

MOTHER COUNTRY: LEONORA BRITO WRITES WALES – BLACK BRITISH IDENTITY, MATERNITY, AND MEMORY IN THE WELSH SHORT STORY

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ABSTRACT

Wales has historically been a colonising and colonised location, both subjugated by the English in the British state and complicit in the activities and ideology of empire. The global trade of the Cardiff Docks area – a significant agent in the export market for industrialisation – means that the location has a unique history of cultural and racial mixing, but this place and its practices of industry have often been written through a masculinist lens. *Dat's Love* (2017 [1995]), the single published collection by black Welsh short story writer Leonora Brito, illustrates the place of black women in these activities of industry in Cardiff, at once challenging the masculinist memory of Welsh industrialism and addressing the themes more often associated with Welsh men's short story writing. Significantly, these themes are addressed through the perspectives of her many historical and fictional black women narrators and characters. Brito does not disregard the themes which recur in Welsh women's short fiction – romance, family, domesticity. On the contrary, she writes of industrialism, agriculture, and work through the framework of these themes, particularly through maternity and memory, engaging with the notion of the postcolonial 'mother country' through a specifically Welsh tradition of women's short story writing.

Black British Welsh short story writer Leonora Brito produced a single collection of stories in her lifetime, titled *Dat's Love*. Originally published by Seren Books in 1995, Parthian reissued the text in 2017 as part of the Library of Wales series, in an attempt to position the text in the contemporary national canon. According to Michelle Deininger, the Welsh short story is 'as enmeshed in constructions of national identity and the scars of industrialization as the Victorian novel was for England' (Deininger 2019: 428). Echoing traditions of women's short story writing in Wales (Gramich 2007; Peach 2007), Leonora Brito's stories engage in a strong feminist voice with the recurrent themes of domesticity, familial and personal relationships, the everyday lives of women, motherhood and maternity, memory, and autonomy. However, *Dat's Love* extends the reach of these issues of Welsh women's writing by illuminating the ways in which they intersect with the author's black Welsh identity, made visible in work, agriculture, industry, heritage, history, and race. Brito employs the national literary form to write Wales through an intersectional feminist perspective, ultimately giving a voice to the black women whose roles in the nation's history of industrialism and its aftermath have been neglected by conventional historical records and fictional representations.

Brito was born in Cardiff's dockland area, Tiger Bay, in the 1950s. While Brito's mother and maternal grandmother were also born in Cardiff, her father and maternal grandfather were seamen from the Cape Verde islands, both of whom settled in Tiger Bay in the twentieth century. The Bay has been, since the nineteenth century, a site of racial and cultural mixing in Britain distinct from the London-centric model of post-Windrush multiculturalism in the twenty-first century. The exportation of materials from Cardiff Docks to other locations around the world meant that the Bay was central to industrialism, modernity, and colonisation. As such, the location was frequently visited by merchants, seafarers, and workers from around the globe and became home, temporarily or permanently, to many of those that passed through. As a result, Tiger Bay also became, as Gill Branston discusses, an example of an 'earlier, often painful but also zestful "cosmopolitanism"' (Branston 2004: 127) in Britain long before the Windrush generation's migration to England. While Windrush settlement in the mid-twentieth century is often reputed to be a pivotal moment for black

Britain and a significant catalyst for twenty-first century multiculturalism in the UK, Tiger Bay offers its own model of cultural and racial mixing. Brito's stories represent this location as marginalised by, yet in charged relation to, black Britain more broadly.

Many of the stories illustrate a specifically Cardiffian experience of multiculturalism, such as the relocation of black families from the Bay to council houses in outer Cardiff during the 1960s and 1980s, following two separate efforts to redevelop the docks for a new, middle-class community. In 'Gone for a Song', for example, the family at the centre of the story have been relocated 'far away from Town'; out in the 'fresh air', the young protagonist considers how the cows on the field outside her home look as though they have 'fifteen Africas painted in ink on their creamy white backs, like maps' (Brito 2017, 50-58: 51). The image evokes the idea of a Cardiff punctuated by its black citizens, the multiculturalism of the Bay now scattered throughout the capital. The implication of cartography draws the relevance of nationality directly into the story – the landscape of Wales, its fields and farming, is encountered via reference to the map of Africa, positioning one within the other and therefore unsettling the borders of both nations. Such blurring of national borders calls attention to the involvement of Wales in the British Empire, to the imprint of the African diaspora on the Welsh landscape. Furthermore, the impression of blurred national borders also destabilises the dominant conception of Britain as a mother country distinct from its reliance on colonisation overseas; as explored in this chapter, the notion of a stable dichotomy between centre and periphery is undermined by a focus on black Britain. The African map superimposed upon the agriculture of Wales, Brito's story resonates with Deirdre Osborne's suggestion that Britain has '*never* been a mono-racial enclave'; rather, Britain's black citizens have 'profoundly transformed British national culture, leading to a more complex and inclusive sense of its past' (Osborne 2016: 2-3, original emphasis).

