

Why and how does the Dutch nobility retain its social relevance?

*Simon Unger and Jaap Dronkers**

Introduction

Modernization theory posits that contemporary Western societies are involved in a process of ever-increasing rationalization. This widely accepted theory is based on the assumption that traditional cultures gradually disappear and give way to a rationalized, characteristically bourgeois form of life. For instance, it has often been argued that gender differences and social inequalities have decreased, while social mobility in general has dramatically increased throughout the last two centuries. Similarly, it is regularly argued that class differences are leveled by our present-day capitalist, meritocratic culture. This process is certainly fostered by government-run welfare systems and a strengthening of the tertiary sector economy. The empirical evidence for this development can be easily discerned in society. For instance, the proletariat as a distinct social class has by and large disappeared, having been absorbed into a more loosely defined middle class. Can a complementary development be observed in so far as the upper classes are concerned? In line with modernization theory, it has been supposed that traditional European elites, that is, the aristocracy and the nobility, have lost their position in the social hierarchy and have been socioeconomically integrated into the bourgeoisie.¹ In earlier studies, the Dutch nobility has been found to possess a strong advantage in achieving elite positions within the Dutch society, even though its legal status is remark-

* The first author was a student at the *University College of Maastricht University*, and he wrote this article as an undergraduate research project. The second author is the supervisor for the project and professor *International comparative research on educational performance and social inequality* at *Maastricht University*. We thank the *Nederlandse Adelsvereniging* (the Dutch Nobility Association) for access to their 2005 survey data of the Dutch nobility. Send all correspondence to the second author: j.dronkers@maastrichtuniversity.nl.

¹ This assumption as regards the disappeared nobility has been formulated most clearly by D. Cannadine in his book: *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New Haven-London, 1990). But also D. Lieven, *The Aristocracy in Europe 1815-1914* (Houndsmills, 1992) and H. Reif, *Adel und Bürgertum in Deutschland. Entwicklungslinien und Wendepunkte im 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 2001) assume the same disappearance of the European nobility.

ably weak since the nineteenth century.² Yet Dutch nobles remain overrepresented in prominent social positions, as they are found throughout the economical institutions, politics, and civil and military service. Therefore, in sum, the Dutch nobility—and, supposedly, the European nobility—does not comply with the developmental pattern implied by the modernization theory. For some reason, the Dutch nobility has retained its social status, despite having lost its legal privileges. Saint Martin reached a similar conclusion for the far more fragmented French nobility, which has enjoyed no legal position since 1872.³ The purpose of this study is to explain this phenomenon, with regards to the Dutch case. Which internal characteristics appertain to the Dutch nobility, and how might they explain the nobility's success in modern society? In this context, both socioeconomic and cultural approaches shall be considered.

First, we will formulate two hypotheses to explain the prevalence of the nobility's socioeconomic relevance. Second, the features and the methods of a recent survey conducted among Dutch nobles are presented. Third, statistical findings from this survey are analyzed and interpreted. Fourth, the results are discussed whereby it is examined whether they can be said to represent the Western European nobility at large. Finally, conclusions are drawn concerning this study's outcome and importance.

Hypotheses

How might we explain the nobility's prevailing socioeconomic relevance despite the fact that its public visibility diminished throughout the twentieth century? The initial hypothesis by which nobility research was started is based on the modernization theory. In this way, the nobility's success may be explained by its members having abandoned their noble identity and having integrated instead into bourgeois capitalist society. Underlying this first hypothesis is the assumption that traditional noble identities and modern liberal capitalism are incompatible. In this context, there has even been speculation about a possible 'bourgeoisisation of the nobility'.⁴ Hence, paradoxically, the nobility's success is explained by its new non-noble, bourgeois mentality. According to this first hypothesis, the nobility was able to retain its social relevance because it modernized its social and intellectual capital.

The second hypothesis is inspired by lifestyles and mentalities prevalent among Dutch nobles. Here, the nobility's success is explained by its traditionalism. We may hypothesize the nobility has succeeded in preserving its socioeconomic relevance throughout the twentieth century, because it preserved a particularly noble, traditional identity. If the nobility had been integrated into the bourgeoisie, we would probably be unable to observe nobles being proportionally overrepresented in elite positions compared to the high bourgeoisie. This second hypothesis is based on the idea that, corresponding to the difference in the average level of success, a difference in mentality and identity indeed may be observable. It remains then to be discovered whether this

² H. J. Schijf, J. Dronkers, and J. van den Broeke-George, 'Recruitment of Members of Dutch Noble and High-Bourgeois Families to Elite Positions in the 20th Century', *Social Science Information*, XLIII (2004) 435-475; J. Dronkers, 'Declining homogamy of Austrian-German nobility in the 20th century? A comparison with the Dutch nobility', *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, XXXIII (2008) 262-284.

³ M. de Saint Martin, *L'Espace de la noblesse* (Paris, 1993).

⁴ Schijf, e.a., 'Recruitment of Members'.

difference consists in the permanence associated with both traditional lifestyles and a particularly noble culture. Pinpointing the existence of noble identity and noble culture would demonstrate that the nobility has not completely merged into the bourgeoisie. Therefore, there may be a specifically, even exclusively noble form of social culture by which nobles are able to network. Due to traditionalism and old social structures, the nobility is remarkably prone to form such networks (for instance knightly orders). In networks—whether they are exclusively or merely predominantly noble—members establish useful contacts, help and support each other, thus forming a relatively close-knit community. According to the second hypothesis, we may expect to find a positive correlation between success, traditionalism, and the degree of noble identity among Dutch nobles.

At first glance, both hypotheses appear mutually exclusive, even antipodal. Whereas the first hypothesis suggests that the nobility's continued success may be explained by its integration into the bourgeoisie and its adaptation to modernity, the second hypothesis is founded on the assumption that traditional identities prevail, thus forming a distinctively noble class consciousness. Whereas the first hypothesis accords with the modernization theory, the second hypothesis stands in opposition to it. However, both hypotheses focus on the nobility's attitude towards modernity: In both cases, the nobility's success is explained by its degree of integration into modern culture. For this reason—regardless of the initial hypothesis—the focal point of analysis is the noble identity in present-day Dutch society. The nobility as an historical institution is originally a pre-modern phenomenon. To understand how it continues to exist today, its relation to both modernity and liberal bourgeois capitalism must be analyzed. Such a relation may, however, be complex and ambivalent. In fact, both hypotheses give an oversimplified account of the nobility's development during the twentieth century. Each present phenotypical cases of nobles who either fully integrate into the bourgeoisie or who preserve exclusively noble identities. However, the reality is expected to be much more complex and not as clearly delineated: nobles may, for instance, preserve their identity in certain domains, but adapt bourgeois attitudes in others. Hence, in order to adequately explain the apparent success of Dutch nobles in twentieth-century Netherlands, both theories need to be combined and vigorously tested in several areas of social life.

