

FROM MILOCCA TO MILENA: THE GEO-ANTHROPOLOGY OF RURAL SETTLEMENT CHANGE IN CENTRAL SICILY

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SUMMARY

This paper analyses rural settlement change in a municipality in west-central Sicily. The period covered is approximately 1930-90. The historical basis of the comparison is the use of a classic but little-known anthropological study of the village carried out in the late 1920s but not published until 1971. This text is Charlotte Gower Chapman's *Milocca: A Sicilian Village*. Although there are some shortcomings to Chapman's study, notably the atypicality of the village and her scant attention to the political context of Fascism and to various other aspects of rural social conflict, much of her analysis is valid as a benchmark, and the first part of this paper comprises a reconstruction of the geography of Milocca (now called Milena) sixty years ago. The second part of the paper examines the main parameters of change – population change (decline since 1951), changes in the patterning of settlement within the municipality (consolidation in the central, main settlement and decay in the hamlets at the periphery), and economic changes (decline in agricultural employment). Special attention is given to the local planning context and to how this is a reflection of political schisms within the community, notably the long-established split into two dynastic factions. The village has undoubtedly been modernised but its economic future is far from secure, for it is increasingly dependent on outside help in the form of migrant remittances and State subsidies.

Key words: Agriculture, rural settlement, population change, Sicily.

INTRODUCTION

The long-delayed publication of Charlotte Gower Chapman's book *Milocca: A Sicilian Village* in the early 1970s brought to public view an anthropological text which, had it been published forty years earlier, when the field work was actually carried out, would surely have become a classic. The reason for the delay was simply that the typescript had been lost: only in 1966 were the brittle and yellow pages of a carbon copy discovered in the University of Chicago. Once the significance of the discovery became clear, the

manuscript was published in more or less its original form, first in America (Chapman, 1971) and then in Britain (Chapman, 1973). Recently an Italian translation has also appeared (Chapman, 1985).

Chapman went to Milocca, a small *comune* (municipality) in west-central Sicily, in 1928. Fig. 1 shows the location of Milocca (now known as Milena — it changed its name in 1933) in relation to surrounding settlements and topography. For eighteen months she lived amongst the 3000 villagers and became intimately acquainted with their social customs, folklore, religious beliefs, agricultural practices and the functioning of the village as a geographical entity. In true anthropological tradition, her experiences drew her to the pulse of the Milocca people and enabled her to analyse them vividly in their relationships with each other, to their community as a whole, and to their surrounding environment. When it was written in the early 1930s *Milocca: A Sicilian Village* was one of the earliest forays into cultural anthropology and only the second such study of a semi-literate people following the model of Robert Redfield's *Tepoztlán: A Mexican Village* which had just been published (Redfield, 1930). The similarity in titles is surely not coincidental. Then, the manuscript was lost and Chapman went off to teach in China and subsequently to engage in war training work. After the war she worked for the CIA. She died in 1982.

Had the book been published in the 1930s it would certainly have rivalled Redfield's in importance. It was a longer, more complete and more detailed analysis than Redfield's in Mexico, and benefitted from the fact that Chapman was in the field twice as long as Redfield. Milocca was, in short, the first detailed anthropological study of a European peasant society. Reading it now, it appeals as a carefully-crafted and in places beautifully written analysis of rural Sicily in the Fascist era, and deserves to be recognised retrospectively as having the classic status that its belated publication denied it.

Our purpose in this article is to draw out the geography from Chapman's study and use this as a descriptive benchmark against which to measure and assess the degree of rural transformation in the area as revealed in recent fieldwork and archival study which we have carried out in the same municipality. Our material is basically anthropological in terms of its small geographical scale and its focus on a single community, but it is geographical in that we concentrate on visible changes in the landscape, especially settlement forms, and on the economy and demography of the *comune*. Landscape changes are expressed mainly through the comparison of archive maps (overlooked by Chapman) with field mapping carried out in 1990, and socio-economic and demographic changes are largely documented by small-area statistics published for the municipality by the various Italian censuses. Chapman's ignorance of cartographic and census sources enables us to redefine the physical and socio-economic character of the settlement as it was *circa* 1930, and compare this picture across a sixty-year time-span with *circa* 1990.

THE TYPICALITY OF MILOCCA

Anthropologists rarely take much trouble to rigorously assess the typicality of the communities they choose to study. Their narrow geographic focus and lack of attention to

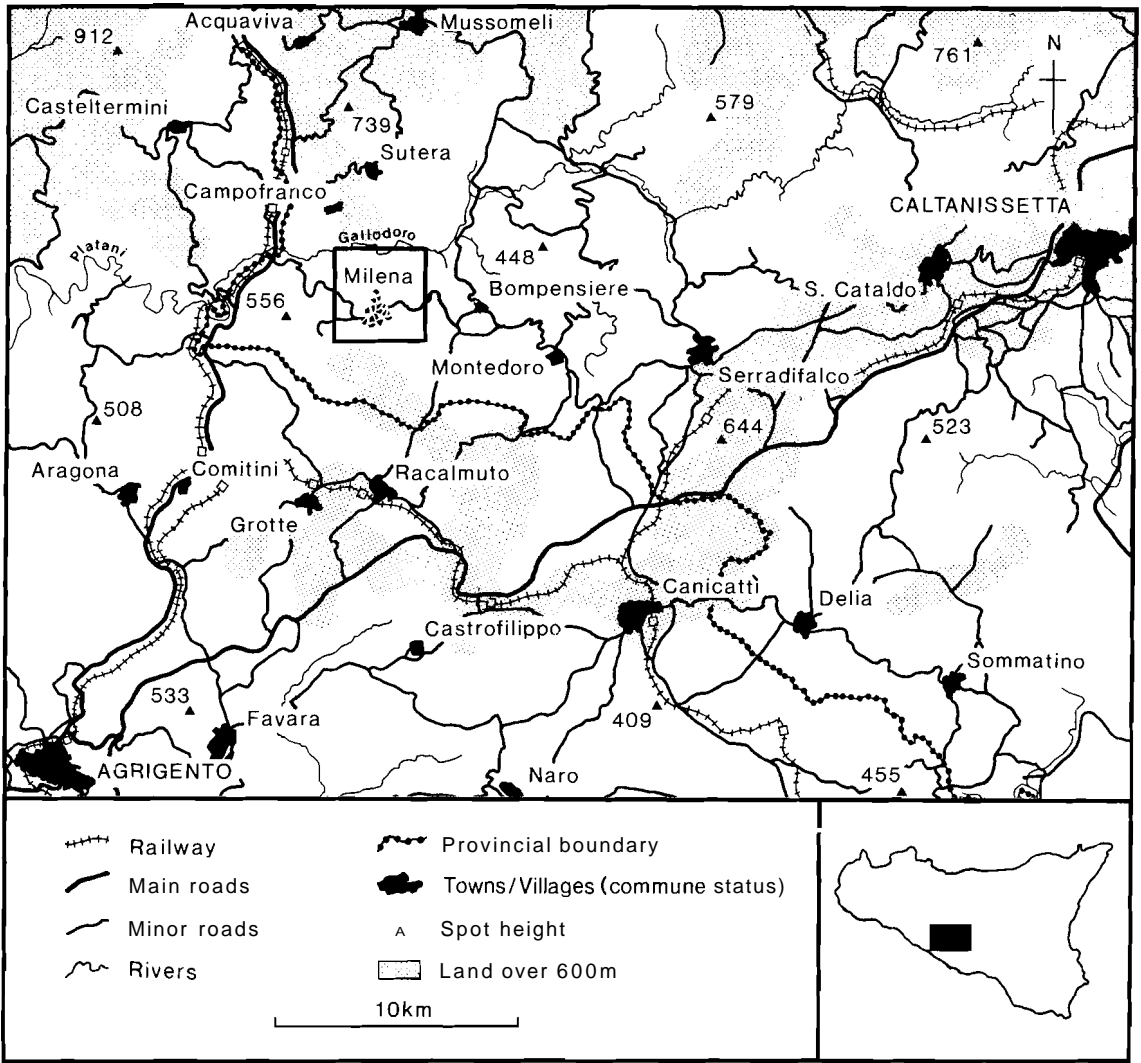


FIGURE 1. Location of Milena in west-central Sicily

broad regional-scale variations and their concern for the traditional, the unique and the exotic often mean that their findings have little validity beyond their chosen community of study. This key criticism has now come to be accepted by anthropologists themselves, notably in John Davis's (1977) critical survey of the rich field of Mediterranean anthropology.

Chapman's work falls spectacularly into the trap of atypicality. From the point of view of its settlement pattern, historical origins and many of its social characteristics,

Milocca/Milena is totally unlike its surrounding municipalities in western and central Sicily (King and Patterson, 1990, pp.4-6). The typical Sicilian settlement form is the «agro-town», described in detail by King and Strachan (1978). Agro-towns take the form of tightly-packed clusters of dwellings almost literally piled on top of each other and often sited on prominent mountainsides and hill-tops. A typical Sicilian agro-town would have a population of 10,000-15,000. Such hybrid settlements are urban in size but rural in function. Milena (we shall use this form when referring to the modern settlement, Milocca when referring to the Chapman era) has a totally different physiognomy, being made up of a number of small villages and hamlets scattered across a wide area and with only a loosely structured central focus. Although recent archaeological discoveries have established the Milena area as a site of interesting pre-hellenic settlement (La Rosa, 1979), this has no direct relationship to the modern settlement pattern which, in Sicilian terms, is quite recent, deriving from a process of colonisation of feudal and ecclesiastical land by peasants from the neighbouring *comune* of Sutera in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries (Petix, 1984). Because the distance between Sutera and the newly-colonised estates was so great and involved traversing difficult countryside, including fording the deeply entrenched Gallodoro river, the peasants from Sutera set up small clusters of dwellings on their newly-acquired lands, such clusters often being located at spring sites.

