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### An 'Other' Scene, an 'Other' Point of View: France's Colonial Family Romance, Protée's Postcolonial Fantasies and Claire Denis' 'Screen' Memories

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**An ‘Other’ Scene, An ‘Other’ Point of View: France’s Colonial Family Romance,  
Protée’s Postcolonial Phantasies, and Claire Denis’s ‘Screen’ Memories**

**by Levilson C. Reis**

**Abstract**

This article challenges the widely held view that in *Chocolat/Chocolate* (Denis, 1988) the female protagonist ‘France’, both as a little girl and an adult woman, owns the point of view. It argues that the film rejects such an exclusive narrative mode, and invites the spectator to reinterpret the story through the perspectives of others, especially that of the houseboy Protée. Drawing on Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytical theories, this article re-examines three key flashback scenes, taking Protée’s vantage-point, while engaging with the paratext of Sartre’s, Oyono’s, and Denis’s own postcolonial views. The article finally shows that the boy’s point of view is as relevant as the little girl’s. (99 words)

**Keywords:** Claire Denis; *Chocolat/Chocolate* (Denis, 1988); (screen) memory; fantasy; point of view; an “other” scene; ein anderer Schauplatz; the colonial family romance

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## **AN 'OTHER' SCENE, AN 'OTHER' POINT OF VIEW: FRANCE'S COLONIAL FAMILY ROMANCE, PROTÉE'S POSTCOLONIAL PHANTASIES, AND CLAIRE DENIS'S 'SCREEN' MEMORIES**

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Point of view in *Chocolat / Chocolate* (Denis, 1988) has been traditionally associated with France, the film's protagonist (Philibert 1996: 178; Strand 2000: 161; Murray 2002: 236; Beugnet 2004: 59; Mayne 2005: 35). As an adult woman (Mireille Perrier), in the frame narrative, and as a little girl (Cécile Ducasse), in the flashback, France appears indeed to be everywhere and to see everything. This apparent omnipresence, however, belies her absence in some key scenes of the flashback sequence. Accordingly, her point of view is not exactly omniscient, especially if one takes into account Denis's statement that all scenes in the flashback are relayed by either little France or the houseboy Protée (Isaach de Bankolé), otherwise the scene does not exist (Bachet 1988: 212). In those scenes where little France is not present, there remains Protée; however, as the movie title suggests, his point of view has been shamefully slighted.<sup>1</sup> This paper seeks to reclaim the boy's personal perspective and, in order to do so, it re-examines the story against the grain of colonial historicism and postcolonial nostalgia. The thrust of the argument in this paper departs from the premise that, in relation to the reality effect of the postcolonial universe of the frame-narrative, the flashback, which constitutes the bulk of the *Chocolat*'s diegesis, mimics the scene of dreams. Engaging with elements of Freud's and Lacan's psychoanalytical theories applicable to film criticism, starting with the 'otherness' that Freud colours the scene of dreams (1958: 536),

this article argues that *Chocolat*'s flashback boils down to a fantasy, understood as a correction of the past, rather than just memory.

Following on from Freud, Lacan proposes a similar conception of the scene of dreams, as a 'scene' where the subject plays out his or her fantasy (2004: 43). He claims that the reality that dominates the subject's waking life gives way to fantasy in the scene of dreams, 'where *it [id]* shows' (1981: 75; emphasis in the original). The scene of fantasy constitutes therefore an 'other' scene, 'ein anderer Schauplatz', the counterpart of 'waking ideational life' (Freud 1958: 536).<sup>2</sup> While re-examining the flashback through this vantage-point, this article marshals 'other' scenes as such, which haunt the (post)colonial discourse of figures such as Sartre, Fanon, and Denis to second the boy's point of view. Additionally, this article considers the relationship between France's childhood memories, Denis's auteurist intervention in the last scene of the flashback sequence, and (France's and Denis's) personal and national fantasies to accentuate the boy's point of view.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Any treatment of point of view must first of all address the very vicissitudes of the concept in so far as it relates to colonial and postcolonial film narratives and specifically to Denis's own conception of point of view in *Chocolat*'s narrative diegeses. On all three counts, Jean-Paul Sartre's theory of the 'look' (Sartre 1956) proffers an apposite point of departure. Lacan's reformulation of the Sartrean concept as the 'gaze' (Lacan 1981), and traditional Lacanian film theorists' conflation of the Sartrean and Lacanian concepts, which Copjec (1989), Jay (1994: 487–91), and McGowan (2003) have brought to light, requires some

