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Wuli, Elan & Inerti:
The Karoninka Approach to Sustainability

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Wuli, Elan and Inerti: The Karoninka
Approach to Sustainability

By

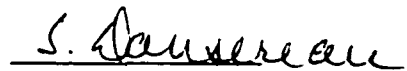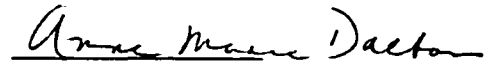Jean-Frédéric Beauchesne

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Abstract

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Approach to Sustainability

Using a counter and post development lens, the author discusses indigenous peoples' relationships with the natural world, with particular focus on ecological spirituality and environmental restrictions. The author suggests that, in recent literature on sustainable development, indigenous peoples generally have been categorized as 'Mother Earth' worshipping societies. Based on ethnographic field research conducted in Basse Cassamance, Senegal and The Gambia, the author proposes that **non-accumulating**, indigenous groups like the **Karoninkas** offer a fresh outlook on sustainability that transcends mainstream generalizations, and provides relevant insights into the indigenous 'problematique'. In *Wuli, Elan & Inerti*, the case of the Karoninkas illustrates that alternative approaches to sustainable development are found in cultures of non-accumulation.

Chapter 1
Introduction:

During the 1980's and 1990's, sustainable development advocates maintained that

indigenous societies were the real experts on sustainability. The impression was that,

having adapted to nature's blows over centuries, indigenous peoples have tremendous

non-monetary wealth and resources that can be measured in knowledge cultivated by a

history of living harmoniously with the land, and of worshipping the 'Earth Mother'.

Such rich cultural heritage has provided them with highly adaptable strategies that enable

them to cope with shocks to their ecosystems. While the experiences of many indigenous

peoples may validate this statement, there is a need to rethink the general acceptance of

the indigenous movement[1] as the voice for ecological sustainability.

Mainstream sustainable development "experts" argue that harvesting forest

products and appropriating indigenous knowledge on an international scale can actually

'save' the forests and their inhabitants. However, the argument can be made that such

actions are synonymous with a new wave of 'eco-colonization' aimed at

misappropriating what little is left from the first wave: the intangibles of indigenous

cultures -with ecological knowledge at the forefront. The first wave of colonisation

involved the extraction of lands and resources, and turned 'Mother Earth' into a factory

in the name of technology and industry. The second wave, eco-colonisation, promotes the

same: external actors, pushing the concepts of commodification of natural and human

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[1] The <u>Gaia Atlas of Indigenous Peoples</u> estimates the number of indigenous peoples world wide at
250 million –4% of the total global population. The book also states that, in the early 1990's,
there were approximately 73 indigenous organizations across the globe.

resources, and acquiring ownership of land, resources, and knowledge. It is a process which is both de-humanizing and de-culturalizing.

Furthermore, one of the fundamental threats facing the world's indigenous peoples is, precisely, their cultural defoliation -as well as the invasion of the land upon which they live. Indigenous peoples are known to have an intimate relationship with their homelands and ecosystems; they are dependent on them for their livelihood, and in their association and with the natural world (Corry, 1988: 6). In many parts of the world, sustainable development programs that require, for instance, the transformation of forests into cash-cropping, protected areas or parks have negatively affected the livelihood of indigenous populations. These people have become the victims rather than the beneficiaries of these transformations[2]. And as so many development strategies which were pursued in the past decade are today considered failures by many, it is now deemed appropriate to take a second look at indigenous peoples' values and lifestyles in our search for development alternatives and counter-development initiatives. The re-emergence of indigenous peoples as voices for the environment requires some questioning of current sustainable development approaches, as well as some rethinking of a number of accepted axioms in sustainable development thinking[3].

Human beings have lived in tribal societies for practically all of history. The remaining indigenous peoples offer us an understanding and a living example of the 'human basis' for our existence[4]. They teach modes and forms social and ecological

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[2] For an analysis of the negative impacts, the reader should consult special issues of *The New Internationalist* , *Abayala News*, *Panoscope*, *Cultural Survival*, *Survival*, *Briarpatch*, and *Native Peoples Monthly*.

[3] During the 1990's, the safeguarding of traditional knowledge and bio-genetic resources became a key struggle for indigenous peoples' self-determination.

interaction with which the industrial societies have, for now, lost touch; denigration and de-culturalization of these people stems from the contempt for ways of living that, as western peoples, we may not fully understand. Yet, indigenous peoples, "with their unique knowledge of sustainable management, may hold a key to our collective survival (Cory, 7)." Because most are primarily tribal in their social organization, and others are not fully capitalist, they offer both a tried and tested approach to environmental sustainability, as well as a new perspective on self-reliance.

Among peasant farmers and tribal inhabitants of tropical forests, savannahs, and coastal areas are men and women well versed in the diversity, origins, and uses of local plant life. These individuals perpetuate legacies of cultural knowledge, and "have few peers as stewards of biological resources (Brush, 1996:1)." In fact, their peasant or tribal landscapes are often "de facto botanical gardens of incredible complexity -stores of biodiversity and natural compounds, providing sources of new hybrids (Brush: 2)." Yet this stewardship by so-called 'uneducated farmers' is rarely recognised or rewarded. A possible consequence is that the cultural legacy from the past may be lost as peasant and tribal stewards lose interest in the resources within their fields and forests (Brush: 2).

When modernisation, technological change, or deforestation deplete and run down environments and landscapes, our planet loses biological resources of immeasurable value. Threats to biological diversity of tropical forests and traditional crop inventories also endanger cultures that have nurtured biological resources in the past. However, promoting cultural survival and indigenous knowledge has become an important agenda, not only to members the indigenous community, but also to anyone

interested in the positive contributions of indigenous knowledge and social structure to sustainable development (Brush: 3).

The impact of neoliberalism, capitalism, and industrialization on indigenous peoples, peasant communities and tribal societies has been severe. In their case, the reformulation of the world economy according to the globalisation of capital has not automatically been translated into benefits for traditional, non-accumulating communities. According to leading indigenous rights activists, tribal people's knowledge and innovations have never fully been recognised; rather, they have been expropriated, along with land, resources, etc. Thus, mainstream assumptions on traditional values and spiritual beliefs have left us with inadequate sustainable development ideas.

This thesis offers a case study of the Karoninka of Basse-Cassamance and The Gambia. Its purpose is to consider an expanded definition of sustainable development that incorporates the knowledge of **non-accumulating** cultures as some of its key components, and to validate alternatives to current development practices for indigenous and non-accumulating societies the world over. Research conducted in Senegal and in The Gambia provides new insights into these questions by refuting modern conceptions of forest 'management', sustainable development and indigenous knowledge preservation. By expanding the concept of indigenous people to **non-accumulating** societies, it is then possible to transcend the reductionistic nature of mainstream conceptualiziton of indigenous, tribal, and First peoples. Non-accumulation, in this case, is seen as the determinant upon which the author's analysis is grounded.

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The thesis suggests that recent literature on indigenous peoples has tended to exclude African non-accumulating groups and rural communities[5]. Often, the scope of mainstream research and investigation has been limited to groups who have a relationship with nature that is centred around a reverence to the Earth Goddess, or 'Mother nature" – a parent relationship with nature involving complex ecological taboo systems and religious rituals. In *Wuli, Elan & Inerti*, the author concludes that mainstream literature on indigenous knowledge and cultural survival overlooks African traditional, non-accumulating societies, despite the impressive similarities among indigenous and non-accumulating groups the world-over.

This research proposes that the narrow scope of the literature on indigenous peoples (such as the inhabitants of the Sacred Groves of India, the Quechua, the Ojibwe, and the Rapanui) has produced a reductionistic, narrow definition of the indigenous identity. The picture we are left with, one of Earth-worshiping, ecologically-driven societies, is downright romantic. Subsequently, the author demonstrates that, under the banner of sustainable development, rural and traditional societies have been absorbed through a systemic mainstreaming of the Mother Earth concept. This problem is caused by not treating indigenous and tribal peoples more broadly and generally as non-accumulating people. Indeed, by looking at the particularities of the West African context of the Karoninkas, we can thus expand the definition of indigenous to include not only these "quaint", marginal groups (as well as deity-worshiping societies), but all **non-accumulating** societies. By looking at non-accumulating groups we can thus see that the issue is not one of the "techniques" of preservation or of scientific forest management as

[5] African groups like the Xhosa, Fulani, Khun, Masia, and Pygmies are given significant attention in cultural anthropology. The <u>Gaia Atlas of Indigenous Peoples</u> also refers to the following African groups as

problem/solution, but one of culturally-specific approaches to the environment sustainability stemming from the way non-accumulating societies produce and reproduce. Culture, then, is not disconnected from the material organization of life; it must, however, be better integrated into development theories and approaches to sustainable development.

In undertaking field research in Kalom, Basse Cassamance (Senegal), the researcher expected to encounter 'Earth Mother–worshipping', indigenous groups. Instead, he met the Karoninkas: self-reliant, non-accumulating 'tribals' living in harmony with the land. Unlike similar indigenous groups, the Karoninkas of West Africa organize their lives without abiding by a constricting system of ecological taboos or assigning spiritual or deity properties to animals, plants, trees, and rocks. Above all, Karoninkas do not place Mother Earth at the centre of their existence.

The upcoming chapter emphasizes the perspectives of those who see mainstream sustainable development as a threat to people's autonomy, cultural identity, and holistic relationship with nature. Here, counter and post development views converge to present the reality of people involved in the process of development and 'change'. In subsequent chapters, the author provides an outlook of development practice from the perspective of the grassroots – a view constructed from diverse voices and stories of indigenous, traditional and 'tribal' people. Other themes explored at length include sustainable livelihoods, ecological preservation, natural resource "management", resistance, and, finally, non-accumulation.

'indigenous': Efu, Mbuti, Twa, Fipi, Tuareg, etc.

Chapter 2
Literature Review:

Adopting a Counter and Post-Development Lens

After centuries of capitalist expansion, many are calling for an end to it all. After forty years of western-style development, what, really, is the end result? Four decades after the creation of 'underdevelopment', the results are clear: people everywhere have been pushed to the fringe of society and have been marginalized economically. The last forty years have considerably impoverished and reduced the potential for cultural evolution... the prospect for development is thus quickly disappearing.

Counter development thinkers[6] assert that attempts at development have miserably failed. Counter development is not a paradigm; it is a deconstruction and reconceptualization of conventional development theories. At the root of this critique I is cultural relativism, recognition of the failure of growth, as well as a 'structural' critique of development. At the heart of counter development is also the notion that the development agenda, process and debate, has been culturally and ideologically biased. The argument from cultural relativism is that it is now necessary to "beware the dangers of projecting a philosophy which is embedded too deeply in a particular intellectual tradition or ethnic or cultural framework (Blunt: 3)".

The case for cultural relativism, Brush claims, has a strong hypothetical basis. For example, the logic of resistance to mainstream notions of progress by various peoples

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[6] This movement includes such names as Wolfgang Sachs, Samir Amin, Eduardo Gudyna, Arturo Escobar, Vandana Shiva and Serge Latouche. Counter development attracts thinkers from many professions and areas of specialization. Counter development sensitivities are plural and not reducible to one single view.

is amply supported by research evidence showing that "perceptions of what constitutes participation, as well as views concerning its desirability, vary between cultures (Blunt: 3)." Such variation, according to Blunt, has a lot to do with the differences that exist between cultures regarding attitudes towards such concepts as authority, loyalty, discipline, faith, and respect. In societies that show great respect for authority and high group loyalty, "notions of development by people [will be] significantly different from those in traditional societies which are more egalitarian and individualistic and have high tolerance for uncertainty (Blunt: 3)".

The counter development discourse is a reflection upon the grand project of modernity. It is a meditation on what really happened and what went wrong in recent human history; essentially, according to Sachs, it is a plea for 'self-reflexiveness' - particularly in regards to the exclusive mechanisms of modernity, reason, knowledge, and power (Sachs, 1992: 4)." Rather than being the panacea of modernity's woes, the counter development field is another terrain or filed of contestation; it is a way of looking back at the last 50 years of development – looking, as Sachs says, in the 'rear-view mirror' as a reflection on modernity. Rather than announcing an end to rationality, subjectivity, or history, counter development thinkers indicate that such concepts must be thought of differently in relation to contemporary struggles.

According to Sachs, the emphasis on essentialism and universalism in creating an "Us/Other" category has produced an unbridgeable disjunction. In order to break through this impasse, strategies to unite our diverse experiences for political coalitions and alliances must be devised. It is the intention of counter development to "clear out of the

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way this self-defeating development discourse (Sachs: 4)"[7]. They manage to do so by deconstructing the existing conceptual foundations of the development routine, and by challenging those indigenous peoples involved in popular or grassroots initiatives, "to clarify their perspectives by discarding the crippling, universalizing development talk towards which they are now leaning (Sachs: 4)".

Counter development essentially is an intellectual review of development thinking; it goes to the core of the key concepts under examination and calls to their ethnocentric, culturally-biased nature. In this thought, development has indeed changed the face of the Earth, but not in the way it had intended. Development, according to Sachs, was a misconstrued and misconceived plan to begin with. Ultimately, it is not its failure which we must fear, but its fulfilment, "for development cannot be separated from the idea that all peoples on this planet are moving along one single path towards some state of maturity, exemplified by the nations running in front (Sachs, 1992: 3)". These 'leading' nations have had a 'head start' in the development race; they are nations acting as models to be emulated by countries playing catch-up (Sachs: 3). In this view, indigenous, tribal and peasant peoples are not seen as living diverse and unique ways of living, but as somehow lacking in terms of what has been achieved, produced, and consumed by the more advanced, developed countries of the West.

Since its inception, the development agenda has implied the modernisation of the world, specifically, the 'Westernization' of the world. The result has been an enormous loss of diversity at all levels: "the world-wide simplification of architecture, clothing, and daily objects assaults the eyes; the accompanying eclipse of a varied languages, customs,

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and gestures, is already less visible. (Sachs, 1992: 4)" Technology and the state have all been tremendous universalizing powers. Both have managed to dispose of countless cultural identities and have turned our common ground into a place of boredom deprived of adventure, surprise and difference. The global 'One-ness' promoted by the development agenda is nothing but global ennui in which there is no 'Other' (Sachs:4).

Four decades after the invention of underdevelopment, the historic conditions that had given rise to global development have largely disappeared. The last forty years of development have diminished the potential for cultural evolution the world over. In fact this process was completely stopped in January 1949, when suddenly, 2 billion people became underdeveloped and, in a sense, stopped being what they were (Esteva, 1992: 6). According to Gustavo Esteva, they were transformed 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 homogenising and narrow minority. (Esteva: 7)"

Since then development has but implied one thing: "to escape the condition called underdevelopment (Esteva: 7)." But in order to fathom or conceive escaping from a particular condition, it is necessary to feel that one has fallen into that condition. For those who make up two thirds of the world's population today, "to think of development requires first the perception of [being] underdeveloped", along with the burden of connotations this carries. For these people, development is but a reminder of an undesirable, undignified condition of backwardness; to escape from it, they have to be slaves to the West's experiences, aspirations, and goals (Esteva: 10).

