

The Shrine of Chino Mine: Extraction Rhetoric and Public Memory in Southern New Mexico

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Just at the intersection of New Mexico highways 152 and 356, the Santa Rita Shrine sits tucked in a battlefield of dying mining towns, a lone structure reminiscent of one of the largest mining communities in the Southwest. This shrine marks the existence of the town of Santa Rita, the townsite for the Chino Mine. In 1910, the company began open-pit mining on the edge of town. By the 1930's, new technologies lined the pockets of company executives, and the mine transitioned entirely into an open pit, rapidly extracting more copper and slowly eating away at the land around Santa Rita. By 1970, the town was completely gone (Huggard and Humble 1-4). Now, the Santa Rita Shrine works as both a place of memory and a place of mourning for the community that lost almost everything to the mining industry.

In this article, I hope to illuminate how local monuments like the Santa Rita Shrine are places of empowerment and stand as a way of linking communities with their history through a shared sense of home. First, I will explain how I came to know about Santa Rita and the Shrine. Then, I will explore the unique sense of loss the residents of Santa Rita experienced as they witnessed the destruction of their physical home. Finally, using the *publics approach* from Jenny Rice's scholarship on urban development in combinations with Carole Blair's work in memorial sites as material rhetorics, I will explore the negotiation between company and community that led to establishing the Santa Rita Shrine, and how the Shrine became a local monument in memory of the town.

The Shrine

Last July, I visited Grant County, New Mexico, with a team of graduate students to facilitate community writing workshops and collect stories to "recognize the lives, labor, and leadership of the women and men of the Local 890" and celebrate the social change and desegregation they brought to the community (Salt of the Earth Recovery Project, "Mission and Vision Statements"). The Local 890 was a chapter of the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers that played a major role in fighting for the rights of Mexican American¹ mine

¹ Using language to classify groups of people is a complicated issue of identity, especially in Southern New Mexico. While I use the term *Mexican American* to describe some of the members of the community, they often use *Mexican*, *Spanish*, *Spanish-speaking*, *Hispanic*, and *Chicano* interchangeably to describe people of Mexican descent. It is important to note that most of these Mexican American families have lived in New Mexico for generations, many even before the Gadsden Purchase.

workers. While talking with the participants about how to honor the Local 890, I came to know about the Santa Rita Shrine.

Workshop participant Willie Andazola was present during the strikes as a child, and he later grew up to join the Union. Today, he is one of the Santa Ritans that maintains the shrine. In his written account, Andazola notes the importance of the shrine as a sacred plot of land that cannot be touched. He says:

[M]ake a statue of a lady standing tall and holding a boy and a girl in her hands. There's a piece of land that is closer to where the strike took place, the Santa Rita [S]hrine, where we have a spot for it. We need to honor my mom and the women and the children that were involved. They deserve all of the recognition. It's overdue. They can't do anything to it. It's the ideal place for a statue, so people can stop and see it. I still respect the ladies that were striking. I give them a lot of credit. Maybe someone can make that statue. (Salt of the Earth Recovery Project, "Willie Andazola")

In our personal interaction, he went on to tell me how the Shrine is a safe place for Santa Ritans to honor those who have passed and those who fought in the groundbreaking Empire Zinc Mine Strikes that had brought about social change to Grant County.

Intrigued by Andazola's description, I wanted to know more about why this was the place to put a statue, and why "They can't do anything to it." Who is "they," and why is a shrine the ideal place to remember the men and women of the Local 890? I scoured the humble Santa Rita Archives at the Silver City Public Library in search of answers. This article grows out of those newspaper clippings and one book, *Santa Rita del Cobre*, co-written by historian and former Santa Rita resident Terrance "Terry" Humble, who was also a participant in our writing workshop.

When I first began writing about the Shrine, it was before the vandalism that took place in October 2018. The statue of Santa Rita still stood in her adobe terrarium, holding a rosary and overlooking a memorial to Grant County veterans. Apart from the statue, sixteen benches serve as pews on that fenced-in hillside, each with a different community member's name engraved on it. Off in the distance, heavy equipment hauls materials across the exposed surface of the mine—the shaving away of a quarry: pink, yellow, brown, and green rock exposing the bones of the Central mining district. It is one of the most beautiful views in Southern New Mexico if you can forget that it is the scar which marks where a whole town was torn from the Earth. The statue of Santa Rita, the only citizen left in the town, had watched over the all-consuming Chino Mine and prayed for the families whose lives and homes were destroyed by the mining industry.

