

**From miners to agricultural settlers. The experience of miners from Pilares,
on the coast of Hermosillo, 1949-1980**

**De mineros a colonos agrícolas. La experiencia de los mineros de Pilares,
Sonora, en la costa de Hermosillo, 1949-1980**

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ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the change and adaptation process of miners who became agricultural settlers on the coast of Hermosillo. All of them had been unemployed because of the closure of the copper mine in Pilares, Sonora, in 1949. The methodological perspective applied instruments of social and cultural history with concepts of memory studies. It is possible to identify a fractured identity through the broken projections for the future, forcing settlers to re-elaborate their life stories. The study involved work with orality, which resulted in some limitations that had to be solved with contrast of documentary and historiographic sources. The visibility of a community with a strong presence in the social imagination of Sonora defined the originality of the study, concluding further that there is a pilgrim cultural identity that was formed outside the mining space but with symbolic elements of it.

Keywords: 1. mining, 2. memory, 3. identity, 4. border, 5. Sonora.

RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza el proceso de cambio y adaptación de los mineros que se convirtieron en colonos agrícolas en la costa de Hermosillo. Todos ellos habían sido desempleados por el cierre de una mina de cobre, ubicada en Pilares, Sonora, en 1949. La perspectiva metodológica aplicó herramientas de la historia social y cultural con conceptos de los estudios de la memoria. Se logra identificar una fractura identitaria al romperse proyecciones de futuro, obligando a los pobladores a reelaborar sus historias de vida. El estudio implicó el trabajo con la oralidad, lo que resultó en algunas limitaciones que debieron ser subsanadas con fuentes documentales e historiográficas. La visibilidad de una comunidad con fuerte presencia en el imaginario social de Sonora definió la originalidad del estudio, concluyendo además que existe una identidad cultural peregrina que se conformó fuera del espacio minero, pero con elementos simbólicos del mismo.

Palabras clave: 1. minería, 2. memoria, 3. identidad, 4. frontera, 5. Sonora.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1949, the closedown of the mine in Pilares de Nacozari, located in the municipality of Nacozari, in the state of Sonora, Mexico, marked the lives of its inhabitants. The final production halt of Moctezuma Copper Company disrupted the economic, labor and sociocultural activities of a mining community that had been benefitted by copper extraction developments, with interruptions and crises, for five decades. Moctezuma Copper Company was founded in 1897 by Phelps Dodge, an American enterprise with mines in the state of Arizona, US, which with the purchase of the mine in Pilares, consolidated a transborder regional mining network (Romero Gil, 2001, p. 221). By the turn of last century, in 1904, Moctezuma Copper Co. made a heavy investment that resolved and optimized the production process of the mine by improving extraction techniques, building a narrow-gauge railroad to transport the materials and setting up large spaces for housing, leisure, and the workers and their families' political and social life. The conditions of enclave, the control of the firm on labor production (hierarchies and labor specialization) and the distribution of the urban layout are some of the characteristics that explain the mining identity forged over the mine lifetime.

Supported on historical data, this article intends to understand how from the consolidation of sociability and solidarity relationships in the mine-town of Pilares after the cessation of mining activities by the end of the 1940's, a group of miners evicted by labor crisis in Pilares arrived in the coast of the municipality of Hermosillo as agricultural settlers, colonizing an unknown socio-territorial space, where they tried to replicate the social forms they had previously built in the originary Pilares, combining them with new learnings on land and agriculture. In this way, by the end of 1949, a settlement called *Colonia Pilares* was born; a chapel, adobe houses and a basketball court were built and later would become the stage to foster old sociability and solidarity relations which they had created around the settlement in the mine. The nascent colony turned into the operation center from which collective endeavors were made to transform a semidesert area into a number of agricultural fields between 1950 and 1980.

The article also has as a goal to acknowledge the way in which the individuals' identities were fractured by the dislocation of their productive activities, destroying their future projections, and how they were forced to re-elaborate their stories from the –painful– experience of leaving their previous place of residence. The memory (or testimonies) of the aged individuals who worked in the Pilares mine allows rebuilding a past substantiated by a broken identity, though it also has made actors generate mechanisms to preserve it via remembrances and transmitting them, and by reproducing sociocultural practices and creating places for memories of the mine and its environment. The historicization of such remembrances, the analysis of the meaning of these memories and the way they evolved over its transmission to younger generations are the goals of this article. In like manner, we will reflect on the way the places of memory are defined, appropriated and explained; that is to say, identifying ambivalences between memories and experiences gives us the chance to recognize the instability of memory and its uses with a view to recover identities, demonyms and personal origins that explain collective presents and futures.

