DE NATIONALE FEESTROK:

WOMEN IN AND OUT OF WAR, NATIONALISM THROUGH NEEDLEWORK, COMMUNITIES IN CLOTH

Charlotte Somerville

Dedicated to my Oma, Maartje Muskens

Nog eens voor alles bedankt

Ik hou zo veel van jou, liefste engeltjes omaatje

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Figure 1. Van Lent, *Feestrok,* 1947, textile, Liberation Museum, Groesbeck, Groningen, NL.

Preface

The *Nationale Feestrok* (national celebration skirt) was an initiative that took place in the Netherlands following the end of World War II. The *feestrokken* were patchwork skirts, made of scraps of old fabric (for an example see Fig. 1).[1] The initiative was founded by Adrienne Minette Boissevain-van Lennep as part of her position on the National Committee for the Creation of Rules and Regulations around National Holidays. As part of the initiative, the skirts were supposed to be worn every year on May 5th (Liberation Day) and Queens Day.[2] This annual wearing was commemorated through embroidered dates along the hem of solid colored triangles. The rest of the skirt could be embellished with additional dates and other decorations celebrating important personal happenings. More than 4,000 *feestrokken* were created during the initiative's prime between 1946-48.[3] After 1948 few skirts were worn and even fewer were created.[4]

During its heyday the initiative as a whole and the individual skirts engaged with many of the salient issues of Dutch national culture following World War II. Studying the *feestrokken* makes visible some of the ways the experiences of World War II were conceptualized at the time. The skirts provide insight into the invention and expression of postwar group identity and national

[1] Transcription of Radio Broadcast by Boissevain-van Lennep 'De Geboorte van een Traditie,' April 18, 1946, IIAV00000020, Folder 40, Archief Adrienne Minette Boissevain-van Lennep: Nationale Feestrok, Atria Kennisinstituut voor Emancipatie en Vrouwengeschiedenis, Amsterdam, North Holland, Netherlands.

[2] Queens day (or Kings day) is a national holiday in the Netherlands which falls on the birthday of the current monarch. Transcription of Radio Broadcast by Boissevain-van Lennep 'De Geboorte van een Traditie,'April 18, 1946, IIAV00000020, Folder 40, Archief Adrienne Minette Boissevain-van Lennep: Nationale Feestrok, Atria Kennisinstituut voor Emancipatie en Vrouwengeschiedenis, Amsterdam, North Holland, Netherlands.

[3] Jolande Withuis, "Patchwork Politics in the Netherlands, 1946-50: Women, Gender and the World War II Trauma," *Womens History Review* 3, no. 3 (2006): 304.

[4] Withuis, ""Patchwork Politics in the Netherlands, 1946-50: Women, Gender and the World War II Trauma," 304.

identity. Their creation addresses the question of who was included in what aspects of postwar culture and why. The *feestrokken* complicate notions that the postwar years followed a gradual move from silence to a discussion of memory, guilt, or trauma. The creation of the *feestrokken* sheds light on the ways in which the war and its effects were addressed in the Netherlands after World War II. In particular the *feestrok* initiative gave voice and agency to average women whose experiences might otherwise be lost.

Jolande Withuis, a feminist social-historian with a focus on postwar Holland, revitalized interest in the *feestrokken* in the 1990s and has produced most of the scholarship on the initiative. As such my research rests on and aims to further hers. In particular I aim to add to Withuis's scholarship by examining how the *feestrok* initiative functioned beyond the ideas and biography of Boissevain-van Lennep. I believe that a large portion of the initiative's story is lost without an attempt to understand the nuances in meaning that the *feestrokken* had to the more 4,000 women who participated in the initiative. This can begin to be redressed through analysis of individual *feestrokken* within an examination of the larger socio-political context of the time. This said due to the scope of the initiative – with more than 4,000 *feestrokken* – this thesis uses the visual analysis case study approach. This approach has previously been used by both Withuis and curators of exhibitions of *feestrokken*, to analyze the initiative. In doing so I will move from looking at the phenomenon of the *feestrokken* as a purely social initiative to looking at them through an art historical lens, examining how the aesthetics of the skirts can be used in an attempt to decode them.

To begin I will provide an historical introduction. Following this, my first chapter continues in a contextual vein, examining the importance of national identity and its creation in the Netherlands during the postwar years and subsequently in the

feestrok initiative. I will look at both the creation and the wearing the *feestrokken* as national identity affirming and nationalistic actions.

My second chapter will explore the acknowledgement of relationships and nuclear group identity within the *feestrokken.* While the *feestrokken* provided a space for the assertion of Dutch identity, the initiative also engaged with other salient issues within the Netherlands – such as the creation and strengthening of interpersonal connections. In this chapter, I argue that the *feestrokken* were mostly used to represent existent communities, as opposed to creating new ones. I will consider how important interpersonal relationships and group identity were both implicitly and explicitly recognized within the *feestrokken.*

Finally, I will look at visual representations of World War II and its aftermath within individual *feestrokken.* While the initiative is often understood as hopeful and celebratory, references to the Holocaust, *Arbeitseinatz* (forced labor), and the Rotterdam Blitz can all be found in the skirts. Postwar strife is also depicted in *feestrokken*. By including these difficult issues in their skirts, I argue their creators were making political and social statements on what should be remembered, acknowledged and dealt with following World War II.

This thesis is informed by original research I did in the Netherlands. As I am a native speaker, I was able to conduct my research in Dutch. As such, I was uniquely able to access archival information. At ATRIA: Institute on Gender Equality and Women's History, I conducted research into the files of Adrienne Minette Boissevain-van Lennep, the founder of the *feestrok* initiative. At the Regional Archives in Tilburg, I was able to research a group of women who formed a group to co-create and encourage the creation of the *feestrokken.* While in the Netherlands I also spoke to scholars on textile history in conjunction with

my research: An Moonen, antique textile and quilt expert; Els de Baan, specialist in costume and textile history; and Gillian Vogelsang, the curator of the Textile Research Center in Leiden. I visited publicly owned *feestrokken* in the collections of the Rijksmuseum, the Centraal Museum in Utrecht, the Resistance Museum in Amsterdam, the National Liberation Museum in Groesbeck, and the Textile Research Center in Leiden, as well as ones in private collections. I was also able to interview Jansje Monninkhof, who created her own *feestrok* in 1946. Despite my efforts, I was unable to see even close to the more than 4,000 examples of the *feestrokken* that were made between 1946-1948. In total I was able to see around 75 skirts. Much research is still needed in order to understand and do justice to this fascinating initiative.

Figure 3 Detail Gerd Schets, *Feestrok,* 1947, private collection: An Moonen.

Figure 4 Jan Wiegers. *Acherburgwal Amsterdam*, ca 1947, Lithograph, 50x40 cm, Beeldbank WO2, accessed March 18, 2019.

Figure 2 Detail Clinst, *Feestrok,* 1947, textile, Liberation Museum, Groesbeck, Groningen, NL.

Introduction

In this historical introduction I will outline the conditions in the Netherlands during the 1930s and 1940s. This will include an overview of the social, historical, and political conditions, as well as a cursory introduction of the initiative. This introduction will serve as the foundation for my following chapters, which will examine particular aspects of how the feestrokken functioned for the women who created them.

The Prewar Years

The political party system in the Netherlands in the 19th and early 20th century was founded on and divided between religious and class affiliation. This grouping was referred to as pillarization. There were four main pillars in the Netherlands: Protestant, Catholic, Communist, and 'Liberal' – the latter referred mostly to the bourgeoise upper-class.[5] Solidarity within and adherence to pillarized identity was reinforced through pillarized newspapers, unions, schools, and other social structures.[6] As such there was very little contact between people of different backgrounds. This meant that the Netherlands existed as more of a conglomerate of distinct, disparate social groups than a culturally unified nation.

[5] R. Steininger, "Pillarization (Verzuiling) and Political Parties," *Sociologische Gids* 24, no. 4 (1977).
[6] Romijn and Conway, "Belgium and the Netherlands." 89.

This lack of cultural unity was compounded by an absence of historical events from which the Dutch could build a strong national identity. Before World War II, the last time the Netherlands had engaged in warfare on European turf was 1830 – when the Belgian provinces declared independence.[7] As such the founding myth on which Dutch national identity was built was still connected to its own declaration of independence from Spain in 1568. By the mid-20th century, Dutch national pride rested on its position as a colonial power – a position that was becoming increasingly divisive both within the Netherlands and abroad. Culturally the Dutch saw themselves as rule abiding and valued non-interference. This was affirmed by the successful adoption of a stance of neutrality during World War I.

Despite its policy of non-interference during World War I, the Netherlands was subject to the social and economic disturbances that characterized the inter-war years.[8] The Netherlands, like most of the world was shocked by the economic crisis of the 1930s. Unemployment surged between 1930 and 1932 and rose steadily until 1936.[9] With the economic crisis of the 1930s, pillarization came under attack.[10] Critics of the pillarized government saw its divided nature lacking a common ground from which to effectively deal with the crisis. As social unrest increased radicalized political groups began to emerge.[11] One of the radical political ideologies to gain traction during this time was fascism.

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[7] Peter Romijn and Martin Conway, "Belgium and the Netherlands," in *Twisted Pathes: Europe 1914-1940*, ed. Robert Gerwarth, 1st ed. (Oxford University Press, 2008), 84-86.
[8] Peter Romijn and Martin Conway, "Belgium and the Netherlands," in *Twisted Pathes: Europe 1914-1940*, ed. Robert Gerwarth, 1st ed. (Oxford University Press, 2008), 84-86.
[9] Romijn and Conway. 97
[10] Romijn and Conway. 89-90.
[11] Romijn and Conway. 85.

Fascism - defined as authoritarian rule with populist ultra-nationalist aspects and obsession with modernism and cross-class brotherhood – attracted supporters throughout Europe during the 1920s and 1930s.[12] The Netherlands was not immune to this trend and a number of small fascist political organizations were created during the interwar years. The largest of these, the *Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging* (National Socialist Movement or NSB), was founded in Utrecht in 1931 by Aton Mussert and Cornelis van Geelkerken.[13] The NSB capitalized on the increasing disenchantment with the political status quo and billed itself as a depillarized political party, which brought together conservative and nationalist figures across society.[14] Similarly to fascist groups throughout Europe, the NSB was concerned with recovering (or creating) strong national values and identity. The party also stated a desire for more concrete steps to be taken to reduce the effects of the economic crisis.[15] With this platform, Mussert's NSB membership numbers increased slowly but relatively steadily in the early 1930s. However, NSB was still disliked and distrusted by most of the Dutch population. In 1933 the Dutch government prohibited all those working for the government from supporting a fascist organization (the NSB). This resulted in a 5% loss of membership. Around the same time a broadly-based movement against the

[12] I am aware of the debate on the definition of fascism and the division between those who believe fascism to be defined only by an ideological set of beliefs (as Orlow put it "fascists were militarists and imperialists, they were racists, and they promised to bring a true Volksgemeinschaft to a country now dominated by materialism, decadence, and democracy.") and those who believe that true fascism requires an understanding of the organizational and stylistic particularities of fascism. However, I will not take a stance on whether or not what I refer to as fascism in the Netherlands was true fascism. Dietrich Orlow, "Leaders, Agencies, Groups, Agendas," in *The Lure of Fascism in Western Europe: German Nazis, Dutch and French Fascists, 1933-1939* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 12.

[13] Orlow. 35

[14] Romijn and Conway, "Belgium and the Netherlands." 103-104.

[15] Romijn and Conway, "Belgium and the Netherlands." 103-104.

NSB, *Einheid door Democractie* (Unity through Democracy), was created.[16] This movement resulted in a reduction by half of NSB membership between 1935 and 1937.[17]

While the NSB did not originally bill itself as an explicitly anti-Semitic organization, the makings of fascist collaboration and xenophobia existed in the Netherlands prior to World War II. In 1934 the Dutch government added two new articles to the Criminal Code against the defamation of any particular group or population. These new articles were put in place in response to the increasing numbers of insults, verbal and physical threats and violence lobbed against Dutch Jews (and likely recent immigrants from Germany following the Nuremberg Laws starting in 1934).[18] Evelien Gans, a researcher at the NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, has argued that the reasoning behind the addition and adoption of these statutes was "concern not so much for the Jews, as disturbances of peace."[19] Gans adds that "insult was defined by defined by form; supposed statements of fact could still be made."[20] For example, under these new articles one could not refer to Jews as 'parasites,' but it was still okay to express an understanding or belief that Jews were selfish and would look after only themselves in times of crisis.[21] This anti-Semitism was left unchallenged by the lack of contact created by pillarization. Ultimately, this combination would prove fatal.[22]

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[16] Gerhard Hirschfeld, "Collaboration and Attentism in the Netherlands 1940-41," *Journal of Contemporary History* 16, no. 3, World War II: Part 2 (July 1981): 478..
[17] Romijn and Conway, "Belgium and the Netherlands." 104.
[18] Evelien Gans, "Why Jews Are More Guilty than Others? An Introductory Essay, 1945-2016," in *The Holocaust, Israel and "the Jew": Histories of Antisemitism in Postwar Dutch Society*, ed. Evelien Gans and Remco Ensel, NIOD Studies on War, Holocaust, and Genocide (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), 22.
[19] Gans. 22.
[20] Gans. 22.
[21] Gans. 22.
[22] Linda Woolf, "Survival and Resistance: The Netherlands Under Nazi Occupation" (April 6, 1996), http://faculty.webster.edu/woolflm/netherlands.html.

Despite the rampant rise of fascism in Germany and the Nazi invasions of Czechoslovakia, Poland, Denmark and Norway between March 1939 and April 1940, the majority of the Dutch population was caught off guard by the German invasion in 1940. Dutch neutrality had been respected by the Germans during the First World War. In 1939, despite war officially having been declared between the British empire, France and Germany, the German government issued a guarantee with the promise to not invade the Netherlands. Unsurprisingly, most of the Dutch population was under the impression that the neutrality of their country would protect them and their nation's sovereignty.[23] In spite of these promises, the Dutch government covertly began preparations for the possibility of a foreign invasion in 1937.[24] Public officials were also given a protocol to follow in the event of occupation by a fascist nation.[25] To those in Parliament, the possibility of German aggression seemed increasingly real and on August 24, 1939 the Dutch troops were officially mobilized with the hope that in the event of a German attack the Allied forces would provide assistance.[26]

Defeat and the Occupation

On May 10, 1940 Nazi forces invaded the Netherlands. Four days later, on May 14th, the German air force targeted civilian areas in Rotterdam. Approximately 800 people were killed and many more were left without homes in what would become known

[23] Romijn and Conway, "Belgium and the Netherlands." 106.
[24] Romijn and Conway, "Belgium and the Netherlands." 104-106.
[25] Romijn and Conway, "Belgium and the Netherlands." 106.
[26] Romijn and Conway, "Belgium and the Netherlands." 106.

as the Rotterdam Blitz. With the threat to bomb Utrecht, Amsterdam, or the Hague next, the Dutch Government chose to surrender.[27] The same day much of the Dutch parliament and Royal Family escaped to England, where they remained for the duration of the war forming a government in absentia.[28] Thus after a few small victories and actual fighting that lasted only a couple of days, the Netherlands was officially under Nazi occupation.[29]

In the Netherlands, the new Nazi controlled government was led by the Austrian Reichskommissar, Arthur Seyss-Inquart. According to the Nazi rhetoric Dutch were also part of the Aryan race. The Dutch would therefore be absorbed into Nazi Germany after the war as part of the master race.[30] For this reason, Seyss-Inquart and the Nazi troops desired to make life under occupation amendable to the majority of Dutch citizens.[31] Seyss-Inquart believed that through doing this, the Nazis could maintain a biddable citizenry and create a broad base for themselves, thereby laying the ground work for a "self-Nazification" of the Netherlands.[32] While the fascist faction of Dutch politics had been widely disliked, the Dutch were generally willing to accept the life under occupation, believing the co-operation was vital for maintaining peace and security.[33] The impression most of the Dutch populace was under was that by laying low, social chaos could be avoided and industrial production and jobs could be protected.[34]

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[27] Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005).
[28] Chantal Kesteloot, "The Role of the War in National Societies: The Examples of Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands," in *Experience and Memory: World War II in Europe*, ed. Jörg Echternkamp and Stefan Martens (Berghahn Books, 2013).
[29] Matthijs Kronemeijer and Darren Teshima, "A Founding Myth for the Netherlands: World War II and the Victimization of Dutch Jews," in *Reflections on the Holocaust* (Humanity in Action, 2011).
[30] Linda Woolf, "Survival and Resistance: The Netherlands Under Nazi Occupation" (April 6, 1996), http://faculty.webster.edu/woolflm/netherlands.html.
[31] Woolf.
[32] Hirschfeld, "Collaboration and Attentism in the Netherlands 1940-41."471.
[33] Hirschfeld. 471-72.
[34] Woolf, "Survival and Resistance: The Netherlands Under Nazi Occupation."

At the beginning of the occupation, this seemed a reasonable approach; life under the Nazi regime was less intense than many had feared. The existence of multiple political parties had not been banned; and while the Royal family and much of the national government was abroad, the Dutch civilian administration, local government, and Dutch law remained in place.[35] At the same time systematic violence against Jews was already underway in some of the other Nazi occupied countries. While some had caught wind of the horror stories, the mass deportation and targeting of Dutch Jews, homosexuals, and political enemies, did not come to fruition as soon as the Netherlands was occupied.[36] Since it was widely believed that the war would be a short lived one, it was understood that the lasting impact of the occupation would be negligible.[37] Therefore, many believed that through seeming to co-operate, the effects of Nazi occupation could be delayed.[38]

Despite the originally less aggressively oppressive approach to occupation, as the war continued the Nazis enforced more restrictions and regulations on the Dutch populace. In 1941, the Reichskommissar disallowed any political party besides the NSB.[39] This came after a struggle between the *Nederlandse Unie* and the NSB for support from Dutch citizenry. The *Nederlandse Unie* was formed in response to the widespread desire to have a platform to represent a Dutch national identity. While membership of the *Nederlandse Unie* was seen by its members as a passionate rejection of the ideals of the NSB, the party was originally tolerated by the Nazis.[40] However, the *Nederlandse Unie* was in a perilous position as it was formally open to Jews and some of its members had

[35] Woolf.
[36] Linda Woolf, "Survival and Resistance: The Netherlands Under Nazi Occupation" (April 6, 1996), http://faculty.webster.edu/woolflm/netherlands.html.
[37] Woolf.
[38] Woolf.
[39] Hirschfeld, "Collaboration and Attentism in the Netherlands 1940-41."481.
[40] Hirschfeld. 479.

engaged in illegal activities.[41] Ultimately in 1941, the Reichskommissar implemented the radical policy of "for or against us." With this the *Nederlandse Unie* as well as fascist splinter groups were banned.[42]

The same year the Reichskommissar enforced a mandate for the registration of all Jews in the Netherlands.[43] Since Dutch censuses traditionally included religious affiliation and the country was heavily segregated along religious lines, hiding from this new registration was nearly impossible. While Dutch Jews were officially citizens, this was no longer respected by Seyss-Inquart and the Nazis. The first deportations occurred in 1941, when 1,700 Jews were deported to Mauthausen, a concentration camp in Austria.[44] In response to this, other anti-Semitic measures, and the increased oppression of Dutch citizenry across the board, the illegal communist party in Amsterdam organized a mass strike in February of 1941.[45] The strike lasted three days (between February 12 – 15) and through collaboration across pillars, the municipal workers of Amsterdam effectively shut down public transportation.[46] However, this strike did not reverse or soften the Nazi persecution of Dutch Jews. Instead deportations increased exponentially between 1941 and 1942.[47] Thus, by the end of World War II, some 107,000 Dutch Jews out of a pre-war population of 140,000, had been deported from the Netherlands to concentration camps. Of these peoples only 5,200 survived.[48]

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[41] Hirschfeld. 478-80.
[42] Hirschfeld. 481.
[43] Woolf, "Survival and Resistance: The Netherlands Under Nazi Occupation."
[44] Ad van Liempt, "The Deportations,: in *Hitler's Bounty Hunters: The Betrayal of the Jews*, (Oxford, UK: Berg, 2005) 10.
[45] Linda Woolf, "Survival and Resistance: The Netherlands Under Nazi Occupation" (April 6, 1996), http://faculty.webster.edu/woolflm/netherlands.html.
[46] Woolf.
[47] G Ad van Liempt, "The Deportations,: in *Hitler's Bounty Hunters: The Betrayal of the Jews*, (Oxford, UK: Berg, 2005) 6-18.
[48] Woolf, "Survival and Resistance: The Netherlands Under Nazi Occupation."

