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Realising Identity: the Process and the Product An Analysis of *Au pays de mes racines* by Marie Cardinal

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For the displaced person, important questions are posed concerning identity and sense of place. In her autobiographical work *Au pays de mes racines* (1980), Marie Cardinal attempts to provide answers to her own dilemma. A *pied-noir* by birth, she was forced by the escalating violence of the Algerian War to quit the country of her roots in 1956 and move to France, a country whose language she spoke, but of whose culture she was largely ignorant. Needless to say, the involuntary nature of the shift from her native Algeria left her with a sense of cultural limbo which she struggled to address in her country of exile. Eventually, she returned, with very mixed emotions, 24 years later to confront the past and to find the self she left behind in a country from which she now feels estranged. Her discoveries are as surprising as they are life-changing and provide important insights into the issue of self-knowledge in an increasingly global environment.

Keywords: culture, difference, exile, identity

When it comes to the notion of selfhood, the concept of fixed cultural identity was, in the past, accepted as the norm. One has only to consider the Latin origin of identity (*idem*, 'sameness') to realise that it has long been associated with images of permanence, of something unchanging and therefore entirely knowable. Kenneth J. Gergen confirms this view: 'it is the sense of continuity – that I know I am I by virtue of my sense of continuous sameness – that for centuries has served as the chief criterion by which a self is to be identified' (Gergen, 1991: 133). Indeed, this notion of cultural immutability

has long contributed to the desire by countries like France to rein in attempts to promote diversity within its borders. Yet increasingly researchers are arguing against such a rigid conception of selfhood, and with good reason. In this age of globalisation, when there is scarcely a culture left that has not experienced some input from others, whether willingly or not, such a definition holds little currency. In this study, we intend to demonstrate the increasingly chimera-like nature of identity by examining the situation of the exile.

For the displaced person, in particular one who has been born in one country but whose passport shows another nationality, questions remain to be answered. Should I deny my ancestral cultural heritage? Or should I embrace the culture of the land of my birth even though it is, legally speaking, not my own? If neither, then who am I? Marie Cardinal is one such displaced person and, in her autobiographical work *Au pays de mes racines*, she explores precisely these issues. Cardinal was brought up in Algeria, living there from her birth in 1929 until 1956 when she was forced to abandon her *pays natal* and return to a land whose language she spoke, but whose culture was largely unknown to her. In *Au pays de mes racines*, she finally makes the return journey to Algeria 24 years later (Cardinal, 1989, henceforth *PR*), after much soul-searching and in trepidation, claiming: 'Aujourd'hui je n'ose pas retourner chez moi, en Algérie, parce que c'est devenu l'étranger aussi. C'est l'étranger partout pour moi' (*PR*: 98). Her return thus becomes an attempt to untangle the obvious chaos of self brought about by years of living without an established sense of place and, in so doing, exorcise her sense of *dis-location*.

The anguish of such an in-between existence is made abundantly clear by Begag and Chaouite (1990: 26–7):

La migration est un risque. Elle est angoissante. Entre un arrachement douloureux et un réancrage conflictuel s'installe le temps d'une crise. C'est celle d'une expérience traumatique marquée par la peur de perdre définitivement les objets quittés et d'affronter l'inquiétante étrangeté.

It is a plight echoing that of many *pieds-noirs* who were forced to quit Algeria as a result of the conflict during the 1950s and 1960s. Pleading for clemency at the trial of one of the captured OAS leaders in 1962, Albert Camus' widow encapsulates the dilemma of the *ped-noir*: 'I feel divided ... half-French and half-Algerian, and, in truth, dispossessed in both countries which I no longer recognise, since I never imagined them separated' (in Horne, 1987: 542).

Therefore, Cardinal, impelled by a curiosity born of a similar sense of incompleteness, begins her quest with an examination of *why* she feels obliged to return to Algeria. Her avowed reason is the attempt primarily to understand what she calls 'l'équilibre ou le déséquilibre que créent en moi l'alliance ou la guerre de deux cultures' (*PR*: 17). However, the question of

motive proves much more complex than a general desire for a syncretic ensemble, as evidenced by the enigmatic beginning to her book:

NÉCESSITÉ de partir là-bas. D'y retourner.

Là-bas, y: l'Algérie, Alger.

