

Religion and Religious Places: Rethinking Hybridity

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Abstract

The Hybrid Nature of Religion and Religious Places

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The oratorio is a Nineteenth Century religious place molded as a center and a school for the young troublesome working class boys and young men of Turin, the capital city of the Kingdom of Sardinia, which occupied what today is the Italian Piedmont. The main promoter of the oratorio was a priest named Don Bosco. Within the walls the oratorio, Don Bosco molded the Salesians, a religious institution shaped by Don Bosco's pedagogical project: turning the brats of the city of Turin into little angels via the oratorio. The thesis explores the story of the oratorio, the Salesians and Don Bosco's pedagogical discourse as a way to criticize the core theoretical frame of postsecular geography, the understanding that "the religious" influences secular societies, which paradoxically reinforces the idea that religion is somehow an independent variable untouched by "the secular". Instead, what I claim is that "the religious" itself is a hybrid religious/secular entity. Religious places, religious institutions and religious discourses are shaped by political, social and economic issues: "the secular" and "the religious" are co-produced.

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1. Prelude and Introduction

1.1 The oratorio today

In Italy, the oratorio today is a place that functions as a youth center, a meeting place, a place for conventions and celebrations of different kind in every village and town around the peninsula. Situated outside of the church, it is where young people hang out on Saturday night, where they socialize and encounter their first lovers (as long as they are heterosexuals). It is the place where young couples receive their sexual education before getting married, and where kids play in the afternoons and during the summer. It is where country fairs are organized and where people can meet to spend some time with each other. It is owned by the Church and managed by priests. It is also a highly gendered place where young boys play soccer while young girls watch, and where the women of the town work as cleaners and keepers.

Considering my personal experience of the place, which I will explore in the next section of the thesis, and the work I carried out at the Queen Mary college, a thesis about how people experience the oratorio today (Bettani, 2010), I entered the field looking the disciplining of gender and sexuality in the birth of the oratorio. However, the archive and the analysis of the data surprised me and forced me to refocus my attention on a deeper story: the nature of hybridity. What follows is the story of the elements that pushed me towards the research questions and a wider critique of Geography of Religion and its understanding of hybrid religious/secular places.

1.2 Growing up in an oratorio

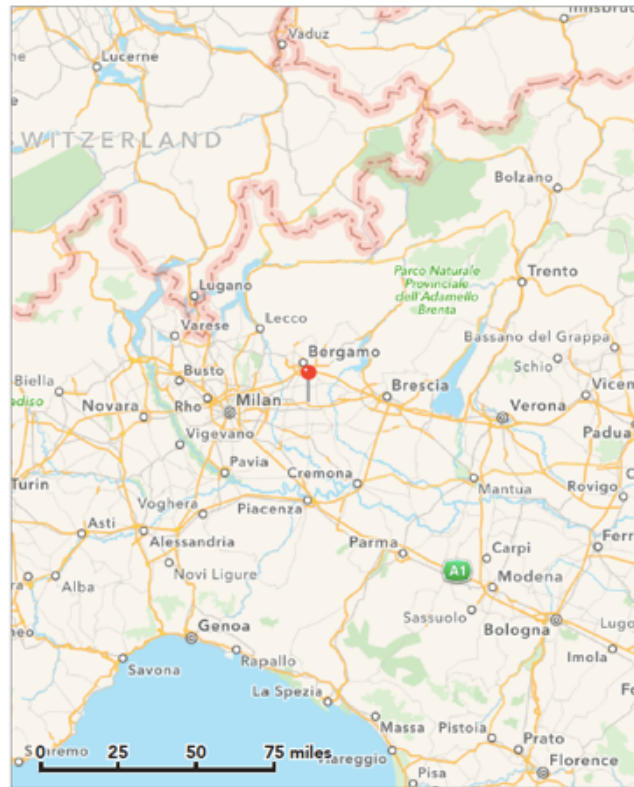


Figure 1.1. “Map of Bariano”. Source: Bettani, S. 2015

I grew up in a small Italian town called Bariano (see Figure 1.1), one of the many villages with just over 3000 inhabitants that constitute the rural constellation known as Pianura Padana: the heart of Northern Italy. While I was growing up there, the town had a primary school, a secondary school, one or two bars, a pizzeria, and not much else. This said, it could (and still can) proudly count on two churches, a convent, and a kindergarten partially managed by nuns. With the main church sitting at the center of the town and the convent welcoming the visitors entering the village from the East, it seems fair to claim that religious places define the geography of Bariano. While the church remains the most recognizable building, with its bell tower announcing every death, marriage and festivity happening in the town, the heart around

which the life of the village rotates is the oratorio.



Figure 1.2. “The oratorio in Bariano”. Source: Bettani, S. 2015

The oratorio in Bariano is a place that includes a soccer pitch, a basketball/volleyball court and a couple of small buildings (see Figures 1.2 and 1.3) situated a few steps from the church, one of the main urban points of reference for the citizens, and the social center of gravity of the town. If you are a kid who lives in Bariano, the oratorio is the place where you go to play soccer or basketball. The gym of the village is within its boundaries. During the summer, the priest – who can access the oratorio from his own backyard – projects movies on its wall, and the town fair is also held there. If there is a social event, big or small, everyone knows the oratorio is the place where it will happen. Besides a soccer pitch and a basketball/volleyball court, it also offers a chapel and a series of rooms that are used for catechism, conferences, and courses for couples who were about to get married, and can also be rented as meeting places. My mother and my father grew up in Bariano (like their parents and grandparents before them) and when they were

kids in the 1950s the oratorio functioned also as secondary school. Without a doubt, the oratorio is the central public space of the village.



Figure 1.3. “Pinocchio at the oratorio in Bariano”. Source: Bettani, S. 2015

More than anything else, however, the oratorio is a place for kids: it is where you go when you want to play with your friends (see Figure 1.4), and it is the place to be if you want to be popular in the village. Within its walls youngsters develop a powerful sense of belonging and experiment their social (and sometimes romantic) skills. Surely enough, the oratorio meant a lot to me and as soon as I found myself owning the academic tools I needed to examine it I decide to analyze the place as a geographer. During my years at the Queen Mary University of London, where I completed my second BA, I developed a project (Bettani, 2010) that included a total of 179 questionnaires, 7 in depth interviews, and 6 focus groups (with a total of 21 people), which allowed me to interact with men and women between 18 and 30 years old who experienced the

oratorio growing up, just like I did. The main purpose of the research was to understand how the participants defined the oratorio and the impact the place had on their own sense of identity.



Figure 1.4. “Tug of war at the oratorio in Bariano”. Source: Bettani, S. 2015

The results of the study indicated the participants had a lot of troubles defining the place as either religious or secular, because the oratorio is formally opened to people of different religions, cultures and ethnic groups, and because the activities carried out within its walls are not necessarily religious. Instead, the interviewees stated the place was built on “universal values” that supposedly transcend Christianity, such as respect for the others, friendship and love. As for the questionnaires, a total of 135 people described the oratorio as a place related to sports, games, movies and theatre, saying it is an important place for socialization and interaction. In comparison, catechism was mentioned only by 86 respondents as the main reason to visit the place. A very strong sense of belonging to the place was also mentioned by those who visited it regularly, and the same people described those who do not use the oratorio as either “bad kids”

or “trouble makers”. While for the interviewees defining the oratorio was difficult probably also because for them it just IS the public place of the village, they never dwelled on its definition, the oratorio certainly seemed to be a hybrid, complex space.

The research left me with a few important unanswered questions: why was the oratorio created? What are the values upon which it was built? And also, are religious values “universal values”? The best way to answer these questions seemed to be the path that brought me to the origins of the concept of oratorio and consequently to its founder Don Giovanni Bosco; the place where it was molded, Turin; and the congregation responsible for the creation of oratori across Italy and the world, the Salesians (sculpted by Don Bosco himself). This is how this project started: as an attempt to bring together personal experiences and academic curiosity regarding the religion, religious values and religious places. The empirical questions that drove me to this project lead me to a broader analysis of geography of religion and the concept of postsecularism. More specifically, I’ve become increasingly intrigued by the ways in which religious places can exist in a dimension between the public and the private, the religious and the secular: religious places are not only about faith, they are a matter of power and identity.

1.3 Introducing the dissertation

Geographers of religion have explored the relationships between religion, landscapes and environment, and the significance of religious places in processes related to power, politics and community building. These scholars have begun to underline how the spatial nature of religion intersects with other axes of identity, such as race, gender and sexuality. One of the main themes discussed by geographers in the last five years, is whether or not western societies are living in a postsecular era defined by a resurgence of the importance of religion in mainstream media,

politics and urban settings. Postsecular theories are a reaction to the notion of secularization, developed starting from the 1950s and 1960s, according to which “modernization necessarily leads to a decline of religion, both in society and in the minds of individuals” (Berger 1999, p.2).



Figure 1.5. “Map of Piedmont”. Source: Bettani, S. 2015

Scholars such as Justin Beaumont (2012, 2013, 2014), Paul Cloke (2015), Banu Gökariksel and Anna Secor (2015), Andrew Williams (2015) Claire Dwyer (2016), Jane Wills and Lina Jamoul (2008), Klaus Eder (2002, 2006) and Jurgen Habermas (2006, 2008) have been arguing faith-based organizations have nowadays an incredible power within social and political arenas, a power that expresses itself in a continuous crossing over in the public arena between “the secular” and “the religious”. I believe this is very simplistic perspective. In fact, by claiming “the religious” is important also in secular societies, postsecular geographers reinforce the idea that

religion is a somewhat independent entity that exists beyond the secular realm that it supposedly influences. What I argue is that religion is influenced by “the secular”, so much so that there is no “religious” without the political, social and economic issues that constitute “the secular”.

1.3.1 Introducing the case study

The dissertation examines the oratorio and the Salesians (salesiani in Italian), which are now known to be one of the largest congregation within the Catholic Church and missionary organization in the world, operating in over 130 countries and counting on more than 17.000 priests and 27.000 Salesian Cooperators (Salesians of Don Bosco, 2016). Within the Papal conclave of 2013, there were four Salesians out of 115 cardinals: no other Catholic order or congregation could count on so many cardinals. It seems fair to claim the Salesians have a lot of power within the Catholic universe. The oratorio, a youth center owned by the priests and usually placed just outside the church, is quite literally the place where the Salesians were molded, which were molded by a young priest named Giovanni Bosco.

Giovanni Bosco came from a poor family and grew up in a small village not far from Turin (see Figure 1.5). His story, and the story of the oratorio, is a journey that intersects religion and secularity. It also speaks to current debates in geography of religion regarding the postsecular nature of religious places, and how faith-based organization have established alliances with secular institutions to in an attempt to fight social problems such as poverty and marginalization. More specifically, the story of the Salesians opens the doors to a wider questioning of postsecularism and the hybrid secular/religious foundations upon which religious places and institutions are built.



Figure 1.6. “Painting of the original Oratorio in Valdocco”. Source: Bettani, S. 2015

In order to contribute to the discussion on postsecular geography, which I properly introduce in the literature review section of the dissertation, I use the case study of the oratorio and the Salesians to answer the following research questions: **1) How is the oratorio a challenge to postsecular geography? 2) What do the oratorio and the Salesians suggest about “the religious”?** The two questions focus on religion and religious places to explore whether or not the crossing between “the religious” and “the secular” is unidirectional like postsecular geographers imply (“the religious” influences “the secular”) or if “the religious” is indeed a religious/secular hybrid. In other words, I analyze the possibility that “the secular” is an intrinsic component of the politics of religion and religious places.

1.3.2 Introducing: Pushing Beyond Postsecular Geography

After I describe in the second chapter the methodologies used to collect the data I needed to answer my research questions, I use the third chapter of the thesis to introduce the reader to geography of religion. I trace the history of the subject, focusing on the major contributions to the field and exploring the latest debates. I conclude the chapter introducing the reader to my research questions, indicating how the dissertation places itself within the current debates on postsecularism and more generally on the hybrid nature of religious places. I then summarize my contribution to the field, a critique to postsecular geography.

There is a broad consensus in the literature that religion influences secular societies. Because of this, geographers have been claiming that the religious/secular boundaries need to be blurred. However, in doing so scholars have been paradoxically reinforcing the idea that “secular” and “religious” are two separate entities to begin with. In fact, you need two entities for any boundary to exist. Furthermore, the “blurring” invoked by postsecular geographers is unidirectional: religious discourses and institutions impact secular societies. I suggest that what needs to be blurred is not the religious/secular boundary but our understanding of the concept of “the religious”. In fact, religion is shaped by “the secular”, just as much as “the secular” is influenced by religious discourses.

1.3.3 Introducing: How “the secular” shaped the oratorio

The first chapter of the results, chapter 4, introduces the reader to the historical and geographical context within which the oratorio was born. I then move on discussing the arguments behind the

need for an oratorio and the circumstances that made its shaping possible. In doing so, the chapter also takes into consideration the life of the founder, Giovanni Bosco, born in 1815, from his childhood to the founding of the oratorio. As it will be clear to the reader, exploring the function of the oratorio as a place for young troublemakers and an alternative to the correctional institutes of the city of Turin, I describe a religious place shaped by the social issues of the time, born at the intersection between the private life of its users and its founder and the public arena. The oratorio was a matter of morality and norms, but also of community building and identity: a place that constitutes a perfect example of the religious/secular hybrids that constitute “the religious” itself.

In fact, while the oratorio was a clear expression of Don Bosco’s will and ideas, it also responded to a need of the local government to take care of the mounting problem of juvenile delinquency in the city of Turin in the early Nineteenth Century. While certainly a religious place based on Catholic values, the purpose and function of the oratorio continuously crossed the barrier between “the religious” and “the secular”, reaching out to the brats of the city and responding to a social call made by the local government. This said, the oratorio was not simply the expression of a possible way in which religious discourses entered the social arena in order to tackle a certain set of social issues, a fact that would make the oratorio a postsecular place. Instead, the same secular issues addressed by the oratorio directly shaped the place. In fact, if those issues were different, the oratorio would have been completely different too.



Figure 1.7. “The Oratorio in Valdocco today”. Source: Bettani, S. 2015

1.3.4 Introducing: The Salesians, religious hybridities

Chapter 5 introduces the Salesians Congregation, molded by Don Bosco within the oratorio’s walls. Following the footsteps of the way in which the oratorio functioned, the Salesians adapted their purpose and their institutional frame to the secular social, political and economic issues of the time. In fact, at the time of the molding of the Salesians the formation of religious groups was forbidden by the Kingdom of Sardinia (the predecessor of the Kingdom of Italy). Thanks to his political connections and skills, Don Bosco avoided the problem by creating a congregation that was at the same time a group of free citizens in front of the State and a religious congregation in front of the Church. Thanks to their peculiar history, the Salesians are a perfect example of how religious institutions are really a religious/secular hybrid born through

dynamic processes that shake the foundation of “the religious” as a separate entity: once again, what we call “religious” and what we call “secular” are truly co-produced.

Shaped in the 1850s, the Salesians included both priests and laymen, who were free to be members without the necessity of taking any sort of religious vows. Just like the oratorio, the Salesians were and still are a hybrid creature. As I draw these conclusions, I ask myself whether or not this hybridity is actually a quality of religion itself instead of simply being a characteristic of the Salesians and their oratorio. In fact, is it possible for a religion to exist as separate entity without including elements of both the private and the public, “the religious” and “the secular”? Chapter 6 takes this under consideration exploring the gendered nature of the oratorio.

1.3.5 Introducing: Religious masculinities

The hybridity explored in chapter 4 and 5 has also a gendered dimension. Game, study and work: the oratorio was a place where troublesome boys (the age varied, from boys under 10 years old to young men in their mid-late teens) could find their own sense of belonging and identity. As a matter of fact, it was built to turn little male devils into little angels, to teach positive moral values and give a safe place to boys and young men who came from poor families and spent their lives wandering in the streets of Turin. The oratorio was meant to be both open and surveilled, a quasi-public place where boys and young men could play and study, sleep and eat, and learn to become “good boys”: an example of how religious places shape gender and sexual identities. As I explain in chapter 6, these gendered identities are a religious/secular hybrid.

The docile masculinity promoted by Don Bosco was his understanding of what it took to turn troublesome boys into both good Christians and good citizens. According to Don Bosco, a good Christian was a good citizen and a good citizen was a good Christian, and in order to become little Christian angels, the boys and young men had to be obedient workers and good students. As a matter of fact, the little angels' rhetoric upon which the oratorio was built was a combination of classist prejudice and morality, gendered models and religious discourses: a religious/secular mix. The chapter explores all this considering the pedagogical approach around which the oratorio and the Salesians were constructed and its impact on how the oratorio shaped the gender and sexual identity of the boys and young men who were invited to enter its doors.



Figure 1.8. “Painting of Don Bosco in Valdocco”. Source: Bettani, S. 2015

2. Methodology

2.1 Data Collection

In order to explore the shaping of the oratorio and the Salesians while also considering the pedagogical discourse upon which the oratorio was built, it was necessary to undertake an archival research. The units of observation were the documents published by: 1. Don Bosco; 2. The Salesians; 3. The Italian Secular Press. The time frame I was interested in runs parallel to Don Bosco's life: from the early Nineteenth Century, when Don Bosco shaped both the Salesians' pedagogy and his idea of oratorio, to death of Don Bosco in 1888.

2.1.1 Don Bosco's Documents

The Memoirs of Don Bosco were published in 1946. This was the first book I read. In his memoirs, the priest talks about his youth, his vocation, his dreams and his Oratorio. It is a diary written by Don Bosco himself that covers the period between 1815 (when he was born) and 1855. I then read his collections of essays and letters, like *Storia d'Italia* (1887), *Indice analitico delle Memorie biografiche di S. Giovanni Bosco* (1948), *Opere edite* (1976) and "*Don Bosco*": *Opere e scritti editi e inediti* (1929), and his *Epistolario* (1955).

This series of letters, essays and memoirs introduced me to the key character "Don Bosco". I examined how and why he decided to create the oratorio and the salesian order. I also explored his vision and his thoughts. The reading of Giovanni Bosco's documents was doubtlessly

fundamental for my dissertation. In fact, I needed to know everything I could about the father of the oratorio, if I wanted to understand why the oratorio was shaped as it was, how it evolved and what was the place of religion within its walls.

2.1.2 The Salesian's Documents

I visited the library of the Università Pontificia Salesiana (Pontifical Salesian University). The Pontifical Salesian University is one of the core institutions for those who want to understand the evolution and the nature of the Salesian pedagogy. The main purpose of my visit was the chance to examine the monthly magazines printed under the title *Salesian Bulletin*, the official publication of the Salesian Congregation, a magazine founded by Giovanni Bosco in 1877. More specifically, I read most of the edition of the magazine that were published between 1877 and 1888.

I also visited the archive of the Istituto Storico Salesiano (Salesian Historical Institute) where I found a series of historical documents related to the *raison d'être* of the Salesian Congregation and the oratorio. More specifically, I accessed the collection called *Società Salesiana (Serie seconda)* - Salesian Society (Second Series) - where I found letters and memoranda written by Bodrato Francesco (1857-1889), Tomatis Domenico (1874-1903) and Francesco Cerruti (1885-1917), some of the key members of the Salesian Congregation who helped Don Bosco shaping the Salesian Pedagogy.

Accessing both archives gave me the chance to collect documents that allowed me to better understand how the oratorio was conceived, how it was organized and what kinds of activities

were thought to be appropriate within its walls. I was very interested in the letters that Don Bosco exchanged with the other Salesian priests: I wanted to read how they talked about the oratorio, what that space meant for them, how it changed and why. I was also very curious to see if I could find letters that the Salesians sent to Italian newspapers and magazines: was there anyone who criticized them, and how did they respond? That's why I also made went through the articles that were published by the Italian secular press on both Don Bosco and his oratorio.

2.1.3 The Italian Secular Press

I accessed the online historic database of the newspaper called *Il Corriere della Sera*, the most important Italian newspaper, which was founded in 1876. More specifically, I searched the headlines of the papers that were printed from 1876 to 1888, looking for any article that contained keywords such as “Don Bosco”, “Salesiani” or “oratorio”. This allowed me to detect whether or not Don Bosco and the Salesian pedagogy ever found themselves in the midst of a national debate or controversy in the time period that interests me. Plus, the research also gave me the opportunity to include the perspective of those who wrote about the Oratorio but did not belong to the Salesian order.

I also examined the historical archives of both *La Stampa* (the most important newspaper of the city, founded in 1894) and *La Gazzetta del Popolo*, a newspaper founded in 1848 and printed until 1983. As I did for *Il Corriere della Sera*, I looked through the digital archives of both newspapers searching for keywords such as “Don Bosco”, “Salesiani” and “oratorio”. Once again, I looked for articles that talked about the Oratorio Salesiano and the Salesian pedagogy from the perspective of the Italian secular press - in this case the Torinese secular press. The fact

that the first oratorio was created in Turin, just like the Salesians themselves, is the reason why the two major Torinesi newspapers were quite significant for my archival research.

2.1.4 Visual Methodologies

As I was visiting the archives in Turin, I collected a series of historical pictures that depicted Turin in the Nineteenth Century, Don Bosco and his oratorio and the Salesians. I was lucky enough to find the original plans for the construction of the oratorio in Valdocco, of which I made a series of pictures. The pictures and the plans were constituted an extremely interesting window onto the world Don Bosco faced. In fact, watching the landscapes and the faces of Nineteenth Century Turin and Piedmont was a key step in the development of my understanding of the historical context in which the oratorio was shaped.

2.1.5 Landscape Analysis

I personally visited the places where Don Bosco grew up, the city of Turin and the Piedmont region to have a better sense of the story I was telling. In order to interpret the landscapes and welcoming them into the dissertation, I took a series of pictures and kept a journal with my thoughts regarding the places I was visiting. This process was very helpful, especially at the beginning of my journey, when I was still framing the project and trying to establish the contours of my dissertation. In fact, witnessing how Don Bosco's life and mission shaped the region and the places that belong to his personal story allowed me to better understand the nature of its plan and the impact the Salesians had on the region.

2.2 Data Analysis

I coded the material collected and I gathered all the possible information regarding the history of Piedmont/Turin, the oratorio Salesiano e the Salesian pedagogy within a database (DB). The DB included three columns:

- 1 - History of Piedmont/Turin;
- 2 - oratorio Salesiano;
- 3 - Salesian pedagogy.

I then divided these three columns in two sub-sections: *Quotes* and *Happenings*. In the sub-section *Quotes* I recorded all the direct quotations - including those that express opinions, emotions and reactions - I needed to answer my many questions and my research questions. The subsection *Happenings* included all the information related to historical events, institutional decisions and reports. Therefore, the final DB was actually structured around six columns:

- 1.1 - History of Piedmont/Turin - Quotes;
- 1.2 - History of Piedmont/Turin - Happenings;
- 2.1 - Oratorio Salesiano - Quotes;
- 2.2 - Oratorio Salesiano - Happenings;
- 3.1 - Salesian Pedagogy - Quotes;
- 3.2 - Salesian Pedagogy - Happenings;

Each and every row represented the source from which the information included in the columns derived. The “source row” included the name of the author, the book title, the page number and all the data I needed to identify the origin of the document (reference numbers of the archive, etc.).

