

# Has the Dutch Nobility Retained its Social Relevance during the 20th Century?

*Jaap Dronkers*

In earlier studies we found that the Dutch nobility continues to have a strong advantage in achieving elite positions within Dutch society today, despite its very weak legal status since the late 19th century. The aim of this article is to explore some of the possible reasons why this ascriptive characteristic has remained important in a modern and bourgeois society such as the Netherlands. From the official lists of members of the Dutch nobility, we selected all 3,977 persons born in the 20th century in 113 Dutch noble lineages with surnames starting with letters between H and Na. Membership of knightly orders (Johanniter, Malta) correlates positively with tertiary education and increases the odds of obtaining elite positions in the Netherlands. The 13 per cent of these members of the Dutch nobility marrying a noble husband or wife indicates homogamy with an odds-ratio of 23. The odds of obtaining elite positions did not decrease significantly for members of the Dutch nobility born between 1900 and 1940, and the lower odds for the members of the nobility born after 1940 are attributable to their youth. The continuing advantage of members of the Dutch nobility is most easily attributable to their bourgeois origins and their modernization of their social and cultural capital.

## Introduction

This article revolves around the following two pieces of the puzzle that arise from the confrontation between observation and theory: a contradiction between the empirical significance of the ascriptive characteristic ‘title of nobility’ and the implications of modernization theory. The puzzle is as follows: Why did membership of the Dutch nobility remain an advantage in achieving elite positions in the Netherlands in the 20th century, while the importance of other ascriptive characteristics (e.g. class and gender) for social mobility in society as a whole declined in the same century?

In sociology, modernization theory, which has a reasonable empirical basis, plays an important role. This theory is based on the rationalization of societies and the disappearance of traditional cultures. The implications for the foundations of social inequality are clear: the effect of ascriptive

characteristics (e.g. nobility, class, and gender) is less in modern societies than in traditional ones, while the effect of achieved characteristics (e.g. intelligence, motivation, ambition, and education) is greater. The force of this transition from ascriptive characteristics to achieved ones in intergenerational mobility remains controversial (Goldthorpe and Erikson, 1992; Shavit and Blossfeld, 1993), although its occurrence throughout the 20th century in the Netherlands and in other societies is beyond dispute (Dronkers and Ultee, 1995; Ganzeboom, Treiman, and Ultee, 1991; Rijken, 1999). The Dutch nobility’s continuing social relevance throughout the 20th century (for instance its advantage in acquiring elite positions) contradicts this modernization theory. Solving this puzzle requires a more solid structure and analysis of new data to explain the contradiction. In this article I present such an analysis of

new data and a more solid structure to enhance understanding of this conflict with modernization theory.

I begin the article by reviewing the contradiction between the significance of the ascriptive characteristic ‘title of nobility’ and modernization theory. Afterwards, I discuss the new data that I have used for the analysis: the characteristics of all members of the nobility born since 1900. I then use these new data to solve the aforementioned puzzle and reach conclusions.

Continuing access to elite positions of the Dutch nobility is one of the indicators of its social relevance during the 20th century, which has been the subject of study in recent years (see the following section). In order to broaden the scope of analysis, we also apply another indicator of the contradiction between the significance of the ascriptive characteristic ‘title of nobility’ and modernization theory: the extent of marriages between members of the Dutch nobility (noble homogamy). The prevalence of marriages within social groups indicates their social proximity. If the Dutch nobility has become socially irrelevant in the 20th century, then the prevalence of marriages within the Dutch nobility should no longer be disproportionately high. Nor should the conventional difference between men and women with respect to this disproportionate marriage pattern continue to exist. The new data also permit the testing of the degree and the development of noble homogamy.

## The Puzzle and Possible Solutions

The Dutch nobility’s continuing advantage in achieving elite positions in the Netherlands throughout the 20th century is highlighted by three studies.

I first encountered this finding in a study about possible functional equivalents of elite universities in the Netherlands. Traditional male fraternities are one such functional equivalent (Dronkers and Hillege, 1998). Accordingly, Hillege and I examined the chances of the 1,660 board members of these fraternities between 1920 and 1960 of achieving a position among the Dutch elite between 1960 and 1980. One of the corollary findings of this analysis was that membership of the Dutch nobility

increased the likelihood that these board members would later achieve elite positions, and that this increased likelihood had not diminished over time. This finding was remarkable, as the increased likelihood for board members from the Dutch *patriciate* (non-noble high bourgeoisie families) disappeared after checking the main subject, unlike the continued significantly greater likelihood among the Dutch nobility.

To determine whether our findings were unique for the student unions, Hillege and I expanded our data to include the board members of the two main confessional fraternities: the Protestant student association SSR and the Catholic student associations (Dronkers and Hillege, 1997). Even after expanding our research population (N=3,775), we continued to observe greater opportunities for obtaining an elite position among board members who were part of the nobility, whereas those from the *patriciate* were not more likely to do so. The most disconcerting aspect – taking modernization theory into account – was this undiminished, increased effect of noble origins: in 1920 board members who were part of the nobility were just as likely to obtain an elite position as in 1960.

A sample of 10,529 students from all Dutch universities and *Athenaeum Illustre* (universities without the right to confer the doctorate title) between 1815 and 1935 was the third place where I encountered the puzzle. Dronkers and colleagues (1996) examined which of these students served in high political offices and civil service positions between 1850 and 1995: members of the government, presidents of the Nederlandsche Bank, Secretaries-General of all departments, members of the Council of State, Commissioners of the King, mayors of the provincial capitals and of Amsterdam and Rotterdam, and Dutch ambassadors to the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Austria, Russia, and Japan. In this analysis, too, we found that membership of the Dutch nobility increased the chance of being appointed to high political and official positions, and that this likelihood did not diminish significantly during the 19th and 20th centuries.

