

Sing after God a New Song

Ritual–Musical Appropriations of Psalms in Dutch Culture between 1990–2020¹

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Abstract

In the Netherlands, traditional churches and religious institutions are losing ground, as is the case in the rest of western Europe. Religion changes and traditional religious forms migrate to other realms, sometimes to return to ecclesial contexts again. In this article, we present a research project on ritual-musical appropriations of psalms in contemporary Dutch culture. The concept of ritual-musical appropriations implies this is a social, and sometimes collective, process of meaning-making, which raises questions relating to formations of community, identity, and the power relations which structure and are structured by this very process.

Keywords

Psalms, ritual-musical appropriation, (collective) identity, power, contemporary culture

1 Introduction

In the Netherlands, traditional churches and religious institutions are losing ground, as is the case in the rest of western Europe. In October 2018, Statistics Netherlands (*Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek*) reported the ongoing decline in worship attendance in the Netherlands.² While the numbers differed, the same trend was visible in the decennial study ‘God in Nederland’, which mentioned the ongoing decline of allegiance to traditional Christian faith, church attendance, and church membership of the Dutch.³ While it might be that structures of traditional churches seem to slowly disappear, many practices rooted in traditional religion are still very alive, often (slightly) altered and appearing in new and unexpected contexts.⁴

1) Our research project is not confined to the psalms from Hebrew and Christian scriptures. Rather, we approach psalms as a cultural form. Some of these psalms are, indeed, translated scriptural psalms, but others use the word ‘psalms’ more freely as a reference to a (textual, musical, performance) style or genre.

2) “Meer dan de helft Nederlanders niet religieus,” *Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek*, last accessed December 18, 2019, <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2018/43/meer-dan-de-helft-nederlanders-niet-religieus>.

3) Ton Bernts and Joantine Berghuijs, *God in Nederland 1966-2015* (Utrecht: Ten Have, 2016), 219.

4) See also: W.B.H.J. van de Donk, A.P. Jonkers, G.J. Kronjee, R.J.J. Plum, *Geloven in het publieke domein* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006); Frans Jaspers, *Nieuwe religiositeit in Nederland* (Eindhoven: Uitgeverij Damon, 2009); Joep de Hart, *Zwevende Gelovigen* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2011).

It is this shift of traditional religious forms, the emergence of new forms of spirituality, and the increased (public) presence of mostly Islamic and Christian immigrants, which incite scholars of religion to argue that categories of ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ are at least problematic.⁵ According to Mirella Klomp et al., religion “is not as separate from identity and politics in Europe as it was previously assumed to be.”⁶

Mirella Klomp and Marcel Barnard have described this changing face of religion as a *transfer* and *transformation* of religion.⁷ Religious language, as well as religious practices have moved beyond the walls of institutional churches, have thereby changed with these new contexts and contents, and have altered the language and practice of the institutional churches as well.⁸ Approaches which, therefore, explore “the rearticulation of religion in specific contemporary settings” prove to be “far more productive than debates about the decline of religion or its withdrawal from the public sphere undertaken from the paradigm of secularization”, as Birgit Meyer claims, because they take into account this

5) See: Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

6) Mirella Klomp, Marten van der Meulen, Erin Wilson and Anita Zijdemans, “*The Passion as Public Reflexivity*,” *Journal of Religion in Europe* no. 11 (2018), 195-221, 205. In this respect, the authors refer to (among others): Benoît Challand, “From Hammer and Sickle to Star and Crescent,” *Religion, State and Society* 37, no. 1 (2009), 65-80; José Casanova, “Religion, European Secular Identities and European Integration,” in *Religion in an Expanding Europe*, edited by Timothy A. Byrnes and Peter J. Katzenstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 66; José Casanova, “The Secular and Secularisms,” *Social Research* 76, no. 4 (2009), 1058-1059; Lucian N. Leustean and John T.S. Madeley, “Religion, Politics and Law in the European Union: An Introduction,” *Religion, State and Society* 37, no. 1 (2009), 3-18; Lori Beaman, “Battles over Symbols,” *Journal of Law and Religion* 28, no. 1 (2013), 141-157; Jürgen Habermas, “Religion in the Public Sphere,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2006), 1-25; Ahmet T. Kuru, *Secularism and State Policies Towards Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) and Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

7) 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), 250. See also: Marcel Barnard, Johan Cilliers and Cas Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture* (= *Liturgia Condenda* 28) (Leuven: Peeters, 2014), 65; Mirella Klomp and Danie Veldsman, “After God But Behind the Cross: The Procession As a Way to Re-encounter God in a Culture Beyond Classical Liturgy,” *Studia Liturgica* 47 (2017), 15-29; Klomp et al., “*The Passion as Public Reflexivity*,” 201; Martin J.M. Hoondert, “The Interpretation and Experience of the Requiem in Contemporary Culture,” *Yearbook for Ritual and Liturgical Studies*, no. 31 (2015), 134; Erik Sengers (ed.), *The Dutch and their gods* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2005); Van de Donk et al., *Geloven in het publieke domein*.

8) Klomp and Veldsman, “After God,” 20-21. This last movement of practices moving back to traditional church and thus changing or influencing traditional liturgy is touched upon in Klomp and Barnard, “Sacro-Soundscapes,” 258.

increasing fluidity of (apparent) religious practices and traditions.⁹

The research we present here acknowledges this fluidity. While its object, the psalms, may appear as a traditional, canonical form of Jewish or Christian (liturgical) practice, we consider psalms as a ‘cultural form’ which flows in, from, and between ecclesial, congregational and cultural institutions and structures.¹⁰ Psalms appear in new forms and contexts, in churches, concert halls, festivals, and education settings. In some cases, completely new poems and compositions are written and explicitly labelled as ‘psalms’. Approaching the psalms as a cultural form which travels in and between different cultural realms, automatically goes “beyond church-centered liturgical, catechetical, congregational, pastoral studies”, and traditional hymnology.¹¹ For this, we need theoretical concepts, which can serve our understanding of a travelling cultural form such as psalms.¹²

Our research is being conducted by Henk Vogel in the context of a PhD project, initiated in October 2018, which is embedded in the Research Program ‘Practices of faith in socio-cultural networks’ of the Protestant Theological University (PThU), Amsterdam.¹³ It is supervised by prof. dr. Marcel Barnard and dr. Mirella Klomp. In this article, we present the design of the research. We will first sketch the diversity and breadth of music traditions and ritual-musical appropriations of the psalms in Dutch culture (2). Thereafter, we will present the research question (3), methods (4), conceptual backgrounds (5), and conclude with some final remarks (6).

