

“I SEE MYSELF ELSEWHERE”: THE WORKS OF MARIE CARDINAL AND ASSIA DJEBAR

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- 18 Homi Bhabha once said in *The Location of Culture*, “Remembering is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present” (90). It is through this “painful re-membering” that this study brings together the works of two contemporary francophone women writers from Algeria, Marie Cardinal and Assia Djebar. Writing outside Algeria, Cardinal and Djebar engage in a retrospective recollection of their traumatic past inflicted by the sociopolitical influences of France’s colonialism and Algeria’s post-independent terrorism. In *Au Pays de mes racines* (1980), the Algerian-born French writer Cardinal remembers her past during her trip back to Algeria, where she reconnects with her lost motherland twenty-four years after being expatriated at the outbreak of the Algerian war of independence. In *Le Blanc de l’Algérie* (1995), Franco-Algerian writer Djebar addresses an immediate demand of memory of the lives of her friends murdered by Islamic fundamentalists in Algeria’s civil conflict. The urge to remember the painful past of Algeria’s history and their respective personal lives becomes the motif for these two authors’ writings, in which they both seek to create a space where their sense of being can go beyond restrictions of gender, exclusivism of the other, and French or Algerian nationalism.

Cardinal was born to a wealthy family of French settlers in Algeria and raised in the context of a colonialist culture and Catholic ideology. As a pied-noir exiled involuntarily from her birthplace, Cardinal feels both French and Algerian and, paradoxically, neither French nor Algerian. Cardinal’s double consciousness and in-between existence is echoed by Djebar, as the latter writes in French, which is seen as an act of betrayal under the control of post-independent Algeria’s regime, whose monolingualism of Arabic leads to the horrific victimization of the Algerian intelligentsia. Djebar is of Arab-Berber descent, a daughter of a Muslim family. However,

she received a French education supported by her father. Writing in French outside of Algeria, Djébar suffers the pain of dislocation and exile. Although Cardinal and Djébar appear distinct from each other when placed within an ethnic and political context, they both share an inner struggle of biculturalism, which results in them a sense of displacement. Through their memoirs, they both strive to reconcile with their French and Algerian origins.

This paper will examine how Cardinal and Djébar create a textual site to express their displaced "I" and how they use their geographic and social position as outsiders to critically analyze the sociopolitical problems in both cultures to offer their vision of a pluralistic Algeria acting as a counter-discourse against French or Algerian monolithic discourses.

A PLACE FOREVER CALLED HOME IN CARDINAL'S *AU PAYS DE MES RACINES*

19

In her study of nostalgia in Pied-Noir literature, Amy Hubbell contends that while some expatriated pieds-noirs choose to return to Algeria to relive their past, others refuse to revisit the country in fear of facing a changed Algeria. An example of the latter is Hélène Cixous, who is unwilling to return to her birthplace because she wants to conserve her "virginal memory of the past" (66). Unlike Cixous, Cardinal declares her urgent need to return to Algeria, as she feels an ineffable "necessity" to search for something beyond "the order of reason" in the country from which she was violently separated. *Au Pays de mes racines* begins with her declaration of this urgency: "Nécessité de partir là-bas. D'y retourner....Ce que je vais chercher n'appartient pas...à l'ordre de la raison....Non, c'est quelque chose qui vient de la terre, du ciel et de la mer que je veux rejoindre" (7). *Au Pays* is a travel journal in which Cardinal describes her complex feelings about her two-week trip back to Algeria after living a twenty-four-year nomadic existence between Europe and North America. Through her autobiographical travelogue, the author attempts to come to terms with her conflict-torn in-betweenness.

In an attempt to understand why she feels compelled to return to Algeria, Cardinal produces a series of binarisms throughout the entire narrative; the text begins with an evident contrast of nature (the earth, the sky, and the sea) and culture (reason) between Algeria and France. Cardinal's dichotomous illustrations show that her being is so severely torn between two countries that are politically and culturally opposed to each other; Cardinal depicts Algeria as a place that is "overwhelmingly positive" and France as a place that is "overwhelmingly negative" (Cairns 347). France is associated with a dreary binary logic, authority, and boredom: "Désormais une vie conforme aux manuels de psychologie, de physiologie, de sociologie. Heureuse-malheureuse. Agréable-désagréable. Passionnée-ennuyeuse. Violente-douce.

