

niveau um 2700 bis 3300 m fördert die Ausbildung der Nebelwälder im engeren Sinne. An Gebirgsstöcken des Binnenlandes ist die untere Nebelgrenze im Bereich des Kartenblattes meist in Höhen um 2700 m ausgebildet. Luvseiten sind vorwiegend nord- bis ost-exponiert.

An der Ostabdachung der Sierra Madre Oriental ist den Nebelgebieten eine Stufe maximaler Niederschlagsmengen vorgelagert. Die Niederschläge entstammen den Wolkenbänken, die weiter oben als Nebel aufliegen. Die maximale Stufe des Niederschlags ist an der Nordostabdachung in Höhen zwischen 800 und 1400 m, an der Ostabdachung bereits bei 600–800 m ausgebildet.

Die Hochflächen sind zum Teil ohne Abfluß zum Meer. Es sind sogenannte endorheische Gebiete (nach DE MARTONNE), deren Abfluß in versalzten Binnen-Restseen erfolgt. Damit zeigen sie die negative Wasserbilanz der Region an. Nur Halophyten können sich in ihrer Umgebung ansiedeln. Diese vegetationsarmen Areale sind die Reservoirs von utgebundenem Feinmaterial, das der Wind als Staub über weite Strecken verfrachtet. An Konfluenzpunkten sind meterhohe Dünen aufgehäuft.

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SICILIAN AGRO-TOWNS

With 4 figures and 1 table

RUSSELL KING and ALAN STRACHAN

Zusammenfassung: Sizilianische Agro-Städte

Große ländliche Zusammenballungen sind eine kennzeichnende Siedlungsform über weite Teile des Mittelmeergebietes. Sie finden ihren klassischen Ausdruck in Zentral-Sizilien. Ihre Einwohnerzahl beträgt in der Regel 3 000–15 000. Die Ursprünge der Agro-Städte spiegeln geographische Faktoren wider, die heute nicht mehr zutreffen.

Zwei ursächliche Hauptfaktoren sind wichtig: historische Unsicherheit und die Verbindung mit feudalen Latifundien. Andere Faktoren, wie Wassermangel und Malaria, sind eher Zufall oder Folge als Ursache. Agro-Städte sind auch eng verbunden mit extensiver Getreide- und Weidelandnutzung und haben eine Sozialstruktur und eine Lebensart erzeugt, die eine wirtschaftlich vernünftige Siedlungsver-

teilung verhindern. Allgemeine Muster von Nachbarschaftsbildung und Einzelhandels- und Dienstleistungsfunktionen kann man gleichermaßen feststellen. Die Auswanderung ist entscheidend für die Zukunft dieser Agro-Städte, aber lokale wirtschaftliche Fortschritte in der Landwirtschaft, Industrie und Kommunikationsentwicklung sind ebenso wichtig. Viele Agro-Städte jedoch werden weiterhin eine rasche Entvölkerung erleiden.

"The interior of Sicily contrasts greatly with the coasts with their gardens, orchards and tourists. In central Sicily the landscape has a steppe-like quality . . . one can travel for hours without seeing a sign of human life or habitation . . . To find the settlements one must lift one's eyes towards the mountain tops: there the agro-towns are clustered. Their location appears now almost incomprehensible, up to 500 metres above their valley bottoms . . . In the bare valley lands one sees, here and there, a poor house whose isolation underlines rather than interrupts the countryside's solitude." (AHLMANN, 1925, pp. 271, 284)

Large rural agglomerations – variously referred to as 'agro-towns', 'peasant-cities' or 'rural dormitories' – are a distinctive settlement type characteristic of many parts of southern Europe and the Mediterranean. They exhibit their most classic development in Sicily where over 150 may be counted in the central, southern and western parts of the island (Fig. 1a).

Most Sicilian agro-towns carry populations of between 3,000 and 15,000 people, but a few are much larger. With (until recently) 50–90% of their inhabitants engaged in agriculture (Table 1) they are basically villages in their functional character. Emigration and the recent expansion of administrative and service employment are now modifying this situation somewhat. Despite the fact that Sicilian agro-towns alienate the farmer from the land he cultivates (DEMANGEON, 1927, p. 4), they persist for reasons of physical and social inertia. Yet the pattern constitutes a considerable structural obstacle to the modernisation and intensification of agriculture because of, among other things, this physical separation of farmers from their fields (KING, 1970, pp. 85–87).

MONHEIM (1971a) characterises Sicilian agro-towns as a hybrid mixing of rural and urban elements. Each has a similar range of central place service functions resulting in a weakly developed hierarchical structure. Table 1 presents detailed census data for five sample agro-towns. This urban way of life of Sicilian peasants is related to the long tradition of pre-industrial urbanism in the Mediterranean culture area (PITKIN, 1963, p. 126).

This paper attempts to reconstruct the social and economic geography of agro-towns in Sicily, based on field work and a close knowledge of several such settlements. It also discusses their future viability against the background of current development policies.

The origin and persistence of agro-towns: A problem in geographical explanation

The settlement system of central Sicily is made up of four elements. Firstly is the compact agglomeration or agro-town proper, frequently the only settlement within the commune. Secondly, smaller centres (*casali*) exist. These vary in origin and function: some are of great antiquity, such as the *robbe* which formed the basis of Charlotte Gower Chapman's classic anthropological study of Milena (GOWER CHAPMAN, 1973), but most have emerged in the last hundred years as valley-located daughter settlements of the hill-top agro-town. A third element of the settlement pattern are the *masserie* or fortified headquarters of the old feudal estates. Finally, there are the *case sparse* or dispersed farmsteads of small peasant owner-farmers. A similar structure is recognised on mainland southern Italy (DICKINSON, 1956). The important feature to note in central Sicily is the almost complete domination of the agro-town element, (95% of the population).

Geographers, historians and anthropologists have advanced many reasons for the clustering of the Sicilian rural population in hill-top agro-towns. Writing of the Mediterranean region in general, SEMPLE (1932, pp. 539–540) explained the agglomeration in terms of scarce spring sites, while PITKIN (1963, p. 123) in a recent anthropological study maintains that topography invites the hill-top nucleation. KISH (1953, p. 496) and UNGER (1953, p. 506), writing respectively on Calabria and Campania said that malaria made lowland settlements unhealthy, thus forcing their abandonment; yet MARASPINI (1968, p. 49) states that in Apulia the population is huddled into densely-packed agro-towns in order to leave as much land as possible for cultivation. A final example attempts to develop an evolutionary model in which the earliest settlements were hill-top forms of the Sicilian (pre-classical) period, and their persistence is explained by 'the difficulty of combating the disadvantageous tropical climate' (AHLMANN, 1925, pp. 288, 307).

Many of these attempted explanations, however, are *ad hoc* rationalisations with little foundation in systematic study. An early attempt to present systematic generalisations about southern European settlement types was made by DEMANGEON (1927). Three broad categories of influences were identified: 1) natural conditions (topography, soil, water resources); 2) social factors (ethnic links, security, health); and 3) rural economic conditions (type of agriculture, agrarian structure etc.). This preliminary classification does not arrive at final statements; for this we must look to an important recent paper by BLOK (1969a) which enables us to separate genuinely causal factors from those which are contingent and consequential.

