

V. THE PAST

The interview schedule incorporated elements of Cantrill's self-anchoring scale. On this scale the past is compared to the present, and the present is compared to what one thinks the future will be like. In Cantrill's administration of the test, the respondent chose numbers to compare the past, present, and future.

The same questions were asked in this study, but the questions were open ended, in an attempt to find out not only whether the present is seen as better or worse than the past, but also the dimensions along which the evaluation is made.

It was believed that this would broaden, deepen, and fill in the picture of the mental life of the people of La Loma and cast more light on the how of their perception of and response to the impending crisis.

To a certain degree this was accomplished. But in changing the measure from the cut and dry choice of a number to the open ended discussion, the distinction between past, present, and future lost their clarity. The respondents did not make those airtight distinctions; the precise division of these three categories was more a fiction of the original study than a measure of real, distinct categories which the people use to evaluate their life.

In talking about their past, the people were asked

to say what were the general features of life in the past as compared to today's life. They were then asked to say what were the happiest moments they remembered. The idea was to isolate the cognitive elements in their image of the past which for them constituted happiness. Differences were expected to be found between the two groups. Likewise they were asked to say which were the worst years, to isolate the factors which cause pain. Similarly, intergroup differences were expected.

The general tendency among the serranos was to glorify the past and look upon it as a happier period of their life in general.

The elements involved in the comparison are the following: weather (specifically amount of rain), freedom to clear hills at will, productivity of conucos, availability of animals, feeling of energy and invulnerability to sickness (i.e. youth vs. age), and quantity of people in the hills (the fewer people the better.).

Not everybody uses all of these categories. But these are the ones that seem personally relevant to the hill planters.

As far as weather goes, the past is seen as abundant in rainfall.

Porque aquí ante' se vivía  
bien, muy bien; aquí, cuan-  
do llovía mucho, llovía,  
much' agua, mucha lluvia

Because life used to be good  
here, very good here, it  
rained a lot, rained, a lot  
of showers, a lot of rain-

..sí, se vivía muy bien. L' agricultura rendía mucho. La crianza de ganado, puerco'...eso se vivía muy bien. Todo'..todo el mundo vivía d' eso.

fall...yeah, life was good. Farming really produced. And animal raising...cows, pigs... life was really good. Everybody lived this way.<sup>51</sup>

(Antes llovía más que ahora?) Uuuuuuuuuuu!!! Cuando yo vení' aquí...no no no no, eso no tenía nombre. Eso era... casualmente quedaba un día que no lloviera. Ud. vía afuera, así, lo patio' echaban com' una lam' azul de tant' agua. Sí!! Echaban una lam' azul. Y ya...hm!

(Did it used to rain more?) Wow! When I first came here... no no no, it was unbelievable. It was...it was a rare day that rain didn't fall. You'd look outside at your back yard...it had like a blue coating from so much rain. Yeah! There was like a blue coating. And now...ha!<sup>52</sup>

The past is a time of abundance in everything.

(No era así cuando Ud. era joven?) No, que va! Diferente tó'. Lo que sí, como le dije ayca, que hacía un conuquito de cuatro tarea' y la' comía sin pelai lo' plátano', se secaban en la mata. Había producción de todo enante. Era una floi pa' daise tó'. Animal y trabajo.

(So it wasn't this way when you were young?) No, not at all. Everything different. Like I told you yesterday, you'd make a little conuco of four tareas and you'd eat without even having to peel the plantains, they'd dry up right on the tree. Everything produced before. It was a time of plenty in everything...animals, farming.<sup>53</sup>

