

# 'And Perhaps There Will Be a New Beginning': An Ecopolitical Counter to Colonial Modernity in Oodgeroo's *Father Sky and Mother Earth*

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## Abstract

Oodgeroo's *Father Sky and Mother Earth* was designed as a children's picture-book carrying the vital message of the pressing needs of environmental preservation. It presents a multimodal alternative historical narration of the development of the anthropocene. While its message and handling of human-driven ecocide do not directly narrate the story of any particular geological territory, its graphic representation of flora and fauna, secondary evidences of settler colonialism's role in devastating precolonial ecologies, particularly in Australia, and Oodgeroo's long life of anti-colonial activism and ecopolitics reflected in her earlier writings enable readers to understand how the author utilizes the children's literature medium to ventilate her pro- Aboriginal, anti-imperialist and anti-anthropocene thoughts. The present paper is an attempt at discussing the aforesaid issues by critically evaluating the text.

**Keywords:** Anthropocene; Anthropogenic environmental disorder; Children's literature; Colonialism; Ecopolitics.

First published in 1981, Oodgeroo's *Father Sky and Mother Earth* (hereafter *FSME*), included most deservedly in the canon of children's literature, can be treated as an allegorical history of the development of the anthropocene and also as a text with a message of biospherical egalitarianism prioritizing an ecologically healthier world. Its message can be characterized universally valid, especially in the contemporary epoch of anthropogenic environmental disorder. However, these valid estimations may not appear comprehensive when we choose to contextualize the book using secondary materials. *FSME* appears to be specially connected to politics with regard to Aboriginal rights of and conceptions about the land in Australia

for certain prominent reasons. Firstly, Oodgeroo lived a life of political and aesthetic activism devoted to resisting colonial modernity in Australia and this activism cannot be ignored while appreciating the book. Secondly, the multimodal experience of the alphabetic text and graphic illustrations available in the book may appear to celebrate a futuristic ecotopia that has strong echoes of the Aboriginal conception of the land and evokes a stereotypical Australian ecological setting even though the issue of the devastated environment may appear to be universal in nature. Thirdly, the critique of anthropocene or anthropocentrism or anthropogenic environmental disorder in the book can be connected to the European colonialists' attitude to and handling of Australian ecological space, portraits of which are lamented and critiqued in many of Oodgeroo's poems that appeared prior to the publication of *FSME*. Fourthly, ecopolitics, anti-colonial politics and politics concerning Aboriginal rights in Australia, especially originating from Aboriginal people, cannot be dissociated from each other, and thus the book can be identified as an ecopolitical pamphlet that critiques the anthropocene and colonial modernity's toxic handling of non-human nature using the camouflage of children's literature.

Before we begin with the analysis of this conflation of ecopolitics and Aboriginal critique of colonial modernity in *FSME*, we must have a critical overview of the text. The physical packaging of the book with its illustrations accompanying the alphabetic text that often uses fable-like characterization of the non-human nature and species, resembles the western stereotypes of picture-books mostly consumed by children. The book conflates the motif of environmental justice with moral education and visualizes the anthropocene and its fallouts while containing a 'vital message' (Noonuccal, *FSME* back cover) concerning the past, present and future of the planet. It presents a history that seems universal and proposes a solution that is universally valid. Written apparently for children, the story begins with the defamiliarization of the conventional beginning of children's books.

Rather than beginning with 'once upon a time', the story begins with 'once upon a world' (Noonuccal, *FSME*). There is an accentuation available with regard to a sense of space and habitat and the fact that the present world nowhere even distantly echoes that world that 'once' had existed is made evident right at the beginning. In a fable-like formulation, that past world is presented as a large domestic space where 'Father Sky and Mother Earth had four children: Sun, Moon, Sea and Rock. They never again lived together after they had their children' ((Noonuccal, *FSME*). As the story goes, 'Sun and Moon created servants for themselves' like Clouds, Rain,

Winds, Storms and so on who lived together with Sun, Moon and Father Sky, while Rock's servants like Trees, Birds, Animals, Reptiles, Insects lived with Mother Earth (*FSME*). Living between Father Sky and Mother Earth was the Sea with his servants like Tides, Oceans, Gales and so on:

Father Sky watched over Mother Earth. When she grew thirsty, he asked Moon and Sun to send her water. They sent Rain to help. Rain created Rivers, Creeks and Lakes and filled them with water.

