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Introduction

Interdisciplinarity can be found between Literature and the Social Sciences. Rebecca Ballard proposes that storytelling can provide insight into the intricacies of structural violence as an example of this interdisciplinary relationship. From doing citational editing on her book, I developed a curiosity to understand how literature can be a method for informing solutions to injustice. This led me to my research question: **How do scholars make claims about literature's role in addressing social issues?** To answer this research question, I focused on a work of environmental justice ecocriticism, a field that discusses how literature can address the environmental inequality people face. I looked at Rob Nixon's "Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor", where he discusses Arundhati Roy's critique of the Sardar Sarovar Dam on the India's Narmada River.

Research Process

1st Step: Citation & Editing

I reviewed the Introduction section of Dr. Ballard's manuscript, fact-checking references, ensuring citations and bibliography were properly formatted according to the notes-bibliography system.

2nd Step: Reading Secondary Sources

I reviewed secondary sources from the manuscript. First I reviewed "Black Power: The Politics of Liberation" which described the nature of structure violence. Second I looked at *Genre*, which described the function of literature in shaping the reader's perception.

3rd Step: Analysis

I then sought to understand how social issues and literature could be in conversation with each other. To do so, I narrowed my focus to Rob Nixon's "Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor", analyzing his claim on literature's role in enacting social change. Nixon discusses examples environmental justice ecocriticism, a field defined by its commitment to using literary studies and literature to talk about social issues. I looked at one of these examples to understand his argument.

