Between heritage, scale and religion: A brief study on the Waldensian and Methodist heritage framework and the Waldensian Valleys

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BETWEEN HERITAGE, SCALE AND RELIGION

"A brief study on the Waldensian and Methodist heritage framework and the Waldensian Valleys"

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Thesis Master Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology: Global Ethnography August 19th 2024

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APPENDIX

FDL: FESTA DELLA LIBERTÀ
GPVM: GIORNATE DEL PATRIMONIO CULTURALE VALDESE E METODISTA
UBCV: UFFICIO BENI CULTURALI DELLA TAVOLA VALDESE
WMH: WALDENSIAN AND METHODIST HERITAGE
OT: OPEN TEMPLE

INTRODUCTION

When I began this research, my goal was to examine “Waldensian and Methodist heritage,” although I did not have a clear understanding of what that entailed, apart from its connection to two seemingly Protestant churches. I also aimed to explore how this “heritage” relates to more official frameworks, such as the state and international bodies, while maintaining its connection to less formal, more grassroots traditions. However, as I delved deeper, I began to question: How can we distinguish between local heritage, national heritage, or something else? How can we determine whether something pertains to the church or to something entirely different?

For me, all of that meant that in the three Waldensian Valleys, three mountain valleys just northwest of Turin, not just the weather but other things can turn unexpectedly. For instance, you think you’re at a local festival, you might realize that others see it as something much bigger, “not just about the Waldensians.” So, when a Waldensian person from these valleys asks, “Did you meet our pope?”—even though you know the Waldensian Church doesn’t have a pope—you can’t help but dig deeper to figure out what they really mean.

As Paola, my main contact and guide, told me when I first started: “Nothing is simple in the Waldensian world… we’re both a church and people in the end.” I was already informed about the Waldensian Church that integrated the Methodist Church on a heritage agreement (i.e. Waldensian and Methodist Heritage). However, alongside the church's official framework, there seems to be a more “local” tradition. as Paola hinted, it could reflect the idea that “we’re both a church and people..”

Therefore this research tries to reassess "heritage" as a local practice by examining “scales", weather local, national or even transnational, and recognizing the interconnectedness of different heritage discourses by trying to find who authorizes them. It raises crucial questions: Who authorizes these heritage scales, and how? What kind of authority is involved? Certainly not "the pope," but the example of the pope brings to light the broader issue of heritage scales and their authorization. The pope, as both a secular and religiously sacred authority, can simultaneously sacralize and secularize. How about the Waldensian case then?

To address the scientific and social relevance, Birgit Meyer and Marleen de Witte (2013) argue that labeling something as "heritage" can impart a distinct sense of sacredness. Conversely, labeling religious forms as "heritage" can diminish their original sacred significance. Given that "heritage" and "religion," "secular" and "sacred" are permeable categories (Meyer & de Witte 2013; Balkenhol, Emel & Stengs 2020), this study aims to shed light on the interconnectedness of religion

and heritage, secular and sacred, by examining the tensions and convergences across different scales.
Moreover, it seeks to contribute to local heritage management and fill a significant gap in Waldensian studies, which often focus solely on Waldensian history, by exploring the contemporary social and cultural dimensions of the Church and taking a closer look at the heritagization of Waldensian and Methodist heritage.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In the forthcoming section, my aim is to emphasize the theoretical foundation of studying heritage as a material manifestation, and as a process and performance. To do this, I will begin by examining the ongoing debates about the origin and "nature" of heritage that have emerged over the past two decades. Moving from theories that focus on the essential traits of what heritage is to theories that study the effect heritage has on people (Waterton & Watson 2013), my goal is to highlight the gaps and ambiguities that make "heritage" a complex and contested concept.
I will explore the main arguments within "heritage management" as a starting point, by presenting the discussions on "theory in heritage" and "theory of heritage" (Waterton & Watson 2013) which highlight the tension between materiality and intangible aspects, such as traditions.
Next, I will discuss the relevance the concepts of locality and scale had in my research and how it is addressed within heritage discourses, although my initial point was the examination of "community relationships," which in the end failed and led me to revise the original research question. "Community relationships" as a concept has to be implemented with Arjun Appadurai's theory of locality (2018) and Anne Tsing's (2000) "theory of scale"—or how community relationships are enacted differently in local heritage-making (such as by the Waldensian community), at a national scale (within Laurajane Smith's (2006) Authorized Heritage Discourse or AHD), and on a transnational scale (such as within the idea of a "heritage community" developed in the Faro Convention's framework).
The remaining part to operationalize is what is secular and what is sacred among Waldensian. To operationalize it I first introduce the debate around the categories of secular and sacred (Asad 2003) and then relate them to dimensions within heritage discourses, drawing on the recent works of Meyer and de Witte (2013) and Meyer (2023). Their analysis explores the complex interplay of heritage, religion, and secularism. After that, I examine the heritagization of the religious by analyzing the entanglement and disentanglement, the merging and separation of place and faith (Hovland 2016). Finally I present another seemingly sacralizing force, which is memory, before revising and presenting a new research question.

HERITAGE, SCALE AND LOCALITY

Heritage is frequently connected to historical buildings, monuments, and cultural festivities, but defining it remains complex. Far from providing a univocal definition, it is crucial to argue that "heritage" should be recognized more broadly as a cultural process (Harvey 2001; Smith 2006), Shifting from the question "What is heritage?" to "What does heritage do?" reveals the dynamic and political nature of heritage as acknowledged by David C. Harvey (2001): heritage as a process, or "heritagization", is the strategic preservation of the past, where "the past" becomes instrumental in shaping present identities and consolidating political landscapes (2001, p. 335). Usually, when

referred as “heritage” it involves a national or larger-scale framework where certain values are specifically selected and elevated over others in both tangible (material heritage, monuments, sites) and intangible forms (immaterial heritage, cultural performances, traditions, festivals).

The field of heritage studies encompasses a vast body of literature that primarily focuses on issues of "heritage management". Emma Waterton and Steve Watson refer to this cluster as theories "in heritage," because they are primarily concerned with elements that contribute to "good practice in terms of management and display" (Waterton & Watson 2013, p. 548). Those theories constitute a large part of heritage debates and encompass various ideas, constructs, concepts, and levels of abstraction that are theoretically informed but may not constitute complete theories in themselves (p. 547). The focus on these "good management practices" is only superficial if not linked with a much broader discourse on heritage as a meaning-making process. The logical next step is presenting theories "of" heritage, or how heritage assumes a particular significance as a process rather than merely a collection of objects to be managed. This perspective does not focus primarily on the materiality of heritage but rather sees heritage as a crafted aesthetic-political process (Meyer & de Witte 2013, p.276), where the past is reinterpreted and reconstructed in the eye of present necessities.

Following the discussion of Waterton and Watson, the focus now shifts to "theories of heritage," specifically addressing the debate between material/tangible and immaterial/intangible categories within heritage discourse. While materiality and tangibility aspects still focus on "good heritage management" practices of classification and preservation, the idea of immaterial and intangible heritage adds complex shades to the heritage debate. Transnational agencies such as UNESCO and ICOMOS work on creating heritage lists, further dividing heritage into tangible and intangible categories. Tangible heritage includes material artifacts to be safeguarded, while intangible heritage goes "beyond physical artifacts" (Harvey 2001, p. 336). Particularly relevant is what Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, while reflecting on intangible heritage lists, calls "metacultural outcomes," drawing attention to how "intangible" extends its reach far beyond heritage management and cultural processes themselves (Kishenblatt-Gimblett 2004). An example could be the idea of “folklorization”: maintaining culture alive while people are not. In other words, it suggests a more structured attempt to encapsulate the essence of tradition as a living entity (Smith 2015, pp.134-135), preserving not just the artifacts but the people and their traditions as well (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004, p. 53). It also suggests that the past should be preserved in its original form and that should be continuously re-experienced, as during festivities or celebrations, in an unaltered state. This is a path that infuses culture with new meanings and changes how people perceive culture itself by a "metacultural operation" (p. 56), the "freezing and solidifying of traditions" which changes "how people understand their culture and themselves" (p. 58).

It is particularly relevant to break down the layers of theories “in” and “of” heritage and spell out the connection between heritage and identity. According to Kevin Walsh (2002) England was one of the first modern nations with political interests in constructing a "British national identity" linked

to inherently material forms of heritage which was the intended expression of British society (p. 72). Walsh uses the example of "country houses" and how they were employed to celebrate the values of the middle and upper classes. Symbolically, the country house emphasizes the idea of "ruling over the countryside" (Hewison 1981, p. 65 as cited in Walsh 2002, p. 76), and thus it was an expression of economic and political power. This type of heritage, as Walsh continues to argue, can was classified as State heritage and was intertwined with the broader struggle for dominance by the traditional Conservatives in British society, which were eager to maintain intact a specific nostalgic identity. For many, these houses represented a metaphor for a pre-World War I society they had to "preserve" in a longing way (Walsh 2002, pp. 74-76), i.e. the cultural materialization of British identity.

According to Smith, heritage is shaped by a singular and dominant discourse known as the Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD), which emerged in the 19th century and was heavily influenced by the rise of nationalism and liberal thought (2006, p. 17). This discourse originated in Europe, particularly in the United Kingdom, Germany, and France. Within AHD, heritage is conceptualized as being grounded in aesthetics and materiality, characterized by pleasing artifacts, national monuments, and sites. This perspective is primarily rooted in European nationalism. However, after 1945 AHD emerges also on a transnational scale, as seen by the increasingly more influential agencies such as UNESCO and ICOMOS, originally as heritage practitioners and nowadays increasingly as "heritage leaders" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004, p. 58).

In the AHD, the connection between materiality and temporality within heritage is reinforced by the power of legitimization acknowledged by the state or other administrative bodies, i.e., expertise or experts. As Max Weber (1968) puts it, this is a type of rational or bureaucratic "authority," legitimized by legal power (p. 81) and inscribed in legal structures such as State power or its ministries. It also grants certain groups the authority to legitimize the past by declaring certain elements as heritage (Smith, 2006, p. 4).

Experts, individuals with professional knowledge deemed more valuable than that of local communities, non-experts, and visitors, play a central role in heritage politics. Their work restricts the understanding of heritage politics to a select few. Additionally, these experts define their own expertise and determine what falls within its scope, leading to a self-referential system. Experts within AHD do not emphasize the dynamic nature of heritage. Instead, heritage is presented as something passive, with visitors being "instructed about" it. "Experts" hold all the competencies that craft heritage narratives for audiences (Smith 2006, p. 31). Experts ultimately legitimize and imbue "heritage" with cultural significance, elevating specific values over others (Smith 2006, p. 26). AHD grants legitimacy to these experts as representatives of other people’s pasts, which results in significant "material consequences for community identity and belonging" (Smith 2006, p. 29).

Given the influence that experts wield over heritage narratives, it becomes essential to consider how these narratives operate on different scales. As anthropologists, we must recognize that "the global" or "the national" always have a “locale” (Tsing 2000, p. 338). Heritage undoubtedly evokes various scales—local, national, transnational, and global—that are crucial to this research. Tsing outlines that the concept of "scale" comprises two components, which are essential in understanding how

heritage operates across different contexts .First, there are "ideologies of scale," encompassing cultural claims about locality, regionality, and globality, along with strategies of proliferation or how these claims circulate. In the context of Waldensian heritage, this refers to what heritage aspires to be and how these aspirations are enacted within the Waldensian community's cultural claims. The second component is "projects of scale making," representing coherent bundles of ideas and practices realized in specific times and spaces, or, in the case of heritage, how it is manifested (Tsing 2000, p. 347). Scale is thus constituted by both projects and ideologies. Engaging in a "project of scale" involves a comprehensive analysis of Waldensian heritage within its locale, even scrutinizing the grandest world-making dreams and schemes. This approach interprets globalism not as a homogeneous narrative but as the sum of diverse and heterogeneous projects from various "local" narratives.

Place and scale-making are cultural, political, and economic practices that delineate power dynamics, determining which actors hold decisive roles at regional, national, and global levels. While people may refer to a broader context (the global), the observation of this global dimension is only possible at specific localities. Scale-making also serves as a means of "assuming a critical perspective" by distancing researchers from claims about globality and locality in policymaking. Places are defined by their relationships with one another, not in isolation. I contend that Waldensian and Methodist heritage-making necessarily involve local, national, and transnational scale and place making (Tsing 2000, p. 329).

Cultural processes and forces are not merely local, global, or national; they are always both. This means that cultural actions and influences are specific to their social contexts (local) while also having widespread impacts (global) (Tsing 2000, p.352).

Scale-making is thus not only about the “local” (Tsing 2000). It is thus essential to spell out which scale are what and how different scale-making takes place and operationalize them. An initial operationalization sees the emergence of two distinct scales: the “Valleys” and the “Waldensian and Methodist”.

To further grasp how these scales interact and shape cultural practices, it is important to consider how “locality” is produced within these scales. Appadurai argues that “locality” is produced within “neighborhoods,” which he describes as recipients of physical and cultural life, encompassing both tangible and intangible aspects (Appadurai 2018, p. 109). A neighborhood recognizes another neighborhood, generating a relational context where locality is produced through interactions and relationships between neighborhoods, i.e., “scale-making.” In other words, the generation of context, which we call “locality”, happens precisely when a neighborhood encounters another neighborhood (p. 111). Appadurai continues by arguing that in this process of “otherness”, most of these neighborhoods generate context or produce locality in a “violent” way (p. 108). Do we find any context-generative violence in the making of these scales? How has this influenced the production of locality in both spatial and temporal terms?

Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1992) call for observing “places” not as static entities but as hierarchically interconnected. Every place exists within a network of hierarchically organized spaces, where some locations hold more significance or centrality than others. However, the identity

of a place is equally shaped by the cultural and social practices of the people who live there. The way residents interact, the traditions they uphold, and the communal activities they engage in all contribute to the cultural construction of the locality. In other words, it involves looking at the "historical and structural understanding of locations" (Gupta & Ferguson 1997, p. 38). How? From a methodological standpoint, Gupta and Ferguson suggest challenging the one-site boundedness with a more nuanced political commitment by "shifting locations" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, pp. 38-39), i.e., focusing on "the connection, the movement, 'the following'" (Candea 2007, p. 172). Defining the boundaries of a field site is no longer solely within the ethnographer's control. The true object of study becomes the political or epistemological processes that create the field site (Candea 2007, p. 171). Localization is also a way to understand how communities and places define and redefine themselves over time through political and cultural processes (Appadurai 1995 (2018), as cited in Candea 2007, p. 171). But localization cannot be assumed as the idea of primaeval communities outside time, space, and history (Gupta & Ferguson 1992; Appadurai 2018)
I realized that although my research focused on a bounded geographical location—the three valleys, which have distinct physical boundaries—it is essential to adopt a broader perspective as advised by Gupta and Ferguson. This involves examining both physical and metaphorical borders. Physically, this approach entails conducting ethnographic inquiries in locations at the cultural borders. Metaphorically, it involves analyzing how people produce and distance themselves from ideas about the local and the global.

Now that the concepts of scale and locality have been partially operationalized, I will introduce the final section which concern heritage theory. How do discourses originating from local premises produce other heritage discourses that challenge established official narratives, particularly by following values different from those promoted by ministries of culture? In other words, can we even consider "local heritage" to be something produced by locality that is not institutionalized? One way could be to investigate how various experiences coexist within the AHD context (not only theories "in" and "of" but also "for" heritage). Some in fact may draw inspiration or influence from a "professional heritage discourse" without fully replicating it (Purvis and Hunt 1993 as cited in Smith 2006, pp. 4-5). For small communities, asserting self-determination through heritage is thus vital. Smith argues that indigenous claims can actively challenge authorized discourse by proposing alternative perspectives that question the inherent nature of heritage itself (Smith 2006, p. 31) with "more embodied approach", or what Waterton and call "theories for heritage": "we know heritage through our experiences" (Waterton & Watson 2013, p.552), suggesting that our understanding of heritage is primarily shaped through a more embodied, intimate, and emotional engagement with it.

"Theory for heritage", or how heritage is understood and experienced, calls for a more nuanced understanding that takes into account the specific social and historical contexts of different communities, recognizing that heritage is experienced differently depending on one's background social and political contexts, including issues of power, identity, and marginalization. (p. 555)

This approach urges scholars to reconsider the "extra discursive" and "non-cognitive" responses that are often overlooked (p. 557) so that heritage is not just a matter of material objects or discursive constructions, but is deeply intertwined with human emotions, social practices, and the fluid interactions between people, places, and things. I was able to do research in this direction by asking whether “local” heritage was a form of more embodied practices and experiences. Communities’ approach focus on active remembrance. Smith (2006) illustrates this in the Castleford Festival example. Castleford, a former Roman-built village turned industrial mining location, faced severe economic decline, losing jobs and its mining heritage (Smith, 2006, p. 243). Smith examines how heritage is built and understood in Castleford through memory embodied in an active sense of community, noting that “in Castleford [heritage] is very much about doing and not necessarily only or primarily having” (p. 260). The Castleford Festival illustrates the dynamic nature of heritage. This blend of mining culture, pride in Roman archaeology, contemporary artistry, and exhibitions embodies the process of heritage-making. "Remembering and commemoration are performances in which the cultural processes of heritage are marked out and identified. This is not simply a process of identification but a constitutive process in which heritage is made and remade" (Smith, 2006, p. 265). Thus, Castleford residents actively create and recreate their heritage and community identity, demonstrating that heritage and communities are not fixed per sé, but reinvent themselves according to present needs, escaping the "static" and fossilization paradigm of AHD (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004).

