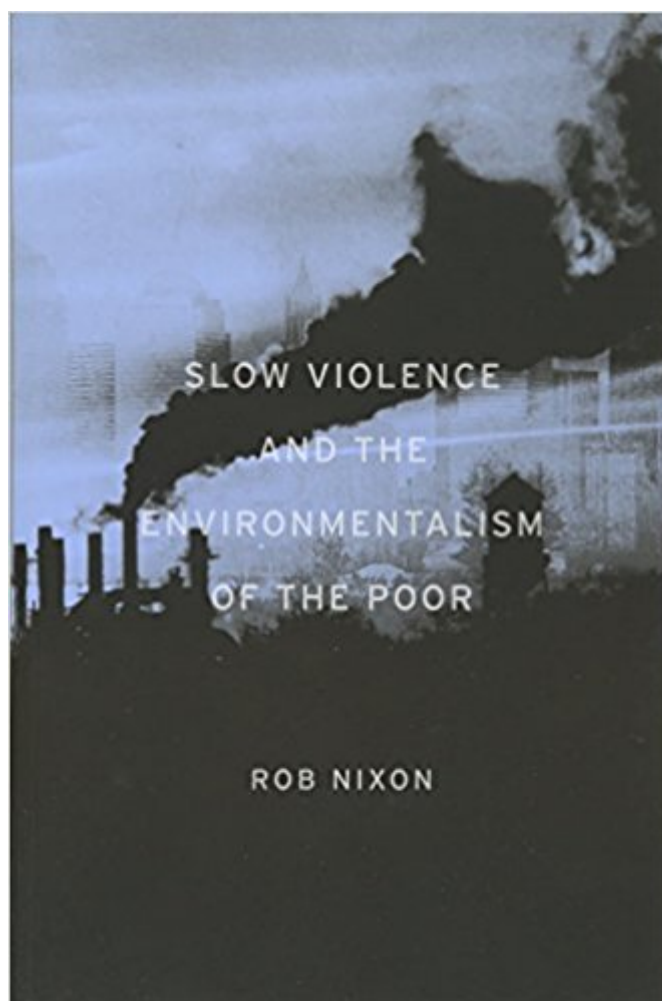


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# Slow Violence And The Environmentalism Of The Poor



## Synopsis

The violence wrought by climate change, toxic drift, deforestation, oil spills, and the environmental aftermath of war takes place gradually and often invisibly. Using the innovative concept of "slow violence" to describe these threats, Rob Nixon focuses on the inattention we have paid to the attritional lethality of many environmental crises, in contrast with the sensational, spectacle-driven messaging that impels public activism today. Slow violence, because it is so readily ignored by a hard-charging capitalism, exacerbates the vulnerability of ecosystems and of people who are poor, disempowered, and often involuntarily displaced, while fueling social conflicts that arise from desperation as life-sustaining conditions erode. In a book of extraordinary scope, Nixon examines a cluster of writer-activists affiliated with the environmentalism of the poor in the global South. By approaching environmental justice literature from this transnational perspective, he exposes the limitations of the national and local frames that dominate environmental writing. And by skillfully illuminating the strategies these writer-activists deploy to give dramatic visibility to environmental emergencies, Nixon invites his readers to engage with some of the most pressing challenges of our time.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Slow Violence is inspiring, innovative, and passionate. Nixon forces us to confront some of the most urgent issues facing the continued existence of humans on the planet. He re-energizes environmental literature, infusing the field with the transnational concerns of world literature, and creatively reinvigorates post-colonial studies. (Hazel Carby, Yale University) Nixon jumpstarts a

conversation between the fields of eco-criticism and postcolonial studies, and the outcome is brilliant. A landmark achievement, directed with great care, lucidity, and no end of foresight. (Andrew Ross, New York University)

