

# Part II

## Sounds

On 9 December 1831, the Senate received an invitation of the Ministry of the Interior:

It is a great honour for me to inform you that on Friday, 16 December, at noon in the Church of Saint Gudule, a *Te Deum* will be held with a thanksgiving for the treaty signed with the five great powers and on the occasion of the birth of the King.<sup>1</sup>

The invitation shows to which extent Belgium, though explicitly conceived and understood as a modern, liberal and secular state, built its identity as a nation from its very beginnings on political, military, monarchic and religious pillars. Throughout the nineteenth century, celebrations of the 'nation' coincided with religious celebration, festivities surrounding the Royal Family and commemorations of the revolution.<sup>2</sup> The singing of the *Te Deum*, at several occasions of royal celebration, offered a particular site of convergence – and often collision – of different branches of nation-bound authority and their representatives.<sup>3</sup> Recurring discussions in the Chamber of Representatives and the Senate on the participation of individual representatives or the chambers as a whole in the religious celebration of the Royal Family, gave rise to explicit statements of different representatives concerning their perspective on the nation. Notary and ultramontanist Jules Lammens, for example, felt compelled to intervene in the discussions 'as a Catholic, a royalist and a Belgian', lumping religion, royalism and nationalism together.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the general acceptance of the *Te Deum* as a ritual and of the congregation of king, clergy, politicians and other authorities, the service aimed at a unification of the nation in all its forms could easily be turned into a site of conflict. Most notably, the yearly celebration offered an occasion to stir up the existing hostilities between Liberals and Catholics concerning (primary) education and schooling: in local churches as well as in the Brussels cathedral, where the members of

parliament were invited, the clergy jumped at the opportunity to translate their protests against the liberal laws on education into a deed of patriotism that was allied to higher values such as deference to the king.<sup>5</sup>

The conflicts over the *Te Deum* service appeared as territorial battles: Priests and bishops refused to allow teachers of the municipal schools entry to the church for the service or declined to celebrate the *Te Deum* on the manoeuvring field and insisted on the service's location in a church.<sup>6</sup> The clergy's position in the conflict was made more comfortable because liberal politicians found it impossible to simply suppress the custom. As the aforementioned ultramontanist senator Lammens aptly stated: 'It is not the Church, it is not God who needs your sincere tribute; but the people and the kings cannot live without divine blessings.'<sup>7</sup> The clergy not only managed to link celebrations of national importance to their territory, but the ritualised course of the *Te Deum* and its spatial arrangement also granted them an acoustic monopoly during the service. Leading the responsorial hymn, the cantor guided the utterances of politicians and people alike. Offering the (uniformed) parliamentarians a seat in the cathedral's choir area, moreover, the clergy appointed them a particular place on a stage that they had set up and controlled.

The recurring *Te Deum* gathering politicians, teachers and clergy, and largely excluding women and children, appears as a good place to start thinking about the numerous performative intersections between (man-made) sound, authority and masculinity. It is but one of the many instances in which inhabitants of the three spaces analysed here were brought together as patriots and men, showing how the closely associated categories of gender and membership in the nation could act as bridgeheads, surpassing otherwise clearly demarcated borders and deep rifts among men. In the next two chapters, I consider the constitutive character of sound (or, more particularly, voice) as part of a masculine identity under construction. As is clear from teacher-pupil relations in class or, indeed, from the script of the *Te Deum* service, the relations between sound and autonomy or authority were hardly straightforward.<sup>8</sup> Silence was not necessarily a matter of oppression; sound could be extorted, and, as will become clear in Chapter 4, the particular quality and form of the sounds produced were at least as important as sound's simple presence, especially from a gender perspective. The sound of masculinity was not only dependent on the particular occasion in which it was produced, but also on a number of cultural practices that appeared to create bodies with specific sound-producing capabilities.

In Chapter 3, *Singing the Nation, Singing the Self*, I focus on the construction of a repertoire of songs for boys and young men, part of which was shared between primary schools and the army – as textual fragments and musical themes were repeated in different contexts. A narrative analysis of the songs' content shows not only how interpretations and images of the nation were introduced, repeated and rehearsed but also how 'men' were rendered acoustically, either as singers or as heroes described in songs. The canon offered to schoolboys and soldiers by their teachers and the army command is largely a collection of 'disciplinary' songs: it encouraged singers to endlessly repeat the vocabulary of the idealised bourgeois family, self-sacrificial hero or brave soldier. Tracing the actual use and influence of this canon is difficult, but its impact can at least be nuanced by looking at a number of more rebellious songs. For example, some *lotelingenliederen* accompanying the ritual of the draft lottery have been preserved, and teachers' correspondence as well as parliamentary proceedings contains the records of complaints over children's and soldiers' acoustic abuse of public spaces (and most importantly the streets). Drawing on the descriptions of these sounds – usually understood as 'noise' – I aim to offer a more nuanced account of the depiction of masculinity in the nation and in a canon that is not merely normative.

In addition, the creation of a fixed repertoire of songs and their content was largely carried out by a relatively small number of individuals, most of whom combined the roles of composer or poet with a job as teacher of young children. Their double position as partakers in a broad European compositional practice on the one hand, and as exponents of knowledge and authority on a local level on the other hand, places them at the centre of the production of the musical branch of the language of masculinity. They not only provided potential singers with material adhering to reigning artistic as well as socio-political conventions, but were also instrumental in developing performance practices 'on the ground': they thus bridged the gap between lofty poetic ideals and the corporeal practice of singing. The location of the performance of the normative canon within the nation as an imagined community and the communicative quality of a number of well-known songs will, finally, be explored through an appreciation of the repertoire and the choreographies carried out in military and school parades and events of national celebration, before an audience of politicians, royalty and a mass understood as representative of 'the people'.

Chapter 4, *Men's Sounds and Silences*, focuses more closely on performance practice and the construction of masculinity through the corporeal

actions and transformations brought about or accompanied by music and vocal sound production. 'If' as Suzanne Cusick has suggested 'gender metaphors actually *do* circulate throughout a society's discourse, it seems logical that gender metaphors are circulating in a society's music.' Insisting on the performative and corporeal nature of music and trying to 'get around music theory's apparent preoccupation with the textlike nature of music', Cusick proposes to consider the possibility that 'elements of all bodily performances' might constitute 'metaphors of gender even when they seem to be performances of other things'.<sup>9</sup> Chapter 4 takes up this proposition and explores the mutual relation between the construction of a (moving) body and the production of music, firstly, by examining the use of music in choreographic practices of the army and primary schools during marches, manoeuvres, parades and school excursions and, secondly, by analysing texts and sheet music used for vocal pedagogy in the nineteenth-century classroom. Using both the (normative) discourse produced by army command, composers and pedagogues, and the (idealised) reports and recordings of musical practice in text and musical notation, the chapter aims to uncover the multiple links and tensions that were crafted between morality, health, rationalism and masculinity through song.

The chapter also focuses on the construction and representation of the politician's voice. Taking both sound production and acoustic metaphors used in the hemicycle into account, the political voice appears as not only an embodied practice producing a gendered body, but also as a disembodied phenomenon related to the less obviously gendered concept of citizenship in representative politics. The terminology of sound that regularly surfaced in parliamentary debate is particularly informative on the subtle configuration of power-relations in a political context: raising one's voice, refusing to speak or producing noise were integral parts of political practice and are therefore worthy of an analysis as sound *per se*, rather than as simple vehicles for the communication of their content.<sup>10</sup>