Before delving into the final set of concepts, it’s important to explain how my research question evolved and why I found other concepts more fitting (heritage, scale and locality, and finally secular vs sacred). Initially, I examined how heritage scales involve community, particularly in frameworks like the Faro Convention, which shifted focus from heritage objects to the communities that value them. However, these community-based approaches often fall short, as they are typically implemented "for" the community rather than "with" it (Waterton & Smith 2010, p. 13). This can lead to communities being treated as objects to be safeguarded, with genuine engagement often lacking (Smith 2006; Waterton & Smith 2010, pp. 13-14).

My initial RQ was:
Is the nationalization of Waldensian-Methodist cultural forms empowering community relationships in the local heritage-making processes, or is this heritage-making process primarily a nationalizing and globalizing force?

Experts often define heritage in ways that emphasize "having" and "possessing," leading to a view of both people and heritage as static entities to be managed and preserved. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004, p. 58) argues that this approach risks turning communities into subjects of management rather than active participants in their own heritage. Elizabeth Crooke (2010, p. 19) similarly critiques this tendency, highlighting how expertise often partitions society into homogenous groups, which are then managed according to predefined categories.

Lauso Zagato (2015, p. 145) explores this by discussing the concept of "patrimonial community," which in the Italian context, aligns with the legal and expert-driven framework established by the Faro Convention. Laia Colomer (2021) adds that the term "heritage community," while flexible and meant to democratize heritage participation, often leads to problems (p. 5). Communities may be given the means to participate, but they frequently lack the necessary economic and social skills to engage effectively, reducing their influence in heritage processes.
As the research progressed, I recognized that the concepts of "relationships" and "community" were more complex than anticipated. In Waldensian terms, the "church" itself often serves as the community, but some individuals identified as Waldensians without any connection to a congregation or faith. This complexity made the concept of "community" difficult to pin down, yet this ambiguity allowed me to explore the Waldensian community in a broader sense, considering both its religious and place-based dimensions.

SECULARIZATION AND SACRALISATION, RELIGION AND MEMORY

This realization also underscores the importance of critically examining the limitations of these experiences and the terms and theories that invoke "heritage." Just as the concept of "community" resists simple definitions, we must also challenge the fundamental boundaries of what is and is not considered heritage. This requires exploring heritage both as a tangible and intangible performance, as well as a discursive practice. While the theories I previously discussed provide insights into "what heritage is," "what it does," and "how it is experienced," it is essential to delve into other concepts that intersect with heritage to fully understand its complex nature.

If expertise often overlooks "competing concepts" of heritage (Waterton & Smith, 2010, p. 12), it led me to question whether "religion" could be considered a "competing" concept in the Waldensian context. This inquiry is particularly relevant because Waldensian and Methodist Heritage (WMH) and the heritage of the Waldensian Valleys are closely intertwined with religion (Christianity), even if this connection is not immediately obvious. How, then, are "religion" and "heritage" related concepts? To explore this, I argue, we must examine the origins of the terms "secular" and "religious."

The relationship between religion and cultural heritage could be spelled-out by reflecting onto what the “secular” means. Talal Asad illustrates the origin of the term secular is:

“..neither continuous with the religious that supposedly preceded it (that is, it is not the latest phase of a sacred origin) nor a simple break from it (that is, it is not the opposite, an essence that excludes the sacred). I take the secular to be a concept that brings together certain behaviors, knowledges, and sensibilities in modern life” (Asad 2003, p. 25).

Secular is thus defined by three main categories (see also Pels 2013, p.222) according to Asad.:

"The genealogy of secularism has to be traced through the concept of the secular, in part to the Renaissance doctrine of humanism, in part to the Enlightenment concept of nature, and in part to Hegel's philosophy of history." (Asad 2003, p. 192)

Thus, we can subsume three main categories which pertains to the secular: "human" as opposed to the non-human or divine power, "nature" as the realm where human activity is replicated and depends on (p. 95) and history as opposed to "fate" and "destiny", controlled by divine power. With the rising of a "secular history", more interested in the facts, rational and emphasizing events and dates over myths, has become central to the functioning of the modern nation-state (p. 43). Another example is what Asad calls "the American secular language of redemption" where political ideas (secularized by the United States view of the words) seek to globalize humanity, making "democracy", "human rights" and "being free" as fundamental and essential values of American secular society (Asad 2003, p. 147). What I want to emphasize particularly is the idea of basic human rights such as "freedom" are linked with secular discourses and narratives which found context in western societies to the point that values, such as "being free", are necessarily universal values.
Conversely, the religiously[1] sacred is what relates to the divine realm. However, as I will argue later, these two categories of the "secular" and the "sacred" do not stand in mere opposition.

First, let's take the example of what remains of "the religious"—and how does it contrast, within seemingly "secularized" societies? Even if exploring the state of religion within these secularized contexts engages a complex and extensive debate and one that will not be fully addressed in detail here, the starting point of the analysis is that when "delimiting" the coexistence of respective competencies (Lehmann 2013, p. 648) usually nation-states hold ultimate authority over religious regulation (Meyer 2023, p. 15). In the European context, state power typically prevails over religious institutions, relegating religion to the private sphere or excluding it from legal systems altogether, with probably the sole exception being the Vatican State. For example, David Lehmann highlights the 2012 ruling in Germany against circumcision, a longstanding Jewish religious practice, illustrating how religion can be "weakened" relative to state power. Unlike cultural practices such as ethnicity or language, circumcision was viewed with suspicion and deemed problematic (Lehmann 2013, pp. 648-650).

As also again Lehmann (p. 658) argues, there are no absolute or universally applicable models of secular-religious understanding where one dimension completely prevails over the other. He explains this by drawing parallels between the European context and the state of the religious-secular distinction in the United States, emphasizing that there is no single model of a secular order but multiple models of state-religion relations that differ significantly, even among similar Western

[1] It will be explained later why, for clarity, it is essential to differentiate between a religious form of sacred and other types of sacred.

countries. Moreover, the underlying suggestion is that religious and secular models could indeed be interchangeable in different periods.

Institutions may completely reject religion as "alien" but also exhibit biases by internalizing religious aspects as "matters of national heritage" or as "long-standing traditions." An example is the controversy surrounding the display of crucifixes in public schools in Italy, which initially appeared to be resolved with the Italian ministry of culture expressing support for their removal from school classrooms, triggering a strong reaction from the Vatican. After various pressures, the ministry subsequently revoked this ordinance (see Joppke 2013 as cited in Astor, Burchardt, & Griera 2017, p. 129). Of course, then, it is possible to argue that the power of the state could be a secularizing force, although I need to specify through which processes.

It is essential to acknowledge that religious elements continue to persist, or are reinterpreted in new forms, even in societies that identify as secular. In many European nations, religion still plays a significant role in political and apparently secularized administrations (Lehmann 2013, p. 649), despite some adopting a façade of religious "neutrality." Another concrete example shows how legal and political systems are still subject to the influence religion has on the public, causing some states to lose the principle of the complex integration of religious minorities within the legal language of Spanish law (see Astor, Burchardt, & Griera, 2017): public discourse in Spain increasingly frames religious heritage as central to national identity, balancing the Catholic Church's support for religious diversity with its efforts to maintain its cultural and legal dominance. While the Church aids other religious minorities in opposing secular power, when it comes to establishing religious places of worship such as mosques, the Catholic church faces criticism from secularists who advocate equal treatment of all religions and challenge the Church's privileged status (pp. 132-136). This shows how religious institutions counter secular power, while also showing that religious frameworks are not monolithic, because they sometimes incorporate and support diverse religious minorities. An extreme example are religious institutions which uses the secular: the Vatican, for instance, proved to be a context where the secular is used but does not prevail over the religious. What happens when the secular is re-sacralized by religion?

Peter Pels offers Science Fiction (SF) as an example, discussing how it has a particular way of re-sacralizing the three main categories that define the secular (Pels 2013). While SF appears as a seemingly secularized novel genre—one that, by definition, plays with science, technology, and religion in surreal and posthuman landscapes, pretending to maintain (as a modernist expectation) a "radical distinction between religion and technology" (p. 214)—it is, as Pels demonstrates, very much preoccupied with religion. So how does SF re-sacralize the presumably secular? Pels argues that SF creates a sense of the amazing, referred to as "awe" and "wonder," which can sacralize the secular without the need for explicitly religious content (p. 222). In other words, in SF novels, "awe" articulates how history, humanity, and nature (indeed the secular) impose actual limits on the future of the protagonists, while "wonder" expresses the superhuman powers that stand in contrast to these protagonists (p. 223). As Pels argues, following Asad's example, we should not take the secular for granted, and we should rather be more preoccupied on how religion is received and reproduced in fields that are already shaped as secular (p. 220).

In this final section I delve deeper into the relationship between heritage and religion, secular and sacred, by exploring the concept of the "secular-sacred" related to heritage-making (Balkenhol, van den Hemel & Stengs 2020). It emphasizes two things:

- Seemingly secular things experiencing a process of sacralization, which could be either religious (i.e. the religiously sacred, related to the divine) but also secularly sacred (as for instance heritagization);
- How the secular and the sacred are not mutually exclusive elements but can intersect, coexist and alternate.

The “secular-sacred” seeks to define neither “the secular” nor “the religious”, but studies the boundaries at which they intersect and influence each other (Balkenhol, van den Hemel & Stengs 2020, p. 7).

Scholars investigate how “religion” and “heritage” coexist: instead of merely asking how religion can exist within heritage, Meyer explores how heritage "reacts" to religion (Meyer 2023, p. 16). This approach focuses on “religious heritage” within secularized practices that incorporate and accommodate religious values within secular displays. Or, in other words: “how secular is religious heritage” and “how religion persists within secularized heritage” (Meyer 2023).

Heritagization, as a secular form of sacralization, elevates material objects or immaterial forms to the status of heritage. Meyer and de Witte explain this by arguing that heritage forms are often endowed with exceptional significance, whether they are objects or traditions, assuming a status that elevates them above others—a process they term “sanctification” (Meyer & de Witte 2013, p. 276) (i.e. sacralization). This new current in anthropology also examines what occurs when objects that already possess a certain sacrality, particularly religious sacrality, undergo heritagization.

If the secular does not entirely stand apart from the sacred, and does not completely exclude religious elements or function as their antithesis (Asad 2003), then what kind of contrast should we adopt to understand the processes of the heritagization of religion? Who considers something as secular, and who considers it sacred? Or, better: who has the authority and power to perform the secular, or the sacred, or both? I identify three main field of inquiry into secularizing/sacralizing tendencies.

(1) The religious sacralization of place:

Ingie Hovland (2016) interprets the dimension of "evangelical place-making," which, as I see it, is a performative way of sacralizing that involves the simultaneous processes of fusing and infusing, settling and unsettling, and emplacing and displacing, “bringing together and taking apart of place and faith.” Evangelicals aim to be actively engaged in the world, influencing it according to their beliefs rather than withdrawing from it. They create spaces that reflect their values and serve as witnesses to their faith, ensuring that religion is prominently displayed in both private and public spheres (Hovland 2016, pp. 349-351). Places (understood as secular) themselves influence their faith (sacred), blurring and shifting the boundaries of religion and heritage.

For instance, evangelicals adopt a minimalistic approach to material places of worship, to enhance the direct experience with “God” (p. 337). The presence of God is mediated by an open Bible but is not necessarily bounded to a single location: Evangelicals connect with a deterritorialized God who

is not materialized in a specific place (pp. 343-344). How does the minimal material approach to God observed in Evangelical traditions contrast with the more tangible expressions of religion seen in the Waldensian and Methodist communities? How is God present in secularized Waldensian places?

(2) "Musealization", or: heritagization of church religion:
According to Sharon Macdonald (2013), the term musealization refers to the transformation of objects of everyday life into museum displays. In her work on musealization she refers specifically to the process by which elements of daily life—especially those that are banal, ordinary, or disappearing—are collected, preserved, and displayed in museums (Macdonald 2013, p. 137). A further enriching of the idea of "musealization" emerges in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett analyses of what is an heritage exhibition. She argues:

"Heritage is created through a process of exhibition (as knowledge, as performance, as museum display). Exhibition endows heritage thus conceived with a second life." (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, p.149)

Therefore, the concept of heritage is closely tied to the idea of a museum. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004) highlights this connection by pointing out the trend of entire nations marketing themselves as "large open-air museums." For instance, countries like Turkey attract visitors by showcasing unique and well-preserved churches and archaeological sites that are not found elsewhere (p. 131).

The concept of musealization involves transforming something—such as an entire nation, as in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's example—into a museum that not only attracts visitors but also legitimizes the display of its cultural assets. This process often leads to these spaces and places acquiring new meanings, although it remains unclear what happens to their original functions and uses, and it also does not offer much insight into the people and culture "frozen" as heritage[2].
What happens when religious places, or sites with an original religious significance, undergo "musealization" and are transformed into museums? To address this question, it is crucial to first explore the complexity of religious heritage and what it represents.

Firstly, a key idea is that religion is not just expressed through material forms (symbols like bibles, sacred spaces, or rituals), although these material forms are a fundamental part of what religion is. The term "materializing religion" suggests that religion is not something that exists independently of the physical world but is deeply rooted in and shaped by it. (Meyer et al. 2011, p.6)
In this sense, Meyer provides a concrete example (also relevant to one of my empirical chapters) by presenting an episode where Christian communities "share" the interior of a church for diverse

[2] In this sense Macdonald (2013, p. 139) refers to the term "museumification" coined by French philosopher and sociologist Jean Baudrillard which describes with a more "degenerative" connotation, a process where the boundaries between the real and the simulated blur. An example is the perfect replica of the Lascaux cave, to indicate the process behind the intent of replicating the real (Baudrillard 1983, as cited in Macdonald 2013, p.139)

purposes (Meyer 2023, p. 19). This creates tension between its use for religious rituals and the secular use of the space. This mix of secular and religious uses of space could characterize the Waldensian community, which originated as an Evangelical movement but has also undergone a process of secularization. How does the "materiality" of heritage, particularly in its tangible forms as emphasized within the AHD (Smith 2006), contrast with the immaterial or spiritual form of religion?
Secondly, by understanding time as simultaneously secular and religious, the first defined by the expectation of development and the course of history (see Asad 2003, p. 192), while the second could be glossed as the expectation of the coming of a Messiah. Ferdinand de Jong adds to this perspective by presenting the intricate case of the aftermath of the burning of the Notre Dame and how its reconstruction evoked different temporalities. He critiques an idea of secular “linear” time and addresses instead how important it is to look at the entanglement and the coexistence of secular and religious temporalities central to shaping heritage and identity (de Jong 2023, p. 7). As de Jong argues, studying heritage offers a view on how religious and secular temporalities could coexist and align, even briefly (2023, p. 8). What multitemporal conjunction of engaging with Christian traditions could possibly exist prior to the seemingly “secular” Waldensian traditions? What does it mean to musealize the interior of a church, even for a limited time?

(3) Sacralization of memory as a secular-sacred paradigm:
Not every aspect declared “heritage” is necessarily sacred, and similarly, not every aspect of religion is “overdetermined by heritagization” (de Jong, 2023, p. 2). If not religion, could it be something else? In other words, could the secular be sacralized in a way that differs from the “heritagization of religion” or traditional religious sacralization? To explore this idea, I present the example of memory.
Pierre Nora’s (1989) influential work on “les lieux de mèmoire” identifies an “irrevocable break” between imagined, remembered placesthat no longer exist in reality:

“There are “lieux de memoire”, sites of memory, because there are no longer milieux de memoire, real environments of memory “(Nora 1989, p. 7)”

Memory is personal, subjective, and often emotionally charged. However, it can also be collective, serving to maintain and reinforce personal or collective identity, such as a sense of belonging across generations. Collective memory acts as a “collective gesture” of remembering (Smith 2006, p. 57). The differentiation between memory and "heritage" lies, as Smith argues, in the nature of memory itself, which inherently involves the possibility of forgetting (Smith 2006, p. 58). Rodney Harrison delves deeper into this by arguing that “forgetting” is integral to “remembering,” because it is not possible to form new memories and attach new values without also selecting things to forget (Harrison 2013, p. 580). He illustrates this through the example of Szobor Park in Hungary. Szobor Park serves as a physical metaphor for the selective process of remembering and forgetting applied during the Soviet regime. The park contains statues and memorials from the Communist era removed and defaced after the fall of Communism. Once symbols of a national dominant ideology,

these objects are now not only displaced from their original locations but also stripped of their original context, in a confusing mix of emotions (Harrison 2013, p. 586). Memory is thus fluid and subject to change, it can be derived from personal and collective experiences (see especially Smith 2006, p. 289), and can fade, alter or be altered over time.
Has memory assumed some sort of sacred sense? According to Nora the "sacrality" of memory stands in contrast with the more secular power of "history" (indeed, Asad argues that history is a category of the secular):

"Memory, insofar as it is affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it…history, because it is an intellectual and secular production, calls for analysis and criticism.
Memory installs remembrance within the sacred; history, always prosaic, releases it again" (Nora 1989, p. 8-9)

Nora thus defines the remembering process as adding an aura of sacrality to the object of this remembering. What is believed to be modern memory in reality is just history, given by the massive presence of archival material, recollections, images, tapes, a sort of materialization of memory. Nora suggests that the sacred resides in the "trace," which is a remnant or a sign of something that once was but is no longer fully present (i.e. the "negation"). The sacredness comes from the recognition of what has been already lost or could be lost, making the act of remembering one of reverence (pp.13-14).