2 The psalms in Dutch culture

Before we discuss new appropriations of psalms (2.2 and 2.3), we will sketch in a few broad strokes the history of various traditions of Christian psalm singing in the Low Countries (2.1), which are ritual-musically appropriated, or which influence this process at least. The year 1990 is in this respect a limit to the scope of this study, which is arbitrary but which we choose for the sake of clarity.

2.1 Traditions of the psalms in the Netherlands until 1990

In the Netherlands, the general understanding of ‘psalm music’ might well be the congregational singing of metrical psalms (with organ accompaniment). Dutch culture is deeply influenced by Calvinism, and in early Calvinism, the congregational singing of psalms was pleaded for and practiced, instead of

9) Birgit Meyer (ed.), *Aesthetic Formations: Media, Religion, and the Senses* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1, 17-18. See also: Manuel A. Vásquez, *More than Belief. A Materialist Theory of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3.

10) For the notion of ‘cultural form’ see: Hoondert, “The Interpretation and Experience of the Requiem,” 134.

11) Klomp and Barnard, “Sacro-Soundscapes,” 241-242.

12) Klomp and Barnard, “Sacro-Soundscapes,” 242.

13) See for full research program description: Protestants Theological University, “Practices Research Program,” last accessed December 18, 2019, <https://www.pthu.nl/Onderzoek-PThU/Practices/onderzoeksprogramma-practices.pdf>.

(exclusive) choir music in liturgy.¹⁴ Thus, already in the first half of the 16th century, metrical translations of the entire biblical Psalter to the vernacular saw the light.

The Genevan Psalter, initiated by John Calvin in 1539, remained for centuries the exclusively permitted repertoire for liturgical music in Calvinist churches in the Netherlands.¹⁵ The first complete translation into Dutch by Petrus Dathenus' (1566) quickly gained popularity and was ordained the standard translation for liturgical use in the Dutch Reformed Church from 1618 until 1773, despite stylistic critiques and many subsequent alternative translations.¹⁶ Mennonites also sang Dathenus' translations but used other versions as well.¹⁷

In 1773, a new translation was delivered. This translation has had great influence on Dutch language and culture and holds a prominent place in (national) cultural memory. The *Psalmen en Gezangen voor den Eredienst der Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk* (1938) still contained this translation. In 1967, the *Gereformeerde Kerk in Nederland* and *Nederlands Hervormde Kerk* replaced the 1773 translation with a new translation, which also found its way to the *Liedboek voor de Kerken* (1973), which was the (main) official hymnal of the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*, *Gereformeerde Kerk in Nederland*, Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Mennonite (*Doopsgezinde*) Society and the Remonstrant Brotherhood. Since then, other translations have been published but have not yet replaced this one.¹⁸

The first Lutheran psalms (and other hymns) were published in the *Bonner Gesangbuch* (1565), and later translated into Dutch by Willem van Haecht in 1579. Many later Dutch Lutheran hymnals still contained psalms in this fashion, based on Lutheran hymn tunes mostly from Germany.¹⁹ This changed when in the *Zwanenbundel* (1944) not the entire Psalter was included but only a selection of psalms, divided over all rubrics, and, strikingly, with Genevan melodies.²⁰ When in 1952 the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Restored (*Herstelde*) Evangelical Lutheran Church merged again, this new situation

14) Ellen Krol, "Dutch," in *Imagology. The cultural construction and literary representation of national characters*, edited by Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 142-145.

15) Pieter Endedijk, "De doopsgezinde traditie," in *Het kerklied*, edited by Jan Luth, Jan Pasveer and Jan Smelik (Zoetermeer: Mozaïek, 2001), 291-325, 305; Joop Boendermaker, Hans Jansen and Hans Mudde, "De lutherse traditie," in *Het kerklied*, edited by Jan Luth, Jan Pasveer and Jan Smelik (Zoetermeer: Mozaïek, 2001), 165-215, 209.

16) Jan Luth and Jan Smelik, "De calvinistische traditie," in *Het kerklied*, edited by Jan Luth, Jan Pasveer and Jan Smelik (Zoetermeer: Mozaïek, 2001), 217-289, 228-232.

17) Endedijk, "De doopsgezinde traditie," 296, 306, 308-310. During the 19th century, however, most psalms disappeared from Mennonite repertoire, and only a few remained in 20th century Mennonite songbooks. See: Endedijk, "De doopsgezinde traditie," 311, 316.

18) Luth and Smelik mention a few. See: Luth and Smelik, "De calvinistische traditie," 279.

19) See for an overview: Boendermaker, Jansen and Mudde, "De lutherse traditie," 209-211.

20) Ulrike Hascher-Burger, "Liedboeken en kerkzang," in *400 jaar Lutherse Kerk Haarlem*, edited by Arno Fafié, Tony Lindijer, Alice Nederkoorn (Haarlem: Spaar en Hout, 2015), 153-162, 155. This hymnal was not an official Lutheran hymnal but was used by many Lutheran congregations. It contained 45 Genevan psalms, of which 35 are of the 1773 translation.

required a new hymnal, which led to the publication of the *Gezangboek der Evangelisch-Lutherse Kerk* (1955). This hymnal contained both Lutheran and Genevan psalms (the 1773 translation).²¹ This translation was already considered outdated, but an ecumenical replacement had not yet been completed. In 1973, the *Liedboek voor de Kerken* was published, which contained a new translation of the complete Genevan Psalter but also a selection of Lutheran psalms.

