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LAND TENURE AND RURAL SOCIAL CHANGE: THE ITALIAN CASE

With 7 figures and 1 table

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Zusammenfassung: Landbesitzverhältnisse und sozialer Wandel auf dem Lande: das Beispiel Italien

Das allgemeine Ziel der Abhandlung liegt darin, die Bedeutung von Landbesitzstrukturen für geographische Untersuchungen deutlich zu machen, denn der Landbesitz ist ohne Zweifel ein wichtiger Aspekt der Beziehung zwischen Mensch und Umwelt. Darüber hinaus hat er eine soziale Komponente, kann doch Landbesitz die Stellung eines Individuums in der ländlichen Gesellschaft bestimmen. Das besondere Ziel des Aufsatzes ist die Untersuchung geographischer Muster des Landbesitzes in Italien, einem Lande, das eine beträchtliche Vielfalt von Landbesitztypen sowie eine große Zahl von Quellen zu den Besitzverhältnissen aufweist. Vier Hauptkategorien des Landbesitzes werden beschrieben: Familienbetriebe, kommerziell organisierte Gutsbetriebe, die *mezzadria* (eine feste Form der Teilpacht) und „andere Formen“. Die erste Analyse, auf der Basis der 20 Regionen Italiens, zeigt überall eine Zunahme der Familienbetriebe während des Zeitabschnitts 1960–77 sowie einen dramatischen Rückgang der *mezzadria* in Mittelitalien, d. h. ihrem ehemaligen Hauptverbreitungsgebiet. Diesem Wandel muß jedoch der generelle Rückgang der landwirtschaftlichen Bevölkerung sowie der landwirtschaftlich genutzten Fläche Italiens gegenübergestellt werden. Die zweite Analyse betrifft die Provinz Chieti in Mittelitalien. Die Daten werden auf der Basis der landwirtschaftlichen Zonen und der Gemeinden analysiert, um Aufschluß über den Wandel auf der Mikroebene zu gewinnen. Der Typ des Familienbetriebs breitet sich von seinem Ursprungsraum im Gebirge aus, während sich die *mezzadria* von ihrem Hauptverbreitungsgebiet im mittleren Hügelland zurückzieht. Dieser „räumliche Antagonismus“ ist verbunden mit dem Wohlstand der verschiedenen betroffenen Gesellschaftsgruppen sowie der politischen Ideologie. Abschließend wird darauf hingewiesen, daß der statistisch vorherrschende Sektor der Familienbetriebe in Wirklichkeit eine Mischung von Kleinbauerntum und kapitalistischem Unternehmertum darstellt: entsprechend dem Agrarzensus von 1970 ist Italien im allgemeinen immer noch vorherrschend ein Land des Kleinbauerntums, dessen Leistungsfähigkeit im ausgesprochenen Gegensatz zu der kleinen Zahl der kapitalistisch organisierten landwirtschaftlichen Unternehmen steht.

This paper has two main objectives. The first of these is a general aim: to explore the theme of land tenure and to draw attention to its meaning for, and neglect by, geographers. The second objective is more specific, and this is to analyse, largely through a series of maps at different scales, the changing patterns of land tenure in Italy, a country where both land tenure data and regional contrasts are well developed. This second function of the paper will also exemplify the first objective by illustrating the potential that exists for the geographical analysis of land tenure patterns and changes.

Geography, land tenure and rural society

Few geographers would disagree with the statement that one of geography's principal themes is the relationship between man and the land. Yet equally few geographers appear to have realised that this 'man-land' definition also characterises the phenomenon of land tenure. Land tenure is the legal link which defines man's relationship to the land he owns or farms. But land tenure also has a further meaning which involves the relationships between people. Land tenure must therefore be understood within the broader framework of rural social relations. The various ways in which land is farmed, owned, rented or otherwise used by a rural community are fundamental to that community's social organisation. In summary, land tenure relations are

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social relations, central to which is man's relationship to man in the use of the land.

PARSONS (1956) elaborates on how the strategic tenure relationship is more than a simple contractual agreement between landlord and tenant. In a rural society property ownership and relations define not only the status of the owner but also the limits, both social and geographical, over which his will is supreme with regard to the use and disposal of the land and its produce. Some landlord-tenant agreements are formal and legally enforceable, but beyond these legal bonds customary arrangements may be equally compelling forces, driven perhaps by religious principles or reinforced by the inertia of centuries of custom.

Land tenure arrangements, either formal or informal, thus may define very precisely the social and economic status of individuals in an agrarian economy. Feudalism is a classic example of this in the history of the West. Feudal forms survived in parts of southern Italy until surprisingly recently, and the legacy of feudalism can still be traced in certain attitudes and behaviours in the villages of the Mezzogiorno.

Furthermore, the terms of tenure under which land is operated also define the use to which that land is put, the relationship between land use or intensity and economic units such as farms or other forms of holding. The terms of tenure stipulate the returns that can be expected from inputs of labour, or from the adoption of new agricultural techniques, or from investments in the care of the soil. To give a specific example, a farmer leasing a plot of land on an annual contract with no security of tenure will be unwilling to plant olive trees which take decades to mature, or to spend money on soil improvement measures which he may not be around to reap the benefit from.

The importance of land tenure and of patterns of land ownership and rights has been recognised in many studies of land reform and rural poverty, especially in the Third World (GRIFFIN 1976; JACOBY 1971; KING 1977; WARRINER 1969). For many analysts, access to land is *the* crucial issue in rural development. Certainly there is little disagreement from the statement that lack of land or of access to land prevents a large part of the world's rural poor from achieving a dignified survival.

The case of Italy: Introductory remarks

Italy can, of course, hardly be considered as a Third World country. Nevertheless, throughout much of the post-war period for which land tenure data are available, Italy has presented a picture, particularly in the centre and the south, of a predominantly rural society.

Land tenure is the historical foundation of Italian rural social structure (ROSSI-DORIA 1958). The medieval structure of lord, vassal and serf survives today as the hierarchy of landowner, tenant and labourer. Italy's 'traditional' social structure revolves around fundamental distinctions that existed between the large landowners or *baroni*, the subsistence oriented smallholders and share-tenants, and the land-

less peasants and labourers (*braccianti*). DAVIS (1973), in a well-known study of land and rural society in a south Italian community, pointed out that the study of Italian land tenure is the study of the relationships between people, and that these relationships are not *sui generis*, but consistent with relationships about other things and activities. Land also carries implications of territorial control and this spatial aspect of the social relationships founded on land tenure structures has been an important factor in determining the relative influence of the different groups interacting within a given area. For instance, the SCHNEIDERS (1976) have shown how regional elites of landowners have been able to control the economy of whole areas of the island of Sicily.

In rural Italy today, land tenure is still of central importance to any analysis of social change since most people, even if they are no longer principally employed in the agricultural sector, still maintain some contact with the land. Land tenure structures may no longer support the kind of deep socio-economic and class distinctions that they once did, but land is still important as a symbol of status and an indication of often submerged power struggles.

Sources of Italian land tenure data

Italian authorities have published a large quantity of data on various aspects of land tenure including tenure types, the distribution of ownership of land and the structure of individual holdings. Most of this material is published by one of two bodies: INEA (*Istituto Nazionale di Economia Agraria*) and ISTAT (*Istituto Centrale di Statistica*), the latter being the official statistical agency. The INEA surveys are probably more analytical – notably the mammoth 15-volume study on Italian land ownership (MEDICI 1947), a monograph and map-study on types of land tenure (MEDICI 1951, 1958) and a large monograph on fragmentation of land holdings (MEDICI et. al. 1962). A summary of the results of these publications is also available in English (MEDICI 1952). The ISTAT data, on the other hand, are more consistent, more up-to-date and, using less legalistic definitions of land tenure, easier to use. Comparison between ISTAT and INEA tabulations is virtually impossible because the two organisations work independently of one another and employ different criteria and methods of data collection (MONTANARI 1979; PUGLIESE, RUSSI 1975).

