

The Mezzadria Family: A Study of Kinship Roles in the Life Cycle

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The research on which this paper is based aims at showing, by means of field data, the correlations between the locally dominant land tenure system, *mezzadria* (sharecropping), and the resulting family structure, size, and lifestyle. The kinship roles in the life cycle of the share-croppers of this area of Tuscany are described and analysed by correlating each kinship theme with the guidelines of the whole research project: 1) relationship between structure and size (i.e.: identification of stages or cycles in the composition of the household units), 2) residential norms and marriage patterns (i.e., as expressed in the possible functions of celibacy), 3) evidence of the correlations between structural and ideological patterns, 4) genealogical knowledge in relationship with residential stability, sex, age, and kinship roles.

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1. Introduction

This paper is based on a research project still in progress in Vicchio del Mugello (North of Florence) which studies the local forms of rural family and its correlations with the dominant land tenure system.¹ Vicchio and its countryside is still today a totally agricultural area; ever since the Middle Ages, it has been heavily characterized by a share-cropping system of land tenure officially ended in the 1960's, but still marking both the features of the landscape and the social patterns of its population.² Before the present genealogical study, the area had received considerable anthropological attention in the recent past. As a part of a long-term project which aims at constructing an overall picture of this share-cropping society, several fieldwork researches have been carried out at different times on correlated themes, such as childbirth, dowry, domestic work, diet, legends, settlement and residential patterns.³ The following pages briefly describe the area and the genealogical study which supplied the information on kinship roles in the life cycle for this paper.

2. Vicchio del Mugello

The share-cropping system, here called by its Italian name *mezzadria*, has lasted over six centuries, deeply shaping the patterns of material life and the forms of social relationship and organization. Two of the main traits resulting from that system are, indeed, immediately perceivable: i) a residential pattern characterized by sparse settlements (each settlement consisting of an isolated house, for humans and animals, surrounded by a field of four to six hectares) and, ii) the *famiglia mezzadrile* (share-cropping family), with its complex internal structure, usually large size, rigid code of norms and practices, and peculiar dynamics.

The residential isolation of each *famiglia mezzadrile* enabled the landowner's surveyors to control the peasants and force them to behave according to values chosen for them by a quite potent and entirely urban class of proprietors (mostly Florentine bankers, merchants and politicians).⁴ The working power and the chances of satisfying the heavy demands of the *patto mezzadrile* (literally, share-cropping pact) rested entirely on the *famiglia's*



A typical share-cropping residential unit: only the right wing (about one fourth of the whole) was used by the family, while the rest was allocated to animals, storage, granary and working space (1987).

size, hierarchical organization, distribution of roles, and strictly integrated attitudes and actions of all its members. Many of these family traits are still observable at present, while others are undergoing radical change, primarily, because of the end of the *mezzadria* system, but also influenced by the massive transformation of all Western traditional societies.

In the most mature and extensive phase of the *mezzadria* system, that is from the early 1940's to the late 1960's, Vicchio consisted of the village proper, five tiny hamlets and a wide plain surrounded by hills and mountains. Even today, the landscape is characterized by the articulated network of the *poderi mezzadrili* (share-cropping fields) with the scattered dwellings of their workers. During the period mentioned, only about 20% of a total population of 11.180 lived in the village itself. They were mostly artisans, shop-keepers, and clerks. The hamlets, on the other hand, are still made up of a rural church, with a tiny cluster of poor houses rented to daily labourers and shepherds. The other 80% of the population included both the few people living in the hamlets and the mass of the *mezzadri*. In 1946, 95% of the 14.000 hectares of Vicchio's land was governed by the *mezzadria* system: this

represents one of the highest percentages attained in Italy.

The contract, also called *patto colonico*, assigned to the *pater familias*, whose local name is *capoccia* (chief), the total responsibility of the field management. It established an articulated set of detailed rules, that controlled even the most private aspects of the family life, such as the marriage of its members. It also regulated the amount of domestic service that *mezzadri* women owed to the surveyors, participation in private and public social gatherings, the substantial *regalie* (gifts) due to landowners and their surveyors on occasions such as harvesting, religious festivals, or fairs. The violation of any of the written or the oral rules was good cause, *giusta causa*, for breaking the contract and sending the whole family from the *podere*.

