

A Palestinian Discourse: Historiographic Metafiction in Rula Jebreal's *Miral*

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ABSTRACT

History cannot be overlooked in fiction, and with the growing art of infusing history into the backgrounds of modern novels, Linda Hutcheon believes that history adds another dimension to various plots. Using Hutcheon's theory of Historiographic Metafiction, this paper applies it to Rula Jebreal's *Miral*. Jebreal reveals to her readers a glimpse of Palestinian life and is able to re-think patriarchal oppression and occupation from a personal point of view, and create a platform for a cultural herstory, where voices of female characters are unsilenced. Jebreal is able to transform her female characters' lives into a historical account retold from the eyes of oppressed victims. Moreover, the film adaptation of *Miral* directed by Julian Schnabel is compared between plot and scenes, analyzing the purpose of each shot, role, and storyline. The comparison uses Linda Hutcheon's Theory of Adaptation in order to clarify how author and director have attracted a much wider audience to reflect upon historical events happening in Palestine.

Keywords: Historiographic Metafiction, Theory of Adaptation, Palestine, Women's Voices, Palestinian Women.

INTRODUCTION

Historiographic metafiction is a concept created by Linda Hutcheon, who used it to refer to fictional events in a historical context. History is then redefined based on the author's intentions. Fiction and history are intertwined to create what Hutcheon calls historiographic metafiction. This form is used in postmodern literature as it adds to the "equally self-conscious dimension of history" (Hutcheon, 1989, p.5). Historiographic metafiction will be the framework of this study as it highlights the experiences of the characters in Rula Jebreal's *Miral* (2004) within a historical context of the fiction and of its film adaptation, and linking historiographic metafiction with Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation in order to analyze how film adaptations can present another form of a historical experience. Film aesthetics such as set design, long take, and continuity editing will be used along with film structure, such as narrative and narration to criticize the director's scope in capturing the characters' actions on screen as they voice their experiences.

Jebreal's *Miral* fulfils the poetics of a historical novel as it takes the reader back to the historical event of the Nakbah, the catastrophe, in 1948. The Nakbah is known as the Palestinian Exodus that forced over 711,000 Palestinians out of their homes due to Israeli attacks on their lands and houses during 1947–1948. It is also known as what Ilan Pappé (2004) calls it *ethnic cleansing*. She also refers to Deir Yassin massacre that happened during April 9-11, 1948, one of the main events that lead to the Nakbah. With these historical events set in the background of her characters, Jebreal adds a prominent historical figure who stands out as a heroine in Palestine and the Middle East, Hind Husseini (1916-1994), a Palestinian woman who has risked her life and family wealth to save thousands of orphaned girls and boys from nearby villages to Jerusalem. Jebreal's first novel *Miral* (2004) is more like an autobiography to honour a land she could never forget, Palestine. Jebreal brings the conflict of the Middle East she has witnessed as a child growing up in occupation, and elaborates in *Miral* how civil society is affected by conflict, and disturbance it causes for many people living there, ruining any chance of having a normal life in Palestine. "Fear and paranoia [have become] the main protagonist in that region" ("Miral, Rula Jebreal", 2010)

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According to Harry E. Shaw's "Standard Historical Novel," the historical novel represents a historical background and the prominence of historical probability. Due to the rise of historicism, that made culture as part of the historical mainstream, history is available generally to novels, and particularly to historical novels. A historical novel is different from the term historiography because the latter attempts to generalize and find a particular formula because it views history as the whole process of development of the past to the present. As for the historical novel, it renovates a world for the sake of catching a glimpse of human nature and recaptures the short-lived moments (Shaw 1983, pp.19-49).

