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Lone Star Wars: LNGs, Communities, and Globalization versus Local Resistance in the Laguna Madre Region of Coastal South Texas

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Lone Star Wars: LNGs versus Communities, Corporate Globalization versus Local Resistance in the Laguna Madre Region of Coastal South Texas

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7 *Lone Star Wars: LNGs, Communities, and Globalization versus Local Resistance in the Laguna*
8 *Madre Region of Coastal South Texas*
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12 **Purpose:** to theoretically contextualize the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) issue using Bauman
13 and Debord. More generally, this research provides a theoretical and qualitative context to
14 understand the LNG issue in discussions of environmental management, globalization, and local
15 government.
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18 **Design/methodology/approach:** this article uses Boje's narrative case study approach to
19 analyze the politics around localized resistance movements to LNG production in the Rio Grande
20 Valley. Specifically, the study examines data collected from the Federal Energy Regulatory
21 Commission (FERC), personal interviews, and public declarations (newspapers, blogs, social
22 media) to create an historiographical account of LNGs in the RGV to analyze the Laguna Madre
23 resistance case regarding three LNG companies.
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26 **Findings:** the development of LNG in Laguna Madre has been at least temporarily halted. This
27 is considered partially due to the pandemic, reduced demand, and local resistance. In the Laguna
28 Madre case, controlling narratives by the LNG resistance appeared to be an essential component
29 of their overall strategy.
30

31 **Originality/value:** understanding the impact of energy development locally and globally
32 becomes increasingly important as access to fossil fuels become more limited. This case helps
33 understand the overall **adverse actions taken by LNGs to exploit** communities, individuals, and
34 the environment while illustrating practical tools being employed to resist the less desirable
35 elements of energy development.
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38 **Keywords:** LNG, spectacle, collateral damage, NIMBY, corporate responsibility, environment
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42 **Introduction**

43
44 The fossil fuel export industry in general, specifically liquefied natural gas (LNG),
45 evokes public criticism in both the social and political dimensions. More specifically, there is an
46 observed tendency to resist hegemonic behavior surrounding location decisions for LNG
47 terminals in the United States. These location decisions are often seen as antithetical to the
48 interests of property owners and people more generally in the region of Laguna Madre, located in
49 South Texas along the border with Mexico. One of the first reactions includes employing
50 specific narratives to invoke legal reactions to hegemonic decisions. In general, locating LNG
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3 facilities is problematic given the existing risks for contamination of properties, the associated
4 plume of impact, and of course, the risk of catastrophic explosion.
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8 Despite these risks and resistance, the process of locating to the Port of Brownsville is
9 well underway. It remains unclear if fossil fuel industries will continue to pursue locations in the
10 region. Global market conditions continue to shift impacting whether or not LNG terminals will
11 locate near the port of Brownsville. Underlying these decisions, however, are consistent
12 examples of hegemonic behavior and its associated narratives (Garrett 2018). The narrative case
13 study employed in this article illustrates the theoretical impact of Bauman and Debord using the
14 approach created by Boje to uncover how property owners, environmental groups, indigenous
15 people, and small businesses have created narrative responses to the hegemonic decision-making
16 practices being employed for location decisions in the Laguna Madre region.
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23 **Conceptual background**

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25 Any discussion of hegemonic decision-making needs to be framed within a theoretical
26 context. Specifically, we rely upon French situationist – Debord (2006) combined with
27 Bauman’s (2011) postmodern approach [1] to the concept of collateral damage. Debord (2006)
28 contributes through his discussion of commodifiable fragments, the reign of the market
29 economy, and the notion of front facing appearances. Bauman’s (2011) application of collateral
30 damage highlights the unintended, unanticipated, and otherwise unplanned effects of market
31 driven decisions. Briefly, the combination of these two conceptual elements elegantly captures
32 the context of the LNG issues being explored in this article. This, in turn, extends, earlier
33 narrative examinations of this issue (Garrett 2018). Additionally, this fusion of two concepts
34 situates itself within the work of Van de Graaf and Sovacool (2020) on “contested frames”
35 whereby their...
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45 ...analytical framework is essentially constructivist and serves to capture the complexity
46 and diversity of individual views on global energy issues. Each frame has a different take
47 on what is happening, what is causing it, and what can be done in the world of energy.
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50 They incorporate foundational assumptions about how the world of energy works (16).
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53 In the context of the Laguna Madre, the philosophical position of Van de Graaf and Sovacool
54 (2020, 17) corresponds with the “radical humanist” theoretical framework (Ardalan 2016) being
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3 developed, as the economically and politically more powerful and dominant pro LNG actors
4 employ a worldview that is neo-mercantilist and adhere to the principles of market liberalism.
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6 Conversely, the environmental and community resistance groups in the lower Laguna Madre are
7 advocates of property ownership, environmentalism, and egalitarianism, meeting the criteria for
8
9 a contested frame.
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12 Within this contested frame, it becomes important to understand the sort of
13 environmental, property driven, and community driven narratives commonly employed.
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15 Consequently, it is important to include a discussion of NIMBY, property contamination, and
16 plume of impact research. These existing scientific and legal narratives serve as evidence to
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18 support Debord (2006) and Bauman's (2011) research on spectacles and collateral damage,
19
20 respectively informing a more mainstream argument focusing on related concepts drawn from
21
22 the environmental justice and disparate impact literature from urban and regional planning. This
23
24 body of literature includes concepts that are ready-made narratives challenging hegemonic
25
26 efforts. Subsequently, these narratives allow resistance groups to employ economic logic, while
27
28 allowing us as researchers to consider the impact of LNGs on local governments, on citizens, and
29
30 the environment more generally. The context becomes particularly interesting when one
31
32 considers that the Rio Grande Valley communities of South Padre Island, Port Isabel, Laguna
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34 Vista, and Laguna Heights, Texas are among the poorest metropolitan planning organization
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36 areas of the United States, highlighting environmental justice concerns.

