

# Filming struggles – past and present

CARL COLLISON

Dr Siona O'Connell 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 1980's – the documentary offers an insightful look into 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, 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.

Dr O'Connell, a Newlands resident, 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 Secondary 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 numerous, 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."

"Almost without fail people have said 'we thought we had dealt with it but clearly we haven't'. They are still scarred, to this day, by, for example, being sjambokked by the police or being that scared thirteen year-old hurtled into the back of a police van. As a result, what we have now is a series of inter-generational traumas that continue to play out in our society today."

‘ There is a need for people to talk – and for somebody to listen

The Trauma Centre's director, Valdi van Reenen-Le Roux concurs. The Woodstock-based organisation, which aims its services at survivors of violence and torture by addressing trauma through inclusive healing processes, compiled a report, titled *Apartheid's Violent Legacy: a Report on Trauma in the Western Cape*.

The report, written and edited by Donald Skinner, found that "torture and political imprisonment were the most visible and horrifying of the forms of repression".

The report adds: "With the unbanning of political organisations, the release of political prisoners and the establishment of a democratic government in South Africa in 1994, many organisations that had provided support to the victims of apartheid repression ceased to function. However, the repressive past and uncertain present continue to have negative consequences for many individuals, families and communities."

Ms Van Reenen-Le Roux adds: "There is an invisibility emerging between the trauma people suffered during the 80s and the trauma of the present."

"We would, for example, have people coming in here for cases of domestic violence or criminal violence who are really struggling to deal with these incidents. And it is only after really working with them that we find that there were these traumatic incidents in their past, during the political struggle, that makes it that much harder for them to deal with their present trauma."

Dr O'Connell adds: "One of the most jarring moments for me was



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

seeing somebody who was imprisoned as a teenager reduced to the shadow of what a human being should be.

"And although the manifestations of these traumas are different for various people – humans react differently to different things, after all – many of those I spoke to find it difficult holding down a job or maintaining successful relationships. What those moments did in the 80s forever changed the trajectory of their lives."

"If you look at things from this perspective, the anger and bewilderment so many of our people sit with today makes absolute sense. There are those who were involved in the struggle who have gone on to achieve magnificent things, but some who have fallen through the cracks."

"With this project I am really hoping to highlight what happens when we stand together across the lines; what happens when we mobilise something within ourselves to strive for something greater than ourselves."

"But, more importantly, I want to highlight our responsibility to hold those among us who have not



■ The documentary also looks into the post-traumatic stress suffered by those involved in South Africa's liberation struggle.

been able to come to terms with their sacrifices – sacrifices they have made for us."

● The documentary, *An Unconscionable Amnesia*, will be screened at the Baxter theatre on Thursday

October 29, at 7pm. Entry is free, though booking is essential and can be done through Computicket.

For more information, call Jade Nair on 021 480 7151 or visit [www.cca.uct.ac.za](http://www.cca.uct.ac.za)

**SPECS for AFRICA**  
OPTOMETRISTS  
*A better sight for all*

**SPECIAL PROMOTION**  
Ends 31 December 2015

**SINGLE VISION R660**  
For frame, clear plastic lenses, eye test

**BIFOCALS R880**  
For frame, clear plastic lenses, eye test

**MULTI FOCALS R1650**  
For frame, clear plastic lenses, eye test

T & C's Apply. Cash Only

**New Cape Town**  
Golden Acre

**Bellville** Tel: 021 951 6315  
**Rondebosch** Tel: 021 685 0006  
**Vangate Mall** Tel: 021 638 1370  
**at woolworths Ent** Tel: 021 418 2185

## Hazy city scenes...

■ *Barfly*, a solo exhibition by Catherine Ocholla will open Thursday October 1, at the Worldart gallery, 54 Church Street, at 5.30pm for 6pm. The exhibition is made up of a series of paintings that presents a mise-en-scene of aspects of contemporary city living, as if seen through the haze of a drunken happy hour or two. The exhibition takes its title from the 1987 movie about the life of poet Charles Bukowski. The exhibition will run until Thursday October 29. For more information, call 021 423 3075 or visit [www.worldart.co.za](http://www.worldart.co.za). Pictured is *Le Cinq a' Sept*.

