Authority, Desire and the Sacred in the New Algeria: Yamina Mechakra's *La Grotte éclatée*

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Yamina Mechakra's 1979 work *La Grotte éclatée*[1] scrutinizes the ideology of the family-nation as a symbol for a new Algerian state in the throws of re-construction. Her book explores the concept of the family-nation as a symbol on which to ground a burgeoning Marxist-socialist state. This symbol made reference to lost values and an identity that had been suppressed during 132 years of French occupation. The Front de la libération nationale (FLN), born to fight a revolution, would later become the ruling party which promoted an "old-style patriarchy" grounded in the slogan "Islam is our religion, Arabic is our language, Algeria is our country" (Carlier 103). In the wake of patriarchal nationalism, Mechakra's novel in 1979 asks a very fundamental question: How will the Algerian people succeed in reclaiming traditional and historical roots denied them during the colonial era, while at the same time achieving a modern, political structure that promotes equality and a cohesive national identity for men and women? Mechakra wrote her novel at a time when women were losing the gains they had made during the revolution. Women had briefly enjoyed the limelight as equals after having fought and died for independence. However by the time Mechakra published her work, women had been relegated to the sidelines of social and political enfranchisement. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Algerian women were increasingly caught between the dogmatic hard-line politics of the FLN and the rising fundamentalist rhetoric of the Front Islamique du Salut. One wonders if Mechakra had waited ten years to write her novel what her words would have been. Already in 1979, when we read between the lines of *La Grotte éclatée*, imposing questions manifest. Where was the Marxist-socialist government of the new society leading women of the Algerian Republic? What would be women's ultimate place and role in the new society? And where would women finally ground their identity; in traditionalism and religious fundamentalism or modernity?

Mechakra's work is a study of the change in the family dynamics of post-revolutionary Algeria and how these dynamics culminated into the symbol of the Algerian family-nation. Since 1962, the notion of the family-nation has been an essential component in the politics of the Front de la Libération Nationale's (FLN) one party system. Certainly in the 1970s (at least according to the Party's view), the symbol served to unite the Algerian people and constitute a viable nation at the beginning of the post-colonial era. In Mechakra's novel, the idea of "family" takes on both mythical and symbolical proportions as it provides the grounding centerpiece of her story of revolution. The narrative is a poetic account, noted down by a young woman who was, in actuality, too young to have really fought during the war for the maquis. Despite the fact that she wrote the novel in 1979,

Mechakra succeeds in capturing the horrors of the war as witnessed by a young woman fighter for the moujahdine.

In my analysis of Mechakra's novel, I seek to explore how traditional gendered spaces, the madness of war and violence, and the context of the revolutionary family (both real and metaphorical) are used by the heroine to build a new reality for herself in postcolonial Algeria based on gender equality. This reality has its roots in Algerian traditions and family bonds with the land, but does not promote traditionalist, orthodox Islam. My study encompasses the following questions: What constitutes a family? And why is family (both traditional and atypical) such a necessary structure for the heroine to counter the insanity of war? How is the Algerian family a symbol for the Nation-State family and why was this symbol so dear to the rebels of the revolution and the subsequent governments seeking to rebuild Algeria?

For the FLN, the family would serve as a model to illustrate not only the ideal Marxist society (thought to be the supreme ideology on which to found a modern nation), but also assure the continuation of the Algerian people, fostering a strong sense of unity among them. Forged in masculine rhetoric grounded in Arabisation programs, the FLN's policies fueled a "virility syndrome" that characterized the political workings of the country particularly during the 1970s. As the 1960s came to a close, this "syndrome" further stimulated the extreme hardline rhetoric of future extremist fringe groups, notably the Front Islamique du salut (FIS). The FIS enjoyed a hiatus in the 1980s and 90's. Virile, anti-woman and anti-modern, the fundamentalists promoted a platform of violent Islamism that found strength in "authority, desire, and the sacred" (Carlier 97). For Algerian women, this triptych meant that "Woman is both desired and monitored more than ever. She is desired more than ever because she is more visible, more free, more beautiful, without becoming accessible; and she is monitored more than ever because her reputation remains a principle of masculine honor for the men close to her" (Carlier 97-98).