As the ecumenical Liturgical Movement was interested in liturgical forms from early Christianity, non-metrical and responsorial ways of psalm singing in the vernacular came to the fore as congregational musical form, and flourished even more because of the larger liturgical role which Roman-Catholic parishes obtained after Vaticanum II.²² Already in the early 1960s, poets like Huub Oosterhuis or Michel van der Plas, and composers Bernard Huijbers created liturgical psalms with verses (choir) and refrains (parish). They were inspired by the psalms of Joseph Gelineau but also by Gregorian chant melodies.²³ Even more reminiscent of Gregorian chant are the psalms of Ignace de Sutter and Marcel Weemaes, the *Abdijboek* project (initiated in 1967 and used in monasteries, parishes and also Protestant congregations), and those from the collaborative work of translator Pieter Oussoren and composer Gert Oost, who also created psalms in the idiom of Anglican chant.²⁴

Another musical idiom with great influence on Protestant, mostly Calvinist, liturgical practice, is the popular idiom of *Opwekking* songs from Evangelical and Pentecostal traditions. Through *Opwekking* CD's, the large *Opwekking* festival and, of course, internet, *Opwekking* songs have entered Reformed liturgical practice. Some *Opwekking* songs are psalm translations and are included on a special *Psalmen in Opwekking* CD.²⁵

Songs from Taizé have also found their way into both Roman-Catholic, Protestant, and even Evangelical liturgies. The same is true of most of the other traditions we have described; Gregorian, neo-Gregorian chant, other responsorial forms, and Genevan and Lutheran psalms are, to give an indi-

21) Hascher-Burger, "Liedboeken en kerkzang," 156.

22) The Old Catholic Church (*Oud-Katholieke Kerk*), combined Gregorian chant with Dutch lyrics already at the beginning of the 18th century. See: Koenraad Ouwens, "De Nederlandse oud-katholieke traditie," in *Het kerklied*, edited by Jan Luth, Jan Pasveer and Jan Smelik (Zoetermeer: Mozaïek, 2001), 99-122, 100, 113.

23) Martin Hoondert, "De rooms-katholieke traditie circa 1550-2001," in *Het kerklied*, edited by Jan Luth, Jan Pasveer and Jan Smelik (Zoetermeer: Mozaïek, 2001), 43-97, 86; Marcel Weemaes, "Het psalmzingen in Vlaanderen na Vaticanum II," in *Psalmzingen in de Nederlanden*, edited by J. de Bruijn and W. Heijting (Kampen: Kok, 1991), 53-65. Another example of compositions in this idiom are those from the series *Cantatorium* (see: Hoondert, "De rooms-katholieke traditie," 91) and Stichting Cantoraat Oude Kerk, *Voor de kinderen van Korach* (Amsterdam, 1987-1999).

24) Hoondert, "De rooms-katholieke traditie," 90; Pieter Oussoren and Gert Oost, *De stem van David* (Voorburg: PSBB, 1989). For more examples and backgrounds of Anglican chants in the Netherlands see: Hanna Rijken, 'My Soul Doth Magnify.' *The Appropriation of the Anglican Choral Evensong in the Netherlands* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2017), 45-55.

25) Eric Lagerström, *Psalmen in Opwekking* (Oisterwijk: Stichting Ecovata, 2010).

cation, included in hymnals like the Roman-Catholic *Gezangen voor Liturgie* (1996) and the Protestant *Liedboek* (2013), which is used in the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, Mennonite Society, Remonstrant Society, Liberal Community of Faith NPB, Netherlands Reformed Churches, and Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated).

During the last two decades, the psalms from (mostly) this diversity of traditions have been appropriated in a variety of contexts. We will illustrate this diversity of ritual-musical manifestations of the psalms below. Although we group the cases according to the primary context in which they appear, by no means do we want to suggest that ecclesial contexts are isolated from broader cultural fields, or that appropriations of the psalms in ecclesial contexts (2.2) are, for instance, more ritual in character than appropriations beyond the ecclesial domain (2.3).²⁶

2.2 Appropriations in ecclesial contexts

As we already mentioned, the Genevan Psalter has deeply influenced Dutch culture and is repeatedly re-appropriated. One Genevan Psalter tradition which reaches new contexts is the *Genemuider bovenstem*: a practice of descant singing by tenors to Genevan psalms. The tradition has roots in at least the 19th century and was added to the list of intangible cultural heritage of UNESCO in 2013.²⁷ While, originally, the *Genemuider bovenstem* is a practice of singing in strictly orthodox Calvinist liturgy, a shift can be seen to the context of concerts where the audience is invited to sing along.

In recent years, several projects were initiated to rework the Genevan psalm tradition. There is *De Nieuwe Psalmberijming* ('The New Psalms Translation'), presenting new translations of complete biblical Psalms to the existing Genevan melodies on a website, where it provides sheets for projection during church services and audio recordings of organ accompaniments as well.²⁸ Another translation project in this vein is *Levensliederen* ('Songs of Life'), but this project presents video recordings of several psalms in a more popular idiom.²⁹ Notable in this respect is also *The Psalm Project*, which com-

26) Klomp and Barnard, "Sacro-soundscapes," 258.

27) Kenniscentrum Immaterieel Erfgoed Nederland, "Bovenstemzingen bij psalmen in Genemuiden," last accessed December 18, 2019, <https://www.immaterieelerfgoed.nl/nl/bovenstemzingen>.

28) *De Nieuwe Psalmberijming*, last accessed December 18, 2019, <http://www.denieuwepsalmberijming.nl/>. There is also the Genevan psalm translation by C.J. Meeuse intended for use in orthodox Calvinist churches, but outside Sunday liturgies, where, in most cases, the 1773 translation is used. See: Jaco van der Knijff, "Ds. C.J. Meeuse: Ik wil met mijn berijming geen onrust zaaien," *Reformatorisch Dagblad*, last modified June 6, 2011, last accessed December 18, 2019, <https://www.rd.nl/kerk-religie/ds-c-j-meeuse-ik-wil-met-mijn-berijming-geen-onrust-zaaien-1.617378>. Another example is the translation of Jan Mul, intended for use in church services. See: Jaco van der Knijff, "Jan Mul brengt Geneefse psalmen in eigentijdse taal," *Reformatorisch Dagblad*, last modified June 23, 2017, last accessed December 18, 2019, <https://www.rd.nl/muziek/jan-mul-brengt-geneefse-psalmen-in-eigentijdse-taal-1.1410978>.

