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**THE PORTRAYAL OF BELONGING AND  
UNBELONGING IN DAVID CHARIANDY'S  
*SOUCOUYANT***

**BA thesis**

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## ABSTRACT

David Chariandy's *Soucouyant*, published in 2007, deals with immigrant characters trying to make sense of their identity and where they belong. However, there has not been a study particularly about belonging and unbelonging and how these experiences may resemble or vary among the characters. The thesis explores the characters' experiences and their similarities and differences. The aim of this study is to explore the belonging and unbelonging of the first-generation immigrant character Adele and her second-generation immigrant son, who is also the nameless narrator of the novel.

The thesis consists of an introduction, a literature review, an empirical study, and a conclusion. The introduction gives a brief overview of the plot of the novel, its relevance in Canadian context and discusses the topics that are further explored in the thesis. The introduction also contains the aim of the thesis and the research questions. The first chapter is a literature review which gives an overview of previous research done on the novel, with a focus on topics such as identity and generation relationships, memory transmission, multiculturalism, and belonging and unbelonging. The second chapter, which is the empirical study, provides an analysis of both Adele's and the narrator's experiences and feelings with belonging and unbelonging. In addition, the similarities and differences of the experiences will be discussed. The conclusion provides a summary of the findings.

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## INTRODUCTION

This study deals with David Chariandy's novel *Soucouyant* which bears a subtitle *A Novel of Forgetting*. While the novel is primarily set in the 1960s-1980s Canada, its themes of immigration and immigrant experiences of living in a new country are topical in today's context as well, both in Canada and other parts of the world. The focus of this thesis is on a narrower aspect of immigrant experience, namely the issue of belonging. The novel shows that immigrants can still struggle to belong after living in a host country for a long time and even when being born and raised there.

To put the discussion of *Soucouyant* into perspective and get an understanding of the contexts that affect the sense of belonging, it is important to provide a brief overview of the storyline of the novel and define the relevant key terms. The novel mainly revolves around two characters, the first-generation Caribbean immigrant Adele and her nameless Canadian-born son and the narrator, who returns home after being gone for two years. They live in a rundown neighborhood in the outskirts of Toronto in Ontario, Canada. The characters are part of the Caribbean as well as the African diaspora which was initiated by slavery (Delisle 2011: 9). The term diaspora can be defined in multiple ways, but Shuval (2000: 43) explains it as “.../ a social construct founded on feeling, consciousness, memory, mythology, history, meaningful narratives, group identity, longings, dreams, allegorical and virtual elements, all of which play a role in establishing a diaspora reality”. Its discourse demonstrates a transnational network of scattered people whose sense of uniqueness and curiosity to the homeland remains persistent (Shuval 2000: 43). This background is one of the influences of the characters' sense of belonging.

The relationship between the characters is challenging because Adele suffers from dementia, which according to the National Institute of Aging (2022: para. 1), is defined as the condition that decreases cognitive functioning, like thinking, remembering and reasoning, that disturbs the everyday life and activities. The son cares for his mother but has trouble connecting with her due to her condition. In addition, as Adele tries to hide her past and struggles, her dementia works against her efforts, and she inevitably transmits her memories to her son. This transmission of memories creates a response of the second generation to the traumas of the first generation that can be explained in the terms of postmemory as defined by Hirsch (2001: 8), who coined the term. Although Hirsch (2001) uses this term to analyze the photography of the Holocaust, it can be applied to the study of Chariandy's *Soucouyant* as well to understand a significant aspect in the novel that influences the narrator's relationship with her mother and his sense of belonging. In another article, Hirsch (2008: 106) expands on this term as follows:

Postmemory describes the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up.

Furthermore, it is important to mention that the action in the narrative present of the novel takes place one year after the passing of the Multiculturalism Act of 1988. Multiculturalism policy was adopted in Canada in order "to recognize and celebrate cultural diversity, to protect minorities from discrimination, and to facilitate minority integration into the public culture" (Eisenberg 2019: 67-68). From the perspective of Canadian multiculturalism, the characters in the novel should feel recognized and protected whereas in reality they are not. Instead, the characters experience discrimination and racism in the country where they should be protected from it, making them feel that they do not belong, although

they are Canadian citizens. These experiences cause and even further deepen the characters' trauma. Trauma can imply a wound or an injury, but in other contexts, including that of the novel, it is an event or a psychological "wound" that is the result of various psychological, biological, social, and other environmental factors (Nijenhuis and van der Hart 2011: 419).

When it comes to the topic of belonging and unbelonging in the novel, it is important to note what has been previously researched on this topic. Although some scholars have examined the idea of belonging in their articles, there has not been a study specifically about belonging and unbelonging in the case of the first- and second-generation characters and their differences, but also similarities. Therefore, this paper aims to show not only the variance, but also the similarities in the experiences of belonging in both the first- and second-generation characters. The analysis focuses specifically on the first-generation immigrant Adele and the narrator, her second-generation immigrant son, and their experiences with the feelings of belonging and unbelonging.