Charlotte Williams, Neil Evans, and Paul O'Leary (2015) note that it is only recently that the role of Wales in imperial practices and ideology has been explored. The more common line of research traces the extent to which Wales itself can be described as a postcolonial nation (Williams 2005).

Perceptions of the position of Wales within colonisation and industrialism vary from the description of the nation as an internal colony (Hechter 2017), used by the British state for extractive industry but culturally and economically subordinate to the metropolitan centre, to a dependent periphery (Evans 1991), reliant upon a state which marginalises its people and culture. Both positions agree that Wales has been and continues to be marginalised and subjugated by England in the British nation state, in a manner that likens the nation's relation to the metropolitan centre to that of the formerly colonised nations overseas. However, Chris Williams differentiates between reading Wales as 'post-colonial' and the notion of a 'postcolonial Wales'. The hyphen in the former – 'post-colonial' – relates to a specific epoch after European colonisation, and Williams suggests that conceiving of Wales in this manner would be 'potentially offensive', given that 'Welsh people made money out of slavery: they were not slaves themselves' (Williams 2005: 10). He ultimately argues that if 'Wales is [...] "post-colonial", it has been so since the sixteenth century and in ways unlike those experienced by any other post-colonial society of more modern times' (Williams 2005: 7). If it is to be read as postcolonial, Wales must be understood along the lines of black Britain more broadly, as a hitherto imperial 'centre', whose culture, values, and representational strategies and reflections are ultimately and significantly changed by the presence of its commonwealth citizens in this 'centre'. This is what Williams indicates by suggesting that Wales can be usefully perceived as a postcolonial – without the hyphen – location.

In 'Gone for a Song', Brito presents an image of blurred national borders within the agricultural landscape of Wales which resonates with this conception of postcolonial Wales, the story's imagery supporting the notion that the capital's black citizens have long held a constitutive role for its culture which has been suppressed by dominant perceptions of the nation's identity. Brito's collection, though, writes postcolonial Wales as distinct from black Britain more broadly, emphasising how Wales itself has been culturally and conceptually marginalised by England in the nation state. Such a dynamic is illustrated in 'Digging for Victory', a story which reimagines the sailing of 'Mr Churchill's war-ship [...] into Cardiff Docks in the spring of 1955' (Brito 2017, 59-66: 59). The narrative details the activities of a group of 'coloured people, Docks people' helping to clear the blocked canal and reclaim the iron

lost by the crash, '[o]n behalf of the nation' (65). However, while the group work to gain the attention of Churchill, who they believe is visiting the Docks for the duration of this emergency, thereby putting their town on the map of the nation, their efforts are erased when the national newspapers praise Churchill himself for clearing the canal, publishing pictures of him celebrating the next day in 'the doorway of Number Ten' (66). The subtleties of the story liken these overlooked efforts of the black citizens of Cardiff to the state's dependency on its colonised subjects for its economy and war efforts, 'when Britain would have stood alone, if the Empire hadn't rushed to her aid' (64). That is, the story implies that there is no 'Us!' (60) – black Welsh people – in the state's perception of its national identity, regardless of their working as a 'purposeful army' (63) in the state's name for the continuing success of its international trade. In this depiction, Wales is presented as postcolonial in the same vein as the other nations of the empire – Britain's economy is dependent upon its activities yet detached from it, and Churchill, representative in the story of the centre of power, calls out directions from a recorded message, his voice 'tremulous' (63).

As in 'Gone for a Song' and 'Digging for Victory', many of the stories in Brito's collection are set in the Cardiff of her youth. At the time of her death in 2007, Brito was writing a second collection of stories for *Seren*, *Chequered Histories*. Though this collection was never published, a few of its stories were disseminated in magazines and anthologies,¹ and two are included in the Parthian reissue of *Dat's Love*. These stories – 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe' and 'The Last Jumpshot' – demonstrate Brito's shifting focus, away from representations of the Cardiff of her childhood and the possible lives of earlier generations of black British women, and towards what Linden Peach suggests is a 'global and conceptual reach' (Peach 2007: 18). Both stories illustrate contemporary multiculturalism and racial tensions in terms of post-Windrush black Britain more broadly, rather than offering the Cardiff-specific focus of the majority of stories in *Dat's Love*. For example, in 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe', hybridity and ambivalence as defined by Homi Bhabha – the former being the legacy of colonialism present in the modern world in the shape of new, mixed cultures, and the latter being the status of the (post)colonised subject as neither (or both) belonging to the colonising or colonised culture – can

be traced in the protagonist Aleisha's search for a sense of belonging in either the white family of her mother or the black family of a father that she has never met. The story shares its name and themes with Hortense Spillers' 1987 essay, which approaches the trope of the absent African American father in terms of the traumatic legacy of colonisation and dispossession; Brito's 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe' creatively imagines the significance of Spillers' theory in the form of literary narrative. 'The Last Jumpshot' conveys the experiences of a multiracial group of young male basketball players, demonstrating a departure from Brito's formerly woman-centred narratives. *Dat's Love*, on the other hand, is a fundamentally feminist and black Welsh text, but the maturation of Brito's writing towards a global, multigendered scope correlates with a changing image of multiculturalism in Wales, one no longer bound to the reputation and representations of Tiger Bay, but resembling a global black identity more broadly, as influenced by pan-Africanism, black America, and black Britain.