It seems that Chapman's main reason for choosing Milocca was simply that she had an introduction to some of the villagers from their emigrant relatives in the Sicilian community in Chicago, which she had studied for her doctorate thesis submitted just before she departed for Sicily. Her motive in going to Sicily was to compare the customs of the Sicilian immigrants she had studied in Chicago with those of the «homeland» and to replicate Redfield's Mexican fieldwork methodology in a different setting (Chapman, 1973, p. 3; King and Patterson, 1990, p. 2).

MILOCCA AND MILENA: METHODOLOGY OF A HISTORICAL COMPARISON

In this section of the paper we set out the methodological approaches we use for the sixty-year comparison between the Milocca of 1930 and the Milena of today. Our principal focus is on the changing physical structure of the village but we also consider contextual demographic and socio-economic change. The general strategy of a «restudy» of a classic field location is not new (see for instance Lewis's (1951) restudy of Redfield's Tepoztlán), but it is, we believe, a technique which could usefully be employed more extensively in the fields of social anthropology and human geography.

The first approach in our Sicilian case study is the careful analysis and interpretation of the data contained in Chapman's text. This information must be evaluated critically (cf. King and Patterson, 1990) but is of tremendous value in building up a «benchmark» picture of conditions in the *comune* in the late 1920s. Chapman's text is laced with accurate descriptions of the landscape, housing conditions, settlement types, agricultural land use and ways of life of pre-war Milocca and this geographical material can be carefully mined and reassembled to fit the comparative framework we wish to adopt.

Chapman's methodology was essentially the time-honoured anthropological technique of participant observation. Although her own ambiguous social position (her status as a foreign female researcher and her unavoidable reliance on one of the main social and political factions in the village) placed limitations on the breadth of her data, her fieldwork was both meticulous and inspired. However, there were certain sources of data theoretically available to her, both in the local archives in Milocca and in census records which it should have been possible to consult in Palermo, which she did not use. These include detailed maps of the *comune* dated 1928 (the year of her arrival in Milocca) as well as various land use and population records for the 1920s and 1930s.

Our own fieldwork also included participant observation, for this is the best way to appreciate the subtleties and nuances that infuse both social life and economic relationships in such a small and still essentially rural community. We abandoned the idea of a programme of standard questionnaire-based interviews to local inhabitants because a pilot study revealed an intense level of suspicion towards a formal questioning approach, especially when the answers were taped or written down. Instead a series of interviews were carried out with certain key personnel involved with planning the development of the village: people in the town hall, local politicians and other individuals who, either by virtue of their age and long residence in the place (a few actually remembered Chapman), or through their strategic social position (eg. as teachers, employers etc.), were capable of making informed judgements about the character of the municipality and its processes of change. Particular attention was given to the planning context in the form of the local *Piano Regolatore Generale*, the commune-level «master-plan», which theoretically zones land use and guides the physical development of the municipality. We constructed our own detailed map of the *comune*, marking every dwelling, its condition and whether it was occupied or abandoned, and every economic and public service function (shops, workshops, bars, schools etc.). Finally we assembled statistical data, from the local municipal archives and from published censuses, to establish the profile of economic and demographic change over the sixty-year period. The annual or periodic nature of some of this data enabled us to identify particular periods of time when the rate of change was dramatic — for instance the 1960s for out-migration.

MILOCCA SIXTY YEARS AGO

Three chapters in Chapman's book contain explicitly geographical material on Milocca sixty years ago. These are chapters I, 7 and 10, entitled respectively «The Setting», «Geographical Units» and «Man and his Universe» (Chapman, 1973. pp. 1-29, 129-157, 210-228). They provide detailed information about the physical landscape, settlement and housing types, agricultural patterns and the general rural way of life. In this section of the paper we present the salient features of Chapman's geographical narrative, bolstered by other literary and statistical information of the period, the intention being to provide a descriptive platform upon which the historical comparison can be built. We start with a brief portrait of the physical landscape of the area surrounding Milocca.

The region of west-central Sicily where Milocca is located is described by Chapman

(1973, p. 1) as being like a gigantic relief-map; a rugged, heavily eroded landscape devoid of trees except for scattered olives and almonds. The countryside was «apparently uninhabited», the people living in high-perched nucleated settlements away from the malarial lower ground and marshy river valleys. Although Chapman made few references to the wider geographical setting of Milocca, it is appropriate at this point to mention that the area is drained by the River Platani, one of the major rivers of western Sicily. Milocca lies in the hills above and to the east of the middle section of the Platani valley (see Fig. 1). Together with its tributary the Gallodoro, which runs beyond the northern border of the territory of Milocca, the Platani flows generally southwest to enter the sea at the ancient Greek site of Eraclea Minoa. It is also appropriate here to mention the administrative context. Milocca had been elevated to *comune* status in 1923, five years before Chapman's arrival. Most of the territory for the new *comune* was taken from the land of Sutera, but one section, the *frazione* of San Biagio, was drawn from Campofranco (Petix, 1984, pp. 11-12). Although Milocca lay at the western extremity of the province of Caltanissetta, it was (and of course still is) somewhat closer to the capital of the adjacent province, Agrigento, to which the natural communications of road and railway led far more directly than to Caltanissetta (Fig. 1).

Isolation was held by Chapman (1973, pp. 15, 19) to be responsible for many of the backward characteristics of Milocca. The village's historic dependence on Sutera meant that the roads were in a deplorable condition and there was no piped drinking water, only a few feeble springs. Electricity was also lacking. Public services were particularly lacking in the hamlets making up the former *frazione* of San Biagio. This section of the *comune* contained 954 inhabitants in 1923. These people lived with no medical facilities, no electricity or street lighting, no church and no roads. Communication with the outside world, even to the «parent» *comune* of Campofranco, was by poor-quality tracks. Perhaps the major inconvenience was the lack of a cemetery, which forced the local people to carry their dead on mule back or on their shoulders 12 km. to Campofranco. During winter when this track was often impassable the dead had to be kept for days or even weeks in the village until the weather improved and the track dried out (Petix, 1984, pp. 127, 144).

Clearly, life in Milocca in the late 1920s was very much a hand-to-mouth existence in which each peasant family tried to provide for its own needs and largely remained outside the money economy — indeed Chapman mentions the use of eggs as legal tender (Chapman, 1973, p.17). Field work was done by hand or animal power, the land being too hilly for mechanised agriculture even if local farmers had sufficient capital to invest in machinery, which of course most had not. In spite of the rugged terrain, every square metre of tillable land was cultivated to maximise output and the sides of the road and paths were gleaned for edible greens and herbs.

Whether they worked on their own plots or on neighbouring *feudi* (large semi-feudal estates), the population of Milocca was almost entirely agricultural. Chapman enumerated barely 80 persons (cf. 1931 population of Milocca 3,800) who were not engaged in farming, and a tenth of these worked in the olive mill, Milocca's only industry. The other non-agriculturalists were teachers, professional people, public servants, merchants and artisans. These few people apart, the life of Milocca moved strictly in accordance with the rhythm of the seasons and of the agricultural year, the high point of which was the wheat

harvest in early July. Of course, in a climatically hazardous environment such as the southern Mediterranean, good harvests were by no means assured and real hardship ensued if the winter and spring rains failed. A bad year was spoken of as a «year of hunger» (Chapman, 1973, p. 11).

With virtually no irrigation, Milocca's was a dry agriculture: wheat, vines, olives, almonds and broad beans. Wheat, for both bread and pasta, was the main staple and in most years a considerable proportion of the total crop was sent for sale outside the *comune*. Almonds were the other main crop «exported» in this way. In good years small surpluses of olive oil, broad beans, wine, cheese (from sheep and goats) and hay were also sent out of the *comune*.

Although Chapman was aware of the existence of the Agricultural Census taken in 1930 — referring fleetingly, and erroneously, to the 31 animals recorded by the survey (Chapman, 1973, p. 61) - she otherwise ignores this richly detailed source of agricultural statistics which provided, for each of the 8.000 *comuni* in Italy, a huge printed sheet of tabulated data. Table 1 provides a synthesis of the most important data for the *comune* of Milocca taken from this source. The importance of wheat, almonds, broad beans, olives and vines in the farm economy is confirmed, as is the dominance of small holdings (95% of holdings were below 10 hectares in size and 65% below 3 ha.). Chapman's mention of 31 animals seems grossly out of tune with the data presented in the census — 2.867 in all. Possibly she was referring to the 34 cattle only.

The social structuring of rural life in Milocca was related to employment and the land tenure status of the numerically dominant agricultural families. But the dominant social schism was between the two factions associated with the Cipolla and Angilella dynasties. The Cipollas were conservative landowners allied to the Church. The Angilellas originated from outside the *comune*; their wealth was in trade. Politically they had socialist leanings although this did not prevent them from declaring themselves Fascists when it counted. The head of this faction, Don Toto Angilella, was the most powerful man in the town in Chapman's time. He owned the olive press, ran the rural bank and was the *commissario prefettizio* (a kind of mayor). The extent to which these factions still dominate the life of Milocca will be briefly touched on later.

The class structure of Milocca was quite simple. Chapman (1973, p. 50) identified three classes: wealthy and professional people, artisans, and peasants. The first of these usually derived their wealth from land; such was the case with the Cipollas. Amongst the professionals were the village teachers, priests, lawyers and doctors. The number of artisans in Milocca was small — about thirty according to Chapman (1973, p. 60). The *viddani* were the most numerous class: they were the landless and semi-landless peasants who hired themselves out to work for others. Rural labour was extremely poorly paid and the *viddani* were fundamentally defined by their poverty and their almost complete lack of formal education — most were illiterate. It was from the ranks of the *viddani* that most of the early twentieth century emigrants were drawn. America was the main destination and Pittston, Pennsylvania and Birmingham, Alabama the specific towns where *Milocchese* emigrants settled (Chapman, 1973, p. 151). Some of those who departed in the years before Chapman was in Milocca had returned with enough money to buy land and establish themselves as *burgisi* or independent peasant farmers.

