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Tides of Tradition: Embodying Costume Heritage and Identity in Arnemuiden

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Tides of Tradition

Embodying Costume Heritage and Identity in Arnemuiden

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ABSTRACT

In the former fishing village of Arnemuiden, traditional costume isn't merely worn – it's lived and enacted through the embodied practices of sewing, dressing, and performance. This article and its accompanying ethnographic film examine how a contemporary revival of regional dress in Zeeland navigates the tensions between tradition and modernity. Rather than a static object of material heritage, the costume emerges as a dynamic, lived practice that anchors women in collective memory while engaging with modern sensibilities.

The film follows several women involved in preserving the costume—including some of the filmmaker's family members—capturing the sensory and relational dimensions of costume-making: the tactile rhythms of hands working fabric, dressing workshop rituals, and the quiet care and joy embedded in these acts. These embodied practices express values of modesty, piety, and feminine discipline, while shaping boundaries of belonging and exclusion through intergenerational transmission.

This thesis argues that tradition is not merely inherited but actively crafted through ritual labor, relational care, and embodied knowledge. Drawing on ethnographic accounts inspired by observational cinema and sensory ethnography, this project critically reflects on the ethics of representation within a religiously conservative community. It challenges narratives that position modernity as rupture, instead offering an embodied counter-narrative where continuity and transformation coexist in the folds of fabric, memory, and identity.

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TO ALL THOSE IN ARNEMUIDEN—*BOERINNEN*, DRESSMAKERS, CARETAKERS OF CLOTH—WHOSE HANDS AND HEARTS SUSTAIN THE LIVING TRADITION OF COSTUME.

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Finally, I am deeply grateful for the stories passed down by my family members who are no longer with us. The questions I never had the chance to ask continue to drive my curiosity in our shared history and cultural heritage.

Introduction. Threads of Meaning

As a child, my mom, sister, and I would occasionally visit Arnemuiden, a small Dutch village in Zeeland that recently celebrated its 450th year of city rights. I enjoyed seeing Aunt Rina and Uncle Rinus (we called my grandfather's siblings aunt and uncle), but after the long journey and a day packed with visits, I often became impatient. Like many rebellious teenagers, I preferred hanging out with friends. Now, half a lifetime later, I wish I had asked more questions about my family's past. Perhaps this curiosity stems from entering a new phase of life, or maybe I'm simply turning inward and gaining a deeper appreciation for my own history. This personal journey, combined with my fascination for the political, personal, and cultural dimensions of human life, has led to the research I present today.

After years of absence, returning to Arnemuiden for the annual *Visserijdagen* (Fishing Days) felt like stepping into a world that is both familiar and strange. On a warm Saturday afternoon in June 2024, blue and white flags ripple in the breeze, and white caps—long absent from the street scene—once again define the character of this historic thoroughfare. Walking down the *Langstraat,* I pass people in costume I haven't seen since childhood, and I can't help but think of all those who came before me.

Opposite the Arnemuiden Museum, an engraving of a smiling woman adorns the facade, her round, rosy cheeks and white bonnet echoing the old photographs of iconic fisherwomen who once walked these streets in traditional dress—baskets of fish in hand, children clinging to their skirts. Positioned above the door, her image conjures the quiet continuity of the past.

My thoughts are quickly disrupted by the thick crowd, compelling us to maneuver cautiously through the masses. Around us, women in long, high-waisted skirts either black or white with vibrant patterns, move with purpose. *Doeken* (cloths) are fastened around their waistbands, their necks adorned with shiny red blood coral necklaces. Their white hoods gleam, framing golden curls on each side, the distinctive forehead loop evident in their hair. The men, dressed mostly in dark blues and blacks, wear trousers held up by dark blue suspenders, round silver buckles at their waist. Black caps complete the look; some decorated with swinging gold earrings. The smell of smoked fish mingles with the pungent scent of horse droppings.

“They are ring riding in front of Uncle Rinus and Jaap’s house,” my uncle explains. Off in the distance, near the old pier head, a large white tent rises. There, a larger group dressed in traditional costume sways to the rhythm of loud Dutch music, plastic glasses of beer in hand.

The scene recalls Uncle Rinus’s stories of an era when traditional costume was everyday wear, when fathers would set out at night to fish, selling their catch the same day, while children sat with their mothers at the kitchen table, peeling shrimp to earn a few pennies. Over the past century, fishing has evolved from a poverty-marked livelihood into a large-scale industrial enterprise (Tydings-Nab 1993). This transformation, driven by global demand and capitalist market forces, has brought profound environmental, economic, and social challenges (Howard 2017). A life-size statue of a fishmonger on the *Markt*, Arnemuiden’s main square, stands as a tangible reminder of the town’s maritime past. Unveiled in 2003 by the last *leurster* (De Ridder 2005), it commemorates both an extinct profession and the traditional Arnemuiden costume (Van der Krogt 2003).[1]

After visiting the *Visserijdagen*, my curiosity about the connection between heritage and traditional costume arose. I found myself wondering how such an extensive collection had developed, what motivated so many to wear these outfits, and what the process of preparing and wearing them involved. Rooted in family memory and local attachment, this curiosity evolved into an anthropological inquiry into how craft, tradition, gender, and religion intersect in contemporary Zeeland. I approach tradition not as something static or nostalgic, but as a dynamic force that women today actively shape through sewing dressing, and performing, negotiating religious and political beliefs in the process.

To explore these questions, I draw on anthropological frameworks that integrate feminist, visual, and sensory perspectives, emphasizing how material objects, embodied actions, and performance shape culture. Sewing, for example, is far more than technical work. It is a hands-on mode of knowing, a feminist practice that intertwines memory, care, and continuity into fabric (Hunter

[1] *Visleurster* (female) or *visleurder* (male) refers to someone who practiced the profession of fishmonging. Fishing dominated Arnemuiden's economy in 1870, employing two-thirds of its 1,675 residents, compared to 46% by 1930-1940 (Tydings-Nab 1993). After the 1871 railway construction, fish arrived via both port Veere and rail (De Ridder 2005). At Veere and Vlissingen quaysides, *leursters* and *leuders* in traditional dress waited with baskets to buy from their regular fishermen suppliers (Tydings-Nab 1993). The fishwives operated communally, sharing purchases and involving families in shrimp processing, often working through the night to deliver as far as Maastricht (De Ridder 2005). Despite the intensive labor, oversupply kept profits low (Tydings-Nab 1993). The trade declined post-WWII, with *leursters* numbers falling from over hundred in the 1930s to just two by 2003 (De Ridder 2005). My cousins Mia and Mattie remember the meager wages: just 12 cents per kilo for shrimp peeling in the 1960s.

2019; Tarlo 1996). Similarly, wearing traditional dress in public becomes an embodied performance of identity (Butler 2002), highlighting the gendered dimensions of cultural expression and reproduction (Moore 1994). The body itself acts as a canvas on which tradition, gender, and values are displayed and negotiated.