Comme une vie d'humaine homologuée" (9). During her stay in the "fatherland," Cardinal feels like an outsider, unable to relate to the names of French provinces as mentioned by her French friends. She recognizes that these names sound foreign to her and their geographic references contain no personal or social meaning because "[il] me manque toujours une clef, la clef de leur terre" (108). Cardinal's sense of feeling like a stranger in France is echoed by many *pièdes-noirs* who are seen as "second class French citizens" in the eyes of the Metropolitan French (Ha 318). Here, Cardinal brings forth an issue of identity. To her, identity is how one makes sense of oneself in a particular place. In "Places and Identity: A Sense of Place," Gillian Rose argues that "a sense of place is more than just one person's feelings about a particular place; such feelings are not only individual but also social" (89). The meanings given to a place may be strong only when one actually experiences it in terms of its social context. What Cardinal lacks in France are subjective feelings associated with socio-cultural lived experiences. This explains why the experiences and feelings of French children

20 could never have been transmitted to her from school textbooks she read at a young age in colonial Algeria, because "Les livres de classe de mon enfance étaient français, faits pour de petits Français vivant en France... Visions incompréhensibles" (113).

What remains incomprehensible to the young Cardinal is that her education imposed social and cultural divisions between her, the French and the indigenous Algerians. In the eyes of Cardinal's mother, who imported an unconditionally bourgeois value system from France, all of the young Cardinal's Algerian Arab friends were "des voleurs et des bicots" (35). Cardinal makes an ironic comment on her mother's binary thinking: "Quelle solitude à chaque fois qu'il faut faire ce choix: eux ou nous!...[D]ans le domaine de la morale...aimer le bien ou aimer le mal. Eux étaient le mal, nous étions le bien" (35). Cardinal's mother inculcated her daughter with a binary opposition presenting the French as "we," the Same, superior to the North African Arabs as "they," the inferior Others. To Cardinal, such moral hierarchy equates to "racisme" (20) and "le lavage de cervelle" (36). With utter contempt for her family's blind worship of French nationalism,¹ Cardinal uses the possessive adjective "their" to refer to France. In the above-cited sentence "la clef de leur terre," the possessive adjective in third person plural form "leur" shows not only how emotionally and socially unfamiliar the exiled writer is with France, but also her sense of marginalization that prevents her from reintegrating into the fatherland her family forced her to venerate. Contrarily, Cardinal develops a sense of selfhood through her close ties to Algeria, placing the country at the center of the universe that constitutes her existence in a physical and spiritual sense (Hall 13). Thus, Cardinal calls Algeria "ma belle terre, ma mère, ma génitrice" (61). Cardinal's reverse usage of her mother's division between "we" and "they" is an act of subversion against Eurocentrism upheld by her conservative, class-conscious family.

While some critics see Cardinal as a privileged subject in complicity with neo-colonialism,² many comment positively on her persistent exploration of her biculturalism as a political gesture to reawaken from French colonialism and attack Eurocentric

hegemonic ideologies. In fact, Cardinal is aware that her ambivalent position as "Arabe-Française, Française-Arabe" (56) inevitably undermines the legitimacy of her political declaration of taking sides with Algerian Arabs. However, Cardinal makes it clear in *Au Pays* that the land and property are her family's only by conquest, an act of excessive violence committed by her forefathers against the indigenous people. When she portrays her family's Arab employee, Barded, the author recognizes that the land belonged to the indigenous Algerians prior to France's conquest (15). This explains the use of an ellipsis in her statement upon her homecoming: "La propriété...oui, je sais" (13), revealing her sense of guilt. The Algerian Arabs who were robbed of their own territory by the French thus become "nomads off their land" (Dennis-Bay 122). In her antagonism against colonialism embodied in her family's paternalistic system and Catholicism, Cardinal thus claims, "Bien que pied-noir, je n'ai jamais été pour l'Algérie française...]'étais contre ce que représentait ma famille: la France et ses conquêtes, son empire colonial, sa morgue, son mépris, son racisme, son humanitarisme hypocrite" (168).