37 **Revisiting risk and uncertainty**

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40 Continuing the examination of Bauman's (2011) collateral damage combined with
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42 Debord's (2006) understanding of spectacle, we must next reconsider risk and uncertainty. LNG
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44 facilities, transportation, and other distribution elements carry associated risks alongside
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46 uncertainty about safety, profits, and other factors. As such, there is an associated set of stigmas
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48 tied to the LNG industry. When we think of stigma in the context of environmental justice, we
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50 are really looking at notions of stigma and value for physical property (Mundy 1992; Sementelli
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52 & Simons 1997; Simons & Sementelli 1997). Previous research has examined impacts of
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54 underground storage tanks (Sementelli & Simons 1997; Simons & Sementelli 1997) and fuel oil
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56 contamination (Closser, 2001). More recent research has extended this notion of stigma to
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58 include abstract concepts more like government itself (Moura & Miller 2019). Interestingly, the
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3 LNG industry with its market spectacle and questions of collateral damage continues to capture
4 both conceptions. Subsequently, media outlets have begun to bring discussions of health risks to
5 the forefront (Hopper 2021). As people become cognizant of risk, it then becomes necessary to
6 consider LNG as a NIMBY issue.
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10 **NIMBY: Not in my backyard**

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12 When experiencing collateral damage (Bauman, 2011) in the context of a market
13 spectacle (Debord 2006) people in general, and property owners in particular tend to try and
14 protect their valuable items including land. The NIMBY problem refers to situations where
15 people object to locating specific projects that are understood to be detrimental, undesirable,
16 unpleasant, or even hazardous. Decision makers, citizens, and other impacted individuals often
17 are not conceptually opposed to the project as long as it is not near them giving rise to the
18 acronym NIMBY or not in my back yard. One of the key elements of the NIMBY argument
19 involves the uneven distribution of risk, meaning that less wealthy, nonwhite, less advantaged
20 people are often those who assume the most risk.
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29 Urban planners typically focus on methods to overcome NIMBY (Dear, 1992) based on
30 arguments for the merits of some project. This is especially true in the energy sectors (Devine-
31 Wright, 2014). Property owners tend to be a risk averse when it comes to decisions that
32 compromise the value of their land. Though a project might have economic merit, the
33 environmental impacts tend to skew risk away from the wealthy, hegemony, and politically
34 powerful towards the disadvantaged consistent with work in critical sociology (Gibson 2005)
35 which in turn sets up collateral damage theory.
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42 **Collateral damage theory**

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44 Bauman's (2011) application of collateral damage borrows judiciously from a variety of
45 literature streams including environmental justice, and critical theory more generally to articulate
46 a great asymmetry between haves and have nots. Though this is hardly a novel concept, it is a
47 useful interpretation of the more mainstream environmental justice literature which focuses on
48 the struggle for safe and healthy environment by linking it explicitly with Marxist theories.
49 Specifically, there is an interesting undertone to environmental justice theory that often
50 emphasizes concepts like participation, function, and flourishing (Schlosberg 2009) that typically
51 reflect more widely held professional beliefs in urban planning. However, something idealized is
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3 not always achievable (Heilman & Sementelli 2020). In practical terms, hegemonic actors often
4 work against the ‘collective good’ idealized by urban planners allowing us to reconsider LNG
5 placement in the lower Rio Grande Valley/Laguna Madre region and how it works against
6 environmental justice.
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11 Bauman (2011) focuses on what critical theorists might call a neo-liberal approach to
12 power and politics around the assumption of risk. Hegemonic oppression in this case is
13 manifested through economic decision-making rather than something that is wholly political. A
14 consequence of this manifestation includes the possibility of “power without politics and politics
15 without power” (p. 23) illustrating another example of the hollow state (Milward & Provan
16 2000) in administrative thought. In the case of LNG terminals, Bauman’s (2011) application of
17 collateral damage is an economic concept, representing a classic argument for shifting negative
18 externalities to local political units, citizens, and the disadvantaged thereby supporting both
19 globalization and neoliberal economic thought to the detriment of public environmental justice
20 concerns.
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29 Theoretically, this assertion by Bauman (2011) is supported by Agamben (1993, 79)
30 who notes “When the real world is transformed into an image and images become real, the
31 practical power of humans is separated from itself and presented as a world unto itself. In the
32 figure of this world separated and organized by the media in which the forms of the State and
33 the economy are interwoven, the mercantile economy attains the status of absolute and
34 irresponsible sovereignty over all social life.” Bauman (2011, 23; *in* Garrett 2018, 59) states
35 that there is now a “power free from politics, and politics devoid of power” – power that is
36 globalized while “politics stay pitifully local. Territorial nation-states are ‘local law and order’
37 police precincts, as well as local dustbins and garbage removal and recycling plants for the
38 globally produced risks and problems.” This in turn, allows us to employ the ‘collateral
39 damage’ argument (Bauman 2011) alongside Debord (2006/1967) to enrich our narrative
40 analysis of the Laguna Madre case.
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The Spectacle

