



“What Will Set Yuh Free is Money”

Sex Work, Debt, and the Dynamics of Exploitation in *Here Comes the Sun* and *The Immortals*

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Abstract

Studies have noted a dependency on sex work to “make do” in economies ravaged by foreign debt (Harrison 1991; Obregón 2018), necessitating a framing of the dynamics of sex work through a globalized system of enforced debt. This paper explores sex workers’ rights in post-quake Haiti and contemporary Jamaica, through an examination of Makenzy Orcel’s *The Immortals* (2020) and Nicole Dennis-Benn’s *Here Comes the Sun* (2017). Like global debt systems, the exploitation of sex workers relies on a politics of dependency and constructed narratives of victimhood. This results in the refusal to recognize sex work as autonomous labor, meaning sex workers do not possess the protections of labor rights (Mgbako 2019). A literary examination of these debates exposes global debt’s modes of subject creation and the powerful resistance inherent in resubjectifying sex workers as conditionally agential rights claimants. This therefore reflects the Warwick Research Collective’s (WReC) suggestion that world-literature registers the “single but radically uneven world-system” in its form and content (2015). By exposing the tensions in subject-making at the heart of both debt economies and sex workers’ rights debates, Orcel and Dennis-Benn create feminized spaces to narrate sex workers’ negotiations of patriarchal-capitalist structures that peripheralize them.

Keywords: Sex Work, Debt, Caribbean, Rights, Haiti, Jamaica



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In her examination of the issue of consent and its impact on sex workers’ rights debates, Lola Olufemi (2020: 98) writes,

In a world that can be described in the simplest terms as an unequal playing field, there is no “consensual” interaction that occurs between anyone that is unaffected by power. This does not remove the necessity of consent or suggest that women lack agency in sexual situations. It means, fundamentally, that consent is not easy, or simple. It is a negotiation of the structures that shape our existence.

Olufemi here registers the contradictions and uneven dynamics of consent which regularly go unrealized in contemporary discourses on the issue. Consent encapsulates debates from sexual agency and freedom to sexual violence and exploitation, broadening analysis of sexual agency to include both the visible and invisible forces which make that agency possible. In the case of sex work,¹ consent registers the complexities of an inclusive fight for rights, one which acknowledges the potential, and regularity, of violence experienced by sex workers, but also one which acknowledges the agency of sex workers to perform this labor and recognizes sex work as such within the world-system of value and exchange. As Olufemi (2020: 97) notes, consent is both “fundamental,” since it “allows us to express an agency that makes us feel like we exist,” and yet has been weaponized by neoliberal feminists who argue that “women who provide sexual services in exchange for money cannot possibly consent because, in a patriarchal society, this exchange is devoid of real choice” (Olufemi 2020: 99). This overly simplistic view of consent “ignores the fact that this kind of ‘non-decision’ is at the very basis of our society” (Olufemi 2020: 100) since “we don’t ‘consent’ to work, we work because it is necessary for our survival” (Olufemi 2020: 100) and, as such, “the world we live in is already a world devoid of choice; it is already coercive by nature” (Olufemi 2020: 100). This is particularly important given the centrality of sex work within the global economy since, as Kempadoo (1999) states,

even though its status as an illegal or semi-legal sector means that it cannot be measured or tabulated in any quantitative way, sex work appears...as an integral part of the local cultures and national economies, which in turn sustain global corporate capital, First World identities, and masculine hegemony. (P. 18)

Therefore, to understand the complexities of the fight for meaningful sex workers’ rights, we must mobilize our understanding of consent as both agential and contextualized as “a negotiation of the structures that shape our existence” (Olufemi 2020: 98); including but not limited to the capitalist structures in which sex work exists, usually unregulated and on the fringes. This becomes particularly vital when examining the rights of sex workers in the Caribbean region, a region which has, since the era of European colonialism and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, been peripheralized

¹I use the terms “sex worker” and “sex work” throughout this article to refer to the exchange of sex for money or something else of value, since, as Kempadoo (2018: 3) states, “the definition emphasizes flexibility and variability of sexual labor as well as its similarities with other dimensions of working people’s lives.” Furthermore, the Global Network of Sex Work Projects (n.d.) state as one of their achievements: “shifting global understanding about sex work as labor through successfully advocating within the United Nations for the use of the terms ‘sex worker’ and ‘sex work.’”

in the world-system as a space for extraction, as noted by Sylvia Wynter (1971: 95) in her suggestion that, “the Caribbean area is the classic plantation area since many of its units were ‘planted’ with people, not in order to form societies, but to carry on plantations whose aim was to produce single crops for the market.”

It is on this basis that this article takes its comparative examination of Nicole Dennis-Benn’s *Here Comes the Sun* (2017) and Makenzy Orcel’s *The Immortals* (2020) as texts which register the complex debates around sex workers’ rights, ascribing these debates onto the figure of the sex worker themselves as they negotiate consent in a world-system premised on the creation of debt, or the debtor-creditor contract. In doing so, both Dennis-Benn and Orcel pose a renewed call for the rights of the sex worker but do so not by placing the sex worker as an object of these rights, but rather as the subject of them. Dennis-Benn and Orcel’s works can thus be understood as contributions to the growing calls for alternative approaches to sex workers’ rights. These include the Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP), one member of which stated:

we are intensely aware that for many people, the entrance point into sex work is one of exclusion or desperation—why wouldn’t we be aware of that? We are those people. But we assert that no one can label us victims and use our experiences to silence us, because we’re resourceful, resilient and the experts on our own lives. (SWARM n.d.)

This autonomy is not a liberating end unto itself, but rather is a recognition that sex workers strategically navigate economic systems which had already counted them out.

The Fight for Sex Workers’ Rights

Kempadoo (2018: 3) states that debates around sex workers’ rights, for many years and across the world, have centered around issues of “identity, rights, working conditions, decriminalization, and legitimacy.” In fact, “the idea of the sex worker is inextricably related to struggles for the recognition of women’s work, for basic human rights and for decent working conditions” (Kempadoo 2018: 3). And yet “prostitution appears to be one of the last sites of gender relations to be interrogated through a critical feminist lens that assumes that women are both active subjects and subjects of domination” (Kempadoo 2018: 9). Instead, in line with broader women’s rights debates at the international level which “appear to have focused primarily on the issue of violence against women and their victimization in this context” (Kapur 2002: 4), discussions around sex workers’ rights have also often emphasized the need to protect women from a trade viewed predominantly through “the figure of the ‘pimp’, a seedy and almost always racialised man who controls the lives of women” (Olufemi 2020: 100). As a result, these debates have principally been associated with trafficking and modern-day enslavement—in other words, they have become part of the peripheries of the world-system, including non-regulated and illegal economies. As Doezema (2018: 42) states, “the campaigning efforts of anti-trafficking groups have been instrumental in creating a climate wherein the great majority of sex work, and practically all sex work involving young men and women in developing countries is seen as abuse.” As a result, “no