Dronkers and Hillege (1998: 56 ff.) explain the ongoing positive effect of origins in the nobility. They note that most formulations of modernization theory rightly indicate a decline in the percentage of persons descended from the nobility acquiring elite

positions over the course of the 20th century. Most authors infer that such origins have become less important for gaining access to elite positions. But the first observation need not imply the second. The importance of noble origins declines only if social relationships change so rapidly (e.g. due to a revolution, defeat in a war, or a serious economic recession) that the old social and cultural family capital is no longer usable or ceases to apply under the new circumstances. Such rapid and dramatic changes in social relationships have never occurred in the Netherlands. Students from the nobility have therefore continued using their – adapted – social and cultural capital and have thus maintained their advantage over their bourgeois competitors.

Moreover, the nobility in the Netherlands is predominantly civil (*noblesse de la robe*), rather than military (*noblesse de l'épée*) or landed. In this respect the Dutch nobility differs from its counterparts in Belgium, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom, where the shares of military and landed nobility are much larger (Kuiper, 1993; Schmidt, 1986). The first reason for this difference in the type of nobility between the Netherlands and the surrounding European countries is the exceptional position of the republican Seven United Provinces (the predecessor of the Kingdom of the Netherlands) between 1580 and 1795 in Europe, which precluded appointments of or additions to the domestic nobility in the Netherlands. Members of the Dutch military nobility were few and far between, as officers were recruited from abroad ('no money, no Swiss mercenaries'). Nor was the landed nobility in the poorer inland provinces attractive to the wealthy citizens in the coastal provinces. The second reason for this difference was the policy on nobility in the brand-new Kingdom of the Netherlands (Bruin, 1992: 125). This policy served to resolve the late 18th century party disputes between supporters of the family of *Oranje-Nassau* (the new royal family) and the *Patriots* (republican citizens: Schama, 1977) and to secure the loyalty of the regents in the cities with voting rights in the new kingdom, by raising them to the nobility.

As a consequence of this deviant background, the Dutch nobility attains its status in one of the following four ways:

1. *Raising* (descendants of non-noble regent families in the cities with voting rights before 1795 or individuals who performed meritorious acts in the 19th century);
2. *Nomination to a provincial nobility council* (individuals nominated by the king in the provincial nobility councils during the first half of the 19th century; many were non-nobles who held already seigniorial rights in that province or belonged to the provincial nobility councils before 1795);
3. *Acknowledgement of old Dutch nobility* (members of lineages from the old domestic nobility before 1795);
4. *Inclusion of foreign nobility* (members of lineages from the non-Dutch nobility, who had settled in the Netherlands; Dutchmen raised to a non-Dutch nobility by a sovereign of another country).

One of this policy's major consequences was that a great many people owed their membership of the nobility to bourgeois and capitalist abilities rather than to a noble culture and past. Such a civil nobility is better able to adapt to the modern era than the military or landed nobility thanks to its financial, cultural, and social capital. Accordingly, the Dutch nobility has always reflected a strong civil bias. This may explain the total lack of any mention of the Dutch nobility in the reference work by Lieven (1992) on the European aristocracy in the 19th century.

The rules of Dutch nobility have much stronger resemblance with nobility from other continental European societies than with the British nobility. The Dutch noble titles and the way to inherit such a noble title (both older and cadet branches of a noble family) are more similar to the German and French than to the British. This resemblance is reflected in the policy that descendants of British nobility are less likely to be included in the Dutch nobility than those of continental nobility, due to the deviant nobility procedures in the UK.

In Europe there still exist three knightly orders, dating back to the mediaeval crusades to the Middle-East and the Baltic, which have Dutch branches: two Protestant (the German Order and the Johanniter Order<sup>1</sup>) and one Catholic (the Sovereign Military Order of Malta). These three knightly orders should not be confused with the Dutch equivalent of the Birthday Honours Lists. The latter are given by the Dutch government for good services to any person and are comparable to normal

republican orders like Légion d'Honneur. While membership of these three knightly orders is optional, prospective members must satisfy various requirements. The German Order admits only Dutch Protestant males and requires in addition to four noble quarters that both parents come from lineages that were noble before 1795. The Order of Malta admits Dutch men and women over 25 who are practising Roman Catholics, are married according to canonical law, and are listed in the records of the Dutch nobility with the Supreme Council of the Nobility. In addition, the marriages of their forebears concluded in the previous hundred years, as well as the current lifestyles of the prospective members, need to be worthy of admission to the Order. The Johanniter Order admits noble Dutch men and women of impeccable conduct who are over 18 and promise that they will observe the Protestant tenets in good faith and will work with the Order to nurse the wounded, the ill, and those who are needy in other respects. Membership of a knightly order is a good proxy for ties with the noble culture and the associated social network of a member of the Dutch nobility.

The three studies mentioned earlier are restricted to university-educated members of the Dutch nobility. Perhaps the puzzle applies only to the members of the nobility who have adapted to the modern era in which a university education has become almost indispensable for acquiring a prominent social position. This could also mean that the Dutch nobility's social and cultural capital will remain profitable only if combined with a university education. Other data therefore need to be analysed as well. Unfortunately, no file is available on the life courses of both noble and comparable non-noble adults in the Netherlands. I have therefore limited my research to a sample of the Dutch nobility from the 20th century. This new file comprises all members of the nobility, not just those with a university education. Even though the sample consists exclusively of members of the nobility, it provides grounds for determining whether membership of the nobility remains socially relevant in the Netherlands in the 20th century.

Hardly any research addresses the position of the nobility in European societies today. Cannadine (1990, 1994) provides an erudite but anecdotal description of the British aristocracy's decline

during the first half of the 20th century, but does not try to chart systematically the life course of all members of the British nobility during the 20th century. By writing merely about the disappearance of the obsolete social and cultural capital, he overlooks the possible significance of this nobility's modernized capital. The studies by Lieven (1992) and Wehler (1990) on the development of European nobility end with the catastrophes that both world wars inflicted upon the old-style European nobility. These works suggest that no role remains for the nobility. The study by the French sociologist De Saint Martin (1993) is the only review I know that is not historical and anecdotal, but that analyses and explains how French noble lineages have retained their significance in the 20th-century republic. Unfortunately, this study suffers from serious methodical shortcomings: because France is a republic, a comprehensive chart of all members of the French nobility is impossible to compile (unlike in my analysis). De Saint Martin therefore had to settle for two non-representative samples: one from the optional association for the French nobility Association d'entraide de la noblesse française (conservative, Catholic, and provincial) and the other from the *Who's Who in France*, which features well-known and successful individuals. As a consequence, its results are not representative of the French nobility today. I do not know of any comparable studies of the present nobility elsewhere in Europe that cover a broader scope than family history (a good German example of such a family history is Conze, 2000).

