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**Alienation as a Reaction to the Intersected Identities of the Haitian
Black Female Protagonist in Elsie Augustave's *The Roving Tree*
(2013)**

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the Requirement for an **M.A. Degree in English Literature and
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Abstract

Colonialism is a doctrine that has deeply ingrained its roots in colonized societies. Its legacy is still present in modern days and its impact on literary works is undeniable. Despite the abundance of postcolonial literature, only a few literary works effectively explore the lasting impact of colonialism and its established power structure across different modern world contexts. As such, the Haitian-American author Elsie Augustave in her novel *The Roving Tree* (2013), skillfully achieves to offer a diverse range of settings in which she voices marginalized subjects within different milieus. Therefore, drawing upon Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of Intersectionality, this work examines the female protagonist's sense of alienation as a result of her intersectional identity in both her homeland Haiti and her host land the United States. Considering Intersectionality as a paradigm that discusses the intersection of different power structures, Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of mimicry, otherness, ambivalence, and hybridity, together with Anibal Quijano and Maria Lugones's concepts of coloniality of power and gender will serve as tools to analyze the protagonist Iris' intersectional identity as a result of the colonial perpetuating power structures.

Key Words: intersectionality, power structures, coloniality of power, coloniality of gender, alienation.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my parents who have been a constant source of love, support, and guidance throughout my academic journey.

To my sister Wissam for her endless support, guidance, and help.

To my twin brother for his encouragement.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	II
Dedication.....	III
Acknowledgments	IV
Table of Contents	V
General Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Exploring the Literary, Historical, and Theoretical Background of the Study	5
<i>Introduction</i>	5
<i>1. Ethnic-American Literature: An Overview</i>	5
<i>1.1 An Insight into Major Themes in Caribbean-American Literature</i>	5
<i>1.2 Alienation in The Roving Tree</i>	7
<i>1.3 Biography of Elsie Augustave</i>	8
<i>1.4 Plot Overview of the Novel The Roving Tree</i>	9
<i>1.5 Elsie Augustave’s Literary Influences</i>	11
<i>2. Contextual Framework and Socio-Historical Background of the Novel The Roving Tree</i>	14
<i>2.1. Poverty and the Social Gap in Duvalier’s Haiti</i>	14
<i>2.2 Gender Struggle in Duvalier’s Haiti</i>	15
<i>2.3 Black Power America inside The Roving Tree</i>	16
<i>3. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework of the Study</i>	17
<i>3.1 General Insight into Intersectionality</i>	17
<i>3.2 Postcolonial Theory</i>	19
<i>3.3 Bhabha’s Postcolonial Concepts</i>	20
<i>3.3.A Otherness</i>	21
<i>3.3.B Mimicry</i>	21
<i>3.3.C Ambivalence</i>	22

3.3.D Hybridity.....	23
3.3.E Coloniality of Power /Gender	23
Conclusion	24
Chapter Two: Deconstructing Intersectional Oppression in <i>The Roving Tree</i>: Unveiling Alienation as a Response to Hybridity, Racial, Ethnic, Social, and Gender Oppression	25
Introduction	25
<i>I- Analysis of Intersectionality: Iris' Alienation in America: Racial Discrimination and Ethnic Prejudice.....</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>1- Racial Discrimination in The Roving Tree</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>1.1 Otherness in The Roving Tree</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>1.2 Mimicry in The Roving Tree.....</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>1.3 Ambivalence in The Roving Tree.....</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>2- Ethnic Prejudice in The Roving Tree</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>2.1 Cultural Expression as a Means of Resistance and Survival in The Roving Tree</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>2.2 Iris' Resistance in the Form of Normlessness</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>2.3 Iris' Resistance in the Form of Rebellion.....</i>	<i>39</i>
<i>II- Analysis of Intersectionality: Iris' Alienation in Haiti: Race, Class, Gender, and Hybridity</i>	<i>42</i>
<i>1- Haiti's Race, Class, and Gender Struggle in The Roving Tree as a Result of the Coloniality of Power.....</i>	<i>42</i>
<i>2- Sexual Violence as a Result of the Intersection of Race, Gender, and Class in The Roving Tree.....</i>	<i>44</i>
<i>3- Diaspora and the Myth of Return: Exploring the Hybrid Identity of Iris in Haiti</i>	<i>48</i>
Conclusion	50
General Conclusion	51
Works Cited	53
Résumé	57

General Introduction

Throughout time, post-colonial literature has been considered more than an artistic expression. It is reasonable to say that postcolonial literary works are the products of undeniable realities. Through thought-provoking narratives, writers denounce the outrageous legacy of colonialism and encourage readers to question its established and persisting power structures. Among these narratives, *The Roving Tree* (2013) by the Haitian-American Elsie Augustave is worth mentioning. When I first read the novel, I discovered that Haitian black women are subjected to different forms of injustice in both their homelands and in the diaspora. These intersecting inequalities are as mentioned the product of modern power structures imposed by colonialism. The novel offers a new perspective on how colonized people suffer from alienation as a result of not a single form of injustice but multiple intersecting oppression in various geographical locations. This issue which is usually silenced and hardly expressed in literature, is given prominence through the novel protagonist's eyes, allowing readers to see and experience it.

In Elsie Augustave's novel *The Roving Tree*, fiction serves as a representation of the intersecting forms of oppression experienced by the Haitian protagonist in multiple locations. As the title conveys, the protagonist in the novel is constantly moving from one extremity to another, therefore, she is depicted as a roving, unfixed tree. The title serves as a metaphor that offers a description of the instability she faces as she navigates her quest for identity and a sense of belonging in a world marked by complex and shifting circumstances.

Elsie Augustave is a newly published novelist with limited scholarly criticism dedicated to her work. In light of this lack of academic attention, I have managed to gather the following criticisms by a Haitian junior scholar. In one of the first analyses of the novel, Marsha Jean- Charles in her article entitled "*The Roving Tree*. By Elsie Augustave" (2015), claims that the novel is clearly about "a timeless topic" (196) which comments on diaspora identity formation, offering the readers an insightful exploration of the multifaceted experiences of being a Black Haitian woman in different locations and diverse contexts, namely in, Duvalier's post-colonial Haiti, Black Power America and

post-independence Congo. The author proceeds that across the novel, the protagonist Iris is constantly reminded that the realities of Black people in different places she has lived are similar. To conclude with her article, Marsha argues that *The Roving Tree* is “a valuable text” (197) for people interested in exploring Black women’s identity politics, the impact of political dictatorship on marginalized communities, and mostly on the journey of a diaspora through different locations.

Besides the aforementioned article, the novel also garnered the interest of the same feminist activist and scholar Marsha Jean-Charles and inspired her to conduct an in-depth examination through her doctoral thesis entitled “Haitian Women’s Migration Narratives and Spaces of Freedom in an Anti-Immigrant America” (2019). In this dissertation, Marsha explores the impact of diaspora on Haitian women and their experience with anti-Black racism in migration. Throughout this work, she made a comparative study by depicting these themes explored in the texts written by Edwidge Danticat, Roxane Gay, Elsie Augustave, and Ibi Zoboi. In the third chapter entitled “The Politics of Being LÒT BÒ DLO: Elsie Augustave’s Global Migration and the “Haitian Migrant Crisis”, the author argues that the novel represents a strong and sophisticated articulation of black feminist citizenship. In her analysis, she highlights the complexities of migration and delves into the Haitian Migrant Crisis which serves as a pertinent illustration of the challenges faced by migrants. She concludes by assuming that the novel successfully explores the theme of decolonial migration, with a protagonist who moves from the first and third world in search of “knowledge of self and a space she can be fully human” (163).

As exemplified by the above-mentioned studies, we can notice that the few existing readings of *The Roving Tree* have tended to emphasize the anti-Blackness and xenophobia experienced by the protagonist in the novel, using a Black feminist citizenship approach. In this research, I will provide a wider view of all forms of exclusion experienced by the protagonist in the novel. The exposure to anti-Blackness is indeed a significant factor in the protagonist’s sense of exclusion, but there must be other factors that contribute to her sense of alienation. Accordingly, there has been no discussion about the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender class, and hybridity in shaping the

protagonist's experience of exclusion in her dual spaces of home Haiti and America. As such, in this research, the main focus is exactly on these issues.

Therefore, intersectional and postcolonial approaches allow us to ask: what are the major causes and effects of the protagonist's immigration to the United States? How does the protagonist resist the intersecting oppressions she faces in the USA? Are the postcolonial issues still reflected in modern societies through the discourse of intersectionality?

The present study can be based on a large array of theories. However, I find it more suitable to rely on intersectionality as I 'am dealing with the Haitian black protagonist's intersection of race and ethnicity in the USA, along with the trinity of race, class, and gender intersecting with hybridity in her motherland Haiti. Through the use of the umbrella theory of intersectionality and Homi Bhabha's postcolonial seminal work, *The Location of Culture* (1994), this paper will delve into the subject of the racial, and ethnic identity of the protagonist in the USA. The work introduces important concepts such as otherness, ambivalence, mimicry, and hybridity. These concepts are extremely relevant in understanding how these aspects of Iris' identity carry a historical meaning. Additionally, it will draw upon the conceptual frameworks of Anibal Quijano and Maria Lugones' ideas on the coloniality of power and gender to discuss the protagonist's intersectional identity in Haiti. These concepts are pivotal to my study since the manner in which colonized's people identities are constructed is very much influenced by their history of colonialism.

To fulfill the aim of this study, our research will be divided into two chapters. The first chapter is conceived to present a brief overview of the theme of alienation as discussed by the American socio-psychologist Melvin Seeman. Additionally, I will provide the readers with the socio-historical and contextual background to shed light on the novel's settings. Besides, Elsie Augustave's biography, and literary influences, together with the summary of the plot will be presented to gain a better understanding of the novel's events. The second part of the chapter is dedicated to the theoretical framework, where I will be providing a general insight into Intersectionality theory in addition to some relevant postcolonial concepts that will be applied in the second chapter of my

analysis.

In the second chapter, I will analyze the protagonist's sense of alienation as a result of her intersectional identities. In this regard, my analysis will be divided into two parts. The first part will be a study of the protagonist's exclusion in her host land the USA as a result of the intersection of her race and ethnicity. Bhabha's concepts of (otherness, mimicry, and ambivalence) will be applied to this concern. Furthermore, the second section of this chapter will be devoted to the Protagonist's alienation in her motherland Haiti. In this regard, the concepts of the coloniality of power/gender will be employed to further shed light on the main character's alienation in post-colonial Haiti.

Chapter One: Exploring the Literary, Historical, and Theoretical

Background of the Study

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present an overview of Caribbean-American literature and its primary themes in relation to the novel *The Roving Tree*. Then, a brief introduction to the theme of alienation will be provided. The chapter will also offer a biographical account of the author Elsie Augustave, her literary influences, and a summary of her novel to gain a deeper understanding of the latter's events. Finally, I provide a general overview on Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of Intersectionality and will eventually link it to Postcolonial theory and its major concepts that will be discussed in the second chapter.

1. Ethnic-American Literature: An Overview

1.1 An Insight into Major Themes in Caribbean-American Literature

Ethnic American literature is a genre that comprises a wide range of works from diverse ethnic backgrounds in the USA. It has emerged as an important field of study that gained imminence in recent years, and which permits the integration of the minority group inside the mainstream. These works suggest that if we approach them with an anti-imperialist perspective, we can gain a better understanding of why these minorities often hold negative views of the United States ethnic and race-based system.

