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WOMEN IN THE ITALIAN WORKPLACE:
EVOLUTION OF A ROLE

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1. Introduction (*). Italian society has undergone profound changes over the last century, and particularly during the last few decades. These changes have had their effect on the role of women in this society. The evolution of their role is due to changed patterns of employment and earnings but also to the crisis undergone by the traditional social structure and to the emergence of female self-awareness.

The increased involvement of women in society's moments of decision has led scholars to pay more attention to this "up-and-coming" protagonist on the modern Italian scene. Not many studies of Italian women have been carried out and they have mainly been done from the sociological or economic viewpoints. Useful works are the collection of social studies by Maria Cacioppo (Cacioppo, 1982) and the investigations on the economic aspects of women's work carried out by Luigi Frey and his team (Frey et al., 1976; 1978). It comes as no surprise, therefore, that little attention has been paid to women as "spatial subjects" and that geographical studies, or rather studies by female geographers, only began to appear in the second half of the 1970s (Arena, 1978; Gentileschi and Zaccagnini, 1982; Bonora, 1988).

It is well known that Italian women have traditionally played a fundamental role within the family, especially the patriarchal family, where domestic tasks were coupled with the role of mother; additional work activity on the land or manufacturing production within the home took place as necessary (Guidicini and Scidà, 1981). Carefully characterized as the "angel of the hearth", Italian women thus found their space and dimension within the institution of the family, their lack of employment being seen as a privilege and a social advance (Piselli, 1975, pp. 63-65). After the second world war they finally achieved some level of independence and emancipation. This is to be understood as freedom from the institutional limitations and barriers which prevented women from taking a full part in their society and living their lives according to their own distinctive qualities but with a position equal to that of men (Ardigò, 1964, p. 10). It is significant that Italian women were first admitted to full suffrage in 1946.

Women had in fact already played an important part during Italian society's moments of crisis, though always in a supporting role. Such moments included periods of armed

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conflict or massive emigration when women were called on to take over men's roles in the family, at work and in society. They carried out their tasks as replacements satisfactorily, immediately taking up their traditional female role again as soon as the crisis was over. But it was industrialization and urbanization, together with the crisis of the family economy, that radically altered the role of women (Ardigò and Donati, 1976). The female city-dweller is no longer lodged within the patriarchal family and finds that in her new family structure she has different, more varied tasks to perform. She administers the household budget, carries out a "hidden" but crucial function by taking often complete responsibility for the raising of the children and sometimes also the care of the elderly and contributes to the family finances from her outside employment (Bugarini and Vicarelli, 1979).

At first women make their entry into the "official" labour market because they need to earn, and their presence is in marginal, poorly qualified and low paid sectors. Only recently have women managed painfully to make their way in typically male, well-paid and independent professions and thus to contribute more and more actively to the economic and social life of the country from positions which are no longer subordinate or marginal. Pockets of exclusion and discrimination still exist, however, from both the employment and spatial points of view.

The aims of the present study are to underscore this shift in woman's role, to analyse the increase in the contribution -in quality and quantity terms - of the female component in Italy's economic structure, and to evaluate the incidence of these changes on the process of transformation affecting the country as a whole. It will also seek to identify any spatial differentiation in the distribution of the female labour force and of the types of labour that would contribute to reinforcing or reducing the existing spatial imbalance within the country.

Attention will then be given to variations in the female employment rate from the end of the war to date, to changes in the type of female employment and to the relationship between rate and type of employment and the social and cultural characteristics of the population. Spatial differences concerning women's levels of involvement in the workplace will then be examined, together with the place being made available to them by a society undergoing transformation. The study concentrates on the period since World War II making use of data from the Central Statistical Institute on the population censuses of 1951, 1961, 1971 and 1981 and on the sample analysis of the Italian workforce in 1988.

2. Women at work: emancipation and discrimination. Women carry out two types of work, as we know. One of these, within the family and unpaid, puts them for statistical purposes outside the labour force. The proportion of work carried out by the housewife in Italy is still very large, both on account of the numbers involved - in the 1980s one woman in three declared herself solely concerned with domestic activities - and on account of the economic benefit to the family and to society at large. More significant, however, is the increasing importance of the second type of female labour, paid employment, which allows a woman to assume an independent role and has contributed to her emancipation and emergence from her condition of inferiority and low importance (Piselli, 1975).

In order to underscore the growing presence of women in the Italian workplace we considered data on the labour force - that is, on individuals entering the market for employment - and on the employed population. Analysis of the data, which are summarized in table 1, shows fairly clearly the increase of the female share in the Italian labour force. The female employment rate grew by approximately 8 percentage points between 1951 and 1988, whereas the male employment rate fell by 11 points over the same period. In other words (and with other figures), whereas the female labour force increased by 2.5 million units (from 5.3 to 8.8 million), the male labour force stayed practically static at some 15 million units.

There was a consequent growth in the feminization of Italian employment (table 2), understood as the proportion of females in the total populations for the various categories considered, though their representation increased to a lesser degree than in other industrialized countries (Cacace, 1987, p. 121). Early in the postwar period (1951), women represented only 25.5% of the Italian labour force; in 1988 they represented 36.5%.

Two distinct phases can be identified within the period (fig.1). The first covers the 1950s and 1960s. It may be described as a phase of latency and maturation, being characterized by only modest changes both as regards the inclusion of women in the labour force and the type of employment they found, these processes being held back by the phenomenon of emigration abroad, which often involved entire family units. Women took only an indirect part in the process of industrialization. They were assigned two types of tasks: to make up, in part, for the lack of manpower in agriculture following on the massive male exodus, and to supply the new industrialized and urban society with necessary services in such fields as health, education and administration (Bianchi, 1981). The first task involved a considerably greater commitment than the official figures reveal, insofar as agricultural labour was

carried out largely as part-time work. It was, besides, the type of work most socially accepted for women and in some cultural areas characterized by low levels of female schooling (and it should be noted that in the 1950s almost a third of the female population possessed no school certificate), it was the only possible one.

