

# Mediterranean Agro-Towns as a Form of Cultural Dominance

## With Special Reference to Sicily and Andalusia

Anton Blok & Henk Driessen

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As the prevalent settlement type, agro-towns are highly characteristic of Mediterranean societies. Their remarkable continuity was not only predicated upon political conditions (insecurity), but it was also intimately connected with specific economic and cultural processes. The significance of an urban ethos in the configuration of these forces has often been mentioned but still leaves us with several questions. What does life in agro-towns mean to the various groups of people living there? What are the main symbols employed to distinguish oneself from rural folk? We will argue that the notions of *cultura* and *civiltà*, respectively, have become an integral part of the cultural dominance of Mediterranean agro-towns over their rural hinterlands.

*Prof. Dr. Anton Blok and Dr. Henk Driessen, Department of Cultural Anthropology, Catholic University of Nijmegen, Thomas van Aquino Straat 1, NL-6500 HK Nijmegen.*

### Introduction

During the last decade, anthropologists working in the Mediterranean area have been urged on several occasions to embark upon comparative research in order to answer “why-questions” (e.g. Davis 1977; Boissevain 1979; Gilmore 1982). Instructive examples of systematic comparisons are indeed rare. Although there have been some attempts to define the common features of the area, the cultural unity and homogeneity have been more often assumed than demonstrated. In fact, the since long discarded concept of culture-area is still implicit in the work of many Mediterraneanists. As an alternative for this construct we suggest to reintroduce the notion of “ethnological field of study”, i.e.:

“an area with a population whose culture appears to be sufficiently homogeneous and unique to form a separate object of ethnological study, and which at the same time apparently

reveals sufficient local shades of differences to make internal comparative research worth while.”<sup>1</sup>

We will see that comparing Andalusia and Sicily can be instructive: both regions share many features, but also differ in important respects.<sup>2</sup> We focus on a characteristic that has often been pointed out as distinctive of the area.

For centuries travellers from North-Western Europe have been struck by the abruptness by which Mediterranean towns end and countryside begins, a sensation that is reinforced by the hilltop location of many of them. These agglomerations evoke the ancient *polis* and *ciuitas*. The modern word agro-town that has been coined for these compact, nucleated settlements exactly expresses their double face. They are overwhelmingly rural in their basis of subsistence yet urban in size, townscape and orientation. These urbanesque settlements are the *dominant* habitat in Europe's South in

both meanings of the word. They prevail statistically as homes for the majority of peasants and agricultural laborers and at the same time are superior in terms of power and civilization.<sup>3</sup> It does not come as a surprise, then, that one of the first attempts to delimit an anthropology of the Mediterranean area precisely focused on this fundamental characteristic (Pitkin 1963; see also Foster 1960).

Agro-towns have for at least two millennia dominated the country-side. This remarkable continuity was not only predicated upon ecological and political conditions, but it was also intimately tied to specific economic and cultural processes (cf. Blok 1969).<sup>4</sup>

The significance of an urban ethos has often been mentioned, but it has never been systematically elaborated on an empirical or theoretical plane. Townspeople in Mediterranean Europe experience strong conceptual, emotional and evaluative differences between town and country. "Rural" carries a definitely negative meaning as opposed to urban. This opposition is an *emic* category which plays an important role in daily life. What are the main symbols employed to distinguish the urban from the rural world? What does life in agro-towns mean to the various groups of people living there? Comparing ethnographic material from Andalusia and Sicily, we will argue that the notions of *cultura* and *civiltà*, respectively, have become an integral part of the cultural dominance of Mediterranean agro-towns over their rural hinterlands.<sup>5</sup>