Such a duality of black identity in Wales, one specifically Cardiffian and the other global in reach, may be most plainly demonstrated by reading across the two collections, but both are clearly present within *Dat's Love*. Unlike Brito's newer stories which embrace global identities, a sense of tension is created by *Dat's Love* between the local experiences which define black Welsh identity and international influences of blackness and racial solidarity; such influences are shown to be problematic and restrictive for black Welsh women. This tension is played out in the opening, titular story of the collection. Through 'Dat's Love', the collection illustrates a model of black identity for Welsh citizens which is imported from America, yet at the same time the story destabilises this model in order to enable a specifically black Welsh identity to be developed and given representational space by the stories that follow.

'Dat's Love' tells the story of Grace, a "godly" singer' who has 'never put red to her lips, [...] does not smoke, or blaspheme, or take strong drink' (Brito 2017, 1-14: 1), preparing to perform at the funeral of Dooley Wilson. Dooley is a fellow performer from Cardiff who found success only when he adopted 'an American sounding name', an act which Grace perceives as 'stepping into someone else's

shoes and trying to make them fit' (3). Dooley's brief career in film has a lasting effect on the way that he presents himself as a musician and a black man. Previously known as 'Archibald something or other [who] played [...] wonderful piano', Dooley becomes his stage persona – eventually falling 'into a more comic routine' when opportunities to play piano become fewer. In Grace's eyes, Dooley adorns 'black taffeta' in place of his skin as he performs his black identity for the sake of his white audience in a manner that Grace perceives as disingenuous (2-4). Grace's narration implies that media and other external influences have encouraged Dooley to adopt an Americanised conception of blackness, involving the internalisation of a white gaze which moulds the performance of his black identity both on stage and off. This reaches a peak in the last memory that Grace has of Dooley, in which he is preparing his costume, 'prettifying himself' and, according to Grace, 'wav[ing] his hands like a minstrel in front of the glass, laughing at his own reflection' (12-13), suggesting that he has become the audience for his act.

Indications of similar influences on the black community of Cardiff Docks are scattered throughout the text via references to various instruments of representation. Films, songs, and the stage, as well as the agent responsible for creating such media – 'people imaginations' (6) – are reoccurring motifs throughout the story, and Grace sees in her husband's eyes the 'greenish-grey sort of gleam' of a television that 'hasn't been switched on yet' (5), suggesting that his expression of identity is likewise dormant, waiting to be roused. Furthermore, the story is not plot-driven, but revolves around Grace's memories of Dooley's performance as she prepares for her own at his funeral – the narrative begins and ends with Grace's singing. Everything in between is 'memories [which] spin around [her] head like a big roulette wheel' (4). This means that on a narrative level, the story is a performance, mimicking and reinforcing the status of the short story on a formal level, as a platform of representation, a medium of expression, similar to those referenced throughout 'Dat's Love.' The relevance of this emphasis is realised when the dynamic between the agents of the narrative – its characters, setting, imagery and symbolism, and the story's position within the collection – is considered.

The design of Brito's characters, for example, interacts with the shape of the narrative of 'Dat's Love' to elucidate its overall effect. The relationship between Grace and Dooley, for instance, is to a certain extent a romantic one; though anxious that he is the same age as her father, Grace 'admires' him, keeping his compliments 'close to [her] heart', and becomes jealous when her friend, Sarah Vaughn, begins a relationship with Dooley (4). The romantic attachment is presented by the story as part of a complicated dynamic between the three, whereby Dooley is desired by both women, but is also a role model, a father-figure to them; 'almost a god' in their eyes (3), he symbolises a deific model of behaviour for the two women. The dynamic between the three characters, then, also signifies a generational arc, with Dooley representing an older generation of black Cardiffians which has established a particular culture for the black community, a certain expression of black identity developed in response to the norms of the dominant culture and the influence of international racial solidarity. This is a patriarchal model of identity, but Grace and Sarah in turn represent the next generation of black Cardiffians with whom the collection is concerned, treading the line between this established culture and their own needs as black women in an ever-changing present. The setting of 'Dat's Love', Dooley's funeral, means that the timeframe of the story is on the precipice of a generational shift, a moment when Grace and Sarah's expression and experience of identity will become the established model after the passing of Dooley's generation. But the memories that make up the body of the story tell of the charged generational dynamic, of Grace and Sarah choosing two opposing life scripts, both of which branch from Dooley's patriarchal, Americanised expression of his black identity. Ultimately, it is Sarah that Dooley coaches into her successful singing career, and Grace comments that Dooley 'will be remembered as the man who discovered Sarah Vaughn. That will be his epitaph, discovering her. Like finding something valuable and precious that no-one else had ever realised was there before. Mr Columbus' (8). The irony in Grace's narration here indicates that Dooley's coaching involved encouraging Sarah to mirror his own Americanised performance of black identity, 'imitat[ing] some Hollywood film star' and 'blacking her face up and acting comical' (8-9). The sense that Sarah is imitating a performed black American identity is reinforced by the fact that her

