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LITERARY CARTOGRAPHIES: THE PLACE NAMES IN MARIO RIGONI STERN'S FICTION

1. The map as a starting point

This paper presents the first results of a hefty work of literary research and recognition of the place names in Mario Rigoni Stern's fiction¹. In doing so, we intend to connect to the scientific debate Claudio Cerreti and Fabio Lando started in the "Bollettino" about the role of cartography as a tool for literary analysis, which Franco Moretti also promoted in the *Atlante del romanzo europeo* (Moretti, 1997; Cerreti, 1998; Lando, 1998). Answering to the question: «Servono davvero a qualcosa, le carte letterarie?», Moretti dedicated a chapter in his 2005 book, *La letteratura vista da lontano*, to the issue (Moretti, 2005, pp. 49-82).

Very briefly, Moretti demonstrates the utility of such maps on two levels, at least: first as «un buon modo di predisporre un testo per l'analisi», through a Cartesian method of reduction-abstraction-reconstruction to provide the first synoptic evidence of the narrative's spatial basis; second, as the result of a «christallerian» proceeding from the map to the model, a «rappresentazione diagrammatica» of hidden patterns, gravitational fields, diagrams of forces. Cerreti recognized the risk of turning geographic reflection into pure geometry, and the map into a «spazio dell'estensione», without «intensità» (Cerreti, 1998, p.45), which would deprive it of the complexity of meanings through which a space becomes a place.

With that, the debate ended. However, the rapid diffusion of literary GIS², with its empirical applications and theoretical reflections, offered new opportunities to resume Moretti's inquiry (cfr. Cooper and Gregory, 2010, p. 92). Before the advent of GIS, the map was understood as a fixed product, a "graphic blueprint", or "diagrammatic representation". But the fluid environmental medium of literary GIS could ensure «open-ended topographies» (Cooper and Gregory, 2010, p. 97), which made possible contingent, relational, and performing maps. Such a constitutively unstable map could never close: the map becomes a «metafora» (Dematteis, 1985), that selects and connects the relevant facts, the objectivity of the phenomena, and the subjectivity of their meanings in a synthetic sketch: «Se questa rappresentazione che ha essenzialmente una funzione connettiva e metaforica viene presa alla lettera (se si guarda il dito invece della luna indicata dal dito), si riduce il mondo ricco e aperto della vita a un insieme limitato e fisso di cose e di relazioni necessarie tra cose» (Dematteis, 2001).

So a map is therefore no longer an ending point but a starting point, a field where literature faces geography, «a breathable space of confrontation between map scholars and literary scholars» (Rossetto, 2013). The map becomes a space of experimentation that is simultaneously highly specific and fickle: in each case, the sensibility and analytical tools of the two disciplines are not fixed, but instead meet halfway. This cognitive and disciplinary knot arises from the interweaving of narratology and geographical studies. It reveals its strength in the difficulty of its dissolution once GIS unites literature and geography. Inspired by the fertile mobility of continuous research in the context of these blends of geographical and literary logics, cartography becomes an ideal playground.

The following analysis begins from the map to discover new possible interpretations of the relationships that the storyteller and his characters establish with space, from the recognition of distributive patterns to increasingly refined reflections (in this circumstance only partially exposed) emerging from the correlation of geographic matter and literary fiction. The reference to specific places becomes the outcome of a perspective on that space which combines objective (the geo-

historical coordinates) and subjective items (the choice of the places, the filter of subjectivity and memory into the relationship that the storyteller establishes with space). In this way, the map acts simultaneously as an ending and a starting point. As an endpoint, it is a work of “selection” of geo-referable data extrapolated from analysis of how the place names function in the text. As a starting point, it is a stimulus for further conjunctions, intersections of attributes, or less obvious relations. Digital cartography offers considerable potential to think about the depth and complexity of geo-literary space.

2. The constitutive “geographicité” of Mario Rigoni Stern’s fiction

Both literary criticism (Affinati, 2002) and geographical studies (Vallerani, 2008) have emphasized the close relation between Rigoni Stern’s work and geographical space. Literary criticism considers the different aspects of the close relationship between his narrative and its spaces, places, and landscape. Rigoni Stern’s distinctive nature arises in his «esperienza della realtà» (Affinati, 2012). Others emphasize the constitutive familiarity of his relationship with space (Gherib, 2010), while some discuss the extraordinarily «concreta, precisa, analitica» nature of his references to places and events (Isnenghi, 2012). Some define his books a representation of the relation between space and time, referring to the Bakhtin’s «chronotopes» (Ambroise, 1995). Rigoni Stern himself underlines the deep *geographicité* of his feeling, calling himself the bard of a «saga paesana» (Rigoni Stern, 1997, p. VI) whose history, always linked to a situation, a period, and a place, must be read «nel paesaggio delle cose» (Milani, 2008, p. 7). In Rigoni Stern’s fiction, history and geography intertwine from the beginning, while places bear the meanings of history and the persistence of its effects (Alfano, 2008). Our own geo-literary research joins an already large corpus of critical reflections on Rigoni Stern’s work to verify and – if possible – enrich its perspectives, starting from a limited but important part of his narrative production, which the storyteller himself wanted to collect in the «Romanzi» section of the volume «I Meridiani». These writings include *Il sergente nella neve* (1953), *Quota Albania* (1971), *Storia di Tönle* (1978), *L’anno della vittoria* (1985), *Le stagioni di Giacomo* (1995), and *L’ultima partita a carte* (2002)³. Rigoni Stern’s narratives naturally invite us to undertake the following kind of analysis (it is quite surprising that nobody has tried it yet). First, because of the very large number of place names that occur in Rigoni Stern (Table 1), and the preciseness of their locations, he seems to treat the very space of the narration as a real «character» with a personality. For this reason, he frequently names locations with a proper noun. As well, in many passages of his books, space and narration coincide: the telling of events in a certain scene becomes the telling of the scene itself and of the people who live in and reflect upon it.

