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Home is Where the Art Is [A Review of *Home* (Tim Johnson, USA, 2015)]
By Walter Metz
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In Salman Rushdie's elegant short book about *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming US 1939), the post-colonial author and intellectual argues that the MGM Technicolor extravaganza is in fact an allegory for the post-colonial subject. Dorothy is so desirous of leaving Kansas to travel over the rainbow, but once she's there she immediately wants to go home again. Like Dorothy, Rushdie is neither at peace in his birthplace, Bombay, India, nor in hyper-industrial, urban New York City, where he now lives. Like *The Wizard of Oz*, the newest animated feature from Dreamworks Animation, *Home* can similarly be investigated via the frame of the post-colonial. In particular, *Home* invokes the film *La Noire de...* (*Black Girl*), a 1966 Senegalese film directed by Ousmane Sembene and the first sub-Saharan African film to make a splash on the international film market, as both films interrogate the nature of colonialism from the point of view of the colonized.

Home begins with an alien race, the Boov, fleeing their enemy, the Gorgs. The Boov are a cowardly race, choosing to run away rather than fight, and so instead repeatedly colonize new planets to serve as secret hideouts. When the Boov land on Earth, they exile all of the humans now living here to Australia. In a comic high-angle shot that offers a new explanation of crop circles, we see that the Boov are even gentle colonizers, having built huge geometrical suburbs full of single-family homes for the billions of displaced humans. The film's story concerns Oh, an outcast Boov voiced by Jim Parsons who befriends a human girl who has eluded the aliens' giant vacuums (one of which kidnapped her mother and relocated her to Australia). With Oh's help, Tip (voiced by Rihanna) eventually finds her mother safe and sound.

The scene of Tip's reunion with her mother reminds one of the ending of *Black Girl*, a journey through crowded colonized space in search of family. In Sembene's film, a French family needing a maid and babysitter scoops Diouana (Mbissine Therese Diop) up off the streets of Dakar. They move her to the French Riviera, where Diouana cares for their rich white children. She at first believes to have escaped poverty and found paradise, but quickly learns that she can only look out at the beach passively, that her duties require constant work and do not allow participation in French social life. Completely miserable, Diouana kills herself in the couple's bathtub.

Out of guilt, the French father returns an African tribal mask to Diouana's village in Senegal. Enraged, Diouana's family and friends rebuff the man. A little boy picks up the mask, puts it over his face, and walks slowly behind the father, in effect chasing the man out of Africa and back to France. In the film's exquisite last shot, the boy slowly takes off the mask and stares directly into the camera in close-up; in short, the boy un.masks the future of a new, post-colonial Africa.

At first glance, *Home* seems precisely the inverse of *Black Girl*: Tip and her mother are quickly reunited, and the colonial space of occupation is not a dusty, impoverished village, but a modern space that looks far more like Levittown than it does the Palestinian refugee camps at which generations of people have lived in the Middle East since the establishment of Israel in the late 1940s. Immediately after the mother-daughter reunion, however, the terms of the film change entirely. It turns out the colonial conquest of the Earth by the Boov was merely the first act in a larger drama. We come to learn that the Boov's entire history has been fraught with the sins of colonialism. The Boov leader, Captain Smek (voiced by Steve Martin) wields a sceptre called the Shusher, the top of which is encrusted with a rock he stole from the Gorg in their first encounter long ago. Oh divines that the Gorg want the rock back. When it appears as if the Gorg ship is going to destroy the Earth along with humans and Boov together, Oh courageously stands up to return the rock. The Gorg Commander – really a small starfish inside a giant metal suit – stops the attack to care for the rock, really a receptacle for the entire next generation of Gorg offspring.

The Gorg rock and the African mask that ends *Black Girl* thus function similarly. Sembene uses a young child to point to the future of an entire continent, a post-colonial Africa finally in African hands. The rock treasured by both Boov and Gorg similarly houses the future of an entire species, and its return ensures the future of both. If anything, *Home* is a more complexly post-colonial film than *Black Girl*. The Boov commit not one but two acts of colonialism. First, in their cowardice, they flee the Gorg and prey upon planets like Earth as hideouts. Second, like the French family, they steal precious artefacts from their enemies and repurpose them for the pleasure of the colonizer. As Rushdie teaches us, sometimes the world of children's literature tells us more about the post-colonial condition than we think. In the case of *Home*, the construct of where we hang our hat is unexpectedly interrogated: the loving relationships between people turn out to matter far more than America and Australia, France and Senegal, or even Earth and the made-up planets of the Boov and the Gorg.