After a review and evaluation of all available sources it was decided for the purposes of this paper to use ISTAT data taken from the following sources: the 1930 Agrarian Cadaster (*Catasto Agrario*), the 1961 Agricultural Census (*Primo Censimento Generale dell' Agricoltura*), the 1970 Agricultural Census (*Secondo Censimento Generale dell' Agricoltura*), and the 1977 Enquiry into the Structure of Agricultural Holdings (*Indagine sulla Struttura delle Aziende Agricole*). The Third Agricultural Census was carried out late in 1980 but publication of the results is still awaited.

Data from these sources are available at varying levels of resolution. The 1930 Agrarian Cadaster contains the most detailed information, with land tenure, land use and holding

structure variables at the level of the commune and of 'agrarian zones' (these are assemblages of around 5–10 communes forming a more or less homogenous physical and agrarian region). The 1961 and 1970 Censuses contain a limited range of tenure and land use data at the commune level, whilst the 1977 survey only permits analysis at the level of Italy's 20 regions. Communes and agrarian zones can also be aggregated to the provincial level (each region comprises 2–9 provinces, there being 95 Italian provinces in all).

Categories of land tenure

These are four in number in the ISAT surveys and designated as follows: i) 'direct administration by the cultivator' (*conduzione diretta del coltivatore*); ii) 'operation with wage labour and/or through profit sharing' (*conduzione con salariati e/o compartecipanti*); iii) 'operation with a stable share-tenant called a mezzadro' (*conduzione a colonia parziaria appoderata*) – a system generally known as *mezzadria*; and iv) 'other forms of administration' (*altre forme di conduzione*). Each of these types will now be described in more detail.

i) Direct administration by the cultivator: 'family farms'

This form of tenure is defined by ISTAT as 'when the administrator himself undertakes manual labour on the holding either alone or with the aid of his relatives'. In effect the farmer in this category is his own boss and farms land he either owns or rents. In the past he did so mainly for the needs of his own family but nowadays there is an increasing commercial element in production. Family farms of a subsistence type are still widespread in the south of Italy, however. This type of tenure is of growing relative importance in Italy today; family-scale farms are close to the ideological heart of the ruling Christian Democrat Party and the Catholic Church.

ii) Operation with wage labour and/or through profit sharing: 'commercial estates'

This category of land tenure includes those holdings with a usually large productive area that may comprise many hundreds or even thousands of hectares. They are run on a system of wage labour according to the following definition given by ISTAT: 'When an administrator employs for manual work . . . a workforce comprised of wage labourers, day labourers (and the like) and/or profit sharers, whilst his work is concerned in general with the administration of the holding in its techno-organisational aspects'. The landowner does not therefore work the holding himself as in the case of a family farm, but rather hires labourers (who are not his relatives) on the basis of daily or seasonal contracts to work the farm for him. Holdings practising this form of tenure are usually concerned with livestock, grain or other high-yielding cash-crop production. Such production systems are termed 'capitalistic enterprises' in the Italian

literature. This term is, however, misleading as 'capitalistic' carries connotations of a political and ideological nature that are not necessarily to do with this type of farm. Hence we use the term 'commercial estates' to describe holdings belonging to this category.

iii) Operation with a mezzadro: 'mezzadria'

The *mezzadro* is a share-cropper or tenant farmer who works for a landlord who allows him the rights to a particular agricultural holding and the farmhouse attached to it in return for a specified proportion of the produce grown on that land. Under the rules of the classic *mezzadria* the produce was in fact divided equally, half to the *mezzadro* and his family, half to the landlord. Hence the origins of the term *mezzadria* and *mezzadro*, deriving from the Italian word 'mezzo' meaning 'half'. The *mezzadria* contract originated in Tuscany, spreading to other parts of central Italy and the Po Valley between the Middle Ages and the nineteenth century.

iv) Other forms of administration and/or operation

This category essentially consists of miscellaneous forms of share-cropping that cannot for one reason or another be allocated to family farming or *mezzadria*. Often this is because the contract does not confer on the tenant a *podere* – i. e. a unified entity with a farmhouse – or because the contract does not include as associates members of the farmer's nuclear family. Such local types of share-cropping are often peculiar to certain areas and reflect particular agrarian and historical conditions.

The following analysis will be at a continuum of scales. We start by looking at broad national and regional trends, based on data for Italy's 20 *regioni*. We then take one of Italy's 95 provinces, Chieti, and examine data at the level of the province's 14 agrarian zones and 104 communes.

National and regional trends

Data for this section have been selected from the 1961 Census and the 1977 Enquiry into the Structure of Agricultural Holdings. The statistics are presented on the basis of two criteria: firstly, in terms of the actual *number* of holdings in any region given over to each of the four tenure types (family farms, commercial estates, *mezzadria* and other forms); and secondly in terms of the productive *area* that these holdings occupy. Each represents a distinctive axis of analysis that tells us different though complementary things about land-defined groups in the rural milieu. As we are primarily interested in this paper in discussing land tenure in terms of the changing nature of Italian rural society, we concentrate on mapping the data by number of holdings rather than by area. A geographer more interested in the changing areal or land use aspects of tenure would obviously choose the other axis of analysis. In practice the *relative* spatial patterns plotted by number and by area of holdings are very similar.

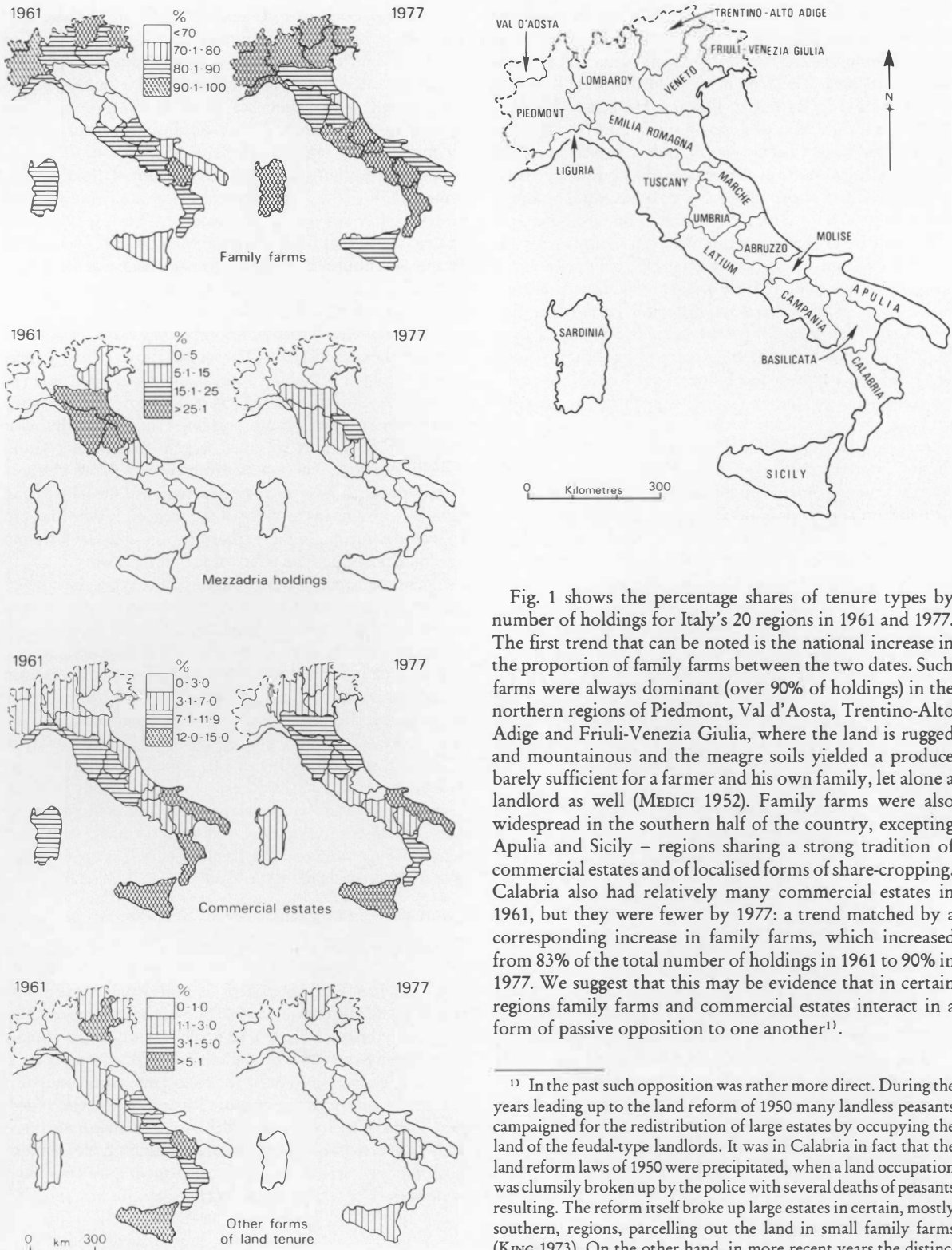


Fig. 1: The changing pattern of Italian land tenure by region, 1961–1977. (Data are by number of holdings)