name is almost identical to that of New Jersey Jazz singer, Sarah Vaughan; in this way, the Sarah Vaughn of the story can be conceived of as a representational copy of the American performer, a fictional echo of Sarah Vaughan without substance beyond the text. Grace, on the other hand, believes that she has rejected her elder's model of black identity, instead choosing a 'steady and responsible' path guided by the church (9). However, Grace has adopted a different expression of black identity influenced by America, that of black respectability.²

Grace's respectability, and the performance of black identity for a white gaze enacted by Sarah and Dooley, are presented as the 'shadowy opposites' (14) of the same model, each one 'provok[ing]' (9) the other to embody and exhibit traits of the opposing part of the binary. Such a binary is presented throughout the story as the only available expression of identity for the black community in Cardiff; there is no space in Grace's narration, and therefore in 'Dat's Love' more broadly, for the articulation or representation of black identity that does not fit into this American model. However, this constrictive narration is challenged by the lyrics of the hymn which Grace sings at Dooley's funeral, which feature at the very close of the story. The hymn is 'His Eye is on the Sparrow', and the lyrics presented in the text are: *'a bird[...] flies where it will[...]. And I sing because I'm happ-ee, and I sing because I am free!'* (14, original emphasis). By the time Grace recites the song at the funeral, she has attempted to sever herself from the influence of Dooley after realising that she has also performed her identity through the binary model offered by Dooley's generation. The protagonist's endeavour to separate herself from Dooley's model is achieved when she remembers seeing herself and Dooley in a different kind of reflective medium: the mirror. He embraces her in front of the mirror so that she is standing in front of him, her face just below his, and the doubles – the 'shadowy opposites' representing two generations – become one. After seeing herself this way, as a reflection of Dooley, Grace cuts him with a blade, making a small incision in his chest. Grace's attack on Dooley is not justified by the narrative; the lack of explanation instead allows the impression of symbolic significance to prevail. It is 'only a flesh wound' (13), an incision which interrupts and disrupts the performance presenting the self to others reflected in the mirror. Therefore, when the lyrics are recited at the close

of the story, they are weighted by the significance of Grace trying to establish freedom for the next generation – by extension, ‘Dat’s Love’ establishes expressive liberty for the chorus of black Welsh women’s voices to follow in the collection.

Having separated herself from Dooley’s influence in this symbolic manner, when Grace takes to the stage to sing, the hymn’s affirmation of freedom has new relevance. During her performance, Grace sees her friend Baby Cleo in the crowd, ‘smiling, smiling and crying at the same time’ (14). Baby, in her name, represents a potential future generation; she is the third member of Sarah and Grace’s band, but she does not follow either the Americanised stage presence of Sarah, nor the respectability-focused church-singing career of Grace. In fact, Baby is given little textual space, beyond Grace’s remark that things are ‘different for Baby’ (8). In this way, Baby stands in for an identity that does not yet have space for expression in the accepted articulations of black Welsh identity, the story itself being a paradigm of such articulations. When Grace sees Baby at the end of the story, she begins to cry, though it does not seem that she is crying for Dooley’s passing. Rather, Grace has established the potential for herself and Baby to express their own black Welsh identity, bolstered by seeing Baby cry and then allowing herself to cry, after which she proclaims the need to ‘Sing!’, and the story ends as her ‘voice veers out of control, and cr-a-ck-s’ (14).

Grace as first-person narrator provides a limited perspective, and her voice cracking on the one hand refers literally to her crying. On the other hand, though, the cracking is also suggestive of her perspective – her understanding of the binary, ‘shadowy opposites’ of black identity influenced by the media and platforms of representation – beginning to shift, a breaking of the binary to allow space for other, not-yet-represented expressions of black Welsh women’s identity to emerge. This more symbolic reading of the close of this story is supported by the presentation of the word ‘cracks’ – it is separated out with hyphens, the space between the letters suggesting that representational, textual space is being opened up for experiences beyond Grace’s perspective. Such a reading is compelling because of the way this story interacts with the narratives that follow; where, in ‘Dat’s Love’, a sense

of entrapment between binary expressions of identity is established, the following stories provide multiple articulations and experiences of black Welsh women's identity that are not bound by this binary, as if the opening story has created space for these in the pages that follow. That is, 'Dat's Love' can be understood as carrying out a particular function as the opening story of the text. It establishes the representation of black Welsh women to be almost absent from popular understanding, dependent upon and limited to the archetypes of black American male performers. Yet it ends by collapsing this dependency, making space within the text that contains it, to present black Welsh women who are not constrained by the same Americanised model that envelops 'Dat's Love'.

