

The myths of developmentalism

from colonial to sustainable development

Ayşem Mert
Department of Environmental Policy Analysis
Institute for Environmental Studies
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
aysem.mert@ivm.vu.nl

This is an early draft. Please do not quote.

Sustainable development is a powerful, paradigmatic discourse that has sedimented into several of institutions and influence the rhetoric of all actors at the international and transnational levels: Most UN system institutions use the term in their mission statements; international summits are held in the name of sustainable development; governments construct sustainable development programmes; multi-nationals write sustainable development reports and establish their own global 'council' on the matter, and NGOs make sure that they merge it with their various aims and demands. Wherever one looks, one can find it is constantly reified.

Such omnipresence makes it difficult to analyse social phenomena, as it inhibits the construction of a uniform reality; what Arturo Escobar (1995: 5) -following Michel Foucault- calls *colonisation of reality*. This paper aims to analyse the 'colonisation of reality' by the sustainable development paradigm in international relations, particularly in the UN system. In order to shatter the omnipresent grip of this exceptionally dominant discourse, the fantasmatic level will be the starting point of my analysis: It is possible to trace back in the western myths that the two ideological roots of sustainable development (environmentalism and developmentalism) are interwoven.

This, however, is only the first step towards a more complex analysis of the politics that merged developmentalism with sustainability. In order to understand this hybrid, I first trace the two ideologies separately and relate them to their respective historical contexts. Only then, will it be possible to account for how sustainable development became the dominant discourse in international relations and ineradicably shaped the ways in which reality is imagined and acted upon.

one

the fantasmatic level

"In myth [...] the signifier is already formed by the signs of the language. Myth has in fact a double function: it points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us. [T]he very principle of myth [is that] it transforms history into nature..."

Roland Barthes (1957 [1972]: 117)

The term *fantasmatic level* has been coined and used by the Essex School, as a part of the three interlinked domains of political analysis: The social, the political and the phantasmatic. In domain of *the social*, repetitive practices resulting from rule-following form patterns and relatively fixed meanings. In the domain of *the political* these meanings, articulations and identities are instituted and challenged; hegemonic struggles, contestations, resistance and dislocations take place. Laclau (2005: 154) suggests that "*all* struggles are, by definition, political" because any struggle over meaning would question and challenge a social practice, politicise it so as to change it. This conception of the political includes both the contestation and the institution of the social:

"This is because the very institution of a new regime or social practice presupposes the possibility that a previous social order is successfully displaced from its hegemonic position and thus de-instituted. [...]"

the political dimension of social relations indicates, via a dislocatory moment, the *limits* of a social formation” (Howarth and Glynos Ch.5).

In this context, the phantasmal refers to the domain in which the radical contingency of social reality can be concealed by a fantasy of perfect fulfilment.¹ The fantasy of perfect fulfilment suggests a condition devoid of the Lacanian *lack*, which can be defined as the difference between 'what is' and 'what ought to be'. From the standpoint of the political subject, this is the condition where there are no contestations, differences or disagreements -no threats to his/her identity. Inversely, this fantasy is about perfect consensus, devoid of differences and antagonism and therefore it denies the possibility of politics: Without opposition there cannot be a demand for change.

Following Chantal Mouffe’s (2000, 2001) work on the influence of desires on the production of collective identity and the support for political projects, Yannis Stavrakakis (2005: 73 -74) highlights the paradoxical character of fantasy in the political:

“the imaginary promise of recapturing our lost/impossible enjoyment [provides] the fantasy support for many of our political projects and choices. [...] On the one hand fantasy promises a harmonious resolution to the social antagonism, a covering of lack. Only in this way can it constitute itself as a desirable object of identification. On the other hand, this beatific dimension of fantasy 'is supported by a disturbing paranoid fantasy which tells us why things went wrong (why we did not get the girl, why society is antagonistic)' (Žižek 1998: 210). [...] There is an important by-product in this balancing-act: the exclusion/demonisation of a particular social group [that caused the lack].”

This paradox is most explicit in phantasmal operations of ideology, utopia and myth, which either naturalise the radical contingency of the social (as Barthes suggests), or construct the lack (the gap between 'what is' and 'what ought to be') and what is needed to fill it. For instance, a utopia constructs and describes a perfect society in the author’s mind.² Most utopian narrations tell of a society devoid of politics (e.g. the socialist utopian tradition), i.e. devoid of differences, identity, disagreements or antagonisms. This perfect society that does not (and cannot) exist, is different from the society in / for which the author produces the utopia: Hence, she highlights what she regards as the impediment to reach the state of perfect fulfilment and identity. For instance, the impediment can be 'the heretics', 'the jews', 'the colonial powers', 'the capitalist class', or 'the patriarchal institutions' whereas the perfect state can be defined by 'a world united under the rule of (the Christian) God', 'the society of purified race', 'the sovereign (native) state', 'socialist organisation of production' or a 'gender-neutral social order'.

Myths are more complex in the way they establish what is desirable: Dvora Yanow (1992: 399) argues that myths determine where we stop asking questions, and “direct attention away from equally valued but contradictory societal principles”. Without seeking rational explanations, they justify the limits of political change and thus maintain social structures. Similarly, ideologies operate not as “an illusion masking the real state of things but that of an (unconscious) fantasy structuring our social reality itself” (Žižek 1989: 33). In sum, the fantasmatic element appeals to the desire of the political subject, by promising a rearticulation of the dislocated structure.

In exploring the three interlinked spheres of the social, the political and the phantasmal, the *logics* of each domain are indispensable for discourse theorists. They not only help with the analysis of each domain, but also link the three domains to one another, explaining how each one of them is influenced by / influences the others. “Social logics consist in rule-following, [while] political logics are

¹ The Lacanian notion of *jouissance* (enjoyment) is related to the Freudian concept of primordial loss and the libidinal urge to escape this loss, therefore it is not synonymous with pleasure. In discourse theory, “fantasy is understood as the frame which structures the subject’s enjoyment. [The subject subscribes to a social practice if] it can tap into the subject’s existing mode of enjoyment and thus fantasmatic frame” (Howarth and Glynos 2008: 161-162).

² This tendency is also apparent in the term *utopia* itself: When Thomas More used the term in the title of his book (now widely-known as *Utopia*), he was aware (cf. his preface to the book) that while *utopia* meant 'a place that does not exist', its homophone *eutopia* suggested 'a good place'. This might suggest that More did not consider such an ideal place to be realistically possible.

related to the *institution of the social*” as well as its de-institution, contestation and defence (Laclau 2005: 117). Simply put, *the logic of equivalence* is the strategy that aims to establish a discursive unity between separate elements, linking several social demands against an antagonistic ‘other’ -in most cases against the hegemonic discourse. Therefore it is an attempt to create polarisation in the political space (‘us’ against ‘them’). The logic of equivalence is typically the strategy of a resistance movement against the establishment. In contrast, *the logic of difference* tries to defy such polarisation by trying to override antagonisms through assimilation, co-optation or concessions. This is typically (although not necessarily or constantly) the strategy of the establishment (or the hegemonic discourse) towards antagonists.

Fantasmatic logics concern the concealment of the radical contingency of the social, by suppression or containment of its political dimension: Like an in-built immune system, they “seek to maintain existing social structures by pre-emptively absorbing dislocations, preventing them from becoming [politicised and transformed]” (Glynos & Howarth Ch. 5). For the discourse analyst, political logics are tools to demonstrate *how* social practices are constituted and transformed, whereas fantasmatic logics reveal *why* certain political projects are supported whereas others do not, thus accounting for continuity and change in terms of the ‘inertia’ of social practices as opposed to the ‘vector’ of political practices (ibid).

The myths of *hubris* and *nemesis*

Ronaldo Munck and Denis O’Hearn (1999) argue that development is a specifically Western myth that in many cultures and languages has no equivalent. They suggest that while “the West has demystified the myths and narratives of [other cultures], it has failed to deconstruct its own myths,” and instead universalised them; and made them “the manifest destiny of all peoples” (ibid: 21). This observation is correct in the sense that the discourses of modernization and development have become central to social imaginaries across the globe and have been appropriated by non-western cultures as well. Nevertheless, the myth of development was indeed a product of Western history, and belonged to the Western psyche in particular, hence it would be difficult to imagine its demise through the same formation.

This general point is emphasised most specifically by two philosophers from different ends of the political spectrum: Oswald Spengler and Cornelius Castoriadis, who also agreed on the role of the social imaginaries in politics. Castoriadis reflects that the social imaginary of development, growth and infinity has replaced the notion of God (the social imaginary of earlier times), and relates this change to its political and economic repercussions:

“Since there are no limits to the march of knowledge, there are no more limits to the march of our ‘power’ (and our ‘wealth’); [...] limitations, when they present themselves, have a negative value and must be transcended. Certainly, whatever is infinite is inexhaustible, so that we will perhaps never achieve ‘absolute’ knowledge and ‘absolute power’; but we ceaselessly draw nearer to them.”

Spengler’s insight, in his *The Decline of the West*, was that the *prime symbol* (that represents social imaginary) of the modern Western civilisation was *infinite space* while its counterpart in antiquity was a finite *point* in space (or the material and individual body). Michael Pretes (1997: 1422) correctly observes that this difference can be observed in arts (representations of the body *versus* of the “ethereal and infinite” God in all his symbols and appearances), sciences (Euclidean geometry *versus* irrational numbers and calculus), architecture (the emphasis on a visible exterior *versus* an “upward thrust into space” most obvious in Gothic church and the modern skyscraper) as well as narratives (mythology *versus* history). Accordingly, the notion of development in Greek antiquity was a constrained growth relating to the inner logic of the being (its *telos*) unlike the modern Western variant, which understood development as infinite and linear growth (ibid: 1423).

Luigi Zoja (1993 [1995]: 7), in his book titled *Growth and Guilt: Psychology and the limits of development*, studies this change in the social imaginary by means of history and mythology, and notes that “the myth of growth found its genesis in the disruption of the principles of moderation that originally flourished in ancient Greece” but the Western psyche still continues to (1) “nourish the taboos and fears of punishment that in the past were associated with arrogance and excessive fortune” and (2) “to live in fear of catastrophe, the forgotten denouement [sic] of its myth.” Zoja sees the myth of unlimited growth equivalent to the developmentalism observed in the contemporary (particularly western) societies. Accordingly, he sees *growth* as a metaphor that is increasingly prevalent in modernized societies that signifies *life itself*, and “endless growth is nothing more than an ingenuous metaphor for immortality” (ibid: 12).

It is often suggested that the Greeks acknowledged, feared, and avoided the infinite, as their social imaginary was based on limits and the myth of moderation (Pretes 1997: 1422, Maor 1987: 4), which has equivalents in Taoist, Confucian, Buddhist and Hindu myths as well. The myth of moderation is based on two central concepts of ancient Greek social and political organisation, *hýbris* and *némesis* (Zoja 1995: 38-39): *Hubris* (from Greek *hýbris* originally meant ‘presumption toward the gods’³) was the gravest of sins, committed by the transgression of the limits of one’s conditions. A just man would not attempt to reproduce the qualities of gods,⁴ which would be subtracting the quality from the god who represented it. If he did, he would invoke *nemesis* (divine wrath), as exemplified by Homer’s narration in both *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.⁵ Thucydides, in his historical narration describes the Persian aggression as an act of hubris, and the victory of the Athenians as the nemesis that the Persians brought upon themselves.

The word *némesis* derives from *nemes*, indicating a just indignation, or a retributive justice, often provoked by the person whom it strikes.⁶ Zoja argues that the circularity between *hýbris* and *némesis* would function as distributive justice, which, the Greek would experience as an unconscious drive unlike the modern rational notion of justice (ibid: 53). When a hero infringed the sphere of gods, or to put it more specifically, when he tried to transgress the borders of *humanness*, limits would be forced upon him by the gods, as has been the case with the famous stories of Icarus, Prometheus, or Phaeton. Most famously narrated by Ovid in *Metamorphoses*, Icarus’ story demonstrates the centrality of these concepts: When inventor Daedalus tries to escape from captivity by constructing two pairs of wings for himself and his son Icarus, he advises his son not fly too high or too low, so that the wax holding the feathers together would neither melt nor get wet. But Icarus, getting ‘wild and wanton’ by the flight, starts flying towards heavens, falls and dies. Daedalus’ hubris results from not respecting the laws of nature and from thinking that natural limits can be deceived or perverted by technology, which brings nemesis.

The myths of limits and moderation demarcate the borders of human might which has a natural aspect as well. According to Ivan Illich (1976: 34-35, my emphasis), not only abstract Greek nouns, but also the forces of nature took the form of a deity: Thus, while the concept of *nemesis* represented “divine vengeance visited upon mortals who infringe on those prerogatives the gods enviously guard for themselves”, Nemesis the goddess represented a natural phenomenon, “*nature’s* response to hubris: to the individual’s presumption in seeking the attributes of a god.” As such, *nemesis* was about restoring the natural order –in the case of Icarus, for instance, when this equilibrium was disturbed by the radical manipulations of nature through technology.

³ [Online Etymological Dictionary](#)

⁴ In ancient Greek mythology, each powerful human emotion was represented by a corresponding deity. Each deity was jealous of the faculties and qualities s/he represented and would only to a limited extent share it with the mortals. The transgression of such limits would mean to “threaten the primacy or privilege of the deity, [thus] abandoning that deity as a point of reference” (Zoja 1995: 46-47).

⁵ *Iliad* starts with the arrogance of Agamemnon who seizes Briseis from Achilles, thus giving rise to his ire and the series of events in *Iliad*. In *Odyssey*, Homer describes the behaviour of ‘the Suitors’ (chieftains who try to persuade Penelope that her husband is dead and to marry one of them) as having been overwhelmed by hubris, which brings their demise. Further examples from Hesiod, Herodotus and Aristotle can be found in Zoja (1995: 50-53).

⁶ [Online Etymological Dictionary](#)

The idea of 'divine limits' and the golden rule of 'maintaining the proper mean' were central to Greek thought, symbolised in the tale of Icarus by altitude, or for instance by the principles governing the ideal city-state in Plato's *The Republic*. This principle was only dismissed after monotheism has rationalized the myth that the universality of Christianity and the Roman state would assume a global model on the basis of a coherent 'civilization of growth' (Zoja 1995: 105). Accordingly, unlimited growth would be "tantamount to the theft and unwarranted exercise of activities that belong to the gods, [as] anything that knows no limits is a part of their own and peculiarly divine prerogative" (ibid: 39). Zoja (ibid: 114, my emphasis) notes that the goddess Nemesis embodied the ethics of limits and therefore stood at

"the line of demarcation that separates two western concepts of history: to the one side we have the Christian and modern concepts that attribute history with tasks of rebirth, growth and improvement; to the other stands the Greek concept –closer to the typically Oriental attitude [...] – that sees the finest realization of history as a return to the confines of proper limits and thus as a restoration of a natural order that has come to be disturbed. *Various modern ideologies that attempt to restore morality to collective events by curbing the excesses of capitalism, of imperialism and of aggressive abuse of the environment can be understood as a re-evaluation of such a scheme*; and in terms of the psychogenesis of symbols that represent a return of the repressed goddess Nemesis."

