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Beyond Post-Colonialism? From *Chocolat* to *White Material*

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Claire Denis's first feature film, *Chocolat* (1988), set in colonial Cameroon, is a reflection on colonialism and its effects on personal relations. With *White Material* (2009), filmed 20 years and 12 films later, Denis literally returns to Africa and to questions of (post-)colonialism that are central to many of her films. The critics writing about the more recent film have thus naturally pointed to the parallel, while Denis herself sees it as a mere coincidence (Ratner 2010: 37). It is another, albeit interesting, coincidence that post-colonialism as an academic term was coined in the very same year that *Chocolat* was released in festivals and cinemas across Europe,¹ whereas *White Material* is usually discussed as clearly addressing post-colonial issues. While Denis's focus in her first film can thus be said to have been post-colonial *avant la lettre*, both movies embrace the rise of the term through its formalisation as an academic discipline, and shed an interesting light on the changes not only of times but also of scientific thinking about First and Third World relations.

Although *White Material* seems to be the post-colonial response to *Chocolat* – proof that the debate about the politics of race and belonging is still ongoing – it can also be read as the rising of new identities that go beyond simple racial ascriptions. The main character of *White Material*, Maria Vial, is a white coffee farmer in post-colonial Africa who refuses to leave the land she feels is rightly hers in spite of an oncoming army of rebels. Whereas France, the aptly named protagonist of Claire Denis's first film, is obviously in search of an identity that she senses she has lost (or never had) somewhere between France and Cameroon, Maria Vial is resolute in her sense of belonging – she sees herself as part of the land she owns, no matter what colour her skin might be.

In this chapter, I will argue that both films centre around questions of race and belonging in ways that academic post-colonialism often fails to address. *White Material* is, as I will show, a more pointed continuation of *Chocolat*, not only acknowledging the historical evolution that has taken place since, but also emphasizing aspects that had hitherto been overlooked.

Denis's co-author for *White Material* is the renowned French novelist Marie NDiaye. NDiaye grew up in suburban France with her mother and brother, while her Senegalese father left the family shortly after her birth. Her texts – 12 novels and six plays up to now – trigger questions of identity and race in a subtle but insistent way. Her novel *Trois Femmes Puissantes* (2009) is her first text set mostly in Africa, a continent whose culture means nothing to NDiaye, who sees herself as '100 per cent Française' (Raya 2009: 14). Setting parts of the novel in Africa is, as the author herself put it, more of a 'musical theme', but it could much more easily be interpreted as a carefully set trap for the critics, who, for the most part, have chosen to get caught up in it and to interpret it as the late acknowledgment of her indebtedness to Africa, awarding NDiaye the prestigious Prix Goncourt for the novel that happens to be the least typical example of her talent.

What may be seen as a return to her roots for Claire Denis, who grew up in colonial Cameroon, is the exploration of a territory that NDiaye has always been linked to by virtue of her skin colour, despite the land being virtually unknown to her. The necessity to transcend colonial practice both on a personal and an aesthetic level is a central issue to the filmmaker Denis and to the author NDiaye. Their collaboration makes *White Material* a poignant statement that goes beyond the established scope of post-colonialism.

Like Maria Vial, the protagonists of NDiaye's novels and plays would like to feel at home in their country and in their respective bodies, but the often hostile gaze of others does not allow them to put the question of belonging to rest. As for the characters of Denis's first and (at time of writing) latest films, their identities are not so much marked by post-colonialism as are their bodies, which seem to utter a truth that they themselves would never dream of expressing – were it not for the others.

Transcending Models

A considerable amount of critical writing exists on the subject of *Chocolat*, nearly always focusing on questions of colonialism, nostalgia and the expression of female desire. Nevertheless, some aspects have hardly been touched upon, though they might lend interesting insight not only into the movie itself but also to its relation to Denis's later film *White Material*.² In this chapter, I would like to argue that Claire Denis's two films challenge the problematic equation

between colonizer and colonized and put the dichotomic and somewhat easy representations of the colonial and post-colonial world under a microscope.

