

OFF-WHITE

Astrid Roemer, translated from Dutch by Lucy Scott and David McKay

1. What role does Grandma Bee's experience of aging and her preparation for death have in *Off-White*? She comments that "No one saw [me] anymore" (pg. 1), but what does the portrayal of aging and death make visible in the novel?
2. Bee's extended family represents the multiplicity of Surinamese society. What is the novel's strategy for introducing each character, including their appearance and family background? How does each character's racial and ethnic background impact their experiences?
3. What importance do institutions—whether religious, educational, military, medical, or psychiatric—have in the novel?
4. Imker tells Bee that "my love is like a house where the two of us live" (pg. 310). How do the various houses in the novel structure relationships? Is the novel itself a kind of house for its characters?
5. Bee observes that life seemed to race "headlong into the future and into the past, both at once" (pg. 354) and that some things are "never over" (pg. 86). How does the novel understand the relationship between the past, present, and future?
6. According to the novel, Louise "never complained" of hardship (pg. 48). What forms of female silence, especially around sex and motherhood, does the novel explore? How does *Off-White* use language to reveal and conceal what has been made silent?
7. What role does Heli—the only character to leave Suriname and whose perspective is narrated in present tense—play in *Off-White*? How is her experience both similar to and different from her female family members?
8. Who and what in the novel are "off-white"? What assumptions about whiteness in a colonial context does the novel identify, and how does it intervene, complicate, or deconstruct them?
9. Suriname became independent from the Netherlands in 1975, almost a decade after *Off-White*'s 1966 setting. As a novel written in a postcolonial context (it was published in 2019), what perspective does *Off-White* have on Suriname's late colonial period? What is its relationship to the Netherlands and the Dutch language, and what forms of freedom does it envision and enact?



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