

Bare Mind:  
Dementia and the Diasporic State of Exception  
in David Chariandy's *Soucouyant: A Novel of Forgetting*

by

Rebekah Ludolph  
B.A., Wilfrid Laurier University, 2011

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of English

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## **Supervisory Committee**

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Dr. Nicole Shukin, Department of English  
**Supervisor**

Dr. Misao Dean, Department of English  
**Departmental Member**

Dr. Gregory Blue, Department of History  
**Outside Member**

## Abstract

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My reading of the figure of Adele, a woman with dementia, in David Chariandy's novel *Soucouyant: A Novel of Forgetting* (2007), brings Giorgio Agamben's biopolitical concept of "bare life" together with the notion of the subject in diaspora to theorize a new mentality that I call "bare mind." The notion of "bare mind" addresses how cognitive imperialism creates a biopolitical state of exception both under forms of sovereign power and within a liberal regime of multicultural governmentality, while acknowledging the ways in which dementia, portrayed as the 'forgetting' of dominant knowledge regimes, reveals resistance to cognitive imperialism.

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## Dedication

*To Fred and Debbie Lou who encourage me to sit with the ambiguities*

*To Margaret who remembered how to laugh*

## Introduction

My reading of the figure of Adele, a woman with dementia, in David Chariandy's novel *Soucouyant: A Novel of Forgetting* (2007), brings Giorgio Agamben's biopolitical concept of "bare life" together with the notion of the subject in diaspora to theorize a new mentality<sup>1</sup> that I call "bare mind." The notion of "bare mind" addresses how cognitive imperialism creates a biopolitical state of exception both under forms of sovereign power and within a liberal regime of multicultural governmentality,<sup>2</sup> while acknowledging the ways in which dementia, portrayed as the 'forgetting' of dominant knowledge regimes, reveals resistance to cognitive imperialism.

The Caribbean soucouyant, or female vampire, bides her time by day encased in the skin of a reclusive old woman. At night the creature sheds her skin and transforms into a roaming fireball on the hunt. A soucouyant's victim grows increasingly fatigued, pale, and bears a "telltale mark or bruise" (*Soucouyant* 135). To escape the soucouyant, one must separate her from her skin: scatter rice for the neurotic vampire to collect, beat the fireball with a stick so that the guilty elder may be identified by her bruises in the morning, or sprinkle salt on the old woman's skin to render it uninhabitable (*Soucouyant* 135).

In the novel *Soucouyant*, David Chariandy depicts Adele, a first generation immigrant to Toronto from Trinidad, as a woman suffering from dementia and simultaneously taking on the identity of a soucouyant. Adele gathers her fingernail clippings compulsively from the carpet and chants "*Old skin, 'kin, 'kin*" as she wanders tortured by the "twoness" of her identity (134). She leaves those around her subtly

marked and drained. However, in the opinion of her son, Adele's story is "not really about a soucouyant" (66). According to a sympathetic Canadian doctor's diagnosis, Adele's "post traumatic stress" is due to her traumatic childhood in Trinidad during the Second World War. By this diagnosis, Adele's disordered mind, shaken by the traumatic occupation of her homeland and her subsequent diasporic immigration to Canada, expresses itself in early-onset cognitive dementia (38).

Within the context of a liberal multicultural governmentality, the medical diagnosis of dementia can itself be a form of cognitive imperialism, that is, an act of mental or psychic colonization that "denies people their language and cultural identity by maintaining the legitimacy of only one language, one culture, and one frame of reference" (Battiste 198). According to the Canadian doctor's diagnosis of Adele, she is the victim of cognitive dementia brought on by the traumas of her past; by this diagnosis, Adele appears to lose the will and consciousness of the human subject, as defined by Western knowledge regimes, and to be reduced to a de-subjectified<sup>3</sup> biopolitical state that resembles the condition theorist Giorgio Agamben has diagnosed as bare life.<sup>4</sup>

In response to this diagnostic form of cognitive imperialism, Adele resists the doctor's verdict. As her mind degrades medically, Adele's new mentality expresses itself through the figure of the monstrous soucouyant. When Adele is initiated into Western knowledge regimes as a child, she begins to view her mother as a horrific soucouyant. Paradoxically, when not in monstrous form, the soucouyant is also an old woman. The "Old Woman" in Chariandy's novel is represented as a powerful figure with the ability to preserve long forgotten forms of knowledge. As Adele begins to forget dominant knowledge regimes with the onset of her dementia, I argue, she resists the effects of



cognitive imperialism. Her resistance takes the form of remembering and circulating alternate ways of knowing, while exposing through performance the monstrousness imposed upon her both by forms of imperialism in Trinidad and by a liberal regime of multicultural governmentality in Canada.

In order to produce the terms needed to discuss Adele's mental state, I will bring together criticism on the diasporic subject and on the biopolitical state of exception. This methodology will allow me to produce a re-contextualization of "bare life" that recognizes the role of difference, diverse technologies of power, and cognitive imperialism in relegating subjects in diaspora to a state of exception. Secondly, this approach allows me to contextualize the state of exception as it is produced both under sovereign power and within a liberal, multicultural governmentality. Thirdly, I articulate a mental state of exception that involves a figure who, through de-subjectification, is at once abandoned and in possession of a resistant mentality. I call this mentality "bare mind." "Bare mind" is a mental state that results from, and reveals, the workings of cognitive imperialism. "Bare mind" consists of the de-subjectification of the human in a state of exception, yet results in a diasporic subjectivity that 'forgets' how to be a properly human subject within Western knowledge regimes, while 'remembering' previously forgotten ways of understanding the world. Chariandy's literary text provides an opportunity to formulate a notion of the diasporic subject in exception by virtue of narrating a son's experience of his mother in such a state. The novel therefore allows bare mind to remain conceptually withdrawn and unavailable to any kind of transparent, for instance medical, representation.

### **Giorgio Agamben's "State of Exception"**

In his 2004 interrogation of racial discourse, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, diasporic theorist Paul Gilroy connects the “politically ambivalent and juridically marginal” condition of bare life, as theorized by Giorgio Agamben, with the vulnerable state of colonial alterity (Gilroy 48). In his seminal work *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998), Agamben develops an understanding of the biopolitical subject that traces back to the ancient figure of Roman law, *homo sacer*. Agamben claims, “the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power” (*Homo Sacer* 6). For Agamben, sovereign power produces a biopolitical body through the ability to decide the state of exception (11). Life caught in the state of exception is what Agamben calls bare life: “human life . . . politicized only through an abandonment to the unconditional power of death” (90). Life that is not protected by the law, but is deemed an exception by the sovereign, is vulnerable to the force of law by virtue of its exception or abandonment. Agamben describes life abandoned by law as stripped of all consciousness and personality to the point of apathy, without memory, grief, instinct, or reason (185). Further, throughout *Homo Sacer*, Agamben claims that this ancient figure of Roman law, *homo sacer*, is the secret to understanding the West’s modern biopolitical condition, finding parallels between overcomatose patients on life support (164), Rwandans in refugee camps (133), the terminally ill bio-chemist who turns his body into a laboratory (185), the patient diagnosed as a “life that does not deserve to live” (136), and the victim of Auschwitz (184). While Gilroy affirms the importance of examining figures of bare life, he also meets Agamben with a challenge. Gilroy argues that, though Agamben is “uninterested in racial discourse or in the analysis of colonial relations,” imperial conquest, including the history of the Middle Passage, has drastically exacerbated the

reduction of humans to a state of exception (*Postcolonial* 48). Despite Agamben's failure to seriously address the histories of imperialism and diasporic displacement that Adele represents in Chariandy's novel, the production of difference and the diverse technologies of power that accompany imperial projects are highly relevant when examining which humans are most vulnerable to being relegated to a state of exception.

The study of subjects in diaspora has at times been approached as the study of the stateless. Agamben's notion of "bare life" is indebted to Hannah Arendt's conceptualization of "mere existence" in her famous chapter "The Decline of the Nation State and the End of the Rights of Man" and to Walter Benjamin's foretelling of State structures being supplanted by a normalized state of emergency (*Homo Sacer* 12). For Arendt, stateless people without a nation "added a new category to those who lived outside the pale of the law" (Arendt 227). Recalling Arendt's statement, "a man who is nothing but a man has lost the very qualities which make it possible for other people to treat him as a fellow-man" (Arendt 300), Agamben's condition of bare life emerges in the interstitial figure of the stateless right-less human.<sup>5</sup> Agamben approaches his study of "bare life" via the claim that Arendt did not make a connection between her identification of the biopolitical human condition and her analysis of totalitarian sovereign power (*Homo Sacer* 4). By beginning his argument with an invocation of Arendt in tandem with Benjamin's prediction, Agamben implies that bare life and statelessness are connected. I develop this implication below in my study of "bare life" within a diasporic context.

Questions concerning the biopolitics of colonial alterity and the conception of "bare life" are raised by David Chariandy's diasporic character Adele. Though conditions of colonial alterity, diasporic subjectivity, and bare life are not interchangeable, Adele

takes on all three of these positions, or characteristics of them. Therefore, at different points in my argument I will refer to Adele as inhabiting all three. Like Gilroy, Chariandy's character connects the position of colonial alterity, that at times is located in diaspora, to a biopolitical state of exception (*Postcolonial* 43). The diagnosis of Adele as suffering from cognitive dementia approximates Agamben's description of de-subjectification in a biopolitical state of exception. Yet, Agamben's formulation of the biopolitical state of exception fits awkwardly with the idealized figure of diasporic memory and resistance. While Agamben's examples of bare life are stripped of all personality, grief, and memory, the subject in diaspora is more often described as one afflicted with nostalgia, haunted by a traumatic history, and/or empowered by diasporic community and cultural memory (Stock 24).

### **The Subject in Diaspora**

The paradoxical combination of mental disintegration and resistance presented in the figure of Adele is often addressed in diaspora criticism.<sup>6</sup> Jewish scholars translating the Torah into their vernacular Greek from Hebrew coined the term "diaspora" to express the condition of Jewish communities scattered throughout the Mediterranean. The word's literal meaning is "to scatter, spread, disperse, [or] be separated" (Baumann 20). The term was developed to capture the capacity of Jewish communities to preserve the law of the Torah and resist assimilation while living as scattered people within foreign cultures. Diaspora describes the ability of the Jewish people to maintain an ethnic-cultural identity while living in relation to a dominant host culture. In essence, this original meaning of diaspora connotes existence within an interstitial space created by belonging to a community while living outside of said community's homeland.

Classical philosophers later adopted diaspora as a metaphor for the decomposition, dissolution, or dispersion of parts of a whole (Baumann 21). In this sense, to be in diaspora metaphorically suggests the process of dissolving. This second definition has developed into the use of diaspora to illustrate a subject condition, and is not specifically applied to geographic areas or displaced populations in their entirety (Anthias 560; Cho 14). In contemporary scholarship both the literal and metaphorical senses of diaspora have been debated, elaborated and applied in relation to different cultural groups under the umbrella of diaspora studies.<sup>7</sup>

In *Cartographies of Diaspora*, Avtar Brah offers an example of the dual meaning of diaspora at work. Brah identifies diaspora as an analysis of “specific forms of migrancy” pertaining to distinct cultural and geographic groups of people (Brah 16). Simultaneously, diaspora suggests a figurative space of dislocation in which a subject wavers between the terror and familiarity of home (Brah 180). Diaspora is a metaphorical, psychological process related to ever-changing and emergent cultural, political and economic conditions (Brah 208). The combination of these two definitions, one historical-geographical and one designating a subject condition (even a psychic condition), arguably produces a much richer and paradoxical idea of what it means to be in diaspora. It is to be both within and loyal to the culture of one’s birth despite distance from one’s homeland, and to be in a situation of dissolution, where cultural and social markers are dispersed and transformed by nostalgia, terror, and existence under the hegemony of a dominant culture. To be in diaspora, then, is to be both in community and outside of community; it is to be part of an imagined whole and part of a whole in the process of dissolving, while set apart from a host culture.

Since the 1960s, diaspora has largely signified cultural groups living in a foreign land. In scholarship today, those living in diaspora include many different subjects—refugees, immigrants, indentured labourers, displaced indigenous populations and even, according to some scholars, colonizing populations.<sup>8</sup> The expansion of the field of diaspora studies seems infinite, even while the cry to remain context-specific is emphasized. As diaspora studies has broadened and diaspora has increasingly taken on metaphorical dimensions, there has been a demand for a return to more specific employments of the term “diaspora” for particular cultural and geographic groups (Baumann 22; Cohen x; Safran 83; Tölölyan, “Contemporary” 648).

Answering this call, and prompted by Chariandy’s fictional character of Adele, the following chapters will attempt to articulate the mentality that is produced at the intersection of the ideal subject in diaspora and the concept of “bare life,” in a specific context beyond those engaged by Agamben. This thesis will offer a re-working of Agamben’s formulation of the state of exception within the context of the Trinidadian diaspora in Canada, specifically Adele’s life in Toronto from 1960-1990, and examine the biopolitical potentials and limits of Agamben’s concept of “bare life” when applied to a literary representation of a gendered, racialized, class-defined Trinidadian-Canadian woman.

Chariandy’s character Adele describes her mentality in terms of “twoness.” In the context of diasporic studies, Adele’s subjectivity and her self-definition in terms of “twoness” represent a form of “double consciousness” reminiscent of the position of alterity that was the focus of W.E.B. Dubois’ work *The Souls of Black Folk* (2008) and appropriated by Gilroy in his study *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double*

*Consciousness* (1992). *Soucouyant* describes a mental divide that appears in Adele once she realizes dominant culture considers her an ‘outsider.’ Adele’s double consciousness is a result of simultaneously viewing herself from her own subject position and viewing herself as ‘other’ through dominant Western mentalities. Adele’s “twoness” complicates her subject position because it renders her in a constant process of counter-subjectification. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall deems the process of subjectification a creative impulse available to the subject in diaspora. According to Hall, by making use of the nostalgia and loss experienced in diaspora, the subject can imitate a return to lost roots that are never finally attainable. These roots exist as a vast “reservoir” of memory and identity to create a self-representation that bursts open the binaries of inclusion/exclusion constructed by the dominant culture (Hall 236). Chariandy’s character of Adele, in the process of remembering her childhood in Trinidad, appears to be continually working to recreate her self-representation and to retrieve it from imperial mentalities that she internalized as a child. Hall’s formulation of a continual process of diasporic subjectification is at odds with the utter de-subjectification that Agamben posits in the condition of bare life. At the same time, Agamben’s biopolitical concept can be used to aid in identifying the extremely dehumanizing effects of cognitive imperialism. For these reasons, prompted by Gilroy, it is valuable to bring diasporic and biopolitical perspectives into conversation when approaching Chariandy’s character of Adele.

### **The Diasporic Subject in a State of Exception**

This thesis aims to bring together the biopolitical concept of “bare life” and the notion of the subject in diaspora in order to produce the language needed to discuss the mentality that distinguishes a character like Adele. Before approaching this task,

discrepancies between diaspora studies and Agamben's theorization of "bare life" must be addressed, including: the importance of the politics of difference for complicating the category of the 'human,' diverse technologies of both sovereign and governmental power, and the production of subjectivity. Once I have laid out the necessary biopolitical framework to approach the concept of bare mind, I will argue that Adele's mind is represented as bare in three senses. First, like Agamben's figure of bare life, Adele's mentality is suspended somewhere between hegemonic Western knowledge regimes and her own displaced forms of knowledge. For example, Adele struggles to convey her story through language, yet her state of mind affects her control of language and as a result she often fails to be understood and turns to other forms of communication. Secondly, Adele's mind is bare in the sense that her memory is progressively stripped of everyday Western knowledge. Her son reports, "She began to forget the names and places, goals and meanings" (*Soucouyant* 12). And thirdly, Adele's mind is bare in the sense that it re-exposes her to a forgotten way of understanding the world. Adele's forgetting of Western conventions occurs as she simultaneously remembers the knowledge passed on to her as a child by an old Trinidadian woman, and comes to realize her own catastrophic internalization of Western ways of seeing and knowing. Bare mind, in all three of these senses, is a newly portrayed diasporic mentality that I contend Chariandy depicts as occurring when the diasporic subject is stripped of dominant governmentalities and forgotten forms of knowledge are remembered.

My first chapter is devoted to theorizing the critical intersection of the subject in diaspora and the concept of "bare life." It offers three considerations that arise when the concept of "bare life" is confronted with examinations of the subject in diaspora. These



considerations are: firstly, how the politics of difference are central to locating the subject in diaspora. Agamben's notion of "bare life" fails to address major forms of difference, including race, gender, and class, and the way that they are used to render particular human lives more vulnerable than others. Secondly, Agamben's figure of bare life is dehumanized through an utter stripping of human subjectivity. Agamben's limit case emphasizes the dehumanizing effects of modern biopolitics and challenges the emancipatory possibilities of diaspora. An ambiguous figure is left at the intersection of the subject in diaspora and the concept of "bare life." This figure's only resistance emerges from a fatal struggle with biopolitical forces. And thirdly, Agamben's formulation of sovereignty does not take into account the diverse technologies of power that may bring about states of exception once diasporic subjects leave the space of the colony. Specifically, within the context of official multiculturalism, a contemplation of Adele must take into account forms of power that function through positive means, such as inclusion. My first chapter will trace these three considerations to demonstrate that, when deployed in reference to a diasporic subject, the hypothesized condition of bare life is mediated by a complex architecture of diverse technologies of power that may render particular forms of life relatively bare. Though diasporic subjects have modes of resistance, when relegated to a state of exception, any act of resistance is turned into a fatal struggle, thus producing an ambiguous figure within a diasporic state of exception.

The second chapter delineates two different contexts within Chariandy's novel that depict Adele in some form of exceptionality. The first context involves the American military occupation of Trinidad during World War Two and Adele's subjugation at that time to forces of imperial sovereignty.<sup>9</sup> The second context, that of the liberal

multicultural society of Canada, shows Adele's distance from Agamben's conception of "bare life" by introducing diverse, including positive, technologies of power. This chapter includes a close reading of Chariandy's depiction of a Heritage Day parade to emphasize the role of positive technologies of power in producing a variation of the state of exception within the Canadian multicultural regime. Through this close reading, Adele is revealed as an included/excluded body, rendered bare and monstrous by conventional attitudes towards aged, gendered, and raced bodies. However, Chariandy's emphasis on Adele's exclusion through the exercise of multicultural "tolerance" and "civility" by her neighbours compels me to consider the relation of a multicultural *governmentality* to the exceptional status experienced by Adele as a subject in diaspora.

