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Feminism and the ethics of reconciliation

The failure of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to do justice to women rape victims was not a simple oversight but is constitutive of the patriarchal political and symbolic order dominating the South African political landscape, writes Louise du Toit. Through its failure to create the vocabulary and space within which rape could be addressed as a political issue in its own right, the TRC entrenched a single-sex model of politics in which masculine agency and victimhood still pose as the universal. In South Africa, as in other societies that model themselves on the idea of a "liberal democracy", there seems to be no space for a truly sexually differentiated politics and symbolic order.

Introduction

I give you my heaven as possibly the single element of consistency in my political life: my distrust of reconciliation. In this I proclaim a new life in South Africa, against those who proclaim a truce between old lives [...] I will not be an instrument for validating the politics of reconciliation. For me, reconciliation demands my annihilation.¹

The question or issue of rape constitutes a blind spot, a particularly salient symptom, or even a paradigmatic or borderline² case of what was passed down as the dominant "western symbolic order".³ This essay forms part of an attempt to come to an understanding of the "meaning" or significance of rape within this particular order, which I describe as patriarchal. The relevance of such an understanding within this limited context pans out in at least two ways: (1) I believe that we quite simply have a moral, ethical and political duty to form a sound understanding of rape as a phenomenon, to not only respond more adequately to victims⁴ and perpetrators of rape after the event, but also to think more clearly and strategically about rape prevention. The urgency that underlies or motivates my concern with rape can surely be traced back to my own situation in a country with a very high instance of rape (estimated to be one of the highest in the world);⁵ but the problem does of course not only affect South Africans. (2) My analysis of rape is also meant to serve my broader project, namely to explore the question or issue of women's subjectivity or selfhood within the Western philosophical symbolic order. I argue that "the problem of rape" is intimately tied up with women's problematic selfhood within this same order.

This article looks in particular at South Africa's political transition and the discourses of "reconciliation" and "forgiveness" from the perspective of

women and more specifically of women rape victims. In my reading of what was widely perceived as a simple or innocent exclusion of women victims from the processes of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC),⁶ I show that the TRC's failure to do justice to victims of rape is not a simple oversight but rather is *constitutive* of the patriarchal political and symbolic order dominating our political landscape. Through its failure to create the vocabulary and space within which rape could be addressed as a political issue in its own right (amongst other things by modelling victimhood and political agency on masculine presumptions) the TRC set the tone for a "new" or "transformed" South Africa in which sexual difference could not and cannot be acknowledged. Moreover, it entrenched a single-sex model of politics, one in which masculine agency and victimhood, as well as masculine-biased concerns and vocabularies, still pose as the universal, thereby effectively silencing in political and public spaces the particularities and specificities of women's being and becoming. In South Africa, as in other societies that model themselves on the idea of a "liberal democracy", there seems to be no space for a truly sexually differentiated politics and symbolic order.

It is not surprising, then, to find that rape rates have remained constant⁷ rather than decreased since the transition to a "democratic" South Africa. An important implication of my reading of the situation is that the locally dominant liberal models of feminist politics based on universality, sameness, and inclusion (often called "gender mainstreaming"), seldom manage to reach the critical depth needed to do justice to women's (current or desired) position within politics, since women *qua* women are neither fully excluded nor fully included; this means that a political strategy of simplistic "inclusion" is unhelpful. Our⁸ position is rather that of delineating the political sphere. We as women occupy the position of border or horizon of the whole, and our uneasy position is constitutive of the political domain as such. The liberal paradigm of simple exclusion versus simple inclusion must therefore itself be opened up to critical scrutiny, since it uncritically assumes the border between "inside" and "outside" (politics) to be given and valid, to be incontestable and apolitical. This is not the case. Women cannot in my reading be simply included within the political without a thorough (radical) disruption of the very structure of the political, of its "borders" as well as its "centre".

The borderline "feminine"

The concept of "reconciliation" stands in a peculiar relation with what I shall call the "feminine" of the symbolic order of "western philosophical metaphysics". Since the "political fate of women" (understood in its broadest sense) is never to be fully separated or divorced from the fate of "the feminine" within this symbolic order, although it might readily be distinguished from it, it would seem to follow that there is a sexual difference issue to take into account when one risks entering the discursive cross-fields of reconciliation, transition, and forgiveness. But the theoretical gaze should also be inverted in the sense that women and "the feminine" must not remain in the object-position only but should also take up a subject-position. This means that from the perspective of women, the issue of "reconciliation" can also be fruitfully revisited and reformulated.

The argument is well taken from various feminist sources⁹ that "the feminine" and women occupy an uneasy, borderline type of position within traditional western metaphysics, of which currently dominant liberal political theories are an important off-shoot. This unease, this ambivalent and problematic positioning of women's subjectivity within the remaining

politico–metaphysical and legal symbolic orders of the West means that women/the feminine are simultaneously included in and excluded from these orders. Continental philosophers and others¹⁰ have consequently arrived at the insight that a feminist politics cannot be satisfied with a mere demand for women's inclusion in existing philosophical and political frameworks, agendas, and so on. This is the case because these frameworks and economies have always already "included" women or the feminine in their ground structure, but then in an ambivalent, ironic or exceptional way. Instead of trying to simplistically establish whether women are "simply" included or excluded under a certain logic or paradigm, it makes more sense to view women's ambivalent position *vis-à-vis* any particular paradigm as *constitutive* of that paradigm itself. It remains a superficial gesture to ask whether women are included or excluded in any particular symbolic order when women and the "feminine" serve to guarantee, uphold and symbolise, to *represent* the very borders, boundaries and logic of that universe. Women constitute the border as such — our bodies, places or subjectivities define the limits of the thinkable, the rational, of the political. In a memorable passage Jean–Francois Lyotard visualises the same point thus:

Everything is in place for the imperialism of men: an empty centre where the Voice is heard (God's, the People's — the difference is not important, just the Capital letters), the circle of homosexual¹¹ warriors in dialogue around the centre, the feminine (women, children, foreigners, slaves) banished outside the confines of the *corpus socians* and attributed only those properties that this *corpus* will have nothing to do with: savagery, sensitivity, matter and the kitchen, impulsion, hysteria, silence, maenadic dances, lying, diabolical beauty, ornamentation, lasciviousness, witchcraft and weakness.¹²

