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Subaltern geopolitics on the walls: The case of 'Orso' in the streets of Florence

Keywords: subaltern geopolitics, Rojava, graffiti, street art, Kurdistan, Florence.

How do subalterns circulate geopolitical knowledge? The death of the Italian 'foreign fighter' Lorenzo Orsetti in Rojava, while battling with the Kurds against the Islamic State, became the occasion to alter the streetscapes of his hometown Florence, Italy, with informal traces. Drawing on participatory observation and in-depth interviews with three types of agents (artists, political activists, and passers-by), this article contributes to the subaltern geopolitical scholarship with two main arguments. First, it emphasises the significance of mundane spaces for subaltern geopolitical knowledge circulation. Second, it explains why and how political graffiti resonates in Florence's youth and affects the environment, inscribing the Kurdish struggle in the urban fabric.

Geopolitica subalterna sui muri: il caso di 'Orso' per le strade di Firenze

Parole chiave: geopolitica subalterna, Rojava, graffiti, street art, Kurdistan, Firenze.

Come si diffondono le idee geopolitiche dei subalterni? L'articolo esplora le rappresentazioni di Lorenzo Orsetti, morto in Rojava a fianco delle forze democratiche curde, nelle strade della sua città natale, Firenze. Attraverso osservazioni partecipative e interviste con tre tipi di agenti (artisti, attivisti politici e passanti), questo articolo porta un duplice contributo allo studio della geopolitica subalterna. In primo luogo, sottolinea l'importanza degli spazi quotidiani per la circolazione della conoscenza geopolitica subalterna. In secondo luogo, spiega perché e come i graffiti politici risuonino nei giovani fiorentini e influenzino l'ambiente, iscrivendo la lotta curda nel tessuto urbano.

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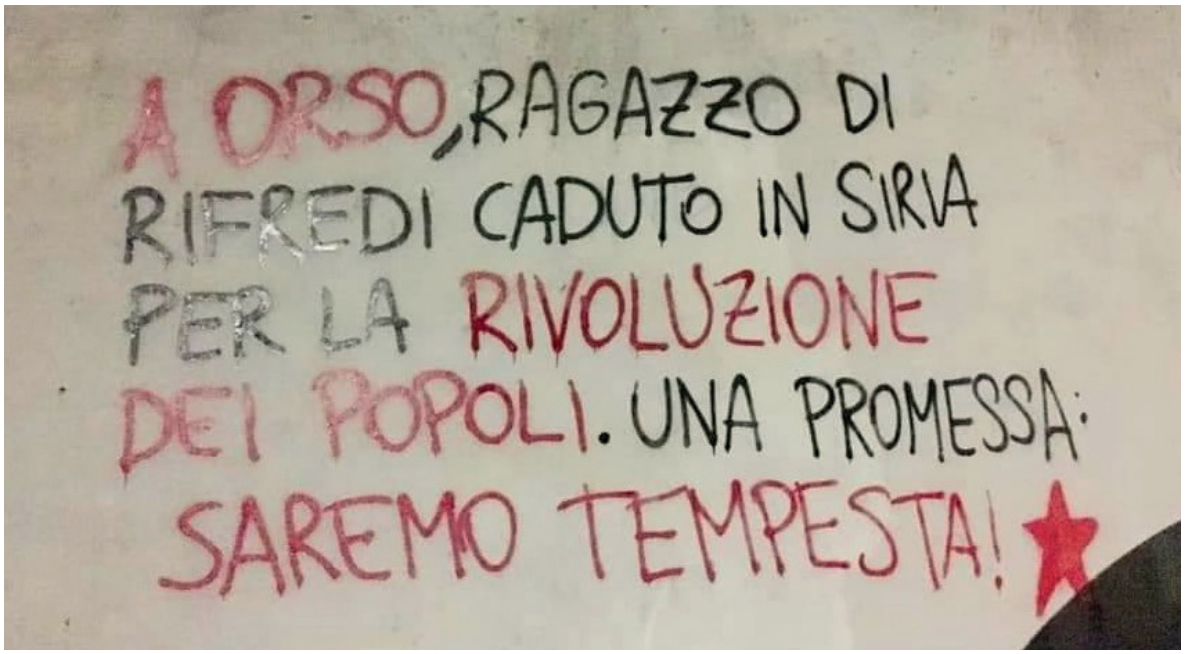
1. Introduction. – "To Orso, a guy from Rifredi fallen in Syria for the Peoples' Revolution. A vow: we will be a thunderstorm" (Fig. 1). This is a spray-painted inscription on a public wall, just outside a tunnel, in Florence, Italy, near the entrance of the neighbourhood called 'Rifredi', on the northern side of the city.



Source: Alessandro Orsetti (AO).

Fig. 1 - Wall writing in tribute to Orso in Rifredi

'Orso' is Lorenzo Orsetti, born on February 13, 1986, and raised in Rifredi, Florence. In 2017, he radically changed his life by joining the Kurdish struggle in Rojava – the Kurdish name for Western Kurdistan, in northeastern Syria. In 2011, a civil war erupted in that country, and the long-repressed Kurdish minority glimpsed an opportunity to establish its self-rule in the northeastern territories. Unlike many other ethnic minorities, the Kurdish forces in Syria did not seek merely to establish their independent state. Instead, they were, and continue to be, a revolutionary force with the political goal of creating a democratic transnational confederation based on autonomy, direct democracy, women's liberation, and social ecology. Consequently, they soon attracted many internationalists worldwide who viewed the Kurdish struggle as the 'Peoples' Revolution', a promise of a social alternative, free from statism, capitalism, racism, and patriarchy.