Books	Different place names	Occurrences
Il sergente nella neve	24	73
Quota Albania	150	287
Storia di Tönle	194	378
L’anno della vittoria	197	362
Le stagioni di Giacomo	249	529
L’ultima partita a carte	274	610
Total amount	795	2239

Table 1. Number of place names and their occurrences in the analyzed works [elaboration: Sara Luchetta]. All place names mentioned with capital letter were considered, including territorial names ascribed to regional areas, nations or continents. The names of properties and owners, often of difficult location, are not included (e.g. “prati degli Scirân”), and also the names of battalions (Vestone, Bassano, Sette Comuni etc.), not referable to a spatial entity.

Other important feature of Rigoni Stern's corpus is its precise rootedness in reality. He does not invent places, nor distort real places. The place names are the substance of the geographical-historical consciousness of the author. In Rigoni Stern's definition of himself, as «narratore» and «recuperante della memoria» (Motta, 1985), he hands down an acquired knowledge that is the result of both his own experience (the books relating his life during the Second World War) and other people's experience condensed in the oral history and in the traditions of his own land, the "Altopiano"⁴. Personal and collective experience – «espace intime» and «espace commune» (Gherib, 2010) – are linked inextricably with the space coordinates which give concreteness to the task that the storyteller proposes to himself: to create a narrative cycle that gathers in a single saga the history of his land and of the people who live there, from the end of the nineteenth century to the end of the Second World War.

3. Place names among geography, history and memory

3.1 Place names and geographical space

A first level of toponymical analysis, a «degree zero» from which our general considerations must start, concerns the spatial distribution of the place names (Figure 1).

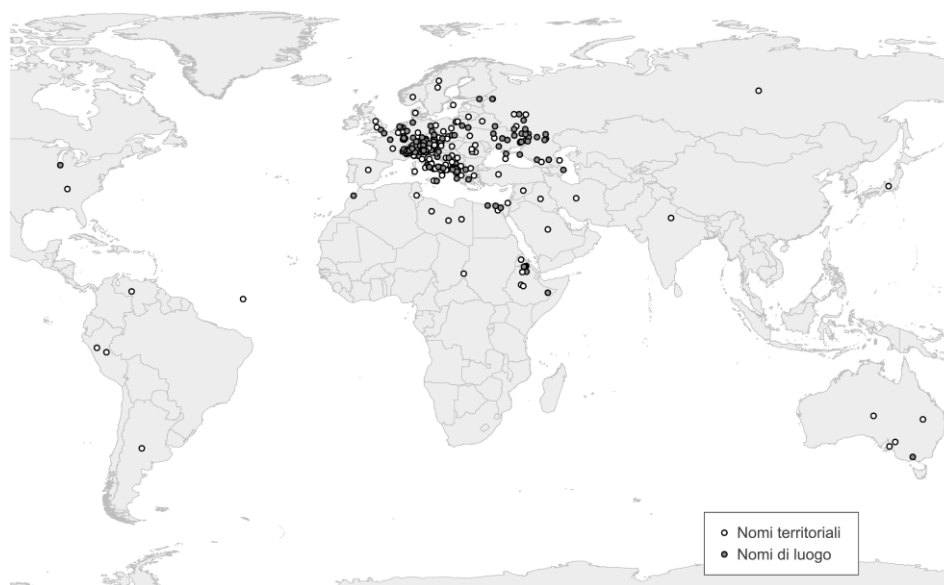


Figure 1. Map of the geographic distribution of place names in the Rigoni Stern works. In white the «territorial names» (referring to large geographic areas, national or regional), in grey the specific place names [Elaborated by Sara Luchetta and Francesco Ferrarese].

A first glance reveals a truly global breath. Beyond the main heart of Altopiano, place references are scattered all over five continents, through the connections with the war's events or the migration routes of the people of the Altopiano between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These world conflicts and migratory flows are the major forces that, in different circumstances and ways, open and break the microcosm of the protagonists. One could extend the reach of Rigoni Stern's fiction to a cosmic dimension, if we consider the repeated references to stars and names of constellations. The famous «quadrato di Cassiopea» appears four times in *Il sergente nella neve*, along with the Pleiades. A simpler function of astronomical orientation arises in the names of some mountains.

However, all this toponymical «dispersion» radiates from the Altopiano, where the local references are most dense, and is linked to other areas rich in references, like Valle d'Aosta or Albania. This geographical primacy manifests not only because three of the six novels focus on the Asiago Plateau

(and the quantity of place names is higher in the «ciclo dell'Altopiano» novels than in the others), but also to Rigoni Stern's continual returns to the Altopiano in his novels dedicated to war stories. There, the toponymical references to his homeland appear in small but meaningful number.

