"Home is Where the Heart Is?": Gendered Sacred Space in South Africa

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Introduction

"We have had enough!" has been the often-heard call to government from women across South Africa in recent years. Abuse, rape and murder of women reached epidemic proportions in this country - across race, class, culture and religion - as we entered the year 2000. A conservative figure from Rape Crisis, based on reported rapes, plus an equally conservative percentage estimate of those unreported, is that a woman is raped every 23 seconds in South Africa. Khadija Magardie reported in the end-of-the-century edition of the *Mail and Guardian*: "South Africa remains one of the most violent, dangerous places in the world for women and girls" (December 23 1999-January 6 2000: 39).

Not only wider South Africa, but also the home, it turns out, is hardly immune from such violence in this country. Traditionally, the home is regarded as a sanctuary, a private place of safety in which people take refuge from the battering of the world out there. Yet the magistrate who sentenced the man who raped journalist Charlene Smith in her home was led to say: "Homes are supposed to be the only places where people feel safe, but that has changed now" (*Saturday Argus*, April 8/9 1999: 22); and the judge sentencing three youths who had brutally raped and murdered a mother and young daughter, commented, "People are not safe on the streets any more. They are not even safe in the sanctity of their homes" (*Cape Argus*, June 15 2000: 4). As geographer Nancy Duncan puts it, "The private space of home can also be a place where aggressive forms of misogynous masculinity are often exercised with impunity" (1996: 131). Home may well be private, a "sacred" site of refuge - but refuge for whom? Only too often, it would seem, not for women and young children, especially girls. For another judge, it appears that the privacy of home and family remains a protected space for rapists and serves, in turn, to protect wider society from their violence: "Mr Judge John Foxcroft ... caused outrage when a 54-year-old father was given seven years rather than life imprisonment for raping his own child ... The man ... was given the lesser sentence because Judge Foxcroft found he did

not pose a danger to society at large" (*Cape Argus*, May 26 2000: 1). What does this "keep it in the family" standpoint on violence mean for romanticised notions of the sanctity of hearth and home? The incidence of domestic violence against women may be even harder to assess accurately, in terms of statistics, but it is considered to be so widespread that "home" might well be the most *unsafe* place for many women in South Africa. For example, in 1997 the African National Congress Parliamentary Women's Caucus reported that two out of every three women presenting to the trauma unit at Tygerberg Hospital in the Western Cape have been assaulted by partners, spouses or family members (Shifman, Madlala-Routledge and Smith, 1997: 25).

As a woman living in Cape Town, as mother of a daughter in her early twenties, and as close friend of a woman who survived a brutal attack by an intruder in her home, I cannot remain untouched by South Africa's - and the world's - social reality of violence. In confronting my personal fears, I have also contemplated how the personal and political realities of violence link up with another part of my identity and context - my work as an aspirant feminist academic in the study of religion. I ask – in all seriousness about the question, but not without a profound ambivalence regarding possible answers - whether writing theory can have any relevance or useful insights to offer towards explaining and changing the endemic violence done to women in society. Therefore, to pursue this question further, I aim to examine the issues of women's subordination, and violence done to them, through the lenses of three theoretical approaches that overlap and interweave with one another: First, spatial analysis in humanistic geography and the study of religion, with particular focus on the production of the home and the maternal body as sacred space, a concern that these two disciplines appear to hold in common; second, feminist geographers' critique of that spatial representation of the feminine in humanistic geography as well as the absence of attention to gendered space and difference in time geography; and third, feminist critical theory in relation to gender and the body in cultural and religious systems, particularly in relation to the genderedness of dualistic representations of space. In interrogating these theories, I aim, finally, to ascertain whether they provide a fruitful resource for examining, and even transforming, discourses of gender, cultural assumptions and symbol systems - including religion - that arguably underpin and shape social relations and practice, including the reality of violence perpetrated against women.

The importance of critical attention to aspects of culture, religion and representations of "the home" with regard to violence against women is borne out by recent media attention to the high incidence of sexual abuse world-wide. Margardie suggests that in many countries the issues of sexual slavery, forced prostitution, rape and other forms of sexual abuse "are regarded as falling within the ambit of religion, culture and 'the home' ... Under the guise of religion and

custom, women will continue to be subjected to forced pregnancy, confinement and the like" (*Mail and Guardian*, ibid.). And in an article in the feminist journal, *Agenda*, on rape prevention in South Africa, "challenging societal beliefs and cultural values that promote and condone sexual violence" is strongly advocated alongside a call to educate potential victims and to jail and/or treat sex offenders (Vetten, 1997: 45). In this essay, I hope to offer theoretical resources for transforming discourses that perpetuate violence against women, not only in the home, as private space, but also in the wider, more public "home"of South African society.

Geography: Home Space and Body Space

Humanistic geography

Humanistic geographers such as Yi-Fu Tuan and E. C. Relph attach central significance to the idea of home in their analysis of space and place (see Rose, 1993b: 71; 80 n9). In his text, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, Tuan claims that intimate experience of place is only possible in the personal, domestic sphere. He points to the home as the source of such experience: "Hearth, shelter, home or home base are intimate places to human beings everywhere" (1977: 147). Essentialised and romanticised ideas of home, according to feminist geographer Gillian Rose, characterise "humanistic geographers' search for the essence of place ... a search characterised in terms of home - but this was an ideal home" (1993a: 56).

Home is situated at the core of geography's idealisation of place as "a source of stability, reliability and authenticity" (Massey, 1994:180). Rose further indicates that humanistic geography is persistent in claiming home as the exemplar of place, which universalises experience where no such unity of experience and feeling exists. Socialist feminists in particular have long challenged this view of the domestic sphere, claiming that it constitutes the main site of oppression of women. From this feminist perspective, Rose asserts, "there seemed little reason to celebrate a sense of belonging to the home, and even less ... to support the humanistic geographers' claim that home provides the ultimate sense of place" (Rose, 1993a: 55). I would further emphasise that given the extent of violence perpetrated against women in the home, home can be a place some women long to get away from rather than long to remain in or return to. From the perspective of humanistic geography, in fact, home turns out to be a utopian, moveable space. As Doreen Massey points out "home is where the heart is", the site of nostalgic emotion experienced by those who have left home. Again, in a universalising vein, humanistic geographers imagine the exile's romantic longing for something that is lost, a deeply personal and subjective imagining of "home"; but this longed-for home is also coded as female, for home is also where "the woman (mother, lover-to-whom-you-will-one-day-return) remains" (Massey,

1994: 180).

Of value, though, are humanistic geographers' efforts to lessen the divide between "outsider" and "insider", academic researcher and subject (object?) of study. A project to recover the felt experience of place and the experiential realities of how people live their everyday lives has been pursued, including close attention to the previously ignored domestic domain, the private space of the home. However, Rose argues that humanistic geography's apparently holistic discourse in search of the essence of place as lived experience spiritualises and feminises the symbolic construction of "home" in ways that may, on the one hand, recover the previously absent feminine in geography but, on the other, betray a masculinist ideal that renders the feminine empty and silent. Place becomes not only domesticated but also idealised as the "maternal home", at the centre of which is located the "fantasised maternal Woman". The symbolic "(m)Other" represents the essence of place as feminine, as "that spiritualised soul of life" which humanistic geographers claim renders it mysterious, uncertain, ambiguous and virtually unspeakable. This suggests nuances of an enigmatic space allied with a kind of mystic experience that is beyond analysis, beyond relationship, and "beyond the discourse of knowledge" (Rose 1993a: 56-59). Nostalgia, then, is for the lost (m)Other, the "maternal home" that is forever the object of human desire and longing.