This study aims at relating historical metafiction with the selected novel and its film adaptation by exploring how historical metafiction reevaluates history, and how a different perspective of historical facts can create a different impact on a present audience. With this intention, a woman's perspective is important to this study, since the main character Miral, not only represents the author Rula Jebreal's real experiences, but also other Palestinian women who go through the same excruciating experiences while growing up under conflict. *Miral* is a work that honors the Palestinians who have helped less fortunate Palestinian women. Hence, this study takes into account the particular female experience under a historical umbrella.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Historiographic Metafiction

Contemporary literature is seen to explore ideas and concepts of history embedded into literature, while exploring the cultural side of both. Novels such as *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* by John Fowles are postmodern examples of novels attempting to look back at history. "Retrospective fiction now became highly popular; indeed the return to the past began to assume near-epidemic proportions during the decade" (Bradbury 1994, p.404). The link created between past and present is a way for writers to examine the nature of "history and history-writing...[as] a matter for self-conscious literary examination." (Bradbury 1994, p.406). As a matter of fact, history dominates most of postmodern fiction.

Historiographic metafiction is Linda Hutcheon's way of describing postmodern literature, being part of a postmodern kind, literature thus contains "self-reflexivity and overtly parodic intertextuality" (Hutcheon 1988, p.105). Metafiction complements postmodernism by adding a dimension of history and theory to the text. Hutcheon perceives history as the predominant element in a text to produce a proper convention set in the background of characters as the plot moves forward (Hutcheon, 1988, p.5). The "theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (historiographic metafiction) is made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past" (Hutcheon, 1988, p.5)

Interest in the past and self-reflexivity are the characteristics of a historiographic-metafictional character, as they engage in "critical and ironic recall of the past" (Duffy, p.23). Hutcheon entitles protagonists to be ambiguous or disoriented on their journey to their rite of passage. This transition from one journey to the next requires a rigorous molding of the character where the protagonist has to structure their identity and discover a new way of life in order to begin a new life (Duffy, p.28).

Theory of Adaptation

According to Hutcheon, adaptations are a visitation of past works in an extended form. Hutcheon's theory tackles a text-based issue and compares it to a wide range of media. In some parts, she "take[s] on the roles of formalist semiotician, poststructuralist deconstructor, or feminist and postcolonial demystified" (Hutcheon, 1988, p.xiii) when examining general issues related to adaptation. Hutcheon brings a cross-disciplinary approach to her work as she examines the continuous developments of different types of adaptation.

Hutcheon discusses the practice of adapting stories by proposing the value of the original story. An adaptation produces its own kind of value from a different angle. Moreover, fan culture and the audience are the elements that control the usage of an adaptation type, whether they be in films, plays, or video games. Public demands and financial gains are the infrastructure of how literature is adapted to various forms of media. Adaptations have their own time and

space, allowing them to create a different atmosphere from the one found in the novel.

This is why Hutcheon calls adaptation a “repetition” and never a “replication,” because adaptations repeat the story in many different ways, generating a completely new different entity. This entity has its own meaning and authenticity that comes from borrowing the novel's characters and changing the plot to serve a higher visual aesthetic experience. By producing two sides of a story with one purpose and similar characters, repetition is achieved in producing a likeness to the novel's story by avoiding a replication of the storyline and dialogue of the original novel. Thus, a film adaptation has its own perspective with its own version of characters and plot.

3. Background and Literature Review

When applying historiographic metafiction and theory of adaptation to *Miral*, it is relevant to link the author and director's backgrounds to the analysis and criticism of *Miral*. The author, Rula Jebreal is an Italo-Palestinian journalist, novelist, and screenwriter who was born in Haifa in 1973, and was raised in Jerusalem. Her father worked as the groundskeeper of Al-Aqsa Masjid. Unfortunate circumstances drove Jebreal's mother to commit suicide when she was only five years old, forcing her father to place her and her sister Rania at Dar El-Tiffel orphanage. It was only at this school did she learn the power of education. She graduated from the orphanage in 1991 and received a scholarship to pursue her studies in Italy as a physiotherapist at Bologna University. Italy became her new home, as she pursued further in her education, obtaining a masters in Journalism and Political Science.

Throughout the history of Italian television, no foreigner has ever achieved the position of an anchorman, nor an anchorwoman per se; however, Jebreal's persistence made her the first foreign anchorwoman and has received an award for covering the Iraqi War (2003-2011). She also received the highest journalism award, International Ischia Award for Best Journalist of the Year, at the age of 33. She is specialized in foreign affairs related to the Arab Israeli conflict, and to Islamic uprisings and movements. ("Rula Jebreal [Journalist, Foreign Policy Analyst and Author," Web).

