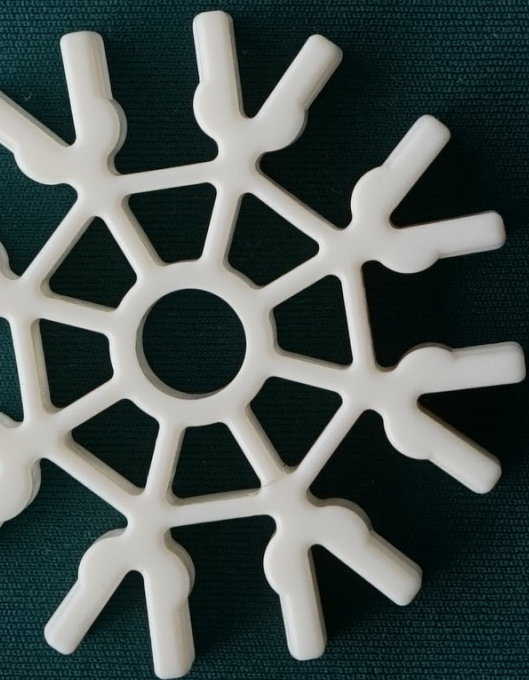


Sing after God a new song

Ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms in
contemporary Dutch and Flemish culture



Henk Vogel

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Sing after God a new song

Ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms
in contemporary Dutch and Flemish culture

Zing 'na God' een nieuw lied

Ritueel-muzikale toe-eigeningen van psalmen
in de hedendaagse Nederlandse en Vlaamse cultuur
(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor
aan de Protestantse Theologische Universiteit te Utrecht,
op gezag van de rector, prof. dr. K. Spronk,
ingevolge het besluit van het college voor promoties
in het openbaar te verdedigen te Utrecht
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door

Hendrik Vogel

geboren op 9 juli 1992 te Leens.

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Prof. dr. M. Barnard

Tweede promotor

Prof. dr. M.C.M. Klomp

*To my dear late mother,
who used to sing the opening lines of Psalm 133
when my brothers and I would quarrel or fight:
"Behold, how good and pleasant it is
when brothers dwell in unity..."*

Memo

It came to me in a dream—how biblical—that a piece of the K’NEX set I played with a lot as a child should adorn the cover of my dissertation. Playing with K’NEX as an allegory of the appropriation of Psalms:

We built on previous designs and dreamed of ever more beautiful constructions. We had ideas about their intended use: solid structures, clockworks, a marble run? K’NEX had specific colors, the box containing K’NEX had a recognizable smell, and rattling in the box to find that one piece made a characteristic sound—sensory memories I can easily retrieve. Sometimes we looked for friends who also had K’NEX to make even bigger constructions, although it wasn’t always as much fun as playing at home.

Come to think of it, we weren’t just playing with K’NEX, it was playing with us as well. It invited us in certain directions and sometimes didn’t feel like cooperating with our ideas (the clock I was building had strange ideas about the progression of time). With K’NEX, many things were possible, but some felt more natural with the materials than others. The white, round connecting piece, for instance, was widely applicable, but seemed to have its own preferences: it didn’t particularly like to be used as a gearwheel, but flourished in its role of keeping the structure together by connecting all different kinds of other pieces.

6 November 2020

List of Publications

Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 have been published as research articles, co-authored by supervisors Mirella Klomp and Marcel Barnard:

Vogel, Henk, Mirella Klomp, and Marcel Barnard. "A Psalm is always a memory. Nostalgia and sacrality in contemporary ritual-musical appropriations of the Psalms." *Memory Studies* 17, no. 2 (2023): 427-443.

Vogel, Henk, Mirella Klomp, and Marcel Barnard. "Competing authenticities. The appropriation of Psalms in the festival '150 Psalms'." *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 37, no. 3 (2022): 535-552.

Vogel, Henk, Mirella Klomp, and Marcel Barnard. "Making sense of the Psalms. Aesthetics and embodied experience in the performance of Psalms." *Religion and the Arts* 26, no. 1-2 (2022): 136-163.

Vogel, Henk, Mirella Klomp, and Marcel Barnard. "Singing apart together. Communities and the heritagization and eventization of Genemuiders Bovenstem Psalm singing in the Netherlands." *Journal of Religion in Europe* 16, no. 4 (2023): 387-414.

Vogel, Henk, Mirella Klomp, and Marcel Barnard. "When Psalms talk back. How the appropriation history of Psalms challenge contemporary ritual-musical appropriations." *Studia Liturgica*, online first (2024).

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1

Introduction

I like that Poesia Divina connects with our Western Christian tradition. There's still a lot of that remaining, and, of course, it's part of our past. And suddenly contemporary poetry is connecting to that! That is very beautiful, of course.

interview with Carl De Strycker, supporting organizer of
Poesia Divina, 28 September 2019

Psalmody, the (collective) performance of Psalms, is taking on new forms and meanings in the secularized, postsecular, and post-Christian cultures of the Netherlands and Flanders. Having occupied an important place in the Low Countries' religious pasts, psalmody continues to live on, sometimes even taking on roles beyond a religious context, as the opening citation serves to illustrate. Through the centuries, Psalms have been sung in Christian and Jewish worship practices, and in educational and domestic settings.¹ Reformed Protestantism in the Netherlands is particularly known for its collective metrical psalmody which, from the 17th century onward, is (or has been) sung in churches and taught in elementary or Sunday schools. In some strictly Reformed traditions, this is still the only repertoire which is allowed in liturgy ('exclusive psalmody').² Psalms are also sung in Roman-Catholic

1 Jan de Bruijn and Willem Heijting, eds., *Psalmzingen in de Nederlanden van de zestiende eeuw tot heden* (Kampen: Kok, 1991), 259; John F.A. Sawyer, "The Psalms in Judaism and Christianity: A Reception History Perspective," in *Jewish and Christian Approaches to the Psalms. Conflict and Convergence*, ed. Susan Gillingham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 140-41.

2 "A Reformed Approach to Psalmody: The Legacy of the Genevan Psalter," Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, 2005, accessed 3 December, 2023, <https://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/a-reformed-approach-to-psalmody-the-legacy-of-the-genevan-psalter-emily-brink/>; Wim Kloppenburg, "Psalmlied en volkslied," in *Psalmzingen in de Nederlanden van de zestiende eeuw tot heden*, ed. Jan de Bruijn and W. Heijting (Kampen: Kok, 1991), 233; Niek Schuman, *Drama*

liturgies, at the Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours. Here they are sung in different styles, including Gregorian chant, choral polyphony, Taizé chants and a variety of responsorial forms. The daily prayers ('canonical hours') in monasteries and beyond are predominantly built on psalmody. Because the religious pasts of the Low Countries are dominated by Christian traditions, practices of psalmody have a place in the collective memories of the Dutch and the Flemish. Of course, (collective) psalmody has deep roots in Jewish practices (as prayers, scripture readings), but Judaism represents a minority in the Low Countries.³

Since the 1960s, the Netherlands and Flanders have witnessed a steady process of dechurched and secularization and one might therefore expect psalmody to be disappearing from collective memories.⁴ Many within the Dutch and Flemish populations have become unfamiliar with liturgical practices and, thus, with psalmody as well.⁵ On top of this, a range of different ritual-musical forms, including hymns and praise and worship songs, have come to be included in Christian liturgies alongside (or instead of) psalmody, which itself has also been subject to stylistic diversification.⁶

van crisis en hoop. De psalmen: gedicht, gebundeld en gebeden (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2008), 241-42.

³ Marc Zvi Brettler, "Jewish Theology of the Psalms," in *Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, ed. William P. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 486; Frederick E. Greenspahn, "The Hebrew Bible in Judaism," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament*, ed. Stephen B. Chapman and Marvin A. Sweeney (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 375; Schuman, *Drama van crisis en hoop*, 213.

⁴ Ton Bernts and Joantine Berghuijs, *God in Nederland 1966-2015* (Utrecht: Ten Have, 2016); "Meer dan de helft Nederlanders niet religieus," CBS, 2018, accessed 21 February 2020, 2018, www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2018/43/meer-dan-de-helft-nederlanders-niet-religieus; Joep de Hart and Pepijn Van Houwelingen, *Christenen in Nederland*, Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau (Den Haag, 2018); Joep de Hart, Pepijn van Houwelingen, and Willem Huijnk, *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving. Deel 3: Buiten kerk en moskee*, Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau (Den Haag, 2022); Peter van Rooden, "Oral history en het vreemde sterven van het Nederlandse christendom," *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review* 119, no. 4 (2004): 524, <http://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.6138>; Gert Verschraegen and Koen Abts, "De Kerk in Vlaanderen in de naoorlogse periode: enkele trends en cijfers," in *De Kerk in Vlaanderen*, ed. Gilke Gunst and Stijn Latré (Antwerpen: Pelckmans, 2021), 20-24; Hans Schmeets, *De religieuze kaart van Nederland, 2010-2015*, CBS (Den Haag, 2016), 5-7.

⁵ Schmeets, *De religieuze kaart van Nederland*, 3, 5-6; Wibren van der Burg and Wouter de Been, "Social Change and the Accommodation of Religious Minorities in the Netherlands. New Diversity and Its Implications for Constitutional Rights and Principles," *Journal of Law, Religion and State* (2020): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22124810-2019004>.

⁶ Alongside collective metrical psalmody in Protestant Christian liturgies, and choral psalmody (Gregorian, choral performances) in Roman-Catholic liturgies other forms have emerged such as Taizé chants of Psalm verses, responsorial psalmody in the vernacular (with lyrics by, for instance, poet and former Roman-Catholic priest Huub Oosterhuis), Anglican chants (in Choral Evensong), and psalmody in a popular music idiom, such as the *Psalmen voor Nu* ('Psalms for today'). For 'bricolage' in contemporary liturgy, see: Marcel Barnard, Johan Cilliers, and Cas

However, as I have suggested, psalmody is now being appropriated in extra-ecclesial domains, and taking on new forms. Psalms attract the attention of the organizers of events and of artists and performers in the fields of arts and heritage. This dissertation is a study of the transfer and transformation of psalmody as a meaning-making process. It investigates how different actors come together (organizers, artists, performers, audience, etc.) to musically reinvent the meaning of psalmody and its different aspects in new and changing contexts. I refer to these meaning-making processes as ‘ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms’.⁷ I have undertaken empirical investigation of these processes across four different case studies through the use of ethnographic methods: the festival *150 Psalms*, *Genemuiders Bovenstem* collective psalmody, the poetry project *Poesia Divina*, and *Psalm 151*. In each of these cases, Psalms are placed on a pedestal as a matter of arts and heritage, receiving their performance in the form of one-off events rather than as repeated liturgical practice. This study will show which connotations of religious practice still resonate in this different context.

Before further exploring the research question and a range of related subquestions, I first want to give a more detailed account of the historical background of psalmody in the Low Countries.

1.1. About psalmody in the Low Countries

1.1.1. Contemporary context

Since the Netherlands and Belgium were once countries in which Christianity was deeply embedded in daily life but are now considered to be among the most secularized countries in the world, the Low Countries, the Netherlands and Flanders (the northern, Dutch-speaking part of Belgium), can now be typified as ‘post-Christian’ and ‘postsecular’ in character. I use the adjective ‘post-Christian’ to refer to the situation in Dutch and Flemish culture in which Christianity has lost its religious monopoly or dominance. I use the term ‘postsecular’, to refer to a cultural situation in which “multiple secularities and multiple religiosities coexist”, which does not necessarily imply a “return of religion” or “end of the secular era”.⁸ Contrary to what both theories of

Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture. Liturgical Ritual Studies. Fields and Methods, Concepts and Metaphors* (Leuven: Peeters, 2014), 119.

⁷ See section 1.2.1. for a more elaborate definition of the term ‘ritual-musical appropriation’.

⁸ James Hodkinson and Silke Horstkotte, “Introducing the Postsecular. From Conceptual Beginnings to Cultural Theory,” *Poetics Today* 41, no. 3 (2020): 319, <https://doi.org/10.1215/03335372->

secularization and ideas of the 'return of religion' might seem to suggest, both religion and the secular appear to live on, overlap and interact in new ways.⁹ Around the start of the 20th century, Christianity was almost omnipresent in both Dutch and Flemish cultures, with the large majority of both populations identifying as Christian and participating in Christian practices.¹⁰ However, there are differences between the two cultures. Although, for example, both cultures were strongly 'pillarized' and knew the existence of different 'pillars' representing different ideological and religious collective identities up until the last quarter of the 20th century, the Netherlands possessed a Protestant 'pillar', which was absent in the Flemish cultural landscape.¹¹ Likewise, Flemish culture 'depillarized' from the 1970s onwards, which is somewhat later than in the Netherlands.¹² Another difference between the two cultures is the stronger institutional and legal position which the Roman-Catholic Church enjoys in Flanders compared to its position in the Netherlands.¹³ Alongside these differences we can trace a number of similarities. In both contexts, church attendance has decreased since the 1960s, with the Flemish population and the Roman-Catholic population in the Netherlands being amongst the most infrequent churchgoers.¹⁴ Furthermore, both cultures are characterized by a pluralization of religion, with immigrants bringing a range of religious

8519586; Umut Parmaksız, "Making Sense of the Postsecular," *European Journal of Social Theory* 21, no. 1 (2018): 107, 10, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431016682743>.

⁹ Hodkinson and Horstkotte, "Introducing the Postsecular," 318-19; Parmaksız, "Making Sense of the Postsecular," 107; Lieke Wijnia, *Beyond the Return of Religion. Art and the Postsecular*, Brill Research Perspectives in Religion and the Arts, (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 9-13.

¹⁰ Cf. Jaak Billiet, "Van verwerpelijke verzuiling naar geprezen middenveld. Bilan van 30 jaar onderzoek," *Tijdschrift voor Sociologie* 25, no. 1 (2004); De Hart and Van Houwelingen, *Christenen in Nederland*, 13-14; De Hart, Van Houwelingen, and Huijnk, *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving*, 144.

¹¹ Sociologist of religion Staf Hellemans argues that "pillarization" has been characteristic of various (Western) countries, including Belgium and the Netherlands. Staf Hellemans, "Pillarization ('Verzuiling'). On Organized 'Self-Contained Worlds' in the Modern World," *The American Sociologist* 51 (2020).

¹² Niels De Nutte, "Vrijzinnigheid: Secular Humanism in Belgium," *Free Inquiry* 39, 5 (2019); Hellemans, "Pillarization," 129-31; Verschraegen and Abts, "De Kerk in Vlaanderen," 20-21. 'Pillars' were pervasive, mutually rather exclusive subcultures, divided alongside religious, ideological, political lines: socialist, liberal, Roman-Catholic, and, in the Netherlands, Protestant pillars, all with their particular newspapers, political parties, broadcast networks, sports clubs and other associations. See for a critical discussion of the concept: Hellemans, "Pillarization."; Peter Van Dam, "Constructing a Modern Society Through "Depillarization". Understanding Post-War History as Gradual Change," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 28, no. 3 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1111/johs.12074>.

¹³ Stijn Latré, "Inleiding," in *De Kerk in Vlaanderen*, ed. Gilke Gunst and Stijn Latré (Antwerpen: Pelckmans, 2021), 15.

¹⁴ De Hart and Van Houwelingen, *Christenen in Nederland*, 38-41, 48, 51-52; Verschraegen and Abts, "De Kerk in Vlaanderen," 20, 23-24.

traditions with them (although in Flanders, Christianity itself is less diverse than it is in the Netherlands: in 2008, 52.8% of the Flemish were members of the Roman-Catholic Church, and only 1% of the Flemish were members of Protestant and Evangelical churches).¹⁵ In both cultures, secularization and dechurching coincided with the rise of expressive individualism: since the 1960s, individual autonomy, self-expression and self-development have become important values in both societies.¹⁶ Thus, as rates of participation in Christian worship practices have strongly decreased, many among the Dutch and Flemish have become less familiar with (collective) psalmody that many of their (grand)parents would still have been accustomed to participate in.

1.1.2. Psalmody

After the Reformation, most of the Dutch population in the northern parts of the Netherlands were Calvinist Protestants, while in the southern parts, such Protestantism was largely absent. Dutch culture is deeply influenced by Calvinism, and in early Calvinism, choirs were removed from liturgical practice, with congregational psalmody taking their place.¹⁷ Metrical translations of the entire biblical Psalter into the vernacular were already seeing the light of day by the first half of the 16th century, following the example of the Genevan Psalter, which John Calvin had introduced. Collective metrical psalmody became one of the main characteristics of Calvinist liturgical practice in the Netherlands; as early as 1619 national and provincial synods began to decide that nothing except for metrical Psalms was allowed to be sung during church services.¹⁸ Although hymns continued to be sung despite these regulations, collective metrical psalmody to the tunes of the Genevan Psalter became the central musical practice in Calvinist liturgies.¹⁹ This was supported by the teaching in primary and Sunday schools: from the 17th until the 20th century,

15 De Hart, Van Houwelingen, and Huijnk, *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving*, 143-44; Verschraegen and Abts, "De Kerk in Vlaanderen," 22-23.

16 De Hart, Van Houwelingen, and Huijnk, *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving*, 133-47; Verschraegen and Abts, "De Kerk in Vlaanderen," 20-21.

17 Ellen Krol, "Dutch," in *Imagology. The cultural construction and literary representation of national characters*, ed. Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 142-45; Van der Burg and De Been, "Social Change and the Accommodation of Religious Minorities in the Netherlands," 5. In later centuries, this metrical Psalter kept its central place in Reformed liturgies, and also gained popularity in Lutheran, Mennonite and Remonstrant contexts.

18 Harry Klaassens, "The Reformed Tradition in the Netherlands," in *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, ed. Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen B. Westerfield Tucker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 464-66.

19 Klaassens, "The Reformed Tradition in the Netherlands," 467; Hanna Rijken, "Psalmzang in Nederland," *Theologia Reformata* 58, no. 4 (2015): 348, 56.

children were taught to know many Psalms by heart.²⁰ In some strict streams of Calvinist Protestantism (the strictly orthodox churches), these practices continue to the present day. In these contexts, exclusive isometric psalmody (slowly sung melodies with all notes having equal length) has even come to be understood as a marker of orthodoxy.²¹ In other Protestant streams, metrical psalmody has become one of many possibilities that can be used in liturgical music alongside hymns, praise and worship music, and other genres.²² In recent decades, a renewed interest in Psalms can be observed, with non-metrical forms such as responsorial psalmody (in the ecumenical movements preceding and following the Second Vatican Council), repeated chants from Taizé (paired with an increasing interest in contemplative monasticism), and Anglican chants (with the appropriation of Choral Evensong), taking their place alongside new metrical translations to accompany the tunes of the Genevan Psalter.²³

In the southern parts of the Netherlands, as well as in Flanders, Roman Catholicism retained its dominance (see above). Up until the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council, many Roman Catholics were mostly familiar with Gregorian chant melodies for the Psalms that were sung at Mass.²⁴ Generally, specialized choirs would sing the propers (introits, graduals, etc.) of the Mass in Latin. Although these would often include passages from the Biblical Psalms, most churchgoers would not be aware of this fact, and collective psalmody certainly did not attain the important role and status which it had in Protestant circles. This, however, changed (to a certain extent) after Vatican II, which engendered a wave of vernacular liturgical music, including

²⁰ Brink, "A Reformed Approach."

²¹ Schuman, *Drama van crisis en hoop*, 241-42.

²² See: Joop Boendermaker, "De lutherse traditie," in *Het kerklied. Een geschiedenis*, ed. Jan Luth, Jan Pasveer, and Jan Smelik (Zoetermeer: Mozaïek, 2001), 209-11; Pieter Endedijk, "De doopsgezinde traditie," in *Het kerklied. Een geschiedenis*, ed. Jan Luth, Jan Pasveer, and Jan Smelik (Zoetermeer: Mozaïek, 2001), 296, 306, 08-10, 16; Ulrike Hascher-Burger, "Liedboeken en kerkzang," in *400 jaar Lutherse Kerk Haarlem*, ed. Arno Fafié, Tony Lindijer, and Alice Nederkoorn (Haarlem: Spaar en Hout, 2015), 155-56.

²³ Jan Luth and Jan Smelik, "De calvinistische traditie," in *Het kerklied. Een geschiedenis*, ed. Jan Luth, Jan Pasveer, and Jan Smelik (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2001), 274-75; Rijken, "Psalmzang," 359; Niek Schuman, "De Psalmen," in *De weg van de liturgie. Tradities, achtergronden, praktijk*, ed. Paul Oskamp and Niek Schuman (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 1998), 165; Henk Vogel, Mirella Klomp, and Marcel Barnard, "Sing After God a New Song. Ritual-Musical Appropriations of Psalms in Dutch Culture between 1990-2020," *Yearbook for Liturgical and Ritual Studies* 35 (2019): 25-28, <https://doi.org/10.21827/YRLS.35.21-39>.

²⁴ Martin Hoondert, "De Rooms-Katholieke traditie circa 1550-2001," in *Het kerklied. Een geschiedenis*, ed. Jan Luth, Jan Pasveer, and Jan Smelik (Zoetermeer: Mozaïek, 2001).

responsorial Psalms such as translations of Joseph Gelineau's Psalms, neo-Gregorian Psalms by Benedictine and Cistercian composers using translations by Ida Gerhardt and Marie van der Zeyde (in the *Abdijboek*), and Psalms by poets such as Huub Oosterhuis. These became very popular among the Roman-Catholic population despite that population's slow decline in numbers.²⁵

Whilst psalmody, in its various forms, thus became part of the collective memory of many Dutch and Flemish Christians, subsequent processes of secularization and de-churching mean that only a steadily decreasing minority is still familiar with (collective) psalmody (see above). In such a context, many consider Christian beliefs and practices to be remnants of a religious past which, in a 'secular' present, have mostly lost their relevance and, at most, serve to allude to a collective past which can perhaps be appreciated for its aesthetic beauty.²⁶

1.1.3. Research problem and research question

In recent years, psalmody has often been re-invented by artists and the organizers of cultural events outside of liturgical contexts. Klomp and Barnard sit alongside a number of researchers who have described the phenomenon of practices (formerly) associated with religious domains being appropriated in other domains in terms such as the "transfer and transformation of religion." Artists such as composers, poets, and (musical) performers bring the performance of Psalms to audiences in other-than-religious contexts in the wider cultural domain. They write and compose new Psalms as well as mixing and inventing rituals incorporating psalmody which seem to both cherish and contest existing traditions. It seems that, despite secularization, psalmody still attracts event organizers, artists and publics, albeit predominantly in different contexts than before. Strikingly, such figures even emphasize the inclusion of *Psalms* in their performances. Apparently, for the organizers of and participants in these performances, Psalms are something special or remarkable, something they wish to cherish. How should we understand this paradox? Why are artists, performers, and audiences attracted to psalmody while the religious traditions to which it is strongly linked are undeniably diminishing? If religious belonging and beliefs are indeed declining, what happens to the theological meaning of psalmody when it transfers beyond religious domains?

²⁵ Hoondert, "De Rooms-Katholieke traditie," 86, 92.

²⁶ Cf. Jerrold Cuperus, "Narrating Dutch Christianity: Secularism, Heritage, and Identity in Museum Catharijneconvent," *FRAME* 32, no. 1 (2019).

The central question of this research study is: *How to understand ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms in contemporary Dutch and Flemish culture, against the background of the transfer and transformation of religion, and how to evaluate these ritual-musical appropriations?*

This study thus explores the transformation of Psalms as they are performed in a postsecular cultural context as well as their meaning and relevance. It deepens existing insights into the transfer and transformation of religion in the Netherlands and Flanders whilst offering an evaluation of these ritual-musical appropriations.

As I have already indicated, I have studied the ritual-musical appropriation of Psalms in four different case studies: *150 Psalms*, *Psalm 151*, *Poesia Divina* and *Genemuider Bovenstem* collective psalmody. *150 Psalms* was a choral music festival in TivoliVredenburg, a prominent concert hall, with performances of all biblical Psalms (although not each Psalm in its entirety) by top-ranking choirs such as the Nederlands Kamerkoor and the Tallis Scholars taking place over the course of a single weekend accompanied by lectures and photo exhibitions. *Psalm 151* is a musical composition by Boudewijn Tarenskeen for singers and organ (or accordions), and was performed by the renowned Cappella Amsterdam in churches and concert halls with newly written texts by poets, literary authors and other public figures known for their public reflection on religion in Dutch society. Similarly, *Poesia Divina* was a four-year series that took place within the sacred musical festival Musica Divina in Flanders (the other three are Dutch cases), with 36 poets writing and reciting new Psalms in monasteries, churches, libraries and theatres. The fourth case, *Genemuider Bovenstem* collective psalmody is a liturgical practice of collective metrical psalmody which has expanded beyond the context of church services to more concert-like collective singing events. These events attract audiences from a wide region well beyond the immediate area surrounding Genemuiden, one of the towns in which the practice originated. Interestingly, *Genemuider Bovenstem* collective psalmody has now been denoted as Dutch Intangible Cultural Heritage and, as such, receives practical and financial government support to conserve the practice for the future. Although the range of these different case studies is somewhat diverse, all of them place an emphasis on the 'Psalms' as the repertoire to be performed, each of them emphasizes the presence of the Psalms in collective memory as one of the reasons for this performance (see the citation at the start of this chapter), and in all cases, artists and event organizers intend to transform psalmody in some way.

I restate my research question: *How to understand ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms in contemporary Dutch and Flemish culture, against the background of the transfer and transformation of religion, and how to evaluate these ritual-musical appropriations?* In order to answer this question, I have formulated five sub-questions, each of which represents a different angle from which to observe the ritual-musical appropriation of Psalms. These questions help different aspects of the appropriations to become visible. They show us different ways in which the meaning of psalmody can be constructed through the transformation of participants' memories of earlier experiences of psalmody (Chapter 3); through their attempts to link back their appropriation to (other) historical forms and functions of psalmody (Chapter 4); through their sensory, bodily experiences (Chapter 5); through the ways they come together for singing Psalms (Chapter 6); and through the challenges the appropriation history of Psalms confronts them with (Chapter 7).

The five subquestions each arise in relation to different features of my research data. First, I noticed that my research participants would often recall (childhood) memories of the Psalms being sung in church, in schools, at home, in concerts, etc. Indeed, many participants in the appropriations of Psalms were already familiar with psalmody. In Chapter 3, I therefore ask: *How to understand the role of biographical memories in constructions of 'the sacred' by participants in current ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms in Dutch and Flemish cultures?* My answer to this question shows how ritual-musical appropriations of the Psalms are informed by participants' biographical memories and their attitudes towards these memories: the aspects they wish to conserve, leave behind or transform. This gives insight into the ways that the ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms become embedded within the lives of those involved in them—their memories of past performances and their hopes for performances in the future. Participants justify their motivations through their reflections on past, present and future, and they interpret their experiences of a recent performance on the basis of such reflections. For instance, one composer removed the word 'God' from a Psalm, as this word reminds him of his religious upbringing, and he wanted to compose a Psalm beyond religion, hoping for a more inclusive psalmody than he could remember from his youth.

Secondly, I noticed that participants in ritual-musical appropriations also link back their appropriation to moments further back in time, and even to a supposed 'original' meaning or intention. This is rather common in the performance of cultural heritage—which often aims to evoke an experience that

a public can perceive as 'real', 'authentic', 'original', or at least as old enough to transcend the present. In Chapter 4, I ask: *How do participants of the festival "150 Psalms" appropriate the heritage of the Psalms?* By answering this question, I show how ritual-musical appropriations of the Psalms are justified by claims regarding what 'authentic' psalmody should look like according to the views of their participants. Although these claims are related to their biographies (see above), this chapter shows that ritual-musical appropriations are not simply a matter of 'memory-making', but also entail the (re)construction of psalmody as heritage ('heritagization'). This often involves claims relating to the Psalms' alleged timeless or essential qualities. For example, some participants claim that 'authentic' psalmody should always glorify God, while others claim that psalmody should be politically engaged with matters of injustice and suffering.

Thirdly, much recent research on the transformation of religion in (post) secular societies has shown that such transformations can only be understood when religious practices and individuals' experiences of those practices are taken into account, rather than focusing simply on religious beliefs in and of themselves. The transformation of religion (and of the secular) appears to take place in embodied, sensorial experience ('aesthetics'): individuals participate in a multitude of practices and play with the religious and secular dimensions of these practices. Furthermore, my case studies show that psalmody is primarily appropriated by artists, artistic institutions and other 'aesthetic' professionals. This leads me to expect that studying the aesthetics of the transfer and transformation of psalmody might be able to provide new knowledge that can contribute to answering the main research question of this study. In Chapter 5, I ask: *How can we understand the aesthetics of Psalm performance in a postsecular context?* In this chapter, I take a close look at the aesthetics of the performances I studied: I analyze and reflect upon participants' bodily, auditory, visual, and synaesthetic perception of the performances and show that these are carefully 'managed' by artists, performers, event organizers, and other participants.

Fourthly, in religious traditions, psalmody is often, and has often been, practiced by communities. In contemporary Dutch and Flemish cultures, ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms often involve a heritagization and eventization of psalmody: liturgical psalmody is reframed as cultural heritage and is performed in one-off events. This means that new forms of community occur in and around psalmody and theories of heritagization and eventization suggest that the 'initial' local communities are therefore at risk of being dissolved or of being overshadowed by new networks of enthusiasts. In other

words: the transfer and transformation of psalmody involves a transformation in the meaning of 'community' when Psalms are performed. In Chapter 6, I ask: *How does Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody serve to construct communities in light of the heritagization and eventization of religious practices?* In this chapter, I dive deeper into the case of *Genemuider Bovenstem* collective psalmody and show how this ritual-musical appropriation of Psalms transforms collective psalmody and the meaning of 'community' in psalmody.

Fifthly, appropriations are always dialectical: the appropriated 'object' comes with a history which to a certain degree directs the appropriation. In the previous chapters, I mostly focused on participants' intentions and ideas for transforming psalmody (their memories, their ideas surrounding the nature of 'authentic' psalmody, etc.). In doing so, I observed that the creation, performance or perception of a 'Psalm' sometimes made these individuals do and/or experience certain unexpected things—as if traditions of psalmody were able to challenge their intentions and endeavors. In Chapter 7, I ask: *How are contemporary ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms in Dutch and Flemish culture challenged by the appropriation history of the Psalms, against the background of the transfer and transformation of religion?* By answering this question, I show that earlier appropriations of the Psalms seem to confront participants in current appropriations with certain challenges. In this chapter, I follow Paul Ricœur's hermeneutics, in which cultural 'texts' neither have timeless, essential meanings, nor are they infinitely open to all possible meanings. Rather, cultural 'texts' are embedded in webs of meaning (earlier appropriations, related appropriations), and at the same time they are open to new signification. Thus far, I have focused on the latter, but in this last chapter, I aim to understand how current ritual-musical appropriations are challenged (enabled, limited) by the appropriation history of the Psalms. Furthermore, I interpret participants' responses to these challenges in light of contemporary cultural and religious trends.

Together, the answers to these subquestions provide a multi-faceted and detailed view of the ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms. The meaning of psalmody in contemporary Dutch and Flemish culture is informed by, and cannot be seen apart from, practitioners' memories, their views on 'authentic' psalmody, their sensorial experiences, their ways of coming together for psalmody, and the inevitable presence of voices from the past through which earlier appropriations challenge, limit and enable current appropriations.

Below, I discuss the aims and objectives of this study, I offer definitions of some central concepts, I explore the fields of research to which this study

contributes, and I present an outline of the dissertation. In the next chapter, I present my methodology and research process, and position myself in relation to the research.

1.1.4. Motive

The motive for this research arises out of two particular interests—from an interest in the trajectory of psalmody over time, and from an interest in transformations of religion and the secular in late modernity.

Firstly, as a researcher in the field of ritual and liturgical studies and practical theology I am interested in ritual practices that are theologically significant: practices in which God is addressed, talked (or sung) about, or experienced, and practices in which theological traditions (customs, musical repertoire, language, objects, performance venues) are foregrounded by organizers, performers and other participants. As I have already described, traditions of psalmody are deeply connected to Christian liturgical traditions. Moreover, in Jewish and Christian traditions, Psalms have been recognized for their theological significance. The Biblical Psalter has been compared to the Torah, it has been called a “little Bible” containing the Bible’s entire theology in condensed form (Luther), and it has been referred to as “Jesus’ prayer book” (Bonhoeffer).²⁷ Throughout Jewish and Christian history, Psalms have been used for (private) prayer, worship, preaching, and pastoral care among many other usages.²⁸ When the form, function and context of such rituals change, their theological meaning often transforms as well. This suggests the need for theological inquiry into the contextual meaning of one of the central ritual-musical liturgical traditions in Christianity and Judaism: what theologies are evoked by the performances of Psalms in secular contexts, and how might these performances challenge existing theological interpretations of psalmody? When psalms are performed beyond the realm of religious ritual

27 Brettler, "Jewish Theology of the Psalms," 486-88; William P. Brown, "The Psalms and Hebrew Poetry," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament*, ed. William P. Brown (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 269; Schuman, "De Psalmen," 169, 72; Schuman, *Drama van crisis en hoop*, 213.

28 Kimberly Bracken Long, "The Psalms in Christian Worship," in *Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, ed. William P. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 546-49; William P. Brown, "The Psalms: An Overview," in *Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, ed. William P. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 5; Walter Brueggemann, "The Psalms and the Life of Faith," in *Soundings in the Theology of Psalms. Perspectives and Methods in Contemporary Scholarship*, ed. Rolf A. Jacobson (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 3-4; Alan Cooper, "Some Aspects of Traditional Jewish Psalms Interpretation," in *Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, ed. William P. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 259; Schuman, *Drama van crisis en hoop*, 202-06, 13.

there is the possibility for such contextual meaning to challenge or contest existing theological interpretations of psalmody.

Secondly, in a cultural context in which religious and secular domains have become more fluid, and in which practices rooted in religion take on different forms and functions, research by theologians, anthropologists, sociologists, scholars in religious studies and heritage studies is needed in order to understand what the transformation of religious practices tells us about, for example, cultural and political realities in wider society. For instance, when religious practices only become acceptable (or receive funding) when framed as cultural heritage related to national identities, such transformations can reflect views on the relationship between Christianity and (Western, Dutch, Flemish, European) culture.²⁹ Such processes raise questions about the meaning and role of practices that are rooted in religion in shifting cultural and political structures and hierarchies in cultures that are highly diverse and globalized.³⁰ The transfer and transformation of other ritual-musical practices and forms such as passions, requiems, Choral Evensong, and sacred music festivals have been the subject of academic research, but, in the Low Countries, none of these have such a long and influential history of collective performance (congregational singing) as psalmody.³¹ The transfer and transformation of

29 Cf. Avi Astor, Marian Burchardt, and Mar Griera, "The Politics of Religious Heritage. Framing Claims to Religion as Culture in Spain," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 56, no. 1 (2017); Sarah Bakker Kellogg, "Ritual Sounds, Political Echoes: Vocal Agency and the Sensory Cultures of Secularism in the Dutch Syriac Diaspora," *American Ethnologist* 42, no. 3 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12139>; Marius Balkenhol, Ernst van den Hemel, and Irene Stengs, "Introduction: Emotional Entanglements of Sacrality and Secularity—Engaging the Paradox," in *The Secular Sacred*, ed. Marius Balkenhol, Ernst van den Hemel, and Irene Stengs, Palgrave Politics of Identity and Citizenship Series (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020); Seçil Dağtas, "The Civilizations Choir of Antakya: The Politics of Religious Tolerance and Minority Representation at the National Margins of Turkey," *Cultural Anthropology* 35, no. 1 (2020); Birgit Meyer, "Recycling the Christian Past. The Heritagization of Christianity and National Identity in the Netherlands," in *Cultures, Citizenship and Human Rights*, ed. Rosemarie Buikema, Antoine Buyse, and Antonius C.G.M. Robben (London: Routledge, 2019).

30 Cf. Balkenhol, Van den Hemel, and Stengs, "Introduction."; Ernst van den Hemel, "The Dutch War on Easter. Secular Passion for Religious Culture & National Rituals," *Yearbook for Liturgical and Ritual Studies* 33 (2017); Mirella Klomp, *Playing On. Re-staging the Passion after the Death of God* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 1-5; Todd Weir, "Heritage Discourse and Religious Change in Contemporary Europe," in *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Religion and Heritage in Contemporary Europe*, ed. Todd Weir and Lieke Wijnia (London, New York, Dublin: Bloomsbury, 2023).

31 Martin Hoondert and William R. Arfman, "Musicalizing All Souls' Day Rituals," *Jaarboek voor liturgieonderzoek* 29 (2013); Martin Hoondert, "The Interpretation and Experience of the Requiem in Contemporary Culture," *Jaarboek voor liturgieonderzoek*, no. 31 (2015); Klomp, *Playing On*; Hanna Rijken, *'My Soul Doth Magnify.' The Appropriation of the Anglican Choral Evensong in the Netherlands* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2017); Ernst van den Hemel, *Passie voor de Passie* (Amsterdam: Ten Have, 2020); Lieke Wijnia, "Making Sense through Music: Perceptions of the Sacred at Festival Musica Sacra Maastricht" (PhD dissertation, Tilburg University, 2016).

Psalms was still uncovered, while its study would provide new knowledge on the role and form of practices rooted in religion in contemporary Dutch and Flemish culture, given the important place psalmody has in Dutch and Flemish religious pasts and collective memory.

1.1.5. Aims and objectives

This research aims to understand the ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms and to contribute to practical theological reflection on this phenomenon. As I have argued in the previous section, this implies a contribution to existing academic knowledge in two ways. First, this research aims to gain an understanding of the meaning of Psalm performance in late-modern, secularized cultural contexts as the ‘next chapter’ in the ongoing appropriation (reception) history of psalmody. Secondly, the research aims to gain an understanding of the cultural contexts in which it takes place and of the different transformations of practices associated with religious traditions in these cultural contexts. Furthermore, I aim to produce academic knowledge that can be made relevant for practitioners of psalmody and others who are involved in ritual-musical appropriations of practices associated with religious traditions.

In order to achieve these aims, I have formulated the following research objectives:³²

1. To offer detailed accounts of the ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms based on analyses of qualitative, ethnographic data (see Chapter 2);
2. To interpret the ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms in light of the transfer and transformation of religion in Dutch and Flemish culture;
3. To explore the transfer and transformation of religion on the basis of my interpretation of the ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms;
4. To evaluate the ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms in light of existing traditions of psalmody and in light of broader cultural trends, including transformations of practices associated with religious traditions;
5. To offer recommendations for practitioners on the basis of this evaluation which challenge them to evaluate, further develop, and improve the quality their own practices.

³² In some of the chapters that have been published as research articles, I formulate my aims and objectives using somewhat different wordings. Often, these are further specifications of the objectives listed here.

1.1.6. Relevance

This research has academic relevance for the intersecting areas between (practical) theology, ritual and liturgical studies, religious studies, heritage studies, memory studies, event studies, ethnomusicology, and study of the arts. This study concerns ritual-musical appropriations of practices which are closely associated with Christian and Jewish liturgical traditions, but are often now appropriated beyond the bounds of these traditions. The ritual-musical appropriations which I investigate involve the transformation of psalmody in relation to the lived theologies expressed and evoked in its performance (i.e. how psalmody can address God in a secularized context). Moreover, the appropriations involve transformations of (liturgical and concert) rituals, which are modified to fit paradigms of psalmody-as-art and psalmody-as-heritage in a postsecular context. This study nuances extant theories in heritage and event studies with regard to the construction of communities through practices that have been subject to processes of heritagization and eventization. Alongside this, it contributes to the field of memory studies by showing how the performance of collective memory involves the transformation of participants' biographical memories, and how such transformed memories are situated in participants' broader views on the past and future of their (religious) identities. Finally, by offering detailed descriptions and analyses of participants' sensorial experiences (aesthetics) of psalmody and the ways in which collective immersion, flow, and transcendent experiences are embodied and experienced on the sensorial level, this study contributes to the fields of religious studies, ethnomusicology, and the arts.

This research has relevance beyond the realm of academia, namely for artists, performers of psalmody and others engaged in the ritual-musical appropriation of forms rooted in religious traditions. It shows the different ways in which Psalm performances are relevant, and can be made relevant in late-modern, postsecular, post-Christian cultures. Artists and event organizers in the arts and cultural domain, as well as church musicians and ministers may be able to find inspiration in the cases studied here, although, of course, this would still require translation for their own situations. This study could also encourage them to reassess their own practices in light of its evaluation of the ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms. Chapters 7 and 8 in particular offer starting points for such reassessments, thinking through questions of what it means to address God in a secularized context, to perform collective psalmody in a context marked by individualization and pluralization, and to articulate hope without turning away from crises in the contemporary age.

1.2. Theoretical framework

In this section, I explain the different terms I use in relation to Psalms and psalmody, I define the notion 'ritual-musical appropriation' and I review research on, and relating to, this topic.

1.2.1. Definitions

Before elaborating on the central idea of 'ritual-musical appropriation', let me briefly introduce the different terms I use in relation to (the performance of) Psalms. The most common of these are 'Psalms', 'biblical Psalms', 'canonical Psalms', 'performance of Psalms', 'psalmody', and 'metrical Psalms'. 'Psalms' is the most generic term, referring to (performed) texts. The context in which I use this generic term will make it clear whether I refer to the texts from the Hebrew Bible (the Old/First Testament) or whether I refer to newer texts being written and performed. Sometimes, in order to distinguish the Psalms in their written form from their performance, I use the terms 'performance of Psalms' and 'psalmody' interchangeably. Thus, 'psalmody' does not exclusively refer to (Gregorian) chanting of Psalms but can also include other styles of singing and reciting such as metrical psalmody. Metrical psalmody is the performance of metrical Psalms, translations of the biblical Psalms whose lyrics have been adapted to fit a hymn tune with a regular metre and rhyme-scheme. Metrical Psalms are particularly significant in a Dutch context, since the melodies of the Genevan psalter and the metrical translations which accompany them (*berijmingen*, 'rhymes') are commonplace in Dutch Protestantism.³³

In this study, I do not seek to define what counts as a 'Psalm' or 'psalmody' in advance, but include any performance which are presented as such. In *Psalm 151* and *Poesia Divina*, for example, the performance of 'Psalms' involves new texts, but these are nevertheless emphatically presented as Psalms by the artists and event organizers. I take this seriously in my study of the ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms, as these cases illustrate that appropriation involves not simply the re-contextualization of psalmody, or a transformation of musical styles, but transformations on the textual level of psalmody as well.

I will now unfold my understanding of the notion of 'ritual-musical appropriation'. In my use of the word 'appropriation', I follow historian Willem Frijhoff, who, in turn, is largely indebted to Jesuit and philosopher Michel de

³³ Rijken, "Psalmezang," 348.

Certeau.³⁴ Frijhoff defines appropriation as “the meaning-making process by which groups or individuals attribute new meanings to external bearers of meaning, so that these bearers of meaning become acceptable, liveable, bearable or dignified.”³⁵ As such, my approach is not primarily concerned with the issues of rightful ownership and expropriation (disownment) which form the focus for many recent debates on the appropriation of cultural goods and practices from marginalized groups by the more-powerful.³⁶ Without seeking to dismiss the importance and urgency of these debates, I use the term ‘appropriation’ more descriptively to include all meaning-making processes involving the transfer of cultural forms and practices i.e. the performance of Psalms. Alongside Frijhoff, my application of the term is inspired by anthropologist Arnd Schneider, philosophers Paul Ricœur and Julia Kristeva and literary scholar Julie Sanders. Following Schneider, Kristeva and Sanders, I consider appropriation to be a characteristic of “all human endeavor” in the creation and consumption of culture (Schneider), as “art, music, drama, dance and literature” form “a living mosaic, a dynamic intersection of textual surfaces” (Kristeva, Sanders).³⁷ Sanders argues that, often, appropriation is possible because of the canonical status of what is appropriated:

[I]t goes almost without saying that the texts cited or reworked would need to be well known. They need to serve as part of a shared community of knowledge, both for the interrelationships and interplay to be identifiable and for those in turn to have the required impact on readers or spectators. This is why (...) adaptation and appropriation have on the whole tended to operate within the parameters of the established canon, serving at times to reinforce that canon by ensuring a continued interest in the original or

34 In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, De Certeau develops a theory of the production and consumption of culture in everyday life activities. Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

35 Willem Frijhoff, "Toeëigening: van bezitsdrang naar betekenisgeving," *Trajecta*, no. 6 (1997): 108.

36 Power dynamics are, however, at play in meaning-making processes as certain actors (e.g. organizers of events) are more powerful in their interpretation of psalmody than others (e.g. individual concertgoers). I pay attention to such dynamics when analyzing the meanings attributed to the performance of Psalms in new and changing contexts. See: Erich Hatala Matthes, "Cultural Appropriation and Oppression," *Philosophical Studies* 176, no. 4 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-018-1224-2>.

37 See: Arnd Schneider, "On 'Appropriation.' A Critical Reappraisal of the Concept and its Application in Global Art Practices," *Social Anthropology*, no. 11, no. 2 (2003): 217; Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 2nd ed. (London, New York: Routledge, 2016), 5. Kristeva's vocabulary suggests a textual focus, but as this quotation serves to illustrate, aims to include all sorts of performance as well.

source text, albeit under revised circumstances, but at the same time ensuring a dynamic revival or 'repair' of the same.³⁸

This is indeed the case for the Psalms examined in the research cases of this study.³⁹

Furthermore, I understand appropriation not only as the transformation of the appropriated 'object', its meaning and relevance, but also as the potential transformation of the individuals and groups who are involved. Following Ricœur and Schneider, I analyze how appropriations of psalmody have an impact on, for instance, the self-conceptions or worldviews of those who are involved, and how the appropriation history of Psalms challenges participants in contemporary ritual-musical appropriations (see Chapters 3 and 7).⁴⁰ Individuals and groups appropriating the Psalms are themselves affected in the process; what they appropriate appears to have certain properties that enable, direct or limit their appropriation in ways they had perhaps not foreseen.⁴¹ This is not to say that such properties are unchangeable or devoid of any contextual peculiarities but that, in the case of Psalm performances, new performances will be informed by previous performances. 'Pure' production does not exist; the appropriation concept shows that all cultural production involves the reception of existing cultural materials (objects, narratives, ideas, practices).

This is why it is necessary to add the term 'ritual'. Ritual performances such as those of musical concerts and liturgy rely on repetition and involve (symbolic) actions taken over from previous ritual performances.⁴² I follow ritual studies scholars Paul Post in his definition of ritual:

Ritual is a more or less repeatable sequence of action units which takes on a symbolic dimension through formalization, stylizati-

³⁸ Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 124.

³⁹ Cf. Brennan Breed, "Reception of the Psalms: The Example of Psalm 91," in *Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, ed. William P. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 297; Sawyer, "The Psalms in Judaism and Christianity," 140-41.

⁴⁰ Paul Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory. Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 92; Paul Ricœur, *Hermeneutics & the Human Sciences*, trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981; repr., 2016), 120, 39-40, 55; Schneider, "On 'Appropriation'," 224.

⁴¹ Allan Bell, "Re-constructing Babel: Discourse analysis, hermeneutics and the Interpretive Arc," *Discourse Studies* 13, no. 5 (2011): 536; Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, vol. 3 (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 172; Schneider, "On 'Appropriation'," 217, 21.

⁴² Cf. Tineke Nugteren, "Sensing the 'Sacred'? Body, Senses and Intersensoriality in the Academic Study of Ritual," *Jaarboek voor liturgieonderzoek* 29 (2013): 51, 64; Paul Post and Laurie Faro, "Een Ritual Studies Onderzoeksdesign. Ervaringen en Perspectieven," *Yearbook for Ritual and Liturgical Studies* 33 (2017): 28.

on and situation in place and time. On the one hand, individuals and groups express their ideas and ideals, their mentalities and identities through these rituals, and, on the other hand the ritual actions shape, foster, and transform these ideas, mentalities and identities.⁴³

The word 'ritual' helps to decentralize the appropriation of texts and to include actions and experiences in the analysis since rituals are performed and embodied.⁴⁴ I do not aim to classify psalmody *as* ritual, but I use the word 'ritual' as a theoretical lens to analyze the appropriation of the Psalms.⁴⁵ It not only helps to emphasize "action over text and process over structure" (cf. Stephenson), but also to interpret these actions as symbolic activities with the potential to reshape participants' being in the world, for instance when rituals provide participants with a space to experiment with different roles and actions.⁴⁶ In this way, the term 'ritual' roots the transformative potential of appropriation (cf. Ricœur and Schneider, see above) in the embodied performance of Psalms.

I supplement the term 'ritual' with 'musical', both in order to pay special attention to the role of sound in the performance of Psalms and to interpret musical performances through the lens of 'ritual'. Together with Christopher Small, I consider music to be an action rather than a thing. For this, Small invented the verb *musicking*: "To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing),

43 Paul Post, "Ritual Studies," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

44 Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture*, 215-16; Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 161; Ronald Grimes, *Ritual Criticism. Case Studies on Its Practice, Essays on Its Theory* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), 14; Mary McGann, "Liturgical Musical Ethnography. Challenges and Promise," *Yearbook for Liturgical and Ritual Studies*, no. 26 (2010): 90; Nugteren, "Sensing the "Sacred"?", 55-56; Barry Stephenson, "Ritual," in *Vocabulary for the Study of Religion*, ed. Robert A. Segal and Kocku Von Stuckrad (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Wijnia, "Making Sense through Music," 52, 62. On a side note, scholar of religious studies Vesna Wallace even argues that appropriation "seems to be fundamental to ritual, as rituals of pre-existing and surrounding religious and cultural traditions are often found integrated in current ritual practices." Cf. Vesna A. Wallace, "Mongolian Livestock Rituals. Appropriations, Adaptations, and Transformations," in *Understanding Religious Ritual. Theoretical Approaches and Innovations*, ed. John P. Hoffmann (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 168.

45 Cf. Wijnia, "Making Sense through Music," 49.

46 Bell, *Ritual*, 161; Mirella Klomp et al., "The Passion as Public Reflexivity: How the Dutch in a Ritual-musical Event Reflect on Religious and Moral Discussions in Society," *Journal of Religion in Europe*, no. 11 (2018): 199; Stephenson, "Ritual.,"; Wijnia, "Making Sense through Music," 55-56, 62.

or by dancing.”⁴⁷ The advantage of this approach is that it includes performers, listeners, organizers, composers and lyricists as participants in the performance even when they have already completed their roles prior to the act of performing. Furthermore, it takes the distinctiveness of each performance seriously; each performance generates its own meanings instead of simply expressing or reproducing an existing set of meanings.⁴⁸ This is important when studying appropriations of psalmody, as an understanding of musical performance as the mere expression/reproduction of ideas would neglect both the meaning-making of participants in the performance and the ways in which performance transforms psalmody and the participants involved.

I must add that my understanding of ‘music’ includes both speaking and singing (‘elevated speech’). Researchers such as ethnomusicologist Jeffers Engelhardt, historian and scholar of religion Rosalind Hackett, and practical theologian Mirella Klomp have advocated for the reconsideration of ‘music’, ‘sound’, ‘song’ and ‘speech’ as distinguishable categories because, although they seem to represent universal distinctions, these categories emerged in Western Enlightenment thinking as ways to distinguish between certain bodily actions and sensory experiences.⁴⁹ The deconstruction of these categories has liberated musical analysis from the study of simply lyrics and musical notation (which was a common practice in hymnology) and subverts categories of ‘music’, ‘song’ and ‘speech’. This is relevant for the study of psalmody, as different traditions of psalmody already involve modes of speech and singing which cannot easily be categorized into a single one of these categories. The research case of *Poesia Divina* illustrates this as poets recite their Psalms in a stylized manner and organizers of the performances present these Psalms as “sung prayers”.⁵⁰ With the researchers mentioned above, I include such performances under the category of ‘music’ as an umbrella term.

Before closing this section, I want to briefly touch upon the concept of ‘heritagization’. As mentioned above, ritual-musical appropriations always contain traces of earlier appropriations. When collective remembrance of these traces

47 Christopher Small, *Musicking. The meanings of performing and listening* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 9.

48 Nicholas Cook, “Music as Performance,” in *The Cultural Study of Music. A Critical Introduction*, ed. Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert, and Richard Middleton (New York: Routledge, 2012), 185.

49 Cf. Jeffers Engelhardt, “Music, Sound and Religion,” in *The Cultural Study of Music. A Critical Introduction*, ed. Michael Clayton, Trevor Herbert, and Richard Middleton (New York: Routledge, 2012), 300; Rosalind Hackett, “Sound, Music, and the Study of Religion,” *Temenos* 48, no. 1 (2012): 12, <https://doi.org/10.33356/temenos.6944>; Mirella Klomp, *The Sound of Worship. Liturgical performance by Surinamese Lutherans and Ghanaian Methodists in Amsterdam* (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 40-43.

50 See: www.musica-divina.be/poesia-divina (accessed 7 January 2024).

becomes a central element in the appropriation of a practice, such appropriation can be identified as 'heritagization'. Heritagization is a transformation (or transfer) in a particular direction, for example: a form or practice which mainly served to express a religious identity can be reframed as a form or practice which mainly expresses the '(collective) wish to remember'.⁵¹ This notion from heritage studies is helpful for understanding, for example, the transformation of *Genemuider Bovenstem* collective psalmody (which became Dutch Intangible Cultural Heritage), without falling back into religion/secular binaries (which have been deconstructed in numerous studies, see section 1.2.3.). As heritage, this practice has not necessarily become something secular or non-religious; as I will demonstrate, this heritagized practice involves and blurs religious and secular dimensions.⁵² However, such binaries can easily slip back into play through terms such as 'cultural heritage' and 'religious heritage'.

To summarize, 'ritual-musical appropriation' is a meaning-making process in which new meanings are attributed to external bearers of meaning, and in which appropriating groups and individuals are also transformed as part of the process. This occurs through ritual (repeatable, symbolic, formalized, bodily) musical actions (different modes of musicking, including listening, singing and speaking), which shape, foster, and transform the ideas, mentalities and identities of individuals and groups. Without understanding the transfer and transformation of psalmody in such a holistic way, meaningful or even essential aspects of this meaning-making process have the potential to be overlooked. The fact that 'appropriation' is both productive (new meanings emerge) and receptive (drawing on existing meanings), involving symbolic, stylized, bodily actions which cannot be understood by looking at the scripts for performance alone could easily be overlooked in a less-holistic model.