In rendering "place as the site of uncertainty, ambiguity and unknowability" in its image of place as maternal home and maternal woman (Rose, 1993a: 60), humanistic geography echoes psychoanalytic theory - particularly Lacan's - in which the feminine is inseparable from the prelinguistic state of the Imaginary, conflated with the preoedipal stage of mother and infant relationship. Only the intervention of "paternal law" and separation from the mother allows entry into the patriarchal Symbolic register of language, power and social relations. In other words, the "feminine" becomes mother, who becomes (m)Other, who becomes all women, who becomes the embodiment of loss and object of desire to be repressed in the unconscious and relegated to the silence of the presymbolic order (Flax, 1990: 103-7). Furthermore, Lacan spiritualises and mystifies the essence of "Woman" and female sexuality as emptiness, beyond representation, something that women can only experience, but never speak. Lacan defines this feminine experience as a highly eroticized death drive, as women's *jouissance*, a pleasure pushed to the boundaries of "exquisite pain" and momentary loss of consciousness (Sarup, 1992: 130). He further theorises it as woman's path above and beyond the patriarchal Symbolic, exalting feminine experience of *jouissance* of the body with mystic nuances of woman's access to transcendent experience that is "*beyond the phallus*" (see Mitchell and Rose, eds., 1985: 145-47). But in reality, Lacan silences women, for actual women (as opposed to the universalised, symbolic notion of "Woman") can only speak once they enter the paternal realm of the Symbolic. While idealising and spiritualising a notion of maternal

plenitude that human beings eternally long for, Lacan relegates real women to the position of subjugated object - object of the subject's (Man's?) impossible desires. Humanistic geography, too, embraces a nostalgia for this "first and ultimate dwelling place":

> Desired but lost, place seems to stand for nothing other than the inaccessible plenitude of Mother. Place becomes the feminised Other in the discourse of humanistic geography, idealised as Woman, spoken of in terms of the (lost) Mother. (Rose, 1993a: 60)

Feminist theorists, in geography and in the wider context of the humanities and social sciences in general, have followed Simone de Beauvoir's lead, in her watershed work, *The Second Sex* (1952), by forcefully challenging such feminised ideals. They have continued to develop diverse and multi-faceted critical analyses of the lived reality of women's suppressed subjectivity and agency that has been forged from the androcentric symbolisation of "Woman" as "Other", defined by lack against "Man" as the norm in patriarchal society. Humanistic geographers' search for the essence of place, perceived as "Other" and conflated with the feminine and maternal symbol of "Woman", universalises their claims about the human experience of place and betrays a lack of acknowledgement of the lived experience of women and all the difference and diversity of status and experience that exists among women, a point that will be revisited in more depth later on in this essay.

Time geography

Time geography extends beyond essentialist and idealised imaginations of place in its mapping of everyday space and time, which inextricably interweave with one another, and its analysis of tempero-spatial structure and social structure, which influence and shape one another. Unlike the enigmatic, even unknowable, space recounted by humanistic geographic research, time geography points to an unbounded and infinitely knowable space that can always be mapped, in which human beings go about their daily business. Time geography, developed by Swedish geographer Törsten Hägerstrand, is defined as "the paths taken by individuals to fulfil their everyday tasks, or projects, using representations of three-dimensional time-space" (see Rose, 1993a: 21). Importantly, this type of mapping particularly considers "the physical, technological, economic and social constraints on such movement" through time and space.

Early feminist geographers, therefore, turned to time geography to map the effects of patriarchy's spatial structuration on women's reality, given its "sensitivity to the routines of women's domestic, everyday lives" (Rose, 1993b:75). This perspective has been especially valuable for analysis of the restraints and

confinements endured by women due to the oppressive, masculinist social construction of everyday spaces into the dichotomy of public space and private space, the latter being earmarked as women's space: "Time geography ... recovers the everyday and the ordinary, and many feminists have argued that the mundane world of routine is the realm of women's social life in masculinist society". Not only that, Rose adds, feminist geographers have also tracked women's agency in negotiating that space and contesting the "ideological limits placed on what they are allowed to do" (1993a: 22-25).

So far, so good. But time geography's mapping of individuals' lives and activities as lines through space, representing the paths individuals "draw" as their bodies move through space, seems to ignore, even erase, the importance of difference and experience in defining and interpreting space and embodiment. This erasure can be construed in two ways: First, space itself, even if "infinitely knowable", appears to retain a certain purity and innocence that is not problematized or critically examined. It becomes "transparent space" that is everywhere, limitless and infinite, offering "freedom to run, to leap, to stretch and reach out without bounds" (Gould, cited in Rose, 1993b: 75). Such spatial freedom, Rose asserts, is usually only experienced by white, heterosexual men. Spaces themselves - especially in the public sphere but also the private, I would argue, given the ubiquitous incidence of domestic violence I have already mentioned - can be constraining and violent. Time geography perhaps overlooks the reality that space is socially produced, that different spatial patterns are constituted by multiple social processes (McDowell, 1996: 29). Space itself is relational, reflecting and produced by power relations in society: "Space is ... a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity and cooperation" (Massey, cited in McDowell, 1996: 31). The reality of sexual, racist and homophobic violence, for example, is repressed by time geography's insistence on transparent, universal and exhaustive space - a vision that sees no difference from itself. But this space is far from innocent; rather, it reflects and is produced by hegemonic masculinity, by an implicit presence of an unseen, disembodied "master subject" who sees all.

This uncovering of a hidden androcentric vision is reminiscent of Donna Haraway's critique of the monopoly on knowledge and power that has been aspired to in the history of western science, especially in its manipulation of vision to claim an innocent objectivity for what is seen (1991: 188-201). In reality, though, this visual capacity has reinforced male supremacy and has succeeded in distancing "the knowing subject from everybody and everything in the interests of unfettered power" (188). Haraway asserts that such a "view of infinite vision is an illusion, a god-trick" that ignores "the particularity and embodiment of all vision" (189). She advocates that "feminist writing of the body" should reclaim vision, but a type of seeing that acknowledges its own embodiment and lays claim only to situated, particular, partial and locatable

knowledges. In other words, for Haraway, it would seem that attention to difference is of paramount importance for feminist claims to knowledge, because the condition of rational knowledge and objectivity is "partiality and not universality" (195).

Second, in time-geographic mapping, the bodies themselves that leave traces through space are similarly undifferentiated, represented simply as lines or paths, colourless - not revealing black or white bodies, or even male or female bodies, heterosexual or homosexual bodies (Rose, 1993b: 77). They are hardly bodies at all. But Duncan (1996: 2) points out that although geography is marked by gendered and spatialized binary oppositions according to which the public sphere has been perceived as the domain of universal reason and transcendence, of "the disembodied, disinterested Cartesian observer", this "model observer" is, in fact, a white, able-bodied, heterosexual male. While humanistic geography tends towards equating the unknowable and enigmatic Other with the feminine and domestic space, time geography seems to ignore and deny the Other altogether in order to repress difference and substantiate the universality and exhaustiveness of the Same: white, masculine, middle-class, heterosexual bodies and hegemonic, masculinist public space. What is absent is attention to the body itself, which has long been denied by the masculine and associated with domestic space and the feminine, and even more specifically, with the maternal body. Along with this erasure, there is no allowable space for "the emotional, the passionate, the disruptive, and the feelings of relations with others" (Rose, 1993a: 28). Or, I would add, for the experienced reality of violence against women.

Geography's strategies for mapping home space and embodied space, then, show a confusing ambivalence: On the one hand, humanistic geography idealises, mystifies and feminises those spaces; and on the other, time geography tends to erase those spaces in favour of a transparent, innocent and infinite space that does not allow for closer attention to the social production of space and to the bodies that move through that space. Consequently, difference and the felt experience of difference located in that space and among those bodies are ignored. These strategies, I suggest, are analogous to the study of religion's approaches to explaining and mapping sacred space, and its production, in which notions of home and the body play a significant role.