Sun sent his warmth to Mother Earth. Rock, Trees, Birds, Animals, Reptiles and Insects all loved Sun. (Noonuccal, *FSME*).

In this fairly alternative historiography and emplotment of creation, a pre-human ecotopia of biospherical egalitarianism is evoked, wherein all aspects and entities have their agency articulated in the saga of creation. Gale, Cyclone and Tornado, Sea's other servants, 'sometimes blew so hard that they knocked over Rock, his servant Tree and other things' and 'Rock's other servants, Birds, Animals, Reptiles and Insects would hide until Gale, Cyclone and Tornado had finished their cleaning' (Noonuccal, *FSME*). The visual scenery attached to the alphabetic text is evocative of the violent sweep of the Gales and Tornados, of Sea's servants toppling Rock's servants. However, there is no exaggeration and sensationalization involving violence. The tornados and gales are not presented as agents of apocalypse or disruption, but of cleansing that is necessary for the life to continue. And thus, during their sweeping cleansing period, 'Birds lived in Tree's branches and some Animals would climb up Tree's trunk and rest there', while Insects took shelter under the Tree's bark or on the trunk and branches; and 'Gum Tree let Koala live in his branches and Koala fed on Gum Tree's leaves' (Noonuccal, *FSME*). In that world of biospherical egalitarianism, even the tiny Bee would participate and collaborate in the construction of 'a happy time of Creation' and 'in this way they all helped one another' (Noonuccal, *FSME*).

There was 'beauty everywhere' until the time when 'a strange Animal came among them. This Animal was not like any Animal they had ever seen and this Animal was called Human' (Noonuccal, *FSME*). The graphic illustration visualizing the arrival of the humans has an extreme longshot showing a human couple surveying the erstwhile happy scene of nature. Their arrival is ominous and is made to appear so pictorially with the male human figure holding a stick as a visual signifier of rule. Unlike the tornados and gales taking down the trees during their seasonal cleaning process, 'Human Animal cut down many, many Trees to build houses' and

this deforestation caused displacement of Koala, Birds, Reptiles and Bees, while 'Platypus, Frog and Tortoise couldn't enjoy their swims any more because Human Animal threw all his rubbish into Rivers, Creeks and Lakes' (Noonuccal, *FSME*). The accompanying graphic illustration presents an extreme longshot of ploughed lands with decapitated tree trunks and a chimney polluting the air. The ploughed lands appear in different colours. The ploughed lands naturally connote a spectacle of plantation and farming, and thereby suggest a capitalistic reshuffling and resourcing of nature. Interestingly, as Oodgerroo narrates:

Human Animal made boxes with motors in them and they made a lot f noise. The motors blew out smoke that choked the Animals, Trees, Birds, Reptiles and Insects.

Human Animal's boxes ran all over Mother Earth. And some of Human Animal's boxes flew high in Father Sky --- higher even than any of the Birds.

And Human Animal's boxes filled Father Sky with Smoke.

Some of Human Animal's boxes ran all over the Sea and spilled oil and smoke everywhere... (Noonuccal, *FSME*)

--- while the graphic illustrations duly showcase the motor cars, airplanes and ships polluting the air and water, they are continually called 'boxes' in the alphabetic prose. This presents a spectacle of their remaining unintelligible and alien in the world of the non-human. Their helplessness is resonated by the fact that they were getting killed, displaced and vandalized by agencies that they could hardly characterize and identify.