Claire Denis never made a secret of the texts that influenced her while writing the screenplay for *Chocolat*: Doris Lessing's first novel *The Grass Is Singing* (1950) and *Une Vie de Boy* (1956) by the Cameroonian author Ferdinand Oyono. Interestingly enough, many critics mention them in passing, but there is no closer examination of the intertextual relation the film bears to the two novels.³

Une Vie de Boy is the bleak account of the humiliating life of Toundi, a mission boy working in the house of a French commander. The commander's wife cheats on her husband with another French government official. When the truth about that the affair comes to light, Toundi, having witnessed the affair, becomes a *persona non grata*, for his presence keeps reminding the commander of his wife's infidelity. Toundi is accused of theft and is beaten so badly by the local police that he dies from his injuries after having escaped over the border to Spanish Guinea. The interest of this short novel lies in the reversal of roles that it shows – although their intimacy seems to be far better protected than that of their domestics, the colonizers are subject to the constant gaze of many onlookers, and their every move is noticed. Their staff knows everything about their lives, habits and morals, and their most intimate secrets are discussed and judged without them being able to prohibit it despite the colonial power relations.

Denis stages the same situation in *Chocolat* and the visualisation makes it all the more tangible: Aimée, her husband and their guests are literally framed by their domestic staff; Denis's camera shows them and little France as spectators of their masters' lives. Unlike Oyono's novel, which is largely concerned with the racist and petty morals of a small African town, what Denis emphasizes is the artificiality of the colonial situation – the house is a stage on which the tragicomedy of colonialism is playing out its last act, faithfully watched and commented upon by the colonized. Aimée's attempts to keep up the facade of mimicking French social life are shown to be nothing more than the impersonation of a script inadequate to represent the reality of Africa.

Also set in the 1950s, Lessing's novel depicts the Turners, a couple who are trying to run a farm in Rhodesia. Having no farming skills or experience, Dick and Mary live in poverty, which makes their lives little better than those of the natives they are exploiting; Mary quietly loses her mind over their lonely existence. Moses, their black houseboy, gains power over her because he understands her utter destitution and sees her pain and her weaknesses. When he realizes that the Turners are about to leave him and the farm, he kills Mary. The novel is a bleak analysis of the consequences of the colour bar and has often been interpreted as a political allegory of colonialism.

Lessing's novel is alluded to subtly in Denis's film when Aimée tells her English visitor that the former (German) owner of their house was killed by

his black houseboy. However, the relationship between Aimée and Protée is different from that of Mary and Moses in that it is not only one of power, but first and foremost one of unfulfilled mutual desire. Mary's desire is so unthinkable, the colour bar so absolute, that she can express it only through her dreams. She fears it – and him – so much that she can finally free herself from Moses's influence only with the help of an intermediary. A transgression of the racial limits is deemed impossible by all the protagonists, and it is in uttering its imperative refusal that Lessing allows her readers to think the unthinkable.⁴

More than a generation later, interracial relations have evolved only slightly. While in a reversal of the colonial relations, Moses gains power over Mary by invading the little privacy she has, in *Chocolat*, Denis puts Protée in similar situations but has him silently rebuke the closeness that Aimée forces upon him.⁵ Denis is careful to translate the upcoming movement of independence into a failing love affair: it is not so much France but her mother, Aimée, who stands for the mother country; Denis drafts her as a rather indolent character, whose only active move will be to silently offer herself to Protée, immediately assuming the passive role again. Protée refuses Aimée's sexual advances, literally putting her in her rightful place. In an inversion of the situation depicted by Lessing, it is no longer the colonizer but instead the colonized subject who refuses the unwanted intimacy, who refuses to be further objectified and thus assumes an active, self-conscious role.

Denis subtly introduces a comment on the colour bar that gives the film's main theme analytical depth: Luc, a rather ambiguous character, reads a text to Aimée that some critics take to be her husband's diary.⁶ It is, however, not his text, but the account that Curt von Morgen, a German traveller in Cameroon, gave of the country in 1893:

Au milieu des visages africains d'un noir bronzé, la couleur blanche de la peau évoque décidément quelque chose de pareil à la mort. Moi même, en 1891, après n'avoir vu pendant des mois que des gens de couleur, j'aperçus à nouveau, près de la Bénoué les premiers Européens. Je trouvais la peau blanche anti-naturelle à côté de la plénitude savoureuse de la noire. Peut-on alors blâmer les sauvages autochtones de prendre l'homme blanc comme quelque chose de contre nature ou une créature surnaturelle ou démoniaque? (01:11:00).⁷

What appears to be an absolute distinction develops into relativism, and this is not the progressive opinion of a post-colonial mind but rather the idea of a nineteenth-century explorer who does not have the general reputation of a liberal. At an intradiegetic level, this may serve as an explanation for Aimée's behaviour, for, like von Morgen, she has lived among the natives of Cameroon long enough to be able to see their beauty and therefore develop a sexual interest

in Protée. What is deemed impossible by Lessing's protagonists is possible for those of Denis, and this is authenticated by von Morgen's statement, which serves to sanction Aimée's decision.