Phenomenology of Religion: The Sacred Space of Home Poetics of sacred space

Humanistic geographers' concern with place, and the idealisation of "home" at its centre, is echoed in the study of religion's concern with the question of what constitutes space or place as sacred. For example, a similarly essentialist understanding of place is uncovered by David Chidester in his study of phenomenologist of religion Gerardus van der Leeuw's approach to defining manifestations of the

sacred (Chidester, 1994). Van der Leeuw's listing of sacred places also focuses on the domestic in identifying several analogous, metaphoric sites that constitute a "poetics of sacred space": home, temple, settlement, pilgrimage site and human body; also homologous are the hearth, the altar, the sanctuary, the shrine and the human heart, each located at the respective centre of the above spaces (see Chidester,1994: 212). As Chidester points out, "At the centre of every sacred place, from hearth to heart, Van der Leeuw domesticated the sacred, asserting, in the end, that a sacred place was ultimately a place in which a person could truly be at home." In other words, experience of place as sacred, in a poetics of sacred space, is defined as intimate, personal and domestic, suggesting a correspondence with humanistic geographers' definition of the essence of place as experiential, as "home". Home, then, lies at the heart of manifestations of sacred space and at the heart of that domestic space - according to the feminisation of that space by masculinist notions of home - resides the maternal body.

Politics of sacred space

Such a poetics of sacred space, as described above, is founded on a substantial definition that imagines an essential experience of the sacred and discerns certain sites as inherently full of spiritual power and meaning. Just as humanistic geography's essentialized and feminised ideal of place masks the reality of women's lives, a poetics of sacred space tends to mask the reality that the sacred, particularly in its manifestation as place, is humanly constructed. This points to a situational definition of the sacred, as emphasised, for example, by historian of religion Jonathan Z. Smith's theory that place is located, sacralized, and maintained as sacred through the human, cultural labour of ritual (see Chidester, 1994: 212). Just as time geography attempts to locate the reality of human everyday activity in defining space so, too, can a different perspective on the sacred allow for the everyday reality of human agency in the sacralization of symbols and place.

On the basis of this situational definition of the sacred, Chidester (1994) juxtaposes Van der Leeuw's poetics of sacred space with an explication of a politics of sacred space. If space itself is relational, produced by social processes and power relations that often involve constraint, domination and violence, as suggested by feminist geographers, so too is place sacralized through human activities that are relational and, most significantly, that similarly involve contested power relations, conflict and even violence. Pursuing this intersection of feminist geography and phenomenology of religion further, a common interest in the cultural and symbolic significance of space and place can be detected. For instance, Linda McDowell emphasizes that "spaces and places are not only sets of material social relations but also cultural objects. Thus we must investigate not only patterns of flows but also the meaning of place, of place as absolute location"; she also advocates that "geographers must link the material and the

symbolic or metaphorical in analyses of the social construction and significance of space" (1996: 32; 37).

The production of sacred space, then, rests on a process that includes four components which, according to Chidester's reading, are present but relatively hidden in Van der Leeuw's text: First, a politics of location or colonisation of space; second, a politics of inclusion and exclusion in which boundaries are maintained so that the space is protected from defilement; third, a politics of property that negotiates who owns the space; and fourth, a politics of exile, referring to alienation, dislocation and remoteness from a place that engenders experience of nostalgia or "homesickness" - a "homesickness" that makes a place seem sacred. The sacred, if defined in this way, is not confined to religious buildings or natural sites and, moreover, places that might be sacralised - and even violently contested - would include the home and the human body (Chidester and Linenthal, 1995: 6-9). As noted above, at the core of idealised notions of "home" reside equally idealised images of woman, or more specifically, the maternal body. Critique of humanistic and androcentric ideals about domestic space as sacred space must inevitably be accompanied by critique of notions about the maternal body that likewise produce the maternal body as sacred space. This kind of analysis may reveal the foundations for attitudes that have perpetuated violence against women's bodies, especially in the "sanctity" of the home.

Binary Oppositions: A Feminist Perspective

So far, I have shown that both humanistic geography's search for the essence of place and phenomenology of religion's aim to explain the sacred in a poetics of sacred space, articulate ideals of home as a "sacred" space - a place where one feels at home, whether at home or away from home. Explication of experience and feeling seems to be the strategy for finding the essence of place, a strategy that idealises and universalises experience in a way that erases difference and the realities of lived experience. A poetics of sacred space does not allow for the human creativity that produces sacred space or the conflictual realities of power relations that are inevitably involved in the creative process. Humanistic geography likewise does not allow for difference and conflict in its feminised notion of home and its idealised notion of the "maternal woman" that stands as the celebrated symbol of home. At the heart of these erasures, I would argue, lie hidden issues of domestic space and embodiment and, most important, their genderedness in the context of the western, dualistic thought that has, for centuries, divided and interpreted these spaces in ways that devalue the body and the feminine, and subordinate women.

The body and the symbolic meanings attributed to it - whether social, cultural or religious - are located at the core of feminist critical analysis of the

construction of gender identity and its inextricable connection with relations of power, including male violence against women's bodies. Many feminist theorists have pointed out that in the western world, at least, the denigration of women is founded on the overarching concept of the mind/body split in its philosophical and religious traditions (see Goldenberg, 1989). Theology and Enlightenment humanist thought have consistently characterised the mind, reason, the soul and transcendent spirit as superior to physicality and the body. Since rationality and disembodied transcendence have been just as consistently associated with men, women's history has been marked by the oppression and disempowerment resulting from the limitations produced by an androcentric perspective that links women with the body, sexuality and nature. As indicated above, nuances of this perspective are replicated in the disembodied nature of the powerful, all-seeing male gaze that points to an "innocent", pure space in time geography's social mapping. Feminist theory, however, in its project "to 'reinsert' the body" in philosophy (Alcoff, 1996: 17), is pursuing varied pathways towards collapsing oppressive, gendered dichotomies such as the splitting of mind and body. Linda Alcoff, for instance, asserts that feminist philosophers are developing "a new conception of reason" based on the premise that the mind is not, and never has been, separate from the body, signifying the "need to rethink the entire opposition that has been drawn heretofore between reason and its 'Others', Others which all, in one way or another, have to do with the body" (1996: 17).

Other related spatial dichotomies that turn out to be similarly gendered in ways that devalue women and the feminine are the divisions of culture and nature, and public and private domains. Early work of feminist anthropologists such as Sherry Ortner and Michelle Rosaldo pioneered critical analysis of these culturally constructed binary oppositions. If all societies attempt to control nature for their own benefit and value their creation of culture over nature, then women, seen as closer to nature than men because of their reproductive capacity, are likewise considered of lesser social value (Ortner, 1974: 73). Cultural interpretations of femininity and women tend to underscore their biological characteristics, such as sexuality, fertility, menstrual blood and maternity (Rosaldo, 1974: 31). Women, therefore, seem to be repeatedly defined by their sexual functions and are further constrained by sexual ideologies based on cultural and religious notions of pollution associated with natural bodily processes, most particularly the essentially female functions of menstruation and childbirth (Moore, 1988: 14-16). Male fear of women's reproductive power has not only associated women with the body and pollution, as signifiers of birth, but also as signifiers of death. Women have become reminders of human embodiedness and mortality.

For example, in the historical and cultural context of South Africa, a study by anthropologist Harriet Ngubane (1976: 274-84) indicates that traditional

Zulu cosmology locates women as mediators between "this world", the place of the living, and the "other world", the place of the spirits after death. This symbolic map is translated into ritual practice in which married women mediate the rites of passage for both birth and death. It is because of her close association with the liminal zone between the two worlds - *umnyama*, or "darkness of night", implying a site of pollution - that the Zulu married woman is marginalized, often known as "mother of birth and death". During times associated with the passage of spirits through this in-between space - either to or from this world (childbirth and bereavement) - a woman is considered to be in a state of pollution, and the spirits are believed to be incomplete and powerless.