The anthropocene is characterized as dystopia. However, the book ends on a positive note:

Some Human Animals looked around and saw all the damage Human Animals had done. The mess made them very worried and sad. (Noonuccal, *FSME*).

And they chose to resist this calamity caused by the other Human Animals. They sat in a ring and discussed the issue, and their militarism and altruism led to mass-campaign in favour of biospherical egalitarianism. They stood against mindless anthropogenic environmental disorder, commodification of the non-human world and proposed the urgent need to reconstruct the world so that 'Human Animal will be able to live peace-

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fully with Father Sky and Mother Earth and their children' (Noonuccal, *FSME*). Oodgeroo envisions a positive future where there will be a new beginning of peaceful cooperative coexistence rather than a world ravaged by anthropocentric subversion of the values of environmental justice. Such a futuristic world of desire is visualized by an extreme longshot of a greener scenery with the humans nurturing plants and remaining happy (Noonuccal, *FSME*).

In one way, it is fairly accurate to characterize *FSME* as a piece reflecting Oodgeroo's environmentalism in general terms dealing with issues that are not local but global. Having been published in 1981 *FSME* allows its readers enough scope to contextualize and characterize the text as one among many such reservoirs of sentimental environmentalist critiques of the 'anthropocene', a term that is used to 'echo geological ages such as the Eocene and Pleistocene' to mean that 'human beings have become predominant over the whole surface of the Earth' (Attfield 1-2). The usage of this term is 'based on the idea that human activities have altered the earth's ecology in such unprecedented ways that it becomes necessary to proclaim a new geological epoch superseding the current Holocene' (Comos and Rosenthal xviii). 1970s and 1980s were times of widespread advocacy in favour of 'environmental philosophy and ethics, and related attempts to apply philosophy to environmental concepts and problems' (Attfield 4). While according to Guha, decades of the 1950s and 1960s could have been described as the 'Age of Ecological Innocence', '1970s and 1980s were a time of great popular concern about environmental matters' (Guha xii-xiii). Set in the context of these new developments, Oodgeroo's *FSME* appears to naturally echo the contemporary philosophical uprisings concerning anthropogenic environmental disorder. However, study of postcolonial interventions with regard to the subject of environmental ethics and ecocriticism as well as the minute voicing of the Australian and the local in *FSME*, both alphabetically and graphically, aided with parallel readings of a selection of Oodgeroo's other poems allows us to rethink about the supposedly 'global' in the text and identify the postcoloniality of Oodgeroo's ecopolitics and environmentalism.

Though 'The idea of the Anthropocene' can be regarded 'as a shorthand for the power of human agency in the Age of Humans' (Adelman, 4), it is important to underline the role played by colonialism in the development of the anthropocene and its devastating agency in environmental disorder, species-extinction and climate change. While all humans are part of the 'we' that is connotative of the human race bringing about the 'Age of Humans', questions are raised about the supposed sanctity of the 'we'

as a universally valid indicator for global population, especially in the context of anthropogenic environmental disorder. Erickson looks at the concept of anthropocene as a 'particularly modern, and liberal, concept established through both liberal humanism and scientific objectivity'. According to him, 'the "we" assumed by the Anthropocene is certainly a white anthropos' (Erickson, 115). While the term 'anthropocene' explicitly characterises humans as 'a collective geological force', 'other critical voices come from the fields of postcolonial studies and environmental justice studies, which challenge the anthropocentric notion that "we're all in this together". Shifting the focus towards the uneven distribution of responsibility and vulnerability, they emphasize the dominant role that Western, industrialized countries have played in remaking the planet, pointing out that those who have contributed least to greenhouse gas emissions are likely to suffer most from its effects' (Comos and Rosenthal, ix-x).

