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**THE UN-EXCEPTIONAL BOMB:  
SETTLER NUCLEARISM, FEMINISM, AND ATOMIC  
TOURISM IN NEW MEXICO**

by

**EILEEN CLARE SHAUGHNESSY**

**B.A. WOMEN STUDIES; JUSTICE & PEACE STUDIES  
SAINT CATHERINE UNIVERSITY, 2008**

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Master of Arts  
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## **DEDICATION**

For Stina and the chickens, both of whom patiently listened to me talk about nuclearism  
all the time and nourished me in different ways.



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There isn't much in this life that we do alone, except maybe die. Writing a thesis is no different. I was held up, comforted, encouraged, prayed for, fed, cheered on, and loved throughout this entire tortuous journey by so many people I could fill all of these pages with their names. In the Harry Potter-esque voyage that has been this thesis project, I have been blessed with many Rons, Hermiones, Luna Lovegoods, and Dumbledores to help me along the way.

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**ABSTRACT**

New Mexico's atomic tourism acts to render the atomic bomb simultaneously so exceptional that it is viewed as the pinnacle of Western intelligence, and yet also so un-exceptional that it is banal, as typified by kitschy atomic souvenirs. A primary way in which New Mexico's atomic tourist sites accomplish this paradoxical narrative is through gendered and racialized discourses in exhibits, gift shops, and on-site narratives. The racialized trope of the "vanishing Native" functions in these spaces to shore up the colonialist progress narrative in which white Western science and Manifest Destiny inevitably result in the creation of the "exceptional" bomb and the elimination of Native Americans. Another aspect of the exceptional bomb, the figure of "Rosie the Riveter," is called forth to celebrate nuclearism as a site where liberal feminist equality can be realized. New Mexico's atomic tourism also renders U.S. imperial violence un-exceptional and banal through the repetitive enactment of domesticity in toys, souvenirs, narratives, and exhibits.

Viewing the bomb either as banal or as exceptional obscures the ways in which atomic weapons are one aspect of state sanctioned violence that is inextricably tied to

settler colonialism, environmental racism, and U.S. imperialism. The exceptional/banal narrative encourages tourists to view the bomb as either in the future (exceptional progress) or as a nostalgic banal object relegated to the past, thereby erasing the present and ongoing violence of settler nuclearism. In this paper, I perform an intersectional feminist visual and textual analysis of objects, souvenirs, narratives, and exhibits in four of New Mexico's main atomic tourist sites. I argue that gendered and racialized discourses in these spaces end up constructing the paradoxical exceptional/banal atomic narrative that ultimately fails to see atomic weapons as a present and ongoing form of settler nuclear violence. By bringing settler nuclearism and atomic tourism into the same temporal frame we can begin to see the processes by which they legitimize themselves.

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## **I. Introduction**

On June 14, 2013, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the National Defense Authorization Act. It allocated \$21 million for the creation of the Manhattan Project National Historical Park, which would feature tourist sites in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, Hanford, Washington, and Los Alamos, New Mexico.<sup>1</sup> The proposed national park would preserve the three sites for their historical importance in relationship to building the world's first atomic bomb.<sup>2</sup> The Manhattan Project National Historical Park would act to formally extend what is known as "atomic tourism" in the U.S., inviting travel and tourism to museums and sites relevant to the atomic age and the Cold War.

The state of New Mexico stands in a unique position to promote atomic tourism as it is the location of multiple major nuclear sites including the world's first atomic test known as the "Trinity Site" in southern New Mexico, "Site Y" of the Manhattan Project in Los Alamos, NM, the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP; the only permanent geologic depository of transuranic radioactive waste in the U.S) in Carlsbad, NM, and two active nuclear weapons labs (Sandia National Laboratories in Albuquerque, NM, and Los Alamos National Laboratory). Atomic-themed tourism and leisure is prolific in New Mexico, featuring Trinity Site tours, multiple atomic museums, and even a minor league baseball team fashioned after nuclear science: the Albuquerque Isotopes. Atomic tourism and leisure combine aspects of New Mexico's two largest employers: the military, and

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Snodgrass, "Proposed Manhattan Project Park Advances," *Santa Fe New Mexican*, July 8, 2013, accessed November 10, 2013, [http://www.lasg.org/press/2013/SFNM\\_8Jul2013.html](http://www.lasg.org/press/2013/SFNM_8Jul2013.html).

<sup>2</sup> Oak Ridge enriched uranium, Hanford produced plutonium, and Los Alamos ("Site Y") served as a secret colony of scientists and their families working to theorize the bomb into existence.

the “enchantment industry” of state tourism.<sup>3</sup> New Mexico’s atomic tourist sites are almost exclusively run by military, government, or corporate interests. These parties have a vested interest in promoting a sanitized national narrative about the atomic bomb by filtering the violence associated with the bomb through notions of patriotism and U.S. exceptionalism.<sup>4</sup> It follows that New Mexico’s atomic tourism industry has a prerogative to sell a palatable (and consumable) version of the atomic bomb to tourists via exhibits, souvenirs, and written narratives. My research questions for this project are: how does New Mexico’s atomic tourism “sell the bomb?” How does settler nuclearism<sup>5</sup> operate in and through New Mexico’s atomic tourism industry? In addition, what roles do gender, race, and colonialism play in selling the bomb to atomic tourists?

To answer these questions, I examine four sites within New Mexico’s atomic tourism industry: the Trinity Site near Alamogordo, the Bradbury Science Museum in Los Alamos, the National Museum of Nuclear Science and History (NMNSH) in Albuquerque, and the Los Alamos Historical Museum (LAHM) in Los Alamos. I analyze both the discursive and material culture of the four sites including souvenirs, exhibits, pamphlets, plaques, autobiographies, and biographies. These prominent atomic tourist sites serve as primary sources in my quest for information about how New Mexico’s atomic tourism utilizes gender, race, and colonialism to sell the bomb. I visited each

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<sup>3</sup> “New Mexico Workforce Coalition” accessed October 29, 2012.  
<https://www.jobs.state.nm.us/analyzer/default.asp>.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. exceptionalism refers to the idea that the U.S. is a unique nation, set apart from all other nation-states and celebrated as such. The atomic bomb plays an import role in this ideology as the U.S. was the first nation to invent, possess, develop, and use atomic weapons. See: Donald Pease, “Exceptionalism.” In *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, edited by Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler (New York: New York University, 2007) 108-112.

<sup>5</sup> Settler nuclearism refers to the underlying mentality behind radioactive colonialism; it combines the logics of settler colonialism and nuclearism. I will discuss this term more in-depth in the “Militarization of the Southwest” section of this thesis.

exhibit, site, and gift shop at least once and in some cases, multiple times. In the “Methods, Methodology, and Sites” section I provide a background for each site as well as a discussion of my methods.

The proposed Manhattan Project National Historical Park is evidence of the ongoing and current national imperative placed on atomic tourism and its attendant aim: selling the bomb. In a *Knoxville News* article about the proposed national park, reporter Michael Collins writes about opposition to the park from anti-nuclear groups. “Anti-nuclear groups have objected to the creation of the park, arguing it would glorify atomic weapons.”<sup>6</sup> The article goes on to quote Nancy Tinker, senior field officer for the National Trust for Historic Preservation who denies glorifying the weapons and says,

“The Manhattan Project changed the world,” she says. “There is no denying that dropping weapons of mass destruction on civilian populations was a horrific thing. It simply was. But it moved the United States. From the beginning of World War II, we were 17th in world power, right behind Denmark, which had just fallen to the Germans. The development of the bomb and its detonation brought World War II to a conclusion.”<sup>7</sup>

Tinker’s statement positions the bomb as an exceptional achievement that “changed the world,” “brought World War II to a conclusion,” and helped to achieve U.S. exceptionalism. The same exceptionalist rhetoric can be found woven throughout New Mexico’s atomic tourist sites, which boldly perpetuate nuclearism in a myriad of ways. Importantly, I found that nuclearism’s progress narrative is executed in the atomic tourist sites particularly through discourses of race, gender, and colonialism. For example, settler colonialism’s trope of the “disappearing Native”- visible in many souvenirs coded as “Native” and through a technological progress narrative- serves as a “primitive”

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Collins. “Manhattan Project National Park Proposal Clears One Hurdle, Faces More” *Knoxville News*, July 1, 2013, <http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2013/jul/01/proposed-park-clears-one-hurdle-faces-more/>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

backdrop for the progressive march of nuclearism. Moreover, I found that liberal feminist narratives surrounding Rosie the Riveter (whose presence I found throughout the sites) and women's participation in World War II war work are deployed in atomic tourism to shore up the exceptionalist narrative in which women's equality is achieved through nuclearism.

There is no denying atomic tourism is actively involved in "glorifying atomic weapons" and rendering them exceptional. However, I found that selling the bomb is more complicated than simply glorifying it. The atomic tourist sites I looked at are also paradoxically rendering the bomb harmless enough to be *banal* through souvenirs, exhibits, and narratives that emphasize the bomb's ties to the gendered realm of the domestic. Kitschy atomic souvenirs, items and exhibits targeted at children, and discourses linking the bomb to the feminized space of the home do the work of banalizing the bomb. The life story of Edith Warner, the mythologized owner of a Los Alamos tearoom where Manhattan Project scientists would dine, is sold and exhibited in many of the sites. Warner's story, along with the writings of Los Alamos scientists' wives, serves to render the bomb banal by documenting the delicate details of domestic life and bomb-building in Los Alamos.

Although rendering the bomb exceptional and banal may seem to be paradoxical, in reality the exceptional/banal discourse mitigates and obscures the ongoing violence of settler nuclearism in New Mexico and in the wider world. Exceptionalist discourse ties the bomb to a technological progress narrative that is future-oriented. For example, the Bradbury Museum in Los Alamos dedicates space throughout the exhibits to extol medical, technological, and military advancements related to nuclear science. On the



other hand, banalizing discourse ties the bomb to a nostalgic narrative that historicizes the bomb. For example, atomic kitsch and domestic narratives that evoke Cold War era gender and cultural norms necessitate an atomic bomb that is safely tucked away in the past. Therefore, the exceptional/banal narrative obscures the ways in which settler nuclearism continues to operate in New Mexico and globally. Indeed, as I argue, the bomb is neither a historic banal object nor an exceptional future-oriented technology, but a present and ongoing form of U.S. imperial and settler nuclear violence. I further argue that the atomic tourist sites I study are actually *productive* of settler nuclearism, which functions as a form of hegemony.<sup>8</sup> In this way, I see New Mexico's atomic tourism as an indispensable part of maintaining nuclear hegemony.

In the next section, I provide an explanation of my intersectional methodology and background on each atomic tourist site I studied in the "Methods, Methodology, and Sites" section. The following section, "Exceptional/Banal" is divided into two main arguments: "The Exceptional Bomb and the Disappearing Native" and "The Banal Bomb: Domesticity, Toys, and the Tearoom." In "The Exceptional Bomb and the Disappearing Native," I identify a discourse within the atomic tourist sites that positions the "disappearing Native" as the primitive backdrop for the progress narrative of nuclearism, which renders the bomb as exceptional. In addition, the figure of "Rosie the Riveter" serves to render the bomb exceptional through a liberal feminist discourse

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<sup>8</sup> I am using the term "hegemony" here to refer to domination by consent. This form of power is indirect and often functions through dominant ideologies like nuclearism. In essence, nuclear hegemony manipulates the masses to think/act in a way that ultimately oppresses them by accepting the "inevitability" of the nuclear weapons industry and failing to confront what Robert Lifton called the "psychic numbing" of nuclearism. See: Antonio Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. (NY: International Publishers, 1995 [copyright 1971]), 337; Robert Jay Lifton, "Beyond Psychic Numbing: A Call to Awareness" *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 52 No.4, (Oct 1982), 619-629.

extolling nuclearism as a means through which white middle class women can gain equality. In both cases, the progress narrative of the exceptional bomb situates the bomb as a future-oriented tool of technology. In “The Banal Bomb: Domesticity, Toys, and the Tearoom” I explore the connections between domesticity and femininity and the “banal bomb,” particularly as they are accomplished through women’s narratives, children’s souvenirs, and domestic-themed exhibits. I argue that the bomb is both rendered banal and situated nostalgically in the past through the repetitive enactment of domesticity. This process again obscures how settler nuclearism presently operates in New Mexico and in the world. Finally, in the conclusion, I offer an analysis of a public mural and a television show that offer disruptions to the exceptional/banal bomb narrative promoted throughout New Mexico’s atomic tourism.

## **II. The Militarization of the Southwest**

*“The Italian Navigator has landed in the New World.”*

*“How did he find the Natives?”*

*“Very friendly.”*

December 2, 1942: Manhattan Project dialogue between Enrico Fermi’s laboratory in Chicago and Harvard University to announce the first self-sustaining fission chain reaction<sup>9</sup>

In order to fully understand that which New Mexico’s atomic tourism seeks to erase and obscure, it is necessary to first trace a brief history of militarization in the U.S. West and Southwest. The western frontier, along with its attendant ideology, Manifest Destiny, appears repeatedly in the atomic narrative, as seen in the epigraph above. Physicist Enrico Fermi compares his 1942 scientific achievement of nuclear fission (which later lead to the creation of the atomic bomb) to Christopher Columbus’s “discovery” of the New World in 1492. This coded play on words is representative of the “convergence between the colonial imaginary of the western frontier and that which come [sic] to inform the nuclear frontier.”<sup>10</sup> The comparison of nuclear advancements to western colonialism is not entirely a metaphor however, as the American West became (and continues to be) the primary site for the production, testing, and waste disposal of nuclear weapons.

Over time, U.S. militarization has dramatically transformed significant portions of the land, community, ecosystems, and airspace of the American West, particularly the Southwest. As Ward Churchill notes, the most devastating impact of the Cold War has been experienced by the Indigenous nations of North America, primarily those whose

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted in, Joseph Masco. *The Nuclear Borderlands: The Manhattan Project in Post-Cold War New Mexico* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 112.