One particular group within ethnic-American literature is Caribbean -Americans. They are characterized by their diasporic status resulting from immigration following World War 2, with a peak during the Post-Civil Rights era (*Encyclopedia*). This migration is motivated by factors such as political turmoil, economic hardship, and family reunification. As such, Caribbean- American writers explore the complexities of these diasporic experiences in their writings with a focus on issues of identity, displacement, and belonging. In her book *entitled Identity, Diaspora and Return*

in *American Literature*, (2014), Maria Antonia Oliver-Rotger claims that Caribbean identities are among those identities that are highly exposed to experiencing displacement and the notion of “return” (2) She asserts that this notion of “returning home” is present in contemporary ethnic American writings, including Caribbean ones, where there is always “a nostalgia and the desire for someplace, to be away from the host country in order to see, know again, and fill in the void left by years of geographic and cultural separation” (2).

Indeed, in the last decades, second and third generations from ethnic backgrounds travel to their ancestral homelands “in search for their roots and their routes” (qtd. in Oliver Rotger 3). They do this in order to understand their personal identity and cultural heritage and to gain a greater understanding of their place in the world. However, in contemporary ethnic American narratives, this idea of “return” and reconnecting to one’s roots can be a difficult and a complex experience for those individuals. This concern is what Maria Antonia Oliver-Rotger mentioned later in her book entitled *Identity, Diaspora and Return in American Literature*:

In the late twentieth- and twenty-first-century writings by ethnic American authors, mythologies of the original home began to be revisited and challenged through autobiographical return narratives or through fictional plots dealing with return where home also proved ‘foreign’ to the returnee ... Showing characters that can neither adjust to the home culture nor fully embrace the values of the American people as a final solution. Rather, they must come to terms with their feeling displaced, discriminated against, and under the effect of cultural loss in the United States. (3)

In this research, I present Augustave’s novel *The Roving Tree* as a strong articulation of a contemporary “return narrative”, where this notion of home is similarly proved to be “foreign” for the protagonist (returnee), and where the future is not about creating a new identity but rather being aware of the latter’s complexity. Thus, ethnic-American literature, including Caribbean-American narratives, uses fiction, imagination, and storytelling as a way “to counteract the effects of loss, trauma, exile or being rooted in multiple locations while at the same time belonging to none”

(Oliver-Rotger 6).

1.2 Alienation in *The Roving Tree*

Ethnic literature is often regarded as a source of universal truth and the product of undeniable realities. Throughout time, Caribbean-American works of literature have consistently served as a powerful medium for tackling a range of challenging themes. In her article “Dimensions of Alienation in Two Black American and Caribbean Novels” (1960), Eugenia Collier asserts that through their writings, black authors in the United States and the Caribbean often write about similar themes in their literature, such as alienation, rootlessness, and a search for the past. Western literature also finds these themes, but the “emphasis is lighter, and the alienation is more philosophical than pragmatic” (46). Indeed, this sense of alienation is particularly important for these individuals from ethnic backgrounds, as it reflects their own experiences and is often the fruit of their oppression. The concept in itself is difficult to define, it involves multiple dimensions, including psychology, history, sociology, religion, philosophy, and many other fields of study. Nonetheless, it refers to the feeling of being isolated, separated, and disconnected that “has come about for a reason, usually the result of a complex of factors”, and it is neither desirable nor inherent to human nature (47).

In one of his debates “On the Meaning of Alienation” (1959), Melvin Seeman offers a socio-psychological interpretation of alienation. He primarily focuses on understanding the social conditions behind alienation and ultimately, its psychological impact on individuals. He identifies five alternative types of alienation namely; powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement. These types are derived from different traditional sociological analyses, but they are interconnected and mostly needed for understanding the protagonist’s forms of alienation in different contexts. However, in this study, it is important to note that Seeman’s conceptual interpretations will be employed not as a framework but rather as conceptual tools to differentiate between the distinct forms of alienation experienced by Iris, and mostly to provide a deeper understanding of the nature of her alienations.

1.3 Biography of Elsie Augustave

Elsie Augustave is a Haitian American novelist, educator, speaker, former dancer, and choreographer. Born in Haiti and grew up in the United States. After completing her elementary schooling in 1967 in Haiti, Augustave's parents sent for her and her siblings to migrate and join them in the United States. Augustave's family was part of the wave of Haitian immigrants who left the country during the Duvalier Regime. She started her college studies at Middlebury College in Vermont and as a French and Spanish major, she became interested in the aesthetics analysis of literature, inciting her to make the study of literature, language, and culture a life endeavor (*The Roving Tree*)¹.

During her second academic year, she participated in a study abroad program in Bogotá Colombia for a semester, followed by a junior year in Madrid. Thereafter, she enrolled at Harvard University, pursuing a specialization in Franco-African and Caribbean literature within the Department of romance languages. Her commitment and dedication to her field have been acknowledged through numerous international grants that had enabled her to pursue her research interest as a Fulbright Scholar in cultural studies in both France and Senegal, an experience which had significantly influenced the creative process of her novel as she could take advantage of the cultural insight to craft her narrative (*The Roving Tree*).

Augustave started her professional career as a teacher of French and Spanish at Stuyvesant High School from 1984 to 2015. She has also worked as a consultant on the College Board for French teachers (*People Pill*). Furthermore, she frequently attends conferences and visits universities as a guest speaker. Her varied experiences make her a compelling speaker for public speaking engagement, enabling her to win a multitude of honors and awards.

¹ In this regard, I refer to Elsie Augustave's website which is named after her debut novel *The Roving Tree*

In addition to teaching, Augustave is deeply devoted to dance and worked as a dance instructor at the National Dance Theater of Zaire, something she has in common with the protagonist of her novel *The Roving Tree (Kreyolicious)* where she writes “dance is like poetry. It is a medium to express feelings in a creative way. Body movements replace words, but the same fluidity and rhythm are there” (*The Roving Tree* 212).

In May 2013, Augustave publishes her only novel *The Roving Tree*, which was her very first attempt at writing fiction. While living in Paris, the author found the courage to write a novel, a dream that had been hers for a long time (*African American Literature Book Club*). She revealed that her memories of research in Haiti studying folk culture and vodou religion, together with the cultural experiences she has been through while visiting several countries, had truly inspired the novel’s setting along with its themes of identity and belonging (*African American Literature Book Club*). In addition to her novel, Augustave is also the co-author of *Autour de L'enfant noir de Camara Laye: Un monde à découvrir (Around the African Child by Camara Laye: A World to Discover)* written with Irène d’Almeida and published in 2018. The guide is designed to help readers better understand and analyse the autobiographical novel *The African Child* by the Guinean author Camara Laye.

Ultimately, Augustave is now a retired educator and has turned her attention to writing which she considers as her “second career and main focus in life” (*Authorsinterviews*). She eventually confessed to having completed her second novel and intends to start working on a short story collection soon.

1.4 Plot Overview of the Novel *The Roving Tree*

The Roving Tree is Elsie Augustave’s first and only novel, published in 2013, The story is told from a non-linear structure with well-interwoven events from the past and present. It begins with Iris facing death and then goes back to tell her life story from the beginning. *The Roving Tree* is a form

Of a fictional addressed autobiography written by the protagonist Iris Odys to her newborn Zati to ensure that she has a sense of belonging and does not feel as lost and rootless as her mother.

The novel tells the story of Iris Odys, a Haitian young girl born of rape during François Duvalier's dictatorship and had to face numerous challenges due to extreme poverty and gender inequality. When she was five years old, her mother Hagathe, a middle-class maid, seeking a better future for her daughter, accepted that the latter gets adopted by John and Margaret Winston, a wealthy American family guaranteeing her a more stable and financially secure life. Arrived in the United States at the height of the Civil Rights Movement, Iris encountered other problems related to her identity; her skin colour caused her to feel again excluded and marginalized. A thing that directed her adoptive parents to schedule meetings with a nearby psychologist to help her manage her feelings of confusion and otherness.

Upon learning of her birth mother's death, Iris returns to Haiti and reconnects with her roots. She meets her biological father, a former employer of her mother, and understands the reasons of her adoption, as well as the circumstances of her birth, she also develops a clear perspective on the political repression of François Duvalier's dictatorship. In her motherland, Haiti, Iris is also a victim of intersectional oppression. This reality made her feel a sense of detachment and exclusion in Haiti. Despite enjoying her reconnection with Haitian life along with discovering the Vaudou culture and beliefs, Iris felt like an outsider in Haitian society as a result of the intersection of her gender, class, and hybridity.

Following her experiences of racial discrimination in the United States and political repression in Haiti, Iris finds herself caught in a never-ending process of indecision about whether to stay in Haiti or return to New York, however, the possibility of being locked up in Haiti led her to reconsider her options. When a job opportunity arises in Congo, Iris remembers a proverb she heard in her native village Monn Nèg "When you can't get the mother to breastfeed you, find the grandmother". Thus, in her search for a sense of belonging, she embarks on a life-changing and ending trip to Congo where she works as a dance instructor at the National Arts Institution of Zaire. At the end of

her journey, she meets Bolingo, falls in love with him, and got pregnant with Zati. She eventually dies on her hospital bed in extreme conditions while giving birth to her daughter, leaving behind a letter that constitutes the core of the novel *The Roving Tree*.

1.5 Elsie Augustave's Literary Influences

Augustave is a newly published author who has recently entered the literary scene with the publication of her debut novel *The Roving Tree*. Despite her limited body of published works, Elsie's literary inspirations are truly rich and come from diverse literary influences. Growing up in a household that valued reading, she revealed her admiration for the magic of words, confessing that her desire to create leaves her no choice but to read whatever she can get her hands on. In this concern, she states what follows:

My grandfather and my aunt liked to read and had books and magazines subscriptions. When I lived with them after my mother left, I used to take their books as soon as the mailman delivered them, stay up late to read, and pretend that they have just arrived after I finished reading them. One of the reasons I was happy when we moved out of Spring Valley to New York City was so that I could visit the French bookstore in Rockefeller Plaza to purchase French Books as I still enjoyed reading in that language.

(Kreyolicious)

Indeed, French literature played a vital role in Elsie's early love for reading. Being born in Haiti with French as an official language, Elsie's early exposure to fiction was Comtesse de Ségur's *Mémoires d'un âne (Memories of a Donkey)* which was the first book she ever read for entertainment. Reflecting on her childhood in Haiti, Augustave recalled her passion for books stating what follows: "whenever my parents sent us money from New York, my sister would use hers to buy apples, grapes... stuff that were considered a delicacy in Haiti then. But me, I would head straight to a bookstore" *(Kreyolicious)*.

Furthermore, Augustave's passion for African literature has been long-standing, her academic background as a Franco-African and Caribbean literature specialist at Harvard University exposed her to the works of African and Caribbean writers whom she declared motivated her to delve into her Haitian heritage and the socio-economic dynamics of Haiti along with developing a growing interest in African culture (*The Roving Tree*).

Elsie's desire to explore and write about the world in which she belongs has been a constant deriving force in her life. Set in the early 1960s America, during the height of the Civil Rights Movement, her debut novel *The Roving Tree* addresses the plight of the black individual. The novel is, in many ways, a reflection of the author's own experiences as an immigrant to the United States in 1967. Augustave was highly influenced by 1960s and 1970s America, and this influence is evident in her work. The opening sentence of her novel starts with Langston Hughes's quote, highlighting her deep admiration for his contribution during the Civil Rights Movement and his activism within the cultural and literary movement known as the Harlem Renaissance.

