

Fracturing Binarisms to Create a Space of “Jouissance”: Marie Cardinal’s *Au pays de mes racines*

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Abstract

This paper examines Marie Cardinal’s 1980 memoir *Au pays de mes racines*, using the concepts of “abstract” and “differential” space as explained in Henri Lefebvre’s work *La production de l’espace*, as well as the work of feminist geographers such as Doreen Massey and Gillian Rose. It is my contention that Cardinal’s work shows the problems of abstract, capitalist space, and the accompanying need to find a counter-space, what Rose would call a paradoxical space. Cardinal’s doubly marginalized position as a woman and eventual expatriate, or in other words, gender and geography, help her to establish a privileged position from which to criticize the prevailing hegemony and to imagine a creative, more inclusive alternative.

“Nécessité de partir là-bas. D’y retourner” (Cardinal, 1980: 7). In this opening line from Marie Cardinal’s 1980 memoir, *Au pays de mes racines*, the adverbs of place—“là-bas” and “y”—point to the central focus of this article, space. Moreover, as the verbs “partir” and “retourner” reveal, the idea of a return necessarily implies a departure. *Au pays de mes racines* is the account of a *pied-noir*’s return to Algeria many years after France’s forced departure during the Algerian War of Independence. Cardinal’s relationship to this North African country is unique and complex. The term *pied-noir* signifies that she is a French citizen of European descent born in colonial Algeria, whereas the vast majority of Algeria’s inhabitants were “indigènes” or later “Français musulmans” without citizenship rights. Moreover, Cardinal comes from a family of *gros colons*, well-off landowners. She is therefore born into the privileged class, and as Sophia McClennen observes, the

question of privilege can be “tenuous and complicated” (2006: np). From 1953 onwards, Cardinal relocated many times, which has led her to express the feeling of being without a homeland, *sans patrie*: “je n’ai pas l’impression, personnellement, d’appartenir à un peuple” (1980: 145). She is an exile, although some may dispute the term given her circumstances. After all, Algeria was a French colony and so perhaps never really “hers,” but the separation was painful to her all the same, which becomes abundantly clear when she cries, “Ma belle terre, ma mère, ma génitrice, de quelle manière ignoble et basse je t’ai perdue!” (1980: 61).¹ She then later deliberately chose to live outside France for many years and even acquired Canadian citizenship before eventually spending the last years of her life in Provence. This constant displacement has contributed to her status as a constant outsider whose writings invoke the triple difference of being not only a *pied-noir* and eventual expatriate, but also, and perhaps most importantly, a woman.

In her work, Cardinal engages in textual games that blur the line dividing biography and fiction, crossing the frontiers of literary genre and perhaps even creating new ones, a fusion that Colette Hall identifies as being typical of twentieth-century feminist writers (1994: 100). The displacement and ruptures in her life find themselves mirrored in her literary creations, for the interactions of the various cultures and races encountered in the course of her life both inspire her writings and infuse them with “hybridity” (Proulx, 1998: 536). Cardinal neither fits into nor writes of a world determined by categories and dualities, but instead fractures such binarisms, reshaping them in order to create unique physical and textual spaces that serve as an alternative to the restrictive norms established by patriarchal ideals, norms that tend to emphasize exclusion instead of inclusion and favor sameness over difference (Rose, 1993: 137-38).

In the analysis which follows, I will be exploring the spaces Cardinal remembers, visits and (re-)creates, using the work of feminist geographers

¹ It is noteworthy that Cardinal more than once refers to Algeria as her mother (1980: 122, 145, 198), given that her relationship with her actual mother was often a source of struggle and pain. Furthermore, the reference to shame and loss leads one to wonder if she is referring to the Algerian War, the trauma inflicted by her mother, or some combination of the two. Numerous studies investigate these intersections more closely, including a promising new study of *Au pays de mes racines* by Nancy Lane (2006) that I have not yet had the opportunity to read.

Gillian Rose, Doreen Massey and Sallie Marston, as well as the concepts of “abstract” and “differential” space as detailed in Henri Lefebvre’s work *La production de l’espace* (2000). Briefly put, abstract space is the space of wealth, accumulation, homogeneity and reproduction. In contrast, differential space, as its name suggests, encourages difference and its expression and emphasizes sensuality, creativity, plurality and a sense of play. While some have already linked Cardinal’s treatment of colonialism to the question of gender, it is my contention that the issues surrounding these two types of space also merit investigation, for they are intertwined with those of gendered colonial space. After all, as Massey explains, our lived experience of a given space cannot be isolated from questions of race and gender (1994: 164), while Marston asserts in her analysis of geographer Neil Smith’s work² that social reproduction, which includes issues of gender and patriarchy, must be considered on the same level as “capitalist *economic production*” (2000: 232). Gender plays an important role in a spectrum of broader concerns, including reflections on the tensions and violence inherent in the colonial encounter.

The heart of this conflict can be seen on a personal level in Cardinal’s descriptions of her birth culture, which is French at school and in certain moments at home (for example, most meals and bedtime), Algerian when she escapes these confines. Through her depictions of these various spaces, it becomes clear that first Algeria, then in *Amour, amours*, Provence, serve as the loci for the creation of a counter culture or counter-space. In Lefebvre’s terms, this is a differential space that moves beyond the binary oppositions established by abstract space, although it does not deny that these dualities continue to exert a dominant influence on modern society. This is clear not only in the descriptions of the colonial Algeria of her childhood, but also in her observations of the modern, independent country to which she returns. Cardinal, for reasons of race, class, geography, and above all, gender, sees herself as being especially well-suited to the task of revealing paradoxes and giving voice to that which has been repressed. Cardinal’s work reveals a dream of a place beyond the limits of “hegemonic space” and “territorial logic” (Rose, 1993: 149) and seeks the qualities one would find in such a space, referred to by Rose as “paradoxical” space (1993: 140). Cardinal’s text

² Smith studies the intersection of public space, social theory and history, and shares with Marston an interest in what she calls “the social construction of scale” as well as an acknowledgment of the significance of gender in this theory.

becomes a privileged place from which to criticize the dominant culture and imagine an alternative, plural, inclusive space. Much like Lefebvre in his view of space, she acknowledges that there is more to be said than mere repetition of hegemonic discourse. Such themes are worth exploring in all of Cardinal's works; I have chosen to start with this particular memoir because through her travel journal and reflections, Cardinal gives a unique perspective on Algeria past and present that confronts, even embraces the contradictions her depiction may reveal.

