

Sustainable Fiefdoms: A Comparative Analysis of the
Political Economy of Tourism in Northwest Peru

A thesis presented by Leigh Rodi

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Advised by Mark Anderson

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Introduction	3-12
An (Incomplete) History of Development	12-23
Tourists for Change and Developing Professionals in Lobitos	23-42
The Enculturators	27-34
The Surveyors	34-41
Luxury, Walls, and the State's Role in Máncoran Tourism	43-59
Conclusion: Quitting The Wall Building Industry	60-63
References Cited	64-69

Introduction

Lobitos

The remnants of Lobitos' past — corroded steel and splinters of pinewood — mingle with the brand new concrete and corrugated sheet metal that constitute its present. On the hills overlooking the town, and in some cases on the same streets as residences, pump jacks— the same woodpecker-esque variety commonplace in the American West— siphon oil from underneath the sandy soil. Though little information is available on the total amount of oil produced by these pump jacks, the amount ostensibly pales in comparison to the 15,000 barrels of oil produced daily by the behemoth oil rigs anchored offshore (USGS).

Like much of Peru's arid coastline, the landscape is almost bereft of vegetation, sparsely occupied by the occasional hardy bush or carob tree. Strong winds come off the adjacent Pacific, blowing forty knots on most afternoons. Though Piura, the department in which Lobitos is located, technically falls in a dry forest biome, one traveling by land from the South would be forgiven for thinking they were still in the Sechura Desert, a 200 mile strand of sand dunes sandwiched between the Pacific and the Andes. Annual rainfall hovers around a meager ten centimeters with the exception of El Nino years, during which warm ocean temperatures coax torrential and destructive storms into inundating the otherwise dry region. Because of the rarity

of El Nino events, and moisture in general, the municipality must import water from Rio Chirra, 170 kilometers South.

The town itself is small, mostly composed of one story homes with short concrete walls facing dirt roads, alongside eclectically constructed shacks and the occasional dilapidated building. On some streets, large scale construction sites ringed by high walls tower over the corrugated steel roofs and lunar landscape below. Two piers jut out from the sandy coastline, with wooden fishing boats moored nearby. Towards the Northern edge are the vestiges of the Peruvian military's former occupation of the town: barracks and other stern, decaying architecture barred from public visitation by fencing.

The words 'ghost town' are used profusely in travel blogs describing the place, but so are "world class surfing destination" (Surfonomics - Lobitos - Save The Waves). This is because Lobitos' unique offshore bathymetry shapes an abundance of ocean swells into prime surfing waves. The waves were further improved by recent El Nino events, when rain storms and mudslides pushed massive amounts of sediment into the ocean. Though the effects on land were disastrous, the sediment filled in holes in the reef, in turn allowing the waves to grip the seafloor and break with ruler edge, mechanistic uniformity. Despite the harsh climate and minimal infrastructure, the promise of surfing perfect waves fostered a reconstruction of the town's image from an inhospitable ghost town into a surfer's paradise.

Máncora

Another coastal town, one which stands in stark contrast to Lobitos, lies forty miles to the north. One of the last towns before Peru's border with Ecuador, Máncora was the original surfers' destination for Limeños (people from Peru's capital, Lima), but has since emerged as an

international tourist hub. Here the ocean is better suited to cater to tourists. The Humboldt Current, which travels South to North and brings cold water to the rest of Peru, diverges from the coast just enough in Máncora for surfers and swimmers to strip down to their swimsuits in the summer. Despite its reputation as a surf town, smaller, friendlier waves break along the shore than further South in Lobitos.

Quintessential images of sea turtles, white sand beaches, palm frond beach umbrellas, and massive resorts pop up on a *Google Image* search of the town. Much of the town center's infrastructure is devoted to tourism, the main streets crowded by a variety of resorts, touring outfits, hostels, and restaurants. In recent years, the town has received international attention. In an article published in 2017 by *Vogue Magazine* with the seductive yet misleading title "Meet Me in Máncora: 5 Reasons to Visit This Locals-Only Peruvian Hideaway", writer Rachel Waldman gushed, "It doesn't take long to fall in love with the under-the-radar spot free of tourist clatter and full of charm. Simply put: If you're looking for the good things in life without added fuss, Máncora is the haven you've been dreaming of." (5 Reasons to Visit Máncora, Peru's Best-Kept Beach-Town Secret | *Vogue*).

"The good things in life" include a steady infusion of alcohol and ceviche for visitors, its array of restaurants and hotel lobbies transformed into clubs and bars each night. Outside of the tourist zone the architecture quickly shrinks into a sprawl of one story buildings topped with corrugated metal roofs and short walls surrounding them. Much of the sprawl uncannily resembles what one would see in Lobitos: chickens clucking around and dogs independent of any obvious owner, sparse vegetation, empty lots and humble architecture (Google Maps).

Theoretical Background

The purpose of describing the present conditions of both Lobitos and Máncora is to set the stage for the rest of this thesis, which rather than concerning itself with the material conditions of the places — demographics, poverty level, ecological concerns— is focused on the discourse that continues to promote the growth of a tourist economy under the auspices of sustainable development. In fact, I cast doubt on the purportedly empirical framework that other social researchers have relied on to measure some of the aforementioned, widespread wellness metrics— a critique that owes much to James Ferguson’s *Anti-Politics Machine* (1994). Borrowing from Michel Foucault’s notion that “discourse expresses how ‘facts’ can be conveyed in different ways and how the language used to convey these facts can interfere with our ability to decide what is true and what is false”, I attempt to cast light on how discourse fertilizes the field of development (Foucault 1980–Mowforth and Munt 1998: 40). Arturo Escobar wrote in his book *Encountering Development*, “From the perspective of institutional ethnography, a local situation is less a case study than an entry point to the study of institutional and discursive forces and how these are related to larger socioeconomic processes.” (Escobar 1995: 109). Both Lobitos and Máncora function, then, as what Escobar would call ‘entry points’ to studying the discursive and institutional forces that create the ‘reality’ on which development is transposed. Of course, scouring through websites has obvious limitations on the type of research that can be done. Measuring how much social value tourism has actually created in Máncora or Lobitos, for example, is impossible. So too is taking stock of how local people really feel about tourism, as others have attempted to do in Lobitos. Acknowledging the limitations of working exclusively with discourse, this thesis seeks to discern something very different from what other social research on tourism, and the development institutions that espouse tourism as a mode of

sustainable development, have sought to do in the past. Rather than focusing my attention on the wellness of the locals, this thesis is far more concerned with the affairs of outsiders: expat business owners, both volunteer and recreational tourists, academics, and other agents of change; in short I dedicate my energies to “studying up” (Nader 1972: 284-311). In the next subsection, I outline the structural components of the thesis and their constituent arguments.

Thesis Structure

Decades before tourists came to visit for waves and ceviche, and the recent generation of expats came to accommodate their vacations, Máncora and Lobitos were outposts for the extraction of natural resources and the production of commodities. This epoch began with the arrival of new industries. For Máncora, this took fruition in a transition from a hacienda (predominantly for the production of charcoal), into a vital port town for the burgeoning fishing industry, and finally into an international tourist destination (Velarde 2020). Lobitos began the century as the location of a British colonial outpost but by the second half functioned as a military base, and only in recent decades has it emerged as a rugged tourist destination (Gonzalez, Lacan 2017). In the first section I offer a brief history of the earlier iterations of development, as necessary to contextualize recent development efforts and the discourse around them.

What I want to engender in this historical account is a central notion of this thesis— that tourism, rather than a final solution to the region’s ailments, is merely the most recent economic force to effectively galvanize the region’s population and resources. A brief consultation with the limited history of these places, which invariably leads to a consideration of the discourse produced during older stages of development and the coinciding political climates, provides a

background for a critical analysis of the discourse that currently circulates: the principal subject of the rest of this thesis.

The second section is first concerned with creating a picture of development imaginary (a term that, for the purpose of this paper, encapsulates the sometimes tacit, sometimes overt assumptions of what a place *should* look like in order to properly suit the needs of tourism) that promotes Lobitos transformation from a ‘ghost town’ into a sustainable ‘tourist locale’, complete with English speaking hosts, clean, air conditioned rooms, and a revamped economy catered to the needs of tourists. In it I reflect on the prominent discursive trends I arrived at after sorting through hastily produced YouTube travel montages, nostalgic surf blogs, authoritative academic papers, and state issued plans for development.

NGO messaging, which identifies Lobitos as the perfect launchsite of “careers in sustainable development”, comes under scrutiny in the following pages of this section. In it, I assert that the problematization of poverty, and with it under-development, is less about solving real problems, as it is about creating the space for institutions to use Lobitos as a training ground for “sustainable development professionals”(Program). James Ferguson wrote, “Like “development” discourse, academic discourse deals not simply with the facts but with a constructed version of the object.” (Ferguson 1994: 27). Borrowing from his influential ethnography, *The Anti-Politics Machine: “development”, depoliticization, and bureaucratic power in Lesotho*, this section of the thesis identifies the planned objectives of NGOs— namely English language skills and entrepreneurship— as measures based in a “constructed view” of how to ‘improve’ the lives of Lobitenos based in a Western ideology that seeks to entrench Lobitos in the global economy.

I argue that much of the attention around creating a “sustainably developed” Lobitos serves to legitimize and perpetuate a growing field of development professionals, as well as an appeal to ecologically-conscious, and deep-pocketed, ecotourists. Sustainable development, moreover, is discursively applied as a catch-all phrase for projects that best harness the area’s limited natural resources. The tourist economy deals principally, as Burns wrote, “with the fulfillment of dreams”, but in Lobitos, this dream has less to do with the enjoyment of a relaxing idyllic locale; instead it is one obsessed with solving problems, problems which are constructs of an institutional framework imposed on the area: problems which, when “solved”, win awards, grants, and prestige (1999: 33). I contend that NGOs and INGOs are creating in Lobitos an array of projects that serve the express purposes of fulfilling the UN’s sustainable development goals, essential indicators of their own prestige. In the process, local people are turned into statistics, while the area’s environment is divided into distinct, separate entities, or resources, each with their own calculated utility. This is a process that, fundamentally, enforces a divide between the environment to be observed (by ecotourists, scientists, and other development professionals) and the token spaces to be afforded under the condition of careful monitoring (for “impoverished” locals). Further, much of the work that NGOs do serves to promote the growth of a tourist economy.

An analysis of the discourse around tourism in Máncora is the focus of the next section. This analysis is partially informed by Fernando Gonzalez Velarde’s *Placemaking and Unsustainable Tourism in Northern Peru*, an ethnography that I found to be an indelible resource. One of the few scholars to apply a truly critical perspective of the tourism economy in Máncora, Fernando Gonzalez Velarde asserted, “By strengthening transnational linkages, and

those between urban centres, and rural and coastal areas, the tourism industry has fostered new dynamics around the use of land, including territories subjected to extreme environmental hazards” (Velarde 2018: 1). The “extreme environmental hazards” this passage refers to are the El Nino events’ catastrophic and habitual destruction of infrastructure in Northern Peru. Considering the political economy of nature in Máncora, this section is concerned with the aesthetic performance of sustainability in a place fraught with prospects of ecological devastation. I pick through TripAdvisor reviews as well as the advertisements of purported eco resorts to consider the discursive function of the vocabulary of sustainability, arguing that it functions as a code for upper class sensibilities rather than an ecological commitment.