Barbara Misztal argues that as "amnesia erodes the comprehensive (national or traditional religious) identities, the need for identities tends to be absorbed by groups' memories" (Misztal 2004, p. 68). Consequently, minoritized groups such as the Waldensians could progressively re-use their past memories as a plausible source of identity. Firstly, because these memories derive from a pre-national period, but also because they escape religious sentiments that have decayed.
Secondly, Misztal also mentions a "rising of new spirituality," wherein there is a new exegesis of traumatic memories (as I will explain in the "a brief Waldensian history" section, Waldensian history is a history of traumas; Misztal 2004, p. 69). These fragments of trauma now form a new or newly discovered memory that connects those in search of meaning or spiritual fulfillment (a "quest for soul") with a collective effort to define or rediscover their identity, in a way "sacralizing" this memory. Which examples exemplify this process? Does memory escape "authorization"?

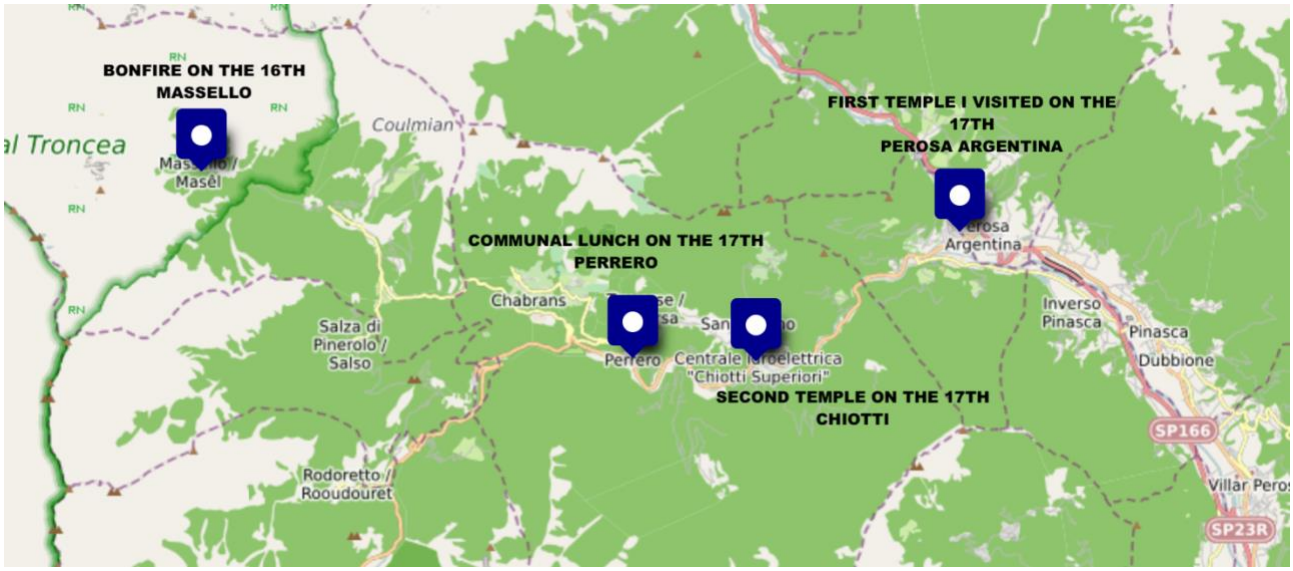
This leads me to reformulate my research question as follows:

NEW RQ:
Does shifting scales (local, national, transnational) produces more secular or sacred modes of engaging with heritage?

COMMUNICATIVE CONTEXT

This section discusses the key elements that have shaped this research: who was involved, where the study took place, what was studied, and how the research was conducted. I begin by introducing my own positionality and explaining how it influenced my access to and perspective on different fields of my study. I will then explore which structures, timeframe, occasions and people, shaped the research outcome. In the final section, I will discuss which methods were most suitable for each context and situation, as well as the ethical issues that may have arisen from applying these methods.

Acknowledging that any ethnographic account is inherently partial, Matei Candea suggests an approach to fieldwork that embraces the fragmented nature of social life (Candea 2007). Countering the oversimplification of holistic approaches that aim to provide a comprehensive account of every cultural aspect (Candea, 2007), this research is a selection of certain fragments which apparently do not tell much when taken separately.
Activities included interacting with church officials, observing singings, speaking with pastors, following people on mountain hikes, participating in communal lunches and gatherings, meeting retired actors, conversing with historians and theologists, and attending masses.
These initially disconnected interactions ultimately shaped a linear research trajectory which generated novel research opportunities and prompted adjustments to the original research question (as I argued in the theoretical section) and strategy. I will also provide a map with the locations I visited to substantiate this methodological approach further.



The initial exploration of the Waldensian world began through online research. Despite being commonly referred to today as the “Chiesa Valdese” or “comunità Valdese,” this terminology actually reflects a dialogue among various dispersed, independent, and often fragmented

congregations and communities, each maintaining a degree of self-governance. The hierarchical structure of Waldensian Protestantism consists of the local church as its fundamental component, followed by intermediate levels called circuits and districts, and culminating in the synod, the highest church assembly[3]. Intermediate strata, such as circuits and districts, play a pivotal role in facilitating coordination, decision-making, and the distribution of authority and responsibilities within the broader religious institution, known as the "Waldensian Church" with a capital "C." The highest decision-making body of the church is the synodal assembly, or synod. Since the synod convenes only once a year for a week-long assembly, a designated body called the Tavola Valdese assumes the responsibility of administering the church during the interim periods. The Tavola does not "substitute" the administrative role of the synod but primarily handles urgent matters outside of the synod's sessions. Formally, the Tavola, composed of seven members—both pastors and laypersons from the Methodist and Waldensian churches—officially represents the churches in their relations with the Italian government and other ecumenical organizations. In this sense, I contacted the Tavola Valdese which in response gave me the email address of an “indigenous” anthropologist working in the area. My understanding of the Waldensian church's institutional framework began through my meeting with her.

Her name is Paola and she became my main gatekeeper and informant. Coming from a university background in heritage studies and anthropology, I presented a formal request to the Tavola Valdese, which appointed Paola as my local guide and supervisor. Paola's role as both my primary gatekeeper and provider of insider perspectives was central in shaping all the subsequent relationships I developed in the field and in contextualizing my research. She provided access to both formal and informal settings. Moreover, the Tavola Valdese wanted a "local supervisor" because they believed I would be navigating an intricate and multifaceted field, and to help me find informants through Paola’s connections.
Carla Reeves (2010) defines the figure of the gatekeeper as essential for having an initial route of access to participants. From the beginning, gaining access to the community and the research site presented its own set of challenges. It required building trust and establishing rapport with the individuals involved, as well as seeking necessary permissions and approvals. My access in the end largely relied on a single gatekeeper. Paola's substantial credibility as a local scholar and her experience in this made he an “institutional gatekeeper”, i.e. an individual within an institution who has the absolute authority to grant or deny access to researchers seeking to conduct studies within those settings (Heath et al. 2007). Her guidance was helpful in both institutional formal and informal settings. On the one hand, Paola enriched the quality of the data I gathered, but on the other, it made me susceptible to her agenda. Reeves (2010, pp. 320-322) reflects on how participants' willingness to engage gives them significant influence over the research process,

[3] This bottom-up approach contrasts with the top-down organization often seen in Catholicism. Unlike the centralized Roman Church, with its clear hierarchy led from Rome and the Vatican, the Waldensians established autonomous churches, each independent and reliant on the communities they formed around them. The churches have full autonomy in decision-making regarding economic and political matters, without formally depending from a centralized power.

highlighting the importance of building and maintaining trust and positive relationships. Feeling confident about sharing my preliminary findings and thoughts from the very beginning, Paola also helped me establish a clear research strategy each week. I relied heavily on her advice and expertise, and our relationship became the context for my work, with her eventually emerging as a critical interlocutor.

However, I found myself oscillating between these two dynamics. I acknowledge that Paola's supervision was instrumental in developing my line of interlocutors. However, she was overtly present within the process. As I gained more experience and confidence, I was able to establish a more balanced power dynamic between us and I started to share only because I felt to and not because I had to. Paola was likely the most enduring interlocutor throughout my research, from the very beginning to the very end. A significant portion of the data came from my frequent interactions with her, as she played a crucial role not only as the primary gatekeeper but also as a key research interlocutor. I interviewed Paola due to her close ties with the Waldensian church and her involvement in Waldensian politics. She provided valuable insights into the formal organization of the church and had numerous connections outside the church, yet still among Waldensians living in the area. She seemed to know almost everyone by name or surname.

The Ufficio Beni Culturali della Tavola Valdese (UBCV), the local heritage management office under the Tavola Valdese, became my second key interlocutor. Paola facilitated my connection with the UBCV by vouching for me and securing the Tavola Valdese's supervision. Through her introduction, I met Sara and Ilaria, members of the UBCV, which enriched my institutional perspective. Engaging with them was crucial for observing the dynamics among heritage experts and provided me with in-depth insights into the "official" Waldensian Methodist Heritage (WMH). Interacting with UBCV members required standardized and formalized communication, including email exchanges, appointment requests, and supervised access to their office. Initially, our conversations occurred online, where I had to clarify my role, research focus, key arguments, final objectives, and intended outcomes. I visited the physical office five times, conducted four periods of participant observation, and held three interviews, two of which were group interviews. I dedicated one week each month (January, February, March) to working with the UBCV, providing them with a scholarly perspective as an anthropologist, particularly in evaluating the "Giornate del Patrimonio Culturale Valdese e Metodista" (GPVM), a two-day event (March 11th and 12th) focused on celebrating and preserving the cultural heritage of the Waldensian and Methodist communities.
This collaboration required careful planning, especially for conducting observations and interviews during the GPVM. The office provided me with a "Waldensian heritage manual" to assist during fieldwork, which consisted of several academic articles on the management of Waldensian heritage. The archival materials I reviewed, under the direct supervision of the UBCV, primarily consisted of letters, photographs, and books related to a local botanist whose work significantly influenced Waldensian culture and its standing.

Our first three meetings were held in person at their office, while the final meeting took place online, allowing me the opportunity to say goodbye to the members of the office.

Paola later introduced me to four different pastors at diverse stages of progress of the research. Pastors represent the third group of interlocutors I engaged with during my research. They occupy a key position, serving as a bridge between the church as an institution and the community. Pastors provide spiritual guidance and counseling, but they also hold an "institutional" role since they are officially on the church payroll. My focus was on their perspectives and discussions surrounding their religious vocation and their inherently secular roles. All the pastors I interacted with were Italian speakers. To coordinate with their busy schedules, I had to arrange meetings at least one week in advance. Pastors are linked with getting access to temples, as temples are closed out of pastors office hours.

The first pastor Paola introduced me to in late January was Pastor Mauro. After a service at the Pinerolo Waldensian temple, we had an initial conversation followed by a semi-structured interview. This pastor invited me into the catechist room of the temple, where we had a very informal conversation during the last week of January. Unfortunately, he did not respond to further contact attempts, so I could only rely on that single interview with him.

Then, in early February, I met Pastor Gianni. Our discussions covered various topics, including the state of the church, its music, and broader community issues. I recorded two of his sermons and one interview. Moreover, pastoral public discourses were a frequent focus of my recordings, as they provided a rich source of data intertwining faith with insights on present-day matters. Besides Gianni, I recorded sermons from two Baptist pastors who were hosting Waldensian services on January 22nd and March 12th. Since these services were public events, I could freely record and use them to gather data. As Gianni invited me to attend the FDL events where he would be present, it created a consistent line of work that I could clearly follow.

Although I gathered contextual information from several other pastors, most were unable or unwilling to participate significantly in the research. For instance, in the first week of February in Bobbio Pellice, another pastor introduced by Paola, who is married to the head of the UBCV, provided insights into the church's organization. As both a pastor and the district president responsible for overseeing other pastors, he offered valuable perspectives on faith, place, and what it means to be Waldensian during our informal talk. However, due to his busy schedule, we only managed to speak once, which limited his involvement in the research. Although this conversation was formal, it yielded limited data.

In Angrogna, a young Methodist pastor hired by the Waldensian church offered a deeper reflection on leading a Waldensian congregation, despite not being Waldensian by confession. Our similar ages fostered a good relationship, but we could only arrange a single interview as he faced a personal loss that kept him away from January to mid-March. This interview took place in the last

week of March, and I felt it was the most straightforward moment with a pastor, likely because we were of similar age. However, neither of them ultimately provided valuable insights that I could use in the empirical chapter.

The Waldensian valleys, located on the outskirts of Turin in the northwest Piedmontese Alps, encompass the Germanasca, Chisone, and Pellice valleys. During my stay, I primarily spent time in the Germanasca and Pellice valleys. I frequently visited key villages such as Pinerolo, at the entrance of Val Germanasca, and Torre Pellice, in the heart of Val Pellice, where the UBCV and Tavola Valdese are located.
Although the valleys are well-connected and easily navigable by car, the mountainous terrain and frequent low temperatures present practical travel challenges. The weather can be harsh, making reliable transportation essential. The Waldensian population in these valleys numbers around 15,000, and the region is notable for its concentration of religious sites, with 18 Waldensian temples in the valleys and a total of 41 in the Piedmont region—the highest number in Italy.

Language plays a crucial role in understanding Waldensian culture. Communication is predominantly conducted in Italian, which is essential in institutional settings like the Church and the UBCV, while gatherings, such as church services, often involve the frequent use of French, the second most commonly used language among the Waldensians. English also plays a significant role as the language of analysis, shaping the interpretation and documentation of fieldwork results. During the winter, when the lack of events shifted my fieldwork away from the church setting to more intimate locations, usually home settings, my focus often turned to language. Paola introduced me to a friend named Milena, who sang in the church choir and had a deep interest in language and heritage. Through Milena, I learned about the "cahiers," large books passed down through generations in Waldensian families, containing personal thoughts, recipes, and, most notably, songs, written in Italian, French and Patois (the local dialect).
This discovery led me to a retired Waldensian actor named Jean Louis, who had spent the last 30 years collecting and preserving many cahiers for his theatrical performances. I contacted him by phone, and he invited me to his home, where I interviewed him and explored his extensive cahier collection.

Additionally, I acquired some ethnographic recordings made available as a music album by a local ethnomusicologist, who had recorded one of the last individuals with a large cahier in the Valley before their passing about 30 years ago. By integrating these video and audio recordings into my research, I was able to document not only the visual and auditory aspects of Waldensian cultural practices but also the emotions and atmospheres that are challenging to convey through text alone.
Paola introduced me to a young Waldensian named Daniele, who was around 30 years old and worked for the UBCV, though his perspectives were not shaped solely by his professional role. I met Daniele and his girlfriend, Anna, in relaxed and informal settings—private homes, over a cup of coffee, or during meals—which created a more intimate and emotionally engaging atmosphere, distinct from the formal and bureaucratic settings. I immediately felt a connection with them,

possibly due to our similar ages (they were only a few years older than me). Our communication was marked by openness and transparency and tended to be longer and more personal compared to my interactions with the other groups of interlocutors.

METHODS AND ETHICS

This section aimed to provide an account on how, where and with whom I communicated. I will now go more in detail about the most suitable methodologies and what ethical considerations they raised.

Participant observation was one of the primary methods used throughout this research. As James Clifford suggests, it requires balancing immersion (actively participating in activities) and analytical detachment (observing and reflecting). This approach necessitates a continuous shift between being "inside," fully engaging in the moment, and stepping "outside" to critically reflect on what has occurred (Clifford 1983, p. 127).
During the "Giornate del Patrimonio Culturale Valdese e Metodista" (GPVM), my positionality shifted several times. In the initial phases, I actively participated in meetings where the UBCV outlined the communication strategies for each participating church. I was asked to provide my opinions on the visual impact and content of the materials, fostering a collaborative approach and knowledge co-creation. During the GPVM events on March 11th and 12th, I took on the role of an observer, taking notes on the proceedings. In the subsequent phases, I was once again invited to offer my thoughts on the overall success of the GPVM.
Although I initially lacked experience in conducting interviews, and some early interactions were more informal exchanges of ideas, I ultimately conducted ten interviews. Upon review and transcription, these interviews proved to be rich in insights. All interviews were conducted in Italian, and I personally translated them into English, preserving the original Italian whenever it was necessary to substantiate empirical points.
All interviews were semi-structured to ensure flexibility and allow for a deeper exploration of the participants' responses. I always requested permission to record the interviews, and everyone agreed without hesitation, as there was a shared commitment to transparency. The recordings were kept for transcription purposes.

As Sarah Pink suggests, engaging with methods that have evolved to capture not only textual or visual data (such as interviews and observations) but also other sensory experiences enriches the modes of participation and deepens the understanding of the research context:

"The practice of sensory ethnography involves the researchers' empathetic engagement with the practices and places that are important to the people participating in the research [...] it involves the production of meaning in participation with them through a shared activity in a shared place" (Pink, 2011, p. 271).

Pink emphasizes the importance of "being with others... walking with them, discussing images with them, listening to music or other sounds with them" as a particularly effective way to foster engagement and genuine collaboration (pp. 269-272). In this spirit, I not only frequently traveled from location to location, but I also often walked with my research informants. For instance, during

the final week of fieldwork, Paola and I chose to reflect on all the information we had gathered by taking a hike up to Angrogna, rather than sitting at a table. This hike, which included visiting some historical Waldensian sites, allowed for a more organic and meaningful discussion.