21

Facing her disturbing double consciousness, Cardinal is fully aware that she must remember the painful past of the dual loss of her biological mother and her surrogate mother, Algeria, before she comes to "comprendre l'équilibre ou le déséquilibre que créent en moi l'alliance ou la guerre de deux cultures" (20). On her journey back to Algeria, Cardinal seeks to "Retrouver mes racines. Me confronter avec moi-même. Revoir les lieux de mes commencements" (91). For this reason, she revisits the very place from which her psychological trauma is generated. Nancy Lane calls this trip "a spatial recapitulation of the internal journey" (152). When Cardinal was in puberty, her mother told her that when she was pregnant with her, she tried aggressively to have an abortion out of extreme hatred of her husband whom she was in process of divorcing. As an unwanted child whose desire for her mother's affection was unfulfilled, the mature Cardinal reveals in many of her writings the transferral of the love for her mother onto Algeria, transforming the country into an authentic mother. Patrice Proulx regards the author's declaration of the love she holds for her country of birth as a "survival strategy" (530) to assuage the violence of pain inflicted by her mother's words and consequent ill-treatment. Cardinal relates, "C'est là qu'elle m'a abandonnée...dans la rue. Je me suis accrochée à ce que j'ai pu, à la ville, au ciel, à la mer, au Djurdjura....[I]ls sont devenus ma mère" (198). Thus, the violent separation from her homeland amounts to amputations and killing for Cardinal: "M'arracher l'Algérie c'est arracher ma tête, mes tripes, mon cœur et mes âmes" (80). Cardinal's journey home is a historic moment in her exiled life; her creative literary production of *Au Pays* becomes an important part of her healing process. Through writing about Algeria and personally re-experiencing its geographic space, Cardinal seeks to remain in contact with this maternal land to overcome her feelings of loss and displacement.

Cardinal's account of her physical and emotional return to postcolonial Algeria centers on the country's nature and landscape as a site filled with passion and bodily

senses: “A moi le bonheur, le jeu, le rire...la jouissance, la sagesse” (25-26). Cardinal uses the word “jouissance” many times throughout the text to portray Algerian land as a space of liberation where body and mind are in unison. In particular, the rhythm of the Mediterranean Sea produces a maternal space of which her mother deprived her. Rejoicing in oceanic embrace, Cardinal feels, “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” (103). The metaphor of the maternal evoked by the association of the two words “mer/mère” is a trope frequently seen in French literary works. Cardinal’s “voyage au pays des racines” (99) symbolizes “a return to the semiotic” (Ha 320). It is with this strong “volonté de jouissance” (210) that the exiled author strives to liberate herself from the pain of a lost childhood and to reestablish a new relationship with the maternal land.

22 However, Cardinal’s journey of self-rediscovery is coupled with fears and disappointments that she might be treated as “une touriste, une étrangère” (80) in the place she claims to be her only country. Ann-Sofie Persson points out that visiting Algeria as a tourist is, for Cardinal, “metaphorically mutilating, revealing the distance between her present self and the childhood perception of being a part of the natural environment” in Algeria (172). Consequently, the sense of alienation creates in Cardinal “un manque, un trou, une plaie” (31), particularly when she must answer that she is “French” to an Algerian consulate clerk, after he inquires about her nationality. The psychological dislocation Cardinal experiences before her trip foreshadows her frustration of geographical displacement in Algeria. Feeling like an/a “étrangère, solitaire” (118) when walking on the streets of her motherland, the expatriate writer must reexamine her new contact with a changed Algeria. What characterizes *Au Pays* is more of the author’s political observations of Algeria’s socio-economic changes than of her personal narrative concerning nostalgic re-creations of the past. Thus, instead of seeing her biculturalism as a marginal position, Cardinal makes an analogy between her nomadism and the migration of “les cigognes,” as they “vont et viennent. Elles traversent la Méditerranée” (119) between Algeria and France. This “ambiguïté” (27) of location, as Cardinal calls her diasporic existence, can therefore be seen as “a source of strength” (Duffy 7), a hybrid perspective through which Cardinal provides readers with a profound cross-cultural understanding of the world.

