

JOEL WAINWRIGHT

DECOLONIZING DEVELOPMENT



COLONIAL POWER AND THE MAYA



Blackwell
Publishers



Contents

List of Figures

Acknowledgments

List of Abbreviations

Introduction Capitalism qua Development

Contesting Development

Nature/Development

The Post-Development Challenge

Development as Aporia

Capitalism qua Development

Postcolonialism

Territorialization

Spacing

Plan of the Book

Notes

Part I Colonizing the Maya

1 Unsettling the Colonial Geographies of Southern Belize

The Colonization of Southern Belize

Hegemony, Settlement, and Territorialization

"The Indian will Require Patient and Sympathetic Treatment"

Conclusion

Notes

2 The Matter of the Maya Farm System

Archaeology, Mayanism, and Agriculture
Discourses of Agriculture Before the Maya Farm System

"Somewhere in the Depths of the Forest"

The Discourse on the Maya Farm System

Conclusion

The milpa and the Menchu Controversy

Notes

3 An Archaeology of Mayanism

Mayanism, de Vera Paz

The Tezulutlán Experiment

Spacing Hegemony

Lascasian Anthropology: Forerunner of Mayanism

Maya Archaeology in the Archaeology of Mayanism

Discovering American Civilization: Stephens and Catherwood

Thomas Gann's Explorations and Adventures

*The Maya in Asturias's Hombres de maíz*78

[*The Maya in the British Museum*](#)

[*Conclusion*](#)

[*Notes*](#)

[*Part II Aporias of Development*](#)

[*4 From Colonial to Development Knowledge: Charles Wright and the Battles over the Columbia River Forest*](#)

[*From Colonial to Development Knowledge: Land in British Honduras*](#)

[*Developing the Maya Farm System*](#)

[*Land as Development Doctrine*](#)

[*“Giving Civilization to these Indians”: The Maya Indian Liaison Officer, 1953-1959*](#)

[*Slash-and-Burn People*](#)

[*Reading the Liaison Officer Position*](#)

[*The Conflict over the Columbia River Forest Reserve*](#)

[*Charles Wright and the Social Nature of the Columbia River Forest*](#)

[*Conclusion*](#)

[*Notes*](#)

[*5 Settling: Fieldwork in the Ruins of Development*](#)

[*Settling In*](#)

Settling the Maya: The Toledo Research and Development Project

“To Achieve a Settled Population”

“An Honest Report of their Failures”

The Promise of Development Ethnography

Rice and Debt: The Toledo Small Farmer Development Project

Indebtedness and the Reservation Lands

Developing Resistance

Conclusion

Notes

6 Finishing the Critique of Cultural Ecology: Reading the Maya Atlas

Making the Maya Atlas

Reading the Maya Atlas

Space and Gender in the Maya Atlas

Counter-Mapping as Territorialization

Counter-Mapping as Cultural Ecology

Conclusion

Notes

Conclusion

Notes

Bibliography

Archival Sources

Works Cited

Index

Antipode Book Series

General Editor: Noel Castree, Professor of Geography, University of Manchester, UK Like its parent journal, the Antipode Book Series reflects distinctive new developments in radical geography. It publishes books in a variety of formats – from reference books to works of broad explication to titles that develop and extend the scholarly research base – but the commitment is always the same: to contribute to the praxis of a new and more just society.

Published

Decolonizing Development: Colonial Power and the Maya
Joel Wainwright

Privatization: Property and the Remaking of Nature-Society Relations

Edited by Becky Mansfield

Cities of Whiteness

Wendy S. Shaw

Neoliberalization: States, Networks, Peoples

Edited by Kim England and Kevin Ward

The Dirty Work of Neoliberalism: Cleaners in the Global Economy

Edited by Luis L. M. Aguiar and Andrew Herod

David Harvey: A Critical Reader

Edited by Noel Castree and Derek Gregory

Working the Spaces of Neoliberalism: Activism, Professionalization and Incorporation