The second task led to a prevailing employment in the tertiary sector, and to all intents and purposes the female labour force skipped the phase of intense industrialization (fig. 2). Moreover, manufacturing activity carried out at home was often "submerged" (Frey, 1975) and did not show up in the official figures. As the services sector grew, new professional opportunities opened up for which women proved fairly apt. These were to be found in education, child and health care, and administration, fields considered "suitable" professions for women by society. By 1951 17.4% of the female population seeking first employment had a high school certificate or university degree - the figure for the male population being only 10%

A turning point came early in the 1970s. On the one hand the feminist movement was challenging the bonds of a traditional culture which particularly constrained women; it was causing society's latent contradictions to erupt, and bringing to a crisis the very institution of the family on which that society was based. On the other hand, women in Italy, as elsewhere, were calling for independence and equality of rights and were putting themselves forward as active participants in the country's economic and social scene, rather than as mere spectators. This led to a changed role for women vis-à-vis the family and vis-à-vis society itself. In the first relationship they were no longer identified solely with the figure of mother and child-minder, and their fertility dropped - a phenomenon similar to what had been found elsewhere (Balley, 1987, p. 238) - with consequent drop in the average family size. In the second relationship, their active social participation increased, including participation in the workplace. The effects were enormous - in one opinion (Cacace, 1987, pp.121-122) more far-reaching even than those produced by technical progress, mass education or the internationalization of the economy.

The growth of the female labour force was greatest from 1971 to 1981, both in absolute terms (an increase of 2.3 million persons) and in relative terms (up 7 percentage points), and this growth continues, though at a more moderaterate, throughout the 1980s. It can be attributed to women's emancipation and also to the legal recognition of women as social and economic subjects. The feminist movement contributed to better protection for female workers (particularly working mothers, provided for by a law passed in 1971). Equality of rights and treatment as between men and women was guaranteed specifically by the

law governing the new status and rights of the family (Ballestrero, 1976; Caravaggi et al., 1976).

Though apparently a positive outcome for women, it turned out to be a damaging situation for them, at least in part. The female labour force increased much faster than the male labour force, but this was not accompanied by a corresponding number of job opportunities for women. The number of women entering the labour market increased but so too did the number unsuccessfully seeking employment and, indeed, the number losing existing employment. The gap between the female labour force and women actually in employment, moderate in the 1950s and 1960s, became successively discriminatory insofar as it was much wider than the gap affecting the male population (fig. 1). This is confirmed by the fact that the female population seeking first employment, around 6% of the total labour force up until the 1970s, reaches a figure of 14% in 1981 and settles around figures on average above 8% in subsequent years. Italy's women were thus the first to have to pay for the country's economic transformation and restructuring. Female employment in fact accounts for one third of the total in Italy, whereas women represent over half of the population seeking first employment (table 2). The population in question is young (70% under 29 years of age in 1988) and well educated (81% having completed high school or university degree course).

The same remarks concerning discrimination against women seeking productive employment apply when we look at comparative unemployment figures for the male and female populations. On average 43% of unemployed in the 1980s were women, and female unemployment, like under employment (Frey et al., 1978) subsequently grows at a faster rate than the male equivalents. The causes are to be sought in the weakness and low importance of female employment which first feels, and feels more strongly, the effects of industrial restructuring and of innovation in production processes. These are phenomena which lead to a general reduction in employment with particular emphasis on job opportunities in the more obsolete sectors. Women tend to be concentrated in the technologically weakest sectors and the introduction of new technology can bring about a labour surplus, a lowering of wages and an impoverishment of female labour or a drop in the importance of women (Bargagli, 1984; Chatterjee, 1989).

It must also be borne in mind that lower pay levels for women, already remarked on in the 1970s (Frey et al., 1978), continue to apply, in the face of clear legislation against this discrimination. Figures from the Ministry of Labour indicate that on average the female workforce is paid 90% of the male average.

3. Development of employment by sector. Women's place in an still "agricultural" Italy that was after the World War II was an important, if not dominant, one. The country's economy was largely centred on agricultural activities and the highest concentration of women in employment was in the primary sector, the figure for 1951 being 41.4% (table 1). Their role in this sector was important in terms of the quantity of work carried out, rarely in terms of quality, since it was the least well-educated women who would undertake this employment (Barberis, 1963).

The 1950s saw Italy in the throes of reconstruction, working its way from an agricultural to an industrial economy. The low productivity of agricultural activities, the requirement to restructure them, the employment attractions of the rising industrial sector, all contributed to a massive exodus from the countryside. The 1961 census shows that only 29% of the total population in employment was still in the primary sector. The proportion for women was higher (30.8%) since, at least at first, the exodus from the land was largely of male manpower. Women were to follow later, and this explains the growing feminization of agriculture at this time (table 2). The woman was frequently the only one left to look after the family farm or to work the fields or engage in seasonal labour, insofar as it was the men who first managed to enter other sectors of employment (especially manufacturing with its better paid and safer jobs), often at the cost of migrating from their area of origin. There is a strong rate of feminization in subsequent decades also, and this is a symptom of the exclusion of the less well-educated and spatially peripheral part of the female population, as we will see.

The 1971 census showed that 18.6% of the female population in employment was working in the primary sector, whereas the figure for the total population was 17.2%. The drastic reduction in agricultural employment during the 1960s (table 2) was due not only to industrialization but also to the massive restructuring and mechanizing of agricultural enterprises. Women were less involved in this process because the use of agricultural machinery is man's work in Italy and women were assigned less well-paid manual tasks. The percentage continued to drop during the 1970s and by 1981 had reached a figure of 12% of total female employment. Technological evolution and the attraction of other sectors of the economy - not just the exodus from the land - are the reasons for this further heavy reduction of employment in the primary sector. Nonetheless there remain many areas - the Salentine peninsula, the Po delta, the Vercelli area - where female labour on farms, especially seasonal labour, is widespread, despite mechanization and new techniques of cultivation.

Analyses of the 1988 sample data further confirm the transformation of the agricultural sector. Only 9.7% of the total labour force was employed in the primary sector, including 10% of the all women in employment, a much lower figure than at the start of the decade. The decline in agricultural employment is of course accompanied by a gradual increase in manufacturing and service activities, and then, as from the 1970s, by a marked strengthening of the tertiary sector. This is particularly noticeable within the evolution of the total professional structure for Italy and of the female component (fig. 2). As far as the latter is concerned the tertiary sector moves into first place quite early, in 1961, skipping the intermediate stage of predominantly secondary activities. The overall professional structure shows slower evolution, passing to predominantly secondary activity in 1961 and to predominantly tertiary only in 1981.