Two sets of factors seem to attain the status of genuine causal relationships: the historical pattern of

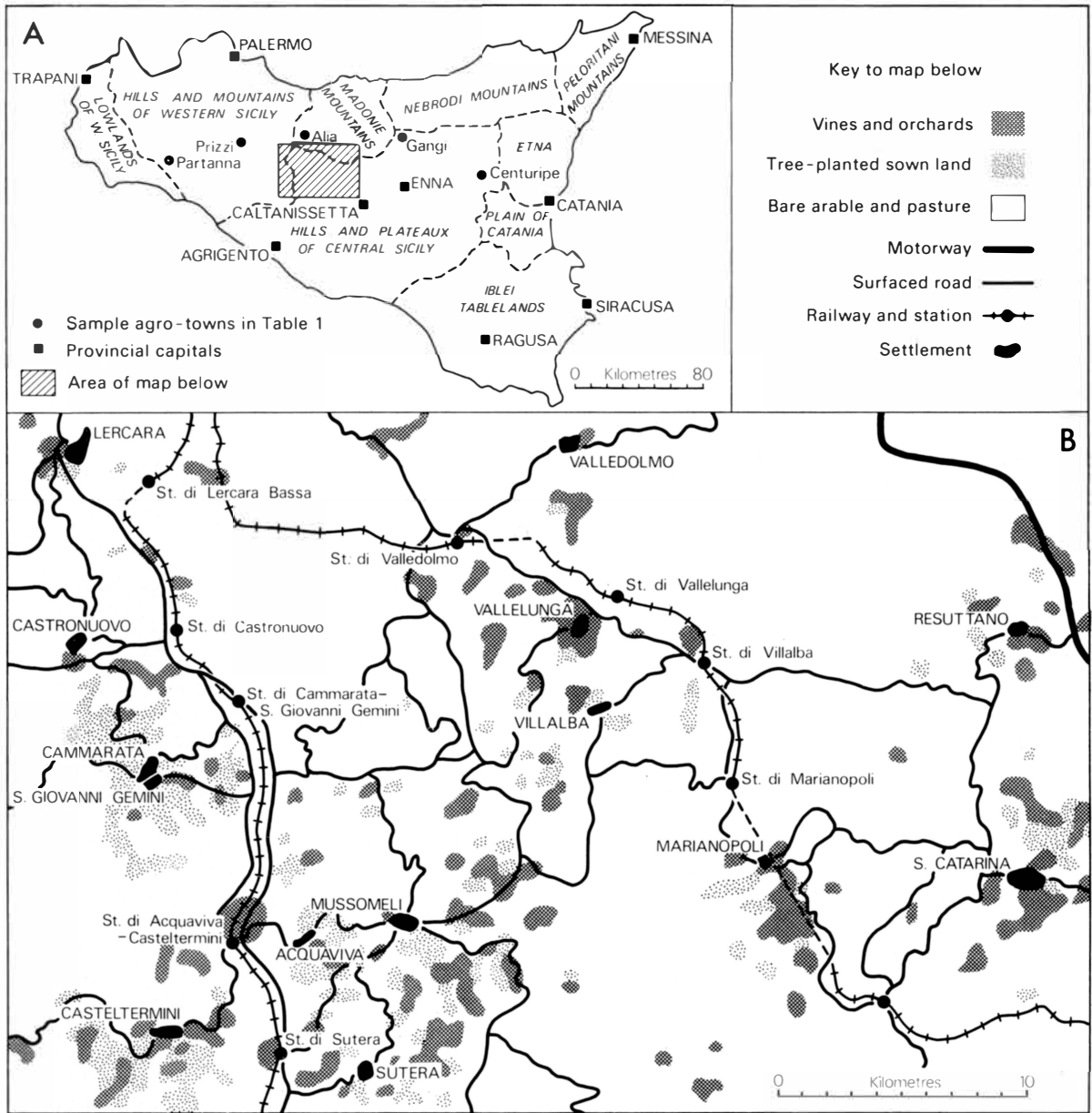


Fig. 1: A) Sicily: a regional subdivision
 B) Settlement, communications and land use in a typical tract of central Sicily. The location of the more intensive land uses (vines, orchards and tree-planted sown land) near the settlements is clear.

insecurity in Sicily; and the association of agro-towns with large estates or latifundia. Whilst it is true that insecurity does not invariably cause agglomeration – MARINELLI (1925, p. 202) notes that in Friuli (north-east Italy) and the Roman Campagna fortified farms dealt with the problem – it does seem to be a very important causal factor, and is certainly stressed by most writers on settlement geography in Sicily and the Mediterranean. The turbulence which succeeded the decline of Roman imperial power led to the abandon-

ment of coastal and lowland sites as the population retreated inland seeking out mountain spurs, high terraces and hill-tops. Under the more settled administration of the Arabs, from the ninth to the twelfth centuries, marked settlement dissemination did occur, chiefly in irrigated lowlands, but this was wiped out by the troublous times of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries when much of the countryside was depopulated. The colonial pattern developed under the Catalan hegemony (fifteenth century) and the

Spanish empire (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) reinforced this insecurity in the countryside, forcing peasants to remain in their densely packed hill-top fortress towns (SCHNEIDER, P., 1972, p. 257). Insecurity does not, however, explain the persistence of agro-towns, for the eradication of insecurity in recent decades has not led to the break-up of the nucleated settlements.

The second causal factor of some importance is the association of agro-towns with a feudal-type tenure structure. Many agro-towns were founded by feudal barons for their landless serf-labourers¹). Peasant tenures were left unprotected against this Spanish colonial expansion which transformed communal pasture into large wheat estates. According to MARINELLI (1925, p. 203) the overlords avoided settling the peasants in the open countryside to keep them more closely under control, to avoid the higher cost of house construction and the danger of malaria, and to prevent isolated settlements from becoming a pretext for claiming land under more permanent ownership. From the fifteenth century on there was considerable population increase in association with this attempt to valorise the central Sicilian wheat lands and to reverse the depopulation of the countryside which had occurred during the previous two centuries. Half of Sicily's present-day communes are post-fifteenth century foundations (MORI, 1920, p. 149). In the seventeenth century alone 96 feudal agglomerations were founded in central and western Sicily. By 1748 282 of Sicily's 326 communes were baronial settlements on latifundia ceded to vassals, the rest being demesne communes, depending directly on the king (MONHEIM, 1969, pp. 16–17). After the end of the eighteenth century no further feudal settlement foundation occurred, although the population continued to increase up to the end of the nineteenth century when emigration started to make inroads on the steady demographic expansion of the agro-towns.

Against these two major factors others appear as contingent or consequential. As an example of the former relationship, water shortage has only been a problem where peasants lacked their own land and capital to dig wells (BLOK, 1969a, pp. 124–125). In spite of the alleged 'tyranny imposed by water on settlement forms in the Mediterranean' (DEMANGEON, 1927, p. 12), there are plenty of examples, in eastern and western Sicily and in other parts of the Mediterranean, of peasants living in dispersed settlements each with its own well. Malaria is an example of a conse-

quential factor: it tended to follow the abandonment of dispersed settlements on the plains rather than cause the establishment of agro-towns, although, once the disease was established, it acted to preserve the upland nucleated pattern and caused new waves of settlement foundation to shun the lowlands (LE LANNOU, 1936, pp. 121–126).

