SEX BEYOND CONSENT IN J.M. COETZEE'S *DISGRACE* AND NGŨGĨ WA THIONG'O'S *PETALS OF BLOOD*

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the episodes of rape, prostitution, and consensually ambiguous sex in the postcolonial African novels *Disgrace* by J.M. Coetzee and *Petals of Blood* by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. Drawing on scholarship on sexual consent, it argues that the liberal theories of sexual consent are rigid and it offers an alternative way to consider sex that recognizes the complexities of human nature, the connection between identity and sexuality, the limits of autonomy, and the roles of male dominance and female subordination engrained in patriarchy. The analysis also takes into account the distinct social environments of postcolonial Kenya and post-Apartheid South Africa and the ways that racial identities and colonialism complicate sexual consent.

This thesis engages with existing critical work on the novels and liberal theories of consent. There is little scholarship about sexual consent for either primary text, or among postcolonialists in general. For this reason, the thesis reads the sexual relationships in the novels through consent theories that, like liberalism, were created in the United States and Europe. In their work, scholars like Ann Cahill, Carole Pateman, David Archard, and Catherine MacKinnon critique the dependence of theories of consent on the liberal democratic values of individualism and autonomy, and challenge the understanding that humans have possessive ownership of themselves and are abstractly equal in society. This thesis extends their arguments that this notion of sexual consent is reductive and does not consider the intensities of human desires and the limited agency of marginalized groups from patriarchal societies to the postcolonial context. Central to the plot of *Disgrace* is a student-professor relationship and the rape of a white woman by Black men. These events present ideal locations to explore the nuances of rape and intercourse and the ways that social constructions of race and gender infiltrate sex. *Petals of Blood* follows four protagonists, one of whom is a woman, Wanja, who is sexually promiscuous and has spent many years as a prostitute. Her beauty and sexuality led her to attract many men who feel powerless with desire. Her time as a sex worker and her mobility in her sexual relationships provide complex circumstances for an analysis of possible female agency.

In exploring the ways that sex is a private and personal action but also a socially and politically constructed human behavior, this thesis analyzes what is right or wrong about episodes of sex that go beyond only consent. In doing so, it finds ways that women can have sexual agency beyond consent as a form of contract. This thesis ultimately pushes for sexuality to be understood as fluid and for social constructions of sexuality to be recognized to allow both women and men to find ways that sex can be safe, equal, and fulfilling.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years the word "consent" has come to charge discourses ranging from gender in/equality to workplace behavior to marital sex. In these conversations, consent (or the lack of it) typically determines if a man's behavior, explicitly or implicitly sexual, around or towards a woman is appropriate. Consent separates sex from rape and harassment from flirtation. Since Ronan Farrow brought to light Harvey Weinstein's "ongoing predatory behavior toward women—whether they consented or not" (Farrow)—in 2017, the #MeToo movement has grown into a worldwide phenomenon. Startling numbers of women have come forward, sharing their experiences of sexual harassment and assault. In most cases, the message is the same—that the woman did not consent. Another consistent thread throughout the #MeToo movement is the relationship between the accused and the accuser; most often the accusing female is subordinate to the powerful accused male, as is true in the cases of Harvey Weinstein, Larry Nassar, Bill Cosby, Jeffrey Epstein, Brett Kavanaugh, Andrew Cuomo etc.. The legacies of some of the most powerful and prominent modern male leaders are tarnished by reports of inappropriate and abusive behavior. These cases and the issue of consent in them raise questions about the nature of sex within patriarchal society. Why is it that women are nearly always expected to give consent to men, and men are nearly always expected to obtain the consent of women? Is sexual behavior in the workplace, or between superiors and subordinates, only wrong when it is nonconsensual? Can a woman only say yes or no to sex? Can she create and fulfill her own desires?

Sexuality and sex are complex topics. Tied up in sex are some of the most intense and uncontrollable emotions of human nature: love, lust, passion, and desire. Sometimes, the feelings and actions that lead up to, during, and after sex can be inexplicable. Yet, discourses of human

sexuality can often be rigid, leaving little room to explore and understand human nature and motivations. This inflexibility can transfer to perceptions of sexual consent. Most often grappled with in legal cases, the problem of consent boils down to a reasonable assumption by both parties that the other is willingly engaging in sexual activity. Intercourse can be either consensual sex or nonconsensual sex, otherwise known as rape. This understanding of consent permeates through the #MeToo movement. For example, Katie Way's 2019 *Babe* article documents the discomfort of an anonymous woman, given the pseudonym Grace, on a date with Aziz Ansari and struggles to make sense of the harm caused by Ansari. Way describes how after exchanging numbers with Ansari at the 2017 Emmy Awards, Grace and Ansari went out in New York. After a quick dinner, Ansari brought her back to his luxury apartment where for the next hour or so he followed her around, persistently touching and kissing her, while she inched away, believing to have repeatedly told him "no" with her body language. She eventually left and Ansari later texted her telling her he had a great time, to which she replied by saying she had not enjoyed the night: "Last night might've been fun for you, but it wasn't for me… You ignored clear nonverbal cues; you kept going with advances. You had to have noticed I was uncomfortable" (Weiss). Ansari explained to Grace and later to the press that he was shocked and sad to hear that she felt this way and apologized. The #MeToo discourse at the time lacked the scope to evaluate what might have been wrong (or right) about Ansari's behavior when there was no legal violation. James Hamblin wrote in an article in the *Atlantic*: "the [#MeToo] movement is easily depicted as an attempt to divide men into two bins: good or bad. In that context, it's easy to be outraged over the idea that Ansari belongs in the same bin as Weinstein." Hamblin finds that while both Weinstein and Ansari have engaged sexually with women nonconsensually and caused harm, their abuses are not equivalent. There is more to these interactions than just a lack of consent.

Similarly, Milena Popova complicates the movement's dependence on the theory of consent in her book, stating that "it is not that powerful people, powerful men like Clarence Thomas, Brett Kavanaugh, and Donald Trump, do not understand that the women they were violating do not consent. Rather, they feel that their own desires and their power override any objections from women" (xi). In scholarship on consent theory, there is more recognition of the nuances of consent and the ways that legal discourses and approaches to consent can be limited and at times ineffective when evaluating rape. Popova prefaces her own writing on sexual consent by mentioning that "discussions of sexual violence and consent are frequently dominated by legalistic approaches, which in many Western jurisdictions have their roots in property law rather than the very messy, human lived experience of sexuality" (Popova 13). In her work and those of other scholars like David Archard, Carole Pateman, Catherine MacKinnon, and Rhéa Jean, there is a clear attempt to grapple with the complexities of human sexuality and the role of consent. Yet, even in the realm of consent theory, there is little certainty of what defines consent, what exactly the harm of rape is, or if female consent is even truly possible in patriarchal societies.

It is crucial to continue examining and discussing cases of sexual assault, rape, and the #MeToo movement, but it is also important to keep in mind the limitations of the Western discourse of consent. One way to do this is by investigating how these discussions are complicated in the global south, specifically in postcolonial contexts. These are settings where Western political and philosophical theories of consent and contract were not gradually developed and implemented, but abruptly forced. Similarly, patriarchal norms might remain stronger or the application of liberal theory might generally exclude considerations of sexuality in these societies. In turn, understandings of sexual relationships and violations are perhaps less

constrained by the legal categories of the consensual and the nonconsensual. Consent doesn't effectively define sex in Western spaces, where the theory was created and shaped by Western sexualities and sexual norms, so its flaws are perhaps even more obvious in non-Western, postcolonial societies.

This thesis will explore how consent is complicated through representations of rape and prostitution in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*, two postcolonial African novels. Both novels challenge liberal theories of consent and human rights through their portrayal of the complexities of human nature and gender relations that influence the sex that their characters engage in. By applying the work of consent theorists to the already complicated sexual relationships depicted by Ngũgĩ and Coetzee, this thesis imagines new ways to understand the rights and wrongs of sex outside the inflexible constraints of consent and identifies ways that women can act with agency in sexual relationships. The discussion of sexual consent, rape, and prostitution will focus on heterosexual relationships between cisgender individuals. This is not to say that consent, rape, and prostitution are not or cannot be problems within other kinds of sexual and gendered relationships. They can, but this thesis will be dealing with the power dynamics between cis men and women within patriarchal societies that are often reflected in sexual relations and that make the matter of consent especially complicated.

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The idea of rape is universally understood to be black and white: rape is morally bad and a criminal offense. Even in the common law courts of thirteenth-century England, where women were understood to be property, rape was punished mercilessly. Although it calls for severe punishment, in practice it is not uncommon for rape to be functionally legal. What defines rape, why it is thought to be wrong, and how possible it is for rape to be reported is inconsistent. For

example, even here in the United States, a nation commonly thought to be a modern democracy and the birthplace of human rights, it was nationally believed to be impossible for a husband to rape his wife until 1993, when every state deemed marital rape a crime. The illegality of rape is also complicated by the intimate nature of the crime. Oftentimes victims feel uncomfortable reporting the details of the attack, and even if they don't, it is difficult to prove that a rape has occurred as there are rarely witnesses. As David Archard explains: "nearly all societies regulate sexual conduct by having taboos on its public expression and by reserving spaces or times in which sexual activity can properly be conducted… the essential privacy of sexual behaviour presents a difficulty for the securing of any assurance that such behavior is also consensual" (*Sexual Consent* 21-22). Moreover, today, it is widely accepted that rape is wrong because of the harm it causes to the woman, but the original objections to rape were less concerned with the effects that rape might have on a woman's physical and emotional well-being. In her exploration of the ethical wrongs of rape, Ann Cahill points to "traditional Western concepts of rape that define it primarily as a crime against (male) property" (168) as the roots of the "conservative" theory of rape. This theory "understands the crime as an unlawful use of another person's property" (168), making a woman's consent (as well as her personhood) entirely irrelevant.

Cahill goes on to contrast this conservative theory to the liberal understanding of rape where "the crime of rape needs to be understood as an affront to individually held rights" (169). The liberal understanding emphasizes equality. In turn, the moral wrong does not reference sexual difference or hierarchy; the "violation is against that which every citizen, regardless of gender, depends on and holds dear, that is, personal autonomy" (Cahill 169). While the conservative view is clearly flawed in its perception that women are property to be owned by men, the liberal theory is also narrow in its understanding of rape. The assumption of the equality

and autonomy of citizens is naive. The subordination of women in patriarchal societies is an element, arguably a cause, of rape that cannot be ignored. Furthermore, the liberal value of autonomy is not achievable for all citizens. Another common critique of the liberal perspective is that it potentially places the responsibility of rape on the female victim. Cahill writes that "since the liberal theory now understands the crime as a violation of autonomy, as a failure to recognize the victim's civil rights of self-determination, consent becomes the standard that determines whether or not the crime occurred" (169). The difference between rape and consensual sex lies in female consent and the extent to which it was given, not what male intentions were.

In exploring sex and rape, it becomes evident why it is crucial to treat the problem of consent carefully. Theorists like Ann Cahill, Carole Pateman, David Archard, and Catherine MacKinnon have discussed the nuances of consent and the ways male and female sexualities interact. These scholars provide a basis for this thesis's study of consent in *Disgrace* and *Petals of Blood*. Their writing challenges the liberal, individualistic understanding of consent and personal autonomy and illustrates the ways that women's inferior status in patriarchal societies and human desires can affect sex. There are important distinctions between various arguments in consent theory, but there is consensus that it is important for both men and women to be willing parties while engaging in sexual activity and that the idea of consent, as understood within a liberal tradition, is not entirely capable of distinguishing sex from rape, especially in a way that recognizes the limited agency that women have in society and, more specifically, in sexual relationships.

The liberal concept of consent is derived from the liberal democratic idea of the contract. This idea is rooted in a particular conception of man and society. This conception is "*individualist*, in that it asserts the moral primacy of the person against the claims of any social

collectivity" and "*egalitarian*, inasmuch as it confers on all men the same moral status" (Gray xii). Contractarians, Pateman explains, understand an individual to be an owner of property in their person who contracts out part of that property in the market (*The Sexual Contract* 191) or through a relationship with another individual. Based on this, sex is understood as an activity where two unconstrained beings or free agents come together and consent to a metaphorical contract to use their bodies in intercourse. Many consent theorists object to this contractarian model as a viable way of understanding sexual consent for a number of reasons. First, consent is difficult to define and understand due to the significance of sexuality for human identity. Our sexual encounters and the ways we experience our sexualities are extremely consequential for our self-perceptions, so it is only natural that a lack of control over the ways our bodies are used sexually is of great concern. Liberal concepts of rape identify the violation of the female body and the physical and emotional harm that it can cause, but stop short of recognizing the intricate connections between sexuality and the self and the damage that sexual abuse might cause to one's identity. David Archard explains that one reason for thinking that sexual consent is important "derives from the consideration that at stake in any sexual encounter is the individual as an embodied self. Sex is an opening up of one person to another, a mutual disclosure in circumstances of particular intimacy and vulnerability" (*Sexual Consent* 20). The conditions of "particular intimacy and vulnerability" that Archard describes in sexual encounters are what separate sex from other instances of laborers contracting out the use of their body, and are why it is reductive to think of sex as merely a contract.