Colonial Algeria: A Problematic Space

Delving deeper into what is meant by abstract space, it is identified by Lefebvre as the space of accumulation, wealth and power (2000: 61), a space in which social relationships lose their primacy except for one, the space of the family, which itself is reduced to its role in reproduction. People become victims of what Lefebvre terms "généralité," in which biological fertility replaces sexual fulfillment and family relationships replace social ties (2000: 61, 64-65). Furthermore, if abstract space is that of reproduction rather than creative production, this means that differences are repressed while homogeneity is prized (2000: 31, 61, 167). For such uniformity to be realized, violent tactics must be employed, including the imposition of hierarchies, the repression of all senses except the visual, a forced move toward the center, and the segregation and fragmentation of peoples and bodies (2000: 31, 50, 163-65, 324, 356-61). In short, "*il y a une violence inhérente à l'abstraction*" (2000: 333).

Such ideas are echoed in Rose's study of geography and feminism when she asserts that the control of public space forms one facet in the construction of male identity and that violence becomes necessary to maintain this control (1993: 148). At the same time, there is a strong delineation of the forbidden, or as Lefebvre calls it, "l'interdit," a term that is especially revealing in that it expresses both the idea that are things which must not be said and the idea that there is a space between, "inter-," that which can be said and that which is silenced (2000: 45, 167, 368-9). Put in Rose's terms, this creates a feeling that someone else, outside ourselves, is charting the spaces in which we are allowed to exist (1993: 147). These ideas will be key to understanding the following section in which the focus will be upon two aspects of abstract space: its function at the state level (in this

context, the colonial state), and the repression of the body, usually the female body.

Lefebvre notes that “des pays dits sous-développés ... se voient pillés, exploités, dominés” while “les pays développés se servent des autres comme sources de main d’œuvre et aussi comme ressource en valeurs d’usage” (2000: 400). Such concerns are brought to life in all Cardinal’s works, for the Algeria of her childhood was thoroughly dominated by colonial France. Factories were built, French-owned yet manned with Algerian³ workers, including one usine belonging to her family and marked with their name in marble 3-meter-tall letters, CARDINAL (1980: 81), an image echoed later when she sees her father’s tombstone marked “CARDIN...” (1980: 138).⁴ Algerian labor was employed to cultivate *la vigne* to produce that quintessentially French product, wine, for the pleasure of and consumption by the French colonists. The land itself is overtaken, divided into vast, French-owned farms, complete with roads and property markers. This particular recollection causes Cardinal to hesitate early in the book, with the calculated use of an ellipsis when she writes “La propriété... oui, je sais” (1980: 13). From her adult perspective, she is able to recognize the problems and ambiguities that arise when another idea of space, that of the colonists, is imposed upon an existing space, that of the Algerians.⁵ In fact, she never seems to lose sight of such considerations, writing in her last work, *Amour, amours*, that the female protagonist loves her house in Provence, but considers herself more its guardian than its owner (1998: 133-134), a vision that runs counter to that of capitalist, male-dominated notions of land and property.

Returning to *Au pays de mes racines*, Cardinal further develops her thoughts on such matters as she describes Barded, an Algerian employee of her family, whose job now includes keeping other Algerians, in this case

³ Terminology in a work like this is a difficult thing, as is the case here with “Algerian.” While some *pièdes-noirs* called themselves Algerian, I am here using the term to refer to the *indigènes*, native-born individuals of non-European descent.

⁴ This repetition is naturally rich in symbolism and irony: at the time of her visit to the cemetery, the French colonial presence has gone the same route as her father; the visual marker of property is now meaningless, and in the latter case, also incomplete. The cycle of reproduction has been broken.

⁵ It should be noted in passing that as much as Cardinal endeavors to denounce such impositions, she sometimes, doubtless out of habit, does not avoid them, for example when she continues to refer to various locations by their French, colonial-era names.

nomads, off their land. She muses that the land was not always theirs: "Peut-être, avant la conquête de l'Algérie par les Français, toute cette terre en friche appartenait à sa famille ou peut-être était-elle le domaine de tribus errantes" (Cardinal, 1980: 15). She is acutely aware that the space she occupies is only hers by conquest, an act of violence. Moreover, French values are established to the point that even the schoolbooks refer to "nos ancêtres les Gaulois" (1980: 129), just as they do in the *métropole*, for the texts are the same, "français, faits pour de petits Français vivant en France" (1980: 113). Rather than acknowledge a separate history for pre-colonial Algeria, schools teach pupils about the Crusades and the efforts to defeat the Arabs since medieval times. Now that colonization has succeeded and the prevailing worldview is French, Cardinal remarks "A en juger par ma situation, huit siècles plus tard, la réussite avait été complète, les Arabes étaient vaincus, c'était une évidence" (1980: 114). In other words, she was a witness to the final moments of the conquest, to what Lefebvre might term "*l'abstraction en acte*" (2000: 310), the actual process of imposing a dogmatic worldview and accompanying space.

Only as an adult, however, does she possess the knowledge needed to see the complexity of the situation; as a child, her view is much simpler, as is the language she uses to convey it: "Cette terre était à moi, c'était chez moi, depuis toujours." After all, she had only to look at the family photos of their life in Algeria to prove to her this was true (1980: 15-16). This, like the aforementioned inscription of the Cardinal name on the family-owned factory, recalls Lefebvre's observations on the primacy of "la vision, du visible, du lisible" in abstract space (2000: 165), for an image suffices to confirm that the space she occupies is rightfully hers. Both photos and architecture are emblematic of the obsession with the visual that characterizes abstract space.

