

**REGIONALISM AND THE MIDDLE CLASS:  
THE CASE OF HERMOSILLO, SONORA**

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**ABSTRACT**

Regionalism is analyzed in middle-class people of Hermosillo, Sonora, Mexico. The accentuation of regional sentiments, reflected in a reification of things Sonoran and a rejection of culture and people from southern Mexico, is traced to the middle class's role in the process of economic development. Regionalism arose as a consequence of the way the middle class was included in and excluded from the project of the modernization of agriculture initiated after 1940. Inclusion and exclusion are examined in light of the concepts of competition, invasion and domination. The results are based on interviews, primary and secondary sources and participant observation.

**RESUMEN**

En este artículo se analiza el regionalismo en la clase media de Hermosillo, Sonora. La acentuación del sentimiento regionalista reflejado en la *reificación* de lo sonorenses y en el rechazo a la cultura y gente del sur de México se remonta al papel que la clase media juega en el proceso de desarrollo económico.

El regionalismo surge como consecuencia de la forma en que la clase media ha sido incluida y excluida del proceso de modernización de la agricultura que se inició posterior a 1940. La inclusión y exclusión se estudian a la luz de los conceptos de competencia, invasión y dominación. Los resultados se basan en entrevistas, fuentes primarias y secundarias y en la observación participante.

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Hermosillo, the capital of Sonora, lies just 278 kilometers south of Arizona; in 1985, it was the scene of widespread middle-class discontent, what may be described as an “opposition to a centralism in conflict with local society” (Tarrés Barraza 1986:363). According to this interpretation, individuals who make up a middle class do not organize around issues that pertain to their class position.<sup>1</sup> Rather, they are more likely to rally around those which directly affect the place they inhabit, be it the local community or the region. In political terms, middle-class people protect their interests by championing local issues, such as public transportation, roads, electricity, water. While this anti-statist and anti-PRI (ruling oligarchy) slant colors political activity in the middle class in Mexico’s capital, in the provinces this discontent has given rise to regional sentiments that have blossomed into full-fledged opposition to central Mexico.<sup>2</sup>

In Sonora, to be sure, regional sentiments have thrived. They are rooted in the state’s history of geographical and political isolation, which permitted many local institutions to develop independently of central Mexican rule, and of regional resentment, which bred antagonism towards the national government (Aguilar Camín 1979). These sentiments have fluctuated in character and intensity, ranging from the separatist movements of the mid-nineteenth century to the *anti-chilango* prejudice of recent decades (Weber 1984:260-261).

Among middle-class *hermosillenses* animosity towards southern and central Mexicans is a part of popular culture. Middle-class men and women blame the southerner for many of their social ills. They repeatedly attribute crime to people from the south. To quote one small businessman in his late 40s, “until the *guachos* [southerners] came everyone slept outside at night during the hot summer months. “However, “after their arrival we had to go indoors, for they would steal and commit other crimes.”

Under closer scrutiny, however, this image does not hold up. Criminal records, to begin with, do not show a correlation between region and criminal activity. What they reveal is the link between poverty and crime. Regardless of place of origin, in Hermosillo the poor commit crimes against the poor. Criminal records, moreover, also reveal a preponderance of Sonorans (J11,J21,J31 Expedientes Criminales del Estado de Sonora, 1940, 1950,1960,1970,1980).

1 Although it is assumed that the middle class is made up of middle sectors, for the sake of brevity, the term middle class is used throughout the text. The people I chose to study were selected according to three criteria: residence, income and profession. Clearly, the ideas expressed here may not apply to all members of Hermosillo’s middle class. This paper seeks to raise issues about middle-class regionalism from the study of a group of middle class people of Hermosillo, Sonora.

2 This study is based on participant observation, interviews and documentary research conducted in 1980-1981. Participant observation included living in two different households, participating in the lives of others and daily notetaking. Interviews were conducted with 80 individuals chosen according to age, gender and occupation. They included an equal number of men and women divided according to four distinct generations as they existed during the year and a half of fieldwork. The four generations included: 1) persons under 24 years of age, 2) persons 25-37, 3)38-56, and 4) 57 and older. Documentary research included newspaper articles, marriage acts, passports, census records and criminal records.