Another important factor accounting for the persistence (as opposed to the origin) of agro-towns is the way in which these settlements have generated their own cultural patterns which make isolated farm settlement unattractive. The sheer size of agro-towns has given rise to a pseudo-urban way of life which involves contempt for the land and those who work on it. The negative value put on farm labour (particularly for women) is a facet of Sicilian and Mediterranean rural life commented on by most social anthropologists writing about this region.

Economic Regime of Central Sicily

The circumstances outlined above surrounding the origin of agro-towns in Sicily help to explain the way in which such settlements were related to each other, to the local economy, and to the outside world. Although physically isolated, agro-towns were linked to the outside world by baronial cliques controlling the towns' economy and the land's export produce. Mutual integration between agro-towns was, and is, minimal since most were not located at nodal points or natural market centres. Even today the road and rail systems are inadequate as means of facilitating contact between neighbouring groups of agro-towns (Fig. 1b).

At the local level, land use regimes and tenancy systems are an important part of the ecology of agro-towns. Maps of the distribution of large estates and *latifondo* land (PETINO, 1964, pp. 48–49; ROCHEFORT, 1961, p. 155) show a concentration in the provinces of Agrigento, Caltanissetta, Enna, southern and eastern Palermo, and western Catania: precisely the areas dominated by agro-towns. Large estates leave little room for peasant smallholdings; in many agro-town communes less than 10% of the land is owner-farmed (ROCHEFORT, 1961, p. 161). Short-term leases, which involve an annual circulation of tenants and sharecroppers, predominate. Moreover a peasant holding, whether rented or owned, is likely to be highly fragmented (due partly to inheritance laws), with several plots located in different parts of the commune territory. The peasant is unlikely therefore to be able to set up a dispersed farmstead on the land and residence in the agro-town is the only option.

The tenancy system is also functionally related to the land use regime. The common wheat-pasture-fallow sequence means that peasant-worked plots have to be continually shifted to accommodate the rotation. Extensive monocultural cereals farming demands work

¹) In the standard historical work on Sicily, MACK SMITH (1968, p. 196) writes that the founding of new villages by the baronage conferred considerable prestige and the illusion or reality of power. Maps of these baronial foundations, with details of dates, types, sizes etc. can be found in MORI (1920, p. 153) and PECORA (1968, pp. 132, 137).

only at certain times of the year, so again residence on the land is discouraged.

Thus all features of the local agrarian economy worked against peasant settlement on the *latifondo* land. Although most farm workers have no choice but to live in the agro-town, such a situation is in many ways economically irrational. Much time and effort are spent travelling to and from scattered plots of land. In some villages half the parcels farmed by peasants are more than 5 km from their dwellings in the agro-town (ROCHFORD, 1961, p. 166). Many large landowners pick up their agricultural labourers by lorry to take them to the fields. For the individual plot holder travel is not so easy, as many plots are located far from roads and are accessible only by mule-track.

These are perfect pre-conditions for the development of a zonal pattern of decreasing land use intensity away from the agro-towns (Fig. 1b). Such a pattern has been described by PRESTIANNI (1947, pp. 98–99) as follows: 'Around the settlement there is a zone of intensive cultivation of tree crops, small fruit and vegetable plots, forming a halo of varying extent according to the size of the settlement. Beyond this zone extend the former fiefs or latifundia, generally devoted to cereals and pasture. Interestingly cultivation is most intensive immediately adjacent to the settlement where (because of the hill-top location) land is of poorer quality'. CHISHOLM (1962, pp. 62–64) has interesting data on land use intensity around Canicatti, one of the largest Sicilian agro-towns (1971, population 27,600), which show a steady decline from the settlement's periphery out to about 8 km.

The classic feudal economy gave way after 1812 to a more complex agrarian structure. The traditional feudal elite was largely replaced by a rising rural bourgeoisie (mostly made up of the former agents and intermediaries of the feudal leaders) who were able to acquire much of the land released from feudal tenure. This new landowner class, due to a combination of agricultural depression, population increase and their own class aspirations, increasingly assumed the characteristics of *rentiers* without any real function in agricultural production or progress (ROSSI-DORIA, 1958). Having lost their communal rights of hunting, gleaning and pasturage, the peasants were thus freed from serfdom only to fall into economic subordination to the new landowners and intermediaries who generally exploited them ruthlessly, operating a system defined by BLOK (1969b, pp. 97–100) as 'rent capitalism' and by MONHEIM (1971b, p. 668) as 'absentee agrarian capitalism'. This system still survives in a somewhat mollified form today. Large holdings or concessions of land were divided into small strips and sub-let by intermediaries (or *gabelotti*) to peasants on a variety of insecure and oppressive contracts. Characteristically the peasant retained only 20–25% of his crop: the rest went to the landowner, his agents and overseers, and on various payments for seed, threshing,

milling, money-lending etc. Investment in the land was minimal as the land controller was interested only in short-term profit and in maintaining sharecroppers in debt.

Some further modification of the *latifondo* pattern took place as a result of, and in anticipation of, the 1950 land reform. In the years just before 1950 *gabelotti* increased their share of land by buying considerable portions of the more fertile *latifondo* lands from estate owners who, faced with expropriation, were eager to sell. Peasant smallholdings also increased in number. Inheritance procedures also increased the number of landholders since where a patrimony consists of many disconnected plots, it is common for each heir to receive a share of each separate plot (SCHNEIDER, J., 1969, p. 115). Indeed much of the conflict that seems to pervade agro-town society derives from the confused land holding and inheritance regulations²).

Social Aspects

The previous section demonstrated that in the context of the *latifondo* economy the agro-towns are the only possible centre for the peasants' fragmented and insecure undertakings. This obligation to live in the agro-towns and not on the land is also reinforced by prevailing social mores. People who live in the countryside are considered less civilised than those who dwell in the central settlement. Their spatial isolation deprives them of friends and influence; patron-client networks, through which peasants have traditionally applied for scarce resources such as work and access to land, are much easier to operate in the crowded agro-town.

The most striking feature of Sicilian agro-town society is the rigid system of stratification. The class divisions present have been much analysed and commented on. A range of schema, from two to six classes, has been put forward³). Differences between these schema are mostly due to the level of detail or to the stress put on recent (i.e. post-war) changes such as the addition of new groups such as returned emigrants.

The most basic division is between those who perform manual labour on the land and those who do not. This dichotomy is all-pervasive: the landowners and the peasants, the rich and the poor, the haves and

²) Much of the conflict over land results from the irregular shape of plots, the fact that they do not conform to natural boundaries, and problems over land measurement. Other disputes result over rights of access to these plots surrounded by land belonging to others (SCHNEIDER, P. 1969, pp. 132–133).

³) Examples are two classes (GALTUNG 1965), three (BLOK 1966, p. 6), four (MOSS & CAPPANNARI 1962), five (MONHEIM 1969, pp. 108–114), and six (LOPREATO 1966, pp. 163–195).

the havenots, the educated and the illiterate. This simple two-fold divide forms the basis of the 'structure of traditionalism' identified by GALTUNG (1965) in western Sicily and represents the survival of the simple feudal system.