To fulfil the aim of the thesis, the following research questions are formulated:

- 1) How do the belonging and unbelonging of the first-generation character Adele and the second-generation character, Adele's nameless son and the narrator, manifest in the novel?
- 2) What are the similarities and differences between the experiences of the characters' sense of belonging and unbelonging?

The present thesis consists of two main chapters. The literature review provides an overview of previous scholarship on the novel. It is followed by an empirical analysis of the experiences of the characters, Adele and the narrator, and their similarities and differences.

# 1 KEY THEMES IN THE PREVIOUS SCHOLARSHIP ON *SOUCOUYANT*

In order to discuss how previous research relates to the topic of belonging, this chapter is divided into four subtopics: identity formation and generation relationships, memory transmission, multiculturalism, belonging and unbelonging. These topics give an overview of what influences the belonging of the first- and the second-generation characters in the novel. Identity is of great importance when considering one's sense of belonging as it conveys where one feels they belong, and it is often influenced by other people such as parents. However, other people from the same generation can influence one's identity as well, therefore, intragenerational<sup>1</sup> relationships have a role in forming identity and perception of belonging. Moreover, to get an understanding why the experiences with belonging differ for the first- and second-generation characters, it is important to cover memory transmission and the effect that it has on the younger generation. Not only do memories and the characters' inner thoughts shape their idea of belonging, but also the environment that they are living in. For this reason, it is necessary to discuss Canadian multiculturalism and the shortcomings of Canadian multiculturalism policy as well as the characters' attitude towards it. Ultimately, the focus will be chiefly on belonging and unbelonging and its significance for the characters in the novel.

## 1.1 Identity Formation and Generation Relationships

Research indicates that the second-generation immigrants in the novel struggle with forming their identity due to having different experiences from their parents and by having been raised in the ways that are inconsistent. Langwald (2016) investigates the idea that there

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<sup>1</sup> Intragenerational implies “/.../ the analysis of direct intersubjective relationships among individuals belonging to the same generation” (Magrelli et al 2022: 19).

is a great difference in the experiences of the first and the second generations in the diaspora which can be seen in postcolonial and diaspora texts of Canadian writers like David Chariandy. She highlights how in postcolonial criticism the difference presented may be due to the first-generation immigrants being displayed as traditional immigrants who have been scattered from their motherland whereas the second generation does not see the significance of their homeland (Langwald 2016: 109-110). The research also proposes that the identities of immigrants are shaped by the connections and interferences of generational relationships (Langwald 2016: 115). Jeffers (2020: 2) adds to this idea that despite the emotional ties of immigrants towards their homeland, immigrant parents are the ones that shape the view and understanding of their place of origin as well as the children's experience in the new country. The parents transfer, whether intentionally or unintentionally, a set of lessons, beliefs, and manners to their children which may not agree with one another (Jeffers 2020: 2). These contradictions could confuse the second generation and their sense of identity even further. However, Sarkowsky (2017: 149-150) argues that individual identity, along with collective identity, is actually dependent on remembering and forgetting. Delisle (2011: 2) agrees that cultural memory is of great importance in the formation of the second-generation identity. She explains that “/.../ cultural memory is central to the formation of identity in relationship to the group, whether family, nation, diasporic imaginary, or ethnic community” (Delisle 2011: 2).

Much of the literature suggests that the relationships between the second-generation immigrants are a means to healing and acceptance. According to Jeffers (2020: 2-3) the aspect of intragenerational relationships provides ways for healing and reaching a consensus for the second-generation immigrants in order to detach from the postcolonial trauma as well as the trauma of their parents. Ludolph (2021: 49) supports this idea by discussing how the shared experience of being forced to submit to racialized violence creates an unconventional bond

between the two second-generation characters which contributes to their healing from the incident. Mackey (2012: 229) adds to this idea that there is a need for new models of intragenerational relationships for the purpose of the second-generation immigrants to accept themselves in a new and different way. She suggests that by these narrative strategies that writers such as Chariandy have used, they can evaluate the ideas of “home” and nation, rearrange the relationships to diasporic family histories in a different perspective as well as create various types of belonging in characters (Mackey 2012: 229).

## **1.2 Memory Transmission**

Some studies have analyzed the first-person narration in the novel for the purpose of exploring memory and its transmission, and the idea of postmemory. Jeffers (2020: 3) suggests that as the narrator is left unnamed due to his mother having forgotten it, it shows how he has been affected by her mother’s loss of memory because of her trauma along with the need to act as if nothing is ever wrong. In addition, the narrator has to reconstruct and transmit certain experiences of her mother’s which she tells by accident and without providing much context (Jeffers 2020: 3). In another article, Jeffers highlights Hirsch’s idea of postmemory (2008 as quoted in Jeffers 2021: 73) which is relevant in relation to the narrator and his mother since he is influenced by his mother’s memories and cannot separate himself from them. He is forced to be part of her mother’s story although she may not intend it. Mackey (2012: 243) agrees with this notion that the narrator has been affected by his mother because the memories of the first generation are handed to the next one affectively but without a word. This is something that has seeped into him, but for him to be able to make sense of these memories, he has to “step in” for his mother in a sense (Mackey 2012: 243-244). Minto (2010: 887) suggests that

remembering and forgetting are of importance for both the first and the second generations. She explains how both generations have to remember their history in order to stay sane in a new hostile environment, yet at the same time, they have to forget their past in order to adapt to the new homeland (Minto 2010: 887). For the character Adele, it is important to remember who she was before coming to Canada, but for her son, remembering is of greater importance due to the fact that Adele's past and experience are what keep the mother and son connected (Minto 2010: 888).

