

# The 'Meanwhile' as Counter-Time: Non-Linear Temporality and the Re- imagination of the Future in Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother* and Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*

Lassana Kanté\*<sup>1</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Université Cheikh Anta Diop, Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines, Ecole Doctorale-Arts, Cultures et  
Civilisations, PhD Student, Sénégal

Received: 23/ 07 / 2025

Accepted: 04 / 08 / 2025

Published: 15/ 01 / 2026

## Abstract

*Meanwhile* is a concept developed by Lauren Berlant to explain 'a space of suspension wanting, and unfinished becoming.' In opposition to *linear progress* or *Teleological resolutions*, this space represents a zone of indeterminate transition where historical trauma, colonial residues, and displacement converge with times of fragile agency and emotional endurance. The present paper examines the way Caribbean women writers, Jamaica Kincaid and Edwidge Danticat, use narrative structuration, questioning the time in *The Autobiography of My Mother* and *The Dew Breaker*. Through close readings, the present paper seeks to explore the way Jamaica Kincaid and Edwidge Danticat refuse to linear temporality associated with healing, nation-building, and emancipation. In this paper, we seek to explore the way both novels resist the linear temporalities related to healing, historicity, and emancipation. This is an exploration of the disruption of linear time and the postcolonial conceptions of time. It is an analysis of postcolonial temporality theory. Findings suggest that the concept 'meanwhile' works in a temporal disconnection and rupture.

**Keywords:** colonial, linear progress, *Meanwhile*, teleological resolutions, temporality, Trauma

## ملخص

"في الأثناء" هو مفهوم طورته لورين بيرلانت لشرح "حيز من التعليق والرغبة والتحول غير المكتمل". وبخلاف التقدم الخطي أو الحلول الغائية، يمثل "في الأثناء" مساحة انتقالية غير محددة تلتقي فيها الصدمة التاريخية وبقايا الاستعمار والاقتلاع مع لحظات من الفاعلية الهشة والتحمل العاطفي. تتناول هذه الورقة الطريقة التي تستخدم بها الكاتبان الكاريبيتان جاماكا كينكايد وإدويج دانتিকা بنية السرد للتشكيك في الزمن في روايتي *سيرة أُمي الذاتية* وكاسر الندى. ومن خلال قراءات تحليلية دقيقة، تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف كيفية رفض الكاتبين لمفهوم الزمن الخطي المرتبط بالشفاء وبناء الأمة والتحرر. كما تسعى الورقة إلى تحليل مقاومة الروائيتين للتصورات الزمنية الخطية المرتبطة بالشفاء والتاريخ والتحرر، في إطار استكشاف لزعة التصورات الاستعمارية وما بعد الاستعمارية للزمن، وتحليل لنظرية الزمن ما بعد الاستعماري. وتشير النتائج إلى أن مفهوم "في الأثناء" يعمل ضمن إطار من الانفصال الزمني والانقطاع.

**كلمات مفتاحية:** استعمار، التقدم الخطي، في الأثناء، الحلول الغائية، الزمن.

## Cite as

Kanté, L. (2026). The 'Meanwhile' as Counter-Time: Non-Linear Temporality and the Re-imagination of the Future in Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother* and Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*. *Atras Journal*, 7(1), 217-228. <https://doi.org/10.70091/Atras/vol07no01.14>

**Email:** <sup>1</sup>[anasna271@gmail.com](mailto:anasna271@gmail.com)

## Introduction

In modern colonial domination and modernist discourses, time is represented in many works as a linear, progressive, and teleological continuum-movement through measurable development and historical closure. Postcolonial literature grapples with the temporal legacies of colonization through the imposition of linear, progress-driven narratives, more precisely through its engagement with thematic and symbolic legacies from colonization and past histories. Women's writing particularly represents time as frequently portrayed in fragmentation, recursion, and non-resolution. The present paper explores how *The Autobiography of My Mother* (Kincaid, 1996) and *The Dew Breaker* (Danticat, 2005) disrupt linear temporality through a space of suspension, which Lauren Berlant terms *meanwhile*. In this perspective, memory, trauma, and identity exist outside colonial chronologies. *The Autobiography of My Mother* traces the life of Xuela Claudette Richardson, a woman born in Dominica who loses her mother at birth. She navigates a space where colonial legacies shape people's lives through racial hierarchies and gendered oppression. This first-person narration unfolds a meditation on identity, memory, and maternal absence with Xuela, who refuses to conform to societal expectations. She refuses to embrace imposed histories. In contrast, *The Dew Breaker* is a polyphonic narrative. It links stories orbiting around central, haunting figures. In this novel, the protagonist's father, considered to be a victim of political violence, has become a perpetrator. This story, which spans from Port-au-Prince to New York, weaves the lives of victims, survivors, and torturers.

