



Article

# Female Relays, Rice-Workers and *flâneuse*: The *geo parler femme* in Renata Viganò's Work

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**Abstract:** The aim of this article was to reflect on how settings are used as narrative practices in the work of Renata Viganò, one of the most famous Italian female writers. Drawing upon Well's concept of *geo parler femme*, this article examined the extent to which the setting plays a role in Viganò's fictional works and essays. Focusing on the most common stereotypes of gendered spatiality, the intention of the analysis was to point out that at specific historical moments, such as the Italian resistance movement and the post-war years, the traditional gender assignment of spaces was no longer valid. The idea of a well distinguished 'limit' that separates certain places as feminine from others as masculine in time of war becomes blurred and destabilizes the traditional dichotomy of public–private spaces. The dialectic masculine–feminine places are nonexistent and often completely reversed, turning the setting into one of the main narrative practices in novels, such as *L'Agnese va a morire* or *Una storia di ragazze*, as well as in politically engaged essays dedicated to female partisans and rice-workers.

**Keywords:** geocriticism; gendered space; *geo parler femme*; Renata Viganò; Italian resistance

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## 1. Introduction

Amy Wells-Lynn, one of the leading geocritics, has dedicated her research to the relationship between gender and space. Drawing upon the dynamic relation of "space–literature–space"<sup>1</sup> (Westphal 2000, p. 21), Lynn warns that studying gendered spaces has to overstep the traditional feminist opposition between male and female spaces:

"Perhaps we can ask how gender identity affects a writer's choice and implementation of space: do the same locations appear across male and female texts, or, how do male and female writers inhabit the same geographic pinpoints differently?" (Wells 2005, p.81)

Instead of addressing the problem of "engendering spaces" in the way that Massey and Rose did, Lynn suggests a new approach, named the *geo parler femme*, that narrows the focus on the geographic strategies used as narrative ones in women's writings:

"In this way, the geocritical approach is combined with *écriture féminine* theories from gender studies to arrive at *geo-parler femme*, a narrative strategy in which women writers use geography as a secret or coded language, communicating emotional or symbolic meaning which can be understood only by readers who share their context. The writers

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<sup>1</sup> "La géocritique, en effet, se propose d'étudier non pas seulement une relation unilatérale (espace–littérature), mais une véritable dialectique (espace–littérature–espace) qui implique que l'espace se transforme à son tour en fonction du texte qui, antérieurement, l'avait assimilé. Les relations entre littérature et espaces humains ne sont pas figées, mais parfaitement dynamiques." (Westphal 2000, p. 21)

may resort to using the geographic codes because they feel they cannot express their feelings or experiences otherwise.” (Wells 2005, p. 81)

What comes to the forefront in Well’s approach is the proposal of gendered spatiality as both a narrative tool, essential for the overall dynamics of a novel, and a metaphor, meant to be decoded by a specific group of readers. Taking into account the censorship during the fascist period and the debates on what ‘engaged’ literature should grapple with in the immediate aftermath of the civil war, these spatial messages can be easily recognized in specific historical moments of Italian literature.

One of the most engaged Italian female authors, Renata Viganò, made use of it by employing geographical sites, real and fictional, as narrative strategies for expressing her societal and political concerns. As a follower of the Communist Party, she was one of the most active writers during the years of the Italian resistance movement and all of her work hinged on the need to address the most present questions related to the miserable condition of women in Italy. The topics she reflected upon were related to rice-workers’ labor conditions, unwanted motherhood, and the right to abortion, as well as the battle for emancipation and equal rights for women in post-war Italy.

This article will revolve around three specific female characters and the relationship that they establish with the settings through which they move and operate. In the first part, the problem of ‘engendering spaces’ will be addressed by taking into account the interrelation between female couriers and the *topos* of the road. In the second part, the inextricable relation between space and gender is tackled in the societal analysis that Viganò conducted on female rice-workers. Finally, the third part addresses women’s difficult conquest of the modern city and the metropolitan destiny of one of its *flâneuse*.