Some literature has shown that immigrants are intentionally remembering and forgetting parts of their past for some significant purpose. Alonso Alonso (2011: 18) explains how people who have experienced abuse and violence try to intentionally forget their past to cope with it. This can be seen especially in diasporic communities since the immigrants have lived in hostile environments and have been forced to escape or emigrate to survive and hence their stories and memories get suppressed (Alonso Alonso 2011: 18). Solbiac (2021: 6) agrees that the first-generation Caribbean Canadian characters may feel reluctant or uncertain of transmitting Caribbean cultural memory. That is because they intentionally try to forget their past lives in Trinidad in order to feel liberated from all the bad and painful memories and sufferings they endured while living there (Solbiac 2021: 6). Cvetkovic (2021:79) adds that the second generation intentionally tries to silence or forget something in order to uncover a different issue. Therefore, forgetting and suppressing these memories can be used to convey a political act, issues of representation or problems with remembering (Cvetkovic 2021: 79). However, Brandel (2016: 79) argues that immigrants might not intentionally try to forget their past, but instead they are not able to access those memories. For the narrator the access may be limited due to Adele's dementia which could have evolved as a result of her traumatic experiences in her childhood, and other aspects, such as racism, rejection and disruption of her

life in Trinidad and later in Canada (Brandel 2016: 79). These aspects have forced her to shelter herself on the margins of society both mentally and physically as she lives in a shabby house in the outlying districts of the city (Brandel 2016: 79). It is reasonable to think that the characters may not want to or cannot transmit all of their memories on to the younger generation whether it is due to personal reasons, or in the case of the second generation, they aim to uncover some other problem that needs to be addressed.

### **1.3 Multiculturalism**

The literature reviewed investigates how Canada might not have been as tolerant and progressive in the past as it has claimed to be and that also today the principles stated in the Canadian Multiculturalism Act do not apply to all. Mergeai (2011: 83-85) argues that throughout history Canadians have attempted to present their country as being tolerant and minority-friendly, whereas Canadian literature portrays otherwise and suggests a new perspective on the matter. She discusses *Soucouyant* as an example of the novels whose authors have stressed the darker sides of Canada, such as discrimination and racism against Black people as well as the immigrants' experience of feeling isolated in the society and not being able to adapt to the new space (Mergeai 2011: 85, 90). In addition, she affirms that the authors of these novels have uncovered the failings of Canada like its inability to support immigrants as well as Canadian citizens who are from ethnic minorities (Mergeai 2011: 99). Jeffers (2020: 5) also indicates that Canada is just as well a place of colonial trauma as is the Caribbean which weakens the distance between homeland and the new place of residence. Solbiac (2021: 2) implies that because the Caribbean societies have experienced colonial deportation, slavery as well as racialization of the non-European, this has created a culture

which has been disgraced with subalternity<sup>2</sup>. He questions how this could influence Caribbean self-reinvention as well as how to secure memory transmission onto the next generation when the people's distinctive history is not accessible to them (Solbiac 2021: 2). In addition to that, it is much harder for the second-generation immigrants to recognize the culture of their immigrant parents due to their subordination and double displacement (Solbiac 2021: 2). Therefore, the second generation cannot rely on or connect to their own culture in Canada, but instead are dominated by another one.

Furthermore, Bannerji (2000: 120 as quoted in Mackey 2012: 249) establishes that multicultural Canada should not be seen as some triumph but rather a place where people continue to struggle. Mackey (2012: 230) advances the idea of the second-generation disappointment represented in Canadian novels and their attitude towards their culture and explains how the second-generation immigrants are expected to act according to their culture although they resent the struggles and experiences of their parents and wish not to repeat them in their lifetime. It is not that the second-generation is not capable of executing this type of living, but rather they refuse to conform to this example just to fit into society (Mackey 2012: 231). In addition, Mackey (2012: 233-234) explains the idea that minorities are only distinguishable in a chiefly white society which may not only cultivate hatred in the immigrants themselves, but it may extend to others around them as well. This confusion about the significance of race and disappointment in perpetual exclusion are primarily experienced by the black male characters in the novel. Moreover, Ludolph (2021: 48) emphasizes that Chariandy's characters depict the failure of Canadian multiculturalism through their personal

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<sup>2</sup> Subaltern denotes being 'of inferior rank', a term adopted by Antonio Gramsci to talk about certain people in society who are dominated by the ruling classes (Ashcroft et al 2013: 244). Their history is not officially accepted, it is fragmented and episodic due to being dependent on the activities of the ruling classes and not having the necessary means to control their representation as well as access to cultural and social institutions (Ashcroft et al 2013: 244-245).

experiences with racism as well as corporate racism, which manifests in substandard and dangerous working conditions that constantly cause various injuries to them. It is evident that the characters, specifically the second generation, feel disappointed in their culture, where they struggle and even extend those struggles and hatred on to others around them.

