

LAND TENURE IN CYPRUS - A POWERFUL TYPOLOGICAL CRITERION

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Cyprus, the biggest island in the Eastern Mediterranean, covers an area of 3,572 sq. miles /9,251 sq. Km/. The variety of landscape over this surface is tremendously large and probably unique in the Whole world over similar size of land. Superimposed upon this landscape which is mainly the product of physical factors, lies a tremendous variety of land tenure^x types, chiefly the product of the island, a long and tempestuous history as well as the result of existing legislations. In this paper an attempt will be made to describe and analyse briefly the existing land tenure structure and to explain how it affects physical and particularly non-physical typological criteria, such as, the size of farms, the share of particular forms of labour supply /family, hired, tenancy/, land use, the methods of farming, /mechanization, irrigation, dry farming, etc./ the intensity of farming, agricultural productivity, /production per unit area/ labour efficiency /production per person employed in agriculture/ a.s.o.

x Land tenure is used in its wider sense to include all kinds of arrangements by which farmers or others hold or control land and the mode they condition its use and occupancy.

The agricultural land of Cyprus /3,232,996 donums/^{xx} about 47 % of the total area of the island, falls under the following land tenure types. /see table 1/.

A. PRIVATE LAND

This category consists of 92.36 % of the total agricultural land. It is made up of as many as 70,200^{xxx} holdings.^{xxxx} Investigations point out that this number of holdings is steadily increasing. The trend is for the small holdings to be increasing and the large holdings to be decreasing in number.

The average size of holding, which is constantly decreasing, is 47 donums. While in 1946 the average size of holding amounted to 54 donums, in 1960 it decreased to 47. This decrease is expected to continue because of industrialization, tourism and urbanization.

Fragmentation of holdings is the most serious drawback in the agricultural development. There correspond about ten plots per operator fragmented and scattered over the entire area of the village or even beyond the administrative boundaries of the settlement. Land fragmentation, however, varies according to geographical region. For instance, in the plain of Chrysochou the average fragmentation is ten plots, in the basin of Morphou 15, in the apple-growing valley of Solia 19 and in the remote, depressed region of Pitsillia over 20.

^{xx} donum = 0.33 acre, 0.133 = hectare.

^{xxx} Census 1960.

^{xxxx}

Holding is the unit of operation and includes the family land owned, rented or otherwise operated.

The dispersion of plots forces the Cypriot farmer to traverse long distances. Research carried out in the regions of Karpasisa, Kokkinochoria, Morphou basin and Pitsilia has revealed that the annual distance travelled by the average farmer well exceeds 1,450 miles. The waste of time expressed in months in the villages of Astromeritis, Ayia Trias, Sotira and Palechori is 2.8, 3.5, 3.9 and 6.5 months respectively.

The average size of plot is 4.7 donums. On a regional scale there are, however, differences. In Morothasa the average size is 2.1 donums, in the vine-growing villages 3.2, in Karpasia 6.5 and in the Central plain 3.6 donums.

The shape of the plots is irregular and awkward. This is due mainly to the law of inheritance which permits equal share of similar land to all co-owners. No doubt this irregular shape impedes the proper cultivation of land.

From the land tenure point of view private lands can be subdivided into the following sub-categories:-

/a/ Holdings operated by their owners.

As many as 38,486 /census 1960/ holdings belong to this category. These, in their majority, are family holdings mainly undersized with negligible employment of hired labour. As many as 32,375 holdings out of the above referred to figure are below 100 donums in area. Crops vary according to geographical region and water

supply. Intensity of farming in the dry lands is low but in irrigated areas it can be very high.

Production per unit area and per person employed is normally low with exceptions in some irrigated areas where highly remunerative crops are cultivated. However, mechanization is not fully employed, although its use is increasing; a high cost of production is noticeable due to the small and fragmented holdings.

Possible sub-divisions within this category are:
/a/ irrigated and non-irrigated holdings, /b/ small-size, medium-size and large-size holdings.