An investigation to establish the origin of the Vicchio *mezzadri* during the last 150 years shows two main residential patterns, still observable today. The first consists of share-croppers of non-local origin, often coming from the nearby mountains of the Romagna region and mostly assigned to the cultivation of the less fertile fields in the marginal zones of the Vicchio territory. This group presents a marked

Two *poderi* divided by the road (1987).



residential mobility, due to a frequent change of *podere*. The second contains many families, mostly originating in the Vicchio area, who can trace their ancestors on the same *podere* back to the early 1800's (and even to the late 1700's). We shall see some of the social traits which seem to be associated with this high degree of residential stability.

The chief's authority and responsibilities were matched by those of his wife, the *massaia*, in supervising the household activities and in governing its internal relationships. Most tasks were distributed according to sex and age. Rigid virilocality caused the exit of all daughters at marriage and the corresponding entrance to the household of the sons' brides. When this polynuclear body reached a certain degree of imbalance between demographic pressure, on the one hand, and productive potentials for the field, on the other, the household went through a phase of single or multiple fragmentation: one or more married sons left the group and started individual households of their own on other *poderi*. Sometimes, the fragmentation was caused by other factors than this internal process of growth: the most common was an early termination of the contract by the landowner, which forced the whole

group to migrate. The latter case was often an opportunity, for a branch of the family, to split off and settle by itself.

When the *capoccia* died, the landlord or his agent usually appointed his eldest son in his place. He ruled over the rest of the household,⁵ though his wife could not become *massaia* until her mother-in-law died or became totally disabled by age or disease. In Vicchio, we so far found few cases in which the chief's death was the cause of the group's fragmentation, though the other causes were mentioned by all our informants.

3. Kinship roles in the life cycle

3.1. Sources

The following considerations are drawn from a combination of sources: (i) genealogies, (ii) field observations, (iii) collection of objects and documents (i.e., photographs, letters, share-cropping contracts, marriage documents, etc.), (iv) archival data, and (v) materials from previous research projects (see note 3).



Share-cropper (age 56, unmarried) at work (1986).

3.2. Kinship knowledge

I am slightly hesitant here in using such definitions as “genealogical memory” or “kinship memory”, even though it *is* through mnemonic processes and devices that people are able to retain past information and to speak of their lives. However, what we are told by the informant is not just memories: it is part of the present state of affairs, active practices and normative orientations; in one word, it is a “tool of action”.⁶ In spite of the obvious symbiotic relationship between remembering and knowing, I find it more satisfactory here to describe the total amount of the interviewee’s information on his kinship network as “knowledge” (or as “competence”), rather than as “memory”. Among other things, it seems to me that “knowledge” is a term that aptly describes the recurrent field situation in which wives appear noticeably more knowledgeable than their spouses about the latter’s kinship net-

works. The past norm of virilocality and the active role women seem to play today (more prominently than men) in maintaining contacts with their husbands’ relatives (by means of phone calls, visits, postcards, going to the cemetery, and so on) is probably what makes wives “know” so much and not just remember.

Testing the kinship knowledge of a person can reveal many aspects of his/her own life cycle. In this sense, the genealogies we collected (50 so far), beside yielding data for about 7500 individuals (such data obviously overlapping in several genealogies), are actual segments of life narratives organized around specific themes of the life cycle. We shall now examine the interplay of three main factors in determining the range and the type of genealogical knowledge and in shaping the roles of kinship in the life cycle, namely: (i) residential stability, (ii) sex, (iii) contacts among kins.

A *capoccia* tells
genealogical narratives
(1986).



4. Residential stability, sex, contact among kin

We have already described two opposite residential tendencies: one, the frequent changing of *podere* experienced by the *mezzadri* of mostly non-local origin, assigned to the poorest portions of the territory, and, two, the marked residential stability shown by some local families whose last names appear on the same *poderi* for several generations. The data collected so far permits a series of preliminary observations which will have to be tested in the future phases of the research.