Regardless of these facts, this perception of southern Mexicans remains, and hostility towards them is strong among middle-class *hermosillenses*. Neither is it just idle prejudice. These sentiments are often the justification these *hermosillenses* use to put social distance between themselves and their southern compatriots. Parents, mothers especially, warn their children against marrying people from the south. Women are considered particularly vulnerable since, according to popular belief, southern men drink too much, chase women and do not provide for their wives. As one mother, an ex-schoolteacher, explained her daughter's marital troubles: "I told her not to marry someone from the south. They [southerners] deceive. They were meant to marry their own kind." Marriage records, interviews, and participant observation in 1980 revealed a decided preference for spouses from Sonora. In almost 70 percent of the marriages in that year, bride and groom were from Sonora; even those middle-class *hermosillenses* living in other regions of the country had looked for wives or husbands from Sonora (RC, Actas Matrimoniales 1980). Not surprisingly, middle-class *hermosillenses* also preferred to live and work in the state, if not the city, even if they went to school in other parts of the country. The great majority of recently wedded couples decided to live in Hermosillo (RC, Actas Matrimoniales 1980). Likewise, local middle-class residents rarely traveled beyond the southern limits of Sonora. Although over 95 percent of the eighty people interviewed in 1980 and 1981 had traveled south of Sonora, the great majority had only done so two or three times. Men traveled south more frequently than women and almost exclusively on business.

In this light, it is possible to view the anti-statist rhetoric of the 1985 elections, at least in part, as the reflection in local middle-class society and culture of a more pervasive animosity towards central and southern Mexicans. In other words, while recent political events may have drawn fresh attention to the middle class, these regional sentiments were not necessarily new to it.

This essay examines the heightening of regionalist, or more precisely anti-centralist, sentiments in the middle class. It argues here that the accentuation of these sentiments is rooted in the history of that class's participation in and exclusion from the process of dependent economic development in Hermosillo after the 1940s -the years of the so-called Mexican miracle. Described by one expert as a period in which Mexico's middle class regained social territory lost during the previous era of post-revolutionary reconstruction, in Hermosillo it corresponded to the modernization of agriculture, one of Mexico's most dynamic programs of economic development (Loaeza 1983:419). Thus, the analysis focuses on the role played by the middle class in the modernization of agriculture.

The essay is divided into three parts. The first raises conceptual questions of dependent development, examining the nature of class alliances, social-cultural change and social inclusion and exclusion. The second part is a case study of the middle class in Hermosillo. It begins with a discussion of the middle class in 1940, on the eve of the modernization of agriculture, and then turns to the particular history of its participation in and exclusion from the development process during the first fifteen years, approximately 1940-55, and examines the reasons behind the rise of anti-southern

Mexican sentiments. The third section takes up the question of regionalism and class.

### *Issues of Dependent Development*

Dependent economic development, write Cardoso and Faletto, is “determined, within limits, by the capacity that the internal systems of alliance between classes and groups and the hegemonic position of these alliances over society [has] to assure economic expansion” (Cardoso and Faletto 1979:26). Thus, while it is an alliance of elites that initially gives life to the dependent economic system, this dominant coalition is eventually forced to include other social groups and classes. This occurs either as a result of their capacity to contribute to the growth of the dependent economy (at different stages elites may woo technicians and professionals or contribute to the formation of a modern working class) or to their ability to contest the dominant system of alliances.

*Social inclusion*, likewise, not only means that a social group participates in a particular development project—the modernization of agriculture in this case—but also refers to that group’s use of the social, economic, political, cultural and physical environments, its *habitat*, in which it meets everyday needs. A project of economic development, depending on its magnitude and “maturity,” will influence or transform a society. The greater its impact, either in the range of activities it affects (be they cultural, social, economic or political) and the deeper its influence, the greater the need and demand will be to participate in the process.

Thus, on the one hand, the desire “to be included” depends on the extent of “development’s” impact on society. In Hermosillo, the middle class demanded to participate in the modernization process in part because it needed work. By the 1950s it had become increasingly difficult to survive outside the *new* structure of labor.

On the other hand, specific social groups may want to become part of a development process even though they may not need to participate. Put somewhat differently, they may believe that they will profit from modifications to their way of life.

While the anthropological record documents that social groups generally do not easily embrace social change, the conditions under which it occurs may make it more or less desirable. Regarding the nature of change, as Jean-Claude Passeron argues, in so far as a social system must reproduce itself, alterations to its structure must originate from outside. Still, he cautions, since no social system exists in a vacuum, it is subject to external forces which strain, tear and often modify the original structure (Passeron 1983:419). Or, from a slightly different perspective, Edmund Leach once pointed out that, practically speaking, it is not possible to isolate individuals into exclusive niches. “Any individual can be thought of as having a status position in several different social systems at one and the same time” (Leach 1954:8). Change arises through conflict when conjunctural-historical conditions impose one system on another.