Female involvement in industrial production has varied greatly over time, without ever reaching a majority of total female employment, even at the moment of maximum industrial expansion in the 1960s. For example, women would find industrial employment especially during wartime, replacing male manpower called to the war, and working mainly in armaments and explosives manufacturing (Savelli, 1991). When hostilities ended, however, they had to return to the enclosure represented by the family home. This happened after the First World War, and also after the Second, though to a more limited extent: at least in the nation's more highly developed areas women did not return to the hearth but continued to take part in the economic life of the country and contribute to its industrial production. Industry has always allowed only marginal space to women. Their employment has been confined to industries such as textiles and food where the emphasis is on the stereotypically female skills of attentiveness and manual dexterity. Female workers with an agricultural background also represented a plentiful supply of persons seeking employment and of the underemployed who were available for work in the home (Crespi et al., 1975; Cutrufelli, 1977). This is a type of employment that experienced strong growth during the years of industrialization, maintaining the house-and-work link from which women have not yet managed to break (Mackenzie, 1989).

According to the first census to be carried out postwar, 28% of female employment was in the secondary sector, and the figure reached a maximum of 32% in 1971, proving that women kept up their presence in industry, participating not only in the reconstruction but also in the development of the sector, though at a lower rate than men. During the 1950s the employed population was strongly involved in the country's industrial expansion, a process affecting as much as 40.6% of the total in employment and 31.3% of the women

in employment. Full industrial development during the 1960s brought about a further increase in the numbers employed in this sector, which, in the 1971 census, was just under half of the total in employment and a third of the women in employment - this despite the adoption of new technologies and the automation of a large part of industrial production. These innovations did however make their presence felt in the subsequent decade, and the industrial labour force fell throughout the 1970s to the point of representing only 39.5% of the total employed population at the time of the 1981 census. This fall also affected the female component in industry, which dropped to 28.8% of total female employment. Furthermore, in no province in Italy was industry the predominant sector of employment in 1981, whereas previous decades had seen a noteworthy female presence in industry, especially the textile industry, within the industrial triangle (Genoa - Milan - Turin).

During the 1980s, as the economy moved strongly towards the tertiary sector, the contraction of employment opportunities in industry became even more marked, with only 32% of the total employed population and 23% of the female employed population working in the secondary sector (fig. 2). Though on the one hand the continuing changes within this sector deprived women of employment opportunities, on the other hand they did open up new possibilities. Besides their traditional role in secretarial and administrative work, women now began to take on tasks involving much greater responsibility than before, even including managerial positions.

The development of service activities in any given society is a function of the level of evolution it has achieved. In the immediate post Second World War period, Italian society was undergoing overall reorganization, as is clear from the low level of importance of the tertiary as compared to the other two sectors of employment (fig. 2). In 1951 only 25.5% of the total employed population worked in services. Women made a considerable contribution to several branches of services, and already accounted for 29.9% of the tertiary work force. Italy's social and economic evolution during the 1950s brought about the creation of new services or reinforcement of existing ones, and by 1961 the percentage of women employed in the service sector had risen to 37.9% of total female employment.

The growth in economic and social development brought about an increasing requirement for new services which were largely provided by women, who achieved heavy penetration of the education and administrative sectors. Feminization of service activities is even more marked during the 1960s. In 1971 over a third of total labour force (table 2) and almost half of women in work were employed in the tertiary sector. The spread of female employment into the tertiary sector was also due to specific causes. Often the activity

could be scheduled in such a way as to allow outside work to be fitted in with domestic commitments. For this reason, however, it was easier for women to become classified into ghetto-like sectors which offered few opportunities for a career or where pay levels were not such as to attract male workers.

In the following decade, Italy underwent a further transformation, or rather a "services revolution", with almost half the total employed population working in the tertiary sector. The role of women progressively increased in importance, and, by 1981, with 59% of the female employed population working in this sector, they had emerged as the main protagonists of this most recent transformation of the Italian economy. This role became even more important during the decade which has just ended, with 67% of employed women working in this sector in 1988. It has to be said, however, that the development of services, particularly of social services, has not always met the needs of the working woman in a manner to increase her opportunities or respond to her needs.

4. Spatial expressions of diversity. An examination of the spatial distribution of the rate and type of employment of the female population underscores the differences and inequalities that exist. In addition, a diachronic analysis of data by province for the period 1951-1981 allows us to follow the various rhythms of change throughout the country.

The well-known imbalances between the north and south of the country apply to women's participation in the labour force. As far as women's labour is concerned, these imbalances have in fact increased over time (figs. 3 and 4). Despite the high rate of employment in certain Apennine areas and in the Salentine peninsula, the south of Italy and the major islands - the Mezzogiorno - was characterized in 1951 by the lowest female share in the employed population of any of the country's main geographical subdivisions; it is still so characterized to this day (table 3). In the more industrialized and developed north-west of the country, on the other hand, the rate of female participation in the labour force is well above the average.

In the 1950s female employment in the south was preponderantly agricultural. In fact, for agricultural employment versus total employment in the provinces of the Mezzogiorno, the Pearson correlation (where values oscillate between +1 for perfect positive correlation and -1 for perfect negative correlation) is +0.871. In the industrial triangle and the north of Italy in general, on the other hand, there is normally a strong positive correlation (+0.915) between total employment and

employment in industry, although agriculture is important in the employment of some rice-producing areas.

This apparently clear-cut north-south split is in fact much more complicated than appears from the data, with local social and cultural characteristics combining with particular economic and territorial characteristics either to cancel each other out or to reinforce one another. The lower level of participation of southern women in manufacturing activity is certainly to be explained in cultural terms. The value and strength attributed to the family, female submissiveness vis-à-vis the male (who is recognized as monopolizing decision-making), a mentality which identifies woman with the figure of wife and mother - all these factors tend to hold back, and sometimes imprison women within the four walls of the home. The phenomenon is particularly evident in the major islands and in the southern regions facing the Tyrrhenian sea. In areas where a manufacturing industry develops which tends to favour female labour - as, for instance, the tobacco industry in the Salentine peninsula - women are able to overcome social constraints and actively move into employment.

In the following decades, and particular during the 1970s and 1980s, female employment increased but so did the territorial gap. The most obvious growth was in north-eastern and central Italy and, to a lesser extent, in the north west, whereas the employment rate in southern Italy remains practically unchanged (table 3). Indeed, women seeking first employment have much less chance of finding it in the south, where in 1981 they represents 23.8% of the labour force, compared to around 10% in the rest of the country.

In the last few years, as we have seen, female employment has altered, moving decidedly in the direction of the tertiary sector and industry, and, in spatial terms, this phenomenon corresponds to a movement of greatest activity towards the more advanced areas of the country - particularly so-called "middle Italy" which is characterized by a combination of light industry and developing tertiary activities. The high share held by women in the employment patterns of the central and northern regions can be explained by the greater opportunities existing there, but also by the collapse of certain traditional values, by changes in attitudes, and by the advanced ideologies which seek to include women in the active life of society and to encourage rather than restrict them.