Since Independence, Algeria's political system has struggled between Islamic fundamentalism, Arabization programs and an authoritative-paternal dogma promoted by the FLN. Counter to the "virile" status quo as Mechakra attests, there exists among women the desire for a secular, more joyous celebration of the motherland. As scholar Omar Carlier explains, "From the 1930s to the 1950s, the head of the nationalist party was the 'father of the party'" (101). This father symbol solidified in the growing authoritarian FLN movement that later established the first post-colonial government. "Mosques and schools used the words and symbols of the past revolution to transfer the heroic, populist, and messianic model of the fathers' generation to the generation of the sons...the FIS's future troupes and leaders. In this sense, the new FIS is very much the son of the FLN" (Carlier 102). Even in language, Arabization programs strove to change "the figure of Mother Algeria" – the motherland – known in dialectical Algerian as

"*l'Algérie*"and therefore "considered feminine through an integration of the feminine French term into the Algerian form of dialectal Arabic" (Carlier 103). Arabization favored the masculine term in classical Arabic, *El Djeza'ir* as the rightful name for Algeria (Carlier 103). Returning to the motherland, *l'Algérie* of the Algerian people, is Yamina Mechakra's central theme. Her novel promotes the ideal of an Algeria that is freed of masculine, Arabized, slogans, constructions and religion. It is an Algeria for women: "Mother Algeria [as] related to all other maternal figures: mother earth, the mother tongue, and the mother who nourishes with her blood and milk" (Carlier 103). As Omar Carlier notes, "This [nourishing mother] refers back to the community of sons of the universal mother of faith, to the *umma islamiyya*" (Carlier 103).

Mechakra's novel is constructed on two principal axes: the real and the symbolic and her works studies how women operate within these two realms. The author's female "real" roles in society, whether traditional or not, are the subject of frequent commentary. For Yamina Mechakra there are definitive characteristics associated with women who fall into either group. The author explores the development of her heroine's identity by placing it in-between traditional and non-traditional spheres. Within this middle space, her protagonist lives as a very atypical Algerian woman: she is an orphan, has no family, no name, no ties to a community, and is totally marginalized on the fringes of *normal* Algerian society (Mechakra 33). "I was shuffled from one orphanage to another" the nameless heroine laments, "At a very young age, I knew the disdain and pity of families with names, at a very young age I liked who I was and enjoyed my independence, my life without attachment...Some called me Mary or Judith, others Fatma. I wore my first names like dresses...." (33). Although marginalized, the heroine's free floating identity affords her a liberating, *ex-centric* position – on the edge of Algerian traditional society. This young woman, who fights for the maquis, enters into a void of *étrangeté* – foreignness. Within this realm, the heroine Ahas changed [her] discomforts into a base of resistance, a citadel of life....without a home, [she] disseminates...multiplying masks and false-selves" (Kristeva 8). Through her multiple-selved heroine, Mechakra posits the varied possibilities that are open to the Algerian revolutionary woman who engages in helping the rebirth of Algeria: "I will multiply myself. We will multiply ourselves. And of our multitude my love, the earth will be reborn" (Mechakra 100).

The second axis of Mechakra's work scrutinizes the ideology of the family and women's roles within it as a symbol for a new nation caught up in the Front de la Liberation Algerian's Marxist re-construction. As scholar Hafid Gafaiti notes, reconstruction of national identity of "North African countries in general and Algeria in particular on the basis of cultural representations and ideological constructions" was invariably linked to "nationalist, ethnolinguistic discourses" honed in Manichaen terms inclusive of Muslim fundamentalist rhetoric "linked to the FLN and its regime" (20). What will constitute this new family and nation? For

Mechakra, it should favor inclusion of its traditional heritage, but she warns, the country should not backslide into Islamic orthodoxy that would only hinder women's equal participation in the new society. Ironically, the author's novel was published on the eve of the official installation of the 1984 Family Code which basically eradicated women's rights. Already in 1976, "the draft code institutionalized the unequal status of women in matters of personal autonomy, divorce, poligamy, and work outside the home" (Lazreg 151).