In the final part of *Au Pays*, Cardinal shifts her focus from the personal to the political: “Je venais chercher ce qu’il y a en moi de plus archaïque...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” (158-59). Her observations of Algeria’s social events and her contact with Algerian people lead her to feel anxious about the country’s future. To her surprise, she discovers there are more women wearing the veil than in the past. Further, she feels constantly watched by men when walking alone on the street in Algeria. She takes the view that the male gaze restricts Algerian women’s mobility and self-assertion: “L’espace vital se réduit considérablement pour une femme ici” (187). The concern about the position of Algerian women in Islam and patriarchy is

an important theme in both Cardinal's and Djébar's writings. Interestingly, Cardinal specifically mentions in *Au Pays* Djébar's novel *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*, which offers a vivid depiction of the life of Algerian women sequestered under men's control. Cardinal explicitly expresses her closeness to the women portrayed in Djébar's work (106).

Algerian socialism is another aspect of revolutionary idealism seriously questioned by Cardinal. She argues that the notion, which claims socialism can enrich Algerian people, is in fact tainted by capitalism, a system that will inevitably produce economic inequality in Algeria. Cardinal explains, "le peuple algérien attend que le socialisme l'enrichisse, mais au sens capitaliste du mot enrichir" (213). She further comments that the ideal of collective richness constructed by Algerian socialism is false because this idealistic term means nothing to peasants who desire to "individuellement" (214) possess richness and property subsequent to the departure of the French colonizers. Cardinal foresees great problems ahead in Algeria concerning not only gender inequality and a form of socialism influenced by traditional capitalist thinking, but also regarding nationalism coupled with radical Islamism. Lucille Cairns points out that Cardinal condemns nationalism of any kind, be it French/pied-noir nationalism or post-independent nationalism amongst Algerians (353). Always disgusted with xenophobia, Cardinal discovers that the nationalistic government and Muslim fundamentalists are intolerant of foreigners. As a friend of hers in Algiers recounts: "L'esprit islamique prend plus d'importance et il en découle plus d'intransigence vis-à-vis des étrangers" (147). Cardinal also notices that additional political problems are caused by Algeria's rigid intransigence towards its very own people, i.e., Algerian activists of Berber origin. To Cardinal's unease, her attempts to learn more about the political protests in Kabylia, raised by the Berbers against the harsh Arabization dictated by the Arab Nationalist FLN government,³ are thwarted because newspapers and people she encounters on the street are too oppressed to discuss this violent upheaval (148-50). Cardinal observes that the Berbers' fight for their own identity and language foreshadows civil unrest in Algeria: "Maintenant il me semble qu'il y a un malaise latent dans les esprits" (150). Cardinal's anxiety about Algeria's sociopolitical instability is visionary, as oppressive monolingualism and Islamists' monotheism did in fact devastate Algeria a decade later, resulting in the civil war of the 1990s. It is precisely against the 1990s violence and oppression that Assia Djébar takes up her defiant pen to remember and rewrite in *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* the lives of her friends and Algerian intellectuals murdered by terrorists during Algeria's fratricidal conflicts.

Far from offering any solutions to the pressing problems of her motherland, Cardinal takes advantage of her "ambiguous" position to analyze Algeria's current social instabilities from a perspective different from that of the indigenous people of Algeria. Cardinal hopes to use her neither-nor identity to regain inner balance by reexamining her relationships with France and Algeria, thus offering an insightful criticism of Algeria's realities. At the close of her travel journal, the author declares

with affirmation, “un équilibre en moi, un rire quand je pense à ce coin-là du monde: je l’aime” (214), expressing her endearment of, and aspirations for, the motherland. Cardinal expects Algeria to be a place going beyond any restrictions of body and mind.