For Lyotard, the "masculine corpus attributes active principles to itself" and in fact "cannot resist wanting to seize" the "passive" object whose "apparent humanity is always elusive", because "the Voice at the Virile Centre speaks only of [...] the Empire's limits (which are women) and we [men, the dominant sex] have to struggle ceaselessly with their exteriority". We meet here thus a strange reversal of roles at the heart of patriarchal logic: the marginal or silenced feminine can be seen at work in the very heart (centre) of the *corpus socians*. This leads Lyotard to ask:

If so, then is not such an object unconsciously endowed with what we call activity? And does not the power to scheme accorded this object betray the secret reversal of our role by theirs? (Is not there a desire on the part of Western man to be sodomised by woman?) Is not the outside of the man's theatre the most important, even for men? Doesn't he discover his "origin" there? And isn't it necessary that this origin be woman: isn't the mother the originary woman? That is, the way the exterior sex is represented in theory: as ground, itself ungrounded, in which meaning is generated? The senseless Being? ¹³

These paragraphs by Lyotard neatly pose the dilemma of "women in politics" in the West — women are the ungrounded ground but must remain on the fringes of the Empire¹⁴ from where we nevertheless play a key (instigating or inspiring, but always indirect, mediating) role. If the homosexual warriors form the visible and audible centre of western civilization — the *politeia* —

and from there claim for themselves authority over society as a whole, then the women's circle or the circle of women's bodies forms its outskirts — our bodies are its outer limits, its frontiers, and as such we form part of the "inside" as well as of the "outside", the "beyond", or even of the "before" — we are the object that seems human but is not. We must thus still become, be transformed and civilised into "the human" or universalised masculine. Defined by the order of homosexual warriors as its opposite, "the feminine" is nevertheless also its central concern, insofar as the borders of its empire and therefore the conditions of its own possibility are central, even if often in silenced or repressed ways.¹⁵

I discern in Lyotard's description the notion of woman as border in at least two senses: (1) woman as man's origin, as ungrounded ground in which meaning is generated; and (2) woman as man's destiny — the outer limits of his existence, as that which calls him to (self-) transcendence, which draws him out of himself. So, while women as "pre-humans" (in the sense of not-yet human) are surely associated with the *outside* borders or ultimate limits of sensible life, civilisation, politics and the law, as "pre-humans" in a different sense (in the sense of those humans that always go before, or as originary humans, as mothers in other words) we are associated with the *inside* borders of sensible life. Put in more technical language, women constitute both a *transcendent* (abstract and idealised) and a *transcendental* (presupposed) border or horizon for the masculine symbolic order. Women('s bodies) are thus not only on the margins in that we are equivocally perched both on the very outside and on the peripheral inside of masculine orders; we are in fact also at the heart of these orders precisely *by virtue* of our absence from the Virile Centre. Through our representation of masculine sheltering and transcendence, both men's (coming-into) being (or birth and sustenance) and men's becoming, women open up a space or a field of tension, a narrative frame, for masculine existence.

On the impossibility of forgiving rape

Jacques Derrida's essay, "On Forgiveness",¹⁶ neatly combines my concerns with women's subjectivity within contemporary philosophical discourse, rape, and the South African politics of transition and forgiveness. The essay refers to the (non-) forgiveness¹⁷ of a certain (unnamed) woman testifying before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Although her sex is not deemed relevant in the body of Derrida's main text, he adds to his description of her as "woman victim, wife of the victim" an interesting endnote in which he draws attention to sexual differences. He refers in this regard to Antjie Krog's description¹⁸ of the situation of militant women who were raped during torture, "and then accused of being not militants but whores".¹⁹ "They", says Derrida, "could not testify about this before the commission, or even in their family, without baring themselves, without showing their scars or without exposing themselves one more time, by their very testimony, to another violence". He goes on to say: "*The 'question of forgiveness' cannot even be posed publicly to these women, some of whom now occupy high positions in the State*".²⁰ There are many things left unsaid and implied or assumed in this short but significant aside from Derrida. I find Derrida's engagement with sexual difference in 2001²¹ encouraging, since he has often been interpreted as neutralising these issues in a manner similar to Lyotard and others;²² nevertheless I find his relegation of the topic to an endnote ultimately regrettable as well as irresponsible in ways that I will delineate.

Derrida's text raises (but does not answer) many important questions. First, why could these women not testify about their rapes before the commission (publicly) "or even in their family" (thus privately)? Is Derrida simply referring here to the well-known fact that rape victims find it difficult to speak (openly) about the assault, feeling a sense of shame or stigmatisation? If it is just a question of talking about being raped, then why does he first say that these women could not *talk* in public (or even in private) and then says the question of forgiveness cannot be *posed publicly* to these women, adding that many of them are now in positions of power? What has the public-private distinction to do here, if he immediately disrupts or overcomes the distinction by saying "even in their family" these women cannot talk? In what does the impossibility lie? Is it impossible *because* they are public figures or *in spite of* them having political power? And what is the logic of this impossibility?

Note that he does not say that these women cannot forgive. That is implied, but his claim is far more radical: the question of forgiveness *cannot be posed to them* — publicly, but presumably also privately (in "the family"). Does Derrida regard the public "baring", the "exposing" and the "showing" of their "scars" as integral to their testimony, and does he see this kind of exposing testimony as integral or indispensable to the question of forgiveness? And most important: why should such a testimony (about man on woman rape) *necessarily* translate into "another violence" and a second (or continued) violation of the victim when all the other testimonies — even where men by their dozens testified about being "sodomised"²³ — are seen *not* as a violation but rather as a kind of liberation and acknowledgement of the victim? If Derrida regards all testimonies as violations of those who testify, he does not say so.