In one of the film's crucial scenes, Marc, Aimée's husband and France's father, comments upon the elusive nature of the colour bar in a metaphorical way. Just after Protée's refusal of Aimée's advances, we see a visibly preoccupied Marc at France's bedside, explaining to her what the horizon is:

...quand la terre touche le ciel, exactement, c'est l'horizon... Plus tu t'approches de cette ligne, plus elle s'éloigne. Si tu marches vers elle, elle s'éloigne. Elle te fuit... Tu vois cette ligne. Tu la vois, elle n'existe pas (01:26:45).⁸

There are two ways to interpret this statement. The fact that the scene immediately follows Aimée's and Protée's encounter implies that the horizon serves as a metaphor for the impossibility of a real connection between Africans and Europeans. In the felicitous words of Adam Muller: 'The horizon, after all, and particularly as Marc explains it, is the site at which the land and the air reconcile; it is a site in principle only, remaining forever unreachable, lying at the very limit of our ability to perceive it' (2006: 746). As with land and air, a reconciliation of (ex-)colonizer and (ex-)colonized is conceivable only on a theoretical level.

In my opinion, however, there is still another interpretation that takes into account the film's contemporary framework. The horizon, as Marc explains it, is an optical illusion that pretends to be a (geographical) reality. The encounter between the adult France and William 'Mungo' Park, the man who offers her a ride in his car, shows that the notion of race linked to ideas of culture and national belonging is itself an illusion. What France sees in Mungo is an illusion based on the colour of his skin, just as his reaction to France owes much to the same delusion. What they believe they have seen serves as a characterization that does not match the actual person. It is, in my opinion, not the impossibility of a union between Europe and Africa that the metaphor of the horizon stands for, but rather the elusive nature of race and identity itself.

Broken Lines

The filming of the colonial past in *Chocolat* is framed by a contemporary setting, in which the now grown-up France, whose name is a reference to the mother country that remains unknown to her during her childhood, has come back to Cameroon to look for her childhood home. Denis has pointed out that, when preparing the film, she was told to abandon this frame;⁹ the fact that she kept

it thus indicates the importance of the framework for the understanding of the film as a whole. The opening scene of *Chocolat* – where we see the man later identified as William ‘Mungo’ Park and Sawa, his approximately eight-year-old son, both black, bathing in the ocean – has already been much commented upon. Oddly enough, an important aspect seems to have been overlooked in all these readings: after having jumped around in the water, both father and son lie on the sand, in the breakers. We see a close-up of a hand, presumably the boy’s. The water washes away, and we get a clear vision of the lines on his palm (00:02:58).

This scene corresponds to another one at the end of the film’s intradiegetic narration: Protée, the black servant who is young France’s companion, has already been banned from the house for having refused the sexual advances of her mother, Aimée. He now works in the garage where France comes to find him. She asks him if an iron tube belonging to the generator he is working on is hot, and he indicates that it is not by putting his hand on it. She follows his example and immediately draws back her hand in pain – the tube is red hot, and she has scarred her hand for life (01:32:45). Both move away from the tube and from each other silently before Protée walks away into the darkness of the night.

