

February 2021

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### Recommended Citation

Balaa, Luma (2021). The Chronotope of the House and Feminist Matrilinealism in Nada Awar Jarrar's Somewhere, Home. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 22(1), 70-82.

Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol22/iss1/4>

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## The Chronotope of the House and Feminist Matrilinealism in Nada Awar Jarrar's *Somewhere, Home*

By Luma Balaa<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

This paper studies feminist matrilinealism in Nada Awar Jarrar's novel *Somewhere Home*. In this novel the author builds her stories around a house which was inhabited by several generations of female ancestors. Tess Cosslett claims that the Bakhtinian concept of the chronotope in matrilineal narratives influences the space and time structures of women's writing whereby women communicate along two time frames simultaneously: a synchronic, horizontal plane and a diachronic, vertical axis. The synchronic plane refers to the way in which women from different generations unite and bond whereas the diachronic plane goes backward and forward in time. Employing Bakhtinian notion of the chronotope and Tess Cosslett's two time frames model of feminist matrilineage, this study argues that the chronotope of the house in *Somewhere, Home* plays a major role in displaying matrilineage and this house clearly manifests the synchronic and diachronic planes: those of female bonding, feminist recovery, and feminist progress.

*Keywords:* Chronotopes, matrilineage, Somewhere Home, Nada Jarrar, female bonding

### Introduction

In her novel *Somewhere, Home*, Nada Awar Jarrar mentions several times a house – this is the house of the narrator's grandmother. Maysa, the narrator, goes to live there so that she can remember and gather stories about her female ancestors. This house is also referred to in other short stories in the book. The Bakhtinian concept of the *chronotope* is useful for explaining why the author utilizes this concept of the house in relation to the theme of feminist matrilinealism. Tess Cosslett claims that the Bakhtinian concept of the chronotope in matrilineal narratives “affects the space / time structures of some recent women's fiction” (Cosslett, 1996, p. 7). She argues that two time-frames are in use simultaneously: a synchronic, horizontal plane and a diachronic, vertical axis. The synchronic plane refers to the way in which women from different generations unite and bond whereas the diachronic plane goes backward and forward in time (p. 7). Similarly, the current paper argues that the chronotope of the house in *Somewhere, Home* plays a major role in showing matrilineage and in shaping the structure of the novel. The house was inhabited by several generations of female ancestors, and so clearly manifests the synchronic and diachronic planes: those of female bonding, feminist recovery, and feminist progress.

The author of this novel, Nada Awar Jarrar, grew up in Lebanon but left the country when war broke out. She lived in exile from 1975–1995 in several countries such as Australia, England, the United States and France, eventually returning to Lebanon where she has lived ever since. She

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writes in English and belongs to the literary tradition of Lebanese women's writing on the subject of war and to the literary corpus of Anglo-Lebanese women's literature in exile. In her debut novel *Somewhere, Home*, she sets some of the short stories during the period of the civil war.

*Somewhere, Home* is composed of three main parts. This paper focuses on Maysa's story and Part I of this novel since it is the frame of the novel; however, Part I will be related to the other stories as a whole since the house links them all. In Part I, Maysa, the narrator, goes to the mountains to her grandmother's home to self-reflect and to write the stories of her female relatives who either used to live in this house or spent some time in it. This self-reflection is necessary for her development as a character. She feels that if she relates her life to that of her female relatives and friends, she will gain strength and enhance female progress.

Her story revolves around three women: her grandmother (Alia), her aunt (Saaeda) and her mother (Leila). In her story, Maysa is pregnant and escapes to the mountains from the civil war, leaving her husband behind. She tells the reader about the birth of her child, Yasmeen, and then stops recounting her story, resuming it when her daughter is sixteen years old. In the next two sections of the novel she goes back in time, telling stories about her other female relatives. In Part II, Aida does not feel she belongs either in Beirut or in Australia. All the men are absent from her life: her father, her boyfriends, and even Amou Mohammad, her father-figure concierge, a Palestinian refugee who took care of her and her family and tried to solve all her problems. When Amou Mohammad dies, she imagines him and talks to him; her life seems to stop. This contrasts with her two sisters, Sara and Dina, who seem to adjust and both get married. They tell her that just because they had to leave Lebanon, this does not mean that life stops. Aida goes back to Beirut to find a job but does not succeed in feeling that she belongs there; she is unable to have a lasting relationship with a man. She finally returns to Australia, assuming that is where she is heading: somewhere home. In Part III, Salwa, a relative of Maysa's, tells her own story. She is on her deathbed and is remembering her past: her father left her family to go and work in Brazil but never contacted them again. She was forced to get married to someone she did not love and was tricked by him into immigrating to Australia.