Ngubane states that all situations and body fluids connected with menstruation, human reproduction and death are assumed to be polluting and contagious in graded levels of intensity. From the time of conception, the Zulu mother enters a marginal state of pollution, which reaches its height at parturition until she stops bleeding. During this period she is considered highly contagious to men's virility, cattle, and to herself and her baby. She therefore withdraws to the edge of the settlement, attended only by other married women. Furthermore, as mother of the infant she is perceived only as the channel for the completion of the spirit's entry into this world as a child; once rites of incorporation into society are performed at a later stage, the child "belongs" to the father and the patrilineal line. Similarly, a widow is chief mourner for the death of her husband, or other family members, and plays a central role in the burial rites that symbolically represent "birth" into the "other" world, followed by a year of mourning that ends with rituals of reincorporation to complete the dead husband's entry into the "other" world of the ancestor spirits. Throughout this process, the married woman is also located in the marginalized and polluted space of *umnyama*, her pollution being at its height at the death and burial of her husband.

Within the context of their proximity to the negatively powered mystical forces of life and death, Zulu married women are marginalized as a site of impurity in the liminal and dark domain of incomplete spirits in transition between two worlds. Fear of this dark and unknown space by those living in the familiar space of ordered human society inevitably generates fear of women's potential power in inhabiting this space, pointing to cultural beliefs and assumptions about the structure of the world and femininity that reinforce male control and domination of women in society.

By contrast, men have been symbolically associated with culture and are situated in the public domain of socio-political relations, giving them access to power over nature and thus over women. As Rosaldo emphasises, men's authority over women does not necessarily exhaust power or deny women some access to power and agency in shaping the social order; but women's power, unlike men's, tends not to be culturally legitimated as authority (1974: 21). In many

cultures, then, women have been marginalised from central social structures and mostly confined to the private, domestic domain of reproduction and raising children, while men pursue the affairs of public life. Mutually exclusive gendered identities and gendered roles that serve to polarise the sexes are socially constructed and legitimated by appealing to the naturalness of female bodily functions - many of them to do with maternity - and the false assumption that women are somehow more embodied and closer to nature than are men.

The Politics of Location and Discourses of Difference

Body

In bringing attention to the oppressive nature of gendered cultural constructs that have been generated by western dualistic thinking and gendered spatial divisions, feminist critique also needs to be interrogated more closely to uncover the problems inherent in generalising across cultures as well as across other social constructions such as race, class, ethnicity and sexual orientation. The history of feminist theory, too, is not entirely innocent of a universalising vision and "has likewise been marked and limited by its location largely within the West" (Alcoff, 1996: 25). Recalling the above study of Zulu cosmology and the gendered social relations associated with its myths, symbols and practices, Ngubane (1976) shows that not all Zulu women lack power or are associated with impurity in that cultural context. As an example, she specifically refers to the role of the *isangoma*, or diviner, who is most often female in Zulu tradition. If called to be a diviner, through possession by the ancestor spirits of her own lineage, a Zulu woman is believed to be in a state of purity and light, becoming a channel of communication for complete ancestor spirits who help to maintain a relationship with the living community. The *isangoma* also tends to be marginalized, set apart from the ordinary, domestic space of the human community, but this is because of a reversal of cultural expressions of purity and impurity: "Her problem is how to reconcile her state of purity ... with the profane world she lives in. Her whole behaviour is governed by this awareness" (Ngubane, 1976: 278). That is, she has to maintain an awareness of the potentially polluting power of the human world and consistently sustain her state of purity through ascetic disciplines. As Ngubane points out, divination constitutes an institutionalised and professional calling of responsibility and power in some Zulu communities and a diviner's practice of trance, clairvoyance and spiritual powers are symbols of transformation and reintegration in society, especially in times of affliction and misfortune. Female diviners, then, provide an example of women who hold not only power, but also authority, within their culture, although their proximity to the positive mystical forces of the spirit world marginalises them from the ordered centre of domestic society.

Gendered power relations and spatial politics that are supported by the

religious and cultural beliefs and practices associated with indigenous Zulu cosmology clearly participate in the subordination of women in Zulu social relations. But the politics of sacred space implicated here is far more complex and diverse in the ways it serves to shape women's lives than might at first be realised. Moreover, critical analysis of gendered spatial politics has not remained static or wedded to a universalising theory of the subordination of women in religion and culture, and has in fact proved to be a contested field in feminist theory, with fruitful results. At the centre of diverse feminist approaches to a politics of location and explanations of gendered identities, is situated the body. The body, I would argue, is where arguments about "sex" or "gender", "essentialist feminisms" and "constructionist feminisms", meet and interact. Paula Cooey, in *Religious Imagination and the Body* (1994), particularly highlights that the dualistic notion of sex as biological and gender as socioculturally constructed - and the attendant division between essentialism and cultural determinism - is no less culpable than any other binary opposition in reinforcing male domination. Sex and gender both reside in the body and the body, therefore, is potentially both *creator* and *creation* of human ideas, imagination and action. In investigating religious symbol systems and how "the 'bodied' imagining subject and the body as cultural artefact" are interrelated, Cooey refers to a "socionatural process" in which the dichotomy of sex and gender can be collapsed (1994: 7). Similarly, in her analysis of the spatiality of the maternal body in a geographic context, Rose suggests that ambivalence, and even conflict, concerning the level of significance of the body among feminists and "feminisms" is a reality that is not necessarily counter-productive: "essentialism" and "constructionism" are feminist strategies and resources and each can be taken up by any one feminist at different times in response to different issues (1993b: 74-75).

Difference and particularity, as Haraway insisted, must be the keys to entering into this politics of location and understanding the positioning of women, how their bodies are represented, where and how they are marginalised and oppressed, and why violence is perpetrated against them. The feminist call to recover the human body reminds us of its centrality to human experience and location. As Jane Flax (1990: 147) recalls, "embodiment is simultaneously natural and cultural" because all experience, whether physical, psychical, social or emotional - and for both women and men - is mediated through the body. Moreover, Alcoff likewise stresses that "biological development is relational and therefore social" and "embodiment, meaning here simply human lived experience, is simultaneously natural and cultural" (1996: 21). In reminding us that all human beings share "that months-long period we spend unfolding inside a woman's body" Adrienne Rich brings specific attention to women's bodies and lived experience in her book *Of Woman Born* (1986). She advocates that women "need to begin with the female body - our own" in order to locate the grounds "from which to speak with authority *as* women", not as a theoretical principle to

apply *to* women (1987: 213). This points to a politics of location that includes all aspects of female embodied experience, for example:

> The politics of pregnability and motherhood. The politics of orgasm. The politics of rape and incest, of abortion, birth control, forcible sterilisation. Of prostitution and marital sex. Of what had been named sexual liberation. Of prescriptive heterosexuality. Of lesbian existence. (Rich, 1987: 212-23)

But this embodied situatedness can never be defined and interpreted as universal or static, as underscored by Rich's strategy for working with difference and particularity: "When I write 'the body' I see nothing in particular. To write 'my body' plunges me into lived experience, particularity ... To say 'my body' reduces the temptation to grandiose assertions" (1987: 215). Analysis of the body as a gendered, spatial location has to recognise what Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose call the "politics of difference", so that any claims to a "transparent space" of total knowledge of all women can be challenged (see 1994: 1-8). Idealised notions of a "global sisterhood" made by universalist feminisms, that seem to assume "women are the same everywhere and always", seem more reminiscent of the master subject's gaze and Haraway's explication of masculinist vision as a "god-trick". Judith Butler raises an apposite question in her groundbreaking text, *Gender Trouble*, by asking "whether feminist politics could do without a 'subject' in the category of women"; she continues by suggesting that "[t]he feminist 'we' is always and only a phantasmatic construction, one that has its purposes, but which denies the internal complexity and indeterminacy of the term" (1988: 142). Blunt and Rose therefore insist on the essential task of articulating "the extraordinarily complex and simultaneous interaction of gender, class, race, and sexuality ... that create differences between women", signifying that we have to deal with "not only the politics of difference *between* two genders, but also the politics of diversity *among* women" (1994: 6-7).