The database was my point of reference for both manifest and latent contents. Manifest content is “the visible, surface content” (Babbie, 2006 p. 319), the actual words used by the authors. Latent content “the underlining meaning of a communication” (Babbie, 2006, p. 319), which does not depend entirely on the exact words chosen to compose the documents I gathered. In other words, I was not only interested in listing the “facts” that I encountered throughout the archival research. In fact, I also pushed myself to understand the powerful, discursive nature of the oratorio: how it was represented and described, how people felt about it, how they experienced it and what they thought about it.

In order to explore the subtleties of the data I collected, I then exported the DB in Atlas TI. This allowed me to examine both etic and emic variables. The etic codes were:

- Masculinity;
- History;
- Oratorio;
- Religion;
- Pedagogy.

Grounded theory helped me develop the emic codes (after I collected instances of masculinity, history, oratorio, pedagogy and religion discussed in the documents), which I identified as I explored the archives and compiled the database. This method involved four stages:

1. The identification and comparison of concepts that arise in the analysis of multiple documents;
2. The analysis of the relationships among the identified concepts;
3. Once the patterns become clear, the concepts that result irrelevant to the research questions were eliminated and the remaining concepts were simplified.
4. The information resulting from the collection of the concepts were included in my final analysis.

The resulting emic codes were:

- Post-religiosity;
- Post-secularity;
- Little Angels;
- Little Brats;
- Working Class;
- Economy;
- Politics;
- The Religious;
- The Secular;

- Hybridity.

The quotes I selected had also to be translated. The final step once I collected the material was the translation of the documents from 19th century Italian to contemporary English. The operation was carried out in a few steps. First of all I translated 19th century Italian into contemporary Italian, which is my first language. Most of the documents contained footnotes that helped me completing this step. Once the first phase was completed, I translated the texts into contemporary English.

Between the construction database and the analysis carried out in Atlas TI via open and axial coding, I was easily be able to answer both my research questions.

3. Pushing Beyond Postsecular Geography

This section of the thesis frames my contribution within a wider range of studies that constitute the so-called geographies of religion. More specifically, the dissertation speaks directly to postsecular geographers, who focuses on the increasingly important role played by religion, religious places and religious institutions in shaping today's local and global geographies, economies and politics (Beaumont 2012, 2013, 2014; Eder 2002, 2006; Gökarıksel and Secor 2015; Habermas 2006, 2008; Matustik 2008; Jamoul and Wills 2008). Challenging the idea that modernization has brought a decline of religion, pushing religious discourses towards "the private" and away from "the public", these scholars underline how in the last 20 years religion has been increasingly more and more important in so-called secular societies in the Western hemisphere.

Geographers have used the concept of postsecularity to analyze the dynamics that blur religious-secular boundaries in the case of spaces of care (Barnes and Prior 2009; Williams et al. 2012) social movements (Barbato 2012, Dabashi 2012) the body (Olson et al. 2013, Gökarıksel 2015), and more generally postsecular partnerships such as those between local governments and faith-based organizations, established to replace a shrinking public service sector (Jamoul and Wills 2008, Cloke and Beaumont 2013, Bondi 2013, Sharma and Guest 2013, Williams 2015). An example is London Citizens, a broad-based organization based in London that brings together leaders of different religious communities, citizens, students and local politicians creating campaigns that focus on issues such as raising the minimum wage in the city (Jamoul and Wills, 2008). Geographers have also argued that religious fundamentalisms and radicalisms have reshaped the centrality of faith in contexts such as the media and the general public

consciousness. For instance, especially after the terrorist attacks in New York in 2001, Islamic fundamentalism has been recently discussed and mentioned in innumerable political discourses, newspapers, magazines and even academic articles (e.g. Hopkins 2006, 2007, 2008).

By examining the importance of “the religious” within secular societies, postsecular geographers paradoxically reinforce the idea that religion is an independent category. In fact, you need two categories, namely “the religious” and “the secular”, in order for any blurring of boundaries to happen. Furthermore, even if postsecular scholars claim the division between “the religious” and “the secular” need to be blurred (Olson et al. 2013, Williams 2015), the postsecular blurring of the religious/secular division is always unidirectional: “the secular” is blurred by the presence of some kind of religious entity. The choice of combining the terms “post” and “secular” is in itself an expression of this, as it clearly indicates a condition in which something happens to “the secular” but it does not question the idea of “the religious”. Instead, I believe what needs to be blurred is not the secular/religious boundary but our own understanding of religion and religious places.

I vigorously argue that religion itself is shaped by specific social, political and economic circumstances. This is quite different from claiming that religion and religious institutions and places are born in a specific time and place (Kong 2001), a statement I agree with but that once again identifies religion as a somewhat fixed entity. What I claim is that religion is not fixed but dynamic and fluid, a wave in a “postreligious” dimension that reverses what postsecularism claim, namely that “the religious” plays a big role in the constitution of “the secular”, in favor of the idea that “the religious” finds its place on the map through its economic, social and political

functions. There is no “religious” outside of the “secular”, just like there is no “secular” outside of the “religious”: what exists is a total and continuous bidirectional co-shaping.

In this chapter I explore the geography of religion, its origins and its evolution. As I do so, I use the work of some of the key authors to underline the steps that have defined the politics of the subject throughout the history of the complicated relationship between geography and religion, the same steps that brought geographers to adopt postsecularity to describe the state of today’s relationships between “the secular” and “the religious”. I begin by tracing the origins of the field of study. Then I discuss how geographers talked religious issues in the late 19th and 20th centuries. In the latest part of the chapter, I then focus on the themes currently discussed by geographers of religion ending with a description of my contribution to the field.

3.1 The Origins of a Subject: Religion is Everything

Geography and theology have been close since ancient times because the relationship between man and the earth has always been a central element in the questions regarding God and the creation of humanity (Glacken 1967). As a matter of fact, geography of religion has a long history that began in Ancient Greece. The first known Greek mapmaker, Anaximander, saw the world as nothing but the expression of a religious principle, which he defined as the inviolability of spatial order: “his diagrammatical efforts to show mathematical proportion in the cosmos and the world map were deemed to be more a ‘religious’ pursuit than a ‘scientific’ one” (Kong 1990, p. 356). This said, it could be argued that geography was merely a subject of religious investigations. Paraphrasing Isaac (1965), more than a geography of religion, it was a “religious geography”, which is not the focus of this dissertation.

The expression “geography of religion” was coined in the German book *Ideas about Religious Geography*, written in 1795 by Gottlieb Kasche. In his book, Kasche (quoted in Buttner 1987, p. 223) writes “the geography of religion convincingly teaches the advantages of Christianity as compared to any other positive religion.” This said, while the term “geography of religion” was born in the Sixteenth Century, the subject was alive and well even in the 14th and 15th centuries, when books like *De dimensione terrae* (Peucer, 1556), *Orbis terrae partium succincta explicatio* (Neander, 1583), and *Cosmographie* (Heylyn, 1652) considered the importance of theology, divine revelation and ecclesiastical histories in shaping the geography of Europe and beyond. In these early phases, religion was considered quite literally the generative force behind everything else. To a certain extent, “the secular” did not even exist as religion represented a truth and a set of untouchable beliefs beyond society itself.

The 16th and the 17th centuries also witnessed the development of the so-called biblical geography, which was based on an emerging interest in the historical geography of biblical time (Kong 1990, Park 1994). In other words, geographers were invested in trying to identify the exact position of places named in the Bible. The subject was fairly popular. In fact, “Martin Luther and John Calvin apparently deliberately used maps as vehicles for the propagation of their religious views,” and “the earliest printed Bible known to contain a map (a heavily stylized map of the Holy Land) is dated 1525” (Park, 1994, p. 11). Biblical geography was very successful, and even famous Nineteenth Century geographers such as Ritter and Huntington visited the Holy Land to document its historical geography.

Geography and religion had other themes in common. In fact, in the 18th century natural theology was also born. Theological explanations of geographical phenomena were extremely fashionable: nature was considered as something that was divinely created. In other words, the scholars who adopted the physicotheological perspective believed that the wisdom of God could be found in nature (Kong, 1990). This also constituted the origin of the interests towards religious landscapes, which geographers cultivated throughout the Eighteenth, Nineteenth and the early Twentieth Centuries. Natural theology was the culmination of the geography of religion born the Fourteenth Century: a subject that saw religion as the ultimate explanation and the Earth as the expression of a divine plan that existed beyond the reach of humanity. What was left to geographers was the description of the design of God.

While natural theology and biblical geographies are unmistakably milestones of what came to be known as geography of religion, it is also important to stress the role played by the Enlightenment in the evolution of the subject. As a cultural and scientific revolution, the Enlightenment pushed scholars from different academic fields to replace faith with rationality. According to this new intellectual stream, the Earth had to be considered the product of scientific laws, and not the mirror of God's will. During the Enlightenment, the focus of geography of religion moved towards the growing influence of Neo-Lamarckism and New-Darwinism, which highlighted the importance of evolutionary change caused by the environment, and therefore revolutionized both natural and social sciences (Park, 1994). As Buttner explains, "all at once it became important, with complete disregard of what had once been the task of the geographer of religion, to assess how far religion was determined by its environment, particularly by climate"

(1974, p. 166). Environmental determinism was born and its shadow extended far into the Twentieth Century.

3.2 The Twentieth Century: The Birth of the Secular

Environmental determinism continued to have a great influence on the early work of geographers of religion during the Twentieth Century. For instance, authors such as Semple (1911) and Huntington (1943) adopted deterministic perspectives to describe the ways in which cultural ideas related to religion were shaped by the environment where these ideas were developed. For example, for the Jews hell is a place of eternal fire, while for the Eskimos hell is a place of intense cold, darkness and storm (Semple, 1911). This said, one of the most important shifts for the history of geography of religion happened in the 1920s and it was a direct consequence of Max Weber's work on the influence of religion and faith on economic and social structures. Starting from the 1905, the famous German sociologist published a series of texts: *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905), *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism* (1915), *The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism* (1915), and *Ancient Judaism* (1920). The books pushed social scientists to consider how religious beliefs influenced other social dimensions becoming part of the human motivation. It could be argued this is the point in which "the secular" was born, a social, economic and political dimension that existed outside of religion. However, geographers did not exactly embrace this shift right away focusing instead on the "motivational" aspect of Weber's theories while remaining close to the roots of the subject.

Moving away from environmental determinism, geographers began to consider religion as a motivational force that shapes environment and landscapes, and the related anthropo-geographical facts (e.g. transportation and communication routes, and human settlements). This was due also to the influence of the Vidalian school of geography, which refused environmental determinism in favor of an analysis of the impact of human activities on the landscape, and especially the Sauer's school of cultural geography. In fact, the majority of research that brings geography and religion together is the expression of the cultural geographical interests of the Saurian school, in which religion is considered a superorganic construct that influences the cultural landscape (Kong, 1990). Between the 1920s and the 1950s, spatial diffusion and patterns of religious groups became central to geography of religion, and scholars began to explore, map and describe cemeteries and pilgrimages, churches and sacred monuments (Hertz 1913, Rutter 1929, Deffonatin 1953, Isaac 1959). At this point, geographers were still far from considering the social, economic and political aspects of religion, which Weber highlighted. It was only in the second half of the Twentieth Century that geography of religion widened its horizons.

3.3 The 60s, 70s and 80s: Beyond Environment & Landscape

Generally speaking, during the 1960s geography of religion was still shaped by classic cultural geographic themes: 1) how environmental settings influence the evolution of religious systems; 2) the ways in which religious systems occupy different places around the planet; 3) how religious systems change the environment; 4) the distribution of religions around the world. In fact, geographers' fascination for the descriptions and mapping of sacred landscapes and religions grew (Isaac 1961, Zelinsky 1961, Fickeler 1962, Licata 1967, Sopher 1967). The political, economic and social implications of religion were still ignored. Things began to change

in the following decades, when slowly but steadily the impact of “the religious” over “the secular” became more and more important for geographers.

In the 1970s and 1980s, geography of religion grew around three main trends. 1) Some scholars were still interested in mapping and describing pilgrimages, cemeteries and religious settlements (Hardwick 1971, Darden 1972, King 1972, Howett 1973, Crowley 1978, Shortridge 1976, 1977, 1978, Martin 1978). 2) Others cared deeply about the religious background of different environmental issues (Dunbar 1970, Toynbee 1972, Cobb 1972). 3) Geographers of religion became also extremely curious about the symbolic, cultural nature of religious places, and the social and political dynamics that shape religious communities (Turner 1974, Tuan 1976, Shaw 1988, Tanaka 1981, Shilhav 1983, Hershkowitz 1987, Jackson 1989). More specifically, geographers discussed how symbolic meanings of places emerged from religious values and structures. Foster (1981), for instance, examined the meanings attached to rural churches in Minnesota and Manitoba, while Wheatley (1971) focused on the cosmological symbolism of the Chinese city. Plus, geographers looked into the symbolic nature of pilgrimages, exploring the connection between pagan and Christian veneration of nature (Nolan 1986) and discussing Buddhist sacred sites and pattern of movements (Tanaka 1981).

Scholars also came to terms with the fact that in each and every society there is a plurality of cultures, and that “the religious” often includes political issues. For example, Shilhav (1983) in his study of the requirements for the construction of a new synagogue, highlighted the importance of the conflict between religions and secular agents in the demand for land.

Lewandoski (1984) studied Madras and explained how the state uses the Hindu religion to justify

the re-shaping of the urban landscape: from the naming of places to the erection of statues dedicated to religious heroes, used to fight against the old colonial symbolism. In these two decades, the questions geographers asked began to include terms such as segregation, symbolism, post-colonialism and community: social and political issues related to religion entered the subject for the first time.

3.4 The 90s: Religion as a Social and Political Issue

The real golden age of geography of religion was the decade that started in 1990. Pushed by the so-called “new” cultural geographers, who claimed that geography should address the wider social context in which cultures are constituted and expressed, geography of religion quite literally flourished. Geographers began to consider the relationships between religious and national identities, analyzing social dynamics such as the institutionalization of Islam (Rath et al. 1991, Lewis 1994, Dwyer and Mayer 1995) and the structure of religious communities (Eade 1991, 1994; Bowman 1993, 1994). They also became interested in exploring the relationships between race, ethnicity and religion, such as Hinduism (Nye 1993), aboriginal cults (Jacobs 1993) and Islam (Prorok 1994, Naylor and Ryan 1998, Samad 1998).

They began to analyze the contested nature of sacred places, which are often the epicenter of conflicts and political claims, like the war in Jerusalem (Friedland and Hecht 1991), the disputes between religious groups and tourists (Graham and Murray 1997), and the production of cultural meanings built of religious landscapes (Pan 1995, Kong 1993, 1999, Good 1999). Geographers also became extremely interested in how religion intersects gender, focusing for instance on the contested nature of the role of women in religious communities (Pacione 1990, Rayaprol 1997,

Dwyer 1998, 1999, 1999a, 1999b). Chidester and Linenthal (1995) claimed that a sacred space is not something that it is simply constructed or discovered, but it is also owned and claimed by people with certain interests. “The religious” came to be analyzed as a contested entity and in the 90s geographers of religion understood it was finally time to explore the power relations that govern religious places.

3.5 Geography of Religion Today: Secular/Religious Binaries

In an attempt to indicate possible future directions for the subject, in 2001 Lily Kong publishes an article titled *Mapping ‘new’ geographies of religion: politics and poetics in modernity*. She suggests geographers should move beyond the “officially sacred”: “other religious places fully deserve research attention, such as indigenous sacred sites, religious schools, religious organizations and their premises (communal halls), pilgrimage routes (apart from the sites themselves), religious objects, memorials and roadside shrines, domestic shrines and religious processions and festivals” (Kong, 2001, p. 226). Plus, “religion, like class and race, must be a matter for historical and place-specific analysis rather than taken as a priori theory” and it has to be considered “at various scales: global, national, regional, local and, indeed, that of the body” (Kong, 2001, p. 226).

At the same time, geographers need to remember that “religious place holds different meanings and exerts different influences on such different constitutions as women, children, teenagers and the elderly,” and “works clearly needs to be advanced to interrogate public-private dialectics in the context of religious place and experience” (Kong, 2001, p. 227). Finally, considering both moral geographies and issues of social justice, geography of religion, according to Lily Kong,

cannot afford to avoid asking another key question: “how are competing constructions of good/bad, just/unjust played out in space, between different religious conceptions and between religious and secular conceptions?” (Kong, 2001, p. 228). Following Lily Kong’s suggestions, moving beyond the “officially sacred” and considering the multiple scales of religious discourses and the dynamics between “the religious” and “the secular”, geographers developed a series of trends that reshaped geography of religion.

3.5.1 Religion at Multiple Scales

Geographers of religion have argued that, in order to properly understand the geographical dimension of religious discourses, it is necessary to consider the local-global structures of religious institutions: there is a need for a multi-scalar approach. It has been claimed that global religious dogma and beliefs are constantly negotiated locally. In fact, geographers have argued that local believers and members of religious institutions (priests, monks, etc.) do play an active role in interpreting global religious values (Vanderbeck et al., 2010; Sadgrove et al., 2010; Valentine et al. 2010; Valentine et al, 2013; Gorman-Murray and Nash 2014).

Local communities should also be better understood, especially because “geographers still know little about how communal identities in specific places are built around a sense of religious belonging” (Brace, Bailey and Harvey, 2006, p. 28). For this reason, geographers have begun to consider the symbolic and the communal aspects of the spatiality of religion. However, an unambiguous definition of religion—or even religiosity—does not exist, as Voas (2006) reminds us. Religion is not only a set of doctrines. Instead it is also a collection of norms and practices that influence social and political issues affecting many aspects of our social lives: marriage and

fertility, socioeconomic position, morbidity and mortality, identity, employment, education, health care and social services, planning, criminal justice and immigration, and ethnicity (Voas, 2006). Furthermore, geographers have also argued that religion is a part of everyday life even at the scale of our own body (Gokariksel, 2009). Thinking about the body as a space where the religious and the secular intersect and compete, Gokariksel claims that religion is fundamentally an embodied practice. The body is central to the production of the self and it is considered our most intimate space.

At this stage, geography of religion has become a subject interested in how the religious and the secular intersect at different scales: the local and the global, the community and the body. Continuing the work started in the 1990s, when “the religious” became a social and political issue, geographers are now considering religion as a collection of norms and practices that influence the social and political realm, not only as a set of beliefs. The last piece needed before the collapse of the division between “the secular” and “the religious”, the theme of postsecular geography, is the understanding of how religion is part of how people construct their own sense of identity.

3.5.2 Different Axes of Identity

Throughout the last fifteen years, geographers continued to ask questions about the intersections between gender, race and religion. However, while in the 1990s geographers of religion tended to consider gender as a synonym for “women”, in the 2000s they discussed both masculine and feminine religious identities. In fact, geographers have explored the role played by religion in defining specific kinds of masculinities (Hopkins 2004, 2006, 2007) and the role of

women in communities and families around the world (Dwyer 2000, Falah and Nagel 2005, Ayari and First 2006, Aitchison et al. 2007). During that decade the concept of diaspora became extremely popular among geographers of religion, and many of them explored the role religion plays in shaping the spatial nature of diasporic identities (Dwyer 2000, Samers 2003, Houston and Wright 2003, Clayton 2005, Silvey 2005, Aitchison et al. 2007). It has also been claimed that religious beliefs do play a very important role in defining gendered and racialized identities within specific contexts, and that the consequences of these defining-processes have a profound impact on how societies are organized, represented and experienced (Hopkins 2011, Laurent et al., 2013, Matthey et al. 2013, Masson McGinty et al. 2013, Roded 2013). The literature that focuses on these issues has been largely shaped by the concept of intersectionality (Brown, 2011).

Questions regarding how “the religious” influences people’s sense of identity have become more and more sophisticated. In fact, geographers seem also to be increasingly interested in discussing how subjects negotiate the intersections between their religious and sexual - especially queer - identities. Many geographers have begun to underline how important it is to consider how gay and lesbian people negotiate their religious identity through contradictions, struggles and resistance: queer people can be religious and religious places can be queer(ed) (Munt 2010, Browne 2010, Yip 2010, Moussawi 2013, Jaspal 2014, Seitz 2014, Hopkins 2014, Siraj 2014, Taylor and Snowdon 2014). As Wetzel argued in his 2014 chapter — titled *Is it possible to be queer and Catholic?* — “while some might argue that queer exit from the church is inevitable, this leaves real problems” (2014, p. 69). As a matter of fact, “strained relationships, tense interactions and tentative reconciliations between religious beliefs and queer sexualities, between

theologies and LGBTI politics, are arguably hallmarks of the contemporary world” (Gorman-Murray and Nash 2014, loc. 646).

Intersections between sexuality and religion happen both in private and public spaces and geographers should “be more attentive to potential tensions between the values, interests, and rights of the different equality strands (race, gender, disability, religion and belief, sexual orientation, age)” (Valentine and Waite, 2012, p. 489). Geographers have claimed that everyday encounters and negotiations should be explored to better understand how people deal with the many contradictions resulting from the intersections between faith, values and personal experiences (Valentine and Waite, 2012; Sadgrove et al. 2013; Anderson et al. 2013). Through these studies, “the religious” has acquired a new personal dimension, which geographers have attempted to include in geography of religion. This has pushed scholars to question the boundaries between what is religious and what is not, a key step in the blurring of the boundaries between “the religious” and “the secular”.

3.5.3 The Rise of Postsecular Geography

Postsecularism is one of the latest incarnations of geography of religion and a reaction to secularization theory, according to which religion interacts with modern societies fundamentally in four ways: 1) religious practices and beliefs regress into the private realm and move away from public places and politics (Habermas 2008); 2) the logic and organization behind religion and religious institutions are excluded from social and political processes (Martin 1978); 3) the importance of religion in individual and social lives declines (Berger 1969); 4) religious practices lose their importance (Brown 2001). On the contrary postsecular theory is the

expression of the understanding that the boundaries between the religious and the secular in modern societies are blurred.

Geographers have focused on how “religion, faith communities and spiritual values have returned to the center of public life, especially public policy, governance, and social identity” (Beaumont and Baker 2011, p. 1). For instance, the interest towards the ways that faith-based organizations connect with local communities and needs has pushed some geographers to begin discussing the idea of postsecularism focusing on the unstable nature of secular/religious binaries, also from a civil society/social justice perspective (Jamoul and Wills 2008, Cloke and Beaumont 2013, Bondi 2013, Sharma and Guest 2013, Williams 2013). More specifically, it has been claimed that over the past two decades western societies have been stricken by a series of crossing-overs in the public arena between the secular and the religious.