Across the pews, looking south toward the exposed rainbow carcass of earth, a plaque reads:

SANTA RITA SHRINE

IN 1960, THE KENNECOTT COPPER CORP. NOTIFIED THE RESIDENTS OF THE TOWN OF SANTA RITA THAT THEY HAD TO VACATE BY 1970 DUE TO MINING EXPANSION, ALL HOUSES, BUILDINGS, AND SANTA RITA CATHOLIC CHURCH WERE EITHER MOVED OR DEMOLISHED. THE STATUE OF SANTA RITA WAS TAKEN TO THE VILLAGE OF CENTRAL MIGUEL OJINAGA. ANGEL ALVARADO AND MOY GONZALES ASKED KENNECOTT OFFICIALS FOR A SECTION OF LAND AND THE STATUE WAS BROUGHT BACK WITH THE BLESSING OF THE DIOCESAN BISHOP OF EL PASO AND THE HELP OF OTHER SANTA RITA RESIDENTS. THE SHRINE WAS BUILT HERE.

THE FORMER TOWN OF SANTA RITA WAS LOCATED 1 MILE EAST OF THIS LOCATION.

DONATED BY TERRAZA'S FUNERAL CHAPELS



Figure 1: Photograph of Plaque at Santa Rita Shrine

The plaque posted up in the corner of the shrine is a reminder of the tragic story of Santa Rita, which I will explore in greater detail later in this article. But the plaque speaks in half-truths about the devastations of Santa Rita, as though the plot of land smaller than the average backyard is a gift for people whose entire community is gone. The residents of Santa Rita did not evacuate—an optional migration in the event of a natural disaster; they were evicted by Kennecott Copper Mining Company, who owned the land in and around the mine and ruled over it mercilessly. In the next section, I will explain how the citizens of Santa Rita were forced to flee as the mine consumed their church, stores, and homes.

The Santa Rita Shine unofficially commemorates their loss, but the wording on the plaque understates the symbolic value of the memorial site and the struggle Santa Ritans endured.

The Injury of Extraction

The history of the town is essential for contextualizing the significance of the Santa Rita Shrine because the shrine emerges as a response to the destruction of Santa Rita, a crisis of modern extraction practices. Drawing upon Rice in *Distant Publics: Development Rhetoric and the Subject of Crisis*, “to call [something] a crisis is to recognize the changes that are happening to the ecology” (28). In Santa Rita, the ecology of the mining town includes an understanding of the town’s history, economy, labor practices, and racial relations.

In 1910, the Chino Copper Company, a division of Kennecott Copper Corporation, began open-pit mining on the edges of Santa Rita, New Mexico. At the time, the town consisted of around 1600 residential houses in addition to company stores and a church. In the 1910s and 1920s, mining corporations often built the mining towns to attract workers who would not disappear when they heard the rumors of more lucrative mines elsewhere. Companies knew that if miners had a place to live with their families, they would find it harder to leave (Baker 37). New mining techniques and technology allowed the Chino Mine to grow in success and profits, and by 1916 it was producing almost 60% of all North American copper (Huggard and Humble). In order to accommodate the expanding mine, Santa Rita went through a series of small relocations starting in the 1950s. The company moved pieces of the town as the pit grew. In 1960, the company issued a removal notice which stated, “all houses must be cleared” (Kennecott 2), and by 1970 the town was gone.

From the inception of Santa Rita, the mining companies structured the city layout to give complete power to the mining company. The Chino Copper Company built the community with racial and ethnic injustice in place as an asset to the company by separating “Santa Rita,” the Anglo neighborhoods, from “East Rita,” sometimes also called “Mexican Town.” Bigger houses with plumbing were built on paved roads to accommodate Anglo managers and superintendents while the company rented lots without access to electricity or plumbing to the Mexican American laborers who made up about 80% of the county and were encouraged to build their own houses. Conditions in the “Indian Village” were even worse. Housing “consisted of tar-paper shacks” near the mine’s waste dumps (Baker 63). The lower wages ensured the laborers could never afford to change the power dynamics (Baker 79; Huggard and Humble 112-114). Kennecott placed workers of color in the lowest job positions so they did not have the means to confront the company about the unfair living conditions. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the solidarity of Local 890, the predominantly Mexican American chapter of the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers, bargained

with the local mining companies, including Kennecott, for better housing conditions and fairer wages. However, they were never able to overturn what physician and anthropologist Paul Farmer calls the *pathology of power*. Farmer's scholarship refers to the way human rights issues are often the direct result of political and economic power abuses. In this case, the economic and political climate of the town, among other circumstances, held citizens of these mining towns vulnerable and defenseless against their employer.