Edited by Nina Laurie and Liz Bondi

Threads of Labour: Garment Industry Supply Chains from the Workers' Perspective

Edited by Angela Hale and Jane Wills

Life's Work: Geographies of Social Reproduction

Edited by Katharyne Mitchell, Sallie A. Marston and Cindi Katz

Redundant Masculinities? Employment Change and White
Working Class Youth

Linda McDowell

Spaces of Neoliberalism

Edited by Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore

Space, Place and the New Labour Internationalism

Edited by Peter Waterman and Jane Wills

Forthcoming

Grounding Globalization: Labour in the Age of Insecurity

Edward Webster, Rob Lambert and Andries Bezuidenhout

Decolonizing Development

Colonial Power and the Maya

Joel Wainwright



© 2008 by Joel Wainwright

BLACKWELL PUBLISHING

350 Main Street, Maiden, MA 02148-5020, USA

9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK

550 Swanston Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053, Australia

The right of Joel Wainwright to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the UK Copyright, Designs, and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, except as permitted by the UK Copyright, Designs, and Patents Act 1988, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Designations used by companies to distinguish their products are often claimed as trademarks. All brand names and product names used in this book are trade names, service marks, trademarks, or registered trademarks of their respective owners. The publisher is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book.

This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold on the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering professional services. If professional advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought.

First published 2008 by Blackwell Publishing Ltd

1 2008

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Wainwright, Joel.

Decolonizing development: colonial power and the
Maya/Joel Wainwright.

p. cm. – (Antipode book series)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4051-5705-6 (hardcover: alk. paper) – ISBN 978-1-4051-5706-3 (pbk.: alk. paper) 1. Mayas-Belize-Toledo District-Economic conditions. 2. Mayas-Belize-Toledo District-Economic conditions. 3. Mayas-Agriculture-Belize-Toledo District. 4. Mayas-Belize-Toledo District-Social conditions. 5. Toledo District (Belize)-Colonial influence. 6. Toledo District (Belize)-Economic conditions. 7. Toledo District (Belize)-Social conditions. I. Title.

F1445.W35 2008

305.897'427072824-dc22

2007026743

The publisher's policy is to use permanent paper from mills that operate a sustainable forestry policy, and which has been manufactured from pulp processed using acid-free and elementary chlorine-free practices. Furthermore, the publisher ensures that the text paper and cover board used have met acceptable environmental accreditation standards.

For further information on
Blackwell Publishing, visit our website at
www.blackwellpublishing.com

*For Julian Cho -
nim li winq, in wami:
Bantiox aawe*

List of Figures

- [0.1](#) George Price teaching a class of Maya students, ca. 1964
- [1.1](#) Sketch map showing logging concessions, 1861
- [1.2](#) Sketch map showing logging concessions, 1861 (transformed)
- [1.3](#) Map of Crown and private lands, 1868
- [1.4](#) Photo of an Alcalde's court, ca. 1948
- [1.5](#) Map of Plan of Indian Reservations, 1888
- [1.6](#) Map of Plan of Indian Reservation at San Antonio, ca. 1910
- [3.1](#) Parra's portrait of Las Casas, 1875
- [3.2](#) Catherwood's painting of the Casa del Gobernador at Uxmal, 1844
- [3.3](#) The British Museum Expedition Team, 1928
- [3.4](#) Producing the 'Maya,' 1925
- [3.5](#) The Maya in the British Museum
- [4.1](#) The Kekchi Traveler, frontispiece to *Land in British Honduras*, 1959
- [4.2](#) 'Physiographic map of the Maya area' from Morley, 1946
- [4.3](#) Julian Cho (at left) leading march through Punta Gorda, 1995
- [5.1](#) Belize Marketing Board rice purchases, 1935–1981
- [5.2](#) Toledo District *milpa* rice production, 1975–2005
- [5.3](#) The decline of mechanized rice in the Toledo District, 1993–1999
- [5.4](#) The division of Indian Reservation lands, 1993–2003
- [6.1](#) Map from the *Maya Atlas*, 1997
- [6.2](#) Map of the Maya Cultural Land Use Area from the *Maya Atlas*, 1997
- [6.3](#) Antinomies of Maya culture in the *Maya Atlas*
- [6.4](#) Map from the *Maya Atlas*, 1997

Acknowledgments

The research for this book was made possible by the financial support of a Fulbright fellowship, a grant from the MacArthur Interdisciplinary Program on Global Change, and fellowships from the University of Minnesota. A Killam postdoctoral research fellowship provided time to write at the University of British Columbia; the book was completed at the Ohio State University. I would like to thank the people of Minnesota, British Columbia, and Ohio for building these great public universities where I have had the good fortune to study, teach, and write.