I aim to test the above solution to the contradiction between the significance of the ascriptive characteristic 'title of nobility' and modernization theory with seven hypotheses. These hypotheses are more guidelines for the following analyses than final tests in the strict sense.

1. University education among members of the nobility accounts for their increased likelihood of achieving elite positions in society today.
2. Members of noble families, who owe their nobility primarily to their civil duties (*raising*), are more likely to achieve an elite position in society today than members of noble families who attribute their status primarily to noble culture and past (*acknowledgement; nomination; inclusion*).
3. Strong ties of a member of the nobility with a noble culture and background (membership of

a knightly order, a noble spouse) reduce the likelihood of an elite position in today's society.

4. Membership of a knightly order reduces the likelihood of having a university education.

I also aim to determine whether the nobility remains significant in today's society by testing hypotheses concerning the extent of marriages between members of the Dutch nobility (noble homogamy). If the Dutch nobility has become socially irrelevant in the 20th century, then homogamy within the Dutch nobility should have disappeared. This assumption has led me to formulate the following three hypotheses:

5. No correlation any longer exists between an individual's noble title and the partner's nobility.
6. No difference any longer exists between the extent that men and women marry within the nobility.
7. Marriages between members of the nobility become more prevalent in the event of strong ties with noble culture and background (membership of a knightly order, the manner of achieving nobility) but decreases among university-educated individuals.

## Data and Variables

My research population consists of all persons born after 1899 who hold a recognized title of the Dutch nobility<sup>2</sup> and belong to a lineage beginning with a letter between G and Na.<sup>3</sup> Only the genealogies of these families are published in the editions of the *Nederlands Adelboek* between 1993 and 2000 and thus provide the most recent and complete information on their life course. Stillborn children are not included. I have omitted the royal families *Oranje-Nassau* and *De Bourbon de Parme* from my population because of their special status within Dutch society (as a royal family or one of its branches). Nor have I included additions and corrections appearing in subsequent editions. Because the first letters of these surnames are not connected with any social characteristic, my research population may be considered a random sample of all persons with a title from the Dutch nobility who were born in the 20th century. The process of gathering data about the life courses did not end at the same moment for all these noble individuals: data gathering on indi-

viduals whose surnames started with a G ended in 1992, while data were gathered on individuals whose surnames started with an M until 1999.

The data about the life courses of members of the nobility are gathered by the Centraal Bureau voor Genealogie (central genealogy bureau) in The Hague: I have not added or omitted any of this information. This source enabled me to chart 3,977 persons from 113 Dutch noble families during the 20th century.

In compiling editions of the *Nederlands Adelboek*, the Centraal Bureau voor Genealogie, used the information available about the genealogies of Dutch families. The Bureau invested considerable effort in tracing all members of noble stock, even if emigration or social decline had eliminated the need for listing them in the *Nederlands Adelboek*. Accordingly, I believe that this approach has yielded more complete and representative data for this group than a written or oral survey could have.

The individuals concerned reported their university degrees, occupation and circle of employment, public offices, memberships of major public works councils, court positions, and memberships of knightly orders for themselves and their spouses. The Centraal Bureau voor Genealogie verified many of these data in published sources, such as the *Staatsalmanak*. Since all parties were aware that the data were intended for publication, they are unlikely to have provided unreliable data. Moreover, social pressure from the family should deter a member from flaunting a university degree not actually obtained, or public offices or court functions not truly held. While people are obviously more inclined to report the peak of their social careers than the nadir, this practice will not distort my analysis. I have observed less honourable places of employment and offices in the *Nederlands Adelboek* as well: it reveals that nearly all members born in the 20th century into one of the oldest noble families in my sample (Van Keppel) are farmers, blue-collar workers, or low-level employees with no clear connection to their noble past. The only public office of a member of another family from my sample is stated simply as mayor in a section of the Nazi-occupied Netherlands from 1944 to 1945. I therefore consider these data reliable, especially with respect to other data obtained via surveys.

Such records render these Dutch data far more reliable and representative than De Saint Martin's data about the French nobility today. The lists of the current nobility in the bourgeois Kingdom of the Netherlands are considerably better than those from the republics of France or Germany, where the nobility was traditionally far more important. The findings about the Dutch nobility today might therefore be a reliable indication of the current position of their counterparts in those European countries as well.

The characteristics of the spouse reflect the most recent marriage.

This article includes the following variables:

*Decade of the 20th century* in which the person was born.

*Province in the Netherlands or foreign country* where the person was born or married or resides at present.<sup>4</sup> The former Dutch colonies of the Netherlands' Indies and Papua New Guinea are listed as Indonesia.

*University degree.* This variable reflects the university degrees of the individuals. Of the 3,977 persons in my analysis, 14.6 per cent held university degrees. Among those old enough to have completed a university education (i.e. born before 1971), the rate is 18.7 per cent.

*Personal noble title.* Baronets [*Jonkbeer*] and hereditary knights [*Ridder*] are both listed as baronets because there are so few hereditary knights. Aside from these two lowest categories in the nobility, only two higher titles (baron and count) exist in the Dutch nobility outside the royal family. In my analysis, 62.7 per cent of these individuals were baronets, 33.0 per cent barons, and 4.3 per cent counts.

*Noble title of the spouse* of the member of the nobility comprises four categories, ranging from none to count.<sup>5</sup> Due to their scarcity, titles superior to count have been included among the counts. Among the spouses, 86.7 per cent had no noble title, 8.0 per cent were baronets, 4.4 per cent barons, and 1.2 per cent counts or higher.

*Highest noble title of both parents-in-law of the member of the nobility.* Including the noble title of the member of the nobility's mother-in-law improved the index of the noble background of the member of the nobility's spouse. Among 82.7 per cent, neither of the parents-in-law has a noble title, 9.0 per cent of one of the two is at most a baronet,

6.1 per cent of one of the two is at most a baron, and 2.1 per cent of one of the two has the title of a count or higher.