/b/ Holdings operated by non-farmers.

Land in Cyprus is continuously bought by non-farmers. Various reasons such as inborn love towards land, fear of inflation, social prestige, aid in obtaining bank credit, speculative motives, etc., lead people, alien to the profession of farmer, to buy or maintain already inherited land. This category of land is exploited through hired labour or agencies. Some part-time farming is also prevalent in certain regions of the Island. As many as 30,883 holdings /census 1960/ belong to people with non-agricultural main occupation. Investigations indicate that part of this land is highly developed particularly if it is irrigated. Some of the best examples of large-scale farming are found in this group. Investment is higher than in the undersized family farms because many of the owners of the farms in this group are business men, lawyers, doctors and wellpaid civil servants. From the economic standpoint this group can be justified but certainly not

from the social. There is also tremendous speculation of land going on at the moment. Land is bought and sold for sheer profit. Its agricultural significance is lost. Research carried out by the author in the plain of Paphos revealed that as many as 11,000 donums have been bought by 152 urban dwellers in the last ten years. An investigation into the purchases of agricultural land in the same region showed that land bought by non-farmers amounted to 85.5 %. This phenomenon is widespread and is obviously a most serious obstacle to rapid agricultural development. This subcategory can be split up /a/ into holdings operated with the help of hired labour on a commercial basis and /b/ holdings bought for speculative purposes and operated temporarily through tenants.

/c/ Farms belonging to absentee landlords.

The absentee landlords either live abroad or outside the administrative boundaries of village settlements, usually in towns. A considerable number of Cypriots emigrated abroad or immigrated to the towns of Cyprus but they still retain legally their property which is either looked after by some relatives, or is leased, or temporarily abandoned. Although the percentage of absentee landlords varies from region to region it still can be said that as many as 40 % of the entitled owners of a village are absentee landlords. Although this depopulation trend helps land consolidation implementation and the establishment of economically viable units, nevertheless at the moment it constitutes a serious obstacle in the development of agriculture. Elimination of absenteeism will promote continuity of cultivation and will lead to improvement of yield of the land as well as to conservation of its resources.

This land tenure type could be sub-divided /a/ into holdings operated by relatives or friends of the absentee landlord or even tenants and /b/ holdings abandoned for the time being until the return of the owner.

Research in the Paphos plain brought out that from 1850 owners of agricultural land as many as 691 were absentee landlords.

/d/ Holdings tenanted.

This category can be subdivided into /a/ holdings leased and /b/ holdings sharecropped.

As far as leasing is concerned the period of tenancy is very short. Research carried out in the plain of Paphos revealed that 94,7 % of the leased land was for less than two years. The tenants favour at least ten-year contract. The short period of tenancy does not permit the tenant to improve the land through soil conservation or other development works, to invest on it, or to grow perennial crops. Besides the tenant feels utterly insecure.

Sharecropping is rather an anachronistic system of operating the land. Owner and tenant come into certain agreements as to the means of production each will contribute.

Sample studies indicate that as much as 85 % of the sharecropped land is for a period of 1-2 years.

Fortunately this system is not much preferred and is on the decline. Since 1946 there has been 43,7 % decline in the sharecropped land. It is worthwhile mentioning that if a tenant exerts much effort and works hard to in-

crease production by 50 % his share at the end will be only 25 %. For this reason productivity and investment are discouraged.

The grant of land on lease or sharecropping raises the question of relations between the landowner and the tenant. The greater the harmony of these relations, the more efficient will be the process of cultivation and the greater the quantity and the better the quality of the yield therefrom. The Republic of Cyprus is considering very seriously the introduction of a Land Lease Art. A tenancy legislation can provide for continuous farming operations, sustained production and protection against underserved eviction. The tenant will be encouraged to make all the improvements he possibly can and develop the agricultural resources. Insecurity on the other hand and in particular lack of adequate compensations for improvements and disturbance of occupancy, will not only discourage initiative but may permanently damage the land by intiting soil exhausting practices.

