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## **“My history is a foreign word”: Diasporic Generationality and David Chariandy’s *Soucouyant***

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### **Zusammenfassung**

*Dieser Beitrag untersucht die Schnittstellen zwischen Identitätsbildung und Generationenbeziehungen in der neuesten Diasporaliteratur und erarbeitet eine neue theoretische Grundlage für die Debatte rund um Generationen und Diaspora auf dem Gebiet der Postcolonial (Literary) Studies. Er stellt weit verbreitete statische Sichtweisen über Generationen im Kontext der Diaspora in Frage, indem er den Begriff der diasporic generationality entwickelt, der der komplexen Dynamik, in der diasporische Identitäten und Generationenbeziehungen verhandelt werden, Rechnung trägt. Anhand einer Analyse von David Chariandys Roman *Soucouyant* demonstriert der Beitrag, wie das Konzept der diasporic generationality funktioniert und wie es eine alternative und komplexere Perspektive auf „die Immigrantenfamilie“ und die diasporischen Identitäten der zweiten Generation eröffnen kann.*

### **Abstract**

*This article examines the intersections of identity formation and generation relationships in recent diasporic writing and offers a new theoretical basis for the debate about generations and diaspora in postcolonial (literary) studies. It challenges the widespread static thinking about generations in the context of diaspora by proposing a notion of diasporic generationality that bears witness to the complex dynamics in which diasporic identities and generation relationships are negotiated. Illustrating the workings of diasporic generationality in an analysis of David Chariandy’s novel *Soucouyant*, this article shows how the concept can offer an alternative and more complex perspective on “the immigrant family” and second-generation diasporic identities.*

### **Résumé**

*Cet article analyse les interactions entre les constructions d’identité et les relations générationnelles dans la littérature diasporique actuelle. Il se propose d’élaborer, dans le cadre des études postcoloniales (littéraires), une nouvelle base théorique pour le débat sur la génération et la diaspora. En développant la notion de « diasporic generationality » (générationnalité diasporique) qui tient compte de la dynamique complexe entre les identités diasporiques et les relations générationnelles, il met en question un certain nombre de points de vue établis sur la question de la génération dans un contexte dias-*

*porique. Il s'agit de démontrer, à partir d'une analyse du roman Soucouyant de David Chariandy, comment fonctionne le concept de « diasporic generationality » et dans quelle mesure il ouvre une perspective autre et autrement complexe sur la « famille des immigrants » et les identités diasporiques de la deuxième génération.*

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### **Negotiating Identities and Generation Relationships in the Diaspora**

"None of us ever knows the world of our parents."<sup>1</sup>

In this quotation, literary critic Marianne Hirsch uses the metaphor of the different worlds that parents and children inhabit to draw attention to the limits of understanding between family members of different generations. Hirsch thus underlines the different experiences of first and second generations in the diaspora that make the parents' world inaccessible to their children. While Hirsch writes about the transmission of traumatic memories between Holocaust survivors and their descendants, her ideas about the ways in which memories connect and separate the generations are meaningful in other contexts, too.<sup>2</sup> The connections to different temporal and spatial dimensions and the resulting limits of understanding between the generations are central themes in postcolonial and diaspora literature as the works of Canadian authors, among them Dionne Brand, Neil Bissoondath, David Chariandy, SKY Lee and Austin Clarke, exemplify. The gap between the generations in the diaspora is marked by conflicts and fights as well as by silence and alienation. Not only the metaphor of the different worlds but also other negative images of struggles, fights and even war usually associated with generation relationships draw attention to the difficulties and complexity of these issues.

Especially in the contexts of migration, diaspora and multiculturalism, questions of generations and generationality are of high interest to critics who discuss the changes in family structures or the approaches of first-, second- and third-generation immigrants to identity formation and cultural belonging. Although there is much interest in the topic of generations,<sup>3</sup> so far, postcolonial criticism has not given due attention to the theoretical conceptualisation of the intersections of diasporic identity and generation relationships and has interpreted generation conflicts and identification strategies in terms of static patterns and fixed categories. According to one set of these patterns, for instance, first-generation immigrants are mainly

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1 Hirsch 1996, 661.