<sup>10</sup> Masco, *Nuclear Borderlands*, 112.

land-bases are in the West and Southwest.<sup>11</sup> He writes that the far western regions and the “Great American Desert” provided dumping and testing grounds that were outside the sight of most American citizens.

In these sparsely inhabited areas, taken up mainly by the internal colonial archipelago of American Indian reservations and treaty territories, it was intended that the psychological costs of the country’s nuclearization be foisted off more or less exclusively on the indigenous peoples who resided there.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, the West provided the four basic needs for the atomic project: a supply of uranium ore, milling facilities where the ore could be processed into weapons, areas where the weapons could be tested, and finally, locales where radioactive waste products from this process could be disposed of.

As Winona LaDuke notes, “On a worldwide scale, Native people hold around 70 percent of the world’s uranium resources- from the north of Saskatchewan, to the Diné and other Indigenous territories of the southwest, the Lakota Nation to the Mirarr nation of Australia.”<sup>13</sup> The Manhattan Project relied on uranium mined from Diné, Laguna Pueblo, and Acoma Pueblo lands in the four-corners area of the Southwest to build the bomb. The Diné, Laguna Pueblo, and Acoma Pueblo communities have higher rates of lung cancer and stomach cancer directly connected to the mining and milling of uranium.<sup>14</sup> Diné toxicologist Monica Yellowhair reports that:

prolonged exposure to uranium not only can result in cancer of the stomach, colon, pancreas and prostate, but has also been shown to cause “genotoxic effects

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<sup>11</sup> Ward Churchill. *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas 1492 to the Present* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1997), 289.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 305.

<sup>13</sup> Winona LaDuke with Sean Aaron Cruz. *The Militarization of Indian Country* (East Lansing: Makwa Enowed, 2013), 36.

<sup>14</sup> Churchill. *A Little Matter of Genocide*, 307.

like chromosomal aberrations, micronuclei formation, sister chromatid exchanges and DNA damage.”<sup>15</sup>

In other words, the effects of uranium exposure can literally alter DNA and wreak havoc for generations.

Atomic testing has produced devastating effects for Indigenous peoples in U.S. and worldwide. In the U.S., the Mescalero Apache reservation was downwind of the very first atomic test in southern New Mexico known as “Trinity”; in addition, the ancestral homelands of the Western Shoshone and Southern Paiute in the Mojave desert were seized and bombed repeatedly by the government in the 1950s for nuclear testing.<sup>16</sup> The U.S. conducted 66 nuclear tests on the Marshall Islands, where the people of one island, Rongelap, have experienced so many birth defects (including “jellyfish babies,” babies born without bones) and cancers that a U.S. study later found the island to be unsafe to live on.<sup>17</sup> As Andrea Smith argues, environmental racism in the form of radiation and nuclear testing can be seen as another form of sexual violence precisely because through violating the earth, Native bodies are also violated.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Rauna Kuokkanen argues that the militarized reproduction and reinforcement of U.S. Empire is predicated on both Native American lands *and* Native American bodies.<sup>19</sup>

The present-day Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) sits on more than 43 square miles taken from the Santa Clara and San Ildefonso Pueblos, restricting their

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<sup>15</sup> Alastair Lee Bitsoi. “Diné toxicologist studies effects of uranium on DNA” *Navajo Times*. October 24, 2014,

<http://www.navajotimes.com/news/2013/1013/102413uranium.php#.UyJP9ijDzCH>

<sup>16</sup> Valerie Kuletz. *The Tainted Desert: Environmental and Social Ruin the American West* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 12.

<sup>17</sup> Andrea Smith. *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (New York: South End Press, 2005), 67.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>19</sup> Rauna Kuokkanen. “Globalization as Racialized, Sexualized Violence” *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, (June 2008) 10:2, 225.

access to sacred sites and exposing them to toxic and radioactive waste buried in the land.<sup>20</sup> Oral San Ildefonso history documents a land transfer from the Pueblo to the Manhattan Project for the war effort that was justified on the grounds that it would be returned after the war. This broken promise is not the Pueblos' only concern however, as the legacy of the Manhattan Project continues to contaminate the land, air, and water with radioactive waste that remains "hot" for centuries. For example, Area G, a thin mesa located on the border between LANL and San Ildefonso, is LANL's primary waste site; it opened in 1957 with the bulldozing of five San Ildefonso ruins. Joseph Masco writes,

Area G is of particular concern at San Ildefonso, not only because of the remaining cultural sites on and around the mesa, but also because traces of tritium have been found recently in water wells at San Ildefonso, suggesting that radioactive materials from LANL may be making their way through the mountain toward the deep aquifer.<sup>21</sup>

San Ildefonsoans continue to gather plants and hunt game very near Area G. Plutonium, one of the most toxic elements to living things, was non-existent in New Mexico until 1943, when it was first brought to LANL. Today, plutonium is found in the soil throughout New Mexico and in the Rio Grande, which is a source of drinking water for the cities of Santa Fe and Albuquerque.<sup>22</sup> Radiation and toxic waste haunt the landscape of New Mexico and will continue to do so for centuries.

Militarism and nuclearism continue to displace and devastate Indigenous lands and bodies worldwide. However, Indigenous and non-Indigenous resistance and grassroots activism challenge the hegemony of militarism. In New Mexico, activist groups like the *Laguna Acoma Coalition for a Safe Environment* and the *Eastern Navajo*

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<sup>20</sup> LaDuke with Cruz. *The Militarization of Indian Country*, 41.

<sup>21</sup> Masco, *The Nuclear Borderlands*, 150.

<sup>22</sup> William Graf. *Plutonium and the Rio Grande: Environmental Change and Contamination in the Nuclear Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

*Diné Against Uranium Mining* provide grassroots activism challenging the effects of uranium mining and milling in Diné, Acoma, and Laguna communities. As Rauna Kuokkanen argues, it is important to disrupt presentations of Indigenous peoples as primarily victims of violence, and instead to emphasize their ongoing survival of centuries of exploitation and abuse.<sup>23</sup>

### ***Settler Nuclearism***

The ongoing militarization of the Southwest is deeply connected to settler colonialism. Settler colonialism is an ongoing process of colonization in which foreign settlers seek to eliminate and ultimately replace the Indigenous inhabitants and is structured into every aspect of U.S. society.<sup>24</sup> In settler colonialism's logic of elimination, the Indigenous population is figured as constantly and consistently disappearing or vanishing. Scholar Patrick Wolfe argues that settler colonialism is a "structure, not an event" demonstrating that the processes of settler colonialism are structured into the present, not relegated to an event in the past.<sup>25</sup> A clear example of the present and ongoing processes of settler colonialism can be seen in the harmful impact of the nuclear weapons industry on Native America as I discussed above.

Winona LaDuke and Ward Churchill coined the term "radioactive colonialism" (also written as "nuclear colonialism") to describe the relationship between Native America and the nuclear weapons industry: modern technology, U.S. Empire and

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<sup>23</sup> Kuokkanen. "Globalization as Racialized, Sexualized Violence," 230.

<sup>24</sup> Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native" *Journal of Genocide Research* 8 No. 4 (December 2006), 387-409; Waziyatawin, "Colonialism on the Ground" In *Unsettling Ourselves: Reflections and Resources for Deconstructing Colonial Mentality*, Compiled by Unsettling Minnesota, (September 2009), 192-199.

<sup>25</sup> Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism," 388.

environmental racism working in tandem to continue the displacement and genocide of Indigenous peoples.<sup>26</sup> They write,

The colonialism is radioactive; what it does can never be undone. Left to its own dynamics to run its course, it will spread across the planet like the cancer it is. It can never be someone else's problem; regardless of its immediate location at the moment, it has become the problem and the peril of everyone alive and who will be alive.<sup>27</sup>

Radioactive colonialism provides language to describe this “new” manifestation of colonialism, which is directly related to the nuclear industry. However, for this paper, I chose not to use the theoretical framework of radioactive colonialism because it does not specifically address the relationship between *settler* colonialism and the nuclear weapons industry.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, I am interested in the ideology of *nuclearism*- the celebration of nuclear weapons as the ultimate symbol of western technological progress<sup>29</sup> - and its

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<sup>26</sup> Winona LaDuke and Ward Churchill, “Native America: The Political Economy of Radioactive Colonialism” *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 13 No. 3 (Fall 1985).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>28</sup> In a later version of the “Native America: The Political Economy of Radioactive Colonialism” article, “Cold War Impacts on Native North America: The Political Economy of Radioactive Colonization” (a chapter in *A Little Matter of Genocide*) Churchill discusses the connection between radioactive colonialism and “internal colonialism.” He argues that the nuclear weapons industry’s resource extraction and exploitation of Indigenous land in the U.S. is directly connected to its wealth and military power. “Internal colonies” of Native North America have provided the resources (and in some cases labor), while bearing the brunt of radiation poisoning, exploitation, and abuse. See: Ward Churchill. “Cold War Impacts on Native North America: The Political Economy of Radioactive Colonialism” In Churchill. *A Little Matter of Genocide*, 289-362.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Lifton coined the term *nuclearism* to mean the secular worship of nuclear weapons and the accompanying “psychic numbing” to their effects (namely mass death and destruction). Lifton’s term has been taken up in varying ways since its first use. Feminist scholar Jane Caputi genders nuclearism in her definition, “a world view combining the disrespect for the atom with the exploitation, eroticization, and worship of nuclear technology as a means to extend elite men’s domination over the elements and the earth.” Annie Grace Ross articulates the connection to colonialism in her understanding of nuclearism; “Nuclearism, first consolidated and actualized in the United States, is the manifest evolution of the philosophy and practice of the foreign occupation (colonization) of Indian land in the Americas.” Robert Lifton. “Nuclearism” *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology* (Summer 1980) 119-124; Jane Caputi. *Gossips, Gorgons & Crones: The Fates of the Earth* (Santa Fe: Bear & Company Publishing, 1993), 22; Annie Grace Ross.



relationship to settler colonialism. In this paper, I use the term *settler nuclearism* to conceptualize the *mentality* or *ideology* behind radioactive colonialism, an ideology that has deep roots in the Western progress narrative. In particular, settler nuclearism refers to the ways in which settler colonialism's "logic of elimination" functions through nuclearism's progress narrative to justify the elimination of Indigenous peoples. To be clear, *radioactive colonialism* refers to the processes of the nuclear weapons industry that disproportionately negatively affect Native America, acting as a modern continuation of colonialism. In contrast, *settler nuclearism* refers to the underlying mentality behind radioactive colonialism, one that is simultaneously a *settler* mentality and a *nuclearist* mentality that I am arguing is at work and produced throughout New Mexico's atomic tourism.

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*One Mother Earth, One Doctor Water: A Story About Environmental Justice in the Age of Nuclearism. A Native American View.* (PhD Diss. University of California, Davis, 2002), 453.

### **III. Sites, Methods, & Methodology**

The Trinity Site, located in the remote Chihuahuan Desert in southern New Mexico, is the site of the first test of the atomic bomb in 1945 and is open to tourists only two days a year. I attended the open house on October 6, 2012 to make observations and gather information. An estimated 4,000 tourists flock to the site each year despite the fact that it is still radioactive.<sup>30</sup> The Trinity Site is managed and run by the U.S. Army, under the auspices of the White Sands Missile Range, an active missile testing range.

The Bradbury Science Museum (BSM) at Los Alamos functions as the public relations arm of the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). Their exhibits focus on research done at LANL, the history of the Manhattan Project, and artifacts from LANL. The museum's funding comes from the Department of Energy (DOE), and LANL is jointly run by the DOE, the University of California, and Bechtel. The Los Alamos Historical Museum (LAHM) is located not far from the Bradbury Museum, in historic Los Alamos. LAHM differs from BSM in that its exhibits focus on the history of the region, including exhibits on geology, homesteading, the Los Alamos Ranch School (pre-Manhattan Project), and the Manhattan Project. LAHM is funded and run by the Los Alamos Historical Society, which is a non-profit publishing and historical society whose mission is to "preserve, promote, and communicate the remarkable history of Los Alamos and its people for our community, for the global audience, and for future generations."<sup>31</sup>

The last site, the National Museum of Nuclear Science and History, is located in Albuquerque and its mission is "to serve as America's resource for nuclear history and

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<sup>30</sup> Nathan Hodge and Sharon Weinberger. *A Nuclear Family Vacation: Travels in the World of Atomic Weaponry* (Bloomsbury: 2011), 28.

<sup>31</sup> "Los Alamos Historical Society: About Us" *Los Alamos Historical Society*, Accessed August 8, 2013, <http://www.losalamoshistory.org/aboutus.htm>.

science. The Museum presents exhibits and quality educational programs that convey the diversity of individuals and events that shape the historical and technical context of the nuclear age.”<sup>32</sup> NMNSH funding comes from revenue earned at the museum, Sandia Labs, various corporations, and federal subsidies. It should be noted that NMNSH is the only congressionally chartered museum on the atomic age in the nation.<sup>33</sup>

By becoming an atomic tourist myself I was able to make observations about the sites, buy souvenirs, and experience first hand how each site encourages tourists to consume the bomb. Sociologist of Tourism John Urry theorizes that all tourism is structured by the “tourist gaze”: a set of expectations tourists place on the tourist experience for a true or authentic encounter with their destination.<sup>34</sup> In the case of atomic tourism in New Mexico, the tourist gaze is directed towards an authentic experience of the bomb. Anthropologist Hugh Gusterson argues that atomic tourists are engaged in what Robert Lifton called “imagining the real.”<sup>35</sup> In other words, atomic tourists are engaged in the difficult task of visualizing and imagining what is often kept far from public view: nuclear weapons and their immediate effects. Gusterson argues that for some, this task is an inherently anti-nuclear one: to challenge the “psychic numbing” produced by nuclearism. However, many tourists also come to the nuclear sites to pay homage and celebrate what they see as icons of U.S. military might. In this way, atomic tourist sites are spaces of contested meanings and discourses.

