

“Cric, crac, queer”: queer storytellers and story-membering in Lawrence Scott’s *Witchbroom*, Shani Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night* and David Chariandy’s *Brother*

ABSTRACT

In the field of Caribbean literature, the figure of the storyteller is commonly associated with an ethos of resistance against the racist and sexist representations of the colonial version of history. Furthermore, some creative writers have turned to this emblematic character to highlight the existence of Caribbean LGBTQI+ identities. In this article, I explore three novels that present such queer storytellers: the intersex character Lavren in Lawrence Scott’s *Witchbroom* (1992), the transgender woman Tyler in Shani Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996) and the “gay” man Jelly in David Chariandy’s *Brother* (2017). By queering storytelling, these writers draw attention to the imbrications of systems of oppression, and to the empathetic bonds that can potentially be created between oppressed individuals. Without occluding the possibility of unreliability that characterizes human subjectivity, the queer storyteller becomes a reconciliatory figure who offers alternative visions of the past, of the present and of the future.

For the longest time we have believed that queer liberation arose as a single-issue event that was simply about sexuality. Hence, we have told ourselves that queer politics came to issues of race, colonization, incarceration, and capitalism later in its development. [One-dimensional Queer] tells a different story, one in which a multidimensional host of concerns were there from the very beginning only to be excised later on. (Ferguson 2019, 2)

Amongst the myriad meanings that the term has acquired through the decades, “queerness” understood as a political stance of multidimensional resistance to interlocking systems of oppression – cisheterosexism, racism and capitalism – is now obfuscated by dominant discourses on mainstream representations of, and promises for, LGBTQI+ people that, more often than not, privilege white/“Western”/middle-upper-class/gender-conforming/cis/gay men (the list is not exhaustive).¹ In *One-dimensional Queer* (Ferguson 2019), black queer theorist Roderick Ferguson unmasks the process through which the original anti-racist, anti-capitalist, anti-cisheterosexist thinking that originally characterized the queer movement has gradually been silenced, and has gone up in (white) smoke, namely in media representations. Ferguson’s intersectional critique unveils the key event of US LGBTQI+ history, the Stonewall riots, and revives the leading roles played by Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, two nonwhite, transgender and sex-working women. By excavating that buried episode of history, Ferguson

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resists the dominant representations of queerness correlating with white supremacy, cisheteronormative assimilationism and capitalist interests by shedding light on nonwhite queer movements and activists from the past (such as the Combahee River Collective) and the present (African American writer Kenyon Farrow, for instance), by “re-membering” queer people of color’s histories; i.e. by positioning them as members of queer memory.

In the Eurocentric and colonial version of history, the atrocities perpetrated against people of color, against women and LGBTQI+ people (and the people positioned at the crossroads of these axes) have more often than not been erased through dehumanizing, demonizing and/or infantilizing representations. History is commonly perceived as immaculate, as a trustworthy reflection of truth, the objectivity and linearity of which simply cannot be questioned, but which in reality works in cooperation with oppressive systems. What I perceive as a “normative” history is a discourse on the past obscuring other perspectives, subjectivities and realities that would directly challenge an unequivocal form of historical knowledge and the present inequities that derive from it. As Ferguson’s critique of one-dimensional queerness shows, representing the past, far from being apolitical, can support oppression as much as it can stand against it. In postcolonial and gender studies specifically, the writing of history is considered as being framed through subjectivities and human intentions, even more so when factual episodes challenge the self-alleged legitimacy and claimed innocence of those in power, hence ensuring the preservation of the status quo and social and exploitative hierarchies based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality and nationality. Many anti-discrimination movements and activists have *historically* fought white supremacy, cisheterosexism and capitalism to reveal the remains of these historical hidings, the repercussions that have survived and led to present endangered realities. As shown in David Chariandy’s *Brother* (Chariandy 2018), one of the novels examined in this article, history is not a mere “thing of the past”, or a long-gone, innocent matter. Chariandy’s novel shows that (single) history is also written in the now, in everyday-life, through mainstream media, political discourses or juridical decisions, for instance, that simultaneously build on and reinforce systems of oppression in explicit or insidious ways. However, other (multiple) his/her/ theirstories too are (re-)written “in the now”, reparative counter-histories disclosed by activists, dancers, singers, performers, writers (along with others) and who are all, in a sense, storytellers.

Wilson Harris writes that “a philosophy of history may well lie buried in the arts of the imagination” (Harris 1970, 7). Many writers actually consider the craft of imagination as part of the process that can ensure reparation and empowerment for the historically oppressed. Imaginative (re-)creation – that is, fiction – allows the deconstruction of linearity thanks to subjectivities, perspectives and voices that, until then, have mostly been silenced. Not surprisingly, alternative stories, the figure of the storyteller and the reconstruction of histories are particularly present in postcolonial, feminist and queer literatures. For instance, the late Toni Morrison, whose work unquestionably has shaped black women’s histories, understands her own storytelling as “literary archeology”, as a “journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply” (Morrison 1995, 92). As Morrison’s statement induces, the limit that supposedly clearly delineates temporality is disrupted by the present “remains” of a silenced past. Through imagination, Morrison discloses these silent worlds by observing and experiencing the system of racial (and gender) oppression inherited from the colonial enterprise. Her storytelling of slaves’ lives does not seek the factual truth and “nothing in it needs to be publicly verifiable, although much in it can be verified” (Morrison 1995, 93), but it rather sheds light on truths, realities that have meaning in the present.

Echoing Morrison’s “literary archeology”, Thomas Glave discusses in his “Fire and Ink” talk the ways in which fictional literature offers writers and readers a means of “re-membering”

silenced histories and thereby resisting oppression. Glave highlights the healing dimension, the truths and realities that emanate from the earlier writings of authors such as Audre Lorde and James Baldwin. For Glave, language and imagination represent the possibility of dismantling oppression, of “re-membering” the past and the present and of creating an alternative future. Literature enables the oppressed

to speak through decades - centuries - of enforced invisibilities, to the selves that we become, have become and will, as, through our stories, we create new selves for each other, and others, and all those who will come after. (Glave 2003, 616)

In stories written by silenced subjects, silenced histories resurface. By queering time - that is, by refusing “Western” linearity and objectivity, and by perceiving the silenced past in the present - such fiction, and stories and storytelling in general, allow empowerment and subjectivity in the face of oppression.