The survey of the Dutch Nobility Association (NAV)

Quantitative data of previous studies of European nobility were largely limited to comparing nobility with patrician families using genealogical data. Such demographic data did not allow for studying opinions, mindsets, and ideologies prevailing among present-day Dutch nobles. The intention of this article is to gain insight into internal structures and mechanisms characteristic for Dutch nobility in order to explain the unexpected success of Dutch nobles in present-day society. For this purpose, we use a questionnaire of the Dutch Nobility Association (NAV⁵) consisting of 293 questions answered by 430 Dutch nobles. The NAV—founded to promote the interests of the Dutch nobility and to help impoverished nobles—took the initiative for conducting this

⁵ www.adelsvereniging.nl.

survey among the Dutch nobility, who are not necessarily NAV members, and gave us permission for a secondary analysis of this questionnaire's data, which is unique for its detailed questions about nobility, not only in the Netherlands but also in Europe.⁶ For more information about the NAV survey, see the overview article in *Virtus*.⁷

The questionnaire was designed to gain an overview of the Dutch nobility's internal composition. The questions cover various topics such as family structure, opinions and beliefs, education, career, membership in associations, social attitudes, and income. Table 1 lists a descriptive summary of all variables relevant for this analysis.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the variables used in this analysis

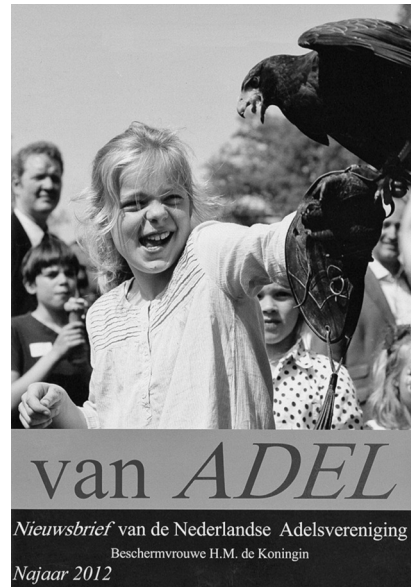
<i>Variables</i>	<i>Number of valid answers</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
Annual income	406	1	5	3.80	1.233
Tax class	393	1	6	3.14	1.884
Number of employees	186	1	6	2.83	1.819
Unpaid function or work in any association or organization	418	0	1	0.54	0.499
Educational level	426	1	7	5.78	1.573
Parents' educational level	428	0	2	1.06	0.692
Frequency of discussions with parents about the topic 'nobility'	424	0	3	1.67	0.826
Frequency of contacts to other nobles	425	0	3	1.70	1.025
Habit to bear a noble title in daily life	425	0	4	1.67	1.046
Wish for more active and public engagement of the Dutch nobility association	388	0	4	2.60	1.196
Wish for more active and public engagement of the knightly order	315	0	4	2.37	1.082
Wish for more active and public engagement of religious knightly orders such as the Johanniter Order and the Order of Malta	314	0	4	2.31	1.109
Capability to recognize other nobles at first sight	418	0	4	1.58	1.181
Degree of acceptance of the statement 'noblesse oblige'	423	0	4	1.66	1.326
Opinion on the compatibility of the nobility with the Dutch society / Relevance assigned to the nobility in the Dutch society	426	0	4	2.76	1.098
Definition of the role of the nobility to serve the royal court	423	0	4	1.79	1.218
Wish for stronger bonds between the nobility and the royal family	426	0	4	2.05	1.237
Wish for more engagement and participation of Dutch nobles at the royal court	425	0	4	1.71	1.176
Self-perception as an elite	424	0	4	2.01	1.156
Number of children (0=less than 3; 1=3 or more)	430	0	1	0.38	0.485
Frequency of discussions with the children about the topic 'nobility'	313	0	3	1.49	0.717
Contacts of the children with other nobles	311	0	5	1.63	1.337
Habit of the children to bear a noble title in daily life	322	0	5	1.44	1.609
Possession of the traditional family house	424	0	1	0.04	0.196
Religious education in childhood	430	0	1	0.71	0.456
Political opinion on a spectrum from left- to right-wing	427	0	1	0.68	0.465
Degree of information on matters of nobility	430	0	3	0.99	0.894
Membership to a knightly order	430	0	1	0.43	0.496
Noble homogeny	298	0	1	0.09	0.283
Parents' noble homogeny	428	0	1	0.22	0.416

Source: NAV survey (authors' computation)

⁶ J. Dronkers, A. Huistra, and Y. Kuiper. 'Hoe 'adellijk' is de adel in het huidige Nederland? Antropologische en sociologische aantekeningen bij de in 2005 gehouden enquête onder de Nederlandse adel', *Virtus*, XIII (2006) 44-61.

⁷ F.F. baron de Smeth van Alphen, 'Adel in Nederland: niet meer zichtbaar, wel merkbaar. Resultaten van de enquête onder leden van de Nederlandse adel, november 2005', *Virtus*, XIII (2006) 7-43.

Van Adel, newsletter of the Nederlandse
Adelsvereniging (Dutch Nobility Association)



We will use this wide variety of questions in the NAV survey to analyze whether the Dutch nobility should be regarded as a distinct social class with a unique slate of characteristics, habits, norms, and values. In doing so, social particularities may be uncovered that will help explain the proportional overrepresentation of Dutch nobles in elite positions. In this context, noble attitudes, noble class consciousness, lifestyles, and forms of noble networks are the focal points of our analysis.