1.2.2. Extant research

In this section, I situate my research on the appropriation of Psalms amidst studies on the transfer and transformation of religion. No substantial study

⁵¹ Cf. Astor, Burchardt, and Griera, "The Politics of Religious Heritage," 129, 38-39; Meyer, "Recycling the Christian Past," 65, 70-71.

⁵² Nevertheless, several authors have demonstrated that 'heritagization' can diminish the control of religious communities over their 'heritage' and replace religious meaning with universalist or cosmopolitan worldviews or nationalism. Cf. Astor, Burchardt, and Griera, "The Politics of Religious Heritage," 138-39; Dalia Gavriely-Nury and Einat Lachover, "Reframing the Past as a Cosmopolitan Memory: Obituaries in the Israeli Daily Haaretz," *Communication Theory* 22 (2012): 48-65; Ming-chun Ku, "ICH-isation of popular religions and the politics of recognition in China," in *Safeguarding Intangible Heritage. Practices and Politics*, ed. Natsuko Akagawa and Laurajane Smith (New York: Routledge, 2019), 196; Meyer, "Recycling the Christian Past," 70, 79.

of contemporary (ritual-musical) appropriations of Psalms has yet been undertaken either in the Dutch or Flemish contexts, or in other contexts. In 1991, church historians Jan de Bruijn and Willem Heijting published an edited volume *Singing Psalms in the Low Countries from the Sixteenth Century to the Present* (original title in Dutch), with chapters on different (historical) traditions of psalmody in the Low Countries (now the Netherlands and parts of Belgium).⁵³ Together with some other hymnological publications, this volume serves to illustrate the deep and broad impact of (metrical) psalmody in Dutch culture, but it provides more of a historical overview than a systematic or practical study.⁵⁴ Beyond the Dutch and Flemish contexts, Old Testament scholars such as Susan Gillingham and others have constructed reception histories of the Book of Psalms and of single Psalms.⁵⁵ Generally, these studies are limited to the reception of the canonical Psalms (thus excluding the creation of novel psalmody), they maintain religious/secular binaries, and they fail to include any detailed analyses of ritual and musical aspects of this reception.

However, a great deal of research exists on the transfer and transformation of other religious practices and forms, including musical practices such as passion performances (and plays) (practical theologian Mirella Klomp, scholar of religion Ernst van den Hemel); Requiems (musicologist and theologian Martin Hoondert), sacred music at festivals *Musica Sacra* (scholar of religion and art historian Lieke Wijnia); and Choral Evensong (theologian and church musician Hanna Rijken). Beyond the Low Countries there are studies on *Beer and Hymns* (ethnomusicologist Andrew Mall); Syriac Orthodox Christian liturgical musical practices (anthropologist Sarah Bakker Kellogg); and Nāda-Brahman, 'Divine sound' (researcher in the aesthetics of religion Annette Wilke).⁵⁶

⁵³ De Bruijn and Heijting, *Psalmzingen in de Nederlanden*.

⁵⁴ E.g. Jan Luth, Jan Pasveer, and Jan Smelik, eds., *Het kerklied. Een geschiedenis* (Zoetermeer: Mozaïek, 2001).

⁵⁵ Breed, "Reception of the Psalms."; Susan Gillingham, *A Journey of Two Psalms: The Reception of Psalm 1 and 2 in Jewish and Christian Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Susan Gillingham, *Psalms Through the Centuries*, ed. John F.A. Sawyer et al., 2 vols., Wiley Blackwell Bible Commentaries, (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2008/2018).

⁵⁶ Klomp, *Playing On*; Van den Hemel, *Passie voor de Passie*; Hoondert, "The Interpretation and Experience of the Requiem in Contemporary Culture."; Wijnia, "Making Sense through Music."; Rijken, 'My Soul Doth Magnify.' *The Appropriation of the Anglican Choral Evensong in the Netherlands*; Andrew Mall, "'Beer and Hymns' and community. Religious identity and Participatory Sing-alongs," *Yale Journal of Music & Religion* 6, no. 2 (2020); Bakker Kellogg, "Ritual Sounds."; Annette Wilke, "Moving Religion by Sound: On the Effectiveness of the Nāda-Brahman in India and Modern Europe," in *Aesthetics of Religion. A Connective Concept*, ed. Alexandra Grieser and Jay Johnston (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017).

My research on ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms builds on the work of these studies, in particular through the concepts of sacro-soundscapes and heritagization. Sacro-soundscapes, a concept coined by theologians Mirella Klomp and Marcel Barnard, ventures beyond the limits of classical hymnology in order to further the understanding of “musical practices in the liquefied religious landscape: a concept that takes fluidity of these practices into account as well as the contexts in which they are performed”.⁵⁷ I deepen this concept by adding dimensions of time (the memories of previous performances, Chapter 3), the senses (Chapter 5), and the communal (transformed styles of community, Chapter 6). Similarly, I enrich the concepts of heritagization and eventization by demonstrating their interrelationship with the transformation of biographical memories (Chapter 3), and by refining understandings of ‘authenticity’ within heritage practices (Chapter 4).

In the next section, I supplement this groundwork (the definitions and existing research) with broader theoretical orientations that further inform my approach to ritual-musical appropriations of the Psalms.

1.2.3. Theoretical orientations

As has become clear, I avoid a categorizing Psalm performances as either ‘religious’, ‘secular’, or ‘sacred’ because such categories have proven to be counter-productive in understanding the transfer and transformation of forms and practices associated with religious traditions.⁵⁸ Theorists such as Zygmunt Bauman and Charles Taylor have argued that contemporary (Western) cultures can be described as individualized, de-institutionalized, pluralized, and ‘liquid’, with individuals simultaneously compiling their identity from a range of different sources as an expression of their ‘authentic self’.⁵⁹ It is

⁵⁷ Mirella Klomp and Marcel Barnard, “Sacro-Soundscapes: Interpreting Contemporary Ritual Performances of Sacred Music through the Case of The Passion in the Netherlands,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 21, no. 2 (2017): 256.

⁵⁸ Cf. Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes: Finding Religion in Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 298; Balkenhol, Van den Hemel, and Stengs, “Introduction,” 2; Marius Balkenhol and Rivke Jaffe, “Introduction: The Netherlands Now,” *Etnofoor* 25, no. 2 (2013): 9; Birgit Meyer, “Introduction. From Imagined Communities to Aesthetic Formations,” in *Aesthetic Formations*, ed. Birgit Meyer (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1.

⁵⁹ Cf. Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000); Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). These insights have influenced research on the role and form of ritual, religion and the secular in late-modernity. See: William R. Arfman, “Liquid Ritualizing. Facing the Challenges of Late Modernity in an Emerging Ritual Field,” *Journal of Religion in Europe* 7 (2014): 24, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18748929-00701001>; Ammerman, *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes*, 303; Balkenhol and Jaffe, “Introduction,” 9; Mirella Klomp, “Ecclesioscapes: interpreting gatherings around Christian music in and outside the

against this background that anthropologists Balkenhol, Van den Hemel and Stengs advocate for a “critical engagement with seemingly self-evident distinctions between religion and the secular inherent in Western modernity”, “instead of focusing on the creation of meta-categories.”⁶⁰ They thus pay close attention to the body, senses, and emotions, since the expression of the authentic self is not just a matter of belief, but also of bodily performance.⁶¹ Similarly, practical theologians such as Hanna Rijken, Marten van der Meulen and Mirella Klomp, and sociologist of religion Kees de Groot have further theorized the liquification of religion and the secular, proposing approaches that acknowledge the messy, liquid nature of practices, such as ‘play’ and ‘re-enchantment’ and further developing ritual scholar Paul Posts’ concept of ‘ritual-sacral fields’.⁶²

This approach is helpful for studying ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms, as these ritual-musical appropriations do not fit into established meta-categories (cf. Balkenhol, Van den Hemel and Stengs). Performances of Psalms can nevertheless evoke individuals’ previous experiences of religious and secular practices and are able to become special, non-ordinary, or set-apart for participants in the performance. With theologian and sociologist of religion Gordon Lynch and art historian Lieke Wijnia, I consider practices and objects (whether religious or not) to be ‘sacred’, when they communicate something absolute or profound to participants in ritual-musical appropriations.⁶³ In this way, as scholar of ritual Martin Hoondert argues, ‘the sacred’, is not “an ontological category” or “institutional religious appropriation”, but “a contingent, historically situated concept”.⁶⁴ This conceptualization of the sacred

church,” in *Studying Congregational Music. Key Issues, Methods, and Theoretical Perspectives*, ed. Andrew Mall, Jeffers Engelhardt, and Monique M. Ingalls (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 248; C. Allen Speight, “On the Past and Future of Religion, Art and Philosophy,” in *The Future of the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. M. David Eckel, C. Allen Speight, and Troy DuJardin (Cham: Springer, 2021), 226; André Van der Braak, *Reimagining Zen in a Secular Age. Charles Taylor and Zen Buddhism in the West* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 17.

⁶⁰ Balkenhol, Van den Hemel, and Stengs, “Introduction,” 8, 4-5.

⁶¹ Balkenhol, Van den Hemel, and Stengs, “Introduction,” 8.

⁶² Kees de Groot, “The Challenge of a Church Going into Liquidation,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 84, no. 4 (2019); Mirella Klomp and Marten Van der Meulen, “The Passion as ludic practice - understanding public ritual performances in late modern society: a case study from the Netherlands,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, no. 32, no. 3 (2017); Paul Post, “From Identity to Accent: The Ritual Studies Perspective of Fields of the Sacred,” *Pastoraltheologische Informationen* 33, no. 1 (2013); Hanna Rijken, *My Soul Doth Magnify. The Appropriation of Anglican Choral Evensong in the Netherlands* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2020).

⁶³ Gordon Lynch, *The Sacred in the Modern World. A Cultural Sociological Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Wijnia, “Making Sense through Music,” 39-40.

⁶⁴ Hoondert, “The Interpretation and Experience of the Requiem in Contemporary Culture,”

helps in distinguishing the different ways in which the (possible) sacralization of Psalms (as heritage, for instance) echoes the sacred status psalmody has (had) in religious practices. It seems that artists, organizers and performers are interested in performing Psalms. What is it that attracts them? That they want to cherish? That astounds them? The notion of the sacred, applied as a situational concept, helps in answering such questions.

Questions of sacrality are theological questions as well. What counts as sacred (as ultimate, set-apart) for individuals (religiously affiliated or not) is a theological concern, since, according to theologian Tom Beaudoin, theology focuses on “the beings, books, and beliefs that people call holy or sacred.”⁶⁵ Beaudoin writes this in the introduction to *Secular Music and Sacred Theology*, which presents many examples of music that is not (clearly) rooted in religious practice. Psalmody, on the other hand, is often still a religious practice (see the case of *Genemuider Bovenstem* psalmody), and still bears many of its connotations. Does this mean that ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms are more prone to sacralization? According to theologians Mirella Klomp and Marten van der Meulen, this is not necessarily the case although, in a post-Christian context, ritual practices which have Christian roots can nevertheless evoke specific types of meaning-making, for example in a playful mode or forms of irony.⁶⁶

1.2.4. Research gap

The study of psalmody in Dutch and Flemish culture has often been confined to historical and textual research, and thus risks perpetuating ideal images of the performance of Psalms and the meanings it engenders instead of the realistic, complex, layered views that qualitative research can provide. Moreover, reception studies of Psalms in other contexts are often limited to the reception of biblical Psalms, are not based on detailed analysis of actual performances, and often uphold clear distinctions between religious and secular domains. The situation in the Netherlands and Flanders demands an approach which is more open to the experimental forms of psalmody that occur in a liquefied cultural context (see previous section).

145-46. Cf. Matthew T. Evans, "The Sacred: Differentiating, Clarifying and Extending Concepts," *Review of Religious Research*, no. 5, no. 1 (2003).

⁶⁵ Tom Beaudoin, "Introduction. Theology of Popular Music as a Theological Exercise," in *Secular Music and Sacred Theology*, ed. Tom Beaudoin (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier Inc., 2013), 7.

⁶⁶ Klomp and Van der Meulen, "The Passion as ludic practice," 396-97.

Furthermore, as I discussed in the section on my research motive (1.1.3.), the transfer and transformation of Psalms has not yet served as an object of investigation, nor has it received attention as a matter of ritual-musical appropriation in today's postsecular, post-Christian, secular cultural context. Collective psalmody plays its own specific and central role in the religious history of the Low Countries, but has largely remained out of the picture while (ritual-musical) appropriations of various other religious forms in Dutch culture have been the object of research. Thus, a study of the ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms will provide new knowledge that extends beyond extant theories on the transfer and transformation of religion in Dutch and Flemish cultures, aiding in my understanding of the role that psalmody, with its important place in both culture's historical pasts, has come to play in contemporary Dutch and Flemish cultures.

In sum, there is a need for empirical research that can offer further theorization about the meaning of performed Psalms, especially in a post-Christian cultural context where performed Psalms once occupied a central place in a collective religious past.

1.3. Outline of the dissertation

In the next chapter, I will present the methodology used to undertake this research and in Chapters 3-7, I go on to present the findings of this research project. Chapters 3-6 have been published as international peer-reviewed journal articles and Chapter 7 has been accepted for publication in the international journal *Studia Liturgica*. In this dissertation, I have slightly modified the texts. Most notably, the methodology sections have been shortened, since these would mostly repeat the contents of Chapter 2. Each of the research chapters comes with a QR code linking to a web page with an 'antiphon' that can be listened to before or after reading that particular chapter.⁶⁷ In certain styles of (monastic) psalmody, each recited Psalms opens and concludes with antiphons that fit the liturgical feast or season and thus shed light on the Psalm itself. In a similar manner, the 'antiphons' in this book serve to bring to life the themes that are discussed in the particular chapters using audio and video fragments of performances (similar to those) which I have studied.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ The web links can also be found in the chapters' opening footnotes.

⁶⁸ Some of these are quoted or explicitly referred to in the chapter concerned, others (such as the antiphon for Chapter 6) contain recordings of performances that are different, but stylistically comparable, to the ones I myself attended.

Chapter 3, *A Psalm is always a memory* shows how ritual-musical appropriations of the Psalms involve the transformation of biographical memories of earlier performances. It shows how these memories are embedded in participants' larger reflections on themselves, Psalms and religion in the past, present and future.

Chapter 4, *Competing authenticities* discusses the construction of 'authentic' psalmody in the festival *150 Psalms*. It appears that the performance allows for different and sometimes contradictory appropriations of psalmody as 'authentic' heritage.

Chapter 5, *Making sense of the Psalms* offers a detailed description of the ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms on the level of aesthetics (sensorial experience) and shows how, through careful management of sensorial stimuli, organizers and other participants balance individual authenticity and collective immersion. This balance appears to enable experiences of transcendence.

Chapter 6, *Singing apart together* shows how the heritagization and eventization of *Genemuiders Bovenstem* collective psalmody involves transformations in the construction of communities. It nuances theories which claim that heritagization and eventization of religious practices comes at the expense of the communities that were initially involved in those practices.

Chapter 7, *When Psalms talk back* is the final chapter to present my research findings and 'turns the appropriations around' by investigating the ways in which appropriating individuals and groups are challenged by earlier appropriations of psalmody. While in the earlier chapters, individuals and groups were the ones who challenged (transformed, modified) psalmody, this chapter shows that, in ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms, participants are challenged in three ways: they are challenged to address God, to perform collectively, and to contemplate life. This chapter interprets these challenges in light of existing traditions of psalmody and in light of trends in contemporary culture.

Chapter 8, *Conclusion and discussion* presents my answers to the original research question and further develops the conclusions of the previous chapters in light of the main conclusion. It outlines the theoretical contributions of this study in relation to existing literature, reconsiders the methodology of the study, offers suggestions for further research, and reflects on the study's practical implications.

2

Methodology

The richest and most complex works on the relationships between memory, memorywork and heritage are grounded (...) in methodologies that engage with lived human experience rather than just observational methods or object, landscape or textual analysis.⁶⁹

In this chapter, I describe my research methodology and methods, the research procedure, and the different case studies.

2.1. Methodological account

As indicated in the previous chapter, this study is embedded in the field of ritual and liturgical studies, falling under the umbrella of practical theology at the Protestant Theological University, with a particular focus on ritual-musical practices. To study ritual and musical performance, participation is key. Liturgical studies scholar Mary McGann emphasizes that (liturgical) ritual and music are “performative by nature—they exist in performance” and that they are “carriers of social customs, ritual expectations, historical shapings, spirituality and cosmology— all of which unfold dynamically in performance.”⁷⁰ Similarly, practical theologians Marcel Barnard, Johan Cilliers and Cas Wepener state that ritual “cannot be approached only by mind” and that it “can no longer be investigated as text form behind a desk.”⁷¹ My approach thus follows in the footsteps of researchers such as Mary McGann, Martin Hoondert, Mirella Klomp and Hanna Rijken, who have approached

⁶⁹ Joy Sather-Wagstaff, “Heritage and Memory,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Heritage Research*, ed. Emma Waterton and Steve Watson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 201.

⁷⁰ McGann, “Liturgical Musical Ethnography,” 87.

⁷¹ Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture*, 231.

their objects of study using ethnographic methods in order to get a grasp on the layered and complex meaning-making processes of the ritual practices that they study.⁷² Underlying these approaches is the ontological understanding that research on ritual, liturgy and musical performance in itself is an embodied activity, that the researcher's body undeniably plays a meaningful role in the study of practices and should therefore be a topic for critical reflection (see 'positionality' below). In the words of anthropologist Timothy Ingold, perception "is not the achievement of a mind in a body, but of the organism as a whole in its environment, and is tantamount to the organism's own exploratory movement through the world."⁷³

2.1.1. Case study research

The methodology used involves the use of ethnographic methods to explore a series of different case studies. Case study research involves the empirical investigation of a particular phenomenon in its real-life context.⁷⁴ John Creswell, who has written extensively on qualitative research methodologies, describes case studies research as

a qualitative design in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. The case(s) are bound by time and activity.⁷⁵

Typically, case study research involves multiple methods of data collection in order to undertake an in-depth study of a phenomenon. These can include ethnographic methods such as participant observation, interviews and document analysis.⁷⁶ The major difference between case study research and ethnography is that, often, case study research involves a shorter period of fieldwork than an ethnography would demand.⁷⁷ Pamela Baxter and Susan

⁷² Mary McGann, *A Precious Fountain. Music in the Worship of an African-American Catholic Community* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004); Martin Hoondert, *Om de parochie. Ritueel-muzikale bewegingen in de marge van de parochie. Gregoriaans, Taizé, Jongerenkoren* (Heeswijk: Abdij van Berne, 2007); Klomp, *The Sound of Worship*; Klomp, *Playing On*; Rijken, 'My Soul Doth Magnify.' *The Appropriation of the Anglican Choral Evensong in the Netherlands*.

⁷³ Timothy Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2000), 261.

⁷⁴ Arya Priya, "Case Study Methodology of Qualitative Research: Key Attributes and Navigating the Conundrums in Its Application," *Sociological Bulletin* 70, no. 1 (2021): 95; Robert Yin, *Case study research: Designs and Methods*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2009), 18.

⁷⁵ John W. Creswell, *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2014), 241.

⁷⁶ Priya, "Case Study Methodology," 95, 97, 106.

⁷⁷ Pamela Baxter and Susan Jack, "Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers," *The Qualitative Report* 13, no. 4 (2008): 546.

Jack stress the importance of “binding a case”, for example by limiting the focus of the research in terms of time, place, activity, definition or context.⁷⁸

Case study research is a fitting methodology for the study of the ritual-musical appropriation of Psalms. I wish to investigate these appropriations in their real-life context (performances), and to explore them in depth, but longitudinal (ethnographic) study is hardly possible, since the phenomena under study (artistic projects with performances of Psalms) often have a duration of no more than a few weeks. Since case study research aims to explore social phenomena in depth and in a holistic manner, this methodology suits my goal of examining the complexity of views that make up the ritual-musical appropriation of Psalms as an intersubjective meaning-making process that emerges through (ritual) action and embodied experience.⁷⁹ In this sense, my approach is indebted to social constructivism, as I consider the meaning of psalmody to be constructed in and through the social reality of intersubjective interaction.⁸⁰

In order to obtain a layered, detailed view of the ritual-musical appropriation of Psalms, I have selected different research cases. This research has a cross-case design, in which “two or more cases experiencing similar events or phenomenon are studied, and then the data obtained from different cases are compared to derive generalizable conclusions.”⁸¹ According to social scientist Robert Yin, studies with multiple cases are generally considered to be more “compelling and robust” than those with a single focus, as such a design has a “greater chance of weeding out data collection errors and prejudices.”⁸² In other words, the selection of multiple cases can increase the reliability of a study (see below). The cases have been deliberately selected for their contrasting characteristics. They therefore vary according to geographical location (urban, countryside, Netherlands, Flanders), performance venue (concert hall, church building), content (canonical Psalms, new Psalms), and the nature of the performers (professional, amateurs), amongst other dimensions.

This study involves empirical, qualitative inquiry into the intricacies of specific performances of psalmody. Ethnographic methods (see 2.2.) are most apt for studying these performances in a contextualist, holistic manner,

⁷⁸ Baxter and Jack, “Qualitative Case Study Methodology,” 546.

⁷⁹ Baxter and Jack, “Qualitative Case Study Methodology,” 545; Priya, “Case Study Methodology,” 97, 105-06.

⁸⁰ Creswell, *Research design*, 8; Priya, “Case Study Methodology,” 105-06.

⁸¹ Priya, “Case Study Methodology,” 101.

⁸² Robert Yin, *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*, 6th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2014), 60-61.

attentive to individual differences and the dynamic nature of particular performances.⁸³ In the previous chapter, I have argued that ritual aspects, musical aspects, and bodily and sensorial aspects, need to be studied in interrelationship in order to fully understand these appropriations of psalmody. These dimensions need to be brought together with an openness for new themes and research questions to arise, since a ritual-musical appropriation is dynamic, and demands that a researcher participates and allows themselves to be transformed in the research process as well. This means to say that a rigid preconception of the frameworks within which ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms should be studied carries the risk of missing essential features. In this, I follow Mary McGann's understanding of the dynamic nature of (ritual) practices and its study:

The meanings we seek in ethnographic work are not simply lying dormant, waiting to be mined; rather, they are constantly arising and being appropriated by participants, in and through their social interaction, on this occasion, in this place.⁸⁴

As this research is participatory, taking place in situations of social interaction and embodied participation, I need to reflect on my primary 'research instrument': my own person, its backgrounds, habits, tastes, embodiment, and so forth. Priya emphasizes that, as "complete conformity in case study methodology (paralleling objectivity in quantitative research) is highly improbable", researchers should highlight their values, preconceptions and biases at the beginning of their research and should remain reflexive during the course of their investigation.⁸⁵

2.1.2. Positionality

All research is influenced by the researcher's personal background, and this is particularly the case for case study research that employs ethnographic methods in which personal observations and personal interactions (e.g. interviews) form part of the research data. Pastoral theologian Mary Clark Moschella states that it "requires the researcher to reflect regularly upon his or her interactions with research participants. Through this practice—known as *reflexivity*—the ethnographer examines his or her personal impressions and responses to experiential encounters and records these reflections in rigorous

⁸³ Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography. Principles in practice* (London: Routledge, 2007), 3.

⁸⁴ McGann, "Liturgical Musical Ethnography," 92.

⁸⁵ Priya, "Case Study Methodology," 102, 07.

journal notations."⁸⁶ Use of these notations (memos) has helped to elucidate my positionality in relation to the research, highlighting the influence of my religious (Reformed) upbringing, my (liturgical-)musical activities, my studies, and my personal spirituality.

I grew up in Leens, a small village in the Groningen countryside. My parents took me to the local church of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated). In the weekly services, we sang hymns and Genevan Psalms with organ accompaniment. Each week, at primary school, my classmates and I would learn a stanza from the Genevan Psalms by heart. I enjoyed singing at school and in church. After moving to the city of Groningen for my studies, I joined a congregation that is part of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, the largest Protestant denomination in the country. I did this mainly because my friends went there, and because of the monumental church building with its impressive historical organ. I started to accompany congregational singing on the organ in several churches, I studied musical composition for one year, and I conducted a small student choir in church services. We sang Renaissance polyphony, and some (a capella) choral classics and chorale settings, including Genevan Psalms. I also started to compose organ and choral music, again often with a focus on Genevan Psalms. Metrical Psalms were thus my first and major point of entrance into the Psalter and into psalmody.

Over the course of my research, I noticed that my personal (musical) preferences drew me towards more-highly professional performances (such as *150Psalms*) and towards experimental choral music (such as *Psalm 151*). *Genemuiders Bovenstem* collective psalmody, on the other hand, was harder for me to appreciate because the style of the singing (rather slow and somewhat loud) and the pietist spirituality that it embodies are both relatively distant from the way in which my musical taste and spirituality have developed. Nevertheless, the Genevan Psalms sung by these communities are, of course, very familiar and dear to me, as is collective singing in general.

Both the church in which I grew up and some of the churches in which I later participated were very 'word-oriented' in nature. Alongside my studies in Dutch Language and Culture, this perhaps explains why I tended to focus on texts (lyrics, transcripts of interviews) over the course of this research, and why I had a certain unease with participant observation and ritual analysis, especially at the start of the project. Despite these tendencies, I am often quite

⁸⁶ Mary Clark Moschella, "Ethnography," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie Miller-McLemore (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 225.

sensitive to sound, vision and social atmosphere, so I enjoyed conducting interviews, and had a great time writing the chapter on aesthetics.

The church I grew up in was also quite strict, with rather schematic doctrines concerning God and how to live a good (decent) life. This may be why I did not initially expect to find any 'God-talk' in the extra-ecclesial contexts that I visited (I had not yet visited a performance of *Genemuider Bovenstem* collective psalmody). Perhaps I thought that God had retreated behind the doors of the church. Over the course of my research (but not principally because of it), my own spirituality moved in the direction of liberation theology combined with elements of mysticism: I became inspired by theology's potential and convinced of its duty to empower the marginalized. At the same time, I developed a growing unease with the doctrines I grew up with which, in my experience, disregarded God's elusiveness. This made it quite challenging at times to write the chapter on the Psalms talking back (Chapter 7). I tended to amplify the prophetic, politically engaged, sometimes 'rude' voices in the data, as well as those which emphasize God's elusiveness. Critical examination of my presuppositions together with my supervisors and colleagues proved to be very effective for establishing a degree of intersubjectivity in analyzing and evaluating the research data in that particular chapter.

2.1.3. Qualitative analysis of ethnographic data

As described above, this study aims to be open to the discovery of unexpected findings that have the potential to escape predefined conceptual categories, especially in ritual-musical practices which, by definition, are performed rather than merely being (neatly) scripted. For this reason, the analysis of the ethnographic data started with open coding and categorization, a process which enabled me to discern patterns in the data which pre-formulated categorizations might have concealed.⁸⁷ In both practical theology and qualitative research in general the tracing of such patterns often raises novel questions leading to further rounds of coding which offer more-detailed analyses of specific themes, often informed by a review of scholarly literature on those particular topics. In this way, data analysis, interpretation and theory construction form a cyclical, dialectical process.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Jennifer Mason, *Qualitative Researching* (London: Sage Publications, 2002), 151; Priya, "Case Study Methodology," 106.

⁸⁸ Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, 180-81.

2.2. Research process

I investigate the ritual-musical appropriation of Psalms as a subjective and intersubjective meaning-making process and aim to acknowledge the diversity of meanings found in, and attributed to, Psalm performances. In order to do justice to this complex diversity, I have chosen to employ a cross-case study approach using ethnographic methods. The data for this project consists of ethnographic field notes, interview transcripts, and textual sources (sung lyrics, advertising texts, program notes, website announcements, etc.), each of which demand different methods for analysis.⁸⁹ I provide a list of my research data as an appendix to this dissertation. Both respondent and method triangulation serve as a strategy to do justice to this multi-layered phenomenon: I checked my interpretations with other respondents (informally, during interviews) and used different methods in order to build up a better, more detailed picture of the ritual-musical appropriation of Psalms.⁹⁰ In the following section, I describe these different aspects of my approach in greater detail, whilst Chapters 3-7 contain methodological accounts of the data analyses for these particular chapters.

The COVID-19 pandemic limited the research process in several ways: some interviews with concertgoers could only be carried out as video calls, travel restrictions made it impossible to attend *Poesia Divina* 2020, performances of *Genemuider Bovenstem* collective psalmody were canceled until April 2022, and, from March 2020, data analysis and writing had to be carried out from home. It took extra effort to find interviewees and to organize meetings with supervisors and colleagues, and spontaneous conversations with colleagues about my research (which I find to be very helpful and inspirational) were almost non-existent in this period.

2.2.1. Selection of the case studies

In selecting my case studies, I limited myself to performances that I would be able to attend in person. In order to obtain a multi-faceted perspective on the ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms I also wanted the cases to be diverse, and I wanted to involve practices taking place (at least in part) beyond the ecclesial domain.

⁸⁹ Anthropologist of religion Michael Lambek describes ethnography as "contextualist, holistic, and attentive to distinctiveness or individuality." Michael Lambek, "Ethnography," in *Vocabulary for the Study of Religion*, ed. Robert A. Segal and Kocku Von Stuckrad (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

⁹⁰ Baxter and Jack, "Qualitative Case Study Methodology," 556; Klomp, *The Sound of Worship*, 93.



Figure 1. A concert by Det Norske Solistkor in the festival *150 Psalms*. Photo by Foppe Schut.

The first case study that I selected was the festival *150 Psalms*, a large choral music festival encompassing performances from the renowned Nederlands Kamerkoor, Det Norske Solistkor, the Tallis Scholars, and the Wall Street Trinity Choir.⁹¹ All 150 Biblical Psalms were performed over the course of 12 thematic concerts, with names such as ‘A mirror to society’, ‘On the run’, ‘Power and oppression’, ‘Gratitude’ and ‘Celebration of life’. Each of the Psalms had been set by a different composer, with ‘classic’ composers such as Palestrina, Bach and Brahms appearing next to new commissions by internationally acclaimed composers such as Mohammed Fairouz, David Lang, Kate Moore and Caroline Shaw. In addition to these choral performances, the contemporary political, psychological and spiritual relevance of the Psalms was explored in a range of accompanying formats. These included lectures by Michael Ignatieff and Tom Holland, introductory speeches by well-known literary authors Désanne van Brederode, Oek de Jong and Ramsey Nasr, a photo exhibition and an exhibition in inflatable tents where visitors’ reflections were further ignited by philosophical questions based on themes found in the Psalms. I conducted semi-structured interviews with members of the festival organization: initiator Tido Visser (managing director of Nederlands Kamerkoor), concert programmer Leo Samama (also Visser’s predecessor as former managing director), theologian and Psalm translator Gerard Swüste,

⁹¹ See the project website: www.150Psalms.com/program-utrecht/.

speech and lecture organizer Merlijn Geurts (editor at De Balie, an organization that produces programs, debates often, about art, culture and politics), as well as with five festivalgoers and six singers.⁹² The festival took place before the commencement of my research. However, I was present for two of the concerts in the festival, and was able to conduct participant observation at three rehearsal days which the Nederlands Kamerkoor put on for a later edition of the festival in Aberdeen, Australia (2020). In addition to these transcribed interviews and observations, I gathered a range of different texts including the festival booklet; the Nederlands Kamerkoor grant application; interviews, reviews and opinion articles in different newspapers; the texts of the lectures; a jubilee speech by Tido Visser; and the texts of the introductory speeches.

The second case I selected, *Psalm 151*, offered a different approach, with its performance consisting of new texts by prominent literary authors, set to music by avant-garde classical composer Boudewijn Tarenskeen. Tarenskeen, who was born in 1952, has worked with many prominent musicians, ensembles and orchestras including pianist Ronald Brautigam, violinist Isabelle van Keulen, harpist Lavinia Meier, singers Hadewych Minis, Wende Sniijders and Ramses Shaffy, ASKO|Schönberg, the Metropole Orkest, Rotterdam Philharmonic, Cello Octet Amsterdam, and Cappella Amsterdam. Several of his works take themes from the Bible and Christian traditions as a starting point for critical appropriation. These include examples such as Tarenskeen's oratorios *Saul*, *Luther* and *Matthew Passion*, as well as *Psalm 151*.⁹³ While *150 Psalms* seemed to be a celebration of psalmody in the canon of (Western) choral music, *Psalm 151* appeared to be an attempt to deconstruct and reinvent that tradition. Tarenskeen invited eight authors who are known for their public reflection on religion in society to write a new 'Psalm': Freek de Jonge, Ramsey Nasr, Willem Jan Otten, Maria Barnas, Hafid Bouazza, Lucas Rijneveld, Mustafa Stitou and Marjolijn van Heemstra. His 100-minute composition included all of these texts and was performed by the professional choir Cappella Amsterdam in a concert format in church buildings and concert halls with organ accompaniment, or with two accordionists at venues without a pipe organ. I conducted semi-structured interviews with composer Boudewijn Tarenskeen,

⁹² Pseudonyms of festivalgoers: Eva, Johan, Roelof, Saskia, Steven; and singers: Camila, Clemens, Dora, James, Karin, Martin.

⁹³ Some of these works have already been the subject of research in ritual and liturgical studies: Mirella Klomp, "Joseph & Jesus. Bible-based Musicals and Contemporary Passions staged in the Public Domain: an Exploration of a Research Perspective," *Yearbook for Liturgical and Ritual Studies* 27 (2011); Lieke Wijnia and Mirella Klomp, "Tarenskeen's LUTHER. Allowing for New Forms of Sacrality," *Yearbook for Liturgical and Ritual Studies* 30 (2014).

with three singers and with four concertgoers.⁹⁴ I also carried out participant observation during two rehearsals, two concerts (one in the Nieuwe Kerk, the Hague, and a second one in the Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ, Amsterdam) and one introduction to a concert.⁹⁵ Additionally, I collected texts from the concert booklet and the project website.

In order to do justice to traditions of Psalm recitation, of psalms as 'elevated speech' (see section 1.2.) beyond the unproductive distinction between speech and song, I added the case of *Poesia Divina*. In this project, poets were asked to create new Psalms, and in announcements relating to the project these Psalms were referred to as 'sung prayers'. *Poesia Divina* took place over the course of four years, and over the course of this time 36 well-known poets were invited to write and recite new Psalms in churches, monasteries, public libraries and theaters within the context of the festival *Musica Divina* in the Kempen area in Flanders. I attended performances of this event in 2019.⁹⁶ Furthermore, I conducted semi-structured interviews with festival director and initiator Jelle Dierickx, with poets Charles Ducal, Bart Stouten, Delphine Lecompte, Gaea Schoeters and Maarten Inghels, with supporting organizer Carl De Strycker of the Poëziecentrum, and with a visitor I refer to by the pseudonym Julia. I also made email contact with another visitor who I refer to as Paul (pseudonym). Alongside this, I collected textual materials and conducted participant observation during a day on which the poets recited their Psalms for camera and in a small church in Herentals.

My final case study is *Genemuider Bovenstem* psalmody, which contrasts with my other three case studies through its focus on collective singing and through its restriction to the realm of church buildings, albeit in two different ritual contexts: liturgy and collective singing events. *Genemuider Bovenstem* psalmody is a tradition associated with the Dutch town of Genemuiden (although the tradition is not limited to a single place) and features an additional, higher melody which is sung above the Genevan Psalm melodies sung by (Reformed) congregations.⁹⁷ *Genemuider Bovenstem* psalmody has been assigned to the inventory of intangible heritage by the Dutch Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage, which implements UNESCO policies on behalf

⁹⁴ Pseudonyms of singers: Bianca, Iris, Stefan; and concertgoers: Heleen, José, Rob, Tessa.

⁹⁵ A later performance can be watched online: www.cultuur247.nl/boudewijn-tarenskeer-Psalms-151/.

⁹⁶ See the website of the 2020 edition: www.musica-divina.be/en/programme/poesia-divina-live-2020.

⁹⁷ See one of the many examples on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/2SckJZ31dLo>.

of the Dutch government.⁹⁸ *Genemuiders Bovenstem* collective psalmody has become heritagized but still remains a liturgical practice. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic I was initially unable to attend any performances of *Genemuiders Bovenstem*; however, I had experienced this tradition twice prior to the commencement of this study. The interview with singers Erik, Arjen and Lammert took place in the Grote Kerk ('Great Church') of Genemuiden, and we sang *Genemuiders Bovenstem* Psalms together in the space where it is sung every Sunday. Some of the interviews took place via telephone or video call, and I made initial contact with 12 of the interviewees by placing an invitation in two of Genemuiden's local newspapers. Although I emphasized that I was looking for a variety of respondents, it is likely that individuals who are less enthusiast about *Genemuiders Bovenstem* or its heritagization would have avoided responding. In the interviews, I showed participants a YouTube video of *Bovenstem* singing and we talked extensively about the live experience. After the pandemic, in 2022, I was able to conduct participant observation at a collective singing event.

2.2.2. Participant observation

I undertook participant observation in all four case studies, attending two rehearsals and two concerts of *Psalm 151* in 2018, performances of *Poesia Divina* in 2019, three rehearsal days with the Nederlands Kamerkoor in 2020, and a collective singing event of *Genemuiders Bovenstem* psalmody in 2022. The COVID-19 pandemic limited participant observation in several ways. As travel restrictions prohibited me from attending *Poesia Divina* in August 2020, I had anticipated attending the final edition in 2021, but this, sadly, never came to pass as *Poesia Divina* would end after four instead of five editions. Likewise, I was only able to attend a performance of *Genemuiders Bovenstem* in May 2022, although I had experienced the tradition twice before, some years before the start of the research. In an effort to compensate for this, I used an elicitation method (a technique for igniting interviewees' memories and imagination of attending a live event of performance) by showing interviewees a YouTube video of *Bovenstem* singing, following this by extensive discussion about the live experience. In addition to this, the interview with singers Erik, Arjen and Lammert (pseudonyms) took place in the Grote Kerk of Genemuiden. This enabled us to sing the descant together in the space where it is traditionally performed every Sunday. While attending all these performances, I made

⁹⁸ See the intangible heritage website: www.immaterieelerfgoed.nl/en/bovenstemzingen.

notes of what I heard, saw, felt, smelled, and thought.⁹⁹ These notes proved to be important for the analysis, as will become particularly clear in Chapter 5, 'Making sense of the Psalms'. In addition to my observations and the interviews (see below), I gathered textual sources such as program booklets, promotional materials, newspaper reviews of the performances, and sets of lyrics. Also, I took photos of the different performance locations and I made audio recordings of some of the performances.

2.2.3. Interviews

In order to enrich my data with different perspectives on the Psalms being performed, I conducted interviews with individuals in a range of different roles in and around the performances. I used several different strategies for finding interviewees, including reaching out to organizers of the performances by email in order to arrange meetings with organizers, artists and performers, handing out small invitations to attendees when they left the venue after the performance, and placing invitations in the email newsletter of the *Nederlands Kamerkoor* and in local newspapers in Genemuiden. As a result, I was able to interview two composers, six poets, fifteen singers, three musicians, ten organizers, and thirteen concertgoers.

All the interviews were semi-structured and open-ended, meaning that I had prepared some topics to discuss in advance of the interviews, but the interviewee(s) and I would also openly explore a range of topics that came up during the conversation. When analyzing the interviews, some of these additional topics emerged as important theme in the data, for example the biographical memories of psalmody that many interviewees brought into the conversation (see Chapter 3). However, each interview started by going back to the particular performance: what were the interviewee's reasons for attending; could s/he describe what happened; what did s/he think about the performance, etc. Often, towards the end of the interview, I would ask: 'Was this a Psalm, and why so?' Many of the interviewees' reflections when answering that question have formed the basis of the analysis in Chapter 7.

2.2.4. Data analysis

All interviews were recorded and transcribed before being coded using *Atlas.ti* software together with the field notes and other textual materials (program booklets, texts of speeches, public announcements of performances, newspaper reviews of the performances). Transcribing the interviews myself and coding

⁹⁹ I made six sets of field notes.

the transcripts (in several rounds), helped to acquaint me closely with the data on a detailed level. When reading and coding the data, I largely engaged in a process of 'interpretive reading', a term used by sociologist Jennifer Mason. An interpretive reading "will involve you in constructing or documenting a version of what you think the data mean or represent, or what you think you can infer from them."¹⁰⁰ As I describe in the methodological sections in Chapters 3-7, interpretive readings are often informed by a literature review and by the findings in previous chapters but aim to stay very close to interviewees' own words. A purely 'literal' reading (if such a thing is even possible) would make it impossible to interpret single participants' words and actions in light of others' words and actions. It is therefore the researcher's task to be attentive to the symbolic or indirect meanings in what participants say and do.

I discuss my coding and analysis procedures in further detail in chapters 3-7, since the research question and topic of each particular chapter made the procedure slightly different each time.

2.3. Reliability and validity

Criteria of reliability and validity are less appropriate when it comes to assessing the quality of qualitative research than they are for quantitative research. Mason argues that reliability is easier to measure in quantitative studies where "standardized research instruments are used."¹⁰¹ Qualitative studies are contextual and dynamic in character, often involving less standardized methods. Mason notes that

indeed, it is possible to argue that an obsession with reliability (...) inappropriately overshadows more important questions of validity, resulting in a nonsensical situation where a researcher may be not at all clear about what they are measuring (validity), but can nevertheless claim to be measuring it with a great deal of precision (reliability).¹⁰²

Furthermore, Mason emphasizes that qualitative researchers should ensure and demonstrate that their "data generation and analysis have not only been appropriate to the research questions, but also thorough, careful, honest and accurate."¹⁰³ Through the course of this research, I have discussed my

¹⁰⁰ Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, 149.

¹⁰¹ Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, 187.

¹⁰² Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, 187.

¹⁰³ Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, 188.

research activities (fieldwork, data analysis, reflections, interpretations) with the supervisors of my project, with colleagues in practical theology at the Protestant Theological University Amsterdam, and at various international conferences: at the congresses of *Societas Liturgica* (in 2019 and 2021), and at the *Christian Congregational Music* conference (in 2019 and 2021). Chapter 3-7 have all been subject to double-blind peer review after being submitted to research journals. These intersubjective activities improved the integrity of my fieldwork, the rigor of my analyses, the effectiveness of my reflections, and the accuracy of my interpretations. Furthermore, I have tried to be as transparent as possible in the choices I have made and the methods that I have used. Upon request, the anonymized research data (audio, transcripts, other materials) and data analyses (in ATLAS.ti) can be inspected for verification. By providing detailed accounts of my approach and by offering descriptions of the contexts, practices and persons under study, I offer other researchers the opportunity to check my research.

Mason discusses two ways for demonstrating the validity of qualitative research: validity of data generation methods, and validity of interpretation. The first concerns whether the selected performances, interviewees and other data indeed provide material for answering the research question.¹⁰⁴ The selected performances and interviewees are diverse and supplement one another. The four research cases were selected because psalmody seems to play a central role in contemporary performances, something which, indeed, appears to be the case. Furthermore, all the performances and virtually all the interviews provided additional, sometimes unique, information for answering the research question. Interviewees appeared to be able to reflect on psalmody, sometimes even in light of the past and present role and the outlook of religion in contemporary society.

Validity of interpretation is established by asking whether the study's analytical methods do indeed serve to answer the research question, and whether the interpretation of the data is justified.¹⁰⁵ My research question concerns ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms in contemporary culture. Although my research is limited to four cases, the diversity within these cases provides a rather broad perspective on the appropriation of psalmody. Moreover, by interpreting these appropriations in relation to other research on the transfer and transformation of religion, I am able to reflect on my analyses in relation

¹⁰⁴ Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, 189-91.

¹⁰⁵ Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, 191-94.

to existing theories on similar, related and overlapping subjects. Finally, as I observed in writing about the reliability of this study, the reflexive notes that I have made help to reveal my lines of reasoning through the course of the research.

2.4. Ethics

This research was planned and carried out in accordance with Dutch privacy regulations (AVG). Furthermore, I followed the policies of the Protestant Theological University and Universities of the Netherlands in writing a data management plan and in asking interviewees' permission to interview them, to record the interview, and to use the interview transcript for the purposes of scientific research. Interviewees that can easily be identified as a result of their public role (such as a composers and conductors) were asked for informed and written consent for using their names, while other interviewees were anonymized. The key which would allow the identification of interviewees' real names has been saved at a different location to the interview transcripts. The anonymized data and documentation will be stored in Dataverse, an open data repository, for a minimum of 10 years. Parts of the data will be accessible and reusable under an open license.

3



A Psalm is always a memory

Nostalgia and sacrality in contemporary ritual-
musical appropriations of the Psalms

3.1. Introduction

I was raised in the Reformed tradition, so I'm very familiar with Psalms. Later, I left church, but this has been an important part of my life. (...) I've experienced an inner iconoclastic fury myself. (...) Of course, when I think of Psalms, I think of the Psalms we sang in church. (...) I still do like singing. I do a lot of mantra singing – my new Psalms...

interview with concertgoer Tessa (*Psalm 151*), 13 December 2018

In my research on ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms outside religious rituals, I have often noticed that respondents recall biographical memories of psalmody.¹⁰⁶ When asked about their experience of such a recent performance of Psalms, they compare this experience with their memories of Psalm performances at earlier moments in their lives. Tessa, quoted above, who grew up with communal psalmody in the Reformed Church in the Netherlands, identifies the mantras she sings nowadays as her 'new Psalms,' and wonders whether the music of *Psalm 151* that she heard at a concert can really be categorized as 'Psalm', apparently regardless of its title. Her biographical memories of performed Psalms, and her reflection on her individual musi-

¹⁰⁶ The 'antiphon' for this chapters is taken from the ending of *Psalm 151*, on which the title of this chapter is based: www.henkvoegel.com/antiphon-3/.

cal practice after she left church, both play a part in how she interprets the performance of *Psalm 151*.

Psalm 151 is one of the three cases discussed in this chapter. I studied performances of *Psalm 151*, concerts of a new composition for choir and organ/accordions with new texts; choral music festival *150 Psalms* with performances of all biblical Psalms; and *Poesia Divina*, where poets recite their new 'Psalms' at the music festival *Musica Divina*. I term these performances 'ritual-musical appropriations' of Psalms, by which I mean that, in these performances, the notion of 'Psalms' is ritually and musically redefined in new contexts, beyond the domain of religious ritual. It strikes me that artists and organizers build their programmes around the notion of 'Psalms', which are inextricably linked to Jewish and Christian traditions.

These ritual-musical appropriations take place in a context marked by steady processes of de-churching and the decline of the institutional Christian religion.¹⁰⁷ Simultaneously to these processes, religious language and religious ritual practices have migrated from the domain of institutional religion into the public domain, or the domain of cultural heritage.¹⁰⁸ Mirella Klomp and Marcel Barnard have described such migrating musical forms as 'sacro-soundscapes'.¹⁰⁹ A 'sacro-soundscape' encompasses the whole complex of performed sounds of a cultural form as well as the way in which it meanders through a cultural landscape, as individuals, groups and institutions "carry these various sounds along, cherish them, discuss them, reject them, leave them behind, and/or find them again".¹¹⁰ In this chapter, I bring to light how histories and (biographical) memories of the people involved play a role in the sacro-soundscape of psalmody.

¹⁰⁷ Bernts and Berghuijs, *God in Nederland*; CBS, "Meer dan de helft Nederlanders niet religieus."; De Hart and Van Houwelingen, *Christenen in Nederland*.

¹⁰⁸ Klomp, *Playing On*, 55; Klomp and Barnard, "Sacro-Soundscapes," 243, 50; Meyer, "Recycling the Christian Past," 65, 70-71, 79-82; cf. Aleida Assmann, "Canon and Archive," in *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Sara B. Young, Ansgar Nünning, and Astrid Erll (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 100-01.

¹⁰⁹ Klomp and Barnard, "Sacro-Soundscapes," 254.

¹¹⁰ Klomp and Barnard, "Sacro-Soundscapes," 254. In the concept sacro-soundscape, the prefix 'sacro' is not intended as a metaphysical claim of the sacred nature of the soundscapes that are studied, but as referring to the religious traditions with which, in this case, the Psalms have long been (exclusively) associated Klomp and Barnard, "Sacro-Soundscapes."; cf. Wijnia, "Making Sense through Music," 34-41. Following its description, anthropologist of music Monique Ingalls and ritual scholar Martin Hoondert have also worked with this concept Martin Hoondert, "New Hymnology," in *Zukunftsraum Liturgie: Gottesdienst vor neuen Herausforderungen*, ed. Peter Ebenbauer and Basilius J. Groen (Vienna: LIT Verlag, 2019), 106; Monique M. Ingalls, *Singing the Congregation. How Contemporary Worship Music Forms Evangelical Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 37.

In the context of the Netherlands and Flanders, these individual memories might very well include memories of collective psalmody in church or at school. Calvinist Protestantism, one of the dominant religious traditions in this area (and one of the typical tropes in Dutch collective self-understandings), is particularly well-known for the communal singing of Psalms, both in ecclesial and educational settings.¹¹¹ Many people who went to Calvinist Protestant churches, Sunday and elementary schools still remember this. Other possible memories are responsorial Psalms in Roman-Catholic liturgy, the music of Taizé, and earlier concert performances, to name only a few. Such biographical memories of collective psalmody, evoked by people's participation in current performances, provide a unique insight into how individuals navigate through, and respond to, the 'sacro-soundscape' of Psalms. This serves my aim of understanding how, in the Dutch and Flemish contexts, religion is in motion. To prevent my approach from being hindered by a conceptualization of religion that is too rigid, I opt to use the notion of sacrality. Sacrality denotes a "marker of ultimate, nonnegotiable value used as sense-making strategy that relates perceptions of ordinary and non-ordinary character", and is not limited to religious or secular settings.¹¹² When tracing the sacred in meaning-making processes, differences between the ordinary and the 'set-apart' come to the fore; that is, differences between people's highest ideals and indifferences, between their most-remarkable experiences and everyday routine.¹¹³

This is the research question which this chapter aims to answer: *How to understand the role of biographical memories in constructions of 'the sacred' by participants in current ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms in Dutch and Flemish cultures?*

In my study of the role of memory in appropriations of Psalms, my approach is characterized by a focus on ritual-musical performance. This forms my main lens. Here 'appropriation' means: the adaptation and transformation of cultural forms within new or changed contexts.¹¹⁴ Following historian Willem Frijhoff's definition, it is the "meaning-making process by which groups or individuals

¹¹¹ Jan de Bruijn, "Woord vooraf," in *Psalmsingen in de Nederlanden van de Zestiende Eeuw tot Heden*, ed. Jan de Bruin and Willem Heijting (Kampen: Kok, 1991), 11; Krol, "Dutch," 142-45.

¹¹² Wijnia, "Making Sense through Music," 42; cf. Balkenhol, Van den Hemel, and Stengs, "Introduction," 2.

¹¹³ Cf. Balkenhol, Van den Hemel, and Stengs, "Introduction," 4-8.

¹¹⁴ Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 1st ed. (London, New York: Routledge, 2005), 2, 10-12, 63-64; Wallace, "Mongolian Livestock Rituals," 168. I am aware that 'cultural appropriation' has become a heavily debated subject, with 'appropriation' often denoting expropriation by the powerful from the marginalized. Here, I aim to grasp the complexities of the meaning-making process that I term 'appropriation'.

attribute new meanings to external bearers of meaning".¹¹⁵ I use the pairing 'ritual-musical' to emphasize my study of these appropriations as social activities: ritual practices consisting of formalized and repeated (inter)actions, in which sound is marked as an exceptionally significant medium.¹¹⁶ Both bodily participation in a specific location (the activity of singing) and the hearing of music appear to be very powerful in evoking biographical memories.¹¹⁷

My study contributes to the fields of memory studies, anthropology, religious studies, and ritual and liturgical studies, showing local peculiarities of more broadly theorized cultural trends regarding collective memory, and transformations of religious traditions.¹¹⁸ Locally engaged research is required to be able to offer a fine-grained understanding of the place of religion-rooted ritual in public space, and its meaning for the individuals involved.¹¹⁹ Thus, I must pay heed that the mechanics of individual memory are not conflated or equated with collective memory and the meaning-making of individuals in the three cases that I study are homogenized.¹²⁰

115 Frijhoff, "Toeëigening," 108; cf. Schneider, "On 'Appropriation,'" 217-19, 24-26. Frijhoff is largely indebted to Michel de Certeau. See: De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*.

116 Grimes, *Ritual Criticism*, 14; Post and Faro, "Een Ritual Studies Onderzoeksdesign," 28; Wijnia, "Making Sense through Music," 45.

117 Ameer Baird et al., "Music evoked autobiographical memories in people with behavioural variant frontotemporal dementia," *Memory* 28, no. 3 (2020): 323; Lola L. Cuddy et al., "Music-evoked autobiographical memories (MEAMs) in Alzheimer disease: Evidence for a positivity effect," *Cogent Psychology* 4, no. 1 (2017): 17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311908.2016.1277578>; Thomas Fuchs, "The Phenomenology of Body Memory," in *Body Memory, Metaphor and Movement*, ed. S.C. Koch et al. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2012), 19; Sandra Garrido and Jane W. Davidson, *Music, Nostalgia and Memory. Historical and Psychological Perspectives* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 7-8, 32; Francesco Iani, "Embodied memories: Reviewing the role of the body in memory processes," *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review* 26, no. 6 (2019): 1758-59; Lauren Istvandy, "Popular Music and Autobiographical Memory. Intimate connections over the life course," in *The Routledge Companion to Popular Music History and Heritage*, ed. Sarah Baker et al. (London, New York: Routledge, 2018), 199; Geraldine Mossière, "Experience, Subjectivity and Performance: an Anthropological Approach to Pentecostal Rituals Based on the Body," in *Understanding Religious Ritual. Theoretical Approaches and Innovations*, ed. John Hoffmann (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 58; Michael Pickering, "Popular music and the memory spectrum," in *The Routledge Companion to Popular Music History and Heritage*, ed. Sarah Baker et al. (London, New York: Routledge, 2018), 191; Catherine J. Stevens, "Is memory for music special?," *Memory Studies* 8, no. 3 (2015): 263, 65.