In a substantive way the research for this book started in 1995, and I owe a tremendous, unpayable debt to the many friends and allies who have sustained and inspired me in the subsequent twelve years. To the following I offer a sincere, and simple, thank you: Daniella Aburto, Pedro Ack and his family, Basilio Ah, Mazher Al-Zoby, Kiran Asher, Nurcan Atalan-Helicke, Luis Avila, Trevor Barnes, Bruce Braun, Jon Brier, Matalia Bul, Oscar Burke, Domingo Cal, Padraig Carmody, Noel Castree, Maggie, Ian, and Ingrid Cho Absher, Ines and Pio Coc, Mateo, Maria, Pas, Marta, Mon, and Cristina Coc, Andres Coh, Mat Coleman, Bud Duvall, Jerry Enriquez, Peter Esselman, Vinay Gidwani, Jim Glassman, Glenn Gould, Leila Harris, Qadri Ismail, Allen Issacman, Carmelito Ixim, Will Jones, Brian King, Premesh Lalu, Gomier Long-ville, Josh Lund, Geoff Mann, Anant Maringati, Jacob Marlin, Mayday Books, Bill and Diane Mercer, Peg and Hans Meyer, Matt Miller, Jane Moeckli, Bernard Nietschmann, Rafa Ortiz, Tom Pepper, Paul Robbins, Morgan Robertson, Eugenio Salam, Abdi Samatar, Anna Secor, Eric Sheppard, Adam Sitze, John Skelton, Michelle Spencer-Yates, Karen Steigman, Amanda Swarr, Pulcheria and Bartolo Teul, Mary Thomas, Latha Varadarajan, Dave and Camille Wainwright, Lou and

Shay Wainwright, Rick Wilk, Theresa Wong, and Charles Wright.

My most heartfelt thanks are reserved for Kristin Mercer.

List of Abbreviations

AI	Atlantic Industries, Ltd.
BDDC	British Development Division in the Caribbean
BEC	Belize Estate and Produce Company
CARD	Community-initiated Agriculture and Resource Development project
CDB	Caribbean Development Bank
CO	Colonial Office
CRFR	Columbia River Forest Reserve
DC	District Commissioner
DFC	Development Finance Corporation
FD	Forest Department
FPMP	Forest Planning and Management Project
GOB	Government of Belize
IACHR	Inter-American Commission on Human Rights
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFI	Intermediary Financial Institution
ILRC	Indian Law Resource Center
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JCS	Julian Cho Society
MAFC	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Cooperatives
MFS	Maya farm system
MLA	Maya Leaders Alliance
MP	Minute Paper
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ODA	British Overseas Development Administration
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
PUP	People's United Party
RLC	Reservation Lands Committee, or the Committee
TAA	Toledo Alcaldes Association
TCGA	Toledo Cacao Growers Association
TMCC	Toledo Maya Cultural Council

TRDP Toledo Research and Development Project
TSFDP Toledo Small Farmers' Development Project
UDP United Democratic Party
UN United Nations
WTO World Trade Organization

Introduction

Capitalism qua Development

Traditional geography steals space just as the imperial economy steals wealth, official history steals memory, and formal culture steals the word.

Eduardo Galeano (2000: 315)

In its brief history, global capitalism has created a world of such intense inequalities that one can only conclude, to borrow Galeano's words, that the world is governed by an imperial economy designed to steal wealth from the poor. Consider: in 2001 the gross net income (GNI) for the entire world was 31.4 trillion US dollars.¹ If this vast sum was distributed equally among the world's 6.1 billion people, it would amount to \$5,120 per person. But the vast majority of people in the world received considerably less. In Latin America and the Caribbean, for instance, the GNI per capita was \$3,280; in South Asia, \$460; in Sub-Saharan Africa, only \$450. Such regional averages are deceptive, however, because each of these regions is in turn divided by inequalities that parallel the global pattern, and the subaltern majorities do not own (let alone earn) even these modest sums. Thus, in a world with a per capita GNI of more than \$5,000, there are 2.8 billion people – almost half of the world – who live on less than \$700 a year. Of these, 1.2 billion people earn less than \$1 a day. This is much worse than it was a generation ago. The average GNI of the richest 20 countries today is 37 times that of the poorest 20, a degree of inequality that has roughly doubled in the past 40 years.²