Pourquoi?

Il me semble que toutes les réponses que je donnerai maintenant à ce pourquoi seront insuffisantes. Les racines, le souvenir, la mémoire, l'enfance, la jeunesse ... bien sûr. Mais quoi encore? (PR: 5)

The effect produced is clearly one of detachment, a feeling created by the insistent use of forms of the words meaning 'there', which emphasise the distance, both geographical and psychological, that must be crossed, in order to reach a conclusion. While suggested motives prove insufficient to explain the need to return, other explanations – writer's block and a sense of having forgotten some key to her existence without which she cannot progress – are similarly vague: 'Impression que j'ai perdu des maillons de ma vie, certaines clefs. Impression que je me suis trop francisée, que j'ai oublié quelque chose, quoi?' (PR: 84). While plausible, none of these reasons accounts satisfactorily for the feeling of a deep-seated lack, as well as the sense of urgency, that she conveys. Instead, the author invites the reader to speculate on the nature of the *nécessité*: 'c'est ce qu'il y a en moi d'archaïque que je recherche et j'ai l'impression que c'est par la terre elle-même que je l'aborderai' (PR: 42–3).

In the course of her reflections the most important ingredient in Cardinal's search for selfhood emerges: 'il n'y a que ... mon lieu de naissance qui me convienne absolument. Ce n'est pas que je ne trouve pas la France belle, au contraire; mais ce n'est pas chez moi' (PR: 24).¹ She thus establishes where she fits in by establishing where she does not. France evokes no sense of belonging in her; its history and geography, even its weather, are foreign and stir up no associations, as she opines:

Quand je suis venue m'installer en France, j'ai rencontré des gens, certains sont devenus des amis, mais me manque toujours une clef, la clef de leur terre. Leurs références, parfois, à la Bretagne, à l'Auvergne, à l'Alsace ou au Limousin, ne suscitent rien en moi, ne me les font pas mieux comprendre et, à chaque fois, j'ai un recul: ce sont des étrangers. (PR: 98)²

As Stuart Hall has rightly suggested, the beginnings of cultural identification are thus rooted in geography:

when we think of or imagine cultural identity, we tend to 'see' it in a place, in a setting, as part of an imaginary landscape or 'scene'. We give it a background, we put it in a frame, in order to make sense of it. (Hall, 1995: 181)

In Cardinal's case, descriptions of her childhood environment provide an anchor for experiences, enshrining them in what Pat Jess and Doreen Massey

aptly term a 'snapshot of space-time' (Jess and Massey, 1995: 172). In other words, she sees identity in terms of a particular moment in history and she wants her notion of place to remain faithful to that long-cherished memory.

It is not only a *geographical* place that is at issue here though: 'places are significant because they are the focus of personal feelings' (Rose, 1995: 88). The place for which Cardinal craves is a reference point where, as she says, 'chaque élément est indispensable au moment et où je suis indispensable à chaque élément' (PR: 7). Such a symbiotic relationship suggests a deep interdependence having its origins in a carefree childhood. She claims: 'Depuis que je ne vis plus en Algérie il n'y a ... plus d'instant où, sans restriction, je suis en parfaite harmonie avec le monde' (PR: 6).³ This harmonious existence is epitomised in the child's perspective, particularly through the technique of possession, used frequently to emphasise her youthful identification with her environment: for example, 'ma belle terre, ma mère, ma génitrice' (PR: 54). For Cardinal, Algeria is 'ma source' (PR: 7) without which 'mes racines flottent' (PR: 19). The random listing of elements which builds up a consummate picture of *joie de vivre* is also a common feature of the child's viewpoint: for example: 'A moi le bonheur, le jeu, le rire, les odeurs, les couleurs, la danse, la jouissance, la sagesse' (PR: 22).⁴ Thus, in essence, Algeria *speaks* to her sensual side, 'producing a dense, richly textured sense of life' (Hall, 1995: 180), and she revels in it. The Algerian landscape is a surrogate mother, providing a nurturing environment; one that makes up for the major shortcomings of her biological mother,⁵ and that is symbolised by such constants as the changing of the seasons and the rocking action of the sea's waves, those of the 'mer/mère' (Lane, 2006: 153), as they lull the child to sleep: 'Rythme régulier, alternatif: l'autre-moi, moi-l'ailleurs, le différent-moi, moi-le-dehors. L'univers et moi, moi dedans lui, lui dedans moi. Parfaits' (PR: 94). Furthermore, the storks, who 'vont et viennent' (PR: 108) during their seasonal migration across the Mediterranean, and the description of the ritual of going to and coming from school, strengthen the impression of a rhythmic oscillation: 'Je pense que c'est en allant et en revenant de l'école que j'étais le plus moi-même' (PR: 122–3). It is this rhythm that forms the basis of an essential connection between the child and the world.