118 In all fields mentioned, authors have expressed the need for such local perspectives (see: Balkenhol, Van den Hemel and Stengs, 2020: 7-8, 15; Bennett and Rogers, 2016: 49-53, 58; Istvandy, 2018: 199, 205; Klomp 2020, 162). My findings also serve as comparison to the studies of Sarah Bakker Kellogg and Seçil Dağtas, who studied how (religious) minorities negotiate their position, and 'religious' and 'secular' dimensions through performance (Bakker Kellogg 2015; Dağtas, 2020).

119 Cf. Balkenhol, Van den Hemel, and Stengs, "Introduction," 7-8, 14-15; Klomp, *Playing On*, 144; Meyer, "Recycling the Christian Past," 65, 79-82.

120 Cf. Andy Bennett and Ian Rogers, *Popular Music Scenes and Cultural Memory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 49-53, 58; Istvandy, "Popular Music and Autobiographical Memory," 203-05.

3.2. Conceptual framework

For my study of the role of biographical memory in ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms, I make use of the work on remembering and forgetting by Aleida Assmann, on nostalgia by Michael Pickering, Sandra Garrido and Jane Davidson, and on sacrality by Lieke Wijnia.

In her work on collective memory, Aleida Assmann distinguishes between active and passive modes of remembering and forgetting. Some memories are cherished (active remembering), others are suppressed or destroyed (active forgetting), some are maintained inattentively (passive remembering), and others sink unnoticed into oblivion (passive forgetting).¹²¹ Thus, collective memory is seen as a process of selection, which is in line with the broader consensus in memory studies.¹²² In order to keep a certain memory practice 'alive' and adjust it to present needs, certain (aspects of) memories are preserved, while others are forgotten, whether deliberately or unintentionally.¹²³

According to Michael Pickering, the same applies to individual musical memory.¹²⁴ Musical experience can trigger all kinds of biographical memories, and individuals can decide to (not) trigger certain memories by choosing the music they want to listen to.¹²⁵ Next to this active remembering (voluntary acts of remembering), musical experience can trigger involuntarily memories and can surprise listeners with nearly forgotten memories.¹²⁶ Also, music that is never heard can have exactly this effect, by evoking reminiscence of familiar genres, styles, timbres, etc.¹²⁷ Therefore, participants in ritual-musical performances of Psalms may experience reminiscences of previous experiences evoked by the performance they are attending, or they may feel that some of these biographical memories are beginning to fade away.¹²⁸

121 Assmann, "Canon and Archive," 97-100.

122 Assmann, "Canon and Archive," 97; Liedeke Plate and Anneke Smelik, *Performing Memory in Art and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 20.

123 Veysel Apaydin, "The interlinkage of cultural memory, heritage and discourses of construction, transformation and destruction," in *Critical Perspectives on Cultural Memory and Heritage. Construction, Transformation and Destruction*, ed. Veysel Apaydin (London: UCL Press, 2020), 16-17; Assmann, "Canon and Archive," 101, 04-05.

124 Pickering, "Popular music and the memory spectrum," 192.

125 Pickering, "Popular music and the memory spectrum," 191.

126 Cuddy et al., "Music-evoked autobiographical memories," 17; Pickering, "Popular music and the memory spectrum," 196.

127 Amy M. Belfi, Brett Karlan, and Daniel Tranel, "Music evokes vivid autobiographical memories," *Memory* 24, no. 7 (2016): 984-85, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09658211.2015.1061012>; Petr Janata, Stefan T. Tomic, and Sonja K. Rakowski, "Characterisation of music-evoked autobiographical memories," *Memory* 15, no. 8 (2007): 868-69, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09658210701734593>.

128 Cf. Birgit Meyer, "Religion as Mediation," *Entangled Religions* 11, no. 3 (2020): [20], <https://>

Biographical memories help individuals to construct a narrative about themselves and their contexts, and the continuities and discontinuities through time.¹²⁹ Passive remembering can change individuals' views on who they are and have been. Active remembering, that is, the voluntary selection of memories, shows how individuals wish to imagine themselves and surroundings through time.¹³⁰ Such reflections on the continuities and discontinuities between past, present and future is what I term 'nostalgia'.¹³¹ Here, nostalgia is wider than the common idea of nostalgia as a romantic yearning for an idealized past. In my understanding, nostalgia is the broader interpretation that participants construct regarding differences and similarities between past, present and future.¹³²

Sandra Garrido and Jane Davidson list a number of different forms that nostalgic reflection evoked by music and singing can take: it can help people "to process and reinterpret past events", "to construct identity" and to reconnect "with people from their past".¹³³ For example, some participants would not want a classical music festival with performed Psalms to take place in a church, as that would remind them of their conservative Protestant upbringing from which they have subsequently moved away. In this example, active forgetting of the church setting in which participants once experienced psalmody is motivated by broader reflection on who they have since become—on how they understand their current identity. Nostalgic reflection can also take the form of (re)interpretation of the present (the quote at the start of this chapter is an example of this) and imagination of the future. Remembering, active remembering in particular, is often future-oriented: certain memories are remembered or forgotten in order to suit the world that people hope to live in.¹³⁴

doi.org/10.13154/er.11.2020.8444.

¹²⁹ Bennett and Rogers, *Popular Music Scenes and Cultural Memory*, 45-46; Lauren Istvandity, "The lifetime soundtrack 'on the move': Music, autobiographical memory and mobilities," *Memory Studies* (2019): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698019856064>; Pickering, "Popular music and the memory spectrum," 193, 95-96.

¹³⁰ Pickering, "Popular music and the memory spectrum," 196.

¹³¹ Cf. Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley, "The Modalities of Nostalgia," *Current Sociology* 54, no. 6 (2006): 936, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392106068458>.

¹³² Cf. Pickering and Keightley, "The Modalities of Nostalgia," 920. This is similar to the notion of 'mnemonic imagination' in Pickering's more recent work (Pickering, 2018: 196-197).

¹³³ Garrido and Davidson, *Music, Nostalgia and Memory*, 33.

¹³⁴ Apaydin, "Introduction: why cultural memory and heritage?," 2-3; Apaydin, "The interlinkage of cultural memory, heritage and discourses of construction, transformation and destruction," 16; Assmann, "Canon and Archive," 97; Pickering and Keightley, "The Modalities of Nostalgia," 920, 36; Apaydin, "Introduction," 2-3; Assmann, "Canon and Archive," 97; Pickering and Keightley, "The Modalities of Nostalgia," 920, 36; Pickering, "Popular music and the memory spectrum," 196-97.

The notion of the 'sacred' is helpful for distinguishing the central aspects in active and passive remembering and forgetting. In nostalgic reflections, certain elements can be qualified as 'sacred' if they appear to be of the utmost importance for participants, or if they are differentiated from the 'ordinary'. Sacrality is a quality of valuation processes, whether in a religious context or somewhere else.¹³⁵ I qualify certain meanings or personal values in my data as 'sacred' if these appear to be non-ordinary or exceptional, indeed "set apart" for participants.¹³⁶ In the nostalgic reflections which participants employ as a motivation for their active remembering or forgetting, I understand those topics which are 'set apart' to consist of all convictions which form fundamental, non-negotiable values for the participants.¹³⁷ In passive remembering and forgetting, I understand as 'sacred' all those experiences that participants recall as something special, as something that changed their view of themselves, their histories, or their worldview.¹³⁸

In summary, active and passive forgetting and remembering serve as a basic framework for discerning how participants relate to the memories of Psalms that they (wish to) remember or forget. The notion of nostalgia helps me to situate these memories in the broader frames that participants construct of past, present and future. Finally, qualities of sacrality make me attentive to what intentions and experiences come to the fore as set apart in the ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms.

3.3. Methodology

This chapter is based on ethnographic fieldwork undertaken during 2018, 2019 and 2020, which utilized a number of different methods for data gathering and analysis. I studied three different cases: two performances of *Psalms 151*, the festival *150 Psalms*, and the poetry event *Poesia Divina*. These cases were selected for their aim to innovate psalmody beyond the context of religious ritual, and because they took place only recently, so I could do ethnographic

¹³⁵ Wijnia, "Making Sense through Music," 32-33.

¹³⁶ Balkenhol, Van den Hemel, and Stengs, "Introduction," 4-8; Evans, "The Sacred," 35-36.

¹³⁷ Veiko Anttonen, "Sacred," in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, ed. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (London and New York: Cassell, 2000), 280-81; Wijnia, "Making Sense through Music," 38, 42.

¹³⁸ Catherine Bell and others have theorized that, in late modernity, ritual has become 'expressive': individuals participate in collective ritual by means to express their 'authentic self' (Bell, 1997; cf. Apaydin, 2020b: 3-4; Barnard, 2001: 192-193; Klomp, 2020: 241). My approach will help to disentangle how ritual is 'impressive' as well: how their participation in Psalm singing both expresses and challenges the views they have of themselves through time.

research. I interviewed participants with different roles (organizers, concertgoers, performers), in order to collect data that are rich in terms of participants' intentions and values (active remembering/forgetting), and their experiences (passive remembering/forgetting). Furthermore, I carried out participant observation, and collected and analyzed texts from concert booklets, project websites, reviews and opinion articles in newspapers.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. I coded all the textual material using Atlas.ti software. The first round of coding consisted of 'initial', 'descriptive' and 'value' codes.¹³⁹ After a second round of 'axial coding', I grouped all codes into categories or code groups using Assmann's theory of active and passive remembering and forgetting.¹⁴⁰ I further refined my analysis using the concept of nostalgia leading to six thematic categories of memories in total, and the concept of sacrality to understand the sacred desires and sacred experiences (discussed in the next section).

3.4. Remembering and forgetting Psalms

My analysis shows that the nostalgic narratives constructed by participants when they reflect on how they (intend to) remember or forget certain aspects of Psalms can be categorized into six thematic categories. The first category 'Memories of comforting Psalms,' for example, includes memories of participants regarding the comforting effect that performed Psalms had on them, framed in nostalgic reflection: "As a child, I felt afraid when listening to Psalms, but now I can find comfort in them, finally" (interview with Tessa, concertgoer of *Psalms 151*). The other five categories are 'Memories of Psalms in church', 'Memories of God', 'Memories of the Psalms' relevance', 'Memories of Psalms in concerts', and 'Memories of singing Psalms together'. Some of the themes concern the Psalms' content, others the context where participants experienced psalmody. I will discuss all six categories, starting with the category with the widest variation of positions regarding its theme, and ending with the category with the least.

3.4.1. Memories of comforting Psalms

One theme that I find memories to centre around is the emotional comfort

¹³⁹ Jeanine Evers, *Kwalitatieve analyse: Kunst én kunde* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2015), 81, 89; Johnny Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2009), 81-85, 70-73, 89-93. The first and second coding methods are also known as respectively 'open' and 'topic' coding (Saldaña, 2009: 81, 70).

¹⁴⁰ Saldaña, *Coding Manual*, 139-45, 59-63.

given by the performance of Psalms. Generally, concertgoers expect performances of Psalms to give them some sort of comfort. For some, this is how they know psalmody from earlier in their lives, while others want to experience it in a more comforting way than before. Some organizers and performers, however, feel that the performance of Psalms should be more than comforting alone, or not so comfortable at all, as they think that psalmody should be relevant to uncomfortable injustices of the present (see the section on the Psalms' relevance).

With regard to active remembering, especially listeners have the desire to conserve the Psalms as something 'comforting'. This can contrast with their memories that the Psalms could be 'depressing' or 'fearful'. Heleen (concertgoer at *Psalm 151*) intentionally listens to and sings Psalms that are consonant and harmonious "to find joy and balance in life" – something she has done for a number of decades as an enthusiast amateur singer (interview, 6 December 2018).

Some organizers and performers, however, actively want to forget the comforting effect of psalmody. Instead, they think that the present, with its political turmoil, asks for performances of Psalms that show awareness of these injustices. To them, performances that are (solely) comforting are inappropriate in a political and societal landscape that is marked by polarization and inequality. Désanne van Brederode, who was a speaker at *150 Psalms*, explains that the joyful Psalms that she sung up to a few years ago in The Christian Community, where she is a member, have now become inappropriate, as her friends from Syria feel hurt by a "spirituality that only speaks of peace and unity" – a biographical narrative of discontinuity.¹⁴¹

Alongside these examples of active remembering and forgetting, I also observe passive remembering and forgetting in the experienced (dis)continuities between memories and performances of Psalms. For example, singers and festivalgoers found comfort in the performances in *150 Psalms*, in a way that recalls their previous experiences of Psalms (interviews with Eva and Johan, Dora on 28 January 2020, James on 29 January 2020). More diverse than these experienced continuities are the experienced discontinuities, mostly heard from concertgoers of *Psalm 151*. *Psalm 151* was more dissonant in musical style, and the texts by different poets showed a great variety. Some concertgoers regretted the absence of a comforting aspect, while others were pleasantly

141 See: www.trouw.nl/nieuws/Psalmen-zijn-een-onuitputtelijke-bron-van-inspiratie~b98c4b26/ (accessed 8 January 2024).



Figure 2. Speaker Désanne van Brederode. Photo by Foppe Schut.

surprised that these Psalms were not comforting. Still others were pleased to find comfort in new ways, in contrast to their memories of the Psalms as fearful or sad. Some concertgoers of *Psalm 151* felt that the comforting aspect was being forgotten, and they regretted that an avant-garde, experimental style of music seemed to have replaced the comforting sounds they would have liked to hear (interviews with Heleen and Rob, both on 6 December 2018). In the case of *150 Psalms*, which was brought out as a ‘ritual for contemplation’, several festivalgoers and singers found that the highly diverse repertoire hindered them from getting into a more comfortable meditative state, although they enjoyed the beauty of the performances. The concertgoers who found comfort in new ways, were amused, or even brought to laughter, by the performance of *Psalm 151*. They remember, for example, how, in the church of their youth, Psalms made them feel scared or sad, and they are therefore surprised to find joy and hope in current performances: “It appears that Psalms can be funny and appealing as well!”, as Tessa explains (interview). She discovers an aspect of Psalms which she deemed impossible, having confined the Psalms to her biographical past when she still was a church member.

3.4.2. Memories of Psalms in church

A second category of memories that are (to be) forgotten or remembered consists of memories that respondents relate primarily to Psalms performed in church. Almost all respondents reflected on this issue, often describing their personal history with the church. They relate the aspects of Psalms they (wish to) remember or forget to nostalgic reflections about how they themselves and the church have (not) changed, or should (not) change.

Several respondents actively remember aspects of Psalms that they find to be 'churchy', such as the spatial setting of church buildings. "That is their home", as concertgoer at *150 Psalms* Eva suggested, relating this desire to her commitment as a strictly Reformed church member (interview), while concertgoer and newspaper reviewer Guido van Oorschot preferred Psalms to be performed in churches because of their acoustics.¹⁴² In 2019, *Poesia Divina* did take place in a small-town church and Gregorian chant was played through the speakers before and after the event. Poet Delphine Lecompte was grateful for this experience, she felt that visiting a church involves "returning to her inner core again", although "maybe that's childish". When reciting her Psalms in a church, she feels she gets the chance to "praise God" again (interview with Delphine Lecompte, 28 September 2019). Poet Gaea Schoeters, who identifies as atheist, uses the chance to give a "grave sacrality" to her performance by "reciting theatrically, like a priest" (interview with Gaea Schoeters).

Some organizers of the events wanted to forget the Psalms' associations with experiences of church. I find two recurring nostalgic narratives that serve to motivate this active forgetting, and both are narratives of discontinuity. Individuals describe the break they have made with the church, at least the denomination of their youth, or they describe the church as outdated. In both cases, they propose alternatives to what, in their memory, church was or is like. They propose that spirituality, meditation, religious openness and mysticism should replace (Christian) dogmatic severity, that political engagement should replace navel-gazing, that playfulness should replace seriousness, or that beauty should replace boring ugliness (interviews with Tido Visser, Boudewijn Tarenskeen, and poet Maarten Inghels of *Poesia Divina*). They would like new Psalm performances to be in accordance with their current self-image, worldview and hopes for the future.

¹⁴² See: www.volkskrant.nl/cultuur-media/het-koor-van-150-Psalms-verzuimt-uit-zijn-coon-te-breken-b3c31ff2/ (accessed 30 November 2023).

Despite such attempts to actively forget, new performances of Psalms also recall participants' experiences of what the Psalms were like in church, which is particularly the case for singers, many of which had started their careers in church choirs. For some singers of the Nederlands Kamerkoor (*150 Psalms*), many Psalms were familiar from church performances—in their “muscle memory”, even (interviews with Dora, James and Karin). Concertgoers (*150 Psalms*) Eva and Johan recognized some melodies of the Genevan psalter that they sing in their Reformed Congregations church (Dutch: Gereformeerde Gemeenten).

Others, mainly listeners, find new Psalm performances to be less churchy than their memories of the Psalms—the church-like atmosphere is passively forgotten. Some of these respondents are glad about this, as they are pleasantly surprised by the light-heartedness, liveliness and playfulness of new Psalm performances, in contrast to their memories of the serious, lifeless and slow Psalms they have experienced in church (interviews with concertgoers at *Psalm 151* José, Tessa). Some other concertgoers, such as Rob and Heleen (*Psalm 151*), and festivalgoers Johan and Eva (*150 Psalms*), regret that the performances they attended are less church-like than their usual experiences of Psalms in conservative Calvinist Protestantism (interviews with Rob, Heleen, Eva and Johan).

The variety of attitudes towards memories of Psalms in church is related to nostalgic reflections on self and church, ranging from averted, to indifferent, to positive. Organizers and initiators, such as Tido Visser and Boudewijn Tarenskeen, seek to transform their memories of Psalms in church, so that Psalms can fit their ideals of openness, relevance, playfulness, and beauty (see above).¹⁴³ Singers experience mainly a continuity between psalmody in church, earlier in their careers, and the Psalms they currently perform. Generally, listeners experience that their biographical memories of Psalms in church are indeed transformed. Their nostalgic reflections on that experience are diverse. Even listeners who left church and found its Psalms ‘oppressive’, for example, do not necessarily appreciate their memories to be transformed, as the example of Rob (*Psalm 151*) shows.

3.4.3. Memories of God

Thirdly, the relationship between Psalms and believing in God is a widely discussed theme in the data. Respondents are often quite clear whether and how they believe in a God. Their self-image as (religious) (non-, ex-)believers is related to their desire to remember or forget aspects of psalmody.

¹⁴³ The next chapter elaborates on these themes in the case of festival *150 Psalms*.

Some participants actively seek to remember how, for them, God played a role in the performance of Psalms. Poet Delphine Lecompte, who was glad to recite her Psalm in a church, compared writing a Psalm with writing her ‘regular’ poetry, and described how she is happy to now have the opportunity to finally “praise God” again, “without irony or mockery” (interview). Other participants try to remember God, although in a transformed way, different from the belief they grew up with: not as a personal (concertgoer Tessa, poet Marieke Lucas Rijneveld, organizer Merlijn Geurts), all-seeing and intervening God (concertgoer Tessa), but more as an “energy” (concertgoer Tessa), “presence” (theologian Gerard Swüste, poet Bart Stouten), “world of memories” (poet Bart Stouten), or “metaphor for our conscience” (speaker Oek de Jong, organizer Merlijn Geurts). Their nostalgic narrative is often a reflection of personal change



Figure 3. Poet Charles Ducal recites his psalm in the Begijnhofkerk in Herentals. Photo by Alidoor Dellafaille.

with respect to the divine. For composer Michel van der Aa (*150 Psalms*), for instance, his nostalgic reflection incites him to remove the word ‘God’ from the Psalm texts. He describes how he closed the church door when he was 18. His father was excommunicated as a priest from the Roman-Catholic Church, and he himself sees religion and belief as problematic. “I am a humanist”, he says, and he thinks that removing the word ‘God’ from the Psalm text will make it more “humanist” and “universal”.¹⁴⁴ These examples show more of a

¹⁴⁴ See: www.trouw.nl/nieuws/Psalmen-zijn-een-onuitputtelijke-bron-van-inspiratie-b98c4b26/ (accessed 30 November 2023).

spectrum between active remembering and forgetting: from continuing with addressing God, transforming images and names of God, and removing 'God' from the canonical text.

Despite these acts of remembering and forgetting, the examples of passive remembering show what is conserved nonetheless. Festivalgoers Eva and Johan, and newspaper reviewer S. Janse, found, for example, that God "cannot be removed", despite, in their view, artists' and organizers' intentions.¹⁴⁵

However, some listeners feel as if God is forgotten in new Psalm performances. Concertgoer Rob, for example, remembers that the Psalms that he learned as a child connected him with God, but thinks that *Psalm 151* sings the death of God. While he states that he has broken with his religious past, he also thinks that Psalms should still give the chance to address the divine (interview). Paul, who attended *Poesia Divina*, writes in an email that most of the poets did not address God with their Psalm, and that these compositions cannot, therefore, be called "Psalms, which are songs (of praise) for God" (email correspondence with Paul).¹⁴⁶ Generally, God is remembered, passively and actively, although in transformed or selective ways, which is interpreted by some listeners as attempts to remove God from memory.

3.4.4. Memories of the Psalms' relevance

A fourth aspect of Psalms that participants (wish) to remember or forget is that Psalms provide good counsel for both personal questions and larger societal issues.

Active remembrance of the Psalms' provision of good counsel is rooted in biographical memories and nostalgic narratives. Time and again, director Tido Visser (*150 Psalms*) emphasized that Psalms still "provide answers" for political issues, such as migrant crises, the climate crisis, and the rise of right-wing populism, but he also suggested that they provide psychological wisdom.¹⁴⁷

He relates his "tendency to preach" to his "family of preachers", and thus connects his way of appropriating the Psalms nostalgically to people from his past (interview with Tido Visser on 8 May 2019, and in *The Australian*, 21 February 2020).¹⁴⁸ Some singers and festivalgoers agree that Psalms should be remembered as "giving direction in life" (interviews with Dora, Karin, Eva and Johan).

¹⁴⁵ See: www.rd.nl/opinie/Psalmen-zonder-god-geven-lege-plek-1.1427096 (accessed 30 November 2023).

¹⁴⁶ The notion of addressing God with psalmody is one of the key elements in chapter 7.

¹⁴⁷ See his introduction in the festival booklet and a travel blog post at www.nederlandskamerkoor.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Verslag-Tido-150-Psalms.pdf (accessed 30 November 2023).

¹⁴⁸ See: www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/review/songbook-for-humanity/news-story/7573d7242642048a582bda0fe4585c09 (accessed 30 November 2023).

Participants who actively forget the idea that Psalms provide answers, often want to stay away from seeking clear-cut answers in general. These participants are found in all cases, having different roles. Often, they have memories of (strict) Christians pointing at the clear answers to be found in the Psalms (interviews with Rob; Leo Samama on 6 May 2019; singer Martin on 29 January 2020). They resist approaching the Psalms in this way and emphasize that Psalms should be used as a source of inspiration for asking new questions over and over, instead of looking for answers.

Nevertheless, some participants appear surprised how aptly the Psalms they heard fitted their own doubts and reflections. Concertgoer Tessa, for instance, found words in *Psalms 151* to interpret her own religious history (“My inner iconoclastic fury”) and concertgoer Saskia (*150 Psalms*) was amazed how



Figure 4. Ramsey Nasr explored the Psalms' contemporary relevance. Photo by Foppe Schut.

speaker Ramsey Nasr elucidated the Psalms' relevance. She used his reflections in a Bible study group at the church where she is a minister (video call with Saskia, 15 May 2020). Gaea Schoeters, Bart Stouten, Charles Ducal and Delphine Lecompte, poets at *Poesia Divina*, all felt that the commission to write a Psalm had an inescapable effect on their writing, pushing them to focus on the major themes of life, limiting them in their active remembering and forgetting (interviews on 28 September 2019).¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ In chapter 7, I will interpret such instances as (unexpected) 'challenges' that participants in ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms are confronted with.

However, some participants feel that new performances of Psalms are sometimes lacking in being relevant. Concertgoer Rob (*Psalm 151*), for example, reflects on a line from Marjolijn van Heemstra's Psalm for *Psalm 151*: "Isn't a Psalm always a memory? Does a new Psalm remember something new? Or just anew?"¹⁵⁰ He thinks that Psalms should be about more than looking back: "Psalms are also about a future, about redemption, about finding a way to continue with life—I missed that" (interview). The singers agreed that *Psalm 151* did not so much address political issues, but they were glad that "for once, the performance wasn't about refugees, how important that may be" (field notes 1).

3.4.5. Memories of Psalms in concerts

The fifth category comprises remembered or forgotten aspects of Psalms relating to their place in the concert traditions of Western classical (choral) music.

Many participants know the Psalms as (choral) concert repertoire. All appreciate this concert tradition, although especially organizers want to forget certain aspects of the performance practice in choral music concerts and attempt to transform it to meet present needs. In both *Psalm 151* and *150 Psalms*, the organizers tried to transform the classical setup of a choral concert by engaging with political issues, by making it multidisciplinary, by making the choral performances more informal, and by putting extra emphasis on the recited texts. The ideals motivating these transformations are a desire to be politically engaged (Tido Visser), to enhance connection and humanness (Merlijn Geurts), to make choral performances more playful (Boudewijn Tarenskeen), and to focus on the relevance of the sung texts (see previous section).

Several participants from outside the organization of these events noticed the transformations that organizers had tried to make. Their passive forgetting is characterized by confusion and pleasant surprise. Heleen (*Psalm 151*) was confused by the number of things happening at once during the concert and would have preferred the order of the choral music concerts she is used to attend, while others were happily surprised by the unconventional playfulness of the singers (interviews with Heleen, José and Tessa). Concertgoers Saskia and Eva, singers Dora, Camila and Clemens, and newspaper reviewers Mischa Spel and Frederike Berntsen (*150 Psalms*) appreciated how different a festival setup was from an ordinary series of concerts, as it gave them the opportunity to delve deeply into the Psalms, instead of hearing fragments in separate concerts.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ See: Marjolijn van Heemstra, "Zingen tegen zwijgen" in the concert booklet of *Psalm 151*.

¹⁵¹ See www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2017/09/03/150-Psalms-haakt-geslaagd-in-op-actualiteit-



Figure 5. Composer Boudewijn Tarenskeen wanted to highlight the diversity of the singers. Photo by Paul Janssen.

On the other hand, some participants primarily noticed a similarity with the concerts they had attended before. Financial director (Utrecht Early Music Festival) Juliette Dufornee and newspaper reviewer Van Oorschot both found that, despite the attempts to be innovative and politically engaged, *150 Psalms* was, in the end, “just a series of traditional concerts” (informal conversation on 10 April 2019; Van Oorschot’s review in *De Volkskrant*). For them, the choral concert setup was passively remembered.

3.4.6. Memories of singing Psalms together

The last category focuses on Psalms as primarily a collective singing activity. This category is, of course, related to the contexts of church and concert (see above), but here, joining in as a singer is the main topic to which participants relate their remembering and forgetting.

It will come as no surprise that singers, in particular, actively remember this aspect of psalmody. Both the professional singers and the audience members who sang in amateur choirs expressed the desire to keep enjoying singing Psalms together. Some of the poets in *Poesia Divina* appeared to be very aware of the ‘collective musical’ aspects of writing and performing a Psalm. Gaea Schoeters, for example, intentionally uses repetition and refrains to simulate collective performance in her solo performances (interview). Tido Visser (organizer of *150 Psalms*) actively wanted to forget collective singing, although

12813461-a1572087 (accessed 30 November 2023) and www.trouw.nl/nieuws/afwisseling-van-koren-geeft-Psalmenfeest-dimensie~be59c9bc/ (accessed 30 November 2023).

it was suggested by concert programmer Leo Samama. Visser thought that singing with the audience would be “too churchy” as it would remind him and others in the audience of the church of their youth (interviews with Visser and Samama). When asked, none of the festivalgoers, except for Steven (see above), had missed collective singing. Singing together with the audience was not considered by the organizers of *Poesia Divina* and *Psalms 151*.

Listeners, particularly those who are experienced choral singers themselves, sometimes feel very involved with the choirs. Their biographical memories of singing in a choir are activated by the closeness of the performance. José and Heleen (*Psalms 151*) were both intrigued by the technical capabilities of and the joyful interaction between the singers (interviews). However, not everybody experiences this sense of collective musicality, although they have memories of having felt it before. Some singers of *Psalms 151* and *150 Psalms* are still too focused on getting through the music without making mistakes to be able to feel “lifted by the music” or a “collective embodiment” (Field notes 1, and interviews with Dora and Clemens). Until then, they passively forget psalmody as an immersive collective musical experience, which is also the case for some concertgoers with a more observant listening experience (Eva, Johan, video call with Steven, 13 May 2020).¹⁵² Generally, concertgoers are content with their role as listeners, especially those who are themselves (amateur) choral singers and feel more easily involved.

3.5. Sacred desires and sacred experiences

I see a number of nostalgic narratives that recur repeatedly through the six different themes discussed above. In the modes of active remembering and forgetting, these narratives are constructed around participants’ ideals, desires and non-negotiable values. I term these ‘sacred desires’. In the modes of passive remembering and forgetting, participants’ nostalgic narratives are challenged by their experience of the performance of Psalms. They are surprised by how similar or different the performance is compared to psalmody they are familiar with, or they notice that writing or performing a ‘Psalm’ almost forces them to use a certain style, and so on. I term these ‘sacred experiences’, as these are non-ordinary, sometimes non-expected experiences. It appears that some sacred desires and sacred experiences are specific to participants with certain roles in the ritual-musical appropriations (performers, organizers, publics, etc.), or specific to one of the three cases that I studied.

¹⁵² The aspect of participants’ bodily experiences will be the central topic of chapter 5.

I can observe four non-negotiable values (sacred desires) motivating participants' active remembering and forgetting: 'humanity', 'contemplation', 'relevance' and 'religiosity'.

Firstly, I identify, in the appropriations of Psalms, 'humanity' as a sacred desire. Participants from all cases and with different roles want to experience the performances of Psalms as an act of sounding and perceiving the 'human voice', of approaching other human beings through music and sound, and of connecting with them. An egalitarian ideal that 'we are all human' is pivotal to this, and informs participants' aversion to formal choral performances that obstruct connection and playfulness, to dogmatism and to more authoritarian images of God, which they deem exclusivist.

The second sacred desire, 'contemplation', I observe in nostalgic narratives marked by an emphasis on meditation, spirituality and silence. Participants who emphasize this believe, for example, that Psalm performances should last longer (in festivals), should be contemplative rather than directive (in the interpretation of Psalm texts, for instance), and that silence and taking the time to understand others and their differing opinions are of great need both now and in the future. For these participants, trying to be attentive and reflective—instead of 'preaching' or moralistic—is sacred, and they appropriate the Psalms accordingly, as organizers (*150 Psalms, Poesia Divina*) and public speakers who try to create a reflective atmosphere in the space of concert-hall and church, relatively distanced from the outside world.

A third sacred desire is that performances of Psalms should be relevant for dealing with 'major personal and societal themes'—with political, societal and personal, existential topics. For these participants, traditional performances in concert halls and churches are too detached from the world and its problems. Many of them try to find inspiration in the "wisdom of the Psalms", although they differ in how literally they want to follow statements from the scriptural Psalm texts (interviews with Dora and Martin; introduction by Yoeri Albrecht in festival booklet *150 Psalms*; interview with Visser in *The Australian*; lecture in *150 Psalms* by Michael Ignatieff; speech in *150 Psalms* by Oek de Jong). For some, the present and future ask for active engagement, or even protest, "a sacred rage"—as speaker Désanne van Brederode puts it.¹⁵³ This sacred desire is found in organizers and performers in *150 Psalms* and, to a lesser extent, *Poesia Divina*.

¹⁵³ See: www.trouw.nl/nieuws/Psalmen-zijn-een-onuitputtelijke-bron-van-inspiratie-b98c4b26/ (accessed 30 November 2023).



Figure 6. A photo exhibition in the festival *150 Psalms* connected the Psalms to present situations of suffering. Photo by Foppe Schut.

The fourth sacred desire is ‘religiosity’. Here, participants deem it important to address the divine through Psalms, to perform Psalms in church buildings, so to maintain the value of religious belief and practice. These participants, mainly from the audiences in all three cases, believe that a religious dimension is needed in order to realize the Psalms’ full potential (also of enhancing humanity, contemplation and addressing major personal and societal themes).

Sacred experiences, on the other hand, are those experiences that make participants reconsider their nostalgic reflections, and are characterized by surprise and wonder. Participants are surprised to experience (dis)similarity with previous moments in their lives, and wonder what the reasons for this (dis)similarity are: have they themselves changed, have times and customs changed, and also: why does engaging with Psalms make them do things that they did not expect? I have observed four sacred experiences recurring through the nostalgic reflections, namely how ‘relatable’, ‘diverse’ and ‘religious’ psalmody appeared to be for them, and how ‘contemplation’ was more absent than they expected beforehand.

Firstly, participants in all groups and three cases are surprised by the ‘relatability’ of the Psalms they attended: they recognise the emotions expressed in the Psalms, and find humor and psychological wisdom in their performance. They are surprised by their emotional accessibility. This sacred

experience of relatability connects well with the sacred desires of ‘humanity’, namely by recognising human emotions, and also with ‘relevance’, as these participants are surprised by how aptly the canonical and new Psalms give words to today’s struggles.

Secondly, mainly participants from *150 Psalms* are surprised and sometimes amazed by the size and diversity of traditions of psalmody. They are struck by the age of texts, by the diverse ways in which Psalms have been set to music in a wide variety of (historical) contexts, or by the fact that new Psalms can still see the light of day. Often, participants derive inspiration from the fact that Psalms have inspired artistic production through the ages. In other words, the Psalms’ canonical status in many different traditions and contexts astounds them.

Thirdly, it is remarkable that certain participants find that their memories of Psalm performance as a religious practice are hard to forget. For these participants, mainly performers, composers and poets in all three studied cases, there is a certain inevitability, or even obviousness, to the fact that Psalms are associated with religious (mostly Jewish and Christian) traditions, and they discover that their musical compositions, poems or performances inevitably refer to those traditions. Some participants appear astonished by this effect, others take it up as an opportunity to address the divine again, or to utilize a style of writing and performance style from which they would normally refrain. For professional singers, especially those who started their careers in church choirs, singing Psalms in concerts or in church is not all that different.

Finally, it shows that ‘contemplation’ is desired (see above), but not so much experienced by participants from the audience and performers. These participants appreciate how, in earlier performances, Psalms often had enough time to settle in, because of being (weekly) repeated or being embedded in a steady monastic rhythm, while *150 Psalms*, as a two-day festival fully packed with concerts and lectures, and *Psalm 151*, as a concert with quite a lot happening in a short amount of time, were both, in particular, rather short and intense, especially for performers, who had to be at the top of their game.

3.6. Conclusion

Biographical memories in the ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms play a twofold role: memories are actively and passively remembered and forgotten. Furthermore, whether intentionally evoked or not, memories are situated within individuals’ broader nostalgic reflections. In these nostalgic reflections,

I distinguished 'sacred desires' informing individuals' active remembering and forgetting, and 'sacred experiences' that, by means of their non-ordinariness, challenge conceptions that participants had about past, present and future. Sacred desires are often idealistic and future-oriented. Through the performance of Psalms, organizers and artists attempt to promote humanity, contemplation, the (political) relevance (of the Psalms) and their religiosity, which are also reasons for listeners to attend the performance. Sacred experiences are individuals' non-ordinary experiences: when they are surprised by the recognizability, size and diversity, and religiosity of the Psalms, and by the relative absence of contemplation in the performance they attend.

As I have shown, the artists and organizers trying to redefine psalmody, try to do so in accordance with their personal beliefs and values, their 'sacred desires'. These sacred desires are framed in nostalgic reflections. The collective ritual they use for the expression of their 'authentic' selves, is a patchwork of biographical memories that are intended to be remembered or forgotten, or that remain or disappear despite all intentions.¹⁵⁴ This expression of individual authenticity is different from Bakker Kellogg's and Dagtas' studies, which describe how minority groups try to find representation and emancipation through performance.¹⁵⁵ Contrary to Dagtas' findings, here, the diversity of individual (religious) backgrounds is framed as something 'interesting' to appreciate and to reflect upon, and also to play with, especially so in *Psalms 151*.¹⁵⁶

My findings show that, in the ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms, aspects experienced as 'religious' and as 'artistic' (concert-like) are both maintained in performance, which is in accordance with other anthropological research on the performance of heritage rooted in religion.¹⁵⁷ My findings challenge the dichotomy between religious and cultural heritage, as these categories obscure the view of how ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms are organized and experienced: namely as both at the same time, informed by memories of religious praxis and beliefs, concert hall experiences, and universalist values.¹⁵⁸

154 Cf. Apaydin, "Introduction," 3-4; Marcel Barnard, "Secular feast and Christian feast in Schleiermacher's Practical Theology and Aesthetics. A theoretical contribution to the study of liturgy and the arts," in *Christian Feast and Festival. The dynamics of Western liturgy and culture*, ed. Paul Post et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 192-93; Bell, *Ritual*; Klomp, *Playing On*, 241.

155 Bakker Kellogg, "Ritual Sounds.," Dagtas, "The Civilizations Choir."

156 Dagtas, "The Civilizations Choir," 173-74, 78-79.

157 Bakker Kellogg, "Ritual Sounds," 441; Balkenhol, Van den Hemel, and Stengs, "Introduction," 2; Kabir Tambar, "Aesthetics of Public Visibility: Alevi Semah and the Paradoxes of Pluralism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 52 (2010): 663, 74, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417510000344>.

158 Klomp, *Playing On*, 134, 60; Wijnia, *Beyond the Return of Religion*, 81. In Assmann's text on

The theoretical framework that I have constructed has proved helpful in making analytical connections between participants' attitudes towards their memories (focused on remembering or forgetting), their broader views of themselves, Psalms and society, and their core values and expectations. I suggest to enrich Assmann's theory with the notions of nostalgia and sacrality, as these turn out to be able to shed light on the role of biographical memory in contemporary ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms or other cultural forms, while doing justice to the beliefs, values and experiences that appear to be sacred for participants in practices that escape 'classic' categories of 'religious' or 'secular'.

remembering and forgetting a religious-secular dichotomy is still clearly visible, and even in some of Meyer's passages on the 'heritagization of Christianity', this heritagization is described as, foremost, a secularization (see: Assmann, 2008: 100-101; Meyer, 2019: 65, 70-71, 79).





4

Competing authenticities

The appropriation of Psalms in the festival

150Psalms

4.1. Introduction

Psalms are to be found at the heart of worship practices in most Christian traditions.¹⁵⁹ They can be found in prayers, Scripture readings, psalmody, metrical hymns, praise and worship songs, repeated refrains, and in many other liturgical and musical creations. Any and all of these forms can be found in contemporary Christian liturgies in the Netherlands; however, beyond the ecclesial domain, the performance of Psalms also features in a range of other cultural projects.¹⁶⁰

One recent cultural event in the Netherlands which features Psalms stands out due to its size. It is the two-day *150 Psalms* festival put on by the Netherlands Kamerkoor (Netherlands Chamber Choir). The festival includes choral performances of all the 150 biblical Psalms (each set by a different composer), distributed across 12 concerts, pairing these with speeches by well-known literary authors, lectures by international intellectuals, and art installations. The original festival was held in Utrecht (as part of the larger Utrecht Early Music Festival) in September 2017, but since then the festival has been reprised in New York (in the Lincoln Center, “The Psalm Experience”) in November 2017,

¹⁵⁹ The ‘antiphon’ for this chapter is taken from *150 Psalms*, more specifically the commissioned Psalm 78 by Isidora Žebeljan, performed by the Netherlands Kamerkoor: www.henkvogel.com/antiphon-4/.

¹⁶⁰ See: Vogel, Klomp, and Barnard, “Sing After God a New Song.” for more examples.

Brussels (in the Flagey Theater, “Klara Festival”) in March 2018, Amsterdam (in the Concertgebouw, “Forum on European Culture”) in June 2018, and Adelaide (“Adelaide Festival”) in February–March 2020.

In the festival’s advance publicity, as well as in its multidisciplinary set-up (music, photography, art installations, lectures), *150 Psalms* demonstrates a complex relationship with the religious traditions within which the music to be performed initially emerged. According to the website and the festival booklet, the temporal structure of the festival is inspired by the Divine Office, the monastic practice of reciting the Psalms at fixed prayer times through the day. However, the issue of what the (supposed) religiosity or sacredness of the Psalms means within the context of a cultural festival is a recurring, sometimes latent, question in the presentation of the festival. The different texts on the festival websites and in the festival booklet deal with this question in various ways, demonstrating a range of different perspectives on this (‘religious’) ‘past’. However, in all of these texts, the Psalms are nevertheless considered a heritage worthy of conservation for the future.

In this chapter, I discuss how different participants of the festival deal with the issues created by the presentation of Psalms-as-heritage at a cultural festival and how their different viewpoints relate to one another. I do so by answering the following research question: *How do participants of the festival “150 Psalms” appropriate the heritage of the Psalms?* I deliberately include the word ‘heritage’ in my research question since the festival organizers present the Psalms as heritage: the Psalms are repeatedly referred to as ‘monuments’, ‘ancient temples’, and ‘something handed down through the ages’. Over and over, the age-old, canonical status of the Psalms is emphasized.

I explore how different participants of the festival deal with the Psalms as heritage. Heritage and cultural memory studies provide me with the concepts needed for the study of such an appropriation. In particular, the notion of ‘authenticity’, which is an important value in heritage practices, emerges as a vital concept for my understanding of the appropriation of the Psalms at the festival. I first introduce the festival in more detail before turning to my conceptual framework, methodology, interpretation of the appropriation of Psalms in the festival, and my conclusions.

4.2. The festival

In September 2017, the Nederlands Kamerkoor celebrated its 80th anniversary by organizing a large choir festival, joining forces with the Tallis Scholars, Det Norske Solistkor, and The Choir of Trinity Wall Street. The concerts were assigned different themes and introduced with a short address by one of three speakers: philosopher Désanne van Brederode, literary author Oek de Jong, poet and actor Ramsey Nasr. In addition to these short presentations, two more extensive lectures were organized: Michael Ignatieff gave a lecture entitled “Reading the Psalms in a Faithless Time” and Tom Holland gave an untitled lecture. Both speakers are public intellectuals of international repute.¹⁶¹ The introductory speeches and lectures were organized by Merlijn Geurts of the debating center De Balie in Amsterdam. All the concerts were performed in Utrecht’s main concert hall, TivoliVredenburg, where the art organization Creative Court confronted visitors with thought-provoking questions and quotes inspired by the Psalms by displaying texts in art installations (inflatable ‘tents’ in which visitors could sit) and attached to the floor of the foyer. All these texts, as well as texts on the festival website and texts in the extensive festival booklet (over 200 pages), underlined the intention of festival organizers to explore both the timeless nature and the current relevance of psalmody (cf. the theme “A Mirror to Society”).

4.3. Conceptual framework

My use of the term ‘appropriation’ is indebted to historian Willem Frijhoff who draws mainly on the work of philosopher Michel de Certeau for his use of the concept. To this I add the work of anthropologist Arnd Schneider who has theorized about the transformation of both the ‘object’ and the human ‘appropriators’ in processes of appropriation.

De Certeau tries to understand the dynamics of cultural production and reception while avoiding a strict dichotomy between the two. He emphasizes that cultural consumption is not just a receptive but also a productive act, even when consumers seem passive or powerless.¹⁶² It is the indivisible interplay between the reception and production of culture that Frijhoff calls

¹⁶¹ Michael Ignatieff is a former politician, author, journalist, and philosopher. Since 2016, Ignatieff has been the president and rector of the Central European University. Tom Holland is a British historian, TV presenter, and producer of documentaries.

¹⁶² De Certeau gives the example of native Americans, colonized by the Spanish, who “made of the rituals, representations and laws imposed on them something quite different from what their conquerors had in mind” De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xiii.

'appropriation'.¹⁶³ He defines appropriation as

the meaning-making process by which groups or individuals attribute new meanings to external bearers of meaning, so that these bearers of meaning become acceptable, livable, bearable or dignified.¹⁶⁴

In these meaning-making processes, a new set of meanings appears that consists of both the existing meanings and the new meanings attributed to an object, practice or narrative. In this view, there is no 'original moment' of pure production, because all cultural production is in some sense receptive and embedded in existing webs of meaning. All cultural reception is also productive, in one way or another.¹⁶⁵ However, the attribution of new meanings, or at least the distinction between 'existing' and 'new' meanings as defined by participants of the appropriation, can still be traced.¹⁶⁶ Thus, in the act of appropriation, the meaning of what is appropriated is transformed.¹⁶⁷ In addition to this, Schneider rightly states that not only appropriated things, but also the appropriating individuals themselves are transformed in the process of appropriation:

The extended meaning [of appropriation] that I have been advocating sees it as a hermeneutic procedure, which consequently implies not only that cultural elements are invested with new signification but also that those who appropriate are being transformed.¹⁶⁸

This implies that not only does an appropriated object, narrative or practice become re-signified, but actors and their contexts are also re-signified along with it: appropriated things come with their own history and, by appropriating them, participants re-define their own situation.¹⁶⁹ In the case of the Psalms, this is certainly the case: as an age-old cultural form, Psalms have

¹⁶³ Frijhoff, "Toeëigening," 109-10.

¹⁶⁴ Frijhoff, "Toeëigening," 108.

¹⁶⁵ Schneider, "On 'Appropriation'," 217.

¹⁶⁶ In recent popular debates on cultural appropriation, 'appropriation' is (predominantly) a negative term, denoting improper (exploitative) expropriation by powerful groups from marginalized groups. Without disapproving of that particular use, my usage of the term is pluralistic, as my aim is to study the diverse ways in which participants perceive the appropriation, instead of primarily viewing it as a manifestation of oppressive power relations Matthes, "Cultural Appropriation and Oppression," 1003-07; C. Thi Nguyen and Matthew Strohl, "Cultural Appropriation and the Intimacy of Groups," *Philosophical Studies* 176, no. 4 (2019): 982, 1000.

¹⁶⁷ Wallace, "Mongolian Livestock Rituals," 184.

¹⁶⁸ Schneider, "On 'Appropriation,'" 224.

¹⁶⁹ This dynamic forms the analytical basis for Chapter 7.

been extensively re-signified through the ages. Someone who appropriates the Psalms might thereby find her/himself undergo re-signification as well: the introductory speeches of the festival are, for example, described as ‘sermons’, which were delivered by ‘ministers’ in a newspaper review and an interview—a vocabulary which is not typical of performances in cultural festivals (interview, Merlijn Geurts, 31 May 2019).¹⁷⁰

When participants appropriate artifacts, narratives or practices as ‘heritage’, the meanings they attribute can often be described in terms of ‘authenticity’. Research in the field of cultural memory and heritage studies considers ‘authenticity’ to be an important quality of the meanings that individuals, groups, and institutions attribute to the things which they use and encounter, not as something that is inherent in a particular cultural object, narrative or practice.¹⁷¹ Here, ‘authentic’ means the “experience of the original”.¹⁷² Authenticity is culturally constructed—a powerful construct, as the (in)authenticity which is claimed for a particular heritage is often the main criterion for the valuation, devaluation, conservation or destruction of that heritage.¹⁷³

According to cultural memory scholar Aleida Assmann, the conservation and destruction of heritage are often ideologically, religiously or politically motivated: in these acts, a particular heritage is not only claimed to be authentic, but a claim is also made that a certain collective is the authentic owner of that heritage and has a certain authority in its appropriation.¹⁷⁴ In Assmann’s

170 For the newspaper review, see Mischa Spel, “150 Psalms haakt geslaagd in op actualiteit”, *NRC Handelsblad*, 3 September 2017, www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2017/09/03/150-Psalms-haakt-geslaagd-in-op-actualiteit-12813461-a1572087, accessed 2 December 2023.

171 Willem Frijhoff, “Herdenkingscultuur tussen erfgoed en ritueel. De verleiding van het presentisme,” *Yearbook for Ritual and Liturgical Studies*, no. 28 (2012): 181; Anna Karlström, “Authenticity. Rhetorics of Preservation and the Experience of the Original,” in *Heritage Keywords: Rhetoric and Redescription in Cultural Heritage*, ed. Kathryn Lafrenz Samuels and Trinidad Rico (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2015), 29-30; Helaine Silverman, “Heritage and Authenticity,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Heritage Research*, ed. Emma Waterton and Steve Watson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 69; Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 67-69, 125. Paul Post describes qualities as “identity-determining characteristics, traits, dimensions or tendencies in a ritual repertoire” Paul Post, “Introduction and Application: Feast as a Key Concept in Liturgical Studies Research Design,” in *Christian Feast and Festival. The Dynamics of Western Worship and Culture*, ed. Paul Post et al., Liturgia Condenda (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 58.

172 Karlström, “Authenticity,” 29-32, 36-40.

173 Karlström, “Authenticity,” 30, 36-37.

174 Assmann, “Canon and Archive,” 98; Aleida Assmann, “Re-framing Memory. Between Individual and Collective Forms of Constructing the Past,” in *Performing the Past. Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe*, ed. Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree, and Jay Winter (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 38, 42-43; cf. Chiara Bottici, “European Identity and the Politics of Remembrance,” in *Performing the Past. Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe*, ed. Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree, and Jay Winter (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press,



Figure 7. Final ovation for the four choirs and conductors Peter Dijkstra, Julian Wachner, Peter Phillips and Grete Pedersen. Photo by Foppe Schut.

terms, this constitutes a process of ‘canonization’, in which a certain group presents a particular heritage in a ‘timeless framework’ and venerates it for its relevance for the group’s collective identity that shares this alleged timelessness.¹⁷⁵ ‘Authenticity’ plays a crucial role in the way participants perceive the appropriation of Psalms at the festival. In answering the research question, I will show that there are different ‘authenticities’ (notions of authenticity) at play within the festival context, which sometimes clash.

4.4. Methodology

This chapter is based on ethnographic fieldwork undertaken during 2019, which used different methods for data gathering and analysis. As the festival had been organized over a year before this research project started, I was not able to conduct any participant observation and therefore limited myself to interviews and the analysis of existing (textual) materials.¹⁷⁶

2010), 342; Frijhoff, "Toeëigening," 113; Frijhoff, "Herdenkingscultuur," 178; Jay Winter, "The Performance of the Past: Memory, History, Identity," in *Performing the Past. Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe*, ed. Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree, and Jay Winter (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 15.

¹⁷⁵ Assmann, "Canon and Archive," 101.

¹⁷⁶ However, Mirella Klomp and I had attended (part of) the festival out of professional and personal interest. Later, after writing this chapter, I did participant observation during rehearsal

I conducted semi-structured face-to-face interviews with a number of individuals involved in the festival. These included festival initiator Tido Visser (managing director of Nederlands Kamerkoor), musicologist Leo Samama (former managing director of Nederlands Kamerkoor), theologian and Psalm translator Gerard Swüste, organizer of speeches and lectures Merlijn Geurts (editor at De Balie), and festival participants ‘Eva’ and ‘Johan’ (pseudonyms). I employed elicitation techniques at the start of the interviews by showing interviewees the festival promotion video and by reading out a fragment of the festival announcement on its website.¹⁷⁷ All the interviews lasted on average 60 minutes; I recorded and transcribed these.

In addition to the interviews, I gathered a range of textual materials relating to the festival. These included: texts from the festival booklet; the Nederlands Kamerkoor grant application; interviews, reviews and opinion pieces in different newspapers; the texts of the lectures by Michael Ignatieff and Tom Holland; a jubilee speech by Tido Visser; the texts of the introductory speeches.¹⁷⁸

To gain an overview of the data and the patterns contained within them, I coded all the textual material using Atlas.ti software. The first round of coding consisted of ‘initial’, ‘descriptive’, and ‘value’ codes.¹⁷⁹ After a second round of coding, I grouped all the codes into categories or code groups.¹⁸⁰ When I analyzed the participants’ reasoning in relation to these categories, it was noteworthy how explicitly many participants contrasted their own views on the Psalms and their appropriation with other viewpoints. In this respect, they all appear to ground their lines of reasoning on claims of continuity and discontinuity with an alleged ‘original’ version, intention or performance. I could group these claims of continuity and discontinuity in six categories—six ways to claim an appropriation to be ‘authentic’. The notion of ‘authenticity’ proved helpful, as it does justice to the intertwinement of what ‘authentic Psalms’, ‘authentic appropriations of Psalms’, and ‘authentic appropriators of Psalms’ are in the views of participants.¹⁸¹

days of the Nederlands Kamerkoor which gave new insights that nuance the conclusion in this current chapter (see chapters 5 and 8).

¹⁷⁷ See project website (www.150Psalms.nl/, accessed 2 December 2023) and the promotion video, produced by Eyehear and Total Identity (2017) (<https://youtu.be/FZmv5AT-B7I>, accessed 2 December 2023).

¹⁷⁸ In this first-written chapter, my study still relies heavily on the analysis of texts. Others chapters, written later, include data gathered during choir rehearsals in the run-up to the festival and will therefore be able to include the performers’ perspectives.

¹⁷⁹ Evers, *Kwalitatieve Analyse*, 81, 89; Saldaña, *Coding Manual*, 81-85, 70-73, 89-93. The first and second coding methods are also known as ‘open’ and ‘topic’ coding Saldaña, *Coding Manual*, 81, 70.

¹⁸⁰ Saldaña, *Coding Manual*, 139-45, 59-63.

¹⁸¹ ‘Authenticity’ is not a word necessarily used by participants, but my choice of analytical terminology.