First of all, there seems to be a higher incidence of cases of celibacy among the stable groups: twice and even three times higher than in the more mobile families. A possible and quite obvious source of celibacy could be the lack of social contacts and the scarce opportunities of meeting possible mates due to the lack of geographical mobility. However, there are other elements: (i) The number of males that stay unmarried and remain in the *podere* is visibly higher than that of the females.⁷ (ii) In the less stable families, the unmarried son (however, a modestly recurrent feature here) tends to be the second one: This "device" might tend to create a useful pause in the increase of demographic pressure and to postpone the ne-

cessity of household divisions. In the more stable groups, on the other hand, it can be either the first or/and the second son who stays unmarried. The result is the celibacy of several sons as a generalized feature. (iii) Sometimes, one can even speak of a partial celibacy (an evident element of continuity today), since we often find *mezzadri* who have recently celebrated their marriage at the age of 55 or 60, after having been single members of the household unit for most of their life cycle. This high incidence of celibacy could be correlated with the possible role of unmarried sons in helping the stability of the household: their energies could be more fully dedicated to the *podere* and to the support of their other relatives. Curious linguistic expressions, still widely used by the people nowadays, might sustain this hypothesis: "*fare lo zio*" (to play the uncle) is said of a man who seems destined to stay single. In addition, the term *zio* (uncle) is often heard in combination with the local term for single, *bizzo*, so that *zio-bizzo* (sometimes *zio-zibo*) is frequently used to refer to an uncle who is entirely devoted to the household, without the personal interests that derive from the roles of father and husband. In one word, he is more available to his nephews and nieces. Male celibacy as a prominent feature of the share-cropping family emerges not only from the genea-

logical data so far collected, but also from our informants' explicit statements: they all clearly indicate it as a social practice which was essential to the functioning and the survival of the family group on the *podere*. The research will have to examine this phenomenon more in depth and try to identify the correlations with various other factors, particularly, with the residential patterns of the households.

4.1. Birth

An aspect of traditional life which helps reveal the relationship between kinship network and life cycle, is the complex set of criteria by which a newly born baby is named. Here, too, traditional patterns appear more sharply among the residentially stable groups, where to a certain extent they are still observable. For example, the names of patrilineal kin receive absolute precedence, unless some important accident or situation should call for a break of this norm. Furthermore, the sudden death of an infant requires the repetition of its name in baptizing the subsequent child (a well-known and widespread pattern, probably based on the belief of the returning child). Among the stable groups, the mother was physically absent during the baptism ceremony until as recently as the late 1970's and there was a tendency to choose the *madrina* (godmother) within the members of the household or, at least, among its recently detached branches. This group has often described magic practices related to birth: for example, the custom of placing the husband's trousers on the bed during childbirth, with its modern development consisting in keeping a shirt of the prospective father under the pillow of the hospital bed, after someone (mother or mother-in-law) has taken the garment to be blessed by a priest.

A widespread custom, reported by nearly all female informants, regardless of the above residential distinctions, and occasionally still followed by today's mothers, is the Roman Catholic rite of receiving a special church blessing forty days after childbirth. This traditional rite of passage (a rite of re-aggregation), called *rientrare in santo* (literally, to reenter a

sinless state) is actively supported by the relatives, especially by the mother-in-law who organizes refreshments for the occasion. Another reported generalized practice was the mother-in-law's throwing the placenta of the baby (but the same goes for newly-born calves) into a well, or into the waters of a stream, to make sure that it stayed wet so that the breast would not become dry and milkless. Only the practice related to the calves is occasionally followed today.

The younger generation, characterized by high mobility, is today gradually abandoning the traditional naming system, especially the adoption of patrilineal names, and is largely following the suggestions of the mass media. However, there is a custom which, though declining, is still quite fashionable. This is the habit of giving a girl the feminine version of the name already attributed to the previous male sibling, or *vice-versa*: *Fabio/Fabia, Dino/Dina, Bruno/Bruna*. It is a constant feature appearing in all genealogies. The explanations offered by the informants may be of some interest: (i) a "lazy" choice which avoided the trouble of looking for another name; (ii) the hope that a pair of sibling thus united by the name may also be united in future life and one day even marry another pair of siblings (another recurrent pattern, in fact, in our genealogies). This practice, seemingly aimed at reinforcing the ties between two subsequent siblings of opposite sex, is modified only when precedence must be given to the name of a recently deceased important ancestor. For example, if, after *Dino* was born, the paternal grandmother *Maria* died, the next girl born must necessarily be named *Maria*. *Dina* will be postponed until the next baby girl: it is as if the duplication of the name were a duty which is temporarily delayed because of a more potent norm.