This scene, which has rightly been seen as one of the film’s crucial moments, is often misinterpreted. In E. Ann Kaplan’s (1997) opinion, Protée punishes France ‘for being part of colonialism’;¹⁰ Janice Morgan thinks that ‘he is deliberately breaking the tie of friendship and trust between them’ (2003: 150). For France, who was born and raised in Cameroon, Africa had been her home up to that moment. She even takes it for granted that they will eventually be buried there, a remark her mother fails even to understand. It is thus appropriate to read the scene as the painful realization of her non-belonging, the beginning of what could be termed her ‘diasporic identity’ (Sandars 2001: 17). However, it is important to note that the scar is inflicted not only on France, but also on Protée himself. From that point on, they share a scar that, on the one hand, marks the impossibility of a real and durable union between the two of them but, on the other, creates a lifelong bond between them that lasts longer than the relationship they actually had. The scar shows both their identities as marked by the experience of colonialism. Despite colonial policy, although they are profoundly influenced by it, France and Protée are united far beyond familial attachments or racial ties by a mutual understanding transgressing the laws of the colour bar. The loss of innocence in the relationship between Aimée and Protée, as well as in that of Protée and France, does, however, impede the further development of these promising bonds.

The scene’s symbolism is further developed within the contemporary frame of the film. France is given a lift by William ‘Mungo’ Park, the man from

the opening scene, who offers to read her hand. His reaction to her scarred palm is telling: 'Elle est drôle, ta main. On ne voit rien, no past, no future' (01:39:06).¹¹ On a symbolic scale, this can be interpreted as a clear statement regarding France's – the country's as well as the protagonist's – relation to the ex-colonies, to Africa and to the Africans: their shared (and violent) past has been ended in an act of violence that has scarred both sides of the conflict. There is no room for France in Cameroon, no common future for the two of them – Mungo turns down France's offer to go for a drink just as Protée had rejected her mother.

What must be kept in mind, however, is the fact that the scar is shared – that it marks both France and Protée. Both of their lifelines are burnt, leaving their palms a blank that resists interpretation. Nobody can know what the future holds for them, neither together nor individually. Protée's name, however, at least points to a possible solution for him: he is protean, he can change his shape. While France's name suggests that she will remain as monolithic as her mother country, he is adaptable and can learn to conform to new, post-colonial situations.¹²

The density of the scene, however, has not yet been exhausted: William 'Mungo' Park,¹³ the black man who gives the grown-up France a lift and is unable to read her hand, is revealed to be other than what the viewer expected – instead of being a Cameroon native, he turns out to be a black American who has come to Cameroon because he thought that, as an African-American, this would be his home. But what he believed to be a brotherhood of Africans, whether born in America or Africa, turned out to be an idealized fabrication. Even after several years in Cameroon he feels that dying there would make him disappear completely.

Post-colonialism as a theoretical paradigm expresses the idea of hybridization, of hybrid people, trapped between one or more cultures, confronted with problems of alienation and non-belonging. Created before the actual constitution of the post-colonial toolbox, *Chocolat* gives a somewhat less optimistic response to those issues. The lifelines that Protée takes away from both himself and the young France can be seen as the literal, bodily expression of the roots one has in a place and culture. Thus, France and Protée are virtually cut off from these roots, and the environment they grow up in alienates them both from their culture and from the place to which they feel they belong in a simplistic perspective of the world. They've been forced (or allowed?) to step beyond the simple assignation of race, nation and culture. This experience enriches their lives, but at the same time burdens them with feelings of alienation and displacement. Hybrid beings they may be, but they are not allowed to savour the riches of their double identity, to find a third space where they will be allowed to live up to their hybridity. On the contrary, France is always depicted in transitory

spaces – on the road, at the bus station and, finally, at the airport. Moreover, there is no lasting bond between the different diasporic identities – France and Protée, Aimée and Protée, France and Mungo all end up observing the rules of the colour bar, be it colonial or post-colonial. Only the following generation, represented in Sawa, the son Mungo has with his Cameroonian ex-wife, has again grown roots strong enough to free him from the problematic hybridity of his parents' generation; as shown in the first sequence, Sawa's palm lines are strong and clear.

However, the final images of the film seem to offer a way out – not for France, whose fate as a displaced and alienated victim of colonialism is set, but instead for post-colonial Africa or at least for Cameroon. In the last sequence, France watches three men working on a conveyor belt that takes the luggage into the plane, presumably the one that will take her back to France. What they very carefully load onto the plane are the different parts of a large indigenous artefact. The country's riches, its history, one could interpret, are being taken away in another neo-colonial gesture. But maybe this interpretation misses the point; a new, modern Africa is emerging, one that does not wish to be seen just as a source for handicraft that may serve to enlarge the collection of European museums. Once needed to form the old, largely Eurocentric image of an ethnologically interesting Africa, these artefacts have now become obsolete. There are new images to come.