This datum enlightens the close relationship the storyteller builds with his omnipresent homeland, not only when he sets action in it, but also when it becomes a place of memory. Rigoni Stern's deepest descriptions of his land of origins appear in the narrative passages related to memory or desire, which confirms a relationship so deep as to become an identification. Reflected in his writing, Rigoni Stern carries his homeland through its most difficult moments, mourning and resonating it on the page, turning homesickness into a war experience: «Il sergente Stern trova la sua forza di resistenza ricordando la sua terra, portandosela nel cuore» (Polato, 2000, p. 390).

The Altopiano, the heart of his toponymical density, is nevertheless an open world, from which a series of «movements» radiate to all the other places in his narratives. Indeed, if we deal just with the place names of the single books, we always find two main territorial categories: the Altopiano and the places reached in *leaving/arriving at* the Altopiano. The writer's land is full of many small individual or collective *anabasis*, which suppose a voluntary or forced «fare la spola» (Isnenghi, 2012). Tönle, smuggler, salesman, horse breeder, and then farmer, is a character who shows the «centrifugal force» of the Altopiano, he lives the reality of his country, but he is also a migrant who makes his wandering a link between his homeland and the reality of Central Europe in the XIX century. The route of Matteo, protagonist of *L'anno della vittoria*, focuses on the recognition of the Altopiano's people during the return from exile at the end of the First World War. The places in focus are those where the characters gather after a long dispersal. Here, the Altopiano acts as a «centripetal force», where they begin laboriously to live again. In *Le stagioni di Giacomo*, Giacomo performs much of his route in the Altopiano itself, but he also regards the departures determined by migration flows towards other nations and continents. The Asiago Plateau is full of those «lived elsewhere»; its inhabitants cover, directly or not, the streets of the world (Isnenghi, 2012). The Altopiano simultaneously functions as an attractive and repulsive force, a natural movement of expansion and contraction, of «diastole e sistole» (as underlined in the jacket flap of the Einaudi's edition of *L'ultima partita a carte*). The distribution of place names reveals an open reality in which the protagonists identify themselves, but from which they must leave, even if they hope to return.



Figure 2. Detail of the distribution of place names in the Asiago Plateau, classified by number of occurrences in the Rigoni Stern's works [Elaborated by Sara Luchetta and Francesco Ferrarese]

Figure 2 clearly outlines a meridian axis of toponymic density in the compact literary dimension of the Altopiano, drawn in a north-south direction from the focal point of Asiago. This axis highlights the tightly woven character of the Asiago Plateau's insularity, «una sorta di pianeta autonomo e connesso, come un'immensa rete neuronale, alla storia del mondo» (Brunetta, 2012). In this, the Altopiano is an icon of the entire Alps, far from the stereotypes of the touristic age's embalming processes (Camanni, 2002). Rigoni Stern's Altopiano is a middle mountain (Varotto, 2013), lived space in its altimetric and climatic articulation, linked to the flows of the forestry and pastoral economies, in a vertical axis of references to woods, shepherds' huts, mule tracks, pastures which connect the upper and lower «Altopiano dentro» and «Altopiano fuori» (Meneghello, 1976). This internal circle of movements intertwines in large-scale relations with bordering valleys, the outer plains and cities. They are related at first to the traditional economic chains of mountain products, and eventually to the final exodus in the political and demographic crisis of the early twentieth century (Varotto, 2008).

3.2 Place names and their historical depth

In Rigoni Stern's literary works, the precision of the spatial data accompanies a rigorous historical context. There are two narrative cycles in his work: the three books focused on his personal war experience are written in the first person, and the three books focused on the history of the Altopiano are written in third person. Their stylistic differences permit a distinction of the functions of the geographic references. In the novels whose narrative and spatial heart is the Altopiano, the place name represents what is closer to the storyteller, his historical, cultural and memorial identity. In the war books, the place name takes a precise cognitive and recognitive role.