In Rojava, Orso adopted the *nom de guerre* Tekoşer Piling, meaning 'fighter tiger'. His social media posts and videoconferences kept the war in Syria in the

public eye in Florence. He wrote about the Turkish occupation of the western canton of Afrin, as well as the atrocities committed by Islamic State militias (ISIS). In Florence, his friends organised public events to connect with him via video and broadcast his messages. Social movements held demonstrations in his name. Students occupied university premises to host information days focused on the Kurdish struggle, their social transformation, and Orso's reasons for joining it. Students, artists, activists, and ordinary people met, learned together, and developed political awareness, all thanks to Orso's passionate reports from Rojava.

On March 18, 2019, Orso fell while battling against ISIS in Al-Baghuz Fawqani, near the border with Iraq. Before dying, he left his ideational last will and legacy, ending with the sentence: "And always remember: 'Every storm begins with a single drop'. Try to be that drop". For the Kurds, he became a *Şehîd* – a martyr. Still today, his figure is honoured by the Kurdish Movement worldwide, and a hospital in Rojava has been named after him. Many in Florence remember him as a partisan, akin to those who liberated Italy from Nazifascism in 1945. Rifredi streetscapes quickly changed, displaying a growing number of writings, graffiti, stencils, and plaques in Orso's memory alongside more geopolitical exhortations to 'Defend Rojava'.

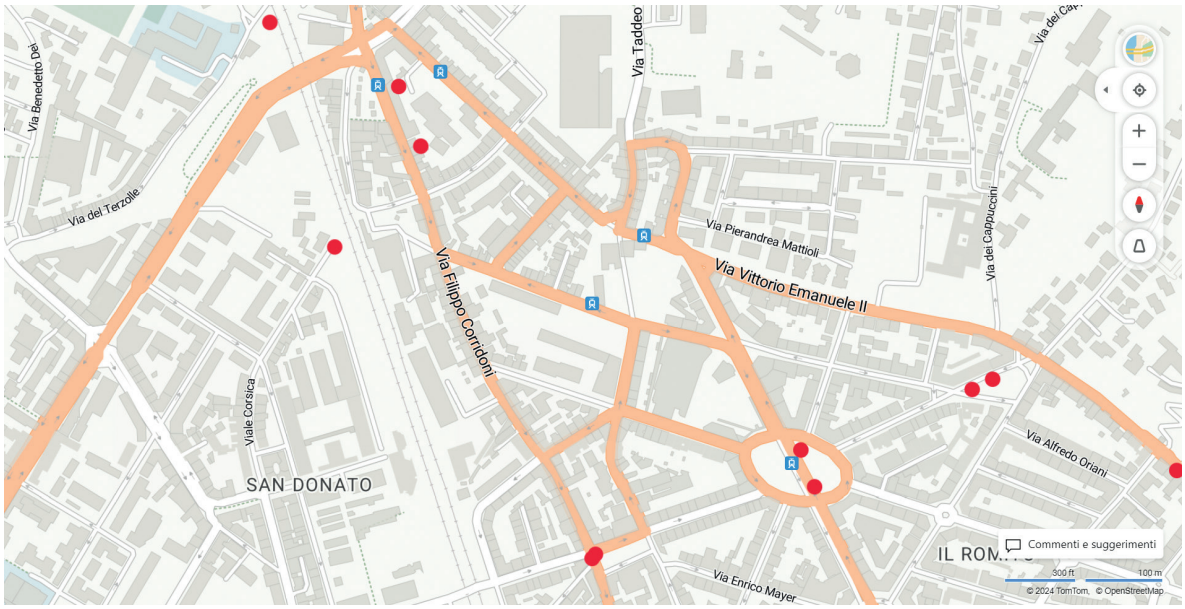
I argue that these traces form precarious urban geographies of subaltern geopolitical representations. They mark a resignification of the Kurdish struggle within the urban context of Florence. Thus, these traces raise a question: how do the subaltern reinterpret and use geopolitical facts and knowledge? The memory of Orso – which extends beyond Florence alone – becomes a pretext for forging an ideal connection between the Kurdish struggle and local forms of resistance, which is worth investigating.

2. Methodology. – The data gathering involved multiple qualitative methods and a multi-phase-field approach in Florence in the autumn of 2023. The first act of data collection entailed mapping traces for Orso across the city, with a specific focus on his home neighbourhood Rifredi and the adjacent areas. Piazza Giorgini becomes central in Orso's biographical geographies, as it is close to his and his parents' houses, just outside Rifredi's historical boundaries. The same is for two '*case del popolo*' (social centres), one in Statuto, the other in Careggi. The mapping provided a set of traces, outlining politically and emotionally meaningful spaces, which fuel the circulation of the subaltern geopolitical knowledge related to the Kurdish struggle. Thanks to the help from Lorenzo's father, Alessandro, I was able to gather almost every trace related to Orso, even those already deleted. The highest density of writings, plaques, graffiti, and stencils is between Piazza Giorgini, Piazza Leopoldo, and Piazza Dalmazia (Fig. 2).