A comparison of the situations in 1951 and 1981 (fig. 3) also shows that deruralization and exodus affecting the southern Apennine areas brought about a sharp fall in female employment not compensated for by increases in other types of activity. Nor has growing southern urbanization

yet brought any appreciable change from the point of view of the quantity of work being offered. Greater fertility rates in the south and the consequent burden represented by the family contribute significantly to preventing women from entering the employment market.

An analysis of the development of employment by sector gives a better idea of the succession of types of economic activity in the various areas of the country (table 4). During reconstruction in the postwar period, there was a strong commitment of female labour in the industrial areas of the north-west, more than half the female employed population working in industry. In the rest of peninsular Italy women were predominantly engaged in agricultural work (64% of the total female employed population). In the 1950s and 1960s the spatial divide increased, with feminization of agriculture dropping to just over 10% of the female employed population in most of the country but 43.7% of the Mezzogiorno's female labour force still engaged in agricultural activities. During the 1950s and 1960s, the two decades of Italian industrialization, women entered the tertiary sector rather than the secondary, which might have been more to be expected. Only in north-western Italy do women take part equally in the industrial and in the services sectors; although female employment in industry in the rest of the country is on the rise, it is a less important phenomenon than employment in services (59% in central Italy in 1971). In the last two decades the pattern has intensified. This is a period during which women not only took less part in industry but also in agriculture, addressing themselves preponderantly to the tertiary sector. Feminization of services is therefore the characteristic phenomenon of this latest period, though with important variations throughout the country. The disparities are not only quantitative but also qualitative, being based on different levels of professional skill but above all on deep social, economic and cultural differences.

The structures - static or evolutionary - of the female employment sectors in Italy's 95 provinces are illustrated by figure 4. Figs. 4a and 4b make clear the very early feminization of the tertiary sector in north-eastern Italy, along the Tyrrhenian coastal strip, and, in particular, in the two major islands; they also show women progressively entering service activities throughout the rest of the country, with a very few exceptions. Only in the north-west, and to a very limited degree the centre, was this movement of female employment into the tertiary sector a movement away from the secondary. In the rest of the country, particularly in the 1970s, the movement towards the tertiary was directly from agricultural activities. The overall professional structure evolved more gradually and is more diversified: the secondary sector predominates in the strip along the foothills of the Alps and is important

in many provinces of central and north-eastern Italy, whereas it is in the south that the tertiary sector predominates, though it is advancing in other areas as well. The tertiary sector's continuing dominance of the structure of female employment in the south of Italy is to be attributed to the traditional position of woman within southern society, which looks on the man as society's only productive element and interprets a woman's working outside the home as evidence of male incapacity to keep her under control (Piselli, 1975). Italy's social and economic evolution, and the consequent growth in the services sector have finally brought into the labour market the types of employment which could be considered "suitable" for women and which could therefore be accepted in cultural and social terms. In northern Italy, on the other hand, the switch of female employment from preponderantly industrial to tertiary activities can be seen as a reflection of larger opportunities of job in the last sector and, in some cases, of women's greater ability to adapt to society's changed requirements.

Analysis of employment by province makes it possible to add some comments to this statement regarding the spread of tertiary employment. First, with regard to female employment in industry, clear traces remain not only in Italy's north-west, but also in the recently industrialized "middle Italy" (Donati and Cipolla, 1978). Because of the spread of light industry, this is the area where women longest retain that considerable presence in manufacturing which, in north-western Italy, they had already lost during the 1970s. Examples are in the knitting industry at Carpi and the textile industry at Prato. The second comment concerns the still very high female component in agricultural activities in some areas of the Mezzogiorno, brought about by the low cost of female labour compared to the cost of mechanization (as is the case in the provinces of Apulia) or by the lack of other job opportunities together with the scarcity of male manpower due to emigration (as in such Apennine areas as Benevento and Potenza).

5. Italian women: segregation and liberation. Despite considerable changes in the composition of Italy's labour force and employment structure, and despite important steps along the road to equality, the country still suffers from considerable sex discrimination.

As pointed out by Reskin (1986, p.2), gender distinctions influence the entry of men and women into the labour market in at least three ways. First, men enter the labour market directly, whereas women still find their initial employment in the home. Second, there are sectors of employment which tend to be either predominantly female or predominantly

male. Third, within any given type of employment, women tend to take up subordinate or secondary roles.

As it has already been noted, over 10 million Italian women (approximately a third of the female population) are registered as housewives, a continuous decrease in numbers (-20%) since 1951. Whether considered as a privilege or a constraint, work in the home is in any case experienced as part of the traditional woman-home-family continuum, which an individual may accept either wittingly or as a matter of resignation to the inevitable. With regard to occupational segregation by sector, the most recent data indicate, for example, that employment in the automotive construction industry is 85% male, whereas the textile and clothing industries are 70% female. Given the strong presence of women in the tertiary sector, it is obvious that the specialization-segregation process will also take place in service activities.

We have seen that women's ability to approach the labour market is largely a function of their level of education. The increase in the female labour force and the increase in female employment in the tertiary sector go hand in hand with a continuous rise in the level of female education, with the progressive feminization of some professions and with women's entry into areas of employment from which they had previously been excluded. In 1960 only 29% of Italian university students were women: by 1971 the percentage had risen to 38%, to reach 46% in 1985 (Righi, 1988b). In 1986 female graduates achieved their maximum percentage (80%) in literature while representing a minimum (18%) in engineering. Women with a degree or school certificate are increasingly available, therefore, on the labour market, but their qualifications are already "feminized". Forty-eight percent of women workers with one of the two qualifications mentioned are in the 25 to 29-year age range: only 18% are in the 50 to 59-year range. The easiest professions for women to enter are teaching or office work. In 1981 women made up respectively 73% and 42% of the total employed populations of these professions - an increase of 6 and of 13 percentage points, respectively, compared with the decade 1971-81.

This segmentation also explains why youth and intellectual unemployment, which is the most obvious and most critical phenomenon in present-day Italy, affects women above all. By attitude and training, Italian women tend to be guided to professions and sectors of employment which have long been saturated and overcrowded. Thus, at the very moment when they manage to achieve a higher level of education they find themselves even more vulnerable to unemployment or underemployment. In particular, unemployment among the better educated is greatest in those traditionally female sectors, such as teaching or office work, for which a humanistic education is sufficient, without the requirement

for specific technical skills in such fields as economics, engineering, information technology.

