

## ■ NEW BOOK

# Stories of forced removals told

*How the legacy of segregation continues to plague displaced coloured communities*

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THERE'S no story of forced removal that will go untold, pioneering author and University of Pretoria Professor Siona O'Connell said as her latest book examining the legacy of segregation was launched this week.

*Impossible Return* delves into the real stories of individuals and families who, in the early 1970s, were forced from their homes in Harfield Village in Cape Town's southern suburbs to make way for whites who today still occupy the area.

O'Connell said the effects of the Group Areas Act continued to plague coloured communities, and could be experienced across every sector of society.

Her book features the late curator David Brown's photographs of the Harfield community before and during the forced removals.

O'Connell had put out a public call for those featured in Brown's photographs to come forward and tell their stories and was inundated with people affected by the Group Areas Act. She spent nearly three years with the former residents, detailing their every emotion.

Her book examines their lost ways of life and their sense of home and belonging.

"Land is central to questions of identity and belonging; it started when Jan van Riebeeck arrived. I spent two-and-a-half years going to the families' homes, attending workshops and dialogues. They read the draft; I wanted them to be involved in the process of having their stories told.

"One story features an elderly man with a hard-hitting account of forced removals, he pulls no punches. Another story features a child of a homeowner in the area, who tells of how wrong the forced removals were, and remain," O'Connell said.

The lives of many people who were dumped on the Cape Flats during the process could have been very different, she said.

"The book takes you on a roller-coaster ride of emotions. You experience sadness, and also resilience and fortitude, especially by women," O'Connell said.

O'Connell was born in Cape Town and studied at UCT, where she was later appointed as the senior archive curator at the Centre for Curating the Archive, and a lecturer.

She is now based at the University



ACROSS Cape Town, from Sea Point to Simon's Town, families were torn from the only existence they had ever known, to live miles away from the places where they were born and called home. One of those areas is Harfield Village in Claremont, the subject of a new book by Siona O'Connell. O'Connell is an academic at the University of Pretoria and a research affiliate at UCT's Centre for Curating the Archive.

of Pretoria as a convener for museum and heritage studies.

Addressing the legacy of racism, oppression and discrimination has been central to her work in recent years. O'Connell's 2015 film, *Coloured*, examined the lives of South Africans living in "the shadows".

O'Connell, her director of photography Adile Cook and editor Andrea Shaw sketch a story of "in-betweenity" among the Miss Gay Western Cape and Spring Queen, as well as coloured people living in the province.

*Impossible Return* can be purchased at all good book stores for R275.