In 1940 middle-class *hermosillenses* lived within the influence of two social systems. One was Sonoran-Mexican or, more specifically, *hermosil-*

*lense*. The other, due to the state's proximity to the international border, was North American, which middle-class *hermosillenses* knew largely through the mass media and by visits across the border to the United States. Although further proof would be required to show that middle-class Hermosillo's familiarity with ideas about "modernity," "progress," and the "free market" had its roots in a border existence, it is clear that North American influence was intimately tied up with these ideas.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the middle class showed a clear interest if not enchantment with "modernity," reflected in their discussion of things "modern" as well as in their curiosity about the United States and the North American way of life.

The "green revolution," the modernization of agriculture, in turn, upset the balance between these two social systems. In post-1940 Hermosillo, the idea of "modernity," associated with a belief in the "free market," became hegemonic. This idea found a receptive audience in the city's middle class. The hegemony of the idea of "modernity," which already formed part of the middle class's "common sense," added to its validity, making it more desirable. By implication, this signaled a greater orientation towards the United States. While this was especially so among the elites, eventually the middle class, too, began to turn to the United States as a point of reference, particularly with regard to patterns of consumption and what may be loosely referred to as a "high standard of living" (Hewitt de Alcántara 1978:159).

"Inclusion" as a social process, however, is almost never broad based. Indeed, "development" generally accentuates *social exclusion* (Cardoso and Faletto 1979:164), meaning, in its broadest sense, the inability to use the social, economic, cultural, and physical environment which one inhabits to meet everyday needs. If exclusion is structural, that is, an inherent part of the process of dependent development, excluded social groups and classes may not necessarily see their social marginality that way. Rather, the interpretation that a social group adopts to understand what has happened and what can be done will more likely arise out of its perception of events. A social group will probably resent that which it believes jeopardizes its opportunities for personal well-being or betterment. In this light, anti-southern prejudice can be seen as the result of middle-class Hermosillo's association of southerners with obstacles to its participation in the modernization process. The history of the middle class's struggle to be "included" and the identification of the obstacles (or threats) to that incorporation with the southerner, or those in alliance with him, accentuated the division between "outsiders" and "insiders" and gave rise to ethnic-like categories to differentiate southern from *sonorense* Mexicans. Out of this morally laden taxonomy (southerners are "bad" or "inferior"), middle-class *hermosillenses* reified the native.

3 Despite its regular appearance in the literature on development, "modernity" is an ambiguous and complex concept. It is used here to refer to recent ideas and behavior these middle-class *hermosillenses* associated with a better quality of life.

*Hermosillo's Middle Class*

In 1940, on the eve of agriculture's modernization, Hermosillo was a small town in comparison to the principal cities in Mexico. It had 18,601 inhabitants, about half of the population of the *municipio* or county (Almada 1952:339). The city looked very much the way it had in 1900. Its population had grown slowly, even declining between 1930 and 1940 (VI Censo General de Población de Sonora 1940), attracting few outsiders; only 111 foreigners had taken up residence there (VI Censo General de Población de Sonora 1940). Small in comparison to the principal cities in Mexico, Hermosillo nevertheless enjoyed a flourishing economy. Cattle-raising haciendas and large ranches lay scattered to the west while growers to the east planted corn, beans, and other vegetables, as well as alfalfa and fruits. At the port of Padre Kino, a fishing industry thrived, exporting most of its product to the United States. There were also a number of small commercial and industrial establishments in the city, many of which serviced the primary sector. However, it was agriculture and livestock production which sustained the economy and gave jobs to most of the working population. Over 42 percent of the economically active population in 1940 worked in the primary sector (VI Censo General de Población de Sonora 1940).

Hermosillo housed a small but heterogeneous middle class. Composed for the most part of small property owners, such as small businessmen who ran most of Hermosillo's commerce, and independent professionals, it also included teachers, clerks, and government bureaucrats. Most middle-class wage earners had business or technical degrees. Only a tiny minority had a university education, and they had gone either to Guadalajara or Mexico City, since Sonora did not have a university (VI Censo General de Población de Sonora 1940). Of those interviewed who had been in their twenties in the early 1940s, less than 25 percent had university degrees. In contrast to Hermosillo's elite, who had homes in the city and the country, the middle class thrived almost exclusively in the city itself. As such, despite their rural origins, most middle-class *hermosillenses* drew their livelihood from the city's commercial and service sectors and state and city government.

By and large it lacked a consciousness of itself as a class with particular interests, identifying with community and kin. Recalling their past, older middle-class *hermosillenses* spoke of their city as a place with few social distinctions. Among those interviewed who were 57 years of age or older, this was a common theme. To quote a retired schoolteacher now in her late sixties: "then we were one town and, more or less, of the same kind of people, the same class. The social distinctions you see today didn't exist."