*Origin of the noble title.* Among the individuals in my files, 41.9 per cent of those I analysed were from lineages raised to the nobility, 37.4 per cent from nominated families, 11.6 per cent from acknowledged families pertaining to the old domestic nobility, and 9.0 per cent from included families with foreign nobility.

*Personal membership of a knightly order.* Only a small percentage of the nobles in my analysis belong to such a knightly order: 4.3 per cent (of those born before 1971: 5.6 per cent). Considerably more individuals belong to either of the two Protestant orders than to the Catholic one (two Protestant members to one Roman Catholic member), which may be due in part to the old balance of power between the Protestants and Catholics in the Netherlands. In my analysis I have merged the membership of the three knightly orders into a single variable.<sup>6</sup>

*Membership of a knightly order of the member of the nobility or his or her spouse.* Spouses of members of the nobility are obviously less likely to belong to knightly orders than the members of the nobility themselves are.<sup>7</sup> Combining the membership of a knightly order for individuals and their partners has yielded a better index of the ties with the noble culture and the associated social network. Of all the members of the nobility in my analysis, 5.1 per cent are involved with a knightly order either personally or via a spouse.

*Personal elite position.* Establishing whether the individual has an elite position involves considering the place of employment, public offices, and the like. In this study I apply both a restricted and a broad description of the elite position concept. The restricted description is the followed in Dronkers and Hillege (1997, 1998). It comprises ministers and state secretaries; members of both Houses of Parliament and the Council of State; secretaries-general of departments; Lords Lieutenant of a province; mayors of the provincial capitals and of Amsterdam and Rotterdam; the most important Dutch ambassadors; members of the court; members of management and supervisory board members of large companies, banks, and industrial enterprises. They are a

medley of political, official, and business elite positions. The broad description of elite positions also includes: deputy generals of departments; members of the Provincial Executive; city council members; mayors; ambassadors in less important postings; high-ranking officials at international organizations; military officers holding at least the rank of general or vice admiral; professors; and senior managers at large companies or banks. The broad description of elite positions therefore comprises the layer immediately beneath the one of the restricted description. Occupations and positions of which the social significance could not be established unambiguously have been omitted from this broad description to avoid distorting the analyses.<sup>8</sup> Overall, my list of elite positions is conservative. Among the employed members of the nobility in my analysis, 2.2 per cent held an elite position according to the restricted description and 8.6 per cent according to the broad description. Considering only persons born before 1951 yields rates of 3.9 per cent and 14.3 per cent, respectively.<sup>9</sup>

*Elite position of the member of the nobility or his or her spouse.* I have classified the place of employment and public offices of the member of the nobility's spouse according to the same categories of elite positions. Among the spouses, 3.8 per cent held an elite position according to the restricted description and 13.1 per cent according to the broad description. Combining the elite positions of the member of the nobility and his or her spouse indicates more clearly whether the member of the nobility interacts with the elite. Of all employed members of the nobility in my analysis, 2.3 per cent interacted with the elite according to the restricted description and 8.2 per cent according to the broad description. Considering only individuals born before 1951 yields rates of 4.3 and 14.5 per cent, respectively.

## Education or Knightly Order

Has the Dutch nobility adapted to the modern era, in which a university degree is virtually a prerequisite for acquiring a prominent social position?

During the 20th century, members of the Dutch nobility have indeed increased their university enrolment considerably. Table 1 depicts the outcome of a logistic regression analysis in which possession of a university degree is the dependent variable. The significant parameters of the independent variables reflect the extent of this parameter's positive or negative contribution to the likelihood of such a university degree. A parameter greater than 1.00 indicates that this variable increases the likelihood of a university degree, whereas a parameter below 1.00 reflects a reduced probability. Members of the nobility born between 1961 and 1970 are 51 times as likely to have a university degree as those born between 1900 and 1910. Moreover, male members of the nobility are nearly eight times as likely to hold university degrees as their female counterparts during the 20th century. The significant interaction between decade and gender shows that women are quickly catching up with the lead of their male counterparts among members of the nobility born after 1960: in this birth cohort the likelihood is only 1.24 times greater ( $7.72 \times 0.16$ ). These findings are not surprising, as similar trends exist throughout the Dutch population. Table 1 does not enable comparison of these parameters with the Dutch population as a whole. The table shows, however, that a university degree was not ubiquitous among the Dutch nobility and definitely not among such individuals born before 1931.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, neither one's own title of nobility nor the origins of such a title significantly affect acquisition of a university degree. Acquiring

**Table 1.** *Likelihood of a university degree for members of the nobility born before 1971 (effect parameters of a logistic regression)*

Birth cohort	Parameter
1900–1910 (ref.)	1.00
1911–1920	1.49
1921–1930	0.99
1931–1940	2.95
1941–1950	4.15
1951–1960	11.03**
1961–1970	51.21**
Man	7.72**
Man*1961–1970	0.16**
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	0.13
Log likelihood	2,652.2

\*\*p < 0.01; \*p < 0.05.

a university degree is thus unrelated to differences within the Dutch nobility. Here, too, university education reflects universalist achievement criteria in accordance with modernization theory. Nor do any significant interactions exist between birth cohort and the other independent variables (except for gender).

Thus, completion of a university education has increased considerably among members of the nobility during the 20th century. None of the data indicate that nobility as an ascriptive characteristic has played a special role in this process.

Has the importance of the nobility's longstanding social and cultural capital, as manifested through membership of a knightly order, indeed decreased because of the progressive decline in noble persons joining such orders during the 20th century?