preliminary discussion. First, Sartre frames the ‘look’ in terms of a relationship of power between the subject, who holds it, and the Other who bears the brunt of it (1956: chapter 2). In the context of colonial and postcolonial film, the Sartrean concept of the gaze is particularly illuminating, as Margaret Majumbar has pointed out, in revealing the dynamics of inequality of the colonial gaze ‘where the voyeur is always the European and the object of the gaze the non-European Other’ (2007: 88). This hierarchical relationship has always determined point of view in terms of (the European) who owns the gaze.

Five years later in a preface to Léopold Senghor’s *Anthology of the New Negro and Malagasy Poetry in French* (1948), Sartre would reverse the hierarchy of the colonial gaze: ‘Here are black men standing, looking at us, and I hope that you – like me – will feel the shock of being seen. For three thousand years, the white man has enjoyed the privilege of seeing without being seen; he was only a look. [...] Today, these black men are looking at us, and our gaze comes back to our own eyes’ (2001: 115). At a film-makers’ panel at the ‘Screening Europe’ Conference (National Film Theatre, London, 7–8 June 1991), Denis invokes this very Sartrean scenario to frame *Chocolat*, not as a product of a postcolonial project nor as an example of a reversal of the colonialist gaze, as it might be expected but, paradoxically, as a fundamentally Eurocentric representation of a colonial story:

When the film was completed I was asked to write a piece on it for the press booklet. Unsure of what to write, I found an introduction to an anthology of black literature and poetry by Jean-Paul Sartre which suggested that for three thousand years the official view of the world had been a white view and he now welcomed an alternative – the view from those who had been watched, what they saw when

they looked at us, the white Europeans. I put this in the booklet because I thought that there was very little else I could say: knowing I was white, I tried to be honest in admitting that *Chocolat* is essentially a white view of the 'other'. (Petrie 1992: 67)

The initial sequence that frames the story would support such an auteurist view inasmuch as national and personal (France's and Denis's) memories fuse in *Chocolat*'s flashback narrative. France has come back to Africa twenty years later to visit the home where she had spent her childhood as the daughter of a colonial administrator in North Cameroon, a scenario reminiscent of Denis's own childhood past. Second, while Sartre's reversal of the colonial look might justify Denis's auteurist point of view, it is Lacan's reconceptualization of 'look' in terms of the 'gaze' that ultimately underwrites an examination of a White woman's looking at the (Black) other, not through the lens of power, but rather desire.<sup>3</sup> The opening scene of the movie starts with a long shot of ocean waves breaking down the beach. The camera pans out left to right to frame a young white woman sitting on the beach. She is not herself the object of the look. She looks from a distance at a presumably African man and boy frolicking in the surf. Then, in a close-up shot, she looks at their sprawled-out black bodies lying in the sun. This opening scene could nonetheless serve as an exemplary reversal of the role that women played in classical mainstream cinema, as Mulvey (1975) puts it, had not the race of the other – being looked at – given it a new significance. For Denis, however, point of view is not fixed: it follows the structure of desire whether it may be centred on race or gender.