Although this novel won the 2004 Commonwealth Writers' Prize, it has not been subject to a large degree of literary critique. Research so far has focused on two main areas: the first group of researchers focus on the text in the context of memory discourses on the Lebanese Civil War, such as the research done by Dawn Mirapuri (2009), while the other group is more concerned with representations of home, concepts of displacement and identity (mainly Syrine Hout [2012] and Jumana Bayeh [2015a, 2015b]). Dawn Mirapuri (2009) analyzes the role of memory and the theme of belonging in this novel, exploring how Jarrar employs the interplay between memory and forgetting the civil war and its impact (Mirapuri, 2009, p. 465). Her reading shows that the first part of the novel reflects the amnesia and the purposeful omission of the civil war (p. 469), and she explains that "this kind of amnesia fosters forms of subjectivity and representation that abrogate responsibility and hinder reconciliation" (p. 469). Because Maysa feels guilty about leaving her husband in Beirut where the civil war is taking place, escaping responsibility and feelings of guilt, she hardly mentions the war. However, this situation does not last for long; as Mirapuri argues, the second part of the novel addresses issues of communal guilt and how people were left behind because of exile (p. 469). Moreover, Mirapuri contends that Maysa's stories "are bankrupt testimonies, because their only role in the postwar crisis of representation is to advance forgetting the present in favour of the past" (p. 472). However, the current paper opposes this view because these memories help Maysa to cope with her problems and by recovering her matrilineage, she seeks feminist recovery, solidarity and progress.

The other group of researchers, such as Syrine Hout and Jumana Bayeh, interprets home as a location in *Somewhere, Home*. Hout interprets Jarrar's view of home as "a location, usually a residence, associated with actual or substitute family members, thus serving as a storehouse of childhood memories from which a secure sense of selfhood is derived" (Hout, 2012, p. 55). Bayeh agrees and adds that home is shown as giving the characters roots and is territorially driven because it is based on an actual ancestral house in the mountains. It emphasizes the fixed and static qualities of home (Bayeh, 2015a, pp. 376–400).

However, focusing on the themes of amnesia, war discourses and representations of home limits the interpretation of the text. Although Hout touches on the theme of progress by arguing that "Jarrar's three stories—through the characters Maysa, Aida and Salwa—illustrate an evolution in this process" (Hout, 2012, p. 63), research to date has not dealt with the theme of matrilinealism, especially in relation to Cosslett's two time-frames theory and Bakhtin's chronotope theory.

### **Cosslett's Two Time-Frames Theory of Feminist Matrilinealism**

Cosslett argues that two time frames are in use simultaneously: a synchronic, horizontal plane and a diachronic, vertical axis. The synchronic plane refers to the way in which women from different generations unite and bond, whereas the diachronic plane goes backward and forward in time (Cosslett, 1996, p. 7). She refers to several feminist matrilineal novels and a house which is inhabited by many generations of women, which clearly shows the synchronic and diachronic planes (p. 7). In Cosslett's two time-frames concept of feminist matrilinealism, the two time frames are in play simultaneously. In the synchronic plane, women hold hands and in the diachronic plane they go back to a powerful female past where feminist recovery and progress can take place (Cosslett, 1996, p. 8).

Cosslett's theory of two time-frames, based on Bakhtin's chronotopes, is helpful for understanding the time frame in the matrilineal narrative. Bakhtin coined the term *chronotope* to describe the intrinsic link between temporal and spatial relationships (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 84), noting that "this intersection of the axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope" (p. 84). The use of chronotopes shapes the space/time structure of this matrilineal feminist narrative novel (Cosslett, 1996, p. 7). Time "takes on flesh" and "becomes artistically viable" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 84); at the same time, space is linked to the movements of history, plot and time. Space and time cannot be separated in a chronotope; that is, one cannot "understand the present without knowing the social, cultural, and political history of a particular place" (Johnston, 2012, p. 140). For Bakhtin, all literary texts have unique representations of time-space that shape their characters' actions and thoughts: "the chronotope, functioning as the primary means for materializing time in space, emerges as a center for concretizing representation, as a force giving body to the entire novel" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 250).