29) "Levensliederen," *Vuurbaak*, last accessed December 18, 2019, <http://www.levensliederen.net/>.

bines (often well-known) strophes from existing translations of the Genevan Psalter (of both the 1773 and 1967 translations) with new refrains, verses, and bridges.³⁰ Sometimes, the Genevan melodies are slightly altered.³¹ The combination of (strophes of) well-known Genevan psalms (such as Psalm 62, 72, 139, 146, and 150) makes it seem that *The Psalm Project* is aimed at a public, which is familiar with this tradition. *The Psalm Project* provides its public and fellow (church) musicians with video and CD recordings, and freely downloadable sheet music. In this same idiom, there is the *Psalmen voor Nu* project: new psalm translations with new composed music, which are also presented on CD's.³² *Psalmen voor Nu* contains translations of biblical Psalms in their entirety, while *The Psalm Project* only chose (well-known) fragments.

In the late 1990s, theologian Niek Schuman (1936-2018) observed a growing interest for non-strophic and non-metrical psalms, as both Roman-Catholics and Protestants rediscovered the Liturgy of Hours.³³ This trend is reflected in the Protestant Service Book (*Dienstboek*, 1998) but also in the more recent *Psalter, gregoriaans en chants* (2006) and *Heel mijn ziel* (2012), which both provided antiphons and recitation tones (unison) next to Anglican chant harmonizations for the use in vespers, evensong, and Sunday morning services.³⁴ Also, several books containing new antiphons for the introit psalms from the *Dienstboek* (1998) were published.³⁵

While the examples listed above are mainly intended for use in ecclesial contexts, most of them also participate in broader networks: they can be heard in concerts, TV shows (such as *Nederland Zingt*), video and CD recordings, and, of course, on the internet.³⁶ In these contexts, the term 'psalms' refer to the biblical corpus of 150 psalms and (strophic) translations (some quite freely) thereof. The examples below clearly appear, however, beyond the context of (traditional) religious institutions. In

30) *The Psalm Project*, last accessed December 18, 2019, <https://thepsalmproject.nl/>.

31) See for example: "The Psalm Project – Mijn ziel is stil tot God (psalm 62)", *YouTube*, last accessed December 18, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wFT8EwmKYA4>.

32) "Home," *Psalmen voor Nu*, last accessed December 18, 2019, <http://www.psalmenvoornu.nl/>.

33) Niek Schuman, "De Psalmen," in *De weg van de liturgie*, edited by Paul Oskamp and Niek Schuman (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Meinema, 1998), 165-175, 165.

34) Arie Schilling, Jo Kapteyn, Wiebe Tilstra, *Psalter, gregoriaans en chants* (Haarlem: Nederlands Bijbelgenootschap, 2006); Nico Vlaming and Christiaan Winter, *Heel mijn ziel. Nieuwe psalmen voor kerk en koor* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2012), 'voorwoord'.

35) For example: Wim Kusee, *Antifonen bij het Dienstboek* (Gorinchem: Narratio, 2004); Pieter Endedijk, "Introïtusantifoon," *Liedboek Compendium*, last accessed December 18, 2019, <https://www.liedboekcompendium.nl/overzichtsartikel/9-intro-tusantifoon>.

36) Videos with the *bovenstem*, for example, have impressive viewer rates on *YouTube*. See for example: 'Psalm 42, vers 1,3 en 5 vers 1 en 5 bovenstem Sint Maartenskerk Zaltbommel', *YouTube*, published on June 25, 2015, last accessed December 18, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yd7HzRu2gCQ> (more than a million views). There are also numerous recording projects with (ad hoc) congregations singing the Genevan Psalms, in different translations. See for example: "Home," *PsalmenProject*, last accessed December 18, 2019, <http://www.psalmenproject.nl/>.

some of these, the term ‘psalm’ is also used for new texts (nonbiblical psalms).

2.3 Appropriations beyond the ecclesial domain in recent decades

In September 2017, the Netherlands Chamber Choir organized an anniversary festival with musical performances of all 150 biblical Psalms, and emphasized the thematic universality of these texts, stating that

Both Christians and Jews have found inspiration and hope in the Psalms, and the Koran also refers to them as holy scripture. The themes found in the Psalms are equally universal: loss, compassion, consolation and hope. (...) *150 Psalms* regards the Psalms as a mirror of society: great themes from 3,000 years ago are still relevant today.³⁷

The psalms sung at this festival had roots in many different traditions but were brought together in a series of concerts in a concert hall. The musical performances by world-leading professional choirs were introduced by literary authors, who discussed the relevance of psalms today, just as art installations and provocative questions stuck to walls, pavements and streets were intended to do. Background information by theologian Gerard Swüste also underlined the (political) relevance. The 150 Psalms were divided over 12 concerts, with 12 different themes, such as ‘suffer’, ‘trust’, ‘gratitude’, ‘power and suppression’, and ‘feast’. In this project, psalms were used to refer, or even discuss, geopolitical issues such as immigration, globalization, warfare, and climate change.

Some other projects are primarily committed to the conservation of musical traditions which are threatening to disappear. One example is the *Psalterium Project*, which claims that one of the oldest traditions of Christian psalm singing, Gregorian chant, is disappearing from culture and liturgy. This project is a recording project aimed at conservation of musical heritage, inspired by a project by St. Paul’s Cathedral Choir and John Scott, with Anglican chant recordings of all 150 Psalms.³⁸

While the *Psalterium Project* seems to be primarily focused on the loss of musical beauty, others refer more explicitly to the psalm heritage as relevant for a collective identity. The *Sweelinck Monument*, for instance, presents Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck as a Dutch national hero. This large recording project of the complete works of Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck consists for the most part of choir pieces based on the Genevan psalter. According to the project’s website, Sweelinck’s *Psalms* are his “*Magnum Opus*, his life work”.³⁹ The *Sweelinck Monument* (hence its title) is a project which concerns

37) “150 Psalms,” *150 Psalms*, last modified March 7, 2017, last accessed December 18, 2019, <http://150Psalms.com/150-Psalms/>.

38) “Motivation,” *The Psalterium Project*, last accessed December 18, 2019, <http://www.psalmschant.com/motivation.html>.

39) “Deel II: Psalmen Davids,” *Het Sweelinck Monument*, last accessed December 18, 2019, <http://jpsweelinck.nl/deel-ii-psalmen-davids/>.

cultural, religious, or even national heritage.⁴⁰ Performances of the Gesualdo Consort Amsterdam appeared on Dutch television in several programs with performances of Sweelinck's *Psalms*, and Queen Beatrix received the first copy, in the Oude Kerk of Amsterdam.