Colonialism, Capitalism and Coffee

At first sight, France and Mungo are unable to really see whom they have met: he believes her to be a tourist, and she thinks that he is a native of Cameroon. Their respective colours still define the way they perceive and are perceived. France's and William's stories intersect, as do, years later, the stories of Claire Denis and Marie NDiaye – while one of them shares a common history with Africa, having lived there and therefore feeling part of it, the other is a stranger. In our post-colonial times, however, this is not a question of race anymore; it is due to the coincidences not so much of history but of very personal stories.

The collaboration between Claire Denis and Marie NDiaye does not, at first, seem an ideal match. Denis is a filmmaker who does not shy away from academic discussions, who teaches at the European Film Academy and who, through friendships with contemporary philosophers such as Jean-Luc Nancy, is well aware of ongoing debates. NDiaye is, on the contrary, a rather secluded author who shies away from academic contexts in which she says she does not feel at home; even in interviews, she is rather reserved.

However, as has already been hinted at, both share a common interest in questions of race, belonging and displacement. As a novelist, NDiaye chooses

never to spell out her subjects explicitly, and her novels and plays are not hyper-realistic accounts of France's shortcomings concerning racial policy but rather enigmatic, haunting accounts of troubled identities. The step into filmmaking is thus a new experience for her and her readers, and her aesthetic reserve, the allusions the reader is asked to grasp and the blanks to be filled, while already making her texts unwieldy, would appear even more intriguing when brought to the screen.

The work of both author and filmmaker shows that the advent of post-colonialism and the widespread discussion about its key concepts have not necessarily led to the global acceptance of these issues, neither on an aesthetic level nor in life. Both women challenge notions of hybridity or third space, which might work well in theory but are hard to live with on a daily basis. Denis and NDiaye tackle post-colonialism by basing their novels, plays and films in real spaces, in real histories, thus showing the shortcomings of the theoretical paradigms. On an aesthetic level, their texts and films do not follow the well-trodden path of identity narratives but rather choose to question it by undermining it subtly.

Together with NDiaye as her co-author, Denis takes up the subject begun in *Chocolat* and further elaborates on it in *White Material*. It is as if we see France, the protagonist of her first movie, reborn in Maria Vial, but a France who has never left Africa and thus has never had the experience of displacement. Maria feels that Africa is her home and the home of her family. She does not question the fact that this is the place where she rightly belongs. The Africans she deals with, though, show her that they view her differently, that they see her as an intruder, as *la blanche* (01:28:30).¹⁴ Yet again, what NDiaye and Denis stage here is another political allegory; not, this time, one of colonialism but of the political ideology that has always been associated with it and which, in many African countries, has come to replace it in the public imagination – capitalism.

It is no accident that Maria, her husband and her father-in-law are coffee farmers, with coffee being one of the main products of colonial exploitation. Next to sugar and cocoa (from which chocolate is made, incidentally), it is coffee that is usually held accountable for the rapid development of the slave trade.¹⁵ As a 'cash crop', it was introduced to many regions of Africa – including, for example, to the grasslands of Cameroon – but its cultivation was restricted to a lucky few: 'It was the aim of the colonial administration that coffee cultivation should be left in the hands of a small "elite," made up for the most part of European settlers, African chiefs, and notables' (Mbapndah 1994: 43). Since the end of colonialism, many Africans have started or continued to cultivate coffee; however, instead of depending on the colonial administration, they now depend on capitalist patterns or, at best, on the laws of the 'fair trade' businesses.

Maria and her family thus continue a business that has its roots in structures of colonialism, inequality and oppression, and the way Maria employs and treats her personnel speaks volumes about it. Though her comments about the farm she runs, but does not own, are a rational, approach of her situation they can also be interpreted as a metaphor for the whole country, presumably for many African countries: 'Rien n'est à moi, mais c'est moi qui dirige' (00:43:59).¹⁶ Although the colonial empires lost their territorial power over Africa long ago, their leading role in the world economy is still strong enough to pull the strings.

What Maria clings to, despite the raging civil war surrounding her, is the country she feels at home in: 'Je ne pourrais plus m'habituer à un autre endroit' (01:14:42),¹⁷ even though this very country does not welcome her and threatens her with imminent death. As with the passengers on the bus that she manages to catch on the way 'home' to her farm, the country as a whole ostracizes her leaving her desperately clinging on to the exterior. Compared to her antecedent Aimée in *Chocolat*, she is a very active and resolute person, yet her frantic activity cannot change the fact that she will have to leave.