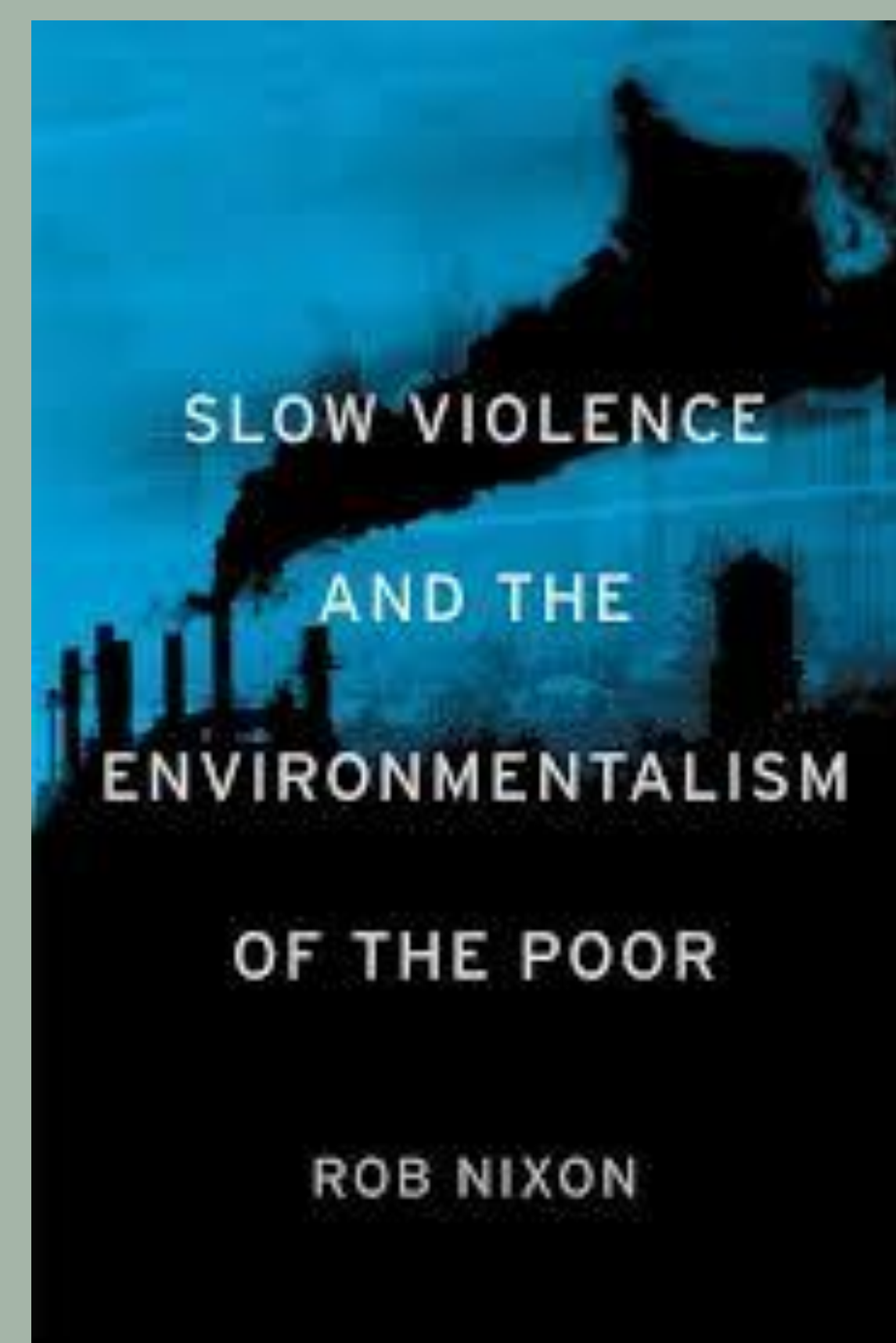