If we unpack the LNG arguments further, we identify links to Debord (2006/1967) as the narratives are economic in nature, and antidemocratic especially when considering differential impacts of the risk involved and are conveyed by mass media. Specifically, we uncover the prioritization and fetishization of capital production over the lives of the affected masses. In this case hegemonic decision-making narratives are presented as something desirable, allowing them to be a part of a broader NIMBY argument although without the equality taken as an *a priori* assumption in urban planning. The particular kind of hegemony in this case can be understood as opportunistic hegemony (Yarbrough & Yarbrough 1987; 1987b; Ogbor 2001), which is closest conceptually even though it is most often applied in the context of corporate culture. Despite the differing context, opportunistic hegemony remains conceptually close to being an ideal representation (Ives 2004) particularly when we talk about narratives and language.

Methodology

This research uses the narrative case study approach developed by Boje (1995, 2001, 2008). Boje's approach is ideal since it captures the fragmented, collective, underdeveloped, and otherwise messy elements of storytelling and narratives. The data was collected from multiple fragmented sources including the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), personal interviews, and public declarations (newspapers, blogs, social media) to provide an accurate, but likely incomplete picture of the actions undertaken by multiple actors in regarding the LNG production in the Rio Grande valley. This qualitative approach is superior since it limits the possibility of 'counterfeit coherence,' which is often a problem in other narrative approaches.

We were also able to incorporate narrative fragments from US Fish and Wildlife, SpaceX Corporation, the Port of Brownsville, along with internet and social media narratives from LNG LLCs. These fragment composite narratives illustrate stories of economic prosperity, environmental hardship, job creation, and risk – all forming a mosaic that makes up the story of the Laguna Madre. Moreover, the narratives demonstrate how questions of collateral damage, antidemocratic practices, and neoliberal economic policies move in and out of the public eye as part of a greater spectacle.

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3 Debord (2006/1967) in particular, highlights the issues of opportunistic hegemony
4 (Yarbrough & Yarbrough 1987;1987b; Ogbor 2001) by the LNG refinery corporations as well as
5 the collective resistance to their efforts. Debord (2006/1967) enriches this discussion of
6 hegemony by highlighting the “sham struggles of rival forms of separate power” (p. 56) that are
7 “defined by specific peculiarities in the varieties of production and power” (ibid) and passed off
8 within the spectacle as a distinct form. This ‘distinct form’ is ultimately just a small facet of the
9 neoliberal economic system of capitalism making the narratives of debate and dialogue
10 ultimately elements of spectacle (Debord 2006/1967).
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18 **Study Area**

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20 The Laguna Madre study area is a region in South Texas where the Rio Grande flows into
21 the Gulf of Mexico (Garrett 2018). The area is a study of contrasts. It is poor, industrialized, part
22 of the commercial space aviation industry, as well as a tourist destination, commercial transit
23 hub, and part of the energy sector. Given this context, residents of communities in the region are
24 seen as being nearly powerless to challenge the global fossil fuels industry. Laguna Madre
25 communities have little influence in Washington, D.C., while the area simultaneously exhibits
26 signs of industry capture (Rubinstein Reiss, 2012). This allows for prevailing narratives that
27 focus on economic development over the local environment to flourish. It becomes clear that it
28 was necessary to use Boje’s narrative approach applied to the theoretical frame that combines
29 Debord (2006/1967) with Bauman (2011).
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38 The following sections analyze narratives regarding the potential construction of natural
39 gas pipelines approved by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) as the former
40 Valley Crossing Pipeline LLC, purchased by Enbridge 2019, was built originally in 2018. In
41 addition to Valley Crossing Pipeline, Enbridge bought Rio Bravo Pipeline LLC from
42 NextDecade’s Rio Grande LNG in 2020 as we will see below. FERC approved all three LNG
43 LLC terminals in November 2019 to be constructed. We begin the narrative analysis examining
44 the initial siting of LNGs in the area, possible effects on the environment, existential threats
45 involving the volatility of LNG processing and proximity to SpaceX rocket launches, and local
46 resistance to the establishment of LNGs.
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From hydraulic fracturing to LNG refineries

As laid out in Garrett (2018, 59) “liquefied natural gas (LNG) is presented as a clean energy alternative by oil and gas corporations to replace the more toxic and pollutant coal.” The Center for Liquefied Natural Gas (n.d. para.1-2) under its web site heading titled “LNG and the Environment” illustrates this as “Natural gas, like other energy sources, has an impact on the environment. That impact has been largely positive over the last two decades, as greater use of natural gas and LNG have contributed to reduced carbon emissions and provided reliable support and back-up for renewable energy.” This assessment does not hold up. Methane gas, like any other hydrocarbon produces significant amounts of carbon dioxide during combustion. Hydraulic fracturing (fracking) extracts oil and gas from shale formations by using high water pressure (U.S. Geological Survey n.d. para. 1). Extracting these fossil fuels from shale is not ideal since it releases more contaminants than other extraction methods in other areas. Known side effects according to the USGS include both earthquakes and degradation of groundwater quality. LNG, of course, can be extracted through fracking.