In the Caribbean, storytelling is first and foremost associated with the oral tradition (as opposed to the colonial written tradition) that traces its roots back to the times of the Atlantic Slave Trade. Véronique Maisier asserts that storytellers functioned at the time in the Caribbean islands “as repositories for communal memory (a role that ties them to the African griots), as agents of resistance on the plantation, and as an alternative model of resistance and survival to the approach adopted by the run-away slaves” (Maisier 2014, 30-31). Inheritors of the African Anancy tales, Caribbean storytellers commonly initiated their narration with the word “cric”, to which the audience’s response is “crac”, signaling their attentive participation in the event. Tales and stories were passed down from one generation to the next, linking the storytellers and their audience to the African continent from which their ancestors had been abducted, and celebrating the voices of slaves silenced by the colonial enterprise. Following Glave’s notion of “passing stories”, Caribbean fiction could be regarded as a form of storytelling in itself, an imaginative realm that stands against subordination, a means of resistance that enables histories to be “re-membered”: “story-membering”. Set in the specific postcolonial, diasporic context of the Caribbean, storytelling and storytellers have actually become common literary motifs in Caribbean literature(s), mirroring the regional writers’ inclination for alternative histories that foreground the Caribbean people’s past and present. Alison Donnell argues that Caribbean literatures and writers intend(ed)

to rehumanize and indigenize those subjects whose humanity, ethnicity (language, religion and cultural traditions) and history had been systematically confiscated by the conditions of colonial rule and plantation life that denied a relationship to the past based on established genealogy, succession and a secure sense of place. (Donnell 2011, 223)

Many Caribbean writers have indeed re-imagined and reconstructed centuries of racial exploitation through fiction, positioning the figure of the storyteller as an “agent of memory”, a mediator between the past and the present who troubles linearity and challenges racial domination. Donnell regards Caribbean literature as “as an important tool for answering an obligation to those lives still unseen - the historically unrecorded, the abused, the queer, the stranger” (Donnell 2011, 427). While Caribbean anti-racist and feminist writings have been explored since the twentieth century, the literary works that concern non-normative sexualities and genders have gained specific attention more recently.

Born of Jamaican parents, Glave released in 2008 *Our Caribbean: A Gathering of Lesbian and Gay Writings from the Antilles*, an anthology that showcases Caribbean queer literature and stands in accordance with the author’s will to highlight past, present and future Caribbean queer

subjectivities and possibilities (Glave 2008). By unveiling Caribbean queerness through literary discourses, the aim of this volume is twofold. On the one hand, it draws attention to the lives of West Indian LGBTQI+ people and to the perpetuation of colonial homophobic laws and cisheterosexual ideologies in the Caribbean region. On the other hand, queer Caribbean writings also strongly defy another elision – namely the dominant association of queerness with whiteness and “Westernness” that operates both in the Global North and in the Caribbean – directly countering discourses that assume the unidimensionality of sexual and gender identities, regardless of other identity traits, such as race, nationality, culture and religion. Queer Caribbean literature also does not present the people claiming these identities as pathetic victims whose help from white saviors from the Global North is needed, but it rather highlights the existing historical bonds between various Caribbean individuals and communities and the networks of resistance that they can share. Writers (and, more broadly, artists) whose works are inscribed onto the specific field of Caribbean queerness, as Ronald Cummings asserts, “have highlighted the fact that the dismantling of [cisheterosexual] hegemony constitutes a necessary part of the regional struggle for a decolonized Caribbean discourse” (Cummings 2011, 323).

In this essay, my aim is to explore the ways in which storytelling and the figure of the queer storyteller can be regarded as being part of strategies of resistance and empowerment that aspire to reparative “re-membering”, or “story-membering”, as I phrase it. More specifically, I intend to highlight how the figure I call “queer storyteller” becomes an agent of resistance, an ally of the decolonizing process who deconstructs and reshapes times, spaces and perspectives and, in doing so, challenges the colonial version of history. Like traditional storytellers, the queer storytellers that will be analyzed disclose communities of voices by recognizing, acknowledging and “re-membering” different silenced histories of oppression. Yet, I argue that queer storytellers differ from their predecessors in the sense that their queerness adjoins the dimension of sexual/gender non-normativity with the concerns of (post/neo)colonialism, racism and sexism and, hence, bridge different experiences of oppression and potentially form new alliances. Indeed, these characters might be regarded as triggering a “literary historical consciousness”, as Donnell writes, “that speaks of and to the messy, unpredictable and yet formative associations across difference that also constitute a distinctly, although not uniformly, Caribbean life both within and beyond the region” (Donnell 2011, 427).

In what follows, I examine three novels in which characters can be considered as representatives of the figure of the “queer storyteller”: namely, the “hermaphrodite” character Lavren in Lawrence Scott’s *Witchbroom* (Scott 1993); the effeminate gay man/ cross-dresser/transgender woman Tyler in Shani Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night* (Mootoo 1996), and the “gay” man Jelly in David Chariandy’s *Brother* (Chariandy 2018). Lavren, Tyler and Jelly can all three be called “queer storytellers” in the sense that their identities challenge gender and/or sexual norms. They are nonwhite (and non-“Western” or from the Caribbean diaspora), and thus occupy positions at the margins in multiple ways. But these storytellers’ queerness also resides in their storytelling; more specifically, in the ways they disrupt normativity and supposedly rigid dichotomies in terms of time, space and language, resulting in alternative, fluid, kaleidoscopic hi/stories. Kaisa Ilmonen’s analysis of the Caribbean trickster in Michelle Cliff’s novels has been illuminative for this study; namely in her discussion of the “trickster position” that clearly shows resemblance with the figure of the queer storyteller:

[The] ‘trickster-position’ is connected to the themes of counter-history, memory, border identities, and ideas of subversion discussed in contemporary postcolonial studies. The trickster-position (re)constructs new ways of remembering by creating an alternative sense of community. [. . .] The trickster turns [. . .] borders into bridges by highlighting the

alternative (third) spaces in-between. The trickster figure represents a multiplicity of voices and serves to reveal the normalizing nature of myths by creating counter-discourses which traverse naturalized borders. (Ilmonen 2005, 104)

Similarly to the trickster figure analyzed by Ilmonen, the queer storyteller becomes a reconciliatory and reparative figure who offers alternative visions of the past, of the present and of the future. Nevertheless, only Lavren perhaps could be considered a “trickster”, partly because of Scott’s magical realist style. The distinction between the figure of the trickster and that of the storyteller, I argue, lies in the storytellers’ anti-Manichean humanness and in their individual subjectivity. Their relationships with other oppressed characters are reciprocal, based on mutual empathetic bonds. Shifting away from the supposed historical objectivity, they destabilize the traditional storyteller/listener dyad by acknowledging their subjective position and, metaphorically, by “passing the microphone around”. Therefore, I suggest that Lavren, Tyler and Jelly, as queer storytellers, are less idealized: they are imperfect; and imperfection, destabilization and recreation, after all, are significant attributes of queerness.