Apart from romantic nostalgia, these notions also reflected the old, urban residential life in Hermosillo. True, the rich had their section of town, the Colonia Centenario, which circled the main plaza, the municipal palace, and the cathedral. The middle class, however, lived close by. Its neighborhoods skirted that of the wealthy or grew out of it, almost as adjuncts, so that personal and daily contact was not only possible but common. The Saturday night dances, for example, were town festivities and everyone went, regardless of class background. At night, the children of the middle

class and the wealthy played together beneath the street lamps of the central plaza.

The livelihood of people of all ages depended, to a large extent, on family relations, which provided anything from labor and capital to housing and health care. The education of the young in matters of business and trade often lay in the hands of older and more experienced kin. Within this system, property (including the practices of independent professionals) was frequently passed down from generation to generation, usually from father to eldest son. Interviews revealed that this was especially true of small shopkeepers and landholders. Yet, those sons and daughters left without property often depended on kin ties, too, for they were a rich network which provided food, shelter, money, and jobs. Indeed, it was not uncommon for middle-class women and men to grow up in communities organized around the family. This was the case, to give an illustration, of the Colonia Cerro de la Campana, located near the city's center. Dating back to the turn of the century, the majority of its inhabitants were related by blood or marriage.

The important role that the family played in the middle-class *hermosillense's* everyday life, combined with a lack of class consciousness, nurtured a personalistic model of social relations. From this perspective social inequalities were deemed largely the result of innate, personal differences based on age, sex, personality, and family background. The elite was perceived as a group, and not a class, of wealthy families with privileges that participated with other families in the community's celebrations and defeats.

This middle class, nevertheless, was also self-critical, intent on bettering its place in society. It expressed much of its concerns in articles and letters to the editor of *El Imparcial*, a local newspaper widely read by the middle class. Even a cursory reading of *El Imparcial* reveals that these men and women were curious about their roles as people entering an increasingly complex and modern world. For them, ideals of the United States played a conspicuous role.

Self-improvement, middle-class *hermosillenses* argued, called for hard work. Articles appeared daily in *El Imparcial* with such aphorisms as "la ociosidad es la madre de la pobreza" (laziness is the mother of poverty) (March 8, 1940), and "la naturaleza exige que trabajemos hasta el cansancio" (nature demands that we work until we are tired). One resident, who had owned a small store, explained that although life had been hard in the beginning, long days of hard work had eventually benefited everyone and had inculcated in the *sonorense* "una reverencia para el trabajo" (a reverence for work).

Even the family did not escape this spirit's critical eye. After all, the seeds of the responsible, modern individual lay in the family. Concerning child raising, columnists of *El Imparcial* advised parents not to employ autocratic methods but, to the contrary, to gain the child's confidence and to respect his individuality. When requested, a parent should give his son or daughter money though the child must repay it. Another writer suggested that parents reward a child's good behavior (October 19, 1940).

Proximity to the United States did not necessarily determine or create a predisposition towards “modernity” or “progress.” However, insofar as the United States was intimately identified with them, border life increased their importance and made them omnipresent in everyday life. Much of the information either published by journalists or quoted in articles written by local residents concerning concepts such as “modernity,” “progress,” and “personal betterment” came from North American newspapers. *El Imparcial* featured syndicated columnists from the United States whose daily writings brought the latest North American opinions to Hermosillo. The newspaper displayed an unabashed curiosity about things North American. Articles covered the most recent fads in North American clothing, sports, and male and female roles (September 29, 1940). The neighbor next door was described by one *hermosillense* as that “magical place” where the newest styles always appeared (October 9, 1940). North American merchants, especially those of Nogales, almost daily placed advertisements in the pages of *El Imparcial* announcing North American goods and encouraging travel “to the other side.”

Knowledge of the United States and its inhabitants, furthermore, stemmed from personal experience. *Hermosillenses* saw North American tourists pass regularly through the city. Although middle-class *hermosillenses* did not travel frequently, when they did they crossed the border (AGES, Passports 1940). Not many North Americans lived in Hermosillo in 1940. Still, though few, they nevertheless constituted the single largest foreign bloc, followed by Italians and Spaniards, and made up the biggest group of foreign property holders (VI Censo General de Población de Sonora 1940). Most importantly, middle-class *hermosillense* kin networks ignored political boundaries. All of the twenty men and women interviewed, who had been in their teens and twenties in 1940, periodically used to visit relatives in the United States. While a few of these relatives lived as far away as San Francisco, Denver, and El Paso, the great majority lived in Arizona, in Nogales, Tucson, Phoenix, Yuma and Douglas.