Kennecott's ability to displace a whole community without repercussions comes from a long history of unchecked power abuse. Santa Ritans were well aware of the power of *la compañía*. In his June 10th, 1985, edition of "Memories of Santa Rita," one former resident recalls:

Although Santa Rita was a pretty freewheeling town, there were limits to what one could get away with. The company had absolute ironclad control over who lived in the town and if one exceeded the limits of company-defined decorum, he was politely, but firmly invited to leave. Some of the acts that precipitated such an invitation were: Excessive family fights, flagrant immorality (especially if it involves someone else's spouse), stealing, and other greater or lesser sins as defined and judged only by the company whose world was law, and there was no appeal. (Jones 8)

Jones went on to write these memories in the local newspaper for several weeks. While Jones began the newspaper series "Memories of Santa Rita" simply to recall his own experiences, the stories illustrate social and economic injustices in the mining district.

While the company fronts as providing basic human rights—healthcare, clean water, education—their ability to fire and evict citizens at will and without an appeal is a direct violation of civil rights. Farmer calls this *structural violence* because of how the rights violations, in this case the eviction of Santa Ritans from their basic right to home, "are symptoms of deeper pathologies of power and are ultimately linked to social conditions" (7). Furthermore, structural violence like the imbalance of power in Santa Rita allows the ideologies of economy to "conceal or even justify assaults on human dignity" (7). We see this in the way Kennecott uses the economic growth and success of the mine to offer the erroneous justification that the mine had "reached a point where another program for the removal of houses and buildings from Santa Rita town is necessary" (Kennecott Copper Corporation 2). While Santa Ritans had "freedoms on paper" (Farmer 7), the structure of violence ultimately ensured they could not defend their social and economic rights. Once we understand how little say Santa Ritans had in their community, the distinction between the supposed "evacuation" and eviction becomes clear. Despite having built their own homes, the company-owned plots left citizens without the gathering space to commemorate their losses and without the artifacts to construct a history to fit their perspectives.

As the earth was torn from under their feet, not only where they lived but where they went for spiritual rejuvenation, citizens of Santa Rita were left with nothing. Like the copper beneath them, Santa Ritans were extracted from their homes as Kennecott moved toward more aggressive mining tactics. Less than 34% of Santa Ritans stayed in Grant County; About 40% of Santa Ritans left the state altogether to seek work far from the devastation (Steinberg 18). The extraction refugees who stayed in the area were forced to move into the nearby towns of Silver City, Bayard, or Hurley; families and their neighbors split apart. We know from Jenny Rice that “a change in a place’s ecology disturbs the centers of our existence,” and “Nowhere is the anxiety of ecological disturbance felt more than non-places” (31). However, Rice’s work in urban development does not begin to describe the non-space the extraction industry leaves behind. Their town was not gentrified or transformed; it was wiped out entirely. When Kennecott asserted its power to repossess all of the lands, they left families defenseless, homesick, and mourning.

Santa Ritans experienced a uniquely environmental devastation linked to the influences of extraction industries. Glenn Albrecht coins the term “solastalgia” in his article “‘Solastalgia’: A New Concept in Health and Identity” to describe the sense of distress and loss communities experience with rapid destruction of their homes. Albrecht’s theory of solastalgia can help explain how Santa Ritans’ “place-based distress was also connected to a sense of powerlessness and a sense that environmental injustice was being perpetrated on them” through an imposed transition of place and the feeling of powerlessness (47-48). Santa Ritans watched as a pit expanded to consume their homes. This grief is intensified knowing the Santa Rita citizens were the ones both assaulting and being assaulted. They dug the pit during the day and came home to sleep in houses they would sweep away. They understood that their paychecks would cost them their lives as they knew it. As the citizens of Santa Rita grieved and watched Kennecott strip away their lands, they felt a “relationship between the psychic identity and their home. What [Santa Ritans] lacked was the solace of comfort derived from their present relationship to ‘home’” (Albrecht 48). The destruction of one’s land is the devastation of one’s identity, especially in a mining town where the earth is tied to their culture.