In other words, “previously assumed divides between secular (=public) and religious (=private) [are] being challenged” (Beaumont and Cloke, 2012, p. 2) and the boundaries between religious and secular motivations are increasingly more and more blurred. In fact, “[...] faith-based organizations are often exploring possibilities for mainstream social service provision and participating in alliances to influence policy-making in particular and processes of political contestation in general” (Beaumont 2008, p. 2012). Faith-based organizations and institutions are often encouraged to be involved in processes that produce community cohesion, regeneration plans of urban areas and poor neighborhoods, and political engagement within local communities. It seems fair to claim that faith-based institutions have indeed become an integral part of what we call civil society offering answers to the many challenges created by secular

urban injustice and inequalities in collaboration with the state and local governments, a kind of partnership that could be defined as a “postsecular rapprochement” (Cloke, 2010).

Geographers have also argued that secular societies are increasingly becoming a place where religious discourses find fertile ground. If on one hand religious institutions are finding a new role in their interaction with the local governments and have begun to enter the public sphere once again (Eder 2002, 2008; Beaumont and Cloke, 2012; Cloke and Beaumont, 2013), on the other the consciousness around religious fundamentalism has brought religious discourses back to center stage (Jamoul and Wills 2008; Habermas 2006, 2008; Folmer, Fauzi Abdul Hamid and Beaumont, 2014). In fact, it could be argued that “religion is gaining influence in the public sphere [...] as a community of interpretation – contributing to public opinion on moral and ethical issues – and as a community of service and care” (Beaumont and Cloke, 2012, p. 10).

To sum up, geographers have adopted the notion of postsecularity as the base of a theoretical frame useful to examine the coproduction of secular and religious places and discourses and underline the new visibility gained by religion in the last 20 years in political, social and cultural arenas especially, but not exclusively, in Europe and the United States (Wills 2008, 2009, Baker and Beaumont 2011, Beaumont 2012, 2013, 2014, Cloke and Beaumont 2013, Olson et al. 2013 Cloke 2015, Gökarıksel and Secor 2015, Williams 2015, Dwyer 2016). However, instead of claiming there is an epochal shift towards a postsecular age (Habermas 2006, Taylor 2007), geographers have used postsecularity as a concept useful to describe contextual processes happening in specific spaces, dynamics that produce a complex blurring of religious-secular boundaries (Beaumont and Baker 2011, Cloke and Beaumont 2013).

This understanding can be applied to spaces of care, locally situated and ethically driven contexts where services are offered to people in need (Barnes and Prior 2009; Williams et al. 2012); social movements (Barbato 2012, Dabashi 2012) and trade unions mobilizations (Holgate 2012); the body (Olson et al. 2013, Gökarıksel 2015); and more generally the landscape of neoliberal governance, considering how postsecular partnerships have been filling the gaps of a shrinking public service sector (Jamoul and Wills 2008, Cloke and Beaumont 2013, Bondi 2013, Sharma and Guest 2013, Williams 2013). For instance, Gökarıksel and Secor (2015) have described new configurations of religion, politics, and public life in Turkey, while Cloke, Sutherland and Williams (2015) have focused on the role religion and religious places, such as churches, played in the protest put forward by the Occupy Movement. In other words, geographers have analyzed specific sites, practices and spaces where both secular and religious voices come together putting aside moral and ideological differences to engage in common political praxis.

This said, it is also important to underline that geographers have also criticized the alleged newness of postsecularism (Ley 2011, xiii) arguing that spaces that cross religious/secular boundaries are far from new (Williams 2015). In fact, scholars have already recognized the historic role played by religious organizations and narratives in political activism (Marsh 2003, Smith 1996), education (Dwyer and Parutis 2012, Watson 2013), psychotherapy (Bondi 2013) and social welfare (Prochaska 2006). Similarly, it has also been claimed that secular societies have always been constituted through theo-ethical discourses (Assad 2003, Milbank and Oliver 2009).

3.6 Bringing it all together

Geography and religion have been connected since Ancient Greece, when mapmakers believed the world was the expression of a religious principle. The number of interests and trends that have shaped the academic subject we call “geography of religion” have been many. From the mapping of places named in the Bible to theological explanations of geographical phenomena; from determinist approaches to the way in which the environment shapes religions to the consideration of how religious activities sculpt cultural landscapes; through the centuries scholars adopted a series of different perspectives to envision the way in which geography should embrace religion. In the Twentieth Century, the subject was hugely influenced by the classic themes of cultural geography, according to which geographers should consider how religious systems change the environment and map the distribution of religions around the world. This said, through the 60s, 70s and 80s academics were still interested in mapping religious settlements and describing how the environment influences religious beliefs. It was only towards the mid-80s and early 90s, when the “new” cultural geography was born, that geographers became interested in the political and symbolic meanings attached to religious places, their contested nature and the power relationships that shape them.

Geography of religion today is interested in how religion intersects with race, gender and sexuality in generating senses of identity and place. Exploring both personal beliefs and religious institutions, geographers have understood the importance of considering the multiple scales of religious discourses, from the global down to the body, and are increasingly engaged in researches that underline the instability of the boundaries between the religious and the secular. In the last ten years, geographers have embraced the concept of postsecularity criticizing the

secular thesis according to which religion has lost its influence on modern societies. Postsecular geographers examine how religious discourses are not only alive and well but they are also increasingly important in political, social and economic arenas around the globe.

This said, while criticizing secular theory for reinforcing “the religious” and “the secular” as separate categories and claiming religion has lost its importance, postsecular geographers fail to destabilize “the religious”. In other words, blurring the religious/secular boundaries still requires the existence of the two categories. Paradoxically, by claiming that secular societies have been built upon religious discourses and that religion institutions are key social, economic and political players, postsecular geographers are reinforcing the idea that religion is an independent entity. What’s missing from this picture is the fact that religion itself is shaped in relation to the social, economic and political circumstances that shape the secular. The “blurring” of the religious/secular boundaries carried out so far by geographers of religion is essentially unidirectional: “the secular” is blurred by the presence of religion. What we need is not a blurring of the boundaries between “the religious” and “the secular”, but a blurring of our understanding of religion itself. This is where my contributions comes in, as a way to demonstrate religious places are shaped as a response to a certain set of social, economic and political needs. In a certain sense, if we consider postsecularity to be an important theme for geography, we should also consider the idea of a “postreligiosity” to underline how religious places exist only in relation to the secular: a total and continuous bidirectional co-shaping.

3.7 Beyond Postsecular Geography: My Contribution

By exploring the origin and the nature of Don Bosco's oratorio and the Salesians, I claim that religious places and institutions are shaped by the social, political and economic circumstances produced by history. This is very different from arguing that religion is born in a certain moment in time and within a certain context (Kong 2001), a statement I perfectly agree with but that reinforces the idea that religion is somehow a fixed entity. Instead, I use the case study to explain how religion is truly a wave that adapts to "the secular", which in turn is wrapped and defined by "the religious". The religious/secular elements shape each other and depend on each other: if a historical circumstances changes, "the religious" adapts; when religious institutions change, "the secular" is reshaped. This is a step beyond postsecularism, which by definition reacts to secularism reiterating the importance of religion in secular societies. Instead, what I analyze is the role played by "the secular" in the shaping of "the religious". In order to do so, I ask: **1) How is the oratorio a challenge to postsecular geography?** As I answer this question, I also raise another issue: **2) What do the oratorio and the Salesians suggest about "the religious"?** This second question is meant to underline the fact that, and this is what I suggest, religious places and religion constantly live in a dynamic dimension continuously shaped by the social, political and economic circumstances of a particular historical moment.

A religious place such as the oratorio is shaped by the historical, social, economic and political circumstances in which it is built. These circumstances are not only the background, the foundations upon which the place is built. Instead, they become part of "the religious", which (re)shapes itself to adapt to the new input. In turn, the oratorio influences senses of belonging and identity, gender and sexuality and class. In other words, the oratorio and the Salesians allow

me to claim that “the religious” and “the secular” are truly co-produced. A term such as postsecularity, which clearly indicates something (post) happens to “the secular”, is therefore quite meaningless precisely because nothing happens to “the secular” without a change in “the religious”.

In the thesis I coin the term “postsreligiosity” with a touch of humor to underline the fact that if geographers insist in giving credit to postsecularity we will at least need another term to balance the equation and portrait the consequences “the secular” has on “the religious”. In the following chapters I begin by exploring the historical circumstances in which the oratorio was shaped. I then move on to examine how the Salesians were shaped and how they grew. Finally, I analyze how Don Bosco promoted a certain kind of submissive masculinity wrapped in a religious rhetoric that was shaped by the social, economic and political circumstances of the time.

4. How “the secular” shaped the oratorio

4.1 The molding of a hybrid religious place

The chapter discusses the contexts in which Don Bosco’s oratorio was born and shaped. In the first part, I introduce the historical context that characterized Europe and the region where Giovanni Bosco was born. In this part of the chapter, the reader will find information regarding Piedmont and the Kingdom of Sardinia, and also the Savoy House and the economic and social issues that affected the inhabitants of their reign in the first decades of the Nineteenth Century. I then introduce Turin and the problems faced by the city, including high rates of poverty and unemployment, criminality and overcrowding.

I then move forward indicating that one of these problems was the presence of a big number of poor children and young people who lived in the city streets of, without parental supervision, stealing and begging in order to survive. Finally, I explore how the local government responded to the problems created by these *monelli di strada* (street brats) and how the Church found itself unable to promptly react to the social crisis that swept Turin. The second part of the chapter chronicles the birth of Giovanni’s Bosco oratorio. I begin by introducing Giovanni Bosco’s background: his childhood and his path towards priesthood. Then, I describe how the idea of oratorio was conceived, and how that place was developed and cultivated, spending some time to discuss where the oratorio was born, its first steps and the early evolution.

In the chapter I begin to address the first research question, exploring how the oratorio was structured as a reaction to the historical circumstances in which the place was molded. “The religious” finds its material expression in the oratorio but in doing so it also reveals the

contextual nature of religion. Owned and managed by a priest, the religious place in fact was clearly shaped around “the secular”. Even before starting the journey through Nineteenth Century Italy, it is important to reiterate that what I claim here is not simply that a religious place is born in a particular historical moment, a statement that is both undeniable and true. Instead, I push the argument forward using the oratorio as an example of how “the secular” is an indispensable ingredient of “the religious”: they both exist simultaneously in a never-ending reshaping. The oratorio adapted itself to the social issues of Turin, which in turn changed because of the shaped adopted by the oratorio. This is a clear critique to the unidirectional religious/secular blurring of postsecular geography, according to which religion influences the secular realm.

4.2 Voices From the Archives

4.2.1 The wider historical context



Figure 4.1. “Italy in 1815”. Source: users.dickinson.edu, 2016

Don Bosco was a Nineteenth Century man who lived from 1815 to 1888 in Piedmont, in Northern Italy, a region that touches Switzerland and France, protected by the half-circle of the Western and Northwestern Alps. It was part of the Kingdom of Sardinia, which was indeed a respectable player in the European political landscape of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries and in the 1860s became the core around which the Kingdom of Italy was born. Turin, the most important urban center of the region and the capital city of the Kingdom of Sardinia, was the first capital city of Italy, from 1861 to 1864. The region belonged to the House of Savoy. In fact, the Kingdom of Sardinia was also known as the Kingdom of Savoy. It included Piedmont, Sardinia, Nice, Savoy and Liguria.

The Savoy is one of the oldest royal families in Europe. Its origin can be traced back to the Tenth Century, when Savoy was part of the Kingdom of Burgundy. The founder was Umberto Conte Biancamano, who died in 1050, a knight of the German king Conrad II. Through the centuries, the Counts of Savoy became the Dukes of Piedmont-Savoy and then, in the Seventeenth Century, Kings of Sardinia. The Peace of Utrecht, in the 1713, which settled the aftermath of the War for the Spanish Succession and involved the French, the Austrian, the Spanish and even the British thrones, assigned the Kingdom of Sicily to Victor Amadeus II (1666-1732), Duke of Savoy: this is how the family earned the royal title. The Treaty of London in 1718 forced Victor to cede Sicily to the Austrian Hapsburgs in exchange for the Kingdom of Sardinia. Liguria, which used to be the Republic of Genoa, was annexed to the Kingdom in 1815.

Both the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars constituted terrible blows for the Savoy family. In fact, the strength of the Napoleonic army forced king Victor Amadeus III (1729-

1796) and his successor, Charles Emmanuel IV (1751-1819) to give up Nice and Savoy, which became part of the French Empire. Piedmont became a free-passage region for Napoleon, and Charles abdicated in 1798 in favor of his brother, Victor Emmanuel I (1759 - 1824) and retired in Sardinia. When Turin was occupied in 1798 by the army of Napoleon, the city became the capital of the French Department of the River Po. It was during this period (between 1798 and 1814) that the walls were almost entirely removed, a urban factor that constituted an important variable during the population growth of the Nineteenth Century, allowing the city to grow beyond its historical boundaries.

Victor, who was forced to live in Sardinia too, returned to Piedmont after Napoleon was defeated in 1814, the year of the Congress of Vienna, which gave back to the Savoy House a part of Savoy, Liguria and Nice. After the final downfall of Napoleon at Waterloo, in 1815, Victor was also able to reclaim the remaining part of Savoy. Turin was once again the capital of a kingdom. This was a factor that played a major role in defining the social issues that I describe in the next section and that also shaped and were shaped by the oratorio, as people were pushed towards the city. The same goes for the many wars in which the Savoy family was involved and the cultural footprint left by the French, which influenced the liberal revolution that shaped the political life of the kingdom and the Salesians, the religious society molded by Don Bosco, as I will explain in the next chapter.

4.2.2 Turin: City of Beggars

Between 1814 and 1848, Turin went through some of the most ground-shaking changes of its history: unprecedented demographic growth, migration towards the urban environment, and economic changes became the protagonist of a century throughout which the urban-experience changed radically. In 1814, the number of inhabitants of the city and the surrounding areas was 84,230. By the 1830s the population had risen to 122,424 to then reach the 136,849 mark in 1848. The pattern was mirrored in other cities around Europe and was partially the consequence of the end of the Napoleonic wars.

In Turin the population growth was extreme and was mainly pushed by the migration of poor peasants who were escaping from the countryside. Furthermore, especially in the first decades of the Nineteenth Century, Turin was different from cities like London or Manchester. In fact, compared to industrial Northern European and especially English cities, Turin did not experience a quick growth in manufacturing jobs. On the one hand, there was certainly an industrial awakening, but for the most part the manufacturing sector was still family based. On the other hand, in the first decades of the Nineteenth Century the condition of the peasants worsened quickly due to the formation of large estates and the loss of family ownership of land. In other words, the peasants migrated looking for any possible mean to survive towards a city that was still unable to offer enough manufacturing jobs.

Looking back through the archives, during those years Turin was an overcrowded crossroad made of contradictions and social problems, possibilities and exploitation. The daily life of the urban working class was extremely hard. Prostitutes, beggars and workers of any kind belonged to a “wounded, angry, sick humanity who tried to survive using all the possible means” (Levra

1989, p. 15) in a difficult urban world. The problems faced by the population were terrible, and included a sharp increase in the number of beggars, homeless and indigents, chronically weakened and in need of care. Inadequate nutrition and hunger brought a high risk of sickness and an even higher mortality rate, especially among babies and children. The life expectancy in the city of Turin at the time was around 35 years, which was still slightly higher than the mean registered throughout the kingdom. Lack of hygiene and more generally bad sanitary conditions were a key feature of the slums of the city, and frequent epidemics of cholera, typhus and smallpox were just a natural consequence. Various kinds of fevers and infections, tuberculosis, bronchial and lung diseases were increasingly more and more common in Turin, and the increase in prostitution brought a great number of venereal diseases. More generally, illiteracy and the abandonment of religious practices were coupled with drunkenness, domestic violence, a rise in criminal activity, suicides and illegitimate birth, which were balanced but an increase in the number of infanticides.

The members of the aristocratic class and the local government were extremely worried about the problems of Turin. For instance, this is what count Luigi Francesetti di Mezzenile said in 1827 during a public speech given to the members of the Chamber of agriculture and commerce of the Kingdom's capital city:

“We are surrounded, every single day we are besieged by beggars; the number is so overwhelming that, even if all these people were really poor and none of them vicious, we could not have neither the means nor the time to stop and help them all. We are therefore

forced to move on in our path ignoring their crying and their touching prayers, which should indeed never hurt the ear of an ordinary man and especially the ear of a Christian man¹.”

The problem was indeed difficult to underestimate and ignore. Vagabonds and beggars had invaded streets, squares and staircases. Street violence and crime became regular occurrences. Here is an example of a letter sent by the Vicariate during those years, it was written by a policeman called Pierre Corso in 1837:

“For some time now we have been witnessing in this city an extraordinary influx of beggars coming from country, especially from the Canavese, and we must consider the lack of food and the misery experienced by these people. Therefore, when I encountered a group of children and women living in these conditions, I decided not to arrest them, and to simply encourage them to return to their homes. It seems, however, that an increasing number of beggars, some of them in good shape, is becoming quite violent, walking around inspiring fear throughout staircases and public streets, not only during the day but also when the night comes; yesterday I decide to question one of these individuals, and he answered me he indeed worked collecting hay for two lire per day but that he also went around the streets begging in order to bring home something to help his family living above the level of misery they were forced to live in; another man called S. [...] Domenico, 40 years of age, was arrested yesterday night in Via Carlo Alberto while he was asking for money armed with a big stick; he stated that he tried to look for a job and that he was forced to beg because he could not find one.²”

As mentioned in the letter written by Mr. Corso, misery affected also women and children, and not only the men who were looking for a job and could not find one. As a matter of fact, both

¹ L. Francesetti di Mezenile, *Memoria sulla necessità di avvisare ai mezzi onde isbandire la mendicizia*. Letta nella tornata del dì 11 dicembre 187 della Regia Camera d’Agricoltura e di Commercio di Torino, Torino, Tip. Chirio e Mina, 1829, p. 3.

² Archivio Storico della Città di Torino, *Vicariato*, cart. 21 fasc. 35, minuta di lettera del Vicariato al Primo Segretario di Stato per gli Interni l’11 giugno 1837

children and women were actively involved in trying to earn a living via prostitution and street crimes.

4.2.3 The Geography of the Poor

The four major Northern districts of the city (Valdocco, Borgo Dora, Vachiglia and Moschino) were those occupied by the impoverished peasants who moved from the countryside to the urban center looking for hope and a better life, and often finding nothing more than misery. The Moschino district was situated at the eastern end of what today is Corso San Maurizio, along the River Po. Historians and commentators have described it as the worst district of the city, a section of town that in 1835 was swept by a cholera epidemic:

The Moschino was a cluster of hovels whose cracked walls, blackened by tie, threatened to come tumbling down at any moment. It was the redoubt of vicious people, hostile to any form of order, greedy of other people's possessions, ever ready to shed blood, driven to evildoing by some fierce instinct. In it crime, poverty and prostitution shared the neighborhood as confederates. In his dearly sewer of vice, scandalous immorality was common, and horrible crimes and cruel murders were regular occurrences. [...] No one dared set foot in the Moschino after dark. Not even the police dared breach the barriers and engage that horde of criminals³.

The most populous of these districts was Borgo Dora, situated between Valdocco (on the west side) and Vachiglia (on the east side). It was characterized by a slaughterhouse and by a few rudimental factories that were born thanks to the water power that came from the Dora River. In fact, in the Borgo Dora district it was possible to find a sugar refinery, a gun factory, a textile

³ G.A. Giustina, *I misteri di Torino*, quoted by Levra in *Bracco, Torino e Don Bosco I*, 65-56.

mill and a wood-processing factory, leather works and a factory for the production of printing machineries. This said, the area was also the poorest section of town. Here is how the historian Levra⁴ describe the district's reality:

Poor people's ghettos, which had been forming through a process of spontaneous agglomeration of migrants gravitating towards the city, were systematically expanded. The first of this expansions took place in the Borgo Dora [...] Manufacturing businesses were gradually transferred into the area, most of them noisy, noxious and dangerous. The gunpowder works exploded in 1852, leaving many dead or wounded. A network of canals from the river provided waterpower, but also made the area dump and malodorous. In 1850, out of some 22.000 inhabitants in the area, 14.000 lived by the day's labor, and some 12.000 existed below the poverty level.

The Vanichiglia District was situated not far from the confluence of the Dora with the Po. The area was characterized by ditches and canals that were used to carry the water necessary to irrigate the fields. At the same time, the public sewer ran in the open here and the sewage was used for the irrigation. The second slaughter house of the city was here. Needless to say, sanitation was a major problem in the Vanichiglia District, which in the 1830s experienced also an outbreak of cholera.

As for the Valdocco District, it was an area that up until the 1830s was basically vacant. Situated along a slope towards the River Dora, Valocco was a dumping ground for the rubbles derived from the demolition of the old city walls. In the 1840s, the area experienced a quick development after King Charles encourage the expansion of the city towards the north approving the disposal

⁴ Levra, *il Bisogno*, in Bracco, *Torino e Don Bosco I* 64-65.

of public lands to private individuals. Small factories and houses were built here, and the population grew. The Valdocco District, which by the 1860s was a slum, was also known for the great number of poor young people and children and it was the place where, as I will explain later in the chapter, Don Bosco established his oratorio.

4.2.4 The Children of Turin

According to the State Archive of Turin, rich citizens and aristocrats had been complaining since the second half of the Eighteenth Century about the social dangers caused by the many jobless and illiterate boys (the age varied from kids less than 10 years old to young men in their mid-late teens) who were living in the street before Don Bosco and his oratorio came to life. In fact, even back in the 1760s there were already plans to build some kind of institutional house, not too dissimilar from the Dickensian workhouses, precisely for the youngsters who spent their days in the streets of the city, without a job and without any sort of professional training (Archivio Statale di Torino, Sezione 1, Materie Ecclesiastiche, 1761).

According to the historians Claudio Felloni and Roberto Audisio (1989), however, it was not until the 1840s that the problem of the “giovani discoli” (young brats) became truly important for both government and public opinion. The reasons have to be found in the radical changes that swept the capital of the Kingdom of Sardinia in the post-Napoleonic era. In fact, as I’ve already indicated in the section that describes Turin in the Nineteenth Century, by the 1840s the city was characterized by poverty, criminality and diseases.