In reality, while pretending not to, Denis understood how indispensable was the Black point of view in the framing of a (post)colonial perspective from the very beginning of the project: 'For a long time I have asked myself how to approach the Black characters. I did not want to define them; I just wanted to let the story show them. That seemed more appropriate, for, as far as I can remember, one could live in Africa, among Whites, and completely disregard Black people, which bothered me a great deal' (Bachet 1988: 124). This preoccupation with the point of view of the Black other becomes more and more noticeable as the film story goes on. When France reappears in the next scene, she is walking alongside the road when the Black man (Mungo Park (Emmet J. Williamson)) she had seen at the beach drives by and stops to offer her a ride back to town. He gets out of the car and looks at her, objectifying her to the status of a tourist.<sup>4</sup> In a reversal of the beach scene, the Black man now owns the look while the White woman is looked at. This further reversal of the look erodes any internal and external screen that colonial, postcolonial, or feminist ideology has erected for the spectator. Confronted with this 'other' scene, the spectator can see beyond the world (*le monde*) in which he finds himself or herself implicated (Lacan 2004: 43–44).

## **2. REVERSING THE DOMINANT POINT OF VIEW: THE FLASHBACK AS FANTASY**

During the car ride, the sonic and visual effect of driving through a present-day African locale, while watching the passing scenery through the car window, takes France back to the time when, as a little girl, she lived with her family and the houseboy Protée at the colonial

outpost in Cameroon, where her father was the local administrator from the late 1950s to the years leading to the Colony's independence. Although the flashback offers a rather conventional transition for the narrative of France's childhood memory of the last days of French colonial rule in Cameroon, I argue that it re-enacts a fantasy rather than just memory or nostalgia. As a visionary or discursive scenario, fantasy brings together memory traces from childhood and impressions from a later period to stage a scene that recast an unsatisfactory personal or collective reality (Freud 1957: 49–55; Freud 1959a: 143–49; Freud 1960: 43–52). Despite the apparent fusion of both personal and collective memory in *Chocolat*'s flashback sequence, the association drawn between “‘the childhood memory’ of individuals’ and ‘the childhood memories that a nation preserves in its stores of legends and myths’ (Freud 1960: 48) does not preclude the ‘screening’ of a colonial past through the point of view of different agents or through a variety of interacting, differing, and conflicting memories, as current theory on collective memory suggests (Ollick 2008), be they attributed to France (the nation or the protagonist), Mungo Park (the expatriate American Black man who gives France a ride back into town), or the houseboy Protée. In fact the film's flashback intertwines France (the nation or film's protagonist) and her fantasy of a ‘colonial family romance’ in which the boy Protée plays an indispensable part as it shall be discussed in the next section.

### 3. THE ‘BOY’ IN FRANCE’S ‘COLONIAL FAMILY ROMANCE’

The first use of the term ‘boy’ in the sense of ‘a young indigenous manservant in certain countries of Africa and Asia’ (Imbs and Quémada 1971–1994) first appeared in Paul



Bourde's *De Paris au Tonkin* (1885).<sup>5</sup> Where the etymology of the word fails to account for the reason French colonialists institutionalized the image of the African male as a boy, the context of French colonial politics offers some explanation. The boy emerges as a concept of French colonial politics, which feeds on the French paternalist colonial ideology that the African child was not only an exotically adorable but, more importantly, an easily assimilated 'raw material' (Martinkus-Zemp 1975: 55–56). By assimilating the African child into the French colonial family as the boy, France fabricated a family romance, in which it played the role of the colonial parent and imposed on the colonized African that of 'perennial children' (Vergès 1999: 5). As Freud's essay on 'Family Romances' elaborates (1959b: 236–41) and anticolonial narratives like Ferdinand Oyono's *Houseboy* ([1956] 1990) also exemplify, the institution of the colonial family romance may have capitalized on prepubescent children's need to resolve family conflicts with authoritarian parents or rival siblings by imagining an alternative genealogy (Reis 2012: 700). While the male child in particular grows intensely preoccupied with 'the task of getting free from the parents of whom he now has a low opinion and of replacing them by others, who, as a rule, are of higher social standing' (Freud 1959b: 238–39), colonial ideology failed to see the ineluctable coming of age of the 'boy' and the nation he represented.