Home

It is clear that lived realities for women do not constitute a coherent, universal experience of being "Woman". Moreover, women's lived experiences of "home" do not speak of home as a coherent, static domestic domain of caring, nurturing, safety and love. The domestic domain has traditionally been understood as private space and, according to feminist geographers cited earlier, as space that is gendered feminine. But ironically, as Duncan recalls, the home "has also traditionally been subject to the patriarchal authority of the husband and father" (1996: 131). Duncan further asks to what extent these "historically persistent perceptions of masculine autonomy and entitlement within the space of

the home" might explain the fact that domestic violence has largely remained a hidden, "private" problem, rendered inaudible and invisible. In similar vein, philosopher Martha Nussbaum addresses "a puzzle about privacy" in her article "Is Privacy Bad for Women?" (2000) by pointing to a critical ambivalence among feminists about the extent to which privacy right can in fact protect women, their bodily integrity, and their liberty. In the American context, in fact, it is frequently "male bad behaviour" such as marital rape and domestic violence that is protected on the grounds of right to privacy. As Catherine MacKinnon has so incisively noted, "In this light, a right to privacy looks like an injury got up as a gift" (cited in Nussbaum, 2000).

The meaning of "home", then, needs to be subjected to rigorous critique through which romantic nostalgia for the "feminine" or "maternal" home is scrutinised from a point of view that privacy of the domestic domain may reinforce hierarchical structures of oppression and violence. For example, in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (1990: 145-53), bell hooks, as black, feminist, critical theorist, writes of her childhood home as a poor, working-class, black location on the margins of the white town at the centre. Memory of home, if not tinged by an illusory nostalgia of "longing for something to be as it once was", reveals an existence limited by "oppressive boundaries set by race, sex, and class domination" (145). But for hooks, remembering the pain of home as it really was, can generate a "politicization of memory ... that serves to illuminate and transform the present" (147). Remembering, as a strategy for activating a politics of location that disrupts and subverts the division of colonising centre and colonised periphery, generates an internalised space of radical openness. By taking the pain of "home" and who one is into the racist and masculinist centre and, as Rose puts it, "speaking the margin" (1993a: 156) – in hooks' experience, from poor, black girl on the periphery, to academic and intellectual at the white, patriarchal centre – home's marginality is remembered as more than a site of deprivation and alternatively reimagined as a site of resistance and liberation. But hooks evokes this experience of shifting visions of location as a painfully fragmented one that involves the hard realities of choice, of coming to know the difference "between that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as a site of resistance" (1990: 153). This choice or site is the real home, which indeed is not static or coherent, but engages the moving reality of felt experience:

> Indeed the very meaning of "home" changes with experience of decolonization, of radicalisation. At times, home is nowhere. At times, one knows only extreme estrangement and alienation. Then home is no longer just one place. It is locations. Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and ever-changing perspectives, a place where one

> discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference. One confronts and accepts dispersal and fragmentation as part of the construction of a new world order that reveals more fully where we are, who we can become, an order that does not demand forgetting. (hooks, 1990: 148)

Although hooks' above critique focuses on racism, it vividly portrays the interaction of race, class and gender in the shifting and differentiated visions of home. Furthermore, hooks also raises the issue of sexism produced at the intersection of race and gender on the colonised margins that constitute home for the black working class in the United States (1990: 75–76). She points to the sexualised language of racist discourse and patriarchal notions of masculinity that describe the nature of black males' suffering as "castration, emasculation, impotency". All this serves to reinforce a belief that "racism is more oppressive to black men than black women ... that black men are particularly wounded by racist practices" that deny them proper employment and "the capacity to be providers and heads of households". Uncritical acceptance of patriarchal norms and conventionally gendered division of labour - by men and by women who excuse men's sexist practices because of their victimisation by racist practices - only serves to veil the triple oppression by race, class and gender often suffered by black women in white-dominated societies in many parts of the world, not least, South Africa. Again, imaginings of home and domestic space have to shift and transform, requiring men to "face the reality that sexism empowers them despite the impact of racism in their lives" and that their condition of "powerlessness" does not excuse male domination of, or even violence against, women in the home.

Identity

All these shifting perspectives of place disrupt any idealised notions of home articulated through a poetics of sacred space. But the complex and fluid "politics of location" described by bell hooks, still, I would suggest, points to a construction of home as sacred, produced through the hard realities of a politics of sacred space that quite evidently involves issues of colonisation, ownership, exclusion and exile. The politics of location, rooted in a contested and shifting sacred space of home, is inextricably interwoven with the equally shifting sands of identity, which is similarly subjected to the oppressive limitations of gender, sexuality, race, class, ethnicity, religion and so on. The felt experience of home is located in the experience of being human - where the heart is - and the idealisation of that "home", or personal identity, as a coherent, static entity is just as much a romantic illusion. Biddy Martin and Chandra T. Mohanty, in their essay "Feminist Politics: What's Home Got to Do with It?" (1986), sum it up succinctly:

> "Being home" refers to the place where one lives within familiar, safe, protected boundaries; "not being home" is a matter of realising that home was an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, *the repression of difference even within oneself*. (196, emphasis added)

In analysing an autobiographical essay by feminist writer Minnie Bruce Pratt, "who identifies herself as white, middle-class, Christian-raised, southern, and lesbian" (193), Martin and Mohanty uncover a "white" perspective of home and identity that is as shifting and fragmented - and painful - as hooks" "black" experience; but, of course, different; they share some identities, but not others.

The story of differentiation, then, does not end there with narratives of difference among women. It would seem that individual identity - especially gender identity - is also not coherent and unitary. Henrietta Moore's cogent analysis of the "internally differentiated subject" in her book, *A Passion for Difference* (1994), suggests that

> there is no single femininity or masculinity for individual women and men to identify with in their social settings, but a variety of possible femininities and masuclinities which are provided by the contradictory and competing discourses which exist, and which produce and are reproduced by social practices and institutions. (63)

In examining the relationship between gender discourses and relations of power, Moore addresses the question of why any individual takes up one particular subject position as opposed to another. Drawing on Wendy Holloway's work (see Moore, 1994: 63-66), she shows that a person's motivations are fuelled by his or her "investment" in a particular position. Such "investment", or "emotional commitment", is argued to reside in "the relative power, conceived of in terms of the satisfaction, reward or payoff, which a particular subject position promises, but does not necessarily provide" (64). Subject positions taken up are also influenced by intersubjectivity, or relations with others, and may be generated by emotional states and subconscious motivations: "The fact that individuals take up multiple subject positions, some of which may contradict each other, obviously cannot be explained in terms of rational choice" (66).