On one hand, there were issues related to the fact that many children were forced or pushed to begin working in the farming and/or manufacturing sectors at a very early age. As an example of

the magnitude of the problem, it appears that in the Turin of the 1840s around 6000 adults were working the textile sector, and with them there were also more than 1000 children (Bravo, 1969). On the other hand, there were those children who quite literally lived in the streets of the metropolis. Some of them spent their days stealing and running from the police. Others, sometimes following the instructions of their parents, were simply beggars. The “*atti criminali*” section of Vicar’s Office, now preserved in the Historical Archive of the City of Turin, is filled with police reports that describe the problem. Here is an example from 1839:

“To whom it may concern, it should be known that, following complaints for petty thefts committed in this city, the police has been looking over the movements of a group of youngsters who are repeat offenders, and who recently were released from the Towers prison. They habitually commit their crimes in the streets away from their homes and their parents’ supervision, and spend their time gambling or doing nothing. They leave by stealing whenever they can from stands selling the most different things, including food. They have been known also to pick the pockets of unsuspecting people in order to be able to afford their vices.⁵”

Whether they were working, stealing or begging for money, these boys were all considered to be “problematic” or deviant by the authorities and the intellectuals of Turin (Felloni and Audisio, 1989). Truth be told, the problem went beyond the economic changes that were pushing the poor farmers out of the European countryside and towards the new industrial urban realities (a process that produced exploitation of the working class and poor living condition in the best part of the cities of the Continent). In fact, while the upper classes were acquiring a new sensibility towards the parents-child relationship, many working class families were falling apart. The archives

⁵ Archivio Storico della Città di Torino, *Vicariato, Atti Criminali*, vol. 107, verbale d’arresto di C. Antonio e altri del 28 dicembre 1839, p. 574.

indicate many working-class boys were abandoned by their parents, while others lost their parents and did not have a single relative who was able to take care of them (Archivio Statale di Torino, Vicariato, Corrispondenza, cart. 65, 1845). Here is an example, a young man called Pietro describing his misfortunes to the police as he gets arrested on the 17th of January 1845:

“My parents died when I was very young and I did not have a place to stay, nothing to live on and nobody to help me. I had no guide and I therefore worked as a shoeshine boy for some time. Then I got into trouble and I was arrested. Since then I lived in different prisons, the Senate prisons, the Correctional prisons, and those in Chivasso. I have never learned or worked at a proper job, and there is nothing I own.⁶”

And then there was Antonio, fifteen years old, who was accused of burglary and arrested on a cold night on the 22nd of November 1838. According to the report:

“He left the house of this father more or less a month ago because of the extreme poverty of his family. He was not yet able to survive on his own, and he was therefore persuaded by his father to make a living elsewhere. And this is what he did.⁷”

Poverty was quite literally destroying the relationships between the members of these families, and there were cases of boys who just decided to run away from home (Archivio Statale di Torino, Vicariato, Atti Criminali, vol 106, 1838). The problem was considered to be both moral and social. As a matter of fact, it is not uncommon to read reports and transcriptions of public statements describing the youngsters who invaded the streets of Turin as being not only

⁶ Archivio Storico della Città di Torino, *Vicariato, Atti Criminali*, vol. 113, verbale d’arresto di P. Pietro e V. Giacinto del 17 gennaio 1845, p. 9.

⁷ Archivio Storico della Città di Torino, *Vicariato, Atti Criminali*, vol. 106, verbale d’arresto di S. Antonio del 22 novembre 1838, p. 193.

“desperate” and in need of help, but also “amoral” and deviant. For instance, an early Nineteenth Century author, called Carlo Ilarione Petitti di Roreto (1790-1850), described the children of the Turin by writing in 1841:

“These poor creatures grew up in idiocy, poverty and pain, in complete ignorance of any religious and moral truth, defenseless against the many dangers to their moral life they meet up with in the work place. This is especially the case where many children of both sexes are grouped together, as is often the practice in factories. Drunkenness, moreover, that most damaging vice so common among factory workers, is not uncommon even among children [...] The result is immorality, the terrible effects of which are evidenced by the greater incidence of crimes and misdemeanors committed by these children, as compared with their counterparts in rural areas - this, according to law-enforcement statistics.⁸”

These youngsters without a family, who ignored every “religious and moral truth”, disturbed the gentlemen of the city and were involved in robberies and other deviant acts, were precisely the *monelli di strada* (little brats) who Don Bosco met when he began his activities as a young priest in the 1840s.

⁸ Carlo Ilarione Petitti di Roreto, 1841. *Sul lavoro dei fanciulli nelle manifatture*, quoted by Chiosso, *L’Oratorio di Don Bosco*, in Braido, *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, 95-96 (Translation by Arthur J. Lenti).

4.2.5 The Generala



Figure 4.2. “La Generala”. Source: www.cgmtorino.it, 2016

The strongest answer given by the local government to the problem of juvenile delinquency was the creation in 1845 of a big correctional facility dedicated to the youngsters of the city: its name was Generala. It was an old farmhouse originally built during the Seventeenth Century. As time went by, the building became a factory, then a correctional institution for women and finally a hospital for the treatment of infectious diseases. At the beginning of the Nineteenth Century, the old farmhouse went through a set of renovation under the guidance of the an architect named Giovanni Piolti (1803-1860). The new Generala had 300 individual cells, plus laboratories and a series of rooms for those who worked in the facility. The boys and young men who were held there were forced to be silent and to follow a rigid educational structure made of school, religion and craftsmanship or work in the fields (the Generala included also some land).

This institution was considered a modern, new approach to the problem, which supposedly took into consideration the moral, psychological and social circumstances experienced by the young

people who lived in the streets of Turin. This was carefully planned as part of a new set of social reforms, according to which young people of minor age who committed a crime and were convicted could not be incarcerated in a prison for adults. Generally speaking, these reforms were also the expression of a new ruling class, a combination of middle class and aristocracy, driven by technical expertise and strong moral beliefs.

More specifically, the Generala was a facility built just for juveniles and was based on article 28 of the penal code that was promulgated in 1839 by King Charles Albert himself. The article explicitly declared that delinquents of minor age had to be committed to a separate prison. The same penal code provided that only the minors who were found guilty of a crime with malice had to be liable for incarceration, thus excluding beggars and thieves. This said over 50% of the cases generally referred to the Generala were related to beggary, vagrancy and loitering, and in the first two years of operation of the prison only 26% of the commitments were by the court for criminal offenses (Audisio, 1987). In other words, the youngsters of the Generala, and of Turin more, were generally guilty of crimes against their own poverty.

4.3 Don Bosco and His Oratorio

While the government acted and tried to answer to this social problem, the Church found itself bounded by old institutional and power structures. In the 1840s, Turin hosted more or less 800 priests. By the mid 19th century, however, the Church began to witness a drastic drop in ordinations: a vocational crisis that affected also the capital of the kingdom. This problem was also expressed in the way that the believers interacted with the Catholic institutions. Generally speaking, in fact, in the Nineteenth Century “the climate of forced religious observance, a result

of social control, entered a period of crisis” (Stella 2011, loc. 336). This crisis was a consequence of the dynamism of the many popular uprising that shook Europe and the power of the Church, starting from the French Revolution in 1789. Unable to answer to the social challenges of the post-Napoleonic era, the majority of the members of the clergy in Turin tried to rely on their old parishes (territorial units in which a diocese is divided, kept under the supervision of a parish priest). The city was divided in 15 parishes, and each parish was managed by a pastor and by a couple of assistants. Within every parish there were chapels, schools, convents and charitable institutions of different kinds, which often required chaplains.

There was, however, a new generation of priests who fought against this old model, suggesting that the society of the Nineteenth Century required a new approach. Don Bosco belonged to this new wave of thought, and he rarely missed an opportunity to underline the inadequacy of the old parishes and pastoral practices:

“Most of the boys I collect know nothing of parish or parish priests [...] Most of these boys [either] are neglected by their parents [and are adrift] in this city, or have come into the city [as migrants] looking for employment and have failed to find any. [...] The fact that they find themselves away from home that they speak a different language, that they have no permanent lodgings, that they are not familiar with the places makes it difficult, if not impossible, for them to attend a parish church. Moreover, many of them are already grown up, at 18, 20, or even 25 years of age, but are ignorant of anything that has to do with religion.”

Born on the 16th of August 1815, Don Bosco was in fact a child of the Nineteenth Century and his childhood included some of the key elements that shaped the life of the young boys of Turin: poverty, the need to migrate to the city, and a problematic family.

4.2.1 The Man and the Priest: Who Was Giovanni Bosco?

The story of Giovanni Bosco's family mirrors the history of Piedmont. His great-great grandfathers and his great grandfathers were farmers and worked in *cascine* not far from Chieri and Castelnuovo d'Asti – today known as Castelnuovo Don Bosco (see figure 4.3), two little towns near Turin. His grandfather tried with no luck to move to town, while his father moved back to the countryside, more precisely in Morialdo, a small village near Castelnuovo. Filippo Antonio, Don Bosco's father, was a capable man and was able to earn back some of the land lost by his adventurous father.

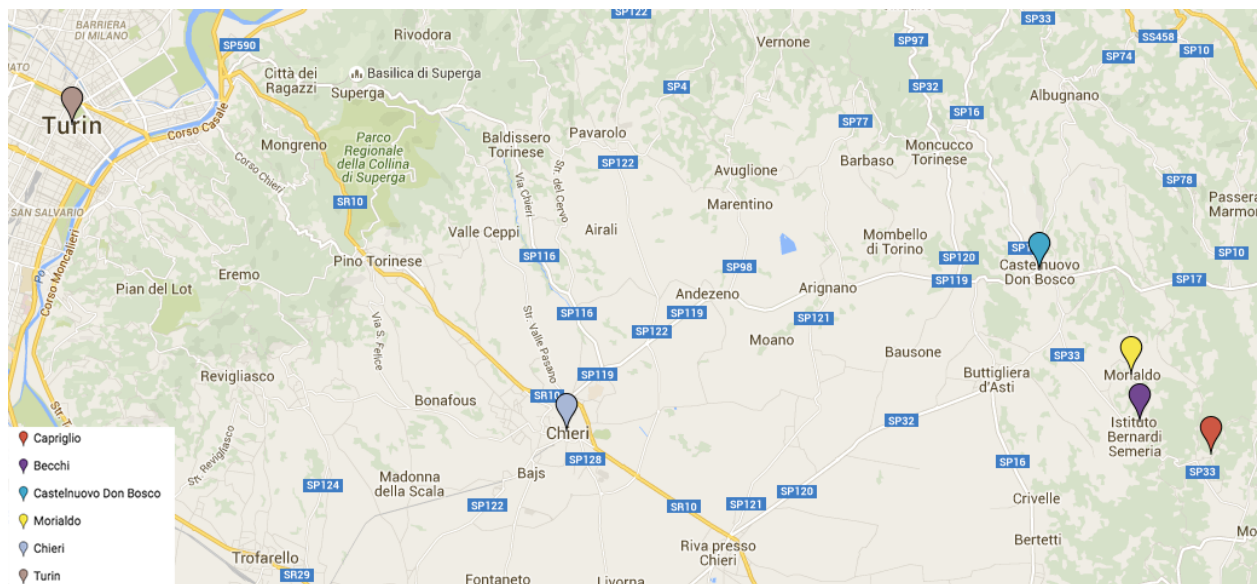


Figure 4.3. “Don Bosco Map”. Source: Bettani, S. 2016

Unfortunately, however, Filippo died from pneumonia on the 12th of May 1817, aged only 34, leaving the 9 years old Antonio (the son of his first marriage with a woman named Margherita Cagliero), his current wife, Margherita Occhiena and the two sons Margherita gave him, Giuseppe, born in 1813, and Giovanni, who was born on the 16th of August 1815. “I was not yet two years old when the merciful Lord hit us with a sad bereavement”, says Don Bosco in his memoirs (2012, loc. 620). He continues:

“My dearly loved father died unexpectedly. He was strong and healthy, still young and actively interested in promoting a good Christian upbringing for his offspring. One day he came home from work covered in sweat and imprudently went down into a cold cellar. That night he developed a high temperature, the first sign of a serious illness. Every effort to cure him proved vain. Within a few days he was at death’s door.”

The death of Filippo Antonio hit the family hard. Plus, 1817 was also a year of famine and bad crops. The family (Margherita, 29 years old, her invalid mother in-law, Margherita Zucca, 65 years old, and the three brothers) was forced to leave the *cascina* and settle in the *Little House of Becchi*.

Drought and famine lasted until 1818. The poverty was absolute. According to the custom of the region, Antonio was the one destined to become the head of the family. It is important to underline here the significance of the fact that Giovanni grew up in rural Piedmont and the role that Margherita, his mother, played in pushing him towards the Church. As Lenti (2010a, p. 172) explains “the Piedmontese, the peasant in particular, was an industrious, hard working and persevering achiever, though not at all an unpleasant or unsociable person”. Furthermore,

Catholicism was extremely strong in the region. In fact, the parish was the centre of both religious and social life in the small villages scattered around the Piedmontese countryside. As for the mother, Don Bosco (2012, loc. 669) himself tells us that:

“When I was still very small, she herself taught me to pray. As soon as I was old enough to join my brothers, she made me kneel with them morning and evening. We would all recite our prayers together, including the Rosary. I remember well how she herself prepared me for my First Confession. She took me to church, made her own Confession, then presented me to the confessor. Afterwards, she helped me to make my thanksgiving. She continues to do this until I reached the age when she judged me able to use the sacrament well on my own.”

The role of Margherita in Giovanni’s life cannot be underestimated, especially if we consider his choice to become a priest. As indicated by Lenti (2010a, p. 173) Margarita taught Giovanni that God is always present, and the belief in constant presence and surveillance will become one of the strongest values of the future Don Bosco. According to Father Lamoyne (1886, p. 18-19), her biographer:

“Margherita knew how powerful a force in a child’s life such a Christian education is; she knew that teaching God’s law every evening from the catechism and recalling it often during the day is the best means of making children obedient to their mothers. She therefore rehearsed the questions and the answers of the catechism over and over until the children committed them to memory”.

Another aspect that turns Margherita into a central figure of this story is her will to see Giovanni learning how to write and read, and keep on studying, which was both unusual and ambitious for

a poor family. It was not until the 1860s that training colleges for teachers were born in Italy, and Giovanni Bosco's primary school (which he attended between the age of 8 and 10 in a small village of Capriglio) was managed by a priest: his name was Father Lacqua. The school was a two-year program, which included reading, writing, catechism, arithmetic and Christian Doctrine (Lenti, 2010a, p. 176). What is interesting about the two years he spent in primary school is the growth of his love for other children, as he himself claims (2012, loc. 781). In fact, it was precisely during primary school that Giovanni felt the first push towards what will become his future mission of caring for boys and young men:

“Many times you have asked me at what age I began to take an interest in children. When I was ten years old, I did what was possible at my age and formed a kind of festive oratorio. Take note. Though I was still pretty small, I was studying my companions' characters. When I looked closely at someone, I could usually gauge what he was thinking [...] I acted as arbiter, and everyone accepted my decisions with good grace. But it was to hear my stories that they flocked around me [...] I drew on many sources for my anecdotes - sermons, catechism, lessons, and stories I had read in *The King of France*, in *Wretched Guerino*, and in *Bertoldo and Bertoldino*.”

Margherita encouraged Giovanni to cultivate his storytelling abilities and pushed him to continue his studies. However, his brother Antonio did not agree with the idea of letting Giovanni study at the family's expense. To ease the situation at home, Margherita decided to send Giovanni to *cascina* Campora to work as a stable boy. It was 1827, the kid was 12 years old. Soon after, the young Giovanni was then sent to the town of Moncucco where he was hired to work in the *cascina* Moglia as a stable boy and a cowherd.

After two years, Giovanni went back home, where Margherita, Michele (her brother) and Giovanni Zucca (nephew of Margherita Zucca and legal guardian of Giovanni and his brothers) forced Antonio, now 21 years old, to divide the Bosco estate. It was a decision that allowed Giovanni to be free from his older brother's authority. This happened in 1829-1830. In 1829, Giovanni (who was 14 years old) met Father John Colosso, an old priest who was living in Morialdo as a chaplain. Aware of the troubles in casa Bosco and impressed by the youngster, Colosso took Giovanni under his protection. As Don Bosco recalled (2012, loc. 959):

“He undertook to take me for one lesson a day. To keep Antonio happy I was to spend the rest of the day helping him in the fields. [...] It was then that I came to realize what it was to have a regular spiritual director, a faithful friend of one's soul. I had not had one up till then. [...] From then on I began to savor the spiritual life, up to then I had acted in a purely mechanical way, not knowing the reasons.”

Giovanni spent one year with Father Colosso as a full time student and a servant, during which he began his journey towards priesthood. In his own words:

“Father Colosso had become my idol. I loved him more than a father. I prayed for him and served him willingly in every way I could. My greatest happiness was to do things for him; and, believe me, I would gladly have given my very life to make him happy. [...] On his part, the holy man loved me so much that he would frequently reassure me: ‘Do not worry about your future. While I am alive I shall see to it that you lack nothing; and I shall provide of you for when I am gone⁹’”

⁹ Bosco, Giovanni, 1989 *Memoirs of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales from 1815 to 1855. The Autobiography of Saint John Bosco*, New Rochelle: NY, Don Bosco Publications, p. 42.

It was after Colosso suddenly died in 1830 that Margherita pushed Antonio to complete the separation of the estate (*Little House of Becchi* and a few acres of land). The house was split in two - Antonio kept the main bedroom, the little stairway, the stable and the woodshed, while Margherita, Giovanni and Giuseppe were awarded the kitchen, the little bedroom, the portico and the hayloft (Lenti 2010a, 208). It is not clear how the acreage were divided - still, we are talking about very small tracks of land. Soon after, in 1831, Antonio got married and Giuseppe moved to Sassambrino together with Margherita and Giovanni, who went back to his education.

Giovanni Bosco studied in Castelnuovo (where he was hosted by a tailor who was also the singer of the parish) and then in Chieri, living in Morialdo. Here, between the 1830 and 1841, Giovanni walked down the path that finally allowed him to become a priest. He enrolled in the *regio collegio* in 1835. While living at the seminary, Giovanni received donations (shoes, clothes, etc) from the people of the village that allowed him to survive and continue his studies. This charity was very common. When the time came to access the sacred order and become a priest in 1840, however, cleric Bosco lacked the assets required by the Church. Nonetheless, he was able to use the land inherited from his father and, thanks also to the financial help of his brother Giuseppe and a close friend, he was finally able to receive the priesthood in 1841, in Turin.

At this point, Don Bosco found himself in front of three options: 1) becoming a preceptor and work for a rich man; 2) working as vice-curate in Castelnuovo; 3) living a life as the chaplain of Morialdo. He decided, however, to create for himself a fourth option: remaining in Turin and work at the Convitto Ecclesiastico of St. Francis, a religious institute where priests could study, work and live. It was a residential institute for the formation of priests, who came to the Convitto

to cultivate their knowledge of the scriptures and connect with likeminded people. The young priest began to interact with the people of Turin, offering confessions, teaching catechism and visiting convents and prisons. More specifically, Don Bosco found himself surrounded by hundreds of migrants coming from the countryside, very poor people, including boys and young men, living in the streets of the big city or locked up in a prison cell: this is precisely the moment when his idea of oratorio was originally conceived.

4.3 The Origins of the Oratorio

The term “oratorio” had been circulating for centuries before Don Bosco decided to make it his own. Originally, it was used to signify a place where people went to pray (*orare* means *to pray* in Latin) or a community of people who get together to pray. In Italy, the first oratorio of this kind was created by St. Filippo Neri in the 1550s, in Rome. Neri used his own bedroom in the residence of the Confraternity of Charity to organize meetings where people meditated and prayed together. His oratorio was then moved to the garret above the church. “Oratori” were also the meetings held by the students of religious schools in Lombardia and Veneto in the Eighteenth Century, which focused on prayers and catechesis. Only in the Nineteenth Century, however, the oratorio became a place that was meant to welcome and help the poor, and especially the young poor. The capital city of this new idea of oratorio was Turin. But how did it all start?

In 1841, under the guidance of Don Giuseppe Cafasso, Don Bosco began visiting the prisons of the city. As he says in his memoirs:

“I saw large numbers of young lads, 12 to 18 years of age, fine youngsters, healthy strong and alert of mind. But how sad to see them idle there, infested with lice, lacking food for body and soul. I was horrified. [...] What shocked me most was to see that many of them were released full of good resolutions to go straight, and yet in a short time they landed back in prison, within a few days of their release.¹⁰”

Furthermore, Don Bosco began to meet the boys and young men where they worked and in the streets of the city.

“Hardly had I registered at the Pastoral Institute of St. Francis, when I met at once a crowd of boys and young men who followed me in the streets and the squares and even into the sacristy of the church attached to the Institute. But I could not take direct care of them since I had no premises.¹¹”

These “premises” became the oratorio. Looking at the biographical sources, it is possible to find two main versions of the “birth” of the oratorio. According to one of them, Don Bosco (quoted in Lenti, 2007b, p. 43) conceived his idea during the visits to the prisons and began organizing meetings in the sacristy of the Church St. Francis:

“The idea of the Oratories arose from my frequent visits to the prisons of this city. In these places, where spiritual and material wretchedness held sway, one met many boys and young men in the flower of their youth, with lively minds, good hearts, who could well become the consolations of their families and the pride of their country. Instead they were detained there in a state of degradation and made the reproach of society. [...] Experience also showed that as one helped them gradually to become aware of their

¹⁰ Bosco, Giovanni, 1989 *Memoirs of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales from 1815 to 1855. The Authobiography of Saint John Bosco*, New Rochelle: NY, Don Bosco Publications, p. 182.

¹¹ Bosco, Giovanni, 1989 *Memoirs of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales from 1815 to 1855. The Authobiography of Saint John Bosco*, New Rochelle: NY, Don Bosco Publications, p. 187.

human dignity [...] many of them changed their behavior even while still in prison, and on being discharged lived in such a way as never again to have to be sent back to jail. [...] To put this perception to test, we began to give appropriate religious instructions in the prisons of this capital and a little later in the sacristy of the Church of St. Francis of Assisi; and so began the gatherings on Sundays and holy days [the Oratory]. These gatherings were open to the boys and young men who were discharged from prison, and to those who during the week gathered [with nothing to do] in the squares and the streets, as well as to those who [if they had a job] would be found in the factories. [...] It was the year 1841 [when it all began]. The boys who attended averaged about seventy.”

There are, however, those (see Stella, 2011) who indicate that the Oratorio was born three years after, in 1844. During that year, Don Bosco ended his three years at the pastoral institute (*Il Convitto*) and Don Giuseppe Cafasso found a place for him in the Refuge of the Madeleine Nuns, where he was expected to become a chaplain. There, however, the young priest began a new phase of his work with the boys and young men migrants of the city. He began to organize meetings in his room for them. He would teach boys and young men catechism and spend time with them. Soon, the group of people involved grew, and Don Bosco began to call his meetings *Oratorio di S. Francesco de Sales* (Oratorio of Saint Francis de Sales), the saint of the rebirth of the Catholic faith. These gatherings were free, open to any young boy who had the will to join the others. Plus, the boys and young men not forced to attend church services in order to access the meetings. There is no data indicating why young women were not included in these gatherings. Probably, this was simply an expression of the culture of the time, a key element of the shaping of the oratorio, as I will reiterate in the conclusions of this chapter, according to which educational places were usually strictly gendered. Italy saw an increase in number of mixed boys/girls educational institutions only after the reform of 1962: more than 100 years after Don Bosco’s birth.