Source: Author.

Fig. 2 - Distribution of the traces for Orso in Florence

Out of this core area (Fig. 3), we find in the first ring of proximity: two *case del popolo*, 'Progresso' and 'Campino', in Statuto and Careggi respectively, the railway wall in Ponte di Mezzo, and the faculty premises of Political Science in the nearby neighbourhood Novoli. Further north-westward, other significant traces can be found in the Giardino Rione Lippi and the squatted social centre Next Emerson, populated by autonomist groups. In the city centre, only two walls host murals for Orso. The first is the faculty premises of Letters and Philosophy, in Piazza Brunelleschi; the second is Piazza Tasso, a vibrant square, inhabited and frequented by many young and politically active people, within the historical neighbourhood of San Frediano. Two further places are worth to be mentioned. One is the squatted social centre CPA – Firenze Sud, on the south-eastern side of the city, characterised by a strong Marxist-Leninist inclination. The other is the subway at the entrance of the neighbourhood Le Cure, in the north-east of Florence: this was one of the first places where graffiti was legally allowed. Four more plaques, identical to the one in the 'Progresso', are hung within four *case del popolo* in other city zones.



Source: Author.

Fig. 3 - Distribution of the traces for Orso in Rifredi

After selecting the material to analyse, the second phase of the fieldwork entailed the identification of three types of agents differently involved in the study: artists, activists, and passers-by. Overall, I conducted twenty-five interviews. With three artists and six activists, open-ended question interviews and focus groups investigated the situation in which the action took place, the artistic meaning, the significance of the related place, and the sense of Orso and the Kurdish struggle for them. Each interview touched on the mentioned themes but developed individually, following the narrative flow and the situation. To these, I added sixteen interviews with shopkeepers and passers-by in Rifredi – especially in Piazza Giorgini – and students at the faculties, asking how the traces for Orso change the surrounding space.

In the following section, I will discuss how mundane urban spaces can be considered a vector of subaltern geopolitical knowledge circulation.

3. Subaltern Geopolitical Streetscapes.

– The case of the representations of Orso in Florence has the potential to make two important contributions to the subaltern geopolitical scholarship. The first concerns the sites of subaltern geopolitical representations. The second explores how the Kurdish struggle resonates in the urban context of Florence through the figure of Orso. When Sharp (2011) introduced the term 'subaltern geopolitics', drawing on Ayoob's (2002) concept of subaltern realism, she was concerned with security and geopo-

litical knowledge production by non-Western actors. Şimşek and Jongerden (2021, p. 1030) noted that "subaltern geopolitics has the potential to make visible other geopolitical subjectivities", exploring sites, spaces, and practices at the margins. The defining trait of subalterns is that they cannot speak, as exposed by Spivak's (1994) seminal work, because there exists no space for them to speak on their own in the hegemon's space. Thus, subaltern geopolitical scholarship primarily deals with geopolitical representations, languages, codes, and narratives, which do not circulate among the Western geopolitical elites, or align with their viewpoints. It is not exclusively concerned with resistance and counter-hegemonic stances, or those positioning themselves outside the state and associated institutions. Rather, it includes the geopolitical knowledge produced by and circulated among subaltern states, such as Third World, postcolonial, or post-revolutionary states.

Scholars investigated multiple sources and sites of subaltern geopolitical representations, such as newspapers (Sharp, 2011), media and speech acts (Myers and Muhajir, 2013), marketing strategies and public diplomacies (Browning e de Oliveira, 2016), oral history (Craggs, 2018), and intellectuals' archives (Ferretti, 2020; 2021). I contend that this scholarship has failed to consider one of the most typical mundane spaces for subaltern voices: street walls. While the connection between contentious politics and streetscapes is not new (Mattar, 2017; Campos, Pavoni e Zaimakis, 2021; Rose-Redwood, Alderman e Azaryahu, 2018; Vogel *et al.*, 2020), nor is the studies of practices of resistance through a focus on streetscapes (Awad e Wagoner, 2017; Christensen e Thor, 2017; Zieleniec, 2017; Carastathis e Tsilimpounidi, 2021; Awan, 2021), or the studies on subaltern streets and urban geography (Arnold, 2019), a specific emphasis on subaltern geopolitical representations in the city streets is still needed. These representations often, but not exclusively, take the form of internationalist solidarity. Historically, internationalism has brought subalterns into international relations and geopolitical debates, highlighting situated forms of worldliness: "[s]olidarities are constructed by subaltern political activity through forging such connections rather than being 'yet to come'" (Featherstone, 2012, p. 52). Subaltern voices resonate globally, erasing geographical distance and illuminating political and emotional affinities between different subaltern subjects (Ventura, 2023).