Prime among a host of contradictions that arose from my research is that Máncora is best visited without actually seeing much of the town outside the walls of resorts. TripAdvisor reviews of the best hotels loosely trace the outer edge of the town. In the same vein, visiting Máncora is best without having to deal with Máncorans: reviews implore potential travelers to visit hotels owned by English speaking expats, hotels which typically employ foreign service workers. I follow this pattern to outline the inherent social and spatial divisions embedded in producing an environment amenable to transnational tourism, arguing that the exclusivity is built into the development of a tourist economy.

Máncora, though often described as its antithesis, provides the perfect critical compliment to Lobitos. Whereas with Lobitos, which is consistently framed as on the precipice of becoming developed, what I found in Máncora was the discursive construction of a town always teetering on the brink of devastation, one that seemingly depends on tourism for the very survival of its people. In Lobitos, development is necessary because it facilitates tourism, yet in Máncora it is the opposite: tourism is a precondition for the town’s capacity to become

developed. Drawing from Marxist Dependency Theory, I argue that because tourism is the fundamental bedrock of Máncora's economy, development is a process the state and the municipality must facilitate—a task which translates in the discourse to sustainable development, and which manifests in the collaborative endeavors of building expensive, large-scale infrastructure. This section focuses its energies on delineating the relationship between municipal and state level government, the infrastructure they construct, and the circumstances that shape spaces for tourism under the label of sustainable development.

Throughout the body of this thesis, I identify a multitude of similarly diminutive and condescending references to the ‘locals’ of both coastal enclaves. This sentiment resonates from the depths of TripAdvisor review pages to the lofty heights of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals. In fact, what almost everyone who writes on Máncora and Lobitos seems to believe is quite eerie: on the North Coast of Peru there is always a danger of back-slipping into a provincial past, leaving the local population destitute and starving. In the conclusion, I describe how this backsliding potentiality sanctifies the forward progression of development through the discourse.

I conclude the thesis with a renunciation of the benevolently transformative potential of development, a repudiation which is buoyed by the critical analysis presented in preceding sections. I argue that as anthropologists we are in dire need of new critical tools to distinguish our efforts from the agendas of development institutions. Perhaps part of the reason the development framework—of which there exists an abundance of failed implementations—is so resilient is that social researchers are yet to abandon it; in fact we are principally involved in maintaining its relevance: often the same institutions that educate and employ us are major stakeholders in the business of “sustainable” development. I argue that we must make a clean

departure from development institutions (and ignore formal ties to such institutions in favor of working directly in service of the communities scheduled to be developed) if we are to build more robust and contemporarily relevant theories of how globalization is affecting change at the local level. While some theoretical frameworks from the past maintain a degree of relevance, and I draw from several in my analysis, none are complete, and many have suffered weathering significant enough to render them obsolescent.

Key terms: **eco-tourism, development, development imaginary, modernization, sustainability, tourism, Marxist Dependency Theory, neoliberalism, spatial production**

An (Incomplete) History of Development

A History of Development in Lobitos

Lobitos ha sido, en los últimos 120 años, un punto focal de los distintos eventos que han ido afectando el Perú: el desarrollo de la actividad extractiva, la concentración de capitales foráneos (especialmente europeos y estadounidenses), el conflicto con Ecuador, los sucesivos gobiernos militares y, últimamente, el retorno de la democracia y la apertura al turismo. / Lobitos has been, in the last 120 years, a focal point of the distinct events that have been affecting Peru: the development of extractive activity, the concentration of foreign capital (especially European and American), the conflict with

Ecuador, the successive military governments, and, recently, the return of democracy and the opening of tourism.

(translation my own) (Gonzalez, Lacan 2017: 61)

Little reliable documentation exists to create a picture of what was happening in Lobitos during the first half of the 20th century. This was entirely inconvenient for the purposes of this paper. The only reliable sources for such histories are almost all written in Spanish, which, for interested parties unfamiliar with the language, provides an immediate hindrance. I began to wonder about the ramifications of such a limited database. Because of this constraint, I postulated, foreigners must continue to rely on the same incomplete histories to construct their own narratives of the town's past. The mis-construction thus reproduces itself in the discourse, trickling into the short historical blurbs reserved for the beginning paragraphs of blog posts. In essence, dehistoricization is reproduced through a feedback loop. At any rate, this section should not be read with the expectation that a holistic history lies within. This thesis is centrally concerned with the discourse of development, and within it the discursive process of how places are constructed. The two are actually intertwined: the discourse "decides", based on a constructed version of the facts, where a place falls on the development spectrum (Ferguson 1994: 27). What is done, then, in the historical section, is always with a sensitivity to the discursive application of development ideology, i.e. when Lobitos was purportedly developed and by who.

Of those written in English, most histories begin with the arrival of Europeans and Americans seeking out oil in the area at the beginning of the 20th century. For the broader purposes of this thesis it is perhaps fitting to understand the history of Lobitos through the lens of

oil production— with oil production came the arrival of the first ‘modern’, English speaking foreigners, and the arrival of problematizations that, I contend, remain entrenched in an ideology of Westernized development even in the contemporary discourse. What follows is a brief description of what this literature afforded: a history of oil production in Lobitos.

Northern Peru in the 20th century provided a microcosm of what were global struggles over the control of Latin American oilfields. From the outset of their ‘discovery’ by Americans and Britishmen, who founded outposts there in the process of prospecting for oil, Northern Peru’s coastal departments, Talara and Piura, were sites of contest over some of the purest oil in the world. The ambitiously named International Petroleum Company, an offshoot of New Jersey based giant Standard Oil, had by the beginning of the 20th century staked its claim on much of Peru's oil (Miller 1982: 400). In Lobitos, however, this was not so. There, Lobitos Oilfields Limited, “a concern founded by British merchants” churned out oil for the first thirty-odd years of the twentieth century (Miller 1982: 400).

Most of the crude was refined and sold in the United Kingdom, where the company’s state of affairs was of some interest to the public. In an article published by *The Manchester Guardian and Observer* in 1924, the author wrote, “The results [Lobitos Oilfields Ltd. oil production and profits] obtained were all the more remarkable when it was remembered *they were pioneers in a remote and desert part of the world*, where no facilities of any kind existed, and where literally they had *built up out of nothing* an enterprise in which he thought they might take some pride”(italics my own). From this quote, readers are left with the impression that Lobitos Oilfields Limited was not imagined as solely an economic venture but an heroic and potentially treacherous *adventure* as well. Oil merchants were correspondingly characterized as courageous frontier men, bold trailblazers on a scorched and unfamiliar landscape. Ostensibly,

the impetus to shell out oil gained inertia through the characterization of the business venture as the next phase in Britain's mythic reckoning with destiny— a destiny in which they were tasked with molding the raw materials of foreign places into 'civilization'. An ideological backbone for their dominion over the landscape and the local population was ready-made, in which the oil colony was not *merely* for the sake of profits, but the extension of a rational society.

What is most striking about this era of Lobitos's history is that much of what is being constructed today, or proposed to be constructed in the near future, was already in place then. The British merchants, who lived in Lobitos while working for Lobitos Oilfields Limited, built homes from American Pine atop concrete foundations, constructed Latin America's first movie theater, a desalination plant, public bathrooms, a fishing pier, a market, etc. (Gonzalez, Lacan 2017: 67-68). Market commodities were sold at subsidized prices, and potable water, gas, electricity and education were all afforded to Lobiteños by their British "guests" (Gonzalez, Lacan 2017: 67-68). Of course, the construction of infrastructure as well as the allotment of the aforementioned resources could not have only been driven by the notion that the British were tasked with "civilizing" the world. First and foremost, radical additions to the town's infrastructure were necessary to facilitate what was a large-scale oil drilling and export business. Secondly, relations between local Peruvians and oil merchants were effectively lubricated in the process; the easiest solution for the British to keep in good standing with their hosts was to offer Lobiteños some of their luxuries. But this 'gift-giving' was, I contend, only a single facet among many dedicated to turning Lobitos into a functional and acquiescent oil colony.

Lobitos Oilfields Limited's relatively brief stint of full control over the eponymous locality came to an end in the mid-1930s. It was then that the International Petroleum Company (IPC), which had since the late 19th century controlled the Lobitos-adjacent La Brea and Parinas

oilfields, gained a 50% share of the company's stock (Clayton 1999: 92). At the time of Lobitos' acquisition, IPC was already an "organization larger than the Peruvian government" (Clayton 1999: 91). Even after the U.S. Congress enacted antitrust legislation in the 1910s, IPC maintained control over a staggering 80% of Peru's oil.

In the literature, IPC is lauded for their strategic consolidation of Peru's oil fields with a similar fervor to Lobitos Oilfields, only with a greater focus on the company's cleanliness than its bravery. A page out of Lawrence A. Clayton (U. of Alabama professor emeritus)'s *Peru and the United States: The Condor and The Eagle*, describes a port just south of Lobitos in the city of Talara. Clayton states, "The I.P.C. refinery, the port of Talara, the workplace, and the homes of I.P.C. employees became a model enclave of a foreign presence in Peru— a clean and healthy port with well-paid workers and an industry that contributed a sizable share of income to the Peruvian state." (Clayton 1999: 92). As with any sanitization crusade led by oil barons, there were skeptics. "Peruvian critics", as Clayton briefly considered in the following sentence, were concerned with "the exploitation of one of Peru's principal nonrenewable resources." (Clayton, 1999: 92-93). It seems some, though not those chairing consequential positions, were put off by the financial arrangement that hid behind the flashing lights of fancy additions to local infrastructure.

Discourse, as it is usually discussed, is embedded in ideology. While that is certainly true in the case of the IPC period's halcyonic depiction, I contend that the development of infrastructure *itself* was intimately concerned with the production of a myth. Not just Lobitos, but several other towns and cities on Peru's northern coast, were retrofitted to corroborate the myth that the International Petroleum Company was not an enormous parasite, but a benevolent host on which the Peruvian government and people were parasites. Rather than discourse doing

the work of explaining the necessity for development in ideological terms, the reversal of subject and object was performed by the construction of physical infrastructure.

By 1962 Lobitos was sold yet again. This time the oilfields were sold to Burmah-Castrol, a company that would later do business under the name British Petroleum, or BP for short. At this point, oil production and Lobitos seem to fade out of the public eye; little information is available on what the place looked like other than “thousands of expats working the oil fields”(EcoSwell). It seemed Lobitos had lost its centrality. The town became anonymous, one of many towns owned by one of the world’s largest oil companies. There was no need for “transformation”, no “identity” to be attached, no national glory to be attained. But six years later tides turned, and the town resurfaced in the historical discourse after its brief hiatus.

1968 was a precipitous year for the nation and Lobitos. At a national level, President Belaunde was ousted by the Peruvian military in a bloodless coup. An event with some precedent, this was the seventh coup since the start of the century for Perú (Cant 2012: 1). Unlike previous coups, however, the Revolutionary Government of the Armed Forces (GRFA) had the intention of enacting left-wing policies, distributing posters with provocative slogans like “Land with no masters”(Cant 2012: 2). Home to several colonial outposts of the transnational oil industry, radical land reform in Northern Peru was bad for business. In a release from the New Yorker, the author warns of windfall to follow the IPC’s loss of adjacent oil fields, writing, “Soon after the coup all assets of IPC were seized. Now the U.S. must decide whether to retaliate by invoking the Hickenlooper Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act., which directs the Pres. to cut off all foreign aid to any country that expropriates a US company without compensation” (Goodwin 1969). Though the Hickenlooper Amendment was never invoked, this quote indicates just how valuable the region’s black gold was to the Global North; precisely because of the area’s

oil, Lobitos was a key node in the global exchange of (extracted) capital decades before the arrival of tourism.