This category occupies 7.75 % of the cultivable land. To this figure, however, should be added the lands of Church, Monasteries, and Evqaf /the Moslem Religious properties/ as well as the State lands which are leased to tenants.

B. CHURCH, MONASTERY AND MOSLEM RELIGIOUS PROPERTIES.

In this category are included the properties that belong to the Archbishopric, the three Sees, the monasteries, the village Christian Churches as well as the Moslem

Religious properties. These properties originated mostly from generous royal donations in Byzantine days or donations of pious Christians or Moslems. Many properties were also granted to the Monasteries during the Turkish Times to avoid confiscation or usurpation. Whereas formerly donations were very large, today they are rare and of little value.

Church and Monastery land amounts to 186,090 donums whereas the Moslem Religious Properties reach the figure of 23,522. Almost the whole of the land of this category is leased. Optimum utilization of Church and Evqaf lands raises a delicate problem for Cyprus because of constitutional provisions prohibiting their compulsory acquisition.

Fortunately the tendency is for the Church land to be sold. It is no surprise, therefore, that the area of this category is steadily diminishing. Investigations at a few small settlements of the Western seaboard revealed that whereas in 1950 the Church owned about 26,000 donums, in 1969 it only owned 8,000 donums.

As a result of this tendency the sale of Church lands tends to accelerate development.

C. STATE LAND.

The State land can be divided into cultivable and uncultivable land. Table 1 shows details concerning the areas under State land. In the first sub-division are the Paphos Chiftlicks /11,842 donums/ and lands reclaimed from minor

forests /24,660 donums/. The Paphos chiftlicks were requisitioned by the Government in 1948. The decision to acquire these lands was made because of the inherent fault of absenteeism and the consequent subleasing to individuals who mainly exploited the land and water for personal profit without any incentive to maintain and develop the properties in accordance with sound conceptions of good husbandry. The Government undertook various measures such as construction of irrigation works, implementation of land improvement works, establishment of permanent plantations and establishment of intensive livestock enterprises.

The land is leased to the tenants' farming co-operative societies who sublet to their members with the approval of the Government. Although there is no co-operative basis in production, these societies play an important role as they enable the farmers to obtain long and short term credit more easily. They offer many other facilities as well.

The leases are long enough /in one chiftlick up to 30 years/ to give the farmer the sense of stability and allow him to carry out improvements on the land he works.

In the reclaimed forest lands leasing is not as longterm as in the four chiftlicks.

The non-cultivable land of this group is mostly made up of land obtained from cleared forests or land named "hali" which remained unregistered during the national registration of 1909-1929 and therefore at the end stayed

as Government land. Hali lands, as they stand now, are of only limited interest for they consist of mediocre quality lands under scrub and sometimes are completely uncultivable i.e. rocky lands, beaches, etc. Squatting, however, on hali lands and cleared forests is a permanent phenomenon but the area varies from year to year. It is, besides, difficult to record all the cases of squatting and even more difficult to determine the areas.

D. COMMUNAL LAND.

This category known as "Merras", the relics of the Turkish occupation in Cyprus, consists of compact grazing lands usually at small distances from the village settlement. This peculiar type of land, very small in area, /44.000 donums/ is owned communally and its exploitation is left only to shepherds.

According to the Law the Communal land belongs to the inhabitants of the village and no person can acquire at any time any private or exclusive right to the communal property. Land use can change in this category only if two-thirds of the male inhabitants who have attained the age of twenty-one years decide that its existing use no longer satisfies them.

E. CO-OPERATIVE FARMS.

There is only one co-operative farm in Cyprus. It is made up of about 820 donums of land. It has been formed by a group of progressive farmers after the second world war. Similar co-operatives were set up in other parts of Cyprus but one after the other were dissolved.