Other environmental risks emerge once natural gas is captured. Transportation of LNG products during various stages of refinement have accompanying risks (The Union of Concerned Scientists February 3, 2014, 5; Garrett 2018, 61). As an example, methane is 34 times more potent than carbon dioxide at trapping heat (ibid) making it a climate change concern though it is less often considered. Rather, advocates typically present evidence that LNG is cleaner than coal, which is more of a condemnation of the coal extraction process (especially strip mining, which leaves far more visible damage) than it is an affirmation of how clean LNG is. In contrast, methane is far less visible as a pollutant making their narrative pitch for a ‘clean sufficiently safe fuel’ reasonable particularly in the context of being a transitory fuel.

Coming to a beach near South Padre Island: LNG refinery sites and tankers at the Port of Brownsville and deepening the Brownsville shipping channel

We could be the largest center for LNG exports in the Western Hemisphere. - Port Director and CEO Eduardo Campirano, Port of Brownsville (Chapa April 24, 2015).

LNG came to us. We didn't go to LNG. – Eduardo Campirano, CEO of the Port of Brownsville (Corso August 8, 2019).

Buried in a *Brownsville Herald* newspaper article (Clark April 25, 2012) titled “Cargo up 16 percent over 2010 at Port of Brownsville,” was a paragraph that indicated five LNG limited

liability companies (LLCs) were leasing land along the Brownsville shipping channel. The five companies cited were Rio Grande Liquefied Natural Gas (RGLNG), Annova LNG, Texas LNG, Sideco LNG and Gulf Coast LNG. The latter two LLCs did not pursue their respective projects but Rio Grande LNG (NextDecade Corporation) which also had the Rio Bravo Pipeline LLC was sold to Enbridge February 23, 2020. That pipeline is not yet completed. As of March 22, 2021, Annova LNG (Exelon Corporation) has decided not to move forward with the construction of its terminals and at least publicly is halting its operations, making a claim that it was due to the global natural gas market (Hydrocarbons-Technology.com March 23, 2021). RioGrande LNG and Texas LNG (Glenfarne Group and Samsung Corporation) are presently attempting to begin operations in the future. Construction timelines for natural gas pipelines and refineries have been slowed by global market forces and local resistance in the Laguna Madre community (more below). Since the *Brownsville Herald* story broke, the only aspect of the project completed thus far is the Valley Crossing Pipeline that extends from the Agua Dulce region near Kingsville, Texas that was sold to Enbridge. There are obstacles for getting Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) approval, but this is the current status for LNG terminals as reported by the LLCs below:

Rio Grande LNG

Project facts: 984-acre site optimally located in the Port of Brownsville, Texas...Total capacity of 27 million metric tonnes per annum (mtpa)...4 x 180,000 m³ full-containment LNG storage tanks...Deepwater port access with supporting marine infrastructure...Two marine jetties, berth pocket, turning basin...Abundant gas supply from the Permian Basin and Eagle Ford Shale (*Source: RGLNG n.d.*)

Annova LNG

Annova LNG is a 6.5 MTPA liquified natural gas (LNG) export facility on the Port of Brownsville, Texas deep water channel. With an experienced leadership team and investment-grade equity owners, including Exelon Corporation, Black & Veatch Corporation and Kiewit Corporation, Annova LNG is a leader among second-wave U.S. LNG facilities... Located on 731 acres along the south side of the Brownsville Ship Channel, the purpose of the Annova LNG facility is to receive natural gas from the Agua Dulce, Texas region, provide any treatment necessary before, chill the natural gas until it condenses into LNG, store such LNG pending loading for tanker transport, and load the LNG onto LNG tankers for export to other countries...(Annova LNG n.d., para. 1).

Texas LNG

Texas LNG's 625+ acre site is strategically located on the Port of Brownsville's deepwater ship channel. Texas LNG will have a permitted capacity to produce 4 MTA (million tonnes per annum) Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG). The project will have two trains using the standard Air Products liquefaction technology producing 2 MTA each...Texas LNG will export LNG to global LNG markets. Texas LNG has received its Department of Energy authorization to export to both FTA and non-FTA markets... The Final Environmental Impact Statement was issued in March 2019. Texas LNG received its FERC authorization in November 2019... *Texas LNG plans to reach Final Investment Decision (FID) in late 2021, contingent on many factors such as completing the required commercial agreements, securing all necessary permits and approvals, obtaining financing and incentives, and other factors associated with commercial viability of the investment.* Construction will begin after FID and first LNG exports commencing in 2025 (Phase 1). Phase 2 exports expected to commence soon thereafter. (*Source: Texas LNG "Texas LNG summary" [n.d.], para. 2-6, italics added for emphasis.*)

The three LNG LLCs – Annova LNG (169 FERC ¶ 61,132), Texas LNG (169 FERC ¶ 61,130), and Rio Grande LNG / Rio Bravo Pipeline (169 FERC ¶ 61,131) –received authorization orders to begin their respective projects effective November 22, 2019, pending final approvals from the Army Corps of Engineers and other state and federal agencies. FERC Commissioner Glick dissented with Commissioner Chatterjee (chair) and Commissioner McNamee approved in all three cases. What is not shown on the LNG websites is that the proposed LNG terminals are close and, in some cases, are within two to three miles of population centers potentially stigmatizing them and raising NIMBY concerns. The prevailing narrative from the Texas LNG, Rio Grande LNG, and Annova LNG websites is that there is positive economic development with little to no environmental degradation in the affected areas.