4.3.1 Finding a Place and a Purpose

While the oratorio began with Sunday catechism and prayers, it soon became something more complex: a place where youngsters went to play and work, study and socialize. In fact, as soon as the oratorio found a physical, stable location, Don Bosco began immediately to expand its purpose. It all began in 1846, after two years in which the increasing number of youngsters and a series of ordinance coming from the city forced the priest to relocate his meetings seven times mainly throughout the Valdocco district:

1 – **October 20, 1844/December 1, 1844:** The Oratorio was held at Barolo’s Home of Our Lady, Refuge of the Sinners, in the Valdocco district of Turin;

2 – **December 8, 1844/May 18, 1845:** The Oratorio was held at the Unfinished Little Hospital of St. Philomena, in far from the Refuge of the Sinners;

3 – **May 25, 1845:** Don Bosco and his followers met at the Holy Cross Cemetery, St. Peter in Chains, short distance northeast of the Barolo Refuge;

4 – **June 1/July 6, 1845:** The Oratorio was held outdoors and in various churches around town, still using the Refuge as a rendezvous point;

5 – **July 13, 1845/December 1845:** The meetings were held at St. Martin’s at the Dora Mills, in the Borgo Dora district;

6 – **January 4, 1846/March 1846:** The Oratorio found his home at Father John Baptist Moretta’s House, a short distance west of the Barolo Refuge in Valdocco;

7 – **March 1846:** The Oratorio was held at the Filippi Field, near the Pinardi property in Valdocco, which became the ultimate home of Don Bosco’s oratorio.

On the 1st of April, 1846, Don Bosco finally found a stable location for his oratorio. The home of the new oratorio was owned by Mr. Francesco Pinardi, and it was placed in Valdocco. Pinardi was an immigrant born in Varese, Lombardy. On the 14th of July 1845, he bought a two-story house and the surrounding land in the Valdocco district and on the 10th of November of the same year he leased it to Mr. Pancrazio Soave, who was interested in starting a starch manufacturing business. While Soave and Pinardi were establishing their contract, a shed was being built to work as a laundry, since the place was not far from the Dora River. The shed, however, was excluded by the Pinardi-Soave contract and Mr. Soave, who knew Don Bosco, notified the priest of the availability of the shed and invited him to visit the place. As Don Bosco himself wrote:

“There was a long shed; one side of its roof leaned against the wall of the house, and the other ended about three feet above the ground. If it were necessary, it could be used as a woodshed, but not much else. To get into it I had to bend my head so as not to bump against the ceiling. *I cannot use it*, I said. *It is too low. I will fix it to suit your needs*, Pinardi graciously suggested.¹²”

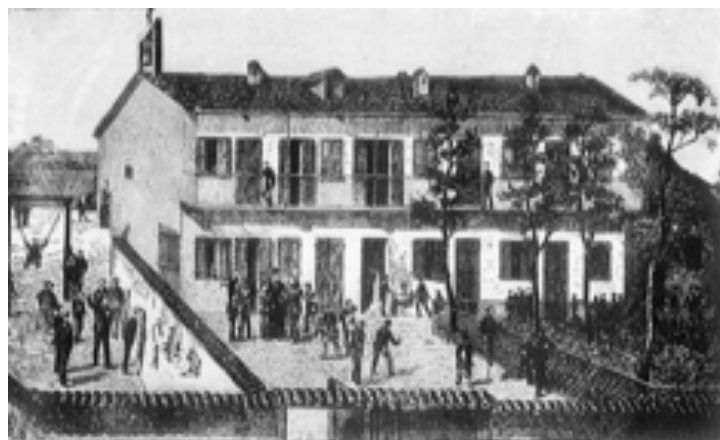


Figure 4.4. “Casa Pinardi”. Source: biesseonline.sdb.org, 2016

¹² Bosco, Saint John. 2012. *Don Bosco’s Memoirs*. Don Bosco Publication. Kindle Edition. Kindle Locations 3295-3303.

Don Bosco immediately announced the news to his young followers. As he wrote in his memoirs:

“I ran right back to my boys. I gathered them round me and began to shout in a loud voice, Great news, my sons! We’ve got a place for our oratory, a more reliable one than we’ve had till now. We will have a church, a sacristy, classrooms, and a place to play. Sunday, next Sunday, we will go to our new oratory, which is over there in Pinardi’s house. And I pointed the place out to them. Wild enthusiasm greeted this announcement. Some ran around shouting and jumping for joy; some stood stock still; some raised their voices, I would say, to yelling and screaming. They were moved like people who feel so intensely happy that they cannot express their feelings.¹³”

In the Pinardi’s house, Don Bosco began to celebrate his mass and teach catechism on Sunday and holy days, using the shed as a chapel. It was the beginning of his project. What happened then on a typical Sunday in the Oratorio, besides mass and catechism? As Don Bosco himself tells us, describing the first few years of his Oratorio in the Pinardi house:

“Some continued their catechism class, some practised their singing, some worked at their reading. Most of them, however, jumped about, ran, and enjoyed themselves in various games and pastimes. All those exploits of jumping, running, juggling, tightrope walking, stick balancing that I had learned long before from acrobats, were practised under my instruction. In this way I could control that crowd, which, in the main, could be described thus: Like a horse or a mule, without understanding. I must say, however, that despite their great ignorance I always admired the great respect they had for everything in church and for the sacred ministers, and their eagerness to learn more about their religion. I made use of that recreation period to introduce my pupils quietly to thoughts of religion

¹³ Bosco, Saint John. 2012. *Don Bosco’s Memoirs*. Don Bosco Publication. Kindle Edition. Kindle Locations 3329-3333.

and use of the holy sacraments. To one I might whisper a recommendation to be more obedient, to be more prompt in attending to his duty; to another I would suggest regular attendance at catechism, or at Confession, or so on. In this way these play periods provided me with an opportune means of making personal contact with a crowd of youngsters who, on Saturday evening or Sunday morning, would willingly come for Confession. Sometimes I would even call them away from their games to lead them to Confession when I had seen some resistance to that important obligation.¹⁴”

While this was the beginning of Giovanni’s project, soon after, the activities carried out within its walls multiplied. In 1848, in fact, Don Bosco began to plan the opening its own boarding school within the oratorio, an institution that was meant to welcome children in trouble, hosting students, professionals, clerics and apprentices. Furthermore, with the support of the local government – as I will discuss in the next chapters – and the help of rich donors, the young priest was also able to purchase Pinaridi’s house in 1851. By then, the oratorio was more than a simple meeting place for Sunday mass, catechism and playtime anymore: it was also a dormitory, a refectory, and a place for arts and crafts workshops (e.g. bookbinding, shoemaking, carpentry and printing). By 1868, the place could often count on hundreds of daily visitors. According to the vice mayor of Turin, in fact, by that year the oratorio was able to permanently host 804 people, without counting those who came and visit the place to attend a particular class or event.

It is worth pointing out that, while clearly being partially inspired by the classic concept of “oratorio” conceived by Filippo Neri in Rome, the place Don Bosco created was indeed quite distinct. First of all, in its attempt to deal exclusively with the marginalized youngsters of Turin, Don Bosco’s oratorio was completely detached from any parish-based structure – i.e. it was not

¹⁴ ¹⁴ Bosco, Saint John. 2012. *Don Bosco’s Memoirs*. Don Bosco Publication. Kindle Edition. Kindle Locations 3387-3491.

under the jurisdiction of a particular parish in Turin. As a matter of fact, Valdocco and Pinardi's house were placed in an area that at that time was fairly isolated. Secondly, as I've already mentioned, while it began as a place for meetings on Sunday and holy days, the oratorio became the first place of its kind that young people could access and enjoy for entire days throughout the week.

Valdocco became a school and a working place, a playground and a meeting place for the most different activities, all supervised by Giovanni Bosco and later his allies. Thirdly, the oratorio in Valdocco was not organized around the church. In other words, and this is a consequence of its being detached from the parish-structure, the place was not defined via the attendance to the mass. Instead, while religion was a key element in the definition of the place, the idea of the oratorio was built around the figures of the priest and the youngsters: the young boys went there to spend time with Don Bosco and their friends, and not necessarily because they went to church. The playground was the center around which everything else grew, and Giovanni himself was famous for joining the boys during the games. Finally, while the oratori of the past selected their members because of their good conduct, Don Bosco focused his attention on the troublesome boys and young men.

4.4 Key Points: The hybridity of the oratorio

The oratorio was a religious place shaped by the issues of Nineteenth Century Turin. After the French invasion and the Napoleonic period, the city was expanding rapidly: it was the capital of a kingdom that was quickly entering the industrial era guided by an ambitious royal family, the Savoy. Poor people flooded Turin, which became a city of slums characterized by

unemployment, criminality, poor hygiene and extreme poverty. A major problem was the presence of young boys who were left alone in the city streets, begging for money or stealing what they could for themselves and their families. Some of them were orphans while others were abandoned by their parents, who could not afford to feed them. The local government tried to act building a new correctional institution for the boys and young men who were caught after committing a crime, the Generala. This was the expression of a new approach embraced by King Charles Albert in 1839, according to which the moral, psychological and social circumstances experienced by the troublesome boys and young men had to be taken into consideration. Consequently, the new institution included school classes and workshops meant to educate the inmates.

The Church reacted to this creating the oratorio. It was molded by a child of the Nineteenth Century, born in 1815: his name was Giovanni Bosco. The personality of the man was shaped by the conditions of poverty in which he lived, forged by the years he spent studying and carrying out charitable work for the poor people of Turin as a young priest. As part of his mission, Don Giovanni Bosco visited the prisons of the city, including the Generala. Shocked by the condition of the young boys, the priest decided to create the oratorio: a place meant to welcome the troublesome boys and young men of the city who found themselves with no home, no education and no work. Initially, it was simply an itinerant meeting place where Don Bosco taught catechism and talked with the boys and young men. However, in 1846 the oratorio found a stable location and grew rapidly, and in a few years it included spaces where the boys could play, a boarding school, dormitories and chapels.

The key point I want to stress here comes from the fact that the oratorio was not simply “born” as a response to a certain set of social issues. Instead those social issues directly molded every element that came together to shape this religious place. “The oratorio was a response to a set of social issues” and “the oratorio was shaped by a set of social issues” are two quite different statements. On the one hand, they both imply the oratorio is a place that must be framed and understood within a specific historical and geographical context, which this chapter examines in detail. On the other hand, the first statement also implies that the place was the answer given by the Church as a way to approach the social issues from a religious perspective. This is how postsecular geography would consider the oratorio, by explaining how the religious institutions interacted with local governments to create the oratorio and solve the problem that affected the boys and young men of the city. However, I believe this point of view is way too simplistic and at the same time very problematic, quite simply because it paradoxically takes “the religious” and places it in a dimension beyond the social, economic and political issues that constitute “the secular”.

In other words, the postsecular approach assumes there is a “religious” before the “secular”, represented by the social issues that affected Turin. What I claim instead is that both elements of this misleading religious/secular binary were so intertwined it is actually impossible to separate them. Don Bosco’s perspective on what “priesthood” meant was clearly the result of his experience of the Kingdom of Sardinia and the city of Turin in the Nineteenth Century. The particular understanding of religion that characterized this Nineteenth Century man was the base upon which the oratorio was built. Plus, the place adopted an educational frame also because of the role religion played in the education of the youngsters. As a matter of fact, religion was also

taught in the Generala as a way to inculcate moral values among the boys and young men. The oratorio was not the religious answer to the problems of Turin, it was the shape adopted by the religious/secular combination. Without these particular social issues, the oratorio would have been different or unnecessary. Without the religious element, the social/moral issues would have been considered differently. There is no religious/secular binary to be blurred here, because there is no binary at all.

5. The Salesians, religious hybridities

5.1 A hybrid religious institution

In this chapter I discuss the way in which the doors of the oratorio opened up to the Salesian Congregation. I consider why the Congregation was created and what were the circumstances that shaped its institutional frame, which include the historical background with which I begin the chapter. I also describe its importance in Don Bosco's vision of the oratorio as an educational place. In doing so, I explore the nature of the congregation, which included both priests and laymen: the Salesians were in fact a religious congregation in front of the Church, and a congregation of free citizens for the Kingdom of Sardinia. This is a wonderful example of how "the religious" and "the secular" shape each other and exist because of each other.

The second part of the chapter is dedicated to the "external collaborators", the Salesians who were not priests. Exploring the dynamics that brought laymen to be part of the Salesian Congregation is an important step to understand the purpose for which the congregation was created and is a key element in my portrayal of the Salesians as an organization that was both postsecular and postreligious. The Salesians became an institution that stood and still stands between faith and politics, the personal and the public, local governments and private lives, social needs and personal beliefs, "the religious" and "the secular". It is postsecular, because it is a clear example of how religion can play a part in creating a charitable organization to tackle social issues in accordance with the local government. It is postreligious, because secular laws impacted its internal structure, because the social issues shaped its purpose, and because laymen were welcomed and played a role in the way in which it functioned. Furthermore, the Salesians were also shaped by political disputes between Don Bosco and the Pope, who was worried about

the loss of his political influence over the Italian peninsula. This is another demonstration that “the religious”, in this case represented by the Church and the Pope, it is shaped by secular elements. Plus, because the Salesians were born within the oratorio, their postsecular/postreligious ethos is a further indication of the hybrid nature of the oratorio as a religious place and, as I claim, of religion itself. Finally, I discuss the expansion of the oratorio in the second half of the Nineteenth Century, which I claim being both a direct cause and a consequence of the growth of the Salesians.

The chapter functions as an introduction to the latest part of the thesis, in which I explore the pedagogical approach around which both the oratorio and the Salesians were organized. The key point to remember as I move closer to this last step, is the fact that the Salesians and the oratorio, just like Don Bosco’s pedagogical vision, are indeed “religious”. By exploring the origin of the Salesians, what I claim in this chapter and throughout the thesis is not that “the religious” does not exist. Instead, I argue “the religious” cannot possibly exist on its own as separate entity that can or cannot influence “the secular”, as postsecular theory claims. On the contrary, by being both postreligious and postsecular, the Salesians are an example of how “the religious” exists only as a religious/secular hybrid.

5.2 The French Footprint and the Birth of Italy

The steps behind the shaping of the Salesians were directly shaped by the liberal revolution that changed the Kingdom of Sardinia in 1848 and the relationship between the Kingdom and the Papal States. In order to understand these elements, I now introduce the historical factors that came into play during the Nineteenth Century and that helped reshape the Kingdom.



Figure 5.1. “Italy in 1810 Under the French”. Source: www.elsalondon.org, 2016

The impact the ideas of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic era had on the Italian peninsula were profound. As shown in figure 5.1, by 1810 Italy was divided in three big parts, plus the islands: the Northwestern regions and big part of Central Italy were annexed to the French Empire; the rest of Northern Italy was named the Kingdom of Italy; Southern Italy became the Kingdom of Naples; the Kingdom of Sicily was under the Spanish Bourbon dynasty while the Kingdom of Sardinia belonged to the Savoy family.

Besides the redrawing of the boundaries, under the French influence there were urban improvements, including new roads and schools, and both agriculture and industry were highly encouraged. In 1792, three years after the Revolution, the Christian calendar was abolished in France and the material and spiritual power of the Church was attacked via dispossessions and

accusations. Under the Civil Code conceived by Napoleon, civil marriage and divorce were allowed to enter the life of the Italian families, parishes lines were redrawn and many parishes were completely eliminated. The Papal States were invaded and Pope Pius IV (1717-1799) died in exile as a prisoner in France, at Valence. Both the attacks to the secular power of the Pope and the reshaping of the Italian political geography had a tremendous impact on what followed the Napoleonic period: the liberal revolution of the Kingdom of Sardinia and the birth of the Kingdom of Italy.

5.2.1 The Birth of the Kingdom of Italy

On the 1st of April 1846 Don Bosco finally found a stable place for his oratorio: Casa Pinardi, in Valdocco. By the time the priest decided to open his first pastoral institute in 1848, however, huge political events started to shake the roots of the Italian peninsula and the relationship between the newborn Italian Kingdom and the Papal States. During that year, in fact, the Kingdom of Sardinia began to fight to unify Italy under one crown, its own. In 1848, the first war of independence began: the king of Sardinia, Carlo Alberto, declared war to the Austrian Empire but was defeated in 1849. In 1859, the Austrian Empire attacked the Kingdom of Sardinia, which fights back with the help of France: this was the second war of independence. After a series of battles and plebiscites that unified the peninsula, Turin became the first capital city of the Kingdom of Italy.

Rome remained in the hands of the Pope until 1870, when the Italian troops enter the city. This is the end of the Papal States and in 1871 Rome became the new capital city of the Italian Kingdom. However, the Pope never officially renounced his temporal power and refused to

come to terms with the Italian State. It was the beginning of the “Roman Question”, which will be settled only on the 11th of February 1929, during the fascist era, with the signing of the Lateran Treaty and the birth of Vatican City. The birth of the Italian Kingdom, and the consequent opening of the so-called “Roman Question” were indicators of wider social changes that accompanied the Italian late Nineteenth Century. The nationalist movement, in fact, pushed by the victories of the Kingdom of Sardinia and the leadership of its Prime Minister Count Camillo Benso of Cavour, coexisted with a general wave of secularization that swept Europe and that also shaped the Salesians, as I explain in the next few sections.

5.2.2 The Kingdom of Sardinia after 1848: A Liberal Revolution

During the time of the first war of independence, between March 1848 and August 1849, the Kingdom of Sardinia made the first decisive steps towards the social reforms that constituted its liberal revolution. On the 2nd of March 1848, the Jesuits – who were extremely opposed to any sort of liberal reform – were expelled from the Kingdom. The move was an attempt to push the education of the children away from the Church (the Jesuits were especially active as educators) and towards the State. During that same year, the Minister of Public Instruction, Carlo Boncompagni, created a new institutional apparatus through which primary and secondary education, and university studies were placed under the control of a Superior Council placed in Turin. Two years after, towards the end of February 1850, the Minister of Justice, Count Giuseppe Siccardi, began to introduce a series of bills that were specifically meant to undermine the Church Privileges. The Minister began by abolishing the ecclesiastical courts. He moved on passing a bill to require the approval of the State in case of acquisition of land by the Church, and he also limited the right of asylum and the number of holy days.

Then, in 1854, the Rattazzi bill – known as the “Law on the Convents” – attacked all religious corporations. The political act was meant to abolish all religious orders, apart from those devoted to nursing, teaching and preaching. New orders needed the permission of the State in order to be born. Plus, the bill also proposed to consider financial actions against the Church – especially after the debts caused by the many wars – restricting the salaries of the bishops while helping local, poor priests. Finally, in 1859, the public education system of the Kingdom of Sardinia went through a new revolution. The Casati Law introduced a two-year obligation at primary level – the first two years of primary school became both compulsory and free, and the teachers had to be provided by the town where the school was placed on submission of good moral life and ability. The energy the Kingdom of Sardinia placed on reforming the educational system and fighting the privilege of the Church played a major role in shaping Don Bosco’s actions and strategies.

Clearly enough, all these laws had quite an impact on what “the religious” was in the Kingdom. This is really the main point the reader should take from this: the liberal revolution that changed Turin and the Kingdom of Sardinia changed also the shape of religion within the society of the time. In fact, a religious institution that wanted to exist within the Kingdom now had to respond to a new set of rules and more generally the power of the Church over the Piemontese society was attacked. In the next section I examine how the Salesians adapted to the liberal revolution. Towards the end of the chapter, I then explain how the Congregation molded by Don Bosco grew impacting how education is conceptualized around the world. When “the secular” changes,

“the religious” changes with it; and the growth of the “religious” impacts elements within “the secular”.

5.3 The Molding of the Salesian Congregation

As indicated in the previous sections, the political environment in which Don Bosco found himself was beginning to react against the Church and its temporal power, a crucial moment in the process that brought to the birth of the Italian Kingdom and later of the Vatican State. The young priest, however, had the ability to use the political instability to his own favor and used personal and institutional connection to turn the oratorio into the spatial cornerstone of an educational, political and institutional model that was exported in other parts of Italy, Europe and the rest of the world. It is only the combination of religious and secular elements that produced the Salesians, a hybrid religious institution. However, what I also want to highlight in this section is the fact that, while the Salesians were shaped and transformed by a specific historical moment, there is nothing exceptional about this institution: religious places and religious institutions are always religious/secular hybrids. As a matter of fact, the purpose of this chapter is to push the reader to ask him/herself: does a “non-hybrid religious” exist at all?

5.3.1 The Need for Collaborators

The first issue Don Bosco had to face was the need to find collaborators he could trust to help him in his mission. In fact, the number of boys and young men coming to the oratorio was growing and the priest soon found himself overwhelmed. There were priests and laymen who

entered the walls of the oratorio in Valdocco, people who decided to donate their time to Don Bosco's cause. There were also youngsters who came to the oratorio and who were also "promoted" as collaborators. It was the close relationship between Don Bosco and his collaborators that resulted in what became unofficially known as the Salesian Congregation, a group of people who shared the values embodied by St. Francis de Sales: poverty, chastity and obedience. The year was the 1854 and the Salesians soon began to wonder about the nature of their congregations. Don Bosco and his collaborators, in fact, had to decide whether or not to define their newborn group as a religious congregation.

In the preface of the constitution of the Salesian Congregation (Don Bosco, quoted in Lenti, A. 2008c, p. 284), removed in 1874, Don Bosco himself describes the congregation in these terms:

"As far back as 1841, Father Giovanni Bosco working in association with other priests began to gather together in suitable premises neglected and poor young people in certain locations in the city of Turin [...]. In order to preserve that unit of spirit and discipline on which the success of the oratories depends, as far back as 1844, a number of priests came together to form a kind of congregation. This was to help one another by mutual example and study. They did not make any vow properly so called; they only bound themselves by a simple promise to devote themselves solely to those things that their superior judged to be for the greater glory of God and the good of one's soul. They acknowledged Father Giovanni Bosco as their superior."

As the quote clearly demonstrates, the reason for this group of priests to come together has to be found not in some kind of alien, out of place religious concept but in the needs of the "neglected and poor young people in certain locations in the city of Turin". This secular element, the product of the history of the city of Turin, was a fundamental ingredient in the molding of the

Salesians. However, if this is insufficient to convince the reader that “the secular” is an indispensable element in the conception of a religious institution, I now move on considering the political background that defined the institutional frame of the Salesian Congregation: a clear example of secular/religious hybridity.

In 1854 the Law on the Convents made its appearance on the Piedmontese political stage: the Kingdom of Sardinia was discussing the need of repressing religious institutes, which were generally deemed useless to the State. Because of his activities, Don Bosco was in contact with the local government. More specifically, the ministry of the interior (the equivalent of the ministry of home affairs) often contacted the priest in case of orphans and sick children who needed a place to live. It was through this narrow political channel that Don Bosco managed to reach Rattazzi, who was the head of the ministry, and ask for advice. According to the law, an organization could not be repressed if it could demonstrate its civic usefulness.

All Don Bosco had to do was to create a congregation that was specifically focused on creating good citizens, welcoming and training (via schools and workshops) boys and young men who would otherwise be left to the streets of the city. This is the transcription of the encounter between Don Bosco and Rattazzi, as reported by Giovanni Bonetti (1892, p. 344) in his 1892 *Cinque lustri di storia dell'oratorio salesiano*:

Rattazzi: [...] What measure do you intend to adopt to secure the permanent existence of your institute?