TABLE 1
Milocca: agricultura] statistics, 1930

Land and production			Size of holdings		
	area (ha) ¹	output (qu) ²	size class (ha)	no.	area (ha)
Wheat	841	9.579	0-1	211	92
Barley	46	395	1-3	220	429
Broad beans	730	5.034	3-5	118	466
Chick-peas	8	74	5-10	80	563
Vegetable plots	5	31	10-20	27	348
Forage crops	48	1.265	20-50	4	110
Vines	86	2.455	50-100	2	158
Olives	40 (195)	3.888	100+	1	102
Oranges	11	396	Total	663	2.268
Lemons	(11)	22			
Apples	(13)	52			
Pears	(13)	98	<i>Livestock</i>		
Peaches	(13)	39		no.	
Almonds	13 (676)	7.102	Bovines	34	
Prickly pear	5	200	Equines	1.197	
Pasture	90		Sheep	1.217	
Fallow	3 5 2		Goats	393	
			Pigs	26	

Notes: 1. Figure in brackets is for area of crop in mixed land use (eg. almonds planted on pasture land).

2. Average annual production in quintals for the years 1923-28.

Source: *Catasto Agrario 1930: Provincia di Caltanissetta*. ISTAT, Romc, 1933.

Perhaps the most interesting geographical information presented in Chapman's account is her detailed descriptions of the unique patterning of settlement in Milocca (see Chapman, 1973, especially pp. 130-136). Unlike the surrounding *comuni*, all of which took the agrotown form noted earlier, the municipality of Milocca was composed of 35 hamlets (36 including the village centre). Each hamlet, or *robba* in local dialect, contained several families, all or most of them related to each other. The biggest settlement cluster was the village centre, or *centro urbano*, where 200 people lived; the smallest was Robba Cardinale, occupied by the families of three brothers. Although Chapman provides a scatter of tantalising detail about the various *robbe* there is no clear indication of their location, nor is there even a systematic listing of all their names. Her sketch-map of the *centro urbano* — to be discussed later — gives an interesting impression of the focal point of this loosely-structured *comune* but it is impossible to guess how the other *robbe* are related to this central cluster. We shall rectify this shortcoming later.

Finally we consider the nature of the housing in Milocca sixty years ago. The *Milocchesi* lived in small houses of one or two rooms built of *gesso* - uneven lumps of gypsum held together with plaster made up of ground gypsum. The thick windowless walls kept the interiors cool during the heat of summer but were less effective in winter when they were easily penetrated by damp. The roof was made of canes lashed together and overlain with heavy clay tiles. Two-room houses had one room above the other, the upper room used for living and reached by an external staircase, the lower room reserved for animals and storage. Upper rooms sometimes had windows opening on to the street. The houses of the wealthy often had an extra room, a *salotto*, for receiving guests. In the much more common single-room dwellings people and animals shared the same accommodation: circumstances hardly making for cleanliness or hygiene. Cooking was done on an open hearth, and bread baked in an external beehive-shaped oven. No running water or toilet facilities were provided. Water was gathered from a nearby spring or fountain, but supplies were unreliable (Cianfrani, 1973, pp. 12-13). Chapman found it difficult to judge the *Milocchese* dwellings aesthetically, noting that whilst their rustic simplicity might appeal to outsiders, they were strictly functional and all much alike. The visitor interested in the local vernacular architecture will find hundreds of traditional houses in Milena today, some still inhabited but many more abandoned.

The remainder of this paper is based around a systematic historical comparison between Chapman's Milocca and the modern Milena. First we shall look at population change, including migration. Then we shall examine in some detail the changing physical structure and appearance of the municipality: this will be based on the construction and reconstruction of maps of various kinds, and also will involve an examination of the role of the local planning framework. Finally we shall consider the broader context of rural socio-economic change, with comparative data on employment, agriculture and other economic activities.

POPULATION CHANGE

Table 2 gives the population figures for Milocca/Milena for all Italian censuses. Since Milocca was only made an independent municipality in 1923, the data for the censuses up to 1921 are a compound of the figures of the *frazione* of Milocca in the municipality of Sutura and the *frazione* of San Biagio in the municipality of Carnoofranco.

The Italian census records two sets of population figures — *popolazione residente* and *popolazione presente*. The former embraces the registered population in each *comune* (including those temporarily absent on census day), the latter records those people actually present in the *comune* on census day. It can be seen that for all censuses since 1901 the «resident» exceeds the «present» population; this implies a considerable temporary absence of people seeking work outside the *comune* (a common phenomenon in Sicilian and south Italian municipalities). Long-term absentees from the *comune* should cancel their registration in the town hall (and re-register in their new destination). One peculiar circumstance affecting the figure for Milocca in Chapman's time was the fact that upwards of a hundred local men were in prison in Mussorneli (a town to the north of Milocca) awaiting trial for

TABLE 2
Milocca/Milena and its agrarian region: census data 1861-1981

Census	Milocca/Milena		Platani hills agrarian region	
	Resident	Present	Resident	Present
1861	1.344	1.431	33.601	33.330
1871	1.408	1.328	35.499	35.264
1881	1.536	1.699	40.207	40.438
1901	2.459	2.432	46.604	46.211
1911	3.041	2.961	49.418	48.296
1921	3.208	3.180	49.984	48.517
1931	3.866	3.824	51.197	50.208
1936	4.205	4.008	53.710	51.955
1951	5.026	4.914	60.139	58.381
1961	4.870	4.480	55.193	52.072
1971	3.802	3.652	42.423	40.283
1981	3.795	3.509	39.481	37.734

Note: For definitions of «resident» and «present» population see text.

Source: *Popolazione Residente e Presente dei Comuni*. ISTAT, Rome, 1985

Mafia crimes; they had been rounded up in the Mafia purge of 1927-28 (Chapman, 1973, pp. 7-8).

Overall, Table 2 shows a rather rapid growth in the population of Milocca from 1861 to 1951, followed by a fairly sharp decline (of 24.5% in «resident» and 28.5% in «present» population) over the period 1951-81. The rate of increase up to 1951 was amongst the most rapid in Sicily (Riccardi, 1958) but of course this reflected the recency of the foundation of settlement in the district. Interestingly the 1981 figure is probably very close to the number of people living in Milocca in 1928-29.

Table 2 also shows the aggregate figure for the agrarian region in which Milocca/Milena is located. This is the *regione agraria* of the «hills of the upper Platani» which contains the following *comuni*: Acquaviva Platani, Bompensiere, Campofranco, Milena, Montedoro, Mussomeli, Serradifalco, Sutura, Vallelunga Pratameno, Villalba. The data for this wider region, which occupies the western extremity of the province of Caltanissetta, show a profile of growth and decline which is quite similar to that of Milena, i.e. with a peak at the 1951 census and a sharp decline, due largely to out-migration, thereafter.

Population change is the combined result of natural increase (or decrease) and net migration. Migration has been the dominant influence in the case of Milocca/Milena. The rapid growth of the population during the period 1881-1911 (a doubling of the resident population during this 30 year period) was mainly due to in-migration from surrounding *comuni* following the distribution of the church lands mentioned earlier. The slowing

down of the rate of population increase in the early decades of the present century was probably due to the departure of many families for America. According to Chapman (1973, p. 11) this type of overseas emigration ceased around 1926. This caused the population to accelerate its growth up to the immediate post-war period. The Fascist ban on both emigration and internal migration naturally had an effect in boosting population growth in rural areas where birth-rates were high. Chapman estimated (1973, pp. 80-81) that mean completed family size was about 5 children.

Table 3 shows the interaction between total population change, natural change and migration in a more clear-cut fashion; unfortunately this analysis can only be made for the three post-war intercensal periods. The decades 1951-61 and 1961-71 were decades of great demographic change in Milena. During 1951-61 a very considerable natural increase (excess of births over deaths) was just about exceeded by a large net outflow of people. Thus there was a small negative change in the total population between 1951 and 1961. During the following decade, 1961-71, natural increase was lower and out-migration higher; hence there was a significant loss in the total population of more than one thousand. By the third decade — 1971-81 — the position had stabilised: a small excess of births over deaths and an equally small migratory loss. The small migration residual does not mean that little movement was taking place. In fact many *Milenesi* were still leaving, but their numbers were balanced by a strong return flow of those who had departed in the 1950s and 1960s. No destinations are given in the census for the migrants, but foreign destinations are known to have changed from the United States in the early part of this century to Germany and Switzerland since the 1960s. There is also a substantial community of *Milenesi* at Asti in northern Italy. Remaining for a moment with Table 3, we can see that whilst the death rate has remained fairly stable over the period covered by the figures, the birth rate has collapsed from an average of 138 per year in the *comune* in the 1950s to 47 per year in the 1970s. Recent data from the municipal records of Milena show that during the 1980s (up to 1987) the average number of annual births was only 41; 1982 was the first year since records started when there were more deaths (50) than births (38) in the *comune*.

TABLE 3
Milena: Intercensal population change, 1951-81

	1951-61	1961-71	1971-81
Births	1.382	868	475
Deaths	453	385	406
Natural change	+929	+483	+69
Net migration	-1.085	-1.551	+76
Total change	-156	-1.068	-7

Sources: *Popolazione e Movimerito Anagrafico dei Comuni*, Vol. 17. ISTAT, Rome, 1974;
Popolazione Residente ai Censimenti del 1971 e 1981 e Movimrnto della Popolazione riel Decennio per Comune. ISTAT, Rome, 1985.

TABLE 4
Milena: age structure of the population, 1951-81

Age groups (years)	1951	1961	1971	1981
0-5	706	630	304	240
6-14	811	833	728	562
15-24	1088	844	579	649
25-34	686	711	356	506
35-44	628	539	503	363
45-54	462	518	414	497
55-64	284	392	435	395
65+	361	403	483	583

Sourci: *Censimento Generale della Popolazione 1951, 1961, 1971, 1981*. ISTAT, Rome, various dates.