To be sure, middle-class *hermosillenses* also suspected the interests, motivations and influence of North Americans. The United States, wrote one man, posed a great threat to Mexico’s sovereignty (*El Imparcial*, April

1, 1940). Another commentator, worried about the influence of Anglo-Saxon customs on local tradition, reminded *hermosillenses* that they were “of a Latin and Roman spirit of thought” (*El Imparcial*, May 7, 1940). “Modernity” made these *hermosillenses* especially uneasy when it undercut the roots of established institutions such as the family. In one letter to the editor, a woman lamented the rejection of past values among the young, which she attributed to the influence of foreign values (*El Imparcial*, May 2, 1940). Not surprisingly, although these *hermosillenses* might speak glowingly of education, they turned their backs on it when it threatened to put women in the workplace or to teach children about sex (*El Imparcial*, May 2 and August 3, 1940).

Within the alternatives for a world system or way of organizing one’s daily business, however, North American capitalism, according to these *hermosillenses*, had “much to offer Mexico” (*El Imparcial*, June 14, 1940). With the western world on the brink of war, middle-class Hermosillo faced three

alternative systems: socialist Russia, capitalist North America, and Nazi Germany. Like many other women and men of the time, middle-class *hermosillenses* took positions regarding the war and, in the process, passed judgment on what they considered a desirable and, by implication, undesirable way of life.

If middle-class *hermosillenses* distrusted Nazi Germany, they were openly hostile towards the Soviet Union. Articles appeared daily in *El Imparcial* attacking the Bolsheviks. In contrast, as a country of individualists selling its goods, the United States had achieved the greatest success as a “free market.” The “gringo,” furthermore, whatever his faults, shielded Hermosillo from “Godless” communism. Middle-class *hermosillenses*, on the whole, meant to stay within the North American sphere of influence.

This enthusiasm for personal betterment, individual enterprise, and capitalism echoed the national politics of the time. When Manuel Avila Camacho became the PRI’s presidential candidate in 1940 and proclaimed his plans to industrialize Mexico by giving free rein to private enterprise, *El Imparcial*, and the letters to its editor, applauded his economic liberalism (March 30, 1940).

### *Regionalism and Class*

The transformation of Sonoran society began during the years of Avila Camacho and his successor, Miguel Alemán. It began with their vision of economic growth -the industrialization of Mexico (Meyer 1977:204)- a plan to be financed, in part, with profits from the export of agricultural goods. Their sale, in turn, depended on international demand, and in the 1940s, with Europe and Japan devastated by war, that meant markets north of the border. Export agriculture, however, really meant prosperity for certain regions, specifically those producing cash crops. One of these was the coast of Hermosillo.

In contrast to other parts of Mexico, the modernization of agriculture here was a capitalist venture from the beginning, characterized by the production of cash crops, largely by private farmers, to sell for profit to the highest bidder. It employed the latest technology, chemical fertilizers, and giant tractors and plows and made use of extensive systems of credit. Modern agriculture transformed Sonora’s economy. By 1950, some sixty thousand hectares had come under cultivation, a massive jump from the two thousand hectares of 1940 (Hewitt de Alcántara 1978:126). By the 1960s, the state had become one of the most important regions of commercial agriculture in Mexico, forming part of an area that raised half of the country’s crops, over 60 percent of them for export (Cockcroft 1983:166; A. de Appendini 1977:14).

The modernization of agriculture, however, was more than simply an economic program. It also signaled the hegemony of the idea of “modernity” and the principles of economic liberalism. As one expert argues, official policy was reoriented in favor of individual social mobility within a “free market” system (Hewitt de Alcántara 1978:297). Modernization, in this sense, meant the imposition of a model of society based on personal gain and consumption over a model of cooperative work or communal well-

being. Gradually, social status became defined by a high income and the consumption of imported, mainly North American, goods.

From the start, members of Hermosillo's middle class wanted to participate in the development process.<sup>4</sup> In time, additionally, it became increasingly difficult for them to survive outside the new structure of production. Yet their demand to be "included" was also due to reasons other than necessity. While at times reluctant disciples of the liberal economic creed, they agreed with it in principle. Middle-class *hermosillenses* might criticize the United States, but they expected to enter the second half of the century under a "free market" system. Still, in order for the local middle class to participate in this "development," it had to enter the new structure of production. More to the point, it had to fit into the labor structure.