Multi-sited ethnography enabled me to recognize the potential evolution of my initial research idea, adapting to the dynamic nature of the subjects under study. I made a conscious effort to seize opportunistic or unexpected opportunities for exploration (Marcus, 1995, p. 106). My approach involved "following the people, the thing, the metaphor, the conflicts, and the plots" (p. 110), reexamining church spaces and heritage perspectives that seemed disconnected or disentangled from previous ones. While my goal was not to provide an exhaustive account, I aimed for a "partial but better" picture (Hovland, 2016, p. 136).

Engaging in such a comprehensive research approach using these methodologies brought up other challenges and ethical considerations at various stages of the study. In his more recent work on multi-sited ethnography, Marcus (2011) warns of certain risks. He highlights again the potential danger of diluting the intensive and immersive nature of traditional ethnography. The concern is that multi-sited ethnography might compromise the depth and quality of ethnographic work due to the dispersed focus across multiple sites (Marcus, 2011, p. 8). Moreover, the risk of “dilution” underscores the importance of having strong norms and accountability for the intended partiality in ethnographic research. Researchers should justify why some sites are studied in-depth while others are not, based on the research design and objectives. For instance, rather than focusing solely on the UBCV office location, I justified my choice by preferring to follow where their work was being realized, i.e. outside their office. This proved to be beneficial but also forced me to explore only Sara and Ilaria’s perspective, rather than collecting their colleagues’ testimony too. Marcus argues that the decision to treat some sites “thickly” and others “thinly” should involve both theoretical and pragmatic considerations (2011, p. 10). My “theoretical” excuse was that I was trying to follow each site’s interconnectedness rather than exploring one in depth to reflect on how a locale is being made. The practical was that many sites, as for instance temples as I illustrated earlier, were in fact “closed” sites.

To maintain transparency and integrity in my ethnographic research among the Waldensians, I implemented several key measures to protect participant confidentiality, foster trust, and ensure ethical conduct throughout the study.

ASA (2011) guidelines highlight the challenges of maintaining privacy and confidentiality in ethnographic research, especially given cultural and legal variations between societies. They state:

“Privacy and confidentiality present anthropologists with particularly difficult problems given the cultural and legal variations between societies and the various ways in which the real interests or research role of the ethnographer may not fully be realized by some or all of participants or may even become invisible over time.”

In my research, I was unable to promise full confidentiality to the participants, but since most of the interviewees held public positions within the church, they were not subject to confidentiality protection for their interviews or actions. The same applies to Paola, who officially worked under a "public duty." Although I reiterated several times that our conversations were recorded and partially

transcribed, and that their political opinions would be reflected in the research results, I sensed that this was something they welcomed (see also Robben 2012, p. 161).
All participants were informed of their right to revoke their consent at any time and could request a certain degree of confidentiality before the final results were published. This approach aligns with best practices in social research, which emphasize respecting participants' autonomy and privacy (Bryman 2016). To maintain anonymity and prevent the unintentional disclosure of sensitive information, each recorded interview was kept separate and identified individually.

CHAPTER 0: A BRIEF WALDENSIAN HISTORY

Before delving into the empirical chapters, I need to make some reflections on Waldensian history from the foundation of the movement, with a particular focus on the construction and evolution of “Waldensian Church”, “Waldensian community” and "Waldensian and Methodist Heritage" over time.

The Waldensian movement, a community of Christians led by the merchant Pietro Valdo, emerged in the late 12th century. Though initially maintaining a Catholic identity, the Waldensians were openly opposing the authority of the Pope, which led to their condemnation as heretics by the Roman Church. Forced into the margins of society, they developed a resilient community in the Piedmont Alps near the Kingdom of Savoy. Before formally identifying as a Protestant Reformed Church, the Waldensians had dispersed, forming nomadic and hidden communities throughout the Italian peninsula, but also in France, Germany and Switzerland.
Initially, the Waldensians were “held together” by figures known as “Barba” or “Beards,” who played a central role at times when the Waldensians were considered a sectarian heretic organization. These Barbas were also responsible for all the preachings (Tourn 2022, p. 87). Giorgio Tourn, a famous Waldensian historian and theologist, describes these figures as “elders, (but) not priests... they are true teachers of faith and life... with an effective organization... the Inquisition rarely managed to catch them.” Throughout the late medieval period, the Waldensians persisted as “isolated groups of secret believers” (Zeman 1976, p. 12), functioning as a “missionary society” (p. 13), i.e. by putting particular effort into traveling widely and preaching the word of God in secrecy. Barbas were key figures in keeping the Waldensian movement alive in the 14th and 15th centuries.
The 12th of September 1532, the Waldensians face a crucial turning point. With the spread of the Protestant Reformation, they made their first serious attempt to come together as a unified group instead of remaining a scattered community across Italy. This particular event, remembered as the “Sinodo di Chanforan” took place at a location known today as “Chanforan” inside Val Pellice, where they gathered for the first time in an “assembly,” marking their formation as a united church. Tourn (2022) describes this event as a “sort of constituent assembly, to use a modern political term. It was open, public... not a clandestine meeting but a debate in broad daylight, in the outdoor field used for popular assemblies” (p. 100).
The synodal assembly of Chanforan was a key event for the Waldensian Church. Nowadays all synodal assemblies resemble it: they are organized as a big meeting, where church leaders, pastors or members have the possibility to intervene and discuss new projects or ways to improve the community. After the discussions, they make decisions together, by voting on different proposals. Moreover, the synod is central to understand the Waldensian church’s fundamental democratic structure. However, only if you are a congregation member you can join the deliberations.

In this historical period (1532-1848) Waldensians are excluded but connected. How? The “unification” undoubtedly came at a certain cost. They faced severe persecution from the

neighboring Kingdom of Savoy, which was firmly Catholic, with tragic massacres in 1545 and 1561, and persecutions which persisted throughout the 16th century with some sort of brief ending during the edict of Nantes period (1598-1685). Yet, the revocation of the latter in 1685 meant further hardships for the Waldensians, forcing them to abandon their strongholds in the Valleys for a time. Only in 1688, some Waldensians were able to return with support from Calvinists in Switzerland, a moment marked in Waldensian history as the “Glorioso Rimpatrio” (Glorious comeback).
However, their return did not significantly change the situation. Towards the Waldensians who resettled in the Valleys and created a sort of stable community in the area, the nature of persecution shifted from merely violent to institutionalized, by restricting their access to society and all their fundamental freedoms. For almost another century, until the early 19th century, the remaining Waldensians in the Pellice, Germanasca, and Chisone valleys of Piedmont continued to live in isolation. To give a socio-historical form to this condition, Tourn (2022) developed the term "Alpine Ghetto." This term is not just theoretical but is evident in real-life aspects, such as the geographic location of Waldensian villages. These settlements were typically founded on the less favorable, darker slopes of the mountains and at specific altitudes, as required by the Kingdom of Savoy, a pattern that can still be seen today as many Waldensian temples are located likewise.
On the other hand, by becoming a “Reformed Church,” the Waldensians aligned with the broader Protestant community and established ties with major Protestant powers across Europe, which recognized them as a formal church. Between 1533 and 1700, Piedmont, particularly the “Valleys,” emerged as a stronghold of Protestantism in Italy, with the Waldensians building their most enduring community there, going through difficult times due to these ties. If excluded from any regional office but recognized as a church by other Protestant powers, the Waldensian church formally lacked a secular structure and the Waldensians were still openly opposed to and vehemently countered by the Vatican and the Kingdom itself .

If we could speak of a Waldensian Reformed Church thanks to the decisions of the Chanforan Synod, the Evangelical Waldensian Church did not form before 1848, because the regional opposition of Savoy did not allow its secular formation. This situation of “ghettoization” ended for political reasons. Alienating all the major Protestant powers within Europe would have been detrimental to King Charles Albert’s[4] goals. He could not continue to ignore the Waldensian "problem" within his realm, especially given his political ambitions for Italian unification (which ultimately came to fruition after his death in 1861). Therefore, he issued the "Lettere Patenti" in 1848, the most significant event in Waldensian history, marking a turning point for the Waldensian church. The "Lettere Patenti" granted civil liberties to Waldensians and Jews in the kingdom, an event now commemorated between the 16th and 17th of February with the Waldensian festivity known as the “Festa Della Libertà.” This was the first formal external recognition of the

[4] King Charles Albert of Savoy (Carlo Alberto di Savoia), born on October 2, 1798, in Turin, Italy, was the King of Sardinia (which comprised Savoy) from 1831 to 1849. During his reign, Charles Albert implemented a series of progressive reforms, including the “Letter Patenti” in 1848, which guaranteed civil liberties to religious minorities.

Waldensians as a community, eventually leading to the foundation of the Evangelical Waldensian Church.

The foundation of the Evangelical Waldensian Church represents, in my opinion, a contentious starting point for discussing "Waldensian heritagization" and provides an essential context for my research. The Waldensians were able to assert their civil rights freely and reunite as a church under evangelical premises, i.e. with a strong focus in spreading the word of God. Local historians suggest that this differentiation became significant in the early 20th century, leading to the commodification of Waldensian social structures. (Peyrot 2022, Tourn 2022). A major shift occurred in the perception of Waldensian heritage: the "Valleys" began to be seen as guardians of Waldensian memory, yet they still developed alongside the community's contemporary evangelization efforts (Peyrot 2022). Waldensian history took central place, exemplified by institutions like the Collegio Valdese, which, with its deep ties to the history and landscape of Valle Pellice, was founded to provide local and national historians access to documents on Waldensian historical events. It is also fundamental to mention the relocation of the Waldensian Faculty of Theology to Rome in 1922, aiming to foster closer ties with Italian culture.
The Valleys assumed a dual position, embodying the essential traits of Waldensian society: on the one hand, they were rooted in local rural traditions (including various dialects, known as "Patois," a mix of Occitan and French), and on the other, driven by this evangelical push, they opened up to historical study and sought a place within the Italian academic and cultural world (where the language became Italian).
The fascist period from 1922 to 1945 is also significant because it saw the development of another strong tradition in the Waldensian cultural landscape: the Alpine tradition. There was a renewed interest in local customs, such as the use of the langue d'oc and various dialects, leading to a rediscovery of Alpine heritage, particularly in music. This was closely tied to the strong partisan presence in the valleys, which openly opposed fascism.

After World War II, the focus on evangelicalism slightly shifted towards ecumenism. This effort actively involved modern social and cultural issues (like freedom of speech and religion). This transformation was supported by the establishment of international ecumenical workshops like Agapè[5], which aimed to encourage dialogue and collaboration among different Christian denominations. These workshops provided a platform for reassessing the role of the Waldensian Church in a changing world and create ties with other Christian denominations.
Particularly, the Waldensian and Methodist churches reached a landmark agreement, leading to the creation of the United Evangelical Churches, yet this only surfaced in 1974.

[5] The Centro Ecumenico Agape or simply Agape is a renowned ecumenical center located in the Italian Alps, specifically in the Waldensian Valleys. It was established after World War II in 1947 as a place for rebuilding and reconciliation in the aftermath of the conflict. The center was founded by the Waldensian Church in collaboration with international and ecumenical partners, reflecting its strong commitment to peace, social justice, and ecumenical dialogue. Source: https://agapecentroecumenico.org/

This agreement established a shared framework for Waldensian-Methodist heritage and resulted in changes to the church's administrative structure. Methodist circuits[6] were integrated into the districts, functioning as pastoral assemblies that promote cooperation and understanding among various communities and support joint initiatives. Interestingly, there were no Methodist churches in the Waldensian valleys; the connection was largely driven by the Waldensians' openness to ecumenical work, which effectively strengthened their relationships not only with Methodists but also with Baptists across Italy. This collaboration exemplifies the Waldensians' commitment to fostering unity among different Christian denominations.
This agreement helps to understand that the shift from evangelical to ecumenical also transformed the hierarchical structure of the Waldensian Church and formalized various disciplines within its agenda. While some areas, like heritage management, became shared interests, others, such as spiritual confession management, remained specific to each church. The notion that this research is about "Waldensian and Methodist heritage" can be misleading, as the Methodist perspective was largely absent in the valleys.

Another effort by the Waldensian Church to foster collaborative pathways is exemplified by their shared framework with the Italian ministry of culture, particularly in matters of heritage. The agreement presented in the introduction, established in 1984, resulted from negotiations between the Waldensian Church and the ministry. Notably, joint commissions were only formed in 2013 with the foundation of the Ufficio Beni Culturali della Tavola Valdese (UBCV). This office brings together state archivists and museum experts to preserve and safeguard Waldensian and Methodist heritage, marking a significant step in formalizing and protecting these cultural assets.
The Waldensian Church officially did not have the resources to initiate collaborative heritage preservation efforts until 2013. Over the preceding 30 years, the European Union emerged as an influential player in how Waldensian experts from the UBCV manage Waldensian and Methodist heritage.

[6] Methodist circuits are organizational units within the Methodist Church that consist of a group of local churches in a specific geographical area. These circuits function to provide mutual support, administrative oversight, and shared ministry among the churches within the circuit. The concept of circuits is fundamental to the structure and governance of the Methodist Church, reflecting its emphasis on collective ministry and community. Source: https://www.secondodistretto.chiesavaldese.org/circuiti.html

CHAPTER 1: HERITAGE, LOCALITY AND SCALE

1.1Introduction

This chapter seeks to explore the complexities of scale in relation to the production of locality and heritage within the Waldensian and Methodist communities. By examining the various scales at play, I aim to differentiate between the "Waldensian Valleys" as a seemingly local context and the "Waldensian and Methodist" connection, which extends from a local to a national scale. The chapter will critically analyze how these scales are constructed, how they potentially collide or interact, and how they contribute to the definition of what Waldensian and Methodist Heritage and Waldensian “local” heritage represent.

Drawing from a diverse range of empirical data, this chapter is structured around several key moments of fieldwork and observation. The first source of insight comes from an interview I had with Pastor Mauro from Pinerolo, along with general observations gathered during my early fieldwork. These insights demonstrate how the production of locality within the "Valleys" establishes a foundation for understanding local heritage-making, particularly by highlighting the distinct differences between the Valleys and the WMH.

The second set of data comes from my observations during the Fiesta della Libertá (FDL), a Waldensian event that articulates the Waldensian and Methodist scale. These insights include speeches delivered by Gianni, a local pastor, as well as an interview with him conducted in early February, along with my observations, particularly during the night of the 16th. These elements provide a deeper understanding of the extent of Methodist influence and the specific ways in which the “Waldensian and Methodist” scale is manifested.

The third source of empirical material is drawn from my observations during the Giornate del Patrimonio Cultrale Valdese e Metodista (GPVM), a first-year festival centered around the theme of WMH. This is supplemented by interviews with members of the Ufficio Beni Culturali della Tavola Valdese (UBCV), specifically Sara, the head of the office, and Ilaria, the head of communication. These interactions provide a critical lens through which to examine the Waldensian and Methodist scale and understand how Waldensian and Methodist heritage (WMH) connects with broader national and transnational heritage narratives.

The primary argument of this chapter is to explore, through the lens of "scale," how locality contributes to the production of heritage, and conversely, how heritage influences the formation of locality. Several key questions guide this inquiry: what kinds of significance define the "local"? How is locality formed, and what processes transform a space into a "place" or a "community" (Gupta & Ferguson 1992; Appadurai 2018)? How are different scales articulated and expressed in the context of WMH? What scale does WMH encompass, and how is WMH itself constructed?

This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section analyzes the production of locality within what is roughly known as the "Valleys," exploring how a sense of place and community is constructed and maintained with specific physical and cultural

characteristics. The second section shifts focus to the Waldensian and Methodist scale, examining how "locality" becomes something else within the framework of WMH and how this scale interacts with both local and global forces.

1.2How locality is produced: the "Valleys"

The Valleys are three mountain valleys situated in the northwestern Piedmontese Alps, approximately 60 kilometers from Turin, my hometown. For many not familiar with this region, these mountains are often seen as a tourist destination, thriving with activity during the summer months when tourists, usually from Germany, France and UK, come to enjoy natural beauty and outdoor recreation. However, the true significance of the Valleys extends far beyond their appeal as a seasonal retreat. From historical and cultural perspectives, there is an entire "hidden" world.
For the largest part of the Waldensian community, the Valleys have served as a home for generations, and up to these days still approximately 35000 Waldensians live here. It can be argued that the enduring presence of the Waldensians in these valleys has resulted in a distinct cultural identity that is intricately tied to the physical landscape (Peyrot 2022).[7]
To fully understand the complex dynamics at play within the Valleys, it is essential to spell out and analyze the scales and scale-making processes that contribute to this unique local character. This involves examining what kind of "locality" the Valleys entails. This analysis draws on a combination of empirical material, including an interview with Pastor Mauro, a key figure in the community, as well as general observations from my initial period of fieldwork.