As for the Arabs⁶ themselves, “Ils étaient assimilés à l’univers français qu’ils servaient comme ils pouvaient, plutôt mal que bien, en faisant du ‘travail arabe’” (Cardinal, 1980: 37). This too reminds us of Lefebvre’s notion of abstract space, of the effort not only to find readily exploitable *main d’œuvre*, even if the work they do is of poor quality (“plutôt mal”), but also that to homogenize and integrate. Yet this effort to assimilate the *indigènes* paradoxically creates a constant reminder that they are different, for example when their labor doesn’t measure up to European standards, and that it was the French colonizer that created this sense of difference: “La France créait la différence en nous haussant, puisque tout ce qui venait d’elle était ‘meilleur.’” Later Cardinal would come to understand that “ce ‘meilleur’ était une culture” (1980: 17), that it was not, as she had been taught, something inherent.

As suggested above, according to Lefebvre, the constant effort to oppress the other, this will to homogenize necessarily implies significant violence, at first on the part of the oppressor, but eventually also on the part of the oppressed as it struggles to the surface (2000: 32). This happened not only in the colony itself in the form of the bloody Algerian War (1954-1962) which eventually ousted the French, but also, on a more personal level, in the psyche of young Marie, whose upbringing was marked by its own kind of brutality. Raised in a Catholic, class-conscious, conservative household, she was constantly made aware of the notion of sin, the possibility of doing wrong, which was exacerbated by the fact that she was female and thus subject to greater restrictions. As a child, she is unable to understand the numerous limitations placed upon her which cause her often to cry alone in her bed at naptime. At the time she imagines her tears were “parce que j’étais mauvaise, parce que j’étais attirée par le mal, parce que le mal était en moi,” although as an adult she comes to realize that she was crying because

⁶ “Arab” is another problematic term, in part because it can have pejorative connotations and in part because it does not fully account for those of Algerian origin, who are not “Arab.” Cardinal uses “arabe” in speaking of the *indigènes*, the non-European Algerians of her childhood, and it is in that sense that I am using it here. Cardinal herself seems to use “Arab” and “Algerian” to refer to the same group of people, but distinguishes between them by using the former when speaking of her childhood and the latter of the post-Independence period. This separation between Algeria past and present also seems to have a corollary in her own life, as it forms a linguistic means by which she can reconcile herself with her past and subsequently free herself from it.

her body was so strictly circumscribed, with so many limits placed upon her. She continues:

La peur de devenir une mauvaise femme me contraignait à changer mes désirs, à contrarier mes inclinations, et cela me faisait souffrir. Je ne savais pas comprendre cette souffrance, je me croyais maudite, mal née, anormale... Le lavage de cervelle ne se fait pas que dans les camps de redressement, il se fait aussi dans les familles, et il n'en est pas moins estropiant (1980: 36).

In this passage, as in much of the novel, the use of the imperfect tense indicates the continual or repeated nature of her experiences. There is also the accumulation of negative descriptions strung together—suffering, cursed, ill-born, abnormal—as well as one of the more vivid metaphors used to describe her childhood in which she refers to her upbringing as brainwashing, saying that it crippled her as much as if she'd been sent to reform school.

In fact, her childhood and in particular her relationship with her mother wounded her so deeply that it became a recurring theme in many of her books, notably the powerful *Les mots pour le dire* (1975), an intense, fictionalized account of the journey to healing and wholeness over several years of psychoanalysis. This inner fracture began relatively early in Cardinal's life, as her recollections show. She tells, for example, of how as a child she played with the "jeunes Arabes de la ferme" and even accompanied them to school and to the cinema (1980: 37). Her body was free to circulate between the two worlds, Arab and French, albeit only at certain times of the day or year, such as festivals and Zorah's wedding, and only for a certain extent of time, until she entered puberty. At that point, their paths diverged, with Cardinal going on to pursue her studies, get married and have children, while her former companions are sequestered, if they are girls, and sent to "l'école coranique," if they happen to be boys (1980: 37-42). Although Cardinal writes of this in largely an observational manner, there are moments when her choice of words reflects judgments that are equally harsh for the upbringing of Algerian Islamic girls and the daughters of French Catholic families. As an adult, her perspective enables her to make striking comparisons, saying of the former that their

upbringing is monotonous and “leurs années n’auront pas de sens,” (1980: 38) while of the latter that their education made them, including herself, “tellement savante que je ne savais plus rien du fait même de vivre” (1980: 41). She is particularly disturbed by the marriage customs of both cultures and what such traditions do to women. This is especially apparent when she recounts the wedding night of Zorah, a young girl on her family’s farm, and how when she saw the blood-stained sheet with which the ritual culminates, she felt physically ill (1980: 68-71). One might seek to attribute her revulsion to the fact that the custom is foreign to her, given that Cardinal is born French and raised with European customs. However, as will be shown in greater detail below, she actually tends to identify more with native Algerian practices than their French counterparts; what is more, closer consideration of the text surrounding this episode reveals the true source of her discomfort, namely her aforementioned Catholic upbringing. Its analogous emphasis on purity and virginity, shared in many ways with the Muslim tradition,⁷ leads her to this conclusion:

Bouleversement: je découvrais que chez les Français aussi le mariage pouvait être une sauvagerie. Depuis les noces de Zorah, à la ferme, je savais que les Arabes n’étaient pas comme nous, qu’ils avaient un côté bestial. Pendant la retraite de ma première communion j’ai su que nous n’étions pas mieux. Plus hypocrites, c’est tout (1980: 67-68).

While the language of this passage is somewhat childlike in its simplicity, the maturity of her contemplations echoes those seen above, which suggests that it is Cardinal the adult putting her ideas in an adolescent’s voice. It would seem that she is especially bothered by the fact that while marriage is apparently imposed upon Arab women without any chance for them to refuse, French women, particularly those of a certain class and religion (Catholicism) are equally “brainwashed” to the point that they believe this is what they want. As she puts it, “Je désirais vivre la vie qu’on me prédisait. Je désirais ce mari, ces enfants, ces servantes, cette maison” (1980:

⁷ There remains much to be said on the question of religion in this and other works by Cardinal; I am leaving it largely aside in order to keep the focus on space. For those interested, see Lucille Cairns (1993: 355-56).

250). The discomfort she expresses finds its echo in Lefebvre, who highlights the prominence of reproductive social structures in abstract space, a schema which reduces women to a single role, the only one made available both to Zorah and eventually also to Marie herself. As Hall asserts, the discovery of her own body led Cardinal to question the rules for life and love that divide men and women (1994: 48). The awareness of gender that accompanies puberty causes her to become cognizant of a painful sense of inner division, although she does not realize the full extent of the damage until much later.