In her seminal work, *The Sexual Contract*, Carole Pateman also makes this distinction. She compares the use of a prostitute's body and a professional athlete's. She explains that "owners of baseball teams have command over the use of their players' bodies, but the bodies

are not directly used sexually by those who have contracted for them" (206). Owners of baseball teams are interested in the use of an athlete's labor power and service; the identity of, and person in, the body is almost entirely irrelevant. The owners are paying for a player, not a person. Conversely, "when a man enters into the prostitution contract he is not interested in sexually indifferent, disembodied services; he contracts to buy sexual use of a *woman* for a given period" (207). Because "identity is inseparable from the sexual construction of the self… In modern patriarchy, sale of women's bodies in the capitalist market involves sale of a self in a different manner, and in a more profound sense, than sale of the body of a male baseball player or sale of command over the use of the labour (body) of a wage slave" (Pateman, 207). Cahill also echoes this sentiment: "My sexuality is a central part of my being; it is not something that I 'own' and can give away, because such a model of possession implies that 'I' exist as myself separate from my sexuality" (183). One can surely contract out the use of one's labor separately from one's identity, but sexuality is not something extrinsic. You cannot contract out the use of your embodied self. The distinction between the body, the self, and their convergence in expressions of sexuality is not recognized in liberal theory, which tends to treat the self as disembodied, making its understanding of consent as contract inadequate for apprehending the experience of sex.

The second reason the liberal contractarian model of consent is understood to be flawed is due to the conception of the liberal individual. It imagines individuals to be free to consent to contracts if so inclined and to refuse if not, but more often than not, this presumption of liberty and autonomy is not a lived reality. In his influential work, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, C.B. Macpherson argues that "English political thought from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries had an underlying unity," that is, "the unifying assumption [of]

'possessive individualism'" (xiiv). He points out how the principles central to liberal democracy were developed at a time when a new belief in the value and the rights of the individual was coming to the forefront. These values and perceptions of the individual draw a link between ownership and individuality. This unity conceives of the individual as the "proprietor of his own person or capacities" (Macpherson 3), removing him from any larger sort of moral or social whole. The liberal "human essence is freedom from dependence on the wills of others, and freedom is a function of possession" (Macpherson 3). The individual is seen to be free from the systems that surround him. Although he still lives within society, he is believed to have physical and mental autonomy, independent from the will of society and others if he wants to be, and is, as Macpherson puts it, "an owner of himself" (3).

This liberal understanding of the individual as owning themselves has been critiqued by many scholars in both consent and political theory. One critic, John Christman, explains that "the characteristic of independence, coupled with a voluntarist understanding of social connections, is a trait prominent in the self-conceptions of privileged males who traditionally assume social relations that are typified by public interactions with relative strangers governed by contractual arrangements" (143). For these privileged males, functioning in society as individuals free to participate in relationships or contracts that benefit them and avoid those that do not might be a lived reality. Men might still be controlled to some degree by social norms, expectations, acts of violence, theft, or assault, and the needs of loved ones, suggesting that complete autonomy is only a fictitious notion. Yet, the extent of their self-determination is certainly greater than that of women and other marginalized groups who traditionally "take on [social] roles marked by close connections with others, mutual (and sometimes asymmetrical) dependence relations, and life outside of the public sphere" (Christman 143). These groups are conventionally defined by the

men whom they are close to and they have little mobility in the public sphere. Their ability to voluntarily enter into any form of contractual relationship is limited and the assumption that women, racial or religious minorities, queer, non-binary, impoverished people, and so forth are able to exercise full autonomy ignores the structural realities of patriarchal and oppressive societies, and these circumstances are especially acute when entire societies are colonized.

Scholarship on consent takes into consideration the patriarchal constraints on female autonomy and the implications this has on sex. Scholars have made the case that female autonomy is affected more so than other marginalized groups. In *Inventing Human Rights*, Lynn Hunt explains that the liberal individual was assumed to have both the ability to reason and the independence to decide for oneself. Many seem to have the capacity to reason; children and the insane do not, but they "might someday gain or regain that capacity" (Hunt 28). Many also lack the required independence of status to be fully autonomous—children, slaves, servants, the propertyless, and women—but here too there are ways to gain or regain autonomy. Children can grow up, servants can leave service, the propertyless can buy property, and slaves can buy their freedom. As unlikely as many of these solutions may be, they are still existing paths to autonomy. Hunt argues that "women alone [seem] not to have any of these options; they [are] defined as inherently dependent on either their fathers or husbands" (28). When taking into account other forms of oppression that harm the impoverished, slaves, and people of color, this claim might appear excessive, but the point stands that being a woman limits autonomy under liberalism in ways that seem inescapable. Carole Pateman develops a similar argument in "Women and Consent." She finds that "the most intimate relations of women with men are held to be governed by consent; women consent to marriage, and sexual intercourse without a woman's consent constitutes the criminal offense of rape" (150). But paradoxically, "women

[also] exemplify the individuals who consent theorists have declared are incapable of consenting" (150) and "consent as ideology cannot be distinguished from habitual acquiescence, assent, silent dissent, submission, or even enforced submission" (150). She writes that "women are not 'individuals' who own the property they have in their persons and capacities" (153) and, consequently, the "appearance of consent, whether three centuries ago or today, should not be taken at face value" (153).

The limits of autonomy, female and otherwise, that prevail in Western discourse are evident in the postcolonial context of Kenya and the post-Apartheid context of South Africa. Postcolonial scholar Ania Loomba writes about how "the construction of vast numbers of people as inferior, or 'other,' was crucial for constructing a European 'self' and justifying colonialist practices" (112). She notes that "despite the enormous differences between the colonial enterprises of various European nations, they seem to generate fairly similar stereotypes of 'outsiders'" (114-115). The functioning of colonialism and Apartheid depended on marking entire groups of people as inferior and alien. This construction of the inferior outsider is taken one degree further for colonized women. In the term coined by Kirsten Peterson and Anna Rutherford, colonized women experience a *double colonization*. They are colonized by both Western and male oppressors. In South Africa and Kenya, where *Disgrace* and *Petals of Blood* respectively take place, Western liberal structures and ideals have been imposed on postcolonial states. In Western societies, ideas of liberalism have developed over many centuries. Inequalities still obviously exist in these places, but there remains an illusion that citizens are autonomous and equal. Ostensibly, everyone can vote, buy a home, get an education, and a job. Colonialism and Apartheid expose this illusion for what it is and destabilizes any easy assumption of equality

in postcolonial states. For this reason, imbalances in power in society, and in turn, the problem of consent, are more explicit and visible.

Arguments that it is impossible for women to be autonomous in the context of liberal theory and that female consent cannot be taken at face value are important, but they are also limiting in some ways. It is true that women have historically been dependent on their fathers and husbands. It is true that there are many ways in which consent fails, and that women can be coerced into sex possibly without even realizing it. Yet many women are able to have fulfilling sex and relationships with men. They are able to feel safe, and to choose to have sex with a man because they desire to. Although there are social conditions that construct circumstances where a woman is led to sex with a man who is more powerful and more independent, it is still possible for her to exercise agency in this relationship. This agency does not stem only from her ability to say “yes” or “no” to sex.

The novels that this thesis will examine raise the question of female consent through a number of different social and sexual encounters. Rape is central to the plot of *Disgrace*. David Lurie, the protagonist, is an Afrikaner professor at a university in Cape Town. The plot of the novel is provided through narration from Lurie’s perspective, explaining the motivations, including desire and power, that shape his actions and sexual conquests. He is first introduced as a regular customer to a prostitute, Soraya. Their arrangement swiftly falls apart in the novel, and Lurie comes to be known as a morally suspect professor of romantic literature. He seduces one of his students, Melanie, and once their relationship is discovered, he “falls from grace.” He loses his job and reputation and moves to the East Cape where his daughter, Lucy, lives on a farmhouse, boarding dogs and selling flowers and produce for a living. Eventually, the farmhouse is attacked by three Black young men. They rob the house, rape Lucy, and beat and

burn Lurie. After long and painful journeys of reflection by both Lucy and Lurie, Lurie resigns himself to his new condition. He gets his own place on the Cape, close to Lucy, and spends his days working on an opera about Byron and euthanizing dogs at the local shelter. By looking at David Lurie's relationship with Soraya, the first chapter of this thesis will explore how sexuality is closely connected to human identity and the implications of this on the selfhood of both female prostitutes and male clients. It then looks at Lurie's relationship with Melanie, and the power dynamics at play in their sexual relationship. Finally, it will consider Lucy's rape and the larger social conditions that constituted it as well as the ways that Lucy is able to recover agency in its wake. Each of these sections will analyze the subjective and social elements of sex that complicate the liberal binary between consensual and nonconsensual sex.

Petals of Blood largely revolves around prostitution. The plot of the novel is delivered through flashbacks and written statements of the four protagonists, Munira, Wanja, Karega, and Abdulla, during an investigation of the homicide of three wealthy native Kenyan businessmen, Kimiera, Chui, and Mzigo. This evidence uncovers the postcolonial development of a small village, Ilmorog. The novel writes the experiences of each character and the development of Ilmorog in contrast to the city, Nairobi, as allegory for the history and development of Kenya, but it also represents a personal history of each character filled with hardships and tragedy. All have been directly affected by colonialism, the Mau Mau uprising against British rule, and the rapid and unstable growth of a national bourgeoisie. The four protagonists are drawn to Ilmorog for different reasons, but all are misfits of sorts—outsiders to Ilmorog but not entirely belonging to their places of origin. The second chapter of this thesis will read *Petals of Blood* to further discuss ties between sexuality and identity and how these are underestimated in perceptions of prostitution and in readings of Wanja's body as an allegory of the nation. It will then analyze

Wanja's experience as a prostitute, identifying ways she is coerced into sex as a prostitute, but also ways she is able to exercise agency in her sex work. The chapter will conclude by examining the relationships that Wanja has with Munira and Karega and how she is able to operate freely within them. Through an examination of the sexual relationships in these two novels, this thesis underlines the complexities of human sexuality and the condition of female oppression in patriarchal societies that cannot be accounted for through contractual understandings of consent. Yet, while recognizing the ways that women are typically conditioned to be reactive and submissive to the sexual desires of men, this thesis also finds ways that women are able to construct and realize their own desires and act with agency in sexual relationships.

CHAPTER ONE: RAPE, RACE, AND MALE DOMINATION IN J.M. COETZEE'S *DISGRACE*

J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* demonstrates lived experiences of sex and human sexuality that cannot be understood through liberal theories of consent. The novel explores the boundaries of prostitution, a professor-student relationship, and rape through the downfall of Afrikaner professor, David Lurie. The plot is narrated through Lurie's perspective and his thoughts about his relationships with the female characters, limiting how female consent is depicted. The first section of this chapter will focus on Lurie's relationship with a prostitute, Soraya, arguing that sexuality and identity are too closely connected to be separated in the contracting out of bodily labor. The second section will explore the dynamics at play in Lurie's sexual relationship with his student, Melanie, and evaluates the potential for Melanie to exercise agency in this asymmetrical power dynamic and how liberal ideas of consent cannot fully account for the potential of rape in such a complicated relationship. The third and final section will examine his daughter's, Lucy's, rape and how she still acts with agency in its wake, taking into account the complicated race relations of postapartheid South Africa and the inherent violence of heterosexual sex.

SORAYA: SEX AND PROSTITUTION

The first woman Lurie describes having intercourse with is a prostitute named Soraya. The relationship between Lurie and Soraya shows the dynamics between a female prostitute and a male patron; it is an example of who is benefitting, whose autonomy remains intact, and who is controlling the relationship. When the novel begins, Lurie has been visiting Soraya every Thursday afternoon for over a year. The first line of the novel explains his satisfaction with the

arrangement he has created: “For a man of his age, fifty-one, divorced, he has, to his mind, solved the problem of sex rather well” (1). He describes Soraya to be “not effusive” in bed but “quiet and docile” (1). Lurie “likes giving her presents” and “enjoys her pleasure, which is quite unaffected” (5). After two divorces, Lurie is glad to have found that “ninety minutes a week of a woman’s company are enough to make him happy” (5). The nature of Lurie’s relationship with Soraya is professional although he seems to desire something more. Soraya accepts Lurie’s gifts, but maintains an emotional distance between them. She is not necessarily passive in their relationship. She solicited herself for the job, she has intercourse with Lurie and chats with him, but she is not quite active in the relationship either, as she allows Lurie to initiate and lead their engagements. Soraya is providing a service to Lurie and is expected to do so in the manner tailored to his preferences.

Soraya and Lurie’s arrangement reveals two limits of liberal theories of consent in prostitution. The first is that sex impacts human identity more than the use of the body in other forms of labor. Pateman suggests that what makes the loaning of one’s body in prostitution distinctly different from the loaning of one’s body in other kinds of labor is how closely tied sexuality is to a person’s identity. She argues that masculinity and femininity are sexual identities and that “identity is inseparable from the sexual constructions of the self” (*Sexual Consent* 207). She ultimately insists that the sale of women’s bodies in a capitalist market is distinctly different from the sale of the body of an athlete or the labor of a wage slave because it entails the sale of a self “in a more profound sense” (*Sexual Consent* 207). Pateman believes that selling sex requires a prostitute to offer something beyond what another laborer might have to. In their sex work, women are helping men feel like men. Men pay prostitutes for sex to feel masculine, but this entails the exploitation of a woman’s femininity. Women who are sexed as female are expected

to use their bodies and sexual selves to please the men around them, whether this means behaving sexually around potential partners, partners, or "masters," or behaving virginally around a father or brother. In both cases, their sexuality is controlled by the men whom they are satisfying by conforming to appropriate sexual expectations. Soraya's unaffected pleasure and quiet and docile nature are behaviors that enable and emphasize Lurie's masculine sexuality. She plays the role of the submissive woman so that he can assume the role of a dominant man. Although Soraya is technically only doing a job, playing this role of submission is likely impactful on Soraya's personal identity as she is tapping into her femininity and sexuality. Ann Cahill also explores the connection between identity and sexuality that exists in everyone, but especially in women:

> Subjectivity is also closely linked to a person's sexuality—not only how she or he is sexed, but the various ways he or she engages in sexual behaviour, achieves sexual pleasure, and so forth. Traditionally, of course… because one was sexed female, one was expected to have a certain kind of sexuality and to behave according to certain sexual norms… Women's sexuality was all-encompassing in terms of her being; she was her sexuality and little more. In contemporary theory, of course, the relationship between one's sexedness and one's sexuality is not nearly so clear or distinct… Nevertheless, it must be recognized that whatever the relation to one's sex, one's sexuality is a crucial element of selfhood and being. (69)

The distinction between a prostitute's work and a wage slave's or athlete's becomes clear in Cahill's account. If "one's sexuality is a crucial element of selfhood and being," then selfhood and being are affected in every interaction between prostitute and patron. The same cannot be said for every interaction that occurs between contractual workers and employers.