This research issue explores the use of non-linear temporality. How does 'meanwhile' function narratively in *The Autobiography of My Mother* and *The New Breaker*? How do they enable re-imagination of the future and critique of colonial concepts of time? At the center of this work lies a question: How does the use of temporality in the narrative device of 'meanwhile' allow postcolonial novels a critique of colonial and precolonial time? This guide provides a comparative reading of *The Autobiography of My Mother* and *The Dew Breaker*, aiming to avoid linear historical interpretations.

"The Autobiography of My Mother: Looking at the Past with Old Eyes" (Muñoz-González, 2018) explores how trauma, colonial legacies, and identity formation shape Xuela's self-narration. The main point in this article is the metaphor of the palimpsest. The latter describes the layered nature of memory and identity. This work is an exploration of the way Xuela's older self overwrites and reinterprets her younger experiences to construct meaning. On page 26 of this article, we read, "Xuela is, according to West, traumatized from birth (2003, p. 4). Thus, *The Autobiography* would be a victim of trauma's autobiography. The distinction between facts and imagination, truth and lies is not the crucial point when an author is trying to narrativize their traumas, even more when 'crucial to the experience of trauma are the multiple difficulties that arise in trying to articulate it'." On another page, the author makes it clearer in these words, "In conclusion, it is undeniable that Xuela is a victim of emptiness, loss, and isolation in her life. She tries to heal the wound caused by her birth traumas using the healing power of narrative, often appealing to the unrealistic and fantastic, to the myth, in order to reconstruct her memories. However, it is also true that she is at the same time a perpetrator, who victimizes, not only those that dare to love her, but also herself" (Muñoz-González, 2018). This article has demonstrated that Xuela is a victim and a perpetrator.

Similarly, Alexandra's reading explores a deeply layered interpretation of *The Autobiography of My Mother* (Schultheis, 2011). This work explains the way Xuela's voice

[character and narrator] challenges traditional ideologies and thoughts of nationhood, familial structures, and truth. Shultheis draws on Amit Rai's subaltern ghost theory; Xuela's voice goes beyond traditional boundaries of fiction and postcolonial theoretical discourse. Kincaid's work is woven with personal, maternal, and ancestral theoretical discourses. The work challenges the tenets of nationalist identity [Xuela's rejection of motherhood and refusal to fit into traditional racial and gender norms].

In "Against dechoukaj: The trauma of Haiti in Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*. *Crossroads*" (Karczewska, 2015, pp. 1-14), a powerful postcolonial and trauma-centered reading of *The Dew Breaker* is explored. This article explains how Danticat gives voice to Haitians whom the brutal Duvalier dictatorship has silenced through the lens of dechoukaj, the violent uprooting of Duvalierist structures after Baby Doc's fall in 1986. This research article clearly explains that *The Dew Breaker* is not just a literary text; it remains a testimony representing the collective voice of a marginalized people, bridging personal grief with national history and global human rights discourse.

Therefore, engaging with theoretical insights from postcolonial thought, mainly focusing on the works of Achille Mbembe and Elizabeth Freeman, the present study demonstrates the way 'meanwhile' functions as an image of counter-time: a temporal mode that destabilizes inherited narratives and makes space for alternative futures.

## Analysis

In *Aliénation et réinvention dans l'œuvre de Jamaica Kincaid* (Yassine-Diab, 2014), Nadine Yassine-Diab sustains that Jamaica's literary work interrogates the psychological and cultural alienation that the Caribbean has experienced. Nadine explains that alienation has become a site of radical reinvention of history and language. Regarding Nadine's analysis of Kincaid's works, people reclaim agency and rebuild in defiance of colonial and social legacies through fragmented narratives and rebellious voices. In "Exiled Subjectivities: The Politics of Fragmentation in *The Dew Breaker*" (Vega, 2007, pp. 181-193), Vega (2007) González explains that characters like Xuela refuse to procreate and to follow social order. She represents a disconnection from a past full of oppression and segregation. This trajectory of Xuela's re-invention is a symbol of re-appropriation. Susana's work concludes that writing remains a symbol of liberation and freedom from past trauma. Time remains politically charged. It expresses how people experience their lives through remembering and envisioning. 'Meanwhile' creates a space of silenced histories and unresolved traumas' re-emergence.