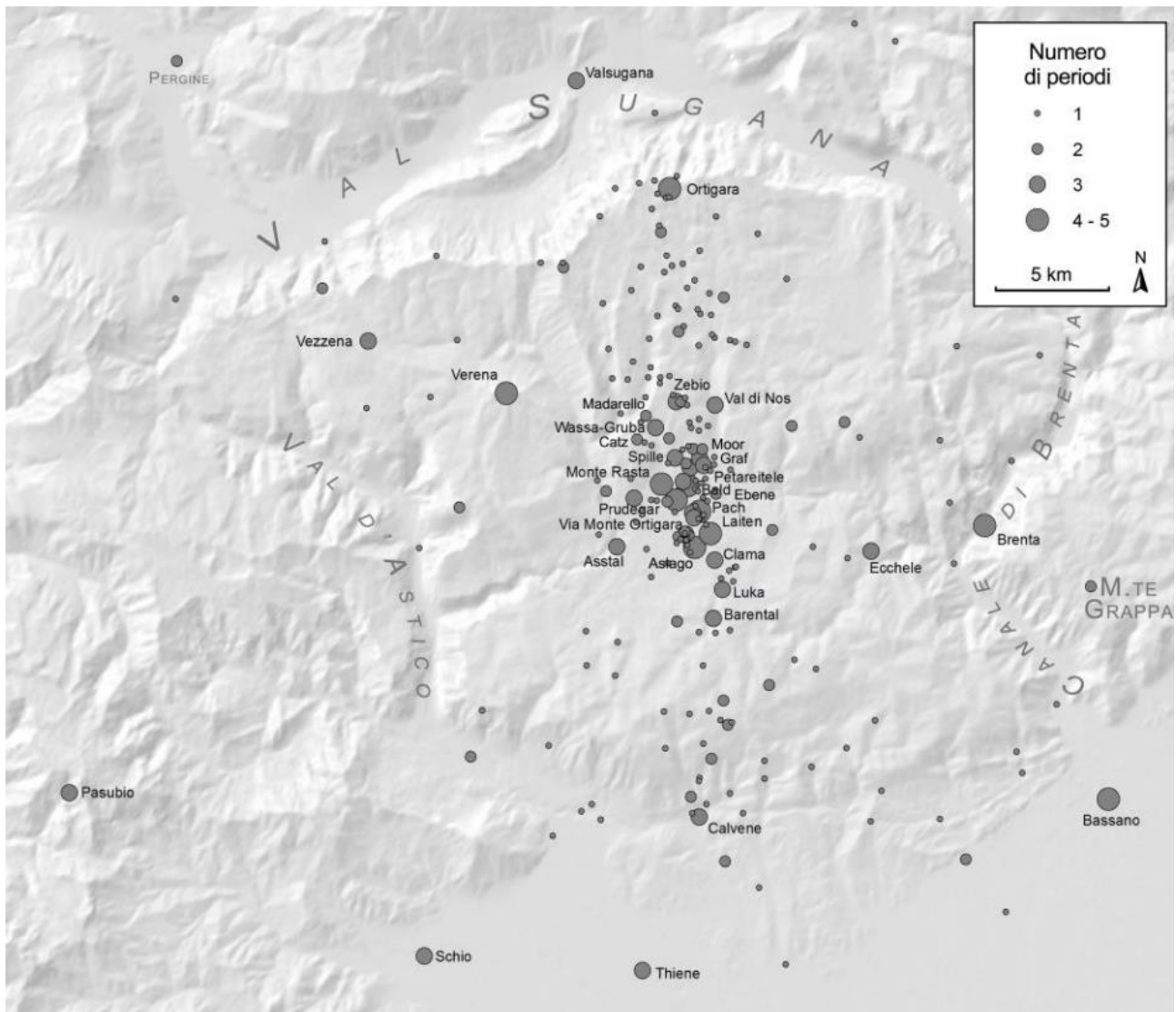


Figure 3. Map of the “historical depth” of place names in the Asiago Plateau: the history has been divided in five periods (before 1914, 1914-1918, 1919-1939, 1940-1945, after 1945). The dimension of the circles is related to the number of periods in which the place name appears [Elaborated by Sara Luchetta and Francesco Ferrarese].

Figure 3 highlights the historical depth of the places, the persistence of the places on the author's page in different history periods. The Asiago Plateau a nerve center in the north-south axis, emerging not only through the density of references but also for their temporal depth. The Plateau is composed of a constellation of micro-toponyms of localities and small places all around and especially on the north of Asiago (Prunnele, Grabo, Pach, Moor, Èbene, Bald, Prudeghar...). Such references are places in the author's life, but also scattered settlements referring to the characters of the Germanic colonization (Kezich, 2008, p. 471). The smaller places are often natural elements, towards which Kezich underlines an «attitudine positiva». Rigoni Stern never names the localities in which the protagonists of his books actually live, but he refers to morphological elements, waterways, springs, hills, and any variation of the ground that physically identifies the landscape.

The “mother-actions” of the narration are set in these places, where Rigoni Stern enacts «una scrittura del tempo», that becomes «la quarta dimensione dello spazio» (Bakhtin, 1979), giving it depth. Two particular places have a peculiarly strong, though different, temporal depth: the Moor and the hill of Laiten.

The Moor, a toponym which refers to the southern hillside of the mount Bi or Catz, watches over Asiago from the north, and a large number of hamlets lie all around it. For Rigoni Stern, the Moor becomes the hinge of a motionless temporality, which accompanies the history of the Altopiano as the characters rotate through it over the years. On the Moor lie the fields from which the characters earn their livelihood; it is the sacred place where they make fires to burn through winter and call upon spring. Tönle's wife dies on its slopes, a death depicted with serenity because on the Moor, it is still possible to take part in the cycle of nature. But the war will twist it, as nature is lost (Motta, 1985). Finally, the Moor revives in the words of an emigrant that Tönle meets during one of his trips: the hill becomes the metonymy of the entire distant homeland. In a different moment of the tale, the hillside is the protagonist of the setting of *Storia di Tönle* and *Le stagioni di Giacomo*.