Yamina Mechakra situates her story in 1955, a year after the first Algerian bombs exploded, launching the revolution against the French colonizers. The novel is a web of disjointed prose and poetry recounting vague information imparted to readers through bits and pieces of the heroine's memories concerning her origins, family, and the war. As previously noted, the heroine remains nameless throughout the novel. Her mother, manipulated by a man who promised her the moon but left once she became pregnant, is also but a somber memory in the mind of the young protagonist. Her mother abandoned her on the doorstep of a convent, leaving the child nameless with no family and no means by which to root herself in traditional Algerian culture. Later this absence of family facilitates the heroine's ability to cut ties with the convent and leave for the mountains and the maquis just as the revolution is taking form: "I was content not to be a part of any community, inventing for myself people and a country as free as me"(Mechakra 34). Her flight to the maquis marks the beginning of her identity quest. As an orphan in a society where family is the supreme root of society, she is an outcast: "I was born of unknown parents in a corner of old, humid Constantine"(Mechakra 29).

Lack of family and social ties allows her access to spaces not often frequented by women. Yet at what price? As she transgresses the highly masculinized sphere of the maquis, she is forced to efface every feminine characteristic that could mark her as weak (as a woman). She shaves her head and becomes physically androgynous so that she will easily integrate into the maquis' camp high in the Aurès mountains (Mechakra 26). Once she wipes away her feminine attributes, she more easily is accepted into the realm of the male maquis. These men become her family "There on a dead frontier....I met brothers who had come from all corners of Algeria, brothers from abroad who came to kill oppression"(Mechakra 29). This larger extended male family, found in the mountains, is made up of Salah (a young wounded 12 year old boy), old Kouider (the patriarch of the group, who has already survived World War II, fighting the Germans for the "colons"), and several assistants who help take care of the maimed and dying, hidden away in a cave in the high mountains. In her androgynous form the heroine fights with her male counterparts outside the cave, however inside its sanctuary, she is relegated to performing more nurturing, feminine tasks which include taking care of the wounded hidden inside the bowels of the cavern.

The cave is a timeless void where the maquis Alive outside time....without national identity papers, without family or first names," where individual identity is obliterated as a result of the horrors associated with war, death, and madness (Mechakra 34). As a uterine symbol, this cavern also plays a role in providing a place where, although human death is ever present, life is occasionally brought forth. Within the cave the young heroine meets her future husband, Arris. In the expanse of two paragraphs, she marries and loses him, claiming he Adied from his wounds" (Mechakra 69). The couple's few moments of pleasure terminate in death and war. Yet from this brief liaison she becomes pregnant. The cave provides a milieu through which she enters a new phase of her life and her identity: motherhood. She alone establishes family ties through a son to whom she gives the name Arris (both the first name of her defunct husband as well as the village of the maquis). On a capacious symbolic note, the protagonist becomes a contributor to the new larger family of the national Algerian community on the eve of Algerian independence. Unique in its composition, her family is one formed by her own volition and not held accountable to patriarchal regimes and the family names of men. Mechakra's family is founded on matriarchy, a new alternative she recommends for the burgeoning Algerian nation: "The child who will be born will have a name; he'll have a place among us: he is the fruit of legal prostitution. [But also] [m]y child will not have a name: I don't know the surname of his father who, in the eyes of others, will justify my existence. My child will have the right to his mother's dreams"(Mechakra 69-70).

Her husband's death is followed by the explosion of the cave by French troops.[2] From the shattered cave the young heroine and her son emerge, wounded but alive. All other maquis who were with her are killed. Through the symbolic renaissance of her heroine, Mechakra reveals a symbol for a new kind of family for her liberated country. The mother-son link, divested of masculine presence, posits a new utopian conception of the idea of a mother-nation, cleansed of the colonization and patriarchal traditionalism both of which relegated women to a milieu devoid of speech and agency. However, the idealism is tenuous as both mother and son suffer from profound wounds. In a Tunisian psychiatric hospital, the young heroine slips in and out of madness. Her son was blinded and lost his legs in the attack and she lost an arm. Insanity offers a temporary refuge from the war and allows the heroine to "leave a world that has become insane with violence and death" (Ali-Benali 14-15).