2 Hirsch's notion of *postmemory* describes the transmission of traumatic experiences from the parents to the children, who adopt the memories of the previous generation as if they were their own memories (2012, 5).

3 See, for example, Bald, Ball, and Chariandy (2007a). The work of Karl Mannheim and Marcus Lee Hansen illustrates that there has been a long tradition of criticism focusing on generational structures in migrant writing. For an overview see Langwald 2015, 78-104.

seen as representatives of a very traditional idea of diaspora,<sup>4</sup> while diaspora and the ancestral homeland no longer matter for the characters of the second generation. These ideas do not sufficiently account for the ambivalences of family relationships and the heterogeneous approaches to self-definition within generations.

In my study entitled *Diasporic Generationality: Identity, Generation Relationships and Diaspora in Selected Novels from Britain and Canada*, I introduce a dynamic notion of diasporic generationality which offers a new theoretical basis for the debate about generations in diasporic contexts. In order to examine the intersections between generation relationships and identity formation in diasporic writing and to develop my concept of diasporic generationality, I have analysed six novels from Britain and Canada: Andrea Levy's *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999), Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000), Caryl Phillips's *In the Falling Snow* (2009), Neil Bissoondath's *The Worlds Within Her* (1998), Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For* (2005) and David Chariandy's *Soucouyant* (2007).<sup>5</sup> Looking at the representation of identity formation and generation issues, I have identified three important discrepancies between the dominant point of view in the critical debate and the above mentioned novels: First, literary criticism strongly focuses on generational differences, conflicts and the stereotype of the disrupted and dysfunctional immigrant family.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, the novels under discussion in my study present family life in the diaspora in a more ambivalent and complex way. Second, critics tend to concentrate on identifying unified generational patterns of identity formation (Kilian/Komfort-Hein 9) which contrast the traditional first-generation parents with their hybrid and rebellious second-generation children. The novels, however, include intragenerational differences and depict generations as dynamic and heterogeneous. The third assumption that dominates the debate about generations is the idea that diaspora loses significance for the second generation.<sup>7</sup> My reading of the novels has led to the conclusion that the second-generation characters rather redefine than abandon diasporic consciousness.

The static ideas about generations in the diaspora that dominate the scholarly debate do not adequately reflect the novels' perspectives. In *Diasporic Generational-*

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4 Central characteristics of a "traditional idea of diaspora" are dispersal and a strong emotional connection to the (ancestral) homeland. The notion also involves a problematic, or even tense, relationship to the country of sojourn. My sense of a "traditional idea of diaspora" is based on William Safran's 1991 definition of diasporas.

5 This article is based on my PhD thesis entitled *Diasporic Generationality: Identity, Generation Relationships and Diaspora in Selected Novels from Britain and Canada* published with Wißner-Verlag Augsburg in May 2015. I am very grateful to the *Gesellschaft für Kanada-Studien* for financially supporting the publication of this book.

6 See McLeod 237-38; James 233, 254; Lowe 256, 266; Foner 3-4. Offering a historical overview of the notion of diaspora and theories of generations would exceed the scope of this article. I have discussed these aspects in more detail in my study *Diasporic Generationality* (see Langwald 2015, 19-70, 78-104).

7 For further information on this perspective, see Quirke/Potter/Conway 9.

ity, I argue that the novels by Levy, Smith, Phillips, Bissoondath, Brand and Chariandy offer a shared perspective on identity formation and intergenerational relationships that makes it necessary to revise the static ideas about generations that are prevalent in critical discourse. Therefore, I suggest that it is necessary to find a different way of thinking about the intersections between processes of identity formation and generation relationships, the representation of diasporic families and second-generation diasporic identity. My study of six novels from Britain and Canada aims at theorising the intersections of generationality and diasporic identities. In this article, I introduce my theory of diasporic generationality<sup>8</sup> that avoids the problems of static models of diasporic identity and generation relationships because it bears witness to the dynamics, ambivalence and complexity of the processes in which they are negotiated. Before I define the concept of diasporic generationality and demonstrate how it works as an analytical tool in one of the Canadian novels I have examined – David Chariandy's *Soucouyant* – I will briefly elaborate on my choice of the texts on which my study is based as well as on the theoretical framework of my concept.