The second pivotal place is the hill of Laiten, near the city of Asiago, where in the spring of 1932 the charnel house monument (Ossario) dedicated to the victims of the First World War began. The temporal value of this place does not lie in the «quantity» of its appearances in Rigoni Stern's books, but emerges from the contrast between the periods *before* and *after* the construction of the monument. Laiten is named for the first time when Rigoni Stern describes the beginning of the monument's construction in *Le stagioni di Giacomo*. An antithesis immediately appears between the time of the construction and a past which will be lost. The author returns various times, through thick analepsis, to that *before*, when the hill was a vital hearth of the hollow of Asiago, a meeting point for the children, where seasons followed one another in a dance of indefinite time. This contrast clearly condemns a procedure of memory that introduces a hiatus in the historical continuity of the Altopiano, providing the «collina dei giochi» of a false temporality, an imposed memory, a rhetorical moment separated from its lived spaces. The Charnel House becomes the venue and emblem of the break with Nature, just as did the tragic entry of the War in the slow natural rhythms of the Altopiano. The hill of Laiten is the prelude of the crucial and epochal transition from the «setting of memory» (the inhabited spaces, memorables par excellence: Ricoeur 2003) to the «lieux de memoire», the bulimia of remembrance and its abuses (Nora, 1984-1986; Todorov, 1996; Varotto, 2011).

It is appropriate, despite of the brevity of this first report, to refer to the exemplary values of three other spatio-temporal intersection points, emerging from Figure 3:

- Mount Ortigara, at the far northern end of the Altopiano, is clearly linked to wartime, but also to the micro-histories that arrive on it in succession, before and after. Ortigara's time is movable, in which the scars of the bombs follow the signs left by the recoverers («recuperanti»), the shepherds' movements, until the arrival of the storyteller who interprets and gives new life to the memory through the narrative told.
- The Brenta river, which flows in the valley of the same name, in the eastern side of the Asiago Plateau, is the constant and favorite path to return to the Altopiano. It is a geographical landmark which guides the narrative to its homeland, an element connecting the «isle» of the Altopiano and the wide «sea» at its feet. Downstream, one finds the level ground of the Veneto region, upstream the Valsugana and the «Big North».
- Mount Verena, on the western side of the Asiago Plateau, functions with Pasubio as a natural sundial for the people of the Altopiano, referring to a temporality completely different from the other places. It connects the time of nature and the time of humans. The storyteller refers to this mountain in four different periods, but always for the same function: to indicate time through space. Mount Verena locates the position of the sun and gives the tale the temporal coordinate for the hour of the day or the season.⁵

The selection of particular «isochronal» layers allows a further analysis, almost a tomography of Rigoni Stern's place names from a historical point of view (Figure 4).