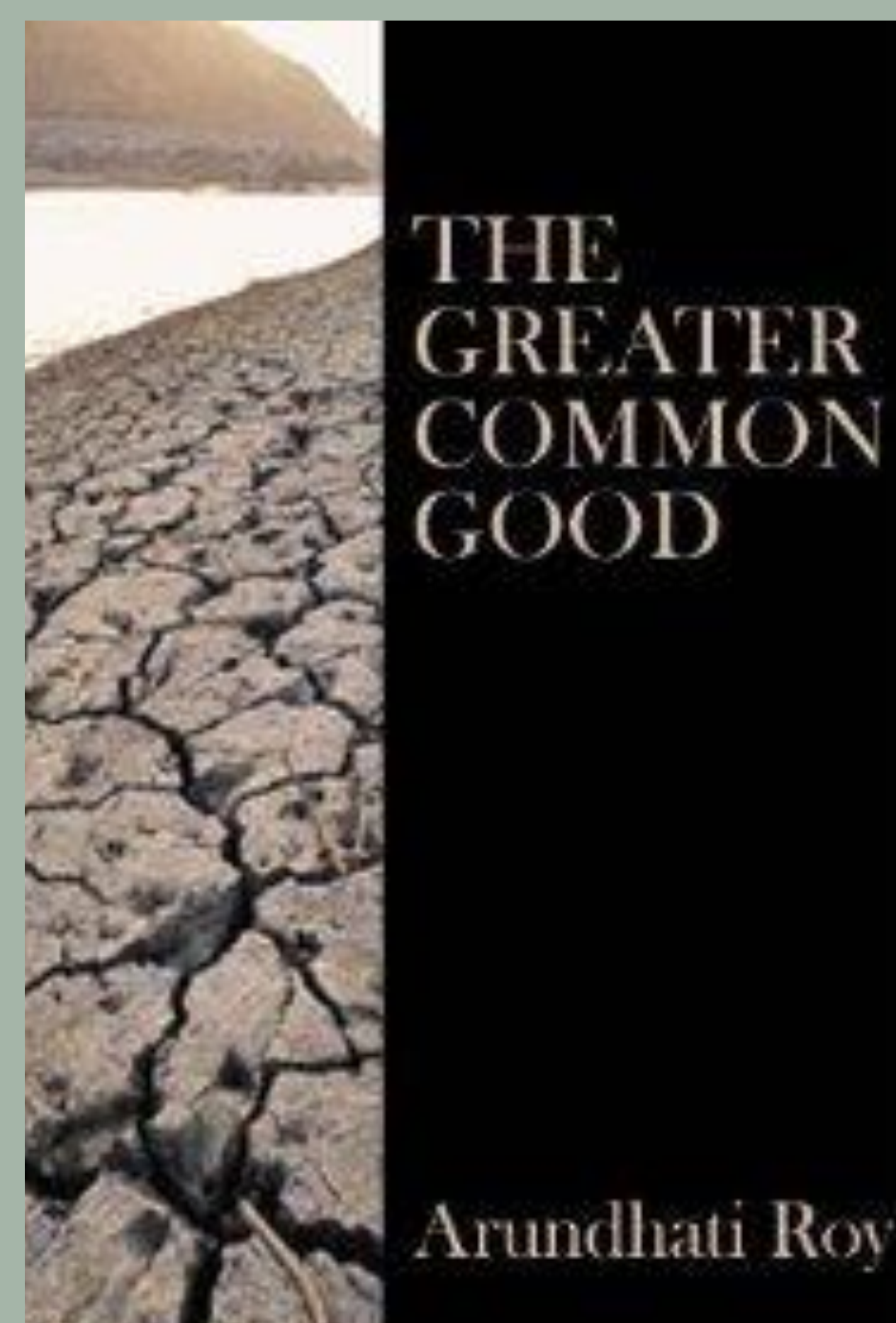
Slow Violence & Megadams