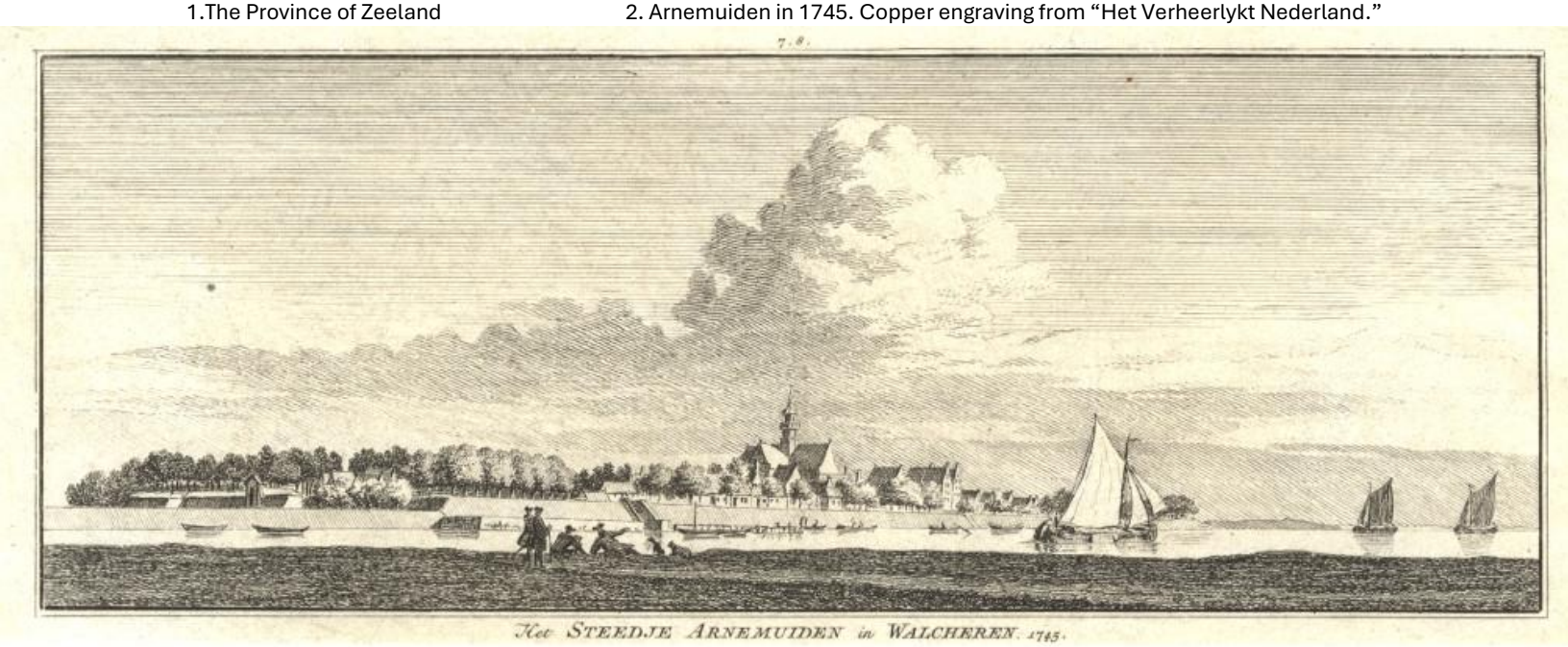
Through this lens, tradition is not passively inherited but actively created; woven from memory, historical materials, and communal aspirations. Arnemuiden's Protestant context introduces a critical dynamic between secular ideals of individual autonomy and the lived realities of religious community life. Drawing on scholars such as Mahmood (2011) and Weber (2001), I explore how religious identity coexists with notions of womanhood. Rather than seeing religion as a constraint, I examine how devout, tradition-oriented women in Arnemuiden express agency through ethics, care, and relational practices.

To effectively capture the affective and embodied dimensions of these women's practices, I combine text with moving images, providing a more nuanced and layered representation. Images and text communicate information differently and convey distinct types of content (MacDougall 1998). This multimodal or visual ethnographic approach allows knowledge production to engage multiple sensory channels (Grasseni 2007; Lawrence 2020). As a complement to this written analysis, I created a 30-minute film showcasing the embodied practices of costume-preparation, dressing, and wearing. Drawing from anthropological filmmaking and sensory ethnography, the film highlights texture, gesture, rhythm, and speech—elements that resist abstraction yet convey meaning through movement and materiality. While the film reveals costume-making, preparing, and dressing as embodied ways of knowing, this article examines their role in shaping local understandings of agency, identity, and cultural memory.

Following the costume's realization into being, this thesis' structure follows its consecutive steps of making, dressing, and performing. Like the garments and their wearers, this thesis emerges as a collaborative thinking-with, attuned to the labor, creativity, and presence of those who continually remake tradition's meanings today.

1.The Province of Zeeland

2. Arnemuiden in 1745. Copper engraving from “Het Verheerlykt Nederland.”



3. Arnemuiden today. Bird-eye view. Picture taken together with my roommate Jesse.

Chapter 1. Conceptualizing Material Heritage

"As a child, I would see my grandmother, her sisters, sisters-in-law and many other women from Arnemuiden walking around daily in traditional dress", former fisherman and costume enthusiast Manuel recalled. "I always loved that. And those old men with their skippers' caps—you could still see them on the streets. Even in Middelburg you'd spot *Erremuuse boerinnen*[2]. Or if you went to the local Jumbo supermarket, they'd be there too." When this everyday presence began to fade a few years ago, Manuel started to fully grasp how *Erremuus*[3] (Arnemuids) this tradition actually was. "But you only realize that when it's no longer there." His reflection touches on a broader cultural dynamic: heritage often emerges most forcefully when tradition recedes. What was once lived and unremarkable becomes marked and meaningful through its loss or transformation. The revival of traditional costume in Arnemuiden, then, is not simply about preserving the past—it is a response to its perceived disappearance. This chapter examines the contemporary revival of traditional costume (*dracht*) in Arnemuiden, situating it within broader anthropological discussions of heritage, tradition, and cultural transformation. I begin with a brief historical overview of Arnemuiden's costume—its garments, colors, uses, and shifts over time—setting the stage for subsequent chapters that explore its embodied, affective, and political dimensions.

Like Manuel, I too encountered the *dracht* not in a museum case or heritage brochure, but during my grandparents' birthdays as a child. We'd always dine at the same restaurant in Bilthoven. My great-aunts Jannie and Jaai would drive all the way from Zeeland to join us, always dressed in their costumes. Although I never fully understood why they dressed this way, I never questioned it. I simply accepted it as normal, just like the rest of my family. My great-aunts' costumes, as well as Manuel's grandmothers' and great-aunts, were more than mere clothing. They symbolized a condensed record of local history: a maritime economy, Protestant modesty, and women's skillful handwork – all preserved in linen, lace, and cotton. In the shift from everyday use to occasional

[2] *Erremuu* is the local slang for Arnemuiden, referring to the phonetic pronunciation of the word, abbreviated as RMU. Another variation is *Aeremuu*, which is pronounced slightly differently. In many Zeeland dialects, the Dutch 'ee' sound is pronounced as an open è sound, which in Zeelandic writing is represented as 'ae' (Francke 2013). The 'ae' spelling thus appears to simply transcribe the local 'e' dialect pronunciation.

A *boerin* is the local term for peasant, commonly referring to a 'lady in traditional costume.' When dressing in traditional peasant attire, locals would say: "op z'n boers" (dressed in peasant style).

[3] *Erremuus* is the local word for "Arnemuids." It refers to the people of Arnemuiden, their local dialect, and anything characteristic of Arnemuiden, as in "something typically *Erremuus*."

display, the *dracht* has entered the realm of material heritage: a preserved object that embodies the skills, values, and histories of a community. More than a mere object, costume encompasses both tangible and intangible elements (Smith 2006) — skills, rituals, knowledge, and memories — that communities mobilize to navigate identity, belonging, and change (Geismar 2015). Heritage functions as cultural memory, linking past and present through embodied practice and symbolic representation. Laurajane Smith (2006) and David Harvey (2001) remind us that heritage is not merely about preservation; it is about meaning making in the present, the active use of the past to shape contemporary identities and futures.

The Zeeland Regional Costume: A Short Introduction

Around 1850, Zeeland's population wore regionally distinctive costumes that reflected both geographical area and social standing. Women typically wore a combination of cap, yak, beech, layered skirts, apron, and sometimes a hat. Men's attire consisted of a *boezeroen* (smocks), vest, knee breeches, neckerchief, and cap. While these traditional costumes featured vibrant colors initially, they gradually became more somber after the mid-19th century (Dekker & Heyning 2005; Zeeuwse Ankers 2025). Women in Arnemuiden wore attire similar to others on Walcheren, though often made with cheaper materials due to working-class poverty (Dekker & Heyning 2005). Men's clothing was practical for seafaring life: wide black trousers with simple fastenings, smocks, and durable footwear such as clogs or boots. By 1900, Arnemuiden women's dress evolved into two distinct styles: the "fisher's costume" and the "civil costume" (see picture below). The civil costume borrowed elements from neighboring Nieuw- en Sint Joosland (Koeman 2022; Dekker & Heyning 2005), showing how "local" styles developed through regional influences. According to Dekker & Heyning (2005), the civil costume—which most closely resembles today's Arnemuiden attire—represented a more modern version of the fishermen's dress. While Nieuwland has abandoned this tradition, Arnemuiden women still wear their distinguishable blue intermediate cap today (see film).

The girls in the picture are both from Arnemuiden: Tannetje Jobse (left) and Francina de Troije (right). Tannetje, Mineke's great-grandmother, wears the fishing costume, while Francina wears the more 'modern' civilian costume (both appear on the quilt she made for the local museum). According to local accounts, the girls were dressed in their finest attire for a visit by Queen Wilhelmina and Queen Emma to Middelburg.

Between 1900-1950, the female undervest became shorter, and the upper bonnet grew larger (see page 14). The golden curls and decorative *stikken* were then placed higher on the head (see film).

Girls from Arnemuiden, 1894, coloured photograph (Zeeuws Museum, KZGW).