As for the director, Julian Schnabel (1951-), he is an American filmmaker and artist who has become famous for his plate paintings, a type of art that uses broken ceramic pieces in creating large paintings. He is an award winning director in the 2007 Cannes Film Festival for his film adaptation of *Miral*. The film maintained the same title of the novel, bringing *Miral*'s story to the silver screen is his way of commenting on the Palestinian Cause.

Jebreal's novel *Miral* (2004) was written in Italian, and was only translated into English in 2010. It is based on her true story of a land she could never forget, Palestine. The novel's story takes place in Palestine, spanning between the years of 1948 and 1993, beginning with the Nakbah, and the pioneer establishment of Hind Huseini's Dar Al-Tiffel School, and ending with the year *Miral* decides to change her future. *Miral* is a novel that has focused on outstanding women who lived under the folds of a turbulent political environment along the borders of Palestine and Israel.

Disposition has become the main focus of Palestinian women writers appearing in the 1950s. “Palestinian women's novels continued their engagement with history in better crafted texts after 1967” (Āshūr 2008, 230). History has become their form of resistance when it comes to diaspora, as “the concept of bearing witness not only serves as a means of recording a past tragedy but also involves a complex repertoire of strategies, including interrogating the past, recreating it and, most importantly, forging resistance against the assassination of liberation itself” (Hamdi 2011, 21).

Palestinian women writers marked the period before the Nakbah with their short stories. Though a limited number of short stories were written, they were mostly in a “highly rhetorical flowery language” (Āshūr 2008, 209) that heavily followed the Arabic traditional form of prose. It was only when Thuraya Malhas, the first Palestinian woman poet to “free herself from the meter” (Āshūr 2008, 212) were women able to explore further into their writings. Novels have become another important dimension for Palestinian women to examine the diaspora or Palestinian life. Novelists, such as Leila al-Atrash and Sahar Khalifeh, themed confrontation to the injustices done by occupation throughout their plots. “Often in the novels, the narrators are women who speak of some aspect of collective experience, or women are central characters whose destinies we follow as they intertwine with the fate of other characters” (Āshūr 2008, 231).

In Rula Jebreal's *Miral*, her story has clearly followed the path of her predecessors, as she explores the different perspectives of women who have struggled for their lives in an oppressive society, combining the five parts of the novel

as a form of retelling the Palestinian women's struggles under Israeli occupation and patriarchal oppression.

4. *Miral*: The Novel and Film Adaptation

Miral begins with Hind Hussein's story on April 10, 1948; an aristocratic young woman, who comes across fifty-five children left abandoned by the Damascus Gate of the Old City of Jerusalem. The children are the sole survivors of Deir Yassin massacre. The *ethnic cleansing* has begun between Israelis and Palestinians, and Hussein could not abandon the children under any circumstance. She takes them straight away to her home and soon establishes Dar El-Tiffel orphanage (the Children's Home) on her family's property in East Jerusalem. Jebreal vividly retells the events of the Nakbah from Hussein's viewpoint, drafting the outskirts of her characters in a historical timeframe:

Approaching the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, Hind came across a ragtag group of children. There were about fifty of them: some sitting on the edge of the sidewalk, leaning against one another, while others stood motionless on the side of the street, as if waiting for somebody. As Hind drew near, she noticed that the smallest children were barefoot. Many of them were weeping almost all had mud-spattered cheeks and dusty, matted hair. She immediately sought an explanation from the oldest girl, who looked to be about twelve and was wearing torn trousers and a shirt with ripped sleeves...Zeina told Hind that she had heard gunfire all night long in her village, Deir Yassin and that she had seen houses, including her own, catch fire (Jebreal, 2010, p.2).

Through this passage, Jebreal reveals a horrific massacre that is of historical significance.