There is little agreement between scholars as to why the Holocaust in the Netherlands proved more fatal to Jewish populations than elsewhere in Europe. However, it is generally accepted that the religious pillarization of the country, which controlled almost all aspects of daily life, meant that there was very little contact between Dutch Jews and Gentiles.[49] For many Jews finding a trusted non-Jewish family with whom to seek a sheltered hiding place, was difficult. Some scholars, such as Linda M. Woolf, have argued that the mass murder of Dutch Jews – 75% of the pre-war population was killed – was not a result of a uniquely callous or anti-Semitic nation, though the ground work for the latter was in place.[50] Instead due to the geographical features of the Netherlands, escape from the country was nearly impossible. The southern and eastern parts of the country bordered Nazi-occupied Belgium and Germany. The North Sea made up the northern and western borders of the country and was controlled by the Germans. Additionally, the flat, densely populated country left little room for hiding in or escaping to a forested mountainous region.[51]

In total around 30,000 Dutch Jews survived the war in hiding, mostly finding shelter with communist and Catholic members of the Resistance. Those who hid Jews and other persecuted peoples from the Nazis were part of the small percentage of Dutch citizens.[52] While many Dutch participated in small acts of 'symbolic resistance,' most people attempted to protect themselves, their loved ones and their property during the increasingly difficult daily life under occupation.[53] However anti-German many Dutch

[49] Linda Woolf, "Survival and Resistance: The Netherlands Under Nazi Occupation" (April 6, 1996), http://faculty.webster.edu/woolflm/netherlands.html.
[50] Woolf.
[51] Woolf.
[52] Woolf.
[53] Woolf.

citizens feelings were, few took steps more radical than the covert celebration of the Queen's birthday or the ownership of a banned radio.

The increasingly difficult circumstances included rapidly decreasing food rations. The bread rations at the beginning of the war were 2,200 grams per week, this fell to 1,800, to 1,400, to 1,000 grams per week in the summer of 1944.[54] Everywhere tensions ran high.[55] Curfews were imposed. Blackout curtains were a necessity, to reduce the risk of allied airstrikes. People bartered with their valuables. Stamps were issued for every product and were frequently traded.[56] While the Dutch had a culture that promoted adherence to the law, during the war many Dutch found that the only way to survive was through transgression from these norms.[57] Ordinary Dutch citizens entered the black market, looted, and stole firewood from abandoned houses.[58] By the end of the war, people were vexed and exhausted – physically and mentally – from hunger and the violence of the war.[59]

Unequal Liberation

As circumstances on the ground in the occupied Netherlands became evermore austere, the war waged on. By mid-July 1944 the Allied forces had liberated Normandy, France. Slow but steady progression meant that by September of the same year, after a

[54] "Famine and Human Development. The Dutch Hunger Winter of 1944-1945.," *Annals of Internal Medicine* 83, no. 2 (August 1, 1975): 290, https://doi.org/10.7326/0003-4819-83-2-290_1.
[55] Woolf.
[56] "Famine and Human Development. The Dutch Hunger Winter of 1944-1945."290.
[57] Peter Romijn, "'Liberators and Patriots' Military Interim Rule and the Politics of Transition in the Netherlands, 1944-1945," in *Europe, 1943-1947: Seeking Peace in the Wake of War*, ed. Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann et al. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), 126.
[58] Romijn, 162.
[59] Romijn, 162.

few days of heavy fighting, the Allied forces had reached the Netherlands and liberated the southern city of Nijmegen. Thus, began a benign occupation by the Allied troops.[60] The Southern provinces were liberated over the course of following four months. Rumors swept across the Netherlands that all of the country would soon be liberated and on September 5, 1944 broadcasts aired alleging that Breda had been liberated. [61] However, complete liberation of the country would not occur until May of the following year. Allied control halted south of the delta of the Rhine River, leaving the more populated northern and western provinces and cities of Amsterdam, the Hague, Utrecht and Rotterdam to endure the harsh winter of 1944-45 under Nazi occupation.

This winter became known as the *honger winter* or hunger winter and was responsible for the deaths of around 20,000 people. Transportation of food goods to the northern and western parts of the country was halted due to a strike ordered by the Dutch government in exile meant to freeze out the German forces.[62] However, it also left most of the population without light, gas, and heat, and very little food.[63] In November of 1944, the bread ration in the occupied half of the country had dropped to 800 grams per week.[64] By April of the following year even this ration would be halved.[65] After October of 1944, butter and other animal fats were no longer supplied. Black market prices for potatoes rose from 7 guilders (the official pre-war price) for 70 kg to 700 to 1,000

[60] Romijn, 117.
[61] "10 Things You Need to Know about the End of World War II in the Netherlands - DutchNews.Nl," accessed November 3, 2018, https://www.dutchnews.nl/features/2015/05/10-things-you-need-to-know-about-the-end-of-world-war-ii-in-the-netherlands/.
[62] Romijn, 129.
[63] C. Banning, "Food Shortage and Public Health, First Half of 1945," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 245, no. The Netherlands during German Occupation (May 1946): 93.
[64] "Famine and Human Development. The Dutch Hunger Winter of 1944-1945."
[65] Banning, "Food Shortage and Public Health, First Half of 1945," 93.

guilders for the same amount.[66] Tulip bulbs, which were not rationed, could be bought at high prices on the black market and were used to make soup and biscuits.[67] The winter of 1944-45 was defined for much of the country by the combination of a lack of nutrients, a dangerously low supply of adequate clothing and shoes, the inability to buy soap and other hygiene essentials and frigid temperatures, which remained below freezing for most of the winter.[68] Tuberculosis, typhoid fever, diphtheria, and edema increased exponentially during the final year of the war.[69] These hardships were compounded by the declaration of martial law on the rest of the Netherlands by Seyss-Inquart and the permission given to police and SS officers to arrest resisters on the spot.[70]

In an effort to lessen the hardships faced by the occupied part of the country, during the last months of the occupation negotiations between the Allied governments, the Dutch government in absentia and the Nazis began. As a result, permission was granted to the Allied forces to begin dropping bundles of food in the starving the occupied section of the country. On May 5, 1945 after heavy fighting between the Allied troops and the Nazis throughout the occupied northern and western parts of the country all of the Netherlands was finally liberated. Two days later, on May 7th, Germany officially surrendered.

[66] Banning, 94.
[67] Jansje Monninkhof (*feestrok* maker), interviewed by Charlotte Somerville, Achterveld, Gelderland, January 7, 2019.
[68] "Famine and Human Development. The Dutch Hunger Winter of 1944-1945."
[69] Banning, "Food Shortage and Public Health, First Half of 1945," 108-109.
[70] Romijn, "'Liberators and Patriots' Military Interim Rule and the Politics of Transition in the Netherlands, 1944-1945," 125.

Reconstruction Years

Restoring public order under allied occupation after liberation was not straightforward. By the end of the occupation more than 20 per cent of the Dutch population was displaced due to evacuations, forced labor (*Arbeitseinatz*), deportation, and murder.[71] World War II was the first time in the recent history of Western Europe that women had been widely affected by wartime violence.[72] Dutch women who were Jewish, Communist, or otherwise targeted by the Nazi occupiers were victimized by their policies. Those who were not targeted were both active in the Resistance and active collaborators. No one had survived the years under occupation unaffected. The years under occupation had forced people fend for themselves., which created a society damaged by a lack of trust between neighbors – even within pillars.[73] The rule-following norms of Dutch culture were broken. The expression of community was disrupted by the Nazi imposed curfews. While acts of incredible selflessness were committed, most people turned increasingly inwards to preserve what little resources they had. Both during and after occupation people pointed fingers at both at those targeted by the Nazis and at those who collaborated with them in an attempt to find scapegoats.

Additionally, while much of the country felt relief at liberation this sentiment was not shared by all. To begin there was the issue of the 100,000 Dutch supporters of national socialism, who, for obvious reasons, did not feel liberated by the Allies.[74] Dutch

[71] Romijn, "'Liberators and Patriots' Military Interim Rule and the Politics of Transition in the Netherlands, 1944-1945," 126.
[72] Pieter Lagrou, "The Nationalization of Victimhood: Selective Violence and National Grief in Western Europe, 1940–1960," in *Life after Death: Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe During the 1940s and 1950s*, ed. Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann, The German Historical Institute (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 250.
[73] Romijn, "'Liberators and Patriots' Military Interim Rule and the Politics of Transition in the Netherlands, 1944-1945," 126.
[74] Romijn, 118.

members of the NSB and other Nazis collaborators were removed from the general population and put into re-education camps. The unhygienic environment of these camps was made worse by the rampant sexual and physical abuse at the hands of the guards, who had often been part of the Resistance. One of the most popular scapegoats in the newly liberated Netherlands were the so-called 'moffen meiden' (moffen being a derogatory term for German soldiers and meiden translating to girls) – women who had relationships with German soldiers – often referred to as horizontal collaborators. Once identified, these women were paraded through the streets before having their hair shaved with dull knives and having dung and rotten food thrown at them and smeared in their scalps.[75]

Many Dutch were also unsympathetic to victims of the Nazi regime returning from concentration camps. Compared to many European countries, the Dutch were slow in the retrieval of concentration camp survivors. Painfully, some of those who had survived the war were weakened and emaciated enough that they did not live to see their home country again.[76] Once home, many victims returned to houses occupied by new inhabitants, neighbors who refused to return goods and heirlooms they had promised to hold in safe keeping, and communities that no longer existed.[77]

Due to these tensions, the returning Dutch government was eager to instill the country with a sense of order. The Government's focus was not on the individual psyche but on the health of society, despite the fact that war time periodicals were

[75] Iris Van Olst, "Vrijen met de Vijand: Moffenmeiden tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog" (2013), 32-35.
[76] Tony Judt, "The Legacy of War" in *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945,* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2005), 24.
[77] Judt, "The Legacy of War," 24.

published that warned of the psychological toll the war could have on individuals.[78] The Dutch government was widely concerned with a fear of social chaos and the potential for resulting violence. This could arise from a number of corners – not all obvious. Perhaps most surprisingly to modern readers, was the fear of social turmoil as a result of the actions of those in the Resistance. The desired a for larger role in the political goings-on in postwar Netherlands by the Resistance was thwarted by a disappointing attempt at winning Parliamentary positions.[79] After the war the government adopted a slow systematic implementation of the national myth of the Netherlands as 'a nation of heroes.'[80] Instead of undermining the Resistance outright, the Dutch government sought to give them a concrete governmental function.[81] As a result the government created the National Resistance Council (GAC) and included many former members of the Resistance in committees on national reconstruction.[82] This, it was hoped, would counter the feared struggle for power from resistance fighters.[83]

This was combined with a bi-directional push for a return to normality – both from the government and from the Dutch populace. This desire reinvigorated the pre-war discussion on the place of the pillarized political system in the Netherlands. One faction of the Dutch populace held a widespread hope the war and collective suffering would finally lead to a de-pillarization. On the other hand, many Dutch citizens believed that the national identity fought for by the Resistance, rested on the preservation the

[78] Jolande Withuis and Annet Mooij, "From Totalitarianism to Trauma — A Paradigm Change in the Netherlands," in *The Politics of War Trauma: The Aftermath of WWII in Eleven European Countries*, ed. Jolande Withuis and Annet Mooij (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2010), 201.
[79] Pieter Lagrou, "Part I Troublesome Heroes: The Postwar Treatment of Resistance Veterans: Appropriating Victory and Re-Establishing the State," in *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation: Patriotic Memory and National Recovery in Western Europe, 1945-1965* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 35.
[80] Lagrou, "Part I Troublesome Heroes: The Postwar Treatment of Resistance Veterans: Appropriating Victory and Re-Establishing the State," 59.
[81] Lagrou, 62.
[82] Lagrou, 62.
[83] Lagrou, 62.

Dutch national traditions and culture – the pillarized divide included.[84] Ultimately, whether or not this was the ideological narrative that the majority of the Dutch subscribed to, pillarization would continue for another couple of decades until the more socially liberal and permissive 1960s. The actions of the government's part made it clear that a return to business as usual was more important than the remembrance of the recent war. For example, in 1946 the celebration of the Day of Liberation was postponed because May 5th fell on a Sunday, which emphasized the status quo (i.e. not working or celebrating on the day of rest) over commemoration. This postponement was indicative of a larger phenomenon of the governmental dictation of liberation celebrations.[85]Another instance of this was the creation of the *feestrok* initiative, which was established by Adrienne Minette Boissevain-van Lennep as part of her position with the Committee for the Creation of Rules and Regulations around National Holidays, which focused on the cultivation of national identity through the creation and curation of traditions around national celebrations.[86]

Adrienne Minnette Boissevain-van Lennep and the *Nationale Feestrok*

Boissevain-van Lennep (09.21.1896 – 02.18.1969) was born to a well-off Dutch family. She married Jan Boissevain (1895-1945), a banker from a prominent Huguenot family, in 1919. They had three sons and two daughters.[87] Boissevain-van Lennep, who showed a social consciousness from a very early age, was an active member of the feminist movement of the 1930s. The whole

[84] Lagrou, 63.
[85] Lagrou, "Part I Troublesome Heroes: The Postwar Treatment of Resistance Veterans: Appropriating Victory and Re-Establishing the State."
[86] djr, "Digitaal Vrouwenlexicon van Nederland," ING Project, October 4, 2018, http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/vrouwenlexicon/lemmata/data/Lennep.
[87] "Atria | Kennisinstituut voor Emancipatie en Vrouwengeschiedenis."

family were members of the Communist party in the Netherlands. When the Nazis occupied the Netherlands, Boissevain-van Lennep and her family quickly joined the Resistance. The family home, 6 Corellistraat in Amsterdam became the headquarters for the resistance group CS-6. Together with the CS-6, Boissevain-van Lennep assisted in the falsifying of registration papers, and in hiding of Jews and other peoples persecuted by the Germans. As an organization, the CS-6 was one of the few resistance groups in the Netherlands that partook in armed sabotage.[88]

In 1941 Jan Boissevain was arrested for his Resistance activities. He did not live to see the end of the war and died a few months before liberation in the concentration camp, Dachau.[89] Boissevain-van Lennep suffered two other major losses during the war with the execution of two of her sons, Janka and Gi, in 1943.[90] Boissevain-van Lennep, herself, and her youngest son, Frans, were arrested on August 2, 1943, when the Sicherheitsdienst (an intelligence agency of the SS) raided the headquarters of the CS 6.[91] After her arrest, Boissevain-van Lennep was first held in a jail in Amsterdam. From there she was transported to Dachau (where she briefly was reunited with her husband) and finally to Ravensbrück, where she would spend the remainder of the war.[92]

During her time in the jail in Amsterdam, Boissevain-van Lennep had the experience that would inspire the conception of the *feestrok* initiative.[93] According to Boissevain-van Lennep, while in the cell, which was incredibly hot due to the overcrowding of 13 women in a small space, a small patchwork scarf was smuggled in via the laundry. This scarf was made of pieces of fabric that

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[88] Withuis Jolande, "Patchwork Politics in the Netherlands, 1946-50: Women, Gender and the World War II Trauma," *Womens History Review* 3, no. 3 (2006): 299.
[89] "Atria | Kennisinstituut voor Emancipatie en Vrouwengeschiedenis."
[90] djr, "Digitaal Vrouwenlexicon van Nederland."
[91] djr.
[92] "60 jaar bevrijding," *Handwerken Zonder Grenzen*, April 2005.
[93] April 18, 1946 radio interview with Mies Boissevain-van Lennep for the *Vrouw tot Vrouw* (Woman to Woman) program."

held special signifigance to Boissevain-van Lennep - pieces from children's clothing and old ball gowns. Boissevain-van Lennep claimed that this colorfully patterned scarf brought life to the dark and hostile cell. It was significant, not only because of its cheerful aesthetic but because it was symbolic of the beauty and hope of a world before (and after) the war.[94] Whether or not this story is true or not, it did serve as a moving foundation for the *feestrok* initiative. Inspired by the gift of the patchwork scarf, Boissevain-van Lennep imagined skirts composed of patches of fabric that held personal signifigance to the creator. She called the subsequent initiative the *Nationale Feestrok* a name that addressed her belief that the skirts had the power to unite and celebrate Dutch women and the Netherlands as a whole (See Fig. 5 for Boissevain-van Lennep's *feestrok*).

The only materials needed for a *feestrok* were old patches, which were sewn together or appliqued onto an existing skirt or sheet that had been turned into a skirt. The manner in which the pieces of cloth were arranged was uniquely dictated by the personal vision of the creator of the *feestrok*. Besides the connecting the patchwork look of the skirts to the foundational story of the initiative, the aesthetic of the *feestrokken* had a practical edge. Textile remained rationed until with the 1948 implementation of the Marshall plan.[95] Since fabric was rationed it was of the utmost importance that women knew how to use what little cloth there was. During the war magazines like *Libelle* published articles explaining how to alter clothing to account for growing children or make new clothing using as little fabric as possible (Fig. 6).[96] Not surprisingly, none of these articles mentioned the war or why it was necessary to be able to create new clothing out of the old. However, mentions of 'these times' did crop up with some frequency – usually in

[94] April 18, 1946 radio interview with Mies Boissevain-van Lennep for the *Vrouw tot Vrouw* (Woman to Woman) program."

[95] Tony Judt, "The Coming of the Cold War" in *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945,* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2005), 149.

[96] "Vroolijke Overgooiers uit oude Jurken." *Libelle*, August 8, 1941.

relation to the meager existence most of the *Libelle* readership was subject to.[97] Books, such as *Nieuw uit Oud* (New out of Old) were published (using the cheapest paper) and explained to women how to repurpose old worn clothing items into new usable ones: making a skirt suit out of an old coat, or a child's outfit out of a women's old dress and a piece of left-over fabric. The photographs of smiling children were contrasted by photos of precisely placed pattern pieces, which showed women how to make the most of an old garment – even if it had tears or worn spots. As fabric became more and more scarce, these prudent measures were not just smart, they were necessary. Clothing worn during the war years, of which little has survived, shows repeated mends and additional scraps of added in fabric. Hems were taken out, and as encouraged in *Libelle* and *Nieuw van Oud*, clothing was repurposed to make do. This type of thrifty cutting and ability to imagine how pieces (or patches) work together as part of a whole provided the groundwork for the type of visualization that would be imperative for the creation of a *feestrok*.

