



**Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*,
Harvard University Press, 2011 (pp 17).**

"In the global resource wars, the environmentalism of the poor is frequently triggered when an official landscape is forcibly imposed on a vernacular one. A vernacular landscape is shaped by the affective, historically textured maps that communities have devised over generations, maps replete with names and routes, maps alive to significant ecological and surface geological features. A vernacular landscape, although neither monolithic nor undisputed, is integral to the socio-environmental dynamics of community rather than being wholly externalized—treated as out there, as a separate nonrenewable resource. By contrast, an official landscape — whether governmental, NGO, corporate, or some combination of those — is typically oblivious to such earlier maps; instead, it writes the land in a bureaucratic, externalizing, and extraction-driven manner that is often pitilessly instrumental. Lawrence Summers' scheme to export rich-nation garbage and toxicity to Africa, for example, stands as a grandiose (though hardly exceptional) instance of a highly rationalized official landscape that, whether in terms of elite capture of resources or toxic disposal, has often been projected



onto ecosystems inhabited by those whom Annu Jalais, in an Indian context, calls “dispensable citizens.”

I would argue, then, that the exponential upsurge in indigenous resource rebellions across the globe during the high age of neoliberalism has resulted largely from a clash of temporal perspectives between the short-termers who arrive (with their official landscape maps) to extract, despoil, and depart and the long-termers who must live inside the ecological aftermath and must therefore weigh wealth differently in time’s scales. In the pages that follow, I will highlight and explore resource rebellions against developer-dispossessors who descend from other time zones to impose on habitable environments unsustainable calculations about what constitutes the duration of human gain. Change is a cultural constant but the pace of change is not. Hence the temporal contests over how to sustain, regenerate, exhaust, or obliterate the landscape as resource become critical. More than material wealth is here at stake: imposed official landscapes typically discount spiritualized vernacular landscapes, severing webs of accumulated cultural meaning and treating the landscape as if it were uninhabited by the living, the unborn, and the animate deceased.”