international agreement condemns the abuse of human rights of sex workers who were not ‘forced’” (Doezema 2018: 41), thus leading to a failure to protect the human rights of a large population of “voluntary” sex workers. These purely protectionist policies advocate predominantly for the removal of all sex work through legal oppression, often without the provision of adequate alternative income sources. As NSWP (2014: 8) states, “framing sex work as violence or as inherently exploitative renders sex workers’ realities invisible by not recognising sex work as work.” As such, the debates around sex workers’ rights have at their heart the inability to imagine sex workers as agential at all. NSWP also note the various ways in which the legal oppression of sex work, as a result of this failure to imagine otherwise, impedes upon sex workers’ rights, including: impeding upon the right to collective advocacy; creating dangerous working conditions; creating institutional discrimination; impeding upon the right to privacy; impeding upon the right to health; impeding upon the right to migrate; and impeding upon the right to free choice of employment (NSWP 2014). As such, as Olufemi (2020: 102) shows, “by focusing on material conditions, we can recognise that the current conditions under which sex workers are forced to conduct their work by the state are life threatening.” Instead, “if sexual labor is seen to be subject to exploitation, as with any other labor, it can also be considered as a basis for mobilization in struggles for working conditions, rights and benefits” (Kempadoo 2018: 8).

In this way, actions by international actors supposedly working for the protection of sex workers in fact reinforce narratives around the conditions of sex work which are steeped in “underlying racist and classist implications” (Doezema 2018: 43), becoming “a platform for reactionary and paternalistic voices, advocating a rigid sexual morality under the guise of protecting women” (Doezema 2018: 45). This has led to criticisms of these campaigns for failing to consult with sex workers themselves (Doezema 2018: 42). These discourses thus place sex workers in the global South, in particular as the object of discussions, rather than understanding them as autonomous rights claimants “simultaneously bound and free, coerced and constrained, victims and agents” (Kempadoo 2004: 65). In departing from a notion of sex work as inherently exploitative then, and instead viewing it as a multi-layered experience including aspects both of autonomy and of exploitation, we enable those people performing this labor to become the subject of their own struggles. Engagement with the complexities of artistic works therefore allows us to avoid disengagement with the complications of being both “victims and agents,” instead provoking examination of the unwieldy nature of sex work to dignify the complexity of the human at the heart of these debates.

Debt and the Labor of Sex Workers in the Reproduction of the Caribbean

Kempadoo (1999: 18) has noted that in the Caribbean, sex work “cannot be viewed in isolation from the global political economy.” Furthermore, multiple critics have cited the links between contemporary sex work and the region’s history in relation to the slave trade in terms both of the reduction of Black women only to sexualized bodies and the reliance of global economic systems on this extracted labor (see, for example: Kempadoo 1999, 2018; Sheller 2012; Nixon 2015). The

very fashioning of globalized modernity as we understand it today created not only the inequalities upon which the sex trade relies, but the gaps in such systems that allows for survival within and beyond visible structures. In this way, the contemporary sex trade in the Caribbean forms part of a longer history of narrative construction of the region, as “a playground for the richer areas of the world to explore their fantasies of the exotic” (Kempadoo 1999: 26–27); a relationship wherein “the racialized-sexualized bodies and energies of Caribbean women and men are primary resources that local governments and the global tourism industry exploit and commodify to cater to, among other things, tourist desires and needs” (Kempadoo 1999: 27). This paper therefore examines sex workers’ rights in the context of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century Caribbean, a region peripheralized within the world-system through histories of debt and exploitation, but also a space in which the core visits upon itself from colonialism through to contemporary tourism and aid. This is partially because “global restructuring of capitalist production and investment” (Kempadoo 2018: 15) since the 1970s had “wide-scale gendered implications and, by association, an impact on sex industries and sex work internationally” (Kempadoo 2018: 15), as a result both of rising unemployment and “the cultivation of new desires and needs” (Kempadoo 2018: 16) through this restructuring.

However, this article’s analysis goes further than the immediate material conditions created by the debt economy. I am interested in examining sex work in the Caribbean not only in terms of a consequence of debt economies but as a form of labor which is cyclically interdependent with debt itself. Whilst global debt has been a fixture of the world-system since the institution of colonialism, we can understand the mass growth of the global debt economy as arising from the financialization of the world-system through neoliberalization in the 1970s and 1980s (Deckard and Shapiro 2019). In her analysis of the reemergence of personal forms of domination in the era of neoliberal fictitious capital, Rebecca Carson (2017: 568) explains: “fictitious capital, capital that has been credited in the form of money [the creation of debt through a debtor-creditor contract], represents future valorised capital and therefore represents a form of capital that is not yet valorised.” As a result, “the valorisation of fictitious capital is suspended and accounted for by the dependence on the valorisation process to occur in the future, with its premise in future labour” (Carson 2017: 566). This reliance on a future labor thus places added pressure on “the reproduction of labour power and the conditions of production in the future as well as the present” (Carson 2017: 569), resulting in the re-emergence of “personal forms of domination implicated in social reproduction” (Carson 2017: 569). In other words, the emergence of a global debt economy reliant on already promised future labor intensifies the subordination of the gendered work of social reproduction. As Douglas highlights in this issue’s Introduction, the reproduction of the conditions for capitalist production or, the reproduction of those conditions necessary for the valorization of future labor through the debt relationship, “far from being valued in its own right...is treated as a mere means to the making of profit” (Aruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser 2019: 22). And yet, this Special Issue examines the contours of social reproduction theory beyond only the reproduction of labor conditions through unwaged domestic labor, instead following Bhattacharya’s (2017: 14) suggestion that social reproduction theory “is primarily concerned with understanding how

categories of oppression (such as gender, race, and ableism) are coproduced in simultaneity with the production of surplus value.”

In the case of the Caribbean then, it becomes impossible to understand the neoliberal debt economies of the Caribbean without examining the reliance of these economies on the unwaged labor of the reproduction of the notion of the Caribbean itself. Or, in other words, we must come to terms with the unwaged reproduction of the cultural imaginary of the Caribbean, which enables its ongoing inferiorization and exploitation by the world-system. “Sex tourism,” as Seabrook argues, “makes tangible a small part of a global relationship, whereby the rich depend to an increasing degree for their comfort and advantage on the labour of the poor” (Seabrook 2001: xii) through economic systems; including “aid, humanitarian assistance, loans and promotion of ‘free trade’” (Seabrook 2001: xvi) and often perceived in terms of “the ‘development’ of the poor” (Seabrook 2001: xvi), but actually embodying an “‘interdependence’ in a global economy between profoundly unequal partners” (Seabrook 2001: xvi). Taking sex tourism in Jamaica and aid work in Haiti as its central point of comparison, this paper thus examines how the neoliberal world-system is in fact a global system of capitalist interdependence, holding at its heart the reliance upon the unpaid, and distinctly gendered reproduction of the image of the “Caribbean” in the global imaginary. It is in this way that we can examine sex work not only as a material necessarily in the context of debt economies, but also as a form of labor underwritten by the very logic of debt. This becomes necessary since systems of indebtedness have produced an economy of sex tourism in the case of Jamaica, and an economy of aid reliance in the case of Haiti, through which Euro-American economies maintain patterns of accumulation by dispossession. These economies of tourism and aid in turn are singularly reliant on the exploitation of the gendered sex worker as a peripheralized subject: at once exotic and in need of saving. As a result, it is vital that we understand debates around sex workers’ rights both within and through this global system of accumulation. Returning to Olufemi’s notion of consent from the beginning of this article, assigning sex workers’ rights becomes not necessarily the possibility of absolute freedom but rather the acknowledgment of a claim to rights in “a world devoid of choice” (Olufemi 2020: 100).