From a historical standpoint, the Valleys have been a site of significant cultural and social activity. Since the first Waldensian settlement around 1300, they have served as a refuge and stronghold for the Waldensian community, which faced persecution and challenges until 1848. This year marked a watershed moment for the Waldensians, as it was the year King Charles Albert of Savoy granted civil liberties to all his subjects, including to Waldensians and Jews.
Starting from a straightforward geographical reconstruction that places the Waldensian Valleys within the Kingdom of Savoy and a historical account affirming their forced "ghettoization" by the ruling Savoy authorities (Tourn 2022), it can be argued that there is a contextual and historical relationship between the Savoy Kingdom and the Waldensians. In essence, this has forced the Waldensians to live, produce, and reproduce themselves within three valleys where they developed distinct cultures and habits.
Appadurai's theory of "neighborhoods" suggests that neighborhoods, meant as physical places with villages, buildings, streets or churches, generate context or produce locality in a "violent" way (2018, p. 108), through a process of "otherness" where one neighborhood encountering another assets its dominance. This dynamic has profoundly influenced the production of locality, which we

[7] A brief disclaimer: I use " the valleys" to indicate the three physical places, while I use "the Valleys" to indicate people's production of the imagined locality known as such.

refer to as the "Valleys," in both spatial and temporal terms (Appadurai 1995, p. 210). In the Waldensian case, these two dimensions are interconnected.
I first break down temporal aspects with some ethnographic insights from observation and participation. Generally, when most of the people I met during fieldwork spoke about the “Valleys,” they were particularly concerned with how time followed a different rhythm here. At first, I could not understand why.
A curious anecdote occurred in February while I was attending a UBCV meeting and taking notes. I was with a group of seven women, transcribing notes on my laptop when, around 4 pm, everyone stopped for a break and sat together in a circle, chatting and having tea. I was invited to join them. I tried to make a joke, saying, “The famous tea at 4 pm.” While laughing, a kind elderly lady sitting next to me, whose name I don’t recall, told me, “We all take tea at 4 pm here; it’s a tradition we have. Since we all have peasant origins, everyone used to finish working in the fields earlier because of the dark and the cold.” Later that day, when I shared this story with Paola, she explained:

“It is normal because people don’t do much in winter, here, in the valleys. Everything is slower because, as people followed the peasant calendar, less sun means people stay at home more and have less time to do things or see each other. You can say the same for other events: much of Waldensian communal life takes place in the summer.”

This pattern is closely linked to the historical circumstances of the Waldensians being forced to live in these mountains and adapt to a specific calendar and also because they had fields on the darker slopes, meaning they were less productive and forced to adapt to the natural course of the sunlight. Spatially, we have the three valleys, comprised of villages, cultural offices, several monuments and all 18 churches built on the darker slopes of the mountains as mandated by the Savoy Kingdom. Still to this day, you can see Waldensian temples built in remote areas, often with very little natural light.

Mauro, whom I met during my first week in the field, shared an interesting conversation with me during a visit in his office after hours. He recalled a recent moment involving a friend who left an important job to return to the Valleys.

Mauro: you have to hear this: I have a colleague of my generation who left a prestigious community to return because he missed the skyline of the mountains. This is not a joke! He was born and raised in the Valleys, a truly excellent pastor.
Me: How good? You mean from a theological standpoint?
Mauro: let’s say he is a squared person…because we are squared, we come from these valleys so we are squared shaped as these mountains…now, I am not as sensitive as my colleague, but I do understand him, it is a sort of D.N.A.
(Mauro interview 19/01/23)

Physical characteristics of the valleys shape the local identity and the character of its inhabitants. This attachment to the physical landscape also manifests in the metaphor Mauro used, describing the people from the Valleys as "squared," shaped by the mountains themselves. This metaphor suggests that the harsh and defined contours of the mountains have influenced its inhabitants to be similarly resilient and tenacious in their character.
Physical characteristics of the surroundings are essentialized as natural traits of people from the "Valleys". As Appadurai argues a neighborhood, with its physical characteristics, is context (social actions, culture), but at the same time, context is neighborhood (Appadurai 2018, p. 109). Thus, there is a reciprocal relationship between physical spaces (neighborhoods) and the social and cultural actions that occur within them (context).

What cultural aspects make the "Valleys" also a context? To gain a comprehensive understanding, I need to show how theory of locality is essential to identify the process of "othering" at the heart of the cultural elements. In this regard, Mauro shared an evocative example from his family's history. His grandfather, when leaving his home in Val Pellice to go to the market in Pinerolo (approximately 15 km away), would exclaim, "I'm going to Italy." He spoke the local Patois from Val Pellice and French, but rarely Italian. Italy was experienced as a distant and somewhat foreign entity, with Pinerolo symbolizing a "national" border. This example illustrates how seemingly "local" cultural identities are not static or isolated but are continuously influenced by external forces, in this case, another context-generative force marked by violence. Mauro's grandfather, born in 1889 and thus an Italian citizen, had only experienced "Italy" through the lens of the two World Wars. These wars profoundly impacted his perception of national identity, with cultural and linguistic boundaries now challenging his sense of locality.
The "otherness" that Mauro's grandfather felt when crossing into Pinerolo reflects the ongoing negotiation of identity within borders. For him, Italy—or more specifically, Pinerolo—symbolized the land of commerce, while the Valleys represented home, in a specifically peasant way. In this context, Italian was seen as the language of commerce (notably, he was going "to Italy" to sell his livestock), while Patois and French were the languages of daily life and cultural expression within the Valleys.
The second example adds another layer to understanding how "local" identity creates context, even in a physically distant space from the Valleys. Mauro recounted an episode from 1976 involving a diasporic Waldensian community in the south-east Italian province of Foggia:

I attended a service in Cerignola. The service took place on February 17th, and they sang during worship all the songs in French. Out of curiosity, I asked, "Excuse me, but why in French?" An elderly man who had hosted me in his little house, answered while we ate, "Because we are Waldensians, we love the language of our homeland (patria)…"and this guy had never been once at the Valleys"
(Mauro interview 19/01/2023)

While the use of a specific language is not necessarily symbolical, in this sense, evoking the Valleys through the connection with language (French) is indeed cultural (as language is culture).
What also emerges clearly are “home” and “homelands” in between “borders” and “borderlands”. I use Liisa Mallki’s argument to articulate “homeland” by saying that this mobility and displacement have led to a situation where people create a sense of "home" or "homeland" not through physical presence in a specific place, but through memories and emotional connections to places they can no longer physically inhabit. Instead of being tied to a specific geographic location, the concept of home is increasingly formed and sustained through memories, narratives, and symbolic ties to places that exist more in the imagination or memory (collective or individual) than in physical life worlds. (Mallki 1992, pp. 25-28)
Conversely, borders and borderlands emerge as "places of incommensurable contradiction" (Gupta & Ferguson 1992, p. 18). A prime example is the city of Pinerolo, which I frequented during my fieldwork for two main reasons: first, it is the largest town in the area, with a population of around 35,000, and served as a practical location for transcribing notes and meeting with Paola, who lived there. Second, Pinerolo occupies a unique position—it is neither fully "in" nor "out" of the Valleys. As a border town, it functions as a gateway to the three valleys, making it a critical point of transition.
Also, the previous example of the diasporic Waldensian community living in southern Italy, who imagine their "homeland" in the Valleys is illustrative of the contradictions of borderlands. Borders are not just physical demarcations; they are sites where "differences" emerge, and cultures mix through encounters with others. In this sense, borders offer a unique vantage point for investigating differences as part of a broader system. While meanings and identities are constantly shifting, no place or culture is entirely localized; they always exist at these "borders" (p. 17).
The concept of locality, therefore, is articulated through the symbolic characteristics of the Valleys, whether in physical terms—such as resilience symbolized by the mountains—or cultural terms, like the use of French. As demonstrated by these examples, the "Valleys" serve as a possible articulation of how locality is constructed and maintained, shaped by both physical geography and cultural practices.

To define “local” heritage, it is essential to explore the degrees and scales of locality that confer on heritage its "local" character. The key issue here is understanding how communities assert their identities and histories through what they perceive as "local" heritage, even when these do not align with national heritage frameworks or standards. Which groups legitimize local heritage? Observing these power relationships is crucial to interpreting who or what has the authority to transform a space into a meaningful place or heritage site or monument.
An illustrative example is *Rocciamaneout*[8]. The "Waldensian Historical Sites" (Luoghi Storici Valdesi) are a series of local heritage sites. They hold significant symbolic and historical value for the Waldensian community. There are eight, among which the *Rocciamaneout* provides a symbolic

[8] This is Patois dialect

location where the Waldensians once took up arms to resist Savoyard troops. To an outsider, like a "tourist" (says Mauro) it might appear as just a rock, devoid of any particular significance. However, for the people of the "Valleys", this rock has been transformed into a monument. This transformation of an ordinary physical feature into a symbol of local heritage underscores the idea

that heritage is not inherent but is constructed and legitimized: historical narratives and the socio-political context of the Valleys turn rocks into symbols of resilience, tangible (monument) and intangible (the experience of resilience).
However, this example also raises questions about which groups or forces legitimize this "local" heritage. Is it the "previous generations" who first inscribed meaning onto this rock? Or is it the ongoing collective memory of the community that continues to reaffirm its significance? The Waldensian Historical Locations are indeed:

"'places of memory[9]' as they have not only been the setting of past events, but have also become the foci of a practice of memory, communal in the truest sense of the word, in which the Waldensians have identified a significant symbol of their own identity." (Jalla 2010, p. 5)

Another example may better illustrate which groups could legitimize local heritage. Consider the longstanding tradition of resilience rooted in the historical relationship between the Waldensians and the former Kingdom of Savoy. The social actions and reproduction within the "Valleys" have significantly shaped what can be termed "local" heritage.
Today, in Waldensian catechism classes, it is notable that in the third year, there is no longer any study of Waldensian history; instead, catechists focus on reading and studying Reformation texts. However, as Mauro pointed out, this was not always the case. Historically, pastors in the Valleys began catechism with the Bible and the New Testament for the first two years, dedicating the third year specifically to Waldensian history.
This historical approach by pastors uniquely connected Waldensian historical events and figures with the present, thereby initiating a "heritagization" process (Harvey, 2001). By weaving the community's past into the fabric of contemporary religious education, they fostered a strong sense of identity and continuity within the Valleys. Mauro, now in his sixties, explained how historical figures such as Henry Arnaud[10] and Gianavello[11],—respectively a Waldensian pastor and a military bandit from the "Valleys"—are re-experienced as "local" heritage:

[9] This publication was curated by the Società di Studi Valdese, a local association of Waldensian historians and published from Waldensian publisher "Claudiana editrice". However, the Luoghi Storici have not been authorized by the Società, but since they published an entire history volume on them, they called it likewise. Here the author Daniele Jalla references Pierre Nora influential work on "les lieux de mèmoire" (1989).
[10] Born in 1641 and died in 1721, he was a Waldensian pastor which led the Glorious Comeback
[11] Born in 1617 and died in 1690, he was a pivotal figure which embraced the Waldensian resistance during systematic persecution thought the mid 1600.

(Growing up in the Valleys) We played games, imagining we were part of those historical events. We played Cowboys and Indians, but more often we played Waldensians and Savoyards, or partisans and Germans. No one wanted to be either the Savoyards or the Germans.
(Mauro interview 19/01/2023)

These figures stand as enduring symbols of resilience and defiance for the Waldensian community. Arnaud and Gianavello are revered as "heroes" for their unwavering resistance against oppressors and invaders, particularly the Savoyards. A statue dedicated to Arnaud prominently stands in the center of Torre Pellice, underscoring his lasting significance. As the historian Bruna Peyrot (2022) highlights, Gianavello remains a central figure in the local heritage of the Valleys (Peyrot, 2022, p. 65). He is commemorated in various ways: for his strategic military leadership, his proactive approach in taking offensive actions rather than merely defending, his deep-rooted connection to the land of the Valleys, and his role as a resilient and heroic mountaineer (Peyrot, 2022, pp. 66-67). Moreover, the example of children's games brings to light the overlap with the partisan tradition, which also developed on a regional scale, as the Waldensian Valleys were home to one of the first Alpine partisan resistance groups against Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. This example illustrates that a specific group of people, particularly the pastors, plays a crucial role in legitimizing this local heritage through the teaching of history during catechism classes.

The Valleys represent a distinctive scale in the context of defining local heritage. The roots of this heritage can be traced back to the historical conflicts between Waldensian villages in the Valleys and their neighboring regions. This dynamic creates a scale that incorporates both local and regional elements, making it appropriate to describe it as a regional scale. The Waldensian community is often characterized by their deep-rooted connection to the Valleys, transforming these spaces into places of profound meaning and identity (Gupta & Ferguson 1992, p. 8). Although this heritage is not formally recognized by the Italian ministry of culture and does not generate universally shared values across Italy, it exemplifies "local" heritage—significant in that it cultivates and perpetuates a strong sense of identity and meaning for the community.

1.3Waldensian and Methodist and their Heritage: spelling out scale

Within the Waldensian community, there are also more official and established discourses that reproduce national bureaucracies at the local level. In this section I am exploring the “Waldensian and Methodist” scale, and what does WMH entails. How is it formed? Does it stand in contrast with the seemingly locality of the “Valleys” and “local” heritage?
First, I need to spell out what the “Waldensian and Methodist” scale stands for and I do this by observing in what kind of relationships the Methodists are with the Waldensian. Given that “Methodist” is not part of the “Valleys” (i.e. there is no Methodist presence in either of the three valleys physically nor inherent to local culture) I could observe the presence of Methodists on only one occasion: during the night of the 16th February night of the FDL festivity, which is a “Valleys” feast.

On the night of the 16th there is the traditional bonfire lit in the main square of the villages . I attended what Paola told me was the “most prominent among all the events”, which took place in in Massello, a small village in Val Chisone. It was indeed pivotal given the presence of the top-ranking Waldensian authorities: the Moderator of the Tavola Valdese and the Bishop of Pinerolo, the highest Catholic authority in the area. Historically, lighting bonfires in villages throughout the valleys symbolizes "the light in the darkness," a key Waldensian motto representing their newfound civil liberties. This is an element of local tradition which continues to exist to this day, and people still light bonfires in their villages. Approximately 60 people attended the bonfire in Massello, a number I had never seen gathered before. Given the often very cold temperatures, sometimes dropping below 0 degrees, people were eager to gather around the bonfires.
Pastor Gianni, who was asked to deliver a speech, was also the person who invited Paola and I to attend the bonfire in Massello. I had met him a few weeks earlier for a brief interview about the nature of the FDL. Gianni is also the former Moderatore of the Tavola Valdese and has served as pastor of several Waldensian villages in the area, so he experiences the festivity as an important and “official” occasion. He was chosen to deliver a speech, as he was standing with a microphone alongside the mayor and other civil representatives. Interspersed with the pastor’s discourse, a local choir led people in singing as they gathered around waiting for the bonfire to burn down.

“This is the Festival of Liberty because, in some way, it is the recognition of civil rights a few days after the Jews. It is not something that concerns the Waldensians or the Jews; it is something that concerns the Italians when there is an awareness that finally affirms itself. And so having a woman (leading our church), this is always important…but also a Methodist, I think, is very significant, exactly what I want to say. The bonfire is hers; the bonfire is everyone's, you understand? This is what people need to understand.”
(Gianni interview 01/02/2023)

Gianni's discourse was not a typical pastoral sermon filled with biblical references. Instead, it was formal in nature, serving to introduce the guests, making announcements about the following day's service, and expressing gratitude to everyone for coming together despite the cold.
The other speakers at the bonfire were also "official" figures: the mayor warmly welcomed everyone present, and the Moderator of the Tavola Valdese, a Methodist woman named Alessandra, delivered the final speech. Her address praised the unity of the two churches (Methodist and Waldensian). At the celebration, there were two Waldensian authorities (one of whom also represented Methodists) and a Catholic authority, the bishop of Pinerolo, who was invited by the Tavola Valdese office but did not give a speech.
As I observed, this event exemplifies the "Waldensian and Methodist" scale, which is characterized by formality and the presence of institutions (religious and secular). This scale operates on a national level, as evidenced by the fact that even the mayor presented himself as a civic authority.

The bonfire event navigated and reflected power relations by performing, from a Waldensian locality, an interaction with broader institutional structures such as the Italian ministry of culture

and religious organizations in their bureaucratic form, along with church officials. However, to articulate a “national” scale, the role of the nation needs to be spelled out too. The State is what Appadurai describes as a "normative hinge" (Appadurai 2018, p. 112), a point of connection that normalizes and reinforces certain practices. On one hand, the State functions as a "neighborhood" in that it has physical boundaries and creates context by establishing rules and legislation. Conversely, this framework also facilitates the creation of context between Methodists and Waldensians. Italy, as a state, provides a common ground for the freedom of religious expression and supports the material and immaterial culture of these churches under what is commonly referred to as WMH, Waldensian and Methodist heritage (Patrimonio Culturale Valdese e Metodista), stemming from the 1984 agreement between Waldensians, Methodists, and the ministry. Here “heritage” is translated with a much more emphasis on possession as the Italian term “patirmonio” suggests.
The extract from a government webpage serves as a testament to how the nation perceives Waldensians and Methodists:

The Italian Republic and the Waldensian Table (which has both Waldensians and Methodists representatives) collaborate for the protection and enhancement of the cultural assets pertaining to the historical, moral, and material heritage of the churches represented by the Waldensian Table, establishing for this purpose specific joint commissions. These commissions are also responsible for compiling and updating the inventory of the aforementioned cultural assets[12]

It is essential to mention about the English translation of cultural assets, that it comes from the term “*beni culturali*”, which in Italian has a less possessive meaning than “*Patrimonio*”.
The Waldensian and Methodist scale and its representation as “heritage”, therefore, articulates a formal local-national relationship and state-sanctioned forms of heritage engagement. These forms of engagement are exemplified by the “joint commissions,” with the “Ufficio Beni Culturali della Tavola Valdese” (UBCV) being the primary example. The UBCV plays a crucial role in local heritage management, having been established to integrate the culture of the Waldensian and Methodist churches into a national framework and to promote knowledge of the history and identity of these two religious minorities.
From the outset, this formality was evident. Meetings with UBCV members required formal communication, including email exchanges and appointment requests. I could not simply approach them without first initiating contact online. Even with Paola vouching for me, I had to obtain their approval beforehand. Although six to ten individuals work at the office, my main interlocutors were Sara, the head of the office, and Ilaria, the head of communication.
Secondly, this formality and institutional structure are further reflected in the organization of the UBCV itself. The UBCV operates under the direct oversight of the Waldensian Church (specifically, the Tavola Valdese, which also includes Methodist members). As a result, UBCV members, like pastors, are employed by the church and work within a three-floor office building located in Torre Pellice. On the upper floor, to the left, is the “Società di Studi Valdesi,” a cultural

[12] https://presidenza.governo.it/usri/ufficio_studi/normativa/L.%20449_11.08.1984.pdf.

association of Waldensian historians that collaborates with the UBCV in managing the museum and library. However, it remains a separate entity, independent from the Tavola Valdese (and the Church), and, therefore, was not included in this research. The UBCV office is located on the left side of the main floor.