The strengthening of already existing *consanguineal* ties between a pair of siblings, by identifying them *socially* with the same name, seems an intriguing though hardly testable explanation of the practice. The question ought to be studied furtherly, possibly, using as a basic approach the concept of "siblings" held by the various societies.⁸

Wedding banquet: the couple and the characteristic "exchange of parents" (bride's father near the bridegroom and viceversa). The woman on the right is the *massaia* (1940's).
Reproduction.



4.2. Courtship and Marriage

In Vicchio, like in most other societies, rituals connected with the life cycle assigned a key-role to certain categories of kin. Key-roles, especially with reference to courtship and marriage, were generally played by the two pairs of parents: a custom still observed today, though in modified form. Both pairs played important parts in the marriage ceremony of their children: one of the formal parts they were assigned consisted of remaining absent from view and staying at home during the wedding celebration (the custom was reported as widespread until 20 years ago). This absence was the symbolic expression of important points: By this gesture, the bride's parents marked the detachment of their daughter both from their privileged affection and from their social unit. The groom's parents, on the other hand, by waiting at home for the arrival of the new bride, marked their right to grant her permission to enter the household they ruled. Similar ceremonies have been described in other areas of Italy.⁹ Once the newly married couple reached the house, the *massaia*, standing on its threshold, greeted the bride with the words "*Benvenuta, sposa!*" ("Welcome, bride!"). The latter replied "*Bentrovata, suocera!*" ("Well-found, mother-in-law!"). These phrases clearly state and acknowledge the hierarchical struc-

ture which the bride is about to join. While this verbal ritual no longer takes place, it is still quite common to hear an elderly woman addressing her son's wife with the term *sposa* (bride), regardless of the latter's age, or to refer to her by the expressions "*la mi' sposa*" ("my bride"), or "*le mi' spose*" ("my brides"), when she speaks of her daughters-in-law.

Another interesting expression, still used occasionally and reflecting the structural role assigned to a married woman in her husband's household, is "*i mi' omini*" ("my men"), whereby she refers to all the males (regardless of age and type of kin relationship) living with her in the same residential unit. This collective expression, which never seems to be used to identify the male members of her own family of origin, is probably a reflection of the strictly virilocal residential pattern. It must receive further documentary attention in the future phases of the study.

Other symbolic actions performed by relatives used to mark the transfer of the bride and her limited belongings (trousseau, mattresses, some gifts). The groom's brothers, for example, the same ones that the bride would soon call "my men", would hail her arrival by enacting a brief ceremonial resistance: this consisted of shooting their hunting rifles from the window, while the door remained still closed.

Although ceremonial practices have now drastically changed, most informants note the central role still played by the parents in courtship and marriage. They volunteer these descriptions as they talk about their genealogical relations and they are often critical of the changes. One of the changes most objected to is the enormously reduced influence of the parents in regulating courtship patterns. In the past (informants report the custom as existing until 30–25 years ago), permission for the boy to visit his girl in her house during the long years of courtship was rigidly predetermined as to time and form. The first visit, for example, had to be sealed by his symbolically shaking hands with her father. This event was dramatically called “*fare la parte in casa*” (“to play the part in the household”). Meanwhile, the girl was practically forbidden to visit the fiancé’s house: the whole courtship period was nearly marked by an attitude of avoidance of her mother-in-law, the guardian and mistress of the household of which she was to become part. All our informants described this avoidance. The latter was elaborated further by cases of the woman calling for the girl in order to oblige her to carry out special tasks, such as:

sewing the *capoccia*’s shirt or underwear, weaving, or some other difficult operation by which the girl would prove her ability to work and, at the same time, learn about her future role in that household structure. These “exams”, in fact, had a double potential value: they prepared the road for her acceptance, but, in case of failure, they made it practically impossible for her to find another husband (once she had crossed that threshold unsuccessfully) and forced her to leave her own house still unmarried, to seek a work as a domestic servant in Florence. In our genealogies, many female relatives now living in that city have such a story. For this reason, most women tell us about how they totally avoided any contact with their mother-in-law until their wedding day.¹⁰ It is interesting to note that, even today, few engaged girls visit their boyfriend’s house, except for very brief courtesy calls on important festive days. Conversely, a pattern of rather formal long visits of the boys to the girls’ house is still reported.

It is interesting to observe that most of the “traditional” behaviour observed in Vicchio, far from being unique, is only a local variant of well-known patterns often described in the



Two unmarried brothers buried together (1987).