## *Suspended Temporality as a Critical Tool*

"Suspended Temporality" and the "Meanwhile" are counter-time, crucial issues in postcolonial and diasporic literature. *The Autobiography of my Mother* and *The Dew Breaker* challenge dominant historical narratives around healing, trauma, and national memory. Kincaid uses non-linear storytelling and repetition to examine the idea that *time heals colonial trauma*. On page 14, the author captures the narrator's early educational experiences and gendered social dynamics. On this page, we read "In that room always there were only boys; I did not sit in a schoolroom with other girls until I was older." Here, Xuela Claudette Richardson is explaining that she was surrounded only by boys. This explains gender imbalance and exclusion of girls from early education, a symbol of the patriarchal structure of colonial

Caribbean societies, like African societies, where boys' education is prioritized. This also explains the lack of solidarity. Symbolically, it can be read as a metaphor for experiencing marginalization as a mixed-race child and motherless daughter. In this quote, Kincaid explains the social structures of colonialism and patriarchy that shape politics and personal development. Xuela has lately been included after a long time sitting in the classroom. She became more inclusive as she grew older, after experiencing a formative event following years of socialization. On page 33, she receives moldy food from the woman [Lao woman—the wife of the laundress] who should take care of her after her mother's death. This act characterizes intention in these terms: “as if she had saved it especially for me to make me sick” (Muñoz-González, 2018, p. 33). This scene contributes to her sense of abandonment in the novel. Her refusal to eat that food makes her turn pointed by deciding to fend for herself. “I learned then how to prepare my food” (p. 33). In this case, food becomes symbolic. It has become a symbol of resistance and self-reliance, a way to assert control over her body, her choices, and her life. She creates her own identity by deciding to cook for herself. Xuela says, “I was a girl who prepared her food” (p. 33).

On page 116, Xuela demonstrates that she is more mature, experienced, and weathered than Lawo women. This section explains that Xuela was born in a world of suffering and precocious awareness, accompanied by her loss of her mother and emotional abandonment. She says, “I was older (Symbolically) than her seventeen years of age” (Kincaid, 1996, p. 33). We continue, “Her words did not come as a surprise” (p. 33), which explains that Xuela is not shocked. She had learnt from infancy to expect coldness, rejection, and indifference from others. She has conditioned herself not to expect love, kindness, and acknowledgement. Her dictation “I had not expected gratitude...I had not expected friendship” (p. 33) shows a guardedness that protects her from emotional disappointment. If we continue, we discover the way trauma, colonial violence, and maternal neglect shaped her human connection: “Friendship...I would have regarded with suspicion” (p. 33).

Lauren Berlant's theoretical concept of “the meanwhile” in *Cruel Optimism* (Berlant, 2011) explains the theoretical context of ‘Suspended Temporality’ and ‘Meanwhile as Counter-Time’ in the postcolonial context. In *Cruel Optimism*, cruel optimism is defined in this way: “A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is an obstacle to your flourishing. It might involve food, or a kind of love; it might be a fantasy of the good life, or a political project. It might rest on something simpler, too, like a new habit that promises to induce in you an improved way of being. These kinds of optimistic relations are not inherently cruel. They become cruel only when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially” (Berlant, 2011, p.1 p. 1). Xuela's relationship with her new mother makes her seek help, assistance, and care. She ends up not waiting for the woman who should help her. She tried to find her road. In the context of *The Autobiography of my Mother*, this relation is developed through the food image between Xuela and her ‘new mother’. Kincaid's novel's protagonist's relation (maternal love, belonging, and identity) is marked by attachment to colonial structures and patriarchy. These relations disfigure her possibility to flourish.

Berlant's ‘the meanwhile’ developed in *Cruel Optimism* explores the condition of suspended temporality. It refers to a stretched present where people live without clear resolution, progress, and closure. It is an analysis of failed promises and uncertain futures, rather than a pause before change. In *The Autobiography of My Mother*, Xuela's life is marked

by her mother's absence, resistance to reproduction, and unresolved identity. This is symbolized by her relationship with Leona and her decision to prepare food for herself. In Danticat's work, meanwhile, a framework is presented that analyzes characters in limbo as symbols of floating between loss and hope, memory and migration. Xuela lives in a paused-life, non-linear present where her past offers no recovery and the future holds no promise. By rejecting illusions of 'good life,' she represents a radical autonomy managed in refusal, detachment, and resistance.