This article therefore poses three key questions. Firstly, what is the role of world-literature in comprehending the complex dichotomy of agency and dependency in a world-system characterized by both debt and systemic oppression? Secondly, what happens to literary imaginaries of sex workers’ rights when read through a recognition of sex work as a form of value-adding labor, rather than a purely peripheralized activity? And thirdly, is there a space in world-literature for a radical reimagining of the negotiation of sex workers’ rights within the confines of the already and inherently oppressive world-system? To answer these questions, I read the texts through the WReC’s (2015: 15) notion of world-literature as the “literary registration and encoding of [capitalist] modernity as a social logic.” In particular, the WReC (2015: 12) understand the modern capitalist world-system through the lens of the theory of “combined and uneven development” taking forth the assumption that, “capitalist development does not smooth away but rather produces unevenness, systematically and as a matter of course.” In this view, “capitalist modernisation entails development, yes—but this ‘development’ takes the form also of the

development of underdevelopment, of maldevelopment and dependent development” (WReC 2015: 13); unevenness lies at the very heart of the world-system. Debt not only represents maldevelopment and uneven access to capital but is an economic system upon which many fiscal projections rely. Indeed, much global capital is itself imaginary. Likewise, if we are to consider the informal economies to which sex work might belong, debt takes on a different shade: debt is a mechanism to obtain what you need without immediately engaging with its exchange value. Debt is thus a useful lens through which to Dennis-Benn’s *Here Comes the Sun* (2017) and Orcel’s *The Immortals* (2020) because it is tied to both a larger economic system, and the nuances of agency within a world-system which both produces and consumes narratives and identities of sexuality and sex work within the Caribbean. In other words, this paper examines this uneven world-system as inherently gendered through not only its exploitation of gendered forms of labor, but also in terms of what we might understand as a world-system of consent: the production of an unevenly experienced and accessed consent. It does so first through an examination of Dennis-Benn’s *Here Comes the Sun*, exploring how cycles of debt come to structure the text’s central characters and relationships, and how Margot, the text’s protagonist, negotiates these structures to claim conditional autonomy. I then shift to comparatively explore Orcel’s complicating of notions of victimhood and the conditionalities of labor in sex work in *The Immortals*, before finally examining the role of the text’s narrative construction in emphasizing a renegotiation of structures of debt through conditional claims to narrative agency.

Narratives of the Caribbean and Jamaican Economic Dependence

As a brief example of my framework, we can turn to Jamaica Kincaid’s *A Small Place* (1988) which narrates a tourist’s viewpoint of Antigua as they land in the airport: “more beautiful than any of the other islands you have seen...where the sun always shines and where the climate is deliciously hot and dry” (Kincaid 1988: 3–4). Kincaid reflects the capitalist construction of narratives surrounding the Caribbean and its sexualization in the global imaginary, before contrasting this view of Antigua’s abundance to that experienced by its inhabitants, including her own experience in which “the Antigua that I knew, the Antigua in which I grew up, is not the Antigua you, a tourist, would see now. That Antigua no longer exists” (Kincaid 1988: 23). “That Antigua” has been consumed by European imperialism, replaced by a constructed paradise. Taking inspiration from Kincaid, Stephanie Black’s (2001) award-winning feature-length documentary film, *Life and Debt*, similarly places in direct contrast the paradisaical tourist image of Jamaica and the economic deprivation which plagues the country. “If you go to Jamaica as a tourist, this is what you will see” (Black 2001), states the narrator *Life and Debt*. In fact, both texts examine this unseen, unacknowledged aspect of Caribbean life which, whilst hidden from the Euro-American touristic image of Jamaica as “sun, sand, and sea” (Nixon 2015: 43) is in fact inextricably linked to the world-economy, peripheralized and invisible though it is. Within less than ten minutes, Black’s documentary presents footage of an interview with Michael Manley, Jamaica’s president from 1972 to 1980 and 1989 to 1992. As is exposed in the film’s title, Manley explains Jamaica’s

fall into economic debt in the 1970s, a debt which through an economic policy predominantly governed by International Monetary Fund (IMF) involvement, has lasted well out of the 1970s and continues to dominate life on the Caribbean Island to today. Although Jamaica enjoyed relative economic growth up to the early 1960s (Clarke and Nelson 2020), this was predominantly reliant on the “export production of bauxite, sugar and tourism” (Brown 1981: 8–9). With its economy of export dependence, the global financial crisis of the 1970s dramatically impacted Jamaica (Clarke and Nelson 2020), resulting in Manley turning to the IMF as Jamaica faced rapidly increasing unemployment and decreasing social conditions (Clarke and Nelson 2020). However, the IMF conditions focused only on short term solutions, imposing strict spending restrictions as well as large interest rates for loan repayment (Black 2001), leading Jamaica into a cycle of indebtedness which has only worsened since the 1970s.

Here Comes the Sun and Cycles of Dependence

Dennis-Benn’s (2017) *Here Comes the Sun* registers precisely these cycles of debt in its narrative construction and characterization through its presentation of an agonizing relationship between a mother, Delores, and her two daughters, Margot and Thandi. The family lives in a fictional area of Jamaica named River Bank, where much of the economy is reliant upon tourism; opportunities for work outside of this economy are minimal or non-existent. Although the text’s narrative is constructed through a third person narrator, much of the story revolves around Margot as a conduit between her mother, her younger sister, and other figures in the town’s sex trade economy.