Admittedly, the Peruvian state's seizure of IPC's assets was not purely an exercise of radically liberatory politics. A war was briefly expected with Ecuador and the town was jerry rigged for the occasion. The usual infrastructure was constructed: a military base, complete with barracks, tall fences and the like. In the discourse, the halcyon days of Lobitos' past were effectively ended by the military takeover. The suspension of extraction marked the end of a golden era, and with the temporary dismissal of foreign capital and the arrival of the Peruvian military state the history of the town was forever marred. It makes perfect sense, then, that from this period emerged Lobitos' depiction as a ghost town— the discourse anticipated, invited, and legitimized the arrival of a transnational tourist economy in the twenty-first century.

A History of Development in Máncora

Under the historical section on Máncora's municipal website, an anonymous author postulates that the municipality's name comes from two disparate origins fused together: "MANCO - poder [power], soberano [sovereignty], tierra [earth] – Cultura Inca. RA – sol[sun], dios[god], creador[creator] --- Cultura Egipcia [Egyptian Culture]. **MANCO-RA: Tierra del sol.**" (Historia - Máncora)(my translations are bracketed)(bold text is original). Three other versions of the name's etymology are proposed, but despite an utter lack of Egyptian influence on the town and the ostensibly minimal influence of Incan culture this one is offered as the most reliable. As elucidated in their version of history, an enterprising couple, Manuel Pazos Ruíz and his wife Manuela Panta Ruíz, founded the town in 1908 to produce charcoal, and were later joined by Tupis culture peoples to aid in their venture. Manuel and Manuela were, according to

the municipality, descendants of the Vicus culture: an ancient indigenous people that once lived in what is now the Piura department just north of Máncora.

This is all somewhat believable, at least as believable as the other seemingly pseudo-historical events the municipality lists as a part of the town's official history. That being said, the municipal government seems to have hedged a bet that no one would take their historical page seriously, let alone attempt to validate their version of events; no reference page nor links to historical documents are provided to corroborate the frustratingly brief outline of the municipality's history. Furthermore, even in the historical outline an emphasis is placed on the present rather than the past; the arrival of tourism is discussed as the ribbon-cutting catalyst to mark the beginning of the town's modern history. For the purposes of a municipal website for a 'tourist town', this makes sense—especially if the past was ugly. Aesthetics are first and foremost a priority for a tourist town riding on an idyllic image. Even as I gathered some important initial impressions, which had more to do with the municipal government's intentions than real historical information, the questions remained: what did the place actually look like? More importantly for the purposes of this thesis, how did Máncora go from a blip on the map to a hub for national, and later, international tourism?

In an attempt to answer these questions, I consulted an ethnography written by Fernando Gonzalez Velarde, *Coastal Tourism in a Context of Neoliberal Development: Social Change in Máncora, Peru*. His introduction includes a brief account of the town before the arrival of modern industry, in which he writes,

During [1880-1940], social life was circumscribed by the countryside and the coastal zone. In the countryside, only a handful of families worked on charcoal and wood production, combining it with self-sufficiency farming. According to old villagers, only a

few fishing families lived in the coastal zone. The Hacienda also used the coast for storing its output in a lumberyard before its commercialisation in regional markets.”(2020: 130).

So from the beginning of the 20th century, Máncora was home to a hacienda— a somewhat nebulous Spanish word translatable to ‘factory’ but also ‘plantation’ or ‘mine’ (the word is less indicative of a specific type of commodity produced and more so of a mode of production in which a land owning elite dictated the operation) (Velarde 2020: 130). The hacienda was not, however, the only game in town— lots of people were also able to provide for themselves by fishing and farming, as many had done since time immemorial in the region.

By all accounts—though, admittedly there are few (this section draws heavily from Fernando Gonzalez Velarde’s ethnography)—the early 20th century saw few changes in Máncora. It was only in the 1940s that Máncora would see a transformation approaching the magnitude of what had occurred decades earlier in Lobitos. In the former’s case, it was not oil but fish that enmeshed the locality in the global economy. The Humboldt Current, which I briefly mention in the introduction, brings cold water and its associated abundance of nutrients to the nearshore environment, creating the ideal conditions for a proliferation of marine life. By the 1940s commercial fishing operations took root along the coast of Peru and began to capitalize on the abundance (Coull 1974: 322). According to Velarde, it was under the current of this national economic boom that six commercial fishing companies staked claims on the shoreline of Máncora (Velarde 2020:130). If Lobitos was a site of development in the name of foreign capital, then Máncora was, at first, developed in the name of national elites. The businessmen who oversaw the fishing industry in Máncora were an ‘elite’ class of men from Peru’s capital, Lima.

These businessmen needed more hands than were immediately propinquitous; subsequently they converted farmers from the interior into coastal fish factory laborers. The operation turned Máncora from a small assemblage of families engaged in charcoal manufacturing and subsistence fishing into a hub of commercial fishing activity.

By the 1970s, Máncora was chartered for new territory. Tourism arrived. Or rather, businessmen interested in creating a tourist locale arrived. Consulting Velarde again, their arrival came in the wake of out-migration. Some of the fishing families left town, “following the exceptional growth of the fishing industry in Chimbote” (Velarde 2020:130). Their absence left space for more businessmen, from Lima and further afield, to cement their role as agents of tourism development; the homes vacated by fishermen were converted into Máncora’s first tourism establishments. The development apparatus thus shapeshifted overnight, finding a new host in the tourism industry. The fishing industry provided the chrysalis, or to use a more appropriately oceanic metaphor, the shell in which tourism found a home.

During its beginning stages, the town was embroiled in a contest over who would stand to profit from the burgeoning tourist economy. Tourism developers emerged triumphant, thanks to intervention from the municipal government, and they went about consolidating their grip on the town, buying up much of the local real estate. Some locals were deceived and bought off for prices far below market rate; Velarde interviewed a former mayor of the town, who divulged, “locals sold their houses for cents because they did not know about tourism and how the value of their properties would increase” (2020: 130). When real estate hawks were confronted with more discerning Mancoreños, laws protecting indigenous land rights were ignored or simply removed from the legal system (Velarde 2018: 1). The neoliberal Peruvian state was far more concerned with creating the space for a tourist economy than obeying legal precedent.

Those who remained were sanctioned to live on the town's outskirts and out of sight of tourists, where a different Máncora was being built to the specifications of tourism developers. The needed infrastructure was built over the next several decades, during which more land was consolidated for tourism with the assistance of government injunctions. Millions upon millions of dollars poured in to build elaborate, state of the art hotels and resorts right up to the shoreline--the same shoreline that commercial fishing businesses had based their operations on.

Final Thoughts on History

The process of becoming sites for tourism, as the historical account attempted to demonstrate, looked very different in Mancora than it did in Lobitos. Whereas in Lobitos the successive waves of development failed to leave lasting effects on the landscape, aside from the installation of pump jacks and offshore platforms, the infrastructure originally utilized by the fishing industry in Mancora was integral to the development of tourism there. In the discourse Mancora is thus taken for granted, or rather, taken as a place that has always been. History became irrelevant once the locality was branded as a well-established tourist destination; a finality was reached, and the development discourse need not look back in appeals to historical precedent. Accordingly, the problematization of Máncora takes a different shape-- hedonism, mishandled sewage and trash, ecological decline, all construct the image of an over-developed, overrun tourist destination not unlike Cancún or Las Vegas. However, the allure of Máncora, for all the millions invested in tourism infrastructure, has been cheapened by the overwhelming presence of tourists and their waste. Despite the government's efforts, the immense waste excreted by the tourist economy clogs the town's streets and sewage system, and has prompted the segmentation of the town between tourist zones (which are seen as clean, safe oases) and the

spaces for the others (which are seen as chaotic, drug-fueled, wastelands). Rather than causing the government to invest its energies elsewhere, the problems caused by the destructive proclivities of the tourist economy further entrench its role in providing the infrastructural backbone for it to continue, retrofitting the town to its specifications under the label of sustainable development.

Keeping in mind the distinct histories of these two localities on the North Coast of Peru will be essential in interrogating the present discourse and its associated actors. The past, rather than supplying a fixed set of historical information, is selectively consulted in the discourse to frame new efforts of development. The historical discourse created social categories that continue to be exercised in contemporary attempts to “make sense” of the continued state of spatial and socioeconomic relations between foreigners and locals. As the discourse obfuscates certain histories in favor of others, an understanding of some of what really went into the development of tourism guides us as we investigate the discursive functions Máncora and Lobitos play in the promotion of development.

Key terms: eco-tourism, development, development imaginary, modernization, sustainability, tourism, Marxist Dependency Theory, neoliberalism, spatial production

Tourists for change and Developing Professionals in Lobitos

In “The Remote Village of Lobitos, Peru: Longevity Road Trip”, which pops up as one of the first search results for “Lobitos” on *YouTube*, viewers join a Canadian couple as they embark

on a trip to “the remote village”. Before they depart, the couple seeks out the help of medical/lifestyle professionals at McGill University in Toronto. Like many interested in visiting Lobitos, the couple claims to have two priorities: the first being to enjoy themselves, and the second being to improve the lives of the locals. Sonia and her husband have plans on retiring soon, and want to avoid the withering away many of their colleagues experienced upon retiring; the couple has theorized that tourism, if done *the right way*, could keep them young and preoccupied. A McGill doctor donning a lab coat tells them, “it takes time and attention to change the world”, a simple recipe applicable to the achievement of their own ambitions. Professorial types in suits tell of their research at the Institute for Life Course and Aging, preaching to the couple the benefits provided by tai chi practiced by elderly Asian women in a nearby park.

Once they arrive, the couple remark on the ‘potential’ of Lobitos. They sense the town, “in ten years or so” will become something impressive, citing the numerous villas and other luxurious edifices in construction. Later in the video, viewers meet expats who explain their ambitions in similar terms to the couple’s. A middle aged man who came to Lobitos explains he and two of his friends “decided to open the opportunity for kids to surf”, after they caught “sick barrels” at the beach out front. “Surfing is not only just taking a wave: there’s a lot of things around it, like how to live with the environment, the ocean, how to respect the ocean”, he tells them. Another expat tells the couple he built a skate park in Lobitos “to keep kids off the streets” and off drugs, whilst adjusting the bearings on a skateboard’s wheels.

Peter Burns asserts in *An Introduction to Tourism and Anthropology*, “if tourism is the ‘conversion of dreams’ then questions must be asked about what sort of dreams and whether or not the conversions will create, ameliorate or irritate cultural tensions.”(1999: 33). Beginning the discourse section with a brief synopsis of this video introduced some important elements of the

development imaginary among the expat and tourist contingency. Underlying all of them is the notion that Lobitos is a place with potential. Tourists come to Lobitos with the expectation that the town is not yet ready for the arrival of another, less conscientious type of tourist; they come under the impression that they are part of a welcoming committee. This committee is, as the beginning of the video demonstrates, equipped with professional know-how, the ‘right reasons’, and open hearts. The committee approaches fun scientifically, always with a measurement of the perceived wellness and health benefits. Fun, in the name of wellness, is to be administered to the town of Lobitos from their measured hands. At the same time the tourism committee’s own pleasure is accounted for with a simple calculation: all the fun they have surfing, skating, enjoying the sun, is morally offset by acts of altruism. Lobitos is a town thought to have problems; furthermore each problem is interpreted as a symptom of under-development only to be alleviated by their “time and attention”.