Selectivity

The NAV survey's initial aim was to gain an overview of the socioeconomic composition and the internal structure of the Dutch nobility. Thus, a maximal degree of representativeness was sought. The addresses of the respondents were collected via the 'Red Book'⁸. However, the NAV survey exhibits a certain inherent bias to the sample. That the survey was conducted by the NAV hints at its members being overrepresented among the respondents. Naturally, nobles who are interested in topics of nobility and for whom nobility is a form of social self-identification were more willing to participate in such a study. That they completed the questionnaire reveals a degree of interest and involvement on the respondents' part concerning matters of nobility. This bias must be kept in mind when assessing whether Dutch nobles remain conscious of their background. In the discussion about a subsumable noble class consciousness, we certainly must assume that the NAV questionnaire respondents were considerably more class conscious than the Dutch nobility on average. This is further indicated by the fact that 29% of the respondents were members of one or more regional and religious knightly orders. In

⁸ These 'Red Books' (or editions of *Nederland's Adelsboek*) are published by the Centraal Bureau voor Genealogie in The Hague. In compiling the various editions of these books, the Bureau uses all information available on the genealogies of Dutch noble families.

contrast, only 5.6% of the Dutch nobility on the whole belong to such associations.⁹ Thus, a bias exists towards certain subgroups of the Dutch nobility, which seem to be informally connected to the NAV. Apparently, noble organizations such as knightly orders are a pool uniting those nobles who take an active interest in matters of nobility.

Furthermore, the overrepresentation of class-conscious nobles and NAV members bears some significant side-effects. For instance, the respondents of this study are relatively old. The average age of the respondents was over 50 years. Older generations tend to care more about traditions and nobility. In addition, more than twice as many men as women completed the questionnaire. This may be related to the exclusively or predominantly male character of noble associations. Similarly, it is reasonable to assume that the NAV survey respondents are richer than the Dutch nobility is on average. Not least, respondents need a certain amount of spare time to inform themselves about nobility matters and to complete a questionnaire as long and detailed as that of the NAV.

Internal differentiation within the Dutch nobility

The results of previously mentioned studies of the Dutch nobility are confirmed by the data collected for this study (see Table 1). Of the respondents, 40% reported an annual income exceeding the Dutch average by at least 100%. One third of the respondents have assets of at least 250,000 Euros, and 10% of the respondents have assets of one million euros or more. Equally important, 47% of the respondents hold a university degree. These results show that the Dutch nobility has not only preserved its social status but also that a high percentage of Dutch nobles is socially ambitious and actively seeks to gain elite positions by acquiring academic degrees and qualifications. However, the selectivity of responses to the NAV survey (older males; more successful persons) may lead to an overestimation of the social position of the Dutch nobility.

In addition, Table 1 shows that nobles differ in both lifestyle and mentality from the bourgeoisie. For instance, it has been found that 53% of our participants vote for the Dutch right-wing liberal party, 15% vote for the Christian Democratic Party. Table 1 shows also that 40% of the respondents are members of a knightly order, while this percentage is much lower among all Dutch nobles.¹⁰ Of the participants, 40% have three or more children. These observations lead us to think that the Dutch nobility and/or the respondents of the NAV survey are on average more traditionalist in terms of culture and mentality than the rest of the society.

Via this analysis, we seek to uncover significant relations between nobles' success in society and their corresponding political and private attitudes, along with their mentalities and lifestyles. For this reason, all relevant variables described in the data section of this article have been included in a factor analysis. However, some variables have been merged in order to be used in the factor analysis. For example, the variables determining the membership of specific knightly orders have been merged into one single variable determining whether a participant is a member of any knightly order.

⁹ J. Dronkers. 'Has the Dutch Nobility Retained its Social Relevance During the 20th Century?', *European Sociological Review*, XIX (2003) 81-96.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

Factor analysis is a statistical procedure that allows researchers to determine relationships between several continuous variables. At its core, a correlation matrix of all variables involved has been produced. Via this matrix, patterns of correlations between the variables can be found; these are known as dimensions. Factor analysis is a technique to simplify these patterns of correlations, allowing us to focus on groups of variables. We may describe this procedure as a method of data reduction of many variables into a few dimensions. The variables selected for the factor analysis cover the main topics of research: success and income, education, ambition, noble identity, networking, traditions, and family environment. By conducting a principal component analysis, three useful and substantive factors or dimensions have been identified. These factors or dimensions explained 34% of the variance (varimax rotation with Kaiser normalization). The loadings of the selected variables on the three dimensions are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The three dimensions or factors with Dutch nobility (the figures in italics contribute heavily to a dimension)

	<i>Noble class consciousness</i>	<i>Success in modern society</i>	<i>Noble family socialization</i>
Annual income	0.03	0.71	0.05
Tax class	0.13	0.56	0.03
Number of employees	-0.16	0.57	-0.09
Unpaid function or work in any association or organization	0.13	0.39	-0.08
Level of education	-0.15	0.48	0.07
Parents' education level	-0.11	0.07	0.18
Frequency of discussions with the parents about the topic 'nobility'	0.13	-0.04	0.92
Frequency of contacts to other nobles	0.33	0.48	0.19
Habit to bear a noble title in daily life	0.39	0.33	0.00
Wish for more active and public engagement of the Dutch nobility association	0.68	0.16	0.17
Wish for more active and public engagement of the knightly orders	0.67	0.09	0.21
Wish for more active and public engagement of religious knightly orders such as the Johanniter Order and the Order of Malta	0.60	0.00	0.25
Capability to recognize other nobles at first sight	0.43	0.05	0.21
Degree of acceptance of the statement 'noblesse oblige'	0.53	0.20	0.18
Opinion on the compatibility of the nobility with the Dutch society / Relevance assigned to the nobility in the Dutch society	0.67	-0.02	0.01
Definition of the role of the nobility to serve the royal court	0.77	-0.11	-0.08
Wish for stronger bonds between the nobility and the royal family	0.81	-0.12	-0.02
Wish for more engagement and participation of Dutch nobles at the royal court	0.77	-0.10	0.01
Self-perception as an elite	0.46	-0.01	0.14
Number of children	-0.09	0.35	0.05
Frequency of discussions with the children about the topic 'nobility'	0.28	0.13	0.55
Contacts of the children with other nobles	-0.06	0.26	0.07
Habit of the children to bear a noble title in daily life	0.03	0.07	0.14
Possession of the traditional family house	0.05	-0.15	-0.01
Religious education in childhood	0.04	0.06	0.05
Political opinion on a spectrum from left- to right-wing	0.40	0.32	-0.05
Degree of information on matters of nobility	0.27	0.19	0.26
Membership to a knightly order	0.25	0.41	0.20
Noble homogamy	-0.05	0.13	0.02
Parents' noble homogamy	0.01	0.15	0.04

Source: NAV survey (own computation).