A PLACE HARD TO CALL HOME IN DJEBAR’S *LE BLANC DE L’ALGÉRIE*

24 As the final work of Assia Djébar’s Algerian quartet, *Le Blanc de l’Algérie* appears most noticeably to be exilic writing. Clarisse Zimra suggests in “Hearing Voices, or, Who You Calling Postcolonial? The Evolution of Djébar’s Poetics” that Djébar’s short essay titled “Le Blanc de l’Algérie,” published two years prior to her book, constituted Djébar’s “declaration of war toward the programmatic Arabization (one national language) and Islamization (one national religion) of the current regime. It sealed her entry into permanent exile” (152). Djébar is disturbed by her displacement of being an Algerian writer who uses the conqueror’s language to describe Algeria’s crisis that has made martyrs of the Algerian intelligentsia, and erased the life of the dead from Algeria’s official history. In the voice of the displaced “I,” Djébar dedicates this memoir to three close friends assassinated during the 1990s violence and evokes the free spirit of intellectuals to both preserve their legacy and create a new language to give voice to the nation and to the deceased.

Concerned that her writing may be problematic and inadequate, Djébar is deeply troubled by the very question she herself raises in regard to the cyclical phenomena of brutality in Algeria: “les tortionnaires sont-ils les torturés d’hier...Comment s’est fait le relais” (177). In the 1980s and 1990s, Algeria suffered from a series of economic crises, religious intolerance, and political unrest. The ensuing combat between the FLN regime, which came into power since the country’s independence, and extremist Islamic groups—military opponents to the FLN—eventually transpired into a civil war. Thousands of Algerian intellectuals, journalists, teachers and artists, particularly those whose profession was related to the French language, were ambushed or murdered, “not only for their political commentaries but also for their implied questioning of the culture of Arabization” (Hiddleston 125), upheld by both the government and Muslim fundamentalists. Out of hatred and fear of dissidents, the radical activists, who used violence to bolster authoritarian ideologies such as Algerian nationalism or Islamic fundamentalism, killed not only tolerant Muslim leaders and intellectuals but also other community members, including women for not wearing the veil. What disappoints Djébar is that the executioners were inflicting torture on their own people in the same way that the former colonizers used violence to oppress Algerians. In allusion to the continuity of violence from the seven-year war of independence to the ’90s tragedy, Djébar writes, “le sang reprend, coule à nouveau et noir, puisque entre combattants supposés fraternels!” (111).

Similar to the beginning of *Au Pays* which directly pinpoints Cardinal's motif of writing and returning, the very first passage of *Le Blanc* sets Djébar's narrative as a response to an urgent internal call to put together the painful past obliterated by the nation: "J'ai voulu, dans ce récit, répondre à une exigence de mémoire immédiate: la mort d'amis proches (un sociologue, un psychiatre et un auteur dramatique); raconter...ce que chacun de ces trois intellectuels représentait, dans sa singularité et son authenticité" (11). Djébar engages in an imaginary dialogue with the three friends, as if they were still alive, about the need to fight bravely against terrorism as part of their commitment to "l'amélioration du statut des exclus" (74). She even urges these specters to "hanter" (17) her so that she can feel their presence anytime and anywhere because the prematurity of their deaths go beyond her comprehension and cause her to feel an unbearable sense of guilt for surviving and for being physically distant from the homeland where their bodies were brutally amputated by unidentified killers. Writing in California, the dislocated narrator says, "Ces chers disparus; ils me parlent" (15). Djébar's use of the present tense for describing her friends' attitude when facing death with dignity and the horrific moments during their assassination produces such a striking reconstruction of the scene of their deaths as to both rewrite the government's so-called official report of the '90s social events and do justice to the dead. Far from being a polemic writer enthusiastic about revolutionary idealism, Djébar empowers herself with a writing that aims to represent multicultural and multilingual ideals of Algeria in its sociopolitical complexities. Through the power of texts, Djébar's transtemporal reunion with the dead allows her to maintain, through her friends' voices and attitudes, her conviction that there are "plusieurs Algéries" (12) yet to be sketched out. James Martel, in his comparative study of Frantz Fanon and Assia Djébar, argues that Djébar's novels "complicate the idea that there is one reality, one people, or one future for Algeria" (209). Her writings thus challenge ideas of absolutism such as monolingualism and monotheism. Djébar shows in *Le Blanc* that these two institutionalized systems are sterilizing and mediocre (243), denying Algerian people of their right to freedom of self-expression and personal choices regarding their beliefs.