'Dat's Love' provides a contextual background from which the collection can progress: references to the tools of representation – cameras, lenses, film, television, written text – remain a feature of the entire collection, bolstering the sense that the text is directly addressing neglected identities. As such, the collection, through a series of narratives, illustrates the lives of black Cardiffian women, writing the Welsh capital as a multicultural, feminist place and thus illuminating the diversity of a location that has often been written through a white, androcentric gaze.³ The stories are above all concerned with the depiction of black Welsh women and their experiences of nationality, race, gender, and platforms and forms of representation. For example, 'In Very Pleasant Surroundings' recounts the experience of an elderly woman fighting a battle with cancer – this battle is presented as not only against her death, but also as a struggle to carve out a representational space for black Welsh women's experiences of such a fight for life. The woman is told to fight the illness 'like a man!' (Brito 2017, 24-33: 27), and this involves her searching for influences on how to do so through a variety of literary references from *Hamlet* to *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* – literary contemplations from a white, male-centred canon on how to live, how to be, in the face of death. Her battling through these references highlights the absence of representation modelling her own identity in these circumstances. In 'Dido Elizabeth Belle – a Narrative of Her Life (extant)', a similar effect is achieved in terms of highlighting and addressing the lack of visibility of black British women, in historical records as well as literary texts in this instance. The story takes a short excerpt from an eighteenth-century

white-male-authored diary describing Belle, a black British heiress born into slavery in 1761 but brought to England by her father, John Lindsay, and raised by his uncle, William Murray, 1st Earl of Mansfield. The excerpt is taken from the diary of Thomas Hutchinson, a governor of Massachusetts, who visited Mansfield in 1779. In the passage, Hutchinson relays Mansfield's lie that his nephew did not father Belle, and the story builds a fictional narrative around this historical document in order to highlight that 'what had been set down by this diarist was but a wicked fabrication, a tissue of lies and half truths!' (Brito 2017, 40-49: 48). Delivered through an imagined first-person narration from the perspective of a fictional Dido, the historical Belle's voice is reconstructed via narrative fiction since official records of her life are filtered through the lens of colonial and patriarchal structures. In doing so, Brito's story demonstrates how any representation of such women is subject to the operations of these structures, and how agency of the kind bestowed upon the reimagined Dido can now only be imagined through 'the tale'; through fiction, Dido can 'set down [her] history' in order to 'possess, rather than be possessed by it' (48).

Such aspects of identity and representation are explored with specific reference to place and locality, in opposition to the American model established by the opening story – references to the influence of America on the realities of the Welsh capital, though, are scattered throughout the text, suggesting that Welsh regional specificities are written in defiance of a 'universal' model. For example, Jock in 'Stripe by Stripe' is frustrated by the 'American style' décor of his local pub, and by the suggestion that this décor harks back to *'those good old hey-days, down the Bay days – when this one square mile[...] was like, the New Orleans of a great coaling Metropolis'* (Brito 2017, 104-114: 107, original emphasis). Likewise, 'Michael Miles Has Teeth Like a Broken-Down Picket Fence' assumes the naïve perspective of a young girl coming to terms with her 'monochrome' identity in a 'black and white [...] world' (Brito 2017, 15-23: 15). The girl's comprehension of her mixed racial and cultural heritage is filtered through the imagery of grey-scale; like in 'Dat's Love', the child's reference for the projection of her identity is taken from mass media, but this time it is from British television adverts between her favourite gameshow, *Take Your Pick*: 'like a housewife [she is] disappointed by the whiteness of her

wash. Mine looks grey, she thought, using the voice of the woman on the advert' (15). The backdrop of these references to American projections of black identity has the effect of reinforcing the collection's illustration of particular black and postcolonial Welsh experiences and circumstances, and articulating the need to create a representational space for such experiences since such a space is absent.

Above all, though, *Dat's Love* seeks alternative life-scripts for black Welsh women which unsettle the masculine focus of black Welsh representation. Given the industrial origins of Tiger Bay's cultural and racial diversity, it is still often remembered through, as Gill Branston describes, 'dominantly masculinist histories and heritage displays' (Branston 2004: 127). Brito responds to this masculinist historicising of the Bay and its multiculturalism by engaging with the themes most associated with feminist and women's writing in Wales: memory, maternity, domesticity, family, and relationships, but by addressing these through the lens of the industrialism which brought her family to Cardiff. This means that work and industry, themes which, according to Michelle Deininger, are typically featured in Welsh men's short stories, are significant narrative elements of Brito's stories. 'Gone for a Song' comments on blurred national borders through a depiction of agriculture in Wales; 'Digging for Victory' filters its account of the crash of Churchill's war-ship through the perspective of a black woman at work who is anxious to 'get paid[,] whatever happens' (63); and 'Dat's Love' positions Grace's potential career as a performer as an alternative to her day-job at a cigar factory. As such, the connection between industrialisation, race, and masculinity in Cardiff is disrupted when the collection addresses such issues through a framework of themes more commonly associated with women's writing in Wales in the late-twentieth century.