By grouping the high-loading variables (greater than 0.4) on any of the components, the factors or dimensions could be identified and labeled. The first factor was named *noble class consciousness*. Most of the high-loading variables on this factor determine respondents' mindset and societal opinions. Individuals scoring high on this factor desire more public engagement of the nobility and stronger bonds of the nobility to the royal court. Noble class consciousness entails the conviction that the Dutch nobility forms a proper cultural group with a prominent social role and moral obligations within society. In this sense, and as it is linked to political attitudes, noble class consciousness is partly ideological in character. Noble class consciousness may also be regarded as a form of traditional noble identity. The second factor determines the respondents' success in society. While it is mainly defined by annual income, tax class, and how many people the respondents employ, membership in knightly orders also plays a role. The third factor determines the character of a respondent's family—we label it *noble family socialization*. It is mainly defined by the importance assigned to noble socialization within the respondents' families and during education. This dimension is independent of the first, but here, the focus is on the extent to which noble culture is anchored within a family and transmitted from one generation to the next.

As seen in Table 2 above, the educational level loads high on the factor of success. The better educated nobles are, the richer they on average become. These results confirm the findings of earlier studies: education is certainly a strong predictor for the nobility's success. Therefore, it seems that the modernization of social capital is a necessary prerequisite for a noble's success in society. Insofar, these results hint towards our first hypothesis based on the modernization theory. However, there is a slightly positive relationship between wealth (determined through the tax class) and the first dimension (noble class consciousness): strong noble class consciousness goes hand in hand with a solid financial standing. By the same token, noble class consciousness is negatively related to education. Thus, we may observe that nobles who have a pronounced class consciousness are on average less educated and financially more successful than Dutch nobles on average. This may seem paradoxical insofar as there is a strong positive correlation between the variables determining financial capital and education. The fact that respondents who have a strong noble class consciousness are on average relatively rich even though they are not particularly educated clearly contradicts the modernization theory.

Even more important, the modernization theory fails to explain why the Dutch nobility on average performs significantly better in terms of socioeconomic success than the bourgeoisie does. This phenomenon may be explained by networking among nobles. In this respect, noble class consciousness is of key importance, as it forms the cultural basis of noble networks. Contacts with other nobles are useful in modern society: as shown in Table 2 above (second column), nobles holding many such contacts are more successful than average. By the same token, the frequency of contacts to other nobles via knightly orders, in private or for work-related reasons loads positively on the dimension of noble class consciousness. In other words, respondents engaged in noble networking tend to have a more pronounced noble identity and are more successful than nobles who do not maintain such contacts.

Apparently, there is a paradox here that neither the first nor the second hypothesis explains. Overall, the relation between noble class consciousness and the variables determining success is ambivalent. As noted above, noble class consciousness is negatively related to education yet positively related to wealth. As noble identity and success are distinct dimensions, there is no significant relationship between these two. However, both dimensions are positively related to those variables determining networking *intensity* among nobles. As we have observed, contacts to other nobles help one succeed in society. At the same time, the networking variables load positively on the dimension of noble class consciousness. To learn which types of nobles are successful, class conscious, or most engaged in networking, we divided the sample into several subgroups, which were tested on their respective factor scores.

Factor scores are scores of the respondent on a certain dimension: the higher the factor score, the more often a respondent has a positive answer on the important variables of that dimension. Thus, for any study respondent, three factor scores, one for each dimension, have been computed.¹¹ In order to understand how groups of nobles may differ, we distinguish our sample by age, gender, education, and religion, as well as membership or non-membership in knightly orders.

First, the sample was divided into three age groups: 18 to 44 years, 45 to 64 years and those who are 65 years or older. Thus, cross-generational effects in the development of the Dutch nobility could be observed. Furthermore, it could be assessed whether the increased level of success among Dutch nobles is of a sustainable nature. The means of the factor scores corresponding to the respective age groups can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Mean scores on the three dimensions within Dutch nobility by age group (standard deviation in parenthesis)

	18-44 years (n=108)	45-64 years (n=176)	65+ years (n=122)
Noble class consciousness	-0.89 (0.98)	-0.09 (0.99)	0.25 (1.05)
Success in modern society	-0.26 (0.91)	0.07 (0.97)	0.15 (1.08)
Noble family socialization	-0.45 (0.89)	-0.07 (0.90)	0.58 (0.97)

Source: NAV survey (own computation).

Although the twentieth century nobility forms the topmost group of Dutch society in terms of financial success, it is notable that their level of success—measured here by means of the factor scores—has declined on average from generation to generation. In general, this observation accords with the modernization theory. However, this process is remarkably late and slow: we see a slight decrease in the means of the factor scores of success for the first post-war generation. The means of the first post-war generation compared to those of the last pre-war generation have dropped from 0.15 to 0.07. This difference is rather marginal and not particularly significant. However, there is a major drop in terms of success to observe for the youngest generation in our sample (from 0.07 to -0.26). In large part, this decrease in success may be explained by the fact that

¹¹ The means of all factor scores have been defined as 0 and the corresponding standard deviations as 1.

nobles younger than 45 years generally have reached neither the peak of their career nor inherited great sums of capital. Thus, the low factor scores of young nobles' success should be regarded with extreme caution. Nonetheless, there is a slight general trend to observe in the second half of the twentieth century: The Dutch nobility is slowly getting poorer—although, compared with the rest of the society, it might still be rich. Yet we can see a parallel trend: After the Second World War, noble family socialization has thoroughly changed. Apparently, today, nobility matters are less often discussed with family members than before the war. The topic *nobility* has lost its relevance in the education and socialization of Dutch nobles. Accordingly, the means of the factor scores of noble family socialization have dropped across three generations (from 0.59 to -0.07 to -0.45). We may conclude that, specifically, noble forms of education in childhood have eroded. Similarly, a sharp decrease in noble class consciousness after the war is observed. According to our data, contemporary Dutch nobles define their identity less through their nobility than they did half a century ago. However, this decrease was restricted to the immediate postwar period and halted in the second half of the twentieth century: the youngest generation of Dutch nobles (additional analyses not shown) appears just as class conscious as the first postwar generation—although the youngest generation's higher class consciousness might also be a consequence of response selectivity. In sum, noble identity is nowadays preserved by the youngest generation of nobles, although it had declined significantly by the mid-20th century. As the scores of noble family socialization have declined while those on class consciousness remained stable over the last two generations, we may conclude that noble identity is no longer communicated primarily via the family but presumably via other methods. In this context, we will consider the role played by noble associations and knightly orders.