The basic assumption in counter development thinking is that the development agenda did not succeed. A quick look at each of the last development decades will illustrate this point. At the end of the first decade of development (a decade of economic growth and modernization), many factors contributed to humble the optimism about economic growth. The lapses and weaknesses of current policies and processes were more significant than at the beginning of the decade, and it became quite clear that rapid economic growth had subsequently been accomplished by increasing inequalities and disparities between rich and poor countries. By then, Esteva says, "economists were more inclined to acknowledge social aspects as social obstacles (Esteva: 12-13)".

The second decade considered the social and economic aspects of development in conjunction with the first decade that viewed it separately. Its "unifying" approach looked at the primary problems humans were dealing with, and called for intervention from the West. This integrated approach to development later became conceptualized as the Basic Needs Approach.

The 1990's, by contrast, have given birth to a new form of development: "redevelopment". In the West, redevelopment means to develop, again, what was maldeveloped, obsolete, or technologically inappropriate; in the South, redevelopment is equated with the "economic colonization" of the informal sector (Esteva: 16). In the name of development and modernization, redeveloping the South has involved a last onslaught against organized resistance to economic development and the global development agenda. But redevelopment has also extended its tentacles to sustainable development practice. It has, for example, become economically sound to find ways to restore nature and conserve the world's biodiversity, to re-forest, to create

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technologically appropriate ways of preserving the environment, and to promote

ecological sustainability via bioengineering.

Unpacking Mainstream Concepts:

At the heart of economic theory and development economics lies the concept of

scarcity. According to Esteva, the 'law of scarcity' was understood by economists in

terms of the presumption that human wants are great, not to say infinite, whereas means

are limited. This fact "defines the economic problem whose solution is proposed by

economists through the market... popular perception even shares this technical meaning

of the word scarcity, assuming it to be a self-evident truism (Esteva, 1992 :19)."

However, according to Esteva, scarcity implies shortage, rarity, insufficiency, and want -

and this, from a counter development perspective, is precisely the notion that we must

nullify, or do away with (Esteva: 18). The concept of scarcity is non-existent in non-

accumulating societies, who, by definition and practice, have managed to live

sustainably.

Another term pivotal to development which counter development hopes to see

eradicated is the idea of development "equality" -catching up to industrialized countries

through economic endeavours. But, according to Lummis, "this notion goes against both

common sense and economic science"... it is a physical impossibility, for it could be

recognized that different cultures actually have their own standards of value, which

cannot be "subsumed into one another or "rank-ordered on some supra-cultural scale.

(Lummis, 1992: 48)" Hence, it is only logical to give each equal respect and equal voice.

The contrasting notion which is prevalent today, that cultures can be assessed against a

single criterion of living measure, renders all cultures unequal and dispossesses the world's peoples of their indigenous notion of prosperity and identity. Consequently, it also facilitates the practical recruiting and organizing of the world's poor into the global economic system, "whose poverty makes the rich peoples' richness, whose economic powerlessness generates their economic power, whose humiliation generates their pride, and whose dependency generated their autonomy. (Lummis: 48)" Catch-up equality is thus seen as a fable which validates the justification of inequality.

According to Berthoud, mainstream assumptions about cultural values have resulted in a distorted and twisted definition of humanity. In the context of development, says Berthoud, to be human is thought to be "motivated for a constant search for material well-being, mass consumption" - the urge to have more at one's disposal (Berthoud, 1992: 82). This materialistic assumption of betterment has been and remains "a universal value somehow transcending all the particulars of culture and society (Berthoud, 82)". To believe in such a myth, one must hold the structural imbalance between wants and available resources as true. This assumption implies a constant struggle to escape from natural and social constraints, and become an autonomous entity who will exercise the right to 'accumulate' within a culturally recognized and competitive context. Some counter development advocates take this point even further. According to Ivan Illich, the historical movement of the West, under the banner of evolution, progress, growth and development, discovered and imposed 'needs'. In this process, the West has witnessed a transition from self-reliant, common "man", to the needy addict "Homo Miserabilis" (Illich, 1992: 90).[8]

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[8] This term was coined by Ivan Illich. According to Ilich, the human phenomenon is no longer defined by what we are, what we face, take, or dream, nor is it defined by the modern

Through this transition, traditional societies have been labelled as backward and abnormal -not following the "normal" process of evolution. By abnormal, what is meant are societies whose natural inclinations or abilities run in a different direction from that in which the 'meta-culture' is moving, and are therefore unrecorded, unsuccessful, and frustrated. What counter development sees, at the macro level, are developing countries not feeling normal because they lag behind in the 'race', and because they don't have access to modern tractors, fertilizers, hybrid plants, super-seeds, etc. In the eyes of global monoculture, these countries are anomalous; their way towards getting acceptance globally is to engage on the single path of westernization. The same analogy could be made at the micro level of culture, looking at indigenous peoples and how the process of cultural defoliation may have brought about the same feelings of inferiority, and self-depreciation. No matter what, those who chose to "stay behind" will be stuck in the abnormal and backward categories.

What counter development prescribes, then, is tolerance for those who deviate from the cultural standard of the mono-culture, for those not trapped in universalistic trends, for those who want to do things their 'own way'. The objective is for the survivors of 'maldevelopment', for developing nations, for the marginalized, for the grassroots, and for non-accumulating societies to escape modern culture.

Counter development suggests that mainstream economic development has failed because economics, in itself, is a subjective science. According to Ozay Mehmet, far from being value-free, development has been too Western-centered, dismissing alternative worldviews as wrong, abnormal, and utterly irrational (Mehmet, 1995: 136).

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notion that we can produce ourselves out of scarcity, but by the measure of what we lack and need." [Illich, 90]".

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As such, it has consistently attempted "to relocate Western norms, ideologies and solutions into non-western localities as an extension of its socio-economic and political context. (Mehmet: 136)" This transplantation has been divorced from ethics and history ands, as such, is inappropriate to the development challenge facing developing countries. Development has sought to capitalize Third World resources, and has benefited Western interests at the expense of the great majority of the developing world. Even with the best intentions and good faith in progress, mainstream development has nevertheless facilitated the evolution of an increasingly unsustainable and inequitable global economy (Mehmet: 135-6).

Counter development thinkers argue that much of the blame for this outcome should be attributed to the cultural biases behind Western economics. They claim that mainstream development has been formulated by Westerners for Westerners, often through the instrumentality of donor agencies. According to Mehmet, Western aid has promoted economic development of outsiders from a "bird's eye view of an economy to be developed or modernised, in accordance with predetermined models of western thinking (Mehmet:138)". Development ideals are based on notions of accumulation that are western-centric and fundamental and have both a materialist and cultural component. The a-historical and a-cultural approach to economic development has succeeded in rationalizing and justifying globalisation of capitalism in a comprehensive logic of exploitation of non-western human, cultural and natural resources, for the sole purpose of appropriating and concentrating wealth in the West. (Mehmet,1995) According to Wolfgang Sachs, the ideology of development is weakening under the weight of new realities... modernity is coming to an end (Sachs, 1992: 2). Under the cumulative impact

of new challenges, Mehmet writes, "Western capitalism is reaching the limit of exhaustion of conventional goods and services for profitable exploitation (Mehmet: 139)".

Developing countries are ethnically, economically, and culturally non-homogeneous. The assumption of the "self-interested maximizer" conflicts with the realities found in different regions where ethics, history and economics are interlaced into holistic conceptions of the individual, culture, society, state and nature (Mehmet:140). Western economics has caused great damage in that it has destroyed local cultures via the unfruitful quest for accumulation and mass production, the drive for mass consumption, and the fight for individual economic prosperity, which is a cultural component of capitalism. The blind pursuit of individualism has been a global attempt at Westernizing the Third World through successive paradigms and interventions; these have facilitated massive inflows of inappropriate technology, skill transfers and humanitarian aid, followed by mass skill deprivation and de-culturalization.

Overall, strategies for economic and sustainable development have been deductive constructions of outsiders looking in, without adequate historical or cultural knowledge. The very essence of modern society is one based on accumulation, while societies with greater levels of co-operation and tolerance are based on non-accumulation. This, from a counter development standpoint, is precisely what has led to the implementation of technocratic, 'ecocratic', bureaucratic and economic prescriptions lacking any kind of realistic grounding. None of these strategies or concepts of growth have been constructed with an open mind to the actual realities within the developing countries themselves. In this reductionistic view, development is synonymous with

economic growth requiring what Vandana Shiva calls "functional inequality as a condition to growth. (Shiva, 1992: 161)" This is the view that loses sight of the ethics of the process of cultural evolution, ignoring, above all, such human virtues as sharing, co-operation, tolerance, reciprocity, and diversity. Modern (reductionist) science, like development, has excluded ecological and holistic ways of 'knowing' ways that understand and respect nature's processes and interconnectedness as science. (Shiva, 1992: 162)

A Critique of Mainstrean Sustainable Development Concepts:

"All conservationists or environmentalists in the industrialized world lead much less sustainable lives, from an environmental point of view, than do indigenous persons who live in the font-line of rainforest, forest, or habitat destruction." - (Cultural Survival, 1993:11)

Listening to counter development perspectives on global ecology and sustainability allows us to further unpack the hegemony western development. For decades, attempts to implement sustainable development theories on tribal and peasant societies have created an artificial divide between indigenous rights and conservation, between cultural survival and ecological preservation. According to Yash Tandon, people have been made to believe that development means high yields and fast results.

"They are in a hurry, as if running to catch a train to some urgent direction.. there are thus active forces at work which find the alternative model of development a threat to their interests. In other words, the struggle for alternative development strategies is not purely a struggle about appropriate technology.... There are active forces at work to frustrate alternative and sustainable models of development... This artificial divide is a mistake in approaches to these issues... The suffering and pain caused by the cumulative effect of colonial policies, short-sighted development patterns and the denial of indigenous values and lifestyles has been a subject of great criticism by counter and post development thinkers (Tandon, 1993: 208-223)".

Kothari, in Global Ecology, claims that 'tribals' in India "are witnessing an unprecedented range of collective assertions and grassroots mobilization stimulated in

part by the continuing conflict over natural resources, and destructive developmental programmes implemented in the area. (Kothari, 1993: 233)" In recent years, there have been several significant events that have challenged sustainable development as a destructive process that not only generates social and economic insecurities, but also threatens indigenous peoples' social cohesion and identity. (Kothari, 233)

In developing countries, the concept of sustainable development -and the ideas of global consciousness that accompany it, is problematic. The colonization of the world's indigenous populations, under the banner of sustainable development, appears therefore as the latest version of Western development dynamics, "the survival of which must be maintained at all costs. (G. Beney, 1993: 180-1)"

According to Eduardo Gudynas, the establishment of global environmental problems has a radical exclusive characteristic: all regional problems are now of secondary importance compared to the global ones which sustainable development aims at alleviating or reducing (Gudynas, 1993: 174). The ideas, concepts and values proposed by sustainable development theory are all linked to a new discourse: an "eco-cratic" discourse which typifies the thinking among institutions such as the World Bank or the European Community (Gudynas: 171).

Problems with Biodiverity Conservation:

According to Vandana Shiva, the most important step in biodiversity conservation is to control the World Bank's 'planned destruction of biodiversity' (Shiva, 1993: 151). By treating the planet's biodiversity as a global resource, the World Bank has emerged as its protector through the Global Environmental Facility (GEF); similarly, developed

countries have been demanding free access to the South's natural resources through a hotchpotch of proposed conventions. The notion of 'global', in this case, has facilitated a skewed view of a common future, let alone 'common ground' (Shiva, 1993: 152).

In her critique of global development initiatives, Shiva refers to the World Bank's Tropical Forest Action Plan (TFAP), which was projected as responding to a global concern about the destruction of tropical forests. However, when forest movements formed a world wide coalition under the World Rainforest Movement, it became clear, according to Shiva, that TFAP reflected the narrow commercial interests of the World Bank and multinational forestry interests such as Shell, and others. (Shiva: 152) Sustainable development, which UNCED endorsed as the slogan of the 1990's, has inherited the fragility and uncertainty of development. The concept "emasculates the environmental challenge by absorbing it into the empty shell of development, and insinuates the continuing validity of development assumptions even when confronted with a drastically different historical situation. (Sachs, 1993: 9)"

Appropriate conservation of biodiveristy in indigenous territories at the genetic, species, and ecosystem level is primordial to the survival and development of these societies. Yet, the globalisation of the market has, in the last decades, increased the commodification (and subsequent erosion) of biodiversity. Corporations and multi-lateral institutions, in the name of sustainable development, have been focusing on traditional peoples' homelands because they are biologically rich areas.[9]Consequently, indigenous peoples around the globe are facing enormous pressures to commercialise their traditional resources and knowledge. We cannot afford to let corporations, multinationals and national governments divide indigenous peoples and communities and dictate their

economic and environmental priorities, while they seek to plunder and pirate their natural resources.[10]

In general, indigenous populations rely primarily on natural resources for their livelihood; by having successfully established a sustainable mode of production, they have directly or "indirectly" developed methods to ensure the protection of their environment, and of biodiversity. Often, such local resource 'management' strategies are referred to as traditional; however, they are not unchanging. These environmental conservation techniques must be examined in more detail, in an attempt to identify a comprehensive sustainable development strategy. In spite of the external and internal pressures they are facing, indigenous and non-accumulating systems have remained not only viable, but also active in many parts of the world. In the few pockets where they are still in existence today, these systems involve elaborate social, technical, and economic mechanisms to safeguard both culture and ecosystem.

Wilderness Thinking vs. Progressive Conservation: The Sustainability Debate

Over the last century, different approaches to environmental conservation and sustainable development have been adopted in the West. Here, the author discusses the evolution of conservation movements, and looks at the role these have played in alienating humans from nature.

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[9] They are seen as pools of genetic materials for the food, agriculture, and pharmaceutical industries.
[10] In sustainable development and biodiversity literature, intellectual property rights (IPR) has often been proposed as a legal instrument under which indigenous peoples could seek protection for the knowledge and resources that they own.

According to Marglin, the 'establishment' view of sustainable development amounts to a "judicious mix between an updated version of progressive conservation and wilderness thinking. (Marglin, 1993: 197)" Progressive conservation, a movement that began at the start of the century, is the forerunner in sustainable development. The movement advocates the rational use and appropriation of natural resources; it has also implied 'rule of experts', 'ecocracy', as well as centralization. According to Marglin, this outlook has been generalized to include "all agricultural and industrial activities under the rubric of sustainable development (Marglin: 197)". Subsequently, the rule of expert knowledge results in new segments of nature being brought under human dominion for increased and sustained production of profitable natural resources.