In *Witchbroom*, the first novel under scrutiny, Scott revisits the history of Trinidad through the eyes of Lavren, a “hermaphrodite” or, in a more contemporary wording, a non-binary and intersex character, who is the last descendant of a white Creole family of plantation owners, the Monagas de los Macajuelos. As mentioned, the perspective of white male individuals prevails in the writing of colonial history, a lens through which the demonization of nonwhite people allows the (self-alleged) legitimization of genocides and exploitation. In the first chapter of *Witchbroom*, entitled “Overture”, the third-person narration is abruptly interrupted by an unnamed I-narrator who admits that “[he] had once started in this fashion: neat, clipped and distanced, until after much more of that, [. . .] it seemed impossible for the story to hold” (Scott 1993, 2). The I-narrator – whose voice, perhaps, interlaces with Scott’s – intends to recount his family story, but acknowledges that, as a privileged, white Creole man, his specific perspective is likely to keep on silencing the histories of violence perpetrated against non-hegemonic racial and gender identities. To remedy this situation and to distance himself, the I-narrator creates an imaginary persona, Lavren, his alter-ego, the storyteller of the six Carnival Tales of the Monagas family, and, to a larger extent, of the histories of Trinidad.

Witchbroom explores Trinidadian past and present through a narrative that queers times and spaces, and that is reconstructed by Lavren, who “levitate[s] between worlds. S/ he h[angs] between genders. S/he tremble[s] between love and desires. S/he [i]s pigmented between races” (Scott 1993, 12). Opposed to “official”, colonial history books, Lavren’s fusing of gender, racial and sexual categories directly challenges the conventional white masculinist perspective and, therefore, as Curdella Forbes argues, “[is] endowed with the capacity for full understanding” (Forbes 1994, 99). Thanks to Lavren’s kaleidoscopic identity, their imagined omnitude and magical clairvoyance reflects a multiplicity of perspectives, of voices that reject discursive partiality.² In that metaphorical understanding, Lavren’s likeness with the figure of the trickster discussed by Ilmonen is rather accurate. The structure of their tales substantially differs from colonial linearity and disrupts the center/marginality dyad. Their tales are constituted of different layers of hidden histories that they excavate by allowing silenced voices to resurface and to resonate with one another. Far from pointing toward a homogenizing and universal understanding that erases individual difference, Lavren’s interstitial position as queer storyteller rather shapes a bridge of compassion, in an imaginative sense, that allows the voices of specific oppressed

² I am using the personal pronouns “they/them” in light of contemporary queer writing and as a way to reflect Lavren’s non-binary, gender-ambivalent identity.

identities – women, people of color, along with others – to be expressed. Metaphorically, this fluid figure transcends all identity categories and, thus, is able to acknowledge the experience of gender and racial oppression of the people they invite to tell the histories.

In the Monagas family, the representations of male characters particularly reflect the hunger and lust for power that typically defines normative “masculinity”. Supported by the “virile” and “vampiristic” colonial enterprise and its consumption of bodies, the Monagas men are mainly represented as child abusers, ruthless exploiters, unfaithful and absent husbands, while the women of the family find comfort in religion and (corrupt) priests. After the sordid tale of child-bride Elena Monagas and her subjection to Georges Philippe de Lanjou’s repeated sexual assaults, one reads that

Monagas women decided not to be silenced. The spell of silence began to fall on the men. [. . .] The women would not be dolls as Elena had been. They would do their duty, [. . .] but the rosary beads would never be far from their fingers. (Scott 1993, 52)

To a certain extent, the balance between voicedness and silence that derives from gender bias is disrupted by the Monagas women’s limited empowerment. Self-evidently, gender oppression does not cease, neither in the reproductive nor in the domestic sphere. The Monagas men’s abandonment compels them to be in charge, to assume the traditionally “masculine” role by taking leadership of the plantation estate and, therefore, to gain more power. Lavren, “caught between the yearning of women and the silence of men” (Scott 1993, 36), reveals the historical fragmentation of gender roles in the family and, more largely, as Forbes suggests, “a powerful Caribbean reality: the matrifocal, parallel society” (Forbes 1994, 102) that follows the men’s abandonment of “home” and, subsequently, women’s relative liberation from their shackles. The Monagas women’s passage to agency, however, scarcely destabilizes the masculinist colonial system with which all women are confronted. Indeed, their experiences of oppression, as privileged, white Creole women, significantly differ from those of nonwhite and lower-class women, some of whom are sexually abused by the very same “absent husbands”. This difference in experience also reflects the contemporary tensions that exist between white mainstream feminism and multidimensional, intersectional feminisms.

The Monagas women blind themselves with a veil made of power and corrupt religion, wittingly closing their eyes on other silenced histories of atrocities and, therefore, living at the expense of the Amerindians, the African slaves and the South Asian indentured laborers, along with others. Although the Monagas women’s adherence to the “masculine” colonial system – that simultaneously oppresses *and* privileges them – could be regarded as a gender-transgressive, queer performance, their conscious repression of racial violence undeniably makes them complicit in the invisibilization of people of color, but also prevents them – due to the imbrications of sexism and racism – from effectively challenging patriarchy. The Monagas women’s reluctance to face their connivance with the colonial regime and the monstrosities that derive from it is significantly illustrated by Marie Elena, Lavren’s “mother and muse” (Scott 1993, 3), with whom they tell their tales on her deathbed. Echoing the epigraph of *Witchbroom* – “history is a fiction subject to a fitful muse, memory . . . In time every event becomes an exertion of memory and is thus subject to invention”, which is excerpted from Derek Walcott’s “The Muse of History” – one understands that Maria Elena is “Lavren’s memory”, the primary source of their tales. The mother too is a storyteller whose own experience and perspective have been silenced by gender hierarchies. Yet, Maria Elena “underst[ands] the horror [of colonialism] [but] turn[s] to the porch of the church” (Scott 1993, 64) and censures Lavren several times through the successive tales, her voice interrupting Lavren’s narration in order to keep in the shadows the

racial oppressions, abuses and killings committed by the Monagas. As her refusal to divulge these historical episodes demonstrates, Maria Elena is “for pressing ahead with time, for forgetting, for forgetting what she wants to forget, what she does not want to remember. Amnesia ran in the family” (Scott 1993, 7). The unwillingness to “re-member” nonwhite people and to acknowledge her privileges inherited from racial violence positions Maria Elena’s perspective as unreliable. Lavren, thanks to their multidimensional prism through which “memory” and “histories” are imaginatively re-constructed, attempts to be “a good storyteller” (Scott 1993, 103) and not to “digress to give you [their] own views or [their] distortions of poor Marie Elena’s stories” (Scott 1993, 103). Yet, the question is, do they succeed? In an interview with Njelle W. Hamilton, Scott quotes Jenny Diski’s *Skating to Antarctica*: “Memory is not false in the sense that it is wilfully bad, but it is excitingly corrupt in its inclination to make a proper story of the past” (Hamilton 2017). Lavren’s attempt not to be influenced by their mother intentionally draws attention to the possibility of failing objectivity, which actually positions Lavren as an unreliable narrator too (which contrasts with the imaginative “full-understanding” creature that is described above), but also as a human being, a “real” queer subjectivity that departs from the folkloric Anancy trickster. As Scott suggests, unreliability ceases to be negatively connoted when the focus shifts from objectivity to subjectivities, from the deconstruction of a unified history to the multiplication of perspectives, as long as these subjectivities are not considered to be univocal truths.