The connection between identity and sexuality plays into the second reason that contractual understandings of consent are limited in prostitution. Carol Pateman's exploration of the relationship between the female prostitute and male patron is helpful for analyzing Soraya and Lurie's relationship. She explains that the contractarian perspective suggests that prostitution is no different from other forms of employment, and that contracting out your body as a server for an hour is the same as contracting out your body as a prostitute for an hour. Both are forms of employment. For a number of reasons, this understanding of prostitution is flawed. In a patriarchal society where male power is rampant, the commodification of the female body and the roles of dominance and submission that men and women engage in differentiate prostitution from other forms of female employment, even if only by degree.

Prostitutes work to serve the physical needs and desires of men. Pateman describes how they have learned to navigate their relationship with men in their career, fulfilling their physical needs, but refusing an emotional connection typically present in heterosexual romantic relationships, and which some of their customers might be searching for:

> Women engaged in the trade have developed a variety of distancing strategies, or a professional approach, in dealing with their clients. Such distancing creates a problem for men, a problem that can be seen as another variant on the contradiction of mastery and slavery. The prostitution contract enables men to constitute themselves as civil masters for a time, and, like other masters, they wish to obtain acknowledgment of their status…. [Nearly all men complain] about the emotional coldness and mercenary approach of many prostitutes they had had contact with. A master requires a service, but he also requires that the service is delivered by a person, a self, not merely a piece of (disembodied) property (*The Sexual Contract* 207).

The liminal intimate and professional relationship that Pateman discusses characterizes Lurie's relationship with Soraya. Lurie pays Soraya for her services, like most men who buy prostitutes, because "prostitution is part of the exercise of the law of male sex-right, one of the ways in which men are ensured access to women's bodies" (Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* 194). "Men demand that women's bodies are sold as commodities in the capitalist market" (*The Sexual Contract* 194) and prostitution makes this possible. But, as Pateman writes, men want access to women's bodies to exercise their role as master over a woman for a time, not over "merely a piece of (disembodied) property" (*Sexual Contract* 207). In the case of Soraya and Lurie, she maintains an entirely professional relationship. She makes up her face the way that he likes and is somewhat affectionate, but "reveals nothing" (Coetzee 3) of her personal life. Soraya is not necessarily cold or mercenary, but it is apparent that Lurie is using Soraya as a replacement for a more intimate relationship. He describes their arrangement as "entirely satisfactory" (1), but he also "toy[s] with the idea of asking her to see him in her own time. He would like to spend an evening with her, perhaps even a whole night" (2). It is likely that if Lurie asked Soraya to spend an evening of her own time with him, she would refuse. Being with Lurie is her job, what she is paid to do, not something that expects or wants to do in her own time.

The distance Soraya creates between her private life and her profession is eventually broken by Lurie. Once he crosses this boundary, Soraya demonstrates agency by ending their arrangement. Over a weekend, Lurie spots Soraya in the city with two young boys, presumably her sons. Soraya catches his eye as he is staring at them through a window. The next time they meet, "the memory hangs uneasily over them. He has no wish to upset what must be, for Soraya, a precarious double life… But neither he nor she can put aside what has happened. The two little boys become presences between them" (6). Lurie's knowledge of her children, of her life outside

of their hotel room, compromises the division in Soraya's private and work life that she has so carefully cultivated. Soraya stops seeing him. Here, Soraya treats their arrangement as a contract. She revokes her agreement to have sex with Lurie for money. Lurie tries seeing a different prostitute but is not satisfied. His dissatisfaction is additional evidence that he was attached to Soraya as an embodied woman and person, not just as a body to go through the motions of sex with. He "pays a detective agency to track [Soraya] down. Within days he has her real name, her address, her telephone number. He telephones at nine in the morning, when the husband and children will be out" (9). She is taken aback by the call, and after a long silence, "she says 'You are harassing me in my own house. I demand you will never phone me here again, never'" (10). When he hangs up, "a shadow of envy passes over him for the husband he has never seen" (10). Lurie's insistence in contacting Soraya, even after she ended their contract, demonstrates that there is more at stake in prostitution than solely a labor agreement. While Soraya was able to choose to stop letting Lurie use her body, she is not able to stop him from remaining emotionally attached to her. The illusion of mastery he had over Soraya abruptly ends when she stops seeing him, but the agency she is able to garner from their contract also proves somewhat illusory when he continues to force himself into her life.

Theories that understand sex to either be consensual and morally "good" or nonconsensual and morally "bad" do not leave room for the nuances of what can be enjoyable or problematic about sex. In the case of prostitution, Soraya has functionally consented to have sex with Lurie, but this does not mean their intercourse is straightforward. The implications it has on Soraya's personal identity are significant and not accounted for in a theory that understands Soraya as a free agent contracting out the use of her body to Lurie. They both engage in sex for reasons beyond utility. It is not just any job that Lurie needs done, but the affirmation of his

identity as a man. Similarly, Soraya exercises agency by ending their arrangement once he has crossed a boundary and demands that he leave her alone when he pushes even further. Soraya's power here is not directly connected to sexual consent, but is important nevertheless. She is protecting herself and her family from Lurie's aggressive pursuit of her, demonstrating how sexual relationships have consequences that extend beyond only the physical act of sex.

MELANIE: INTERCOURSE OR RAPE?

The entanglement of sexuality and identity is important in the case of prostitution, but it also has impact in larger society. Radical feminists like Pateman and MacKinnon find that in a patriarchal society, "women's sexuality is, socially, a thing to be stolen, sold, bought, bartered, or exchanged by others. But women never own or possess it, and men never treat it, in law or in life, with the solicitude with which they treat property" (MacKinnon, 172). Male control over female sexuality (through stealing, selling, buying, bartering, and exchanging) translates into male control over the female body and self. If a woman's identity is inseparable from her sexuality, and her sexuality is controlled by men around her, then her identity must also be largely controlled by these men. Similarly, if male sexuality is connected to masculinity, it is logical that men might desire to exercise their mastery over women and demand that female bodies be treated as a commodity through prostitution and other methods of subordination. Pateman considers many theories of prostitution: "Prostitution was seen, for example, as a necessary evil that protected young women from rape and shielded marriage and the family from the ravages of men's sexual appetites; or as an unfortunate outcome of poverty and the economic constraints facing women who had to support themselves" (*The Sexual Contract* 190). Although the latter explanation is clearly rooted in reality, the former might seem a bit more far-fetched

and cynical. It is distressing to think that a handful of female prostitutes are positioned to protect other women from the ills of male desire, but, in *Disgrace*, this is exactly what happens.

The novel presents prostitution as an alternative for, or, more troublingly, as a preventive of Lurie's exploits of young women. He had been satisfied with his arrangement with Soraya, but once it falls apart, he aggressively pursues his young student, Melanie, to fulfill his sexual desires. He first runs into her on the street and invites her to his flat for a drink, dinner, and to spend the night. Melanie asks Lurie why she should join him. Lurie responds: "'Because a woman's beauty does not belong to her alone. It is part of the bounty she brings to the world. She has a duty to share it'" (16). Lurie's belief that Melanie and women in general are obligated to share their beauty with the world, or the men around them, falls in line with the male demand of sex workers. This echoes Pateman's suggestion that many men, like Lurie, feel they are entitled to constant access to female bodies. This sense of entitlement manifests in many ways, especially as men grow older. The novel notes that, when Lurie was young, "if he looked at a woman in a certain way, with a certain intent, she would return his look, he could rely on that…. Then one day it all ended. Without warning his powers fled. Glances that would once have responded to his slid over, past, through him. Overnight he became a ghost" (7). When he was young, Lurie's looks granted him free access to the bodies of most women, but once they faded, he was forced to depend on prostitutes and vulnerable young women to fulfill his desires.

Lurie's pursuit of Melanie after the end of his arrangement with Soraya is significant not only because it exemplifies the inappropriate lengths men will go to for contact with a female body. It also raises the question of a male right to desire. A few days after they share a meal at Lurie's flat, he finds her telephone number and asks her to lunch. She is caught off guard and agrees with uncertainty. Picking up on her confusion, he thinks that she is "too young. She will

not know how to deal with him; he ought to let her go. But he is in the grip of something… She does not own herself; perhaps he does not own himself either" (18). Despite his awareness of her immaturity, he proceeds anyway, trusting his instinct that neither Melanie nor he has control or ownership over their actions or selves, and takes her back to his flat after lunch for sex. Lurie seems to believe that his behavior is justified as only the response to an impulse. While there is some validity to this belief, it can often be used to excuse male sexual abuses. The argument against this perception—that rape is a product of overwhelming male, carnal desire—is that rape is a political product of male-dominated culture, and this is equally unaccounted for in liberal theories of consent.

The idea that women and men have ownership over their bodies and minds, and thus can sexually contract themselves out is challenged in the novel through Lurie's lapses in rationality. Liberal theory assumes that we have equal ability to reason and to be autonomous. It is in this individual state of rationality that we are able to choose to enter contracts, but Lurie's passion for Melanie and Melanie's youth cause them both to act confusedly and irrationally. Lurie knows that his actions with Melanie are morally questionable but he justifies himself on the grounds of desire. When Lurie is staying with Lucy she asks Lurie for his explanation of what happened. He tells her "my case rests on the rights of desire" and he thinks "*I was a servant of Eros*" (89). Lurie considers his attacks on Melanie's self and body and finds that his uncontrollable desire for her is what had driven his inappropriate behavior. Hoping to better explain his case, he goes on to tell Lucy an anecdote about a neighborhood dog when she was growing up:

> [The dog] was a male. Whenever there was a bitch in the vicinity it would get excited and unmanageable, and with Pavlovian regularity the owners would beat it. This went on until the poor dog didn't know what to do. At the smell of a bitch it would chase around

> the garden with its ears flat and its tail between its legs, whining, trying to hide… There was something so ignoble in the spectacle that I despaired. One can punish a dog, it seems to me, for an offence like chewing a slipper… But desire is another story. No animal will accept the justice of being punished for following its instincts… the poor dog had begun to hate its own nature. It no longer needed to be beaten. It was ready to punish itself. At that point it would have been better to shoot it (90).

Lurie suggests that being forced to ignore your nature, your desire, is tortuous and inhumane. Through his anecdote, he connects the dog's nature of being in heat to his desire to pursue young and beautiful women like Melanie. He portrays his desire to possess her body to be uncontrollable and all-consuming. It would be inappropriate to excuse rape and other acts of sexual violence on the grounds that men were acting in the grasp of desire, but it is also only human to lose control of your emotions at times and act irrationally.

In her work, Elizabeth Anker discusses the questions that *Disgrace* raises about the effectiveness of the law in determining sexual abuses. Liberal theories of consent assume humans to be rational beings who can reasonably decide for themselves if they would like to have sex and evaluate if their partner(s) would as well. She suggests that the complexity of Lurie's character and the consensually ambiguous sex that occurs in the novel indicate an inadequacy in the way these theories and human rights discourses understand rape. Regarding Lurie's anecdote about the dog, Anker finds Lurie's justification to be self-serving at first, but his appeal also demands an appreciation of the prevalence and naturalness of manifestations of sexual and other forms of desire. She explains that "in *Disgrace*, impulse and the unjustifiable repeatedly overrule rationality and seem to offer more accurate explanations for human motivation" (246). These alternative explanations reveal insufficiencies in the law and in liberal

consent theory, specifically, that they disavow forms of unreason and passion: "By only validating deliberate, agentive actions, the law ostracizes the irrational and impulsive, motivations that equally account for human behavior" (246). These forms of unreason and passion explain many human behaviors, and complicate sexual consent as understood by liberalism, but it is also important to understand the limits of irrationality as an excuse, particularly in relation to sexual violence.

Cahill discusses the belief that men rape "because they find themselves at the mercy of their sexual desires… they find it difficult, if not impossible, to control themselves" (24). In this model, rape is a crime of passion. It happens because men are enthralled by the female body and in turn oblivious to any signs of protest. Under this explanaiton, rape is not a calculated and intentional attack on a woman's body. Cahill raises this belief in the nature of rape in conjunction with the theory of second wave feminist Susan Brownmiller, who believes that the "motivation for rape is not to be found in the goal of sexual satisfaction… it is rather to be discovered in the will to dominate, to degrade, to possess" (24). This line of Brownmiller's argument must be followed with caution, as Cahill also warns, because it can easily undermine real possibilities of agency for women by portraying them to be "*only* acted on and never acting" (25). Yet, Brownmiller's argument persuasively challenges the model of rape as an act of desire and reveals that the male ego is conditioned to dominate in patriarchal society. In the case of Lurie's relationship with Melanie, his motivation is likely derived from both desire and dominance. His mind seems to genuinely be overwhelmed by desire, but part of his obsession with her stems from her vulnerability and immaturity, two characteristics that allow him to be in control: "he is the one who leads, she the one who follows. Let him not forget that" (Coetzee 28). This union of desire and dominance displayed by Lurie might be explained by MacKinnon's theory that

sexuality "is a pervasive dimension of social life… along which gender occurs… Dominance eroticized defines the imperatives of its masculinity, submission eroticized defines its femininity" (130). If masculine sexuality is defined by dominance eroticized, then sexual desire is fulfilled through acts of dominance and force. Lurie is motivated both by his desire and his need to control Melanie because in a male-dominated society, these acts are conditioned to be inseparable.