### The ecological, socio-cultural and historical background

It has been casually observed that Andalusia is the 'Sicily of Spain' (Marvaud 1910: 42). This simple statement invites systematic comparison. To start with, ecotypical similarities between the two regions of Southern Europe are overwhelming.<sup>6</sup> The long summers are hot and dry, while the winters are short and mild. Rains come mostly in fall and winter, between October and March. Although this climate is favorable for grain-farming – the basic mode of cultivation in both regions – it is a constant source of uncertainty for the cultivators, and

the roads, soil and inhabitants suffer from the extremes in temperature, drought and rainfall. Topography is similar. Small coastal plains are enclosed by hills rising to bare mountain chains which are topped by gently rolling, fertile highland plains. On the whole, Sicily is more mountainous than Andalusia. Over 93 percent of the total area exceeds 500 meters in altitude in the former region. The interior plains with their heavy, grey-colored soil are ideal for extensive grain cultivation. They are granaries of the Mediterranean area and constitute the setting of agro-towns. Climate and topography have made for similar agrarian regimes. Wheat, olives and grapes have always been the 'holy trinity' of the inland plains, but a broad gamut of additional crops like beans, chickpeas, vegetables and tree crops, although small in quantity, have played an important role in the local and regional economy. Cereal production has been coupled with livestock raising. Zones of intensive horti- and arboriculture (*ruedo*, *corona*) are located adjacent to the nuclear settlements. Beyond these green belts extend the rolling grain, olive and pasture lands. Both are areas in which large landed estates (*latifundia*, *latifondi*) dominate local economy and society.<sup>7</sup> The greater part of the agro-towns' territories are extensive and were largely owned by absentee landlords who live in provincial and district capitals. The large estates (*cortijos*, *masserie*) are managed by either big leaseholders (*labradores*, *gabbelloti*) or stewards, and worked by agricultural laborers, tenants or sharecroppers. Recently, emigration and mechanization have stimulated more or less direct management by bourgeois entrepreneurs. Although there have also been land reforms in both regions, their effects on the property structure have been minimal.

Communication has always been difficult and deficient. Except for the provincial and district capitals, the network of roads (and rails) has no nodal points where the main arteries come together. The links between the settlements are lineal. Until recently they were merely mule and cart tracks. This configuration of roads does not favor integration of towns and of towns with countryside (cf. Schneider 1972). Especially during the rainy

season local communication becomes difficult. They heavy clay soil inhibits drainage, and many roads turn into muddy streams.

Sicilian and Andalusian agro-towns are characterized by sharp socio-economic stratification. The great majority of the population still depends on casual wages. *Braceros* and *braccianti*, as day-laborers are called, are unemployed during long periods. They are prepared to hire themselves out for any menial odd job. Seasonal migration and getting by on little mark their lives. They glean the fields after harvests, gather wild asparagus and snails, poach birds and rabbits, and hang around in taverns and the *plaza* (*piazza*). Many of the older day laborers are virtually illiterate. They hold a dual view of their community: on this side are "we, the poor, who must work on the land," on the other are "they, the rich who own the land without working." The local elite of landowners, entrepreneurs and professionals looks down upon the illiterates. The educated consider themselves the carriers of "civilization" (*cultura* and *civiltà*). They despise manual labor and live segregated from the rural proletariat. Metropolitan society is their frame of reference and they pursue its material and spiritual symbols. Between the elite and the proletariat is a growing group of hardworking self-employed tradesmen, cultivators, civil servants and skilled workers.

There is a sharp distinction between town (*pueblo, paese*) and country (*campo, campagna*). The countryside outside the urban center live in a different world, though in some aspects both worlds are interdependent. Country dwellers are regarded as an inferior category by townspeople. The term with which they are designated – *del campo* or *campesino, contadino* or *villano* – all have a pejorative meaning. Educated townsmen consider them hardly more intelligent than mules, they are "animals with speech". The dual habitat of town and country expresses the cleavage between the landholding elite and the rural proletariat. The most obvious feature of the town-country opposition is the fact that agriculture is controlled by and directed towards the towns (see also Caro Baroja 1963). Politically and administratively the country has always been

dominated by the town. All bureaucratic and political functions are concentrated in the agglomerations. Townspeople have thus a greater sense of involvement in administration, politics and "civilization" than country folk. For centuries municipal services were monopolized by townsmen. Doctors, teachers, priests, notaries, other professionals and officials, local landowners, artisans and traders lived in urban centers. Power resources are unevenly distributed between town and country.