The impact of past migration trends has had a marked effect on the evolving population structure of the people left behind. Migration being a selective process — it being mainly young adults who leave — the shrinking residual population becomes disproportionately weighted by the elderly, especially if the migrants come back home to retire. This effect is clearly demonstrated in Table 4. Whilst the number of young children below 5 years of age has dramatically fallen from 706 in 1951 to 240 in 1981, the number of over-65s has risen from 361 to 583. The fall in the economically (and reproductively) active cohorts (15-45 years) is also quite marked - from 2,402 to 1,518. The implications of this ageing population for economic activity will be considered later.

SETTLEMENT CHANGE

Chapman wrote that the unusual patterning of settlement into the *robbe* gave Milocca a reputation for backwardness: it was a community «forgotten by God and by man» completely lacking the modern comforts of civilisation (Chapman, 1973, p. 2). By this she meant not only water, plumbing and electricity but the urban «tone» that was present in the agro-towns with their monumental churches, feudal castles, large squares, shops and general bustle. The rustic aspect of Milocca apparently made it the laughing-stock of the surrounding district (Chapman, 1973, p. 149).

The attainment of municipal status in 1923 and the appointment of Don Toto Angilella as local commissar in 1927 gave Milocca a chance to improve its backwoods image. In 1928, the year of Chapman's arrival, a number of changes were made. Roads were repaired, the springs were improved, kerosene lamps were installed to illuminate the *centro urbano*, and a sanitary officer and pharmacy were introduced. Less tangibly, but in tune with the municipality's aspirations to urbanism, the local nomenclature was changed. The old *robba* names were abolished and the 35 or 36 clusters were reorganised into 14

«villages», each with a fine patriotic name - Roma, Cavour, Garibaldi, Mazzini etc. Similarly the little lanes between the houses and the winding paths that led from one *robba* to another were patriotically re-named: Via Caltanissetta, Via 4 Novembre etc. Chapman observed sardonically that these high-sounding names were used by no-one, and known or understood by only a few (Chapman, 1973, p. 9).

There is a major difficulty in reconstructing the location and nomenclature of the *rohhe* and relating them to the modern *villaggi*. Chapman, as we have noted, gave little help in this regard. The local historian Arturo Petix (1984, pp. 12-13) merely adds to the confusion by listing no fewer than 49 *rohhe*, many more than the generally accepted number which is 35 or 36. It would seem that Petix assigns the name *rohba* to small rural districts or isolated houses which others do not recognise as being true *robbe*. A further problem is that for most of the *rohhe* there are at least two alternative spellings, and for some as many as four. Often these reflect variations between standard Italian and local Sicilian dialect, but the spelling problem is also due to the fact that, even in official documents, there is no consistent spelling for the local place-names.

Table 5 is an attempt to systematise the *robba* names under the respective *villaggi* into which they were grouped in 1928. Mostly the names given were taken from documents and maps dated 1928 and 1930 found in the municipal archives. As far as possible these have been cross-checked with other local sources such as Petix (1984), as well as census spellings and the forms used locally by the people of Milena. Often, however, this cross-checking leads to confusion not clarification! Checking the situation on the ground by talking to the older inhabitants of the former *robbe* can obviously help, and we have done this where possible; however, the growth of new housing since 1928 has blurred the formerly clear boundaries between *robbe* and many locals are now unclear where one *ex-robba* ends and another begins.

Fig. 2 puts the information in Table 5 into a spatial context. It shows the physical extent of the *villaggi* as they are today, with the *rohhe* numbered 1-36 according to the notation of Table 5. A few further points to be noted are as follows. First, Villaggio Mazzini is also known as Villaggio 21 Aprile. Second, Villaggio San Martino is now entirely uninhabited and therefore hardly qualifies for *villaggio* status any more. Third, one or two of the *rohhe* are assigned to different *villaggi* by different authorities. Robba Grizzanti, for instance, is part of Villaggio Masaniello according to Petix (1984, p. 13) but all other authorities, including the maps of 1928, put it in San Miceli. Given the distance of Grizzanti from Massaniello, Petix must be wrong. In the listing in Table 5 the first three *villaggi* - Grappa, Roma and Battisti - were in the *frazione* of San Biagio and were formerly part of the *comune* of Campofranco. This was also the case with Robba Cappa, part of Villaggio Masaniello. The rest of the *robbe* and *villaggi* in Table 5 were formerly in the *frazione* of Milocca and part of the *comune* of Sutera before 1923.

The only map in Chapman's book is a sketch-map of the town centre, the *centro urbano* (Fig. 3). In a modest way this group of houses clustered around the church was Milocca's business centre even 60 years ago. Here were found most of the shops, school-rooms and artisans' workshops, plus the administrative offices, police station, mill and inn. Outside of the town centre five *robbe* had shops where merchandise could be purchased. Robba Grizzanti had two stores, Robba Cardiddu had the pharmacy (the only outlying

TABLE 5
Milena: villaggi and robbe

<i>Villaggi</i>	<i>Robbe: most common form (other spellings)</i>	<i>Other localities included in the villaggi by Petix (1984)</i>
GRAPPA	1 Magaro (Magaru)	
ROMA	2 Caratelli (Caratiddi, Carratieddi)	Nuara
	3 Cicco Paolo (Ciccupaulu)	
BATTISTI	4 Caniglia(Canigli, Camiglia)	Bivieri
	5 Nimoli (Nimmoli, Nimmuli, Mendolame)	
	6 Tingi (Tinci, Tirigi)	
MASSANTELLLO	7 Cappa	Ciantro, dei Porci,
	8 Grande (Rrani)	Ianigallo (Ianigaddu), Manta,
	9 Pinto (Piritu)	Serra Pignato, Tulumello
SAN MICELI	10 Grizzanti	
	11 Purgatorio (Purgatono I and II)	
	12 San Miceli	
MAZZINI	13 Canelli (Caniddi)	Serra
	14 Cinciani (Ciaciani)	
GARIBALDI	15 Bilasi (Bilan)	
	16 Bonfiglio (Bomfigliu)	
	17 Cardinale (Cardinali)	
CRISPI	18 Cannemesca (Cannamasca)	
	19 Cartafansa (Cartafanzi)	
	20 Mangarelli (Mancarelli, Mancareddi)	
PIAVE	21 Mantione (Mantiuna)	Frattase, Vallone (Vadduni)
CAVOUR	22 Falcone (Farcuna)	Carrubbu
BALILLA	23 Caini	Noto (Nuatu), Umni
	24 (Cardillo)	Virciglia
	25 Cassenti (Cassianti)	
	26 Nola (Nolo, Nuali)	
VITTORIO VENETO	27 Monella (Muneddi)	Carlazzi, Cartucci
	28 Nascarelli (Nascareddi)	
	29 Patino (Patini, Patisci)	
	30 Pellizone (Piddizuna)	
SAN MARTINO	31 Collura	Spranzone
	32 Gandolfo	
	33 Liuzza (Liuzzo, Luigi)	
	34 San Martino (San Martinu)	
	35 Santa Mana	
CENTRO URBANO	36 Valente (Valenti)	Centro chiesa (Chiana di chiesa)

Note: For the location of the *robbe* see Fig. 4.

Source: Milena municipal archives; Petix (1984).

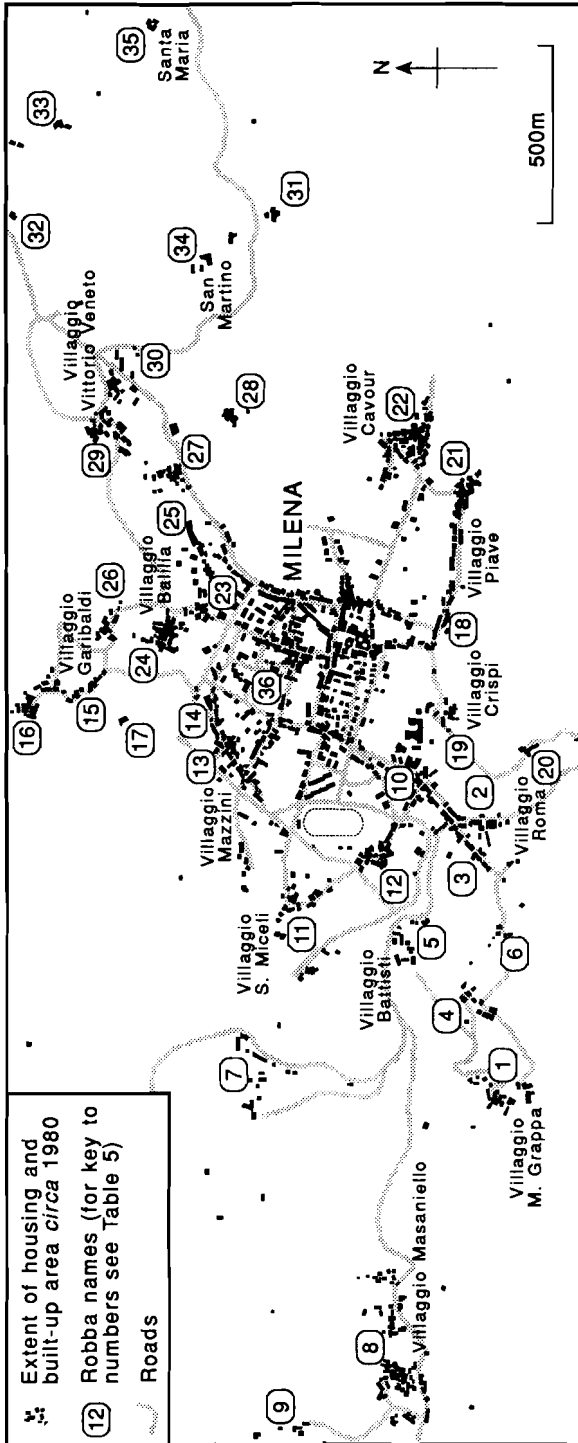


FIGURE 2. Milloca: villaggi and robbe.