The text takes on a tormenting cyclical form of abuse and trading on the sex of one’s own body and that of others. In many ways, our first (chronologically speaking) introduction to this cycle comes in Delores’s memorializing of her own pain as, under economic and societal pressures, she sells sex with her daughter, Margot, for six-hundred dollars to a tourist. Whilst selling “items to tourists” when Margot was “barely fourteen” (Dennis-Benn 2017: 201), a man, “wearing sunglasses, like most tourists... pulled out a wad of cash” (Dennis-Benn 2017: 202). For Delores, “the crispness of the bills and the scent of newness” (Dennis-Benn 2017: 202), draws her to an imagined freedom through “the possibility of moving her family out of River Bank, affording her daughter’s school fee, books, and uniforms, buying a telephone and a landline for her to call people whenever she liked” (Dennis-Benn 2017: 202). Delores is placed in a position of desperate vulnerability, giving what we might read as forced consent on behalf of her daughter in the hope of a better life for her children. In this sense, the interaction becomes reflective of Seabrook’s (2001: xii) notion of the dynamics of sex tourism in which “the relationship between rich tourists and the sex workers they meet... is one of the rare occasions when privilege confronts poverty face to face.” Satirically inscribed in Delores’s desperation is a recognition of the fetishization of poverty which comes with this form of sex tourism. Delores’s actions are almost primal in their urgency, as she, “tore her eyes away from the stack” (Dennis-Benn 2017: 202) and “made up her mind the minute the scent of the bills hit her” (Dennis-Benn 2017: 202). This is mirrored in the tourist’s performativity, as he “pulled out a wad of cash and began to count it in front of Delores.

Delores watched him count six hundred-dollar bills. She had never seen so much money in her life” (Dennis-Benn 2017: 202). We can read this performative exchange as “premised upon long-standing economic, gender, and racial relations of power between tourist and local, between wealthy and poor nations, between the haves and the have-nots, between those who participate as ‘white’ and those defined as ‘black’” (Kempadoo 2004: 121). Both characters embody, in an almost caricatured way, a sense of overt economic dependence.

We can therefore read the interaction, and the consent given on Margot’s behalf by Delores, as structured by the broader systems of economic insecurity in which the characters live, and this is reflected also in the exchanges between mother and daughter during the conversation, which are entirely structured by the language of debt. “Delores had made up her mind the minute the scent of the bills hit her” (Dennis-Benn 2017: 202); and yet, “her eyes pleaded with her daughter’s, and also held in them an apology. *Please undah-stand. Do it now and you’ll tank me lata*” (Dennis-Benn 2017: 202, italics in original). The extended temporality of the exchange (“*you’ll tank me lata*”) defines the structure of both this and other relations inscribed throughout the text. The notion of a belated reward, the idea that there may be a temporary loss to create the conditions for a future gain, registers the temporality of the neoliberal economy which IMF borrowing instills. Analysis of IMF and World Bank structural adjustment policies (SAP) in developing countries during the 1970s and 1980s highlights its focus on apparently temporary sacrifice for (rarely realized) long term economic growth. SAP enforced by the World Bank and IMF as part of loan agreements for global South countries relied on a promise of future development through a reliance on external borrowing and foreign direct investments (Babb 2005: 200; Toussaint 2008: 94), and included conditions such as “national currency devaluation, full trade liberalization, contractionary fiscal policy, market-determined exchange rate, and removal of all excise taxes” (Elu 2000: 202–203). Research on the impact of these policies has, however, shown that they have repeatedly failed to deliver on their promises of long-term economic growth and have instead resulted in increased inequality (Babb 2005; Forster et al. 2019) and long-term debt reliance (Toussaint 2008). The text’s formal framing through relationships of belated reward thus in many ways registers this condition of SAP through which Jamaican economic borrowing came to be defined in the last decades of the twentieth century.

In this way, this initial event frames Delores and Margot’s relationship throughout the text in the extended temporalities of hope and cyclical victimization. This is reflected not only in Delores’s initial sacrifice of her daughter’s sexuality and her pleading with her to “*do it now and you’ll tank me lata*” (Dennis-Benn 2017: 202, italics in original), but also in Margot’s subsequent actions. As an attempt to escape from the debt-ridden relationship, Margot later gives away the money Delores received in this exchange to Delores’s brother; who uses it, ironically, to fund his own escape from Jamaica. We hear how “she handed the money to him, thinking he would leave her alone” (Dennis-Benn 2017: 217). And yet,

the victory was short-lived, because Delores only got meaner, hungrier, subjecting Margot to more strangers to make up for the money she lost. Margo realized too

late that when she gave Uncle Winston the money, she was giving away herself.
(Dennis-Benn 2017: 217)

Her “short-lived victory,” implying a kind of momentary fix, in fact marks the beginning of “giving away herself;” a sense that in this exchange Margot loses her own agency and enters a cycle of enforced victimhood. This in many ways reflects the debt cycle which Jamaica becomes enveloped in from the 1980s onwards, one of broken promises and ever-increasing indebtedness.

This sense of a never-ending cycle of debt in the hope of some future promise is also heavily reflected in the relationship between Margot and Thandi throughout the text. Thandi represents for both Delores and Margot the potential for escape from poverty; if they fund her schooling, she will get a “good education” and a “good job” (importantly setting this “good job” up in contrast with Margot’s sex work). As such, Thandi represents an embodied escape for the family, especially for Margot who desperately tries to protect Thandi from any form of potential exploitation. We hear:

when her sister was a baby with a head full of curls, Margot discovered that in the braiding she found escape from various men’s untying, unclasping, and unbuckling. It was in this soft, delicate texture that the roughness of the other touches faded.
(Dennis-Benn 2017: 35)

Thandi, in the “soft, delicate texture” of her hair, embodies Margot’s dreams of escape from the visceral “roughness” both of her work and of the sexual violence which she experiences multiple times through the novel. And yet, this dream of escape which Thandi seems to supply becomes increasingly ominous throughout the novel, as promise turns to resentment between the sisters: Thandi towards Margot and Delores for not allowing her to pursue her academic and personal wishes, and Margot towards Thandi for effectively embodying Margot’s own sacrifices. In the hope of this future escape, Margot commits her entire being to the market forces of sex tourism, for

Thandi whom she clothed, sheltered, fed, gave every bit of herself to. With her body she shielded her sister from Delores’s wrath. Gave her the opportunity to get away. To be better than them so she wouldn’t have to sacrifice anything. (Dennis-Benn 2017: 339)