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<sup>32</sup> “Visit the Museum” *The National Museum of Nuclear Science and History*, Accessed December 14, 2012, [www.nuclearmuseum.org/visit/](http://www.nuclearmuseum.org/visit/) “Mission”.

<sup>33</sup> *The National Museum of Nuclear Science and History*, Accessed August 9, 2013, <http://nuclearsciencemuseum.blogspot.com/>.

<sup>34</sup> John Urry. *The Tourist Gaze*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Sage Publications, 2002).

<sup>35</sup> Hugh Gusterson. “Nuclear Tourism” *Journal for Cultural Research* 8, no. 1 (January 2004), 23-31.

The methods I use to approach the information, observations, souvenirs, and biographical and autobiographical narratives I gathered from these four sites include: feminist visual analysis, participant observation, feminist textual analysis, and institutional analysis. In each of these approaches I center *intersectionality* as a methodological strategy. Intersectionality as a methodology presumes that gender, sexual, racial, and colonial oppressions are not separate, but deeply and inextricably bound up together.<sup>36</sup> In order to effectively fix my critical crosshairs on the material and rhetorical violence of settler nuclearism within New Mexico's atomic tourism, I must also examine those intersecting logics that give it form and shape and intersectionality provides the necessary tools to do so.

In addition to intersectionality, Indigenous feminist theories also inform my methodology.<sup>37</sup> Indigenous feminist theories offer trenchant critiques of mainstream feminism (or what Sandy Grande terms whitestream feminism) for its centering of the white woman subject and thus its figuring of patriarchy as the locus of all oppression rather than acknowledging the intersectionality of sexism, heterosexism, racism, classism, and settler colonialism.<sup>38</sup> In addition, Indigenous feminists theorists such as Sandy Grande and Aileen Moreton-Robinson argue that white women have historically

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<sup>36</sup> Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43, No.6 (1991), 1241–99; Catharine A. MacKinnon. "Intersectionality as Method: A Note" *Signs* 38, No. 4, (Summer 2013) , pp. 1019-1030.

<sup>37</sup> I take a cue from Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill, who use the term "Native feminist theories" not "Native feminism" or "Native Feminists" to highlight the fact that many non-Indigenous and/or non-feminist identified scholars have added valuable scholarship on the intersections of colonialism, gender, and sexuality. See: Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, Angie Morrill. "Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging Connections between Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriarchy" *Feminist Formations* 25 no. 1 (Spring 2013): 8-34.

<sup>38</sup> Sandy Grande. "Whitestream Feminism and the Colonialist Project: A Review of Contemporary Feminist Pedagogy and Praxis" *Educational Theory* 53, no. 3 (Summer 2003), 329.

served and continue to serve as agents of colonialism, often under the guise of feminism.<sup>39</sup> I turn to this scholarship particularly in the “Banal Bomb: Domesticity, Toys, and the Tearoom” section of this thesis. Finally, Indigenous feminist theories draw connections between gendered violence and colonial violence to show that the task of truly challenging patriarchy necessarily involves decolonization. In the words of Andrea Smith, “A Native feminist politics seeks to do more than simply elevate Native women’s status- it seeks to transform the world through indigenous forms of governance that can be beneficial to everyone.”<sup>40</sup> The devastating effects of nuclearism have the potential to touch every living thing, and as such decolonization is a necessary project in truly challenging the hegemony of the nuclear weapons industry.

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<sup>39</sup> Sandy Grande, “Whitestream Feminism”; Andy Smith. “For All Those Who Were Indian in a Former Life” in *Ecofeminism and the Sacred* ed. Carol Adams (New York: Continuum, 1993), 169; Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *Talking Up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2000).

<sup>40</sup> Andrea Smith. “Indigenous Feminism Without Apology” *Unsettling Ourselves: Reflections and Resources for Deconstructing Colonial Mentality* Compiled by Unsettling Minnesota (September 2009), 161.

#### **IV. Exceptional/Banal**

The U.S. Southwest is a region marked by a myriad of overlapping and conflicting discourses; histories of genocide, colonization, and environmental destruction merge with notions of “empty land,” settler fantasies, and romanticized narratives of the culture and environment. New Mexico’s tourism industry draws on romanticized narratives of noble Natives and Spanish conquistadors in order to construct an idealized past that is palatable and attractive to tourist-consumers.<sup>41</sup> In this way, the backdrop for atomic tourism in New Mexico necessarily references the complex and ongoing processes of settler colonialism that haunt the region.

In my research, I observed settler nuclearism working through two distinct pairings: the exceptional bomb and the “disappearing Native,” and the banal bomb and domesticity. While these two pairs result in seemingly opposite renderings of the bomb (either exceptional or banal), together the exceptional/banal narrative works to legitimize settler nuclearism and radioactive colonialism. In addition, the exceptional/banal narrative relies upon gendered, racialized, and colonial tropes. I will demonstrate that both pairings function as necessary components of the overall mentality of settler nuclearism endorsed and enacted through New Mexico’s atomic tourism industry.

##### ***The Exceptional Bomb and the Disappearing Native***

New Mexico’s major atomic tourist destinations promote a narrative in which the atomic bomb is glorified and celebrated as an exceptional military and scientific

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<sup>41</sup> See: Silvia Rodriguez “Tourism, Whiteness, and the Vanishing Anglo” in *Seeing and Being Seen: Tourism in the American West* eds. David Wrobel and Patrick Long. (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2001), 194-210; Chris Wilson. *The Myth of Santa Fe* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997).

achievement. To be *exceptional*, it must be both “unusual and extraordinary.”<sup>42</sup> In many of the atomic tourist sites, bomb replicas and bomb casings are displayed like trophies alongside verbose sycophantic narration. I argue that the trope of the “disappearing Native” is fundamental to rendering the bomb exceptional. As I will show, the trope of the “disappearing Native” in New Mexico’s atomic tourism does work to shore up the technological progress narrative in which the bomb is an exceptional achievement. In this progress narrative, women are largely absent, although not entirely. I will also demonstrate how certain versions of femininity and facets of liberal feminism are deployed in atomic tourist spaces to shore up the “exceptional bomb” narrative; however, in this instance, the markers for exceptionalism are the goals of liberal feminism.

In *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism* author Elizabeth Povinelli offers a thoughtful discussion about tense and temporality that informs my analysis of atomic tourism. Povinelli demonstrates that the unequal distribution of suffering and prosperity in our world is directly related to temporality: in the U.S., Indigeniety is equated with the past and non-Native settlers are equated with the future. Narratives about the past and future have direct impacts on the distribution of resources and life-giving versus life-taking practices at every level of society. Indigenous scholars like Vine Deloria Jr., Glen Coulthard, and J. Kehaulani Kauanui have demonstrated that dispossession of Indigenous land is not an event relegated to the past as the myths of settler colonialism would have it, but rather an ongoing process.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, as Ana María Alonso argues, Indigeniety gets associated with

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<sup>42</sup> “Exceptional” [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com) Accessed December 30, 2013.

<sup>43</sup> Vine Deloria Jr. *The World We Used to Live In: Remembering the Powers of the Medicine Man* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2006); Glen Coulthard. “Subjects of Empire: Indigenous People and the ‘Politics of Recognition’ in Canada.” *Contemporary Political Theory* 6.4 (2007):

“an epic past rather than a national future” while ongoing realities of exploitation and suffering are erased.<sup>44</sup> Consideration of tense and temporality can help us understand how large-scale injustices continue unfolding in what Povinelli calls the “durative present.”<sup>45</sup> I am interested in understanding how the ongoing effects of radioactive colonialism and the proliferation of settler nuclearism’s mentality are being obscured through the terms of temporality in the way Povinelli describes them, as “*social* divisions of tense that help shape how social belonging, abandonment, and endurance are enunciated and experienced.”<sup>46</sup> For example, the exceptionalist bomb progress narrative that I will further examine promotes a future-oriented view of nuclearism in which the progressive march of nuclear science keeps getting better and better, leading the way to an ostensibly utopian future. However, Indigenous people have no future in this narrative, and the utopia is staked on their having no future. Povinelli discusses Ursula Le Guin’s story, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas,” in which a “child in the broom closet” is confined and humiliated to a dirty broom closet because the happiness and well-being of an entire city depends on this child’s suffering. Much like the “child in the broom closet,” the success of settler nuclearism relies on the unequal suffering of one population (Indigenous peoples) through the ongoing violence of radioactive colonialism; however its toxicity and violence has the potential to affect all life on earth (as Churchill and LaDuke articulated in their quote about radioactive colonialism above). New Mexico’s

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437-61; J. Kehaulani Kauanui. *Hawaiian Blood: Colonialism and the Politics of Sovereignty and Indigeneity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

<sup>44</sup> Ana María Alonso, “The Politics of Space, Time, and Substance: State Formation, Nationalism, and Ethnicity” *Annual Review Anthropology* 23 (1994), 398.

<sup>45</sup> Elizabeth Povinelli. *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 2.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 11.



atomic tourism promotes an “exceptional bomb” narrative that elides the violence of radioactive colonialism and in turn, produces a discourse of settler nuclearism.

Visitors to the Trinity Site in southern New Mexico can see “ground zero,” where the first atomic bomb was detonated on July 16, 1945. Upon entrance to the Trinity Site, every tourist is handed an informational booklet titled simply “Trinity Site: July 16, 1945.” The cover features a large photograph of the Trinity test mushroom cloud, and beneath the picture is a famous quote from General Thomas Ferrell about the first atomic explosion, nicknamed “Trinity.”

The effects could well be unprecedented, magnificent, beautiful, stupendous, and terrifying. No man-made phenomenon of such tremendous power had ever occurred before. The lighting effects beggared description. The whole country was lighted by a searing light with the intensity many times that of the midday sun.<sup>47</sup>

The imposing photograph accompanied by Ferrell’s awestruck language (“unprecedented,” “magnificent,” and “tremendous”) serves to encourage a tourist gaze that views the bomb as truly exceptional. A short distance from ground zero is the McDonald Ranch House, a small adobe house where the scientists assembled the plutonium core of the bomb before its detonation. In front of the ranch house, a plaque reads,

In the front room of this humble ranch house the world’s first nuclear device was assembled... This historic event signaled the dawn of a new age and was to forever change the human experience... This site is dedicated to all those Americans who contributed to one of man’s greatest technological conquests- the harnessing of the atom.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> White Sands Missile Range. “Trinity Site: July 16, 1945” Informational Pamphlet. Retrieved October 2012.

<sup>48</sup> Inscription, “National Historic Landmark” McDonald Ranch House: Trinity Site, Almagordo, New Mexico, October 6, 2012.

Celebratory rhetoric such as “dawn of a new age” and “one of man’s greatest technological conquests” serves to position the atomic bomb as exceptional, and simultaneously to elide the violence caused by the bomb. At the heart of this narrative is the problematic assumption that the bomb represents the culmination of human ingenuity and intelligence. In other words, the bomb is the pinnacle of (white, western) civilization. At the Bradbury Science Museum’s first location, a plaque underneath replica casings of the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki reads, “These bombs represent the highest achievement of the human intellect.”<sup>49</sup> Again, the forward-marching progress narrative in these settings encourages tourists and visitors to view nuclearism as a future-oriented, ever improving technological achievement. In this progress narrative, science (i.e., white male scientists) has the ability to probe nature’s deepest mysteries in the service of solving civilization’s most pressing problems. In the LAHM gift shop, book titles like *They Changed the World: People of the Manhattan Project*, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*, and *Manhattan Project Legacy: Creativity in Science and the Arts* also do the work of normalizing the bomb’s celebratory progress narrative. Additionally, the bomb’s exceptionalist progress narrative is normalized through the deployment of the racialized and gendered “disappearing Native” trope (a function of settler colonialism’s logic of elimination.)

Settler colonialism’s logic of elimination can sometimes paradoxically take the form of honoring and appropriating Native culture. In this facet of the disappearing Native logic, Native peoples and Native culture are enshrined and memorialized in the settler imagination; meanwhile, this settler nostalgia provides the justification for the

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<sup>49</sup> Masco. *The Nuclear Borderlands*, 240.

active displacement of Native populations. As Ella Shohat and Robert Stam argue, the narrative of disappearance requires Natives to play dead so as resolve the “cognitive dissonance” of memorializing a living culture.<sup>50</sup> In this way, nostalgic settlers elide their guilt about present (and past) atrocities through appropriation and consumption of Native objects, customs, and spirituality. Tourism in the Southwest is replete with this phenomenon, and atomic tourism is no different.

The Los Alamos Historical Museum (LAHM) gift shop features a large section of “Native American” books, items, and souvenirs for sale among the requisite science kits, mushroom cloud kitsch, and Manhattan Project books. The section includes an “Easy-to-make Pueblo Village” out of cardboard, an *Indian Pueblos Coloring Book*, pottery with the sign “Handmade by Pueblo Indians”, “Rock Art Symbol” magnets, a children’s book titled *Ancient Indians of the Southwest*, and two paper doll booklets labeled “Little Southwest Indian Girl Paper Doll.” As I discussed in the “Militarization of the Southwest” section, Pueblo communities, particularly San Ildefonso, Santa Clara, Laguna, and Acoma Pueblos have been disproportionately impacted by uranium mining, radioactive dumping, and testing in direct proximity to the nuclear weapons industry. Here the LAHM gift shop draws on the trope of the disappearing Native by commodifying and trivializing Pueblo peoples as a primitive backdrop for the progress narrative of the exceptional bomb.

The progress narrative of science and the bomb is inextricably tied to the progressive march of Manifest Destiny in the American West and the frontier. In *Savage Perils*, scholar Patrick Sharp argues that the frontier narrative relies upon the concept of

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<sup>50</sup> Ella Shohat & Robert Stam. *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 118-119.

racial frontiers in order to demonize nonwhite populations as primitive savages in opposition to civilization.<sup>51</sup> The savagery vs. civilized trope is one that can be seen working within the technologies of settler colonialism and its logic of elimination. This trope is being played out in New Mexico's atomic tourist sites as an integral part of the progress narrative of the bomb in multiple ways.