The "green revolution" transformed Hermosillo's labor market. In the beginning, it opened up a large number of jobs for day laborers or peons. Since Sonora suffered from a labor shortage, waves of migrants from other regions of Mexico were drawn to Hermosillo's fields in the years after 1940 (VII and VIII Censos Generales de Población del Estado de Sonora 1950, 1960). Modern agriculture, however, in the words of one expert, "had little to do with the development of rural areas"; it "developed," instead, Sonora's cities (Hewitt de Alcántara 1978:268). This urban boom was of particular significance for the middle class.

Hermosillo grew rapidly after 1940, due largely to its growing importance as a political, commercial, service, and banking center. The growth of the urban economy altered the labor market, gradually expanding the secondary and, above all, the tertiary sectors (VII, VIII, and IX Censos Generales de Población de Sonora 1950, 1960, 1970). Both grew rapidly after 1940. While service and commercial activities contributed a third of the state GNP in 1950, by 1960 they accounted for over 50 percent. In 1965 industry surpassed agriculture for the first time (Hewitt de Alcántara 1978:279). As Table 1 shows, such change in the sectoral contribution to the state GNP was reproduced in the composition of the labor force between 1950 and 1970.

**TABLE 1**  
**The Changing Composition of the Labor Force in of Hermosillo**

	1940	1950	1960	1970
		(percentages)		
Primary sector	42	32	35	24
Secondary sector	19	26	23	24
Tertiary sector	39	42	42	52

Source: VI, VII, VIII, and IX Censos Generales de Población de Sonora 1940, 1950, 1960, 1970.

4 Some sectors showed more desire to enter the new structure of production than others. Clearly, the next step towards an understanding of the ways in which the middle class was included or excluded from the development process would be to do a systematic study with this sectoral variable in mind.

Potentially, the growth of service and commercial activities meant more economic opportunities for the middle class, since many of its occupations (as small businessmen, teachers, independent professionals, bureaucrats) belonged to those sectors. The demand for skilled professionals grew dramatically while jobs in federal and state government agencies multiplied rapidly during the first twenty years of the "boom." Between 1940 and 1970, the labor force employed in government agencies grew fourfold (VI and DC Censos Generales de Población de Sonora 1940 and 1970). The construction of the campus of the Universidad de Sonora in Hermosillo opened up additional jobs. Hermosillo's urban growth, in turn, offered other possible benefits to the middle class. Federal investment in the state meant the construction of public works, from hospitals and schools to city streets and highways (Hewitt de Alcántara 1978:268), as well as the expansion of existing public services, the telephone and the mail, for example. Generally, then, the modernization of agriculture created favorable conditions for Hermosillo's middle class to grow and prosper.

Although Hermosillo's middle class might have wanted to take advantage of the new opportunities, they were not always able to do so. Their exclusion had roots in the dependent development process, a result of structural changes in the social, economic, and urban environment characteristic of this kind of growth. The analysis here examines the social marginality of the middle class as a result of competition, invasion and domination.<sup>5</sup>

Conjunctural and personal *competition* occurred between members of Hermosillo's middle class and those from the center and south of Mexico; it took place principally, and most significantly, in the job market. Since the livelihood of Hermosillo's middle class, to a large extent, was based on small property and organized around family resources, it did not provide the preparation that these new salaried jobs required.<sup>6</sup> In the early years of the economic transformation, to reiterate, only a tiny minority had a university education. Interviews conducted in 1980 documented that less than 36 percent of those 57 years or older could claim any schooling beyond the preparatory level, while almost none of the women had more than a primary education. Existing schools at the time taught business or commercial courses for the most part (VI Censo General de Población de Sonora 1940), and the local state university, established in 1942, had only just begun to turn out graduates with the required skills. Furthermore, most of the middle-class *hermosillenses* who had studied in universities in other parts of Mexico had not returned home after completing their degrees. The first, and usually second, job kept them away from Sonora. In sum, middle-class *hermosillenses* for the most part could not compete successfully for jobs in the new organization of labor.

5 For further discussion of these concepts see Park (1936) and McKenzie (1926) of the school of urban ecology.

6 The inability to make the transition from small property owner to salaried professional has marked the history of other middle classes. For a comparative experience see Vogel 1963, especially chapters 1 and 2. Despite the obvious cultural and historical differences between Japan and Mexico, the experience of these two middle classes was similar.

If locals could not fulfill the demand for people with university or professional degrees, migrants eventually did. Arriving principally from Mexico City and other urban areas, they formed part of the larger migrations to Sonora that began after 1940 (Hewitt de Alcántara 1978:265). The arrival of these professionals not only provoked middle-class resentment, but their continued presence made it more difficult for those Sonorans ready and able to hold jobs as accountants, lawyers, or engineers to find employment. When applying for jobs, local professionals ran into a personal network of work relations that Mexico City professionals brought with them to the north. When choosing others with whom to work, an economist from Mexico City, for example, would likely hire a friend, relative or acquaintance from home and pass over qualified local applicants.<sup>7</sup> Exacerbating matters for the local middle class. Sonora offered enticing economic opportunities for mobile men and women from other states. In response to the growing sales of goods, the expanding market for them, and the increased need for supplies to the primary sector, outsiders with training and money began to establish businesses in the city (Hewitt de Alcántara 1978:273).