Zeeland's *dracht* was never entirely self-contained. Fabrics were brought in from Flanders and from the "East"[4], and jewelry followed European fashion trends (Koeman 2022). The gradual shift from continental court styles to rural adaptations reflects how villagers often retained older silhouettes while integrating new materials and aesthetic codes. Costume thus evolved not in isolation, but through the circulation of goods, images, and ideas. The interest in the Zeeland

[4] Throughout the Netherlands, so-called "exotic" fabrics were imported via VOC trade routes from regions broadly referred to at the time as "the East"—primarily the Dutch East Indies (present-day Indonesia) and other parts of Asia. These materials, admired for their intricate designs and vivid colors, were incorporated into traditional Dutch dress, including Zeeland costume. Sailors also brought back silver filigree work, which inspired locally adapted jewelry, such as the trouser pieces worn in Zeeland (Koeman 2022). This historical terminology reflects a colonial worldview in which diverse Asian cultures were collectively labelled as "the Orient". In his analysis of Orientalism, Said (1979) critiqued this reductive approach, showing how the East was constructed as exotic, passive, and fundamentally "Other" in contrast to the West.

costume began flourishing in the late nineteenth century, ironically, just as concerns about its disappearance emerged (Dekker & Heyning 2005).

World War II represented a decisive turning point in the decline of the costume. Material scarcity, shifting social ideals, and the pressures of modern life led many women to abandon the costume in favor of contemporary fashion (Dekker & Heyning 2005). As my cousin Nel explained, “There was no money, and the goods weren’t available.” She explained that many families in Arnemuiden sold their jewelry, fabrics became rare, and the labor-intensive nature of dressing made modern styles increasingly appealing. “Women wanted to wear modern, trendy clothes as well”, my cousin Corrie added.

According to former fisherman Manuel, the arrival of jeans marked a symbolic shift toward “civil” clothing. The 1953 North Sea flood further disrupted the continuation of daily dress in parts of Zeeland, for many people lost all their belongings (Koeman 2022). Yet in Arnemuiden, the *dracht* endured longer than elsewhere, partly due to its strong religious traditions, tight-knit community structures, and the commitment of local women who preserved the knowledge (ibid.).

From Everyday Wear to Exceptional Attire

The first night I had dinner at my cousin Clazina’s house in Arnemuiden, I noticed a black-and-white photograph in the hallway. It showed her parents posing in front of the camera, looking neutrally, dressed formally. “This was at a wedding,” she explained. I paused, studying her mother’s attire. “She went to a wedding in mourning clothes?” I asked, surprised by the dark, unadorned garments. “That’s right,” Clazina replied. “Mother never came out of her mourning attire.” In Arnemuiden, costume was not only worn for life—it bore the marks of life and loss. As my cousins Clazina and Mia explained, after the death of a first-degree relative, women would enter a period of heavy mourning, signaled by dull black clothing, no lace, and an absence of jewelry. Later, they could shift into light mourning, marked by a black apron with a subtle pattern and muted silver ornaments (Zeeuwse Ankers 2025)). Mourning, in short, was expressed through a visual grammar of modesty: black garments, subdued interiors and, as Nel told me, sometimes even the covering of mirrors[5].

[5] While my participants were uncertain about its origins, the practice of covering mirrors corresponds with older European folk and supernatural beliefs. Exalto (2020) notes that while the Protestant Reformation partly attempted to eliminate magical (unorthodox) influences from religion, ordinary people nonetheless continued to hold various supernatural beliefs well into the twentieth century.

These practices align with Weber's (2001:71-74 ,140) concept of “inner-worldly asceticism”: the infusion of daily life with moral discipline. When I asked about the origins of certain customs, people typically responded simply, “that’s just the way it was.” It wasn’t until my cousin Rudi said, “you should not question everything, trust His word,” that I connected this mindset to Weber’s observation about Protestantism: it values fulfilling one’s role without questioning its deeper meaning. According to this religious and moral framework, the right approach isn’t to investigate why mourning customs exist, but to perform them faithfully as demonstrations of humility, self-control, and respect. Through this lens, Arnemuiden’s historical mourning practices can be understood as acts of humility that aligned with community expectations—grief should be visible yet contained. Beyond moral propriety, these traditions exemplify how the costume serves as both a symbol of faith and a tangible representation of kinship, memory, and community values.

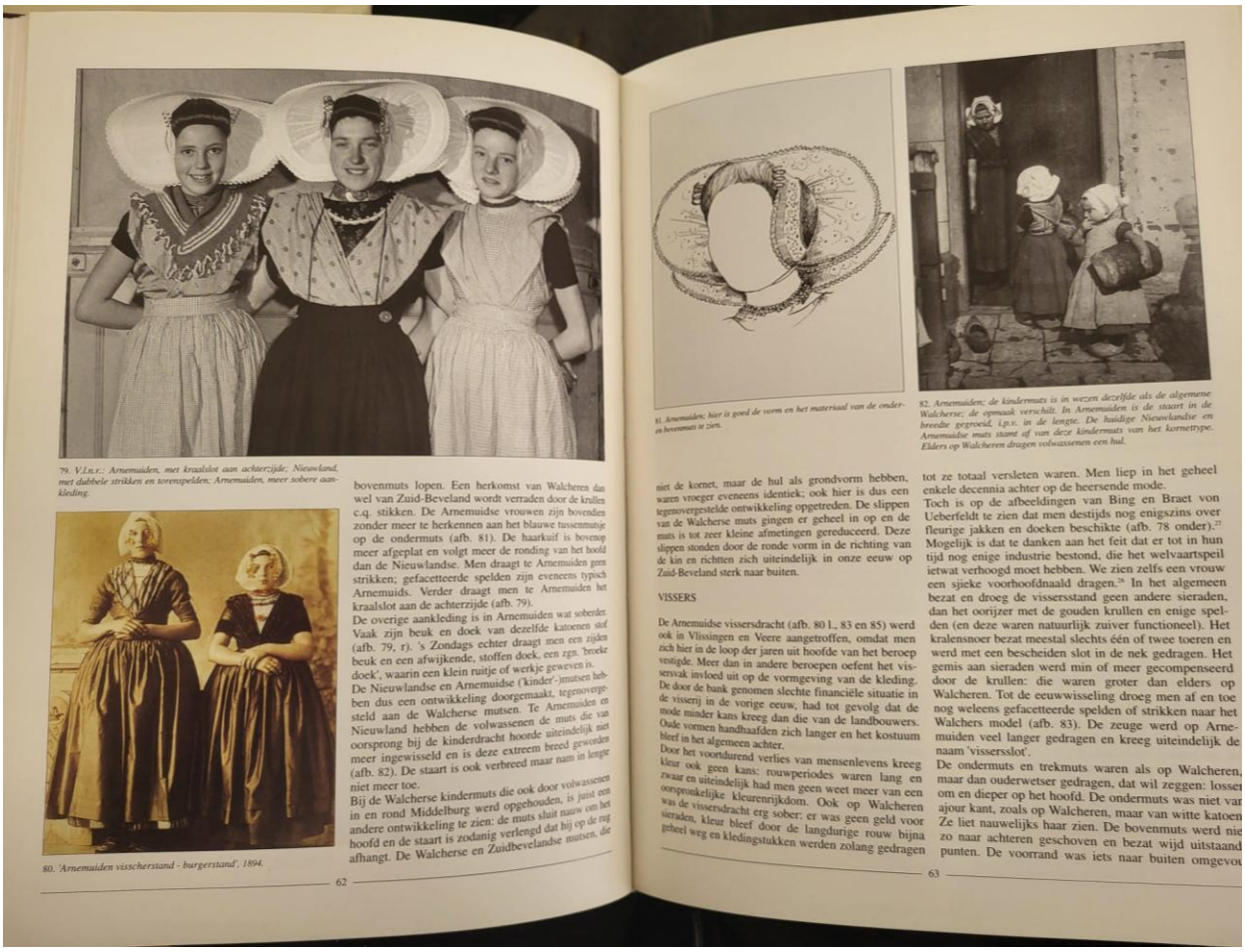
My grandfather Henk and grandmother Sien posing with her sister Jannie and husband Klaas in front of the Reformed Church in Arnemuiden. Jannie is dressed in mourning attire. Family picture.

What Is Next

In this research, I examine *costume* as a form of both material and intangible heritage, approaching it not as a preserved cultural object but as a living, dynamic practice. I use several terms with overlapping meanings throughout my work: *dracht*, costume, dress, attire, and garments. When I use "costume," I'm not referring to clothing for masquerades or theatrical performances, but rather to "dress from distinct historical periods, and native, indigenous clothing styles" (Hansen 2004: 371). More importantly, costume is the literal translation of the term *dracht*, used in the local dialect of Arnemuiden, is the abbreviated form of "klederdracht," meaning folk costume or regional attire. I use *dracht*, costume, dress, and attire interchangeably, all referring to the Arnemuiden costume as worn from the 1950s onwards until today. "Garments" specifically refer to the individual components that make up the costume (such as aprons or skirts), whether self-made or inherited. Today, each newly made bonnet, or skirt is not simply a reproduction of the past but the result of hours of skilled labour, sensory attention, and personal investment.