Brito is, according to Deininger, a significant contributor to what 'seems to be a renaissance in women writing the short story' in Wales during the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries (Deininger 2016: 196). Deininger finds the Welsh short story to be apt for 'exploring belonging, loss, childhood, and alienation', and in women's writing in particular, for exploring 'loneliness, exile, and

dislocation’ – claims which are supported by her analyses of the short fiction of Glenda Beagan, Catherine Merriman, Rachel Trezise, Jo Mazelis, Susie Wild, and Brito, among others (Deininger 2019: 428). Exploring the works of these writers, Deininger begins to unpack the ways in which the short story tends towards characteristics which enable the expression of the oppressed voices and experiences of Welsh women. Deininger follows Clare Hanson’s definition of the form as ‘a vehicle for different kinds of knowledge, knowledge which may be in some way at odds with the “story” of dominant culture’ (Hanson 1989: 6). According to this characterisation of the form, the short story is capable of conferring a voice to the women historically silenced by society because of its association with alterity, its cultural marginalisation against the novel and the correlation of this marginalisation with the expression of other – that is, non-dominant – forms of knowledge and experience. Hanson continues: ‘The formal properties of the short story – disjunction, inconclusiveness, obliquity – connect with its ideological marginality and with the fact that the form may be used to express something suppressed/repressed in mainstream literature’ (Hanson 1989: 6). Here, Hanson affirms the way that the cultural marginality of the form interlaces with its apparent capacity for alterity, but she also delineates certain formal approaches characteristic of the short story which uniquely enable its unearthing of that which is suppressed.

Deininger concentrates on the first point that Hanson makes regarding the correlation between the cultural marginality of the short form and its embrace by marginalised peoples – she connects Hanson’s theory of the form as a ‘vehicle’ for suppressed and alternative knowledges with Frank O’Connor’s proposition that the short story appeals to ‘submerged population groups’ (O’Connor 2004: 17), those that are in some way marginalised by or on the fringes of the dominant society and culture. Following Deininger’s assessment of these properties as defining the Welsh short story in general, and Welsh women’s short stories in particular, it is useful to build upon her premise by considering Brito’s stories alongside those specific formal approaches which Hanson suggests characterise the short story’s ideological marginality and its capacity to expose the suppressed and repressed: disjunction, inconclusiveness, and obliquity. These qualities can intersect with the task of

chronicling the experiences of women in Wales, acknowledging that this place has historically been conceived of through a masculinist lens, and that the task is therefore a necessarily interrupted, continuing, indeterminate, and uncertain one. That is, the short story's tendency towards fragmentation and partiality – what Hanson suggests is the short story's ability to remain 'limited' in comparison with what is often thought of as the 'inclusive, universal power of the novel' (Hanson 1989: 24-25) – enables Welsh women's stories to foreground how women writers and the representation of Welsh women's experiences have historically been repressed and oppressed. The formal approaches highlighted by Hanson enable the impact of such oppression to be preserved at a textual level, even while the important task of etching a tradition of Welsh women's writing is achieved.

Brito's stories represent Wales as a multicultural, feminist place through these formal qualities, at once recording the lack of textual representation for black Welsh women, and at the same time creating space for such representation. To take an example, the impact of 'Digging for Victory' is its overall sense of the marginalisation of Wales in the nation state despite the country's significance to British industrialism and imperialism via its extractive industry. This is achieved, not through the direct narration of events, which follow a single character's experience of the day, but rather obliquely, in the way that Churchill's voice haunts the story even while he is physically absent from the location of the emergency, a voice directing events and their interpretation rather than interacting unambiguously with them. In terms of formal disjunction, 'Dido Elizabeth Belle' critiques the patriarchal, colonial writing of official records by positioning the historical document against narrative fiction, revealing the constructed nature of the former by juxtaposing it with the latter, which offers scope for reinterpreting history. 'Dat's Love' functions as an introduction to the chorus of voices to follow in the collection, establishing how inconclusiveness operates in Brito's writing. The story's ending is also a beginning, an invitation for the collection to begin the project of redressing the lack of representational space for black Welsh women to which it draws attention.