Why is it impossible even to raise the very question of forgiveness with regard to these women but not with regard to all other victims of pre-1994 violence? And: does the situation of these women differ from those of all other rape victims in South Africa — those who were and continue to be raped allegedly "outside" of "political" concerns in a purely "non-political", "private", or "criminal" sense? Does the political context of these militant women's rapes render the rapes more, or rather less, forgivable? It should be remembered that the TRC attempted to put some kind of closure on a violent and illegitimate past. Among the worse results of this attempted closure is that there is now a kind of vacuum concerning gross violations of human rights — now, when women and children are raped and battered, these are seen as purely "private" matters. No harmful acts, it seems, can be politically motivated anymore, since we now ostensibly live in a "just" political dispensation just as we used to live in a wholly unjust political dispensation before. During the political struggle women's rape was justified in terms of the struggle, in other words, it was seen as a weapon of terror, an instrument of torture, or women's sexuality was simply used as a way of motivating or rewarding soldierly acts. This was moreover done by both "sides" of the "struggle".²⁴

Rape thus served to exclude women from the struggle as a political space, and it also served as a way of symbolically marking off the "homeland", the private sphere, the place of peace that used to exist and that will one day return. Women's bodies were associated with what essentially lies outside "the real", outside politics and war, but which is then also crucially that which is being fought over: the land, the home, the womb, the humane existence. At the historical and political turning point (which I take to be the TRC's activities during the 1990s) rape was subsumed under or overshadowed by other (masculine biased) discourses of violation and oppression, even if rape did

feature fleetingly as a political phenomenon and insofar as it could be understood as political. Unfortunately, however, the TRC and surrounding discourses served to obscure the political nature and relevance of rape in the time *after* the transition. This happened because of its black–white thinking about rape before and after democratisation, and also because the TRC failed to clearly expose rape as an action *definitive* of the political, as well as a way of inscribing the masculine power struggle on female bodies.

The inability or unwillingness to view rape as a political act of women's subjugation in the current dispensation signifies to me the extent to which the TRC failed to allow for or encourage a women's voice to develop within and in response to the national political processes of reconciliation. Moreover, it failed to conceive of the possibility of a need for a political reconciliation between the sexes or for a political transformation and transition on the level of sexual difference, sexual politics, and sexual oppression. When the official version of those struggles was forged during the TRC hearings and consequent report writing, rape was eclipsed by other forms of oppression and violation where men were the vast majority of victims. Framing "the" struggle in terms of men's struggles, leaving women on the road–sides of history, the TRC contributed to the disappearance of rape and women's particularities from the political and public consciousness and agendas after 1994 in ways that would ostensibly never have been possible with other forms of human rights abuses that mainly affect(ed) men, such as ("sex–neutral") torture. Thus, in spite of its enormous role in facilitating a remarkably peaceful and morally accountable transfer of political power, the TRC is also a clear instance of a contemporary refusal to politicise sexual difference, to allow sexual difference onto the political scene, and to allow women to appear and speak as women within politics.

It might thus well be that the answer about the impossibility of forgiveness that Derrida (rightly, I think) discerns here does not lie in any of the factors mentioned above, but rather in the way in which the torturous rapes seemed to have discredited the militant women *as militants*, in the way in which this act *symbolically transformed them from militants into whores*, and refused them a (sexually specific) place and identity within the political. Women's sexual identity was used to define the apolitical, the beyond or before of politics, the horizon of the political. Rape was thus employed as a tool for symbolically defining and *demarcating the political as masculine–universal* and for *unmaking* or undoing women's political and moral agency. As such, that is, as an act of marking or tracing the boundary or horizon of the political and the moral, rape itself could not easily appear as a crime *within* the spheres of the political and the moral. The structural (necessary) symbolic invisibility of rape in the context of the liberation struggle feeds on and in turn reinforces the invisibility of women. It reinforces our pervasiveness in, through our (present) absence from, a system for which we act as guardians, gate–keepers and symbolic guarantees. It is thus crucial to ask in 2005, after the political transition and well on our way into a new political dispensation: if women (and children) continue to be raped at exceptionally high levels, what, in the deepest sense possible, is the political meaning or significance of this?

My reading of the struggle and transition is supported by texts such as Krog's book and the report on the Special Women's Hearing before the TRC.²⁵ It is clear from these texts, one of the most common ways in which women militants were "broken" in jail was through communicating to them that "real women" are outside of politics and "safely" at home, "responsibly" looking after their families — a sentiment ironically and ominously echoed by some

inside the liberation movement.²⁶ Because good women are apolitical, purely private creatures, a woman's involvement in the struggle had to be explained by "reasons" such as "you are not the right kind of woman — you are irresponsible, *you are a whore*, you are fat and ugly, or single and thirty and you are looking for a man" (my emphasis).²⁷ A responsible woman does not have an independent, mature or autonomous political identity, but only a private, sexual and supportive (secondary) one. The message was (and arguably still is) clear: you cannot be both a woman (sexually specific) and a political agent, and the only way in which your sexual specificity can obtain public or political form is through making your sexuality (in its most basic sense) available to the real political agents, namely men.

As a vital part of the struggle, women's sexuality was activated²⁸ through rapist torture and consequently used to strip away their political identity, their dignity and their sense of self. There were deliberate attempts to tap into women's sense of responsibility for dependent others and to shame them sexually and morally — women's bond with their children or fetuses was exploited to expose their "identity" as one of extreme vulnerability. Everything they stood for was reduced to unpaid prostitution, and this moreover created the *license* for sexual abuse by the interrogators, the police, and the soldiers. Women were reduced to their sex and thus stripped of their full humanity. In ANC camps abroad, women "comrades" were raped (used as concubines) and their role in the movement thereby reduced to a sexual function. Maybe this is the key to Derrida's "impossibility of forgiveness" or of the posing of the question, irrespective of what the answer may be. Women were both at the heart of the struggle (on both sides they were often portrayed as the ultimate *reason* for the struggle) and fundamentally foreign to it — marginal, exceptional, excessive, exploitable and out of place, essentially displaced.