To understand how the *Arnemuidse dracht* continues to exist as material heritage, we must explore the workshops, sewing rooms, and kitchens where women cut, stitch, starch, and fold tradition into being. This article examines the three key aspects of the dressing process—making, dressing, and wearing—each explored in subsequent chapters. Making serves as a metaphor for weaving continuity and care; dressing showcases the negotiation of identity and social belonging; and wearing brings heritage to life, revealing the interconnected threads of individual, communal, and historical consciousness.

- **Chapter 2** examines the practice of *making*, framing costume revival as a form of care, negotiation with tradition and modernity, and materiality
- **Chapter 3** focuses on *dressing*, tracing how bodies, beliefs, and generations are woven together through embodied practice
- **Chapter 4** turns to *wearing*, analyzing how costume mediates belonging, memory, and the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion



79. *V.l.n.r.: Arnemuiden, met kraalslot aan achterzijde; Nieuwland, met dubbele strikken en torenspelden; Arnemuiden, meer sobere aankleding.*

80. *'Arnemuiden visscherstand - burgerstand', 1894.*

bovenmuts lopen. Een herkomst van Walcheren dan wel van Zuid-Beveland wordt verraden door de krullen c.q. stikken. De Arnemuidse vrouwen zijn bovendien zonder meer te herkennen aan het blauwe tussenmutsje op de ondermuts (afb. 81). De haarkuif is bovenop meer afgeplat en volgt meer de ronding van het hoofd dan de Nieuwlandse. Men draagt te Arnemuiden geen strikken; gefacetteerde spelden zijn eveneens typisch Arnemuids. Verder draagt men te Arnemuiden het kraalslot aan de achterzijde (afb. 79).

De overige aankleding is in Arnemuiden wat sobérder. Vaak zijn beuk en doek van dezelfde katoenen stof (afb. 79, r). 's Zondags echter draagt men een zijden beuk en een afwijkende, stoffen doek, een zgn. 'broeke doek', waarin een klein ruitje of werkje geweven is.

De Nieuwlandse en Arnemuidse ('kinder'-)mutsen hebben dus een ontwikkeling doorgemaakt, tegenovergesteld aan de Walcherse mutsen. Te Arnemuiden en Nieuwland hebben de volwassenen de muts die van oorsprong bij de kinderdracht hoorde uiteindelijk niet meer ingewisseld en is deze extreem breed geworden (afb. 82). De staart is ook verbreed maar nam in lengte niet meer toe.

Bij de Walcherse kindermuts die ook door volwassenen in en rond Middelburg werd opgehouden, is juist een andere ontwikkeling te zien: de muts sluit nauw om het hoofd en de staart is zodanig verlengd dat hij op de rug afhangt. De Walcherse en Zuidbevelandse mutsen, die

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81. *Arnemuiden; hier is goed de vorm en het materiaal van de onder- en bovenmuts te zien.*

82. *Arnemuiden; de kindermuts is in wezen dezelfde als de algemene Walcherse; de opmaak verschilt. In Arnemuiden is de staart in de breedte gegroeid, i.p.v. in de lengte. De huidige Nieuwlandse en Arnemuidse muts stamt af van deze kindermuts van het kornettype. Elders op Walcheren dragen volwassenen een hul.*

niet de kornet, maar de hul als grondvorm hebben, waren vroeger eveneens identiek; ook hier is dus een tegenovergestelde ontwikkeling opgetreden. De slippen van de Walcherse muts gingen er geheel in op en de muts is tot zeer kleine afmetingen gereduceerd. Deze slippen stonden door de ronde vorm in de richting van de kin en richtten zich uiteindelijk in onze eeuw op Zuid-Beveland sterk naar buiten.

VISSERS

De Arnemuidse vissersdracht (afb. 80 l., 83 en 85) werd ook in Vlissingen en Veere aangetroffen, omdat men zich hier in de loop der jaren uit hoofde van het beroep vestigde. Meer dan in andere beroepen oefent het visserswak invloed uit op de vormgeving van de kleding. De door de bank genomen slechte financiële situatie in de visserij in de vorige eeuw, had tot gevolg dat de mode minder kans kreeg dan die van de landbouwers. Oude vormen handhaafden zich langer en het kostuum bleef in het algemeen achter.

Door het voortdurend verlies van mensenlevens kreeg kleur ook geen kans: rouwperiodes waren lang en zwaar en uiteindelijk had men geen weet meer van een oorspronkelijke kleurenrijkdom. Ook op Walcheren was de vissersdracht erg sober: er was geen geld voor sieraden, kleur bleef door de langdurige rouw bijna geheel weg en kledingstukken werden zolang gedragen tot ze totaal versleten waren. Men liep in het geheel enkele decennia achter op de heersende mode.

Toch is op de afbeeldingen van Bing en Braet von Ueberfeldt te zien dat men destijds nog enigszins over fleurige jakken en docken beschikte (afb. 78 onder).[27] Mogelijk is dat te danken aan het feit dat er tot in hun tijd nog enige industrie bestond, die het welvaartspeil ietwat verhoogd moet hebben. We zien zelfs een vrouw een sjieke voorhoofdnaald dragen.[28] In het algemeen bezat en droeg de vissersstand geen andere sieraden, dan het oorijzer met de gouden krullen en enige spelden (en deze waren natuurlijk zuiver functioneel). Het kralensnoer bezat meestal slechts één of twee toeren en werd met een bescheiden slot in de nek gedragen. Het gemis aan sieraden werd min of meer gecompenseerd door de krullen: die waren groter dan elders op Walcheren. Tot de eeuwwisseling droeg men af en toe nog weleens gefacetteerde spelden of strikken naar het Walchers model (afb. 83). De zeuge werd op Arnemuiden veel langer gedragen en kreeg uiteindelijk de naam 'vissersslot'.

De ondermuts en trekmuts waren als op Walcheren, maar dan ouderwetser gedragen, dat wil zeggen: losser om en dieper op het hoofd. De ondermuts was niet van ajour kant, zoals op Walcheren, maar van witte katoen Ze liet nauwelijks haar zien. De bovenmuts werd nie zo naar achteren geschoven en bezat wijd uitstaand punten. De voorrand was iets naar buiten omgevou

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The upper picture shows the traditional women's costume from Arnemuiden circa 1950, which has shaped contemporary attire. My grandmother, Francina Poortvliet (known locally as "Teacher Sien"), appears in the middle. She wore a cloth and beech of different materials, as was customary then. Today, most women select cloth and beech made from matching fabrics and colors (as demonstrated in the film). The right image shows the upper bonnet as it's still worn today—a surprising discovery I made when my cousins showed me this picture in Arnemuiden. The image is from Polderman's (1993) book.

Chapter 2. Crafting Tradition

Cutting, Stitching, Sewing: Re-Inventing Material Heritage

Making Sense of Tradition: Manuel's Story

The recent renewed interest in the local Arnemuiden costume went accompanied with initial difficulties finding male garments, Manuel explained. A former fisherman from Arnemuiden in his early 30s, his passion for traditional costume began in childhood, sparked by visits to the museum with his father: "My father worked at the museum, and as a child I often went along. I had to wear traditional dress for opening events, which I enjoyed."

Now with children of his own, Manuel wanted to dress them in traditional costume as well. Yet sourcing proper pieces proved challenging: "My grandmother was too elderly to help, and there weren't many women wearing traditional dress anymore. I eventually found Jannie Schroevers, who agreed to help. While I could find clothing for girls, finding pieces for my son was hard. No suitable trousers or jumpers were available. With the city's 450th anniversary approaching last year, I thought it would be wonderful to see many people wearing traditional costume again."

One and a half years after Manuel's call to get together and gather garments, knowledge, and skill, the seamstresses of Arnemuiden have made over hundred garments while still being busy fulfilling villagers' requests. Manuel's story exemplifies how tradition is not passively inherited but inspired by memory and longing, and actively reworked through improvisation, and communal collaboration. In this chapter, I explore the challenges of striving for "authenticity" in a local costume that dates from the post-war era and navigates between historical interpretations and contemporary aesthetic preferences.