#### **1.4 Belonging and Unbelonging**

Research has shown that the immigrant characters in the novel feel that they are in a space where they do not belong anywhere or that they have been displaced. According to Minto (2010: 887) the immigrant characters in the novel are in an in-between space of (un)-belonging due to not belonging to either Canada or Trinidad. In that space, the characters are pressured to both remember and forget their past as well as resort to different coping mechanisms to negotiate the boundaries of that space (Minto 2010: 887). Delisle (2011: 12) adds to this idea that it is distinctive of the black diaspora in Canada to be living in an in-between position. He explains that “/.../ second-generation black Canadians in particular are positioned between inherited diasporic legacies and national narratives” (Delisle 2011: 12). Moreover, Solbiac (2021: 7) investigates two Canadian novels and explains that the Caribbean characters who migrated to Canada are of either African or Indian descent, meaning that living in Canada positions them in a state of double displacement. Not only does the second generation inherit this displacement, but they also have to substitute for their parents by creating their own Caribbean cultural knowledge to be transmitted as a way to be liberated from that displacement (Solbiac 2021: 21).

Some of the literature suggests that belonging plays a vital role in the identity formation of the second-generation immigrant characters in the novel. Langwald (2016: 115)

discusses how the story of the creature *soucouyant* in the novel, with respect to Adele's narration, makes the narrator question his own sense of belonging, but also gives him a chance to reflect on his sense of self. This narrative transmission shows how identities, differences and belonging are essentially constructed by both disruptive and bonding interactions between the first and the second generations (Langwald 2016: 115). Brandel (2016: 79) adds to this idea that "It is this partly remembered and partly forgotten past and the protagonist's simultaneous belonging and not belonging to it which constitutes an essential component of his personal history and identity." It is clear that the issue of belonging is of great significance to the second-generation immigrants and their sense of self and identity. Cvetkovic (2021: 82) takes the idea even further and argues that the second-generation immigrants and their sense of unbelonging and alienation are strengthened by diasporic memory, prejudice as well as marginalization of race. They stand out in Canadian society due to their culture and race and are therefore considered different (Cvetkovic 2021: 82).

To conclude, identity is a key theme in the novel as it is shaped by the characters' upbringing, generation relationships, and cultural memory. Notably, intragenerational relationships help the second generation find acceptance in themselves and create a new sense of belonging. In addition, the narrator bears the consequences of postmemory by having to reconstruct certain memories to make sense of them although they were passed on unintentionally and without explanations. There is a variety of opinions on whether Adele remembers and forgets intentionally or not, but it is certain that it is influenced by her traumatic past and she does not want to pass the bad memories on to her children. Moreover, Canadian literature discusses the failings of multiculturalism and how, despite the principles and promises, Canada was not a tolerant nation towards immigrants. Thus, the second

generation is left disappointed as they have to continuously endure racism and exclusion. Moreover, both the first and the second generation feel displaced, but the second generation can be liberated from it through cultural knowledge. Belonging is important as well, especially for the second generation, and it is shaped by the interactions between the first and the second generation. However, it affects the second generation more due to diasporic memory and their experiences with racism. The ideas and concepts discussed in the literature review will serve as a basis for the empirical part of the thesis that focuses on the issue of belonging.

## **2 TENSIONS BETWEEN BELONGING AND UNBELONGING, REASONS FOR AND WAYS OF DEALING WITH IT IN THE FIRST AND THE SECOND GENERATION IN *SOUCOUYANT***

The struggle to belong is a central theme in the novel as it revolves around immigrant characters and their children who are trying to find their way in a new homeland. There are various complex aspects and experiences that contribute to the characters' sense of belonging. As the focus is on two characters from different generations, their experiences may differ due to growing up in different environments and being surrounded by different people. Not only does the physical environment influence the characters' perception of themselves, but so does their state of mind. The following empirical study will be devoted to an analysis of the first- and the second-generation immigrant characters, specifically the narrator and his mother Adele. This method of close reading is applied to the most prominent examples from the novel to understand how their experiences with feelings of belonging and unbelonging manifest in the novel. The first subchapter is devoted to the character of Adele and the second one to the narrator. Finally, the similarities and differences between their experiences are discussed.