Subaltern geopolitics illustrates how non-Western states and political actors contest the status quo and forge their own representations (Myers e Muhajir, 2013; Browning e de Oliveira, 2016; Smith, 2016). Critically, Sunca (2023) poses the question of subalternity within subaltern regions. He adopts a Gramscian perspective to frame subalternity as a power-position, rather than a postcolonial subject-positioning. By taking the Kurdish case, Sunca argues for a more objective condition of subalternity, challenging postcolonial nationalist discourse which perpetuates a static West/non-West dichotomy and obscures dominations within

the non-Western regimes and societies. Such an emphasis on the power position enables new forms of transnational identification and internationalist solidarity, overcoming geocultural boundaries and divides. By moving away from subject-positioning, subalterns from different regions, both in the Global South and the Global North, can identify with each other.

Furthermore, revitalising Gramsci's notions of subalternity discloses his gradual articulation of the term and how we can identify subalterns in different contexts. According to Liguori (2011), Gramsci uses the term 'subaltern' in three main ways: to describe politically and culturally marginalised groups, to refer to the advanced industrial proletariat engaged in a hegemonic struggle, and to denote individuals based on their social status and cultural constraints. It is a dynamic interpretation of subalternity, including political and cultural dimensions. In Gramsci, the subalterns can challenge the hegemons, struggling to emancipate from their state of subalternity and express themselves.

With this in mind, we can better grasp the role that international multi-scalar connections between activists, inside and outside institutional settings, play in the forging and thriving of subaltern politics (Harris, Craggs e McConnell, 2023; Featherstone, 2012; Ferretti, 2020, 2021). As Cheong (2019, p. 993) put it, the subaltern "can also be understood as a multi-scalar performative politics of resistance and solidarity, from the subject to the state".

Focusing on the modalities of international circulation of subaltern narratives raises the question of why solidarity bonds come to be defined. This article thus attempts to answer this question through a dual analysis. On the one hand, it focuses on the relational dimension that is created between the representation of the Kurdish struggle through the memory of Orso and certain individuals in Florence. This relational dimension is explored through the concept of resonance (McDonnell, Bail e Tavory, 2017). Resonance is precisely a relational phenomenon, "perhaps even the phenomenon of relational affect *par excellence*" (Palstroem 2023, p. 78), which requires "the so-called 'affective dispositions' of individuals, that is, the affective capacities to affect and be affected" (Palstroem, 2023, p. 78). At the heart of this approach is the pragmatist recognition that cultural objects are relevant insofar as they make the world visible in a new light. A defining characteristic of resonance is, therefore, to be problem-solving and future-oriented because it "helps identify lines of action toward 'ends-in-view,' potentially revising people's desires and imagining of what is possible" (McDonnell, Bail e Tavory, 2017, p. 4).

While the way resonance makes the world visible in a new light may differ for each individual, its functioning remains the same. Intense emotions and associations facilitate the resonance of cultural objects. Emotional feedback circuits create the experience of resonance among individuals and small groups, and through this

experience the message contained in cultural objects travels, adapting to different situations (McDonnell, Bail e Tavory, 2017). Thus, resonance theory can help the literature on subaltern geopolitics understand how international solidarity bonds are formed. On the other hand, the article investigates the spatial dimension of the representations in memory of Orso. While resonance operates relationally between the cultural object and the individual, urban traces also record public activity within urban space and their ability to bring forth affective atmospheres (Nomeikaite, 2023). In this sense, such traces acquire their own agency, producing spatiality. By becoming part of the environment, they inscribe geopolitical content into everyday life, while defining an emotion-laden landscape that autonomises itself from the initial intentions of the authors but at the same time integrates distant worlds.

In the next section, I will introduce mundane spaces of geopolitical knowledge circulation, by investigating political graffiti, murals, and plaques in memory of Orso, showing how and why they convey subaltern geopolitical messages.

4. Mundane Spaces of Geopolitical Knowledge Circulation.

– The city space can be seen as a "place where speech can become 'savage' and, by escaping rules and institutions, inscribe itself on walls" (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 19). Graffiti and wall writings, framed as "an unsanctioned urban text" (Carrington, 2009, p. 410), reclaim the space from below in three distinct ways: first, they turn space into place by their presence; second, they transform the place into a common public place; third, they reclaim art from the monopoly of elite cultural institutions (Castillo, 2023). Thus, writings on the walls and graffiti are "an alternative form of subaltern writing to construct a narrative of resistance" (Benavides-Vanegas, 2005, p. 55). Consequently, they become sites of struggle between subalterns claiming their right to speak and authorities attempting to silence them. Mirroring the Colombian elite's expression '*La muralla es el papel de la canalla*' – meaning that the wall is the paper on which poor and undereducated people write (Benavides-Vanegas, 2005) – one of the interviewees (Int. 8) for this research utilised the Italian expression '*Muri puliti, popoli muti*' – clean walls, silenced peoples. Both sayings highlight elites' repressive aim of keeping street walls clean to prevent unauthorised voices from being heard. Street walls thus emerge as sites for subalterns to claim their right to 'write the city' (Zieleniec, 2017), resulting in "physical appropriation of space as property, or territory" (Cosgrove, 1985, p. 55).