When telling their tales, Lavren is also accompanied by their black nanny Josephine – “cook, housekeeper, servant, nanny, nurse, doer of all tasks, comforter in the darkness and in the hot stillness of noon” (Scott 1993, 2) – whose voice erupts in the narrative in the same way as Marie Elena’s does, but which draws upon a significantly different experience. “I always say you is my child, you is my white child, you is the child I leave my own black children like my black self for” (Scott 1993, 251), Josephine tells Lavren, a perspective that sheds light on the displacement of black mothers to nurture white Caribbean families, but that figuratively makes Josephine into Lavren’s “black mother”, “muse” and “memory”. In contrast with their white predecessors, Lavren insists on the importance of not silencing Josephine’s voice in their tales, because

no tale would be a tale without hers, no fiction a fiction, no history a herstory without hers. There is no memory without the memory of Josephine. Lavren tells a story as she would, like the storytellers of Africa. (Scott 1993, 7)

From this stance, the repetitive circle of racial (and gender) invisibilizations is disrupted. While transcending (or queering) times, spaces and individualities, Josephine’s voice encapsulates the voices of other black servants, all exploited by the Monagas family, but also those of their ancestors. Josephine’s memory reflects, for instance, the hidden histories of black female slaves and servants of Caribbean plantations being sexually assaulted by white masters and patriarchs. Josephine recounts in the “tale of the bed” (Scott 1993, 250), the day when Lavren’s father, Auguste, sexually abused and impregnated her, and how he would forever silence the very existence of their mixed-race son. Josephine tells Lavren that, after Marie Elena’s death, the bed on which the traumatic event happened should be hers, a request that, metonymically, can be understood as her reclaiming memory, as “re-membering” all the Josephines. Josephine’s intersectional experience of oppression resides in the entanglement of sexism and racism. Like other black women, she forgets her “black self” (Scott 1993, 251), a self that is fragmented by the colonial mentality in which she is immersed. Her racial self-denigration is evident, for example, when, after telling the “tale of the bed”, she “crie [s] for her madam whom she ha[s] never wanted to betray” (Scott 1993, 252). Although their racial identities and experiences are unquestionably

contrasted, Marie Elena and Josephine are bonded by womanhood and gender oppression, this “allegiance which history ha[s] shackled them to, and they ha[ve] made out of its inequality a kind of partnership” (Scott 1993, 249). *Witchbroom*, I argue, navigates between the histories of misogyny and misogynoir, between privileges and oppressions, between repressions and disclosures, just as Lavren is caught “between [their mothers’] schizophrenic selves: Josephine’s rebellion and her servitude, Marie Elena’s religion, love for God and her oppressive regimes” (Scott 1993, 220).³ Lavren’s storytelling, like an assemblage, a mosaic or a patchwork, is the fabric that holds the histories together. They metaphorically stand for a queer bridge of historical acknowledgment, reparation and reconciliation.

Like Scott’s *Witchbroom*, Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night* includes a multitude of muted hi/stories that resurface thanks to a queer storyteller, here called Tyler. Although this young nurse’s storytelling focuses on Mala – her patient in the almshouse of Paradise – and the traumatic events that led the old lady to withdraw from society, Tyler also shares the stories of other inhabitants of Lantanacalara (a fictional island reminiscent of Trinidad) who have, like her, been oppressed due to their non-hegemonic gender, sexual and racial identities.⁴ Unlike the Monagas’ self-congratulating family history, Mala’s story is based on ostracizing “rumours” and “tales” (Mootoo 1996, 24) that circulate by word of mouth on the island. Tyler is, like Lavren, the queer storyteller that brings the shattered pieces of Mala’s story together, reconstructs and “re-members” it. She is, as Ilmonen puts it, “the healer, interpreter and re-signifier of Mala’s multifaceted story, which reflects [. . .] Caribbean history” (Ilmonen 2008, 231).

Tyler’s queerness is particularly made evident through her non-conforming gender and shape-shifting identity. Before openly embracing her transgender identity, the former Tyler is depicted as an “effeminate” gay man and as a cross-dresser. She occupies an interstitial position, navigating on the gender spectrum, but her queerness is also expressed by her nonwhite identity, which remains unspecified, uncategorized until the end. As Belinda Deneen Wallace suggests, “the novel asks us to enter a space of indeterminacy and not just in-betweenity” (Wallace 2018, 68), a space in which the deconstruction of normative categories highlights their inadequacies and challenges the erasures of gender, racial and sexual histories. I agree with Miriam Pirbhai when she states that Tyler, as a queer storyteller, “act[s] as a counter-discourse to the seemingly indelibly entrenched sites of oppression in [her] community” and sheds light on “the heterogeneous, shifting nature of memory, perspective, and identity” (Pirbhai 2005, 178).

Like Lavren, Tyler attempts to be “a good storyteller” (Scott 1993, 103) by trying not to affect the narrative with her individual experience and voice:

I have my own laments and much to tell about myself. It is my intent, however, to refrain from inserting myself too forcefully. Forgive the lapses, for there are some, and read them with the understanding that to have erased them would have been to do the same to myself. (Mootoo 1996, 3)

Less of an omniscient, “magical” figure than Lavren, Tyler offers a form of storytelling that explicitly acknowledges standpoints and subjectivities and, consequently, challenges colonial history. She is conscious that her “own laments” (Mootoo 1996, 3) erupt in the narrative, just as Mala’s, Otoh’s (the transgender man with whom she falls in love) and other characters’ do.

³ I am using “misogynoir”, a term coined by black feminist Moya Bailey, to depict the type of misogyny that considers gender and race as concomitant and that is experienced by black women specifically.

⁴ Although I could also have used the pronouns “they/them” to reflect Tyler’s gender ambivalence (as I did with Lavren’s), the pronouns that I am using here, i.e. “she/her”, when referring to Tyler have been selected because Tyler “blooms” as a transgender woman toward the end of the novel.