Negotiating Authenticity: Women's Work

At the sewing club, the work of "making tradition" unfolds stitch by stitch. On one evening, Levina guided Clazina through her first pair of flap pants, using a pattern traced from an old pair belonging to her husband's grandfather. From that nearly century-old example, a new version was drawn and cut—alongside, tellingly, a pattern for jogging pants. Fabrics were adapted too: *pilo*[6] replaces

[6] Many of the old fishermen pants are made from pilo, a type of woven fabric made of half cotton and half linen that was used for workwear. This cheaper fabric was mainly used for men's everyday clothing (Ons Boeregoed 2025).

velvet, being lighter and easier to sew. Pants that once remained unfinished and tied with laces are now lined and fastened with buttons. Mistakes were frequent: trousers too short, smocks sewn crooked. Sewing was slow, laborious, and often frustrating, with one garment taking days or weeks to complete.

This labor is not trivial. As Tarlo (1996) shows in her study of Indian dress, small material decisions—whether about fabric, fastening, or pattern—become sites where history, social values, and personal preferences intersect. In Arnemuiden, each pin, fold, and seam embody a negotiation: garments must “fit and function,” but they must also resonate with memory and communal standards of authenticity. Authenticity here is not a static standard but a lived practice, continually recalibrated.

Levina displays her first *klepbroek* (valve pants) made in children's size. Unable to find any historical children’s pants or existing patterns, she creatively used sweatpants as a template for her design.

Seamstresses Lia and Levina, the initiators of the male costume revival and 'teachers' of the local sewing club, both insist that they have no specific personal interest in wearing the costume themselves: "I simply enjoy making them, and seeing all Arnemuiden boys and men dressed in it", Levina explained with a smile. "Besides, I don't have time for it, I don't like how it fits. Just let me focus on making these men's garments and enjoy their happy faces", she added. For Lia and Levina, the sewing work is not so much about personal identity, but about communal continuity. As Clare Hunter (2019) reminds us, textiles are carriers of affective memory; they bind communities through the labor of hands as much as through the images they project. Sewing nights are more than technical workshops: they are communal spaces of care, laughter, trial and error, and shared storytelling, moments where heritage is literally pieced together.

The gendered dimension of this work is striking. While men like Manuel and Adrie (my cousin Rudi's father-in-law, Joselyn's father) are involved in initiating or supporting the revival, the labor of sewing remains largely coded as women's work. Adrie, the only man in the group, described his contribution modestly as "helping out". The overtly female representation in sewing reinforced ideals of textile work's association with femininity, care, and kinship. Henrietta Moore (1994) has emphasized how gendered practices structure social worlds, not simply by dividing labor but by producing subjectivities. In Arnemuiden, sewing costume is not only a technical craft but a social practice that reaffirms women's roles as custodians of continuity and care.

At the same time, these women do not necessarily see themselves as preserving an untouched past. As Levina put it: "We are just inventing it as we go." This resonates with Lambek's (2012) observation that modernity is often experienced as dislocation, a rupture with embodied knowledge and communal continuity. Yet in Arnemuiden, this rupture becomes the ground for creative reassembly. Sewing groups do not oppose modernity or "modern" touches; they actively use modern fabrics, fitting current aesthetics and stylistic preferences, as well as electric sewing machines, and design adaptations. In this sense, modernity itself functions as a catalyst for tradition (Jansen & Craik 2018), prompting new forms of attachment, solidarity, and pride.

These practices of slow, unpaid textile labor also challenge capitalist rhythms. They embody what Taylor (2003) calls the social life of clothing, where garments are not commodities but bearers of histories, relationships, and affect. In the Dutch' economic context, such voluntary, time-intensive work is easily undervalued. Yet for participants, while its very slowness sometimes creates

impatience, it overall turns out meaningful. As Clazina explained: “I have to do most of the work at home, since here we don’t get much done, but the sewing club is just fun because you do it together, you help each other.” Sewing becomes an ethic of care—labor that is not only about garments but about solidarity and belonging.

Threads of Memory and Belonging

The interest in Arnemuiden’s costume initiated in the village, its re-invention has extended the province's boundaries. The costume circulates in other villages, dancing groups from outside the village, and even transnationally, linking communities across continents. In Orange City, Iowa—settled by Dutch immigrants in the nineteenth century—*klederdracht* is worn during the annual Tulip Festival.[7] During the annual costume day in Westkapelle, a town on the edge of Zeeland, a lady from Orange City told me they were visiting Arnemuiden to learn costume-making from locals. When I asked her how they became so interested in Dutch costume traditions, she replied: “The U.S. is such a young country, compared to all countries in Europe and so many other countries in the world, that it really needs to be part of something older, greater, and bigger. We really enjoy that about Orange City.” The stories from Orange City exemplify what Giddens (2013) highlights: living in late modernity requires actively negotiating one's identity amid constant pressure from social change, uncertainty, and multiple possible life paths. Identity is no longer simply inherited or assigned—it must be reflexively constructed when facing dilemmas. In Orange City, settlement and heritage aren't opposites but mutually reinforcing—heritage develops as a response to displacement, providing both symbolic roots and a transnational sense of belonging.

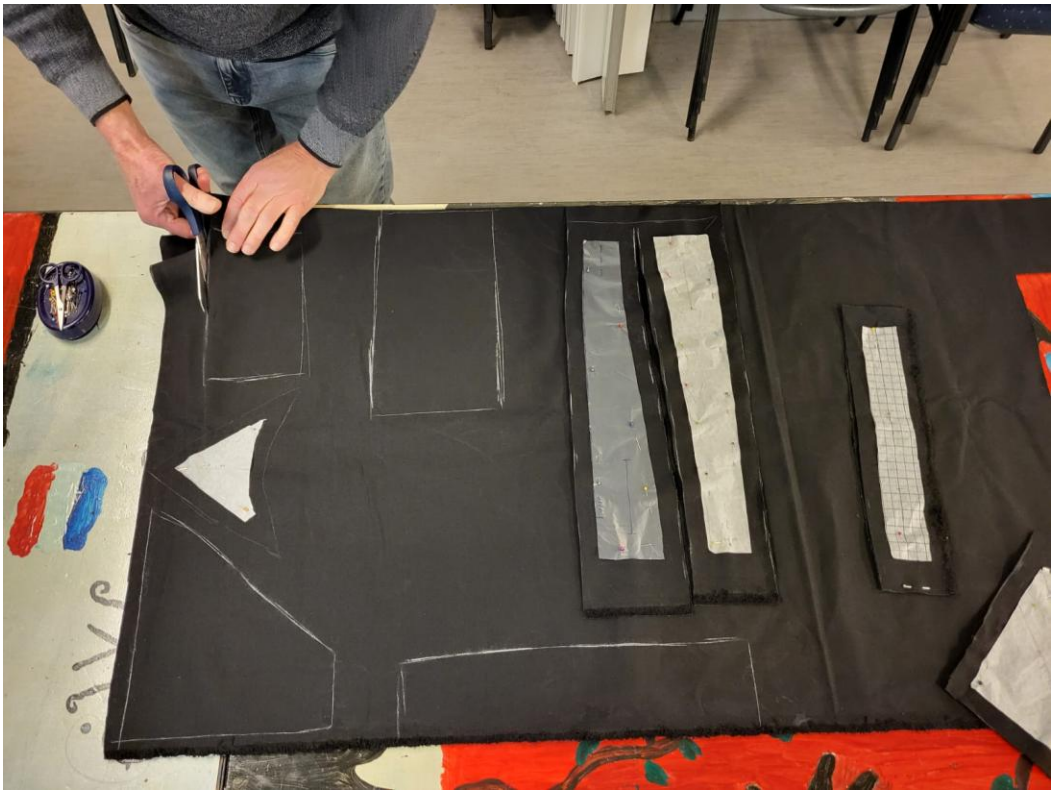
For many participants, their outfits are not merely replicas of a distant past or hometown but creative reconstructions that affirm belonging across both time and space. For some people who have left Arnemuiden, the costume continues to be an important marker of belonging and rootedness. Janneke, Mineke’s sister, left Arnemuiden years ago but comes back often to visit, including wearing the costume. “When they started dressing in costume again a few years ago, we

[7] Orange City was founded in 1870 by settlers from Pella who were seeking “opportunities,” as the women from Orange City told me during a costume day in Westkapelle. One of them explained that her ancestors were frontiersmen: “They didn’t move out of dissension or anger. In the U.S. at that time, the mentality was very much 'keep moving West.’ They moved to where land and opportunity existed. It wasn’t about coming in and taking over communities or conquering. It was settlement.” While it exceeds the scope and focus of this research, the very concept of settlement raises important questions about belonging, as well as colonial rule.

got excited right away". Costume here functions as what Hunter (2019) calls an affective archive, binding memory and identity across generations and geographies. Seen in this light, the Arnemuiden costume is part of a wider network of practices where dress serves as both communal aesthetic and performative assertion of identity. It is not only about fidelity to a past but about crafting belonging in the present, whether in Zeeland or across the Atlantic.