Given the fact that the initiative was conceived of as part of a national committee, the practical re-usage was also given multiple symbolic meanings as part of the larger national ideology. Boissevain-van Lennep asked that the assemblage of contrasting fabrics from a variety of sources be viewed as representative of the physical reconstruction of the damaged Netherlands. They could also be read as emblematic of Dutch society as constituted of many different people with different beliefs. The nationally inclined ideology of the skirts was visually captured through the hem of solid colored triangles. *5 Mei* (May 5th) was supposed to be embroidered in the centermost triangle, commemorating the day of Liberation. To the right the creator was supposed to embroider *1945*. The rest of the triangles were reserved for the consecutive embroidery commemorating the annual wearing of the skirts as part

[97] "Razzia in Kleerkast en Lappenkist." *Libelle*, August 8, 1941.

of the celebrating national holidays. This triangular hem grounded the skirts in an expression of national identity and pride and linked them to the nation and to each other. The rest of the skirt was free to be embellished in whatever way its creator saw fit. In particular women were encouraged to use the space to embroider dates of personal signifigance.

In order to popularize participation in the *feestrok* initiative Boissevain-van Lennep took out advertisements in newspapers and wrote articles that were published in women's magazines, such as the *Libelle*, to encourage women to participate in the *feestrok* initiative.[98] For a fee of 1.50 guilders (about $6 accounting for inflation) women could register their skirt with the *rokken*-committee.[99] This payment had to be sent in, along with a card with the name, date of birth, and place of residence of the skirt's creator.[100] The *rokken*-committee would then stamp the *feestrok* to authenticate it and give it a registration number.[101] This well-organized system allows us to know that around 4,000 skirts were made and registered. Since many women did not register their skirts, though, the total number of skirts made as part of the *feestrok* initiative is likely much higher.

Once the skirts were made, they were supposed to worn for as many consecutive Liberation Days as possible. Later the women who made them were supposed to pass the skirts down to their daughters, thereby making the *feestrok* a family heirloom for families across the nation. Perhaps Boissevain-van Lennep and the creators of the *feestrokken* believed that the skirts had the potential to become a way for future generations to understand their ancestors' experiences of World War II, and what was valued in the

[98] "De Nationale Feestrok en Zijn Symboliek." *Libelle,* April 19, 1946.
[99] Adrienne Boissevain-van Lennep, "Gegevens over het Veraadigen van de Nationale Feestrok" (1947), Box 653, Folder 2, Regional Archief Tilburg.
[100] Adrienne Boissevain-van Lennep, "Gegevens over het Veraadigen van de Nationale Feestrok" (1947), Box 653, Folder 2, Regional Archief Tilburg.
[101] Adrienne Boissevain-van Lennep, "Gegevens over het Veraadigen van de Nationale Feestrok" (1947), Box 653, Folder 2, Regional Archief Tilburg.

reconstruction years. At the very least, it had the potential to become recognized as a national, folk art heirloom. Ultimately, however, by the 1970s and '80s, many were hidden in closets or in children's dress-up boxes.[102] Perhaps this is because by the 1950s both the messages hidden within the *feestrokken* and their handmade, folk-ish aesthetic had become passé for a culture interested in moving on and modernizing.

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Given the cultural salience of the *feestrokken* in the late 1940s, it is surprising that the initiative has inspired relatively little secondary research. Public engagement peaked during the initiative's heyday between 1946-48. In the 1990s interest was piqued again through research from Jolande Withuis, who rediscovered the initiative. This led to a number of museum exhibitions and related newspaper articles. In the two decades, however, little scholarship has been done to further the discoveries made by Withuis and public interest has dwindled again. This has resulted in a homogeneous account and interpretation of the *feestrok* initiative. With the upcoming 75th anniversary of liberation, this situation may be subject to change. The Liberation Museum in Groesbeck has an exhibit of their collection of *feestrokken* planned for the occasion. Elsewhere the organization, *Verhaalstof/Feestrok 2020* is attempting to revitalize the initiative as relevant to the 21st century.

Between 1946-48 many newspaper and magazine articles were written about the new *feestrok* initiative. These primary sources included advertisement-cum-articles and pamphlet calls to action, written by Boissevain-van Lennep and Elisabeth

[102] Loes Temple. 'Bevrijdingsrok'. Email, 2018.

Hannema-van Maasdijk. Hannema-van Maasdijk was a close friend of Boissevain-van Lennep's who not only wrote about the *feestrokken* but also composed the lyrics for *Lied voor de Nationale Feestrok* (a song that extoled the project and called on women to make a skirt of their own).[103] Other primary accounts opinion pieces were written both by fans and detractors of the initiative. Those in favor of the initiative lauded the fun colorful patterns of the skirts. Others appreciated the ideological sentiments of national unity, beauty created through frugality, and the reconstruction of the Netherlands that were represented by the *feestrokken*. Opinion pieces disparaging the initiative focused on the aesthetics of the skirts. Where some saw the skirts as playful others wrote them off as slobby patchwork which was undignified apparel for national celebration.[104] In 1948 around 400 women wore their *feestrokken* in the Hague as part of a celebration of the 50-year reign of Queen Wilhelmina and the accession to the throne of her daughter, the new Queen Juliana. This parade was documented in numerous accounts published in newspapers throughout the country. Ultimately the celebratory parade in 1948 was both the last time that many women wore their skirts and the last time that the *feestrok* initiative was written about extensively by its contemporaries. These contemporary accounts, advertisements, and opinion pieces provide insight into how the initiative was understood in its time.[105] However, they lack the necessary historical hindsight to provide much interpretation of the initiative beyond the meaning placed on it by Boissevain-van Lennep.

[103] Adrienne Minette Boissevain-van Lennep 'De Nationale Feestrok' 1946, 653, Box 2, Folder 1, De nationale Feestrok, afd. Tilburg, Tilburg Regional Archives, Tilburg, North Brabant, Netherlands

[104] Newspaper article discouraging women from making *feestrok* 'Geen Feestrok!' 1948, 653, Box 1, Folder 3, De nationale Feestrok, afd. Tilburg, Tilburg Regional Archives, Tilburg, North Brabant, Netherlands.

[105] Newspaper clipping describing the skirts made by the R.K. Vrouwengild, the Kath. Arbeitersvrouwen, and the Kath. Boereninnenbond, September 1948, 653, Box 1, Folder 3, De nationale Feestrok, afd. Tilburg, Tilburg Regional Archives, Tilburg, North Brabant, Netherlands.

In 1991, Jolande Withuis published the first historically interpretive analysis of the *feestrok* initiative in her article "De Doorbraak en de Feestrok: Een uitnodiging tot onderzoek naar de politieke geschiedenis van seks rond het einde van de Tweede Wereldoorlog."[106] This text was translated into English in 1994 as "Patchwork politics in the Netherlands, 1946-50: women, gender and the world war ii trauma."[107] Withuis is a social and feminist historian whose work focuses on the Dutch postwar years. Her pioneering scholarship on the *feestrok* initiative uses a feminist lens and focuses on Boissevain-van Lennep's biography and vision for the project. As the first scholar on the subject, what little subsequent research and writing on the subject has been done builds off of Withuis's scholarship. However, her expertise has remained unrevised for the most part.

In 1992 *Het Spoor Terug*, a radio program focused on Dutch history, produced an episode on Boissevain-van Lennep as part of its series on Dutch citizens who risked their lives for noble causes. Most of the episode consists of interviews with people who had known Boissevain-van Lennep personally and focuses on her role in the Resistance during the war and her feminist ideals. The program also includes an interview with Jantje de Jong-Brouwer, who was both active in the Resistance and creator of a *feestrok* after the war. In this interview de Jong-Brouwer introduces the instructions for a *feestrok* as disseminated by Boissevain-van Lennep in 1946. De Jong-Brouwer's own *feestrok* and the story behind it is also discussed. As a member of the Resistance, the imagery and story behind de Jong-Brouwer's *feestrok* is intimately connected with these actions. This work also connected her to Boissevain-van Lennep, which is perhaps why she was chosen to represent the initiative on the air. However, de Jong-Brouwer's Resistance activities

[106] Withuis Jolande, "Patchwork Politics in the Netherlands, 1946-50: Women, Gender and the World War II Trauma," *Womens History Review* 3, no. 3 (2006): 293–313.
[107] Withuis Jolande, "Patchwork Politics in the Netherlands, 1946-50: Women, Gender and the World War II Trauma," *Womens History Review* 3, no. 3 (2006): 293–313.

provide her *feestrok* a heroic backstory that it is unlikely most of the *feestrokken* created had. The radio broadcasted interview with de Jong-Brouwer reintroduced the all but forgotten *feestrok* initiative to the general public eye after 44 years. Despite the historical distance between the broadcast and the initiative, de Jong-Brouwer's personal story as a creator of a *feestrok* provides insight into what these skirts meant for some of the women who sewed them.

In 2017 Debra Knoop produced the first scholarship focused on a propaganda trip Boissevain-van Lennep's took to the USA in 1949 in an attempt to popularize the *feestrok* abroad. Using primary source documents, such as letters and contemporary newspaper articles, Knoop analyzes the reception of the *feestrokken* in the US and concludes that while they were seen as potentially interesting symbols of peace, the initiative and Boissevain-van Lennep were ultimately seen as quaint. Knoop was one of the first scholars to add to Withuis's interpretation of the *feestrokken* by bringing to light the American interpretation of the *feestrok* as a symbol of peace and freedom.[108]

Other contemporary writing on the *feestrokken* has been limited to exhibition catalogues and newspaper articles in conjunction with these. Many of these articles and catalogues include interviews with the makers of the *feestrokken* featured. The initiative is usually introduced using Withuis's findings and interpretation. The largest exhibitions of the *feestrokken* to date took place in 1994 at the Rijksmuseum and in 2001 at the National Liberation Museum in Groesbeck. Withuis wrote the exhibition catalogue for the Rijksmuseum exhibit. She was also heavily cited by Marijke van den Esschert, the curator of the National Liberation

[108] D. Knoop, "De Nationale Feestrok" (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2017).

Museum.[109] The protestant newspaper, *Reformische Dagblad,* published an article 'Een Rok vol Herinneringen' in connection with this exhibit, which includes interview quotes from the creators of the displayed *feestrokken.* As a whole, the article emphasizes the memory-holding potential of the *feestrokken*. Els de Baan wrote her own exhibition catalogue in 1997 in conjunction with the exhibition that she curated, *The Feestrok: Memories of the war in Spijkenisse and Hekelingen in fabric and stitches*.[110] This exhibit focused on two skirts made in the neighboring towns of Hekelingen and Spijkenisse. De Baan is a costume historian and conducted interview-based research to understand the individual stories behind the skirts on display.[111] In 2015 Klasina Hoen-Goenewoud, Femmie de Graaf-Muis, and Alie Pereboom of the Steenwijkerland historical society included a locally made *feestrok* in their exhibit on World War II in Steenwijkerland.[112] The exhibit catalogue entry on the *feestrok* includes a brief introduction to the initiative. Photographs of other *feestrokken* worn by the local population are accompanied with first person accounts and biographical information about those pictured. Most recently a number of newspaper articles, *Vertel je Levensverhaal met Stoffen* in De Senator (2018), *Levensverhaalen Vertellen Met Stoffen* in De Puttenaer (2018), and *Textile Bewerken tot Levensverhaal* in Puttens Weekblad (2018) have been published in Putten, Gelderland, which include interviews with local Jansje Monninkhof, who made a *feestrok* in 1946. Monninkhof is photographed examining her *feestrok* at the depot of the Museum Rotterdam. The emphasis in all three of these articles is on the *feestrok*'s ability to serve as a memory-keeping and story-telling folk art.

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[109] Original Title: *Een Rok vol Herinneringen.* Translation authors own. Janneke van Reenen-Hak, "Een rok vol Herinneringen," *Reformische Dagblad*, September 7, 2001.
[110] Original text: *De Feestrok: Herrineringen in stof en steken aan de oorlog in Spijkenisse en Hekelingen.* Translation authors own.
[111] Els de Baan, *De Feestrok: Herrineringen in stof en steken aan de oorlig in Spijkenisse en Hekelingen*, trans. M.A.A. Leenen, 1st ed. (Spijkenisse: Centrale Bibliotheek Spijkenisse, 1997).
[112] Klasina Hoen-Goenewoud and Femmie de Graaf-Muis, "Bevrijdingsroken En Nationale Feestrok: Tentoonstelling over de Tweede Wereldoorlog Gementemuseum Steenwijkerland" (Gemeentehuis Steenwijkerland, April 14, 2015).

Due to the lack of scholarly research on the *feestrokken,* Withuis's scholarship on the initiative has been left unrevised. What little has been published focuses heavily on Boissevain-van Lennep's desires for the initiative. Newspaper articles and museum exhibits on the *feestrokken* tend to emphasize the memory-holding potential of the initiative. My scholarship builds on these sources. In my research I attempt to walk the middle ground between restating Withuis's previous scholarship on Boissevain-van Lennep and continuing in the nuclear regionality of small scale newspaper articles and exhibits. The following thesis rests on my interpretation of the desires and feelings about the war and the postwar years communicated by the creators of a set of 75 *feestrokken.*

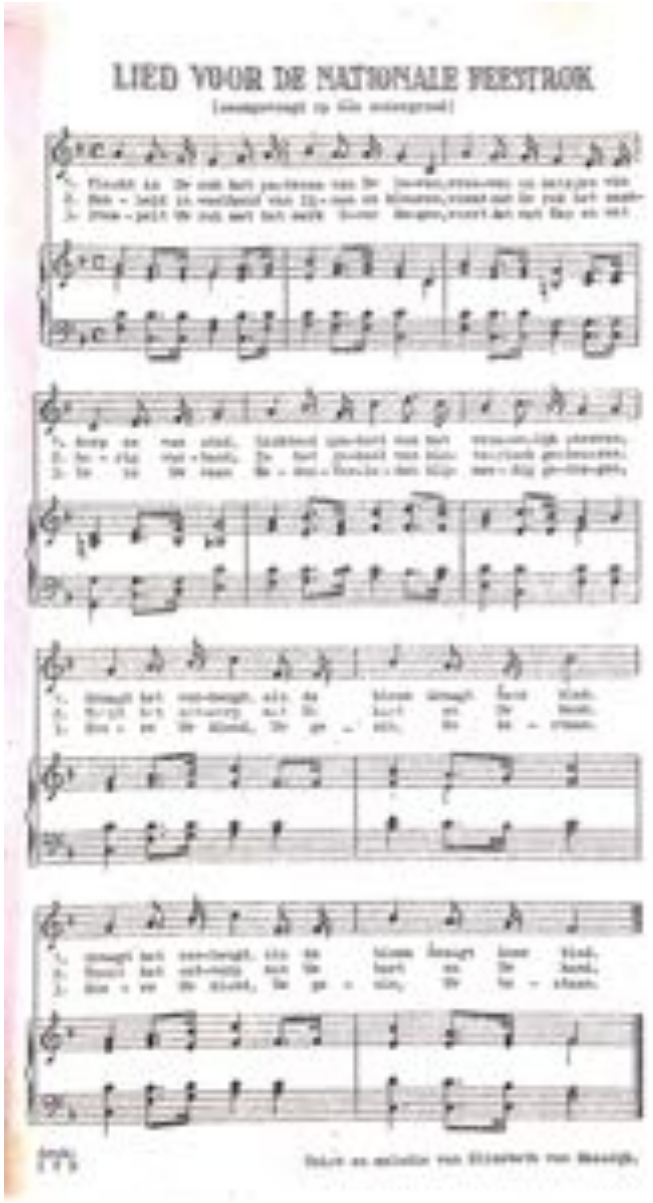

Figure 7 *Elisabeth Hannema van Maasdijk, "Lied voor de Nationale Feestrok," 1948, 653, Box 1, Folder 1, De nationale Feestrok, afd. Tilburg, Tilburg Regional Archives, Tilburg, North Brabant, Netherlands.*

Saamgevoegd op een Ondergrond
National Identity and Nationalism

In this chapter I will go further into depth on the issue of national identity and its creation in the postwar years. The inclusion of nationalistic elements in many of the skirts is part and parcel of a larger phenomenon occurring in the Netherlands after the end of World War II. Since nationalism and national identity were core to the feestrokken as whole, this essay will continue to explore the larger context/experience of the feestrok initiative as it pertains to expressions of nationalism. I will look at the implications of the intention Boissevain-van Lennep set for the feestrokken to be widely seen as a symbol of unified national identity, worn on Liberation Day and Queens Day throughout the country. I will look at the parade on September 2, 1948 for Queen Wilhelmina's 50-year reign and Queen Julianna's accession to the throne as the largest display of the feestrokken in a singular place and analyze the role of costume and ritual in performance of national identity.

National Identity Creation

The *feestrok* initiative was conceived of and made public less than a year after the end of World War II. The years of suppressed national identity and forced conformity under the Nazi regime created a pressure cooker and the excitement that came

with freedom led to an unparalleled jubilant expression of national identity.[113] Before the war, for most of the Dutch populace solidarity within pillars took precedence over a sense of national integrity. Following the liberation on May 5th, 1945, however, an unmatched celebration of the courage and survival of the nation occurred. Dutch flags were flown seemingly from every window, balls and concerts put on across the country, and new songs praising the country were composed and sung.[114] Emotionally, the citizens of the Netherlands were encouraged to adopt a hopeful gaze forward towards the future of a newly united country with a strong national identity.

At the same time the postwar years quickly became a time of intense fear, resentment, and distrust. Both the struggle of the occupation years and the continued difficulties of the reconstruction years were reasons for contempt. Suspicion and mistrust continued to run rampant between neighbors.[115] People were wary of those who might have collaborated with the Nazis and they were bitter towards those whom they perceived as having experienced lesser hardships.[116] It was broadly agreed that these difficult emotions had to be dealt with, lest violence break again. The ability to celebrate national freedom and hope had to be combined with

[113] During the occupation the expression Dutch national identity through the singing of *Wilhelmius* and the celebration of the Queen's birthday was criminalized.
[114] Withuis and Mooij, "From Totalitarianism to Trauma — A Paradigm Change in the Netherlands,"202.
[115] Withuis and Mooij, "From Totalitarianism to Trauma — A Paradigm Change in the Netherlands."202.

[116] Those coming back from the internment camps in Indonesia faced this type of discrimination. Even more shockingly Jewish and other concentration camp survivors (who were not affiliated with the resistance and were therefore seen as passive victims instead of heroes), were subject to such statements as "Well, quite a lot of your kind came back. Just be happy you were not here. How we suffered from hunger!" Pieter Lagrou, "Martyrs and Other Victims of Nazi Persecution: National Martyrdom," in *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation: Patriotic Memory and National Recovery in Western Europe, 1945±1965*, Studies in the Social and Cultural History of Modern Warfare (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 242.

the reduction of potentially antisocial behavior. This created a massive social and governmental push for the creation and celebration of a cohesive national identity behind which the county could unite.