The job competition with migrants threatened the middle class's livelihood and hopes for upward mobility. When these *hermosillenses* saw themselves brushed aside by the better prepared migrant, they grew resentful. Their reaction was not unusual. As one observer writes, "it is economic competition between ... social groups which lies at the root of the tensions between them"; at that point, "traditional walls start crumbling, and fierce competition ... develops in the fields which were formerly the preserve of distinct ethnic, or religious [or in this case regional] groups" (Wertheim 1965:76).

Conflict between middle-class *hermosillenses* and migrants did not just happen at work. Eventually, it spilled over into the city itself. Hermosillo became an arena for strife, "regional" strife, between two different classes, middle-class *hermosillenses* and migrant workers. These highly personal encounters created another area of dispute, the urban environment, and they focused additional attention on the southern migrant. Social exclusion took on the character of an *invasion*.<sup>8</sup>

The events of early summer 1955 provide an illustration. A month before the cotton harvest, an army of migrants arrived on the coast of Hermosillo ready to work. Nothing was available, neither jobs nor a place to stay until the harvest began. The city found itself unprepared to host these workers. Almost immediately, newspaper articles began to appear concerning the migrants. At first, the articles voiced concern over the living conditions of the strangers, particularly in light of the summer months ahead and the extreme temperatures -which tested even veterans of Hermosillo's sum-

7 For a comparable example of the impact on local peoples of rapid economic development, change in the occupational structure and migrations see Allub and Michel 1982.

8 While other confrontations occurred, this account examines two incidences. The nature of these two conflicts, the role of the middle sectors and the outcomes were highly representative of other encounters of the same kind.

mers. Letters to the editor commented sympathetically on the poverty of the men who had suddenly appeared without money or food. Even if lucky, they would have to wait at least an entire month for jobs to open up. Then, as one day led to another and the month ended and the migrants stayed on, many *hermosillenses* began to feel put upon by these jobless and increasingly desperate people.

The migrants, meanwhile, had carved out “homes” in whatever recess of the city they could find. Searching for a solution to the problem of these homeless, wealthy *hermosillenses* put at the disposal of city officials a tract of land to temporarily house the newcomers, land earmarked for a children’s ball park. Another incident occurred after the harvest began. One morning in July, *hermosillenses* woke up to learn that a group of homesick and angry cotton pickers had occupied the post office, blocking entry into the building. The migrants accused postal officials of deliberately holding up the delivery of letters from family and friends. The siege lasted three days before police forcibly removed the protesters.

These two incidents gave rise to a heated exchange of views. Not surprisingly, much of the debate concerning what had happened, and what to do, took place in *El Imparcial*.<sup>9</sup> Middle-class *hermosillenses* believed they had proved good-hearted in allowing the migrants to occupy outlying areas and their streets. But to see the ball park land reserved for their children turned over to “vagrants” was too much for them. Editorials and cartoons appeared which chastised city authorities. One depicted a tearful *hermosillense* youth grasping a baseball bat and looking out over the playing field towards a sign that read “para trabajadores” (reserved for workers). What had begun as an attempt by large growers to bring cheap labor to Hermosillo’s fields had turned into a confrontation between *hermosillenses* and migrants over the use of urban space. When southern migrants occupied the post office, cartoons appeared again, one depicting an *hermosillense* en route there wearing a coat of arms and facing a line of angry workers.

These encounters between middle-class *hermosillenses* and migrants fed anti-southern Mexican sentiments and provided grist for the mill of regional jingoism. Articles in *El Imparcial* degraded and villainized the southern Mexican. They employed a wide lexicon of supposed “southern Mexican” character traits, both verbal and visual, and relied heavily on the use of contrasts. In one typical cartoon two rural laborers, a *norteño* (*sonorense*) and a southerner, are talking. The *norteño* wears blue jeans, a pocketknife clipped to his belt, a flannel shirt, and a ten-gallon hat. He is tall, slender, and clean shaven. The southerner, in contrast, is hatless, has a sarape draped over his shoulder, and wears baggy pants and *huaraches*. Short and dark, he looks up longingly at the northerner. He is asking himself what he can do to become a northerner, whether wearing a ten-gallon hat, boots, and levis will make him a *norteño*. The message behind this stereotype and others like it was clear. The south was poor, the north rich. While the southerner was crafty, the *sonorense* worked hard; the southerner was

9 The conflict engendered by the presence of the southern migrants and the incidents which this conflict provoked are chronicled in *El Imparcial*, April-August 1955.

duplicitous, the *sonorense* open and forthright. The south lived by the grace of the north, because the *sonorense* fed the south and gave its people work. Furthermore, the *norteño* should beware because, given the chance, the southerner would likely try to take what rightfully belonged to the *sonorense*.