This event is also shown in the introductory scene of the movie; Hind Hussein (actress Hiam Abbas) is seen saving the children who were crying in a deserted street in Jerusalem. Schnabel's technique is that of a functional approach, which in film studies means that he relies on the fiction and connects it to the non-fictional perspective. The functional approach "attempts to relate a film to its historical and social context and argues that genre films embody the basic anxieties and values of a society" (Buckland, 2003). Hence, Schnabel highlights the Palestinian cause in his feature film to touch upon significant historical facts. In this scene where Hind helps the abandoned children, the camera focuses on her stern, yet concerned face, to not disrupt her actions. Later on, the long takes and continuous editing come up to indicate Schnabel's commentary on the events, which is trauma is beginning prior 1948.

Jebreal does the very same method throughout her writing. Many critics mentioned that the film was an attempt by Schnabel to complete the history of Israel and Palestine within two hours, which is almost impossible. In Schnabel's defence, Mark Jenkins wrote an article for NPR, stating that the film is never seen as an attempt to summarize the history of Israel and Schnabel's relations with the Palestinians, for as a film, it has a theme and style (Bois, 2011) that reflect the director's balance throughout the film, which is "peace and love" (Buckland, 2003).

This act of peace and love is one of the reasons why Schnabel kept the title as is, due to *Miral*'s significant meaning. The meaning of the name *Miral* is a particular rare red flower that only blooms in spring in certain areas of the world. The film starts with a black and white screen, focusing on a simple white title that introduces the audience to Hind Hussein. The camera shots are a long take of Jerusalem, as it focuses on the historical significance of the setting. The *mise-en-scène* – the staging – shows the importance of history Schnabel wants to capture on screen. He also uses several long takes, focusing the camera for a long period on a certain scenery in order to distance the viewer from the events and characters. The camera's focus remains on Hind and shows how she fights to keep the orphaned children safe. The focus does not waver from Hind's face as it reveals her plans to provide a proper education for them in order to achieve "cultural liberation" (Jebreal, 2010).

In both novel and film, the story then shifts to Nadia, a poor young woman from Halissa, Haifa. She is constantly raped by her stepfather, and cannot rely on her mother who knows about the rape but prefers to remain silent instead of going against her husband. Nadia finally escapes the horror, leaving her sister behind to suffer the same torment her stepfather inflicts. She finds work in Jaffa as a belly dancer as means of survival. Her choice of becoming an independent woman is to be blunt, aggressive, and outspoken, who no longer accepts insults from anyone, especially from any man. When an Israeli woman degrades her, she fights back, causing Nadia to be sent straight to prison without trial. In prison, she meets Fatima, a frustrated nurse who cannot bear the violence and humiliation of the occupying army and resorts to

a more violent kind of resistance, which is to join the Palestinian guerrillas. However, the path Fatima chooses is classified as an act of terrorism and ends up becoming the first woman to organize and carry out an attack to bomb an Israeli cinema.

In the film adaptation, Fatima's suicide mission is captured in a continuous editing mode, in which the director moves in and out with the camera lens, cutting scenes as he forwards the plot. Continuous editing is "all about the coherence and orientation," in which a scene is broken into many shots, known as "fragments of space and time" (Buckland, 2003). Like pieces of a puzzle, Fatima's act of bombing the cinema is cut into several shots to allow the audience an opportunity to fit them together and create a whole picture in their minds.

This effect allows the director to have further control of the film, allowing him to transform a terrorist act into an act of resistance. The stories of both Nadia and Fatima are significant as both author and director use historical metafiction to show that there is not just one side to a story, and that both sides of a historical event should be encountered. Nadia and Fatima are barely a glimpse of the other side of the story, as both women resist occupation in their own way. Their resistance can also be seen as a matriarchy bonding over their own stories that must be told to the women around them, making them stronger, and transforming their story into a *herstory*. Jebreal and Shnebal have given these symbolic characters a platform to speak the unspeakable horrors of genocide.

When Nadia is released from prison, Fatima instructs her family to take good care of her. Fatima's brother Jamal, a renowned Imam at Al-Aqsa Masjid, falls in love with her and later marries her. However, he fails to accept her past, making her attempt to self-heal more difficult. Because of Nadia's psychological trauma of her past rape and imprisonment, she cannot function as a stable loving wife and mother to her two daughters Miral and Rania. Eventually, Nadia commits suicide as an attempt to relieve her family from her indiscretions and save her daughters from a similar trauma.