In addition to Langston Hughes, Augustave is influenced by many other African American literary figures and movements. Although she did not explicitly state this, it is evident in her novel where she says:

The night when darkness and silence covered my room, I thought of Jamel's militancy, his leadership, and his artistic talent. Hours ago, listening to him and read his poem about black solidarity and the greatness of men like Marcus Garvey, Toussaint Louverture, Malcom X, Martin Luther King Jr, Shaka Zulu, Kwame Nkrumah, and Frederick Douglass was inspiring and uplifting ... The poem ended with a plea to our generation to carry on the dreams of Pan-Africanism and to valorise the greatness of our race. (*The Roving Tree* 43)

Through this passage, I can presume that the author implies her admiration for these historical figures and their messages of Pan-Africanism. Indeed, as a Haitian immigrant living in New York, this influence has impacted Elsie's own understanding of the idea of resistance against oppressive systems, and her connection to post-colonial literature as it pertains to the Haitian experience. In

this concern, she celebrates the black culture and folklore in her novel, while revealing the profound implications of institutional racism and social inequality on black identity and the black experience. This post-colonial discourse is evident in her novel *The Roving Tree* where she challenges the colonial dominant discourse, reveals to readers the reality of colonized people in modern worlds, and subtly incites them to challenge the power dynamics present in modern societies. Another postcolonial reply that is clearly noticeable, is her response to the colonial narrative *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad, offering a different perspective that challenges colonial attitudes and stereotypes. In this concern, she asserts the following “Africa is stereotyped in this book... According to that book, Africans are irrational and violent, which is not true at all, not from my experience anyway” (*The Roving Tree* 242). The reference used in the given excerpt suggests that the author is truly involved in a form of a post-colonial critique that seeks to contest prevailing colonial discourses.

Talking of reference, Elsie’s novel is a product of Postmodern literature, and she clearly acknowledges the influence of this literary movement in her work. One of the ways in which she demonstrates it is through the use of intertextual references as mentioned above. By doing so, she engages with the literary canon and builds upon it. Additionally, she incorporates elements of magic realism which allows her to depict the mythical elements of Haitian vodou religion and spirituality. Through this technique, she represents a fictionalized version of Haiti’s complex culture and history.

Augustave’s novel is described as a story revolving around a young woman’s search for her cultural identity. The story depicts the struggles faced by individuals living in a multicultural environment who must navigate cultural belonging and find their place in society. In this regard, the author, believes that the process of immigration has brought about globalization, making it difficult to speak of a single culture. Accordingly, this leads to an internal identity conflict that is more often experienced by a particular class or ethnic group. (*Memo From La-La Land*).

Ultimately, the author has expressed her admiration for the multiculturalism displayed by Maryse Condé and Isabelle Allende. Hence, her work exemplifies multicultural literature, as it incorporates factors such as Vaudou beliefs and traditions into the narrative, highlighting any other possible differences from the mainstream culture. In this way, she asserts that her novel covers how this issue of cultural identity is “a sort of malaise that is common among people living in a multicultural environment. Thus, they are often pulled in opposite directions by different set of values” (*Authorsinterviews*).

2. Contextual Framework and Socio-Historical Background of the Novel *The Roving Tree*

2.1. Poverty and the Social Gap in Duvalier’s Haiti

Iris Odys is born in the first black republic of the world. The Republic of Haiti, a Caribbean nation that has experienced a turbulent history of political instability, social inequality, and economic hardship (MacLeod et al). One of the most notorious periods in Haitian history was the dictatorship of François Duvalier which Laurent Du Bois in his book *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History* (2012), depicts as “a period of successive economic troubles, a place of disaster, poverty, and suffering, inhabited by desperate people trying to escape” (3). A significant portion of the population in Haiti is composed of individuals of African descent, commonly referred to as “blacks” (321) who often belong to the working class or what is commonly known as the “masses”. The issue of skin colour is crucial in Haitian society where individuals with lighter skin tones, known as the “mulatto elite”, enjoy certain social advantages due to their perceived proximity to whiteness (Du Bois 19). As for Duvalier, “color was class and class was colour”, therefore, this has resulted in a fundamental opposition between the Mulatto bourgeoisie and the black majority, or the masses, leading to a social gap in Haitian society (321).

2.2 Gender Struggle in Duvalier's Haiti

Duvalier's regime was characterized by extreme levels of repression, which can be seen as an innovative approach to maintaining power. What set his regime apart was the level of brutality that had never before been achieved (Dubois 326). In his book *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour and National Independence in Haiti* (1996), David Nicholls asserts that Duvalier's regime is both ruthless and dictatorial. His approach to governance is to be seen as a further continuation of that post-colonial pattern that emerged in the 19th century and from which the country has not entirely freed itself (213-214). In this sense, colonial inheritance is not only a historical phenomenon but also a present-day reality in Haiti. This system of power known as coloniality of power imposed a classification and a categorical separation on these colonized populations (Lugones 751). As a result, certain groups of people, particularly women, are often excluded from positions of authority and become "impossible beings" (757).

Indeed, poor women and those of certain middle-class segments are the most oppressed and exploited groups in Haitian society (Charles 142). In his book *Haiti, State against Nation: the Origins and Legacy of Duvalierism* (1990), Michel-Rolph Trouillot claims that During the early days of the Haitian state, women were generally considered to be "politically innocents" (167). According to him, what characterizes Duvalierist violence is not the fact that it touched women not even the fact that it targeted them more than the previous regimes. Instead, what made it different is the "complete disappearance" of the protection traditionally provided to them. This is evidenced by the fact that François Duvalier himself made it known that women could fall victim to state violence, hence, "the unusual became the principle" (167).

2.3 Black Power America inside *The Roving Tree*

The socio-political and economic turmoil born out of Duvalier's Regime pushed Hagathe, the protagonist's mother, seeking a better future for her child to send her to 1960s America. A period as claimed by Elsie Augustave where "people have a disease called racism and a lot of them are infected with it" (*The Roving Tree* 11). In recent decades, The United States of America has been the world's prime destination for Latinos. In the early 20th century, the Haitians more particularly started to be attracted to the so-called "American Dream", yet, due to the white dominant race, these presumed minorities encounter constraints regarding their race, history, and vivid past. In fact, the country's legacy of slavery has had a lasting impact on the construction of race and the distribution of power along racial lines. The enslavement of black people formed the basis of a racialized society in which white people held power and privilege and people of colour were confined to subordinate positions. Indeed, the experience of black immigrants coming to the United States is unique in that they not only enter American society but specifically black American society. This can result in what Bryce Laporte calls "a double invisibility which means "being a black and a black foreigner (31) in that community.

Iris Odys a Haitian black immigrant during black power America, is not exempt from this phenomenon. In fact, she even faces what Zéphir Flore describes as a "third invisibility" due to her status as a non-English-speaking black foreigner (20). In their book entitled *Black Power: the Politics of Liberation in America* (1967), Carmichael and Hamilton indicate that despite the progress made during the Civil Rights Movement, racism remained deeply ingrained in American society, perpetuated by various institutional and cultural practices (10). This has consequently pushed many black individuals to assume that traditional Civil Rights approaches were not enough in bringing about significant change.

3. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework of the Study

3.1 General Insight into Intersectionality

Intersectionality in its most simplistic form is a way of looking at how different forms of power intersect and cause someone to feel oppressed or privileged. This includes things like gender, class, race, culture, and history, among other social constructs. Unlike other theories such as Feminism, Marxism, and post-colonialism, it is challenging to trace the historical roots of Intersectionality. However, it has emerged from the experiences of black feminists and women of Colour who felt the need to look for a specific paradigm that would understand the intersected complexities in their lives. These women were the subject of oppression not only based on their gender but also on their race and many other factors. They recognized that their experiences were different from those of the white feminists and that a more inclusive framework was needed.

In 1989, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, a prominent theorist of feminism and critical race theory was credited for being the first to coin the term “intersectionality” in her seminal work “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Anti-Discrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics” (1989). In this article, she uses the term “demarginalizing” to refer to the need to address and recognize the experiences of African American women who face multiple forms of oppression based on their gender and race. She, a civil rights advocate, believes that anti-discrimination law fails at addressing the experiences of women of colour as it treats race and sex separately rather than recognizing the intersection of both. In this regard, she asserts that “these problems of exclusion cannot be solved simply by including black women within an already established analytical structure (140). She further argues that feminist activists and scholars should not consider race and gender as separate categories. In this way, she illustrates her intersectional approach by comparing the discrimination faced by black women to a traffic intersection as follows:

Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination. (149)

In 1991, Crenshaw adopted intersectionality in the study of the experiences of black women who encounter violence due to their sex and skin colour. In her article “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color” (1991), she concentrates on the problems of rape and assault, assuming that the violence experienced by these women is due to both their race and gender and that these experiences “tend not to be presented within the discourses of either feminism or antiracism” (1244). Thus, to fully understand these experiences, there should be a separate discourse that would not contribute to their double oppression. Kimberlé’s argument about intersectionality is that the focus on one aspect of identity, such as gender, in the case of violence against women can be “problematic” because it ignores how other dimensions of identity, such as race and class intersect with gender and can form women’s unique experiences of violence (1242). Due to its ability to highlight inequalities and analyze individuals from various backgrounds, Intersectionality has gained widespread acceptance across various disciplines, fields, and theoretical perspectives. It is considered an umbrella theory that includes but is not limited to philosophy, social sciences, psychoanalysis, multiculturalism, disability studies, and others, beyond its original roots in black feminism (Davis 68). Thus, it is important to understand the many practical applications of intersectionality to expose more diverse applications and perceptions of the theory. In this way, Crenshaw, Mc Call, and Cho, in their article “Towards a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Application, and Praxis” (2013), explain that intersectionality can be broadly categorized into three types of engagement: the first involves using intersectionality as a theoretical framework to study and investigate different intersections of identity the second consists of “discursive debates” about intersectionality as a theoretical and methodological paradigm, and the

third consists of using intersectionality as a tool for political interventions (785). Although intersectionality has been broadly approved by many disciplines, many researchers remain uncertain regarding its practical applications. Nevertheless, its vagueness “has enabled it to be drawn upon in nearly any context of inquiry” (Davis 77). Offering the potential to explore numerous combinations of intersecting differences. In his article “In Dialogue: Postcolonial Theory and Intersectionality” (2015), Stefan Wallaschek argues that “there are shared grounds on which both intersectional and postcolonial approaches can build up”. He further assumes that his study is not about merging both theories into one but demonstrating how they complete each other (220). Thus, he claims that the practices and experiences encountered by individuals are connected to one dominant discourse and power structures, which are examined from both intersectional and postcolonial perspectives (223).

3.2 Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonialism is a theoretical framework that reads and interprets the effect of colonialism on cultures and societies (Ashcroft et al 168). The first attempts to explore the legacy of colonialism date back to the late 1970s, with works such as Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978). In this work, Said sheds light on Western colonial dominance and its representation of the East. The book has been a major contribution to the field of colonial discourse. However, regarding postcolonialism as a theory, it was not until the late 1980s that Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, in their influential book *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989), coined the term and opened the door to other scholars and theorists to bring their perspectives and ideas into the field of postcolonial studies. This marked the beginning of postcolonialism which focused on the impact of colonialism on various aspects of society, including race, gender, culture, and class...etc.