These efforts towards postwar renationalization were troubled by the continued pre-war issue of a lack of prideful national myth around which to build a national identity. As previously discussed, before World War II, there had been few great, unifying events that could give substance to a united idea of nationhood. The Dutch had generally remained passive in armed disputes and took pride and comfort in their place as a colonial power. Despite the Dutch military neutrality, most Dutch citizens had faith in their armed forces. This belief in the capability of the Dutch military was shattered by the Nazi invasion and subsequent defeat after only five days of fighting. The German bombardment of Rotterdam and resulting Dutch surrender solidified this grand defeat as a national one. It was the Dutch army that had been defeated and the homeland of the Netherlands that was occupied.[117] In contrast, the liberation of the Netherlands was executed by the Allied forces.[118] Subsequently, the Netherlands did not have grounds to view the victory against the Germans as truly their own.[119] At a moment when the country needed unifying – hope in the face of the omnipresent fear, uncertainty, and continued austerity and struggle of the postwar years – a national defeat and liberation at the hands of a foreign army, were hardly the makings of a satisfying national identity building myth.[120]

[117] Lagrou, "Part I Troublesome Heroes: The Postwar Treatment of Resistance Veterans: Appropriating Victory and Re-Establishing the State," 29.
[118] Lagrou, "Part I Troublesome Heroes: The Postwar Treatment of Resistance Veterans: Appropriating Victory and Re-Establishing the State," 30.
[119] Lagrou, "Part I Troublesome Heroes: The Postwar Treatment of Resistance Veterans: Appropriating Victory and Re-Establishing the State," 33-35.
[120] Lagrou, "Part I Troublesome Heroes: The Postwar Treatment of Resistance Veterans: Appropriating Victory and Re-Establishing the State," 29.

In the case of the Resistance the war had provided a common enemy against whom those of different backgrounds could band together. For most people, however, the austere fearful years of the war destroyed relationships and created further isolation. Many Dutch citizens were also suspicious of their mayors and petty elected officials, many of whom stayed in the Netherlands and may have collaborated with the Germans. On a parliamentary level disputed arose regarding whether to reinstate the same religion-based political parties or attempt to de-pillarize society and politics.[121]Additionally, the postwar years were only marginally less severe than the war years in terms of rations. This continued struggle threatened to overwhelm hope as the defining characteristic of the postwar years. As suffering continued fears that National Socialism would reemerge spread. It was paramount, therefore, to work towards a type of unity.

In reaction to finger pointing and fragmentation, a myth of a common past began to emerge.[122] A seeming lack of short term memory resulted in the adoption of an idea of widespread resistance during World War II. Conveniently this also dealt with the lack of a prideful national victory. After the war, 'resistance' grew to encompass "everything from a tightly organized sabotage team" to the buying of bookmarks produced by peoples in hiding to the covert celebration of the Queen's birthday.[123] It is therefore difficult to pin down the actual number of active resisters. Today, it is generally agreed that a very small percentage of the Dutch population took part in organized resistance.[124] Most people had acted as bystanders in the war and tried to make sure that they survived along

[121] Biess and Moeller, "Defining the Postwar."
[122] Lagrou, "The Nationalization of Victimhood: Selective Violence and National Grief in Western Europe, 1940–1960,"252.
[123] Lagrou, "Part I Troublesome Heroes: The Postwar Treatment of Resistance Veterans: Appropriating Victory and Re-Establishing the State,"24.
[124] Burke, "Representation, Occupation, and Dutch War Films,"42.

with their families. However, being a bystander was passive. For a populace who had been suppressed for the past five years, unification behind passivity was not inspiring. Both in the present and retroactively people wanted to have agency. Agency meant acting. Once passivity was taken out post-factum as a non-action, were two modes of action: Resistance or collaboration. Those who had participated in the Resistance where good – and therefore able and welcome to join in rebuilding the Dutch society, and those who had collaborated were bad – and excluded.[125]

Additionally, the Dutch National Resistance Council (GAC) was created, which included many members of organized resistance groups. The GAC worked closely with the Dutch government in the postwar years. Through this collaboration the heroic legitimacy of the resistance and the political legitimacy of the government was merged, "integrate[ing] resistance and the nation."[126] Working with the GAC and on its own the Dutch government monitored and attempted to create the atmosphere around and culture of postwar celebrations and restoration.[127] As previously discussed the creation of the *feestrok* initiative was part of these efforts.

[125] Wendy Burke, "Representation, Occupation, and Dutch War Films," in *Images of Occupation in Dutch Film: Memory, Myth, and the Cultural Legacy of War*, Framing Film (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 39-40.

[126] Lagrou, "Part I Troublesome Heroes: The Postwar Treatment of Resistance Veterans: Appropriating Victory and Re-Establishing the State,"35.

[127] For example: close regulations were put on war monuments by the 1947 Commission for War Memorials in the Hague to represent: "the suffering of oppression, impotence in the face of supremacy, the irreparable grief that hit so many of us, the lawlessness, the material hardships and the fear for survival; the dogged resistance, the faith and pride of the powerless, *the solidarity of all who knew that they were united against the oppressor, the inner certainty of victory* [emphasis added], the hope for liberation, the triumph and the deliverance of the heavy burden, all that we, as a people, want to transmit to posterity, as the experience of this dark epoch that almost ended our existence as a nation." Burke, "Representation, Occupation, and Dutch War Films," 43.

National Identity and the *Nationale Feestrok*

The *feestrokken* functioned as props for a nation-wide performative expression of national identity on national holidays. Like regional or national folk costume, the *feestrokken* visually connected Dutch women throughout the country. In contrast to previous pervasiveness of regional costume over national in the Netherlands, the scope of the *feestrok* phenomenon was nation-wide. While there were common elements within regional traditional dress in the Netherlands – striped blouses, aprons, and ubiquitous wooden clogs - each province had distinct headpieces that prevented a nationally cohesive aesthetic.[128] While the *feestrokken* were all different, when worn, the women wearing them were symbolically interlocked, part of a larger national community.[129] Unlike conformity created through modernity and access to 'fast fashion,' the *feestrokken* were unique clothing items that symbolized a cohesion to a larger group, transcending their individuality.

While *feestrokken* provided leeway for personal expression, one way of integrating the skirts into a symbol of national unity was the stamping and numbering (Fig. 8).[130] The registering, stamping, and numbering of the skirts as part of the initiative was an important communicative element of the skirts. It created a visual representation of or nod to the many other skirts, within each individual *feestrok.* This could have enforced what was thought of as the deep need national group mentality in the postwar period.

[128] Constance Nieuwhoff, Willem Diepraam, and Cas Oorthuys. "Introduction: How It All Began." In *The Costumes of Holland*, (Amsterdam: Elsevier), 1985, 13.
[129] Shukla, "Conclusion: Costume as Elective Identity," 250.
[130] It is clear, though, that many women made *feestrok* without choosing to register their skirts – though it is unclear whether this was for monetary or practice reasons – such as not knowing about the option - or for ideological ones. Based on the fact that many skirts that were made as part of the *feestrok* initiative were not stamped, it is likely that many more than the oft stated 4,000 were made.

The motto on the *Nationale Feestrok* registration stamp: *samengevoed op een ondergrond,* which translates to "brought together on one foundation," further reinforced this group mentality. This motto could be interpreted a number of ways. It presented a reference to the joining together of patches on an old skirt. It also made clear two closely related ideological components of the project, as conceived of by Boissevain-van Lennep: 1) the *feestrokken* were all supposed to be made centered on the same (national) ideas or ideals 2) the *feestrokken* and their creators were unified through their national background. This latter point was made again in the informational pamphlet, *Gegevens Over Het Vervaardigen Van De Nationale Feestrok* (Information on the fabrication of the national feestrok), which was produced to inform women on how to make a *feestrok*. As previously discussed, these pamphlets encouraged women to include visual references to their personal lives and individual communities in their *feestrokken*. However, the fact that the skirts were supposed to communicate national *saamhorigheid* (unity) was repeatedly, subtly stressed. "These triangles [along the hem of the skirt] symbolize the high points of our nation, which we celebrate annually, these are the days of liberation and unity … The skirt is an expression of the fact that man is always a part of his nation; this can be seen even in his personality."[131] This quote shows the extent to which Dutch-ness was imagined as a core experience and even inherent personality trait.[132]

[131] Original Text: *deze punten stellen voor de hoogtepunten van ons volksbestaan, die wij jaarlijks samen vieren, de dagen van bevrijding en saamhorigheid … De rok wil uitdrukking geven aan de gedachte dat de mens altijd blijft onderdeel van zijn volk; ook als persoonlijkheid is hij dat* Translation author's own. Boissevain-van Lennep, "Gegevens over het Veraadigen van de Nationale Feestrok."

[132] The quote also strays from the normative 'womanhood-centric' writing on and ideals of the *feestrok* by refereeing to the skirt as an expression of a male national subject. Given Boissevain-van Lennep's involvement with feminist organizations both before and after the war, it seems unlikely that this is an unintentional choice.

As was true for most aspects of the initiative, the registering, stamping, and numbering of the skirts also had a practical purpose. By requiring women to stamp and register their skirts as part of the *feestrok* initiative Boissevain-van Lennep, the rokken-committee and the Dutch government were also able to keep track of this aspect of postwar celebration. This enabled Boissevain-van Lennep and the Dutch government to numerically assess the success of the initiative. This level of success was key for funding purposes. Perhaps because of the success of the *feestrokken,* Boissevain-van Lennep was fearful that they would be picked up and mass-produced. Thus, she required that skirts be handmade. This was further justified by the importance of memory-holding patches to the *feestrok* initiative.[133] The handmade obligation served two other purposes: 1) it made sure that the skirts that were made were easier to keep track of since they could not be made in bulk 2) it shrewdly – and perhaps unintentionally – created an initiative that could be interpreted as women pledging their allegiance to their country throughout the stitching of their skirts. In other words, Boissevain-van Lennep effectively asked that during the making of the skirts women consciously or unconsciously asserted and reasserted their national identity to themselves – patch by patch, stitch by stitch.

While this may seem like a stretch, the notion that through doing needlework, the seamstress is continuously conjuring up the objective of her creation actually has a long history. Early modern English literary scholar, Lisa Klein has claimed Elizabethian gifts of needlework had the "unique capacity to evoke the giver, her hands occupied in painstaking and loving labor and out- stretched in an attitude of presentation, devotion, or supplication."[134] While the *feestrokken* themselves were not gifts to be given to the country

[133] Boissevain-van Lennep also offered bags of patches for sale for women who did not have enough fabric to create their own *feestrok*. This charitable gesture undermined the stated reason for the skirts having to be handmade (patches hold important personal memories). However, it did allow more women to participate in the initiative.
[134] Lisa M. Klein, "Your Humble Handmaid: Elizabethan Gifts of Needlework," *Renaissance Quarterly* 50, no. 2 (1997): 459–93, https://doi.org/10.2307/3039187.

(or the Queen), as they were nationalistic objects one can imagine them having a similar function. That is, the skirts had the ability to evoke their creators and the assiduous labor of piecing and applique, which would enable the creators to present their devotion to their country through the wearing of the skirts. As is clear from the details in many of the *feestrokken*, women were concerned with stitching visually nationalistic symbols and using the national colors of red, white, blue, and orange. Klein's claim that Elizabethian gifts of needlework were symbolic of a deeper devotion and gratitude is mirrored in final lyrics of Hannema-van Maasdijk's *Lied voor de Nationale Feestrok* "give thanks with (or to) your skirt to your to your family and your existence."[135] The idea was that through the creation of a *feestrok* women would be able to provide recognition that they had survived the war presumably in part due to the strength of their nation.

Furthermore, the idea that one can give oneself to one's nation (perhaps as an act of gratitude) is routinely played out in national spectacles, where the performative subject-formation allows individuals to be subsumed by their national identity. This type of spectacle took place on September 2nd, 1948 for Queen Wilhelmina's 50-year reign and her daughter, Julianna's, accession to the throne. While the *feestrokken* were not meant to be given in the same way that the Elizabethan needlework Klein discusses were, the parade on September 2, 1948 can be read as a performance gift to the monarch. For this occasion, *feestrok*-clad women paraded through the Binnehof in The Hague (Fig. 9). They sang a the *Lied voor de Nationale Feestrok*, which extoled the role of the *feestrokken* in the reconstruction of the Netherlands and performed simple march-like dances. Similar to women wearing their *feestrokken* on other national holidays was a way to visually pledge their allegiance, this parade assembled both the *feestrokken* and

[135] Original text "*siere Uw kleed, Uw gezin, Uw bestaan."* Translation author's own. Elisabeth Hannema van Maasdijk, "De Taal van de Rok" (1948), 1.

their creators together. Photographs of the parade show a group of women in *feestrok*, which are almost uniform-like in their unity. Perhaps, visually it bore a similarity to military parades – a demonstration of the wealth and skill of a nation and the devotion of its subjects. Visually the parade was clearly demonstration of unity. One could say that this display took the many *feestrokken* and with them created one symbolic *feestrok* - individual skirts acting as patches. When worn together, the *feestrokken* ceased to be expressions of individual experiences and instead became uniform-like – "[replacing] personal identity with a collective one."[136]

Registration for the parade began on July 15, 1948.[137] By August enough women had registered that Boissevain-van Lennep had to turn away potential participants due to a lack of space in the courtyard of the Binnehof for all who wanted to partake in the *feestrok* parade part of the festivities.[138] Even so, the final number of women who participated in the défilé was around 400.[139]

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The creation of this spectacle would not have been possible without collective efforts. This included the overt collaboration of groups of women who traded and shared patches for their skirts, or groups who created matching *feestrokken*. It included organized meetings, like those of the Dutch League of Rural Women, that centered the collective creation of the *feestrokken.* It also included the assistance that many women were given by their mothers, sisters, and friends in sewing their *feestrokken*, as well as the obvious

[136] Shukla, 251.
[137] Letter from Adrienne Minette Boissevain-van Lennep to Mevr. Janssens-van Kemenade, August 10, 1948, 653, Box 1, Folder 1, De nationale Feestrok, afd. Tilburg, Tilburg Regional Archives, Tilburg, North Brabant, Netherlands.
[138] Letter from Adrienne Minette Boissevain-van Lennep to Mevr. Janssens-van Kemenade, August 10, 1948, 653, Box 1, Folder 1, De nationale Feestrok, afd. Tilburg, Tilburg Regional Archives, Tilburg, North Brabant, Netherlands.
[139] Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, "Nationale Feestrok: Patching the Pieces Together after the War."

collecting and giving of patches. Covert ideological collaboration was also inherent in this participation in a widespread artistic initiative.[140] This ideological unity was somewhat unique in the still religiously segregated Netherlands. Additionally, the September 2nd parade provided a somewhat rare opportunity for female connection across the pillars of Dutch society. While some women may have marched alongside others whom they knew, others went to the parade alone.[141] Those who came alone still participated in the visual declaration of the unity of the nation's women. In her propaganda for the défilé Boissevain-van Lennep tellingly penned the following sendoff: "When one wears [a feestrok] … it creates unity. Unity brings peace. Peace brings reconstruction."[142] This simple, poetic sendoff captures Boissevain-van Lennep's hope that by wearing and creating the *feestrok,* women would be able to unite and create [a national] community. This cohesive national community was the basis on which peace and the work of reconstruction could be built.

[140] Other examples of this solo creation as collaboration in a larger 'spectacle' can be the creation of Pussyhats contemporarily in the United States, or the AIDS Quilt in the 1980s-2010s. The Pussyhats, like *feestrok*, were (in theory) made to be worn in 'performance' – in the case of the Pussyhats, a protest. Like *feestrok* they also had clear guidelines for creation.

[141] de Baan, *De Feestrok: Herrineringen in stof en steken aan de oorlig in Spijkenisse en Hekelingen,* 12.

[142] Original text: *Een dracht … maakt eendracht. Eendracht brengt vrede. Vrede brengt opbouw*." Translation author's own. Boissevain-van Lennep, "Gegevens over het Veraadigen van de Nationale Feestrok."

Figure 10 Ann Visser-Geurts (right) and Two Friends in their *Feestrokken,* 1947, (Photograph by unknown, Private Collection).

Eenheid en Veelheid

Community, Connection, Collective Creation

The advertisements for the creation of the *feestrokken* and manifestos on its ideology were mostly written by Boissevain-van Lennep and her collegues. Contemporary accounts refer to her driving throughout the country between 1946 and 1948 to promote the creation of her initiative and she maintained personal correspondence with many of the women who made the *feestrokken*.[143] Given how entwined Boissevain-van Lennep was with the *feestrok* initiative, it is difficult to parse the objectives she set for the initiative from its actual functions. One belief Boissevain-van Lennep held was that the creation and wearing of the *feestrokken* could help women, the Netherlands, and the wider-world connect after and heal from World War II. Boissevain-van Lennep believed these three were interconnected. The dissolution of the sharp divides along religious lines (pillarization) was one way many people in the Netherlands, including Boissevain-van Lennep, thought the country could connect and heal. It was unclear, however, exactly how this would happen. This idealistic desire for depillarized unity played a major role in how the *feestrok* phenomenon was conceived of and written about by Boissevain-van Lennep and her peers. The *Lied voor de Nationale Feestrok*, written by Elisabeth Hannema van Maasdijk, was used to advertise the *feestrokken* as creating a sense of unification:

Unity out of difference, recreated through fabrics and colors

[143] Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, "Nationale Feestrok: Patching the Pieces Together after the War" (Exhibit Catalogue, May 1995).

Use your skirt to create unity.[144]

Metaphorically, the use of eclectic patches represented the union of different pieces of society - aesthetically embodying a united togetherness. However, Boissevain-van Lennep did not want the *feestrokken* to just represent togetherness. She believed the *feestrokken* could concretely impact life and culture in the Netherlands. According to Boissevain-van Lennep the creation of the *feestrokken* could not only strengthen existent communities and relationship but establish new ones as well, perhaps transcending religious or pillarized barriers.

In order to do this, Boissevain-van Lennep encouraged women to create their *feestrokken* in groups. These groups would provide a space for women to share the stories, joys, and sorrows that came with their patches, according to Boissevain-van Lennep. Ideally, Boissevain-van Lennep believed that all women should have the chance to make such a skirt. Through collaborative creation those with less could still be participants. In order to provide equal opportunity, Boissevain-van Lennep encouraged the sharing of patches with those who did not have enough fabric left over from the meager war years.[145] Through collective making and collaborative sharing, the *feestrok* phenomenon would not only be political campaign but become a community building project.

Boissevain-van Lennep's desire seems to have come to fruition to some extent. Regional women's groups, such as divisions of the *Nederlandse Bond van Plattelandsvrouwen* (Dutch League of Rural Women), had monthly, bi-monthly, and even weekly

[144] Original Lyrics: '*Eenheid van veelheid van lijnen en kleuren/Vormt met Uw rok het saamhorig verband'* Translation authors own. Lyrics for "Lied voor de Nationale Feestrok" (1948), Folder 48, Archief Tentoonstelling 'de Nederlandse Vrouw 1898-1948', ATRIA archives, Amsterdam, South Holland, Netherlands.

[145] Boissevain-van Lennep, "Gegevens over het Veraadigen van de Nationale Feestrok."

meetings in which they worked on their *feestrokken*.[146] In cities such as Tilburg, so called *rokken*-committees were set up as dedicated groups that provided space for women to create their *feestrokken* in tandem. Some of these regional committees were even set up so as to be able to stamp and register the skirts made locally. This saved women the cost of sending their skirts to Amsterdam to be registered there.[147] However, the groups of women who came together to co-create the skirts tended to be part of communities that already existed.[148] The same was true for the relationships that were chosen to be represented in the *feestrokken*. In short, while interpersonal relationships were foundational for the initiative, the skirts did not create connections between pillarized communities. In this sense, Boissevain-van Lennep's utopian vision of a united Netherlands brought together in part by the *feestrokken* did not come to fruition.