There is a secondary problem for the LNG sites. The Brownsville shipping channel is only 42 feet deep and it has to be at least 52 feet deep to accommodate LNG tanker ships incurring substantial infrastructure costs. Brownsville Port Director, Eduardo Campirano, in December 2016 noted that preliminary estimates for deepening the channel would be in the range of \$250 million and would take at least three years to complete with the estimate at the time that the dredging of the channel would be completed by 2020 (Chapa December 16, 2020). However, later estimates have come in at \$350 million, half of which is alleged to be paid by NextDecade

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3 Corporation pending whether they move forward with making a final investment decision on
4 building the Rio Grande LNG complex in 2021 (Veazey November 20, 2020). Nothing has
5 started as of December 2020 and the channel deepening funding could be in jeopardy if
6 NextDecade Corporation decides not to go forward with the Rio Grande LNG project. The
7 economic and environmental resistance to these corporate initiatives by local communities is laid
8 out in the next section.
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16 **Resistance: Save RGV from LNG versus Corporate LNGs**

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18 *“When we first learned that big companies wanted to build LNG plans here in Brownsville*
19 *at the port, May 2014, we could not believe anyone would ever do that. We came to find*
20 *out that the plans had been in the works for years before, but the public did not know.*
21 *Now six years later, we have been involved in many campaigns to impede the development*
22 *of LNG terminals at the Port of Brownsville” – Jim Chapman, President of Friends of the*
23 *Wildlife Corridor, and leader in Save RGV from LNG. Email sent to author, November 9,*
24 *2020.*
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28 *“Texas LNG plans to destroy a pre-Columbian archaeological site called Garcia Pasture*
29 *with the remains of our ancestors and villages. These pristine lands where the Rio Grande*
30 *LNG, Texas LNG, and Annova LNG companies plan to bulldoze and spew toxic pollution*
31 *are sacred to the Carrizo Comecrudo Tribe, and the companies did not consult with us,”*
32 *said Juan Mancias, Chairman of the Carrizo Comecrudo Tribe of Texas (Wolinsky, July*
33 *10, 2019, para. 6).*
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36 This section examines narratives of resistance regarding LNG construction projects.
37 Historically, FERC has been overwhelmingly in favor of development projects. From 1987 to
38 2016 may have approved nearly 100% of the projects proposed. The notable exception was the
39 Jordan Cove (Oregon) export project in March 2016 (Sickinger 2016, Garrett 2018), where the
40 project was delayed rather than completely stopped. Because of this ambiguity, groups are still
41 working towards delaying if not stopping the project. While FERC approved the project in
42 March 2020 (Danko March 19, 2020), the state of Oregon stepped in to delay if not stop the
43 project (Sickinger February 9, 2021). The Jordan Cove project represents a model of resistance
44 for Laguna Madre communities. In the Laguna Madre region, this resulted in the emergence of
45 *Save RGV from LNG*. The goal, of course, is to limit the impact of federal agencies that rubber
46 stamp fossil fuel projects.
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Grassroots support and community resistance in the Rio Grande Valley have been led by the local chapter of the Sierra Club. The primary tactic used initially was to educate the people in the cities of South Padre Island, Laguna Vista, Port Isabel, Long Island Village, and Laguna Heights concerning the uncertainty, risk, and stigma from LNG refineries in close proximity. For example, the Texas LNG terminal site is less than 2 miles from Port Isabel high school. The groups opposed to the LNG terminals have held meetings to expose the risks for air, water, soil and light pollution from the refineries and pipelines. The risks were communicated by media, and social media campaigns as well. Through these tactics, the leadership of the Sierra Club brought various community groups together under the *Save RGV from LNG* campaign, which included a blog, *Twitter*, and *Facebook* accounts.

The campaign *Save RGV from LNG*, organized protests on August 11, 2015, at the Port Isabel Convention Center during the FERC LNG scoping meeting. The LNG protestors were not allowed into the scoping meeting. In contrast, Annova LNG, Texas LNG, and Rio Grande LNG were allowed to have “information” tables inside the center. FERC established rules that citizens could come to the meeting and have their testimony taken individually and not collectively. There were 30 comments by 165 citizens in the Laguna Madre area who filed as intervenors in June 2016 both for and against Texas LNG. A partial list in favor included Texas Lt. Governor Dan Patrick, Los Fresnos Area Chamber of Commerce, Brownsville Navigation District, and the South Padre Island Chamber of Commerce. Groups that were against Texas LNG included members of the U.S. National Park Service, Sierra Club, City of South Padre Island, Sea Turtle Inc., Town of Laguna Vista, Vecinos Para El Bienstar de la Comunidad Costera, Texas Shrimp Association, Lower Laguna Madre Foundation, Friends of the Wildlife Corridor, and the City of Port Isabel (Chapa June 17, 2016). By August 2016 when Annova LNG, the first of the three LNG terminals, announced their intentions to construct their liquefied natural gas refinery in the Port of Brownsville, hundreds of Laguna Madre citizens and fifteen groups sought an injunction with FERC against the LNG corporations. Chapa (August 18, 2016) listed the groups objecting to Annova LNG:

1. Friends of Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge
2. Sea Turtle, Incorporated
3. Defenders of Wildlife
4. Lower Laguna Madre Foundation
5. Long Island Village Owners Association

6. Center for Biological Diversity
7. Sierra Club
8. Vecinos Para el Bienestar de la Comunidad Costera
9. City of South Padre Island
10. City of Port Isabel
11. Shrimp Outlet
12. Burnell Marine & Supply
13. Shrimp Outlet Farmers Market
14. Texas Shrimp Association
15. Brownsville/ Port Isabel Shrimp Processors Association

Successful outcomes from these acts of resistance to LNG corporations have included stopping tax abatements for Annova LNG and Rio Grande LNG in the Point Isabel Independent School District that serves the lower Laguna Madre region. All three LNGs were asked to leave the area and not locate their terminals in the Port of Brownsville by resolutions passed by the city councils of South Padre Island, Laguna Vista, and Port Isabel. This was due in large part to lobbying efforts and meeting attendance by members of *Save RGV from LNG* coalition and locally affected small business owners. The LNGs were able to obtain political support from area local chambers of commerce by buying memberships. Additionally, letters of support for the LNGs have come from state representatives, a state senator, a Congressional Representative, and both U.S. Senators from Texas (among others). Despite resistance to the LNGs, the Cameron County Commissioner's Court approved a tax abatement for Rio Grande LNG in October 2017 (Garrett 2018). Two years later, they similarly gave Annova LNG a tax abatement despite opposition from Rebekah Hinojosa, Sierra Club organizer, stating....

By approving this terrible tax break deal, Cameron County commissioners failed their constituents who will bear the costs of Annova LNG's polluting facility... The communities of South Padre Island, Port Isabel, Laguna Vista and Long Island Village have all passed anti-LNG resolutions. Annova LNG would pollute Latinx communities and poses a huge environmental risk to the Rio Grande Valley (Reyna October 1, 2019, para. 13)

The LNGs emphasize narratives of economic development and job creation that appeal to elected officials in one of the poorest regions in Texas and the U.S. with chronically high unemployment (Ura and Wang September 13, 2018). *Save RGV from LNG* and other local resisters to the LNGs find it challenging to counter economic arguments with politicians in a region that is both chronically poor and susceptible to exploitation by the fossil fuel industries.

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3 The Carrizo-Comecrudo people additionally contributed to trying to stop funding of
4 LNGs, particularly Rio Grande LNG, by protesting French investment banks such as BNP
5 Paribas and Société Générale and seeking allies such as Friends of the Earth – France, thwarting
6 the corporations obtaining funding (Wolinsky July 10, 2019). The Carrizo-Comecrudo tribe of
7 Texas is not federally recognized by the U.S. government, which makes it difficult to have
8 standing while taking any legal action against the LNGs that are attempting to seize their lands
9 and their associated cultural heritage sites in the lower Rio Grande Valley.

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11 The *Save RGV from LNG* network has utilized the legal system in federal and state courts
12 to stop LNGs from building their pipelines and refineries. Recent examples of lawsuits suing
13 FERC, other federal departments and agencies, the Port of Brownsville Navigation District, and
14 the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) are shown in Table 1 (see below).

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16 <Table 1 goes here>

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18 As of November 2020, there are eleven lawsuits by various affected groups and communities
19 attempting to stop the LNGs from locating along the Brownsville Shipping channel. The cases
20 are ongoing.

21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 **Matches and tinder – immediate risks to the Laguna Madre region: SpaceX, the volatility** 34 **of LNG and potential terrorism risks on the Mexico-U.S. border**

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36 “They went from proposing a few launches per year of an already field-tested rocket to
37 ongoing experimentation of untested technology without doing the studies that would
38 ensure environmental protection and public safety and without giving the local community
39 a chance to have a say,” said Jim Chapman, president of Friends of the Wildlife Corridor
40 (Foust, November 25, 2020, para. 9).

