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## 1. Introduction

- <sup>1</sup> Between 1947 and 1948 three opinion polls were conducted in the Netherlands to reveal those individuals for whom the Dutch held the highest esteem. The nominees could not be deceased, or be members of the royal Dutch family. The overall winners were Winston Churchill and the Dutch Prime Minister, Willem Drees, followed by a series of well-known international figures such as Pope Pius XII, Stalin and Truman. None of the resulting three lists included names of women. The male reporter of one Dutch newspaper therefore mockingly stated that the categorical exclusion of women would certainly arouse anxiety among “our male and female feminists.” He then concluded that, evidently, the Dutch people only moderately admired Mrs. Roosevelt, who at numerous conferences “plays the first violin”—a Dutch expression for being dominant—and added that the average Dutch citizen ostensibly failed to admire “the fascist and communist quarrelers among women of world importance,” such as Mary Poes-Pas-Pos. The latter’s name is actually Mary Pos, “Poes-Pas” having been added to ridicule the journalist’s work as mumbo-jumbo. In addition, although Pos is well-known among the Dutch at home and abroad, she was no woman “of world importance.”<sup>i</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Noteworthy here is that the newspaper article, while providing the names of two women who would have been possible candidates for the popularity elections, simultaneously mocks and perhaps implicitly disqualifies them (“first violin,” “world importance,” “Poes-Pas”). Remarkable as well is the fact that the two figures that the

newspaper mentions in one breath, at first sight have very little in common. It surely seems to be a bit far-fetched to link the globally operating and world-famous former First Lady, in 1948 saluted by the international media as “First Lady of the United Nations”<sup>ii</sup> with a travel journalist from the small Dutch town of Zaandam. However, in the 1940s the two women were similarly engaged in activities that confirm as well as challenge existing gender expectations and versions of institutionalized femininity in the patriarchal models of early to mid- 20<sup>th</sup> century U.S. and the Netherlands. Each worked within, but also stretched, the gender boundaries of their own maneuvering space, one as former First Lady and chairwoman of the UN Commission on Human Rights, and one as female journalist. In addition, Mary Pos attended two of Roosevelt’s press conferences, in 1937 and 1950 respectively; her recording of these meetings suggests that the two women share more features and interests than their contemporaries were probably able to perceive, or that the reporter of *Het Dagblad* who singled out their exclusion from the popularity poll was possibly aware of.

<sup>3</sup> This essay will examine how Pos’ narratives of her encounters with Eleanor Roosevelt expose the professional and psychological forces at work in the (gendered) field of journalism in the late 1930s and early 1950s. It will especially look at the way in which both women positioned themselves during Roosevelt’s press conferences. Secondly, it will investigate the extent to which ideas on women’s rights and intercultural understanding as put forward in their work were similar.

<sup>4</sup> The main primary sources of this essay consist of Pos’ correspondence, diary entries, personal and lecture notes, and reviews of lectures that make up part of the Mary Pos papers housed by the Historical Documentation Centre for Dutch Protestantism (1800 to the present day), affiliated with the Free University in Amsterdam. In addition, I will draw on Pos’ published accounts of her 1937 visit to the White House, newspaper reports of Roosevelt’s 1950 press conference in the Netherlands, published transcripts of the press conferences for women reporters held by Eleanor Roosevelt, the latter’s column “My Day” and other (auto)biographical publications.

## 2. Travel journalist Mary Pos

<sup>5</sup> Mary Pos (1904-1987) grew up listening to stories told by her uncle, a missionary in the Dutch East Indies. Her father made plans to follow his brother’s footsteps, but due to his wife’s health conditions, the orthodox Protestant family stayed on in the northern part of the Netherlands, where father Pos became an evangelist visiting poor farmers on his bicycle. Inspired by the stories, between the early 1930s and the late 1960s Pos ventured out on numerous journeys to visit the diasporic Dutch in overseas missionary settlements and immigrant communities. In addition, the self-proclaimed “first female travel journalist” explored countries and cultures that she considered to be worthwhile sources to study and to explain to those staying at home. Publishing her travel narratives in more than 2000 articles and 20 books, and offering hundreds of lectures all over the Netherlands and abroad, Pos presented herself as a cultural ambassador making crucial connections between peoples and countries. Her experiences not only shaped her own development, but also seem to have influenced ideas of national and gender identity among her audience.

<sup>6</sup> From the 1930s through the 1950s, Pos was a very popular speaker and author. Her novels and travel writing were relished by her many female readers, and reached

numerous enthusiastic male readers and listeners also. Her followers apparently appreciated Pos' Protestant-Christian and somewhat moralizing tone, her frequently melodramatic style, and the way in which she as narrator seemed to take her audience with her on her travels. Part of Pos' fame was also attributable to the enormous professional and personal network she had constructed of notables, diplomats, and businessmen, relatives and acquaintances at home and abroad, and sponsors and admirers who would financially or otherwise support her self-presentation as a well-known, well-read, and well-travelled professional. Pos' travelling was sponsored by organizations as diverse as KLM, Heineken beer, Wybertjes cough drops and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Nevertheless, many reviewers labelled her writing and lectures as shallow, ill-informed and anecdotal ramblings, or as outmoded and sermonizing products.<sup>iii</sup> She could be an extremely demanding person and oftentimes came across as headstrong, uncompromising, and self-important. Her rather complicated character is evident in her correspondence. Such letters also show how she appeared to struggle with feelings of insecurity both in the professional and personal spheres, which caused severe mental depressions.

7 One of the many factors that played a role here was Pos' necessary negotiation with various discourses of femininity available to her at the time. Schippers defines femininity as a web of symbolic meanings, "produced, contested and transformed through discursive processes."<sup>iv</sup> It may contain idealized characteristics such as delicacy, compliance, physical vulnerability, sweetness and softness, but could also include less "emphasized" forms of femininity. Referring to women's subordination in patriarchy, Raewyn Connell explains that:

8 One form [of femininity] is defined around compliance with this subordination and is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men. I will call this 'emphasized femininity'. Others are defined centrally by strategies of resistance or forms of non-compliance. Others again are defined by complex strategic combinations of compliance, resistance and co-operation.<sup>v</sup>

9 Trying to establish for herself a place in the male-dominated profession of journalism and travelling on her own across national and cultural borders, Mary Pos needed to position herself using various existing gender discourses, as will be pointed out below. Her accounts of her journeys as well as encounters with well-known Americans and others provide a window on her project of gendered self-(re)formation which was oftentimes a struggle.<sup>vi</sup>

10 However, Pos was determined and felt that her mission was to travel and meet, write and lecture, and thus build connections. Of course, as a single woman she also needed to earn a living. In all these respects her seven journeys to the U.S. were successful. Staying in hotels, the YWCA, and with friends and acquaintances she explored the country and its people. She also presented lectures about Europe and the Netherlands at women's clubs, churches, the YWCA, and other organizations. Upon her return to the Netherlands she would then publish, among other titles, *Ik zag Amerika* [I saw America] (1940), which was based on her journey to the U.S. in the Fall and Winter of 1937, *Ik zag Amerika en bezocht het opnieuw* [I saw America and visited again] (1952), and *Californië: Dwars door Amerika op zoek naar Nederlanders* [California: Across America in search of the Dutch] (1955).

11 In the first two titles she relates of visits to American families of various ethnic and class backgrounds and reports on making friends with young people in Harlem. Her interest in poor urban areas dated back to 1926, when as a secretary for an advertisement

firm she traveled to a commercial conference in London where, she would later claim, she preferred to explore the local slums to being at the posh conference venues. In addition, she organized meetings with Americans that her Dutch audience back home in the Netherlands would later enjoy reading and hearing about, such as Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Eleanor Roosevelt, industrialist Henry Ford, CIO-President John L. Lewis, the warden of the Sing-Sing prison, Lewis Edward Lawes, and deafblind author and activist Helen Keller.