When the boy reaches the sexual stage and understands the legitimacy of his original family, as Freud explains (Freud 1959b), the oedipal structure of the family romance only serves to set the stage for his own personal stories of desire. In *Chocolat* the *mise-en-scène* of a sexually mature man at the heart of the colonial family incarnates in flesh and blood the fantasy of the colonial family romance and exposes 'the quadrilateral of power, sexual, and other relations' (Hall 1992: 49) that characterizes the second phase of the family romance as

the boy re-positions himself within the family as a man and in relation to his own desire. Denis's casting of the ostentatiously masculine, sexually appealing thirty-one-year-old Ivorian actor Isaach de Bankolé in the role of the boy further troubles both the cinematographic and ideological representation of the boy, which relies on the misrecognition of the colonized African's manhood. What is left is the blatant incongruity between a boy's adult body and the fabrication of his symbolic role as a helpless child.

Split between his place in the colonial family romance and his desire for selfhood, manhood, and independence, Protée represents the colonized subject's struggle to deliver himself from the fantasized colonial infantilization. In the scenes where boy offers a point of view, much of what happens in the spectator's field of vision seems to manifest Protée's internal conflict between his sense of self and social identity in the colonial world. This psychic conflict gains particular significance in three revealing scenes involving Protée and Aimée (and, in one case, little France) that stage the boy's internal struggles amidst the realities and fantasies of the colonial world.

### **3.1 THE MIRROR SCENE**

The first scene takes place in Aimée's bedroom in front of a full-length mirror. Aimée is getting dressed for a formal dinner in honour of a visiting British consul. Protée comes over to consult Aimée about last-minute preparations for the dinner. Aimée invites him in and tells him to tie the stays of her gown. At first, he hesitates to get closer to his mistress and touch her. After her second call for help, which sounds more like an order, Protée obeys the

command. To the left of Aimée, facing the camera, in a frame that doubles up as the bedroom mirror, Protée becomes suddenly aware of his image in the mirror.

Denis's mirror scene invites an interesting comparison with Lacan's mirror-stage scenario (Lacan 2006: 75–81) not because the mirror is part of the prop, but rather because in this scene, as in Lacan's mirror scenario, the boy's identification rests on a misrecognition, not of his specular image, as in Lacan, but on his screen role as a colonial boy. In Lacan's essay, the boy is indeed an infant (roughly between 6 to 18 months) who, despite the inability to stand up, manages to look at himself in the mirror and recognize his self-image, although he cannot easily reconcile his lack of coordination with the mirror's perfect snapshot (Lacan 2006: 75–76). In *Chocolat*'s mirror scene, however, Protée stands as a fully developed, muscularly coordinated adult, in contradistinction to Lacan's mirror-stage infant. Yet, alongside his colonial 'caretaker', he is supposed to be the helpless child – the 'boy' – in much the same way in which Lacan describes his infant's 'motor impotence' and 'nursling dependence' (2006: 76). At the visual level of the body image, which Lacan calls 'imaginary', Protée recognizes his mirror image and identifies himself as a man, but this identification does not correspond to the 'symbolic' (linguistic, sartorial, and ideological) representation of the (colonial) boy. There lies the gap that neither the imaginary nor the symbolic can shore up and that creates fissures in the ideological representation of the colonial apparatus (McGowan and Kunkle 2004: xvi). *Chocolat*'s mirror scene, in which the boy sees himself as a man, troubles the colonial image of the colonized as a helpless infant. In fact, the colonizer rather than the colonized assumes the status of the helpless, uncoordinated subject, for, as Aimée's cries for help indicate, the colonial mistress cannot even get dressed without the boy's assistance.

Despite this real sense of mastery, Protée does not escape the alienating gaze of the Other. Although Lacan defined identification as the subject's jubilant mastery of its own body through a dual relation between the ego and its specular image, he later recognized the presence of the (big) Other, as another subject, in the subject's movement from imaginary to symbolic identification. Before the big Other assumes its primordial symbolic function of investing the subject with language and the Law, the infant is bound to confront the Other as another subject at the very level of its body image (Lacan 1994). In an illustrative reference to the mother, Lacan remarks that the sheer omnipotence of her body undermines the infant's jubilant mastery of the primary Gestalt, for 'in the presence of that totality in the form of the maternal body he must realize that it does not obey him' (Lacan 1994: 186; my translation). The experience of the mother's body as an inassimilable otherness explains the subject's desire to recover the lost mastery as the infant turns to his or her caretaker and, with a look, appeals for 'the recognition of the image, by verifying it, from the jubilant assumption, in which *it* [elle] certainly *already was*' (Lacan 2006: 568; emphasis in the original).