IN TIMES OF MOCTEZUMA COPPER COMPANY, THE SENSE OF BELONGING TO THE MINE

The mining towns that appeared by the end of the XIX century in northern Mexico, which were greatly successful enterprises for a good part of the first half of the XX, were incorporated into the local imaginary through their stories as dynamical, social spaces deemed “homogeneous [in which] there is no clear boundary between firms and communities, between place of work and place of residence, between production and reproduction spheres” (Sariego, 1998, p. 13). Using urbanization as a guideline, foreign enterprises devised spaces, company towns or enclaves, that had the necessary infrastructure for the workers to permanently settle in the mine area (Zapata, 1985). Under these conditions, the structure of the organization form produced relationships not only visible in the sphere of production, but also noticeable in the various spheres of the workers’ daily social life (Sariego, 1998, p. 13).

For example, the layout of the old town of Pílares was linked to modernity, as understood by president Díaz, and to productivity and efficiency in mining extraction labors. The ruins of the original town are located 15 km from the municipal head, Nacoziari de García, in northwest Sonora. As in the legendary Cananea mine, and up to the present day, mining has been the main productive activity in the region. Ever since its foundation, Pílares was physically built following a segmentation supported on labor hierarchy, but also on the nationality and ethnical background of the population. The houses and constructions encompassed in the urban layout were built on irregular, rugged terrain, right next to the mine shaft (Sariego, 1998, p. 109). The social hierarchy of the old mine was based on labor specialization, which was noticed in the spatial organization. This way, there were populous working-class neighborhoods called “*Agua Prieta*”, “*Guadalupe*”, “*San Juan*”, “*El Porvenir*” and “*La Esperanza*”, different from those for managers and administrative staff, both American. On the other hand, the company provided basic services such as water, electricity and transport, a fire station, a company store and various leisure and service infrastructure such a hospital, a church, a library, a sports club and a movie theater. These places were implemented by the company to “care for a specific workforce, scarce in many places and also volatile” (Cárdenas García, 1997, p. 143).

At present, it is still possible to notice these hamlets and buildings next to the mine, an aspect that made it impossible for the original dwellers to detach from the relation with the everyday activity in the mine; for instance, small duplex housing for two or more families of Mexican workers were purposely build and located in neighbors far from the “American” ones, place for the houses of managers and supervisors, who lived in buildings with running water, electricity, sewer and telephone. It is worth mentioning that eventually most of the houses would have running water and electricity, though this would take place well into the 1930’s.

Under these conditions, the structure of the enterprise organization was supported on a system that not only mediated in the production sphere of the mine, but also in the social and daily sphere of the population (Cárdenas García, 1997). The permanent contact of its inhabitants and their daily

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interactions propitiated deep sociability between “differenced peers” (Rodríguez, Miranda and Medina, 2012, p. 148).

By interviewing people who lived in the original Pilares, we are able to identify constant longing for the life in the old mine, as they recollect on the benefits they received from the mining company: housing, health and leisure, just to point out the most recurrently mentioned. In their memories, Moctezuma Copper Co. was seen as a “model enterprise” as regards labor safety and conditions of life in comparison with other mines in the region. In Pilares, there was an infirmary with three doctors and help points located at various levels in the mine. Plus, an equipped hospital in Nacozari de García. The workers or their relatives who fell gravely ill were sent to Phoenix, Arizona, US, to be treated. As Cárdenas García points out, as a part of the negotiation relations between the enterprise and the workers, the former had to enact social benefit policies for the latter (Cárdenas García, 1997, p. 137).

This also occurred in the company store. A dispute between local retail sellers and the company was taken to the municipal authorities. The traders accused the firm and its store of unfair competition; while its representatives pointed out that the company store’s *raison d’être* was to protect the mining families so that they did not spend their payment on alcoholic beverages. Likewise, they adduced it was not fair to take these benefits from them only to favor traders with stores in the company premises (Cárdenas García, 1997, p. 7). The regulation and organization of labor, economic and social relationships of the place were defined by the firm.

However, beyond this actual control of the dynamics of the mine, it was a fact that the life conditions mining offered were far from the peasant context from which a significant number of workers came (Cárdenas García, 1997, p. 7). Moreover, education and leisure spaces were at first defined and controlled by the firm. The construction of the school, the creation of a sports club, a gym, a library, movie theater, a square with a kiosk and the catholic church were part of a unique condition, which enabled forms of sociability that consolidated over time by means of everyday interactions between the community members.

The daily hustle of the mine workers was enlivened by forms of coexistence that allowed them to forget their work routines to interact more horizontally in activities and social spaces where men and women integrated, producing friendships, *compadrazgo* [joint parenthood in catholic contexts] and family networks. For example, one of the spaces gladly remembered by former miners is the Sports Club; a symbol of the elegance and taste people from Pilares had for balls. All the mine workers and service clerks had a suit and shoes they wore on special occasions such as the new year’s ball, the celebration of 5 de Mayo, Holy Saturday, or summer balls.