In this sense, the growth-focused developmentalism and the limits-focused environmentalism reverse the historical transformation in the central myth of Western culture. It can be argued that environmentalist movements to be often accused of 'scaremongering' highlights its psycho-mythical relation to *némesis*. This is not to argue that developmentalism *causes* environmentalism, but rather that the mythical elements noted above can help us intuitively understand how the environmentalist critique belongs to same fantasmatic space with developmentalism. As Pretes (1997: 1424) notes, the practice of the Western social imaginary of infinite space consisted of "controlling and taming of nature (deemed separate from humanity) for the benefit of the society" as well as "bringing all other societies into the Western worldview". By doing so, not only does he relate the environmentalist critique of development with the problems resulting from the social imaginary of infinite space and the myth of growth, but also he implies the connection between colonialism and developmentalism, which is the focus of the following section.

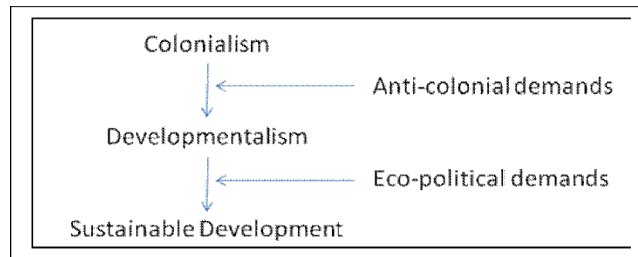
two

developmentalism in historical perspective

This section analyses the discourse of development starting with some deeper/historical layers that structures contemporary international relations. First, the narrations around colonisation and decolonisation and then those of developmentalism are surveyed so as to highlight the historical continuity between colonisation and development, and underscore the ideas that remained intact, while the semantic constellation that development was linked has changed. Each section highlights how the rhetoric was transformed significantly so that the residuals of earlier discourses are carefully concealed, while the *direction* of these discourses remained remarkably similar to the earlier ones, and to the myth of growth.

For this, the discourses of colonialism, developmentalism and sustainable development will be scrutinised on the elements that are relevant to how the hegemonic discourses have dealt with radical popular challenges posed against them, as shown in Figure 1. This is not to suggest that anti-colonial and eco-political demands simply *caused* the change in the hegemonic discourse, although they have been instrumental to some degree. It does however suggest the presence of these challenges and their political influence, which this paper details through studying the discursive change that took place.

Figure 1- Hegemonic discourses and populist challenges



development in colonialist discourses

Max Havelaar, the polemical 19th century novel by Multatuli, gives the Western account of the colonial developmentalist psyche in its full complexity. Multatuli's semi-autobiographical story entails the most progressive stance of its time, with its perturbing account of the ill-treatment and oppression inflicted upon the native peoples of today's Indonesia by the Dutch colonial administration. This exposé of the conditions of the native peoples under colonial rule created a big stir-up in Dutch society when it was published, and led to welfare reforms in the so-called *Dutch Indies*.



The main character, Max Havelaar, after whom the fair trade movement named itself (on the left), is intensely concerned about the human condition. More importantly, he finds himself in a position to help the Javanese people that are oppressed by their native prince as much as the colonial coffee trade in the island. There is famine, migration, and extreme poverty when Havelaar is appointed to the office of Assistant Resident of *Lebak* (a part of Java). As he arrives at *Bantan-Kidul*, he gives an inaugural speech to the native princes, in which he captures the essence of well-meaning developmentalism in the colonial era (pp. 115-124, my emphases). He starts with explaining his joy in this appointment to this poorest region:

"I know that there is much that is good in Bantan-Kidul! But not only because of this was my heart rejoiced. ... I perceived that your people are poor, and for this I was glad in my inmost soul. For I know that Allah loves the poor, and that He gives riches to those whom he will try. But *to the poor He sends the one who speaks His word*, that may lift up their heads in the midst of their *misery*. [...] Should I not rejoice to be allowed to hold a helping hand to him who falls into the pit?"

Havelaar's sincerity is proven throughout the novel; he does lend a hand to those in need, even when it might result in his own downfall. He refuses his appointment to another district when his position and possibly life is in danger. He does these since he perceives himself as the one that speaks God's word, and he is sent to those in misery (almost like a prophet), to ensure the well-being of the impoverished natives. The colonial reason (coffee trade) for these impoverishment is absent in his speech, but he regards the Chiefs of *Lebak* as the responsible party (see below).

Havelaar starts his analysis of poverty in *Lebak* by listing what he perceives as its symptoms:

"Chiefs of *Lebak*, there is much work to do in your region! Tell me, is not the husbandman poor? Does not your paddy often ripen to feed those who did not plant it? [...] Is not the number of your children small? [...] is it not bitter for you, to [...] see the mountains that bear no water on their flanks? Or the plains where never a buffalo drew the plough? Yes, yes... I say unto you that your soul and mine are sad because of these things. And for that very reason are we grateful to Allah that He has given us the power to labour here.
[...] For in this land we have acres for many, though the dwellers in it are few. And it is not the rain which is lacking, for the tops of the mountains suck the clouds from heaven to earth. And it is not everywhere that rocks refuse room to the root, for in many places the soil is soft and fertile, and cries out for the grain, which she wishes to return to us in the bending ear."

He observes that there is no war in the land, nor sickness, draught, or floods. He claims that it is Allah's will that the place flourishes. But this is not the case. His perception of poverty and the indications of misery have several provocative aspects: Firstly, he recognises that the land given by god is rich and fertile, therefore famines, immigration, and lack of a healthy and abundant labour force are not normal. Secondly, this abnormality can be corrected, as it is not 'natural'. Thirdly, the labour of correcting this abnormality is a blessing by god, i.e. a responsibility for the colonial administrator, as he can help those 'in misery'. This is consistent with his understanding that 'the paddy that ripens to feed those who did not plant it' is an indication of poverty, before it is matter of injustice (in other words, poverty is a *function* of injustice or as we will see below, that of bad administration). Hence, it should be corrected, too. Redistribution, and the transformation of the Javanese social institutions is therefore not only a matter of establishing order and ensuring justice, but also the condition that will allow for god's will, the labour of flourishing the land and increasing the yield, to take place. Throughout the speech Havelaar makes it explicit that such an intervention is his god-given duty:

"Our land is poor because we have made so many mistakes. [...] Chiefs of Lebak! We *all* wish to do our duty! But should there happen to be amongst us those who neglect their duty for gain [...] who shall punish them? [...] Listen to me, and I will tell you how justice would then be done."

In this exhilarating speech, reflecting all his well-intentions and idealism, Havelaar claims to be the one to know how justice will be done, and deliver it. It is again himself who envisages the development of the region in the following fashion:

"If everyone is left in enjoyment of the fruit of his labours, there is no doubt that in a short space of time the population will increase both in numbers and in possessions and culture, for these things generally go hand in hand."

To leave everyone in enjoyment of his labours, that is to say, to establish a system in which labour yields to *individual* possession, would make development of the region possible. This does not only concern economic growth, however; such a system would also bring about cultural development, "for these things generally go hand in hand."

The reason for Max Havelaar to be such an important narration is not only its literary value or its social impact, which are both remarkable. Maybe more importantly,

- its *setting* is critical: it takes place at a time and place in which colonialism has already fractured the way the Javanese society has been traditionally operating. The native princes in question oppress the people of *Lebak* owing to the combined effect of traditional values (such as largesse) and the tributes they pay to the Dutch government. A prince has responsibility towards the Dutch colonial administration, and no longer to his community, as a result of which the problems of a (possibly already imperfect and unfair, but presumably previously functioning) social system is amplified.
- it is not an account of the evils of colonialism as such, nonetheless it is very realistic: It is a tragedy, in which not only the idealistic colonial administrator finds no support in the Dutch colonial system, but also the parallel narration, the famous love story of a Javanese couple Adinda and Saijah, ends up in their destruction. Multatuli sees the possibility of the local population to break this vicious circle of poverty and oppression as virtually non-existent.
- it openly talks about injustice and poverty caused by colonisation and views 'the white man' in a position to do something about it. It is in the administrator's power, and his god-given duty to end such misery, by ensuring 'development'. Hence, the inaugural speech Havelaar delivers sketches the colonial logic based on the ethic of 'the white man's burden' and equates it to development of colonised lands.

This is not to say that the colonised societies were not being violently transformed. The idealistic profile of Max Havelaar is interesting because he is an outlier, and most of colonial rule was far from

being so deeply concerned with the well-being of the colonised. It depicts the best of colonial intentions whereby limitations become all the more obvious. Havelaar's interest in the well-being of the people of *Lebak* brings his own doom, as the identity of the colonised cannot be signified by the colonialist discourse. In actual fact, such humane considerations were so exceptional that Edward Said observes that Karl Marx was one of the rare thinkers "still able to sense some fellow feeling" to the suffering caused by colonisation, although he ultimately had to return to "his protective Orientalized Orient" (*Orientalism* 1978 [2001]: 153-154). What Said refers to, is the underlying Romantic (/messianic) narrative, which he terms the *Orientalization of the Orient*⁷. Western conceptions of the Orient did not allow for a discussion of its people as individuals or existential human identities: "As human material the Orient is less important than as an element in a Romantic redemptive project"; the Orient was made up of "artificial entities, [...] races, mentalities, nations, and the like" and hence it provided the grounds on which its population had to be treated in other ways than their western counterparts (ibid). Said rightly observes that Marx gives up the humane consideration quickly: In his study of the British rule in India (1853a), Marx writes "sickening as it must be to human feeling to witness those myriads of industrious patriarchal and inoffensive social organizations disorganized and dissolved into their units, [...] and their individual members losing at the same time their ancient form of civilization, and their hereditary means of subsistence, we must not forget that these idyllic village-communities, inoffensive though they may appear, had always been the solid foundation of Oriental despotism, that they restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies."

For Marx, England had 'a double mission' in India (1853b); one destructive, as it annihilated the old Asiatic society, and the other regenerating, as it established the material basis of Western society in Asia. He saw historical materialism manifest in the process of colonisation: England was causing a social revolution, the means of which need not be justified as she was only an "unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution," without which Asia would not be able to "fulfill its destiny" (1853a). At this point Marx' narrative appears very close to that of Max Havelaar, in terms of production being an ideal/destiny as well as the end goal of development; the native rule being regarded as oppressive; and colonisers' role being delinked from that of the native oppressor. For this reason, Said notes that Marx was falling back on the *Orientalized Orient* and reproducing the same category of representation. This representation (justified whether by historical materialism or by Judeo-Christian conceit of a god-given duty) created its mirror image on the side of the colonised, as the burden that the colonial rule leaves behind: a transformation that cannot be reversed, even after (or particularly because of) decolonisation. This linear reading of history was depicted by Arundhati Roy (of the anti-/alter-globalisation movement) in her Booker Prize winning novel *The God of Small Things* (1997: 52-53), when the once-Oxford-student Chako tells his twin cousins that

"though he hated to admit it, they were all Anglophiles. [...] Pointed in the wrong direction, trapped outside their own history, and unable to retrace their steps because their footprints had been swept away. He explained them that history was like an old house at night. With all the lamps lit. And ancestors whispering inside. 'To understand history,' Chako said, 'we have to go inside and listen to what they're saying. And look at the books and the pictures on the wall. And smell the smells.' [...] 'But we can't go in [...] because we've been locked out. And when we look in through the windows, all we see are shadows. And when we try and listen, all we hear is a whispering. And we cannot understand the whispering, because our minds have been invaded by a war. A war that we have won and lost. The very worst of war. A war that captures dreams and re-dreams them. A war that has made us adore our conquerors and despise ourselves."

Disdain of traditional ways of living and adoration of the Western ways, colonised the reality of the native elite in the colonised lands, which later on became decolonised 'independent' countries (cf.

⁷ For Said, the West was the coloniser and the Orient was the colonised. The references to these overtly broad categories are reproduced here to depict his analysis of the colonisation process, rather than assuming a Western and Eastern geographical space for these categories. However, it is impossible to dismiss the replication and the change in rhetoric, in the reinvention of these categories in the development discourse, as the North/South divide (see below).

Fannon 1961). What matters most about Chacko's narration is the closing down of the way back: history becoming a house the colonised feel they are locked out of. The psychological implication of this on the political subject is not an independent self-creation as suggested by the Enlightenment myths of national self-determination; on the contrary, it results in replicating similar systems of rule, of oppression, and of depression in the aftermath of decolonisation. Understanding colonisation as a narrative of 'bringing civilisation to the uncivilised' is the mirror image of the romantic albeit impossible longing for what was before colonisation (nativism) as the colonised are locked out of their own history. Hence, Chako (Roy 1997: 53) continues:

“We're prisoners of War. [...] Our dreams have been doctored. We belong to nowhere. We sail unanchored on troubled seas. We may never be allowed ashore. Our sorrows will never be sad enough. Our joys never happy enough. Our dreams never big enough. Our lives never important enough. To matter.”

In his later study, *Culture and Imperialism*, Said (1994: 27-28) observes how the dreams of the colonised have been doctored and re-dreamt, in his observation that “imperialism has monopolised the entire system of representation” and therefore, even after the colonisers have departed from the colonies physically, “they retained them not only as markets but also as locales on the ideological map over which they continued to rule morally and intellectually.” From the perspective of the colonisers, this was a furtherance of their mission based on the idea of bringing civilisation to the uncivilised, who are unable to invent and/or appreciate it (see Table 1 for the continuing ontological absence of the colonised as the political subject). In parallel fashion, the decolonisation movements were led by people formed and produced by the same colonial power they were fighting against and they “in effect tended to replace the colonial force with a new class-based and ultimately exploitative one, which replicates the old colonial structures in new terms.” (ibid: 269).

Table 1- The legitimization of 'ontological absence' of the colonised and the responsibility language used in international treaties in 19th and 20th centuries

Year	Document	Agreement included
1884-5	The General Act of the Berlin (Congo) Conference	“to educate the natives and to teach them to understand and appreciate the benefits of civilization”
1892	The General Act for the Repression of Slave Trade (the Brussels Act) (Article 2)	“to increase their welfare; to raise them to civilization and bring about the extinction of barbarous customs”
1919	League of Nations Covenant (Article 22)	to assume tutelage for the well-being and development of “peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world”
1945	United Nations Charter (Article 73)	to “promote constructive measures of development” and assume guardianship of “peoples who have not yet attained a full measure of self-government”

Decolonisation is not a reconciliatory process: In the West, it fails to create a public space for an account of what has been undermined by the colonial rules. Contemporary Western discourses on colonisation still exclude what was undermined (of the traditional ways of living and being) from the space of representation mainly by reifying how “the colonised world was in some ways ontologically speaking lost to begin with” (Said 1994: 28). This is manifest in the Western perceptions of the Orient, in which the authoritarian and/or corrupt regimes, inequalities, poverty, and ethnic and tribal brutality in the former colonies were brought in as evidence to this ontological inferiority. Later, the same narratives were employed for the implicit justification of development projects, or at times, ‘emancipation’ operations in the form of military occupation.

Neither is decolonisation a reconciliatory process for the former colonies that experience their independence through nationality, nationalism, and nativism. As Said correctly observes (ibid: 277), these are increasingly restrictive processes that result in increasingly authoritarian rules. The circle is thus closed as more oppressive regimes justify further western interventionism. For Said, to break this

circle would require recognising the interdependence of the histories of the colonisers and the colonised. In other words, Said points out to the paradox of the independence myths that romanticise the pre-colonial native. These myths disregard the radical contingency of social structures as well as the passing of time. The decolonisation process did not (and could not) result in re-establishing native systems of rule

- 1) because of the ontological absence of the colonised as political subject for extended periods of time,
- 2) because the elites leading decolonisation were incapable of capturing exclusion, inequality, injustice, and antagonisms that were a part of the native systems.
- 3) And because the disregard of these elements meant that political change that would have taken place in these native systems was ignored: Native systems, too, would have changed in time in order to keep the deeper layers of their social structure intact.