There are several basic socio-cultural traits which both regions share. The agglomerations are fairly self-contained and to a high degree replicas of each other. Each town boasts a more or less broad gamut of services and trades. Common residence is an important basis for a sense of community. Local patriotism (*patria chica, campanilismo*) is a strong sentiment in Andalusian and Sicilian agro-towns. This is most dramatically expressed in the relationships of the towns with the outer world, in the contacts between local people and outsiders, and in the main festivals such as the patron saint cults. Local parochialism is intimately tied to *ambiente* (*ambiente*), which derives from the meeting of large numbers of people marked by differences in occupation and personality. Regardless of class, townspeople think of their own community as open, friendly and of a distinct character. If there is one feature of community life that admits of no criticism from outsiders it is precisely *ambiente* (see also Gilmore 1980). In towns of limited size where houses are huddled together on narrow streets and the climate invites people into the open air, it is very difficult to maintain privacy. Almost all public places are exposed to constant scrutiny. Sociability, spontaneity and conviviality are qualities that are highly praised.

At the same time, privacy, the nuclear family and autonomy are highly valued. Andalusians and Sicilians rely upon their nuclear families which are the focus of strong loyalties. Boundaries between private and public space largely coincide with male and female domains. Most men hold that women belong at home with the children. They consider their homes as places to eat and sleep. The cafés,



Andalusia, Spain. A *cortijo* in the countryside.

plazas, streetcorners are the main places for men to meet. However, in the class of agricultural laborers, female labor power is of paramount importance to the maintenance of the household. The wife is in charge of the household finances and the socialization of the children. From time to time she works outside for a wage. The ideal sexual division of domains is closely tied to the honor-and-shame complex with its strong emphasis upon masculinity.

The history of Andalusia and Sicily has been a history of successive conquerors and invaders and of subjugation to external powers. In his monumental work on the Mediterranean Braudel (1975, part I) has pointed out the close link between this history of submission and the prevailing ecological conditions in both regions. The links with outside power have been crucial for intra-regional developments. There are both similarities and significant differences in this respect between the regions. Since the Castilian-Aragonese crown subjugated the regional barons of Andalusia in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century and incapsulated them into the royal bureaucracy, the latifundist nobility of the South has been part of the

centralizing elite. The same holds true for the bourgeois landowners of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. To be sure, this incorporation of Andalusia into the Spanish state was rather deficient, as endemic banditry and the phenomenon of *caciquismo* (political bossism) clearly indicate. Italy, on the other hand, is an example of late state building. The feudal baronial regime in Sicily could persist well into the nineteenth century, when, as in Andalusia, the transition from feudal to capitalist farming with its concomitant ecological, demographic and power crises was made. Consequently, in Sicily physical violence was a prevailing ingredient of the social relationships through which the *masserie* were exploited:

"In this way mafiosi kept restive peasants in submission, while opening up avenues for upwardly mobile peasants who qualified in the use of violence" (Blok 1975: 75).

In Andalusia this task was increasingly performed by the strong arm of the state, the Civil Guard, in coordination with semi-private estate guards. One of the results of this specific



Andalusia, Spain. The *ruedo*: sanctuary of the patron saint and cemetery.

interplay of regional and national forces was that the problem of insecurity in the countryside was much more serious and acute in Sicily than in Andalusia. Besides, a different timing of state and nation building, the more geographically isolated location of Sicily vis-à-vis the center of state power, might be an important factor in explaining socio-cultural differences between the two regions. Another striking distinction is that in Sicily pastoralism in tandem with cereal cultivation prevailed up to the twentieth century, while in the Andalusian plains livestock raising was less crucial to the regional economy. In the former region there was a more solid material basis for the survival of the pastoral code of honor and violence than in Southern Spain (cf. Schneider 1971; Schneider & Schneider 1976: 66). In the twentieth century attempts at land reform failed in both areas. Following the Second World War, Southern Europe became a large-scale exporter of labor to industrial Europe. Today, Sicily and Andalusia still lag economically and socially behind other regions of Italy and Spain.