Wilderness thinking aims at preserving wild nature from the colonising thrust of development. It views human intervention in nature as inherently destructive and, therefore, remains fundamentally hostile to subsistence farmers and pastorals. The implementation of wilderness thinking in the developing world, usually in the form of parks and reserves, has had disastrous impacts on tribal, peasant, and traditional communities. By definition, wilderness thinking separates the spiritual from the material and, consequently, livelihood from nature. Although it is opposed to current sustainable development trends and progressive conservation on the issue of dominance of nature by humans, "wilderness thinking shares with them both the disconnecting of society from nature and a profound aversion to peasant and tribal ways of life. While progressive conservation places society above ecology, wilderness thinking, on the other hand, places ecology over society. (Marglin: 198)"

By embedding ecology in society, indigenous peoples transcend both of these perspectives. The Sacred Groves of India and the Karoninka *Inerti* 'sanctuaries' are locally designed for the purpose of worship and ritual, are not nature reserves, nor are they wilderness parks. Such protected areas are mere creations of the "consumption phase of industrial capitalism in opposition to, and in conflict with, the ethos of co-operation with nature for increases in production (Marglin: 206)." The sacred groves of India and the *Inerti* sanctuaries of Basse Cassamance and The Gambia are preserved by the people living in these villages for the unique reason that they safeguard their way of life, their continued existence, and their environment.

Today, few conservation agencies continue to believe that the establishment of protected areas[11] will, by itself, assure the preservation of biological diversity: while such spaces attempt to isolate threatened areas from destruction around them, they fail to address the root causes of their destruction. Nevertheless, the creation and expansion of protected areas is seen as a practical way of preserving the greatest amount of biodiversity and remains a priority for many international donor agencies.

The ethic underlying biological diversity conservation is that it fulfils the needs and rights of present and future generations. But this raises the question —conservation for whom? Conservation advocates have only recently come to realize that the establishment of most national parks and protected areas has had negative effects on their prior inhabitants. In fact, some conservation movements have been reluctant to acknowledge that indigenous groups (and other local residents) have any rights in protected areas. Often, the social, cultural, political and environmental problems caused by transplanting people out of protected areas are justified in strictly environmental

terms. But such relocations eventually disrupt neighbouring lands, ecosystems, and environments into which the residents have been displaced.

People are confined to small and inappropriate land areas where traditional social institutions and patterns of land 'management' and tenure, which previously regulated access to resources, are undermined. The net results, and immediate impacts, are environmental and cultural degradation. The establishment of protected areas without taking into account the needs and rights of local people will inevitably create societal breakdown, thus threatening the long-term viability of the parks and reserves.

Environmentalism and Forest Management: Foreign Concepts.

The preoccupation with protected has areas created an obsession with conservation which, in turn, has resulted in the 'forest management' agenda. According to Scheffer, environmentalism has its roots in conservation –"the preservation and careful use of natural resources. (Scheffer: 3)" However, in the years after World War II, the West learned that relying on conservation alone "would not enable humanity to survive indefinitely in surroundings which daily were growing more dangerous, ugly and impoverished. (Scheffer: 3)" During the first half of the century, the West witnessed the management of public parks, forests, soils, watersheds, and wildlife by national and international agencies. According to Scheffer, "the old belief that property rights were absolute was giving way to the notion that some things actually belong to all. (Scheffer: 6)"

Yet, while conservation theory focused on the *"what's* and *how's"* of managing resources, it seldom touched on the *"WHY's"*.

The literature on the Sacred Groves of India and on the many 'indigenous' communities examined in this thesis has provided new insights into this question by flatly refuting the modern conceptions of forest management (as promoted under the sustainable development rubric). The Sacred Grove is not a nature reserve, nor is it a wilderness park. Those are but mere creations of what Marglin sees as the "consumption phase of industrial capitalism in opposition to, and in conflict with, the ethos of co-operation with nature for increases in production (Marglin: 206)." Sacred Groves are preserved by the people living in these villages for the sole reason that they safeguard their way of life, their continued existence and their environment.

Among peasants of coastal Orissa ,"culture and society are imbedded in nature, while the spiritual is embedded in the material. (Marglin: 206)" In their case, no amount of planning for sustainable development can perpetuate their sustainable way of life. For this to happen, rediscovering and respecting the practices that have preserved their environment is the more viable option. The model of wildlife reserves that has been transplanted in the developing countries, has, above all, deculturalized the communities living from the forests. According to Marglin, "the sacred groves can not only be the regenerative principle for the local communities, but for forests in India in general (Marglin: 206)." As Marglin argues, when the commons of the local communities are still protected by the great Goddess, India's nature, biodiversity, and peasant culture are preserved, and are rendered sustainable.

It is apparent that there are many ways of dealing with the forests -that of sustainable development advocates and administrators, and that of the tribal peoples -one imposed and parasitic... the other inherent and symbiotic. "Conversely, the tribal way of life is also a way of 'management'. What is often referred to as 'peasant culture' preserves and perpetuates the environment because the tribals and the forests are interdependent... no [human beings] will deliberately destroy his own home (Rahnema, 1997: 34)"

If such aspects of a society are not included in the development process, little will be gained from it. Development, in theory and in practice, necessitates the study of shared values. Spirituality, kinship, the role of elders, and agricultural practices are just as important as market transactions and political activities of a people. The notion that indigenous culture is a barrier to sustainable development is a current of thought that exists in mainstream development literature. In fact, conceptions of tribalism and assumptions about the traditional attitudes and beliefs of indigenous people are held up as an explanation for the failure of past development projects. Their relationship with the ecosystem, their spiritual beliefs, and their ritual practices are often regarded as the reasons why their environment becomes degraded, and why their subsistence economy fails to grow (Corry, 1993; *Survival for Tribal Peoples*, 1993: Scheffer,).

This thesis examines various cases of indigenous peoples' interaction with nature which escape the logic of sustainable development as described above. The main conclusions are drawn from field research undertaken in The Gambia and Senegal, where the author spent several weeks studying the Karoninka ethnic group. True to the 'Grounded Theory' style, the author did not go into the field with a pre-determined set of

questions and hypothesis, but instead allowed assumptions and realities to unfold through discussions and observations. The reality emerging from the case of the Karoninkas suggests that sustainable development (in the context of ecological and cultural preservation) can be 'improved' by focusing on the concept of non-accumulation as opposed to indigenous spirituality. The critical issue is that we must recognize that indigenous peoples might differ in spirituality; specifically, they do not all embrace concepts of Mother Earth, Mother Nature, or Earth Goddess. Moreover, to focus on just one type of relationship with nature is to adopt a romanticized view of indigenous peoples. For the Karoninkas, the key to sustainability and survival lies in non-accumulation... not Mother Nature.

The Karoninkas of Kalom cannot follow a universal, mainstream, or romantic path to development; in fact, they actually prove that no such paths exist. The Karoninkas have their own form of societal evolution; it is a holistic, non-accumulating approach to development that, using the words of Mehmet Ozay, "entails inter-generation equity" as well as harmonization of animism and human needs, and the preservation of biodiversity and ecosystems. (Mehmet, 1995: 136)

Chapter 3
METHODOLOGY:

Grounding our Theory:

"The Cassamance mangrove forest is thick, vast, and reminiscent of Amazon movie scenes. Blue herons, perched on propped roots, keep stoic company to mud skippers and white-clawed crabs. A pyrogue is taking us along the intertwining, serpentine rivers of coastal Cassamance. On our way to Kailo, Boun Hilol and Casel, on our journey to the *Thiossan* -the birthplace of Karoninkas, the only access to the birth home is via river channels. The boat is full and Joseph strikes up a conversation with an 'old pa' whose weathered hands shake as he speaks in a raspy, '*soumsoum*' voice. Upon understanding my purpose in Kalorn, he informs us of the sudden cancellation of the Kayorn Kalorn festival, to have been held in Boun. My plans are ruined...off to the bush, for god knows how long, I'm drifting into the unknown , with a bottle of water and a dictaphone in hand." J.F. Beauchesne, field notes.

A grounded theory, according to Strauss, is one that is "inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents... it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. (Strauss, 1990: 24)" Here, data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other. Using this method, the researcher does not begin with a theory, hypothesis or research question and then try to prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study, a broad question or research idea...what is relevant is then allowed to emerge.

The main assumption behind this model is that if theory is faithful to the every day reality of the substantive area and carefully induced from diverse data, then it should fit that data. Because the theory represents a reality, it is comprehensible and makes sense both to the individuals who were 'studied' and to the researcher. If the interpretations upon which it is based are conceptual and broad, then the theory will be abstract enough;

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it will include ample variation to make it applicable to a variety of contexts related to that experience.

Grounded theory is, according to Strauss and Corbin, a qualitative research method that uses a "systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived theory about a phenomenon. (Strauss: 24)" The research findings constitute a theoretical, qualitative formulation of the reality under investigation, rather than consisting of a set of numbers. Through this methodology, the concepts and relationships among them are not only generated but they also are tested. Grounded theory method allows us to build a theory that is faithful to and sheds light on the area and/or people under study. "Researchers working in this tradition also hope that their theories will ultimately be related to others within their respective disciplines in a cumulative fashion, and the theory's implications will have useful application. (Straus: 25)"

The grounded theory method was selected because it allowed the researcher to create a theoretical framework founded upon a multitude of school of thoughts, development perspectives, and academic disciplines. What counts here are the procedures (and these are not discipline-bound). Grounded theory also provides the researcher with a creative license –and creativity, according to Strauss, "is a vital component of grounded theory (Strauss: 24)". It forces the researcher to break through assumptions and to create 'new order out of the old'. Creativity is manifest in the "ability of the researcher to make the free associations that are necessary for generating stimulating questions and for engaging in comparisons that lead to discovery. (Strauss: 25)"

Surveying through Narratives, Conversations, and Songs:

"The ability of the objects of social science research to converse with each other and with the scientific investigator is so vital that it cannot be disregarded in any well rounded study." (Palmer, 1928: 168-9)

Conversation was a crucial element of this field research. Hence, the "unstructured interview as a conversation" was thought to be most appropriate qualitative method for the research objective of this thesis. The conversations of human beings are an important part of the data of social research, as well as an important part of social research technique (Palmer: 169) In this particular context, conversations provided crucial data for the researcher, as well as being engaging methods of investigation.

By using unstructured interviewing techniques as forms of conversation, the author incorporated elements of everyday life into the execution of his field research. The unstructured interview provided the researcher with an opportunity to probe deeply, to uncover new clues, and to acquire accurate, inclusive accounts and stories from informants that are based on personal (lived) experience. Here, a standard set of pre-determined questions would have been far too constricted or narrow. As a result, unstructured interviews assumed the appearance of natural conversations throughout the research.[12] The challenge, for this novice interviewer, was to maintain a 'controlled' conversation, and to guide and direct it as appropriate. The researcher kept the informants relating personal experiences and attitudes that were relevant to his broad research ideas or questions. Open, trusting dialogues were sustained, hence encouraging the informant

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[12] This does not mean, however, that they were not genuine.

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to freely discuss these experiences.[13] Also, integration within the Karoninka community

in Serrekunda was rapid. Over repeated visits, the researcher became an accepted

member of the Karoninka setting, thus allowing him to understand the positions that

informants and interviewees adopted in various situations, as well as their views on such

topics as development, the environment, and Western influence.

Literature on grounded theory suggests that different types of questions can be

used to encourage informants to talk about particular situations. For the purpose of this

research, all types were used contextually. The first type is known as the "devil's

advocate" position question, in which the informant is presented with an opposing point

of view. In this respect, it was often possible for the researcher to discover the

informant's feelings, opinions or stance through given responses. Secondly, the

researcher posed hypothetical questions in order to find out what an informant might do

in particular circumstances. Finally, after having established a trusting relationship with

his informants, the researcher began to offer his interpretations of situations, ideas,

events, conditions, practices, and beliefs. This took place towards the end of the research

programme and stimulated informants to ground the researcher's findings, or to respond

with counter-information and facts setting him on a different line of investigation.

(Strauss: 23-26)

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[13] Based on the Strauss model, the researcher would offer comments and remarks, together with an occasional question designed to keep the subject on his main theme or to stimulate the conversation when it lagged...

Data Collection and Analysis:

Following the mode of analysis in the grounded theory approach, the actual transcribing of field notes was selective; the very first interviews and conversations with village elders were entirely transcribed and analyzed before moving on to the next field of observations. This provided guidance for the next field encounters, discussions, and informal interviews. Questions investigated the Karoninka relationship with the land, spiritual connection to the forest, burial grounds and ancestral lands, shamanism, dependence on the forest for livelihood, impact on development projects on the ecosystem, holistic view of nature, resistance to development and western education, and Karoninka definitions of sustainability and development. The interviews were informal, and flexible. Much of the information given by elders was extracted from narratives, myths and songs. *Esumpan* (local tobacco) and *elan* were often presented as gifts in hopes of facilitating the interview process, especially with village chiefs and elders.

The researcher 'hired' a research assistant and translator, Joseph Demba, whose term commenced in early October; this was deemed early enough for the researcher to spend three weeks studying the Karoninka dialect. Together with Mr. Demba, the researcher requested permission to attend village ceremonies and to interview residents from village chiefs. Local Gambians were also consulted in order to obtain background information on the collected history of the Ajaamat ethnic group; resources consulted in the field included reference materials by Patience Sonko-Godwin, a historian having published several books and essays on the history of various Sene-Gambian ethnic groups. A highly respected Ajaamat woman, owner of a batik shop, and teacher in the art

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of batiking was also interviewed. A local sociologist and member of the National Socialist Party was consulted on the evolution of Ajaamat society in The Gambia. The initial research question was approached in two ways: by looking at a variety of indigenous groups using indigenous publications, journals, magazines (Chapters 1 and 2), and by conducting primary research with the Karoninka of Cassamance and The Gambia (Chapter 3).[14]

In chapter 4, indigenous peoples are identified and defined using various case studies from several 'mainstream' publications, as well as contemporary literature on indigenous peoples, tribal rights, and cultural survival. Debates surrounding indigenous culture, religion and spirituality, land ownership, ecosystem interaction, and agricultural production were addressed.

In chapter 4, the author presents case studies on the Sacred Groves of India, the Ojibwe people of North America, and the Quechua, Rapanui, and Mayans of Latin America. Chapter 5 narrates the primary research undertaken with the Karoninka people of The Gambia and Basse Cassamance, Senegal. The Karoninka population of Kalom is dispersed between three main villages (Kuba, Hilol, and Kailo); these villages were visited for a period of 3-5 days, during which the author met with village elders, traditional healers, herbalists, palm wine tapers, and spiritual leaders. Five visits were made to the Gambian village of Darsilameh, from mid-November to mid March. On two separate occasions, focus groups of Karoninka elder women on women's issues were held in Kuba and Darsilameh. Ajaamat and Karoninka youths were also invited to informal gatherings and discussion groups at the author's compound; there, the

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[14] The Karoninkas are an Ajaamat (or Jola) sub-ethnic group of primarily subsistence farmers living in Darsilameh, The Gambia, and in the Kalom area of Basse Cassamance, Senegal.

discussions aimed at analyzing the cultural evolution between generations; issues of cultural diffusion, cultural gaps, and enculturation were examined. In addition, informal research was conducted on a daily basis. In an attempt to build a relationship of trust with his 'informants', the author hired Joseph Demba[15] as his research assistant, guide and translator. Significant information was collected, and many observations were recorded; extracts of the research journal are used in upcoming chapters.