Posted on Stumpy Vision, a travel blog site, readers are told “thanks to surf tourism, Lobitos is slowly sparking to life”, after it “lay abandoned for decades”(Lobitos, Perfect Waves in a Peruvian Ghost Town. — Stumpy Vision Surf Blog & Photography). In another blog post, this one on Culture Trip, titled “Lobitos: How Peru’s Secret Surf Spot has a Dark Past”, readers learn “the waves are why the town has been reborn”(Lobitos: How Peru's Secret Surf Spot Has a Dark Past). Conceptualized as a body, the town is resuscitated by the medicine of surfing. The description of Lobitos as a *corpus* is a metaphor not for the local community, but for the expat and tourist cohort’s available accommodations and surrounding landscape, i.e. bars, restaurants, and surf schools; the new body is being born out of the husk of the old. With this corporeal metaphor, discourse is cleverly privileging the role of tourists and expats as *a priori* paramount to the health of the town as a whole. Further, sport is re-imagined as self-conscious and

environmentally conscientious praxis, as a means of connecting Lobiteños with the Pacific Ocean and endowing an interest in the sanctity of the coastal environment. As expats explain, surfing is not only a distraction from obscenities on land, but a baptism into the international conservationist community. Shedding its rough exterior, surfing in Lobitos takes on a new age, religious sentimentality as the beating heart of an infant body.

The depiction of surfing omnipresent in online blog posts, which are first to pop up in any online search of Lobitos, addresses the concerns of two audiences. On the one hand, intrepid surfers seeking perfect, uncrowded waves away from more common locales like nearby Máncora, Cabo Blanco, or Chicama, find a more than suitable outpost in Lobitos, the seductively mysterious “ghost town” with a “dark past”. On the other hand, people like the couple from the video are pleased to find a nexus for their double interests of surfing and humanitarianism. Because Lobitos is imagined as a sub-par travel destination as well as a “secret surf-spot”, it is both an ideal host for the surfing community as well as a perfect patient for volunteer tourism.

NGO's in Lobitos: Harbingers of Sustainable Tourism

That last bit sets the scene for an analysis of the discourse produced by a different type of expat. As I try to elucidate in this section, they share much in common with the tourists and business owners – although they would most likely disdain the comparison. I'm alluding to the NGOs which find Lobitos a town in dire need of their expertise. I tried to illustrate in the preceding section the ways in which tourism discourse has constructed a series of problems, problems which only abate, conveniently, with a restructuring of the local economy to better facilitate tourism. Approaching the discourse produced by NGOs, we find institutional jargon used to discuss the mechanisms being employed to prepare Lobitos and Lobiteños for tourism.

This next section draws from an online body of research to contend that organizations posturing as humanitarian and conservationist are equally, if not more, productive harbingers of tourism as tourists and expatriate businessmen.

The Enculturators: WAVES for Development

...tourism has become part of that critical assemblage of goods, practices and experiences that are taken up as social ‘bridges and doors’, so important in bonding some and excluding others. (Featherstone 1991: 111) (Mowforth, Munt 1998: 124).

WAVES doesn’t give, it facilitates. Its workers are humanitarian fixers. Want to start a t-shirt company? They’ll give you a loan. Want to become a surf photographer? They’ll hook you up with a pro photographer on vacation and teach you how to sell your shots to the traveling surfers. Tired of fishing all day to put food on the table? They’ll teach you how to charter your boat to foreign anglers. (WAVES for Development Makes a Sustainable Impact in Peru)

In the beginning of this section, I briefly mentioned a certain Limeño who had, with a couple of his surfing buddies, started an organization dedicated to “opening the opportunity for kids to get into the ocean”. The name of that organization is WAVES (an acronym for Water, Adventure, Voluntourism, Education, Sustainability) for Development (WAVES for Development). The WAVES mission is to “Understand the culture and community needs. Focus on personal youth development. Give safe spaces for the development of personality. Offer tools and resources to contribute to Improve Life Quality. Assure the continuous development of the

community, taking care of health and the environment.” (WAVES for Development). The subject of personal development evident in the mission statement stands in stark contrast to how development is generally spoken about: the construction of physical infrastructure and structural adjustments to the economy. As WAVES tells us, “The school curriculum has no courses in personal development, English or the environment” (WAVES 2021: 4). The NGO takes it upon itself to fill in the gaps. By analyzing the discourse around three of the marquee programs: English lessons, surf education, and social entrepreneurship (the three predominant stopgaps for the school’s supposed deficiencies); I delve into what I think are the underlying motivations behind each, paying consummate attention to how WAVES applies its institutional power to shape the local community into a new social body appropriate for the development of tourism.

Beginning with English lessons, I argue that there is a twofold rationale to offering the program: first, the attraction of a large pool of wealthy applicants, and second, the cultural relevance of having english-speaking locals for a tourist economy. Let us begin by considering the capacity for the program to attract a pool of voluntourists. In theory, if one was trying to attract the broadest possible pool of candidates from a relatively inexperienced population, would it not make perfect sense to advertise a program in which the only obvious requirement is to be able to speak your birth-language, or in the case of Europeans, one you were taught throughout your primary education? I propose that this is precisely what is going on here with WAVES for Development. Candidates looking to add to their list of volunteer experiences whilst enjoying a surf or two find a perfect opportunity in WAVES for Development, where they can teach English to the town’s youngsters right off the beach— an important addition to their resume for a \$500 down payment topped off by an extra \$400 per week (Mach 2019: 447).

Facing a different angle, WAVES asserts that teaching English is treated as the fulfillment of an axiomatic need, insofar as it is integral to the local population's capacity to join in on the tourist economy. They leave little room for misinterpretation, stating, "[English] is important to provide tools for the interaction with tourism"

(<https://www.wavesfordevelopment.org/programs/#>). By offering the opportunity for Lobiteños to learn the language, WAVES functions as an interlocutor between tourists and locals. This program, however, has the effect of language itself being problematized: a lack of English skills condemns one to a life incapable of being beneficial for the tourist economy. This problematization is integral to the WAVES structure, a structure that seeks, through its programs, to mobilize the local community for such purposes. This is all to say that teaching English is much more than simply giving locals the lingua franca of tourism with which they can articulate their way into an advantageous position within the new economic strata. It is simultaneously a product sold to the local community as medicine, a gateway to their inclusion in development, and a selling point for foreign voluntourists.

"Surf Comunitario" (community surfing in English) is another prong of the effort to develop the personalities of local youth in Lobitos, in which local youth are taught how to surf. In their 2021 progress report, WAVES tells us, "The surf classes strengthen youth cultural identity, values, the economy and care for the environment through surf classes." (7). Before each session, surf students are asked about their well being, and after they reflect on their experiences. After surfing and conversing with instructors, surf students meditate for a short period. Surf lessons are not just about riding waves, but a clinic in wellness praxis. As the report states, "The boys and girls between 12 and 14 years of age that participate in our program seek to develop personal qualities like team spirit and respect."(2021:12). Surfing is imagined as a

conduit for the transfer of joy, bravado and ‘belonging’ to the international surfing community, as well as a means of imparting important personal values such as self-esteem, creativity and socio-cultural identity (WAVES 2021: 10). As far as strengthening cultural identity goes, however, the program seems to be geared far more towards strengthening an identification with surf tourism and surf culture than a local identity.

Another objective of surf instruction is to identify and mold young people thought to have potential to work for WAVES and ultimately, open their own surf tourism businesses. As they describe it, “Another objective of the surf program is to give to the alumni the opportunity of being surf instructors so that in the future they can open a business, like a surf school for example” (WAVES 2021: 7). This objective is particularly pertinent to the purposes of this section. It demonstrates that, for WAVES, the end goal for their surf program is to bestow in their participants the capacity to capitalize on surf tourism themselves. Surf skills, for all the purported mental health benefits, translate into real economic power– but only through the extension of tourism development.

If, as WAVES has it, “Surf and tourism open opportunities but do so slowly due to a lack of support and knowledge of business management”, WAVES financial literacy programs are there to accelerate the process (WAVES 2021: 5). Perhaps the most crudely obvious mechanism of enculturation– as far as WAVES’ objectives go – is “social entrepreneurship”. The phrase itself is interesting in that, rather than entrepreneurship being classified as an individual endeavor, it suggests a group effort. Upon some investigation, it turns out that WAVES for Development not only provides financial literacy courses on entrepreneurship, but also functions as a bank would, providing loans for small businesses to be paid back with interest. A blog post on their website tells the story of a seamstress whose sewing machine broke and received a

“microloan” for replacement parts (Supporting Small Business Development in Lobitos).

Another woman apparently started a small convenience store and received money from WAVES to stock the shelves. “The women will pay back their loans over the course of the next 10 months with interest. The repayment plus the interest will be re-invested into the program for future microloans and business education opportunities.”(Supporting Small Business Development in Lobitos). On the one hand, this has the effect of micro-financing Lobitos’ transition from a fishing community into a community of business owners, incentivizing a broader shift towards dependency on a tourism economy. On the other hand, the loans and the interest collected on the loans are used to prop up the NGOs own capacity for future investments. I couldn’t find any information on how it panned out for these women, but thanks to an ethnography by Leon Mach titled *Surf for Development: An Exploration of Program Recipient Perspectives in Lobitos, Peru* I was able to identify substantial skepticism over the saliency of the WAVES program (2019). As Mach notes, the program resulted in an increased gravitational pull towards foreign capital:

Looking at a macro level, surf tourism in Lobitos remains dominated by outsiders and while some enterprising individuals have found outlets to earn extra income from tourism, they have little control over the scale, pace, and style of development. Of the roughly 40 lodging options, almost all are owned by upper- and middle-class families from other cities in Peru and from overseas (Mach, 2014). Many of these enterprises are rather insular and many rely on workaway.com for hiring temporary labor from places like the United States and Canada for employment in exchange for room and board, rather than employing a great deal of local wage-labor. (2019: 451)

Rather than “social entrepreneurship”, as advertised by WAVES, benefitting the entire community, it cuts a fission across its nucleus, dividing the community between those who are deemed worthy of participating in the new tourist economy and those who find themselves left out (Mach 2019: 451). Locals who best demonstrate the desired traits of the WAVES workforce: “timeliness, honesty, hospitality, and hard work”, are the only ones eligible to work for them or receive microloans for the own entrepreneurial endeavors, while the others are sent back to the drawing board to figure out how to make a living as fisheries decline and tourism subsumes the local economy (Mach 2019: 451). This selection process is a coercive exercise of enculturation, in which locals are left with few opportunities for escape from the tourism development paradigm. Escobar wrote of the necessity for enculturation, stating “The economy is not only, or even principally, a material entity. It is above all a cultural production, a way of producing human subjects and social orders of a certain kind.”(1995: 59). If WAVES is concerned with personal development, as they claim to be, it is a personal development in line with enculturation.

The development of a tourist economy is an uneven process, through which only a select few locals find themselves in better standing than they were beforehand. It follows that community development, the purported outcome of the “social entrepreneurship” program, is an illusory oxymoron. I would venture to say that the discourse produced by WAVES exemplifies the core deceit underlying a great many sustainable development NGOs. They establish themselves under the benevolent condition that they are there for the benefit of impoverished locals – and, by tagging on sustainability, the conservation of the environment. However, by looking into what WAVES is actually doing, their true role becomes obvious: the organization is

building from within the community the cultural basis for a new economy, an economy that, in return, offers no assurances to the welfare of the local community.