The next subgroup tested consists of nobles holding university degrees. The factor scores of this subgroup are seen in Table 4.

Table 4. Mean score on the three dimensions within Dutch nobility by university degree (standard deviation in parenthesis)

	University degree (n=200)	No university degree (n=226)
Noble class consciousness	-0.06 (0.99)	0.05 (1.00)
Success in modern society	0.50 (0.85)	-0.42 (0.90)
Noble family socialization	-0.15 (0.99)	0.12 (0.98)

Source: NAV survey (own computation).

Strikingly, nobles who have attained a university education are significantly more successful than the noble average. The mean of the factor score of success is approximately 0.5 and thus significantly higher than the noble average of 0; this is no surprise, for education is an important variable loading on the second dimension (see Table 2 above). Moreover, the correlation between the variables measuring the attained educational level and the annual income is 0.304. It is difficult to tell how this advantage in terms of education reflects in net income. However, we know that 94% of the nobles holding a university degree earn more than the Dutch average. In contrast, only 74% of the nobles without a university degree earn more than the Dutch average. Of the

nobles with a university degree, 55% earn more than twice as much as the Dutch average, whereas only 25% of the nobles without a university degree earn as much. Similarly, 15% of the nobles with a university degree have assets of more than 1 million euro, whereas a similar degree of wealth is attained by only 8% of the nobles without a university degree. Hence, a university degree effectively doubles a noble's chances to become a millionaire. In general, good education improves one's chances to earn money and, accordingly, access to elite positions. In fact, education is the best available predictor to explain the nobility's success. Insofar, these results seem to confirm the first hypothesis and thereby the modernization theory: In order to succeed in contemporary society, nobles need to modernize their social capital. The most promising way to do so is to get a good education. The results suggest that the nobility's wealth is no longer self-evident but instead is linked with qualifications and social ambition. Yet we observe another hint in favour of the modernization theory: the factor scores on noble class consciousness and family socialization of noble university degree holders are slightly below average. Apparently, noble identity and mentality communicated from parents to children is not necessary for a noble to become successful. On the contrary, the noble class consciousness scale is negatively related to the educational level. To some extent, it seems that educated nobles have emancipated themselves from their noble background and adopted modern, bourgeois mentalities.

Nonetheless, one might still wonder why even nobles who have had the benefit of a university education continue to earn significantly more than an average Dutch person and why they retain remarkable wealth. Some of them might be the beneficiaries of inheritances, but that fact alone cannot explain why they are able to report relatively high annual incomes. Equally important, the modernization theory cannot explain why university-educated nobles perform so extraordinarily well – in fact, they significantly outperform university-educated persons who do not stem from the nobility. The answer is that although noble class consciousness no longer prevails among all nobles, the nobility provides many networking opportunities. Indeed, Table 5 shows that members of knightly orders score higher on the scale of success than non-members do.

Table 5. Mean scores on the three dimensions within Dutch nobility by members and non-members of any knightly order or nobility association (standard deviation in parenthesis)

	<i>Members (n=187)</i>	<i>Non-members (n=243)</i>
Noble class consciousness	0.28 (0.90)	-0.21 (1.01)
Success in modern society	0.48 (0.92)	-0.37 (0.89)
Noble family socialization	0.25 (1.02)	-0.19 (0.92)

Source: NAV survey (own computation).

The mean of the scores of a member of a knightly order or a noble association on the success dimension is 0.49, almost as high as that of nobles having a university degree. This suggests that knightly orders are platforms of networking on which successful nobles meet and may establish useful contacts for their careers. As shown in Table 5 above, knightly orders unite a remarkable concentration of successful individuals. As

knightly orders are exclusively noble associations, the nobility gains an advantage vis-à-vis the rest of the society. Therefore, the nobility's success might be explained by nobles networking with each other, whereby knightly orders are the most prominent examples. However, considering that order members are more successful than other nobles, we must not infer that there is an underlying causality. We cannot tell whether successful individuals meet in knightly orders because they are successful or whether they are successful because they meet in knightly orders. It may be equally possible that a hidden variable exists that possibly influences the correlation between success and order membership. To rule out such variables and to search for causality, we will return to this issue in a future article. For this study, we merely checked whether respondents holding a university degree continue to profit from being a knightly order member.

Table 6. Mean scores on the three dimensions within Dutch nobility by members and non-members of any knightly order with or without a university degree (standard deviation in parenthesis)

	<i>Member of knightly order & university degree (n=96)</i>	<i>Member of knightly no university degree (n=91)</i>	<i>Non-member of knightly order & university degree (n=104)</i>	<i>Non-member of knightly order & no university degree (n=135)</i>
Noble class consciousness	0.19 (0.96)	0.37 (0.83)	-0.30 (0.95)	-0.16 (1.06)
Success in modern society	0.94 (0.68)	0.00 (0.89)	0.10 (0.79)	-0.71 (0.27)
Noble family socialization	0.06 (1.02)	0.45 (0.98)	-0.36 (0.92)	-0.09 (0.91)

Source: NAV survey (own computation).