Women's entry into the more advanced, more typically male sectors is still at the pioneering stage, although some welcome signs are already visible. The growth rate in the numbers of women magistrates, notaries and advocates is above the average, from 4% of total employed in the sector in 1971 to 10% ten years later. Women accountants or specialists in mathematics or economics were 10% of those employed in the sector in 1971: in 1981 this figure had reached 21.5% (Cacace, 1987, p. 127). By 1988 the self-employed and entrepreneurial professions had also witnessed growth (1.9% of total female employment, compared to 0.4% in 1971), as had the category of managers and office workers (accounting for 42% of the female workforce, as against 23% in 1971). By contrast, the percentage of female manual workers and helpers, which had been a clear majority of the total of working women (62%) in 1971, was reduced to only 42% by 1988.

The incidence of career women is therefore increasing even though women managers and entrepreneurs are perhaps those most conscious of the consequences of sex differences. An investigation in the Milan area in the early 1980s (May and Zanuso, 1982) underscored the difficulties women encounter in achieving managerial status. From first employment to appointment as manager takes a woman on average 20 years; she has to work continuously and intensely, often merely to "prove" her competence and suitability. Her lack of mobility implies a career model conceived of as within the original workplace and which often counts, over and above the woman's own personal capacities, on the protection of powerful and influential male figures.

Female entrepreneurs fall into two categories (May and Zanuso, 1982, p. 16). First are the "founders", who have created their own business. They may choose sectors, such as fashion or public relations, where their natural gifts and creativity are important; they may also operate in sectors where technical expertise carries weight, such as consultancy. Second, there are those who have inherited a business or who collaborate as co-owners together with their father or, particularly, their husband. This latter type of career, starting as it does with a composite function, is particularly significant: even though the woman may often display considerable personal capacity for innovation, her career is not undertaken as a matter of free choice, but derives from a male figure, whether living or deceased.

Particular attention has recently been paid to women entering scientific research and university work. In 1987 female research workers were exactly 1/3 of the total population employed in research in the public sector, a

considerable increase (12 percentage points) over the figure for 1982. But it is precisely in this sector that the most glaring contradictions occur between the individual's personal qualities and capacities and their chances of making a career. At the National Research Council the number of female research workers almost doubled between 1982 and 1987 - the years for the study carried out by A. Righi (1988a) - mostly concentrated in the disciplines of highest feminization at university level. If, however, we look at the more prestigious and more responsible positions, we find that only 15% of women manage to achieve such roles. Similarly, research conducted in the science faculties of eight universities (Alicchio and Pezzoli, 1988) shows that the ratio of women to men at the research worker level (the first rung of the university ladder) is approximately 1/1 but becomes 1/2 for associate professors (the second rung) and 1/10 for full professors (the top rung). Furthermore, only 18% of women in the universities have managerial roles. Against this background we have looked at the specific situation for Italian geographers in the years 1979 and 1990. The numbers of women remain practically the same and the ratio of female to male geographers is unchanged at 6/10. Neither has the imbalance in roles and career levels changed, with the sex ratio for full professors still 1/10. Associate professorships, a role created after 1980, show a ratio of 4/10, whereas the ratio for research workers is 13/10.

Despite constant progress in terms of the quantity and quality of women's employment, the "fragility" of the female presence in the workplace must be underlined. Although the restructuring in Italy has been frequently associated with tertiarization of employment and therefore with greater participation by women, it also leads to progressive exclusion from the industrial sector. In any case female workers tend to find themselves in subordinate roles of comparatively lower prestige and importance. There are many causes contributing to this state of affairs, but they may well be summed up as what may be called the production-reproduction antithesis (Bimbi, 1981), that is, as the contradictory situation of a worker who at the same time has the desire and duty to act as a mother, looking after children and family while not neglecting the commitment required by paid employment. Female research workers, for example, find their pattern of study characterized by discontinuity, with long interruptions and brusque restarts. Behind many of the choices women make as to employment or non-employment there lies, in fact, the workday timetable and the possibility or otherwise of having enough time to carry out their "work as mothers" (Sartori, 1982).

Despite the many cultural and social constraints which remain, Italian women find themselves in a changed situation in terms of opportunities and expectations. In

the immediate postwar years women went to work out of necessity, accepting sporadic or lowly work in order to cope with an immediate or unpredictable economic situation. Today they are motivated, rather, by a desire for independence and for a self-realization which has its cultural and therefore also its professional aspect. The gap between the situations of women in the north and in the south of the country still remains today, but this is due only in part to women themselves and their position in society - a great deal depends on the economic and cultural conditions of the various areas of the country and on the actual opportunities being offered to women.

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Table 1. Employment characteristics of Italy's population, 1951 - 1988

Year	Labour force	Employed pop.	Pop. seeking	Employed pop. by sector			Housewives
	total pop.	total pop.	first employment	employed population	employed population	employed population	total pop.
	%	%	%	I	II	III	%
				%	%	%	
1951	21.7	20.3	6.9	41.4	28.0	30.6	51.6
1961	19.5	18.8	3.2	30.8	31.3	37.9	49.2
1971	19.6	18.4	6.4	18.6	32.8	48.6	43.3
1981	26.7	22.9	14.1	12.2	28.8	59.0	34.5
1988	30.1	24.4	8.3	10.0	23.0	67.0	n.a.

Source: ISTAT (Central Institute of Statistics)

Table 2. Changing representation on women in the labour force, 1951 - 1988
(female population / total population)

Year	Labour force	Employed pop.	Pop. seeking	Employed population by sect.		
	%	%	first employment	I	II	III
			%	%	%	%
1951	25.5	25.1	32.7	24.6	21.9	29.9
1961	24.9	24.8	28.1	26.3	19.1	31.1
1971	27.4	27.0	35.7	29.1	20.0	34.1
1981	34.4	32.9	47.6	36.1	24.0	39.3
1988	36.5	33.7	51.3	34.6	24.1	38.9

Source: ISTAT (Central Institute of Statistics)

Table 3. a) Female employed population (as % of total population)

Area	1951	1961	1971	1981	1988
North-western Italy	24.8	22.6	22.0	27.3	29.3
North-eastern Italy	22.6	20.1	20.5	27.4	30.5
Central Italy	19.5	17.1	17.6	23.7	26.1
Southern Italy	16.2	16.3	14.8	16.7	17.0

b) Female population seeking first employment
(as % of labour force)

