Abstract – The essay focuses on Sergio Rubini’s film La terra (2006), investigating the ways in which
the story of the four Di Santo brothers, plotted around the sale of an old family farm left to them by
their father, reworks and represents the southern landscape of Puglia. In particular, it explores the
film’s reinterpretation of what Sandro Bernardi has termed the “iconographic theme” detectable in
the Italian cinema beyond the plurality of its manifold poetics and genres. The magnificent scenery
of Salento is turned into an autonomous element, almost a character whose pervading presence
starkly contrasts with the human landscape of violence and repression emblematized in the figure
of Tonino (played by Sergio Rubini himself), the local loan-shark. The reification of the traditional
opposition between rural and urban spaces, staged along with the Italian divide between north and
south, is evoked in absentia, embodied in the complex character of Luigi (Fabrizio Bentivoglio), now
a professor of Philosophy at Milan university. Forcing him to face an entire world he thought he
had left behind forever, Luigi’s trip southwards and return home entail the concurrent resurfacing
of past impulses and events that deeply affect his relationships with his family, his life companion
and his land.

Keywords: Sergio Rubini – cinematic landscape – representations of southern Italy – in family ties