Although Protée's identification with his body image in the mirror gives him a certain sense of mastery, the confrontation with Aimée's racial and sexual otherness threatens his perceived wholeness. As in the context of Hollywood's classical narrative cinema (Mulvey 1975), the woman threatens the subject with castration, but in *Chocolat* the feminine Other seems to pose a much more real threat in the sense that, as Frantz Fanon puts it, 'the Negro guilty of lying with a white woman is castrated' (1967: 72). Protée knows, as Denis intimates, that in 1950s Africa 'even a politically uneducated young man would fear that if he gave into his sexual desires, he would be imprisoned' (Reid 1996: 68). How could Protée

assume such a socio-historical consciousness in the fantasy world of the flashback sequence? As Laplanche and Pontalis point out, ‘the most primitive defensive reactions, such as turning against oneself, or into an opposite, projection, negation: these defences are even indissolubly linked with the primary function of fantasy, to be a setting for desire, in so far as desire itself originates as prohibition, and the conflict may be an original conflict’ (1986: 27). For Protée, nevertheless, the object of desire is in the gaze of the Other, that is, in Aimée’s gaze, and his desire is to be recognized by the Other – by Aimée – not as a helpless child but as a man.

As Protée looks at Aimée, making an appeal similar to that of the infant in Lacan’s mirror-stage scenario, she does not see him. Similarly, in *Chocolat*’s mirror scene, Aimée cannot see Protée because she is looking at him from a different place. At this point, it does not matter how Protée sees himself; for Aimée, he is the product of a historico-racial discourse woven out of ‘a thousand details, anecdotes, stories’ (Fanon 1967: 111). Like the infant’s desire for recognition of his image reflection in Lacan’s mirror-stage scenario, Protée’s real desire for recognition remains unsatisfied.

### **3.2 THE BOY’S SHOWER SCENE**

The next scene shows Protée bathing in the open boy’s shower. In a wide-angle shot, the camera shows Protée in the midst of taking a shower as Aimée and France return from a walk in the woods. The camera frames Protée in a medium shot rinsing the soap off his body while in the background Aimée pulls little France by the hand towards the house. After hearing Aimée’s and France’s voices, Protée realizes that mother and daughter have

seen him, yet he only hears them. Leaning against the wall, he does not see them or attempts to look at them. The *mise-en-scène* forces the spectator to bear the brunt of France's, Aimée's, and Protée's gazes. The little girl stares at Protée via the spectator as though she had never seen Protée before, while the mother frantically pulls her away towards the house.

This scene recalls one of Fanon's scenarios of racism, in which the Fanonian Black Subject tries to avert the objectifying gaze of the racist little boy in the train but cannot fail to hear the latter's objectification of him: "Look ... Mama, a Negro! ... Hell, he's getting mad. ... Take no notice, sir, he does not know that you are as civilized as we ..." (Fanon 1967: 113). The mother is the spectator here who deflects the gaze of her racist little boy, who cannot see the (Fanonian) Black Subject as a civilized European. She is also the one who gives the Black Subject's body back to him 'sprawled out, distorted, recolored' (Fanon 1967: 113).

Although Protée becomes the object of the Other's gaze in the open boy's shower, he maintains a full-frontal position in relation to the spectator. As mother and daughter disappear into the house, the camera shifts to a close-up shot of Protée to capture his stifled cry and his striking his fist against the wall of the shower, which demonstrates, as E. Ann Kaplan has perceptively noted, '[his] desire to see and be seen, as a sexual subject, [as] a sexual man' (1997: 168), just like Fanon's Black subject: 'All I wanted was to be a man among other men. I wanted to come lithe and young into a world that was ours and to help to build it together. [...] I wanted to be a man, nothing but a man' (Fanon 1967: 112–13). In *Chocolat*, the moment of epiphany that enacts Protée's ultimate moment of subjectification takes place in the sexual scene when he rejects Aimée's sexual overtures.