Little wonder that women experienced great difficulty during the transition to account for their political role as well as for their sex-specific suffering in a language that would be understood within the context of the TRC and the "new" political order. Women were expected to translate their sex-specific oppression into so-called "neutral" (masculine-universal) vocabularies and logics. The terms and conditions that the TRC set for itself, the call for testimony it issued, were already strongly biased against the stories women had to tell about sex-specific oppression, was already an effective silencing of the voices of women speaking as women, speaking out against the various ways in which they were silenced during the struggle.²⁹ It is thus no wonder that many women often chose to respond to this silencing gesture with a mere, mute staging of their silenced state: several women simply and profoundly testified that they could not testify.³⁰

And just as Derrida's essay on forgiveness graphically and textually keeps women's issues on the margins by merely referring to it in an endnote and not allowing the issue of sexual difference to impact on the heart of Derrida's main argument about forgiveness, the TRC Report has also kept women's exclusion as a central, constitutive political issue in its own right on the margins of *its* text. The failure by the TRC to deal with women's marginal position within political discourse and in reality, may have contributed to the unabated continuation after 1994 of rape as a "private crime". This would also account for the fact that the current local "reconciliation" debate has not yet developed a view "from women's side". The failure of the TRC to struggle with and to forge a vocabulary in which to address women's fundamental, structural exclusion (in the sense of marginalisation) from politics expressed *inter alia* in our rape "epidemic"³¹ — whether it is struggle, transition or reconciliation

politics — in fact ensured that it remained (structurally, logically, politically) impossible to publicly pose the question of forgiveness to women rape victims. This means that the marginalisation of women cannot be limited, "closed off" or contained in an evil apartheid past. In contrast to some of the cruder forms of racism, it has survived the political transition remarkably well. The oppression of women is still a structural feature of the current South African nation and political landscape (as one can surely say of other "feminised" categories of people such as the poor). This may be another and perhaps the crucial reason why the question of forgiveness cannot (in the present tense) be posed to these women. Their oppression has not yet passed, has in fact not been acknowledged. A public, shareable language has not yet been found in which to name "it" (the large-scale sexual violation and rape of women and girls by men in this country) in a way that would *make sense* to women and men, rape victims and perpetrators, a language that would carry weight in a public-political, inter-subjective setting. It seems bizarre to ask someone to forgive even as the injustice transpires, in the very process of her being damaged and violated.

Forgiveness and reconciliation seem to logically come (if they come) only after the injustice has ended and the "crime" or damage has been well defined and understood by both parties. These terms only make sense after a lapse of some non-violent time and a redefinition of power relations. There is a sense in which the parties to reconciliation and forgiveness have to be approximate equals and have to speak the same language, at least. There is thus a sense in which the damage, the wrong done to women *as women*, most clearly exemplified in rape but also in more "everyday" experiences of sexual "murder" or "de-subjectification", cannot (yet) be expressed in the language of forgiveness. The nature of the violation in the case of rape is not and has not been obvious because symbolic orders dominated or heavily influenced by the history of western ideas have a blind-spot when it comes to acknowledging rape as a political act and as a sex-specific crime against women. Women can thus not be asked for forgiveness with regard to rape since there is no clear, public and political consensus that there is "something" to forgive (as there nowadays clearly is in the case of apartheid and other forms of colonial oppression, for example). And amongst those who do believe that the rape of a woman requires a forgiveness of sorts, there is little clarity or agreement on precisely what needs to be forgiven, what exactly the harm is that had been sustained. Furthermore, this systematic "misunderstanding" or misconception of rape is ideologically laden, not innocent. It is most intimately tied up with one of western modernity's most persistent dreams of self-deceit, viz. that the masculine-specific represents the universal. The inability to conceive of rape as something that cries out for forgiveness, as an historical and ongoing crime against women as women, and as something that men should ask forgiveness for publicly and in terms of political reconciliation, corresponds with, feeds on and reinforces the inability to allow systematic political expression of sexual difference and identity more generally.

Forgiveness is a woman

In paragraph VII of "On Forgiveness" Derrida links the history of sovereignty with forgiveness. The act of forgiveness, he says, is sometimes the affirmation of sovereignty. The "I forgive you" is often "addressed from the top down, it confirms its own freedom or assumes for itself the power of forgiving, be it as victim or in the name of the victim".³² Although he finds this "sovereign" forgiveness in typical style "unbearable", "odious", and "obscene", he seems to assume nevertheless that at least some element of sovereignty is indispensable

for forgiveness when he says "it is also necessary to think about an absolute victimisation which deprives the victim of life, or the right to speak, or that freedom, that force and *that power which authorises, which permits the accession to the position of 'I forgive'*" (my emphasis).³³ Here, the unforgivable consists in depriving "the victim of this right to speech, of speech itself, of the possibility of all manifestation, of all testimony. The victim", he says, "would then be a victim, in addition, to seeing himself stripped [sic in translation] of the minimal, elementary *possibility of virtually* considering forgiving the unforgivable." And then he adds significantly, "This absolute crime does not only occur in the form of murder" (his emphasis).³⁴

Rape (whether it occurs in "war" or not) is one such absolute crime, even if Derrida does not explicitly link rape and absolute victimisation. Rape is a form of absolute crime because it murders the subject–self of the person against whom the crime is committed. Rape is precisely a way of removing "that freedom, that force and that power which authorises [and] which permits the accession to the position of the 'I forgive'". Victims of rape often cannot even access the position of the "I accuse", let alone the position of the "I forgive". This, I would contend, is not the case due to any kind of innate nature of rape, but because of the way in which the function and significance of rape are constructed within a patriarchal, sexist, rape–prone society such as South Africa. The impossibility of forgiving rape must thus maybe primarily be sought in the systematically unequal power relations between women and men. This notion is supported by Derrida's argument to the effect that the "unforgivable" may be defined or perceived as unforgivable not only by virtue of the degree of damage inflicted,³⁵ but also by virtue of the precise constellation of power relations that may render grave injustices systematically invisible³⁶ and unspeakable, forever unacknowledged and unappreciated. The question of power (the power to be asked for one's forgiveness, to forgive, to consider forgiving the unforgivable) belongs therefore to the heart of the question of forgiveness. It is finally only the relatively powerful who ever get into a position from where they might be entitled and empowered (symbolically, socially, and otherwise) to consider forgiveness. Because humans are intrinsically social beings (socially and discursively constituted) it is virtually impossible to consider forgiving something that significant (private and/or public) others do not regard as standing in need of forgiveness because they cannot make sense of the alleged damage of the alleged crime. The language of forgiveness presupposes on some basic inter–subjective level a shared language of damage, a shared appreciation of the nature and degree of the violation.