Finally, in Chapter Three I introduce the concept of "bare mind" as a way of bringing together the concept of "bare life," the subject in diaspora, and dementia. I highlight the relevance of cognitive imperialism to my discussion through an examination of two key scenes from Chariandy's novel. The first scene represents Adele's initial ingestion of a Western hegemonic understanding of the world, within a context of sovereign power, in the form of an apple gifted to her by an American soldier in Trinidad. This charged act signals the beginning of Adele's "twoness" and of her monstracization of her mother into the form of the soucouyant. The second scene I examine takes place in Canada where a sympathetic doctor diagnoses Adele's cognitive dementia within the framework of a liberal multicultural governmentality. As her mind begins to disintegrate, Adele slips back into forgotten ways of understanding and takes on a different mentality, one that I term "bare mind." As previously stated, bare mind is an ascribed mental state that results from and reveals cognitive imperialism. The mental state occurs through the

de-subjectification of the human in a state of exception, and produces a new mentality that ‘forgets’ how to be a subject within Western conventions. Adele’s shift towards bare mind includes her gradual transformation into a soucouyant, her embracing of a forgotten Trinidadian cosmology, and her growing understanding of the effects of Western knowledge regimes on those around her as she realizes that she is viewed as monstrous (just as she herself viewed her mother as monstrous). Adele’s bare mind, like cognitive dementia, is eventually fatal. However, like Agamben’s conception of “bare life,” it is from the very limit of recognizable cognition that Adele is able to access other forms of knowledge in a final gesture of resistance. Rather than pathologize her condition, Chariandy’s narrative suggests that Adele periodically takes on an alternative subjectivity that references a cosmology inaccessible through Western understanding.

Chariandy, like Agamben, offers a depiction of the ways human life can be diminished. At the same time, like Gilroy, Chariandy is sensitive to the imperial histories that condition human subjects. Chariandy’s representation of Adele illustrates that a state of exception may be produced through narratives of difference and diverse technologies of power. I argue that Adele, as a diasporic subject in a state of exception, is similar to a figure of bare life in the sense that, according to Western understanding, cognitive dementia has stripped her of her subjectivity. However, within a liberal regime of Canadian multiculturalism, sovereign power works in tandem with diverse technologies of power and the effects of governmentality are revealed to have a vital relationship to the biopolitics of a diasporic state of exception.

Unlike the sympathetic fictional doctor who diagnoses the character of Adele, and Agamben’s theoretical diagnosis of the modern biopolitical condition, through a work of

fiction Chariandy is able to draw attention to the biopolitical significance of the very act of diagnosis within a liberal multicultural governmentality without reducing Adele to her diagnosed condition. Chariandy allows his character of Adele to retreat into an inaccessible state of mind. Chariandy accomplishes this crucial distance through his narrator, Adele's son, who, even when he presumes knowledge of his mother's state, is continually troubled by his mother's withdrawal. Chariandy's narrator straddles the spaces between a normalized Western understanding of the world and his mother's mentality, enabling a representation of the effects of cognitive imperialism without pronouncing a victimizing diagnosis of the resulting mentality.

## Chapter One

### The Production of Bare Life in Diaspora

As noted in my introduction, Paul Gilroy recently insisted on the use of the term “bare life” to describe the condition of racialized colonial alterity that has resulted in diasporic populations (*Postcolonial* 43). The subject in diaspora has long been posited as existing in an interstitial space; from poet Dionne Brand’s descriptions of “in-betweenness” (Walcott 74), to Stuart Hall’s formulation of “hybridity,” and Homi K. Bhabha’s “third space,” each articulation of the subject in diaspora places said subject in an interstitial space. The idea of existing in ‘a space between’ accompanies the concept of “bare life” as well. For Agamben, a human is reduced to the state of bare life by embodying the paradox of inclusion in the law only through abandonment by the law. Caught in the interstitial zone of in-distinction between inclusion and exclusion by law, the biopolitical condition of bare life renders human life vulnerable to being killed with impunity. However, as explained in the introduction, the concept of “bare life” and the subject in diaspora are incompatible in many ways. Therefore, to approach Chariandy’s character of Adele, who exhibits characteristics of both, a new analytical tool will have to be produced. Before this can be attempted, the discrepancies between these very different concepts must be addressed. As a result, this chapter will trace the biopolitical framework I employ in subsequent chapters to examine Chariandy’s character of Adele as an embodiment of a diasporic state of exception. To this end, the following chapter will first review Agamben’s theory of “bare life” and then formulate an adapted notion of “bare life,” in conjunction with the subject in diaspora, to produce an understanding of

Chariandy's character of Adele and her existence within a state of exception under both sovereign power and a liberal regime of Canadian multicultural governmentality.

### **Bare Life: Sovereignty and Biopower**

In his best-known work, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Agamben takes up Michel Foucault's claim that while sovereign power is founded in the right to commit its subjects to death, modern power works through the administration of life.<sup>10</sup> For Foucault, the entry of life into the mechanism of power signals the beginning of modernity (3). Taking issue with this claim and laying aside Foucault's conceptualization of interlinking technologies of power, Agamben seeks to establish that the "*production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power*" (6). Agamben finds evidence for his claim in a constellation of historical and modern figures, the primary figure being *homo sacer* from Roman antiquity. The sovereign's power to decide the state of exception becomes the focal point of Agamben's conception of biopolitics. The sovereign simultaneously exists in exception, creates the exception, and allows the law to seize hold of life. The biopolitical space of exception presents an interstitial topos that, according to Gilroy, can help to illuminate how power operates vis-à-vis colonial alterity (*Postcolonial* 44).

Unlike Foucault's theory of power that differentiates between technologies of sovereign power and biopower, Agamben's inquiry "concerns precisely [the] hidden point of intersection between juridical-institutional power and the biopolitical modes of power" (*Homo Sacer* 5-6). Agamben derives his definition of sovereignty from the work of Carl Schmitt. Schmitt provides the connection between the state of exception and the ultimate authority necessary for sovereign power to seize hold of life and produce a biopolitical

condition (*Homo Sacer* 11). For Schmitt, as he describes in his work *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (1985), “the sovereign is he who decides the exception” (7). Schmitt is clear: “What characterizes an exception is principally unlimited authority, which means the suspension of the entire existing order” (12). In deciding the exception, the sovereign emerges as both included and excluded from the law. The sovereign remains included because his decision alone can suspend the normal rule of law, but in possessing unlimited authority to decide when the law applies or when it does not, the sovereign acts outside the law. In Schmitt’s words, the exception “defies general codification” while simultaneously revealing the sovereign’s “monopoly to decide” (13). Since the sovereign exists in an exceptional relation to the law, the sovereign is excluded from the law and the law applies to him only through its withdrawal. For Schmitt, in this exceptional status, the sovereign produces and maintains the situation that the law requires for its own “validity”: the state of exception (*Homo Sacer* 17). The double structure of the exceptional sovereign and parallel exceptional state of *homo sacer*, as will be explained, defines Agamben’s conception of the sovereign who decides upon the exception and produces the biopolitical figure of bare life. In contrast to Foucault’s genealogy of biopower, Agamben’s concept of power rejects differentiation between sovereign power and biopower and contends that the sovereign exception produces the biopolitical subject.

Agamben’s analysis of biopolitics is founded in Schmitt’s understanding of the state of exception in combination with a re-examination of Aristotle’s definition of man. For Agamben, Aristotle’s distinction between *zoē*, biological life, and *bios*, political life, underpins the modern biopolitical condition because it allows for the separation of citizen

and human. In identifying this distinction in Aristotle, Agamben reveals the exclusion of natural life from the *polis* and its relegation to the private sphere. According to Agamben, bare life emerges from the rupture of *zoë* and *bios* as natural life included in politics only through its exclusion (*Homo Sacer* 11). In Agamben's reading of Aristotle, bare life subsists as the excess of natural life included in the *polis* only through its being banned from it (7). The paradoxical construction of inclusion/exclusion that seizes hold of natural life constitutes the interstitial space, or "zone of indistinction" as Agamben puts it, inhabited by bare life and the original biopolitical activity of sovereign power.

Agamben recognises the ancient Roman figure of *homo sacer* as an example of life that exists in an interstitial space and is included in the law through a relation of abandonment. This relation of abandonment characterizes the fate of the modern biopolitical condition. Vulnerability to the law through withdrawal of its protections distinguishes the plight of bare life held in abandonment. Agamben borrows this relation of "ban" from Jean-Luc Nancy, who states, "[The] abandoned being finds itself deserted to the degree that it finds itself remitted, entrusted, or thrown into this law" (Nancy 44). Abandoned life is at the mercy of the citizenry through exclusion. Abandoned by the law, bare life is caught in the zone where the border between homicide and sacrifice is indistinct. To illuminate this relation, Agamben draws on archaic Roman law. In Roman law *homo sacer* is "an obscure figure . . . in which human life is included in the juridical order . . . solely in the form of its exclusion (that is, of its capacity to be killed)" (*Homo Sacer* 8). Agamben derives his description of *homo sacer* from Popeius Fetus:

The sacred man is the one whom the people have judged on account of a crime. It is not permitted to sacrifice this man, yet he who kills him will not be condemned



for homicide; in the first tribunitian law, in fact, it is noted that “if someone kills the one who is sacred according to the plebiscite, it will not be considered homicide.” (71)

According to Popeius Fetus, *homo sacer* subsists within a vulnerability to the law through its withdrawal. *Homo sacer* is therefore left abandoned to the force of law by means of exclusion from its protections. Like the sovereign, *homo sacer* is both the exception and the one who produces the norm through his own exemption.

In the archaic figure of *homo sacer*, Agamben locates the law’s abandonment of bare life. To distinguish the modern biopolitical condition from the original activity of sovereign power, Agamben adopts Walter Benjamin’s conviction that great State structures have “entered into a process of dissolution” and argues that the state of emergency has become the norm (*Homo Sacer* 12). Modern democracy’s foundation upon the concept of *habeas corpus* (1679) makes it possible for bare life to become the norm. The formula of *habeas corpus* attached legal significance and rights to the *corpus*, the biological person, rather than an individual’s status within feudal relations or their existence as a citizen. This bringing of *zoë* into the law provides the basis for modern democracy. Each natural life becomes the sovereign bearer of rights and a figure of the sovereign exception while, at the same time, it is precisely the body’s capacity to be killed that deems natural life the bearer of rights (123-125). Still, Agamben claims the modern biopolitical condition was not made visible until the refugee crisis following the First World War revealed the fictitious nature of the bond between birth and nation. With the mass displacement of refugees and stateless people after the war, it became apparent that the rights of the citizen (*bios*) were separate from the rights of human life without

citizenship (*zoë*). The modern biopolitical condition is set apart by the dissolution of nation-birth links which renders every life vulnerable to abandonment. Lives outside of citizenship are approached through humanitarian efforts on the grounds of their bare life, while citizens have rights based on their very capacity to be killed; such is the modern biopolitical condition according to Agamben (131-135).

Within the modern process of State dissolution, the new political space becomes the “camp”—a topos Agamben derives from his examination of limit figures of bare life within Nazi concentration camps. The camp is formed out of the state of exception and martial law when “[t]he state of exception . . . ceases to be referred to as an external and provisional state of factual danger and comes to be confused with juridical rule itself” (*Homo Sacer* 168). As a result, within the camp, the state of exception is normalized. Under the modern planetary order, the space of the camp materializes whenever law is suspended and leaves sovereign individuals with the power to commit atrocities abated only by their own ethical judgement (174). “Camps” emerge wherever there is a sovereign, and this sovereign is any figure who “decides on the value or non-value of life” (142). From Agamben’s vantage point, the radical topos of the camp can be used to identify dire states of exception in different modern contexts.

In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben’s figures of the modern biopolitical condition are extreme: the overcomatose patient (164), the terminally ill biochemist who turns his own body into a living laboratory (185), and most famously the prisoner of Auschwitz—Primo Levi’s *Muselmann* (184). For *der Muselmann*, “humiliation, horror and fear had so taken away all consciousness and all personality as to make him absolutely apathetic” (185).<sup>11</sup>

This ultimate example of life in abandonment exhibits certain qualities, primarily a loss of

will, consciousness, memory, grief, instinct, and reason. *Der Muselmann* exists at “the extreme threshold between life and death” as a human surviving the experience of the inhuman (*Remnants* 45-47). The extreme condition of life in the camp reveals the complete de-subjectification that occurs within the modern biopolitical state. For Agamben, this limit figure of utmost abandonment is the horror of the modern biopolitical condition, while simultaneously a possible “silent form of resistance” (*Homo Sacer* 185). In its complete indistinction between law and life, *der Muselmann* embodies a new form of resistance that leaves behind the double bind of sovereign power.

In summarizing his biopolitical treatise, Agamben states, “law is made of nothing but what it manages to capture inside itself through the inclusive exclusion” and law therefore finds its own existence in “the very life of man” (*Homo Sacer* 27; Foucault qtd. in *Homo Sacer* 27). In positioning the inclusive/exclusion, Agamben conflates sovereign power and biopower to produce an original understanding of the modern biopolitical condition. Through the foundation of modern democracy upon the rights of natural life and the disintegration of nation-birth links, bare life has proliferated and been made visible. For Agamben, within the modern planetary order, the exception is the norm and all life is potentially rendered bare life.

### **‘Different’ Life**

Agamben’s concept of “bare life” has been used to approach populations that are produced through diasporas such as refugees and immigrant labourers. In a discussion of immigrant groups through the lens of “bare life,” Prem Kumar Rajaram and Carl Grundy-Warr point out that “[t]he refugee or other irregular migrant, the detritus or remainder, is integral to the sovereign law that encompasses the interiorized humanity” ( 35). They

write:

The encounter with an excess . . . is both a threat to the regular order and integral for its continuation. It is a threat to the order because it reminds us of the ruses undertaken to confine human beings to a politicized life within the nation-state. And it is integral to the continuation of the system of the nation-state because its unruliness serves to define the norm. . . . [The sovereign law] maintains a ruse of inside/outside while at the same time creating the ambiguous system of the nation state that depends on the appropriation of the ostensibly excluded in order to maintain the inside. (36)

The double structure of the ban emerges from the relationship between the State and “irregular migrants” accompanied by a relationship of dependency that emphasizes the role of the excluded in the perpetuation of the norm and, consequently, the continual creation of exceptional bodies. Nevertheless, though articles such as Kumar Rajaram and Grundy-Warr’s address the relationship between the state and the immigrant populations, they do not approach their subject through the lens of diaspora.<sup>12</sup>

This body of scholarship affirms the proliferation of bare life that Agamben posits as occurring within modernity. *Homo Sacer* ends with the powerful statement: “Today’s democratic-capitalist project of eliminating the poor classes through development not only reproduces within itself the people that are excluded but also transforms the entire population of the Third World into bare life” (180). Seizing on Agamben’s gesture, diasporic theorist Paul Gilroy takes the concept of “bare life” and articulates his own appropriation and critique of the state of exception; namely, the racialization of difference that has been pivotal for the rendering of bare life throughout imperial history. In

*Postcolonial Melancholia*, Gilroy equates the proliferation of life residing in the interstitial spaces of “the colony” with increasing “inhuman conditions” or what Agamben calls the condition of bare life:

Though [Giorgio Agamben] is uninterested in either racial discourse or an analysis of colonial relations, there is something profound to learn from [his] attempts to reconcile the theoretical issues of Arendt and Foucault in this area. He has made a dense but invigorating study of sovereign power that is centered on the politically ambivalent and juridically marginal figure of the person who has been killed with impunity and of their reduction to the inhuman condition of bare life that sanctions their death. (48)

Gilroy’s reading of Agamben draws attention both to the importance of Agamben’s articulation of “bare life” for the study of colonial alterity, including the diasporas of the Black Atlantic, and to Agamben’s failure to address the role that racialization has played in the projects that have relegated so many lives to states of exception.

Agamben’s approach to difference beyond the *zoë/bios* distinction, to difference *within* the category of the human, is important for understanding how “bare life” may be applied to the plight of some diasporic subjects. For Agamben, the only true division is the fundamental split between *zoë* and *bios* that is the essence of “the people.” Agamben explains, “Every interpretation of the political meaning of the term ‘people’ must begin with the singular fact that in modern European languages, ‘people’ also always indicates the poor, the disinherited, and the excluded. One term thus names both the constitutive political subject and the class that is . . . excluded from politics” (*Homo Sacer* 176). Agamben believes that contemporary society is preoccupied with overcoming this

division by eliminating those who are excluded. Exclusion/inclusion then becomes the only structure of difference because, in the modern world, all of life has been potentially reduced to bare life. This fissure between *zoë* and *bios* is “the pure source of every identity but must, however, continually be redefined and purified through exclusion, language, blood and land” (*Homo Sacer* 178). This obsession with exclusion through connections of blood, language and land relates to the concepts of race harboured by the Nazis who function as Agamben’s main example.<sup>13</sup> However, in keeping with his biopolitical treatise, Agamben emphasizes the “care of life” that was implicit in the National Socialist project and focused around the elimination of certain genetic qualities that rendered race nothing more than a combination of genes (147). The deep formative ideologies that render some lives more likely to be called into exception are dismissed by Agamben, and this basic gesture towards divisions of “blood,” “language,” and “land” are Agamben’s only acknowledgement of the question of difference that has historically played a pivotal role in determining which subjects will be relegated to interstitial lives.<sup>14</sup>

In accordance with his understanding of difference, Agamben sees life caught in abandonment by the law as administered by authoritative sovereign figures rather than diverse technologies of power that would include a technology of difference. Political theorist Ernesto Laclau, for one, has deemed this a “dubious premise” (21). Similarly, in a chapter entitled “The Complexities of Sovereignty,” William E. Connolly questions Agamben’s depiction of the sovereign nation-state. Instead, Connolly points towards the changing global context of sovereignty. Within the current state of globalization sovereignty is always shifting within a loosely assembled and flexible global system (Connolly 36). Further complicating sovereign power, Connolly claims sovereignty is

swayed by the underlying ethos of the citizenry: “A change in ethos, which forms a critical component in the complexity of sovereignty, alters the course of sovereignty” (35). For Connolly, complex global networks affect the distribution of a particular ethos, which includes a politics of difference (Connolly cites the exceptionalization of First Peoples in the United States based on their ‘lack of Christianity’). Gilroy, in the same vein, argues:

Histories of conquest and famine alike reveal that colonial government contributed to the manifestation of bare life in historically unprecedented quantities and circumstances under the supervision of managerial systems that operated by the rules of raciology and qualified the dictates of ruthless economic logic. (48)

Presently, the changing context of globalization further disperses sovereign power, but in many ways the same ethos determine which lives will be relegated to each side of the people/People division. Rather than merely a fundamental fissure in the people along the lines of *zoë/bios*, as Agamben would argue, the racialization of difference is specifically involved in the production of states of exception. In Gilroy’s words, “reliance on divisions *within* humankind, for example, demanded and institutionalized the abolition of all conceptions of citizenship as universal entitlement” (*Postcolonial* 49).