The sacrifices which thus plague Margot and her work throughout the novel come to a head as Thandi, in a kind of doomed coming-of-age, becomes increasingly aware of the pressures placed on her through these sacrifices; and the consequent indebtedness she holds towards her sister despite these choices remaining largely out of her control. This resentment culminates the novel, as Thandi realizes “she exists merely as a debt to be paid” (Dennis-Benn 2017: 336); representing, in Carson’s (2017: 580) words, fictitious capital’s “constitution of a corresponding subject who lives a life that is pathologically driven towards the ability to repay and pay for what has been credited to them.” For Thandi, like Margot in her mother’s decision to pimp her at the market, this destiny is predetermined for her, with the consent given by someone else on her behalf. In the final pages of the text, we watch as the full cycle of debt relations which structured the novel’s relationships up to that point are laid bare. On finding Thandi with Margot’s own boss, Alphonso—

who had previously lent Margot the money to pay Thandi's school bills and thus, inserted himself into their dynamic of indebtedness—Margot desperately tries to interrupt their potential sexual exchange. Invoking the debt relation between them, she states “my childhood was spent like a hundred-dollar bill on you. Everything you needed was put on me. If yuh needed formula, I had to sleep wid yuh father to get it” (Dennis-Benn 2017: 339). Margot's childhood being “spent like a hundred-dollar bill” on Thandi, followed by the directness of Thandi's needs being paid for by Margot's sexuality, reflects the absolute instrumentalization of Margot's body in the relationship. And yet, at Thandi's indignant refusal to follow the path laid out for her, Margot has a realization: “maybe her sister will only learn how to swim when she, like Margot, is pushed into the deepest parts of the ocean” (Dennis-Benn 2017: 340). Consequently, “Margot leans in and kisses her sister gently on the forehead for what will be the last time. And, very gently, she pushes her toward Alphonso. ‘Mek me proud’” (Dennis-Benn 2017: 340). The ending then reflects much 1970s and 1980s Caribbean literature which lost the “sense of promise awakened” in the region's mid-century literature (Niblett 2012: 54), instead becoming “marked by a mood of disillusion or even despair” (Scott 2006). Through this cyclical indebtedness and consequent despair, the text presents sex work as the only option, and thus as a form not of agency and autonomy but of exploitation. The text's cycle thus seems to uncritically reflect the “poverty as force” assumption (Doezema 2018: 43) inscribed in numerous debates around sex work in global South countries, where women are assumed to enter sex work only because they have no other option in the face of extreme poverty, thus once again inscribing sex workers in global South countries as requiring “saving” from the trade, rather than as requiring the protection of working rights.

Indebtedness and Sex Workers' Rights in *Here Comes the Sun*

And yet, Dennis-Benn does not simply uncritically reflect these assumptions. To understand the complex registration of these contradictions through the character of Margot, it becomes vital to turn back to the WReC. In their examination of capitalist modernity, the WReC (2015) state,

modernity is neither a chronological nor a geographical category. It is not something that happens—or even that happens *first*—in “the west” and to which others can subsequently gain access...capitalist modernization entails development, yes—but this “development” takes the form also of the development of underdevelopment. (P. 13)

In many ways, Dennis-Benn's representation of Margot is reflective of this false notion of an unfolding modernization which the WReC critiques. Margot's intense exploitation of others, as well as her own self-instrumentalization, is driven by the dream of modernization: Thandi's education and consequent facilitation of their escape from poverty using the locomotive of Euro-American money. To some extent, Margot succeeds in escaping poverty through her exploitation of others as a pimp, adopting her own mother's debt to her. In the novel's final chapter, “Margot wakes up in the beachfront villa—her villa” (Dennis-Benn 2017: 341). And yet, there is a discomfort in reading Margot's success here, juxtaposed directly with her pimping of her sister to

Alphonso, which ends the preceding chapter. This is further evidenced earlier in the text when one of her sex workers leaves the job, stating to Margot, “unlike you, is blood dat pump through me vein. Not greed” (Dennis-Benn 2017: 288). Margot turns her back on her village and people and even sacrifices her own queer relationship with a woman, Verdene, whom Margot tricks into selling her house in order to free up the land for a new hotel resort in an action which can be read as an abandonment of queer relationality in the place of heteronormative modernization (Dennis-Benn 2017). In many ways then, the discomfort that we feel at Margot’s success, and even the unsympathetic representation of her character can be understood through the discourses of sex work in the Caribbean which arguably enable what the WReC call the world-system’s “development of underdevelopment.” As Doezema (2018: 38) states, “the image of the prostitute as agent, who willingly chooses her occupation, was unimaginable.” This is further evident when we account for the specific contours of these debates as they are mapped onto an uneven, (post)colonial world-system where,

The “voluntary” prostitute is a Western sex worker, seen as capable of making independent decisions about whether or not to sell sexual services, while the sex worker from a developing country is deemed unable to make this same choice.... Potentially the most frightening division, however, created by the voluntary/forced dichotomy is that of sex workers into guilty/“voluntary” and innocent/“forced” prostitutes, which reinforces the belief that women who transgress sexual norms deserve to be punished. (Doezema 2018: 41)

Margot’s character, then, can only be presented as transgressive. In understanding the text as a work of world-literature and thus as a commodity entangled within the contours of the world-system itself, Margot’s apparent success at negotiating this oppressive system is almost radical, a breaking away from assumptions of monetary coercion and thus “guilty” (Doezema 2018: 41).

And yet, as a final complex resistance to this dominant narrative, Dennis-Benn once again inverts our understanding of Margot’s character and her negotiation of rights in an inherently coercive system. Whilst the novel ends with Margot’s success in escaping the poverty of her town, this is a bittersweet success. Not only is this final scene juxtaposed with her pimping of her own sister alongside the many other women that Margot plays a part in exploiting, but there is a distinct awareness in the final lines of Margot’s losses as a result. We hear how “Margot stands on the pool terrace.... Everything glitters in the new sunlight, just like Margot had always thought it would. Except for her lone, grainy figure on the water’s surface, dark in the face of the sun” (Dennis-Benn 2017: 345). The text’s ending emphasizes not only Margot’s eventual escape, but the loneliness which plagues this escape, encapsulated in her “lone, grainy figure” (Dennis-Benn 2017: 345). This is reflective of Scott’s (2006) suggestion that with the lost promises of economic prosperity following decolonization, and the latent debt plaguing many Caribbean economies in the period, late twentieth century Caribbean literature is defined by a hope that “is confined to the individual realm; women may ‘make it’...but the victory is tainted by an awareness of those left behind.” Margot’s character is thus defined not simply by discourses of “immorality” which seep through debates around sex workers’ rights in postcolonial countries, but by the broader ongoing economic

exploitation of these countries, and the complicated and multi-layered success of escaping conditions of indebtedness through the profession of sex work. Margot is certainly responsible throughout the text for complicating the level to which others are able to give consent, particularly through her role as a pimp where she takes advantage of others on multiple occasions (see, for example, Dennis-Benn 2017: 275). And yet, her own consenting to her role as provider for her family is taken out of her hands. Ultimately, Margot's attempted escape through her sister's "credit" fails, and she is left only with her own partial and lonely escape. This failure comes because the trajectory of "development" is not straightforward: in fact, Thandi and Margot's condition within the world-system is already set, they are already imprisoned within globalized modernity. Margot is not an entirely evil nor immoral character but is rather a concretized and contextualized character who reflects precisely Olufemi's (2020: 108) call for "a more expansive idea of consent [which] recognizes that though we cannot escape oppressive structures, we do have a certain level of agency within them." Margot is neither entirely victim nor entirely perpetrator; she is instead a character attempting to navigate her inherent and already indebtedness in a racialized and gendered combined and uneven world-system.