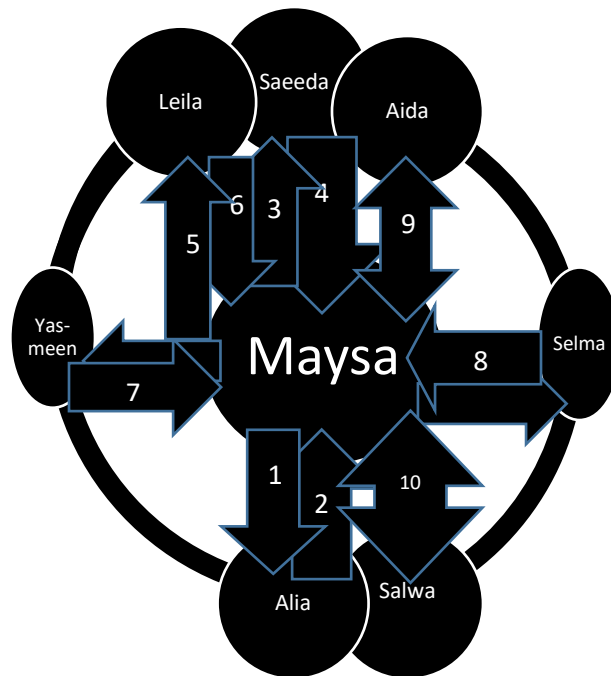
Minor chronotopes are also important and characterize certain texts or authors, such as the chronotopes of meeting: a public square, a salon, the road, a provincial town, and others (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 252). Keunen defines these minor chronotopes as the building blocks of narrative texts as "four-dimensional mental image[s], combining the three spatial dimensions with the time structure of temporal action" (Keunen, 2001, p. 421). This paper focuses on two main chronotopes: that of the castle and the threshold. Bakhtin describes the chronotope of the *castle* as historical since it is linked with the past. It is the place where historical figures lived and the furnishings, weapons, or any family archive in it reflect that period and generation. It is through this castle that hereditary rights and legacies are transmitted (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 245–246). The chronotope of the *threshold*

has a metaphorical meaning and is connected with moments of crisis or major life decisions (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 248); it is a place “where crisis events occur, the falls, resurrections, renewals, epiphanies, decisions that determine the whole life of a man” (p. 248). Bakhtin adds that time is “essentially instantaneous” and “has no duration and falls out of the normal course of biographical time” (p. 248). It exists in a space in-between, and examples of these chronotopes are those of the staircase, corridor, street, square or the front hall (p. 248).

*Somewhere, Home* tells the stories of three generations of women. Cosslett’s two time-frames are clearly portrayed in this novel: the diachronic and synchronic, which she suggests might represent horizontal and vertical lines, respectively (Cosslett, 1996, p. 9). The image of the house is a helpful spatial tool to combine the synchronic and diachronic planes of matrilinealism; the chronotopes of the house and threshold are linked to matrilinealism. The author adapts these chronotopes to suit the way in which she wants to present matrilineage. The novel includes themes of feminist recovery, female solidarity and progress. There is a strong awareness of time and space realities because the narratives which are linked to the house (the space) go back and forth in time, where time and space are interlinked. There are four generations of women (a mother, her mother and grandmother, and her daughter). Maysa’s recovery project, the narrative, oscillates between the story of Maysa and her female relatives. The two time-frames are in progress at the same time: a synchronic, horizontal plane and a diachronic, vertical axis.

The house was inhabited by Maysa’s grandmother, Alia, who found comfort in that home (Jarrar, 2003, p. 16). Maysa narrates how her family “continue to live in the small mountain village their families had inhabited for hundreds of years, a quiet haven balanced on the side of Mount Lebanon and named after the refuge of ancient gods” (p. 16). Figure 1 illustrates how the use of Cosslett’s two time frames helps to reveal the structure of this matrilineal feminist narrative novel. The house plays a role as “a space in which the synchronic and diachronic patterns of a feminist matrilinealism can be enacted” (Cosslett, 1996, p. 11). Figure 1 shows how Maysa is at the center of the grandmother–mother–daughter–aunt circle and other female relative relationships; she is the key person and tries to recover her matrilineage. Figure 1 highlights the two time frames: the diachronic vertical framework, which includes Maysa, Alia, Saeeda, Leila, Aida and Salwa, and the synchronic horizontal framework, which includes Yasmeen and Salwa. Maysa is surrounded by female relatives and friends. Although these time-frames are understood along ‘traditional’ XY axes, the give-and-take of these relationships across time is better expressed in a nonlinear graphic because it emphasizes the multiple trajectories and layers involved and the power of the matrilineage involved between these women, especially in the diachronic time-frame.

The writing of these women’s stories and having Maysa at the core suggests a circular link, as in Cosslett’s model, where they are all tied together and linked to Maysa. Maysa shows her synchronic and diachronic frameworks by linking to her daughter, Yasmeen, and her friend, Selma, as shown in Figure 1 by horizontal arrows; at the same time, she tells us stories diachronically (indicated by vertical arrows) about her grandmother (Alia), her aunt (Saeeda), her mother (Leila), and her female relatives (Aida and Salwa), as shown below in Figure 1:



**Figure 1 The Two Time Frames in *Somewhere, Home***

The narration is divided into three sections. In Part I of the novel, Maysa, a first-person narrator, is at the center of the eternal core. She narrates her story and sets it in winter, going back and forth between her female relatives' stories and her own story. In Figure 1, trajectory 1 tells the story of her grandmother, Alia, and trajectory 2 reveals how she goes back to tell her own story. This proves that she is influenced and shaped by her ancestors. As if she regains energy and hope after recovering her grandmother's story, this chapter is set in spring, Trajectory 3 tells Saeeda's story and trajectory 4 shows the return to telling her own story, which is set in summer; again, going back and forth shows how influenced she is by her aunt's life and story. Trajectory 5 tells the story of Leila, her mother, who married Adel, her father; she narrates how Maysa, the girl, was born and how she grew up, also describing her relationship with her mother. She goes back to continue her story in two consecutive chapters in trajectory 6, which is when the birth of her daughter occurs. She does not dedicate a chapter to describing her relationship with her daughter and friend, Selma, but these stories are labeled as trajectory 7 and 8, respectively, because these stories are embedded within her own stories. In Parts II and III of her narrative, she does not go back to her own story but dedicates two whole sections to two of her female relatives: Aida and Salwa (trajectories 9 and 10). Maysa is the one who is remembering these stories and although she tells the story of Aida, she makes Salwa tell her own story. Because the two time frames are linked and occurring simultaneously, it is important to dissect them to show that the synchronic time-frame contains the embedded trajectories 7 and 8, which reveal solidarity between Maysa, her friend and her daughter. The diachronic axis is shown by all the other overlapping multilayered trajectories which largely dominate the text.

The chronotope of the *threshold* is also manifested in this novel. The time Maysa spends in the mountains in the house acts as a threshold, but the garden and her grandmother's room act as the chronotope of the threshold because this is where most epiphanies, transformations and births occur, as Bakhtin suggests, such as the birth of her daughter and that of the renovated garden. This representation of time-space shapes Maysa's actions and thoughts. The stories do not follow

the normal course of biographical time but the female protagonist undergoes growth and development. Maysa is at a threshold, between the past and the present, the place where she has her epiphanies. It is at the house/her grandmother's bedroom where she reaches her turning point. Being able to cope with her present and future, she is able to cross the threshold and become a new, stronger person than before.

The house acts as a place in which she experiences moments of crisis. Maysa is in a dilemma because she does not feel that she belongs. She has run away from the war and needs to find herself as well as finding her female ancestry. Johnston explains that “[w]e live in the world attending to how past forces have made us who and what we are, conscious that we can grow, learn, and change as we continue the journey of life” (Johnston, 2012, p. 140). Each person is shaped by his/her past and can still grow when s/he faces the future, which explains why Maysa is so eager to search for her past. Maysa's female ancestry experienced similar crises such as their husbands abandoning them and having to take full responsibility for their children as a result. After she remembers her female ancestors' stories, she crosses a bridge from a state of dilemma to that of security, especially when she returns to her husband and daughter in Beirut. Bayeh points that since one house, which has made a tremendous impact on many female generations, is referred to throughout the novel, this gives a feeling of permanency despite the sense of insecurity and the upheavals of war (Bayeh, 2015b, p. 111). Therefore, being in the house for sixteen years has helped Maysa cope with her dilemmas. The house is also where she experiences synchronic relationships with other women: her daughter and friend.

### **Solidarity among Women: The Synchronic or Horizontal Plane**

The synchronic plane is the zone which shows solidarity between women. Solidarity between Maysa and Selma is manifested at different levels: fellow females, friends, relatives (distant cousins), and practicing the same religion. Selma, a midwife, takes good medical care of Maysa during her pregnancy. She even helps her redecorate her house to welcome the newborn baby by ordering a new large mattress to place over Alia's old bed. Selma listens to Maysa's problems and gives her advice, and helps her to cope with her dilemma by taking her to pray. She is sixty years old and is finding the right time to initiate her religion because usually Druze are not let into their religion until they reach that age. Maysa's husband, Wadih, draws a sketch of Selma praying (Jarrar, 2003, p. 77). Seeing her as belonging to the mountains and as “so complete on her own” (p. 77), he is terrified that his wife will end up like that, living independently of him and his daughter.

Maysa's relationship with her daughter, which is based on love and support, is also part of the synchronic frame. When Yasmeen was young, Maysa used to hold her tight, resting her on her hip and her daughter used to press herself against her mother's legs as she walked (Jarrar, 2003, p. 65). The mother and child used to lie down together on the bed during bedtime storytelling; when Yasmeen fell asleep, Maysa would bury her face in Yasmeen's neck (p. 66). However, at times Yasmeen suffered from a feeling of conflict and tried to break away from her mother, living with her father for a while. The novel shows a conflict between recovery and progress in Yasmeen's case, paralleling what Jane Flax calls a conflict between nurturance and autonomy (Flax, 1978, pp. 171–189). At age sixteen, Maysa's daughter tries to “make a life of her own” (Jarrar, 2003, p. 64). However, later on she tells her mother to come closer to her world when she asks her to come and live with her and her father (p. 64). In fact, Yasmeen does realize the importance of these stories early on in her life to the extent that she memorized them all. “They're in my head, Mama” (p. 69).