*The Dew Breaker* exposes the Dew Breaker through disconnected and recursive timelines, where resistance to chronological order provides insight into how trauma, guilt, and memory function outside linear time. The affirmations of Ka's father, "I was working in the prison," (Danticat, 2005, p. 20) and "...It was one of the prisoners inside the prison who cut my face in this way," (p. 20) represent Ka's father's unnamed trauma. Anne shares a historical event with Ka about her [Ka's] father's story. She explains, "A long time ago, more than thirty years ago, in Haiti, your father worked in a prison, where he hurt many people. Now look at him. Look how calm he is. Look how patient he is. Look how he just drove forty miles, to your apartment in Westchester, to pick you up for Christmas Eve Mass" (pp. 71-72). This is a haunting co-existence of past violence and present tenderness. The father of Ka, in the past, hurt people in prison in Haiti, and now appears calm and caring. This characterizes the unspoken histories reflecting suspended temporality that Lauren Berlant calls 'meanwhile'- the place where trauma is neither confronted nor erased, but silenced.

The presence of words and expressions like 'prison' (49 times), 'silence' (10 times), 'fear' (16 times), etc., demonstrates the relations between past, present, and future. On a page, we read "I tell you that in Europe they eat sugar with our blood in it and you mock me with a colonial title" (Danticat, 2005, p. 154). This citation explains the themes of colonialism, exploitation, and resentment. '...in Europe they eat sugar....blood in it' explains that European wealth and luxury (symbolized by sugar) come at the terrible cost, the suffering, labor, and blood of colonized nations [here she refers to the Caribbean as a colony where sugar plantations were built on slave labor and exploitation].

The haunting of Ka's father, his traumatic past, and silence represent the symbols of "meanwhile" as counter-time and suspended temporality. Tonton Macoute, the notorious secret police under Duvalier's regime, is a symbol of colonial-era political terror. About Duvalier's character, we read, "Like the president, she had a deep love for folklore, which, according to her, they discussed frequently. Moreover, since the president had named his volunteer militia after the mythic figure of the Tonton Macoute, a bogeyman who abducted naughty children at night and put them in his knapsack, she wanted to name her female force Fillette Lalo, after a rhyme most of the country grew up singing, a parable about a woman who eats children" (Danticat, 2005, p. 129). The Duvalier regime appropriated traditional folklore for political purposes. They blend cultural identity with authoritarian rule. Tonton Macoute, a mythic bogeyman, kidnapped children at night. He was responsible for torture, disappearance, and murder. What is another surprise is that Fillette Lalo is represented here as a woman who eats children. This represents an authoritarian regime's rebrand of oppression as tradition, which makes violence seem natural, even moral.

On page 19, curiosity makes the narrator [the wife of the "dew breaker" — the man with a violent past as a torturer in Haiti] ask questions after a silence. She wanted to know what was in this silenced voice. At the end, she asks, "I stop stroking my wrist, sensing something



coming that might hurt much more. He is silent again. I do not want to prod him, feed him any cues, urge him to speak, but finally I get tired of the silence and feel I have no choice but to ask, “What are you talking about?” (Danticat, 2005, p. 19)

The narrator feels worried because of the man’s quietness and upset. Regarding *The Dew Breaker*, characters living in optimistic beliefs, such as justice, redemption, and healing, represent the political violence in Haiti, where their attachment to a ‘better life’ in the USA and reconciliation with their past have been haunted by unresolved trauma. In this perspective, ‘meanwhile’ finds its orientation as a temporal space where subjects linger between the past trauma and the fantasy of a healed future, often linked to what Berlant calls ‘lateral agency’. The latter refers to the small acts and symbols that people engage in, not to achieve grand transformation and liberation. These forms of resistance and acts people use to face events in order to survive and find pleasure in their difficult socio-political situations. In opposition to the traditional concept of agency [linked to acts of heroin and revolutionaries], lateral agency refers to ordinary practices, indirect representations without really facing the events.