Having examined how the costume is made, I now turn to how it is worn. The next chapter explores dressing up as a transformative act: how embodying a *keurige boerin* (a "neat peasant woman") becomes a performance that bridges past and present, and in the chapter thereafter, reinterpreting historical meanings of modesty, piety, and femininity within a Protestant moral world.

Clazina cutting the fabric for her future beech. Picture by me.



Adrie cutting several pieces of the contemporary male peasant valve pants. Picture by me.

Lia demonstrates Mineke how to bat the fabric, in preparation for sewing, with special basting thread.

Chapter 3. Embodying Tradition

Seeing, Feeling, Making: Heritage through Sensory Enskilment

Sylvia helps me sort through piles of musty-smelling old garments in search of my own *doek* and *beuk* (cloth and beech), but we discover only pieces from the *Walcheren* costume are available: 'yaks' and 'beeches.' The yak is a short, tight jacket worn over the beech—unlike the distinct Arnemuiden style of draping cloth over the beech. The sales lady mentions she has some Arnemuiden skirts and aprons, so we begin our search. As we sort through piles of skirts, I realize I am taller than their original owners. They hit at my ankles, while Sylvia explains they should fall just above the shoes. "It shouldn't be too short, it just shouldn't," she insists. I learn that the skirt and apron must be a specific length: just below the calves, showing a bit of one's shoes, but never revealing the calves themselves. The apron can be slightly longer than the underskirt, but not the reverse. Ideally, they should be equal in length. Finally, we find a suitable double-layered skirt with black embroidered florals, quite fancy, I learn. The apron search proves equally educational. I find one with the correct band length (longer than Walcheren's style) and a protective "bumper edge" (*stootrand* in Dutch) that prevents fabric damage, but it's too short and too wide for me. Sylvia explains that the ends of the apron, in this case luxurious with its decorative "gallon" (*galon* in Dutch), should neither overlap nor gap, but just touch each other. Though unsuccessful in finding skirts, I become the fortunate owner of a double-lined black shawl—a traditional winter garment from the days "before coats were common".

This chapter argues that dressing is a deeply embodied, socially situated practice, where knowledge is acquired through memory, experience, repetition, and sensory engagement rather than through abstract instruction. Drawing on *enskilment* (Ingold 2022), *skilled vision* (Grasseni 2007; 2025) and *habitus* (Bourdieu & Nice 2013), I show how the rhythms, gestures, and postures of costume-wearing are internalized over time, shaping both perception and comportment. Habitus here is not fixed and ultimately a deeply personal experience inscribed into the body by larger social and historical structures; it evolves through intergenerational interaction, communal labor, and attentive practice, producing a corporeal sense of what it means to inhabit Arnemuiden tradition.

Training the Senses

Participating in the costume search alongside a local with a trained eye revealed the complex, embodied judgments involved in selecting what counts as proper attire. Sylvia's instructions about ideal skirt length, apron proportions, or the correct fall of the gallon, did not follow fixed rules laid out in manuals but emerged from lived experience and deeply ingrained cultural aesthetics. As fashion ethnographer Woodward (2007) argues, clothing choices are not merely about fashion or identity statements, but are shaped by habitual, embodied, and practical engagements with garments in everyday life. Whereas dominant fashion theory mostly focuses on either symbolic meaning (e.g. identity, class) or high fashion, I follow Woodward's (2007) approach on material culture and practice theory (especially Bourdieu) to show that women's clothing choices are often non-verbal, unconscious, and grounded in bodily experience and daily routines.

When asking why certain garments had to be of a certain length, the women from Arnemuiden often could not explicitly state why that was so. My cousin Clazina, would answer "that's how it should be" or "that's how mother did it." For Clazina and many other women in Arnemuiden, their costume choices are not always deliberate or expressive, but habitual and intuitive (Woodward 2007). Woodward (2007) draws on Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* to show how women "just know" what to wear based on learned dispositions. In this context, apprenticeship is shaped by both intimacy and hierarchy. As a relative, I was welcomed into this knowledge system—but as an outsider to the tradition, my access remained provisional, contingent on the guidance and approval of all the local experts. The hegemonic forces at play here are not state institutions or dominant ideologies in the usual sense, but rather the unspoken moral authority of those who 'know' tradition, in this case typically older women with long-standing social positions in the village. They determine what is "right," not only aesthetically but morally and emotionally. The "proper" costume is not only historically accurate—it feels right. That sense of rightness follows what Grasseni (2022) calls "skilled vision": a way of seeing that develops through practice and embedded in relations of care, expertise, and power. It combines visual discernment with tactile sensitivity and social authority.

Intuitive Knowledge

On an early Thursday morning in March, I am both nervous and excited. My cousin Nel is going to dress me. Though I haven't met Nel before, Clazina has assured me that she is one of the women in

town “who can do it best.” Once undressed, I experience her expertise firsthand. She swiftly directs me to stand, sit, and turn around. Before I know it, I’m dressed in bottom skirt, top skirt, cloth and beech, with countless pins holding the various garments tightly in place. After the “battle” with the under cap, Nel flawlessly sets the outer cap tight and straight.

As British anthropologist Ingold (2022:20) recalls, his father, a botanist, taught him by directing his attention to plants and fungi. By inviting his son to look, smell, and taste, he provided embodied guidance that allowed knowledge to be discovered through experience rather than transmitted through explanation. This illustrates *enskilment* (Ingold 2022) as a process of learning by attentive participation rather than instruction. Beyond mere visual appearance, becoming “enskilled” in Arnemuiden costume extends into the tactile realm. This engages a different sense, as garments must primarily “feel” or sit right. The technical training required for proper Arnemuiden attire integrates both emotional and intuitive development. What appears as “just knowing” is in fact the outcome of what Marcel Mauss (1973) calls “techniques of the body”: learned bodily practices that are socially transmitted and culturally specific. Nel’s ability to judge the quality of cloth, fit, and form has been honed over decades – by watching elder women, being corrected, dressing others, and internalizing community standards. Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* (Bourdieu & Nice 2013) helps to explain how such embodied skills and judgments become second nature: they are not imposed from above but sedimented through repetition, correction, and practice. The “feel for the game” is not instinctive in a biological sense, but socially and historically conditioned as an intuition that acts as memory lodged in the body. In this way, aesthetic and moral decisions about costume, like choices of blouse, skirt, or headwear, are guided less by conscious rule-following than by dispositions cultivated through lived experience.

From a feminist-material perspective, this process challenges the gendered dismissal of “intuition” as irrational or unscientific. In this setting, intuitive knowledge is a skilled, cultivated form of expertise, passed from woman to woman through gesture, correction, and shared attention to detail. It is learned not by instruction alone, but by doing with others, by slowly aligning one’s body with the moral-aesthetic rhythms of the tradition. To dress properly is not only to look right, but to move, feel, and even decide in the right way—to let the tradition guide your hands as much as your eyes.

Corrie adjusts Mieneke’s cloth ‘properly’. Neeltje watches. Photo courtesy of Jeanique Meerman.

Becoming a Peasant

Roughly an hour later, it's time to assess the results. I look in the mirror and can hardly believe my eyes: I am in costume. Though initially hesitant—I normally dislike skirts, stockings, and ornate jewelry—seeing myself transformed in the mirror surprises me. I feel like an entirely different person. Now comes the ladies' judgment. "Netjes!" Clazina remarks. "You are a neat peasant woman," Nel adds approvingly. As I go to sit down with my coffee, Clazina quickly instructs me to lift my apron. I wonder aloud if this is to show the galon, the narrow decorative braid at the bottom edge. I feel a flicker of pride, since I remembered something from Corrie's overwhelming workshop last week, about protecting or displaying this detail as proof of a properly embroidered skirt. But no. Clazina simply explains: "You take your apron, sit, lift it up neatly"—because "you can't sit on your apron." It's as simple as that. Peasants behave in certain ways, and lifting your skirt before sitting is one of them.

