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Healing trauma of past

As the country commemorates Heritage Day, a UCT academic from Newlands looks at the impact of the pain of our past...

CARL COLLISON

Dr Siona O’Connell, a Newlands resident is motivated by her desire to keep stories of the past alive, which is in part what led to her latest documentary, *An Unconscionable Amnesia*. “I’m saddened at how ordinary stories fall by the wayside,” she says during an interview about the documentary which features people from various areas across Cape Town who were involved in South Africa’s struggle for political freedom – particularly in the 1980s – the documentary offers an insightful look into how the effects their political activity has had on their lives at present.

Dr O’Connell, who serves as director of UCT’s Hiddingh Campus-based Centre for Curating the Archive, in Gardens, adds: “I was a teen in the 80s, and I kept thinking about these people who were so politically active then and are now approaching middle age and how their lives have played out after the sacrifices they made during that period. “Also, when I lecture here at UCT and I ask students what they know about the Trojan Horse incident or the Wynberg Seven, all I often get back are these absolutely blank stares – and this across all races.” The resultant combination of curiosity and need to inform led to her working, for the past year, on putting together the documentary, which will be screened, free to the public, on Thursday October 29, at the Baxter Theatre.



■ Featuring archival images, left, captured by photographer Zubeida Vallie, the documentary *An Unconscionable Amnesia* looks into the youth-driven political struggle of the 1980s.

Dr O’Connell, adds: “I started tracking down people across Cape Town who formed part of that crucial youth movement of the 80s. This project took me to remarkable schools, like South Peninsula in Diep River, where I found students still deeply engaged with what is happening around them. Schools such as Livingstone High School in Claremont, Alexander Sinton Sec-

ondary School in Athlone, Harold Cressy High School and Trafalgar High School in District Six were crucial schools and played such a strong role in the politically formative years of these now middle-aged people. “What I found, through numer-

ous, heart-wrenching interviews, was that there is this need for people to talk – and for somebody to listen. And that the business of the past is certainly not in the past.

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