Thus, according to Adelman, from 'the start of the Industrial Revolution to the last quarter of the twentieth century, the climate catastrophe was overwhelmingly the responsibility of white, bourgeois and predominantly Christian men' (6). To Derek Gregory, while the precolonial past cannot be identified as a 'golden age' 'of ecological equilibrium', since, 'Famine, deforestation, and environmental degradation were not exclusive products of colonial modernity', and since 'Neither did modern colonialism inevitably issue in ecological apocalypse: colonial ecologies were not always and everywhere exploitative and destructive', 'Colonialism was involved in a distinctive cultural politics of nature' (90). Vandana Shiva comments on the role of the European Enlightenment ideologues in the development of an anthropocentric universe when she writes:

The Age of Enlightenment, and the theory of progress to which it gave rise, was centred on the sacredness of two categories: modern scientific knowledge and economic development. Somewhere along the way, the unbridled pursuit of progress, guided by science and development, began to destroy life without any assessment of how fast and how much of the diversity of life on this planet is disappearing. (xii)

An echo of Shiva's arguments can be found in Gregory too when he writes that:

From the sixteenth century the triumph of European modernity came to be represented as in some substantial sense the triumph of 'culture' over 'nature'....

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It was widely assumed that European nature has been forced to yield its secrets to the intimate probings of a new experimental European science... and to release its energies through the inventions of a new mechanical European technology.... Modern cultures were supposed to have dissected nature so deeply and to have imposed themselves upon nature so forcefully that they were no longer at its mercy, whereas premodern cultures were regarded as creatures of their containing natures whose institutions, practices, and possibilities were conditioned and limited by the caprice of their local ecologies. (87-88)

British colonization of Australia took place within the historical context of the popularization of Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution ideologies and cultural, economical and political models. Moreover, Australia was a settlers' colony. In the Manichaean world (Fanon, 31) of a settlers' colony, the Aboriginal population in Australia was 'incorporated within the uneven power relations of a settler society' (Kleinert, 171). Erickson rightly points out that 'settler colonialism establishes itself' 'through an invasion that is a continual production of physical and discursive infrastructure that stabilize and secure settler states' (111). And this phenomenon did evidently transform the precolonial ecology of the land to create habitable homelands for the settlers. Case studies of the alteration of the Australian landscape as results of settlers' colonization of the land evoke the portrait of ecological transformation and violent extinction of precolonial eco-cultural models as well as the ecology in general. For example,

Within a few years of establishment of the colony of South Australia in 1836, the Adelaide Hills landscape had undergone significant changes. The natural landscape of Eucalypt forest had been felled, and the valleys and hillsides were transformed to resemble the cultivated rural landscapes of Britain and Europe. (Piddock, et al., 65).

This settler-colonialism-inflicted metamorphosis of precolonial ecology is central to the understanding of Australia, the Aboriginal population and their imaginings with regard to the land, and Oodgeroo's poetics and politics in *FSME*.

If the anthropocene is to be identified as an 'Age of Humans' as a geological epoch and the human beings are to be characterized as collective human agency in the context of anthropogenic environmental disorder, especially in the context of the Australian case seen from the perspective

of Oodgeroo, then the 'we' or the 'man' implied in the construction of the identity of the human agency is supposed to point towards the white settler with his capitalistic greed and unsympathetic zeal of imposing colonial modernity. It is after all an undeniable fact of history that the capitalistic commodification of human, non-human and ecological resources was a regular trait of colonialism. In case of Australia, with the arrival of colonialism, 'Nature became commodity, in the sense of being the total environment commandeered by the new settlers. This revolutionary attitude figured in the cultural construction of the environment at the birth of the nation' (Russell, 67).