With a hope to stop the bleeding, Djébar's courage in confronting the brutality in her country is clearly shown, for it reopens the national wound of internecine conflicts. In "une recherche irrésistible de liturgie" (12), the author is creating not merely "un panthéon algérien," as Doris Ruhe aptly calls Djébar's narrative (362), but also a process for healing, similar to Cardinal's memoir, to mitigate individual and national pains. It is therefore important for Djébar to return to the country's history of oppression before she can grasp any sense of why contemporary Algerians have violently turned against each other. She recounts a political purge by Algerian Colonel Amirouche during the war of independence. Colonel Amirouche, who is officially regarded as a hero in the fight against colonization, had ironically demanded the total elimination of educated and French-speaking young Algerians because he was led to believe that they joined revolutionary movements only to help the French

army destroy such movements. Two to three thousand young people, including women, had their throats slit, simply “par cette nouvelle langue, c’étaient fatalement eux les premiers ‘traîtres’” (211). The author’s juxtaposition of both past and present atrocities reopens a hideous scar the nation refuses to face: “une haine aveugle” (146). To Djébar, the FLN regime and Islamists are similar to each other in terms of their oppressive political maneuverings. Hafid Gafaïti notes that these two political structures are based on “un discours théocratique” aiming to eliminate not only thought and art, but life itself (234). Djébar’s link between Amirouche’s vengeful massacre of French-speaking young people to the current bloodshed of francophone intellectuals is illustrative of her critical attack of “l’anti-intellectualisme” (212) upheld by radical activists.

26 Djébar’s narrative is a discourse of commemoration not only for her three friends but also for many other prominent Algerian poets, novelists, and journalists who died during the last four decades due to accident, illness, or assassination. When expressing her deep sadness about “une Algérie sang-écriture” (245), the author pays homage to her “confrères exemplaires” (112) whose writings become unfinished because of their unexpected deaths. It is incomprehensible to Djébar that the monolingualism upheld by both the nationalists and Islamists waging war against the French language caused the assassination of Youssef Sebti—an Algerian poet writing in Arabic—who had his throat slit. Djébar’s search for a liturgy is to overcome her concern that those writers might undergo a kind of “double death,” as John Erickson states in “Translating the Untranslated: Djébar’s *Le blanc de l’Algérie*” (97), the first as a physical death and the second as falling out of Algerians’ memory and history. Her evocation of deceased Algerian intellectuals thus constitutes a spiritual literary community beyond boundaries of time and space. Djébar wants to illustrate an objective reality of Algeria being a nation inhabited by people of different origins, religions, and languages including Arabic, French, and Berber dialects. She calls for authors writing in French and Arabic to become her “alliés” (18) so they may collectively create a textual space where their unfinished work can continue to develop. Aline Bergé-Joonekindt regards this space of writing, where voices between yesterday and today are transmitted, as a “transmission” of multicultural heritage of Algeria (217). By reinscribing into Algeria’s memory those who have been obliterated by official history, Djébar points to the importance of “défendre la démocratie” (213) for an open Algeria in the future.

It is profoundly significant that Camus is placed as the leading figure amongst the nineteen intellectuals remembered. This gesture shows Djébar’s belief that the heritage of Algerian literature is multicultural and hybrid. A pied-noir writer living between two cultures, Camus represents “the archetypal Other,” as expressed by Jenny Murray (149). By calling for the presence of this literary master, Djébar prays for peace in her homeland: “Camus, vieil homme...l’Algérie en homme, en homme de paix, dans une dignité rétablie, est-ce pensable?” (110). In addition to “Camus l’Algérien” (111), individuals of different languages, ethnicity, and religious beliefs are

also remembered. For example, Taos Amrouche, who is both an Arab and a Christian Berber, is a renowned singer and the first woman to have novels published in Algeria. In praise of Taos's multi-faceted life, lived between Algeria and France, as well as her polyphony of languages, Djébar writes, "Elle a fini sa tâche, Taos l'exilée, l'enracinée" (185). It is worth noting that only four women are portrayed in *Le Blanc*. Aside from Taos Amrouche, Djébar recalls poet Anna Gréki, the daughter of a pied-noir school-teacher, imprisoned in Algiers as a Communist militant and expelled; Josie Fanon, a journalist and the widow of Frantz Fanon, who committed suicide because of the FLN's increasing oppression; and an unnamed school principal, Djébar's former student and a practicing Muslim, who was assassinated in 1994. Azade Seyhan interprets Djébar's recovery of these women's voices as the writer's "intimate portrait of mourning" and her lamentation of "the broken promise of a new age of women's literature in Algeria" (164-65).