In this way, work was compensated not only by economic gains, but also by recreation activities at weekends, when there were balls or parties, or else, in bars and even whorehouses, which, under a different modality, were attempted to be controlled by the municipality via regulations for tolerance (Regulations for tolerance the mistresses and heads of whorehouses had to observe, 1925). It was in the social sphere, by means of their cultural, religious and sporting activities that

the inhabitants reproduced and provided the feeling of belonging to a community such as Pilares with meaning.

Furthermore, it is important to recognize the consolidation of a mining-working class via union organization. The swiftness with which they created their union gives an account of this; the first assembly of Pilares' Workers Union was held in 1925 (El Látigo, 1925). The presence of workers in the public life of the mine became more relevant when Pilares was appointed as a municipality in 1918. The registration of political clubs with worker representatives to run for mayor shows the politization of this sector. For example, in 1921, Benito Juárez Club was created and presented workers, miners and electricians as mayors and delegates (Aguayo, 1921).

The above is explained because there was neither elite nor political power established in Pilares—only that of the company—while traders were a small group with restricted or diminished power to influence on political matters. The historiography on organizations of mining workers in Sonora did not pay attention to the unionization process of the community under study and an explanation for this omission is the closure of the mine and that of their actors as a consequence, without disregarding the lack of classification of the files.

The workers' holding offices did not mean that relationships with Moctezuma Copper Company were fractured or confronted. Conversely, we witness a negotiation for the spaces of organization and control of the government. These relationships were varied in nature; for example, those in which the mayor was the intermediary in the tensions between capital and labor; or when certain maintenance activities were carried out by Moctezuma such as the cleaning of the town that was "largely performed by the Firm [...] in collaboration with and supervised by the Police and the Representative" (Ayuntamiento de Pilares de Nacozari, 1928). Other actions that evince the importance of the enterprise in the good functioning of the municipality of Pilares were economic donations it made for civil and sporting events (Hamilton, 1918). In 1921, the town hall approved that the firm made a discount to be utilized to buy tools for arts and crafts in the school for men. Seemingly, this ordering was received with no problem by the company and workers, which points at the link between political agencies and community interests (Ventura, 1921).

The sociability dynamic, in combination with workers' organization and political action, allowed us to identify resistances and negotiation capacity between the various agents. The times of the mine were also symbolical. Work was hard and was compensated by all of these activities and forms of exercising the autonomy we already mentioned. However, social cohesion, bonding, and solidarity features were also expressed in health crises, accidents, shortages, strikes and temporary and definitive stoppages.

Social cohesion and solidarity are noticeable in the collective memory of the former inhabitants, and also in the emotions and attitudes in which social and economic inequalities disappear to make room for a broad and totalizing sense of community. As an instance, we find the case of evocations of the conditions of life in the mine, which have a common background: the positive benefits as housing, services, health care and recreation provided by the firm.

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The narrative of the former inhabitants, built years after the stoppage in 1949 and the departure from the mining town in Pilares toward dissimilar destinations, contributed to recover a past time supported on a mining identity that positively restituted the way of life in the campsite in the face of adverse experiences after their exodus.

WHEN THE SOCIABILITY OF THE ENCLAVE IS PUT TO THE TEST

According to Rodríguez, Miranda and Medina (2012), mining cycles may destroy a mining community, for the closure of this sort of employment not only conveys an economic crisis, but aspects related to the identity and culture of the affected group are also involved (Rodríguez *et al.*, 2012). As well Reyes, Rodríguez and Medina (2014) state that in the experience produced by a crisis in the mining cycle, collective suffering that has to do with the imbalance in the daily practices related to labor dynamics appears, putting an end to “a pact between an individual and their world, the individual and the city, the individual and nature” (Reyes *et al.*, 2014, p. 240).

The population groups that depended on a productive activity such as mining faced its own economic swings, which made it a fluctuating industry: economic crises, bankruptcies and strikes are part of the history of these enclaves. Well now, despite the instability marked by industrial times and paces appears in the social and labor spheres of mines, workers and their families stabilize uncertainty by appropriating the space, normalizing social practices and cultural rites, as well as identifying themselves with the urban landscape and environment (Rodríguez *et al.*, 2012, p. 146).

The mining town of Pilares had already experienced various economic setbacks that forced Moctezuma Copper Company to halt its operations. The Wall Street Crash of 1929 affected copper industry, which made the company declare a lockout in 1931. The stop led to the first mass exodus of workers and their families; following suit, Pilares lost the category of municipality, which as stated had gained in 1918 and had contributed to the organization of workers in political clubs, becoming involved in administrative issues of the town.