<sup>12</sup> Pos prepared herself for these meetings in various ways. We know that before she visited Eleanor Roosevelt, she had read the “My Day” columns which the President’s wife started to write in 1936. We do not know whether Pos was aware of the contacts, interests and experiences that she shared with the U.S. First Lady: Eleanor Roosevelt had toured slum areas as well and as a young woman she had been involved in settlement house work in the New York City slums.<sup>vii</sup> The two also shared some of the same contacts: Roosevelt, like Pos, admired and corresponded with Helen Keller and both attended and enjoyed meals organized by the National Women’s Press Club. Both women were at times criticized for being naïve and for talking in platitudes and generalizing statements.<sup>viii</sup> In addition, both Roosevelt and Pos enjoyed horseback-riding, occasionally smoked cigarettes, and delighted in airplane trips.<sup>ix</sup> Furthermore, they were similarly engaged in writing, broadcasts and lecturing, and both took voice lessons to improve their speech.<sup>x</sup> The two women were, each in her own way, engaged in the construction of their public persona—only one effect of which was the Dutch naming a rose after Eleanor Roosevelt, and a tulip after Mary Pos.<sup>xi</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Most important, perhaps, is the fact that both women moved beyond the gender boundaries of their times and were involved in building bridges between people and cultures. These are exactly the two features that Pos stressed most in her *published* accounts of her meetings with Eleanor Roosevelt. However, Pos’ *personal* accounts show that the two women, who themselves were strong advocates of better intercultural communication and understanding, had difficulty connecting during the two press conferences under study. This may have been one of the reasons why Pos changed her assessment of “Mrs. Roosevelt” from a sympathetic and “natural” First Lady engaged with her female reporters in a motherly manner, as will be explained later on, to “an unsympathetic business woman” when on tour in Europe in 1950. Below I will first sketch Pos’ accounts of her personal encounters with American Presidents, after which I will focus on her report of Eleanor Roosevelt’s press conference.

### 3. A first press conference at the White House

- <sup>14</sup> On January 11, 1952, attending a press conference held by President Truman, Mary Pos carried in her purse a silver tea spoon decorated with a Dutch Windmill. She intended to present the spoon to the President, but ended up handing it to the President’s wife. Four years later she admitted to the chief editor of *De Spiegel*, a journal in which she regularly published as a freelance journalist, that she had originally wished to present it to the President to show her admiration for the tactful and humorous way in which he had always handled delicate questions from journalists.<sup>xii</sup> Fifteen years earlier, meeting with the Roosevelts in Washington, she had likewise been greatly impressed with the skillful way in which the two managed interviews and press conferences. It spoke to her personal

and professional interest in issues of self-presentation, and her fascination for matters such as interpersonal negotiations and communication.

<sup>15</sup>The first meeting between Mary Pos and Eleanor Roosevelt is preceded and framed by Pos' encounter with the President on December 21, 1937 at a White House press conference. She relates of that visit in published work, in lectures held in the Netherlands, and in typed-up, personal notes. In the latter we mostly read of her journey to Washington. She stresses the somber weather, the grey and black industrial surroundings at Newark airport, and the rudeness and indecency of the people she encounters: an airlines "clerk," two taxi drivers, and a fellow passenger. Flying into Washington, however, did give her pleasure: "white and in the full sun [I noticed] Washington. Again the zeppelin was flying high and gleaming in the early morning above the city. The white column, the white buildings, the Lincoln monument, the river below us, the smooth grounds of the airport."<sup>xiii</sup> Pos' technique of zooming in is something she would also apply when reporting on her visit to Eleanor Roosevelt the next day, as we will see below.

<sup>16</sup>From her personal notes we also learn that Pos subsequently traveled by foot from her hotel, the Evangeline Home for Girls owned by Washington's Salvation Army, to the White House. She was accompanied by Michael J. McDermott, Chief of the Division of Current Information of the State Department, who instructed her not to take notes which, she wrote later, does not make sense as all reporters present are taking notes. When they entered the hall, Pos found it filled with a multitude of reporters, only three of which were women, whom she describes as "unattractive and dressed in bad taste." Like the male journalists, the three seemed to call out to the President in loud voices.<sup>xiv</sup>

<sup>17</sup>At odds with her expectations, Pos explains in her *personal* notes, she was not allowed to enter the "special door" for the foreign press but had to find her way to the press room with all the other reporters. It also seems that she was not able to come up closely to the President's desk, as she notes that "up front" two women, "both unattractive creatures," were thrusting themselves forward. In her *published* account, however, she has altered this awkward situation and states that upon arrival of the President, when all reporters rushed to the door that would open to the President's study, she and McDermott were fortunately allowed to enter another door: "[...] otherwise I would never have been able to see even a glimpse of President Roosevelt, as the others were crowding into the President's desk. Now I was offered a seat on the first row."<sup>xv</sup> This privileged position gave her ample opportunity to study the President's body language and allowed her to conclude that "a sign that this man did not take life as lightly as his cheerful answers would suspect were the nervous twitches between his eyes and the tired fluttering of the eyelids."<sup>xvi</sup> Assuming Pos' personal notes are correct, her fabricated and published version may have been a way for Pos to create a public persona that occupied a special place during presidential press conferences.

<sup>18</sup>But in her *personal* account as well she acknowledges how "exceptionally interesting" it is, and how "delighted" she is about being present. Among the group of reporters in attendance she noted a Dutch foreign correspondent, a certain Scheltema who was a correspondent of a Rotterdam-based newspaper, who had finally, after nine years, been allowed to meet with Roosevelt.<sup>xvii</sup> This prompts her to conclude that she should be contented with what she has already achieved.

<sup>19</sup> Setting herself off against the Dutch foreign correspondent, Pos does the same with the few female reporters who were present. Her irritation with the two women reporters who thrust themselves up front to ask questions, is Pos' second reference to female colleagues whom she may have considered rivals. Pos' irritation may have been partially triggered by the conditions in which the President received Pos and her colleagues: the room, according to Pos, was cramped and stiflingly warm. That Pos describes the atmosphere of the meeting as extraordinarily pleasant, casual, and informal seems largely to be the result of the President's appearance and attitude: he looked "enormously natural," very kind and healthy, "much kinder than I have ever seen him portrayed," with a "fine mouth" that laughs continuously.<sup>xviii</sup> He answered the reporters' questions skillfully, in a quick, frank and witty manner.<sup>xix</sup>

<sup>20</sup> At the end of the meeting Pos was granted some time alone with the President for reasons she does not explicate. Sitting down next to him, it seems that she had already adopted the jolly discourse of the male-dominated press conference. First of all, presenting herself as a collector of signed photo portraits and requesting one of the President, she informed him that she would like a "genuine" signature, not one copied by one of his officers. This teasing remark, Pos reports in her book, is followed by the President's hearty laugh.<sup>xx</sup> Secondly, when Roosevelt "proudly" informed Pos that his ancestors were from Zeeland and that at heart he still felt like a Dutchman although his last visit was in 1910, Pos jovially proposed a little vacation without his yacht but with the big steamer *New Amsterdam*, which would take him to old Amsterdam. The otherwise level-headed Dutch would instantly transform into exuberant characters and welcome him with open arms. Encouraged by Roosevelt's smiling face, Pos then added a third joke: she mischievously inquired whether the two could perhaps already set a date so that she could forewarn her countrymen and -women to prepare for the visit.<sup>xxi</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Noteworthy here is that Pos bonded with Roosevelt in several ways. First of all, they shared a history and national heritage, and talked about "all that is Dutch in the country, about the great and impressive achievements of the Dutch."<sup>xxii</sup> Secondly, both of them were involved in the exchange of objects and thus materially connecting two worlds, even on a micro-level: the President informed Pos of the 1664 Dutch family Bible he had inherited and which had been used when he declared the presidential oath; Pos collected photos of FDR and other distinguished Americans which she took home to exhibit. Thirdly, the two connected in terms of the (gendered) professional discourse they shared, as Pos shows she was capable of adapting to the talk of her colleagues and the President.