The author's unusual mother-son dyad which proposes a new view of motherhood, as well as a new family dynamic, subtly offers a critique of the "family-State" symbol which is (and was in 1962) the foundation of the Algerian Republic. The revolution as well as the Marxist ideology (posited immediately afterwards by the FLN in an effort to build a new egalitarian society), theoretically should have changed the status of Algerian women. Psychologically during the conflict, Algerians experienced a transformation with respect to traditional

relationships and the gendered spaces dividing men and women. "Women's entry in the decolonizing movement was revolutionary in the sense that it upset patterns of gender relations" (Lazreg 137). The typical masculine outside realms of Algerian society became mixed as women fought alongside men for freedom. Frantz Fanon predicted in his earlier, now infamous, *A Dying Colonialism*, that "revolutionary war is not a war of men" (66). In this work he closely scrutinizes the roles of Algerian women in the domestic as well as revolutionary spheres, stating emphatically that the war could not be won without their participation. In *A Dying Colonialism* the psychiatrist underscores the fact that Algerian society is not "the womanless society" that the French colonizer thought it was (66-67). As the struggle to eradicate French oppression became acute in the late 1950s and more and more women were called upon to participate in the revolution, the Algerian freedom fighters realized that nationhood could not be achieved solely by the efforts of male rebels. Algerian men could not deny the contributions to the independence movement women had repeatedly been making (Fanon 66).[3]

Through revolution, Algerian women became possessors of their own bodies, wills, and spirits. The revolution had a cathartic effect and gave women access to the *outside*; a site beyond the veil, the interior walls of home, and the submission they had endured under colonialism and the phallocratic mores of their own culture. Through the psycho-cultural upheaval of tradition which the war inevitably caused the Algerian people, women were granted a venue to a new identity. As Fanon explains, "she" in times of revolution "learns both her role as a woman alone in the street and her revolutionary mission instinctively" (Fanon 50). Discovery of their revolutionary mission led Algerian women to subvert the patriarchal organization of labor, culture, and society to which they had grown accustomed over the centuries, allowing them to embrace a new identity. Revolution became a focal point for change because it offered Algerian women a window through which to see *what could be.* As Mechakra's novel attests, this "what could be" set into motion the possibility of a new social order, while granting women the opportunity to form a new platform on which to build an ideology of contest (Ebert 8). For the first time in Algerian history, both men and women fought side by side for the same thing: Liberty. However, as Marnia Lazreg writes in her study *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question*, the risks that women encountered during the revolution and after far out numbered those experienced by men:

> *[m]ore than men, [women's] participation in the war entailed greater personal sacrifices and dangers....[because] women risked loss of the protection and safety of their homes and families and the possibility of good marriage and family life....[as well as] the omnipresent danger of rape.* (Lazreg 115)

Algerian women thought that by breaking with tradition a new social order would develop, generating a new consciousness more favorable to them. In the heroine's diary entry for "June 1961," this consciousness she predicts will be linked to the earth and the people, modeling the new nation as if from clay:

> *Algerian independence, a hope invigorated with torrents of voices and fists held in the air from all the corners of the country, a hope inflated by the gunfire of our hearts beating the irreversible marching of a people who pulled the earth to it in order to impose the form of its breasts, its teeth, its language, its own stomach, its burgeoning genitals, its hands. Our rose marble and our white marble have become more hard. Future mosaics for the gardens of our* aouleds. (Mechakra134)

Unfortunately in the years after independence, the new social consciousness that women had hoped for slowly was effaced. In the end the "language of revolution that extolled the woman fighter who became 'free' the moment she joined the movement gave way to the language of immutable gender inequality" (Lazreg 132). Algerian women found themselves abruptly silenced. Commenting on the continued perseverence of the masculine "social superego," Marnia Lazreg denounces the overbearing authority that has ruled women with an iron hand since the end of the revolution (Lazreg 176).