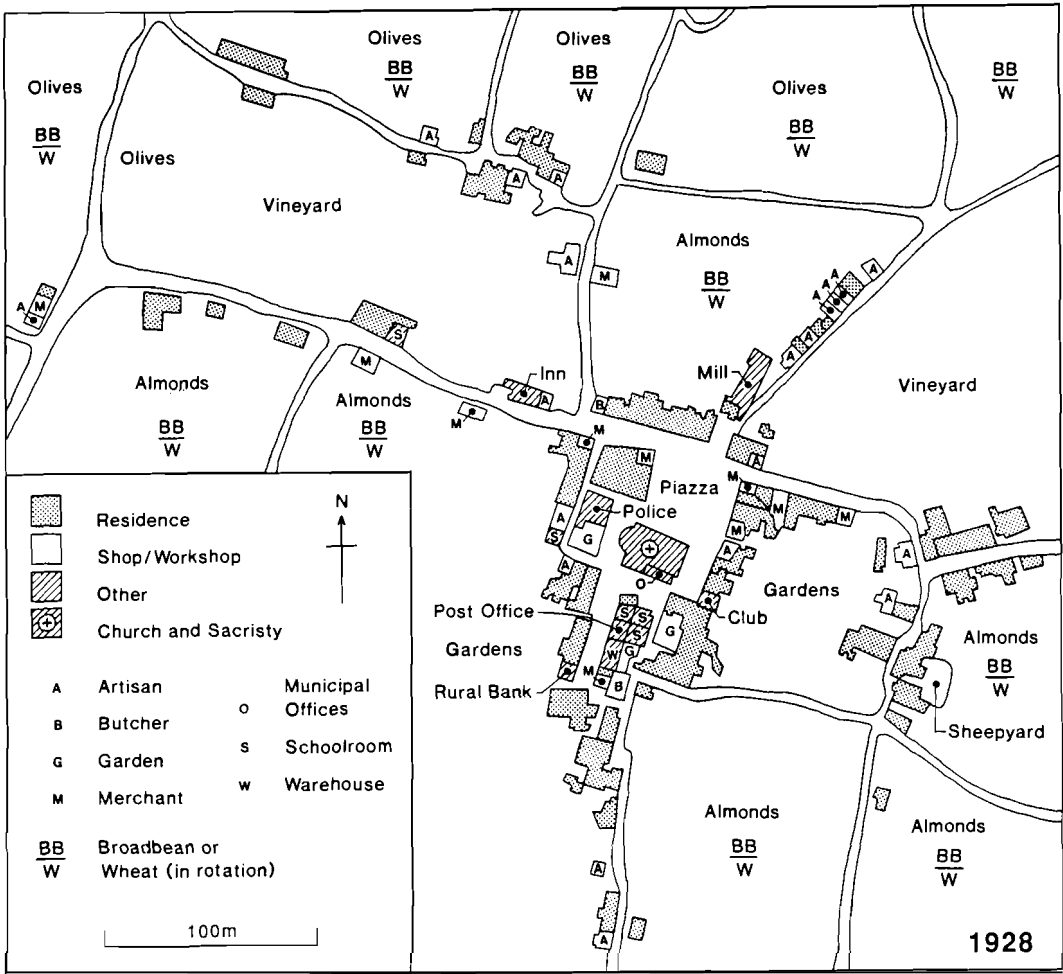


FIGURE 3. The *centro urbano* of Milocca in 1928 (after Chapman, 1973).

shop not to be duplicated in the *centro urbano*) and a general store licensed to sell the government monopolies, salt, stamps and tobacco. Robbe Valenti, close to the *centro urbano*, had a relatively large number of artisans (Chapman, 1973, pp. 2, 33).

Figs. 3 and 4 compare the central zone in Chapman's time, with its loosely grouped houses and much open ground, with the *centro urbano* of today in which dozens of retail and service outlets have mushroomed and much of the intervening land between the streets has been built on. Shops and services are particularly concentrated along the Via Nazionale, leading from the main piazza by the church, but are also quite densely scattered in adjacent streets (Fig. 4). However, no retailing outlets are found in the outlying villages, save a single barber in Villaggio Balilla (ex Robba Cardillo). These service outlets reflect in a quite dramatic way the tertiarisation of Milena's economy and its shift from an

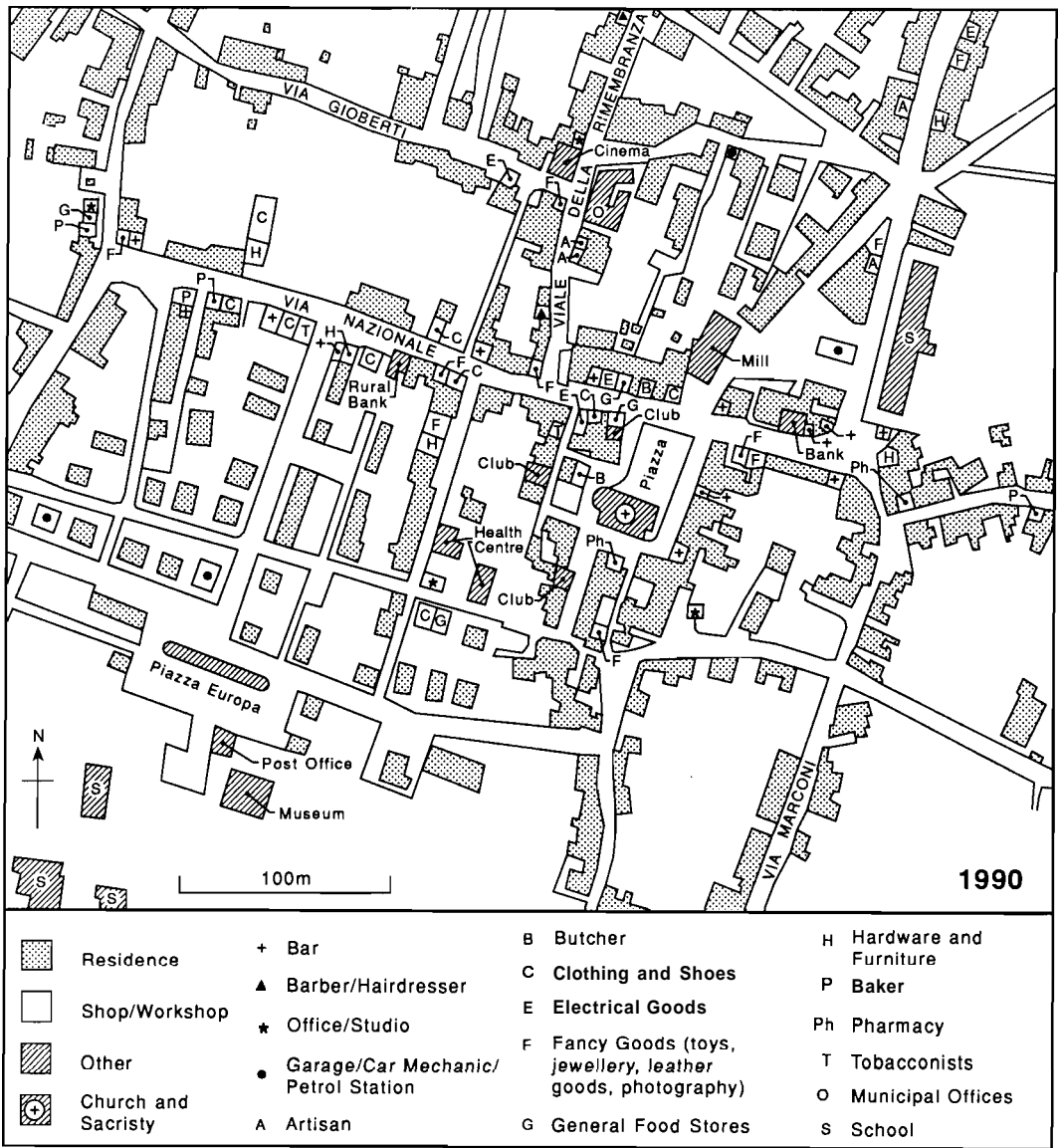


FIGURE 4. The *centro urbano* of Milena in 1990.

agriculturally self-sufficient base into a wider market economy. The shops comprise not only food and general stores but also specialised outlets retailing clothing, furniture, electrical goods, bathroom suites etc. The multiplication of retail outlets is particularly dramatic when one considers that the population of the *comune* today is virtually the same size as it was in Chapman's time.

Changes in the physiognomy of Milena's settlement pattern since Chapman's time have to be considered within the context of evolving urban plans and the ambitions of the local political leaders. Here it is important to note that the two factions which dominated *Milocchese* life in Chapman's time are still present today: the dynasties are the same, as is the political polarity between the Socialist and the Christian Democrat (DC) camps. Some degree of concentration of settlement and services in the *centro urbano* had already occurred by 1928, for Chapman notes (1973, p. 2) that the population of this area had increased from 39 in 1901 to about 200 by 1928. After the Second World War, the impetus to centralisation quickened as the municipality's first urban plan — the Piano Regolatore Generale or PRG — provided a planning framework for tuning a scattered collection of villages into a town. The overall goal was physical modernisation of the *comune*, but this was to be achieved at the expense of the outlying villages. The planners endorsed the view that a better standard of living was to be found in new housing, and this new housing was mainly zoned in and adjacent to the *centro urbano*. This corresponded with the generally held view that community life was better in the centre, and that to live on the periphery signified backwardness (Davis, 1969).

The role of the municipality-level PRG in Italian land use planning is considered in detail by Bastianini and Urbani (1975) who also hint at some of the potential political difficulties involved. In Milena the intrusion of factionalism and local politics into all aspects of community life means that the PRG is an intensely political document. The PRG consolidates the power of the ruling group which drew it up, and is always presumed to serve their interests and those of their supporters. Changes in the physical structure of the town thus parallel the political struggle and charges of corruption are rife. When the plan zones various blocks of land for different types of development, and forbids such development elsewhere, and where some people are entitled to funding for development whereas others are not, or even have their land expropriated for some public project, personal interests are clearly at stake. Given the sacred nature of land and property in rural Sicily, feelings run high.