Revisiting Algeria Past: A Differential Space

There is also a geographical schism for Cardinal, in that as was explained above, she was forced to leave Algeria due to the war, and she later chose to leave France to teach abroad. McClennen suggests that since nationalism tends to negate the right to be different, transnationalism, for some, could be an appealing alternative (2006: np). For those unable or unwilling to leave, however, other options remain, for it must be remembered that a repressive order, nationalist or other, can see its violence turned back upon it. To cite Lefebvre, “la violence subversive réplique à la violence du pouvoir” (2000: 32). He then elaborates on this, saying that abstract space tries to reduce differences, which themselves come to be emphasized, since they must be identified before they can be eradicated. This then causes a new space to form, which he identifies as differential space, for it is born out of difference (2000: 64). In other words, abstract space, with its damaging emphasis on difference, contains the seeds of its own contradiction and presumably its own destruction. All that is repressed in abstract space must eventually resurface, creating “un espace de la jouissance” (2000: 65), whose goal is “inverser la tendance dominante, celle qui va vers la fragmentation, la séparation, l’émiettement, subordonnés à un centre ou pouvoir central” (2000: 16). This “contre-espace,” which for Cardinal is a physically different space, is one in which “qualité” prevails over “quantité,” “usage” over “échange.” It will develop with difficulty (2000: 440), though less so for those already excluded, including women, racial or ethnic minorities and any others who are already living in the margins of the prevailing Western hegemony.

According to Lefebvre, the “droit à la différence,” whether personal or national, can only be attained with great effort (2000: 456-7) in part because it must start with a marginalized group, and in part because a new space cannot be created by one group, but rather must come from the relationships among various groups (2000: 438). Furthermore, Lefebvre acknowledges that it must initially pass through an elitist stage (2000: 438), which is primarily what is seen in the idealized space depicted by Cardinal, of which she says “je suis en parfaite harmonie avec le monde” (1980: 8). It is worth pursuing, for only in differential space will the fullness of existence be restored. Contradictions and diversity will no longer be abolished, but celebrated (Lefebvre, 2000: 36, 77-78). The moment will be attained “où commence le processus créateur d’œuvres, de sens et de jouissance” (2000: 162). Bodies will no longer be fragmented, but whole, with women’s bodies in particular being freed, for all the senses will be restored; the visual (the phallic) will no longer reign supreme (2000: 419, 438, 442-443). Space and time will reconnect as people recover the rhythms of the “quotidien,” while social relations, sensuality and sexuality will flourish along with creativity and a sense of play (2000: 419, 443, 450-453, 455).

One might be tempted to assume that differential space is simply everything that abstract space is not, and indeed, Cardinal frequently enumerates seemingly black-and-white contrasts between Algeria and France (1980: 7-9, 20-25, 42, 47). In these sets of antitheses, Cairns notes, the observations of Algeria tend to be decidedly favorable, while those pertaining to France are exceptionally harsh (1993: 347). However, as Cardinal herself would likely admit, the oppositions are not as easy or straightforward as all that, especially now that Algeria is independent and changing fast. Furthermore, for her personally the opposition is not so easily made, even if she does express a clear preference for “the non-European, the southern Mediterranean, often explicitly [...] the Arab” (Cairns, 1993: 347). In fact, she overtly rejects France, and especially French Algeria: “je n’ai jamais été pour l’Algérie française... J’étais contre ce que représentait ma famille: la France et ses conquêtes, son empire colonial, sa morgue, son mépris, son racisme, son humanitarisme hypocrite” (Cardinal, 1980: 168). As Cairns observes, Cardinal underscores time and again her view that France’s justification of its presence in Algeria lacks legitimacy (1993: 350).

Yet even if Cardinal was born in and identifies most strongly with Algeria, she is in fact French, and must come to terms with that. This is

rendered especially difficult in that while she is told to identify with the French values of the *métropole*, she finds herself unable to internalize them. The *métropole*, for her, is “un lieu sacré et lointain: la France, effacée mais vénérée” (1980: 16). She comes to acknowledge that *pièdes-noirs* such as herself and her family are, while not wholly innocent, all the same distinct from and in some ways also victims of the France’s power and empire: “Longtemps je ne l’ai vue que colonisatrice, maintenant je la vois aussi colonisée. Victime et bourreau à la fois” (1980: 26-27). Victim because having gone to Algeria with great hope for the future, families like hers have fallen in love with the land and no longer feel at home in France. Executioner because even if they love the land they have come to call home, the fact remains that it is only theirs by the aggressive act of colonization and its accompanying imposition of space. As Hall notes, Algeria represents more than a deep-seated attachment to the land, for it is also connected to Cardinal’s life in a colonial system that provided her family with not only its Western, Catholic values, but also its economic well-being (1994: 8). As she continues to explore her reactions to having grown up in colonial Algeria, Cardinal compares her present situation to that of those French citizens who chose to stay in Algeria, saying of a visit to one family: “Ils ne sont pas partis, eux, ils sont restés seuls pour conserver ce bout de jardin. Ils ont préféré la pauvreté et l’isolement. Ça n’a pas dû être facile. Il leur en a fallu de l’amour! Je les comprends autant que je ne les comprends pas... Je n’arrive pas à établir un pont entre eux et moi” (1980: 206). She realizes that while she feels torn from Algeria and has difficulty finding her place in the *métropole*, she would not want to be in their situation. She has been living, and is perhaps destined to remain, in what she calls “ambiguïté” (1980: 27), which is in large part what inspires her to return to Algeria and write the ensuing memoir of her journey. In fact, in many ways *Au pays de mes racines* shows how Cardinal moves toward a celebration of this “ambiguity” as she finds a way to move beyond overly simplistic dualisms such as Algeria/France, colonizer/colonized and toward a new self that is at once “Same and Other,” as Rose would say (1993: 137). Noting that living between two realities is all but impossible (1980: 111) because it constantly forces one to choose (1980: 20), Cardinal moves beyond this logic that Massey refers to as one of “mutual exclusivity” (1994: 256). Just as she reconfigures her understanding of external geography, exclaiming that she has suddenly realized “l’Algérie fait partie de l’Afrique!” (1980: 212), she is

also able to reshape her inner space and come to terms with an identity that is plural rather than dual.