## 2. Female ‘relays’ on the Road

Of the remarkable array of duties performed by women in the civil war, that of the ‘relay runner’ stands out as the most important one. Their main assignment was to walk down the roads of the Resistance and travel many miles to supply the partisans with a diverse range of necessary goods, such as letters, clandestine press, food, weapons, ammunition, clothing, and medicine. It was a new role born out of the necessity of the movement and it was usually assumed by young girls, physically fit to tackle their tasks in the shortest time possible. As Marina Addis Saba asserts, their job, far from “a feminine one that keeps women at home, tied to their traditional roles” (Addis Saba 2007, p. 80), entailed considerable risks:

“It was a new profession, unthinkable before the war: in these new living conditions, young women were given freedom. They went through villages, climbed mountains and descended valleys getting past the German and fascist checkpoints. Often by riding a bicycle, and even more often, on foot, in the snow, in the mud or under the sun. Sometimes, they had to travel by train, other times they dragged carts and wheelbarrows of luck, using large bags of shopping, garters and bra in order to hide their stuff.” (Addis Saba 2007, p. 80)

By scouting out ways to reach the brigades and to accomplish the missions they were entrusted with, these women constantly participated in transgressive acts, both in Deleuze’s terms, as a transgression of the ‘striated spaces’ of the enemy’s occupation, as well as in terms of gendered spaces. By crossing the streets and taking part in the war along with male soldiers, they were simultaneously responding to the spatial control exerted over women in patriarchal societies and were inverting the traditional stereotypes on this interrelation. As their nickname suggests, what they were asked to do was to relay, to move from one geographical point to another, and it was with this new motion that they were starting to permeate into the male gender ‘codes’, most frequently inscribed within open settings, such as the roadspace. Being a relay meant tireless mobility through the enemy’s surveilled territory, but it also meant going to war with the patriarchal dichotomy domestic sphere/public life, and the neatly distinguished and properly assigned activities of the homemaker and the breadwinner. In addressing responsibilities and risks on a par with their male

counterparts, the female partisans paved the way for new possibilities for women, both in terms of personal and political growth.

As with the majority of feminist writings, Viganò narrated the war from a biographical viewpoint. By reflecting on her soldier experiences, she brought to the fore a first person narration and in almost all of her work, young female partisans, abandoned and saddened mothers, or widows became the main characters. Keenly aware of the limitations imposed on women, especially in the fascist era where the regime insisted on limiting female rights and on confining them to their more traditional roles, the writer recounted the Resistance from a new perspective. What was unique in her stories was the symbolic dimension ascribed to her settings, particularly in narrating her memory of entering the war. That is to say, the beginning of this new chapter of her life was often presented as a literal transgression of a limit, or as more of a spatial than a temporal act. Becoming a soldier coincided with embracing a new, frightening spatiality where gender distinctions and roles were no longer entrenched:

“I was not young anymore, I already knew everything in relation to wars, and I had a husband, a child and a house. Thus, when my husband became a partisan, I took the child and left every possession of mine at home, including my fears, and decided to become a partisan as well. From cities to towns, from one task to another, the orders of the Resistance took place in the Comacchio Valleys. Not on a horse but on foot, and with a child, I followed the person who was necessary for us to be a family. It was cold and dangerous, but it was for sure better than being home, behind a blind wall.” (Colombo 1995, p. 101)

“She had never regretted that time, even though it had been full of risk and fear. She would not have wanted to stay with the child in a safe place and wait for her companion, nor would she have liked if her companion had stayed with her. They never said big words. Only: Let's go. And let's take the kid with us. And they had been in the partisan struggle for nineteen months.” (Viganò 1976, pp. 137–38)

The juxtaposition of women's ordinary life in their homes and the extraordinary mobility they were encouraged to undertake in times of war is the most recurrent spatial construction of Viganò's novels and short stories. It is within this binary opposition between indoor–outdoor settings that biographical stories like *Assolto in istruttoria* or *La mia guerra partigiana* are set, even though the same spatial opposition characterized the fictional geography of *L'Agnese va a morire*, Viganò's most famous work.

The story of Agnese, a peasant woman, starts only when she decides to abandon her old life and enrol in the partisan movement. Having witnessed the deportation of her husband, she joins the forces, even though as an old and uneducated woman, her knowledge both of the party and the war is quite limited. The plot is centered on the political maturity that awaits Agnese and, consequently, it requires a specific spatiality wherein her *Bildung* story unfolds. Since the new relay experience cannot stay confined to her familiar spaces, in order to embrace the task of a soldier, Agnese is invited to conquer a new spatiality. After the murder of the German sergeant with a “violent gesture,” the second part of the novel shifts from her village house to the Comacchio Valleys, where the clandestine activities of the brigades take place. It is a shift that marks the most important episode of the novel, as well as the most significant moment of the protagonist's life:

“(…) by dividing the German's head in two, she also divided her life in two. The first part, the simplest, the longest, the most understandable was now beyond a barrier, over, ended. There had been Palita, and then the house, the work, the everyday life, repeated for almost fifty years: here she was in front of a new beginning, and certainly it was the shorter part; she did not know anything else but this fact.” (Viganò 1949, p. 73)

On the one hand, the old life confined to her village house, and on the other hand, the military camps and roads of the Resistance where her previous identity as a washerwoman ceases to be relevant. Similarly, in the short story *Tiro al piccione*, Nigrèin's life is shaped by the same spatio-temporal limit. The setting's division is announced to the reader from the beginning, where Nigrèin's

first universe, the “placid and harmless secure point” (Viganò 1976, p. 114) of her house is juxtaposed against the “cold, difficult and endless” (Viganò 1976, p. 116) wintry streets:

“During all that time, Nigrèin continued to serve as a relay for miles and miles of plains, between many houses and villages. Slim and good hearted, with her big eyes and dark hair, her body almost like a child and her mind as a partisan expert, she went on a bicycle without ever getting tired, shivered with cold and sometimes in terror, but she could not refuse anything because the living and conscious action was infinitely easier than the heavy wait that wore out the faint nerves of inactive people.” (Viganò 1976, p. 116)

Here, the threshold that distinguishes between Nigrèin’s certainty embedded in the house and the scary outdoors is rendered even more tangible due to the difficult weather conditions, and the sacrifice required from the young woman to complete her tasks. The function of the outdoor setting, thus, is functional also in relation to the new image given of the female body, underlining her perseverance and atypical strength. From the cold winter to the muddy ground that hinders normal walking or the fast riding of a bicycle, the spatiality makes the relay’s activities and tasks even more difficult to achieve. It is another trait that connects the two stories:

“Agnese oftentimes had to come down and drag the bicycle stuck in the mud. In order to avoid the bridge, she was obliged to walk all the way behind the embankment. She ventured on another road, and took her bicycle over the shoulder. Halfway along, she thought she was falling into the river, the planks were swinging, and the rapid current below made her head spin. She managed to stay upright, to reach the shore, dragged her bicycle up the steep slope of the embankment, then down the other side. Finally she was back on the road.” (Viganò 1949, pp. 25–26)

It is in the space of displacement and unbridled mobility on the dangerous roads that Viganò inscribes her *geo parler femme*. The communist ideology is revealed to Agnese after she boards the partisans’ boats. In particular, it is during the tasks Nigrèin is entrusted with as a brave soldier, that she discards the remnants of her past and deepens her political awareness. To achieve personal and ideological growth, these female warriors are inevitably obliged to transfer their old lives to new geographical sites, and to practice endurance in order to fulfil the war obligations.

Nevertheless, it is important to underline that in Viganò’s work the construction of a new female identity embedded in specific spaces does not require a complete abandonment of the traditional parts. Agnese is a courageous soldier, but when not engaged in the relay, she takes care of the temporary household built within the military camps. Accordingly, Nigrèin’s soldier identity is interwoven with her role as a sister whose anguished cry over her murdered brother concludes the story. Thus, relays’ outdoor settings should be considered more as a *continuum* between the new conquered roles and the ‘private’ issues that, instead of being completely left behind, “are written onto the road” as well (Ganser 2009, p. 77). The coalescence of both the masculine and the feminine principle in the Resistance heroines is particularly evident in the essay *Le donne della Resistenza*, where the presentation of the 128 participants from Emilia Romagna are portrayed in this ‘in-betweenness’. They stand “alongside the comrades of the Bolognese Resistance” (Viganò 1955, pp. 9–10) and show “men’s strength” when needed (Viganò 1955, p. 7), but at the same time, they love “beautiful clothes, good food, theater, dance and cinema.”