It is important to highlight the fact that throughout *FSME*, Oodgeroo never differentiates in her narrative alphabetic prose between the Aboriginals and the Europeans. In fact, terms like 'Aboriginals' or 'Europeans' or even 'Settlers' never occur in the book. Additionally, nowhere in the text we find alphabetically written records concerning the racial identity of the 'Human Animal'. However, Oodgeroo does differentiate between the general 'Human Animal' and a special class of Human Animals called the 'worried humans' that critique the 'damage Human Animals had done', a 'mess' that 'made them very worried and sad' (Noonuccal, *FSME*). *FSME* appears to be a critique of the anthropogenic ecological disequilibrium caused by the practices of the anthropocene. In that sense, both her message and portrayal seem adequately universal since *FSME* does not, at least directly, talk about a particular nation or geological space. However, it is here that the multimodality of *FSME* has to be taken into account. If we critically observe the graphic illustration of the book, the Rock's servant Birds and Animals are distinctly iconographed as the Emu and Kangaroo, a fact that allows us to identify the landscape as Australia (Noonuccal, *FSME*). The platypus, the Koala, the Gum Tree, species, flora and fauna of native Australia are consistent in alphabetic and graphic narrations in *FSME*.

In Oodgeroo's case, anticolonial politics and ecopolitics cannot be dissociated from each other. *FSME*, therefore, cannot be read and understood in isolation. Though she does not directly characterise the 'worried humans' as Aboriginals, it becomes clear that they are implied to be identified as Aboriginals or whites that have sympathies with an Aboriginal outlook with regard to greater nature. It is essential to understand therefore what were/are the distinctive features of Aboriginal attitudes towards nature and the place of humans in it and how they get reflected in *FSME* and Oodgeroo's other poems which must be read as parallels.



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As Colin Bourke and Helen Cox explain:

Despite Aboriginal resistance England declared itself the sovereign or ruler of Australia. The established legal doctrine that enabled it to do this is known *terra nullius*....

Australia was declared to be a land that was not occupied by a people with settled laws. In legal effect, it was *terra nullius*. (59).

The discursive stereotypification of Australia as *terra nullius* validated colonial domination and legitimized the imposition of colonial modernity as a mode of bringing Australia within the category of civilizations. This mode of legitimization of colonial violence characterized the Aboriginal population as not merely secondary citizens, but more potently as uncivilized brutes, hunter-gatherers and ontologically inferior to the 'civilized' and 'industrialized' Europeans who were the settlers. Moreover, 'The land was declared *desert and uninhabited*' and only later 'represented as *terra nullius*' (Eleanor Bourke 1). Declaration of the land as desert and uninhabited naturally enabled the settler colonizers to characterize the same as a potential *tabula rasa*, which had in precolonial times existed without humanity and human agency. Within the bounds of these discursive stereotypifications, the white settlers got identified as the first 'human' on the uninhabited stage. This method does not merely dehumanize or sub-humanize the Aboriginal population, but also validates white man's domination of the land and its ecology that accommodated the lesser-human Aboriginal population and the non-human flora and fauna of Australia.

The first 'man', in the colonial discourse, is thus implied and celebrated as the white man. Oodgeroo's portrayal of the 'Human Animal' in *FSME* and his actions serving as contributors to ecological devastation and species extinction may therefore ironically echo the violent history of white exploitation with regard to Aboriginal population (that were regarded lesser humans or were dehumanized) and Australian flora and fauna which in itself being seen as 'ontologically inferior' from the perspective of Enlightenment and European Christian<sup>2</sup> principles to human beings were to serve as commodities. In this way, Oodgeroo manages to unify the themes of ecocide and colonial violence in *FSME*. In her critique of the anthropogenic environmental disorder and the alphabetic and graphic representation of the devastation of nature by 'man', the unsympathetic handling of Aborigines as well as the Australian nature gets continually evoked with tragic overtones and angry resistance. For example, the graphic spectacle of the airplane, the ship, the cultivated lands, factories and their remain-

ing unintelligible to the other animals in nature, echoes the plight of not merely non-humans but also the Aboriginal population to whom such developments, that were imported from the West were naturally unintelligible. In *FSME*, the graphic representation of the decapitated trees, the neatly cultivated lands and the factory with its chimney-smoke echoes naturally a Europeanized Australia with the agency of the non-humans as well as the Aboriginals equally and forcibly muted. This ecocide is naturally an echo of forceful introduction of colonial modernity that is a dominant theme in many of Oodgeroo's poems. For example, in her condemnation of colonial modernity and elegiac reflection of the colonial order of things in 'Municipal Gum' Oodgeroo writes:

Gumtree in the city street,  
Hard bitumen around your feet,  
Rather you should be  
In the cool world of leafy forest halls  
And wild bird calls. (Noonuccal, *My People* 49).