With that I would like to conclude the analysis of WAVES for Development. To recount, I drew out what I believe to be the underlying motivations behind three programs offered by WAVES for Development: English instruction, surf lessons, and social entrepreneurship. With English instruction, I emphasized its function as both a means of attracting an international pool of volunteers as well as producing employees for an Anglicized tourist economy. With environmental education, a euphemism for surf lessons and ocean safety courses, I proposed that the program's emphasis on learning how to safely and successfully interact with the ocean for the perceived benefit of strengthening one's resolve was part of a broader process of personal development for the new tourist economy. In my reflections on the social entrepreneurship program, I encapsulated the socioeconomic function WAVES for Development plays in promoting local dependency on tourism. In closing, what upon first glance looked like run of the mill surf voluntourism, I found upon closer inspection to be an organization primarily focused on the enculturation of Lobitos' local population into the emergent surf industry/ tourist economy. Although WAVES is primarily devoted to the development of people rather than infrastructure, that distinction does not diminish its capacity to be a powerful arm of the development apparatus; on the contrary WAVES is an especially pervasive means of exerting pressure on the local population *because* of the magnifying glass through which it applies its personalized approach.

The Surveyors: EcoSwell and the Incubation of Development Professionals

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.” -Margaret Mead (About the Program — EcoSwell)

Lobitos has been an oil encampment since the beginning of the 20th century, a military base in the 1970s, is currently a surfing paradise and has always been a fishing village. Today, in yet another stage of its multiple lives, it is a laboratory for good ideas thanks to EcoSwell. (Our Story — EcoSwell)

Compared to EcoSwell, WAVES for Development looks like a humble operation. From the outset of looking into EcoSwell, I was met with astounding statistics: “5,246 lives directly impacted”, “23,823 lives indirectly impacted”. It wasn’t clear from the statistics exactly what that impact was, but the impression was that this was an impressive feat. There were more, at least equally impressive statistics: “3 localities in which we operate”, “32 partners with whom we propel sustainability”, “19 sustainability projects implemented”, “10 SDGs applied to date”. EcoSwell is, I gathered from their website, a holistic, inspired, and articulate sustainable development NGO, with partners across the globe: in the UN, in the transnational energy sector, and in the halls of prestigious universities worldwide (Our Partners — EcoSwell).

What I found in researching this powerful and academically charged organization was an acute proclivity not for the development of just the local people, like WAVES, but of sustainability professionals who are building out of Lobitos an incubator for, well, more sustainable development professionals. Their efforts are deployed, by volunteer interns working in tandem with senior level employees, among five categories: “Reforestation, Conservation and

Ecosystem Restoration”, “Renewable Energy”, “Water and Sanitation”, “Research and Monitoring”, and “Public Health” (Our Project Areas — EcoSwell). Through the institutional management of Lobitos’ natural environment for small scale projects, collecting reams of data on the local ecology and calculating the economic value of natural resources under the halo of conservation, EcoSwell is surveying the land’s potential for the development of tourism.

Through the management of the environment (“Reforestation, Conservation and Ecosystem Restoration”), new borders are drawn across the landscape, and the valuable labels of “endemic”, “rare”, and “endangered” are assigned to formerly valueless (not yet conceived as having market value) living things, such as birds, mammals, trees and other flora and fauna. The new fangled borders etch out the locations of where beings-to-be-conserved are shown off from the vantage points of new trailheads. Moreover, the imposition of conservationist language, which is inherently an argument for the imposition of new borders between humans and nature, is not for the creation of a new commons, but the creation of an institutionally regulated neonature. The living beings within the environment are under close surveillance of EcoSwell professionals in order to garner international recognition for the exemplary preservation of the local ecosystem, as well as to incite an influx in tourism thanks to the new ecological attractions on display.

Similarly, even as EcoSwell successfully procures water from the air and turns sunlight into electric current, the projects are focused on reinforcing centers of power rather than democratizing electricity, the latter being either a project they haven’t the means to surmount or, more cynically, do not intend to forego. The project page reads, “At EcoSwell we are heavily focused on designing and implementing small scale, high impact, renewable energy projects to improve the energy resilience of key buildings like the Fishermen’s Community Hall, the local

Medical Post and others.”(Renewable Energy — EcoSwell). The beauty of the trick is in the presentation: on the same page where that quote is found, readers learn, “nearly 1.5 million people suffer regular cutoffs to their electricity”, “70% of energy in Peru is generated by only four private companies”, “less than 5% of Peru’s energy is generated from non conventional renewable energy sources”, and “After food, energy costs represent the largest monthly expense for low income households (approx. 20%)”(Renewable Energy — EcoSwell) .

All of these statistics are intended, I would argue, to add a sense of urgency to the mission of instituting a reliable, decentralized, decommodified and cleaner method of producing and distributing energy across the Peruvian countryside. The saliency of EcoSwell’s small-scale project to keep the lights on for a handful of administrative and municipal buildings in Lobitos, rather than being diluted by overwhelming statistics, is concentrated under the remedial umbrella of a supranational humanitarian mission. The trick, moreover, has two parts to it: one, the unveiling of “small scale, high impact, renewable energy projects”, and two, the embedding of the aforementioned as an initiative within a global movement.

The postmodern activist messaging of, “think globally, act locally” (a quote heading an EcoSwell web page), manifests in NGOs marking their territory across the developing world (a euphemism for the Global South) with small-scale projects. As we see with EcoSwell’s institutional partnerships, the threads of a power structure headquartered in the Global North are sewn together with those of municipal and national governments, as well as transnational corporations in the Global South. Rather than a gradual sublimation of these projects into a global transformation, NGOs create an international archipelago of the ideal, juxtaposed against an unhealthy landscape outside the confines of their institutional jurisdiction.

One of the most novel ways they go about this is the “conservation of waves” perceived as valuable to a tourist economy (Bosquetti et. al. 2020). Rather than needing to be captured in order to be capitalized on, waves simply need to be re-imagined as a natural resource; there will always be another wave-generating storm out to sea, and, barring apocalyptic sea level rise, the waves will always meet the same shoreline. This is not merely an interior process of conceptualization; the conservation of waves is intended to broadcast the potential dollars to be made by sitting your business nearby. Surfonomics, an economic metric designed by another NGO, Save the Waves, which “determine[s] the economic value of a wave and surfing to local communities”, was conducted in Lobitos by EcoSwell (Bosquetti et. al. 2020: 12). They hope to utilize this study to quantify the potential of surfing as an economic boon in the locality, writing:

This Surfonomics study aims to estimate the direct contribution of surf tourism to the local economy of Lobitos and highlight the importance of investing in infrastructure and solving local environmental issues in order to improve the tourist experience. The findings of this empirical study can be used to support the development of public policies which account for the main environmental threats listed here. This in turn will help guarantee the sustainable development of the town's tourism industry. (Bosquetti et. al. 2020: introduction)

Last year, the NGO submitted a petition to the United Nations to have the waves “protected” in coordination with the Sociedad Peruana de Derecho Ambiental (Peruvian Society of Environmental Rights), la Federación Deportiva Nacional de Tabla (FENTA) (National Sporting Federation of Boardsports), and DG Costera “(private sector)” (The Ocean Conference | Conserve the Ocean of Lobitos by declaring it a World Surfing Reserve (WSR)). The petition states, “By making Lobitos a World Surfing Reserve and completing all the necessary

requirements, EcoSwell can ensure the conservation of the ocean and guarantee the sustainable economic well being of the community.”(The Ocean Conference | Conserve the Ocean of Lobitos by declaring it a World Surfing Reserve (WSR)). Citing the surfonomics study, EcoSwell argues the overwhelming economic benefit of the waves warrants their “conservation”. They would join an auspicious, eclectic and international list of WSRs, including Bahia de Todos Santos (Baja, Mex.), Ericeira (Portugal), Gold Coast (Australia), Guarda do Embau (Brazil), Huanchaco (Peru), Malibu & Santa Cruz(CA), Manly Beach (Aus.), Noosa (Aus.), and Punta de Lobos (Chile). Aside from being home to some of the world’s best surfing waves, these locales hold little in common. They are knitted together through their designation as WSRs, set aside, as the petition states, “to have...surf breaks protected and properly managed for surf tourism”(The Ocean Conference | Conserve the Ocean of Lobitos by declaring it a World Surfing Reserve (WSR)). Unlike the other WSRs, the most recent Peruvian candidate lacks a surfing history. All of the others are veritable surf cities, nexuses of global tourism and hosts of international surf competitions (World Surfing Reserves - Save The Waves). However, rather than this deficiency inhibiting Lobitos’ suitability to be a WSR, the lack of infrastructure and historical precedent makes it an ideal candidate. Development can be “managed”, EcoSwell argues, to create an idyllic, sustainably developed tourism destination suited for the expansion of the surf industry precisely because it is “under-developed”. Through the process of institutionalization –by way of becoming official WSRs– the locations are thought to be sheltered from the dirty business of the outside world. Paradoxically, the WSR designation is based on the commodification of the very thing EcoSwell promises to conserve, implicitly an argument for the maximization of the surf’s profit potential by the private sector. The eternal, regenerative energy of waves is commodifiable not in the normal, hydro-electric sense, but through their deployment as advertisements for

tourism to buy stock in the town. This is how the deployment of sustainability discourse works: under its good graces, something as raw and impartial as the ocean's waves becomes an advertisement for tourism development disguised as environmental advocacy.

As far as the terrestrial domain is of concern to EcoSwell, it is for further implementation of so-called conservationist measures. As is the case with electricity, a global issue is presented to legitimize EcoSwell's endeavors:

“More than elsewhere, forests and agrosilvopastoral systems in drylands [worldwide] play crucial economic, social and environmental roles, including improving the environmental sustainability and resilience of wider landscapes. If well-managed and properly valued, they can help alleviate poverty and contribute to the food security and sustainable livelihoods of 2 billion people worldwide.” (Renewable Energy — EcoSwell)

Though I have already elaborated on the obfuscatory effect of such framing, the problematic of land management presents substantially different challenges as to warrant specific consideration—the most immediately obvious being the fact that, unlike the case of solar energy, land management requires a subversive process wherein local populations are implicitly deemed incapable of caring for the land they reside on. Locals in Lobitos find themselves the subjects of educational campaigns and levied with new tasks. In fact nearly all of the EcoSwell projects rely on local participation: “community greening (nurseries of native seedlings, families adopting native trees), community ecotourism (generating sustainable economic income for the community from the conservation of their natural assets and standing forests), reforestation (using technified irrigation in water-scarce rural settings and remote degraded locations to

recover habitat and therefore food and shelter for these endangered species), environmental education campaigns (at local schools with children, workshops and house-by-house visits with adults)”; being pertinent examples presented by EcoSwell as “solutions” to environmental degradation (Reforestation & Conservation — EcoSwell).

At this juncture, it may be tempting for the reader to consider these measures under the category I established in the last section: development of local people towards their enculturation for a new economy. In lieu of this, I would like to offer an alternative categorization for what EcoSwell does: surveys of the land’s resources and people. I offer this definition because rather than the people of Lobitos being developed, it seems that they are being monitored: how many trees local families plant and care for, how many students are attending environmental education, and other metrics of community sustainability are measured daily by sustainability professionals in training. This monitoring is not, I contend, for the cause of enculturation, but for the statistical benefits to be acquired by their acquiescence to EcoSwell’s initiatives – for their capacity to reflect the effectiveness of the NGO. When an NGO desires institutional prowess (which is necessary to attract development careerists and to win donor funding), it pays dividends to demonstrate how successfully they meet universally defined metrics of success, all of which are typically associated with development. In the case of EcoSwell, this translates to “meeting the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals” (Our Project Areas — EcoSwell). It follows that, rather than being beholden to localized development prerogatives, NGOs such as EcoSwell rely on international bodies for guidance and legitimization. The monitoring of local populations is done to ensure the NGO is able to achieve certain goals to hoist their reputation among more authoritative and reputable bodies. In turn the NGO islands that meet UN specifications may legitimately claim that such places are certifiably developed, humane destinations for

conscientious travelers. This certification process does little to diminish the notion that such organizations are the surveyors for a new tourist economy, which is hardly an ecologically sound prospect; to be more critical, the UN, by issuing such certifications, deputizes the role of NGOs as harbingers of a tourist economy.