The workers who lived the exodus after the 1929-1931 economic crisis moved to a number of regions supported by the local government with the promise of farmlands. Particularly, they migrated to agricultural fields in Navojoa and Etchojoa, also in the state of Sonora, where they established *Colonia Nacozari*, which would not be fruitful owing to governmental mismanagement (Figueroa, 2008, p. 75). Workers who had been transported to the agricultural region in southern Sonora complained of the lack of attention by those in charge of the colony before the state executive; they tried to organize, they joined and appointed representatives to procure the necessary resources to start working in the fields. However, in the new settlement this organization tradition inherited from the mine did not work for them at all, to the extent that one of the representatives and his family were banished from the colony (Figueroa, 2008, p. 76).

By the 1940's, the population in the mining town of Pilares had noticeably reduced, if compared with the one 10 years before. Indeed, in 1930 there were 7 029 inhabitants –not counting those in

Nacozari, 5 368, where the company headquarters were—; in 1940 the population reduced to 2 892, out of 13 494 (Secretaría de la Economía Nacional, 1934, 1940; Secretaría de Economía, 1953).

In 1937, in a more favorable economic environment, Moctezuma managed to reactivate the mine; though 12 years later, after announcing it no longer would be able to afford copper extraction it definitively ceased operations in 1949, in spite of having previously postponed the closure by means of wage reductions after an agreement with the union. When the National population Census was carried out in 1950, Nacozari and its precincts reached 5 500 inhabitants in total (Secretaría de Economía, 1953). The low population rate evinced the departure of a half of its dwellers, mainly from the mining town of Pilares, caused by the closure of their source of employment. The company never regained the production levels it had had in prosperous years and carried out minimal activities with a small group of workers up to 1960.

After enduring crises and stoppages that workers considered temporary, the final fracture of the relationship space-community occurred in 1949. A reduced group of workers decided to remain in Pilares de Nacozari and engaged in livestock rearing and prospecting minerals (*gambusinos*). As it was the case in the second wave in 1931, migrants left in long caravans toward various destinations. Some returned to the highlands and the valleys of Sonora, other emigrated as braceros to the US (Arizona and California), whereas a considerable number moved to the capital, Hermosillo, to hire in the agricultural cooperatives that were developing in the coastal zone. In December of the same year, an agricultural colonization decree for the coast of Hermosillo was passed, by means of which, following a modern capitalist agricultural model, it was intended to devote a vast area (200 000 ha) for agriculture, including the drilling of wells, providing electricity and making roads; according to the project, the effect of such agricultural colonization would draw about 40 000 people to Hermosillo and surrounding areas (Pérez, 2014; Moreno, 2006). In the context of this decree the allotment of land for miners displaced from Pilares was defined. They were given 5 000 out of 132 516 hectares of irrigable lands available for farming (Noriega, 2010, p. 180); particularly, they received 350 ha each as compensation for unemployment caused by the postwar crisis on copper due a fall in its price and the suspension of the 3-cent subsidy per pound produced (Durazo Rivera, n/d, p. 56; von Der Borch, 1998, p. 556; Ramírez, Guadarrama, Conde, Leon, Martínez and Martínez, 1985, p. 184).

For its part Moctezuma Copper Company never returned to the production level of its prosperous years; up to 1960, it kept low activity to hold possession rights with a small group of workers to carry out maintenance tasks on machinery and facilities; according to Mamfredo Morguen these workers were not even 20, (M. Morguen, face-to-face communication, May 26, 2013). Other former workers engaged in livestock rearing and prospecting. Though something had changed, and 1949 symbolizes such definite fracture of the space-community relationship that had remained in spite of the crises, leading to its inhabitants' intempestive exodus.

BEING AN INHABITANT FROM PILARES: MEMORY AND MINING IDENTITY

The symbolical appropriation the workers and their families had made of the mine and their lives in Pilares contributed to produce a collective identity on the basis of values of industriousness, sociability, daily life integration and the dynamic of the mine with their times, rules and spheres of political and cultural participation, repertoires that make identification with a community possible (Mercado and Hernández, 2010, p. 241). Company towns appear after the discovery and opening of a mine. Pilares was built by the company, though its workers and population provided it with meaning and sense.

With the development of the mine the people took the demonym *Pilareño*, which had been coined from individual and collective experiences. Being a *Pilareño*, on the one side, restated and underscored the labor specialization of the worker, which was considered a privilege, while on the other, made them recognize themselves as members of a community with a past shared in fraternity, solidarity, and common practices and rituals. In this way, in the sociocultural fabric created by the specific conditions of the enclave, the workers made projections of future life, mainly once they managed to settle and had families of their own. Then, the firm and the community of *Pilareños* consolidated in parallel, while identity elements were expressed as a set of practices in the colonization process of the coast of Hermosillo, especially when building a community.