In this sense, decolonisation replicates the mirror images of *burdened white man* and the *locked out native*. As Roy's narration shows, the history has been 'locked' through the process of colonisation: There is no way of knowing how it would have developed without colonial intervention. Moreover, the colonised no longer dream their own dreams, as their dreams have been doctored. In other words, the key to their history is lost. Although decolonisation movements often recreated nativity myths, this only resulted in a paradoxical situation: A successful myth signifies 'perfect' unity, fantasmatic wholeness; this meant that the nativity myths impeded any critical inquiry into the native social structures. They could not afford to account for the problems of pre-colonial systems of rule. The result was sometimes the production of excessively conservative discourses in these societies (e.g. religious fundamentalism) that excluded any condition of modernity. At other times, when put into a pedestal with the modernity myths signifying not only endless and continuous growth and progress, but also for instance equality before law, or women's rights, the nativity myths have lost their appeal at least for a part of the population. This meant the articulation of a competing hegemonic project by this part of the society that very quickly modernised. Often these two happened at once, resulting in a clash of modern and traditional discourses in post-colonial societies.

On the other hand, with the decolonisation process following the Second World War (WWII), the Western supposition of 'civilising' the colonies could no longer be maintained rhetorically. In the Atlantic Charter, the United States determined one of the terms of its engagement in the WWII as "the rights of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they live" should be respected; after the war the US pursued this clause to make sure several empires gave up their colonies. Paradoxically, while *Max Havelaar* ended up in the compulsory curriculum in the new Indonesian republic (except for the ending of the Adinda and Saijah story, which was turned into a heroic happy ending), it was no longer possible to suggest what Max Havelaar did, not only in terms of telling how justice would be done, but also in terms of the colonisers' identification with the god-given duty of bringing civilisation to other lands. White man's burden was lifted. Colonialism as it were, was no longer a feasible discourse, and instead the new United Nations Charter (see Table 1) employed a new vocabulary: to "promote constructive measures of development" and assume guardianship of "peoples who have not yet attained a full measure of self-government." Hence colonialism and developmentalism were discursively unlinked.⁸

⁸ Of course, the historical link between colonialism and developmentalism has been studied by numerous social scientists (cf. Escobar 1995, Rist 1997, Slater 1993), and acknowledged even in some international policy documents in the early 1970s. But in the aftermath of the WWII, this link was hardly established. On the contrary, the concept of development was placed in a completely different semantic constellation. Thus, the new developmentalist paradigm with its non-imperialist and non-colonialist connotations found its place in the global hegemonic discourse being established, as the next section explores.

Throughout the Cold War, both the Soviet Union and the United States went through rapid industrial development and economic growth (see below). Both superpowers ensured that countries under their hegemony (and sympathetic movements in the countries under the other's sphere of influence) were supported ideologically and financially. Their strategies were rather similar although the rhetoric each employed reflected their ideological positions: In this sense too, developmentalism (as intervention) was a particularly American concept, as opposed to the notion of 'internationalist class formation' that Soviet Union employed to justify these interventions. Although the military side of these struggles and aid is by no means minor, in order to remain focused on the history of developmentalism, the following section studies this new semantic constellation that the concept of development was placed in. For this, it juxtaposes a non-fictional and far better known inaugural speech to Max Havelaar's: Harry Truman's *Four Point Speech*, which was made after the first post-war elections in the US.

developmentalism as the new international paradigm

Harry Truman's inaugural address on January 20, 1949 is often regarded as the start of the development paradigm in international relations (Escobar 1995, Sachs et al. 1992, Rist 1997, Goldman 2005). The *Four Point Speech* (Truman 1949, my emphases) prescribed the vision put forth at the end of the WWII by Truman in four points: (1) to support the newly-established UN, (2) to continue with post-war economic reconstruction (particularly of Europe), (3) to continue protecting allies from (Soviet) aggression. Point Four was about development:

“Fourth, we must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of *underdeveloped* areas. More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching *misery*. Their food is inadequate, they are victims of disease. Their economic life is *primitive* and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and a *threat* both to them and to more prosperous areas. For the first time in history humanity possesses the knowledge and the skill to relieve the suffering of these people [...] I believe that we should make available to peace-loving peoples the benefits of our store of technical knowledge in order to help them realize their aspirations for a *better life* [...]

This should be a cooperative enterprise in which all nations work together through the United Nations and its specialized agencies whenever applicable. [...] With *the cooperation of business, private capital, agriculture, and labor in this country*, this program can greatly increase the *industrial activity* in other nations and can raise their standards of living. [...]

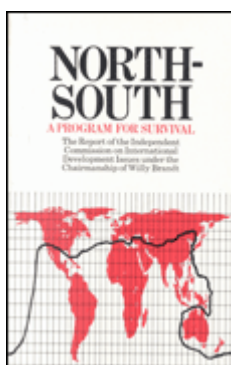
The old imperialism – exploitation for foreign profit - has no place in our plans. What we envisage is a program of development based on the concepts of democratic fair dealing [...] Greater production is the key to prosperity and peace. And the key to greater production is a wider and more vigorous application of modern scientific and technical knowledge.”

By development critics this speech is recognised as having “provided the cognitive base for both arrogant interventionism from the North and pathetic self-pity in the South” (Sachs 1992: 2). By casting off of more than half of the world as ‘underdeveloped,’ Truman created a new perception of one's own self and of the other, in the sense that half of the world population “ceased to be what they are, in all their diversity, and were transmogrified into an inverted mirror of others' reality: a mirror that belittles them and sends them off to the end of the queue, a mirror that defines their identity, which is really that of a heterogeneous and diverse majority, simply in the terms of a homogenizing and narrow minority” (Esteva 1992: 6-7). This is why for Esteva (ibid: 9) the vernacular use of development metaphor (also see below) “gave global hegemony to a purely Western genealogy of history, robbing peoples of different cultures of the opportunity to define the forms of their social life”: the application of developmentalism results in a similar series of events to those narrated by Arundhati Roy's locked-out Indians. The latent result of this assumption of historical uniformity and linear description of development is a re-appropriation of progress as José María Sbert (1992:195) recognised:

“With the timely arrival of development, the term ‘progress’ was subsequently applied only to what the self-designated First World had already achieved and to the infinite potential conquests still to be secured through its economy, science and technology, and not yet available to the rest of the world. The Third World had to develop first – before even thinking about real progress. The term ‘development’ would be one in a series of words to describe – and rally people to – the ever more elusive path of progress. Only a path, not an arrival – and one, for that matter, that would be proved utterly inadequate.”

For Truman, the ‘miserable state’ in which more than half of the world lived was a result of their ‘primitive and stagnant’ economic life: While the word *primitive* brings back the colonial discourse, the word *stagnant* points to economies that are not growth-oriented. The way out of this situation was the replacement of these economic systems with the growth-oriented capitalism, with a focus on industrial production. To modernise other spheres of life was possible through science, technology, and industry (“as these things go hand in hand” Havelaar would add). To receive US aid, however, depended on two conditions. One was apparently this capitalistic condition that the recipient countries would have to agree to (also see below). The second, subtler and almost implicit condition was the acceptance of this new category of being underdeveloped. In order to conceive the possibility of ending a situation, one has to agree with being in that condition. Hence, to call oneself ‘developing’ requires first the perception that one is underdeveloped, which brings with it “the whole burden of connotations that this carries” (Esteva 1992: 6-7). In this sense, Truman’s speech was an intervention in the phantasmal order of what is desirable and how it could be attainable, which had repercussions for the identity formation of the newly independent post-colonial nations. It was not so much that a president of the United States was articulating a hegemonic world view that was the problem, but that this worldview recognised plurality neither historically nor into the future.

Historically this uniformity was manifest in the politico-semantic intervention which replaced the coloniser/colonised contrast (that expressed the inequalities rising from colonial domination) with a new one: developed/underdeveloped. The difference between these two couplets was the rhetorical vanishing of the relations of domination, which is indeed “at the heart of the dialectic of development and underdevelopment” (Latouche 1989 [1996]: 82). This transformation not only naturalises history to dismiss the on-going effects of colonisation and decolonisation, but also conceals the question of *how* the ‘development’ of the already-developed countries had once taken place. In Esteva’s (1992: 12) words, developmentalism “displays a falsification of reality produced through dismembering the totality of interconnected processes that make up the world’s reality and, in its place, it substitutes one of its fragments, isolated from the rest as a general point of reference.” This new paradigm would not only universalise development, recognising it as a sovereign right and duty for all nations, but also erase the extent to which western development was built on (and by) colonial interactions. Hence, Esteva agrees with Said on the interdependence of histories, this time not between the west and the orient (the coloniser and the colonised), but (as it causally follows) among countries whose levels of development were interdependently shaped. Accordingly, by the 1980s, the east/west divide has been replaced by a north/south divide on the basis of development levels, and on the assumption that certain development indicators could impartially assess levels of development (UN 1980). The Brandt line (on the left), suggested by the Brandt Report of 1980, visually depicts the economic split between North and South, encircling the world at the latitude of 30° N (with the exception of Australia and New Zealand). This gulf between economies was described with no reference to history in the report, and the *impoverishment* caused by colonisation was translated into an economic narrative of *poverty*, based on ‘objective and calculable’ development indicators.



The second point refers not to the *historical* uniformity but to the short term effects of this uniform world vision. Gilbert Rist argues that the development programme suggested by the United States and employed by the UN bureaucracy allowed for the deployment of a new ‘anti-colonial imperialism’ by keeping several national liberation movements in control and gaining access to these new markets.

Nevertheless, this does not, on its own, explain how the development paradigm has also been internalised by the modernist movements within the so-called developing countries. In order to understand this, we need to retrieve Said's observation that the entire system of representation was monopolised by imperialism, which allowed for the colonisers to retain their former colonies *not only as markets*, but also through moral and intellectual influence after decolonisation (“though he hated to admit it, they were all Anglophiles”). In other words, before the realities, the fantasies were colonised. Truman was correct in his foresight that this new paradigm would be different from old imperialism (“exploitation for foreign profit”): Development, not only enticed the rulers, intelligentsia and the elite, but this time to a large extent the people of these lands. It colonised the reality of developed and underdeveloped alike, once these categories were accepted by the categorised.

This internalisation could only take place because of the fantasy that developmentalism enticed: The role of fantasy in politics is not to create a *false* illusion for the political subjects, but rather to allow for intersubjectively constructed realities to exist in, and at times dominate, the public domain. Development was not a conspiracy planned by the politicians of industrialised countries and the UN bureaucratic elite. It was however a fantasy that *successfully promised* solutions to the perceived problem of economic inequality across the globe. By calling it ‘underdevelopment’ or ‘poverty’, not only were causes of this inequality (e.g. colonialism) neutralised but also the socialist myth that ‘the economic inequality and hardship’ could be overcome by way of revolution.

Fantasies save the political subject from intolerable fragmentation of ‘reality’ by successfully promising solutions to the lack: that it would diminish through a limited number of political actions. The fantasmatic logics in the post-WWII developmentalist discourse, suggested that the difference between *what is* and *what ought* would diminish with the achievement of development. Development could be achieved through rational management of resources, a liberal economy, and global free trade; or revolution, mechanisation, rationalisation; or through national independence, careful alliance building and industrialisation.

Finally, this vision placed a uniform goal in front of all nations *for the future*: to develop. As Barthes reflects, myths are metaphors that transform history into nature, and the myth of developmentalism does so quite literally: Development is a biological metaphor (Sachs 1992). Underdevelopment is not the opposite of development, but its “embryonic form” (Rist 1997:74), hence the only logical or even possible route to take is those of the already ‘developed’ countries. The initial use of the very word *development* in biology described a process wherein the potentialities of an “organism are released until it reaches its natural, complete, fully-fledged form”, the failure of which would be an anomaly; the concept was transferred to the social sphere only at the end of 18th century, interweaving “the Hegelian concept of history and the Darwinist concept of evolution” (Esteva 1992: 8-9). The implication of this biological metaphor is blocking the route back to a time when subsistence was possible (akin to in Roy’s narration of Indians being locked-out of history). The use of such a metaphor with teleological implications made it no longer conceivable that a society could choose ‘not to develop’. Hence, the metaphor suggests that any society that is not growing (‘developing’) is dead or disqualified (rogue states, axis of evil or underdeveloped areas depending on the political context). However, as Truman insists, this growth cannot take place in the expansionist form that was legitimate only a century ago, but only through an economy that is not stagnant but growing. In other words, economic growth is made the condition for development, which is in turn the condition of progress. Hence, the biological metaphor of evolution also contributed to the enlargement of development's sphere of influence.

From this uniformity about the past, the present, and the future emerged a new semantic constellation to which 'development' was tied: progress through techno-science, economic growth through industrialisation, idealisation of a system that merges liberal democracy with a capitalist economic system, and increasing control over the wealth, health, and lifestyle of the population under a modernisation project. Critics suggest that Truman's speech marked the beginning of this new ideology: the era of American hegemony (Rist 1997: 75-76, Esteva 1992: 6), together with an era of

underdevelopment (Esteva 1992: 6-7). The former was because Truman transmogrified the meaning of development and created the emblem of the era of American hegemony. The speech justified industrialisation, by placing the Western industrialised societies at the top of the social hierarchy, and the US as “pre-eminent among nations in the development of industrial and scientific techniques; [... and its] resources in technical knowledge are constantly growing and inexhaustible” (Truman 1949)⁹. However, the very existence of countries that ‘achieved’ industrialisation outside of the capitalist order required yet another step in the formation of Truman’s developmentalist intervention; the justification of capitalism (Sachs 1992: 2):

“Truman launched an idea of development in order to provide a comforting vision of a world order where the US would naturally rank first. The rising influence of the Soviet Union [...] forced him to come up with a vision that would engage the loyalty of decolonizing countries in order to sustain his struggle against communism.”

Sach’s observation is correct, not only regarding Truman’s (most probable) motivation, but more importantly, regarding how Soviet-style socialism was rather similar to American capitalism in its relationship with nature, development and industrialisation: Even before WWII, the Soviet Union put energy-production as a top priority, constructing a network of thirty power plants between 1920 and 1931, with heavy environmental impacts. In the two decades following WWII, the Soviet economy largely relied on heavy and extractive industries. The aim of transforming an agrarian society to an industrial one was not so different than American industrialisation, although its political organisation has considerably diverged. In other words, although development as a hegemonic project was an American invention, development as a national economic strategy (characterised by industrialisation and increased levels of production and consumption) was by no means solely American, as the Brandt line correctly captured, and development as a fantasy was already becoming worldwide.

While the narratives of Multatuli and Roy have been critical entry points to open up the two sides of the colonialist discourse, the Nigerian novelist Ben Okri’s¹⁰ narration is a good counter-point to Truman’s. *The Famished Road*, Okri’s prize winning novel of 1992, details the spread of developmentalism across the globe in the decolonisation and successive nation-building processes. This is a story of development in a poor African village. The development of a small boy, Azaro, and his family (towards a deeper understanding of the world they live in) is made possible through their ceaseless journeys in a spiritual world, made up of dreams and nightmares, of witchcraft, healing, evil-doing and wisdom. As Azaro grows, his narration of their journeys in this real/spiritual/magical world gradually turns into an understanding of politics. At no point does the narration separate the real from the spiritual, other than immediate political events: the distribution of milk powder that poisons the whole village, the violence that political shambles give rise to, the riots against the white man, and the escape of the village photographer (who took the photos of all these events) from the corrupt policemen, the Mafioso politicians, etc.