The irony is that this historic expansion of inequality occurred during a period known as the “age of development,” a time when “development decades” came and went and scores of states built their hegemony, along with multilateral institutions and NGOs for that matter, upon one mandate: *accelerating development*. A truly global consensus emerged concerning political-economic management – a form of hegemony in Gramsci’s sense³ – that the world’s poor should enjoy the fruits of development. The fact that global capitalism has increased inequality without substantially reducing poverty raises stark questions: what is it that makes some areas of the world rich and others poor? How is it that capitalism reproduces inequality in the name of *development*? Indeed, how is it that the deepening of capitalist social relations comes to be taken *as* development?

Contesting Development

This book clears space to answer these questions by investigating colonialism and development through the lens of a postcolonial Marxism and by considering the colonization and development of the region known today as southern Belize. This area, also called the Toledo District, is the poorest in the country and among the poorest regions in Central America. The 2002 GNI for Belize was \$2,960.⁴ The greatest poverty is concentrated in the rural Maya communities in the Toledo District, where 41 percent of the households earned less than \$720 per year.⁵ For the World Bank as much as the local farmers who experience the existential effects of this poverty, the solution to this situation is economic development via neoliberal policy and loans of financial capital.⁶

The 1990s were a tumultuous decade in the Toledo District of southern Belize as export-oriented neoliberalism became Belize's de facto development strategy. State spending had been governed by a strict austerity and the state privatized public assets at a rate that left it with little left to sell.⁷ This complemented a vigorous search for new exports, which have led to an expansion of resource extraction, particularly in fisheries, timber, and agriculture. When the Ministry of Natural Resources sold a number of new logging concessions in Toledo in the mid-1990s, the neoliberal development model collided with an indigenous movement that was gaining ground throughout southern Belize.⁸ This social movement – called simply “the Maya movement” in Belize – was led by the late Julian Cho, a schoolteacher who was elected to the chairmanship of the movements' central organization, the Toledo Maya Cultural Council (TMCC), in 1995. Julian and the TMCC struggled to organize Mopan and Q'eqchi' Maya-speaking people, whose livelihoods are based on corn and rice production in the forests of Toledo, to win secure rights to the lands that were threatened by the logging concessions.⁹ This Maya movement used the logging concessions as a way to articulate claims about land rights and the marginality of the Mayas in Belizean development on national and international scales.¹⁰

The drive to expand logging exports and the rise of the Maya movement collided in September 1995 when a logging concession was granted to a multinational firm to cut timber in the Columbia River Forest, an area used by a number of Maya communities for hunting, farming, and collecting other non-timber forest products. Demonstrations by Mayas and their allies called for an end to foreign logging operations, secure land rights, and a new investment by the state in a development project in the region (called “CARD”: see chapter 2). To map their territory and present an alternative

vision of development, the leaders of the Maya movement organized a project to map all of the Maya communities in southern Belize (I discuss this project in chapter 6).¹¹ The maps and the logging concessions were two key pieces of evidence in a lawsuit drawn up against the state and brought before the Supreme Court of Belize in 1997. The Maya movement won some of its demands. Logging operations were cancelled in the Columbia River Forest in mid-1996. Maya leaders were invited to assist in designing a new development project, funded by the state with loans from regional development banks, that aimed at improving incomes in rural communities. After the 1998 election of the progressive People's United Party (or PUP) government of Said Musa, "friendly settlement talks" were established between Maya leaders and state representatives to resolve the land issue.