Such is the case of Irma Bandiera, a 23-year-old girl who “died in the war as the bravest soldier” (Viganò 1955, p. 15), even though she came from a rich family and had the opportunity to flee from the ravages of war. Lea Gaccaglia (Viganò 1955, pp. 19–20) and Irene Callegari (Viganò 1955, p. 28) preferred the role of combatants to that of mothers, whereas Lisa Venturini and Rosa Zanotti are remembered for sacrificing their lives together with 500 other women during the strikes in Imola. Nevertheless, besides the bravery of these “women fallen as male soldiers” (Viganò 1955, p. 5), able to grasp “very quickly the tricks of the clandestine life” (Viganò 1955, p. 10), they are never completely devoid of the “sweet or bitter problem of the house” (Viganò 1955, p. 7). This is why, once the war is over, all of them return to their old roles:

“Those who remained alive, returned home; the female partisans who, for months and months, went against death became once again women like all the others. Small women without ambition, without boast, as if their warfare were ordinary and natural, a simple duty being accomplished.” (Viganò 1955, p. 11)

### 3. Open Fields as “places of torture”: The Italian Rice-Workers

Published in 1952, and dedicated to Maria Margotti, a female rice worker shot during a women’s labor strike in the main square of Molino, *Mondine* is a survey Viganò conducted in different parts of post-war Italy. Her intention was to depict the unbearable working conditions in which every year a group of “beautiful girls, courageous wives and resistant mothers, tough as any man” (Viganò 1952, p. 29) had to work tirelessly in the hope of ensuring their families’ survival.

In fact, the majority of her protagonists, from the most famous Agnese to the less well known Miranda, are representatives of the underpaid and exploited subaltern class.

Similar to the relays, women workers were invited to once again surpass the walls of their homes, placed among the infertile soils and “isles of stones” (Viganò 1952, p. 30), in order to undertake their seasonal, low-paid jobs. In this case, the distinction between the rice-worker and the breadwinner dissolves completely: “they would bring home those few thousands of lire together with a good plaster block to stop the house from being completely ruined” (Viganò 1952, p. 31). This idea of collecting the necessary materials for the reconstruction of the houses alleviates the pain from these ‘places of torture’:

“They were singing on their departure, and singing on the fields as well, and singing upon their return, because these girls were hoping to spare enough money for the dowry, the new wives were dreaming about their white sheets in their bedrooms (...)” (Viganò 1952, p. 30)

Space, thus, stands once again as a narrative strategy in the representation of the social injustice inflicted on women. The house of the partisans, as well as the ones of the rice workers, belongs to the same semantic field, since its primary function is to symbolize women’s attachment to it. This assignment of the house as the most ‘appropriate places’ for women dates back to Penelope and her long wait for the return of Ulysses, and it survived well into the 19th century when female protagonists were able to defy their static destiny, only by shifting from their first family nest to their marital house. As Bompiani highlights, the only mobility in Austen’s novels pertained to the ‘National Marriage Market’ phenomenon, a transfer from one domestic sphere to another, since marriage was considered the “totality of woman’s social space, the maximum field of her freedom” (Bompiani 1978, p. 43).

Unlike Jane Eyre’s static contemplation of the landscape from the roof top of her home, Viganò’s female warriors and rice-workers go to war with women’s banishment from an authentic life, by subverting their traditional roles and undertaking the risk of plunging into a less known world from which they had traditionally been excluded. This is why the outdoor settings are endowed with many challenges for the protagonists. In the case of the rice fields, what differs from the Resistance settings is the nature of the job itself, which demands even more physical strength. The focus on the “wide feet, swollen even in slippers” (Viganò 1949, p. 121), and the legs that “seem to float like two rags” (Viganò 1949, p. 113), always in the foreground, no longer serves to point out the elegance and the fragility of the feminine body, but rather its strength activated after long years of immobility.

Another example of the *geo parler femme*, thus, is assigned to this interrelation between the polysensorial landscape and the fixation on the corporeal:

“Here, the insects, the mosquitos, are in great abundance. In great abundance are also the leeches, the traces of which are perceivable on the women’s ankles, or on their big and benevolent socks which cannot cover completely the feet. The rice workers have to be barefoot in order to fit in the mud and give the possibility to the fingers to move naked in order to balance the slippery and sticky mortar of the valley, on the dead grass or rotten background. The leeches are lurking, they grab the skin, penetrate it and start to suck. Then,

the girl grabs the beast, pulls it and it becomes longer and longer as an elastic (...)" (Viganò 1952, p. 34)

Another spatial practice that underscores the non-existent living conditions of the rice-worker's temporary dwellings is also encoded in the interiors, often compared to an old "stable, a litter of beasts" (Viganò 1952, p. 56):