The humanized gumtree is 'Castrated, broken, a thing wronged, / Strapped and buckled' (Noonuccal, *My People* 49). This ecocide is an extension and attribute of the colonial violence inflicted on Australia. The gumtree is an extension of the exploited Aboriginal population, as Oodgeroo manages to unify the wronged tree with the wronged Aborigines as she exclaims: 'What have they done to us?' (Noonuccal, *My People* 49). Oodgeroo's graphic display of deforestation and commodification of nature in *FSME* naturally echoes the sentiments and predicaments available in 'Municipal Gum'. The caged Gumtree is an echo of colonialism-driven anthropogenic ecological devastation by which the scene available alphabetically and graphically in *FSME* wherein we find how once 'Gum Tree let Koala live in his branches and Koala fed on Gum Tree's leaves' (Noonuccal, *FSME*) is so tragically altered. In linking Aboriginal population with the plight of the gumtree, Oodgeroo positions herself as a 'worried human', made worried by colonialism and colonization-enforced-ecocide.

The trope of this worried human is regularly available in Oodgeroo's earlier poetry. In 'Return to Nature', Oodgeroo addresses nature as 'Lover of my happy past'. The worried self in the speaker is also weary, needing nature to 'soothe' her weariness 'with warm embrace'. However, she fails to get herself calmed and concludes how her and nature's enemy is her 'civilized' self:

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My tear-stained eyes  
 Open now to see  
 Your enemy and mine

Is --- civilized me. (Noonuccal, *My People* 88).

This Aboriginal persona, tragically aware of her 'civilized' self, who has been metamorphosed by colonialism-inflicted cultural encounter and is tempted by the capitalistic diversion to commodify non-human nature is a foreshadowing of the 'worried human animal' in *FSME*.

Similarly, the worried human animals who participate in the great restoration of biospherical egalitarianism and bringing about a change in perception so that a mutually habitable ecotopia for humans and non-humans can be built in *FSME* come out with their slogans that resemble what Oodgeroo writes in 'Time Is Running Out'. In this poem, Oodgeroo pen-pictures the white man's capitalistic greed:

The miner rapes  
 The heart of earth  
 With his violent spade.  
 Stealing, bottling her black blood

For the sake of greedy trade. (Noonuccal, *My People* 96)

This extremely passionate, counter-violent and zealous sloganeering on the part of Oodgeroo is echoed in the 'warning signs' spread by worried human animals that read slogans like 'Beware Human Animal Is the Most Dangerous of All', 'Human Animal Rubbishes', 'Human Animal Pollutes' and so on in *FSME* (Noonuccal, *FSME*). Their attack on the fellow Human Animals is reminiscent of Oodgeroo's attack on the white colonialist who 'destroys old nature's will' (Noonuccal, *My People* 96). Old nature's will was evidently present in the 'Once upon a World' that had not got devastated by greedy human animals in *FSME*.

Evidently, seen from the light of a parallel reading of Oodgeroo's other poems *FSME* may seem to be an environmentalist critique of colonialism-driven ecocide. However, Oodgeroo's ecopolitics and anti-colonial activism also allow her to celebrate Aboriginal conception of the land and nature through the utilization of the fable-like structure of *FSME*. It is identifiable that *FSME* follows the structure of a conventional pic-

ture-book fable with anthropomorphic characters like the tree, the rock, the bee and so on. In this regard, it is important to refer back to the fact that the strategic application of the *terra nullius* discourse devalued the preexisting Aboriginal customs and ideologies. However, though muted and no longer available in popular currency due to the overhauling near-extinction of Aboriginal population and belief system, they find their places in Oodgeroo's emplotment of the creation narrative in *FSME*. Yami Lester writes:

Aboriginal culture cannot be separated from the land. On the land are stories --- Aboriginal stories that explain why people, rock-holes, the hills and the trees came to be there. The land is full of stories. Every square mile is just like a book, a book with a lot of pages, and it's all a story for the children to learn. (quoted in El-eanor Bourke, 51).