At present, such values and representations still subsist in the memories of those who call themselves *Pilareños*, and also for those who were related to such space and its people. That is to say, from the common base and notion of being a *Pilareño*, elements that refer to a specific identity and collective memory are retrieved (Halbwachs, 2004). Even if the mining town of Pilares is no more, neither as society nor as camp, its former inhabitants recall it in their memories on three aspects: childhood, work in the mine and the spaces for non-labor socialization.

The uncertainty and nostalgia of bringing to mind having belonged to a space they thought their own was etched in the memory of *Pilareños*. It was thus stated in an interview by former resident Yolanda Ruiz de Moreno:

We were that way for about three months, I saw Pilares disappear because everyday houses were demolished or abandoned. It happened that way and the lights were also turned off, not only in the bay, also *barrio libre*, the American neighborhood was in darkness and little by little they were leaving... lifetime neighbors started leaving, people I was born and grew with.

They started to give all the inhabitants of Pilares their deeds for the small lots in the coast – because there had been negotiations with the government on some land on the coast to settle people from Pilares and bring them here so they didn't feel the uprooting–. It was traumatizing, I mean, look at me after so many years... (Ruiz, face-to-face communication, May 20, 2013).

After the closure of the mine in Pilares, some miners and their families move to the center of the state. The government had to address the mass and sudden loss of jobs in the mine and seized the opportunity to colonize the unpopulated area close to the sea in the municipality of Hermosillo. The decree on the agricultural use of Miguel Alemán Valdez Colonization District established that

“the reserve of national terrains inside it for colonization purposes respecting previously acquired private properties, however with the obligation to urbanize them when they surpass the limits established by Agrarian Legislation” (Durazo Rivera, n/d, p. 53)

By 1949, the drilling and equipment of some 70 deep wells along the coast of Hermosillo were authorized (Moreno, 2006, p. 172). Within this context, Governor Ignacio Soto promoted the colonization of an area with former miners from Pilares. Pressure from some former miners on the government were fruitful, thereby the goal of their movement would be fulfilled. By making true the program boosted by President Miguel Alemán in 1948 with the publication of an agreement whereby the opening of coastal plains for cultivation was decreed for the state of Sonora, the march to the sea advanced after extending the agricultural border (Guadarrama, Ramírez, Conde, León, Martínez and Martínez, 1985, p. 172; Moreno, 2006, p. 179). It is worth mentioning that *Pilareños* were offered lands in the Valley of the Yaqui, but there were fears of a *Yoreme* uprising and they ended up receiving virgin lands on the coast.

The former miners and their families who decided to accept the new offering from the state government to make their lives in the coast of Hermosillo were transported in buses and train to this city, the capital of the state. Upon arrival, they were gathered in the park Francisco I. Madero, which is in downtown (Ayón, face-to-face communication, May 24th, 2013). When they were given the land in the coast they created Colonia Pilares. After settling down they noticed a stark contrast and found it difficult to adapt to the place, climate and the new conditions of the place:

We started by contrasting all the comfort we had. Paying the bills... we had a rough time and didn't know what to do. We had been grouped for two years [until] we received the land... Colonia Pilares. We were there for like eight years and we left with nothing on our backs. We were guinea pigs, we were experimented on machinery, systems... everything but help us work (C. Ayón, face-to-face communication, May 24, 2013).

They were willing to work but found a new lifestyle. The pace was different from the schedule and discipline imposed by the mine. In the coast of Hermosillo, they faced a territory with semidesert vegetation they had to prepare to turn it into cultivation lands, in addition to building a household and basic services for their families' consumption and education, under utterly different conditions from those of the past. In mining work, the organization of work was defined by the firm, mainly in company towns. Social relationships, for their part, were defined by the union and municipal power (Sariago, 1998; Zapata, 1985). In spite of the new economic and labor circumstances, *Pilareños* tried to replicate the life they had led in the mine and in Hermosillo on the fields. The organization patterns they experienced in the new enclave were transferred to the fields in Navojoa and Obregón, in the south of the state, and more markedly, to the coast of Hermosillo. Though, not only did they try to reproduce this very characteristic, also social coexistence practices. This last aspect was consolidated and has endured over time.