4.5. Authenticities

It appears that claims of authenticity play a prominent role in the appropriation of Psalms within the festival. Participants recognize this authenticity in terms of their 'beauty', 'humanity', 'religiosity', 'relationship with God(s)', 'political relevance', and 'ambiguity'. They claim the appropriation of the Psalms in the festival and their own appropriation to be (in)authentic in relation to these characteristics. As I will make clear in the section on consensus and tensions (4.6), participants selected, contrasted and combined different notions of authenticity, although it is the case that the first three ('beauty', 'humanity', 'religiosity') are themes for all participants. This is the rationale for the order in which I discuss the different authenticities, starting with the theme that causes most consensus between participants, ending with themes that are more divergent.

4.5.1. Beauty

The first authenticity which can be traced in the data is that of the Psalms' beauty, whether textual, musically composed or something experienced in the moment of performance. The festival organizers aim to "connect aesthetic appreciation with reflection".¹⁸² All the participants agreed that the performance of Psalms in the festival was 'beautiful' and authentic in its conservation of the Psalms' beauty. However, they also believe that 'beauty' is not enough. F. Hoogland, a reformed minister, writes in a blog post that a "godless world annexes the Psalms for their mere beauty", which, he thinks, is an inauthentic appropriation of Psalms because it "removes God".¹⁸³ Others share the view that the appropriation of Psalms should be about more than beauty but add that the festival fulfills this demand by appropriating the Psalms' political relevance authentically (see below).¹⁸⁴

Tido Visser and Gerard Swüste relate the authenticity of the performance to the beauty of the Psalms, in contrast to liturgical performances which, in their view, often fail to exemplify this quality. Visser stated that, for many concertgo-

¹⁸² See the contributions of Yoeri Albrecht and Tido Visser in the festival booklet (2017).

¹⁸³ See: F. Hoogland, "Psalmen zonder de Heere", *Een in Waarheid*, 23 September 2017, www.eeninwaarheid.info/index.php?rub=2&item=1482, accessed 2 December 2023. Hoogland follows Janse and quotes extensively from the latter's opinion piece, see: S. Janse, "Psalmen zonder God geven lege plek", *Reformatieisch Dagblad*, 6 September 2017, www.rd.nl/artikel/723641-psalmen-zonder-god-geven-lege-plek, accessed 2 December 2023.

¹⁸⁴ See Michael Ignatieff's festival lecture ("Reading the Psalms in a Faithless Time", which formed the basis for his later book *On Consolation*), and Mischa Spel, "'150 Psalms haakt geslaagd in op actualiteit", *NRC Handelsblad*, 3 September 2017, www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2017/09/03/150-Psalms-haakt-geslaagd-in-op-actualiteit-12813461-a1572087, accessed 2 December 2023.

ers, the festival liberated the Psalms from the church of their youth (interview, 8 May 2019). He thought that the ‘ugliness’ of collective psalmody in church is inauthentic, and not in accordance with the Psalms’ beauty. Swüste went further by arguing that the lack of quality in the performance of music (and of preaching) in many church settings is one of the reasons why many people have left the church (interview, 30 April 2018). Here, the festival’s performance is claimed to be authentic in its conservation of beauty, while performances in ecclesial settings are claimed to be inauthentic due to a lack of beauty.

4.5.2. Humanity

For some participants, the Psalms are to be understood first and foremost as ‘human’ in nature. In their understanding, this humanity has been the main reason for the conservation of Psalms. Some participants emphasized the emotional relatability of Psalms, others spoke of their ‘universal relevance for mankind’. In the first case, the appropriation within the festival is considered to be authentic because it conserves the human emotionality of the Psalms.¹⁸⁵ Swüste (involved as theologian) and Yoeri Albrecht (De Balie) emphasized that all human emotions are present in the Psalm texts, including uneasy feelings such as hate and vengefulness.¹⁸⁶ For both Swüste and Tom Holland, the appropriation within the festival is authentic with respect to the Psalms’ emotional diversity because all 150 Psalms are performed, not only the desirable ones.¹⁸⁷ There is, however, a general preference for Psalms which are about suffering and uncertainty in the festival (interview, Merlijn Geurts, 31 May 2019).¹⁸⁸ The element of suffering is experienced as consoling, as both lecturer Ignatieff and Geurts (De Balie) emphasized. Both individuals experienced a consoling “sense of connection shared across time with others who have felt exactly the same”, as Ignatieff put it in his festival lecture.

¹⁸⁵ I found this in the contributions by Yoeri Albrecht and Gerard Swüste to the festival booklet, Ignatieff’s festival lecture, the interview with Gerard Swüste (30 April 2019), and a newspaper review by Gerrit-Jan KleinJan: “Psalmen zijn een onuitputtelijke bron van inspiratie”, *Trouw*, 29 August 2017, www.trouw.nl/nieuws/Psalmen-zijn-een-onuitputtelijke-bron-van-inspiratie~b98c4b26/, accessed 2 December 2023.

¹⁸⁶ Examples of this can be found in Yoeri Albrecht’s and Gerard Swüste’s contributions to the festival booklet.

¹⁸⁷ See Tom Holland’s festival lecture and Gerard Swüste’s contribution to the festival booklet.

¹⁸⁸ Speakers Oek de Jong (introduction to the “Suffering” concert) and Ramsey Nasr (introduction to the “Powerlessness and Redemption” concert) show this preference, as does newspaper critic KleinJan (“Psalmen zijn een onuitputtelijke bron van inspiratie”, *Trouw*, 29 August 2017, www.trouw.nl/nieuws/Psalmen-zijn-een-onuitputtelijke-bron-van-inspiratie~b98c4b26/, accessed 2 December 2023).

Not only is the emotionality of Psalms considered 'human', there is also the notion of the Psalms' 'universal' humanity in the appropriation of Psalms. For Rabiaâ Benlahbib (Creative Court), this universality is located in the texts, while initiator Tido Visser also finds it in the human voice.¹⁸⁹ Visser claims the festival to be authentic with regard to the Psalms' humanity, describing the Psalms as "the voice of humanity" and the festival as a monument or altar to "1,000 years of choral music".¹⁹⁰ When emphasizing this universality, participants often believed that 'God' and/or 'religion' have the potential to obstruct it. For them, to appropriate the Psalms' universality authentically means either circumventing a God who is not considered to be universal (enough), or liberating the Psalms "from a religious atmosphere" (interview, Leo Samama, 6 May 2019; interview, Merlijn Geurts, 31 May 2019).¹⁹¹

Both the emotional humanity and the universal humanity of the Psalms are recognized by participants as grounds for 'connection', either with past generations or with other individuals attending the festival. Both Geurts and columnist Pia de Jong share this sentiment, suggesting that they feel connected with "all those suffering people who sang or muttered the Psalms" and that "all these vulnerable humans merged into one lamentation" (interview, Merlijn Geurts, 31 May 2019).¹⁹²

According to Visser and Geurts, the intensive 'marathon' set-up of the festival also creates a 'connection' between the wider body of festival-goers (interview, Tido Visser, 8 May 2019; interview, Merlijn Geurts, 31 May 2019). In Geurts' view, the festival could, however, have been more authentic with respect to the appeal for the 'human connection' she finds in the Psalms, by including collective singing and more informal choir performances. Collective singing had indeed been proposed by musicologist Leo Samama (interview, Merlijn Geurts, 31 May 2019; interview, Leo Samama, 6 May 2019).

¹⁸⁹ Both organizers emphasized this in their contributions to the festival booklet.

¹⁹⁰ See Visser's contribution to the festival's booklet. Notably, heritage scholars Giblin and Smith both argue that "universalizing discourses" about cultural heritage often use the notion of universality to conceal and perpetuate (colonial) inequality, and that "universal humankind" is used as a cover for "white, middle and upper-class Western males" (Giblin 2015, 316–317; Smith 2006, 11, 7–8).

¹⁹¹ See also Gerrit-Jan KleinJan: "Psalmen zijn een onuitputtelijke bron van inspiratie", *Trouw*, 29 August 2017, www.trouw.nl/nieuws/Psalmen-zijn-een-onuitputtelijke-bron-van-inspiratie-b98c4b26/, accessed 2 December 2023.

¹⁹² See Pia de Jong's newspaper column: "Stemmen die de hele ruimte vullen", *NRC Handelsblad*, 27 November 2017, www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2017/11/27/stemmen-die-de-hele-ruimte-vullen-14243800-a1582677, accessed 2 December 2023.

4.5.3. Religiosity

For some participants, the Psalms are primarily understood as religious heritage. Here, participants value the authenticity of the appropriation within the festival in terms of its ‘religiosity’, referring to (the place of Psalms in) different religious traditions. According to some participants, an artistic festival is (uniquely) capable of conserving the religious dimension. Xavier Vandamme and Jed Wentz (respectively, director and program organizer of the Utrecht Early Music Festival) state, for instance, that “the form in which modern humanity has most completely conserved the contents of religion is art”.¹⁹³ Theologian Swüste does not think that the arts have replaced religion, but that “art and religion are very close [...] and nowadays, they approach each other again” (interview, Gerard Swüste, 30 April 2019).



Figure 8. Michael Ignatieff gives his lecture “Reading the Psalms in a faithless time”. Photo by Foppe Schut.

The festival organizers, however, made selections as to which varieties of ‘religiosity’ they wanted to acknowledge in the festival. Swüste, Samama, and Visser resent that Christianity appropriated the Psalms inauthentically. All three emphasized that the Psalms are originally a Jewish textual source and that Christian additions are inauthentic and should be avoided in performance (interview, Gerard Swüste, 30 April 2019; interview, Leo Samama,

¹⁹³ See Vandamme and Wentz’ introduction in the festival booklet.

6 May 2019, interview, Tido Visser, 8 May 2019).¹⁹⁴ This led musicologist Samama to avoid Psalms with Christian doxologies ('Gloria Patri etc.') as much as possible in his selection of the festival repertoire. However, most of the selected compositions still had roots in Christian traditions, as Samama also tried to offer an overview of the canon of Western classical choral music (interview, Leo Samama, 6 May 2019).

The structure of the festival had its roots in Christian religious heritage: the 'marathon of concerts' was an appropriation of the monastic liturgy of the hours (interview, Merlijn Geurts, 31 May 2019). Furthermore, Geurts and newspaper critic Mischa Spel interpreted the introductory speeches as short sermons and Visser admitted that he "used the festival to preach a bit" (interview, Merlijn Geurts, 31 May 2019; interview, Tido Visser, 8 May 2019).¹⁹⁵ While all three claimed to be authentic in their appropriation of particular liturgical practices (the liturgy of the hours, preaching), they also separated the festival from liturgy by emphasizing the festival's focus on 'open reflection' in contrast to religious reflection and preaching, which they consider too narrow-minded and therefore inauthentic with respect to the 'ambiguity' or openness of the Psalms (interview, Merlijn Geurts, 31 May 2019; interview, Leo Samama, 6 May 2019; interview, Tido Visser, 8 May 2019). Samama suggested that making collective singing part of the festival would be authentic to Psalm traditions in Germany and the Netherlands; however, Visser thought that this would be "mimicking church" and "too forceful" and therefore unfitting for such a cultural event for open reflection (interview, Leo Samama, 6 May 2019; interview, Tido Visser, 8 May 2019). Again, liturgy and the arts are set in conflict in relation to the Psalms as a source of contemplation.

In his festival lecture, Ignatieff refrained from drawing sharp lines between a supposed religious narrow-mindedness and a supposed secular openness and argued that the doubts in the Psalms

free us from a kind of spiritual envy and nostalgia, intrinsic to the narrative of secularization, according to which there is a world of certainty we lost, in an age of faith we can never recover. The Psalms help us to understand that there is no lost paradise of certainty behind us, no human era in which radical doubt was not present.

¹⁹⁴ Samama (who is of Jewish descent) stated that "the primary function of the Psalms was to give ordinary people, the Jewish people, their identity" (interview, Leo Samama, 6 May 2019).

¹⁹⁵ Cf. Mischa Spel, "'150 Psalms haakt geslaagd in op actualiteit'", *NRC Handelsblad*, 3 September 2017, www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2017/09/03/150-Psalms-haakt-geslaagd-in-op-actualiteit-12813461-a1572087, accessed 2 December 2023.

Here, the claim of authenticity is based on a continuity between religious uncertainty in the Psalms and in the present day, without contrasting a religious past ('an age of faith') with a secular present.

Concertgoers Eva and Johan (both church-goers) were able to experience their individual religiosity during the concerts by "taking these Psalms only for myself" and by sometimes "ignoring these introductory speeches", which they believed to be "only secular perspectives on the Psalms" without offering "deeper insights" (interview, Eva, 21 May 2019). For them, religious contemplation should have had a more prominent role at the festival. An assessment which, in hindsight, led them to consider the appropriation of the Psalms within the festival to be inauthentic in this respect.

4.5.4. God

Another reason for participants to consider the performance of Psalms to be 'authentic' is if, and how, the Psalms' relationship with God is preserved. While God plays a role for all the participants, views concerning the conservation of Psalms for the future and God's place therein differ. Different images of God (and ideas about how to address God) play a part.¹⁹⁶

One image of God that I can trace within the festival is that of God as a Hebrew/Jewish deity. Samama, for example, emphasized that "the God of the Psalms is JHWH". He avoided Christian doxologies and also "a personal, Christian God", which he considers to be inauthentic to the God in the Psalms. He thought a "more liberal view, such as that of Gerard Swüste's" is more in line with the questioning nature of the Psalm texts (interview, Leo Samama, 6 May 2019).

Another image of God is a Christian (conservative Protestant) image of the transcendent Creator who gave the Psalms to humanity in order to provide them with words of faith and consolation, as concertgoers Eva and Johan believe. They used this image of God to authenticate their own appropriation when they experienced "a relationship with the Lord" during the festival or when they sing Psalms in church. Johan argued that this notion of God was kept out of the picture during the festival because of the "horizontal translation" of the Psalms that the festival sought to create (interview, Johan, 21 May 2019). S. Janse, a minister of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, who contributed an opinion piece in the *Reformatorisch Dagblad* (a strictly Reformed newspaper), even wrote about the festival practicing *damnatio memoriae* by

¹⁹⁶ This is one of the major topics in chapter 7.

actively destructing memories of God.¹⁹⁷ He considered the festival organization's appropriation to be inauthentic, given its negligence of a transcendent God ("the vertical dimension", in Johan's words).

In a third understanding of God, God is viewed as something or someone who is beyond a transcendent-versus-immanent dichotomy. For Albrecht (De Balie) and introductory speaker Ramsey Nasr, God appears to be simultaneously understood as constructed and real.¹⁹⁸ Such appropriations of the Psalms are authenticated by acknowledging the doubts in the Psalms concerning the existence or presence of God and "understanding the God of the Psalms in universal truths" as inauthentic with respect to the God of the Psalms.¹⁹⁹

For adherents to the second image, 'Lord' (in Dutch, *Heer*) is a common name for God, but Samama, Geurts, Swüste, and Nasr avoided this word. They tried to be authentic with respect to the elusiveness of the God of the Psalms by omitting God's name or opting for 'the Living' or 'the Breath' to be authentic with respect to God's closeness. Nasr, for example, who considers himself a "mild non-believer", finds consolation in translating *dominus* with 'darling'. For him, his translation of Psalm 38 makes it a "love poem of desolation which opens the back door to God", while "liturgical" translations remain inauthentic as those translations (deemed "too sacred") keep God at a distance when they use 'Thou' or 'Lord' to address God.²⁰⁰ For Swüste and for introductory speaker Van Brederode, contemplating God means calling out for justice (for Van Brederode, "Psalms inspire a sacred rage") or finding inspiration for charity.²⁰¹ 'God', in this context, mostly consists of an appeal and is to be understood to a much lesser extent as an acting agent itself.

4.5.5. Political relevance

A next notion of authenticity which can be found in the data is that of political engagement. Participants claimed that the Psalms address political issues and have (always) been used to communicate political ideas. All the participants agree upon the idea that the authors of the Psalms questioned their political

197 S. Janse, "Psalmen zonder God geven lege plek", *Reformatorisch Dagblad*, 6 September 2017, www.rd.nl/artikel/723641-Psalmen-zonder-god-geven-lege-plek, accessed 2 December 2023.

198 See Albrecht's introduction in the festival booklet, and Nasr's introductory speeches ("Powerlessness and Redemption" and "Feast").

199 See Nasr's introductory speeches to the concerts "On the Run" and "Feast".

200 Nasr compared these different translations in his introductory speech to the concert "Safety".

201 See Swüsted's contribution to the festival booklet, and the interview with Van Brederode in KleinJan ("Psalmen zijn een onuitputtelijke bron van inspiratie", *Trouw*, 29 August 2017, www.trouw.nl/nieuws/Psalmen-zijn-een-onuitputtelijke-bron-van-inspiratie-b98c4b26/, accessed 2 December 2023).

contexts. For some, the directness with which the Psalms address political issues incites the same in their contemporary appropriation. In this view, to address current political issues with Psalms is to be authentic with respect to what the Psalms are, while to refuse to do so is inauthentic.

Political issues were indeed addressed in the festival. Photographs and texts (posters, website, booklet), introductory speeches and lectures were used to reflect upon the politics of US President Donald Trump, Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán, and Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, the (European) migrant crisis, and wars in the Middle East. It appears that the festival was not simply about asking questions, as Samama suggested, but it also proposed possible directions for answering them. Festival organizers, composers, speakers, and lecturers all appear to endorse a progressive, cosmopolitan worldview and find grounds for this in the texts of the Psalms (interview, Merlijn Geurts, 31 May 2019; interview, Leo Samama, 6 May 2019; interview, Tido Visser, 8 May 2019).²⁰²

Geurts emphasized the need for connection in the current political landscape that is marked by polarization and believed that, for this purpose, the Psalms were authentically appropriated in the festival (interview, Merlijn Geurts, 31 May 2019). Composer Mohammed Fairouz and conductor Peter Dijkstra saw a special role for choral music in this respect. They suggested that choral music and singing (Psalms) together have great force in connecting people with each other and in preventing (further) societal and political polarization.²⁰³

While sharing the view that Psalms have political relevance, others believed that the festival was inauthentic with respect to this aspect of the Psalms. They considered a choral festival with traditional concert performances to be predominantly an event of aesthetic appreciation and insufficiently capable of addressing political issues. Newspaper critic Guido van Oorschot holds this opinion, suggesting that traditional choral performances (with an older audience) fail to be authentic with respect to the Psalms' political expressiveness.²⁰⁴

202 See Albrecht's contribution to the festival booklet, KleinJan ("Psalmen zijn een onuitputtelijke bron van inspiratie"), Van Brederode's introductory speeches ("Leadership", "Path of Life", "Power and Oppression"), and the newspaper report by Nell Westerlaken, "Psalm 14 lijkt voor deze tijd geschreven te zijn, meent deze componist", *De Volkskrant*, 30 August 2017, www.volkskrant.nl/cultuur-media/Psalm-14-lijkt-voor-deze-tijd-geschreven-te-zijn-meent-deze-componist-b6727fa3/, accessed 2 December 2023.

203 See the report by Westerlaken ("Psalm 14 lijkt voor deze tijd geschreven te zijn") and Mischa Spel, "Er wordt in Nederland weinig op écht hoog niveau gezongen", *NRC Handelsblad*, 30 August 2017, www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2017/08/30/er-wordt-in-nederland-weinig-op-echt-hoog-niveau-gezongen-12740115-a1571592, accessed 2 December 2023.

204 See Guido van Oorschot, "Het koor van 150 Psalms verzuimt uit zijn cocon te breken", *De*

4.5.6. Ambiguity

A next understanding of authenticity is the ambiguity of the Psalms: the Psalms have a ‘questioning’ character and have an ambiguous quality, which made them relevant in different historical contexts and is the main reason for their endurance. The participants’ admiration for the ambiguity of Psalms has already been mentioned above. For Albrecht and Nasr, these ambiguities are not only recognizable (e.g. doubts about God), but also show the Psalms’ literary quality. To explain the Psalms in terms of ‘universal truths’ or ‘singular interpretations’ is, they claimed, to be inauthentic, not truthful, with respect to ideals of literary quality in general and specifically to the literary quality of the Psalms. According to Samama, the festival’s principal aim was to be authentic in preserving the Psalms’ ambiguity and questioning nature: “Our political statement was a question mark. Psalms ask questions which are still relevant” (interview, Leo Samama, 6 May 2019).²⁰⁵ All the participants regarded the appropriation within the festival to be authentic in this respect, except for Eva and Johan, who found the appropriation insufficiently diverse—quite the opposite: too one-sidedly secular and therefore inauthentic (interview, Eva and Johan, 21 May 2019).

4.6. Consensus and tensions

My analysis shows that the participants do not point to just one issue of authenticity in their evaluation of the festival. They all recognize that the ‘emotional humanity’ and ‘beauty’ of the Psalms are authentically appropriated in the festival. However, they also think that the appropriation of Psalms is, and should be, about more than these two aspects. They pair their emphasis on (one of) these two notions of authenticity with other authenticity claims.

When the participants combined different notions of authenticity, they described these as having different effects on them. The festival organizers suggested that the ‘universal humanity’ of the Psalms makes them feel connected with ‘humanity’, while they also stated that the ambiguity of the Psalms makes them contemplate their individual lives and individual religiosity and that the Psalms’ ‘political relevance’ inspires them to engage with current political issues. They combined ‘humanity’ with ‘ambiguity’ and ‘political relevance’,

Volkskrant, 3 September 2017, www.volkskrant.nl/cultuur-media/het-koor-van-150-Psalms-verzuimt-uit-zijn-cocon-te-breken~b3c31ff2/, accessed 2 December 2023.

²⁰⁵ See Benlahbib’s contribution to the festival booklet, KleinJan’s newspaper report (“Psalmen zijn een onuitputtelijke bron van inspiratie”) and Nasr’s introductory speeches.

but these different authenticities have different roles in their appropriation of the Psalms. They contrasted their own use of the Psalms with what they view as traditional Christian usage, which they think is too narrow-minded and insufficiently critical with respect to political issues.

Here I observe a tension. In the festival, an effort was made (by organizers, speakers, composers) to remove the Psalms 'from a religious atmosphere' (which they consider oppressive, lacking universality, and too narrow-minded) and to re-frame the Psalms in an atmosphere that makes room for 'humanity', 'universality', and 'open-mindedness'. The tension I observe lies in the fact that the ways in which these frames are characterized by the participants (narrow versus open and universal) are not in accordance with the way the frames functioned in the festival. While emphasizing openness and universality, the festival promoted a worldview that is less open: the 'universal humanity' of the Psalms and their 'openness' were combined with a cosmopolitan, liberal political message (interview, Leo Samama, 6 May 2019; interview, Tido Visser, 8 May 2019).²⁰⁶ The tension that I observe resonates with the concerns which concertgoers Eva and Johan raised (interview, Eva and Johan, 21 May 2019).

It is not that there was no room for 'religiosity' or 'God' in the festival, but these aspects were confined to the realm of individual experience and contemplation.²⁰⁷ On the part of the organizers, speakers, and composers, 'religiosity' and 'God' are regarded as obstructive to openness and universality, while a political message which is not necessarily 'universal' or 'open' lingers behind claims of universality and openness. In other words, the tension I observe is the tension between the festival's claim to be 'universally human', and therefore to be more 'authentic' with respect to the Psalms than a 'religious atmosphere', and the reality of the festival itself, which was as directional as 'religious atmospheres' are accused of being.

²⁰⁶ See Albrecht's and Visser's contributions to the festival booklet, Van Brederode's introductory speeches, and KleinJan's and Westerlakens' newspaper reports.

²⁰⁷ Further research nuanced this tension: after having done more fieldwork (participant observation, interviews) and by paying attention to the aesthetic (sensorial) aspects of the performances, it became clearer that collective 'religious' dimensions were not excluded from the festival, but became more implicit (collective singing disappeared, but a shared feeling of 'flow' was widely recognized among participants). See Chapter 5.

4.7. Conclusion

In the festival *150 Psalms*, the Psalms were appropriated as heritage. In this appropriation, authenticity is an important quality, as cultural memory and heritage scholars have already pointed out.²⁰⁸ All the participants agree that the appropriation of the Psalms at the festival is authentic in its conservation of the Psalms' emotional humanity and beauty. However, it turns out that this is not enough for any of the participants, who all stated that there is an additional duty to be authentic with respect to other aspects of the heritage of Psalms. It is here that participants diverge, all claiming their own appropriation to be more authentic than the appropriations of others, either through its '(universal) humanity', its 'religiosity', its 'relationship with God(s)', its 'ambiguity' or its 'political relevance'. Furthermore, I conclude, on the basis of the combinations of authenticities that participants made, that these different authenticities function in different ways; for example, an authenticity of 'universal humanity' provides a basis for 'connection', while an authenticity based around 'religiosity' is confined to the realm of individual contemplation. 'Religiosity' and 'God' were not omitted in the festival, but reduced to the level of individual experience as the festival organization believes collective religiosity to be too oppressive and narrow-minded. My analysis challenges the festival organizers' emphasis on the openness and universality of the festival, as their appropriation of the Psalms tends to foreground liberal and cosmopolitan worldviews.

In the festival *150 Psalms*, Psalms are venerated as a canonical heritage, but there seems to be no collective consensus about which universality or timelessness is constitutive of which shared identity. This urged me to investigate more deeply what it is that participants share, want to share or what diverges them. Assmann's theorization about 'canonization' made me attentive to claims of universality and timelessness, but my analysis showed that these claims appeared to be too contradictory or at odds with one another, making it impossible to speak of a collective that canonizes a certain heritage for the construction or consolidation of its collective identity. Assmann's conceptualization of canonization generally holds when an analysis of the appropriation of heritage primarily focuses on the perspectives of organizers and journalists (critics), but I expect that further data gathering among choir members and festivalgoers will yield an even more dynamic, heterogeneous picture of the

²⁰⁸ Frijhoff, "Herdenkingscultuur," 181; Karlström, "Authenticity," 29-30; Silverman, "Heritage and Authenticity," 69; Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 67-69, 125.

appropriation of the Psalms in the festival—a picture that escapes any lens that relies predominantly on the uniformity of collectives. It appears that, in the case of festival *150 Psalms*, the canonization of Psalms is not a homogeneous appropriation by a unified collective sharing a consensus about either the Psalms or a collective identity. Rather, beyond a general agreement between participants about the ‘authentic beauty’ of the performed Psalms, the appropriation of Psalms in the festival is characterized by competing authenticities.



5



Making sense of the Psalms

Aesthetics and embodied experience in the
performance of Psalms

5.1. Introduction

Collective singing in a concert hall ... that's too much like church music for me ... In a church, I would sing at the top of my voice, it's easy to join in, but in a hall like that ... I would be afraid other people would think I was fervently displaying my faith, like evangelizing ...

interview with Roelof, concertgoer of *150 Psalms*, 15 May 2020

I appreciate the recitation of poetry in a church, because it's a space that appeals to something that's not cerebral or intellectual, but emotional. For most people, religion is something emotional, it's a context where poetry is meaningful.

interview with Gaea Schoeters, poet of *Poesia Divina*, 28
September 2019

At some point you immerse yourself in it, you forget your surroundings, you stare at a single point above, or on the organ... you just take off!... Just looking at nothing, it's something euphoric, something religious.

interview with Erik, singer of the *Genemuiders Bovenstem*, 20
September 2020

The Psalms are on the move.²⁰⁹ The role of Psalm recitation at the heart of the Jewish and Christian traditions, means that Psalms have long been (and still are) predominantly associated with these religious traditions.²¹⁰ Just like many other examples of 'religious' heritage, however, the Psalms are currently being reinvented and reframed in ways that are neither exclusively religious nor secular.²¹¹ In my research on contemporary Psalm performances, I frequently observe the intermingling of religious and secular meaning especially on the level of sensory experience as the opening fragments serve to demonstrate.

'Postsecular' theorists have argued that the re-dimensioning and blurring of the religious and the secular are often particularly conspicuous in the realm of cultural heritage and the arts and, in particular, on the level of sensorial experience.²¹² Religious and secular meanings can come together when, for instance, art ignites experiences of transcendence, spirituality, or enchantment despite its secular context in a museum or concert hall, and when secular values such as the freedom of individual rationality begin to determine religious practices in place of religious authority and doctrine.²¹³

A 'postsecular' understanding means not simply understanding the reframing of 'religious' heritage as a process of secularization but engaging in critical reflection on the dichotomy between the religious and the secular.²¹⁴ Such

209 The 'antiphon' for this chapter is taken from *Poesia Divina*, more specifically 'The invention of the body' by Maarten Inghels: www.henkvoegel.com/antiphon-5/.

210 Cf. Brettler, "Jewish Theology of the Psalms," 486; De Bruijn, "Woord vooraf," 11; Klaassens, "The Reformed Tradition in the Netherlands," 464, 67; Yke Schotanus and Hendrik Vincent Kooops, "Interaction Between Musical and Poetic Form Affects Song Popularity: The Case of the Genevan Psalter," *Psychomusicology: Music, Mind, and Brain* 28, no. 3 (2018): 1127-128, <https://doi.org/10.1037/pmu0000216>; Schuman, "De Psalmen," 169; Vogel, Klomp, and Barnard, "Sing After God a New Song," 23-26.

211 Klomp, *Playing On*, 51; Meyer, "Recycling the Christian Past," 65, 82-83; Wijnia, *Beyond the Return of Religion*, 81.

212 Davor Džalto, "Preface," in *Religion and Art. Rethinking Aesthetic and Auratic Experiences in 'Post-Secular' Times*, ed. Davor Džalto (Basel: MDPI, 2019), ix; François Gauthier, "Consumer Culture and the Sensory Remodelling of Religion," in *Aesthetics of Religion. A Connective Concept*, ed. Alexandra Grieser and Jay Johnston (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 453; Hodkinson and Horstkotte, "Introducing the Postsecular," 324; Birgit Meyer and Jojada Verrips, "Aesthetics," in *Key Words in Religion, Media and Culture*, ed. David Morgan (New York: Routledge, 2008), 29; Nika Spalinger, "Art and Religion in a Post-Secular, Multi-Religious Society," in *Taking Offense. Religion, Art, and Visual Culture in Plural Configurations*, ed. Christiane Kruse, Birgit Meyer, and Anne-Marie Korte (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 59, 71; Wijnia, *Beyond the Return of Religion*, 13, 42.

213 Wijnia, *Beyond the Return of Religion*, 13, 27, 64-65, 81.

214 Rosi Braidotti et al., "Introductory Notes," in *Transformations of Religion and the Public Sphere. Postsecular Publics*, ed. Rosi Braidotti et al., Palgrave Politics of Identity and Citizenship Series (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 4; Gauthier, "Consumer Culture and the Sensory Remodelling

reflection does not entail a denial of secularization but, rather, acknowledges the complexities which result from the overlapping and blurring of meanings that can be religious, secular, sacred, and mundane all at the same time.²¹⁵ Thus, the prefix 'post' should not be taken to mean the return of religion at the expense of the secular, rather, it denotes a critical attitude towards secular normativity, religious normativity, and an uncritical binary conception of the two as mutually exclusive.²¹⁶ Theorists of the postsecular argue that such a critical attitude is often strikingly manifest on the level of aesthetics (that is: sensory experience, see below), rather than on the level of abstract ideas alone.²¹⁷ Scholar of religion François Gauthier argues that the religious and the secular are primarily negotiated on the level of experience (in relation to their aesthetic attractiveness or effectiveness) and not on the level of believing or belonging, thereby eroding the borders suggested in secular thinking between religious, artistic, secular, and public spheres.²¹⁸

I have observed the organizers and performers of 'high art' classical music events deliberately experimenting with the religious dimensions of the performances they stage in concert halls, traditionally a secular location. And I have seen practitioners of a religious musical practice (descant singing in Genemuiden) organizing concerts outside of the Sunday liturgy and seeking

of Religion," 453; Hodkinson and Horstkotte, "Introducing the Postsecular," 318; Parmaksız, "Making Sense of the Postsecular," 107; Wijnia, *Beyond the Return of Religion*, 11.

²¹⁵ Joshua King and Winter Jade Werner, "Introduction," in *Constructing Nineteenth-Century Religion. Literary, Historical, and Religious Studies in Dialogue*, ed. Joshua King and Winter Jade Werner, Literature, Religion, and Postsecular Studies (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2019), 3-4; Meyer, "Introduction," 1.

²¹⁶ Braidotti et al., "Introductory Notes," 4; Hodkinson and Horstkotte, "Introducing the Postsecular," 319; King and Werner, "Introduction," 4; Klomp, *Playing On*, 134, 60, 97; Parmaksız, "Making Sense of the Postsecular," 101-03, 07; Wijnia, *Beyond the Return of Religion*, 9, 15, 80-81. Apart from its ambiguous prefix, the notion of the postsecular has been rightly criticized for its over-dependence on secular normativity, and for being overly Euro-centric. See: Braidotti et al., "Introductory Notes," 1-2; Gauthier, "Consumer Culture and the Sensory Remodelling of Religion," 449. Despite this, it can still help to point to a contemporary configuration of Dutch and Flemish society in which it is, or has become, very common to question the normativity of religion, the secular (e.g. science), and the opposition of the two.

²¹⁷ Gauthier, "Consumer Culture and the Sensory Remodelling of Religion," 452-53; Wilke, "Moving Religion by Sound," 345. As I will discuss, I define aesthetics as the sensorial, embodied interaction with, and interpretation of the world. Cf. Alexandra Grieser and Jay Johnston, "What is an Aesthetics of Religion? From the Senses to Meaning - and Back Again," in *Aesthetics of Religion. A Connective Concept*, ed. Alexandra Grieser and Jay Johnston (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 8; Meyer and Verrips, "Aesthetics," 21.

²¹⁸ "Consumer Culture and the Sensory Remodelling of Religion," 452-53; cf. Grieser and Johnston, "What is an Aesthetics of Religion?," 22, 40; Charles Hirschkind, "Is there a secular body?," *Cultural Anthropology* 26, no. 4 (2011): 633; Meyer and Verrips, "Aesthetics," 29; Wijnia, *Beyond the Return of Religion*, 20, 43, 80.

recognition and support from the secular institutions that implement UNESCO intangible heritage policies on behalf of the Dutch government. Studying such changes along traditional institutional and doctrinal delineations of religion and the secular would miss the ways in which these practices contest such delineations.²¹⁹ In a societal context marked by plurality, where (individual) experience seems to have gained ascendance over adherence to (religious) authority and belief, I have set out to ask how religious and secular dimensions are manifest in the performance of Psalms on the level of sensorial experience.²²⁰ In other words: *How can we understand the aesthetics of Psalm performance in a postsecular context?* In answering this question, I have undertaken an in-depth examination of aesthetics, and through this I aim to contribute to further theorization of the postsecular.

The notion of aesthetics can serve as a lens that directs my attention to the sensory experience of the Psalms performances that I have studied. Alongside the work of religious studies scholar Birgit Meyer, I understand aesthetics to be a “sensory engagement with the world that synthesizes sensation and sense-making.”²²¹ Such a synthesis undermines an unproductive opposition between sensory and abstract knowledge, and serves, therefore, not as an “overall critique against text and belief, or questions of meaning”, but rather as a corrective extension to the “text-oriented focus in the study of religion” that considered objects and practices to be mere expressions of ideas.²²² Thus, an analytic focus on aesthetics helps to keep sensation and meaning in close

219 Gauthier, "Consumer Culture and the Sensory Remodelling of Religion," 449-50; Grieser and Johnston, "What is an Aesthetics of Religion?," 4-7; King and Werner, "Introduction," 7; Klomp, *Playing On*, 146; Meyer, "Religion as Mediation," [28].

220 Cf. Balkenhol and Jaffe, "Introduction," 9; Birgit Meyer, "The Dynamics of Taking Offense. Concluding Thoughts and Outlook.," in *Taking Offense. Religion, Art, and Visual Culture in Plural Configurations*, ed. Christiane Kruse, Birgit Meyer, and Anne-Marie Korte (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 364-65; Meyer, "Religion as Mediation," [33]; Spalinger, "Art and Religion," 59; Wijnia, *Beyond the Return of Religion*, 30-31. According to scholar of religion Sally Promey, distinctions between religious and secular spheres on the basis of “nonsensory interior” belief are “neither as easily and firmly located nor as extreme as many who have claimed to be moderns have asserted” Sally M. Promey, "Religion, Sensation, and Materiality. An Introduction," in *Sensational Religion. Sensory Cultures in Material Practice*, ed. Sally M. Promey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 12. In other words, sensorial experiences have always played a role in the construction of religion and the secular, which encourages me to study the aesthetics of Psalm performances even more.

221 Birgit Meyer, "How to capture the 'wow': R.R. Marett's notion of awe and the study of religion," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 22 (2015): 20, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.12331>; cf. Grieser and Johnston, "What is an Aesthetics of Religion?," 8; Meyer and Verrips, "Aesthetics," 21.

222 Grieser and Johnston, "What is an Aesthetics of Religion?," 2-4, 29; cf. Meyer, "Religion as Mediation," [21].

proximity, “integrating the role of the senses in sense-making.”²²³ Recent understandings of aesthetics have emphasized its embodied nature and ways in which the different senses are entangled.²²⁴ This is of particular interest in a postsecular context, as transformations of religion and the secular (have) brought with them changes in the hierarchy of how different sense are distinguished, evaluated, and cultivated.²²⁵

Thus in my study of the aesthetics of Psalm performance, I analyze the role of the senses—both separately and in relation to one another—in the meanings people attribute to the particular performances they participate in. In embarking upon this endeavor, I come up against the challenge of writing about the realm of sensorial experience on the basis of narratives and observation (see below). Although this is an indirect, verbal way of “thinking through and reconstructing the observed and analyzed,” I agree with Grieser and Johnston that “thinking about a dance does not need to be danced, and studying religions/s does not require one to re-enact them.” Descriptive language can still

be a valuable way of gaining both a closeness to religion as aesthetic practice (acknowledging the intensity and the qualities of aesthetic effects), and a position of distance, going beyond reproduction and appreciation of aesthetic forms and providing a systematic frame for comparing and analyzing the single case in light of more general questions.²²⁶

In section 5.3, I seek to provide just such a systematic frame through my discussion of the ways in which different sensorial experiences of contemporary Psalm performances are connected with sense-making.

223 Meyer, “Religion as Mediation,” [7]; cf. Peter J. Bräunlein, “Thinking Religion Through Things. Reflections on the Material Turn in the Scientific Study of Religion/s,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 28 (2016): 390, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700682-12341364>.

224 Alexandra Grieser, “Aesthetics,” in *Vocabulary for the Study of Religion*, ed. Robert A. Segal and Kocku Von Stuckrad (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Meyer, “Introduction,” 6; Promey, “Religion, Sensation, and Materiality,” 10-11.

225 Grieser and Johnston, “What is an Aesthetics of Religion?,” 15, 18-19; Meyer, “Religion as Mediation,” [21]. Grieser and Johnston use the notion of “aesthetic profiles” to describe the ways in which the different senses are distinguished, grouped, valued, and privileged in specific traditions, which is similar to Meyer’s notion of “aesthetic regimes”. See: Grieser and Johnston, “What is an Aesthetics of Religion?,” 19; Meyer, “The Dynamics of Taking Offense,” 364.

226 Grieser and Johnston, “What is an Aesthetics of Religion?,” 21. Barnard, Klomp, Sonnenberg, Belderbos and Van Anandel distinguish four different levels within research data relating to liturgical phenomena. My data can be located on the first level (“perceptions by the researcher”) and, to a greater extent, on the second level (“reconstructions of (...) perceptions of a phenomenon”). Marcel Barnard et al., “Dots on a blank sheet. Procedures in ritual and liturgical research,” *Jaarboek voor liturgieonderzoek* 25 (2009): 38.

5.2. Methodology

This chapter is based on ethnographic fieldwork undertaken between 2018 and 2020, in which I utilized a number of different methods for data gathering and analysis. I studied the performance of Psalms in four different settings: the concert series *Psalm 151*, the festival of *150 Psalms*, a series of poetry events entitled *Poesia Divina*, and the (extra-)liturgical tradition of *Genemuider Bovenstem* (Genemuïden descant singing).

All interviews were recorded and transcribed, and textual material was coded using Atlas.ti software. I used evaluation coding for themes relating to sense-making (e.g. 'beautiful', 'boring', 'moving') and provisional coding for the sensorial experiences (e.g. 'sound', 'vision', etc.). I also analyzed the co-occurrence of these sensorial experiences with sense-making. During analysis, it became clear that some experiences were so highly multisensory that I needed an additional category of 'synaesthetic perception.' This category came to include the perception of time and of space, which, earlier in the analysis, had existed as separate categories, but appeared to comprise data fragments which could be grouped together under the categories of bodily perception, auditory perception, visual perception and, in particular, synaesthetic perception.²²⁷

5.3. Findings. Perceiving Psalms

I present my findings according to four dimensions of sensory experience: bodily perception, sonic perception, visual perception, and synaesthetic perception. This final category relates to sensory perceptions in which different senses merge so as to become indistinguishable, and which, therefore, cannot be categorized separately as, for example, sonic or visual perceptions. Multisensoriality is the main and most prominent characteristic of such sensory experiences.²²⁸

5.3.1. Bodily perception

The first category, bodily perception, involves the ways in which respondents perceived the performance of Psalms through their bodies. Examples of this include moving and singing along, (changing) posture, the perception of

²²⁷ Grieser and Johnston, however, list the sense of time and space alongside the traditional senses of seeing, smell, touch, hearing, and proprioception. See: Grieser and Johnston, "What is an Aesthetics of Religion?," 16.

²²⁸ I use the words 'multisensorial' and 'synaesthetic' interchangeably.

temperature, crying, goosebumps, and the sensation of being surrounded by other bodies. All such experiences contribute to the bodily perception of Psalms as collective, intense, emotional, sincere, recognizable, and religious.

Firstly, respondents described how they perceive Psalm performance as a bodily collective experience. They speak about being physically together in the space of a church or concert hall and of joining in a shared bodily practice. At



Figure 9. Choral singers and other participants join in *Genemuiders Bovenstem* collective psalmody. Photo: Kenniscentrum Immaterieel Erfgoed Nederland.

the festival of *150 Psalms*, such togetherness was experienced in “walking from concert to concert, going through the program together” (interview with Tido Visser, 8 May 2019) and, for singers, through immersion in the physical sensation of singing together: “Sometimes, when all the voices intertwine, and everything comes together, you lose track of the boundaries between yourself and others” (interview with Dora, 28 January 2020). Concertgoer Johan missed out on this experience, asking: “Why are we only allowed to experience it so individually? Why not create connection by singing together?” (interview, 21 May 2019). By contrast, the elements of individuality that respondents experienced in the performance of *Psalm 151* resulted from the way in which the individual singers, before the start of the concert, would move around the concert space and chat with people from the audience and with each other. In *Genemuiders Bovenstem*, the physical act of sitting closely together and singing together in groups (of men) can enhance the perception of the Psalm performance as something collective

in nature. Respondents prefer it when the descant is produced by male bodies (vocal chords). In these performances it is, therefore, not the case that each and every body has equal access to the intimacy of singing descants together.²²⁹

Secondly, the bodily experience of Psalm performance is ‘intense,’ and especially so in the activity of singing together. *Genemuiders Bovenstem* performances are singalong events where all can join in by sounding the hymn tune or the descant, an activity which respondents described as physically intense. This intensity is lacking when they do not sing along, or when they listen to recordings. Reported experiences include “shaking on [my] legs” (interview with Lammert, 20 August 2020), a feeling like “falling into a big bag and totally going with it” (interview with Erik) and “goosebumps and shivers” (interview with Arend Booij, 20 August 2020). Singers, and especially descant singers, prepare themselves by sitting upright, tilting their heads back a bit, and trying to give the experience their full attention. In *150 Psalms* and *Psalm 151*, physical intensity was experienced differently. In both cases, the performers were singers (Nederlands Kamerkoor and Cappella Amsterdam) who, by profession, need to perform the music as perfectly as possible. Camila (a singer at *150 Psalms*) emphasized that “for us, it’s tough ... We have to adapt very quickly ... we need to be very, very concentrated ... all the time” and, since it is “so very intense, in so many ways, we really need to be very healthy, in our minds and bodies” (interview, 28 January 2020). Such physical intensity was absent in the narratives of most concertgoers, with the exception of Rob (*Psalm 151*): “Ah those sounds... I feel I am getting warm, even now, when I think of it again!” (interview, 6 December 2018).

Thirdly, the performance of Psalms is an emotional, bodily experience: crying, or having goosebumps, for instance. Different respondents shared the memories they had of crying when they heard *Genemuiders Bovenstem*, narrating their experiences as illustrations of the format’s direct, intuitive, emotional power. I can compare this with Visser’s (director of Nederlands Kamerkoor and *150 Psalms*) record of

a concert about suffering, a program with painful notes. People huddle together. Two are holding hands. The man next to me wipes a tear. The Psalms speak right to the heart.²³⁰

²²⁹ As such, practicing *Genemuiders bovenstem* is an example of the bodily performance of masculinity, as is well illustrated by singer Erik’s characterization of descant singers: “We’re a group! ... Men among men. Drinking some beer, eating some snacks to celebrate wedding anniversaries. That kind of nonsense” (interview, 20 August 2020).

²³⁰ Travel blog by Tido Visser, when *150 Psalms* toured to New York. See: www.

Respondents from *Psalm 151* and *Poesia Divina* did not speak in these terms about their emotional experiences. When they did talk about their emotions, their bodily reactions remained more out of the picture, as these events relied less on a collective state of 'flow' (see the synaesthetic perception section).

Fourthly, the performance of Psalms is bodily perceived as 'sincere.' Experiences of tears and shivers are perceived as truthful or honest. Such sincerity was highly valued by respondents from *Genemuider Bovenstem*, which they often described as 'truly coming from the heart.'²³¹ Here, 'heart' is used as a metaphor, but a corporeal one nonetheless, like '(lower) belly' or 'chest.' Singer Erik asserts that you need to be physically healthy in order to sing sincerely, and not simply "technically right":

When you're not so fit, when you don't feel totally healthy, maybe you're able to sing, technically. But the notes you sing aren't as beautiful as when you truly experience the texts emotionally, when you truly believe what you sing! (interview).

The act of singing also evokes questions of whether it is done sincerely, or what 'sincerity' means for professional singers (*150 Psalms*, *Psalm 151*), who often emphasize that their sincere performance lies not in agreement with the (religious) textual content of the Psalms but in performing the music to the best of their ability.

Fifthly, respondents described how they recognize familiar Psalms with their bodies. Singers, in particular, talked about Psalms being in their "muscle memory", and singing them (almost) without the need to think. Singers who grew up in Genemuiden heard the Psalms every Sunday in church and can "naturally sing along" (Erik, interview), and these singers are proud of having learned this by imitation instead of studying from sheet music, as is often the case for descant choirs from elsewhere. *Genemuider Bovenstem* respondents are convinced that learning the parts from sheet music is less "natural" and "too rehearsed" (Erik, interview). In a similar manner, Dora (a singer at *150 Psalms*) describes (almost) subconsciously performing music that is familiar and which has

nederlandskamerkoor.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Verslag-Tido-150-Psalms.pdf (accessed 8 January 2024).

²³¹ The practice of *Genemuider bovenstem* descant singing is particularly popular in the strictly Reformed subculture in the Netherlands, which is characterized by emphases on conservative Reformed Calvinist values, on believers' personal conversions, and, most important in this context, their authentic faith experiences Hijme Stoffels, "Protestantisme," in *Handboek religie in Nederland*, ed. Meerten Ter Borg (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2008), 122-45.

become part of your muscle memory ... it's not a conscious action, it's just something you do ... and when you start to think about what you're doing actually, you've lost it! (interview).

At the festival of *150 Psalms*, a large number of different compositions spanning a wide range of different musical styles had to be performed, most of which were not very familiar for the singers. This is also the case for *Psalm 151*, as Stefan comments: "We're still so busy singing the right notes, that I'm not yet lifted up by singing" (field notes 1, 25 November 2018).

Finally, the performance of Psalms can be bodily perceived as religious. This appears to be something precarious, something that respondents are hesitant about. Depending on the spatial context, respondents desire to embody a certain 'religiosity.' For example: concertgoers at *150 Psalms*, even when they were regular churchgoers and choral singers themselves, were glad that they did not have to sing along in the concert hall, as Roelof's quote at the opening of this chapter illustrates. Similarly, Tido Visser (director of the Nederlands Kamerkoor and of the festival) was cautious that collective singing could become too "churchy" (interview). In *Poesia Divina*, which in 2019 took place in a church, some of the performing poets reflected on whether, and how, their performance style (gestures, posture) should be in some way 'religious'. For Bart Stouten, writing, and reciting poetry facilitates an embodied connection with the transcendent:

Religion is about connecting the earthly with the transcendent ... our bodies and our limited memories aren't capable of getting in touch with it, at least not completely. But with poetry, you can. So, writing poetry is a religious activity, certainly when you use the form of a Psalm (interview, 28 September 2019).

For Gaea Schoeters, another poet, an explicitly embodied religiosity can even be the only possible way to write and perform a Psalm:

The only form of religion that I, from my atheist worldview, can relate to, is the mystic ... The relation between the erotic or even sexual, and becoming one with yourself in a religious ecstasy. For me, that's a logical connection, a natural one, as this Psalm seemed to write itself (interview, 28 September 2019).

It seems that these poets who participated in *Poesia Divina* are not afraid that performing and embodying religiosity might become 'too churchy.' The perception of singers is comparable in this respect. Generally, they experience singing as a 'spiritual' activity. For Iris (*Psalm 151*), singing in a concert is al-

ways spiritual, regardless of the repertoire, “because of the intensity of singing together, shared by the audience” (field notes 1). As Erik’s quote at the start of this chapter has already illustrated, *Genemuider Bovenstem* respondents often describe their intense bodily experiences as “something religious.” He adds that such intensity is a delicate issue, especially when somebody sings the descant at “not so appropriate” moments (during a more solemn, sober verse, for example) and others hesitate to ‘correct’ the singer, because “you shouldn’t take people out of their religious trance, so there’s a tension” (interview).

Throughout the six categories which I have described, it becomes clear that respondents often describe their bodily perception of psalmody as something that is beyond rational deliberation. They notice that their bodies sing, cry, shake, shiver, or remain silent, sometimes (almost) unintentionally. Such experiences make this a precarious subject for respondents, and especially so when it comes to ‘religious’ aspects of performance. Some respondents consider collective bodily action (singing, moving) a danger to the critical attitude they cultivate as individuals. They want to keep to themselves whether, or how, they ‘believe’ what the Psalms texts proclaim (regarding God, for instance). Some respondents, in contrast, enjoy sharing their convictions by singing along. For others, the ‘irrationality’ of physical performance is necessary for performing challenging music (so that they can rely on their ‘muscle memory’), or a chance for connecting with others without rational agreement regarding the meaning of the Psalms being performed.

5.3.2. Auditory perception

The perception of sound is a frequent theme in discussions of Psalm performance aesthetics. In all four of the locations under study the Psalms are experienced as musical events. Also in *Poesia Divina*, the musicality of poetry recitation (rhythm, repetition, intonation, etc.) is a recurring theme. Respondents described their perception of the sounds of Psalm performance as collective, intense, emotional, recognizable, sincere or beautiful, in a manner similar to the discussion of bodily perceptions which was the theme of the previous section. However, as the current section will show, sound appears to evoke these meanings somewhat differently.

Firstly, the sounds of Psalm performance are often perceived to be ‘collective,’ particular in the case of *Genemuider Bovenstem* and *150 Psalms*, where the singers seek to cultivate a sound which is homogeneous in timbre and pitch. Choral singer James (*150 Psalms*) described the collective sensation when a chord is perfectly in tune:

It's that vibration that is shared, when everybody is ... when it comes together ... it becomes euphoric, it's like a drug! ... It rings, it rings! ... It's just sound, and coming together, and doing it together (interview with James, 29 January 2020).

It is a defining characteristic of *Genemuider Bovenstem* that the Psalms are sung by large groups at rather high volume. As Yvonne (non-descant singer, *Genemuider Bovenstem*) describes it: "When I hear it, it's a feeling of togetherness, of being together!" (interview, 13 November 2020). The perceived individuality of *Psalm 151* stands out in contrast to this idea of sonic homogeneity. The sound of the singers and accordionists is characterized as heterogeneous in nature, with each person having their own individual tone and role.

Secondly, the sound of Psalm performance is perceived as intense. In *Genemuider Bovenstem*, this concerns an intense loudness, "a hurricane of sound," as descant singer Lars describes his experience (interview, 13 November 2020). For women, who do not usually sing the descant part, the loud descant can be disturbing, as Agatha told us: "Sometimes, it's too intense, and then it distracts me from singing the hymn tune" (interview, 11 November 2020). In the other locations under investigation, sound is often perceived as intense because of its complexity. Singer Dora (*150 Psalms*) described her experience as follows: "When the music is so complex, you can do nothing but listen. There's no mental space for other things" (interview). Heleen (a concertgoer at *Psalm 151*) found the same experience in the music of Boudewijn Tarenskeen, which was not only dissonant, but also rhythmically and spatially turbulent, as sounds are produced from different sides within the concert space. In



Figure 10. Cappella Amsterdam and accordionists duo TOEAC perform *Psalm 151*. Photo by Paul Janssen.

Poesia Divina, which was performed in a small space with a small number of visitors, attendees found intensity in the softness of sounds and in the silence.

Thirdly, sound is often perceived to be emotional, and respondents reported how sound moves or repulses them. Respondents from *Genemuiders Bovenstem* spoke about “the emotional moment of sounding praise” (Lammert, interview). The respondents from *Genemuiders Bovenstem* appreciated these emotions, but concertgoers Rob and Heleen both regretted how the music of *Psalm 151* had affected them. Heleen confessed that:

I want to be moved, and the dissonances to be solved ... the resolution of dissonances give me joy and balance in life ... Life can be so hard, so I would like to feel some balance [but the dissonances in the performance remained unsolved, HV] (interview, 6 December 2018).

Fourthly, respondents described their perception of sound in the performance of Psalms as something which could be recognized. In *Poesia Divina*, some of the poets deployed recognizable phrases. Gaea Schoeters, for example, uses

classic forms of address, like in the biblical Psalms, and then, every good Catholic echoes along: “Praise, praise be to you”, or like the Lord’s Prayer, which everybody knows. You create a recognizable frame for people (interview).

