III. SHIFTING CULTIVATION: GENERAL

The shifting cultivation of the serranos is the principal point of interest here. But rarely is shifting cultivation--be it by primitive groups of practitioners or non-primitive communities--found as the sole economic mainstay of a group. It is invariably combined with other economic activities.[23] Among primitive groups the supplementary activities frequently take the form of hunting and gathering.

The economic endeavours of the typical serrano family, over and above the cropping of conucos, include the raising of cows and pigs, and/or the growing of coffee on the mountainsides (an activity quite apart from the conuco). Over and above these activities, the serrano occasionally earns money selling the logs of already dead pine trees (law forbids the felling of live ones) to buyers who have paid for a government license to transport such lumber and sell it in the pueblo. (This type of activity is called sacando postes). Furthermore money is frequently earned by the gathering and selling of cuaba, inflammable pine wood cut from the ubiquitous stumps of the pine trees which were felled by the lumber company during its twenty-odd years of functioning in the sección of Monte Adentro, before being shut down in late 1967 by the government of Balaguer.

The most recent supplement to the conuco has taken the form of a monthly grant from the government, which has been reaching the sierra since August of 1970. This twenty-peso

grant which is made to most of the families in Monte Adentro is part of an incipient Agrarian Reform program. The government, determined to put an end to the felling of pines, has stated intentions of eventually resettling the *serrano* families on parcels of Agrarian Reform land in the lowlands. In the meantime the political leaders of the province have succeeded in having the *serranos* included on the Agrarian Reform rolls as though they already had land, and they are thus given the monthly twenty pesos.

Thus the economic endeavours of the *serranos* go far beyond the practice of shifting cultivation. It is time to single out from their complex repertoire that one sequence, shifting cultivation, and make some general observations.

There are such fundamental differences in the technicques used by different shifting cultivation groups that one wonders if this is not the case of a name being applied to phenomena which in reality are quite different. But in spite of the difference, there are two criteria that have been present in all of the systems which have been called shifting cultivation: *firing* and *fallowing*. According to Conklin:

> Minimally, shifting cultivation may be defined as any agricultural system in which fields are cleared by firing and are cropped discontinuously (implying periods of fallowing which always average longer than periods of cropping.[24]

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There are various names for this system of agriculture. In the Dominican Republic the name of a shifting cultivation plot is generally conuco. But this aboriginal term has also come to be applied to small permanent-field plots in other parts of the Dominican Republic; as the cropping system evolved into permanent-field cropping, the aboriginal name for the small plot persisted, though firing and fallowing disappeared from the technological repertoire. Similarly the word parcela, which generally refers to a small, lowland permanent-field plot, is also used in some places to refer to shifting agriculture plots in nearby hills. Thus there is no term in the Dominican Republic (to my knowledge) which is used exclusively to refer to a cropping system in which firing and fallowing are the defining characteristics. In Central America the shifting plots are called milpa.[25]

Spencer argues that shifting cultivation was the first form of agriculture in human history, "...the elementary and pioneering cropping system used by the early agricultural occupants of many forested regions of the world."[26] Wolf calls it "swidden farming" and classifies it as a "palaeotechnic ecotype," an offspring of the First Agricultural Revolution which began around 7,000-6,000 B.C.[27] As has beenppointed out, shifting cultivation was the principal economic mainstay of the pre-Columban Arawak Indians on the island of Hispaniola, and was passed on th the Spaniards and African slaves before the complete exter-

mination of the aboriginals.

It has been pointed out that shifting cultivation is not invariably linked to any sort of settlement pattern. Even more obviously, it is not linked to any level of cultural or social development. It is the mainstay of many primitive groups, but it is also the chief occupation of many non-primitive communities.

In similar fashion, shifting cultivation, though it is confined principally to the tropics, is not inevitably bound to one type of environment within this zone. In modern times the vast majority of groups who are practicing shifting cultivation are doing so in mountainous regions. This has led some writers to search for a natural affinity between shifting cultivation and the mountains--by alluding, for example, to the fact that it is easier to fell trees on slopes than on level ground. Spencer takes a different view of the matter:

> It is culture and culture history, rather than physiography, which dictates the broad environmental location of shifting cultivation as a cropping system... When free choice of any landform situation has been available, and when the group has not been culture-bound, the choice has been for open to smoother areas.. When all such territory has been preempted by more powerful groups, the choice is no longer free, and groups have had either to take less favorable situations or to fight for the space they deemed desirable. Many shifting cultivators have been shoved into environmental regions of lesser quality, generally rougher in landform, and chiefly made up of acutely sloping surfaces... What we see in the past century is not the optimum and logical operation of the system of shifting cultivation but its declining practice in regions and on lands that as yet no one else really wants.[28]

This is precisely what has happened in the Dominican Republic in recent years. The agricultural terrains in the valleys and lowlands have been occupied by a few *latifundistas* and thousands of *minifundistas* as irrigation became more widespread.[29] Accompanying this process has been the spread ofdland tenure by deed. Many persons who found themselves squeezed off of lowland terrain have chosen the option of taking to the mountains--as in the case of the ancestors of the present day inhabitants of Monte Adentro. On the island of Hispaniola, furthermore, with its history of slave revolts (both in the Dominican Republic and Haiti, though more spectacularly in the latter)and constant political turmoil and forced recruitment into various armies, the mountains have always been a place of refuge for various groups. This point we have discussed under residence patterns.

In short, the presence of this shifting cultivator group in the sierra is due not to any affinity between mountainous regions and their shifting cultivation technology, but rather to the fact that up until recently nobody else has had any use for the sierra. On the contrary, there is a strong *lack* of congruence between the technology which the *serranos'* ancestors brought with them to the hills and the natural environment. The fact that shifting cultivation is being practiced in Pino Tumbao is no indication of an affinity between Pino Tumbao and shifting cultivation; rather it is the result of scarcity of land in more suitable regions.