Having stated that "[e]ach time forgiveness is effectively exercised, it seems to suppose some sovereign power", Derrida reiterates his "dream", his "madness", what he tries to think of "as the 'purity' of a forgiveness worthy of its name [...] *a forgiveness without power: unconditional but without sovereignty*" (my emphasis).³⁷ We know that with this dream or madness of pure forgiveness ("only the unforgivable *can be forgiven*" — my emphasis) Derrida wants to carve out a trans–political, trans–legal domain, an understanding of forgiveness which cannot be reduced to or contained in the political, but he nevertheless wants to make "of this trans–political principle a political principle" in that "it is necessary also in politics to respect the secret, that which exceeds the political or that which is no longer in the juridical domain".³⁸ This, I would say, constitutes the heart of his thesis on forgiveness. "Pure" forgiveness, unconditional and without sovereignty, belongs to that which exceeds the political (the expedient, the calculated, the transparent, the reasonable) but which should nevertheless be respected by the political. This

stance leaves him critical of the use of "forgiveness" in the South African TRC process (for example), where he sees forgiveness as being reduced to pragmatic processes of reconciliation. The two poles he identifies, namely that of forgiveness understood in terms of "non-negotiable, aneconomic, apolitical, non-strategic unconditionality" (or pure forgiveness) and forgiveness as political processes of reconciliation and reconstitution of the health or normality of the *corpus socians*, are simultaneously irreducible to one another and remain indissociable. This horizon of a "hyperbolic" ethical vision of forgiveness is for Derrida indispensable for the possibility of progress of the law, and this "field" between the empirical and the ideal is the "space" he wants to open up and keep open for all ethical and political decisions.

For Derrida,³⁹ then, "woman", in her latest guise as the form of pure forgiveness, also opens up a field for the (masculine) law's becoming. But as Derrida himself seems to acknowledge, if only in an aside, in spite of this positive evaluation of the "figure of woman", or maybe partly because of it, "woman" and "women" remain caught in an in-between world where they are both inside and outside the legal, political and symbolic orders. The question of protest that I would like to pose to this tradition is (in line with Irigaray's thinking): how about women's *own* becoming, forgiveness and reconciliation? If women have this constitutive but borderline position *vis-à-vis* the "real" and realistic processes of politics, reconciliation and forgiveness, keeping open through our non-inclusion and systematic violation a reminder of "pure" forgiveness but paying the price amongst other things in that our forgiveness cannot even be asked, then should women resist or rather embrace this feminine, patriarchally apportioned, position as place-holders for the beyond?

This philosophical tradition, by feminising and at the same time idealising that which exceeds the political, the rational, the strategic, casts and recasts every time in a new format women's border status as that which draws, seduces and entices the masculine "I" (or "his" law, his morality) at the centre of the symbolic order towards self-transcendence, becoming, and growth. This means that woman's sexual difference from man is once again and always anew reduced to an enticement, a function in man's becoming. As the unconditional welcome (Levinas) and the unconditional, inexpressible and powerless forgiveness (Derrida), as the ungrounded ground or origin of man's becoming (Lyotard), woman's *border-line subject-position means that she lacks both a border and a ground of her own being and becoming*. She remains difference-from and difference-for the masculine universal. In these metaphysics, women's difference tends to remain always already appropriated for masculine being (belonging, home-coming) and masculine becoming (venturing forth), in both its transcendental and transcendent modes.

In Irigaray's terms,⁴⁰ this means that a relation between woman and man has not yet been established — woman is still caught up in man's mirroring of himself (even if it is an idealised self) to himself and he has not yet discovered that she represents to him an other, a radical alterity and an absolute limit beyond which he cannot pass and which his mind cannot contain. She has not yet established herself as an absolute, an undomesticated and ungraspable other to man.

She remains rather the feminine m/other who gives him his measure, his house. In Irigaray's terms, she remains "other of the same" without gaining the aspect of (for the masculine) radically disruptive, fundamentally challenging "other of the other" or another face which he has to face.

Against this background one could argue that a term like "reconciliation" which implies a return to a lost "home" or a severed "belonging together" rests partly on a feminised and nostalgic notion of "home" as the primordial and unconditional (almost senseless) Levinasian Ur—"welcome",⁴¹ namely the mother or womb. This static and timeless "home" has always been placed *outside the time of masculine becoming and used as a frame for that very journey*: the masculine subject both departs from and returns to the "home", the home in relation to which he travels far and achieves heroic status. Everything significant takes place in men's time: the linear time of heroic action, growth, productivity, change and transcendence. "Home" and "the feminine" serve as the contrasting and static background against which masculine achievement and the passage of time can be measured.

The feminine represents something like an absolute, "pure" and unconditional welcome — a logic or economy that can "obviously" not function nor appear within the realities of the masculine journey, of (masculine, real and realistic) politics, but which nevertheless forms the silent inspiration for that journey itself. Translated into the terms of national political processes of reconciliation and forgiveness, one can argue that women will remain trapped in either one of two possible positions: (1) in the (original, transcendental woman or mother's) position of unconditional forgiveness, of the always—already sacrificed,⁴² of the mother—home that ultimately sets no conditions or boundaries of her own and on whom we may count to forgive or accommodate all her "lost" sons; or (2), in the position of the (always eluding, idealised and distanced, transcendent) "beloved" facilitating masculine becoming and overcoming towards the mysterious "other", being herself thereby excluded or displaced from the opportunity for being and becoming. Woman's displacement from politics can lean towards either the transcendental (maternal) position or towards the transcendent (erotic) position, but both are clear forms of designating the political as masculine—universal and of refusing politics itself to become sexually differentiated. Women's boundaries and women's becoming thus become the casualties of uncritical (unreflective) theories about reconciliation and forgiveness, hence the structural impossibility of women accusing and women forgiving. Hence also the reduction of "reconciliation" and "forgiveness" to nothing more than a brotherly embrace in the mother's house, in the house that the mother has prepared (that she in a sense is) and that she is also supposed to maintain, but at the cost of the mother's own belonging (and becoming). *She is the necessary condition of the reconciliation from which she will remain erased.*

Despite their differences, Lacan and Irigaray seem to agree that a deep but repressed nostalgia, driven by guilt towards and longing for the mother, permeates masculine identity.⁴³ One can furthermore assume that this nostalgia would be heightened or deepened in times of (collective or individual) trauma, that the need to safely and unconditionally belong would become even more pronounced. Ironically, however, this deeply felt need to belong unproblematically and unconditionally would also seem to inform and fuel humanly inflicted traumas such as a genocide or apartheid. In other words, the same untheorised and unproblematised masculine nostalgia for the maternal would seem to inform both the infliction of trauma and the felt need for reconciliation. To the extent then that genocide and reconciliation may well be implicitly based on the same (masculine) nostalgia for the mother/womb or a political (masculinised) version of the mother, both are obviously highly problematic. Put differently: the longing to belong, to be at home, may be equated with the longing to reside in the familiar, and this may easily translate into the desire to be where nothing is other or not—the—same, to remain forever

in a virginal order of the pure, unshared and same, an order which is ruled by a basic intolerance towards the strange(r), other or non-similar.⁴⁴

A new maternal home?