A similar argument could be made to locate the importance of gender and class in determining which lives are rendered bare.

Racism—alongside the network of literatures, policies, institutions, and ideologies that support it—has been key to reducing colonial subjects to the state of bare life. For Gilroy, “The role of race thinking in rendering the bodies of natives, slaves, and other infrahumans worthless or expendable is a pivotal issue in specifying how the racialization

of governmental practice impacted upon the pragmatic exercise of colonial power” (Gilroy 45). Similarly, in her article “Bare Life on Strike: Notes on the biopolitics of Race and Gender,” Ewa Ptonowska Ziarek argues that the “paradox of bare life is [the] simultaneous erasure of the political distinctions and negative differentiation [of race, ethnicity and gender that] is retrospectively produced by such erasure” (93). Her examination of this paradox allows Ziarek to seize hold of specific lives that are rendered bare.<sup>15</sup> Ziarek sees the interjection of politics of difference into Agamben’s articulation of “bare life” as necessary. This stipulation will become apparent in the next chapter where I apply Agamben’s theory to the liberal multicultural context of Canada that is rooted in histories of settler-colonialism. Emerging from imperial history, Chariandy’s fictionalized Canadian context demands that relations of race, gender, and class be taken into account when studying the biopolitical production of bare life.

Despite Agamben’s dismissal of the politics of race and other forms of difference, the concept of “bare life” can itself draw attention to the dehumanizing effects of division within the concept of the human. Diane Enns argues that “the concept of bare life becomes useful for thinking about the state-occupied body, the inhabitant of nowhere, stripped of political identity, nationhood, and basic human rights, by virtue of the fact of birth, a body whose very biological rhythms are regulated and controlled by a sovereign power” (“Political Life Before Identity” n. pag.). Enns proceeds to cite examples of specific subjects identified through narratives of difference: the Iraqi, the Tamil, the Chechen, the Tibetan, the indigenous Zapatista, and the Palestinian. The occupied subject is left in a condition of abandonment by the State’s sanctioned body-regulating juridical laws. Specific politics of difference produce the conditions under which certain subjects



are differentiated and come under the grasp of an occupying power. Enns approaches the racialized or colonial subject to argue that racism “occurring in the context of a contemporary focus on difference” tends to forget to recognize an individual’s humanity before their political identity (“Political Life Before Identity” n. pag.). In other words, racialized subjects are relegated to a state of exception when their humanity, beyond political identity, is forgotten. Enns’ emphasis on the dangers of placing political identity before naked humanness identifies the use of racialized thinking for the production of bare life. This separation of social identity and bare humanity is affirmed by Agamben’s concept of subjectivity. As Catharine Mills helpfully elaborates, for Agamben, the subject who is speaking is simultaneously subjectified and de-subjectified. The subject in a state of bare life is unable to be heard and therefore is completely separated from the possession of subjectivity and identity (Mills 104). Despite universal potential for abandonment, reified differences along the lines of race, gender and class pre-select some humans out for exceptionalization.

### **Resistant Life**

As noted in his discussion of *der Muselmann*, Agamben’s limit concept of “bare life” finds a hope for resistance to sovereign power in the very excess that modernity is trying to eliminate. However, others have postulated various forms of emancipation from the double bind of sovereign power. In his critique of Agamben, Laclau demonstrates the ramifications of Agamben’s reluctance to account for the politics of difference that render some bodies more vulnerable to abandonment, and he identifies the possibility that difference may produce the potential for counter-laws. Laclau describes Agamben’s “bare life” as “a naked individuality, disposed of any kind of collective identity”(14). Agamben

does not consider that an alternate collectivity might determine its own law. For Laclau, this erases the powerful articulation of difference found in seminal anti-colonial texts such as the work of Franz Fanon or those emerging from any decolonizing movement. In an effort to critique Agamben, Laclau quotes Fanon:

The *lupenproletariat*, once it is constituted, brings all its force to endanger the “security” of the town, and is the sign of irrevocable decay, the gangrene ever present at the heart of colonial domination. So the pimps, the hooligans, the unemployed, the petty criminals . . . throw themselves into the struggle like stout working men. These classless idlers will by militant and decisive action discover the path that leads to nationhood . . . The prostitutes too, and the maids who are paid two pounds a month, all who turn in circles between suicide and madness, will recover their balance, once more go forward and march proudly in the greatest procession of the awakened nation. (14)

Laclau’s invocation of Fanon demonstrates the possibility of an alternative political order that Agamben actually begins to recognize in *The State of Exception* (2005). In this later addition to the *Homo Sacer* series, Agamben allows for a version of alternative law that would exist as a separate and non-referential entity. Both laws must be equal and mutually exclusive in order to be recognized by Agamben. What Agamben never recognizes, according to Laclau, are “social movements [which] constitute particularistic political spaces and give themselves their own ‘law’ (which is partially internal and partially external to the legal system of the State)” (17). This interstitial position is ironically at odds with the rigid structure of the double ban that Agamben posits as the original structure of sovereignty and exception.

The interstitial position between laws, as opposed to inclusion under one sovereign law, is a position praised by Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha in their studies of diasporic populations and culture.<sup>16</sup> Stuart Hall places “difference” in a zone of indistinction between otherness and sameness. Drawing on Derrida, Hall explains that difference is both “to differ,” as in to be different, and to “defer,” as in to postpone. Difference for Hall emerges as the continuously “differed” process of becoming that blurs boundaries and creates a hybrid identity. For Hall, hybridity defies binaries and, in doing so, counters the bounds of nation-state sovereignty that have been erected through imperial projects (235). For Bhabha, similarly, hybridity and interstitiality break with facile binary oppositions (3;142).<sup>17</sup> It could be extrapolated that these emancipatory positions also contradict the dual structure of Agamben’s sovereign ban and the parallel between sovereign and *homo sacer* in states of exception. Hybrid positions emerge as an “empowering paradox of diaspora” in dwelling in one place with connections to a network of dispersed people (Clifford 269). These interstitial positions constitute, for Hall and Bhabha (as well as Floya Anthias and Rinaldo Walcott), challenges to nation-state imaginaries that solidify the law and the power to decide the exception.

Such interstitial spaces of hybridity could be termed “deterritorialized diasporas” (Cohen 123). In *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy attempts to describe the complex formations of Black diasporic consciousness that arose through the cultural commingling of Africa, Europe, and the Americas, and the subsequent formation of “transnational and intercultural multiplicity” (195). This multiplicity carried with it enough similarity to give rise to the emergent culture characterized as “the Black Atlantic.” Gilroy’s work critiques arguments for ethnic/cultural/racial purity, which he claims shift all too easily into

fascism. Instead he points hopefully towards cultural hybridity and social plurality. In his later work, Gilroy interrogates strategic essentialism; he remains convinced that diaspora as a fluid concept persists as a hope for transformative thought and action. In *Against Race* (2000), Gilroy insists that the conception of diaspora offers an alternative to essentialisms and “rooted belonging” (123); it provides a “means to reassess the idea of essential and absolute identity precisely because it is incompatible with . . . nationalist and raciological thinking” (125); and it offers “conceptual ‘distance’ from the disabling assumptions of automatic solidarity based on either blood or land” (133). From this perspective, the space of diaspora begins to appear as an interstitial space of resistance. The fluidity of the diasporic topos of the Black Atlantic contrasts with the topos of the camp that, for Agamben, exemplifies the space of bare life. Though they are both interstitial spaces, the topos of the camp represents the utter stripping down of the human, while the Black Atlantic is a topos defined by fluid movement between identity politics and sovereign claims to land and nationhood through which a collective culture is produced. It is within diaspora as he conceives it—in its simultaneous dispersal and unity—that Gilroy finds a space of resistance that perhaps collates itself in the space between laws that Laclau locates.

However, it is important to note that, although a hybrid position can generate an alternative law, according to Agamben, such a law may itself take on the character of a tyranny parallel to that of a dominant culture (*State* 28-29). Though anti-imperialist and decolonizing movements have continually employed concepts such as hybridity and Third Space, diasporic communities can themselves become polemical and further entrench ideas of nation-state and territorialized forms of diaspora when an interstitial counter law

assumes a sovereign position of power. The first issue of the ground-breaking journal *Diaspora* announced, “*Diaspora* is concerned with the ways in which nations, real yet imagined communities (Anderson), are fabricated, brought into being, made and unmade, in culture and politics, both on land people call their own and in exile” (Tölölyan, “Nation” 3). This seminal 1996 issue of the journal began with the assertion that “transnational communities are sometimes the paradigmatic Other of the nation-state and at other times its ally, lobby, or even, as in the case of Israel, its precursor” (5) There is no guarantee that diasporas will avoid ethnic absolutism or produce communities and ways of being that are more liberating than the dominant culture.

In a less glorified way, Zairek and Enns have found reason to identify a form of resistance within the zone of bare life. Unlike their diasporic counterparts, these resistances are more like the resistance posited by Agamben. In Enns’ analysis of suicide bombing in the context of the occupation of Palestine, she proposes that, though they are beyond understanding, suicide bombings can be an act of testimony on the part of those condemned to bare life:

We need to listen to those who bear witness to the conditions of life under an occupying force, and to those whose sacrifice, in the end, may not count for anything except momentary empowerment for a people. A resistance that cannot be appropriated or recuperated, one that remains *outside* of the mutually reinforcing paradigms of power and counter-power, violence and counter-violence, is clearly evident in the resilience of the Palestinian people to their occupation. (n. pag.)

For Enns, the testimony that emerges from those who experience desperate bare life has only an unromantic resistance, but is nonetheless tied to a kind of hope that Agamben's notion of "bare life" beyond emotion fails to recognize. This hope comes in the form of individual self-imposed death rather than in the degraded survival of occupied life.

In a similar fashion, Ziarek finds resistance in the bare life of hunger-striking suffragettes and their challenge of the sovereign hold over their lives:

As a counter to the sovereign decision, hunger-striking suffragettes seized hold of their bare life, wrested it away from sovereign decision, and transformed it into a site of the constitution of a new form of life. The suffragettes' public redefinition of the female body so that it no longer bore the repressed signification of bare life and acquired instead a political form not only challenged the sovereign decision over bare life, but in so doing called for a new mediation of life and form outside the parameters of that decision. At stake here is a new type of link between bare life and political form that would be generated from below, as it were, rather than imposed by a sovereign decision. (102)

Both the suicide bomber and the hunger-striking suffragette have attempted to temporarily disrupt the power of the sovereign decision over their lives. However, it is vitally important to repeat that Agamben, for his part, does not see bare life itself as holding emancipatory possibilities. Rather, in his view, bare life ideally will give way to a new form of life, one that inaugurates the union of *zoë* and *bios* rather than perpetuating a constant zone of indistinction between the two. What Ziarek and Enns helpfully point to is the potential for alternatives to the existing order that emerge from the very condition of bare life that Agamben situates as "beyond" politics. "Bare life" itself, and particularly

Agamben's articulation of it, is haunted by this aporia of fascination and horror occurring from its potential. Like many diasporas, bare life is formed out of unspeakable tragedies and histories of persecution, yet human life on the very edge of Western conceptions of life also seems to hold the potential for new ways of being and knowing.

It is this kind of resistance, the kind that fatally wrestles with the limits of Western hegemonic order, that I identify in the fictional character of Adele. Read as a figure of bare life, Adele is reduced to a state of de-subjectification. Paradoxically, through this stripping of subjectivity, Adele is recalled to her sense of difference and the traumatic history survived by her foremothers that has been lost within a Western understanding of the world. This emancipatory forgetting will come to light in Chapter Three. Presently, I wish to emphasize that the confluence of the potential agency of the subject in diaspora and the de-subjectified state of exception reveals a form of limited resistance that is possible only due to the extreme de-humanizing effects of biopolitics.

### **A Diasporic State of Exception**

Bringing together the differing concepts of diaspora and "bare life" has required adjusting ideas of resistance and difference in Agamben's concept of "bare life" and diasporic theories. However, it is also important to note that conceptions of both resistance and difference are affected by perceptions of power dissemination. Within the conversation of diasporic studies, differences of race, class and gender do not merely appear when enacted through a sovereign decision (*Postcolonial* Gilroy 44; Hall 226). Rather, as Foucault is aware, they are put into circulation as forms of knowledge, which function through dominant knowledge regimes and globalized networks. Dominant knowledge regimes invest in their subjects different forms of self-knowledge that

contribute to the self-governance of the subject. These governmentalities can relegate certain humans to a state that resembles Agamben's exception. In the following chapters, I identify the states of mind or mentalities that result in the exclusion of the diasporic subject in Chariandy's work of fiction.

The diasporic ideal of resisting through the use of interstitial spaces is further complicated by the institutionalization of difference and incorporation of positive forms of power, such as knowledge production, within the current era of globalization. The institutionalization of difference reaches out to include in itself the very concepts that have been used to resist modes of power. Rather than embrace positions of difference as necessary forces for emancipation, in his theoretical article "Postcolonial Diasporas," Chariandy takes up Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's claim, "the postmodernist and postcolonialist theorists who advocate a politics of difference, fluidity, and hybridity in order to challenge the binaries and essentialisms of modern sovereignty have been outflanked by the strategies of power" (Hardt, *Empire* 138). Hardt and Negri have identified the changing nature of the world order in today's globalized context. The world market requires circulation, mobility, and diversity and thrives on infinite possibilities. In light of these diverse workings of power, Canadian anthropologist Eva Mackey has critiqued Homi Bhabha's conception of dominant power functioning through the erasure of difference. Mackey asserts that the Canadian context of ethnic diversity has been embraced by technologies of power through official multiculturalism; this incorporation of difference complicates resistance that might be found in hybridity or a 'third space' (38). Similarly, it could be argued that within the context of modern networks of power, Agamben's insistence that sovereignty always works to eliminate the fissures in humanity



through the erasure of bare life is representative of only one technology within the modern networks of power (*Homo Sacer* 171). In his vision of “postcolonial diasporas,” Chariandy agrees with Hardt and Negri when they claim that today both postcolonialists and dominant power structures cry, “Long live difference! Down with essentialist binaries!” (Hardt qtd. in Chariandy, “Postcolonial” n. pag). This embrace of difference by power actors challenges us to explore how sovereignty continues to work in and through celebrations of difference rather than repressions of it; it is a phenomenon that complicates the certainty of finding resistance within interstitial spaces.

Against what he calls the “repressive hypothesis”—the idea that power works in a sovereign manner to oppress—Foucault posits governmentality as a form of productive power. For Foucault, governmentality is an ensemble of diverse technologies of power and a set of knowledges that function to care for the population. Foucault claims that governmentality is the preeminent type of power in the modern West, though it functions alongside sovereign and disciplinary powers (*Security* 108-109). These governmentalities work as constructive forms of power. Knowledge regimes produce and uphold the desiring subject through the creation and circulation of forms of knowledge that are mentally and practically internalized by the population (Mackey 18). Within contexts like Canadian multiculturalism, the diasporic subject in a state of exception must contend with diverse technologies of power, including those that act on the mind of the subject and, at times, through inclusion.

The study of diaspora has been adapting to these complexities of power, and within contemporary diaspora theory, diasporas themselves emerge as complex phenomena. In his discussion of “postcolonial diasporas,” Chariandy has identified the

term diaspora as ambiguous in both its political and methodological assumptions.

Chariandy confronts the paradoxes in the critical vocabulary of postcolonial diasporas and weighs their ability to address the dislocations resulting from histories of imperialism and current global conditions. He concludes that diasporas offer a source of hope and resistance to dominant cultures while being simultaneously based on extremely painful realities and histories. Chariandy contends that diaspora may be both politically ambitious and marred by methodological assumptions, such as an investment in the idea of 'the nation' as the primary site of resistance in order to strengthen canonical diasporas even when they undercut the objectives of postcolonial diasporas, or assuming that diasporas are self-evident rather than constructions that can help us to understand modern cultural politics ("Postcolonial" n. pag). Similarly, Lily Cho argues for a complex approach to diasporas when she writes:

[D]iasporas are not just there. They are not simply collections of people, communities of scattered individuals bound by some shared history, race or religion. Rather, they emerge in relation to power, in the turn to and away from power. Diasporic subjects emerge in turning, turning back upon those markers of the self—homeland, memory, loss—even as they turn on or away from them. (11)

The field of diaspora studies therefore recognizes an emerging need to study the subject in diaspora neither as a vehicle for an alternative revolutionary law nor as a subject completely stripped of power. What emerges from the intersection of "bare life" and diaspora is a figure included through exclusion, who is neither a completely apathetic nor an idealized revolutionary force; what we might call bare life in diaspora is an ambiguous state.

## Chapter 2

### The Diasporic Exception within Canadian Multiculturalism

The previous chapter outlined several adjustments that are necessary for bringing together the concept of “bare life” and the subject in diaspora. First of all, for Agamben, the only articulation of difference relevant to the production of biopower is the difference between who is included and who is excluded. In other words, *Homo Sacer* disregards the politics of difference (race, gender, or class) and its importance for determining which lives will be caught in an interstitial space and reduced to what I call “bare mind.” Secondly, in locating the consequences of the inhuman conditions of the modern “camp,” Agamben strips figures of “bare mind” of all emancipatory possibilities, except the emergence of a new form of life through complete apathy towards the sovereign decision. In contrast, subjects in diaspora are commonly associated with agency located in interstitial spaces. A diasporic state of exception might then allow for a limited resistance to paradoxically reside in de-subjectification. Thirdly, the image of a unified sovereign power, which is posed by Agamben as the perpetrator of “bare life,” does not account for the various networks of technologies that characterize the working of power within contexts like the liberal regime of Canadian multiculturalism. This chapter will show how the literary figure of Adele forces us to re-think “bare life” on these three fronts.