First, the placement of "Native American" items in the context of the atomic gift shop, located right next to *They Changed the World: People of the Manhattan Project*, science kits, and mushroom cloud postcards suggests a colossal gap and a marked difference between white science and technology and the culture of the nearby Pueblos. In this narrative, the advancements of science and technology stand in opposition to the "primitive" technologies of rock art, pottery, and adobe houses of the San Ildefonso and Santa Clara people on whose land LANL now sits.<sup>52</sup> This belief has roots in racist evolutionary Darwinist thought. Sharp writes, "For Darwin, the victories of civilized Europeans over their savage foes were due to technological superiority and were therefore just another example of natural selection that had been shaping humanity since the beginning."<sup>53</sup> Second, the souvenirs labeled "Native American" serve to flatten out diverse peoples under one heading that is relegated to the past. Items such as the book *Ancient Indians of the Southwest* and the "Rock Art Magnets" (magnets manufactured to look like Native petroglyphs) enact the logic of elimination, which says that Native people are always already disappearing. Thus, such items are marketed as trinkets and relics from a dying culture. Third, Indigeneity is associated with childishness through the

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<sup>51</sup> Patrick Sharp. *Savage Perils: Racial Frontiers and Nuclear Apocalypse in American Culture* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007).

<sup>52</sup> LaDuke with Cruz. *The Militarization of Indian Country*, 41.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 4.

objects clearly marketed towards children such as the “Easy-to-Make Pueblo Village” and the “Little Southwest Indian Girl Paper Dolls.”

In all of these ways, the gift shop lays out a clear distinction between the “pre-modern” and “primitive” Pueblo souvenirs and the souvenirs that celebrate technology and militarism in the form of the “exceptional” atomic bomb. In settler colonialism, the elimination of Native peoples and their replacement with white settlers is seen as natural and inevitable. By reducing Native culture to commercialized artifacts and hieroglyphs, and paper dolls complete with “primitive” accessories of clay pots, the message is clear: this is a culture of the past and the disappearing Native is fading into the sunset.



**Figure 1:** “Arrowhead Laser Pointer” souvenir sold at the National Museum of Nuclear Science and History in Albuquerque, NM.

One item sold in the NMNSH captures the disappearing Native trope very clearly: the “Arrowhead Laser Pointer” made by Kikkerland (fig. 1). It is essentially a laser pointer manufactured to look like a sharpened arrowhead. The packaging shows the

silhouette of a un-identified Native male warrior on horseback with feathers in his hair holding an arrowhead-tipped spear. The reddish-orange colors of the background suggest a fading sunset and the warrior's featureless figure appears as a shadow or apparition, almost fading with the sunset. The gaze of the viewer first lingers on the warrior's silhouette in the background and is then drawn upward towards the point of the laser in the foreground, suggesting a progressive moment away from a primitive past, towards a modern, technological future.

The tagline reads, "Get straight to the point with this Neolithic laser pointer. Hunting and gathering was never this easy. Great for presentations or use just for fun." Here, the manufacturers present a tongue-in-cheek narration that equates Indigeneity (represented by the warrior silhouette) with primitive tools (arrowheads) and hunting and gathering, which is far eclipsed by modern technology (the laser). In the atomic gift shop, laser technology (which was developed side by side with atomic research) encased in a "primitive" arrowhead suggests that it is humorous to think about "primitive" cultures coexisting with technologically advanced Western society. Importantly, this logic states that Natives are presumed to be eliminated *because* they are primitive and ill-equipped for modernity. In place of the disappearing Native figure, this object offers the image of a modern businessman or woman giving corporate presentations.

Although they may seem quaint or trivial, souvenir items like the Arrowhead Laser Pointer as well as children's toys like "Cowboys and Indians" have long been cultural spaces where similar narratives play out. Margaret Jacobs writes in *White Mother to a Dark Race*, "Conflicts with American Indians are immensely popular in narratives of westward expansion, and their eventual capitulation is taken as an inescapable

consequence of Americans' superior technology, military prowess, and centralized state."<sup>54</sup> In the atomic tourist sites, the underlying narrative makes a subtle argument that not only was settler colonialism natural and inevitable, but it was justified because it ultimately resulted in the technological achievement of the atomic bomb. In other words, the bomb is used as a rhetorical (and retrospective) justification for settler colonialism.



**Figure 2:** “Permian Age Rock Salt” souvenir sold at the National Museum of Nuclear Science and History in Albuquerque, NM.

The exceptional bomb narrative relies on an assumption that science and technology will carry us forever towards a utopian future. However, in both the immediate and long-term future, the nuclear industry's most pressing demand is how to safely dispose of the huge quantity of radioactive waste we have accumulated since 1945. The Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) is the only (permanent) geologic depository of

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<sup>54</sup> Margaret Jacobs. *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009) , 4.

transuranic radioactive waste in the U.S., located near Carlsbad, New Mexico.<sup>55</sup> New Mexico's atomic tourism has folded this aspect of the nuclear fuel cycle into its exceptionalist narrative in the form of souvenir bagged "Permian Age Rock Salt" sold in the NMNSH in Albuquerque (fig. 2). The Department of Energy (DOE) bags and sells pieces of the rock salt that is mined 2,150 feet below the Chihuahuan Desert to make room for the underground storage of radioactive waste.

WIPP represents what many in the business of nuclear weapons and nuclear energy consider the vanguard of radioactive waste storage, yet as Jen Richter points out, it is essentially a "long term experiment that we are living through."<sup>56</sup> Indeed, a recent radioactive spill at WIPP on February 14, 2014, has caused many to question the validity of scientific and government claims that WIPP can safely hold waste.<sup>57</sup> Government officials and scientists chose WIPP as the nation's primary radioactive waste depository because of the vast underground salt beds that will ostensibly act as self-sealing and impermeable storage containers for the waste. The salt beds formed approximately 250 million years ago (before the dinosaurs roamed the earth) during the Permian Age. The salt contains trapped molecules of water- remnants of an ancient sea.

In multiple ways, WIPP brings to light the seemingly inconceivable relationship between the nuclear and time as we know it. Due to the fact that nuclear materials are radioactive for thousands upon thousands of years, the DOE required a ten thousand-year safety plan to be put in place before WIPP could be established.<sup>58</sup> To do this, the DOE assembled a team of scientists, linguists, archeologists, science fiction writers, and

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<sup>55</sup> Masco *Nuclear Borderlands*, 36.

<sup>56</sup> Jen Richter Dissertation defense. April 26, 2013.

<sup>57</sup> Kay Matthews. "Commentary on the Radiation Leak at WIPP" *La Jicarita* (March 7, 2014) <https://lajicarita.wordpress.com/2014/03/07/commentary-on-the-radiation-leak-at-wipp/>.

<sup>58</sup> Masco. *Nuclear Borderlands*, 198.



futurists to create a warning message for the next four hundred generations to keep away from the buried waste. The longevity of radioactive waste requires officials to challenge and expand their conceptualization of time and even nation. As Joseph Masco points out, the DOE's report is a unique government document in that it acknowledges not only the eventual demise of the U.S. as a nation-state, but also its contested origins as a settler state.

What is unique about this report is that it is perhaps the only genre of DOE policy documentation that contemplates a less than eternal American nation-state...(it) is also one of the few moments in the official U.S. nuclear policy that recognizes the possibility of other national claims on the territory of New Mexico, that suggests the United States might be a temporary national-cultural formation...<sup>59</sup>

As difficult as it is for humans to conceptualize ten thousand years, 250 million years is almost beyond our comprehension. Yet, in another science fiction-like twist, the unsuspecting hero in the radioactive waste saga that the DOE turns to is Permian Age rock salt- formed 250 million years ago. Somehow the age of the rock salt (as well as its purpose) transforms it from something ordinary into a celebrated and exceptional object-worthy of souvenir status. Thus, fears about the future of radioactive waste are safely contained in the exceptional progress narrative, which holds up science and technology as the arbiters of a utopian future.

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<sup>59</sup> Masco. *Nuclear Borderlands*, 198-199.



**Figure 3:** Souvenir T-Shirt sold at the National Museum of Nuclear Science and History in Albuquerque, NM.

In the National Museum of Nuclear Science and History's gift shop in Albuquerque, the atomic/technological progress narrative is very clearly displayed in the form of a T-shirt with the iconic image of the "evolution time-line" of humans starting with a knuckle-dragging ape, evolving into an upright human male, and ending with what appears to be a cyborg or robot-like creature with mechanical arms and a vaguely human form (fig. 3). Beneath the image are the words "National Museum of Nuclear Science and History, Albuquerque, New Mexico." With each step forward the human figure is taller and the cyborg/robot at the end of the timeline is significantly taller than the human male/ape before it. The implied message here is that as time marches forward (symbolized by the left to right progression of the ape/man/robot), so too humans advance themselves through the progression of science and technology. Here very

clearly is the future-oriented view of nuclearism, in which nuclear science will lead us to higher and higher levels of evolution and achievement.

A feminist reading of the “evolution T-shirt” souvenir reveals that women are conspicuously absent from this representation of the evolution of the human race, which serves to reinforce the sexist myth that science and technology are exclusively masculine spaces. While the emphasis on white male scientists as heroes of the atomic story and all-knowing subjects is evident throughout museum exhibits as well as in books and souvenirs for sale, this discourse exists alongside other gendered discourses that do not erase women, but actively hail certain versions of femininity. In this way, it is important to acknowledge all of the gendered discourses within the bomb’s exceptional progress narrative. One such discourse calls forth the historical figure of “Rosie the Riveter” from the archives of World War II.

Rosie the Riveter is a predominant figure in New Mexico’s atomic tourist sites in display cases, on posters for sale, and on kitschy items such as mints and post-it notes. The image depicts a white woman, wearing a red work bandana in her hair, flexing her bicep, with the slogan “We can do it!” above her head. She represents the many American women who went to work producing munitions and war supplies while the men were fighting World War II. She has also come to represent facets of liberal feminism: women’s equality in the workplace and the concerns of white middle class femininity.

I read Rosie’s presence in the space of New Mexico’s atomic tourism as an extension of the exceptional bomb narrative. However in this version of the exceptional narrative, the atomic bomb and nuclearism become exceptional via the primary goal of

liberal feminism: women's equality. The relationship between women and the atomic bomb is a historically complex topic that many feminist scholars have written about from varying disciplinary angles. Many feminist scholars critique the almost complete lack of women in official narratives about the invention, production, and use of the atomic bomb. However, while in some cases, scholars fold the critique of women's absence into arguments that are critical of nuclearism,<sup>60</sup> others take up this critique as a corrective within the confines of uncritical nuclearism. Scholars including Ellen McGehee, Ruth Howes, Caroline Herzenberg, and Denise Kiernan argue that the antidote to women's exclusion from atomic discourse is to include their stories and to celebrate their previously undervalued patriotism. There has been an increase in scholarship aimed at celebrating the role (white) women played in the building of the atomic bomb, challenging the dominant narrative in which "women's experiences at Los Alamos have

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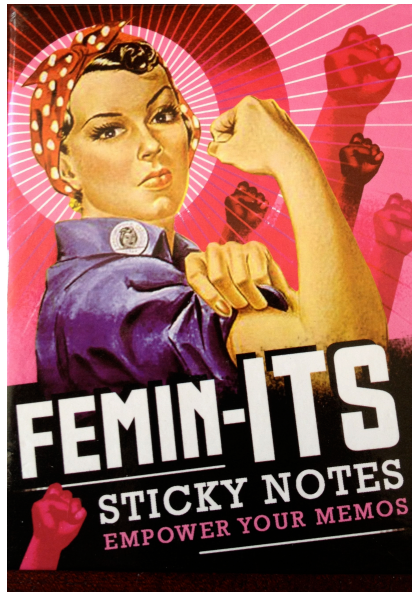
<sup>60</sup> This feminist approach identifies the atomic bomb as a patriarchal and imperialist project. Indeed, feminists have thoroughly and critically analyzed the realms of technoscience and militarism for the past forty years. Ecofeminist scholars such as Vandana Shiva and Carolyn Merchant link the techno-militaristic patriarchal oppression of the earth to the oppression of women's bodies. The ecofeminist approach to nuclear criticism also emphasizes the sacredness of the earth- a sacredness that is violated by nuclear weapons. Feminist science studies scholars such as Donna Haraway, Evelyn Fox Keller, Sandra Harding, demonstrate that far from being objective and gender-neutral, science has created and perpetuated racialized and gendered oppression. Indigenous feminists offer a wider lens on nuclearism by highlighting the intersections of gender, race, class, sexuality, and colonialism; while also critiquing the white-centric tendencies of mainstream feminism. The insights of Indigenous scholars such as Winona LaDuke (Anishinabé) and Annie Grace Ross (Maya) reveal that nuclearism is a manifestation of both patriarchy and colonialism.

See: Vandana Shiva. *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* (New Jersey: Zed Books, 1989); Carolyn Merchant. *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980); Evelyn Fox Keller. *Secrets of Life, Secrets of Death: Essays on Language, Gender and Science* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Sandra Harding. *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives* (England: Open University Press, 1991); Donna Haraway. *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991); Ross, *One Mother Earth, One Doctor Water* (2002); LaDuke with Cruz *The Militarization of Indian Country* (2013).

often been overshadowed by stories that focus on the famous men of the day...”<sup>61</sup> In 2013, Kiernan’s book *The Girls of Atomic City: The Untold Story of the Women who Helped Win World War II* was released to wide acclaim. Kiernan’s text highlights the women who worked to enrich uranium for the world’s first atomic weapons in Oak Ridge, Tennessee (another “secret city” within the Manhattan Project). *The Girls of Atomic City* is available for sale in the gift shops of the NMNSH and LAHM among the other women-centric narratives of the Manhattan Project. The Canadian television drama *Bomb Girls* premiered in January 2012, and has enjoyed popularity internationally, including in the U.S. The show focuses on the lives of women working in Canadian munitions factories during World War II, assembling bombs for combat. Again, the underlying message within these narratives is a liberal feminist one: women’s contributions have not been appreciated or included in the overall story of the atomic bomb. Implicit in this message is an uncritical celebration of the bomb itself, as a site where liberal feminism was able to achieve its goals.