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43 The people who dwell in the communities of South Padre Island, Port Isabel, Laguna
44 Vista, Laguna Heights, Long Island Village could be endangered by LNGs building refineries
45 and beginning their operations. The Annova LNG terminal was scheduled to be built along the
46 Brownsville shipping channel is approximately 5 miles from the SpaceX launch pad in Boca
47 Chica with Rio Grande LNG and Texas LNG also nearby. Sierra Club’s Rebekah Hinojosa noted
48 after FERC approved the location of the Annova LNG terminal in March 2017 they would be
49 launching *Falcon 9* and the *Falcon Heavy* SpaceX rockets dangerously close to the Annova LNG
50 terminal, located on the south shore of the Brownsville Ship Channel, sharing State Highway 4
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3 with the launch site. For environmentalists, Hinojosa said the worst-case scenario is a SpaceX
4 rocket failure causing an explosion at one or all three of the proposed LNG facilities” (Chapa
5 March 23, 2017, para. 18). The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) was part of the FERC
6 approval process. However, since the approval, SpaceX’s Elon Musk decided to launch the much
7 more powerful *Starship SN Series* and *Falcon Super Heavy* rockets that are being considered for
8 approval by the FAA at Boca Chica launch site (Arevalo November 23, 2020). The previous
9 FERC/FAA analysis showed some risk due to the proximity of the LNG terminals to the SpaceX
10 launch pad. The potential for risk to the communities remains uncertain while the FAA conducts
11 a thorough analysis.
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19 Liquefied natural gas can be hazardous in large quantities such as when located in LNG
20 terminal storage containers and onboard LNG tanker ships. Garrett (2018, citing MIT Professor
21 James Fay in Hurst February 2008, 3) notes “Once ignited, as is very likely when the spill is
22 initiated by a chemical explosion, the floating LNG pool will burn vigorously [and] Like the
23 attack on the World Trade Center in New York City, there exists no relevant industrial
24 experience with fires of this scale from which to project measures for securing public safety.”
25 The Council on Foreign Relations report in 2006 (Kaplan February 27, 2006) and a February
26 2007 Government Accountability Office report illustrated the potential of a terrorist attack on
27 LNG tankers (Garrett, 2018). Given these risks, LNG tankers must be escorted by the U.S.
28 Coast Guard when they approach populated areas. This raises additional issues for residents in
29 the lower Laguna Madre region near the Port of Brownsville.
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41 **Conclusion: The spectacle of global market conditions, collateral damage, and profitability** 42 **for LNGs – Implications for future research** 43

44 The Covid-19 pandemic has been harmful to national economies generally and to fossil
45 fuel industries in particular. Profit margins have suffered since LNGs leased property to build
46 their refineries and deepen the Brownsville shipping channel limiting the corporations’ interest in
47 incurring risk from investment. *Save RGV from LNG* leader, Stefanie Herweck, noted in 2016
48 prior to the coronavirus outbreak that....
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53 "From every angle, this does not look like a sustainable project," said Stefanie Herweck
54 with *Save RGV from LNG*... [Herweck] said the Texas LNG project and two similar ones
55 also proposed for the Port of Brownsville will pollute, disrupt tourism and pose a public
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3 safety risk. Herweck [stated]...from an economic standpoint, Texas LNG, Annova LNG
4 and Rio Grande LNG all missed the opportunity to take advantage of higher commodity
5 prices in Asia. "The Brownsville projects are way down the queue in the process. It's hard
6 to see how they will be profitable" (Chapa, April 8, 2016, para. 4-7).
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9 *Save RGV from LNG* has attempted to redirect narratives against the LNGs and their
10 global corporate support to limit or avoid problems of collateral damage (Bauman 2011). They
11 have had some success so far as exhibited by their actions against FERC and the LNGs. All three
12 LNG projects are well behind schedule yet continue to lease land from the Port of Brownsville as
13 they weigh whether to continue forward with development while facing community resistance.
14 As noted above, Annova LNG has halted the construction of its terminal claiming that a poor
15 natural gas market was the cause. *Save RGV from LNG* activists have welcomed the cancellation
16 of the project claiming, "Today's victory is the result of six years of tireless efforts of the Rio
17 Grande Valley communities in South Texas who have written comments, attended hearings,
18 protested banks, and more to protect their health, their precious coastline, and the climate from
19 Annova LNG's proposed fracked gas project" (Wilkins March 23, 2021, para. 3). Regardless of
20 context, the threats of risk, uncertainty, and stigma loom large. People in general and property
21 owners in particular historically balk at controversial projects. Combining these longstanding
22 fear narratives with analysis we discover pathways for a critically informed postmodern
23 approach (Garrett 2018) to grassroots resistance by combining the work of Debord and Bauman.
24 As such, the lower Rio Grande Valley case study illustrates how community resistance to the
25 opportunistic hegemony of globalization efforts may counter the more hazardous aspects of neo-
26 liberal capitalism. Whether the two remaining LNGs locate to the Port of Brownsville and begin
27 operations remains to be seen as the capabilities of *Save RGV from LNG* have been demonstrably
28 successful in terms of delaying the development thus far and, perhaps, stopping the Annova LNG
29 project. **Additionally, Texas LNG and Rio Grande LNG lost legal arguments brought about by a
30 Federal Court of Appeals lawsuit of the *Save RGV from LNG* coalition that resulted in the LLCs
31 having to provide a *social justice* rationale – taking into full account the adverse impact on
32 economically depressed minority communities – for their climate analyses that were missing
33 from their original FERC approved invitation to proceed with building their respective LNG
34 terminals (Malo, August 3, 2021). The local resistance continues. However, the court upheld the
35 authorizations for the continuance of the pipelines and terminals if they comply with the court
36 ordered recommendations. As it stands, neo-liberal capitalism remains a powerful political and
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3 economic force yet to be fully reckoned with in the lower Rio Grande Valley's Laguna Madre
4 region. Profits and exploitation of economically poor regions continue at the expense of
5 communities and the environment.
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9 Neoliberal globalization continues. The research presented here using concepts of
10 Debord's (2006/1967) spectacle and Bauman's collateral damage are useful for framing the
11 social construction that underlies the hegemonic power of global corporations and their
12 government allies against local communities, particularly in economically depressed regions like
13 Laguna Madre. The theoretical framework developed in this article has implications for future
14 investigations into the how communities may resist the onset of unwanted corporations interested
15 in exploiting and extracting resources, leaving locals with the consequences of increased
16 environmental pollution, displaced local economies, and other potential threats. The authors
17 invite other scholars to pursue these areas of inquiry to understand the implications of both
18 corporate expansion and global responsibility.
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21 22 23 24 25 Endnote