The FLN's reliance on phallocratic ideology as well as its increasing alliances with the powerful *ulemas* (ultra- Islamists) divided men and women.[4] Certainly conceptualization of how the new nation would be formed and the roles that women particularly would take with regards to the nation and the state, were constantly at the forefront of Algerian politics. Men and women had conflicting views on what nationalism and patriotism would mean for the budding country. In Algeria, as in other newly independent African countries, nationalist and patriotic ideologies took on different meanings according to which gender was considering them. Typically, nationalism is defined by the singular politics of a group which seeks to establish supreme authority on sovereign territory. Patriotism, on the other hand, is a sentiment shared by the people of a nation who aspire to establish a community which is both social and political at the same time. In order to found a new nation, it is necessary to have an equilibrium between these two concepts. Yamina Mechakra's novel reflects the hope shared by men and women of the FLN during the war. This hope was grounded in the mutual investment in these two ideologies. A strong nation built on equality would assure not only a new brand of postcolonial politics, but also guarantee the loyalty of all toward the rediscovery of the roots of Algerian myth and the beauty of the land:

> *The country of the setting sun would capsize with the whirlwind of our history. Land of legends and of miracles. There Atlas was changed into mountains, there Heracles with one club swing dug the columns of Hercules, there he picked the golden apple in the garden of the Hesperides*. (Mechakra 146)

In the author's work, here on the edge of the Atlas mountains, AAlgeria appears on the horizon" (Mechakra 149). The possibility of regaining lost history, lost myth and lost identity become more a reality as the heroine makes her way through the years of the war. As the denouement of the novel progresses, the words and descriptions offered by the heroine become more and more patriotic, rooted in the burgeoning formation of the new, independent country; "c'est l'Algérie qui se lève" – "Algeria is rising" (Mechakra 148).

In her book *Sexuality and War*, Evelyn Accad remarks that the word "patriotism" is "intertwined with female and male images – *patria* as mother earth to whom loyalty is a congenital duty, *pater* as the father who commands loyalty at once gentle and appropriate" (Accad 15). Nationalism, however "is a kind of imperialist ideology that imposes uniformity on geographic areas that may be infinitely extended" (Accad 15). The characters in Mechakra's novel, repeatedly define their environment as rooted in the patria; a symbolic construction for mother earth. Loyalty to pater and patria mix within the nurturing space of the cave, the inner sanctum of the earth mother where the heroine heals the wounded. Unfortunately, as Mechakra's heroine realizes at the end of the novel, it is nationalism in the guise of a hyper-patriarchal framework that wins out, effacing the idea of attachment to the earth as a symbol for the foundation of a feminized utopia equally profitable for men and women. The nationalist patriarchy would provide the rhetoric and the ideology for recapturing lost identity. Nationalism and state building became the exclusive affair of men, upheld by the need to harmonize and unify Algerian culture and society into a strong, nation state. French historian Gérard Noiriel explains that within the framework of nationalism, a true, strong state exerts "power over a space that coincides with the limits of national territory and therefore affect[s] the population living within those boundaries....the state intervenes in nation formation essentially by destroying traditional oral cultures through industrialization and replacing them with a centralized, written culture spread throughout the national territory" (Noiriel xvi).