“We grew more afraid. Silence made it easier for us to be more powerless. The forms of dominance grew more colossal in the nightspaces. And those of us who were poor, who had no great powers on our side, and who didn’t see the power of our own hunger, a power that would frighten even the gods, found that our dreams became locked out of the freedom of the air. Our yearnings became *blocked out of the realms of manifestation*. The battles for our destiny raged and we could no longer fly to the moon or accompany the aero-planes on their journeys through rarefied spaces or imagine how our lives could be different and better. So we had bad dreams about one another...”

The Famished Road is also a story of developmentalism: development aid comes in the shape of products and services (such as milk powder, electricity and roads); or political reform (such as elections and party politics). These ‘developments’ –sometimes indirectly, but often directly- bring with them violence, prostitution, deepening social stratification and increased poverty for the many,

⁹ The discursive interplay of industrialisation and westernisation has been noted by Serge Latouche (1989 [1996]: 76) as he wrote that westernisation is “nothing more than a cultural cladding for industrialization” which in turn is “deculturation [by way of] destruction of all traditional structures, economic, social and mental.”

¹⁰ Ben Okri, *The Famished Road*, London, Vintage 1992: 495-6 (all quotes from these pages)

while they take away the traditional and organic (albeit imperfect) ways of being, living, and imagining a future. Once the 'real' aero-planes of the white man (in collaboration with the Party of the Rich) arrive, it is no longer possible to fly to the moon on the wings of a cricket; the villagers can neither accompany the aero-planes on their journeys through rarefied spaces nor can they imagine how their lives could be different and better. Okri shows how developmentalism colonises reality, frustrating the ways of thinking and being: how people are blinded to "the power of [their] own hunger," how their dreams "became locked out of the freedom of the air" and how their "yearnings became blocked out of the realms of manifestation." All these references are simultaneously an indication of how the reality is colonised, and how the Southern political subject is once more rendered without agency.

The similarities between the two Southern narrations regarding the hegemonic projects of colonialism and developmentalism is remarkable. Roy's locked out native and Okri's underdeveloped villagers have in common not only being blocked out of history and out of representation, but also having dreams transformed by what happens beyond their reach. Okri (1992: 495-6) states explicitly myths and dreams are related, and how different mythologies represent contesting hegemonic projects:

"The political parties waged their battles in the spirit spaces, beyond the realm of our earthly worries. They fought and hurled counter-mythologies at one another, [...] for the supremacy in the world of spirits. [...] The party of the Rich drew support from the spirits of the Western world. At night, over our dreams, pacts were made, contracts drawn up in the realm of nightspace, and our futures were mortgaged, our destinies delayed. In that realm the sorcerers of politics unleashed thunder, rain flooded those below; counter-thunder, lightning and hail were returned. On and on it went, in every village, every city of the country, and all over the continent and the whole world, too. Our dreams grew smaller as they waged their wars of political supremacy."

Through this, Okri implies a potential beginning to an 'African Renaissance': As the dreams get smaller the African political subject ends up in a whirlwind; the imperfections of the pre-colonial nativity and pre-developmental existence make it impossible to retrieve the agency to reflect back on these problems of oppression which are different than the problems of 'underdevelopment'. The only power for Okri's political subjects comes from the power of their own hunger.

Colonial and post-colonial discourses on developmentalism could also be juxtaposed by the two inaugural speeches -that of the fictional colonial administrator and the actual US president. The differences between the two speeches are clear: The replacement of god by techno-science as the reason to (help) develop other lands requires a different basis for the selection of who benefits from this charity. This was one of the reasons (together with several others that result from the modern techno-scientific *épistémè*) for the production of 'impartial' development indicators. This has not only influenced the way the UN organisations have operated, but also solidified the inferiority on the self-perceptions of those sent to the end of the queue. In other words, techno-science became the only medium that was commendable in pursuing progress and development.

Another critical difference is the causality between war and production. While in Havelaar's speech there is no war in *Lebak*, hence there can be abundant production; Truman reverses the causality: Not only is greater production the condition for peace, poverty is a threat both to the poor and to the prosperous. This inversion is critical, firstly because reduction of poverty is made into self-interest for the rich; secondly since it creates the logical condition that the poor are a threat to the prosperous, and to peace. This is important particularly in the light of Truman's condition: the benefits of knowledge will be made available only to peace-loving peoples. As greater production is the condition for peace, only those that aim at greater production (as opposed to for instance, greater equality, universal employment or other socialist ideals) can be peace-loving. Hence, this inversion rhetorically marginalises the poor and creates an antagonistic 'other,' identifying *the poor* with *the socialist*.

A final difference to point out is in the way the two speeches draw the boundaries of normality. Havelaar sees production in Java as normal; the soil is fertile and the people are willing. It is due to administrative injustices that abnormalities such as famine and immigration take place. In Truman's

speech, this normality is inverted. The normal situation is not necessarily production; what exists as a socio-economic system in more than half of the world is primitive and stagnant. Only through the medium of technology can development be achieved, and its universal application to relieve human suffering is possible only for the first time in history. This suggests not only that all the historical achievements of these societies are cast aside in this narration, but also that this medium Truman speaks of is already acquired by some and can be shared on the conditions stated above.

The similarities in the contents of these two speeches are equally interesting: Despite the decoupling of colonialism and development, colonial ideals such as increased production through the introduction of private property, interlinkage of cultural and economic development, as well as the will to expand (this time not to new lands, but to new areas of influence and/or markets) was retained. The discourse of colonisation was sacrificed while the commitment to capitalist economy and political influence (through seemingly charitable action) was kept. Both Havelaar and Truman use health, prosperity, production and abundance of food as the criteria to separate what is miserable from what is desirable. The duty to help 'people in misery' resonates in both speeches. Havelaar's feeling of responsibility is a god-given duty for which he appears thankful, whereas Truman's belief that human suffering should be relieved stems from the sheer possibility that it *can* be done, now that humanity possesses the knowledge and skill to do. Either dictated by a god or techno-science, they both speak from a position of *might*, which brings with it an assumed responsibility to others.

Finally, both Havelaar and Truman call upon structural changes in societies to which they have some (unrepresentative) relation, which are in their perception in a miserable state. Havelaar asks for princes to moderate their demands from the peasants in Java. Truman does not make it as explicit, but refers to a certain democratic fair dealing and a condition of being "peace-loving peoples". The structural changes suggested by Truman are made much more explicit in a report by the United Nations Department of Social and Economic Affairs, titled *Measures for the Economic Development of Underdeveloped Countries*, in 1951 (in Escobar p.3):

"There is a sense in which rapid economic progress is impossible without painful adjustments. Ancient philosophies have to be scrapped; old social institutions have to disintegrate; bonds of caste, creed and race have to burst; and large numbers of persons who cannot keep up with progress have to have their expectations of a comfortable life frustrated. Very few communities are willing to pay the full price of economic progress."

The quote above suggests a radical change in the way post-WWII societies were to be organised. The impediment between the existing situation and the "expectations of a comfortable life" is listed in this quote, quite explicitly: Ancient philosophies, old social institutions, traditional bonds and so forth. The suggestion of such a transformation reveals that development is not a solely socio-economic endeavour. It becomes "a perception which models reality, a myth which comforts societies and a fantasy which unleashes passion" (Sachs 1992: Preface).

three

environmentalism in historical perspective

"I hate that dam," Smith said. "That dam flooded the most beautiful canyon in the world."

"We know," Hayduke said. "We feel the same way you do. But let's think about easier things first. I'd like to knock down some of them power lines they're stringing across the desert. And those new tin bridges up by Kite. And the goddamned road-building they're doing all over the canyon country. We could put in a good year just taking the fucking goddamned bulldozers apart."

"Hear, hear," the doctor said. "And don't forget the billboards. And the strip mines. And the pipelines. And the new railroad from Black Mesa to Page. And the coal-burning power plants. And the copper smelters. And the uranium mines. And the nuclear power plants. And the computer centers. And the land and cattle companies. And the wildlife poisoners. And the people who throw beer cans along the highways."

"I throw beer cans along the fucking highways," Hayduke said. "Why the fuck shouldn't I throw fucking beer cans along the fucking highways?"

"Now, now. Don't be so defensive."

"Hell," Smith said, "I do it too. Any road I wasn't consulted about that I don't like, I litter. It's my religion."

"Right," Hayduke said. "Litter the shit out of them."

"Well now," the doctor said. "I hadn't thought about that. Stockpile the stuff along the highways. Throw it out the window. Well . . . why not?"

"Doc," said Hayduke, "it's liberation."

The night. The stars. The river. Dr. Sarvis told his comrades about a great Englishman named Ned. Ned Ludd. They called him a lunatic but he saw the enemy clearly. Saw what was coming and acted directly. And about the wooden shoes, *les sabots*. The spanner in the works. Monkey business. The rebellion of the meek. Little old ladies in oaken clogs.

"Do we know what we're doing and why?"

"No."

"Do we care?"

"We'll work it out as we go along. Let our practice form our doctrine, thus assuring precise theoretical coherence." [...]

"I'm thinking: Why the fuck should we trust each other? I never even met you two guys before today."

Silence. The three men stared into the fire. The oversize surgeon. The elongated riverman. The brute from the Green Berets. A sigh. They looked at each other. And one thought: What the hell. And one thought: They look honest to me. And one thought: Men are not the enemy. Nor women either. Nor little children.

Not in sequence but in unison, as one, they smiled. At each other. The bottle made its penultimate round.

"What the hell," Smith said, "we're only talkin'."

The Monkey Wrench Gang, Edward Abbey (1975 [2006]: 68-70)

Political connotations of 'sustainability' originate from the employment of the term by ecological, environmental, green movements and thought. Despite their differences (and transformations in time), these philosophies and movements have a common concern regarding the environment, the ecology/economy balance, and the ways in which modern societies are organised. In Zoja's words they represent 'a return of Nemesis'. In the 19th century worldviews concerned with or related to these issues have already been formulated, most notably by Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, and Aldo Leopold in the US, Alexander von Humboldt, Ernest Haeckel, Wilhelm H. Riehl, Karl Marx, and John Ruskin in Europe. But movements specifically concerned with the environment in the political sense (that aimed at polarising the social space on the issue of environment, and politicise 'nature' which was previously an apolitical matter), emerged in the post-WWII period. This section focuses mostly on the *eco-political* thought and movements, as an inquiry into the historical development of sustainability discourse.

on being the right size: ideational roots of *limits*

Daedalus; or, Science and the Future was a lecture given by biologist J.B.S. Haldane at Cambridge University in 1923, which was later published as a book. Although it had a rather liberal/progressive tone regarding the way science revolutionises social life, it simultaneously expressed scepticism over some scientific advances, most notably over the studies of eugenics of the time. For Haldane, unless a scientific advance was accompanied by a corresponding change in ethics, it would not bring progress to mankind. For him, Daedalus was a far more interesting figure than Prometheus, because it was not Daedalus himself who was punished, but it was his son Icarus, who received divine wrath (*nemesis*) due to his father's hubris. Greek myth often tells of the fates of families, rather than individuals; thus Icarus' death is certainly also the tragedy of Daedalus. "The premises of the destiny to be suffered by the son are already present in the personality of the father [who] would seem to be nothing less than the incarnation of *hýbris*, and Icarus represents *némesis*" (Zoja 1995: 133). Accordingly, Icarus is often not narrated at length as a separate individual, but in relation only to his father. Haldane's (re-)reading of the myth reflects a conceptual change, inspired by modern biology and its theories of genetic inheritance: One generation's hubris could bring divine wrath to the generations to come, but that would be a tragedy for all of humanity.

Haldane was no ordinary biologist; he was also a Marxist author, who befriended and influenced Aldous and Julian Huxley. More importantly, his main body of work was on population genetics, and in 1926 he published *On Being the Right Size*, which focused on proportions: The book demonstrated the way plants and animals are shaped by their size and sized by their shape. In other words, a species' proportions cannot exist outside a certain upper and lower limit: Since the weight increases with the cube of its size, legs to carry this new weight would inevitably be beyond recognisable properties of a species' proportions. This has become known as *Haldane's principle*. In the early 1930s, Max Kleiber's biological work (*Kleiber's law*), too, was becoming increasingly popular, which observed that most animals' mass correlated with their metabolic rate. Both *Haldane's principle* and *Kleiber's law* applied the laws of physics and geometry to biology, and are likely to have been influenced by an earlier and much more poetic inquiry into allometry (study of the relationship between size and shape): *On Growth and Form*, published in 1917 by D'Arcy Thompson, a mathematical biologist, was an inquiry into the form that fits the size, in a more abstract way. Thompson (1917 [1952]: 205) challenged the scientific norm that assumed the possibility of linear extension of proportions:

"An organism is so complex a thing, and growth so complex a phenomenon, that for growth to be so uniform and constant in all the parts as to keep the whole shape unchanged would indeed be an unlikely and an unusual circumstance. Rates vary, proportions change, and the whole configuration alters accordingly."

It was Leopold Kohr who translated this inquiry into allometry to the language of economics in the 1950s. He made the biological morphology of Thompson and Haldane as the starting point of a social morphology, by discussing that societies are shaped by their size and sized by their shape: Growth

could neither be linear nor uniform in all societies, therefore plans of developmentalist scientists (particularly those of economists) should be rejected when they were time- and context-free (Illich 1994). Later on, Kohr wrote about *overdeveloped nations*, a term that reflects his opposition to the dichotomy drawn so successfully by Truman between development and underdevelopment, which has inspired several influential philosophers of green thought, such as Kirkpatrick Sale, Ivan Illich, and E.F. Schumacher. Kohr was exceptional in the sense that his social critique was specifically against the logic of limitless growth, which was in the core of both capitalism and mainstream socialism of the time.

The 1950s is the decade that follows the end of WWII, and Truman's inaugural speech; it is also the starting of modern eco-political movements. These movements were only partially influenced by the ideas of the biologists of the time. They were also influenced by three other significant changes: The first one was *rapid economic growth*, as a result of which not only consumption levels, but also the distance between the site of consumption and the site of production increased. Thus, the link between the consumer and the environmental consequences of her action were delinked and consumption 'depersonalised' (Hays 2000: 16).

Secondly, around this time, *the US preservation movement was changing* in two directions as well. The first one of these veins was marked by the *Land Ethic*, proposed by Aldo Leopold (1949) in his book *A Sand County Almanac*. The Land Ethic dealt with the relationship between humans and the land-community (composed of living and inanimate members), recognising humans not as the conqueror but a plain member and citizen of this community. The second streak, which I will call neo-Malthusian, was concerned about the increase in human population across the globe. Two books were specifically popular: Fairfield Osborn (1948), the President of the New York Zoological Society, published *Our Plundered Planet*, underlining the global consequences of humankind's poor stewardship of the Earth. William Vogt (1948), an ecologist and ornithologist, published *Road to Survival* the same year. Both of these books employed a sensational style, and an alarming tone regarding the impact of population growth on the global environment. Neo-Malthusianism has become an increasingly dominant perspective in the eco-political issues of the next decade. In other words, while Land Ethics focused on the quality of the relationship between humans and other elements of the ecosystems, Neo-Malthusianism focused on the relationship between the quantity of human population and natural resources.