Cardinal's unique socio-cultural position and especially her gender place her in the margins mentioned by Lefebvre, but also in the center, for she is both "une fille de colon," that is, part of the dominant (though minority) class, and "une femme," which places her in what she calls the "coulisses," the wings (1980: 60). While the fact that she belongs to the former suggests that she is not, in fact, all that marginalized, I would argue that her gender, as well as her agonizing feeling of being torn between worlds (1980: 109) contribute to her sense of exclusion, or perhaps more accurately, the ambiguity mentioned above. To use Rose's terms, Cardinal's Algeria is a space that is comprised of multiple, changing perspectives. Furthermore, it is "paradoxical" in that she finds herself at once inside and out, in the center and on the periphery (1993: 140). It is in this paradoxical experience of space that she seeks not only to challenge the dominant race, class and gender, but also to recover her childhood "paradis perdu" (Cardinal, 1980: 193; Hall, 1994: 14; Bacholle, 2006: np), a significant choice of words that reveals not only the loss of an idealized place, a garden of Eden, but also the loss of childhood innocence and wholeness. It is in the descriptions of the Algeria of her childhood that the notion of differential space takes on its clearest, most coherent form, for many parts of Cardinal's narrative bring immediately to mind Lefebvre's words concerning this space, most notably the connection with the archaic and the natural, the recovery of all the senses and the rediscovery of the sensual body and non-reproductive social structures.

"Archaic" is a term that Cardinal herself employs repeatedly, and by which she conveys a connection with the earth itself. As she declares, "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, pas par les gens. Les gens portent une culture qui embrouille l'archaïsme; je le voudrais brut" (1980: 48). This hunger for a relationship with the land rather than "culture" and the imposition of meaning it implies, is reiterated throughout the work (1980: 7, 9, 22, 47, 96-97). The metaphor of a tree and its roots, seen in the title, is recreated in various forms throughout the text (1980: 44-45, 99, 107, 140-1, 180), and reinforces the link between the writer and the land. It should be noted too that it is not her family tree she seeks to re-establish, though she does visit her father's grave. Since family emphasizes reproduction and

repression, it cannot give her what she needs and besides, she already carries it within her (1980: 47, 158). What she needs is the land itself, not in the sense of property, but rather in that it is where, as she says, “les rythmes de l’univers qui sont communs à tous les humains sont entrés en moi.” She then explains her return as a need to “laisser ces rythmes me pénétrer de nouveau, retrouver les échos les plus anciens du sang qui bat en moi comme en tous” (1980: 96). As Lefebvre said and Cardinal shows, the natural cannot be entirely repressed. This finds resonance in Cairns’s analysis when she points out that were Cardinal to disavow her Algerian past, it would be as though she had excised part of her soul (1993: 348). What Cardinal seeks in place of such a rupture is a space in which thought and body are not alienated. Instead, they function together, with thought no longer isolated from the body, but instead passing through it (Rose, 1993: 146). One cannot help but hear echoes of Hélène Cixous here, and especially what she refers to as “l’écriture féminine,” for Cardinal seems to be responding to the call that women must make their bodies heard (1975: 43). She is ready to cease struggling and enter “un temps de jouissance” (Cixous, 1975: 39) in which she will recover her whole self, particularly her intimate rapport with the land where she was born. The expression “jouissance,” also used numerous times by Lefebvre to describe differential space, is particularly resonant in this context, for Cardinal herself says of her visit “je voulais jouir d’Alger et de l’Algérie. Cette volonté de jouissance était énorme” (1980: 210). Though it involves taking a risk, from this new space of “jouissance” will be born a text, a specifically feminine text that destabilizes and rejects the norms of male hegemony.

With the rediscovery of the earth comes the reawakening of sensation, and indeed one of the greatest delights of Cardinal’s work is her extensive evocation of all the senses. Again Cixous comes to mind, as she alludes to the unknown songs and luminous torrents of feminine desire (1975: 40). In Cardinal’s version of this feminine experience of writing, the reader feels the heat of the African sun, hears the rustling of the leaves and the buzzing of the insects, smells and tastes the abundant, savory food, revels in the seasons as they change. Such passages are too numerous to count, much less to examine in their entirety. I have therefore chosen one particularly forceful example from early in the memoir: “Bruissement sec des feuilles d’eucalyptus agitées par le vent du désert. Tintamarre des cigales. La sieste. La chaleur fait bouger le paysage. Rien n’est stable, tout est éternel. Le ciel

est blanc" (1980: 8). This passage recalls her vision of "le paradis d'Allah" that, as a child, she prefers over its Christian counterpart because of what she perceives to be its focus on sensuality and lack of rules or structure. Furthermore, it not only illustrates the synesthetic arousal of all the senses typical in Cardinal's writing, it also exemplifies her desire to write in images, which she claims to need both to understand and to write (1980: 182). The varying lengths of phrases, the absence of verbs from most of the sentences, the absence of metaphor, and the use of onomatopoeia such as "bruissement" and "tintamarre" all help to create mental snapshots or perhaps better put, video sequences of the land she loves. Though she is a writer, she appears here anxious to escape the traps of language, of substituting one thing for another.

Her Algerian roots also allow her to at least begin to free herself from the numerous bodily constraints placed upon her as a female child of the French bourgeoisie. She frequently contrasts her experiences playing with the children of her family's Algerian employees with the aforementioned fact that as she physically developed, she was forced to quit such associations, for with adolescence and adulthood come the separation of races, classes and genders. She still carries within her a sensual, social child, however, for example as she remembers playing in the Algerian sun:

A moi le bonheur, le jeu, le rire, les odeurs, les couleurs, la danse, la jouissance, la sagesse.
 'Chaba, chaba! Belle, belle!' Bien sûr belle, puisque je suis heureuse!
 Au soleil la terre brûlante qui rend la démarche sautillante; bientôt l'ombre où s'accomplissent les noces (1980: 26).