Postcolonial theorists such as Frantz Fanon, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha, drew inspiration from earlier theories such as Marxism, Psychoanalysis, and Feminism, as well as Deconstruction, Essentialism, and Structuralism. This influence is evident in their works where they drew upon influential thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Lacan to explore colonialism's establishment of power structures and its shaping of social hierarchies and identities. Postcolonialism emerged as an important theory during the twentieth century in the domain of literature. It serves as a powerful tool that voices marginalized subjects, offering a vivid image of the deadly impact of colonialism and imperialism. This theory also examines the workings of power structures in neo-colonial worlds and questions the notion of fixed identities by analyzing how they are constructed, defined, and challenged in colonial/postcolonial worlds. By developing concepts and ideologies, post-colonial theorists effectively depicted the perpetuation of power structures in neo-colonial eras, along with challenging colonial stereotypes such as notions of inferiority, ignorance, and primitiveness. Accordingly, this research will use Bhabha's concepts of otherness, mimicry, and hybridity. Additionally, it will draw upon the conceptual frameworks of Anibal Quijano and Maria Lugones' ideas on the colonality of power and gender. These concepts are pivotal to my study and will be further discussed in the subsequent section.

3.3 Bhabha's Postcolonial Concepts

Homi K. Bhabha is an Indian- British scholar and one of the leading voices and influential figures in postcolonial discourse. He wrote many articles and published significant works such as *Nation and Narration* (1990), and *The Location of Culture* (1994). *The Location of Culture* is widely respected in the field of postcolonial studies. It contains his most important writings and introduces useful concepts such as mimicry, ambivalence, hybridity, and difference. These concepts are extremely important for understanding postcolonial identities and analyzing postcolonial texts.

In this work, Bhabha examines the intricate cultural and political divisions that exist between the spheres of gender, class, race, ethnicity, and culture, with these concepts, he delves into the interconnectedness of these categories and highlights how they influence and intersect with each other within postcolonial contexts.

3.3.A Otherness

Much Postcolonial theory is built in large part around the concept of otherness. The term refers to an individual's exclusion from social, political, and cultural power structures. Otherness or Alterity are terms primarily adopted by philosophers to refer to a “philosophic problem” of being separate from oneself. In itself, the term is derived from Lacan’s concept of “other”, where he claims that there are two definitions of “other”. Postcolonial theorists claim that the one with a small “o” designates the colonized, and the one with a capital “O”, also called the “great Other”, indicates the colonizer. The latter is significantly important for the subject because “the subject exists in its gaze” (Ashcroft et al 155). In other words, the other’s identity and sense of self is shaped by the way he/she is perceived by the great Other.

The term has since been used interchangeably by postcolonial theorists to refer to the feeling of being other or different. (Ashcroft et al 9). However, in postcolonial studies, the concept of otherness takes a discursive dimension, thus, the construction of “otherness” cannot occur without the colonial discourse and its imperial assumptions and depiction of the colonized as inferior and different. (10). The postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak uses the term “Othering” to refer to the process by which the colonizer with his discourse creates the “mastered subject” or the “other” (Ashcroft et al 156).

3.3.B Mimicry

Mimicry as Merriam -Webster suggests, is the act of imitating something but “may allow for some variation”. In postcolonialism, Mimicry is the representation of the difference felt by the other. Homi Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994) describes mimicry as one of the most effective strategies used by the colonial to exercise his power (85). These strategies include hegemonic and dominant discourses which distort the other’s identity and press him to desire

recognition and gain acceptance. Thus, he becomes “almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha 86).

Postcolonial theorists claim that the adoption of the colonizer’s behaviors, culture, and values is “never a simple reproduction of those traits. Rather, the result is a ‘blurred copy’ of the colonizer that can be quite threatening” (Ashcroft et al 125). It is threatening because it can expose the ambivalent colonial discourse. From one perspective, this forced resemblance acts as a sign of submission and one of the colonizer’s ways to maintain power and exert influence over the different other. However, it can also be perceived as a mockery, as when the colonized practices mimicry, this imitation is not the exact reproduction of the great other’s traits. Thus, it distorts and parodies his ways. Besides being a mockery, mimicry can create uncertainty and weakness in the dominance of the colonial power because it empowers the colonized to resist. Consequently, the colonizer’s authority is ambivalent and contradictory, causing a threat and a shift of power from the colonizer to the colonized.

3.3.C Ambivalence

Ambivalence is a term introduced in the field of psychoanalysis that describes the state of wanting something and its other simultaneously (Ashcroft et al 10). In contemporary studies of postcolonialism, Bhabha adopted the concept to depict both the positive and negative feelings that the colonizer and colonized feel toward each other. Bhabha claims that ambivalence comes from mimicry (120), when the colonized mimics the colonizer, he maintains a certain level of difference. Therefore, “The relationship is ambivalent because the colonized is never simply and completely opposed to the colonizer” (Ashcroft et al 10).

So, instead of assuming that some colonized subjects are ‘complicit’ and others ‘resistant’, Bhabha suggests that the colonized’s attitude towards the colonizer is ambivalent as it involves elements of both complicity and resistance (Ashcroft et al 10). Bhabha introduced the concept of ambivalence to describe various situations, such as the relationship between the colonizer and colonized, the ambivalent state of colonial discourse, and the experience of the colonized when

encountering new social norms and culture. Therefore, the existence of these two opposite feelings leads to a sense of being in-between and not fully belonging to either culture.

3.3.D Hybridity

The term hybridity had a long history, based on linguistic studies, the philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin described hybridity as a language derived from two different social languages using the examples of Creole and Pidgin. It then evolved and found its meaning in postcolonial studies. In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha reviewed the term and used it as a postcolonial concept. He defines it as the coexistence of two or more different languages, traditions, and cultures to create a conflicting identity that is “neither the one nor the other” (Bhabha 25). Hybridity for Bhabha is a sign of the colonizer’s effectiveness and ability to maintain control over the “other”. As it is claimed by him, “It [hybridity] is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the ‘pure and original identity of authority’” (Bhabha 112).

By creating discriminatory and hybrid identities, the colonizer and through his colonial discourse aims to mask his oppressive actions, secure his authority and his idea of pure and superior identity. Therefore, the consequence of this hybridization is a culture that is neither like the original cultures nor completely independent from them. It is rather a space that Bhabha calls the ‘third space’ or in-between space where different cultures interact and intersect, creating something new and unique (Ashcroft et al 108).

3.3.E Coloniality of Power /Gender

Coloniality of power is a concept that reveals the political, racial, cultural, and social hierarchies imposed by European colonialism in Latin America. It is developed by the Peruvian sociologist and thinker Anibal Quijano who attests that the manifestation of the coloniality of power is noticed through the transition from colonialism to coloniality, a situation where colonized people still live under the exploitation, dominance, and governance of a regime similar to the colonial state (qtd. in Fasakin 906). In doing so, he incites colonized people to challenge and move away from the Western

understanding of power and domination that perpetuates their colonial power dynamics.

Inspired by Quijano's concept of the coloniality of power, the Feminist and leader in Decolonial feminism Maria Lugones, defines the intersection of racism, capitalism, and gender oppression in the concept of "coloniality of gender". In her article "Toward a Decolonial Feminism" (2010), she claims that the coloniality of power does not only refer to racial classification but also influences gender relations. According to her, European colonialism imposed and continues to impose its colonial gender on colonized people by positioning women as inferior to men. In doing so, she deduces that in order to understand colonized women's oppression, we have to "combine processes of racialization, colonization, capitalist exploitation, and heterosexualism ... [therefore] [she] calls the possibility of overcoming the coloniality of gender "decolonial feminism" (Lugones 747).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced Caribbean-American literature and its major themes in connection to the novel being analyzed. Then, I have provided a brief definition of alienation. Moreover, I have examined the author's biographical background and literary influences, as well as provided a summary of the novel's plot. Furthermore, by examining the socio-historical and cultural context of the novel, I offered a deeper insight into its major themes and events. At last, I introduced intersectionality as a theoretical framework that elucidated its basic principles and origins. I eventually integrated the main postcolonial concepts with which I intend to analyze this work, namely Bhabha's concepts of (otherness, mimicry, ambivalence, and hybridity), together with Anibal Quijano and Maria Lugones's concepts of coloniality of Power and Gender.

Chapter Two: Deconstructing Intersectional Oppression in *The Roving Tree*: Unveiling Alienation as a Response to Hybridity, Racial, Ethnic, Social, and Gender Oppression

Introduction

Drawing upon the theory of Intersectionality, this chapter is an analysis of the protagonist's sense of alienation as a result of her intersectional identity. It consists of two parts; the first part is an analysis of Iris' immigration to the United States and her sense of alienation due to the intersection of her race, and her ethnicity. In this sense, Bhabha's concepts of otherness, mimicry, and ambivalence are used to analyze this aspect. The second part discusses how Iris' intersection of her race, gender, class, and hybridity in Haiti, deepens her sense of alienation. This section will eventually be examined through the lens of the coloniality of power and gender, as discussed by Anibal Quijano and Maria Lugones to show how the power dynamics in Haiti further intensifies her sense of exclusion.

I- Analysis of Intersectionality: Iris' Alienation in America: Racial Discrimination and Ethnic Prejudice

I- Racial Discrimination in *The Roving Tree*

In Elsie Augustave's *The Roving Tree*, Iris is the protagonist and one of the feminine characters who is shattered by her intersecting identities. The novel starts with a prologue depicting Iris' final desire as she confronts death, then goes back to tell her story from the beginning. The protagonist's last wish was for her daughter to know who she is, as she "[Iris] did not want her to feel rootless, trapped in a world of darkness" (*The Roving Tree* 1). Iris' last wish encapsulates her profound feeling of being disconnected, and a yearning for belonging that pervades her entire journey. To gain a better understanding of Iris' source of alienation, I will examine the power structures present in her life.

The novel starts with an involuntary adoption and immigration of a five-year-old Haitian girl to America, a sudden displacement that initially left young Iris confused about the changing happening in her life reminding her that “[she] was away from Monn Nèg’s narrow dirt roads, where cars seldom passed and torches and gas lamps brightened dark nights. Indeed, [her] way of life had changed” (*The Roving Tree* 5). Hagathe, Iris’ mother, agrees to her daughter’s adoption because she is concerned about both the oppressive Haitian patriarchal system as well as the detrimental poverty ruining Iris’ life. Zéphir Flore in his book *The Haitian Americans*, reports that most Haitians, have come to the United States because of the total absence of a secure life in their homeland. The oppressive political and economic turmoil born out of Duvalier’s dictatorship, caused people from different backgrounds to “lose all hopes for a decent life in Haiti” (68).

The really significant waves of Haitian immigrants entering the United States occurred in the late 1950- early 1960, coinciding with the presidency of François Duvalier, commonly known as Papa Doc. The reception of Haitian immigrants in other countries, including the United States, is usually far from welcoming. They are the subject of numerous challenges as they often face various forms of discrimination such as xenophobia, anti-black racism, and negative attitudes towards Vaudou beliefs and religion that often furthers an already rampant anti-Haitianism (Jean-Charles 12).

Haitian immigrants do not come to the United States as a tabula rasa². Their physical appearance is just as crucial as their values, beliefs, and cultural background. Studies about the experiences of Haitian immigrant people in the United States highlight the significant impact of the racial discrimination these people face because of their status as black immigrants that poses

² A Latin term that means a clean or blank slate

troubling challenges, as asserted by Zéphir Flore, “When you are Haitian, you are black and you are immigrant” (Zéphir 138). To illustrate these issues faced by Haitians in Augustave’s novel *The Roving Tree*, it is important to mention that the protagonist Iris emigrated to the United States in 1961 (*The Roving Tree* 5). A tumultuous period under which black people, including Haitian immigrants, confronted significant challenges and made difficult choices. One such obstacle is the low and disadvantaged position in which they often find themselves in American society. In this concern, “at a very early stage [they] come to realize that they have entered a society that, unlike their own, uses a classification system based on race” (Zéphir 120).