### Symbols of urbanity and the urban ethos

Architecturally agro-towns demonstrate the urban aspirations of its past and present inhabitants. The *plaza* (*piazza*) is the core of the agglomeration and the heart of public life. Most commonly, it is bordered by municipal buildings, the *casino* or *circolo civile* (the gentlemen's social club), two and three-story buildings, cafés, and sometimes the parish church and ancient ramparts. Among the larger buildings are some aristocratic mansions with their coat of arms above the main entrance, built in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The plaza is the main social meeting place where townspeople take their customary strolls (*paseo*, *passeggiata*) during the evenings. It is also the main stage of ceremonial and ritual performances. The greater part of local commerce and trade is located on the streets that lead away from the plaza. In general, proximity to the plaza determines the value and desirability of houses and the ambience of streets. Dwellings at the periphery of the settlement, facing the countryside, are ranked lowest. People clearly prefer the close





Andalusia, Spain. Town and *ruedo*.

presence of neighbors, the noise and bustle of the social center. The most urbanesque and desirable streets are demarcated symbolically by the customary strolling and procession routes. The possession of a permanent dwelling in town is a central value in Andalusian and Sicilian society, a major ingredient of a family's status and prestige. Pitkin, Redfield and Pitt-Rivers among others have emphasized that a mystical attachment to land is lacking among the Southern-European peasantry. The counterpoint to this attitude toward the land is a general and strong spiritual attachment to urban space.

There are several physical features that set the town apart from the countryside. The sharp distinction between the built-up area of agro-towns and the surrounding countryside is striking. Agro-town dwellings are huddled together on narrow streets, constituting an unbroken and closed facade. In towns there is a larger variety of buildings and house types, there are more decorations, and most streets are paved and lined by side-walks. A main

characteristic of urban as opposed to rural space is the former's cleanliness. An architectural motif not found in the country is the main entrance of houses which consists of two doors and a hall decorated with flower pots. Even smaller houses in town conform to this pattern. In rural dwellings the main door opens directly into the kitchen-annex-living room, a sign of backwardness in the eyes of townspeople. Finally, vegetable gardens, barns, and animals are common in hamlets and villages, but one rarely finds them in agro-towns. Audio-visually, the noisy and lively social traffic in the streets of agro-towns contrasts with the solitude, slowness and lack of movement in rural settlements.

The townscape constitutes the stage upon which the urban way of life is enacted. The urban ethos is materialized in the culture and behavior of the people living in town. One crucial feature of the urban ethos is a strong distaste for physical labor. In the status hierarchy of economic activities labor connected with animals and land ranks lowest. Pastoralism is the



Western Sicily. Gibellina (1966), before the earthquake of January 1968.

least respectable, since shepherds and goat-herds spend most of their time in the solitude of the “barbarian” countryside, separated from civil life in town (cf. Schneider & Schneider 1976: 66). Agricultural laborers, small tenants, owners and sharecroppers who own a dwelling in town where they live most of the year, rank higher than their counterparts who live permanently in isolated dwellings or in hamlets and villages. Mechanized agricultural labor enjoys more prestige than backbreaking manual labor.<sup>8</sup> Work done in an urban setting, such as construction and artisanal labor, is generally preferred over agricultural labor. Day-laborers are eager to get a job in construction. In an Andalusian town the establishment of a cooperative textile factory was in part a reaction against women working in the fields. The president, a farm worker, said that one of their main objectives was to keep their wives and daughters off the land, “because land labor makes them ugly”. The sexual division of labor in agriculture is less strict among countrydwellers as compared with townspeople. The

general rule is that virtually all types of physical work are less prestigious than any type of office work. Valued above all is ownership of land to the extent that one is able to have it worked by others.

