

*Original Article*

# Displacement in Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* and Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*

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**Abstract:** The topic of invasion of native lands and the displacement of local people, as well as their agrarian way of life and resources, is at the center of both of these novels i.e. Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* and Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*. This study examined displacement in Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* and Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* by applying post-colonial eco-critical perspective. Both the novels deal with the issues of invasion of native lands and displacement of the native people and their agrarian lifestyle and resources. In doing so the ecocritical insights developed by Aldo Leopold, Rob Nixon, Lenka Filipova, and others are used as theoretical parameters to analyse the primary texts under scrutiny. Modern development invades their place in the nature and the tribal group is under serious threat. At the same time, the dependence of the tribal group on hunting leads to the displacement of the natural resources. The study concludes that displacement from the land makes people feel of being placelessness and hence rootlessness. Attachment with the place respecting the stability, beauty and integrity of the land community make people experience their identity, dignity and sense of individuality.

**Keywords:** Doris Lessing, Ken Kesey, Displacement, postcolonial

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is through the use of a post-colonial eco-critical perspective that investigates and analyzes the concept of displacement in the works of Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* and Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*. The topic of invasion of native lands and the displacement of local people, as well as their agrarian way of life and resources, is at the center of both of these novels [1]. Consequently, the ecocritical insights that have been established by Aldo Leopold, Rob Nixon, Lenka Filipova, and other individuals are utilized as theoretical criteria in order to conduct an analysis of the main texts that are being examined. Over the course of Lessing's work, European settlers in Rhodesia are responsible for the act of displacing native resources, as well as the locals themselves and their traditional values [2]. The Slatter family and the Turner family are white farmers who were responsible for the displacement. Mary Turner despises the indigenous people and is unable to tolerate their presence. Slatter takes advantage of the indigenous land to the utmost extent possible, cutting down all of the trees in order to make money [3]. Mary experiences an emotional displacement as a result of the loss of the community's sense of belonging to her. In Kesey's tale, the original way of life of the Columbian Indians is disrupted because the government constructs a hydroelectric dam in the river, on which they are dependent. The indigenous people are facing a significant danger as a result of the modern development that is encroaching on their natural habitat [4]. At the same time, the fact that the tribal group is dependent on hunting results in the extraction of natural resources from their natural habitat. It indicates that people who are uprooted from their homes experience a sense of placelessness

and, consequently, a lack of a sense of belonging. People are able to experience their identity, dignity, and sense of individuality when they have a connection to the location, respect the stability, beauty, and integrity of the land community, and attach themselves to the area [5].

## 2. POST-COLONIAL ANALYSIS

The displacement of tribal lifestyle, landscape and their natural resources due to growing domination of colonizers and modern development activities are used as the main theoretical parameters to examine, analyze, and reflect upon Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* and Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*. This research examines the displacement of natives and their natural resources from postcolonial ecocritical perspectives [6]. Ecocritical reading of Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* foregrounds distinction between the ecological approach of Charlie Slatter and Dick. They both are major characters. Charlie Slatter demonstrates the tendency towards Eurocentric way of exploitation of the natural resources belonging to the natives. He is more like a symbolical character. How far human can go exploit and commodify nature, he can be taken as an example [7]. Irony about this character is that he appreciates and other non-human aspects of environment only for their monetary or instrumental values. Dick "represents the alternative ecocentric, deep ecological environmental philosophy" that effectively counters Slatter's anthropocentrism. Dick Turner undermines ecological virtues by treating African and the natural worlds like trees and land bringing the displacement of black Africans from their land on the surface. He does not want to see that human life and the biosphere intricately connected [8]. Their exploitation of the nature has larger impacts upon human beings and other aspects of the biosphere. They treat the Africans in inhuman way. At the same time, they trigger the displacement of the natives from their own natural resources and settings. The novel presents the breakdown of environmental and human mental health at the same time. The state of one's home-place and environmental surroundings is always fundamental to human wellbeing. The novel has depicted this suggesting more broadly that the effects of environmental degradation on the human are more extensive than we have traditionally imagined. Both the novels adopt the subject matter of the pre, during, and postcolonial states of the native people and their property including the environment around them [9]. Thus, this research will be based on the sense of dispossession and displacement among the native people after their land was colonized by the Europeans and the Americans. Together with this aspect, the research will study the short-term and long-term impacts on the ecology of these newly occupied places [10]. The study hypothesizes that the colonizers and their treatment to the native people are the factors that are responsible for creating a sense of dispossession and displacement among them. Likewise, the native people are dispossessed and displaced from their place because their right to natural resources is restricted, and their culture is intervened by the culture and tradition of the colonizers [11]. In *The Grass is Singing*, Moses, a Rhodesian native kills Mary, Mr. Turner's wife, who unlike her husband was suppressive to the servants. The killing of Mary is an illustration of dispossession and displacement in Moses who does this due to his insecurity. In other words, postcolonial ecocritical theory combines the study of postcolonial era in relation to environment in literary work. Ecocriticism as a literary theory, attempts to analyze the texts to highlight environmental concerns and explore the roles of literature to bring awareness to society. On the other hand, post colonialism studies the cultural and economic exploitation of the colonized/marginalized/the natives and their land [12]. The environment comprises of nature and culture, humans and nonhumans, animate and inanimate as an integral part. Postcolonial ecocritical study takes the challenge to respond to postcolonial and ecocriticism, by studying the environment as a complete body composed of humans, animals, and land. It redirects critical thinking towards the relationship between humans in terms of indigenous and foreign, and land and humans and nonhumans (4). In contrast, post colonialism is a response to colonization, which is used to study the cultural and economic exploitation of the colonized/marginalized/ the natives and their land. As one