During the struggle, women were repeatedly sexualised and forced back into our role of private, caring creatures, and of sexual servants to men, and as such stripped of any public-political agency and identity. Rape during the struggle can thus also be seen as that which drew the line between the means and the end, the violent present and the utopian future, the reality of masculine struggle, heroism and pragmatic politics on the one hand, and the ideal of feminine passivity, justice, and reconciliation on the other. Rape simultaneously divides the private and sexual from the public-political sphere by punishing and (re-)sexualising women who participate in the public-political, and it radically destabilises that same divide through the use of sexual violence as an instrument of war. Rape is neither private nor public, and it is both: it is used to draw the very distinction and to police the border.

For it to become possible for men to publicly ask women's forgiveness for rape, the private-public divide will have to be radically revised to the extent that women will have to appear as fully equal as well as fully sexually differentiated subjects within the public sphere. The unease reflected in Derrida's formulations about women testifying to their rape in public "or in private" and his fear about their inevitable exposure to "another violence" if they were to testify in public, should be understood against this background. Rape is the preferred method (at least in certain societies) to enforce the divide between the two spheres and moreover to force women back into the private and out of the public-political through a violent sexualisation of our identity.

Against the background of women's very problematic relation with both the private and the public-political home, I find it important to consider alternative versions or understandings of home that may include a concept of home which does not render women homeless through the equation of women or the feminine with men's homes. Phrased more positively: I am interested in the idea of women's home or belonging, of being sheltered and affirmed in our full and sexually differentiated subjectivity. If women are to meet men as equal and sexually differentiated, "sexually other" subjects in the public-political domain (so that the idea of forgiveness for rape becomes a real possibility), then it seems to me that the symbolic and physical sheltering or belonging of women as women is first needed as a kind of non-negotiable condition. Although "sovereignty" is perhaps too strong a term to use (too masculine in its origins and orientation?), I do associate the idea of at-home-ness or belonging with a place to stand, a secure place and sense of self from which one may step in the direction of the other. For a politics of sexual difference to become a reality, women need to develop a strong sense of our (sexually differentiated and differentiating) subjectivity so that we may meet men in the public spaces in and through an affirmation of our different subjectivity rather than through the negation of what makes us different from them.

I think it is important to see that we need to confront openly and clearly the associations and connotations of reconciliation with the feminine. Insofar as reconciliation is associated with passivity, (self-)sacrifice, welcoming of the other, the embrace, the return, the open-ended and beckoning horizon and the unconditional, it has several deep and enduring links with how the feminine was/is traditionally conceived within western metaphysics. The problem identified in the conception of the feminine in the recent philosophical "turn to

the feminine" is that, although ethical priority is given to the feminine, and even though the feminine is held as an ethical model for the masculine, virile subject, the implications of these moves for women, and especially for women's own being, subjectivity, transcendence and becoming, are not thought through in the work of any of these philosophers. In my critical discussion of an oversimplified identification of woman with the home, I have tried to show that forgiveness and reconciliation should consistently and constantly be separated out from nostalgia for the mother, since nostalgia for the mother in the first place may exacerbate sexual violence against women (in an attempt to keep the private, sexual sphere pure and separate) and in the second place renders public forgiveness for rape an impossibility.

Reconciliation should instead come to hold for us the meaning of learning "how to hang in space supported by nothing at all". This formulation comes from "Orion", a short story by Jeanette Winterson.⁴⁵ In the story, the god Orion rapes the goddess Artemis after she has managed to some extent to make herself at home in her hunting-grounds. Being a hunter, occupying a traditionally masculine role, is depicted in the story as a daring thing for a woman to do, even if she is a goddess: she has to twist her father's arm to get permission. Artemis tried to gain for herself something of men's "long-legged freedom" to roam the earth by being a hunter. She quickly learns that the real challenge of freedom has more to do with spiritual strength (and learning to live with all one's various selves) than with physical ability. So she makes herself at home, she finds a make-shift home of sorts, living in a shack with her dogs and hunting, and learning to live with herself in all her guises (child, queen, hunter, and so on). She prefers this existence to deriving her identity from a man (father, husband or son) and creating a home for them. Her abode is then discovered by Orion who implicitly punishes her for leading a man's life and refusing to become his wife by destroying her home, killing her dogs, and finally raping her. Deprived by the rape of even this makeshift and temporary sense of security, precariously balanced between the world of women and the world of men, of this "scant home", Artemis discovers that it is possible to "hang in space supported by nothing at all". The story leaves open multiple possible interpretations of this phrase. What I try to convey by it here is, first of all, a rejection of nostalgia for the perfect, timeless and maternal home, and, secondly, the idea or dream that one can "hang in space" or "hang on", without ultimately holding anyone or anything else responsible for one's own being or becoming.

It is thus also the dream of learning to carry one's own fears and losses rather than projecting them onto others who are then made to carry the burden of that projection. Through having her most basic sense of home or "at-home-ness", her body, violated and her shack destroyed, Artemis learns to live largely without (metaphysical) supports. Rape so radically destroys all bases of a person's existence that it inevitably confronts her with the question of whether she can live, can occupy a space, can be someone, supported or grounded by nothing at all. Rape ultimately forces a woman to acknowledge that her existence is supported by nothing substantial — neither physical nor symbolic. The important question that this story raises is the question about women's belonging and subjectivity: is it possible to conceive of identity and subjectivity for women that are neither modelled on traditional (metaphysical) masculine identity and subjectivity, nor cease to be identity and subjectivity altogether? But this question cannot simply be reduced to the question about post-metaphysical identity or subjectivity in general, since such generality inevitably loses sight of anything sexually specific and thus uncritically perpetuates the mono-sexual logic of western metaphysics. The story rather

forces us to consider the possibilities for women to establish subjectivities that are neither metaphysical nor the nothingness metaphysics have traditionally attributed to women. This dream or madness (to borrow from Derrida's terminology) is captured by the phrase to "hang in space supported by nothing at all", where both the occupation of space and thus the being of somebody and the lack of final ground or support are combined in a single notion.