For the respondents who have both a university degree and are members of a knightly order, the mean of the factor scores on success was approximately 0.95, compared to 0.51 seen in Table 4 above (university degree) or 0.49 seen in Table 5 above (knightly order). Hence, the benefits conferred by education and order membership are almost fully cumulative. University-educated order members are much more successful than university-educated non-members. Thus, nobles who have modernized their social capital by acquiring a university degree may extract even greater profit from traditional noble networking structures. In this context, it is notable that the scales measuring noble class consciousness are higher than the average for members of knightly orders, both the university educated and the non-educated. That nobles organized in knightly orders remain more conscious of their nobility than others is of course not surprising. However, this observation contradicts the modernization theory. In view of this theory, it seems paradoxical that the most successful subgroup of the sample, consisting of university-educated order members, has scores higher than average on the noble class consciousness scale. Apparently, these individuals are remarkably successful while maintaining a traditionally noble form of identity. In this sense, the most successful Dutch nobles are less *bourgeois* than the Dutch nobility on average. A viable explanation is offered by the second hypothesis: by virtue of observing that many nobles preserve their traditional identity and do not fully merge into the bourgeoisie, we may explain that they form associations and networks. Through organizations such as knightly orders, nobles may form an exclusive, close-knit community based on mutual recognition and support. Through networking, they gain an advantage in modern society, as they establish useful contacts resulting in higher incomes and access to elite

positions. Granovetter¹² explained in his theory on networks how weak ties between individuals who hardly know each other may form stable communities offering support and protection. Equally important, he showed that individuals connected through weak ties may increase their chances to become financially successful: Social contacts help one to find a good job. Through associations such as knightly orders, nobles may form communities offering such contacts. Similarly, Dronkers and Hilege¹³ showed in earlier studies that board members of Dutch student associations are more likely to gain access to elite positions than non-members are. Similar mechanisms seem to apply to knightly orders. The character of noble associations is exclusive. Through this exclusivity, noble identity is maintained and preserved. It thus forms the foundation of noble associations. In that sense, noble identity is linked to the extraordinary success of the Dutch nobility as it engenders community potential in building networking platforms.

The idea that networking in knightly orders may be responsible for the Dutch nobility's success is fostered by some observations regarding social differences between noble men and women.

Table 7. Mean score on the three dimensions within Dutch nobility by men and women (standard deviation in parenthesis)

	Men (n=290)	Women (n=140)
Noble class consciousness	0.09 (0.99)	-0.18 (0.97)
Success in modern society	0.28 (0.97)	-0.58 (0.77)
Noble family socialization	-0.02 (1.04)	0.05 (0.89)

Source: NAV survey (own computation).

By comparing the factor scores of men and women, we found that noble men are significantly more successful than noble women. In addition, men share on average a more developed noble class consciousness than noble women do. These results go hand-in-hand with earlier findings: Knightly orders are usually reserved for men. Through noble associations, men are afforded better opportunities than women are to form a distinctively noble class consciousness. As explained, men may get the chance to build networks and to cooperate in their careers, whereas women remain largely excluded from such noble social structures. Furthermore, a comparison of the factor scores of success may lead to the suspicion that noble women are not emancipated and that the traditional family model still holds among nobles. Thus, it may be equally explained why noble families are on average relatively large. The fertility rate of our sample is 1.93 children per person – which is, compared with the Dutch average of 1.66, relatively high. Moreover, we observe a trend towards large families: almost 40% of the respondents had three children or more, whereas about 30% had no children at the time the study was conducted. These findings show that the nobility's societal success is largely reserved for men. Similarly, men tend to adopt a noble class consciousness

¹² M. Granovetter, *Getting a Job. A Study of Contacts and Careers* (Chicago, 1995).

¹³ J. Dronkers and S. M. M. Hilege. 'Board Membership of Traditional Male Fraternities and Access to Dutch Elites: A Disappearing Avenue to Elite Positions?', *European Sociological Review*, XIV (1998) 191-204.



85th *Ridderdag* or annual meeting of the protestant Johanniter Orde in the Netherlands, in the presence of Prince Bernhard, Land Commander, June 16th, 1984 (photo Rob Bogaerts; coll. National Archives, The Hague)

more than women do, which might be explained by the fact that men are better organized in noble networks.

What are the most effective forms of noble networks? For the sake of this analysis, religious knightly orders dating back to the crusades have been compared with regional noble associations, the *Ridderschappen*. In the Netherlands, there are three religious knightly orders of which two are Protestant and one is Catholic: the *Ridderlijke Duitse Orde Balije van Utrecht* (the Teutonic Order (Protestant)), the *Souvereine Militaire Orde van Malta* (the Sovereign Order of Malta (Catholic)), and the *Johanniter Orde* (the Knights Hospitallers (Protestant)). The regional orders comprise the *Ridderschappen* of Noord-Brabant, Gelderland, Utrecht, Overijssel, Friesland, and Zeeland. In Table 8, we compare their scores on the three dimensions within Dutch nobility.

Table 8. Mean score on the three dimensions within Dutch nobility by membership of religious or regional knightly orders (standard deviation in parenthesis)

	Religious orders (n=46)	Regional orders (n=56)
Noble class consciousness	0.60 (0.89)	0.32 (0.91)
Success in modern society	0.42 (0.86)	0.69 (0.74)
Noble family socialization	0.40 (1.10)	0.13 (1.04)

Source: NAV survey (own computation).

Most important here is to observe that members of regional orders on average score higher on the success scale than members of religious orders do, while the latter score higher on the noble class consciousness and the noble family socialization scales. We may assume that entering a religious order is a matter of conviction: Typically, persons with a well-developed noble identity enter such an order. For instance, to enter communities such as the Teutonic Order, strict membership criteria must be fulfilled. The motivation to become a member certainly originates from a noble identity: Members enter, as they may identify with noble traditions or particular family traditions. For regional orders, this seems to be true only to a lesser degree. Most regional orders are not as old as the religious orders, and they do not follow as many traditions—the only membership criteria is a certain historical link between the respective region and the potential member's family. Due to the regional character of these knightly orders, members might be geographically closer to each other, probably see each other more often, and have more contacts to each other independent of, and outside, the order's yearly meetings. Thus, entering a regional order seems to be much more a matter of practicality than conviction. This may explain why noble class consciousness is less prevalent in regional orders than in religious orders. In addition, it may explain why members of regional orders score higher on the scale of success. By entering a regional order, members might consciously seek out contact with other nobles: Here, the community-networking aspect is more important than the noble-tradition aspect. As members are geographically closer to each other, contacts are most likely of a more intensive nature. Accordingly, members of regional orders can better profit from the bonus that networking among successful individuals may convey to their careers.

Another focal point of analysis was to research whether any socioeconomic differences between religious groups among Dutch nobles exist. Traditionally, the Dutch nobility is predominantly Protestant. However, in the southern region of the Netherlands, in Limburg and Brabant, Catholics are in the majority. As observed almost anywhere in Europe, secularization started earlier among Protestants than among Catholics. Thus, Protestants were more prone to abandon their religious traditions and to become atheists than Catholics were. Today, the largest religious group is formed by atheists—although the Dutch nobility is on average still more religious than the rest of the society. Table 9 presents the scores on the three dimensions within nobility of the respective religious groups.