Fig. 1 shows the percentage shares of tenure types by number of holdings for Italy's 20 regions in 1961 and 1977. The first trend that can be noted is the national increase in the proportion of family farms between the two dates. Such farms were always dominant (over 90% of holdings) in the northern regions of Piedmont, Val d'Aosta, Trentino-Alto Adige and Friuli-Venezia Giulia, where the land is rugged and mountainous and the meagre soils yielded a produce barely sufficient for a farmer and his own family, let alone a landlord as well (MEDICI 1952). Family farms were also widespread in the southern half of the country, excepting Apulia and Sicily – regions sharing a strong tradition of commercial estates and of localised forms of share-cropping. Calabria also had relatively many commercial estates in 1961, but they were fewer by 1977: a trend matched by a corresponding increase in family farms, which increased from 83% of the total number of holdings in 1961 to 90% in 1977. We suggest that this may be evidence that in certain regions family farms and commercial estates interact in a form of passive opposition to one another¹¹.

¹¹ In the past such opposition was rather more direct. During the years leading up to the land reform of 1950 many landless peasants campaigned for the redistribution of large estates by occupying the land of the feudal-type landlords. It was in Calabria in fact that the land reform laws of 1950 were precipitated, when a land occupation was clumsily broken up by the police with several deaths of peasants resulting. The reform itself broke up large estates in certain, mostly southern, regions, parcelling out the land in small family farms (KING 1973). On the other hand, in more recent years the distinction between family farms and commercial estates has become much more blurred, due partly to some definitional confusion proffered by ISTAT. Briefly, family farms are identified wherever

There is a relative absence of family farms in the regions of central Italy for 1961. Such is hardly surprising when one bears in mind that the *mezzadria* had its medieval origins in this precise area. The convincing hold this form of tenure still had in Emilia Romagna, Tuscany, Umbria and Marche in 1961 is a reflection of a long-term domination of these areas by the ancient landed gentry. Indeed in central Italy at that time the proportion of *mezzadria* farms was very high: in Emilia 26% of the total number of agricultural holdings, in Tuscany 30%, in Umbria 34% and in Marche 50%.

The nature of the interaction between family farms and the *mezzadria* can be explored further. We believe these two forms of tenure to be actively locked in a mutually antagonistic relationship. There are historical reasons for supposing this. The expansion of the *mezzadria* from its Tuscan homeland was achieved at the expense of small family farms of a subsistence type, where owners were forced into tenancy agreements by the extraction of high taxes and other financial pressures (JONES 1968). So it is that from the very start these two forms of land tenure have represented conflicting interests: on the one hand family farms that represent the interests of what might be termed a 'landed proletariat'; and on the other hand an opposing social group, the 'landed gentry'. These two forms of land tenure, then, judging not only by these historical and sociological criteria but also by the patterns of spatial antagonism they have generated, do not therefore seem able to co-exist in the same sociogeographical matrix. This is true not only at the national level but, as we shall see, at the provincial level too.

That successful pressures were brought to bear on *mezzadria* contracts is evidenced by their decline. By 1977 the *mezzadria* is no longer of any significance in Veneto and is substantially eroded in all its other historical centres except Marche where it still accounted for almost 20% of the total number of holdings.

Commercial estates made a modest bid to occupy the historical homeland of the *mezzadria* in the wake of its decline. Thus many *mezzadria* holdings passed not, as the Communist and Socialist lobby wished, into peasant ownership, but rather were converted by astute landlords into large commercial farms.

Finally, the 'other forms' category of land tenure shows a universal trend towards extinction, retaining some slight importance only in Trentino-Alto Adige, Basilicata and Sicily in 1977. This trend is a clear indication of moves towards more modern and rational systems of farming.

Although the area-based data are not mapped, a few brief comments are in order. Family farms, although proportionally very numerous, account for a much smaller proportion

of area. For example in Umbria in 1977, 81% of the total number of holdings were family farms but they only accounted for 44% of the productive area of the region. Family farms are often small and represent weak economic interests, except where they are combined into cooperative structures. Commercial estates, on the other hand, are few in number but large in size. In Abruzzo in 1977 they accounted for only 2.5% of the number of holdings but covered 45% of the productive area. *Mezzadria* holdings tend to be slightly larger than the average. Thus, in 1961, they comprised 50% of the holdings in Marche and covered 59% of the agricultural area, with corresponding figures of 34% and 42% for Umbria, 30% and 31% for Tuscany, and 26% and 34% for Emilia Romagna.

The major trends that therefore emerge from the regional data for the period 1961–1977 are as follows. Firstly, there is a national strengthening of the family farm structure in all regions. Second, there is a marked decline of *mezzadria* and other forms of share-tenure; this is the single most dramatic trend, although it is confined largely to central regions. Thirdly, commercial estates exhibit only minor changes. They appear to have increased in regions like Veneto and Emilia Romagna in the wake of the *mezzadria*'s decline, but to have declined in some southern regions like Calabria and Sardinia, possibly as an effect of the land reform².

These changes in proportions of tenure types must be set against changing total numbers of holdings and the shrinking extent of farmed land, quantities which fell by 15.9% and 5.7% respectively during the 1961–70 intercensal period. The decline in farmed area (1 507 448 ha.) is almost exactly equivalent to the decline in pasture (1 500 461 ha.) but there were also substantial losses in arable land compensated partly by increases in arboriculture. Although a land use analysis is not the main objective of this paper, it is nevertheless worth pointing out that there is a relationship between tenure changes and crop changes, the decline in *mezzadria* and 'other' tenures having a disproportionate effect on wheat, forage and vegetable farming as well as on declining livestock numbers (FABIANI, GORGONI 1973, 79–80).

Introduction to the province of Chieti

We move now to an analysis of land tenure patterns and trends at the more detailed scale of a single Italian province. Obviously, many of Italy's 95 provinces would be suitable to exemplify the patterns and relationships at a more local scale. Chieti was chosen for the following reasons. First, it lies in the centre of the country, spanning the sharp geographical and socio-economic differences between northern and southern Italy and therefore containing elements of both the 'two Italies'. Secondly, its topography contains a wide variety of terrain including high mountains, interme-

the farmer involves himself directly in manual labour absorbed by the holding, even where this labour is a small proportion of the total labour absorbed by the holding, the rest being hired. Commercial estates are defined as those holdings where *all* the labour on the farm is performed by hired workers. This rather asymmetric divide between the two tenure forms means that many holdings of a distinctly commercial or capitalistic character get classified as family farms (FABIANI and GORGONI 1973, 68).

² For more detailed attempts to analyse the tenure effects of the Italian land reform see KING (1973, 198–204) and MONTANARI (1979, 372–376).

diate hill country and coastal plains. Thirdly, its tenure characteristics make it broadly representative of the national picture. Finally, both authors lived in the province for part of 1981 and so had a good knowledge of the local geography, economy and society.