But the Maya did not win all that they had struggled for. Julian Cho died under mysterious circumstances in December 1998. As the movement fractured, the Musa government found that there was no unified leadership and no substantive proposals to negotiate. The settlement talks on the land issue soon dissolved. Today, the same logging company is at work in Toledo's forests; CARD, the development program, has come and gone, leaving Belize with more debt, and poverty has only deepened in the Maya communities. As for the lawsuit, in 2003 the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (the IACHR, part of the inter-American system of international law) ruled in favor of the Maya, but as of September 2007 the practical effects of this ruling have been nil.¹²

This story resounds with those from many parts of the world today. It is a cliché to say that development projects often hurt the poor, women, or other subaltern social groups. The literature cataloging the hybrid ways that neoliberal capitalism has seized and reformed the political

sphere (only to be met by new forms of resistance) is vast. As in southern Belize, a common narrative involves environmental threats and conflicts between different social groups and the state that are resolved through a shift from political and legal to developmental policies.¹³ Today, threats to hegemony that emerge through such conflict are always already negotiated and resolved in terms of *national development*, a political surface that expands and contracts as hegemony is reworked in struggles over capital accumulation, identity, territorialization, and social power. Though this book examines the politics of development in contemporary Belize, my aim is not simply to document neoliberalism's effects – nor to write an ethnography of the Maya or their resistance.¹⁴ Rather, this is a study of the history and politics of development as a form of power, one with a truly global sway. In the wake of formal, political decolonization, development became the central mission or justification for Third World states. These states faced the enormous challenge of reconfiguring longstanding economic patterns and processes that were immiserating much of the world.¹⁵ The promise of development has gone unfulfilled for most of the world, and we must criticize the development policies that have failed to create the conditions for local capital accumulation, social investment, or sustainable livelihoods.

This task has been made more urgent in the past twenty years. The disastrous consequences of neoliberalism and structural adjustment, consolidated as the de facto development project for the world, led many to suggest a relationship between imperialism and development.¹⁶ The authority of the Bretton Woods institutions – the IMF, the World Bank, and the GATT/WTO – is vast and plainly rooted in colonialism. For Belize, the transition from colonial rule to neoliberalism was seamless: the government gained formal

independence from Britain only in 1981, and in the face of a growing balance-of-payments crisis adopted its first agreement with the IMF in 1985.¹⁷

Just as there can be no doubt that neoliberalism holds sway in discourses about development and economic management today, there is a parallel strength to the enframing of development issues as the property of nation-states.¹⁸ For instance, the balance of accounts and trade deficit are understood as Belizean problems, notwithstanding the facts that the economic life of Belizeans exceeds the territorial extent of the state, and that Belize's elites are increasingly transnational. That the constellation of issues that are thematized as "economic" is defined vis-à-vis the territory of the nation-state is neither innocent nor particularly old. The very identification of "the economy" as having an essentially national character dates from the early twentieth century.¹⁹ At both the local and global scales, the economy has been constituted as a sphere of economic flows regulated by national policies. This formulation of the economic as a geographical object is rooted in the colonial period.

Although this book concerns development in Belize, I do not treat Belize as an unproblematic site of analysis. If we begin by simply assuming that Belize is *there*, if we presume that the ontology of "Belize" is fixed in advance, we stand to miss a crucial effect of colonial power. The iterative production of Belize as a territorial nation-state works through practices that are thoroughly colonial. This is one of the lessons of the Maya land rights movement – what we call "Belize" today is an object produced through Spanish and British colonialism. This process of becoming Belize cannot be disassociated from primitive accumulation and the production of essentialist forms of national and racial forms of subjectivity. These effects are reiterated in the

colonial present through the very act of taking Belize as an unproblematic object.²⁰ Like much of the world, the processes that have played the greatest role in shaping the political economy and social life in Belize are both colonial and capitalist; therefore I focus on these relations. To interpret them effectively requires an engagement between development and the Marxist and postcolonial traditions.

Nature/Development

In *Keywords*, Raymond Williams argues that “nature” is “perhaps the most complex word in the [English] language”²¹ because it gathers three radically different meanings under one sign. “Nature” can refer, first, to the essential quality of some thing. If we ask after the nature of a thing, we are asking after its essence. Second, “nature” can refer to an “inherent force which directs either the world or human beings or both”; third, “nature” can also refer to the world itself, environment, the space in which things live. These meanings are frequently conflated when some thing is described as being “natural.” An affiliation between essence, direction, and environment is thus woven through our language. Williams explains of “nature”:

What can be seen as an uncertainty was also a tension: nature was at once innocent, unprovided, sure, unsure, fruitful, destructive, a pure force and tainted and cursed. The real complexity of natural processes had been rendered by a complexity within the singular term.... The emphasis on discoverable laws... led to a common identification of Natural with Reason: the object of observation with the mode of observation Each of these conceptions of Nature was essentially static: a set of laws – the constitution of the world, or an inherent, universal,

primary but also recurrent force... teaching a singular goodness.[22](#)