### **Female Recovery from the Diachronic, Vertical Axis**

Another main theme of the novel is the recovery of “foremothers”; because her matrilineage is lost and silenced, Maysa tries to recover her foremothers. She goes to her grandmother’s house and tries to remember and reconstruct the stories of her grandmother, aunt and even her mother, and those of other female relatives. Historically speaking, a house or castle signifies patrilineal dynasty, and as Cosslett rightly comments, in patriarchal literature castles are associated with prisons for females (Cosslett, 1996, p. 9). However, this text changes this concept and the house symbolizes nurturing; as Bachelard suggests, the image of the house is maternal (Bachelard, 1958, p. 45). To Maysa, this house is not just a place but is like a castle, which is associated with the history of her kin and has become a meeting place for all her relatives. Maysa describes the house as “this old, dilapidated house, was once a castle, alive and spilling over with energy” (Jarrar, 2003, p. 10), and gives a detailed description including its bedrooms and garden in relation to her relatives. Maysa tells the reader that she went to this house to recover the stories of her female relatives, who are not only present in her stories and memories but also in her relative’s belongings such as those of the house, the garden, and the objects they owned, including her grandmother’s bed. The diachronic descent line is reinforced by Maysa inheriting all of her female relatives’ possessions.

The reasons for recovering her female relatives’ stories are many: to find herself, to gain strength and enhance female progress, and to take revenge. Yu remarks that “irrespective of all the gaps and differences between generations of women, the sense of a motherline cannot be disrupted and discontinued. Because without it, women will have no sense of themselves, their history and their past” (Yu, 2005, p. 99). Maysa feels that her present life depends on her past lives; she is shaped by her past and she can learn and grow from her past. Hout argues that because she stayed nine extra years in the house after finishing her book, writing was not the sole reason for staying away (Hout, 2012, p. 66). This study explains that Maysa needed time for self-reflection. When Maysa writes these stories, she understands her relatives and, in turn, herself. As she tells her husband: “I’ve been trying to write my own thoughts down, my own unfocused musings” (Jarrar, 2003, p. 45). She needs time to think about her life, her religion and her relationship with her husband.

### **Seeking Female Strength and Progress from the Diachronic, Vertical Axis**

Maysa gains strength when she relates to her female ancestors. As she comments, “years from now whenever someone looks into the wrinkles and crevices that line the surface of my open palm, they will say, ‘I see great reserves of strength in you, a coming together of a host of spirits’” (Jarrar, 2003, p. 63). Maysa begins the novel by pointing out that she “returned to the mountain to collect memories of the lives that wandered through this house as though my own depended on it” (Jarrar, 2003, p. 4). Mirapuri contends that Maysa’s “acts of memory constitute a conscious process of locating a genealogy of resilience in the women who came before her. However, this genealogy serves no useful purpose in the present if Maysa is unable to incorporate it into her present reality” (Mirapuri, 2009, p. 469). The current paper refutes this view, however, by observing that Maysa does incorporate resilience into her present reality. When she visits the stories of her ancestors, she feels good. “When I open the notebook, I am pleased at the sight of pages that are filled with words, at the names of those who came before and are here no longer, indelible now, but I still cannot explain the hollowness in my heart” (Jarrar, 2003, p. 33).



When Maysa learns about how her female relatives dealt with traumas, she derives strength to cope with the difficulties of life and she understands what she is going through. People turn to their memories in times of trouble or instability because they are energized “by the desire to anchor [them]selves in a world characterized by an increasing instability of time and the fracturing of lived space” (Huyssen, 2000, p. 28). Hout argues that she goes back in time to better understand herself and gain strength from her foremothers (Hout, 2012, p. 66). Mirapuri argues that Maysa “fails to see that the women were not helpless but demonstrated agency in adversity” (Mirapuri, 2009, p. 471). However, Maysa gained strength from her female ancestors when she realized that although her ancestors lived in a patriarchal society and were oppressed, to a certain extent they rebelled in their own ways.

Maysa admires her grandmother’s courage and strength, and recognizes her subversive power within the patriarchal society in which she lived. Although Maysa admits that she does not know the truth and asks many questions about her grandmother, such as whether Alia loved her husband or whether her marriage was part of her arranged destiny, she does not agree with her friend Selma that her grandmother just accepted her fate (Jarrar, 2003, p. 30). Maysa looks for energy and resilience to cope with her pregnancy and to find herself. When she was bleeding while pregnant, she asks her friend Selma, “Why can’t I be more like Alia?” (Jarrar, 2003, p. 11). Even her daughter, when she listens to stories about Alia, remarks that Alia was a brave and strong woman, and asks her mother: “Was she like the two of us together?” (p. 66). Maysa compares herself to her grandmother: “I wonder if Alia taught herself, as I have, to dwell on the details of daily life, to know in these moments her soul’s longings. Did she see herself in the inevitable loneliness of always being half-wife, half-mother and never entirely herself?” (p. 70).