The province of Chieti lies on the Adriatic coast of Italy due east of Rome (fig. 2). It is the southernmost of the four provinces of Abruzzo, the other three being Pescara, Teramo and L'Aquila. Chieti province extends to 2 587 sq.km and at the 1971 Census contained 351 567 people. Nearly a third of the province is classified by ISTAT as mountainous in nature. In the province's interior, limestone highlands, part of the Apennine backbone of the Italian peninsula, rise to a maximum height of nearly 2800 metres, culminating in the summit of the Maiella (Monte Amaro). The lower slopes of the Maiella are tree and pasture covered but higher up there is much bare rock, agriculturally useless. To the north of the Maiella the land is lower but still uncompromisingly mountainous: hence the name of this area of Maielletta or 'Little Maiella'. Between these mountain ridges and the coast stretches a wide belt of plateaux and hill country. Towards the interior these hills are based on Eocene clays and sandstones; lower down they become gentler, founded on more recent Pliocene deposits. About half of the province is made up of these hills and plateaux, mostly between 100 and 500 metres. The coastal lowlands are limited, opening up only in

the presence of river valleys running down from the interior. The principal rivers are the Pescara and the Trigno, which define respectively the northern and southern limits of the province, and the Sangro, whose flat and fertile basin extends into the heart of the province. Two smaller rivers, the Foro and the Sinello, lie respectively to the north and south of the Sangro and complete the symmetrical arrangement of the province's drainage (fig. 2).

The economy of the province of Chieti is still predominantly rural, with agriculture contributing 40% of the gross provincial product. In the earlier post-war period much of the farming was subsistence, but since the early 1960s there has been a marked trend towards more commercialised agriculture, assisted by improvements in road, rail and motorway links. Vines are the province's most important crop, both for wine and eating grapes. Viticulture is, however, limited to the coastal plains, the intermediate hillsides and the Sangro Valley floor. The other main forms of land use are olives and cereals, with pasture in the highlands. Tourism has a growing importance along the coast, especially at Francavilla al Mare and Ortona. Although there is a wide distribution of small scale artisan industry, including trades linked to construction, larger scale industry is a recent phenomenon and, compared to other parts of Italy, is still only embryonic in its development. Three main areas are emerging as nodes for industrial expansion: the Chieti-