Being black and Haitian, the protagonist Iris Odys is not exempt from this phenomenon. From her very encounter with her American parents, she instantly noticed her dissimilarity with her family and she utters the following:

When John and Margaret visited our home in Monn Nèg, I was far from imagining that they would mold the rest of my life. I remember being intrigued and fascinated by their appearance. I could not stop staring at their skin that was even lighter than the shop owner in town who everyone called the Syrian. They both had long, slender legs and hands that felt so soft. The color of their hair reminded me of the straw that women weaved to make hats and baskets to sell in the market. Their lips were thin and pink; their noses long. As far as I knew, they fit the descriptions of the master and mistress of the waters that I had heard about in the folk tales that adults told every evening. Everyone called them Blan.

(*The Roving Tree* 5)

At first, Iris had a completely different understanding of race. The fascination that she held for her adoptive family stemmed purely from innocence. Upon meeting her elder sister Cynthia, also adopted by the Winstons, Iris remarked, “Cynthia looked like John and Margaret and like most of the people in the airport” (*The Roving Tree* 6). Despite this difference, Iris gradually adapted to her new life and became “fully Americanized” (*The Roving Tree* 13). “[she] even learned to accept the way people stared at [her] when [she] was out with [her] new family” (9). However, the problems

regarding her identity are far from being over. The contrast between her caring family environment and the harsh realities of the outside world of sixties America became increasingly distressing. In this way, Elsie Augustave denounced racial discrimination by portraying the experiences of black individuals within a society where anti-black cruelty had become a deeply ingrained norm. This norm had been built upon a detrimental notion, that “to be black is to be inferior... less than human, and most importantly, deserving of the physical and psychological mistreatment and marginalization” (Comrie et al 76). The following passage displays how Iris was both physically and psychologically mistreated:

What I disliked most was the way people found an excuse to touch my hair like a woman did one Sunday when Mom, Dad, Cynthia, and I went to brunch... my sister and I went to the restroom, and when we returned, we found Mom and Dad engaged in a conversation with an older couple ... the man raised his eyebrows. His wife stared at me... before moving closer to me. With a frown on her face, she said ‘I always wondered what these people’s hair felt like’, and without the slightest hesitation, she patted my hair. Flushed with irritation, I took a step back. Stop petting me. I’m not a dog I said. She quickly removed her hand from my hair. I noticed Mom and Dad smiled when the couple moved away.

(The Roving Tree 9)

Iris felt vexed and outraged, and the fact that her parents smiled at that couple, shows how anti-blackness mistreatment became such a common and accepted behavior during 1960s America. Furthermore, the racial discrimination faced by Iris did not stop at an interpersonal level, at her predominantly white school in Westchester, she is verbally insulted for being black “that nigger better not sit here... they’re loud, lazy, and stupid” (*The Roving Tree 9*). That same day, she is told by one of her classmates to “Go back to Africa” (10).

It is through these past incidents that Iris came to realize that not all whites are free from prejudices and are as welcoming as the Winstons. In the above-mentioned excerpts, Augustave wanted to point out that if Iris were to encounter the N-word³, then, it would have to be outside her adoptive family's home. Therefore, despite her assimilation and adaptation to life in the United States, she still has much to learn about American society and most essentially, to comprehend what the term race does connote as Zéphir Flore asserts: [for Haitian black immigrants] the term black does not convey the same meaning as it does in their homeland-that is to say freedom, independence, majority equality, and pride. To some segments of American society, it can mean the exact opposite: inferiority, minority, inequality, and oppression (120).

Following her encounter with racial discrimination, Iris' understanding of race completely changed, leading her to question her own sense of belonging and whether she was truly accepted. Furthermore, she finds herself drawing comparisons with her elder sister Cynthia who "did not care about being adopted as much as [Iris] did because she had [their]parents' skin color. Besides she had no recollection of a life without the Winstons. And [Iris]did" (*The Roving Tree* 10).

It is important to acknowledge that Iris while being a young girl, encountered the distressing reality of racial discrimination. In the process of adapting to her new life, this overwhelming experience not only made her feel strange but also left her with a profound sense of exclusion. It prompted her to raise questions about the N-word, as evidenced by her contemplative statement "All afternoon the words 'nigger' and 'Africa' echoed in my mind" (*The Roving Tree* 10).

³ A slang word that refers to black people. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the N-word as a term used inoffensively to refer to the word nigger.

Seeking clarity, she turned to her parents, who explained that “[r]acists in this country use this name to insult black people... they have a disease called racism. A lot of people in this country are infected with it. Dr. Martin Luther King is trying to cure them” (*The Roving Tree* 11). Additionally, Iris is baffled when she unintentionally overhears her parents, John and Margaret engaged in a conversation, she learns that in a country that claims to offer equal opportunities, individuals are still treated differently because of their skin colour. Iris describes the discussion between her parents as follows:

John: I wonder if adopting Iris was the best thing for her

Margaret: Why do you say that?

John: I don't know if this country is ready for a black child living with a white family. I'm afraid she may suffer from more racist acts... maybe we're taking this dream of little black and white children living happily together a bit too literally.

Margaret: I still think she's better off here than in Haiti ... what happened on the phone?

John: The Father [classmate's father] said that... liberals like us are ruining the country, and that life would be better here if we would leave Negroes where they belong. (*The Roving Tree* 11)

Overwhelmed by the conversation, Iris could not bear to listen any further, “tears filled [her]eyes as [she] wandered where people like [her] belonged. The girl in the cafeteria said in Africa” (*The Roving Tree* 11). Iris did not know what to do, the hurtful remark of her white classmates in the school cafeteria echoed in her mind, leading her to feel excluded and marginalized. A thing that directed her parents to schedule meetings with a psychologist to help her.

1.1 Otherness in *The Roving Tree*

As mentioned in the first chapter, the way American society is racially constituted is largely shaped by its history of colonialism/slavery. Colonialism played an important role in shaping the way both the colonizer and colonized perceive themselves. In the novel being studied, Iris is a girl from the global south, she represents the ‘other’ or the ‘foreigner’ in a dominant, imperialist country, the USA. As a result, her racial identity is constructed by the historical experiences of slavery and colonialism which led to the establishment of power structures and hierarchies that are maintained through the colonial discourse of the one who holds power. These power structures reinforce this notion of otherness, recreating and perpetuating a sense of difference and hierarchies within society. In light of this, the colonial ‘other’ has been described in various ways by postcolonial theorists. In general, the term refers to “the colonized subject [who] is characterized as ‘other’ through discourses such as **primitiveness** and **cannibalism** as a means of establishing the **binary** separation of the colonizer and the colonized and asserting the naturalness and primacy of the colonizing culture and world view” (Ashcroft et al 154-155).

In this concern, this notion of “otherness” involves the process of excluding and marginalizing the colonized subject based on his differences. This can include race, culture, and ethnicity. To illustrate this from the novel, Iris is a colonized subject who is viewed as the “other” through discourses such as primitiveness “[t]hat nigger better not sit here... [t]hey are loud, lazy, and stupid” (*The Roving Tree* 9). Upon her arrival to the USA, she is treated as inferior, second, and different. This difference is well displayed in her visit to the psychologist Dr. Connelly’s cabinet who again made it clear that she is different saying that “it should be expected that child would be traumatized when she is ... brought to live with people who are different from her in every way” (*The Roving Tree* 13). Iris was consumed by this sense of otherness that keep coming back. A feeling that she felt for the very first time outside with her family, that day of the fight in the school cafeteria, and finally, at Dr. Connelly’s office. This feeling drives her to copy and emulate her family’s physical traits to avoid and fight exclusion.

1.2 Mimicry in *The Roving Tree*

Mimicry is practiced by colonized people to camouflage their identity in order to gain inclusion and acceptance in the society they are being excluded. This practice is done through assimilating and adopting the cultural norms and practices of the dominant group. In connection with the novel, when requested by Dr. Connelly to draw a picture of her family, the protagonist Iris portrays everyone's face, including her own in beige (*The Roving Tree* 13). This act of depicting herself in the same colour as her family can be interpreted as a form of camouflage. Indeed, the protagonist is seen as the "other", and this process of othering leads her to practice mimicry, as explained by Homi Bhabha in his seminal work *The Location of Culture*, "Mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. [It] is, thus a sign of a double articulation, a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which "appropriates" the other as it visualizes power" (Bhabha 86). In this sense, the following extract shows how Iris denies her own difference by pretending to be white in order to fit in American society and gain privilege:

Determined not to be different from my new family, I was willing to do anything not to stand out... Lighten up your skin ... My heart jumped with joy when I read those words in a copy of *Beautiful Black Teens* Magazine that I had picked up at the library. Thinking I had found my salvation, I tore out the advertisement and carefully folded it before hiding it in my book bag. When I reached home, I look at the ad again and again. whatever it took, I decided, I had to look like the woman in the magazine. It was hard to tell whether she was white or black and that was how I wanted to be. If people could not tell that my skin was dark, they would not reject me or single me out. (*The RovingTree*14)

To overcome her feeling of otherness and wrongness, Iris tried to assimilate into and mimic American social norms. For one, she learned to speak English and adjusted to eating new food (*The Roving Tree* 8). Besides this simple way of trying to fit in, she also bought an ad-cream to make her skin lighter. In addition to that, she decided that she needed to work on her nose as stated by her:

As I helped Mom take the laundry out of the washing machine, an idea came to my mind. ... I took out the clothespin I was hiding under my pillow. I clipped it on my nose, and though I could hardly breathe, I endured the pain and concentrated on breathing through my mouth. I woke up several times during the night, not only to breathe but to rub my swollen nose and put the clothespin back on. (14)

The above-mentioned excerpt depicts Iris' willingness to do whatever it takes to gain acceptance and resemble Americans. When her mother asked her what she was doing, she simply replied "I want a nose like yours ... please buy this for me" (15). Moreover, Iris' eventual obsession with straight hair can be seen as an issue originating from racial insecurities, "wherever, [her mom] combines out [her] matted hair, [she] usually end[s] up in tears, wishing having Cynthia's soft hair flowing down [her] back" (*The Roving Tree* 9). All the mentioned Western beauty standards, such as having a small nose, straight hair, and a white face, are westerns physical traits associated with power and privilege, and therefore, they are perceived as better and superior.

1.3 Ambivalence in The Roving Tree

Bhabha claims that the effect of mimicry is camouflage. This camouflage is done to protect the other from otherness. However, due to the latter's attachment to his native identity, this imitation has not been perfectly successful. In this regard, Bhabha does not entirely agree with Fanon's view of mimicry which is to "turn white or disappear" (qtd. in Bhabha 120). He rather suggests that the colonizer opts for a more ambivalent and paradoxical choice which is camouflage. This process is first described by Bhabha in his "Signs Taken for Wonders" (1985) as follows:

Mimicry reveals something in so far as it is distinct from what might be called an itself behind. The effect of mimicry is camouflage ... It is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled – exactly like the technique of camouflage practiced in human warfare. (120-121)

According to Bhabha, ambivalence is created through mimicry (Bhabha 120). He described mimicry as distinct from the intended original, the process of imitating something while maintaining a certain level of difference. Therefore, the result of mimicry is not a reproduction of the original, but a camouflage or what Bill Ashcroft et al call a “blurred copy” (125). To support this idea from the novel, *Iris*, as a colonized subject, mimics and behaves like the colonizer but at the same time, she does not want to abandon her native identity. This ambivalent feeling is well depicted when she tries to mimic the white woman in the magazine where she says “It was hard to tell whether she was white or black, and that was how I wanted to be” (14). This quote displays perfectly the ambivalent feeling *Iris* was going through. She is in a way longing for the physical traits of the colonizer while she is also against denying her black identity.