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<sup>61</sup> Ellen McGehee *The Women of Project Y: Working at the Birthplace of the Bomb, Los Alamos, New Mexico, 1942-1946* (MA Thesis, University of New Mexico, 2004), xvii; See also Ruth Howes and Caroline Herzenberg *Their Day in the Sun: Women of the Manhattan Project* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999).



**Figure 4:** “Femin -ITS Sticky Notes” souvenir sold at the National Museum of Nuclear Science and History in Albuquerque, NM.

The deployment of Rosie the Riveter in New Mexico’s atomic tourism serves to render the bomb exceptional via the liberal feminist narrative of inclusion and equality. In this gendered version of exceptionalism, the bomb becomes a unique nationalist site where women’s participation in nuclearism signifies the fruition of liberal feminist goals. The emphasis on women’s roles in the building of the bomb through souvenirs such as “Femin-its” post-it notes and “Empower-mints” featuring Rosie the Riveter serve to reference liberal feminism in order to elide the violence and imperialism underlying atomic tourist sites (fig 4). As Cynthia Enloe and Rauna Kuokkanen point out, the “Rosie the Riveter myth” (in which World War II advanced women’s liberation) requires that feminists overlook the devastating impacts of war on women worldwide.<sup>62</sup> As Enloe writes,

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<sup>62</sup> Cynthia Enloe. *The Curious Feminist: Searching for Women in a New Age of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 133; Kuokkanen. “Globalization as Racialized, Sexualized Violence,” 228.

The myth is alluring. It is one on which militarists depend...it makes a militarized economy appear to be an *aid* to women's liberation: 'the only thing that was bad for the second world war's Rosie was that the war *ended*.' Of course, the myth and its update overlook that it was the fact that the military needed so many thousands of men in its ranks that drove weapons factory managers, stripped of their *preferred* work force, to hire far less preferred workers, women.<sup>63</sup>

As Enloe argues, Rosie the Riveter continues to be celebrated from within a militarized framework because she was a short-lived anomaly- an anomaly that fits nicely within the exceptional bomb narrative.

Thus, Rosie the Riveter's presence in New Mexico's atomic tourism functions in a similar way to the presence of the disappearing Native: both tropes shore up a racialized and gendered progress narrative that ultimately promotes settler nuclearism and celebrates the bomb as an exceptional achievement. As I have shown, the disappearing Native acts as a necessary backdrop for the progressive march of settler nuclearism. The future-oriented exceptionalist narrative in New Mexico's atomic tourism seeks to position the bomb and nuclear technology as the arbiter of a better future, a future devoid of Indigeneity, yet inclusive of (white) women's equality. The bomb is further rendered exceptional through the prolific deployment of Rosie the Riveter and liberal feminism via books, kitschy items, and posters. In this version of the progress narrative, liberal, white, middle-class feminism is the vehicle through which settler nuclearism promotes the bomb as exceptional. This narrative extols the bomb for being a catalyst for "gender equality" through bringing predominantly white, middle-class women into the workplace. As I discussed, while some feminist scholars, such as ecofeminists, antimilitarist feminists, and many Indigenous feminists, critique nuclearism, this version of liberal feminism celebrates nuclearism uncritically, again serving to render the bomb exceptional.

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<sup>63</sup> Cynthia Enloe. *Does Khaki Become You? The Militarization of Women's Lives* (London: South End Press, 1983), 191.

### ***The Banal Bomb: Domesticity, Toys, and the Tearoom***

The opposite of exceptional is the everyday, the ordinary, the *banal*. Banality must be “so lacking in originality as to be obvious and boring.”<sup>64</sup> Cultural theorist Ben Highmore defines the banal as “the landscape closest to us, the world most immediately met.”<sup>65</sup> The banal are areas of life that often avoid scrutiny due to their everydayness, lost or ignored in the repetition of the ordinary. The atomic tourist sites I studied did not only render the bomb exceptional, but also completely everyday, ordinary, and banal. In this section, I will demonstrate the multiple ways New Mexico’s atomic tourism and leisure renders the bomb banal, particularly through the complicated notion of domesticity.

Domesticity, as Rosemary Marangoly George notes, conjures up multiple linked meanings: the “private” space of the home, the national space of the domestic in opposition to foreign spaces, and the act of domestication, which carries colonial connotations of civilizing or subjugating.<sup>66</sup> As Amy Kaplan demonstrates, domesticity itself is a concept that is constructed through U.S. imperial and colonial violence; contrary to ideas about the separation between the masculine public sphere and the feminine domestic sphere, these spheres mirror and reinforce one another. She writes, “Not a retreat from the masculine sphere of empire building, domesticity both reenacts and conceals its origin in the violent appropriation of foreign land.”<sup>67</sup> Thus, the feminine domestic and what Kaplan calls “Manifest Domesticity” plays a crucial role in

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<sup>64</sup> “Banal” accessed December 29, 2013,

<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/banal?s=t&path=/>

<sup>65</sup> Ben Highmore. *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 1.

<sup>66</sup> Rosemary Marangoly George. “Domestic” *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* Edited by Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler (New York: New York University, 2007), 88-92.

<sup>67</sup> Amy Kaplan. *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 50.



“reenacting” and “concealing” the ongoing violence of settler colonialism. Liberal feminism (particularly Western middle class white feminism), including the work of Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, and Virginia Woolf, focuses on liberating women from the suffocating confines of domesticity.<sup>68</sup> In a discussion of de Beauvoir’s work, Rachel Bowlby writes, “...the housewife with her ‘days leading nowhere’ is deprived of the capacity to form and carry out projects; her work is *mere repetition* with no product at the end or in the future...”<sup>69</sup> In the everydayness of the domestic sphere and the housewife’s endless “mere repetition” we can see the ways in which the space of the domestic, like banality, is marked by repetition and the everyday, and (if not for feminism) often goes overlooked. It is important to note that women of color feminists have thoroughly critiqued the myopic liberal feminist focus on domesticity as a predominately white, middle-class concern, failing to account for intersectionality.<sup>70</sup>

The concept of domesticity appears repeatedly throughout New Mexico’s atomic tourist sites in souvenirs, exhibits, and autobiographical and biographical narratives. I will demonstrate how this repetition of the domestic serves to render the bomb banal, a theme that is not new to studies of nuclear culture. Many feminist scholars bring attention to the ways in which nuclear discourse since the beginning of the atomic age has worked to feminize and domesticate certain aspects of the bomb.<sup>71</sup> Scholars such as

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<sup>68</sup> Simone de Beauvoir. *The Second Sex* (London: Vintage Books, 2011); Betty Friedan. *The Feminine Mystique*, Reprint Edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2001); Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* Reprint, (Eastford: Martino Fine Books, 2012).

<sup>69</sup> (emphasis mine) Rachel Bowlby “Domestication” *Feminism Beside Itself* Edited by Diane Elam and Robyn Wiegman (New York: Routledge, 1995), 78.

<sup>70</sup> See: bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000); *But Some of Us Are Brave: All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men* ed. By Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, Barbara Smith (New York: The Feminist Press, 1982).

<sup>71</sup> Feminist scholars such as Elaine Tyler May, Wendy Kozol, Cynthia Enloe, Susan Northcutt, and Gillian Brown demonstrate the ways in which the project of nuclearism calls forth women to

Elaine Tyler Moore, Wendy Kozol, Carol Wolkowitz, and Susan Northcutt demonstrate how Cold War culture linked national survival in the face of an impending nuclear apocalypse to the individualized nuclear family as nuclear fears became subsumed into the feminized “safe” realm of the domestic (often through civil defense rhetoric). In New Mexico’s atomic tourism, the bomb becomes banal through its repeated links to domesticity specifically through white settler femininity, the home, and to children. Through the “everyday,” and “ordinary” feminine space of the home, the atomic bomb becomes a domesticated, banal object and the mentality of settler nuclearism becomes naturalized. Like the “exceptional bomb” narrative, the banalizing narrative relies on concepts of gender and race that are intimately linked to settler colonialism. Finally, whereas the “exceptional bomb” linked nuclearism to a future-oriented discourse, I will demonstrate how the “banal bomb” promotes a narrative in which nuclearism is viewed nostalgically, again obscuring the present and ongoing effects of settler nuclearism.

The first site at which I observed an enactment of the “banal bomb” via domesticity was the Trinity Site. As tourists approach “Ground Zero” (a fenced off circular area with an obelisk marking the site of the bomb’s detonation) they must first walk a short distance from the welcoming and information area. In this area, the military organizers set up a long folding table with various objects strewn on top of it such as cigarettes, “Fiesta” dinner plates and bowls, and a salt shaker. A man stands behind the

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“domesticate the bomb.” Elaine Tyler May. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 2008); Wendy Kozol. *Life’s America: Family and Nation in Postwar Photojournalism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Cynthia Enloe, *The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Susan Stoudinger Northcutt, “Women and the Bomb: Domestication of the Atomic Bomb in the United States” *International Social Science Review* 74, No. 3 & 4, (1999), 129-139; Carol Wolkowitz, “Nuclear Families: Women’s Narratives of the Making of the Atomic Bomb” in *Transformations: Thinking Through Feminism*, ed. By Sara Ahmed, Jane Kilby, Celia Lury, Maureen McNeil, and Beverly Skeggs (New York: Routledge, 2000), 235-249.

table holding a small Geiger counter that emits audible clicks as he holds it above the various objects on the table. The purpose of this demonstration is to ease tourists' fears about the doses of radiation they will receive due to visiting the site, which continues to be radioactive almost 70 years after the initial explosion. By demonstrating that everyday household items such as Fiesta dinnerware<sup>72</sup>, cigarettes, and irradiated food like salt are radioactive, the military seeks to contextualize Trinity's radioactivity not as a cause for concern, but as a banal fact of everyday life.

The choice to highlight domestic-themed items like dinner plates and table salt evokes a subtly gendered (and nostalgic) Cold War discourse in which suburban housewives perpetually set the table for a hetero-nuclear family happily oblivious to nuclear fears. Here, the symbolic survival of the nation is linked to citizens' ability to domesticate and contain their nuclear fears into the properly gendered hetero-nuclear family. After viewing the Geiger demonstration, I overheard one woman exclaim, "My mother had 'Fiestaware!'" She turned to the man beside her and said, "See honey, there's nothing to worry about- I'm still here!" It is unclear whether her companion was concerned about the radioactive "Fiestaware" or about the dose of radiation from the Trinity Site, but either way, the Geiger demonstration successfully re-directed any anxiety she had about radiation to the presumed safety of her mother's kitchen. This re-direction is also a nostalgic turn to the past, evoking a better, simpler time. Here a past-oriented, or nostalgic version of nuclearism is promoted, obscuring the present and ongoing violence of settler nuclearism, and encouraging tourists to associate the bomb with a desirable, if antiquated past.

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<sup>72</sup> The glaze used on 1940s Fiestaware contained uranium. See: "Radioactive Materials in Antiques" December 2012, *United States Environmental Protection Agency*, <http://www.epa.gov/radtown/antiques.html>.

The organizers of the Trinity Site spent considerable time and energy promoting the banalizing narrative via radiation. The first two pages of the “Trinity Site: July 16, 1945” informational booklet are blanketed in information about radiation, again aimed at contextualizing Trinity’s radiation in “everyday” sources of radiation like flying in an airplane, watching television, or getting a medical X-ray.<sup>73</sup> The unspoken irony is that while the military’s narrative in the Geiger demonstration and in the informational booklet seeks to normalize radiation as an everyday experience, in reality “everyday” radiation can all be traced back to the first atomic explosion at Trinity. Irradiated food, medical applications of nuclear science, and even “background radiation” in the atmosphere are all directly connected to the Manhattan Project and the nuclear industrial complex. As Masco writes, “What now constitutes the ‘background’ field for all studies of radiation effects is a mix of naturally occurring and industrial effects...After all, the very idea of a background radiation standard is to establish a norm, a new definition of the ‘natural’ in which past effects of the nuclear complex are embedded as a fundamental aspect of the ecosystem.”<sup>74</sup> In other words, the military’s attempt to normalize radiation as an everyday occurrence overlooks the very origins of nuclearism, which began in New Mexico in 1945.

After tourists visit “ground zero” at the Trinity Site, they can stop by the multiple souvenir stands in the parking lot featuring multiple items targeted towards children. What is more banal, commonplace, and domestic than a child’s toy? In this manifestation of the domestic, the atomic bomb is made so banal as to be safe for children to consume and bring into the home. T-shirts, candy, and toys all do the work of normalizing the

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<sup>73</sup> White Sands Missile Range. “Trinity Site: July 16, 1945.”

<sup>74</sup> Masco *Nuclear Borderlands*, 299.

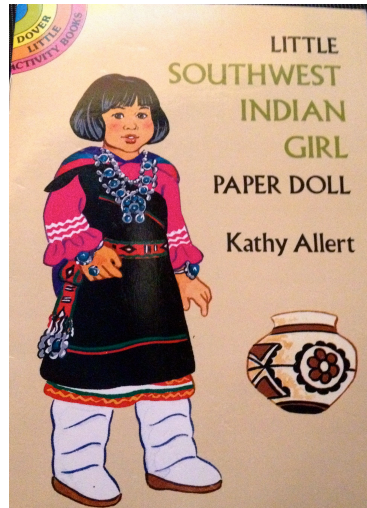
bomb as a banal object. In addition, both the Bradbury Museum and the NMNSH design many of their exhibits to be hands-on and kid-friendly. The NMNSH offers a special membership for children under the age of thirteen called “The Neutrons” with a logo featuring a cartoon cat wearing a T-shirt with the spinning atom, encouraging parents and children alike to associate the bomb with harmless fun and beneficent science.