A mature Cardinal recognises the disparity between that connected childhood world and the life since imposed on her in France, an existence described as institutionalised, regimented and regularised, 'une vie conforme ... une vie d'humaine homologuée' (PR: 7). It is a life lived according to the demands of a rapidly expanding technological Western civilisation, rather than that of Algeria where she existed, as she wistfully describes, 'dans un cadre qui ... [était] ... mon complice, mon complément, mon inspirateur, ma source, mon bassin' (PR: 7). Indeed, after much conjecture, we finally arrive at a compelling reason for her return:

les rythmes de l'univers qui sont communs à tous les humains sont entrés en moi là, c'est là que je les ai connus. Pour continuer à vivre

avec les autres je dois retourner là-bas, laisser ces rythmes me pénétrer de nouveau, retrouver les échos les plus anciens du sang qui bat en moi comme en nous tous. Parce que c'est là que je les ai perçus pour la première fois. Il me faut ce cadre-là, cette chaleur, ces palmiers, ce langage, ces vagues, ce sol, ces odeurs, ce sec, ce pourri. (PR: 88)

In other words, she feels compelled to seek out 'un simple point de départ' (PR: 88) or, rather, the *spiritual* reference point that has, in the past, provided not only a source of life-giving energy and inspiration, but also a fertile landscape for imagination and, consequently, an anchor for her intellectual and emotional development:

ces racines essentielles des gens sont, en moi, tellement embrouillées aux scènes de mes commencements que la mort, l'amour, le travail, l'argent, le hasard sont, dans ma tête, algériens. Dans ma tête et dans mon corps aussi ... La mort va avec les visages griffés des pleureuses, l'amour avec la sieste, le travail avec la chaleur, l'argent avec le maquillage, le hasard avec un cheval ailé.

Impossibilité de me débarrasser de ces encadrements. (PR: 99)

The eminent Martinican identity theorist Édouard Glissant calls this moment in cultural development 'le point d'intrication' (Glissant, 1981: 36) or the instant at which a person or culture is irrevocably changed through contact with another. Like many others, Cardinal seeks to return to this moment in order to begin a self-evaluation that will, it is hoped, lead to a safe cultural reference point from which to turn and face the world.

Having identified *why* she feels compelled to return to Algeria, we may now grapple with her perceived situation. As she says, 'je n'ai pas l'impression, personnellement, d'appartenir à un peuple et ... souvent cela me manque. Il y a entre le peuple français et moi l'espace d'une terre qui n'est pas la France: l'Algérie ...' (PR: 132). To begin with, the intervening period in her life, during which she has been separated from Algeria, is anchored in a metaphorical landscape reeking of disempowerment. References to this period bristle with images of injury, amputation, cutting, wounding, killing, suffocation and paralysis – largely surgical terminology which, although used figuratively, is a constant reminder of the anguish created by cultural division, for example: 'La coupure avec moi-même a commencé tôt: Arabe-Française, Française-Arabe?' (PR: 50).⁶ The two hyphenated pairings only serve to increase the impression of frustration, since neither suggests a partnership between the two sides, but rather a persona in which one side will dominate and ultimately stifle the other. For Cardinal, such a prospect is clearly not likely to lead to a peaceful existence: 'Je voudrais pouvoir être tranquillement bi-culturée sans que la névrose s'empare de ma personne bicéphale, sans que le reniement guillotine l'une de mes deux têtes, sans avoir à faire un choix impossible' (PR: 17).

