

FAMILY, KINSHIP AND STATE IN CONTEMPORARY EUROPE



Vol. 2

The View from Below: Nineteen Localities

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value attached to the family and to the strong ties that characterize the domestic group and wider kindred form a bulwark against economic and social uncertainty, that together with other factors such as emigration and state intervention, and ties of neighbourhood and community, help to reduce uncertainty and facilitate the distribution of resources.

As Dalla Zuanna (2001) has suggested, familism can best be seen as the routine and moral dimension, the “spirit” of those strong family ties that, according to Reher (1998), are deeply embedded within the societies of the European Mediterranean – strong ties between parents and children, siblings and across the generations, which are consolidated by a constant flow of goods, resources and reciprocities between family and kin (Barbagli et al. 2003). Familism does not imply the inevitable closure of the nuclear family at the expense of other forms of relationship. It is an integral part of a crucial mode of resource distribution – if not always equitable, at least efficacious.² In what follows, we seek to describe the role of the distribution of resources and help among Tramonti families, and the ways in which they have changed over time.

Approached from the Amalfi coast, Tramonti is hidden by the wooded uplands of the Lattari Mountains. Unusually for the South, whose typical settlement pattern is that of the nucleated agro-town, its population is divided into thirteen small villages of unequal size, that straddle the valley road that joins the Amalfi coast, with its well developed tourism industry, to the towns and cities of the Agro sarnese-nocerino, whose agro-industrial activities are closely linked to the Neapolitan market. Tramonti embraces both traditions. Its inhabitants work in agriculture, agro-industry, tourism and small local enterprises and the building trade. Territorially, it is the largest of the Monti Lattari mountain communities, although its 3,900 inhabitants make up only 10 per cent of the total population. Each of the thirteen villages that form the commune has its own parish and sense of identity, which finds expression in patronal festivals.

Agriculture retains a certain importance in the local economy. It is more prominent than in other Amalfi Coast communities. Indeed, about one-quarter of all agricultural enterprises in the *Comunità Montana* region are located there (Piano Socioeconomico 2001). Its inhabitants stress these activities, and tend to see themselves as members of a rural community,

² Thanks to Professor Amalia Signorelli for this useful suggestion.

anchored to a peasant tradition³. Reality is somewhat different: whereas in 1961, 55 per cent of the population was employed in agriculture, by 1991 this percentage had halved, and today is undoubtedly still less.

Nevertheless, almost all families own vineyards, chestnut plantations and other plots of land, mainly geared towards family consumption. As in other southern communities, if, perhaps, less dramatically, a predominantly agrarian economy with a strong artisan tradition has given way to a mixed economy focused on the secondary and tertiary sectors, mainly construction work and tourism, in which agriculture is relegated to a subsidiary role (Donolo et al. 1978, Signorelli 1983). Small plots and vineyards link families to the community and provide a sense of continuity, while offering an extra source of income.

In the near recent past, the local economy was oriented towards the Neapolitan market and focused on the intense cultivation of lemons, wine and chestnuts, bolstered by wood-based industries and livestock production (Aversano 1988). Peasants, smallholders and fixed tenants, were its main protagonists. Frequently, peasant agriculture was combined with artisan activities, leading to an economy of “mixed figures” and “unlikely combinations” (Davis 1973, 1977, Schneider 1969), common to much of the South. This combination of diverse sources of income and “mixed figures”, such as the worker/peasant or the building worker/peasant, is still commonplace; agriculture, often limited to household consumption, has long been a subsidiary activity when compared to other sectors of the economy. In turn, peasant lifestyles, especially among older members of the community, are sustainable only thanks to state pensions, welfare provision and the privileged unemployment benefits offered to agricultural workers.

As elsewhere in the South, migration has been a conspicuous feature of the recent history of the village, with many members of the older generation choosing to seek work and prosperity in the industrial economies of Northern Italy or other parts of Europe. While some found fortune as pizzaioli or in the restaurant trade, no more than a handful of today’s young people have been willing to follow in their footsteps.