Table 9. Mean score on the three dimensions within Dutch nobility by religious affiliation (standard deviation in parenthesis)

	<i>Protestants (n=95)</i>	<i>Catholics (n=61)</i>	<i>Atheists (n=122)</i>
Noble class consciousness	0.34 (0.90)	0.14 (0.82)	-0.24 (1.08)
Success in modern society	0.42 (0.94)	0.08 (1.09)	-0.23 (0.98)
Noble family socialization	0.35 (0.92)	0.44 (1.16)	0.23 (0.85)

Source: NAV survey (own computation).

In general, we find a tendency contradicting the modernization theory: Religious nobles are more successful than atheists. According to the modernization theory, religious background or religiosity should not be related to the level of success in a modern

rational society. So how to explain the observed differences? In this context, the other factor scores are relevant as well. It is remarkable that Protestants have a more pronounced noble class consciousness than Catholics have, while the respective mean score for atheists is negative. Across the religious groups, apparently, a positive correlation exists between the factor scores of success and noble class consciousness. In this context, it is not surprising that atheists do not have a strong noble class consciousness: noble traditions and religion are closely linked to each other. In this sense, atheism is by itself practically incommensurable with noble traditionalism. How to explain the finding that religious nobles who are conscious and even proud of their nobility are more successful than atheists who abandoned their traditional noble mentality? Again, we observe a certain connection between nobles' identity and success. The preservation of a traditional lifestyle does not hinder nobles in achieving success within a modern capitalist society; on the contrary, the two may go hand-in-hand. Religiosity is a crucial aspect of a certain traditionalism that differentiates large parts of the Dutch nobility from the bourgeoisie and the rest of the society. Noble traditionalism is the backbone of the identity that is so characteristic for the Dutch nobility and that allows Dutch nobles to form a distinct social group. Noble class consciousness is the basis of any form of noble network - why would anybody join a knightly order if he could not identify himself with the Dutch nobility? Similarly, religiosity - as a part of the noble identity and lifestyle - is linked to the phenomenon of noble networks. As already mentioned, the oldest knightly orders are religious orders. Accordingly, the aspect of religiosity is notable among the membership criteria of the Teutonic Order, the Knights Hospitallers, and the Order of Malta. Thus, it would appear from the data that religious nobles are more prone to network than atheists are.

However, we observed some significant differences between Catholics and Protestants: The latter are more successful and score higher on the noble class consciousness scale. These differences may only be explained by the historical development of the Dutch nobility. Although the Netherlands became a Protestant nation, a substantial part of the population remained Catholic. Catholic nobles in the south were predominantly landed, whereas northern Protestant nobles were present in the coastal urban trade centers and the Northern provinces. Accordingly, Protestants were much more engaged in capitalist activities and held more contacts to the rising bourgeoisie than Catholics did. Moreover, the Netherlands were ruled by Protestant elites: apart from the southern provinces, Catholics were generally excluded from holding elite positions on a national level. Thus, the Catholic nobility never gained as much in terms of wealth and power as its Protestant counterpart. The socioeconomic and political marginalization of the Catholic nobility in the last centuries may explain why, even today, Catholic nobles are not as successful as Protestants in acquiring wealth and elite positions. Similarly, the Catholic nobility is not as thoroughly organized as the northern Protestant nobility. In fact, most of the knightly orders are Protestant. This lack of organization is thus reflected in the difference in terms of success and noble class consciousness between Protestants and Catholics.

Conclusions

By statistically analyzing the questionnaire answered by 430 Dutch nobles, it has been confirmed that in our modern era, the Dutch nobility remains financially successful and still possessed of considerable capital. Although the level of financial success has slowly declined during the twentieth century, the Dutch nobility is on average wealthier and better educated than any other social class. Moreover, the Dutch nobility differs from the rest of the society in terms of political and social attitudes, voting behavior, and religiosity. Traditional opinions and lifestyles still prevail among Dutch nobles. Equally, the traditional family model is still applied by large parts of the Dutch nobility: Dutch nobles have more children and larger families. Accordingly, women often do not pursue independent careers in the labor force. Even more important, many nobles are conscious of, and feel pride in, their noble heritage and assign great societal importance to the nobility in general. Therefore, we may speak of a noble class consciousness persistent in modernity. As a result, segments of the nobility are organized in associations and knightly orders on a religious or regional basis. In addition, many nobles wish for more public engagement of noble associations such as knightly orders. In view of these particularities, we conclude that the Dutch nobility still forms a distinct social group or class differing from the bourgeoisie.

The main purpose of this study was to analyze how the nobility could preserve its prominent position within the Dutch society. Two hypotheses served as a guideline for analysis. The first hypothesis was informed by the modernization theory: It suggested that the modernization of social capital is an indispensable prerequisite for success in a rationalized modern society. The second hypothesis was based on the opposite assumption: It suggested that the nobility's extraordinary success may be explained by actions taken by nobles to preserve their traditional culture and social structures.

To some extent, both hypotheses are supported by the NAV survey data. On the one hand, those nobles able to modernize their social capital—for instance, by acquiring a university education—perform significantly better than those who are unable to do so. Today, a university education is the best available predictor of noble success. On the other hand, it has been found that successful and rich nobles are proportionally over-represented in noble associations such as knightly orders. Similarly, noble identity and class consciousness do prevail particularly among the richest and most successful parts of the Dutch nobility. In terms of success, order members perform significantly better than non-members do. Just as university education, membership of a knightly order is an excellent predictor of noble success. Furthermore, it has been found that regional orders, the *Ridderschappen*, gather more successful individuals into their circles than religious orders do. We might explain this phenomenon in this manner: knightly orders serve as regional networking platforms. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that career-oriented nobles are naturally attracted by knightly orders offering opportunities to establish contacts. By the same token, knightly orders are of an exclusive character: Only nobles are accepted as members, thus preserving old traditions and noble identity. The intellectual basis of all knightly orders is a specifically noble class consciousness. Although knightly orders are pre-modern institutions, they may flourish in modernity while safeguarding their traditional noble character. This observation can only be appropriately explained by networking theories.