"Suffering during the trip, because of the heat, thirst, slowness and overcrowding of the public transports. Suffering in the holes of the work places, because of the lack of food, not seasoned rice and beans, and guzzled everywhere, the sour smell of the dunghill or in the dusty pruritic breath of a barn. Suffering because of nights spent on straw, in deportees' chambers, like prisoners, without having the possibility to move from one dog's bed to the other one, and short of breath. Suffering because of the hours spent beneath the sun, with the malnourished and tired body (...). Oppression, running water, summer heat without a shadow, mosquitoes. These are the rice workers' conditions, repeated year after year, (...)." (Viganò 1952, p. 9)

The male dominance, in the case of the 'relays' always being assigned to the commander of the brigade, is here substituted by the antagonistic presence of the "Mister Agent" (Viganò 1952, p. 13). He is a representative of the phallographic power in the field labor, standing as a 'gazer', the "sharp eye of a master's spy that observes from the embankment to denounce if one rice worker moves for a second her head" (Viganò 1952, p. 9). The exertion of the agrarian's masculine power gains its most vivid representation in the direct insults thrown at the female body, judged as being inadequate for the job and, consequently, rejected:

"In the house of Rotorà, in Ottobiano, I saw a rice worker, criticized by the agrarian for being too fat. I thought I would see a deformed body, but I met an ordinary woman, with a bit of tummy, normal for all women who have given birth to a lot of children. Actually, she has had five of them, the last one only nine months old. And an unemployed husband. The agrarian, who knows why, sees her as a fat lady, he doesn't want her. When I met her, she had already been sleeping for nine days on the floor, she was given food by the other workers, (...) and if she wanted to go back home, she had to buy the ticket herself, even though she did not have any money left. Poor Esterina Bonfanti, for you the season was tragic as well, tears instead of sweat, all day long crying among the void corridors, unpaid desert hours, because the agrarian doesn't like this poor tummy of yours where five children were given life." (Viganò 1952, pp. 13–14)

For the gender distribution of places in this essay, it is also important to underline the recurring motif of Margotti's tragic death, reintroduced on several occasions among the annotation of the work conditions in the rice fields. Viganò's urge to recount the way her life ended, shot by a young policeman during the political repression, transforms the square into an ultimate symbol of male power, once again confronted with women's attempt to participate in the fight for equal rights. It is an event that brings Viganò to reflect on the consequences of the civil war, on her ideological beliefs and the disillusionment after the elections of 1948 and, especially, on what right a young policeman has to kill a woman. More than a courageous soldier and a female activist, Margotti was a grieving widow and mother, faithful to the only job she had in her short life: that of a rice-worker. Consequently, what is questioned is not the guilt of the murderer, but his ignorant and almost involuntary act, which had less to do with the labor strike itself and more with the price his victim had to pay in the name of all women who had opted for a role other than the one traditionally assigned to them:

"Maria Margotti is dead, as any other woman from Mulino di Filo could die, because they are all rice-workers and laborers, and all of them joined the strike; she died like Terzilla could die, or Elsa, or Gigina, or Paola, as Tisa could have died shot by the policeman (...). All of them could have died, the women from Mulino, but it was Maria Margotti to be shot,

(...), and became a symbol, a flag, the first 'mondina' fell in the 1949 brigade strike." (Viganò 1952, pp. 19–20)

#### 4. La 'flâneuse' in the Big City

In 1962, Viganò published *Una storia di ragazze*, her last novel. Marino Moretti referred to it as her most successful work, particularly praising the originality of the environments "portrayed with true mastery." Unlike the Resistance roads and the open rice fields, the main scenery in this case is the modern city where the story of Miranda takes place. The young girl, due to the economic difficulties of her family, is forced to leave her mountain village and transfer to the big city where she starts to work for a rich family as a servant.

The typical neorealist organization of space is still present in the spatiality of the novel. The binary class opposition between rich and poor is symbolized by the poles between which Miranda's story is set: on the one hand, the village with its traditional values, left behind, and on the other hand, the bourgeois iconography of the new home in the city, with its cold, dark, and spacious rooms. The frequent flashbacks denote Miranda's nostalgia, especially in the first days of her urban experience, but, at the same time, the high buildings, the enchanting shop lights, the discovery of the cinema, and the new means of transportation fascinate the young girl. Even though space plays a protagonist role in all of Viganò's work, it is within this character that we recognize the greatest interrelation between character and lived space. No longer is the Nazi-fascist occupation considered an enemy, but it is rather the paddle growing post-war urbanism and the new capitalist values that determine "the spatial and social reorganization" (Massey 1994, p. 234), where Miranda's story of initiation unfolds.