All of these projects relate in a different manner to musical traditions and oeuvres. *150 Psalms* selected psalm compositions from a wide variety of contexts and asked some contemporary composers to compose new music to fill in the 'gaps in the program', as the aim was to include compositions by 150 different composers. The *Psalterium Project* explicitly aims to conserve heritage which functioned originally (mostly) in monastic contexts. In contrast, the *Sweelinck Monument* recorded music, which was originally not intended for liturgical use, but this recording project brought the attention of church choirs to Sweelinck's music, which now sing his settings of the psalms in liturgy, as well.⁴¹ These projects share, however, their approach to psalms: all projects are based on the complete biblical corpus of 150 Psalms.

Other projects are freer in their approach, as they use the term 'psalm' as a title for completely new music and texts. This is the case with the *Psalm 151* project of composer Boudewijn Tarenskeen and professional choir Cappella Amsterdam. Tarenskeen invited eight literary authors to write poems (nonbiblical psalms) which he would then set to music. Tarenskeen reflects more explicitly on the religious dimensions of the genre while discussing his own history with religion and belief:

After my inner iconoclasm, my reckoning with institutional belief, what remained for me was the religious music by geniuses like Gesualdo and Messiaen – an indestructible heritage. We, as current composers, have to develop a language which provides alternatives for the sacral musical gesture, which still is so dominant. In our striving for autonomy, we use styles that reach beyond the church walls. Liberated from ideologies we open windows and doors to the world.⁴²

40) Considering the Genevan Psalter as religious heritage, there is also the *allePsalmen* project of organist Sietze de Vries, who states that "the content and melodies of the Genevan Psalter have a timeless relevance and beauty." See: "Home," *AllePsalmen*, last accessed December 18, 2019, <https://allepsalmen.nl/>.

41) 'Over Sweelinck', *Het Sweelinck Monument*, last accessed December 18, 2019, <http://jpsweelinck.nl/over-sweelinck/>. Another heritage project is the *Clemens500* in Flanders. For this project, focused on composer Jacob Clemens non Papa (ca. 1510-ca. 1555), composers were invited to recompose his *Souterliedekens* ('Psalter songs') in such a way that children and professional singers could both take part, singing respectively easier and more difficult parts in these new compositions. These *Souterliedekens* (1540), originally set to folk tunes, were very popular in the Low Countries for more than a century. The *Clemens500* project not only aimed to commemorate Clemens non Papa but also to keep this musical heritage alive with educational programs. See for *Clemens500*: "Souterliedekens," *Clemens500*, last accessed December 18, 2019, <http://www.clemens500.be/souterliedekens.html>; and for more about the *Souterliedekens*: Luth and Smelik, "De Calvinistische traditie," 226; Endedijk, "De Doopsgezinde traditie," 296, 306, 308-310.

42) Boudewijn Tarenskeen, "De muziek," *Tetterettet, Psalm 151*, last accessed December 18, 2019, <http://www.tetterettet.net/producties/index.php/psalm151/117-demuziek>.

The text and music of *Psalms 151* are only related to the biblical corpus of Psalms or liturgical-musical psalms traditions on an abstract level but are nevertheless explicitly presented as psalms, although, as the title suggests, they are an addition to the 150 biblical Psalms.⁴³

A selection of this conglomerate of ritual-musical psalms practices and the meanings they engender is the subject of our study. Our research project aims to gain deeper insight into the meanings attributed to psalms as a musical, textual, and performative phenomenon in some of the specific contexts mentioned above. Why are composers, singers, festival directors, poets, writers, and audiences engaging with this old corpus? How do they do that? When is something a psalm to them, and why?

3 Research question

We summarize all these questions in our main research question:

How to understand the ritual-musical appropriation of Psalms in Dutch culture between 1990 and 2020 against the background of the transfer and transformation of religion?

The ritual-musical phenomenon of psalms is the starting point of our research and it defines our selection of cases: the term ‘psalm’ is used in a variety of musical contexts, but what does that mean for performers, audiences, creators, or whomever is involved?

With the transfer and transformation of religious forms and practices in mind, it is of interest how psalms participate in these processes. How are they appropriated and reshaped to fit new situations, and how do they, in their own right, shape these new situations? If God, or, at least, “the traditional thought of God, that is, a God as *Deus ex machina* in times of neediness” is dead, how can one understand the recurrence of practices, which are rooted in religion and sometimes explicitly presented *as such* in these new appropriations?⁴⁴

We think the notion of ‘the sacred’ is helpful for our understanding, as practices which are perhaps not religious *per se* can possibly engender meanings or experiences which can be typified as ‘sacred’ – when understood not “as an ontological category”, but as “a contingent, historically situated concept.”⁴⁵ We will elaborate on this notion in our conceptual background paragraph (5). But first, let us briefly elucidate our methodology.

43) The initiators of this project do not mention the 151st Psalm, found in most copies of the Septuagint. A comparable example in a Flemish context is the *Poesia Divina* project, which, since two consecutive years, invites poets to write new psalms, which are set to new music and sung in churches and monasteries during the *Musica Divina* festival. See: “Poesia Divina,” *Musica Divina*, last accessed December 18, 2019, <http://musica-divina.be/poesia-divina>.

44) Klomp and Veldsman, “After God,” 23.

45) Hoondert, “The Interpretation and Experience of the Requiem,” 145-146.

4 Methodology

This project investigates how people in particular contexts, and/or during specific events, engage in relationships with the psalms and aims to acknowledge the diversity of content, meanings and functions found in, and attributed to performances of the psalms. Our main concern is the subjective and intersubjective processes of meaning-making around psalms in events and/or projects. In our study, this large question is narrowed down to an intensive study of a number of case studies, in order to provide an answer by illuminating the depths and complexities of specific cases.