Another example of *Iris*’ sense of ambivalence is well-depicted in her feeling of nostalgia for ‘home’. The paradoxical process of assimilation, together with the desire to maintain a connection to her native identity confused her and left her with a feeling of ambivalence. In *The Roving Tree*, *Iris* exhibits all the signs of a nostalgic individual. Anouk Smeekes and Jolanda Jetten in their article “Longing for One’s home country: National Nostalgia and Acculturation among Immigrants and Natives” (2019), identify two sorts of nostalgia: nostalgia (time) and homesickness (space). The protagonist *Iris* can be classified in both categories. She is longing for the Haiti of her childhood when: “[she] and [her] cousins used to make clothes out of rags to dress up mango seeds that [they] pretended were babies” ... and [the Haitian rich folklore], while “[inhaling] an aroma that reminded her of the tea [Her] great-grandmother used to make with cinnamon sticks and brown sugar” (*The Roving Tree* 7). Her deep nostalgia and bittersweet yearning for a lost time and space are notable, especially when she says:

About a month later, when the novelty of it all wore off, I began to think about my family in Monn Nèg and missed the aroma of smoke from my great-grandmother’s pipe. I missed the warmth of my mother’s dark, watery eyes, the sounds of my cousins’ laughter, and the taste of mangos that had fallen from the trees. This left me with a yearning for a familiar

world. Sobs often rocked me to sleep when there were no tears left. (*The Roving Tree* 8)

The nostalgic memories from Iris 'childhood highlight the impossibility to return to a lost time and place. she longs for an idealized place that only exists in her mind. As Susan J. Matt attests in her article "You Can't Go Home Again: Homesickness and Nostalgia in U.S History" (2007), "longing for lostplaces, peoples, and times represent a desire to bridge past experience and present conditions" (471).Indeed, in *The Roving Tree*, the brutal displacement experienced by Iris left a profound emotional shock and emptiness in her. Thus, to cope with her present conditions and to find a sense of appertaining within American society, she decides to long for her idealized past and childhood that became a mere dream to her.

2- Ethnic Prejudice in *The Roving Tree*

In addition to racial discrimination, Iris is also a victim of ethnic prejudices. Ethnicity as defined by Amy Morin in her article "Differences between Race vs Ethnicity" (2023), contrary to race is not based on physical traits. It refers to peoples' cultural expression and identification, including their customs, behavioral characteristics, history, language, and religion. As such, immigration for Haitian diasporic individuals is more than the process of moving from one place to another. It represents a profound and fatal shift in their lives. In the novel, Iris 'arrival in New York is a testament to this change, as even the behaviors and the fundamental social norms that once regulated her life in Haiti have been broken and are no longer functioning in her new American life,as stated by her:

The real change in my life happened when Margaret held me by the hand ...A world of magic opened to me. everything seemed so vast, open, and clean. there were no clothes hanging from lines outside, no pots and pans, and calabash bowls stashed inside wicker baskets. I had to get used to a kitchen with appliances and food that I never knew existed.

(*The Roving Tree* 8)

Discourses on Haitian immigrants often focus on the racial discrimination they experience. Therefore, they always tend to neglect the outrageous change they face in their new life. This fatal change is more often related to the contradictory environment they find themselves in. Indeed, the quasi-absence of Haitians' integration into American social conventions and norms is due to the ethnic prejudices inflicted upon them. In their article "Deconstructing the Portrayals of Haitian Women in the Media: A Thematic Analysis of Images in the Associated Press Photo Archive" (2015), Maria José Rendon and Guerda Nicolas assert that Haitian immigrants are the subject of detrimental portrayals. Most of the stereotypes that circulate include Haitians being masters of black magic, practitioners of a supernatural religion (Vaudou), boat people, and AIDS carriers (Rendon and Nicolas 3).

In the novel, the protagonist is not spared from these false assumptions, during her journey in the USA and following the significant change she experienced. Iris as mentioned above, began to have perplexing nightmares. After recounting them to Dr. Connelly, she not only encounters racial discrimination from him but also becomes a target of ethnic stereotypes. In fact, Dr. Connelly speculates that Haitians perceive the moon as a person and assumes that "the dreams [she] had are probably because of [her] exposure to Vaudou" (*The Roving Tree* 14-17). Furthermore, he goes as far as making prejudiced assumptions about Vaudou and Haitians being 'devil worshipers' (18). In truth, Haitian Vaudou had long been perceived through a distorted lens by outsiders "When Haitian boat people were blamed for bringing AIDS to the United States, stereotypical and denigrating portraits of vodou dominated most public discussions about the religion" (Dubois 92). These false assumptions, undoubtedly, influence Haitians' well-being and integration into their "new homeland". Iris is a victim of these stereotypes, upon arriving home, she throws her biological mother's picture to get rid of her past and origins which according to her are the source of her exclusion. In this regard, she asserts what follows:

[T]here was one more thing I needed to do. Once I reached home, I threw the picture of my biological mother in a large black plastic bag that the garbage truck would pick up the next day. Rather than being the person I used to talk to for comfort, she had become responsible for my confusion and I no longer wanted her in my memory. The mother I once loved eventually vanished into oblivion and became a mythical figure beyond reach. (*The Roving Tree* 18)

The protagonist's mother serves as a symbol of her motherland which means her racial and ethnic identity. Through the act of throwing the picture, Iris aims not only to distance herself from her Haitian heritage but to completely get rid of it, believing that it is the cause of her feeling of otherness, exclusion, and alienation. Indeed, the harsh reality of her host country and the intersection of her race and ethnicity forcefully made her realize that she does not have her place in 1960s America. With no other option, Iris seeks a sense of belonging by isolating herself from the larger American society and finding solace within the Haitian black community in New York. This choice can be seen as both a survival and resistance strategy against the discriminatory system of 1960s America. The following part will discuss how the intersection of race and ethnicity contributes to the protagonist's sense of alienation that manifests in a form of rebellion. I will draw on Melvin Seeman's understanding of alienation to analyze this aspect.

2.1 Cultural Expression as a Means of Resistance and Survival in *The Roving Tree*

The Haitians' journey in the USA proves to be onerous upon their arrival, they face numerous hardships and the effect of these difficulties was devastating for them. In his book entitled *The Haitian Americans* Zéphir Flore attests that Haitians, perhaps more than any other group in America are subjected to ethnic stereotypes and racial discrimination (81). He further claims that New York City (where the protagonist resides), "has the largest concentration of Haitians in the country" (90). Indeed, this makes them a highly visible ethnic community, where "[their] presence is real and cannot go unnoticed by anyone" (92). This presence as described by Zéphir in his book entitled *Haitian Immigrants in Black America: A Sociological and Sociolinguistic Portrait* (1996), renders them "invisible" at best and "inferior" at worst (20),

and in both cases, they are marginalized.

The marginalization and alienation that Haitians suffer from especially in the 1960s, urged them to look for various ways to establish a sense of belonging. These means vary from forming ethnic communities to participating in cultural events and connecting with others to share similar experiences. In his article “On the Meaning of Alienation” (1959), Melvin Seeman provides five meanings of alienation including, meaningless, powerlessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement. In this study, I focus specifically on normlessness and isolation, as they seem to be the types of alienation suffered by Iris as a result of her race and ethnic intersection in the United States.

2.2 Iris’ Resistance in the Form of Normlessness

Normlessness is defined as “the lack of commitment to shared social conventions of behavior” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). On his meaning of alienation in a form of normlessness, Seeman adopts Merton’s description of anomie where the social norms regulating an individual are no longer effective as rules for behavior (Seeman 787). As far as the novel is concerned, the protagonist’s case is noteworthy of how her Haitian social norms start to break down as soon as she arrives in the USA. Simple behaviors such as table manners and way of sleeping are no longer functioning in her “new home”, as stated by her:

Indeed, my way of life had changed. I no longer slept on the floor with my cousins nor ate each meal holding an enamel plate on my lap. Now I slept alone in a bed and sat in a hotel dining room at a table covered with a white tablecloth; I learned to use a knife and fork... I found it hard to believe that I could have chicken because, at home in Monn Nèg, it was a special treat reserved for Christmas, New Year’s Day, or Easter. (*The Roving Tree* 5)

Indeed, Iris’ encounter with abnormality and difference provoked a sense of alienation within herself. As such, Seeman argues that when individuals experience a sense of normlessness, they tend to believe that “*socially unapproved means are required to achieve given goals*” (788). He additionally asserts that one of these unapproved behaviors or what he calls “adaptations” is

that of innovation. When considering the novel, Iris is alienated within American social norms and mainstream culture, hence, to achieve her goal of finding a sense of belonging in her host land, she uses culturally disapproved means.

On the one hand, she attends Haitian dance classes as “[she] imagined making Haitian friends who would tell [her] about Haiti and who would perhaps help bring back memories of a life [she] once knew” (*The Roving Tree* 23). The young lady remained dedicated to the dance classes because as expressed by her:

The sounds of drums playing in my mind ...pressing me to reconnect with the culture that only weeks ago had made me feel so ashamed that I had gotten rid of my mother’s picture... the thought of hearing sounds from my childhood in rural Haiti was suddenly like seeing and feeling the sun in the middle of a winter day... the dance classes triggered an emotional and physical release that uplifted and energized me and allowed me to explore and accept the essence of my being. (*The Roving Tree* 22-24)

In addition to attending Haitian dance classes, Iris frequently visits the Haitian bookstore “on a quest to reconnect with more Haitians... [being there] vaguely reminded [her] of Monn Nèg and forced me to summon memories of the little girl [she] once was. Even though her presence in [her] was undeniable, a body of recent experiences overshadowed her” (27). Ultimately, to achieve her goal of finding a sense of belonging in her new home, Iris’ attending of Haitian dance classes together with her constant visits to the Haitian bookstore, are considered culturally rejected and highly criticized means in 1960s America where the white free-minded ideal and mainstream culture are the norm.

2.3 Iris’ Resistance in the Form of Rebellion

Seeman argues that ‘rebellion’ is one of the manifesting forms of isolation, as it “leads men outside the envioning social structure to envisage and seek to bring into being a new, that is to say, a greatly modified, social structure” (qtd .in Seeman 789). To support this from the novel, Iris’ intersection of race and ethnicity caused her to feel isolated. Thus, she engages in a form of a

'rebellion' that is expressed through her joining of the Black Student League. Through her active participation in the club, she intends as expressed by her "to share our common African heritage with the college community so everyone can better understand *The Souls of Black Folk* as W.E.B Du Bois would have put it" (*The Roving Tree* 45). In addition to fighting racial inequality, the protagonist is actively committed to celebrating her ethnic heritage. She attests that "BSL members are not just black Americans. There's a guy from Ethiopia, one from South Africa, and a sister from Kenya... some of us are West Indians or Latinos. Together we celebrate our common African heritage" (*The Roving Tree* 49). Another example of Iris' sense of rebellion is her attending of meetings about Haitian refugees. The following extract from the novel shows how Iris with hundreds of Haitians gathered on Eastern Parkway to protest against the American ethnic-based system:

Hey, hey USA! Stop supporting Duvalier... Fellow Haitians and citizens of the United States, we welcome and thank you for being here tonight. To support the Haitian refugees is to support the ideology of justice this country represents... The American government has extended a welcoming hand to Cuban refugees. But Haitians, who took that same perilous trip across the sea, are imprisoned because they're black, poor, and uneducated, let us remind the politicians in Washington that if Haitians are poor and uneducated, it is because of the political system they fled ... doesn't that make them political refugees...we must inform the national and the international communities that Mother Liberty has denied Haitians their natural right to freedom in this land of opportunity". (*The Roving Tree* 26)

As illustrated in the above-mentioned passages, Iris suffers from a structural social exclusion, as such, she is doubly othered due to the intersection of her race and ethnic identity. This exclusion makes her isolated and eventually pushed her to rebel against the existing social structure in the 1960s USA. Therefore, through resistance, she and the Haitian black community seek to establish a greatly modified social structure that is more inclusive of their identity.