On the coast, they “were given an unexploited plot in the zone closest to the beach, toward Kino Bay. A remote desert area” (Durazo Rivera, n/d, p. 31-33), the farthest from the city of Hermosillo. These plots – whose real-estate value would increase after they leveled them– would be the place

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for a social and economic project, now in the hands of these new agricultural settlers. By the end of 1949, about 170 former miners from Pilares became owners of 5 000 remote hectares, fully into the highlands west from present-day *Calle 28 Sur* (28th Street South), of the coast of Hermosillo, some kilometers away from the former Road to Kino Bay. Some of these former miners had left Pilares in 1946, when the mine started to stop operations (von Der Borch, 1998, p. 569). In such areas in the coast of Hermosillo established *Colonia Mineros de Pilares* (known as *La Pilares*) as operation and colonization center of the zone. Also, other non-miner settlers would establish new cultivation fields.

In 1951, President Miguel Alemán authorized resources for more wells and to do so, he favored the group of *Pilareños*, who made a path into the forest to reach the area where the agricultural fields were. After this leveling-valorization process of the territory, fourteen agricultural fields were created, besides credit societies were organized, comprising twelve *Pilareños* each: “each one of these societies was created around an agricultural well with sufficient water to irrigate about 300 hectares” (von Der Borch, 1998, p. 567).

From this great agricultural colonization endeavor in which they invested many hours of collective work to level a hectare, field-credit societies came to being, for instance “Miguel Alemán, Nazario Ortiz, Ignacio Soto, Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, Lázaro Cárdenas... Moctezuma, Bella Vista, Cuahémoc, Escuadrón 201, Kino, La Providencia, El Futuro, Villa San Ignacio, and Ignacio Zaragoza” (von Der Borch, 1998, p. 567).

Together with the settling of the town, the leveling of lands, the creation of agricultural fields and drilling of wells, resources from credits for sowing started to arrive. Former miners had advisers from the back-then existing *Banco de Crédito Agrícola* [Bank for Agricultural Credit], though the inexperienced farmers were not well-trained to do so and resorted to their own creativity to carry on with sowing and harvesting on their own. Two years after receiving the lands, they were given resources to purchase machinery and transport. A large part of the credit was utilized to pay for their first tractor, Oliver brand, a Massey Harris threshing machine and a Chevrolet truck to move the harvest (von Der Borch, 1998, p. 567). All the equipment was utilized following a collective model; that is to say, it may be used by in the private property of each settler to cultivate and harvest. Maintenance, operation and transportation costs were afforded with contributions from all the settlers.

Between 1949 and 1952, the construction of a very dynamical, advanced and multifaceted community was underway, in spite of being only a hundred inhabitants they were inspired by their recent past as mining settlers. Life in the fields passed among fallowing, seeding, weeding, cleaning and harvesting wheat, cotton, maize, etc. In the preparation of the land, the role of irrigators and tractor drivers was very important, they worked for 24-hour shifts. Crop dusters landed on *Calle 36 Sur* [36th Street South] to load pesticide and flew to the various plots to disperse it.

Early in the agricultural cycle, cotton and wheat were mainly grown (Durazo Rivera, n/d, p. 99). Such economic progress is explained by two reasons: 1) these produces experienced a boom in the market; and, 2) the success attained by the Association of Settlers of the Coast of Hermosillo, an

organization founded in the fifties and of which *Pilareños* were active members (Pérez, 2014, p. 209). The above explains that these settler entrepreneurs broadened their agricultural border by buying a new field, which they called *Villa San Ignacio 2* [Saint Ignatius Villa 2], also known as *Campo Nuevo* [New Field].

At the beginning of the eighties, the *Pilareños* who had settled in *Villa San Ignacio* “started an enterprise in a new field: poultry farming. They bought a plot [...] and built a poultry farm for 20 thousand birds, which produced some thousand boxes of eggs a week” (Durazo Rivera, n/d, p. 132), which they distributed to be sold in the market of the city of Hermosillo. This economic project included the construction of a mill to produce balanced food for the chicken. Moreover, they had a “refrigerated warehouse to store the eggs. Then, they built breeding facilities with 25 thousand fattening chicks” (Durazo Rivera, n/d, p. 132).

However, by the end of the *Lost Decade* (the eighties), high interest rates charged by the banks, overexploitation of the aquifer from the drilling of 498 wells and saline intrusion from the Gulf of California led to the failure of the utopia of the agricultural colony in the coast of Hermosillo (Moreno, 2006, pp. 222-223). The crisis was evident and only eight partners remained in *Villa San Ignacio*, some of them were founders while others because they had received rights to exploit a well, by purchasing or inheriting it. At that moment, they decided to divide the assets they had as partners, as it would be the case of machinery and transportation means. Poultry farms had not succeeded and debts that came from this had to be paid (Durazo Rivera, n/d, p. 141).