Balancing between an altruistic distancing from the self and necessary personal testimony, this combination of perspectives shapes the web-like constellation of silenced stories that makes up *Cereus Blooms at Night*. Grace Kyungwon Hong argues that Tyler's storytelling "offers another mode of historical memory through an aesthetic of contingency, unknowability, and the deferment of resolution" (Hong 2006, 76), which suggests that the narrative, as in *Witchbroom*, departs from a colonial self-alleged objectivity toward an alternative, positive, self-conscious instability and unreliability. While both Lavren and Tyler are unreliable as storytellers, their queer subjectivities operate differently. Lavren's storytelling is indeed destabilized by external voices and perspectives that metaphysically transgress temporal, spatial and diegetic boundaries, which not only induces the possibility of their digressing but also legitimizes the presence of the others' voices in the narrative. By contrast, Tyler's unreliability resides in the acknowledgment of her own subjectivity and humanness. Thus, one could argue that Lavren acts as a "mediator" between voices and stories, while Tyler recreates them from her own *necessarily subjective* position.

Tyler first hears about Mala when, still a child, she listens to her "Cigarette Smoking Nana" (Mootoo 1996, 24) telling her about the story of "a woman whose father had obviously mistaken her for his wife, and whose mother had obviously mistaken another woman for her husband" (Mootoo 1996, 109; my emphasis). The parallel between child abuse and same-sex/gender desire that is drawn here denounces the legal and social indistinct understandings of acts of violence and acts of love/consenting sex. Mala's widely despised family is indeed a source of scandals on the island, namely due to Mala's mother, Sarah, who flees her household with her female lover Lavinia, and to the subsequent wrath of misogynist Chandin - Mala's father - falling into alcoholism and sexually abusing both Mala and her younger sister Asha on a regular basis. Tyler acknowledges, however, that "there is much more to that story" (Mootoo 1996, 70), and her queerness figuratively allows her to explore the interstices erased by these oversimplifications. She describes herself as an "outsider [,] still [is] and may well always be" (Mootoo 1996, 6), as "neither properly man nor woman but some in-between, unnamed thing" (Mootoo 1996, 71). Inhabiting the gender fringe, she experiences cisheteronormativity in its daily manifestations, aware of the "subtleties and incremental degrees of hostility" (Mootoo 1996, 15), including homophobia and transphobia. Lantacamaran rigid gender biases invisibilize Tyler but, with the arrival of Mala - whose marginalization is different, but metaphorically similar - comes a mutual understanding. Originating from this encounter at the margin, Tyler's storytelling imaginatively transcends categories and language, and leads to subjectivity, community and voicedness.

Beyond the fence of Mala Ramchandin's garden, her seclusion, although the direct consequence of a story marked by traumas and complex memories, is assumed to be the undisputable proof of senile dementia. She is taken to the almshouse where Tyler works, but the circulating rumors and her reputation precede her arrival. Feared by some employees and infantilized by others (except Tyler), Mala, attached to her bed with leather straps, is soon taken care of by the queer nurse who starts to feel "empathy for her clenched fists, defiant stare, pursed lips and deep, slow, calculated breathing - an empathy that words alone cannot describe" (Mootoo 1996, 18). Here, the absence of words becomes a language in itself, a mirror that stands between two unspeakable stories. Like Tyler, who is paralyzed by systems of oppression, Mala too is an alternative storyteller whose animal sounds and isolated words are evocative of memory and greater meaning. Thanks to their "shared queerness" (Mootoo 1996, 48), Tyler and Mala start to shape a community of sorts, "fortif[y]ing [them]selves against the rest of the world" (Mootoo 1996, 48). This compassionate relationship is particularly evident when Mala, after having stolen a dress in the almshouse's garden, suggests that Tyler tries it on. Through silence, Mala's understanding allows Tyler to feel "the possibilities trembling inside [her]" (Mootoo 1996,

76), and even though Tyler perceives her own queerness as “the suspended nameless in the limbo state between existence and nonexistence” (Mootoo 1996, 77), Mala pays no attention to this new appearance, because “to her mind, the outfit [i]s not something to either congratulate or scorn – it simply [i]s. She [i]s not one to manacle nature, and [Tyler] sense[s] that she [i]s permitting [her] its freedom” (Mootoo 1996, 77). Silence is presented here as the counter-narrative that stands against normative language and rigid categories. In Hong’s words, the novel actually “confounds the totalizing taxonomy of natural history and its need to name all things by displacing language itself” (Hong 2006). By understanding beyond normative words, Mala offers Tyler reparative queer possibilities of being and of “re-memembering” her existence. “Thanks to [Mala], [her] own life has finally [. . .] begun to bloom” (Mootoo 1996, 105), the nurse writes. Along with other characters, Tyler may be like the “cereus that blooms at night”: metaphorically, her subjectivity is triggered by the embracement of non-normative difference, of stillness, of queerness and the communion with other invisibilized subjects.

If silence can become an alternative mode of communication and trigger queer empowerment, Tyler’s storytelling, in its multidimensionality, contradictions and refusal of homogeneity, underlines that the silencing of difference can erase individual subjectivities. She narrates another transgender story, that of Otoh’s, a transgender man who, together with his father Ambrose (Mala’s childhood friend and lover), regularly visits the elderly woman at the almshouse. Otoh and Tyler rapidly become aware of their shared queer identity, and Tyler is thrilled to perceive this young man’s fluid gender mirroring her own, with his “angularity and sprightliness of a girl reluctantly on the verge of becoming a woman” (Mootoo 1996, 101), but also “the innocent feyness of a young boy who would never quite grow into manhood” (Mootoo 1996, 101). However, unlike Tyler, Otoh is perceived as a cisgender man and, still a child, even his parents “hardly noticed that their daughter was transforming herself into their son” (Mootoo 1996, 109). Otoh disrupts normative categorization, particularly when, as a teenager, he crossdresses with one of his mother’s dresses, and “[w]ithout knowing why, [. . .] want[s] to share his secret with Mala Ramchandin, even at the risk of being caught walking the streets like a woman” (Mootoo 1996, 121). Like Tyler, his queerness is drawn by and reflected in Mala’s marginality, as he says: “I felt as though she and I had things in common. [. . .] Somehow, I wanted to go there and take all my clothes off and say, ‘Look! See? See all this? I am *different!*’” (Mootoo 1996, 124; original emphasis). By crossing and re-crossing socially-constructed gender “boundaries”, Otoh sheds light on the fluidity of identity that language cannot convey. Most importantly perhaps, however, he also strives for queer recognition and the need for his difference not to be silenced. Otoh’s own story and need for *difference* becomes complementary to Tyler’s need for *similarity* and equality of treatment; two stories that the queer storyteller presents side by side.