A closer examination of Lurie and Melanie's sexual encounters raises questions about the lines that separate sex from rape and the role that male domination and desire play in blurring these lines. On the first occasion that they have sex, after he calls and takes her out to lunch, she is extremely passive: "On the living-room floor, to the sound of the rain pattering against the windows, he makes love to her… The girl is lying beneath him, her eyes closed, her hands slack above her head… Averting her face, she frees herself, gathers her things, leaves the room" (19). Melanie is not entirely comfortable being with Lurie and she is not engaged in their intercourse. While her passivity is obvious, the novel does not clearly portray their first sexual encounter as rape. Lurie does not note any feelings of distaste from Melanie (although we are of course not provided her perspective): "he wakes the next morning in a state of profound wellbeing" (19). The context of Lurie as an older man hungry for control over the young woman still stands, but Melanie's consent is taken for granted. A few days later, Lurie has sex with Melanie again when he arrives abruptly at her flat. This time, Melanie verbally resists:

> He has given her no warning; she is too surprised to resist the intruder who thrusts himself upon her. When he takes her in his arms, her limbs crumple like a marionette's… 'No, not now!' she says, struggling… But nothing will stop him. He carries her to the bedroom, brushes off the absurd slippers, kisses her feet, astonished by the feeling she

> evokes… She does not resist. All she does is avert herself: avert her lips, avert her eyes. She lets him lay her out on the bed and undress her: she even helps him, raising her arms and then her hips (24-25).

Lurie leaves Melanie's flat immediately after and sits in his car reflecting on what happened. He believes his attack to be "not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core… [and thinks] at this moment, he has no doubt, she, Melanie, is trying to cleanse herself of it, of him. He sees her running a bath, stepping into the water, eyes closed like a sleepwalker's" (25). This time he is "overtaken with such dejection, such dullness" (25) afterward. He feels that he made "a mistake, a huge mistake" (25). The main difference between the first and second episode of sex is Melanie's cry of resistance, but the episodes provoke different reactions from Lurie. After the second, more suspect sexual interaction, the first also appears more perverse.

The difficulty of separating rape and sex stems from a multitude of problems, one of which is the effort that a man might make in understanding a woman's behavior. David Archard engages with this question by contrasting instances of negligent and reckless behavior. He describes negligence as when "one acts negligently in not taking the precautions that a reasonable person should" and recklessness as when one is "deliberately taking risks one ought not to" (*Sexual Consent* 143). A man can rape a woman both when he is acting negligently and recklessly, and the harm caused does not differ. But these terms are useful for determining what a man's intentions were, or at least the extent, of his responsibility. It would seem appropriate to consider the first sex that Lurie has with Melanie as an example of negligent behavior. He did not have any malicious intentions, but he also did not take the precautions that a reasonable person would have to ensure that Melanie was comfortable and eager to have sex with him. The second sexual encounter might be described as an example of reckless behavior. Abruptly showing up at

Melanie's flat and pushing himself on her is deliberate risk-taking. Although Lurie's ability to reason is questionable due to his state of passion, his act of getting into a car and driving to her house suggests otherwise. It is not that Lurie was with Melanie and suddenly overcome by a wave of desire. His actions required intent and consideration. The difference in negligence and recklessness separate Lurie's instances of intercourse with Melanie, and sex from rape more generally in many rape cases. Negligence is most familiar as the defense that a man truly believed the woman had consented. However, Archard also qualifies this excuse: "the nature of any sexual encounter is such that it is hard normally to miss signs of non-consent. A lack of consent insinuates into a person's behaviour, is worn on her body" (*Sexual Consent* 144). Melanie's passivity during the first time that they had sex does not translate into consent. She wears repulsion on her body, but Lurie gives no attention to her signs.

One way such negligence might be avoided is by understanding one of the nuances that separates sex from other forms of relationships or physical activities: it is done *together*. Archard explains that sex "is a joint enterprise… It is not so much a case of John doing things to Mary just as Mary does things to John but rather one of John having sex *with* Mary (and conversely Mary having sex *with* John)" ("Sexual Consent" 176). When Lurie brings Melanie back to his flat, and "on the living room floor… he makes love to her" where "she is passive throughout" (19), there is no evidence that Melanie had sex *with* Lurie; it seems that he had sex *to* her. Following this logic, it might not be accurate to label any of the sex between Melanie and Lurie as consensual and both encounters might be understood as rape. In her work, MacKinnon wonders if "perhaps the wrong of rape has proved so difficult to define because the unquestionable starting point has been that rape is defined as distinct from intercourse, while for women it is difficult to distinguish the two under conditions of male dominance" (174). Melanie

and Lurie's sex exemplifies that rape and intercourse are difficult to separate under conditions of male dominance, but this it not only true for women themselves. Lurie grapples with and is confused by his own actions. He did not mean to rape Melanie, but he also falls victim to the social construction of men as sexually dominant and women as sexually passive. Liberal theories of consent do not consider the consequences of male domination on both feminine and masculine sexualities. They can make rape appear to be intercourse and intercourse appear to be rape, confusing and harming both men and women when consent is the only tool available for distinguishing the two. An agreement to have sex cannot be formed through contract, since that depends on the equality of its participants, when sex is frequently conducted under the circumstances of inequality between men and women.

LUCY: RAPE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Another woman whose sexuality and sexual encounter(s) are described in the novel is Lurie's daughter, Lucy. Lucy is positioned as a somewhat asexual character. Described by her father as "a solid countrywoman" (60) and "sturdy young settler (61), Lucy is a single, young woman living in an empty farmhouse, once a commune in Eastern South Africa. She makes her living boarding dogs on her farm and selling flowers and garden produce. For a time, she lived in the farmhouse with her partner Helen, but evidently, after a falling out of sorts, Helen moved to Johannesburg, leaving Lucy alone. When Lurie is staying with Lucy, after his departure from the University of Cape Town due to his sexual relationship with Melanie, the farmhouse is attacked. Lucy is violently raped and Lurie is beaten, set on fire, and locked in the bathroom. Lucy's rape leads her to reflect on both the social structures of racism in South Africa and the inherent violence in heterosexual sex that affect her own sexuality. She demonstrates that sex and sexual

consent is not only an individual and private matter, between two persons, but a social one influenced by many factors not considered by liberal consent theories of sex.

Grant Farred, writing about the history and post-Apartheid state of South Africa, describes South Africa, specifically the Eastern Cape, as a border "where the Orient and the Occident collide, where the colonizer and the colonized first encounter each other" (Farred 16). Farred explains that the "Eastern Cape has played host to struggles against colonial incursion, struggles over livestock, over boundaries, over control of the land" (Farred 17). The context that he provides of the Eastern Cape as a borderline is important to a reading of *Disgrace*. Another border marked by the Eastern Cape, or the frontier as Farred calls it, is a border between present, past, and future. It is where tradition lies but also new beginnings: "the slow dying and recasting of liberal virtues, the birth of the black landowning class" (Farred 18). The borders that converge on the Eastern Cape surround Lucy's rape with sociopolitical tensions. The raping of a white woman by Black men would cause anxieties in any place, but it is especially charged in a place caught in balance between tradition and change and fraught with racism, sexism, and violence. Elizabeth Thornberry discusses the specific history of rape in South Africa. This history is shaped by "the phenomenon of 'black peril,' a series of public scares about the sexual assault of white women by black men that swept through the country from the 1870s through the 1920s… public discourses extrapolated individual incidents of interracial rape (real and imagined) into an existential threat to white South African womanhood" (19). She explains that discourses of black peril shaped racial politics in South Africa to justify "a range of segregationist policies… [as] the figure of black rapist looms large in discussions about crime, often justifying a covert nostalgia for the apartheid era" (19). It is important, however, to note that these panics were characterized by disproportionate fear against the actual number of reports and incidents.

The racial politics of South Africa influence Lucy's reaction to her rape. Lucy is shaken by the encounter and falls into a depression: she "keeps to herself, expresses no feelings, shows no interest in anything around her… Lucy spends hour after hour lying on her bed, staring into space or looking at old magazines, of which she seems to have an unlimited store. She flicks through them impatiently, as though searching for something that is not there" (114). Lucy reports to the police the shot dogs, the stolen car, and the other valuables that were taken during the attack, but she does not mention the rape. Lurie is taken aback by this; he intensely wants justice to be served for the rape of his daughter. Many times, he expresses his desire for Lucy to report it to the police, but each time Lucy pushes back. She explains to Lurie:

> this has nothing to do with you, David. You want to know why I have not laid a particular charge with the police. I will tell you, as long as you agree not to raise the subject again. The reason is that, as far as I am concerned, what happened to me is a purely private matter. In another time, in another place it might be held to be a public matter. But in this place, at this time, it is not. It is my business, mine alone (112).

Through this reasoning, Lucy garners agency by claiming the rape as a private matter. She centers it around herself as an individual, but also sees what happened to her to be larger than a singular attack, since it happened "at this place, at this time" (112). She suggests that in another time, another place, she might have reported the rape to the police, but in the context of post-Apartheid South Africa, she is aware that the reporting of the rape would contribute to panics and a historical stigma of African men as dangerous.

Farred asks: "How does the white woman's violations measure up against the black man's historic disenfranchisements? What purchase does a white woman's rape have when the perpetrator is an unemployable, black male youth?" (18) These questions are ones Lucy herself

seems to consider, and the conclusions that she arrives at lead her to refuse to report what happened to her. Lucy comes to view her rape as a symptom of Apartheid and the anxious state of post-Apartheid South Africa, recognizing her rapists to be the "unemployable, black male youth" that Farred writes of. She is terrified by them and explains that she thinks "they have done it before… At least the two older ones have. [She thinks] they are rapists first and foremost. Stealing things is just incidental" (158). The emotions of sympathy and fear she experiences collide into a confusing and disturbing mix of guilt, horror, and acceptance. Lucy tells her father that the rape "was so personal… It was done with personal hatred… The shock simply doesn't go away. The shock of being hated, I mean. In the act" (156). To Lucy, her rapists did not feel like the seemingly random men that they were. She felt that they hated her, whom they had never met before, for something that she had personally done. As she reflects more in her conversation with Lurie, she asks: "what if *that* is the price one has to pay for staying on? Perhaps that is how they look at it: perhaps that is how I should look at it too. They see me as owing something. They see themselves as debt collectors, tax collectors. Why should I be allowed to live here without paying? Perhaps that is what they tell themselves" (158). Lucy relates the exploitation of her sexuality, of her body, as reparations for the exploitation of the people and the land of South Africa. Although she is scarred by what happened to her, Lucy knows that "any individualized attention to the trauma experienced by the victim would serve as fodder for generalizing racist assumptions" (Anker 75) and that "her empowerment through legal reparation would inevitably play itself out in her representation of 'others'" (Anker 76). Because she wants nothing to do with the furthering of racist ideologies in South Africa, she keeps her rape to herself.

In the wake of the attack Lurie reflects on the post-Apartheid politics in South Africa that have made violence all too common. The failures of capitalism and the evils of colonialism have left South Africa and men like those who raped Lucy in poverty. He thinks:

> A risk to own anything: a car, a pair of shoes, a packet of cigarettes. Not enough to go around, not enough cars, shoes, cigarettes. Too many people, too few things. What there is must go into circulation, so that everyone can have a chance to be happy for a day… Not human evil, just a vast circulatory system, to whose workings pity and terror are irrelevant. That is how one must see life in this country: in its schematic aspect. Otherwise one could go mad. Cars, shoes, women too. There must be some niche in the system for women and what happens to them (98).

Lurie's thoughts are less directly connected to colonialism than Lucy's. He seems to also be getting to an idea related to reparations but is less perceptive about the specific implications that Apartheid has had on the lives and material needs of black South Africans. Lurie finds that all of South Africa is engaging in this "vast circulatory" system. The commodification of female bodies becomes apparent in his reflections. Lucy views her rape as the payment of a debt. Because colonizers exploit/ed African land, Africans can now exploit female colonizer bodies. She feels personally connected to the past of South Africa and is aware of the implications of her living in a postapartheid state. Lurie's conclusion is less specifically concerned with Lucy's person and her connections to present and past South Africa. He views Lucy and female bodies in general as merely another commodity to be passed around. Like cars, shoes, cigarettes, Lurie finds that the female body is something that every man wants ownership of, even if it is only temporary.