Brito's destabilising of the binary between men's and women's themes in the Welsh short story by approaching the former through the framework of the latter, her attention to postcolonial Wales as both subjugated by the British nation state and complicit in its history of colonisation and imperialism, her alertness to the ways in which Welsh women have written of their marginalisation through the formal techniques of the short story, and her own occupation of these techniques to distil a sense of the lack of representational space for black Welsh women – all of these elements come together through a single story within *Dat's Love: 'Mother Country'*. 'Mother Country' depicts a black Welsh woman's experience of childbirth, specifically a moment of emotional transformation from her initial anxiety and disbelief over her new status as a mother into her amazement at her ability to create life and nurse it to health. This moment of maternal bonding structures the story, which opens with the mother 'repelled' (Brito 2017, 34-39: 35) by the life of the child and closes with her '[e]ntranced' (38) by her and the child's physical and emotional connection upon breastfeeding. In between, the narrative provides an image of the mother giving birth, but this is obliquely rendered via references to the history of slavery and colonisation since the child is 'another country'; the body is a 'Panamanian birth-canal', and the new mother is a 'two headed doll' giving birth to her own 'African mammy' (37, original emphasis). Formal disjunction and inconclusiveness are established by this blurring of the identity of the narrating voice between self and other, her position as both mother and child creating the impression of a generational unity rather than linearity. As such, the story interlaces the physical act of giving birth, of creating new life, with a symbolic notion of the way in which the history of slavery endures in the former colonising centre, the weight and memory of such history carried by the descendants of colonised subjects in the 'centre' while it is repressed in the ideology of the dominant culture. The story, therefore, by obliquely rendering its depiction of maternity through the metaphor of empire, literalises the idea of the political mother country.

The term 'mother country' in the context of the British Empire generally refers to the metropolitan centre, a home away from home which will one day open itself up to the people of the colonies, a promised and protective land, and a reference point of identity and belonging for the

colonised. However, as Black British writer and journalist Charlie Brinkhurst-Cuff describes in her recently published edited collection of life writing essays by Windrush migrants, the UK 'was not maternal' for its migrants who arrived in 1948 or their descendants. According to Brinkhurst-Cuff '[m]otherhood in our society still represents nurture and love', but at the same time as it publicly celebrated this conventional idea of motherhood, the UK behaved as an uncaring maternal figure, 'encouraging hard work and reverence of British society, all the while failing to extend protections to those new residents from the tarbrush of racism and later, deportation orders served by the Home Office' (Brinkhurst-Cuff 2018: xxiv-xxv). Therefore, Britain's black communities are denied the political 'maternalism', the kind of protection and belonging evoked by the concept of a motherland, and the notion of Britain as the 'mother country' emerges as a fallacy. Here, Brinkhurst-Cuff draws on the comparison between a hostile and neglectful Mother Country and the rejection and discrimination suffered by black women in Britain addressed in one of the founding works of black postcolonial feminism, *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain* by Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe. Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe refer to black women's work in the 'Mother Country' as 'labour pains' (2018 [1985]: 28) and signal the 'uncaring' (2018 [1985]: 97) state which had promised its former colonial subjects security and meaningful work (2018 [1985]: 33). Brinkhurst-Cuff refers to an idealised, patriarchal notion of maternity to reveal the paradoxes central to the concept of the political mother country. Such an idealisation, though, is a symptom of the ideology in which the metaphor developed. As discussed by Louise Falconer:

The ideological space created by the British Empire provided opportunities for explorations into the meanings of Victorian femininity. Woman could be the intrepid missionary, bringing light to dark Africa [...] or a vulnerable piece of her husband's property to be defended from the 'other'. She could also be the heroic mother responsible for the preservation of the race, or, simply, an object of intensifying legal control over her reproductive capacities (Falconer 2003: 149).

Brinkhurst-Cuff's exploration and occupation of the metaphor reveals the ways in which such ideologies persist into the present. Similarly, Brito's 'Mother Country' engages with such ideology of

femininity and motherhood in a way that illuminates the hollow reality undergirding Britain's promise of home and belonging for its commonwealth citizens.

The story opens with a sense of 'dissociation' (35) when the mother is handed her child for the first time, and because 'Mother Country' blurs its depiction of the act of giving birth with imagery relating to postcoloniality, such dissociation can be interpreted in terms of the uncaring maternal figure of the political mother country. Brito's story, by inflating the representation of a black mother with that of the colonial centre, reveals the ways in which Britain and the colonies cannot be dichotomised as 'centre' and 'periphery', but are rather fundamentally entwined. A focus on the metaphor of the mother country in a black British context necessitates a conception of Britain as historically diverse, in terms of race and culture – Tiger Bay has indeed been a historically multicultural location due to its involvement in extractive industry. In the beginning of Brito's story, the mother appears as a figuration of the motherland that is colonial Britain, and her child represents the (post)colonised subject: much like the empire's attitude towards the enslaved, the mother approaches the newborn in a 'detached, impersonal' (35) manner and is 'bloated with power', an 'overwhelming power' which asserts its control through violence: '... could crush – just use my arm like a vice and crush its head, its skull, in the crook of my arm... Or I could take it by the legs [...] and dash its brains out' (36). Attempts to justify such violent authority imposed by the empire upon its colonised subjects took place through an ideology which strove to dehumanise the enslaved. In Brito's story, a sense of this dehumanisation is achieved in the opening section through the suggestion that the mother perceives her child as a 'doll', a 'boneca' with '[l]egs made out of laminated plastic' and fingers and toes 'stuck together' (34). However, upon nursing, the mother realises the humanity of the child and the responsibility of nurture that accompanies her power and control over its life. Upon this realisation, the mother transforms from a representation of the colonial motherland and turns to perceive herself as her own 'African mammy' (37). The bodily, filial act of breastfeeding makes the mother aware of her own maternal lineage and with this she becomes a representation in the story of the colonised rather than the coloniser, calling to question the parallels between the supposed