Standards of cleanliness likewise serve as a status marker, differentiating townspeople from countrydwellers, and propertied from working-class people. Agricultural laborers living in town share the elite’s view that the country is unclean and filthy. As early as the beginning of this century agricultural laborers demanded proper sanitary conditions for their houses (cf. Díaz del Moral 1973: 392). Complaints about living arrangements in the Andalusian estates centered upon issues of cleanliness and physical comfort (cf. Martínez Alier 1971: 190–91). The tidiness of Sicilian and Andalusian agro-towns and houses clearly contrasts with the conditions prevailing in the *cortijos*, *masserie* and hamlets. Permanent field hands who traditionally slept in town only once every ten days went to town in order to wash themselves and change their clothes. When ag-



Western Sicily. Salaparuta (1966), before the earthquake of January 1968.

ricultural laborers and farmers return from the fields in the afternoon, the first thing they do is to wash the country dust and smell from their bodies with strongly perfumed soap, and change their clothes before going out for a stroll. Both in Andalusia and Sicily we observed that agriculturalists returning from the fields avoided the main streets in order not to expose themselves in their working clothes. Townspeople clearly distinguish among three categories of dress, i.e. working, leisure and festive clothes. Cleanliness, color, quality, and fashion are the differentiating criteria. These distinctions are far less pronounced among countryside people.

Regardless of class, townswomen constantly clean their houses, sweep the street and sidewalks, and watch the neatness of their husband's and children's clothes. Even in the recent past when poverty was extreme among people of the working class, they took great pains to dress themselves decently. Women monitor standards of cleanliness in house visits.

Town councils also played an active part in the setting and enforcing of these standards. Over the last two centuries rural elements, like

animals, dung and mud were increasingly considered unclean and removed to rural space. This process of "urbanization" of settlement space was an integral part of the advance of *cultura* and *civiltà* in Andalusian and Sicilian agro-towns.

Literacy is another important component of the urban ethos. The high value placed upon literacy is by no means confined to the small circle of the elite. Anarchist and Socialist proletarian movements in Andalusia in the first decades of this century embraced the value of literacy. Working-class schools and alphabetizing courses were set up in numerous towns (cf. Díaz del Moral 1973: 291; Mintz 1982). The conscious workers or "men with ideas", as they were called, constituted the vanguard of the labor movement. They were largely self-educated. Statistical evidence on literacy in an Andalusian township shows that in the 1920's the degree of literacy in the urban center was twice that of the countryside settlements. There are also indications that workers in town made use of the opportunity – however small – to send their children to elementary school (Driessen 1981: 204–5). Today, the differences between town and country are less





Western Sicily. Contessa Entellina (1966).

sharp. However, schoolteachers still complain about the high degree of non-attendance by children who live in the country, and children of countrydwellers rarely receive secondary education.

The educated look down upon both country-people and the agro-town proletarians as illiterate ignorants, although they agree that there are exceptions among workers who live in town. *Educación* (*educato*), the core of *cultura* and *civiltà*, has a broader meaning than formal education or instruction. It primarily means that a person has acquired general standards of moral and civic behavior. It implies displaying good manners, being able to talk eloquently, making a good appearance, possessing a sense of honor and shame, keeping one's face, participating in discussions on important topics, conducting contacts with outsiders, having an own personality, and being able to behave with *formalidad*. This is a concept that overlaps with *educación*. It means politeness, honorableness, self-discipline, the ability to control one's emotions and stand upon one's dignity. Although a person might acquire *educación*, *formalidad* and *cultura* through upbringing, the educated hold that it has much to do with heredity.

First and foremost these concepts are used

as ideological dividing-lines between town and country. In the eyes of townspeople, particularly the elite, countrydwellers are a lower sort of people who "do not possess *cultura*"; peasants are said to lack *civiltà*, polite forms, polish, genteel behavior. The slowness of speech and wit of people living in the country is a recurrent element in jokes about countrypeople. They are said to be devoid of civilized luster (see also Pitt-Rivers 1971: 105). To an outsider these images of countrydwellers may seem exaggerations. In fact, they are stereotypes. However, the important fact is that agro-townsmen *perceive* these differences between town and country, they are part of the symbolic dominance of the town over the country. Agricultural laborers use less strong terms. They say that it is boring in the countryside, that there is nothing going on there, which is also a judgement on the inhabitants. Workers are well aware of the lack of prestige of working the land and they believe that literacy and *cultura* are good in and of themselves. They encourage their children to study well.