The financially most successful subgroup of the sample consists of university-educated members of knightly orders. Hence, the most promising strategy of Dutch nobles to become socially and financially successful is via modernizing their social capital by gaining a university education while actively engaging in exclusively noble networking structures. Hence, the most successful nobles adapt to modernity even as they preserve their traditional class consciousness. In this context, it is crucial to understand that noble identity is incommensurable neither with modernity nor with capitalism. Noble identity does not prevail *despite* the ongoing rationalization of society but rather *within* our modern societal framework. Knightly orders are certainly not anachronistic. On the contrary, they function as networking centers uniting the more successful members of Dutch society. Certainly an interrelation between noble identity and order membership is clear. We suggest this relation is characterized by a feedback loop. While the persistence of noble identity forms the precondition for the existence of exclusively noble associations of any kind, by the same token, noble identity is upheld, strengthened, and fostered through communities such as knightly orders. As the Dutch nobility is socially organized in networks, it may preserve itself, both on a cultural and a socioeconomic level. The result of noble identity's persistence is not a noble parallel society, but an exclusively noble form of social culture. Simultaneously, Dutch nobles usually keep good contacts with the bourgeoisie—it would be a misinterpretation of this study to regard them as outsiders of the Dutch society.

In addition, internal differences within the Dutch nobility have been found. On average, religious nobles are more societal successful than atheists. This may be explained by acknowledging that traditional noble identity is more prevalent among religious individuals than among atheists. Religiosity, as a form of traditionalism, is certainly part of noble culture. Accordingly, religious nobles are more prone to join knightly orders and to network. In fact, some knightly orders are explicitly religious. Thus, religious individuals are more likely to gain contacts with other nobles. This may result in an increased level of financial success. Moreover, significant differences between Protestants and Catholics have been found. Protestant nobles earn on average more money and they have a more pronounced noble class consciousness. In addition, they are more strongly represented in knightly orders. These differences in terms of success and mentality may be explained by the Dutch nobility's historical background. Historically, the Netherlands were politically and economically dominated by Protestants. Accordingly, on a national level, Catholic nobles were largely excluded from elite structures and politically marginalized. As a result, Dutch Catholic nobles do not share the same class consciousness prevalent among Protestant nobles. This may explain why Catholics are less prone to form noble networks.

The persistence of a traditional noble social environment and culture contradicts the modernization theory. The Dutch nobility's success demonstrates that modern society is far more complex and considerably less rationalized and meritocratic than modernization theorists claim. Even in a widely rationalized bourgeois-dominated meritocracy, traditional cultures may survive if their members are able to form networks and stable social structures based on a common identity, including values and traditions.

Wider implications of the results

How representative are the results of this study in a wider European context? The great advantage of any research on the Dutch nobility is that it is, compared with other European nobilities, relatively free of nation-specific particularities. In the last three hundred years, Dutch history was largely unaffected by major socioeconomic caesuras such as revolutions or great wars. In that sense, the Dutch nobility remained untouched. Hence, it is much easier to analyze the Dutch nobility than its European counterparts, and the results yielded may be considered representative for the European nobility at large. In contrast, in France, a distinction between Napoleonic and pre-revolution nobles must be made. Moreover, many individuals claiming French noble heritage have been in exile since the French revolution, which hinders any effective socioeconomic statistical analysis of the French nobility. In Germany, the Prussian nobility lost its landed properties during the Second World War when the German population was expelled from Prussia, Silesia, and Pomerania. Therefore, the Protestant German nobility is considerably poorer than its southern Catholic counterpart. Similarly, Austrian nobles originating from Bohemia, Hungary, Moravia, Rumania, or Yugoslavia have been expropriated. Moreover, in Austria, nobles are forbidden to bear their titles since the downfall of the Habsburg monarchy. The absence of revolutions, expropriations, and other caesural historical changes therefore makes the Dutch nobility an ideal subject of study.

The most outstanding particularity of the Dutch nobility is that it is comparatively a young manifestation of European social strata: most of the Protestant nobles gained their titles during the nineteenth century. Many patricians gained access to the Dutch nobility as of result of their financial success. Thus, the Dutch nobility is characterized by a strong sociohistorical interlink to patrician classes. In contrast to important segments of the German and Austrian nobility, the Protestant branch of the Dutch nobility especially has acquired its wealth by engaging in capitalist activities. With regards to the Dutch nobility, landed possessions are only of minor importance. In this sense, the Dutch nobility might be more bourgeois than most of its European counterparts. But the low level of Dutch ennoblement from the second half of the nineteenth century until 1918 in comparison with the high levels of ennoblement in Austria-Hungary, Germany, and the United Kingdom in that same period might contradict this bourgeoisie character of Dutch nobility. The ennoblements of more and more high bourgeois in Austria-Hungary, Germany, and the United Kingdom between 1848 and 1918 increased the level of 'bourgeoisisation' of the Austrian, Hungarian, German, and British nobilities, while the ennoblement of high bourgeois into the Dutch nobility has a low pace after 1848. However, this bias does not render our study unrepresentative. Although the Dutch nobility is to a relatively high degree *bourgeoised* and to a large extent of bourgeois descent, it has been found that socioeconomic differences between members of the nobility and the high bourgeoisie in the Netherland persist.¹⁴ As the Dutch nobility is of bourgeois origin, these differences are expected to be more clear-cut in other European societies in which the historical interlink between nobility and

¹⁴ Schijf, e.a., 'Recruitment of Members'.

bourgeoisie is less manifest. It is to suspect that this study's findings concluding the Dutch nobility still forms a socioeconomically privileged class are transferable to an even greater degree to other European societies.

Caveats

Although the NAV study aimed to select respondents with Dutch noble titles randomly, there might be a certain bias. As already explained in the selectivity section of this article, the addresses of all respondents were collected with the aid of the 'Red Books.' That a noble willingly participated in this study indicates someone interested in the topic *nobility* and who may identify with the idea of a noble background. Thus, there is a bias inherent to the nobles who responded and returned the questionnaires: Possibly, the respondents of this study tend to be more conscious of their nobility than the Dutch nobility on average. As a side-effect, the respondents of this study are relatively old in comparison with all Dutch nobles. Moreover, males are overrepresented. Regarding the results of this study, this bias towards age and noble class consciousness should be considered. Furthermore, the response rate of this survey was rather low. Accordingly, in part, this study's findings suggesting differences between the nobility and the bourgeoisie in terms of mentality are thereby leveled. The results presented in this article thereby should be accepted with some caution.