The conflict over the ballpark, however, upset the middle class for other reasons. Hermosillo's elite had allied itself with the southern migrants, setting apart a piece of land for them at the expense of middle-class interests -a ballpark for local children. The elite's "consideration" of the migrant workers' situation angered the middle class and temporarily turned it against the wealthy. The conflict over the ballpark, furthermore, demonstrated that the interests of the elite were distinct from, and at times contrary to, those of the middle class. In short, Hermosillo's wealthy had begun to contribute to the middle class's social exclusion.

The exclusion of the middle class through *domination* grew out of the concentration of productive activity. It was a gradual process, initiated when the first plans to exploit the coast were laid out. Concentration of productive activity took place in both the countryside around Hermosillo and in the city itself. While 400 growers in 1948 owned over 100 hectares or more on the coast of Hermosillo, by 1956 this group, which had dropped to 160, held titles to an average of 167 hectares; by 1971, the surviving 150 each owned no fewer than 800 hectares. Some had as many as 2,000 hectares of land (Hewitt de Alcántara 1978:155). Furthermore, this small agrarian elite eventually gained control of most of Sonora's commercial activity. Some invested their profits in the large commercial establishments;

others married into the families that ran Hermosillo's commerce (Hewitt de Alcántara 1978:127). The monopolization of commerce hurt those with small or medium capital. This was especially hard on the middle class whose economic livelihood depended, to a significant extent, on small-scale commercial activity. By the early 1950s it had become difficult for members of the middle class to start a business and, for those already in business, to stay afloat.

By the mid-1950s, the elite's exclusive control of the productive process and its fruits was a reality. The agricultural/commercial alliance -a mixture of the old Porfirian landed aristocracy, the "revolutionary" rich, and a smattering of up-and-coming speculators- had a concise idea of itself as a class. There were the "clubes de empresarios": the Unión de Crédito Agrícola de Hermosillo and the Lion's Club, to name two. The wealthy lived in either the Colonia Centenario, originally home to the Porfirian upper crust, or the newer Colonia Pitic in the northwest corner of the city, with its grid-like rows of streets and sidewalks and modern looking houses with front lawns, North American style. These families worked hard to build ties with the United States. Both individually and through the "clubes de empresarios," members of Hermosillo's wealthy met regularly with North American capitalists, encouraging them to invest in their state (Hewitt de Alcántara 1978:128). More and more, their sons studied in the United States. Upon returning home they spoke English and mastered the latest Yankee advances in agriculture and business.

### *Conclusions*

The reasons for the rise of anti-southern Mexican sentiments in the middle class, in conclusion, are varied and complex. These sentiments arose primarily as a result of the middle class's demand to participate in Hermosillo's "development" and its exclusion from that process. The middle class's social exclusion during the early years of the economic transformation left it frustrated. The highly personal conflicts with migrant workers - many of them from southern states- both at work and in Hermosillo's streets provided a ready scapegoat. The southern presence "explained" the middle class's inability to benefit, at least initially, from the process of economic development.

It would have been difficult for members of the middle class to arrive at a structural or class analysis of events after 1940. If the various sectors of the middle class held similar ideas about what made up a good way of life, they did not share a class consciousness. Middle-class *hermosillenses* ascribed to a personalistic model of social relations; they saw themselves as part of a community, not one sector in conflict with others. Differences perceived they attributed largely to personal or family idiosyncrasy. As such, they reduced social action, and especially class conflict, to personal affronts which, in turn, gave rise to personal resentments. The encounters with migrants were translated into contests between "insiders" and "outsiders." In other words, the high level of community integration and loyalty not only weakened the possibility for a class consciousness to develop, but lent itself to a perception of events in terms of "outsiders versus natives." Conflicts between locals and migrants took on territorial dimensions and, not surprisingly, employed an ethnic-like taxonomy of things native and foreign.

### ABBREVIATIONS

AGES-Archivo General del Estado de Sonora J 1 I-Juzgado de Primera Instancia J2I-Juzgado de Segunda Instancia J3I-Juzgado de Tercera Instancia RC -Registro Civil

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