Elite people, who are addressed with the referential title of *Don*, refer to their own group as "we, the educated", or "we, the people with civilization". They belong to the *casino* or *circolo civile*, a gentlemen's social club usually located



Western Sicily. *Masseria*.

on the main plaza. Landowning families who were "too rustic" were excluded from membership in these social clubs (cf. Schneider & Schneider 1976: 151). At the turn of last century *casinos* were founded in most larger Andalusian towns. They became bastions of local landed and commercial interests. They were the stage upon which local politics were acted out. Situated in the core of the town, they were the center of gravity of urbanity and the local shrine of "civilization". They were terminals of communication with the outside world, the only semi-public place where newspapers were read. It was there that the first telephone, radio, and television were installed. In their fashionable lounge with plush arm-chairs, carpets, and engravings, the best wines were served. Here gentlemen discussed local and national politics. The *casinos* and *circoli* represented the town to the outside world. High civil authorities were welcomed there and important business transactions were settled over a glass of sherry. Since the early 1960's more and more members of the rising middle-class –

merchants, bureaucrats, and skilled workers – have been admitted to these clubs. The upwardly mobile find the entrance fee and annual dues cheap for membership in this civilized place *par excellence*.

*Cultura* and *civiltà* are constantly acted out and confirmed in an atmosphere of intense daily sociability in the *casino*, the *cafés*, the *piazza*, and voluntary associations. "Civilization" is expressed in the *desire* to live in the compactness of the town, in the love of human noises and action, in talking and debate, in the higher esteem for urban *residence* than for rural living.<sup>9</sup> This general *ambiance* sets the agro-town apart from the surrounding countryside. The town's *ambiance* is one of the reasons why small farmers, tenants, and day-laborers prefer town over country life. Life in the country is, in their view, a life spent away from the pleasures of intense social intercourse. Participation in the luster of civilized life constitutes the primary meaning of living in an agro-town. In this respect, the propertied and working classes depend upon each other for the

promotion and enhancement of their town's ambiance. Although the landless who live in the agro-towns can not fulfill all of the requirements of a "civilized" way of life, they indirectly partake in it and share in its *ambiente*.

In the past, living in the country as a day-laborer or peasant brought no extra benefits to compensate for the lack of ambiance. To become a permanent laborer on an estate and thereby gain at least the security of full employment was difficult. The insecure terms of tenancy and sharecropping contracts did not act as a stimulus either. Crop failures could easily ruin a smallholder. True, there was a little more to eat in the country, but a smallholder had to work even harder than a day-laborer. Employers exploited their laborers, but a tenant or sharecropper exploited himself (and members of his household) even more for a little more bread, oil and chickpeas in the good years. In the eyes of workers this toil did not result in a dignified life. There was nothing but hard, dirty, backbreaking work in the country. As a result, many tenants and sharecroppers kept their residence in town and commuted between town and fields. Those who grew labor-intensive crops often constructed small huts of straw as a temporary residence.

This attitude towards the land and rural living has deep historical roots. When in the second half of the eighteenth century the reform ministers of Spain's Charles III drew up a plan to colonize the wastelands along the Andalusian highway with the objectives of combatting banditry and encouraging cultivation by creating an independent middle peasantry who lived near or on the land, they considered local peasants and laborers unfit for this project. Instead they recruited thousands of Flemish and Bavarian settlers accustomed to living in a scattered habitat (cf. Caro Baroja 1957: 205-33). One of the reasons why the authorities failed to decentralize the nuclear settlements in Sicily by settling the peasants on the land, was precisely the peasants' preference for the sociability of the agro-town (cf. Blok 1966: 10-12).