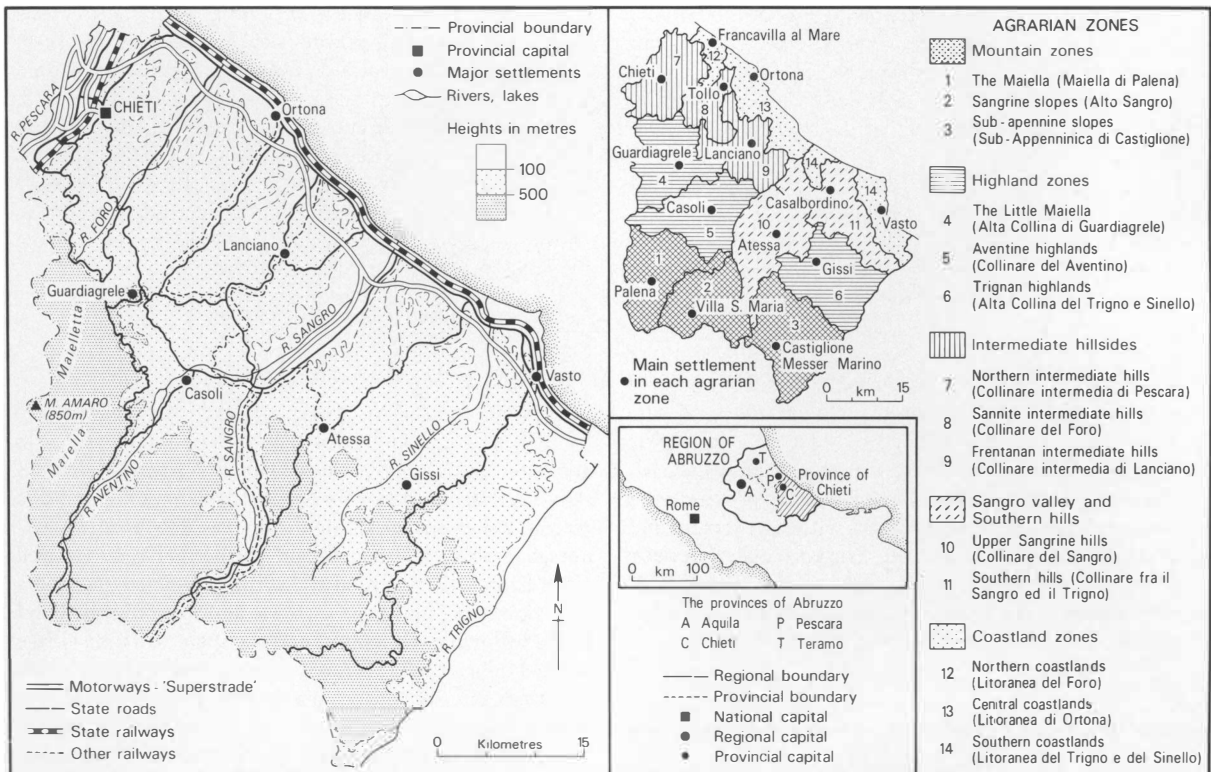


Fig. 2: The province of Chieti: General features and agrarian zones

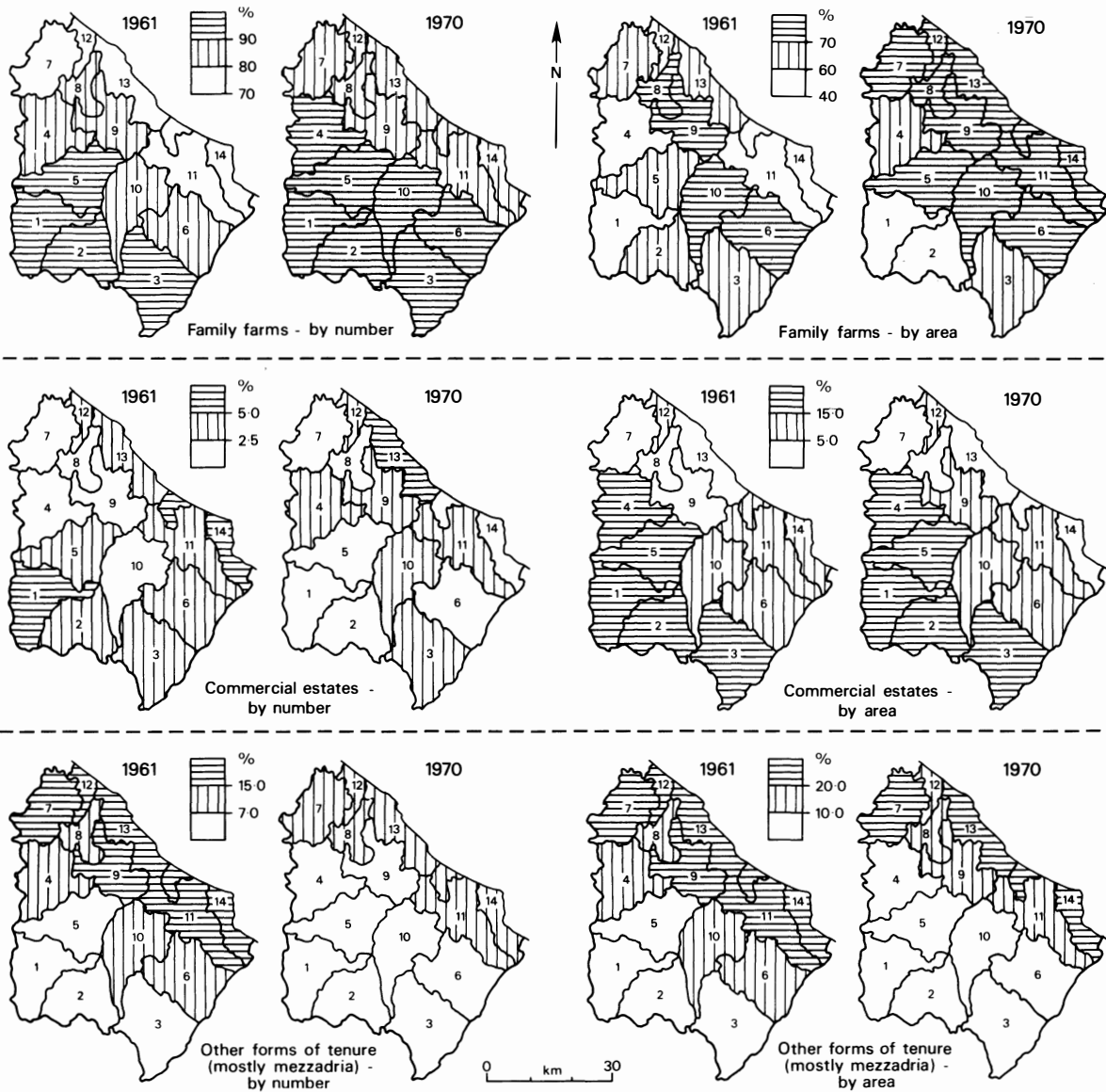


Fig. 3: The changing pattern of land tenure in the province of Chieti by agrarian zone, 1961-1970

Ortona axis, which is related to the larger scale industrial-region centred on Pescara to the north of the province; the port and industrial complex of Vasto, with large cement and glass producing plants; and the Sangro Valley between Lanciano and Atesa, site of the newly constructed SEVEL light van factory, run jointly by Fiat and Peugeot, as well as Piaggio and Honda moped assembly plants.

Land tenure changes in the province of Chieti by agrarian zone

The right part of fig. 2 shows the 14 agrarian zones of the province of Chieti. Each agrarian zone is a group of com-

munes with similar physical and land use characteristics. As can be seen from the key in fig. 2 the 14 zones fall into five groups: mountain areas, highland areas, intermediate hill-sides, Sangro Valley and adjacent southern hills, and coastal areas. Each zone is shaded according to this scheme, given zone numbers (which we shall use as a form of shorthand in the following discussion) and the main town or village marked. Since the 1970 Agricultural Census collapsed the *mezzadria* into the 'other forms' category in the small area statistical tabulations, this analysis, based on the comparison of data from the First and Second Agricultural Censuses, is limited to a tri-partite classification of tenure, carried out for both number and area of holdings (fig. 3).

Fig. 3 shows that Chieti reflects the national pattern in terms of the relative expansion of family farming, coupled with the decline of the *mezzadria* and 'other forms' and the minimal adjustments of the commercial estates sector. In spite of a drop in the absolute number of family farms in the province (49 397 in 1961 to 45 475 in 1970), the relative dominance of family farms increased in every agrarian zone. Looking at the distribution of family farms by number, it can be seen how this form of tenure moved down over the decade from the mountains, its traditional stronghold, to extend its dominance over adjacent highland and hill areas (zones 4, 6 and 10) where over 90% of holdings were family farms by 1970. Even in the lowland zones the proportion was everywhere above 80%.

Turning now to the spatial distribution patterns generated for 'other forms' including the *mezzadria*, it is observed how the behaviour of this category between 1961 and 1970 is exactly the reverse of that for family farms over the same period. Thus in the same way that family farms spread from the highlands down to the coast, share-cropping retreats from the intermediate hills and other inland areas, growing also more rare along the coast. In this way as the one advances the other would appear to fall back. Such an idea also draws support from the trend observed earlier at the national level.

How commercial estates are to be integrated into this description of the land tenure structures of the province is uncertain. Their distribution as a proportion of the total number of holdings is somewhat random, both in 1961 and 1970. Hence, though of relatively significant proportions in 1961 on the Maiella (zone 1–6.1%) and the Southern Coastlands (zone 14 – 5.6%), their presence subsequently diminishes in these areas. By 1970, commercial estates constitute a relatively large proportion of the number of holdings only along the Central Coastlands (zone 13), where they accounted for 5.5% of the total number.

When examined in terms of area, however, commercial estates generate a much more meaningful distribution (fig. 3). Their dominance in the mountains and highlands (zones 1–5) can be explained by the large quantity of public property in these environments, for these kinds of land administration are classified as commercial estates. This in turn also explains why the numerical dominance of family farms in upland zones is not matched by areal domination: family farms are numerous but not very large, dwarfed in extent by a few vast holdings owned by public enterprises.

This leads to the final piece of analysis that can be carried out for Chieti's 14 agrarian zones. This is the size distribution of holdings, a parameter related both to tenure types and to certain social characteristics of the population. The structure of agricultural holdings can in fact be examined over a forty-year period, drawing on data from the 1930 Agrarian Cadaster and the Second Census of Agriculture taken in 1970. For whereas the classification of land tenure contracts rests on complex definitions that differ through time, the figures relating to the size of holdings do not, for the categories involved are of a purely numerical nature the meaning of which has not altered between different surveys. For

Table 1: The size distribution of agricultural holdings for the province of Chieti, 1930 and 1970

Size classes (ha.)	1930		1970	
	% holdings by number	% holdings by area	% holdings by number	% holdings by area
0– 1.00	24.5	3.2	23.7	3.3
1.01– 3.00	37.3	18.6	36.6	17.6
3.01– 5.00	19.6	19.5	19.5	18.6
5.01–10.00	13.8	24.2	15.5	25.6
10.01–20.00	4.1	13.7	3.9	12.4
20.01–50.00	0.5	3.8	0.6	3.8
over 50	0.2	17.0	0.2	18.7

Sources: *Catasto Agrario 1930*, Rome, ISTAT;
2° *Censimento Generale dell'Agricoltura 1970*, Rome, ISTAT

this reason a direct comparison of data over such a long period from the sources mentioned above is quite viable.

Looking simply at the provincial totals (table 1) there would not appear to have been any great change in the general structure of holdings in the province between 1930 and 1970. The number of holdings below 1 ha. falls only from 24.5% of the total in 1930 to 23.7% in 1970. The number of holdings over 50 ha. remains at 0.2% for the entire forty year period. Similarly the figures relating to productive area of the other classes of holding do not vary widely over the inter-censal period.

However, an analysis of changes by agrarian zone in the province does reveal some interesting discrepancies (fig. 4). Such an examination shows that over the period 1930–70 the number of holdings below 3 ha. in size has significantly increased along the coast (zones 13 and 14) and decreased in the mountains and southern highlands (zones 1, 2, 3 and 6). Conversely, holdings greater than 20 ha. have significantly decreased along the coast (zones 13 and 14 again) and increased in mountains of the Maiella and Maielletta (zones 1 and 4) as well as in the 'intermediate hillsides' of the stretch of country between Chieti and Lanciano (zones 7, 8 and 9).