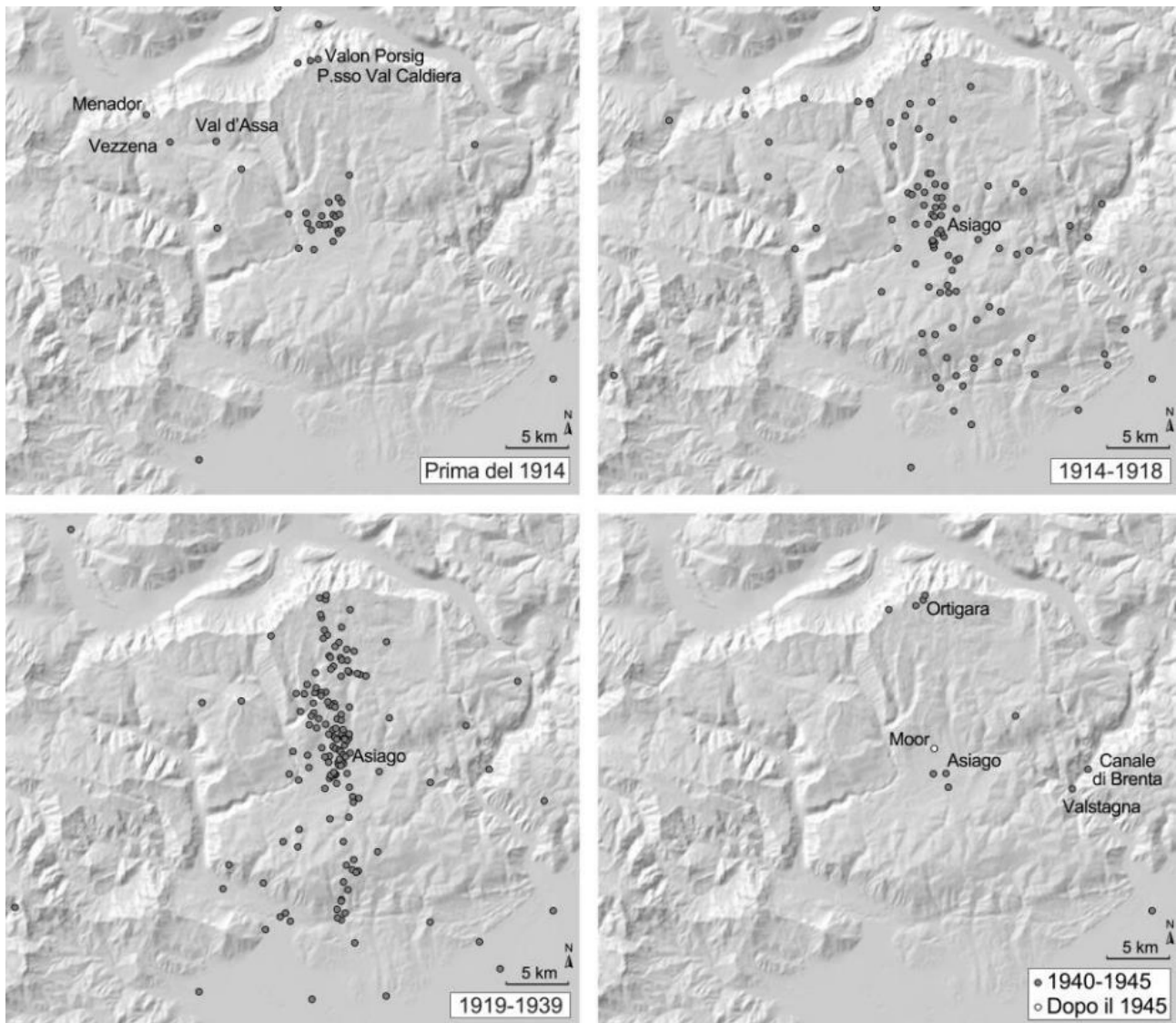


Figure 4. Place names in the Asiago Plateau distributed among different historical periods. The periodization is the same of Figure 3. In the lower right frame there are both the place names of the period 1940-1945 and after 1945 (in white) [Elaborated by Sara Luchetta and Francesco Ferrarese].

In this case, we can distinguish different temporal articulations of the toponyms, generated from the intersection of place names and narrative times. Figure 4 reveals interesting information about the quantitative distribution of place names in the different periods. A real «toponymic explosion» starts with the First World War and produces after-effects for the following twenty years. That explosion produces precious informations about the internal mobility of life on the Plateau, offering us an interpretation of the perception – individual, collective, anthropological – of lived space:

- The first period, before 1914, sees the attractive forces of the «North» emerging over the compact microcosm of Asiago as commercial exchange, smuggling routes, and migration itineraries towards Central European. Meanwhile, the south and the ground of the Veneto region appear nearly deserted. Rare toponyms show the «official» path the emigrants usually travelled: through the Vezzene pass, the Assa valley, the Menador. Those toponyms reveal a second, more dangerous path on the north of the Altopiano, used when facing risk of arrest. Also Tönle «arrischio per il passo di Val Caldiera e per la discesa del Valon Porsig dove, sia per il pericolo delle slavine che per la difficoltà del cammino, le guardie non le avrebbe certo incontrate» (p. 17).

- The second (1914-1918) and the third (1919-1939) periods suggest a contrastive analysis. The years of the First World War are characterized by toponymic expansion, the sign of a deeper historical and environmental explosion of territory. The first period's circular pattern expands over the wide territory of the Altopiano, underlining the collective experience of the war and the exile that involved the Asiago Plateau's entire population. After wartime, the territorial axis of Asiago takes shape: the tale grows around a fundamental guideline corresponding to the protagonists' north-south movement. The road south of Asiago is particularly important, as Matteo, protagonist of *L'anno della vittoria*, travels again at the end of the war along this road towards his village, trying desperately to regain his land through a thick toponymical references.
- In the last period of Rigoni Stern's corpus (1940-1945), the storyteller himself leaves his homeland to go to war, clarifying the difference between experience and memory. Quantitatively, the number of place names is much smaller, but the quality of references acquires a fundamental importance. The first nucleus concentrates around Asiago; a second concentrates on the most tragic frontline of the First World War, Mount Ortigara. During the Second World War, the storyteller returns here through memory while participating because of the similar difficulty and trauma his relatives experienced. Finally, the village Valstagna in the Brenta River Valley, the provenance of the captain Beppo, bridges the homeland with the Russian front. Analyzing such an empty map can be useful to understand the strength of memory supporting Rigoni Stern's writing and its indissoluble link with the little *heimat* of provenance, encapsulated with the image of the «ritorno a baita». This style stands out in the post-war period when Rigoni Stern wrote his novels. The Moor is the only place name in his corpus is the only landmark in postwar Altopiano, a silent presence that persists and participates in the passing of seasons and of history.

3.3 Place names and memory

The cycle of novels that adapts Rigoni Stern's Second World War military experience emphasizes the relation between direct experience and the memory of places, the preferred way to understand the storyteller's connection with space.

In his first book, *Il sergente nella neve*, the quantitative element of the place names speaks of the quality of the connection with space most clearly. Here the place names, if we exclude the references to states like Russia and Italy, are almost absent. We can find only three place names directly referenced the territory of the retreat: Don, Nikolaewka, and Gomel, a very few coordinates against a toponymical precision that is constant and powerful throughout the following books. Considering that he finished the draft in 1947, Rigoni Stern surely could have improved his geographical knowledge of the stopover during the retreat, but this didn't influence the narration, which remained faithful to the disoriented perception of a soldier. The narrative power of the book lies in the geographical «emptiness» in his treatment of space that clashes with the precision of the maps of their retreat that the novel includes. As the storyteller himself declares in the novel, «Noi non sapevamo nemmeno il nome del paese dove era il nostro caposaldo; ed è per questo che trovate soltanto nomi di alpini e di cose» (p. 582). *Il sergente nella neve* offers us a white map, empty of any orienting point, that itself denounces the protagonists' ability even to perceive. The book includes no geographical references in the vast steppe they had to go through to arrive home. The absence of place names makes the territory hostile to the completely disoriented soldiers.

If we analyze the narration of *Quota Albania*, the book telling of the military offensive before the Russian disaster, there are many more place names. Also, these place names enter the tale as an explicit act of orientation, a primordial attempt to appropriate a space (Turco, 1988). As the tale advances, an «ascending» motion of knowledge takes the author from the total ignorance to his first knowledge of the coordinates with which he can orient himself. The growth of the number of place names mirrors the changes of the author's relation with his surroundings that transforms a space into a place. *Quota*

Albania is especially interesting in its relation between experienced space and places of memory, to which the storyteller refers through his military adventures in that country (Figure 5).