The intense sociability of agro-towns is linked to economic and political conditions. In the case of agricultural laborers this sociability

is, among other things, a function of solidarity in the face of harsh unemployment and political conditions. By being around in the streets and plazas, a man can gather information on work opportunities, wages, prices, odd jobs, all important knowledge where work is scarce and fragmented. A man can also more easily monitor the behavior of the female members of his family, an important requirement for maintaining his honor. Links of friendship and kinship are essential for obtaining information. Communication between large numbers of people in compact settings is easy, but difficult in the countryside. In Andalusia the informal *unión* (solidarity) of day-laborers acted as a mechanism to maintain or increase wages and to reduce unemployment in a time when labor union were repressed (cf. Martínez Alier 1971: 145). The compact habitat facilitates the creation and maintenance of cohesion among the workers. As members of an urban community workers can more easily lay claims on communal services and charity than country-dwellers. Finally, their place of residence is used to claim some dignity and superiority vis-à-vis their country dwelling peers. They derive some self-respect from the knowledge that there still is a lower category of people beneath them.

For the landowning and professional elite the agro-town is the center where lines of control and influence come together, where they can enjoy a "civilized" life free from manual labor. Sozializing is an essential part of the elite way of life. And it is the frame of reference for their claims of superiority over those who have to work on the land.

In order to understand the impact of an urban orientation on life in agro-towns it is essential to grasp the interdependency of the different classes of people who live there. Centuries of rural insecurity united the walled-in community. In addition, peasants and agricultural laborers were dependent on the local elite for their means of subsistence. This dependency was ritualized in the institution of godparenthood and other forms of patronage. It was also expressed in the charity dispensed by the elite. Although the elite was also dependent on the common people for labor and services, the relationship on the whole was highly

unequal. Laborers and peasants, dependent in the material sphere, had to consider the elite's sensibilities in the sphere of manners. The elite used the labor of the common people to maintain a life style in which manual work was ostentatiously denigrated and stigmatized as uncivilized. Because the elite controlled the power resources, the stigmatized laborers not only did not retaliate, they came to believe themselves that manual labor was degrading. There are two mechanisms at work here that are characteristic of "established-outsider configurations" (cf. Elias & Scotson 1965: 101-2, 152-3). Agrotown elites (the "established") successfully claim superior status vis-à-vis the common people (the "outsiders"), which originates in their control over the means of subsistence, but which is phrased in terms of more "civilization" (*cultura, civiltà*). This is also true in the factual sense as the elite's code of behavior demands a higher degree of self-restraint (*formalidad*). Although the peasants and laborers cannot attain the high standards of the elite's code, they identify with the elite's style of life and try to imitate it (cf. Redfield 1960: 73). They look down upon country-dwellers (the real outsiders) who are even further removed from the seat of power and "civilization". We maintain that pacified life behind the walls of agrotowns and the specific interdependencies of people who share the same space favoured the development of an urban ethos which served as a model for behavior. Formal manners, elaborate language and rituals, in their turn, helped to minimize conflicts inherent in the sharp socio-economic stratification.

Our focus on cultural dominance has also made us aware of important complementary oppositions in Andalusian and Sicilian society. These contracts include those between civilized and uncivilized, human and animal, pacified and violent, cleanliness and uncleanness, leisure and work, literate and illiterate. All these contrasts – each of which can be regarded as a transformation of the opposition between urban and rural – overlap in and are mediated by the *corona* or the *ruedo*. Bordering the agrotowns, this zone is clearly different from the countryside in four important respects: small and medium size plots as opposed to fairly ho-

mogeneous latifundia; intensive as opposed to extensive cultivation; polyculture as opposed to monoculture; and resident as opposed to absentee ownership. The *ruedo* or *corona* is transitional space, both urban and rural, betwixt and between. Several other phenomena attest to its liminality. Here we encounter engaged couples taking strolls (without being chaperoned); non-peasants tending crops; and women working on the land. Furthermore, this intermediate zone is the site for communication with the other world. It is here that we find the cemetery and shrines, where mortal being communicate with immortal beings, where saints mediate between heaven and earth. Finally, some of the processions pass through this zone. All these liminal dimensions of agrotowns deserve further research.