### **2.1. The First Generation: Adele**

To get an understanding of Adele's experiences, it is important to note how she came to Canada. From the moment that she set her foot on Canadian soil, it felt as if she was supposed to be grateful for everything that was given to her. She was put in a house that was smelly and had cockroaches, and yet, Adele was grateful to have it (Chariandy 2017: 48). She encounters a similar experience as she goes to a restaurant where it becomes evidently clear that she is not welcome (Chariandy 2017: 50). The owner mistakes her for a prostitute and informs her that

she is not welcome to eat in that establishment alluding to her skin color (Chariandy 2017: 50). However, Adele's reaction is different from what one would think as she reflects:

She's become too sensitive, she tells herself. She's living the dream of countless people in her birthplace, stuck back there with the running sores of their histories. She's been given a chance in a new land. She's one of the lucky ones. She must always remember that. (Chariandy 2017: 51)

Adele undoubtedly feels guilty for taking the owner's words to heart when she should be appreciating what she has already been given since other people in her homeland are not as lucky as she is. Another thing to mention is that for her this is a new opportunity for life in a way. She can start her life over in a new country, leaving behind the memories and events of her past. Her purpose is to belong to this new country whether she has to force it or not.

However, her attitude changes slightly as Adele and her husband Roger are trying to seek better accommodation for themselves but are constantly left disappointed (Chariandy 2017: 75). It should be noted that Roger is of South Asian descent who lived in Trinidad for a while (Chariandy 2017: 70). Once again, the problem is that they are not white which can be seen from the responses they get: "They get evasive answers when their accents are heard, but they persist undaunted. They realize their voices might be the problem, and so they practice speaking 'Canadian' to each other/.../" (Chariandy 2017: 75). It is implied that they have a strong Trinidadian accent and due to that are denied getting a new home. Later, they manage to find a home, although the landlord is not happy renting it out to colored people and often criticizes their ways of living (Chariandy 2017: 75). Mackey (2012: 232) explains that "Unable to name the systematic, everyday racism that they face on their new home, they can only blame themselves for their repeated 'disappointments', thinking they stem from private failures rather than public systematic barriers". Taking this into consideration, it once again becomes clear that Adele thinks that she is the problem instead of the system that she is living in, and she is disappointed in herself for not being able to belong.

But despite that, there is one aspect about which she is critical of Canada and that is connected to medical institutions and medicine. As Adele is living in Canada, she starts to get symptoms of dementia. For example, she forgets the name and age of her son, but as the narrator tries to talk to her about it, she responds with the words: “Don’t be stupid child. I does know what your name is. I just wanting you to say it properly” trying to minimize her problem of forgetting (Chariandy 2017: 19). However, at one point Adele refuses to do any more tests and scans to understand her condition (Chariandy 2017: 39). There is a distinctive occurrence in the novel where Adele’s and Roger’s thoughts on medicine are explained: “They were suspicious about the diagnostic tests which always seemed to presume meanings and circumstances which were never wholly familiar to them in the first place” (Chariandy 2017: 39). There is no doubt that Adele feared what she could not understand and thought it easier to move on from medicine. In addition, she could have feared that if there is something ‘wrong with her’ it could indicate that she does not belong as she is already different enough and would not want to intensify those feelings. Sheridan (2021: 30) has described Adele’s condition as a psychological or phenomenological transformation that inevitably isolates her from human cultural understanding. As a result, she cannot belong to a culture as its idea of the world prizes specific forms of agency and perception (Sheridan 2021: 30). Moreover, Adele was disappointed in how the medical specialists described her condition (Chariandy 2017: 40). In her diagnosis she was referred to as being part of the uneducated and/or ethnic minorities, and how medical professionals need to be cautious when handling such patients (Chariandy 2017: 41). This makes her appear as an otherworldly creature that needs to be treated with caution, which dehumanizes her and deepens her sense of unbelonging.

The need to belong also comes through by the way that Adele treats and talks to her children. As her son, the narrator, is crying, she asks him: “Why you crying, child of mine,

child of this beautiful land?” (Chariandy 2017: 195). Although at this point in the novel her symptoms of dementia have intensified, her understanding of their situation remains the same; she believes that in Canada they have better opportunities for life. Adele cannot understand how her son could possibly cry when he has everything he needs in Canada. Solbiac (2021: 8) explains the view of the first generation that “They raise their Canadian-born children in near cultural amnesia because they believe in the superiority of the cultural model of Canada /.../”. Therefore, not only does she believe that Canada is the best place for her and her family, but she also values the culture of Canada.

Furthermore, there is an interesting instance in the novel when Adele and her best friend Mrs. Christopher are taking a road trip, but they get stopped at customs (Chariandy 2017: 91). The narrator then makes a statement about their situation “Two women between countries and belonging to neither” (Chariandy 2017: 91). Although the women are situated between Canada and the United States, the reference is actually about being in between Canada and Trinidad. It shows how Adele does not feel that she belongs to Canada, but in addition to that, she now does not belong to Trinidad either. Whether it was her decision to let go of her roots entirely or not, at that moment she is in a state of unbelonging.