A two-part special commemorative article from the *Silver City Daily Press* by Steven Siegfried highlights the pain citizens face. He writes about Santa Ritan Ruben Gonzales, who is so distraught as he watches the demolition that he began collecting salvage remnants from the church and storing them in his garage. Gonzales, the once miner and now artist, explains:

Every time I came home, I looked at the Catholic church. They were tearing it down. The old church burned. The company helped the people build the new church. It broke my heart when they tore the new church down. I am a very sentimental person. I painted the church [in my

artwork]. I still do...I still use pieces from those things [I collected from wreckage] in my assemblages and art. I'll put a piece in a chair or furniture. I still have a piece of stained glass from the church.
("Neighborhoods Thrived in Santa Rita Community" 3)

Gonzales collects these fragments of the same Catholic church the statue of Santa Rita came from. These souvenirs are testimony that it once existed, like the way we hold onto pictures of loved ones who have passed away, with a longing to remember and the pain of never being able to see them again.

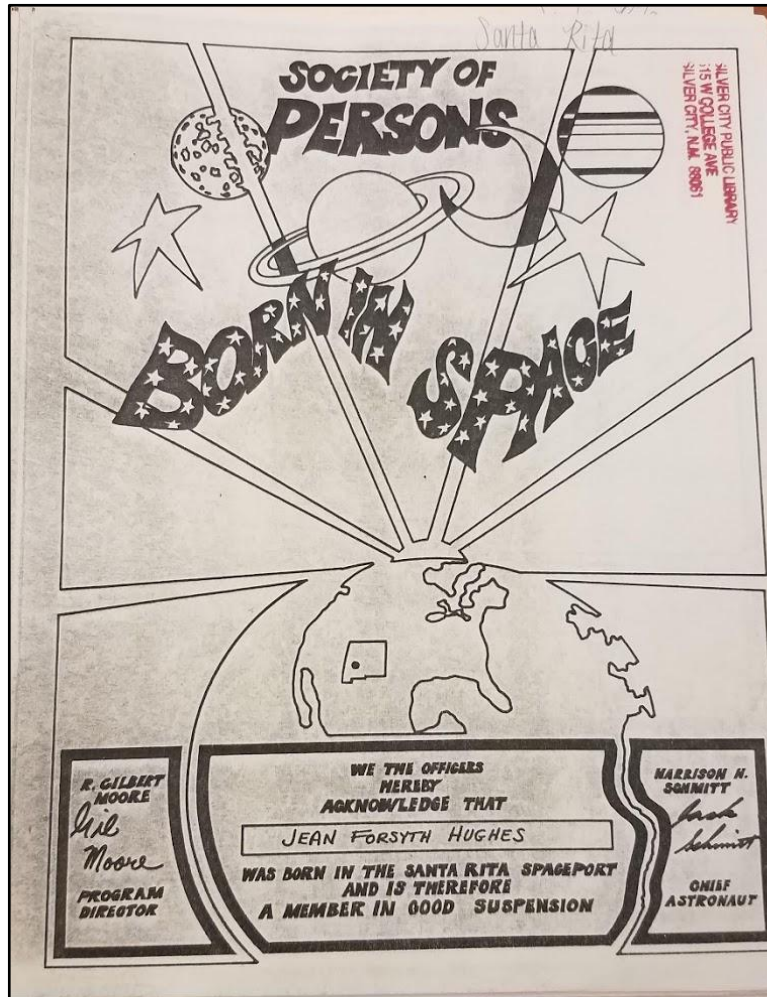


Figure 2: A certificate from the Society of Persons Born in Space to acknowledge that Jean Hughes was born in the Santa Rita Spaceport—as found in the Santa Rita Archives at the Silver City Public Library

As a result of their loss, Santa Ritans began describing the pain they faced at the hands of the company. They talk amongst each other in public forums such as newspapers and newsletters and often use *injury claims* to frame themselves as victims of tragedy (Rice). One example of this comes from the same article by Steven Siegfried. In it, Santa Ritan Myrtle Humble makes clear the devastation of this dismantling for her mother: “It was heartbreaking when they tore down Santa Rita. My mother would never go back there. She moved to an apartment in Silver [City], and she’d never go back there” (2). *Injury claims* can disempower the injured by investing in historical narratives of suffering, thus “produc[ing] and maintain[ing] the citizen-victim that transforms the wound into identity” (Rice 82). In fact, the people of Santa Rita sometimes refer to themselves as the “Persons Born in Space” for the fact that where they grew up is literally an empty space in the middle of the mining pit (Huggard and Humble, Moore and Schmitt), as the image shown in Figure 2 illustrates.