Feeling 'Right'

Learning what to wear and how it should look and feel is deeply affectively charged. Choosing garments isn't merely assembling an outfit; it's inhabiting a way of being in the world. As anthropologists like Lila Abu-Lughod (1993) and Michelle Z. Rosaldo (1984) have shown, emotions are not just internal states but cultural and relational forces. Wearing the *dracht* is emotionally meaningful: it stirs feelings of pride, modesty, nostalgia, and concern for propriety. Similarly, Alfred Gell's (1998) theory of art and agency reveals how aesthetic forms shape and evoke emotional responses through social orchestration. When a skirt falls perfectly or an apron meets without gaps, it creates more than correctness—it produces a pleasing, respectable, *affectively appropriate* whole. Through the guidance of Sylvia, Corrie, Clazina, Nel, and other women who introduced me to Arnemuiden attire, I began to understand these forms not just mentally but bodily. These aesthetic judgments, as Ingold (2022) notes, come not through abstract learning but through *enskilment*—a process of doing, touching, failing, and receiving correction.

In the next chapter, I turn from this *living archive* to the *cultural archive*, examining the Arnemuiden costume as heritage embedded in broader questions of identity, belonging, and nationalism. Drawing on Said's notion of cultural narratives as "narratives, histories, and travel tales" (1993), next chapter explores how the costume functions not only as a source of pride and connection, but also—as heritage often does—as a boundary.

Chapter 4. Wearing Belonging

As a regular fish smoker, Joselyn thought reviving an old village trade would resonate: selling fish in baskets while wearing traditional dress, just as generations of Arnemuiden women once did. On the scorching Fishing Day of 2024, she dressed in a full three-layered costume and stepped into the market, balancing heavy fish baskets from her yoke. “Smoked salmon for sale!” she called out brightly. But instead of customers, she met puzzled stares and cameras. “I didn’t sell a single fish,” she later laughed, “they only wanted to take pictures.”

When I asked another cousin whether she felt proud wearing the dress, she paused before answering thoughtfully: “I am grateful for being part of this revival, having taught others how to dress themselves.” Her response reveals the complex entanglement of pride, modesty, and performance. During the annual Arnemuiden Fishery Days—a festive highlight in the village calendar—these tensions crystallize. The event features stalls, music, demonstrations of maritime and textile crafts, processions in costume, a church sing-along, and a ceremonial walk to the mill for a group photograph.

What, then, does it mean to move through these spaces in clothing layered with historical, gendered, and political meanings? How does costume simultaneously invite celebration and photography, while also signaling in- and exclusion? This chapter explores the performative and communal dimensions of traditional dress in Arnemuiden, arguing that it is more than technical skill. To wear the costume is a transformative act: it materializes ideals of femininity, kinship, and belonging, while also making visible the boundaries that sustain community life.

Performing Womanhood

Wearing the traditional costume in Arnemuiden is first and foremost a gendered, embodied practice. Characterized by the snow-white cap that must be round as a shell shape without a crease, the costume is judged not only by technical precision but also by how it fits and moves with the woman’s body. Compliments such as “You have real peasant arms” reveal that female bodily aesthetics in Arnemuiden are measured in strength, roundness, and sturdiness rather than slimness. As Butler (2002: 173) emphasizes, gender is performative: it is constituted through repeated acts, gestures, and norms rather than expressed as a pre-existing identity. Everyday

practices of dressing—carefully folding fabrics, preparing and washing the bonnet, layering skirts—are practical, yet also inscribed with cultural values, enacting ideals of femininity and propriety through repetition.

Butler (2002) reminds us that gender is not a stable essence but the effect of repeated acts – how one dresses, speaks, or moves – that produce the appearance of "natural" identity. In Arnemuiden, the traditional costume operates as a cross-temporal archive of such acts, carrying the weight of 1950s' moral and gender norms. Yet today, its very visibility underscores its performative character. Deviations in posture, cloth, or style (e.g. shorter vests, wearing sneakers) immediately reveal that identity here is being enacted rather than simply lived. Gestures of dressing, such as pinning lace, ironing bonnets, fastening aprons, adjusting caps, walking with measured poise, are inseparable from ancestral memory. Honed over generations, they sediment communal ideals of femininity, strength, and grace in the body itself, which becomes both vessel and archive of tradition.

Cultural theorist Mieke Bal (2001) highlights that performance – whether in dance, film, ritual, or costume – succeeds not by representing an untouched "truth," but by moving people, building community, and generating shared meaning. In Arnemuiden, the costume exemplifies this: it is not merely practical, but a medium through which gendered identity is produced and communicated. Compliments such as *pront* (neat, proud) or *een mooie boerin* (a beautiful) do more than praise aesthetic correctness; they recognize that the performer has successfully enacted the ethical and communal ideals embedded in her forebears' gestures. In this sense, the intergenerational performance of womanhood is both relational and affective, producing an authenticity that emerges not from originality, but from meaningful, collective enactment.

Dressing Piety

Whereas Butler (2002) emphasizes performativity as the reiteration of acts that produce the effect of gender identity, Mahmood (2005) highlights how religious practice forms dispositions, desires, and ethical subjectivities. For Mahmood (2005), modesty and piety are not simply external gestures of compliance but forms of embodied habituation, in which bodily discipline and repetition cultivate an inner moral orientation. Agency, in this sense, does not reside in resisting norms but in the active ethical work of inhabiting them. In Arnemuiden, the careful pinning of lace caps, the smoothing of aprons, and the composed way of walking in costume similarly enact more than

aesthetic ideals: they cultivate modesty, neatness, and grace as moral values. To dress correctly is to discipline the body into a historically rooted femininity, one deeply bound up with Protestant ethics of self-restraint, dignity, and communal respectability.

Whereas Butler (2002) emphasizes performativity as repeated enactment producing gender identity, Mahmood (2005) focuses on how religious practice can shape dispositions, desires, and ethical subjectivities. Gender, here, is internalized through habits, practices, and forms of self-cultivation rather than just outward gestures. As Saba Mahmood (2005) observed in her study on piety in Egypt, the enactment of moral norms is not merely about outward compliance but an internalized shaping of bodily and ethical life. In Arnemuiden, the meticulous care with which women wear and move in their costume performs a comparable cultivation: modesty, neatness, and grace are not only aesthetic standards but moral ones, training the body to inhabit an idealized, historically rooted femininity.

The Arnemuiden costume exemplifies this dynamic. Its careful enactment preserves ancestral memory while also negotiating contemporary ideals of femininity, modesty, and communal belonging. By embodying historical norms through repeated practice, wearers make visible not only a heritage of craftsmanship and style, but also ethical and social values embedded in the community. In other words, the costume performs both the past and the present: it is at once a living archive, a gendered and religious practice, and a medium through which collective identity is maintained, contested, and reimagined. In this way, Arnemuiden dress resonates with broader anthropological insights into costume as a site of continuity, performance, and transformation, demonstrating that heritage is not a static object, but a practice enacted and experienced in the body, in space, and in relation to others. As such, the costume operates both as a material expression of local identity and as a visual affirmation of “Protestant ethics” (Weber 1901)—where modesty, discipline, and community take precedence over individual display.

Dress and the Politics of Belonging

Drawing on Edward Said’s (1993) concept of the “cultural archive”, as further developed by Gloria Wekker (2016), I believe traditional costume holds a repository of cultural knowledge, affect, and historically sedimented attitudes—what Raymond Williams once termed “structures of feeling.” The Arnemuiden dress, as a material expression of identity, evolved during the height of Dutch imperial expansion and should therefore be read not only as regional or folkloric, but as historically

entangled in broader Western imperial logics. Said (1993) emphasized how disciplines such as literature and anthropology are embedded in these histories of empire, shaping what becomes visible, knowable, and valuable. While this thesis does not seek to analyze the dress's imperial position, it takes seriously how clothing participates in the production of belonging, inclusion, and exclusion. In doing so, it asks: who is embraced within the costume's realm, and who is left outside it?

Said (1993:52–53) describes the cultural archive as the deep structures of knowledge, affect, and classification inherited from imperial pasts. Although this thesis does not directly focus on colonial hierarchies, Arnemuiden's historical ties to maritime commerce—through, for example, the fact that Arnemuiden had one of the biggest harbors during the so-called "Golden Age"— situate local wealth and identity within global systems of extraction and domination. Following Wekker (2016), we can see how the afterlife of empire persists in the Dutch cultural imagination, not as explicit ideology but as sedimented affect and structure: a sense of "us" that implicitly excludes certain "others." In Arnemuiden, this logic of belonging is articulated not necessarily through ownership of the costume, but rather through genealogy: surnames operate as markers of nativeness, where the question "From who are you?" signals that one's place in the community is determined by descent as much as by residence. In this sense, tradition and genealogy, when bound to local pride and Protestant ethics, function as both an affirmation of belonging and a guarded inheritance.