Today on the contrary: they feel the eyes of the forest rangers following them wherever they go. "Nos llevan en una clausura mala." ("They have us hemmed in"- the opposite of the image of soltura, looseness, which characterized their earlier life.) "Aquí lo que andan ello' e' con la vara de hierro atrá' de lo' agricultore'." "Here all they're doing is walking behind the farmers with an iron rod." "Andan cuatro, cinco atrá' de nosotros, viendo adonde...a vei onde que...adonde que 'tamo trabajando pa' cogcino' y llevaino' preso." So we've got four

or five of them following us everywhere, watching where it is we're working, so they can grab us and arrest us." This a vivid contrast to the freedom they enjoyed in past times, and is one of the principal features of life today which make it difficult for the farmers. This desire for soltura, freedom, is certainly economically relevant. If they can't chop the trees down they can't grow the food. But on the other hand one gets the impression that soltura has become a need in its own right, independently of the economics involved. Freedom and mobility have become a way of life. The past is seen as a period of freedom, the present as a period of enclosure.

This is allied to the concept of youth and the energy that accompanies youth.

Durante Ud. t'á joven, Ud. s' encuentra a que...vamo suponer, aunque Ud. no tenga nada pero Ud. s' encuentra orgulloso, porque 'tá joven, no e' voidá? Vive lleno de.. de orgullo y de..'lusiones', nuevoidá? No como cuand Ud. 'tá viejo. Ya...ei que 'tá viejo no 'tá pendiente má' que si consiguió un peso, coméiselo.

While you're young, you feel...let's suppose you don't have anything, but you know you're proud, because you're young, right? You live full of...pride and.. illusions, right? It's not like when you become old. Somebody that's old is just worried about finding a peso to eat with.<sup>54</sup>

Youth is the happy time when you feel strong enough to do anything. For this reason the past is automatically better than the present. There is a striking emphasis on physical well being and, as will be seen, a preoccupation with the waning of strength which accompanies old age.

These are the most frequent dimensions along which the serrano compares the past to the present. Obviously times have changed. The question is: why have they changed? To what does the serrano attribute his altered condition. There are two tendencies in the protocols. One of these is to view the decay as the inevitable result of "la profecía, escrita en los libros," "the prophecy written in the books." Nobody knows who made the prophecy or in what book it's found; but it has been passed on from father to son and is generally acknowledged by the older serranos to be the cause of present day ills. And there's no use fighting it, they say; this all had to happen. In the following the question that had been asked was: why have the rains grown scarcer?

Bueno...yo no m' e'plico, porque la gente dice que e' por la' demontacione. Pero que va! No señoi. E'to e'... a lo que yo entiendo...que decían lo' viejo' enante, di'que cumpliendo profecía, y que e'to había que veilo. Que con los año', según diba pasando año', Ud. sabe, había que dí' viendo eso siempre, de que las agua' no' diban e'caseai. Y aquí la loma y todo tenía que sei carretera. Y nosotros' decían que eso no podía sei porque...nosotro' tando mu-chachito, sabe...decían: "Noooo! Adiós, y de qué maneerera? Hay que sei un bruto pa' creei en eso." Aaaah? Pue' yea ya. Ya toa la' loma' tán traminá, ya se ve tó' carretera...ya todo

Well I...I can't figure it out; because people say it's because the mountains have been stripped of trees. But that's not so! No sir. This is..the way I look at it..as the old men used to say..this is the fulfillment of prophecy, and it had to happen. As the years went by, this had to happen, y' know...that the waters were going to get scarce. And that the hills and all this were going to turn into roads. And we used to say...that can't be..when we were little kids, y'know, we said "Noo, what are you talking about? How can that happen? You have to be stupid to believe in that." Yeah? Well just look. All the hills are crisscrossed now, roads everywhere! Roads