For the first half of the twentieth century, however, a four-fold classification would be more accurate. The basis of differentiation between these four classes lies in the traditional values of the society and birth and marriage patterns are crucial to their maintenance. Marriages are conducted strictly within class and occupational boundaries.

At the top are the landowning nobility, most of whom are in fact absentee, living in Palermo, Rome or elsewhere. Family lineage is important here. Numerically this group is very small, no more than 2% of the agro-town population, and fast disappearing as the old paternalistic landowners die off. The second stratum, the *borghesia*, is made up of various professionals and intermediaries such as land agents, merchants, doctors, teachers, priests and local government officials. Many have university degrees or some other form of specialised educational training, and they tend to dominate local politics. Members of the *borghesia* make up 10–20% of the population, this proportion increasing in recent years. The third class is the artisan/shopkeeper group. Artisans are generally considered superior to the peasant/farm labourer class (the fourth group) because the former do not dirty their hands on the land. The artisan element of this class is in fact rapidly shrinking, representing less than 5% of the population now. The fourth class contains numerous substrata but the main division is between the landless labourer and the smallholding farmer, with renting and sharecropping peasants somewhere in between.

In the past 25 years or so a number of changes have modified the social structure outlined above. The traditional land-based division into landowners, smallholders, renters, sharecroppers and labourers is now to a certain extent artificial in that many of the lower status persons derive income from various sources. Such is the degree of under-employment in the agricultural sector that many are forced to combine farm and non-farm activities. And just as the agro-town may be viewed as the central locus in fragmented, insecure farm activities, so it is the integrating factor in fragmented economic activity outside of agriculture. Ease of communication is important here; in the agro-town's piazzas and bars men hear more quickly which jobs are available than they would if they lived in the countryside (DAVIS, 1969, pp. 180, 183–184).

This leads on to the topic of patronage, another theme much studied in Sicily by anthropologists (cf. BLOK, 1969c, BOISSEVAIN, 1966). In the traditional model, where the agro-town was virtually a closed system with fixed resources of land and work and scant external contacts, one person could only improve his lot at the expense of others of his own class. Such

progress was best achieved through the help of a patron in a higher class, such as a money-lender, landowner or *gabellotto*, often in return for electoral support. In this way economic and social behaviour was channelled through patronage networks formed of vertical chains of two-person ties, rather than through social classes or through social organisations such as trade unions or political parties. Similarly the rural Mafia, which dominated the agro-towns until recently, can be viewed as one gigantic patronage network. Indeed it has been shown by BLOK (1969b and 1974) and by KING (1975a) how closely bound up with agro-towns and the *latifondo* economy is this peculiarly Sicilian institution.

By the 1960s, however, land reform, emigration and the proliferation of village-based public and semi-public officials had changed the picture somewhat (BLOK, 1969c, p. 155). Land reform has reduced the power of the landowners as patrons; returned emigrants constitute a new monied class; and new patronage links have developed with the functionaries of para-state organisations. With emigration reducing peasant pressure for land, labour unions have been better able to improve wages and conditions of work for agricultural labourers. In this way horizontal associations, either of a formal (e.g. trade union) or informal (e.g. an 'action-set' formed to carry out a specific transaction) kind are replacing vertical clientelage networks (SCHNEIDER, J., 1969).

Emigration has had the effect of drawing certain strata out of the social system, especially young males who twenty or thirty years ago would have formed the majority of the landless labourer class. This group had no ties of land ownership or renting contracts to keep them in the village; hence they have been the group most affected by emigration, making up 70% of the emigrants in one study, for example (CHIRONI, 1962, p. 75). In the first great wave of Sicilian emigration (*circa* 1880–1914) peasants moved mostly on a semi-permanent basis to the United States. Relatively few came back. This had the primary effect of simply reducing pressure on land. The second, post-1950, phase of emigration has seen rural Sicilians move on a more temporary basis to other parts of Europe, e.g. northern Italy, Switzerland, Germany for mostly short term work periods of perhaps six months or a couple of years.

The effects of emigration on the population structure of agro-towns are marked. In Realmonte and Raffadali (province of Agrigento) for example 73% of the emigrants between 1951 and 1960 were between 19 and 35 years of age, mostly males. As a result this group was reduced by 47% in the two villages (BACARELLA & DRAGO, 1962, p. 89). Emigration has two main effects on employment structure. First, the fact that most emigrants originate in the rural sector means that the numbers employed in agriculture fall rather sharply. Secondly, the fact that migrants are nearly

all workers reduces the proportion of the resident population economically active (Table 1). Emigration also has an impact on the housing and landholding structures: the percentage of empty dwellings increases and the overall number of farm units decreases. For those migrants who do not sell their land (many regard a piece of land as useful security for when they return), there is a tendency to rent it for cash to other farmers. Finally, the reduction in the labourer class forces large-scale farmers to mechanise.

The role of returning migrants in the agro-towns' class system has been little studied in Sicily although analyses exist for other south Italian settlements. LOPREATO's (1966) work on Stefanaceni, in Calabria, is particularly informative. He shows that upward social mobility is strongly related to remittance income. Money is converted into highly valued social symbols such as land for renting out, house improvements and the education of sons, rather than being economically invested in commercial or industrial enterprise. He also demonstrates (LOPREATO, 1966, pp. 175–187) how emigration tends to boost an individual's social class position from, on average, class 5 to class 3 in his system⁴).

As well as returning migrants, another group has been moving into agro-town society in recent years. These are the 'new professionals'. Rather distinct from the 'old professionals' (merchants, lawyers, *gabellotti*, etc.) of the traditional land-based *borghesia*, the new group is composed especially of various members of the Civil Service and of the post-war development agencies set up to improve socio-economic conditions in the south of Italy, Sicily included. True to their position in the *borghesia* class, these groups also generate some patronage relationships with the local population, for they control important new sets of resources (credit, grants, education, welfare). Because of their non-local origin, however, they are considered as partly outside the village class system.

Internal Structure of Agro-Towns

Each settlement in central Sicily tends to be similar in appearance and function. LEVI's (1959, p. 109) de-

⁴ LOPREATO (1966, pp. 163–195) outlined six social classes, briefly as follows: 1) the old landowning aristocracy; 2) the rich professionals; 3) the well-to-do (includes the 'old *Americani*', those who migrated in the early twentieth century); 4) the artisans, shopkeepers and 'new *Americani*' (those returnees who originally migrated in the post-war era); 5) the 'respectable' peasants; 6) the very poor, the destitute. The effects of the return of long term migrants are not necessarily comparable with those associated with the current wave of return migration from northern Italy and northern Europe (cf. KING 1977). It is also important to mention that other students of the sociology of return migration, MOSS & CAPPANNARI (1962, pp. 294–295) have found returnees less easy to classify.

scription of Sciarra in the Madonie Mountains south-east of Palermo is instructive. Viewed from afar the silhouette of the village is dominated by the castle and the church, two elements which have traditionally been of great importance in agro-town life. Between the two, in hovels that almost seem to mingle with the earth, live the peasants. If this simple, heraldic picture of rural Sicily is changing now, it has been true until remarkably recently.