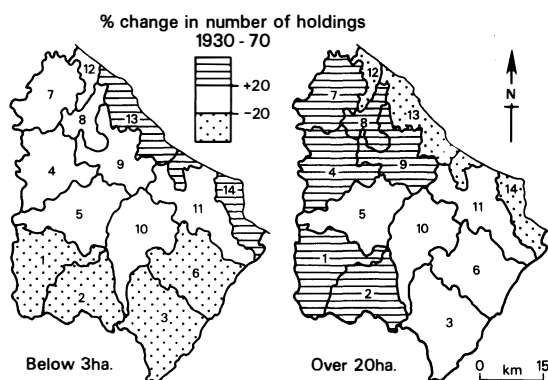


Fig. 4: Change in the number of small (below 3 ha.) and large (over 20 ha.) holdings in the province of Chieti, 1930–1970

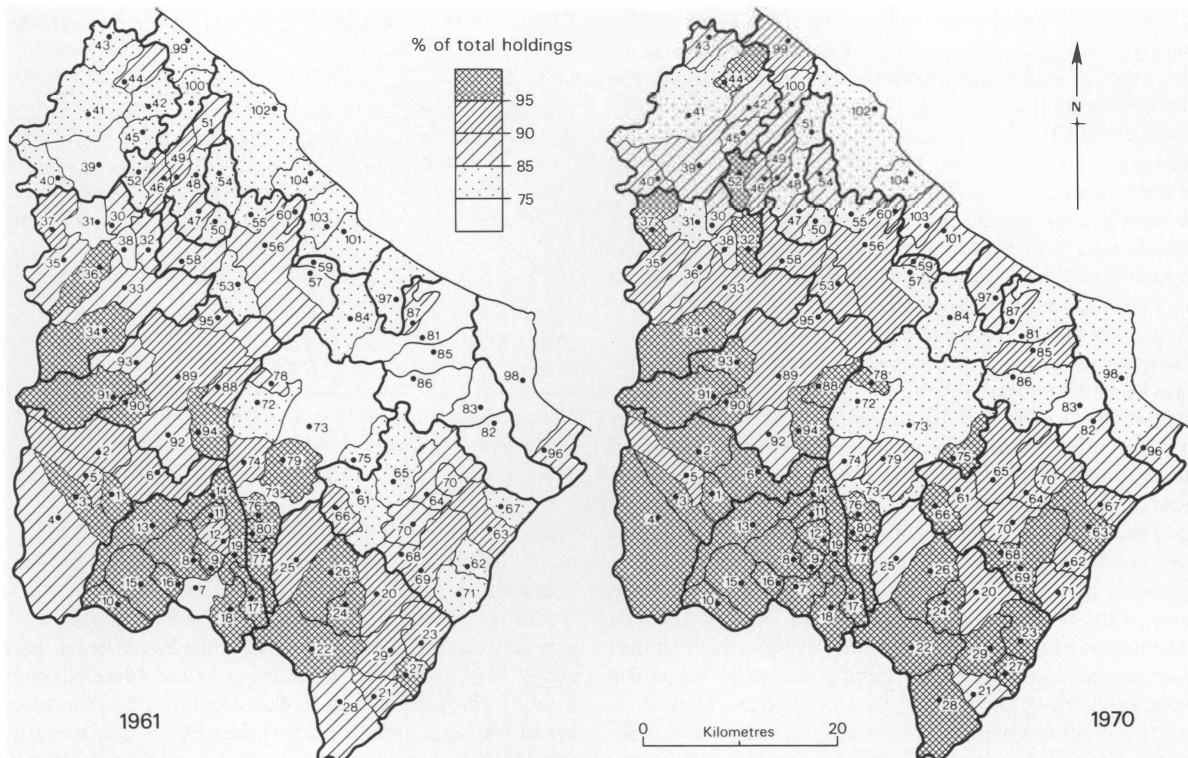


Fig. 5: The pattern of family farms in the province of Chieti by commune, 1961–1970

We can link these changes in size-of-holding pattern to the tenure changes discussed earlier. Along the coastal strip the reduction in the number of holdings of greater than 20 ha. can be related to the break-up of medium-sized *mezzadria* holdings, a process which leads to their replacement by highly fractioned smallholdings – hence the coastal increases in the below 3 ha. class. As coastal land prices shoot up under pressures from resort development, intensification of agriculture and the desire of returning migrants to buy up small plots, so land is sold in smaller and smaller lots. The corresponding decrease in the number of very small holdings in the mountains can probably be linked to the abandonment of small-scale farming in these marginal areas of high out-migration (BOLINO 1973).

Land tenure changes in the province of Chieti by commune

We move next to a description of the commune patterns of Chieti's tenure data, the commune being the smallest geo-statistical unit for which tenure data are available in Italy. Like the agrarian zone data, the commune data from the 1961 and 1970 Agricultural Censuses have to be standardised on the basis of a tri-partite classification into family farms, commercial estates and 'other forms' of land tenure. We limit the mapping to data on number of holdings, the agrarian zone maps (fig. 3) having already indicated the close

relationship between the spatial patterns for number and area of holdings. For ease of mapping, the communes on figs. 5–7 are numbered rather than named; they are then referred to in the text by these numbers. Also marked on the commune maps are the boundaries of the 14 agrarian zones into which communes are grouped; this facilitates comparison with figs. 2–4 discussed earlier.

Fig. 5 shows the communal pattern of family farms, by number, for 1961 and 1970. In 1961 family farms constituted at least 75% of total holdings in all but a few communes. These exceptions were found in two areas³⁾. The first of these areas is a small knot of communes to the south of Chieti (commune 41). The second is a larger group of communes south of the Sangro Valley stretching between the large communes of Atessa (73) and Vasto (98); in one of this group of communes, Montedorisio (83), the figure is as low as 58%, the lowest in the province. As will be seen shortly, these two areas of relatively weak family farming are where the *mezzadria* was strongest in 1961. For the time being, it is

³⁾ The small commune of Borrello (commune 7) in the south of the province is something of a statistical anomaly. It recorded a family farm figure of 73% in 1961 (180 out of the commune's total of 247 holdings, the remaining 67 holdings all being 'commercial estates'). It is possible that many of these 'commercial estates' were mis-classified as family farms, for by 1970 all but one of them had disappeared.

sufficient to note the fairly widespread dominance of family farms which, in every commune bar those just noted, accounted for over three-quarters of the holdings in 1961. By 1970 only Montediorisio (83) still had less than 75% of holdings as family farms. Meanwhile family farms consolidated their domination in all the mountain communes, as well as over large areas of the intermediate hills and plateaux, both north and south of the Sangro Valley. The increase in family farms was particularly marked in the hills south of Chieti around Lanciano (commune 56) and in communes 61 to 70 (which form agrarian zone 6 – see fig. 2).

By contrast the patterns representing the data for commercial estates (fig. 6) are far more random, and based on small numbers. Moreover the randomness is not consistent through time for the 1970 pattern shows changes from that of 1961. This pattern of unstable randomness is probably strongly related to the small numbers of holdings involved, for in the vast majority of the province's communes less than 6% of holdings were commercial estates in 1961 or 1970.

Fig. 7 shows that in 1961 'other forms' (chiefly *mezzadria*) comprised more than a fifth of holdings in a large number of communes stretching along the coast and over the low hills just inland. In the higher hill country and in the mountains *mezzadria* was practically absent. *Mezzadria* recorded its highest figures just south of the provincial capital, with

figures of over 30% in Fara Filiorum Petri (31) and Bucchianico (39), and in a larger belt of communes between the Sangro River and Vasto, stretching from the twin communes of Mozzagrogna and Santa Maria Imbaro (57 and 59) just north of the Sangro through to Vasto (98) and Cupello (82). These two areas, it will be remembered, are precisely those where family farming was weakest in 1961. By 1970 the spatial pattern of *mezzadria* holdings has shrunk back from the intermediate hills and remains restricted to the coastal strip and its associated lowlands and low plateaux. Only in two communes – Cannosa Sannita (48) and Montediorisio (83) – does the number of *mezzadria* holdings exceed on fifth of the total. In two large communes in the centre of the province – Lanciano (56) and Atesa (73) – the fall-off of *mezzadria* holdings is quite dramatic: all the more significant, in fact, because of these communes' large sizes and populations (Lanciano 27 624 in 1961, Atesa 9 807).