Thirdly, the eco-political movements were responsive to and influenced by the Cold War. The next section explores the political developments that accompanied these ideas.

logic of equivalence: sustainability as the *empty signifier*

The first decade of the Cold War was marked by nuclear arms race. The Soviets developed their own atomic bomb by 1949, and both the US and the Soviet Union tested hydrogen bombs in the following three years. It was not until 1963 that the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty between the United States and the Soviet Union was signed. Hence, despite increasing soil, water, and particularly air pollution across the planet (e.g. 1952 London smog killing several thousands), and despite new formulations such as Land Ethics and the alarming tone of population ecologists, it was the anti-nuclear movement that captured public attention.

By the end of 1950s, anti-nuclear movements began calling for peace and pacifism, and against nuclear technologies. In less than a decade, they spread across the US and Europe, merging issues of health and environment and sometimes a critique of consumerism. The first reason for this expansion in the scope of the movement was the transboundary health and environmental effects of the nuclear tests. The long-term health effects of radioactive fallout, particularly on children, have been a major concern for women's groups such as Women Strike for Peace (WSP), founded in 1961. Another reason for this expansion was that nuclear reactions were starting to be used in power production, which involved potential risks to human and ecological health. The geographical expansion of the movement

can be explained by the concerns over Atoms for Peace Program of the Eisenhower Administration, which supplied equipment and information for civilian use of nuclear technologies throughout the world, and started the nuclear programs of Iran, Pakistan, Israel etc. By the end of the 1960s, the anti-nuclear movement was a fully fledged political movement that mobilised peace activists protesting the American war against Viet Nam. On the other hand, it was in synch with a wide range of other movements ranging from the counter-culture and student movements to religious pacifism.

Another influential book started to attract public attention, and focused it on the effects of chemical pollution (using the metonymy of 'chemical fallout'): *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson (1962) is widely recognised as 'the book' that inspired modern environmentalism. The book was influential not because it scientifically demonstrated the thinning of the eggshells due to the use of DDT in agriculture, but because it was an attempt to formulate ecology as a *subversive subject* (Shepard 1969, Kroll 2006). In other words, although Carson used the 'rational discipline of ecology', she was also sceptical of the intensifying scientific control of both the body and the environment; and her critique of "materialism, scientism, and the technologically engineered control of nature" transformed the discipline into a radical political project (Kroll 2006). In this sense, Carson's critique of technological control of micro and macro biological systems is symbolic in linking the critiques of technology with concerns over health and environment.¹¹ Around the same time, Murray Bookchin was developing his theory of *social ecology*, and published *Our Synthetic Environment* in 1962. The book not only criticised the uses of pesticides and preservatives in modern production but also questioned the way through which science and technology was becoming a "substitute for a balanced relationship between man and nature" (Lewis 1962: 201). Throughout the 1960s, ecology as a subversive subject has been advocated by 'the radical ecologists'.

This was a time when the environmental movement in the US has made a legalistic turn. The local environmental causes were being adjudicated through law suits. In 1967, the Environmental Defense Fund was established to pursue legal solutions to environmental damage; and in 1970, Natural Resources Defense Council was formed with a professional staff of lawyers and scientists to influence environmental policy in the US. The underlying assumption of such legalistic approaches was that the environmental problems could be solved within the existing social, economic and legal systems. Although the anarchist, socialist and other radical ecologist streaks remained powerful points of reference in the eco-political discourses until mid-1980s, they have increasingly coincided with less subversive and less critical versions of environmentalism.

Throughout the late 60s and early 70s, environment-focused governmental agencies (e.g. Environmental Protection Agency in the US) as well as non-governmental organisations such as Greenpeace, Worldwatch Institute, Friends of the Earth (FoE) were established. These NGOs started non-violent activism, information gathering and publicising, and international networking which resulted in several changes in the national and international legislations. It was by this time that Green parties started to emerge; deschooling, animal rights, anti-car movements began; environmentally concerned non-violent direct actions, publicity stunts and other forms of civil disobedience (e.g. pacifist interventions on nuclear tests) took place. The increasingly widespread articulation of these (and other) demands reached its peak in 1968, and these movements were later called new social movements. The Green Parties (first in New Zealand, Australia and the UK, and then in Europe) started to merge these demands under pluralistic charters and manifestos, such as the 1972 *New Ethic Charter* of United Tasmania Group,¹² the 1975 *Values Party Manifesto*,¹³ the *Four Pillars* of the German Green Party in 1979-1980.

¹¹ Otherwise, more expansive and radical critiques of technology were already present, for instance, by the works of Jacques Ellul (already translated to several languages and influenced a remarkable number of European authors and activists at the time) or Lewis Mumford.

¹² <http://www.global.greens.org.au/charter/UTGnewethic.html>

¹³ <http://www.global.greens.org.au/charter/valuespartymanifesto.html>

In this sense, the eco-political movements in 1970s directed a fundamental critique towards the techno-scientific modernist industrial society, polarising the social space by linking the demands of feminists and homosexuals, anti-racist movements, pacifists/peace activists and the anti-nuclear movements. Several social groups merged to demand an ecologically sustainable society, as they perceived it being threatened by –respectively- the patriarchal social organisation, interracial injustice, war, and nuclear energy/arms race. The demand for *sustainability*, therefore, was a successful counter-hegemonic demand that allowed several other demands to be articulated *against* the industrial-military character of the modern Western state establishment.

The eco-political movements of the 1970s were *popular* movements in Laclau's terminology. They brought together various different demands from different parts of the society, and the demand for an ecologically sound and sustainable society functioned as the empty signifier: For the eco-feminists this demand indicated a return to the feminine values that were forgotten in the patriarchal social organisation; for pacifists it was the articulation of a peaceful co-existence no longer governed by the rules of realism in international relations; for anti-nuclear movements it was resistance against the expert-rule, high technology, and centralisation of decision making; for gay activists it signified a celebration of sexual plurality.

In *Emancipation(s)*, Laclau (1996: 11-14) comes to the conclusion that particularisms of each identity formation have to appeal to the universal in order to become emancipatory. It is strictly in this sense that the eco-political movements and the radical ecologists attempted at a universal emancipation. What was being negated was nature, which had a universal appeal: Edward Abbey would call it "the bare bones of existence, the elemental and fundamental, the bedrock which sustains us" (quoted in Cevasco and Harmond 2009: 4). In *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, Abbey's best-selling eco-anarchist novel, the relationship between this element and identity is constructed by one of the gang's members as follows (1975 [2006]: 87):

'For the night and the wilderness belongs to *us*. This is Indian country. Our country.'

Or so he assumed.

None of the gang's members are Indian, but they related to the wilderness such that they assume it is theirs. As the quote at the beginning of this section demonstrates, the gang members unite in being threatened by developmentalism, industrialisation, and consumerism of the existing social order. Hence, they draw an antagonistic frontier (by *just talkin'*). On the one hand, their particularisms are oppressed by the equivalential chain they are weaving (e.g. the littering of roads); on the other, several dimensions of 'The Enemy' is being bundled together, as later in the book the one of monkey ranchers reflects (ibid: 107):

"When cities are gone [...] and all the ruckus has dies away, when sunflowers push up through the concrete and asphalt of the forgotten interstate freeways, when the Kremlin and the Pentagon are turned into nursing homes for generals, presidents and other such shitheads, when the glass-aluminum skyscraper tombs of Phoenix Arizona barely show above the sand dunes, why then, why then, why then by God maybe free men and wild women on horses, free women and wild men, can roam the sagebrush canyonslands in freedom."

Against the universal appeal of the wilderness and nature Abbey places this bundle of enemies (referring to the existing system), which the gang calls *The Enemy*. A gang member reflects "the enemy. His enemy? Whose enemy? The Enemy" (ibid: 274). The gang's identity forms against the antagonistic Other which unifies it. The monkey wrench gang gathers its force around the aim to "slow if not halt the advance of Technocracy, the growth of Growth, the spread of the ideology of the cancer cell;" this goal emerges from a *political demand*, and aims at a radical emancipation for the society, narrated in the book as (ibid: 225-29):

'I have sworn upon the altar of God,' Hayduke bellows into the roaring wind [...] trying to remember Jefferson's words, 'eternal hostility against *every fucking form of tyranny*' –getting it slightly wrong but absolutely right– 'over the life of man.'
[...]
'All you're asking for is a counter-industrial revolution.'
'Right. That's all.'

Similarly, from the WWII onwards preservationists like Aldo Leopold, and deep ecologist philosophers like Arne Næss were identifying with the intrinsic value of nature. While Leopold's *Land Ethic* placed humans amidst a land community to be identified with, Næss (1989: 164-165) was arguing for Self-realisation through non-violence against all individuals of the ecosystem. This (capitalised) *Self* was different than the ego-centric or the anthro-centric self: its realisation depended on the Self-realisation of other beings too; only in a holistic way could the true ecological Self be achieved. In short, a new fantasy and collective identity was being generated.

logic of difference: sustainability as the *floating signifier*

As we have learned from Michel Foucault, where there is power, there is always also resistance. We have also learned from Ernesto Laclau that where there is resistance, *the logic of difference* is, sooner or later, present. Herbert Marcuse's influential essay *Ecology and Revolution* (1972) already applied these two points to eco-political movements: Firstly, for Marcuse, eco-politics (including anti-war movements of the time) was a radical way of "attacking the living space of capitalism" as the "ecological logic is purely and simply the negation of capitalist logic". Thus, a new 'revolutionary' identity between peace movements and environmentalism was being articulated. Secondly, he insisted that the eco-political movements have already been co-opted by commercial capitalism. Two events of 1970 in the United States supported his view and indicated the beginning of this co-option: President Nixon's State of Union address in January, and the Earth Day on April 22. Nixon explicitly stated that the environmental cause was apolitical, and suggested a way forward, that was agreeable to the *status quo*:

"Restoring nature to its natural state is *a cause beyond party and beyond factions*. It has become a common cause of all the people of this country. [...] But clean air is not free, and neither is clean water. The price tag on pollution control is high. The program I shall propose to Congress will be the most comprehensive and costly program in this field in America's history. [...] We shall intensify our research, set increasingly strict standards, and strengthen enforcement procedures. [...] We can no longer afford to consider air and water common property [...] we should begin now to treat them as scarce resources. [...] This requires comprehensive new regulations. It also requires that, to the extent possible, the price of goods should be made to include the costs of *producing* and *disposing* of them without damage to the environment."

Gottlieb (1993 [2005]: 152) suggests that challenged by potential presidential candidate Edmund Muskie, Nixon was seeking to "pre-empt the environmental issue by putting forth a technology-centered, pollution control approach [that] appealed to [his] mainstream constituency." Indeed, none of these demands belonged to the radical ecologists, except for the overarching idea that environmental protection was necessary and important. Against the eco-political critique of capitalism and militarism, Nixon's argument was that environmental problems could be solved within the existing system: Production and consumption patterns did not have to change, but the prices should include these 'externalities'. Moreover, Nixon reflected on the dilemma between ecology economy, claiming that 'inventive genius' that created problems would also solve it, therefore the dilemma was a false one: echoing Truman, he suggested that America pioneered in "turning the wonders of science to the service of man" and that

"the answer is not to abandon growth, but to redirect it. [...] Continued vigorous economic growth provides us with the means to enrich life itself and to enhance our planet as a place hospitable to man. [...] I propose that before these problems become insoluble, the Nation develop a national growth policy."

Finally, Nixon suggested that “each individual must enlist in this fight if it is to be won.” By constructing a metaphor of violence (through the use of words like 'enlistment' and regarding environmental degradation a 'fight to be won'), he started establishing a different chain of equivalence. This was a language fundamentally different than that of the radical ecologists, not only due to the violent undertone, but more importantly, because it dismissed the antagonistic frontier they have drawn between themselves and the techno-industrial military character of the capitalist societies. Secondly, by ‘enlisting’ all individuals, Nixon insinuated that the cause of environmental degradation was not industrial production and economic growth, but the lifestyles of individual Americans. His solution was geared towards reflecting their choices in the prices of products they bought, rather than re-organising the production system in a fundamental way.

Three months later, Wisconsin senator Gaylord Nelson proposed celebrating the first ‘Earth Day’ across the US as a ‘teach-in’, inspired by the ‘sit-in’ protests against the American attack on Viet Nam. When the bill was accepted, Nelson selected Harvard law student Denis Hayes to coordinate the national activities, who suggested that the Earth Day should “bypass the traditional political process.”

¹⁴ According to the *Time* magazine of the time (my emphasis)¹⁵ this has been a successful attempt:

“Some radicals complained that the nation's relatively abrupt concern for the environment represented a distraction from the issues of war and racism. A few rightists noted darkly that Earth Day was also Lenin's birthday, and warned that the entire happening was a Communist trick. [Yet] Earth Day at least temporarily *gathered nearly all bands of the political spectrum.*”

What happened was that with almost 20 million participants, the 1970 Earth Day has been successful in making the environment an issue outside of the political sphere and pushed it back to the sphere of the social. This was partially the result of a shift in the discourse of environmentalism, from being the subversive subject of ecology into a matter of engineering (Kroll 2006):

“As environmentalism became a matter of political consensus dominated by professional environmentalists, ecology lost its subversive edge. Environmental science departments mushroomed in academia [...] but it was not a subversive ecology that questioned fundamental values of economics, consumer habits, and techno-scientific control. It represented an engineering mentality in which problems of waste, pollution, population, biodiversity and the toxic environment could be solved scientifically.”

Such engineering and management approaches have already been proposed by two zoologists, Garret Hardin (famous for his socio-biological views and utilitarian ethics) and Paul Ehrlich in 1968. Hardin (1968) linked the idea of natural limits to population growth, in *Tragedy of Commons*, demonstrating that in a growing population the standards of living were bound to fall. The underlying liberal economic assumption of the article was that human beings were all self-interested rational beings that operate only with short-term calculations. Hence, the ultimate destruction of natural resources was inescapable unless common resources were not secured through management, private ownership or enclosure. Managerial and apolitical approaches were thus justified while several environmental problems were equated to resource depletion.

Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* (1968) was mainly inspired by the neo-Malthusians of the late 1940s and the continuing public debate about overpopulation in the 1960s (cf. Desrochers and Hoffbauer 2009). The book forecast famine and economic catastrophe as early as the following decade. Even though these predictions were largely unfulfilled, the book has been a great success, due to the public debate it created, with its alarmist tone and emotional style (Rubin 1994: 79). Despite its pessimism, the book suggested a number of actions for individuals to avoid the population disasters. The intellectual influence of the book has been described by historian Thomas B. Robertson as having given Malthusianism the attention it has never received before, at the expense of other environmental issues (Robertson 2005: 5–6 quoted in Desrochers and Hoffbauer 2009: 38). On the more practical side, International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) was established in 1971, by

¹⁴ http://criticalmass.wikia.com/wiki/Earth_Day#cite_note-7

¹⁵ <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,943782,00.html>

renowned economist and policy advisor Barbara Ward, seeking to establish 'economic progress' in line with environmental resource protection. This was also the time Ward was commissioned (along side René Dubos) to prepare a policy document in preparation for the Stockholm Conference (see below for details).

In sum, with the logic of difference, a contestation has emerged over the representation of environmental issues: On the one hand, the demand for sustainability became the empty signifier that brought different movements of the time together. On the other hand, a second chain of equivalence was formed by the existing hegemonic project, based on technological solutions, capitalism, and individual responsibilities, which called for an apolitical environmentalism. This resulted in a division among the ecological movements: Some reinforced the existing chain of equivalence established earlier, and formed an increasingly more radical eco-political world-view throughout the 1970s (see below). Others found it valuable that environmental values were becoming widespread and started increasingly to operate within (and possibly transform) the existing system.