Table 2 predicts the probability of individual membership of a knightly order, once again through logistic regression. The decline in membership of knightly orders is hardly significant. The only significant decline appears with the group born between 1961 and 1970, although I consider this result to be age-related: many people in this group were too young to join in the early 1990s (they would have been in their 20s). Men are six times as likely as women to belong to knightly orders and barons more than 1.7 and counts more than 2.7 times as likely as baronets. This pattern indicates that ascriptive characteristics have consistently played an

important role in membership selection, especially considering the absence of significant interactions between birth cohort and gender or title of nobility. The origins of the nobility, however, do not have a significant impact on membership, which suggests that this ascriptive characteristic is no longer relevant within the nobility. Simultaneously, a university degree nearly triples the likelihood of belonging to a knightly order, indicating that modern scholastic achievements are a positive factor in membership selection instead of a negative one. This contradicts the fourth hypothesis.

Thus, membership of knightly orders is closely related to both ascriptive and achieved characteristics. These orders appear to have remained equally attractive during the 20th century.

## Homogamy within the Dutch Nobility

Is one's own title of nobility no longer related to that of one's spouse? Have the differences disappeared in the tendencies of men and women to marry within the nobility? Is marriage within the nobility more likely among individuals with close ties to their noble culture and background and less likely among those with university degrees?

The top panel of Table 3 depicts the titles of the spouses for all married members of the nobility in my analysis and the bottom section the highest

**Table 2.** *Likelihood of belonging to a knightly order among members of the nobility born before 1971 (effect parameters of a logistic regression)*

Birth cohort	Parameter
1900–1910 (ref.)	1.00
1911–1920	1.16
1921–1930	1.51
1931–1940	0.92
1941–1950	0.89
1951–1960	0.61
1961–1970	0.20**
Man	6.32**
Baronet (ref.)	1.00
Baron	1.71**
Count	2.71**
University education	2.87**
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	0.18
Log likelihood	1,110.9

**Table 3.** *Patterns of marriage within the Dutch nobility: spouse's title of nobility and highest title of nobility of the parents-in-law*

Spouse's title	Own title of nobility			
	Baronet	Baron	Count	Total
None	88.8	83.5	75.5	1,902 (86.4)
Baronet	6.7	9.6	12.7	175 (8.0)
Baron	4.0	4.9	6.9	97 (4.4)
Count	0.5	2.0	4.9	27 (1.2)
Highest title of nobility of spouse's parents				
None	85.4	79.7	68.6	1,820 (82.7)
Baronet	8.4	9.5	13.7	199 (9.0)
Baron	4.9	7.7	10.8	135 (6.1)
Count	1.2	3.1	6.9	47 (2.1)
Total	1,361 (61.8)	738 (33.5)	102 (4.6)	2,201 (100.0)

$\chi^2 = 34.5$ , resp.  $36.5$ ;  $df = 6$ .

such title for the parents-in-law of these members of the nobility. Both sections of Table 3 reflect a positive and significant relationship between the title of the individual and that of his or her spouse or parents-in-law. The higher the person's own title, the greater the likelihood that his or her spouse or one of the parents-in-law will have a (higher) title of nobility.<sup>11</sup> This pattern refutes the fifth hypothesis, which states that noble homogamy within the nobility has disappeared.

Nonetheless, 87 per cent of the Dutch nobility born in the 20th century do not marry a member of the nobility or somebody with a parent who is. Noble homogamy within the nobility therefore does not seem relevant in the Netherlands. Comparing the rate of 13 per cent for members of the nobility with noble spouses with corresponding rates for other groups (95 per cent for blacks in the United States, 62 per cent for Catholics in the United States; Kalmijn, 1998: 404–406) indicates that this rate seems low. This low percentage is misleading, however, because of the very low number of potential spouses within the nobility compared with those outside. The relative number of potential marriage partners is much higher in most ethnic, religious, or socio-economic groups. Assessing the importance of these differences in the relative number of potential spouses requires calculating the odds-ratios. These ratios reflect the likelihood that a member of the nobility will marry inside the nobility compared with the likelihood that a non-noble will marry a member of the nobility.

In order to compute these odds-ratios I use four reasonable assumptions:

- the total number of living members of the nobility is 10,000 (Bruin, 1992: 121), of whom 80 per cent marry in the Netherlands (Dronkers, 2000);
- 13 per cent of the members of the nobility marry within the nobility (Table 3);
- the total number of Dutch people over 20 is 11,073,900;
- only 10 per cent of the adult Dutch population (1,107,390) is of the same socio-economic class as the nobility in the Netherlands and is therefore eligible to marry such a person.

With these assumptions I have generated a comprehensive table of marriages for noble and non-noble individuals.<sup>12</sup> The odds-ratio for this table of

marriages equals 23.4. Throughout the 20th century noble individuals have been nearly 24 times as likely to marry other members of the nobility as non-noble individuals with comparable socio-economic backgrounds are to marry a noble person. This high odds-ratio indicates that marriage within the Dutch nobility continues to thrive, as borne out by comparison of the odds-ratios for the link with the education of spouses.<sup>13</sup> The odds that a member of the nobility will marry a non-noble person are the same as the odds that a university graduate will marry somebody with only primary-school education. If I were to attribute the high homogamy among the nobility entirely to this group's strong socio-economic position, these members of the nobility would figure in the top 0.4 per cent of the social scale.<sup>14</sup> Inspection of the occupations in my analysis reveals that this assumption is inaccurate. The assumption underlying the previous calculation that the Dutch nobility belongs to the top 10 per cent of Dutch society is far more reasonable. I therefore conclude that noble homogamy is thriving within the Dutch nobility. This pattern indicates a social relevance for the nobility during the 20th century.

The dependent variables in Table 4 reflect whether the spouse or one of the parents-in-law is a member of the nobility.<sup>15</sup> The first model, with the spouse's nobility as the dependent variable, shows clearly that barons are more than 1.6 times as likely – and counts 2.6 times as likely – as baronets to marry other members of the nobility. Considering other characteristics of members of the nobility in Models 2 and 3 leaves intact these differences between persons with different titles of the nobility with respect to homogamy within the nobility. Nor does significant interaction exist between birth cohort and title of nobility, thus indicating that this difference between titles of the nobility has persisted during the 20th century. Model 2 shows a gradual decline in the likelihood of marrying within the nobility among the birth cohorts. Such noble homogamy has thus decreased significantly over the course of the 20th century.