It is important to note that this unique pain is both the point of injury and the point of invention. Simultaneously these *injury claims* become the material through which communities form a *public*. Despite the deep pain Santa Ritans faced, “the wound site becomes a stable displacement for a more complex history and social wrong; yet it is also the site of invention” (Rice 82). Through public correspondence about the pain, the community maintains their civic engagement and they are able to advocate for the memory of the town to live on. While the physical public spaces to communicate—their churches, schools, and parks—are gone, it was this sense of shared loss that allowed the community to advocate for the erection of the Santa Rita Shrine.

Shrines and Memorials

The strategic framing of the site as a “shrine,” although accurate in definition, does not fully acknowledge the corporation’s role in the destruction of Santa Rita. The plaque at the Shrine illuminates two things about the shrine. First, citizens of Santa Rita felt empowered to ask Kennecott for the land, and second, they always intended the Shrine to serve as a memorial. In this section, I will use Carole Blair’s work with memorial sites as exemplars of rhetoric’s materiality to demonstrate how the Shrine is also a memorial site.

Before I begin talking about the Shrine as a memorial, it’s important to note the difference between shrines and memorials; even though they share some characteristics, the purpose of each is distinctly different because of how an observer is meant to interact with each of the spaces. Shrines are sacred spaces, usually religious, marked by relics wherein a person prays or meditates. As the plaque notes, the Santa Rita Shrine *is* a shrine because the statue of Santa Rita resides there, and Santa Ritans were given blessing from the Catholic Church to erect the Shrine. However, the Shrine also serves all of the purposes of a memorial as outlined by the work of Carol Blair.

First, the Shrine is symbolic (Blair 18); the statue of Santa Rita is a metonym for the citizens who were evicted. As all of the buildings in the town came down and people moved out, the statue safely waited out the demolition in El Paso, Texas, until the dedication of the Shrine on August 28, 1967. Because of their connection with the church and their shared history with the statue, Santa Ritans see themselves in the statue. Furthermore, apart from the statue, Santa Rita the saint is herself a cultural symbol—an “advocate for the impossible” and considered the “patron saint of miners” (“The Shrine of Santa Rita”). Quite



Figure 3: An undated newspaper clipping from the Santa Rita Archives that shows an image of the Shrine before the vandalism. The caption reads: “The Shrine of Santa Rita, built and maintained by the people of the area to house the statue of Santa Rita. —Photo by BeeJay”

literally, she is meant to bless those who face impossible circumstances and protect miners. The plaque tells the story of both the statue and the town because the space is meant to serve as both a place of worship and a place of public remembering. True, the statue is the object around which Grant County citizens can pray. More importantly, it also represents the immovability and resilience of those who were displaced.

Second, Blair finds that memorial sites are in conversation with other texts (39). As a memorial site, the shrine works against the rhetorical texts of Kennecott. When Kennecott began issuing orders to evacuate the town, they did so with little remorse and avoided taking responsibility for the eviction, but the erection of the shrine implicitly placed that responsibility back upon the mining company. From the start, Kennecott used their company magazine *Chinorama* to assert that the displacement of people is just as natural to mining as the extraction of ore. An article in the March-April 1965 edition of *Chinorama* begins, "Santa Rita is on the move again" (1), and goes on to explain that Santa Rita has gone through several minor movements since 1909. The opening line, "on the move again," refers to a 1953 article from the *Silver City Enterprise* titled "Santa Rita Townsite 'On the move.'" This article covered the news when Chino ordered the first buildings to be moved for the "extraction of ore bodies" ("Santa Rita Townsite 'On the Move'"). This relocation moved several of the buildings in old "downtown," leaving only the hospital and company operating buildings in the middle of the pit, which became known as "the island" ("Santa Rita Doesn't Fit the Boom Town Image" 1). Regardless of how many times individual buildings moved for the expansion of the mine, none of these compare to the complete erasure of the whole town from 1965-1970. Kennecott underplays its responsibility in the continued suffering of Santa Ritans by framing this series of injustices as natural and inevitable. The nature of pit mining *is* expansive and destructive. Despite typical patterns of pit-mining, we cannot blame the eviction on nature nor necessity.