Final thoughts on Lobitos discourse: sustainability, community, and development

Through each subsection, the congealing forces reshaping Lobitos from a ghost town into a tourist destination, voluntourism, personal development of the local population, and the inculcation of the locality's natural resources into an institutional framework, were de-constructed through an examination of the discourse produced by their respective arbiters. In hindsight of these analyses, several themes take shape. First, the theme of *sustainability*— a lighthouse for voluntourists as well as a foundational concept upon which a superstructure of sustainable development organizations cement themselves, galvanize public approval and provide the pretense for a proliferation of projects in its name. Through an analysis of the discourse, it became evident that sustainable projects—small-scale water distillation, solar panel implementation—are simply the only feasible options. Therefore development is done 'sustainably' due not only to the aforementioned institutional pressure and public appeal, but because of a lack of alternative resources. In the same context, the conservation of wildlife, reforestation efforts, and the conservation of surf spots make the space amenable to tourism and to the UN's sustainable development parameters.

Secondly, the theme of *community*— a nebulous social body charged at times with neglect of the local environment, at others endowed with the potential to be developed, and at still others a point of reference to the successful implementation of universal objectives. In inculcating the

fishing community in conservation initiatives, personal development, and environmental education, tourism development siphons an appearance of caring for them whilst enlisting them for their own aggrandizement.

Third and last, the theme of *development* itself— an axiomatic prerogative of voluntourists, NGOs, municipal, national and international bodies of government, yet whose meaning is understood in dialectic relation to a diverse set of ideals. Through this dialectical relationship, development comes to be defined as a broad set of processes; the construction of physical infrastructure, the enculturation of people and their personalities, and the on-hands training of sustainability professionals all fell into its terminological camp. The set of processes that were discussed as part of development leaves me with the impression that when the word development appears it is most likely a stand-in for something slightly less savory on the palate, something that goes down much easier with the vaguely humanitarian pretense it imbues.

Development gains even more sanctifying power when injected with the pathos of sustainability. What this section demonstrates is not only the discursive flexibility of sustainable development, but the dubious proliferation of institutional over-reach justified through the application of corresponding terminology— a proliferation that, rather than democratizing the resources of a given location, green washes their commodification. This process of commodification takes place under the pretenses of sustainability, the NGO's contention being that the town's resources can only be conserved through the logic of the market. However, this concession to the market extends far past the territory of terminology, commandeering every pillar of the NGO framework.

Luxury, Walls, and the State's Role in Máncora Tourism

In sum, touristic landscaping tends to move beyond re-placing altogether. Instead, it tends to effect a de-placing of the landscape—an extreme form of locational transformation in which "placeness" itself—the capability to become a place in the phenomenological (and cultural) sense of the term here employed—is itself transformed. (Ness 2005: 120)

In a mirror of the highly developed, resort-ified landscape, Máncora is not a jumping off point for development careerists precisely because it is not a place that is, in any way, new to tourism. It seems, however, that there is no “after development”, but an eternal now of problems to be rectified via further development—themselves products of previous developments. Sustainable development here manifests as the interterminal project of retrofitting the town's infrastructure to facilitate tourism. As we consider in this section, the landscape, which has come to fruition in the shape of a fully realized tourist destination, is rife with barriers, both real and socio-economic, between the tourist area and the area for others. Visually, these barriers demarcate a segmented space, a small sea of eclectically constructed edifices on dirt streets ringed by the islands of state of the art, American style resorts. After discussing the discourse around these sustainable fiefdoms, focusing on spatial production and segmentation, I consider the political economy of globalization through the Peruvian state's efforts to propel its economy on the back of tourism. Finally, I return to Máncora to fill in the details of how the promoters of a transnational tourist economy affect political dynamics at a local level, by briefly examining a few municipal documents.

Máncoran hotels cater to the contemporary state of their clients' tastes: luxurious yet sustainable tourism. Arennas, one of the premier hotels in town, promises on its website, a "paradise within a paradise", where "Luxury awaits on the shores of the Pacific"(About us – Hotel Arennas Mancora). A virtual tour, available on the website, sheds light on the amenities, all of which stand in stark contrast to the barren yellow brown bluff overlooking the resort. After 'walking' through a bespoke wooden gate and under a flower-adorned archway, I found myself among wooden lounge chairs, under towering palms, and atop wooden outdoor flooring, all of which are bordered by a verdant rectangle of grass and shrubbery. The center piece, an azure pool lined with tan mosaic tiles, lies maybe a hundred yards from the alluring green blue water of the semi tropical Pacific Ocean. A beige lounge area replete with coffee tables, long couches and daybeds is available for a reprieve from the sun under an elaborate roof composed of zig zagging dark wooden slats that protrude from the side of the main building. It struck me that I could recall seeing the same features, even with the same color scheme of tan and black, on my stays in similar hotels, or visits to yacht clubs, as a child sometimes privileged to visit ritzy coastal enclaves on both coasts of the continental U.S. These were features, I should say, befitting my American standards of beachside luxury. Indeed, as the same Arennas website tells us, "In a time when it seemed only locals and national travelers were interested in the sunny beaches of northern Peru, 'Las Arennas de Máncora' was created to play host to those seeking adventure and nature"(“those” by deduction being a world traveling, jet-set clientele) (About us – Hotel Arennas Mancora) .

Yet, apparently, this luxury is accommodated without the sacrifice of environmental degradation. Under their sustainability tab, we find a host of measures in place to, apparently,

ensure the conservation of the local environment and the minimization of the resort's carbon footprint. Arennas elaborates,

We have large green areas within our facilities, which, as we all know, are the lungs of the planet. We train our staff on energy consumption and climate change to raise awareness. We understand that each worker can be responsible for significant energy savings, at the same time, they can apply this in their homes and this makes the community aware of what we are looking for. We encourage our travelers to visit the beaches by bike or on foot during their stay. We stopped buying butter and jams that come in plastic, thereby contributing to the planet by not consuming plastic containers. Since 2019 we have been saving 154 kilos of plastic. We set up a program with the municipality for continuous support from the hotel, on the subject of sustainability and constant information to schools in the area. We have alliances with companies on the care of marine flora and fauna. Our workers are from the area, whom we train and provide decent work. We have a Sustainability Committee within the property, which functions as a governing body and who ensures that all the proposed objectives are met.

(Sustainability – Hotel Arennas Mancora).

Several of these measures, such as limiting plastic usage and encouraging walking or cycling, materialize as the fulfillment of obligatory corporate responsibility standards. Much of this is familiar territory in terms of critical development studies. Though these are probably all written down somewhere, probably next to the three Rs of recycling (another initiative mentioned by Arennas), they are, it goes almost without saying at this point, unsatisfactory to the ends of saving the planet. Though less superficial than the “large green spaces...lungs of the planet”, the effect of their implementation lies not in the reduction of carbon dioxide, but in the aesthetic

greenwashing of the resort's impact on the environment. Not only are the purported "lungs of the planet" exhausted in maintaining green spaces, supplying air conditioning, filling swimming pools and other water features; they are also significantly tarred by the jet fuel required for tourists to visit the "oasis" of Arennas. Furthermore, in their posture as refuges of sustainability, resorts disguise the fact that their relationship with the environment is exponentially more harmful than the local community.

In an extension of the contradictory, obfuscatory relationship with the environment that Arennas assumes, other measures indicate the paternalistic role assumed by the resort. Educational initiatives, a "Sustainability Committee within the property", training and awareness on environmental issues, and employment of locals, are framed as conscientious steps in the direction of improving the community (Sustainability – Hotel Arennas Mancora). In the United States, this is an alien concept; it would be, for example, quite strange to see the local Marriott engaging in a similar process with their employees. Perhaps, rather than being an anomaly specific to Arennas employees, this has something to do with the imagined role of the townspeople in the tourist economy. This audience has lavish taste yet, presumably, is at least tacitly concerned with the preservation of the environment: they are ecotourists. "Ecotourist", as Mowforth and Munt described, "has a double meaning...not only does it signal an interest and focus of this type of tourist on the environment (ecology), it also indicates the ability to pay the high prices that such holidays command (economic capital)" (1998:133). It's worth mentioning that Arennas—which, among the resorts I've encountered, belabors its sustainable practices to the greatest degree—charges some of the highest rates in town: over \$200 a night. The local community is inculcated only to provide the image that ecotourism is a benign force in the community, disseminating wealth and instilling eco-friendly values among the local people.

Moreover, by implementing so-called sustainability measures, hotels such as Arennas not only signal virtue to the Global North, they also attempt to instill a green performativity to local behavior for the sake of accommodating ecotourist expectations.

Arennas is only one among many resorts in town that appeal to ecotourist sensibilities to attract foreign patronage. Eco Lodge, the second highest rated hotel in Máncora on *TripAdvisor*, claims to be “designed according to nature’s well being, built with local construction materials, under an eco-design architectural concept” ([DCO Suites, Lounge & Spa](#)). DCO Suites, Lounge and Spa, the top rated resort, “es un oasis de tranquilidad y privacidad que diálogo con su entorno natural inmediato... la orilla del mar.”/ “is an oasis of tranquility and privacy, in conversation with its immediate natural surroundings... the ocean’s shore.”(translation my own) ([DCO Suites, Lounge & Spa](#)).

For these high end resorts, the environment is a selling point. At its simplest, this commodification of the environment translates into the provisioning of ocean front views; however many of the higher ticket items—the ones that set high-end establishments apart from the rest— like green spaces, water features, spas, horseback tours of the coast, and so on, migrate further and further away from exhibiting local reality. Rather than tourists in Máncora coming to witness exotified ecologies, to “see the place”, they come to experience their own personal rejuvenation – experiences of nature have largely been replaced by a personalized unification with the “spirit” of nature. These experiences are increasingly not of the place’s unique offerings (outside of the locally caught tuna that winds up on resort menus) but instead are wellness industry imports with global currency. Sally Ann Ness wrote in her ethnography, *Tourism-Terrorism: The Landscaping of Consumption and the Darker Side of Place*, “Spatialized touristic landscapes, thus, primarily embed the intentionalities of place consumption a far

narrower, shallower range of sense-abilities than occur in sustainably cultural places.”(2005: 121). In the resort-ified landscape of Máncora, the place that is being consumed is utterly detached from the character of the exterior landscape. By way of their estrangement, resorts and the tourists that visit them divorce themselves from the locality while retaining elements with the greatest value towards the achievement of personal well-being. Ecotourism so easily retreats from the local landscape because its bourgeois outposts no longer seem to rely on the outside world in order to provide “meaningful experiences” for their guests. Instead, they rely on what Ness calls a “non-place”, created for the express purposes of eco/ wellness tourism (2005: 120).