Violence

According to Moore, fantasy is of key importance in the taking up of gendered subject positions. In terms of relations of power that result in domination and interpersonal violence, it is fantasy that plays out a pivotal role in producing

multiple subjectivities, such as "ideas about the kind of person one would like to be seen to be by others", and these "fantasies of identity are linked to fantasies of power and agency in the world" (66). Fantasies of identity link with fantasies of power and when an individual perceives a threat to that identity - a threat that is often as unreal as the fantasies of identity and power themselves - violence ensues: "For example, wives are frequently beaten for imagined infidelities" which threaten the husband's own perception of himself as well as his perception of how others would see him, involving the further threat of loss of status in the eyes of others (68). This type of violence is congruent with a discourse of gender that imagines masculinity (the husband's) as dominant and in control, and femininity (the wife's) as passive, subservient and nurturing of the male. Violence, Moore argues, is a consequence of a crisis in representation, where "the inability to maintain the fantasy of power triggers a crisis in the fantasy of identity" (69). Violence is a means of resolving this crisis, restoring fantasised identities based on conventionally accepted discourses of gender. For example, the inability of a husband to control his wife's sexual behaviour (real or imagined) becomes part of a struggle to maintain sexualised fantasies of identity and power in which violence serves to reconfirm the imagined nature of male power and female subjugation. The crisis to be resolved may be one of representation, but the enactment of that violence, surely, is a social practice that is only too real in its bodiliness - done to, and felt by, real women's bodies.

Following Moore's argument, it seems evident that the experience of threat, and then enactment of violence, is just as much due to representations, expectations, and fantasies concerning the other - in our context, male fantasies of the (m)Other. In accord with my stated intention to interrogate the relevance of theory for understanding men's violence against women, the remaining question is: what masculinist representations, fantasies and expectations of women are vulnerable to failure of fulfilment, and consequently to the enactment of violence? In this regard, I think we have come full circle and need to revisit androcentric symbolisations of home and maternal body that are implicated in this regard, with brief attention to specifically feminist theoretical strategies that challenge and possibly replace those cultural representations in a useful way.

Representation and Violence Against Women: Challenging Cultural Assumptions

Women's vulnerability in a politics of sacred space

Closer feminist critique of the genderedness of spatiality - or "a politics of location" that reinforces male domination of, and violence against, women - calls for entry into the complex and multi-faceted space of the maternal body. According to Rose, the maternal body remains a space that the masculine im-

agination is unable to enter (1993b: 77); but what the masculine imagination *has* been able to do, I have shown, is idealise home and the maternal body as sacred space. Furthermore, it can be argued that this sacralization of the feminine is highly ambivalent in its symbolic significance for and effects on women's lived reality, an ambivalence of idealisation on the one hand, and denigration on the other, an ambivalence that may include the production of violent spaces.

In focusing on notions of home and the maternal body, I have argued that humanistic geography and the study of religion's poetics of sacred space point to an essence of place that produces an idealised and romanticised notion of home. This sacred space is also lodged in the human heart that is the metaphoric site of nostalgic longing for the fantasised, maternal "Woman", the lost (m)Other who symbolises the eternally unrequitable object of male desire. From an androcentric perspective, the essence of place is feminised and represented as enigmatic and unknowable; likewise, the essence of "Woman" is empty, silent and beyond representation. Masculinist strategies of mystic sanctification of woman and the maternal deny the realities of the lived experience of women, deny the social significance of cultural symbolisations of female sexuality and the maternal body for women. Although time geography offers a glimpse of the realities of everyday activities and experience, the male gaze envisions a transparent space that erases the realities of embodied difference and is unable to enter into the felt experience of women. As a result of such androcentric symbolic strategies incorporated by culture and religion, for instance, women's subjectivity and agency are repressed and subjugated within the social realities of patriarchal society.

Ideals of home and symbolic constructions of the maternal body constitute a site on which gendered power relations are played out, clearly indicative of the four elements of a politics of sacred space pinpointed by Chidester (1994), all of which have been touched on in this article: First, a politics of location - for example, the gendered divisions of culture and nature, public space and domestic space as well as the closely meshed interaction of gender, race, class, religion and sexual orientation that produce difference among women, difference that is ignored by male fantasies of sanctified "Woman"; second, strategies of inclusion and exclusion - for example, those generated by the philosophical separation of body (woman) and mind (man), or those based on boundaries erected by cultural and religious regulations of purity and pollution, where the female body, its fluids, and its reproductive capacities are often represented as polluting. In western history of philosophy and religion, male fantasies of woman remain ambivalent, as feminist theologian Meredith Underwood (2000: 286) points out by asking: "is woman Eve or Mary? temptress or madonna?" – or, for that matter, is she virgin or whore? – both male imaginings of femininity that have been perpetuated as objects of male desire; third, contested issues of ownership - for example, male control and regulation of women's bodies, violence

being one such weapon of control; and fourth, dislocation and exile, the primary instance being the experience of separation from the maternal body, followed by male rejection of femininity in accord with "paternal law". Yet male fear of being engulfed by the (m)Other, by femininity and corporeality, is accompanied by unconscious longing for reincorporation into the imagined "home" or plenitude of the maternal body. Steeped in dualistic thinking, from Plato to the Enlightenment, a politics of sacred space that engages in defining "Woman", and the representations of femininity inherent in it, render women as confined on the one hand and open and vulnerable on the other, in spaces that can become violent in a moment, as Ann Snitow's incisive comment shows: "one can be recalled to 'woman' any time - by things as terrible as rape, as trivial as a rude shout on the street" (cited in Underwood, 2000: 287).

As feminist anthropologists such as Ortner and Rosaldo suggested in their early work, such androcentric representations, cultural assumptions and spatial divisions that reinforce women's subordination and vulnerability to harm are not limited to western culture - even if care needs to be exercised in avoiding universalising anthropological interpretations of "indigenous" cultural beliefs, symbols and practices. A recent study by anthropologist Suzanne Leclerc-Madlala reported in the *Mail and Guardian* (December 10-16 1999: 38) is apposite in this regard. Her insightful article critiques claims to "cultural right" and "sacred rights", made on the basis of revival of lost "African traditions", in relation to the practice of "virginity testing" in KwaZulu-Natal. The claim that virginity testing is a cultural, or religious, practice worth reviving refers to a past ritual festival that took place in spring in rural, agrarian areas of KwaZulu-Natal, dedicated to Nomkhubulwane, the goddess of rain and fertility. Offerings were made to her in the hope that she would bless the people with good crops and many children. One of the rites involved girls who had been confirmed as virgins - for only virgins were pure enough and good enough (as mentioned earlier, married women, especially during pregnancy and childbirth or while menstruating, were considered potentially dangerous and polluting to crops, animals, and male virility) - digging up a patch of land and planting crops for "Nomkhubulwane's consumption and pleasure". Today, Leclerc-Mdlala continues, "self-proclaimed guardians of tradition ... like true missionaries with a cause" insist that the recent resurgence of virginity testing on young girls is a reinterpretation of the old rituals of an agrarian people who depended on the generosity of "Mother Nature" for their survival, now utilised in a "culturally appropriate way to combat things like teenage pregnancy and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/Aids".

The above claim, I noticed, articulates a paradoxical mix of the fluidity of tradition in its adaptation of the "old" to the "new", on the one hand and, on the other, an appeal to the static, concretised coherence of tradition that serves to justify masculinist controlling practices that do violence to women. "Cultural

right" is extended to men having "extramarital girlfriends" and some "even go as far as to say that wife abuse is a cultural right". Furthermore, in South Africa, the first sexual experience for the majority of women is coerced, and yet many female pupils are expelled from school for pregnancy. In the reality of a South Africa where teenage pregnancies and HIV infection rates soar, Leclerc-Mdlala raises searching questions of a politics of sacred space played out on the bodies of young women: "Whose culture is it anyway? Who defines the parameters of that culture? Who takes away a girl's virginity in the first place? Who is making her pregnant? Who is giving her diseases? Who is transmitting HIV? Who controls her body? Her sexuality? Her reproduction?" And, I would add, when does "cultural right" inform practices based on an androcentric, nostalgic perspective of "home", as sanctuary, in a space and time long past. These questions point to old gendered representations of the female body that are still only too alive and powerful in their potential to determine social practice.