Beur writer Azouz Begag describes this bicultural approach as the attempt 'de poser une fesse sur chaque chaise et de rester en équilibre'

(Solé, 1986: 12), but this is obviously a precarious position at best. A choice between the two sides is not a valid alternative either, the one involving a denial of the future and the other a negation of the past. Understandably, as Cohen points out, 'One aspect of the charged nature of cultural identity is that in claiming one, you do not merely associate yourself with a set of characteristics: you also distance yourself from others' (Cohen, 1994: 120). For Cardinal then, being true (that is, sincere) to one side necessarily involves being false (that is, insincere) to the other; the resulting sense of guilt is paralysing. The last option she contemplates is therefore simply to do nothing, but this is an equally testing experience, since failure to establish some sort of allegiance can only add to a growing impression of divided loyalty, and ultimately to one of cultural betrayal:

Double culture, double liberté pourrait-on croire, mais c'est le contraire. La liberté ne peut se vivre de deux manières différentes. Il faut une grande agilité pour savoir passer d'une liberté à une autre et peut-être même que cette agilité est, en fait, de la duplicité. (*PR*: 101)

So Cardinal remains undecided, rather like a nervous high-wire artist paralysed between two poles.

There are some who see biculturalism in an entirely positive light, citing the potential for dynamic cultural creativity (Hall, 1995: 207; see also the discussion in Judge, 1996: 18), but, as Cardinal confirms, such an in-between existence, such a juggling of her rational French side with her sensual Algerian side, if at times rewarding from a creative point of view, is also extremely demanding:

Être née à la colonie dans une famille de colons est un fait lourd à porter; et pourtant, être une créole est une joie, une pétillance en moi. Sans arrêter la terre et la tête, le corps et l'esprit, se battent et s'unissent dans des mêlées épuisantes ... Mais quand la culture est double et doubles aussi les géographies et les histoires, l'équilibre est constamment en péril, il y a peu de repos. (*PR*: 23–4)

This exhausting combat between the two sides of her self is most evident when the narrative sways out of the child's imaginal perspective into the realm of the analytical adult. Lucille Cairns pinpoints the source of the divergence, confirming 'life must be lived forwards but can only be explained backwards' (Cairns, 1992: 282).⁷

Cardinal thus discovers that memory is not purely restorative, for, influenced by experience and by the aim of her enquiry, the autobiographer is automatically predisposed to interpretation and criticism. Sidonie Smith elaborates on this concept of reflection on the past which interprets rather than embalms a prior experience:

the autobiographer has to rely on a trace of something from the past, a memory; yet memory is ultimately a story about, and thus a discourse on, original experience, so that recovering the past is not a

hypostasizing of fixed grounds and absolute origins but, rather, an interpretation of earlier experience that can never be divorced from the filterings of subsequent experience or articulated outside the structures of language and storytelling. (Smith, 1987: 45)

Consequently, the writer-outsider emerges as an alter ego, at once sympathetic and detached, ready to examine and evaluate the instinctive responses of the child-insider:

Cette enfant je la connais, elle vit encore en moi, elle est toujours moi, mais les années ont fait grandir la sœur aînée que je suis aussi devenue pour elle, et maintenant je juge, ce qu'enfant je ne faisais pas. (PR: 22)

Her recreation of her childhood world is thus bittersweet, as she realises that it is only a re-enactment of a certain view of the past, the key to which lay in unquestioning existence:

Dans des pays comparables au mien ... par moments, à cause du bruit de la mer, à cause d'une odeur de poussière, à cause de la chaleur, à cause de je ne sais pas quoi, par moments, fugacement, l'impression que j'existe, que je suis là, que je suis entière, comme dans mon enfance. Mais dans mon enfance, il n'était pas question d'impressions ni de moments, j'étais, c'était tout. Et le fait d'être se liait totalement au lieu où je me tenais. (PR: 43)

Nancy Lane rightly identifies this sense of oneness with place as 'a source of writing, however, the subject comes into being only as a result of being expelled from paradise into language' (Lane, 2006: 154). Cast out, the writer who now goes in search of the past is no longer the one who lived it; re-creating the past is thus impossible. In trying to do so, the autobiographical writer is, consequently, drawn into what Sidonie Smith refers to as the 'tantalizing and yet elusive adventure that makes of her both creator and creation' (Smith, 1987: 46).