Holding a university degree, however, nearly doubles the likelihood of having a noble spouse. This fact clearly conflicts with the second part of my seventh hypothesis, which assumes a negative correlation between an achieved characteristic,

**Table 4.** *Likelihood that the spouse or at least one of the spouse's parents is a member of the nobility among married members of the 20th-century Dutch nobility (effect parameters of logistic regressions)*

	Spouse member of nobility			Spouse's parent member of nobility		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Baronet (ref)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Baron	1.58**	1.48**	1.49**	1.49**	1.44**	1.22
Count	2.58**	2.00**	2.07**	2.65**	2.43**	1.90*
Man		0.47**	0.51**		0.54**	0.53**
1900–1910 (ref)		1.00	1.00		1.00	1.00
1911–1920		0.62*	0.62*		0.70	0.71
1921–1930		0.46**	0.45**		0.53**	0.56**
1931–1940		0.44**	0.42**		0.41**	0.41**
1941–1950		0.33**	0.32**		0.36**	0.37**
1951–1960		0.25**	0.25**		0.22**	0.23**
1961–1970		0.18**	0.18**		0.23**	0.24**
Member of a knightly order		3.10**	26.20**		3.42**	3.45**
University degree		1.82**	1.82**		1.67**	1.38
Netherlands and colonies (ref.)		1.00	1.00			
Belgium		1.58	1.59			
Germany		2.61**	2.53**			
United Kingdom and France		0.54	0.54			
Other countries in Europe		1.44	1.46			
Outside Europe		0.45*	0.46*			
Male member of a knightly order			0.31*			
Baron*Belgium						3.99**
Baron*Germany						7.07**
Count	2.58**	2.00**	2.07**	2.65**	2.43**	1.90*
Count*university						6.49**
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	0.01	0.07	0.07	0.01	0.07	0.08
Log likelihood	1,709.0	1,579.5	1,573.3	1,984.9	1,856.5	1,825.3

Note: Models 2 and 3 are constructed in layers based on the significance of the dependent variables and interactions and the increase in the Log Likelihood. \*\*p < 0.01; \*p < 0.05.

such as a university degree, and an ascriptive characteristic, such as a noble spouse.

Membership of a knightly order also increases the likelihood of having a noble spouse considerably (more than threefold). This pattern corresponds with the first part of my seventh hypothesis, which presumes that an ascriptive characteristic, such as membership of a knightly order, correlates with having a noble spouse.

Finally, male members of the nobility are half as likely as female ones to have noble spouses. This gender-specific difference in homogamy within the nobility has remained constant throughout the 20th century.<sup>16</sup> Thus, male members of the nobility are consistently more likely to marry

'down' (i.e. non-noble women), while female members of the nobility are still more likely to marry 'up' (i.e. noble men). This practice contradicts my sixth hypothesis, in which I assumed that this pattern no longer existed. The occurrence and continuity of this classical phenomenon among the 20th-century nobility appears to be a second indication of the Dutch nobility's social relevance and surfaces in one of the most important and also one of the most personal decisions: choice of spouse.

Including the title of nobility of one of the two parents-in-law as a dependent variable hardly affects the results. At most, some become more meaningful. They show that members of the higher Dutch nobility, who were born in Belgium and Germany,

are more likely to marry within the nobility. Perhaps the noble culture and tradition in those two countries remains stronger than in the Netherlands. They also suggest that the greater likelihood that a university graduate will marry within the nobility applies primarily among the members of the higher nobility.

The strong homogamy within the nobility during the 20th century has thus declined but remains an evident social reality in which both achieved (university education) and ascriptive characteristics (knightly orders) are once again significant.

## Is Access to the Elite in the Netherlands Diminishing?

Have the opportunities of members of the nobility for achieving elite positions diminished during the 20th century? Do university degrees account for the improved opportunities for obtaining elite positions among members of the nobility? Are members of noble lineages who attribute their nobility more to civil duties (*raising*) more likely to achieve an elite position than those who attribute their nobility to their noble culture and past (*acknowledgement; nomination; inclusion*)? Do stronger ties with noble culture and background reduce a member of the nobility's chances of achieving an elite position?

Table 5 reveals that a member of the nobility's likelihood of achieving an elite position has hardly diminished significantly during the 20th century.<sup>17</sup> Individuals born between 1940 and 1950 are the only ones with a significantly smaller chance. This result may, however, be age-related rather than generational. In the early 1990s individuals born between 1940 and 1950 were only in their 40s, which is too young for an elite position, especially according to the restricted description. The difference between the parameters for the birth cohort 1940–1950 in the restricted and the broad descriptions of the elite supports my age interpretation. If this age interpretation is acceptable, the other parameters for the birth cohorts in Table 5 mean that the likelihood of acquiring an elite position has declined somewhat but not enough to argue that a title of nobility has become socially irrelevant.

Table 5 also shows that a university degree considerably increases a member of the nobility's likelihood of achieving an elite position (more than fivefold according to the broad description and threefold according to the restricted description). This result supports the first hypothesis. Moreover, members of the nobility became increasingly likely to take university degrees during the 20th century (Table 1); this rise in educational attendance has offset the reduced opportunities among the younger generations of the nobility to penetrate

**Table 5.** *Likelihood of an elite position (broad description or restricted description) among members of the 20th-century Dutch nobility born before 1951 (effect parameters of logistic regression)*

	Broad description			Restricted description		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
1900–1910 (ref.)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
1911–1920	1.26	1.06	1.07	0.88	0.77	0.84
1921–1930	0.74	0.58	0.58	0.71	0.63	0.61
1931–1940	0.67	0.60	0.61	0.62	0.63	0.58
1940–1950	0.45**	0.42**	0.43**	0.25*	0.27*	0.28*
Knightly order		3.21**	1.54		2.88**	3.11**
University		5.17**	5.15**		3.41**	3.39**
Spouse's parents nobility		0.55**	0.39**		0.41**	0.45*
Knightly order and spouse's parents nobility				3.07**		
University and baron						9.47*
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	0.03	0.23	0.24	0.03	0.16	0.18
Log likelihood	796.2	678.4	672.9	327.6	291.4	285.4

\*\*p < 0.01; \*p < 0.05.

the elite. It also substantiates the explanation for the solution to this article's puzzle: Why did membership of the Dutch nobility remain an advantage for achieving elite positions in the Netherlands in the 20th century, while in the same century the value of other ascriptive characteristics (e.g. class and gender) diminished for social mobility in society as a whole? Only members of the nobility who have modernized their social and cultural capital through a university education are still likely to acquire an elite position.