### 3.3 THE BIG BOX OFFICE SCENE

Towards the end of the flashback sequence, Aimée and Protée come together in a scene that foreshadows the consummation of their sexual desire. Facing the camera, Aimée is crouching on the floor by the front door with her arms tightly around her legs. Her body faces the camera. Protée comes in. With his back towards the camera, he starts closing the front shutters for the night, and then Aimée touches his right leg. He finishes closing the curtains, crouches on the floor to get down to her level, strokes her cheek to get her attention, and suddenly grabs her by the shoulders to raise her up. Without saying a word, he leaves her in a perplexed, frozen stance.

Denis claims that she borrowed the idea of a sexual encounter between the White mistress and her boy from Ferdinand Oyono's *Houseboy*:

I remembered a novel [*Houseboy* (1956)] I'd read by a Cameroonian writer [Ferdinand Oyono] which influenced how I developed the black manservant's role. [...] The novel dealt with a young manservant in a French colonial administrator's house. [...] I borrowed this idea from this Cameroonian novel and placed it in my script. I decided to create the possibility of a sexual relation – at a certain point in the narrative, the black manservant would refuse his white colonial mistress. (Reid 1996: 68)

Although there is no sexual relationship between the madame and her boy in *Houseboy*, there is a reference to the currency of such sexual relationships during colonial times

(Oyono 1990: 95–96). Denis draws on the sexual imaginary of the colonial world only to hint at a possibility of a sexual affair between the colonial mistress and the boy. For Denis, 'Protée's refusal [of Aimée's sexual advance] was the purpose of the film' (Petrie 1992: 67).

Protée's rejection of Aimée's advances has implications that go beyond the act of sexual imposition. By turning her down, Protée refuses to succumb to the stereotypical lasciviousness that the colonial imaginary has imposed on the boy and which, because of his subaltern position, carries the implication that 'it is unthinkable that he may wish to decline' (Rosello 1988: 11). Furthermore, I argue that the refusal constitutes Protée's ultimate rejection of the schizoid characterizations of the boy which have often oscillated between the image of a noble savage and a ravenous cannibal, an innocent child and a lascivious animal, a submissive subaltern and rebellious revolutionary (Bhabha 1983: 34; Ezra 2000: 9–10). Protée's deflection of Aimée's sexual advances not only challenges these stereotypes, which emerged from the fantasy of the colonial enterprise and the necessity to defend its social and political institution, but also questions the transmission of such racist (post)colonial representations to modern spectatorship.

The fact that the very producers of *Chocolat*, for example, asked Denis to construct a love affair between the White mistress and her Black manservant to raise box office sales testifies to the persistence of a postcolonial imaginary and a cinematic ideological machinery that still exploits stereotypical colonial images of the Black man (Petrie 1992: 67). The episode, in which Aimée (the beloved) and Protée (the protean [potential] lover) come close to consummating their sexual desire, contains all the elements of what Lacan calls the phantasmatic scene: two characters and a spectator in a scene that could either play out or freeze up at a given point (1994: 119). In the first scenario the sequence gives full rein



to the fantasy to play itself out. In *Chocolat*, such an unfolding of events would have led to a sexual affair between Protée and Aimée. This was the outcome the producers envisaged as ‘good box office’ (Petrie 1992: 67). This aspect of the fantasy scene borders on perversion for it stages the enjoyment of the subject (and that of spectator) in terms of a very stereotypical colonial script.