The formerly mentioned high end establishments rely on barriers: usually physical and paywalls, to distinguish and isolate their environment from regular Máncora, the Máncora that is not a non-place. Outside of their walls, Máncora is a party town, and in lieu of what the reviews indicate, it serves one best to visit without participating in the debauchery. Consulting *TripAdvisor* again, reviewers tell us the best places to stay are: “away from the hustle and bustle of Máncora”, and, “a little bit away from trouble”. I got the feeling that the best way to see the place was to avoid getting too close to it. In order to visit safely, then, requires a delicate dance, in which not only barriers and guards must be in place, but also a withdrawal from the town itself. The truly beneficial tourist experience can only be enjoyed within the bubbles of safety provided by hotels and resorts. We see in the discourse an agreement between the tourists and the accommodators, in which both seem to have decided it is best to minimize contact with the town proper as much as possible. It is difficult to see how— operating in the spaces in between the centers of this exclusive economy— local Mancoreños, stand to benefit from such a mode of tourism. Velarde writes,

At present, the coastal area has been developed into hotels and private properties, restricting fishing activity to the fishing neighbourhoods and Máncora's artisan dock, situated at the entrance to Las Pocitas. In this exclusive tourist zone, some wealthy hotel owners next to the dock do not allow fishermen to run aground their boats on the beach and also demand them not to anchor their boats in front of their hotels because they spoil the view for their guests. (2018: 14).

This spatial distinction is formally enforced by a police force, or rather multiple forces, in a collaborative effort made by the Peruvian state, the Máncoran municipality and local hotel owners. According to *VivaMancora*, "There is a National Police of Peru station in Máncora (also a Touristic Police), Los Organos and Zorritos. They are responsible for keeping the order in these places." In addition, "there is a private security group constantly around the beaches of Máncora and Pocitas, contributing to the security on the beaches." (*VivaMancora*---Police/Security).

Tourists are doubly secured, by both state and private police. This has, I believe, two sides to it. On the one hand, this collaborative effort ostensibly suppresses the capacity of local people to tarnish Máncora's image as a safe tourist destination. On the other end, we see the creation of new jobs in a secure line of work. These jobs provide steady livelihoods on the condition that, through the protection of property and capital, officers in the area strengthen community ties to the state and the tourist economy, while monitoring the streets and beaches to ensure none of the property or capital finds its way into the wrong hands. Policing in Máncora is yet another function of the tourist economy's capacity to prevent, to the extent that the threat of violence permits, capital from escaping a tight-knit network. Likewise, just as this network is isolated to centers of tourist activity, so too are the police. *VivaMancora* warns, "Don't walk at night in lonely streets and beaches", buy drugs from taxi drivers, and other measures, indicating that

policing is reserved to the zones trafficked by tourists. The police force obviously has its limits, as any police force does, but it is of paramount importance that their services are reserved for tourist zones. Doubts that its services extend to those who live outside of these zones instill a fear that, in visiting less frequented areas, one risks becoming a victim of crime. This effect further deepens a spatial divide between tourist zones and the residential zone.

Even outside the confines of such resorts, the upper echelon of tourists still remain under the halo of ecotourism. They engage in activities with the natural environment, but only so far as they fit their healthy, exciting, and organic criteria: whale watching, windsurfing, and swimming with turtles are the most obvious examples. As is the case within the resorts, nature is contorted for their benefit. Sea turtles, for example, are “free to swim in the ocean” but fish are thrown off the dock to keep them within sight of visitors (It's harmful for the turtles/ Es malo para las tortugas!!! - Review of Mancora Entertainment, Mancora, Peru - Tripadvisor) . Visiting Máncora, for this class of wellness seeking ecotourists, is not a cultural experience, but an immersion in the resort lifestyle. In other words, theirs is an engagement with activities, experiences, and sports that take place in the local environment but are in no way unique to the area. This globalized mode of ecotourism appears as a gift to the local community, who otherwise, would not be privy to their presence and would have to go on living as they had before. This, of course, betrays the reality of the situation, in which locals are notoriously absent from the tourist economy except as low-level employees in the service industry.

Compounding this effect, as Velarde notes, “Hotel owners prefer to hire foreign workers because they live permanently in the hotels or rental houses, and so they are available twenty-four hours a day for less money than the Mancoreño, who has a family in town and wants higher pay. Hotel owners also believe that foreign workers are more qualified to work, or willing

to learn more about the catering sector, than the Mancoreños.”(2018: 9). Velarde applied an understanding of this process to argue that tourism develops in lockstep with the ‘dog in the manger’ racism first promoted by former Peruvian President, Alán García, in which indigenous people on the coast were uprooted on the pretense that they stood in the way of Peruvian prosperity (2018: 10). However, I would argue that more is going into resort development than the realization of a racist ideology. Fundamentally, the type of insulated tourism we are both engaged in critiquing is catered primarily to the tastes of the Global North. It follows that the corresponding development of tourism accommodations is a conscious effort of attending to these tastes. I contend that it is due to the developers’ efforts towards attracting globetrotting, English speaking tourists, not a devotion to an ideological bedrock, that locals—who fail to meet the global standards of customer service—are excluded. To Velarde’s credit, he does note, “Máncora tourism has generated economic benefits only for certain privileged sectors of the population; mainly those with economic means, access to the natural resources required, and sufficient knowledge of the tourism industry.” (2018: 9). However, he fails to delineate an important aspect of the “tourism industry”: that it is an engine of displacement in and of itself, one that produces space and supplants localities. Moreover, the distinction I am trying to make is that the tourism economy caters to the needs for aggrandizement of an exclusive club, and that while this process does reinforce traditional racist dogma, it is an effect (and at times an “explanation” made by the municipal government, as Velarde illustrates, for why locals have seen so little in material gains) rather than a cause of such development (2018).

Of what little has been written about the forces responsible for bringing tourism to Máncora, much of the blame has been assigned to the neoliberal, 1990s Peruvian state. Velarde writes,

In tourism contexts, processes of neoliberalisation contribute to forging perceptions of the environment as a resource with market value. Neoliberalisation is understood here as a ‘global process that varies from location to location’ (Igoe and Brockington, 2007: 436) and that considers the market as the best mode of governance of the non-human world (Castree, 2008). (Velarde 2020: 128).

This definition of neoliberalisation speaks to the heart of my troubles with adopting the phrase to define the economic conditions under which tourism occurs in Máncora. As I mentioned in the historical section to this paper, the area had a previous life, as a center for the fishing industry, for decades. Before tourism, and long before the arrival of neoliberal geopolitics, “perceptions of the environment as a resource with natural value” were applied in the context of commercial fishing: in which fish were sold on an international market¹. It seems strange, from this understanding, to distinguish earlier economies from the tourist economy of today on the grounds of neoliberalisation. A “global process that varies from location to location” is similarly cloudy (with the fishing industry, Máncora was already firmly enmeshed in the global economy). The final point, about market governance, is perhaps the strongest tie to tourism; yet, if it is the market doing the governance, then how can it be that the development of tourism in Máncora is a project in which the Peruvian state is intimately involved with?² It was in light of the difficulties

¹ This point might come under fire from advocates for a neoliberal framework of critique, who might point out the distinction between the commodification of natural resources (in this case via commercial fishing), and the commodification of nature as a surface for tourism activities upon which tourists engage in activities. However, I would contend that this distinction between commodified natures has less to do with neoliberalism and much more to do with the needs of tourism (an engagement with nature rather than a siphoning of natural resources).

² There are, of course, types of neoliberalism that incorporate state involvement in economic projects such as the ones undertaken by the Peruvian state in Máncora. I would contend that state involvement here has to do with Peru’s role in the global economy, and more broadly the states’ of the Global South generally supplicatory role in the capitalist system (see MTD). The state’s involvement in promoting tourism, moreover, is transhistorical (a recent phase in a broader national/ supranational project within the context of globalization) and superimposing neoliberalism, in my view, narrows the scope of criticism to a specific phase in political economy.

I had explaining the development of tourism within the confines of neoliberalism, that I sought out terms offering greater lucidity.

I found that much of the dynamics I've been describing in this section sit well within a settler colonialism paradigm, wherein tourism is a process of foreigners settling in Máncora and cementing themselves and their property as superior to the exterior landscape. I have argued against understanding this process as a racially motivated one, and argued instead for racial exclusion as a bi-product of the resort-ification of the locality. Keeping these two characterizations in mind, my critique of the tourist economy under scrutiny here might best be described on the whole as rooted in the Marxist Theory of Dependency (MTD). MTD arose out of the necessity to understand why, exactly, “developing” nations in Latin America never seemed to become “developed”—a question that much of this paper has been dedicated to answering, albeit at the molecular level. The forefather of this theory, Ruy Mauro Marini, asserted, “the history of Latin American underdevelopment is the history of the development of the world capitalist system” (quoted in Valencia Sotelo 2017: 34). Marini further argued that Latin America will never be allowed to fully develop because its underdevelopment is integral to the maintenance of the world capitalist system (Valencia Sotelo 2017). We can see this playing out in the local theater of Máncora, where there is always more “developing” happening, yet, paradoxically, Máncora is never mentioned as having surmounted the cusp of being developed. Capital flows among the network of expats, Limeños, and tourists, yet the space it carves out is shaped in such a way that the flow hardly splashes into the hands of local Mancoreños. The business of development—the formal name for the carving of this space—intentionally shapes it in this way. Those who are left out of the loop are the token subjects to be developed; it is from the subjectivization of them as undeveloped in the discourse, their image as an “impoverished”

people living in undesirable conditions, making a living “archaically”; that development projects are constructed (Escobar 1995). Escobar put it succinctly when he wrote: “It rested on the ability of the development apparatus systematically to create client categories such as the “mal-nourished,” “small farmers”, “landless laborers”, “lactating women”, and the like which allow institutions to distribute socially individuals and populations in ways consistent with the creation and reproduction of modern capitalist relations.”(1995: 106-107).

The Peruvian state’s alignment with hoteliers in overseeing the development of tourism, in which the state assists in driving the plow of development, illustrates the relevance of applying the critical framework of MTD to understanding tourism in the Mancoran context. There are several organizations within the state apparatus, each with respective officers deployed in Máncora, that are involved in the process of what is referred to as ‘sustainable development’. *El Regional Piura*, an online newspaper, reports,

Un equipo técnico del Ministerio de Comercio Exterior y Turismo (Mincetur) y de la Comisión de Promoción del Perú para la Exportación y el Turismo (Promperú) son los encargados de la elaboración del Plan de Desarrollo Turístico (PDT) de Máncora y ya vienen realizando un trabajo de campo, visitando diferentes operadores turísticos del distrito.”/ “A technical team from the Ministry of Exterior Commerce and Tourism (Mincetur), and from the Commission on the Promotion of Perú’s Exports and Tourism (Promperu), are in charge of enacting the Plan for Tourism Development (PDT) in Máncora, and they are already doing field work, visiting different tourism operations in the district. (Talara: avanza elaboración del Plan de Desarrollo Turístico de Máncora)

The combination of the terms, “commerce”, “tourism”, and “exports”, in the names of the commissions charged with overseeing the “Plan for Tourism Development”, lends credence to the notion that tourism is supposed to be a multifaceted boon for Péru’s coastal towns. The transnational exchange of tourism is of paramount importance. Unlike the nation’s other exports, tourism requires luring customers to sample the goods on offer in situ. They must be enticed, as such, out of the comfort of their North Atlantic homes and into a foreign environment. On a macro level, just as Arennas and other resorts have done on a local level, the state takes on a supplicatory role to this end. By “enacting the Plan for Tourism Development”, they broadcast their attempt to produce a developed territory, on par with the tourist destinations in other developed countries, on their desert coast. Development, in this light, is not only in reference to the construction of better infrastructure, but an indication of the local political, economic, social climate as hospitable to tourists.