This passage, like the one above, is an excellent illustration of certain aspects of differential space, not only for the emphasis on the senses with the references to color, laughter, heat and shadow, but also for the focus on pure joy, pleasure and festival. Cardinal doubtless recalls this scene fondly because her body was not considered in its reproductive context, but rather as part of a society, and indeed a festive, celebratory society. It is also significant that this scene is recreated in a number of her works, both fiction and non-fiction, for this shows to what extent she is marked by the experience. As Carolyn Durham explains, the many retellings of the harvest

scene reveal the repressive nature of the dominant colonial culture, yet at the same time give insight into the marginalized world of the “Arabes,” especially the women, thus serving as a means of subverting the hegemonic norm (1992: 21). If Cardinal struggled throughout her life with the constraints placed upon her as a Frenchwoman,⁸ memories like this, that she carried deep within, gave her the will and capacity to (re-)discover an alternative to the values that had been imposed upon her.

Algeria Present: Spaces Yet to (Be-)Come

This study of space and Algeria would not be complete without a discussion of Cardinal’s observations about its situation upon her return. As suggested above, Algeria is changing rapidly; moreover, she no longer sees a place for herself there (1980: 191). Contrary to what she expected, she realizes almost immediately upon her arrival that the peace and link to the archaic that she hoped to find were already present within (1980: 158-59). In fact, she wouldn’t want to be among those who stayed (1980: 207), even as she continues to be enchanted by the diverse sights, smells and sounds and the sensations they elicit. In fact, as her time there draws to a close, she declares that she is ready to leave, referring to an “Urgence du départ, urgence de ma vie ailleurs” (1980: 199). This impression that Cardinal quickly found what she sought is reinforced by the observations of her daughter, Bénédicte, who accompanied her mother on the trip and wrote her own reflections entitled *Au pays de Moussia*, published at the end of *Au pays de mes racines*. Bénédicte describes her mother’s initial outward emotion as “le visage d’une enfant apaisée, euphorique” (1980: 218), and Cardinal herself uses the term “euphorie” to describe her early emotions at seeing that the Algerians seem happy and at her own feeling “je suis chez moi, je suis rentrée chez moi et j’y suis bien” (1980: 124). She soon acknowledges, however, that “dans l’euphorie des retrouvailles, j’avais chassé [d]es ombres” (1980: 150). She becomes increasingly aware of “un malaise latent” (1980: 150) as the idealized setting of her childhood necessarily gives way when confronted with present-day realities. She is especially concerned that in the years since Independence, as Algeria grows economically, something is getting lost: “Pays sous-développés. Pays en voie de développement. Pays

⁸ One cannot help but notice the degree to which both halves of this compound word, “French” and “woman,” are loaded with meaning in the context established here.

civilisés... Les trois marches. Les trois degrés à grimper. Pour arriver où? Et, pour ceux qui sont en voie de développement (ce qui est le cas de l'Algérie), attention de ne pas perdre sa culture en route!" (1980: 151). Her most pertinent commentaries in this vein relate to the previously described notion of abstract space, its relationship to capitalism and the violence ingrained in such a space.

First of all, imperialism, in the form of colonialism, and later capitalism (even if post-Independence Algeria is nominally socialist), have had their effects on Algeria, both positive and negative, though Cardinal dwells more on the latter. Her thoughts are quite revealing, for example when she observes that "le peuple algérien attend que le socialisme l'enrichisse, mais au sens capitaliste du mot enrichir" (1980: 231). She describes how upon the departure of the French, the Algerians appropriated all that was left behind, which at first seemed "miraculeux," but now things have become considerably more complicated. She is afraid that those in power do not grasp the idea of "l'enrichissement collectif" that socialism is supposed to represent, preferring instead "le mot propriété... [qui] n'a rien perdu de son éclat" (1980: 214).

Elsewhere in the memoir, she mentions two particular issues, the first relating to the country's oil wealth. One of her thoughts on the topic uses simple language to convey an attitude of ironic sarcasm: "Et puis il y a eu du pétrole. Ça, c'était intéressant." She goes on to describe in an acerbic tone how France tried suddenly to soften its approach to its colony, to no avail, for "ses amants imbéciles avaient tout gâché" (1980: 75). Later, she reflects on Algeria's present economic issues: "Est-ce que le pétrole et le gaz peuvent remplacer tout le reste?" (1980: 153). Her words here have an almost prophetic effect, as twenty-first century readers experience the turmoil of the global oil market and face the possibility of this resource becoming prohibitively expensive before one day running dry. In addition, the focus on immediate capital at the expense of other aspects of life bring to mind Lefebvre's observations concerning abstract space. It would seem that modern Algeria is in danger of imitating its former colonizer, in the sense that in spite of claiming certain socialist ideals, Algeria, like France, risks some of the aforementioned problems inherent in abstract, capitalist space, including the violent repression of difference and the focus on reproduction and accumulation of wealth at the expense of creative production and play. Moreover, as Cardinal hears repeated criticisms of the Algerian workforce

and business practices (1980: 126,146-47, 149), she wonders if the people of the land she loves will find a way to “concilier la lenteur nécessaire de ce temps-là avec les journées de la Production, leurs horaires précis, leurs cadences rapides?” (1980: 191).

In addition to her concern about oil's overwhelming prominence in Algeria's economy, Cardinal also addresses tourism, which has developed in part as another means of increasing the nation's wealth. In the process, however, the country risks becoming the simulacrum of differential space described by Lefebvre: “Si le pourtour de la Méditerranée devient espace de loisirs pour l'Europe industrielle, du même coup l'industrie y pénètre... Les contradictions se développent: les urbains veulent retrouver une certaine 'qualité de l'espace'" (2000: 409). Similarly, McClennen describes how tourists attempt to buy a non-existent version, devoid of meaning, of the places they visit, usually in the form of “cheap souvenirs” (2006: np). Cardinal, however, tries to refuse this type of travel experience, even as she is repeatedly confronted with it.⁹ This starts when she goes to plan the trip and is shown “Une Algérie d'opérette” at the travel agency (1980: 83). Later, while there, she notices the development of an “Algérie de carte postale” (1980: 155), whether it be new buildings built by a French architect “*dans le style de vieilles villes algériennes*” (1980: 150-51, emphasis mine) or the creation of a “nouvelle cité touristique” which she has no desire to visit (1980: 154). Perhaps the most amusing aspect of the re-deployment of space for foreign tourism is the recent installation of camels on the beach “pour les touristes qui repartiront vers l'Europe et ailleurs en racontant que les plages algériennes sont peuplées de chameaux!” (1980: 180). Between the problems spurred by its dramatic growth and oil wealth, and the misguided efforts of those wanting to promote the development of tourism, Algeria, indeed all of Maghreb, is in jeopardy of becoming a faded copy of its former self. Cardinal is not arguing for an essentialist notion of a fixed Algeria that must be preserved, but she is asserting that too much might be sacrificed in the name of economic growth.