The fields they had acquired were later raffled and four partners remained in each. Adding to debts with banks and credit societies, the leaders of the Settler Association misappropriated its funds (Durazo Rivera, n/d, p. 91). If corruption were not enough, in 1980 water had turn salty, the government stopped allowing the drilling of wells owing to the overexploitation of the aquifers and the low recharge they were receiving. Plus, due to the recurrent economic crises and the increase of debts, agriculture became impossible to afford for the settlers. First, *Villa San Ignacio 2* was sold, later on *Campo Uno* was purchased by stockbreeders from Guadalajara. This closed the chapter of some miners who tried to become prosperous farmers, which to a certain point they managed to be for 40 years.

After trying their luck in the coast and failing, a significant group of *Pilareños* decided to settle in Hermosillo, some of them –the fewest– kept their agricultural fields, while most sold them as a consequence of the fall in agricultural production in a context of economic crises. Once established in the capital of the state, the members of *Colonia Pilares* created the Civil Association *Club de Amigos Pilarenses A. C.* on November 26, 1985, with a view to fostering unity among *Pilareños* and their descendants (Durazo Rivera, n/d, p. 134). The club had *Por un mañana mejor, unamos nuestros esfuerzo* [For a better tomorrow, let us join our efforts] as a motto, which concentrated the entire history of a collective life of constant struggle and work since the distant years in the old mining town of Pilares.

Furthermore, to remember the old *Club Deportivo de Pilares*, they built a place to hold their meetings and social gatherings, a place that served to reproduce the ways of interaction they had

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consolidated in the mining town and which they idealistically tried to reproduce in the coast of Hermosillo. The new club was a catalyst for memory, where balls were “in memory”:

When we started, we followed the tradition of Pilares, we even dressed formally. There were commissions to organize the ball, embellishments, reception and so [...] We adorned the place with pine leaves, as if we were in Pilares. It was a big thing. Then, it changed with modernity [...] and we left the suits [and changed them for] hats and boots (Badilla, face-to-face communication, May 24, 2013).

We notice a collective behavior before crisis and uprooting from a place. On the institutional side, on an attempt to organize and work the agricultural fields, they failed; while regarding the sociocultural, as for identity, they managed to preserve and reproduce practices of coexistence and sociability which have allowed them to recognize themselves as a community with features anchored to their mining past, in spite of the exodus. The sense of belonging to a community was created from a cultural background configured by labor, workers' organization and the material conditions that propitiated sociability. Such conditionings depended, at first, on a structure. A company town such as the one in Pilares defined the social relations of men and women. However, the appropriation of a lifestyle somehow mixed with cultural, religious and nationalist traditions which were assimilated by the settlers.

In 1949, there were some negative or unpleasant moments of their life in Pilares which are not mentioned in the recollections on their experiences prior to such year. Cold frosts, collapses and fires that caused the death of some workers appear as a background for an operation halt. particularly, the event of the *Engasados* [gassed workers], in which two people died from breathing gas inside the mine, it appears in each of the stories of the respondents. If such year was a milestone in the lives of *Pilareños*, the interviewees have ordered their stories from broader commemoration dates. For example, they remembered that on May 1 (Labor Day), Moctezuma Copper Company announced the coming closure in June (The Spokesman-Review, 1949); few days before this, there was a last ball in Pilares. Some miners and their families waited for their departure with music and dance.

Many years after living the departure from the mining town, the *Pilareños* who participated have reconstructed their lives in Pilares from an amalgamation between the life in the mine, the experience of labor stoppages and the adaptation they had to undergo once the mine closed. In this way, the reconstruction of their past differences from their individual stories of life. The closure of the mine appears in the memory of the former miners from two standpoints. The first is of those who decided to remain in the mine or nearby, in the city of Nacozari, and managed to become ejido owners of a part of the former mining center over the years. Their memories of the event are nuanced and do not transmit the pain and suffering of the displacement and adaptation of their lives without the mine. The second is of those who emigrated to other regions of the state, mainly those who settled in agricultural fields and suffered uprooting and hard years of fruitless agricultural cooperatives.

In this way, when *Pilareños* remember 1949, it just comes to the closure of the mine. The most significant events are mediated by circumstances after the occurrence and by the re-elaboration

past facts take from a current standpoint. It is thus transmitted to new generations, who build their familial and personal stories from the link they have with Pilares. They appropriate their parents' longing and describe the landscapes of the place, and also their hardships, as though they were part of that scattered community, as this descendant elaborates:

I always remember Pilares as longingly as they did. Above things, the hardships they endured; for them, it was a happy time because they married there, they had their first children. They remembered it with a bucolic aura, as a very beautiful place. I imagine it as a Christmas card, I felt it was [that way] they had lived. And that is the idea I have. Maybe they didn't live it with as much drama as I think, that they had been banished and left with nothing, totally defeated (Gallegos, face-to-face communication, April 28, 2013).