North-western Italy	9.4	2.3	4.2	9.2
North-eastern Italy	7.7	3.8	5.3	7.9
Central Italy	6.4	4.7	8.3	14.2
Southern Italy	3.5	3.0	8.4	23.8

Source: ISTAT (Central Institute of Statistics)

Table 4. Female employed population by sector of activity (in percent)

Area	1951			1961			1971			1981			1988		
	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III
North-western Italy	15.9	50.5	34.2	10.0	49.8	40.2	5.3	47.2	47.5	4.1	38.2	57.7	4.6	30.4	65.0
North-eastern Italy	43.7	24.6	31.7	22.5	32.6	44.9	11.8	35.1	53.1	7.5	32.8	59.7	7.9	28.4	63.7
Central Italy	44.8	19.3	35.9	26.4	26.3	47.3	11.5	29.4	59.1	6.5	29.0	64.5	6.9	20.4	72.7
Southern Italy	64.4	7.2	28.4	59.1	14.6	26.3	43.7	16.5	39.8	30.7	13.5	55.8	21.2	10.8	68.0
Italy	41.4	20.0	30.6	30.8	31.3	37.9	18.6	32.9	48.6	12.2	28.8	59.0	10.0	23.0	67.0

Source: ISTAT (Central Institute of Statistics)

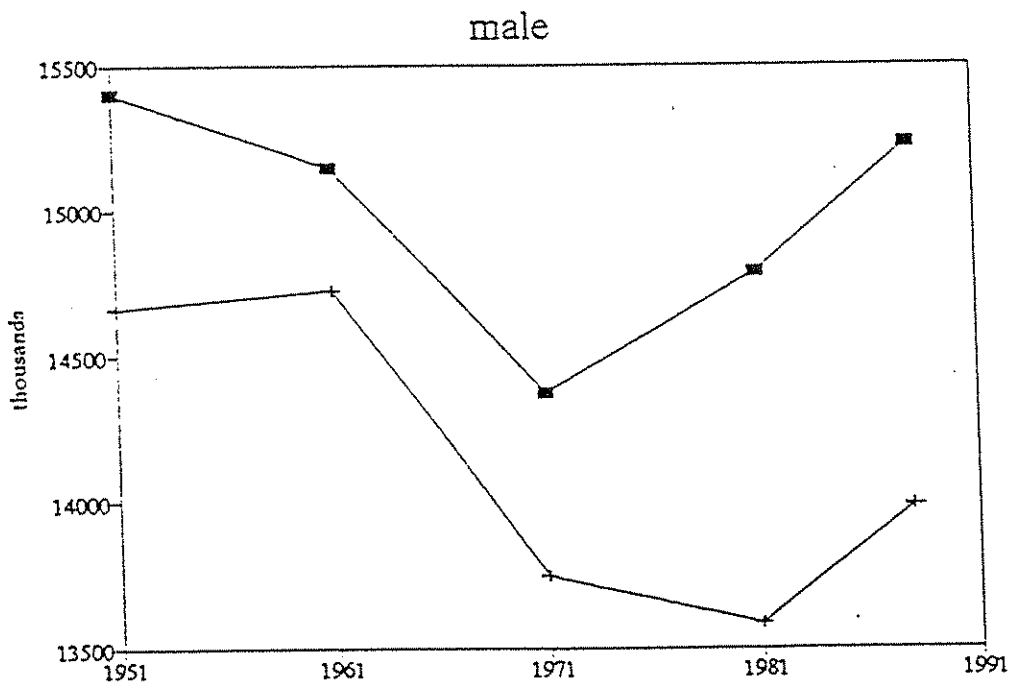
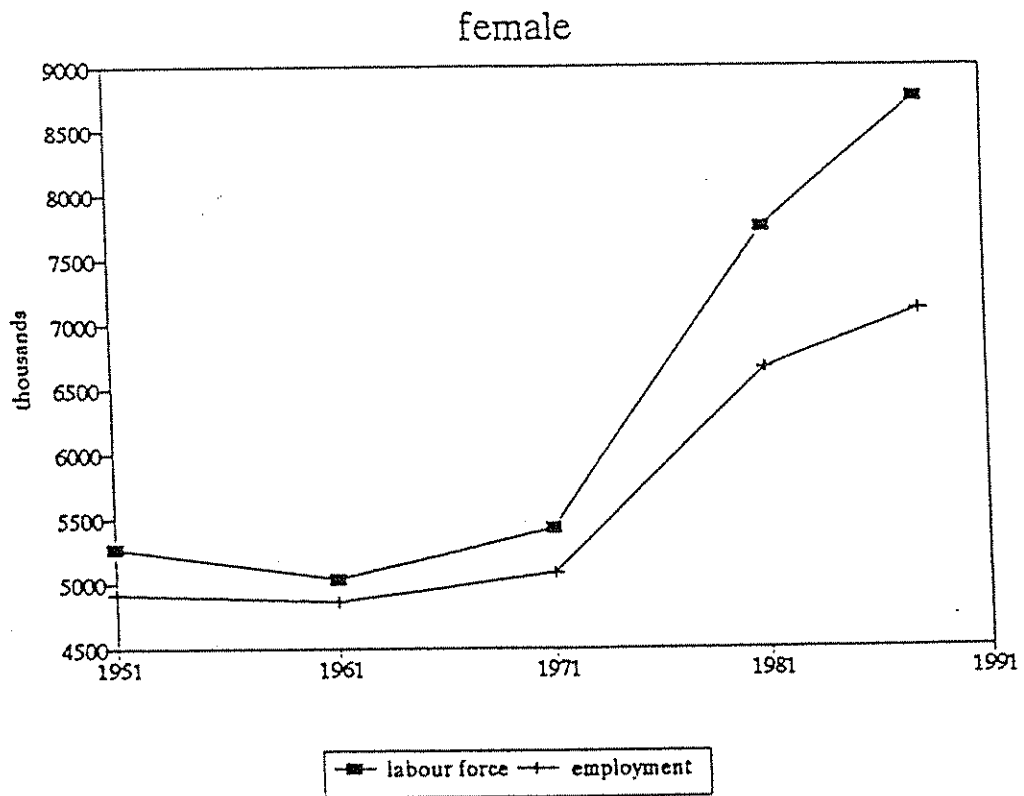