In *Genemuiders Bovenstem*, this kind of recognizable frame is strongly present, as the descant singing is (largely) an oral tradition of singing, learned by ear and through imitation. The descant and its standard organ accompaniment have become extremely familiar for these singers, so they immediately recognize it when an organist does something different, as singer Erik recalls:

Once, we had a concert elsewhere, with an organist we didn’t know. We just started singing our descant, but the organist threw some dissonances in to butcher us, and so the descant perished slowly during that verse ... (interview).

150 Psalms, a two-day festival with a wide variety of choral music, included a mix of familiar and unknown sounds, sometimes even within a single composition. Newspaper reviewer Westerlaken described how in Mohammed Fairouz’ *Psalm 14*, “you don’t only hear the Middle East, you also hear jazz, pop, and classical music.”²³² The music of *Psalm 151* was not so familiar for

²³² See: www.volkskrant.nl/cultuur-media/Psalm-14-lijkt-voor-deze-tijd-geschreven-te-zijn-meent-deze-componist-b6727fa3/ (accessed 8 January 2024).

the concertgoers. For some, this was an unsettling experience, as they “had no starting points, no clues” (Rob, interview) and “missed a recognizable theme in the music” (Heleen, interview). Others were positively surprised by the music’s strangeness.

Fifthly, respondents talked about their perception of sound in terms of sincerity, meaning that they characterized sounds as truthful, modest, authentic. For the professional singers who took part in *150 Psalms* and *Psalms 151*, sincere sound depends largely on technical quality and on how well the singing is executed (intonation, diction, style, etc.). In *Genemuiders Bovenstem*, sound is perceived as sincere when respondents can hear the emotional engagement of performers and “you feel, they really put their emotions into it” (Lars, interview). In *Psalms 151*, the sincerity of sound lies in its heterogeneity: each performer produced a distinguishable, individual sound. Composer Tarenskeen tried to deconstruct the traditional choir with its homogeneous-as-possible sound and standard repertoire with religious (in his view, dogmatic, oppressive) texts. The heterogeneous sound of his *Psalms 151* was recognized by concertgoers as reflecting the sincere—that is the autonomous and independent—intentions and involvement of the individual performers on stage. In *Poesia Divina*, sonic sincerity has to do with the sobriety and bareness of the performances. In the words of organizing director Jelle Dierickx: “It was pure, no show. Just eight poets reciting, and that was it” (interview, 22 September 2020).

Lastly, respondents mentioned that they perceived the sound of Psalm performance to be ‘beautiful.’ In *Genemuiders Bovenstem*, the beauty of sound was a prominent theme. All respondents agreed that the descant sounds more beautiful when sung by men, instead of by “shrill and shrieking high women’s voices,” to use the words of Agatha (interview). However, this beauty can get lost when singers are too engaged in the performance, as singer Lars explains: “Sometimes, emotion overrules beauty ... when they sing too loud” (interview). In *Psalms 151*, respondents offered disparate responses when it comes to the beauty of sound. Concertgoer Heleen “missed the harmony of beautiful sounds” (interview), while Tessa was astounded by their beauty, especially in the composition’s opening:

It was so beautiful! I found it beautiful, how it started with those primal sounds. In many spiritual traditions, creation started with sound. I found it really beautiful, and so appropriate! (interview, 13 December 2018).

In *150 Psalms* and *Poesia Divina*, the sounds were appreciated for their diversity (choral traditions, recited poems), which in itself is characterized as ‘beautiful’ without further reflection. Only a few respondents regretted that the concert hall for *150 Psalms* lacked the reverberation of a large church, which would amplify the Psalms set to music by Bach and earlier polyphonists beautifully.²³³ The auditory perception of Psalm performance results in more heterogeneous meaning-making than is the case with bodily perception. While bodily perception is more homogeneously described as unreflective participation (see the previous section), sound perception appears to leave more room for individual, more distanced reflection. One example is the performance of unfamiliar Psalms. Singers for whom a Psalm is (still) unfamiliar, and who are still at the stage of rehearsing it, are not (yet) “on top of the music,” as singer Stefan (*Psalm 151*) worded it (field notes 1). For listeners, on the other hand, it is easier to appreciate unfamiliar sounds, and to reflect individually on what they appreciate about them. However, there appears to be agreement that homogeneous sounds are more ‘collective’ than the ‘individualistic’, heterogeneous sound of *Psalm 151*.

5.3.3. Visual perception

The third category is the visual perception of Psalm performance. The performance of Psalms is visually perceived to be collective, sincere, emotional, and recognizable. Although these understandings occurred already in the previous sections, this section will show that visual perception has its own particularities.

Firstly, it appears that the experience of collectivity is connected to seeing other persons during the performance of Psalms. Respondents mentioned the way in which eye contact enhances their feeling of being together. In the churches used for *Genemuider Bovenstem* and *Psalm 151* (Nieuwe Kerk, The Hague), this was aided by the concentric positioning of pews (see above) and the light from large windows. In the concert hall for *150 Psalms*, the spotlights and light-colored decor drew the visual attention of the audience to the stage, since they were seated in a darker surrounding area arranged in ascending rows. This reduced a sense of visual collectivity. Initiator and director Tido Visser sought to enhance a more individual experience using a sober visual setup, without “any moving visuals behind the choirs ... so it would be just

²³³ See for instance a newspaper review by Guido van Oorschot in *De Volkskrant*: www.volkskrant.nl/cultuur-media/het-koor-van-150-Psalms-verzuimt-uit-zijn-cocon-te-breken~b3c31ff2/ (accessed 18 November 2021).

you and the music” (interview). Singers from *Genemuider Bovenstem* navigate between a focus on their collective and on their individual experience with their eyes. At some moments, they make eye contact, in order to “be a group,” “it cheers you up” (Erik, interview). At other moments,

you immerse yourself in it, you forget your surroundings, you stare at a single point, above, or on the organ ... you just go! ... Just looking at nothing (Erik, interview).



Figure 11. Some singers of *Genemuider Bovenstem* psalmody gaze away. Photo: Kenniscentrum Immaterieel Erfgoed Nederland..

Secondly, it appears that seeing others’ (facial, gesticular) expressivity can contribute to the perception of a Psalm performance as ‘sincere.’ Respondents assume, for instance, that (other) singers’ vivid body movements and facial expressions demonstrate their honest engagement. In the words of José, a concertgoer at *Psalm 151*: “You could see the true engagement and joy of the singers!” (6 December 2018). For others, visual perception of the sincerity of a performance lies in a limitation on ‘showy’ elements, such as (more) spectacular lightning or video projections that might distract from the ‘bare power’ of the Psalms. Jelle Dierickx (director of *Poesia Divina*) explains: “That’s why we make videos that are very sober. No nonsense. A black background and just one little lamp” (interview).

Thirdly, respondents are moved by what they see, especially when it comes to *150 Psalms* and *Genemuider Bovenstem*. They see other people crying, for

example, and are moved by that display. Singer Lammert (*Genemuider Bovenstem*) is moved when “you can see people’s emotions ... when they hear it for the first time, you see that emotion coming through” (interview).

Finally, the performance of Psalms is visually ‘recognizable.’ Respondents can see if a performance is a ‘traditional’ or ‘common’ performance of Psalms. In this respect, the performances of *Genemuider Bovenstem* and *150 Psalms* are distinctive. In *Genemuider Bovenstem*, descant singers have a distinct performance style, as I described in the section about bodily perception (sitting upright, tilting the head). The professional singers who participated in *150 Psalms* wore clothes which would be conventional for a choir performing in a Western classical music context, while the performers of *Psalms 151* wore clothes in different colors and styles, which surprised concertgoers in connection with a performance of Psalms.

Thus, visual perception is often a way for respondents to make ‘more sense’ of what they perceive with the rest of their bodies. By looking at others and by making eye contact, the ‘collective’ experience they also experience in sound and body, is (deliberately) enhanced. Gazing (away) helps them to intensify the ‘individuality’ of their experience. In this manner, seeing (and closing the eyes) can be a deliberate act in negotiating between the collective and individual aspects of sensory experience, more so than hearing. The visual also plays an important part in whether or how respondents perceive a performance as ‘sincere.’ The tears of (other) listeners, the active body language of performers, and the soberly lit stages and videos convince them that the performance of Psalms is not ‘just a show.’

5.3.4. Synaesthetic perception

Sometimes, the respondents talked about sensorial experiences of performed Psalms that have a significant multisensory component. Different senses overlap and can sometimes become hard to distinguish. Synaesthetic perception is intense, sometimes even too intense, resulting in overwhelming experiences. It appears that time and space both play an important role in directing the attention and in preventing synaesthetic experiences from becoming too overwhelming.

As would be expected, since synaesthetic perception is essentially multisensory, respondents often find synaesthetic experience to be intense in nature. Poet Mark van Tongele (*Poesia Divina*) describes such intense experiences as “an intuitive awareness of another shared and larger experiential world ... The ongoing metamorphosis of one image into the other, of images into sound,

of sound into colors” (interview in *Poëziekrant*). Other respondents describe synaesthetic experiences as an awareness of something that is invisible or unmeasurable. Jelle Dierickx (*Poesia Divina*) spoke about an intense “silent energy” (interview) when people come together to meditatively listen to Psalms, and singer Erik suggested that (*Genemuiders Bovenstem*):

You’re not totally aware of what is going on, but you can feel it, I am sure. You feel: something is happening, there is more between heaven and earth. Something is happening, when somebody moves and disconnects from all that surrounds him, and is totally absorbed in his faith. You can feel that, I am sure! (interview).

This kind of trance-like, all-encompassing synaesthetic experience seemed particularly common in conversation with singers.

In some cases, synaesthetic experiences can become too intense, and this was especially common for the respondents who were present at *Psalm 151*. Concertgoer Heleen explained that

it was something for multitaskers, which I am not, not at all! So I decided to read the text only afterwards, at home. And I had to make choices: I wanted to listen to the accordionists. It really required a lot of attention (interview).

Other concertgoers agreed that such an intense multisensory experience confused or overwhelmed them, noting that “it was all loose bit, small fragments” (José, interview) and that, afterwards, “nothing of the music has stayed with me” (Heleen, interview). Nevertheless, José enjoyed the inventiveness of the musical composition, the singers’ expressive physical performance, and their dress.

Time matters

In synaesthetic experience, it seems to be important that individuals have sufficient time to fathom what is going on. When there is insufficient time to process the experience, respondents sometimes found their synaesthetic experiences too complex, too fragmentary, or overwhelming. The organizers of all four Psalm performances are aware that synaesthetic experiences can easily become too intense and seek out ways of organizing the multisensory load through careful time management. By offering more time between concerts in order to process intense experiences (festival *150 Psalms*), through shortening events and ‘lightening’ their intensity (*Psalm 151* and *Poesia Divina*), and through the steady repetition of a practice (*Genemuiders Bovenstem*), they seek to stimulate a synaesthetic experience that respondents perceive as rich rather than (too) disturbing.

In this respect, *150 Psalms* was rather successful. The different senses of visitors were stimulated separately and at different moments. During the concerts, the (rather static) positioning of audience and singers on an illuminated stage enhanced an attentive perception of the sounds and (sober) visuals. Between the concerts, festivalgoers could walk more freely in and around the building, engage in conversation, read texts displayed on walls and floors, and visit a photography exhibition. Here, they had more time and freedom to choose as individuals what to listen to, watch, sing or taste, and where to move. In *Psalms 151* and *Poesia Divina*, organizers sought to avoid overstimulation by limiting the length of events, although some respondents who attended *Psalms 151* would have preferred a somewhat longer performance with more slow passages (slower textual and musical changes) and more repetition. In *Genemuiders Bovenstem*, repetition and (a slow) tempo are key to enhancing 'pleasant' synaesthetic experiences. Interview data shows that singing familiar Psalms at a slower pace and steady rhythm (all notes having equal length), without too many (unexpected) visual 'distractions,' helps singers to get into a synaesthetic state of flow.

Space matters

Space is the second important factor in shaping synaesthetic experiences. This encompasses the spatial organization of different rooms (e.g. the different areas in the concert hall for *150 Psalms*), of audience seating, pews, the stage, and the room's acoustics. Such spatial organization directs the senses of at-



Figure 12. Festivalgoers of *150 Psalms* visit the festival exhibition. Photo by Foppe Schut.

tendeers. On top of this, respondents' synaesthetic experiences are directed by their expectations and by the knowledge they have of the space where the performance of Psalms takes place, whether that be a church (used for liturgy), a former church, or a concert hall. It appears that respondents' synaesthetic experiences of Psalm performance are different in churches and in concert halls.

Generally, church spaces engender a synaesthetic experience of performances that is more 'collective' and 'religious' than in a concert hall. It is not just the characteristics of the space (lightning, spatial ordering, acoustics) which are important, but also the (historical) function of churches as meeting places for church communities. Respondents associate church spaces with the performance of religious rituals by homogeneous collectives. This means that the heterogeneous (bodily, aurally, visually—see previous sections) performance of *Psalm 151* was interpreted by respondents as being in contrast with the space of a church. Respondents also feel more comfortable singing along in a church than in a concert hall where the spatial setup enables concertgoers to experience their own individual connections with the performance and where collective singing would suddenly make them aware of being surrounded by others. In churches, respondents often reflect on the religious connection between these spaces and the Psalms. Composer Tarenskeen and some of the poets from *Poesia Divina* emphatically played with this connection. Gaea Schoeters felt encouraged by the church space to play with an address to God:

I played with the idea of a penitential Psalm, and tried to put it in my sort of atheist context, one way or another, I found that logical: invoking a god, as we're reciting in a church, in his house, so to speak—but is there a god or isn't there? (interview).

In *Genemuider Bovenstem*, the 'religious' nature of Psalms goes without saying, and they are rarely performed outside of church buildings. In the words of singer Lammert: "It's something you do in churches, and a church is [there] to spread faith. Psalms are by their nature a church thing" (interview).

Some respondents associated concert halls with a more rational or reflective mode of participation (sitting still, watching, and listening) and identified churches as "spaces that appeal to something that's not cerebral, intellectual, but rather something emotional" (*Poesia Divina* poet Gaea Schoeters, interview).

In conclusion, space is an important factor in how respondents make sense of the Psalms. The connotations that a particular space has for them because of its (historical) function and its material characteristics, mean that respondents experience and embody the performance differently.



Figure 13. Poet Gaea Schoeters recites her Psalm. Photo by Alidoor DellaFaille.

5.4. Critical reflections on the aesthetics of Psalms

My analysis shows that the performance of Psalms in the different cases under study is aesthetically diverse with each type of sensory perception having its own particularities. The categories 'collective,' 'religious,' and 'sincere,' for example, are connected to several modes of sensory perception (see above), but for each type of perception this works slightly differently. I will discuss the aesthetic particularities of these three categories since they appear to be meaningful for my reflection on the aesthetics of performed Psalms in a postsecular context.

Firstly, I observe that, in all four cases, there is a striving after a certain collective experience, at least on the part of the organizers. At the same time, organizers and participants in the performance (singers, listeners, etc.) want to maintain a certain level of individual autonomy. A collective ritual is required for individuals to experience Psalm performances, but space is also required for individual participation, as Mirella Klomp has found in her study of the public ritual of *The Passion*, and Hanna Rijken, in her examination of Choral Evensong performances in the Netherlands.²³⁴ My research adds to extant knowledge the insight that collective ritual and individual involvement are kept in balance in the management of different senses: by reducing the visual, for example, or by stimulating different senses at different moments and in different spaces.

The second particularity is a tension I can observe in relation to the 'religious' aesthetics of Psalm performance. In all four cases, the religious connotations of the Psalms (their embeddedness in Jewish and Christian traditions, and God as addressee in the texts) play a prominent role as an object of reflection which is aesthetically managed by organizers, performers, and visitors. In participants from all these groups, I observed an interest in religious aesthetics but also a hesitance when they suspect that these aesthetics (will) endanger individual authenticity by becoming too dogmatic, conservative, or homogenizing. *Genemuiden Bovenstem*, for instance, is performed away from the Sunday liturgy of a local congregation. In the other three performance spaces, organizers and artists seek ways to reinvent traditional practices of music and poetry recital (which they feel are old-fashioned) by the introduction of aesthetics associated with religion: a festival of the Psalms based on a monastic ritual, recognizable 'churchy' sounds (choral polyphony, organ music, textual formulas), and the use of church spaces. At the same time, they avoid the performance becoming

²³⁴ Klomp, *Playing On*, 62, 162; Hanna Rijken, Martin Hoondert, and Marcel Barnard, "Turning East. Turning Exit? Turning to the Music! Spatial Practice in Choral Evensongs in the Netherlands," *Studia Liturgica* 46 (2016): 240, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00393207160461-215>.



Figure 14. In *Psalm 151*, the organist plays an elaborate and musically complicated part. Screenshot taken from www.cultuur247.nl

'too religious,' by emphasizing aesthetic beauty (against dogmatic sobriety), heterogeneity (against oppressive homogeneity), playfulness (against rigidity), and intimacy (against impersonal remoteness). Thus, the dissolution of the individual into a homogeneously religious collectivity is avoided.²³⁵

This latter aspect relates to the third particularity: sincerity, which appears to be an important value in the performance of Psalms. The activity of singing, in particular, appears to demand a 'sincere' engagement on the part of the performers. They only want to sing along when they are sure that they can do so truthfully or authentically, and listeners expect them to do so. When a performance is perceived as 'sincere,' it is often also perceived as 'natural,' with an absence of 'showing-off' and pretense.²³⁶ However, such a 'natural performance' requires training. Performing *Genemuiders Bovenstem* 'naturally' requires repetition and training, and professional singers (*150 Psalms, Psalm*

²³⁵ Or, in Charles Taylor's vocabulary: the autonomy of the secular "buffered self" is not dissolved, as, in these collective rituals, the boundaries of the individual are maintained cf. Charles Taylor, "Buffered and porous selves," *The Immanent Frame. Secularism, religion, and the public sphere*, Social Science Research Council, 2008, <https://tif.ssrc.org/2008/09/02/buffered-and-porous-selves/>; Van der Braak, *Reimagining Zen in a Secular Age*, 17, 56. This resonates with philosopher André van der Braak's suggestion that "today, we live in an age of the emergence of a postmodern 'liquid' self", which is autonomous and flexible at the same time. Van der Braak, *Reimagining Zen in a Secular Age*, 159.

²³⁶ Thus, as the section on 'bodily perception' (see above) shows, the perception of the 'sincere performance' of Psalms is emphatically embodied and (multi)sensorial, more than, as Hirschkind and Taylor suggest, in (secular) (late)modernity, where 'sincerity' would primarily be a nonsensory, interior. Hirschkind, "Is there a secular body?," 639; Taylor *Buffered and porous selves*; cf. Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture*, 212-13; Promey, "Religion, Sensation, and Materiality," 12.

151) can only come over as natural after intense rehearsal.²³⁷ This suggests that participation which depends on authentic individual engagement cannot escape its own dependency on processes of socialization.

These three particularities show that the traditional performance of Psalms in (Western classical music and poetry) recitals and (Christian) liturgy are not able to meet the aesthetic demands of organizers, performers, and publics. For organizers such as Tido Visser, Merlijn Geurts (*150 Psalms*), Jelle Dierickx (*Poesia Divina*), and artists such as Boudewijn Tarensken (*Psalms 151*), the traditional ritual of a choral concert or poetry recital needs to be updated in order to remain relevant. In *Genemuiders Bovenstem*, relevance and the preservation of a liturgical practice is sought outside of the Sunday liturgy through its accreditation as 'intangible heritage.'

But what are the aesthetic demands that organizers, performers, and publics place on the performance of Psalms? It appears that Psalms should be performed in such a way that they enhance the immersion of individuals in a collective ritual while also enabling the expression of individual feelings.²³⁸ Sebastian Schüler has shown, such immersion requires repetition, collective synchronization, slowness, the ability to observe other participants in the ritual, and, foremost, a delicate alternation of action and receptive experience on the part of participants.²³⁹ Organizers and performers appear to be aware of this, and they structure the rhythm of action/receptive experience, the musical and ritual repetition and tempo, and the visual interaction between participants accordingly.²⁴⁰ They manage time and space so as to enhance synaesthetic immersion.²⁴¹ Such multisensory immersion appears to be able to engender experiences of the sacred or transcendent, as Lieke Wijnia, referring to Rina Arya, also has described in more general wordings.²⁴²

²³⁷ With the emphasis on 'naturalness' in *Genemuiders Bovenstem*, sincerity is akin to what anthropologist John Brahinsky writes about 'cultivation' in a Pentecostal context, where he observes a similar tendency to frame sincere performance as natural and spontaneous, and insincere performance as rehearsed and studied. Josh Brahinsky, "Cultivating Discontinuity: Pentecostal Pedagogies of Yielding and Control," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (2013): 410-13, <https://doi.org/10.1111/aeq.12039>.

²³⁸ Cf. Taylor Buffered and porous selves; Van der Braak, *Reimagining Zen in a Secular Age*, 17.

²³⁹ Sebastian Schüler, "Aesthetics of Immersion: Collective Effervescence, Bodily Synchronisation and the Sensory Navigation of the Sacred," in *Aesthetics of Religion. A Connective Concept*, ed. Alexandra Grieser and Jay Johnston (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 374-78, 84.

²⁴⁰ Wijnia brought Arden Reed's theory of 'slow art' to my attention. He suggests that this "came to satisfy our need for downtime" as "cultures sped up and sacred aesthetic practices waned." Arden Reed, *Slow Art: The Experience of Looking, Sacred Images to James Turrell* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2017), 11; in Wijnia, *Beyond the Return of Religion*, 69.

²⁴¹ Cf. Brahinsky, "Cultivating Discontinuity," 412.

²⁴² Wijnia, *Beyond the Return of Religion*, 66-67; cf. Klomp, *Playing On*, 51; Grieser and Johnston,

My analysis shows that religious or transcendent aesthetics do not completely leave the building when Psalms are performed in 'secular' settings. It appears that, in the performance of Psalms, aesthetics reminiscent of religious ritual are often sought after, albeit selectively, since a more distanced, unisensory appreciation of a performance, associated both with 'secular' neutrality and individuality, is valued at the same time.²⁴³ This is even the case in *Genemuider Bovenstem* concerts, which tend to focus on the music's expressivity for individual visitors, instead of its (exclusive) embeddedness in the weekly liturgy of a local congregation. My findings confirm and enrich existing (postsecular) thinking on contemporary ritual and aesthetics, namely the idea of ritual as an 'authentic' expression of the self-conscious individual in a highly pluralistic cultural environment.²⁴⁴ My contribution is a detailed analysis and interpretation of the aesthetic balancing act between collective immersion and individual authenticity. When organizers and participants suspect that such immersion might diminish individual authenticity, they temper it by reducing multisensoriality or by distributing the stimulation of different senses across a wider temporal or spatial area.

Furthermore, I see that it is exactly the postsecular setup of the performance of Psalms which enables interactions with the transcendent to take place, be it in an immersive trance-like singing experience, or in addressing God when reciting a new Psalm. I see that, for organizers and performers, traditional recitals and liturgy fall short in this respect, as, apparently, both offer experiences that limit emotional, transcendent immersion by being too authoritative, impersonal, or dogmatic.²⁴⁵ When aesthetics are taken seriously as a multisensory being-in-the-world, such (synaesthetic) perceptions of the invisible, immeasurable, and transcendent have to be respected as well, which is why Grieser and Johnston propose the need for "adequate epistemologies that neither try to prove, nor to explain away phenomena relevant to people".²⁴⁶ Here I challenge Birgit Meyer's rather clear distinction between the immanent and the transcendent, which appears to be just as contextual as the distinction between the religious

"What is an Aesthetics of Religion?," 22.

²⁴³ Cf. Hirschkind, "Is there a secular body?," 638.

²⁴⁴ Barnard, "Secular feast and Christian feast," 192-93; Bell, *Ritual*, 241; Gauthier, "Consumer Culture and the Sensory Remodelling of Religion," 451; Wilke, "Moving Religion by Sound," 343.

²⁴⁵ Among others, Gauthier and Bakker Kellogg state that postsecular aesthetics are characterized by an emphasis on experience rather than belief Bakker Kellogg, "Ritual Sounds," 438; Gauthier, "Consumer Culture and the Sensory Remodelling of Religion," 452.

²⁴⁶ Grieser and Johnston, "What is an Aesthetics of Religion?," 22.

and the secular.²⁴⁷ Having a clear conception of what would universally count as immanent or transcendent is an example of what Umut Parmaksız calls “secularnormativity”.²⁴⁸ I agree with him that a postsecular stance should imply the interrogation of both religious and secular normativities, including those related to the distinction between the immanent and the transcendent. On the level of aesthetics, and synaesthetics in particular, such a distinction does not hold.

5.5. Conclusion

The performances of Psalms which I have described can be understood as experiments with religious rituality and secular individual freedom which challenge the mutual exclusivity of the religious and the secular on the level of aesthetics. Each of the four cases are characterized by their own “aesthetic profile”, treading a line between (‘religious’) collectivity and enchantment on the one hand and the (‘secular’) valuation of individual integrity and distanced observation on the other.²⁴⁹ Such a layered conclusion has only been possible because of analyses of different sensory modalities both in isolation and in relation to one another. Studying them in isolation showed the peculiarities of the different senses, such as the ambivalent relation between collectivity and bodily perception, or the importance of the visual in perceiving a performance as ‘sincere.’ Studying the senses in relation to one another showed how different senses were stimulated or de-stimulated in order to safeguard individual autonomy, and also how synaesthetic perception, and its careful temporal and spatial management, is needed for an immersive ritual experience to become fertile soil for enchantment and an interaction with the transcendent. This suggests that in a postsecular context, regardless of any absence of elaborate beliefs regarding the divine or “the beyond”, interactions with the immanent and transcendent remain ‘casually’ present on the level of aesthetics.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁷ Cf. “Religion as Mediation,” [18].

²⁴⁸ Parmaksız, “Making Sense of the Postsecular,” 109-11.

²⁴⁹ Cf. Grieser and Johnston, “What is an Aesthetics of Religion?,” 19.

²⁵⁰ Cf. Meyer, “Religion as Mediation,” [21].



6



Singing apart together

Communities and the heritagization and
eventization of *Genemuider Bovenstem* collective
psalmody in the Netherlands

6.1. Introduction

Every Sunday morning in Genemuiden (a relatively small town in the Netherlands) a unique style of communal psalmody can be heard streaming from the church buildings.²⁵¹ This style of singing is known as *Genemuider Bovenstem* and it has acquired a particular association with the three strictly Reformed churches in the town. In these churches, metrical Psalms are sung to the tunes of the Genevan psalter, a practice which is characteristic of strictly Reformed liturgy throughout the Netherlands. Genemuiden's variant, however, has acquired its own particular uniqueness due to the addition of a second melody, or descant, referred to as the *Genemuider Bovenstem* (literally "Genemuiden's upper voice"), above the Genevan Psalm tune.²⁵² Similar practices can be found in other (historical) fishing villages such as Urk and Yerseke. Nevertheless, out of all of these, *Genemuider Bovenstem* is the most well-known tradition, partly due to efforts by local groups to popularize it through collective singing events and partly through its accreditation as

251 The 'antiphon' for this chapter is a recording of Psalm 89, sung with descant, which was also sung during the collective singing event that I attended on 26 May 2022: www.henkvoegel.com/antiphon-6/.

252 See one of the many examples on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/2SckJZ31dLo> (accessed 27 October 2021).

Intangible Cultural Heritage.²⁵³ In this chapter, I present an analysis of the construction of community in *Genemuider Bovenstem* collective psalmody as it is performed both in the worship practices of strictly Reformed church communities and at collective singing events which draw together enthusiasts from a wider region.

Genemuider Bovenstem's fame is the result of efforts by individuals from the Genemuiden region to consolidate and conserve *Genemuider Bovenstem* collective psalmody, which took place from the 1960s onwards. To this aim, they formed groups spanning multiple church communities, such as male choirs, to produce recordings and organize collective singing events. Since *Genemuider Bovenstem* descant collective psalmody was accredited as Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2013, the applicants for this accreditation (the groups mentioned above) are obliged to engage in such activities in order to hold on to the practical and financial support they receive from the Dutch government via the Dutch Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage. As such, these applicants have become what, in the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Heritage, is called a "heritage community".²⁵⁴ The convention states that such heritage communities should receive support as owners of their cultural heritage.

These different endeavours have contributed to a sense of 'hype' around collective descant psalmody in the strictly Reformed subculture in the Netherlands.²⁵⁵ Collective singing events are announced in the national strictly Reformed newspaper (*Reformatorisch Dagblad*), which helps to attract audiences from a wider region, and some YouTube videos showing *Genemuider Bovenstem* performances have reached over a million views.²⁵⁶ The strictly Reformed subculture, which cuts across a number of different Reformed church denominations, can be understood to constitute a reaction against secularization and against liberal streams within Protestantism. The subculture is characterized by a certain inwardness and by emphases on traditional values and customs, both in daily life and in the context of church.²⁵⁷ One example of this is the

253 See: www.digibron.nl/viewer/collectie/Digibron/id/tag:RD.nl,19910215:newsml_faad6c2a5cbf3d7dd99821cba0d62002 (accessed 8 December 2021).

254 Cf. *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2003), <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention> (accessed 25 November 2021)

255 See: www.digibron.nl/viewer/collectie/Digibron/id/tag:RD.nl,20101130:newsml_28378aa0c1548ae1c9b25ca2fb62bfca (accessed 8 December 2021).

256 See for instance: <https://youtu.be/yd7HzRu2gCQ> (accessed 8 December 2021).

257 Paul Schnabel, Rob Bijl, and Joep de Hart, *Betrekkelijke betrokkenheid. Studies in culturele cohesie, Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau* (Den Haag, 2008), 412; Herman Johan Selderhuis, ed., *Handboek Nederlandse kerkgeschiedenis* (Kampen: Kok, 2006).

strict limitation which is placed upon the musical repertoire that can be used in church services; only metrical Psalms are performed by congregations in “old rhyme” (the metrical translation from 1773), at low tempi, with all notes having an equal length (isometre).²⁵⁸ In this way, collective psalmody has even become an important marker of strictly Reformed group identity.²⁵⁹

Thus we can see that *Genemuider Bovenstem* collective psalmody is performed by a range of different groups, including church communities, male choirs, and audiences who take part in collective singing events. Additionally, control over the practice is also handled by a range of different groups and institutions, including all-male church councils, the boards of male choirs, the organizers of collective singing events, governmental heritage institutions, and the strictly Reformed media organizations who broadcast and publicize collective singing events. This chapter analyzes the boundaries and interconnections of these different groups against the background of extant theories suggesting that the ‘heritagization’ and ‘eventization’ of religious practices can result in the transformation of communities into more loosely connected networks, or in decreasing levels of control on the part of local communities in relation to their practices.

Heritage scholars have argued that processes of ‘heritagization’ are often accompanied by transformations of community and redistributions of power.²⁶⁰ Scholars of heritage and religion, meanwhile, have used the notion of ‘heritagization’ to describe how, in secular and postsecular societies such as the Netherlands, “[r]eligious media that pointed towards the presence of

258 Jan Dirk Snel, “Waarom daar?,” in *Refogeschiedenis in perspectief*, ed. Fred van Lieburg (Heerenveen: Uitgeverij Groen, 2007), 89.

259 Schuman, *Drama van crisis en hoop*, 241-42. Historian Martin Tijssen describes the strictly Reformed subculture as an imagined community, which is internally diverse and divided between different church denominations, but which is symbolically imagined as a coherent whole. Martin Tijssen, *De krant en het pand. Het Reformatorisch Dagblad en de ontwikkeling van de bevindelijk gereformeerde gemeenschap* (Utrecht: KokBoekencentrum, 2018), 9-10; cf. John Exalto, “Welkom in de strijd. Dynamiek en desintegratie van de bevindelijk gereformeerde narratieve gemeenschap,” in *Refogeschiedenis in perspectief*, ed. Fred van Lieburg (Heerenveen: Uitgeverij Groen, 2007), 93; Herman Paul, “Een verleden zonder historiciteit,” in *Refogeschiedenis in perspectief*, ed. Fred van Lieburg (Heerenveen: Groen, 2007), 159; Snel, “Waarom daar?,” 89.

260 Janet Blake, “Further reflections on community involvement in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage,” in *Safeguarding Intangible Heritage. Practices and Politics*, ed. Natsuko Akagawa and Laurajane Smith (New York: Routledge, 2019); Min-Chin Chiang, “Intangibility re-translated,” in *Safeguarding Intangible Heritage. Practices and Politics*, ed. Natsuko Akagawa and Laurajane Smith (New York: Routledge, 2019), 94-98; Máiréad Nic Craith, Ullrich Kockel, and Katherine Lloyd, “The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Absentees, objections and assertions,” in *Safeguarding Intangible Heritage. Practices and Politics*, ed. Natsuko Akagawa and Laurajane Smith (New York: Routledge, 2019), 120; Ku, “ICH-isation of popular religions,” 197.

God are now recast as secular media that convey a sense of a shared Christian past."²⁶¹ I do not assume that *Genemuider Bovenstem* has necessarily been recast as a 'secular' practice, however, it has certainly begun to extend beyond the worship practice of local church communities without disappearing from them, and is now often framed in terms of intangible heritage, even by practitioners themselves.²⁶² Similarly, the 'eventization' of communal practices often results in the transformation of communities. Event scholars Michaela Pfadenhauer and Ruth Dowson use the term "eventization" to describe the reframing of the religious practices of a religious community as spectacular, memorable events in order to attract audiences in a pluralized context.²⁶³ Greg Richards, David Jarman and others have investigated the ways in which communities are challenged and constructed when "iterative events" (cyclical and emphasising "tradition" and "local content") give way to, or are transformed into, "pulsar events" that are "relatively rare".²⁶⁴ Through its designation as Intangible Cultural Heritage, and its extension from the Sunday worship practices of church communities in Genemuiden into collective singing events, *Genemuider Bovenstem* collective psalmody is subject to 'heritagization' and 'eventization.'

Since the heritagization and eventization of religious practices are said to transform the communities engaging in these practices, I pose the following central question: *How does Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody serve to construct communities in light of the heritagization and eventization of religious practices?* The aim of this qualitative empirical study is to reconsider theories that state that the heritagization and eventization of religious practices imply either the fluidization or the dissolution of local (religious) communities.²⁶⁵

²⁶¹ Meyer, "Recycling the Christian Past," 70; cf. Astor, Burchardt, and Grier, "The Politics of Religious Heritage," 127-29.

²⁶² It is not clear whether the practice originated in church or whether, in the late 18th and early 19th century, groups of men sang Psalms during work and at home, and introduced the practice into church services. See: www.digibron.nl/viewer/collectie/Digibron/id/tag:RD.nl,19910215:newsml_faad6c2a5cbf3d7dd99821cba0d62002 (accessed 8 December 2021).

²⁶³ Michaela Pfadenhauer, "The eventization of faith as a marketing strategy," *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing* 15, no. 4 (2010): 382; Ruth Dowson, "Religious and spiritual festivals and events," in *The Routledge Handbook of Festivals*, ed. Judith Mair (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 318.

²⁶⁴ David Jarman, "Festival to festival: Networked relationships between fringe festivals," *Event Management* 25 (2020): 100, 03, <https://doi.org/10.3727/152599520X15894679115510>; cf. Greg Richards, "Events in the network society: The role of pulsar and iterative events," *Event Management* 19, no. 4 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.3727/152599515X14465748512849>; Jens Kaae Fisker, Grzegorz Kwiatkowski, and Anne-Mette Hjalager, "The translocal fluidity of rural grassroots festivals in the network society," *Social & Cultural Geography* 22, no. 2 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2019.1573437>.

²⁶⁵ In the field of critical event studies, a need for qualitative research is expressed by, among

The case of *Genemuider Bovenstem* psalmody offers a unique insight into the ways in which communities are networked both in church services (iterative) and in 'heritage events' (pulsar). It sheds light on the meaning and experience of collective psalmody in both ritual-musical contexts, and on the question of whether or how any fluidization or dissolution of communities takes place.

In this chapter, I draw a distinction between three different social categories – between 'groups', 'communities' and 'networks'. 'Groups' are characterized by a shared purpose or interest, to which individuals, nevertheless, can have different levels of commitment.²⁶⁶ The Foundation for the Preservation of Genemuiden's Descant is a 'group' with a clearly formulated purpose. Secondly, I define 'community' as a group of individuals that share a "sense of togetherness or connection with one another" which cannot be boiled down to a single or identifiable set of shared purposes.²⁶⁷ Communities are heterogeneous and performative, which means that 'community' results from repeated interaction between individuals, rather than existing as a fixed entity producing individuals' interactions.²⁶⁸ Finally, my use of the term 'network' is informed by the work of Manuel Castells and its application in the field of event studies.²⁶⁹ Networks are characterized by a multiplicity of connections between groups and individuals

others, Vern Biaett and Greg Richards. See: Vern Biaett and Greg Richards, "Event experiences. Measurement and meaning," *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events* 12, no. 3 (2020): 277, 83.

²⁶⁶ Cf. Esther McIntosh, "Community and Society: John Macmurray (1891-1976) and New Labour," in *Community Identity. Dynamics of Religion in Context*, ed. Sebastian C.H. Kim and Pauline Kollontai (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 71; Berdine van den Toren-Lekkerkerker, "Community as Mission. The Church Mission Society as Gift and Call in an Individualised and Globalised World" (PhD Dissertation, Protestant Theological University, 2021), 21.

²⁶⁷ Kenneth C. Bessant, *The Relational Fabric of Community* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 16-17; cf. McIntosh, "Community and Society," 71-72; Emma Waterton and Laurajane Smith, "The recognition and misrecognition of community heritage," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 16, no. 1-2 (2010): 5.

²⁶⁸ Meyer, "Introduction," 4, 7; Mark Porter, *Contemporary Worship Music and Everyday Musical Lives*, Congregational Music Studies Series, (New York: Routledge, 2017), 49-50; Waterton and Smith, "The recognition and misrecognition of community heritage," 8, 12. In recent years, sociologists, anthropologists and heritage scholars have warned against (colonial) conceptions of 'community' which homogenize, romanticize, and 'other' (Indigenous) groups by overlooking their diversity and empowerment, and which simultaneously have a blind spot for community in western societies. Cf. Bessant, *The Relational Fabric of Community*, 16-17; Pablo de Marinis, "The Multiple Uses of 'Community' in Sociological Theory. Historical Type, Ideal Type, Political Utopia, Socio-technological Device and Ontological Foundation of 'Society'," in *Potency of the Common*, ed. Gert Melville (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2016), 34-35, 38; Waterton and Smith, "The recognition and misrecognition of community heritage," 4-9.

²⁶⁹ Manuel Castells, *The Rise of The Network Society*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000); Manuel Castells, "Afterword: Why networks matter," in *Network Logic. Who governs in an interconnected world?*, ed. Helen McCarthy, Paul Miller, and Paul Skidmore (London: Demos, 2004).

within an open dynamic structure. Often, these connections are temporary, and they are not constrained by physical proximity between people. 'Nodes' are made up of clusters of connections, e.g. when individuals meet others with a shared interest in a gathering, online or offline.²⁷⁰

When it comes to Psalms, 'community' is a common theme in academic handbooks on these texts and their performance, not least because of the lively descriptions of individuals' emotions and scripts for ritual performance which both can be found in the ancient canonical texts. These aspects serve to imply the presence of a community capable of sounding the different voices found in the texts in the course of different role-plays. As a result, performers in Jewish, Christian and other traditions have found themselves confronted with questions about to whom the pronouns in the texts should refer to, how should they be embodied in performance, and who should partake in collective performances.²⁷¹ In this chapter, I study the handling of these questions in a specific example of collective psalmody characterized by heritagization and eventization, and partially governed by other-than-religious authorities.

Doing so, I deliberately avoid taking the church context as the norm. Theologian Mirella Klomp has coined the notion of 'ecclesioscapes' as

a tool offered to acquire deeper understanding of gatherings around Christian repertoire, which practices and meaning-making are particular, plural, and complex—and that may be applied to a gathering whether or not the groups in questions [sic] identify themselves as church, (...) thus avoiding placing the church in a central position that relegates other gatherings around Christian repertoire to the margin.²⁷²

270 Castells, "Afterword," 224; Jarman, "Festival to festival," 103; Greg Richards and David Jarman, "Events As Platforms, Networks, and Communities," *Event Management* 25, no. 1 (2021): 3; Ilja Simons, "Changing identities through collective performance at events," *Leisure Studies* 39, no. 4 (2020): 568, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2020.1768281>.

271 Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 2011), 111-14, 21-25, 207-08; Brown, "The Psalms: An Overview," 1, 5; Brueggemann, "The Psalms and the Life of Faith," 8, 22; Cooper, "Some Aspects of Traditional Jewish Psalms Interpretation," 260; Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford, "The Theology of the Imprecatory Psalms," in *Soundings in the Theology of Psalms. Perspectives and Methods in Contemporary Scholarship*, ed. Rolf A. Jacobson (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 83, 85-86; Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford, "The Meta-Narrative of the Psalter," in *Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, ed. William P. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 368; Frederick W. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Poetry of the Psalms," in *Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, ed. William P. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 84; Joel M. LeMon, "Saying Amen to Violent Psalms," in *Soundings in the Theology of Psalms. Perspectives and Methods in Contemporary Scholarship*, ed. Rolf A. Jacobson (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 107-09.

272 Klomp, "Ecclesioscapes," 260. See also: Jeffers Engelhardt, "Congregation and Chorality:

The notion of 'ecclesioscapes' incites me to take the layeredness and complexity of the groups which do not necessarily identify themselves as church(-related) seriously, whilst the notions of 'heritagization' and 'eventization' provide me with a vocabulary for the discussion of my findings. I will critically reflect on these concepts following the discussion of the findings. First, however, I will describe *Genemuider Bovenstem* collective psalmody in more detail, elaborate on the Dutch and strictly Reformed context, and present my methodology.

6.2. Genemuider Bovenstem in context

Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody can be found in three strictly Reformed church communities in Genemuiden. These are the Hervormde Kerk (Netherlands Reformed Church, part of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands which retains the name it had before joining the PCN in 2004), Gereformeerde Gemeente (Reformed Congregations), and Hersteld Hervormde Kerk (Restored Reformed Church, consisting of congregations which refrained from joining the PCN in 2004, see above). The music in the church services of these strictly Reformed congregations is limited to the congregational singing of metrical Psalms with organ accompaniment.

In each service, the congregations sing a number of Psalms that are selected by the (male) minister who leads the service. Some Psalms come with a descant, and in the 'descant Psalms', a regular first verse in unison is usually followed by a climax-building organ interlude, leading to a verse in which a group of men with high voices add the descant, the Genemuider Bovenstem, to the regular Psalm tune. Many of these descant singers know their part by heart, especially in the popular Psalms, and the harmonies played by the organist offer them support.

The earliest reports of Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody in church date back to the 19th century.²⁷³ When, halfway through the 20th century, the tradition began to wane, a group of enthusiasts decided to found a choir for the promotion of Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody. The male choir 'STEREO' produced and sold a number of recordings, and decided to open all their rehearsals and concerts with Genemuider Bovenstem collective

Fluidity and Distinction in the Voicing of Religious Community," in *Studying Congregational Music. Key Issues, Methods, and Theoretical Perspectives*, ed. Andrew Mall, Jeffers Engelhardt, and Monique M. Ingalls (New York: Routledge, 2021), 140, 47-48; Ingalls, *Singing the Congregation*, 5; Mall, "'Beer and Hymns' and community," 33-34, 33-39.

²⁷³ See: www.digibron.nl/viewer/collectie/Digibron/id/tag:RD.

nl,20101130:newsml_28378aa0c1548ae1c9b25ca2fb62bfca (accessed 25 November 2021).

psalmody. Half a century later, Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody is very much alive, especially at collective psalmody events.²⁷⁴

These events, some of which are exclusively aimed at Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody, serve to attract audiences beyond the city of Genemuiden itself. They often take place in large and significant church buildings, celebrated both for their acoustics and for their historic organs, which are often played by organists who are well-known in strictly Reformed circles. These events are organized relatively independent from the local church communities that normally (on Sunday, at least) hold their services in any particular building. In these events, male choirs who specialize in Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody play a central role in the performance, and are often positioned on stage and wearing suits, a contrast to typical Sunday performances, in which the descant singers consist of regular churchgoers who stand out neither by virtue of their positioning nor of their clothing.²⁷⁵

STEREO applied for the practice of Genemuider Bovenstem to be indexed as Intangible Cultural Heritage, together with the newly founded Stichting



Figure 15. Concert performance by male choir STEREO in Genemuiden's Grote Kerk. Photo: Kenniscentrum Immaterieel Erfgoed Nederland.

²⁷⁴ See: www.digibron.nl/viewer/collectie/Digibron/id/tag:RD.nl,19910215:newsm_l_faad6c2a5cbf3d7dd99821cba0d62002 (accessed 25 November 2021); www.digibron.nl/viewer/collectie/Digibron/id/tag:RD.nl,20101130:newsm_l_28378aa0c1548ae1c9b25ca2fb62bfca (accessed 25 November 2021).

²⁷⁵ A photo impression of a collective singing event can be found here: www.immaterieelerfgoed.nl/en/bovenstemzingen (accessed 25 November 2021).

tot Behoud van de Genemuiden Bovenstem (Foundation for the Preservation of Genemuiden's Descant), and the Bovenstemgroep Genemuiden (descant group Genemuiden) precisely in order to consolidate this popularity. These three groups consist of members and affiliates belonging to a range of different church communities. STEREO has around 140 members, consisting of men aged "between 14 and 90 years old", belonging to the wider region around Genemuiden.²⁷⁶ The Stichting consists of a board representing the three strictly Reformed church communities where Genemuiden Bovenstem collective psalmody takes place. Thus, while the Stichting is formally independent from the churches, it nevertheless maintains a formal connection to the churches through the membership of this board. The Stichting organizes collective singing events, it invites choirs and organists to perform, and it publishes background materials relating to Genemuiden Bovenstem singing. The Bovenstemgroep Genemuiden has no board or members, instead it represents a common designation referring to any group that comes together to sing the descant in collective singing events outside Genemuiden. It is not a formal choir, but an ad hoc collective of enthusiasts. Nevertheless, the Bovenstemgroep Genemuiden is named as one of the three applicants behind the Intangible Cultural Heritage proposal.

In 2013, the practice was indeed designated as such by the Dutch Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage, the institution which implements UNESCO policies as laid down in the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.²⁷⁷ The Dutch Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage is responsible for offering practical knowledge for the conservation of intangible heritage, and for checking whether applicants succeed in implementing their own 'action plans' effectively.²⁷⁸ In addition to this, the provincial government (the province of Overijssel) provided financial support for the conservation, and the Reformatorische Omroep (strictly Reformed broadcasting company) offered additional support by making and broadcasting video recordings of Genemuiden Bovenstem collective psalmody events.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁶ Cf. *Immaterieel Erfgoed in Overijssel* (2017), www.enterserfgoed.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Immaterieel-Erfgoed-Overijssel.pdf (accessed 8 December 2021).

²⁷⁷ Cf. *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2003), <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention> (accessed 25 November 2021); *Kennisagenda Kenniscentrum Immaterieel Erfgoed Nederland 2017-2020* (2018), www.immaterieelerfgoed.nl/nl/document/5143?slug=kennisagenda-kenniscentrum-immaterieel-erfgoed-nederland (accessed 25 November 2021); Blake, "Further reflections," 17.

²⁷⁸ The Dutch version of the Intangible Cultural Heritage webpage shows which 'safeguarding actions' the applicants have agreed upon. See: www.immaterieelerfgoed.nl/nl/bovenstemzingen (accessed 25 November 2021).

²⁷⁹ See, for example: *Immaterieel Erfgoed in Overijssel* (2017), www.enterserfgoed.nl/wp-

Genemuiden is a relatively small town (c. 10,000 inhabitants). Demographic statistics and reports show that, in comparison to average figures for the rest of the country, Genemuiden's inhabitants are geographically stable (low relocation figures), form relatively large households, have relatively low levels of education, and often work in family companies in Genemuiden's carpet industry.²⁸⁰ In a 2008 report on social cohesion in Genemuiden and the other towns in municipality Zwartewaterland, Genemuiden is characterized in terms of its strong social cohesion, mostly via work and church, with the suggestion that new inhabitants find it hard to become part of the Genemuiden community, especially if they do not participate in one of the churches.²⁸¹ Voting figures show that the strictly Reformed political party (Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij) has a significant majority in Genemuiden, whereas it is one of the smallest political parties in the Dutch parliament.²⁸²

Both these voting figures and the visibility of church in social life serve to highlight the significant connection that exists between Genemuiden's population and the strictly Reformed subculture in the Netherlands.²⁸³ Genemuiden is located in the so-called Dutch "Bible Belt", which stretches from the southwest to the northeast of the Netherlands and is known for having the highest concentration of strictly Reformed Calvinists in the country.²⁸⁴ These Christians form a small but visible minority group which is conservative both in terms of religion and culture.²⁸⁵ Generally, strictly Reformed communities

content/uploads/2017/07/Immaterieel-Erfgoed-Overijssel.pdf (accessed 8 December 2021); www.reformatorischemoer.nl/nieuws/4okt-kampen (accessed 8 December 2021).

²⁸⁰ See: www.allecijfers.nl/ buurt/genemuiden-noord-oost-zwartewaterland/ (accessed 25 November 2021); search for "Zwartewaterland" on: www.waarstaatjegemeente.nl/dashboard//zoekresultaat (accessed 25 November 2021); www.allecijfers.nl/ woonplaats/genemuiden/ (accessed 25 November 2021); www.zwartewaterland.nl/omgevingsvisie-thema-wonen (accessed 25 November 2021).

²⁸¹ See: *De stukjes en de puzzel* (2008), 15-17, www.surfsharekit.nl/objectstore/013ea916-b8bf-49ef-a46e-c8525aa54903 (accessed 25 November 2021).

²⁸² See: www.allecijfers.nl/verkiezingsuitslagen/zwartewaterland/ (accessed 25 November 2021).

²⁸³ Tijssen, *De krant en het pand*, 10-13. According to historian John Exalto, the demographics of this subculture are most visible in Reformed Political Party voters. John Exalto, "Kerk, school en partij: De SGP als politieke representatie van de bevindelijk gereformeerden," in *Mannen van Gods Woord: De Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij 1918-2018*, ed. Hans Vollaard and Gerrit Voerman (Hilversum: Verloren, 2018), 67. A voters' map can be found at: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible_Belt_\(Netherlands\)#/media/File:Sgpstemmen1.png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible_Belt_(Netherlands)#/media/File:Sgpstemmen1.png) (accessed 8 December 2021).

²⁸⁴ Paul Schnabel, "De Biblebelt: groot in geloof, klein in getal," in *Bij ons in de Biblebelt*, ed. Tanja Kootte and Fred van Lieburg (Gouda: Dutch Bible Belt Network, 2020); Snel, "Waarom daar?," 57, 60-61.

²⁸⁵ Snel, "Waarom daar?," 60. Theologically, strictly Reformeds are reminiscent of Pietism and Puritanism, with an emphasis on personal belief, conversion and salvation through God's grace. See: Exalto, "Welkom in de strijd," 92; Fred van Lieburg, "Toe-eigening van de bevindelijke traditie,"

oppose abortion, euthanasia and homosexuality, and place significant value on physical appearance: women commonly wear skirts and dresses, and men often keep their hair short.²⁸⁶ With respect to worship practices, they generally use the 1673 Bible translation for scripture readings, alongside the 1773 metrical translation of Genevan Psalms, which is characteristically performed in isometric fashion, at a low tempo, and with organ accompaniment.²⁸⁷

6.3. Methodology

This chapter is based on ethnographic research undertaken in 2020 and 2021, in which I utilized a number of different methods for data gathering and analysis (see Chapter 2). I gathered textual materials, such as newspaper articles and heritage policy documents, and I interviewed 17 individuals with different roles in the performance, heritagization and eventization of Genemuider Bovenstem. Among these were Arend Booij (the organist who notated the descant), Henk Beens (a local historian), and Albert van der Zeijden (a researcher at the Dutch Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage), all of whom were all involved with the heritagization of Genemuider Bovenstem. I also interviewed Harm Hoeve (organist and conductor of male choir STEREO), singers and other enthusiasts: Agatha, Arjen, Arthur, David, Erik, Geke, Frits, Lammert, Peter, Ruben, Rutger, Sara, Wietse (pseudonyms).

Interview transcriptions and other textual materials were coded using Atlas.ti software. An opening round of “initial coding” was followed by a categorization of these open codes into different thematic groups.²⁸⁸ The resulting themes focussed on participation in collective Genemuider Bovenstem performance, namely biographical backgrounds (such as gender and place of residence), experiences (such as hearing descant singing as a child), collectives (such as choirs and church communities), actions (such as teaching children to sing the descant), motivations (such as the desire to increase the national visibility of Genemuiden) and broader societal processes (such as secularization, to which certain organizers respond with their actions). After this, I analyzed the inter-relatedness between different themes and codes using “axial coding” and with the help of the co-occurrence tool in Atlas.ti.²⁸⁹

in *Refogeschiedenis in perspectief*, ed. Fred van Lieburg (Heerenveen: Uitgeverij Groen, 2007), 10.

²⁸⁶ Anne-Marije De Bruin-Wassinkmaat, "Finding One's Own Way. Exploring the religious identity development of emerging adults raised in strictly Reformed contexts in the Netherlands" (PhD Dissertation, Protestant Theological University, 2021), 14-16.

²⁸⁷ Paul, "Een verleden zonder historiciteit," 158-59; 81.

²⁸⁸ Saldaña, *Coding Manual*, 48, 81-85, 139-45.

²⁸⁹ Saldaña, *Coding Manual*, 159-63.