Denis and NDiaye give a grim account of an Africa whose modes of acceptance are still based on racial terms. Not being black accounts for Maria's and her family's dismissal, a displacement that can be seen as a late revenge taken out not on the colonialists themselves but on their legal and ideological successors. As the young black official puts it at the end of *White Material*, speaking of Maria's son Manuel:

L'extrême blondeur attire une forme de valeur, c'est quelque chose qu'on désire saccager. Les yeux bleux sont gênants. C'est pourtant son pays, il est né ici, mais le pays ne l'aime pas (01:34:43).¹⁸

Yet again, the crop that Maria and her family have been growing sheds an interesting light on the question of identity. The harvesting and manufacturing of the coffee is shown at great length in *White Material* – a process in which the bean is turned from a greenish white into a dark, brownish black. What may work for the crop does not, however, for the skin tone of a human being. Manuel, Maria's son, who has been visibly struggling with his blurred identity, ultimately shaving off his fair hair and then joining the rebellious troops, is burned alive in the coffee factory, which is now diligently guarded by the government soldiers. His corpse, burned beyond recognition, is now, in a cynical comment on the issue of race, undeniably black, a state that was inaccessible to him in life. In her utter despair, Maria turns against her father-in-law, who, with his African affiliations and properties, seems to be the author of all of these alienated, unhappy identities.

While *Chocolat* can be seen as an account of identities broken and displaced as a result of colonialism, *White Material* takes up the subject more than 20 years later to explore it in much bleaker tones. To France and William 'Mungo' Park, third spaces that would allow their hybrid identities to develop freely do not exist, but they still have the possibility of returning to a motherland – the United States or France – that would welcome them. For Maria and her family, France does not seem an option anymore; instead, it is considered an exile that would not allow them the same individual freedom that Africa has. Yet again, and in spite of Maria's presumably strong palm lines, there seems to be no past, no future – and no present. The post-colonial world seems to have become an even more hostile place.

Notes

- 1 The discipline of post-colonial studies is generally considered to have started a good twenty years ago, with the publication in 1989 of Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith and Helen Tiffin's *The Empire Writes Back. Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, which quickly became the standard work of reference. The title alludes to Salman Rushdie's epigraph, '... the Empire writes back to the Centre ...', Rushdie, Salman, 'The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance', *The New York Times* (3 July 1982): 8.
- 2 Although *Chocolat* came out as early as 1988, most of the critical writing devoted to the film has been published since the year 2000. It seems that especially those film critics interested in questions of colonialism and post-colonialism rediscovered it as an early example of a film concerned with these issues. However, in reading the film along those lines, many interpretations get caught up in the same dichotomic views that they mean to criticize, making both the colonizer and the colonized a monolithic block that allows for no individual position within this fixed framework. It is significant that nostalgia comes to be a key term for at least three of the articles written about *Chocolat*, and it is even more significant that what they mean by nostalgia is the longing for the lost Africa of the protagonist's youth, which is strongly reprehended by the critics as a neo-colonial attitude. The fact that the African countryside and the male protagonist, both undeniably beautiful, are shown to be beautiful by Denis's camera is not assigned to the artistic mastery of the filmmaker but denounced as unduly Orientalistic representations that 'diminish ... the historical value of *Chocolat*' (Watson, 'Beholding the colonial past in Claire Denis's *Chocolat*', in V. Bickford-Smith (ed), *Black and White in Colour: African History on Screen* (Oxford, 2007), p. 188). Alison Murray goes a step further, stating, 'It is possible to conclude that all three films [*Indochine*, *Outremer* and *Chocolat*] aestheticise the colonial past without giving it serious critical consideration' ('Women, nostalgia, memory: *Chocolat*, *Outremer*, and *Indochine*', *Research in African Literature* xxxiii/2 (2002): 241). Apart from the fact that it is at least questionable to look for historic truth in a feature film (or to deny beauty any critical potential), it is as if these critics had willfully overlooked the careful