### Defining Diasporic Generationality

My notion of diasporic generationality is informed by an interdisciplinary theoretical framework as well as by an in-depth study of six novels from Britain and Canada which were published between 1998 and 2009. Andrea Levy's *Fruit of the Lemon*, Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, and Caryl Phillips's *In the Falling Snow* serve as examples of Black British writing, while Neil Bissoondath's *The Worlds Within Her*, Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For* and David Chariandy's *Soucouyant* represent the context of Caribbean-Canadian literature. This selection includes not only key texts that have featured prominently in the debate about generational differences in the diaspora, such as *White Teeth* and *What We All Long For*, but also works that have not received sufficient critical attention despite their interesting approaches to the topic, such as *Fruit of the Lemon* and *The Worlds Within Her*. Of course, the six novels analysed in my study cannot be considered to be representative of Caribbean diasporic writing in Canada and Britain in general, but they are exemplary because they reflect more general trends as they increasingly focus on the experiences of

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8 I use the term *generationality* because it captures the complex dynamics of inter- and intragenerational relationships more accurately than the word *generation* and because it underlines the relevance of a generational framework without homogenising the characters' experiences. While the term *generation* is often associated with conflict (Kilian/Komfort-Hein 9) and a static pattern of age units, *generationality* avoids these problematic ideas. It highlights, first, that people can be part of different generational constellations (in the contexts of family and migration), and, second, that generational consciousness and belonging are dynamic processes that involve transformation as characters position themselves differently in relation to diaspora throughout their lives. Thus, *generationality* is a more suitable term than *generation* as it captures both differences and commonalities between the generations without homogenising them.

second-generation characters and their affinity to their local environment. These novels, which depict the lives of diasporic families – mainly of Caribbean background – in Britain and Canada, deal with similar themes such as the first and second generations' conflicts over different approaches to identity, belonging and diasporicity,<sup>9</sup> the lives of the second generation as well as the negotiation of filiative and affiliative relationships. In my analyses, I particularly focused on techniques of narrative transmission, setting and the novels' time structures, characterisation and the psychic dimensions of the characters as well as imagery, all of which reflect my idea of diasporic generationality as my discussion of *Soucouyant* will illustrate.

My close reading of the novels is complemented by an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that incorporates insights from the fields of sociology, psychology, postcolonial and diaspora studies, and, of course, literary and cultural theory. My study utilises both established and newer theoretical concepts. The notion of diaspora – especially the work of Robin Cohen, Stéphane Dufoix, Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy – and the concept of generations are central to the debate on migrant families. Karl Mannheim's work on generations has gained renewed interest among critics, especially in the US. Although Mannheim's notion of generations is problematic to a certain degree,<sup>10</sup> it has been vital for my study because he reconciles the ideas of generations and intragenerational differences. The work of Stuart Hall is particularly significant for a similar reason: he underlines the meaning of difference for identities in the diaspora. Paul Gilroy's focus on intercultural connections in the diaspora and his concept of the black Atlantic emphasise another important dimension of diasporicity and human relationships. The terms *filiation* (kinship) and *affiliation* (chosen bonds), as theorised by Edward Said, are helpful in a discussion of the dynamics of identity, family relationships and cultural affinity because they highlight different types of human bonds. I have also employed the concepts of hybridity (Homi K. Bhabha) and transculturality (Wolfgang Welsch) because of the ways in which they shed light on the interaction of different cultural influences.