Ethnographic fieldwork is best suited to acknowledge these depths and complexities. As Hammersley and Atkinson point out, ethnographic research concerns “people’s actions and accounts (...) in everyday contexts”, which are studied in a rather “unstructured” manner.⁴⁶ The latter is because ethnographers are interested in people’s behavior and cultural patterns, which are both subject to constant change, and these changes are of interest as well. Hammersley and Atkinson also state that “human actions are based upon, or infused by, social or cultural meanings: that is, by intentions, motives, beliefs, rules, discourses, and values.”⁴⁷ Human actions create, in turn, new social and cultural meanings, and it is this complex process, which is studied in ethnographic research, often in local contexts.⁴⁸ A variety of ethnographic techniques will be deployed to study and analyze the narratives, artifacts, and practices that define the appropriation of psalms in specific contexts.

Interviews will be conducted with people who relate to the studied cases in different ways: they might be musicians, concertgoers, poets, composers, festival organizers, etc. In these open-ended interviews, people will be asked how they describe, interpret and value the event they participated in. So, narrativized experiences of the ritual-musical event are the starting point of the conversation. As these events themselves thematize the psalms, interviewees are invited to reflect on that. Observations and interpretations of texts, sounds, artifacts, space, and practices around the event are all of possible interest for the interview – whatever occurs as meaningful to the collaborative interpretation during the conversation – especially when these concern the psalms. Transcriptions of these interviews will be made and these will be coded and consulted repeatedly, in order to create a theory, grounded in the data.

The data for this project will consist of ethnographic field notes, interview transcripts, and textual sources (psalm texts, advertising texts, program notes, website announcements, etc.), each of which demand different methods for analysis. Both respondent and method triangulation will serve as a strategy to do justice to this multi-layered phenomenon. The aim is to construct theories, which are complex and stable enough to be able to accommodate new data.

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

47) Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 7.

48) Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 3.

5 Concepts

Making use of these ethnographic methods, we interpret and theorize the ritual-musical events and the narratives they ignite. Below we summarize the conceptual framework to this approach. First, we provide the conceptual backgrounds for approaching contemporary musical performances of psalms as appropriative (5.1), ritual-musical (5.2) practices. How these practices themselves act on levels of identity (5.3) and community (5.4) formation, and by which power relations (5.5) they are shaped, is the topic of the subsequent conceptual paragraphs.

5.1 Appropriation

As became evident in the paragraph on psalms in Dutch culture (2), in many of the cases, melodic, textual, and/or performative aspects of psalm music traditions are transferred to new contexts. This might be understood against the background of the already noted transfer and transformation of religion, for which the notion of *appropriation* seems helpful for our understanding.

Historian Willem Frijhoff discussed the usefulness of appropriation as a heuristic device for the study of cultural ‘production’ and ‘reception’ when employing an approach which aims to avoid exactly this binary of passive reception versus active production of cultural goods, language, and practices.⁴⁹ He states that “reception of culture is, at the same time, production of culture. It is exactly this indivisible combination which constitutes appropriation as such.”⁵⁰ 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.⁵¹

The appearance of psalm music beyond the ecclesial domain might be understood as reflecting such processes of appropriation. These are, thus, processes of meaning attribution, making the ritual-musical practice of psalms acceptable, livable, bearable or even dignified in new socio-cultural contexts. In this process, traditional meanings of psalms might change or are even replaced by new meanings.

49) Willem Frijhoff, “Toeëigening: van bezitsdrang naar betekenisgeving,” *Trajecta* 6 (1997), 99-118, here 109-110. Frijhoff is mainly influenced by Michel de Certeau’s, *L’Invention du quotidien. I. Arts de faire* (Paris: Union Générale des Éditions, 1980). We are aware that, in recent (popular and academic) debates on cultural appropriation, the term denotes exploitative expropriation by powerful groups from marginalized groups. We do not disapprove with that particular use of the term, however, we use it more in a pluralistic manner. Without eschewing the (oppressive) power relations that (possibly) are at play, we start with studying the diversity of meanings that appear in appropriation processes.

50) Frijhoff, “Toeëigening,” 112.

51) Frijhoff, “Toeëigening,” 108.

One central traditional meaning of psalms is, for example, that they are *sacred music*. Often, psalm music is then understood as sacred music *in itself*. It might be, in a process of appropriation, that this label of *sacredness* persists, changes, or disappears. We approach the sacred, then, as a label, attached by participants of performances to their experience.⁵² Echoing Frijhoff, this attribution of ‘sacred’ to experiences paves the way for a bearer of meaning to become not only acceptable but dignified as well – thus, gaining special, sacred value. As we consider the ‘sacred’ a quality attributed to things or actions, it can be viewed as a process of valuation, as Lieke Wijnia regards it.⁵³ The sacred, then, is not confined to the religious domain but it is a value which can be attributed to whatever is perceived as something belonging to a special, ‘non-ordinary’ category.⁵⁴ Wijnia defines the sacred as follows: “the sacred is a marker of ultimate, non-negotiable value used as a sense-making strategy that relates perceptions of ordinary and non-ordinary character.”⁵⁵

How ritual-musical performances of psalms (the traditional ‘sacred’) and this interactional, situational ‘sacred’ relate to each other, and, perhaps, conflict with one another, is what we will study by analyzing actions and narratives of participants in these performances.⁵⁶ This might shed light on the process of transfer and transformation of psalms in the specific ritual-musical performances under study, as traditional meanings and functions of psalms will probably change, when these psalms are appropriated in other realms.

5.2 Ritual–musical performance

In this endeavor, we prefer approaches that consider music as a communicative social activity. Approaching music as a *thing*, an enclosed object, is unsuitable when analyzing the valuation processes as mentioned above. These processes of valuation do not only occur in the music score or musicians’ interpretations but also in the perceptions and reflections of whomever is involved in the musical performance.⁵⁷ Christopher Small famously pleads for thinking of music as social activity, by introducing the verb of ‘musicking’:

52) This is in line with Lieke Wijnia’s approach. See, for instance: Lieke Wijnia, *Making Sense through Music: Perceptions of the Sacred at Festival Musica Sacra Maastricht*, PhD dissertation, Tilburg University (2016), 7, available online: https://pure.uvt.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/16250328/wijnia_making_12_09_2016.pdf.

53) See: Wijnia, *Making Sense through Music*, 32-33, 38, 41-42.

54) See also: Klomp et al., “*The Passion as public reflexivity*,” 201; 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* 32, no. 3 (2017), 387-401, 388; Matthew T. Evans, “*The Sacred: Differentiating, Clarifying and Extending Concepts*,” *Review of Religious Research* 5, no. 1 (2003), 32-47, 35-36.