Where women thought that they had fought (in the name of patriotism, the love of country), to restore and heal the lands of Algeria (the colonial-raped mother earth; the – *terre-mère* – of displaced tribes), the FLN countered by increasingly favoring a more masculinized rhetoric used to ground a new political system. This system allowed no place for nostalgic references to tribal lands or provisos for the birth of new women's roles in post-colonial society. The postcolonial Algerian state would be built through, a "bond that unites members of a national community [in

order to form] collective representations" (Noiriel xvi). The principal strength of the new Algerian state would rely on this state being "seen as the agent that creates and spreads national images and symbols" (Noiriel xvi). Unity among the Algerian people became the principal rallying point of FLN ideology, thus renouncing any possibility of individualism and recourse to individual family/tribal ties with the land. At the heart of FLN ideology, Algerian land is re-conquered, but traditionalism is refashioned as a means only to found a collective identity lost under French colonial occupation (Stora 171). Concerning this ideology which promoted only one view of nationhood and revolution, that of a national-collective identity, Benjamin Stora writes,

> *[it was important] to drain all convictions....putting off particular interests for later. This conception of a unified society, 'guided' by a unique party, fostered a particular vision of the nation. After independence, an undecomposable block, the nation is seen as a solid and unified entity.* (Stora 171)

Algerian nationalism at the end of the war, and henceforth, would be linked to symbolic family traditionalism wherein men and women would have specific roles determined by gender in order to uphold the larger national goals which stipulate, as cites John Ruedy, "the restoration of the sovereign, democratic, and social Algerian state within the framework of Islamic principles"(Ruedy 159). There is no place within this schema for claims to equality or individual attachment to the land (*patria* – mother earth –) as the only foundation of the new society. Women thought they had fought for change in their social status not only in terms of the nation but also within family and tribal organizations. Unfortunately, their claims to the land, to new social structures and equality were lost. Women's agency, thus, was "managed" by the FLN-Marxist-nationalist power structure. As Anne McClintock maintains, in the case of Algerian women freedom fighters: "feminist agency....[was] contained by and subordinated to nationalist agency" (McClintock 367).

In Mechakra's work, repudiation of the phallo/autocratic FLN rhetoric in favor of an individual woman's quest to bond with her land is most evident. Her propensity for equality, as well as loyalty to the pater and devotion to the patria, are continually noticeable throughout the novel. For the heroine, once again finding love of *la terre* fosters the rejuvenation of "a language that before was forbidden" (155).[5] This rejuvenation consists of re-establishing all that was lost and effaced by the former colonizer in order to plant the seeds of new possibilities. A new form of the Algerian family as well as a new political system for the nation would reinstall lost history and identity for Algerians. The heroine's devotion to an idea of a melded mother earth and fatherland are evident in the eternal confusion centered around the word "Arris." ARRIS (written in capital letters) refers to a village high in

the Aurès mountains, the heart of the maquis' stronghold. The heroine shares a particular bond with the village since it is a magical place to which she will go once independence has been won: "When independence comes, we will go there, to ARRIS," she whispers to her dead husband and to her newborn son, also named Arris like his father (Mechakra 137):

> *I will whisper your song, Arris, to our son when he has your eyes to understand me with, and my lips to name you. I will grow old, my love, in the shadow of your memory and on each wrinkle sprouting forth from my body, I will inscribe your name and my youth. Arris, my love, today a beloved stinking carcass, tomorrow earth rich in phosphorous where a will-o'-the-wisp will dance*. (Mechakra 142)

"Patria" and "pater" are unified in an ideology that links the protagonist to her dead husband, the land around the sacred village of the maquis, and the nation that has taken the lives of so many to build. Yamina Mechakra's postcolonial vision for the Algerian people is forged from land, tribe and family: "Arris, my son, you were my revolt. To you, today, my child. I pronounce your dead father, on his lips my love....I say ARRIS my country and its harvests/ARRIS my ancestors and my honor/ARRIS my love and my home" (Mechakra 172).