Mbembe’s *On the Postcolony* (2001) gives a more comprehensible approach to *the Concept of the Breaker*. Mbembe offers a meditational reading on the afterlives of colonial violence and social mechanisms in the postcolonial context. On a page of *On the Postcolony*, we read “Under the protection of the colonial bureaucratic apparatus, the market began to function in gangster mode” (Mbembe, 2001, p. 72). *The Dew Breaker* represents the story of a titular figure of a former torturer under a totalitarian regime. In *The Dew Breaker*, violence is normalized as part of political and economic systems. The systematic oppression characterized by Tonton Macoute operates through politically enforced economic predators. This mirrors Mbembe’s claim that postcolonial power mimics colonial structures by turning the state into a criminal enterprise, a ‘gangster-group’ where corruption, force, and informal networks drive governance. In the novel, the Dew Breaker himself represents this logic: he is an agent of state terror and benefits materially from violence. In the context of *The Dew Breaker*, the state is seen to commodify and distribute violence.

In *The Autobiography of My Mother* and *The Dew Breaker*, suspended temporality is represented in a critical narrative tool. They both explore the afterlives of colonialism, trauma, and identity. They disrupt linear and chronological time in order to represent the psychological and historical disorientation that violence, exile, and memory have caused. In Kincaid’s work, time is fragmented and recursive. It mirrors the protagonist’s attempt to rebuild her life amidst generational loss and colonial alienation. The narrator’s life dwells in past wounds that make the present a space of repetition and emotional stasis. In contrast, Danticat’s work temporality is used to represent the layered nature of trauma and complicity. Characters in Danticat’s live in tensions between unresolved pasts and uncertain futures, and stories unfold non-linearly. They reflect memory and guilt interrupted by present life. *The Autobiography of my Mother* and *The Dew Breaker* represent suspended temporalities as political and psychological strategies in order to resist dominant narratives of progress and closure. They expose the unfinished, haunted realities of postcolonial subjects.

### ***Narrative Structures in Addressing Temporal Fragmentation***

Narrative structure is how stories are organized and presented to the reader. It shapes the way the meaning is constructed. Traditional structures often follow a linear and chronological

sequence for [ex. Beginning, middle, end. This chronology allows clear progression and resolution. Modern and postcolonial works use non-linear procedures like flashbacks, fragmented timelines, and recursive patterns in order to represent disrupted histories, trauma, and subjective memory. Stories within stories, framed narratives, multiple perspectives, and unreliable narrators are standard techniques that complicate the reader's perception of truth and authority.

In *The Dew Breaker*, Xuela, the narrator and protagonist, recounts her life in a non-linear progression. Her story is expressed through associative and recursive reflection. Her decision not to bear children disrupts colonial and patriarchal productive futurism. In her character, trauma and memory (colonialism) coexist in the present narration. Their existences are oriented through non-linear and circular temporal structures. In *The Dew Breaker*, time is experientially shaped by pain, absence, and interiority. Xuela lives in a suspended state of being where trauma and a future she refuses to embrace makes her story a referential image to Berlant's 'meanwhile'. In Mbembe's work, we read "To think relevantly about this time that is appearing, this passing time, meant abandoning conventional views, for these only perceive time as a current that carries individuals and societies from a background to a foreground, with the future emerging necessarily from the past and following that past, itself irreversible. However, of central interest was that peculiar time that might be called the time of existence and experience, the time of entanglement" (Mbembe, 2001, p. 17). Mbembe questions the past, present, and future as connected and disconnected in some way. The historical focus of Berlant's novel asserts the time of existence and experience. Xuela is presented as an experimental image of a postcolonial world where past events characterize her life. She does not live in existential time. She is in a moment of resistance and trauma. Mbembe's *Entangled Time* portrays here a colonial defied time where Xuela moves in ancestral and psychic time, not political chronology, and resists being read through a linear and teleological frame. This represents Glissant's Opacity. *Poetics of Relation* introduces *opacity* as a counter-concept to Western demands for transparency and comprehension (Glissant, 1997). He underlines that the right to opacity [people, cultures, and identities are not forced to be fully understood or translated into dominant frameworks: Opacity] remains not only a cultural right, but it is a philosophical necessity in a globalized space.