Maysa narrates her grandmother’s life story: Alia’s husband, Ameen, and sons, left Alia and went away to work in Brazil. Alia’s husband was not there for his wife and family most of the time, like Maysa’s husband for a while, until he became old and returned home. Alia gave birth at home, and took care of the children alone and was very independent. Because the men leave the women alone, this gives them the power to handle their lives on their own. Two of Alia’s children died. She was illiterate and once asked a minister at the church to write a letter to her husband but she never sent it. Missing her husband, Alia let her emotions out in the letter expressing her feelings (Jarrar, 2003, p. 25). She dared to ask her husband whether he had found another woman to satisfy his needs (p. 26). Selma told her that her grandmother “was capable and dutiful like most women had to be at that time” (p. 11). Her grandmother encouraged her sons to study and get careers. Her four sons became successful in life: a doctor, a lawyer, a businessman and an engineer. She told her granddaughter that their dreams were hers too (p. 14).

Maysa learns from her grandmother’s story; she learned not to become too attached to her male children because she knew that they would grow up and leave her to work abroad. Maysa, as well, had the strength to live far away from her daughter for a while. Although she loves her daughter, she does not want her to never live for herself. She feels being a wife and mother sometimes clashes with being herself. Maysa depicts her husband as someone who depends on her, which is different to her female ancestors’ husbands, and he cannot tolerate living without her. In Maysa’s story, Wadih, her husband, is an engineer who is quiet and mysterious. He does not reveal what he is thinking. After six years of marriage, she leaves her husband when she is pregnant and goes to the mountains to her grandmother’s house to collect memories and stories from her past. He stays with her for a while but then leaves her when he thinks that she does not need him. She loves him but hates his silence, which makes her feel unloved. He needs Maysa and asks her if she is ready to come back to her family. However, his being far away from her and her being

alone and digging up her past has made her matrilineage stronger. Her husband does not seem to understand that Maysa needs her space, a house of her own, in order to self-reflect or write. She tells her husband that “these are the stories of the women in our family” (Jarrar, 2003, p. 78). Her husband does not understand the importance of matrilineage and replies: “These are the stories you have been telling yourself because you are unable to embrace your own” (p. 78).

Maysa also derives strength from recalling her mother’s story. Her mother, Leila, married Adel, Maysa’s father, after she fell in love with him but she later found out that it was planned as an arranged marriage. However, she was not forced to get married, like Saeeda and Salwa were, and felt that she would have married him anyway. She came from West Virginia to Lebanon for a visit and then got married. They had two children: Kamal and Maysa. When Adel traveled, Leila tried to fill in the gap for them. Leila used to tell Maysa stories about fairies and goblins and took good care of her, showing her the love she had for her. Maysa mentions her father on several occasions in the novel, mostly when she remembers the house and the stories he told about it (Jarrar, 2003, p. 3). She learns how her mother kept her relationship and love for her husband going. At times, she felt some “distance from her husband like a tearing at her heart” (p. 53). Nevertheless, she was quickly able to recover and focus on the love between them and “the ties that bound them together” (p. 53).

Saeeda, Maysa’s aunt, has inspired her niece. Despite living in a patriarchal society, she was able to rebel in limited ways; she refused to accept wearing the veil and instead tore and buried it. Saeeda got married at age fifteen through an arranged marriage to Alia’s first cousin’s son; however, he never loved her and was in love with someone else. The marriage lasted less than a year and the husband left for South America; they never heard from him again. Saeeda was forced to look after her in-laws. Her aunt put the comfort of others before her own (Jarrar, 2003, p. 38); Maysa learned not to do so. Saeeda never had children of her own and when her in-laws died, she took care of her parents. She fell in love with a man called Khalid, who kept coming to their house, but found out that he was already involved with an African woman and had children from her. His parents wanted to arrange a Lebanese wife for him; he considered Saeeda as a friend.

Because Saeeda’s mother never expressed her feelings, Saeeda was angry with her mother. She asked her if she ever loved her father and her mother replied that in those days no one talked about love (Jarrar, 2003, p. 41). She initially got angry and asked her mother if she at least missed him. Maysa then understood how women at that time were not allowed to show their emotions towards men. Saeeda, herself, could not clearly express how she felt towards Khalid and let him leave without telling him how she felt. When her mother asked her if Khalid intended to propose, she told her that she never loved him. As part of progression, Maysa learns to better express her emotions to her husband and daughter and she learns to take care of herself. Saeeda channeled her anger at patriarchy into gardening. Maysa does the same by sublimating and her garden reminds her of her aunt’s. She is able to transform the garden from a long-neglected one into a beautiful healthy garden. She plants seeds everywhere and divides the garden into many sections such as that of herbs and flowers (Jarrar, 2003, p. 37).