carretera...eeh? Eso viene por la mano de Dió'. To' eso había que veilo, eso había que veilo. Y no' feita mucho poi vei todavía. Oh sí..je je. No' feita mucho. No' feita mucho, je je. (Como qué?) Bueno, según..según van pasando año, que van la cosa, como quien dice, e'caseándose todo, todo s' e'tá e'caseando. Vea, la crianza se 'tá 'cabando. Y eso había que veilo. Vea, dicen que se llegarí' a un tiempo que los hijo' le diban a preguntar a su papá: "Papá, de qué era e'te hueso?" Entonje le diba conte'tar su papá: "Ay mi hijo. Es' era de un animal que se llamaba 'vaca'" ja ja ja ja. Bueno y así.. así va todo. Ud. no ve? E'to..e'to eran lugare' de mucha crianza. Cuando yo vine aquí, Ud.no veía má que vaca'...vaca, y toa clase 'e animalc. Y ya de casualidá Ud. v' una vaquita aquí. De casualidá Ud. ve una vaquita. Y ei que la tiene: que "Ay, se me murió la vaquita..." Eso lo que l' e'toy diciendo. Qu' eran cosa' que 'tán e'crita', y que habería...hay que veila. Ud. ve nosotros? Nosotros' muriremo...nosotro' taivé no lo' veamo, pero e' lo que toy oyendo, que falta mucho...mucha' cosa' poi vei todavía.

everywhere, right? That comes from the hand of God! All that had to happen, it had to happen. And we haven't seen anything yet, just wait, yes sir.. There's a lot more coming, ther's a lot more coming, heh heh. (Like what?) Well...as the years go passing and as things, like we say, get even scarcer... everything's getting scarcer. Look, animal-raising has almost gone out of existence. And this had to happen. Yes. They say that they's going to come a time when children would ask their father: "Daddy, what kind of a bone is that?" And then the father would answer: "That belonged to an animal we used to call 'a cow.'" ha ha ha. Well..and that's the way it all goes. Don't you see? This region used to have animals all over the place. When I first came here, all you saw were cows...cows, and every type of animal. And now it's rare when you see a cow around here. And the guy that owns it will end up saying: "Oh no, my poor cow died..." That's what I'm telling you. These are things that were written and that...that had to happen. Y' see us? Maybe we'll die...we may not see it, but according to what I hear, there's a lot more coming... a lot of things we haven't seen yet. 54

Why then are things going downhill? The Prophecy. This fits in nicely with the general tendency of the serrano to value submission and conformity. This fatalistic view of life's decay rationalizes a submission and passive stance toward it all, the stance that is most in keeping with what they value most in

their character. "De la conformidá viene tó'..." "Resignation brings all things..."

However other serranos, usually younger, have a different attitude. They take a more causal approach to the matter: if life is worse today than yesterday, it is because certain men have made it that way. The culprits, by coincidence, happen to be the same ones who are making life unlivable today. Why is there no rain? The sawmill has stripped bare many mountains and, since "pines attract rain..." the deforestation carried out by the Company is what has made the rain scarce. Why have the rivers dried up? The sawmill, in making roads, through the hills, "...troza las venas de agua," cuts across the veins of water, the streams that trickle down the folds of the hills. It is Company activity that has caused the decline of the times. Even the disappearance of livestock is due to the Company:

(Porqué se acabó la crianza?) Porque la hicié'n acabai! Fué obligao que no' la hicié'n acabai! De'de que se metié'n esa gente ahí, ..dique lo' puerco' le arrancaban lo' pino'. La vaca, ei que la tenía tuvo que mataila a coméisela porque ello' le' tiraban lo' pino' arriba y la' rompían. Sí.. que matá'n mucha' vaca'. Y entonce' quien la tenía, la sacó.

(Why have you stopped raising animals?) Because they made us stop! They forced us to stop. Ever since those guys came here (the Company).... supposedly our pigs were hurting their pines. And cows...whoever had cows had to kill them and eat them because those guys would chop trees over on the cows and break their backs. Yes, they killed a lot of cows. And whoever had any got rid of them.

And freedom? That is gone too. Why? The forest rangers. All the elements of the good life have been



snatched away from them, one by one. The older men see it as the hand of God--"y hay que sei confoime..." " and you have to be resigned." The not so older men see it as the hand of some evil men. This explains the answer that so many of them gave to the question: "Think back: which was the worst period of your life?" Most of them responded: "Esta de ahora." The one right now.