55) Wijnia, *Making Sense through Music*, 42. Original italics removed.

56) For ‘the situational sacred’ see: Wijnia, *Making Sense through Music*, 34-41.

57) See: Wijnia, *Making Sense through Music*, 45-46.

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), or by dancing.⁵⁸

In this line of thought, Wijnia defines music as “performed meaning through organized sound and silence”, which she elucidates by stating that

sounds and notes become music, because someone frames or perceives them as such. These perceptions result in, and are based on, the particular sequence and order music consists of. The ordering makes the individual sounds and notes relate to each other and to the frame they are put in. In turn, listeners relate in their own ways to the performed sounds and the artistic frame. The attribution of meaning is located in this act of relating, which in turn possibly may lead to a perception of sacred value.⁵⁹

Thus, with ‘performed meaning’, Wijnia does not consider music the expression of ideas but the outcome of a social process in which people perceive sound and silence as music because of a special social frame. This social frame encourages them to attribute meanings to the perceived sound and silence.

This social structure of action and perception which molds sound and silence into music, might well be understood with the lens of ritual studies, as ritual studies provide a rich vocabulary for the understanding of structured, meaningful human interaction. Our claim is not that musical performance is nothing but ritual, but we use the notion of ritual as a theoretical lens to understand how social interactions in and around musical performances engender meanings, and which actors (are allowed to) play which role in that possibly ritual interaction.⁶⁰ According to Catherine Bell, “intrinsic to performance is the communication of a type of frame that says ‘this is different, deliberate, and significant – pay attention!’”⁶¹ This is a frame which turns sound and silence into performed and/or perceived meaning.

One of the advantages of approaching music as a ritual performance with ethnographic methods, is that it acknowledges the role of the body in meaning-making processes. Mary McGann states that “the rich, holistic human knowing that takes place in ritual and music making is indeed *body-based*.”⁶² Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener agree:

58) Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 9.

59) Wijnia, *Making Sense through Music*, 45.

60) See also: Wijnia, *Making Sense through Music*, 49.

61) Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 160.

62) Mary McGann, “Liturgical Musical Ethnography. Challenges and Promise,” *Yearbook for Liturgical and Ritual Studies* no. 26 (2010), 83–98, 90. Italics original.

The body interprets the liturgical ritual. It cannot be approached only by mind. That also holds for the academic approach to liturgical ritual. Worship can no longer be investigated as text from behind a desk.⁶³

Observing, and participating in, the bodily interactions of musical performances can, therefore, enrich textual analyses of lyrics or descriptions of events. As we try to understand how meanings emerge around performances of the psalms, the body, as a pivotal aspect of (ritual-music) performance, should not be neglected.

Musicologist and anthropologist Georgina Born also recognizes music as a social activity but warns against thinking of ‘the social’ in ways which fail to pay attention to the heterogenic and dynamic nature of social formations. She provides us with a refined analytical framework for the study of the social in music and music in the social. She recognizes four ‘planes’ of social mediation, which interact and cannot be strictly separated but which are helpful when analyzing music and the social.⁶⁴ Musical practice is shaped by routines and (implicit) rules on these four different planes, but, reciprocally, musical practices influence these routines and rules as well.⁶⁵ The first plane she describes is the diversity of socialities around the immediate musical performance: “the intimate microsocialities of musical performance and practice, the social relations enacted in musical ensembles, and the musical division of labor.”⁶⁶ This first plane is rather similar to what we already described above when we elaborated on music as ritual practice. The other planes Born distinguishes resonate in the next paragraphs, as they concern: secondly, the power of music to “animate imagined communities, aggregating its listeners into virtual collectivities or publics based on musical and other identifications”; thirdly, the interaction of music with wider social identity formations of “class, race or ethnicity, gender or sexuality, nationality, or locality” and, for us, religion as well; and fourthly, the entanglement of music in “institutional forms that enable its production, reproduction, and transformation.”⁶⁷

5.3 Identity

Music can consolidate, create, and contest individual and collective identities and can, in Wijnia’s words, be used as a “cultural tool with which people actively manage their identities, environments,

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

64) “The point is that each – performance socialities, imagined communities, social identity formations, institutions – has an autonomy. By opening up each plane to enquiry, as well as their interrelations, they can be analyzed as contingent, as taking a variety of forms – and as the potential conduit for a politics.” Georgina Born, “Music and the Social,” in *The Cultural Study of Music. A Critical Introduction*, edited by Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert and Richard Middleton (New York: Routledge, 2012), 261-274, here 266.

65) Born, “Music and the Social,” 267.

66) Born, “Music and the Social,” 266.

67) Born, “Music and the Social,” 266-267.

and emotional states.”⁶⁸ We already described that appropriation is a process of meaning making by individuals and/or by collectives. In the process of all the differing individual appropriations, certain patterns can possibly be traced, but these apparent patterns of collective attribution of meanings to external ‘bearers of meanings’ take place in mutual modulation with “the quality of the listener, its attention”, and “memories and other associations through individual biographies.”⁶⁹ If we take Born’s warning of avoiding reductionism of the social collective seriously, we need to describe how individuals use music (performances) as a cultural tool, without simultaneously isolating the individual from the social formations, in which it engages.

Our research will, therefore, also concern itself with the interplay between the experiences of musical performances and the own and other’s identities these individuals try to manage in the context of “actual, imagined, or remembered” social relations.⁷⁰ Born draws a distinction between the planes of social identity and of community. They do, however, interact. Often, individuals derive parts of their social identity from communal participation, and music performances have the potency of imagining and embodying such sense of community.⁷¹

5.4 Community

In theorizing about community, the work of Benedict Anderson can hardly be overestimated. The notion of *imagined communities* has proven its worth in thinking about (the history of) nationalism, but the term is also referred to by Frijhoff on appropriation, by Born on music and the social, and by Meyer on the usefulness and shortcomings of the term when analyzing social formation and (religious) aesthetic experience.⁷²

Meyer emphasizes that community is “not a preexisting entity that expresses itself via a fixed set of symbols but a formation that comes into being through the circulation and use of shared cultural forms and that never is complete.”⁷³ Meyer proposes the notion of aesthetic formations instead, to underscore the *embodied*-aesthetic and *ongoing* formation of community.⁷⁴ This is helpful, as community might be experienced by some individuals for no longer than during the musical performance, or an organizing institution might envision a certain imagined community which contradicts the experience of some participants. Tensions between such intended community, experienced community, and

68) Wijnia, *Making Sense through Music*, 45. See also: Born, “Music and the Social,” 266-269.