maternalism of the political mother country and the reality of sustaining life in a postcolonial nation. The mother is taken aback by the 'fair[ness]' (38) of the child; the child is representative of the colonised subject in the centre of colonial power, when the motherland has 'shut' itself 'off' (38) from its responsibility of care for its commonwealth citizens. The story's depiction of motherhood ultimately merges the political and the personal; in the end, the mother calls for her child to 'know me!' (38), to know of its lineage and prevent the mother and the representation of coloniality which she embodies from 'receding into history' (38), where it would be forgotten by cultural memory.

The uniting of the personal and the political in Brito's 'Mother Country' extends and productively complicates Katie Gramich's demarcation of the formal and thematic approaches of Welsh women's short story writing. Primarily, Gramich finds the interaction between representations of maternity, the Welsh landscape, and memory to be the most prevalent and effective in women writing Wales as a 'feminist place' (Gramich 2007: 146) during the mid-to-late twentieth century. A significant agent of this writing of the feminist place is the figure of the 'Welsh mam'; like the symbolic idea of the political mother country, but unlike its lived realisation, the 'Welsh mam' establishes a sense of home through the love and nurture of both kin and land. While representations of the 'Welsh mam' have been prevalent since the nineteenth century, it is during this period that she is given a voice. With this voice, throughout the many examples offered by Gramich's analysis, the Welsh mam 'traces her roots back' to the Welsh land through 'the coalescence of the personal and cultural memory, embodied in the almost forgotten female ancestor' (Gramich 2007: 158). Resultingly, the Wales of the maternal line is grasped as a past that is 'inscribed on the landscape of today' (Gramich 2007: 179). The 'Welsh mam' is, in this period, 'also a poet, who responds to the literary echoes of the Welsh landscape' (Gramich 2007: 147). Literary form becomes a kind of device for chronicling memory, a means of imagining and uncovering the 'foremothers' of a Welsh women's tradition of writing via its bridging of the personal, the domestic, and the cultural and political. When Brito writes of the political mother country through a representation of motherhood, she similarly bestows a literary voice upon the figure of the 'almost forgotten' black Welsh mother.

Through its formal techniques, therefore, Brito's collection is aligned with the interests and approaches of Welsh women's short story writing as described by Deininger, but these formal approaches are practised with a difference in *Dat's Love*. Where Deininger finds the themes of industrialisation and working-class life to be mostly absent from Welsh women's short stories but prevalent in their male-authored counterparts, Brito explores these 'men's' themes through the lens of colonisation, race, and identity. At the same time, though, these issues are approached through a framework which occupies women's writing in Wales, as delineated by Gramich, one which bridges the personal and the cultural and political. Through Brito's 'Mother Country', writing similarly becomes an act of remembering, a means of reconciling past and present via a narrating voice that fluidly moves between mother and child, between generations. That is, by making platforms and forms of representation a recurrent theme of her stories while imagining voices for black Welsh and British women stretching from the eighteenth century to the present, Brito maps a similar kind of network of 'foremothers' to that of the 'Welsh mam', but one that is inclusive of issues regarding race, colonisation, and industrialism via the unification of the political and personal 'mother country.' Ultimately, Brito, through *Dat's Love*, becomes a literary foremother for writing black Wales, by tracing the ways in which these postcolonial issues variously intersect with the tradition of Welsh women's writing.

NOTES

¹ For example, in Dai Smith (Ed.) (2014) *Story: The Library of Wales Short Story Anthology*, Cardigan: Parthian; Lewis Davies and Arthur Smith (Eds.) (1999) *Mama's Baby (Papa's Maybe): New Welsh Short Fiction*, Cardigan: Parthian; and the short story magazine *Cambrensis*.

² Daniel Williams explores the ways in which the 'ethnic and gender struggles of Wales and African America' have been connected by a shared history of 'the ideology of racial uplift' since the second half of the nineteenth century. This is reflected in the 'Blue Books' of Wales which represent a "'universal" civilizationist mission in which women were the disseminators of [...] morality, sobriety, [and] temperance' via their position within 'the domestic and religious realms.' Daniel Williams (2012), *Black Skin, Blue Books: African Americans and Wales 1845-1945*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 4-7.

³ Such as in the writings of Howard Spring and John Williams. Linden Peach describes Williams's perspective of Tiger Bay as 'typical of the representation of the Bay, perceived as an enclave and written about from the point of view of a male outsider looking in' (Peach 2007: 21).

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