The above three named women have one thing in common with Djébar: a life of exile. Djébar says, "Je m'installai désormais dans de constants allers-retours, me résignant à cet entre-deux, entre deux vies, entre deux libertés" (188). Her feeling of displacement grows stronger when she blames herself for not having been with Algeria's victims as they fought against a blind war. Djébar says, "Simplement, je ne vois plus l'Algérie...Vous, toujours là-bas, et moi, expulsée du désert...Je me vois ailleurs...Je suis là-bas sans terre natale" (146-47). As a result, Djébar describes herself in the land of her birth as an "étrangère" (55), the exact same word Cardinal uses for herself. While she writes in California and later in Paris, about the deaths of her compatriots whose mutilated bodies turn into ashes spreading over the white sand of Algerian land, the exiled Djébar has "no longer any home to go home to" (Priebe 51). Immersed in violence and blood, Algeria becomes a place difficult for Djébar to call home.

Though Djébar recounts her nomadic wandering in a somewhat helpless tone, she nevertheless looks up to the three women who "écrivent, jusqu'à l'adieu final" (188). Like Cardinal, Djébar brings into play the metaphor of exile with the image of the storks: "Une écriture qui n'aurait pas été seulement de fuite, tel le vol de la cigogne qui...persiste à observer...les courettes où restent parquées encore tant de jeunes filles, tant d'adolescentes" (188-89). Writing becomes the ultimate vehicle for both Cardinal and Djébar to remain in contact with Algeria and to deal with the recognition of their homelessness; only through writing outside the nation about their relationships with this land and its people can the two writers transcend their position of interstices and recreate a new perception of Algeria. However, Djébar is deeply saddened by the fact that her country is turning "blanc" (241). White is a predominant metaphor in Djébar's memoir, which brings forth multiple connotations such as "le blanc de la poussière" (241), "le blanc du linceul" (242), the "blanc de l'avenir" (245), and even leukemia—"maladie blanche" (245)—that took the life of Kateb Yacine, the Algerian writer of Berber origin notable for his novels and plays in French and Arabic. In a liturgical lamentation of the nation's crisis, Djébar sees

white as a “non-color” by referring to a poetic phrase of Kandinsky: “Le blanc, sur notre âme, agit comme le silence absolu” (241). Djébar’s writing is characterized by the difficulty between writing and expressing the individual and collective self under oppression. As an Algerian woman and a writer in exile, Djébar feels frustrated and helpless about the white silence of Algerian people. In allusion to the unwrittenness and untranslatability of Algeria, the writer has this to say: “Le blanc de l’écriture, dans une Algérie non traduite? Pour l’instant, l’Algérie de la douleur, sans écriture; pour l’instant, une Algérie sang-écriture, hélas!” (245). In her introduction to Djébar’s essay “Le Blanc de l’Algérie,” Zimra maintains that Djébar indicts “a whole generation of writers and thinkers, herself among them, who have not spoken soon enough and loudly enough” (140-41). How does one deal with silent voices and the blank page of the dead? How does one represent Algeria, with its conflicts and horrors not translated into words? Like Cardinal, Djébar offers no political solutions to social conflicts in Algeria. While pondering over these thorny questions, Djébar persists in creating a space for writing where her faith in “the corrective and redemptive power of words” (Seyhan 164) can be shared, and the legacy of Algerian literature can be passed down from generation to generation.