Furthermore, once placed under the microscope, aspects of her past life are revealed to have contributed in large part to her present sense of displacement. Her education, for example, with its content biased towards France, is judged to have been designed to reinforce ancestral links: 'Les livres de mon enfance étaient français, faits pour de petits Français vivant en France ... Tout m'était incompréhensible dans ces bouquins, sauf les croisades où les Français rencontraient les Arabes' (PR: 103). With Manichean simplicity, she sums up: 'mes jardins étaient bons, mon éducation était mauvaise' (PR: 23). Her religious background is also perceived to be a factor contributing to her sense of alienation; she comments tersely: 'Après ma première communion, je suis devenue plus française' (PR: 59). As Anthony Cohen affirms, 'rites of initiation transform individuals by investing them with socialness. In doing so, they also enable the society to reproduce itself culturally' (Cohen, 1994: 57). Hence the significance of her first communion that, with hindsight, she feels deliberately distanced her from her Algerian side.⁸

Her childhood home is, furthermore, depicted as a typical *pied-noir* enclave where anything to do with France is venerated: 'Tout ce qui touche à ça, tout ce qui vient de là, est sacré' (PR: 30). This worship of France is not shared by the young Marie; instruction in French culture, described as 'brainwashing' (PR: 32), is deemed to have triggered the process of alienation from Algeria. From the few details provided, there is no doubt that it was a wounding experience; she records simply that 'le dressage me blessait' (PR: 32). Her family tries to force her to divide the world into them (the Arabs) and us (the French). For a child who as yet knows little of social and cultural distinctions and prejudices, this division constitutes a bitter lesson: 'Tous mes amis sont des voleurs et des bicots ... Quelle solitude à chaque fois qu'il faut faire ce choix: eux ou nous!' (PR: 31).⁹ Her eventual return to Algeria again raises the threat of painful choice: 'c'est là-bas que j'ai commencé à regarder, à comprendre, à entendre, à aimer. M'arracher l'Algérie c'est arracher ma tête, mes tripes, mon cœur et mes âmes' (PR: 73). This time, however, it is historical and political circumstance that have the potential to wield most influence, causing her fear of feeling 'encore plus déracinée qu'avant' (PR: 72).¹⁰

Her relationship with Algeria is thus a complex one that can, in part, be elucidated by Anthony Cohen's comments on the dynamic operating between the individual and society:

I think of society and the self as dancing an improvised *pas de deux*: each tries to cover the moves of the other; sometimes they merge, at others they separate. Their combination may be harmonious; or it may be awkward in the extreme'. (Cohen, 1994: 71)

In Cardinal's case, the harmonious dance is illustrated by the child's immersion in the Algerian landscape, where 'Le temps ... coule sans interruption, sans heurts, et moi je coule avec lui, interminable, identique' (PR: 150–1). Later, the rupture caused by the war and her departure severs this connection and results in a sense of displacement that leads to an awkward dance, or what Jonathan Rutherford lightly calls 'Two to Tangle' (Rutherford, 1990: 13).¹¹ Continuing the analogy, it follows that the steps she has learned in Algeria cannot be danced in France. She must come to recognise that, while she may continue to derive a spiritual strength from it, her idyllic childhood habitat is not a place to which she can ever fully return. Like German poet Walter Benjamin's angel of history who, while attempting to return to fix things in the past, ends up 'being blown backwards into the future' by the storm of progress,¹² she must look forward and address the 'cacophony of potentials' (Gergen, 1991: 73) in Algeria:

Je venais chercher ce qu'il y a en moi de plus archaïque, de plus ancien, les rythmes du commencement. J'ai trouvé tout ça intact, dès mon arrivée ... Mais je me trouve en même temps confrontée à ce qu'il y a en moi de plus récent, de plus nouveau, de plus instable. (PR: 144–5)¹³

At this point, Marie Cardinal begins to recognise an important and healing truth about her situation, one that is also paramount in the acquisition of self-knowledge. While pondering over how to recapture the past, she discovers that the truths that have emerged from the search have been confirmed by the search itself. She comments: 'Il n'y a pas de déjà, rien n'est acquis, tout est en perpétuel devenir' (*PR*: 87). She is thus beginning to construct:

an alternative version of the past which sees it as a process of constant mixing and accumulating: a tradition which is not 'lost' as you move further from some (anyway mythical) origin, but rather *built* as new developments, contacts and innovations are introduced. (Massey and Jess, 1995: 232)

