Joel Wainwright’s thorough critique of development in Belize offers an original reading of development. He investigates the relationship between colonialism and development, and explores the ways in which colonialism has shaped the modern world. He does so by drawing on philosophy, political theory and the case study of Maya in Belize. His book is published as part of the Antipode Book Series which focuses on distinctive new developments in radical geography. The overarching aim of the book – to “decolonise capitalism as development” – is certainly broad, but with the focus being on the small area of southern Belize the author is able to draw upon a rich source of detailed information and specific examples to make some important and thought-provoking claims. Through the use of the case study, Wainwright attempts to bring to light the complex dynamics through which colonial tropes have been drawn (and redrawn) in contemporary development discourse(s).

Wainwright begins the book with a substantive and well crafted thesis in which he highlights the ways in which the expansion of capitalism through European colonialism has contemporary corollaries in our present day capitalism qua development, with particular attention given to how these forces shape “politics, subjectivities and the worldliness of the world” (2008: 23). He clarifies his own approach to the study of Maya by first taking the reader through some possible alternative theoretical approaches, with detailed explanations of what he perceives to be their major shortcomings. Here, Wainwright presents a forceful critique not only of Marxist approaches to development economics, but also of state theory which he regards as inadequate to the task of explaining the dynamic forms of colonial hegemony as it has been articulated through neoliberal capitalism. He argues that postcolonial theory provides an important extension and modification of the Marxist problematic. However, the author goes on to argue that the postcolonial literature has avoided the question of how the state produces its space – that is, territorialisation – which, as Wainwright points out, has always been at the heart of colonial capitalism. In so doing, Wainwright studies the political effects of capitalism qua development in the colonial present in a manner which simultaneously investigates the spatio-ontological basis of the nation-state (i.e. territory).
In problematising colonialism-development, he is calling for (and attempting to engage in) an extension of the Marxist and postcolonial theoretical purview. This argument takes place within a well delivered, spirited and strong philosophical register. Borrowing and shifting a term from Derrida, he refers to the practice of reading he adopts as *spacing*. Employing spacing in this particular way makes it possible, he argues, to achieve critical readings of capitalism *qua* development in the Americas, which are already related to colonial discourses. In applying the above methodology to Belize, he successfully illustrates in this book that the hegemony of postcolonial development articulates and reinforces capitalism and territorialisation.

Early in the book, Wainwright examines the ways in which colonial practices, which have territorialised Mayan spaces, have actually bound together political identity with development and settlement. In his words, “Colonial power materialized a longstanding alignment of the concepts of city, citizen, and state” (2008: 27). The latter is examined by way of conducting a deconstructive reading of the inherited concepts of development, territory and Mayanism, respectively.

The matter of territorialisation is tackled throughout the book. The first chapter is devoted to illustrating how the geographies of southern Belize were constructed through colonial practices. Here, Wainwright demonstrates how the resulting hegemony that enabled colonialism was “constituted on the basis of spatial forms of political power: settlement, land taxation, and territorialization” (2008: 59).

Overall, Wainwright’s reading of colonisation and development calls into question the enframing of development in Belize. Following Timothy Mitchell, Wainwright argues that “what is at stake in colonialism and development is the very constitution of modernity as the dominant mode of enframing the world” (2008: 28). The author here aims to question the enframing that has made it possible to think of Belize as having a proper, empirical and historical geography – one that, he argues, silences Mayan resistance to these practices.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part, entitled ‘Colonizing the Maya’, takes place through readings of archival texts, maps and development practices. Wainwright examines the subaltern history of southern Belize and more specifically the colonisation of southern Belize, the settlement and territorialisation of the Maya. He also examines the discourses of the Maya farm system, the reform of their agricultural practices, the agricultural development projects, the accelerated
development and the broader archaeology of Mayanism. In this part of the book, the reader discovers the documented centuries of resistance and struggle over the Maya’s representation and their land.

The second part of the book, entitled ‘Aporias of Development’, revolves around the politics of state-led development projects since the 1950s. This is explored through three case studies of failed attempts at development. Firstly, he considers the work of a soil scientist who served the British colonial state and was instrumental in transforming colonial discourse into a discipline of development. Secondly, he cites two development projects that aimed for the ‘settling’ of Maya agriculture by improving mechanised rice production. And finally, he considers a ‘counter-mapping’ project, the Maya Atlas, which offers an indigenous view, and thus represents an attempt to oppose the top-down established approaches to the geographical management and development of southern Belize. Wainwright, who was himself involved in this last project, came to the conclusion that since the maps had to be compiled within the parameters and language of Western cartographic practices, such a project could never have been truly ‘indigenous’.

Wainwright concludes by arguing that in consolidating the theoretical gains of postcolonial Marxism, “we should be able to conceive colonial power as the simultaneous extension of territorial and capitalist social relations” (2008: 283). Indeed, in the close study of Maya in Belize, the author aptly demonstrates how development has been actually maintaining precisely what it promises to resolve – namely, power inequalities.

Finally, he successfully illustrates that we may take hold of development conceptually in such a way as to be able to think more critically of capitalism’s great historico-geographical achievement of becoming capitalism qua development.

For those with an interest in theorising development this book provides not only an original perspective but also a rich source of information on the social and political theory surrounding the concept. The book contains a high level of theoretical engagement, and as such it appears to address an academic and/or theoretically specialised reader. People unfamiliar with postcolonial theory may find some of the language and arguments difficult to follow. But such minor issues will not detract from what is a significant achievement and what will surely influence the ongoing debates on development, capitalism and postcolonialism.
Stratis-Andreas Efthymiou (se44@sussex.ac.uk) is a DPhil candidate in Sociology at the University of Sussex. His primary research interests include nationalism, identity, masculinity and militarism (particularly in contexts of conflict).