- framework of the film that marks its intradiegetic narration as a childhood record and thus as a very personal recollection.
- 3 Ruth Watson is the only one to take a closer look at the two novels; the conclusions she draws are, however, somewhat unsatisfying inasmuch as they focus largely on the question of realism, making Lessing's novel 'a more sophisticated depiction of the tension in the colonial household' ('Beholding the colonial past', p. 198).
 - 4 The possibility of unions between white women and black men is alluded to by Lessing, only to be refuted vehemently: '[Tony] had met a doctor on the boat coming out, with years of experience in a country district, who had told him he would be surprised to know the number of white women who had relations with black men. Tony felt at the time that he would be surprised; he felt it would be rather like having a relation with an animal, in spite of his "progressiveness"' (*The Grass Is Singing* (London: Harper Collins, 1950/2007), p. 186).
 - 5 Denis relies on Lessing's novel to depict this conflict, restaging the dressing scene (*The Grass*, p. 186; *Chocolat*, 00:36:12) and the shower sequence (*The Grass*, p. 143, Denis: 00:45:54).
 - 6 Durham, Carolyn, 'More than meets the eye: Meandering metaphor in Claire Denis's *Chocolat*', in E. Rueschmann (ed), *Moving Pictures, Migrating Identities* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), p. 133; and Philibert, Céline, 'From betrayal to inclusion: The work of the white woman's gaze in Claire Denis's *Chocolat*', in S. Najmi and R. Srikanth (eds), *White Women in Racialized Spaces: Imaginative Transformation and Ethical Action in Literature* (Albany: State University of New York, 2002), p. 214. Homler rightly identifies the text as 'the travel diaries of a white explorer', without citing von Morgen's name. His analysis of the ensuing scene is quite accurate: 'Protée approaches and a pained silence ensues, for the intractable difference of race is objectified as if it had no real effect on the interpersonal relations of those whose lives center around the commandant's house' ('Love child: Mimesis and paternity in Claire Denis's *Chocolat*', in A. Tcheuyap (ed), *Cinema and Social Discourse in Cameroon* (Bayreuth: Bayreuth African Studies, 2005), p. 316.
 - 7 'Amidst bronzed black African faces the white skin colour evokes something akin to death. In 1891, I, myself, having seen only coloured people for months, once again saw Europeans near the Benoué. I found the white skin unnatural next to the fullness of black skin. Then why blame the natives for considering the white man as something contrary to nature as a supernatural or fiendish creature?' The original German version can be found in Curt von Morgen: *Durch Kamerun von Süd nach Nord. Reisen und Forschungen im Hinterlande, 1889-1891*. Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1893, p. 114.
 - 8 '...where the earth touches the sky that's the horizon... The closer you get to that line, the farther it moves. If you walk towards it, it moves away. It flees from you... You see the line. You see it, but it doesn't exist'.
 - 9 Quoted in Durham: 'More than meets the eye', p. 125.
 - 10 Kaplan, E. Ann, "'Can one know the other?'" The ambivalence of post-colonialism, in *Chocolat, Warrior Marks and Mississippi Masala* (London, Routledge, 1997a), p. 162. For Robin Wood, it is a punishment, because France 'embodies the

- oppression under which he has lived' ('Claire Denis and Nadine Gordimer', *Film International* ii–iii (2004), pp. 8–13).
- 11 'Your palm is strange. Can't see anything, no past, no future'.
 - 12 William 'Mungo' Park can be identified as a new version of Protée, who, by virtue of his name, is able to foretell the future. Greek mythology has it that Proteus changes his shape to avoid having to do so, and it can be seen as a twist on his ancient name that it is only the contemporary version of Protée who is finally willing to give a glimpse of the future.
 - 13 Carolyn Durham points out that the name Denis chose for her protagonist makes him a distant relative of the Scottish explorer whose writings about Africa established a model for sentimental writing about the continent ('More than meets the eye', p. 126).
 - 14 'The White woman'.
 - 15 See Wild, Anthony, *Coffee. A Dark History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005); Pendergrast, Mark, *Uncommon Grounds. The History of Coffee and How It Transformed Our World* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).
 - 16 'Nothing's mine, but I'm in charge'.
 - 17 'I could no longer get used to anywhere else'.
 - 18 'There is a value put on extreme blondness. It cries out to be pillaged. Blue eyes are troublesome. This is his country. He was born here. But it doesn't like him'.