The UBCV occupies a central role within the Waldensian church cultural framework, holding the responsibility for the protection, enhancement, and promotion of Waldensian cultural heritage. These responsibilities align closely with official heritage discourses often promoted by nation-state bureaucracies. The UBCV's practical tasks include managing the Waldensian historical archive (located one floor below their office), assisting in the management of the Waldensian library (situated on the main floor), and overseeing the Waldensian museum[13] (on the upper floor). The UBCV is committed to preserving and ensuring the accessibility of documents, books, artifacts, and artworks that are integral to Waldensian history and tradition. In addition to these duties, the UBCV organizes events, exhibitions, and educational activities that highlight Waldensian and Methodist culture on both local and national levels.
The relevance of the UBCV is further amplified by their incorporation of the Faro Convention's principle of heritage community into their work, particularly within the context of the Waldensian and Methodist Heritage (WMH) framework, which operates on what appears to be a national scale. This connection to the Faro Convention is significant as it underscores the importance of engaging "communities" in heritage processes, aligning with the principle of empowering heritage communities through education, capacity building, and access to information. Such empowerment allows individuals and groups to actively participate in heritage processes and make informed decisions regarding their cultural resources.

During my interactions with the UBCV, I met with Sara and Ilaria, both of whom showed immediate enthusiasm for my research and warmly welcomed me to their office in Torre Pellice. As I gained their trust, I learned about a pivotal initiative they were organizing, scheduled for the 11th and 12th of March 2023, aimed at raising national awareness of WMH. This initiative is where the Faro Convention's principle of "Heritage Community" becomes particularly relevant.
Inspired by the European Heritage Days model, the event was named the "Giornate per il Patrimonio Culturale Valdese e Metodista" (GPVM). The GPVM consists of a series of events aimed at various Waldensian and Methodist communities spread over Italy but organized by the UBCV from within the physical location of the Valleys. The initiative involves opening the doors of churches and cultural institutions, such as libraries and museums, to the public for activities that highlight the heritage of these communities. These activities include guided tours where volunteers explain the historical, architectural, and religious significance of these "sites-for-two-days"[14], along with other cultural events like concerts and exhibitions.

[13] It is "administered conjointly" by the Tavola Valdese (so by the Church) and the Society di Studi Valdesi, which is not, formally, dependent from the Waldensian church
[14] As in all the places opened for the GPVM, across Italy.

For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus specifically on the aspects of the GPVM that took place within the office building on the 11th of March. In this section, I will first break down how the UBCV enacts this degree of formality and institutionalization, drawing on an interview I conducted with Ilaria in February about the GPVM organization. Some of the information, particularly about the pre-event or organizational aspects, is conveyed indirectly by Ilaria. At this point in the process, the only part missing was the full program, so during the interviews, Sara and Ilaria were still awaiting responses from most of the churches to finalize the details.
In this way, the church communication has capillary and formalized canals:

"When we send out the communication, it goes to the pastors and the presidents of the church councils. They then promote the initiative (GPVM) internally, asking who will take charge. Sometimes it's a group, other times just one person. These individuals often reach out to us for guidance on what to propose, and we work with them to develop ideas and offer support with logistics like graphic design. Our communication process is quite structured. For example, we make sure that the correct logos and order of names are used depending on who is involved and what the document represents. This includes being mindful of institutional communication practices and making sure everything is historically and factually accurate, as we have a responsibility to maintain high standards in our communication."
(Ilaria UBCV interview 27/01/23)

The communication process described here highlights the formal channels through which the UBCV operates. The use of structured communication pathways—from the office to pastors and church councils—ensures that information is disseminated in an organized and consistent manner. Furthermore, this process shows the significance of institutional formality within the UBCV's operations. Attention to detail in communication, such as the correct use of logos and the precise order of names, reflects the office's commitment to professionalism and also prefigure ownership. This formality is crucial in maintaining the integrity and authority of the UBCV, ensuring that all communications align with the office's objectives, which also in a way mirror the broader goals of the churches and the heritage framework they operate within, particularly under the guidance of the Faro Convention. This approach mixes community engagement while maintaining oversight and expertise.

The previous section serves as an example of how "heritage experts" operate. Experts play a crucial role in legitimizing heritage. But how is "official" WMH legitimized? In the next paragraphs, I will break down how the UBCV legitimizes and create WMH by showcasing the example of Rostan, a local Waldensian botanist whose legacy was re-evaluated not only for his scientific contributions but also for his embodiment of certain values of connection.
The central theme revolves around the figure of Eduard Rostan, a renowned Waldensian botanist who, despite spending most of his life in the Valleys, established a network across Europe with other prominent scientists and doctors. Born in 1826 and living until 1895, Rostan's life spanned significant historical changes: in 1848, when the Waldensians were granted civil liberties, allowing

him to study at the University of Turin, from which he graduated in medicine; and in 1861, when the modern Italian state was born. Rostan was connected to Italy through his membership in the Italian Society of Botanists, becoming the first Waldensian to achieve this. Thus, scale is once again formed at the intersection of the local and the broader national context.

Although he rarely left the "Valleys" except for studying in Turin and attending the International Congress of Botany in 1874, the UBCV chose Rostan as a symbol of a Waldensian deeply rooted in his territory while achieving international recognition for his botanical expertise. Botanists primarily conducted expeditions to collect plant and flower samples and preserved them in herbaria[15]. By exchanging these plants with other botanists, they built national and international relationships.
On one hand, the plants are unique to their territory and show an aspect linked with local specificity (i.e. the valleys). For example, during the guided tour of Rostan's herbarium, some plants were shown that no longer exist in the Valleys, some discovered by Rostan and named after him, preserved in his herbarium. This not only highlights the local biodiversity but also the historical significance of Rostan's work in the broader botanical community. He sent some samples of local Waldensian plants into herbaria that have been conserved in many cities around the world[16].
During the GPVM, the UBCV aimed to portray the Waldensian Valleys as more than just a remote and mountainous area; they sought to emphasize its role as a cultural hub that engaged with the wider world through science and culture. The focus was not solely on the scientific accuracy of Rostan's work but on the large reach of his network across Europe. This was highlighted through an entire section of the tour, which featured an exhibition of Rostan's letters and documents, showcasing the extensive connections he maintained throughout Europe.

1.4 Concluding remarks

In this chapter, the concept of scale-making has proven essential for understanding how different social, cultural and political effects of "heritage" phenomena are constructed, negotiated, and interconnected. Scale-making is about recognizing the dynamic, relational, and power-laden nature of these scales. It involves understanding how communities and institutions define and navigate these scales, imbuing different levels with varying degrees of significance. I identified at least two prominent scales and various levels of construction of significance, i.e. scale-making. The "Valleys" which promotes a local-regional scale and the "Waldensian church" or "Waldensian and Methodist" which promotes a local-national scale. These scales, far from being naturally occurring, are socially and culturally constructed (Tsing 2000) . They emerge from the power relationships between places and people inhabiting them.

[15] Traditionally, herbaria were created by drying the plants and attaching them to blank pages, which were then compiled into a catalogue for preservation. Nowadays, all herbaria have a digitalized form.
[16] According to the Società di Studi Valdesi, his samples were sent to various locations including Florence, Berlin, Gothenburg, Gottingen, Leiden, London, Geneva, Auckland, Cambridge, Oxford, Manchester, Amherst (Massachusetts), Washington, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Paris, Vienna and Turin.
https://www.studivaldesi.org/dizionario/evan_det.php?secolo=XIX&evan_id=117

First I examined “locality” and his physical and cultural construction. Locality in this context is not merely defined by being born in a particular place, but by the cumulative experiences lived within that space—hence, for Mauro people are like mountains, and mountains are like people, i.e. "neighborhood is context and context is neighborhood" (Appadurai 2018).
It emerged that for instance, the feeling of belonging to a place—articulated as "home"—is not necessarily tied to a specific geographic location, as demonstrated by the diasporic Waldensian church in southern Italy which sensed the belonging to the “Valleys” by using the French language during the celebration of the cult. Despite being physically distant from the "Valleys," the members of this church maintain a strong sense of connection to their “homeland”, while for Mauro’s grandfather this sense of belonging emerged when confronted with another space felt as “distant” (the experience of “Italy”).
Secondly, I examined the "Waldensian and Methodist" identity: even in the absence of a Methodist presence in the physical geography of the "Valleys," this scale does not undermine the existence of a Methodist identity or community. Instead, it contextualizes this identity within a national framework, where diverse locales are linked under the umbrella of a shared religious and cultural identity. As such, the local is not confined to a specific place, and the global is not a distant force but is rather intricately connected with the local, national, and transnational dimensions.

By utilizing the theories of localization proposed by Appadurai (2018) and Gupta & Ferguson (1992), I have explored how space is transformed into place—how the production of locality occurs. Places and cultures are not entirely localized (Gupta & Ferguson 1992, p. 17) and communities are not just passive recipients of historical events, but they actively participate in and shape history. As Appadurai notes:

"...the subjects of history become historical subjects, so that no human community, however apparently stable, static, bounded, or isolated, can usefully be regarded as cool or outside history." (Appadurai 2018, p. 110)

Following Tsing’s theory, this study illustrates that there are no "local" places and "global" forces; rather, all phenomena exist simultaneously as “local” and “global” (Tsing 2000, p.352)
Heritage-making is shaped and validated across multiple scales, whether “local” or “national.” The Valleys, as a local-regional relationship, embody a space of profound emotional significance and resilience, whereas the Waldensian and Methodist scale, functioning as a local-national relationship, reflects the realm of institutional significance and formalization.
In my research, “local” heritage is demonstrated by pastors who leverage history to cultivate a collective sense of resilience within their community. Conversely, within the Waldensian and Methodist scale, local heritage is legitimized by “local” professionals and church officials from the UBCV, bolstered by adherence to state-sanctioned norms and caring for Waldensian and Methodist churches nation-wide. The key difference lies in the fact that WMH is institutionalized on a national scale, supported by “official” local and national bureaucracies. This formalization adds an

additional layer of recognition and authority, setting WMH apart from the more grassroots, “unofficial” local heritage of the Valleys.

To conclude, the valleys as the place of “memory” and embedded memories while the “Waldensian and Methodist” is the place of legitimized discourses, such as WMH. The concept of “*Patrimonio”* (Italian for heritage) as articulated by law scholars like Zagato highlights the tension between official, institutionalized heritage and the more fluid, lived experiences of memory within communities (Zagato 2015, p. 145). *Patrimonio* is often codified, curated, and preserved according to specific criteria that are deemed important by authorities, be they state bodies, cultural institutions, or international organizations. However, this can lead to a disconnection from the dynamic and evolving nature of memory as it is lived and experienced by communities. Memory, unlike "*Patrimonio*," is not a settled, completed thing but rather an ongoing process of change, shaped by the present and informed by the past in ways that resist formal codification or authorized heritage (Smith 2006). The Waldensian Valleys, for instance, could embody this tension: the living memories of the community, shaped by oral histories, local traditions, and communal practices, intersect with a much more formalized heritage recognized by official narratives, i.e. WMH.

This chapter shows, therefore, two distinct forms of secular heritage: the local-regional heritage of "the Valleys" (as in the Cerignola example) and state and Faro-authorized heritage of the WMH.

CHAPTER 2: Secular and sacred among Waldensians

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I showed that the Valleys and the Waldensian and Methodist Heritage (WMH) are closely intertwined with broader processes of elevating certain values over others. In this chapter I will address those question by exploring the tension between the secular and the sacred, by examining the material and immaterial aspects of religion within the context of seemingly secularized spaces, such as temples during the GPVM (Giornate per il Patrimonio Culturale Valdese e Metodista). This raises an important question: How does the minimal material approach to God, often observed in Evangelical traditions, contrast with the more tangible expressions of religion seen in Waldensian and Methodist communities? By examining the open-temple organization and subsequent events of the GPVM, where visitors are invited into spaces traditionally reserved for worship, I aim to shed light on this interplay between the physical and spiritual dimensions of religious practice.

However I first need to spell out "the secular" and "the sacred" in the Waldensian context.
I gathered these insights primarily through interactions with the UBCV particularly from a brochure they distributed for the GPVM "open-temple" (OT) initiative, which I will specify in the next section and a subsequent series of interviews. This brochure was intended to explain the material aspects of religion (objects such as the furniture of the church and its use) and through this discussion of materialization to address a sense of the secular to potential visitors.
I also incorporate discussions I had with Paola, who was training church members to become open-temple attendees, during which she herself questioned the boundaries between the secular and the sacred.

The section "sacralized performances vs sacralization of memory" delves into the secular and sacred elements present in the Festa della Libertà (FDL), focusing particularly on the concept of freedom as articulated in Gianni's speeches on February 16th and 17th. Here, I investigate the sacralization of seemingly universal human values—such as freedom, which reflect "humanity" as a distinct category of "the secular" (Asad 2003, Pels 2013)- and how these values are interpreted through the lens of religious belief. For instance, freedom can be understood as a fundamental human right (a secular view) or as part of a divine plan (a sacred view). I also consider to whom these concepts of freedom are sacred or secular by examining the contrasting tendencies found in traditional Waldensian attire, which carries symbolic weight. Additionally, I explore another layer of sacralization, where the secular is rendered sacred, particularly through the sacralization of memory—how collective memory itself becomes an object of reverence within the community (Misztal 2004).

The second part of the analysis relies heavily on my observations during the FDL on the 16th and 17th of February and on the analysis of Gianni's interview before the FDL and his speeches held during it.

2.2 Sense of the Sacred in the Materiality of the Open-Temple

This initial section demonstrates how reflecting on the material aspects of religion—such as the temple and its internal elements, including furniture and other fixtures—leads to a broader discussion on the secularization of spaces. This part specifically addresses the so-called OT initiative. For Protestants, temples are not considered sacred spaces but function more like offices; if the pastor is not available during designated community hours, the temple doors remain closed. Additionally, Waldensian temples are notably unadorned, both inside and out, with no images and minimal furnishings, and the facades are typically unpainted.

During the phase prior to the Giornate del Patrimonio Culturale Valdese e Metodista (GPVM), I had a meeting with Ilaria from the Ufficio Beni Culturali of the Tavola Valdese (UBCV). At her office, we discussed UBCV's plans for communicating the GPVM, including the online calendar, the distribution of information to churches, and the materials to be provided to visitors. She also shared insights into what the OT initiative represents for the UBCV and the other churches. This conversation offered valuable insights into the relationship between the sacred and the secular from a Waldensian perspective:

"(We say that) The Protestant temple is open because, unlike Catholic churches, Protestant buildings are not consecrated. There isn't the option for them to always be open for prayer or personal meditation. So, when there isn't a service, a church-related activity, or a concert, the temple is closed. This is a significant difference... It's unlikely that you can just walk into a Waldensian temple while passing by and think, "Oh, I'll go visit it." That's not possible." (Ilaria UBCV 09/02/2023)

I consider first what emerges when Ilaria compare Waldensians with Catholics, where the church building , altar, and icons of the former are seen as sacred, manifesting the divine. In contrast, Protestants do not view material objects, including the temple, as holding sacred significance or implying divine presence. The pastor, likewise, is not seen as a "holy person". As Ilaria explains, Protestant temples are typically closed outside designated hours, functioning as "working spaces" that align with the pastor's schedule. This limits access for visitors or those unfamiliar with the church, who may not see or understand how the space is used.
The OT initiative allows the community to showcase the temple's interior and functions to a broader audience. However, the organization and authorization of all GPVM events, including OTs nationwide, are overseen by the UBCV on the 11th and 12th of March. As Ilaria explains, while OTs are authorized by the UBCV, they are also commonly used by communities in other occasions, particularly in larger cities, to engage with the public. However in the GPVM context, the OT

initiative temporarily transforms the Waldensian and Methodist temples (because it is nation-wide) into an exhibit authorized by the UBCV.