Furthermore, Kennecott uses their rhetorical texts to explicate their legal right to extract people from their homes rather than to ease the hardship of the "removal program." The *Chinorama* article clarifies:

The land in Santa Rita is owned by Kennecott. Only the houses are owned by the residents. Legally speaking, after June 30, 1965, the company may demand the land, cleared of buildings, by giving the house owner four months' removal notice. This is clearly stated in the leases. After June, [sic] 30, 1965, the leases will be made on a month-to-month basis only . . . The leasing agreement of the company is the same for both types of houses. With proper legal notice, the land must be vacated. (Kennecott Copper Corporation, 2-4)

Kennecott prefers to cover their tracks and assert their authority rather than apologize or even explain the stakes of their decision. The use of the law as justification allows Kennecott to position themselves as within their rights so as to avoid taking the blame for the destruction. They seem to assert that all citizens, (“both types of houses”) Anglo and Mexican American, are treated equally. Nevertheless, it is apparent that those who lost the houses they built and could not afford to live elsewhere—the laboring class—could likely never recover their losses.

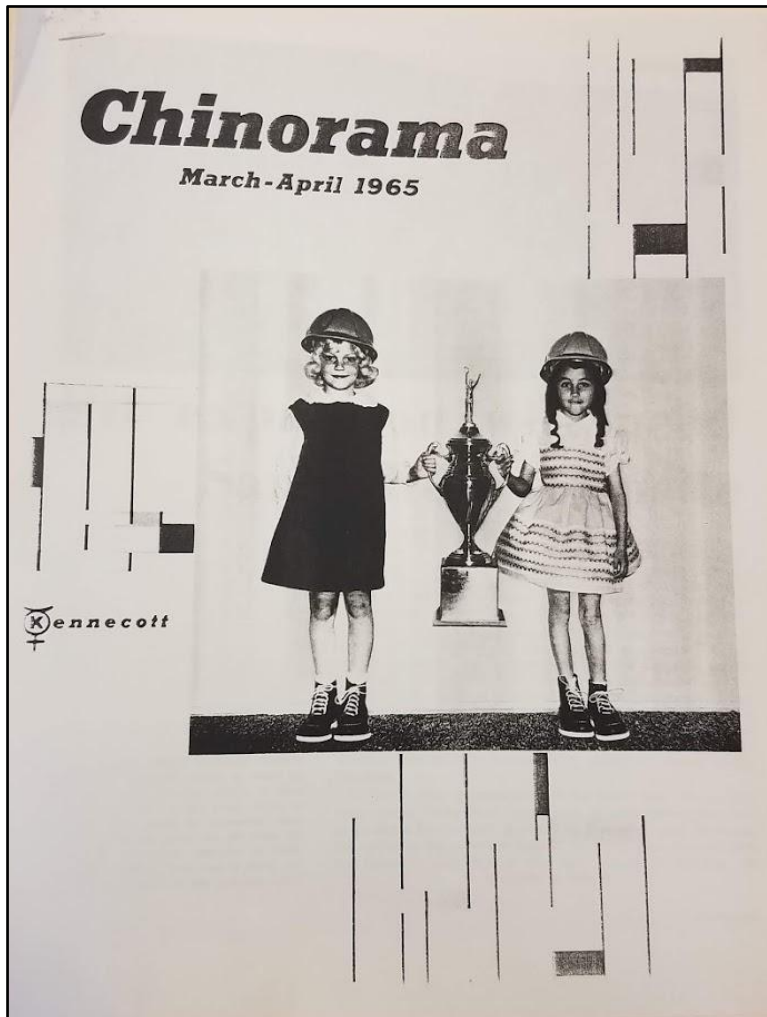


Figure 4: Cover of the *Chinorama* issue explaining the history of migrations in Santa Rita to justify the complete eviction. Copy found in the Santa Rita Archives at the Silver City Public Library.

From the perspective of Kennecott, the gifting of land for the Shrine is a public statement of consolation and an attempt to remedy tensions between the company and laborers; after all, they still needed workers. Instead of holding themselves responsible for the pain they caused, Kennecott chooses to reconcile

with the community by gifting them the land for their statue. Kennecott could not give Santa Ritans the land under title of memorial because to do so would be an admission of guilt. Under the framework of a shrine, Kennecott could maintain that the cause of displacement is natural to mining and “necessary [to] operations” (Kennecott 2). To the passerby, the Shrine is just that, a place to hold the statue, but to the people of Grant County, the Shrine is in conversation with these texts about what causes the pain, and it allows the citizens of Santa Rita to speak against the injustice. With their strong sense of community, the citizens secured their own plaque to dedicate the Shrine alongside the story of the town, which insists that the significance of this intimate space moves beyond it being a quiet place to pray.