Later in the novel, there is an unfortunate event where Adele receives a prank call from a teenage girl Meera, living in the neighborhood, although she does not know it is her calling. At one point in the call Meera says that Adele’s children have died and goes on to explain:

Your family would have survived only to be monsters in this place, forever scarred, forever proclaiming a violence that nobody in their right mind would ever want to remember. They would have been alone with their traumas, forever alone, just as you, starting now, will forever be alone. (Chariandy 2017: 165)

Adele responds to this by continuously apologizing as if the ‘fake’ accident was her fault. Although the reader does not know what Adele is thinking at this moment and what mental state she is in, through her response it is understandable that she feels as if she has failed to

give her children the life they deserved. Due to Meera calling her sons ‘monsters’, it further intensifies the feelings of unbelonging as well as dehumanizes her and her family once again. Adele now being alone not only indicates that she has lost her family, but also that she is alone in the society.

## **2.2. The Second Generation: The Narrator**

The first thing that should be noted about Adele’s son is that he is left nameless in the novel. This could be interpreted in many ways, one being that because the mother has forgotten it, he remains unnamed. Another possibility is that the use of a nameless narrator is a literary technique which refers to the problem of identity in addition to belonging. However, it could also indicate that because he feels that he does not belong, he strips himself of his name and identity as it does not fit him or the environment around him.

Furthermore, there are various aspects that cause unbelonging in him, including the way he talks. As a child the narrator struggles in school due to having acquired his parents’ accent and is sent to the special needs office to fix this ‘problem’ (Chariandy 2017: 101). Due to his parents’ speaking Trinidadian English at home and being taught Standard English at school, the narrator discards what he is taught and takes the Trinidadian accent instead (Solbiac 2021: 9). But because of the response of the school and being treated this way, the narrator regards this treatment as violence (Solbiac 2021: 9). In a way, it is a protest of being forced to let go of his accent that resembles his culture as well as being judged. Not to mention that him sounding different already makes him feel like an outcast and that he does not belong. However, when he is older, his accent changes and his friend comments on it: “You talk all good. Man, you talk as if you’re whiter than me, and my grandfather was in the bloody Asiatic Exclusion League! What’s up, homeboy? What’s your problem?” (Chariandy 2017: 31). In

this case the narrator rejects his origins and its most fundamental aspect, the mother tongue (Mackey 2012: 236). Yet, it is apparent that no matter the way he talks, it is still a problem to those around him, further deepening his sense of unbelonging.

His family's place of residence confuses the narrator as well, since they live in what he describes as "This lonely cul-de-sac in the midst of 'a good neighborhood,' this difficult place that none of our neighbors would have settled for" (Chariandy 2017: 58). When the family bought the house in the suburb of Scarborough in Toronto, it was in a relatively bad state as it was rundown, rotting and the lake eroded their backyard (Chariandy 2017: 57-58). However, once the narrator is older, he realizes the reason for this move since "It was considered one of the last remaining 'good' parts of Scarborough, meaning distant from the growing ethnic neighborhoods to the west" (Chariandy 2017: 58-59). On the one hand, their family had to live far away from their community, but in a place with a better reputation. In this sense, the narrator must feel grateful for having better living conditions than others in his community. On the other hand, they did not belong there either, since some people in the neighborhood did not accept them. For instance, during the Heritage Day Parade, Adele goes roaming the streets in her underwear and the narrator freezes seeing his mother in such a state (Chariandy 2017: 61). One neighbor decides to comment on it: "...his mother, for god's sake. And he just stands there. I mean, what kind of people are we allowing to live here, anyway?" (Chariandy 2017: 62). It is hard enough for a child to see his mother in such a vulnerable state, but hearing what other people are saying of this situation must have made the narrator feel so alone in that moment as well as guilty for living in that neighborhood. Cvetkovic (2021: 81) explains this in simple terms that because of the racism, prejudice, and diasporic memory in addition to the influences of his mother and the environment, a sense of unbelonging progresses in the narrator.

Nevertheless, at one point in the novel the attitude the narrator receives is relatively different from before. When the narrator goes to the city, he starts working aside other colored people from different backgrounds (Chariandy 2017: 30). Although the working conditions are poor there, for the first time he is referred to as being Canadian by one of his colored friends (Chariandy 2017: 30). Considering the fact that as a child, the narrator felt excluded for being different as well as sounding different, in that brief moment he finally belongs somewhere.

There are interesting instances in the novel between the narrator and a local librarian, Miss Cameron. She is constantly telling the narrator things to be grateful for as well as how lucky he is. For example, she brings up his mother's hometown "Look at these books about your mother's birthplace. You should be very, very proud. Have you any idea of how important it was as a member of the British Empire?" (Chariandy 2017: 106). Jeffers (2021: 64) makes two good points about this occurrence: firstly, that Miss Cameron wishes the narrator to be proud of the things that are not entirely praiseworthy, as his ancestors had to work as slaves for the British Empire. Secondly, that instead of comforting, Miss Cameron eventually further deepens the narrator's sense of alienation since he cannot admire, or dream of his homeland and it is evident that he does not belong to Canada (Jeffers 2021: 63). This is in part because he has no connection to his homeland and because he does not see the good in his origins. In addition, there is another instance in the novel that causes the narrator to have similar feelings on the matter. The narrator is going through some old photos that he has found and sees their relatives who all seem all too familiar to him and yet he cannot remember, or he does not know their names (Chariandy 2017: 114). He hardly even remembers travelling to Carenage, where his mother used to live in Trinidad, as he was only a little boy at the time (Chariandy 2017: 115). Here it becomes clear once again that it is hard for him to connect to his background due to not really having any memories of it and not knowing his relatives or

the local people there. Regarding these examples, the narrator would feel more connected and included in Canada than Trinidad.

