

THE CLAUDE AKE MEMORIAL LECTURE

# What Does it Mean to be Human After Historical Trauma?

Re-visioning *The Sunflower* and  
Why Hannah Arendt Was Wrong.

**PROF. PUMLA GOBODO-MADIKIZELA**

Wednesday 9 December, 15.15 - 16.45  
Uppsala University Main Building, Room IX  
(Biskopsgatan 3)

The public lecture is followed by a reception. If you are interested in attending the reception, please respond to [susanne.olsson@pcr.uu.se](mailto:susanne.olsson@pcr.uu.se) by Friday 4 December.

“COMING TO TERMS WITH THE PAST,” when perpetrators of atrocities live in the same country as victims compels us to consider the question: What drives victims to enter into constructive encounters with the “other,” to feel empathy for her or him, even when their internal moral compass points toward its inappropriateness, and the “other” seems morally undeserving? What motivates the need to face the victim, as some perpetrators have done in different post-conflict countries, and for victims to search out perpetrators? These questions are explored in

this presentation using Simon Wiesenthal’s *The Sunflower* as backdrop. First, it is argued that this search for face-to-face encounters is a tacit recognition that mourning and “working through” the past must involve the “other.” Second, Hannah Arendt’s notion of the “unpardonable” “unpunishable” and “unforgiveable” aspects of the human condition are considered, concluding with a discussion of why she was wrong when arguing that our response to perpetrators’ remorse should be determined only through the lens of moral judgment.

**PUMLA GOBODO-MADIKIZELA** is Senior Research Professor for Trauma, Forgiveness and Reconciliation at the University of the Free State, South Africa. Her book, *A Human Being Died that Night: A South African Story of Forgiveness*, won the Alan Paton Award in South Africa, and the Christopher Award in the United States. Her other books include *Narrating our Healing: Perspectives on Healing Trauma*, as co-author (2007), *Memory, Narrative and Forgiveness: Perspectives on the Unfinished Journeys of the Past*, as co-editor (2008). She is editor of the forthcoming volume, *Breaking Intergenerational Cycles of Repetition: A Global Dialogue on Historical Trauma and Memory*.