In other words, the *process* – a gradual acceptance of herself as an evolving being in a world likewise in constant evolution – *is* the *product*. The revisiting of her childhood sense of a continuous rhythmic connection with the natural world has led her to this realisation: 'Il y a des cycles ... Tout est toujours pareil et rien n'est jamais pareil. Les progressions se font dans ces recommencements' (*PR*: 95–6).¹⁴ The only negative response would be a refusal to learn from what nature's constant renewals can teach. As she affirms, 'Les savoirs ne sont intéressants que parce qu'ils sont incomplets, en constant devenir' (*PR*: 128). An acceptance of this 'changing sameness'¹⁵ thus assists Marie Cardinal to come to terms with the contingent nature of identity.¹⁶

In her journey of self-discovery, Cardinal thus discovers that the task of adjusting to incompleteness as the only reality includes a willingness to accept change, while retaining the ability to engage in what Begag and Chaouite term 'un tri entre ce qui ne doit pas changer sous peine de perdre son intégrité psychologique et ce qui est éventuellement négociable. Dans la personnalité, il faut donc considérer un noyau dur et des périphéries flexibles' (Begag and Chaouite, 1990: 46). By adopting this flexible perspective, Cardinal learns to see life in terms of 'routes', or *directions*, instead of 'roots', or *racines*.¹⁷

Every day, peoples and the trappings of their civilisations glide across boundaries, both geographical and cultural; this constant ebb and flow of enquiring humanity is an accepted part of daily life in an age of global travel and communications. As these peoples, with myriad backgrounds, journey back and forth in this way, mirroring the oscillation of Cardinal's waves and the migrating storks, they are, unknowingly, perpetually re-writing not only their own set of cultural specifications, but also those of the people with whom they come into contact.¹⁸ Julia Kristeva explores at length the notion of the otherness that we all carry within us that should be used to recognise 'la cohabitation de ces étrangers que nous reconnaissons tous être' (Kristeva, 1998: 11). Each one of us receives a

little dose of otherness every time we engage with the outside world, whether it be through direct human contact, or via the newspapers, television, the internet or even the new local food franchise. The list of possible influences is limitless.¹⁹ Stability resides therefore not in a fixed sense of self, but in the *search* for that self in a human arena characterised by constantly transforming interrelations. It is a quest that not only underpins our very existence, but, self-perpetuating, also provides us with the necessary stimulus to keep striving for that elusive key to identity. So, in today's global environment, Cardinal's answer to the question 'Then who am I?' can only be answered by a resounding 'Who I am – the sum of a complex set of cultural interconnections'²⁰ – interconnections that will, of necessity, require lifelong renegotiation.

Notes

1. As Stuart Hall affirms, '[h]aving or wanting a place where you feel you belong ... is often experienced as a natural human attribute, a basic human instinct' (Hall, 1995: 178).
2. See pp. 25–6 for her description of the seasons in Algeria. For example: 'Dans mon pays les saisons ne sont pas comme en France' (*PR*: 25).
3. In an interview in 1964, Cardinal spoke of the depth of her feelings of intimacy with her *pays natal*: 'Je ne garde pas le "souvenir" de l'Algérie. L'Algérie vit en moi, elle se promène avec moi, elle dort avec moi. Je suis d'Algérie, même quand j'habite le Canada' (Médicis, 1964: 339). An interview with singer, Eartha Kitt, for BBC radio revealed much the same sense of connection to one's birthplace. When asked by the interviewer where home was for her, she replied 'Home is within me.' From 'In the Psychiatrist's Chair', BBC Radio 4, 26 July 1989, quoted in Rutherford (1990: 24).
4. For example:

Que ce pays est beau ... Je le prends, je l'aspire, je le touche, je le caresse des yeux!' (*PR*: 149) and, for example: 'Chaque éclat de senteur, chaque parcelle de couleur, chaque bout d'image, chaque écho de rythme, sans cesse perçus, enregistrés, reçus, sentis – en allant à l'école, en travaillant, en se reposant – secrètent et échafaudent une vie. Une vie faite de sensations, d'émotions, de sentiments, d'impressions; une vie nerveuse, une vie langoureuse, une vie douloureuse, une vie sensuelle, une vie de pied-noir. Une vie où la communication entre le pays et l'être se fait constamment. Pays qui sent fort, pays qui brûle, pays qui glace, pays rude qui malmène, pays tendre qui caresse, pays qui n'est, après tout, qu'une mère adoptive, une étrangère à laquelle on peut donc faire l'amour ... Quand on naît là il n'y a pas de choix à faire, la sorcellerie opère tout de suite, il n'y a pas le désir de choisir l'ailleurs, on se laisse façonner, avec délices. Finalement, les familles se perpétuant, les gens de là-bas étaient comme une végétation ou une faune propre à cette terre. (*PR*: 69–70)