Two of the new formulations combining different elements from these chains of equivalence from the early 1970s were The Ecologist's¹⁶ *A Blueprint for Survival* (1972), and the Club of Rome report *Limits to Growth* (1972). It is worth looking into the contents of these texts to understand the change they have initiated in the discourse of sustainability and limits.

A Blueprint for Survival was very much influenced by the concerns about overpopulation and overconsumption, predicting a "breakdown of society and the irreversible disruption of the life-support systems [...] possibly by the end of the century."¹⁷ But the causality and the solutions suggested in this book were different than that of Ehrlich: The most critical cause of the ecological problem was perceived as "the industrial way of life with its ethos of expansion [...] that is not sustainable". Furthermore, the solution had to be a political one: The book suggested the foundation of a national movement, inspired by the on-going work of the newly-established Club of Rome, which would assume political status and enter into the next elections, hopefully giving rise to an international movement. This political movement would ensure a highly controlled change that could only occur through a systemic reduction, substitution, and decentralisation of industrial growth through mainly technological means and in a top-down approach.

But it was *Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al. 1972), the long-awaited Club of Rome report, that has become the symbol of *the limits ethos*, and the best-selling environmental book of all times. On the one hand, the report defined the relationship between ecological degradation and economic growth. On the other hand, it placed population growth as an equally important dimension for the logic of limits, as industrialisation: Among the "five major trends of global concern" (namely population growth, industrialisation, malnutrition, resource depletion, and environmental degradation), only the first two were independent variables (causes of ecological crisis), while the last three were dependent variables (indicators of ecological crisis).

Wolfgang Sachs (1992: 27-28) observes that together with *The Population Bomb* and *A Blueprint for Survival*, the report "made it seem natural to imagine the future of the globe as the result of the interaction of quantitative growth curves operating in five dimensions". The reason of Sachs' critique is the methods employed in the report, which are very different from the various humanist and biocentric perspectives of the time. These alternatives put more emphasis on the human condition or the intrinsic value of nature, which would inevitably require an end to the logic of growth and to the exploitation of nature. However, the global ecosystems approach employed by the Club of Rome researchers,

"proposed the global society as the unit of analysis and put the Third World, by denouncing population growth, at the centre of attention. Moreover, the model rendered intelligible what would otherwise

¹⁶ *A Blueprint for Survival* was published in January 1972, occupying all of *The Ecologist* Vol. 2 No.1, in advance of the 1972 Stockholm Conference. According to the magazine's website, "so great was demand for the *Blueprint* that it was subsequently republished in paperback by Penguin books on 14 September 1972." (<http://www.theecologist.info/key27.html>)

¹⁷ <http://www.theecologist.info/page34.html>

have appeared as a messy situation by removing resource conflicts from any particular local or political context. The language of aggregate data series suggests a clearcut picture, abstract figures lend themselves to playing with scenarios, and a presumed mechanical causality among various components creates the illusion that global strategies can be effective. And even if the ideal of growth crumbled, there was, for those who felt themselves in charge of running the world, still some objective to fall comfortably back on: stability.”

This was a powerful fantasy that not only made its methods ‘seem natural’ but also to depoliticise developmental inequality and re-establish the so-called Third World as the cause of environmental problems. Moreover, for the first time, sustainability was being equalised to stability. Nonetheless, prominent scholars were challenging the notion of *growth* and proposing its replacement with a different ideal (of equilibrium and sustainability). The authors recognised how their own reality too was colonised by the logic of growth:

“We can say very little at this point about the practical, day-by-day steps that might be taken to reach a desirable, sustainable state of global equilibrium. Neither the world model nor our own thoughts have been developed in sufficient detail to understand all the implications of the transition from growth to equilibrium.” (Meadows et al. 1972: 180)

Doing so, the report left a large gap between *what is* (growth) and *what ought* (sustainability). How to fill this gap was indeed the focus of political contestation during the next decade. In the first instance, *Limits to Growth* has been praised not only by the environmentalists, but as Sachs argues, also by the international bureaucracy of the United Nations for whom the report provided the cognitive base for viewing the world as an inter-related system, functioning under common constraints. Technological, liberal, expert-led, top-down approaches could be a way of ensuring stability. But it could also be filled in a bottom-up fashion, based on sustenance, adequateness, minimalism, and a de-industrialisation effort. This ambiguity in the report made it eligible for discussion, for developmentalists and environmentalists, technocrats and activists, conservatives and liberals alike.

Indeed, as Sachs suggests in the quote above, *stability* was in the core of the logic that the report established: *Sustainability* referred to a state of ecological *and* economic stability. In other words, the term *sustainability* pointed to the eco-logical impossibility of continuing with the trends of economic and population growth, assuming linearity. This assumption of linearity, made the report very fragile and easily refutable, as it has been the case since its publication (cf. Passel et al. 1980). But more importantly, it was this very assumption that lied in the core of developmentalism, and has already been questioned by biocentrists and humanists, and since Leopold Kohr, even by economists.

In 1973, Fritz Schumacher (a student of Kohr and an economist) published a best-seller and a highly influential book titled *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as If People Mattered*. It brought economic insights into why and how the transformations suggested by the eco-political movements of the time should and could take place, and challenged the notion of growth and the motto of ‘bigger is better.’ Instead, Schumacher argued for appropriate use of technology and small scale economic organisation on the basis of *adequateness*. For Schumacher (1978) modern industrialism was irrational and inefficient as it required too much while accomplishing too little. It was immoral, as only “greed and envy demand continuous and limitless economic growth of a material kind” which are the urges that “the modern private enterprise system ingeniously employs [...] as its motive power.” In its place Schumacher put day-to-day steps to achieve a bottom-up global transformation.

Let’s look into the logics of development and sustainability on the basis of the biological metaphor they use to normalise and neutralise their political positions (see Table 2). While the logic of developmentalism used a biological metaphor based on a continuous process (the absence of which would indicate abnormality), the logic of sustainability employed a biological metaphor that suggested *the limits* of such development: after a certain point growth would suggest abnormality (like cancer or obesity), if not prove impossible.

Table 2- The biological metaphors of hegemonic & contesting logics

	Logic of developmentalism	Logic of sustainability
<i>Basis of the biological metaphor</i>	<i>Development</i> is a natural process wherein the potentialities of an organism are released until it reaches its complete, fully-fledged form.	There are natural <i>limits</i> to growth, as form fits size and size fits form.
<i>Application to society</i>	<p>Social development is a natural and linear process; the failure to develop would be an anomaly (underdevelopment).</p> <p>All societies develop in a more or less similar fashion.</p> <p>A growing economy is the condition for development, which is in turn the condition of progress.</p> <p>Economic growth can be endless.</p>	<p>Growth is not a linear function; just like the human body, when a certain size is surpassed further economic growth might have catastrophic effects.</p> <p>Social change must be determined by local conditions.</p> <p>Production and reproduction are ongoing natural processes, but will meet natural limits and/or result in unsustainable situations (e.g. malnutrition, environmental degradation, resource depletion, impoverishment).</p>
<i>Means</i>	<p>Increasing governmental control over the wealth, health, and lifestyle of the population is necessary to reach the aim of development mainly through</p> <p>a) techno-science b) economic growth through industrialisation c) a system that merges liberal democracy with a capitalist economy</p>	<p>To avoid these catastrophes, a balance between size and form should be sustained (a conceptual optimum, or equilibrium)</p> <p>a) form that fits the size: appropriate technology b) natural limits on production and reproduction should be internalised: small scale economic organisation on the basis of <i>adequateness</i></p>
<i>Agency</i>	the nation state and international governance institutions	the individual and human-sized communities

Compared to *developmentalism*, the logic of sustainability relies much more on the ideas of interdependence, communality and equality than that of freedom (as in the form of free trade or unleashed economic growth). In its logical extreme, it counters the idea that man should freely derive *personal* possession from his labours and that this is the essence of freedom, unlike the colonial as well as the post-WWII notions of development. On this basis, *Limits to Growth* can be perceived as a successful challenge to the development paradigm by the time of its publication: Its suggestion to limit growth (economically and biologically) came as a shock to neo-classical economics; and in the political context of the 70s in Europe and the US, it created a somewhat strong spur. Against the background of development as an established social logic and practice, internalised and institutionalised at all levels, the report was a political intervention. The demand to *limit growth* challenged the established developmentalist ideology, and hence moved it from the sphere of the social, to that of the political: the *logic of sustainability* was to some extent successful against *developmentalism*. On the other hand, the report was simultaneously (1) an attempt to scrutinise the ecological crisis in *quantifiable* terms, and (2) left the practical gap mentioned above. Although the *logic of sustainability* established in the report was fundamentally different from *developmentalism*, it also set the scene for further co-option.

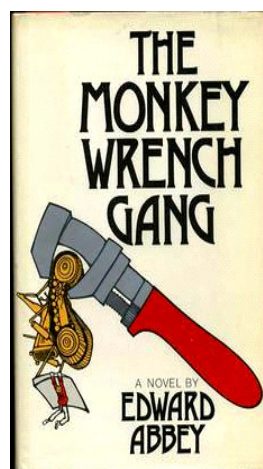
What has happened by the articulation of eco-political demands by the hegemonic discourse (e.g. as manifest in Nixon's speech and in the discourses of international development elite) was the establishment of a second chain of equivalence. *Sustainability* has become a *floating signifier*, whose meaning is suspended between the equivalential chains of competing hegemonic projects. This moment of floating (for the signifier *sustainability*) was a watershed. In a few years, eco-political movements have ramified into more radical and mainstream components. The second half of 70s and the early 80s was marked by *transborder* industrial disasters with greater and better documented ecological impacts, which might have eased the practical turn many NGOs have opted for. The most (in)famous examples are the Love Canal in Niagara Falls, NY, the nuclear meltdown in Three Mile Island power plant, the industrial disaster resulting from the operations of Dow Chemicals in Bhopal, India, the explosion of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in the Soviet Union, and the Exxon Valdez oil spill off Alaska. Schumacher's argument regarding the inefficiency and side-effects of large-scale technological and industrial organisation on human freedom and wilderness was being documented on the global media. These events influenced the environmental movements: For instance, for the first

time, environmental concerns were the cause of terrorism with the bombings of the so-called 'Freedom Club,' better known as *Unabomber*.

In 1977 and 1979, two NGOs were formed with more radical approaches and strategies than any other environmentalist movement to date: the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society and Earth First!. At the origins of both of these groups laid a critique of other environmental NGOs, which were becoming increasingly mainstream. Paul Watson, one of the founders Greenpeace, unsatisfied with the organisation's principle of 'bearing witness' to whale hunting, established the Sea Shepherds, which uses direct action strategies including scuttling, disabling, 'stink bombing', non-violent but extralegal boarding of whaling vessels, as well as seizure and destruction of drift nets¹⁸. Earth First! was another similar action group: Their most famous founder David Foreman decided to establish Earth First! as a consequence of his frustration with environmental lobbying and the general professionalisation of the movement. The group separated itself from the mainstream environmental movement by tactics of 'monkeywrenching' – industrial sabotage traditionally associated with labour struggles. This was in sharp contrast with the cautious lobbying efforts of the established environmental organisations. Fittingly, the logo of Earth First! is a monkey wrench and a stone hammer (on the right).



The monkey wrench was not an arbitrary logo, and neither were the similarities between the two organisations: Paul Watson and David Foreman befriended each other, as well as Edward Abbey, who coined the term *monkeywrenching* for his novel dedicated to Ned Ludd. *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (Abbey 1975 [2006]) is a radical political critique of the social, economic and technological organisation of the US (and modern societies in general), and it is a strategy against the co-optation of the eco-political movement. For instance, the gang's members are all politically incorrect individuals: Not only do they dismiss liberalism in terms of property law by sabotaging development projects, but also the way of life it brings. For instance, one of the characters have plural marriages (three happy wives), mistrusts banks, and chooses to live below poverty level, while another likes excessive drinking *and* driving, big cars, weapons, swearing and makes a point against hygiene. As the quote at the beginning of this section demonstrates, the gang has several conversations regarding the amount of 'violence' they are willing to use. Pragmatic, symbolic, and moral views intersect at the point of *decide*: "The murder of a machine" (ibid: 86). No murder is committed and no one is intentionally harmed *physically*, but 'the person' is not identified with her property. Fittingly, the illustration on the cover of the paperback edition (below) depicts a caterpillar being crushed by a monkey wrench; the person hanging from the caterpillar is about to fall, yet appears insignificant.



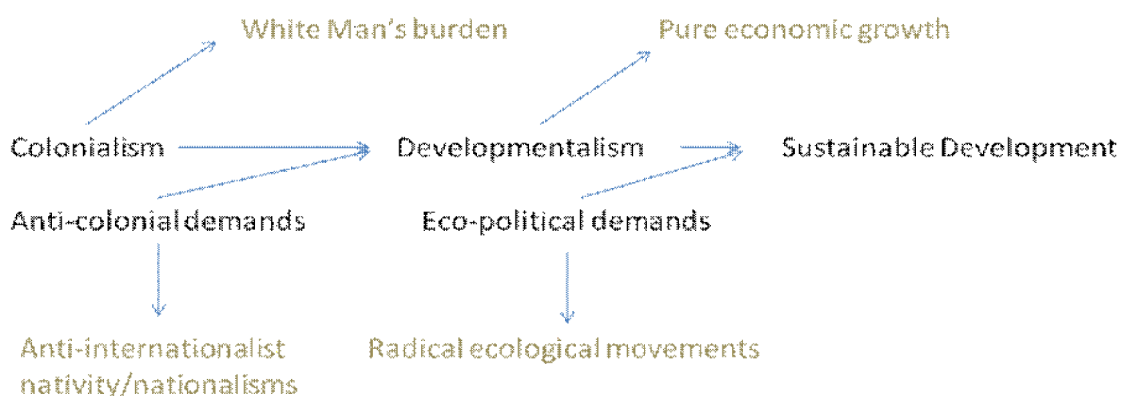
Abbey's politically incorrect characters revealed how he regarded professional, mainstream environmentalism as forced uniformity and sacrilege towards nature. He was also deeply aware that apolitical references to and articulations of environmental values were prone to be co-opted through

¹⁸ <http://www.seashepherd.org/whales/sea-shepherd-history.html>

what he calls ‘eco-porn’—the green wash activities of and the lip service paid by the very corporations that caused the damage (ibid: 236). Mainstream environmentalists criticised his politically incorrect and “highly opinionated style on the grounds that this is detrimental to the serious cause of environmentalism”; on which he would apologise from “anyone still present whom [he] failed to insult” (quoted in Cevasco and Harmond 2009: 5). Abbey’s dismissal of the politically correct liberal environmental movements was shared also by Watson and Foreman, and shows the fracture between radical and (increasingly) mainstream environmentalisms: For instance, in the core of the gang’s “healthy hatred” was the Glen Canyon Dam (to which the quote at the beginning of this section refers), which was also one of Earth First!’s first areas of activity. The preface to the book’s 2006 edition notes that Earth First!’s early actions there “made Sierra Clubbers look like Junior Leaguers on a do-gooder field trip” (Abbey 1975 [2006]: xxiii). On the one hand, several changes initiated or inspired by environmental movements have been so influential that they have become mainstream values for most industrialised societies, in a variety of ways. On the other hand, the way environmental values have been increasingly internalised by the existing social system resulted in the emergence of environmentalisms more compromising with the way the society is organised.