<sup>22</sup> It is difficult to overstate the personal impact of her rendezvous with Roosevelt. When on Friday April 13, 1945, she received the news of Roosevelt's death, she wrote in her diary, in some state of shock and in a peculiar logical twist, "But you must keep calm, Mary, just be reminded of how calm Roosevelt himself would cope with such a message and would not let this knock him over. [...] So I behaved calmly and told my family and others."<sup>xxiii</sup> Mary Pos honored FDR in the lectures she presented in the following years. One newspaper report of such a lecture quoted Pos as pointing out the greatness of Roosevelt's character, his brilliance, his idealism and altruism, and his unwavering Christian faith.<sup>xxiv</sup> She also emphasized the benefits of transatlantic connections, and the significance of connecting "the virtues of the American people" to "the virtues of the Dutch."<sup>xxv</sup> It is regrettable, according to Pos, that firstly "global tensions" and then "the war" made it impossible for the President to follow up on his wish to visit the Netherlands, and thus substantiate the transatlantic link once more. "We" should stop

just living for ourselves and forget about our own “I,” proclaimed Mary Pos.<sup>xxvi</sup> This declaration fits well with Pos’ many platitudes and naïve sermons, but also makes plain once again her ambitions of becoming an appreciated cultural ambassador and her belief in the building of intercultural connections, which her father and uncle, both misionaries, had ingrained in her. In that sense Pos resembled Elenor Roosevelt who from very early on expressed her commitment to intercultural understanding, as in her *My Day* columns and during her press conferences.<sup>xxvii</sup>

## 4. Women-only press meetings

23 It is noteworthy that Pos, in her report of FDR’s press conference, singles out the three female correspondents and particularly comments on their appearance. Reporting on her attendance of one of the women-only weekly press conferences organized by Eleanor Roosevelt and her staff on the next day, December 22, 1937, she refers not only to the way in which the First Lady is dressed, but also – and not less than three times – to the looks of the other female reporters. Eleanor Roosevelt, Maurine Beasley asserts, believed that “[w]omen needed to be ornamental. She saw nothing degrading in using a mild form of sex appeal to promote a meritorious cause.” Beasley points out that Roosevelt’s column is brimming with comments on her own looks.<sup>xxviii</sup> In her column of December 22, 1937, she assesses Mary Pos as an “attractive young wom[an].”<sup>xxix</sup> We do not know for certain what Pos wore, but it seems very plausible that she was dressed in the new outfit that on the previous day she described in a letter to her Swiss lover, Walter. She discussed the purchase of a very nice, dark brown coat, which she thought made her very young, as well as a matching little velvet hat or turban, “sehr schön mit einen dunkelbraunen voile.”<sup>xxx</sup> Read in combination with her negative portrayal of the looks of her fellow reporters, Pos’ private display of femininity seems to set her off against the others, who were considered as possible rivals.<sup>xxxi</sup>

24 Pos and Roosevelt’s references to appearance do not automatically mean that the press conferences held by the First Lady were shallow and merely social gatherings to dress up for and where form was more important than contents. Indeed, various scholars have pointed out that whereas the contemporary press, dominated by men, labelled the women’s conferences as trivial events, they were in fact focused on political issues relating to both women and legislation, as well as social issues and personal life at the White House.<sup>xxxii</sup> The emphasis on appearance referred to above, however, may have been related to another issue: at a time when female reporters were largely underrepresented and oftentimes belittled in the world of journalism, many women reporters of the 1930s and 1940s may have felt the need and/or delight to ingeniously combine their professionalism and femininity.<sup>xxxiii</sup> According to Linda Lumsden, “Contradicting gender messages forced women reporters to become somewhat schizophrenic [...]” as they studied journalism texts books that “nurtured the alleged dichotomy between femininity and journalistic skills.”<sup>xxxiv</sup> Referring to women war correspondents, Maurine Beasley claims that a number of these women “took pleasure in maintaining their feminine identity while at the same time they displayed their professional competence.” She offers as example Margaret Bourke-White, photojournalist for *Life* magazine, who seemed to have been “highly particular about combining her professionalism with her femininity and meticulous in the attention she paid to her appearance.”<sup>xxxv</sup>



<sup>25</sup> Eleanor Roosevelt herself was very much aware of the weak position of women in the professional field of journalism. In fact, it was part of her reason for organizing the women-only press conferences starting immediately after the election of her husband in March 1933. Indeed, Beasley lists the advancement of the position of American women—women in general and female reporters particularly—as one of the reasons for holding the conferences. The other two were helping establish Eleanor Roosevelt’s status as First Lady, and supporting her husband’s New Deal.<sup>xxxvi</sup> Roosevelt saw a major role for female newspaper reporters, who could “lead [...] the women in the country to form a general attitude of mind and thought.” They had to be “interpreters to the women of the country as to what goes on politically in the legislative national life, and also what the social and personal life is at the White House.”<sup>xxxvii</sup> Offered this new task, the female reporters attending the conferences gained confidence and recognition.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Between March 1933 and April 1945, Eleanor Roosevelt held 348 women’s only press conferences. At the time when Pos attended, in the 1930s, an average number of 20 to 30 regular reporters were present.<sup>xxxix</sup> Apart from these regulars, Roosevelt invited women writers (Mary Pos among them), notables, performers and artists to the conferences, as well as “woman leaders” such as Mary Anderson, head of the Children’s Bureau, Madame Chiang Kaishek, and Dutch Queen Wilhelmina.<sup>xl</sup> Beasley, who has extensively studied the women’s press conferences, concludes that “In retrospect, the significance of the press conferences lies more, perhaps, in what they conveyed in general regarding women’s position in society than in their specific content.”<sup>xli</sup> In addition, I would say, they also reflected some of the social complexities of women reporters’ work. Although Roosevelt never let her reporters scoop each other, Black refers to “in-house rivalry between reporters assigned to cover hard news and those assigned to the women’s pages.”<sup>xlii</sup> For the period 1920-1940 Linda Lumsden has shown that women journalists emphasized “succeeding on individual merit,” and were involved in an “ardent individualism that carried women to reporting’s top echelons.”<sup>xliii</sup> This attitude may have played a role during Roosevelt’s press conferences, although Beasley also points out the reporters’ camaraderie. Roosevelt herself, reflecting on the press conferences in her autobiography *This I Remember*, refers to the reporters’ “trick questions” and concludes that “Every press conference was a battle of wits, and at times it was not easy for me, or for them, I imagine.”<sup>xliv</sup> Mary Pos also refers to the cunning questions posed by the press women convening at the White House.

## 5. Zooming in on the First Lady

- <sup>27</sup> Pos’ coverage of her visit to Eleanor Roosevelt’s press conference on December 22, 1937, in *Ik zag Amerika* (1940), is almost cinematic. She first zooms in on the White House’s surrounding area and the lovely weather, and then on the building itself, glistening in the morning sun: “White as snow it lays in the midst of green grass plots and old black trees.”<sup>xlv</sup> With the other women of the press she first traversed the terrace with its stately columns, and then entered the great hall, where she seems to have been overwhelmed by the way in which the faces of the “negro servants” contrasted with the whiteness and lighting of the hall. Then, passing time in the waiting room, she considered the number of colleagues present, and felt relieved to see a smaller number of reporters than at FDR’s press conference. Still, the women reporters crowded by the door in order to be able to

“conquer” a good spot. Pos decided this was not “sympathetic,” as the women blocked the way for those coming in late. Guards needed to solve the situation.<sup>xlvi</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Later on, all women rushed upstairs, through the opened cast-iron gates; at that point, Pos strained with them, but was finally unable to keep up, and decided that “this performance under the eyes of the servants [was] foolish.”<sup>xlvii</sup> Whereas previously the black servants had stood out in the brightness of the hall, here not color but an improper gendered behavior seemed to be conspicuous. Occupying a marginal position in that grand governmental space, the Dutch journalist may not have been able to identify with the servants, but she felt at least ashamed on their behalf. Her feelings of triumph over the American press women resound when she proudly states that a reserved seat was available for her on the first row, near the door through which Eleanor Roosevelt would enter: “she would sit right across from me, on the low sofa.”<sup>xlviii</sup> Pos spent her time waiting by studying paintings of sailing ships, and a portrait of the President, as well as a piano, book case, and open fire.<sup>xlvi</sup> Pos’ detailed portrayal of the room must have had the effect of suspension on at least some of her Dutch readers. With her, they are awaiting Pos’ encounter with the American First Lady.