The peasant houses are generally tightly-packed single storey units composed of one to four rooms. Single-room dwellings were common up to about twenty years ago but are now disappearing (Table 1). Most houses are of back-to-back design with little or no private open space, although courtyard patterns are a variant in south-east Sicily (PECORA, 1959, pp. 25–29, 60, 99). Around the main piazza and along the principal roads the more imposing houses of the *borghesia* are to be found. The occasional castle or *palazzo* represents the traditional residence of the landowning nobility.

This basic model is being modified by certain recent changes. Emigrant remittances particularly are instrumental in modifying and up-dating the appearance of old peasant homes. Often a second storey is added. Small groups of *case popolari* (local authority houses) are sometimes found on the periphery where some privately-sponsored new building of higher status villas and small apartment blocks for the new *borghesia* class and for returned migrants also takes place.

Differences in street-pattern differentiate some agro-towns from others (Fig. 2). The older settlements, such as Centuripe and Lentini, have evolved over several centuries and exhibit a casual, unplanned street layout with many narrow and stepped alleys. The more recent feudal foundations of 200–400 years ago are more planned, with grid-iron pattern roads (e.g. Vittoria) or long terraces of uniform dwellings (e.g. Partinico). Occasionally the two types are juxtaposed if there has been settlement shift or the development of a daughter settlement nearby: examples are Lentini and Carlentini, and Petralia Soprana and Petralia Sottana (CRINO, 1922, pp. 226–227, 378–379). Radial (Grammichele), hexagonal (Avola) and linear forms (Palma di Montechiaro, Naro, Butera and Barrafranca) are much rarer (SCHOLZ, 1952, p. 13).

The physical and social centre of agro-towns is the main piazza. Fronting onto this are the settlement's most important and imposing edifices: the church, the town hall, and the houses of the main landowning families. A few offices of professional people or of political parties, as well as perhaps a couple of bars, banks and shops face the piazza: these are also continued along the *corso* (or 'high street'). More than this, however, the piazza is the expression of the agro-town's social existence. Many people wait here for buses, or to meet friends, or just to while away their leisure hours. The absence of females is marked. The

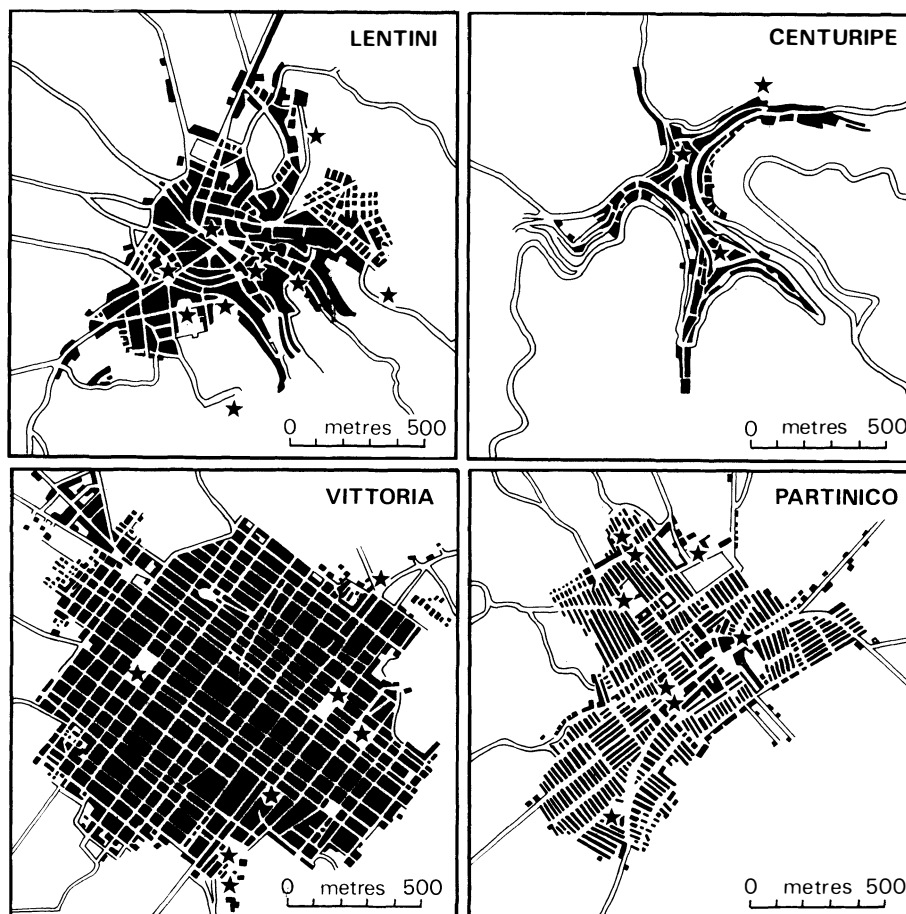


Fig. 2: Street plans of four Sicilian agro-towns (asterisks indicate principal churches). 1971 populations as follow: Lentini 31,741; Centuripe 8,178; Vittoria 45,717; Partinico 25,383.

piazza and the *corso* come into their own at sunset: the hour of the pre-dinner *passaggiata*. It is in this period and in these places that social exchanges are made and confirmed, with the enactment of rituals representing the existence and formation of patronage networks, and the solidarity of the settlement made manifest (MARASPINI, 1968, pp. 61–63).

The spatial distribution of social classes and groups within agro-towns can be summed up as follows. In the traditional pattern the nobility and the *borghesia* lived near the centre of the settlement, facing on to the main piazza and the *corso*. Lower status groups lived elsewhere in the agro-town in various quarters with the lowest status of all outside the confines of the agro-town⁵). More recently there is a tendency for the new immigrant professionals, with their more

urban style of living, to build new dwellings with modern facilities on the periphery. Generally, however, horizontal expansion is minimal.

Anthropologists working in Sicilian settlements have noted the tendency for members of the same kin group to live near each other and for those who practice the same trade to settle in the same neighbourhood. DAVIS (1969, p. 177; 1973, pp. 68–71) has shown that neighbourhoods tend to be based on female rather than male kinship links. This is partly because the agro-town residential environment is very much the preserve of the female, as she spends virtually all her life there, whereas the men are out on the fields or in the bars and piazzas of town much of the time. Also the mother-daughter relationship is rather stronger than the parents' relationship with sons, so that a married daughter is more likely to live near her parents than a married son near his: the practice of passing on houses in the female lineage (as opposed to land which passes in the male lineage) reinforces this pattern of woman-centred neighbourhoods.

The attachment to a particular quarter or neigh-

⁵) The extent to which quarters possess occupational uniformity varies from settlement to settlement. MONHEIM (1969, pp. 114–118) demonstrates clear semblances of a pattern in Gangi and notes that in other Sicilian agro-towns the separation is even more marked.