Furthermore, Flora Gallegos, a respondent in this study, finds in the unionist past of her father in Pilares the value and strength with which she faced the telephone-worker strike in Hermosillo in the eighties:

Pilares [was] when they learnt to be unionists and the meaning of the word strikebreaker for my father understood very well when I cried, while the Union of Telephone Workers was on strike, a group of scabs betrayed us. My father knew what exploitation in the company store was and knew the taste of defeat, of the mass dismissal when Pilares closed down (Gallegos, face-to-face communication, April 28, 2013).

This process of recovering the positive experiences of their elders is noteworthy because of the memory works carried out by the members of the mining community who experienced the exodus, according to the proposal by Jelin (2002), and also because of the appropriation and transformation of such memory by later generations (Jelin, 2002, pp. 14-15). There is a re-elaboration process of the past in the present by the descendants with a view to not forgetting.

As we have described, after trying their luck in the agricultural fields, a significant group of *Pilareños* decided to settle in Hermosillo. In 2012, when we started to locate them to interview them, we noticed they had settled in neighborhoods in the north of the city. An informant sent us to another former *Pilareño* in the coast of Hermosillo, which reaffirmed the sense of belonging to a community. Additionally, in the interviews the former miners expressed their ties to the old mining town as they visited Pilares once a year accompanied by their descendants:

All of the club members went together. In the square [in Pilares] each one set their tent ... we have the house of aunt Fidela [who was] the only inhabitable house because my nieces and nephews live in Agua Prieta... and repaired the house. They come in Holy Week, on vacation (Valenzuela, face-to-face communication, April 25, 2013).

Those who detached from Pilares and experienced hardships in the agricultural fields in Sonora were those who created mechanisms to preserve their broken identities. They wanted not to forget, and transmitting the memory of Pilares was one of their mechanisms, and creating spaces in which the practices and social relationships of the mine were somehow reconstituted, as in *Club Pilarense*, which according to the information provided by one of the members of the direction board ceased existing in 2012 (Valenzuela, face-to-face communication, April 25, 2013). Likewise, Pilares

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became a place of memory; the buildings and constructions still standing fuel their imagination regarding what it was and the meaning of belonging to a mining community, they are the shelter of a memory that was broken (Vilanova, 2006, p. 92), and the way to alleviate the suffering from being deprived of their daily life (Rodríguez *et al.*, 2012, p. 160). Without the institutionalism surrounding the creation of spaces of memories, the community itself, following their desire to revitalize the past, thus consolidated them in a place of memory, in the everydayness of their mechanisms to preserve identities.

However, as we identify differences in the memories about the closure of the mine of the former settlers and their descendants, something similar occurs in the case of the places of memory. On the one side, we consider that people who live far from the mine are longing and wishing for the survival of what they consider their tangible heritage; whereas those who have been close, as in this case the former miners and their children –now ejido owners– have naturalized their relationship with it.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to Halbwachs (2004), in the close contact characteristic of small societies – the French sociologist compared them with the societies of populous cities– we may find “collective originary memories” that refer to a shared identity, a past that defines biographies from the individual, though always linked to the collective (Halbwachs, 2004, p. 74). The history of the mining enclave of Pilares is an example of this sort of societies. A cohesive mining society, which appropriated an urban space and adapted it for their needs, was the result of an urban project in the form of a company town, its organization and hierarchization of production and reproduction of labor.

Over this process of collective identity creation, the individuals devised future life projects because of their work, families and new generations. Over this process, the individuals tended to obviate the contingency of mining. The surprise from the announcement of a final stoppage of the activities of Moctezuma Copper Company in 1949 disrupted the development of a community and cancelled individual projections (what to do with life? Where to look at?) (Reyes *et al.*, 2014, p. 250), provoking at once the dispersion of identity and mind.

In spite of this dispersion, former miners and their families found alternatives or mechanisms to build bridges with a past they still feel close, which has enabled them to provide their lives with meaning and order from the present: on the one side, the desire of communicating the symbols from the original Pilares, their golden years and the way it influenced their lives; on the other, the need to reproduce common sociability patterns, returning to the place, creating a civil association and building a space enabled them to activate memory from collectivity.

The year 1949 is the inflection point in the memory of *Pilareños*. The memories of their lives before the closure of the mine are timeless, they seem to occur in a continuum. Childhood, working hours and spaces for sociability are in their minds with no accurate chronological marks. From the interpretation of their past, *Pilareños* have fallen into a synonymy between the event and the year 1949. It is likely that, without the diaspora, the identity of the community may not have survived

as it has thus far. In a certain way, we can conclude that collective memory about the old mining town of Pilares exists as we know because of the exodus.

Translation: Luis Cejudo Espinoza

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