6.4. Findings

The interrelations which I traced between different themes and codes showed that experiences often depend both on the biographical backgrounds of participants and on membership within certain existing collectives. Together, these form a basis for the actions of individuals within the context of (new) collectives, sometimes in response to broader processes. This thematic coding also highlighted the way in which the two different ritual contexts of Genemuiders Bovenstem collective psalmody are, to some extent, two different domains, where biographical backgrounds, experiences, collectives, actions, motivations and processes are meaningful in different ways for participants. For example: being born and raised in Genemuiden, going to a strictly Reformed elementary school and attending one of the churches where Genemuiders Bovenstem collective psalmody is performed, might provide a basis for someone to become very familiar with the descant and to sing the descant themselves in church services on a Sunday. In collective singing events, participants gather together from a wider region, attracted by the promise of a special event in the form of a musical performance which is not necessarily something that they themselves had grown up with. I will discuss both ritual contexts (Sunday worship and collective singing events) in detail, and then make comparisons between them.

6.4.1. Genemuiders Bovenstem collective psalmody in Sunday worship

The performers of Genemuiders Bovenstem collective psalmody in Sunday worship are usually churchgoers, many of whom were born and raised in the area. They have usually learned this style of descant singing in church or primary school, or by imitating their fathers or grandfathers. My analysis shows that individuals' biographical backgrounds—whether Genemuiden is their (former) place of residence, their gender, primary school, and family—influence the likelihood of them to become familiar with and participate in Genemuiders Bovenstem collective psalmody.

Firstly, I observe that the churchgoers performing Genemuiders Bovenstem usually live in Genemuiden or the surrounding area. According to Henk Beens, a descant singer and local historian who wrote a book on Genemuiders Bovenstem, there are around “600 proud Genemuiders descant singers” in Genemuiden (interview, 14 October 2020). The practice of Genemuiders Bovenstem is, quite unsurprisingly, strongly tied to the town of Genemuiden, and is a major source of local pride.

Secondly, I see that it matters whether or not an individual attends church at one of the three strictly Reformed church communities that engage in Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody in Genemuiden (see above). One strictly Reformed church community, the Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerk (Christian Reformed Churches) congregation does sing isometric Genevan Psalms, but without descants. This is because “they are somewhat lighter”, and less strictly Reformed, as Henk Beens explained in an interview. The performance of Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody appears to be related to the degree of strictness of a certain congregation or denomination. The three churches where Genemuider Bovenstem is sung show stylistic differences, and interviewees mentioned that the different church communities are somewhat separate from one another. Churchgoers would only rarely, if ever, visit church services at one of the other churches. Theological differences can divide families and other groups, as the split in 2004 between Hervormde Kerk and Hersteld Hervormde Kerk serves to demonstrate. Thus the congregation they grow up in significantly affects whether and how individuals become familiar and involved with Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody.

Thirdly, it is clear that gender is an important factor in the roles that individuals are able to fulfill in a performance. Boys and girls are raised to participate in Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody in different ways. Erik is a descant singer, organist, and teacher at the Netherlands Reformed (Hervormd) primary school of Genemuiden, where he instructs the children to sing Genemuider Bovenstem: “I say to the girls: just stick to the melody, then I will sing the descant with the boys!” to which he adds: “Yeah, maybe that’s racist or something, I don’t know, but that’s what I do” (field notes 5). Women are limited in the roles they are likely, or even allowed, to play in and around the performance of Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody, including whether they sing the descant or Psalm melody, whether they receive a seat on the church council, or become a minister. It is thus connected strongly to the broader theological anthropology of these church communities. Although women are allowed to play the organ in church services it appears that, in reality, all organists are men. Remarkably, all my interviewees, women included, prefer the descant to be sung by male tenors.

Fourthly, as Erik’s quotation has already shown, I can see that primary schooling is also a factor affecting whether individuals become acquainted with Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody. At the strictly Reformed “Rehoboth” primary school, children sing isometric Genevan Psalms every morning, often with the descant (interview with Arend Booij). At the

Netherlands Reformed (Hervormd) primary school, this practice is waning, with Erik's Psalm practice serving as an exception to the rule (see above). Peter (11 years old), who attends that particular school, thinks that "there's one classmate who sings the descant, and also my nephew. For the rest, I'm not so sure" (11 November 2020).

The fifth factor is family context. My analysis of interviews shows that families play an important role in the process of becoming participants in Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody. Often, descant singers like Peter, who sits next to his grandfather every Sunday (interview), begin by imitating their fathers or grandfathers. Sara describes how she is surrounded by family in church: "My husband David sits next to me, my father behind me, and my son on the other side. And all three sing the descant!" (interview, 13 November 2020). Family members both demonstrate how to sing the descant and encourage young boys to sing the descant themselves.

Thus, one's place of birth and residence, church congregation, primary school, and family all play a role in whether and how an individual experiences Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody: in becoming familiar with the practice, in feeling encouraged by others to participate in certain ways, and in appreciating the activity of performance. Gender is the main determinant of whether individuals are encouraged, trained or restricted in particular ways.



Figure 16. Male singers of different generations join in *Genemuider Bovenstem* collective psalmody. Photo: Kenniscentrum Immaterieel Erfgoed Nederland..

6.4.2. Genemuider Bovenstem in collective psalmody events

Some of the men who attend the three strictly Reformed church communities that practice Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody on Sundays have undertaken different actions in order to preserve Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody as a response to the slow decrease in its popularity, the decay of other local customs (traditional dress and craftsmanship), and the emergence of other musical styles (pop songs, worship music, hymns). Organist Arend Booij suggested in interview that the collectives dedicated to the conservation of the practice are relatively independent from the church councils. The only exception to this is the male choir Harpe Davids ('David's Harp'), which belongs to the Gereformeerde Gemeente (Reformed Congregations). According to different interviewees, the choir Harpe Davids is not so eager to perform with STEREO, and is sometimes disallowed from performing in the church buildings of other denominations, such as the Hervormde Kerk, by the Gereformeerde Gemeente church council (interviews with Erik, Lammert, Arjen, Arend). Harpe Davids was also not involved in the Intangible Cultural Heritage application.

The members of male choir STEREO come from different church communities, and also from outside Genemuiden. Some participants are not church members. Erik explains that new members from elsewhere often become members via friends from Genemuiden:

Entire groups of friends are joining. At first, I was the only one, and my friends thought that I was crazy, but after a while, some became curious and wanted to take a look, and now, the whole squad has become a member! (interview)

Several interviewees (Erik, David) described how an atmosphere of "men having fun together" is an important aspect of the choir. Again, in the words of Erik:

We're a group, really! Having a get-together, men among themselves. Having some beer, having fun... eating snacks, when someone has a wedding anniversary, that kind of nonsense. It's fun going there (interview).

Similarly, the Bovenstemgroep (ad hoc Genemuider Bovenstem descant groups, and one of the applicants for Intangible Cultural Heritage despite their ad hoc character), was described by interviewees as a group of enthusiast singers going on a trip and having a nice get-together. Initiator Arend reported: "With the Bovenstemgroep, we have been to quite a few places, with a bus

full of singers!” (interview). The social aspect of these gatherings appears to be important for the interviewees.

The Stichting tot Behoud van de Genemuider Bovenstem (Foundation for the Preservation of Genemuiden’s Descant), whose board contains members from all three strictly Reformed church communities, takes the lead in the organization of a part of the collective singing events. Although the Stichting is formally independent from the church councils, board member Arend Booi reported that the councils do sometimes set limits on musical repertoire and public speakers when the collective singing event takes place in their church (interview). He mentioned that the Stichting had the intention of inviting Jan Terlouw as a public speaker for a Liberation Day event with Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody, but that “some people were not so happy with that, as he is of D66”, which is a liberal and progressive political party (interview). Henk Beens confirmed that church councils are often stricter than those who “just want to sing Genemuider Bovenstem together”, but that the organizers of events often find ways to perform Genemuider Bovenstem collectively despite these restrictions, for example by searching for alternative venues in the area (interview).

The applicants for the Intangible Cultural Heritage designation described several motivations for their application. These bear a similarity to the reasons given by other interviewees for their participation in collective singing events: celebration of their local culture in a space outside of their own region, preservation of their specific style of isometric psalmody, praising God, and compensating for the number of Intangible Cultural Heritage practices which lack any religious association (interviews with Arend, Erik, David, Sara). For some, however, performing Genemuider Bovenstem outside of Sunday worship is inappropriate, especially if that performance is accompanied with a feeling of local pride. Rutger, organist and descant singer, for instance, thinks that, when it comes to singing for God, “I think it’s wrong to be proud (...), although cherishing and preserving Genemuider Bovenstem has my first priority” (email conversation, 3 November 2020). In contrast to Rutger, most individuals do not find the combination of local pride and religious practice to be particularly problematic. Erik, for instance, states that “it really is a part of Genemuiden, just like church is, and being Christian is just part of us, (...) it’s folksy and churchy at the same time” (interview). Arjen has even noticed how often they are able to move listeners from elsewhere. He thinks that “we shouldn’t be ashamed to sing Genemuider Bovenstem, even in unusual places... maybe God employs us to reach people” (interview). For participants

like Arjen, the heritagization and eventization of Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody are also ways to evangelize.

In general, I observe a desire to increase the public visibility of descant singing as an emphatically local and religious practice, despite the fact that this entails the involvement of singers, speakers and organists from outside Genemuïden, and performing Genemuider Bovenstem in a ritual outside Sunday worship, somewhat removed from the authority of church councils.

6.4.3. Comparing psalmody practices in the two contexts

There are overlaps as well as differences between the two ritual contexts when it comes to participants' biographical backgrounds, their experiences, their actions, the collectives they are affiliated with, and the processes they respond to.

The overlap can be found in the fact that, in both contexts, many singers have a strictly Reformed background or upbringing and are, thus, familiar with the congregational practice of isometric Genevan Psalms singing. Other similarities between the two performance contexts include the lack of entrance fee, the location in church buildings, male leadership, and participants' experience of the music as 'beautiful' and 'impressive'.

The differences concern the degrees of variety that can be observed when it comes to participants' place of residence, church denomination, reasons for participating and experiences of the performance, as well as the distribution of leadership and other roles in the performance. In Sunday worship, participants in Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody are attending a church service at their local church. They describe their experience of Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody in terms of 'appropriateness' – whether the descant collective psalmody fitted the content of the sermon and the prayers in that particular church service (interviews with David, Lammert, and Sara). Not all churchgoers are big fans of Genemuider Bovenstem, but since descant collective psalmody is not always a dominant element within the services, they are able to 'endure' it (interviews with David, Sara, Arend, Henk).

The collective singing events, on the other hand, often taking place in churches outside Genemuïden, attract an audience from a wider area (interviews with Henk Beens and Arend Booi). Descant singers are not necessarily members of the particular church community in whose building the performance takes place.²⁹⁰ They have a variety of denominational backgrounds,

²⁹⁰ The Bovenkerk in Kampen, one of the most popular venues for *Genemuider bovenstem* performances, is another interesting example. The building is no longer used for church services,

including individuals who no longer identify as churchgoers. Their participation is based on personal interest and taste, instead of church membership. Interviewees appreciate that, in these collective singing events, Genemuider Bovenstem appeals to all listeners, Christians or not (interviews with David, Lammert, Arjen), and that “church walls just disappear” (interview with Sara). Church members who do not enjoy the Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody, tend to stay away from these events, whereas ‘descant fans’ are attracted by the presence of famous organists such as Pieter Heijkoop, André Nieuwkoop or Marco den Toom. (interviews with Arend Booij, Erik). Thus, ‘taste walls’, so to speak, have emerged where church walls disappear.

Participants who are attracted to the collective singing events describe their experience of Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody as ‘unforgettable’ rather than ‘appropriate’, which is how descant collective psalmody in Sunday worship is more often described. In interviews, individuals often appeared to be very aware of which events they had attended or missed (interviews with Arend Booij, Erik, Arjen, Lammert). Some of them listen repeatedly to recordings made during Genemuider Bovenstem events:

I listen to those video recordings two or three times a week. I still do that, each week! (...), it was one of the most beautiful moments in my life (interview with Lammert).

Furthermore, while in Sunday worship all participants are mixed in together, in collective singing events, descant choirs wear suits and are seated separately from the other participants. Thus, the boundaries between different blocs of performers are drawn more clearly, and these coincide with traditional gender categories. This has practical reasons, as the choirs do also perform choral music while the audience listens. Men have a more active and visible role in the performance, especially since the “crowd-pulling” public speakers, organists and choir conductors which draw people to the events are all male as well (interview with Arend Booij).

Many persons who participate in collective singing events also participate in Sunday worship services, but not necessarily in Genemuider. However, they behave differently in different ritual contexts, forming different groups and they describe their experiences differently. In this way, Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody in both contexts is complementary in nature. Rehearsals and collective singing events inspire singers and listeners with unforgettable, special experiences, while the regularity and continuity of local congregations’ church

but is dedicated almost entirely to organ concerts and events involving collective singing.



Figure 17. In collective singing events, all choir members wear similar suits. Photo: Kenniscentrum Immaterieel Erfgoed Nederland.

services provide routine for the descant singers, especially those who are not choir members, and familiarize young singers with the tradition. Nevertheless, local church councils and organizing committees are sometimes in conflict when collective singing events are (somewhat) at odds with the theological views of church councils regarding the appropriate use of church buildings.

6.5. Discussion and conclusion

I have observed overlaps between the different groups and communities involved in Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody. Furthermore, my analysis suggested that the two contexts of “iterative” and “pulsar” events, namely Sunday liturgy and collective singing events, are not opposed, but mutually dependent.²⁹¹ This dependency lies in the fact that the local church communities performing Genemuider Bovenstem form the breeding ground for individuals to become familiar with the practice and for them to form groups dedicated to the practice. At the same time, the collective singing events support the frame of Genemuider Bovenstem as heritage and event, and thus increase its relevance in a context characterized by the heritagization and eventization of religious practices.²⁹²

²⁹¹ Cf. Richards, “Events in the network society.”

²⁹² Michelle Duffy uses the term “experience economy” to describe a context where, “particularly

My analysis suggests that the heritagization of Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody results in greater awareness of and pride in the tradition within Genemuiden church communities. In this sense, I propose, following Greg Richards' terminology, that the performance of Genemuider Bovenstem forms a "platform" where different communities and groups interact in a network, and in which the different groups (male choirs, the Foundation for the Preservation of Genemuiden's Descant, the Bovenstemgroep) form nodes.²⁹³ Of all of these, the Bovenstemgroep is the most ephemeral, as singers can join and leave whenever they want to. However, distinguishing networks from communities is barely possible in Genemuider Bovenstem, since many participants and leaders are involved in both the liturgical practice of local church communities in Genemuiden and the heritagization and eventization of the practice, with the exception of media and heritage institutions.²⁹⁴ I have shown that the ecclesioscape of Genemuider Bovenstem involves both the collective singing of Psalms with 'fans' from a wider region during the week, and singing the same repertoire with local churchgoers on Sundays in Genemuiden.

As church members have formed groups, such as the Foundation for the Preservation of Genemuiden's Descant, they have also managed to revive a musical practice within their church communities, by using the intangible heritage frame but without letting Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody slip away from Sunday worship practices.²⁹⁵ However, in the collective singing events, greater emphasis is put on an ecumenical (interdenominational) strictly Reformed, 'Bible Belt' collective identity, as can be seen in the choice of organists and venues, announcements in the strictly Reformed newspaper and the involvement of strictly Reformed broadcasting companies.²⁹⁶

in developed countries, surplus time and money allow for increased participation in leisure activities and heightened emotional experiences." Michelle Duffy, "Music events and festivals," in *The Routledge Handbook of Festivals*, ed. Judith Mair (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 309; cf. Biaett and Richards, "Event experiences," 283; Meyer, "Recycling the Christian Past," 70-71, 83; Pfadenhauer, "The eventization of faith," 382; Greg Richards, Brian King, and Emmy Yeung, "Experiencing culture in attractions, events and tour settings," *Tourism Management* 79 (2020): 2; Chris Ryan, "The experience of events," in *The Routledge Handbook of Events*, ed. Stephen J. Page and Joanne Connell (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 253.

²⁹³ Greg Richards, "The Value of Event Networks and Platforms. Evidence from a multiannual cultural program," *Event Management* 25, no. 1 (2021): 88.

²⁹⁴ Cf. Richards and Jarman, "Events As Platforms, Networks, and Communities," 4.

²⁹⁵ This is contrary to Andrew Mall's findings regarding hymn singing in the context of a 'pulsar' event (festival), without the connection to the congregational practice of a church community. See: Mall, "Beer and Hymns' and community," 34, 38.

²⁹⁶ Cf. Ryan, "The experience of events," 253; Simons, "Changing identities through collective performance at events," 568.

I conclude that the collective singing events evoke a shared Reformed identity that the Sunday worship context is unable to provide, while enhancing descant singers' local pride, as they are able to impress participants from elsewhere with their Genemuider Bovenstem.²⁹⁷

I have observed that the divisions between the different strictly Reformed church communities from Genemuiden become somewhat weaker in the pulsar events whilst, at the same time, divisions between visiting 'fans' and others become stronger. As I have shown, interviewees can clearly remember which events they have attended or not, and they recognize others who are 'Genemuider Bovenstem fans'. Pulsar events that are experienced as special and extra-ordinary by their participants reconfigure borders between insiders (attendees) and outsiders, as Simons has also observed.²⁹⁸ Of course, belonging to this group of insiders does not necessarily imply that other belongings disappear. Rather, I argue that Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody broadens the participants' range of possible belongings, including specific church communities, male choirs, the population of Genemuiden, a broader strictly Reformed subculture, or, indeed 'insiders' who attend collective singing events. I thus conclude that in the heritagization and eventization of Genemuider Bovenstem psalmody, new styles of coming together are added to extant practices.

At the same time, although pulsar events have the potential to disrupt hegemonic social hierarchical viewpoints via collective performance, the organizers of the collective singing events do not employ this potential.²⁹⁹ I have observed that gender inequalities are maintained, and even enhanced in the eventization of Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody, both in its performance and organization.³⁰⁰ Gender categories are demarcated

²⁹⁷ Duffy, "Music events," 304-05. According to Ilja Simons, the performance of collective identity by crowds and audiences has still rarely been studied in critical event studies. See: Simons, "Changing identities through collective performance at events," 568-69.

²⁹⁸ Ryan and Simons describe this as a collective "liminal" experience of "communitas". Ryan, "The experience of events," 253-54; Simons, "Changing identities through collective performance at events," 570-71.

²⁹⁹ Duffy, "Music events," 308; Simons, "Changing identities through collective performance at events," 569-70.

³⁰⁰ Teresa Berger, "Congregational Singing and Practices of Gender in Christian Worship: Exploring Intersections," in *Studying Congregational Music. Key Issues, Methods, and Theoretical Perspectives*, ed. Andrew Mall, Jeffers Engelhardt, and Monique M. Ingalls (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 213-14; Beverley Diamond, "Afterword," in *Performing Gender, Place, and Emotion in Music. Global Perspectives*, ed. Fiona Magowan and Louise Wrazen (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2013), 189-90; Engelhardt, "Congregation and Chorality," 150; Ellen Koskoff, *A Feminist Ethnomusicology. Writings on Music and Gender* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of

more heavily than in Sunday worship because of how authority is distributed, and because of the way in which male choirs and mixed audience are spatially organized with men on the stage, organ bench, and pulpit.³⁰¹ It is possible, as liturgical scholar Teresa Berger suggests, that this could be a reaction to the emancipation of women in Dutch society more widely and in the strictly Reformed subculture in particular, as Erik's quotation seemed to hint ("maybe that's racist or something, I don't know, but that's what I do").³⁰² It could also be that a feeling of unity in collective singing transcends the experience of gender inequalities, as female interviewees did not seem to be bothered that leadership roles and singing the descant are restricted to men.³⁰³ Ethnomusicologists Ellen Koskoff and Fred Everett Maus both emphasize that the meaning of gender and gender roles is contextual, and can be contradictory in different settings.³⁰⁴ Thus, the meaning of gender roles in the specific context of Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody requires further and detailed study. Nevertheless, I can conclude that women do not have the opportunities that men have to play prominent roles in organising and performing Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody.

In closing, I return to my research question: *How does Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody serve to construct communities in light of the heritagization and eventization of religious practices?*

Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody has served to increase the number of different groups engaged with the practice. Processes of heritagization and eventization do not result in the overruling of communities from the iterative event context (church communities). Rather, church communities demonstrate an overlap with other groups (such as male choirs and fans), gathering together in the pulsar collective singing events. I conclude that there is a cross-fertilization between the ritual contexts of iterative

Illinois Press, 2014), 78, 80, 83, 89, 122; Fiona Magowan and Louise Wrazen, "Introduction," in *Performing Gender, Place, and Emotion in Music. Global Perspectives*, ed. Fiona Magowan and Louise Wrazen (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2013), 2; Sara R. Walmsley-Pledl, "Transforming the Singing Body," in *Performing Gender, Place, and Emotion in Music. Global Perspectives*, ed. Fiona Magowan and Louise Wrazen (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2013), 112-13.

³⁰¹ Cf. Koskoff, *A Feminist Ethnomusicology*, 78; Magowan and Wrazen, "Introduction," 6.

³⁰² Cf. Berger, "Congregational Singing," 221; Henk A. Post, "In strijd met de roeping der vrouw: De Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij en het vrouwenkiesrecht" (PhD dissertation, Vrije Universiteit, 2009), 128-29, 253, www.research.vu.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/42186508/complete+dissertation.pdf.

³⁰³ Sara Walmsley-Pledl argues as such in her chapter on gender and place in Bavarian choral singing. See: Walmsley-Pledl, "Transforming the Singing Body," 123.

³⁰⁴ Koskoff, *A Feminist Ethnomusicology*, 132; Fred Everett Maus, "Music, Gender, and Sexuality," in *The Cultural Study of Music*, ed. Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert, and Richard Middleton (New York: Routledge, 2012), 321.

Sunday worship in strictly Reformed church communities in Genemuiden and pulsar collective psalmody events that attract audiences from a broader region. For most 'double participants', there is difference but not discrepancy when participating in iterative and pulsar events. Participants generally appreciate the heritagization and eventization of Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody, since their local pride grows with its popularity, and as their songs to God move fans beyond their local church communities. Interestingly, this occurs with the support both of secular governmental heritage institutions and of strictly Reformed media institutions. I conclude that singers of Genemuider Bovenstem Psalms relate to each other in an increasing number of ways—singing apart together in the ecclesioscape of Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody.





7

When Psalms talk back

How the appropriation history of Psalms challenges
contemporary ritual-musical appropriations

7.1. Introduction

For many centuries, Psalms have belonged to the core ritual-musical repertoire of Jewish and Christian liturgical traditions worldwide.³⁰⁵ Even today, Psalms are sung and recited every day in synagogues, churches, monasteries, schools, households, and many other locations besides. In the Netherlands and Flanders, where in ages past Christianity was the dominant religion, despite secularization and a general decline in church attendance, Psalms are now appropriated outside liturgical contexts, in addition to liturgical performances.³⁰⁶ In this post-Christian or postsecular context, new forms of meaning-making around practices associated with religious traditions often emerge in synchrony with the fluidization of formerly ‘religious’ or ‘secular’ domains.³⁰⁷ Consequently, practices (formerly) associated with religious or secular domains begin to transform and transfer to other domains. Marcel Barnard and Mirella Klomp sit alongside a wider range of scholars who describe this phenomenon in terms of the “transfer and transformation of

³⁰⁵ The ‘antiphon’ for this chapter is taken from *150 Psalms, ‘Cantate Domino canticum novum’* by Ruggiero Giovannelli, performed by the Nederlands Kamerkoor: www.henkvogel.com/antiphon-7/.

³⁰⁶ Bernts and Berghuijs, *God in Nederland*; De Hart and Van Houwelingen, *Christenen in Nederland*; De Hart, Van Houwelingen, and Huijnk, *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving*.

³⁰⁷ André Droogers, *Play and Power in Religion. Challenges for the Study of Religion* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2012), 144; Hodkinson and Horstkotte, “Introducing the Postsecular,” 317-19; Klomp, *Playing On*, 147, 60.

religion," pointing to the changing meaning of religion, secularization, and sacrality in late-modern society.³⁰⁸

Following a similar approach, I study the ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms in contemporary Dutch and Flemish culture and evaluate these appropriations. Psalms attract organizers, artists and performers in the fields of arts and heritage. I term this the 'ritual-musical appropriation of Psalms', which I study in four research cases: the festival *150 Psalms, Genemuider Bovenstem* collective psalmody, the poetry project *Poesia Divina*, and *Psalm 151* (see the methodology section). In all these cases, Psalms are placed on a pedestal as art and as heritage, in which connotations of religious practice still resonate. I understand psalmody as the ritual-musical performance of Psalms, sung or recited. In order to observe the depth and breadth of what 'psalmody' entails in a secularized context, I also include the performance of other than canonical Psalms (whenever organizers/artists present them as such).

In my use, the term 'appropriation' denotes a meaning-making process concerning a migrating cultural form: together, different actors (organizers, artists, performers, audience, etc.) reinvent the meaning of psalmody and its different aspects in new and changed contexts.³⁰⁹ I refrain from describing this phenomenon primarily in terms of ownership and disownership, which is different from how the term 'appropriation' is often used in recent debates on cultural appropriation.³¹⁰ Rather, I study how the performance of Psalms gains new meanings in new contexts. I use the adjectives 'ritual' and 'musical' to emphasize my understanding of 'appropriation' as a meaning-making process that emerges in ritual and musical performances.³¹¹ In previous chapters, I focused on the intentions and experiences of organizers, artists, performers,

³⁰⁸ Hoondert, "The Interpretation and Experience of the Requiem in Contemporary Culture," 133-47; Klomp, *Playing On*, 74-92; Erik Sengers, ed., *The Dutch and their gods*, ReLiC. Studies in Dutch Religious History (Hilversum: Verloren, 2005). I follow social theorists such as Zygmunt Bauman and Anthony Giddens, who argue that the contemporary era witnesses a radicalized state of modernity, marked by the rise of expressive individualism, globalized capitalism, and the liquification of (social) relations. Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*; Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).

³⁰⁹ Psychology of religion scholar Brenda Mathijssen describes 'meaning-making' as "the embodied, cognitive and affective processes by which human and non-human animals seek, create and interpret meaning in relation to their experiences in concrete time-spaces." Brenda Mathijssen, "Ritual Worlding. Exploring the Self-and-world-making Efficacy of Rituals," *Yearbook for Liturgical and Ritual Studies* 39 (2023): 28.

³¹⁰ Without disapproving of that particular use, my usage of the term is less normative, as my aim is to grasp the complexities of the meaning-making process that I term 'appropriation'.

³¹¹ Cf. Schneider, "On 'Appropriation,'" 215-29; Vogel, Klomp, and Barnard, "Sing After God a New Song," 32-35.

and other participants in the performances of Psalms. I observed that the creation, performance or perception of particularly a 'Psalm' made these individuals do and/or experience things they had not expected, such as the 'need' to address God through their performance, or that their performance 'should' be serious in tone—as if traditions of psalmody challenged their intentions and endeavors in these directions. Apparently, the deep historical roots of the Psalms inform contemporary appropriations in different ways.

This raises the question: *How are contemporary ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms in Dutch and Flemish culture challenged by the appropriation history of the Psalms, against the background of the transfer and transformation of religion?*

I use the word 'challenge' in order to point to instances where appropriating groups and individuals perform or interpret psalmody differently than (previously) expected, because they think that traditions of psalmody demand this. In other words: their appropriation is challenged by earlier appropriations.

In doing so, I follow Paul Ricoeur's thinking. Ricoeur opposes an unlimited openness when it comes to matters of meaning: the possible meanings of a 'text' (or other media or cultural forms) are limited by the text's history and the contextuality of its particular performance, although, in a performance, a text can acquire different, even contradictory meanings.³¹² Canonical texts, such as the Psalms, come with especially large traditions of appropriation, which, in the words of sociolinguist Allan Bell, "become part of the horizon against [which] each fresh interpretation is reached."³¹³ Such a horizon limits and challenges interpretations, even though all texts are pastiches with earlier traces, and 'true original' simple meanings of an 'unappropriated version' do not exist.³¹⁴ Ricoeur describes the way that texts, when they present themselves to readers, provide those readers with 'arrows' to follow, which are dependent on the context of the reader (this is the 'present character of interpretation').³¹⁵ The reader must allow the text to guide her/his interpretation. Thus, I evaluate whether and how appropriating (groups of) individuals let themselves be challenged by older traditions of psalmody, or whether they stick (only) to an initial uninformed idea of the meaning of the Psalms. This way, I can observe the *contextual* meaning

312 Cf. Bell, "Re-constructing Babel," 530; Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics & the Human Sciences*, 121.

313 Bell applies Ricoeur's thinking to the interpretation of the Biblical Babel story. Bell, "Re-constructing Babel," 538; cf. Michaël Foessel, "The World of the Text and the World of Life," in *Hermeneutics and Phenomenology in Paul Ricoeur*, ed. S. Davidson and M.-A. Vallée (2016), 83; Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3, 172; Schneider, "On 'Appropriation'," 217.

314 Bell, "Re-constructing Babel," 536; Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3, 172; Schneider, "On 'Appropriation'," 217, 21.

315 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics & the Human Sciences*, 121, 23, 55.

of performing Psalms, rather than departing from essentialist meanings with ('original') meanings lying dormant, waiting to be uncovered. I analyze and compare appropriating individuals' interpretations and cluster the ways in which the fact that they are dealing with a Psalm (and not a different musical form) serves to challenge them. This is how I move beyond the interpretation of individuals to the ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms seen as a whole. In other words, I trace the similarities between the 'arrows' that different individuals follow or diverge from in their interpretations. Furthermore, I interpret these similarities alongside existing academic literature on the Psalms and their appropriation history.

This chapter explores the influence of earlier ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms on the Psalms' current ritual-musical appropriations in contemporary Dutch and Flemish culture, a culture in which a transfer and transformation of religion has been observed. Based on empirical research into four very different ritual-musical appropriations of the Psalms, I have analyzed whether and how contemporary performances of Psalms are challenged by the appropriation history of the Psalms. The results provide new knowledge regarding the meaning of Psalm performance, in relation to both the appropriation history of Psalms and the context of late-modern, postsecular, post-Christian Dutch and Flemish societies. My research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the transfer and transformation of religious practices in these societies.

7.2. Methodology

This chapter is based on ethnographic fieldwork undertaken between 2018 and 2020. I studied the performance of Psalms in four different settings: *Psalm 151*, *150 Psalms*, *Poesia Divina*, and *Genemuider Bovenstem* collective psalmody. All textual data were coded using Atlas.ti software. I coded and clustered the instances where respondents described their intentions, changes in their intentions, and their own explicit characterizations of the Psalms and psalmody. I used "descriptive coding" for identifying the basic topic of data segments (such as "psalmody should be serious"), and "simultaneous coding" for tracing the overlap (co-occurrence) of different topics in the data (such as "Psalms serve to address God" and "Psalms are grateful").³¹⁶ This data analysis led to the identification of three principal challenges that respondents are confronted with in their appropriation of Psalms: the challenge to address God, to perform Psalms collectively, and to contemplate life through these Psalm performances.

³¹⁶ Saldaña, *Coding Manual*, 70-73, 62-65.

To deepen my understanding and evaluation of the findings, I reviewed academic literature on the themes that I found in the data, and on the broader transfer and transformation of religion in order to understand ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms in relation to wider cultural trends.

7.3. Three challenges

As mentioned, my analyses of empirical research data show that the ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms are challenged by the appropriation history of the Psalms in three ways, which I discuss in more detail below.

7.3.1. The challenge to address God

In my analysis, I observed that many participants are challenged to address God through their (participation in a) Psalm performance. Regardless of participants' (religious) beliefs, they feel that creating or performing a Psalm demands that they at least reflect on whether and how they might address God through their performance. They deal with this challenge in a variety of ways, ranging from unreserved praise, to omitting God's name, to experimenting with different ways to address God. It appears that, even when they refrain from addressing God, they still feel the need to explain why they do so, which shows they do indeed feel challenged to address God.

Firstly, poet Delphine Lecompte (*Poesia Divina*) is glad to “finally praise God again” in her new Psalm. She feels that Psalms should be written “without irony, and with a spirit of exaltation (...), that's what a Psalm wants to achieve” (interview, 28 September 2019). In the other cases, participants, such as some singers in *150 Psalms* and *Genemuider Bovenstem*, show similar ways of addressing God ‘without irony or mockery’. In the case of *Genemuider Bovenstem* collective psalmody, praising God through collective singing is a recurring theme throughout the interviews. I noticed that, “in the speech by a minister, and in the collective singing, the greatness of God and the nullity of humans are consistently opposed—a distance that it seems can hardly be bridged” (field notes 6, 26 May 2022).

Secondly, in contrast to this, others, mainly composers and poets, decisively remove names for God from the canonical texts, or circumvent God in their new texts. In most cases, they think that the word “God” narrows the Psalms' relevance for publics that are diverse (not simply Christian). Composer Michel van der Aa explains:



Figure 18. Poet Delphine Lecompte is glad to “finally praise God again” in her new Psalm.
Photo by Alidoor DellaFaille.

I wanted to make the phrases more universal and get rid of an overly specific religious intent. I wanted to create a more humanistic story for myself—the word God is a big thing for me, too big.³¹⁷

Composer Mohammed Fairouz argues that removing the word ‘God’ from the canonical text does not necessarily imply the denial of God: “Instead of ‘God’, I read: something that is bigger than humans.”³¹⁸ Similarly, Oek de Jong (an introductory speaker at *150 Psalms*), explained that, to him, addressing God means addressing your own conscience, your “heart of hearts” (introductory speech, 1 September 2017). He, and other participants who do not believe in a personal God, are hesitant to articulate either praise or thanksgiving which, to them, embody an overly submissive attitude to God.

Thirdly, in between the two extremes of either addressing God directly or omitting the name of God completely stands a spectrum of experiments with different ways to address God, which I encountered mainly in the new texts of *Psalm 151* and *Poesia Divina*. These poets play with conventional ways to address God, with words like *Heer* (“Lord”) and pronouns like *Gij* (“Thou”), but, nevertheless, appear to be hesitant when it comes to praise and thanksgiving, and opt for a more angry or reproachful tone.

7.3.2. The challenge to perform collectively

The second challenge which I identified is the way in which participants (particularly the designers of the performances) are challenged to enhance collective participation in their performance of Psalms. They find different ways to deal with this challenge.

Firstly, it seems that people can be relatively easily seduced to join in with acts of collective singing. In *Genemuiders Bovenstem* collective psalmody, all the attendees at a performance join in the act of collective singing. Many of the interviewees described how this makes them feel, as according to Sara: “It’s that feeling of solidarity, of being together. For me, it’s like heaven” (interview, 13 November 2020). This strong feeling of togetherness appears to be evoked primarily by singing together in an isorhythmic fashion (in which the duration of all notes is equal) at a slow tempo and at a rather loud volume (interviews

³¹⁷ Gerrit-Jan KleinJan, “Psalmen zijn een onuitputtelijke bron van inspiratie”, *Trouw*, 29 August 2017, www.trouw.nl/nieuws/psalmen-zijn-een-onuitputtelijke-bron-van-inspiratie-b98c4b26/ (last accessed 26 June 2023).

³¹⁸ Nell Westerlaken, “Psalm 14 lijkt voor deze tijd geschreven te zijn, meent deze componist”, *De Volkskrant*, 30 August 2017, www.volkskrant.nl/cultuur-media/psalm-14-lijkt-voor-deze-tijd-geschreven-te-zijn-meent-deze-componist-b6727fa3/ (last accessed 26 June 2023).



Figure 19. Participants in *Genemuiders Bovenstem* collective psalmody. Photo: Kenniscentrum Immaterieel Erfgoed Nederland.

with Harm Hoeve, 26 August 2020, and with Wietse and Geke, 11 November 2020). I observed that the selection of (stanzas of) metrical Psalms supported the collective flow, as these were selected and arranged in such a way that almost all Psalms ended with a climax—beginning with lower sounds in the organ accompaniment alongside lyrics about sin and suffering, and leading into exuberant praise (field notes 6).

Secondly, Tido Visser, the leading organizer of *150 Psalms*, tried to enhance collective participation in the festival’s performances through the ritual setup of the festival, which was inspired by the monastic Liturgy of the Hours: two days filled with 12 concerts, two lectures, and a photo exhibition (interview, 8 May 2019). In his introduction to the festival booklet, Visser describes the way in which “the humanity and connective power of singing and of the Psalm texts”, together with monastic traditions of psalmody, inspired him to design such an intense festival.³¹⁹ However, Visser decided not to include collective singing in the festival in order to avoid being “too churchy” (interview). As a result, festivalgoers sit, watch and listen to the performances.

Thirdly, in *Psalm 151* and *Poesia Divina*, collective participation is also less prominent. In *Psalm 151*, composer Boudewijn Tarenskeen aimed to deconstruct

³¹⁹ Tido Visser, “The Psalms—The Project”, *150 Psalms* (festival booklet), 11-13.



Figure 20. Festivalgoers in *150 Psalms* sit, watch and listen to a performance by the Nederlands Kamerkoor. Photo by Foppe Schut.

the homogeneous unity of choral singing, and asked the singers to search for individual roles and timbres, although he also alludes to choral music and collective singing by imitating 16th century polyphony and including folksy refrains. Similarly, some of the poets in *Psalm 151* and *Poesia Divina* used plural pronouns (“we”), refrains and recognizable phrases from Christian liturgy to evoke collective (liturgical) performance (e.g. Gaea Schoeters, interview on 28 September 2019).

Fourthly, all the organizers that I spoke to selected performance venues which, as monumental heritage, allude to a collective (religious) past, or, at least, made adjustments to the venue in this vein. These include churches (*Psalm 151*, *Poesia Divina*, *Genemuiders Bovenstem*), monasteries (*Poesia Divina*), and stage equipment reminiscent of ecclesiastical architecture (*150 Psalms*). Respondents repeatedly referred to psalmody as part of “our” Western, European, Christian, Dutch past (interviews with Merlijn Geurts on 31 May 2019, with Martin on 29 January 2020, with Jelle Dierickx and Carl De Strycker on 28 September 2019, and with Boudewijn Tarenskeen on 5 December 2018). Venues are selected for their connection to this collective past (interviews with Jelle Dierickx, Boudewijn Tarenskeen), which, in all cases, is more important than whether the venue is still in use by religious communities or not.

Fifthly, on the other hand, designers of the performances (organizers, artists) want to make room for individual experience and diversity in their performances.³²⁰ The organizers of *150 Psalms*, *Psalm 151* and *Poesia Divina* made sure to engage artists (poets, speakers, composers) from a diverse range of contexts, including those from secular, Jewish and Islamic religious backgrounds, and various ethnic identities (interviews with Leo Samama on 6 May 2019, with Boudewijn Tarenskeen on 5 December 2018, and with Jelle Dierickx on 28 September 2019). In *Genemuiders Bovenstem* collective psalmody, the collective singing events are held in monumental churches that are no longer (or no longer obviously) related to a single denomination, in order to include room for publics from diverse denominations to participate. Furthermore, in all cases, the performance of Psalms has moved beyond the regular liturgical practice of religious communities and predominantly takes places in infrequent events which do not imply participants' (possible) commitment to a (religious) community.



Figure 21. In *Psalm 151*, composer Boudewijn Tarenskeen encouraged singers to explore and express their individuality. Photo by Paul Janssen.

In sum, it appears that organizers and artists feel challenged to involve their publics ('audience') in the performance of Psalms and to include a diversity of performers and artists in order to create a hospitable atmosphere, while

³²⁰ Research has shown that the opportunity of individual meaning making is an important characteristic of contemporary collective ritual-musical appropriations. Cf. Klomp, *Playing On*, 162.

they are wary of involving all participants to any great extent in a singular homogeneous collective. Because of this hesitance, some of them avoid collective singing and employ other ways of collective participation.

7.3.3. The challenge to contemplate life

Furthermore, participants feel challenged to contemplate life through their participation in a performance of Psalms. This third challenge concerns the atmosphere and mode of reflection evoked by the performance, and the topics addressed in the performance. Organizers create rituals which stand apart from daily life, which support a contemplative attitude among participants, and which carve out room to reflect on existential themes.

Firstly, the performances are characterized by attentive atmospheres and collective flow. Participants in *Genemuider Bovenstem* collective psalmody described their experience of the performance as something “from another world” (interview with Arjen, 20 August 2020), “heaven” (interview with Sara), “like you fly away” (interview with Henk Beens, 13 November 2020), and, in my own experience, I observed that “the slow singing and the preacher’s theatrical, melodious delivery affect your sense of time and place” (field notes 6).³²¹ In *150 Psalms*, the two-day festival (inspired by the Divine Office) was designed to create a collective flow and a meditative, contemplative state among the festivalgoers, now more susceptible to be enchanted by beautiful music, which stand-alone concerts would not be able to accomplish (interview with Tido Visser). Similarly, composer Boudewijn Tarenskeen (*Psalm 151*) made sure that the complexity of his music would demand the concertgoers’ full attention (interview), and organizer Jelle Dierickx (*Poesia Divina*), tried to create an atmosphere of truthful attentiveness which, in his view, is apt for the performance of Psalms (interview, 28 September 2019).

Secondly, these atmospheres enhance a reflective, meditative mode of participation in which participants reflect on their humanness, their being in the world. Singers often compare their performance of Psalms with meditation (mindfulness and yoga), and describe a physical feeling of flow in the here and now (e.g. interviews with Clemens and Dora on 28 January 2020, and with James and Karin on 29 January 2020). In this vein, many of the poets in the projects *Psalm 151* and *Poesia Divina* employed a strikingly self-reflective

³²¹ Strictly speaking, the collective singing event was not a church service, but the speaker leading the event was an ordained strictly Reformed minister and announced the different Psalms, prayed and delivered a sermon. In Chapter 5, I have elaborated on the musical aesthetics of the studied performances, and how these influence participants’ feeling of ‘flow’.

tone of voice, paying remarkable attention to their own emotions and embodied existence. According to several organizers, Psalms are about “what it means to be human” (interviews with Jelle Dierickx on 28 September 2019, Tido Visser on 5 May 2019, Leo Samama on 6 May 2019, Merlijn Geurts on 31 May 2019, and Boudewijn Tarenskeen on 5 December 2018). Contemplation of human (embodied) existence is central here.

Thirdly, some of the poets, mostly those involved in *Poesia Divina*, and some of the speakers involved in *150 Psalms*, took the opportunity to reflect on contemporary injustices in the world, something which the organizers had also asked them to do. For these participants, Psalms inevitably evoke critical reflection on politics and society on a wider scale, including reflection on injustice and suffering related to climate crises, racism, migration, and psychological suffering.³²² As well as addressing suffering, many performances articulated a hope for justice, which can be seen in the evolution of the concert themes of *150 Psalms* from ‘a mirror to society’, to ‘suffering’, ‘on the run’, to ‘justice’, ‘safety’, ‘helplessness and redemption’, ‘power and oppression’ and ultimately to ‘feast’. In *Psalm 151*, political and societal engagement was overshadowed by the intensity and complexity of the music and texts, and concertgoers felt that the performance lacked hope (interviews with Rob and Heleen, 6 December 2018). Similarly, in *Poesia Divina*, the reflective nature and political engagement of the texts were somewhat hard to comprehend for attendees, despite the silent and meditative atmosphere of the performances. These new texts appeared to be rather ‘challenging’ for the audience to get to grips with, hindering them in their reflection and leaving them confused rather than hopeful. In *Genemuiders Bovenstem* collective psalmody, I observed that such reflection on contemporary injustices did not play a significant role. Rather, as mentioned above, the performance of Psalms served to underline human’s dependence from God’s grace, with many performed Psalms starting as expressions of sinfulness, and ending with God’s destruction of all evil (field notes 6).

³²² Gerrit-Jan KleinJan, “Psalmen zijn een onuitputtelijke bron van inspiratie”, *Trouw*, 29 August 2017, www.trouw.nl/nieuws/psalmen-zijn-een-onuitputtelijke-bron-van-inspiratie~b98c4b26/ (last accessed 26 June 2023).

7.4. Interpreting the ritual-musical appropriations

As the findings show, the four different research cases show different, even contradictory, approaches to the three different challenges which I have identified. Organizers and artists seek both to improve traditions of performing Psalms and to compensate for what they view as earlier inaccuracies in these (religious) traditions. Before I evaluate their endeavors, I discuss them in light of broader cultural trends. The ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms fit the desires of late-modern, autonomous and diverse individuals to express their individual authenticity and explore their (shared) spirituality beyond institutional religion, and to do so in performances of Psalms that enchant them, that engage with their individual struggles and address societal, global crises, and that allude to an alleged shared (religious) past.

7.4.1. Expressive individualism

Firstly, artists and organizers organize performances of Psalms, not as “apologetic” religious practices, but as opportunities for individuals to interpret the performance and its meaning for themselves.³²³ Generally, artists and organizers who value human autonomy wish to ‘liberate’ psalmody from theologies of an almighty, all-knowing God, and opt instead for images of God as a source of love, to be accessed within the individual self.³²⁴ Such ideas about God fit a late-modern ‘open’ or ‘mystic’ spiritual attitude, and have become popular among the [Dutch] population.³²⁵ Philosophers such as Zygmunt Bauman and Charles Taylor have argued that, in late modernity, individuals are burdened with the task of fashioning an identity for themselves, instead of being provided with one by the community that they belong to.³²⁶ Alongside “depillarization”, diversification and the decline of institu-

³²³ Cf. Klomp, *Playing On*, 92.

³²⁴ Cf. Kees De Groot, Jos Pieper, and Willem Putman, "Nieuwe spiritualiteit in oude kloosters?," *Jaarboek voor liturgieonderzoek* 28 (2012): 94-95. Sociological reports show that such theologies prevail over images of God being all-knowing and all-powerful: De Hart, Van Houwelingen, and Huijnk, *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving*, 140-41; Neha Sahgal, Alan Cooperman, and Anna Schiller, *Being Christian in Western Europe*, Pew Research Center (Washington, D.C., 29 May 2018), 107, 10, www.pewresearch.org/religion/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2018/05/Being-Christian-in-Western-Europe-FOR-WEB1.pdf.

³²⁵ De Groot, Pieper, and Putman, "Nieuwe spiritualiteit in oude kloosters?," 82-83; De Hart, Van Houwelingen, and Huijnk, *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving*, 65.

³²⁶ Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 31; Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 484-89. Cf. De Hart, Van Houwelingen, and Huijnk, *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving*, 28, 64, 147. We side with theorists who use the term ‘late modernity’, although notions such as expressive individualism and the liquification of social relations have been described as characteristics of ‘post-modernity’ as well. See note 308.

tional religion, this has transformed individuals' participation in collective (religious) rituals into a matter of choice and authentic expression and, as a result, collective rituals have evolved into representations and expressions of diversity.³²⁷ Indeed, scholar of music and theology Jonathan Arnold has argued that "the context in which the music is performed is not necessarily a defining factor, nor a constraint" when it comes to composers' and other participants' religious adherence, beliefs and doubts.³²⁸ Similarly, scholar of comparative religion Annette Wilke has shown that the pluralization and individualization of religion are exemplified in musical performance of music rooted in religious traditions.³²⁹

7.4.2. Enchantment

A second trend is a desire for enchantment. Philosopher and political theorist Jane Bennett describes enchantment as "a state of wonder, (...); it is a state of interactive fascination, not fall-to-your-knees-awe."³³⁰ In response to the stress and acceleration of contemporary society, which some thinkers describe as rationalized and 'disenchanted' (following Max Weber), meditative practices have gained popularity, and artists have increasingly sought to highlight the 'enchanting' qualities of their work, such as its beauty, quietness, or slowness, and to evoke a 'spiritual', embodied response among audiences.³³¹ I have shown that the ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms involve performances which stand apart from daily life, thanks to their meditative qualities and the beauty of the performance.³³² This fits the trend that, in the performance of 'sacred' music, the performance serves to shift the focus from religious doctrine, to a shared experience of being enchanted by (beautiful) sound.³³³

³²⁷ Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture*, 119; De Groot, Pieper, and Putman, "Nieuwe spiritualiteit in oude kloosters?," 84-86; Klomp, *Playing On*, 62. Cf. Hoondert, "The Interpretation and Experience of the Requiem in Contemporary Culture," 133. 'Depillarization' is the dissolution of 'pillars' (relatively isolated cultural spheres according to different political and religious identities) in Dutch society in the second half of the 20th century. See for an explanation and critical examination of this notion: Van Dam, "Constructing a Modern Society Through 'Depillarization'."

³²⁸ Jonathan Arnold, *Sacred Music in Secular Society* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 39, 148.

³²⁹ Wilke, "Moving Religion by Sound," 343.

³³⁰ Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life. Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 5.

³³¹ Billie Ing and Ben Page, *Global Trends 2023 report. A new world disorder. Opportunity in a polycrisis*, Ipsos (Paris, 20 February 2023), 98; Rijken, *My Soul Doth Magnify*, 79-80, 152-53; Sahgal, Cooperman, and Schiller, *Being Christian*, 135; Trent Spiner, "14 emerging trends," *Monitor on Psychology* 53, no. 1 (2022): 42; Wijnia, *Beyond the Return of Religion*, 26, 53-54, 69, 73.

³³² I have discussed this more elaborately in Chapter 5.

³³³ Cf. Arnold, *Sacred Music in Secular Society*, 83; Bakker Kellogg, "Ritual Sounds," 438; Dagtas,

7.4.3. Engagement with crises

Thirdly, the ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms are generally marked by a shared concern among organizers and participants for individuals' psychology and spirituality, and for current global crises. This fits a trend in the performing arts of art organizations and collectives that engage with (ecological, political, psychological) crises, which in turn fits a cultural trend where psychological self-reflection is highly valued (see above), including reflection on the hardships of life, and a social world where the suffering, injustice and crises of a globalized world stir collective reflection and debate.³³⁴ This distinguishes the appropriations of Psalms from the appropriation of Choral Evensong, Passion plays or Requiems, where such explicit engagement with suffering has not been observed.³³⁵

7.4.4. The heritagization of religion

Fourthly, all of the performances which I studied present the Psalms as a heritage symbolizing a collective past and representing a collective identity, which fits the trend of the 'heritagization' of religion.³³⁶ This (cultural) 'heritage frame' serves to bridge religious and secular differences, and is often intended to produce a greater sense of openness than performances built on religious foundations.³³⁷ Theologian Susan Gillingham, who has extensively studied the reception of Psalms, argues that, indeed, liturgical traditions of psalmody can be made accessible for wider, diverse publics through 'secular' concert performances.³³⁸ In *Genemuider Bovenstem* collective psalmody, the heritagization of psalmody allows individuals from different denominational

"The Civilizations Choir," 168, 79; Deborah A. Kapchan, "The Promise of Sonic Translation. Performing the Festive Sacred in Morocco," *American Anthropologist* 110, no. 4 (2008): 467, 71, 80; Rijken, *My Soul Doth Magnify*, 154.

³³⁴ Kees De Groot, "Disaster Theater: Play When Things Go Awry," in *Handbook of Disaster Ritual. Multidisciplinary Perspectives, Cases and Themes*, ed. Martin Hoondert et al., Liturgia Condenda (Leuven: Peeters, 2021), 569; Spiner, "14 emerging trends," 42. Recently, it has become more common to typify the current age as an age of global crises or polycrises. Cf. Ing and Page, *Global Trends 2023*, 5-6, 10, 61, 112; Alfredo Saad-Filho, *The Age of Crisis. Neoliberalism, the Collapse of Democracy, and the Pandemic* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

³³⁵ The appropriation of Choral Evensong, for instance, centers more around themes such as beauty, sacrality and transcendence. See: Rijken, *My Soul Doth Magnify*, 152-54.

³³⁶ Meyer, "Recycling the Christian Past," 70-71, 79-82.

³³⁷ Scholar of religion Welmoed Fenna Wagenaar describes this as the "secular veil of universality". See Welmoed Fenna Wagenaar, "Moral Management and Secularized Religious Heritage in the Netherlands," in *Managing Sacralities. Competing and Converging Claims of Religious Heritage*, ed. Ernst van den Hemel, Oscar Salemink, and Irene Stengs (New York: Berghahn, 2022).

³³⁸ Susan Gillingham, *Psalms Through the Centuries*, ed. John F.A. Sawyer et al., vol. 1, Blackwell Bible Commentaries, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 298.

backgrounds to participate. Nevertheless, participants still share a strictly Reformed identity, which is a minority identity characterized by a general dismissal of mainstream, secularized culture.³³⁹ For this reason, *Genemuider Bovenstem* collective psalmody does not fit with some of the characteristics mentioned above. It is characterized by (greater) homogeneity among participants and the expression of strictly Reformed doctrines (emphasizing God's majesty and human sinfulness) instead of political engagement in the performance of Psalms.

Thus, contemporary ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms reflect broader cultural trends. In post-Christian, postsecular Dutch and Flemish cultures, the transfer and transformation of religion is characterized by expressive individualism, enchantment, artistic engagement with crises, and heritagization.

7.5. Evaluating the ritual-musical appropriations

The ritual-musical appropriations discussed in this chapter are critical transformations of psalmody, informed by its current cultural context. At the same time, these appropriations act as an extension of existing traditions, as the three challenges that I mentioned are familiar themes in the appropriation history of the Psalms. I will discuss my evaluation of how appropriating individuals and groups deal with these challenges, and argue that this history has the potential to critique the ritual-musical appropriations that I have studied for a loss of nuance when it comes to how these three challenges are dealt with.

7.5.1. Nuanced ways to address God

The first challenge comes from an important 'function' of psalmody as identified by numerous Old Testament scholars: the invocation of God through praise and prayer, a function which the Psalms fulfill in many different, contrasting ways.³⁴⁰ The Psalms show different, contrasting images of God, without dissolving the contradictions and tensions between them.³⁴¹ However, appropriating

³³⁹ I have elaborated on this collective identity in Chapter 6.

³⁴⁰ Cf. deClaissé-Walford, "The Theology of the Imprecatory Psalms," 78; John Goldingay and Kathleen Scott Goldingay, "The Sting in the Psalms, Part 2," *Theology* 118, no. 1 (2015): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040571X14551690>; Michael Morgan, "Singing the Psalms," in *Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, ed. William P. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 569-70.