**Figure 5:** Toddler-sized T-shirt souvenir sold at the Trinity Site on White Sands Missile Range, NM.

The Trinity Site sells many items geared towards children including a toddler-sized T-shirt with a cartoon image of the atomic bomb the U.S. dropped on Nagasaki, Japan (nicknamed “Fat Man”), superimposed over an actual picture of the mushroom cloud that rose over the devastated city after 40,000 people were killed instantly (fig. 5). The bright yellow cartoon image of the bomb and lettering of “Fat Man, Trinity Site” contrasts with the black and white photo of the ominous mushroom cloud in the background, lending an almost comical or cartoonish feel meant to appeal to children. The bomb is drawn not realistically, but again, as a cartoon and to a child it could easily look like a toy. Moreover, while the mushroom cloud image in the background is

immediately iconic and recognizable to adults, children could mistake it for fluffy clouds. All of these design strategies taken together market a product that renders the bomb into a banal object, so harmless that toddlers can wear it. The T-shirt comes in gender-neutral colors: yellow or lime green, but other atomic souvenirs are clearly gendered either masculine or feminine.



**Figure 6:** “Little Southwest Indian Girl Paper Doll” Booklet sold in the Los Alamos Historical Museum Gift Shop.

For example, the LAHM gift shop, Trinity gift shop, and the NMNSH gift shop all sell children’s “science kits,” clearly marketed towards boys as the boxes feature pictures of little boys putting together the planes, clocks, and chemistry experiments. Other items subtly marketed for boys included fighter jet toys and “atomic cannon” kits. For girls, the LAHM sells glow-in-the-dark nail polish, a tongue-in-cheek reference to the byproducts of nuclearism: radioactivity and toxic waste. In addition, they sell “Little Southwest Indian Girl Paper Doll” booklets also targeted at young (presumably non-Native) girls (fig. 6). The booklet is miniature, about the size of a small pamphlet folded in half, making it an ideal child-sized item. A young Native girl is dressed in traditional

clothing with a pot nearby. The reader can “dress her up” in different “costumes from other Indian tribes of the Southwestern U.S.” This item tacitly references the problematic history of the colonial encounter between the Los Alamos settlers and the Indigenous inhabitants in which tourism and owning an “authentic” Indian item figured as a primary way settlers negotiated their presence on the plateau. By miniaturizing and commodifying Native culture into a paper doll booklet, atomic tourism naturalizes radioactive colonialism as a necessary process in order to build the bomb. The booklet obscures and also reenacts the violence of settler colonialism, particularly in the context of Los Alamos and the wider Southwest region.



**Figure 7:** “TOXIC WASTE: Hazardously Sour Candy” sold at the gift shops of the NMNSH and the LAHM.

The gift shops of both the NMNSH and the LAHM carry sour candy in the form of a barrel of toxic waste labeled “TOXIC WASTE: Hazardously Sour Candy” complete with green slime oozing out of the barrel (fig. 7). The label also includes “Mr. Toxie Head,” an anthropomorphized mushroom cloud (complete with bulging cartoon eyes, a mouth, and arms) that is the unofficial mascot of the “Toxic Waste Candy” brand. Although labeled “Toxic Waste,” the bright colors, plastic toy-like design, and cartoon

“Mr. Toxie Head” denote that the candy is clearly marketed towards children. Candy Dynamics (the Indianapolis company who sells Toxic Waste Candy) operates a website where kids can play games, watch videos of other kids eating the sour candy, and even enter a contest superimposing their “sour faces” over the cartoon mushroom cloud. The sour candy is made in Pakistan and ironically, the Candy Dynamics company made news in 2011 when two of its products, including the “Nuclear Sludge Bars” were recalled when they were found to contain elevated levels of lead.<sup>75</sup>

If “Toxic Waste” candy recalled for its toxicity is ironic, so too is the presence of toxic waste dumps such as “Area G,” located only a mile from where the “Toxic Waste” candy is sold in Los Alamos.<sup>76</sup> Rather than calling attention to the effects of radioactive colonialism literally down the street from the gift shop, the “Toxic Waste” candy obscures radioactive colonialism. By linking the dangerous by-products of nuclearism such as radiation and hazardous waste to children’s candy, toys, and T-shirts, New Mexico’s atomic tourism promotes a banal bomb safe enough to bring into the home, safe enough to play with, and safe enough to consume. The home is the space through which the bomb ceases to be exceptional (and still potentially threatening) and becomes the opposite: everyday, un-extraordinary, and banal.

A discussion of domesticity and the banal bomb would not be complete without acknowledging the prolific presence of Edith Warner in New Mexico’s atomic tourism. Like the Fiestaware and children’s toys, Warner’s tearoom is a cultural space through which the bomb is transformed from an exceptional (yet terrifying) weapon, into a banal, everyday, domesticated object. In nearly every atomic gift shop in New Mexico with a

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<sup>75</sup> “Toxic Waste Candy Lives Up to its Name” April 1, 2011. *NPR News*.  
<http://www.npr.org/2011/04/01/135035296/toxic-waste-candy-lives-up-to-its-name>.

<sup>76</sup> Masco, *The Nuclear Borderlands*, 149.



book section, one or more versions of Edith Warner's life story is on sale: *The House at Otowi Bridge: The Story of Edith Warner and Los Alamos* by Peggy Pond Church, *The Woman at Otowi Crossing* by Frank Waters, and *In the Shadow of Los Alamos: Selected Writings of Edith Warner* edited by Patrick Burns. Water's novel and Church's poetic biography have both become Southwestern classics since their publications in 1965 and 1959 respectively. The typewriter on which Church wrote *The House at Otowi Bridge* is displayed in the Los Alamos Historical Museum among other relics of Los Alamos atomic history as a testament to the book's popularity and to Warner's iconic status.



**Figure 8:** A postcard souvenir sold at the Los Alamos Historical Museum. The text on the back reads: "Edith Warner's 'Tea House,' located on the North Grande at Otowi Bridge (old railroad crossing). Edith Warner's Tea House was a favorite spot for Manhattan Project scientists and their families."

Edith Warner, a white woman who moved to Los Alamos, New Mexico from Philadelphia in 1922, at the age of 29, ran a famous tearoom where she hosted tourists, visitors from the San Ildefonso Pueblo, and eventually atomic scientists from the Manhattan Project, such as Robert Oppenheimer and Niels Bohr. Warner's adobe house sat at the foot of Los Alamos, near the Otowi Bridge crossing of the Rio Grande, where

she lived with Atilano Montoya, a San Ildefonso elder from the nearby Pueblo. Her location “in-between the worlds” of the San Ildefonso Pueblo and the secret community of bomb-builders at Los Alamos has led many to mythologize her along with the well-known story of the Manhattan Project and the building of the atomic bomb. Her legendary status is immortalized in books, articles, and in her own writing sold in the atomic gift shops around New Mexico. In the gift shop of the Los Alamos Historical Museum, a wandering tourist can purchase Edith Warner books, cookbooks, and even postcards (fig 8). In the words of journalist Anne Poore, “She is mentioned in sometimes reverent, sometimes romantic, sometimes awestruck terms in nearly every account.”<sup>77</sup> Mythology about Warner takes up prominent space in New Mexico’s atomic tourism and is therefore worth a closer look to understand how domestication is key to rendering the bomb banal.

In a collection of Warner’s writings, editor Patrick Burns writes about visiting the site of Warner’s old adobe home in Otowi, New Mexico in the 1990s. Although the house is not an official tourist site, he drives to the location and sees an unidentified San Ildefonso man in the driveway near a “For Rent” sign. Curious to see what remains of the famous tearoom, Burns approaches the man and asks to see the inside of the house. They exchange banter about the rent and as the man unlocks the door to the house, the first thing he says is, “‘*This* is where the atomic bomb was made- not up there,’ pointing toward the Hill.” Later, he emphasizes this point saying, “‘That’s where the *atomic bomb* was made,’ he repeated, pointing at the tearoom.”<sup>78</sup> What does this man mean when he

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<sup>77</sup> Anne Poore. *The Santa Fe New Mexican* (October 9, 1977), quoted in *In the Shadow of Los Alamos: Selected Writings of Edith Warner* Expanded Edition. Edited by Patrick Burns. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001),

<sup>78</sup> Burns, *In the Shadow of Los Alamos*, 55.

says the bomb was made in Edith Warner's famous tearoom? It is common knowledge that the bomb was invented "up on the hill" in Los Alamos during the top secret Manhattan Project and assembled in the desert at White Sands, near Alamogordo, New Mexico. Burns' only response is to laugh both times and he offers no other commentary on the man's remarks, which contradict the "official" Los Alamos version, leading the reader to interpret them as throw-away lines. What would it mean to take seriously the San Ildefonso man's comments that the bomb was made *not* in Los Alamos, but rather in Edith Warner's tearoom? For one, it would mean taking a closer look at the "simple" white woman to understand what role the domestic realm (i.e. the tearoom) played in the making of the atomic bomb. In addition, how and why is her story being used to "sell the bomb" today through atomic tourism? The domestic setting of Warner's story and its emphasis on the intimate details of Warner's life and tearoom link the atomic bomb to the banal, feminized space of Warner's home, kitchen, and tearoom.

Warner occupied a unique position "in-between the worlds" of the "primitive" and "ancient" world of San Ildefonso and white culture's futuristic atomic science. She came to represent a bridge between cultures and eras, mirroring the Otowi Bridge that she lived beside. As Patrick Burns writes,

Edith was not only living at the bridge, she was the bridge between the ancient communal lifestyle of the San Ildefonso Pueblo and the new community of scientists and engineers soon to bring about a new era in the history of mankind... Destiny allowed her to look through keyholes into the past and future, from the great pueblo age to the atomic age."<sup>79</sup>

Here again is the progress narrative in which the primitive Pueblo past is replaced by a modern technological future, yet this time it is white woman who ushers in the transition.

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, xii-xiii.

As Joseph Masco has argued, LANL and the surrounding Pueblo nations mirror one another in the emphasis both parties place on secrecy.<sup>80</sup> Warner's proximity to the secretive cultures of San Ildefonso and the secretive research on the atomic bomb lends her story the authentic air of a privileged "insider." As a white woman, Warner did serve as a "bridge" between the white world and the Indigenous world. In many ways, she acted as an intermediary that radioactive colonialism could work through to ultimately build the bomb and displace Native people. In addition, the ongoing popularity of Warner's story in the context of atomic tourism demonstrates the powerful narrative linking the bomb with the domestic space of the home, the kitchen, and the tearoom.

Indeed, if we take seriously what the San Ildefonso man said, that the atomic bomb was made in Warner's tearoom, it is not difficult to see the connections between the domestic, the banal, and settler nuclearism. Warner's tearoom served as a crucial site for leisure and stress-release for the community at Los Alamos. Instead of thinking about her tearoom as existing outside the scientific and technical realm in which the bomb was made, I read her tearoom and the LANL wives' domestic realm as a central site where the bomb was "made"- and specifically made everyday and banal. Warner herself called her work serving the scientists in the tearoom her "war work," doing her part to end World War II. The candlelit dinners and famous chocolate cake in her simple tearoom provided a "badly needed escape and did much to restore everyone's outlook..."<sup>81</sup> Los Alamos wife Elsie McMillan writes, "The men would talk quietly, and the women would decide

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<sup>80</sup> Masco, *Nuclear Borderlands*, 119. The secretive and "security" culture in which the atomic bomb was made continues today within the modern military industry complex. Pueblo nations closely guard their spiritual and cultural traditions, particularly as a strategy to resist colonialism, tourism, and the effects of LANL. In one case secrecy is utilized to continue settler nuclearism and in the other, secrecy is a tool to resist settler nuclearism.

<sup>81</sup> Jennet Conant. *109 East Palace: Robert Oppenheimer and the Secret City of Los Alamos* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 158.

who got the produce for sale from the garden. Edith's warm kitchen became a safety valve that helped keep the pressure cooker up on the Hill from blowing."<sup>82</sup> In other words, when Oppenheimer asked Warner to close off her tearoom to outside tourists in order to exclusively serve the scientists, he knew exactly what this tearoom would provide: a morale boost for weary scientists and their wives. McMillan, writes, "Robert (Oppenheimer) well realized what these dinners and Miss Warner's presence would do for our morale. The moment one walked into her home, one felt the beauty, peace, dedication, and love that existed there."<sup>83</sup> The tearoom became so popular, reservations had to be booked months in advance.<sup>84</sup> Warner's tearoom provided a feminine space seemingly outside the hectic masculine work environment on the hill. Yet, no doubt the scientists continued to discuss their project around Warner's dinner table.

Dr. Philip Morrison, a Los Alamos physicist wrote Warner in a letter in 1945 that is worth quoting at length.

We shall never forget our time on the Hill. The time was made of long night hours and of critical discussions, of busy desert days and patient waiting in the laboratory; it held the terrible suspense of the last minutes at Trinity. There was more... What was new was the life around us we began to share. We learned to watch the snow on the Sangres and in the valley there was an old and strange culture; there were our neighbors, the people of the pueblos, and there were the caves in Otowi canyon to remind us that other men had sought water in this dry land. *Not in the smallest part of the life we came to lead, Miss Warner, was you. Evenings in your place by the river, by the table so neatly set, before the fireplace so carefully contrived, gave us a little of your assurance, allowed us to belong, took us from the green temporary houses and the bulldozed roads. We shall not forget.*<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Burns *In the Shadow of Los Alamos*, 44.

<sup>83</sup> Elsie McMillan *The Atom and Eve* (New York: Vantage Press, 1995), 12.

