“France, effaced but venerated”
– Marie Cardinal’s *Au pays de mes racines*

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**MARIE CARDINAL** (1929–2001) was born into a wealthy family of French settlers in Algeria and raised both on the farm which had been in the family for generations and in the city of Algiers. She later lived in Europe (Greece, Portugal, Austria, and France) and North America (Quebec), but she always considered Algeria her place of origin, despite the distance imposed by the Algerian war of independence. After twenty-four years of absence, she decides to make a trip to Algeria, returning, in a sense, to her country. The thoughts and preparations preceding the trip, the stay in Algeria itself, and the period immediately following it are recorded in an autobiographical narrative in the form of a journal, kept between 29 April and 7 June 1978, and published under the title *Au pays de mes racines* (1980). In this journal, the colonization of Algeria by France starting in 1830, the Algerian war of independence (1954–62), and the departure of the descendants of the French settlers,
known as *pieds-noirs*, are omnipresent events. Cardinal’s narrative illustrates how the *pied-noir* identity is constructed as both French and Algerian, and at the same time as neither. Eventually, it becomes evident to the reader of *Au pays de mes racines* that Cardinal identifies with Algeria more than with France. Given the author’s way of inscribing herself in the context of Algeria as the homeland, although she belongs to the settler community, it seems appropriate to say that through Cardinal, Africa is writing Europe. It is certainly a different Africa from that of a writer of Arab origin, but it is also an entirely different version of Europe from one written by a French writer born and raised in France. This study will focus on the images of France as representative of Europe, as opposed to Africa, offered by Cardinal in *Au pays de mes racines*. The techniques or the themes that will receive particular attention in the investigation of how Cardinal constructs an image of Europe are the use of contrasting images of Africa and Europe, the child’s perspective as a pupil of the colonial school, hierarchical patterns, the idea of being French and Algerian, and that of being a woman and a feminist.

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When Cardinal constructs an image of France, Algeria is often used as a contrast which in turn tells us what France is not. The representation of Africa, in itself very interesting, will here be studied only as a different manner of writing Europe. In the opening pages of *Au pays de mes racines*, we find an attempt to define the meaning of living in and outside of Algeria. Since Cardinal was living in France when writing the book and has mainly lived in different places in Europe, one can probably conclude that when she talks of what life is like outside Algeria, she is referring to European countries. The European way of life is described in the following manner:

> Vivre ailleurs que là a changé pour moi le sens du mot vivre. Vivre ailleurs est devenu synonyme de besogner ma vie, organiser ma vie, structurer ma vie, prévoir ma vie.

(Living elsewhere has changed the meaning of the word to live for me. Living elsewhere has become synonymous with working with my life, organizing my life, structuring my life, planning my life).4

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