<sup>29</sup> Then, without warning, Pos—and implicitly her readers—were caught unawares when, “Suddenly, swift as the wind,” Mrs. Roosevelt entered the room. She was in horse-riding costume, and a white silken band held her “grey wavy hair” together.<sup>1</sup> This is echoed in the photograph that accompanies Pos’ article in the Dutch national newspaper *De Telegraaf*, published a few months after her return to the Netherlands.<sup>li</sup> The picture, taken from a position much higher than Roosevelt and her horse, appears to have been shot by Pos herself, as if from a window in the waiting area. Pos portrays Roosevelt as tall, slender, and flexible, and with a sportive and natural look. Her naturalness is partially a result of a lack of make-up (in contrast to all reporters present), and partially enhanced by “the smell of the park” which she has brought along from her early horse-riding. Pos concludes by stating that Roosevelt is not attractive, but has a friendly and lively face.<sup>lii</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Mary Pos admired Roosevelt and her performance instantly and was surprised by the informal dynamics of the conference. She noted the attention the President’s wife offered each individual reporter: upon entering the room, she “moves freely, and not in a forced way at all, between reporters and chairs to make sure she had shaken hands with everyone.”<sup>liii</sup> During the session, Pos also perceived Roosevelt’s personal and “almost jaunty” style: she talked freely, made jokes, laughed out loud, and came across as “natural” and cheerful. Pos immediately made a link with Dutch women: “This woman is the mother of six children, and she is even a grandmother. She is not at all like Dutch grandmothers.”<sup>liiv</sup> Her feelings of surprise and awe also speak from yet another comparison with Holland: Dutch reporters, Pos knows, would never submit a First Lady to such personal questions. Discussing the American boycott of Japanese goods, they posed a “cunning” follow-up question that actually combined the political and personal, namely whether Roosevelt was planning to buy new silk stockings soon. Mrs. Roosevelt, however, was quick-witted to understand the question straightaway, laughed out loud, and stated that she did not need to buy them as she had all she needed.<sup>liv</sup>

## 5.1. Women at work and women in the world

<sup>31</sup> The combination of the political and the personal also stands out from one of the three questions Mary Pos posed during the press conference, i.e. whether married women

should be allowed to work. Pos must have been aware of Roosevelt's adamant stance vis-à-vis married women working. The latter even used her news conferences as a channel to declare wives' rights to work.<sup>lvi</sup> On a personal level it seems quite expected that Pos selected the above question about married women's right to work. She had been engaged to a Dutch high-school teacher since 1929, but the two had so far been unable to get married, as Dutch social norms of the time required the husband to be capable of earning a living for the upcoming new family. The issue was eventually one of the reasons why the engagement came to an end after 10 years.<sup>lvii</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Pos' unpublished notes typed up after the interview state that Roosevelt did not fully understand her question "about the ways in which she could lecture so much and accomplish so much work."<sup>lviii</sup> Remarkably, her published account does not mention this at all. But Pos repeated the question during an exclusivesession following the press conference, to which a Finnish correspondent and Pos were invited. This special session enabled her to make notes that testify to the degree of diplomacy and accuracy Roosevelt used with European reporters: "About married women who work, yes, [Roosevelt] gave much money to the poor, was able to do this because husband earned money, many marriages would be impossible if woman would not earn money, as Mother [of young children, Roosevelt had] given herself entirely to mothering."<sup>lix</sup>

<sup>33</sup> In her book *Ik zag Amerika* Pos eventually pieces together Roosevelt's answer by referring to the economic conditions that make married women's entrance into the labor market necessary, and to the unnatural conditions and relations that would arise when a young wife is not allowed to keep her paid position in order to help earn a living for the family. She concludes her discussion of the issue by stating that personally Roosevelt felt delighted with the possibilities to lecture and publish, and financially assisted others with the money earned. Although "Mrs. Roosevelt" originated from a rich family, she had always been interested in the less fortunate, Pos explains, and she had often been distressed by the unjustifiable differences between immense richness and deep poverty. We see here that the personal question stated above has led to a somewhat moralizing lecture in which we can no longer differentiate between Roosevelt's and Pos' ideas. It therefore suggests Pos' partial identification with the First Lady.

<sup>34</sup> Mary Pos also seems to equate Roosevelt with the American woman in general. In one of her many lectures for the Dutch in the late 1940s, she introduced American women as embodiments of modernity. She noted that the hundreds of thousands of married American women, who had since the beginning of the "horrid depression" been forced to work outside of the home, were no drudges or victims. Pos depicted them as admirable and vital: they were very active and industrious, informed and intelligent, they knew how to tackle problems and how to adapt, and were broad-minded and very interested in life in general and in the lives of others. The American woman's "position in life is completely equal to that of a man," concluded Pos.<sup>lx</sup> In both meetings and conversations men attentively listened to women, and valued their contributions. Pos added she was impressed with the institution of the American women's club, as it enabled and stimulated American women to study, reflect on and discuss political, economic and social issues. Many women in these clubs, Pos explicated, were politically active, and in unity they were strong.<sup>lxi</sup> Pos then turned to the roles for *Dutch* women, who are "economically far better off" than American women and whose family life is much more "comfortable and peaceful," and "less restless and hurried" than that of Americans. The

“great mission of every woman, and especially the privileged Dutch women [is to] acknowledge the responsibility to help out others who are needy.”<sup>lxii</sup>

<sup>35</sup> This “mission” is also the focus of a *second* question that Mary Pos was allowed to ask at the December 1937 press conference: could European women possibly contribute to peace in Europe? Pos reiterates this question in *Ik zag Amerika*, following which we read that the women in Europe have great geographical advantages, as they only need to “find” and “understand” other women across borders and reach out to them. The more they will learn about each other’s history, culture and national character, the more they will be able to understand each other’s problems. In addition, they also have to pray for each other and for peace. Noteworthy here is that it is impossible to ascertain whether this recommendation comes from Pos or the First Lady. No quotation marks are used.

<sup>36</sup> In other reports of the press conference it is likewise difficult to distinguish between Roosevelt’s and Pos’ voice because Pos is inconsistent in her use of quotation marks, as is shown in the quotes below.

<sup>37</sup> Naturally there were many things in America that those in Europe did not understand, but one should not attempt to look through European spectacles. Emil Ludwig had done exactly that! His book on the President [*Roosevelt: Studie über Glück und Macht*, 1938] had been written by someone who had been transfixed in the European tradition.

<sup>38</sup> “Whoever wishes to understand America should not limit themselves to New-York [sic] and Washington, but should also venture into the Mid-West and Far West and certainly also into the South, where the results of slavery are still noticeable in the problem of the colored population, fully affecting southern life, pushing down the living standard.”<sup>lxiii</sup>

<sup>39</sup> The use of the exclamation mark, and the “should not” and “should,” suggests that this is not merely a response provided at a press conference, but an instruction in itself. Both Pos and Roosevelt appeared to teach their audience while communicating with their audiences. Indeed, Maurine Beasley claims in her book on Roosevelt’s press conferences that Roosevelt performed as an instructor who informed the journalists on teaching other women how to read the newspaper” (June 15, 1933) and use a salutary new product, dried skim milk (May 7, 1935).<sup>lxiv</sup> Beasley further points out that Roosevelt “used the conferences to lecture on women’s duties as citizens.”<sup>lxv</sup> In her biography, Allida Black even refers to Eleanor Roosevelt as conducting classes and “deliver[ing] a tutorial.”<sup>lxvi</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Roosevelt’s instructions on newspaper reading closely relate to her belief that women’s role in politics is based on knowing how to gather information, as the following quote from a press meeting in 1933 shows:

<sup>41</sup> [...] this is a time when women have a special task in watching national and international news. Every woman should have a knowledge of what is going on in economic conferences. It does affect the future amicable relations between the nations of the world. [...] Very few women know how to read newspapers and they miss what could give a new point of view. [...] One’s own prejudices and own ideas go into interpretation of public events. Women should train

themselves to see both sides, then decide what they really think.<sup>lxvii</sup>

- 42 Will married women who work outside of the home and who know how to read the newspaper eventually rule the world? That concern was, more or less, the focus of Pos' *third* question, posed during the personal session with Roosevelt following the press conference.