All Souls' Day 1986: visit to the cemetery.



ethnographic literature on rites of passage and the life cycle. What matters here, in fact, is to account for the intensity of the occurrence, the converging of related customs, their common dependence on the *mazzadria* system, and to evaluate their present developments – if any – twenty years after its official end.

Another custom, current up to 15 years ago,¹¹ again refers to the central role of the mother-in-law. On the Sunday preceding the wedding – which always took place on a Saturday, as in most of rural Italy – the *massaia* visited the bride's house in order to deliver her personal gift – always a ring – and then stayed for dinner. This very formal gesture, which has been explained as a form of advance payment or reward for the girl's future services in the household, could only take place among sharecroppers who were not too impoverished.¹² Today, given the improved economic conditions, there is a much higher occurrence of mother-in-law's gifts, although the latter have lost some of their formal character and certainly their previous economic function.

There were other ceremonial markers of the bride's definite transfer. These included her being forbidden to visit her own family for several weeks after marriage and the symbolic

gifts that she would bring her parents-in-law upon arrival at their house, namely, a shirt for the *capoccia* and an apron for the *massaia* (a custom which has so far only been reported by very old women). The overwhelming presence of food, prepared and consumed according to traditional patterns, is still today a conspicuous characteristic of wedding practice, although, in Vicchio as elsewhere, the fashion is now to hold a banquet, paid and arranged for by the bridegroom's relatives, in a restaurant or motel. In the past, it was the custom to hold the wedding banquet in the bridegroom's house. Members of that household carried out the first part of their task of food suppliers and administrators early in the morning: during their trip to fetch the bride and take her to church, they deposited – actually, hid – food in corners or bushes all along the way. These places became ceremonial stops where the bridal party refreshed themselves when they took the bride from the church to her new residence. All informants described the little scene always enacted during the banquet: the *massaia*, once again in an active role, would place a large basket (or soup bowl) at the centre of the table and would ask the bride to stand up and lift its lid. As two pigeons flew away, the old



All Souls' Day 1986: cleaning activities at the cemetery.

woman would cry: “*Viva la sposa!*” (“Long live the bride!”) and the group would join in and clap hands.

In case of premature death of the bridegroom, his widow could marry one of his brothers (one of “her men”). This pattern has appeared several times during our research, and more frequently than the opposite, but certainly not as often as marriage between parallel and cross cousins. It is obviously not a case of “levirate”. Although there were no sanctions for non compliance, the pattern existed very clearly. Since all informants warmly approved, it was probably a form of preferential marriage (and, maybe, this custom of marrying the widowed sister-in law could be considered as a function of the male celibate we discussed earlier in relationship with residential stability).

As already stated, the extraordinary genealogical competence shown by most informants appears as a function of several variables. One

of these is the frequency and type of contact with kin (an aspect which is still important today). The well-integrated structure of the *famiglia mezzadrile*, its internal cohesion and economic solidarity, is now limited to a few surviving cases. What remains is a widespread concept and use of kinship as a privileged area of social life. The universe within which most social interchange takes place is still one's own kinship network and only to a minor extent – even among the younger generations – does this privileged area include friends. Family gatherings provide occasions for contact and exchange of information, such as All Souls' Day (*Festa dei morti*), weddings, funerals, confirmations, Sunday visits, joint working activities (i.e., harvest or vintage). These occasions, not only reinforce kinship ties, they also have the important effect of enculturating the children into their universe of relatives. The present stage of our research does not allow us to say whether the very young generations display a greater knowledge of their patrilineal kin, a pattern which characterizes their parents. For example, we had a case of a woman who, for a while, could not even remember her own mother's name. This temporary amnesia, however, was characteristically accompanied by a vivid memory of quite remote relatives of both her husband and her father. This phenomenon, I believe, beside being due to the patrilineal transmission of the surname, is also an obvious outcome of virilocal residence. The latter, weakens the married woman's ties with her family of origin and produces series of gaps in her children's knowledge of their matrilineal kin.