Earth First! and Sea Shepherds were in this sense reclaiming the ground, operationalising the logic of equivalence once again –by directing an increasingly radical critique towards the modern industrial society and its myth of growth. Their politically incorrect attitude might have protected them against co-optation, but it also made them vulnerable to marginalisation. Although their discourse was no more radical than that of Thoreau, the political background was different. As it happened with the anti-internationalist/nativist claims of decolonisation discourses, while some of their claims were internalised by the hegemonic project, others were marginalised. Eco-political activism against private property was significantly marginalised, while a general concern for the environment was internalised by the developmentalist project. Simultaneously, the discourses within the hegemonic projects were changing as well: Similar to the elimination of the colonialist conceit of civilising other lands and societies, the ideal of constant and linear economic growth could no longer be maintained. A new political and discursive formulation was in the making: Sustainable development was the product of this political process, and found its most famous expression in 1987 with the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, titled *Our Common Future* (See Figure 2).

Figure 2: Discursive elements internalised and marginalised during the progression from colonialism, to developmentalism and sustainable development



four

the merger: sustainable development

A year after Earth First! was founded, the term sustainable development appeared for the first time in a joint report by The World Conservation Union (IUCN), the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), titled *World Conservation Strategy – Living Resource Conservation for Sustainable Development*. This report was the first document of its scope that fused the issues of environment and development, suggesting their equal significance:

“Development and conservation are equally important for our survival and for the discharge of our responsibilities as trustees of natural resources for the generations to come.” (IUCN 1980:1)

But the term *sustainable development* became ubiquitous only when the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), authorised by the UN to sketch the future of environmental governance, published its report titled *Our Common Future* in 1987. With the mission of writing down the international political strategies for *environmental* protection, the Brundtland Commission took four years to publish *Our Common Future*, which has defined sustainable development, irrevocably, as

“development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” (WCED 1987: 8)

This definition was remarkably different than the way 'sustainability' was used by the eco-political movements to date. It was not only the exclusion of the term 'environment' all together that made the change so paradigmatic. It was also the causality that the term 'sustainable development' signified. In *Limits to Growth*, the authors reached two broad conclusions (Meadows et al. 1972, my emphasis):

“1. If the present growth trends in world population, industrialization, pollution, food production, and resource depletion continue unchanged, the limits to growth on this planet will be reached sometime within the next one hundred years. The most probable result will be a rather sudden and uncontrollable decline in both population and industrial capacity.

2. It is possible to alter these growth trends and to establish a condition of ecological and economic stability that is *sustainable* far into the future. The state of global equilibrium could be designed so that the basic material needs of each person on earth are satisfied and each person has an equal opportunity to realize his individual human potential.”

The word *sustainable* was employed several times in *Limits to Growth*, referring to a state in which ecological stability could coincide with economic stability. In other words, the term *sustainability* was employed in order to point to the ecological impossibility of continuing with the trends of development and population growth. They had little to say about the practical steps to take for a desirable, sustainable state of equilibrium; nevertheless they thought it was possible to establish such a state of ecological and economic stability “sustainable far into the future” by altering the growth trends (ibid: 24, 180). In sum, the transition from *growth* to *equilibrium* could be achieved by limiting economic growth and mitigating population growth.

In *Our Common Future*, what was to sustain has changed: “Humanity has the ability to make *development* sustainable” headed the Brundtland definition of sustainable development (WCED 1987: 8, my emphasis). The shift in emphasis, once again was critical in shaping how environmental politics and international institutions to date were going to frame the relationship between environment and development. We can rephrase the causality established in *Limits to Growth* as ‘[population- and economic-]growth-as-usual causes environmental degradation.’ With the concept of sustainable development, this causality has been altered in *Our Common Future*, and it was postulated that ‘growth as such can be limitless,’ and that “economic development can be consolidated with environmental protection” (ibid: 40). It was not development, but *under-development* that caused environmental de-

gradation, and hence, it should be 'cured.' This revision is clearly articulated at the introduction of the report: "We have in the past been concerned about the impacts of economic growth upon environment. We are now forced, to concern ourselves with the impacts of ecological stress [...] upon our economic prospects." (ibid: 5)

Finally, the Brundtland Report established the three "interdependent and mutually reinforcing" pillars of sustainable development as economic development, social development, and environmental protection, which concealed the conflict between developmental and environmental demands. On the contrary, the report actually suggested that sustainable development as a guiding principle would solve the dilemma between economy and ecology:

"The concept of sustainable development provides a framework for the integration of environment policies and development strategies –the term 'development' being used here in its broadest sense. [...] policy makers guided by the concept of sustainable development will necessarily work to assure that economies remain firmly attached to their ecological roots and that these roots are protected and nurtured so that they may support growth over the long term." (ibid: 40)

Development was being used in its broadest sense, and policy makers could employ a wide range of strategies to ensure that their economies were growing. These economies should remain "attached to their ecological roots," which could be interpreted in various ways. Environment was to be protected so that it could support further growth. Hence, the environment was linked to development. Economic growth, the limits of which were being constructed in 1972, was once again introduced into the picture, and this time as a viable and desirable *solution* to inequalities in development and environmental degradation. The suggestion was not a contraction and convergence model which would ensure the so-called 'developing' countries to create and maintain healthy economies, while the industrialised countries would slow down economic growth. On the contrary, according to the report, annual per capita GDP growth rates that could be 'achieved' in industrialised economies were prescribed as three per cent (ibid: 173). And the way forward was through free trade, industrialisation and technological innovation. Economic growth through industrial development was introduced as a viable and desirable *solution* to environmental degradation and economic inequalities across nations (ibid). Industry was regarded as vital for 'human' needs, implying that social and economic models that are not based on modern machinery and technology, (e.g. subsistence models) were inhumane:

"Industry is central to the economies of modern societies and an indispensable motor of growth. It is essential to developing countries, to widen their development base and meet growing needs. [...] *Many essential human needs can be met only through goods and services provided by industry.* The production of food requires increasing amounts of agrochemicals and machinery. Beyond this, the products of industry form the material basis of contemporary standards of living. Thus all nations require and rightly aspire to efficient industrial bases to meet changing needs." (ibid: 206, my emphasis)

On the one hand the 'threat' embodied by the world's poor was changing from being a threat to the economic activity and safety of private property in the more 'prosperous' parts –as Truman established it-, to a threat to the environment. Since ecological stress had impacts upon economic prospects of everyone, the so-called underdeveloped were once again fixed as the threat to economic prosperity of all. The difference was the indirectness of this threat, with the inclusion of yet another link to the chain: that link was environment. Evidently, an immediate policy implication was the prioritisation of developmental issues compared to environmental problems, which was supported rigorously by Southern governments and modernist intellectuals.

The position of Western societies was corrected once again: They were no longer to be blamed for environmental degradation or responsible for its correction; it was the "developing countries of the South" that should protect the richly diverse ecosystems by refraining from their destruction (through a certain type of economic activity that was not exactly defined in the report). The industrialised countries would certainly aid this pursuit, which would also give them the moral high ground in the matter. Pretes (1997: 1424) also notes that

“rather than jettisoning the notion of development, and rather than displacing development and infinite progress as social imaginary, Western society has responded [to the environmentalist critique] by mutating the discourse surrounding development, incorporating the arguments of its critics without fundamentally altering the nature of the conception. [...] This new discourse has emerged around the term ‘sustainable development [which is] not a new form of development [but] development that reaffirms the idea of the infinite.”

In other words, to make development sustainable was to make it infinite, and thus, the idea of sustainable development was an inherently conservative one (ibid). To make sure this message is clear, the report (WCED 1987: 9, my emphasis) states: “The concept of sustainable development does imply limits – *not absolute limits but limitations imposed by the present state of technology and social organisation* on environmental resources and by the ability of the biosphere to absorb the effects of human activities.”

The effect of Brundtland Report on environmental politics can be traced in various sustainable development discourses that share common arguments such as (adapted from Şahin 2004):

1. Development is the means to satisfy all basic needs of everyone,
2. The future generations are entitled to satisfying their basic needs as much as we are,
3. Poverty/underdevelopment is the reason for environmental degradation hence needs to be overcome,
4. (*ergo*) Issues of environment and development should be tackled together,
5. The solution to these problems is to use resources rationally and ensure further development,
6. This can only be achieved through liberalisation of trade, technology transfer, and industrialisation.

Hence, the radical conservationist ideal of an *ecologically sustainable society* was transformed into an industrialist social-democratic idea of the hegemonic developmentalist ideology. Now it was intertwined with other Western liberal ideals such as scientific and technological progress, capitalism, and economic growth. In other words, a new equivalential chain was established that related growth-focused demands to the environmental ones. The most general and critical result of this paradigm shift was to marginalise ecological movements that demanded fundamental changes in the production and consumption models and the industrialist ideologies of modern Western societies. This shift is the basis on which further neo-liberal connotations would be attached to the concept, such as the introduction of global free trade and open markets as solutions to environmental problems and the only way to ensure economic growth.

five

the UN context: conferences produce texts produce institutions

1972: *Only One Earth* and the Stockholm Conference

The contestation at the intergovernmental platforms was different. Already in the 1960s the Southern governments were growing weary of the environmental concerns in the North. When the Stockholm Conference, titled the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (UNCHE) was announced, some of the Southern delegations made their negative stance explicit:

“Vocal arguments were raised, particularly by Brazil and Algeria, claiming that the Conference on the environment was a rich man's show to divert attention from the development needs in the underprivileged parts of the world. An influential seminar in Founex, Switzerland in the spring of 1971 concluded that there is no inherent contradiction between environment and development, and that these two

concerns should be mutually supportive. This secured attendance from most developing countries, but the question could not be substantively settled at the Stockholm Conference.”¹⁹

This conflict needed to be resolved before international action and regulation was possible on environmental issues. Another attempt to bring together the conflictual claims of environment and development was a policy document commissioned to René Dubos and Barbara Ward by Maurice Strong, Secretary-General of UNCHE in May 1971. Strong asked the authors to draft a report that will “represent the knowledge and opinion of the world’s leading experts and thinkers about the relationship between man and his natural habitat at a time when human activity is having profound effects upon the environment” (preface to the report). This would be a part of the preparations to the Stockholm Conference.

The resulting document was *Only One Earth: The Care and Maintenance of a Small Planet*, which was drafted by Dubos and Ward, with contributions from 152 consultants. The consultative process was mainly for ensuring the support of Southern governments. Accordingly, *Only One Earth* reflected the concerns of scientists and opinion leaders over the bi-polar international order at the time. It put emphasis on the conditions for peace and the need for international cooperation, questioning the indispensability of national sovereignty in the face of global environmental problems throughout the text. The report asked challenging questions, and came up with a critical outlook of the existing social systems:

“If all man can offer to the decades ahead is the same combination of scientific drive, economic cupidity and national arrogance, then we cannot rate very highly the chances of reaching the year 2000 with our planet still functioning safely and our humanity securely preserved.” (Dubos and Ward 1972: 66)

This tone was maintained throughout the report. It problematised technology in its Part Three, titled *Problems of High Technology*. It challenged mainstream economic indicators, replacing the GNP-based system at times with indicators for quality of life (“little boys swimming in Delaware or Volga” *ibid*: 201) or calorie calculations. It directly linked colonial relations with the origins of the developmental imbalances. The “disguisedly subsidized consumption” patterns of modern urban societies (*ibid*: 203) and “the disease of growthmanship” (*ibid*: 199) were questioned while the “insufficiency of the market approach” was demonstrated (*ibid*: 57). Alternative models of development were suggested for the South, replacing “monsters of efficiency” with ecologically constructive man-power (*ibid*: 233).

The relationship established by the report between development and environment is best summarised in the following paragraphs:

“Industry, often under foreign direction and ownership, introduces modern labour-saving technologies when unskilled labour is chiefly available. Markets overseas are blocked by the presence there of monsters of efficiency –Mitsuis, IBMs, Volkswagens– and by the tariffs raised to keep out cheap labour-intensive goods. Markets at home remain limited by local poverty or, often enough, by the extreme smallness of the post-colonial states. Such are the difficulties that make up a maze, a web, an obstacle race for developing governments which both intensifies their determination to break out of poverty and frustrates the efforts which they have to make.

In developing, as in developed, lands all the pursuits and consequences of the only exits from poverty – greater productivity, the ‘more for less’ – have their impact on the environment. [...] Industry puts its effluents into the ‘free goods’ of air and water” (*ibid*: 210-211).

In this narration not only is the relationship between environment and development is conflictual, but also the poverty in the ‘developing’ countries is regarded as a function of the colonial past, the existing market conditions and the efficiency oriented industry. The report clearly recognises that there needs to be different paths to development, but it does not suggest solutions. It limits its suggestions to the need for knowledge, delegating limited power to international bodies, and a standard development aid of one per cent of the industrialised countries’ GNP. However, it is fundamentally different from its

¹⁹ http://www.un.org/Pubs/Chronicle/2002/issue3/0302p14_essay.html

successors in placing the environmental problems as predominantly social issues. The report does not have a technocratic tone and does not go into the details of how a certain issue should be assessed, or what policies should be designed. Rather, it contours the historical roots of environmental degradation and developmental problems and calls for concerted action beyond concerns for national sovereignty, in the spirit of the Stockholm Conference.

Clapp and Dauvergne (2005: 55) note that the initial focus of the Stockholm Conference was environmental problems arising from industrialisation, but it gradually expanded to include developmental concerns so that the Southern governments would participate, and support the resulting documents. The Southern position on the matter was that (1) exploitation by global capitalists caused poverty, which in turn caused environmental degradation; (2) the solution would be to reform the global economic system, which currently obliges the South to export cheap raw material in exchange for expensive industrial products (ibid: 56). Accordingly, the so-called developing countries have made a suggestion to the UN to create a New International Economic Order (NIEO), which would not only give more power to the South in the IMF and the World Bank, but also restrict the operations of the transnational corporations and reform the terms of trade for raw commodity producers (ibid). NIEO never was established although it was a focal debate in the 1970s. The concerns of the South proved accurate in the following years, as the OPEC oil crisis further increased the prices of industrial products relative to raw materials and as the UN Chronicle suggests, the Northern countries showed little interest in global environmental protection.²⁰

Although the resulting texts of the Conference did not reflect any suggestions regarding economic reform, they did reproduce the idea that environment and development were linked and non-contradictory issues. During the Stockholm Conference and in the follow-up events statements in these lines have been commonplace. The most memorable articulation was made by Indira Gandhi, who suggested that the worst form of pollution was poverty and the reason for environmental problems in the South was not excessive industrialisation but inadequate development.