In the alternative scenario, the cinematic sequence suddenly stops, freezing the two characters before anything else can be shown. For Lacan, this sudden stop compares to a frozen image on a film screen, standing for ‘the full-fledged [sexual] scene, [...] immobilized in the fantasy, which remains charged with all the erotic values included in what the scene expressed’ (1994: 120). The whole scene is shot in a fixed-frame in a half-lit living room, which resembles the atmosphere of a darkened theatre auditorium. The scene begs the spectator to watch. Denis’s decision to shoot the scene hurriedly in one take (Petrie 1992: 67), suggesting only the possibility of a sexual affair between Aimée and Protée, represents the second function of the fantasy scene which aims at protecting the subject not only from castration, understood in *Chocolat* as the impossibility of an equal relationship between Aimée and Protée (not excluding the possibility of a real castration as previously discussed), but also from perversion, by disassociating Protée from the boy’s stereotypical sexual role. In Denis’s own perspective, Protée’s refusal

demystifies the prevalent screen image of the black stud and the exotic black, something imagined in Hollywood films like *Out of Africa*. *Chocolat* rejects images of the colonized black African as an always passive subject who bends to the white European’s whims. I wanted to show that the choice lay in the black

man's calloused hands instead of in the woman's finely manicured sexual fantasies. Personally, this story is more interesting than most stories about Africa, which usually show that if the woman wants sex with the black man, the black man is more than happy to have her. (Reid 1996: 68)

Denis's cutting the full sequence short, explained above in very philosophical terms, constitutes an authorial stance that discloses a certain relationship toward the Other. The cut screens off not only what should never be seen. More significantly, it screens off what should not be remembered, especially if one takes the revisionist historical tone of Denis's statement above.

#### 4. CLAIRE DENIS'S FANTASY

Because of this very clear personal concession, *Chocolat* also reads as an authorial fantasy, in the sense that an artist creates a work of art as a way to correct an unsatisfying (personal) experience (Freud 1957: 50; 1959a: 146). Although Denis originally rejected that *Chocolat* was autobiographical (Bachet 1988: 124; Reid 1996: 68), she would later admit that it occupies a certain place in her colonial past: 'When I was making *Chocolat*, I think that I had a desire to express a certain guilt I felt as a child raised in a colonial world' (Petrie 1992: 66). She has later also admitted that while the script may have been originally based on 'real incidents from [her] own African childhood' (Reid 1996: 68), the actual screenplay remains fictional. The interplay between fictional and autobiographical elements that make up the stuff of an artist's fantasy only adds to its significance. Adult France's desire for Mungo

Park in the frame-narrative (inspired by one of Denis's experiences with American GIs in Senegal), Aimée's desire for Protée in the flashback (based on colonial cases of interracial relationships between a colonial mistress and her boy), to go back to a couple of previously discussed examples, are all reformulations of a personal fundamental fantasy created to resolve an unequal colonial relationship with the Other, except for little France's relationship with Protée. Little France and Protée's friendship constitutes the only memory that has the potential to correct the predominant nature of French–African colonial relations.

If, in the case of the artist, the work and the fantasy it stages provide the author the means to 'escape the doom of neurosis' (Freud 1957: 50), one would have to examine the artist's life to confirm whether or not the subject has traversed his or her fantasy, as Lacan has put it (1981: 273), to assume 'a new position with respect to the Other', which goes beyond neurosis (Fink 1995: 62). If one examines pertinent aspects of Denis's life for signs of a salutary intersubjective relationship with others, one would find that she has developed and cultivated a very close rapport with the actors of her films, especially with the Black ones, which critics have correctly characterized as professional relationships steeped in a profound sense of solidarity (Mayne 2005: 144; Morlock 2004: 90–91; Wood 2000: 4). Denis's relationships with these actors appear to have compensatory or recuperative effects for both parties involved. As Denis has expressed it: 'I feel like obliged to go to people that should be seen, that should be in the light. Because they are interesting, not only because they have had the hard life. Because I think they are worth it' (Romney 2000: n. p.). In *Chocolat*, France set in motion a visionary fantasy of what the relationship between the French and the Africans should be. Through her relationship with Protée, France not only

stages a model type of relationship between the Self and the Other, based on equality and solidarity, which Denis has emulated, but also shows that such relational attitude could include the point of view of the Other.