So strong was the norm of virilocal residence, that the unavoidable exceptions in its applications – due to the lack of sons or to their premature death – has a specific local term: *generatico*. This word is based on the official Italian term *genero* (son-in-law). It was known and used by everyone we spoke to: “*Fare il generatico*” (“to apply the ‘generatico’”) is the expression indicating that the norm had to be broken and a daughter was thus permitted to bring her husband to her household after marriage. The lack, or the scarcity, of men on the *podere* could force the *capoccia*, or his surviv-

Only her side is occupied,
for the moment (1987).



ing wife, to accept a son-in-law in the house, who would start a family with another surname (although some informants report the habit of ignoring this new surname for a long period of time). This practice was always described by its local term *generatico*. The emphasis which generally accompanied the use of the term and justified the adoption of the practice proves the widespread awareness of the importance of the virilocal norm.

4.3. Death

Everyone in Vicchio pays an annual visit to the local cemeteries for the "*Festa dei Santi*" (1st of November: "the feast of the saints") and the "*Festa dei Morti*" (the "feast of the dead", on the 2nd of November). In addition, they pay other occasional visits there, on Sundays, or on anniversaries. Even very old persons and small babies are taken there for this annual ceremony. Few non-resident relatives fail to come back for the occasion from distant regions and abroad. The several small cemeteries (roughly a dozen) scattered about the Vicchio territory suddenly become alive with activity and are filled to capacity with visitors. Many family groups are equipped to spend a good portion of the day there. Though we are forced to leave aside a full description of this visiting pattern,

we must at least mention the busy domestic atmosphere which is transferred to the graveside. Women, wearing large aprons and rubber gloves, sweep and wash the tombs and the surrounding area with soap and bleach; they carry buckets, mops and dusting appliances to and from between the grave and the fountain. Meanwhile, men just stand about, limiting themselves to moving a heavy ladder or indicating where the flowers should go, and children play and sit on the grave stones, eat their snacks, or sleep in their carriages. The old men stand or sit in the sun (if there is one), watching all this activity; their attitude is similar to the one they assume when standing or sitting in the little village squares.

The obvious consequence of the long visits people pay to their dead relatives is renewed contacts with the living ones they meet there. Even more important, while the children are exposed to their group's funeral lore, both adults and youth are reminded of kinship ties and norms through the inscriptions on the grave stones. These provide quite instructive reading. One never sees, for example, a married woman buried in – or next to – the grave of her own kin. Even if she should precede her husband in death (which here, as elsewhere, is rare), she will be put in the grave of his family, if they have one. She may also just be buried by

herself, but in this case, the stone inscription and the position of her photograph will clearly indicate that she is waiting to be joined there one day by her spouse. In other words, the norm of virilocal residence is strictly applied in death, as it is in life, and both the physical arrangement of the graves and inscriptions such as "*Maria Beccai nei Falli*" ("Mary Becai into the Fallis) are there to remind the observer of that residential norm.

The deep knowledge of kinship referred to in this paper is certainly also a function of the contacts with the type of genealogical archive represented by the cemetery inscriptions: as one kneels by a grave, one will be reminded of names, surnames, places and dates of birth, marriage, and death, names of parents and of many other relatives (i.e., the list of the kin who have mourned the loss and contributed to the stone). More than once, informants volunteered the following explanation for knowing the date of birth of a remote ancestor: "I see it whenever I go to the cemetery!"

I should now like to conclude by mentioning one more effect, among those produced by intensive visiting dead ancestors, which we could jokingly define as "magic economics". It has been widely reported¹³ that, in order to win the lottery, or to receive a decisive stroke of good luck ("*buona fortuna*"), one must ask a dead relative by his or her grave. The needed supernatural information will be supplied later, during a dream, usually in the form of a set of "safe" numbers ("*numeri buoni*"). So, here we have a dead relative, who has already concluded his own life cycle, but who still performs his fundamental duty of supporting his kin, by stretching a "lucky hand" ("*buona mano*") across the "threshold of his grave..."

Appendix: Methods and contents of the genealogical research

The first phase of our field investigation¹⁴ has consisted, in the systematic collection of genealogies for a sample of *mezzadri*, *ex-mezzadri*, and other types of agricultural workers.¹⁵ Keeping well in mind that genealogies "are not accounts of biological relationships, but sociological statements" (Barnard and Good, 1984:

23) and using previous research experience into the kinship patterns of Italo-Americans,¹⁶ we decided that the genealogy was to be our basic tool, a framework through which and around which we would gather all the information. Here is a list of the information expected and obtained from each Ego through the genealogical inquiry:

- a) An "emic" view of Ego's known and recognized kin network.
- b) The range and qualities of Ego's knowledge of his consanguineal and affinal ties, generational depth, and collateral relations.
- c) Contextualized genealogical data, in which the mentioning of the various kin is surrounded by the telling of life cycle episodes. A sort of genealogical "time chart", in which Ego's lifetime appears marked by the contacts with kin on meaningful occasions, i.e., childbirth, baptism, marriage, etc.
- d) Concepts relative to grades of kinship (i.e., the supposed 'boundaries' of the kinship network), of primogeniture (i.e., which of the twins or triplet is to be considered as the senior),¹⁷ concepts of sex roles (emerging, for example, from statements such as: "He had seven sons", where the existence of the remaining five daughters is 'forgotten'. This type of omission occurred many times and one informant justified his mistake by saying: "*La donna è un debito*" ("a daughter means debts").
- e) Marriage norms and practices, marriageable areas, endogamic versus exogamic tendencies, ethnocentrism, consanguineal marriages, prescribed marriage sequence, role of parents and of their kin in marriage.
- f) Functions of celibacy.
- g) Naming system.
- h) Magic concepts of kinship, such as those of "milk mother" and "milk sibling" ("*madre di latte*", "*fratello di latte*", "*sorella di latte*"), of the used name or of the re-born sibling.¹⁸
- i) Frequency of contact with kin (information obtainable in measurable ways, for example, by listing the relatives attending the latest meeting occasion: funeral, wedding, or just Sunday visiting).¹⁹
- j) Composition of the household unit at crucial

stages of the life cycle (i.e., change of *podere*, marriage, death) and the places of residence of Ego and his immediate kin.

- k) Oral traditions relative to kinship roles and functions (such as proverbs like "A father is good for a hundred children and ten children are not good for one father").²⁰

Notes

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1. In this field research work, I am supported by the valid contribution of dr. Francesco Aperi, of the University of Florence. The study, however, belongs to a wider research plan, undertaken by several Italian Universities and coordinated by P. G. Solinas (of Siena University), under the general title: "For an atlas of family forms in the rural areas of Italy."
2. The present population is of 5,959 inhabitants, but in the 1931 census it was of 11,802. As recently as the late forties, 80% of the population consisted of agricultural workers.
3. See the works by C. Bianco's collaborators and graduate students: De Palma, 1979; Eghenter, 1982; Tavarelli, 1982; Aperi, 1985 and 1985a; Bertoldo, 1986.
4. A vast literature is by now available on this theme. See, for example, P. Clemente, 1980, G. Giorgetti, 1974; G. Cherubini, 1984.
5. I use the term "household" as in Laslett, 1972, and as in the Italian "aggregato domestico".
6. See M. Fortes, 1969: 54.
7. Even if single, the girls were expected to leave home and most of them became housemaids in a large city or nuns in some countryside convent.
8. On this and related theoretical problems, see A. M. Cirese 1978–79 and 1988.
9. For an analogous verbal ceremony in Basilicata, see G. B. Bronzini 1961.
10. P. Tavarelli, 1982: 167.
11. *ibidem*: 179.
12. A widespread peasant custom in Italy established that only the bride received a wedding ring.
13. L. Zipoli, 1987: 217–221. (Abundant field data support the primary role of dead kin to this sort of help, although Christ, or the saints also can assist).
14. After the municipal archives had been previ-

ously consulted (see: De Palma, Bertoldo, Tavarelli).

15. The first sample includes roughly 75% *mezzadri* (or *ex-mezzadri*), and 25% other working categories, such as lumberjacks, agricultural daily labourers, shepherds.
16. See, for example, the experiments on Italo-American genealogies in Bianco, 1983 (but, also, Bianco 1974 and 1980).
17. Curiously, the youngest is the first to be born and the explanation given by informants is: "Because the seed was put there last". In a hierarchical household structure, establishing seniority was an important issue. It involved the inheritance of the right and the responsibility of becoming the *capoccia* and the right of precedence in the marriage sequence.
18. The idea behind the common practice of using a different name from the official one (which then becomes practically unknown to most people in a community) is that a person could be harmed by black magic applied to his/her name.
19. This aspect of the research is still at a preliminary stage.
20. We also decided to obtain each genealogy by means of more than one visit, in order to focus on different aspects and check on previously obtained data. Tentative diagrams were drawn during interviews (the latter always tape recorded), while future visits could extend the inquiry to other relatives of the informant's genealogy.

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