



The Military, Masculinity and Colonialism

BEAU TRAVAIL

Denis Biography



Image source:

[Belgian Society of Cinematographers](#)

- Born in Paris (1948), but emigrated to Cameroon at 2 months due to father's work with French Colonial Administration
- Lived in Cameroon, Djibouti and Burkina Faso during era of struggle for independence
- Returned to France at age 13 when contracted polio
- Returned to West Africa at age 17 for schooling (Japanese, history, geography)

Denis Education & Early Career

- Intern at [Télé-Niger](#)
- Entered Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinématographiques (IDHEC); graduated 1972
- Worked way up through filmmaking ranks (intern, production assistant, second assistant director) and served as assistant director for filmmakers such as Jacques Rivette, Wim Wenders, Costa-Gavras and Jim Jarmusch
- Experience on Wenders's *Paris, Texas* leading her to search for own landscape



Image source: [University of Alabama](#)

Denis From AD to Director

- First feature: *Chocolat* (1988)
 - Combined Denis's childhood experience in colony, Oyono's novel *Houseboy* and history of decolonization in Cameroon
 - Beginning of long collaboration with co-writer Jean-Pôl Fargeau and cinematographer Agnès Godard



Still from *Chocolat* (1988).
Image source: [Harvard Film Archive](#)

Denis Feature Films

- *Man No Run* (1989)
- *No Fear, No Die* (1990)
- *Jacques Rivette, Le Veilleur* (1990)
- *I Can't Sleep* (1994)
- *Nénette and Boni* (1996)
- *Beau Travail* (1999)
- *Trouble Every Day* (2001)
- *Vendredi Soir* (2002)
- *The Intruder* (2004)
- *Vers Mathilde* (2005)
- *35 Shots of Rum* (2008)
- *White Material* (2009)



Image source: [Paste Magazine](#)

Beau Travail (1999)

- Sources
 - Melville's *Billy Budd, Sailor* (1885-91/1924) [[Synopsis](#) :: [Etext](#)]
 - [Billy Budd](#), opera (1951)
 - [Le Petit Soldat](#) (Godard 1960/1963)
 - [French Foreign Legion](#) mythology and iconography
 - Experience of living in Djibouti



Still from *Beau Travail* (1999).
Image source: [Reverse Shot](#)

European Colonialism in Djibouti



- Ruled by Sultan of Raheita, Tadjoura and Gobaad in late 19th century
- French purchase anchorage of Obock in 1862
- French expanded holdings into colony of French Somaliland by 1884
- Becomes French Territory of the Afars and the Issas in 1967
- 1977: Independence for Republic of Djibouti