Crafting streetscapes reshapes geographical imaginaries and spatial coordinates of everyday life, bringing 'new worlds' into the urban space (Rose-Redwood, Alderman, and Azaryahu, 2018). In the case of Orso, what is striking is the intrinsic geopolitical dimension of the traces left in his memory in the urban context, literally bringing a new world into Florence. The first aspect to highlight

is the reference to the armed struggle that the murals aim to convey. One of the artists who painted the portrayal of Orso (Fig. 4) in a subway near the anarchist and autonomist squat in Viale Corsica 81, now evicted, explicitly said that he chose "a photo where he is dressed for battle, has Kurdish military signs on him, precisely because that was the experience through which he brought those messages. In addition to remembering the person, the intention is to recall gestures, ideas, and martyrdom, too" (Int. 2). According to the artist, keeping all those military signs was crucial to locating Orso in that specific context, which is part of the memory.

Source: AO.

Fig. 4 - Mural for Orso in a subway in Rifredi

The same can be found in another artistic representation: a poster displayed in an empty public advertising space, just over the inscription used at the beginning of this article. Here, the artist chose to bring the Kurdish battlefield to Florence but also added an element of association with internationalist anarchist history. A typically Rojava green-yellow-red coloured writing connects Orso and the YPG

Source: AO.

Fig. 5 - Orso-YPG billboard in Rifredi

Source: marxist.org.

Fig. 6 - CNT-FAI poster

(Fig. 5), the Kurdish People's Defence Units fighting in Syria, blended with the 1936 Barcelona CNT anarchist union iconography (Fig. 6). YPG and anarchist flags wave over soldiers shooting, while Kurdish words read: 'fight fascism until victory'.

Three important elements emerge from this piece of art, which are also part of further representations. The first is the theme of communalist ideology. Without the ideological proximity, all these traces would have hardly been produced. The author said that, in London, he learned something about the Kurdish ideology, defined as "socialist but closed to anarchism", as articulated by the historical leader of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party), Abdullah Öcalan, considered a "great leader" (Int. 3). An activist echoed him, saying that the main attractive aspect of the Rojava Revolution is the democratic confederal system, built upon autonomous communes, which she hopes will be expanded to the whole world (Int. 8), as also envisaged by Öcalan (2011) himself.

The second element emerging from the Orso-YPG poster involves the contraposition between peoples and military powers. As their ideology concerns a territorial redefinition, their struggle is directly geopolitical, and questions nation-state borders existence. Paying tribute to Orso in the streets of Florence also aims to make the Kurdish people's struggle for freedom and autonomy visible. Referring to the troubled situation of Kurdistan, an activist emphasises that what is portrayed "is a region, not a state; it is something that transcends borders. Even though it is a very distant world, it still manages to communicate a great deal to everyone" (Int. 7). Another one highlights how the Kurds are mostly left behind and invisible in public debates while talking almost only of the states of the region (Int. 9). "Orso opened a door upon that world" said an activist (Int. 8) who also reached Rojava after listening to Orso's stories from there. All the interviewees say that

Orso helped them understand that there is a rich and variegated world beneath the statist surface of the Middle East. Recalling Sunca (2023), it is the geopolitics of subalterns in a subaltern region: the search for national autonomy against the homogenised nation-state space (Ventura e Custodi, 2024).

The third element introduces the association with other anti-fascist and internationalist fighters. This is key to understanding how Orso's message resonates from Rojava to Florence. As argued in sociology, "resonance occurs as actors successfully incorporate or transpose a way (or schema) to make sense of a new situation" (McDonnell, Bail e Tavory, 2017, p. 5). Therefore, the image of Orso as an internationalist anti-fascist partisan lies down in people's minds, recalling different and solidly established imaginaries. The association with the Italian partisans produce those "emotional feedback loops" (McDonnell, Bail e Tavory, 2017, p. 9), which are crucial in conveying a message. As explained by an activist:

> Florence is a city that in 1944 liberated itself with the partisans who came down from the surrounding mountains, and it is very proud of this. There is a parallelism with the Kurds, who have retreated to the mountains, and there they resist oppression and strive to liberate their land, so the analogy is immediate (Int. 6).

The Italian Resistance against Nazifascism is a living myth generating emotions and future-oriented hopes. Lorenzo's father specifies that it was not the Resistance as such, but the communist revolutionary side of it that worked as an ideal model for Orso:

> For Lorenzo, the Resistance, as remembered by the April 25 recurrence, meant a rediscovery of values, of those values and alternative meanings, a different world, a new world (Int. 5).

Here, we find the spatiotemporal connection between the Rojava Revolution, internationalism, and the Italian Resistance. They do not work just as an evident analogy because of their aesthetic similarities. They are associated because, in so doing, they inspire a solution to a present problem. Orso works as a vow to build a different future, not only in Rojava but in Florence, too. One of the activists at the *casa del popolo* 'Campino' expresses this sense of urgency by maintaining that:

> Since we always say that April 25 is not just a commemoration, Lorenzo's death reminded us how even today, in the mountains, people resist, liberate cities, and free territories from new fascists. It is not something that happened once and cannot be repeated (Int. 6).