Table 5 further indicates that ascriptive characteristics both increase and decrease one's chances of obtaining an elite position. Membership of a knightly order increases this likelihood, whereas a noble parent-in-law reduces it. This finding partially contradicts my third hypothesis, which presumes that all ascriptive characteristics reduce the opportunities of acquiring an elite position. Apparently, this negative effect applies for marriage within the nobility but not for membership of a knightly order. The first corresponds with my explanation for the lasting effect of a title of nobility on opportunities for acquiring a socially prestigious position. Only members of the nobility who modernize their social and cultural capital will continue to reap its social benefits. Marrying within the nobility would not modernize such capital, as it would merely add 'old' cultural capital to 'old' cultural capital. This explanation, however, fails to clarify the phenomenon's absence with membership of knightly orders. Or does such membership merely confirm an achieved position of prestige, thereby indicating that the causal sequence presumed in Table 5 is inaccurate? But the statutes of these knightly orders do not require that the candidate has already acquired such a position of prestige. Alternatively, membership of a knightly order might indicate his or her social ambition, whereas marrying within the nobility signifies traditionalism rather than ambition.<sup>18</sup> A sociological study focusing on the operation of knightly orders in the Netherlands would certainly be welcome.

Finally, Table 5 reports indirectly that the gender variable does not noticeably affect achievement of an elite position by members of the nobility, as this table lists only the variables with significant effects. This means that female members of the nobility have the same chances as their male counterparts of acquiring elite positions, controlling for differences

in university education and membership of knightly orders. Apparently, 20th-century noble women are more emancipated than non-noble women are. This finding comes as no surprise, as women's emancipation started in the upper classes in the Netherlands.

The differences between the left and the right panels of Table 5 indicate that the discrepancy between the results for the restricted and the broad descriptions of the elite is minor. This shows that the restricted and the broad descriptions of the elite are related.<sup>19</sup>

The analyses presented in Table 6 concern the elite positions of both the individuals and their spouses.<sup>20</sup> In several respects the findings correspond with those of Table 5: membership of a knightly order and a university degree (third hypothesis). But they also reflect two remarkable differences. First, Table 6 shows that after controlling for the other characteristics, female members of the nobility are twice as likely as male ones to live in elite surroundings, especially considering the gender-specific differences in relevant characteristics, such as university degrees and membership of knightly orders. This result can be explained by the combination of one's own elite position that of one's partner. The raw percentage of female members of the nobility with husbands who have an elite position is considerably higher (broad description: 16.3 per cent; restricted description: 4.7 per cent) than the percentage of female members of the nobility who have an elite position themselves (broad description: 2.5 per cent; restricted description: 0.5 per cent). Among the male members of the nobility the opposite raw percentages applies (3.8 per cent and 1.3 per cent for the wife; 11.5 per cent and 3.0 per cent for the man himself). This imbalance of elite positions and partners means that female members of the nobility are more likely to live in elite surroundings (based on their own or their husband's elite position) than male members of the nobility. On these grounds, one might argue that the unequal opportunities of female members of the nobility for studying at a university and acceding to knightly orders (and consequently for attaining elite positions) are more than offset by their better marital prospects. Female members of the nobility are thus more likely to live in elite surroundings than their male counterparts.

**Table 6.** Likelihood of an elite position or an elite position for the spouse (broad or restricted description) among the 20th-century Dutch nobility born before 1951 (effect parameters of logistic regression)

	Broad description			Restricted description		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
1900–1910 (ref.)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
1911–1920	1.11	1.07	1.06	0.95	0.99	0.98
1921–1930	0.85	0.81	0.80	0.67	0.66	0.64
1931–1940	0.69	0.72	0.72	0.54	0.58	0.54
1940–1950	0.67*	0.67*	0.66*	0.36**	0.38**	0.38**
Knightly order		2.94**	2.88**		2.64**	2.85**
University		3.94**	2.41**		3.21**	2.78**
Spouse's parents nobility		0.45**	0.38**		0.33**	0.33**
Man		0.50**	0.51**		0.50**	0.48**
Raised (ref.)					1.00	1.00
Nomination					0.44**	0.37**
Acknowledgement					0.33*	0.32*
Inclusion					1.30	1.30
University and spouse's parents nobility				1.97*		
University and baron						12.43**
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	0.01	0.15	0.15	0.02	0.15	0.16
Log likelihood	1,479.2	1,337.9	1,334.0	66.4	573.4	566.8

\*\*p < 0.01; \*p < 0.05.

The second interesting difference concerns the significant effect of the origin of the title of nobility on life in elite surroundings according to the restricted description. According to the second hypothesis, members of noble lineages who attribute their nobility to their civil duties (*raising*) are more likely to occupy an elite position than members of noble lineages who derive their standing from their noble culture and past (*acknowledgement; nomination; inclusion*). Confirmation of this hypothesis reveals that the Dutch nobility's roots in the bourgeoisie partly explain its ability to continue acquiring socially prestigious positions during the 20th century.

Overall, members of the nobility have become less likely to occupy elite positions during the 20th century, but the increase in university degrees among members has offset this decline.<sup>21</sup> The importance of a university education for acquiring an elite position is the key to solving the contradiction I mentioned at the beginning of this article. The three previous studies cover only university-educated members of the nobility and thus reflect a bias that has distorted the findings. After all, the university-educated members of the nobility, who have modernized their social and cultural capital,

have more opportunities for acquiring an elite position. Conversely, members of the nobility who have not modernized their social and cultural capital through a university education are less likely to acquire elite positions. This also means that this modernized 'old' social and cultural capital of the Dutch nobility remains socially relevant.