³⁴¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 117; Brown, "The Psalms and Hebrew Poetry," 269; Melody D. Knowles, "Feminist Interpretation of the Psalms," in *Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, ed. William P. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 427. Culture theologian Jeffrey Keuss writes that, in the Hebrew Bible and early Christian mysticism, God is "both revealed and elusive, and the work of the faithful was to accept that all things both reveal and conceal God." See: Jeffrey F. Keuss,

individuals tend to narrow this wide range down to either skepticism, anger and apathy, or submission, thanksgiving and praise. Generally, artists who experiment with new ways to address God (mostly those involved in *Psalms 151* and *150 Psalms*) avoid praise, thanksgiving and submission. The ambiguous ways in which God is addressed in the Biblical Psalms are not fully recognized in these appropriations.³⁴² Similarly, *Genemuider Bovenstem* collective psalmody limits this ambiguity, as the performance evokes a submissive, grateful and praiseful attitude towards God, but is largely devoid of the anger and skepticism found in the Biblical Psalms. Thus, the ritual-musical appropriations of the Psalms seem to be influenced by a dichotomous idea of belief in God on the one hand and skepticism on the other, while the Biblical Psalms and how these are appropriated through history show more nuance in this respect and challenge the ritual-musical appropriations to explore these nuances.

7.5.2. Individual and community

The second challenge that I found in my data (collective performance) is another common theme in the appropriation history of Psalms.³⁴³ Through the centuries and in diverse religious traditions, the Psalms have served both practices of individual devotion and of collective worship.³⁴⁴ Old Testament scholars have argued that the Biblical Psalms embed the individual in a community that is both affirmative and critical of the emotions and piety expressed by the individual; individual and community cannot be seen apart from one another.³⁴⁵ This embedding in a community requires repeated collective practice in which individuals share a repertoire of words and (musical) sounds and maintain this repertoire in practice.³⁴⁶ Furthermore, the appropriation history of Psalms knows many different ways to distribute roles between different individuals and groups in a performance.³⁴⁷ Contemporary ritual-musical appropriations,

"Tom Waits, Nick Cave, and Martin Heidegger: On Singing of the God Who Will Not Be Named," in *Secular Music and Sacred Theology*, ed. Tom Beaudoin (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier Inc., 2013), 102.

³⁴² Cf. Brueggemann, "The Psalms and the Life of Faith," 7, 9, 19, 24; Brown, "The Psalms and Hebrew Poetry," 253.

³⁴³ Cf. Bracken Long, "The Psalms in Christian Worship," 550; Brown, "The Psalms: An Overview," 13-14; Brown, "The Psalms and Hebrew Poetry," 259-62; Cooper, "Some Aspects of Traditional Jewish Psalms Interpretation," 260; deClaissé-Walford, "The Meta-Narrative of the Psalter," 368, 74-75; Peter S. Hawkins, "The Psalms in Poetry," in *Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, ed. William P. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 99.

³⁴⁴ Brown, "The Psalms: An Overview," 5; Cooper, "Some Aspects of Traditional Jewish Psalms Interpretation," 258; Schuman, *Drama van crisis en hoop*, 189-91, 98, 202-08, 13, 30, 42, 53-57, 61.

³⁴⁵ Cf. Brown, "The Psalms and Hebrew Poetry," 268; LeMon, "Saying Amen to Violent Psalms," 107.

³⁴⁶ deClaissé-Walford, "The Theology of the Imprecatory Psalms," 90.

³⁴⁷ See for a concise overview: Bracken Long, "The Psalms in Christian Worship," 550.

however, stick to the basic and clearly defined groupings of choir, silent audience and/or singing 'congregation' (in *Genemuider Bovenstem* psalmody). Their role in the performance is clear and unchangeable from the beginning to the end.³⁴⁸ As a result, participants form a single group of silent listeners or, in *Genemuider Bovenstem* psalmody, a single singing collective, notwithstanding organizers' attempts to enhance 'connection' among all participants (in *150 Psalms* and *Poesia Divina*) and/or try to deconstruct the homogeneity of choirs (in *Psalm 151*). Thus, the diversity of participants (as individuals and groups) remains unarticulated in performance. Furthermore, participants gather together for a single event instead of being regular participants in a repeated (liturgical) practice.³⁴⁹ In my evaluation, the contemporary ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms are somewhat limited as, generally, performances do not express the diversity of all their participants and performances mostly take place as singular, one-off events. This hinders the performance of Psalms from becoming a communal practice in which diverse participants are allowed to take up different, layered and flexible roles.

7.5.3. Contemplation on the fullness of life

The third challenge, the challenge to contemplate life through the Psalms, also resonates with the appropriation history of the Psalms. Indeed, Psalms have a long and extensive history of being connected to sacred places such as Jerusalem, synagogues, monasteries and churches where (among other things) their performance served to sacralize time in the liturgies, pilgrimages, feasts and festivals which take place in and around these different environments.³⁵⁰ Furthermore, the Biblical Psalms inspire reflection on "the human soul" and on justice in strikingly honest ways due to their truthful expression of suffering and despair, particularly, but not exclusively, in the 'psalms of lament'.³⁵¹ Old Testament scholar and theologian Nancy deClaisse-Walford suggests that

³⁴⁸ Still, participants find ways to create their individual experience within the (collective) performance (see Chapter 5).

³⁴⁹ This is similar to Rijken's findings regarding the Dutch appropriation of Anglican Choral Evensong, where the choir has become the 'focal point' and the visitors have become an audience "with scarcely any active participation." Rijken, *My Soul Doth Magnify*, 103.

³⁵⁰ Cf. Brown, "The Psalms and Hebrew Poetry," 262; Dobbs-Allsopp, "Poetry," 84, 90; Gillingham, *Psalms Through the Centuries*, 1, 75; Schuman, *Drama van crisis en hoop*, 189-90.

³⁵¹ Brown, "The Psalms and Hebrew Poetry," 267-68; Brueggemann, "The Psalms and the Life of Faith," 16; Leonard P. Mare, "Psalm 137: exile - not the time for singing the Lord's song," *Old Testament Essays* 23, no. 1 (2010): 126; Tarah Van De Wiele, "Justice and Retribution in the Psalms," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible and Ethics*, ed. C.L. Crouch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 286-87.

“perhaps, the shrinking world in which we live” confronts the suffering and despair worldwide to audiences in all regions.³⁵² Furthermore, Old Testament scholars emphasize that, as well as addressing injustice and despair, Psalms provide hope—a balanced hope in which suffering is still remembered and acknowledged.³⁵³ Indeed, the organizers of contemporary Psalm performances try to lead the performances away from daily life in order to address existential topics in the performances.³⁵⁴ It appears that, in the performance of *150 Psalms*, these three elements were balanced rather well: the concert hall, festival setup, high-quality performances evoking awe among participants, as well as the speeches, a photo exhibition and lectures brought with them a dimension of reflection on today’s (geo)political problems and psychological or spiritual matters. Furthermore, the explicit political engagement of *150 Psalms* and *Poesia Divina* is in line with the now rather common understanding in Biblical theology that Psalms about injustice, poverty, and suffering should not be spiritualized in an allegorical reading, but are relevant to the concrete injustices of the psalmists’ context and of today (cf. contextual Bible interpretation, liberation theology, feminist theology, black theology).³⁵⁵ This way, the ritual-musical appropriations explore, in Gillingham’s words, “the use of the Psalms” for addressing “societal, ecological and gender issues.”³⁵⁶ *150 Psalms* addresses these difficult aspects of life in a rather balanced manner, but *Psalm 151* and *Poesia Divina* lean more towards despair than to hope, and *Genemuiden Bovenstem* psalmody emphasizes hope in such a climactic way that doubts and suffering no longer have a place. In my evaluation, these last three cases tend to limit the Psalms’ potential to integrate different dimensions of life (suffering, relief, injustice, hope) in a layered manner.

³⁵² deClaisse-Walford, “The Theology of the Imprecatory Psalms,” 86.

³⁵³ Brueggemann, “The Psalms and the Life of Faith,” 13, 16, 18, 21; Rolf A. Jacobson, “‘The Faithfulness of the Lord Endures Forever’: The Theological Witness of the Psalter,” in *Soundings in the Theology of Psalms. Perspectives and Methods in Contemporary Scholarship*, ed. Rolf A. Jacobson (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 132; Mare, “Psalm 137,” 127.

³⁵⁴ See Chapter 5.

³⁵⁵ Cf. David Adamo, “Reading Psalm 109 in African Christianity,” *Old Testament Essays* 21, no. 3 (2008): 587-88; Goldingay and Goldingay, “The Sting,” 8; Helen C. John, *Biblical Interpretation and African Traditional Religion*, ed. Paul Anderson and Jennifer L. Koosed, vol. 176, Biblical Interpretation Series, (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2019), 8, 16-17, 23; Knowles, “Feminist Interpretation of the Psalms,” 424-36; Mare, “Psalm 137,” 126; David Rensberger, “Ecological Use of the Psalms,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, ed. William P. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 612-13; Van De Wiele, “Justice and Retribution in the Psalms,” 286-87; Arie Zwiep, *Tussen tekst en lezer. Een historische inleiding in de bijbelse hermeneutiek. Deel 2: van moderniteit naar postmoderniteit* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2013), 391-406.

³⁵⁶ Gillingham, *Psalms Through the Centuries*, 1, 311.

7.6. Conclusion

I return now to my research question: *How are contemporary ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms in Dutch and Flemish culture challenged by the appropriation history of the Psalms, against the background of the transfer and transformation of religion?*

The ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms are challenged by longer appropriation histories in three ways. When individuals or groups appropriate psalmody, they are confronted with three different questions: 'In your ritual-musical appropriation of Psalms, (1) how will you address God, (2) how will you perform the Psalms collectively, and (3) how will you contemplate life?' I have found that individuals' different approaches in dealing with these three challenges often imply a critique of older traditions of psalmody, whilst being influenced by broader cultural trends such as expressive individualism and diversity, disenchantment, public awareness of global crises, and the heritagization of religion. The appropriation history of Psalms strongly informs these contemporary appropriations, as the three challenges come up frequently in the Psalms' appropriation history. However, evaluating contemporary ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms, I have concluded that these appropriations tend to reduce the complexity present in the appropriation history of the Psalms when it comes to addressing God, performing collectively, and of contemplating life. Composers, poets and organizers could have gone further in their endeavors of 'opening up' the performance of Psalms for individualized, diverse, and secularized publics, as the appropriation history of Psalms offers many ways to address (and avoid) God beyond simply belief or unbelief, offers the chance to perform collectively as authentic individuals, and to contemplate the fullness of life's despairs and hopes. The ritual-musical appropriations tend to be limited by dichotomous preconceptions of belief versus unbelief, and hope versus despair, as well as by the limits of a single-event format which contrasts with the affordances of repeated, communal practice. The history of psalmody could further assist contemporary practitioners in their critique and further enhance the relevance of their performances.

My conclusions offer new academic knowledge on the appropriation of Psalms in late-modern, post-secular culture. The study of psalmody in Dutch and Flemish culture has often been confined to historical and textual research and thus risks perpetuating ideal images of the performance of Psalms and the meanings it engenders instead of the realistic, complex, layered views

that qualitative research can provide. Moreover, reception studies of Psalms in other contexts are often limited to the reception of biblical Psalms, are not based on detailed analyses of actual performances, and often uphold clear distinctions between religious and secular domains. The Dutch and Flemish contexts demand an approach which is more open to the experimental forms of psalmody that occur in these liquefied cultural contexts.

The contribution of this study lies in its detailed analysis of empirical data that show how, in a late-modern, post-Christian, post-secular cultural context, something as old as psalmody takes on new forms and meanings, while at the same time still heavily being informed by existing traditions of (liturgical) performance. For instance, my study shows that the collective nature of psalmody does not necessarily disappear in the ritual-musical performance of Psalms (although this does occur), but that artists and organizers reinvent collective psalmody for postsecular, post-Christian audiences. This evokes new questions about the meaning of collective participation in ritual practices rooted in religious traditions in cultural contexts characterized as secular or postsecular. Therefore, further research could dive deeper into developments within the ecclesial domain, as styles of practice and belief appear to be subject to the same and similar cultural trends that I described in this chapter. How do, for instance, leaders and performers in liturgical psalmody balance collective participation and participants' individual authenticity and diverse ways of addressing God?

This chapter offers an example of how new ritual-musical appropriations of psalmody, approached as honest attempts to renew traditions of psalmody that also take into account the wide array of existing traditions, are at the same time challenged by these traditions. When Psalms talk back, they have more to offer than participants in the ritual-musical appropriations are seemingly aware of.



8

Conclusion and discussion

Times change, but these songs are strong as ever, because they reflect what it means to be human. (...) All human emotions are in there, and are still relatable for people today. (...) At the same time, one way or another, these songs are prayers to God, and quite fundamentally so. (...) But it's clear that people who don't have anything with God can still appreciate the Psalms. (...) But still, how will you relate to what is unspeakable, ineffable, inimitable, unnamable? Do you hold it at a distance, or do you say: it says something about me, it appeals to me, asks something of me?

interview with Gerard Swüste, 30 April 2019

For theologian Gerard Swüste, who was involved in the organization of the festival *150 Psalms*, and for many of the other individuals whom I interviewed in the course of this research, it is important to reflect on what it means to perform Psalms in a concert hall, theater, or a church building. More than this, however, Swüste reflects on what it means, in such contexts, to sing Psalms as “prayers to God”. The question of what it means to address God appears to be an important question for many of the artists and organizers involved in the performances. In a similar manner to Swüste, many of them recognize this interaction with the divine as an important feature of psalmody, but some feel that, in order to remain authentic to themselves, they should invent new ways to do it, as they have outgrown the conventional idioms they grew up with. In the following sections, I offer my conclusion to this dissertation, bringing the question of what it means to address God to the fore as one of the distinctive features of ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms.

8.1. Answering the research question

My main research question has been *how to understand ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms in contemporary Dutch and Flemish culture, against the background of the transfer and transformation of religion, and how to evaluate these ritual-musical appropriations?*

The ritual-musical appropriations of the Psalms which I have examined involve the transfer and transformation of psalmody led by artists and event organizers in the fields of the arts and heritage who move psalmody beyond traditions of religious (liturgical) and artistic (concert) performance. These different projects maintain an explicit connection to the religious (Christian) past of Dutch and Flemish cultures through the repertoire (choral music, metrical Psalms, liturgical texts) and performance venues they select (churches, concert halls) and through the performance styles that they include (choral singing, collective singing, organ music). At the same time, they frame psalmody as cultural heritage and as art in order to make psalmody accessible for diverse, secularized audiences. Instead of religious belief or commitment, they emphasize psalmody's aesthetic beauty, cultural value (where psalmody represents a 'Dutch', 'European', 'Bible Belt' culture, or human civilization in general), meditative qualities and/or political relevance.

This all takes place in a postsecular cultural context characterized by secularization, dechurched, individualization and pluralization. In this context, practices rooted in religious traditions undergo a process of transformation so that aesthetic qualities and cultural value become more important than the doctrinal aspects of these practices (to some extent even in *Genemuiders Bovenstem* collective psalmody). Against this background, ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms stand out in three ways: artists and organizers feel challenged by traditions of (collective liturgical) psalmody to address God; the organizers seek to enhance collective participation and make room for existential contemplation in their appropriation; and other participants (such as concertgoers) often evaluate the performances in terms of these different qualities.

Artists and organizers seek to deal with these challenges in ways that align with secularized, pluralized and individualized audiences. Thus, they seek to address God in non-confessional ways, to enhance collective participation without disrupting individuals' sense of authenticity, and to encourage existential contemplation without implying that religious (mainly Christian) traditions will provide the answers to participants' existential questions.

Generally, *Genemuiders Bovenstem* collective psalmody forms an exception to this, as these performances clearly express ways of addressing God (almighty, intervening) that are common in strictly Reformed contexts (submissive, with thanksgiving). These tend to involve collective performance (slow isometric psalmody), and existential contemplation (pointing at God's redemption from sin and suffering). Nevertheless, the Intangible Cultural Heritage frame and the ritual setup of collective singing events beyond the bounds of Sunday liturgy serve to include audiences across and beyond strictly Reformed congregations who do not necessarily wish to commit themselves to the regular (weekly) worship practices of local church communities.

According to my evaluation, such 'opening up' of psalmody for diverse audiences is in line with the ritual-musical appropriation history of the Psalms. This history demonstrates diverse, nuanced, ambiguous and even contrasting ways of addressing God (with gratitude, praise, lament, reproach), of collective performance (with different configurations of congregations, choirs and soloists expressing the 'lyrical I' and 'we' from the Psalms), and of existential contemplation (addressing injustice, redemption, suffering, hope, all at once). However, my research shows that the appropriation history of the Psalms challenges performers and other participants to acknowledge these nuances and ambiguities even more than they do already. Artists and organizers who tend to address God with anger and reproach or with praise and thanksgiving are challenged by the Psalms' appropriation history to explore other, more layered modes of addressing God—beyond expressions of, or critique of, belief in God. Similarly, the appropriation history of the Psalms challenges artists and organizers to explore different ways of collective and individual performance beyond those of concert performances (with audiences that sit and listen) and collective singing (with all attendees joining in a rather homogeneous singing collective). Furthermore, the appropriation history of the Psalms challenges artists and organizers to balance expressions of despair, suffering and injustice with visions of redemption and hope in an integrated manner, giving room to the expression of despair, exile, etc. instead of overshadowing those.

The different nuances and ambiguities that are embodied in the Psalms could have been acknowledged even more in their contemporary ritual-musical appropriations. This would have been in keeping with most artists' and organizers' ideals of making room for individuals' diverse attitudes towards God, (religious) community, and existential contemplation: Psalms show that addressing God does not necessarily imply (submissive) belief in God, that collective performance does not equate to religious homogeneity, and that

consolation through beautiful music and visions of hope can still do justice to injustice and suffering. The fact that these nuances and ambiguities are not always fully explored in contemporary ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms seems to relate to artists' and organizers' views on, and memories of, liturgical psalmody in church. In these views and memories, liturgical psalmody serves to express collective belief in a redeeming God, something which artists and organizers either wish to continue (mainly in *Genemuider Bovenstem* psalmody) or to move away from. In this respect, the ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms that I have studied attest to contemporary cultural realities, with psalmody forming part of current generations' memories of the churches they have either left or stayed in.

8.2. Reviewing the sub-questions

I now return to the research questions of the individual chapters, further developing the conclusions of the individual chapters in the light of the project as a whole.

8.2.1. The transformation of memories of psalmody (Chapter 3)

In order to understand the different ramifications of the ritual-musical appropriations of the Psalms, I needed to understand the memories that are relevant for participants in the process of appropriation. How do they know the Psalms, which memories of psalmody are important for them to remember? which memories do they wish to forget? And how do the performances of Psalms evoke or 'overwrite' these different memories, regardless of participants' intentions? I asked: *How to understand the role of biographical memories in constructions of 'the sacred' by participants in current ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms in Dutch and Flemish cultures?*

Chapter 3 shows that ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms cannot be separated from participants' biographies. Their intentions and experiences are informed by their biographical memories of psalmody, some of which they cherish, some of which they would rather move away from. This underlines the contextual nature of ritual-musical appropriations: in events involving different artists, organizers, performers and concertgoers, the appropriations would have evoked different pasts and futures. By using the notion of sacrality—that which is set apart, non-ordinary—I showed that particular non-negotiable desires and non-ordinary experiences inform participants' appropriations of the Psalms. Some participants, for instance, have a 'sacred desire' to emphasize the Psalms' 'humanity', which they believe creates an

open connection among participants, reaching beyond religious and secular diversities. One ‘sacred experience’ that I discovered involved participants’ perception that there was a ‘lack’ of a contemplative atmosphere.

When writing Chapter 3, I had not yet researched the case of *Genemuiders Bovenstem* collective psalmody. As became clear in Chapter 6, many participants in *Genemuiders Bovenstem* psalmody share similar memories of isometric psalmody (slow, with all notes having equal length) from their schools, their homes, and in church. Because of this, they can join in collective singing together almost ‘automatically’ and immerse themselves in a collective flow. This contrasts with the finding that contemplation was ‘lacking’ in the studied performances. In *Genemuiders Bovenstem* collective psalmody, it seems that ritual-musical appropriation is indebted to participants’ memories of psalmody in Sunday liturgy, school and at home in such a way that participants can join in without having to think about what to do.

8.2.2. Perceptions of ‘authentic’ psalmody (Chapter 4)

Alongside the transformation of memories, ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms involve the heritagization of psalmody. Participants motivate or justify their appropriation with claims that it is truthful to the alleged ‘original’ meaning of the Psalms. A claim to ‘authentic’ heritage gives an appropriation authority and links the appropriation back to a perceived ‘original’ state or ‘essential’ meaning. I observed that participants in the festival *150 Psalms* framed the Psalms as heritage, but in different ways, so I asked: *How do participants of the festival “150 Psalms” appropriate the heritage of the Psalms?*

This chapter shows that the construction of ‘authentic psalmody’ in the ritual-musical appropriation of Psalms at *150 Psalms* is multifaceted: a collective act of canonization does not imply a homogeneous canonizing collective that uses psalmody to express a single shared idea or collective identity. By framing psalmody as cultural heritage, organizers widen the appropriation beyond religious meaning-making alone. For instance, by emphasizing the ‘universal’ humanity of Psalms (texts, choral singing, the human voice), organizers include non-religious perspectives, with psalmody appearing as an expression of artistic beauty or political engagement. In later chapters, this perspective is extended further so as to include psalmody as the celebration of local culture (see Chapter 6, on *Genemuiders Bovenstem* collective psalmody). Thus, the cultural heritage frame serves to bridge the ‘universal’ and the ‘local’: psalmody become a witness to universal human civilization and an expression of a local cultural identity.

Throughout this chapter, which I wrote before the others, I have tended to distinguish ‘religious’ psalmody from ‘universal’ (secular, humanist) psalmody, despite being familiar with theories that deconstruct such dichotomies.³⁵⁷ Additional interviews and further analyses led to a less dichotomous picture regarding the religious versus secular nature of the appropriations. In fact, Chapter 5 shows that, far from suppressing the participation of religious believers, many forms of embodied religiosity are instead enabled by the ‘distance’ that a heritage/artistic frame provides. What participants in the ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms share, is the act of remembering and cherishing psalmody itself.

8.2.3. A closer look at the performances (Chapter 5)

Having carried out fieldwork for each of the different case studies, I sought to take a closer look at the performances on the level of embodied experience and the senses, since in all of them psalmody is performed and organized by specialists in aesthetics (composers, professional musicians, performing arts institutions). This led me to expect that a study of the aesthetics of the performances would provide indispensable knowledge for understanding the ritual-musical appropriation of Psalms. Informed by theories which suggest that, in postsecular contexts, the transformation of religion often takes place on the level of embodied experience and the senses, I asked *How can we understand the aesthetics of Psalm performance in a postsecular context?*

Broadly, Chapter 5 shows how the ritual-musical appropriations work ‘in the flesh’. This chapter enriches and nuances some findings from previous chapters. Through a detailed analysis of empirical research data regarding different sensory perceptions (bodily, auditory, visual, synaesthetic), which I studied independently and in relation to one another, I showed that religious and secular dimensions become intertwined in the temporally and spatially organized stimulation of different senses. This is a picture even more complex than that discussed in the previous chapters. For example, the immersive ritual experiences of the festival *150 Psalms* make more room for interaction with the transcendent than the claims of organizers and participants might suggest. In this light, it seems that Chapter 4 might have followed the different normativities of my interviewees a little too closely—reducing religion to a

³⁵⁷ Perhaps, the normativity of my religious upbringing plays a role here (see section 2.1.2. on my positionality as a researcher). During the course of this research, I became aware of this tendency when I discussed my results with my supervisors and other researchers.

matter of beliefs—Chapter 5 instead acknowledges that practice, experience and belief are hard to separate.

Some aspects in Chapter 5 demand further interpretation and evaluation, such as the finding that in participants in performances do not always reach a feeling of collective flow that enables transcendent experiences. In light of the appropriation history of Psalms, this should not necessarily be understood in terms of ‘deficit’; such experiences can still be very ‘Psalm-like’: solitude and perceptions of God’s absence have an important place in traditions of psalmody (Chapter 7). The total absence of such experiences would mean that voices of despair and desolation, as found in the Biblical Psalms, would be suppressed in the ritual-musical appropriations. Thus, what in Chapter 5 might seem to be a shortcoming within the performance of *Psalms 151* in particular, resonates with existing traditions of psalmody: the estranged individual.

8.2.4. Community (Chapter 6)

The performances of Psalms in Chapter 3–5 are designed in such a way that participants can immerse in ritual collectives without losing their individual autonomy. Yet, in the case of *Genemuider Bovenstem* collective psalmody, these dynamics may be more complex than previous chapters have suggested, since it is performed in both the context of church communities and in collective singing events. With its interlinkage of these two ritual-musical contexts, *Genemuider Bovenstem* collective psalmody offers a unique example of the transfer and transformation of psalmody. I asked *How does Genemuider Bovenstem collective psalmody serve to construct communities in light of the heritagization and eventization of religious practices?*

The leading figures in the heritagization and eventization of this type of collective psalmody are usually members of local church communities. These individuals form new groups that aim to conserve their tradition and raise its popularity for publics beyond the town of Genemuiden and its church communities. They employ the frame of intangible cultural heritage for the conservation of their liturgical practice, which they emphatically present as a collective expression of religious belief. Collective singing events attract publics from a wider region than the communities themselves and from different, although mainly strictly Reformed, church denominations. In this way, the eventization of *Genemuider Bovenstem* collective psalmody bridges religious differences and increases the level of (religious) diversity among participants in its performance. Because church communities in Genemuiden identify themselves strongly with *Genemuider Bovenstem* collective psalmody,

however, organizers of collective singing events cannot afford to let the events become too experimental.

This chapter shows that the heritagization and eventization of *Genemuider Bovenstem* collective psalmody involves a partial shift from the domain of church authorities to that of the government authorities that support it through specific policies regarding the conservation of intangible cultural heritage. It may well be that the policies of art subsidy programs place limits on the appropriations of my other case-studies as well, for example, when certain aspects of the performances are considered to be too 'religious' for a project to receive a subsidy. This forces us to question the different understandings of what counts as 'secular' and 'religious' which undergird such policies. Together with other chapters, Chapter 6 shows that such distinctions are problematic when it comes to the realities of performance.

8.2.5. When Psalms talk back (Chapter 7)

In chapters 3-6 I took the individuals and groups involved in ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms as my main starting point. These different participants transform psalmody according to their ideals and worldviews, informed by their memories and belongings. On several occasions, however, the appropriations seem to have escaped their intentions. In Chapter 7, I asked *How are contemporary ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms in Dutch and Flemish culture challenged by the appropriation history of the Psalms, against the background of the transfer and transformation of religion?*

In this chapter, I describe how the appropriation history of the Psalms challenges ritual-musical appropriations in three different ways. When individuals or groups appropriate psalmody, they are confronted with three main questions: '(1) how will you address God, (2) how will you perform the Psalms collectively, and (3) how will you contemplate life?' As these are common themes in the Psalms' appropriation history, it is no surprise that they also inform contemporary appropriations. At the same time, the ritual-musical appropriations often imply a critique of this history, and this is influenced by broader cultural trends such as expressive individualism, diversity, secularization, the heritagization of religion, disenchantment and public awareness of global crises. In this way, Chapter 7 interprets the findings from previous chapters in light of the appropriation history of Psalms and the cultural context in which contemporary ritual-musical appropriations are situated.

Over the course of this chapter I also evaluate the ritual-musical appropriations from the viewpoint of the three challenges mentioned above. I conclude

that artists and organizers could have gone further in their endeavors to ‘open up’ the performance of Psalms for individualized, diverse, and secularized publics, since the appropriation history of the Psalms offers many ways to address (and avoid) God beyond simply belief or unbelief, and offers the chance to perform collectively as authentic individuals, and to contemplate the fullness of life’s despairs and hopes. The ritual-musical appropriations tend to be limited by dichotomous preconceptions of belief versus unbelief, and hope versus despair, as well as by the limits of a concert and event formats which often contrast with the affordances of repeated, communal practice. The history of psalmody could potentially assist contemporary practitioners in their critiques whilst further enhancing the relevance of their performances. It is possible that particular imaginations of the religious (Christian) past with which psalmody is closely associated continue to shape expectations. Ideas that liturgical psalmody demands a belief in God, that participants submit to a religious community, and that they hope in God’s relief of their suffering continue into the present day. Whether or not these images are indeed representative of religious practice in the past or the present, they play a role in ritual-musical appropriations of the Psalms when participants view their appropriation as a continuation of, or break with, the religious past of Dutch and Flemish cultures. Through exploration of these issues, Chapter 7 explores narratives surrounding the liberation of psalmody from religious practice (cf. Chapter 3 and 4), as well as relativizes ideas surrounding the fluidization of religious and secular meaning-making, since this binary still seems to play a role in how individuals and groups appropriate the Psalms today.

8.3. Further reflections

8.3.1. Theoretical contributions

This research contributes to the study of the heritagization of religion. Firstly, it shows that, as heritage, psalmody allows for plural appropriations in which religious and secular meanings become blurred as appropriating individuals explicitly and freely play with symbols and rituals from different religious and secular (concert) traditions.³⁵⁸ However, it also shows that such blurring is often limited when it comes to addressing God through psalmody, in collective psalmody, and in existential contemplation. For many participants in

³⁵⁸ Cf. Hoondert, “The Interpretation and Experience of the Requiem in Contemporary Culture,” 133; Klomp, *Playing On*, 62, 134, 90; Elza Kuyk, *Tussen erfgoed en eredienst. Meervoudig gebruik van vier monumentale stadskerken* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023), 248, 50, 57.

the ritual-musical appropriations, psalmody still reminds them of submissive (and exclusivist) styles of Christian belief and practice, from which they wish to distance themselves or, as is mostly the case in *Genemuider Bovenstem* collective psalmody, to which they wish to conform. In other words, when psalmody comes to evoke religious belief and (collective) belonging, appropriating individuals often feel the need to take a clear stance. Chapter 5 has shown us that, in this respect, the choice of performance venue matters: concertgoers who are comfortable with singing along in church are often not so comfortable doing the same in a concert hall—different spaces have different connotations, and different spatial setups (the positioning of pews or seats) influence what individuals are comfortable doing. Since organizers try to stay away from exclusivist and confessional religious performance (which, to a certain extent, is even the case for the organizers of *Genemuider Bovenstem* collective psalmody events), they employ symbols, spaces, sounds and rituals which are not associated with single church denominations or institutional Christianity, but that are recognizable beyond the boundaries of religious traditions.³⁵⁹

Anthropologist of religion Birgit Meyer states that the heritagization of religion often involves a new kind of exclusion: a nationalist or nativist idea of Dutch (or Flemish) culture which excludes immigrant individuals and populations.³⁶⁰ This does not generally seem to be the case when it comes to ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms. The organizers of *150 Psalms*, *Psalm 151* and *Poesia Divina* in particular made sure to include artists and performers of different religious and ethnic backgrounds. Some of these artists express critical reflections on the intertwinement of Christianity and national identity through their psalmody.³⁶¹ Nevertheless, in all cases, psalmody is, in Meyer's words, "reframed as art or cultural heritage and [is] made to mediate a shared past that is taken as the roots of a Dutch or European identity."³⁶² Time and again, participants (especially the organizers) emphasize that Christianity, and therefore psalmody, lies at the root of Dutch, 'Western' or European 'civilization'. *Genemuider Bovenstem* collective psalmody is the project that

³⁵⁹ Cf. Wagenaar, "Moral Management," 244. For example, organizers select 'monumental' churches which allude to different (religious) pasts at once (pre-Reformation Roman-Catholicism, Protestantism, national history), they organize a festival which alludes to the monastic Liturgy of the Hours (but without spoken prayers, scripture readings), and they play recordings of Gregorian chant before and after the recital of new Psalms (in *Poesia Divina*) as background music.

³⁶⁰ Meyer, "Recycling the Christian Past," 65, 83.

³⁶¹ Ramsey Nasr did so in his speeches in *150 Psalms* and his Psalm for *Psalm 151*.

³⁶² Meyer, "Recycling the Christian Past," 65.

seems to fit in with Meyer's statements the most, as the heritagization of this repertoire partially shifts the practice from the domain of exclusively or primarily religious expression to the celebration of local, regional culture.

The emphasis on religious diversity in ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms is different from the ways in which ritual-musical appropriation of other forms of religious diversity is 'managed'. For example, although participants in the appropriation of *The Passion*, Requiems and Choral Evensong seek to open up these practices for diversified publics, these practices are rooted in Christianity, in the story of Jesus, Christian (Roman-Catholic) liturgies of mourning the deceased, and Anglican liturgy respectively.³⁶³ In ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms, however, many appropriators acknowledge the fact that psalmody is rooted in different religious traditions at its very core (it precedes Christianity, is rooted in Judaism, and is associated with different religious traditions), something which gives it a greater interreligious or ecumenical potential than the examples mentioned above.³⁶⁴ This study provides new knowledge about the potential of the Psalms in a (religiously) diverse cultural context.

Another distinctive feature of the ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms is the breadth of existential themes that artists and performers address through their performance. Participants in the appropriations recognize that Psalms address 'all aspects of life', including thanksgiving, celebration, singing praise, depression, solitude, fear, injustice, suffering, and, indeed, lament. This existential 'gravitas' is characteristic of ritual-musical appropriations of the Psalms. The appropriation of Requiems, for example, involves composers' "individualized statements on death and afterlife", as Martin Hoondert has shown, with different participants in the performance of Requiems recognizing them as "an intercultural symbol of death and mourning in music".³⁶⁵ Ritual-musical

³⁶³ Hoondert, "The Interpretation and Experience of the Requiem in Contemporary Culture," 136; Klomp, *Playing On*, 189-90; Rijken, *My Soul Doth Magnify*, 156.

³⁶⁴ Of course, psalmody from Christian traditions is dominant in the ritual-musical appropriation, but the religiously diverse history of psalmody still plays an important role in the appropriation. Old Testament scholar and theologian Susan Gillingham describes the ecumenical and interreligious potential of psalmody, especially when Psalms are performed in secular settings. Gillingham, *Psalms Through the Centuries*, 1, 266, 309, 11; Gillingham, *A Journey of Two Psalms*, 232-33, 88-94.

³⁶⁵ Hoondert, "The Interpretation and Experience of the Requiem in Contemporary Culture," 133, 36. Similarly, Klomp discusses contemporary Passion compositions that "more and more follow from the personal motivation or engagement of their composers" and "not seldom pose fundamental questions – 'Is it at all possible to compose a Passion today?'" Klomp, "Joseph & Jesus," 54.

appropriations of the Psalms share this emphasis on individual expression and intercultural embeddedness, but, generally, their themes are broader.

This emphasis on the Psalms' existential depth and breadth results in musical experiences that are varied in nature. Compared to the appropriation of Choral Evensong, in which 'heavenly beauty' plays an important role, ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms appear to have greater room for unsettling, experimental sonic expressions which concertgoers do not always appreciate for their beauty (or do not appreciate at all).³⁶⁶ In *Psalm 151*, for example, the music serves to express anxiety, fear, and hatred in musical styles that some of the interviewed concertgoers found disturbing. Despite this, 'beauty' remains a theme in this ritual-musical appropriation of the Psalms and, among other things, the appropriation involves the aestheticization of (liturgical) psalmody as (professionally) trained composers, poets and performers create performances of high artistic quality. *Genemuiders Bovenstem* collective psalmody goes in a different direction, and here the heritagization and eventization of psalmody is comparable to what practical theologian Hanna Rijken describes as the "cathedralization of Reformed worship", albeit in a different ritual-musical style than Anglican Choral Evensong.³⁶⁷ Organizers of collective singing events select venues (cathedral-like churches with monumental organs) and well-known, professional organists for performances that sublimate regular liturgical psalmody in smaller churches with amateur performers.

Furthermore, this study contributes to academic knowledge about collective psalmody in a highly diverse and individualized cultural context: the nature of collective participation undergoes a transformation, but it remains an important aspect in ritual-musical appropriations of the Psalms. I have shown that appropriating groups and individuals can feel challenged to perform the Psalms collectively. They recognize psalmody as a collective practice. Thus, poets feel that they should evoke collective elements in the psalmody (they use 'we', refrains, and forms reminiscent of collective worship), composer Boudewijn Tarenskeen seeks both to allude to, and to deconstruct, collective psalmody, and the organizers of the festival *150 Psalms* considered the inclusion of collective singing in their concerts—to name only a few examples. More than many other religious forms which are subject to appropriation (see above), Psalms evoke collective singing, and the individuals and groups (mostly artists and event organizers) who appropriate them seek ways to

³⁶⁶ Rijken, *My Soul Doth Magnify*, 152-53, 57, 61.

³⁶⁷ Rijken, *My Soul Doth Magnify*, 152.

allude to this, although collective singing is not included outside the case of *Genemuider Bovenstem* psalmody.

Theologically, the major contribution of this study concerns the potential that lies in the framing of psalmody as (cultural) heritage. In Chapter 7, I argued that the different ritual-musical appropriations of the Psalms could have involved a greater variety of different perspectives when it comes to addressing God, to performing collectively and to existential contemplation. In this way, psalmody can become an inclusive practice and, as such, it can also become “a praise in which the anguish of disorientation is not forgotten, removed, or absent,” as Old Testament scholar and theologian Walter Brueggemann has argued.³⁶⁸ By showing that framing psalmody as heritage can serve to enhance such openness and inclusion of different perspectives, I have contributed to theorization around the potential and relevance of psalmody in contemporary culture. I have shown that framing psalmody as heritage can be a theologically significant strategy to make more room for God’s unfathomable nature, to respect different (religious, secular) styles of participation in psalmody, and to include different beliefs regarding God’s role in situations of despair, suffering and injustice.³⁶⁹

8.3.2. Methodological considerations

In this section, I consider the contributions and limitations of my methodological choices (cf. Chapter 2): my selection of research cases and of respondents; the ‘textual nature’ of the data; the openness of my approach (e.g. semi-structured interviews); the level of detail employed in coding the data; and the COVID-related lockdown situation in which a great deal of this research took place.

One strength of this research is the selection of four very different research cases. Each of the cases is unique in its combination of performance venue (church buildings, concert hall, theater), lyrics (canonical Psalms, new texts), particular forms of participation (solo and/or choral performances, collective singing), and geographical context (urban, Dutch, Flemish, countryside). This variety prevented me from ‘running’ to easy conclusions, as generalizations would often be contradicted or nuanced by other findings in the data. This,

³⁶⁸ Brueggemann, “The Psalms and the Life of Faith,” 19.

³⁶⁹ Cf. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, 121; Breed, “Reception of the Psalms,” 301; Brueggemann, “The Psalms and the Life of Faith,” 16; Brown, “The Psalms and Hebrew Poetry,” 269; Knowles, “Feminist Interpretation of the Psalms,” 427; Walter Moberly, “The Old Testament in Christianity,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 403.

however, came with another risk, namely of avoiding generalization altogether and resorting to mere comparison between the four cases. This balance between making generalizations on the one hand and doing justice to the complexity and contextuality of the different performances on the other is a delicate one. While, at the start of the research (e.g. Chapter 3), I sometimes tended to overlook the differences between the different research cases I managed to find a better balance over the course of the research. Feedback from my supervisors, from reviewers of my articles and from colleagues encouraged me to pay more attention to contextual factors (performance venues, specific performers, musical style, demographic context, etc.) when analyzing the research data and writing the articles.

Similarly, the variety of different data sources (interviews with different respondents, textual sources such as concert booklets, websites, newspaper articles) is a strength of this research, and it carries a similar risk. By including different types of data and in interviewing individuals with different roles, I was able to study the ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms from different viewpoints, including perspective from performers, concertgoers, authors, journalists, and organizers. However, when coding and analyzing the data, there was a risk of neglecting the different roles respondents play in the ritual-musical appropriations. For instance, the critical remarks of concertgoers Eva and Johan on the festival *150 Psalms* (cf. Chapter 4) could easily have gained the same weight as the views of organizers and performers. Acknowledging both their (divergent, unique) opinions and their relatively small role in the larger appropriations was, at times, challenging, especially at a stage in the research when I had not yet interviewed other concertgoers.

Another challenge was to keep in mind the fact that I was studying the performances and the meanings that participants attributed to *performances* of Psalms, while the data that I analyzed consisted mainly of texts. Of course, a large portion of these texts consisted of field notes and interview transcripts, and thus represented 'real' conversations and observations regarding the performances. Nevertheless, my background in literary studies meant that I tended to focus on, or perhaps over-emphasize, texts such as lyrics, introductions found in concert booklets, and newspaper articles. Although all these sources are relevant for studying appropriations of Psalms, for studying *ritual-musical* appropriations of Psalms, analyses of actions, interactions and experiences are indispensable. Chapter 5 is based on these broader varieties of analysis, serving to nuance and enrich the findings of other chapters (see section 8.1). Writing this chapter helped me significantly in overcoming a textual bias.

A study of ritual-musical appropriations of the Psalms would be difficult or impossible without the use of ethnographic methods that have some degree of openness to the complexity and layeredness of the meanings that participants construct. Semi-structured interviews allowed interviewees to bring up a range of different topics which later proved to be relevant for my research, and 'open coding' made me sensitive to unexpected themes that later proved themselves to be vital to the different Psalm appropriations. For example, the biographical narratives (cf. Ch. 3) that inform the ritual-musical appropriations could only be constructed by analyzing participants' elaborate responses to my simple question "were you already familiar with psalmody?" Because of their elaborate answers to this question, and because these answers appeared to be relevant for understanding appropriations of psalmody, I decided to study the ritual-musical appropriations in terms of the 'transformation of memories' (Ch. 3) and to analyze all research data through this lens. We can find a similar example in the 'challenges' described in Chapter 7, these came to the fore when analyzing participants' reflections on their expectations of what psalmody would entail, and how their appropriation of Psalms altered their expectations and intentions. Many of these reflections came about because of the open, flexible structure of the interviews in which interviewees seemed to feel they had some room for thinking out loud.

I did not usually (initially) analyze my data using pre-formulated codes and categories, but started by coding the research data in an inductive and detailed manner. This strategy has some advantages: it shows respect to participants' individuality and to the complexity of the data and it helped me, as a researcher, to become very familiar with the data on a detailed level. At the same time, as I carried out additional rounds of coding for each of the subsequent chapters (research articles), I tended to remain close to the wordings of the different respondents, with the result that, in different chapters, some terms have slightly different meanings. Thus, for example, the word 'contemplation' takes on slightly different meanings in chapters 3, 4, 5 and 7. In other words, doing justice to the complexity of research data risks leading to overly complex coding systems. Because of this, my endeavor to re-categorize the codes into clear thematic categories was rather time-consuming. I would advise researchers to be aware of such tendencies and to choose styles of coding that serve their research objectives, leaving enough room for the complexity of the research data, but putting in place coding systems that are consistent and coherent and serve the clarity of their analyses and arguments.

Finally, it is important to mention that my research activities were affected by lockdowns and other restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of this, some fieldwork was delayed (most notably when it came to *Genemuiders Bovenstem* psalmody), and large sections of this dissertation had to be written whilst working from home. Moreover, for a long period, I was not able to meet my supervisors and fellow researchers in person or in a casual manner. To compensate for this, I organized regular (almost daily) virtual meetings with colleagues, something which improved my research and creative process immensely. I am grateful for these moments, and would strongly advise other researchers to do the same in (God forbid) future lockdowns.

8.3.3. Suggestions for further research

In addition to the recommendations that I have already made for further research based on my methodological reflections (see above), I want to offer two additional suggestions: the first concerns the exploration of research cases bearing witness to transformations of religion that are not mentioned in this research, and the second concerns attention to aspects of the ritual-musical appropriations which I have not (extensively) studied.

A number of projects have recently emerged in addition to those that I have studied, all of which attest to similar and additional aspects of the transformation of religion in contemporary Dutch and Flemish societies. Several of these involve the transformation of psalmody into popular music idioms, mainly in the context of Reformed liturgies. These include *Psalmen voor Nu* (new metrical translations, new melodies) and *The Psalm Project* (existing, 'familiar' translations, with modified melodies from the Genevan psalter in 'praise and worship' style).³⁷⁰ These projects aim to give new life to psalmody in Protestant (mainly Reformed) liturgical practice. The translation project *De Nieuwe Psalmberijming*, which offers new metrical translations of the entire Psalter to be sung using the tunes of the Genevan Psalter has a similar aim.³⁷¹ *Psalmen Anders*, a supplement to the widely used *Liedboek* hymnal, introduces a wide variety of new Psalms including metrical Psalms (on Genevan and

³⁷⁰ Psalm 84 from *Psalmen voor Nu* has become a modern classic in Dutch Reformed liturgies: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ApLReosJd0s (accessed 4 January 2024). For an example of *The Psalm Project*, see this reworking of Psalm 86: <https://youtu.be/mF0gauSpCY0?si=1YQg2swGjSGT2E2Y> (accessed 4 January 2024).

³⁷¹ The project website: www.denieuwepsalmberijming.nl/ (accessed 4 January 2024). A transformation of performance style can be observed in the project *Psalternatief*, in which Psalms from *De Nieuwe Psalmberijming* are performed in popular music idioms. See: www.psalternatief.nl/opnames/ (accessed 4 January 2024).

other tunes), antiphons and versions of the psalms in popular music styles.³⁷² Although these four examples are mainly situated in, or close to, ecclesial domains, they relate to different transformations of religion which themselves are open to study: to changing styles of performance and the ways that these are experienced by participants; to the changing (growing?) roles of media (TV, internet) in the dissemination of new Psalms; and to changing theological emphases in these appropriations of psalmody.³⁷³ Further research has the potential to shed more light on developments within the ecclesial domain (which, of course, is already porous and liquefied), as styles of practice and belief appear to be subject to the cultural trends described in previous sections (and Chapter 7) and other trends alongside.

Ritual-musical appropriations of the Psalms (in my four research cases and in the projects mentioned above) could also be studied with a different focus to that of my own research. Future research could focus on the role played by governments and other institutions, and on the requirements they place on artists, performers, and anyone who receives a subsidy. What is the content of these requirements? And what ideas about religious or secular practice, cultural diversity, or the societal relevance of performances are they based upon? Although I have touched upon these subjects, my primary focus has been on the performances, and on actors relatively close to the performances. Furthermore, ritual-musical appropriations of the Psalms, and broader transformations of religion are not limited to live performances and take place in the digital realm as well. Although I have referred to online recordings of psalmody (e.g. performances of *Genemuider Bovenstem* psalmody), further research might be carried out on the digital side of live performances (online promotion, online broadcasting, etc.), on online networks of performers and fans, and on virtual psalmody.³⁷⁴ Such research would further elucidate the role of psalmody in contemporary Dutch and Flemish societies, providing a more complete and detailed picture of the changing meaning of Psalms than I was able to provide within the limits of this research.

³⁷² The project's YouTube page represents this variety: www.youtube.com/@Liedboek-Psalmenanders (accessed 4 January 2024).

³⁷³ Other projects worth mentioning are the recording projects *The Sweelinck Monument* (all vocal works of Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck including all 150 Genevan Psalms, presented as Dutch cultural heritage), the *Psalterium Project* (with all 150 Psalms as gregorian chant), and *Psalms Electrified* (with compositions by renowned guitarist Wiek Hijmans inspired by the entire Biblical Psalter).

³⁷⁴ An example of the latter is the performance of 'U geeft rust' (based on Psalm 62) by Christians from different denominations, in the COVID-19 lockdown. See: www.youtube.com/watch?v=HEqe9KUPKK0 (accessed 4 January 2024).

8.3.4. Practical implications

For practitioners of psalmody, this research shows both the versatility of psalmody and the different ways that psalmody fits into late-modern (secularized, pluralized, globalized, etc.) societies. In Chapter 7 in particular, I have shown the different ways that ritual-musical appropriations of the Psalms reflect contemporary cultural trends. The appropriations are characterized by (religious) diversity, individual authenticity, enchantment through beauty and stillness, and by engagement with contemporary 'crises' (political, social, psychological, spiritual). Practitioners of psalmody could use these findings to inspire new ways to make their psalmody resonate with contemporary culture, translating elements of what is presented in this study for the specific nature of their own particular contexts. This research might also lead them to rediscover a number of different aspects of psalmody which I have drawn attention to in existing ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms: the rich and creative variety of ways in which God is addressed, in which collective performance is designed and experienced, and in which psalmody evokes existential contemplation among participants. Chapter 5 demonstrates some different ways in which psalmody can be managed 'aesthetically', showing how participants' sensorial experiences (and organizers' management thereof) affect the meanings they attribute to a performance.

Chapter 7 shows that appropriating individuals are confronted with three major challenges in appropriating the Psalms (to address God, to perform collectively, and to contemplate life). Evaluation of the different ways in which participants in the ritual-musical appropriations have dealt with these challenges confronts practitioners with questions such as: How balanced and layered are the ways you address God through psalmody? Do they include, for instance, thankfulness, praise, reproach, lament, or even indifference towards God? How do you balance participants' individual authenticity with the communal aspect of psalmody? How do you balance despair, suffering, exile, homecoming, hope and other existential topics in your performance?

According to Old Testament scholar Brennan Breed, "from their very moment of origin, the Psalms have been begging to escape their contexts and find new horizons."³⁷⁵ Indeed, in every age, Psalms extend an invitation to 'sing a new song' that resonates with the present reality (so no nostalgic or utopian escapism), but which nevertheless evokes hope beyond the present.³⁷⁶

³⁷⁵ Breed, "Reception of the Psalms," 308.

³⁷⁶ Cf. Brueggemann, "The Psalms and the Life of Faith," 21-22.

In postsecular and post-Christian contemporary Dutch and Flemish culture, this song seems to reinvent what it means to address God after God, to perform collectively, and to reflect on the strange fullness of life.