³ Tramontini tend to have a foreshortened view of the past. As elsewhere in the South, unification led to the substantial peasantization of many rural communities, and in this sense, late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Tramonti can plausibly be described as a peasant society. For an earlier period, this categorization is much more problematic (see Table 7.1 below).

Despite Tramonti's economic transformation over recent decades, these changes have failed to bring about a significant or sufficient improvement in economic and social security. Extreme poverty and the deprivations (*miseria*) of peasant life have disappeared; informants generally acknowledged improvements, typically comparing the hardships of their own childhood experience and those of parents with the relative affluence of the present day. Nevertheless, many of the people encountered during fieldwork worked in conditions of extreme uncertainty, in the "black" economy, without social insurance or pension provision, or had only occasional, seasonal jobs in the building and tourism industries. According to Istat, only 36 per cent of the local population is economically active, a figure well below the provincial average; rates of unemployment are 19.34 per cent (against a national average of between 6 per cent and 8 per cent). Youth unemployment is also very high: 46.4 per cent. High rates of dependency of 65.35 per cent (provincial average: 50.67 per cent) bear witness to the weakness of the local economy.

With an uncertain labour market and such high unemployment, the constructive combination of different sources of income within the family – from paid employment, agricultural profits, pensions and subsidies – is crucial to survival and to achieve a reasonable standard of living. In this respect, the family plays a vital role, since incomes and resources are cumulated and redistributed among its members, and because it confers access to land and often a house, whose ownership is an important font of security and saving.

These redistributive and support functions are, however, provided not so much by the nuclear family as by a cluster of family units that include those of parents and married children, bound together by strong moral ties and reciprocal support and exchange – similar to what some scholars have described as the *famille entourée* (Attias-Donfut et al. 2002, Bonvalet 2003) – that is at the historic core of domestic organization in Tramonti.

Razza and history: continuity and change in household formation systems

Local families in past time

Throughout the early modern and modern periods, Tramonti's kinship organization was characterized by marked patrilineal inflexion, despite the constant erosive presence of a legally enforced, notarially authenticated, partible inheritance system. Its earliest, sketchy, population listing, the *Catasto* of 1468 (Archivio di Stato di Napoli⁴, *Catasti Antichi, 1468*) provides, at least according to the *Annales* historian, Delille (1985), a classic example of an early modern community internally divided into *quartiers lignage*, with each of its (then fifteen) *casali* (hamlets/villages) dominated by a small number of shallow patrilineages. Under the impact of the demographic crisis of the mid-seventeenth century, and with increasing economic and occupational differentiation within the local economy,⁵ by the time of the next, much fuller and systematic, land and population register, the *Catasto Onciario* of 1756 (A.S.N., *Catasto Onc.*, Busta 4030), these lineages had lost much of their corporate property base, and were much more fragmented and scattered between different *casali*. They retained, however, a strong ritual focus and sense of identity. Each *casale* had its own confraternities, of varying wealth and complexity, responsible for regulating ritual performance on which local identity depended. Local lineages and dominant families largely controlled presentment to parish and confraternity office. Partly financed by residual legacies, as well as the small annual subscriptions of members, confraternities had important welfare functions distributing charity to indigent members of the *casale*, visiting the sick, contributing to medical and burial fees. In many of the richer *casali*, however, their main responsibility was to assuage the impact of divergent devolution and to protect lineage property by providing *maritaggi* (marriage funds), relatively large cash contributions to women's dowries.⁶

4 Henceforth A. S. N.

5 See Table 7.4, Occupational structure – Tramonti – 1756

6 These payments were quite widespread. Thus, the *casale* of Gete provided 5 *maritaggi* annually, Pucara: 4, Ceserano: 6 (A.S.N., Misti Processi, 1797, b. 447, f. 2578). In their general welfare functions, Tramonti confraternities provide an interesting, and strictly local, 'third way' solution to Laslett's (1989) nuclear family hardship thesis and puzzle. As lineage unity eroded, local self-help confraternities, rather than the state, took