Reconstructing Aida’s life story, Maysa derives strength. She learns from Aida that she has to face her fears of not belonging in Lebanon, especially when she, like Aida, left Beirut during the civil war and escaped to the mountains. Aida tries to remember Amou, the caretaker, to seek support such as Maysa seeks from her female relatives’ stories. Aida imagines seeing Amou just as Maysa at times imagines hearing her female relatives’ voices. Aida met Kameel, who was a doctor, and insisted that he took her with him to the mountains. When she suggested that she change an old house, which is that same house always mentioned, into a school, he became upset

with her and broke up with her. In a way, this is similar to how Wadih becomes upset with Maysa for leaving him to live in her grandmother's house. Like Aida, Maysa feels guilty because she has left her family for all these years, especially when the civil war was going on in Beirut and she is safe in the mountains. She learns that she has to find her "somewhere, home" wherever that may be, "*somewhere from which there is no further to go, somewhere home*" (Jarrar, 2003, p. 145; own emphasis). She learns that she has to go back to her husband and family, unlike Aida who was never successful at relationships with men.

Maysa learns several lessons from Salwa's story. Salwa is able to stand against many forces of oppression; her secret was clinging to her memories of her family. Maysa learns to remember her family and female ancestors. Salwa is a relative of Maysa's and lived in that same house just after the Great War. Salwa is on her deathbed in a nursing home and is remembering her past; as a grandmother, she tells the story from her perspective. The story is set in the 1950s and she describes her childhood experiences and how she suffered from poverty, patriarchy and abandonment; Salwa does not want her grandchildren to suffer as well. She was coerced at age fifteen to leave her sister and her family. Her father is presented as missing or irresponsible; he left them when they were children to go and work in Brazil, never to return and only writing to them once. She felt a sense of loss and kept waiting for her father to come back. Blaming herself, she tells Nabil, her grandson, that he might have stayed or contacted her if she were a boy because there is normally a strong father-son relationship. She was forced to get married to an older man who worked in Brazil. Salwa's mother was poor and felt the burden of taking care of her and her sister. Her husband tricked her and forced her to leave Lebanon for America and Australia. On her way to Australia, she learns from a newspaper that her father had died.

Maysa learns about the solidarity between Salwa and Mathilde, her sister, and the importance of women bonding. She learns that family is important and that she should not abandon her husband and daughter. She discovers that there has been female progress and she is lucky to have privileges such as education, wealth and freedom. She learns to appreciate her home country, the mountains and Beirut, and to continue fighting for women's rights. Maysa learns to be strong like Salwa's mother, who was able to look after her children on her own without her husband. She used to crochet for a living and her children used to help her. Salwa sees her ancestral house in a photograph and she remembers her childhood memories, though her daughter tells her that she is mistaken because it is not the house that Aunt Mathilde was living in.

Cosslett comments that a "very common pattern in matrilineal narratives is one of initial fear, mistrust and misunderstanding between generations being overcome at some climatic moment of coming together or mutual recognition" (Cosslett, 1996, p. 8). In this novel there is no fear or mistrust but some misunderstanding is envisaged, which is later on resolved. For instance, Maysa blames her grandmother for never telling her children that she loved them (Jarrar, 2003, p. 31). Later on, she forgives her because of the circumstances that she had to go through. However, the main misunderstanding occurs between Maysa and her daughter, Yasmeen, but this is resolved in the novel when she reunites with her daughter. Her daughter refuses to read the book of stories her mother wrote because "she already knew all the stories by heart" (Jarrar, 2003, pp. 78-79). However, when Yasmeen was young, she did like hearing these stories and would ask her mother to read her a page of her choice from her female relatives' stories at bedtime (p. 65). Both females make progress when Maysa relates her present life to that of her female ancestors. She sees the birth of her daughter as a continuation of the female legacy. Maysa "explains that the addition of family members saw the house expand in size and undergo a process of modernization in

preparation for the birth of her daughter” (Bayeh, 2015b, p. 386). Maysa sees herself as a torchbearer handing over her legacy to her daughter.

### **Revenge for Previous Female Generations**

This novel does not only depict female progress but also revenge for the previous female generations. Maysa elaborates this in three ways: by telling their stories, getting some of them to tell their own stories, and finally by attempting to “fix the past,” as Hout (2012) argues. Because these stories were lost, by exposing them she is rebelling against the silence, especially as some of these women were illiterate.