can see the split between the two schools of thought: nature versus culture, it has been a trend for more than a decade. This split of thought has further demolished the fact that the environment is an integration of nature and culture, humans and nonhumans, animate and inanimate [13]. Likewise, Boardman interprets the novel *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* as the voice of marginalized. Bromden's predicament is illustrative of his tribe, and perhaps of much of Indian life in the US at that time. Bromden's childhood would have been in the 1920s and 1930s, when the US government was struggling to decide whether Indians should maintain their tribal customs or adopt white culture, after the obvious failure of the Dawes Act, to achieve integration of the Native Americans into white American culture. By this point many Indians, like Bromden's tribe, had sold their land and lost their social cohesion and old way of life. By 1934 the government realized the extent of the Indians' poverty and passed the Indian Reorganization Act (Wheeler-Howard Act) which, rather than attempting assimilation, tried to reestablish a tribal government and sustain the disappearing culture by encouraging the study of Indian history and art. Lands were returned to tribal, not individual ownership [14]. Most of the scholars have analyzed the selected novels from postcolonial perspective and ecocritical perspective separately; they have focused less on the issue of dislocation as observed by the researcher. They have mentioned the postcolonial impacts on the lives of the native people and the natural and cultural environment of the colonized lands. Therefore, this study, to fill this gap, will attempt to analyze *The Grass is Singing* and *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* by applying postcolonial ecocritical tools to study the impacts of colonization on the colonized people and their natural property. After accomplishing detail review of the literature, the researcher has noticed the study gap that detail study of the texts is needed to add nuances on its postcolonial ecocritical reading [15].

### 3. ANALYSIS IN PERSPECTIVE OF SENSE OF DISPLACEMENT

Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* portrays the public life in Rhodesia, Africa. Numbers of white people are making their fortune in farming and exploitation of natural and ecological aspects like soil, trees in that African soil. Thus, they trigger the act of displacement of the local, indigenous, black ecology and values. The novel begins with a newspaper article titled "Murder Mystery" in Ngesi. The report of tragic murder of a white woman Mary Turner arouses curiosity from the very beginning and we are attracted to understand the social position and behavior of the Turner family [16]. This news is just to show the consequence of the way Turners behave in the society. At the same time, it also shows their treatment of overall environment and landscape of Ngesi though the news only reports the superficial detail of the murder. The locals do not discuss about the news; there is certain unanimous agreement that they do not gossip anything about it. They just feel it and keep it silent. The image of the white people is not good among the black people because of their approach towards the natives and African land [17]. The white lady has been murdered by her black servant Moses for money. Before this research ventures into the ecological displacement of African village, Ngesi, it examines the colonial position of Turner family. Looking at the Turners, one sees that they are poorest whites of the whole village and they lack the better life standard than that of many of the natives. They have not made a fortune by using African landscape and natural resources either. Instead of gaining a lot of profit from African resources, the Turners bear the loss of life in Africa, at the hand of Moses, the native servant. Turners' colonial position of the white family in Africa, and their presence hated not only because of normal native perception towards white people, rather their self-alienating poverty and social standing is evident in the novel. Postcolonial ecocriticism is the theoretical vein that raises environmental concerns and issues of environmental justice and equity are interlocked with sexism, racism, ecophobia, industrialism, Eurocentrism, poverty or other phenomenon that promote domination, disasters or displacements [18]. It is clear that more than the monetary division in the society, there was racial division. Economically independent African people were ignored by whites. As per the social perception of class division, economically poor whites were Africans. However, African society was not willing to regard