How can we dramatize slow violence? This beautifully written book shows how writers have conjured the invisible environmental calamities that have come to be the hallmark of modern times. The damage in question is out of sight--and out of mind for the global elites who command center stage. Nixon's evocative prose redoubles the charge of the writers who fight to show us the central challenge of our era. Everyone should read this book. (Anna Tsing, author of *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*)

This is a fine book, disturbing and revealing in content, and worthy of lengthy study. (Jules Pretty Times Higher Education 2011-09-15)

The work is groundbreaking in its call to reconsider our approach to the slow rhythm of time in the very concrete realms of environmental health and social justice, as well as its investigation of both the power and challenges inherent in creative representation...*Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* challenges readers to new modes of thinking through grave realities. In so doing, it makes a fundamental contribution to contemporary debates. (Monica Seger *World Literature Today* 2012-07-01)

The previously published sections of *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* placed Nixon in the vanguard of a movement to make ecocriticism and environmentalism more attuned to imperialism (past and present), to related global injustices, and to postcolonial literatures. The book itself ensures his position among the most prominent voices of what has come to be known as postcolonial ecocriticism, part of a larger effort to open "up paths, inside the academy and beyond, to more diverse accommodations of what counts as environmental." Yet, even by the standards of this field, *Slow Violence* is impressively interdisciplinary and activist. Not only does it draw extensively on environmental history, the social sciences, and various kinds of journalism, it also offers keen historical and sociological insight into pressing contemporary issues. *Slow Violence* will be engaging and accessible to all those working in academia and beyond who are interested in social justice and its relationship with environmental change. In fact, in his role as a public intellectual, in his clear and elegant prose, and in his commitment to anti-imperial scholarship and activism, Nixon effectively follows in the footsteps of Edward Said, even as he moves to address a blind spot in Said's writing and (until relatively recently) in postcolonial literary studies: the significance of slow environmental violence for understanding imperial relationships and the often repressed ways they have shaped and continue to shape the globe. (Byron Caminero-Santangelo *Research in African Literatures* 2012-05-01)

I thought the book was worth buying for its introduction alone, which presented the idea of slow violence and the practical and political challenges behind fighting it. The chapters that follow are a

gallery of horrors: one scene of violence after another, each seemingly insurmountable and somehow less surprising than the last. Yet, remarkably, this is the least depressing environmental book I've read in years. By presenting these disasters alongside the writer-activists working to counteract them, Nixon leaves no room for despair. Instead I'm left buoyed, hopeful and--after 300 pages--impatient to learn more. (Blair Braverman Waging Nonviolence 2012-04-04) Slow Violence will, I think, become what it aspires to be: a foundational text of an "environmental humanities" that also conjugates ecologism, anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism, to be achieved through a "creative alliance" between environmental and postcolonial studies, two protagonists accustomed to ignoring each other. (Mary Louise Pratt Interventions 2012-06-01)

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This is the type of book that we rarely stumble upon. We would not expect a book that exposes the relationship between environmentalism of the poor, environmental writer-activists and a proposed concept of slow violence to be a pleasant, beautiful read. I would expect such a book to be interesting, useful, innovative, but still adept of the sterile, academic tone and prose. But that's not the case. By drawing examples from different writers-activists and their different circumstances (micro-minorities in the oil-rich but socially poor Nigerian delta, post-war environmental calamities in Iraq, an industrial spill-off in India and others), Nixon not only dissects ideas and underlying political, aesthetic and historical concepts, but also elegantly defends his hypothesis while he does all that. His hypothesis is that environmental degradation and the violence it entails is particularly difficult to pinpoint and to bring to the foreground of media and popular culture because of its lack of spectacular, condensed and vivid manifestation. Environmental damage causes what Nixon describes as slow violence, violence that is spread throughout time and space, that dissipates slowly in an area not clearly defined for months, years or even centuries (as in the case of radiation in nuclear test sites). This violence is also invisible since it can reach the cellular level through mutation and other forms of very intimate violence. The author then takes the challenge of how to describe and make this type of violence more visible and the answer he finds is through literature, with its linguistic richness, its power to tell concrete, tangible and personal stories and its various tools to turn attention to the intimate, often invisible circumstances around us. He then proceeds to locate these writers in the "Global South" that turned to literature as a way to raise the topic of environmentalism and slow violence in the attempt to show the existence of this violence to a larger

audience. The result is astounding.