1983-1992: *Our Common Future* and the Rio Conference

The Brundtland Commission and the resulting WCED Report, *Our Common Future* were the third example of the UN tradition of asking social democratic prime ministers to establish commissions for creating overarching policy documents regarding global problems (after Brandt and Palme Commissions). Like its 1972 counterpart, Brundtland Report too has been written through a long consultation process (at least at elite level). Accordingly, the purpose of the Brundtland Commission was laid down by General Assembly Resolution 38/161 (UN, 1983, my emphases) as finding solutions agreeable to all states involved:

"(a) *To propose long-term environmental strategies for achieving sustainable development to the year 2000 and beyond;*

(b) *To recommend ways in which concern for the environment may be translated into greater co-operation among developing countries and between countries at different stages of economic and social development and lead to the achievement of common and mutually supportive objectives which take account of the interrelationships between people, resources, environment and development;*

(c) *To consider ways and means by which the international community can deal more effectively with environmental concerns, in the light of the other recommendations in its report;*

(d) *To help to define shared perceptions of long-term environmental issues and of the appropriate efforts needed to deal successfully with the problems of protecting and enhancing the environment, a long-term agenda for action during the coming decades, and aspirational goals for the world community..."*

²⁰ http://www.un.org/Pubs/Chronicle/2002/issue3/0302p14_essay.html

In the official document that established the Brundtland Commission, the term sustainable development was used, and yet, not defined. Actually, the text did not even put as much emphasis on development as on environment.²¹ The issue was placed squarely as a problem of cooperation ‘among countries at different stages of development’, as the South was at great unease regarding the environmental concern of the industrialised countries: For them, those who have achieved industrialisation were kicking away the ladder. Hence, the task of the Commission was *to find a way to cooperate on issues of environment* despite different levels of ‘development’.

With the introduction of sustainable development, this problem was solved, at least rhetorically: The shift in the discourse of *development* was in no opposition to the demands of the Southern governments and elite. On the contrary, they were a part of the discourse coalition for the remarkably successful hegemonic project of development to absorb the environmental demand. The merging of sustainability and development reified the dominance of the development discourse, rather than weaken it. As a result, sustainable development became the signifier that represents the environmental demand within the developmentalist project. As the new equivalential chain formed by the logic of difference took hold, the contestation over the meaning of the floating signifier ‘sustainable’ was actualised. Development itself has become not more but less specific when merged with the adjective *sustainable*: Sustainable development became a shapeless-yet-ineradicable concept as *development*; it has been taken up by the World Bank and Royal Dutch Shell, by Greenpeace and United Nations, by nation states and tourism agencies alike. Just as Wolfgang Sachs (1992: 4) once observed development to be, its contours became blurred, and despite this lack of content, it created a common ground on which the *status quo* could keep operating.

This has been exactly the case with the Rio Conference. All the documents resulting from the summit referred to the Brundtland definition as the main reference point of all activities. Agenda 21, which has been drafted since 1989 and concluded at the conference, was a major document that would specify in 40 chapters the social, economic, conservation, resource management, participation, and means of implementation dimensions of sustainable development. The Rio Declaration listed the 27 principles that would guide sustainable development around the world. The Commission on Sustainable Development, established by the UN General Assembly to ensure effective follow-up to the summit, was the first institution that reflected the sedimentation of sustainable development discourse.

2000-2002: The MDGs and the Johannesburg Conference

In September 2000, following the Millennium Summit, the General Assembly adopted the Millennium Declaration, out of which the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were synthesised. The Declaration was based on certain principles and values, some of which I would like to cite so as to demonstrate how the influence of the shift from sustainability (the empty signifier of the ecologist project) to sustainable development (a nodal point in developmentalist discourse) remains with us:

“Equality. No individual and no nation must be denied the opportunity to benefit from development.

[...]

Respect for nature. Prudence must be shown in the management of all living species and natural resources, in accordance with the precepts of sustainable development. Only in this way can the immeasurable riches provided to us by nature be preserved and passed on to our descendants. The current unsustainable patterns of production and consumption must be changed in the interest of our future welfare and that of our descendants.”

The Millennium Declaration regards development as a right, and respect for nature as in line with this right. In this articulation the conflict between the two demands is successfully concealed and

²¹ A simple word count shows that the word *development* was only used four times in the text (as in *sustainable development* twice), as opposed to 31 repetitions of the word *environment*.

environmental demands lose their primacy. For instance, from this point on, the adjective *sustainable* would be added to many more concepts related to developmentalism (sustainable economy, sustainable research, sustainable energy production etc.). The MDGs reflected this change even further: Out of the eight MDGs only one of them refers to environmental sustainability, while the rest mostly focus on poverty reduction. More significantly, from this point on, the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs have become the main documents that the UN based its environmental policies on, as opposed to the Agenda 21 of the previous decade. The MDGs were (and could be) more practical and goal-oriented than the long and detailed Agenda 21, which has already established the prioritisation of development over environment.

On the issue of 'underdevelopment', the Declaration (Chapter III, para 11-16, my emphases) used a determined tone:

“We will spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty, to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected. We are committed to making the right to development a reality for everyone and to freeing the entire human race from want.

We resolve therefore to create an environment – at the national and global levels alike – which is conducive to development and to the elimination of poverty. [...]

We are concerned about the obstacles developing countries face in mobilizing the resources needed to finance their sustained development. We will therefore make every effort to ensure the success of the High-level International and Intergovernmental Event on Financing for Development, to be held in 2001. [...]

We are also determined to deal comprehensively and effectively with the debt problems of low- and middle-income developing countries, through various national and international measures designed to make their debt sustainable in the long term.”

By this time, no trace of colonialism was left in the developmentalist discourse of the UN, and economic inequities among countries were no longer linked to the global economic system. Inversely, the environmentalist claims were universalised such that they meant little more than a general goodness about *the protection of resources* for future generations and the importance of nature for economic production. With an emphasis on the human genome project and information technologies, globalisation was settling into the discourse of development.

the conferences

The resulting texts of UN environmental summits can be juxtaposed to this background in order to show the shift in the discourses of environment and development, and particularly its international political dimensions. In the 1972 Stockholm Declaration (UN, 1972, para. 2, my emphases), the rights and responsibilities coincide and are supported by the ideas of freedom, equality, and dignity:

“Man has the fundamental right to freedom, equality and adequate conditions of life, in an environment of a quality that permits a life of dignity and well-being, and he bears a solemn responsibility to protect and improve the environment for present and future generations.”

The Stockholm Declaration embodies an understanding of environment that is linked with rights which also brings responsibilities, carefully carving the Southern and Northern demands into the text. The right to environment will ensure the conditions for dignity and well-being, and is a fundamental right as those of freedom, equality, and adequacy.

With the Brundtland Report and the establishment of the *sustainable development* ideal, the *requirement and right of aspiring to industrialisation* was placed in front of all nations as a target. Similarly, in the UN context, the 'rights and responsibilities of men and nations' have changed in the documents resulting from the environmental summits. The most immediate manifestation of this requirement and right was in the documents of the Rio Earth Summit. The Rio Declaration (UN 1992b) uses the term sustainable development in its first principle; its second principle evokes states'

“sovereign right to exploit their own resources;” while “the right to development” is defined in principle three. Simultaneously, Chapter II of Agenda 21 (UN, 1992a, paras 2.3-2.7) is titled and devoted to “international cooperation to accelerate sustainable development in developing countries” and points at a requirement at the global level:

“The international economy should provide a supportive international climate for achieving environment and development goals by: [removing] tariff and non-tariff impediments, [...] substantial and progressive reduction in the support and protection of agriculture. [...] Trade liberalization should therefore be pursued on a global basis across economic sectors so as to contribute to sustainable development. [...] Enhancing the role of enterprises and promoting competitive markets through adoption of competitive policies.”

At the end of the Cold War, the texts tended towards liberal capitalism, as did the world. Fittingly, the documents of the Johannesburg Summit make direct references to globalisation as if it is a force of nature: an objective, irreversible feature of the world, which can neither be disputed nor influenced or overcome. Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) (UN, 2002c, para 47, emphasis added) devotes its Chapter V to “Sustainable development in a globalizing world,” painting a very neo-liberal picture:

“Globalization offers opportunities and challenges for sustainable development. We recognize that globalization and interdependence are offering new opportunities for trade, investment and capital flows and advances in technology, including information technology, *for the growth of the world economy*, development and the improvement of living standards around the world. At the same time, there remain serious challenges, including serious financial crises, insecurity, poverty, exclusion and inequality within and among societies.”

It is worth noticing that the opportunities are narrated as a direct consequence of globalisation, while the challenges are the remainder, as if these are problems that globalisation is yet to solve, rather than it caused or deepened. More importantly, the opportunities it represents are directly linked with the growth of a world economy, and advancing of technology. The JPOI (para. 3), emphasises the importance of Doha Ministerial Declaration and Monterrey Consensus for sustainable development, introduces partnerships for the implementation of sustainable development policies. These partnerships are embedded into globalisation:

“the implementation should involve all relevant actors through partnerships, especially between Governments of the North and South, on the one hand, and between Governments and major groups, on the other, to achieve the widely shared goals of sustainable development. As reflected in the Monterrey Consensus, such partnerships are key to pursuing sustainable development in a globalizing world.”

The main goal of partnerships and all other implementation efforts was the eradication of poverty, which was regarded as “an indispensable requirement for sustainable development,” and thus “although each country has the primary responsibility for its own sustainable development and poverty eradication” global action and legislation too was legitimate and required (part II para 7, p.3). The paradigmatic shift that was initiated by the Brundtland Report in the constructed causality was even more strongly emphasised in the Political Declaration of the WSSD, which establishes the universal aim “to banish underdevelopment forever” in the name of “human dignity” through technology transfer and opening of markets (UN, 2002b, para.18). Evidently, an immediate policy implication of this change was the (re-)prioritisation of developmental issues compared to environmental problems.

Table 3- UN Summits on Environment 1972-2002

Date	Place	Acronym	Conference	Rights emphasised	Environmental protection through
1972	Stockholm Sweden	UNCHE	UN Conference on Human Environment	The fundamental right to freedom, equality and adequate conditions of life	The responsibility to protect and improve the environment
1992	Rio de Janeiro Brazil	UNCED	UN Conference on Environment & Development	Sovereign right to exploit natural resources Right to development	Trade liberalization across the globe and across sectors Industrial growth
2002	Johannesburg South Africa	WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development	The right to development and the right of everyone to a standard of living adequate for their health and well-being Intellectual property rights, and rights to self-determination The right to utilise the opportunities globalisation and technology brings <i>for the growth of the world economy</i>	Global trade liberalisation to further investment and capital flows Partnerships among North and South as well as different sectors

As Table 3 shows, the changes in the documents relate to

- *causes* of environmental degradation, from growth to underdevelopment
- *solutions* to environmental degradation, from a critique of industrialised society and technology to further development and technological advances
- *policies for environmental protection*, from being based on responsibility to protect the environment towards trade liberalisation, technology transfer and partnerships.

The conferences were accordingly titled: in 1972 the conference was on human environment, while in 1992 development entered the picture: Although most environmentalists refer to the Rio Conference as 'the Earth Summit', the official title was the UN Conference on Environment *and* Development. The global approach as well as the consolidation of sustainable development is reflected in the title of 2002 Johannesburg Summit as well: the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

six

conclusions

Gustavo Esteva (1992: 8) observed that development is the strongest force in modern mentality guiding thought and behaviour, and that the term “occupies the centre of an incredibly powerful semantic constellation.” He simultaneously recognised that development was a feeble and fragile word incapable of giving substance and meaning to thought and behaviour. With so many connotations and an overload of meanings, the term development “ended up dissolving its precise significance” (ibid). These features of the term can be replicated for sustainable development as well.

For theoretical purposes an important question is whether development, and later sustainable development, are empty signifiers. Laclau suggests that the universal is an empty signifier. Nonetheless, he always refers to this process in the formation of popular resistance movements, and identities and demands that are articulated in this context. In other words, the universal is an empty signifier in the process that the particular *demand* is shared by many groups, reflecting their identities. Otherwise, when a concept is simply a buzzword, one without any particular meaning or when a notion 'dissolves its precise significance', I argue it is not an empty signifier. My answer to the question above is thus negative as the process through which an empty signifier is established requires a popular element that lacks in the conception of these two concepts.

For sure, in the process that led to Western colonialism, development might have once acquired contested political connotations. But in the modern Western psyche, development is a master signifier in the social imaginary (or in Spengler's terms, a prime symbol) rather than a signifier around which the many identities of popular resistance movements are reflected. Similarly, while the political project of an ecological society signified by *sustainability* was once an empty signifier, the term *sustainable development* never acquired such a function. It only came into existence through the logic of difference operating at the international level, which was successful in co-opting most eco-political movements, and marginalising the rest. As Laclau (1996: 11) wrote, "the agent of emancipation has to be one whose identity is prevented in its constitution/development by an existing oppressive regime" in ways that are more than the product of the existing system for the antagonistic dichotomy to be established. Neither the authors of the sustainable development paradigm nor the followers have this quality.

Secondly, I have tried to demonstrate how sustainability was the empty signifier of eco-political movements. The issue moved from the sphere of the social to that of the political, creating social antagonisms between social groups that would identify with the ecological critique and the existing hegemonic discourse. Later, with the conception of sustainable development, a competing equivalential chain has been established, between sustainability and other developmentalist notions. Sustainability hence became a *floating signifier*, the meaning of which was suspended until the contestation over it ended. Sustainable development on the other hand was from the start a part of the hegemonic developmentalist discourse. The resulting managerial approaches to environment and development standardised and objectified issues that were once of political nature and relocated them into the sphere of the social. As a result, discourses of voluntarism and expertise negated the political nature of environmental issues.

The study of how radical elements in the eco-political discourses have been integrated to the developmentalist ideology demonstrates how the logic of difference operates. In the long run, most environmental discourses conformed to the sustainable development paradigm. Professional environmental NGOs, consumer campaigns on environmental awareness, and liberal environmental values have become the norm. As foreseen by Marcuse, on the one hand the ecological logic was a negation of the capitalist logic, on the other hand this challenge has been successfully overcome as environmental values were internalised by developmentalism.

From the perspective of the hegemonic discourses, it has been a contestation they have successfully integrated to their social imaginary. As Figure 2 describes, firstly, the colonial discourses based on developing the land for the sake of human well-being and civilisation has been internalised by the developmentalist discourse. Max Havelaar's notion of god given duty to do this has been transformed into Truman's desire to share the benefits of technology with 'peace-loving peoples'. As a result while the white man's burden was eliminated from the hegemonic discourse of development, several developmentalist notions were maintained. On the other hand, the radical elements such as the anti-internationalist/nativist claims of the decolonisation discourses were excluded and marginalised from the hegemonic developmentalist discourse as well.

There are parallels between this shift (from the colonialism to developmentalism) and the next (from developmentalism to sustainable development). So far I have only mentioned that when faced with the challenge of eco-politics, the developmentalist discourse has successfully internalised some of its environmental values while ridding it off the radical elements. Just like the previous shift, this one too had marginalised both 'pure economic growth' arguments and those of radical ecology. The new master signifier in the developmentalist discourse has become sustainable development, the invention of which maintained the developmentalist logic and the existing social order.

Finally, there is an important similarity between these hegemonic discourses regarding the political subject. The Orient, the South, the 'developing' countries, or the Third World is always external to the western identity. It is "a screen for the Western projections of otherness [in the Lacanian sense], the

mirror by which the West can see itself as a positive unitary subject; [therefore] Western discourses on development and the Third World, can be understood not as discourse about the 'reality' of the Third World, but as another means by which the West represents its own ideal of itself to itself" (Tuathail 1993: 230-231). This externality and otherness implies a profound western "fear of 'the shadowy outside' which must be made safe through penetration and assimilation" (Slater 1993: 7). Such a fear allows for interventionism in the modern western identity exemplified in the 'democratisation efforts' in the case of Iraq, transition to market economy in the case of Eastern Europe, transfer of technology and 'know-how' in development projects in Africa. In this sense, what Said notes to be the ontological absence of the Orient (or South) continues in the developmentalist discourse as well, and it is reified by sustainable development.