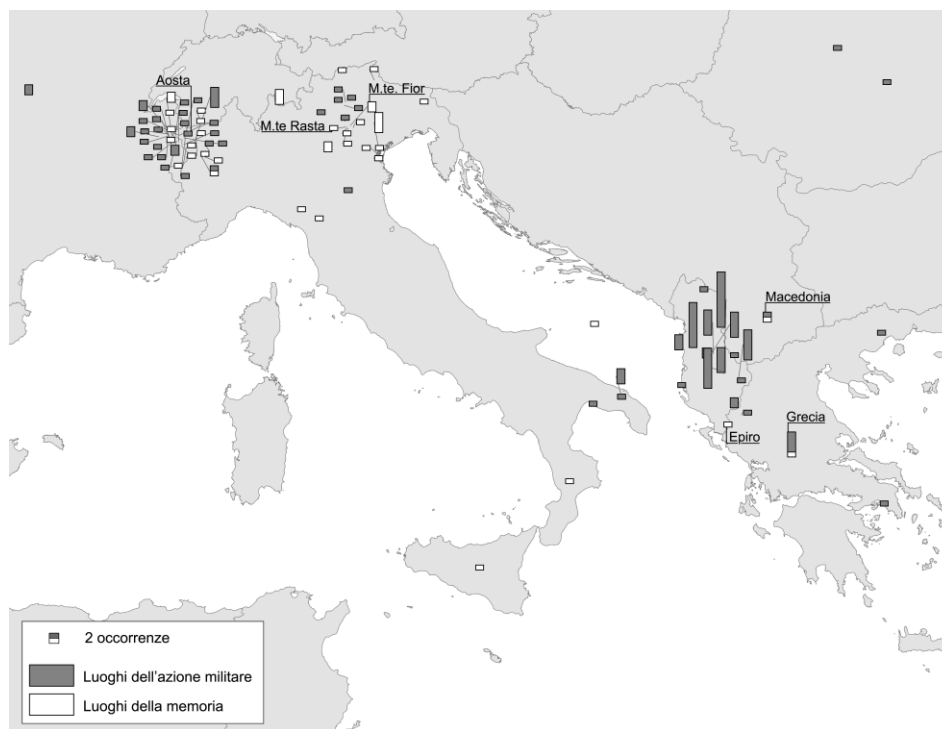


Figure 5. Distribution of the place names mentioned in *Quota Albania*, referred to the military action (in grey) or to the protagonist's memory (in white). The places which have one or the other function were considered, excluding those related to the provenance of the characters and to the national or political names [Elaborated by Sara Luchetta and Francesco Ferrarese].

In this novel, more place names refer to an «elsewhere» compared to the places where the action is actually set. The place names are located around three principal nuclei:

- In the first nucleus, in Albanian territory⁶, the number of places linked to the invasion is higher, dominated by a grey color. The exception is three places of memory – Macedonia, Epiro, and Greece – that recall history lessons that the storyteller attended.
- The second nucleus is situated in the area of Veneto and Trentino, where the author spends a «break» during the war, which also includes the territory of the Altopiano. Here, there is a marked two-color print that shows us the narrative importance of reference to *other* places, compared to the lands at war. This «topography of the elsewhere» does not derive from individual memory alone, but emerges from a community which shares the need to refer to another dimension, «absent» in space and «previous» in time (Ricoeur, 2003, p. 60). During the offensive, sitting around a nighttime fire, the soldiers carve temporal and spatial breaks for themselves out of the contingency of the war to return to the places of memory, collective lifeline in the war's short breaks. The references to the Altopiano are significant, spatial flashes with which the storyteller confers narratological: detailed, almost «sentimental», descriptions, very rare in Rigoni Stern (Rossetto, 2008). Mount Fior, for example, appears with its power to evoke the First World War as a parameter of comparison – and as an incentive – during one of the storyteller's first battles. Then there is the wonderful reference to Mount Rasta, collector of memories that becomes a living presence by means of a «sensorial» description, similar to the famous incipit of *Il sergente nella neve*, which unsettles the protagonist's consciousness: «Non mi fece dormire quella notte, questo ricordo» (p. 516)

- The third nucleus to emerge from the cartographical transposition is also the one in which places of contingency and places of memory create the most tormented dialogue, between places that shock and places of memory. A year before the Albanian campaign, the boundary between Val d'Aosta and France was the seat of serene military exercises in Alpine School of Aosta. But Italy's entry into the war against France transformed those same mountains into the scenery of the dramatic war. In this way, the tale joins wartime experiences with memories of peaceful places through their temporal and existential dimensions. The accumulation along the borderline of place names with such different ontologies visually underlines the idea, which permeates much of Rigoni Stern's work, of a frail, strained, and dangerous separation of geographically and anthropologically similar zones. The negative experience of place and the reference to an opposed dimension of memory becomes a condemnation of the absurdity of war.

The continuous dialogue between places of contingency and places of memory recall a peculiarity of Rigoni Stern's narrative: in every situation the experience of a place demands the call to an *elsewhere* which may intervene, mediate, or only confront itself, in opposition or similarity, with reality.