Don Bosco: To tell the truth, your Excellency, I have not reckoned on dying so soon; I have thought about procuring myself some help for the present, but not about the means

of carrying on the work of the oratori after my death. Now, since you have mentioned the matter, might I ask you, in my turn, by what means do you think it possible for me to establish such an institution on a safe footing?

Rattazzi: In my opinion [...] you should select a certain number of laymen and ecclesiasts, form a society under certain rules, imbue them with your spirit, teach them your system, so that they may not merely give you assistance, but may carry on the work after your departure.

As the beginning of the conversation between Rattazzi and Don Bosco already indicates, the molding of the Salesians was the result of the coming together of the religious mission of Don Bosco and the needs and laws of the local government. However, there is a more subtle point that comes across reading this dialogue, especially the second part:

Don Bosco: But does your Excellency believe it possible to found such a congregation in these days? The Government two years ago suppressed certain religious communities, and is perhaps preparing now to do away with the rest. Do you think it would allow the establishment of another of a like nature? [...]

Rattazzi: It should not be a congregation [...] in which each member keeps his civil rights, submits to the laws of the State, pays the taxes and so forth. In a word, the new congregation, as far as the Government is concerned, would be nothing more than an association of free citizens, united and living together, and having the same charitable purpose in view.

Don Bosco: And is your Excellency sure the Government will allow the founding of such a congregation, and its subsequent existence?

Rattazzi: No constitutional or regular Government will oppose the founding and development of such a congregation, just as it does not prevent, but rather promotes, commercial, industrial and other similar companies. Any association of free citizens is allowed as long as its purpose and actions are not opposed to the laws and institutions of the State.

Don Bosco begins by saying “certain religious communities” were suppressed by the State: the State was involved in the suppression for secular reasons, namely the attempt to limit the political power of the Pope. This is a key element because it shows how the suppression of certain religious institutions was indeed a political issue. In turn, this is a sign indicating “the religious” is indeed a political issue that involves secular elements (such as the laws of the State). Just like the shaping of the Salesians was the expression of a political choice made by Don Bosco, the suppression of religious organizations was the result of the fact that the purpose and actions of those organizations were somehow “opposed to the laws and institutions of the State”.

Furthermore, these political issues were not only relegated to the Kingdom of Sardinia. In fact, once he considered the molding of the Salesians with Rattazzi, Don Bosco went to Rome to discuss the issue with the Pope. It was the 1858, the second war of Italian independence was about to begin and the Pope was very much against the anticlerical actions taken by the Kingdom of Sardinia, which from his perspective were a clear attack to his power. It is hard to deny that the politics of religion that defined the Salesians were intrinsically mixed with the “secular” politics that involved the Kingdom, the Church and the city of Turin.

5.3.2 Meeting the Pope

Pope Pius IX was well aware of the political revolutions that were shaking the Piemontese society and his reaction to Don Bosco’s visit and project was clear: the Salesian Congregation, according to the Pope, had to be a proper religious congregation. Pius believed religious congregations were in fact vital for the Church and strongly disagreed with the legislative steps

taken by the Kingdom of Sardinia. An important element to point out here is the fact that “the religious” invoked by Pius was just as hybrid as the oratorio or the Salesians. In fact, the reasons behind the Pope’s behavior were shaped by the political situation in which the Papal States found themselves in the 1850s. The need for religious institutions was not just a matter of faith: it was also a strategic claim by the Church, which used religious institutions as a source of funding and more generally as a channel of influence on local communities.

According to Pius, in order to exist and become a legitimate institution, the Salesians had to be built upon religious vows and remain under the authority of the Church. In fact, according to the Pope the Congregation had to do whatever it could to neutralize the interference of the government. In other words, as the Pope himself said to Don Bosco:

“It is necessary that you should establish a congregation with which the government cannot interfere; but at the same time you must not be satisfied with mere promises, otherwise you would never be sure of your subjects, nor could you count on them for any length of time.”

(Pope Pius IX, quoted in Bonetti, G. 1934, *St. John’s Early Apostolate*, p. 356).

The priest suddenly found himself in a very difficult situation. Following the advice of the Pope, in fact, would have meant running towards a political suicide in Turin. The solution found by Don Bosco was meant to satisfy both the Kingdom and the Pope: the priest decided the Salesians needed to be citizens for the State and a religious group for the Church.

5.3.3 The hybrid political solution

The solution was the coming together of “the religious” and “the secular” elements: the Salesians were molded as a congregation that was both a religious group and an association of free citizens. This is what makes the Salesians and probably all religious institutions a wonderful example of hybridity per se: the group was literally created to include both priests and laymen, and even potentially people who were not religious at all but believed in Don Bosco’s project, considering the laws of the state, religious beliefs and the politics of the Church. This said, what I claim here is that, while the Salesians are certainly a clear example of this religious/secular dynamic, this is not a special feature of Don Bosco’s project but it is indeed something all religious institutions have in common: they all are religious/secular hybrids built upon complex politics and a reaction to the secular circumstances in which they are born.

Moreover, I suggest we should push the argument even further: if all religious institutions are religious/secular hybrids is because “the religious” itself is a hybrid entity that cannot exist without being shaped by “the secular”. In other words, our understanding of “the religious” itself should be blurred to welcome the idea that there is no boundary between “the religious” and “the secular”: they are completely coproduced. A possible proof of this is the fact that, while planning the hybridity of his institution, Don Bosco never disputed the religious nature of the Salesians. This is the key: the Salesians were a religious institution while being hybrid, because “the religious” is always hybrid. In other words, the Piemontese priest never tried to sell his institution as a somewhat “hybrid” or even “secular” institution: the Salesians were always religious in his writings and speeches.

In 1859 the priest began to draft the constitution of the Congregation to submit to the Church authorities. According to this document, the Salesians were a group of priests who decided to come together with laymen – “external collaborators” – to create a religious organization.

According to the Piedmontese priest:

“This Congregation [...] must have vows to serve as a bond of unity and spirit and works. These vows, however, should be simple, and such as are easily dissolved [...]. This Congregation, moreover, should be a true religious congregation in the eyes of the Church and at the same time such as to guarantee its members freedom and protection against jeopardy from civil laws. This means in the eyes of the civil authority each member should enjoy the protection of the law like any other citizen.”

(Don Bosco, quoted in Lenti, A. 2008d, p. 309)

While the Congregation received the *decretum laudis* from the Pope in 1864, this was the official document by which the creation of a religious institution was officially approved, the Church refused to accept Don Bosco’s decision to include “free citizens” in his project. The fact that the members of the Salesian Congregation were to retain their civil rights and the presence of “external collaborators” was especially problematic. This was once again a matter of politics. In other words, the problems related to the hybridity of Don Bosco’s Salesians were expressions of the Church’s refusal to potentially lose power over an institution.

This is important to understand because I believe it suggests the hybridity per se was quite accepted, and indeed quite invisible. This is also demonstrated by the fact that the “external collaborators” were finally accepted by the Church in 1874, when Don Bosco included them within his institution by creating a second branch of his Salesian Congregation: the Salesian

Cooperators. The game changer was not the presence or the absence of the “secular” element, represented by the members who were not priests, but the fact that these collaborators ceased to be “external” and out of the Church’s control. By becoming part of the Salesians, the Cooperators had to act according to the directions given by Don Bosco and his closest collaborators.

5.4 From external collaborators to Salesian Cooperators

After the idea of the “external collaboration” was rejected by the Pope, Don Bosco began working on a new project starting in 1874, which he called the Union of St. Francis de Sales. This “Union” was meant to bring together those who collaborated with the priest, supporting the Salesian Congregation and helping with his oratorio. Truth be told, there was no significant difference between the “external collaborators” envisioned by Don Bosco in the 1840s and 1850s and the “Salesian Cooperators”, the name given to the Union of St. Francis de Sales in 1876. As Don Bosco explained in the 1877 manuscript *Cooperatori Salesiani* (Salesian Cooperators):

“The history of the Salesian Congregation dates back to 1841, when we began to gather together poor and homeless boys and young men in the city of Turin. [...] To meet the wide range of their needs, many gentlemen joined together and by their work and financial contributions supported the work of the so-called festive oratories. They were called by the title of their office, but as a rule they were referred to as benefactors, promoters, or cooperators of the oratory of St. Francis the Sales”

Therefore, the presence of gentlemen who were not priests within the institutional frame of the oratorio was not exactly new. As a matter of fact, without the donations of these gentlemen, it is

possible the Salesians would have never had the chance to grow in the first place. This was just another way for “the secular” to play a role in the conception of a religious institution in the form of money and practical help. Among the Salesian cooperators there were aristocratic men like the marquis Fassati di Montemagno, count Callori di Vignale and count Scarampi di Pruney. There were also teachers, craftsmen and tradesmen. These laymen became an active element within the Salesian Congregation, especially when the oratorio grew and workshops began to be organized.

As Don Bosco himself writes:

“So we had recourse to some upper-class people and others in the city who graciously offered to teach catechism and classes, to assist at church functions and outdoor activities. It was their task to lead prayer and song, to the boys and young men for the sacraments and instruct them for Confirmation. Outdoors, they kept order. They met the youngsters at the oratorio entrance and in a friendly way joined them at their games, keeping them within proper bounds while they played. Another important duty of the cooperators was job placement. Many of the boys and young men came from distant villages; they needed food and work and someone to care for them. Some cooperators took it on themselves to find work for them with decent and honest employers. They made sure that the lads were neatly dressed and knew how to apply for jobs. During the week they would visit these boys; they met with them on Sundays so as not to let one day destroy the fruit of several weeks’ effort. Even on the nastiest winter evenings many of these cooperators would regularly walk hazardous streets to come and teach reading and writing, music, arithmetic and grammar to the youngsters. Others would come every afternoon to tutor slower boys in their catechism [...]”

The quote introduces yet another secular element to the religious equation: class. The “upper class” people who helped Don Bosco in his mission clearly had an impact in how the oratorio worked, its pedagogy and the values taught in its schools. These are elements I will discuss in

more detail in chapter 6, but what I am talking about is a set of pre-concepts according to which the troublesome boys who came to the oratorio were “little devils” coming from lower classes who needed to be dressed and fed, to be taught the value of hard work, obedience and to be kept under surveillance, a process that turn created good Christians and good citizens.

In 1877, the cooperators began publishing the Salesian Bulletin (*Bollettino Salesiano*), which became their official journal: an instrument that became a great source of funding and a powerful megaphone to advertise the mission of the Salesians. In the first number of the *Bollettino Salesiano*, Don Bosco writes:

“Cooperators are those who want to be the protagonist of charitable actions not is general but according to the spirit of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales. A cooperator on his own can do good but the results remain limited. On the contrary, united with others he finds support, advice, courage, and often with a little effort he achieves a lot, because even the strength of the weak grows when it is united with others. As it is said, unity is strength... Therefore, our collaborators, following the mission of the Salesian Congregation, will use their own strength to collect boys who are unstable and abandoned in streets and piazzas; teach them catechism, entertain them during the weekends and offer them to a good employer, counseling them, help them in any way possible to turn them into good Christians and honest citizens.”

(Don Bosco, *Bollettino Salesiano* 1877)

Don Bosco considered the collaboration of these laymen fundamental. In his writing, such as the quote from the *Bollettino Salesiano* I just reported, he often insists on the importance of the Salesian Cooperators in the process of education of the youngsters. The priest was convinced of

this and asked for the participation of fervent Catholics, liberals and also non-Catholics who however believed in his educational efforts (Stella, 2001). The reasons for the existence of the Salesian Cooperators multiply as the number of activities performed within the oratorio grew: from catechism to recreational activities, resident schools and workshops, training of seminarians and classes. This said, the nature of the Cooperators is better understood by reading through the rules that governed this branch of the Salesian Congregation.

5.4.1 The rules of the Cooperators

The Salesian Cooperators received the approval of Pope Pio IX on the 9th of May 1876. I now list the main rules that governed the Cooperators, which were included in the regulation approved by the Church. What is important to underline here is the combination of elements that show how the concept of “the religious” is truly a secular/religious hybrid shaped by historical circumstances and cultural/political elements. These are the rules (Bosco, G. *Cooperatori Salesiani*, 1877):

I. It is necessary for Christians to unify around good deeds.

In every moment, the unity among good people to carry out good deeds and keep away the evil has been judged necessary. So did the Christians of the primitive Church who, surrounded by dangers, which affected them daily, without losing courage, united in one heart and spirit, used to push each other to keep the faith strong and be ready to surpass the many troubles that threatened them. That was what God himself told us: weak forces when united become strong, and if a rope alone can be easily broken, it is way more difficult to break three. *Vis unita fortior, funiculus triplex difficile rumpitur*. So, while men remain lazy in their affairs, should the sons’ light be less careful than the sons of

darkness? Certainly not. We need to unify as Christians in these difficult times, to promote the spirit of charity in every possible way, using religion to remove or mitigate the difficulties that threaten the values of the young boys, whose hands hold the destiny of our civil society.

The first rule in the constitution of the Salesian Cooperators is a reminder that the Salesians were a religious institution. In other words they were an institution in which “religion” played a central role. Furthermore, it underlines how, according to Don Bosco, religion needed to be used to “mitigate the difficulties that threaten the values of the young boys”. This could be read as a “postsecular” element: the Salesians were meant to change the destiny of the civil society. In other words, the Salesian were a Nineteenth Century version of a modern faith-based organization. However, the postsecular argument collapses considering how religion itself was not shaped by politics, culture and history. In other words, the Salesians were shaped by the issues they were trying to tackle and by the political circumstance of the time, as I explained in this chapter.

II. The Bond of the Salesian Congregation.

Finally approved by the Church, this congregation can serve as a safe and stable bond for the Salesian Cooperators. In fact, its purpose is that of working for the good of the youth upon which it is founded the good and the bad of the future of society. We do not want to assume the Congregation is the only way to fulfill this mission, because there are many others. Here, we propose the work of the Salesian Cooperators, asking the good men who live in this century to come and help this Congregation. It is true that the number of the members of the Congregation has grown decisively, but that number is still far away if we consider the need in Italy, Europe, China, Australia and America, especially from the Republic of Argentina. In all these places every day there are those who ask for help to us, because people need someone who takes care of the troublesome young boys, who

opens oratori and schools, who begins or strengthens missions. This is why the Cooperators are a necessity.

This is a key element that explains the difference between the external collaborators and the Salesian Cooperators, an element I've already underlined but that is worth reiterating because of it was probably the turning point that convinced the Pope to accept the presence of laymen within the Salesians. The bond that brings together the Cooperators, as indicated in the second rule, is the Salesian Congregation that was growing under the approval of the Church. By stating the Cooperators were under the jurisdiction of the Congregation, Don Bosco was indicating the Church was finally in control over the actions of the laymen who were joining the Salesians.

III. Purpose of the Salesian Cooperators.

The fundamental purpose of the Salesian Cooperators is that of carrying out good deeds and live a life, in every possible way, similar to that of a community. Many of them will come together and meet but others, because of their age, health or other reasons, will not be able to do so. Therefore, the Salesian Cooperators can continue their normal lives and jobs, live with their families, and still consider themselves as if they were part of the Salesian Congregation. As to the Pope, this group could be consider like an ancient order, with the difference that in ancient times the center was the Christian value of pity, here instead the center is the exercise of charity especially towards the troublesome young boys.

The third rule is a reiteration of the hybridity of the Salesians, a characteristic that was not unique but still very evident. In fact, the Cooperators were clearly not priests and could live a normal life while being part of the Salesian Congregation. Interestingly, the rule does not even include the necessity for a Cooperator to be Christian. Instead, it states the group should be

guided by Christian values. The concept of “values” is clearly a cultural, contextualized idea: a further indication that religion is indeed a wave that adapts to the secular circumstances of a particular historical period, which in turn is coproduced through the politics of religion.

IV. Way of cooperation.

To the Saleian Cooperators we offer the same ways of cooperation of the Congregation of Saint Francis de Sales, which will be associated with them.

5. Promote spiritual exercises and catechism, especially in the places where there is lack of material and moral tools.
6. Because these times are affected by a lack of vocations, those who are able to do so will take a special care of the young and adults who, being equipped with the right moral values and an aptitude towards study, show signs of a call, helping them with their counseling and addressing them towards the seminars where they can be cultivated and directed towards the fulfillment of their call. [...]
7. Divulgate good printed material and fight against irreligious and immoral press, sharing and promoting good books, flyers or any material in places where it seems appropriate.
8. Other tasks assigned to the Salesians Cooperators include welcoming the troublesome boys, educate them and address them towards the faith, helping them in moment of danger, carry them where they can learn about religion. Those who are not able to carry out one of these tasks can ask someone else, like a parent or a friend.
9. It is possible to cooperate with prayers or with material goods when it is possible, just like the ancient believers did when they carried gifts to the Apostles, who then used them to help widows, orphans and other people who had serious needs.

This last rule is yet another indication of the fact that the Salesians were indeed a religious institution. Because of this, the main suggestions given to the Cooperators included: promoting

spiritual practice and catechism, addressing the boys to the (Christian) faith, and even helping young boys to cultivate a possible vocation to priesthood. The hybridity upon which the Salesians were built never quite changed the fact they were a religious institution.

5.5 The Growth: Further Signs of Hybridity

The previous sections of the chapter described the hybridity of “the religious” as suggested by the shape of the Salesian Congregation. I now move forward to examine how signs of religious hybridity are also present in the steps that pushed the Salesians and their oratorio beyond Turin and Italy. These signs are a mix of politics, institutional changes, choices made by Don Bosco, and negotiations with the Church and local authorities. The scales involved in the production of this religious hybridity are multiple. I start by considering the local context in which the Salesians grew, which includes personal negotiations between Don Bosco, local institutions and the Church. I then continue considering the international dynamics that allowed the Salesians to expand further.

5.5.1 The First Signs: A Local Political Mix

The molding of the Salesian Congregation and of the Salesian Cooperators coincided with a decisive expansion of Don Bosco’s project. During the 1860s the oratorio in Valdocco was characterized by the presence of an unusual number of young clerics who saw in Don Bosco the embodiment of a new priesthood. As mentioned before, the Church was witnessing a general lack of interest for the ecclesiastic career and the local bishops, who never approved the degree of independence from the old parish structures that the Piemontese priest was seeking, were

often envious of the power Don Bosco had to inspire young people. Nevertheless, these young boys believed in the project initiated by Don Bosco and were ready to help him in his educational endeavors. At the same time, thanks to the Casati law (1859) the first two years of primary school became both compulsory and free. This was forcing the villages across the Kingdom to open schools in order to be able to educate the local boys.

The combination between the diktat of the Casati law and the supply of manpower convinced Don Bosco this was the right time to offer to the local government his availability. In 1860 he was entrusted with the small seminary of Giaveno, a small comune 30 kilometers west of Turin. Soon after, the priest sent a group of young boys and clerics from Valdocco to Giaveno. This first attempt of expanding his educational project, however, failed. The main problem was that small seminaries like the one in Giaveno were strictly under the supervision of the Torinese Curia, and the bishops were unwilling to give up the control of the institution. The interests of the Church, expressed by the discomfort felt by the local bishops towards the mission of the Salesians, and the laws of the State combined with the beliefs of Don Bosco to create a hybrid mix. Just like it happened in the moment of the shaping of the Salesians, different political elements came into play shaping the institution created by Don Bosco.

The mixing of local circumstances that shaped the Salesians did not end with the first attempts made by Don Bosco to expand his mission. In fact, while the experience with the local seminaries was unsuccessful, the municipal boarding schools became the fertile ground that allowed Don Bosco to cultivate his ambitious project. Local officials, who often had at their disposal places such as old convents (thanks to the laws written to limit the privileges and the

power of the Church in the Kingdom), approached Don Bosco, who could offer trained manpower and a strong pedagogical model – which was the one displayed in his oratorio in Valdocco. In return for good results and high moral standards, the priest asked total control of both education and finances. It was thanks to this combination of elements that, between the 1860s, the 1870s and the 1880s, the school-oratorio model of the Salesians reached Lanzo Torinese (1864), Cherasco (1864), Alassio (1869), Varazze (1871), Cuneo (1876), Mathi Torinese (1877), La Spezia (1877), Lucca (1877), Ariccia, Este and Albano (1878), Brindisi, Randazzo, Cremona and San Benigno Canavese (1878), Penango, Mogliano Veneto and Florence (1880), Faenza (1881), Catania (1884), Rome (1885), Fogliozzo (1886), and Parma (1887).

5.5.2 Migrants, Missionaries and Schools: An International Mix

The success of the Salesians and their oratorio crossed the Italian boundaries. Around the time of the Vatican council of 1869, Don Bosco had the opportunity to send missionaries in India and received by the bishop of San Francisco a proposal for the opening of a foundation in the United States. The priest, however, believed his Salesians were still too weak to expand beyond the national boundaries. It was towards the mid 1870s that he decided to step outside of Italy. It happened in France, more specifically at Nice. In 1874, in fact, Don Bosco had the opportunity to open an oratorio there, which was meant to be also a hospice for young craftsmen. The oratorio was officially established in 1875 and became the first Salesian home outside of the Kingdom of Italy.

In November 1875, Don Bosco also organized the first squad of "missionaries", whose task was to reach Argentina and open oratori in Buenos Aires and other Argentinian cities. After the Argentinian expedition, the Salesian organised multiple missions in South America: in December 1881, November 1883, February 1885, December 1886 and December 1887. Between 1875 and 1887, the number of Salesians who arrived in South America was around 150, men and women who were responsible for the opening of oraratori in Argentina (1875), Uruguay (1876), Brasil (1883), Chile (1887) and Ecuador (1888). In Europe, Salesian oratori were soon open in France and Spain (1881), and then England (1887).

Of all these nations, the example of Argentina is the most documented in the archives, mainly because of the high number of Italian migrants that reached the South American nation:

Argentina perfectly exemplifies the strength of the international expansion of the Salesians, an expansion that became possible because of a combination of the religious and secular elements. More specifically, I am talking about the presence of missionaries and the migration of Italians for economic and political reasons, namely poverty and the instability caused by the unification of the Italian peninsula.

At the arrival of the first group of Salesians, the Italian community in Argentina, which increased exponentially in size in the second half of the Nineteenth Century, was characterized by an extremely high level of illiteracy. Around 75% of the individuals above 6 years of age were illiterate. The Italian migrants, who tried to escape hunger and poverty, leaving from the ports of Livorno, Genoa and Naples, were mainly farmers and artisans in need of education. For many on them, including those who arrived in Argentina, in fact, education represented one of the main

channels through which they could access the world of the upper classes and leave the misery behind.

The organizations that managed the education of the Italian communities in Argentina were either benefit or philanthropic societies founded on the Italian language, positivist pedagogical approach and the exclusion of religion. The Salesians offered a different model. First of all, they proposed classes in Spanish, a fact that was much more acceptable for the Argentinian government, another element that entered the religious/secular mix that shaped the Salesians. Secondly, they pushed forward the model of the oratorio, which included catechism and religious education, an introduction to the humanities and workshops for artisans and craftsmen (which in Argentina were called “de artes y oficios”).