By not reporting her rape, Lucy does more than display sympathy for her attackers and an understanding of South African politics. Lucy prohibits the men around her, namely Lurie, from obtaining control of her body, emotions, reactions, and life in the wake of her rape. As her father, Lurie becomes attached to the idea of retribution and takes her resistance personally. Lurie assumes that Lucy "would rather hide her face [than report the rape]… Because of the disgrace" (115). This male reduction of Lucy's reactions to her rape is damaging. It is possible that Lucy harbors feelings of disgrace, guilt, or shame around her assault, but it is also unreasonable for Lurie to believe that Lucy is unable to experience feelings beyond those he identifies. Lucy proves herself to be a complex and intuitive woman who understands and is closely tied to the world around her. Her disgrace, guilt, shame, and even fear does not keep her from carefully examining the circumstance she finds herself in. Lucy states to Lurie that "what happened to [her] is [her] business, [hers] alone, not [Lurie's], and if there is one right [she has] it is the right not to be put on trial like this, not to have to justify [herself]—not to [him], not to anyone else" (133). In this statement, Lucy claims her rape, her future, and her thoughts and feelings as her own. Her body has already been invaded by the men who raped her, but she refuses to allow any further male intrusions. She demonstrates that sexual agency does not only come from sexual consent. She does not consent to have sex with any of the men who broke in, but they rape her anyway, curtailing her agency. Yet, she is able to protect her sexuality and control the intimate and traumatic details of what happened to her. Sex is more than just a singular act, and there are ways to control how it affects us beyond consent in the immediate moment.

Lucy's queerness further contributes to her resistance of male control over her sexuality. Through his descriptions of Lucy's appearance, Lurie makes clear that Lucy does not attempt to please men physically, although with the body of a woman she still might still do so: "A woman

in the flower of her years, attractive despite the heaviness, despite the unflattering clothes" (76). Lucy interacts with many men—Petrus, Ettinger, Bill Shaw—but these relationships are clearly platonic. These men largely act as father or brother figures in her life. There is no underlying sexual tension or possibility that exists. Lucy's sexual isolation from men is consequential in many ways; it prevents her from having a male partner who might own and defend her land, but it also protects her from potentially being sexually exploited or manipulated by a male partner and it gives her nearly complete independence. In Lurie's opinion, Lucy's sexuality places her in a more vulnerable position when she, like nearly every woman, is verbally, sexually, or physically threatened or invaded by a man. The morning after the attack, Lurie ponders the event of rape, the ever-present threat that men pose to women. Lurie "wonders whether women would not be happier living in communities of women," then thinks "perhaps that is all that lesbians are: Women who have no need of men. No wonder they are so vehement against rape, she and Helen… Raping a lesbian worse than raping a virgin: more of a blow" (105). Lurie's thoughts are naive. He believes that because of a woman's sexual preference, rape might be a worse or better experience, that the crime is less horrific if a woman prefers and is used to penetration. Lucy explains to Lurie, in her own words, the way that her sexual orientation has affected her perception of heterosexual sex even outside of rape:

> When it comes to men and sex, David, nothing surprises me any more. Maybe, for men, hating the woman makes sex more exciting. You are a man, you ought to know. When you have sex with someone strange—when you trap her, hold her down, get her under you, put all your weight on her—isn't it a bit like killing? Pushing the knife in; exiting afterwards, leaving the body behind covered in blood—doesn't it feel like murder, like getting away with murder? (158).

In relating sex to murder, Lucy highlights the violence that is inherent in heterosexual sex. The man "holds down" the woman and "puts all of his weight on her," "pushes in" and "leaves the body behind." The language that Lucy uses closely mirrors that used in describing the first time that Lurie and Melanie engage in sexual activity.

In Lucy's example, she specifies that she is speaking of sex done to "someone strange," that the man might even hate the woman and that is what makes it exciting and pleasurable for him. In her work, Catherine MacKinnon essentially agrees with Lucy's suggestion, that sex where the man "hates" the woman is violent but goes further to claim that heterosexual sex in general is inherently violent. MacKinnon writes that "the law, speaking generally, defines rape as intercourse with force or coercion and without consent. Like sexuality under male supremacy, this definition assumes the sadomasochistic definition of sex: intercourse with force or coercion can be or become consensual" (172). She points out that violence and consent are not mutually exclusive. As explained in the section on Melanie, because of the sexual roles of male dominance and female submission, rape typically involves force and/or coercion and lacks consent, but it is also possible for consensual sex to involve force and/or coercion. Lucy seems to be getting at the same idea. She would likely not consent to any sex with any man, violent or not, but it is insinuated that she has had penetrative sex with a man at some point in her life. The space she has given herself from heterosexual intercourse, interrupted by her violent rape, leads her to relate these instances to each other, the past with the present. She sees what is the same; the holding down, the pushing in, the trapping.

While politics affect sex everywhere—who can have it, who is desirable, etc.—the hyper-racialized and gendered conditions of post-Apartheid South Africa shape sexual encounters aggressively. Sex is not just about desire and consent, but about power dynamics,

race and gender, property, history, and so much more. Examining sexuality and motivations for sex on an individual level is necessary to understand what makes a sexual relationship healthy and fulfilling, but our individual experiences are also shaped by larger social structures. Lucy finds that her rape was a product of the history of apartheid and the violence that exists in heterosexual sex. Social influences like these don't fit neatly into a contract. In liberal theories, for a woman to truly consent as a reasonable and autonomous being, she would have to transcend oppressive social structures, and this is unrealistic. In *Disgrace*, Soraya, Melanie, and Lucy struggle under male dominance. Even though Lucy is able to act with agency by not reporting her rape, not allowing Lurie to control her narrative, and insisting on staying on at the farmhouse, and Soraya by ending her contract with Lurie, men still dominate all three women. In the next chapter on *Petals of Blood*, an analysis of Wanja will exemplify how women, like Lucy, can have mobility and resist male dominance in sex beyond consent, or even find sex enjoyable and fulfilling under these conditions.

CHAPTER TWO: AGENCY UNDER PATRIARCHY IN NGŨGĨ WA THIONG'O'S *PETALS OF BLOOD*

Liberal views of sexual consent as a contract between two free agents are explored and further interrogated in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*. *Disgrace* tells the story of David Lurie and three different women that he has relationships with. The events of the novel are described almost entirely from Lurie's perspective, leaving only the actions of the female characters and some external dialogue through which to interpret the question of sexual consent. Conversely, *Petals of Blood* focuses on the sexual experiences of one woman, Wanja. Wanja is one of four main characters who describe their own histories, feelings, and motivations, so she is able to explain herself the complexities of her sexuality and the nature of her sexual encounters. This narrative, focused from her perspective, is essential in reinforcing that consent is an inadequate concept through which to evaluate sexual relationships and to understand how capitalism and patriarchy manipulate female sexuality both individually and socially. Wanja herself does not seem to have a clear sense whether she consents to sex or not in some situations. She also speaks of her awareness of the power she can have over men. In prostitution and in her private life, Wanja uses her body and sexuality to get what she needs from the men around her. This is a facet of sex that none of the women were able to describe in *Disgrace* and that illustrates the complexities of female sexuality. This chapter will first examine the ways that Wanja's sexuality is central to her identity and how this is not acknowledged in allegorical readings of her as a symbol for Kenya. It will go on to look closely at Wanja's sex work and the ways she is sexually exploited, but also examine ways she is still able to exercise agency. Finally, this chapter will evaluate Wanja's relationships with two of the male protagonists, Munira and Karega, and identify the ways that Wanja is able to act as a free agent in them.

SEX AND SUBJECTIVITY

Wanja is a beautiful woman whom men are generally attracted to. Her first sexual relationship occurs when she is a young girl with an older man who is friends with her father. She eventually becomes impregnated by him and, overcome with shame, runs away from her parents' village to live with a cousin in the city. She gives birth to her baby but discards it in a latrine and becomes a barmaid-cum-prostitute. She works as a barmaid for many years, until she moves in with her grandmother in Ilmorog, where she hopes to become pregnant again so she can be a mother. Here, she becomes close with Abdulla, Munira, and Karega. She helps Abdulla run his bar, without engaging in prostitution, and eventually, they create a successful brewery of their own. As Ilmorog develops, land and businesses are bought up by the national bourgeoisie and filled with various tourist attractions. When Wanja and Abdulla lose their brewery to the capitalist class and her grandmother dies, Wanja opens her own brothel. The novel ends when Wanja's brothel is burned down and she is impregnated by Abdulla. Their union also marks the end of Wanja's career in sex work. In Wanja's storyline, her sexual relationships with men are typically pursued with intentions outside of physical desire—for money, for revenge, or for power—but they still seriously impact her sexuality and identity. The previous chapter of this thesis had addressed the subjective experience of sex, specifically in relation to prostitution. The connection of human sexuality and identity is so profound that the use of one's sexuality in prostitution cannot be separated from the embodied person, as other instances of the body and contractual labor can be. In *Petals of Blood*, Wanja describes explicitly the ways her own sexuality is tied to her subjectivity and identity. She does this not in reference to the sex she has as a prostitute, but to the moments leading up to it. Being able to draw on male desire for a living

impacts her identity in a way that success in other forms of labor does not. This exemplifies how contractual theories of consent are not only limited in their understandings of sex, but of sexuality and its links with identity.

When discussing her work as a prostitute and sex in general, Wanja often describes the power she knows she holds over men. She enjoys the sense she is sexually desired and the lengths that men will go to to realize their fantasies about her. When Munira and Abdulla ask about her life as a barmaid in the city before she moved to Ilmorog, a job that also entails sleeping with customers, she explains, "for a woman, anyway, it is a good feeling when a thousand eyes turn toward you and you feel that it is your body that is giving orders to all those hearts" (156). She remembers with excitement moving to work at a new bar, where men " treat you as if you were a virgin. They will outdo one another to buy you beers. Each wants to be the first" (155). The pleasure that Wanja feels from being sexually desired is distinct from how other laborers might feel for being praised at doing their jobs, which reinforces the point in the previous chapter about Soraya—that sexuality is too closely connected to identity to be seen as mere contractual labor. Wanja desires male eyes on her body because her sexuality is part of her identity. These men who are eager to sleep with her validate Wanja as a sexual being. In other forms of labor, workers might feel pleased when they notice they are being admired or hired because they are physically attractive, but sexual access to their bodies is not an integral part of the job, and they have the right to refuse these sorts of advances (whether that right is observed or not is another question). Wanja shares many of the adversities faced by barmaids, one being that at night "you are supposed to give them yourself and sighs in bed" (90). Again, she describes the experience of prostitution as one that impacts her personhood. She feels she is giving herself to the men she sleeps with, not just giving them the use of her body.

Although Wanja enjoys male admiration, she has ambivalent feelings about the power she holds over men. She knows she can manipulate their desire and how all-consuming that desire may be, but still finds that this is not necessarily fulfilling and that she might have less control over them than she believes. The contradictions and complexities of Wanja's understanding of her sexuality are reflected in her discomfort with sex work. Wanja ponders these feelings and doubts one evening while she is tending to Abdulla's bar and hoping to sleep with Munira:

> She was somehow sure of her power over men: she knew how they could be very weak before her body. Sometimes she was afraid of this power and she often had wanted to run away from bar kingdoms. But she was not really fit for much else and besides, she thought with a shuddering pain of recognition, she had come to enjoy… turn[ing] a man into a captive and a sighing fool. Still in her sober moments of reflection and self appraisal, she had longed for peace and harmony within: for those titillating minutes of instant victory and glory often left behind an emptiness, a void that could only be filled by yet more palliatives of instant conquest. Struggling in the depths of such a void and emptiness, she would then suddenly become aware that in the long run it was men who triumphed and walked over her body (67).

Wanja finds that her control over the men around her is fleeting. Empowering in the moment, it leaves her with a feeling of exploitation in general. This paradox is something that cannot be accounted for by theories of contract or consent. The experience of human sexuality is unstable. Something might feel right one day and entirely wrong the next. A contract is an agreement to understood and fixed terms, but Wanja exemplifies how her experience of sexuality is fluid. Rhéa Jean makes a similar case against a contractual reading of sex work. She argues that "the duty, the pragmatism and the subordination that we find in [normal] work" is not compatible

with sex (62). She believes that "we have managed to define sex and sexuality as a human dimension in which we express our identity and as something we should liberate from personal and institutional oppression" (62). In the moments where Wanja captivates the men around her and turns them into sighing fools, she is wrapped up in her conquest. She feels the weakness of the men around her and feels sure of herself and the power of her sexuality. It is in her moments of reflection, after the men have gone, that she feels how fleeting her mastery is. She is confronted by the ways that her profession shapes her sexuality and subjugates her, with all of the elements of work that Rhéa Jean mentions: duty, pragmatism, and subordination. This makes her uncomfortable with her profession, as she can feel the ways it is oppressive to her sexuality and how it is the men who truly exercise power over her.

The specificity of Wanja's subjectivity in her work as a prostitute is also overlooked in existing criticism on *Petals of Blood*, where Wanja's character is typically discussed through Ngũgĩ's allegorization of Wanja as a symbol of the nation-state. Wanja symbolizes the trials and tribulations of Kenya and is a representation of female African tropes. These readings revolve around Wanja's prostitution (or sexual exploitation) as an allegory for the colonial exploitation of Kenya, and on Marxist lines, the capitalist exploitation of the worker: Karega, Ngũgĩ's symbol of the revolutionary Marxist leader, explains in the novel that "we are all prostitutes, for in a world of grab and take, in a world built on a structure of inequality and injustice… we are all prostituted" (286). This understanding of sex work, like that of the contractarians, perceives it to be contractual labor equivalent to that of a wage slave. While Wanja as an allegorical figure is valuable in reading the development of Kenyan national identity in the novel, it equates her sex work to that of other forms of labor and reduces the subjective experience of Wanja's sexuality and its particularities. Florence Stratton makes the case that "Ngũgĩ's Wanja enacts through her

story the postcolonial history of the nation…. Her condition… serves as an index of the state of the nation" (Stratton 119). Her success as a schoolgirl parallels the resistance of the Mau Mau to British colonialism. She drops out of school when she is seduced and impregnated by Kimiera, symbolizing the defeat of the Mau Mau, a militant nationalist movement in Kenya that resisted British control in the 1950s. Stratton argues that this marks the "the end of a period of national optimism, the abandonment of a hope that the new nation would be founded on socialist principles of distributive justice" (119). Wanja goes on to be sexually exploited by the national bourgeoisie and, when she turns to Ilmorog in hopes of a fresh start, she adopts the 'eat or you are eaten' ideology of her capitalist oppressors by opening her own brothel. Here, Stratton argues, "Ngũgĩ makes explicit the analogy between prostitute and national degradation" (119). Stratton goes on to argue that Wanja eventually becomes more connected to the land by farming with her grandmother, and becomes pregnant again with her final lover, a Mau Mau hero, Abdulla, signifying "the regeneration of potency in the struggle for freedom from oppression and exploitation in present-day Kenya" (120). Stratton also suggests that Wanja embodies the African tropes of both the "fecund, nurturing mother" and "nubile and erotic" whore (113).