## Conclusion

Architecture, attitudes towards work, literacy, formality, cleanliness, refined manners, and ambiance, all these phenomena reviewed in the preceding section amount to *civiltà* and *cultura*. These native conceptions entail ideas about a civilized way of life which may be summarized in our concept of urban ethos. It expresses the cultural dominance of agrotowns over their rural hinterlands. Within the agrotowns a minority claims to be more civilized than the majority who from time to time have to leave civilized space to work on the land for a livelihood. The urban ethos is thus also an ideology that justified and buttresses the position of the landed and professional elite.

Post-war emigration of thousands of agrotown people paradoxically reinforced and heightened people's awareness of their urban ethos. While in the mountains of Andalusia and Sicily the ambiance of the small towns has been destroyed by the exodus of too many inhabitants, most towns of the plains have proved to be more resilient, even though many day-laborers' families continue on the brink of poverty. In the 1970's state subsidies and emigrants' remittances have been invested in the ambiance of these communities. Streets and houses have been renovated, new voluntary associations have been founded. Considerable



funds have been invested in ceremonial pagentry.

The urban ethos, then, acted as a social magnet that prevented most of the peasants and laborers from permanent dispersal in the countryside, just as it now contributes to the viability of small towns in the countryside in an era of massive emigration.

## Postscriptum

We would like to call attention to Keith Thomas' fine new book on changing perceptions of the natural world in early-modern England. He argues that the growth of industrial towns led to a new longing for the countryside. It is shown that an increasing control over the natural world and a diminishing dependence of animal power and agriculture as a means of subsistence generated new sensibilities in townspeople with respect to landscapes, trees, flowers and animals. This study can offer a significant case for comparative research on attitudes towards nature, land and animals in Mediterranean agro-towns. It is important to stress that, unlike the towns dealt with in Thomas' book, this paper deals with agro-towns. Most of their inhabitants are highly dependent upon agriculture, and consequently on the vagaries of nature. This difference in the degree of dependence goes a long way to explain variant sensibilities regarding natural environment.

## Notes

This article is a revised version of a paper presented at the XIth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, Vancouver, August 20–25, 1983. (Symposium on the Anthropology of Mediterranean Agro-towns.)

1. Cf. De Josselin De Jong (1977 [1935]: 167–68). This theme will be explored more fully elsewhere; see the forthcoming essay "The Mediterranean Area as a Field of Ethnological Study".
2. For a suggestion of such a comparison, see Boissevain's review article of Cutileiro's monograph on Soppothen Portugal (1974: 193).
3. Map 1 in Dovring (1965: 14–5) provides a useful overview of settlement size in Europe. Note the preponderance of big villages and agro-towns in

Andalusia and Sicily. Sicilian agro-towns are on the whole somewhat larger than Andalusian agglomerations (cf. Monheim 1969: 159–60).

4. Agro-towns emerged as fortified settlements in a highly insecure environment. Their main function was security and self-defence. How can one explain the persistence of these agglomerations after the countryside had been largely pacified? Causal links between ecological conditions and settlement type cannot be maintained. What is needed is a more refined analysis of a complex interplay of a wide range of forces, including cultural processes.
5. This paper is primarily based on field work. For more detailed evidence and bibliographical references see Blok (1969) and Driessen (1981).
6. Our evidence mainly refers to the interior of Western Sicily and the lower plains (*campiña*) of Andalusia.
7. In Western Andalusia more than forty percent of the agricultural land is held in estates of more than 300 hectares (cf. Maas 1983: 89).
8. Note that there is a counterpoint to this negative view of manual labor. Andalusians display a strong sense of *cumplir*: "the obligation to do one's job with the required degree of diligence" (Martinez-Alier 1971: 174).
9. It has recently become fashionable among parvenues of agro-towns to buy a *piso* (apartment) on the Costa del Sol or in one of the provincial capitals. A very recent trend among the metropolitan wealthy is to boast a fancy country-house.

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