Fruitful yet destructive, a pure force and yet tainted: synonyms of “development,” an equally difficult keyword that Williams, alas, did not define for us in Keywords. Our inherited concept of “development” shares much in common with “nature.” Like nature and culture, development is one of those words that first described “a quality or process, immediately defined by a specific reference, but later became independent nouns.” Also like nature, development carries multiple and radically divergent meanings. The first is the *unfolding* of something essential, as in “plant development” or “child development.” This is the older meaning – older even than the English word “development.” The verb “to develop,” from which “development” is derived, has Latin roots that carry the connotation of “disentangling.” “Development” thus refers to a particular ontological quality that is expressed through the process of unfolding.[23](#) Aristotle in *Physics* uses the illustration of the seed to speak of the essence that is expressed in the totality of its unfolding. Here is Aristotle in Book IV of *Physics*, chapter 1:

We also speak of a thing’s nature as being exhibited in the process of growth by which its nature is attained. [This is “development” as ontology, i.e., unfolding of (the) latent.]... But it is not in this way that nature (in the one sense) is related to nature (in the other). What grows *qua* growing grows from something into something. Into what then does it grow? Not into that from which it arose but into that to which it tends. *The shape is then nature.*[24](#)

Thus the essence of nature as essence is given in what – today – we would call development. That term was not available to Aristotle, or, for that matter, anyone before the 1800s. Not before the rise of the nation-state-capital trinity:

a clue to our inquiry. The modern usage enters Western philosophy via Hegel, who defines development with the example of the seed developing into a plant in his *Encyclopedia*. Hegel usually uses “development” in the ontological sense, i.e., to refer to the self-unfolding of life toward the divine or of “the divine in the world.”²⁵

Second, “development” also refers to an intention to create or change something.²⁶ In this sense, “development” refers to a force that tutors a change in something or a course of events. This meaning always carries the sense of *will*: development in this second sense implies an intervention – to make something move in a direction that is *not* given in advance, essential, or required. The object of development is changed, moved, or improved, by some willful power applied from above and outside of it.

Our concepts of “development” and “nature” share this problematic conflation for a common reason: they are two of our most entrenched, inherited, ontological signs for indicating essence. In Western metaphysics “nature” and “development” both express essence by proposing a relationship between temporality, spatiality, and ontology. As with nature, development is sometimes defined as an inherent force which directs human beings. Nature binds temporality and ontology by joining worldliness as totality with interior, substantial essence. The substantiality of nature articulates interiority and becoming: for instance, again, in Aristotle’s *Physics*, Book II, we read: “nature is a source or cause of being moved and of being at rest in that to which it belongs primarily, in virtue of itself and not in virtue of a concomitant attribute.”²⁷ Nature is perhaps an older concept than development, but we can see its relation to development in Aristotle’s claim that nature is a “cause of being moved... in virtue of itself.” The essence of nature is expressed through development. Development thus binds

temporality and ontology via the *rational unfolding of presence*.

The distinct meanings of development are frequently conflated in ways that have important effects. When we refer to “national economic development,” for instance, we at once refer to something that is desirable, that requires willful intervention, and also is a “natural” thing for the nation to do. This conflation is not due to a choice made by the speaker. It is an effect of language – and one of great significance. To consider the implications of this, we need only add two additional comments. First: it was precisely the promise of “national economic development” that every state promised its people on the eve of independence, and it is the global and structural failure to deliver on this promise that animates all our discussions of development today. Yet though we may recognize the globality of this failure, everywhere it remains the remit of the *nation-state* to resolve. Second comment: today, “national economic development” always refers to the deepening of *capitalist* social relations, even when it is not named as such. This affiliation between capitalism and the compound sign “development” has fundamental political effects. The unfolding of capitalism on an ever-wider scale – a process driven by the contradictions of capitalism as a mode of production – is inscribed with an undeserved sense of *directionality*. This directionality may be historical (in the sense of “inevitability”), spatial (in the sense that it produces spatial relations that are taken for granted), or ethical (by implying guidance towards ends desired by liberal-humanist values).²⁸ Very often these are combined in ways that make the worldliness of the world seem like a “natural development.”²⁹ When capitalism is treated as development, the violent effects of the capitalist social relations are normalized and unjust geographies become hegemonic. The “historical identity between Reason and

capital” assumes its epistemic and ontological privileges when the extension of capitalist social relations is taken as development. Thus of development we could say what Adorno once wrote of “progress”: “one cannot employ the concept roughly enough.”³⁰