Of all of the characters in the novel, it is no surprise that Wanja's body is the one allegorized, for two reasons. First, she is allegorized because of the postcolonial feminist argument that women under colonization are doubly colonized. Both women and men are oppressed under Western colonialism, but women alone are simultaneously colonized by patriarchy and by foreign and native men alike. As Kirsten Petersen and Anna Rutherford explain, colonization forced "the ethos of the colonies as a predominantly male domain, both in reality and in the popular imagination which was both formed by the myths and in turn shaped reality" (9). The colonial world was a man's world "celebrated in a series of male-oriented

myths: mateship, the mounties, explorers, freedom fighters, bushrangers, missionaries. At a later stage, the same skills were used to overthrow colonialism" (9). In turn, they argue that colonized women, who could not escape the colonial world, were effectively assuming a place "denied in the imagination" (9). Their lives and stories were left to the powerful men around them, both native and foreign. Thus, Wanja serves as a perfect allegory for the colonization of Kenya as she is colonized by men throughout the novel and she, like many colonized women, has been stripped of nearly all expression of her individual identity. Stratton sees this as a weakness in the novel, and further suggests that Ngũgĩ's allegorization and troping of Wanja "elaborates a gendered theory of nationhood and of writing, one that excludes women from the creative production of the national polity, of identity, and of literary texts. Instead, woman herself is produced or constructed by the male writer as an embodiment of his literary/political vision" (122). Although it is Ngũgĩ's writing of Wanja that depicts her experience in prostitution and her sexuality as subjective and fluid, readings of her as only a symbol of Kenya over-simplifies her sexual affairs.

The second reason for Wanja's allegorization is that the parallels drawn between the exploitation of Kenya and Wanja's life revolve around the sexual exploitation and use of her body and, in turn, Ngũgĩ's perception of the exploitation of Kenya by the national bourgeoisie. As a prostitute, Wanja's customers are Kenyan men, as she "could never bring [herself] to go with a white man" (Ngũgĩ 157), symbolizing Frantz Fanon's critique of the national bourgeoisie who "on a psychological level… identifies with the Western bourgeoisie from which it has slurped every lesson" (72). Stratton takes issue with this allegory because "prostitution is not treated as a woman's issue. Rather it is a metaphor for men's degradation" (124). Stratton's critique of Ngũgĩ's appropriation of the abuse of female sexuality as a metaphor for colonialism

implies that there is a difference in these forms of exploitation. As argued earlier, the self is tied closely to sexuality and sexual exploitation is therefore a distinct category. The uses and abuses of sexuality have a powerful impact on a person, possibly greater than other forms of abuse. For this reason, the mapping of Wanja's individual sexual exploitation onto the symbol of the exploitation of Kenya by both colonial and native powers robs her of her subjective experience. The reading of Wanja as an allegory of the nation is persuasive and the similarities between British colonialism and the adversity that Wanja face are certainly marked in the novel, but it is also important to examine Wanja and the sexual exploitation of her character as a particular, gendered experience.

AGENCY AND COERCION IN PROSTITUTION

In *Petals of Blood*, Wanja is coerced into sex in both her private life and in her work as a prostitute. Here, coercion means that she agrees to have sex—she technically consents—but it is not realistically possible for her to refuse. There are many pressures and motivations outside of desire and pleasure that push her to have intercourse with men. In her private life, these influences are obvious, but as a sex worker they are disguised by an appearance of free will through consent. Yet, in these conditions, Wanja is still able to garner some agency and benefit whether it be financially, circumstantially, or materially.

Wanja is coerced by a wealthy, British-sympathizing friend of her father's when she is a young girl and again when she is a grown woman. Wanja explains that this "big man" (46), Kimiera, moved into her village and she "was drawn to him from the very first time I saw him in his bus acting as conductor" (46). He would buy her floral dresses and take her to the Royal Cinema in the city, and "whenever he came to visit [her family]... his visit was always a sign

between [them] that he wanted to see [her] the following afternoon" (47). Eventually Wanja is impregnated by him and their relationship abruptly ends as she drops out of school and flees to live with her cousin in the city. In this example, Kimiera takes advantage of Wanja's naivete and her young age, much as Lurie does Melanie. He buys her gifts and gives her special attention to sexually exploit her. Their relationship is technically consensual, but because of his age and his status, Wanja is drawn to his power as a sort of captive rather than a free agent. Yet, she also has interest in him and effectively acts on this desire by allowing him to take her out and by having sex with him. She benefits from the money he spends on her, and the trips into the city that they take together. She enjoys them as they make her feel like "a cousin of [hers] who had gone to the city a long time back" (46-47).

The second time Kimiera coerces Wanja into sex occurs when a delegation from Ilmorog travels to Nairobi, the city, to ask their Member of Parliament for aid during the drought. Wanja and a number of others end up trapped in Kimiera's house when they approach him for a place to stay and some food and water. Kimiera is bitter that Wanja had left him after becoming pregnant when she was young and asks, "why did you run away from me?" (185). Wanja ignores his question and asks for him to let them go in peace, he exclaims: "You are a witch, do you know that? My witch. Will you, will you come back to me? I can give you a nice little flat in the city centre" (185). Wanja refuses and Kimiera spitefully says: "I shall not let you go until you have lain, legs spread, on that bed. Remember you are no longer a virgin. Think about it. The choice is yours to make, and freedom is mine to withhold or give" (186). Wanja deliberates— "what shall I do? What shall I do? Face another humiliation?" (187)—and ultimately decides to have sex with him for the sake of the delegation. Kimiera presents Wanja with a choice, which typically implies agency, but he knows that realistically she has no choice over the circumstance.

Kimiera's manipulation of Wanja is clear, as well as the fact that sex is unwanted by her. Again, she technically consents to intercourse, but if she does not, Kimiera has threatened to keep her and those she cares about locked up, and the delegation will not be able to reach their MP. Wanja has little agency here as she is positioned to be reactive to Kimiera's wishes and desires. Although she benefits by her and her friends being freed, Kimiera has forced her into this situation to begin with, so the sex is coercive.

The coercion that occurs in Wanja's sex work is not as obvious as her encounters with Kimiera. The agency she possesses in her choice to be a prostitute and the money she is paid overshadows the constraints and external influences on her life. Scholarship on prostitution discusses the rights and wrongs of prostitution and tries to determine the agency available to prostitutes by examining opposing sides of the debate, often referred to as the radical feminist versus the pro-sex work positions. Essentially, abolitionist (radical) feminists are preoccupied with the fact that female sexuality is coerced in prostitution. They believe that the *possibility* for women to exercise agency in prostitution is slim to none. They argue that a prostitute's consent is a survival strategy rather than an example of sexual agency. Conversely, pro-sex work theorists focus only on the agent's mental *capability* for agency. They fear that abolitionist feminists undermine and dismiss whatever agency a prostitute might have, and, in turn, they focus on the choices that prostitutes are able to make. They believe women should be trusted if she says she truly wants to be a prostitute and have sex with a customer, but they pay little attention to the circumstances that might motivate such a decision. Rhéa Jean uses aspects of both perspectives to argue that separating sexuality from the work sphere is necessary for "ensuring that women can have control of their sexuality and not be forced to comply with sexual duties generally dictated by men's demand" (53). She believes that agency hinges on both the capability of a

person to reason and act with agency and the possibility for them to exercise that agency. She finds that women "can show agency by making rational choices, but if we live in an oppressive social context, it becomes particularly hard to exercise this agency" (57). Rhéa Jean's argument helps us to consider the agency available to Wanja. She finds that "what makes a prostituted woman a 'passive object in male sexual practice' or a person who is 'coerced'" (55), as abolitionist feminists suggest and pro-sex worker theorists argue against, "is not her incapability of making rational decisions, but the context of prostitution itself, which represents a threat to her agency… a context of sexual commodification, sexism and lack of alternatives for women that makes them more likely to 'consent' to unwanted sex for money" (55). What is troubling about Wanja's circumstance is not necessarily her ability to consent during the moment of sex. While she technically can choose to say yes to sex with a client or her employer, whether out of physical desire or to protect her job, she can't feasibly say no, even if she literally consents to the sexual encounter. For this reason, consent is not always meaningful. Rhéa Jean, however, agrees with the pro-sex work view that sex workers are entirely capable of exercising agency. However, she also takes seriously the abolitionist argument that prostitutes are not free agents, that their bodies are influenced by circumstances out of their control. This thesis likewise makes an argument that incorporates both pro-sex work and radical feminist views, recognizing the complex situation of prostitution, but also appreciating that prostitutes can still exercise agency within social constraints.

For most of the novel, Wanja works as a prostitute. Although in *Disgrace* there is little background given about what brought Soraya to her job, *Petals of Blood* explains in detail how Wanja goes from being an ambitious schoolgirl to a sex worker. It is clear that Wanja first arrives at prostitution not out of desire but necessity. Wanja becomes a barmaid when she runs away

from home to live with her cousin in Eastleigh, a neighborhood in Nairobi. She tells Abdulla and Munira that her cousin "tried to make [her] face the reality [she] had chosen. And yet had [she] chosen it? … [She had] tried [her] hands at various jobs, but work in bars seems to be the one readily available to girls—dropouts from school and CPE failures and even some dropouts from high schools" (48). In *Petals of Blood*, being a barmaid also frequently entails being a prostitute.

The question of choice that Wanja raises when she asks herself, "yet had I chosen it?" (48), is the first time the problem of consent and coercion in prostitution is staged. Can the sex that Wanja has as a prostitute-cum-barmaid truly be consensual when she takes the job not because she wants to, but because it was the only job readily available to women in her circumstance? Should the economic coercion surrounding prostitution lead us to believe that prostitutes are unable to exercise agency or choice in their profession? David Archard engages with the problem of choice in prostitution and wonders if prostitutes are free agents. He identifies two places where the possibility of a prostitute's agency is limited. The first is the freedom of choice to become a prostitute, the other is the freedom of choice one has as a prostitute. Archard explains that some women (like Wanja) may enter prostitution in moments of crisis and out of dire economic necessity or have backgrounds of abuse and deprivation that drive them to it. He goes on to point out that once women have entered prostitution, they are also in danger of being "forced by their pimps into sexual activities in which they otherwise would not engage" (*Sexual Consent* 106), or that they might "find themselves trapped within a vicious cycle of prostitution" (*Sexual Consent* 106). With essentially no worker protections, she might be asked and/or forced to engage in any sort of sexual act for any person. Julia Davidson presents a similar argument, that prostitutes are subject to both personalistic and materialistic forms of domination (17). Like Archard, she finds that prostitutes are controlled by both their pimps and clients who can directly

force and manipulate them into prostitution (personalistic power); and their needs for security, housing, money, or drugs (materialistic power). The motivations for women to become prostitutes are thus largely out of their hands.

In the novel, Wanja describes both being caught in a cycle of prostitution and being taken advantage of by her employers. It is important to note that her feelings can at times be contradictory. Sometimes she describes her life as a barmaid nostalgically and other times bitterly. When she first accounts for her life in the city with Munira and Karega, she says: "Sometimes you see what is wrong. You want to get out: you also want to remain.... I know some who tried… [but] in the end they all return to the world where they have friends and where they know the rules… A barmaid does not take herself to be a prostitute. We are girls in search of work and men" (156). This explanation echoes Archard's argument that it is not difficult for women to become trapped in prostitution, but from the perspective of a woman, for whom prostitution is a reality, agency is not completely absent either. Wanja rationalizes her work, saying that she is only "in search of work and men" (156). It seems that rather than viewing her profession exclusively as prostitution, she imagines sleeping with men as one aspect of her job as a barmaid. However, it is still difficult to leave the profession. She gives a handful of anecdotes of women she knows who had left bars and tried to be housemaids or tea pickers, only to be paid less for more difficult labor. These women returned to being barmaids where, as Wanja puts it, "they know the rules" (156). Prostitution is one of the only available jobs for women with nowhere and no one to go to.

On other occasions, Wanja remembers her life in the city as a barmaid less fondly. Here, she tells Abdulla and Karega that "there is only one song sung by all barmaids. Woe. [Bar owners] give you seventy-five shillings a month. They expect you to work for twenty-four hours.

In the daytime you give beer and smiles to the customers. In the evening you are supposed to give them yourself and sighs in bed" (90). She also explains that "barmaids never settle in one place. Sometimes you are dismissed because you refused to sleep with your boss. Or your face may become too well known in one place. You want a new territory" (155). The life of a barmaid seems to be inflexible; they make little money and serve men nearly every hour of the day. The women attempt to find other work but are conditioned to their circumstance and uncomfortable about leaving. Yet, Wanja still describes ways she is able to exercise her agency as a prostitute. Prostitutes are still able to move around or try to leave, like Wanja's friends. From Wanja's experience, it is advantageous to start fresh in "new territory" (155), and in most cases, it is possible to exercise that mobility. She also says that it is possible to refuse to sleep with your employer, even if they may dismiss you from the job. By refusing to have sex with their boss, she is suggesting he wouldn't rape them. However, the sex is still a form of coercion, as their options would be to sleep with their boss or lose their income and security. When the women agree to sleep with their employers to protect their jobs, they might technically be consenting, but the sex is still likely unwanted.