To sum up: the past is better than the present. All those elements which constitute the good life for the serrano are disappearing, and appear on the brink of extinction. Why has life gone down? Some say God's Prophecy. A very safe evaluation; since it is God, one can be conforme, because "...he who brings want also knows how to bring abundance." Others say it is the evil company, the evil forest rangers, and the evil rich. A bit more dangerous. But in comparing the past to the present, all have carefully avoided seeing what is at the center of their present plight: the government which they elected--the Jefe whom they placed in office--has, in the name of "national interest" decided to eliminate their way of life. The fantasies which they concoct about God and the evil Company are all attempts to make sense of a plight whose origin their minds refuse to admit to consciousness.

The dimensions along which the worker compares his present lot to his past differ greatly from those of the serrano. In general the past is seen as better, but for different reasons.



The most salient elements involved are: greater spending power of money, greater variety of foods, fewer family responsibilities, greater availability of recreational diversions. Some examples:

Bueno, en la época que yo me vide má' contento..porque sí, aquí había tiempo que el arró se comía má' barato, había ba'timento' má' barato. Cuando nojotro trabajábano' a dieciocho centavo por millai, Ud. comía. E' má. Aquí ná' má' había un tiempo bueno. Que fué cuando se compraba la carne a 5¢ y el casave a do' centavo. Y había ba'timento que Ud. diba onde mí: "Yo vine a bu'cai...yo vine a comprai 20¢ de plátano." Ud. tenía que llevai un burro. "Coge ahí, saca to' lo que Ud. quiera ahí." Y cuando Ud. lo pretaba, no podía. Ud. decía: "Ya 'tá bueno." Esa fué la única ve' que aquí se gozaba. Ina libra de carne valía 5¢. Eh..l' habichuela a do' centavo' y tre'. Ei maí', a tre' chole'. Esa fué la época que se vivía la mejoi vida, en es' edá que tengo yo. Se trabajaba, Ud. ganaba poco, pero 'taba tó' abundante.

Pero las cosas eran baratas. Ud. iba a una fonda d' esas y se comía 10¢ de comida, y le daban un plato de moro con dos o tres pedazos de carne, y dos pedazos de plátanos, y se sentía satisfecho, con 10¢, je je je.

Como le digo, de loj momento' maj alegre' que 'tuve... eso' tres año' que 'tuve ahí

The period in which I was happiest....it's a fact, there was a time here when rice was cheaper, food was cheaper. when we used to earn 18¢ a millar you could eat well. As a matter of fact there was only one good time here. That was when meat was 18¢ and casave was 2¢. And there was food...you'd come to my place: "I came to buy 20¢ worth of plantains." Well you hadda bring along a burro. "Sure, help yourself, take as many as you want." You tried stuffing them in but you couldn't...you hadda say "Whoa, that's enough." That was the only time that you had fun here. A pound of meat cost 20¢. Beans were for two cents and three. Corn, three cents. That was the time when life was best, in my whole life. You worked, you didn't make much, but everything was abundant.<sup>56</sup>

But things were cheap. You went to one of those stands and bought 10¢ worth of food, and they gave you a plate of rice and beans with two or three chunks of meat and two pieces of plantain, and you went away filled, with only ten cents, heh heh.<sup>57</sup>

Like I say, the happiest moments I've had were those three years that I was there

en Santiago con mi señora y mi tre' hijito' que tengo.. tenía, que ná' má' teníamo' tre' cuando eso. Porque allí yo vivía en Santiago, yo pasaba la semana trabajando, pensando en la tarde, salía del trabajo pa' mi casa. Eh, muchaj vece' l' invita- b' a ella: "Vamo' ir ai teatro." Que mucha' vece' la cue'tión era de ...la visita de la familia, qu' éramo' tó'..vivíamo' todo' ahí. No' di' traíamo' mucha' vece' en el teatro, que hay ahí. Una taide... no' íbamo' ei domingo ahí donde nue'tra familia, pa- saban la taide junto', y así en fin haciendo de tó, ...y visitádono', y visi- tando los amigo'.