Debt, Disaster, and Scandal in Haiti

On January 12th, 2010, Haiti was hit with the most devastating earthquake in the country's recorded history; at a magnitude of 7.0, it killed between 70,000–316,000 people (DesRoches et al. 2011: 1). And yet, "from the very beginning of its history, right up to the day of the earthquake, Haiti had a lot of help on its long road to ruination" (Díaz 2011: 46). Díaz's analysis thus outlines a vital consideration in our understanding of sex workers' rights in Haiti today: since the Haitian Revolution, the Haitian economy has been dominated by debt and thus, by dependence. As a French colony, Saint Domingue was "the most productive colony in the hemisphere" (Obregón 2018: 601). The 1791–1804 Haitian Revolution, representing what Ulysse (2015: 61) highlights as the "reclamation of humanity," for the French, represented the loss of one of the most profitable industries of the period: sugar production using enslaved people's labor. As a result, to counter a commercial embargo by France and the United States following the revolution, Haiti reluctantly agreed to pay an "independence debt" to France in 1825 (Wisner and Concannon 2023: 187). Although the agreement included recognition of Haiti's independence, its terms, negotiated under the threat of reinstating slavery in Haiti, forced Haiti to pay millions in debt, which would be inherited by future governments, hindering development spending, and sending Haiti into a cycle of aid dependence (Obregón 2018). As a result, throughout the twentieth century, Haiti was forced to borrow further from a host of European nations and eventually from the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and Inter-American Development Bank in order to support basic and infrastructural development (Wisner and Concannon 2023). As Obregón (2018: 614) highlights, "the Haitian population has [thus] never experienced itself as completely free of empire...Haiti was the first 'African' state where creditors built a practice of economic imperialism." Haiti's

underdevelopment has, in this way, existed inextricably with the modernization of Euro-American public and private sector development through debt.

Haiti’s history of colonial and postcolonial debt can therefore be read as a history of the creation and maintenance of a racialized narrative of victimhood and inferiority assigned both to the country as a whole and to its people. This history of enforced victimhood, stemming from the project of transatlantic slavery, is based on a racial capitalism which “divided peoples by exaggerating subcultural, regional, and other differences into racial ones” (Obregón 2018: 598), and resulted in:

the ideological and cultural rationales through which the Caribbean became the subject of the internationalizing and imperial efforts of Wall Street’s banks and at the same time fashioned the racial, economic, legal, and governmental terms through which the Caribbean was encountered. (Hudson 2017: 16–17)

It is for this reason that, “Haiti has an image problem. That remains Haiti’s burden” (Ulysse 2015: 30). The next section of this article builds on works including Mark Schuller’s (2016: 12) *Humanitarian Aftershocks in Haiti*, which explores the role of foreign agencies in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake which “[implemented] expensive, inefficient, unsustainable “solutions” that deepened dependency, dehumanized or infantilized the population.” I hope to explore the role of gender in these “humanitarian aftershocks” (Schuller 2016), examining how these historic and contemporary paradigms of dependence impacted directly upon sex workers’ rights in the aftermath of the earthquake.

The catastrophic nature of the earthquake brought with it a stream of media coverage which frequently served only to maintain historically unfolding representations of a “subhumanity” (Ulysse 2015: 11) of Haitian people. Whilst “most cameras shifted their lenses when the morbid and grueling work began—the massive discard of the dead and what to do with the displaced living” (Ulysse 2015: 12), the earthquake’s survivors were brought back into focus by explosive coverage of the “Haiti Sex Scandal” only eight years later. The 2018 “global media scandal” of “an alleged Oxfam cover-up” (Pardy and Alexeyeff 2023: 76) of sexual misconduct by its staff during the aftermath of the earthquake, “rocked the international development sector, prompting shame and indignation among supporters of foreign aid, non-government organization (NGO) donors, feminists, activist groups, and academics” (Pardy and Alexeyeff 2023: 76). “The public outrage sparked by the Times was fueled by depictions of poor, vulnerable, non-white cisgender Haitian women being harassed, exploited, and abused by powerful white humanitarian men” (Pardy and Alexeyeff 2023: 77), and yet, in Oxfam’s—and the wider development sector’s—response “Haitians were central but marginal. Ultimately, the sector positioned Haitian sex workers not as active subjects of the controversy, but as objects of suffering to be aided and through whom development organisations might atone for their own alleged wrongdoings” (Pardy and Alexeyeff 2023: 77–78). The scandal ultimately became yet another tool for reinstating the victimhood of the Haitian people and particularly of Haitian women as “victims of suffering, as the ideal subjects for reinforcing development’s legitimacy and claims for funding” (Pardy and Alexeyeff 2023: 93). In this way, the scandal serves to directly highlight the intertwinement of

Haiti's positioning as "dependent" in the global imaginary, and the nuances of agency and consent which sex workers continually negotiate.

Complicating Notions of Victimhood in *The Immortals*

Orcel's (2020) *The Immortals*—first published in French as *Les Immortelles*—originally published eight years prior to the media outrage of the Oxfam sex scandal, acts as a prior resistance to this victim-subject formation of Haitian sex workers, and thus registers this history of imposed narratives of Haitian victimhood through the particular lens of debates around sex workers' rights. The text explores the lives of several of Port-au-Prince's sex workers in a formally experimental vignette style, through the narration of a sex worker, and her writer-client who in exchange for sex, agrees to write her stories. The text then—as well as the metaliterary inscription of the worker's narratives—is an attempt to *immortalize* the sex workers of Port-au-Prince who lost their lives in the 2010 earthquake, as well as those who survived but continue to live a life pushed to the fringes of society due to the invisibility of their labor. In this work of cultural mourning, *The Immortals* works through the dynamics of debt to counter this narrative of victimhood in the relationship between sex worker and client, re-subjectifying the sex workers it portrays not only as autonomous subjects but as laborers requiring the protections of labor rights, not legal oppression.