Discussion: Some socio-political aspects of a spatial antagonism

The main feature of the maps described, at whatever scale (region, agrarian zone, commune), is the advance of the family farms and the retreat of the *mezzadria* and the 'other forms'. Spatially, the advance of the former is patterned on

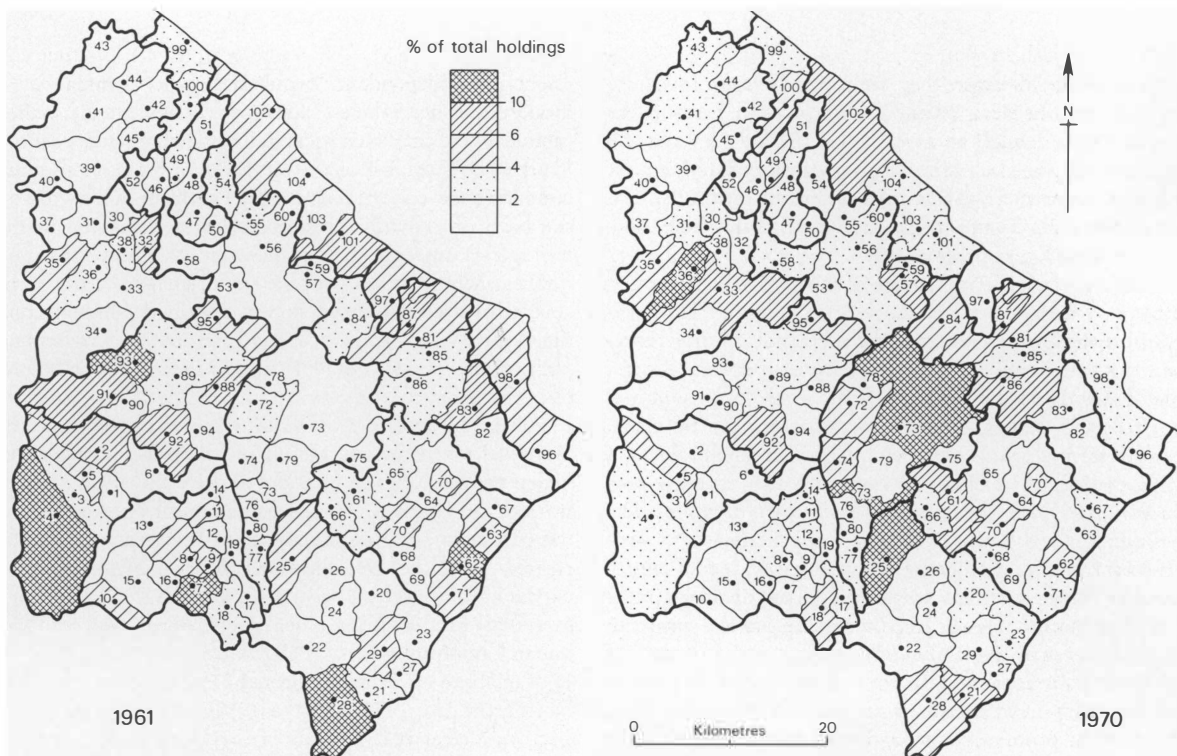


Fig. 6: The pattern of commercial estates in the province of Chieti by commune, 1961–1970

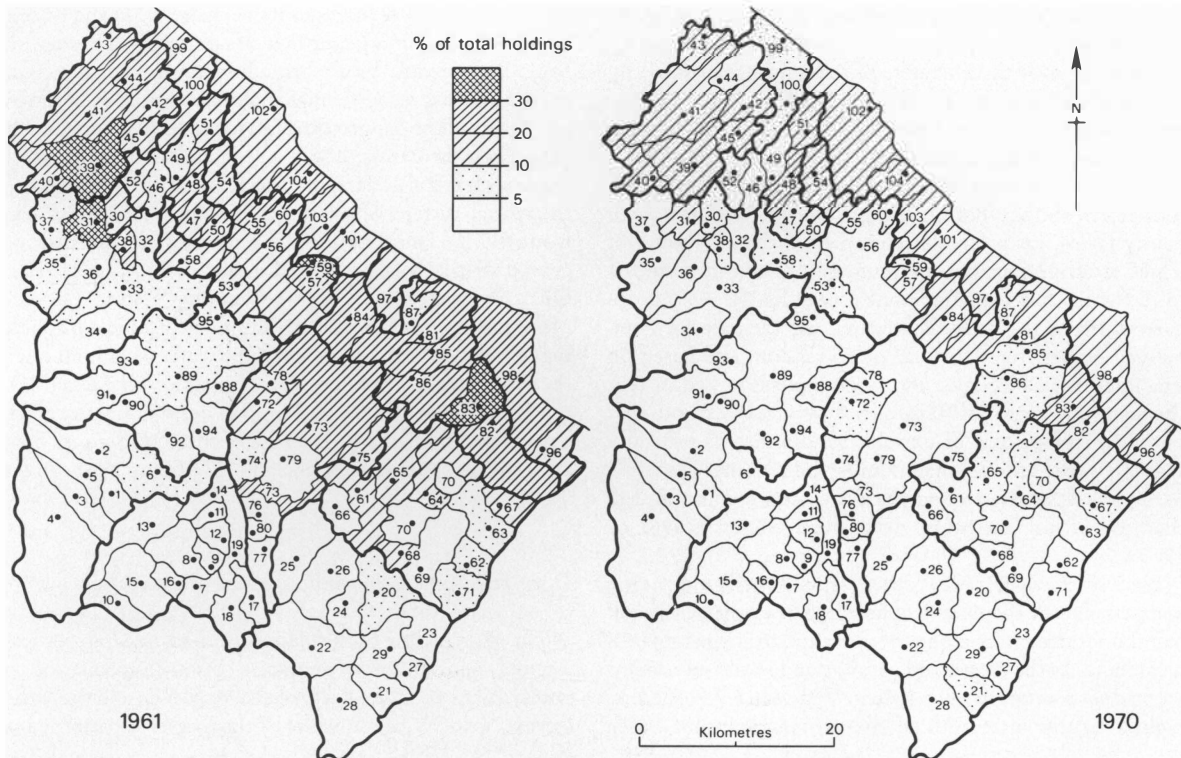


Fig. 7: The pattern of 'other forms of tenure' (largely *mezzadria*) in the province of Chieti by commune, 1961–1970

the retreat of the latter: they are mirror-images. In Chieti province family farms 'strike out' from their bases in the mountains to launch an invasion on the hillsides and the coasts, at the expense of the other categories of land tenure. The analogy with a battle is not a casual one for this 'spatial antagonism' masks an agro-political conflict in which these tenure forms figure prominently.

To understand the full nature of the interaction between these two forms of land tenure, it is necessary to firstly examine the characteristics of the social groups they represent. Although the census data on tenure types do not correspond exactly to different economic forms of production nor to social classes, certain generalisations can be made. Family farms include the mass of peasant smallholders, a diffuse group of small landowners who until recently produced largely for the needs of their own families. The *mezzadria* incorporated two social groups. First, there was a powerful landed aristocracy whose ancient, feudal family lineages ruled over their villages by virtue of their almost complete monopoly over land ownership – a class similar in some respects to the *latifondisti* or large estate-owners of southern Italy. Secondly, the contract embraced the peasant families who lived as tenant farmers on *mezzadria* land, dividing the produce of the land with their landlord.

These two forms of land tenure constituted a mutual threat. The mass of peasant smallholders comprised an

essentially independent 'proletariat' who commanded a modest but nevertheless autonomous reserve of landed capital. These characteristics clash somewhat with the more 'deferential' position of the *mezzadro* and his family who conducted their social relationships with the landowner on the basis of carefully prescribed duties enshrined in the *mezzadria* contract. The *mezzadro* received protection and rights to half the produce of the land, rights normally heritable. Ultimately, however, he was heavily dependent upon the landlord and in no position to argue over rights and obligations. SILVERMAN (1970) judged the system to be one of exploitation.

The drastic decline of the *mezzadria* in the post-war years, as evidenced by its contraction in the hills and plains of Chieti province, has come about in the wake of legal alterations to the contract. These legal alterations in turn reflect the particular agrarian ideologies of Italy's major political parties. Since the 1948 elections the two major political parties have been the Christian Democrats (DC) who have exercised uninterrupted government since 1944, and the Italian Communist Party (PCI) who almost took power in 1948 and have subsequently been the main opposition party. During the late 1940s and the 1950s, under the threat of electoral defeat at the hands of the PCI, the DC enacted several agricultural reforms, including land redistribution based on the expropriation of large estates in the south of

Italy, and alterations to existing tenure contracts, including the *mezzadria*. The division of produce from *mezzadria* holdings was changed in 1947 from 50/50 to 53/47 in favour of the *mezzadro* tenant, and the traditional servile duties proffered by the tenant to his landlord were also abolished.