Fig. 1. Evolution of labour force and employed population according to gender

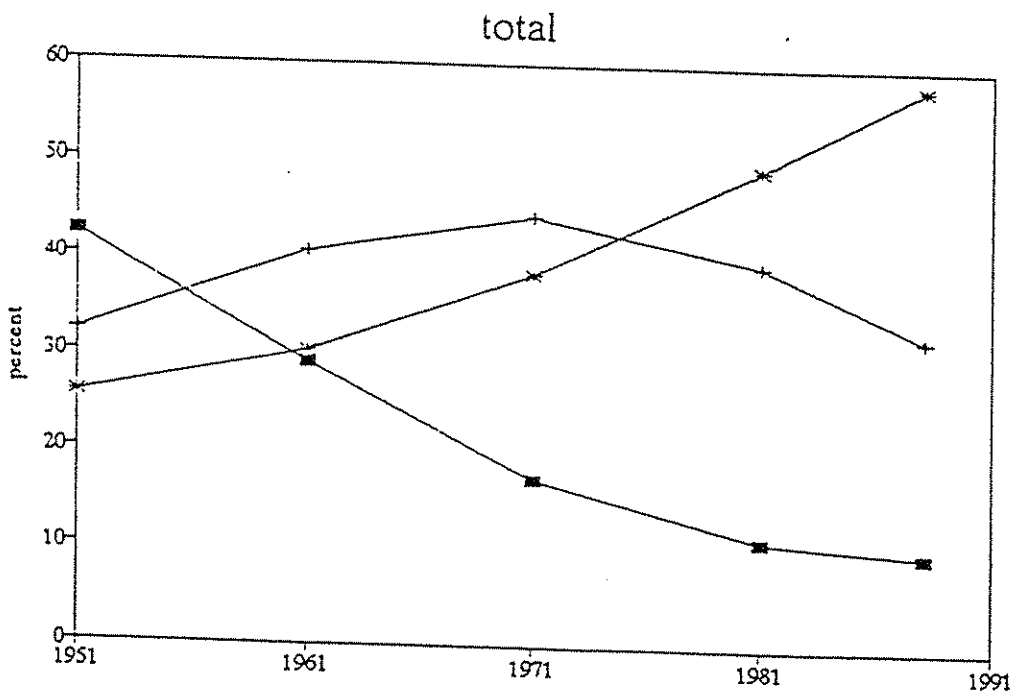
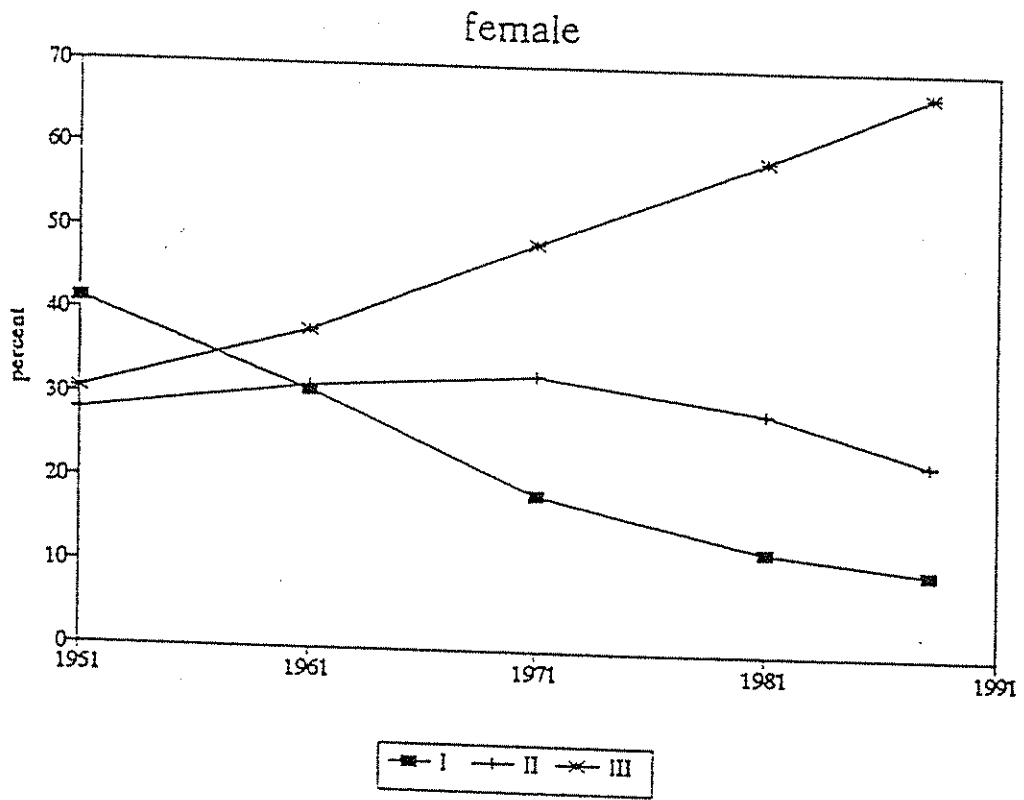


Fig. 2. Evolution of employed population in the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors

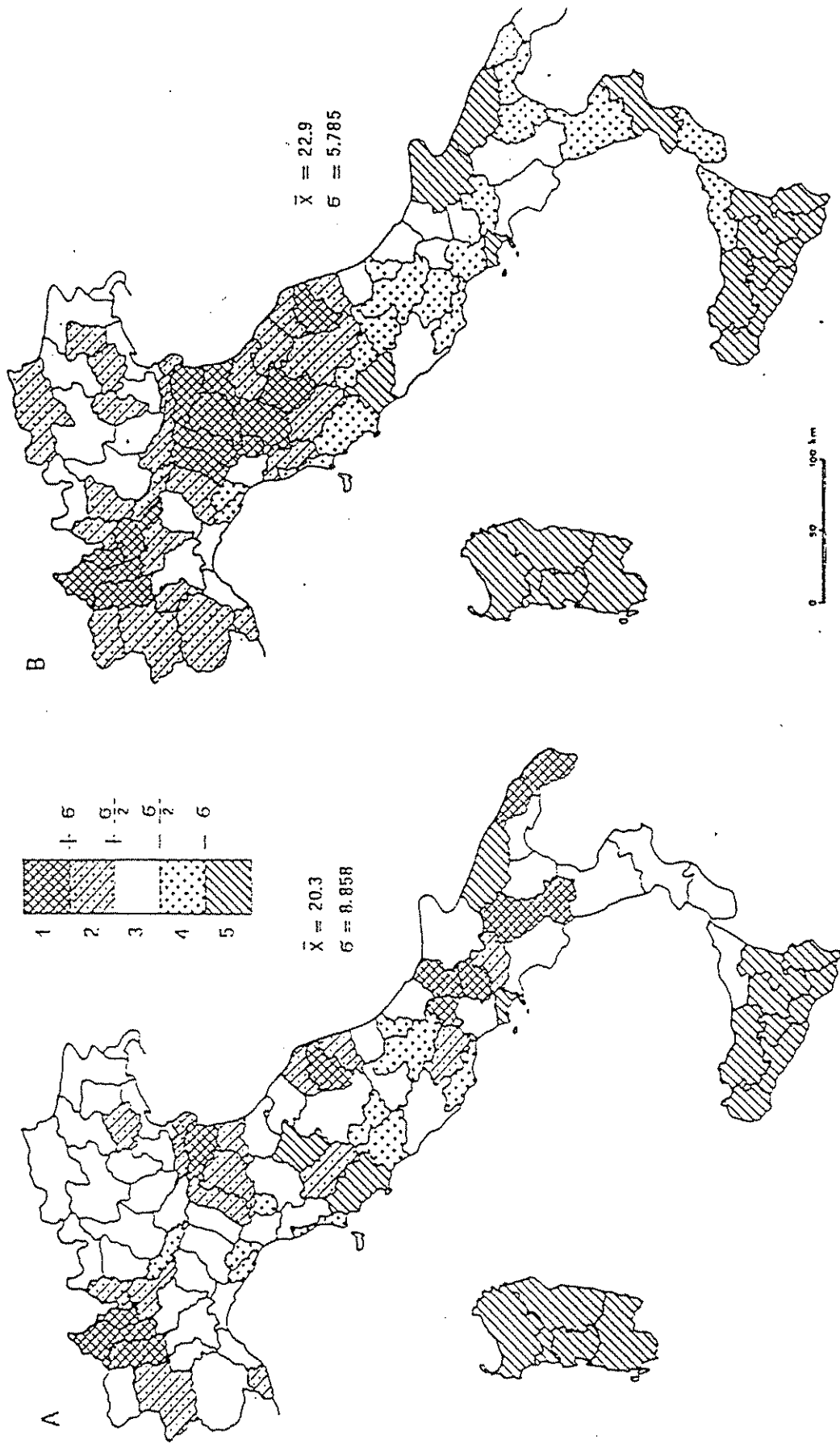


Fig. 3. Distribution of rate of female employment in 1951 (a) and 1981 (b) according to standard deviation (1. high; 2. high-to-average; 3. average; 4. average-to-low; 5. low)

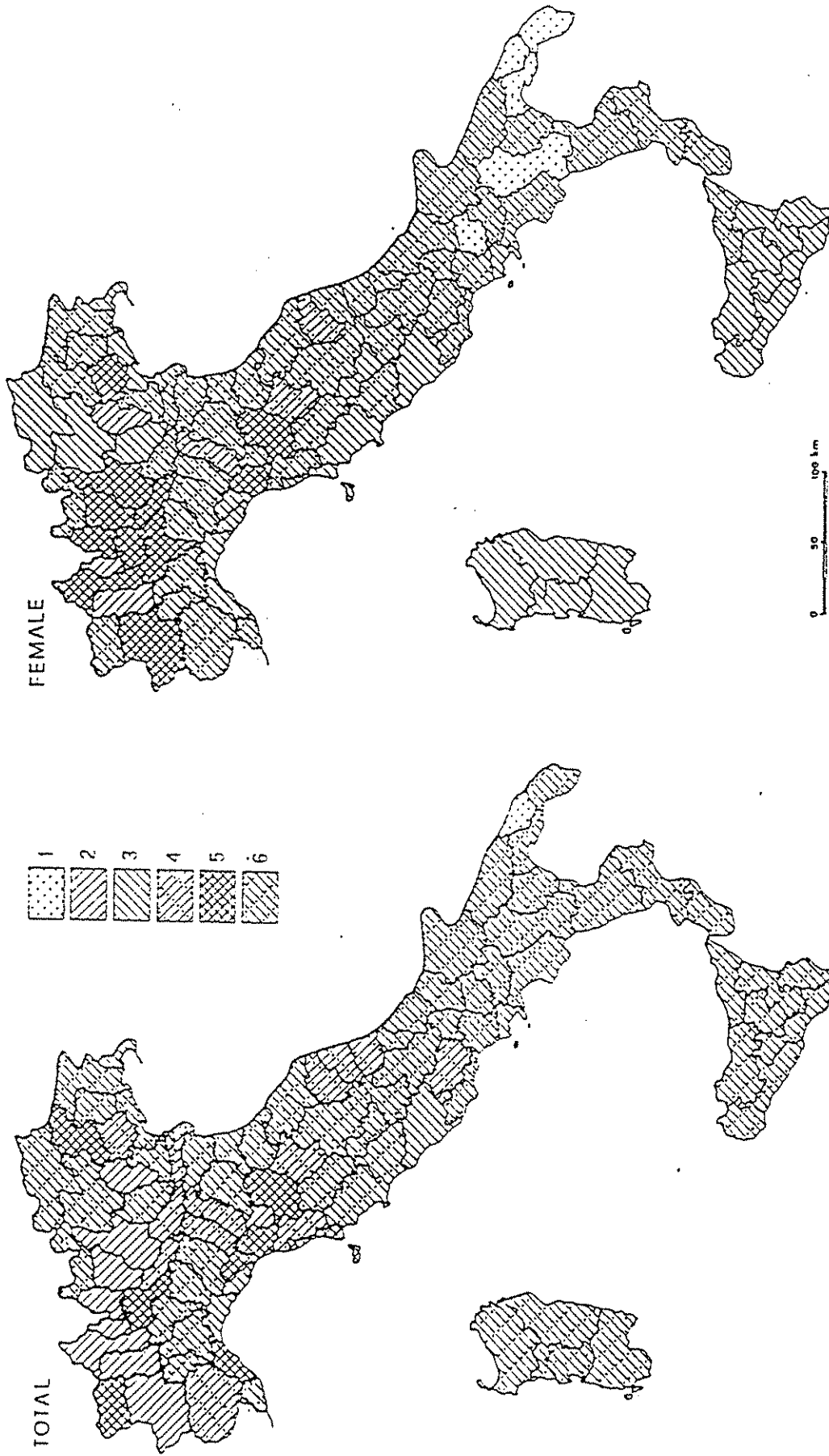


Fig. 4. Provinces of Italy according to evolution of employment structure (1951 to 1981)

- with substantive immobility (1. primary; 2. secondary; 3. tertiary)
- with marked change (4. from primary to secondary; 5. from secondary to tertiary; 6. from primary to tertiary)

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