Implicit, Explicit, and In Between

Familial, platonic, and romantic relationships were essential for the creation and decoration of many *feestrokken.* The importance placed on nuclear community can be seen expressed explicitly (or legibly to unfamiliar viewers) and implicitly in most *feestrok*, though the explicit is rarer. Explicit expression in this case refers to examples of *feestrokken* where names of loved ones or dates of birth or other important familial dates (such as weddings) are embroidered and named. One very clear example of this type of expression of relationships can be seen in a *feestrok* made for a child, housed at the Liberation Museum in Groesbeck, Gelderland,

[146] Els de Baan (specialist in costume history) interviewed by Charlotte Somerville, Leiden, South Holland, Netherlands, January 10, 2019.
[147] Tilburg
[148] [148] Withuis Jolande, "Patchwork Politics in the Netherlands, 1946-50: Women, Gender and the World War II Trauma," *Womens History Review* 3, no. 3 (2006): 295.

NL (Fig. 11). Its donor, Elly Hendrik-Wijdenes, would have been nine at the time of its creation. Given the size of the skirt it is likely that it was made for her. The skirt is neatly made, using a blanket stitch to attach the patches to a white backing (likely a reused sheet).[149] The blanket stitch is done precisely using small stitches, as is the decorative embroidery. The desire to create and the subsequent creation of an item for a child in and of itself implies a relationship, as the child could not create the skirt herself. In its creation, Hendrik-Wijdenes' *feestrok* is not unique. The *feestrok* phenomenon inspired the creation of many skirts or aprons for children as part of the initiative. However, it is the content of the embroidery on the skirt that sets Hendrik-Wijdenes' *feestrok* apart. It includes the following names and dates: Elly Wijdenes 08.06.38, Gerard Wijdenes 31.03.36, Marion-Ine Wijdenes 24.08.43, and Dick-Peter Wijdenes 21.11.49. It is almost certain that these are the names of the maker's children and Hendrik-Wijdenes' siblings. This embroidering of names and dates of birth is similarly seen in C.E. de Visser's *feestrok*, which includes on it dates embroidered next to cut-out four photographs of children's faces.

Implicit expression refers to the *feestrokken* where the allusions to familial or other relationships are not readable by an audience of outsiders. Often this is because these references exist within the choice of patches. An unfamiliar viewer cannot call to mind the specific child from whose dress a patch of floral cotton comes or the memories a square of flannel might conjure. However, reminiscing about loved ones as inspired by the fabric in a *feestrok*, was an essential aspect of the initiative as conceived of by Boissevain-van Lennep. The pamphlet *De Taal van de Rok* (The Language of the Skirt), written by Hannema-van Maasdijk, translated Boissevain-van Lennep's idea of how the patches would stand in for relationships. Written from a first-person point of

[149] Boissevain-van Lennep, "Gegevens over het Veraadigen van de Nationale Feestrok."

view, Hannema-van Maasdijk takes the reader on a virtual tour of the memories embedded in the patches of her *feestrok.* A small triangular grey and white patch reminds Hannema-van Maasdijk of her mother's kind, wrinkled face.[150] Other fabric sparks recollections of her sons.[151] By writing about the relationships encased in the patches of her *feestrok,* Hannema-van Maasdijk brings her readers into her group of intimates. This type of quasi-advertisements written by Hannema-van Maasdijk and Boissevain-van Lennep were how most women learned about the *feestrok* initiative. Since most women did not have the public forum of published writing that Hannema-van Maasdijk did, the expression of relationships via patchwork was a mostly a private or inward turning affair. Boissevain-van Lennep hoped that the maker of the skirt and those intimately entwined with her life, would be able to point to specific patches and recollect from whose clothing the patch had come. Based on the importance of this memory-holding aspect of *feestrok* in these quasi-advertisements, this mode of relationship expression was likely inherent in how women conceived of their *feestrokken.* This can be discerned via the aesthetics of most of the skirts*,* which use fabric from women's clothing and scraps indicative of the fabric used for men's or children's clothing. Even if the nature of the relationships held in the patches is not determinable by the average viewer, the diversity of fabric suggests an array of clothing whose wearers were varied in gender and age.

Many of the *feestrokken*, however, also include embellishments that toe the line between implicit and explicit references to personal bonds. This can include the embroidery of nicknames, or the addition of pins, or iconographic patches. Decoding this type

[150] Elisabeth Hannema van Maasdijk, "De Taal van de Rok" (1948), 1.
[151] Elisabeth Hannema van Maasdijk, "De Taal van de Rok" (1948), 1.

of reference requires a level of familiarity with the maker. However, the choice to diverge from the patchwork norm through embroidery of a nickname or a reference to an inside joke, indicates an active choice of inclusion on the part of the maker.

An example of an 'in between' articulation in the vein of nicknames, can be seen in the *feestrok* of Gerd Schets, in the private collection of An Moonen (Fig. 12). Besides the usual embroidery of *5 Mei* and the subsequent years when the skirt was worn (in Schet's case *1945*, *1946*, *1947*, and *1948*) the skirt, includes two nicknames, '*Snoebeltje*' and '*Poetje,'* neatly embroidered using a backstitch (Fig. 13). Moonen kindly agreed to meet with me and tell me what she knew about this *feestrok*, which was given to her by Schets, a family friend. According to Moonen, Schets made her *feestrok* alone.[152] However, the two nicknames, indicate important relationships in Schets' life. Moonen was able to tell me that *Poetje* was a nickname Schets, herself, went by for much of her life.[153] *Snoebeltje*, Moonen hypothesized, was the nickname Schets had for her father, with whom she lived and took care of after the war.

Other examples of 'in between' relationship articulation, can be found in Hannema-van Maasdijk's *feestrok* in the form of pins (Fig. 14). One of these comes from skating race held in the winter of 1941. The pin consists of a heavy gold cross hung from a green and white ribbon (Fig. 15). The cross is stamped with an image of a man skating. The year '1941' is etched on the back. It is unlikely that Hannema-van Maasdijk won the ribbon herself since she would have been 46 at the time of the race and women generally did not partake ice skate racing. It is more probable that the pin was won by a close male friend or family member. Both the fact that this pin was a prize and the fact that it was made of metal – a precious commodity in the occupied years – indicate its

[152] An Moonen (Dutch Quilt Specialist) interviewed by Charlotte Somerville, Westervoort, Gelderland, Netherlands, January 12, 2019.
[153]An Moonen (Dutch Quilt Specialist) interviewed by Charlotte Somerville, Westervoort, Gelderland, Netherlands, January 12, 2019.

importance. Hannema-van Maasdijk's *feestrok* also includes a military patch with a lion and the motto 'Je Maintiendrai' – part of the uniform of the Princess Irene Brigade (Fig. 16). The Princess Irene Brigade (P.I.B) was a Dutch military unit that arrived in the United Kingdom in 1940 following the occupation of the Netherlands. The 1,500 troops that made up the P.I.B fought alongside the Allies in France, Germany, and the Netherlands.[154] Both the medal and the patch must have been given to Hannema-van Maasdijk. Given the signifigance of both they were likely gifts from people close to Hannema-van Maasdijk. This was likely true for many of the patches included in most of the *feestrokken.* However, the memory-holding patches were a practical medium in the austere war years, as well as an ideological one. The inclusion of metals and appliqued patches, such as the ones seen in Hannema-van Maasdijk's *feestrok* did not serve a practical purpose. Thus, it can be assumed that they were included purely as homage to people in Hannema-van Maasdijk's life.

Group Creation

In addition to referencing their relationships visually in their *feestrokken,* women also made their skirts in small groups. Organizations like the Dutch League of Rural Women, used their meetings to work on their *feestrokken*. In addition, group affiliation can be inferred from lists were kept by the Amsterdam *rokken*-committee of the *feestrokken* that were registered. These lists included the addresses and names of the creators of the *feestrokken* that were sent in, as well as the total payment received for the registration

[154] Frank Bolle, and Frank van der Drift, trans. "Prinses Irene Brigade." Traces of War, July 26, 2012. https://www.tracesofwar.com/articles/2544/Prinses-Irene-Brigade.htm.

costs.[155] From these lists, the co-creation of *feestrok* by bands of women unaffiliated with a larger organization - presumably women from one family or close friends - can be surmised. Sometimes one woman sent in the payment to register multiple skirts. The lists also include multiple lines with skirts all registered to the same name.[156] At other times Boissevain-van Lennep notes that a woman sent in more than one skirt and includes the total guilders that were attached.[157] Even women who made their *feestrok* seemingly alone often had help from a family member or friend.[158] That women made their skirts both in groups and collaboratively is further supported by interviews, photographs, and a number of skirts themselves.

In Hekelingen, a small town outside of Rotterdam, a group of friends set about making their *feestrokken* together. In an of itself this was unremarkable. However, textile history scholar, Els de Baan, conducted interviews with one of the women, Kaatje Mol (Fig. 17). These provide information about how this group worked together to make their *feestrokken.* The group consisted of four young women: Mol, Koosje Stolk, Lena van der Meer-Scheigrond, and Co de Koning. All four worked at the local Sunday school and learned about the initiative from the Pastor's wife. Sadly, three skirts (made by Stolk, van der Meer-Scheigrond and de Koning) have been lost or thrown away.[159]

[155] Registration list of skirts, 1947, Nationale Feestrok, Folder 41, Archief Adrienne Boissevain-van Lennep, ATRIA archives, Amsterdam, South Holland, Netherlands.
[156] Registration list of skirts, 1947, Nationale Feestrok, Folder 41, Archief Adrienne Boissevain-van Lennep, ATRIA archives, Amsterdam, South Holland, Netherlands.
[157] Registration list of skirts, 1947, Nationale Feestrok, Folder 41, Archief Adrienne Boissevain-van Lennep, ATRIA archives, Amsterdam, South Holland, Netherlands.
[158] Jansje Monninkhof (*feestrok* creator) interviewed by Charlotte Somerville, Achterveld, Gelderland, Netherlands, January 7, 2019.
[159] Els de Baan conducted interview based research for her exhibit Els de Baan, *De Feestrok: Herrineringen in stof en steken aan de oorlig in Spijkenisse en Hekelingen*. She kindly agreed to share with me the interview transcripts from her conversation with Mol. Els de Baan, *De Feestrok: Herrineringen in stof en steken aan de oorlig in Spijkenisse en Hekelingen*, trans. Leenen, 1st ed. (Spijkenisse: Centrale Bibliotheek Spijkenisse, 1997), 6.

What is remarkable about Mol's skirt and those made by proxy Stolk, van der Meer-Scheigrond and de Koning, is that it can be definitively said that the patches came from fabric that was traded between the four women.[160] During the six to eight weeks Mol, Stolk, van der Meer-Scheigrond, and de Koning, were meeting to co-create their skirts, they exchanged patches with each other. They chose fabric that they all found beautiful or wanted to include; they then cut it into four equal pieces.[161] This is how a section of the same Dutch flag was included in all four skirts.[162] The choice to evenly divide and include a section of the Dutch flag is indicative of two of the central ideas of the *feestrok* initiative: its ability to bring together women and its connotations for national identity expression. The importance of exchange (be it of stories or patches) as a manner of relationship creation or expression in the *feestrok* initiative is also encapsulated by this gesture. In other words, the sharing of the flag fabric symbolically bonded all four women both to each other and to the Netherlands.

The *feestrokken* were also used to show adherence to a larger group. A case study of this type of group identity in the *feestrok* initiative can be seen in the skirts made by the women of the Tilburg *rokken*-committee. This was a larger intentional group founded with the focus on the creation of the *feestrokken* and was started by Mevr. Janssens-van Kemenade and Mevr. Verbunt-van Lier. Three distinct groups, with eight members each took part in the *rokken*-committee: the *R.K. Vrouwengild* (a Catholic women's group), the *Katholic Arbeitersvrouwen* (Catholic Worker's Wives), and the *Katholic Boereninnenbond* (Catholic farmers' wives).

[160] This can be surmised from the interviews conducted by de Baan.
[161] Els de Baan, *De Feestrok: Herrineringen in stof en steken aan de oorlig in Spijkenisse en Hekelingen*, trans. Leenen, 1st ed. (Spijkenisse: Centrale Bibliotheek Spijkenisse, 1997), 6.
[162] Els de Baan, *De Feestrok: Herrineringen in stof en steken aan de oorlig in Spijkenisse en Hekelingen*, trans. Leenen, 1st ed. (Spijkenisse: Centrale Bibliotheek Spijkenisse, 1997), 6.

None of the skirts associated with the Tilburg *rokken*-committee have survived, or if they have, they are in private hands. However, a surviving newspaper article provides written descriptions of the 24 *feestrokken* made:[163]

> The Catholic Womens Guild wore red, white, blue and orange skirts (there were two skirts of each color). The skirts embroidered with emblems of the Royal House of the Netherlands. One skirt was embroidered with the coat of arms of each of the eleven provinces, along with the coat of arms of the Netherlands and the national motto 'Je Maintiendrai.' Another skirt was embellished with an orange flower and the lineage of the House of Orange – embroidered using Smyrna wool. Still another skirt (a blue one) was adorned with a scene of our city hall, complete with the orange blinds! The women of the Catholic Workers Wives were dressed in the city colors of Tilburg (four women wore blue skirts and four women wore yellow ones). Using the contrasting color images of different Tilburg city landmarks were embroidered - the station, the city statue of Petrus Donders, the city hall. Finally, the members of the Farmers Wives wore skirts in the colors of Brabant (four white and four red). The women appliqued a plow in the contrasting color on each skirt. Above the plow was a little cross. All of the women [of the rokken-committee] wore white blouses …[164]

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[163] Typescript describing the skirts made by the R.K. Vrouwengild, the Kath. Arbeitersvrouwen, and the Kath. Boereninnenbond, 1948, 653, Box 1, Folder 2, De nationale Feestrok, afd. Tilburg, Tilburg Regional Archives, Tilburg, North Brabant, Netherlands.

[164] Original text: *Het vrouwengilde waren in rode, witte, bauwe en oranje rokken (van elke kleuren twee). Op deze rokken waren emblemen van ons Koninklijk Huis of van Nederland geborduurd. Zo was er een rok met de wapens van de elf provincien met het Nederlandse wapen en de spreuk 'Je Maintiendrai,'een andre droeg een oranjebloom met de afstamming van het Oranjehuis in smyrnawool [sic], weer een andere rok (een van blauwe) was getooid met een afbeelding van ons Paleis Raadhuis, zelf met de oranje rolluiken! Dan de dames van De K.A.V. die waren gekleed in de Tilburgse kleuren (vier blauwe en vier gele rokken). Hierop waren in de contrasterende kleur verschillende Tilburgse stad punten geborduurd, zo als het station, het stadbeeld van Petrus Donders, het Paleis Raadhuis e.d. De klokrok had contrasterende punten, evenals de ceintuur. Tenslotte de leden van De Boerinnenbond zij drogen rokken in de kleuren van Brabant. (vier witte en vier rode). Op de rokken ontwaarde men een geappliqueerde ploeg in de contrasterende kleur, Boven deze ploeg bevond zich een kruisje. Al deze dames droegen witte blouses* …Translation author's own. Newspaper clipping describing the skirts made by the R.K. Vrouwengild, the Kath. Arbeitersvrouwen, and the Kath. Boereninnenbond, September 1948, 653, Box 1, Folder 3, De nationale Feestrok, afd. Tilburg, Tilburg Regional Archives, Tilburg, North Brabant, Netherlands.

As this description shows, eight women of each smaller group made and wore more or less matching skirts. This is another example of how the *feestrokken* were utilized as tools for the expression of relationships or adherence to a group: the creation of matching skirts. This mode of relationship expression differs from both the implicit and explicit assertions seen in individual skirts. Within these singular skirts, the choice of how to arrange patches was (mostly) a personal one. The individual skirts made by the women of the Tilburg rokken-committee may have used memory-holding patched as implicit references to relationships. However, these *feestrokken* were created with aesthetic unity in mind. This implies a collective, if not collaborative, making process. Perhaps creative choices were collectivized or democratized. Certainly, within the groups that made up the Tilburg *rokken*-committee, being part of a visually cohesive group was prioritized over individual desires.

In addition to signaling an adherence to a group, matching *feestrokken* could also be declarative of intimate relationships. This is seen in a pair of skirts in the Rijksmuseum collection (Fig. 18 and 19). This mother-daughter pair was donated by Jantje Maria van den Bosch-Elzinga. Besides the difference in size and a few discrepancies in patches and embroideries, the skirts are nearly indistinguishable. The larger skirt is 27" across at the waist and 29" long and the smaller one is 26" at the waist and 27" long. Based in the size it is it is reasonable to assume that the smaller skirt was worn by an older girl or teenager. Both skirts are made of triangular patches. They have almost all the same embroideries in the same places. Following the obligatory *5 Mei*, the hem of both skirts is annually embroidered from 1946 through 1955 with a blackletter calligraphy style in brightly colored thread. Other embroideries on both skirts include a fully embroidered patch with scene of a hand placing a brick on a wall with *wederopbouw* (reconstruction) embroidered above it. Both skirts have a J with a royal crown (which celebrates Queen Juliana's assent to the throne

in 1948) embroidered in a purple patch. One of the subtle but noticeable differences between the skirts is the placement of an embroidered gold W with 1898-1948 over it and *Je Maintiendrai* (the motto on the Dutch royal coat of arms) embroidered under it. This embroidery commemorates Queen Wilhelmina's 50-year reign. On the smaller skirt this tribute is found on a pink triangle, which centrally placed next to a yellow triangle (Fig. 20). This yellow triangle includes the registration number (400) and the authenticating stamp. On the larger skirt the commemoration triangle is blue and placed next to the triangle with the J embroidery (Fig. 21) It is unclear if the skirts were made by one woman (presumably the mother) or the mother and daughter in collaboration. In any case, the skirts are the work of very skilled seamstress(es). It is likely that the smaller skirt was made first, as its base is made out of four panels of the same fabric – a loosely woven red and white check (Fig. 22). The backing of the larger skirt includes two white cotton panels along with two of the same check (Fig. 23). If both skirts were made by the same woman – in which case it may be safe to assume the mother – the fact that the smaller skirt was, perhaps, made first may speak to a prioritizing of her daughter's skirt. If the skirts were made collaboratively the care and precision with which the embroidery is done, are a sign of time spent on the skirts and perhaps together. Whether the skirts were made by one woman or two their visual mimicry unifies them. When worn together – as they were during the parade for Queen Wilhelmina in 1948 – they look symbolic of the connection between their wearers – a visual expression of a bond. The congruency in dates along the hem of the skirts says that the skirts were worn each year from 1946 to 1955. The ongoing nature of wearing both skirts appear to be a visible sign of an ongoing relationship and the ongoing desire to express it.