Towards the beginning of the Twentieth Century, when the Italian community was quickly reaching the 1 million units, the number of students in the non-Salesian schools was declining while the oratori kept growing. According to the *Annuario delle Scuole italiane all'Estero* (Annals of the Italian Schools Abroad), in 1906 the Salesian schools in Argentina counted 2.100 units. In 1910, the Salesians declared to the Italian consulate they counted 3.500 registered students. Adding a new ingredient to the religious hybridity upon which the success of the institution was built, the educational endeavours of the Salesians were pushed by the success of their missionary efforts in Patagonia and the Tierra del Fuego, thanks to which the Pope in 1883 officially assigned to Don Bosco and his congregation the Apostolic Vicariate (i.e. the jurisdiction) of Patonia, of which Don Giovanni Cagliari (who was with Don Bosco in Valdocco) was made prelate first and then bishop. The Vicariate was turned into the Apostolic

Prefecture of the southern Patagonia in 1887, and the Salesian Don Giuseppe Fagnano became its prelate.

Despite his age, Don Bosco continued to travel around Italy and Europe throughout the 1880s. In 1883 he made a journey through France, visiting Nice, Cannes, Fréjus, La Navarre, Tolone, Marseille, Avignon, Valenza, Lyon, Lilla, Paris, Amiens, Dijon and Dôle. During the same year, he also travelled to Austria, in Frohsdorf, where he was invited by the count Henri-Charles de Chambord, claimant to the throne of France. In 1884 and 1885 he travelled again through Southern France, while in 1886 he reached Spain, where he was welcomed like a saint. The political connections the Piedmontese priests built over the years through personal relationships with aristocrats and political men were part of the recipe that boosted the success of the Salesians.

A clear sign of the success reached by Don Bosco and his Salesians is the way in which both the Church and the people of Turin reacted when the priest passed away. Don Bosco died in Turin on the 31st of January 1888. The news of the death was published by newspapers across the world and the funerals were attended by a crowd. According to the edition of the 4th of February 1888 of the newspaper “L’Unità cattolica”, Turin was invaded by as many as 400.000 people. He was buried in Torino-Valsalice, and two years later, on the 3rd of June 1890, the Church began the informative process for his beatification.

5.6 Key Points: Religious as Hybrid

The chapter describes the molding of the Salesian Congregation, which was created by Don Bosco as a way to organize his followers into an institution that was built around the oratorio. The Salesian family included both priests and laymen, and it was specifically created to be both a religious confraternity and a community of free citizens. The institutional frame of the Congregation was partially the result of the historical moment Turin was living, the Rattazzi law made it very hard for certain religious orders to exist in the Kingdom of Sardinia, but it was also the expression of Don Bosco's design: bringing together priests and laymen in order to turn the troublesome boys of the streets of Turin into good Christians and good citizens. In fact, Don Bosco needed the help of noblemen, craftsmen, artisans and all those who were contributing to his mission either by donating money or by offering their time to be part of the education of the boys of the oratorio.

This said, the most important point of the chapter is that Salesians were a religious institution, a faith-based organization: they were approved by the Pope himself, Christianity was considered by its members as the main point of reference in matters related to values and codes of conduct, and a Catholic priest was the undisputed head of the institution. The hybridity of the Salesians stood within "the religious" element upon which they were built. In other words, it was "the religious" itself that was hybrid.

The religious hybridity of the Salesians is evident in the multiple "secular" aspects that shaped the history of the institution, starting from their molding, which was shaped by the political struggles between the Kingdom of Sardinia and the Church, a consequence of the liberal revolution that swept Turin and the crisis of the Papal States. These struggles were also the result

of a wider set of historical circumstances connected to the French invasion of the Italian peninsula and the unification of Italy under one crown. Another “secular” element were the classist values brought by the noblemen who helped Don Bosco, an aspect that I will analyse further in chapter 6 but that clearly shaped the pedagogical approach chosen by the Piemontese priest.

Furthermore, the rules that governed the Salesian Cooperators were the expression of a mix of politics and religious statements, and the growth of the Congregation was the result of a series of local and international circumstances. These circumstances included economic and social crises that followed the unification of Italy, and the migration of Italians all over the world. Plus, we cannot forget the personal connections built by Don Bosco around Europe and the laws of the Italian State, which gave to the Salesians the opportunity to use their manpower and become a point of reference as an educational institution. Moreover, the growth of the institution involved also struggles within the Church: the bishops of Turin never appreciated Don Bosco’s success because the growth of his influence over citizens and politicians meant the demise of their own.

At this point, a clarification is in order. While in the chapter I label some elements as either religious or secular, the purpose of my argument is to indicate that the combination of “the secular” and “the religious” produces a religious hybridity that constitute “the religious” itself. In fact, as the Salesians demonstrate, religious institutions are a reaction to local and global social, economic and political circumstances: religious institutions are political institutions, they are economic institutions, and they are social institutions. The Salesians are not simply a bridge between a faith base organization and a set of social issue, as postsecular theory would suggest.

Instead, just like the oratorio, they are also produced through the social issues they act upon absorbing and adapting to the many “secular” circumstances offered by history.

I must admit it is quite complicated to talk about “the religious” and “the secular” without risking to reinforce the idea that the two are somehow independent variables. Let’s be clear: I reject the suggestion that religious and secular elements do not exist. I also understand that the labelling of an element as either religious or secular is complicated and challengeable. However, this is precisely my point: both “the religious” and “the secular” are inseparable, coproduced and blurry. There is no boundary that needs to be crossed between them as they both play a role in the production of one another. This is why I insist in underlining the fact that the Salesians were indeed religious and in being religious they represented a great paradox: they could not be religious without the secular elements through which they were molded. In other words, what I argue is that the only way for the Salesians or any other congregation to be a religious institution is to be a hybrid institution.

6. Religious Masculinities

6.1 Hybrid Religious Discourses

The chapter explores the gendered/classed dimensions of the hybridity around which both the oratorio and the Salesians were molded. I begin by describing the new concept of “youth” born in Nineteenth Century Europe as an answer to the fear aristocrats and middle-class people felt especially towards the working class boys. I then moved forward considering the parallels between this new concept and Don Bosco’s pedagogical approach, the rules of the oratorio and those of its workshops. In doing so, I explore the way in which the young males who visited the oratorio were welcomed and instructed by the Salesians, and how a hybrid mix of religion instructions, classist assumptions and gendered models was used as an educational tool. It is clear that in the pedagogical model adopted by Don Bosco and his followers, religion transcends the spiritual realm to become a hybrid religious/secular mix through which the Salesians planned to turn the “bad boys” into a certain kind of docile “little angels”.

As I continue the description of the kind of masculinity that was actively promoted and rewarded in the oratorio, together with a certain level of de-sexualization of childhood, I then discuss Don Bosco’s proposal of holiness for young people. In order to do so, I analyze the story of Domenico Savio, a kid celebrated by Giovanni for his virtues, a young boy who was studying with Don Bosco to become a priest, a teenager who died at the age of 14. I then consider a few examples of how Don Bosco himself used to tell stories about his own childhood in order to promote a certain model of “holy”/“religious” masculinity among the young males of the oratorio.

Throughout the chapter, I constantly underline the parallels between Don Bosco's pedagogy and the gendered/classist Nineteenth Century discourses upon which the Salesians constructed their own rhetoric. First the oratorio as a religious place, then the Salesians as a religious institution, now the Salesian pedagogy as a religious discourse: this is the final step in my consideration of the hybridity of religion. In other words, in the chapter I explore the Salesian discourse, their pedagogical model built on rules, suggestions and tales, to finally claim "the religious" is truly a mix of different sorts of religious/secular elements.

6.2 A new concept of "youth"

As I describe in the fourth chapter of the thesis, the Turin of the Nineteenth Century was characterized by the problem of the many boys who were living in extreme poverty, forced to either steal or beg for money. Answering the complaints of the noble and middle-class population, preoccupied and annoyed by beggars and bands of boys roaming the streets, the local government began to look for a solution building institutions such as the Generala and then allowing Don Bosco to contribute with his oratorio and the mission of the Salesians.

The growth of the awareness towards the problem of juvenile delinquency coincided with the rise of a new conceptualization of "youth" across Europe, as underlined also by Prout and James (1990) and Skelton and Valentine (1998). In medieval times children were considered to be nothing more than miniature adults, and it was not until the Fifteenth Century that the "child" came to be understood and represented as having a different nature and needs, separate from the world of the adults (Aries, 1962). Once the separation happened, the formal schooling system, a structure conceived as a space within which children had to be taught their adult roles started to be developed (Prout and James, 1990).

The concept was based on the idea that children require long periods of schooling in order to become good adults. In fact, by the mid Nineteenth Century the people of Turin, especially those who belonged to the upper classes, had begun to acquire a new sensibility towards the parent-child relationship. More specifically, it was believed that the deviance of the (poor) children was the consequence of bad parenting, and the state was pushed to create institutions that could take over the role of the fathers and mothers who were not there to take care of their own children (Felloni and Audisio, 1989). As a matter of fact, by the mid Nineteenth Century, experts and academics in big cities like Milan and Turin were actively discussing the problem of the young boys (Bravo, 1969).

More importantly, the concept of childhood has historically been shaped by concepts such as gender and class. In fact, in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries only the children of the upper classes could afford to have a “childhood”. They were the “little angels” who had to be protected and were radically different from the “little devils” of the working class, who needed to be controlled and kept under surveillance. In fact, throughout the Nineteenth Century the middle classes of Europe became increasingly worried with the necessity of controlling the working class young boys (Skelton and Valentine, 1998). The classist preoccupation related to the unruly and undisciplined nature of working class young boys was framed in moral panics about juvenile crime and violence (Pearson, 1983), which was embodied in gendered characters such as the *monelli di strada*, the bad boys who lived in the streets of Turin. The presence of young boys in the streets was particularly problematic, because it was (and still is) considered as a potential threat to public order (Baumgartner, 1988; Cahill, 1990). As a reaction to this problem,

different institutions throughout the last 200 years have introduced various forms of spatial curfews and surveillance (Valentine, 1996a, 1996b, 1997a). One example was the Generala. Another example was the Salesian oratorio.

6.3 The Preventive System

The strength of Don Bosco's oratorio resided in its ability to attract young people without formally imposing any sort of barrier to someone who wanted to access the place. It would, however, be a great mistake to consider the oratorio as a place without rules. As a matter of fact, the Piedmontese priest had a clear idea in mind regarding the education of the males who decided to play, work or study within the walls of Casa Pinardi in Valdocco and the other oratori. Don Bosco called this idea the "preventive system".

According to Don Bosco's pedagogical approach, the educator (in this case, either the priest or a Salesian cooperatros) had to be constantly present, like a father who never loses sight of his children: during informal meetings or playtime, work or prayers, school classes or recreational activities. In other words, according to the preventive system those who were educated had to be left without a chance to break the rules. As Don Bosco himself said, "the preventive system allows the pupil to be warned and the educator can speak with him with the language of the heart during educative and recreational moment. Once he conquers the heart of the pupil, the educator will be able to exercise a great power over him, warn him, offer him advice [...]" (quoted in Stella, 2001, loc 670). In a letter he wrote from Rome in 1884, Don Bosco reiterated the concept,

indicating the educator should be with the youngsters every time, especially during the time of play. In the letter, he said:

“By being loved in the things they like, through taking part in their youthful interests, they are led to see love in those things which they find less attractive, such as discipline, study and self-denial, and so learn to do these things too with love. [...] By a friendly informal relationship with the young people, especially in recreation. You cannot have affection without familiarity, and where affection is not evident there can be no confidence. If you want to be loved, you must make it clear that you love. Jesus made himself little with the little ones and bore our weaknesses. He is our Master in the matter of the friendly approach. The teacher who is seen only in the classroom is a teacher and nothing more; but if he joins in the pupils’ recreation he becomes their brother [...] This confidence creates an electric charge between youngsters and their educators. Hearts are opened, needs and weaknesses are made known. This love enables educators to put up with the weariness, the annoyance, the ingratitude and the trouble that youngsters cause.”

It was a matter of acting as a family member, either a father or a big brother, for children who spent their days in the streets of a rough city often with no family. A man who lived and experienced Don Bosco’s oratorio, described the way in which the young priest interacted with young people by saying:

“I speak of the kind of goodness that his homey, humble, cordial, lovable, and at once fatherly, motherly, brotherly. I speak not of the kind of goodness that condescends, but of the kind that draws near to a person and that tries to live with and for that person - the kind that makes room for the other. [...] In spite of his heavy workload, he always kept a part of his person, of his mind, of his heart available to the last comer, no matter what the hour, what the work. In one word, he loved, and we felt the power of his love.”

(Alberto Caviglia, 1934, p. 91)

Don Bosco was constantly available and he was a presence the young boys who experienced the oratorio could not ignore. The priest was sure that the lack of parental control needed to be counterbalanced by constant supervision, and the oratorio was the place where this supervision was to be practiced. As he said, in fact:

“The young constitute the most fragile, yet most valuable, component of human society, for on them we base our hopes for the future. They are not of themselves depraved. Were it not for parental neglect, idleness, mixing in bad company, something they experience especially on Sundays and holy days, it would be so easy to inculcate in their young hearts moral and religious principles of order, good behavior, respect, religious practice. For if they are found to have been ruined at that young age, it will have been due more to thoughtlessness than to ingrained malice. These young people have real need of some kind person who will care for them, work with them, guide them in virtue and keep them away from evil. [...] The oratori should be reckoned among the most effective means for instilling the religious spirit into the uncultivated hearts of neglected young people.”

(Don Bosco, 1854, quoted in Lenti, 2007B, p. 26)

The need to inculcate “moral and religious principles of order, good behavior, respect, religious practice” was translated into different set of rules that regulated how the young boys were to behave, especially during classes and workshops. Before jumping in the analysis of these rules, it is important to underline that Don Bosco did not invent his preventive system out of thin air. In fact, the idea of “prevention” was quite popular among intellectuals.

In Turin Aporti and Rayneri used the term to indicate that education is a powerful form of prevention. In France, the term was related to the criminal system, the dangerous classes and issues of public order. For instance, Adolphe Thiers, the second elected President of France who served as a prime minister in 1836, 1840 and 1848, famously claimed education and surveillance were a critical part of the role the State played to avoid disorders (Stella, 2001). Another example is Félix Dupanloup, bishop of Orléans. In his influential pedagogical work titled *l'Éducation* (1850), he stated that prevention without confrontation is better than repression.

The key point here is the fact that the model Don Bosco's used to inculcate moral and religious principles was a bridge between the need to take care of the young boys who were causing panic in the streets of Turin and the prevention conceptualized by European intellectuals to tackle issues of public order. In other words, while including religious morality and principles, the model was itself based on the same classist and gendered models that stood behind the new concept of youth described in the previous section of the thesis. Furthermore, the religious principles described by Don Bosco included order, obedience, good behavior and respect, another reaction to the disorder, unruly and vulgar behavior of the *monelli di strada*, the working class brats. Don Bosco pedagogy, a model placed in a religious frame, upon which the oratorio was built and the Salesians sculpted, was indeed a religious/secular hybrid discourse. This classist and gendered hybridity is even more evident in the rules of the oratorio and its workshops.

6.4 The Hybrid Rules of The Oratorio

Here are the rules of the first oratorio-based youth association, The Company of St. Aloysius, established by Don Bosco in 1847:

1- St. Aloysius was a model of exemplary conduct; therefore, all who want to become members of this solidarity must follow his example. They must behave in such manner as not only to avoid giving any kind of scandal, but also to strive constantly to set a good example, especially by the faithful observance of their religious duties. St. Aloysius from early childhood was so exact in performing his duties, so fond of prayer and so devout that, when he went to church, people flocked to see his modest demeanor and his recollection.

2 - Endeavor to go to confession and Communion every two weeks or even more frequently, especially on solemn feast days. These sacraments are the weapons by which we triumph over the devil. As a young boy, St. Aloysius received them every week, and as he grew older, more often. Any member unable to fulfill this obligation may substitute some other act of devotion, with his director's advice. All are encouraged to frequent the sacraments and to attend church services in the oratory chapel so as to set good example for their confession.

3 - Flee from bad companions as from a plague, and be very careful to avoid improper conversation. St. Aloysius not only shunned such talk, but showed such modesty that no one even dared to utter an unseemly word in his presence.

Reading these first three rules, it is already possible to notice the combination of religious and secular elements that constituted the base of Don Bosco's pedagogical approach. On one hand, the priest clarifies that the boys who wanted to join the association had to respect their religious

duties: prayers, going to the church, confession and Communion. On the other hand, the boys are reminded to avoid improper conversation, scandals and bad companions.

4 - Practice the greatest charity toward your companions, readily forgiving any offense. St. Aloysius repaid insults with friendship.

5 - Have the greatest respect for the house of God. Urge others to practice virtue and to join this sodality. Out of love for others St. Aloysius volunteered to nurse the victims of a plague, and thereby sacrificed his own life.

6 - Be very diligent in your work and in the fulfillment of your other duties. Promptly obey your parents and superiors.

7 - When a sodality member falls sick, all the others should pray for him and also give him material assistance according to their means.”

The last four rules are once again a mix of religious and secular elements. The boys are reminded of the need to respect the house of God and to pray for a sick friend, but at the same time they are pushed to be forgiving and obedient. In other words, the boys had to be docile and ready to fulfill their duties.

It is worth pointing out that the insistence on confession as an obligation, which appears over and over again in Don Bosco’s rules and suggestions, adds a new Foucauldian layer to Don Bosco’s pedagogy. In fact, it suggests that the boys were constantly supervised while being pushed to monitor their own behavior. Also, although not explicitly mentioned, the term “scandals” coupled with concepts such as “foul language”, “obscenity”, “immorality”, which appear as “things to avoid” in other rules reported in this chapter, lead me to believe Don Bosco was also

attempting to de-sexualize his boys by keeping them from talking about sex. This assumption is also based on the fact that in Nineteenth Century Europe, slums like those from which Don Bosco's boys were coming from were often hyper-sexualized by the press and upper-class rhetorics, which pictured them as a "perverse sexual jungle" (Walkowitz, 1992, p.4).

The same kind of docile and obedient "religious" masculinity that was rewarded in the youth associations founded in the oratorio was also enforced in the workshops that were held by the Salesians Cooperators. What follows is a list of rules that explicitly reinforces the claims I put forward so far: Don Bosco's pedagogy was really a set of classist and gendered elements promoted in Nineteenth Century Europe mixed with religious components, namely the need to pray and confess. The result is religious hybrid discourse that could not be fully understood if not contextualized in the politics and the pedagogical discourses of the time.

6.4.1 Religious hybridity in the workshops

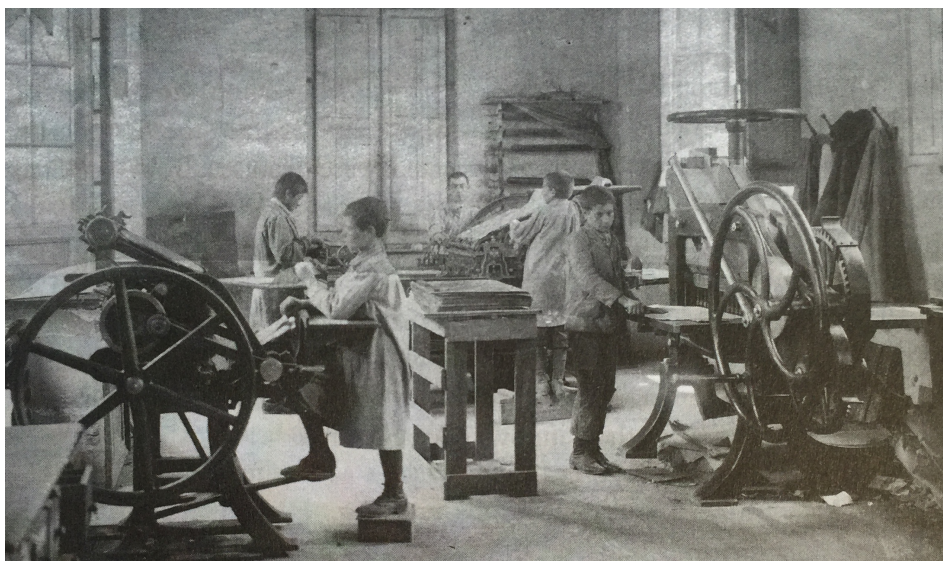


Figure 6.1. "Workshop in the 1870s at the Valdocco's oratorio". Source: Lenti, A.J. 2007

The regulations of the workshops (Lemoyne, et al. 1898, p. 116-118) is a list of 20 rules were compiled between 1861 and 1862. According to Don Bosco, the oratorio's workshops constituted an attempt to remove the boys from the physical and moral dangers of the workshops of Turin. He believed his own workshops were a key element in protecting the "bad boys" from damaging influences, from both a physical and a moral perspective. All this is reflected in the rules he created for his boys. Rules number 10 to 15 include technical aspects of the workshop life that are not important for my thesis, such as who is in charge of purchasing new tools or reporting about financial issues. What I list here are the rules that directly mention how the boys should behave.

1 - The young apprentices in each workshop must be docile, submissive and obedient to the Assistant and to the craft master, who are their immediate superiors.

2 - Apprentices to one trade may not switch to another without permission from the Financial Administrator or from the Rector.

Rule number 1 and rule number 2 set the tone for the rest of the list: the boys have to be docile, submissive and obedient. This was also the kind of docile "religious" masculinity promoted in the oratorio as a way to supervise the problematic working class boys enrolled by Don Bosco and the Salesians.

3 - In the workshops it is absolutely forbidden to smoke, drink or play games of any kind. A rigorous silence must be maintained, as compatible with the art or trade in question.

4 - Apprentices may not leave the workshop without the Assistant's permission. Should it be necessary to send an apprentice out on some job or errand, the Assistant must first seek the Financial Administrator's or the Prefect's permission.

5 - No job from outside the House, or of any importance in the House, may be undertaken without a previous understanding with the Financial Administrator.

Rule number 3 introduces an important element: it prohibits the boys from indulging in vices such as smoking, drinking and playing games. The prohibition introduces a moral component that will be developed later in the list to include "foul language". Even more than obedience, morality required the boys to watch their own behavior and judge it in terms of right and wrong, an element that was combined with the invitation to confession described in the previous sections. Furthermore the boys were also asked to be silent.

6 - The Assistant must keep a record in the workshop's register of any job undertaken, and note date, price agreed upon, name and address of the client, and any other important information.

7 - The Assistant must carefully supervise the apprentices and see to their good behavior and to their punctuality on the job.

8 - It is the duty both of the Assistant and of the craft master to prevent foul talk of any kind, and to report immediately any offender.

9 - The Assistant and the craft master should be at their post on time to supervise the apprentices as they enter their workshop, so as to prevent any misconduct from taking place at such time. He then can assign each apprentice his work without loss of time.