F. MIXED TENURES.

The law of inheritance has created a great number of co-ownerships which to-day constitute a great obstacle in the programming and development of agriculture. A donum of land or a tree may belong to various owners who are registered with the Registration Dept. There is a case in Cyprus that property has been sub-divided in such a manner over considerable time that to-day the share of its owners has as denominator a figure above 40,000,000. There are many cases that a plot of land belongs to one owner, the trees on it to another and the water rights to a third. It is possible that a tree may belong to an individual, whereas the land may be forest or belong to the State. It is calculated that 20-25 % of the cultivable land is owned in undivided shares.

Farmers consider these lands under undivided shares as second class lands and consequently neglect their-exploitation. Since it does not belong wholly to the farmer apart from 1/15 or 1/50, or 75/3,000,000 of it, no doubt he will not try hard to exploit it. So a considerable part of the land is neglected and left to the agents of denudation.

Even if undivided land is cultivated, it is usually not exploited with the most suitable crop because of disagreements among the co-owners. Three or four co-owners might prefer three or four different crops.

Undivided land is not usually improved through soil conservation or irrigation works because not all co-owners might agree, not to mention that even some might be absentees. No investments are made over this land, the fertility diminishes and production and productivity are affected.

Conclusion

Through this paper it has been endeavored to present the land tenure types prevalent over modern Cyprus. Many of these types are the relics of the past. They do, however influence considerably the present day agriculture of Cyprus despite the fact that efforts are being exerted through legislations to establish a new land tenure structure though which agriculture will be rationalized.

The various land tenure types, some of which are very anachronistic, affect considerably physical and non-physical typological criteria. Two holdings of the same size adjacent to each other with the same physical background can give completely different results simply because they belong to two different owners. One might be an absentee landlord or a person alien to the profession of farmer for whom there is little economic pressure to use his land intensively, not to mention that it can be totally neglected; the other might be an owner-operator whose living depends entirely upon the proper exploitation of his holding. Even a comparison between private leased lands and State or Church leased lands brings forward different results.

The mapping of land tenure types in Cyprus particularly on a large-scale map will show a mosaic. Even such a mapping will be highly difficult, if not impossible, because of the excessive fragmentation and the mixed tenures prevailing in Cyprus. The paper aims, however, at pointing out how powerful is the factor of land tenure in Cyprus and how much the existing land tenure structure impedes full, efficient use of the land, labour force as well as other resources at the command of agriculture. In Cyprus who owns the land counts much. This is not a final classification of agricultural types. It is only an attempt to show that on the basis of land tenure there is, at least in Cyprus, ground for such a classification.

Table 1. LAND TENURE IN CYPRUS

LAND TENURE CATEGORIES	A. R. E. A /In donums/					
	Agricultural land			Uncultivated		Total
	Area per category	% of category	% of total agricultural land	Area	% of uncultivated land	
A. PRIVATE LAND						
/A/ holdings operated by their owners	1.496,089	46.28		---		1,496,089
/b/ holdings operated by non-farmers	1.200,522	37.13		---		1,200,522
/c/ holdings belonging to absentee landlords /included in Ab, Ad, Ae/	---	---		---		---
/d/ holdings tenanted /leased or share-cropped/	250,508	7.75		---		250,508
/e/ Neglected private holdings	---	---		1,141,651	58.56	1,141,651
/f/ Land belonging to corporations, companies Government farms and other institutions. /liable to change use at any moment-some vacant agricultural land/.	38,943	1.20	92.36			38,943
B. CHURCH, MONASTERY MOSLEM RELIGIOUS PROPERTIES						
Church and Evqaf	209,612	6.48	6.48			209,612
C. STATE LAND						
Cultivated land	36,502	1.13	1.13			
Uncultivated land				764,000	39.19	800,502
D. COMMUNAL LAND						
Merras				44,000	2.25	44,000
E. Co-OPERATIVE FARMS	820	0.03				820
F. MIXED TENURES						
Undivided shares /included in Aa, Ab, Ac, Multiple ownership /Ad, Ae and B/						
	3,232,966	100 %	100 %	1,949,651	100 %	5,182,647

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