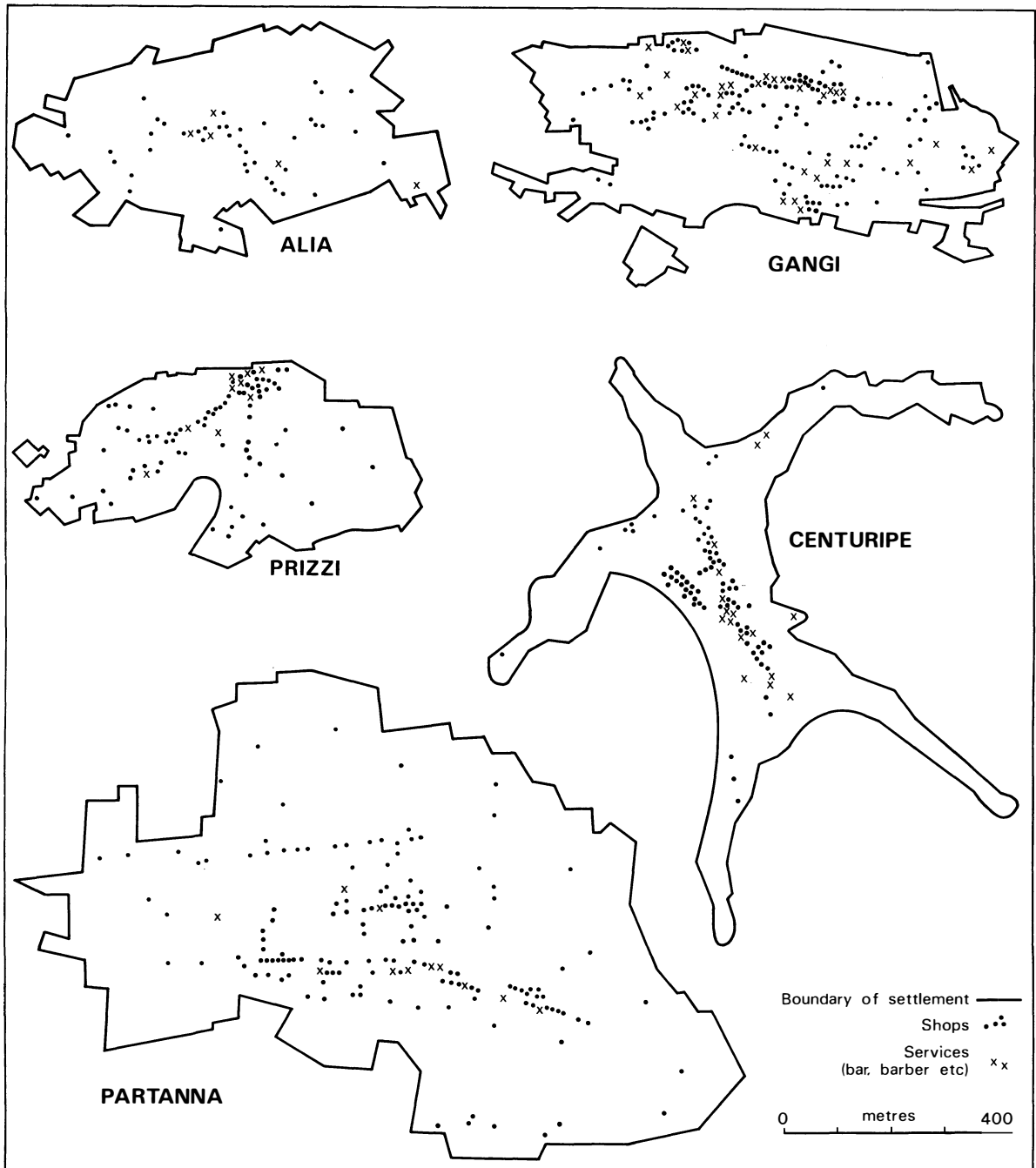


Fig. 3: Distribution of shops and services in five Sicilian agro-towns (partly after MONHEIM 1969, pp. 92, 97, 153–154). For population figures see Table 1.

bourhood can be almost as strong as to the settlement itself. MOSS & CAPPANNARI (1960, pp. 25–27) note that while most settlements in southern Italy exhibit *campanilismo* (introversion, village-mindedness), some exhibit multiple *campanilismo* in terms of attachments to local quarters or parishes. Such intra-settlement mental boundaries generally correlate with occupa-

tional or class groupings as well as with physical or ecclesiastical confines.

The distribution of retailing and service functions in agro-towns is fairly clear, for there are marked spatial concentrations along the central axis of the *corso* (Fig. 3). Specialised shops selling items such as electrical goods, furniture, clothing, jewellery and

fancy goods tend to cluster rather more in the central area than shops retailing everyday goods such as food-stores which are more evenly scattered. Services (mostly bars and barbers) are also highly concentrated, but artisan workshops (cobblers, carpenters, stonemasons, blacksmiths, etc.) are distributed specifically away from the main axis in the various back alleys of the settlement. The rapid decline of artisan trades is partly offset by the recent building activity and proliferation of service concerns linked to the automobile. The location of garages and mechanical workshops, however, is different in that these activities concentrate on the periphery of the settlement along the main roads leading out of the agro-town.

Many of these broad distributional features are brought out in MONHEIM's (1969, pp. 83-102) detailed study of Gangi and by the authors' recent field work in Centuripe⁶). A total of 2552 separate dwellings was enumerated for Centuripe. There was a relative concentration of the 1199 old, unimproved dwellings in the core of the settlement (though the core itself is rather difficult to identify given the attenuated shape of this agro-town); new (295) and improved (1001) dwellings tended to be located round the periphery. Notable was the lack of space for residential expansion, given the restricted nature of the site, so that most new buildings were multi-storey. The distribution of Centuripe's 78 shops, 16 services and 2 cinemas is much more clear-cut, there being a distinct concentration along the main street leading south from the cathedral and the main square through the heart of the settlement (Fig. 3). Such a concentration of functions gives the centre of Centuripe a marked urban flavour, although many shops are modest in character (a few lacking even a small shop window). The 33 specialist shops are nearly all along the main axis: everyday shops are more dispersed.

Future of Agro-Towns

The preceding analysis confirms the existence of agro-towns as curious hybrids between rural and urban settlements. The agro-town represents a meeting-place of two cultures.

But what of the future of these settlements? Recent socio-economic changes in central Sicily are due to a variety of influences. The land reform tried to change the tenure structure of the land, and with it the pattern of settlement. The aim was to expropriate, against compensation, landholders possessing more than 200 ha. But in its execution Sicilian land reform brought minimal benefits to the peasants. Many landowners managed to divide and sell the best parts of

their estates. Mafia involvement was strong, in terms of avoiding expropriation, of buying up land due for expropriation and of establishing power within the land reform agency itself (BLOK, 1966, pp. 9-10; 1969b, p. 112). Only 98,523 ha. were assigned to 25,474 families, an average of less than 4 ha. each. Redistribution of land was accompanied neither by technological change nor by credit facilities. Most of the assigned plots were too small or too remote to ever be viable farms⁷). The isolated farmsteads built by the reform agency demanded an unacceptable psychological revolution of adaption on the part of the assignees. Mafia-inspired violence and insecurity on the former latifundia was a further important factor working against isolated farm settlement. In general the attempt to fragment the latifundia, transform agriculture and disperse the agro-towns failed (KING, 1973, pp. 109-114).