Jamal not only failed to embrace his wife as who she is, he also failed to properly raise his two daughters under the good example of a devoted father. Handing them over to Dar El-Tifl orphanage under Hussein's care shows his weakness as a father who is facing his own trauma in the suicide of his wife. He vows to visit them every Friday, hoping to keep some kind of relationship with his daughters.

The girls enter an environment of strong-willed women who have risen up from the ashes of war. Miral, upon seeing this, grows up into a strong-willed, rebellious woman under occupation. She later falls in love with a Palestinian activist, Hani, and gets further involved into politics. Soldiers assassinate Hani, and his death was on the dawn of the Oslo Agreement, which has finally brought negotiations to the table after a long struggle for peace. At the very end of both novel and film, Miral is found conversing with an Israeli girl who voices her opinions by stating that she is against the violence her people has caused the Palestinians. A comment clearly reflected as a mouthpiece for both author and director. On this note, Jebreal reflects the insight of Palestinian women as she has experienced it, and how oppressed women struggle culturally and politically in order to survive under an occupation. Miral is Jebreal's voice of the past who is able to seize an opportunity and tell a story of her own.

Despite *Miral's* success, critics have not dealt with *Miral* as a historical novel but rather attacked it for being anti-Semitic. Joanne Intrator and S. Rose (2011) believe that Miral harbors anti-Semitic notions and feelings, stating:

To the extent that Jebreal formulates coherent geopolitical proposals, she would appear to favour a single-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Notably, she is recklessly unbalanced in her recommendations for how to reach that goal, were that goal even deemed enduringly safe for the Jews of the Middle East. She has a tendency, outside of her fiction, to fault Jewish Israelis obliquely but sharply for everything, and Palestinian Muslims mildly for almost nothing (Intrator and Rose, 2011).

In spite of the backlash on the novel or film, the collaboration between Jebreal, a Palestinian, and Schnabel, a Jew, shows a new means of modern communication. Thus, *Miral* from a post-modern approach, proves that it follows a post-modern genre and applies its poetics. The analysis of the women characters and their circumstances signify a historical importance. In addition, Avrom Fleishman (1971) emphasizes that the presence of a historical concept in a historical

novel is used as a shaping force, thus shaping human beings through specific and unique social mediations, and this reflects on the veracity of history. A historical narrative is an imaginative portrayal of history, which tells the truth, but it does not tell it directly. Hence, portraying the thoughts and feelings of people rather than becoming just a sequence of events (Hutcheon, 2013).

Moreover, Fleishman (1971) believes that aside to the presence of historical events, there should be at least one historical figure among fictitious ones to qualify as historical. The protagonist is usually a typical person of the chosen age in the novel, who is shaped by the world of historical figures and events in a way that characterizes the process of change in the whole of society. Universality is then achieved with the hero's representation in the novel. Historical novelists tend to go back to the historical for commenting on the present and finding solutions for contemporary life's problems (Fleishman, 1971).

Jebreal's *Miral* is a great example of a historical reflection of the Palestinian plight, because she highlights a significant historical event, which is the Nakbah, the Catastrophe of 1948. Known as the Palestinian Exodus, over 711,000 Palestinians were forced out of their homes due to Israeli genocide on their lands and houses between 1947-1948. Internal refugees were about 160,000 Palestinians living in camps scattered around the country.

The United Nations voted for the Palestinian division under the Partition Plan for Palestine that ensure an independent Arab and Jewish state after the retrieval of the British mandate. However, the Arab community, including the Palestinian Arab Higher Committee that supported the Arab League, objected such a plan. Arabs reiterated that such an act would only violate the rights of the Palestinians. Resistance was inevitable when the Israeli army forced themselves on Palestinian civilians (Russel and Rose, 2012). Schnabel's adaptation clarifies this struggle. In fact, Schnabel has faced critiques; yet, some scenes were appreciated as the film presented historical aspects, coinciding with events presented in the novel (Tucker and Roberts, 2008).