This set of rules includes concepts such as “foul talk” and “misconduct”. While not explicitly stated, the concept of “foul talk” in Italian could be easily translated also with “bad words” or “dirty talk”, indicating a will to de-sexualize the workshops and consequently the boys. This is also in accordance with the idea of de-sexualized “little angels/saints” that I will explore later in the chapter. The bad working class boys had to be docile little saints or angels avoiding temptations, which include “dirty talks”: work and obedience were the answer to sins. To confirm this, in a booklet wrote in 1847 called *Il Giovane Provveduto* (The Good Boy/The Boy Who Is Ready) Don Bosco suggested to the boys “avoid occasions of sin, such as evil conversations and immoral public shows [...] keep yourself occupied with work”.

16 - Should any tool be found to be damaged or missing through someone’s fault, let it be replaced at the offender’s expense. Should the culprit remain unknown, let the item be replaced at the expenses of all the apprentices in the workshop equally.

17 - The day’s work begins with the Actiones and the Hail Mary. The Angelus is always recited before the apprentices leave the workshop.

18 - Let the Assistants and the craft master keep in mind that by zeal and charity they will be able to do much good, and thus receive their reward from the Lord.

19 - Let the apprentices keep in mind that human beings are born to work, and only those that labor with love and perseverance find the burden light and are able to learn the trade that will provide them with an honest livelihood.

20 - These articles are to be read to the youngsters in a loud and clear voice every fortnight by the Assistant or by someone in his place. A copy of these articles is to remain posted in the workshop.

As it is clearly stated, these rules had to be posted in the workshop and read out loud: no misunderstanding about their validity and importance was to be allowed. Just like the set of rules analyzed in the previous section, they include elements that are clearly meant to shape the character of the working class bad boys: zeal and charity were promoted, while stealing or damaging working tools was condemned. All this was mixed with the religious background. In fact, every work day “begins with the Actiones and the Hail Mary”. This is the key element added by this last set of rules: the way in which religious and moral/practical rules were combined to mirror the pedagogical discourse that characterized Don Bosco’s oratorio and the missions of the Salesians.

6.4.3 Religious hybridity during playtime

The religious hybridity that constituted the base of Don Bosco’s pedagogy was expressed in the rules of the oratorio or the workshops, but it was also a key element of the games and the sports practiced within the oratorio’s walls. Around Italy, space for organize sports were absent from schools and public gardens until the late Nineteenth Century. In the oratorio, however, playground and team sports have been a key element from the very beginning. Don Bosco wanted a big playground, a place that could allow a great number of boys to take part in the games. He believed team sports could bolster informality and self-expression, which the educators could then observe: this was another way to supervise the “bad boys” who needed to be kept under surveillance at all times according to Don Bosco’s pedagogical model, as I indicated at the beginning of the chapter.

All the educators were required to participate to the games and continuously chat with the boys. The main purpose was to establish a gaming routine that was neither physically nor morally dangerous: no foul words, no violence and no misbehaviors on one hand; rewarding of team work, charitable, placid and good behavior on the other. Don Bosco called this practice “little words”: a combination of personal chats, confessions, invitations and warnings the priests responsible for the education of the youngsters were called to reiterate. It was in these “little words” that the hybridity expressed itself through a combination of the same religious, classist and gendered rules upon which the workshops and the oratorio itself were built. Even on the playground, the boys were pushed to watch their language, confess and avoid bad behavior, which consisted in violence and foul words.

6.5 The little angels’ tales

A key part of Don Bosco’s pedagogical hybrid discourse is the figure of the “little angels” or “little saints”. These characters represent the culmination of the religious, classist, gendered that shaped the mission of the Salesians and upon which the oratorio was quite literally built. In fact, these little angels/saints were the embodiment of the model of “religious” masculinity promoted by Don Bosco: an obedient, docile, de-sexualized representation that the young boys of the oratorio were supposed to embrace.

In accordance to the upper-classes’ vision of the working class young males of the time, in the archives Don Bosco often describes his boys as difficult, in need of assistance, and sometimes dirty and unkempt. For instance, here is how Don Bosco describes them in the manuscript *Cooperatori Salesiani*, written in 1877: “some of our pupils were nothing but dirty, unkempt

ragamuffins. No one could stand them, and no employer wanted them in his workshop.” The activities of the oratorio and the rules set up by Don Bosco and the Salesians were meant to transform the boys from these dirty, disobedient and unkempt brats to obedient, docile little saints. Don Bosco described these little saints in a number of writings and speeches. The most famous was his biography of Domenico Savio, written in 1859.

6.5.1 The tale of Domenico Savio

According to the biography, Domenico Savio was born on the 2nd of April 1842 in a small village called Riva presso Chieri. He died of cholera on the 9th of March 1857 in Mondino di Castelnuovo¹⁵. The book written by Don Bosco about the young boy begins recollecting the early life of Domenico. From chapter one (*Home – The boy's character – His early goodness*) to chapter nine (*Study of Latin – Curious incidents – School – He prevents a fight – He avoids danger*), the central theme is how edifying the life of the boy was. The story moves then to the central chapter, chapter ten (*His decision to become a saint*), where Domenico makes the decision of becoming a saint. Chapters ten (*His decision to become a saint*) to eighteen (*His special friends – Relationship with young Camillo Gavio*) focus on his virtues and heroic attempts to push his friends to abandon vice. In chapter nineteen (*His relationship with young John Massaglia*) Don Bosco talks about moments of ecstasy and mystical prayer that involved Domenico, while chapters twenty (*Special graces and particular deeds*) to twenty-five (*His final moments and his wonderful death*) are dedicated to the youngster's death and chapters twenty-six (*Announcing his death - Fr Picco's words to the students*) and twenty-seven (*Imitating Savio's*

¹⁵ Domenico Savio was proclaimed saint in 1954 by Pope Pius XII.

virtue – Many pray to him to obtain heavenly graces and are heard - A reminder for everyone)
contain a series of testimonies of his holiness.

The biography is full of examples of the kind of behavior Don Bosco wanted to promote among the bad boys of the oratorio. For instance, in the second chapter he writes:

“He had, of course, to mix with the young and thoughtless boys of his own age, but he always managed to avoid their little quarrels and disputes, although this at times brought upon him taunts and insults, which he bore with remarkable courage and patience. The usual boyish, but by no means praiseworthy, tricks and escapades were part of the usual programme of his companions, but Dominic generally found means for being otherwise employed when these were in progress.”

(Bosco 2009, p. 16)

This is clearly an indication of the kind of character Don Bosco wanted to turn into a model of docile masculinity for his students. To reinforce the image of the “little angel” even further, in chapter three he continues:

“In his little book of devotions he wrote down some resolutions, which I have been able to transcribe with all their original and direct simplicity, and their introduction in diary form: ‘Resolutions made by me, Dominic Savio, in the year 1849, on the day of my First Communion, at the age of seven.

1. I will go to Confession often, and as frequently to Holy Communion as my confessor allows.
2. I wish to sanctify the Sundays and festivals in a special manner.

3. My friends shall be Jesus and Mary.
4. Death rather than sin.’

These resolutions were not simply written out and then put carefully away; he read them very often, and they were a guide to him throughout his life. If among the readers of this little work there should chance to be some who are yet to make their First Communion, I would strongly urge them to follow young Savio as their model.”

(Bosco 2009, p. 20-21)

To the placid character described in the second chapter, Don Bosco now adds the “go to Confession often” and the “death rather than sin”: two religious elements that mix perfectly with the classist/gendered model promoted in the other chapters of the book. The priest met with Domenico in Murialdo, a small village where the boy was living. According to the book, it was the boy who asked Don Bosco if he could move to Turin to study with him and be part of his oratorio. The priest says “directly he came to the oratorio, he came to my room, in order to place himself, as he said, entirely in the hands of his Director” (Bosco 2009, p. 36). This is just another example of how the little angel was docile and obedient. As for the conduct of Domenico once he joined the oratorio in Turin, in chapter seven Don Bosco says:

“His mode of life was just the routine life of school work; and at first there was nothing extraordinary to remark, beyond his scrupulous observance of every rule. At study or any other duty, he was at once diligent and zealous [...] He always made a point of asking for explanations of difficulties, and thus he was able to make continual progress in virtue, and in exactness in the performance of his duties, so that it would be difficult to go beyond the excellence he attained. He had already requested the favour of having his faults pointed out, so that his conduct towards all became equally praiseworthy; he was

very apt at noticing what should be avoided in the conduct of a companion, and what should be imitated, and Dominic chose his companions accordingly.”

(Bosco 2009, p. 37)

In more than one instance, the boy is described as careful and courteous, attentive and respectful: the opposite of the dirty and unkempt bad boys Don Bosco and the Salesians were welcoming within the oratorio’s walls.

Domenico Savio has become a central figure in the Salesian rhetoric. Representations of the young boy have been introduced in the Salesian Bulletin and in a myriad of booklets for children printed by the main Salesian publishing company Elle Di Ci (founded in 1941). Here are just a few examples of the way in which the life of Domenico Savio is represented:



Figure 6.2. “Domenico brings a friend to Confession”. Elle Di Ci, 1991



Figure 6.3. "Domenico refuses to go to the circus". Elle Di Ci, 1991



Figure 6.4. "Domenico destroys a pornographic magazine". Elle Di Ci, 1991

In the Figure 6.2, Domenico Savio brings a friend to Don Bosco for Confession. In Figure 6.3, a young boy tries to convince him to forget about school and go to the circus with him. He refuses. In Figure 6.4, Domenico finds a few boys reading what the caption defines as a “pornographic journal”, which he immediately destroys. In the Salesian booklets and bulletin, Domenico is the embodiment of the “little angel”, a graceful young man who reacts strongly to what Don Bosco defines as sins, such as foul language, blasphemy, laziness and violence: the ultimate model of docile “religious” masculinity reiterated among the working class ragamuffins of the oratorio.

6.5.2 The dream of Giovannino

Domenico Savio was not the only young boy Don Bosco used as an example of “little angels” for the boys of the oratorio. In fact, through his writings and tales the priest also built a sort of mythical aura around his own childhood, turning his young self into a sort of little saint, similar to Domenico Savio. In order to better understand the nature of the “myth of Giovannino” (little Giovanni), I now examine the dream Don Bosco describes in his biography (2012, loc. 725-731). This is a famous dream in the Salesian tradition and has been reproduced in innumerable forms, from comics to paintings.

“It was at that age [nine years old] that I had a dream. All my life this remained deeply impressed on my mind. In this dream I seemed to be near my home in a very large yard. A crowd of children were playing there. Some were laughing, some were playing games, and quite a few were swearing. When I heard these evil words, I jumped immediately amongst them and tried to stop them by using my words and my fists.”

Right at the beginning of the dream, Don Bosco already mentions an example of the kind of “bad behavior” he considers to be sinful, just like he does in Domenico Savio’s biography.

Giovannino gets upset when he hears “evil words”, just like Domenico reacts strongly against blasphemy. Right from the beginning, the bad boys of the oratorio who heard this story knew “evil words” had to be avoided in order to be “little angels”. The dream continues:

“At that moment a dignified man appeared, a nobly-dressed adult. He wore a white cloak, and his face shone so that I could not look directly at him. He called me by name, told me to take charge of these children, and added these words: You will have to win these friends of yours not by blows but by gentleness and love. Start right away to teach them the ugliness of sin and the value of virtue. Confused and frightened, I replied that I was a poor, ignorant child. I was unable to talk to those youngsters about religion. At that moment they stopped their fighting, shouting, and swearing; they gathered round the man who was speaking.”

In this passage, a figure of authority tells Giovannino he has to be gentle if he wants the other boys to stop shouting, swearing and fighting. The docile “religious” masculinity is once again reiterated with strength. The story moves on:

“Hardly knowing what I was saying, I asked, Who are you, ordering me to do the impossible? Precisely because it seems impossible, you must make it possible through obedience and the acquisition of knowledge. Where, by what means, can I acquire knowledge? I will give you a teacher [...] But who are you that speak so? I am the son of the woman whom your mother has taught you to greet three times a day.”

Not only Giovannino has to be gentle in order to calm the other boys, he also has to be obedient: obedience, docility, these concepts are repeated endlessly to become stronger in the head of those who listened to the story, the boys of the oratorio.

“[...] At that moment, I saw a lady of stately appearance standing beside him. She was wearing a mantle that sparkled all over as though covered with bright stars. Seeing from my questions and answers that I was more confused than ever, she beckoned me to approach her. She took me kindly by the hand and said, Look. Glancing round, I realised that the youngsters had all apparently run away. A large number of goats, dogs, cats, bears, and other animals had taken their place. This is the field of your work. Make yourself humble, strong, and energetic. And what you will see happening to these animals in a moment is what you must do for my children. I looked round again, and where before I had seen wild animals, I now saw gentle lambs.”

When a woman, who supposedly is Mary, appears to Giovannino, the boy is told he has to be humble, strong and energetic, and the troublesome boys, who turned into goats, dogs, cats and bears, will become gentle like lambs. The appearance of the religious element, Mary, is just the culmination of the religious pedagogical mix that characterized the Salesian pedagogical discourse: from the oratorio, to the institution, to the “religious” masculinity and the tale of the “little angels”.

6.6 Key Points: Hybrid Religious Masculinity

While chapter 4 discusses the hybridity of a religious place, the oratorio, and chapter 5 talks about the hybridity of a religious institution, the Salesians, chapter 6 focuses on a religious discourse, namely the discourse upon which the pedagogical approach of Don Bosco was based. More specifically, the chapter examines the kind of behavior Don Bosco was promoting through his oratorio and the pedagogical approach adopted by the Salesians. The result of this promotion was the creation of a certain idea of “religious” masculinity characterized by docility, obedience

and a certain degree of de-sexualization, all framed in religious rituals such as the sacrament of Confession.

The chapter examines the frame within which this kind of docile masculinity was promoted and described the hybridity of Don Bosco discourse: a combination of religious rhetoric, classist and gendered models molded by Nineteenth Century ideals that portrayed young working class boys as unkempt, dirty and unruly, and in need of constant surveillance. Unsurprisingly enough, the boys of the oratorio were continuously under surveillance and were pushed to face the sacrament of Confession multiple times during the month, therefore imposing a dynamic of self-surveillance. Part of the gendered/classist/religious discourse Don Bosco's promoted was the creation of the tale of the "little angels", embodied in boys like Domenico Savio and Giovannino (the young Don Bosco): obedient, gentle boys ready to fight against vice, from blasphemy and foul language to indecent magazines, violence and laziness. The bad working class boys were encourage to push each other towards these models represented in tales and booklets, statues and paintings.

The key point of the chapter is that, just like the oratorio and the Salesians, Don Bosco's pedagogical discourse is not exceptional in its hybridity. Instead, it is hybrid because it is religious and "the religious" is always a hybrid mix of religious and secular elements that continuously shape each other. While Don Bosco's pedagogy constitutes a particular expression of this hybrid mix, the mix is always what comes first: religious places, no religious institutions, religious discourses are a meaningless concept before the mixing of religious and secular

elements. This might seem like a minor point but it is key to my argument: “the religious” is simply unconceivable if taken out of its co-shaping with “the secular”.

Therefore, I believe it is quite incorrect to assume religious discourses, places and institutions are “born”: instead, they are molded. They are the expression of the shape the religious/secular mix takes in a particular historical moment, instead of being conceived out of nowhere. Concepts such as “revelation” and “miraculous appearance” are just as misleading as the postsecular need to “blur” boundaries between two supposedly separate realms (the religious and the secular). What I claim is that “the religious” just like “the secular” is only a never-ending mixing made of elements such as political, social and economic issues.

7. Conclusions: Blurring “the religious”

7.1 A religious place that does not feel religious

The questions I was left with at the end of my Queen Mary College project (Bettani, 2010), namely why was the oratorio created and what are the values upon which it was built, were the sign of a curiosity that came from my experience of the place. Growing up as a child in the oratorio of Bariano, I never really questioned whether the place was religious or not, even if it was indeed owned and managed by the Church in collaboration with the local government and the priest was almost always around. The place was simply the center of gravity of the village. I met friends who were not even Catholics there and whenever something significant was happening in Bariano the oratorio was the place to be.

Therefore, when I started my research on the original oratorio molded by Don Bosco, I was really expecting to find that the place was not really religious: maybe it was simply a center for young boys or some kind of institution managed by the city of Turin, which then asked Don Bosco to contribute. Instead, what I found is that the oratorio was indeed religious: Don Bosco conceived it, he managed it and religion remained always central to his pedagogical model. In a certain sense, this was my most surprising finding: a place that did not “feel” religious to me was actually religious. This was also what made me realize that maybe my feeling was a sign that “religious” meant something a little more complicated than praying and believing in God. Maybe, the oratorio did not “feel” religious to me because “the religious” is actually a big dynamic mix of elements: a religious/secular hybrid. Maybe “religious” and “secular” exist at the same time and in the same place, which in this case is the oratorio.

This is how I began to question the concept of postsecularity, by pushing beyond the idea that the oratorio was simply a religious place owned by the Church and used by a priest to help the city of Turin tackling social issues related to some young troublesome boys. The story of the oratorio, the Salesian Congregation and Don Bosco's pedagogical discourse helped me to take a step further and argue that religious places, institutions and discourses, which throughout the thesis I've labeled as "the religious", are completely shaped by social, economic and political circumstances, "the secular". Thinking about religion as being shaped by secular elements means reversing one of the foundational arguments of postsecular theory, the fact that "the religious" plays a role within "the secular". What I claim is that there is no religious/secular boundary, because the two elements are not separated to begin with: religious and secular institutions, discourses and places are simply different expressions of the same hybrid mix.

7.2 Answering the research questions

I now go back to the research questions answering them while addressing the wider discussions I examined in chapter 3 of the thesis.

1) How is the oratorio a challenge to postsecular geography?

The oratorio speaks directly to the postsecular scholars who claim that in the last decades "the religious" has been playing an increasingly important role in "secular" societies, especially if we consider the service sector (Jamoul and Wills 2008, Cloke and Beaumont 2013, Bondi 2013, Sharma and Guest 2013, Williams 2015). Following postsecular theory, I would be pushed towards an understanding of the oratorio as a postsecular place: the spatial expression of the

coming together of religious institutions and local government, priests and citizens ready to tackle common social issues, in this case the problem of the working class boys of Turin.

Furthermore, I would be inclined to understand the oratorio simply as the Church's response to a social problem, a place born to carry out a certain service. All this makes sense. However, I believe the postsecular perspective is extremely simplistic and that the oratorio challenges it in multiple ways, which I now enounce.

The oratorio challenges postsecular theory because it was shaped by the same issues it was supposed to tackle. In fact, without the problem of the bad boys of Turin, the oratorio would have been either very different or completely useless. Describing the oratorio as simply the answer of the Church to a problem would be misleading because it would imply there is a "religious" answer to a problem. But where does that "religious" come from? One of the main arguments of postsecular theory is that postsecular places are the expression of some sort of strategic alliance through which people of faith and nonreligious people momentarily suspend their own beliefs (Olson et al. 2013, Williams 2015). The people of the oratorio did not suspend their beliefs: the oratorio was a religious place. What made it hybrid was precisely its being "religious": religion itself is the hybrid element produced by a mixing of religious and non-religious elements. In fact, the oratorio was a religious place, a political place and a social place.

Furthermore, the oratorio challenges postsecular theory also because it underlines that religious places are not simply born in a particular historical moment (Kong 2001). The idea of a religious place as being "born" or "founded" is in fact another way to position religion outside of the religious/secular mix. Allow me to explain this further. If I claim the oratorio was "born" in the

Nineteenth Century, what my language suggest is that somehow the oratorio suddenly appeared out of nowhere as something unique, which is dangerously close to claiming that the oratorio was the product of a revelation or a miraculous appearance. I believe it way better to say that the oratorio was the Nineteenth Century expression of the never-ending mixing between religious and secular elements. Describing it this way, what I do is taking away its uniqueness by placing it within a wider hybrid dynamic that includes politics and economies, social issues and religious beliefs: the hybrid foundation upon which religious places, religious institutions and religious discourses are built.

2) What do the oratorio and the Salesians suggest about “the religious”?

What the oratorio and the Salesians suggest is that “the religious” is always a hybrid that includes complicated negotiations between personal beliefs, social issues, political circumstances, and a myriad of other elements. They suggest that thinking about a boundary to blur between religion and the secular world (Cloke and Beaumont 2013) is a misleading idea, because “the religious” and “the secular” are expression of the same hybrid discourses. Religious institutions are also social, political and economic, just like the religious places to which they are attached. The same is true for the religious discourses that constitute the foundation of those religious institutions and places.

As chapter 6 explains, the pedagogical religious discourse upon which both the oratorio and the Salesians were built was a mix of religious, classist, gendered and de-sexualized models that were fairly popular in Nineteenth Century Europe. Separating “the religious” from the hybrid

mix that shapes it creates a falsely unique and separate religious variable that assumes a somehow out-of-place and out-of-time quality, which in turns makes religious both untouchable and unanalyzable: a matter of pure “faith”, a philosophical concepts easily out of reach for social scientiests. Making religion a matter of faith is precisely what postsecular geography paradoxically does through its attempts to underline the importance of “the religious” over “the secular” (Barnes and Prior 2009; Williams et al. 2012, Barbato 2012, Dabashi 2012, Olson et al. 2013, Gökarıksel 2015).

This is not a thesis about philosophy and therefore I am truly not interested in discussing the value of the concept of “faith” as a personal set of beliefs born out of some kind of human need. As a social scientist, I wrote this thesis as a way to debunk the idea that “the religious” is somehow untouchable by showing how “the religious” and “the secular” really belong to the same hybrid realm. The oratorio and the Salesian are a wonderful example of this because their story is filled with complicated political negotiations and social issues, and also because the Church at the time did not make any effort to hide its nature as a political institution with secular interests. This said, as I repeated multiple times, the oratorio and the Salesians are not unique, and this is precisely the loudest thing the say about “the religious”: all institutions, places and discourses that are labeled as religious are indeed religious/secular hybrids.

7.3 Future Studies: Not just a problem of language

Future studies in postsecular geography should indeed consider whether or not postsecularity is a useful concept or a misleading one, as I suggest in the thesis. If postsecularism continues to be a unidirectional force based on the idea that “the secular” is blurred by the

presence of “the religious”, scholars should at least consider coining a new term, something like “postreligiosity”, to discuss how secular issues affect religion. This could be helpful if geographers still believe postsecularity continues to be important to contrast secular theory, which is equally misleading in its claiming that religion has somehow disappeared from secular societies. This said, I personally believe geography of religion could benefit from a broader reconceptualization of “the religious” as a blurred concept.

If we take a step back and consider how “the religious” and “the secular” are truly coproduced, we can get rid of both postsecularity and postreligiosity, and move to a better understanding of how religion shapes itself according to the social issues of the time, which in turn are molded also by religious discourses, places and institutions. Besides being a problem of language and concepts, this is also an issue that involves the status of religion itself as a somehow untouchable personal realm based of beliefs and miraculous revelations. By merging “the religious” and “the secular”, religion becomes a human issue instead of being a divine one: a delicate issue that can be discussed with attention but without fear.

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