Concept: Slow Violence

Nixon defines slow violence as a type of violence that "occurs gradually and out of sight; a delayed destruction often dispersed across time and space." (Nixon, 2). The ramifications of this violence is "long dyings", or delayed destruction of the environment (Nixon, 2).

Example: Megadams

- Megadams are built to fuel hydroelectric energy, useful because of the high amount of water they hold.
- The Sardar Sarovar Dam has displaced 45,000 families, due to the flooding of their villages by the Dam reservoir filling up (Sikka & Carol, 1357)
- Nixon describes that the root of this injustice can be found in slow violence because of destructive impacts on communities and ecosystems that gradually occur over time (Nixon, 157).
- Nixon claims that Arundhati Roy reveals the complexities of this slow violence occurrence through her essay "The Greater Common Good".



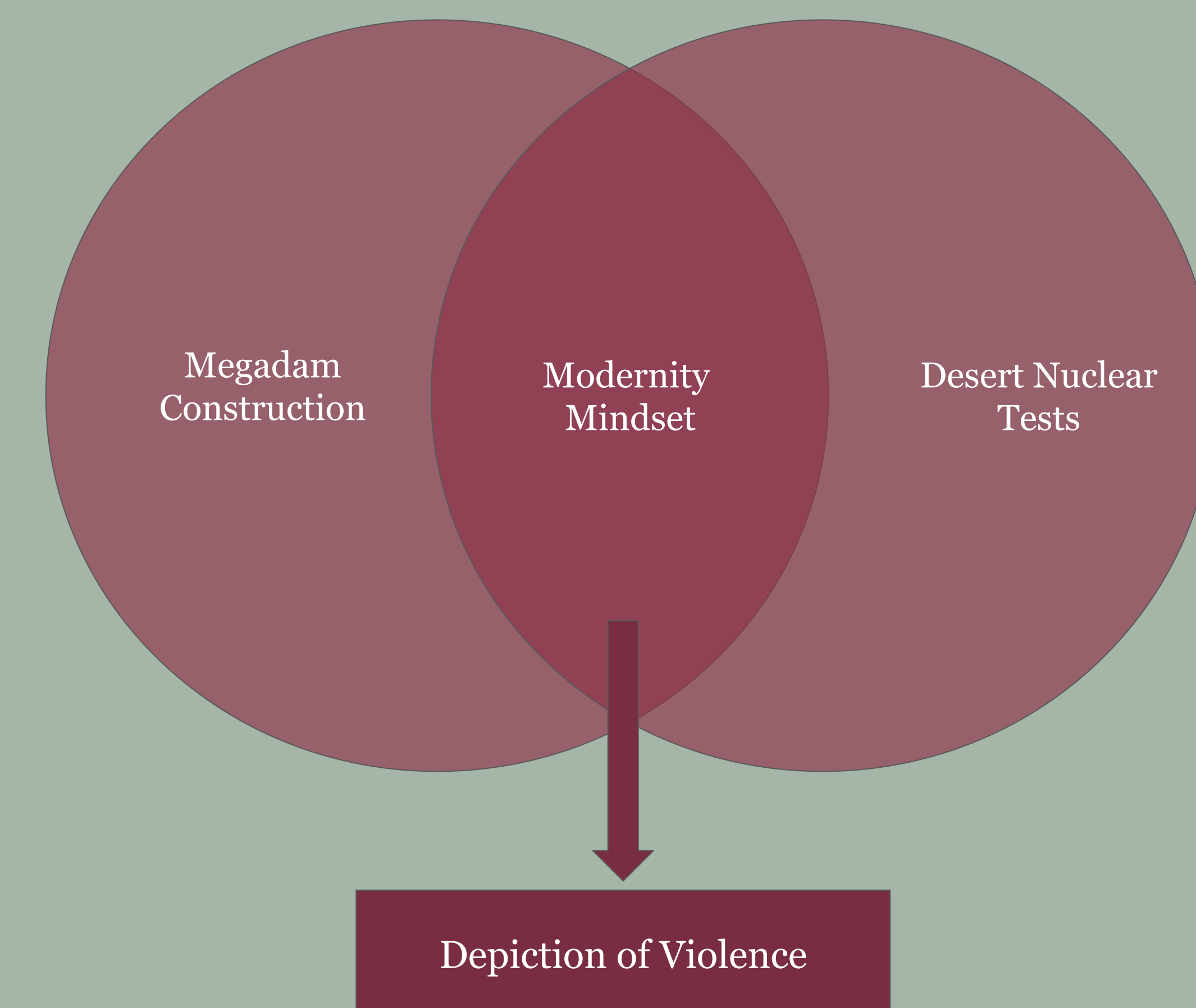
Literature Response: "The Greater Common Good"

Arundhati Roy's Claim: A Single Mindset

- Roy argues that both the the Indian governments mindset behind the construction of Sardar Sarovar Dam and Desert Nuclear Tests in 1998 are the same: to be a modernized country at the expense of their people.
 - "They're both weapons of mass destruction. They're both weapons governments use to control their own people. Both twentieth-century emblems that mark a point in time when human intelligence has outstripped its own instinct for survival." (Roy, 62).
- Roy uses imagery to communicate the ramifications of this mindset:
 - "They represent the severing of the link, not just the link—the understanding—between human beings and the planet they live on. They scramble the intelligence that connects eggs to hens, milk to cows, food to forests, water to rivers, air to life, the earth to human existence." (Roy, 62)

Nixon's Argument

- Instead of separating these two instances of modernity as Malign (Nuclear Tests) and Benign (Megadams), Roy pairs these occurrences together (Nixon, 158)
- This pairing brings the megadam building into the "domain of violence", being a product of the same mindset (Nixon, 158).



Future Research:

- Future Discussion could revolve around the nature of interdisciplinarity between Literature and Social Science.
- How do other literature fields besides environmental eco-justice criticism shed light on the roots of complex social issues?
- Is there a correlation between literature and enacting social change?
 - Essentially can literature cause a substantial response from the reader, enough to create durable solutions to issues of structural violence?
- How do other scholars within the environmental eco-justice field analyze literature's role in describing social issues?
- How do scholars categorize speeches in regards to literature and enacting social change?
 - For example, where does MLK's "I Have a Dream" speech fit into the conversation of genre?

References

- Carmichael, Stokely, and Charles V Hamilton. *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*. Random House, 1967.
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- Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard University Press, 2013.
- Sikka, Gaurav, and Yong Ooi Lin Carol. "Dam-Induced Displacement and Resettlement and Masculinities: The Case of India and Malaysia." *Taylor & Francis*, 2022, Accessed 2025.
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