Visiting the Karoninkas and recounting their story addresses our initial question thereby leading us to a re-conceptualization of the "indigenous" identity. For a period of approximately 1 ½ months, the author conducted qualitative field research in The Gambia and Basse Cassamance. The research consisted primarily of unstructured interviews with members of the Karoninka community.[16] Spending time with the Karoninkas and listening to their stories revealed significant differences between African non-accumulating societies and Mother Earth-worshipping indigenous groups (as described in chapter 4). Using this comparative method of analysis, the author was able to look at a variety of issues in culturally-specific contexts.

Using qualitative research method, unstructured interviews, and casual conversations, this author designed an inductively derived theory of the mainstreaming of Mother Earth. The upcoming chapters advance research findings that constitute a theoretical and qualitative formulation of the Karononika reality. Through this methodology, this author generated and explored the concept of non-accumulation, all the

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[15] Mr. Demba and the author quickly became good friends. This friendship created many opportunities for the author to fully immerse himself in Karoninka society by attending celebrations, weddings, funerals, and other ceremonies.
[16] Due to the mounting tensions between Cassamance separatist rebels and Senegalese government troups, the amount of travel to Cassamance had to be limited to the months preceding Ramadan; there were rumours of reprisals by Cassamance separatists following Ramadan.

while building a theory that is faithful to, and illuminates the case of the Karoninkas.

Chapter 4
Indigenous People:
Worshipping the Earth as a Mother

Part 1. Defining the Indigenous Identity

According to Brush, two definitions of indigenous knowledge exist. A somewhat broader definition refers to popular (or folk) knowledge that can be contrasted to "formal and specialised knowledge that defines scientific, professional, and intellectual elites in both Western and non-Western societies (Brush, 1996: 4)." In contrast, formal knowledge is typically found or situated in "written texts, legal codes, and canonical knowledge (Brush: 4)". Hence, indigenous knowledge is culture-specific, whereas formal knowledge is, in a sense, de-cultured.

A more narrow definition refers to knowledge systems of indigenous people and of minority cultures. For the purpose of this thesis, the concept of indigenous knowledge is used in this narrow sense -referring to the knowledge of indigenous groups rather than local (folk), or informal knowledge in general. This more restricted usage derives in part from the desire of cultural anthropologists like Marvin Harris to "validate the knowledge systems of cultures or languages that are subordinated and often depreciated by the dominant national culture and threatened with extinction (Brush: 5)."

Human culture, according to Marvin Harris, is "the total socially acquired life-style of a group of people including patterned, repetitive ways of thinking, feeling, and acting." (Harris, 1979: 106) Taken in its wide ethnographic sense, culture is a complex whole that includes

"knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by a man as a member of society... The condition of culture among the various societies of mankind, in so far as it is capable of being investigated on general principles, is a subject apt for the study of laws of human thought and action" (Harris: 106).

'Indigenous' Culture:

Indigenous peoples have increasingly become the focus of the counter and post development. Within these few remaining traditional societies, counter development thinkers have identified important alternatives to the efforts of the development industry and to the encroachment of capitalism and commodization. The terms 'indigenous' and 'traditional' are often defined in relationship to the use of land and co-existence with the environment. Indigenous knowledge includes knowledge of soils and nutrients, hunter's knowledge of animals an birds, shaman's ability to predict weather patterns and make rain, and complex systems of rules and restrictions concerning nature's exploitation. Beyond indigenous peoples' outlook of nature, their social organization -as egalitarian, non-accumulating, and producing with low levels of technology, is worth attention.

Traditional and Vernacular: the "Pre-Development" Societies

Most of the world's remaining indigenous peoples live in vernacular communities. A vernacular space, such as a village or a community, may look simple or even primitive from the outside, but it actually represents a microcosm with a different and highly complex universe of its own. According to Rahnema, the vernacular society is a complex, eclectic, and multifarious web of human solidarities that have been "woven, throughout the ages, between the members of a social group."(Rahnema, 1997: 113) It often exudes a sense of belonging or cohesion to a group; in that sense, vernacular

societies differ radically from the more competitive, 'economized' societies of the West. They have a specific organic connection: "their structures are a living tissue of social and cultural relations defining the activities of their members and protecting them against possible dangers... It is this tissue of human solidarities that preserves the community's immune system. (Rahnema: 123)"

Vernacular societies are generally shaped by a limited number of members; the social, cultural and material needs of these communities are, in principle, simple and restricted. According to Rahnema, "what is considered to be necessary and desirable for them to live in dignity is defined by both tradition and by their collective capacity to meet their culturally defined needs. (Rahnema: 112)" A vernacular society does not believe that it must, at all costs, maximize its resources, for, as Rahnema claims, its functionality is not based on the idea that the needs of its members are without limits. Furthermore, greed is actually perceived as a vice; consequently, it considers that "the restriction of needs to the minimum dictated by the socio-economic and natural environment ensures the cohesion of the social tissue, to the benefit of everyone. (Rahnema: 114)" Social and cultural organization is thus ultimately based on principle of **non-accumulation**.

Although the productive activities play an important role in the functioning of vernacular societies, they are, according to Rahnema, embedded in socio-cultural relations and interactions. The vernacular economy is a sort of social endeavour in which individuals are involved with "the common goal of strengthening the community's immune system.... [on another level], the usual stimulus of a worker is not profit, but reciprocity, competition, pleasure of work and the approval of society. (Rahnema: 113-

128)" The resources that vernacular societies consider essential for their survival are defined, produced and consumed at the local level.

According to Rahnema, members of vernacular communities share 'prudent' attitudes towards innovation and progress. Change can only be justified when it is viewed as a way of doing things better, and when it benefits the larger community. (Rahnema: 115). Vernacular societies have another trait in common: "a kind of inherent care of the physical environment. (Rahnema: 114)" Their instinctive concern for a noble, 'clement' environment is, however, very different from contemporary notions of ecological sustainability. In their reality, nature is not perceived as an additional 'super-resource' that has to be managed in a scientific and cost-effective fashion; it is, rather, a "God-given source of life without which it would be unimaginable to live."(Rahnema: 115).

Alternative approaches to sustainable development are found in the study of indigenous peoples, especially in the growing recognition of the existence of environmental knowledge and experience within traditional cultures. Indeed, an attempt has been made to incorporate the viewpoints of traditional societies into the international debate on the environment. More and more, indigenous voices have been heard aloud, and in some cases, have even brought weight to decisions that are adopted by development institutions.

The Mainstreaming of the Indigenous Voice:

Recent literature on cultural survival, First Peoples, and indigenous knowledge asserts that traditional cultures are repositories of vast accumulation of knowledge and experience that link humanity with its ancient origins. The disappearance of such cultures

is inevitably seen as a loss for society at large –a society which can learn a great deal from their traditional skills in the sustainable management of very complex ecological systems.

According to Gro Harlem Brundtland, the starting point for a just and humane policy for indigenous peoples is the recognition and protection of their traditional rights to land and natural resources that sustain their livelihood. These rights often do not fit into western, capitalistic, or liberal-democratic legal systems. In fact, indigenous peoples must have their own institutions to regulate rights and obligations for maintaining harmony with nature and the environmental awareness characteristic of their traditional way of life. "The recognition of traditional rights and beliefs must go hand in hand with measures to protect local institutions that enforce responsible resource use, and this recognition must also give local communities a decisive voice in decisions concerning resource use in their area. (Brundtland, 1993: XIII)" According to Brundtland, protection of traditional resource rights must be accompanied by measures to enhance the well-being of communities in ways that are culturally appropriate to their life-style.

As the World Commission stated in its report, Our Common Future, "it is a terrible irony that as formal development reaches more deeply into rainforests, deserts, and other isolated environments, it tends to destroy the only cultures that have proved able to thrive in these environments.(Brudtland,: XIV)" The marginalisation of 'traditional' cultures is a symptom of a development agenda that neglects both human and environmental considerations. And this is why a more careful and sensitive consideration of their interest is a "touchstone" of a sustainable development policy. (Brundtand: XVIII-XIX).

For generations, 'traditional' cultures have been labelled as living in harmony and in balance with the natural environment. These cultures generally have been characterized by their utmost respect for nature, and by their ability to live within its constraints. Their very survival has depended on their ecological awareness and adaptability. The isolation of many such cultures due to physical barriers and differences in social and cultural practices has helped preserve their traditional ways of life. However, with the gradual advance of so-called development into areas rich in natural resources, indigenous peoples are now among those most affected by environmental degradation. Exploitation of natural resources disrupts local environments, thereby endangering traditional ways of life[17](Brundtland: XVIII-XIX).

Interaction with modern society has excluded indigenous peoples from the process of global economic development. Social discrimination, cultural barriers, and exclusion from national political processes have made their people vulnerable. Many groups have become dispossessed and marginalized, and their traditional cultures have disappeared: they are the victims of "cultural extinction".

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[17] According to Fenrandes, the inhabitants of these regions have often been deprived of access to their traditional

Part 2. Remnants from the Past

A) Sacred Groves at a Glance

There are but a few aspects of the ecological heritage highlighting the culture of sacred landscape where traditions go back a hundred years –and where there is a unique connection between people, their way of living and the natural world can be found.

In Orissa, surrounding the Amman shrine, is a thick grove of trees which is the sacred grove, the repository of unique and rare plants. This is the home of many insects, birds, reptiles, animals, and plants - a "storehouse of the country's diverse natural wealth." (Fernandes, 1988: 148) Unfortunately, these groves have gradually been encroached upon by agricultural development; this, according to Fernandes, has reduced these repositories of ancient culture, wisdom, and diversity to mere pockets of trees, shrubs, and plants. In this case, the sacred groves of India are seen as the last repositories of biodiversty, and culture. Similarly, in Tamil Nadu, almost every village has an Arasa Maram -the peepal tree on the banks of lakes or rivers.

"The peepal tree is considered an auspicious tree and a Pillaiyar idol sits below, alone or with a Naga (snake). While people worship the tree and circumambulate it, it is said in the month of Margazhi that this serves as a good exercise for inhaling oxygen released from the tree, which also has medicinal properties. The vila tree (Aegle marmelos) is associated with Siva. The vilva is said to have medicinal properties (Fernandes, 149).

Indeed, sacred groves stress the need to conserve or preserve one's cultural and ecological heritage. In fact, based on Fernandes's sacred grove study, it can be concluded that the tribal's culture, beliefs, and practices were "geared to maintaining a balance between human and ecological needs." (Fernandes: 160) Such a balance was essential because, given the extent of their dependence on their environment, there always was the

land and water.

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danger of over-exploitation if some kind of social control was not implemented or exercised. As part of this control there evolved different kinds of taboos and prohibitions concerning the use of forest resources; these controls were "legitimized by giving a religious basis through myths." (Fernandes: 160) Thus there existed tales of goddesses who were angered by the cutting of certain species of trees and destroyed the whole village of the offender in particular. Animals and birds were also protected by the same set of values and beliefs (Gadgil, in Fernandes, 1988: 160).

Throughout the Sacred Groves, restrictions on use took the following forms. These restrictions, enforced on forest dwellers all over, can be classified under four categories:

1. Restrictions confining exploitation to certain resources: for instance, the *nakhdun* plant is harvested only during the communal festival and its harvest is otherwise forbidden during the rest of the year;

2. Restrictions based on certain stages of life; for example, numerous tribes traditionally did not kill fawns, pregnant does, or fish during spawning season;

3. Restrictions on cutting of sacred species: as in the *banyan* and the *peepal* trees, which are protected throughout rural India;

4. Restrictions on quantity exploited: in several parts of India, every family is allotted a fixed quota of timber and fuel (e.g. one headload of fuel wood per week).

(Fernandes: 160-162)

Apart from giving protection to individual trees and restricting the use of others, the 'tribals', claims Fernandes, protect their entire ecosystems. In the tribal areas such protection has traditionally been accorded to three systems known as the *sarna*, the

akhra, and the *sasan* (Fernandes, 162). These ecosystems symbolize the symbiotic

relationship between the tribals and the forests. The *sarna* was a plot with several

hectares of thick forest growth in which the tribal teenagers were initiated into adulthood;

the *akhra* was the tribal dancing ground, and *sasan,* the burial ground (Fernandes,162).

Such sacredness attributed to the ecosystem is essential for the 'tribals' if they

were to protect their life system. Apart from setting apart a few places as sacred, it "(was)

essential to build myths and stories both around these spots as well as around the rest of

the forest and trees." (Fernandes: 162). This, Fernandes argues, is because mere social

control without divine legitimisation is difficult to enforce in traditional society; and that

is precisely what the 'tribals' have done in rural India, particularly in Orissa (Fernandes:

163).

The 'tribal' religion of Orissa is centred around nature, where an abundance of

gods, spirits, and ghosts dwell in trees, plants, animals, birds, and rocks; these have to be

worshipped and kept satisfied for fear of being provoked into destroying the individual,

the family or the entire village (Fernandes: 163). Significantly, such beliefs are closely

related to the preservation of the species needed the most for their economic and

ecological balance. "Most of these beliefs and stories link species to the origin of the

tribe," thus linking the survival of the tribe with the preservation of the species.

(Fernandes: 163)

Myths of Creation:

The first series of myths is centred around the creation of the world, or the origin

of the tribe, attributed to some animal or tree. Celebrations, beliefs, myths and legends

signifying the need for preserving a species exist in all tribes. Most of them show a relationship between the tribe and the species concerned; an example is the *Kalahandi* district where the tiger is treated as a brother. If a tiger dies, the neighbouring village is expected to bury it with all the elaborate funeral rites which are observed when one's brother dies (Fernandes: 164-65).

Other forms of sacredness suggest protection of trees by showing their usefulness. According to Didaysis of Koraput, " when the world sank under water, the supreme being made a new world without trees. Slowly, however, the suffering of all human beings made him realise the need for timber for housing and fuel purposes, for cooking and shade of trees for resting. So he produced seeds from the dirt on his body, planted them and looked after them... other trees grew from the seedlings. (Fernandes: 165)" In Dhenkanal, *sahada* trees were considered so sacred that all vegetation surrounding them, and sometimes the entire villages, was protected. This was to ensure that *sahada* was not cut by accident, and in the process, the village community was protected. (Fernandes: 166)

These are but a few examples of traditional beliefs that ensure protection of the ecosystem. Such environmental protection, however, is granted not merely in the Orissa region, but in all forest areas of India. (Fernandes: 166) All over the country, *banyan*, *peepal* and several other trees form an intrinsic part of religious beliefs and practices, not exclusively of the tribals, but of most rural populations. They are thus protected from destruction. Moreover, according to Fernandes, those species that have great 'economic' and medicinal worth, play an important role in their rituals and ceremonies. Predominant among the religious ceremonies of Orissa forest dwellers are the *Bana Devata* (forest

god) which ensure the protection of the local population and the steady supply of forest products; other celebrations are all linked to the forest. (Fernandes: 166)

Across several countries, regions, and continents, many of the earth's indigenous people live according to similar structures and beliefs as described above. There is indeed great resemblance among native peoples; along with the 'tribals' of the sacred groves, a significant number of indigenous groups share a belief in "Mother Earth, "Mother Nature" or the "Earth Goddess". The following section allows us to understand the different ways in which many indigenous groups are bound in a partnership with Mother Earth, or similar forms of divination.