In *The Dew Breaker*, concepts and words "my mother," (11 times), "funeral," (20 times), "loss" (4 times) express the statute of death. In both *The Dew Breaker* and *The Autobiography of My Mother*, the narrative centers on the way victims and perpetrators remain no-binary opposites. Generational trauma manifests through history and narratives. In *The Dew Breaker*, trauma is transmitted through silence, guilt, and fragmented memory. The father in *The Dew Breaker* represents the image of a silent perpetrator, a reformed man, and an absent truth as a former torturer in Haiti and the post-Duvalier regime. This is characterized by opacity. Glissant refers to his past as partially hidden and disavows the fact of refusing full confession to his daughter, Ka. In consequence, Ka remains the victim of postmemory that Marianne Hirsch describes as the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the traumatic experiences of their parents and ancestors (ex., Ka and the father) in *The generation of postmemory: Writing and visual culture after the Holocaust* (Hirsch, 2012). Ka does not directly live the trauma, but his identity and worldviews are shaped by it. The daughter of the titular "Dew Breaker" experiences postmemory through fragmented knowledge of their parents' past trauma and suffering in Haiti.

Pain transforms people. In *The Autobiography of My Mother*, Xuela is haunted by the loss of her mother, whom she had never known. She is a victim of postmemory, and her life is shaped by memory and history. Xuela's selfness is marked by what has been transmitted to her. She is influenced by cultural embeddedness reflected by the afterlives of colonial violence.

Ka embodies 'meanwhile' in her negotiation of the place between admiring her father and revealing his brutal past. Her sculpture represents a cruelly optimistic object. Ka underlines that "I had never tried to tell my father's story in words before now, but my first completed sculpture of him was the reason for our trip: a three-foot mahogany figure of my father naked, kneeling on half-foot-square base, his back arched like the curve of a crescent moon, his downcast eyes fixed on his very long fingers and the large palms of his hands. It was hardly revolutionary, rough and not too detailed, minimalist at best, but it was my favorite of all my attempted representations of my father. It was the way I had imagined him in prison" (Danticat, 2005, p. 4). Ka cannot narrate a coherent future for herself without the re-configuration of the past. Her refusal and silence in the face of her father's trap give her an image of a false narrative that will collapse once the truth emerges. This is represented in her father's unspoken past. In contrast, Nadine, the Haitian-American nurse's life is marked by isolation, repression, and detachment from her patients and her history of the past: "Three weeks had gone by since the letter arrived, and Nadine still had not called" (p. 53). Her pain of separation and failure to be part of one community [no American nor Haitian] represents her emotional 'meanwhile'. She exists in what Berlant calls 'the impasse of adjustment', the suspension between expectation and emotional withdrawal. Beatrice, the character marked by surveillance and Non-Seen (unseen), is the representative image of the in-between. She does not express crimes and conducts surveillance by documenting her movement. She waits for a revelation that will never arrive. The hope for the future in her character traps her in repetitive and self-isolating behavior.

On a page, we read "The secret is time, Beatrice said, picking up the cup she had poured for herself. 'I always take my time, whether it is getting dressed, making coffee, or sewing those wedding gowns'" (Danticat, 2005, p. 53). This quotation serves as a symbol of postmemory, as theorized by Marianne Hirsch and Lauren Berlant. Mariame qualifies time as a coping mechanism for inherited trauma (postmemory), and Laurent Berlant suspended temporality and deferred justice refers to a stretched-out, suspended present, in which characters like Beatrice in *The Dew Breaker* live between an unresolved past and an uncertain future. Beatrice's "taking her time" is emblematic of the meanwhile.

In *The Autobiography of My Mother*, Xuela is the motherless daughter who is shaped by colonial subjects and a self-fashioned woman. She was born to a colonized mother. The death of her mother at her birth exemplifies the metaphor for the trauma of historical erasure. She refuses motherhood, sexuality, and domesticity and uses her body, sexuality, and voice to control her life. Her refusal to be a mother is a denial of patriarchy and colonialism. It is a moment of stasis when she decides to be no one, to shed her gender representation, in order to create a new form of identity. She represents characters such as Tambu (Tamnbudzai) in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Mournable Body* (2020) and *Nervous Conditions* (2004), and Madina in Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* (2012). Xuela's father was a colonial functionary characterized by emotional and enforced power. He is the representation of a colonial black man working for the power of colonization and has internalized the values of the oppressor (his uniform). Xuela receives the absence of her mother, and Ka, the secrets of her father's past life, with no context



(no periodization). Alfred enforced colonial laws, but Xuela refused to produce. Ka's father lived a guilt-ridden life, but Anne forgives. In *The Dew of Breaker*, trauma is symbolized by scar, statue, and silence. In *The Autobiography of My Mother*, the symbol is embodied in the dead mother of Xuela, the body, and the refusal to motherhood.