Feminist reoccupations of the sacred space of the maternal body[1]

This final section turns briefly to feminist strategies of "writing the body" which challenge masculinist cultural assumptions and symbolic constructions of sacred space, strategies that could be called "feminist reoccupations of space" (Grosz, 1995: 120). Just as the masculinist notions and practices analysed above are saturated with nuances of religious discourse of the sacred, so, too are feminist techniques of writing the body. Certainly it could be said, on the one hand, that such strategies of writing the body remain at the level of symbolic discourse and abstract thought; but on the other, they translate into practice aimed at dislodging, and even replacing, masculinist symbolic discourses of gender that underpin oppressive social practices, including male violence against women, and even replacing them, reoccupying the spaces. Feminist reoccupation of the space of the maternal body is a case in point, a place to start as a theoretical contribution to feminist resistance and praxis. Such feminist reoccupations enter the sacred space of the maternal body, of embodied *experience*, in all its complexity, where the masculinist imagination fears to tread.

Following her own injunctions in *Of Woman Born* (1986) for women to "think through the body" (1986: 284), and most particularly, "my body" (1987: 215), Rich recounts her own embodied experience of motherhood - its joys, but also the pain, resentment and anger suffered in having to conform to the "sacred calling" of institutionalised motherhood demanded by the patriarchal society in which she lived. This is the domain of the maternal body, with all its lived emotions and passions, that Rose maintains the masculinist imagination has been unable to enter. Through her own bodily experience, Rich reoccupies this space and challenges masculinist myths of motherhood, for example - and perhaps the most "sacred" - maternal instinct: "Motherhood is earned, first through

an intense physical and psychic rite of passage - pregnancy and childbirth - then through *learning* to nurture, which does not come by instinct" (1986: 12; emphasis added). Rich boldly outlines the institutionalised sacred space produced by idealised notions of motherhood, a space that she claims remains under male control and thus fails to support women's subjectivity. As Paula Nicolson later commented in a similar vein, women's desire to have and nurture children has become "scientifically" substantiated on the basis of being a "biological imperative", effectively obfuscating the reality that women are socialised into wanting children (1993: 208). For Rich, the maternal body and the institution of motherhood is clearly an embodied sacred space produced through contested claims to ownership and control. Furthermore, her writing points to a mother's state of exile from, as well as imprisonment in, her own body (whether it is truly experienced as her own being the point in question): "In the most fundamental and bewildering of contradictions, it has alienated women from our bodies by incarcerating us in them" (1986: 13). She stresses, however, that it is the patriarchal, institutionalised "sacred calling" and not the fact of motherhood itself that had alienated her from her body and spirit (1986: 39).

Rich could be accused of an essentializing and universalising perspective of "woman" and "mother", but recalling her study of the "politics of location" we are reminded that she calls for critical analysis of male notions of femininity to include all aspects of female embodied experience, in all their signs of difference and *particularity* ("*my* body"). But drawing on experience to write the body seems to be the key to reoccupying masculinist representations of the maternal body. Similar themes of control, alienation and exile of women on the basis of their embodiedness feature in the work of Luce Irigaray, one of the most prominent French feminist psychoanalytic theorists and protagonists of *l'écriture féminine*. Irigaray sets out to deconstruct and reinterpret maternal sacred space by disrupting Lacanian discourse in which the feminine and maternal are relegated to the Imaginary and denied subjectivity in the patriarchal Symbolic. As Elizabeth Grosz points out, "The ways in which space has been historically conceived have always functioned to either contain women or to obliterate them" and therefore Irigaray aims to reconceptualize relations between men and women "as is required for an autonomous and independent self-representation for women and femininity" - by reconceptualizing masculinist representations of space and time (1995: 120). Irigaray thus reoccupies the emptiness of maternal space and reconstructs an alternative discursive space to psychoanalytic theory's representation of "woman" as "Other", as empty and silent.

Luce Irigaray's work, it can be argued, rests on the stance that women and men, femininity and masculinity, are by nature different, an assumption that could be attacked for its apparent biological essentialism. However, Irigaray seeks to forge a new theory and an entirely new ethics that reappropriates female and maternal sexuality and recovers an avenue for women's equal but

different speech and participation in society and culture: "Women's exploitation is based on sexual difference; its solution will come only through sexual difference ... It is quite simply a matter of social justice to balance out this power of the one sex over the other by giving, or giving back, cultural values to female sexuality" (1993a: 13). In her book *Elemental Passions* (1992), Irigaray uses poetic and disruptive metaphor to reveal the violent realties of the unequal, sexualised power relations she sets out to challenge, such as masculinist confinement of women's bodies to the domestic domain and the violence of male power that serves to cover men's fear of femininity and the maternal body. Her imagery clearly signifies a gendered politics of sacred space:

> Everywhere you shut me in. Always you assign a place to me. Even outside the frame that I form with you. ... Could it be that what you have is just the frame, not the property? ... You mark out boundaries, draw lines, surround, enclose. Excising, cutting out. What is your fear? That you might lose your property. What remains is an empty frame. You cling to it, dead. ... You close me up in house and family. Final, fixed walls. Thus displacing and expelling what you have not had? ... Alone, I rediscover my mobility. Movement is my habitat. My only rest is motion. (1992: 24-25)

In her classic texts *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985a) and *This Sex Which is Not One* (1985b) Irigaray advocates working towards an exclusively feminine linguistic practice in the former, and defines a specifically feminine alterity that stresses the primacy of women's desire in the latter. Essential to Irigaray's recovery of female subjectivity and feminine language is a critique of psychoanalytic theory's marginalisation of the mother-daughter relationship in favour of giving father and son centre stage. Not only does woman become object of male desire, but she also, according to Freud, only attains her true femininity through her reproductive function, especially as mother of an infant son - a son, who by all accounts will eventually reject her and any shadow of femininity, in obedience to the paternal law. The unsymbolised relationship between mother and daughter, Irigaray suggests, signals women's exile from the patriarchal Symbolic, but at the same time points to male fear of its underlying threat to that masculine space, as articulated in her ironic extension of Freud's infamous dictum on femininity as an enigmatic "dark continent": mother and daughter represent "the dark continent of the dark continent" (cited in Whitford, 1989: 108). For Irigaray, it is essential to construct a separate, autonomous female Symbolic, restoring a genealogy of women, of mothers and daughters, in which the mother-daughter relationship can be a prototype for relations between women, where women are not reduced to their reproductive function. The mother, then, can

also be a woman and thus provide a model for the daughter to separate from her and individuate as a *woman* (see Whitford, 1989: 108-21). In striving to construct such a female sacred space, in which the maternal body is metaphor for all women, Irigaray also does not ignore difference among women in her writing the maternal as a multivalent metaphor:

> [W]e are all mothers just by being women. We bring many things into the world apart from children, we give birth to many things apart from children: love, desire, language, art, social things, political things, religious things... We must take back this maternal creative dimension that is our birthright. (1993: 18)

Irigaray's inclusion of "religious things" is another important aspect of her project, showing how women's exile from the masculine sacred space of the Symbolic is further replicated in western patriarchal religions. Recalling the history of the gendered division of mind and body, she asserts that these religions offer no way back to the mother and the body, only a way *up* "to heaven, toward the father and his kingdom" (1993b: 15). Again, the mother, as both body and earth, must be subjugated and controlled to hasten human transcendence to some world *beyond* the one we have. But, says Irigaray, we do need divinity in order to become free and autonomous and women do need an alternative way of relating to what is larger than them: "No human subjectivity, no human society has ever been established without the help of the divine" (1993b: 62). However, exiled from the sacred space of man's construction of a uniquely male god, women need a god of their own - one that serves to revalorize women's subjectivity, language, and experience of the body, one that values mother and daughter, fertility and nature. What is it, Irigaray asks, that holds women back from becoming "*divine women*"? Her answer suggests that "as long as woman lacks a divine made in her image she cannot establish her subjectivity or achieve a goal of her own" (1993b: 63). This perspective is perhaps limited by its focus on images of the divine in western, monotheistic religion, but it does underscore Irigaray's project to construct a separate, independent discursive space for women and a new ethics of relationship between two *subjects*, female and male, rather than attempting to transform the phallogocentric "sacred space" of masculinist discourse that produces "a universe built upon the erasure of the bodies and contributions of women/mothers and the refusal to acknowledge the debt to the maternal body that they [men] owe" (Grosz, 1995: 121).