<sup>84</sup> Peggy Pond Church. *The House at Otowi Bridge: The Story of Edith Warner and Los Alamos* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1959).

<sup>85</sup> Emphasis Mine. Quoted in *Ibid*, 98.

Morrison sees Warner's tearoom and her "assurance" as a crucial piece of his "time on the hill." He describes the delicate details of the space that Warner provided, bringing life to the ways in which the domestic minutiae of the banal everyday were intimately linked with the overall work to build the bomb.

Warner's story is featured in atomic gift shops alongside other narratives written about the bomb by women- primarily wives of Los Alamos scientists. Both the LAHM and the NMNSH had numerous autobiographical and biographical accounts written specifically by white women about their lives in wartime Los Alamos, that are for sale among the other books. Texts like *Standing By and Making Do*, *Tales of Los Alamos: Life on the Mesa 1943-1945*, *Inside Box 1663*, and *Atoms in the Family: My Life with Enrico Fermi* feature the first-hand accounts of LANL women and their lives in Los Alamos. I read these women's narratives, which predominantly focused on the domestic realm, everyday life, and relationships against the backdrop of the other "official" narratives about the building of the bomb, in which the focus was largely on the historical, technical, and political significance of the atomic bomb. The women's narratives exist as liberal feminist correctives to the dominant atomic discourses where women are almost entirely absent. The women's narratives are similar to the liberal feminist corrective role Rosie the Riveter plays in atomic tourism; however unlike Rosie (who emphasizes women's work *outside* the home), the women's narratives link the bomb with the banal space of the feminine domestic.

Women's roles in the wartime project of building the atomic bomb in the community of Los Alamos were multiple and varied. Women made up about eleven percent of the working population in Los Alamos, filling jobs such as physicists,

mathematicians, doctors, nurses, secretaries, technical workers, household and laundry workers, teachers, and childcare providers.<sup>86</sup> Ellen McGehee writes,

In reality, the atomic bomb would not have been built without the wide-ranging contributions of women- women working not only behind the Main Technical Area fence in scientific, technical, and support jobs, but also working formally and informally to establish the fledgling community so crucial to the success of Groves and Oppenheimer's scientific and social experiment."<sup>87</sup>

McGehee makes the important observation that the women's informal roles in creating social relationships and structures that formed the community of Los Alamos were essential to the success of the entire project.

No matter what professional role they played, each woman had the dual role of homemaker and mother/wife that she performed according to 1940s gender roles in addition to her war work. However, the white housewives did have help from an "Indian maid service" made up of women from the San Ildefonso and Santa Clara Pueblos; approximately sixty women were bussed up to the mesa every morning except Sundays and Feast Days.<sup>88</sup> The Project's rationale for creating the maid service was to free up white women from domestic work so that they could work technical, administrative, and other support jobs for the Project. Here, settler nuclearism and capitalism work alongside sexist double-standards to ensure that the housework neglected by the mostly-male scientists is taken care of, while relying on Indigenous female labor to do the "dirty work."

The white women's writing in many of the LANL women's narratives often exoticizes Indigenous dress, customs, and pottery and clearly filters their encounters

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<sup>86</sup> McGehee *The Women of Project Y*, 168.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 3-4.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 131.

through their own whiteness.<sup>89</sup> They write about their own experiences of “going Native” through purchasing Pueblo pottery or going to San Ildefonso on Feast Days. In a blatantly racist example, one writer recalls a “hilarious” skit performed for the Los Alamos community in which physicist Otto Frisch dons drag as a “Pueblo housekeeper” and plays the part by disinterestedly breaking dishes and sweeping broken liquor bottles under the rug. By drawing on the “drunken Indian” stereotype, the scientists attempt to legitimate their destructive presence on the Pajarito Plateau and situate themselves as superior racially, technologically, and culturally.

The title of one collection of LANL women’s writing, *Standing By and Making Do: Women of Wartime Los Alamos*, conjures images of the dutiful, patriotic wife standing by her husband in times of difficulty, through war or perhaps through pioneering the West. Throughout all of the women’s narratives sold in the gift shops, the authors draw on pioneer imagery to write about their arrival at Los Alamos. Ruth Marshak, Los Alamos schoolteacher and physicist’s wife, wrote of “arriving” on the mesa. “I felt akin to the pioneer women accompanying their husbands across the uncharted plains westward, alert to danger, resigned to the fact that they journeyed, for weal or for woe, into the Unknown.”<sup>90</sup> This metaphor carries over to their husbands, whose “pioneering” work into the “unknown” territory of the atom frequently invoked frontier references.

The LANL wives’ narratives clearly and brazenly endorse the mentality of settler nuclearism: the women construct their gendered participation in the building of the bomb as part of their civic duty to bring about modernity, progress, and national security,

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<sup>89</sup> See: *Standing By and Making Do: Women of Wartime Los Alamos*, ed. By Jane Wilson and Charolette Serber (Los Alamos: The Los Alamos Historical Society, 1988); Bernice Brode, *Tales of Los Alamos: Life on the Mesa 1943-1945* (Los Alamos: Los Alamos Historical Society, 1997); Eleanor Jette, *Inside Box 1663* (Los Alamos: Los Alamos Historical Society, 1977).

<sup>90</sup> Wilson and Serber. *Standing By and Making Do*, 2.



necessarily displacing (and replacing) the “primitive” and “quaint” Native population in the process. Moreover, like Warner’s story the women’s narratives emphasize the everyday spaces of the home, the kitchen, and the family as essential to the successful building of the atomic bomb. In the context of New Mexico’s atomic tourism, the women’s narratives contribute to the “banal bomb” narrative, rendering the atomic bomb safe and commonplace through its association with the home. Eleanor Jette, a Los Alamos wife, writes in the introduction to her narrative *Inside Box 1663*, “It is the story of the lives of men and women who lived and worked in grim secrecy to hasten the end of the war... We were all part of it whether we served in the Laboratories *or in the homes*.”<sup>91</sup> In other words, the banal work of domesticity was as important as the technical work to build the bomb; here Jette breaks down the public/private dualism in a move echoing liberal feminism. Jette positions the women’s work in the home alongside the work in the laboratories as work “to hasten the end of the war.” Indeed, part of the labor women performed in the home was having sex with their husbands and giving birth to almost 80 babies a year.<sup>92</sup> In this way, the women aided in making Los Alamos not a “temporary intrusion” into the Pajarito Plateau (as was initially communicated to the San Ildefonso Pueblo), but a permanent military settlement that continues to make weapons to this day.

The women’s narratives highlight the very real ways in which white women’s work in the domestic space of the home helped to build the bomb. However, their labor in the home also worked to render the project of the bomb safe, everyday, and banal. Similarly, Edith Warner’s tearoom served and continues to serve (through its mythology

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<sup>91</sup> Emphasis mine. Jette. *Inside Box 1663*, 4.

<sup>92</sup> Wilson and Serber. *Standing By and Making Do*, 92.

in New Mexico's atomic tourism) as a space through which the bomb is transformed from an exceptional weapon of destruction into a banal, domesticated object. As I have shown, the interconnected theme of domesticity runs through New Mexico's atomic tourism, from children's toys and Fiestaware to Edith Warner's tearoom rendering the bomb a banal object and obscuring the ongoing effects of radioactive colonialism.

## **V. Conclusion**

I have argued that New Mexico's atomic tourism "sells the bomb" by simultaneously rendering it both exceptional and banal. While this move may seem paradoxical, together the exceptional/banal narratives ultimately serve to obscure the everyday, ongoing violence of the nuclear weapons industry and to legitimate settler nuclearism. The exceptionalist/banal dichotomy serves to fix the bomb permanently in the past or in the future and to obscure the present and ongoing effects of settler nuclearism in New Mexico and the world. The move to see the bomb as either exceptional or as banal distracts from what Lauren Berlant and Jean Baudrillard call the "slow death" of nuclearism in New Mexico, one that primarily affects Indigenous bodies via cancer, birth defects, and land theft.<sup>93</sup> Povinelli writes, "In contrast to cruddy, cumulative, and chronic lethality are special forms of enemy and spectacular forms of death that capture and rivet the imagination of late liberal societies..."<sup>94</sup> The exceptional bomb and the banal bomb both serve (in different registers) as "spectacular" distractions from the "cruddy, cumulative, and chronic lethality" of radioactive colonialism and settler nuclearism happening *now* in the same geographic space as the atomic tourism. In addition, as I have demonstrated, New Mexico's atomic tourist sites rely on gendered, racialized, and colonial tropes to sell the bomb and to render it either exceptional or banal. Finally, I have argued that the exceptional/banal discourse I have uncovered in New Mexico's atomic tourism functions to produce settler nuclearism by promoting nuclear hegemony: silence and denial.

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<sup>93</sup> Jean Baudrillard *L'échange symbolique et la mort* (1976), *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (Sage Publications, 1993); Lauren Berlant. *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>94</sup> Povinelli. *Economies of Abandonment*, 146.

In this conclusion, I will analyze a public mural in Albuquerque and a *Simpsons* television episode which both disrupt, or *queer* the taken-for-granted pairing of the exceptional bomb and the disappearing Native, and the banal bomb and domesticity. My purpose in examining sites that disrupt the two pairings is to bring into harsher relief the danger of the pairings that make up the exceptional/banal narrative within New Mexico's atomic tourism, and also to offer examples of creative strategies that denaturalize the hegemony of settler nuclearism. Indeed, as I have made clear, the danger in assuming a natural coherence between the exceptional bomb and the disappearing Native, and between the banal bomb and domesticity, is to naturalize settler nuclearism (and thus obscure it) at a time when New Mexico's land, water, and air continue to be poisoned by the nuclear weapons industry, and Indigenous communities like San Ildefonso, Santa Clara, Laguna, Acoma, and Navajo peoples continue to feel the brunt of that violence.

As I discussed in the "Banal Bomb" section above, New Mexico's atomic tourism sells the bomb by rendering it banal and safe primarily through notions of domesticity. I offered an analysis of Fiestaware, children's toys, and Edith Warner's tearoom as everyday, domestic cultural spaces through which the bomb became banal. Another primary example in New Mexico of an everyday space through which the bomb becomes banal is Albuquerque's minor league baseball team, the "Albuquerque Isotopes." In 2003, the team officially changed their name from the "Albuquerque Dukes" to the "Albuquerque Isotopes," supported by a poll in the *Albuquerque Journal* in which Isotopes received 67% of the 120,000 votes.<sup>95</sup> The name "Albuquerque Isotopes" is partially a reference to an episode of the TV series *The Simpsons* in which Homer goes

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<sup>95</sup> "Doh! Go Isotopes!". [Seattle Post-Intelligencer](#) (Hearst Corporation): p. C8. May 13, 2003

on a hunger strike to thwart the Springfield Isotopes from moving to Albuquerque. The name also implicitly references New Mexico's own nuclear industry and history as the birthplace of the atomic bomb.

The Albuquerque Isotopes fuse nuclear imagery and references (the spinning atom logo, the stadium known as "The Lab" referring to LANL, and the "Orbit" mascot, an unidentifiable alien-like creature who could be read as a mutant) with the safe, fun, and family-oriented atmosphere of minor-league baseball. In this way, the Isotopes function as a public space through which the bomb becomes banal, much like the Fiestaware, the toys, and the tearoom. However, a rupture exists in this narrative, a rupture in the form of *The Simpsons*.

From the beginning of the show's opening credits, which fly over the nuclear power plant that looms large over Springfield, *The Simpsons* has consistently provided satire and comedy that is critical of nuclearism. The bumbling protagonist of the show, Homer Simpson, works as a safety inspector at the Springfield Nuclear Power Plant and is constantly causing near-disasters and meltdowns because of his laziness and stupidity, a portrayal that highlights the very-real flaws and hypocrisies of the nuclear industry. In the opening credits, Homer is seen holding a radioactive fuel rod, which he accidentally drops down his own shirt and carries into his car. When he discovers it, he carelessly tosses it out the window of his moving car as his son Bart skateboards by, knocking it into a street drain, which presumably leads to the river. *The Simpsons* repeatedly explores themes of disaster, radiation, and nuclearism through the banal and safe setting of a nuclear family.



**Figure 9:** Still from *The Simpsons* “Two Cars in Every Garage, Three Eyes for Every Fish” 1990.

One episode in particular offers a relevant discussion for thinking about the disruption of the pairing of the banal bomb and domesticity. In “Two Cars in Every Garage, Three Eyes on Every Fish,” which aired in 1990 (when the Cold War was not yet officially over), the episode opens with Lisa and Bart Simpson fishing just downstream from the Springfield Nuclear Power Plant. Bart catches a fish that has not two, but three eyes, suggesting mutation from toxic radiation leaking from the upstream power plant (fig. 9.) This causes the plant, owned by a rich and heartless mogul Mr. Burns, to undergo an official inspection. It is found to have 342 egregious violations (ranging from “Gum used to seal crack in coolant tower” to “Plutonium rod used as a paperweight” to Homer literally sleeping at the monitoring station) and although Mr. Burns tries to bribe the inspectors, the plant is at risk of being shut down. Mr. Burns decides to use his considerable wealth to run for governor, so that he will not have to answer to the inspections. The night before the election, Mr. Burns’ handlers advise him to have dinner

with one of his plant workers, a common man, in order to boost his image as relatable. They decide on Homer Simpson; however, Marge and Lisa are not pleased with hosting what Bart describes as a “media circus” because they both support Burns’ opponent, Governor Mary Bailey, who is the popular incumbent.