Orcel's presentation of the women in the text reflects the complexity of claims for both humanity and laborer on which the sex workers' rights movement places its demands. In doing so, Orcel registers the demands of the movement not by simplifying these discussions but rather, like Dennis-Benn's presentation of Margot, by complicating the characters and their labor. In his afterword to the English translation of the text, the text's English translator, Nathan Dize (2020: 123) states, "*The Immortals* imagines a world where these women can live and die without losing their right to human dignity." Dize thus proposes the text as a comfortable reinstatement of the humanity which is often missing from representations "of women in the Third World as perpetually marginalized and underprivileged" (Kapur 2002: 6). Whilst I would agree with Dize that the text works to restore the dignity of the story's women, I argue that this dignity comes only from the complicated and multi-layered presentation of the women. The workers in the text are presented as exploited and agential, victims and actors, of both their own work and their post-disaster context. Many of them are forced into sex work because of a lack of alternative economic opportunities, and thus are presented as victims of this work. The narrator explains,

In this country you must set your priorities, identify what is indispensable to your life, or rather, to your survival. In my profession, you can't waste time being picky, weighing the consequences, choosing. You don't know how to choose when you're paid to dole out pleasure. To suck and suck some more without the right to have had enough, to no longer want anymore. (Orcel 2020: 18)

There is a sense in these initial lines of absolute precarity in the focus on "[identifying] what is indispensable to your life" (Orcel 2020:18). This is emphasized in the lack of choice in succeeding

sentences, where the narrator presents a life in which she rarely has the power to give consent or, indeed, to take it away, “without the right to have had enough” (Orcel 2020: 18). The suggestion that, “you don’t know how to choose when you’re paid to dole out pleasure” (Orcel 2020: 18) suggests a dependence upon the clientele. The text also situates this relationship within a broader gendered and racialized world-system, as we hear, “the only unity possible between the oppressor and the oppressed is in the very act of oppression. The oppressed suffers. The oppressor climaxes” (Orcel 2020: 55). This representation of the relationship between sex worker and client reflects the hegemonic “notion of sex workers as exclusively ‘victims’” (Kempadoo 2018: 8), with the suggestion that “the oppressed suffers [whilst] the oppressor climaxes” (Orcel 2020: 55) mapping global systems of patriarchal capitalist oppression onto the bodies of the sex worker and her client, through that crude suggestion that “the oppressor climaxes” (Orcel 2020: 55).

This mapping of oppressive regimes of sexuality is preceded by the narrator’s warning to the text’s central “little girl,” a young girl whom the narrator takes under her wing as she begins her own sexual labor: “you can’t even know, little girl, how advantageous that can seem, how dangerous it is for a whore to be appreciated, loved by her clients, for a slave to be cherished by her master” (Orcel 2020: 55). Through this warning, the text highlights the linkage between the historical enslavement and rape of many Black women and the contemporary dynamics of sex tourism in the Caribbean. This is reflected in Kempadoo’s (1999: 5) suggestion that “prostitution in the Caribbean is inextricably tied to the power and control exerted by European colonizers over black women since the sixteenth century” since enslavement enabled “not only the compulsory extraction of labor from the blacks but also, in theory at least, slave owners’ right to total sexual access to slaves” (Beckles 1989: 141). Enslavement thus represents the absolute surrender of bodily autonomy for the enslaved women, both through the extraction of their labor and the abuse of their sexuality since, “enslaved, indentured and colonized womanhood thus came to represent uninhibited and unrestricted sexual intercourse” (Kempadoo 2018: 10).

In this sense then, *The Immortals* registers the racialized and gendered exploitation which lies at the heart of the historical continuum from enslavement to the contemporary sex trade in the Caribbean. As we saw in the introduction, the contemporary liberal discourse of Euro-American-led development and rights assignment seems to accept this as the hegemonic understanding of contemporary sex work in the Caribbean. In fact, the sense that Haiti’s sex workers of are by definition oppressed and thus in need of saving aligns to a Western feminist politics which has “promoted this image of the authentic victim subject” (Kapur 2002: 2); “used repeatedly to justify imperialistic intrusions, whether in the form of military or humanitarian interventions” (Pardy and Alexeyeff 2023: 78). As we have seen, this representation is certainly registered in the text. And yet, Kempadoo (1999: 8) has noted that, “Caribbean history suggests that sexual labor was also performed as an act of resistance to oppressive and dehumanizing conditions of slavery, providing women with the possibility of obtaining freedom for themselves, children, and men from a racist institution.” In this way, argues Kempadoo (1999),

This specific characteristic of sex work in Caribbean history allows us to ponder the possibility of defining Caribbean prostitution not only as a form of masculine

oppression and exploitation or as a category of “naturalized” women’s work that is employed as a survival strategy in time of economic hardship but also as a strategy of resistance to racialized relations of power and dominance. (P. 8–9)

The notion of resistance inherent to aspects of the performance of sexual labor therefore complicates a singular notion of oppression assigned to contemporary sex work. This is also strikingly evident in the context of post-2010 Haiti. Whilst, in their response to the Oxfam Sex Scandal, the development sector, “positioned Haitian sex workers not as active subjects of the controversy, but as objects of suffering to be aided” (Pardy and Alexeyeff 2023: 77–78), many Haitian sex workers took a pragmatic approach, with one woman telling the UK’s Guardian newspaper that, “a foreigner would give her at least \$100 (£72), more than five times the price a local would pay” (Daniels 2018), reflecting Jennings’s and Nikolić-Ristanović’s (2009: 23) findings that the “gendered peacekeeping economy” creates new demand for sex work with predominantly male military and humanitarian officials. Orcel’s *The Immortals* also directly registers this complicated dynamic of simultaneous exploitation and agency, bringing dignity to its central characters not only by humanizing them but by professionalizing their labor. The text is littered with the narrator’s reflections on her support for the young sex worker through advice such as: “never start before you get paid” (Orcel 2020: 49); and “the street is of extreme importance in this profession... You negotiate and you bring them here” (Orcel 2020: 59). The narrator’s advice for the girl not only highlights the work of sexual labor as a profession, but also emphasizes its potential pitfalls in terms precisely of labor, focusing on the importance of sufficient payment for services, negotiation, and pipeline of clients. The examples reflect the centrality of labor in the definition of sex work, through the “similarities with other dimensions of working people’s lives” (Kempadoo 2018: 3). In this way, the text’s historicization of oppressive regimes through linkages to the slave trade, as well as representations of contemporary modes of resistance and negotiation of the sex trade, are inscribed in terms not of abstract gendered oppression but rather as intertwined within a world capitalist system of labor and commodity exchange. In this sense, whilst we can question the extent to which we observe any agency over consent in the text, this lack of consent is suggested not because the sole exchange of sex itself “is devoid of real choice” (Olufemi 2020: 99), but on the basis instead that, “the world we live in is already a world devoid of choice; it is already coercive by nature” (Olufemi 2020: 100).