In contrast to the affective particularities that marginalized characters such as Mala, Otoh, and Tyler develop, others seem to cope with their experience of oppression by, consciously or not, reinforcing the entanglement of gender and racial violence. More specifically, two male characters illustrate the fact that a shared marginality does not necessarily induce solidarities and empathetic bonds. On the one hand, Chandin stands for toxic masculinity; namely, in the episodes that display the extreme violence to which Sarah, Mala and Asha are subjected. But Tyler’s storytelling reveals with details the colonial racist ideologies that Chandin had to face as a young man. On the other hand, the story of Boyie/Ambrose, the “elusive” man, problematizes the consequences of “inactive silence” when witnessing violence, much as Maria Elena’s own inhibition does in *Witchbroom*. As a queer storyteller, Tyler attempts to reveal what/the lies behind each character, no matter how despicable they might appear to the readers’ eyes. In that

sense, while these men are definitely held responsible for their acts, Tyler's queer storytelling rejects Manichean representations and offers a complex story that discloses the interwoven connections between racial, gender and sexual oppression and the (missed) possibilities of coalition.

The acknowledgment/rejection of shared marginalities is figuratively represented in *Cereus Blooms at Night* when young Mala and Ambrose come up with the idea of creating a spider farm for harvesting thread. Ambrose says:

You could make a bridge with the threads from this spider business, a bridge to cross the river and no matter how much people, animal and car they drive on it, it would never come falling down. (Mootoo 1996, 215)

This passage, I argue, encapsulates two realities that are simultaneously directed toward the past, the present and the future, "re-membering" and "reparation". Indeed, one can read in Ambrose's voice the echoes of the past imperial promises, the colonial enterprise, the Atlantic Slave Trade and Indentureship. But one can also understand the thread as imaginatively representing the empathetic connection that oppressed people may create, together, like Tyler's, Mala's and Otoh's create their own queer thread. Yet, while Ambrose initiates the project with a few spiders in a tank, he soon realizes that the animals have killed each other, "the evidence of natural selection. Overcrowded, the spiders had waged war. Only the fittest had survived and not a fragment of web had been spun" (Mootoo 1996, 220). Racial and gender normative classifications originate from pseudoscientific, supposedly natural taxonomies, and the histories of oppression do count many similar massacres and "wars". The reproduction of oppression still occurs and privileges destruction over coalition, as shown by the character of Chandin Ramchandin (a repetition that is echoed in his own name). Finally, another interpretation of this passage leads us to storytelling itself, as the spiders metaphorically evoke Anancy, the trickster and storyteller whose threaded hi/ stories are destroyed here, which suggests that antagonism instead of cooperation between storytellers results in annihilation and invisibility anew. Tyler, as a queer Anancy figure herself, spins the different threads, the stories of the characters in *Cereus Blooms at Night* and re/cross-dresses the histories of oppression with one another.

Unlike Lavren and Tyler, the queer storyteller in Chariandy's *Brother* is represented by a peripheral character, a black "gay" man called Jelly, who is thus narratively and subjectively positioned at the margins.⁵ Most of the story is told by the I-narrator Michael, a young mixed-race man and the son of Trinidadian immigrants. Shifting between past and present, Michael tells the story of his brother Francis, who was shot by a white policeman in a poor urban area of Scarborough, Toronto; a story that unquestionably reflects the histories of police violence, racial profiling and demonization of nonwhite people by the media. Ten years after the event, Michael is visited by his first love, Aisha, which forces him and his mother Ruth to face their past, with its unhealed scars and memories, and their impossibility of mourning caused by the invisibilizing silence that surrounds Francis' death. Indeed, the story of the murder is distorted by the media, presenting him as a black, ghetto and essentially violent man; in accordance with racist and classist ideologies. As in *Cereus Blooms at Night*, the family's history is also altered by the rumor mill of "the Park", a fictional ghetto area of Scarborough. It is a story, as Michael puts it,

made all the more frightening through each inventive retelling among neighbours. It is a story, effectively vague, of a young man deeply 'troubled,' and of a younger brother

⁵ I would like to underline here that Jelly may not identify as a gay man for he does not refer to his sexual identity. However, the narrative strongly suggests that he and Francis have an intimate relationship, which consequently positions him on the queer spectrum.

carrying ‘history’, and of a mother showing now the creep of ‘madness’. (Chariandy 2018, 36)

Echoing the destruction of the spider farm in *Cereus Blooms at Night*, the rumors in the neighborhood induce that storytelling can be destructive too. Francis is “troubled”, that is, equated with trouble, just as he is racialized through the dominant white gaze. As his brother’s story is transformed by others, Michael, ceaselessly reluctant to raise the subject, is unable to utter the silenced history, while Ruth falls silent and, like Mala, fully withdraws from the world. This unspeak-ability, as I argue, is one of the consequences, one of the “ruins” caused by the distortions and invisibilizations of Francis’ memory. As Michael states: “Memory’s got nothing to do with the old and grey and faraway gone. Memory’s the muscle sting of now” (Chariandy 2018, 1), caused by the restless efforts of less-privileged and oppressed people with silenced histories in order to survive in the “ruins”. With Aisha’s arrival, Michael finds himself at a crossroads, having to choose between the path of repressive silence, on the one hand, and that of collective “re-membering”, on the other.

Sharing similarities with Josephine in *Witchbroom*, Ruth too works “as a cleaner, and sometimes a nanny” (Chariandy 2018, 16), two gendered and racialized professions that repeatedly displace her from her family home and two sons. Having left Trinidad to seek her fortune in Canada, Ruth lives the difficult life of a single black mother, like many others in the neighborhood, “who had journeyed far beyond what they knew, who took day courses and worked nights, who dreamed of raising children who might have just a little more than they did, children who might reward sacrifice and redeem a past” (Chariandy 2018, 146). Ruth, like many other parents of “the Park”, is persuaded that the only way not to spoil what she calls “[their] only chance” (Chariandy 2018, 14) is to behave with “‘respectability’ and ‘plain civilization’” (Chariandy 2018, 24). In Ruth’s words are echoed the promises of her Trinidadian colonial education, which present nonwhiteness and “non-Westernness” as essentially “uncivilized”, while positioning white “Westernness” as the model of “modernity” that is supposedly the only path left to follow. Ruth’s hope for her sons is effectively based on the insidious lies of the exploitative and racist system in which she has been immersed, both in Trinidad and in Canada. As a result, her relationship with Michael and Francis is affected by social pressure and, before being left alone, the sons are warned by their mother’s rules, with a “voice, schooled harshly in the Queen’s English, now articulating threats mined from the deepest hell of history” (Chariandy 2018, 11). Here, the silence that surrounds the horrors of colonialism indirectly resurfaces in the present and the histories of racial oppression – and, more specifically perhaps, of anti-blackness – are excavated. Like Josephine, Ruth is forced to forget her “black-self”, a condition that actually leads her to identity dissociation and muteness. Her voice is transfiguratively replaced by that of white colonizers and slave masters: for instance, when she warns the boys “I will beat you so hard your children will bear scars. Your children’s *children* will feel!” (Chariandy 2018, 11; original emphasis). In the white supremacist society in which they live, Francis and Michael do feel the “scars” left by slavery and racist ideologies. Black people’s experience of oppression and demonization transcends times and, as the character of Ruth fictionally illustrates, whiteness can keep on muzzling them: Ruth is haunted – oppressed and possessed – by white supremacy, while her own, “true” voice remains silenced.