In striking contrast to the small, extensively farmed or abandoned reform plots, many of the former landlords with their residual 200 ha. holdings, and many former *gabellotti* who managed to acquire large blocks of land just before the reform, now possess modern, rational farms. A new generation of progressive farmers, many of them young agronomy graduate sons of *gabellotti*, is appearing in central Sicily; under these people the iniquitous social conditions of the old inefficient latifundia are disappearing (PETINO, 1964, pp. 61-62; ROCHEFORT 1961, pp. 158-159).

Some communes with access to fertile valley lands and to irrigation water have real possibilities of agricultural intensification. The Dittaino, Salso and Simeto Valleys below Centuripe have seen a recent expansion of citrus orchards which have taken over as the mainstay of the local rural economy. A similar process of rural development is slowly taking place along the plains and valleys of the south and south-eastern coast.

Industrial development holds out relatively little hope for the majority of central Sicilian agro-towns, unless a new policy is devised combining industrial dispersion with improved communications. At present Sicily's industrial development policy involves concentration in specially designated coastal industrialisation nodes (Palermo, Milazzo, Catania, Siracusa-Augusta, Gela, Porto Empedocle). As STEIN (1971, pp. 192-198) has shown, these industrial developments

⁷) In Corleone, a typical *latifondo* commune (1951 population 16,200), the reform assigned only 921 ha. of the commune's area of 22,000 ha. to 152 peasants; the land was rocky mountain pasture on the fringe of the commune five hours away by mule track from the agro-town (LOSCHIAVO 1963; ROCHEFORT 1959, p. 454). Similarly unsatisfactory results were evidenced in other agro-town communities where the land reform has been studied: in Contessa Entellina (BLOK 1966, pp. 10-11), San Giuseppe Jato (DI PAOLA 1962), Gangi (MONHEIM 1969, pp. 54-56), Roccamena (FERRETTI 1963) and Francavilla di Sicilia (CARLYLE 1962, pp. 104-108).

⁶) The assistance of students on the 1977 Leicester University Geography Department field trip to Sicily is acknowledged here.

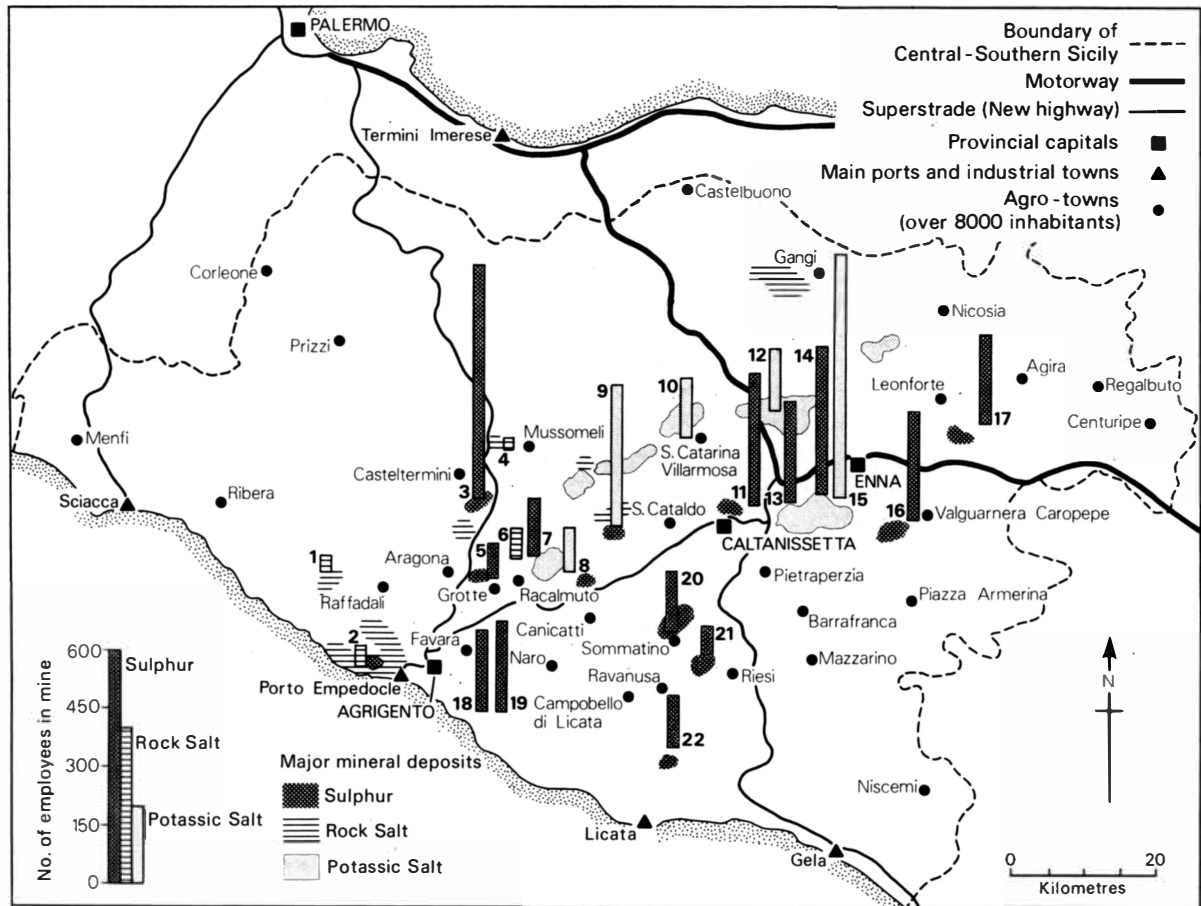


Fig. 4: Mineral exploitation and axial development in central-southern Sicily (after RUGGIERO 1974, pp. 155, 163). Names of mines as follows: 1. Cattolica Eraclea; 2. Realmonte; 3. Cozzo Disi; 4. Muti e Coffari; 5. Stretto Cuvello; 6. Pantanelle e Sacchitello; 7. Gibellini; 8. Montedoro; 9. S. Cataldo; 10. S. Catarina; 11. Gessolungo; 12. Corvillo; 13. Trabonella; 14. Giumentaro; 15. Pasquasia; 16. Floristella; 17. Giangagliano Zimbalio; 18. Ciavalotta; 19. S. Lucia; 20. La Grasta; 21. Trabia; 22. Muculufa

can draw workers from agro-towns up to 30 km. away, but the influence on central Sicilian settlements is virtually zero.

This may well be changed by road improvements recently completed or currently under construction and planning. Particularly the new cross-island motorway between Palermo and Catania has revolutionised travel across the interior. Further road improvements in west-central Sicily (*autostrada* Mazara del Vallo–Alcamo–Palermo; *superstrade* Agrigento–Palermo, Agrigento–Caltanissetta–Gela and Sciacca–Palermo) will facilitate movement to and within this most backward part of the island (Fig. 4). These effects are, however, only selective, affecting corridors of agro-towns that happen to lie along and just off the motorways, but leaving whole blocks of the interior untouched. In view of this fact, and of the rising cost of petrol and the irregularity of public transport, it seems unlikely that MONHEIM's (1971a, p. 225) vision of

agro-towns as residential towns of commuters will ever be realised for more than a handful of favourably placed settlements.