As mentioned above, the narrator's mother never intentionally explained her past to him, but despite that he still learned about it. He renders her mother's behavior as follows:

Mother told me other things too, especially later, when she couldn't help herself. When the scenes and secrets were spilling out of her involuntarily. /.../ She told, but she never explained or deciphered. She never put the stories together. She never could or wanted to do so. (Chariandy 2017: 136)

This is significant because it had a great effect on the narrator. As Brandel (2016: 79) explains, the remembering or forgetting of the past is a significant part of the narrator's identity as well as personal history. The narrator's condition can be further elaborated by applying Hirsch's term of postmemory to understand the impact of his mother Adele's memories on him:

To grow up with such overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth or one's consciousness, is to risk having one's own stories and experiences displaced, even evacuated, by those of the previous generation. (Hirsch 2008: 107)

This would cause great confusion for the protagonist as well as his past. He does not accuse his mother of inheriting her memories and having to deal with them, but it is certain that it affects him. Adele told him snippets of the time of WWII in Trinidad, the soldiers visiting their home and about an accident, all of which are fairly difficult for a child to hear and make sense of (Chariandy 2017: 136). However, by knowing the troubles back in Trinidad while living in Canada, the narrator would feel like he belonged to Canada more. Delisle (2011: 19-20) further explains that these inherited memories from the birthplace and the ancestral homeland create a new sense of belonging for the second generation that provide a new view of one's identity in Canada which in turn surpasses the discourse of multiculturalism. In this sense, the second generation might feel troubled by the memories of their parents, but at the same time, they find comfort and a sense of belonging in their birthplace.

Furthermore, towards the end of the novel there is a moment between Adele and the protagonist which reflects both of the characters' feelings. The narrator explains that:

She was smiling at me, and I caught it. I caught her reading me all the way through. The person I'd become, despite all of her efforts. A boy so melancholy, melancholy despite the luxuries that she'd worked so hard for him to enjoy. A boy moping for lost things, for hurts never his own. (Chariandy 2017: 194)

The narrator must feel as if he had failed his mother since despite all her efforts and what she has provided for him, her son is still unhappy and does not feel like he belongs to Canada. Instead, he is occupied with reconstructing and living in the past that he was not even part of. In another sense, Adele has failed as well because she tried so hard to fit into Canada where life should have been better for her and her family and yet they feel the exact opposite.

Ultimately, there are many aspects that have contributed to the characters' feelings of belonging. Both Adele and the narrator have been judged, excluded and mistreated due to looking and sounding different. Ludolph (2021: 41) suggests that “/.../ both the narrator and his mother are innately damaged by virtue of their status as first and second-generation immigrants of color from an ‘underdeveloped’ country”. As a result, this has caused the feeling of not fitting in as well as unbelonging. Moreover, they both wanted to belong to Canada, although the narrator did not articulate it as much. Belonging is essential when it comes to one's identity, thus it is significant for both characters. Another aspect they share is the need to feel grateful for what they have, like their home, even if it is not in the best condition nor are they treated well in that area. Thus, they almost have to force this idea of belonging to a community or place despite its flaws.

Yet, there are aspects in which their experiences vary to some degree. As mentioned previously, Adele does not understand how her son could be unhappy in Canada where life is much better than in Trinidad. Langwald (2016: 116) stresses that because the first-generation

parents have a different relationship to Canada, they cannot fully understand their son's feelings. They see it as the only place where their son could belong although it is not completely a home for them either (Langwald 2016: 116). Another thing is that Adele did her best to fit in even if it meant losing her accent to find accommodation or succumbing to racism whereas the narrator considered discrimination as an act of violence and in a way protested against it by keeping his Trinidadian accent when he was younger and he refused to glorify his ancestors' slavery as some sort of victory to be proud of. In addition, the narrator's experience differs from his mother's due to inheriting her memories and having to question his sense of belonging because of that. However, he makes peace with them and forms a new sense of belonging which Delisle (2011: 19) believes is made possible through the connections of family and diaspora.

## CONCLUSION

The thesis analyzed how the first- and second-generation immigrant experience with belonging and unbelonging, namely Adele's and the narrator's, appear in the novel *Soucouyant* and in what ways they are similar or different. Previous research indicates that identity is of great significance to the second generation, and it is influenced by various aspects such as their struggles of growing up, cultural memory as well as relationships. Postmemory and cultural memory are of importance as well as the second generation inherits the memories of the first generation that continue to impact them in their everyday lives. In addition, the second generation resents living in multiculturalist Canada due to it not living up to its principles and causing unbelonging in them.