The 1948 Nakbah was not the only historical event Jebreal and Schnabel have referred to; Jebreal also refers to Deir Yassin massacre that happened during April 9-11, 1948. Deir Yassin was a small village near Jerusalem that was inhabited by 750 Palestinians. The village was important because it overlooked the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem road, and it "was slated under occupation under Plan Dalet. The forces involved included members of the paramilitary Palmach organization, which was part of the Jewish self-defence organization Haganah" (Tucker, 2009). The Israeli soldiers killed 254 villagers that were mostly women, children, and elderly; the corpses were left on the streets or dumped in a water well to rot. Survivors were stripped naked and paraded in the streets of West Jerusalem. Humiliated, they were brought back to Deir Yassin and killed. The surviving children were orphaned and were left "outside the wall of the Old City in Jerusalem" (Tucker, 2009). There were about one hundred orphans, left hungry and scared. The massacre was broadcast all over Israeli radios to terrify Palestinians, causing the "flight of hundreds of thousands of Arabs from Palestine" (Tucker, 2009).

With these historical events in the background of her fictional characters, Jebreal and Schnabel add a prominent historical figure that stands out as a heroine in Palestine and the Middle East, Hind Hussein (1916-1994). Hussein was a Palestinian woman from a well-off family, who had lost her father as a child. Novel, film, and the historical narration of this important figure correlate with one another, as they all depict how Hussein was one day taking a stroll in the streets of Jerusalem, spotting fifty-five children abandoned by the old wall. These orphans had survived the Deir Yassin massacre, because she has taken them in, fed them, and decided to transform her grandfather's mansion into an orphanage that has soon become a school to educate the orphans. They have become independent because she believed in them and in her will to survive. Hussein did not stop there, she devoted her time and efforts to women's issues by establishing a college for women and had become an effective member of the Arab Woman's Union (Irving, 2012).

Miral is a typical character from the community, who now is fully aware of the critical situation that is happening to her and her people. As a fictional protagonist of the novel, she is affected deeply in many ways by the incidents happening to her country. Jebreal uses Hussein as a source of inspiration for her character in order to continue living proactively. Jebreal's message can be seen in Hussein's advice to Miral when she is called upon to her office one day:

Miral, 'do you know how I've managed to keep this place open?' Hind began. "I've convinced everyone that education is the best means of resistance. Do you have any idea how often we've had to start all over, from scratch? When I found the first orphans on the street, I had only 128 dinars. As far as I'm concerned, you're all my children, and I love you all very much, especially you. This school is the difference between you and the children in the refugee camps. I've invested a great deal in your future, and your father has done the same. Don't waste this opportunity. This is your chance' (Jebreal 2010, p.78).

Yet Miral's idea of fighting back is not in Hussein's advice, it is more of an activist approach, as she takes a more tangible attitude by joining the first Intifada, the first civil protest. By maneuvering her character in the paradigms of history, Jebreal embarks on another historical event, the First Intifada (1987-1991), which was a violent uprising of the Palestinians against Israeli occupation. However, it remained unarmed and non-violent as the Palestinians rallied in the streets.

The uprising began at Julia Refugee Camp after an Israeli truck ploughed into a car and killed four Palestinian civilians. The people could not stay quiet any longer and burst into the streets throughout the Gaza strip and the West Bank. Palestinians boycotted Israeli products and refused to pay taxes. Israeli soldiers were ordered then to use violence against them, breaking Palestinian bones and opening gunfire on the protesters (Alimi, 2007).

Miral is placed in the midst of the Intifada's rage, bearing resentment and hatred towards the Israelis for suppressing her freedom. She is unable to understand Hussein's calm and careful approach towards politics. Repeatedly, Hussein tries to convince Miral to not intervene with the Intifada and keep her distance. She does not listen, and goes into the streets with her fellow classmates to the protesters:

Snipers had been posted on the roofs of the surrounding buildings, and at the first sight of the soldiers the young protesters started throwing rocks and chanting, 'Free Palestine! Get out of our land!' Immediately, a cloud of tear gas enveloped everything, shouts, shrieks, shots ensued, and the protest turned into chaos. Miral instinctively began to run, dashing away so as not to be arrested, and at the same time trying to hold on to her friend Hadil's hand. But after running some three hundred meters, she was knocked down by someone. She discovered that Hadil had fallen on her. Miral tried to lift her up, and she realized that her hands were covered with a dense liquid...her hands came upon a hole in Hadil's head. Miral tried to scream, but her voice wouldn't come out; it was trapped in her throat, as in a nightmare (Jebreal 2010, p.171).