**Figure 10:** Still from *The Simpsons* “Two Cars in Every Garage, Three Eyes for Every Fish” 1990.

In preparation for the staged dinner, Lisa and Homer are given scripted questions to ask Mr. Burns. Lisa suggests another question, saying “Can I ask him to assuage my fears that he’s contaminating the planet in a manner that may one day render it uninhabitable?” When Marge voices support for Lisa’s question, Homer literally silences her, shouting “Marge!” and he assures Burns’ advisor that Lisa will ask the scripted question. Later, when Marge and Homer are in bed, Marge refuses to cuddle with Homer. She says, “I don’t want to cuddle with somebody who’s not letting me express myself.” Homer responds, “But you do get to express yourself! In the lovely home you keep, and the food you serve.” Marge groans in response, but seems to have an idea. At the staged dinner the next day, Mr. Burns arrives with a camera crew. Homer and Lisa ask their staged questions, and the evening appears to be going well for Mr. Burns. Lisa confides

in Marge that she feels awful after asking the scripted question, worrying that “We’ve become the tools of evil.” Marge says, “Lisa, you’re learning many lessons tonight, and one of them is to always give your mother the benefit of the doubt.” With that, Marge brings the main course out and lifts the cover to reveal the three-eyed fish. Everyone gasps as Marge serves Mr. Burns the head (fig. 10.) He takes one bite and spits it out, revealing his fraudulent and hypocritical campaign. He loses the election.

“Two Cars in Every Garage, and Three Eyes on Every Fish” disrupts the banal bomb and domesticity pairing in various creative ways beginning with the episode’s title, which is a reference to a 1928 Republican National Committee slogan used during Hebert Hoover’s campaign often written, “A chicken in every pot, and a car in every garage.”<sup>96</sup> Here, a well-known phrase is twisted in order to disturb our assumptions. Whereas the banal bomb narrative naturalizes itself through domestic settings like Edith Warner’s tearoom and children’s toys, this phrase paints a domestic setting in which the presence of the nuclear is a source of anxiety and unease. Throughout the episode, the nuclear presence is introduced with this same unease, and the feeling that “something is off”; this is often done in an exaggerated and comic way such as when a glowing green rat runs through the Springfield Nuclear Power Plant during the inspection scene. Joseph Masco uses the term “nuclear uncanny” to refer to the psychic dislocation and anxiety produced by the ubiquity of nuclearism in our world.<sup>97</sup> Edith Warner’s tearoom, the Fiestaware, and the children’s toys all did work to deny the nuclear uncanny and remake the bomb as safe and banal enough to be brought into the home (literally and figuratively). However, “Two Cars in Every Garage, and Three Eyes on Every Fish” locates the nuclear uncanny

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<sup>96</sup> Dan Amoss. “A Chicken in Every Pot, A Car in Every Garage” *The Daily Reckoning*, May 10, 2006, <http://dailyreckoning.com/a-chicken-in-every-pot-and-a-car-in-every-garage/>.

<sup>97</sup> Masco. *The Nuclear Borderlands*, 28.



firmly inside the domestic space of the home, revealing a deep and substantial fissure in the logic of settler nuclearism that naturalizes the banal bomb through domesticity.

When the inspectors first arrive at the Springfield Nuclear Power Plant their Geiger counters click insanely, indicating high levels of radiation. Mr. Burns tries to deflect concern, saying, “Ah, I suppose that's normal background radiation? The kind you'd find at any well-maintained nuclear facility, or for that matter, playgrounds and hospitals.” Here, we see a reflection of the “official” version of radiation displayed by the Trinity Site literature and officials. Like Mr. Burns, the Trinity Site sought to normalize radiation as a primarily everyday and banal occurrence by placing Fiestware and cigarettes next to radioactive Trininite, again dispelling fears and denying the nuclear uncanny. *The Simpsons* reveals the transparent hypocrisy and fallacy at the heart of this logic by speaking it through the mouth of the greedy antagonist Mr. Burns.

The episode also offers rich material for thinking through the connections between gender, sexuality, domesticity, and the bomb. At first glance, the Simpson family appears to be the picture of suburban, all-American heteronormativity. However, upon closer inspection there are cracks in this façade. Homer hardly fits the role of domineering patriarch as he is constantly being outsmarted by both his wife and kids and revealed to be the fool.<sup>98</sup> The morning after Bart catches the three-eyed fish, the family is discussing it at the kitchen table and Homer scoffs and dismisses Marge's concern about “that hideous genetic mutation.” As he leaves for work at the power plant, Lisa cautions, “Try not to spill anything, dad,” making the connection between her father's job and the dangers of nuclearism. Bart jokes, “Keep those mutants comin' Homer!”, directly

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<sup>98</sup> However, Homer also fits the role of domineering patriarch in other ways such as his constant use of violence with Bart. He also is deeply invested in reifying heteronormative gender and sexual roles as I discuss towards the end of this paper.

implicating Homer in the fish's mutation.

In another scene, after Homer displays blatant sexism by silencing Lisa and Marge, Marge responds by refusing to cuddle with him that night, saying, "I don't want to cuddle with somebody who's not letting me express myself." Here Marge claims her agency and refuses to passively submit to the logic of patriarchy. Again, Homer displays outright misogyny when he responds, "But you do get to express yourself! In the lovely home you keep, and the food you serve." However, Marge utilizes her domestic role to expose Mr. Burns' hypocrisy by serving him the three-eyed fish. In this bold move, Marge brilliantly deploys a feminist critique of Homer's misogyny and also completely shatters the myth of the banal bomb naturalized through domesticity. The unsettling presence of the three-eyed fish in the most domestic of settings (the hetero-nuclear family's suburban dinner table) disturbs and disrupts any notion that the bomb is banal. In essence, Marge serves the nuclear uncanny for dinner, revealing the dangerous domestic logic of settler nuclearism.

In "Two Cars in Every Garage, Three Eyes on Every Fish" the home and family become the primary site for resistance to nuclearism, rather than reifying it. However, at the end of the episode, after his foiled campaign, Mr. Burns vows to destroy Homer's dreams and Homer turns to Marge for comfort. In the last scene, Marge lies in bed and says, "Homer, when a man's biggest dreams include seconds on dessert, occasional snuggling and sleeping in till noon on weekends, no one man can destroy them." Here, the episode re-routes its half-hearted critique of hetero-norms back through domesticity, marriage, and heteronormativity. In other words, although the episode provides a disruption of the nuclear and domesticity, with moments of feminist critique, its

conclusion reifies heteropatriarchal gender roles and the nuclear family. In addition, “Two Cars in Every Garage, Three Eyes on Every Fish” is resoundingly silent on the connections between settler colonialism and nuclearism, as the episode shows the effects of radiation as primarily felt by nature and potentially the predominantly white (yellow?) citizens of Springfield.



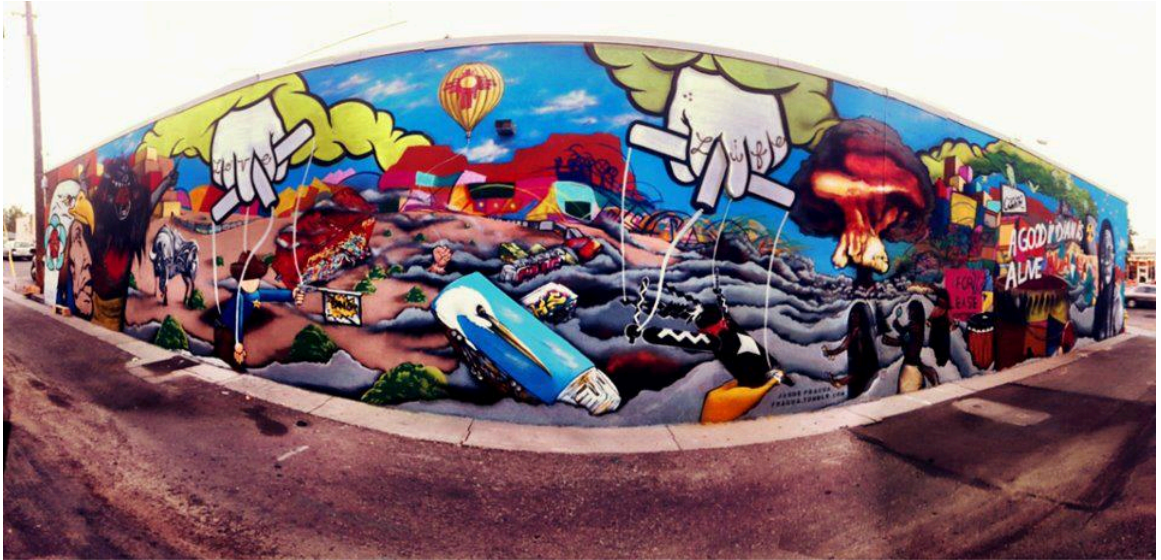
**Figure 11:** Mural in Albuquerque, NM created by Ernest Doty, Jaque Fragua, and Ryan Montoya in 2011.

I now turn to an example of public art presently on display in Albuquerque that offers alternative ways of thinking about atomic tourism and settler nuclearism in New Mexico. The 2011 mural is just off the old Route 66 on Central Avenue in the Nob Hill area of Albuquerque, a popular tourist destination. It fills the length of an alleyway and can be seen from the sidewalk or street. The mural is the combined work of three artists, Ryan Montoya, Jaque Fragua, and Ernest Doty, and depicts a complex scene that involves a four-eyed Native American man, nuclear waste, and the slogan, “A good Indian is a live Indian!” (figs. 11 & 12)

I read this work of public art as a productive counter-example to the four New Mexico atomic tourist sites I examined in this thesis. Although the mural is not an official tourist destination, its location and prominence in a popular tourist area in Albuquerque means that tourists are likely to encounter it on a visit to New Mexico's largest city. The mural presents a counter-narrative to the official atomic tourism in New Mexico by blatantly and visually linking the ongoing violence of settler nuclearism to tourism, atomic weapons, and the Indigenous people of New Mexico. In addition, as a free and public work of art whose only text is the phrase, "A good Indian is a live Indian!", it is an accessible and primarily visual experience not commissioned by any major corporate, military, or governmental interests- unlike the official atomic tourist sites whose funding comes exclusively from such sources. The pizza parlor whose building the painting occupies reportedly gave the artists \$200.00 and free pizza for their work.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Johnny Mango. "Nob Hill Mural Dominates Central Ave. Alley" *Duke City Fix*, September 9, 2011, <http://www.dukecityfix.com/profiles/blogs/nob-hill-mural-dominates-central-ave-alley>,



**Figure 12:** Panoramic view of the entire mural.

In vivid colors, the mural depicts many of the most iconic symbols of nuclearism: the red boiling mushroom cloud rising to the heavens, the yellow and black radioactive symbol tacked to a concrete smokestack that spits out green smoke and morphs into a skeletal, death-like figure reaching its bony hands outward, and multiple figures like a four-eyed buffalo and a four-eyed Native American man that suggest nuclear mutations. A yellow hot air balloon with the Zia symbol (now featured on the state flag, although the symbol originally belonged to the Zia Pueblo) floats in the sky, a reminder of the “enchantment industry” of state tourism in which the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta draws thousands of tourists each year. A puppeteer in the sky holds the puppet strings to a cowboy figure with a toy gun and a kachina doll, which is important in Pueblo spirituality. The sacred kiva of Pueblo spirituality is transformed in the mural to resemble a paint can and a sign that reads “Casino” rises behind it. One green skeletal foot extending from the radioactive green cloud holds the casino sign in place, suggesting

a connection between nuclearism and the economic pressure many tribes feel to run casinos as a source of income for their tribes.

Unlike New Mexico's atomic tourist sites, the mural represents Native America as a spiritually-rich, live, and vibrant people that are negatively impacted by the nuclear weapons industry in New Mexico. One of the artists, Jaque Fragua is a Native artist (Jemez Pueblo) whose work frequently features themes of decolonization and Indigenous resistance.<sup>100</sup> The mural's themes tie heavily to Pueblo spiritual and cultural traditions, referencing the problematic fact that Pueblo people are most immediately and negatively affected by the nuclear weapons industry in New Mexico.<sup>101</sup> In contrast to the discourses that render the bomb as exceptional and in the future, or as banal and in the past, the mural depicts settler nuclearism as a current and nefarious presence in Indigenous peoples' lives. The slur "a good Indian is a dead Indian" has been attributed to General Philip Sheridan in 1860 and embodies the logic of elimination within settler colonialism: the Indigenous population must be eliminated and replaced with settlers. Therefore, the artists' choice to substitute the word "live" for "dead" in this well known racist phrase acts to shift its meaning entirely. What was a rationale for genocide becomes a defiant slogan for survival. Like the title of the *Simpsons* episode ("Two Cars in Every Garage, Three Eyes on Every Fish"), a popular phrase is re-worded to disturb our assumptions.

The Albuquerque mural clearly exposes the issues of temporality by visually linking the toxicity of radioactive colonialism and settler nuclearism to Indigenous (Pueblo) lands and bodies in this present moment, a link that is not relegated to the past or the future. In addition, the mural queers the link between the exceptional bomb and the

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<sup>100</sup> "Jaque Fragua" <http://fragua.co/>.

<sup>101</sup> See Masco. *The Nuclear Borderlands*; Ross, *One Mother Earth, One Doctor Water*; LaDuke with Cruz, *The Militarization of Indian Country*.

disappearing Native, by depicting a spiritually vibrant, and physically visible Native presence, particularly manifest in the slogan, “A good Indian is a live Indian,” and again highlighting not only the suffering caused by radioactive colonialism, but also Native survival in the face of ongoing settler nuclearism.

Thus, taken together, the “A Good Indian is a Live Indian” Albuquerque mural and *The Simpsons* episode “Two Cars in Every Garage, Three Eyes on Every Fish” offer a glimpse at queerings and disruptions to the dominant narratives I have been arguing are at work throughout New Mexico’s atomic tourism. The dangerous pairings of the exceptional bomb and the disappearing Native, and the banal bomb and domesticity ultimately act to legitimate and produce settler nuclearism and obscure the violence of radioactive colonialism. In addition, as I have shown, they rely on gendered, racialized, and colonial tropes to naturalize themselves. In order to fully challenge the normalized narrative of the exceptional/banal bomb, we must be able to disrupt the settler nuclearist logic at its core and fundamentally understand all that is at stake.

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