them as African either. “Though the arguments were unanswerable, people would still not think of them as poor whites. To do that would be letting the side down. The Turners were British, after all”. This establishes the colonial position of Turners strongly in the novel. Charlie Slatter is only “personified society for the Turners”. He used to be “a grocer’s assistant in London” (13) and came to Africa “twenty years ago”. It shows the inability of the Turner family to develop friendships with natives, and their sense of belongingness to the place is also dependent on the white people of the society [19]. Slatters are the only society they know; they are not very close as the subsequent neighbors. Making money using the indigenous landscape and white privilege is the open goal of Slatter. He is hell-bent to do anything for money; there is no question of using all the available resources. He wants to use his white privilege and masculine authority as much as he can to make the money. He is hard on his wife, his children and the farmhands. The writer calls the labor he uses in keeping the geese that lay the golden eggs. Slatter uses them in the same way as the domestic animals until they produce a lot of money. Slatter appears to be very clever and wise so far as running his life is concerned [20]. He knows early that he could live without doing the job for others and doing his own work and earning money by himself. Therefore, he leaves the job of grocery in London and came to Ngesi twenty years back. He earns enough money in Ngesiby exploiting everything – the soil, the trees, the workers and the other resources that are available for him. Further, he uses all the instruments and the methods of punishments that speed up his job. It is evident that Slatter used all the cruel means to punish the farmhands that was not only limited to whipping them rather it exceeded and reached to the point of killing the farmhand once. There is no question of the natural rights or ethical obligation in his treatment of the farmhands [21]. The whipping works very well with Slatter. It is also evident that a white man escapes the punishment so easily even when he kills a black farmhand. He was fined just thirty pounds killing a laborer once, and that incident taught him to control his anger. He had also suggested Turners to buy sjambok at the beginning of their farming, but it does not work well for the Turners. The white authority, cruelty over the working-class blacks and available resources, is evident with the analysis of the characteristics of Slatter. The White men have got the colonial privilege and authority. The narrator and his friends had stood silently in an autumn day; they had to be happy without doing any recreational works, just by listening to the sound the kids hitting the football [22]. They stood there putting their hands in the pocket watching the townspeople driving away; the doctor got out of the hospital. McMurphy noticed their sad and pensive mood and tried to make them happy by telling the jokes and teasing the girls. He is the miscreant breaking the rules and revolting for the just and human environment for all in the hospital. McMurphy attacks the Big Nurse catching her neck and thereby nearly killing her for her authoritarian, dehumanizing treatment of the patients. McMurphy is like the cornered animal. He fights for all the dehumanized, cornered-animals of the mental hospital without caring about his death or any punishment [23]. That ultimately leads him to the lobotomy, displacement of the sane patient into coma-like vegetable state. Rob Nixon sees, regarding the attack into nature, human nature and natural environment by the people or any authority does not only displace the local communities, rather it also creates the imaginative displacement. In this last part of the novel, Bromden kills McMurphy out of mercy as he has already gone vegetable after he received lobotomy. Bromden describes McMurphy’s body as big and tough. These qualities in him make Bromden admire him and think him closer relative to him [24]. Here is another act of displacement, he refers McMurphy as "it" dehumanizing him [25]. The mental hospital is responsible for this dehumanization of the human being and cutting off their tie with the life. His life displaces from a healthy man to a man unable to feel anything. Bromden’s escape from the mental hospital gives the ray of hope that he might find the place in the community he is once displaced from and he could be able to get back to nature [26].