There is no denying the fact that the graphic illustrations in *FSME* most evidently bear an Aboriginal flavor. They are reminiscent of Aboriginal rock paintings. They also represent pastel-shade drawings of children in found in their formative years' sketch books. The emplotment of the creation narrative in *FSME* conflates the stereotypical fable-like structure and Aboriginal story-telling in terms of both alphabetic and graphic narrations. While 'In Western thought, culture as human achievement is distinguished from the natural world' (Edwards, 81), according to Sutton, 'In traditional Aboriginal thought, there is no nature without culture' (Edwards, 81). In his chapter, Bill Edwards talks about Aboriginal conceptualizations about Dreaming<sup>3</sup> and the land. According to Aboriginal outlooks:

The whole of the landscape is conceived as having been formed through the activities of the Spirit Beings. The whole environment is viewed as the arena in which the dramatic events of The Dreaming were and are enacted.... all the land is a sacred site. The Spirit Beings are said to be present continually in the forms of the landscape which were created through their activities. (Edwards, 81)

This existence of the central presence of the spirits in every aspect, being and face of nature is a defining feature of *FSME* wherein, mimicking the western stereotypes of children's picture-book fables and utilizing the conventional fantasy element in children's book, Oodgeroo manages to ventilate her Aboriginal discourse of the land's history, the creation stories which from a western point of view was usually branded as unscientific.

*FSME* with its powerful message tries to ventilate the need of arriving at oneness of culture and nature, human and ecology, a belief system that is characteristic of the Aborigines in Australia. It is also significant that in her earlier-published famous piece 'We Are Going', this spiritual oneness of the Aboriginal people and the land was celebrated. While she showcased how due to the introduction of the despicable colonial modernity 'The scrubs are gone, the hunting and the laughter', 'The eagle is gone, the emu and the kangaroo are gone from this place' (Noonuccal, *My People* 76) and all of this gets echoed in *FSME* with the graphic display of ecocidal dystopia unleashed by human animals, she also unites the native people with the land and its plight, when she writes, 'We are nature and the past, all the old ways' (Noonuccal, *My People* 76). This oneness of culture and nature, human and ecology is central to the desired and proposed realization of biospherical egalitarianism in *FSME*, and that is how Oodgeroo manages to celebrate the environmentalist utopia and Aboriginal ecotopia in *FSME*.

As the paper has already highlighted, *FSME* becomes an example of Oodgeroo's ecopolitical take on colonial modernity, its anthropocentric, technocentric and capitalocene model of commodification of nature and thereby it is truly a book that is pro-environmentalist and anti-imperialist. The children's picture-book narration may have provided Oodgeroo the opportunity to recolour and reestablish her anticolonial and ecopolitical outlooks available in her earlier writings but at the same time the book's message and emplotment is central to our understanding of colonialism's and colonial modernity's role in environmental degradation if we choose to localize the narrative in Australia's ecological, cultural and political history and prefer to be aided by secondary materials and Oodgeroo's own writings. It is an undeniable fact that the worried human animal's agency in *FSME* to develop a world of oneness among humans and the ecology at large in complete refusal to acknowledge the exclusiveness and omnipotence of human agency in the anthropocene clearly matches the Aboriginal customs and the sentiments of Oodgeroo's other poems where she identifies the Aborigines as 'Nature' themselves and says that 'Dreamtime folk are massing/ To defend their timeless land' (Noonuccal, *My People* 76 and 96). Additionally, it should be highlighted that *FSME* presents before us a beautiful ecotopia that is achievable:

Father Sky, Mother Earth, their children and their children's servants will once again be bright and clean, and happy and beautiful and peaceful, just as they were in the beginning.