#### **Soucouyant: Representing Withdrawn Life**

Chariandy’s novel *Soucouyant* narrates the tale of Adele’s son as he returns to Adele’s home during the most advanced stages of her dementia. As the narrator, Adele’s son recounts both the experience of caring for his mother in her state of advancing

dementia and the process of piecing together Adele's life story beginning in Trinidad, continuing through her displacement during the Second World War, her immigration to Canada, and finally the last days of her life. Even though figures of bare life are arguably beyond representation both in the political and literary sense, Chariandy's fictional narrative of a son's experience of his mother's retreating consciousness offers a representation of the state of exception by depicting Adele's inaccessibility. In an examination of Adele's withdrawal, literary critic Jennifer Bowering Delisle has traced the importance of cultural memory throughout the novel. Both Delisle and Chariandy himself highlight the detachment of the son from his mother's memories (Chariandy, "Spirits" 813; Delisle 1). Though the narrator sometimes assumes he knows his mother's story, her feelings, and even at times her thoughts, he is nonetheless removed from her dementia and continually perturbed by Adele's withdrawal. Rather than imposing an overt narrative upon the character of Adele, Chariandy recounts her son's imposition of narrative upon the withdrawing parent. This narrative perspective generates a unique opportunity to discuss the production and inaccessible interiority of life in exception.

**Contexts: Sovereign Power and Governmentality**

In *Postcolonial Melancholia*, Gilroy draws attention to the interlinked, but differing, contexts of the colony and the "postcolonial environment" (29); in the latter, "the desire to purify groups and homogenize communities" coexists with complex patterns of proliferated race thinking (37). Under these intricate conditions, race can be a marker of prestige, just as it can be a marker of bare life, but race is nonetheless used as a marker of "segregation" within differing multicultural environments including, as Gilroy notes, Canada (38). The "distinctive association of governance with military power and

martial law” that emerged through colonial practices of sovereignty has informed the modern political authority in nations such as Canada (44). As a result, though arguably emerging from colonial history, liberal multicultural regimes that intentionally and institutionally privilege racialized groups still fail to recognize the “humanity of the racial Other” (57). Consequently, it may be reasoned that official multiculturalism produces exclusion in ways both reminiscent of, and different from, the sovereign power found in the colony.

As a diasporic character who travels from the space of the colony to an ostensibly postcolonial context, Adele draws attention to the connections and differences between bare life in the colony and exclusion within multicultural societies. Within Chariandy’s novel *Soucouyant*, there are two different contexts that can be read as fictional studies of what Agamben conceives of as bare life. Both contexts are related but exemplify different architectures of power. The first context is Trinidad under American military control during the Second World War. This context demonstrates sovereign power as Agamben describes it in *Homo Sacer*. The second context is Toronto from the early 1960s to the late 1980s. This context reveals productive forms of power working in tandem with sovereign forms of power, resulting in a differentiated architecture of power that is nonetheless dependent on an inclusive/exclusion that resembles a state of exception. The liberal regime of Canadian multiculturalism draws the reader’s attention to the governing mentalities that allow some people to enact sovereign power and relegate others to exceptional status despite their inclusion within multicultural policy.

Chariandy depicts the first relevant context, Trinidad, as surrounded by a complex imperial history and under the sovereign power of the American military during the

Second World War. In his depiction of Trinidad, Chariandy weaves a web of imperial forces that ensnares Adele in multifarious ways. Evoking complex diasporic histories, Chariandy notes the population of Indian labourers who celebrate their traditional holidays of Hosay, Diwali and Phagwa (*Soucouyant* 174). The narrative also locates Adele and her mother within the diasporas of the Middle Passage and highlights the role that the Caribbean played in the slave trade through the character of an old Trinidadian woman. The “Old Woman” sees “endless floors of bone” on the ocean floor and recalls the old slaving ships that used to come to the port to be cleaned (182). The memories of the Old Woman evoke the history of the Black diasporas and recall stories of slavery. Her visions of bone allude to the slaves thrown overboard during the Middle Passage from Africa. Pointing towards both historical imperial desires and modern economic systems, Chariandy identifies the island as important for trade in sugar, coffee, chocolate, and most importantly oil. The narrator reminds his mother that Trinidad was “a major producer of oil for the entire British Empire” (175). Adding to the complexity of Caribbean history, Chariandy makes sure to note that Columbus landed in Trinidad on his third voyage and met indigenous people who called the island “Iere” (176). Finally, Chariandy describes the plight of Trinidad during World War Two. The Caribbean is depicted as a pawn for American, French, Brazilian, Dutch, and British powers who had military bases there. The Americans lease their military base from the British, which at that time is still the main imperial force in the world, because the Americans are concerned with protecting their own interests in the Panama Canal (177). The American engineers scour books and papers in Spanish, French and English to gather all the knowledge they can from previous occupiers of the island. As the Americans set up their base, they dig through history and

find conquistador helmets, poison Carib arrowheads, fossils, and boat hulls (176). As a navel hub for imperial powers, in Chariandy's novel Trinidad exists within a network of imperialist power dynamics and complex histories.

As previously explained, Gilroy claims imperial history perpetuated states of exception. In *Soucouyant*, this process is examined through the sovereign power of the American military during the Second World War. The American military executes the sovereign decision to relocate entire populations who "imagine they have some sort of right to live there" (178). The military denies women who are unattached to a male any form of compensation for their relocation (22). When met with resistance, the soldiers complain that the local population is not "mentally equipped to understand the logic behind the curfews and the rationing of food and the restrictions on movement" (178). Within this state of exception provoked by war, soldiers become sovereign figures in which law and fact are blurred, and displaced locals become figures whose lives may be killed with impunity. Removed from their land, Trinidadian locals lose their status as the rightful inhabitants of their community and are "plunged into poverty without trusted networks of support" (179). For example, when "rich and light-skinned men" rape a girl from Carenage, the girl's father never returns from his confrontation with the rapists (183). Similarly, Adele's mother is left without work and resorts to prostitution. As a prostitute, she is exposed to both the desires and the beatings of the soldiers who are her clients (182). The sovereign power of the military is marked by an imperial ethos that condones the use of Trinidad for global war. Race, class, and gender function as violent forms of imperial differentiation, marking off the exception of local Trinidadians who are dispossessed of their homes and communities.

By contrast, the second context in which a form of exclusion figures in Chariandy's novel is the liberal regime of Toronto from the 1960s to the 1980s as Canadian multicultural policy is under development. To draw attention to Toronto's context of official multiculturalism, Chariandy notes that Adele's son returns to his mother's home just about a year after the Multiculturalism Act is passed in 1988 (*Soucouyant* 33). This second context complicates the technologies of power that may be implicated in the production of bare life. As Gilroy notes in *Postcolonial Melancholia*, the technologies of power at work in the colony influenced, but are not the same as, those at work in modern political authority (44). The work of Eva Mackey highlights that the settler-colonial project of Canada effectively utilizes positive mechanisms of power in order to realize its "imagined community" (Anderson 6). Positive mechanisms of power are arguably just as dependent on a form of inclusive/exclusion; however, unlike the state of exception defined by Carl Schmitt, this form of exclusion occurs within the law.

Despite histories of racism, in the aftermath of World War Two, Canadian socio-political institutions began to function through limited programs of inclusion, laying what would be the groundwork for official multiculturalism. During the 1950s Canadian women entering the work force, a prospering economy, and the baby boom generated competition for domestic workers. Though Canadian sentiment and immigration policy has a history of racism against Black populations, these post-war conditions compelled the Canadian government to institute the second Caribbean Workers Domestic Scheme in 1955 and entice women from Barbados and Jamaica to come work in Canada. Eligible recruits were single, between 18 and 35 years old, healthy, and possessing at least an eighth-grade education. After fulfilling a one-year contract with a designated employer,



the women were granted landed immigrant status and were eligible for citizenship after living five years in Canada. These basic requirements were applied to all domestic workers in Canada at the time regardless of race or nationality, but there were additional requirements for immigrants from the Caribbean. While domestic workers from Europe could be medically screened in their home country, Canadian authorities controlled the final medical screening of Caribbean women. In addition, Caribbean governments were required to pay the return fare of any of their domestic workers deported within their first year of residence in Canada. Most women who came to Canada as domestic workers had not been domestic workers in their home country. Many were nurses, secretaries, clerks, or teachers and they used the domestic schemes as the only way that they, as Black women, could enter Canada at the time. The job evaluations of most of the women indicated their performance was satisfactory to their employers; as a result, the Canadian government increased the annual quota for the scheme to 280 women, drawn from a wider range of Caribbean nations, including Trinidad. The majority of these female immigrants went to work in Toronto and Montreal. By 1965, Canada had admitted an estimated 2,690 Caribbean women as domestic workers. This figure exceeded the number of all Caribbean immigrants to Canada before 1945 (Barber 23; Mensha 152). Though individual women may have benefited economically, many women reported enduring loneliness, isolation, racism, and exploitation at the hands of Canadians.<sup>18</sup> This Domestic Worker Scheme is the historical background of inclusion and marginalization that brings Adele to Canada in Chariandy's novel. This political context is intricately linked to the Canadian nation-building project and its dependence on immigration (Wong 169). It also lays the groundwork for the liberal nation-state project of official multiculturalism. The

Caribbean Domestic Worker Program demonstrates the legal inclusion of individuals vetted through a screening process for the betterment of Canada. However, as will be illustrated, this inclusion comes at the price of conforming to a liberal multicultural governmentality that forces some immigrants into an exceptional state.

In Chariandy's novel, Adele arrives in Canada during the early sixties "before the new dark-skinned troubles and the new dark-skinned excitements" (*Soucouyant* 69). Adele comes to Canada as a domestic worker and is promised landed immigrant status after working for one year. She is provided with an apartment in an appropriate part of town and, though it is "smelly" and full of cockroaches, it seems wonderful to Adele who is captivated by her new home (48). Adele had been a maid in Trinidad, but in Canada her employers, the Bernsteins, entrust her with more serious matters in their "massive" "castle" of a house (48). Nevertheless, Adele lives in fear of when she has to leave her house and so she lives off of "oatmeal and stewed prunes and milk" until she is forced to go out into the streets to buy more (49). On these excursions, she can't help but notice her "change [is] always placed on the counter never in her hands;" that people give her "cold cutting glances on the streetcars and sidewalks;" and that passers-by "wrinkle their noses and shift away, or stare openly at the oddity she [has] become in this land" (49). As a domestic worker Adele is supplying needed labour for the Canadian nation-state while being held outside of the Canadian community due to racial exclusion.

In Toronto Adele's daily life is contoured by the Canadian nation-building project and the horrors of Caribbean imperial history she experienced as a child. Chariandy conveys Adele's precarious position in relation to both of these political histories through the situating of Adele's Canadian home in Scarborough. On the one hand, Adele's house

sits precariously balanced on the edge of the “Black Atlantic,” or at least the Ontario version of the sea. The Scarborough bluffs are slowly eroding away under the foundations of her house, joining Adele to the saltless sea of Lake Ontario that is nonetheless lined with “bones of drift wood” (*Soucouyant*, 16). These bleached fragments of wood washed ashore, like the bones spied on the ocean floor by the Trinidadian Old Woman are reminiscent of the bones of slaves thrown overboard during the Middle Passage. On the other hand, Adele’s house is also pushed up next to the railroad tracks. Trains on the railroad fiercely shake Adele’s home each time they pass (9). The railroad within Canadian history represents the inaugural nation-building project from sea to sea. Adele negotiates these two contexts as each exerts its own technologies of power. The sovereign power at work in the Caribbean context has already been discussed, but the nation-building project of Canada, and particularly its policy of liberal multiculturalism, advances positive technologies of power that work in a different way than the conceptualization of sovereign power that Agamben employs.

### **A Heritage Day Parade**

Through an examination of Chariandy’s depiction of the Heritage Day Parade in *Soucouyant*, the remainder of this chapter will elaborate the potential production of an exceptional state *within* the Canadian multicultural regime. In this context, a state similar to Agamben’s “bare life” is produced through the ostensible “tolerance” of difference as well as through racialization and marginalization. This depiction of an inclusive/exclusion points towards the effects that more liberal, tolerant technologies of power like a multicultural governmentality can have on the diasporic subject: governmentality and sovereignty need to be considered in tandem to explore the figure of Adele.

In her study of the politics of difference in Canada, Eva Mackey articulates how positive forms of power, such as the “tolerance” and “inclusion” of state-sanctioned multiculturalism, can produce intolerance and racism. Mackey draws on Foucault to explore this phenomenon through an examination of various national celebrations. She demonstrates “that official policies and attitudes of multicultural ‘tolerance’ for ‘others’ reinforce the dominant Anglo-Canadian culture by abducting the cultures of minority groups, pressing them into the service of nation-building without promoting genuine respect or autonomy” (xv). In Chariandy’s novel, the civility of the neighbours of Port Junction where Adele and her family reside, the neighbours’ tolerance of Adele’s presence in their neighbourhood, and their inclusion of multicultural “non-Canadian-Canadians” in their heritage celebration all draw attention to the way that subjects excluded from community are included through their multicultural recoding as individuals who require the tolerance of the community. Therefore, though both “Canadian-Canadians” and “non-Canadian-Canadians” are included in the law, it is those held in exclusion from the community that allow those included to perform the tolerance that constitutes their celebrated defining characteristic. At the Heritage Day parade, the Canadian community arguably exceptionalizes Adele through its performance of civility. The enactment of civility stems from historically imperial politics of race, gender, and class and functions through mentalities that undergird individual sovereign decisions. Simultaneously, Chariandy’s description of Adele’s performance during the Heritage Day parade reveals Adele’s capacity to produce a disruptive counter-performance that, though limited, exceeds Agamben’s characterization of bare life as beyond emotion, and points

towards the complexities of a multicultural governmentality operating on exceptionalized diasporic subjects.

Chariandy's description of the Heritage Day parade in *Soucouyant* is as follows. The neighbourhood of Port Junction where Adele and her family live in Canada is "traditional" and the last remaining "good part of Scarborough, meaning distant from the growing ethnic neighbourhoods to the west" (60; 58). Port Junction is home to "Mackenzies, Rosses and Laurences" who dutifully tell the story of their settlement of the nation with "postboxes [that bear] silhouette illustrations of horses and buggies as well as family names in old fashioned scripts" (60). On Heritage Day, veterans, bagpipers, and proud citizens join together in ethnic garb to celebrate. Despite the blue-eyed model family emblazoned on the town's publicity, one particular Heritage Day the community is careful to announce "*everyone* [is] invited to participate ... the Heritage Day parade [is] being revamped ... to recognize 'people of multicultural backgrounds,' and 'not just Canadians'" (60). For Adele's son, this particular Heritage Day parade during his childhood is significant. At this point in the narrative, Adele can no longer babysit to help bring income into their home (13), she can never remember why the groceries are depleting, and she cannot place the noises of a parade (60). Though Adele's family has usually been unable to attend the annual Heritage Day festivities (more often than not Adele would misplace the invitation and her husband would be too busy with work), this year Adele wanders from her house into the crowd "without a blouse or skirt but mercifully in a bra and pantyhose [and] at least half a dozen pairs of underwear yanked up, one over the other" (61). Her unexpected presence halts the parade, and the crowd is reduced to whispering and pointing at Adele. Then, as Adele's son watches from his

home, “another parade” seems to start; an older man and woman help the “somewhat unwilling” Adele to return to her home and her son (61). When the helpful neighbours try to comfort him, the narrator backs away in fear as his mother grows to “inhuman size” before his eyes. He reports: “She swelled as big as one of those inflatable puppets you sometimes see on poles at parades. As looming and caricatured and awkwardly handled as that” (62). The old veteran and his wife who help Adele home are unaware of Adele’s transformation in the narrator’s eyes and politely encourage the son to “just help [his] mother inside.” Appalled by the narrator’s fear of his own mother, the couple mutters, “What kind of people are we allowing to live here, anyway?” as they retreat from the house, mission completed (62).

The Heritage Day parade reveals the workings of a multicultural governmentality within the Port Junction neighbourhood. First of all, the politics of difference at work in the community are highlighted by Adele’s exclusion from the parade. Secondly, Adele’s exclusion is what allows representatives of the community to enact tolerance towards her. The tolerance of the Port Junction neighbours reveals a multicultural governmentality that is dependant on Adele’s exceptionality. The neighbours’ sympathetic behaviour is the result of a complex of knowledges, including a certain politics of difference, that diagnose Adele and her son as lacking in civilized behaviour. This diagnosis places Adele and her son in an exceptional state, and simultaneously allows the neighbours to enact their tolerance (and maintain the pretence that they are more civil than those different from the Canadian norm). Unlike Agamben’s “bare life,” Adele and her son are not outside the law; however, within the working of multicultural governmentality, in a certain fashion, Adele and her son are still exceptionalized. This exceptionality is not based on a law, but

rather created through the governmental system that produces community. Adele and her son are included in the multicultural governmentality only through the internalization of their own exclusion. Thirdly, the reaction of Adele's son to his mother's behaviour, and his monstrous vision of her, demonstrates his internalization of dominant knowledge regimes. This internalization both unearths the effects of a multicultural governmentality and uncovers the manner in which the narrator's perception is coloured by this internalization of dominant ways of perceiving and knowing difference.

### **Within the Law: A Multicultural State of Exception**

At the Heritage Day parade, Adele is excluded from participating partly because of her exposed body and 'diseased' mind, and partly because her hardworking husband is unable to attend the event and mediate Adele's participation. Within the Canadian context, conceptions of race, gender, and class within the category of citizen create an imagined Canadian community that forces some citizens into interstitial spaces. According to Benedict Anderson, the nation "is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 6). The members share a consciousness of common language and values especially in new world colonies that have defended themselves against groups very similar to themselves, such as imperial parent nations (Anderson 47). As experienced by Adele, the dominant imagined community in Canada may be described as discriminating based on race, gender and class.