The other policy, of setting up small, strategically-placed industrial estates throughout the interior, seems at first sight equally unlikely to succeed in view of the Cassa's policy of concentrating industrial investment in a few major growth poles. There are, however, recent signs that this concentration policy may be changing, evidenced by the Sardinia experiment with a new model of dispersed industrialisation to bring work to underemployed shepherds (KING, 1975b).

Secondly, an axis of development is emerging in south-central Sicily, related to the exploitation of the belt of rock salt and potassic salts (RUGGIERO, 1974), which runs for 140 km. between Sciacca and Centuripe (Fig. 4). New chemical industries are developing under the triple aegis of E.N.I. (the national hydrocarbons authority), E.M.S. (the regional mining organisation)

Table 1: Selected Census Data for Five Agro-Town Communes 1951-71

Commune: (Province): Altitude (metres):	Alia (Palermo) 750	Centuripe (Enna) 730	Gangi (Palermo) 1050	Partanna (Trapani) 400	Prizzi (Palermo) 1007
Population: 1951	8,331	11,020	11,015	13,714	10,553
1961	7,167	10,008	11,051	13,257	9,752
1971	5,244	8,178	10,080	11,357	8,057
% change 1951-61	-14.0	-9.2	+0.3	-3.3	-7.6
% change 1961-71	-26.8	-18.3	-8.8	-14.3	-17.4
% of population economically active:					
1951	31.5	32.3	35.9	34.5	34.0
1961	28.3	27.0	34.0	34.8	31.5
1971	25.7	25.7	30.7	31.2	27.2
% of working population engaged in agriculture:					
1951	74.2	57.6	73.5	57.5	67.6
1961	65.5	42.0	65.2	48.7	57.3
1971	49.3	25.2	52.4	40.8	50.6
number of landholdings:					
1961	1,667	3,518	1,719	3,253	1,898
1970	1,105	3,320	1,313	2,810	1,217
% change 1961-70	-33.7	-5.6	-23.6	-13.6	-35.9
% of population over 6 years of age illiterate:					
1951	25.2	27.7	28.5	20.0	21.3
1961	17.7	20.2	19.7	13.3	12.3
1971	17.7	16.4	14.8	8.7	8.6
Average number of rooms per dwelling:					
1951	2.6	1.8	2.8	2.9	2.1
1961	2.7	1.9	2.8	3.1	2.5
1971	3.2	2.4	3.4	3.8	2.5
% of dwellings unoccupied:					
1951	3.9	2.4	14.9	4.0	3.1
1961	10.6	10.3	19.9	4.1	7.2
1971	22.2	14.9	21.5	20.9	12.8

Sources: 9° *Censimento Generale della Popolazione*, 4 Novembre 1951, Vol. 1 Dati Sommarî per Comune, Fascicoli 84, 86, 89. Rome: ISTAT, 1954-55.

10° *Censimento Generale della Popolazione*, 15 Ottobre 1961, Vol. 3 Dati Sommarî per Comune, Fascicoli 81, 82, 86. Rome: ISTAT, 1965-66.

11° *Censimento Generale della Popolazione*, 24 Ottobre 1971, Vol. 1 Primi Risultati Provinciali e Comunali sulla Popolazione e sulle Abitazioni, and Vol. 2 Dati per Comune sulle Caratteristiche Strutturali della Popolazione e delle Abitazioni, Fascicoli 83, 84, 88. Rome: ISTAT, 1972-74.

1° *Censimento Generale dell'Agricoltura*, 15 Aprile 1961, Vol. 2 Dati Provinciali, Fascicoli 81, 82, 86. Rome: ISTAT, 1962.

2° *Censimento Generale dell'Agricoltura*, 25 Ottobre 1970, Vol. 2 Dati sulle Caratteristiche Strutturali delle Aziende, Fascicoli 83, 84, 88. Rome: ISTAT, 1974.

and Montedison (a semi-public company powerful in the chemicals and manufacturing fields). About 2,000 people are currently engaged in mining activities, but it is envisaged that this will be more than doubled by secondary processing developments, especially in the field of chemicals. Although much of the development planned is coastal (Porto Empedocle, Licata, Termini Imerese), some factory development in the interior is provided for at Campofranco, San Cataldo, Villarosa

and Pasquasia (near Enna). With improved road links a new north-south cross-island linear axis of industrial development is being established, stretching from Porto Empedocle to Termini Imerese. With the decline of the sulphur mines in the Agrigento-Caltanissetta area, however (employment down from 12,000 in 1950 to 3,000 in 1973), this new development is seen at best as a holding operation, cushioning the otherwise rapid unemployment effects (RUGGIERO, 1974, p. 164).

For the most part, the only significant feature to change most agro-towns in recent years has been outmigration. A few agro-towns have been losing population since the beginning of the century⁸), but generally losses have been particularly drastic since the 1950s. Kinship links and investment of savings tie the annual or seasonal commuters involved strongly to their agro-towns which therefore receive a boost to their economy, but structurally they do not change, and this false development stimulated from outside certainly does not assure the agro-town economy of any long-term security. Indeed an economic crisis in the areas receiving Sicilian migrants would create serious difficulties for these no longer primarily rural settlements (MONHEIM, 1971b, pp. 673–674).

According to SCHNEIDER, P. et al. (1972, pp. 340–343) the dominant feature of post-war west-central Sicily has been modernisation in the absence of significant development. The rise in incomes, the decline in illiteracy and in the proportion of the population engaged in farming (Table 1) and the wider availability of consumer products – all of these are a consequence of close contact with industrial centres but they have not been accompanied by a significant expansion of productive capacity *in loco*. This new purchasing power is underwritten by two major sources. The welfaristic character of much development aid improves living standards without altering the basic economy. It accounts for the relief of the most severe poverty and for the expansion of agency personnel appointed to administer these policies at the local level. Secondly, industrial development elsewhere, especially northern Italy, causes outmigration and the compensating flow of remittance money, most of which is invested in the multiplication of low-grade commercial establishments like shops and bars or is spent on house improvements.

The future of agro-towns is insecure. Further loss of population seems inevitable for many although it is unlikely that they will in the foreseeable future become completely depopulated as have some of the smaller highland villages of Calabria and Corsica. Any large scale policy of breaking down the hill-top agro-town pattern must be expensive and, in view of past experience, treated with caution. Emigration abroad will no doubt continue but there are limitations in view of the present recession in the economies of northern Italy and other European countries.

The only other option open is to resolve the problems of agro-towns *in situ*. A start has already been made, with improved road communications and the identification of axes of growth. A functional (not physical) reorganisation of settlement, with the nodally located larger agro-towns assuming central place

functions for marketing, retailing, administration, education and certain industries (e.g. food processing and mineral-working), and other settlements, via improved road, rail and bus links, supplying some workers to these central places, may well revitalise the stagnant spatial system of central Sicily (DOGLIO & URBANI, 1964; MONHEIM, 1971b, pp. 675–682). But such a co-ordinated policy would demand willing co-operation between settlements, freedom from corruption and a high level of planning skills. So far none of these qualities has been much in evidence in Sicily.

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⁸) Racalmuto, Sambuca, Vizzini and Marineo experienced population drops of over 20% during 1901–51 (RICCARDI 1958, pp. 349–352).

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