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The *feestrokken* were supposed to be worn every year and eventually passed down to a younger female family member. In doing so the relationships encapsulated in the skirt would continue to be remembered. The giving of the skirt would also be an expression of community and love. In most cases, the *feestrokken* were not passed down in this way. They ultimately often wound up in dress-up boxes or attic wardrobes. However, the relationships which they enshrined were not forgotten and neither were the origins of patches in the *feestrokken.* In many cases women can recall the person from whose clothing various patches came, as well as some specific memories more than fifty years after they made their *feestrok*. In the past twenty years, after a period of disuse, the *feestrokken* have begun to inspire the sharing of memories again.[165] In some cases, the re-visiting of a *feestrok* has sparked conversations about the war that would not have happened otherwise.[166] This memory-sharing aspect of *feestrok* phenomenon and its subsequent community building has caught on in other ways as well. In the province of Gelderland Margreet Bijnagte and Laurens Strijbos have recently created a community organization that encourages the creation of *feestrok*-like clothing items, using memory-holding patches.[167] In particular, Bijnagte and Strijbos see the creation of these clothing items as a way to inspire memory sharing between Dutch citizens and recent immigrants.[168]

[165] Jansje Monninkhof (*feestrok* maker), interviewed by Charlotte Somerville, Achterveld, Gelderland, January 7, 2019.
[166] Jansje Monninkhof (*feestrok* maker), interviewed by Charlotte Somerville, Achterveld, Gelderland, January 7, 2019.
[167] Laurens Strijbos, interviewed by Charlotte Somerville, Utrecht, Utrecht, January 14, 2019.
[168] Laurens Strijbos, interviewed by Charlotte Somerville, Utrecht, Utrecht, January 14, 2019.

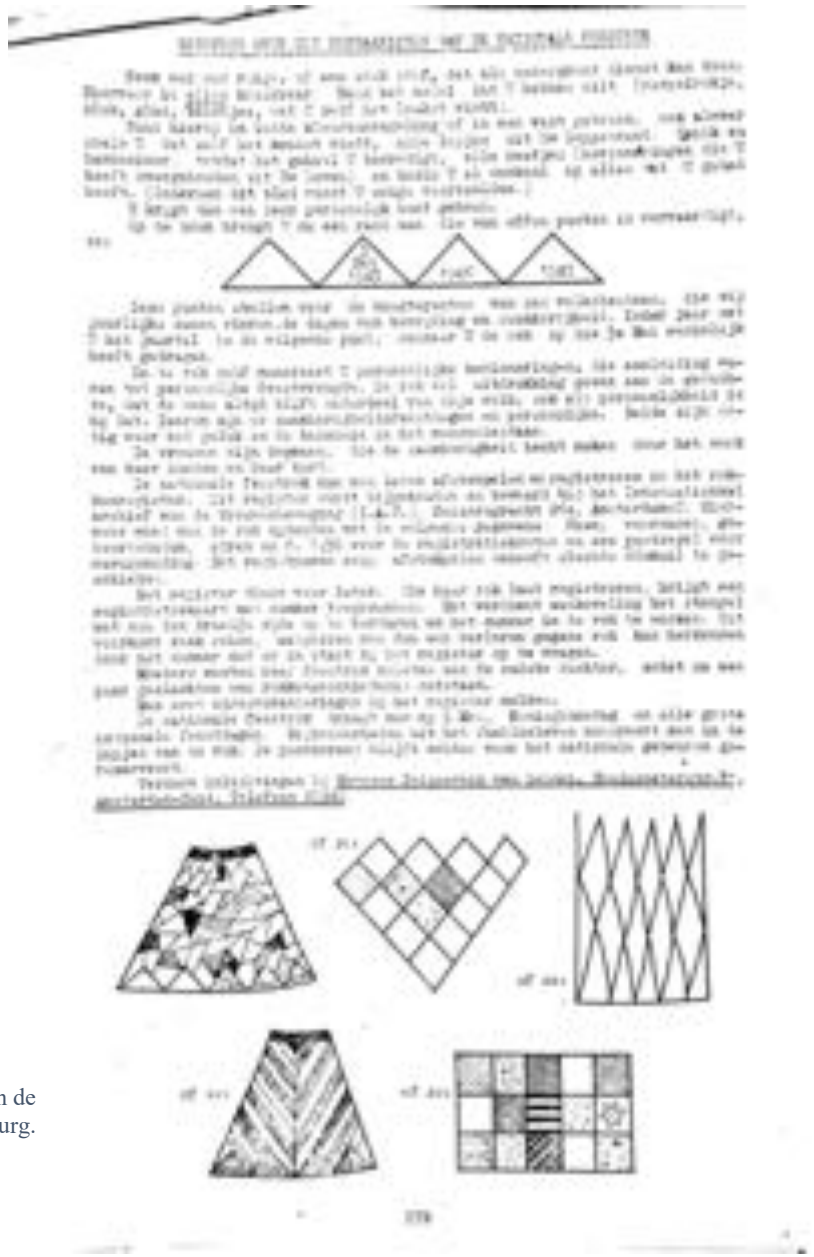

Figure 24 Adrienne Boissevain-van Lennep, “Gegevens over het Veraadigen van de Nationale Feestrok” (1947), Box 653, Folder 2, Regional Archief Tilburg.

Het Patroon van Uw Leven

Depictions of Death, Destruction and World War II

Until recently, the postwar years have been characterized as silent on the issues of the recent war. However, this can be contradicted by a simple look at a number of the feestrokken. These skirts include graphic, widely visually legible, depictions of the war. The imagery on them references the bombing of Rotterdam, the forced labor of Arbeitseinatz, and the Holocaust. The creation of these skirts was separate from the widespread emphasis on an idea of 'hope' in the new era and opposed the desire to 'move on and not look back.' Rumination on the destruction of the war was discouraged due to a widespread fear of social dissatisfaction and chaos that it could cause. However, the scenes and symbols that crop up in these feestrokken, suggest that their creators' lived experiences did not always line up with these vague ideals and confirm that dealing with the memories and results of World War II was not a unidirectional or uniform affair.

Mourning and the processing of trauma are complex and multifaceted and manifest in different ways in different people. Human beings hold onto some objects and let go of others for a variety of reasons. One reason, of course, to get rid of an object is because it holds unwanted memories and by tossing it out, one literally discards the physical reminder of and ideally forgets unwanted

history.[169] For some the throwing out of a loved one's clothing after their death is a way to process and move on.[170] For others that act in unfathomable – the (often unspoken) belief being that the loved one is somehow melded into the fabric of their clothing.[171] Some have suggested that people hold onto their own clothing after it is no longer useful because symbolizes the '[person they] want to be' or the '[person they] fear [they] could be.'[172] The same could be supposed to be true for patches that were meant to act as memory-aides. This sentiment could also be extended to the 'nation they want to be part of' or 'the nation they fear they could be.' Through the choices of which patches to include and which to discard women were able to choose to actively remember some things and try to ignore (or in extreme cases maybe forget) others.

Despite the fact that some of the *feestrok* I will look at in this chapter broke from Boissevain-van Lennep's instructions (i.e. not using a triangular hem), all of the skirts were registered with and given numbers by the *rokken*-committees. This may speak to the importance, from the view point of the administration overseeing the creation of the *feestrokken*, that women should be able to use the initiative to process and express their experiences of the war. This would again contest the idea of a purely forward-looking, hopeful postwar era. Fundamentally, Boissevain-van Lennep herself believed that the *feestrokken* would allow more women to tell their stories of the war – be it to themselves or others. This notion made its way into the lyrics of E. Hannema-Van Maasdijk's *Lied voor de Feestrok* (song for *feestrok*):

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[169] Martin Ball, "The Pleating of History" Weaving the Threads of Nationhood," *Cultural Studies Review* 11, no. 1 (2005): 169.
[170] Peter Stallybrass, "Worn Worlds: Clothes, Mourning, and The Life of Things," in *The Textile Reader* (London: Berg Publishers, 2012), 70-73.
[171] Leora Auslander, "Beyond Words," *The American Historical Review* 110, no. 4 (October 2005): 1020.
[172] This can be seen in clothing kept for aspirational reasons ("I'll wear this again when I lose weight") or as warnings ("I never want to be this big again") Alison Slater, "Wearing in Memory: Materiality and Oral Histories of Dress," *Critical Studies in Fashion & Beauty* 5, no. 1 (October 1, 2014): 126, https://doi.org/10.1386/csfb.5.1.125_1.

> Braid in your skirt the pattern of your life … Create with your skirt unity and connection –Using the extent of historical events … Print your skirt with the mark of your days.[173]

When it came to the this 'printing of the mark of one's days,' women mostly designed their *feestrokken* in ways that represented "the nation they wanted to be part of."[174] The choices of which patches to include were meant not only to communicate their story to others, but more importantly to themselves. After the war, the nation, and presumably many Dutch women, wanted to heal. This inevitably influenced which patches were included and how. Since objects, as well as familiar sights and smells, function as important memory cues for people, certain *feestrokken* provide a microcosmic look at the memories women felt compelled to remember.[175]However, as exemplified by the following *feestrokken* these memories did not have to preclude the negative or traumatic.

Wartime Experiences

Fabric patches and abstract embellishments on the skirts communicated memories to a select group of intimates with the necessary personal context to decode them. As was true for explicit references to relationships, decipherable pictorial embellishments were able to impart a memory to a wider audience. Perhaps a conscious choice on the part of their creators, these

[173] Original Dutch: *Vlecht in Uw rok het patroon van Uw leven … Vormt met Uw rok het saamhorig gebeuren – In het geheel van historisch gebeuren … Stempelt Uw rok met het merk Uwer dagen.* Translation by author
[174] Term modified from Alison Slater, "Wearing in Memory: Materiality and Oral Histories of Dress," *Critical Studies in Fashion & Beauty* 5, no. 1 (October 1, 2014): 126, https://doi.org/10.1386/csfb.5.1.125_1.
[175] Leora Auslander, "Beyond Words," *The American Historical Review* 110, no. 4 (October 2005): 1020.

embellishments may have acted as calls to action or commemoration. C.E. de Visser's *feestrok* is one such skirt (Fig. 25). It is unusual in a number of ways – its lack of patchwork aesthetic, its use of paper as well as fabric, and its embroidery of dates both before and after the war – all of which I will discuss in depth in a later section of this thesis. For the purposes of this chapter, let us focus on the inclusion of a noticeably large embroidered scene (likely a depiction of the bombardment of Rotterdam), appliqued onto the front of the skirt. The scene is embroidered onto a piece of nubby black fabric, which almost blends in with the black velvet triangles that make up the hem. It consists of a church with a grave yard, a box that seems to represent a prison with red-ish bars and barbed-wire encasing it, a pair of simple brown box-like buildings set ablaze with red flames, and a group of grey and white planes over head. Above the scene, in letters as large as those that hold commemorative dates, is embroidered in the same running stitch, 1940 1945. Between these two dates is a thick red swastika. The bottom of the scene is encased by a border of grey barbed wire.

The church and gravestones are embroidered using long white stitches. Next to the church the brown buildings are embroidered in a similarly rudimentary fashion. The prison to the right of the buildings has a thick grey outline and copper bars. Behind the bars are abstracted outlines of figures. A jagged outline of the Netherlands made to look like barbed wire surrounds the embroidered cell. Above, one of the white planes seems to be nose diving, headed straight towards the steeple of the church. The choice to not only include but embroider such a large scene of national destruction may indicate the importance of this event in the life of its creator. Embroidery can be labor- and time-consuming. As such, the choice to display this scene of the bombing was not only deliberate but required dedication. Its prominent placement is confrontational and might be read as a request to the viewer to remember this event.

Jantje de Jong-Brouwer's *feestrok* is another example of a skirt that is unique in its reference to war-time experiences (Fig. 26). The skirt itself is visually stunning. Important national dates from both before the war, as well as important Dutch symbols, such as provincial flags or the Dutch Republic Lion, are embroidered in various of the diamond-shaped patches. Other embroideries and appliques adorn the rest of the skirt. De Jong-Bouwer must have worn her skirt until at least 1959, the last date in the triangles. De Jong-Brouwer's skirt is further interesting since she was interviewed in 1992 with *Het Spoor Terug*. In this interview de Jong-Brouwer provides context and explanations for many of these patches and symbols. Created nearly 50 years later, this interview functions similarly to Hannema-van Maasdijk's first person tour of her skirt in 'The Language of the Skirt.' Additionally, Withuis has previously written about J. de Jong-Brouwer skirt. Withuis's analysis of de Jong-Brouwer's *feestrok* provides the following information:

> [De Jong-Bouwer] embroidered events from these terrifying and dangerous years in her skirt: the kidnapping of the mayor, the murder of the Resistance group leader, arrest and sometimes return from a German concentration camp of relatives and friends, embroidered trains symbolizing the anti-German railway strike of 1944, a parachute (on a patch of 'parachute-silk') commemorating the dropping of English soldiers, and an embroidered candle for the fall-out of electricity … *There's the word Nazi beside the swastika, an authentic yellow star Jews were obliged to wear, a fingerprint symbolizing the identity card* [emphasis added][176]

Withuis's visual analysis includes the fascinating and, perhaps, disturbing aspect of de Jong-Bouwer's *feestrok*: the decision to include a yellow Star of David. However, Withuis does not analyze *how* de Jong-Bouwer got a hold of this piece of fabric or *why.* De Jong Brouwer provides an explanation for this patch in her interview, so perhaps Withuis's decision to forgo further discussion

[176] Withuis Jolande, "Patchwork Politics in the Netherlands, 1946-50: Women, Gender and the World War II Trauma," *Womens History Review* 3, no. 3 (2006): 297-98.

of it is confusing. In her interview de Jong-Brouwer explains that as a young woman she assisted in the transportation and hiding of Jewish children by willing Dutch families. After the end of the war, de Jong-Brouwer was given one of the Stars of David by a member of the Amsterdam Jewish Council. [177] While Withuis does not go into depth with regards to the Yellow Star, she does mention many the many references to Resistance in de Jong-Bouwer's skirt and acknowledges that de Jong-Brouwer was involved with the Resistance.[178] Given other parts of embroidery on the skirt, which reference both resistance activities and underground newspapers, it is likely that de Jong-Brouwer included the star as a reference to her own work with the Resistance, as well as a reference to the history of the Netherlands.

The Yellow Star is accentuated by its central placement on the skirt. The patch is appliqued onto a plain black diamond, further highlighting it. It is possible that de Jong-Brouwer displays the star with such prominence because of the little sympathy and patience she saw from her fellow Gentile Dutch for their Jewish compatriots returning from concentration camps or coming out of hiding.[179] Perhaps she wished to include a clear reference to the actions she took to help save Dutch Jewish children. This set her apart from segments of the population who claimed to have been part of the Resistance while not actively helping those who the Nazis persecuted or helping sabotage Nazi actions. Both de Visser and de Jong-Brouwer's *feestrokken* can be understood as vehicles for messages on the importance of remembering the tragedies of the recent war.

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[177] Jantje de Jong-Brouwer, "De Gedrevenen 7: Mies Boissevain," Het Spoor Terug, VPRO, Hilversum, NL: VPRO, Jan 28, 1992.
[178] Withuis Jolande, "Patchwork Politics in the Netherlands, 1946-50: Women, Gender and the World War II Trauma," *Womens History Review* 3, no. 3 (2006): 298.
[179] Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005):71.

The previously discussed *feestrok* are remarkable in their transparency of war-time experience expression. Some *feestrok* were more opaque or cagey in how they communicated about the war. Kaatje Mol's skirt embodies this subtlety, but, like the previous two skirts Mol's *feestrok* can be read as making an ideological case on how the war should be dealt with. Unlike the unique pictorial references de Visser's skirt, Mol's skirt is made using typical patchwork applique. Many of the patches on Mol's skirt have personal significance. One of the patches is a piece of her brother's *Arbeitseinatz* uniform.[180] Mol's use of her brother's uniform recognizes another form of oppression under German occupation – the forced movement and labor of Dutch men in Germany. Given the fact that Mol uses part of the uniform, it is unlikely that her brother was one of the many men who went into hiding after the Germans mandated the participation of all Dutch men. However, the fear and loss of income that many Dutch families felt as a result of the imposed *Arbeitseinatz* was a real and difficult part of the war. Additionally, during the reconstruction years many *Arbeitseinatz* workers and their families were accused of having collaborated with the occupying forces. As such, many former forced laborers were discriminated against. Perhaps the argument can be made that the inclusion of this patch is not only a reference to struggles felt during occupation but a political statement as well. The *feestrokken* were supposed to be a symbolic part of the reconstruction of the Netherlands and this patch may be meant as an inclusion of Mol's brother in reunited and rebuilt Dutch nationhood.

Not all references to the war were inherently traumatic. Some creators of the *feestrokken* chose to focus on aspects of their existence for which they were grateful. In many skirts explicit and implicit traumatic memories co-existed with joyful ones.

[180] Els de Baan, *De Feestrok: Herrineringen in stof en steken aan de oorlig in Spijkenisse en Hekelingen*, trans. M.A.A. Leenen, 1st ed. (Spijkenisse: Centrale Bibliotheek Spijkenisse, 1997), 6.

Sometimes these memories were one and the same. This is arguably the case with Rinske van Dijk's *feestrok* (Fig. 27). Only a couple of colorful patches are sewn onto van Dijk's grey wool skirt. Most of these seem to be remnants of old fabric or clothes, which may have held personal signifigance to van Dijk. However, like de Visser, van Dijk also includes a pictorial reference to life during World War II. A small scene near the top of her skirt includes an appliqued red parachute with a brown package attached. Like all of the patches on the skirt, the parachute is appliqued using a blanket stitch in an accent color – in this case white. Its strings are embroidered in white, as well. It is likely that this scene references the dropping of food-goods by the Allied troops into the occupied part of the country during the latter part of the 1944/45 hunger winter. Next to this scene, a long strip of fabric in the colors and pattern of the Dutch flag (red top stripe, white stripe in the middle, and a dark blue stripe making up the bottom third) is appliqued. This ribbon is also printed with a miniature British flag and American one. Based on the pattern of this patch it is likely that it was either purchased for the express purpose of being included in this *feestrok* or in any case gotten during liberation celebrations. Perhaps this patch is another reference to the liberation and help from the Allied forces. Of the skirts discussed thus far, van Dijk's may have the least clear ideological call to remembrance. However, one could read the inclusion of both the scene and the flag patch as a desire to give thanks to the Allied troops and a reminder to others to do so as well.

Postwar Strife

The difficulties women experienced as a product of the war were not limited to the years under occupation. As previously mentioned, the postwar years in the Netherlands were tumultuous times in their own right. The effects of the war were evident in

every village, town, and city. It is not surprising that references to postwar life in Netherlands is found in many of the skirts, given that women were supposed to continue to document important personal and national occurrences through embroidery and applique. De Jong-Brouwer's skirt, for example, include a reference to the independence of Indonesia, an event that divided the Netherlands and tangentially resulted in Queen Wilhelmina's succession of the throne. Other skirts expressed more localized postwar struggles.

Iman Cornelis Dekker's *feestrok* deals almost exclusively with the outbreak of typhus immediately following liberation (Fig 6). Made in 1947, the skirt includes none of the typical patchwork.[181] The bottom hem of the skirt consists of a thick red, white, and blue ribbon, instead of the regular triangles. Besides this, unlike other *feestrok* examples Dekker's *feestrok* does not include any patchwork like details. Most of the satin crepe skirt is decorated with white embroidery, which mostly pertains to the outbreak of typhus. One of the many typhus-related embroideries is a faucet with the text 'within 24 hours/ water pipeline/ Burg Keizer' – a reference to the contaminated water that spread the disease.[182] An appliqued handkerchief in the middle of the skirt – front and center – incudes the text 'in remembrance of/ Fientje/ 10 May.'[183] According to Dekker's daughter, Fientje was, a friend of her mothers who must have passed away, perhaps during the epidemic. The *ABCD* embroidery on the skirt references the water examination service during the epidemic.