The 1967 PRG captured the optimistic spirit of the 1960s: it provided for an expansion-oriented programme of building, mainly in the town centre; it made it plain that the onus was on the community to take advantage of the various incentives on offer from the Sicilian regional government; and it was based on a projected demographic increase. In some respects these assumptions were reasonable, in others they were proved to be wrong. Certainly there was a case for modernisation of the housing and living conditions in Milena. In 1951 and again in 1961 and in 1971 Milena had the highest proportion of dwellings without a WC or piped drinking water of any *comune* in Sicily. In 1961, for instance, 897 of the 1,431 dwellings in Milena were without both WC and piped water. Table 6 gives further details, based on census data for the *comune* of Milena from 1951 to 1981 (earlier censuses did not record this information on housing standards). The data in this table show several interesting features: the impact of electrification in the 1950s, the improvement in water and sanitary facilities in the 1960s and 1970s, the rapid increase in the number of abandoned dwellings as people left the *comune* or moved to newer houses in the town centre, and the large proportion of one and two-roomed dwellings (699 out of 1,137, or 61.5%, in 1971, falling to 36.5% in 1981).

TABLE 6
Milena: housing stock and facilities, 1951-81

	1951	1961	1971	1981
Total no. of dwellings	1.328	1.431	1.422	1.843
Occupied dwellings	1.228	1.251	1.137	1.215
Empty dwellings	100	180	285	628
<i>No. of occupied dwellings with:</i>				
Electricity	426	1.138	1.121	1.210
Piped drinking water	0	18	852	1.201
WC	44	239	692	1.054
Bath or shower	0	7	191	620
Central heating	0	1	5	74
Dwellings without WC and water	1.228	897	243	7

	1971		1981	
	No. dwellings	Inhabs.	No. dwellings	Inhabs.
<i>Size of occupied dwellings</i> (no data for 1951. 1961)				
1 room	211	521	101	189
2 rooms	488	1541	343	941
3 rooms	230	870	344	1130
4 rooms	134	558	251	872
5 rooms	42	181	101	372
6+ rooms	32	124	75	285

Sources: *Censimento Generale della Popolazione 1951, 1961, 1971, 1981*. ISTAT, Rome, various dates.

The projected demographic increase (of 1.500 between 1961 and 1991) essential to get maximum financial aid from Palermo did not, however, take place. The census figures of 1951 and 1961 had already indicated huge outmigration and some overall population loss, but the planners chose to ignore the trend of the previous decade and drew up a picture of increased employment and population growth whereas the opposite scenario would have been more realistic. The planners convinced themselves (and, more importantly, the regional authorities) that a turnaround of the emigration pattern would occur as a result of a modernised agricultural sector based on land reform, cooperatives and new crops. They also hypothesised that returning emigrants would offer a stimulus to development by bringing back cash and new skills acquired in the North. In fact, as will be shown in more detail in the next section of the paper, agriculture failed to modernise and returning

emigrants were not for the most part innovative entrepreneurs. As for the demographic trends, instead of a turnaround, emigration and depopulation accelerated: there was a net loss of 1.511 people due to outmigration and the population fell from 4.870 in 1961 to 3.802 in 1971 (Tables 2 and 3). Only after 1974 was the population loss arrested, since when it has stabilised at around 3.700.

Legislatively the PRG cannot adjust to a future that it does not itself foresee. It does not effectively register changes that occur within its own lifetime (generally agreed to be 25 years although there is no legally stipulated timespan) and therefore can become very quickly anachronistic. This, however, is partly to miss the point - for an expansionary scenario is the one which gets most regional support, and this support may well be forthcoming in spite of contrary economic and demographic indicators after the plan has been approved.

The urban zoning categories used in the PRG are quite complicated (Fig. 5). The residential category is split into seven types (RI-R7) according to the types of building allowed. As Fig. 5 shows, the 1967 PRG foresaw virtually the entire *centro urbano* being developed according to regulations governing RI (*zone residenziali al centro*); this meant that as the area was already built up (though not «saturated» as in the case of the typical Sicilian agro-town), the type of building allowed would be in keeping with existing structures. Once approved, the zoning plans represent a very powerful incentive for the development of the area, and this inevitably leads to land speculation as olive groves or other forms of farmland acquire enhanced value.

Sometimes the local administration may decide to invoke a law which empowers them to expropriate land in the public interest. A particular case in point in Milena was the compulsory purchase in the early 1970s of 2.5 hectares on the southern side of the *centro urbano* for the development of a new piazza and service-centre — the Piazza Europa development (Fig. 5). This scheme was also meant to open up land in the centre for settlers from the outlying *villaggi*. Once again the factional political subplot behind this planning initiative must be recognised: it was pushed through by the socialist administration whose leading figures came from outside the *centro urbano*, and it worked to the detriment of the conservative landowning faction whose land was expropriated for the development. The scheme has not been an unqualified success. A huge dusty piazza has been laid out and one or two new services, such as the post office and a half-built folk museum, have been located there, but 33 of the 89 lots of land associated with the development remain unused, and the area continues to have an empty, half-finished appearance. The old village centre, focussing on the square in front of the church and on the Via Nazionale (Fig. 4), is still the social heart of the community; it is here that people gather in the evening and at weekends for the *passaggiata*, and the Piazza Europa is left to the stray dogs and as a parking space for heavy lorries.

In addition to the Piazza Europa development, several other major building projects may be noted (Fig. 5). All date from the expansionist phase of the 1960s and 1970s when the Socialist local administration, benefitting from its personal and political contacts with the provincial and regional authorities (located in Caltanissetta and Palermo respectively), were able to secure substantial funds for projects in Milena. These included new school buildings, especially the «Luigi Pirandello» secondary school, the large blocks of public housing concentrated on the western side of the *centro urbano*, and the adjacent sports

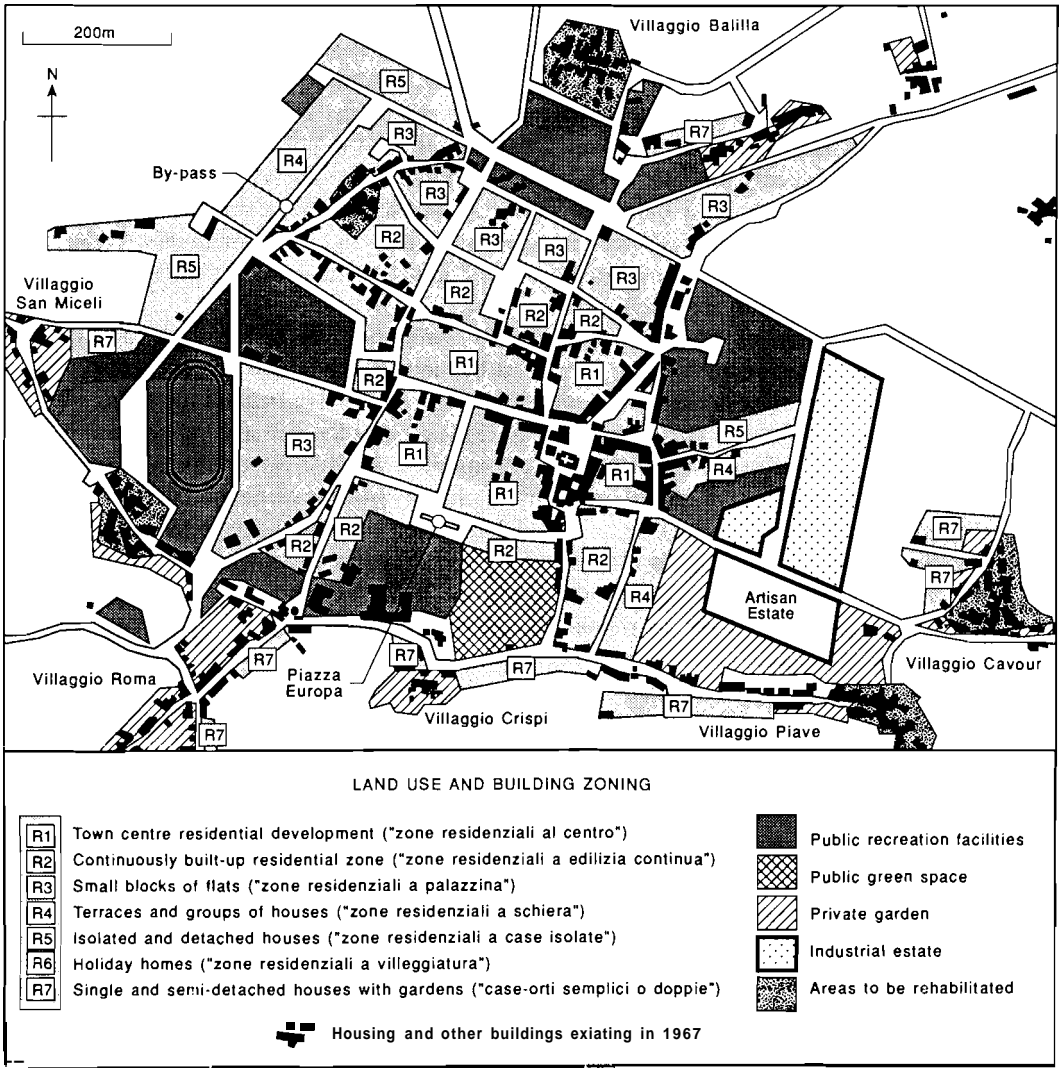


FIGURE 5. Zoning of land use and development in Milena according to the Piano Regolatore Generale.

complex made up of football stadium, tennis and basketball courts, and swimming pool (the last of these is unfinished).