4. Conclusions

This first and very limited cartographical transposition of the corpus of place names in Rigoni Stern's works is still in progress. Our account of the complexity of relations with the spaces, landscapes and places in his books is far from complete. We can, however, confirm critical consensus of the centrality of the Altopiano (Brunetta, 2012), the close link of his fiction with existentially and collectively experienced space, (Gherib, 2010), the fundamental role of memory in the narratives' construction (Polato, 2000), how memory springs from places and becomes closed to them in narration, and the existential dialectic between the exodus and return to the homeland, between one's «natural space» and the sudden loss of that same space (Ambroise, 2012).

In addition, cartographical analysis highlights aspects of Rigoni Stern's work that until now have gone unidentified, which deserve and more in-depth analysis. Key among these is the internal articulation of the spaces of the Asiago Plateau, in which the meridian axis, which maps the continuity and depth of relations among the high and the middle mountain, the valleys and the ground, prevails on the diagonal axis of relations among the Altopiano's villages, with political and existential consequences. Another powerfully important aspect that emerges with cartographical analysis is the primary role of micro-place names in the narrative construction, surrounding the «epopea minima», the stylistic center of Rigoni Stern's production. He loved to define himself as nothing more than a «salice nano» also in the «bosco letterario» (Rigoni Stern, 2003, p. 3).

But perhaps the most interesting of these newly revealed aspects is how, from the beginning, Rigoni Stern's writing constitutes a world. He achieves this both through the sensitivity of references, across five continents, from the infinitely small to the immensely big, and through the intensity of the relations with places, landscape, nature. None of these have yet been cartographically explored. His message discloses the cosmopolitan dimension of human life, the perceived need to intertwine the here and the elsewhere, cosmos and hearth (Tuan, 2003). The stronger the attachment to the Altopiano, the greater the need to explore and respond to the call of distant lands beyond the mountains and the political frontlines that distant authorities impose on the alpine watershed. The double surname of the author reveals, in that sense, a hybrid or frontline identity that feeds on mobility. He is a perfect icon not only of the Altopiano, but also of the Alps and of contemporary territoriality. Because of this, Rigoni Stern's Altopiano cannot be conceived only as «monde clos», «haut lieu» of interiority (Gherib, 2010, p. 17).

Rigoni Stern's mobility leads us to the nature of the maps and to Moretti's opening question. Our literary maps demonstrate, going beyond some interesting acquisitions, all their heuristic potentials as an open space of relations. Evidently, we must develop the mobility of the relations that digital tools invite us to explore, considering the complexity of the meanings that the meeting of literature and

geography suggests, following the invitations of Cooper, Gregory, and Moretti: «Placing a literary phenomenon in its specific space – mapping it – is not the conclusion of geographical work; it's the beginning. After which begins in fact the most challenging part of the whole enterprise: one looks at the map, *and think*.» (Moretti, 1998, p. 7, cit. in Cooper e Gregory, 2010). Just as Italo Calvino conceived the geographical map as «Odissea» and «idea narrativa» (Calvino, 1990, p. 24), so proceeds the narrative route of Mario Rigoni Stern, «viandante nella mappa».

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- 1 This research is the result of a fruitful collaboration between geographers and literary scholars of the University of Padua. The recognition of place names in Rigoni Stern's fiction is the result of Sara Luchetta's work of MSc degree *Il narratore nella mappa: spazio e memoria in Mario Rigoni Stern* (supervisors: Franco Tomasi and Mauro Varotto), University of Padua, 2012-2013. Although the paper is the outcome of a common reflection, paragraphs 1 and 4 are written by Mauro Varotto, paragraphs 2 and 3 by Sara Luchetta. The GIS analysis owes much to Francesco Ferrarese's experience. We thank him for his precious collaboration.
- 2 A hefty literature begins to exist in Anglo-Saxon world, starting from the article of Muehrcke and Muehrcke (1974), up to the current critic of the different approaches to literary cartographies in Tania Rossetto's latest work (2013). A bibliography on literary cartography and mapping in the last twenty years is available in the blog «Literary Geographies»: <http://literarygeographies.wordpress.com/litgeog-mapping/>.
- 3 Even if the author decided to insert *L'ultima partita a carte* at the end of the volume (for the explanation of this choice see the introductory note of the book, *Al lettore*), in this analysis we consider this novel as closer to the «long tale» form than to the «short novel» form, and also for its «balancing» function (it is the third book dedicated to war stories and, after many years, it closes the cycle). The mentioned narrative passages, if not differently specified, follow the pagination of this edition (Rigoni Stern, 2003).
- 4 We use here the official name of «Altopiano» referring to the Asiago Plateau, even if the Rigoni Stern's favourite place name was «Altipiano» (as in the title chosen for the "Meridiani" edition, *Storie dall'Altipiano*). Such

different form nowadays becomes a sort of literary denomination, following the works of Emilio Lussu and Luigi Meneghello (cfr. Rigoni and Varotto, 2008, p. XXII).

- 5 This method of defining temporal coordinates is very frequent in our storyteller's works. He often refers to a «natural» temporality in which there are no clocks, but spatial coordinates that help to perceive the passing of the time.
- 6 In the narration there are 16 small place names not displayed in the map, because of their difficult localization.