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Appendix: list of research data

Transcribed interviews

5 December 2018	Boudewijn Tarenskeen	Live interview	<i>Psalm 151</i>
6 December 2018	Heleen (pseudonym)	Live interview	<i>Psalm 151</i>
6 December 2018	José (pseud.)	Live interview	<i>Psalm 151</i>
6 December 2018	Rob (pseud.)	Live interview	<i>Psalm 151</i>
13 December 2018	Tessa (pseud.)	Live interview	<i>Psalm 151</i>
30 April 2019	Gerard Swüste	Live interview	<i>150 Psalms</i>
6 May 2019	Leo Samama	Live interview	<i>150 Psalms</i>
8 May 2019	Tido Visser	Live interview	<i>150 Psalms</i>
21 May 2019	Eva and Johan (pseuds.)	Live interview	<i>150 Psalms</i>
31 May 2019	Merlijn Geurts	Live interview	<i>150 Psalms</i>
28 September 2019	Bart Stouten	Live interview	<i>Poesia Divina</i>
28 September 2019	Carl De Strycker	Live interview	<i>Poesia Divina</i>
28 September 2019	Charles Ducal	Live interview	<i>Poesia Divina</i>
28 September 2019	Delphine Lecompte	Live interview	<i>Poesia Divina</i>
28 September 2019	Gaea Schoeters	Live interview	<i>Poesia Divina</i>
28 September 2019	Jelle Dierickx	Live interview	<i>Poesia Divina</i>
28 September 2019	Maarten Inghels	Live interview	<i>Poesia Divina</i>
28 January 2020	Camila (pseud.)	Live interview	<i>150 Psalms</i>
28 January 2020	Clemens and Dora (pseuds.)	Live interview	<i>150 Psalms</i>
29 January 2020	James and Karin (pseuds.)	Live interview	<i>150 Psalms</i>
29 January 2020	Martin (pseud.)	Live interview	<i>150 Psalms</i>
13 May 2020	Steven (pseud.)	Video call	<i>150 Psalms</i>
15 May 2020	Roelof (pseud.)	Video call	<i>150 Psalms</i>
15 May 2020	Saskia (pseud.)	Video call	<i>150 Psalms</i>
18 August 2020	Albert van der Zeijden	Video call	<i>Genemuiden Bovenstem</i>
20 August 2020	Arend Booij	Live interview	<i>Genemuiden Bovenstem</i>
20 August 2020	Erik, Arjen, and Lammert (pseuds.)	Live interview	<i>Genemuiden Bovenstem</i>
26 August 2020	Harm Hoeve	Live interview	<i>Genemuiden Bovenstem</i>
27 August 2020	Roelof (pseud.)	Video call	<i>150 Psalms</i>
22 September 2020	Jelle Dierickx	Video call	<i>Poesia Divina</i>

23 September 2020	Mirjam (pseud.)	Phone call	<i>Poesia Divina</i>
14 October 2020	Henk Beens	Phone call	<i>Genemuiders Bovenstem</i>
11 November 2020	Agatha and Peter (pseuds.)	Video call	<i>Genemuiders Bovenstem</i>
11 November 2020	Wietse and Geke (pseuds.)	Live interview	<i>Genemuiders Bovenstem</i>
13 November 2020	David and Sara (pseuds.)	Live interview	<i>Genemuiders Bovenstem</i>

Field notes

1	25 November 2018	Rehearsal and concert	Nieuwe Kerk, Den Haag	<i>Psalm 151</i>
2	30 November 2018	Public interview preceding the concert, concert, conversations with concertgoers afterwards	Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ, Amsterdam	<i>Psalm 151</i>
3	28 September 2019	Performance of recited Psalms	Begijnhofkerk, Herentals	<i>Poesia Divina</i>
4	28 and 29 January 2020	Rehearsal days of Nederlands Kamerkoor	Silokerk, Utrecht	<i>150 Psalms</i>
5	20 August 2020	Informal conversation after the interview	Car drive between Genemuiders and Kampen	<i>Genemuiders Bovenstem</i>
6	26 May 2022	Collective singing event	Bovenkerk, Kampen	<i>Genemuiders Bovenstem</i>

Other materials

Unknown author	"Psalm 151"	Project website	<i>Poesia Divina</i>
Unknown author	"Schaam je niet mens te zijn" (<i>Poëziekrant</i> , July/August 2018)	Interviews with poets Carmien Michels, Marc Tritsmans, Mark van Tongele	<i>Poesia Divina</i>
Yoeri Albrecht	"De goddelijkheid van het woord en de menselijkheid van de psalmen"	Introduction in festival booklet	<i>150 Psalms</i>
Peter van Amstel, Boudewijn Tarenskeen	"Psalm 151"	Concert booklet	<i>Psalm 151</i>

Arthur (pseudonym)	[no title]	E-mail correspondence	<i>Genemuider Bovenstem</i>
Maria Barnas	“Waar men bang voor is”	Lyrics of new Psalm	<i>Psalm 151</i>
Rabiaâ Benlahbib	“Hoe ontregeling en reflectie ons kompas kunnen herijken”	Introduction in festival booklet	<i>150 Psalms</i>
Frederike Berntsen	“Afwisseling van koren geeft psalmenfeest dimensie” (<i>Trouw</i> , 4 September 2017)	Newspaper review	<i>150 Psalms</i>
Hafid Bouazza	“Zal de hanenbalk je wakker kraaien”	Lyrics of new Psalm	<i>Psalm 151</i>
Anniek van den Brand	“Ontroering golft door de kerk” (<i>Trouw</i> , 16 May 2009)	Newspaper report	<i>Genemuider Bovenstem</i>
Désanne van Brederode	“Leiderschap”, “Vertrouwen”, “Levensweg”, “Macht en onderdrukking”	Concert introductions	<i>150 Psalms</i>
Miriam Cosic	“Songbook for humanity” (<i>The Australian</i> , 21 February 2020)	Newspaper interview with Tido Visser	<i>150 Psalms</i>
David (pseud.)	[no title]	E-mail correspondence	<i>Genemuider Bovenstem</i>
Paul Demets	“Incarnaat”	Lyrics of new Psalm	<i>Poesia Divina</i>
Charles Ducal	“Twee psalmen van Leonardo”	Lyrics of new Psalm	<i>Poesia Divina</i>
Moya De Feyter	“Oh mens oh pretmachine”	Lyrics of new Psalm	<i>Poesia Divina</i>
Frits (pseud.)	[no title]	E-mail correspondence	<i>Genemuider Bovenstem</i>
Dirk de Geest	“Het Kempens Psalmen Boek” (November 2021)	Online review	<i>Poesia Divina</i>
Marjolijn van Heemstra	“Zingen tegen zwijgen”	Lyrics of new Psalm	<i>Psalm 151</i>
Maurice Hoogenboom	“De schrijvers van de Psalmen wisten wat het is om te snakken naar troost, om wanhopig te zijn, of eenzaam” (<i>Nederlands Dagblad</i> , 25 November 2021)	Newspaper interview with Michael Ignatieff	<i>150 Psalms</i>
Tom Holland	[no title]	Lecture	<i>150 Psalms</i>

F. Hoogland	[no title] (www.eeninwaarheid.info, 23 September 2017)	Blog post	150 Psalms
Michael Ignatieff	"Reading the Psalms in a faithless time"	Lecture	150 Psalms
S. Janse	"Psalmen zonder God geven lege plek" (<i>Reformatorisch Dagblad</i> , 6 September 2017)	Opinion article in newspaper	150 Psalms
Oek de Jong	"Spiegel voor de maatschappij", "Lijden", "Dankbaarheid", "Rechtvaardigheid"	Concert introductions	150 Psalms
Pia de Jong	"Stemmen die de hele ruimte vullen" (<i>NRC</i> , 27 November 2017)	Newspaper column	150 Psalms
Freek de Jonge	"Ruimtetijd"	Lyrics of new Psalm	Psalm 151
Gerrit-Jan KleinJan	"Psalmen zijn een onuitputtelijke bron van inspiratie" (<i>Trouw</i> , 29 August 2017)	Newspaper interview with Désanne van Brederode and Michel van der Aa	150 Psalms
Immaterieel Erfgoed Overijssel	"Bovenstem zingen bij de psalmen in Genemuiden"	Policy report on intangible heritage	Genemuiden Bovenstem
Maarten Inghels	"De uitvinding van het lichaam"	Lyrics of new Psalm	Poesia Divina
Kenniscentrum Immaterieel Erfgoed Nederland	"Factsheet Erfgoedinstellingen"	Brochure for heritage 'custodians'	Genemuiden Bovenstem
Jaco van der Knijff	"Stemmen zingen" (<i>Reformatorisch Dagblad</i> , 9 January 2010)	Newspaper report	Genemuiden Bovenstem
Jaco van der Knijff	"Bovenstem Genemuiden op lijst immaterieel erfgoed" (<i>Reformatorisch Dagblad</i> , 25 November 2013)	Newspaper report	Genemuiden Bovenstem
Jaco van der Knijff	"Genemuiden en de bovenstem" (<i>Reformatorisch Dagblad</i> , 30 November 2020)	Newspaper report	Genemuiden Bovenstem
Delphine Lecompte	"Psalm voor de bedeesde zeepzieder"	Lyrics of new Psalm	Poesia Divina

Lisette Ma Neza	“Erfelijkheid”	Lyrics of new Psalm	<i>Poesia Divina</i>
Els Moors	“Psalm in de dichtkunst kan ik alles wat maar mogelijk is”	Lyrics of new Psalm	<i>Poesia Divina</i>
Ramsey Nasr	“Psalm voor een afkomst”	Lyrics of new Psalm	<i>Psalm 151</i>
Ramsey Nasr	“Op de vlucht”, “Veiligheid”, “Machteloosheid & Verlossing”, “Feest”	Concert introductions	<i>150 Psalms</i>
Nederlands Kamer- koor	“Aanvraag meerjarige subsidie Fonds Podiumkunsten 2017-2020”	Grant application	<i>150 Psalms</i>
Guido van Oor- schot	“Het koor van 150 Psalms verzuimt uit zijn cocon te breken” (<i>De Volkskrant</i> , 3 September 2017)	Newspaper review	<i>150 Psalms</i>
Willem Jan Otten	“Eén zin”	Lyrics of new Psalm	<i>Psalm 151</i>
Paul (pseud.)	[no title]	E-mail correspon- dence	<i>Poesia Divina</i>
(Marieke) Lucas Rijneveld	“Alles waar ik spijt van had”	Lyrics of new Psalm	<i>Psalm 151</i>
Ruben (pseud.)	[no title]	E-mail correspon- dence	<i>Genemuiden Bovenstem</i>
Rutger (pseud.)	[no title]	E-mail correspon- dence	<i>Genemuiden Bovenstem</i>
Leo Samama	“Musicologisch concept”	Introduction in festival booklet	<i>150 Psalms</i>
Leo Samama	[no title]	E-mail correspon- dence	<i>150 Psalms</i>
Gaea Schoeters	[no title]	Lyrics of new Psalm	<i>Poesia Divina</i>
Willi Soepboer	“Zwijg niet, God van mijn lied!” (<i>Kerk in de Stad</i> , August 2017)	Interview about small festival inspired by <i>150 Psalms</i>	<i>150 Psalms</i>
Mischa Spel	“Er wordt in Nederland weinig op écht hoog niveau gezongen” (<i>NRC</i> , 30 August 2017)	Newspaper interview with conductor Peter Dijkstra	<i>150 Psalms</i>

Mischa Spel	“150 Psalms’ haakt geslaagd in op actualiteit” (NRC, 3 September 2017)	Newspaper review	150 Psalms
Mustafa Stitou	“Verhaspelde psalm”	Lyrics of new Psalm	Psalm 151
Bart Stouten	“Brug over de liefde voor Lisa en Leonardo”	Lyrics of new Psalm	Poesia Divina
Gerard Swüste	“Psalmen als hartekreet van de mens”	Introduction in festival booklet	150 Psalms
Gerard Swüste	“Spiegel voor de maatschappij”, “Leiderschap”, “Vertrouwen”, “Lijden”, “Op de vlucht”, “Dankbaarheid”, “Rechtvaardigheid”, “Veiligheid”, “Levensweg”, “Machteloosheid & verlossing”, “Macht en onderdrukking”, “Feest”	Introductions to the concert themes in the festival booklet	150 Psalms
Xavier Vandamme and Jed Wentz	“Voorwoord”	Preface in festival booklet	150 Psalms
Kaat Vanneste	“Charles Ducal”	Online interview	Poesia Divina
Tido Visser	[no title]	Jubilee speech	150 Psalms
Tido Visser	“150 Psalms in New York”	Blog	150 Psalms
Tido Visser	“De psalmen – het project”	Introduction in festival booklet	150 Psalms
Nell Westerlaken	“Psalm 14 lijkt voor deze tijd geschreven te zijn, meent deze componist” (De Volkskrant, 30 August 2017)	Newspaper interview with composer Mohammed Fairouz	150 Psalms

Samenvatting

Context en aanleiding

In meer dan een halve eeuw zijn de demografische cijfers van mensen die zich in Nederland en Vlaanderen religieus of gelovig noemen of regelmatig kerkdiensten bezoeken drastisch gedaald, en hebben religieuze instituties hun maatschappelijke rol steeds kleiner zien worden. Tegelijkertijd bestaat er nog steeds ruime publieke belangstelling voor rituele praktijken die geworteld zijn in religieuze tradities. Veelal zijn die praktijken wel veranderd en (ten dele) verhuisd vanuit religieus ritueel naar andere domeinen, zoals de kunsten, entertainment, of de openbare ruimte. Voorbeelden daarvan zijn de vele drukbezochte *Matthäus Passion*-uitvoeringen, het grote media-evenement *The Passion*, allerlei praktijken rond Allerzielen en de veelvuldige Choral Evensongs naar Anglicaans voorbeeld. Deze praktijken zijn onderzocht door onder meer theologen en antropologen, om zicht te krijgen op de veranderende vorm, plek en betekenis van dergelijke praktijken, en, breder, op religie, geloof, zingeving, het seculiere en het heilige in de huidige post-christelijke, post-seculiere cultuur. De praktijk van het zingen en uitvoeren van psalmen is daarin nog niet aan de orde geweest. Dit onderzoek wil die leemte opvullen. Ten eerste omdat het muzikale erfgoed van psalmzang een veel langere en bredere toe-eigeningsgeschiedenis kent dan andere muzikale vormen uit de christelijke traditie. Het psalmzingen voert immers terug tot het jodendom voorafgaand aan het christendom en is sindsdien nooit weggeweest uit beide religieuze tradities, in vele vormen en in vele contexten. Ten tweede omdat het psalmzingen zo'n vertrouwde praktijk is (geweest) van veel kerkgangers, met name protestanten in Nederland, maar natuurlijk ook alle kloosterlingen, en zij die in mis en synagoge het psalmzingen praktiseren. Ten derde omdat ook het psalmzingen migreert naar buitenkerkelijke, –kloosterlijke en –synagogale domeinen en aan transformatie onderhevig is. Buiten liturgische contexten wordt het psalmzingen heruitgevonden door kunstenaars en cultuurmakers: ze dichten en componeren nieuwe psalmen, mengen en creëren rituelen met psalmzang, ze koesteren, (her)waarderen en bekritisieren bestaande tradities.

Onderzoeksvraag

Een onderzoek naar die migratie en transformatie (*transfer and transformation*) biedt niet alleen zicht op de veranderende betekenis van het psalmzingen in de Lage Landen (Nederland en Vlaanderen), maar ook, breder, op de veranderende rol en betekenis van in religie gewortelde praktijken in algemenere zin. Dit onderzoek stelt zich de vraag: *Hoe kunnen we ritueel-muzikale toe-eigeningen van Psalmen in de hedendaagse Nederlandse en Vlaamse cultuur begrijpen, tegen de achtergrond van de 'transfer' en 'transformation' van religie, en hoe kunnen we die evalueren?*

Theoretische achtergrond en onderzoeksproces

Onder de term ritueel-muzikale toe-eigening versta ik het betekenisgevingsproces waarin mensen nieuwe betekenissen toekennen aan 'betekenisdragers' (in dit geval uitvoeringen van psalmen) in een andere context dan waarin deze betekenisdragers voorheen functioneerden. Ik onderzoek dus niet zozeer ethische kwesties van rechtmatig eigenaarschap en onteigening, zoals dat in recente debatten rond culturele toe-eigening (*cultural appropriation*) het geval is. Veeleer gebruik ik de term 'toe-eigening' neutraler en meer beschrijvend, zonder tegelijk te ontkennen dat machtsverhoudingen een rol zullen spelen in de toe-eigeningen die ik onderzoek. Verder maakt de toevoeging 'ritueel-muzikale' duidelijk dat ik me richt op rituele aspecten (herhaalbare, symbolische, geformaliseerde, lichamelijke handelingen) en muzikale aspecten (verschillende muzikale activiteiten, zoals luisteren, zingen en spreken) van de toe-eigening. Ten slotte merk ik op dat mijn benadering beïnvloed is door de filosofen Paul Ricoeur en antropoloog Arnd Schneider, die beiden benadrukken dat toe-eigening niet betekent dat een culturele vorm die in een nieuwe context wordt geplaatst, openstaat voor alle mogelijke nieuwe betekenissen. In andere woorden: als mensen een culturele vorm toe-eigenen uit een andere culturele context, resoneren reeds bestaande betekenissen mee in de toe-eigening, en bepaalt de geschiedenis van het toegeëigende mede wat het toegeëigende in een nieuwe context kan betekenen. Tegelijkertijd ligt betekenis niet vast: nieuwe, soms tegenstrijdige betekenissen kunnen wel degelijk toegevoegd worden, en sommige betekenissen verdwijnen in de loop van de tijd. Ik hanteer dus geen essentialistisch, contextloos idee over de betekenis van psalmzang, alsof dat ergens, buiten de tijd opgeslagen zou liggen om slechts ontdekt te hoeven worden. Ik beschouw de betekenis van psalmzang als contextueel en niet oneindig 'vrij', alsof elke willekeurige betekenis toegekend zou kunnen worden aan een uitvoering van psalmen, zonder

dat die toekenning een reactie zou zijn op bestaande betekenissen. Het is van belang dit expliciet te benoemen, omdat beide benaderingen geen recht zouden doen aan de toe-eigening die ik bestudeer: de essentialistische benadering beschouwt de ritueel-muzikale toe-eigening van psalmen vanuit een ideaaltipe van wat psalmzang zou móeten zijn om daar de toe-eigening vooral mee te vergelijken; de andere benadering heeft weinig oog voor de toe-eigening als reactie op eerdere toe-eigeningen, als continuering, breuk en doorontwikkeling van tradities van psalmzang.

Om de onderzoeksvraag te beantwoorden bestudeer ik vier 'ritueel-muzikale toe-eigeningen': festival *150 Psalms*, dicht-, compositie- en concertproject *Psalm 151*, poëzieproject *Poesia Divina* en het psalmzingen met Genemuiden Bovenstem. In twee daarvan, te weten *Psalm 151* en *Poesia Divina*, gaat het om nieuwe teksten en niet om de canonieke teksten uit het Bijbelboek Psalmen of directe bewerkingen daarvan. Deze casus hebben bewust een plek in mijn onderzoek, omdat ze duidelijk zichtbaar zullen maken op welke manier de betrokken organisatoren en kunstenaars hun uitvoering tóch als 'psalm' presenteren en op welke manier hun toe-eigening bestaande tradities uitdaagt. Als een uitvoering als 'psalm' wordt gepresenteerd, kan het als zodanig worden onderzocht.

In deze Nederlandse samenvatting gebruik ik de term 'psalmzang', terwijl ik in de Engelse tekst veelal spreek van *psalmody* of *performance of Psalms*. Het Engelse *psalmody* wordt vaak breder gebruikt voor allerlei soorten psalmzang en –recitatie: bijvoorbeeld op gregoriaanse psalmtonen en *Anglican chant*, of als berijmde psalm – *metrical psalmody*. Omdat 'psalmodie' in het Nederlands toch beperkter gebruikt wordt, namelijk vooral voor het reciteren van psalmen op vaste reciteerformules (psalmtonen), hanteer ik hier het woord 'psalmzang'. Daaronder versta ik trouwens óók de voordracht van poëzie, dat immers evenzeer een gestileerde, zelfs muzikale, behandeling van tekst is, gesproken 'op verhoogde toon'.

In het licht van deze overwegingen heb ik vier zeer diverse casus geselecteerd, om zo een veelzijdig beeld te krijgen van ritueel-muzikale toe-eigening in de hedendaagse Nederlandse en Vlaamse cultuur. Het zijn casus die ik verder heb gekozen omdat de betreffende praktijken zich minstens ten dele buiten het kerkelijke domein bewegen (en dus laten zien hoe psalmzang in andere domeinen wordt toegeëigend) en duidelijk transformaties zijn van psalmzang en de betekenis ervan. Verder wilde ik de uitvoeringen live kunnen bijwonen en betrokkenen (zangers, dichters, bezoekers, organisatoren, etc.) kunnen interviewen. Ik zal de vier casus kort beschrijven.

Festival *150 Psalms* was een groot festival rond koormuziek in TivoliVredenburg, met uitvoeringen door het Nederlands Kamerkoor (hoofdorganisator) en verder door Det Norske Solistkor, de Tallis Scholars en Wall Street Trinity Choir – vier koren met sterke internationale reputatie. Het tweedaagse festival behelsde twaalf concerten, waarin alle 150 psalmen gezongen werden, telkens getoonzet door weer een andere componist. Daaronder waren enkele opdrachtcomposities aan componisten van naam, onder wie bijvoorbeeld Michel van der Aa, Kate Moore, David Lang, Caroline Shaw, Isidora Žebeljan en Mohammed Fairouz. Theoloog en psalmvertaler Gerard Swüste was betrokken om alle psalmen te verdelen over de twaalf thematische concerten. De thematische concerten werden ingeleid door de literaire auteurs Désanne van Brederode, Ramsey Nasr en Oek de Jong. Zij waren betrokken door debatcentrum De Balie, dat ook de internationale sprekers Michael Ignatieff en Tom Holland aantrok om een lezing te komen geven over de zeggingskracht van psalmen in de geschiedenis en vandaag. Daarnaast was er een tentoonstelling van opblaasbare tenten met daarin prikkelende vragen, om, net als met een fototentoonstelling, bezoekers aan het denken te zetten over de hedendaagse relevantie van psalmen.

Psalm 151, de tweede casus, was verrassend anders: componist van moderne, avantgardistische klassieke muziek Boudewijn Tarenskeen had auteurs en andere publieke personen die bekend staan om hun reflectie op religie en samenleving benaderd om een nieuwe psalm te dichten: Freek de Jonge, Ramsey Nasr, Willem Jan Otten, Maria Barnas, Hafid Bouazza, Lucas Rijneveld, Mustafa Stitou en Marjolijn van Heemstra. Tarenskeen had reeds samengewerkt met musici en gezelschappen met internationale faam, en heeft zich in zijn werk onder meer toegelegd op het kritisch beschouwen van thema's uit de Bijbel en christelijke tradities, zoals in zijn oratoria *Saul* en *Luther* en zijn *Mattheüs Passion*. Voor *Psalm 151* werkt hij samen met zangers van Cappella Amsterdam, organist Gerrie Weijers en accordeonduo TOEAC. In zijn 100 minuten durende compositie wilde Tarenskeen het psalmzingen deconstrueren en heruitvinden.

Omdat ik naast het 'conventionele zingen' ook het reciteren, voordragen op verhoogde toon, van psalmen een plek wilde geven, heb ik ook het *Poesia Divina*-project geselecteerd, de enige casus in Vlaanderen. Ook hier werden auteurs benaderd om een nieuwe psalm te dichten, die in voorpublicaties van de uitvoeringen steevast 'gezongen gebeden' werden genoemd. Voor vier edities van het jaarlijkse *Musica Divina*-festival werden telkens negen auteurs aangetrokken om een psalm te dichten en voor te dragen in kerken,

kloosters, bibliotheken en theaters in de Kempen in Vlaanderen. Onder de in totaal 36 auteurs bevonden zich bijvoorbeeld Sylvie Marie, Inge Braeckman, Bart Stouten, Gaea Schoeters, Charles Ducal, Maarten Inghels, Delphine Lecompte, Lisette Ma Neza, Els Moors, Moya De Feyter en Paul Demets, Lucienne Stassaert en Geert van Istendael. *Poesia Divina* werd georganiseerd in samenwerking met Poëziecentrum Gent. In het *Musica Divina*-festival brengen koren en ensembles met internationaal bereik hun muziek (veelal maar niet uitsluitend muziek uit religieuze tradities) in de kerken en kloosters in de Kempen in Vlaanderen.

Ten slotte selecteerde ik het psalmzingen met Genemuider Bovenstem als vierde casus. Deze casus onderscheidt zich van de vorige drie, omdat dit een *collectieve* zangpraktijk betreft die zich uitsluitend in kerkgebouwen afspeelt, hoewel in twee verschillende rituele settings: in de zondagse liturgie van reformatorische kerken en in samenzangevenementen. Het psalmzingen 'met bovenstem' is verbonden aan het stadje Genemuiden, hoewel er vergelijkbare tradities zijn op andere plaatsen: boven de relatief traag gezongen Geneefse psalmmelodie zingen vooral mannen een tweede, hogere melodie. Het psalmzingen met Genemuider Bovenstem is in 2013 bijgeschreven op de inventaris van immaterieel cultureel erfgoed door het Kenniscentrum Immaterieel Erfgoed Nederland, dat namens de Nederlandse overheid het UNESCO-erfgoedbeleid uitvoert. Zodoende is het 'bovenstemzingen' 'geërfgoediseerd', trouwens op initiatief van mensen uit Genemuiden. Tegelijk blijft het nog steeds een kerkelijke, liturgische praktijk. Met andere woorden: beoefenaars en liefhebbers van het bovenstemzingen hebben geprobeerd hun traditie levend en toekomstbestendig te houden door de erkenning van een buitenkerkelijk instituut, en door evenementen te organiseren waarin het bovenstemzingen een centrale plaats inneemt.

Voor het onderzoeken van uitvoeringen binnen deze vier casus heb ik gebruikgemaakt van etnografische methoden: participerende observatie bij repetities en uitvoeringen, interviews met allerlei betrokkenen en verzameling en analyse van divers aanvullend (bijna uitsluitend tekstueel) materiaal. Om zicht te krijgen op de gelaagdheid en complexiteit van de ritueel-muzikale toe-eigeningen, is het noodzakelijk om die toe-eigeningen 'holistisch' te benaderen, dat wil zeggen: met oog voor de (rituele) handelingen, lichamelijke ervaringen en klankkenmerken, naast de analyse van wat er rondom de uitvoeringen gesproken en geschreven wordt aan reflecties, recensies en te zingen teksten. Op die manier kan de contextualiteit van de toe-eigening serieus genomen worden, omdat de transformatie van religieuze praktijken een

voor een belangrijk deel plaatsvindt op het niveau van (rituele) handelingen en ervaringen. De empirische onderzoeksdata heb ik vervolgens kwalitatief geanalyseerd, door die te coderen en datasegmenten op inhoudelijke kenmerken te groeperen en categoriseren.

Subvragen

Ik formuleerde vijf subvragen om de hoofdvraag uiteindelijk te beantwoorden. Die subvragen heb ik beantwoord in de hoofdstukken 3 tot en met 7.

Allereerst heb ik in hoofdstuk 3 gekeken naar de rol van herinnering in de ritueel-muzikale toe-eigeningen van psalmen. Immers, als de toe-eigening impliceert dat de psalmen ‘in beweging zijn’ naar andere culturele contexten, en als toe-eigeningen altijd beïnvloed zijn door vorige toe-eigeningen en oudere tradities, hoe zit dat dan met de toe-eigening van psalmen? Ik vroeg: *Hoe kunnen we de rol van biografische herinneringen in de constructie van het ‘sacrale’ in de ritueel-muzikale toe-eigeningen van psalmen begrijpen in de Nederlandse en Vlaamse cultuur?* In dit hoofdstuk heb ik laten zien hoe belangrijke kenmerken van ritueel-muzikale toe-eigeningen samenhangen met biografische herinneringen van de deelnemers in de toe-eigeningen. Kunstenaars of concertgangers hebben bijvoorbeeld herinneringen aan psalmzang in de concertzaal of vroeger in de kerk, en willen iets daarvan behouden, terwijl ze tegelijkertijd andere aspecten het liefst zouden vergeten. Met het woord ‘sacraal’ heb ik willen aangeven wat voor hen ‘on-onderhandelbaar’ en ‘onalledaags’ is: het kan voor een componist bijvoorbeeld on-onderhandelbaar zijn om de naam van God te verwijderen uit een psalmtekst, omdat hij/zij vindt dat dat woord de psalm ontoegankelijk maakt voor moderne luisteraars en dat toegankelijkheid ongeacht religieus geloof van deelnemers een ‘on-onderhandelbaar’ uitgangspunt is. Hoofdstuk 3 laat zien dat zulke *overtuigingen* vaak samenhangen met biografische herinneringen: de betreffende componist vertelt bijvoorbeeld negatieve herinneringen te hebben aan de exclusiviteit en de interne gerichtheid van de kerk van zijn/haar jeugd. In het geval van sacrale, ‘onalledaagse’ *ervaringen*, gaat het bijvoorbeeld, maar niet uitsluitend, om concertgangers die niet zozeer actief iets willen veranderen of behouden in het uitvoeren van psalmen. Veeleer zijn zij bijvoorbeeld verrast door een aspect van de uitvoering die ze bijwonen: in tegenstelling tot hoe zij zich psalmzang herinneren, is er bijvoorbeeld opeens ruimte voor humor (*Psalm 151*) of is er ineens veel grotere muzikale schoonheid dan ze zich van vroeger herinneren. Hier is ‘schoonheid’ een sacrale – onalledaagse, verrassende – ervaring die

hun herinneringen als het ware bevraagt. Door dergelijke on-onderhandelbare *overtuigingen* en onalledaagse *ervaringen* te onderscheiden, kon ik duidelijk maken hoe de ritueel-muzikale toe-eigeningen van psalmen zijn ingebed in de concrete levens van betrokkenen, of specifieker: hun beeld van hoe zij vroeger psalmen ervoeren en hoe zij dat in het heden en toekomst ervaren, of zouden willen ervaren.

Het viel me echter op dat deelnemers in de toe-eigeningen niet alleen verwijzen naar hun eigen biografische herinneringen, maar hun toe-eigening ook verbinden met momenten veel langer geleden. Ze beschouwen psalmzang als een erfgoed van vorige generaties en proberen in hun toe-eigening recht te doen aan wat zij beschouwen als de ‘authentieke’, ‘oorspronkelijke’ of ‘echte’ betekenis of bedoeling van psalmzang, soms ook verwijzend naar psalmisten van duizenden jaren geleden. In hoofdstuk 4 stel ik de vraag: *Hoe eigenen deelnemers in festival 150 Psalms het erfgoed van psalmen toe?* Ik richtte me op de casus van *150 Psalms* omdat ik bij het schrijven van het artikel dat aan dit hoofdstuk ten grondslag in deze casus voldoende veldwerk had verricht en omdat in deze casus vrij expliciet wordt terugverwezen naar de psalmisten en tradities van psalmzang. Ik laat zien dat verschillende deelnemers in het festival hun toe-eigening ‘authenticiseren’ door een beroep te doen op traditie of een verondersteld ‘oorspronkelijk’ moment. Ik heb zes verschillende varianten daarvan gevonden. Sommige daarvan, zoals ‘Psalmen moeten mooi zijn’ worden door veel deelnemers erkend, terwijl ‘Psalmen moeten politiek relevant zijn’ voor lang niet alle deelnemers een noodzakelijk kenmerk is van een authentieke toe-eigening. Hoofdstuk 4 laat kortom zien dat, wanneer psalmen worden toegeëigend als erfgoed, betrokkenen heel verschillende ideeën kunnen hebben over wat dat erfgoed authentiek, ‘echt’ maakt. In tegenstelling tot wat in erfgoedstudies wel is gesuggereerd, namelijk dat erfgoed ertoe dient een collectieve identiteit te bestendigen (‘Het psalmzingen drukt uit wie wij écht zijn’), laat dit hoofdstuk zien dat de constructie van erfgoed ruimte laat voor een diversiteit van meningen over de betekenis ervan. Dat gegeven ligt aan de basis van de conclusie van de gehele dissertatie.

In hoofdstuk 5 kijk ik voor het eerst naar alle casus, en direct heel gedetailleerd naar de lichamelijke handelingen en zintuiglijke ervaringen van deelnemers in ritueel-muzikale toe-eigeningen van psalmen. Naar aanleiding van theorieën die stellen dat de transformatie van religieuze en seculiere praktijken in postseculiere culturen voor een belangrijk deel plaatsvindt op het niveau van lichamelijke en zintuiglijke ervaringen en handelingen, stel ik de vraag: *Hoe kunnen we de esthetiek van psalmzang begrijpen in een postseculiere*

context? 'Esthetiek' betekent in dit geval niet zozeer bekoorlijke schoonheid (al is dat niet uitgesloten), maar het geheel aan zintuiglijke en lichamelijke gewaarwordingen waardoor mensen betekenis geven aan de wereld en zichzelf. In het hoofdstuk bestudeer ik hoe deelnemers (inclusief ikzelf) in de toe-eigeningen de psalmzang ervaren met betrekking tot lichamelijke perceptie (kippenvel, warm, koud, etc.), auditieve perceptie (mooi, lelijk, chaotisch, harmonieus, etc.), visuele perceptie (donker, licht, podium, het zien andere concertgangers, etc.) en synesthetische perceptie (als verschillende zintuiglijke ervaringen ononderscheidbaar worden). Dit hoofdstuk laat zien hoe de betekenissen die deelnemers toekennen aan de psalmzang samenhangen met hun lichamelijke en zintuiglijke ervaringen. Bijvoorbeeld: wanneer bezoekers een zanger(es) als 'oprecht' beschrijven, blijkt het dat ze dat doen op basis van hun visuele percepties, meer dan op basis van wat ze horen. Ook laat ik zien dat organisatoren en kunstenaars heel bewust de zintuiglijke perceptie van bezoekers 'sturen', en dat bezoekers dat zelf ook doen. In het 'managen' van verschillende zintuiglijke prikkelingen, proberen organisatoren er bijvoorbeeld voor te zorgen dat bezoekers de buitenwereld even vergeten (door het donker te maken bijvoorbeeld) of zich sterk verbonden voelen met de uitvoerenden (door zangers om het publiek heen te laten lopen of een praatje te laten maken). Verder maak ik duidelijk dat een zorgvuldige balans tussen verschillende zintuiglijke prikkelingen ruimte kan maken voor 'transcendente' ervaringen: door in festival *150 Psalms* af te wisselen tussen collectieve muzikale concentratie in concerten en visuele prikkeling in de tentoonstellingen in de foyers, ontstaat er een ritme dat een gevoel van 'flow' bevordert onder festivalgangers. In dit 'managen' van lichamelijke ervaring en zintuiglijke prikkeling door organisatoren en deelnemers zelf, wordt zichtbaar dat de ritueel-muzikale toe-eigeningen van psalmen elementen van zowel 'religieuze' collectieve ritualiteit als 'seculiere', meer afstandelijk-beschouwende, individuele deelname combineren. Zij zorgen ervoor, en deelnemers doen dat zelf vaak ook, dat er ruimte is voor collectieve flow en vervoering, terwijl individuele deelnemers genoeg ruimte ervaren voor hun individuele authenticiteit: zij hoeven zich niet te identificeren met alle (religieuze) betekenissen en aspecten van de uitvoering. Hoofdstuk 5 laat zien dat ritueel-muzikale toe-eigeningen van psalmen aspecten van liturgisch ritueel en concertritueel verenigen op een dusdanige manier dat ze individueler, diverser, mooier en experimenteler wordt dan (het beeld dat deelnemers hebben van) liturgische psalmodie, en gemeenschappelijker, oprechter en betekenisvoller dan (het beeld dat deelnemers hebben van) concertante psalmzang.

Hoofdstuk 6 handelt verder over de rol en constructie van gemeenschap in rituele-muzikale toe-eigeningen van psalmen, in dit geval het psalmzingen met Genemuiders Bovenstem. Het psalmzingen met Genemuiders Bovenstem wordt zowel gepraktiseerd in de zondagse liturgie van reformatorische kerkgemeenschappen in en rond Genemuiden, maar ook in de samenhangende evenementen waar liefhebbers van het 'bovenstemzingen' op af komen. Dat laatste is een 'evenementisering' van psalmzang. Verder is het psalmzingen met Genemuiders Bovenstem bijgeschreven op de inventaris Immaterieel Erfgoed Nederland. Dat is een 'erfgoedisering' van psalmzang. Er zijn theorieën over de erfgoedisering en evenementisering van religieuze of culturele praktijken die stellen dat dergelijke ontwikkelingen vaak ten koste gaan van de gemeenschappen die aanvankelijk betrokken waren bij de praktijken: hun belangen zouden niet erkend worden door immaterieel erfgoedbeleid en nieuwe netwerken van liefhebbers zouden de aanvankelijke gemeenschappen overschaduwden of verdrukken. Daarom stel ik in hoofdstuk 6 de vraag: *Hoe worden in het psalmzingen met Genemuiders Bovenstem gemeenschappen geconstrueerd, in het licht van de erfgoedisering en evenementisering van religieuze praktijken?* Ik laat zien dat de erfgoedisering en evenementisering van het psalmzingen met Genemuiders Bovenstem wordt geleid door personen en groepen die nauw verwant zijn aan de kerkgemeenschappen waarin het bovenstemzingen wettelijke praktijk is. Zij willen die traditie bewaren en bekendheid geven bij een breder publiek door het bovenstemzingen zowel in kerkgemeenschappen een impuls te geven als de schoonheid en zeggingskracht ervan duidelijk te maken door het als immaterieel erfgoed te laten erkennen en in samenhangende evenementen te laten horen. In de erfgoedisering worden zij ondersteund door het Kenniscentrum Immaterieel Erfgoed Nederland en de samenhangende evenementen worden gepromoot door reformatorische media. Zij blijven daarbij benadrukken dat het een collectieve religieuze expressie betreft. De erfgoedisering en evenementisering van het psalmzingen met Genemuiders Bovenstem overstijgt de kerkmuren die op zondag gelden: deelnemers in de evenementen komen uit verschillende (vooral reformatorische) kerken, maar ook van daarbuiten. Kortom: deze ontwikkeling gaat niet ten koste van de aanvankelijke kerkgemeenschappen die het bovenstemzingen beoefenen, maar biedt liefhebbers van het bovenstemzingen meer manieren om zich tot andere bovenstemzangers te verhouden dan voorheen: zij zingen niet alleen samen met hun kerkgemeenschappen, maar ook met liefhebbers met diverse achtergronden uit wijdere omtrek. Deze groepen overlappen en de beide rituele settings versterken elkaar: de zondagse praktijk voedt bovenstemzangers

als het ware op in het bovenstemzingen, maakt hen ermee vertrouwd, en de praktijk in samenzangevenementen inspireert hen door het samen met een breder publiek te beoefenen in monumentale kerken, met medewerking van geoefende mannenkoren en organisten die bekendheid genieten in reformatorische kring. Net als in hoofdstuk 4 (over *150 Psalms*) blijkt ook hier: het frame van (immaterieel) cultureel erfgoed 'opent' psalmzang voor toe-eigening door een (relatief) divers publiek, waarin plaats is voor verschillende religieuze en seculiere toe-eigeningen tegelijkertijd.

In de hoofdstukken 3 tot en met 6 heb ik telkens de intenties en acties van toe-eigenaars als uitgangspunt genomen. Zij transformeren psalmzang volgens hun idealen en wereldbeelden, beïnvloed door hun herinneringen en (religieuze) achtergrond. Verschillende keren bleek echter al dat hun toe-eigening zich niet altijd voegt naar hun aanvankelijke intenties. Ze ervaren dat het feit dat ze een psalm toe-eigenen iets van ze vraagt, en ze verhouden zich vervolgens tot die ervaring. Eigenschappen van eerdere ritueel-muzikale toe-eigeningen dagen hen als het ware uit om bepaalde accenten te leggen in hun toe-eigening van psalmen. Ik stel de vraag: *Hoe worden hedendaagse ritueel-muzikale toe-eigeningen van psalmen in de Nederlandse en Vlaamse cultuur uitgedaagd door de toe-eigeningsgeschiedenis van psalmen, tegen de achtergrond van de 'transfer' en transformatie van religie?* Ik laat zien dat dat op drie manieren gebeurt, alsof toe-eigenaars drie vragen wordt gesteld als zij psalmen toe-eigenen: (1) hoe zul je je in je toe-eigening tot God richten, (2) hoe zul je de psalmen gezamenlijk uitvoeren, en (3) hoe zul je het leven contempleren, existentiële contemplatie vormgeven? Ik heb deze drie thema's, deze drie 'uitdagingen', niet geformuleerd vanuit een essentialistisch idee van wat psalmzang zou 'moeten' zijn, maar heb de plekken in mijn onderzoeksdata geanalyseerd waar bleek dat toe-eigenaars zélf blijk geven van de ervaring dat ze zich tot de geschiedenis van psalmzang zouden moeten verhouden op een bepaalde manier, dat ze zich uitgedaagd lijken te voelen. Vervolgens heb ik deze thema's geïnterpreteerd met academische literatuur over de receptiegeschiedenis van psalmen, waaruit bleek dat het alle drie heel gangbare thema's zijn in de toe-eigeningsgeschiedenis van psalmen – kort gezegd: het zingen tot God, het samen zingen van psalmen, en psalmzang als meditatieve oefening om te reflecteren op het leven (de eigen existentie en vragen over wat het betekent om 'goed' samen te leven). Wat dat betreft klinken in de ritueel-muzikale toe-eigeningen van psalmen echo's van oudere tradities van psalmzang. Tegelijk weerspiegelen de toe-eigeningen de hedendaagse cultuur die gekenmerkt wordt door expressief individualisme, (religieuze) diversiteit,

de erfgoedisering van religie en publiek bewustzijn van (en debat over) crises wereldwijd. Op die manier weten toe-eigenaars het psalmzingen relevant te maken in de hedendaagse culturele context. Ze maken ruimte voor deelnemers om hun individuele authenticiteit te uiten, voor de (religieuze) diversiteit van uitvoerenden en andere deelnemers, ze maken psalmen relevant door ze (ook) als cultureel erfgoed neer te zetten, en ze appelleren aan een breed gevoel dat psychologische, politieke, ecologische en andere crises om collectieve reflectie vragen. Echter, bij het evalueren van de toe-eigeningen constateer ik tegelijk dat de drie 'uitdagingen' (zie boven) gelaagder en genuanceerder geadresseerd hadden kunnen worden; dat de toe-eigeningsgeschiedenis van psalmen de bestudeerde toe-eigeningen uitdaagt om verder te gaan in het exploreren van de complexiteit van het adresseren van God, van collectieve uitvoering van psalmen, en van existentiële contemplatie. Dat zou allereerst de toe-eigeningen nog relevanter gemaakt hebben in de hedendaagse geïndividualiseerde, diverse en gesecculariseerde cultuur, en daarnaast nóg meer rechtgedaan hebben aan de toe-eigeningsgeschiedenis van psalmen (zie onder).

Conclusie

In hoofdstuk 8 beantwoord ik de hoofdvraag die deze studie wil beantwoorden, die luidde: *Hoe kunnen we ritueel-muzikale toe-eigeningen van Psalmen in de hedendaagse Nederlandse en Vlaamse cultuur begrijpen, tegen de achtergrond van de 'transfer' en 'transformation' van religie, en hoe kunnen we die evalueren?*

De ritueel-muzikale toe-eigeningen zijn *transfers* en transformaties van psalmzang, geleid door kunstenaars en evenementenorganisaties in de velden van de kunsten en van erfgoed. Zij 'doorontwikkelen' en verenigen religieuze (liturgische) en artistieke (concertante) uitvoeringstradities van psalmen. In hun toe-eigening refereren ze expliciet aan het religieuze (christelijke) verleden van de Nederlandse en Vlaamse cultuur. Dat doen ze met het gekozen repertoire (waaronder koormuziek, berijmde psalmen, andere liturgische teksten), de gekozen uitvoeringslocaties (waaronder kerken, concertzalen), en de uitvoeringsstijlen (waaronder koorzang, samenzang en orgelspel). Tegelijkertijd *framen* ze deze als cultureel erfgoed en als kunst, om psalmzang toegankelijk te maken voor een divers, gesecculariseerd publiek. In plaats van religieuze overtuigingen of religieuze gemeenschappelijkheid benadrukken ze de esthetische schoonheid van psalmzang, haar culturele waarde (als uitdrukking van een 'Nederlandse', 'Europese', 'Bible Belt'-cultuur of van een algemene menselijke beschaving), haar meditatieve kwaliteiten en/of politieke relevantie.

Dit past in een culturele context die gekenmerkt wordt door secularisatie, ontkerkelijking, individualisering en pluralisering, waarin praktijken die geworteld zijn in religieuze tradities zodanig transformeren dat esthetische kwaliteiten en culturele waarde belangrijker worden dan leerstellige aspecten. Tegen deze achtergrond vallen ritueel-muzikale toe-eigeningen van psalmen op drie manieren op: veel kunstenaars en organisatoren voelen zich uitgedaagd door tradities van (collectieve liturgische) psalmzang om zich in hun toe-eigening (1) tot God te richten, (2) collectieve participatie te versterken en (3) ruimte te maken voor existentiële contemplatie. Andere deelnemers (zoals concertbezoekers) beoordelen de uitvoeringen veelal ook in deze opzichten. De manieren waarop kunstenaars en organisatoren omgaan met deze drie uitdagingen passen veelal bij een gesecculariseerd, pluralistisch en geïndividualiseerd publiek. Het psalmzingen met Genemuiden Bovenstem vormt hierop een relatieve uitzondering, omdat deze uitvoeringen duidelijk uitdrukking geven aan manieren om God aan te spreken die gebruikelijk zijn in reformatorische contexten (onderdanig, met dankzegging), van collectieve uitvoering (langzame isometrische psalmzang) en existentiële contemplatie (wijzend op Gods verlossing van zonde en lijden). Desalniettemin dienen het frame van immaterieel cultureel erfgoed en de rituele opzet van collectieve zangevenementen buiten de zondagse liturgie ertoe een publiek te bereiken van zowel binnen als buiten reformatorische kerken, van mensen die zich niet noodzakelijkerwijs willen binden aan de reguliere (wekelijkse) eredienstpraktijken van lokale kerkgemeenschappen.

Volgens mijn evaluatie is een dergelijke 'openstelling' van psalmzang voor een divers publiek in overeenstemming met de ritueel-muzikale toe-eigeningsgeschiedenis van de psalmen. Die laat inderdaad diverse, genuanceerde, dubbelzinnige en zelfs contrasterende manieren zien om God aan te spreken (met dankbaarheid, lof, klacht, verwijt), van collectieve uitvoering (met verschillende configuraties van groepen, koren en solisten die het 'lyrische ik' en 'wij' uit de Psalmen uitdrukken), en existentiële contemplatie (gericht op onrecht, verlossing, lijden, hoop).

Ik stel echter dat de geschiedenis van de toe-eigening van psalmen artiesten en andere deelnemers uitdaagt om deze nuances en dubbelzinnigheden nog meer te erkennen dan ze al doen. Door verdergaand te laten zien dat het adresseren van God niet (enkel) een volmondig geloof in God hoeft te behelzen, zouden de toe-eigeningen (nog) verder uitgestegen kunnen hebben boven een binair denken over 'geloof versus ongeloof'. Door verder te verkennen dat er allerlei, gelaagde manieren zijn om alleen en samen deel te nemen aan psalmzang zonder per definitie een homogene religieuze gemeenschap te (moeten)

vormen, zouden de toe-eigeningen verder uitgestegen kunnen hebben boven veronderstelde tegenstellingen tussen religieuze gemeenschappelijkheid en individuele autonomie. En door diepgaander te onderzoeken hoe de grote, soms tegenstrijdige existentiële thema's uit de psalmen (zoals dankbaarheid, onrechtvaardigheid, verlossing, ontheemding, thuiskomst, schuld, euforie) elkaar niet hoeven uit te sluiten maar tegelijkertijd bezongen kunnen worden, zouden de toe-eigeningen nog verder uitgestegen kunnen hebben boven binair denken over 'hoop op God versus het serieus nemen van lijden en onrecht'.

Wellicht spelen beelden en herinneringen die toe-eigenaars hebben van liturgische psalmzang hier een rol, namelijk dat psalmzang een geloof in (of onderwerping aan) God zou verlangen, dat participatie aan collectieve psalmzang het conformeren aan een geloofsgemeenschap zou betekenen, en dat het bezingen van onrecht en lijden in liturgische psalmzang hoort op te lossen in een lofzang op Gods redding. Of deze beelden rechtdoen aan de realiteit van psalmzang in liturgische contexten of niet, ze lijken een rol te spelen in ritueel-muzikale toe-eigeningen van psalmen, wanneer toe-eigenaars hun toe-eigening beschouwen als een voortzetting van óf breuk met het psalmzingen in het religieuze verleden van Nederland en Vlaanderen. Kortom, hoewel religieuze en seculiere betekenissen veelal met elkaar gepaard gaan in de ritueel-muzikale toe-eigening van psalmen, lijkt er tegelijk nog een onderscheid te worden gemaakt door voornamelijk organisatoren en kunstenaars tussen religieuze en seculiere psalmzang, als het aankomt op het adresseren van God, collectieve participatie in psalmzang, en contemplatie rond existentiële thema's.

In dat opzicht weerspiegelen de bestudeerde ritueel-muzikale toe-eigeningen van psalmen het huidige culturele moment, waarin psalmzang (nog) deel uitmaakt van de herinneringen die generaties hebben aan de kerk die ze hebben verlaten of waar ze juist zijn gebleven. Met de voortdurende ontkerkelijking zullen toekomstige generaties mogelijk minder bepaald worden door (hun eigen) herinneringen aan kerkelijke psalmzang. Mogelijk zullen in toekomstige ritueel-muzikale toepassingen religieuze en seculiere dimensies van psalmzang verder vervagen. Anderzijds: wellicht zorgt afnemende vertrouwdheid met kerkelijkheid juist voor versterking van stereotype beelden van liturgie en kerkelijkheid.

Bijdrage van dit onderzoek

Dit onderzoek draagt bij aan de bestudering van de erfgoedisering van religieuze praktijken en de bestudering van ritueel-muzikale toe-eigeningen van religieuze praktijken. Het laat zien dat de erfgoedisering van religieuze praktijken het een divers publiek mogelijk maakt om deel te nemen en betekenis te geven aan de praktijk. Het (kerkelijk) verleden van toe-eigenaars blijkt daarin wel een rol te spelen: zij zetten dat verleden bijvoorbeeld voort of zetten zich ertegen af, vooral als het aankomt op het aanroepen van God in psalmzang, het collectieve deelnemen aan psalmzang, en in contemplatie op existentiële thema's.

Religieantropoloog Birgit Meyer stelt dat de erfgoedisering van religie gepaard kan gaan met nieuwe vormen van exclusie, wanneer namelijk 'christelijk' niet zozeer meer een religieuze, maar een culturele of etnische aanduiding wordt om (niet-witte) immigranten (vaak moslims) uit te sluiten. De 'openheid' van het erfgoedframe draagt dan een nieuwe geslotenheid in zich. In ritueel-muzikale toe-eigeningen van psalmen lijkt dat niet zozeer aan de orde en krijgt (etnische, religieuze) diversiteit veelal een plek. Tegelijk worden de christelijke en soms ook de joodse wortels van psalmzang regelmatig verbonden aan Europese, Westerse of Nederlandse 'beschaving'.

In vergelijking met de ritueel-muzikale toe-eigening van andere in christelijke tradities gewortelde praktijken (passiespelen, Requiem, en in enige mate ook Choral Evensong) laten de toe-eigeningen van psalmen een vergelijkbare nadruk op (religieuze) diversiteit zien. In het geval van psalmen gaat dat relatief gemakkelijk, omdat die al vele eeuwen een plek hebben in verschillende uitvoeringstradities in verschillende religies. Andere opvallende kenmerken zijn dat de toe-eigeningen van psalmen weliswaar óók een nadruk op (muzikale) schoonheid laten zien, maar dat die het vaker mag ontgelden als het lijden, het onrecht en de wanhoop uit de psalmen aan de orde zijn (*Psalm 151* is hiervan het duidelijkste voorbeeld). Verder onderscheiden de toe-eigeningen van psalmen zich doordat organisatoren en kunstenaars zich uitgedaagd voelen om te zoeken naar collectieve uitvoering van psalmzang, zeker in de Nederlandse context, waar psalmen zo verbonden zijn met de samenzangtradities van berijmde psalmen.

Suggesties voor vervolgonderzoek

Ik doe in deze dissertatie enkele suggesties voor vervolgonderzoek. Allereerst noem ik dat er nog andere toe-eigeningen van psalmen zijn die buiten het bestek van deze studie vielen, waaronder vele recente voorbeelden in kerkelijke sfeer. Ook daarin verhouden toe-eigenaars zich tot de toe-eigeningsgeschiedenis van psalmen, worden zij beïnvloed door culturele trends, en proberen zij daarin een balans te vinden als zij het psalmzingen doorontwikkelen. Onderzoek naar deze voorbeelden kan laten zien hoe, in deze toe-eigeningen, nieuwe stijlen gepaard gaan met veranderende theologieën en welke instituties, netwerken en (digitale) platforms een rol spelen in de verspreiding ervan.

Daarnaast zou vervolgonderzoek een andere focus kunnen hebben dan dit onderzoek, bijvoorbeeld door meer oog te hebben voor de beleidskant van de toe-eigeningen (subsidiebeleid omtrent de gewenste religieuze/seculiere inhoud, culturele diversiteit, of maatschappelijke relevantie van de uitvoeringen) of voor de toe-eigening van psalmen in de digitale wereld (online verspreiding, online netwerken van fans, virtuele psalmzang zoals tijdens de COVID-19-pandemie).

Praktische implicaties en slotwoord

Voor uitvoerenden van psalmzang, toe-eigenaars dus, laat dit onderzoek zien wat de relevantie van psalmzang in de hedendaagse cultuur kan zijn, die gekenmerkt wordt door grote (religieuze) diversiteit, expressief individualisme, een hang naar betoverende schoonheid en verstillings, en een breed gevoelde nood om (wereldwijde) crises te adresseren. Ook toont deze studie de veelzijdigheid van psalmzang in verschillende vormen van aanroepen van God, individuele en gemeenschappelijke psalmzang en existentiële contemplatie. Tegelijk daagt mijn evaluatie van de toe-eigeningen ook andere toe-eigenaars uit om te reflecteren op vragen als: doet jouw toe-eigening recht aan de ambigue, gelaagde, complexe manieren in de psalmen om God aan te roepen? Hoe balanceer je tussen gemeenschap en individu in collectieve psalmzang? Hoe doe je recht aan de verschillende existentiële toonaarden in de psalmen?

Telkens weer voelen mensen zich uitgedaagd door de psalmen: “Zing een nieuw lied!” Een lied dat de geleefde, eigen realiteit weerspiegelt en tegelijk hoopvol boven die realiteit uit zingt. In de hedendaagse postseculiere en post-christelijke Nederlandse en Vlaamse cultuur blijkt dat een lied te zijn dat (opnieuw) verkent wat het betekent om, ook na 'de dood van God', al dan niet tot God te zingen, alleen of met anderen, en wat het betekent om het leven te bezingen in alle vreemde toonaarden die het rijk is.

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Marie, you already seem to understand that love doesn't need words. Nevertheless, I can't wait to hear you sing your song. Please let me accompany it for a while. Thank you for opening my eyes again for the fragile beauty of the world.

Curriculum Vitae

Henk Vogel was born on 9 July 1992 in Leens, Netherlands. In 2010, he completed secondary education at the Reformed (liberated) Gomarus College in Groningen. He obtained a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Groningen in 2016, studying Dutch Language and Culture. Meanwhile, he became active as a composer and (amateur) performer of church music. He continued his studies at Utrecht University with a research master's degree in Dutch Literature and Culture. His master's thesis dealt with the construction of imagined and embodied communities in the (liturgical) celebrations of the Protestant Reformation's Tercentenary (1817). Subsequently, from 2018, he started his PhD research at the Protestant Theological University in Amsterdam (Practical Theology Department). From 2022, he started working at the Dominican Convent in Zwolle, where he programmes a wide variety of activities, including concerts, lectures, guided tours, group meditations, meals, reading groups and (creative) workshops.

Henk is married to Hilde de Jong. Together with their daughter Marie (2024) they live in Amersfoort.

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Psalmody, the (collective) performance of Psalms, is taking on new forms and meanings in the secularized, postsecular, and post-Christian cultures of the Netherlands and Flanders. Having occupied an important place in the Low Countries' religious pasts, psalmody continues to live on, inside religious contexts and in other domains, such as the arts and cultural heritage. Psalmody is increasingly being reinvented by artists and cultural creators.

This dissertation is a study of these ritual-musical appropriations of Psalms. Empirical investigation of four different case studies through the use of ethnographic methods forms the basis of this study. These cases are: the festival *150 Psalms*, *Genemuider Bovenstem* collective psalmody, the poetry project *Poesia Divina*, and *Psalm 151*, a project with new poetry and new music. It appears that, as heritage, psalmody allows for plural appropriations in which religious and secular meanings become blurred as appropriating (groups of) individuals explicitly and freely play with symbols and rituals from different religious and secular (concert) traditions. At the same time, this study shows that, in their appropriation, individuals often feel invited or challenged by traditions of (collective) psalmody. In their appropriation, they feel challenged to address God, to enhance or evoke collective performance, and to make room for existential contemplation.

This empirical research offers further academic theorization about the meaning of heritage rooted in religion, in this case performed Psalms, especially in a post-Christian cultural context in which religious past psalmody once occupied a central place. For practitioners of psalmody, this research shows both the versatility of psalmody and the different ways that psalmody fits into late-modern (secularized, pluralized, globalized) societies.

Henk Vogel studied Dutch Language and Culture (BA) at the University of Groningen and Dutch Literature and Culture (RMA) at Utrecht University. He wrote this dissertation at the Protestant Theological University.