It is possible to understand Irigaray's intention to create separate and autonomous female and male spaces that can coexist and relate to one another as two subjects - rather than dominant subject and subjugated object - which signifies a new ethics, social justice and love: "love can be the motor of becom-

ing, allowing both the one and the other to grow. For such a love, each must keep their body autonomous. The one should not be the source of the other nor the other of the one" (1992: 27). For male fear of the maternal body and the consequent domination and control of - and sometimes violence against - women to be transformed, perhaps we need both new spaces and transformation of old spaces, where the reality of human embodiment and mortality is confronted and accepted by both women and men. Naomi Goldenberg (1989: 244-55) asks "why we [both women and men] flee our bodies in the first place" and argues that acceptance of corporeality and mortality could be the essential core of new discourses that will not oppress women and destroy the earth. But the neurotic evasion and repression of the human fact of embodiment and mortality is reproduced in the repression of women's subjectivity, on the basis of the mistaken association of female sexuality and the maternal body with death as much as with birth.

These themes are taken up and reworked by Madelon Sprengnether in her book *The Spectral Mother: Freud, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis* (1990) that offers a detailed and innovative critical analysis of Freudian theory of sexuality and its repression of maternal subjectivity and agency. To be extremely selective, in order to be brief, Sprengnether discovers submerged subtexts in Freud's writings that refer to birth as the site of separation of mother and child, rather than the later stage of the Oedipus and castration complexes that became central to psychoanalytic theory's focus on the paternal phallus as signifier of separation and entry into the masculine space of language and social relations (see 227-46). If Freud had followed the former train of thought, his emphasis on the need for the father's threat of castration to separate child and mother would be entirely superfluous (236). However, Sprengnether observes, the theoretical choice of psychoanalytic theory has been to fantasise preoedipal relations as a site of unity and plenitude, thus returning pride of place to masculine subjectivity, agency and dominance in the creation of culture. By constructing this myth of maternal sacred space, patriarchy paradoxically worships the mother on the one hand as representative of narcissistic wish-fulfilment and plenitude, but denigrates her on the other, as representative of the unconscious and the death instinct, the eternally desirable but forbidden Other that threatens to engulf male subjectivity. Phallogocentric discourse therefore generates ever more oppressive strategies to control women, in the vain hope that we can then control, transcend and even avoid corporeality and mortality:

> At the heart of phallogocentrism lies the terror as well as the certainty of its undoing. And this undoing is associated with the body of a woman, who must be controlled, who must be prevented from achieving a condition of power from which she can exercise this threat. Like all systems of

> oppression, moreover, patriarchy mytholgizes the object of its dread, inventing ever new rationalizations in terms of "feminine psychology" for sustaining the status quo. (244)

By focusing on original loss and exile from the mother, and the sense of longing for return to maternal plenitude that lingers in the unconscious, Sprengnether develops an alternative strategy and challenges the notion of early undifferentiated fusion between mother and infant that is articulated in Freudian theory. Such a picture of symbiotic bliss is fiction, according to Sprengnether, nothing more than a fantasy that denies the subjectivity and agency of the mother. If the maternal body is the site of division that initiates consciousness, the mother seems to signify loss and mourning rather than "blissful nondifferentiation. ... the body of the mother represents at once the dream of plenitude and the recognition of its impossibility" (230).

Moreover, Sprengnether points to maternal experience of continuous division and splitting during pregnancy, designating the maternal body as the container of self and otherness, even before birth. It is conception itself that is really the locus of origin for separation and the journey into life, which simultaneously entails the advent of consciousness of mortality. Sprengnether articulates the experience of "otherness" that seems to be "inherent in the human condition, a separateness that reaches back into the womb, to the beginning of life itself" (242). In short, oblivion, or what she calls "exile from consciousness", ends with conception itself. It is the maternal body, then, that is situated at the very centre of a politics of sacred space, which is, in turn, at the very heart of male fear of femininity and oppression of women. It is the maternal body that is the site of origin for the sense of alienation and "estrangement of being" that Sprengnether asserts is experienced by all human beings. Psychoanalytic notions of nostalgic longing for return to a safe haven of maternal plenitude, therefore, remain in the realm of fantasy and sacred myth. This, I would argue, is analogous to notions of the essence of place or sacred space of "home" as feminine that we have seen loom large in humanistic geography and the poetics of sacred space in the study of religion. All human beings, female and male, Sprengnether reminds us, experience this estrangement of being and inherit the paradoxes of life. It is true that life, desire, and the inevitability of death all originate in the body of the mother, but from that moment onwards, these realities belong to all human-beings, women and men. And so I would advocate that Sprengnether's words sum up a useful place to start transforming gendered discourses of sacred space that serve to repress female subjectivity, confine women, and support social practices that control and do violence against their bodies:

> We are, each of us, male and female, fallen out of that state of fullness of Being which we sometimes imagine as para-

> dise, which we seek falsely to identify with intrauterine existence. And yet each of us enters the world through the body of a woman - a carnal enigma that has virtually baffled our systems of understanding. Rather than fleeing, condemning, or idealizing the body of the (m)other, we need to recognise her in ourselves. (245-46)

Conclusion

Experience of the paradoxical nature of life forms part of what it means to be human. Social practices that enact culturally constructed power relations, seem often to be founded on notions of duality in culture and society. These divisions are humanly constructed and then take on a reality, perceived as concrete and coherent, that exposes human attempts to deal with and control the effects of paradox on life, particularly at the level of felt experience. Paradox is culturally represented as gendered and hierarchical in patriarchy, made manifest in the attribution of higher value to male over female and vain attempts to control the fluid, complex and diverse nature of identities taken up by human beings. Male domination of women, and especially violence against women, rest on representations of femininity that lay the problems of paradox, human desire and loss at the feet of women. The longing for "home" and a nurturing, safe domestic space is feminised and made sacred: the space of the maternal body. The maternal body is also - however unconsciously - desired as the ultimate repository of plenitude, wish-fulfilment and avoidance of death, a desire that can never be requited. The pure, virginal, self-sacrificing and all-giving mother is a figment of imagination that remains in the unconscious - (m)Other - and produces images of the feminine that women, in reality, can never fulfil.

On the other side of things, though, power is similarly feminised in ways that lead to rejection of femininity and denigration of women. For this desire that is (m)Other is also imagined as the source of pollution and death, threatening to engulf us and destroy consciousness. Such power is located in the female body, the "whore" that represents both carnal desire and the fear of death that embodiment and consciousness bring. I would suggest that feminist critical theories touched on in this paper recover awareness of the reality that tension between desire and fear is derived from both corporeality and consciousness, both of which belong to all human beings, male and female. Whether control or surrender is the "right" approach to dealing with the feelings of separation and "estrangement of being" we inherit through birth into human life is an existential question beyond the scope of this paper, but in patriarchy, attempts to control such feelings have generated a politics of sacred space played out on the field of gender. In conclusion, feminist critique that challenges ideologies of gender and

cultural representations of "femininity" and "woman", and further exposes and disrupts masculinist assumptions that attach such problems to women alone, seems to be at least one good place to begin transforming or even replacing those gendered discourses that reinforce violence against women.

Notes

[1] I am indebted to Elizabeth Grosz 's concept of "feminist reoccupations of space" for this title. See Grosz, 1995: 120-24.

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