Growing up in “The Park”, Michael and Francis are perpetually swamped with dreadful news, altered “stories on TV and in the papers of gangs, killings in bad neighbourhoods, predators roaming close” (Chariandy 2018, 16). Through media representation, the repeated criminalization of nonwhite people and, specifically, of young nonwhite men, creates the figure of a folk devil with whom the two brothers identify despite themselves. Michael recalls that “[o]ne

morning, [he] peered with Francis into a newspaper box to read a headline about the latest terror and caught in the glass the reflection of [their] own faces” (Chariandy 2018, 16). The superimposition of the boys’ faces with the ones in the paper reflects the essentialization of nonwhite bodies as intrinsically criminal. Caught between the image that is imposed onto his person and his mother’s expectations, Francis “gr[ows] dissatisfied with the world and with his destined place in it” (Chariandy 2018, 22), and eventually decides to leave the household to live at “Desirea’s”, a barbershop forming a community of youngsters who, like him, struggle and resist racist misrepresentations. Because the term “desi” refers to the diasporas of South Asian people and cultures, while the Latin etymology “rea” means “accused of a crime”, the barbershop’s name metonymically reflects these youths’ identities. At Desirea’s, all are indeed daughters and sons of immigrant parents originating

from Trinidad and Jamaica and Barbados, from Sri Lanka and Poland and Somalia and Vietnam [and] worked shit jobs, struggled with rent, were chronically tired, and often pushed just as chronically tired notions about identity and respectability. (Chariandy 2018, 101)

Like Francis and Michael, the members of this community have presumably been caught between their parents’ false expectations and their criminalization by a racist society. If conflicts do erupt because of first- and second-generation differences, the “chronic” nature of the parents’ struggles evokes both temporality and corpo-realities; experiences of racial oppression that are, metaphorically rather than essentially speaking, marked on specific bodies and that are inherited by a silenced memory that transcends time. Because they share similar existences, the youngsters make Desirea their own “home”, regulated by their very own rules regarding behavior and physical appearance in order “to let the world know [they are] not nobody” (Chariandy 2018, 81). Despite this relative feeling of communal empowerment, disillusionment soon shows its teeth, especially when, after having been beaten by some white male bodyguards, Francis is self-aware, left with a feeling of nonexistence. He tells his peers to closely “look” (Chariandy 2018, 156) at themselves. Retrospectively, Michael reflects:

We were the children of the help, without futures. We were, none of us, what our parents wanted us to be. We were not what any other adults wanted us to be. We were nobodies, or else, somehow, a city. (Chariandy 2018, 156)

Both parents and children form communities of silenced voices, ostracized by a society the pyramidal social taxonomies of which draw the line between existence and nonexistence, between “re-membership” and exclusion. After being killed by a white policeman at Desirea’s, Francis leaves a void, a silenced reality that progressively leads to the disintegration of the barbershop’s community.

Surrounded with silence and misrepresentations, Francis’ death triggers Ruth’s muteness, episodes of “madness”, and “complicated grief” (Chariandy 2018, 66), which, as Michael defines it, refers to “losses that mire a person in mourning, that prevent them from moving forward by making sense of the past. You become disoriented, assailed by loops of memory, by waking dreams and hallucinations” (Chariandy 2018, 66). Like Mala’s in *Cereus Blooms at Night*, Ruth’s silence metaphorically reflects “unspeak-ability”, the impossibility of uttering a silenced past, which is worsened by the perpetuation of present invisibilizations. For his part, Michael attempts to cope with his brother’s death by keeping “to a minimum all discomfoting talk about the past” (Chariandy 2018, 33) and by repressing memories, a healing strategy that induces his distancing from his past and, consequently, from his own self. When Aisha visits the household and suggests

the possibility of organizing a “gathering [. . .] with food and music, maybe a few words spoken about the people [they]’ve lost” (Chariandy 2018, 64), Michael categorically rejects the idea, claiming that his “mother doesn’t need a group of strangers in her home” (Chariandy 2018, 65). Aisha still decides to organize the meeting, and Michael comes to discover people in his house who “are black and brown, but others are Asian, white, and who knows what else. They’re beautiful” (Chariandy 2018, 95), he admits. Yet, Michael soon represses the image, and depicts them as “intruders, lowlifes, entering without [his] permission, and attracting the attention of the authorities” (Chariandy 2018, 95). Michael’s reflections explicitly echo the words used by his racist and xenophobic employer, Manny, who defines “lowlifes” as “people who attract all sorts of problems” (Chariandy 2018, 92). One understands that, in the same way his mother’s voice is “colonized” by that of the white master, Michael’s own voice is similarly dissociated, invaded by Manny’s racist discourse. Michael too clings on to the promise of “respectability”, of a future distanced from the media representations of his identity. Through the parallel drawn between him and Ruth, the perpetuation of racial oppression and invisibilization is explicitly highlighted, and the (missed) possibility of healing, of reparative “re-membering” with other “strangers” still remains in the shadows.

As Mala illustrates in *Cereus Blooms at Night*, “re-membering” does not necessarily imply the use of speech. When Aisha organizes the secret gathering, most guests “[are] standing about silently” (Chariandy 2018, 93) and, as Michael chases the youngsters from the house, his mother declares: “We were . . . *listening* to music. [. . .] We were . . . *talking*” (Chariandy 2018, 96; original emphasis). The syntactic parallel that is drawn suggests the superimposition of “listening to music” onto “talking”, epistemically equating the two actions. Language is queered - deconstructed and reconstructed - an alternative strategy of resistance against “unspeak-ability” that (literally and figuratively) breaks the silence and allows communal “remembering”. Music itself thus becomes the storytelling, the means through which the silenced voices of the oppressed surface and connect with one another. While Jelly, the DJ of Desirea’s and Francis’ lover, is depicted as a quiet, whispering black man throughout the novel, he is actually the queer storyteller who enables possibilities of reparative healing through music.