<sup>43</sup> *Ik zag Amerika* offers a discussion of the issue, which apparently followed Pos' query during the women's rendezvous. Women all over the world are steadily becoming more knowledgeable and entering new fields: "Women in the East are waking up more and more and in countries such as Russia and America, worlds in themselves, women are increasingly taking hold of high-ranking positions, positions which fifty years earlier no one would have dreamt they would occupy."<sup>lxviii</sup> There are no quotation marks in the text, so for the reader it is unclear whether this is Pos' introduction of the topic to her readers or to the First Lady, or Roosevelt's response. The exposé seems to be co-authored by Roosevelt and Pos, two women who are exactly representing the women referred to here. In that sense it is possible that Pos' contemporaries read the exposé as a pep talk. But the latter is cut short when Pos paraphrases Roosevelt as saying that she does *not* believe

<sup>44</sup> that women will ever overrule men. It is true that in some continents women are making immense progress; but the strengthening of one gender does not necessarily mean the weakening of the other. Both will have to work together in harmony and the understanding between the two must grow stronger.<sup>lxix</sup>

- 45 The question is also mentioned in Pos' *personal* notes, where she points out that Roosevelt "extensively" answered her "question about strong women." Here, however, the emphasis is more on strength than "harmony" and "understanding." Roosevelt did not believe that we [...] would enter an age of Amazons. Women were still making progress, albeit slowly, and were growing stronger, but that one sex became stronger did not necessitate the other to diminish in power. Both needed to become ever stronger. *Something like this.*<sup>lxx</sup>

<sup>46</sup> The last sentence suggests that Pos attempts to translate Roosevelt's monologue, but feels unsure about the argument. Roosevelt herself indicated that Pos had some trouble understanding her: in her column "My Day" she writes that the two foreign correspondents (who based on Pos' reports must have been a Finnish journalist and herself) wished to depict the United States in a truthful way, but felt confused: "I think it must be a tremendously difficult thing to find yourself trying to grasp political and social situations at the present time with a somewhat limited knowledge of the country."<sup>lxxi</sup> Roosevelt here expresses her empathy with the position of the foreign journalists. She does not mention any language barriers, but we know from personal sources that Pos felt insecure about her fluency in English.

<sup>47</sup> Approximately ten years later, in a postwar lecture Pos held for her Dutch audience, she almost literally reiterated Roosevelt's earlier recommendation that women and men work together in harmony and understanding resurfaces. Pos yet again seemed to mix her own text with that of the interviewee as she, reporting on her conversation with Roosevelt, offered a "passionate plea" for a "shoulder-to-shoulder and conjoint battle by both men and women," to triumph over the injustices of the times and help the tens of

thousands of victims struggling with the results of the war.<sup>lxxii</sup> Pos apparently employed Roosevelt's words as a vehicle to both generate feelings of national solidarity and trigger the emancipation of Dutch women whose status, stated Pos, had been weakened and whose assistance was not employed effectively in the postwar reconstruction of the country: Dutch women had been systematically excluded from boards and committees, and had therefore not been able to help make decisions in the best interests of women. In conclusion, although we have no verbatim account of what Roosevelt communicated to Pos in December 1937, the Dutch journalist certainly drew on that meeting to convey to her Dutch postwar audience a strong message regarding the need for national cohesion and a strong position for women.

## 5.2 Rivalry

48 Pos' personal notes typed up after Eleanor Roosevelt's press conference reveal feelings of frustration and anxiety that do not speak from her published accounts. We surmise from the incomplete notes that during the plenary discussion on women's emancipation Pos brought up Dutch women's early procurement of the right to vote, because she was "unpleasantly surprised" by the voice of a Finnish reporter who made an objection and accused Pos of not telling the truth: Finnish women, the reporter claimed, were the first to obtain voting rights.<sup>lxxiii</sup> Pos felt intensely bothered by this journalist, who "thoroughly spoilt everything" for her. Wishing to exchange some ideas with Roosevelt during the press conference she ended up "not having Roosevelt for her alone."<sup>lxxiv</sup> In addition, when Pos and the Finn stayed behind after the conference, "it was she who was asking all the questions."<sup>lxxv</sup>

49 Pos portrays the woman as elegantly dressed in a typical red, with the same color for her nails. But she is also "skinny and not tall, very skinny her face."<sup>lxxvi</sup> This description of the woman's stylish looks is followed by the following assertion, in the original text in a mixture of Dutch and English,

50 It was a gorgeous and balmy day, and the warmth also made me dead-tired but how others do that I do not know, because she [the Finnish reporter] had a lunch appointment and after that a car ride and after that a cocktailappointent [sic] and after that dinner and after that dancing, real dancing etc.<sup>lxxvii</sup>

51 Complaining about her own condition of fatigue, Mary Pos here compares herself to the modern, energetic and socially successful Finnish woman, whose full schedule of upcoming social engagements even resembles the list of appointments which Roosevelt would typically go over at the beginning of a press conference. Still, Pos states in her notes that she does not consider her colleague to be a competitor, although "she was an enormous showoff who dared a lot and was very cunning." She asked questions about labor, capital, and government that "a woman like Mrs. Roosevelt could impossibly answer. Impossibly." Pos indicates having been impressed with the way in which Roosevelt took to answer, time and again, the Finnish reporter's "daring questions." However, the First Lady did not come up with anything "shockingly new" and she actually offered what anyone who is only a little informed about the American conditions already knew. This seems an implicit attempt on the part of Pos to weaken the Finnish reporter's success as well as Roosevelt's tendency to speak in platitudes.

<sup>52</sup> Pos further attempted to intervene, introducing to Roosevelt the state of the Dutch labor unions, and asking her whether she thought that laborers should be organized. But Roosevelt only seemed to have briefly confirmed that, and Pos' notes end with referring to the Finnish reporter once again, who after the session confided in Pos that Roosevelt "could not be caught articulating an irresponsible statement." Pos appropriated this conclusion and states in her published account that Roosevelt never hesitated when giving her answers, but that no answer was careless.<sup>lxxviii</sup> Years later, in the Summer of 1950, when Eleanor Roosevelt visited the Netherlands as one of the European countries that received Marshall Aid, Pos again appeared to feel frustrated with rival female reporters. Her report of the press conference held at the exclusive Amstel Hotel in Amsterdam is integrated in a one-page diary entry dated July 5, 1950, which refers to Roosevelt as "that unsympathetic business woman Roosevelt."<sup>lxxix</sup> It is unclear exactly why Pos described Roosevelt in such strong terms, and what caused her change of heart, as she had formerly partially identified with her and her ideas. From the remainder of the diary entry we may infer at least that feelings of depression, and the way she is dealt with by her colleagues following the press conference, effected this labelling of the former First Lady. In addition, her negative judgment of Roosevelt may also be related to the latter's unwillingness to respond to Pos' demand for help to the Moluccan island of Ambon. The island had proclaimed its independent Republic of the South Moluccas a few months earlier, on April 25, 1950, and had thus rejected the 1945 proclamation of the centralized Republic of Indonesia.<sup>lxxx</sup> On 17 August 1950 the central state of Indonesia repressed the Moluccan rebellion, and reinstated its power on Ambon and other islands.