## CONCLUSIONS

Remapping *Chocolat* as a fantasy reveals the complex conflation of personal and national memories in the revisionist representation of colonial history, which critics have hitherto found discomfiting, to say the least. Intradiegetically, Protée stands not only as part of little France's memories in the flashback sequence but also as a figment of adult France's fantasy when he reappears in the last scene of the frame-narrative as an airport baggage handler as if twenty years had not passed since the timeframe of the flashback sequence.

Extradiegetically, Protée embodies Denis's own fantasy of maintaining her solidarity with the colonized Other. The author draws on the childhood memories of a successful relationship between a little girl and 'boy', whether autobiographical or not, to fulfill her own wishes of attaining a working relationship with the Other in real life, as her professional relationships with frequently cast members such as Isaach de Bankolé and Alex Descas exemplify.

Notwithstanding, the notion that Denis empowers the boy with the agency to control his own destiny becomes a moot point in the scheme of the film diegesis. Despite Denis's rather auteurist intervention in the last scene between Aimée and Protée, the previous mirror and shower scenes had already shown Protée's desire for independence and, after all, the sense of agency with which he had been empowering himself. The re-examination of the

boy's point of view in those scenes reaffirms that what he 'sees' and 'does' has an effect on the development and the resolution of the flashback sequence. Protée's personal dis-identification with what he was supposed to be and how he was supposed to act in the framework of colonial fantasies and realities does not merely coincide with the film's representation of the end of the French colonial control in the Cameroon in the flashback sequence. His growing sense of independence and agency determines the whole film narrative.

The access to the point of view of the Other exposes accordingly the illusionary foundations of colonial ideology in ways that the spectator can no longer filter them through the screen that colonial (filmic) ideology had erected for him or her. Confronted with the other point of view that the scene of fantasy stages, the spectator can see beyond the world in which he finds himself or herself implicated. In such a new stance, the spectator can also see beyond the imaginary and symbolic realities of the colonial world to accede to the 'other scene', in which the subject plays out his or her fantasies. It is through this *mise-en-scène* of fantasy that the spectator can identify with the film's 'other' point of view.

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### ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> In keeping with the film's purported Eurocentric perspective, the boy's point of view in *Chocolat* has chronically been just as shamefully ignored. Geetha Ramanathan (2006) who argues that the boy has not only a point of view but also the agency to fashion his own destiny stands as a notable exception. Susan Hayward (2002) was the first to give undivided attention to the boy's point of view and to ascribe to him a certain degree of agency, but her feminist colonial approach reassigns him the status of a static object of the female gaze. Criticism on *Chocolat* continues to focus on the nostalgic aspects of colonialism, as though the boy's point of view were unimportant. See, for example, Adam Muller (2007) and Watson (2007).

<sup>2</sup> This terminology *ein anderer Schauplatz* derives from elements of Freud's statement that 'der Schauplatz der Träume *ein anderer* ist als der des wachen Vorstellungslebens' ['the scene of dreams is different from that of waking life'] (1925: 52, 456; emphasis and translation mine).

<sup>3</sup> Equally important and perhaps fundamentally prior to the Lacan's reformulation of Sartrean 'look' are the racial and feminine conceptualizations of the look, which Fanon (1989) and Mulvey (1975) would add to Lacan's theory of the mirror stage ([1949] 2006).

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Denis's representation of the boy in *Chocolat* also brings into play post-Mulveyan concepts of the female and homosexual gaze depending on who is looking.

<sup>4</sup> This scene draws upon Denis's real-life experiences in Africa. While traveling in Senegal doing some preparatory work for a documentary about African-American Vietnam Veterans living there, Denis came across a Senegalese on the side of the road, whose car was on fire as the result of an accident. He dared to ask her to pay him for looking and photographing his misfortune. In retrospect, she wished she had told the young man off: 'Don't you see that I am from here, that I am not like the other tourists because I lived in this land?' (Strauss 1990: 31; translation mine).

<sup>5</sup> Attested in 1890.