The Post-Development Challenge

The failing of the best-known Marxist approach to destroy development conceptually – I am speaking of the political economy of development tradition³¹ – led to the rise of the “post-development” school. This group argues that development cannot be understood outside of, or prior to, its operation through discursive practices.³² To its credit, this move reopens *the* fundamental question of development studies: *what is development?*

Within this literature, the general answer that has been provided is that “development” is a discursive formation exported via global institutions in the mid-twentieth century, extending from centers of power through the Global South via development projects. In a widely read case study, James Ferguson argues:

“Development” institutions generate their own form of discourse, and this discourse simultaneously constructs Lesotho as a particular kind of object of knowledge, and creates a structure of knowledge around that object. Interventions are then organized on the basis of this structure of knowledge, which, while “failing” in their own terms, nonetheless have regular effects... [including] the entrenchment of bureaucratic state power, side by side with the projection of a representation of economic and

social life which denies “politics” and... suspends its effects.³³

Because development’s gravitational pull on politics encourages centralized forms of leadership and favors the “developed” over the “underdeveloped,” uneven power relations and the authority of the bureaucratic state are deepened in the name of development.³⁴

Numerous criticisms have been leveled against the post-development literature.³⁵ Two are especially pertinent. First, “development” has often been reduced to a singular, monolithic discourse, devoid of any contingency.³⁶ Ironically, in their effort to displace “development,” the postdevelopment critics have often implied that development is essentially singular, and that it has been so since its inception (“in the early post-World War II period” according to Arturo Escobar).³⁷ That is, for a project that aims at showing, again in Escobar’s words, “how the “Third World has been produced by the discourses and practices of development,”³⁸ the work treats development as monolithic. Yet as Vinay Gidwani writes:

To proceed, as post-development scholars do, on the assumption that “development” is a self-evident process, everywhere the same and always tainted by its progressivist European provenance... is to succumb to the same kind of epistemological universalism that post-development theorists... are at such pains to reject.³⁹

Second, critics have shown that there is a notable weakness within the literature that I would call, following Gramsci, the “analysis of situations”: careful studies of class formations, production and consumption, and state-society relations. On this point, Michael Watts argues that post-development is weakest where it matters most. Escobar and colleagues fail to adequately analyze how development discourse is

articulated through concrete socioeconomic practices; Escobar's work, Watts once remarked, is insufficiently dialectical.⁴⁰ To capture the subtleties of that dialectic, Watts called not for post-development but rather "development ethnographies."⁴¹ Yet our challenge is not ethnographic. Certainly, discerning the effects of development practices presupposes a rich understanding of state-society relations, and we must examine the sedimented effects of the historical-geographical processes that have shaped the particularities of capitalism qua development and its hegemony. But that is where the similarities with ethnography should end. If we wish to carry out that work under the sign, "ethnography" – surely one of the signature colonial disciplines – we will only introduce more confusion and epistemic violence.⁴²

We should therefore leave the term "post-development" behind. The "post-" before development serves only to draw us off the path of the inquiry. Unlike postcolonialism, which is a concept that I will take up and argue for, in the end, "post-development" amounts to little more than the facile negation of the object it criticizes.⁴³ Instead of "post-development," we need a fundamental critique of development: one that examines its power, its sway, as an aporetic totality. What is needed, I argue, is a specifically *postcolonial* Marxist critique of development. It is notable that post-development failed to incorporate Marx's critique of capitalism and failed to incorporate postcolonialism. Yet a postcolonial Marxism that rethought development would retain two key points from the post-development literature. First: a critique of capitalism must have the theoretical tools to take apart "development" on discursive and ontological grounds. This clarifies how we can leverage what counts as "development" away from its historical moorings as *trusteeship*.⁴⁴ Second: the reading that produces this