In Piazza Giorgini, on April 25, 2020, challenging the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, a small group left a plaque in Orso's memory (Fig. 7), drawn by a

painter, who then contacted Lorenzo's parents. It reads: "LORENZO ORSETTI – Third Millennium Partisan Hero. Those who fight for freedom never die. Killed by ISIS on March 18, 2019, in Syria, while battling for the Kurdish people". Someone left a sketch (Fig. 8), illustrating a poppy, the traditional symbol of the Italian Resistance, at the bottom of the post where the plaque was hung. Besides the flower, a few words: "So that April 25 is not just a remembrance but a daily struggle for FREEDOM".

Source: Author.

Fig. 7 - A plaque in Orso's memory in Piazza Giorgini

Source: Author.

Fig. 8 - A sketch under the plaque in Piazza Giorgini

Orso's memory becomes a geopolitical gateway, which can assume different faces, such as the Kurdish guerrilla fighter, the anarchist internationalist, the anti-fascist partisan, and simply the guy from Rifredi. Each time, he takes on the colours and aesthetics most closely aligned with the sensibilities of those using him to convey a message, which transcends both his memory and the Kurdish struggle itself. The familiarity with something known makes Orso's story resonate within the given context. Thus, the representation of subaltern geopolitics paves the way for a shift from a geopolitical to a political divide, recontextualised in the

urban setting. The interactional dynamics within and behind these representations explain "how resonance can lead to the spread and diffusion of objects and ideas – and specifically how new solutions to practical puzzles become legitimate or institutionalized" (McDonnell, Bail e Tavory, 2017, p. 9).

As Lorenzo went to fight in the Rojava western canton of Afrin, then militarily controlled by Turkey and its proxy, the solidarity campaign 'Rifredi to Afrin' was established, in Florence. Somehow, with his death, it is a journey back, Rojava to Rifredi streets, which become a valuable means of subaltern geopolitical knowledge circulation. The Kurdish struggle is now inscribed in the urban fabric of Florence, linked to Orso's memory and the Italian Resistance, adding a new interpretation to that struggle, and opening new potential solutions, at least ideally. While geopolitical communication resonates individually, it takes on a spatial dimension beyond the authors' intentions when entering the surrounding environment. In the next section, I explore this dynamic and affective dimension of Orso's representations in the Florentine urban context.

5. The Affective Dimension. – The traces for Orso outline an emotional/political space. Political emotions are "those emotions related to our sense of power over ourselves and our environment as we pursue those goals, ideals and activities that give our life a meaning" (Hage, 2009, p. 69). In this sense, murals, graffiti, and plaques mark the spaces where Rojava Revolution-inspired ideals and practices circulate. They outline specific emotional and political geographies of subalterns in Florence. They are close to politically significant spaces, forming a political symbolic space (Hána e Šel, 2022). These traces are found in places frequented by anti-fascists, internationalists, autonomists, anarchists, and working-class youth, i.e., those who challenge the hegemonic space of the city order by appropriating a space to express themselves. Rifredi is "the stronghold of squatted buildings" (Int. 3). The entrance to the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy is a strategic place, a site of demonstrations (Int. 7). Piazza Tasso is the only city centre meaningful square for those who share Rojava-like ideals (Int. 9). In contrast, the city centre is felt as a meaningless space:

> The city centre is not a space of community, but not even a space of conflict: it is just empty, nobody knows what to do with it. It is not even a space of repression anymore (Int. 8).

> I have never thought about doing [graffiti] in the city centre, which is little lived and therefore meaningless. All the places where Orso has been represented were in our neighbourhood [Rifredi] or where his life was a model and his story was wished to be told (Int. 4).

I am interested in awakening the conscience of those who are like me and those closest to me. I do not care if a tourist in the centre sees it and says 'Ah, that graffiti is beautiful', even if he or she agrees (Int. 2).

Graffiti marks a political action in urban space, acquiring its own agency (Awad e Wagoner, 2015). Thus, graffiti and plaques can function as markers of territoriality, transforming neighbourhoods into emotion-laden landscapes (Nayak, 2010). In this way, the traces for Orso become the meeting point between the emotion-driven political activity of activists and friends and the traces' capacity to affect the surrounding environment (Awad e Wagoner, 2015).

According to Wood (2013), emotions play a crucial role in how young people interact with public spaces. Positive emotions, such as a sense of belonging and enthusiasm, can particularly encourage participation. However, in this case, participation takes the form of spatial reclamation, seeking to create affective and welcoming atmospheres for those marginalised by official urban spaces. On the one hand, it marks the appropriation of the public space, even illegally. On the other hand, it aims to adapt the space to political emotions capable of generating a sense of belonging.

It is perhaps a warm embrace for those who already know who Orso is and for those who will discover him in other ways and reconnect the times his name was written on a wall. It is a sense of belonging. […] It creates a sense of community (Int. 8).