26
27 [1] The theoretical concept “postmodernism” used in this manuscript follows the work of Best &
28 Kellner (2001). Postmodern theoretical approaches often critique and challenge structural
29 functional approaches to science, technology, and culture. Our application reflects elements of
30 critical postmodernity given that we expose the exploitation of LNGs through the use of
31 hegemonic action on Laguna Madre communities since they are less powerful politically and
32 economically for resource extraction. This case study bridges critical theory and postmodernism
33 while underscoring the contributions of narrative analysis (Boje, 2001).
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Table 1: Save RGV from LNG Court Litigation “LNG Lawsuit” Tracker

Plaintiffs and Defendants	LNG Company	Date Filed	Plaintiff Attorneys	Reason for Lawsuit	Status	Current Court
Vecinos,* Sierra Club, Port Isabel, SaveRGVfromLNG v. FERC	Rio Grande LNG/Rio Bravo Pipeline	2/20/2020	Nathan Matthews, Erin Gaines, Gilberto Hinojosa	FERC violated NEPA*** & Natural Gas Act in their decision to grant permit	Oral Arguments Pending	D.C. Court of Appeals
Vecinos,* Sierra Club, Port Isabel, SaveRGVfromLNG v. FERC	Annova LNG	3/27/2020	Nathan Matthews, Erin Gaines, Gilberto Hinojosa	FERC violated NEPA*** & Natural Gas Act in their decision to grant permit	Oral Arguments Pending Combined with Texas LNG	D.C. Court of Appeals
Vecinos,* Sierra Club, Port Isabel, SaveRGVfromLNG v. FERC	Texas LNG	3/27/2020	Nathan Matthews, Erin Gaines, Gilberto Hinojosa	FERC violated NEPA*** & Natural Gas Act in their decision to grant permit	Oral Arguments Pending Combined with Annova LNG	D.C. Court of Appeals
Sierra Club, Defenders of Wildlife v. U.S. Dept. of Interior	Rio Grande LNG/Rio Bravo Pipeline	4/14/2020	Devora Ancel, Eric Huber, Reba McCreary	Endangered Species Violations regarding Ocelot survival	Oral Arguments Pending	U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals
Sierra Club, Defenders of Wildlife v. U.S. Dept. of Interior	Annova LNG	4/20/2020	Devora Ancel, Eric Huber, Reba McCreary	Endangered Species Violations regarding Ocelot survival	Oral Arguments Pending	U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals
Fishermen & Shrimpers of the RGV, Sierra Club, SaveRGVfromLNG v. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	Rio Grande LNG/Rio Bravo Pipeline	7/23/2020	Erin Gaines, Nathan Matthews	Clean Water Act violations, wetland destruction	Oral Arguments Pending; USACE has suspended permit	U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals
Port Isabel, JJ Zamora, Martin Cantu v. Brownsville Navigation District	Rio Grande LNG, Annova LNG, Texas LNG	1/27/20	Gilbert Hinojosa	All three LNG leases are obstructions of public rights	Dismissed/ Appealed	13 th U.S. Court of Appeals
Port Isabel, Fishermen & Shrimpers of RGV, Vecinos,* v. Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ)	Rio Grande LNG/Rio Bravo Pipeline	2/20/2020	Erin Gaines, Gilbert Hinojosa	Challenging TCEQ air permit	Lost on standing	U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals
Sierra Club, Vecinos,* Shrimpers & Fishermen of the RGV, Carrizo Comecrudo Tribe, SaveRGVfromLNG v. FERC	Rio Grande LNG/Rio Bravo Pipeline	7/16/2020	Nathan Matthews, Erin Gaines	Larger pipeline / other changes are contrary to the public convenience, should not have been approved	FERC Environmental Assessment pending (originally due 11/16/2020)	D.C. Court of Appeals
Vecinos,* v. TCEQ	Texas LNG	8/5/2020	Erin Gaines	Challenging TCEQ air permit	Oral Arguments pending	Travis County District Court
City of Port Isabel v. TCEQ	Texas LNG	Unknown	Gilbert Hinojosa	Challenging TCEQ air permit	Oral Arguments pending	Travis County District Court

Source: Based on Jim Chapman, *Save RGV newsletter November 9, 2020* titled “What are we doing now...” SaveRGVfromLNG, saveRGVfromLNG@gmail.com. Sent to the author on Monday, November 9, 2020 at 8:13 PM (Central Time).

*Vecinos para el Bienstar de la Comunidad Costera

** Since this filing, a motion to FERC to intervene and protest has been filed 7/16/2020 by Vecinos,* Shrimpers & Fishermen of the RGV, Carrizo Comecrudo Tribe, Save RGV from LNG, to intervene and protest Enbridge’s amendment for changes to the pipeline and other changes that are contrary to the public convenience and necessity.

***National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.