And perhaps Human Animal will be able to live happily and peacefully with Father Sky and Mother Earth and their children.  
(Noonuccal, *FSME*)

Children's picture-storybooks must end in this way. However, there is obviously enough room for skepticism especially with regard to even the most distant possibility of treading back to that time of the 'beginning'. Is it really possible to recreate an extinct world? Based on the available scientific resources, the concept of linear flow of time through geological epochs arriving at the present state of the anthropocene, the answer is perhaps negative. However, according to the Aboriginal conception, time is 'cyclic, rather than linear' and 'each generation is able to experience the present reality of The Dreaming' (Edwards, 79). Even here Oodgeroo seems to celebrate the desired ecotopia of biospherical egalitarianism wherein human animals may live in peace with non-human agents by acknowledging their collaborative agency and mutual living-rights as The Dreaming that is possible to go back to. Perhaps, this vital message is wayward and unscientific, but is vitally effective in presenting an alternative vision and diversion that the present anthropocene so dearly needs.

The postcolonial rereading and rethinking aided by secondary resources about colonialism's impact on various ecologies and Oodgeroo's own anti-colonial and ecopolitics registered in her earlier writings definitely lend *FSME* a different flavor and enables us to scrutinize her politics and aesthetics from different standpoints other than a children's picture-book on environmental degradation is conventionally expected to allow<sup>4</sup>. Significantly, removing herself from all essential confrontationalities, Oodgeroo, in her poem 'Integration – Yes' seems in favour of integration by which 'black and white may go forward together/ In harmony and brotherhood' (Noonuccal, *My People* 23). This vision of integration is central to the message that *FSME* offers. Its central message is essentially universal and globally applicable. She is in favour of unifying nature and culture. This direction and vision, with its metaphorical message that warns us to check ourselves, is central to ecological equilibrium, animal ethics, sustainable development and environmental justice and therefore needs to be put to practice in the best way possible.

**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup>The line is from *FSME* (Noonuccal, *FSME*).

<sup>2</sup> In his analysis of Milton's poetic rewriting of the Creation of Man in the

Bible, Borlik finds an 'expose' of 'the indiviious axis between Christianity, patriarchy, and anthropocentrism' (2). As Attfield informs:

In an influential essay of 1967, Lynn White Jr argued that Christianity is essentially human-centred and committed to an arrogant and despotic attitude to the natural world, holding that it is God's will for humanity to exploit the Earth. (92).

Christianity, like colonial modernity, was imported in Australia through colonial cultural encounters. Aboriginal ideas about non-human nature are not based on exclusive authority, right and agency of the humans over non-human nature. However, in this regard it must not be assumed that precolonial Aboriginal Australia or any other geological territory which later came under colonial rule was essentially an ecotopia of environmental justice. Moreover, Christianity cannot be blamed for anthropocentrism and environmental degradation. As Attfield adds:

... early modern Christianity certainly encouraged the scientific quest for laws of nature ... to discover the creator's plan. But none of this makes Christianity human-centred, let alone commending the ruthless exploitation of nature for human purposes. The Old Testament has prohibitions against maltreatment of domestic animals (Proverbs 12:10), and taking mother birds from their nests (Deuteronomy 22:6-7), and recognizes that God has created times and places for wild creatures such as lions and sea-creatures... (92-3)

<sup>3</sup> As Bill Edwards highlights, 'The term, The Dreaming, is used to describe the Aboriginal creative epoch.... The use of the English word Dreaming should not suggest that it refers to some vague reflection of the real world. Rather, Aboriginal people see the world of The Dreaming as the fundamental reality.' (Edwards, 79).

<sup>4</sup> It is not at all exceptional or rare to find how extremely important political dogmas get ventilated through the utilization of the camouflage of children's literary texts. However, children, as the desired readership, are not expected to decode such politics of the adult world in such texts.

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