⁹ For the most part, Cardinal succeeds in her quest for a certain type of travel experience, although it must be acknowledged that she does accept some of the things she claims to reject, for example by staying at the government-run five-star Hôtel Aurassi (1980: 91). However, her stay there puts her ill at ease (1980: 136), which fits with most of her other reactions to the new Algeria being developed for tourist consumption.

Another concern, one that also goes with abstract space, is that the government seems to be ever more repressive, ever more controlling of discourse. The violence that eventually expelled the French has not as yet resulted in any "droit à la différence" (Lefebvre, 2000: 456), but rather led to a different kind of repressive state. This is devastating, for as Lefebvre says and Cardinal shows in her allusions to historical events (most notably the Algerian War of Independence and the Berber Tamazight Spring, a period of political mobilization by Berber activists in Kabylia and its subsequent repression that coincided with Cardinal's trip), oppression in the end can only lead to violence. With each resurgence of oppressed elements, greater force is necessary to quell them, with the result that all discourse is restricted, thereby rendering it difficult to develop an accurate idea of where modern Algeria really stands. Thus her various attempts to engage in conversation about Kabylia are met with avoidance or silence (1980: 126-27, 148, 150), and as she tries to learn more about the strikes and riots at the universities, she is confronted with government-controlled propaganda (1980: 148, 158). At the same time, however, it seems at certain moments as if she is unwilling to hear the reality proffered by certain Algerians with whom she speaks, for example when she listens to a litany of complaints from a man she meets on the beach and remarks that she revolts against what she hears, saying "Ce bonhomme me flanque le cafard" (1980: 200). In spite of this occasional wish to avoid reality, however, what she hears and sees does lead her to be anxious for the future, for while the people still seem close to the revolution that led to their independence, insidious forces are already defining what Algeria will be: "ils sont en train de définir une fois pour toutes les institutions du peuple algérien" (1980: 183). Above all, she fears that they will fall into the same traps as post-Revolutionary France and its ensuing brutal nationalism as she wonders, "Pourquoi le pouvoir entraîne-t-il obligatoirement l'interdiction de choisir?" (1980: 183). In the end, Cardinal is unsympathetic toward all nationalisms, whether post-Independence Algerian or *pied-noir*/French (Cairns, 1993: 353). Moreover, Cardinal appears to agree with other writers, including some Algerians, in that she acknowledges that while France's role as colonizer is partly to blame, some of the present-day issues are specifically Algerian and closely tied to "official Algerian historiography" (Donadey, 2001: 4).

Especially to be noted in this more restrictive atmosphere is that she believes that the land she loves has become far less free for women, who, as

it has been shown, were already oppressed, and this in spite of the fact that one might expect that freedom from colonial rule would create greater freedom for all. Women, however, have not been wholly freed and allowed a full and vital role in society. If anything, their roles and the places where they can circulate are more restricted than ever, at least in Cardinal's eyes. One has to remember, however, that what she remembers as being female experience does not necessarily correspond to the reality of Algerian women's lives. As a European *colon*, she would have had greater freedom in her childhood, even as a female, something to bear in mind in the following considerations. For example, as she revisits the places of her past, she notices more women wearing the Islamic veil, and realizes that as a woman, she no longer feels able to move about as freely as she did in her childhood. Yet it could be that the veiled women are as restricted as they were in the past and that as a child, she did not notice it. Alternately, one could also hypothesize that if she doesn't remember seeing veiled women, this is perhaps because they were not out of doors as much in the past. Then at another point, while walking down what she remembers as la rue Michelet, she becomes aware that "Les hommes parlent entre eux et dévisagent les passantes" (1980: 132). This gaze makes her so uncomfortable that more than once she decides not to stop in a café for a drink, even when she is quite thirsty (1980: 132, 187). She also wonders what will happen when her attractive youngest daughter joins her, which leads to the decision that it would be best to find a car so that they will attract less of the unwelcome attention. (1980: 132, 187).¹⁰ With some evident resentment, Cardinal concludes, "Une femme seule ne peut pas vivre à Alger. Elle est traquée" (1980: 133), a declaration that for her is confirmed when they visit certain beaches. These beaches, where women are circumscribed by male power and the male gaze (1980: 188), are in sharp contrast to the non-commercialized beaches described elsewhere, with the former having entered the realm of abstract space while the latter would still seem to belong to the differential, that remembered and preferred by Cardinal as she revels in "la mer, sa couleur, son agitation" and its restorative effects on her body and psyche (1980: 164-65). Here again, however, the distinction must be made that Cardinal's experience as a European is necessarily different from that of the Algerian women she sees.

¹⁰ There is no little irony in the fact that the only way for two women to move "freely" is to be enclosed within the confines of a vehicle.