In this scene, both novel and film show the gruesome loss of Miral's best friend Hadil, making reader and viewer forget their political agenda for a minute, and focus on the humanitarian aspect instead. Miral, Nadia, Fatima, and Hussein are a kind of resistance and battle for freedom from oppression, transcending into a universal message that can be understood by everyone. According to Fleishman, a protagonist creates universality by getting involved with events that shape the character's personality.

Miral as a protagonist of the story may have experienced a downfall due to her inexperience and rash decisions that caused the death of Hadil, and the arrest of another student, Nisreen. Despite her flaws, her youthfulness and struggle are universal, as she shapes part of a community that lives its days under apartheid. Miral represents the voice of the future, her final decision to accept an Italian scholarship for a Bachelor's degree in Italy shows the important lessons Hussein has been trying to teach her all along; change can happen but only when it comes from within.

Education is the key to this brighter future, as Hussein makes it clear in her teachings to Miral and the rest of Dar El-Tifl girls: "Believe me, Miral; sometimes you can serve your country much better from a distance" (Jebreal, 2010). The distance Hussein mentions is realistic and symbolic, for it is only when one detaches themselves from the heat of a moment do they truly understand the root of a problem and learn from one's mistakes.

In truth, *Miral* is an autobiography, in which Jebreal recreates the past, and renames herself to Miral to universalize the protagonist, in order for every Palestinian girl facing the same tension and traumatic experience while growing up in Palestine embraces Miral as her own. This cathartic experience is a method many women writers tend to use to voice their fears, anguish, and hopes. Through memory, Jebreal is able to connect the present to the past in order to comment,

understand, and heal. Elements of trauma are vivid in the pain and anguish of the women in *Miral*. That is an important point to consider about women's writings; some women write as a form of catharsis and resistance, which can be seen in *Miral*. This type of writing is essentially used as a psychological mechanism, which employs artistic creation to arouse the readers' emotions. A reader can connect to a character's plight because it is so realistic in its resemblance to an actual experience a person can go through.

Regarding women writers, it is identified that some postcolonial women writers cut across, reject or topple the dominant patriarchal society by using a cathartic experience in a transformed framework of emotions and words. Women writers usually place their own private stories, subjectivities, national and traditional narratives, sexualities, and intimate pleasures by using a cathartic form of writing (Pinkerton, 2016), making their words more powerful and believable. Catharsis, whether physical-emotional or cognitive-emotional, could be effective for expressive writing and attracting the attention of readers. Yet exaggerated, the real reflection of an experience can affect how women writers present their crisis to the real world, and can have their stories misinterpreted (Pinkerton 2016), which is a common issue for third world women writers. Some writers face scrutiny and misinterpretations of their fiction due to political or patriarchal pressure. An example of such an experience is writer, feminist, physician, and psychiatrist Nawal El-Saadawi (1931-), who faced constant political and patriarchal oppression to her feminist ideas and outspoken behavior.

Some politically-active women writers write for a purpose of recasting past experiences into metafictional events, creating a platform rooted in history intertwined with fictitious, yet somehow real characters. This can be seen in the adaptation of *Miral*, Schnabel succeeds in creating an aura of independence when using the functional approach by connecting history to its social context, arguing that the film embodies "the basic anxieties and values of a society" (Buckland, 2003).

The functional approach has also proved to be effective in making the connection between a social context and a historical context. In this regard, it can be stated that this film has successfully combined the values and anxiety of a silenced conflict, and has served justice in giving the lead character intellectual freedom and a choice in life. With platforms such as the printed word and the silver screen, the oppressed are allowed to retell their story from their point of view in a successful way, transforming *Miral* into a historiographic metafictional story.