Members of the nobility with stronger ties to their noble culture and background are indeed less likely to acquire elite positions. This is especially true for the noble standing of the spouse's parents and the origin of the title of nobility of the families. Remarkably, this negative consequence of the ties with noble culture and background is not apparent with another indicator: membership of knightly orders. This membership increases the likelihood of an elite position. The lack of a clear explanation for this contradictory pattern justifies a sociological study on the operation of knightly orders.

## Conclusion

The findings presented here reveal that the Dutch nobility has retained its social relevance during the

20th century, even though its public visibility has undoubtedly diminished. A social phenomenon's public visibility, however, is not a valid indicator of its social importance. Nor is the extent to which those interviewed report their noble culture and past in their life stories a valid indicator of the nobility's social importance. Society often circumvents people, and motives and life stories then prove to be unreliable justifications. The ongoing noble homogamy among the nobility and the continued importance of noble origins in assigning elite positions or living in elite surroundings reveal the Dutch nobility's social relevance, even – and perhaps especially – in one of the world's most bourgeois societies. Given these results for the Dutch bourgeois society, one can argue that German or French nobility still has social relevance despite their republican environments and that British nobility will keep its social relevance in spite of the disappearance of the obsolete part of their social and cultural capital. Sociological research on the European nobility during the second half of the 20th century might show their surviving social relevance.

The analyses presented provide the solution to the contradiction between the significance of the ascriptive characteristic 'title of nobility' and the implications of modernization theory. A title of nobility offers an advantage, but only together with other achieved characteristics, such as a university degree. But why do modernized, ascriptive characteristics, such as titles of nobility and membership of knightly orders, remain important? Perhaps sociology has misjudged the most important mechanism, which is expected to account for the effect of acquired characteristics in modern societies. The mechanism is no longer the practice of handing down assets or property, which had been the most important mechanism in agrarian societies. In more modern societies, ascriptive characteristics are more likely to be signs of potentially valued characteristics, such as a certain social or cultural capital. In a labour market with many highly skilled workers, for example, employers face the challenge of selecting the most suitable candidate at the lowest recruitment cost. Complementary ascriptive characteristics, such as titles of nobility, are an inexpensive means of selecting from the vast supply. On the Dutch labour market of highly skilled individuals,

this option is even more necessary than in other countries, as institutionalized quality differences between universities and programmes of specialization do not exist. The importance of ascriptive characteristics may derive from higher productivity as a result of a specific selection and socialization, from more or different social or cultural capital, or from discrimination in the workplace or against customers when colleagues of customers favour persons with certain ascriptive characteristics. In both situations, employers are advised to consider this characteristic in their staff policy. Mayhew (1970: 313) formulated this as follows: 'the staying power of ascription is attributable to its cheapness, with firms thus saving much rather than creating a new specialized structure for the same purpose.' According to this argument, there is no reason to assume that ascriptive characteristics will become irrelevant in modern societies.

## Notes

1. The protestant cleavage of the Order of Malta.
2. Persons belonging to families that were acknowledged or included only after their death are not in my data, because they did not have a recognized title of Dutch nobility.
3. The Von Balluseck family has been added to the population, as the genealogy of this family (included in the Dutch nobility in 1995) is listed in the *Nederlands Adelboek* 1995.
4. Place of residence was indicated only for individuals or their partners listed as still living according to the *Adelboek*.
5. Foreign titles of nobility are classified according to one of these four categories.
6. The overwhelming majority of the members of knightly orders belong to the Johanniter Order or the Order of Malta. Omitting members of the German Order will not affect the results presented here.
7. Only members of noble lineages are admitted to knightly orders. Given that 86.7% of the spouses of members of the nobility are not noble themselves, the percentages of spouses who are members of a knightly order is likely to be substantially lower.
8. These include unspecified heads at departments and universities; managers of little-known firms; unspecified entrepreneurs, merchants and bankers; advisors and self-employed individuals.

9. As the *Adelboek* editions consulted list the careers through the early 1990s, I am underestimating the peak of social careers among individuals born between 1940 and 1950, as they are less unlikely to have reached this peak in their 40s. For the same reason, I have omitted elite positions held by all individuals born after 1950 from the analysis.
10. The *Teding van Berkbout* family (Schmidt, 1986) of Holland is an exception in this respect. Kuiper (1993: 382) notes that 60 per cent of the male members of the late-19th century Friesian nobility had been enrolled at a university.
11. The Spearman correlation (for ordinal variables) is .10 in both sections of Table 3.
12. A table of marriages between all noble and non-noble individuals in the Netherlands (Table A1) is presented in the Appendix.
13. These range from 2.94 to 25.00, depending on the discrepancy in education between the two spouses (Hendrickx, Uunk and Smits, 1995: 167).
14.  $(1,040/6,960)/(6,960/x) = 1.00$ . Here  $x$  must equal 46,711.
15. The title's origin does not affect the dependent variables significantly and has therefore been omitted from Table 4.
16. No significant effect of the interaction between gender and birth cohort was found.
17. The origin of the title of nobility and the country of birth did not have significant parameters and are therefore not included in this table.
18. The different result is not attributable to multicollinearity between the two independent variables. Even when they are introduced separately, their effects are comparable.
19. The explained variance for the restricted description is less than for the broad description but may easily be attributed to the restricted description's smaller restriction of range. Differences occur only with the higher-order interactions.
20. Country of birth did not have significant parameters and is therefore not included in this table.
21. The odds-ratio for Dutch nobles and non-nobles with respect to obtaining elite positions is impossible to calculate, as the necessary assumptions are harder to quantify and the results therefore less plausible.

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## Appendix

**Table A1.** *Marriages between all noble and non-noble individuals in the Netherlands (Reconstruction)*

	Noble	Non-noble	Total
Noble	1,040	6,960	8,000
Non-noble	6,960	1,092,430	1,099,390
Total	8,000	1,099,390	1,107,390

## Author's Address

Department of Political and Social Sciences, European University Institute, Badia Fiesolana, Via dei Roccettini, 9, I-50016, San Domenico di Fiesole (FI), Italy. Tel.: +39-055-4685-260; fax: +39-055-4685-201; email: jaap.dronkers@iue.it

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