*The Autobiography of My Mother* symbolizes the rejection of linear time by expressing a cyclical, recursive, and associative narrative. In other words, time in this novel is not chronological but layered and recursive regarding the protagonist's fragmented self and postcolonial situation of dislocation. This is symbolized by the death of her mother when she was born on pages 4 and 14.

"When my mother died, leaving me a small child vulnerable to all the world, my father took me and placed me in the care of the same woman he paid to wash his clothes." (Kincaid, 1996, p. 4).

"I was not afraid, because my mother had already died and that is the only thing a child is terrified of; when I was born, my mother was dead, and I had already lived all those years with Eunice, a woman who was not my mother and who could not love me, and without my father, never knowing when I would see him again..." (Kincaid, 1996, p. 14).

These two quotes announce the collapse of linear time. Xuela's life is characterized by pain, desire, and loss. This explains postcolonial experience, where history is broken, inherited, and erased, rather than unfolding "naturally." Postcolonial subjectivity is characterized by 'what happened', by what is felt, refused, and imagined. Xuela's repetitive visit to her mother's death; her refusal to womanhood and motherhood are symbols of temporal fixations. It is a refusal to reproduce colonial time, and her refusal to motherhood is a refusal of linear generational continuity. Here, narrative opacity, the denial to make the story easily readable and resolvable, represents the factual misunderstanding of Xuela's position regarding questions like naming people, re-naming, re-producing, and accepting.

In *The Autobiography of My Mother*, periodical fragmentation is a method and structural resistance to colonial and precolonial times. It imposes coherence and linear development. The unresolved trauma of colonial violence, maternal loss, and cultural erasure is expressed through recursive repetition, reflection, and temporal collapse. It is an expression of postcolonial temporality. Here, 'meanwhile' determines future deferred and the present saturated, with unresolved problems. Ka, Nadine, and Beatrice in *Dew Breaker* cannot move forward. They are stuck between deferred justice and histories. Trauma remains present, persistent, and through affect and body memory.

*The Autobiography of My Mother* and *The Dew Breaker* structure their narration in formal responses to the temporal fragmentation that violence, trauma, and displacement are characterized by. They both reject linear chronology. Kincaid builds a fluid, introspective monologue where memory overrides sequence. He blends past and present in repetitive, circular motion that represents the narrator's psychological entrapment. Dinticat assembles shifting interlinked stories between characters and timelines to reflect the dispersed nature. In both novels, silences, gaps, and non-linearity serve as strategies to represent what could be unresolved.

### *Reimagining Identity and Futurity*

Identity and futurity are represented as linear projections from the past as contingent, recursive, and often fractured issues that do not fold with Berlant's 'the meanwhile'. The latter, a temporal zone of suspended resolution and non-resolved tension, is a figure of resistance and finality. It allows Ka, Beatrice, Xuela, and other characters to exist in a state of becoming, not being, a condition in postcolonial subjectivity. In *The Dew Breaker*, memory remains postmemory, which Marianne Hirsch defines in *The Generation of Postmemory* (Hirsch, 2008, pp. 103-128). It is a term of comparative literature and gender studies developed in the context of Holocaust studies. It develops the transmission of traumatic memory [Ka, Beatrice, Xuela, etc] across generations. In *The Autobiography of My Mother*, the death of the protagonist's mother, the loss of the mother, is fundamental to identity formation. In *The Dew Breaker*, the duality of the father being the hunter and the desire to make the father the perfect person complicates the fixed understanding of the story. The daughter's narrative desire rewrites the self of the father.

Kincaid makes identity through the absence of maternal lineage. In this novel, identity is an imaginative re-assembly instead of being genealogical inheritance. The denial to make the mother figure is an image of cultural continuity, introducing a rupture in postcolonial social, political, and patriarchal tradition. Gaps, silence, and projections shape identity and, meanwhile, remain preserved through colonial afterlives and trauma. Danticat builds identity through inter-generational storytelling. In *The Dew Breaker*, it is a tool of resistance and complicity where characters dwell in zones between revelation and repression. The father in the novel is characterized by duality [torturer and survivor], where the crisis of futurity, the way the future is rooted in trauma, characterizes the re-imagination and extension of people's identities.

Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism* is defined as a condition in which the events characters desire are obstacles to their flourishing (Berlant, 2011). In this perspective, people's very objects of hope and attachment remain stuck, limited, and harmed. This is exemplified in the characters of Ka, Beatrice, and Xuela. In both *The Autobiography of my Mother* and *The Dew Breaker*, authors expose people living between crisis and resolution. In their lives, fundamental transformation is not happening; they are living in the past, full of trauma and violence, and their future remains uncertain. Xuela is the antagonist representation of linearity. A looping internal monologue characterizes her life. It is filled with re-evaluations, contradictions, and reflects counter-temporality. Her unawareness of who enforces her image of 'caught in the "meanwhile" of not knowing who her father would be.

*The Dew Breaker* and *The Autobiography of My Mother* dismantle linear, genealogical, and redemption narratives of identity and futurity while foregrounding divided temporalities and suspended states of being. Connected to Lauren Berlant's 'meanwhile', this temporal space is presented by contradiction, deferral, and ambivalence, where narratives are articulated through identity and existence. The questions of being and existence remain at the center of the debate. Xuela is built in radical opposition to both maternal inheritance and postcolonial norms, posted in refusal, solitude, and bodily autonomy.

Danticat's characters navigate through epistemic and emotional consequences of heritage of trauma, consequences of trauma, silence, and absence. In this perspective, futurity is not just a linear trajectory toward healing and progress; it remains speculative and contingent. In *The Dew Breaker*, *Ka Bienaimé* represents the artist-daughter reconstructing

her father's past. In *The Autobiography of My Mother*, Xuela Claudette Richardson symbolizes the autobiographical narrator of her own life. She controls her voice and, in maternal absence, she creates a radical self-invention in solitude and refusal. Xuela forms her identity through inherited silence and fragmentation, built on a partial understanding of her father. While Xuela embraces bodily and emotional autonomy, Ka admires and idealizes her father, which is at the origin of her reconciliation with a hidden, violent past.

Xuela's stepmother and other women in *The Autobiography of My Mother* represent a failed image of maternal replacement, especially the woman who was called to take care of Xuela's life. In *The Dew Breaker*, Beatrice Saint Fort and Anne are survivors of trauma carrying gendered wounds.

*The Autobiography of my Mother* and *The Dew Breaker* represent identity and futurity as not built through stable, linear progress, but imaged through fragmentation, silence, and ambivalence. It is a postcolonial perspective of identity formation. Their narrative techniques challenge conventional notions that center characters' identities shaped by trauma, colonial legacies, and intergenerational dislocation. Kincaid represents Xuela as a symbol of resistance who inherits roles of womanhood, motherhood, and nationhood. Xuela's identity is built through negation and solitude. She rejects imposed 'rules' and chooses radical self-possession outside established norms. Consequently, futurity is non-productive and self-contained about Xuela's image. Danticat's characters, mainly children and survivors of violence, live in the shadow of past events. Their identities are fragmented by guilt, exile, and silence. Within the fragmented spaces, Danticat's narrative opens possibilities for connection, testimony, and remembrance.

## Conclusion

The present research has demonstrated that in both *The Dew Breaker* and *The Autobiography of my Mother*, postmemorial strategy and the concept of temporality are illustrated through a postcolonial context and differ from socio-political contexts. The first characterizes life with an unspoken past lived in trauma, violence, colonialism, and domination. The second explains the life paused, stretched, and filled with a routine instead of resolution. *The Dew Breaker's* response to trauma remains resistance production and the embrace of bodily and emotional autonomy. In contrast, *The Autobiography of my Mother* answers with struggles between betrayal, love, and moral responsibility.

Xuela lives in an existential present-ness with no nostalgic past and aspirational future. In contrast, Ka is suspended between false past and incomplete truth [Berlant's 'meanwhile']. They are both fathers, Ka's father, an ancient torturer who lives in anonymous exile, and Xuela's father, an ancient colonial police officer who represented the empire and law relations to power, are symbolized by colonial structures, values, and domination for Xuela's father, and past power abuse and anonymity for Ka's father. They are agents of authoritarian structures.

Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother* and Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker* resist the future through redemptive tools and emphasize open-endedness, where political re-imagination of self outside of colonial temporality creates identity as an act of futurist narration.

## About the Author

**Lassana Kanté** is a PhD student in Anglophone and Comparative Studies at Université Cheikh Anta Diop of Dakar, specializing in African and Postcolonial Studies. His research explores the intersections of power, life, memory, identity, anticoloniality and decoloniality, power, gender and sexuality. **Orcid:** <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-6138-2835>

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## Statement of Absence of Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest related to the research, findings, or recommendations presented in this paper. All conclusions drawn are independent and unbiased.

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