Third, Blair reminds us that the link between the Shrine and the public memory is substantial (Blair 38). Memorials serve the specific rhetorical functions of public memory. In “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” Pierre Nora describes what he calls *memory sites*, which connect history and memory. Memory sites are powerful symbolic places that reconstruct often painful realities for their publics. As a memory site, the Shrine reminds visitors of the devastation of the eviction through the eyes of the locals who lived there. The function of the Shrine as a memory site is also what inspires Willie Andazola to dedicate a new statue at the site of the Shrine, and it indicates that although we refer to it as a shrine, locals visit this place to be reminded of the past.

Memory sites like the Santa Rita Shrine work on a shared social experience of memory. In 2003, sociologist Sheila L. Steinberg conducted a study of former Santa Ritans to understand community ties after the destruction of the town. One respondent in the survey explains, “It represents a wonderful community that exists only in our collective memory” (23). Although the plaque commemorates individuals, and each of the pews around the Shrine celebrates names of people who have passed on, the Shrine does not highlight a single experience. Rather than calling on the feeling of loss from one person, it works from what Bruce E. Gronbeck calls the “rhetoric of collective memory” to bridge individual experiences of loss (56). Collective memory works differently from history in that “the primary movement is not from the past to the present but the other way around . . . the collective memory is recalled, seemingly, so as to let the past guide the present. But it can only do so when the past is remade” (Bronbeck 56). The significance of the Shrine revolves around telling history through narratives and looking at the implications of those narratives on the present.

Memory of Santa Rita

With such a strong sense of community, Santa Ritans more often make what Rice calls *memory claims*, which allow them to see themselves as having a deliberative relationship with one another—one centered around the idea of recognizing an ever-existing home. The results of Steinberg’s survey conclude that Santa Ritans still feel a strong connection to one another through their

understanding of Santa Rita as *home*. Interview excerpts from Steinberg's study reveal the intense sense of community they feel twenty-six years after the destruction of their home. One respondent remarks, "our whole existence was contained in a small area, and to us it was home" (14). Another respondent explains,

Santa Rita is HOME. Because it was destroyed as a community and yet still there does make the memories even more special and its history unique [*sic*] . . . Santa Rita's destroyer is from the source that supported the families, educated the children, built our churches, supplied our recreation, took care of our health and birthed our new citizen and buried our dead. As years passed, the economies, culture, and politics greatly changed our lives, but we have stayed special and close. My death plans are written and paid for and my family is in agreement, and it gives me comfort to know my ashes will be scattered in Santa Rita. Yes, I am still an active member of the Santa Rita community. (14)

In fact, nearly all of the comments about the community center around the idea of home. *Memory claims* and narratives about a lost space allow the community to create a different place altogether—one that is emotional as much as it is physical.

While *injury* of Santa Rita became the public discourse that brought community together in non-place (Rice 82), the Shrine is material public discourse that brings the community together in the physical space. The Santa Rita Shrine is now the gathering place for the community. Every year since its commemoration, Santa Ritans have come from all around the Southwest for a special Catholic Mass and feast held at the Shrine on March 22 ("The Shrine of Santa Rita"). Festivities of the celebration include trimming the foliage around the Shrine and cleaning up other commemorative sites special to the district. They also pitch washers and horseshoes in the nearby park (Siegfried 1-2). The tradition of Santa Rita Day is celebrated worldwide on March 22 to honor the saint on the anniversary of her death. But here in Grant County, it offers another special significance. It was once the town's biggest celebration, and Santa Ritans refused to end the tradition even after Kennecott squandered the town out of existence. Siegfried's article "Neighborhood thrived in Santa Rita community" from the *Silver City Daily Press* expresses the importance of Santa Rita days by pulling from lost oral histories. He records Terry Humble explaining that Santa Rita days are "like a family reunion. Everybody takes it for granted that the place where you grew up is always going to be there. If the town were still there, there probably wouldn't be as strong a bond between the people born and raised there" (2). These traditions are proof of the living memory of the town, and the Shrine gives the community a physical space for celebration of their culture and accomplishments.