Sustainable development of the tourist economy in Máncora is looked after by a convoluted municipal vessel. Each sub-division has slightly different, complementary prerogatives. A complex chart published by the municipality lays out how each are interrelated, albeit the chart does little to elucidate exactly what each subdivision does on the ground. Gerencia Municipal, or Municipal Management; for example, appears to be the parent commission overlooking the División de Servicios Comunes y Gestión Ambiental (Division of Communal Services and Environmental Management), which itself heads both the Departamento de Servicios Públicos y Saneamiento Básico y Ambiental (Department of Public Services, Basic and Environmental Sanitation), and Departamento de Servicio de Comercialización (Department of Commercialization Services); meanwhile two separate divisions under the Division of Communal Services and Environmental Management concentrate their energies, respectively, on

infrastructure and social services and economic development (Organigrama) . All of this, at least in my opinion, quickly gets confusing.

The Peruvian press has proven a helpful interlocutor for understanding what this municipal government really does. In November of last year, the town’s mayor Alexander Ramírez Granda issued a statement calling for urgent action in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Reported by the Peruvian newspaper *La República*, Granda implored,

Son muchos los que han fallecido en nuestro distrito durante la pandemia, pero sería fatal para nosotros un nuevo cierre de playas y la paralización de las actividades turísticas, ya que dependemos de ello. Por eso hago un llamado al compromiso de la responsabilidad de hacer cumplir las medidas y restricciones impuestas por el Gobierno central para evitar la propagación y contagio de la COVID-19”/ “There are many who have passed away in our district during the pandemic, but a new closure of the beaches and the paralysis of tourist activities would be fatal for us, as we depend on them. Because of this I am calling for commitment to the rules and restrictions imposed by the central government to avoid the propagation and spread of COVID-19. (translation my own)
(Piura: alcalde pide a pobladores y autoridades trabajar juntos por el desarrollo de Máncora | Sociedad | La República)

In the same *La República* article, the journalist writes, “The district mayor of Máncora, Alexander Ramírez Granda, called on the population and other authorities to work together in search of the sustainable development of the populous resort in the north of the country.” This was an enormously collaborative effort; *La República* reported,

Indicó que está coordinando con los representantes de la Policía Nacional, Ministerios de Salud y Educación, Marina de Guerra y Ministerio Público para mantener las calles, avenidas y playas limpias y seguras, por lo que hizo un llamado a la población a que forme parte de esta causa, que tiene como único objetivo el desarrollo sostenible del distrito./ “He indicated that he’s coordinating with representatives from the national police, the Ministries of Health and Education, the Navy, and the Public Ministry, to ensure the streets, avenues and beaches are kept clean and secure, to this end he issued a call to action for the population to join the cause, that has as its sole objective the sustainable development of the district. (translation my own) (Piura: alcalde pide a pobladores y autoridades trabajar juntos por el desarrollo de Máncora | Sociedad | La República)

These quotes illustrate that yes, containing the spread of COVID-19 is of the utmost importance, but only insofar as the pandemic threatens to lead to “the paralysis of tourist activity”, the instrumental conduit for “sustainable development”. We get an idea of what kind of infrastructure is in the process of development from the same press release:

Asimismo, informó que el Plan de Desarrollo Urbano se encuentra en un 80% de su elaboración, que en los próximos días se firmará un convenio para mejorar el recojo de los residuos sólidos y que se ejecutan obras de infraestructura, como la construcción de nuevas escuelas, para que en el 2022 la familia escolar retorne a las clases presenciales. Además, dijo que se construyen pistas y veredas para mejorar la calidad de vida de la población./ In addition, [the mayor] informed that the Urban Development Plan is 80%

complete, and in the coming days he will sign an agreement to better the collection of solid waste and to execute infrastructure projects, like the construction of new schools, for families to return to in person class in 2022. He also said they are in the process of constructing tracks and sidewalks to improve the quality of life for the population.

(translation my own)

Granda's speech delineates the relationship between three overlapping, contingent matters: tourism, sustainable development, and infrastructure. Tourism is described as a prerequisite for the continuation of sustainable development; the emphasis placed on preventing the collapse of the tourist economy – preceding Granda's promotion of new infrastructure projects – corroborates this. Sustainable development appears to manifest as the creation of bare bones infrastructure: schools, sewage, water, and sidewalks. This begs the question: why is the construction of basic infrastructure framed as the materialization of sustainable development? A good way to answer this question might be to consider what Máncora would look like absent of this infrastructure: a town without a decent sewage system or readily available clean water, and without formally educated locals. Additionally, it would be hard to get by on foot, as tourists often like to do, without the new sidewalks being proposed. Ultimately, the (un)built landscape would be untenable for tourism, or any other large-scale economic form that thrives solely with the involvement of lots and lots of people.

This is the primary goal of Máncora's municipal government: to keep things running smoothly (which in turn keeps tourists coming back), and you can see this materializing with the construction of sewage and water infrastructure. In order to serve this function, the municipal government requires the assistance of the Marines, Health and Education Ministries, and other

public institutions; even as the government makes every effort to sustain a tourist economy, the tourist economy simply cannot repay the gesture with assistance in these projects. Sustainable economic development, evidently, cannot sustain itself without the intervention of public institutions. The projects are deemed necessary because if tourism were to be discontinued for any period of time, as Mayor Granda put it, the town would suffer a fatal blow.

The municipality and tourism seem to be inextricable; the development of tourism is dependent on the development of infrastructure, and vice versa. Tourism requires the constant infusion of public money and attention, yet forecloses the capacity for a locality to grow independent of it. In this relationship, the tourist economy parasitically controls the municipal government's agenda, commanding its concerns to be of the utmost importance in the town's plans, on the pretense that the town could not exist without its infusion of foreign capital. This turns out to be such a momentous undertaking as to require the faculties of the Peruvian government. Furthermore, I argue for an inversion of the commonly touted relationship between tourism and the development of infrastructure: it is not tourism that produces the capacity for the development of infrastructure, but infrastructure that produces the space for tourism. Only because the town's economy has become dependent on a transnational tourist economy, does it appear as the opposite.

Conclusion: Quitting the Wall Building Industry

In a subsection with the inviting title of “*What should we do?*”, located in the epilogue of his well-cited ethnography, *The Anti-Politics Machine*, Ferguson first highlighted what we ought not to do: rely on the state, the World Bank, or USAID for guidance (1990: 285). He dismissed these avenues on the grounds that, “...it is perhaps not too much to say that the preoccupation of governments and government agencies is more often precisely to forestall and frustrate the processes of popular empowerment that so many anthropologists and other social scientists in their heart seek to advance.”(1990: 285). This advice rings just as true today as it did when first issued. Through the keyholes into an institutional study provided in the discourse around Máncora and Lobitos, this much is obvious: the government on display— both at the municipal and state level— is primarily concerned with, as Ferguson often described it, “so-called development” for reasons that have little to do with democratization of resources or the redistribution of wealth (Escobar 1995)(Ferguson 1990). This should not be considered, necessarily, as their fault. The money and power at the disposal of a transnational network of corporate giants—with the backing of North Atlantic nation-states— left the Peruvian state with few alternatives to providing gracious hospitality. When the state adopted neoliberal economic policy, it was the formal admittance of this role; it was an updated term that tried to make sense of their new role as host to new systems of foreign exploitation, such as the transnational tourist economy that came to fruition on the northern coast of the country.

Whereas during the previous tenancies of the fishing industry in Máncora and the oil industry in Lobitos, commodities were exported for a global market; with tourism, the exchange was reversed. To facilitate the tourist economy requires a constant influx of imports. I argue that the reason we are met with a barrage of the now worn out phrase “tourism development”, is that

these imports are not only commodities but infrastructure, culture, and neonature. Tourists are the consumers of the theater their hosts provide, which is furnished with these imports. Setting the stage entails the intensive grooming of the local environment and the relocation of the waste produced by tourism, an all consuming process which progenitors of tourism discourse translate as development. In Máncora these imports have flooded the streets, clogged the old infrastructure, and “spoiled” the area. Reliant on the tourist economy, the municipal government is tasked with cleaning up the debris and upgrading the infrastructure, and must enlist the support of the state to ensure Máncora is able to accommodate tourists.

For now, development in Lobitos remains—for the most part—in the hands of organizations principally concerned with concocting a magical potion, one with equal parts ingenuity and entrepreneurship, in an effort to sustainably develop tourism in the locality. As they brew the potion, new magicians—development professionals from far away, “developed” places—gain their first stripes. These stripes are the tallied numbers of the children participating in their environmental education programs, the number of buildings they install electricity in, the amount of water they siphon from thin air, the trails they blaze on the lunar landscape, and ultimately the UN Sustainable Development Goals fulfilled.

The question invariably posed in critical development studies has to do with the specific ingredients put in the potion of development. As a rule these studies tend to gravitate towards a consensus that, the more professionals, the greater the institutional influence, the better chances development will eventually produce a developed place. An impressive quantity of literature is dedicated to arguing over exactly what this formula looks like. Ostensibly, with the bevy of institutions and professionals working towards this end (albeit with an eye on their respective reputations and careers) Lobitos is chartered for that ideal territory. This territory retains much of

the original charm of Lobitos, yet the people are well-fed and have sturdy roofs over their heads, speak English, provide excellent customer service and so on; tourists mill about, conscientious patrons who ensure their carbon footprints are minimal, teach the locals how to surf, and fish with local fishermen.

The disconcerting reality is that, if one was to simply exchange “development professionals” with “expats and elites”, the situation developing in Lobitos would bear a stronger resemblance to the tourist economy in Máncora than this idealized territory. The same relationship is in place, one in which development is a euphemism for importing infrastructure, molding culture and manufacturing a neonature. The biggest difference between the two remains not the local dynamics, but the actors who instill said dynamics, and the language they use to promote their endeavors.

Development, as both case studies demonstrated, is a faulty paradigm. Esobar wrote to this effect, “...those seeking to understand the third world through development have long lost sight of this materiality by building upon it a reality that like a castle in the air has haunted us for decades”(1995: 53). Extending this metaphor, tourism development in Lobitos is an attempt to bring this castle to earth. Professionalized tactics employed in the business of constructing a foundation for this edifice fail to account for the structural deficiencies within development itself. A ubiquitous image throughout this thesis has been that of walls, both real and symbolic, between tourist zones and zones for the others. These barriers are everywhere in Máncora, and in the process of construction in Lobitos. Social scientists who work for development institutions find themselves employed in the project: they are tangentially part of a collective effort that sets about constructing these walls, framing their interiors in a positive, humanitarian, and conservationist light. All of this framing belies an actually archaic, perversion undergirding

tourism development: a regressive tendency towards the consolidation of wealth and power within well-guarded fiefdoms. Tourist zones and NGO campuses provide illustrative examples (Graeber 2004: 62-63).

Returning to Ferguson, what are we, as academics, to do? First and foremost, we must sever ties with the wall building industry. I would suggest that it might aid our pursuits to build some new theories, based in reality; this time working from the ground up rather than plucking them out of the sky. The old ones all have holes in them. Even MDT, for all its saliency, fails to account for the labor conditions of tourism in Northern Peru; a crucial aspect of the theory is “super exploitation of labor”, yet, as far as I can tell, it is often the case that laborers are imported from elsewhere (developed countries)— a dynamic that leads to the local population being left out of the tourist economy entirely, rather than being exploited. This lack points to the need for new critical tools to understand globalization, outside the confines of even the most radical theoretical frameworks— not because they were all wrong, but because they are insufficient. This is not to suggest that we ought to keep up the pace of criticizing development; ironically criticizing it seems to fuel new ways of improving its tactics. The discursive application of sustainability and wellness, as well as their associated projects and metrics, illustrate this effect succinctly. We ought to leave this tit for tat strategy behind. Instead of imagining development, we need to begin thinking of new ways to undermine it, working directly with local communities. At the very least, we need to disentangle our own efforts from the agendas of development institutions.

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