Conclusion

The women in *Miral* may be seen as round characters, capable of taking their own decisions under controversial circumstances, but one cannot ignore the element of history used in the background to enhance their visions, voices, and struggles. Therefore, it is concluded that *Miral* is a doorway to the past, where the struggles of its characters can show independence, and are capable in making tough decisions during controversial circumstances. History cannot be ignored in the novel, and with the growing art of injecting history into the context of modern fiction, history adds another dimension to the plot, portraying a sequential scheme that resides in the echo of time, proving that the pen can be mightier than the sword.

The strong and independent presentation of *Miral*'s character as seen in the movie has maintained the integrity of the novel and historic metafiction. Its adaptation has lifted the curtains and revealed pain, love, hate, and the struggles of the oppressed. Using Hutcheon's theory as a critical frame, Jebreal's *Miral* has enhanced the revelations of the characters, as elements of history traces her storyline from an oppressed point of view. Jebreal is thus able to turn her work of fiction into a historiographic metafictional record by showing readers a glimpse of Palestinian women and their lifestyles, beliefs, traditions, and culture.

In addition, the film compares between plot and scene, analyzing the purpose of each shot, character and storyline. The comparison shows that Jebreal and the film's director Julian Schnabel have attracted a wider audience to reconsider the historical events in Palestine from a universal standpoint while weighing the positive and negative effects of a historical background. The way Jebreal and Schnabel present *Miral* end up complementing one another in terms of adaptation; Jebreal adapting historical facts whereas Schnabel adapting historiographic metafiction, as both revolve

around a global message of the injustices done to powerless women who face discrimination under occupation.

Using the universal message of oppressed women is one of history's major issues, as it manifests in authoritative forces that prevent women from fighting for equality. In many cultures, the oppression of women has become a united front where their voice becomes the story of every woman's struggle, and emotional guide to fight for justice and equality. Cultural oppression is practiced by different societies and these include ridiculing or shaming women for their inferior nature and limiting their economic means as seen in Dar El-Tiffel orphanage (Alexander and Taylor 2016).

According to psychological perspectives, oppressing women occurs due to competitive and aggressive behavior of most males and their nature to control and implement power. Jebreal's characters has presented the cultural aspects of oppressed women, and Schnabel's adaptation has also presented the same image. Both writer and director have attempted to explain patriarchal oppression and apartheid where both forms use similar means of oppression.

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الخطاب الفلسطيني: ما وراء التاريخ في رواية ميرال لرولا جبريل

بسمه بسام الطاهر *

ملخص

لا يمكن تجاهل التاريخ المربوط في الخيال، ومع تنامي غرس التاريخ في خلفيات الروايات الحديثة، تعتقد ليندا هوتشون أن التاريخ يضيف بُعداً آخر إلى أحداث واقعية مختلفة. هذه الورقة تستخدم نظرية هوتشون فيما وراء التاريخ المطبقة على رواية رولا جبريل ميرال. تكشف جبريل لقارئها لمحة عن الحياة الفلسطينية بإعادة التفكير في الاضطهاد الذكري والاحتلال القمعي من وجهة نظر الشخصيات المنشئة منها وتخدم كمنصة لرواية ثقافية يتعالى فيها أصوات الشخصيات النسائية المتأثرة من الاضطهاد. تستطيع جبريل تحويل حياة شخصياتها الأنثوية إلى رواية تاريخية يتم سردها من عيون الضحايا المظلومين. علاوة على ذلك، تتم مقارنة فيلم "ميرال" للمخرج جوليان شابل بين الأحداث والمشاهد السينمائية، حيث يتم تحليل الغرض من كل لقطة ودور وسرد. ومن أجل ذلك تستخدم نظرية ليندا هوتشون للتكثيف من أجل المقارنة وتوضيح كيف اجتذبا المؤلف والمخرج جمهوراً أوسع من أجل التفكير في الأحداث التاريخية التي تحدث في فلسطين.

الكلمات الدالة: ما وراء التاريخ، نظرية التكثيف، فلسطين، قصص نسائية، نساء فلسطين.

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