Throughout the novel, Adele feels the need to belong to Canada even if she is being treated badly or not accepted in society. She is grateful for everything that is provided for her and makes every effort to fit in whether it is changing her accent at times or accepting her fate as it is. Not only does she want to belong, but she wants her family to belong as well and she has trouble understanding why her children are unhappy or not appreciative of things and privileges that they have in Canada. She feels guilty for the way her children are feeling in addition to feeling that she is alone in the society. However, despite her efforts, there are instances when she still feels that she belongs nowhere, such as when the Canadian medical system dehumanized her and made her feel like an outcast due to her condition.

Similarly, the narrator feels like an outcast at times due to not sounding or looking like a 'Canadian'. Even after changing his accent, it is still not enough for him to belong. In addition, living in a good neighborhood, although in a shabby house, does not change the way people see him and his family, making him feel like they are unwanted and not accepted there.

Nevertheless, unlike Adele, he does not feel grateful for what he has, nor does he accept how he is treated but instead protests against it. In addition, he refuses to glorify his ancestors' past of working as slaves and he struggles to connect to his family's past. But there are instances when he feels that he belongs as well. By inheriting his mother's memories, he heard of her struggles back in her homeland which made him overlook some of the struggles he has in Canada and form a new sense of belonging there. It is clear that the feelings of belonging and unbelonging are complex and varied for both generations, regardless of whether their experiences are similar or different.

In order to expand on this topic, further research could be done about the characters Mrs. Christopher and Meera and their sense of belonging. Their experiences could be compared to those of the characters analyzed in this study as well. In addition, some other novels dealing with the immigrant experience could be included in the study.

David Chariandy's *Soucouyant* demonstrates the various experiences of belonging and unbelonging of the first- and second-generation characters and how these experiences can vary or relate to one another. At times, they might feel that they are left out of the society, but despite that, they have a chance to feel as if they belong with the help of others or by believing and accepting it themselves.

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## RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL  
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

**Grethe-Ly Ärsis**

**The Portrayal of Belonging and Unbelonging in David Chariandy's *Soucouyant***

**Kuulumise ja mittekuulumise kujutamine David Chariandy romaanis „Soucouyant“**

Bakalaureusetöö

2024

Lehekülgede arv: 30

Annotatsioon:

Bakalaureusetöö eesmärk on analüüsida kuulumise ja mittekuulumise kujutamist David Chariandy 2007. aastal ilmunud romaanis „Soucouyant“, keskenduses esimese generatsiooni immigrandist tegelasele Adele'ile ja tema teise generatsiooni immigrandist pojale, kes on ka teose nimetu jutustaja. Töö analüüsib tegelaste kogemusi ja kuidas need sarnanevad ning erinevad.

Töö koosneb neljast osast: sissejuhatausest, kirjanduse ülevaatest, empiirilisest osast ja kokkuvõttest. Sissejuhatus tutvustab raamatu sisu, selle olulisust Kanada kontekstis ning annab ülevaate teemadest, mida lõputöös edasi käsitletakse. Sissejuhatauses esitatakse ka töö eesmärk ja uurimisküsimused. Esimene peatükk on kirjanduse ülevaade, mis arutab olulisi teemasid Chariandy teoses „Soucouyant“ nagu identiteet ja põlvkondlikud suhted, mälestuste edasiandmine, multikultuursus ning kuulumine ja mittekuulumine. Teine peatükk on empiiriline osa, mis keskendub mõlema tegelase kogemustele ning nende sarnasustele ja erinevustele.

Töö tulemusena selgus, et kogu romaani vältel tunneb Adele vajadust kuuluda Kanadasse, kuigi teda koheldakse seal halvasti ning teda ei aktsepteerita. Ta on tänulik kõige eest ning ta ei suuda mõista, miks tema lapsed ei hinda seda elu ja õigusi, mida Kanada neile võimaldab. Kuid vaatamata sellele tunneb ta mittekuuluvust pärast seda, kui Kanada meditsiinisüsteem teda tema seisundi tõttu põlatuna kohtles. Samamoodi tunneb jutustaja end põlatuna, kuna ta ei räägi ega näe välja nagu „kanadalane“ isegi pärast enda aktsendi muutmist. Heas naabruskonnas elamine ei muuda asjaolu, et jutustaja tunneb, kuidas tema pere ei ole seal omaksvõetud. Erinevalt oma emast protesteerib ta rassismi ja diskrimineerimise vastu ning keeldub ülistamast oma esivanemate raskusi ja orjatööd. Kuid pärides oma ema mälestused, tekib ka jutustajas kuuluvustunne. Kokkuvõtteks saab öelda, et tegelaste kogemused ja kuuluvustunded on mõlema põlvkonna jaoks keerulised ja mitmekesised, sõltumata sellest, kas need kogemused sarnanevad või erinevad.

Märksõnad: identiteet, kanada kirjandus, kuulumine, mittekuulumine, David Chariandy

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