In 1964 and 1978 further legislation was passed which made the signing of any new *mezzadria* contract illegal. As if in anticipation of this the *mezzadria* had already in 1970 disappeared as a separate tenure contract from commune tables of the 1970 Agricultural Census – a move which hastened the academic if not the practical extinction of this form of tenure.

The role of the family sector

The growth of family farms can also be charted historically in relation to social and political ideology. The 'institution' of the family farm is very close to the social encyclicals of the Vatican; it represents both a social philosophy and a landscape that is frequently represented as ideal and idyllic in Italian art and literature. It reaches its apotheosis in the venerable, terraced landscape of Tuscany. The extension of family farming is coupled not only with the decline of the *mezzadria* since the war but also with the longer-term trend towards the disappearance of the landless agricultural proletariat, the *braccianti*. The agricultural employees were 53% of the working population in farming in 1910, and 30% in 1930. Today they have all but disappeared as an agrarian class. Their revolutionary potential was neutralised by the 1950 land reform. Where they still exist, in pockets of specialised agriculture needing temporary casual labour, they are sustained by social security as 'clients' of Italy's new welfare state (PUGLIESE, RUSSI 1975).

The formation of peasant-owned property in the post-war period was aided by two policies: the 1950 land reform which enabled some 700 000 ha. of former estate and state land to be acquired by landless and semi-landless peasants; and the institution of the *Cassa per la Formazione della Piccola Proprietà Coltivatrice* which gave *braccianti* and other small peasants credit for buying small amounts of land – about 1 million hectares were acquired under this scheme.

The 'quiet revolution' of the diffusion of small owner-farmed property started to come to an end in the late 1950s as the rural exodus, provoked by an inflation-ridden land market and by the availability of jobs in industry at home and abroad, took many out of agriculture. Between 1961 and 1970 the censuses indicate a loss of 686 662 farm holdings and 1 507 448 ha. of agricultural land. Both of these figures are underestimates of the real scale of agricultural abandonment, as a number of authors have stressed (BOLAFFI, VAROTTI 1973; FABIANI, GORGONI 1973; PUGLIESE, RUSSI 1975). ISTAT's record of land passing out of agricultural use was restricted to land which was completely abandoned. Land which was effectively abandoned from cultivation but which was still used for desultory grazing was not counted. Another phenomenon glossed over was the rapid growth of part-time farming.

The decline in numbers working in agriculture, in number of holdings and in the quantity of farmland has affected all types of tenure but, as we have seen, the impact has been most devastating on the *mezzadria* and 'other forms' categories. It therefore needs to be stressed that the increasing dominance of 'family farms' is only relative, for the absolute number of family holdings is shrinking (by 366 669 or 10.5% during 1961–70), although the area covered by such holdings increased by 1 152 376 ha. or 8.7% over the same period. The loss of farmland and farm holdings is mainly confined to the smaller size classes; farms above 20 ha. increased. This is the reverse of the trend in the decades before 1960 which was for fewer big estates and more small property (PUGLIESE, RUSSI 1975, 228).

A final remark is that the apparent continuing increase in the relative importance of family farms masks an increasing heterogeneity of economic types within the family farm sector. The point has already been made that tenure categories do not correspond exactly to economic modes of farming. Family farms range from smallholdings on which all the labour requirement is carried out by the farmer and his immediate family to larger economic units on which the majority of the labour is hired – these are not classified as commercial estates for the farmer still performs *some* of the labour needs of his holding. FABIANI and GORGONI (1973, 90) show that holdings below 10 ha. generally have less than 10% of their labour input made up by wage labour. As the size of the unit grows, so too does the reliance on outside workers. For holdings in the 10–20 ha. class the figure is 15.5%, for 20–30 ha. it is 27.2%, for 30–50 ha. it is 41.0%, for 50–100 ha. it is 59.6%, and for holdings over 100 ha. it averages 77.7%. Obviously, areal size is not a very precise indicator of economic size, for intensity of land use varies very markedly in Italian agriculture. And there are other factors too. Southern farms which are undercapitalised may hire outside labour, particularly if such casual labour is readily available and cheap. Enterprises where labour demand is unevenly distributed throughout the year (such as olive farms) will also tend to need wage labour at times of harvest. The economic structure of the region is another relevant variable. In regions where industrial development has taken place, many small and medium holdings are part-time enterprises; family members with industrial jobs continue to live on the farm and are therefore readily available for temporary farm work when needed. On the other hand, on farms in regions with little or no industrial development (such as the hilly interior of the peninsula), the need or desire for off-farm work generally impels the younger adults to emigrate to northern Italy or abroad, a move which makes them unavailable for farm work and forces the remaining farmers to employ wage labour⁴.

⁴ Where seasonal emigration occurs, it may be possible for the migrant to continue working in agriculture during his periods of return. In a study of a Calabrian village SCHRETTENBRUNNER (1970, 22–23) has shown how periods of return are closely related to the needs of local farming with migrants returning in time for autumn ploughing and sowing and for the harvesting of grapes, olives and citrus fruits.

FABIANI and GORGONI (1973, 100–105) then go on to divide the 'family farm' category into its 'peasant' and 'capitalistic' elements. Using ISTAT data from the 1970 Agricultural Census they define as the peasant sector those holdings on which more than two-thirds of the labour is contributed by the administrator of the farm. Where more than half the labour is contributed by wage-workers this is defined as capitalistic, and where the administrator provides between 50 and 66% of farm labour input this is termed 'peasant capitalistic' (*contadino-capitalistico*). All family holdings over 50 ha. are also regarded as capitalistic. Using these criteria, and adding the 'peasant' element of family farms to *mezzadria* and 'other forms' of tenure (both of which employ very little outside labour) gives a total proportion for the peasant sector of Italian agriculture of 53.5% by area, a very different proportion from the 73% arrived at by the simple aggregation of the ISTAT family farm, *mezzadria* and 'other forms' categories. The commercial or capitalistic sector, made up of commercial estates plus the capitalistic element of family farms, is 42.1%. The residue, 4.4%, is mixed peasant/capitalistic.

These results are, however, only available by area. FABIANI and GORGONI (1973, 105–112) do try, on the basis of much weaker guidelines from the census data, to give proportions of different types of farming by *numbers* of workers. This calculation, based largely on land uses and size classes of holdings, varied for each region, is much more approximate than the area estimates given above. The find that 81.5% of total agricultural labour is of the *contadino* type, 9.4% is

mixed *contadino-capitalistico* and 8.5% is *capitalistico*. These proportions are fairly stable from region to region, with two exceptions – Sicily (45.9%, 35.8% and 17.0% respectively) and Apulia (38.3%, 47.9% and 13.3%) – where there is a heavy concentration of specialised tree crops such as vines, olives, almonds and citrus which require wage labour, often hired on temporary bases.

Conclusion

It is quite clear therefore that in spite of the progressive decline of outmoded forms of tenure such as the *mezzadria* and other forms of exploitive tenancy and share-cropping, Italy's agrarian structure remains encased in a straightjacket of small-scale family oriented holdings. On the basis of 1970 data at least, over half the farmed area and over four-fifths of farm labour can be described as of the peasant type (*agricoltura contadina*), the efficiency of which contrasts markedly with the smaller quantity of capitalistic farming employing 8.5% of the agricultural workforce on 42.1% of the farmed area. The results of the 1980 Agricultural Census, which should be published by ISTAT within the next couple of years, are awaited with interest. Not only will they enable further and more up-to-date documentation of the tenure changes outlined in this paper, but they will also cast some light on how rural Italy has been affected by the recession of the late 1970s.

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