While the theoretical framework of my study of diasporic generationality has been shaped by these well-established concepts, I have also integrated relatively new concepts into my discussion, which have not been applied in the context of identity and generation relationships in diasporic writing from Britain and Canada so far although they offer very important insights. Breinig/Lösch's notion of transdif-

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9 The term *diasporicity* occurs frequently in the academic debate, but it has not been formally theorised. *Diasporicity* includes different forms of diasporic consciousness and underlines that diasporic consciousness transforms. It also bears witness to the fact that an individual can have a diasporic state of mind without considering himself or herself part of a diaspora. *Diasporicity* also highlights that individuals and communities can show some – but not necessarily all – features of a diaspora.

10 Sigrid Weigel criticises Mannheim's approach to generations because he locates the concept within a national context and because it is a static model (169-70). For a discussion of the uses of Mannheim's model today, see, for example, Kraft/Weißhaupt (17, 19) as well as Edmunds/Turner (7-12).

ference is a highly controversial concept,<sup>11</sup> but it strikingly captures the co-presence of differences and commonalities in human relationships and takes many types of differences into account. Marianne Hirsch's concept of *postmemory* offers a relevant perspective on the dynamics of processes of memory between generations theorising the transgenerational transmission of traumatic memories in the diaspora. At the same time, it is important to account for the unexpected links between different memories and people and to bear witness to the fact that memory and remembrance might also fail. Therefore, my theoretical approach incorporates Michael Rothberg's idea of multidirectional memory.

These theoretical concepts offer important insights into individual aspects of identity formation, diaspora and generation relationships; however, there is no theory that brings these concepts together looking at the intersections of diasporic identity and generationality from a larger perspective. This theoretical framework and the novels inform each other in terms of their views of diasporic identity and generation relationships and, thus, make it possible to develop a new perspective on the intersections of identity and generationality.

My theory challenges static thinking about generations and identity formation by offering a model of diasporic generationality that bears witness to the complex dynamics and contexts in which identity, generationality and diasporicity are negotiated. It describes generation relationships in the diaspora as well as a person's diasporic and generational consciousness incorporating different meanings of the notion of generations in the contexts of both family and migration.<sup>12</sup> Diasporic generationality understands identity formation as a dynamic and relational process: identity, differences and belonging are negotiated in the interactions between the generations and are subject to change. Therefore, diasporic generationality acknowledges the meaning of multiple cultural inventories for diasporic identity. Being cognisant of the significance of processes of unsteady remembering, the concept highlights both the importance as well as the limits of the past as a means of making sense of identity.

Diasporic generationality emphasises the limits of understanding between the generations and the role of a process which I call generational othering – a process that is marked by an increased perception of the other generation as different. The concept is cognisant of the relevance of shared generational consciousness and, at the same time, it draws attention to intragenerational differences and the limits of

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11 Frank Schulze-Engler suggests that the concept of *transdifference* fails "to acknowledge the importance of globalised modernity" (123) and that Breinig/Lösch give different, contradictory definitions of *transdifference*.

12 In a family, the concept of generations refers to age structures, for instance those of parents and children, while in the context of migration, generational structures refer to the characters' place of birth or their affiliation with the (ancestral) homeland or the country of sojourn. For a more elaborate discussion of the meaning of generational structures from different vantage points see Langwald (2015, 80-105).

unified generational perspectives. In doing so, it offers room for a variety of approaches to diasporic identities in the first and second generations – such as traditional as well as multidirectional understandings of diasporicity. Diasporic generationality recognises the relevance of relationships based on filiation as well as affiliation conceiving of them as a space in which identity, differences and belonging are negotiated in a relational exchange between generations. My concept captures the ambivalences of generation relationships by acknowledging the simultaneity of conflict and connection as well as commonalities and differences in inter- and intra-generational relationships. By highlighting that intragenerational differences and shared generational consciousness can coexist, diasporic generationality reconciles the heterogeneity of generations with the idea of generationality.