Initially marginalized as a "spectator of the great theatre", Miranda's experience of the city is translated into her gradual becoming of a 'flâneuse'. Her newly gained role of a city girl implies a step-by-step inclusion into the public sphere of the main setting:

"(...) she would have liked even to sit at those tables, waiting for a waiter to bring her something on the tray, but she knew she would not dare to enter." (Viganò 1962, p. 28)

"She could not decide to overstep the shadow of the porch to the light of the entrance, she was intimidated by the cashiers behind their machines, by the ticket vendors at the counters. The act of extending the hand with the money and asking for entry or consumption was something she could not have learned in the mountains." (Viganò 1962, p. 28)

In terms of gendered spatiality, this possibility to observe instead of being observed is by itself a transgressive act, since Miranda is no longer the representative of "the one-way-ness and the directionality of the gaze" (Massey 1994, p. 234). Nevertheless, the encoded gendered spaces are clearly entrenched in the way a female character moves through and inhabits the streets of the metropolis, an act that is also gender-transgressive, since it destabilizes the physically and socially "masculine setting" (Ganser 2009, p. 51). As the city becomes a more familiar place to Miranda, the *Bildung* story evolves and is firstly traced by the transformation of her looks: Veronica Lake's hairstyle, new shoes that no longer make the "devil noise" as those worn before, and the more frequent looks at her reflection in the mirrors and windows of the outside settings. All elements that endow Miranda with a new confidence, separating her from her primary village identity and values. Its culmination arrives with the relationship with Pino, "the rootless citizen, without childhood or family," who takes advantage of the young girl's innocence:

"She was now entering a lucid, icy atmosphere, inside an empty space that ended up against an impassable limit. Beyond that there was nothing but darkness. (...) A heavy silence stretched out in the room, increasing the heat. In the closed air, one breathed heavily. Not a noise, not a voice on the stairs. The old house slept with its human load." (Viganò 1962, p. 128)

Contrary to the protagonist's traditional beliefs, her unexpected pregnancy in the city brings her nothing more than the feeling of being trapped in a labyrinth from which death seems the only possible way out. It is once again a limit to characterize the feminine space, since Miranda finds herself in front of the most difficult decision: give a chance to a new life or take her own. It is only with the arrival of her brother Alfio, a young communist who, having moved to the city, discovers by chance Miranda's misfortune. Being the character entrusted with the "reorganization and attribution of meaning after the violation and the tumultuous succession of events" (Moretti 1991, p. 317), it is with his appearance that the plot takes a new, unexpected direction and concludes with a positive outcome.

However, the same passage from adulthood to maturity, caused by an unwanted pregnancy, is experienced by Piera, the daughter of the lord's family where Miranda works. She is the "double mirror" of the protagonist: if Miranda is an unexperienced, poor, and timid girl from the mountains, Piera is an experienced "flâneuse" who knows how to handle the city hustle, but who, nevertheless, becomes the victim of the same lack of authenticity inscribed within the new urban lifestyle. What differs is the result: she accepts the abortion as the only way to avoid bringing shame upon her family for having a child without being married, as required by the bourgeois society. It follows that the cityscape in the last novel that Viganò wrote is mostly concerned with the *geo parler femme* through the social problem of abortion. The metropolis is the perfect setting for tackling the question of involuntary maternity, since it corresponds to the values imposed by mass culture and by capitalist logic.

## 5. Conclusions

By giving a voice to the heroines of the war and of the reconstruction period, Viganò was among the first Italian writers of the 20th century to be considered 'gender aware'. She supported the formation of their consciousness and emancipation by recounting the resistance from the relay's perspective, by writing documents on the female comrades and rice-workers, and by addressing feminist questions in post-war Italian society. By transgressing the limits of their homes, her protagonists were rewiring the established gender pattern of spatial distribution. During the civil war, no longer was the opposition between the homemaker and the breadwinners tenable, inasmuch as both male and female soldiers were equally interwoven in the horrors of the partisan movements. In the post-war society, rice-workers were examples of how the traditionally assigned roles had to be reversed in order to make a living and to survive the poverty of the reconstruction years. Thus, roads crossed by the real soldiers who lost their lives while partaking in the resistance, as well as the new urban streets linked to the new women's identity, become places of unique gender possibility. By proposing female mobility itself as a double resistance—against the political oppression and against women's subordination—the open space of the road becomes the only ground for grappling with secular women's confinement to the domestic sphere. The *geo parler femme* allows Viganò to closely depict the condition of women in the historical context of which she was a part.

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