

III CONCLUSION

The field work of this summer was undertaken in the hope that ethnographic research could be done in such a fashion as to provide specific, concrete answers as to the origin of poverty in the sierra. The synchronic description first given of the current horticultural sequence followed by the diachronic glimpses into various aspects of the system, now permit the construction of the following model of the genesis of the serrano's plight.

The upsurge in population that hit the Dominican Republic in the second and third decade of this century paved the way for the disruption of the centuries old subsistence patterns. The once universal availability of land for subsistence cropping--an abundance founded on a sparse population and no formalized tenure system--came to an end. Throughout most of the fertile lowlands the old way of life based on extensive livestock grazing and informal, communal land tenure was demolished. Extensive horticulture gave way to intensive agriculture; tenure by usufruct was supplanted by tenure by deed, and the right to send animals out to forage was curtailed by agricultural zoning laws. The Dominican peasantry was forced onto small, permanent-field minifundias, or into tenant relationships on the land of others, or into the search for wage labor in the pueblos.

But one segment of the campesino population fled these changes and migrated up into the high sierra, a vast, unpopulated, unclaimed no man's land. They brought with them their economic endeavours--livestock grazing on unclaimed land and shifting cultivation--which had existed for centuries and which was being eliminated behind them. They applied their old technology to the new environment of the steep mountain slopes.

But the attempt was doomed from the start. Their technology was out of place in the mountain environment. The steepness of the slopes and the complete lack of terracing technology among the serranos brought rapid erosion to the already thin topsoil. Few sites could be cropped successfully for more than one year. Deforestation took place; and the soil erosion that occurred on the steep slopes prevented the return of healthy ligneous secondary growth; low grade scrub and brush replaced the once luxuriant forest. This spread of low grade vegetation was further increased by the grazing practices, where fire was intentionally set to the hills precisely for the purpose of producing this herbaceous vegetation. Such a way of life is consistent only with lowland topography and only with a very low population density; and that stage had now passed forever from Dominican history. Even the sparse population that eventually migrated and reproduced in the hills was too much for the primitive

economy of which extensive grazing was an essential component; and most of the animals eventually died out. The mountaineers were edged into ever more heavy dependence on their conucos. There were two classes of appropriative activities which might have released the pressure by providing a cash income; the sale of timber and the panning for gold. But as the serranos began turning to these activities in the late thirties and early forties, calamity came from another source. The outside world--government and big business--took a sudden interest in the exploitable resources of the sierra. Laws were passed which made the performance of these activities a punishable offense. And offenders were in fact punished; Trujillo succeeded in effectively bringing the entire national territory within arm's reach of the law.

The serranos were now almost completely dependent on the land. A market for coffee opened up in the late forties and early fifties, inducing the planting of thousands of tareas of coffee--reducing even more drastically the amount of space available for cropping. Thus the serranos had to return prematurely to fallow land. Though the man-hours of labor on the conuco are just as great as in former years, the yields are now less than a third of what they formerly were. The livestock component of their economy, which once was the sustaining axis, is now a diluted travesty; few serranos have more than three or four cows and a half-dozen pigs. The golden age

has passed and decline has set in. The population has stagnated, and each year the sierra is losing more people, who decide to try their luck in the burgeoning barrios of the nearby pueblos.

The Dominican government has expressed determination to stop once and for all any clearing of mountain slopes by shifting cultivators, and apparently has serious plans for removing the people gradually from the hills, resettling them on permanent-field agrarian reform plots in the lowlands.

The present residents of Pino Tumbao are probably the last generation of Dominican shifting cultivators. The serrano, as defined by this ancient and special way of life, will pass from the scene. And with him will pass the last and only significant technological remnant of the aboriginal past, the slash-and-burn conuco.

NOTES

Introduction.

1. Harris. 1964:0111.

2.

Text

1. See Black (1969:168). For a characteristic exposition of this point of view, see also Frake (1969:23-37).

2. Padilla. 1960:22

3. Smith. 1960: 912-16. A good example of a discussion that ends up arguing over definitions.

4. For the discussion of the following section I relied on: Roberts (1966:Chaps. 2 and 19), Núñez Molina (1968), Mears (1963:25-9), Rogers (1962), Miró (1966:1-32).

5. Roberts. 1966:12.

6. Spencer. 1966: 30-36.

7. Roberts. 1966: 20-21.

8. From OAS maps made available to me in Santo Domingo.

9. Núñez Molina.(1968: Chap. 6.

10. An unpublished report of John Belcher of the University of Georgia, made available to me by the U.N. office in Santo Domingo.

11. Spencer. 1966: 45.

12. Roberts. 1966: Chap 4.

13. Ibid.

14. Conklin. 1961.

15. Spencer. 1966: 19-22.

16. Ibid.

17. Bosch. 1970: Chap. 4.

18. Antonini. 1968: Chap. XVI.

19. Spencer. 1966; 67-9.
20. Antonini. 1968.
21. Franco. 1970; Chap. 1.
22. Redfield. 1964. Lewis. 1963.
23. Spencer. 1966; Chap. 6.
24. Conklin. 1957; 1.
25. Redfield. 1964.
26. Spencer. 1966; 4.
27. Wolf. 1966; 19.
28. Spencer. 1966; 29.
29. Antonini. 1968.
30. Conklin. 1957.
31. Harris. 1964; 95-6.
32. Ibid.
33. Rouse. 1946-50; 507-545.
34. Conversations with foresters in the Dominican Republic.
35. Antonini. 1968.
36. Lewis. 1963; 150-1.
37. Ibid., 153, 154.
38. Bosch. 1970; Chap. 4.
39. Ibid.
40. Spencer. 1966; Chap. 4.
41. Ibid.
42. Fernández de Oviedo. 1963; 27-9.
43. Núñez Molina (1968), beans are not even mentioned. In Mears (1963; 28), they are given but passing mention.

44. Spencer. 1966:44.
45. Ibid.
46. Roberts. 1966: 278.
47. Winters. 1967: 30-1.
48. Mortensen. 1966:13.
49. Wolf. 1969: Chap. 7.
50. Schaedel. 1962: 79.
51. Spencer. 1966:33.
52. Mortensen. 1966: 184, 251.
53. Spencer. 1966: 42.
54. Bosch. 1970.

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