In my study, I theorise the concept of diasporic generationality in relation to Black British and Caribbean-Canadian diasporic writing but the concept can also be applied to other diasporic communities. In his novel *Any Known Blood*, Lawrence Hill offers a transgenerational perspective on the Black experience in the USA and Canada, while Jean Kwok's *Girl in Translation* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* depict the lives of a Chinese and a Bengali migrant family in the USA. The notion of diasporic generationality might also offer interesting perspectives on the complex generational structures depicted in Black British novels, such as Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara* or Diana Evans's *26a*. In the following, I will demonstrate how my idea of diasporic generationality works in an analysis of a Canadian novel: David Chariandy's *Soucouyant*.

### **Diasporic Generationality in David Chariandy's *Soucouyant***

David Chariandy has emerged as a new and important voice in both Caribbean-Canadian writing and in the academic landscape. His debut novel *Soucouyant* (2007) explores intergenerational conflicts and the second generation in the context of the themes of memory and forgetting which are complicated by the issue of dementia. *Soucouyant* deals with a young black man who struggles to come to terms with his mother, Adele, and her early-onset dementia. As a young adult, the protagonist abandons his mother but returns after two years to make peace with her. Upon his return Meera, Adele's caregiver, confronts him with his failure to take care of his mother. Adele came to Canada from Trinidad, where, as a child, she was involved in a terrible accident in which her mother was severely burned. The novel shows how Adele and her son struggle with the disintegration of Adele's mind and the haunting memories of the past which manifest themselves in a story which Adele increasingly retells towards the end of her life: her encounter with a soucouyant – a mythical vampire figure from Caribbean folk tales.<sup>13</sup>

What insights about identity and generation relationships in *Soucouyant* does the notion of diasporic generationality offer? In order to illustrate this, I discuss the

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13 Giselle Anatol offers more information on the soucouyant myth (45).

novel's technique of narrative transmission, the representation of place, space and multiculturalism, the role of transdifference, transculturality and multidirectionality, the depiction of memory and the past, and, lastly, the representation of generation relationships and family dynamics. All of these dimensions reflect important aspects of diasporic generationality.

In my analysis of narrative transmission, I follow Gabriele Helms's premise that narrative discourse often carries meaning in itself (15). One major characteristic of diasporic generationality that is reflected on the level of narrative transmission is relationality. Although *Soucouyant* uses a first-person narrator – Adele's son, the unnamed protagonist of the novel – the narrative goes beyond such a limited point of view by including passages which are focalised by other characters such as Adele and Meera. This approach reflects the protagonist's attempt to locate his identity in relation to his mother's past, for example, when he includes his mother's voice and her attempts at telling the story of the soucouyant in his own narrative: "'Soucouyant,' Mother said aloud to herself one day. 'I saw one in the morning'" (Chariandy 2007b, 23, emphasis added). "'It happen ...,' she tries again. 'It happen one fore-day morning'" (Chariandy 2007b, 47, emphasis added). Due to Adele's growing inability to tell her own story and the son's need to come to terms with that memory, the son tries to tell the story himself: "She saw a soucouyant. It happened long ago in a faraway place" (Chariandy 2007b, 173). "[T]here was once a girl named Adele [...]" (Chariandy 2007b, 180). Interestingly, while Adele depicts her encounter with the mythic creature as a fact, her son's use of fairy tale language indicates a more distanced relationship to that story – and also to the space of the Caribbean, more generally (Salter 251-52).

In this context, the question of the ethics of narration becomes relevant (Salter 233): Is it appropriate that the son tells the story of his mother's past? On the one hand, Adele's story is not told in her original voice and, consequently, access to her authentic experience will not be possible. On the other hand, by narrating Adele's encounter with the soucouyant, Adele's life story is communicated – even though it may be influenced by her son's perspective. However, the contrast between Adele's and the narrator's versions of the story of the soucouyant illustrates that the protagonist negotiates his sense of identity and belonging in relation to his mother's narration. He feels connected to her past and, at the same time, distances himself from the soucouyant story (Salter 251). Adele's past matters for the protagonist and offers him the possibility to reflect on his own sense of self. Thus, *Soucouyant's* technique of narrative transmission reflects the role of relationality for identity formation and generation relationships by illustrating that identities, differences and belonging are shaped in the interactions between the generations involving both connection and disruption.