Metaphorically, the name “Jelly” not only refers to a substance that is associated with fluidity, perhaps with polymorphism too, but it is the homophone of the term “Djeli [. . .]. As in a griot. A storyteller with memory” (Chariandy 2018, 111). Jelly embodies storytelling, memory, silenced histories and Africa, as the “patch of onion brown on his temple shaped, somehow, like a forgotten continent” (Chariandy 2018, 78) suggests as well. Perceived as a marginal artist in the field,

his genius [is] all about continuous flow, about ceaselessly mixing in one sound, one style, one *era* with another. He work[s] magic with the cross-fader and the different equalizers, allowing us to recognize connections we’d never otherwise imagine. (Chariandy 2018, 103; original emphasis)

Jelly’s music shapes a multifaceted constellation that reflects fluctuation and hybridity, and that transcends times, spaces, as well as gender, racial and national differences, metaphorically gathering in his songs various histories of oppression. Indeed, Jelly disrupts socially constructed boundaries and hierarchies

by knitting together two completely different tracks, old and new, Caribbean and American and [. . .] African soul [; by] overla[y]ing voices on top of one another, mess[ing] with time, and ma[king] a man sound like a woman and a woman like a man, the truer

feeling and meaning a song suddenly emerging through the work of his hands. (Chariandy 2018, 114, 127)

Through music, Jelly “knits” stories together like a spider, like the Anancy figure. He does not erase differences, but rather sheds light on the possible “connections”, the bonds and unexpected alliances that can work for oppressed people as a communal act of resistance. Jelly resembles Lavren in many ways, for he too imaginatively disrupts all categories, and allows the voices of the past to e/merge. When Francis is shot by the white policeman at Desirea’s, his last words, “Don’t touch him” (Chariandy 2018, 159), aim to protect Jelly, his lover, from the police. Yet, if Jelly stands for silenced histories and reparative “re-membering”, Francis’ words can be understood as an act of resistance to invisibilizations and misrepresentations, emphasizing the importance of storytelling and storytellers for repairing pasts, presents and futures.

The three novels under scrutiny present histories of gender and racial oppression, revealed through the voice of queer storytellers, alternative languages and re-imaginings. Memory and “re-membering”, conveyed as mutual, communal and reparative imperatives, are to be encountered in the hopeful notes of the three books’ endings. In *Witchbroom*, after having told the last of their tales, Lavren leads the carnival parade, an ephemeral event where “[t]here is no hierarchy [. . .]; no colour, no class, no race, no gender: all may cross over and inhabit the other” (Scott 1993, 264). Carnival enables communal “re-membering”, and presents an alternative, united Trinidadian society, where individuals live in apparent harmony and commemorate silenced histories. One might suggest that Carnival, Lavren, and even *Witchbroom* itself overlap one another: they all encapsulate communities of voices that resonate in unison and, actually, through imagination, form the very essence of Trinidad. Similarly, *Cereus Blooms at Night* ends on a utopian note, where the reader encounters Tyler, Otoh, Mala and Ambrose gathered in the almshouse’s garden, “re-membering” the past and freely embracing their own identity. In “Paradise” - and the term chosen by Mootoo is not insignificant - Tyler, now an openly transgender woman, concludes her storytelling by addressing her lost sister, saying: “Not a day passes that you are not foremost in our minds. We await a letter, and better yet, your arrival” (Mootoo 1996, 249). One might argue that Tyler - and perhaps, Mootoo herself - are here directly speaking to the reader, who, like her, Mala, Otoh, Ambrose and others, might experience oppression and have this “shared queerness” (Mootoo 1996, 48). By disrupting the boundary between fiction and reality, Mootoo’s novel could be regarded as a bridge of imagination that connects with other silenced identities, to let them know that they are not alone. As in the other two novels, the ending of *Brother* provides a kind of therapeutic communion, where Aisha, Michael, Ruth and Jelly are gathered with “music low on the record player” (Chariandy 2018, 176). Through music, Jelly stands for the healing figure and, “when the low voice of a woman cuts the silence, [Ruth] frowns slightly, as if in pain. Jelly fumbles to dial it down, but [Ruth] shakes her head. [. . .] ‘Volume,’ she says” (Chariandy 2018, 176-77). Ruth’s request echoes an earlier scene at Desirea’s when the youngsters ask to for more “volume”, metaphorically that is, so that their histories are acknowledged and “re-membered” instead of silenced and altered.

In conclusion, through the queering of storytelling, Scott, Mootoo and Chariandy foreground the voices of racial, gender and sexual identities that have been silenced, both in and out of the Caribbean context. In each narrative, queerness is conveyed through the transcendence of language, time and space, but it also figuratively emphasizes the possibilities of communal reparation and resistance to entangled systems of oppression, namely cisheterosexism and white supremacy. Consequently, queerness in the Caribbean and its diaspora evokes the multidimensionality and fluidity of identities, substantially departing from other ultra-contemporary elisions, those that invisibilize and/or misrepresent nonwhite *and* non-Western

queerness. As a practice that is historically and culturally attached to Caribbeanness, storytelling is passed on as a means of reparative “re-membering” that, here, takes a literary form. In her analysis of the Anancy figure in Wilson Harris’ and George Lamming’s works, Joyce Jonas writes that,

[l]ike Anancy, the artist escapes the disastrous prospect of nonbeing by weaving a (fictive/narrative) thread and climbing it to freedom. He [and she] takes the strand of linearity (oppressive history or plot) and complicates it by making a patterned web of connections and interrelationships – a woven ‘text’ that turns history/his [her/their] story into oracular myth, an infinite play of signifiers. (Jonas 1990, 2; my additions)

Thanks to Caribbean queer activists, the laws criminalizing homosexuality – those that had been implanted by colonizers – are gradually being repealed (for instance, in Trinidad and Tobago [12 April 2018]), which constitutes an important milestone for the local LBGTQI+ communities. Nevertheless, political resistance against cisheterosexism, homophobia and transphobia in the region is not a recent social phenomenon, and to affirm the opposite would undeniably be to “dis-member” queer Caribbean memory. Queer Caribbean literatures inscribe themselves onto a longstanding discourse on identity politics, as shown by Scott’s, Mootoo’s and Chariandy’s novels, but also by works by other authors, from H. Nigel Thomas’ *Spirits in the Dark* (Thomas 1993) to Dionne Brand’s *In Another Place, Not Here* (Brand 1997), from Patricia Powell’s *A Small Gathering of Bones* (Powell 1994) to Jamaica Kincaid’s *My Brother* (Kincaid 1998), from Onya Kempadoo’s *Buxton Spice* (Kempadoo 1998) to Ingrid Persaud’s recent *Love after Love* (Persaud 2020). Such authors, as Denise DeCaires Narain, Alison Donnell and Evelyn O’Callaghan argue, “have imaginatively structured new possibilities for understanding difference, building empathy and forging alliances” (DeCaires Narain, Donnell, and O’Callaghan 2011, 5). Along with many others, they constitute queer Caribbean histories by “re-membering” them. Because literature can lead to reparative “story-membering” and to possibilities for the past, the present and the future, such works are in their turn to be “re-membered”.

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