Scholars who examine the constitution of communities in Canada also discern the racialized thinking that Gilroy insists is the basis of the formation of many states of

exception. In her article “Geography Lessons: On Being an Insider/Outsider to the Canadian Nation,” Himani Bannerji defines the imagined community of Canada:

The category ‘Canadian’ clearly applied to people who had two things in common: their white skin and their European North American (Not Mexican) background . . . ‘Canada’ then cannot be seen as a given. It is obviously a construction, a set of representations, embodying certain types of political and cultural communities and their operations . . . Europeaness as ‘whiteness’ thus translates into ‘Canada’ and provides it with its ‘imagined community.’ (290)

In accordance with Bannerji’s assessment of racism in Canada, Rinaldo Walcott identifies members of Black diasporas in Canada as living in a state of “in-betweenness”(31). For Walcott, to be a Black Canadian is to be in-between because one has the ability to be geographically in Canada yet never able to be fully identified as Canadian because ‘real’ Canadians, it is implied, are not Black (11). Racist thinking therefore acts as a form of differentiation that could be said to function as a sovereign decision that determines who to except from the Canadian community.

Bannerji characterizes the Canadian nation not only as racist but also as defined by discriminatory categories of gender and class. Through the institutionalization of categories such as “minority women” in both state and civil spheres, an interstitial space is produced through the categorization and intentional differentiation of women based on their race, gender, and class (Bannerji 291). The differentiation of the Black community based on discourses of race and class has been prominent, for instance, in Toronto’s history. Evoking W.E.B. Dubois, Walcott is clear that being Black in Canada means being a “problem” (12). Walcott explains how crime in Toronto has been constructed as



an “ethnic problem” pertaining specifically to Black people who are of an assumed class. The categorization of individuals in Canada based on race, class, and gender allows for the diminishment of some citizens to classification as ‘less-human’ or ‘uncivil’.

On the occasion of the Heritage Day parade, Adele’s prominent display of her racialized and gendered body prompts her exclusion from the community event. *This* display, or parading of Adele’s body, recalls an episode in the novel that occurs earlier in her life. In the sixties, upon her arrival to Canada, she entered a family restaurant to buy a piece of lemon meringue pie with her saved pennies, a delicacy that for her represents the Canadian dream.<sup>19</sup> When Adele entered the restaurant, she was approached by a prospective client as if she were a prostitute and she was then asked to leave by the owner: “[T]his is a family restaurant and no prostitutes or coloureds are allowed to eat here, though he knows of other places on the street where she would be welcome. He knows that she hasn’t come to this country to cause trouble and he hopes that she will understand and respect the rules of this here place” (*Soucouyant* 50). Echoing her mother’s prostitution after their relocation in Carenage,<sup>20</sup> Adele’s racialized, female body is assumed to be of a particular class that could only engage in the ‘uncivilized’ career of prostitution in order to achieve a living. She is excluded from the Canadian restaurant based on the same racist thinking that compounds with gender and class distinctions to render some lives “bare.” Like the soldiers in Trinidad, members of the Canadian imagined community appear to enact the sovereign decision and decide the exception, which appears to be based on a racist ethos.

Those who are excluded from the Canadian community are also alluded to during the festivities in Adele’s neighbourhood. The Heritage Day parade, despite its open

invitation, excludes anyone from a class that cannot afford to take time off work.

Originally as immigrant labourers, Adele and her husband Roger were admitted to Canada because they were necessary for the economic success of the Canadian nation; however, even after attaining citizenship Adele is excluded from full belonging in the Canadian community by virtue of her class and race. Evidence of this kind of inclusion/exclusion is present on the day of the Heritage Day parade. Adele's family is never able to attend the day's festivities partly because their economic situation does not allow Adele's husband, Roger, a day off of work. Roger "always seemed to be working," (*Soucouyant* 60). Roger is described as "manic" in the way he works to improve his home in Scarborough. He is friendly, always greeting his neighbours, but his salutations are both "ordinary and apocalyptic at once" (59). This paradoxical observation on the part of the narrator implies his father's presence signals the beginning of the end for the idealized 'pure' neighbourhood, while also demonstrating his father's status as an 'ordinary' part of the community. Roger fully performs his role in the Canadian community, working too many hours at a job that leaves him in poor health and that ultimately kills him, yet he still remains excluded from the Canadian community due to his race and class (25). Despite his citizenship, Roger is not welcomed into the neighbourhood nor is he protected from dangerous working conditions. This inclusive/exclusion is the "in-betweenness" Walcott describes based on racialized categories that inform class distinctions and produce a form of exceptionality while upholding the norm of Canadian community.

Evidence of Adele and Roger's exclusion-despite-citizenship pervades Chariandy's novel. When Adele and Roger are newly married, their landlord is "not happy with renting out the place to coloureds" (*Soucouyant* 75) and, after celebrating

their anniversary, the couple returns home to “all of their furniture missing or ripped or broken” and ‘GO BACK’ written on their wall in feces (77). The Canadian landlord seems to find the vandalism appropriate, stating “You people come here ... So what the hell do you expect” (78). Exclusion also pervades the Canadian system in subtle ways. The “*Standard Word Recall test*,” which is developed to identify dementia, must be culturally specific in order to be effective, yet it is not developed for “*ethnic minorities*” in Canada (41). Similarly, Adele’s children are summoned to the “special needs office” in order to learn to speak ‘proper’ English (101), requiring that they lose any trace of a Trinidadian accent. When the children are returned to class, the teacher “had no great desire to repeat the lessons” that had been missed (102). Instead, when the boys’ “interest in school began to wane” due to frustration and teasing (102), it is assumed that they are “hands-on students” who should be taking practical courses that lead to employment in “for instance fast-food restaurants” (15). Each of these occurrences involving housing, the medical system, and the education system exclude Adele and her family from basic rights of education, healthcare, and a safe home, which Canada claims to provide to its citizens. Because they are denied these rights, members of Adele’s family have limited security, despite their status as citizens.

The use of sovereign power to produce a marginalized population within a multicultural citizenship regime has already been discussed. Nonetheless, *Soucouyant* alludes to a mobile architecture of power that is embedded within the population of Adele’s community and their relations to the world at large. William E. Connolly filters Agamben’s invocation of unified sovereign power through the argument of Hardt and Negri, who insist, “[t]he fundamental principle of Empire ... is that its power has no

actual localized terrain or center. Imperial power is distributed ... through mobile and articulated mechanisms of control” (*Empire* 36). This disseminated and flexible network of power can be seen at work in Canada in the complex relationships between internal communities and external communities.

The power relations within Canada are complex and defy the idea that one imagined community could hold sovereign power over all others. In her critique of Canadian postcolonialism, Donna Bennet pronounces power relations in Canada to be complicated by numerous imperial histories and neo-colonial realities. In Canada, a postcolonial existence is hampered by narratives that promote domination of East over West, South over North, Anglophones over Francophones, “Canadian-Canadians” over new immigrants, Canada’s involvement in international conflict and resource extraction, and, perhaps most of all, the continual conflict with First Nations over traditional lands. As Gilroy notes, this sort of network of relations is infused with histories of racial and class categories employed by dominant powers and communities to push some humans toward a state of bare life. Most of these complex relations are held together through a belief that Canadian inclusion allows for difference (Coleman, *White* 13). This precarious network of inclusive relationships works in concert with repressive sovereign power. It is, therefore, through the subtle networks of diverse, even positive, technologies of power in combination with the sovereign decision that power manifests itself and can be made to work on the biopolitical subject in Canada.

The Heritage Day parade demonstrates a performance of the subtle and complex networks of power that can produce exceptionality including the tolerant and liberal forms of governmentality that paradoxically cast some humans as ‘uncivil.’ First of all,

Adele is not escorted from the parade as an act of repression performed by a sovereign figure of her community. Rather, Adele is excluded by the whispers and stares of the community and, finally, the choice by some neighbours to physically remove her from the community, allegedly for the sake of her own well being. The man who helps Adele home is a veteran who has lost an arm in some previous war (*Soucouyant* 62). His presence harkens back to Canadian participation in international conflicts such as the Second World War that impacted Adele so violently as a child. This allusion is compounded by the narrator's description of Adele's association of the parade with her violent expulsion from her home in Trinidad by American troops. On Heritage Day, Adele peeks nervously through the curtains, unable to differentiate the "performance" of "semi-orderly marching" in uniforms and "soul-shuddering cry" of a "distressingly amateurish bagpiper" from the threat of a "war or a violent expulsion" (60-61). This flashback, imagined by her son, points to larger networks of power that made the lives of Adele and her mother expendable during the war. Chariandy illustrates Canada's role in these networks of power as well. The settler images that the narrator sees displayed on mailboxes are a reminder that even the 'real' Canadians were settlers themselves, the perpetrators of a "violent expulsion" of Indigenous peoples and some immigrant peoples (60). The British names of the settlers and their bagpipes identify the community of Port Junction as having Scottish and English heritage. This British union itself is the product of the formulated and shared conception of "civility" that permitted the Scottish to join the English in imperial ventures (Coleman, *White* 6). In his memory of the Heritage Day parade, the narrator links his mother's exception to complex histories of integration and

marginalization that work both through sovereign decisions and disseminated forms of knowledge that foster mentalities of inclusion.

To help explain the workings of governmentality within the complex networks of Canadian history, scholars such as Daniel Coleman and Eva Mackey have identified the ways in which interstitial spaces can also be produced through positive (in a Foucauldian sense) forms of power that promote, rather than repress, difference. Drawing on Mackey's analysis of tolerance, Daniel Coleman identifies the performance of "civility" as constituting the Canadian imagined community (*White Civility* 21). As a form of self-governance, civility can arguably be extended to a form of governmentality (45).

Civility is performed through the intentional inclusion of those who are excluded. Those who perform civility are, in a sense, dependent on those who are excluded because it is only through the performance of civility towards those diagnosed as 'less civil' that 'civil individuals' can enact their own civility. This economy of civility also dictates that the 'civil individual' possess some form of sovereign power; the 'civil individual' is the one who decides the 'uncivil' exception. As a result, some individuals and groups are excluded from status within the community due to their perceived 'uncivil' behaviour. Often race, class, and gender categories are used to decide who is capable of civility and who must be taught to become civil (*White Civility* 45). This form of inclusion/exclusion constitutes an operation of dispersed sovereign power in everyday interactions within the law, an operation that is informed by a multicultural governmentality. For example, Adele's family, and in fact her very illness, provide an opportunity for the enacting of civility. The couple that helps Adele home is able to demonstrate their Canadian civility and to actually define themselves as Canadians through their helping of Adele home. The

couple defines their own civility by comparing it to the uncivil behaviour of Adele as manifested in her unseemly public display. Similarly, when Adele's son, informed by the dominant multicultural governmentality, views his mother as monstrous and shrinks back from her, the couple categorizes him as different from themselves because he does not react with the same civil manner toward his parent. Adele's 'uncivil' presence is therefore necessary for the creation of the 'civil' norm from which she is excluded. Adele is included in the community solely through her necessary exclusion, placing her in an interstitial space within the liberal regime of multiculturalism.

Festivities such as the Heritage Day parade can be examined for technologies of inclusion that function as positive forms of power. The Heritage Day parade is a prime example of the kind of attitude, or perhaps expression of governmentality, that Mackey describes as "tolerance." Tolerance is an approach which promotes nation-building but not genuine autonomy for cultural groups (Mackey xv). Official multicultural festivities allow for difference to be integral and included in the Canadian cultural identity. However, Mackey's book explores events analogous to the fictional Heritage Day parade by conducting interviews with community members and organizers of similar events; she found the large number of the "*Canadian-Canadians*" she interviewed were happy for multicultural displays to be included in their national celebrations, but their responses implied that the actual reality of multicultural society and its many demands were not welcome (3). In *Soucouyant*, Adele's inclusion in the multicultural rhetoric of the Heritage Day parade in combination with her exclusion due to her 'uncivil' display leaves her in an interstitial space of acceptance without "genuine respect" (Mackey xv).

The image of Adele as a caricature of a parade balloon demonstrates this inclusion without actual autonomy. Adele's son describes his mother as a puppet in the parade: "one of those inflatable puppets you sometimes see on poles at a parade. As looming and caricatured and awkwardly handled as that" (*Soucouyant* 62). Adele becomes a part of the parade that is controlled by the crowd. In Agamben's terms, the crowd holds sovereign power over Adele's life; Adele is controlled in the sense that the community decides whether she may be included and how she will be treated. The neighbourhood chooses to handle Adele's presence awkwardly, "without promoting genuine respect or autonomy," despite the multicultural aspect of the day's celebration (Mackey xv). Adele's Caribbean body could easily be included in the parade if she were to behave according to the "rules of this here place" (*Soucouyant* 50). But, Adele's misunderstanding of the community's norms is the basis for her to be included only through her 'uncivil' presence that is used to constitute the 'civil' Canadian norm.

Due to her dementia, Adele is unable to participate appropriately in the Heritage Day parade. It is important to note that the traumatic childhood from which her dementia stems is the result of the same wars that injured her veteran helper (*Soucouyant* 62). Though the veteran is celebrated for his acts as a soldier and included despite his shattered body, Adele's shattered mind bars her from the festivities. Adele's history of suffering is excluded because, according to a multicultural governmentality, Adele is diagnosed as an 'uncivil' other and therefore excluded through a sympathetic tolerance which demands she be cared for through her removal. Just as Adele was previously displaced from her home in Trinidad, she is now also displaced from the parade. This repeated removal to an interstitial space parallels Canada's relationship with the



Caribbean and its history as a hub of colonial power. In the Caribbean, informed by a politics of difference, the military enacted a repressive sovereign decision to relocate Adele and her mother (*Soucouyant* 181). In Canada, the same politics of difference are applied through a multicultural governmentality. This multicultural governmentality insists that “*Canadian-Canadians*” are more civil than others (Mackey 3), and therefore they must enact civility through the tolerance of their ‘uncivil’ multicultural neighbours.

The very geography of Port Junction, as it is described on the day of the parade, emphasizes the interstitial space that Adele inhabits in relation to her community. Adele’s home is on a “lonely cul-de-sac” within a “good neighbourhood” (*Soucouyant* 58). It is a house that none of the neighbours would inhabit and that the parade will only pass by at a distance. Despite the hard work of Roger and Adele, the house itself is disintegrating, not unlike Adele’s ability to uphold Canadian norms. It is from this house that the narrator watches the episode of the Heritage Day parade, and it is to this house that Adele is returned. The house is home to a family included through ‘tolerance’ in a multicultural community. The community’s multicultural governmentality excludes Adele’s family based on a politics of difference that diagnoses the family as the ‘uncivil’ exception. At the same time, community members enact their own civility through their tolerance of Adele and her family. As a result, this form of inclusion is necessarily produced through a state of ‘uncivil’ exceptionality.

### **Approaching Bare Mind: Western Knowledge Regimes and Monstrous Life**

An examination of the Heritage Day parade reveals that Adele is held in exception by both sovereign powers and a liberal multicultural governmentality. However, unlike Agamben’s “bare life,” scholarship suggests that the Trinidadian-Canadian subject in

diaspora is far from apathetic towards their marginalization. Rinaldo Walcott's claims that "these same folks [who are victimized] are quite aware of the limits of nation-states and thus refuse to place all their hopes and dreams in the nation" (13). Literature written by Trinidadian-Canadians and Trinidadians in Canada has identified the in-between position of Trinidadian-Canadian as marginalizing, and has done so critically. Famous Trinidadian-Canadian poet and novelist Dionne Brand is scathing of the patriarchal and racist undertones of the Canadian nation and perpetually ties Canada, along with the Caribbean, to histories of imperialism. Much of Brand's work "illustrates the debilitating effects of the psychic atrophy that Toronto induces in its refusal to acknowledge the humanity of the Caribbean immigrant" (Luft 47). Trinidadian author Stefano Harney also refuses to glorify the working of official multiculturalism when he summarizes the work of Trinidadian authors writing about migrants to Canada. He identifies the Canadian space as "a stop along the way," rather than a multicultural home (123). Harney finds that Trinidadian literature continually draws attention to the similarities between Canada and Trinidad in order to claim both immigrant nations fail to authentically exist as pluralist societies. The interstitial space of the Trinidadian-Canadian is marginalizing, but subjects in diaspora are far from unaware of their situation.

In literature, Trinidadian-Canadians are represented as both diminished and de-humanized, to a certain extent, by dominant governmentalities, but also attuned to their conditions of exclusion. In my examination of *Soucouyant*, I approach this literary recurrence through the metaphorical disintegration that is Adele's dementia. Chariandy's character Adele represents a form of dissolution that paradoxically attempts to forbear her fatal de-subjectification. Adele's dementia, which causes her to wander into the Heritage

Day parade and be thrown out, is described as a form of creative remembering that occurs in tandem with negative disintegration. Adele's son explains:

Forgetting can sometimes be the most creative and life-sustaining thing that we can ever hope to accomplish. The problem happens when we become too good at forgetting. When we somehow *forget* to forget, and we blunder into circumstances that we consciously should have avoided. This is how we awaken to the stories buried deep within our sleeping selves or trafficked quietly through the touch of others. This is how we're shaken by vague scents or tastes. (Chariandy, *Soucouyant* 32)

Adele isn't "simply forgetting;" she has *forgotten to forget* the traumas of her past (22). She continually relives the traumatic experiences of her childhood while failing to recall the rules of Western culture. Adele cannot differentiate her son from her long dead husband (44); she wanders outside without proper clothing (61); she is unable to list the items stolen from her because she cannot recall the items she has already listed (7), and she cannot remember to respect the institution of private property (101). These forgotten norms demonstrate the mental disintegration that Adele experiences as an exception to her Canadian community. However, Adele's forgetting is not only a form of de-subjectification because, at least for a time, it allows her to remember previously forgotten understandings in an effort to find subjectivity. Adele's mental state recalls an alternate form of knowledge that is arguably dangerous enough that it cannot be included in the Heritage Day parade.