69) Wijnia, *Making Sense through Music*, 45.

70) Wijnia, *Making Sense through Music*, 45.

71) Born, “Music and the Social,” 266.

72) In short, *imagined communities* are culturally constructed communities. With shared symbols and practices, collective traditions are ‘invented’ as a basis for collective identity. See: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1994).

73) Meyer, *Aesthetic Formations*, 4.

74) See Meyer, *Aesthetic Formations*, 7.

the interplay between more vast or looser social relationships need to be recognized in the analysis of ritual-musical performances and possible aesthetic formations.

Taking these possible tensions into account prevents the supposition that, for example, appropriations in a church service take place in more solid communities against appropriations a supposed ‘freer’ space of the concert hall. Instead, we want to maintain the openness of both social spaces while still paying attention to the (implicit) strategies, which institutions might conduct to influence social formation processes.

To what extent, however, participants in musical performances feel a part of possible social formations, and for how long, remains a question.⁷⁵ Wijnia states: “it remains debatable to which extent the participants experience a similar kind of collective ideal, or that this notion of the ideal needs to be understood in purely subjective terms.”⁷⁶ Institutions, organizers, musicians, audience members, or churchgoers might have ideals of collectivity, and perhaps even share them. But since we view appropriation as a social process, in which different actors can have different roles, it is of interest which actors have the power to take on which roles as well as the power to include or exclude others. Scrutinizing the possible discrepancies between ideals of community and experiences of community in ritual-musical performances of the psalms will bring a richer understanding of processes of appropriation.⁷⁷ This can be summarized as follows: who appropriates psalms, with whom, and who is included or excluded by whom in the process of appropriation?⁷⁸ This will be analyzed at the performance level (who is allowed to sing along, for example) but also at the level of the so-called *imagined community*: what kind of community do different actors *imagine*, and what are the power relations in these more abstract ideals of community?

5.5 Power

These last questions address issues of power, as certain appropriations will in one way or another be preferred or suppressed by institutions but also by ever-forming social formations. One more obvious example of this is the policy of churches when certain practices of psalm music are allowed or forbidden, while groups in a given church might protest or contest such a policy by singing forbidden music. More interesting, however, are the strategies or politics, which claim to be non-dogmatic or open, what we might call implicit strategies.

Deborah Kapchan, for instance, described how the organization of the *Fès Festival of World Sacred Music* uses ‘the sacred’ as a universal category instead of relying on dogma or religion. Neither dogmatic like-mindedness nor religious uniformity form a basis for a sense of unity or community, but aesthetic beauty functions as a universal category aimed to cover religious and socio-cultural dif-

75) See also: Wijnia, *Making Sense through Music*, 45-46.

76) Wijnia, *Making Sense through Music*, 47.

77) See also: Klomp et al., “The Passion as Public Reflexivity,” 199.

78) See also: Frijhoff, “Toeëigening,” 109.

ferences. According to Kapchan, this new (aesthetic) universality becomes a doxa in its own right, a certain ideology of all religion being the same, and, possibly, an ideology which depoliticizes religious differences or conflict.⁷⁹ Where difference or conflict are depoliticized, it raises the question if the appropriation is, indeed, an expropriation or disownment from marginalized or excluded groups, groups that are denied to participate.⁸⁰

Again, we argue for a ritual approach. Wijnia states that “ritual says something about the group performing it and about the ideas this group has concerning larger issues and questions in life. Ritual is not seen as representing, but rather as a realization of a particular idea or world.”⁸¹ In ritual, certain ideas and ideals are promised in performance, which might not only concern community as we have already discussed but also a certain worldview. Social relations and ideals are enacted and, thus, embodied in performance. Whether ritual participants recognize themselves in this, or if this really influences their behavior or worldview is, surely, another question.⁸²

The political dimension is related to the dimension of social formation around performance but comprises, more specifically, a changed perception of the world, which organizers and/or participants (wish to) experience. Of course, before, during, and after performances, participants have different worldviews, but a ritual performance is able to enact, encourage, or challenge certain ideological worldviews more than others. Practices can exercise propagandistic power and influence people’s theologies as well.⁸³ By interviewing participants about these worldviews or even theologies, they become “primary theologians” as David Mellott suggested for research which combines ethnography and (practical) theology.⁸⁴

6 Concluding remarks

We will study the appropriation of psalms in Dutch culture with ethnographic methods in a few specific contexts. In doing so, we understand music as a social, communicative phenomenon, which comes about in ritual performances. The appropriation of psalms is, then, a social process of attributing meanings to cultural forms, with which individuals and groups manage their identities, imagine and celebrate communities, cherish or condemn ideologies in more overt or implicit ways, and following or contesting structures of power.

79) Deborah Kapchan, “The Promise of Sonic Translation,” *American Anthropologist* 110, no. 4 (2008), 467-483, 468-472.467-483 467-483.

80) See footnote 49.

81) Wijnia, *Making Sense through Music*, 55.

82) When performances achieve this, they become ‘performative’: resulting in a (temporarily) changed perception of the world. See: Wijnia, *Making Sense through Music*, 53, 59.

83) McGann, “Liturgical Musical Ethnography,” 93. See also: Wijnia, *Making Sense through Music*, 63.

84) David M. Mellott, *I Was and I Am Dust* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 9.

Against the background of the decline of institutionalized religion and an apparent disappearance of ‘God’, forms and practices (predominantly) rooted in religious traditions survive but have changed in form, content, function, or context. We analyze and interpret this change as a social process of appropriation and are convinced that the disciplines of practical theology and liturgical and ritual studies are well equipped for this task. After all, practical theologians and ritual scholars have developed concepts and vocabularies for the interpretation of both traditional religious practices and of new or renewed (ritual) practices in other contexts. In short, these disciplines have proven to be able to interpret the transfer and transformation of religion sensibly.

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