The workings of diasporic generationality are not only evident in Chariandy's approach to narrative transmission but also in the novel's representation of place and space, which illustrates the complex dynamics and contexts in which identity and



family relationships are negotiated and it underlines the role of inter- as well as intragenerational differences. In the protagonist's family, there are both differences and commonalities between the first and the second generation. There are significant differences in the characters' sense of belonging to Canada and the Caribbean. Here, the traditional ideas of the first generation's stronger attachment to the Caribbean and its lack of a sense of belonging to Canada are contrasted with the second generation's alienation from the Caribbean and its stronger, though not unproblematic, sense of belonging to Canada. While the novel seems to underline the typical distinction between traditional migrant parents and their more progressive offspring, *Soucouyant* also emphasises that first and second generations share experiences, such as racism and exclusion in Canada. In the 1960s, Adele and Roger's apartment is destroyed by racists, and in the 1980s, Meera and the protagonist's brother fall victim to a racist attack on their way home from school. However, this commonality does not make the idea of generational consciousness obsolete since racism has a different quality for the second generation, as the brother's feelings about the attack illustrate: "As if someone there could have helped or advised him. As if any parent born elsewhere could have understood or even begun to grasp the contradictions" (Chariandy 2007b, 159). This passage highlights that, despite the fact that the first and the second generation experience racism in Canada, there are significant limits of understanding between the generations. The first-generation parents cannot entirely comprehend their son's feelings because of their different relationship to Canada: while Canada has never entirely become 'home' for them, it is the only space of belonging that is available to their son. Interestingly, *Soucouyant* not only depicts intergenerational differences but also draws attention to intragenerational differences by contrasting Adele and Roger as representatives of a rather traditional idea of diaspora with Meera's Caribbean mother Antoinette who has chosen to become a "successful immigrant" (Chariandy 2007b, 155) by assimilating into Canadian society. Thus, *Soucouyant* highlights the heterogeneity and diversity of generations and exposes the insufficiency of unified generational patterns of identity formation while simultaneously emphasising the importance of generational structures.

The workings of these generational structures are also evident in the novel's representation of memory. *Soucouyant* shows how the protagonist negotiates his identity in relation to his mother's past. In this context, Hirsch's concept of postmemory, of the transmission of traumatic memories across generations through stories as well as emotions, is relevant (Bowering Delisle 6, 8). The novel traces the protagonist's development through different phases of remembrance and forgetting: at the beginning, the protagonist cannot cope with Adele's traumatic stories and leaves for Toronto. "The city was for me a place of forgetting" (Chariandy 2007b, 30). And there, he "met others who were fleeing their pasts, the discontents of nations and cultures, tribes, and families" (Chariandy 2007b, 30). However, the protagonist cannot escape what Chariandy himself has once described as the "diasporic haunting"

of the second generation (2006, 105): the protagonist realises that the past still affects him when a friend tells him that he muttered the word *soucouyant* in his sleep. The protagonist realises that he cannot abandon his and his family's past and decides to return to his hometown to take care of his mother.

After his return, he is, again, frequently confronted with Adele's memories. When Adele suddenly disappears, wandering around the neighbourhood on her own, the protagonist calls the police to help him find his mother and is forced to explain her behaviour to a police officer:

I mean, it's not really about a soucouyant. It's about an accident. It's about what happened in her birthplace during World War II. It's a way of telling without really telling, you see, and so you don't really have to know what a soucouyant is. Well, I guess you do, sort of. What I mean is, I'm not an expert on any of that sort of stuff. I was born here, you see. Not exactly here, of course. In a hospital farther west. But here, as in this land. (Chariandy 2007b, 66)

The protagonist assumes a more active role in relation to Adele's past and even begins to tell her life story. Interestingly, he moves from an explanation of his mother's behaviour to his own identity and his feelings of in-betweenness. He distances himself from her story but, at the same time, he explains her behaviour through her life story. This underlines that his relationship to his mother and her past is shaped by both distance and connection.