To conclude: as long as reconciliation is framed or implicitly understood as a return to the all-forgiving, passive and nurturing mother whose acceptance should be unconditional and who sets no boundaries for herself, who never says no and who never fails to forgive⁴⁶, such "homecomings", whether understood in political or religious or any other terms, will always happen at the expense of women's own belonging and becoming and at the expense of justice to women as women. In short, the condition for the possibility of forgiving rape is a definitive end to women's exile from the symbolic order. This moreover is only possible if the sexes can come to find in each other (in the irreducibly sexual other) their absolute limit and thus also their border, in a sense their home. The sexes must give birth and a voice to each other through a radical delimitation of each other, including political delimitation of the sexes and a sexualisation or sexual differentiation of the political. Nothing less than such is process is needed to heal the political rift between the sexes in South Africa — a rift that may prove to be more enduring and more pernicious than our admittedly atrocious racial divisions and violently racist past.

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- ¹ South African author, Njabulo S. Ndebele, lets the self-reflexive, fictive character of Winnie Mandela speak these words as if on behalf of all South African women in his novel about women's experiences of marginalisation during apartheid and the struggle. See: Njabulo Ndebele, *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* David Philip: Claremont, South Africa 2003, 112–3.
- ² I do not use the term "borderline" here to express marginality in the sense of triviality or obscurity, but rather in the sense of delineating, definitive of the system as a whole. I use it in rather the same sense that Karl Jaspers uses the notion of a limit situation (*Grenzsituation*) or "ultimate situation". For Jaspers, such ultimate situations provide the most profound source of philosophy. See: Karl Jaspers, *The Way to Wisdom* (trans. Ralph Manheim) New Haven: Yale University Press 1954, 20.
- ³ The phenomenon of rape understood as forced sex is surely not limited to so-called Western societies. For the purposes of this study, however, I focus on the "place" or significance of rape within the western cultural symbolic without assuming anything about how different cultures or symbolic orders "deal with" or signify rape.
- ⁴ Victims of rape as well as feminist activists have reacted against the use of the term "victim" and some people choose to use the term "survivor" instead. See: Charlene Smith, *Proud of Me: Speaking Out against Sexual Violence and HIV*, London: Penguin Books 2001. My continued use of the term "victim" is not meant to betray insensitivity towards the feelings of those who have survived rape, nor to further deny women's agency and subjectivity by emphasising our powerlessness in the face of rape. I believe we need to critically interrogate these feelings rather than simply affirm them. Rape victims much more than other victims (say of car crashes) resist the associations of powerlessness tied up with the term "victim" because powerlessness lies at the heart of the humiliation and injury of rape. It is thus important to address the root of the problem (women's lack of political subjectivity and agency) rather than be satisfied with superficial linguistic changes. One does not become a survivor by denying the extent to which one has been a victim. In fact, such a stoic denial of victimhood with its emphasis on the victim's agency and resilience may well inadvertently prevent thorough investigations such as the one undertaken here into the ways in which wider societal beliefs endorse a rapist ethic.

- ⁵ In September 2004 the national police commissioner of South Africa, Jackie Selebi, reported that the police were achieving success in combating most crimes, but not rape. In 1994 there were 115.3 police rape cases per 100 000 people and in 2003/4 there were 113.7 per 100 000. In contrast with the Law Reform Commission's estimate that there are 1.7 million rapes a year, only about 54 000 rape victims lay charges each year. According to Interpol, South Africa has the highest rate of rape in the world, as well as the highest incidence of HIV. In 2002 the Medical Research Council reported that 26 per cent of doctors and nurses who treated rape cases did not think them a serious medical problem. And maybe the most horrifying statistic, in South Africa, 41 per cent of those raped are under the age of 12. All of these statistics are from "Rape has become a sickening way of life in our land", an article in *The Sunday Independent* of 26 September 2004, 5, by Charlene Smith.
- ⁶ The creation of this Commission was one of the results of extended negotiations among representatives of various political factions in South Africa during the early 1990s and the Commission was regarded from the start as an important tool for dealing with the moral, ethical and religious dimensions of political transition and power transfer.
- ⁷ The most recent (September 2005) national crime statistics show that all types of crime except hijackings, and violence against women and children, have decreased. With respect to the latter, there is a 4 per cent increase since last year.
- ⁸ I decided to use the first person form of the plural pronoun when I speak about women in this article, knowing full well that there are good reasons both for and against such usage. I have no clear solution to this dilemma, but decided to identify myself stylistically as a woman and to associate my speaking voice with the "women...we/our" position, because the gist of my argument is precisely that we are always and thoroughly sexed (also in our thinking and writing) and that we all (women and men — maybe especially men) should become more self-consciously so.
- ⁹ Examples of what I have in mind include: Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, Cambridge and Oxford: Polity 1988; and Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (trans. Gillian C. Gill) Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press 1985.
- ¹⁰ For evidence that a major contingent of Australian feminists have come to similar insights, see Carole Pateman and Elizabeth Grosz (eds.), *Feminist Challenges: Social and Political Theory*, Boston: Northeastern University Press 1986.
- ¹¹ I am not sure what Lyotard means by homosexual here. It might simply refer to the preference for homosexual over heterosexual love in ancient Greek philosophy and practice, for example in Plato's *Symposium*, but it also resonates strongly with Irigaray's concept of the "hom(m)osexual" political and symbolic order where masculine "love of the self or love of the same" describes the logic of the economy. Irigaray, *Speculum*, 171.
- ¹² Jean-François Lyotard, "One of the Things at Stake in Women's Struggles", in: Andrew Benjamin (ed.), *The Lyotard Reader* Oxford & Cambridge: Basil Blackwell: 1989, 111–121.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ In capitalism women disappear by homologation, not exile: according to Lyotard, women "disappear into the male cycle, integrated either as workers into the production of commodities, or as mothers into the reproduction of labour power, or again, as commodities; themselves (cover-girls, prostitutes of mass-media, hostesses of human relations), or even as administrators of capital (managerial functions)". This implies that "women can only be part of modern society if their differences are neutralised" and that the current "erotic culture" is thoroughly capitalist: sexual differences become neutralised and "come globally under the law of the interchangeable". Ibid. 116.
- ¹⁵ In this vein, Luce Irigaray speaks of a symbolic matricide as founding gesture of the Western philosophico-political and legal orders. Luce Irigaray op. cit.
- ¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, London & New York: Routledge 2002.
- ¹⁷ The particular woman was asked to and consequently refused to forgive *on behalf of her husband*, who was killed during the freedom struggle. She was thus only indirectly asked to forgive a harm done to herself, being the wife of the (actual) victim. This was the typical position the women who took part found themselves in during the TRC process — the position of being asked for their forgiveness on behalf of the actual, male victims, with whom they were closely associated. The woman referred to by Derrida in his main text is thus exemplary in this context in that she is not asked to forgive something done to herself.
- ¹⁸ Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull*, Johannesburg: Random House 1998, 177ff.
- ¹⁹ Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism*, 60.
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ The year in which "On Forgiveness" was published in the French.