<sup>53</sup> Mary Pos had visited the Dutch East Indies since the 1930s, and had published a couple of travel books based on those travels. She had also built a rather large network of friends and acquaintances in Indonesia. None of her published or non-published work, however, clarifies her stand on the Moluccan issue, nor her insistence in posing the question. Neither do we know whether she was aware of, and how she assessed, America's role in the history of Indonesian independence. Nevertheless, Pos writes that during the press conference in Amsterdam she "dared" to ask Roosevelt whether she could possibly use her influence to generate support from the International Red Cross for Ambon. Pos' action, she states in her diary, was not tolerated by her colleagues from the "Red and papal gang," partially due to feelings of jealousy. She had therefore suffered "from folks I had never seen before" and also from the "papal Marijke Vetter," a journalist of the *Volkskrant*, whom Pos describes as "small, fat, arrogant, and jealous." Pos does not explicate what she means by "suffer from," but we may perhaps infer that this included verbal abuse, gossip or giving dirty looks.<sup>lxxxii</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Her intervention at the press conference, she conveys, furthermore engendered an "unfair piece" in the Dutch weekly paper *Vrij Nederland*, fitting with the "lowest way" in which "bright red" had "oftentimes attacked her." Here Pos probably refers to her affair with *Het Parool*, a formerly clandestine resistance newspaper, which after a study of Pos' published reports on her trip to the Ostmark in the Summer of 1945 had inaccurately accused Pos of journalistic collaboration with the Nazis. The *Parool* issue, which motivated the Military Authority to forbid her to write, would affect her professional standing and seriously damage her career. Still, Pos was rehabilitated that same year, and in addition she was invited to travel to Switzerland to present lectures on the Dutch resistance movement. It was perhaps a jealous colleague who upon her return from her trip sent her an anonymous and hateful letter labeling her "the incorrect missionary."<sup>lxxxiii</sup> The "unfair

piece” in *Vrij Nederland* referred to by Pos is one section in a front-page editorial called “In het vizier” [In sight].<sup>lxxxiii</sup> It declares the failure of both the reception held in honor of Mrs. Roosevelt, and the succeeding press conference. The ambiance had been somewhat cold, snobbish, and chaotic, and Roosevelt was “charming,” but her book signing session took too long, leaving no time for “Amsterdam” to become acquainted with her “life work.”<sup>lxxxiv</sup> In addition there had not been much time left for the press conference, which was not just attended by members of the press, but also by some lingering guests. Topping all of that was “Miss Mary Pos, who at times treads onto the slippery ice of journalism with her graceful little shoes.” The Dutch expression of treading onto slippery ice, meaning taking risks, is here rewritten with a gender-biased and belittling slant.

<sup>55</sup> This patronizing and chauvinist tone continues in the remainder of the editorial. Pos had posed the “accusing” question why Mrs. Roosevelt had not personally taken action in the case of Ambon. With a smile Roosevelt had apologized, stating “Because that is not my job, do you see?” This is taken up by the (unnamed, but presumably male) editor of *Vrij Nederland* who concludes that “Miss Mary Pos” did not “see” this like all others present. This caused such a commotion against Pos after Roosevelt’s departure, the editor claims, that Pos also disappeared from the venue with a “quickness that did not match her self-confidence.”<sup>lxxxv</sup> The incident at the Amstel Hotel is covered by two more newspapers that, although not naming Pos explicitly, are mostly focused on the skills with which Roosevelt refuted Pos’ questions, and quote questions that differ from the ones in the *Vrij Nederland* editorial. An unnamed female reporter (“redactrice”) of *De Tijd* [The Time] likewise complained about the little time available for a thorough exchange of thoughts on complex issues such as Roosevelt’s chairmanship for the UN commission on human rights. Then she states,

<sup>56</sup> It was somewhat embarrassing that one of those present, a well-known female publicist, resolved to make use of this occasion to bring up our Dutch policies vis-à-vis Indonesia, and more or less demanded of the Commission of Human Rights to provide accountability. This offered the others present the opportunity to admire the power and the tact with which this disgraceful attack was refuted.<sup>lxxxvi</sup>

<sup>57</sup> The Indonesian newspaper *De Preangerbode* refers to an anonymous journalist who asked an “inappropriate question” about the possible effect of the petitions signed for Ambon, which were submitted to the UNO. Roosevelt being “an extremely intelligent woman” and a “natural diplomat,” however, could not be lured into impulsive answers.<sup>lxxxvii</sup> She merely stated that these petitions would be shared with the respective governments. The newspaper does not only praise Roosevelt for being very tactful, for weighing each question scrupulously, and repeating it in the correct context, but also for being knowledgeable about the existence of the island and its current situation. The account then criticizes the “journalist” in question for pressing for an answer: “Could you not employ your personal influence at the support of millions of people?” Mrs. Roosevelt briefly smiled, charmingly and humbly, upon which she merely stated: “In the United Nations I have little personal influence’.”<sup>lxxxviii</sup>

<sup>58</sup> The account does not name the mischievous “journalist”. Noteworthy, however, is that on the very same page, in a next column, Mary Pos is explicitly pointed out as having created another, but very different, scene. “Do you still remember Mary Pos? As a journalist she repeatedly visited, toured, and reported of Indonesia.” Recently, the



column reports, she was summoned in court for parking in a pedestrian zone. When the judge resolved the case by offering either a small fine or two days in prison, Pos stated that for her it was easy to decide: being in jail would provide her with a splendid opportunity to write an account of incarcerated life. In the midst of great merriment she left the courtroom.<sup>lxxxix</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

<sup>59</sup> The Dutch writer Mary Pos, a self-proclaimed first female travel journalist, was one among a group of American and European female journalists who in the 1930s and 1940s found its way into the male bastion of journalism. Many gatekeepers played a role in this process, for instance by offering to be interviewed, acting as intermediators, writing positive reviews of their work, and functioning as role models and sources of inspiration. Both Franklin D. Roosevelt and Eleanor Roosevelt had such an impact on Mary Pos. They allowed her to attend their press conferences and had personal sessions with her. Their work and their lives inspired the once small-town Dutch journalist, and offered examples of the public persona in which Pos could mirror herself.

<sup>60</sup> Whereas at least according to her own travel narratives Pos was able to bond with FDR in terms of jovial conversation and shared ethnic/national background, this was not so with Eleanor Roosevelt. Although Pos' published work suggests that they fully agreed on issues such as women's roles and intercultural understanding—indeed in Pos' *Ik zag Amerika* the two women seem to speak as one—her personal accounts show that they at times had trouble understanding each other. That is no wonder, of course. Pos and Roosevelt came from very different national and cultural contexts, and their professions, status, and personalities were poles apart.

<sup>61</sup> Pos changed her original positive assessment of Roosevelt into a rather unfavorable one. In addition, she seems to have felt alienated and marginalized among the self-assured, ambitious and modern women she met during press conferences organized by or for the Roosevelts. This was partially caused by the competitive attitude of her colleagues and intercultural differences, but also perhaps by her own provincial and orthodox religious background, her somewhat naïve and stubborn stance, as well as her lack of tact and inadequate knowledge of world politics.

<sup>62</sup> Still we could say that in her lecturing and travel writing Pos, very much like Eleanor Roosevelt, challenged existing gender expectations and stretched the boundaries of her own gendered maneuvering space. Both women had to negotiate with various discourses of femininity available to them at the time, with biases and expectations. Both supported a resilient role for women in making connections with men, and between countries and cultures. Although Roosevelt operated on a much more global and political level, and with an entirely different set of tools and means, and although she had a far greater and much more civic and diplomatic reach than Pos, both women questioned and affected ideas of national and gender identity among those who made up their audience.