The protagonist's attitude towards the past changes yet again as he spends more time with his mother. Eventually, he incorporates this postmemory transmitted by his mother, which is evident in his statement: "My history is a travel guidebook. My history is a creature nobody really believes in. My history is a foreign word" (Chariandy 2007b, 137). Interestingly, there is a certain degree of tension between the anaphoric use of "my history" – through which the protagonist claims his mother's past as part of his own life story – and his awareness of the fact that most Canadians do not know anything about the creature that plays such an important role for his sense of self. This passage also illustrates his own familiarity with and alienation from the past which he acknowledges as part of his own life story and, thus, establishes a connection not only to his mother's personal trauma but also to a history of oppression and diaspora in the Caribbean.

Still, at the end of the novel, Adele's past recedes to the background. This is an aspect that is frequently neglected in the discussion of the novel. While the novel focuses on the protagonist's process of negotiating his relationship to his family and the past, it also significantly matters that, at the end of the novel, after Adele has died, he clears out the family's house – a place of historical and personal significance – and sells it. He has realised that his mother's past matters to him but also that he has to move beyond it. Thus, *Soucouyant* underlines the importance as well

as the limits of the past as a means of making sense of the present, demonstrating that diasporic generationality is marked by a process of unsteady remembering.

The protagonist's identity is not only influenced by his mother's past but also by a more complex web of histories, which reflects the idea of multidirectional memory. As a child, the protagonist often visits the local librarian Miss Cameron, who familiarises him with the "Scarborough Settler's Lament" – a poem by a Scottish immigrant to Scarborough written about 150 years ago. Miss Cameron wants to show the protagonist that he is not the only person who finds it hard to feel at home in Canada. Many years after their meetings, when Miss Cameron has died, the protagonist receives a parcel with the book that contains the "Scarborough Settler's Lament" and he feels deeply touched. This episode can be read as an example of multidirectional memory. The novel establishes a surprising connection between different people and their histories across time and space – visible minorities in the present and Scottish settlers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – which helps the protagonist locate his own identity. This underlines that second-generation diasporic identity is not only shaped by ancestral memory but also by multiple influences and other cultural inventories.

Miss Cameron also exemplifies another important aspect of diasporic generationality. Her friendship with the protagonist can be read as a transdifferent affiliation – an issue that is very important for the second-generation characters in the novels I have analysed. This friendship is based on commonalities and differences. Miss Cameron and the protagonist share an interest in books, and their connection transcends differences of culture, class, gender and age. However, at the same time, there is still some tension in their relationship as the protagonist mentions that "something loomed between us all the same. Something vague and yet palpable, like a bruise or soreness after a night of fitful dreams" (Chariandy 2007b, 105-106). This illustrates that not only filiative relationships but also affiliative connections significantly matter for the second generation and that, although this transdifferent connection to Miss Cameron is very important for the protagonist, not all differences can be overcome.

Still, family relationships are at the heart of *Soucouyant*. Canadian novelist Alistair McLeod says about Chariandy's debut novel that it "bridges geographic, cultural and generational gaps" (Chariandy 2007b, blurb). Insofar as the protagonist negotiates his mother's past, develops empathy for her and, finally, makes peace with her, this is certainly true. However, the bridging of generational gaps does not imply that these gaps disappear entirely. *Soucouyant* presents families that are disrupted: silence and the inability to talk about the traumas of the first and the second generation create tensions that dominate family life. When Adele behaves strangely in a restaurant, her other son and her husband can only stare in silence at the mess she has made in the washroom and, even after that episode, the family members do not talk about what happened – or about Adele's dementia in general. The process of generational othering, of an increased perception of the other generation as differ-

ent, plays an important role for the generation conflicts in *Soucouyant* as Adele's otherness alienates her from her son. When the protagonist speaks to Adele about the soucouyant, she replies: "What would a nine-year-old boy who grow up in Canada know about soucouyants?" (Chariandy 2007b, 135). Adele intimates that her son is unable to understand the significance of this story because he is still very young and has not lived in the Caribbean.