Chapter 5. Methodological Reflections

My 30-minute film, the counterpart of this article, draws on observational cinema, understood not as passive neutrality but as an active, experimental, and embodied stance (Grimshaw 2013; Grimshaw & Ravetz 2009; Postma 2021). Following Grimshaw, I regard the camera as another participant, sharing space with those filmed and carrying my own curiosity and hesitations – rather than an "omniscient eye" (Grimshaw 2013:227). As Nichols (2017: 108) notes, observational work values the tacit knowledge gained through watching, listening, and inferring the conduct of others—a mode of understanding well suited to the subtle, embodied knowledge conveyed through costume.

Filming as Embodied Practice

In practice, this meant choosing both a filming and editing style that matched the setting. I relied on handheld shots at shoulder height to maintain eye contact and informality, gradually adopting longer takes to reflect the rhythms of sewing nights, harbor routines, and domestic work, inspired by People's Park (2012).My aim was not to stage dramatic moments, but to sustain attention on gestures, silences, and repetitions, as well as moments of laughter and chaos. Film, photography, and photo-elicitation allowed me to capture gestures, silences, and textures that writing alone cannot convey, producing relational, embodied knowledge (Pink 2010). Observing, sewing, dressing, and walking alongside participants became both methodological and analytical tools, revealing how cultural memory and identity are felt as well as performed.

Shifting Positionalities

My Arnemuiden-born grandparents were crucial for my acceptance in a village where kinship is largely defined through genealogical blood ties—specifically, shared surnames. Arnemuiden is a small world shaped by an *ons kent ons* mentality (everybody knows everybody), where intimacy fosters both belonging and exclusion. Surnames, professions, and family histories quietly position people within village hierarchies.

My transformation from student to “costume expert” was a dynamic and fragile process of role-shifting. As a researcher with family ties to the village, I could never position myself completely outside the field. I shifted between roles—observer, participant, cousin, granddaughter, filmmaker, ethnographer. As Rabinow (2007) observed in Morocco, an anthropologist’s position constantly changes with circumstances, from guest to burden, confidant to outsider. These shifts aren’t disruptions but the very foundation of ethnographic knowledge.

This fluidity intensified through my role as filmmaker. As Snowdon (2017) argues, a filmmaker’s attention is split between the film being created, the images captured, and remaining fully present with the people being filmed. The film’s quality depends on creating meaningful dialogue while maintaining exploratory openness even in controlled situations. In Arnemuiden, filming heightened my awareness of distance and difference—becoming both a bridge and a boundary, a way of participating while also marking me as an outsider. One fisherman stated directly: “No offense, but you look quite different from what we are used to here.” Having grown up in a larger Dutch city, I saw myself as moderate, yet these subtle markers revealed how deeply environment shapes worldviews and cultural differences.

Collaboration and Ethics

Collaboration became more central as relationships evolved: participants watched themselves on screen, joked, or corrected me, making the film part of the ethnographic encounter. Humor helped negotiate boundaries, while moments of discomfort exposed initial prejudgments and the fact that collaboration is always negotiated in situ. Ethical practice involved ongoing consent, respecting newcomers’ presence remain off-camera and sharing edited scenes for feedback. Post-film conversations, often private, were treated as valuable moments of trust rather than merely as “lost data.” In this sense, fieldwork became a relational, co-constructed process.

Reflexivity and Aesthetics

Inspired by Agnès Varda's (1985; 2000) reflexive style, I treat film as a medium that combines aesthetics, intimacy, and critique. My aim was not merely to document Arnemuiden, but to render visible the negotiations through which tradition, belonging, and research itself take shape. Gender, age, and appearance shaped field dynamics, facilitating some interactions while complicating others, echoing Postma's (2006, 2021) reflections on embodied, situated filmmaking. Ultimately, observational cinema allowed me to blur the lines between observing and doing, participant and ethnographer, creating a space where knowledge is co-produced through shared, embodied practice.

The Double-Edged Sword of Immersion

Fieldwork experiences underscored a critical methodological insight: returning to tradition is never a neutral act. Belonging in Arnemuiden is not only spoken but embodied, negotiated through kinship, gesture, dialect—and crucially, through dress. This gradual deep immersion, however, carried its own challenge. Being fully enmeshed—participating, observing, filming—sometimes made it difficult to adopt an outsider's perspective or anticipate what others might want to see, know, or learn from this work. The intimacy that enabled trust and ethnographic richness also risked narrowing my analytical lens: empathy and experience could blur critical distance.

Navigating this double-edged sword required conscious effort to step back, reflect, and position the thesis not only as a record of my embodied encounters but also as a medium for communicating broader insights about tradition, belonging, and negotiation to audiences beyond Arnemuiden. Fieldwork essentially is a relational, co-constructed process. I learned that being a fluctuating or "casual insider" carries its own ethical demands – not neutrality, but responsibility; not authority, but accountability. Making these tensions visible, in film, text, and presence, has been central to this work and will remain so as it reaches wider audiences.

Above: Sylvia, Tanja, Mineke. Below: Jannie, Gerard, me. Photo courtesy Jeanique Meerman.

Conclusions

This thesis has explored what it means to *wear* tradition. Wearing the *dracht* is not simply about putting on a garment; it is about feeling its weight, its textures, its tightness, and the social meanings stitched into every fold. In Arnemuiden, the costume is worn with pride, precision, and care—but also with a keen awareness of who may claim it and under what conditions. As women fasten aprons, pin lace caps, and adjust their posture, they do more than reproduce a cultural form: they enact a deeply felt history, negotiating identity, morality, and belonging in the present.

Through intimate fieldwork encounters and attention to bodily experience, my research—both written and filmed—has shown that the costume is not only performed but also policed; it is not only remembered but felt. Sometimes it comforts, sometimes it constrains, and the boundaries between inclusion and exclusion are quite literally drawn across the body. By observing, participating, writing, filming, sewing, dressing, and walking alongside practitioners, I have traced how local understandings, practices, and interpretations of Arnemuiden costume merge concepts of material heritage (Geismar 2015) and the embodied archive (Taylor 2003) into a *sensorial* archive: a living, layered garment in which communal, historical, and affective threads are not just preserved, but continually woven, worn, and remade.

In answering my first research question—how women actively shape cultural memory through sewing, dressing, and performing—I have shown that memory here is not abstract but tactile, carried in hands that stitch, bodies that move, and eyes that recognize the "right" way to wear a cap. Women do not simply inherit memory; they remake it in every embodied act of care, repair, or display. Drawing on Tarlo's (1996) insights into the politics of dress, Hunter's (2019) emphasis on affective materiality, and Taylor's (2002) attention to the labor embedded in clothing, we see that the Arnemuiden costume revival is not a static preservation of the past but a deeply embodied, gendered, affective, and skill-based negotiation of tradition in the present.

Second, the agency expressed in these practices lies not in overt resistance or radical change, but in subtle forms of negotiation: memorizing their mothers' skills, asserting value for women's work, safeguarding historical knowledge, teaching the next generation, or quietly reinterpreting how modesty, femininity, and respectability should appear. These forms of agency are powerful precisely because they are situated—embedded in local ethics, kinship obligations, and everyday

aesthetics. The dress is a performance of Protestant ethics—of discipline, modesty, and humility—but it also opens space for reinterpretation. Sewing and wearing *dracht* becomes a practice through which women mediate between faith and modernity, community and individuality, memory and change.

Finally, rather than setting these negotiations against religion or conservatism, I have argued that they operate within them. Arnemuiden's reanimation of folk costume is not a merely nostalgic or romantic practice. It reflects a broader European pattern where modernity does not eradicate tradition but incorporates it, selectively and symbolically, to structure belonging. It is a communal aesthetic—but also a moral and political act. Yet implicitly and without intention the current costume revival also resembles a form of resistance: against forgetfulness, against the erasure of rural women's labor and dignity, against globalizing sameness or individualism. Women who sew and wear the dress embody this tension. Their work expresses not only nostalgia or identity, but a powerful negotiation with modernity, gender roles, and the gaze of outsiders. The garments they make are subsequently not static relics but living cultural archives, constantly re-stitched, re-interpreted, and re-experienced by their eyes, hands, and bodies.

Looking ahead, the future of the costume remains uncertain yet promising. While younger generations primarily wear it for ceremonial occasions, their growing interest in learning dressing skills suggests that *dracht* will endure as a living tradition, albeit in evolved forms. Will it continue to revive and be cherished as a symbol of local ties and village pride? How will it maintain connections to faith, family, and femininity while adapting to changing aesthetics and practical needs? Might we see more traditional costume-wearers incorporating modern elements like piercings, tattoos, or even lipstick? These questions highlight that material heritage is never static—like the cloth itself, it frays and requires repair, stretches and needs refitting, yet persistently carries threads of belonging into the future.

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