B) The Innu of Nitassinan (Labrador and Eastern Québec)

The Innu used to live in a region called Nutshimit, where they had hunted and gathered since time immemorial. According to Tanien Ahini, the town of Sheshatshui used to be a summer trading place -until the Canadian government convinced and forced the Innu into settling the area, and then began to deplete the land. Over the years, village life worsened, and the Innu hunting way of life became threatened. Tanien Ahini, an Innu belonging to the first generation born in Sheshatshui, began a program of non-violent action aimed at the Canadian government; its aim was simple: preserving the Nutshimit, and restoring traditional values and practices among Innus (Ahini: 14-15). According to Ahini, "in the country we do things that are meaningful, that enrich us, that give us pride and enhance our self-esteem... We are also able to practice our traditional religion in the country. The religion is based on a belief in animal masters and other forest spirits... Our elders communicate with the animal masters through dreams, drumming, steam tents, and

a form of divination called *matnikashaucu*." (Ahini, 1997: 15-16) The Innus achieve

sustainability by not overhunting or overtraping in areas where animals are scarce. A

profound respect for nature and its 'animal masters' forms the basis of their relationship

with the Earth Mother. (Ahini: 14-18)

C) Mayan Civilization:

The Mayan civilization of Mesoamerica has managed to survive five hundred

years of colonization –a process begun by the Conquistadores and perpetuated by their

descendants. Today, most of the Mayans can be found in Guatemala, where they make up

a mosaic of twenty-two sub-ethnic groups. Despite the numerous onslaughts of

colonization, the Mayans have preserved the traditional 'cosomovison' that describes the

Mayan interaction with the world.

For Mayans, "time and space are primogenital gods, and nature is the superior

force from which emanates the authority that gives direction to life and to the

reproduction of all beings." (Chay, 1997: 21) Mayas believe that all nature is life with

each animal, stone and river having its own "*nahual*" –divine personification. According

to Queme Chay, "the logic of capitalist productive and economic organization, as in

industrial and productive versions of historic socialism, is accumulation... the logic of

ethnic-Indian economies, whether in the form of home or small market production, is

anti-accumulation. (Chay: 120-22)"

To this, the communal leader of the Quiche ethnic group adds that human beings

bend to the design of nature, which they do not consider alien to themselves and which

they cannot exploit without mercy. The irrational use of the natural resources made

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available to humans is a sin. "The Mayan farmer must observe certain propitiatory rituals and asks forgiveness for the wound he is about to inflict **on Mother Earth**. (Chay: 30)"

For the Maya, **Mother Earth** is sacred and humans are part of nature. Mayans claim that full integration of Mayas state level will lay the foundation for a new societal structure that is the precondition for harmonious, sustainable and environmentally –sound development. (Chay: 31)

D) The Quechua of Central and South America:

"We Indians deify all nature's forces, not because we're afraid or because we see them as something supernatural, but because we have known and understood the truth of their laws. We treat them with respect and recognize the benefits of life that we receive from them. Religion itself, and all the rites we use to worship [the holy Pacha Macha] **Mother Earth**, are expressions of a mutual relationship between man and the cosmos. We indigenous people only want to live in communion with nature. Any violation of its laws and physical integrity is also an act of violence against our societies and our people themselves. **All the world's people have their roots in one natural and common spirit**. It is we Indians who are today's guardians of this spirit, a spirit that shapes an entire system of life, in spite of the insurgence and domination of the Western system, which, in our eyes, is anti-nature and egoistic"
(Palomino, 1997: 45-46)

According to the Quechua "cosmovision", unity is the couple, not the individual; this is the one belief that encapsulates, in their practical expression, the laws of nature. As a 'conquered' people, their socio-cultural universe has been buried under theories and concepts of experts who have consistently misinterpreted the Quechua value and belief systems. Misinterpretations have occurred either through prejudice, lack of appreciation for that which is different, or "as decodification of a culture in line with the demands of the oppressor's culture. (Palomino: 46)" For the Quechua, it seems illogical that through "western thinking, idealism, anthropocentrism, and class inequality are extolled. (Palomino: 47)" Only western religious thinking conceives an invisible world populated by gods who are themselves invisible – a world that is over and above the cosmic reality.

For them, religion is really a way of life, knowing, understanding, and living side by side with the forces of nature in holy mutual harmony. (Palomino: 45-60)

E) The Rapanui of Easter Island:

"We can't touch the Earth, because it doesn't belong to us. It is the property of the gods who have given it to us" (Chavez, 1997:62)

The Rapanui make up the majority of the population of Easter Island. While the island is currently a province of Chile, with its governor in Santiago, the Rapanui have nonetheless managed to hold on to their ancestral form of self-government. (Chavez: 61) In Rapanui culture, respect for the Earth, the plants, and the ecosystem is directly linked with "man". "Man" is nothing if there are no plants, winds, no water. "Man" needs all these elements provided by **Mother Earth** just to live, and that is why the Earth is seen as something given by the god to all men. In their cosmovision, "man" must relate to and harmonize with Earth and Nature, making rational use of all that they offer, because the trees plants, water, and stones are their "brothers", are part of "man himself". For the westerner, "the Earth is something that can be given away, sold, pawned, mortgaged, but not for the Rapanui. (Chavez: 62)"

F) The Ojibwe of Canada:

"When we begin to separate ourselves from that which sustains us, we immediately open up the possibility of losing our responsibility and our kinship to the earth... When we view the world simply through the eyes of human beings we create further distance between our world and ourselves... When the perceived needs of one spirit being is held is above all others, equality disappears... We can view the things of the earth as resources to be used for our own benefit. We can take without thought for the consequences... We can trick ourselves into believing that our life and the life of others have improved... While doing all of this, we can quite readily forget that at some point in time the earth will no longer be able to give and we will no longer be able to take. As the separation between human beings and the earth widens, so the chances of our survival lessen. (Clarckson, Morrissette, and Regalet, 1997: 42)"

For the Ojibwe, spiritual consciousness is the highest form of politics. The 'old people' play a central role in many aspects of the daily life of the people. They are the transmitters of the culture itse'f. Through legends and stories they impart to all members, including children, the history of the people and the deep understanding of their relationship to **Mother Earth**. They provide advice and guidance when someone does not know what to do –" they advise the appointed leaders by calling upon their years of experience and knowledge of their role and relationship to the Creation. (Clarkson: 42)"

A tradition that has a continued impact is the Ojibwe thanksgiving tradition; it requires human beings to place themselves in a humble position relative to the natural world and to consider, in one mind, the contributions of these other species to our well-being and survival. It asks the human being to consider the purpose of everything in nature as part of the design of the Creator of Life, and aided by the four Sacred Skyworlds Beings and the winds, rivers, grasses, trees, fishes, birds, **Grandmother Moon, Mother Earth, Eldest Brother Sun** (Clarkson: 44).

Part 3. Romanticizing Indigenous knowledge

The bulk of the literature on indigenous peoples alleges that ecological vigilance and the belief in Mother Earth are views characteristic of native peoples. By looking at the way indigenous peoples are portrayed, in the context of mainstream sustainable development, we can understand the general historical romanticism, generalization and misinformation about Native cultures.

Maurice Strong a Canadian voice in 'Our Common Future', recently claimed that indigenous peoples retain "collective experience and insights which have slipped our grasp," and yet these hold critical lessons for our future. (Brundtland, 1987: 6). He views indigenous peoples as indispensable partners in our attempt to make a successful transition to a more secure and sustainable future for our planet. (Brundtland: 6)" Such perceptions idealize indigenous people as the embodiment of spiritual values; this, ultimately, is a typical romanticization of their livelihood. If anything, indigenous people should be perceived, above all, as people who cherish their own cultures, are victims of past and present-day colonialism, and are determined to survive. As well as their diversity, they share values and experiences among other indigenous groups and non-accumulating societies.

Indeed, indigenous peoples have a strong sense of their identity as unique peoples, with their own land, languages and cultures. The Gaia Atlas of Indigenous Peoples, claims that while "some live in cities, others retain the traditional way of life... [but] they are united in their desire to maintain their identity, and to be able to adapt and survive. (Burger, 1990: 16-17)" Indigenous societies share a set of values, that are marked in contrast to western priorities; the Ojibwe of North America, the Quechua of the Peruvian

highlands, and the forest people in Orissa, India, are all connected through their profound relationship with the land. For them, the land is the source of life. For the Ojibwe of North America, the consequences of this relationship with the Earth and its gifts are a deep, close and humble relationship with all living things and a profound reverence for Mother Earth.

While it is true that indigenous peoples share many similarities in terms of customs, rituals, farming techniques, irrigation knowledge, biodiversity preservation, and impact on the land, it does not hold true that all consider the Earth like a parent and revere it accordingly. In the case of the Karoninka, Mother Earth is NOT "the centre of the universe, the core of their culture, the origin of their identity as a people", as current indigenous peoples' literature professes. (Burger: 20) This is where a closer look at the non-accumulating culture of the Karoninkas and their relationship to the land allows us to do away with generalizations.

Chapter 5:
The Non-accumulating Karoninkas

Part 1. Indigenous Peoples -the African Reality

According to King Moshoshoe of Lesotho, conservation, for the African rural

farmer, is a vital political and socio-economic issue, a matter of survival; both

management and ownership of the land provide livelihood and shelter. For indigenous

African people, land has a mix of cultural and social meanings, in addition to its role as

habitat and as a source of resources for production activities (King Moshoshoshoe, 1997:

160). In most African societies, land is related to lineage groupings, where boundary

limits can be extended until an entire group is included in one single area, depending on

the availability of unclaimed (and unoccupied land); this is also the case for Karoninkas.

There are also instances when land is 'linked' to social organization through a

series of rallying points marked in a distinctive manner, as with the Tonga of Zambia,

who use what they call 'rain shrines' (Moshoeshoe, !997: 60). In some parts of Africa,

land was considered a national and social asset to be equally enjoyed by all. Land-related

issues in Africa vary tremendously from highly capital intensive to the simplest

subsistence production. However, the central point is that land has always played a

significant role in the indigenous culture, power systems, and ideologies of African

people. Land has always been a significant political and social issue; it has provided the

basis for indigenous civilization, the moulding of people's attitudes and behaviour. As

such, there are fundamental similarities between African 'indigenous' peoples and those from other continents.

The environmental and agricultural dictates of Western sustainable development initiatives have seldom been instituted with the consent of, or in consultation with, local farmers, peasants, tribals and communities whose lives have been so inevitably affected. According to King Moshoeshoe, development experts and ecocrats have shown a total disregard of the African's long-established and successful methods of ensuring their survival and well-being by safeguarding the soil, plants, and animals on which they have always depended for their survival. Such experts have failed to understand the social and ecological bases of the cultural practices on which they seek to impose externally derived solutions. The result, says King Moshoeshoe, is that many of their agricultural strategies and environmental solutions have proven disastrous for the people, wildlife, and natural environment of Africa (Moshoeshoe: 158). Indigenous cultures may not be able to replace modern political and socio-economic analyses of world realities, but they certainly can provide creative and innovative fuel to complement and/or correct maintsream developmet thinking (Mosheoshoe: 158).

Before the arrival of slavery and colonization, African culture had its own structures of knowledge, values, religious beliefs, and social systems that ensured the protection of the natural environment. Africa was on a progressive course of evolution (however differently the goals of that progress were defined from the progress of the western development model). (Mosheoshoe: 158) Indigenous Africans saw natural resources as sacred and held them in trust both for current and future generations. In Karoninka culture, for example, all land belongs to the collective people as a whole.

Every citizen is entitled to a share of the land –for building a home, for pasture, for cultivation. In this way, the needs of the whole community are met.

According to King Moshoeshoe, there is, in traditional African culture, a sacred bond between individuals, their communities, and the environment. This sacred bond is only one aspect of African religion, which, according to Moshoeshoe, "underpins all African thought and action and which is expressed in an ongoing and unending process of divine creativity" –not only through nature but through each human being. (Moshoeshoe: 159) In such a continuum, the individual is seen as a 'replica of the external universe', which is why, Moshoeshoe claims, "it makes sense for each being to always seek harmony with the physical laws of the natural environment (Moshoeshoe,:159)."[18]

Such views are characteristic of the many 'indigenous' groups mentioned in the preceding section. However, by broadening our focus to include West African particularities, it then becomes possible to identify significant differences in the way **non-accumulating** societies sustain their ecosystems and preserve nature. By looking at the Karoninkas of Basse Cassamance and The Gambia, holistic relationships with the environment are given new meaning. The Karoninka spirituality provides an alternative to the mainstream and romantic Mother Earth concept, and extends the sustainable development debate to the mainstreaming of Mother Nature. The following chapter introduces the Karoninkas of Basse Cassamance and The Gambia.

Karoninkas are tribal, indigenous, traditional, and peasant. They are self-reliant, and their relationship with nature is holistic; but, above all, they are non-accumulating.

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[18] According to Moshoeshoe, there exists, in the African worldview, an analogy between the behaviour of matter and that of society. The world is seen as a duality of matter and spirit, both in the person and in the natural environment –the spiritual being manifested through the physical (in short, two dimensions of the same divine Creation) (Moshoeshoe: 157-170).

Karoninkas do not believe in the 'Earth Mother'; they do not worship an Earth Goddess.

As such, they have been left out of the sustainable development discourse, but

Karoninkas, as non-accumulating people, remain experts on sustainability.

Part 2. The Karoninkas of The Gambia and Basse Cassamance:

"We don't believe in Mother Nature... we don't feel remorse when an animal dies... we feel no guilt. We believe in palm wine tapping, we believe in rice farming, and we believe in Inerti... we are Karoninka, this is what we know.
-Pa Jassey, Darsilameh.

History:

The Karoninkas are an Ajaamat sub-ethnic group. The Ajaamat are thought to be the "real" indigenous people of The Gambia and Basse Cassamance. The Mandinka, (ethnic majority of The Gambia), had a history of fighting with the Ajaamat and named them Jola -"person who revenges", in their local language. While they are presently located on the South Bank of the river Gambia, the Ajaamat, some historians argue[19], are amongst the earliest settlers in the Cassamance area; they appear to be the longest residents of The Gambia, and for centuries have held on to traditional beliefs and customs.