According to this argument of alienation and turning back to our investigation of intersectionality, *The Roving Tree* shows the sense of alienation through the intersectional oppression of Iris in the USA. In this regard, Patricia Hill Collins, one of the pioneers in the field of intersectionality, in her article “The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought” (1989) affirms that “one key reason that standpoints of oppressed groups are discredited and suppressed by the more powerful is that self-defined standpoint can stimulate oppressed groups to resist their domination” (749). In the context of the novel, when Iris found that the American standpoint was inadequate, she tried to modify it and develop one of her own. In doing so, her rebellion and resistance, that is to say “[her] actions exemplify the connection between experiencing oppression, developing a self-defined standpoint on that experience, and resistance” (Collins 749).

I conclude that Iris’ rebellion in America is a second different form of resistance as she already tried to resist the social structure through mimicry. Hence, she decided to find shelter in the Black Student League to fight against racial inequality and ethnic prejudices that are part of her structural intersected oppression. In this concern, When addressing the battered black women’s shelters due to the intersection of their class and gender status, Kimberlé Crenshaw, in her article “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color” (1991), claims that “ these shelters serving these women cannot afford to address only the violence inflicted by the batterer; they must also confront the other multilayered and routinized forms of domination that often covered in these women’s lives” (1245). As a point of fact, it is accurate to say that the protagonist Iris found shelter in the Black Student League. Working as a member of that union, she was able to express the intersection of both her racial and ethnic oppression. However, despite these attempts, Iris could not find a sense of belonging in American society because as claimed by her Haitian friend she is “a long-lost daughter of Haiti” (*The Roving Tree* 27).

II- Analysis of Intersectionality: Iris' Alienation in Haiti: Race, Class, Gender, and Hybridity

1- Haiti's Race, Class, and Gender Struggle in *The Roving Tree* as a Result of the Coloniality of Power

To provide a brief historical background of the Haitian Republic, it is worth mentioning that despite being the first black republic in the world, a place where blacks defeated Napoleon's undefeated army and threw off French rule, Haiti never reached independence. As Beverly Bell attests in her book *Walking on Fire* (2001) "self-proclaimed emperors and presidents -for-life, militaries, and Tonton Macoutes" all contributed to the country's downfall and exploited the poor peasants for the benefit of the small elite (10). In fact, they are all part of colonialism's legacy or what is known as the coloniality of power. Anibal Quijano and Michael Ennis in their article "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America" (2000), argue that colonialism had left its legacy within colonized nations. This legacy is seen in the perpetuation of a given power structure which according to him: "always involves, partially or totally, the imposition by some (usually a particular small group) over the rest" (557). In Haiti, this particular small group known as the small elite is composed of the government and the white elite known as the mulatto. The mulattos, holding the blood of the white colonizer and having lighter skins, considered themselves superior to black "because of their closeness to the whites' skin color and customs" (Zéphir 29).

Indeed, a significant portion of Haiti's population is of African descent. Throughout the colonial period, these people were enslaved, dehumanized, and assigned to the lowest level of the social hierarchy. Even after independence, this oppressive treatment persisted. During Duvalier's era, the country's light-skinned elites continued to suppress black people. For Duvalier, class, and colour were "inseparable". He believed that a person's skin colour is enough to determine his social class and vice-versa, as for him, "Color was class, and class was color" (Du Bois 19).

Therefore, a deep division emerged between the mulatto ruling class and the black serving class, resulting in a significant social gap within Haitian society. As far as the novel is concerned, Iris states that “this country [Haiti] seems to be divided into two groups that share the same geography but not much more... one group is meant to serve and the other to be served... that is precisely why we have to consider another system. We need to end class struggles” (122). In fact, despite being in the USA, Iris frequently hears of Haiti’s latest political development. However, she remains unaware that her parents come from these two different groups, one serving and the other being served.

Upon learning about the death of her biological mother, Iris returned to her homeland Haiti. She saw in this home return an opportunity to learn about the reasons for her adoption as well as the circumstances of her birth. The Haitian young lady carries with her questions about her biological parents’ relationship and eagerly seeks to find answers. She found out that Hagathe, her mother, worked as a maid in her father’s domestic household. He possessed everything that seemed to destine him for a good life, including finding himself in Haitian high society. In the novel, he is described as well as his family in the following manner:

Monsieur Bonsang [Iris’ Grandfather] came from a pedigreed mulatoo family. His father often bragged about his ancestor, a mulatoo slave owner whose patriarch was a Frenchman from Normandy, [who] fall in love with a free black woman, who bore him two sons and a daughter. Thus began his family lineage”. (*The Roving Tree* 62-63)

As defined by Zéphir Flore in his book *The Haitian Americans* (2004), Haitian Mulattos are children of French fathers and black slave mothers (30). Brahami, Iris’ father, is a rich mulatto of French origins. A man of “good blood” (bon sang) as his name literally means. In the novel, the author says that in Haiti, “the more French ancestors one could trace, the better” (56). As such, after independence, the nation was divided along colour lines, individuals with lighter skin enjoyed some privileges while the masses are black and poor. This fact is evidenced in the novel, where Iris’ mother, of black descent from Africa, lived in poor conditions. The very same poverty that forced her to work as a maid in the Bonsang household and therefore to be raped by Iris’ father. Iris comes

to realize that in addition to the intersectional oppression she experienced in the USA, even her very conception is the site of intersectional violence and oppression. Thus, her entire identity and existence are challenged.

2- Sexual Violence as a Result of the Intersection of Race, Gender, and Class in *The Roving Tree*

In Haiti, poor women of colour are the most affected subjects under the system of classification. In her article “Between Intersectionality and Coloniality: Rereading the Figure of the Poto-Mitan Women in Haiti” (2021), Sabine Lamour, uses the term the *Poto- Mitan* referring to Haitian black women as pillars of society and as “being indispensable to the maintenance of society” (139). The concept in itself has its roots in slavery designating black women who “were obliged to perform work traditionally reserved for men, especially working the land or women of urban working classes, often cooks and servants” (143). After independence, the same social structure is perpetuated where black women are still excluded from spheres of power.

In the same article, the author claims that there is a link between intersectionality and coloniality. She defines intersectionality as a concept that facilitates the understanding of the interconnectedness of different forms of power, such as gender, race, and class, and how the latter influence various aspects of peoples’ lives (Lamour 138). Coloniality in its turn is meant to understand “relations of domination in the contemporary world” (138). After the so-called decolonization, she claims that, “colonialism continues to organize material and discursive relations in formerly colonized societies”, this includes, “the exploitation of the labor force, systemic oppression of particular races and gender relations” (138). In the light of these two concepts, she argues that the Poto-Mitan is “an intersectional figure that exists in the continuum of power” (138). This figure reflects how different forms of power are intersected and it mainly shows how colonialism continues to shape societies even after the end of colonization.

The concept of the *Poto-Mitan* is often a sensitive and complex subject in Haiti. Being black and poor, these women are frequently subjected to marginalization. This mistreatment is particularly evident in urban households. In fact, “both in poor and some middle-class households, women bear the responsibility for various household chores. Nearly one-half of urban households are female-headed” (Charles 145). In the novel, the daily routine of Haitian black women is described as follows:

The poor thing who has to clean the place, do the laundry, and wash the feet of the lady of the house for scraps of food ... a schoolboy pushed her, and the water fell from the bucket she carried on her head, and she had to return to the fountain. When she came back to the house, the woman beat her with a rigwaz because she took too long ... Brahami ... watched the undernourished servant girl ... he felt even more pity when he saw that her face was badly burned, which made him ponder the question he had often asked himself in Paris when he flirted with Communism: could Marxism be the answer to Haiti's color and class division? (*The Roving Tree* 59)

The aforementioned excerpt highlights the contradictory life Iris' father was leading. While he thinks of potential solutions offered by Marxism to end class inequality in his country, he himself perpetuates inequality and abuses his power through his sexual exploitation of his servant. Taking advantage of his position as a rich mulatto man in Haitian high society, Brahami imposed his race, social class, and gender to abuse and sexually overpower Iris' mother. This is a suggestive metaphor for the ways in which Haitian black women were oppressed by the mulatto families they were working for, and how they were victims of white patriarchal supremacy. This intersection, as Maria Lugones attests, renders them “Impossible beings. They are impossible since they are neither European bourgeois women, nor indigenous males” (757). As such, I concur with Lugones' coloniality of gender since the brutal Duvalier dictatorship in Haiti was principally the product of neo-colonialism that despised women and underestimated their existence.

In this sense, Hagathe, Iris' mother, as mentioned above, is a victim of this inequality. she, just like other *Poto-Mitans*, had the same routine. In addition to serving Bonsang's family, “she [Hagathe] buy[s] wholesale merchandise that she would later sell in the market” (*The Roving Tree*

35). Hagathe and her mother worked in Iris' father's home for decades. When Iris' grandmother passed away, Hagathe replaced her. Without the presence of male protection, she saw Bonsang's household as a refuge, a place to shield herself from the dangers of the outside world in Haiti. However, this very shelter turned into a prison for her, as she became a victim of sexual violence by her employer.