The author notes that ancient, tribal family values, as well as those of the new Marxist state, must co-exist in harmony in order to assure the well-being of post-colonial Algeria as well as the women who are its citizens. The attachment to both the land and the nation is for the protagonist, as well as the author, the only solution for founding an equilibrium for the country after more than a hundred years of colonialism and eight years of war (both of which displaced tribes, decimated villages and scattered thousands of people). Algerian independence for Mechakra must be more than the politics and the virile ideology of the FLN. A true, new nation must be conceived of by men and women who will work to build a utopia. At the end of the story, in the wake of independence, the wounded heroine, holding her blind and maimed son, leaves the Tunisian mental hospital where she has convalesced. She has no possessions and is left abandoned and alone on the 4th of June 1962. She returns to the Algerian-Tunisian border, stopping at ARRIS. Taking off her shoes, she walks on the scorched, rocky earth, symbolically rooting herself *on* and *within* Algeria:

> *I let my arm fall and then took off my shoes. With my feet covered in craters of napalm, my naked and charred feet, I walked upon the scorched earth of my country. I took a step, and then another, and then still another. The rocks shredded my skin, the brambles*

> *scratched me, I was thirsty, I had a headache and I fainted*. (Mechakra 170)

On the edge of the frontier of Algeria she finds her peace and her identity. A lone tree marks the place of the exploded cave where she lost her friends, comrades, and husband. The free standing tree "was the only single thing that had grown in my memory when I was in my dying cave, it was the only single thing that still spoke to me of my friends"(Mechakra 171). On this tree she hangs her belt, reminding the knowledgeable reader of Algerian women's tradition of hanging a belt on a sacred tree in order to bring forth life; to give birth. As scholar Zineb Ali-Benali notes in her article on Mechakra's work, this ritual allows a woman to "make a pact with underground forces, germinating forces. She will come back at the birth of a child to manifest her recognition of the forces of Nature. She will bring food which will be shared and eaten under the tree" (Ali-Benali 19). This pact links woman, nature, and birth in an all-encompassing harmony that cannot be broken. As she hangs her belt on the tree, this nameless heroine at last, symbolically, roots herself in the pater and patria, which are for Yamina Mechakra, a forged "mosaic" of "rose marble"; a symbol for the destiny of Algeria (Mechakra 134).

Within the schemata of patria-pater, motherhood and war, Mechakra's work becomes more than a war journal; it is a testament to women who grounded their Algerian identity in the land and not the rhetoric of nationalist ideology which, in the end, rewarded them with very little. The author offers homage to a woman who had to fight like a man on the bloody battle fields of revolution. Yamina Mechakra's novel offers a vision of a utopia that if it had been achieved would have redefined the ideology of nationhood, motherhood, and feminine identity for Algerian women.

Endnotes

1. There are no official English translations of this work, therefore all translations of Mechakra's text are my own. The title in English is best translated as "The Exploded Cave." In 1999, Mechakra published a novella, *Arris*, in *Algérie Littérature/Action* no. 33-34 (Sept-Oct. 1999: 5-91).
2. Mechakra's description of French troops exploding the cave is reminiscent of the "enfumades" carried out by the French armies of the 1830s during the conquest of Algeria. Reference to French violence during the war of independence as well as historically occurs throughout the novel. In the 1830s, as General Bugeaud's troops hunted down Algerians and massacred hundreds in villages across Algeria, people fled to caves in the Aurès mountains. In order to eradicate these people, the French army would either smoke them out in order to massacre them, or burn them alive in the caves.
3. From 1956 forward, Algerian women increasing participated in the revolutionary movement. Perceived by the French to be unassuming, passive, docile, and harmless, these veiled women were perfect for passing bombs, ammunition, and supplies to the rebel fighters of the Front de la Libération Nationale (FLN). Under their long *haïks* (traditional Algerian dress) Algerian women hid the armory of an entire revolution. It is true that without their aid independence would have been more difficult to achieve. Fanon delineates the Algerian woman's contributions to the war, pointing out the important significance ideologically women's roles played in the revolutionary process. Women hoped that these

roles, transformed by revolution, would guarantee their eventual emancipation from the cultural binds of Muslim traditionalism.

4. It should be noted that at the outset the FLN sought to form a government based on a "Western ideology of socialism as the engine for rapid development," however the Islamists had always been highly organized and repeatedly forced their way into government policy making (Martin Stone, *The Agony of Algeria*, NY: Columbia UP,1997, 148-150).

5. Mechakra is here referring to the French colonizing mission which forbade all use of native languages as well as Arabic in French public places: schools, government, the workplace.

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