The Ajaamat have been resistant to change; they have fought vehemently against the adoption of Islam, especially in Basse Cassamance.[20] However, the Ajaamat cannot be classified as one homogenous ethnic group. In fact, there many Ajaamat sub-ethnic groups: Jola Foni, Jola M'lomp, and Jola Bandial to name a few.[21] Also among them are the Karoninkas[22].

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[19] According to Gambian historian Patience Sonko-Godwin their original settlement may have been far more widespread prior to the Mandinka infiltration that drove them into their present territory.

[21] Some Ajaamat claim that there are as many as twenty sub-ethnies.
[22] Demographic Stats: Estimates from village chiefs, Joseph Demba (research assistant) and other Karoninkas showed tremendous discrepancies. While this author estimated the Karoninka

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General Background:

"I met Pa Jassey during my first visit to Darsilameh. In exchange for a few Kola nuts and handful of esumpa, I was welcomed into his house where we drank palm wine and discussed Karoninka culture and spirituality. Later that afternoon, I walked out of his ekumpan with 2 hours of taped conversation and the gut-wrenching feeling that my original hypothesis had been refuted." –Beauchesne, field notes.

The core aspects of Karoninka culture, according to Pa Jassey, are rice

cultivation, palm wine tapping and the belief in deities. Other significant aspects include

palm oil production, male and female circumcision, initiation of adult boys and girls,

fishing, wrestling, and the accumulation of cattle for ceremonial rites. **Mr. Jassey** is one

of the oldest living Karoninkas in The Gambia. He is the father of the Karoninka

community of Darsilameh; he is also the head of the Christian community there. This

'old pa' is highly regarded both in Kalom and in Darsilameh because he has

accomplished what was expected of Karoninka man -he was an excellent palm wine

taper, palm kernel harvester, excellent wrestler, a gifted farmer and had a large herd of

cattle.

Social Organization:

Social organization among the Karoninkas... Major similarities include the

importance of ancestors and the formation of clans; the clan system is a form of

organization that derives its parameters from nature. Ancestors organized themselves

into communal groups that were egalitarian, self-sufficient and strongly connected to the

land and its resources. According to Pa Jasey, Karoninka ancestors had a capacity for

educating their children, outlining social responsibilities, acquiring the necessities for

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population of Basse Cassamance at approximately 30,000, Joseph Demba, for example, was under the impression that there could be as much as 100,000 karoninkas living in the Senegambia area.

their survival, and for establishing and maintaining relationships between themselves and others.

The Karoninkas live in close-knit communities; clans usually cluster in one compound of about 6 to 8 houses. Typically, the first to third generations will stay in one compound and the fourth will set up a new one to avoid overcrowding; all clan members, however, still recognize the original home as leaders and advisers. Most rural Karoninkas live in mud and thatched houses or huts. During the rainy season they grow rice. While palm wine is tapped all year, it is strictly tapped for personal consumption during the rainy season. Karoninkas fish all year round and collect palm oil only during the dry season.

The Karoninkas are an agrarian people but hunting is also a part of their subsistence living; the game is shared equally among villagers. Karoninkas do not believe in selling any goods to fellow villagers: sharing and bartering are the norm[23]. In a Karoninka village, almost everything is free, and there are plenty of possibilities for people to practice togetherness, and to share traditional talents like dancing, singing, drumming, and palm wine tapping. Labour is inexpensive and can be paid with goods or money, although bartering seems to be the most common practice. The Karoninka 'ethic' is relatively easy to summarize: what is not considered good is the belief in witchcraft, the dislike of hard work, and the attempt to find a better life outside of the *Thiossan*[24].

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[23] In the village of Kuba, Joseph Demba's *Thiossan*, is a small shop selling mainly beer, warm soft drinks, and tobacco products; it is one of the rare signs of 'capitalist' endeavours.
[24] Young people are leadign the exodus out of the birthplace in order to find a better life in Banjul, serrekunda or Dakar.

While Karoninakas do not have a caste system (and although leadership does not

seem to be a concern to them), the Karoninka village is nonetheless headed by a chief[25].

According to traditionalists, a good chief must co-operate with his people. If his own

residents disobey him, how can he expect people from surrounding villages to respect

him? In a Karoninka village, according to 'Antoine' (Kailo village chief):

> "if people solve their problems without the help of the chief, they will think he is
> of no use to them... a chief should be concerned with problems facing every single
> family in his village. It is only by respecting others in this way, and by inquiring about
> their well-being, that the chief can get others to respect him."

While the majority of villagers interviewed showed tremendous respect for their

chiefs, some elders, like Pa Jassey, held a different opinion. "In the past, only mad people

did not obey the chief's words... Today, the wealthy villagers do pretty much as they

please, and the young ones disregard the chief's words, threatening to leave the village

and move to the city. Yet, when in trouble, it is these same people who come back to

them. And the chiefs will still help them, despite the disrespect shown towards them . A

good Alkalo doesn't 'pay back' with these same bad behaviours."

A chief, according to "Antoine", is sometimes seen as a father to his village. He

also represents the village in the outside world, acts as liaison with government

representatives, soldiers, and military policemen. He is, in Western political terms,

something like an 'external affairs deputy'. Frequently, he calls his people together for

discussions, for the conducting of *Pisabo*[26], or to introduce strangers and newcomers to

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[25] Often referred to as *Alkalo* –a Wolof word used by several tribes and ethnic groups.
[26] Pisabo: ritual involving the use of sticks to identify, among other things, thieves, murderers, witches. It typically involves 2 to four men who let themselves be "carried" by the 'power' of the sticks towards whoever, or whatever, is responsible for a particular incident.

the community. Karoninka chiefs will also insist that anyone wanting to live in 'his' village, temporarily or permanently, must abide by his rules and decisions.

A village is not only a social entity, it also an administrative unit. In this respect, the chief functions as the administrator. He is the link between all families in his village, as well as the tie between modern and traditional structures. Karoninka society, according to Joseph Demba, if compared to other African peoples' societal structures, is quite similar. These similarities however, should not reinforce generalizations between African societies or among 'indigenous' people.

The Role of Elders:

In Karoninka culture, the elders are often the ones expected to treat any sickness or disease seriously threatening the lives of young Karoninkas. The elders are thought to possess a strong understanding of biology and human physiology; Karoninkas rely on experienced traditional herbalists to collect different herbs used in the curing of a variety of illnesses. The health services provided by local medicine men and women are taught to be more reliable than Western drugs, especially in dealing with diarrhoea, open wounds, headaches, or various skin rashes and diseases.

Elders are what 'Robert' calls the 'guardians' of Karoninka culture. They ensure that those remaining in villages preserve the Karoninka dialect and not speak French around the home; they also encourage the youth to remain in their *Thiossan* and rekindle with traditional ways. As Pa Jassey wonders the future of the Karoninkas of Darsilameh village, he is overwhelmed with emotion: "our only problem is that the young people go away. They did so in the past, but now they don't come back, except for funerals and

marriages... we miss them. They seem to think that happiness dwells in towns, while their *Thiossans* have so much to offer."

The Karoninka Household:

Typical Karonika household formation is the extended family unit, headed by the oldest man. His brothers build their owns homes in square or circular form, and an open place is left for children to play. A communal kitchen area is allocated for the women to do the cooking. Men contribute to the preparation of meals by slaughtering animals and preparing the meat. The male elders take most family decisions, but older women are usually consulted, especially for issues dealing specifically with women. Women manage the family property, and its disposal is solely their work; the men have very little say in this. Family property is shared among members according to age, with elders taking the largest share.

In order to make the best out of their many tasks and limited resources, women work harder and co-operate better than men (from necessity as well as sociability). Each afternoon, women come in from the field, alone or in a group carrying baskets full of fruits, roots, leaves, etc. Although women are thought to be physically weaker than men, they are thought to have the strongest necks; hence, carrying loads is part of women's work. When a group of women carry rice bundles and firewood from the fields, walking in line, they encourage each other to endure the task at hand: they will do so with shouts, songs and laughter. During the harvest period, drummers are sent to the field to help women (and men) keep a good working pace; they also provide entertainment and relaxation during mid-afternoon breaks, and on long walks home before sunset.

Ownership and Communal living:

"We the native people did not have a concept of private property in our location, and the principles of private property were pretty much in conflict with our value system." (Rahnema, 49)

When it comes to communal living, the Karoninkas are very similar to other indigenous societies in that individual ownership is non-existent. People own only clothes, and even those may be shared. One important aspect of Karoninka culture, according to Joseph Demba, is the ownership of cattle by clans. Every clan is expected to have a herd of cattle for marriage, death, circumcision, and initiation ceremonies. When an elder dies, at least one or two bulls must be killed on the second day of the funeral. If the family cannot afford a bull, a pig is killed instead. During the funeral, songs are sung, and traditional dances are performed; traditional dances for different age groups take place regularly.

Referring to the Karoninka subsistence economy, Pa Jassey expanded on the local resistance to commerce: "In our culture, we don't do cash cropping. Also, fish is shared among relatives. Men collect palm oil, store it, and use it through the rain and dry season... at times, women also extract oysters from the river and share them communally... The only time we sell any of our food surplus, it is to get enough money to buy cattle... this is the only instance where commerce, enters the community." Otherwise, the traditional Karoninkas maintain a barter-type system which fosters communal living.

Karoninkas and Modern Education: Cultural Defoliation

When asked "In what ways has the West permeated Karoninka society?" Karoninka elders will often answer "Western education is destroying our culture."

"Modern" education, according to Mead leads to the creation of discontinuities. 'Primitive' education was a process by which continuity was maintained between parents and children. Modern education, on the other hand, includes a heavy emphasis on the function of education to create discontinuities "-to turn the child of the peasant into a clerk, of the farmer into a lawyer, ... of the illiterate into the literate (Ki-Zerbo et al, 153)"[27] In the Karoninka context, the establishment of modern schools had resulted in cultural gaps between the newly schooled elites of the French system and the rest of the population, a phenomenon that, according to many elders, has largely been responsible for the rural exodus. The most successful students abandon their village folk (often for good) for the bigger cities (Ziguinchor, Banjul, Serrekunda, Dakar), and later for foreign lands, hence fostering the process of brain drain.

Many elders complain that "formal" schooling, in many instances, has replaced traditional classrooms: 'the circumcision and initiation bush'. When children reach the age of 11-12 years, they are herded into a specific location in the thick bush where they are to be circumcised. The bush is where young Karoninka boys exhibit their 'manhood'; it is a place where fathers show pride in their sons for their ability to withstand hardship and show courage, or scold and shun them for cowardice. Young men spend up to 4 months in the bush where they learn how to greet and to speak to elders, and how to interrelate with the rest of society. This initiation experience, to a westerner, may appear cruel and inhumane, but to Karoninkas, such practices are viewed as benign.

There is a strong belief that one has something to learn from the initiation experience. But beyond the acquisition of "secret knowledge", the 'bush school" is a place where both men and women get the opportunity to earn respect within their village.

A man will not be considered a man if he is not circumcised. It is taboo to reveal what

takes place during the initiation; moreover, both male and female circumcision cannot be

'joked' about. In Karoninka culture, rituals of circumcision and other rites of passage

rituals are taboo conversation topics.

Traditional healing:

> "We also believe in God... we believe God has granted knowledge about plants and our
> natural environment. So if somebody is sick, we go to a tree or plant, collect its juice or leaves
> and give it to the sick person... such knowledge of healing and medicine, we believe, has been
> given to us by god... we know our plants, we get protection form metallic things: warfare tools
> and arms will not enter your body."
> - Traditonal healer from Boun.

Traditional healing, a core feature of Karoninka culture, is actually a practice

shared by all Ajaamat. Some famous Ajaamat, are known to hold the secrets (passed on

from forefathers or foremothers) to curing many diseases and illnesses[28]. Many Ajaamat

who have left their native villages to live in Banjul return to their birth places to be

healed. This author met with a Karoninka woman from Boun who is revered as one of

Cassamance's best traditional healers. People will often trek through the bush for days to

get a chance to be healed by her, and to 'pour libations' with her. Upon his second visit to

Basse Cassamance, the author had the opportunity to briefly meet with this woman. She

spoke of a small mangrove island where Karoninkas perform sacrifices and pour libations

as offerings for *Inerti*; this Island, called Telos, is perceived as a sanctuary, and is

reserved for rituals and prayers.

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[28] It is believed that Yahya Jammeh, President of The Gambia (an Ajaamat) can cure Asthma.

Karoninka Superstructure: The Organization of Religious Beliefs and Practices[29]

An investigation of the Karoninka society 'superstructure' reveals the connections between spirituality and sustainable ecology. The Karoninkas live in an animist society; animism, according to cultural anthropologists, is the belief that inside ordinary visible tangible things there is a normally invisible, normally intangible being: the soul. [Harris, 392]. "The soul appears in dreams, trances and visions. There exists also supernatural beings including the souls of animals, plants, objects, spirits, and so forth." [Harris, 392] Like other aspects of the superstructure, Harris claims, religion and spirituality serve a multitude of economic, political, psychological and social organization functions. The Religion adopted by the majority of Karoninkas (Christianity) is a key factor in preserving their animist beliefs.

Certain animistic beliefs are universal; each culture, according to Harris, has its own distinctive animistic beings and its own specific elaboration of the 'soul concept'. Robert Marret, an early-century anthropologist, introduced the term "animatism" to designate the belief in non-soul forces. Possession of concentrated animistic force can give certain objects, animals, and people extraordinary powers independent of power derived from souls and gods (Harris, 1979: 393). Therefore, Marret's concept of Mana, which simply indicates the belief in a powerful force, seems more appropriate in discussing the *Inerti* and "totems" of Karoninka culture.

Many Karoninkas also wear *jujus* which serve several purposes from protection against illness and diseases, '*toubabs*' (white people), bad persons or intentions; there

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[29] Culture: For the purpose of this research, particular attention is devoted to various aspects of modes of production, as they relate to 'sustainable" development. Also, rituals, discipline, societal

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even are *jujus* which are thought to make people disappear. Many Ajaamat, including

Karoninkas, will acquire protection bracelets from blacksmiths[30]. Such bracelets are

known among Karoninka youth as the "Black Power"; they are believed to provide

protection during travel, as well as protection from poisoning.

Witchcraft, Deities and the *Inerti*:

"Karoninkas are very much tied to their deities... there isn't a Karoninka clan without a deity.
"Everyone believes in *Inerti*; every family has an *Inerti* sanctuary... It is located in the forest, in a
place where no one is allowed to go... Only one person is designated custodian of that sacred
place." -Joseph Demba, Sulayman Joof, and S.K. Jatta

Our indirect care for nature comes from our fear of reprisal by *Inerti*... Our system of 'totems'
reminds us that we are trespassing protected grounds, or that we are hunting another clan's
animals. -"Robert"

Throughout Basse Cassamance and Darsilameh, witchcraft and *Kasai*

(shapeshifting) are quite common[31], so are magic and shamanism. According to cultural

anthropologists, shamans plays an important role in the maintenance of law and order in

'pre development' societies by blaming misfortunes on scapegoats who can be killed,

banished, or ostracised without damaging social cohesion and unity. (Harris, 394)

Another kind of "specialist" concentrates on doing evil things, causing illness and death

rather than cursing it –these specialists are locally known as sorcerers or witches. There is

a connection here between curing illnesses and causing them: it is often the same

specialists who can cure an illness who can also cause it. In the village of Cassel, not too

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control, and the domestic economy are analysed.