Female characters are empowered by narrating their own stories such as Salwa’s story in Part III. *Somewhere, Home* is “revolutionary because it not only exposes the private lives of women but it also allows the marginalized voices of women to tell their own stories” (Bayeh, 2015b, p. 127). Hout (2012) rightly draws on Rubenstein’s *Home Matters* (2001) argument that narratives which depict themes of loss, home and nostalgia face the past in order to fix it. There is evolution in the stories, especially in Maysa’s story, and Maysa seems to take revenge on behalf of her sisters. Hout further explains that “they secure it more strongly in the imagination, and second, they correct it by revising it. In so doing, they traverse the gap between longing and belonging” (Hout, 2012, p. 63). The feminist progress is manifested in the improvement of women’s status since then: “While the mother is often the prosaic figure in the middle, the grandmother and the daughter can be points of mystery and potential, leading off into the unknown future or past” (Cosslett, 1996, p. 8). Both Maysa and Yasmeen are moving into unknown futures. The female ancestors were oppressed; they did not marry for love; their husbands abandoned them. Maysa is the main authority on narration and has the power of narration, being at the center of the narrative; Bayeh explains that Maysa “exercises interpretative power and selects what to include in her history” (Bayeh, 2015b, p. 128). A sense of revenge can also be seen when Maysa shows her emotions toward her husband as opposed to the inhibition of the ancestors; when her husband tells her that he misses her, Maysa answers that she misses him as well (Jarrar, 2003, p. 45).

### **The Theme of Reincarnation and Its Relationship to Matrilineage**

The Druze identity of the narrator seems to manifest itself on many occasions in the novel. The belief in reincarnation helps explain the theme of matrilineage. Maysa is a Druze and is encouraged by her friend Selma to go, pray and learn about her religion. Maysa was initially skeptical but later finds inner peace in prayer. The house is set in the Druze mountains, and she sees faith in “the memories [her] grandmother left behind, the legacy of stars” (Jarrar, 2003, p. 71). Also, the affiliation to the Druze community and heritage helps in linking the narrator to her past and present. Their faith is kept mostly secretive and they call themselves “Unitarians.” They mainly believe in reincarnation, that a dead person’s spirit inhabits another body, and that their souls have lived for centuries. Reincarnation is revealed in this novel in various ways, mainly in the description of a haunted house and the soul of her grandmother inhabiting Maysa. The fact that Maysa believes in reincarnation reinforces the themes of matrilineage and female progress, and more specifically, that of the diachronic, vertical axis. The belief that a dead relative returns to another life by inhabiting another body, especially if it is a woman’s body, shows that women not only learn from their past but also try to improve their past.

The house is haunted like a Gothic castle. Because this faith believes in undying spirits, this makes the protagonist inclined to see the ghosts of her dead female ancestors. Aida sees her caretaker's ghost on several occasions and she even talks to him. In Part I, the portrayal of ghosts is symbolic of the matrilineal power given from foremothers to daughters. The protagonist feels that they are with her and she can draw on their power anytime she wants. Their past lives are very much alive in this house, not just through their stories and memories but also through their objects and belongings in the house, such as a Persian carpet which belonged to her mother and her grandmother's oak dressing table. When Maysa wants to write her mother's story, she says: "I can almost swear to have heard Adel's and Leila's voices murmuring along with mine on lonely nights in this house" (Jarrar, 2003, p. 47). The narrator says that "my grand-mother sat in a wooden-backed chair at the southern window, watching for the last of her children running home from school, and now there are shadows where she has been, shadows without sunlight, clouding my vision, filling me with fear" (p. 10). This can be interpreted as showing that her grandmother's shadows or undying spirits are appearing before her. When she is about to deliver her baby, she paces up and down the house, praying and waiting for Alia's spirit to stir in her (p. 62). Maysa comments that "this belief in reincarnation does not reassure us of the existence of an afterlife, nor does it mean the single repetition of joys and hardships. Rather, it shows us the vital part we play in the infinite process of living, the uninterrupted movement towards oneness" (Jarrar, 2003, p. 67). Also, the themes of female progress and fixing the past are reinforced because all these women will have chances to improve their lives as their souls are reincarnated. Maysa's husband does not differentiate between "her stories" and the ones about her relatives, perhaps reinforcing the merging between the spirits or the possibility of reincarnation. Wadih asks her if there is a difference between her stories and Alia's (p. 78). Mirapuri argues that "in becoming the embodiment of the spirits of the past, she denies her own identity and her own existence" (Mirapuri, 2009, p. 473). In fact, Maysa grows and learns about herself when she connects with her past. She learns lessons from her past and tries to fix the past by showing female progress.

To conclude, Cosslett's two time frames theory and the Bakhtin theory of the chronotopes of the house and the threshold have helped to analyse the theme of matrilinealism in this novel. The common ancestry house mentioned was inhabited by several generations of female ancestors and Maysa resorts to narrating all of their stories. Matrilinealism is manifested through the two simultaneous time-frames (those of the synchronic and diachronic planes), introducing a three-dimensional space. She derives female bonding from her friend Selma and daughter who belong to the synchronic plane but at the same time she goes back to the diachronic plane to tell all the other female relatives' lives for various reasons, such as feminist recovery, progress and revenge. The belief in reincarnation has also helped in explaining this attachment to her past. After learning many lessons from her present and past, Maysa eventually goes back to her family, her daughter and husband.

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