Archard makes an important distinction that "these features [of coercion] are contingent aspects of prostitution as it is practised in certain contexts. They do not show prostitution as such to be non-voluntary… many prostitutes will stress the voluntariness of their entry into the profession… [and] emphasise the degree of control they can exercise over the terms, price, and clientele of their sexual services" (*Sexual Consent* 106). It is important to consider situations of coercion, but he argues that it is also crucial to not strip prostitutes of every shred of agency, chalking up all their choices as derived from past abuses, financial necessity, or patriarchal demands, especially when a woman says she is voluntarily engaging in prostitution and has

control over her actions. Archard also points to different forms of prostitution that might reflect varying possibilities of agency. He explains that "within one and the same society the class of prostitutes might include a wealthy courtesan servicing only one client as well as individuals forced by economic necessity to sell sex indiscriminately under difficult, dangerous, and unpleasant conditions. The prostitute can work the street or inhabit the penthouse" (*Sexual Consent* 104). The prostitutes who work the street might have less possibility for agency, as they are more exposed and vulnerable in that setting and dependent on an inconsistent base of customers. The other type of prostitute, the woman who inhabits the penthouse, who is a courtesan servicing only one client, is viewed as empowered, as fully capable of exercising agency and protected by her money. When Wanja is working in the city as a barmaid, she aligns with the predicament of the street worker. Her work is erratic with no regular clients, she moves around often, she makes little money, and is often financially exploited by her employers. In Ilmorog, she opens her own brothel, employing various girls from around town. Here, she aligns with the situation of the courtesan who inhabits the penthouse. She only has a handful of regular clients, all members of the national bourgeoisie, who take her to the most expensive clubs and buy her things. She makes large amounts of money that fund her luxurious lifestyle.

Yet there are important similarities between Wanja as a prostitute who owns her own brothel and Wanja as a prostitute who works the bars. Karega and Wanja herself seem skeptical that the difference in positions is meaningful. To be sure, there is certainly more possibility for Wanja to be a free agent, even if the use of her body and sexuality still has detrimental effects. Wanja explains to Karega and Munira the situation she has created for herself:

> One night I fully realized this law. Eat or you are eaten. If you have a cunt— excuse my language, but it seems the curse of Adam's Eve on those who are born with it— if you

> are born with this hole, instead of it being a source of pride, you are doomed to either marrying someone or else being a whore. You eat or you are eaten. How true I have found it. I decided to act, and I quickly built this house… I have hired young girls… it was not hard… I promised them security… and for that… they let me trade their bodies… And me? Me too! I have not spared myself… It has been the only way I can get my own back on Chui, Mzigo, and Kimiera… I go with all of them now… I play them against one another… they pay for it… they pay for the rivalry to possess me… each wants to make me his sole woman… And now I can go anywhere… even to their most expensive clubs… they are proud to be seen with me… even for one night (348)

Wanja touches on motivations for prostitution that are familiar. She finds that, as a woman, if she does not marry and have a man to support her, she is left with prostitution as her only alternative. She has built the brothel and hired her own girls to prevent herself from being further exploited. She is still driven by economic necessity, as much as she was working the street, and has no other option for financial support besides marrying a man. She builds the brothel not as the act of a free agent, but as a defense mechanism. She positions herself as the owner, boss, or eater not out of willingness, but to prevent herself from being exploited or eaten. Similarly, she is still possessed by her clients. Yet, the difference is that she has greater choice over who owns her for an evening. When she explains her new circumstance to Munira and Karega, Wanja seems to be painfully aware of the constraints that still contain her. She ends her narration of how and why she created her brothel with "a kind of savage screaming tone, as if she was answering doubts inside her. Karega sense[s] the doubt and now look[s] at her more intently. There [is] a hardness on her face that he could not now penetrate" (Ngũgĩ 348). It seems plausible that Wanja doubts her decision to create her brothel, or at least, her claim that her profession is simply a "game…

for money" (348). It seems that it is more taxing than she might let on, that she is having to give up a part of herself.

Yet Wanja is still able to possess more agency as the owner of her brothel than she was as a barmaid. She has more control over the use of her body, as well as the girls she employs. She is safer having sex with only the few men whom she entertains. Wanja also clearly benefits from the operation as she is able to charge lots of money. She receives all of the profits from her work, rather than a small portion from her employer. With this, she is able to afford a beautiful house with servants. She also exercises power over the men who have wronged her in the past: Kimiera, Chui, and Mzigo. She pitches them against each other as they compete to possess her. She proves herself to be one of the few things they cannot fully own, in spite of their having bought up and developed most of Ilmorog. Although Wanja is still constrained as the owner of the brothel and her work still appears harmful to her identity, it is important to acknowledge the ways this form of prostitution is very different. It provides Wanja with more agency. She no longer has to worry just about surviving. She can turn down clients or stop having sex with them if she wishes, without the concern about losing her job or not being able to pay bills. The nuances of these two forms of prostitution also undermine liberal theories that assume human beings are equal and autonomous. The degree of autonomy Wanja is able to achieve as a barmaid is less than when she owns her brothel. The specific histories of each prostitute, the resources available to them, their relationship with her boss and coworkers, the support they might receive from outside of the sex work industry, and so forth make them unequal.

Ultimately, Wanja's experiences in prostitution exemplify how liberal perceptions of consent are inadequate for handling the issue of prostitution. The problem is not a prostitute's capability to reason, her capability to act as a free agent and make choices for herself or to

consent, but the circumstances that dictate her choices. The pressures that motivate Wanja to be a prostitute and to have sex with her clients don't allow her to plainly say "yes" or "no" to sex. Prostitution creates a case where a woman's agency is simultaneously undermined and acknowledged. She is perceived to be empowered in her ability to work, make money, and be sexual, but also seen as weak and dependent on the whims of the men around her. The paradoxes of female agency in sex and prostitution suggest that elements of prostitution are harmful not because a woman does or does not consent, but because of the coercion that may occur.

MALE POSSESSION AND PASSION

Throughout *Petals of Blood*, Wanja develops relationships with the male protagonists that all become sexual at one point or another. Her relationship with Munira stems from his male entitlement to her female body and sexuality, but her relationship with Karega presents a healthy sexual engagement that goes beyond the terms of consent. In both, Wanja is active and works to create her own desirable ends. She is not able to entirely escape the constraints of patriarchy, but she utilizes Munira's possessive obsession of her for her own benefit and, with Karega, she experiences fulfilling sex. Unlike her experiences with Kimiera and as a prostitute, both of these situations are positive for Wanja. However, the sex that she has with Munira and Karega is still not contractual, and it is not just Wanja's consent that makes it desirable.

In the novel, Munira and Wanja have sex twice and Wanja is an active agent in both episodes. She initiates the sex. Their intercourse is not compatible with contractual understandings of consent for two reasons. First, although she is the one who initiates the situation, she is not motivated by desire to have sex with Munira per se. The first time, she is motivated by the desire to be pregnant; the second time she is motivated by her desire to exact

revenge on Munira. Milena Popova discuses circumstances of sex like these. She describes them as "'unwanted sex': sometimes individuals will consent (in a legal sense) to having sex even if they do not want it. Sometimes they will even initiate it. Sometimes, we may choose to have sex for reasons other than desire… But in many cases unwanted sex is experienced as a violation, or at least as something not quite right, and nonetheless consented to" (66). In *Petals of Blood*, Wanja does not describe how sex with Munira makes her feel, so it is hard to know if she feels violated. Nevertheless, the notion of consent is complicated in these situations, as Popova argues. Wanja consents to sex with Munira, but this is not what makes it a positive experience for Wanja. The use of her body here is still potentially dangerous for her identity, for many of the same reasons it is in prostitution. What is positive is that Wanja is acting freely in her sexual relationship with Munira. She is not motivated by a need to survive or to make money, as she is when she engages in sex work. She is fulfilling her own desires to have a child and to get back at Munira for sending Karega away from Ilmorog.

The second reason is that, in their sexual relationship, these characters do not take on typical male and female roles. MacKinnon argues that "the male sexual role… centers on aggressive intrusion on those with less power. Such acts of dominance are experienced as sexually arousing, as sex itself" (127). Wanja does not allow Munira to aggressively intrude on her. In turn, his overwhelming desire for her, which she does not return, challenges his dominant position as a man and leads to a violent passion and his eventual hatred of Wanja. He is sexually frustrated because he is unable to fulfill what he understands as his "natural" male role. In Cahill's work, she critiques the liberal theory of consent because it plays into the normalization of such roles. She argues that the idea of consent constructs situations that benefit a man, "but to which women must consent… [which] is strikingly different than to seek out a certain situation

and to choose it for oneself" (173). This leads to an assumption and the practice of "the active, male role and the reactive, female role" (173). Wanja flips these roles. She seeks out situations with Munira and he only reacts to her choices. This reversal undermines the liberal understanding of consent in a patriarchal society.

From the first time that Munira meets Wanja, he is struck by her beauty and attracted to her sexually. When he sees her coming down the path, "For a few seconds Munira's heart [stands] still: he [can] hardly believe his eyes. She [leaves] the village path and [walks] toward him" (27). She introduces herself and they chat over cups of water that Munira provides: "He felt a little generous within, even a bit warm. But he was suddenly shaken out of his mood by her vigorous laughter. He instinctively looked at the zipper of his trousers and he found it in place" (28). Over time, Munira comes to be "irresistibly drawn toward her… [and] she [starts] appearing to him in dreams" (40). It is here that Munira becomes overcome with desire for Wanja, much like David describes in his response to Melanie. He tells of being "scared of this possession, of the way she had taken [his] heart prisoner so that she could say so coolly: *and you'll bring me a pound of the long-grained rice*: and [his] whole being so ready to obey" (56). Beginning as an innocent infatuation (although he objectifies and sexualizes her from the start), Munira becomes obsessed with Wanja.

The first time that they have sex occurs at the beginning of Munira's obsession. Wanja is aware of his interest in her and plans to have sex with him on the night of the full moon, as she has been advised that this is when she is most likely to become pregnant. She asks him: "'Please, Mwalimu… stay here tonight… Break the moon over me.' Her pleading voice had startled Munira out of his thoughts. He too wanted to stay the night. He would stay the night. A joyous trembling coursed through his body. Aah, my harvest" (79). Their intercourse is not described in

the novel, but Wanja does not become pregnant, and she does not express sexual interest in Munira again until much later, when they have sex for a second time. During this interval Munira becomes possessive and bitter. He describes his overwhelming desire for her on many occasions. As she goes about her life, he describes how "it pained [him] that [her] luscious growth was beyond [his] reach, that [he] could not eat it, [his] share even… she had wrapped [his] soul in twists and knots around her… the very movement of her skirt was a razor-sharp knife in [his] inside" (291). He feels that "she [has] conquered him" (299). His desire is all-consuming and leaves him powerless. There is nothing he can do to obtain her, and this frustration forces him outside of a male sexual role marked by aggressive intrusion that MacKinnon has detailed. He has violent fantasies of possessing her: "The warmth [he] now felt for her turned into fire, fire-tongues of desire. [He] wanted to make love to her there: on the Friendly floor: [He] wanted to hear her little screams and cries for help. Power" (121). When Wanja becomes sexually involved with Karega, Munira is overcome with jealousy. He "could not bear the pain. [He] could not resist the evil thought. [So he] cycled to the headquarters" (294) to have Karega fired from his teaching position at the school, forcing him out of Ilmorog.

Wanja knows that Munira has always wanted to have power over her, and has exercised this in the only way that he can by firing Karega. She resents him for this and desires to assert her power over him. He is frustrated by her work at the Sunshine Lodge, and her open proclamation of love to Karega in his presence: "how could he recount his own descent into a five-year hell at Wanja's feet? She had somehow gripped him, possessed him, turned his head and made his heart beat with a thousand pains and sighs. She was exacting her vengeance: she was his ruin" (320), but this had not been her intention. It is only when she invites him to have sex with her, and at the last moment, makes him pay to use her body, that she truly exacts her

vengeance. She invites him to bed and says: "You look surprised, Mwalimu. I thought you always wanted me" (331). She goes on to tease Munira, asking, "that's why you sent [Karega] away, not so?" (331), and details how Munira's dismissal of Karega and his hand in the development of New Ilmorog has negatively impacted her life. She finishes by asking him, "what are you waiting for?" (331). Already, he is hypnotized and "angry with himself for being tongue-tied and yet he [is] propelled toward her.... Yet below it all, deep inside, he [feels] a sensation of shame and disgust at his helplessness" (331). She goes on to ask him for one hundred shillings, saying, "this is New Kenya. You want it, you pay for it" (332). Munira pays for the sex, but "for years to come, he has not to forget the shock and the humiliation of the hour" (332). Wanja forces him to be reactive to her desires and makes it obvious that she does not want him as a person, but that she will allow him to be another of her customers. This manipulation leaves Munira positioned as the female in the sexual relation, while Wanja exercises agency through domination, a markedly male feature of sex. Wanja's masculinization and Munira's feminization create a contract that Munira does not expect. Like most sexual encounters and contracts, there is still an imbalance in power not accounted for by liberal theory, but Wanja is the one with more power in this episode. She positions Munira to submit and consent to her dominance. Much like Soraya does to Lurie, Wanja uses contract to signify that their sex is not about emotion or connection but money.