The UBCV provides guidance and assistance in this process, primarily by supplying churches with small brochures to distribute to visitors the UBCV itself preassembled. These brochures serve two distinct purposes:
1) they address the material aspects of the temple. They contain descriptions of various elements within the temple's interior. Here is a list of objects which are represented on the brochure: the Bible, the pulpit, the communion table, the cross, the baptismal font, musical instruments, hymnals, songbooks, pews, chairs, cushions, offering baskets, service sheets, plaques, stained glass windows, and decorations. Moreover, the brochure contains a brief description of Waldensian temples:

"The building of worship, the 'temple,' does not possess any sacred character but serves as a meeting place... When the community gathers for its activities or worship, there are various elements that define the way people come together and experience the communal dimension: the spaces of worship, the places where people meet, the objects present, the way these objects are used, and finally, the existence of practices that are shared and passed down."
(Brochure GPVM 2023)

The UBCV indeed play a key role in transforming objects within the temple—objects that are not inherently sacred but are part of religious rituals— into a temporary repertoire to be explained and showcased to visitors, much like exhibits in a museum. The UBCV is particularly clear in its approach, demonstrating a process of authorization: the materiality of the objects inside the temple is considered secular, and the brochure reflects this authorized perspective.
This process can be described as "musealization," where religious spaces and objects are transformed into heritage and put on display. How, then, do we understand the temples that participated in the OT initiative during the GPVM? The objects presented in the brochure, however, extend beyond the material aspects of religion. For example, during an observation on the last day of the GPVM at the Villar Pellice temple (4 km from Torre Pellice), the temple was hosting a large concert inside. There was a famous baroque classical composer, an organist from Italy, performing that day. After the performance, the organist started to explain to the audience the craftsmanship involved in constructing the instrument, emphasizing that each organ is "unique"—not only for the community but also for musicians, as church organs are increasingly rare.

Thus, the organ is not solely for performing sacred music during worship; it also serves a broader purpose. He was an example of how musicians and scholars, including those from conservatories, frequently use the organ for practice and study, with each organ being unique in design and sound.

2) the brochures touch on the sense of the sacred too, even if they primarily focus on the material aspects of the temple. At the heart of this sacredness is the word of God, symbolized by the

open Bible (the bible per se is again just material, however an open bible symbolizes the sacred). This representation of the sacred, embodied in the “sacred scripture”, stands out as the most prominent sacred aspect I have observed in my research so far (apart from the "sacralized performances" -- which indeed are “sacred” because they invoke the word of God-- that I will discuss in detail later). As Paola explains:

"For Protestants, the church is the people gathered around the Bible who make up the church, and this can happen in fields, as it did for the Waldensians... it can happen in a supermarket parking lot—we’ve done it a few times..."
(Paola interview on OT training 29/03/2023)

It is crucial to highlight how the Waldensians distinguish between "doing church" (gathering around the word of God) and "being church" (gathering in a specific place associated with religious activities, such as Catholic churches). "Being church" refers to the material aspects of the church itself, typically linked to Catholicism. In contrast, "doing church" aligns more closely with Protestantism, where the focus is on spreading the word and evangelizing.
Therefore, as Hovland (2016) explains, evangelicals "bring together and take apart faith and place, continuously" (p. 346) and this could indicate an ongoing process of sacralization that is understood to be temporary or not intended to be permanent (indeed the Waldensian temples are not sacred even if the bible stays inside the temple). This sacralization occurs through the pastor's formulas (immaterial), the presence of the open Bible, and the gathering of people around it (the materiality of gatherings, see also Meyer et al . 2011).
Therefore, not every aspect declared as heritage is necessarily fully heritagized. As Meyer and de Witte (2013) suggest, something remains "sacred" in a certain way, resisting complete transformation into heritage.

2.3 Sacralising performances VS sacralisation of memory: the FDL case

This section begins with a reflection on my initial misconception: I approached the field with the assumption that the Festa della Libertà (FDL) was a religious celebration. However, as the FDL is specifically tied to the symbolic dates of February 16th and 17th, it actually marks the Waldensians obtaining civil liberties in 1848, thanks to King Charles Albert. Paola quickly corrected my mistake the first time we met.

This realization serves as a starting point to explore whether the FDL can be considered a religious festivity. While it primarily celebrates civic liberties, I argue that it still carries religious elements. These elements are rooted in the practices the Waldensians use (or were using) to make sense of the

sacred and the divine, suggesting that the FDL, while not wholly religious, does encompass aspects that are religiously sacred. How are these elements recognized? How do they stand in contrast with the seemingly secularized parts of the festivity?
To better contextualize this, I will illustrate a sacralizing performance within this secular festivity and explore the "secular-sacred" entanglement, as discussed by Balkenhol, van den Hemel, and Stengs (2020), between secular and sacred dimensions.

First, it is important to recognize that the FDL is a combination of two distinct events. In the mid-1800s, news, such as that of newly granted liberties, was spread orally. It took more than a day for the Waldensians in the valleys to become fully aware of their newfound civil liberties. The night of the 16th thus symbolizes the moment when the news reached the Valleys.
The actual celebration of freedom, with its rituals—such as the lighting of the bonfire, the gathering, and the singing—was traditionally associated with the night of February 16th and I produced some empirical consideration about it in the previous chapter.

My primary sources of information here are insights drawn from my interview with Gianni and observations made during the FDL. As a former moderator of the Tavola Valdese, the spokesperson for the Waldensian church, Gianni is well-versed in articulating his thoughts clearly and effectively. He is direct and speaks his mind freely. His political views are closely intertwined with his role as a church leader, reflecting a perspective common among many Waldensian pastors: the importance of maintaining a connection to faith by gathering around the word of God. Gianni believes that without faith, the social and cultural fabric of the Waldensian community would lose much of its cohesion and continuity. This idea aligns closely with what Hovland (2016) argues about evangelical place-making. I observed an example of invoking divine power with specific formulas, which sacralize moments during the FDL:

Thank you (Lord) for this generous offer you make to us once again today, on the day we remember a long-awaited freedom—a freedom for the Waldensian people...
(Gianni speech on the 17th during the worship in Chiotti temple)

Remember: freedom is not a status, it’s a vocation (Gianni speech on the 16th during the bonfire)

Even though the bonfire in Massello, as I argued elsewhere, represents the secular dimension of the Waldensian and Methodist scale, Gianni still attempts to sacralize the event by using specific formulas that, particularly through the word "vocation," link the concept of freedom to a higher, purposeful calling.

For Gianni, gathering around the biblical word and maintaining faith is an essential and enduring hallmark of being Waldensian, though this perspective is not always shared. Faith is increasingly perceived as losing its importance, and fewer people are willing to listen to the word of God.

“The day when there is no longer a Waldensian church understood as a small confessing reality that gathers around the Word of God, in my opinion, everything else risks becoming folklore. It doesn't disappear; it will survive the church but risks becoming folklore in a positive sense. I don't say it with a derogatory connotation. Folklore, tradition, is fine for all this.”
(Gianni Interview 01/02/2023)

I argue that the notion of folklore in this context is closely tied to a process of secularization, where the diminishing role of religion is gradually transforming the Valleys into a "folk" space. As faith and religion lose their significance, the question arises: Should we understand the FDL as “religiously sacred”, secular, or under another type of “sacredness”? Through closer analysis, I have come to interpret certain moments of the FDL through proper alternative "sacred" frameworks connected to processes of sacralizing memory—ones that no longer involve religious elements or, more precisely, emerge from the decline of traditional religious significance, as Nora (1989) suggests. The FDL invokes a process of memory—a memory that, as Gianni also observes, tends to obscure also the religious significance:

"It’s absurd that no one at the bonfire says even a single word—not one!" (referring to the word of God)
(Gianni Interview 01/02/2023)

Moreover, Gianni recalled that the worship service of the 17th was originally preceded by a parade. In the second half of the nineteenth century, February 17th was known as the "Fete de Menard." During this celebration, children were given white bread, fruit, and, in some cases, cheese, along with half a liter of wine. Reflecting on this tradition with a touch of irony, Gianni noted that such a practice today would likely lead to reports or complaints. Nevertheless, the memory of this part of the 17th remains is vividly alive in the Valleystoday.

On the morning of the 17th, I had been staying near Pinerolo to attend the morning celebration. While I had planned to follow Gianni’s preaching at the Chiotti temple, I hadn’t anticipated that the only road would be blocked by the early morning parade. As a result, I was forced to stop in a village a couple of kilometers before my final destination and decided to leave the car and join the parade. Around 300 people were marching in the streets, heading towards the temple of Perosa Argentina. I joined them, immersed in a festive atmosphere: men, women, and children sang, conversed, and the joy was palpable. I followed the parade all the way to the temple.

The sight of the parade, with people dressed in peasant clothes, was more striking than the temple itself, even when filled with worshippers.
Curious about the connection people had with their traditional attire, I later asked some of the research participants about the significance of Waldensian dress. I posed this question to two women in separate instances. Both shared that the dress represented a very intimate family memory.

Milena, a friend of Paola, had restored her mother's traditional Waldensian dress, which held deep personal significance for her, as I will discuss in more detail later. For Milena, the dress symbolized a strong emotional connection to her family heritage. A couple of days after the FDL, I asked Anna, Daniele's girlfriend, about her feelings regarding the traditional dress. Although she didn't own one herself, she expressed a similarly profound emotional connection to her family heritage, tied to the memory of the dress. This connection will be explored more in detail in the next chapter.

2.4 Concluding remarks

In the first part, I examined the heritagization of religion and how it manifests in the form of musealization. The WMH formal framework, embedded by the authorization of the UBCV, illustrates how heritage "tends to accommodate" (Meyer 2023, p. 16) the religious.

As explored by Balkenhol, van den Hemel, and Stengs (2020), the concept of the secular-sacred extends beyond merely describing a seemingly secular entity that becomes involved in a process of sacralization. It also includes how the secular and sacred, as I argued in the theoretical section, are two categories that can coexist. In this context, "secular sentiments about the nation" (p. 4)—exemplified by the UBCV's desire to incorporate these practices into a national heritage framework as WMH—become entangled with sacrality. Regarding this point, even if these objects do not specifically evoke an immaterial sense of the sacred, as Birgit Meyer et al. argue, "religious heritage retains and remains indebted to the religious dimension of the things that are heritagized" (Meyer et al., 2011, p. 20).

In the second part, I follow from these previous insights and examine the double sacrality (Meyer & de Witte 2013) of FDL: first with the sacralizing performances of Gianni. In this way, Pastor Gianni transformed a space into a place, and the FDL is the annual commemoration of this process (sacred performance).

Then, I consider the secular-sacred (Balkenhol, van den Hemel & Stengs 2020) concept of memory, where religious significance diminishes, but secular memories become sacralized in the Waldensian context. How are these moments felt and experienced by the majority of people? My observations, along with Gianni's assumption that most people do not identify as Waldensian or connect their identity to faith, reinforce my argument. While Gianni's speeches invoke religiously sacred elements through sacralizing formulas, I contend that it is memory—rather than faith or traditional religious practices—that elevates these moments to a "sacred" status.

Here, memory is both secular and sacred. Secular, as seen in the materiality of the tradition of women wearing the typical peasant dress. As Nora (1989) contends, as traditional religious ways of remembering have declined, society has substituted them with a secularized form of memory that still seeks to fulfill some of the same functions. But memory is also sacred here: while the sense of

religious practices is lost, this form of memory often carries with it a sense of reverence for a world, such as the peasant one from the Valleys.
How, then, does memory relate to the material account of such memories? How does memory relate to heritage?

CHAPTER 3: Heritage and memory within the tradition of singing

3.1 Introduction

Waldensians consider singing a vital part of community life, integrating it deeply into their cultural and social fabric. Their musical repertoire is rich and diverse, including songs that reference their historical struggles and survival through centuries of persecution. This repertoire encompasses not only the poignant melodies of their past but also vibrant Occitan chants that celebrate rural life and Alpine influences that resonate with the natural beauty of their mountainous homeland. These songs exist in both written and oral traditions, passed down through generations.
The blending of these themes—historical, cultural, and personal—within their music highlights how the Waldensian community uses singing as a means of negotiating and expressing their identity.

Similar to Castleford's study on heritage, memory, and community identity interplay (Smith 2006), this chapter examines how the Waldensian community leverages memories across multiple locations to evoke a distinct sense of place within the oral and written dimensions of singing. Memory in the Waldensian community is crucial in shaping both "official" and "unofficial" heritage narratives. The selective process of memory involves not only preserving tangible elements but also deeply valuing shared experiences, traditions, and historical events that bind the community together. According to Smith (2006, p. 239), heritage "is something that is actively made in the present in response to cultural, social, and economic needs and aspirations." Heritage is a "process of doing," where memories play an active part in shaping the interpersonal relations that create the community.

The first subchapter "Why we all sing" is the result of participant observation and an interview with Jean Louis, a Waldensian retired actor who has meticulously preserved multiple "cahiers" for 40 years. This interview sparked a reflection on the active role of memory in the process of safeguarding heritage. This section also provides an opportunity to reflect on tangible and intangible heritage within the Waldensian community and the ways they make sense of it.

The section "Why we keep singing" narrates my meeting with Milena, a Waldensian woman and member of a church choir. She wrote a book on Waldensian songs from the Valleys as a way to reconnect with her late mother. Interestingly, she did not approach this task by searching the Waldensian archives or finding inspiration in the local musicological repertoire available through the archives. Instead, she relied on her personal memories to recall songs and used her musical training to arrange the melodies. The songs she remembered from her childhood sparked a process of active remembering, which also evoked memories in others.

Singing is heritage in the sense of being "about using the past, and collective or individual memories, to negotiate new ways of being and expressing identity" (Smith 2006, p. 4).
I asked what role does singing play in shaping and sustaining community identity? How does memory and remembering enter the process?

3.2Why "we all sing"

"Singing has always been important! Everyone sings together! Even without knowing the music, we sing in three parts: someone does the melody, someone does the alto part, which is a minor third below, and someone does the bass. Here […] we create a three-part choir without needing the sheet music. It's part of our heritage (Patrimonio)"
(Jean Louis interview, 03/02/2023)

Waldensians have a vast and mixed heritage encompassing both secular and religious elements, reflecting the diverse cultural practices of this Evangelical group. Religious songs and hymns are a prominent feature of church services, playing a significant role in worship and spiritual expression. Additionally, popular Alpine and Occitan songs are crucial to the community's cultural life, especially within the "Valleys," more so than in the temples. One notable example is the development of the "chanson tradition," an oral tradition unique to the valleys that eventually evolved into a written tradition, available in the form of "cahier de chansons" or simply "cahiers." These cahiers are songbooks that contain collections of traditional songs and poetry but also personal reflections and thoughts and even cooking recipes. They serve as a means of passing down memories from one generation to the next within a familiar home setting. Dating the appearance of "cahiers" is challenging due to their composite nature, although the oldest one currently available dates back to 1783[17].

I arranged a meeting with Jean Louis, a retired actor and member of the Angrogna church congregation. He invited me to his home in Val Pellice to an informal meeting.

Why does the past become so valuable that it must be preserved in written form in the present? The concept of documenting the past and preserving it in a tangible form is longstanding, yet it manifests differently under the premises of Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD) compared to community-driven local initiatives.

In the context of the Waldensian repertoire, the written preservation of songs serves two primary purposes, each distinct from the other.

[17] https://rbe.it/2024/05/20/canti-e-cahiers-de-chansons/ . During this conference, ethnomusicologist Elisa Salvalaggio, which is following a project at the Società di Studi Valdese on the Waldensian vocal heritage and the "cahier de chanson", argues at 03.40 that the oldest one is from 1783.

First, there is the fear of these songs being forgotten, driving the need to leave something tangible for future generations. As Jean Louis explained, the written form ensures that the songs, traditionally transmitted orally, do not disappear over time.

"The farmers in our valleys would pass them down from father to son and so on. They would write down the verses of the songs they had learned to prevent them from being forgotten."
(Jean Louis interview, 03/02/2023)

This practice of writing down heritage sparks a significant debate on the reasons behind conserving such an intangible practice (singing) in a tangible way. Within Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD), intangible practices become tangible when the focus is on safeguarding, leading to what Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004) calls fossilization. Marilena Alivizatou (2011, p. 55) illustrates that when AHD tends to prioritize official, institutional, and often state-sanctioned narratives and preservation methods, community-driven efforts emphasize the living, continuously reinterpreted, and dynamic aspects of heritage crucial to the community's identity and continuity. The fossilization or crystallization of heritage appears not simply when intangible practices or tradition are given tangible form, such as for instance with museumification. Rather, it happens when the interplay between "renewal" and "destruction" is neglected, as heritage is not just about preserving the past unchanged but involves a cycle where old practices may be forgotten or altered, and new practices emerge. I argue that cahiers, even if not "official heritage", could be an example of this cycle of "renewal".
While the Cahiers exist only in written form, Jean Louis emphasizes the "uniqueness" of each one. Holding a cahier in his hand, which was given to him by a certain Francis Rostan, a friend of his father, he recalls an episode of his father and Francis discussing two versions of the same song:

"...my father also used to sing. Every now and then they would get together and say: 'How does that song go again?' He'd say, 'I don't remember anymore.' They – you know, my father had his own variation, which maybe wasn't exactly the same as the others – so they would compare, and he'd say, 'No, you don't say it like that here, it should be this way…' and they would go on!" (Jean Louis interview, 03/02/2023)

This uniqueness is based on each cahier's imperfections and variations, and on how the past, present, and future interact within them. Each cahier is unique because it is the intimate expression of different individuals who lived not only in different places but also in different periods. For example, the materials used can vary: some cahiers are written on certain types of paper, and then the next page might have a different paper consistency. The handwriting can also differ, with some parts written in pen and others typed. The practice of writing down songs into cahiers therefore differs from fossilization. There is no dynamic of destruction, but rather of renewal. Old songs are

kept, sometimes with comments below them that integrate or correct missing or incorrect words, which imply renewal.

There is no “fossilization” as they are never “completed”; there are always new sections, with blank pages intentionally left by grandparents and parents for their children and grandchildren. The act of writing down the songs turns heritage and singing toward a more intimate and familiar dimension, reflecting a home setting. Cahiers represent a form of Waldensian heritage that is, fundamentally, family heritage. They create new memories alongside old ones. Memory thus serves not only as a tool for preservation but also as a medium through which heritage is continuously recreated and reinterpreted.