The expression 'warm embrace' pertains to the sensory dimension that urban traces can enable. Commenting on Marx's words, Anderson (2009) highlights how the actions of enveloping and pressing characterise the concept of atmosphere. Enveloping and pressing are precisely what an embrace does, generating warmth, a sensation that is felt but not seen. In this sense, the urban traces commemorating Orso are not merely representational; they acquire agentic characteristics. In other words, they act by producing spatiality (Bowen, 2013). As the interviewee states, they generate a sense of belonging and community. In political terms, this sense of belonging and community constitutes the production of territoriality through an emotion-laden landscape. However, my aim here is not simply to discuss how graffiti or street art generates affective atmospheres, as already extensively discussed by others (e.g. Wood, 2013; Nayak, 2010; Ansaloni and Tedeschi, 2016; Nomeikaite, 2023; Sanches e Silva, 2016; Cook 2024). What interests me now is understanding how such atmospheres result from a process of autonomisation from the subaltern geopolitical reference. Ultimately, I seek to explore how this process of autonomisation strengthens the content of subaltern geopolitics by inscribing and embedding it within an affective dimension.

To understand such a process, I will distinguish the existence of two types of traces with different genealogies. On the one hand, there is the graffiti made by

Lorenzo's friends during intimate but collective events with family and friends. For example, every year they gather at the Giardino Rione Lippi to remember him with new graffiti in his honour. They have no political purpose but as Lorenzo's father said, "sometimes emotional representations convey the message even faster" (Int. 5). One of his friends recounted hearing some elderly people telling Orso's story to their grandchildren in front of the graffiti. Even though their intent is not political, his friends recognise the value of his choice: "Keeping his memory alive is the most important thing because his gesture deserves to be remembered" (Int. 1). On the other hand, there are political murals, such as the one at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, which portrays his face, a PKK flag, and the inscription 'Long live the new partisans' (Fig. 9). This mural was made in 2019, after a military escalation in Rojava by the Turkish army, which was bombing the canton of Afrin, and the subsequent protests in Florence in solidarity with the Kurds and internationalists fighting there. The students "were reforming the collective […] and Kurdistan and the confederal revolution were a great inspiration" (Int. 7).

Source: Author.

Fig. 9 - Mural 'New Partisans' at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy

These two approaches differ, but both contain Orso's two defining traits. He was not a political activist before leaving, but he died fighting for a revolution, which he defined as "the closest thing to [his] ideals that [he has] ever found"[1] (Orsetti, 2021, p. 40). His choice to join the YPG ranks surprised many, who knew him superficially, especially those who were politically active and never met

[1] English translation from Italian is made by the author.

him in political contexts. Nonetheless, they heard him saying in his last will that he was an anarchist and read that he died "defending the weak and staying true to [his] ideals of justice, equality and liberty", and adding that he "couldn't have asked for more" (Orsetti, 2021, p. 3). As one of the activists who joined Rojava after Lorenzo's death explained, "he was emotionally political because he had a sense of justice" (Int. 8). Such an ambivalence revives in the urban traces in his memory, where emotions and political ideology eventually merge, contributing to heighten the emotional and affective dimension of graffiti, murals, and plaques, interacting with the surrounding environment.

This dual nature found a point of convergence in the definition of 'partisan of Rifredi', to "place him in the city context" (Int. 6). The plaque (Fig. 10) in his memory, affixed in the courtyard of the *casa del popolo* 'Campino', remembers him with all his names – Lorenzo Orsetti, Orso, Tekoşer, Partisan of Rifredi – and is dedicated to all the women and men who fight for freedom. It is significant to emphasise the choice of the present tense, which imposes no spatial or temporal limitations but remains open to future actions, as the plaque was conceived with an explicit pedagogical aim (Int. 6). In it were quoted the most famous phrases from his testament, already cited at the beginning of this article.

Source: Author.

Fig. 10 - A plaque for Orso at the 'Campino'

Source: Author.

Fig. 11 - Graffiti for Orso at the 'Campino'

On the inauguration day, Lorenzo's friends made graffiti (Fig. 11) in his honour beside the plaque. They decided to use the yellow-blue colours of the local Rifredi football team, whose fan base is located right there. So, Orso's figure is absorbed into the environmental context, intensifying the emotion and inscribing his story into a pre-existing sense of collective identity. The sense of belonging and community evoked by one of the interviewees produces territoriality, merging everyday life with the memory of the fallen fighter in Kurdistan.

Orso remains the fallen fighter and "one of us" (Int. 7). The interviewees refused to turn him into a hero because that would have made him a distant figure, capable of doing what others cannot. For this reason, keeping Orso's memory alive as a simple guy from Rifredi becomes a way to autonomise subaltern geopolitical content, transforming it into a spatial element of everyday life, capable of accompanying those who pass through those places. It becomes a reminder that revolutionaries can be born and raised in the city.

> It is important to understand that [Orso] was just an ordinary person from Rifredi who made this choice […]. It is something unexpected from many points of view and, eventually, something that anyone could do. Even if it is no longer the 1930s, participating in a revolution can still be done (Int. 5).

> He made us reflect on the figure of the hero and role models, even those positive. One key lesson Orso taught me is the importance of taking action, moving from political organisation to concrete deeds. This is far more compelling and serves as an example of translating words into action (Int. 8).