Wanja's sexual relationship with Karega, on the other hand, is fulfilling to her. Their bodies are connected sexually, but their identities are also connected emotionally. In their relationship, the question of explicit consent does not arise, but it is assumed. Karega interprets Wanja's behavior as sexually willing and eager, yet they also confirm female roles of submission and male roles of dominance. Their relationship is evidence that sex can be safely agreed to and

sought out without explicit reference to consent or contract and still be entirely gratifying for women even in conditions constructed by the patriarchy. When writing on consent, David Archard expresses worry that explicitly consensual sex is passionless sex. He explains that sex "is an activity characterised by informality, spontaneity, heightened senses, high feeling, imperatives of satisfaction; it is one in which its participants are taken over by passion and the needs of the moment" (*Sexual Consent* 22). There is no space for "the seeking of or expression of something as formal, considered, and deliberate as consent" (*Sexual Consent* 22). Archard believes that it is necessary for both parties to be willing to have sex, but that explicit consent is not a practical goal in many sexual scenarios. He suggests that "the possibilities of intimacy and openness to another which sexual activity involves means that it is also the site of a heightened sensitivity to the wishes and feelings of another" (*Sexual Consent* 23). He finds that sex is a deliberate act and feelings can be communicated through the behaviors of its participants. He also acknowledges that behaviors can of course be misinterpreted, yet, so can consent. Another way to think about behavior during sex comes from Archard's argument, discussed in the first chapter, that sex is done *with* someone, not *to* someone. While oftentimes it is obvious if both people are participating in sex, or if one is entirely passive, making Archard's proposition useful in evaluating the willingness of another person to have sex, consent can still be difficult to determine under patriarchy, where men are conditioned to be aggressive and dominant, and women are conditioned to be submissive and are frequently treated as "a thing for sexual use" (MacKinnon 130). Again, returning to the first chapter of this thesis, this idea is articulated in MacKinnon's argument that sex is nearly always marked by male violence and aggression, making intercourse not so different from rape.

The first time Karega and Wanja have sex is after they drink Theng'eta, an indigenous beverage in Ilmorog that gives you "your spirit… It is a dream. It is a wish" (251). They drink it with Abdulla, Karega, and Wanja's grandmother and spend hours sharing their histories with each other, learning the ways that they are entangled. Karega and Wanja go on their own into the night, up onto the ridge. On their walk up, they both describe feelings of "inevitably… [of an] animal within, stretching and struggling to be born" (272). These feelings are "elusively clear in [the] head and heart [but] could not take the shape of words" (271). Eventually Karega begins "gradually laying her on the grass, surely and methodically removing her clothes with her hands making impotent gestures of protest, oh please Karega don't do that, and he hearing that genuine fear of need and desire in the voice, felt hot blood rush up and suffuse his whole system as his body sought out hers" (274). On a verbal level, Wanja does not consent to this sex. She quite literally says, "don't do that." Still, Karega hears "need and desire" in her voice and continues on as "they [start] slowly, almost uncertainly, groping toward one another, gradually working together" (274). Her words contradict her actions. This episode exemplifies the constraints of consent if understood as something explicit and verbal like a contract. Wanja's verbal opposition might reflect her practice of a submissive, female role, but she still engages in sex *with* him. This is a clear contrast to the sex that Melanie and Lurie had, discussed in the first chapter. When Melanie says, "No, not now!" (24), Lurie still continues on, but "her limbs crumple like a marionette's… [and] she lets him lay her out on the bed and undress her" (24-25). Both women protest, but the novels present "no" differently. Lurie only thinks of his own need for sex, having intercourse with Melanie in a way that most read as rape. Conversely, Karega trusts his interpretations of Wanja's behavior and the tones of her voice as signifying that she would like to have sex and does not interrupt a moment of what is depicted to be shared passion with a verbal

interrogation of her opposition. Wanja is left "enjoying an inner peace and an inner lightness she has never felt before. Her other affairs are always accompanied by anxiety, bitterness, and overriding need for a palliative, a temporary victory, a tormenting need for blood and vengeance, for gain. This is different. This is peace. This holiness" (274). Their sexual encounter is an entirely positive experience for Wanja, even though it does not conform to the mold of liberal and consensual sex.

Wanja describes her sexual relationship with Karega to be different from those she has experienced with other men. She explains that "with most men [she has] gone to them with a purpose" (299), but with Karega, things are different. When she is pleading with Munira not to send him away, she shares her desire for Karega: "I want him. I really want him. For himself. For the first time, I feel wanted… a human being… no longer humiliated… foot-trodden… It is not given to many: a second chance to be a woman… without shame" (299). Later, after their relationship has ended, she tells Karega that love has always escaped her, except for when she had been with him: "that time I felt my womanhood come back… I felt accepted as I was… For the first time I could make love without the burden of guilt or the burden of search" (346). Her descriptions of her emotions around sex with Karega reveal that what is meaningful and fulfilling is derived from more than her ability to say "yes." This is further evidence that sexuality and identity are intricately connected. The way Wanja's body is used in sex, especially in prositution, affects her selfhood. It makes her feel humiliated, foot-trodden, ashamed, and guilty, even though she technically consents to it. Conversely, the sex she has with Karega makes her feel like a human being and that her womanhood has been restored, even though she verbally opposed their encounter. Their sexual engagement is satisfactory because although Wanja and Karega do play into the sexual roles that they have been conditioned to as women and men, they still engage in

sex together, embodied, equally, and for desire, emotions, and conditions that are built from a trust and connection greater than a contract.

Ultimately, Wanja's relationship with Karega is evidence that the male dominance and inherent violence of heterosexuality that MacKinnon and Pateman find prevalent in patriarchy certainly exists, but also that women can still find agency and sexual enjoyment. Pateman writes:

> Rape is conventionally presented as a unique act that stands in complete opposition to the consensual relations that ordinarily obtain between the sexes. The most tragic aspect of even a brief consideration of the problem of women, rape, and consent is that rape is revealed as the extreme expression, or an extension of, the accepted and "natural" relation between men and woman ("Women and Consent" 161)

Here, she argues that rape is not distinct from sex, but a form of sex. MacKinnon makes a similar argument in her work: "Many women are raped by men who know the meaning of their acts to their victims perfectly well and proceed anyway. But women are also violated every day by men who have no idea of the meaning of their acts to the women. To them it is sex…. She had sex. Sex itself cannot be an injury. Women have sex everyday. Sex makes a woman a woman. Sex is what women are for" (180-181). She finds that rape for a woman might be sex for a man. Violence and violation are not only inherent to heterosexual sex but inseparable. This thesis accepts and argues that domination and violation are prevalent in heterosexual sex and blur the lines that separate rape and intercourse. This is displayed when Wanja tells Karega to stop, but he continues. It is also displayed in Melanie and Lurie's sexual relationship. Yet, this thesis finds that rape is different from sex. MacKinnon asks: "What is the nonviolation (sic) of intercourse? To know what is wrong with rape, know what is right about sex" (174). What is right about the sex that Wanja has with Karega is that she enjoys it. She is fulfilled, she does not feel humiliated,

she feels like a woman. Even though Karega is dominant, she feels safe, and she feels "inner peace" (274). Surely, this experience of Wanja's is distinct from the violation of rape.

In her engagement with MacKinnon and other feminists like her, Cahill writes that "while MacKinnon assumes women to be wholly constituted by the power structure that imposes their inferiority, I argue that such a model ignores the possibility of resistance as well as the degree to which women themselves are implicated in that structure" (4). When it is assumed that women are forced to be entirely submissive and reactive to the violence and desires of men, it prevents a serious acknowledgment of the agency that women are still able to garner and exercise. It cannot be assumed that Wanja is violated by Karega because she tells him no or because he has more sexual agency than she does, and has never had to let his sexuality be used to get things that he needs. As Cahill argues, it is possible for women to resist structures of patriarchy, but this depends on thinking about sex beyond the moment of consent. There is little hope for female sexual agency when the only options are to say "yes" to a man's request for sex or "no."

CONCLUSION

When sex is understood solely through liberal theories of consent, it limits our ability to understand the construction and functioning of sexuality outside of the act of sex. As shown in the analyses of the novels, the subjective experience of sex, the sexual roles that men and women are conditioned to occupy, and the wider social structures of gender infiltrate sex acts and influence the ways we engage with our own sexualities and identities. Similarly, sex shapes social behaviors, norms, and politics. Liberal consent theory thinks of sex as an individual matter, and it is important to consider individual sexual encounters, but the greater social dynamics at play need to also be acknowledged. Coming back to the #MeToo movement, the way sex is understood and framed in the public sphere is important and the #MeToo movement has proven to be invaluable in bringing this to broader attention. Sexual violence has always been pervasive in society, and this has always been known by both men and especially women, but the #MeToo movement makes explicit that male domination and violence are systemic and makes it impossible to ignore the ill-treatment of women. However, even though the movement has positively impacted our understanding of sex and gender, it heavily relies on liberal theories of consent that hold back the necessity of further complicating sex in society.

The #MeToo movement aims to hold accountable men who interact sexually with women without their consent. The movement understands female agency in terms of their ability to report sexual violence, punish men who are sexually abusive, and speak out about the adversities they have faced. While these are all important ways for women to resist and identify oppression, they are all reactive and occur after women have experienced sexual violence. Moreover, men who are accused of sexual violence and even proven to be guilty are often not necessarily punished. Amia Srinivasan, in her recently published book, discusses the consequences of the

#MeToo movement for men. She writes that accused men might be "cancelled" or fired, but these punishments are not long-lasting. Inevitably they re-enter the public sphere, write a best-selling book about their experience, or are hired again. Even Harvey Weinstein, whom more than a hundred women came forward against, was convicted on only one count of third-degree rape and one count of criminal sexual assault. He was sentenced for twenty-three years. Other men, who are not criminally convicted but socially ostracized, have "conceded their bad behavior, only to demand soon after, like a child growing weary of a timeout, to be let back in to play" (Srinivasan 18).

The movement's call for male accountability is serious, but it seems that it is confused about how to proceed once perpetrators have been identified. In the case of Ansari, it was clear that his behavior was harmful to Grace, but to many, it seemed unreasonable to criminalize or socially exile him. Perhaps a form of restorative justice is necessary, but that would require men to take these allegations and the harm of their behavior seriously, and that proves difficult when the language available to us about sex comes solely from liberal theories of consent, and when harm is merely evaluated by the words "yes" and "no." Srinivasan writes: "These disgraced but loved, ruined but rich, never to be employed again until they are employed again, prodigal sons of #MeToo: they and their defenders are not… outraged by the falsity of women's accusations. They are outraged by the truth of those accusations. They are outraged, most of all, that saying sorry doesn't make it all better" (31). It seems that the solution to sexual violence that permeates through society is not only accountability, attention to consent, or punishment. There needs to be a way to truly evaluate harm in sex so that it can be understood and avoided. As Srinivasan asks, "what does it really take to alter the mind of the patriarchy?" (24). This question has no simple answer, but what is certain is that the mind of the patriarchy cannot be altered only through

reactive behaviors. A better understanding of the way sex operates, the way our sexualities are deeply connected to our identities, the social constructions and systems that make sex distinct for men and women, and the ways our sexualities function beyong the act of sex is necessary to challenge and prevent sexual violence that has become so normalized. This means not only considering male entitlement to sex and myopic understandings of gender relations and female oppression, but also engaging with the ways in which we all enter roles of submission and dominance or experience unequal sex in general. It also means recognizing the way that men and women are unequal without always assuming that men have more agency and women have less.

The #MeToo movement points to what can be wrong with sex and male sexual dominance and entitlement, but it struggles to imagine a state of sexual equality. In the novels examined in this thesis, Coetzee and Ngũgĩ depict sex as an encounter that cannot be clearly understood as consensual or nonconsensual, and thus challenge how sex is conventionally understood. Although they don't provide any examples of sexual equality on an individual or social scale—Wanja and Karega's relationship is the closest to this, but, it still plays into roles of dominance and submission—they provide the tools that might allow us to do so. In bridging critiques of masculine behaviors that resemble those of radical feminists like Pateman and MacKinnon, with a portrayal of the lived experiences of women who navigate sex under patriarchy with some measure of agency, Ngũgĩ and Coetzee reveal the paradoxes that must be addressed before we can fully evaluate harm in sex. In the novels, Soraya acts with agency in terminating her relationship with Lurie, but he still invades and threatens her privacy; Melanie chooses to have sex with her professor, but she is still coerced and confused by the roles of male domination and female submission; Lucy protects herself and her story in the wake of her rape, but she is still raped; Wanja exercises power over men, but she still ultimately feels exploited and

down-trodden, even when she first felt she was the one with the upper hand. Even Munira as a man does not percieve sex to be equal. His deep desire for Wanja throws off the balance of their relationship, demonstrating that unequal gender relations can be likewise damaging for male sexuality. It is possible for women to have sexual agency under patriarchal conditions, but sexual equality is not yet realized. Perhaps it is impossible to prevent all sex from being harmful, but deconstructing the ways that we think about sexual agency and expect masculine and feminine sexualities to be expressed is a good place to start. Ngũgĩ and Coetzee show us how we can critique and challenge the circumstances of patriarchy—male dominance and pervasive sexual violence—while still appreciating real ways that women can act with agency. Their depictions of sex make it clear that if we only frame the problem of sex as one where men don't listen when women say "no," we will never reach a state of sexual equality.

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