The fact remains that situations such as those encountered at the café and the public beach provide Cardinal with a first-hand experience of what Rose describes when she writes that women are made to feel as if they do not truly have agency over their bodies, but are instead defined from the outside by men and given a restricted space in which to move. Since they do not choose this space, women can quite literally feel out of place, in “alien territory” (1993: 146). Furthermore, such experiences bring to mind Lefebvre’s observations concerning the limits placed on the body, especially female, in abstract space, and the fact that such bodies are reduced to commodities, valuable only for reproduction. In Cardinal’s own words, men look at women “comme si nous étions de la marchandise ambulante qui se juge, se jauge, s’évalue” (1980: 187), an assessment that echoes her earlier thoughts on the institution of marriage. There is, however, a difference between past and present, namely that she feels as though the space allotted to women is visibly shrinking compared to what she remembers. Between the constant obligation to travel by car and the fact that women are kept sheltered behind veils and walls, she comes to conclude, based on her own observations, that “L’espace vital se réduit considérablement pour une femme ici” (1980: 187). Again, however, this is only her experience. Perhaps what has changed most is that she now feels *herself* to be the victim of a gaze that is both Algerian and male. The issue here is not only the growth of capitalism, but also, simply put, male power, a situation that is not unique to Algeria. As Massey explains, numerous surveys have shown the many ways in which men, and not just capital, limit women’s mobility; these include physical violence, ogling, and literal or physical exclusion (1994: 148), all of which are found in Cardinal’s observations about women and space in Algeria. The place which Cardinal had so longed to identify as a locus of wholeness and freedom becomes yet one more in which gender inequity is all too apparent.¹¹ Any healing that she might derive from her visit will have to come from a reconciliation with her past that is combined with her more recent experiences, for she must make peace with the former

¹¹ Be that as it may, Cardinal stops short of suggesting that Algeria or other predominantly Islamic countries should have Western feminism imposed upon them (1980: 58), apparently for fear that such a proposition would be yet another form of cultural imperialism. Cairns effectively analyzes the contradictions inherent in this argument (1993: 353-57).

and allow the latter to help her to establish a new place for herself, a third space between past and present, Algeria and France.

Conclusion

What conclusions can be drawn about the creation and representation of space in *Au pays de mes racines*? As one might surmise, the answers vary depending on which aspect of the work is under consideration. If one ponders what space means to Cardinal personally, it is clear that she carried the elements of differential (Lefebvre) or paradoxical (Rose) space within her throughout her life, but she had to fight to free them, and it took a return to Algeria to help her accomplish this. Although she is at first almost entirely absorbed by her past and her memories, Cardinal soon realizes that the present has its place as well: "aujourd'hui m'intéresse plus qu'hier. Et pourtant hier... J'ai même reconnu certaines dalles des trottoirs" (1980: 135). The past is not something she wants or needs to forget, but she is now able to see her life in Algeria as exactly that, the past. As Bacholle proposes in her study of Cardinal and Kim Lefebvre, both writers must reevaluate their bi-cultural identities in order to negotiate a path that accounts for their past and takes them beyond a dual identity to a third space, a third identity (2006: np). Instead of living in a world defined by "doubles," which Cardinal finds to be impossible (1980: 111), she moves toward the possibility of such a third space, a third identity. This is significant for the present study, in part because in the end Cardinal chose to reside in the French Mediterranean region of Provence, as seen in *Amour, amours*, a blend of autobiography and fiction in which the protagonist creates a space for herself that is a blend of East and West, Algeria and France (1998: 135). While Cardinal never felt completely French, she was also unable to identify herself as Algerian (Cairns, 1993: 349-50). She therefore finds a way to use her sense of being "displaced everywhere" (Cairns, 1993: 350) to create for herself "an elsewhere beyond patriarchy" (Rose, 1993: 143), an alternative space that encourages rather than eradicates difference (Rose, 1993: 155). In this, according to Proulx, she is an "archetypal exile" who tries to reestablish her lost homeland in a new spatial context (1998: 531). Though it is fragile, it would appear that she has found a sort of equilibrium, a reconciliation of all the aspects of her self that brings to mind Cixous's call to write of the whole woman (1975: 43). She has established a geographical,

internal and discursive third space shares that shares much with the open, transitional space described by Cixous (1975: 54). As Proulx suggests, Cardinal's writing indicates a desire to break with the rules and traditions in which she had been raised and to create an emancipated, open textual space (1998: 535).

It is also important to underscore that Cardinal found differential space in Maghreb, a non-Western culture, and in addition, that this Mediterranean space, at least as she remembers it, is for her a true counter-space. As Algeria suffers through the growing pains analyzed above, however, it becomes more and more distinct from the land of her childhood. Cardinal, in part because of this childhood, finds herself in the position of the privileged few who are able to see things from a unique perspective and are thus able to fracture binarisms. After all, Massey reminds us that "dichotomous thinking," which is directly related to the ways in which gender is viewed and understood, is something we need to transcend (1994: 256). Cardinal likewise refuses binary oppositions that limit her thinking to male/female, outside/inside, and other such antagonistic pairings (Rose, 1993: 137), for they serve only to perpetuate exclusions and oppressions such as those seen in abstract space. Rather than fall prey to such limiting exclusivity, Cardinal seeks a new, inclusive space. Like other female postcolonial writers, she moves beyond a space defined by repression and exploitation in order to create a hybrid, plural identity (Donadey, 2001: 143). She fuses the different parts of this identity through her own, personalized version of "fractured colonial histories" (Donadey, 2001: 143), and in doing so confronts her family's European values with those she finds in "mythic Arabic tales" (Proulx, 1998: 533). Cardinal's ability to reconcile and move beyond apparent opposites transgresses the hegemonic norms set by abstract notions such as gender, family and nation.

In the end, Cardinal's readers might assert with Lefebvre that differential space allows for a veritable revolution seen in the capacity for new creations, as opposed to mere reproductions, in the spheres of daily life, language and space (2000: 66). Cardinal's treatment of space reveals a way to recognize and escape the limitations of artificial, abstract constructs and move beyond them to find differential space, a true counter-culture, and in this space, a source of creativity, as evidenced by her writings. It is surely not an accident that this text was written in 1980, a time when France was endeavoring to forget the Algerian War while Algerian nationalists, for

their part, were attempting to exploit it (Donadey, 2001: 12). Cardinal chooses a third option, for not only does she look to her Algerian past to find differential space, she also uses literature, the fruit of that space, to confront and dispute artificial gendered and national norms. In the process, she creates something new as the fruit of her transgression. As her daughter observes, in place of a monolithic being to whom she refers as “la vérité,” there emerges instead a woman who accepts herself as plural, formed by the contradictions of her inner nature as well as those of her past and present (1980: 239). One can only hope that more individuals, and eventually entire societies, from France to Algeria and beyond, will one day do the same, embrace the right to difference and move toward a space of *jouissance* beyond the restrictions of gender, nationalisms and other fruitless exclusions that serve only to limit, not to create.

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