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## NOTES

- i. *Het Dagblad: Uitgave van de Nederlandsche Dagbladpers te Batavia* 4:50, 30 November 1948, 2. This newspaper was published in the Dutch East Indies.
- ii. Maurine H. Beasley, *Eleanor Roosevelt and the Media: A Public Quest for Self-Fulfillment* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 167. The occasion was the UN General Assembly's passing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on 10 December, 1948. Two years later, Roosevelt would be introduced to the Dutch as "the First Woman of a world-in-the-making," see "In het vizier: Ontvangst [In sight: Reception]," *Vrij Nederland: Onafhankelijk weekblad*, 10:43, 24 June, 1950, 1.
- iii. See, for instance, "'Ik zag Amerika': Babbeltjes van mej. Mary Pos" [*I saw America: Babbling of Miss Mary Pos*] in *De Tijd*, 4 December 1940, 3; and "Franklin Delano Roosevelt," *De Vrije Pers Dordrecht*, 1 February, 1946.
- iv. Mimi Schippers, "Recovering the Feminine Other: Masculinity, Femininity, and Gender Hegemony," *Theory and Society* 36 (2007): 93-94.
- v. Raewyn W. Connell, *Masculinities* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 184-185.
- vi. Babs Boter and Suzanne M. Sinke, "Adjusting and Fulfilling Masculine Roles: The Epistolary Persona in Dutch Transatlantic Letters," in Marcelo Borges and Sonia Cancian, eds., *The History of the Family*, Special Issue on "Migrant Correspondence" (forthcoming 2016).
- vii. Maurine H. Beasley, ed., *The White House Press Conferences of Eleanor Roosevelt* (New York & London: Garland, 1983), x.
- viii. Maurine H. Beasley, *Eleanor Roosevelt: Transformative First Lady* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 85, 100-101.
- ix. "[...] she occasionally lit up a cigarette herself just to make her strike against the double standard," Betty Boyd Caroli, *First Ladies: From Martha Washington to Michelle Obama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) (revised and updated edition), 204. "At a time when most Americans still thought flying too dangerous to try, Eleanor Roosevelt delighted in leading the way. She was photographed alongside planes and interviewed inside, doing more for the aviation industry, it was sometimes said, than anyone since Charles Lindbergh," Caroli, *First Ladies*, 200. Mary Pos' travels were oftentimes sponsored by the KLM. Many photo portraits of Pos show her posing in front of airplanes, as is the case for Roosevelt.
- x. J. William T. Youngs, *Eleanor Roosevelt: A Personal and Public Life* (Boston & Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1984), 176; Caroli, *First Ladies*, 193.
- xi. Biographer Maurine Beasley's observation that Roosevelt "Involv[ed] herself in never-ending pursuits [that] enabled her to ward off attacks of depression to which she was subject throughout her life" (*Transformative*, 87) could very well apply to Pos. "Persona" here refers to Mineke Bosch' work on the performance of public identity. She has theorized this in "Persona en de performance van identiteit: Parallele ontwikkelingen in de nieuwe biografische geschiedschrijving van gender en van wetenschap," *Tijdschrift voor biografie* (Fall 2012) 1:3, 10-21.
- xii. Mary Pos, letter 23 June, 1956, Box 5, Folder 36, Correspondence related to publications 1940-1956, n.d., Collection 529, Mary Pos Papers, Historical Documentation Centre for Dutch Protestantism (1800 to the present day), Free University Amsterdam. Hereafter "Mary Pos Papers, HDC."
- xiii. Mary Pos, "Dinsdag, 21 Dec. 1937," Diaries 1936-1938, Box 6, Folder 43, Mary Pos Papers, HDC.

- xiv. Mary Pos, "Pers conferentie President Roosevelt, 21 Dec. 1937," Diaries 1936-1938, Folder 43, Box 6, Mary Pos Papers, HDC; Pos, *Ik zag*, 221.
- xv. Pos, *Ik zag*, 221.
- xvi. Pos, *Ik zag*, 222.
- xvii. Pos refers to the newspaper as "Nw. rotterdammer," but she may have wished to refer to the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*. Mary Pos, "Pers conferentie President Roosevelt, 21 Dec. 1937," Diaries 1936-1938, Folder 43, Box 6, Mary Pos Papers, HDC
- xviii. Ibid.
- xix. Pos' rendezvous with the President will resonate in her postwar lectures. One newspaper report of a lecture quotes Pos as pointing out the greatness of Roosevelt's character, his brilliance, his idealism and altruism, and his unwavering Christian faith, "Amerika en President Roosevelt: een onvergetelijke avond", review of lecture by Mary Pos, *Ons Noorden*, 13 March, 1946., Folder 57, Box 8.
- xx. The signed photo portrait will later be included in an album in which Pos poses next to a wall in her Dutch home covered with photo portraits, pointing at the photo of FDR. See image 1. "Vijf Werelddelen dragen haar voetstap: In een huis vol herinneringen woont Nederlands meest bereisde vrouw [Five continents hold her foot step: In a home filled with memories lives Mary Pos, the most travelled woman of the Netherlands]," n.d., n.p., Box 64, Interviews with Mary Pos, Typescripts and Interviews 1940-1941, 1949, 1963, n.d., Mary Pos Papers, HDC.
- xxi. Pos, *Ik zag*, 222.
- xxii. Ibid.
- xxiii. Mary Pos, diary entry Friday 13 April, 1945, "Roosevelt dood [Roosevelt dead]," Folder 45, Diaries 1945-1952, Box 6, Mary Pos Papers, HDC.
- xxiv. "Franklin D. Roosevelt," *De Waarheid Dordrecht* 30 January, 1946; "Amerika en President Roosevelt: Een onvergetelijke avond [America and President Roosevelt: An Unforgettable Evening]," Folder 57, Box 8 Reviews *Ik zag Amerika*; "Mary Pos sprak over Amerika en Roosevelt" [Mary Pos spoke about America and Roosevelt]," typed manuscript for *Dorpsch Dagblad* 30 January, 1946, Folder 51, Mary Pos Papers, HDC.
- xxv. "Amerika en President Roosevelt."
- xxvi. "Mary Pos sprak over Amerika."
- xxvii. For an early example of Roosevelt's discussion of the issue of intercultural understanding, see *My Day*, 25 November, 1939. [https://www2.gwu.edu/~erpapers/documents/myday/displaydoc.cfm?\\_y=1939&\\_f=md055433](https://www2.gwu.edu/~erpapers/documents/myday/displaydoc.cfm?_y=1939&_f=md055433)
- xxviii. Beasley, *Public Quest*, 117.
- xxix. [https://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/myday/displaydoc.cfm?\\_y=1937&\\_f=md054831](https://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/myday/displaydoc.cfm?_y=1937&_f=md054831)
- xxx. Mary Pos, letter to Walter, Tuesday 21 December, 1937, Washington, Folder 10, Box 1, Correspondence, Mary Pos Papers, HDC.
- xxxi. Schippers, "Recovering," 91.
- xxxii. Blanche Wiesen Cook, "Introduction," *Eleanor Roosevelt: Vol II The Defining Years, 1933-1938* (New York: Penguin, 2000); Beasley, *White House Press Conferences*, 1, 3-4; Beasley, *Transformative*, 97; Allida M. Black, *Casting Her Own Shadow: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Shaping of Postwar Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 25.
- xxxiii. In 1930, Mirjam Elias shows, only 38 of the 600 members of the Dutch circle of professional journalists (NJK) was female; the separate Roman Catholic organization counted three women amongst her 200 members, in Mirjam Elias, "Voor zover plaats aan de perstafel: Honderd jaar vechten om een plaats te veroveren," Els Diekerkhof, Mirjam Elias, Marjan Sax eds., *Voor zover plaats aan de perstafel: Vrouwen in de dagbladjournalistiek, vroeger en nu* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff 1986), 27. Elias also notes that, during the Depression years, many Dutch women reporters working for newspapers were requested to write on domestic and women's issues (idem, 26). Writing on Dutch journalistic history, Frank van Vree points out that in 1940 Dutch

dailies, who had on average 10 to 12 reporters working for them, hardly hired women. See Frank van Vree, “Beroep: journalist. Beeldvorming en professionalisering,” in: Jo Bardoel, Chris Vos, Frank van Vree, Huub Wijfjes, eds, *Journalistieke cultuur in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 159. For the U.S., Lumsden has concluded on the marginal position of American female reporters between 1920 and 1940. See Linda Lumsden “‘You’re a Tough Guy, Mary—And a First-Rate Newspaperman’: Gender and Women Journalists in the 1920s and 1930s,” *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 72:4 (Winter 1995): 913-921.

**xxxiv.** Lumsden, “Tough Guy,” 914, 918.

**xxxv.** Maurine Hoffman Beasley, “Women and Journalism in World War II: Discrimination and Progress,” *American Journalism* 12:3 (1995): 328.

**xxxvi.** Maurine H. Beasley, “The Press Conference of Eleanor Roosevelt,” Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Corvallis, OR, August 6-9, 1983): 1.