However, the tradition of cahiers has ceased to exist, largely because they are not passed down within families. Jean Louis recalls receiving many cahiers from family friends who had no children or heirs to continue the tradition. Holding the Rostan cahier open in his hands, he says :

“It was given to me years ago by a family that had no children, no heirs, and feared that this notebook would be lost. So they said, "I'll give it to you."
(Jean Louis interview, 03/02/2023)

By the time Jean Louis started to collect cahiers (around 1980) they were already abandoned as a cultural practice since the 1950s-1960s. Jean Louis began his work almost 40 years ago, and collected and preserved more than 10 cahiers, that later became material for his theater performances.
From the seventies local ethnomusicologists started to interest themselves in studying the cahiers. It was only in 2023, after I was already back from fieldwork, that cahiers became the focus of an official project funded by the Piedmont region. This two-year project, managed by the “Società di Studi Valdesi,” aimed to study the contents of the cahiers from an ethnomusicological perspective and to catalogue them. It could not become an object of my study, but it would have been interesting to compare this “official” and experiential gaze on otherwise popular heritage.

The abandonment of the cahiers sparks an interesting reflection: while the practice of singing as a performative and oral tradition has not disappeared, its focus has shifted. Today, choirs predominantly perform a religious Protestant repertoire. The Alpine and Occitan repertoire has also been revived by professional chorales, which began forming as groups after World War II to rediscover and preserve this tradition by performing only selected repertoire.

Singing, once a familiar and intimate activity, has now become completely a communal one. Moved outside of private settings, it still remains a central part of community life. When I asked Jean Louis to clarify this shift, he shared his personal experience. After showing me a cahier, he carefully placed it back in a plastic bag and stored it in a wardrobe. He returned to his chair and sat down again. We talked about his life since his childhood in Torre Pellice. At one point, he explained that singing holds both practical and symbolic value for the community—it is not just “singing.” The ritual required to join the community, the Confermazione, will be explained in detail in the next

chapter. For now, it is essential to reflect on what happens after joining the church community of your village.
Jean Louis mentioned that once you enter the community as a young individual, you have to "take on responsibilities" and “get involved, to do things for the community.” The activities available are limited; youngsters can either act or sing in the choir. These recreational activities serve as a way to engage with the community and create significant bonds. He told me that he recalled meeting all his group of friends, including his wife, with whom he formed the acting group, in his youth group. However, these recreational activities extend beyond creating bonds; they also serve practical purposes, such as the financial sustenance of the church. Organizing spectacles or concerts is a way in which each congregation financially sustains itself. This practice continues even today. Every church has its own budget and relies heavily on individual donations from its members, who receive a letter asking them to contribute according to their financial capability. Additionally, every church organizes events, predominantly related to music, to support itself financially, ranging from organ concerts to choir performances.

The tradition of singing has evolved from a familial activity to a broader communal practice. Singing remains a central part of Waldensian life, with choirs and communal performances playing a significant role in both religious and social contexts. Like heritage, singing often shifts from intimate home settings to community-wide events, where it serves an active role in fostering unity, creating bonds, and sustaining the community's cultural and financial health. The next section will delve deeper into the themes of “memories” by exploring Milena's intriguing approach that turns singing into a social practice by using individual memories.

3.3Why we keep singing

I met Milena through Paola, who is her friend. Paola and I were in a Waldensian bookshop in Pinerolo, having coffee and chatting about my research progress, when she saw Milena and waved at her. Paola introduced me to Milena, who told me about the book she had written a couple of years back, which was being reprinted. The book, called “Chants de Maman” or “Mommy’s Songs,” is a collection of “Waldensian chants from the valleys.” The book's preface describes it as capturing “situations, scents, sensations, and sounds come back to life, to vibrate, almost as if they were being experienced again in reality.”

I was immediately curious about this work, but it was only after she left that Paola informed me about the sensitive situation. The book was an effort by Milena and her sister to reconnect with their late mother, whose passing had inspired its writing.
Paola offered me a chance to meet Milena again to talk about the book but explicitly told me that she needed to organize everything and be present during our conversation to handle the situation carefully. I agreed, and a week later, Paola and I were invited to Milena’s home.

Milena is a middle-aged woman who lives just outside Pinerolo with her husband. Deeply immersed in her Waldensian church community, she attends celebrations and services every Sunday, maintaining strong bonds with other congregation members.
She feels particularly connected with the Valleys, although her mother relocated to Milan from San Germano (Val Germanasca), when she married Milena's father. Consequently, Milena was born and raised in Milan, spending her childhood there. However, her grandmother had a house in Prali (Val Chisone), where Milena used to spend all her summers and vacations. She told me that she never felt a true sense of belonging in Milan and always considered the valleys her true home. Once she was old enough, she moved back to this area just outside Pinerolo and got married. Milena also has a sister who moved to Canada and works as a professor of Italian studies at the University of British Columbia. They wrote the book together, sharing many childhood memories in the process.

Milena greeted us at her house to discuss the idea behind her book. She wanted to show us another "memory" that made her feel close to her mother again. This connection was even more recent, as the writing and publishing of the book had already happened a couple of years ago. She invited us into the room next to the kitchen, her knitting and sewing room, and showed Paola and me her mother's ceremonial dress, which she had recently restored. It is a long white ceremonial dress, accompanied by a black vest and a characteristic headscarf. These types of "ceremonial" dresses and headscarves are meticulously handmade. They can be passed down through generations among Waldensians through matrilineal descent or created from scratch, always with the help of other women. Usually, these dresses are great-grandmother's dresses that become grandmother's and then get passed on and on. However, in this case, it was different due to World War Two. Her mother needed a new dress, but there wasn't much high-quality material available at the time. She had to make a new one with cheap acrylic material, the only material her family could afford.

Milena felt very emotionally attached as she described how her mother made this dress with great care and attention to detail, despite the lack of high-quality materials. She has recently restored and remade the dress completely according to her taste. It is not just the intricate details of the dress but the history and effort behind it that evoked strong emotional attachment. For Milena, the past represented a dimension of simplicity and morality. She did not freeze it or displayed it as an artifact; instead, she interacted with it, even inviting me to touch the material and all the details. She un-made and re-made it according to her present taste. This approach highlights that heritage is performative and that remembering involves "embodying that memory" (Smith 2006, p. 47). Heritage must be experienced and performed to remain alive. Milena viewed with suspicion the practice of wearing ceremonial dresses only once a year during parades, referring to them as "costumes" with a somewhat negative connotation of a frozen tradition (Smith 2006, p.48), something merely for tourists. As Milena explains:

"We now call it a costume, but it was actually the everyday dress…to distinguish from the folk costumes of other valleys, which are worn only for tourist parades."
(Milena interview, 08/02/2023)

After showing us the dress, Milena led us to the living room where we sat down to discuss her book. Singing is a central part of Milena's life; she works as a music teacher at the local elementary school and, in her spare time, is one of the lead singers in the church choir. However, she had never written songs until her mother passed away, at which point she felt an urge to reconnect with her. Milena's mother used to sing to her and her sister every day during their childhood. This practice was not just a personal activity; it reflected a deeper connection with Waldensian communal life, as her mother began singing in church and later joined a youth group.

As Jean Louis previously explained, within youth groups, young people had to find a common activity that deepened their commitment to the church and served as a way to financially support the community. It was also the main way to create bonds and socialize with friends.
This section captures how Milena recounts her mother's past (from the end of WWII onward) through the lens of singing. This way of remembering her mother and her generation captures the essence of her book and evokes nostalgia.

"The songs she sang weren't just trivial songs. They transmitted strong values they21 shared, reinforcing their bond every time. Friendship, respect for nature, gratitude to God, the simplicity of small things"
(Milena interview, 08/02/2023)

In the past, Milena argued, people valued simplicity over material abundance. Reflecting on her mother's youth group, Milena praised their humble aspirations. They did not seek great wealth but found genuine contentment in what little they had, which reflected an inward connection to their mountainous surroundings and their faith. Milena connected singing with her mother's heritage, but she went further: singing became both a personal and socially accepted dimension.

Milena frequently evoked a nostalgic past where Waldensian people knew what they wanted and understood their place (e.g., Smith 2006, p. 139). Singing represented this connection with the past, a time when people were happy and simple and expressed this with singing. Parallel to this, Milena also presented the figure of her grandmother, a tenacious woman who raised two children alone after losing her husband early in life. She described her grandmother as someone who had suffered greatly, enduring so much that she "had stopped singing," as the hardships of life had taken away her serenity and desire to sing. Milena did not remember what her grandmother sang, her memories were only filled with her mother's songs. There was also a language barrier: her mother sang in French, which Milena understood but did not speak, whereas her grandmother sang in Occitan, a language Milena could not understand and found distant.

As Misztal argues (2003, p. 15, as cited in Smith 2006, p. 64), the emotional affection, in this particular case evoked by song and the social dimension of singing, creates continuity with the past by selecting what to remember and what to forget. Thus, Waldensians from Milena's mother

generation celebrated friendship, love, and particularly their passion for the mountains in their songs. These are the values, transmitted through their music, which Milena recollects, where the private sphere of memories influences a more collective and public sphere.

As I presented earlier with Jean Louis's findings on the cahiers, singing was present as a familiar, private dimension (where it also becomes a material type of heritage) but frequently turned public, as in masses, church choirs, or even in youth groups, where it becomes a social mechanism.
For example, the youth group was the only chance that Milena's mother had to hang out with friends at the local church and to make trips. Just after World War II, they went on a trip to Switzerland for an ecumenical camp organized by their church. From this experience, Milena recalled her mother returning home with a small songbook. Milena clearly remembered seeing this songbook in her childhood and explained that 70% of the songs in the book "Chants de Maman" were taken from those her mother frequently sang to her and her sister. Milena explained that the songs her mother brought back from Switzerland covered various themes, including faith, walking, mountains, friendship, love, and worship, reflecting the religious sphere and their intended use for a church youth group titled "Chansonnier Évangélique Protestante." Many of these songs had not been sung for 45 years and were forgotten. Even the ones she took from her mother’s booklet did not have any arrangement or melody to accompany them, so with the help of her choir, she rearranged all the melodies. The remaining 30% are reinvented and rearranged with the help of her friends and family. Milena's unique approach involved writing the music for each song so that readers of the book could try to sing them as well.

When I found the titles of these songs, it was like a leap back 50-70 years, and everything came flooding back. It was an explosion of memory. I kept writing and writing because as I sang, the words would come back. But then my mind would recall another song, so I would write that down too. Even at night, I kept dreaming and hearing these songs. It started as something personal. Then, I began to expand the research. I asked relatives who had sung with us back then, told them about the work I was doing, and together we remembered more songs. They would say, "Oh, there's also this one, and that one." It expanded from there. For instance, I went to a person who had sung these songs back in the day and had material. There was a man from San Germano, who had sung in the local choir for many years. He had a whole folder of choir songs and sheet music. We went through it together, and we found three or four songs I knew but didn't have the material for, no lyrics or

sheet music. Then I visited an old aunt in Pomaretto, she still had handwritten sheet music from my uncle, which I now have. I took material from there too. I also visited a cousin and we looked through all these songs together. He found some among his own collection. I also went to other friends I sing with in my choir, and they too had a lot of music. They said, "Oh, there's also this one and that one."
(Milena interview, 08/02/2023)

Reflecting on the place where certain patterns of memory originate, Smith (2006, p. 64) argues that this process of active remembering could originate in different types of regional or national communities, or, in this case, families. More importantly, Milena's memories were not static. Rather than including all the songs from her mother's booklet, she selected only the ones she liked, not choosing them based on their popularity in the valleys. By selectively including songs that resonate with her personal and familial memories, she transforms her individual recollections into a shared cultural heritage. This process of active remembering through singing facilitates a sense of ongoing community continuity (Smith 2006, p 64). Even though the historical continuity of the songs may have been disrupted (the songs are "outdated" in the sense that they were no longer sung, as they recalled a certain period), the shared emotional experiences and the collective act of remembering, writing down, and performing together recreated strong bonds among community members. This process makes the community "visible" as people engage in active remembering and experience a renewed sense of place.

Milena uses what she perceives as family heritage to evoke collective responses, encouraging people to engage in active remembering by singing. To support this, she provided music sheets for the first edition of the book. For the second edition, she recorded some of the songs with her church choir and included a small album with a copy of the book for people to listen to. When the second edition was on its way to be published/TP: The 2nd edition had already been published by the time I was doing fieldwork. Here I wanted to emphasize that even though the 2nd edition was on its way, still many parts of the book had verses missing/, still many song verses were missing. The book was published purposedly with songs missing verses, seeking help to complete them. Milena received first a call from a Waldensian musicologist who helped her complete one song and then she was phoned by a Waldensian girl who knew the lyrics to an entire song from her grandmother, and helped Milena finish it. Additionally, Milena decided to perform some of the songs during the book launch events in the valleys. These performances eventually led to the completion of other songs.

3.4Concluding Remarks

The two most important conclusions can be drawn from this chapter: firstly, the dynamics between unofficial and official heritage. The distinction between unofficial and official heritage is evident in the Waldensian community's approach to their musical traditions. Unofficial heritage, leveraged by collective memories, is dynamic and personal, not necessarily validated by experts but deeply embedded in the lived experiences of the community. Milena's songbook project is a prime example of unofficial heritage. It relies on personal and familial memories, reinterprets them, and shares them with the community as a shared cultural practice. At the same time, Milena is aware of the existence of a more "professional" Waldensian heritage discourse, which involves academic studies, preservation efforts, and formal transmission of cultural practices. This official heritage is

often supported by institutions and experts who document, study, and safeguard the Waldensian heritage in a structured manner. However, this formal approach does not overshadow or obscure more private, unofficial initiatives like Milena's. Instead, both forms of heritage coexist and complement each other:

"Well, I am not a professional. What I know is very simple. I haven't done any special studies or research"
(Milena interview, 08/02/2023)

This focus on simplicity and personal memory complements the official Waldensian heritage discourse (if there is one), which often centers on more formalized and academically validated aspects of cultural preservation, as the role of the Ufficio Beni Culturali della Tavola Valdese exemplifies in chapter 3. While the official discourse provides a structured framework for understanding and safeguarding heritage, Milena's approach brings a personal, emotional and intimate gaze.

The "cahiers" represents a unique hybrid of tangible and intangible heritage, sitting at the intersection of unofficial and official heritage practices. On the one hand, the cahiers are an example of unofficial heritage, deeply embedded in personal and familial memories and practices. On the other hand, they embody a blend of performance and material heritage that caught the attention of experts and institutions, leading to systematic documentation and validation (possibly, because the project has just begun). The abandonment of the cahiers has indeed interested ethnomusicologists and local heritage experts, leading to efforts to study and catalog them as part of an official heritage discourse. Additionally, professional musicians study this repertoire and incorporate revised versions into their performances. This transition from private, family-held artifacts to subjects of formal study exemplifies the broader process of how unofficial heritage can be recognized and preserved within an official framework as "fossilized" or "crystalized" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004).

Secondly, a conclusion about the distinction between individual and/or collective memory versus heritage. Smith argues (2006, p. 60) that memory plays a crucial role in shaping identities. Unlike professional historical narratives, which are often more detached and analytical, individual and collective memories are deeply emotional and personal. Because these memories are personal, they carry a strong emotional resonance: in this way memories become "collective", shared among a group, amplifying the emotional impact and creating a shared sense of identity and belonging. For memories to have even greater emotional power, they need to be connected to tangible, concrete elements. This means that physical objects, places, or practices can serve as anchors for these memories, making them even more vivid and impactful.
In both Jean Louis and Milena's cases, the tangible elements (the cahiers, the songbook, the ceremonial dress) serve as powerful anchors for memory, enhancing their emotional resonance.

For instance, Milena's project to compile and publish "Chants de Maman" demonstrates how tangible elements can amplify the emotional power of memory and how individual memories evoke an emotional response in the collective.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSIONS

Chapter 1 laid the groundwork for understanding scale-making by highlighting how heritage-making operates across different scales, revealing the power dynamics between the emotionally significant dimension of the "Valleys" and the more formal "Waldensian and Methodist" scale. Chapter 2 instead explored the heritagization of religion through the concept of the secular-sacred, demonstrating how the FDL reveal a dual sacrality in the coexistence of sacralizing performances and secularized traditions. Finally, chapter 3 focused on the interplay between unofficial and official heritage, illustrating how personal and collective memories shape heritage-making, as seen in Milena's songbook project.

In synthesizing the findings across the three chapters, a crucial connection that emerges is the interplay between scale-making and the authority involved at different relationships between scales. The authority governing these scales—whether local, national, or transnational—signals processes of secularization or sacralization, or, in the case of heritagization, perhaps both simultaneously. The study shows that the categories of the secular and the sacred are highly permeable, and it is therefore important not to assume that any process is entirely secular or entirely religious. To observe this shift it is necessary to look at who authorizes those “scales”.

A recurring theme throughout these chapters is the tension between official, institutionalized heritage and the more fluid, lived experiences of memory within communities. The Waldensian Valleys, in particular, exemplify this tension, where the living memories of the community intersect with the formalized heritage recognized by official narratives, such as the Waldensian and Methodist Heritage (WMH). Although I did not delve into it extensively, it is worth noting that the creation of a sense of "home" or "belonging" to a particular locality, such as the Valleys—often considered a secular relationship—might actually represent one of the more sacralized aspects of secularism that defines modern nation-states. This observation could suggest a potential avenue for further research in the future.

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