[30] Jarjus: traditionally, this family or clan, were blacksmiths.

[31] ...in fact, many people are thought to posses various skills which, from a Western perspective,
would generally be thought of as grounded in superstition.

far from the tourist *'campement'* of Kafountine, the incidence of witchcraft has taken on such large proportions that many Karoninka youth have deserted the area, fearing possession and illness.

Inerti:

Karoninkas worship the *Inerti* spirit at the base of a large tree, usually located in close proximity to their property. According to Pa Demba, a tree is chosen as the site for *Inerti* because "it stays a long time" -it has a long life span in regards to human beings. A living tree is chosen because termites do not attack living trees, only dead ones. In Karoninka society, the worshipping area must never be cut down.[32]

"Theft is almost non-existent in Karoninka culture, because of fear of reprisal by *Inerti*." The *Inerti* deity serves as the village police, judge, executor, and hangman. If serious theft occurs, the victim visits or calls upon *Inerti*, and asks for help; this is normally accompanied by the ritual of prayer and pouring of libation. Soon after this ritual, the culprit will become sick (or die) -as requested by the victim. Karoninkas believe that the spirit will oblige the property by "giving them signs" proving the identity of the culprit. Karoninkas also maintain that there is a Cobra spirit living in the *Inerti* tree; the Cobra spirit prevents thieves from leaving the compound from which they have stolen. Only when a thief returns the stolen property will the Cobra move out of his/her way —any attempt to escape will be met with a fatal bite.

Inerti, unlike other indigenous people's deities, does not impose environmental preservation codes and behaviour... it does not function as an 'eco-enforcer'. In fact,

when Pa Diamme was asked how *Inerti* dealt with Karoninkas who harm (or overhunt) animals and purposely destroy nature, he replied:

"If you go to the vicinity of the *Inerti* and you wrongfully kill an animal or cut down a tree or plant, nothing will happen to you that is 'spiritual'... The *Inerti* will not attack you, but the people, on whose land the act took place might... If you cut down the Inerti tree, nothing will happen to you that will come form the *Inerti* spirit... but if you cut down or remove or plough over the libation (and worshiping) area (which is usually found on or at the base of the tree), then the *Inerti* will come after you."
"...the power of the *Inerti* is immense. Whatever you say, the *Inerti* will always listen to you... whatever you say is what is going to follow. If one wants a person who has done you harm to fall inside a well and die, it surely will happen... whatever you ask of *Inerti* will happen. *Inerti* will do whatever you request it to do. If someone doesn't like his fellow human being, because that person committed a wrong, if someone kills your child mysteriously (not beaten, not killed with a stick, stone, or knife, but through witchcraft, you, as a father, will go to the deity, and pray that the person who killed your infant will suffer the consequences. The power of the deity will have effect on him... If you ask *Inerti* to have the person who is guilty come and speak to you, and identify himself or herself as the killer, it will do so. In a nutshell, *Inerti* will take your request, whatever it may be... whatever you say, whether it involves death or not, it will happen." – Pa Diamme

According to Sulyman Joof, a young Karoninka from the village of Marakisa, "if someone commits a crime against your family, you or your relatives can go to the police, charge the man, convict him in the law courts, and then he is either hanged or killed". But in Karoninka society, "*Inerti* is there to serve everyone...if someone hurts your family or steals from your property, you can go to the deity and it will serve as an arbitrator: it has the power to show what has happened, and can immediately identify the culprit."

As Pa Demba claims, "when someone hurts us, we don't use revenge directly onto that person...we do it in our own way, that is, we instead go to the *Inerti* and wait for it to identify the guilty person... *Inerti* is there to help us maintain order in our society. When we were going for a war, we would go to *Inerti* and say: you are the most powerful please help us, all we want is for you to help us succeed."

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While the *Inerti* is perceived as the source of power for all Ajaamat, it is the ritual calling of *Inerti* that distinguishes the Karoninkas from other Ajaamat. Karoninkas believe in life after death -a belief pre-dating the introduction of Christianity; hence, when they drink palm wine[33], they will pour some on the ground for the ancestors to drink first. The ritual calling of the *Inerti* spirit also consists of a palm wine offering. The wine is poured onto the earth and food is then placed at the base of a tree where the spirit effigy hangs. Shoes must, at all times, be kept outside the sanctuary[34]. Later, sand from the base of the tree is rubbed all over the body, and no bathing is allowed for a day.

While everyone can encounter *Inerti*, only its sanctuary custodians are able to "see" it; even the people who come to it and offer libation do not know what it looks like. The deity comes to the custodian in dreams... its shape reveals itself in dreams, but custodians apparently never get to see it "physically". According to Joseph Demba, "even those pouring libation or asking the *Inerti* for help will not be able to see the deity in their dreams."

Farming and Agricultural practices:

"Farming is plenty of hard work during the rainy season, but when harvest time comes, benefits are reaped by everyone... Even those who did not engage in extra rice, vegetable, or cannabis growing for cash crops benefit from farming as they earn the food they eat." -'Café'.

In Karoninka society, agricultural planning is a family affair; wife and husband discuss what crops to plant. Usually, the most 'active' partner goes ahead and plants. Being responsible for the preparation of daily meals, women may be more concerned

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[33] Karoninkas freely consume palm wine and other locally made alcoholic beverages (*soumsoum*) because these are thought to be 'gifts form god to man'.

[34] ...a tradition practised prior to Islam infiltration in local culture.

with other crops than men (women will tend to concentrate on okra and cassava production).

When 'Paul', of Marakissa, first came to the area that was to be his new family compound, he invited his younger wife to walk around and examine the vegetation and the water sources. Later, they decided where the gardens, vegetable plots, and compound facilities were to be set up. "We watched the way mango trees, bushes, plants, and even the grass grew, in order to pick the most fertile spot for our new fields and gardens. We have our special ways of determining where to dig our water holes… it is from those that the village women draw water for us." In Cassamance, large wells or reservoirs are carefully dug up in strategic locations (near vegetable and cannabis plots), so as to collect rainwater. This water is to be used throughout the dry season as other wells run dry.

Challenges of Farming:

Like all other living things, plants have different needs at different stages of their growth, and each variety demands special care. Local maize and rice must be carefully looked after as to prevent choking form weeds; groundnuts need ridges if they are to thrive; sweet potatoes demand a field of their own. Orange trees, mango trees, papaya, 'plum' trees, aubergine, tomatoes, and cannabis also have their specific needs. It is the job of the cultivator to see to it that each crop has what it needs to thrive and survive. In return, the plants feed the family, the clan, and the village. It is as if a 'silent' partnership has been struck up between plants, trees and people.

With the rain everything grows at a very fast pace; the villagers must weed the fields so that plants do not suffocate from weeds and grass. As people wait for the their

major crop to grow and ripen, there is enough time to turn to their personal "backyard" garden plots where they sow, transplant, thin and weed vegetables for household consumption. The harvest starts, though slowly at first, then hurriedly, as all nature suddenly seems to bear fruit... and just as nature turns back upon herself and gets ready for a new cycle of generous growth, so do the people. Villagers have the time they need to repair their houses and their tools, to meet with friends and exchange news and views, to visit relatives in other parts of Cassamance, The Gambia or Northern Senegal, and to make plans for the upcoming season. Then, once more, the rainy season approaches as the heat intensifies, and hoeing and planting begins. It all fits, according to Antoine, into

"a timetable carefully drawn up by the sun and the rain for the villagers and everything else alive in their environment... hoeing is a simple job that is why it is suitable for women... Women are not good workers like us men. The man is the head of the family and is involved in heavy and important jobs like stumping trees and deciding what and precisely when to plant. Women are thought to be too weak for certain jobs and for a man to practice women's work is for him to practice weakness."

Many cultivators have to build themselves a shelter; it consists of a thatched roof resting on poles which provides protection against the scorching sun and the rain. Men and women engaged in agricultural activities typically leave the village in the early morning and only return as the sun is about to set around the village. Between those times, in the heat of the day, the shelter provides everyone with a place to rest, cook, or relax over a few *koni*'s full of palm wine. Many such shelters are equipped with goat or cow skin that can be used as a blanket, as a way of warming up during the early hours of the morning.[35] When most rice cultivators get tired, they will often wander off to a

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[35] ...especially during the months of December through February where the morning temperature hovers around 10C.

neighbouring palm wine taper's hut where they get fresh palm wine and spend the hottest hours of the day among friends.

Most cultivators I have spoken to do not feel the need to acquire tractors or "modern" farming implements. Even though tractor ploughing would have its share of advantages (i.e., reducing the actual amount of hoeing and planting hours), it is regarded as impractical ("how do we ship it over, and carry onto the islands?") and expensive ("there isn't enough money in the village to hire someone to deliver, drive, repair it etc."). In many fields, tractor ploughing is impossible as large tree stumps have been left on the ground, and because roads have not been cleared. In Senegal, according to Antoine, the demand for tractors at the peak of cultivation far exceeds the supply anyway.

Most villagers display 'charms' and *hiton* effigies in their fields. This increases crop yields and prevents people from stealing produce. If cultivators know how to protect themselves by using charms, *jujus*, or *Inerti*, no one in their village will be able to touch their crop - not even a mango, a twig or a leaf." In this art of using charms, the elders are known to possess more "tricks" than younger Karoninkas. For that reason their crops are usually taller, richer, greener, and more bountiful. As villagers grow up, "they will learn how to protect themselves, their crops, animals, and even their household belongings." For that reason, elders are quite instrumental in giving advice and helping fellow villagers; their knowledge is indispensable.

Almost everywhere in Africa, rain is the determining factor between sufficiency and scarcity. In Kalorn, it is the subject of daily conversation. Once the rain arrives, everything blooms and turns green. The rate at which everything grows and turns from brown to green is stunning; everything seems to sprout with vitality. However, rain only

means prosperity providing seeds have been planted at the right time and that the weeds have been kept under control. How well people cope with weeding and field preparation depends on the size of the fields and the labour they can draw upon. If the household labour pool is low, palm wine becomes an effective way of mobilizing labour. Karoninkas have a strong awareness of the natural world that surrounds them. They know that whatever nature offers is not intended for humans alone - so many other creatures are waiting for it, eager to get their share. For example, the very moment crops start to ripen, monkeys are on the spot ready to devour garden treats. Rice fields (*Hoss*) bordering forests are most troubled by them. Monkeys, according to "Zo", are one of the main problems, but so are birds, rats, bush pigs, goats, and cattle. With the monkey obviously regarded as a pest, farmers have no regrets about shooting a monkey, but only if they can find a way to share the meat.

For Karoninkas, sustainable livelihoods depend on many things: the fertility of the fields, the strength of available labour, the skills of the cultivator, and rainfall (in sufficient quantity). Some of these things are outside the control of the villagers, but how the cultivator uses land and labour is largely an individual decision. Once the harvest is secured and leisure time increases, the time comes to think of the future. In only another few months, the new agricultural season will start, demanding decisions on crops and fields, which are arrived at by discussing the issues with the family.

Pig rearing:

Karoninkas share pigs by agreement with their neighbours. According to 'Leonard', "pigs are quite easy to raise because they need not be watched closely as they

never venture very far." In Hilol, however, the pigs are 'closed in' during the rainy season and fed in the enclosure. In the dry season they are free to roam about in order to find food wherever they can. One of Leonard's major complaints is that "pigs, much like dogs, must be fed." During the rainy season, it is the woman and children's job to feed them; if they are busy, the man can also do it (it is also the man' s job to slaughter the pigs, while women kill the chickens). –"Leonard", Kailo.

Rice cultivation:

Rice cultivation is central to Karoninka society. According to tradition, the status of a Karoninka household is defined according to the number of bundles of rice it has. One person may find it difficult to get a wife or husband if it is thought that the family is lazy and cannot produce enough rice to sustain itself. Rice is the main staple food grown, and it is complemented with backyard food growing, small-scale fishing and occasional hunting. Hard work is therefore typical of this ethnic group

During the rainy season, everyone cultivates rice, collectively. Men and women gather at different households, head to their fields and plough; drumming and singing accompany this activity while the rice is transplanted. Women and men work on the fields, although separately. When the planting is finished, the men prepare palm trees for wine collection. While the women frequently visit the rice fields, traditionally, no one is expected to visit another's farm without permission: to do so would result in someone being accused of bewitching the farm. Unless they are engaging in communal farming activities, people only tend their family farm.

The Karoninka Relationship with Nature:

"When the rains come, when we are ploughing our fields, we go to the deity, and we will invoke
and ask it for help, so that our crops will have good yields." Other rituals performed by Karoninkas focus
on fertility of land, rice transplanting, and good harvest.
"If anything bad is coming to attack our crops, we also invoke Inerti and explain to it the situation and ask
for help -for protection of our crops. If we pour libation for the deity, we feel that the "mysterious thing"
that is coming to destroy crops will die and whither away... that is the knowledge we have in respect to the
deity...-Jo Demba"

On whether the traditional Karoninka see a relationship with nature in terms of

mutual respect for animals and flora, Pa Jassey replied:

"Our relationship is diverse... some destroy the crop, and some don't... we see
those who do as a nuisance (the hedgehog destroys our crops, but the antelope does not).
We kill the hedgehog, and use its carcass as food. We also respect nature in that we do
not see it as an opportunity for profit. The rice growers see their land as potential food
crops, and not cash crops. In Karoninka culture, all we know is rice growing... we have
many rituals which centre on rice growing and harvesting... we cannot live on rice alone,
and so we also supplement our diet with fish. We only fish enough for one day's meal...."

Also, when we plant our crops, we take these leaves, braid them and place them

where we planted our crops; thus, anyone tampering with our crops, anyone stealing from

a field, *Inerti* will attack that person and inflict on him whatever we requested. This is our

ethnic group, this is what we believe."

Cultural changes and resistance in Kalorn:

There have been many changes in Karoninka culture. With the interaction of other

cultures, Karoninka society is losing much of its norms to the West; the introduction of

monetisation has negatively impacted on Karoninka culture. According to Joseph Demba,

"some Karoninkas have begun to think neo-liberally."

Although the vast majority of Kalorn residents still engage in barter and sharing,

a great number of them conduct business to make extra money. Even in the "Thiossan" of

Cassamance, people engage in business activities; in fact, the growing of cannabis

(illegal) is rampant. In the morning, men, women, and children all take part in the daily watering of the cannabis plants. The money made from it normally goes to paying taxes imposed on the village by the Senegalese government. Some families who grow an abundance of cannabis will use their profits to purchase cattle for weddings and other village celebrations. Hence, the money absorbed form such an activity is not used for private investments. Instead, profits are pooled together for the betterment of the community; cannabis growing remains a non-accumulating activity.