Ante' era mejor que ahora. Porque...fué lo que le dije.. que uno ante..yo no tenía familia, y que si uno echa- ba dic' peso' en ei bolsi- llo, puece..sabía que era de uno. Y no tenía que mirai nada atráda, porque ya uno no tenía un hujo, no tenía una mujei. Si.

in Santiago with my wife and the three children I have... had, we only had three at that time. I lived there in Santiago, worked all week looking forward to the af- ternoons...went directly home after finishing work. A lot of times I'd invite my wife: "Let's go to the show." A lot of times it was a matter of...visiting relatives, we were all..we all lived there. We often had a good time in the theaters that are there. One afternoon... we used to go on Sundays to our relatives' place, spent the afternoon together, in short, doing everything... visiting each other, visi- ting friends.<sup>58</sup>

Things used to be better. Because..like I said before.. You used to be able...I didn't have a family, and if you put ten bucks in your pock- et, well you knew it was yours. And you didn't have to worry about anything else, because you didn't have a son, you didn't have a wife.<sup>59</sup>

Life in La Loma is seen as bad because all of these elements are missing. Today everything is expensive; the food provided in the company store is monotonous and the diet is the same from day to day; most of them feel "burdened" with large families; there is no chance to enjoy oneself after work.

Most of the complaints are in fact true. Prices are higher than before, local food is extremely mono- tonous; since there is no electricity in La Loma,

there are no refrigerators; no vegetables are available; the company store provides neither fresh milk nor fresh meat; they must be bought locally. And with the system of payments the way it is, they rarely have money for meat or milk. Almost all have wives and children; the size of the families varies greatly; but a family itself is seen by many of the workers as a burden, and many of their complaints contain elements of "life would be better if I had no family." As far as recreation goes, there is little available. The pool-hall and occasional baseball games provide the main diversions. But most nights after sunset the sawmill is quite dead.

Thus in general the workers feel discontent. Present life is seen as unpleasant; things in general were better in the past. Who or what is to blame for the downhill plunge life has taken? None of the workers turn to a "Prophecy" as the cause: it's the "rich bosses" who are to blame. Is life costlier? It's because the rich have raised the price of everything. Is money scarce? The Company has set up a system of vales, credit slips, whereby the workers rarely see cash and are as often as not in debt to the Company. Recreation? The Company refuses to help them get access to the outside world. The workers know that life in the Sierra is bound to be monotonous and no complaints were voiced that the Company hadn't turned the sawmill into a pleasure-park. What was complained about was the fact that the Company

wouldn't allow the truck to take the workers down into the surrounding towns, where at least on occasion they could enjoy some of the commodities they had come to desire.

Comparing the serranos and the workers, it is clear that both groups are dissatisfied with their present lot, both groups look back to happier times. But as might have been expected, the elements involved are different for the two groups. In expressing their felt needs each group is revealing quite different notions of what the good life consists of. The serrano's desires lie basically on his conuco; he most feels the lack of rain for his land, scarcity of livestock, inability to look for new land. He does not mention money too frequently, nor the lack of diversion, nor the monotony of the diet. The worker on the other hand is bothered by all these elements.

Each has different views of their past and different complaints about their present. But both groups blame life's decline on what they see as purposeful selfish malevolence on the part of certain persons more powerful than they. And a later chapter will show how both groups see hopes for an upsurge only if a protective hand reaches down from above and protects them from these malefactors.

At the end of the last chapter, the intergroup differences were tentatively linked with the different economic situations of the two groups, the workers participating in

a modern system and displaying in their self-image certain elements that characterize participants in a modern system. Likewise with reference to the intergroup differences in their comparison of the past to the present, the workers emphasize elements which are characteristically important to participants in a modern system: money and diversions which only money can buy. The serranos on the other hand are psychologically, as well as physically, still living in the sierra. Their hearts are set on their conucos; they would be happy if they could return to the freedom and abundance (both in agriculture and animals) of the days of yore. From the internal, as well as from the external, point of view, the serranos and the workers are living in different ages.