[181] Quirijna Dankerina Sara Sophia Dekker and Wilhelmina Quirijna Jozina Jantije Dekkker, Answers to the question about the Nationale feestrok of Mrs..C. Dekker-de Rijke, interview by Els de Baan, 1996.
[182] Original text: *Binnen 24 uur/waterleiding/Burg Keizer* (translation by author)
[183] Original text: *ter herrinering aan/ Fientje/10 Mei* (translation by author)

Remarkably, despite its variation from the norm and the fact that it adhered to almost none of Boissevain-van Lennep's *Nationale Feestrok* guidelines, Dekker's *feestrok* was stamped and given a registration number in 1948. Dekker then wore the skirt as part of the September 2nd parade in the same year.[184] Both of these facts indicate that despite the written instructions, within the *feestrok* initiative personal choice was valued more than the adherence to the norm. This valuation explains why all of the skirts discussed in this chapter were stamped, despite their divergence from Boissevain-van Lennep's instructions. The diversity within the skirts created within the *feestrok* initiative demonstrates the variety of beliefs and values women held in the reconstruction years. While the individual *feestrokken* women made were mostly seen by people in their local communities, the skirts were still a foundation from which to preach one's ideas. As seen in the previous *feestrokken*, these skirts may have supplied the base for the expression of the importance of remembering. As seen in De Visser, de Jong-Brouwer, Mol, van Dijk, and Dekker's *feestrokken* this was not limited to positive memories. Instead these five *feestrokken* may be read as visual requests that the horrors of the war, the Allied support in liberation, and the postwar strife, not be forgotten.

[184] Quirijna Dankerina Sara Sophia Dekker and Wilhelmina Quirijna Jozina Jantije Dekkker, Answers to the question about the Nationale feestrok of Mrs..C. Dekker-de Rijke, interview by Els de Baan, 1996.

Figure 29 Photograph taken at the TRC on 10th January 2019, showing the Feestrok, the handkerchief from the internment camp at Stads Kanaal, and the photograph of Adrienne Minette Boissevain-van Lennep.

Conclusion

The *feestrok* initiative was large in scale with more than 4,000-some participants. It was widely publicized and discussed during its two-year prime. However, the initiative and the skirts all but vanished from the public eye for some decades, meaning that the many lenses through which the *feestrok* phenomenon was viewed and the many roles it played in the post-war period were partly lost. Given the size of the initiative, many of these lenses through which the *feestrokken* were understood and the many functions they played were at times contradictory. The *feestrokken* could have been a way for women to express and encapsulate important relationships and remember happier times. At the same time, the *feestrokken* were objects in which women found voice to discuss their experiences of World War II. Additionally, the creation and wearing of the skirts had strong nationalistic undertones. Despite the celebratory nature of the skirts, their creation was steeped in lack of material and the meager means, indicative of the austere postwar years. Supporters of the initiative viewed the *feestrokken* as pretty, colorful objects with important memory-holding abilities.[185] To their critics, the *feestrokken* were kitschy and tasteless.[186]

[185]Antoinette Witte-van Nimwegen. "Sjokke, sjokke, sjokke, achter aan mijn rokke ... De Nationale Feestrok." *Libelle*, April 19, 1946.
[186] Newspaper article discouraging women from making a *feestrok* 'Geen Feestrok!' 1948, 653, Box 1, Folder 3, De nationale Feestrok, afd. Tilburg, Tilburg Regional Archives, Tilburg, North Brabant, Netherlands.

Given the variety of approaches women took with their *feestrokken* and the many ways in which the finished products were understood, it is not surprising that further examination brings to light new ways to conceptualize the phenomenon. Therefore, I must give tremendous credit to Jolande Withuis, whose pioneering scholarship sparked this project. Withuis's research and publications introduced me to the *feestrok* initiative and provided me with the intellectual groundwork from which I could pursue my own investigation. In my thesis, I have attempted to capture many of the components, contradictions, and dualities found in the *feestrokken,* at times using Withuis's scholarship to arrive at alternative conclusions. I do so while acknowledging that as a movement the *Nationale Feestrok* was a multifaceted initiative. As such there many parts that I have not yet explored, which still lie beneath the surface or between the threads. Additionally, despite my travel to the Netherlands in conjunction with my research, my native level language skills, and my congoing contact with museums and archives with *feestrokken* in their collections, I have only seen a fraction of the skirts created. As such, there are numerous stories that I have been unable to discover or pursue that would have furthered my scholarship. Each individual *feestrok* holds within it an expanse of meaning. The individual patches themselves, point to numerous stories, relationships, and memories, many of which we will never be privy to. As they are combined and embellished with embroidery and various appliques, new conversations and meanings are created. Many of these have become opaque with time and distance. As the generation that created the *feestrokken* passes away, more of these stories will undoubtedly be lost forever.

The desire to understand this significant but understudied phenomenon both on the level of the individual *feestrokken* and within a larger context inspired me to write this thesis using a triangle approach. Using socio-historical contextualization, I began with an examination into how the initiative functioned on the level of national identity. Next, I moved into more visual analysis to

how the *feestrokken* both expressed and was used to re-enforce existent communities. Finally, I explored depictions of individual experiences of World War 11 and its aftermath in a select group of *feestrokken*. In doing so I inadvertently focused on what I see as three of the key ideas of the *feestrok* initiative: memory, community, and national identity.

Regarding memory I analyzed the choices some women made to include both graphic and subtle representations of the war in their *feestrok*. De Visser's *feestrok*, which with its embroidered scene of the bombing of Rotterdam is perhaps the most vivid in its highly stylized but still widely legible portrayal of violence. Despite its more understated look, de Jong-Brouwer's use of the Star of David, provides an equally striking and disturbing refence to the war. I also looked at the role memory could play in the choice of which patches to include and how this allowed most *feestrokken* to implicitly reference important interpersonal relationships.

The expression, strengthening, and building of community were also vital aspects of the *feestrok* phenomenon. This was key for skirts that focused on the celebration of family, such as Wijdenes-Hendrik's with its embroidered birthdays. Within the expression of community, political desires came to light as well. Mol used her *feestrok* to counter dominant narratives of the time that accused *Arbeitseinatz* workers of collaborating with the Germans by including patch from her brother's uniform. The relationships depicted in most of the *feestrok* that I was able to observe were nuclear. Perhaps this was because in tense times people tend to turn inwards to their trusted communities, isolating from the unknown. That said, there are also instances where the feestrokken strengthened larger communities, as with Mol's circle of friends, or the Tilburg women's group. However, Boissevain-van Lennep hoped that her initiative could help create relationships across the deeply segregated religious party system of the Netherland. This did not happen.

The *Nationale Feestrok*, which was created by Boissevain-van Lennep in conjunction with her position on the national committee on national holidays, was also seen as a way to unite Dutch women. This ties into what I see as the third influencing factor on the *feestrokken* was the creation and expression of national identity and nationalism after World War II. In an attempt to avoid possible factions after World War II, the Dutch government made quick moves to collectivize the experience and 're-write' the liberation as a Dutch triumph. In order to do this and create unity during a time with much potential for (and even fear of) social unrest, committees were set up by the government to help create a Dutch national identity. Both in the conception of the initiative and in the nationalistic elements seen in many of the skirts, the *feestrokken* were part and parcel of this phenomenon.

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It was generally understood that all women in the Netherlands were called upon to create their own *feestrok.* However, one group was notably excluded from the community and national identity creating aspects of the *feestrok* phenomenon and discouraged from sharing their memories. These were the women who had collaborated with the occupying Nazi forces. Understandably, collaboration was an aspect of Dutch history that many wished to forget or distance themselves from. However, like it's supposed opposite, resistance, collaboration was an ill-defined concept, especially for women. On one end were women who were part of one of the fascist organizations set up in the Netherlands or the NSB or women who had participated in the atrocities of the Holocaust and other forms of Nazi Violence. It included women who were married to SS officers. Collaboration also included so called

Moffenmeiden, women, often young, who had been romantically involved with German soldiers.[187] Dutch citizens, including these women, who had worked with the Nazis were not included in reconstruction efforts. Approximately 100,000 were sent to internment camps during the postwar years, some to await trial (though few actually were actually tried). Women and men were separated and sent to various make-shift encampments.

Perhaps because of this exclusion from the larger projects of reconstruction and what may have felt like sudden forcible muzzling, inmates in these camps found other ways to express their existence. As I conclude this project, I would like to bring light another fabric-based event occurred simultaneously with the *feestrok* initiative – a handkerchief created in an internment camp for women. The Ons Belang camp was set up in a strawboard factory of the same name in Stads Kanaal, Groningen.[188] As has been true for women throughout history the women in the Ons Belang internment camp turned to producing needlework to assert their existence and build solidarity. In this case the women of Ons Belang turned to embroidery to tell their story of the war and postwar period – similarly to the women on the outside who were making the *feestrokken.*

Aesthetically the handkerchief bears almost no resemblance to the *feestrokken.* While the latter are colorful and made of many different patches and fabrics (not to mention large enough to wear), the handkerchief is simple - a small white square (about 10”x10”) made of woven flax, undamaged by age. In the center of the handkerchief “Stads Kanaal I.K. 17-5-1945 Ons Belang” is

[187] Iris Van Olst, “Vrijen met de Vijand: Moffenmeiden tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog” (2013), 32-35.
[188] Gillian Volgelsang, “Stads Kanaal Commemorative Handkerchief.” TRC Needles. September 17, 2016. https://trc-leiden.nl/trc-needles/individual-textiles-and-textile-types/commemorative-and-commissioned-textiles/stadskanaal-commemorative-handkerchief

embroidered in red thread. The I.K. stands for *internerings kamp* and the date (May 17, 1945) likely refers to the day the new occupants of the camp arrived. Below the red *Ons Belang* in cream colored thread a second date is embroidered "5-9-45," which likely denotes when a second group of women arrived at the camp. It is embellished with the embroidered names of 25 women – and almost all have a different uniquely discernable hand, indicative of individual signers.

To put one's name on something can be read as a way to own it. Signature can also be used to express one's existence – the way a child might write their name followed by "was here" on the wall of a bathroom stall. Within the *feestrokken* it is rare that a signature is used as a way to assert the unique identity of the creator, her ownership over the skirt or the experiences she used it to commemorate. However, the signature of the maker is implicit in the singularity of each skirt and its clear expression of presence. Despite their differences both the *feestrokken* and the handkerchief provided an outlet for their creators to tell themselves and a wider group something about who they are. Take the embroidered signature of Tony Bijland on the Ons Belang handkerchief, for example, which has *zwemster* (swimmer) embroidered under it in the same hand. Through including this descriptor of self, Bijland both nuances her identity (albeit in a small way) and, perhaps, includes some of her memories. Perhaps, these are happy ones, similar to those in the patches of the *feestrokken.* The creation of the handkerchief also functioned, as Boissevain-van Lennep hoped the *feestrokken* would, as an object around whose fabrication women would gather. The different colors used to embroider the two dates likely correspond to the respectively colored names. This could be seen as evidence that the embroidery of one's name upon internment at Ons Belang was a sort of community initiation process. While this is not a community that I wish to celebrate, the

handkerchief was clearly an important object for the women who created it, as it was kept, likely by one of its creators, in pristine condition for 70 years before it was acquired by the Textile Research Center (TRC) in Leiden in 2015.[189]

I visited the TRC to look at a *feestrok* in the collection, as well a press photograph of Boissevain-van Lennep from her propaganda trip to the USA. While I was there, Gillian Vogelsang, the director of the TRC, pulled out the Ons Belang handkerchief without my asking because she saw it as possibly furthering my research. This small gesture is indicative of the sharing attitudes that characterized my trip to the Netherlands. At the TRC I placed the *feestrok*, the photograph, and the handkerchief in a triangle on the table. As I looked the objects before me, I asked myself: What would these people say to each other if put into conversation? It seemed to me that these three items provided a simplified look into the options women were forced to face during the Second World War: collaborate (the handkerchief); resist (Boissevain-van Lennep); or lay low, turn a blind eye, and try to make it through alive, as most did during the war? These options were obviously more nuanced that this question betrays and the same can be asked as well of any *feestrok* or group of *feestrokken.* It is possible, if not inevitable, that within the 4,000-some women who made the *feestrokken*, some committed actions that would read as collaboration. Others acted in ways that were understood as associated with resistance. Additionally, given how hazy these definition were, it is conceivable that some women enacted both collaborative actions and ones in line with how resistance was understood. However, as time passes the women who made these skirts and can answer

[189] Gillian Volgelsang, "Stads Kanaal Commemorative Handkerchief." TRC Needles. September 17, 2016. https://trc-leiden.nl/trc-needles/individual-textiles-and-textile-types/commemorative-and-commissioned-textiles/stadskanaal-commemorative-handkerchief

those questions for us pass away. Scholarship on the *feestrokken* must continue using what we can learn from history, biographical clues, detailed visual analysis, and above all, critical compassion in an attempt to discern what they might be trying to tell us.

Figure 5 Adrienne Minette Boissevain-van Lennep, *Feestrok*, Textile, 1946, Resistance Museum, Amsterdam, North Holland, MA.

Figure 6 "Vroolijke Overgooiers uit oude Jurken." Libelle, August 8, 1941.

Figure 8 J Beekman, *Feestrok*, Textile, 1948, Liberation Museum, Groesbeck, Gelderland, NL.

Figure 9 Anonymous, *Negatief van een foto van vrouwen in nationale feestrok*, photograph, 1948, folder 56, Archief Adrienne Boissevain-van Lennep, ATRIA archives, Amsterdam, South Holland, Netherlands.

Figure 11 Elly Wijdenes-*Hendrick, "Feestrok,"* Textile, 1946, Liberation *Museum, Groesbeck, Gelderland, 1946*

Figure 12 Gerd Schets, *Feestrok,* Textile, 1946, Private Collection.

Figure 13 Detail Gerd Schets, *Feestrok,* Textile, 1946, Private Collection.

Figure 14 Elisabeth Hannema-van Maasdijk, *Feestrok*, Textile, 1946, Centraal Museum, Utrecht, Utrecht, NL.

Figure 15 Skating pin detail, Elisabeth Hannema-van Maasdijk, *Feestrok*, Metal and Textile, 1946, Centraal Museum, Utrecht, Utrecht, NL.

Figure 16 Princess Irene Brigade Patch Detail, Elisabeth Hannema-van Maasdijk, *Feestrok,* Textile, 1946, Centraal Museum, Utrecht, Utrecht, NL.

Figure 17 Anonymous, *Kaatje Mol and Friends*, 1947, in *De Feestrok: Herrineringen in stof en steken aan de oorlig in Spijkenisse en Hekelingen*, Els de Baan, Spijkenisse: Centraal Bibliotheek Spijkenisse, 1997.

Figure 18 Maria van den Bosch-Elzinga, *Mother's Feestrok,* Textile, 1946, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, North Holland, NL.

Figure 19 Maria van den Bosch-Elzinga, *Daughter's Feestrok,* Textile, 1946, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, North Holland, NL.

Figure 20 Detail Maria van den Bosch-Elzinga, *Daughter's Feestrok,* Textile, 1946, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, North Holland, NL.

Figure 21 Detail Maria van den Bosch-Elzinga, *Mother's Feestrok,* Textile, 1946, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, North Holland, NL.

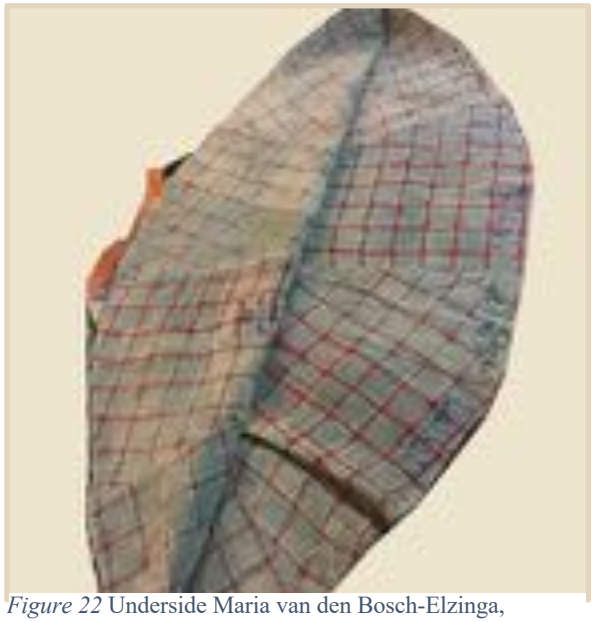

Figure 22 Underside Maria van den Bosch-Elzinga, *Daughter's Feestrok,* Textile, 1946, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, North Holland, NL.

Figure 23 Detail Underside Maria van den Bosch-Elzinga, *Mother's Feestrok,* Textile, 1946, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, North Holland, NL.

Figure 25 C.E. de Visser, *Feestrok,* Textile, 1946, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, North Holland, NL.

Figure 26 Jantje de Jong-Brouwer, *Feestrok*, Textile, 1946, Fries Verzets Museum, Leeuwarden, Friesland, NL

Figure 27 Rinske van Dijk, *Feestrok*, Textile, 1946, Fries Verzets Museum, Leeuwarden, Friesland, NL.

Figure 28 Iman Cornelis Dekker, *Feestrok,* Textile, 1947, in *De Feestrok: Herrineringen in stof en steken aan de oorlig in Spijkenisse en Hekelingen*, Els de Baan, Spijkenisse: Centraal Bibliotheek Spijkenisse, 1997.

Figure 30 Ons Belang Handkerchief, Textile, 1945, Textile Research Center, Leiden, South Holland, NL.

Coda

Een Nederlandse Volkunst

An Argument for the Artistic Merits of the *Nationale Feestrok*
a speculative comparative essay

Here it becomes evident that the hallmark of the new type of researchers is not the eye for the "all-encompassing whole" nor the eye for the "comprehensive context" (which mediocrity has claimed for itself) but rather the capacity to be at home in marginal domains.

- Walter Benjamin

What follows is a speculative essay that breaks from my former historical analysis driven approach. In it, I wish to put the *feestrokken* in conversation with canonical works of art or methods of creation. What I aim to do here is to make an argument for the *feestrokken* as having a place within conversations about montage and assemblage, as well as within 20th century art more generally. This essay uses ahistorical comparisons between the *feestrokken* and other artistic creations. However, I believe that this speculative creation of dialogue between objects from different historical moments, creates an understanding the *feestrokken* as artistic objects with aesthetic value. This understanding may challenge conceptions of the phenomenon as serving purely social and

political purposes. Understanding the *feestrokken* as artistic objects, creates the awareness that many of the visual quirks of the skirts, which may seem haphazard or random, may have been intentional, formal choices. Furthermore, examining the artistic aspects of the initiative provides insight into the interdisciplinary space between activism and art and the role of artistic creation in identity formation.