A direct consequence of the strategy adopted by the planners to concentrate on the modernisation of the *centro urbano* has been the progressive abandonment and dereliction of the outlying villages. By effectively banning the erection of new houses or new service enterprises outside the perimeter of the central area, the PRG signed the death warrant of the smaller peripheral settlement clusters. This fact should not be overstated, however, for

processes of decay were taking place independently of the PRG due to emigration and the general abandonment of farming from the late 1950s onwards.

The original PRG of 1967 was revised by the Socialist administration in 1989 as one of their last political acts before their defeat at the communal elections of May 1990 which saw the Cipolla-led conservative DC faction returned to power for the first time in 36 years. Undoubtedly the 1989 revisions of the PRG were a factor in the Socialists' defeat for the plan became a focus for political opposition. In an unlikely political alliance with the DC, the opposition to the plan was led by the local communist leader whose land had been classed by the Socialists as of archaeological interest and therefore could not be developed in any way.

The 1989 revision of the PRG categorically admits the role of the 1967 plan in accelerating the abandonment of the peripheral hamlets, and it admits the necessity of reversing this trend by restoring the confidence of those who live beyond the limits of the *centro urbano*. There is also an embryonic realisation of the cultural importance of the *robbe* as a form of settlement and social organisation which is rather unique. As the example of the monastery of San Martino shows, this revival has come too late to be of much use. Hypothetically speaking, it might have been possible to have saved it by invoking a 1978 law which made provision for the restoration of public buildings via a *piano di recupero* (restoration plan). Now it is too late. In 1928 Chapman saw a monastery that was still inhabited, if not by monks. In 1977 Petix saw a deserted monastery. In 1990 we saw a monastery totally in ruins. There is, quite simply, nothing left to save, except an arch or two and the double exterior staircase. Thus has been lost «one of the finest and most grandiose examples of the peasant civilisation that was for centuries the fulcrum of the economy and the history of all south-west Sicily, the Sicily of the *feudi*» (Petix, 1984, pp. 69-70).

The decline in population of the various settlement units in the municipality of Milena cannot be effectively monitored from the censuses although it should be theoretically possible to do so. The main problem is the failure of the census enumerators to distinguish the various *villaggi* and *robbe* on a consistent basis from one census to another. Only a fraction (which varies from census to census) of the 14 *villaggi* are listed, and only four of them - Battisti, Garibaldi, Grappa and Vittorio Veneto - are given in all four postwar censuses. Whilst Vittorio Veneto's population has remained fairly stable (259 in 1951, 263 in 1961, 234 in 1971, 243 in 1981), the other three have all declined sharply (Battisti 230 in 1951; 124 in 1981, Garibaldi from 171 to 72, and Grappa from 206 to 82). Other settlement nuclei, in the form of *ex-robbe*, are listed even more inconsistently: in the few cases where a consistent listing is available, continuous population decline is recorded: Cappa from 138 in 1951 to 66 in 1981, Gandolfo from 55 to 8, Pirito from 71 to 16. Also in decline are the *case sparse* or isolated dwellings outside the perimeter of any settlement nucleus. In 1951 246 people lived in *case sparse*; by 1981 this had fallen to only 14. The overall picture, then, although far from complete, is one of population withdrawal from the periphery and consolidation in the *centro urbano*. By 1981 2,849, 75.1% of the total population of the *comune*, were living in the *centro urbano*.

To chart the individual demographic and economic history of each *robba* or even each

villaggio would be an impossibly detailed task. It is clear that the various villages have developed at different rates at different times and each has its own emigration story and its own particular relationship with the centre of town. The reasons why one village might be abandoned whilst another just a stone's throw away is still more or less fully occupied are complex. However, it does seem that, with the exception of the big village of Massaniello which is far from the centre and yet still well populated (partly because of its size and perhaps partly because of its situation close to the road from Milena to the Platani Valley), the villages and hamlets which are close to the *centro urbano* are densely populated (some indeed have been swallowed up by the outward expansion of the town centre and have lost their identity in the process), whereas those further out are partially or fully abandoned, especially where such clusters are small and off the beaten track. Fig. 6 compares the housing situation in a selection of *robbe* in 1928 and 1990. The 1928 maps are based on manuscript maps drawn up by the new *comune* of Milocca as part of the reorganisation into *villaggi*; the 1990 maps are based on our own fieldwork in the municipality. The contrast between some *robbe* such as Nascareddi which are mainly abandoned and ruined shells, and others which are still occupied and have been modernised, is clear. For the location of these examples see Fig. 2.

At the same time, for those who have stayed on in the villages, conditions have improved in certain respects. The tight sociability of the time when all houses were occupied may have gone, but in other respects the quality of life has improved. Some of these improvements are by public initiative — school buses, telephone boxes, resurfacing of tracks with asphalt — and some by private enterprise — mainly the modernisation of housing by emigrants who are working in the North or who have returned. Also, the old people of the peasant class have been reluctant to move from the peripheral *robbe* to the centre of town, either because they are simply too old to move, or because it has been perfectly possible for them to continue to live on the margins and remain in touch with their families in the centre due to the improvements in roads and in car ownership.

In fact the most important population movement has not been between outlying villages and the *centro urbano* but from all parts of the *comune* to abroad or to Northern Italy, especially to the town of Asti in Piedmont where there is a large community of emigrant *Milenesi*. Nevertheless the need of the emigrant to feel «anchored» has had a stabilising effect, not only as regards the people who remain, but on the value of property in the *comune*. The emigrants, having left the village, now return once a year, and in the space of a month (usually in summer) recover for themselves an identity that is submerged in the North. The annual holiday return brings an influx of money for the shops and bars of the village, and functions socially as a means for the emigrants to renew kinship contacts and to display their (relative) prosperity. The link to the village is also symbolically stated in the houses which they proudly build or modernise, some of which are empty for most of the year. Nevertheless the incidence of houses being repaired in many of the villages by their emigrant owners is high enough for it to have a generally beneficial effect on the physical fabric of the *villaggi*.

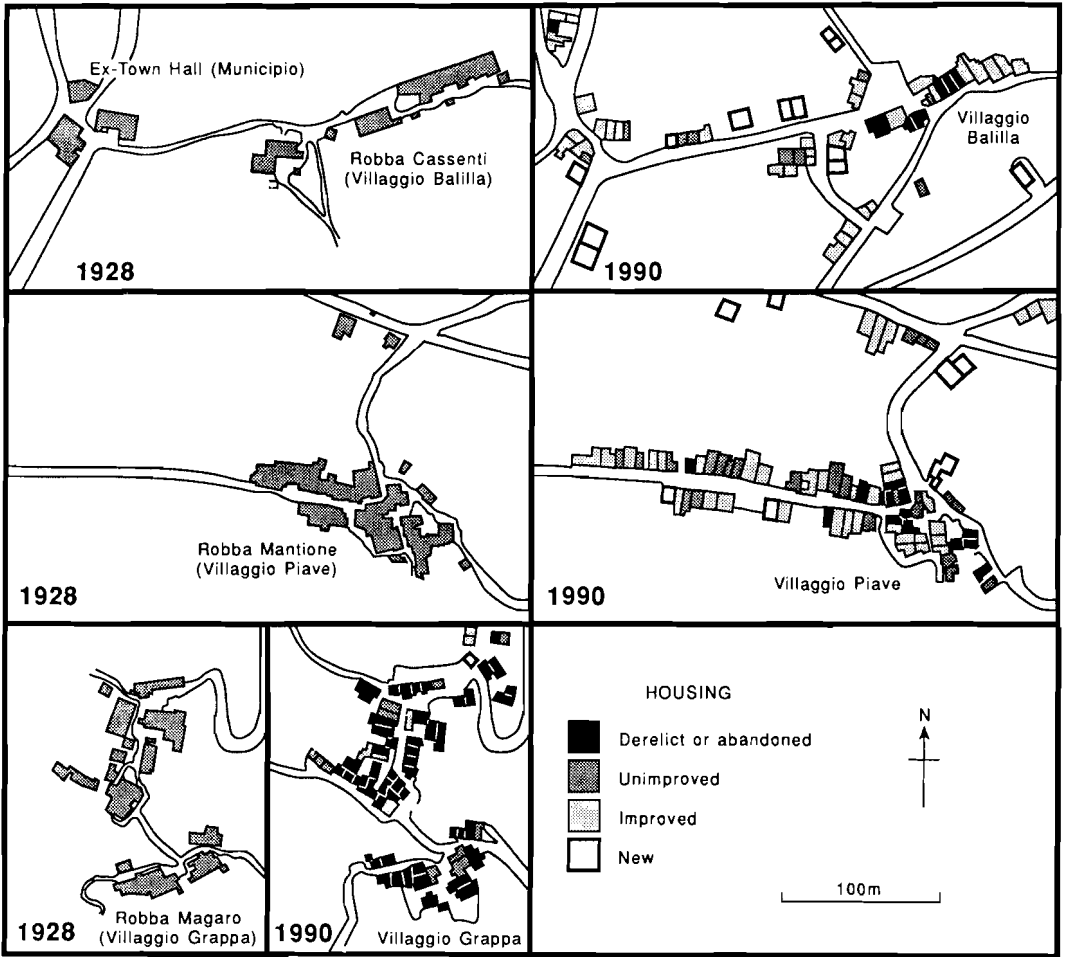


FIGURE 6. Housing in a sample of *robbe* in 1928 and 1990.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGES

In the Preface to her book which she wrote in 1970 Chapman doubted that the basic economy and social structure of Milena had changed since she was there forty years before (Chapman, 1973, p. xv). This assertion was based largely on hearsay since she had not revisited «her» village since she left it in 1929.