Western influence has not fully permeated Karoninka culture. The elders have resisted its infiltration by sending children to the bush in hiding, hoping to evade contact with white missionaries and school officials. The "toubabs" (white people) had to wait many years before they were successful in building their first school -a school which, today, remains unfinished. The tentacles of power arraigned against the Karoninkas have been immense and, ultimately, the resistance was defeated; children were eventually registered for western education. According to Pa Jassey, Karoninkas only wanted to subsist and they didn't want much contact with the outside world. "We didn't want our children to receive western education, but as time went on, and because there was so much contact between us and white people, we accepted western education, but our forefathers resisted, they didn't want it, but they later accepted it." This has drained systematically the able-bodied manpower of the village of Kalom. Because the old people left behind cannot do the work, rice is no longer cultivated in large quantities and palm wine is not collected enough. According to S.K. Jatta, resident of Darsilameh, "elders are now complaining that palm wine must now be purchased... such things were unheard of in his time."

Focus groups conducted with residents from Kuba and Hilol revealed the extent of the damage caused by the infiltration of western ideas. "Because the usual circumcision rites and initiation are not taking place where they used to, youngsters don't often show respect to the elders, nor do they listen to their advice... teenage pregnancies are increasing, and contraceptives (cheap and very hazardous to their health) have been introduced. Boys and girls have lost touch with Karoninka morals concerning sexual intercourse... Families who, years ago, would gather cattle as investment for future rituals and ceremonies, are now quarrelling over cattle ownership; some even end up 'marketing' theirs."

Many changes are working against the natural development of Karoninka society. As Pa Diamme states, "many old men and women weep at certain occurrences that are totally devoid of tradition...from our birth to our death all that we know as Karoninkas is work, hard work... Karoninkas know farming, rice cultivation, and palm wine tapping... we also know how to make palm oil ...Karoninkas know how to climb trees and extract oil and wine from them. Mandinkas don't know how to climb trees, that is why they buy palm products from us... that is our culture -dating all the way back to our forefathers."[36]

Kayon Kalorn:

Four years ago, the Karoninkas thought it was time to rejuvenate Karoninka culture and instil a renewed sense of pride in Kalom: they set up the "Kayon Kalom"

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[36] Resistance to "total" Christian assimilation: According to Joseph Demba,"the *Jalang* is situated next to the sister's convent... this has led to bitterness on the sisters' part because they see it as against the teachings of Christianity... but we are not going to stop it because it is part of our culture, although many if us have adopted and converted to Christianity, we still uphold traditions and value our culture, of which the deity and the *Inerti* is a part of, and which help us sustain our livelihoods."

festival. The organizers have created a cultural awareness group whose sole purpose is to teach young Karoninkas to remember their history, and ways of life. Every year, other villages put on cultural activities ranging from dances, drum sessions, exhibition of local artefacts and crafts. Every Friday evening, a cultural programme on Karoninka culture is aired on Gambian radio. All major rituals, festivals, dances, and sacrifices have been forbidden outside of the *thiossan*; this, according to Henriette, is one way of bringing lost Karoninkas back to their roots. There are may aspects of Karoninka society that have been lost; indeed, many are being left behind as the society is evolving, but there is resistance to a complete denigration of Kalom culture. As Pa Diamme claims, "we, the elders, have been telling our young children about the *Jalang*; we are doing so because there are so many differences between the various *Jola* groups, and we want our young ones to know what makes them Karoninka."

The Karoninkas are a non-accumulating people. They, like the Quechua, Ojibwe, and Innui are tribal, indigenous, and peasant. They engage in subsistence production, they are self-reliant. However, Karoninkas do not structure their existence around strict, ecological taboos. While they do maintain a culture of non-accumulation, Karoninkas have an inherent, holistic understanding of the natural world. Unlike the people of coastal Orissa or the Rapanui, they do not believe in Mother Earth, nor do they worship an Earth Goddess; their ecological and environmental awareness spawns, instead, from their culture of non-accumulation. Karoninkas offer a refreshing, West African perspective and analysis of sustainable development which transcends the mainstream, and provides culturally-relevant insights into environmental preservation.

Chapter 6

Conclusion:

"That is our *Thiossan*, that is what we know... those are the 'original' things that we do..." –Pa Demba

The Western project of development, as well as its alternative solution, sustainable development, has not worked. A western presumption of superiority embedded in the idealised, abstract 'development' has facilitated the recommendation of plans and strategies to deplete and transfer asset values out of a 'developing world' stereotyped as irrational, inferior and, above all, underdeveloped.

Having adopted both a counter and post development stance, the author offers a critique of the sustainable development discourse, of Western hegemony, and of the mainstreaming of Mother Earth. The author looks at questions of sustainability, with particular emphasis placed on cultural defoliation, colonization of the minds, ecologically and culturally unsustainable development practices, and current conceptualizations of indigenous knowledge.

Using counter and post development perspective the author has unpacked the "Indigenous People's View". Although testimonies from several groups indeed validate the assumption that indigenous cultures, despite their great diversity, have many things in common, the author, by using a comparative method, proposes a new perspective challenging the reductionistic nature of "mainstream" conceptualizations of 'indigenous'.

By extending the notion of cultural sustainability and environmental practices

beyond only indigenous peoples to include "non-accumulating" societies, it was possible

for the author to expand his scope to the Karoninkas of Darsilameh, The Gambia and of

Basse Cassamance, Senegal. Here, the 'grounded' realities and particularities of the

Karoninka ethnic group, in the context of ecological and cultural preservation, were

examined. The description of Karoninka society was grounded in cultural relativism,

where each cultural pattern is regarded as being intrinsically as worthy of respect as all

the rest.

In this thesis, one of the things being determined is how the *Inerti* sanctuary and

the Karoninka spiritual beliefs affect their attitudes towards nature, and if so, to what

extent. Specifically, the study attempts to understand how the Karoninkas have

maintained their traditional ways, preserved their culture and, subsequently, conserved

their ecosystems. From the author's viewpoint, whether Karoninkas share a 'pro' or 'anti'

ecological stance, their perspective is nonetheless important.

Field research in Basse Cassamance and The Gambia suggests that the major

difference between Mother Earth-worshipping societies and Karoninkas is found in the

particularities of their respective spirituality. The Karoninka relationship with ancestors,

its africanization of Christianity, its animism, its fear and respect of *Inerti*, all of these

elements provide limits to the exploitation of nature. Although Karoninkas have not

adopted the concept of Mother Earth, they have managed to preserve their ecosystems

while engaging in sustainable hunting, fishing, and cultivation. Their ecological and

environmental awareness is founded on a culture of non-accumulation. The Karoninkas

offer a new, West African perspective and analysis of sustainable development that

transcends the mainstream; they provide culturally-relevant insights into indigenous environmental preservation that extend beyond the Mother Earth concept.

Several approaches to sustainable development are described in mainstream literature on "indigenous people", and in the growing recognition of the existence of environmental knowledge and experience within 'traditional' cultures. However, this thesis suggests that we look at indigenous cultures in a different context, where traditional beliefs continue to exist, but where their "owners" can be categorized as "non-accumulating", rather than simply tribal, vernacular, native, peasant traditional, or indigenous people.

The question remains, what are some of the alternative patterns of development that non-accumulating societies like the Karoninkas can pursue? First there must be a general acceptance that political action for alternative development should not be derived from mainstream theory, not even theories based on a critique of development; instead, it should emerge from the concrete and grounded realities and specific struggles of the people themselves. Thus, by remaining sensitive to the gender, ecological, cultural and spiritual aspects involved in redefining development, the concrete struggles becomes primarily about confronting the hegemonic structures of power and influence-locally, nationally, and globally.

Development theories are grounded in universalistic theories. These theories must be made 'smaller'. New conventions must be drawn, using the views not only of indigenous peoples, but focusing on their non-accumulating nature. There are 'non-accumulating' particularities, as exemplified by the Karoninka ethnic group, which development theories and practices must take into account

A Glossary of
Karoninka Words:

"Kayorn Kalorn"	Festival of the Karoninkas
Ayim	Man
Aal	Woman
Akampane	Boy
Amachul	Girl
Hitaku	To have
Pikayou	To go
Hiton	Inerti deity effigy
Kasai	Shapeshifter or witch
"Ay Junjun Sama Kanahle"	Famous 'Rain Song' from Marrakissa
Epoulapoula	Duck
Ekouthon	Chicken
Lingan	One who drinks fast –'chug'
Pisabo	Karoninka ritual
Koni	Local palm tree fruit
Elan	Palm wine
Chignotte	"Palm wine that sits overnight"
Soumsoum	Local alcohol
Dinkira	Libation
Tya	Groundnut
Palyal	Food
Mann	Water
Magne	Money
Esumpa	Tobacco
Ekumpan	House
Sorn	Fish ('talapia' fish)
Enun	Tree
Kamagn	Harvest
Hoss	Rice field
Kanu	Ear or Sound
Khot	Leg
Sinue	Nose
Juju	Talisman
Hani	No
Yo	Yes
Kakit	Farm or large growing area
Kasumai	Hello, welcome (official greeting)
Kasumai Lama	Universal response to Kasumai

Cha Chawi Pumei	What's your name
Okatola Kasumai	Goodbye
Timpa Timpa	Thank You
Njo Pa Teke	I'll be back
Kasumai Kyeno Naweh	Peace be with you
Anyine	Your son
Awi Yam	Friend
N'Chi Piyetu	I'm going home
Fuyoye	Today
Houkan	Yesterday
Kachom	Tomorrow
Koko	Coconut
Incho Yem	I am
Akinba Yem	He/she/it is
Awe Yem	You are
Ouna Ouyema	We are
Alu Niyem	You are (plural)
Poko Kayem	They are
Alonk Ow	How are you?
Ey	Universal response to Alonk Ow

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Primary Resources:
Main Karoninka Interviewees

Joseph Demba: Joseph hails from the village of Darsilameh, The Gambia. Over the course of this research, Joseph and the author became very close friends. Joseph played a key role as translator and research assistant for *Wuli, Elan & Inerti*, and provided the author with significant background information on the Karoninkas. 'Jo' accompanied the author on all travels to Cassamance and Darsilameh, where he facilitated interviews with village chiefs and elders. In February 1999, Joseph Demba graduated with a Bachelor of Arts from the University Extension Program of Saint Mary's University in The Gambia.

Pa Demba: Pa Demba is Joseph's Father; he currently resides in Darsilameh. In his youth, Pa was recognized as one of the regions best palm wine tapers. During the author's visits to Darsliameh, Pa always made himself available for interviews, informal chats and *sousoum* sessions. In exchange for a few tobacco leaves, 'Pa' would tell stories hours.

Pa Jassey: Pa Jassey is thought to be the oldest living Karoninka in the Darsilameh area. He was the first elder to be interviewed for this thesis. This memorable 'interview' lasted an entire afternoon, and was followed by several tumblers of palm wine. For the occasion, Pa Jassey invited some of the village teenagers to listen and learn from Karoninka tales, myths and stories.

Sulayman Joof: Sulayman Joof is a student at the University Extension Program. He hails from a Gambian village named Marakissa. Sulayman is both of Serer and Karoninka decent. "Sul" played an important role in organizing social events and informal gatherings where the author met many Karoninka youth (including 'Café', 'Soldier Man', 'Chris' and 'Che'). Sulayman is a gifted singer who has written many Karoninka songs including '*Ay Junjun Sama Kanahle*" –"Let it rain".

"Henriette": Henriette is a young Karoninka woman who left her *thiossan* to work in Bakau, The Gambia. She is Joseph Demba's wife and proud mother of their young baby boy. Henriette facilitated meetings with several Karoninka women and young girls; a wonderful cook, she introduced the author to succulent Karoninka dishes.

"Robert": The author met Robert in during his stay in Kailo. Robert is a part time primary and secondary school teacher in Basse Cassamance. Robert blends the French school curriculum with traditional Karoninka values and teachings. Robert escorted the author for a day-trip to the village of Boun. Reputable host, Robert supplied the author with some of his most memorable Karoninka rice-based meals.

"Philippe" and "Leonard": The researcher met Philippe and Leonard on his way to the Kayorn Kalorn Festival. Both of them spent 3 days with Jospeh Demba and the author. They arranged for the research 'team' to stay at a relative's compound. Philippe and Leonard showed great interest in the research; the duo facilitated two late night group discussions on Karoninka spirituality.

Pa Jatta: 'Pa' Jatta is a young man from Darsilameh. Pa helped organize hunting and fishing trips near Darsilameh. 'Pa' played a key role in facilitating the author's integration among the youth of Darsilameh.

"S.K." (Jatta): S.K. is an ex-soldier who left Darsilameh for Banjul, The Gambia. The author and S.K. had several conversations on a variety of topics. S.K was quite instrumental in gathering large number a young Karoninka men and women at various meetings, dinner parties, and social events.

"Antoine": Antoine is the village chief of Kailo, Basse Cassamance. Antoine showed a lot of interest in this research project and helped set up many interviews and informal discussions with village elders and women. The author interviewed Antoine on several occasions in Kailo and in Kafountine, a fishing village in Basse Cassamance.

The Women of Kailo, Kuba, and Hilol: During his visits to Kailo, Kuba, and Hilol, the researcher had the opportunity of meeting different women's groups to discuss gender roles in Karoninka culture. Instead of sharing their knowledge through formal discussions, the women opted to sing stories, myths, legends, and anecdotes.

Appendix: Pictures from the field

Left to right: Joseph Demba: 'Robert', 'Phillipe' (back), and Joseph
Demba. The three Karoninka men are paddling local pyrogues
through sinuous mangrove forest channels. This picture was
takenthe author and his three escorts were off to meet with a
traditional healer from the village island of Boun, Basse
Cassamance.
Note: These Pyrogues are made form from the majestic Fromager tree.

The author (third from left) attending funeral 'program in Kailo. The man and woman on his right are son and daughter of the deceased man. The deceased was known as a great rice farmer. In his honor, a rice bundle is displayed at the entrance of his compound.
Back: women and children are preparing the food for the day's activities (singing, dancing, skits, and palm wine consumption).

Forefront (left to right): Here, Robert and Leonard, a resident from Kailo, are making their way back from a funeral 'program'.
Back: A crowd of women is gathered around the *Inerti* tree. The tree is located at the Centre of the village of Kailo. The women are paying respect to the deceased by performing skits and monologues about the deceased.

Here, Pa Demba is making a *hiton (Inerti* effigy) out of palm tree leaves. Such effigies are suspended on tree branches or doorways; they are used to warn thieves of the presence of the *Inerti* spirit.
Back: Joseph, Pa Demba's son, is seen relaxing under a mango tree, awaiting a delivery of fresh palm wine.

Joseph Demba, collecting water form a typical Karoninka well. The fence
is used to keep animals from drinking from it. Such wells are used to
collect rainwater for watering plant and vegetable gardens during the dry
season.