A deeply important book--not only for its precise and timely intervention at such a tenuous political/ecological moment, but for the accessibility, thoughtfulness, and grace of its delivery. Not only does this work broaden our thinking about the environmental politics in the sphere of the postcolonial, it allows us to think about violence itself in new ways. Specifically, violence not simply as an effect of imbalanced political histories, but violence as a text we have to learn (and relearn!) how to read. This is a contribution that directly faces the entanglement of neoliberalism, deepening toxification of natural spaces/resources, growing economic disparities, and a widespread cultural illiteracy about questions of global crisis itself. For this reason, it's a book that speaks across disciplinary contexts more effectively than any other, in recent environmental studies. *Slow Violence* is a text written in and for a cultural moment that struggles to see beyond the politics of the momentary. As such, it is an opportunity to learn to think differently about global crisis, not only in a variety of disciplinary contexts, but in the course of the everyday.

thank you - this book is a must - our planet is our only home so love it and care for it like you love yourself

Fantastic book. Engaging writing, self-reflective and not self-congratulatory, and important call to action to resist the most elusive problems of our time.

dense text, very good read and great topics. absolutely loved the tone of the chapters, ranging from academic to memoir.

Recommend. Great read!

This is an important book. It makes one think differently about key issues of environmentalism -- pulling one out of the micro and forcing a macro view. Sadly, it will be read by many fewer people than it deserves. The fault of the book is the overwriting. The prose is beautiful, but there is simply too much wrapping paper around the gift.

Beyond the lens of a media trained on the dramatic scenes of hurricanes, wars, and terror attacks, the real violence at work, according to Rob Nixon's new book, *Slow Violence* and the

Environmentalism of the Poor, is one that works insidiously over time and outside of view on the poorest and most vulnerable citizens of the planet. Instead of just chronicling the despicable practices of energy conglomerates, big oil, armament manufacturers and the coalition of the willing--the IMF, World Bank, and neoliberal governments like our own, Nixon's book does something much more interesting. He focuses on the literary and imaginative responses of writer-activists around the world as they have joined forces with indigenous peoples and the poor to save their lands and ways of life. Nixon, who grew up in South Africa under apartheid and who has spent much of his own literary and scholarly work on environmental justice issues, is a keen observer of how writer-activists have learned to use a whole range of literary forms (novels, plays, essays, blogs, testimonial protest, and literary journalism) to counter the powerful forces at work in the name of globalization, economic development, progress, and democracy. With lucidity and careful contextualization, Nixon presents the work of several key writers and describes how their passion, outrage, and intellectual and artistic influences find a voice in their causes. We learn of the heroic work of Ken Saro-Wiwa exposing the horrific poisoning of the lands and fishing culture of the Ogoni people of Nigeria by Shell Oil. We follow the work and life of Nobel Peace Prize-winning Wangari Maathai as she helps to organize farmers and women to plant trees to save the depleted soils in Kenya. And, In India, Nixon examines the powerful protest essays and journalism of Arundhati Roy's in her support of indigenous Indians trying to save their lands against transnational mining and the mega-dam industry. But throughout the book, Nixon gives us a whole range of writers from the global south and north who have found "imaginative strategies," as he calls them, to shed light on various slow forms of cultural and environmental degradation from e-waste dumping, depleted uranium from US bombings in Iraq and Afghanistan, and even the seemingly benign billion dollar global tourism industry. From the viewpoint of the writer-activist, Nixon reminds us that writers since the monumental works of Rachel Carson and Nadine Gordimer have always played an indispensable role in speaking truth to the powerful forces of industry and in inspiring local activism in the protection of the environment and those who depend on its health.

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