Our own impression, based on recent fieldwork, is that her statement is rather far from the truth. However, before we analyse this debate in more detail, a number of preliminary points need to be made. The first is that the considerable changes which we claim have taken place could have occurred during the interval between 1970 and 1990. Undoubtedly there have been substantial changes over the past 20 years, but we argue that the major

structural transformation of the *Milene* economy took place before 1970, during the late 1950s and the 1960s. Various types of census data will be presented shortly to back up our argument. Second, whilst we acknowledge that agriculture remains the single most important economic activity carried out within the boundaries of the municipality, its economic importance has come to be progressively overshadowed by public sector contributions in the form of pensions and welfare hand-outs and by private capital transfers in the form of migrant remittances. Our third point is that, while Chapman's remark about an unchanged economic structure is wide of the mark, her comments on the social life of the town are probably more valid. Social structure is still based around the basic occupational classes of landowner, artisan and peasant, although other groups have recently modified the tripartite outline, as we shall see. Moreover the two dynastic factions are still as all-pervading as they ever were.

A study of the changing character of both the economy and the social structure of Milena is perhaps best approached through an analysis of employment data. Table 7 presents the employment figures for Milena for all censuses since 1936. Numerous features are worthy of comment. The first is the sharp fall in the population who were economically active during the decade 1961-71 - a drop of more than 35%. This decade, it will be recalled (cf. Table 3), was also the decade of highest outmigration and population loss. During the longer period 1936-71 the economically active fell from one third to one quarter of the total population, rising to 29% in 1981. Secondly, Table 7 shows that agriculture has remained the most important economic sector for employment, but that its importance has steadily diminished - from 89.4% of the active population in 1936, soon after Chapman's fieldwork, to 43.5% in 1981. The decline has not been compensated for

TABLE 7
Milena: employment figures 1936-81

	1936	1951	1961	1971	1981
Economically active population	1.410	1.625	1.513	975	1.095
Ditto, as percent of total population	33.5	32.3	31.0	25.6	28.8
Active population engaged in:					
Agriculture	1.206	1.433	881	536	476
Industry'	100	40	52	67	93
Construction		32	316	170	232
Transport	13	10	24	32	38
Commerce	47	62	128	140	105
Public administration	30	47	50	25	140
Energy, gas, water	0	1	3	5	11
Other	14	96	59	154	161

Note: 1. The 1936 figure for Industry includes Construction.

Sources: *Censimento Generale della Popolazione 1936, 1951, 1961, 1971, 1981*. ISTAT, Rome, various dates.

by a correspondingly **dramatic** increase in any one sector. Instead there has been a fairly **small** increase (at least in absolute terms) across a range of other employment categories: industry, transportation, public utilities and administration, retailing and other **services**. For each of the three most recent censuses construction has absorbed the most employees after farming, although numbers **have** fluctuated fairly widely. The short-term nature of employment in the building industry means that construction labour **does** not offer stable employment opportunities. Indeed most construction activity in the *comune* is financed by emigrant remittances so it hardly represents economic development *in situ*.

Given that agriculture remains for the time being the most important employment sector, how has the structure of farming changed? Table 8 compares certain variables from the 1930 Cadaster with matching data from the three postwar Agricultural Censuses

TABLE 8
Milena: agrarian structure, 1930-82

		1930	1961	1970	1982	
<i>Types of tenure</i>						
(i)	Owner-cultivator ('conduzione diretta del coltivatore')	no. of farms	407	469	468	613
		area (ha.)	1.055	1.139	1.425	1.451
(ii)	Wage-labour farms ('conduzione con salariati')	no. of farms	154	37	71	174
		area (ha.)	835	108	361	714
(iii)	Sharecropping and other types ('mezzadria e altre forme')	no. of farms	102	101	154	14
		area (ha.)	378	1.011	617	55
Total		no. of farms	663	607	693	801
		area (ha.)	2.268	2.257	2.403	2.220
<i>Size of holdings</i> (no data for 1961)						
0-1 ha.		no. of holdings	211		212	248
		area (ha.)	92		120	126
1-5 ha.		no. of holdings	338		343	431
		area (ha.)	895		965	1.020
5-10 ha.		no. of holdings	80		90	82
		area (ha.)	563		620	535
10-20 ha.		no. of holdings	27		30	22
		area (ha.)	348		428	284
20-50 ha.		no. of holdings	4		7	8
		area (ha.)	110		194	255
50+ ha.		no. of holdings	3		1	
		area (ha.)	260		76	

Sources: *Catasto Agrario* 1930, *Provincia di Caltanissetta*. ISTAT, Rome, 1933; *Censimento Generale dell'Agricoltura* 1961, 1970, 1982. ISTAT, Rome, various dates.

taken in 1961, 1970 and 1982. This table shows that, in spite of the fall in agricultural employment, the farm structure (number of farms, types of land tenure, sizes of holdings etc.) has remained remarkably stable. The size of the area farmed has hardly changed, whilst the number of farm holdings has actually increased in spite of the calamitous drop in the agricultural population. This means several things. First it implies that most of those who have left agriculture were not owners or holders of land but *viddani*, landless agricultural labourers. In fact members of this impoverished rural class have been the main «emigrators», since they had less to lose and most to gain by leaving Sicily. Second, the increase in those with a title to land has been due to more people acquiring land through inheritance or purchasing small plots with migrant savings. Evidence for these two processes comes from the increasing numbers of very small holdings. Returnees tend to buy small plots of good quality land for hobby farming, whilst inheritance splits ownership, via the *Code Napoléon*, amongst the many heirs, so that individual holdings become progressively smaller. The third perspective that the agrarian structure data introduces, and one also brought out in our own fieldwork, is the increasing importance of part-time farming and of multiple job-holding. Relatively few people in Milena nowadays have a single source of income. People tend to work part of the year on their land, and combine this with other part-time or seasonal work, for instance in the construction industry, or on road-mending schemes, or in a shop, or by driving a lorry etc. This multi-occupational pattern means that the employment data presented in Table 7 are somewhat suspect. At best, these data represent people's principal job; certainly many employment types and regimes are hidden by these figures.

Table 9 presents data on land use and livestock for 1930 and 1982. These figures are largely self-explanatory so only a few key features need be highlighted. On the land use side, there has been a drop in sown land (major declines in wheat and in other «peasant crops» such as broad beans), an increase in tree crops (especially vines and fruits), and increases in pasture and unused land. Livestock comparisons are hindered by the paucity of data for 1982, but the indications are that there has been an increase in «intensive livestock» husbandry (cattle and pigs) and a decrease in extensively grazed stock (sheep and goats). Field observations show that equines (horses, asses, mules, donkeys) have definitely decreased since Chapman's day when they were almost as numerous as sheep.

Overall, the figures in Table 9 bear witness to a fundamental shift in agricultural types. In 1930 the overwhelming orientation was towards self-sufficiency. Every scrap of land was cultivated and the basic products were peasant staples - wheat, broad beans, olives, sheep and goats. Since then there has been a dual process of intensification and extensification: more favoured land has seen the expansion of high-value crops, especially vines, whilst at the same time the less-favoured marginal land has been downgraded to pasture or scrub.

CONCLUSION

This paper has reviewed in some detail the changing economic and settlement geography of the *comune* of Milena over the past 60 years, taking advantage of the fact that the place

TABLE 9
Milena: land use and livestock changes 1930-82

	1930	1982
<i>Main land use categories (ha.)</i>		
Sown land ('seminativo')	2.070	1.368
Tree crops (including vines)	157	491
Pasture	90	176
Other (woods and unused land)	17	175
<i>Individual crops (ha.)</i>		
Wheat	841	637
Forage crops	48	38
Vines	86	258
Olives	40	58
Other fruits (citrus, almonds, pears, peaches etc.)	24	176
<i>Livestock (head)</i>		
Cattle	34	110
Sheep	1.217	760
Goats	393	n.d.
Pigs	26	100
Equines	1.197	n.d.

Sources: *Catasto Agrario 1930: Provincia di Caltanissetta*. ISTAT, Rome, 1933; *Censimento Generale dell'Agricoltura 1982*. ISTAT, Rome, 1985.

had already been surveyed in depth (although in a very different way from our methodology, used here) by the American anthropologist Charlotte Gower Chapin in 1928-29. Although we have stressed the atypicality of Milena in the context of the settlement system of Sicily, in many respects what is going on in Milena is not unique. Settlement abandonment and the degradation of the rural built environment are common all over Sicily, especially in those interior upland districts where the possibilities for improving farming are limited. The physical collapse of many of Milena's *robbe* has been hastened by their marginalisation by the local planners, but it is a process which to a certain extent would have happened anyway from a purely practical point of view. Undoubtedly many of the houses which are now derelict were in need of substantial, and therefore expensive, repair by the time the people who lived in them emigrated or went to live with relatives or in the public housing project in the *centro urbano*. The form of construction of the old houses is a major

disincentive to their repair. Not only are the methods originally used for their construction now obsolete and largely forgotten, the materials themselves are of such a crude type as to be inappropriate for the building of modern houses where recourse to commercially available regular-shaped construction materials seems so much more sensible.

The physical decay of the building-stock has proceeded hand-in-hand with emigration and the decline of farming as a way of life for the people of Milena. The employment figures discussed in the previous section of this paper revealed the inexorable erosion of farming as the economic base of the *comune*, and a failure to find a compensating source of employment. Instead people are spread across a range of tertiary and public sector activities, with the construction industry the single most important grouping. For those who remain in employment in farming — mostly men aged over 55 years — the rhythms of the agricultural year are practically identical to those described by Chapman (1973, pp. 21-24): a pattern dominated by the main harvests — wheat, olives, vines, almonds and broad beans — and the various planting, pruning and other tasks associated with the cultivation of these crops.

The future of Milena must remain one that is linked to its role as part of the subsidised economic periphery of Sicily and Southern Italy (Reyneri, 1980). Agriculture has limited horizons in this area. Tourism can never make more than a minor contribution to the economy of this particular part of Sicily, with little extension beyond the «returning migrant tourism» of the summer months. Ultimately success in maintaining and increasing the levels of outside funding will depend on the political links that local leaders have with the regional authorities in Palermo. In this sense the local elections of May 1990, which ended 36 years of socialist rule in Milena, and brought in the Christian Democrat faction, may prove to be a watershed.

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