The Future of Santa Rita

Memory sites like the Santa Rita Shrine are not only rhetorical texts in the sense that they have writing on the plaques and pews. Memorials themselves are material texts because questions arise from their very existence (Blair 30). What is the significance of the Shrine's existence? Because the shrine exists, it denotes that something is worthy of attention—like the shaving away of the landscape one mile east of the Shrine, and the supposed evacuation of residents. As a memorial, the Shrine works as a cultural symbol to translate a chronological series of events in the past (history) into psychological time (memory), and it translates the physical space on the hillside into a social space of remembering.

Scholarship in public memory has repeatedly found that public memory is equally concerned with narrating the past as it is with actively navigating the present (Blair, Dickinson et al., Rice). The Santa Rita Shrine is an important memorial for Grant County, especially in this precarious moment. Those who remember the pain of Santa Rita's removal watch the resurrection of destruction as the Chino Mine has begun a new rapid process of mining—mountaintop removal. Rather than continuing to blast away at the pit, they are flattening the mountain that overlooks the nearby town of Hanover. Removing one town was sufficient for maintaining production for 48 years, and now locals question if operations have again "reached a point where another program for removal is necessary" (Kennecott 2). Hanover, New Mexico, watches the mine encroach on their homes. The mining company has yet to issue evacuation orders, but their history with the community and the nature of mining fuel anxiety over the future of other towns in the Central mining district. For the purpose of preserving the memory of the community, the Santa Rita Shrine is more important than ever. Yet, as we know from reading Blair's research on rhetorics of materiality, "durable material may actually render a text more vulnerable" (37).

On October 2, 2018, vandals struck at the Santa Rita Shrine. Having become acquainted with the stories and people of the Central mining district, I was shocked to see the Shrine in such disarray. Flats of cardboard cover the busted glass, and crime scene tape sections off the enclosure. The statue's pedestal sits empty; the last remaining resident of Santa Rita is gone, and her absence plays an interesting role in negotiating identity and memory in Grant County, as residents of nearby mining towns worry other towns will be swallowed by the mine. What do we make of a shrine's significance when the religious artifact is no longer there? A recent *Silver City Daily Press* article explains,

The irreplaceable statue of the Virgen de Santa Rita from 1943 that was in the original Catholic church in the town that no longer exists [was] smashed to the ground. Broken glass everywhere. The concrete tiled

corners of the memorial to the Santa Rita boys killed in Vietnam also smashed, the cone vases with their plastic flowers thrown to the ground.” (Steele, “Vandals Strike”)

It is interesting that the local community combines two women in the news article. Santa Rita and La Virgen de Guadalupe both symbolize an aspect of cultural identity in Grant County. As I discussed before, Santa Rita protects miners and offers hope for seemingly lost causes; la Virgen de Guadalupe signifies Mexican, Catholic identity. Both women symbolize working-class struggles of the



Figure 5: Photograph depicting damage to the Santa Rita Shrine, taken by Christine Steele for the *Silver City Daily Press* (“Reward Offered”).

predominantly Mexican American miners. The combination in the article is likely a mistake, but it reveals the connectedness Santa Ritans feel with both aspects of their identity. It is clear the statue at the Santa Rita Shrine is symbolic for

Santa Ritans themselves. Given the anti-union sentiment in the mining district and talk of commissioning a statue on the grounds of the Santa Rita Shrine to commemorate the Local 890, I suspect the destruction of the Shrine was an act of rhetorical aggression. Obliterating this precious artifact of cultural memory, was meant to erase a sense of shared past and send a message to the future about the prospects of solidarity.²

Artifacts of memory not only point to moments in the past, but the social climate also anticipates something about the future. As the mine encroaches on other nearby towns, Grant County residents cannot afford to have their recollection of Santa Rita dismembered. If the extraction industry continues to value profits over people, the future of Grant County is grave not only for all Santa Ritans, but also for future generations of environmental extraction refugees. Now Santa Rita is a whisper of pews behind a chain-linked fence, and nearby mining towns of Hanover and Fierro dwindle as the pit runs dry again.

² Donations to help with the repairs to the Shrine can be mailed to or dropped off at First American Bank in Bayard and made out to Guillermo (Willie) Andazola. On the memo portion of the check, write: St. Rita Shrine.

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