Like the aforementioned articles by Ewa Ptonowska Ziarek and Diane Enns, Daniel Coleman is interested in locating forms of resistance that are exercised by

ostensibly helpless victimized subjects. In his article “Epistemological Cross-Talk: Melancholy, Historical Trauma, and Spiritual Cosmology,” Coleman examines the resistance Adele poses by placing her own traumatic memories within a spiritual cosmology that challenges the “Euro-Enlightenment epistemologies” that dominate Western cognition (1). As Coleman explains, the threat of the soucouyant is that “the weakest, oldest woman in the village may be a fireball of terrific energy at night” (16). By evoking the soucouyant, which emerged from a mixing of French and African tradition, Adele is evoking the disconnections caused by imperial history and a spirit-being that is itself a product of diaspora. The soucouyant in Trinidadian tradition signifies both the segregation of elderly racialized women through the forms of discrimination unleashed by an imperial politics of difference, *and* the ascription to these women an incredible and dangerous power (“Trinidad” n. pag). The figure of the soucouyant in literature has been used to attack conventional depictions of women and provide women with a model of power and agency (Anatol 33). However, as Coleman notes, the use of the soucouyant as a figure of folklore privileges the presumptions of Western feminism and anthropology. These fields claim a spirit-being cannot actually exist and deny the powerful gesture Chariandy, in particular, makes towards “unrecoverable alternative epistemologies” (“Epistemological” 20). Adele’s embodiment of the soucouyant is “beyond cognition” within Western knowledge regimes, yet it is also hauntingly present (22). Chariandy himself describes the soucouyant’s presence as an embodiment of a history that is “spectral” and “remote” but nonetheless ever sensed in the present (“Spirits” 811). The figure of the soucouyant, like the concept of “bare life,” is both the result of exclusion and a locus of resistance.

This paradox of sensing a dangerous resistance in the soucouyant that is beyond cognition is glimpsed during the Heritage Day parade when the “Canadian-Canadian” couple helps Adele home. The couple overlooks any danger Adele poses by assuming she is simply an ill woman in need of their help. Yet simultaneously, setting the legitimate helpful urge of the Canadian couple aside, the community finds Adele’s disruption disturbing enough that they must remove her from the parade. In one sense, the Canadian couple is acting out of kindness, just as any genuinely sympathetic neighbour would act. On the other hand, no neighbour knows Adele well enough to understand why Adele is frightened because she is routinely kept at a marginalized distance from the community. The couple cannot understand the narrator’s fear of his own mother. Only the narrator views Adele in her soucouyant-like “inhuman proportions” (*Soucouyant* 62). As I will argue in the next chapter, within Chariandy’s text the narrator views his mother’s “inhumanity” based on a criterion of incivility and reveals his own internalization of Western knowledge regimes, as well as his ability to see the acute effects of marginalization upon his mother.

During the Heritage Day parade, Chariandy depicts the narrator’s internalization of Western knowledge regimes and his simultaneous realization of the effects these knowledge regimes are having on his mother. The narrator, as a second-generation immigrant, with few memories of Trinidad is not found in the same subject position as his mother. In his analysis of literature produced by first and second generation Black immigrants to Canada, George Elliot Clarke makes a very clear distinction between the way first and second generation Black Canadians depict interactions with the dominant Canadian culture. Clarke claims that first-generation writers view themselves as

immigrants in exile, while the second-generation writers must come to grips with what he calls the “truth” of racisms and power relations within Canada in order to address them (Clarke qtd. in Cuder Dominguez 195). From Clarke’s perspective, this is a positive and productive shift. Chariandy depicts the productive nature of this shift in the ability of Adele’s son to assimilate to Canadian culture. For example, the narrator is able to conform to Canadian English when required. His assimilation is so successful that a white friend accuses him, “[Y]ou talk as if you’re whiter than me, and my grandfather was in the bloody Asiatic Exclusion League” (*Soucouyant* 31). Though the son’s enculturation may be productive in terms of fitting into the Canadian nation, he does so based on Western hegemonic ideas and the rules of Canadian culture. The narrator’s vision of his mother as a monster of “inhuman proportions” conveys his assimilation to Canadian standards and his internalization of a worldview that frames his mother as a monstrosity. As previously mentioned, this mentality will be investigated in the next chapter where I explore how Adele herself comes to view her own mother through the eyes of American soldiers.

On the other hand, though viewing his mother’s behaviour as a monstrous shows the son to be conforming to Western mentalities, the grotesque vision of the narrator reveals the effects of Western knowledge regimes upon Adele. The son’s perception of the parade is actually very acute; Adele’s son sees the underbelly of liberal tolerance and its monstracization of himself and his mother when he identifies the control that the crowd has over his mother and the effect it has on her way of being (*Soucouyant* 62). This simultaneous subjection to cognitive imperialism and revelation of its effects

demonstrates a unique mentality produced through exceptionality within the workings of a liberal regime of multicultural governmentality.

Chariandy's literary depiction of the Heritage Day parade depicts a diasporic state of exception constructed through the politics of race, class, and gender that emanate from a multicultural governmentality. As a diasporic subject exceptionalized by her community, Adele is ambiguously de-humanized to a certain extent and simultaneously shown retrieving a lost dangerous resistance embodied by the powerful soucouyant. This depiction of Adele parallels Chariandy's characterization of diaspora. Adele and figures of diaspora are simultaneously the products of painful histories and creative forces of possibility. In order to discuss Adele's exceptional state produced through governmental technologies in combination with sovereign power, it is necessary to move beyond the topos of the camp where Agamben locates bare life, towards the fluid cognitive space represented by "dementia" in Chariandy's novel.

## Chapter 3

### **Bare Mind: A Diasporic Mentality Between Forgetting and Remembering**

Two key scenes in Chariandy's novel illustrate Adele's relationship to dominant Western knowledge regimes. An examination of these scenes will help me to articulate my concept of "bare mind" and develop the language necessary to discuss Chariandy's character of Adele.

The first scene highlights Adele's initiation into a form of double consciousness during her childhood in Trinidad. This initiation takes the form of accepting a gift from an American soldier. Among other things, the gift includes an apple. The scene strikingly places Adele within the Western narrative of original sin stemming from Eve: the eating of the apple and the fall from grace. By eating the apple, Adele is introduced into narratives of female weakness and shameful sensuality. Significantly, Chariandy's evocation of Eve places the subject with dementia in the middle of the Western knowledge regimes that privilege the mind over the other bodily senses that can produce forms of understanding and ways of knowing. As Adele ingests the apple from the Western tree of knowledge, she begins to view her mother, forced into prostitution by the onset of the war, as the monstrous *soucouyant*, and to perceive her own racialized and gendered self as Other. This mental rift brings on Adele's affliction of twoness: *soucouyant/human, mind/body, Trinidadian/Canadian, included/excluded*. In other words, Adele's incorporation of Western knowledge forces her into a state of double consciousness. The ensuing argument between Adele and her mother results in the two of them being doused in oil by American soldiers, and then lit on fire when the absent-



minded Adele flicks a lighter. This ‘enlightenment’ scars Adele for life, both physically and mentally.

The second relevant scene I want to examine describes the process of diagnosing Adele’s ‘condition’ once she is in Canada. This second scene contrasts with the first because it is not violent, but rather grounded in a kind of politeness and care that nonetheless imposes a form of cognitive imperialism through the liberal technology of diagnosis. Based on the Canadian medical institution’s standardized criteria for cognitive dementia, Adele is more likely to be diagnosed as ill, due to her minority status. Her diagnosis, and her subsequent resistance to the doctor’s verdict, highlights medical biopolitical technologies that produce and support Western knowledge regimes and their dependence upon states of exception. Like Agamben’s description of the humanitarian production of bare life within aid organizations (*Homo Sacer* 133), the knowledge produced through diagnosis relegates Adele to a state of exception so that she can be helped. However, as a subject in diaspora, Adele perpetually resists diagnosis and de-subjectification. Instead, even as she is stripped of dominant forms of knowledge, Adele’s dementia allows her to remember forgotten ways of understanding the world.

### **Bare Mind**

Chariandy portrays his character Adele as suffering from cognitive dementia. His employment of dementia draws attention to the paradoxical processes of de-subjectification and re-subjectification that are part of her ‘condition.’ Chariandy’s portrayal of Adele’s ‘dementia’ contradictorily locates her in proximity to life in states of exception stripped of subjectivity, and to the ever-shifting subjectivity of a diasporic condition. I therefore formulate a concept of “bare mind” in an effort to establish

language with which to discuss Chariandy's enigmatic character of Adele. I define "bare mind" as a mental state that results from, and reveals, the workings of cognitive imperialism. Bare mind occurs through the de-subjectification of a human in a state of exception and results in a new mentality that forgets how to be a subject within Western governmentalities while remembering previously forgotten forms of knowledge.

As I see it, Adele's mentality, described by Chariandy, could be considered "bare" in three ways. First, Adele's dementia places her mind in a "zone of indistinction" between subjectification and de-subjectification. Due to the effects of cognitive imperialism, Adele is not fully integrated into an alternative governmentality or way of living. Instead she is placed on the threshold of subjectification attempting to access forgotten forms of knowledge and to situate her own subjectivity. This interstitial mentality evokes the "in-betweeness" of the subject in diaspora and mirrors the zone of indistinction between law and fact that characterizes the concept of "bare life." Secondly, as previously established, Adele's mind is "bare" in the sense that her mind, like the mind of Agamben's bare life, is *stripped* of everyday Western knowledge, including the required Canadian multicultural governmentality. And thirdly, Adele's mind is "bare" in the sense that it *exposes to her* the workings of cognitive imperialism as well as some forms of knowledge she has forgotten. As Adele's dementia strips her of dominant multicultural governmentality, she simultaneously remembers the knowledge an old Trinidadian woman passed on to her as a child, and she becomes aware of own internalization of Western knowledge regimes. "Bare mind" in all three of these senses is a mentality possessed by a diasporic subject; it may occur when diasporic life is stripped

of dominant governmental regimes and forgotten ways of understanding return once again.

In order to bring the subject in diaspora into conversation with the state of exception and approach the character of Adele, my notion of “bare mind” requires several adjustments to Agamben’s ideal-concept of “bare life.” First, to accommodate the subject in diaspora, “bare mind” attunes Agamben’s victimized bodies devoid of memory, consciousness, and will, to the mentality of diaspora that fluctuates between forgetting and remembering in a perpetual creative cycle of re-subjectification. Secondly, though bare mind takes on the flexibility and creative impulse of the Black Atlantic and consequently rejects the static space of the camp, dementia, like the camp, guarantees fatality. In taking on the flexibility of the Black Atlantic, bare mind is able to remember and circulate alternative forms of knowledge and therefore take shape as a kind of counter-mentality within dominant knowledge regimes. However, it is ultimately fatal. Thirdly, bare mind’s flexibility and creativity complicate Agamben’s claim that the camp is the paradigm of modernity; in doing so it reveals the Eurocentric nature of Agamben’s version of “bare life.” In contrast, Adele’s experience of “bare mind” is specific to her subject position and it rebuffs such grand generalizations. Adele’s inaccessible mentality, beyond Western understanding, is precisely outside of such universality. Adele’s dementia, like Chariandy’s description of diasporas and the Black Atlantic, is the result of a specific painful history and simultaneously an opening for momentary resistance (*“Postcolonial”* n. pag.).

Chariandy’s literary depiction of the ruptures that constitute the mind in diaspora addresses the effects of exceptionality on the mind. Chariandy’s paradoxical

representation of continual de-subjectification and re-subjectification develops a mental or psychic state of exception. This interstitial state of mind makes visible forms of cognitive violence, such as some uses of Western medical epistemology. As dominant knowledge regimes are stripped from Adele, she begins to enact the monstrousness imposed upon her by dominant knowledge regimes and through this performance reveal the effects of cognitive imperialism. As a mentality, “bare mind” allows Adele to counter dominant forms of governmentality. Like diasporic consciousness, which is negatively shaped by experience of marginalization, but may yet be positively shaped through an identification with global cultural-political forces (Clifford 256), “bare mind” embodies a form of resistance by revealing the workings of cognitive imperialism.

Nonetheless, while bare mind does exhibit a kind of resistance, this state of mind is simultaneously produced through the de-subjectifying forces of a multicultural governmentality acting in combination with sovereign power. As a result, bare mind is not a liberated position, but rather a diminished position from which particular forms of creative resistance are possible. “Bare mind” moves from analysis of repressive forms of biopower that define Agamben’s sovereignty towards the technologies of power that work through knowledge production. It focuses on the liberal sympathetic technologies of power that operate in Western multicultural societies such as Canada, and on figures like the compassionate doctor who enact productive forms of power. Ultimately, Adele’s state of bare mind reveals the ways in which dementia can resist the dominant knowledge regimes that enforce a state of exception through positive mechanisms of power, even as, like the resistance figures described by Enns and Ziarek, Adele is fatally marginalized and diminished by the same mechanisms of power.

### **Self-Knowledge and Double Consciousness**

One of the ways Chariandy's narrator explains the mentality that results from Adele's dementia is through the metaphor of "twoness." Chariandy draws on the formula of double consciousness prevalent throughout diaspora studies. First articulated by Black-studies pioneer W.E.B. DuBois' in his explanation of double consciousness among African Americans, twoness is described as the:

sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (12)

This continual work of being 'two' is one of the conditions the narrator uses to explain his mother. The metaphor of twoness also evokes the feminist analysis of the doubleness of the woman who straddles the contradictions of self and normative gender ideals.

Chariandy draws attention to these paradoxes of race and gender indirectly. He compares Adele's split mentality to the expression on her face when she eats lemon meringue pie. Adele gets very excited about lemon meringue pie, a metonym for the Canadian dream. Her face expresses a "twoness" as she takes in both the "velvet sweet and sharpness at once" (*Soucouyant* 53). The first time Adele sees the pie in a restaurant window she is attracted to the "fluffy sweetness as exotic as snow," but as illustrated in the previous chapter, Adele is not in fact able to try the pie as she has to leave the establishment on account of her race, gender, and assumed profession of prostitution (49). The twoness of Adele's existence is encompassed in the paradox of attaining her dream to live in Canada and be Canadian, while at the same time continually revealing that she is not part of

Canada in the eyes of other Canadians. This discrepancy places Adele in an interstitial mental space. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall explains the phenomenon, which Chariandy depicts: “It is one thing to position a subject or a set of peoples as the Other of a dominant discourse. It is quite another to subject them to that ‘knowledge,’ not only as a matter of imposed will and domination, but by the power of inner compulsion and subject conformation to the norm” (226). In other words, knowledge about the self can change an individual’s mentality. While double consciousness, explains the psychological conflict afflicting Adele, Dubois’ articulation of double consciousness fails to address this biopolitical subject that is produced by the internalization of this knowledge. In the case of Adele, double consciousness is itself produced and maintained through governmental practices.

At the culmination of his novel Chariandy connects Adele’s introduction to Western knowledge regimes with the onset of her so called ‘dementia.’ Adele reveals her internalization of Western hegemonic ideals when she views her mother through the eyes of the American soldiers occupying Carenage. As already noted, Adele’s initiation into a Western understanding of the world takes the form of a gift from an American soldier. The gift contains money, candy, post cards from around Lake Superior, pictures of American movie stars, and:

[m]ost startling of all an apple. It’s wrinkled and bruised, but an apple nevertheless. Adele stares at the fruit for close to an hour, touching the wrinkles, smelling the skin, even carefully licking the moist bruises. Then, when she can’t wait any longer, she cuts it in eighths and eats it down to the core. It is chalky and

turned, she later realizes, but she understands it then as the most precious fruit in the world. A promise that something else is possible. (*Soucouyant* 188)

The apple, representative of the fruit of the tree of knowledge and the root of Western worldviews, holds fascination for Adele and immediately precedes her first view of her mother and herself as Other. This apple is accompanied by symbols of Western success such as movie stars, money, luxurious food and the pureness of the North. After eating the fruit of knowledge, Adele feels a desire for “something else” and to be different than who she is. Immediately following her ingestion of the apple, Adele internalizes an awareness of her otherness and is attacked by the soucouyant/her mother, the double-being of monster/old woman.

Adele’s introduction to Western conventions is the result of various imperial intrusions into Trinidad by the interests of the Western world and the intricate workings of sovereignty that accompanied them. Chariandy’s narrator explains: “By 1943, [Trinidad] emerged as one of the most important training regions of the war, with not only the Americans, but also the British, French and the Brazilians, and the Dutch all simultaneously performing training drills in different locations” (*Soucouyant* 177). Adele and her mother are displaced from their home to the village of Carenage in order to make way for the American military base put in place by an agreement between the Americans and the current imperial force of the British (178). In an interview with the journal *Callaloo*, Chariandy explains that the building of the American base was seen as a positive project towards the modernization of the island and as a step towards the ideals of Western progress (“Spirits” 821).

As women displaced by the American military, Adele and her mother are not “eligible for any compensation since they appeared unattached to any adult male” (*Soucouyant* 181). This displacement results in Adele’s mother’s entry into prostitution because she has no other way of making a living. With this ‘fall’ into prostitution, Adele begins to align her mother with the soucouyant, just as the narrator will later come to see Adele as monstrous at the Heritage Day parade. Adele’s mother’s nightly transactions produce “dark blossoms upon her neck or upper arms or between her thighs” mimicking the dark marks left by the vampire (184). When she has been so beat up by her customers that she cannot work, Adele’s mother “begins to live outside herself,” not unlike the roaming fireball of the soucouyant (185). In a horrific performance, Adele’s mother starts wearing her best dress all day long, plucking her eyebrows out and burning her hair with an over heated comb. She “obsesses over her bruises in the mirror, chanting obscenities, softly naming invisible events and beings” (186). Then one day “Adele returns home to find a sloughed form on the floor, her mother’s empty dress” (186). The dress takes on a resemblance to the soucouyant’s skin. It is only after Adele eats the apple, gifted to her by the American soldier, that she seeks to distance herself from her ‘monstrous’ mother and internalizes the knowledge that she, like her mother, is Other in the eyes of the soldiers and her neighbours.