- 22 For example: Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, New York: Columbia University Press, 124.
- 23 Antjie Krog notes that during the TRC trials, men refused to use the word "rape" when they testified. They would speak about "being sodomised, or about iron rods being inserted into them". Her comment on this: "In so doing they make rape a women's issue. By denying their own sexual subjugation to male brutality, they form a brotherhood with rapists which conspires against their own wives, mothers and daughters..." According to Krog's interpretation, the term "rape" is thus reserved exclusively for women's sexual subjugation, and thereby becomes *sexist in its meaning*. See: Antjie Krog, *Country*, 182.
- 24 Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull* Johannesburg: Random House 1998, 181
- 25 These "Special Women's Hearings" or the "Gender Hearings" took place after the Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALS) at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1996 made a submission to the Commission on their perceived "lack of sensitivity to gender issues".
- 26 Govan Mbeki, an ANC veteran, said "women created problems for the liberation movement because they wanted to know [about politics, the movements of their husbands]." *TRC of SA Report*, Vol. 4, 289.
- 27 Krog, *Country*, 179.
- 28 Krog quotes academic Sheila Meintjes who asserts that sexual torture of men and of women have opposite intentions. "The sexual torture of men is to induce sexual passivity and to abolish political power and potency, while the torture of women is the activation of sexuality". She adds significantly that "[t]here is a lot of anger about women — because women do not have the authority, but often they have a lot of power". Krog, *Country*, 182.
- 29 The *Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act* (no. 34 of 1995) gave the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission the mandate, amongst other things, to "get as complete a picture as possible of the nature, causes and extent of politically motivated gross human rights violations (i.e. acts of torture, killing, abduction and severe ill-treatment)". Two aspects of this mandate can be criticized from women's point of view. (1) Historically and traditionally, women have been excluded within in the South African context from definitions of "the political" through highly patriarchal cultures and social institutions, so that the qualification of "politically motivated" applied uncritically, may prejudice against the inclusion of women's suffering by e.g. the presupposition that women's lives belong per definition to the private rather than the political realm. And (2) the list of "gross human rights violations" does not include rape whereas it does include torture, thereby implicitly linking the violations to sexually stereotypical masculine violations parading as universally "human" rights violations.
- 30 Mark Sanders, *Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid*, Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press 2002, 209; Antjie Krog, *Country*, 178–179.
- 31 Talk about a rape "epidemic" in twenty-first century South African cannot be divorced from consideration of that other epidemic, the HIV devastation, which rages here simultaneously. Transmission of the virus from men to women during intercourse is eight times more likely than the inverse, and Unicef reports that six times more girls than boys in Africa are infected with HIV because women experience forced sex. Charlene Smith, "Rape has become a sickening way of life in our land", in: *The Sunday Independent* 26 September 2004, 5.
- 32 Derrida, *Cosmopolitanism*, 58.
- 33 Ibid. 58–9.
- 34 Ibid. 59.
- 35 This would be the case in the examples of "the unforgivable" that he gives, namely when a person's children had their throats cut, or a person's family was killed in a death oven (Derrida, 2002: 55).
- 36 Cf. Lyotard in *Le Differend* (1983) for an exposition of this idea.
- 37 Derrida, *Cosmopolitanism*, 59.
- 38 Ibid. 55.
- 39 Ibid. 51.
- 40 See for example the essay "Sexual Difference", where Irigaray laments the nearly complete absence of a "fecund encounter between the sexes". In: Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill) Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press 1992.
- 41 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, (trans. A. Lingis) The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff 1975, 154 .
- 42 Following Girard and Mauss, Van der Walt explains (2003: 641) sacrifice as a ritualistic action through which "society maintains and/or endures its antinomies and ambiguities". Sacrifice attempts to but cannot finally succeed in unraveling the antinomy and in reducing

the ambiguous to the unequivocal. "Sacrifice", therefore, "concerns a cleansing that cannot rid itself of impurity". Johan Van der Walt, "Psyche and sacrifice: An essay on the time and timing of reconciliation", in: *Tydskrif vir die Suid-Afrikaanse Reg* [Journal of South African Law] 2003, Vol. 4, 635–651. In this context I see the sacrifice of the mother or womanly other as an unsuccessful attempt to deal with ("endure") sexual difference and ambiguity by reducing everything to the masculine–universal and its deviants.

- ⁴³ See: Christine Battersby, *The Phenomenal Woman: Feminist Metaphysics and the Patterns of Identity*, Polity Press: Cambridge 1998, 112.
- ⁴⁴ What was the Rwandan genocide other than an attempt to clear the home (country) of problematic, stressful relationships that have spanned centuries (Véronique Tadjo, *The Shadows of Imana: Travels in the heart of Rwanda Oxford*, Heinemann 2002.). And what was apartheid South Africa other than an attempt to clear a space, a home, a country where white South Africans needed not to face, interact or compete with otherness in the form of blackness?
- ⁴⁵ Winterson, Jeanette *The World and Other Places*, London: Vintage 1998.
- ⁴⁶ In this sense it is significant that Derrida chooses to include in his text on forgiveness the character of *a woman who refuses to forgive*. This female figure defies the role of the feminine–maternal that never refuses forgiveness mainly because it is never asked of her. In a (different, non–Derridean) sense this woman does the "unforgivable" by refusing to forgive what she perceives to be unforgivable. It is furthermore significant that it is this anonymous unforgiving woman that Derrida chooses to textually mark with an endnote which draws our attention to problems and issues concerning sexual difference and forgiveness.

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