Narrating Rights and Wrongs: Encoding Agency and Victimhood in *The Immortals*

But Orcel takes his analysis of negotiations of consent in a world of uneven indebtedness one step further, exploring debates around indebtedness and autonomy in Haiti through the characters of the women themselves, but also through the construction of the narration. Vitally, the narrative is set up as an exchange between the sex worker-narrator and her client, a writer with whom she agrees a deal: “you give me what I ask you for and after you can have me in any way you desire” (Orcel 2020: 2). In exchange she requests not monetary compensation but “writing for sex” (Orcel 2020: 2); “a book, she said, to make [the women of Grand Rue] living, immortal” (Orcel 2020:1). Initially, we might read this through the lens of the silenced subaltern woman seeking a voice to

share her story, and thus look for its revictimization of the narrator, especially in the post-quake context which, as we have already observed, became a context for reinscribing Euro-American discourses of gendered saviorism. And yet, “this opening episode,” states Munro (2014),

seems to present writing about the earthquake itself as a form of prostitution, a means of exchange between the subjects of the book and the writer, who becomes at once a client of the prostitute and one who sells himself and his trade in order to tell a story of the disaster. (P. 383)

This “form of production” which Munro discusses is thus presented as more complex, not without exploitation through the mutual selling of subjectivity but, importantly, a mutuality or, as Munro (2014: 384) later calls it, “a new form of interdependency” is present. In his opening, the writer-narrator explains, “for me, sex and alcohol were the best therapy” (Orcel 2020: 1). The writer is thus wholly imperfect and flawed as a character, a character apparently recovering from “a violent nervous breakdown” (Orcel 2020: 1), whose exchange with the sex worker is one of ambivalence. This ambivalence is further emphasized through the structure of the narrative. Importantly, the deal between the writer and the sex worker is temporally constructed as, “I *first* just had to write and *then* fuck her” (Orcel 2020:2, italics added). The text itself presents the sex worker’s narrative, and the process of the writer constructing this narrative, ending with the sex worker addressing the writer directly and asking him to “wish [her] good luck” (Orcel 2020: 120). Rather than the exchange of sex itself, the exchange of the narrative is given priority throughout the text, and the reader never observes the writer claiming his side of the deal. This assigns a level of privacy to the woman which is not seen in much of the narrative itself, but also places the writer in a dependent position throughout, locked in an indebtedness in which he must first carry out the worker’s wishes before he attains his reward.

The ambivalence of the relationship between client and worker is also maintained throughout the text through the continual insertion of the space for female narration and the female voice in producing the narrative and subjectivity of the Haitian woman. In proposing the exchange of “writing for sex” (Orcel 2020: 2), the sex worker sells her bodily and sexual autonomy in exchange for the sharing of her story. Her body, and the bodies of those whose stories she tells, then become vital in the negotiation of narrative autonomy in the face of a history of racialized and gendered bodily violence. In this way, the narrative reflects Munro’s (2014: 382) suggestion that “the body is a kind of historical repository...in much of postplantation writing, including recent Haitian fiction.” Munro (2014: 384) has analyzed the structure of the narrative in *The Immortals* as a form of interdependence since “the author needs the subject’s voice and story, and the subject needs an author to transcribe the narrative in order to bear testimony.” In this way, the deal between writer and client sets up a complex mutuality between the pair, registering the creation of a specifically gendered space of self-narration, and thus resisting patterns of hegemonic narratives which attempt to speak *for* sex workers. Whilst at the beginning, the writer agrees to “transform” the worker’s story from prose to poetry, the resulting formal blend of poetry, prose, and notebook entries suggests a limit to the writer’s “transformation,” reflecting the sex worker’s self-advocacy of her story throughout, reflected in lines such as, “I only asked you to write, to play your role as a writer

while I speak” (Orcel 2020: 14). As Munro (2014: 86) acknowledges, the author’s role in the writing of the narrative diminishes throughout, as the woman states, “without wanting to interfere too much with the direction of your work, writer, I’d like for you to add this notebook to your story.” The narrative thus becomes increasingly polyvocal, as further voices accumulate in its construction, so much so that by the end of the narrative, the role of the writer is barely recognizable, as the worker claims her agency over the story’s telling, “encroaching, in an almost mean way, on [the writer’s] artistic freedom” (Orcel 2020: 120), since “[she] was the one who chose to write it as such” (Orcel 2020: 120). The worker asserts her active role in the story’s telling and consequently in the subjectification of herself and the other workers. In many ways then, like Margot’s story, the construction of the narrative in *The Immortals* reflects the sex worker’s negotiation of her own agency in an already coercive patriarchal world-system. The WReC (2015: 20) note that “the effectivity of the world-system will *necessarily* be discernable in any modern literary work, since the world-system exists unforgoably as the matrix within which all modern literature takes shape and comes into being.” This is in many ways embodied in the worker’s narrative: her story is constructed and enabled through an exchange relationship in which she becomes alienated from her own bodily autonomy, and thus is entirely structured by the contours of the neoliberal world-system, and all the debt relations which come with it. As such, the relationship is at once already coercive since there is an immense dependence based on the writer *immortalizing* or, “keeping alive” the women of Grand Rue. And yet, the worker claims autonomy not only over her body through the delayed gratification of this deal, but also over her narrative. She does so through the insertion and affirmation of her own voice throughout the narrative, thus suggesting her claiming of some level of agency precisely through an exchange relationship of debt.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I want to return to the discussion of consent which opened this article, particularly Olufemi’s (2020: 98) claim that “consent is not easy, or simple. It is a negotiation of the structures that shape our existence.” This article has examined *Here Comes the Sun* (2017) and *The Immortals* (2020) as two works of world-literature which both examine and critique the subjectivity of the sex worker in the context of the Caribbean debt economies of late capitalism. Through their examinations of sex workers in the Jamaican and Haitian contexts, Dennis-Benn and Orcel intervene in dominant discourses around sex workers rights by highlighting the sex worker as a laborer through the professionalization of the sex trade. However, there is also a further resistance in the narrative construction of the sex workers in both texts, not only as laborers but perhaps more simply as subjects; claimants of rights rather than objects onto which rights are placed. Returning to our discussions around current sex workers’ rights debates from the beginning of this article, international debates around sex workers’ rights often frame the issue purely through the lens of victimhood, removing the autonomy of workers themselves to claim these rights by making invisible any sense of agency in this labor and disallowing space for workers themselves

to intervene. Both *Here Comes the Sun* and *The Immortals* register precisely the complexities of this battle for rights ownership by highlighting the attempted, although frequently limited agency the characters have over their own narratives; Margot because of her ultimately ambivalent success in constructing her own economic development, and the central sex worker in *The Immortals* because of her ultimately incomplete claim over her own story through her mutually dependent relationship with the writer. Both texts then can be read as examinations of the labor of subjectifying the Caribbean sex worker through the framework of storytelling and narrative construction, or the cultural and imaginative labor of subject construction. Therefore, these texts serve as examples of attempts to subjectify within a system that already structures being itself through a late capitalist world-system of debt. Returning to our discussion of debt’s construction from the beginning, these texts, both as internal narratives of the capitalist world-system and, on a secondary level, as works of literary production, are constructed within a system which is always already under pressure to reproduce the cultural narratives and subjects of the Caribbean which enable its ongoing exploitation by the core economies of the world-system. As works of narrative cultural production attempting to reproduce the subject of the sex worker, then, these texts become vital forms of resistance to this structuring of being, not through liberal notions of subjecthood, which are extracted from the realities of a racially and gendered oppressive world-system, but rather through a “negotiation of the structures that shape our existence” (Olufemi 2020: 98).

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