**xxxvii.** Idem, 7.

**xxxviii.** Beasley, “The Press Conferences of Eleanor Roosevelt,” 1; Black quoted in Beasley, “The Press Conferences of Eleanor Roosevelt,” 4.

**xxxix.** Beasley, *The White House Press Conferences*, 2.

**xl.** Idem, x.

**xli.** Idem, 2.

**xlii.** Black, *Casting*, 25.

**xliii.** Lumsden, “Tough Guy,” 913, 917. This also holds for the few Dutch female journalists who were on the dailies’ payroll: during the 1930s they had no time for collective feminist actions, and did not see any point in it: “each struggled for herself” (Elias, “Voor zover plaats,” 25).

**xliv.** Eleanor Roosevelt, *This I Remember* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), 103.

**xlv.** Pos, *Ik zag*, 224.

**xlvi.** Idem, 224.

**xlvii.** Ann Cootrell Free, one of the regulars at the press conferences, recalls years later “how women reporters rushed up the White House stairs in an unseemly dash for front-row seats in the second-floor Monroe Room” (Beasley, *Transformative*, 88).

**xlviii.** Pos, *Ik zag*, 224. Pos does not make clear whether other (female) foreign correspondents were granted a seat up front.

**xlix.** Other women writers who attended Eleanor Roosevelt’s conferences have similarly described the place, such as Sally Knapp, *Eleanor Roosevelt: A Biography* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1949), 97.

**l.** Pos, *Ik zag*, 225.

**li.** Mary Pos, “Bij de First Lady van de Ver. [sic] Staten: Een vrouw, die zichzelf durft te zijn” [with the First Lady of the U.S.: A woman who dares to be herself].” *De Telegraaf* 17 April, 1938, 7.

**lii.** Pos on occasion described first ladies as simple, as is the case when she portrays Mrs. Elizabeth Verwoerd Schoonbee, the South African Prime Minister’s wife when she visits the couple in the 1960s. Mary Pos, *Wie was Dr. Verwoerd?* (Utrecht: De Banier, 1968), 125.

**liii.** Mary Pos, “vervolg conferentie Mrs. Roosevelt [continued conference Mrs. Roosevelt],” Box 8, Folder 55, “Typescripts of articles and lectures 1948 and n.d.,” n.d., Mary Pos Papers, HDC.

**liv.** Pos, *Ik zag*, 225.

**lv.** Idem, 226.

**lvi.** Caroli, *First Ladies*, 195.

**lvii.** During those years Pos had several lovers, including the Swiss one mentioned above. . Pos was not a believer in sex radicalism, as for example defined by Mary K. Trigg in *Feminism as Life’s Work: Four Modern American Women through Two World Wars* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press 2014). Pos’ diaries indicate that she felt rather guilty about her secret love affairs, but when reproached about her infidelity she would retort that she would negotiate with

God later on. It seems that most of those who read Pos' work and attended her lectures were not aware of her love life. Pos' successful career appears not to have suffered from rumours about such private details.

**lviii.** Mary Pos, "vervolg conferentie Mrs. Roosevelt."

**lix.** *ibid.*

**lx.** Mary Pos, undated and untitled lecture on "het leven van de vrouw in Amerika [woman's life in America]," Folder 55, Box 8: Typescripts of articles and lectures, 1948; n.d.

**lxi.** Pos *Ik zag*, 44-45; Pos, undated and untitled lecture.

**lxii.** Pos, undated and untitled lecture. Pos does not mention here that at this time Dutch women still had to deal with shortages, low wages and other Reconstruction problems.

**lxiii.** Pos, *Ik zag*, 227.

**lxiv.** Beasley, *The White House Press Conferences*, 16, 25.

**lxv.** Beasley, *Transformative*, 98.

**lxvi.** Black, *Casting*, 25-26. In this sense the press conferences showed an interesting dynamics of reciprocity: whereas Roosevelt saw her job partially as educating her "press girls" (Beasley, *The White House Press Conferences*, 1), many reporters in their turn supported Roosevelt, and "some actively helped her avoid awkward situations by coming to her defense if questions seemed hostile. They saw her as naïve and in need of their protection," Beasley, *Transformative*, 112, 88-89.

**lxvii.** Beasley, *The White House Press Conferences*, 10.

**lxviii.** Pos, *Ik zag*, 226.

**lxix.** *ibid.*

**lxx.** Emphasis added. "vervolg conferentie Mrs. Roosevelt" [continued conference Mrs. Roosevelt], Box 8, Folder 55, "Typescripts of articles and lectures 1948 and n.d.," n.d., Mary Pos Papers, HDC. In none of her written work does Pos use the term "age of Amazons," neither has she otherwise referred to a matriarchal or utopian place. I therefore tentatively assume this is Roosevelt's phrase.

**lxxi.** Roosevelt, Eleanor, "My Day," 23 December 1937, <http://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/myday/displaydoc.cfm?Y=1937&f=md054831>

**lxxii.** Pos, undated and untitled lecture.

**lxxiii.** It is unclear which Finnish reporter was present, possibly Salama Simonen (later Hirvonen) (1910-2007), Anni Voipio (1906-1983) or Irma Helena Karvikko (1909-1994). Finnish women obtained the right to vote in 1906, the Dutch in 1919.

**lxxiv.** Mary Pos, "vervolg conferentie Mrs. Roosevelt."

**lxxv.** *Ibid.*

**lxxvi.** *Ibid.*

**lxxvii.** *Ibid.*

**lxxviii.** Pos, *Ik zag*, 227.

**lxxix.** Mary Pos, diary entry 5 July, 1950, Folder 45 (Diaries 1945-1952), Mary Pos Papers, HDC.

**lxxx.** Pos was not the only one who drew attention to the Ambon case during Roosevelt's visit. When the former First Lady called on the Zealand town of Oud Vossemeer on 24 June, 1950, where her late husband's relatives received her enthusiastically, she was offered a bouquet of flowers by a delegation of Ambons. According to the local newspaper this was meant to point out the hazardous situation in Ambon. *Eilandennieuws*, <http://www.oudvossemeer.com/roos1.htm#.WBvsY8lAFf4>

**lxxxi.** *Ibid.*

**lxxxii.** <https://ilibrariana.wordpress.com/2012/01/04/mary-pos-1904-1987-de-eerste-vrouwelijke-reisjournaliste/>

**lxxxiii.** The discussed editorial or column titled "In het vizier" was possibly written by Johan Winkler (1898-1986), who was chief editor of *Vrij Nederland* starting in 1950. Henk van Randwijk,

who was chief editor until Winkler took over in 1950, is most almost certainly not the author. He and Pos were both members of a Protestant Christian authors' society (Christelijke Auteurskring), had jointly contributed to a collection of poetry (*Verzeild bestek: Uitgave ter gelegenheid van het tweede lustrum van den christelijken auteurskring 1929-1939*, 1939, red. G. Kamphuis et al. Kampen: Kok Publishers 1939), and had supported Pos when *Het Parool* accused her of collaboration with the Nazis in the Summer of 1945.

**lxxxiv.** "In het vizier," 1.

**lxxxv.** Ibid.

**lxxxvi.** *De Tijd* 106:3, 20 June, 1950, 3.

**lxxxvii.** "Notities uit Nederland," *AID "De Preanger Bode,"* Tuesday 4 July 1950, 1. Beasley discusses Eleanor Roosevelt's media training, which included guidance in not being impulsive (1987, 42).

**lxxxviii.** Ibid.

**lxxxix.** Ibid.

## ABSTRACTS

Mary Pos, self-proclaimed first female travel journalist from the Netherlands, met Eleanor Roosevelt first in 1937 during a women-only press conference at the White House, and then in 1950 when Roosevelt visited Amsterdam. This essay examines Pos' published and unpublished reports of these encounters in order to see which professional and psychological forces were at work in the transnational and gendered arena of journalism in the late 1930s and early 1950s. Secondly, it will investigate potential correlations between Roosevelt's and Pos' ideas on women's rights and intercultural understanding.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** Eleanor Roosevelt, Franklin D. Roosevelt, gender identity, journalism, Mary Pos, Netherlands, press conferences

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