Although *Soucouyant* foregrounds familial disruption, it offers a more ambivalent image of generation relationships by highlighting not only the conflicts but also the emotional connections in families as the protagonist's statements about his return exemplify: "I wanted to see her again. I wanted to see the life in her face. I longed for her as any son would for his mother, even so frightening a mother as she had become" (Chariandy 2007b, 33). Therefore, I argue that *Soucouyant* contests the stereotype of the dysfunctional diasporic family not by denying conflicts but by showing that conflicts exist alongside strong emotional bonds and by explaining familial disruption not in terms of an inherent dysfunctionality of the protagonist's family but in terms of the complex and difficult life situations of diasporic families.

### **Translating Diaspora into the Future**

My analysis of *Soucouyant* has demonstrated that the concept of diasporic generationality can offer a more complex perspective on the intersections of diasporic identity and generation relationships. While my study exposes the shortfalls of stereotypical, unified generational patterns of identity formation, it emphasises that generational structures still matter. Diasporic generationality imagines family as a space where identity, difference and belonging are negotiated in the interactions between the generations and exemplifies the significant role of ambivalence, heterogeneity, relationality and transgenerational exchange for identity formation. The concept draws attention to the meaning of interactions of commonalities and differences as well as continuities and discontinuities for generation relationships highlighting that identities in the diaspora are shaped by highly dynamic processes involving multiple cultural inventories, processes of unsteady remembering and different types of human bonds. These characteristics are part of the concept of diasporic generationality, which offers a new theoretical basis for the debate on generations and identity formation as it reconciles the diversity and heterogeneity of generations with a sense of generationality.

The concept of diasporic generationality I have proposed in this article challenges static thinking about family life in the diaspora and second-generation diasporicity by highlighting the complexities and ambivalences of family relationships and the heterogeneous strategies of self-definition within generations. My analysis underlines that diasporic identity still matters for the second generation which redefines its diasporicity in terms of continuities as well as discontinuities with the experiences of its ancestors and develops multidirectional understandings of diasporicity. In that context, diasporicity can be understood as a state of mind and an emotional

investment of the second generation. This underlines that generational structures still matter, but they are no longer the only relevant factor in the complex web of influences that affects the second generation.

*Soucouyant* and the other novels discussed in my study draw attention to the difficulties of diasporic families, the complexity of intergenerational relationships in diasporic contexts and people's heterogeneous approaches to identity, diasporicity and belonging, which need to be considered and understood in order to renegotiate multiculturalism in Britain and Canada. While the novels emphasise that racism and exclusion are still present in contemporary societies, they imagine alternative models of identity and community based on transdifference and multidirectionality.

Generations and diaspora remain important topics in postcolonial studies, and I maintain that they also matter as analytical concepts. My study of diasporic generationality has focused on six novels from Britain and Canada, but the dynamics described in this concept are of broader relevance. Further research could apply the concept to other texts and contexts and look into the ways in which diasporic generationality offers insights into diasporic identities and generation relationships in other ethnic groups. The idea of diasporic generationality is not only relevant for literary criticism since moving beyond static ideas about immigrant families and diasporic identity and comprehending the role of multidirectionality for second-generation diasporicity also matters for intercultural communication and integration policies. Diasporic generationality is cognisant of the continuities and discontinuities of identities and generation relationships as well as the ways in which diasporic identities and generationality transform, and I think it will be fascinating to observe how coming generations will translate diaspora into the future.

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