In the novel, it is stated that "women have to become mistresses to keep their jobs" (123). Hagathe could not accept such a thing happening, so she left the Bonsang household, and "no one ever mentioned [her] and her baby again ... [also because] Brahami decided that creating a tie with the former maid and her child would further complicate his life" (65). However, the ruthless and cruel outside world in Duvalier's Haiti is harsh and offers no mercy. In fact, prior to the emergence of Duvalier's Regime, women, children, and old individuals in Haiti were defined as political innocents (Charles 139), because women, in particular, were perceived by the state as being:

Dependents, they had the 'privilege' of not being subjected to state violence. Under the Duvalierist state, however, systematic repressive policies undermined the prevailing conception of women as passive political actors, devoted mothers, and political innocents... thus, they begin to be detained, tortured, exiled, raped, and executed. Ironically, state violence created for the first time, gender equality. (Charles 139-140)

Indeed, during Duvalier's reign, women were subjected to similar if not more severe mistreatment compared to men. François Duvalier himself made it known that women could fall victim to state violence, therefore, "the unusual became the principle" (Trouillot 167). In his book, *The History of Haiti* (2008), Steve Coupeau attests that during Duvalier's Regime, many Haitian people, specifically women and children were subjects of kidnapping, rape, and total dehumanization by military forces (155). These military forces as stated in the novel were the army of Duvalier who, "knew he was going to be a puppet to the army... so he created a militia to counterbalance their power" (13). Tragically, Hagathe herself together with Iris, fell victim to the same state violence, when leaving the Bonsang's house, they found themselves jobless and without a male relative to

protect them, Hagathe confesses the following:

I worry so much about my daughter. sometimes I walk around like a zombie, worrying about what might happen to her... Hagathe let out a moan of anguish mixed with fear and exasperation ‘vilanus, the Tonton Macoute’ she said, ‘You know, the village militia, he can’t stand my daughter’ Alarm and sadness covered her face as she spoke. She moved closer to Margaret and lowered her voice. ‘He thinks it’s because of her that I don’t want him. God only knows what that evil man will do to my daughter. (*The Roving Tree* 33)

Hagathe and her daughter Iris were excluded from the hierarchy of power within their own country. In addition to being abused by Iris’ father, Hagathe was violated by the same Tonton Macoutes who “emerged from the field and stood before her... wearing the *Tonton Macoute* uniform of blue denim shirt and pants, a red scarf around his neck, and dark sunglasses. His narrow, reddish eyes accentuated his evil nature and made him look like a wild beast” (*The Roving Tree* 109). Later on, she agrees to her daughter Iris’ adoption because she is also concerned about both the violation of black women and girls, as well as poverty ruining her life. After being violated by Tonton Macoutes, Hagathe finds herself on a hospital bed, having been transported there by John and Margaret, her daughter’s future adoptive parents. She expresses the following:

I’m here at the Lord’s mercy...Thank you for everything you and your husband have done. I wouldn’t be alive without you. Doctors in this country don’t even look at you if you cannot pay in advance. Mèsi Anpil, thank you very much. I’ve decided to let you take Iris with you...Wait until she’s an adult before bringing her back here; wait long enough for that Tonton Macoute to forget her. (*The Roving Tree* 37-38)

Drawing upon Kimberlé Crenshaw’s theory of intersectionality, I argue that violence against women is usually shaped, as Crenshaw asserts in her article, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color” (1991), “by other dimensions of their identities, such as race and class” (1992). She further claims that the majority of abused women who seek shelter are unemployed or underemployed. In the novel, Hagathe is not only burdened by poverty and unemployment but also by “child care responsibilities, and the lack

of job skills” (1245). These burdens, that she carries on her back are as concluded by Crenshaw, “largely the consequences of gender and class oppression, are then compounded by the racially discriminatory employment and housing practices women of color often face” (1245-1246).

When Iris returns to Haiti to better understand the circumstances of her birth and the factors that led to her adoption by the Winstons, she becomes “aware of the place [her]mother occupied in that class-conscious society ...and had a clearer view of Hagathe’s aspirations and the life she lived within the cloister of Haiti’s social limitations” (*The Roving Tree* 111-112). In addition to being a subject of intersectional oppression in the USA, the protagonist Iris had a clear vision of the life she had before her adoption. She discovers that her very conception, as well as the reasons for her immigration, are the result of her intersected identities, that of being a black Haitian poor woman. Her return home made her not only aware of her intersectional oppression in Haiti but also adds another identity problem to her already intersectional identity. Living in the USA and getting assimilated into the American way of living, Iris no longer identifies with the Haitian life mode and became aware of the hybrid identity that she has developed. The following section will discuss how Iris’ intersectional oppression and her hybrid identity led to another feeling of alienation and a complete sense of unhomeliness.

3- Diaspora and the Myth of Return: Exploring the Hybrid Identity of Iris in Haiti

Hybridity as defined by Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994), is the coexistence of two or more spaces, cultures, values, and norms to create what he calls a ‘third space’, or a new identity that is “neither the one nor the other” (Bhabha 25). Iris is an illustrative case of a multicultural person who finds herself marginalized both in her homeland and host land. In her book entitled *Identity, Diaspora and Return in American Literature* (2014), Maria Antonia Oliver-Rotger suggests that literature about returning to one’s original homeland explores the ways in which the return subject is abruptly removed from his borrowed land to suddenly find himself “psychologically placed in between two cultural and geographical imaginaries... and it [return narrative] often dramatizes a form of hybridity” (5).

The novel describes the protagonist as “roving Iris” (141). The term roving as defined by *Merriam-Webster*, is something that shifts from one place to another having no fixed location. In the context of Iris, her return to her homeland made her feel like she is torn between two extremities and does not have a fixed identity. Instead, she develops a new hybrid one that is a blend of both. Thus, the collision of the two cultures creates a profound feeling of not fully belonging for Iris. This sentiment is evident as she articulates the following:

When I left Monn Nèg at the age of five, I left behind everything and everyone I had known. Now the questions about my former life followed me like an invisible shadow. People, places, and experiences emerged from darkness to become a life beyond conscious memory. The river that knew the mysteries of my ancestors had caused my mind to wander in its flow. The river remembered the paths it traveled but couldn't return to them, just like I couldn't return to my past. Although I took pleasure in bathing in the river, eating local food, and being reacquainted with Haitian life, I felt more like a tourist who willingly blended into a new culture, knowing the experience was only temporary. Sooner or later, my life would resume its course away from the pastoral setting. It would have been different if I had never left. But now, another culture and another life had claim to me. (95-96)

Maria Antonia Oliver-Rotger claims that in a return narrative, the notion of home is also proved to be foreign for the returnee. *The Roving Tree* is a compelling illustration of a return narrative; therefore, this idea of home is revealed to be foreign and unfamiliar for the protagonist Iris who feels rooted in different locations but belonging to none. Her intersecting oppressions caused her to feel alienated. This sense of alienation is depicted in her description of her Haitian half-sister as follows:

I watched her take small, quiet sips; and I realized, at the moment, that she was almost flawless and that her good nature was probably the result of having lived a life free of adversities. The straight line of her life was definitely the opposite of the intricate spiral that described mine. It also occurred to me that Pèpè never had to struggle to transcend the troubling feeling of not belonging; the inescapable feeling of being abandoned; the haunted desire to retrace a past to find the assurance of kinship and acceptance. (*The Roving Tree* 12)

To conclude, Iris is obsessed with finding acceptance within the two places she lived in. The novel is an example of a return narrative that “[does] not testify only to the multiple cultural affiliations of the ethnic subject but also to the psychological processes of alienation, deterritorialization, uprootedness, or exclusion involved in geographical relation of empire, coloniality, and neo-coloniality” (Oliver-Rotger 5). The protagonist is a character that can neither adjust to her born and raised environment nor fully embrace the values of her borrowed home. Therefore, it is accurate to say that this exclusion is a result of the ongoing legacy of colonialism, of which she is a victim, and which eventually restricts her ability to find her place within the dual spaces of home.

Conclusion

Throughout the analysis of Iris’ character, I explored how her own intersecting identities contribute to her sense of alienation within the two corners of the world she lived in. The first part of the chapter delves into the protagonist’s alienation in the USA due to the intersection of race and ethnic oppression. In the light of Bhabha’s concepts of (otherness, mimicry, and ambivalence), I analyzed the impact of racial and ethnic discrimination on the protagonist’s sense of alienation. Furthermore, relying on Melvin Seeman’s meanings of alienation, I further exposed the different tools used by the alienated protagonist to resist her intersected oppression.

The second part of the chapter aimed to investigate the overlapping of race, gender, and class in Haiti. By drawing on Anibal Quijano and Maria Lugones’ concepts of coloniality of power and gender, I demonstrated the ways in which the intersectional identity of the Protagonist is tied to the historical legacy of colonialism. In the same concern, I further analyzed the protagonist’s hybrid identity and its interaction with these intersecting oppressions. Through this examination, I assume that all these factors collectively contribute to the protagonist’s sense of alienation and non-belonging in her dual spaces of home.

General Conclusion

This current research, as shown above, is an examination of the colonial-perpetuating power structures and their effects on colonized people within different contemporary contexts. In this respect, it explored the Haitian female Protagonist's sense of alienation as a result of her intersectional identities in both the historical context of 1960s USA and François Duvalier's Haiti. By delving into these contexts, this work exposed the intersectional nature of the Haitian black Protagonist within a complex continuum of power structures.

The first chapter is mainly divided into three sections. The first one explored the literary background of the study, offering general insight into the theme of alienation, together with other major themes in the Caribbean-American literature, to which the analyzed novel belongs. Additionally, it provided a summary of the novel, plus an insight into Augustave's early life and literary influences. The second section depicted the socio-historical and cultural contexts of the novel to shed light on its major settings which are fundamental in understanding the Protagonist's sense of alienation. Lastly, the third section of the chapter introduced the theoretical and conceptual frameworks with which our study has been analyzed.

The second chapter of our study is divided into two main parts. It is essentially dedicated to the analysis of the Protagonist's intersectional identities and experience of alienation in the two distinct environments of her upbringing. By applying Bhabha's concepts of, otherness, mimicry, and ambivalence, the first part examined the impact of 1960s American ethnic and race-based system on the Protagonist's sense of self. Besides, I explored the different means of resistance adopted by the main character to resist the intersectional form of oppression she faced in her host land. The second part of the analysis delves into the lasting impact of the colonial power structures in Haiti, namely gender, race, and class power dynamics. Relying on Quijano and Lugones' concepts of coloniality of power and gender, I exposed the impact of these intersected forms of oppression on Iris' sense of belonging in her motherland. Lastly, in addition to the aforementioned intersected forms of oppression the character Iris experienced, I found it crucial to highlight her status as a

hybrid returnee. This status further contributes to the interlocking disadvantages she faces in both her dual spaces of home resulting in a sense of belonging nowhere.

Ultimately, this research demonstrated the reality of colonized people in the modern world and their struggle to find their place within the enduring power structures established by colonialism. As such, Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality is important because it helped us to understand the interconnectedness of these power dynamics and how they influence peoples' lives, as was the case of the protagonist. Finally, this work has provided a close study of the colonized Protagonist and her challenging struggles in fighting coloniality in all its forms. Nevertheless, due to time constraints and for the sake of length, this study could not include the Protagonist's experience in Congo. The latter has been culturally excluded from the Congolese society adding to her existing intersecting oppressions and driving her to feel a profound sense of unhomeliness.

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Résumé

Le colonialisme est une doctrine qui a profondément enraciné ses racines dans les sociétés colonisées. Son héritage est toujours présent de nos jours et son impact sur les œuvres littéraires est indéniable. Malgré l'abondance de la littérature postcoloniale, seules quelques œuvres littéraires explorent efficacement l'impact durable du colonialisme et de sa structure de pouvoir établie dans différents contextes du monde moderne. Ainsi, l'auteure haïtiano-américaine Elsie Augustave dans son roman *The Roving Tree* (2013) parvient habilement à offrir une diversité de cadres dans lesquels elle donne la voix aux sujets marginalisés au sein de différents milieux. Par conséquent, en s'appuyant sur la théorie de l'intersectionnalité de Kimberlé Crenshaw, cette étude examine le sentiment d'aliénation de la protagoniste en raison de son identité intersectionnelle à la fois dans sa patrie, Haïti, et dans son pays d'accueil, les États-Unis. En considérant l'intersectionnalité comme un paradigme qui discute l'intersection de différentes structures de pouvoir, les concepts de mimétisme, d'altérité, d'ambivalence et d'hybridité de Homi K. Bhabha, ainsi que les concepts de colonialité du pouvoir et de genre d'Anibal Quijano et Maria Lugones, seront utilisés comme outils pour analyser l'identité intersectionnelle de la protagoniste Iris en tant que victime de la structure de pouvoir perpétuant le colonialisme.

Mots-clés : intersectionnalité, structures de pouvoir, colonialité du pouvoir, colonialité du genre, aliénation.