As a result of Adele accepting the American soldier’s gift, Adele and her mother argue. While Adele is still swallowing the last seeds of the apple, a neighbour, who has witnessed Adele’s interactions with the soldier, accuses Adele’s mother of training her daughter in the ways of prostitution. For the first time, Adele disowns her mother, calling her a “whore” and a “horror” and identifying her mother’s desperate attempts to earn a



living as shameful (*Soucouyant* 189). Adele's new understanding categorizes her mother as unclean and monstrous. In a terrified response to her mother's screeching sobs that resemble laughter, Adele bolts from the house (190). Then Adele claims to have really seen a soucouyant: "... a brilliance passing overhead and a silence like glass. I see it then, the creature. It using water in a rusted oil drum like a mirror. It putting on she skin, syrup sounds and soft elastic snaps. Gloving on it fingers when she roll she eye" (190). Chased by her mother's chiffon gown, Adele continues to flee. Adele's mother follows her into the military base and denounces the soldiers for interacting with Adele. This results in the soldiers splashing Adele's mother with a washbucket full of oil. When the oil hits Adele as well, Adele believes they will "forever stink of something shat from the bowels of the earth and cooked in hell. They will never be clean again" (192). Tortured by this new knowledge, Adele uses a lighter given to her by the American soldier to light her mother's dress on fire, and both women are ignited in a murderous 'illumination.' With this gesture, both women's bodies are marked by fire and the sign/skin of the soucouyant. Ignited by the gifts of the American (both lighter and apple), Adele takes on the dual nature of the powerful and monstrous soucouyant. For the rest of her life, Adele will associate the burn scars on her body with the attack of the soucouyant. But, significantly, Adele will also associate the feel of Canadian snow with a cold that "burns hot" like Trinidadian oil on her skin (99). Akin to her son at the Heritage Day parade, Adele has both monstracized her mother and come to a realization that Western conventions categorize her mother and herself as monsters.

### The Technology of Sympathetic Diagnosis

In Canada, Adele's family is continually concerned by her emerging "new being" and changing behaviour, so she and Roger decide to visit a medical specialist (*Soucouyant* 40). Both the doctor and Adele's son, the narrator, observe Adele's mental functions as they attempt to diagnose her "condition." The act of diagnosis is also privileged in Agamben's primary study of states of exception. Agamben approaches the diagnostician as a figure of sovereign power. Within Agamben's paradigm of the "Camp," the doctor has the power to decide what life "does not deserve to live" (*Homo Sacer* 136). Agamben examines the Nazi eugenics program to locate the doctor as a figure of sovereignty under the fascist regime. Based on what the Nazis saw as "humanitarian considerations" for the well-being of the 'racially superior' population, the doctor had the power to diagnose "life that does not deserve to live" (140). Furthermore, for the sake of those same "humanitarian considerations," medicine under the Nazi regime had to take on new duties, particularly the material conditions of the economy of human life. Rather than pursuing an eighteenth-century-style "care for life," the Nazi regime moved towards fighting the "enemy" through its management of life. Life that did not deserve to live was employed for the advancement of the war effort (147). Humans were subjected to perverse experiments that would help determine how long a crashed pilot could survive in freezing water, who could withstand vaccinations for diseases terrorizing troops, or how one might be able to survive on salt water (155). Under the sovereign decision of the doctor within totalitarian conditions, some human lives are put to use for the 'betterment of the citizen population' through exposure to death.

In liberal multicultural contexts, the power of the diagnosis operates positively to promote life, rather than negatively through exposure to death, yet sometimes with

insidious effects.<sup>21</sup> Adele is diagnosed for the sake of the preservation of her own life, but is nonetheless relegated to a medical state of exception. Within the confines of his office, the doctor attempts to diagnose the condition of Adele's mental life. The specialist politely questions Adele to extract information about her current condition and state of mind. The doctor is puzzled by many of the symptoms Adele displays and finally states his verdict: without any more tests, there is nothing more that can be done (*Soucouyant* 38). Within a liberal multicultural governmentality, Adele is diagnosed as the helpless victim of a degenerating mind in order that she may be helped.

However, it appears Adele fails to internalize the knowledge that she is suffering from a degenerative disease. After the diagnosis, she and her family dismiss the official name of Adele's illness, "cognitive dementia," and the doctor's explanatory pamphlets are thrown in the trash. Adele's son only briefly glances at the medical explanation for Adele's diagnosis:

*although the SWR or Standard Word Recall test may offer preliminary indications of the condition, one must be cautious. Depression and certain post traumatic states may produce false positives. One must especially be cautious when dealing with the uneducated and/or ethnic minorities. Often enough, a SWR test administered to these people will result in a clear positive when, strictly speaking, cognitive dementia as discussed is not truly in effect. (Soucouyant 41)*

Diagnostic tests, such as the SWR are used to decide whose life is disintegrating into a state of dementia. As the pamphlet warns, those who are "uneducated," "ethnic minorities," and those who have experienced great trauma are at a greater risk of this diagnosis, even within a multicultural society that purportedly accounts for difference.

Therefore, rightfully cautious of accepting Adele's diagnosis, the narrator admits, "my parents were never satisfied with how the medical specialists were articulating Mother's new being" (40). Adele and Roger "were suspicious about diagnostic tests which always seemed to presume meanings and circumstances which were never wholly familiar to them in the first place. They were especially suspicious about medical institutions and offices" (39). For Adele medical institutions are not only a place of potential healing, they are also the places of harm: "scissors and hooks ... certainly lurked in those antiseptic spaces. The bloody and jaggedly-sewn cures. Patients' heads opened up and then roughly laced back like old washekongs" (39). Adele's image of a hospital reveals that she perceives medical institutions and diagnosis to have an ominous kind of power. Like Agamben, Chariandy's character situates the medical institution as the site where her life may be threatened by a diagnosis of exception.

Both Chariandy and Agamben recognize that diagnosis allows power to seize hold of life. For Agamben, the doctor's ultimate power resides in his ability to enact eugenics and the final act of deciding a life is not worth living. The diagnostician, after giving the patients a summary examination, effectively has the power to decide whose death is not considered homicide (*Homo Sacer* 139). In Adele's case, no matter the causes, her diagnosis explains away the effects of her so called degenerative disease. Unlike Agamben's doctor who decides immediately which life is worth living and which life is not, a diagnosis stemming from liberal sympathy produces knowledge about the self that changes one's mentality and in such a way attempts to grasp hold of Adele's life for its protection.

Methods such as diagnostic tests and interviews make the medical office a site of knowledge production. In the past, the internalization of imposed categories had affected Adele's understanding of herself and therefore her mentality. However, upon leaving the doctor's office, Adele is more interested in the doctor's polite demeanour than in what he has diagnosed. Nonetheless, Adele's dismissal of her diagnosis does not disrupt the external production of knowledge, which allows others to consider her life to be in a state of exception. For example, the doctor suspects Adele is suffering from early on-set dementia. Once Adele's diagnosis is determined, it can be used to explain her condition and, as a result, condemn her life to a certain kind of existence. Medical epistemology insists Adele is degenerating, forgetting her memories, and failing to function within society. This understanding of Adele relegates her to specific forms of regulation. For example, when Adele wanders out of her house, the police investigate. The police wish to know "what kind of medical condition [Adele] has" (*Soucouyant* 65). Adele's son is hesitant at first to list a diagnosis, but then finally admits to "early on-set dementia." The police, elsewhere in the novel referred to as "professional knowers" (28) use this diagnosis "so they can help" in the future (65). No matter what knowledge Adele internalizes, once the police have recorded Adele's diagnosis they will be able to monitor and treat her appropriately as she is the victim of a degenerating mind and, therefore, an exception.

### **The Camp: The Topos of a Mind Stripped Bare**

Both the doctor and the police officer condemn Adele to exceptionality by confirming that she is suffering from incurable dementia. For Agamben, the space of the exception is the topos of the camp. The camp, to which the extreme limit figure of bare

life is confined, is a space of disintegration. Agamben describes bare life's state of mind in his work *Remnants of Auschwitz*. Agamben suggests that the camp's "supreme ambition is to produce, in a human body, the absolute separation of the living being and the speaking being, *zoë* and *bios*, the inhuman and the human – survival" (156). Completely separated from political life, bare life in the camp is "the non-human who obstinately appears as human: he is the human that cannot be told apart from the inhuman" (82). *Der muselmann*, this human/inhuman, is "a being from whom humiliation, horror, and fear had so taken away all consciousness and all personality as to make him absolutely apathetic" (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 185). Consequently, all of *der Muselmann's* "instincts are cancelled along with his reason" and he exists in a world "without memory and without grief" (185). Within the camp, bare life survives an inhuman condition and in doing so remains fundamentally human, but this biopolitical limit figure does nothing but survive. The camp therefore serves as a space of perpetual de-subjectification for those enduring bare life. For Agamben, the only form of resistance within this limit space emerges from complete apathy and breaks the sovereign hold through the embodiment of the very bare life of which society wishes to rid itself. Similarly, Adele's bare mind is both formed out of imposed exceptionality and reaches a form of resistance through its de-subjectification. However, Adele's diasporic case provides access to another way of being beyond Western cognition that attempts to surface when Adele is stripped of the dominant form of subjectivity.

### **Resistance to Diagnosis**

Adele and her family continually choose to work around and ignore the normative explanations for Adele's condition. Explanations themselves litter Chariandy's narrative:

explanations for Adele's behaviour (*Soucouyant* 65), explanations for the function of a turtleneck (108), explanations of why Adele has scars (24), and explanations of why Adele's son accidentally cuts his mother clipping her toe nails (83). Even so, meaning continually escapes Adele and Adele's meanings continually elude explanation. The question pervades the novel, "What would [explanations] accomplish ... How would they exactly change anything" (120). Like the doctor's diagnosis, the explanations that Chariandy's characters produce within Western approaches to understanding never seem adequate.

Rather than admit Adele to the victimhood of dominant explanations for her condition, Adele's son is "determined to see her in [his] own way" (*Soucouyant* 41). As a child, he believes his mother emptied her mind into the sky (38-39). Throughout the entire novel, the narrator appears to be piecing together Adele's self-explanation – her affliction by the soucouyant. The narrative runs almost imperceptibly between Adele's scattered murmurings and the son's narration. Adele appears to have varying control over her storytelling. Words slip out of her mouth, and others fail to come, but in the end the son believes he knows what his mother has "accidentally" told him over the years (184). At times Adele's son has confidence that he knows his mother's narrative from beginning to end. However, despite the way her son neatly packages her story at the end of the narrative, the narrator never has full access to Adele due to her dementia and admits he is left without the ability to "understand" (195).<sup>22</sup> No explanation or diagnosis pieced together by the narrator is able to capture Adele.

In an effort to accurately represent his mother, Adele's son tries to explain to a helpful police officer what Adele is experiencing by sharing Adele's memory of the soucouyant:

She saw a soucouyant ... Not literally ... At least I don't think so. 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, so you don't really have to know what a soucouyant is. (*Soucouyant* 66)

In this justification of his mother's behaviour, Adele's son wishes to validate his mother's experience, even as he relegates her framing cosmology to the status of a folktale.

Overhearing the conversation, Adele herself does not attribute any meaning to the word "dementia" when she hears the police officer record it. Unlike the apple of Western knowledge, she refuses to internalize this diagnosis. While Adele's son struggles to understand his mother's condition, Adele's dementia allows her to lay aside the dominant explanations for her state, and embrace a mentality that is beyond Western conventions.

Like Adele, in several episodes the narrator privileges forms of knowledge other than dominant Western approaches to understanding. To begin with, consider the narrator's shifting opinions of Meera, who has no medical education but acts as Adele's nurse. Before the narrator knows Meera is not a nurse, he privileges his own knowledge of his mother over the medical education he assumes Meera possesses. Adele's son believes "when you live with anyone that long, they tell you all sorts of things without ever meaning to do so . . . [he] knows the sorts of things that no nurse, however qualified or sensitive, can ever imagine" (*Soucouyant* 82). And although Meera reads continually, the narrator points out, "[t]here is not a single book on dementia or its management in the



whole house;” eventually convinced of Meera’s closeness with his mother, the narrator concedes that she does “an incredible job” of caring for Adele (120). Personal familiarity and the forms of understanding it provides are therefore privileged over universalizing medical epistemologies.

For Adele, the book knowledge privileged by Western society is also distrusted. When Adele’s son begins to explain to her what he has learned of her history from library books, Adele responds, “And what some boy have seventeen year think he know about oil and empire” (175). She claims, “They always does tell the biggest stories in books” (175). Despite Adele’s distrust of books, the narrator’s brother, Adele’s oldest son, would like to be a poet. The narrator fancies running into his estranged brother at a poetry reading in a bookshop and talking with him about the ins and outs of being an emerging author. At the end of the novel, the narrator learns that his brother was nearly illiterate. His poetry is a scribble of half-written words; nonetheless, he is “talented in his own way” (172). As a poet the narrator’s brother “drew from all languages and meanings . . . The smeared toothpaste of clouds upon the sky and guerrilla art of bird shit on the rocks . . . the oatmeal of lake scum and the constellations of trash and plastic bottles that washed up on the shore” (17). This poet’s knowledge is not confined to the Western tradition of written words, or the cognitive imperialism that demands a unitary frame for meaning. Rather, words and unitary narratives are depicted as being insufficient for understanding.

In a similar gesture towards unravelling the unifying violence of cognitive imperialism, Chariandy demands that Adele’s complete narrative remain withdrawn from the reader. Once the narrator has completed his mother’s narrative by piecing together what he has been told by her and the history books, he asks for one last piece of

information before leaving: the identification of “a plant whose name we’ve both forgotten” (Chariandy, *Soucouyant* 194). However, Adele is never able to tell him this last thing, leaving the narrative incomplete. While the narrator claims at times he can “hear and understand and take away ...” because he is her son, he also cries in sadness because he doesn’t “really understand it all” (195). The narrative itself is the narrator’s attempt to understand and situate himself, and it serves the function of creating his own subjectivity (Delisle 2). However, the narrative does not produce any real access to an understanding of Adele. Even by the end of the narrative, the reader cannot understand Adele’s interiority because the narration has only taken on the task of conveying the son’s experience of Adele. Chariandy’s depiction of Adele refuses to privilege Western literary conventions with an understanding or concrete explanation of Adele’s mentality. Rather, the narrative privileges the depiction of a withdrawal from a Western form of cognition and movement towards an inaccessible alternative.

### **The Black Atlantic: The Topos of the Soucouyant**

As her dementia increases, Adele forgets how to function within her community and then within her family. It is as if the process of enculturation that accelerated with her eating of the American’s apple is being undone and leaving her devoid of a complete approach to understanding the world. For example, Adele forgets how to find her way around her own house and waits hours until someone can show her where to find the washroom. Or she forgets how old her children are and is devastated to find them already teenagers (*Soucouyant* 18). At times Adele cannot dress appropriately, speak appropriately, or control her bodily functions. She can’t remember the rules to games or even sign her name consistently on legal papers (40; 27). In these ways, Adele is

forgetting the “rules of this here place” and the dominant conventions of her Canadian community (50).

Adele’s forgetting is painful for both her and her family. Her sons and her husband are troubled by it, and her affliction prevents Adele from having the fulfilled relationships both she and her family evidently want. When the narrator and his brother were children and Adele couldn’t remember how to play cards, the narrator succumbed to tears and his brother abruptly left the table (*Soucouyant* 40). And, though her husband claims, “She only forgetting. Worsen thing have happen,” the day does come when Adele can’t recognize “some coolie-man’s dark fingers laced in hers” (21-22). Adele’s dementia is not only a forgetting of Western knowledge regimes, it is a complete stripping of the effective ways she communicates with her loved ones and community. No-matter the explanation, this stripping of Adele’s life is a painful history.

On the other hand, it is clear at the outset of Chariandy’s narrative that while Adele is ‘forgetting,’ she is also intensely remembering and therefore, at least for a time, circumventing complete de-subjectification. The static space of Agamben’s camp and its mental disintegration fails to account for Adele’s active mental processes of remembering and creative forgetting. Her mental state is perhaps better represented by theories of diasporic memory. As described by Stuart Hall, the subject in diaspora is continually in the process of creating subjectivity through accessing the depths of nostalgia and memory (236). The experience of diasporic memory is described as the process of recalling a past ‘homeland’ that “inflects the diasporic life in the present” and shapes diasporic subjectivity (Oliver 85).<sup>23</sup> This intake of senses is part of the creative process of positioning a past and a present to produce an ever-shifting subject position.

The narrator deduces that Adele takes part in the creative process of positioning herself within a past and a present through the use of her bodily senses:

Touch has remained important to mother. It steadies her to an increasingly alien world and jars her to recollection when sight and sound fail to do so. Mother may not always remember me. Not always, but she remembers physical quirks like my trick knee. She's also able to read something on the bumps of my spine and in my hair, the texture somewhere between the soft and tight curls of her own and the spiny quills of my father . . . Smell too is a trustworthy sense . . . Hearing is good, but her comprehension has suffered. (*Soucouyant* 41)

Adele's senses still take in the world. However, she does not use the information from her senses to produce the same knowledge as others. Adele's use of her senses to produce understandings that privileges the body knowledge on the same level as the mind. To do this, Adele must forget the Western imposition of the mind over the body that she ingested with the symbolic act of eating the American's apple in Trinidad. By forgetting this distinction, Adele moves into the mentality of the soucouyant, who is at once indistinguishable from the human/inhuman, a complete hybrid product of diaspora, and the bearer of a way of knowing beyond Western cognition. The act of forgetting begins to unravel Adele's internalization of dominant knowledge regimes; Adele appears to actively take part in the world and produce meaning for herself through her own monstrous, racialized, and aged body, of which she was previously ashamed.

After witnessing his mother's state and her combined forgetting and remembering, Adele's son is determined that she is "growing not diminishing . . . awakening to something that we wouldn't have guessed at otherwise. The freedom from meaning, the

wild magic of existence” (*Soucouyant* 194). From this perspective, Adele’s forgetting becomes a creative resistant action that achieves a certain freedom from the marginalizing confines of conventional attitudes. By forgetting to forget, Adele makes space to remember long lost alternative forms of knowledge. She remembers the forty-nine different types of mango (46), and she recalls traditional Trinidadian cures for numerous things (181). Adele’s mental state flows between forgetting Western hegemonic understanding and remembering forgotten alternative knowledges. Adele’s consciousness is fluid like the Black Atlantic. Her mentality flows in and out and back and forth with the tides of memory and the present; her bare mind is produced by painful history, but is creatively flowing to fill the ever-diminishing spaces it has.