28

Although Djébar holds firmly to her faith in writing and empowers herself with words to balance out two opposing value systems, she remains uncertain about Algeria’s future. This uncertainty is best illustrated through her reference to a philosophical quote from Samuel Beckett: “Je continue...Je ne peux pas continuer. Je continue parce que je ne peux pas continuer” (148). This citation succinctly conveys her ambiguous attitude mixed with seeming helplessness and great possibilities for her country’s future. Elizabeth Fallaize explains that Djébar’s narrative is an act of memory through which she refuses to bring closure to the deaths evoked (55). Djébar makes it clear that their death is “inachevée” (232) as she tries to symbolically resuscitate the dead through her memoir and thus calls “ce parcours interrogateur” as “la mort inachevée” (233). Djébar’s text captivates readers with her uncompromising resistance to monistic thinking, even though she recognizes the risks and difficulties of defending cultural and linguistic hybridity in her country. Precisely because of this recognition, Djébar is obsessed with “l’écriture et son urgence” (242). Toward the end of the narrative, Djébar evokes again preeminent Algerian writers beginning with Apuleus, the prose writer of Berber origin from the second century, and continues to the Christian theologian and philosopher Saint Augustine, then to more contemporary writers like Kateb Yacine, and the pied-noir Camus. The portraits of these multilingual and multicultural figures confirm the presence of hybridity in Algerian history. Djébar’s evocation of these writers in the past and the intellectuals murdered during recent crises serves to form a continuity of Algerian literature and reinforces the inescapable plurality of languages, cultures, and identities in postcolonial Algeria. Djébar concludes her narrative in a somewhat positive tone: “Dans la brillance de ce désert-là, dans le retrait de l’écriture en quête d’une langue hors les langues, en s’appliquant à effacer ardemment en soi toutes les fureurs de

l'autodévoration collective, retrouver un 'dedans de la parole' qui, seul, demeure notre patrie féconde" (245).

No easy answers can be found in this text that offer solutions to Algeria's sociopolitical problems. Only the necessity of words compels Djébar to engage in creating a new language to counter ideological discourses of power. Djébar's "langue hors les langues" calls to mind Roland Barthes's concept of "the third language." Barthes perceives the third language as powerful because it can neutralize the power of two opposed value systems. He states, "In the conflicts of rhetorics, the victory never goes to any but the *Third Language*. The task of this language is...to scatter the signified, the catechisms" (50). For Djébar, the "langue hors les langues" is the ultimate means to fight against the whiteness of Algeria and challenge dogmatic ideologies. With her urgent call for the search of the "dedans de la parole" to represent her wounded yet "féconde" homeland, Djébar's courageous account of her country's tragedy forges both a narrative strategy as a discourse to counter cultural and linguistic dominion and a new model of francophone writing that is siding with neither French or Arab hegemonic thinking.

29

CONCLUSION

As women and writers, both Cardinal and Djébar are twice marginalized by an Arab society, which represses the voice of women and their writing in French. It can be said that these two francophone women writers, living across two cultures and two borders, can no longer belong to one single history or one people but rather to a new space where their nomadic existence can be accepted. Their works challenge binary value systems in France and Algeria and demonstrate a refusal to be reduced to one single identity. During their journey back to Algeria, whether physically or spiritually, both writers problematize the notion of the homeland; as Algeria cannot be oversimplified to one unity given its cultural and political contradictions. Thus, their nomadic wanderings become an important process of reshaping a self-identity encompassing diverse worldviews. In "Nomadic Thought, Postcolonialism, and Maghrebian Writing" John Erickson's exploration of displacement helps explain the disenfranchisement and involuntary exile of Cardinal and Djébar, as he suggests that nomadic thought is marked by "pure difference" (71) and that the homeland of a nomad becomes "a cultural mosaic that comprises a discourse interwoven with a multiplicity of voices" (80). Through their autobiographies, both writers accentuate the inseparable link between the individual and the collective, and advocate postcolonial hybrid identities in a society that respects differences and embraces complexities.

NOTES

1. I borrow this term from Lucille Cairns who defines “French nationalism” as “patronizing Algeria as the conquered and culturally inferior territory” (346).
2. In terms of the social, political, and economic policies of enforced dependence of colonial Algeria upon France, some critics point to Cardinal’s condescending mentality inherited from her French background towards the colonized Algerian Arabs, charging the exiled writer of either failing to rethink the nature of colonialism (Laroussi, footnote 20), colluding with neo-colonialism (Woodhull 166), or always portraying the Arabs as “subalterns” (Ha 321).
3. FLN—Front de Libération Nationale—is a nationalist and socialist political party in Algeria, established in 1954.

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30

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