By the mid-eighteenth century, Tramonti had a fully monetarized economy. Its many wood specialists – barrel, basket and chest-makers, wood dryers and charcoal burners – and cotton workers catered for the provincial market; the artisan production of its chocolate makers, herbalists, and lemon farmers was directed toward the luxury markets of the capital. Agricultural and pastoral activities provided main employment for no more than 30 per cent of the population. In a not very strongly stratified society, property ownership was widely dispersed – house ownership almost universal (93 per cent). In addition, most families possessed some land, ideally, gardens, vineyards, chestnuts and coppiced woodland, which conferred a degree of self-sufficiency.

The residual strength of Tramonti's patrilineal organization was also reflected in the household returns of the 1756 *Catasto*.⁷ Exceptionally for the South (Da Molin 1990, Viazzo 2003), some 60 per cent of households were extended or complex, for the most part, three-generational patrilineally extended or joint fraternal households; solitaries were comparatively rare (8 per cent); overall household size conspicuously large at 7.38. It is important to recognize, however, that most complex families tended to have complex residential arrangements. Some lived within a single house or *casa palazzata*, others in *comprendorie* or *ospizii di case* – i.e., sets of apartments surrounding a single courtyard with common services and facilities. On the evidence of eighteenth-century property divisions and wills, these semi-independent apartments were assigned by household heads to the different nuclear units that made up the complex family, whose members were then enjoined to work their lands jointly, at least until the youngest daughter of the household married, and hopefully beyond.⁸ In their emphasis on residential independence, except for stronger patrilineal skewing, these households foreshadowed the spatially clustered entourage families of the present day.

Marriage choice was weighted towards *casale* and local community endogamy, with a discernible incidence of affinal and kinship re-linkages. From the notarial contracts that frequently accompanied eighteenth-

up the welfare slack. They also attest to a flourishing ancien régime civic culture that directly controverts the arguments of Banfield (1958) and Putnam (1989).

7 See Table 7.5, *Catasto Onciario – Tramonti – 1756 – Types of Household*.

8 For a detailed specification of provisions of this sort, see, for example, the will and pre-mortem property division of a local land factor, G.P., Archivio di Stato di Salerno, Prot. Not. 1773, v. 6936.

century marriages, it is clear that daughters were entitled to an equal or near equal share of the family estate. They married earlier than their brothers. Wherever possible, however, their portions were paid in trousseau and in cash derived from three generally equal (non-lineage) sources: the mother's original dowry, confraternity *maritaggi* and debts on the estate. In return, they were expected to renounce future claims on family patrimony. Every effort was made to keep houses and real estate intact in the male line, and to postpone estate division as long as possible.

Continuity and change

Barbagli and his co-authors (2003) have argued that to understand the specificities of the Italian family, it is necessary to examine long-term continuities in systems of household formation both between northern and Mediterranean Europe and within Italy itself.

Many elements of the lineage quarter system are still evident in present-day Tramonti, although modified to cope with a diverse social and economic situation. The *razza*⁹, the set of patrilineal kin (Palumbo 1991), is an obvious survival that varies in extent and importance according to personal and family experience. *Razze* are no longer operative at the economic or political level, and groupings of family and kin are not necessarily organized patrilineally. When invoked, these lineage fragments, which extend at most to three or four generations, are mainly concerned with identity, defining the social personality and common characteristics of the members. It is, thus, common to hear: "He is from the *razza* Giordano" or "He belongs to the *razza* Apicella", to identify people, stressing the characteristics – health, honour, reputation – shared with other members of the same group. Attributes of this kind, while sufficient to define family and lineage identity, are vague and anecdotal, not least because of an absence of clear boundaries between the "casa" or "casata" – families sharing the same surname, with no common identity – and *razze*, among whom kinship ties are known. Members of lineage segments are united by blood and shared substance, often seen as the basis of family resemblances, and also by "l'erera", inheritance passed from father to son. Material inheritance, houses and land that under the lineage quarter system were passed exclu-

⁹ Literally "race", "stock".