When Adele’s mind moves into the fluid topos of the Black Atlantic, she is also moving into the space of a diasporic history and of the soucouyant who marks that space. The soucouyant is a dangerous monster, but she is also an old woman and a figure of powerful forgotten knowledge. As previously elucidated, in Chariandy’s novel the character of the Old Woman in Trinidad carries with her narratives of Trinidadian history and traditional ways of healing. The Old Woman, who is displaced with Adele and her mother in Trinidad, claims the bottom of the ocean is covered in bones and that the slave ships from Africa carried ghosts (*Soucouyant* 182; 23). She is respected because of her wisdom and traditional healing skills, which she passes on to Adele (23). She has “long memories and [knows] the proper names for things” and even remembers that sometime long ago there had been a people who lived there first and had “been scattered by exploding weapons [and] by sickness that burst in pustules on their skin” (183) It is also the old woman who heals Adele’s mother “with spiderwebs” after an attack by the

soucouyant (183). This Old Woman carries with her alternative knowledge that Adele has forgotten due to the effects of cognitive imperialism. When Adele is ‘remembering,’ she sings Caribbean calypsos (180), lists the uses of plant remedies (23), and tells tales of supernatural beings like “La Diabliesse, the lady with a crowsfoot and the face of the corpse” (184). These forms of knowledge are passed onto Adele by the Old Woman and, without being relegated to folklore, they cannot be explained within Western ways of understanding the world.

The other side to the soucouyant, the monster who withdraws from her human skin, also appears as Adele’s dementia increases. As she ages, Adele retreats from her fellow human beings and begins to act the part of the soucouyant. The knowledge of the monstrous soucouyant appears to be an understanding of the effects of cognitive imperialism. As Adele remembers the marginalized monstrosity that was imposed upon her mother, Adele simultaneously begins to illustrate through performance that she is also considered a monster by the multicultural governmentality that surrounds her.

Adele’s last day of interaction with her son before she completely withdraws from him is the last chance the narrator has to observe his mother’s state. The narrator awakes in the middle of the night to the sounds of “someone smashing things downstairs” (*Soucouyant* 133). Adele stands in the kitchen with red lipstick smeared across her mouth like a “wounded clown face.” After not moving for days Adele has closed all the curtains and proceeded to “attack” a coconut with a hammer. In the eyes of the narrator in this midnight scene, the coconut becomes a “human head, with skull fragments strewn about the floor, tufts of wiry hair still attached” (133). To the narrator, she appears grotesque and horrific. In her state of bare mind, Adele displays to her son the monstrousness that

cognitive imperialism imposes upon her. Yet, Adele's son is also aware that she is "alive with physical and mental purpose" as she expertly remembers how to make her mother's delicious coconut bake (133). Making this traditional recipe, Adele is so lucid that she can skilfully remove each morsel of coconut meat from the shell without scraping her fingers on the grater. Adele doesn't need to measure the ingredients, but "pours and shakes out precise quantities" of everything she needs (133). In her state of bare mind, Adele is remembering knowledge passed on to her from her mother. Adele proceeds with ease until it comes time to heat her accompanying cocoa on the stove and cannot fathom how it is used: "She looks at the dials on the stove and frowns at the symbols on them . . . She cannot decide which dial to turn" (134). Even as she remembers how to concoct her mother's famous recipe, Adele has forgotten the written modes of communication that are used to dictate temperatures and instructions. With this inability to understand the common language of technological communication, Adele turns to her son and he swears he hears a soft whisper of the chant of the soucouyant: "*Old skin, 'kin, 'kin/ You na know me,/ You na know me . . .*" (134). When the narrator addresses his mother she makes her final vocalization. She contorts her face into a "clownish and horribly pitiful" expression and mocks him with the imitation of "a little boy's whiny call . . . 'Ma ma ma ma ma ma . . .'" (134). Adele never makes another utterance. With her final interaction, Adele accuses her son of the same monstracization she imposed upon her mother when she internalized Western knowledge regimes. Adele looks straight at her son and embodies the monster he imagines by mocking his fear and longing for his mother before finally withdrawing from him. In a certain sense, this final act could be construed as Adele's explanation of what has happened to her.

### Concluding Counter-Circulations

No matter the diagnosis or the explanation it gives of Adele's state of mind, Chariandy's novel unavoidably ends with Adele's death. Though it is evident she falls down the stairs and hits her head, Adele's death recalls a vampire-like attack. Her son finds her in the still of the night, awoken not by the disturbance of the train or a storm on the lake, but by a strange calmness. He finds his mother in her favourite haunt of the cellar and lifts her head to see "a spot of blood. Not very large at all" (*Soucouyant* 138). Adele's death is marked not only by the soucouyant's bite, but also by the "cold thin scar" of a crescent moon through the basement window (138). Adele's death, both a natural accident and marked by the signs of the soucouyant, is tied to the cold "scarring" of Canadian society, just as much as to the burning scars of the soucouyant which first afflicted her in Trinidad. Finally, following her death, Adele's coffin returns to the black Atlantic; with a splash on a rainy day, it is lowered into her grave like the bones covering the Atlantic Ocean floor (143).

Yet, Adele's death does not bring an end to the circulation of the fragmented and forgotten forms of knowledge she began to disperse. During her lifetime Adele read bodies like brail. The scar on her face and the click in her son's knee carry more recognition than any words (*Soucouyant* 8; 122). These intimate exchanges carry a history that hovers just beyond the access of those who are closest to Adele, and like the soucouyant, leaves those around her marked and drained. Adele spreads her knowledge with the mark of the soucouyant. For example, her husband has a small birthmark on his hand. Similarly, Adele's son has a "mysterious bruise on [his] forehead" when he wakes the morning after her funeral (141). Further, all his life, Adele's son has had a "mole on the back of his wrist" (98). Even Meera, Adele's caretaker, has a birthmark like "a flare



of energy running down her neck” (54). The knowledge of the soucouyant is “a way of telling without really telling, you see” because a soucouyant is beyond the reaches of a liberal multicultural governmentality (66). Rather, the soucouyant, the monster produced through diaspora, works beyond Western understanding and circulates forms of knowledge that are only partially understood.

After Adele’s death, her son temporarily begins to show signs of the soucouyant, signalling his own understanding of the effects of cognitive imperialism on himself and his mother. First of all, the narrator becomes obsessed with his own version of twoness. Rather than his mother’s lemon meringue pie, the son fixates on the beverage produced by “coin operated coffee machines . . . The type that gives you options and dispenses sugar and artificial whitener” (*Soucouyant* 140). He stays up late into the night trying to replicate the beverage produced by the machine using “different brands of coffee whiteners,” “‘brewed’ cups of instant coffee,” and “a bowl of sugar” (140). He claims, “This way, I will be able to figure out how it is done. How the taste in the machine is achieved”(140); but, he never quite gets it right. The narrator broods over the brand of difference that is acceptable in Canada, the mixture of Blackness and Whiteness produced by the Canadian multicultural machine that “gives you options” and provides “artificial whitener” to allow an immigrant to fit into society. Nonetheless, despite his desire and the fact that he possesses all the ingredients, the narrator is unable to produce this ideal product. This episode draws attention to the narrator’s realization that he cannot conform to the appropriate governmentality for a multicultural subject within the liberal Canadian regime.

On the morning of Adele's funeral, following his frustrating realization that he cannot achieve a proper multicultural subjectivity, Adele's son wakes to find a "mysterious bruise on [his] forehead" (*Soucouyant* 141). This cephalic mark brings to mind the sign of the soucouyant and its mental effects. Like Adele and her mother before her, the narrator under the mark of the soucouyant proceeds to costume himself. He chooses to dress in his father's "embroidered cowboy suit of gold stitching and glittering rhinestones" for the funeral (141). During the funeral the narrator fails to act 'appropriately.' He takes the bus to the cemetery rather than traveling in the hearse and giggles with grief as the coffin lands with a splash in its grave (143). His mind wanders in and out during the service. Rather than pay attention, he notices the kind of details his mother fixated upon. He reports, "I phase out again during the oration, this time paying attention to the neat cornrows on a woman's head"(141). And again, during the eulogy the mention of slat-prunes draws the narrator back to the memory of the flavour of their taste "red and evilly good in a mouth-tightening, scrunched-up eyes sort of way" (142). Like his mother, under the influence of the soucouyant, the narrator interprets the world through his senses. At the reception, the narrator gorges himself on the "most delicious food [he has] ever tasted:" jerk chicken, roti, dal and rice. In gluttony, he eats and vomits again and again in a horrific and luxurious enjoyment of an insatiable monstrous appetite (143). Recalling his mother's increasing silence, the narrator speaks to almost no one during the reception and funeral, but during the next days he "slowly regains [his] senses" (144).

The only companion the narrator chooses during his mother's memorial events is a child named Bohdan who knew his mother. Like the narrator, Bohdan seems to put into

circulation forms of communication he learned from Adele. Chariandy first introduces the “unusually pale” almost “albino” Bohdan on the beach where he is “improperly clothed for the season” and tied up as the captive in some childhood game (*Soucouyant* 11). He responds passively as the other children kick him, splatter him with sand and leaves, and finally drop a caterpillar down his shirt to squish it against his skin. Rather than resisting, the boy “acts as if he is immune to the imaginations of those around him,” while for the children he is “an Indian,” “artistic” (meaning “he don’t feel nothing” but perhaps a mispronunciation of ‘autistic’), or “*the boogey man*” (111). Bohdan responds apathetically to the children’s production of him as a frightening dehumanized other. When the narrator unties the child, his “face appears completely vacant” and his touch is “cool and moist and impossibly a child’s hand” (112). It is Adele who recognizes the effects of the children’s game when she identifies Bohdan as “the ghost” (113). Adele can see that, like herself, Bohdan has been transformed into a monster by the imaginations and mentalities of those around him. It is only after Adele’s death that the narrator learns Bohdan and his mother have recently immigrated to Canada, perhaps from Eastern Europe, and that Adele used to take care of Bohdan while his mother was working. Bohdan’s mother characterizes Adele as a vision of generosity and openness that she wishes their community and nation could replicate (139-140). At the funeral reception, both Bohdan and the narrator are solitary. When approached by the narrator, Bohdan, like Adele, reaches out to experience the person in front of him through touch. He probes the narrator’s bruise and then does something quite amazing. The child enacts Adele’s signature-move of tracing someone’s eyebrow and whispering “eyestache” (143-144) This behaviour on the part of Bohdan suggests that Adele has passed on to him, someone

she recognized as rendered monstrous like herself, some of her knowledge and way of experiencing the world. In this way, Adele's forms of knowledge continue to circulate after her death.

Meera, too, bearing the mark of the soucouyant across her neck, shares Adele's knowledge. Chariandy ends the novel with a passing train, the sounds of the lake, and Meera tracing the narrator's eyebrow and whispering "Eyestache" (*Soucouyant* 196). Meera, who has perhaps endured the most similar conditions to Adele as a Trinidadian woman in Canadian society, ends the novel with the circulation of Adele's knowledge against the background of both the Black Atlantic and Canadian imperial history.

In her reduced condition, Adele's persistent circulation of alternative knowledge demonstrates the hope of diasporic resistance, even while she experiences the de-subjectifying effects of being rendered exceptional. As a diasporic mentality, bare mind circulates its own understandings of the world produced through creative processes of forgetting and remembering. This mentality places Adele, as a figure of dementia, in a position of resistance to cognitive imperialism, despite the fact that her bare mind was produced through the de-subjectification that cognitive imperialism inflicted upon her.

"Bare mind," as a derivative of Agamben's provocative conceptual tool of "bare life" does not offer a liberating vision of agency, but it does conceptualize space for resistance, even as life and mind are increasingly reduced to bare conditions. While Agamben finds the hope of passive resistance in the sovereign-breaking apathy of *der Muselmann*, Ewa Ptonowska Ziarek and Diane Enns find resistance in figures who seize hold of sovereign power over their own bare life like the suicide bomber and the hunger striking suffragette. Reminiscent of these fatal acts of resistance, the character of Adele is

depicted by Chariandy as seizing hold of her own bare mind to fatally illustrate a portrayal of her own marginalization through monstracization. Adele's dementia allows her to remember forgotten forms of knowledge that resist cognitive imperialism, but ultimately it does not allow her to function within Canadian society, or even to fully interact with those closest to her. Recalling Chariandy's conception of diaspora ("Postcolonial" n. pag.), Adele's mentality is the result of historical horrors and offers a glimmer of alternative knowledge regimes. Like Agamben's condition of "bare life," Adele's tragic act of fatal resistance occurs at the very limits of recognizable life, or in this case of recognizable cognisance.

## Conclusions

At the end of his seminal work *Homo Sacer*, Agamben claims that the camp has become the paradigm of modernity. In *Postcolonial Melancholia* Paul Gilroy takes up this claim to produce an understanding of the state of exception as it is historically produced within the space of the colony. But diasporic characters like David Chariandy's Adele, who travel between locations of sovereign power and liberal regimes of multiculturalism, require a different model. The space of exception that can be identified through bringing together the very different concepts of the subject in diaspora and the notion of "bare life" conjures up the idea of a mental state of exception that mimics the topos of the Black Atlantic. The space of exception, in Adele's case, has moved from the corporeal body confined within the camp to the fluid space of the mind that is nonetheless limited within a state of exception.

Adele's dementia provides an opportunity for challenging dominant ways of understanding and a returning to long forgotten sets of knowledge. Through this process Adele's state of mind allows her to circulate knowledges that are based on a cosmology inaccessible to dominant Western knowledge regimes. The movement of Adele from locations of sovereign power to mobile sites of governmentality points towards the larger project of understanding the integration of sovereign power, as it has been utilized in extreme cases of camp and colony, into more liberal power regimes that work through inclusion. This larger project is perhaps more compatible with an in-depth study of Michel Foucault's conceptualization of technologies of power and is a vital extension of the work here begun.

Chariandy's novel brings to light the value of literary representations for approaching the withdrawn biopolitical subject, a strategy that Agamben alludes to in his own mention of Herman Melville's short story "Bartleby the Scrivener" (*Homo Sacer* 48). I propose that the end of Chariandy's novel can identify the capacity of literary representations to help in the production of language necessary for discussing the dehumanizing effects of modern biopolitical constructs. Near the end of his narrative Adele's son cries, "I don't know, Mother. I don't really understand at all" (195). This admission on the part of Chariandy's narrator draws the reader's attention to the constructed nature of Adele's son's imaginative imposition upon his mother. No diagnosis can produce a comprehensive explanation of subjectivity's withdrawal, but it is precisely this distance from "understanding" that a literary depiction can throw into relief.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> I use the term “mentality” throughout this thesis in order to draw attention to the workings of governmentality in creating the state of exception. This goes against Foucault’s differentiation between sovereignty and the governmental production of biopower.
- <sup>2</sup> Prompted by Eva Mackey’s Foucauldian analysis of Canadian multicultural society, I refer to Canadian dominant knowledge regimes as a form of “liberal multicultural governmentality.” This term emphasizes the workings of diverse technologies of power to produce specific mentalities. Foucault’s articulation of governmentality locates a sense of productive power rather than repressive power that is helpful for understanding the biopolitical dynamics at work within inclusive multicultural policy in Canada.
- <sup>3</sup> I use the term ‘de-subjectification’ to describe the way Adele’s mind is stripped of dominant governmentalities imposed through cognitive imperialism. This process of de-subjectification is similar to Agamben’s description of the de-humanizing effects of the state of exception because Adele is stripped of Western knowledge due to the extreme conditions of exceptionalization. However, unlike Agamben’s account of de-subjectification, I use the term to refer to a continual process that results in the remembering of alternate knowledge that was not accessible until dominant ways of knowing were forgotten. This form of de-subjectification may appear complete or absolute according to Western conceptions of the subject, but it also opens Adele up to the possibility of other forms of subjectification that are outside of dominant ways of knowing. In this sense Adele’s de-subjectification is a vital component of her process of creative re-subjectification.



<sup>4</sup> Agamben uses the term “bare life” as a concept, a figure, and a condition. In order to differentiate between these uses of term bare life, the concept will be referred to as “bare life” in quotation marks, and bare life the condition, and figures of the condition, will not be in quotation marks. The same distinction will be used for the concept of “bare mind” and the mental state of bare mind.

<sup>5</sup> For an exploration of the relationship between the thought of Agamben and Arendt, see Diane Enns’ article “Political Life Before Identity.”

<sup>6</sup> Recent work in diaspora studies has focused on the interstitial position of those in diaspora as the subaltern (see Mishra, Spivak). The subaltern is one way the interstitial position of the subject in diaspora has been developed and described. It is not the focus of this project, but could also be used to approach Chariandy’s character Adele.

<sup>7</sup> Anthias elaborates on the uses of diaspora as a metaphorical “social condition” and geographical/historical phenomenon.

<sup>8</sup> For an expansion on different forms of diaspora, see Robin Cohen and William Safran.

<sup>9</sup> I use the term “imperial sovereignty” in order to connect the Trinidadian context to the multiple histories of imperialism that overlap in Chariandy’s novel. These include the American military occupation of Trinidad during the Second World War, British oil interests, and histories of slavery.

<sup>10</sup> For Foucault’s articulation of forms of power, see *The History of Sexuality*, which Agamben references, and also *Security, Territory and Population*.

<sup>11</sup> For a history of the use of the term *Muselmann* and a detailed description, see *Remnants of Auschwitz*, “The Muselmann” (41-86).

<sup>12</sup> For similar articles see Lee.

<sup>13</sup> Gilroy engages in an elaborate discussion of race under the Nazi regime in *Against Race*.

<sup>14</sup> Though Agamben mentions the racialized thinking of Nazi Germany, he does not address the pivotal role race played in establishing sovereignty. For a discussion of the role of ethos, such as race thinking, in grounding sovereignty, see William E. Connolly.

<sup>15</sup> Fluri provides an in-depth examination of the consequences of the erasure of complex identity within states of exception.

<sup>16</sup> Anthias, Gilroy, Smaro, and Walcott also find hope in the interstitial positions of diaspora.

<sup>17</sup> In his article “Bare life, Interstices, and the Third Space of Citizenship,” Charles T. Lee draws on Bhabha to argue that migrant workers in the United States live in a state of exception and use a Third Space to draw attention to their own political identity while expanding the definition of citizenship.

<sup>18</sup> For more history on Canadian Domestic Worker Schemes and the Caribbean, see Mensah, Bolaria, Arat-Koc, Barber, and Calliste.

<sup>19</sup> See Chapter Three for a discussion of this symbol in Chariandy’s novel

<sup>20</sup> See Chapter Three for an elaboration of Adele’s mother’s prostitution.

<sup>21</sup> Nikolas Rose provides a detailed Foucauldian analysis of biopower within medical institutions and the productive power of changing medical knowledge regimes.

<sup>22</sup> Delisle provides a comprehensive analysis of the narrator's relationship to cultural memory and his mother's story.

<sup>23</sup> For other discussions of diasporic memory, see Hall, Stock, Brah, Anthias (577), and Clifford (310).

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