

## Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela

### Acknowledgement of Responsibility for the Past is Essential for Reconciliation:

#### The Problem of Denial of Complicity



This presentation takes as its starting point Ginn Fourie's story of her encounter with Letlapa Mphahlele, who commanded the operation in which her daughter Lyndi was killed.

Using insights drawn broadly from psychology, the discussion will reflect on the significance of both Fourie and Mphahlele's acknowledgement of responsibility, and on what this means for their healing journey together.

The discussion will then explore the potential of their story as a narrative and testimonial that illustrates the role that moral imagination plays in helping family members of victims to work through past trauma.

The presentation will conclude with discussion of what happens when responsibility for the past is not acknowledged in the broader social context in the aftermath of historical trauma.

Focusing on the issue of denial of complicity for the apartheid past among many White South Africans, the discussion draws parallels between this phenomenon of denial and the post-war suppression of guilt and the German population's struggle to come to terms with the Nazi past, what Margarete and Alexander Mitscherlich called the "inability to mourn".

The discussion highlights the continuing need for acknowledgement of the past as *one of* the components necessary for the reconciliation agenda to be taken forward in South Africa.