5. Cardinal had an unhappy relationship with her real mother. When Cardinal was just ten years old, her mother revealed the number of times she had tried to abort her daughter in order to sever all links with the husband she was at that time in the process of divorcing. The child's reaction to this brutal revelation was to reach out for

the only stable influence in her life at the time – Algeria. From that moment on, Algeria became the one source of stability in her life:

Je me suis accrochée à ce que j'ai pu, à la ville, au ciel, à la mer, au Djurdjura.
Je me suis agrippée à eux, ils sont devenus ma mère et je les ai aimés comme
j'aurais voulu l'aimer, elle'. (PR: 181)

6. For example: 'Y'en a marre des "raisons", elles tuent, elles étouffent, elles ferment' (PR: 128).
7. She is referring to Kierkegaard's views on autobiography.
8. However, conversely, her French side is shocked by the perceived barbarism of the deflowering of the young Algerian bride by her much older husband (PR: 64–5).
9. *Bicot* is a racist term used to refer to North African Arabs.
10. 'Est-ce [la peur] de découvrir que l'Algérie n'est plus rien pour moi et de me trouver en perdition?' (PR: 71–2) or of discovering that French culture has swamped its Algerian counterpart or even that she will feel like a stranger in her own home? (PR: 71–2).
11. The war thus led to a case of premature 'weaning'.
12. From Anderson (1989):

She said: What is history?
And he said: History is an angel
Being blown backwards into the future
He said: History is a pile of debris
And the angel wants to go back and fix things
To repair the things that have been broken
But there is a storm blowing from Paradise
And the storm keeps blowing the angel
Backwards into the future.
And this storm, this storm
is called
progress

Laurie Anderson dedicates the song to Walter Benjamin whose reflections on a Paul Klee painting named *Angelus Novus* provided the basis for the lyrics of the song. From Benjamin (1968: 259–60).

13. Massey and Jess (1995: 216) confirm this discovery on the part of Cardinal:

If ever there was a simple correlation between place and culture, it is no longer so simple. No culture, no place, is 'pure' and there is no authentic version of either to 'go back' to. Globalization is part of major processes of social change, and the multidirectional nature of the moving and mixing involved has produced and reproduced not sameness but hybridity and local uniqueness.

14. '[L]a vie ... va d'un mouvement à l'autre pour se continuer, se continuer, se continuer, à jamais' (PR: 94).
15. See Paul Gilroy for more discussion of what he terms 'the changing same' (1993: 198).
16. According to Kenneth J. Gergen (1991: 16):

As we absorb multiple voices, we find that each 'truth' is relativized by our simultaneous consciousness of compelling alternatives. We come to be aware

that each truth about ourselves is a construction of the moment, true only for a given time and within certain relationships.

17. '[T]he *uniqueness* of cultures is in part constructed out of their *interrelations*. Moreover ... these interrelations, or interdependencies, do not work to dilute an original uniqueness; on the contrary, they constantly produce new reworkings, combinations and transformations – new uniquenesses' (Massey and Jess, 1995: 223).
18. 'Established traditions and customary ways of life are dislocated by the invasion of foreign influences and images from the new global cultural industries which traditional communities find enormously seductive, impossible to reject, yet difficult to contain' (Hall, 1995: 176).
19. 'Identity then is never a static location, it contains traces of its past and what it is to become. It is contingent, a provisional full stop in the play of differences and the narrative of our own lives' (Rutherford, 1990: 24).
20. For further discussion of the idea of the whole as a series of interconnected parts, see Massey and Jess (1995: 218 and 230). See also Rutherford (1990: 19): 'Identity marks the conjuncture of our past with the social, cultural and economic relations we live within.'

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