#### 4. LAYERS OF DISPLACEMENT

This research studies Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* and Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* from post-colonial and ethical ecocritical perspectives. The research has studied the native landscapes, places and the displacement of the natives from the natural settings as well as the displacement of the natural resources. Lessing's novel, while portraying the native life and in Rhodesia, presents Africa interfered by the white European settlers which is responsible for the displacement of the natives and their resources [27]. Numbers of white settlers migrate there to make their fortune, in turn; their ways of farming and treatment of the native landscape trigger exploitation of natural and ecological aspects like soil, trees. The native land and its resources, the local, indigenous, black ecology and values all undergo displacement both physically and psychologically. The white settlers, like Mary, escalate displacement because of her approach to the place and the natives. Ken Kesey's novel, on the other hand, presents the displacement of the patients in the mental hospital as well as the displacement of the native Columbian Indian tribe's displacement from their natural habitat due to development activities like hydroelectric dam. At the same time, the Columbian Indian lifestyle dependent on hunting displaces the wildlife from their natural habitat [28]. This novel is studied as the novel with multi-layered displacement. This study points out that overall displacement of ecological aspects is not only physical, it is also psychological too. This research reaches that position after looking at the displacement of the characters from post-colonial and ethical ecocritical vein in the characters like Lessing's Mary and Kesey's Bromden and other mental patients. Displacement is less physical and more mental or imaginative phenomenon becomes evident as the research progresses. Thus, the focus of this research is on the physical and imaginative displacement of the characters from the nature and native place. The Columbian Indian native narrator of Kesey's novel, Chief Bromden also appear to be displaced from his senses because he has been to the mental hospital acting deaf and dumb even though he can listen and speak [29]. It is evident in the course of the research that other aspects of the nature bear the phenomenon of displacement physically but the types of displacements of human beings are numerous: they can be physical, imaginative as well as triggered and forced. Mary's displacement is imaginative one in Lessing's novel but Bromden's displacement is multilayered. Physically, there is the displacement of his tribe, emotionally, he feels dehumanized and lacking in human dignity and the displacement of his senses, the curb on his hearing and speaking abilities are forced or triggered displacement. McMurphy, the character who brings life to the dehumanized world of mental patients in the hospital protests upon this dehumanization and loses his life fighting against displacement. Mary also meets with similar fate trying to get out of emotional displacement plagued by colonial mentality as well as crushing poverty and her husband's incompetence [30]. The colonial position and modern development are the major enactors of the physical displacement of the natives and their natural resources respectively in Lessing and Kesey's novels. The writer describes the Slatter's farm lacking a single tree a farming malpractice. This malpractice is an act of physical displacement of the natural resources from the native soil. Slatter does not care about the nature and ecology; he does not care whether the land is used or abused. He only cares about making money. It is unethical practice to do so when environmentally conscious person looks at it. It is an act of irresponsible destruction of ecology and disruption of ecological cycle. Colonial mentality triggers numerous acts of displacement; the apathy towards natives also generates the emotional displacement of the natives in their community. All the trees are cut off in Slatter's is also misuse of the farm and is devoid of ethical commitment and environmental responsibility [31]. It is inhuman and barbaric to exploit all the resources that come to their access to make the money is horrible while considering from ecocritical perspective as it is insensitive towards the ecosystem; cutting down all the trees have made the earth dead. Evidently, Slatter has cut down every tree out of the farm to sell it to feed his goal of making money. In Kesey's novel, the government's plan to build hydroelectric dam in the river the Columbian Indians go fishing to sustain their life has harsh consequences both to the nature and the natives. It commits the act of

displacement limiting the space for the Columbian Indian tribe. It changes the nature of the tribe and affects their tribal life in adverse way.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The study foregrounds numerous implications in the course of study. Primarily, it points out the various possible dimensions of the displacement largely contributing to and moving the future studies in this area. Secondly, this research shows the areas where the migrants and the policy makers need to be careful while migrating to the other countries or planning for some development-related infrastructures regarding the land, ecology and natural resources. Further, it also points out far reaching consequences and socio-cultural hazards of the displacement that occurs psychologically. It focuses the need of considering issues of migration and displacements regarding the importance of interconnectedness between human beings and nature as well as respecting place of all ecological members in the ecosphere.

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