This essay is informed ideas put forth by art critic, Monika Amour, in her essay "On the Contingency of Modernity and the Persistence of Canons," and curator, Pam Parmal. Amour makes a case for "[bridging] different modernities, to bring together canonical and noncanonical works belonging to different cultural, generational, and national contexts."[190] This dismissal of traditional and comfortable divisions allows for the use of a comparative model. Parmal adopted the comparative model for the 2014 exhibition "Quilts and Color," which put in dialogue late 19th and early 20th century Amish quilts and Op Artists and Abstract Expressionists. As is true for the *feestrokken* and the other works of art discussed in this essay, it is unlikely that either group in this exhibition was aware of or inspired by the other. However, by putting them in dialogue, canonical conceptions of quality and originality, as well as the divide between high art and craft were challenged. Using this comparative method, I approach the *feestrokken* as a sort of collage objects. As such I will look at other objects that embody two of collage's main tenements: destruction and creation. Not surprisingly, these are two ideas which define much of the 20th century, with its tremendous progresses and unparalleled destruction. To begin I will look at the *feestrokken* as they relate to collage as a conceptual method of creation. I will

[190] Monika Amour. "On the Contingency of Modernity and the Persistence of Canons." In *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*, edited by Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor, and Nancy Condee. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 88.

then put the *feestrokken* into dialogue with a number of ahistorical case studies. Using this speculative approach, I argue that the *feestrokken* were unconsciously part of a larger ideological movement within the 20th century.

The *feestrokken,* like the wider phenomenon of collage, created new meanings, messages and products out of and through the destruction of old material, which had its own former meanings and messages. The former context of this old material was a key component of the ideology of the *feestrok* initiative. Often this other context was supposed to be a happier time, which was associated with a patch. Once recognized and selected the creator could cut this memory along with the piece of fabric. The memory holding patch was then "pasted" onto the *feestrok.* Through this process the creator engaged in what David Banash has called the "utopian … almost always profoundly nostalgic" gesture of collage.[191] The sewing together of these nostalgic objects may be read as an attempt to create an homage to the memory of happiness in an attempt to harness it. However, this creation of a new product out of dissimilar patches or pieces also accentuates the fragments or destruction.[192] The visually emphasized fragments make apparent the methodologically necessary act of cutting. This act can be read as both the selection and the removal of something. In the case of the *feestrokken,* this can be the abovementioned act of selecting which positive memories to include. Or, it could also be the removal of physical evidence of war or scarcity, such as repeated repairs or stains. If the act of selection can also be understood as the act of removal, then perhaps the utopian symbolism of patchwork may be inverted as well. In this case the patchwork is not symbolic of a

[191] David Banash, "Nostalgia: Collage, Collecting and the Paste," in *Collage Culture: Ready-mades, Meaning, and the Age of Consumption*, Postmodern Studies (Brill, 2013), 173.
[192] David Banash, "Critique: Collage and the Politics of the Cut," in *Collage Culture: Ready-mades, Meaning, and the Age of Consumption*, 1st ed. (Brill, 2013), 133.

utopic creation but rather of the fractured nature of society. In both readings of this act, however, the use of cutting and pasting embodies the larger idea of destruction and subsequent creation indicative of collage.

As one comparison that focused largely on creation, I will look at a near contemporary of the *feestrokken:* the TVA Quilts. Created in the 1930s, the TVA quilts would retroactively become known as the Black Power quilts. Like the *feestrokken* the TVA quilts are an example of a collaborative work of art, founded on a singular vision, with ideological undertones. The TVA quilts were created to celebrate the contributions of the Black employees of the Tennessee Valley Authority.[193] The series was designed by Ruth Clemence Bond, whose husband was personnel officer for the TVA, as part of a larger 'home beautification' project,' which she charged with helping envision.[194] The quilts were designed to be created by the community of women whose husbands worked for the TVA. The imagery of the quilts was meant to be read as hopeful with moralizing messages about the merits of employment with the TVA. More broadly, Bond was inspired to celebrate the expanded opportunities for Black workers under the New Deal.[195]

Both the TVA quilts and the *feestrok* phenomenon promoted identity and community affirmation. Through the creation of the quilts the TVA quilters and Clemence Bond were able to assert the importance of Black labor and reaffirm their own worth and that of their community. The TVA quilts and the *feestrok* phenomenon held a cultural salience that continued long after the moment

[193] Angelik Vizcarrondo-Laboy, "Fabric of Change: The Quilt Art of Ruth Clement Bond," *Museum of Art and Design: Views* (blog), February 21, 2017, https://madmuseum.org/views/fabric-change-quilt-art-ruth-clement-bond.
[194] Vizcarrondo-Laboy.
[195] Vizcarrondo-Laboy.

of creation.[196] Of the panels designed by Clemence Bond perhaps the most striking is one which boldly features a black fist breaking through the ground and clutching a red lightning bolt (Fig. 31). According to Bond the panel specifically symbolized the work of Black TVA workers in bringing electrical power to the area.[197] However, it was reinterpreted by the younger generation as a symbol of Black power.[198] Today the raised Black fist brings to mind the work of the Black Panther movement and a gesture used recurrently in the struggle for Black liberation. While different from the literal power that was meant to be symbolized in the panel, both interpretations speak to the ability of an oppressed people to fight and work for the improvement of their lives. Like the TVA quilts, but less explicitly, the *feestrok* initiative was intended by Boissevain-van Lennep to be a celebration of a group's contribution to the (re-)construction of society, in the case of the *feestrokken* case, women's contribution.

The TVA quilts, like the *feestrokken*, constructed a new hopeful vision of the world. As Banash points out, this was very much an aspect of collage. However, pervious scholars have also argued that the fragmentation of collage reflected the fragmentation of a society at large.[199] This reading is also applicable to the state of the social world in which the *feestrokken* were created. However, emphasis placed only on fragmentation or creation ignores the fact that the hopeful vision was often of equal importance.

[196] In the case of *feestrok* this salience comes in the form of its anticipatory nature regarding art in the 20th century – in particular the feminist movement of the 1970s; as well as the renewed interest in the initiative within the past decade.
[197] Bost, "Quilts as Visual Texts."
[198] Vizcarrondo-Laboy, "Fabric of Change: The Quilt Art of Ruth Clement Bond."
[199] Patrizia C. McBride, "Introduction," in *Chatter of the Visible: Montage and Narrative in Weimar Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016.), 4.

As a second case study I will use the group CoBrA, which was a geographical and generational contemporary of the *feestrokken.* Created in 1948 by artists from Denmark, Belgium and the Netherlands, CoBrA had many of the same practical and ideological hopes and fears as the *feestrokken*.[200] The CoBrA artists existed within the same larger social dualities of hope, fear, and trauma as the creators of the *feestrokken* did. Both movements saw the fragmentation of their worlds and were inspired by the subsequent desire to create a new society. Both hoped that artistic creation would lead to larger social unification. Like Boissevain-van Lennep, the creators of CoBrA subscribed to Marxist ideologies.[201] The desire to move past the horrors of World War II through artistic production was stated by both Boissevain-van Lennep and members of CoBrA. However, the war was not forgotten by either movement – both referenced the war explicitly and implicitly as seen in examples of the *feestrokken* and in ideological teachings of CoBrA, which critiqued Nazism and in the movement's penchant for grotesque imagery.[202] Despite these similarities, there is not sufficient evidence to suggest that either movement was more than vaguely aware of or in any way inspired by the other.

The artists of CoBrA were inspired by the teachings of Gaston Bachelard, a French philosopher, who emphasized the importance of reuse and exchange within the creative process.[203] Despite the weight placed on reuse much of CoBrA's art did not

[200] *Oxford Art Online*, s.v. "Cobra," accessed April 4, 2019, http://www.oxfordartonline.com.proxy2.hampshire.edu/groveart/view/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.001.0001/oao-9781884446054-e-7000018327
[201] *Oxford Art Online*, s.v. "Cobra," accessed April 4, 2019, http://www.oxfordartonline.com.proxy2.hampshire.edu/groveart/view/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.001.0001/oao-9781884446054-e-7000018327
[202] Karen Kurczynski and Nicole Pezolet, "Primitivism, humanism, and ambivalence: Cobra and Post-Cobra," *Anthropology and Aesthetics* 59/60, (spring/autumn, 2011): 290.
[203] Jelena Stojanovic, "Internationalities: Collectivism, the Grotesque, and Cold War Functionalism," in *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945* ed. Black Stimson and Gregory Sholette (Minneapolis, MA: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 24.

delve into collage, with the exception of Jan Nieuwenhuy's drawings. However, paintings such as Asger Jorn's 1947 *Automolok* include almost geometric sections of light and dark colors (Fig. 32). This is done in such a way that suggests depth or layers. Jorn's altered reproductions, such as *Monsters of all Lands Unite!* also reflect Bachelard's idea of creative reuse and exchange (Fig. 33). *Monsters of all Lands Unite!* consists of a romantic pastural scene of a white house, flanked on both sides with bushy autumnal trees. In the foreground two swans swim in a little pond. On top of this scene and juxtaposing it, Jorn added the head and neck of a gigantic monster. Unlike the painted pastural scene, Jorn's monster is made up of thick brush strokes in bright colors. While the added monster is painted, like the background scene, its absurdity makes it feel almost pasted – as if it had come from an earlier context. Additionally, the emergence of the grotesque monster from the peaceful pond could be read as indicative of the fragmentation or violence of society, waiting to break through the surface. Finally, Jorn's monstrous addition to the kitschy reproduction is suggestive of the wider CoBrA critique of the high/low, avant-garde/kitsch, folk-art/fine-art dichotomies.[204] Within this critique, the *feestrokken* would perhaps have a space within the creation of 'new society and new art.'[205] This problematizing of canonical dichotomies would also find its way into the artistic ideas of the Second Wave feminist movement.

Both CoBrA and the *feestrokken* embraced low-culture in their own way. As pieced and appliqued skirts, the *feestrokken* made use of feminine craft methods traditionally associated with kitsch and folk art. In doing so the creation of the *feestrokken*

[204] Karen Kurczynski and Nicole Pezolet, "Primitivism, humanism, and ambivalence: Cobra and Post-Cobra," *Anthropology and Aesthetics* 59/60, (spring/autumn, 2011): 290.
[205] *Oxford Art Online*, s.v. "Cobra," accessed April 4, 2019, http://www.oxfordartonline.com.proxy2.hampshire.edu/groveart/view/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.001.0001/oao-9781884446054-e-7000018327

discarded ideas about the correct medium with which to express ideological and political messages. While the *feestrokken* were not understood as feminist by many of their creators, this use of craft medium as way of asserting self-narrative anticipates much feminist art of the 1960s and '70s. Quilting, embroidery, knitting, and macramé, formerly relegated to the domestic sphere and labeled crafts or hobbies received renewed attention. Artists such as Faith Wilding, Faith Ringgold, and Miriam Shapiro centered textile art in their practice and worked towards blurring the distinctions between craft and high art. Had the phenomenon of the *feestrok* continued, I believe its celebration of female identity through traditionally feminine craft would have prospered in the world of Second Wave feminist art. Not only do the skirts have more in common with patchwork chic of the 1970s than the fashionable moments of the 1940s (such as Dior's New Look), they exemplify the emphasis on feminine experience that cuts through the work of Second Wave artists like Shapiro, Martha Rosler, and Judy Chicago. By putting the *feestrokken* in conversation with ideas proposed by feminist artists in the 1970s, I mean to say that they deserve the same before mentioned revisionist look that has allowed quilts to be increasingly understood as art objects worthy of aesthetic and scholarly consideration.

Shapiro and Melissa Meyer acknowledged the anticipatory nature of women's crafts and projects, coining the term *femmage* in 1977. Femmage expressed the idea that women had practiced collage techniques and ideas for centuries, perfecting and innovating upon the method, long before Pablo Picasso proposedly invented it around 1912.[206] Shapiro and Meyer came up with 14 criteria of

[206] Miriam Shapiro. "Femmage." In *Collage: Critical Views*, edited by Katherine Hoffman, 295. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989.

femmage, eight of which had to be met for a work to be considered as such. These included the obvious points that the work should be made by a woman, that saving and collecting were important elements (similarly, though included separately, the use of recycled scraps was fundamental), and that the theme work should be based in the lived experiences of women. Additional criteria included the use of 'covert' imagery, the production for an audience of intimates, and the creation in commemoration of an event. The work could have an diarists' point of view, include embroidered versions of drawings or handwriting, silhouetted images on another material (as seen in many works of applique), or photographs or other printed matter. Image-based items should be readable as a narrative sequence, those consisting of abstract forms might produce a pattern. Finally, an item of femmage might be both practical (and therefore associated with craft) while also reaching for the aesthetics of high art.[207]

Almost all of the *feestrokken* adhere to at least eight of the femmage criteria. The fact that the *feestrokken* were supposed to be created by women was self-evident in the ideology of the initiative. They were made of reused or recycled (a.k.a. saved) scraps of fabric. They were an expression of war, hope, community, and national identity as experienced by women. Additionally, national and personal memories were collected and added to the skirt by way of embroidery. As such the skirts could function as fabric-based diary for special events in women's lives. The skirts often included additional 'sewn in' drawings and writings, which enhanced their diaristic nature. Thus, the context of each skirt was based in the life of its creator. This can be seen as well in the lyrics-cum-advertisement, *Lied voor de Nationale Feestrok,* by Hannema-van Maasdijk writes "braid a pattern of your life into your skirt/women

[207] Schapiro, "Femmage,"

and girls from villages and cities/A bright symbol of womanly aspiration…"[208] The *feestrokken* were made and worn in commemoration of May 5th, 1945, Liberation Day. As wearable items the skirts were both practical and visually pleasing.

The aspect of collecting brings together femmage, the *feestrokken,* many quilts (such as the crazy quilts) and collage. In the case of the *feestrokken*, and many instances of femmage, this collecting was not only of material but also of experiences. These two things were often one and the same as the reused materials were infused with memories of their former lives.

The collection and infusion of the maker's life into the object allow an interpretation beyond the somewhat obvious anticipatory nature of the *feestrokken* as femmage to viewing the *feestrokken* as an antedate to works of art such as Robert Rausenberg's Combines. By calling the *feestrok* phenomenon an antedate to Rauschenberg, I do not wish to suggest that Rauschenberg was aware of these skirts made halfway across the world, which were little known outside of the Netherlands. However, I include it as a final gesture towards the elevation of the *feestrokken* as artistic objects with recurrently pertinent ideas. This speculative comparison concludes my argument that within a 20th century lens, the *feestrokken* were part and parcel of larger artistic notions. Bear with me then in this imagined dialogue between the decidedly canonical Rauschenberg and the all but forgotten participants in the *feestrok* initiative, many of whom remain anonymous. Both the *feestrokken* and Rauschenberg's Combines include objects of personal pertinence, many of which remain hidden to the unfamiliar viewer. Rauschenberg's Combines, such as *Untitled*

[208] Original text: "*Vlecht in Uw rok het patroon van Uw dagen/Vrouwen en meisjes van dorp en van stad./Lichtend symbool van het vrouwelijk streven …"* translation author's own. Elisabeth Hannema van Maasdijk, "De Taal van de Rok" (1948), 1.

(Man with White Shoes) (1955) (Fig. 34), are hot beds of personal and autobiographical references and memorabilia. They are "semantic traps," according to the art critic, Yve-Alain Bois, in their opaque references to relationships and events through both visual and textual means.[209] *Untitled (Man with White Shoes)* includes what I would consider explicit references to relationships through its usage of newspaper clippings relating to Rauschenberg's family and a letter from Rauschenberg's son, Christopher.[210] However, like many of the *feestrokken*, *Untitled (Man with White Shoes)* and Rauschenberg's other Combines perhaps include hidden or confusing references. The position of the *feestrok* as a wearable work of art (and therefore three dimensional) can be seen as anticipating the future privileging of works of art that were neither paintings nor sculptures. Through imagining the parallels between the *feestrokken* and Rauschenberg, I ask if Bois's assertion and prediction that Rauschenberg's Combines will "[keep] art historians busy for generations to come," should be extended to the *feestrokken.*[211]

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The phenomenon of the *feestrok* is both part of, a product of, and a precursor to many of the aspects of the larger conversation on montage, through which most modes of creation of the 20th century (including those discussed in this chapter) have been read. To conclude, I would like to discuss Walter Benjamin's ideas on montage and storytelling as they relate to the *feestrokken.* Benjamin is credited with pioneering the idea that the creation and proliferation of montage as a method was a response to the alienation of

[209] Yve-Alain Bois quoted by Greg Allen, "American Beauty: Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, and the Case of the Missing Flag," *Art News*, 2016.
[210] This is similar to de Visser's *feestrok* with its photographs of children's faces next to dates of birth.
[211] Yve-Alain Bois quoted by Greg Allen, "American Beauty: Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, and the Case of the Missing Flag," *Art News*, 2016.

modern life. Benjamin also championed the idea of storytelling (particularly in oral traditions) as a collective practice.[212] This practice was based in experience; that is the source from which a storyteller drew. Storytelling (as an oral tradition) was based in community, so passing down a story allowed for the present and past to mingle more freely and for a more open-ended approach. Benjamin wrote "…montage explodes the framework … bursts its limits both stylistically and structurally and clears the way for new epic possibilities."[213] These possibilities included new ways of bringing the salient, collective aspects of storytelling into modern life. Benjamin compared these norms of storytelling to the novel, which he saw as overly aspiring for closedness and overly centered on the individual. Patrizia McBride also suggests that montage and storytelling may not be at odds, despite the fact that the former is clearly rooted in modern life and the latter rooted in the archaic.[214] The *feestrokken* exemplify both aspects of montage and of storytelling as defined by Benjamin. The *feestrokken* re-use and re-assemble everyday objects/images to create a new whole (fabric in the case of the *feestrokken)*. As is the case for montaged, assembled or collaged pieces, the fabric in the *feestrokken* never truly loses sight of its original context. The scraps were supposed and acted as memory-holding objects. However, this new whole has its own stories and valences and its own (semi-deconstructed) narrative. The variety of stories in the *feestrokken* include but are not limited to stories of wartime hunger, acts of resistance, and the experience of liberation. In its assembly of present and past events into one and its collective process, the *feestrok* is a visual representation of Benjamin's oral storytelling based in community. As

[212] Patrizia C. McBride, "The Narrative Restitution of Experience: Walter Benjamin's Storytelling," in *Chatter of the Visible: Montage and Narrative in Weimar Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 43.
[213] Walter Benjamin as quoted in McBride, 50.
[214] McBride 42.

previously discussed, the creation of the *feestrokken* often relied on collective action. A shared experience was created through the dispersed collective creation of the skirts across the Netherlands. The loss of this shared experience, Benjamin claimed, was in part to blame for the expiry of storytelling as a communal tradition.[215] In this way the *feestrokken* both were able to help their creators participate in the lost communal tradition of storytelling and in the overarching trend of assemblage and montage by which some would define the 20th century.

[215] McBride, 41.

Figure 31 Tennessee Valley Authority Applique Quilt Design of a Black Fist, Textile, 1934, Museum of Arts and Design, New York, NY.

Figure 32 Asger Jorn, *Automolok,* wax crayons, pastel, graphite and watercolor on paper, 1947.

Figure 33 Asger Jorn, *The Disquieting Duckling,* Oil on canvas (older painting), 1959, Museum Jorn, Silkborg, Denmark.

Figure 34 Robert Rauschenberg, *Untitled (Man with White Shoes),* mixed mediums with taxidermy hen and a pair of painted leather shoes, 1954
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