This process of autonomisation – the transition from being a transmission tool to being an agent interacting with the surrounding space – does not weaken subaltern geopolitical content but makes it an invitation to action in the given context. The Rojava Revolution is thus re-signified in the everyday spaces of Florence, signalling the presence of a potential subalterns' insurgency. In the subway near the Viale Corsica 81 squat, the central part of his last message was reported:

> Only by combatting the individualism and selfishness in each of us can we make a difference. These are difficult times, but do not give in to despair, do not ever abandon hope, never! (Orsetti, 2021, p. 3)

The wall speaks with Orso's words addressed to people in Florence. The Rojava Revolution and the Kurdish movement "may serve as inspiration for radicals all over the world. It will speak to the masses of disempowered people today, in Kurdistan as well as in Germany, in Turkey as well as in Norway" (Eiglad, 2012, p. 164) and Italy. However, the wall is understood as "everything that surrounds it and communicates with it" (Int. 7). It thus has a spatial and dynamic dimension, where political communication enters "unilaterally" (Int. 7) but then remains and interacts daily, becoming part of the environment. This means that its affective capacity depends on the dual political ability to mark the wall and maintain the trace, despite its potential erosion or removal (Int. 7-9). Murals and graffiti become part of the urban landscape reflecting certain actions occurring through that space. Thus, an activist frames the eighty-year-old man's resistance to eviction in Piazza Tasso, helped by friends and the community, as a 'drop' (Int. 9).

Within this context, the traces for Orso become a 'warm embrace', going beyond pedagogical, memorial, or solidarity purposes to paint the urban landscape. They do not act directly on individual choices but immerse actions within a politically affective atmosphere, leveraging on political communication and sensorial interaction. As some passers-by highlighted, the graffiti's aesthetic and colourful dimensions help make it part of the everyday imagination (Int. 15-16). Thus, "indirectly, it enters everyone's lives" (Int. 19). However, the urban landscapes generated by these traces are not static. Their existence is precarious; they may deteriorate or be erased because they are also contested, precisely due to their political nature. They always carry within them the constitutive act of space appropriation – even illegally – by those challenging the city's spatial order. Yet, it is precisely this act of appropriation that gives meaning to space:

> They leave a trace of human passage, which is not merely a narrative passage, and make a neighbourhood historical. Otherwise, everything would be just the Renaissance, frozen in an era that has passed and does not live now, does not pulse now with historical events and the people who have walked through it (Int. 14).

In contrast, even though a general attitude of appreciation and respect is observed, some do not agree with the appropriation of space, framing it as an issue of urban decorum (Int. 18). Some others reject the appropriation of space and Orso's political choice (Int. 10), confirming the political nature of the graffiti, which marks affinities and discordances in the public space (Awad e Wagoner, 2015). What remains is the inscription of Orso's and Kurdish struggle in the urban fabric of Florence. Subaltern geopolitical knowledge fades into local everyday atmospheres to be strengthened eventually.

> They don't make me think of the Middle East in general […] but they do make me think of the Kurds (Int. 14).

> I think that the images of Orso connect people to his decision to go there and fight a harsh, difficult situation (Int. 16).

> These writings change the landscape because they tell the story of a little-known struggle, making it alive here as well (Int. 12).

In conclusion, the traces in Orso's memory follow a process of autonomisation, which ultimately strengthens subaltern geopolitical content by inscribing the Rojava Revolution into Florence's urban environment. Firstly, they signal a political territoriality of those in Florence who identify with this revolution. Secondly, they imbue the landscape with political emotions, creating the conditions for sensory

experiences (Bowen, 2013) and thus acquiring affective agency. They become a 'warm embrace' that envelops and accompanies the everyday life of certain places. However, given their political nature, they are also contested and rejected. On the one hand, these traces indirectly enter the everyday imagination. On the other, they reproduce a political tension that lies at the heart of subalterns' agency. Ultimately, they keep the Kurdish struggle present within the Florentine context.

6. Conclusion. – In this article, I sought to fill a gap in the literature of subaltern geopolitics, which neglected urban mundane spaces, such as streetscapes, as a space for subaltern geopolitical knowledge circulation. By focusing on the representations of an Italian fighter fallen while battling against the Islamic State with the Kurdish YPG, in Syria, I demonstrated that street walls, squares, and public social centres premises are vectors of international affairs viewpoints. Furthermore, political graffiti, including other forms of streetscape decoration from below, often signals an intense activity of underground, marginalised, even illicit, political presence. Social movements and protesters utilise them "in their efforts to maintain, empower and materialize their own identities, narratives and aesthetics" (Pavoni, Zaimakis e Campos, 2021, p. 12). Therefore, scrutinising these traces unveiled connections and affinities between the Rojava Revolution and some Florentine youth's political emotions.

The analysis has focused on two key aspects. The first concerns the mundane spaces where subaltern geopolitical knowledge circulates. Here, attention is given to the strategies subalterns use to reclaim space and make Orso's figure and the political content linked to him resonate with individuals. I have demonstrated how Orso functions as a geopolitical gateway, adopting different aesthetics, interacting with various contexts and associations, and engaging with diverse audiences. The second aspect examines how these traces undergo a process of autonomisation from the intentions of their creators, becoming spatialised. At this point, they are no longer merely tools but acquire their own capacity to affect. They generate territoriality and atmospheres, shaping places and accompanying everyday life. However, they retain a divisive political element, both in their very existence and in their content. As a result, they re-signify and contextualise subaltern geopolitical knowledge, facilitating its circulation.

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