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## Ethnocentrism in the Low Countries: a comparative perspective

Jaak Billiet, Rob Eisinga and Peer Scheepers

*Abstract* This study explores differences of ethnocentrism and related phenomena in The Netherlands and Flanders on the basis of two comparable surveys conducted in 1990 and 1991. The explanatory models derived from theories of ethnocentrism are largely confirmed. People in Flanders subscribe more strongly to both components of ethnocentrism (i.e. to an unfavourable attitude towards out-groups and to a favourable attitude towards the in-group) as well as to a number of its predictors such as authoritarianism, anomie, and social cultural localism. The interpretations of these findings involve historical processes, intergroup tensions, economic fluctuations, and the organisational embeddedness of right-wing extremism in The Netherlands and in Flanders.

Right-wing extremism is a phenomenon that has reared its head occasionally throughout history in virtually every European country. With the exception of the 1930–1945 period, the support given to this political phenomenon, however, has always been relatively marginal. The horrible events of this period have always been invoked in order to contain the threatening danger of right-wing extremism. Up to a few years ago, these warnings were successful in almost the whole of Europe. In The Netherlands, extreme right-wing organisations and political parties that propagated the related body of ideas received only little support (Van Donselaar and Van Praag 1983; Van Donselaar 1991; Scheepers *et al.* 1993). In some European countries however, the situation has changed. Belgium is one. This became painfully obvious with the enormous electoral gain of the *Vlaams Blok* in the national elections of November 1991 (10.3 per cent of the overall vote in Flanders) and the stabilisation of its electoral support in European elections of June 1994 and in the national elections of May 1995.

Immediately in the wake of the *Vlaams Blok's* electoral gain, politicians and commentators sought to identify elements in the body of ideas of this political party in order to understand its attraction.<sup>1</sup> Preliminary analysis had shown that ethnocentrism had been the primary motive for voting for the *Vlaams Blok* in the European Parliament election in June 1989 (De Witte 1992). This was confirmed by subsequent research (Billiet *et al.* 1992; Billiet and De Witte 1995), which showed that a good half of the people who had voted for the *Vlaams Blok* mentioned the immigrant theme as a primary motive for their voting behaviour.

The present study will first examine the differences between The Netherlands

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and Flanders as regards indications of ethnocentrism. An attempt will then be made to determine the differences between the *explanation* of ethnocentrism in these two settings.

### **Ethnocentrism: concepts and theory**

The phenomenon of ethnocentrism was initially described by Sumner (1906) rather rudimentarily. A few decades later, Adorno *et al.* (1950/1982) and then Levine and Campbell (1972) contributed significantly to the description of the concept, while Tajfel (1981, 1982a, b) exposed the mental mechanisms that lead to ethnocentrism. It was assumed that ethnocentrism would result from two mental mechanisms: social identification and social contra-identification. Social identification was defined as the selective perception of predominantly positive characteristics of the in-group, while social contra-identification was defined as the selective perception of predominantly negative characteristics of out-groups. Both mechanisms would contribute to the reinforcement and/or maintenance of a positive social identity. These theoretical ideas were operationalised by Eisinga and Scheepers (1989). Tests confirmed the existence of the expected structure of the ethnocentric body of ideas in The Netherlands and Belgium.

Ethnocentrism appeared to consist of two components: a positive attitude toward one's own social group and a negative attitude toward other ethnic groups, even those groups with which there is very little chance that one has ever had contact. Both components contain prejudices: positive prejudices about the in-group and negative prejudices about other ethnic groups. These two components are very closely related both in The Netherlands (Pearson  $r$ : 0.57, cf. Eisinga and Scheepers 1989) and in the Belgian regions (Kendall  $\tau$ 's between 0.46 and 0.57, cf. Billiet *et al.* 1990).

To explain this phenomenon, a number of theories have been proposed to explain this phenomenon. These were developed and tested in The Netherlands and in Belgium, as well as in South Africa.<sup>2</sup> Some of the theories were at least partially disproven, while others stood their ground. The following describes these theoretical propositions, from which predictors have been derived that appeared to contribute significantly to the explanation of ethnocentrism.

#### *Predictors of ethnocentrism*

Previous studies indicated that *authoritarianism* is determinative for both aspects of ethnocentrism. Authoritarianism, considered to be a personality characteristic, refers to a cluster of nine so-called sub-syndromes (Adorno *et al.* 1950/1982) of which conventionalism, authoritarian submission, and authoritarian aggression may be considered crucial. The last two of these sub-syndromes would be responsible for the tendency of authoritarian people to identify strongly socially with their own group and also to contra-identify socially with other social or ethnic groups. Previous studies have shown that authoritarianism is not independent of the *social class* to which people belong: self-employed people, in particular, as well as workers are prone to this disposition, even when the impact of other important predictors is discounted. In addition, it has turned out that *age* and *education* also affect authoritarianism: as one gets older, authoritarianism increases, whereas a high level of education reduces it.

Anomie, too, appeared to contribute to the explanation of ethnocentrism. This



concept, originally introduced by Durkheim (1893/1978, 1897/1967), was adopted by Srole (1956) who conceived anomie as a situation of social disorientation, moral deregulation, and defective identification. From such a situation, the individual would search for social and moral points of departure. Therefore, the individual would identify more strongly with, for example, the social group of which he or she considers him- or herself a member. This may be accompanied by social contra-identification with respect to other social groups of which the individual does not consider him- or herself a member. In this regard, it has been noted previously that anomie occurs more strongly in certain social classes than in others, while the level of education also appeared to reduce the degree of anomie.

In the field of the sociology of religion, it has long been assumed that the Christian faith, with its emphasis on 'love thy neighbour', would stimulate its adherents to adopt a tolerant attitude toward other social and religious groups. When an impressive body of empirical research showed that Christian believers were actually more intolerant toward all kinds of other groups, the confusion was great, and a diligent search was launched for explanations of this phenomenon. This resulted in all kinds of qualifications. The most important of them was that Christians cannot be lumped in one group: a distinction should be made in function of the degree in which people were involved in ecclesiastical institutions, *in casu*, church involvement (Eisinga *et al.* 1990b; Billiet 1995).

In addition, it was often suggested that Christians are not moved to intolerance by their faith as such but that other characteristics, such as authoritarianism and anomie, were responsible for Christian intolerance. In other words, many theoreticians supposed that the concurrence of Christian faith and aspects of ethnocentrism was spurious. An explicit theory was put forward by Roof (1974). He thought that Christians would be intolerant of other social groups because they are strongly oriented to their local community and would have 'localistic' attitudes. Within the local community, there would be a high degree of solidarity as well as a consensus about values and norms. One would be intolerant of people from other social groups who would want to penetrate the tight local network or who would question the existing values and norms. These theoretical ideas were specified by Lehman (1986), who thought that the orientation to the local community in general had to be distinguished from the orientation to the specific local community, in this case, the neighbourhood in which one lives. He called the former orientation cultural localism and the latter social localism. Nevertheless, Lehman, too, assumed that both orientations would give rise to a social identification with the national in-group and at the same time to social contra-identification with other social groups. This orientation to the local community would be fed primarily by a restricted 'breadth of perspective', which would result from a limited amount of education.

#### *Theoretical model*

The above provides an outline of the most important findings of previous Dutch and Belgian studies. The present study combines these findings with the aim of comparing The Netherlands and Flanders as regards ethnocentrism and its important predictors. This synthesis is reflected in the theoretical model in Figure 1.

The rationale of this model is, briefly, that the relations between social



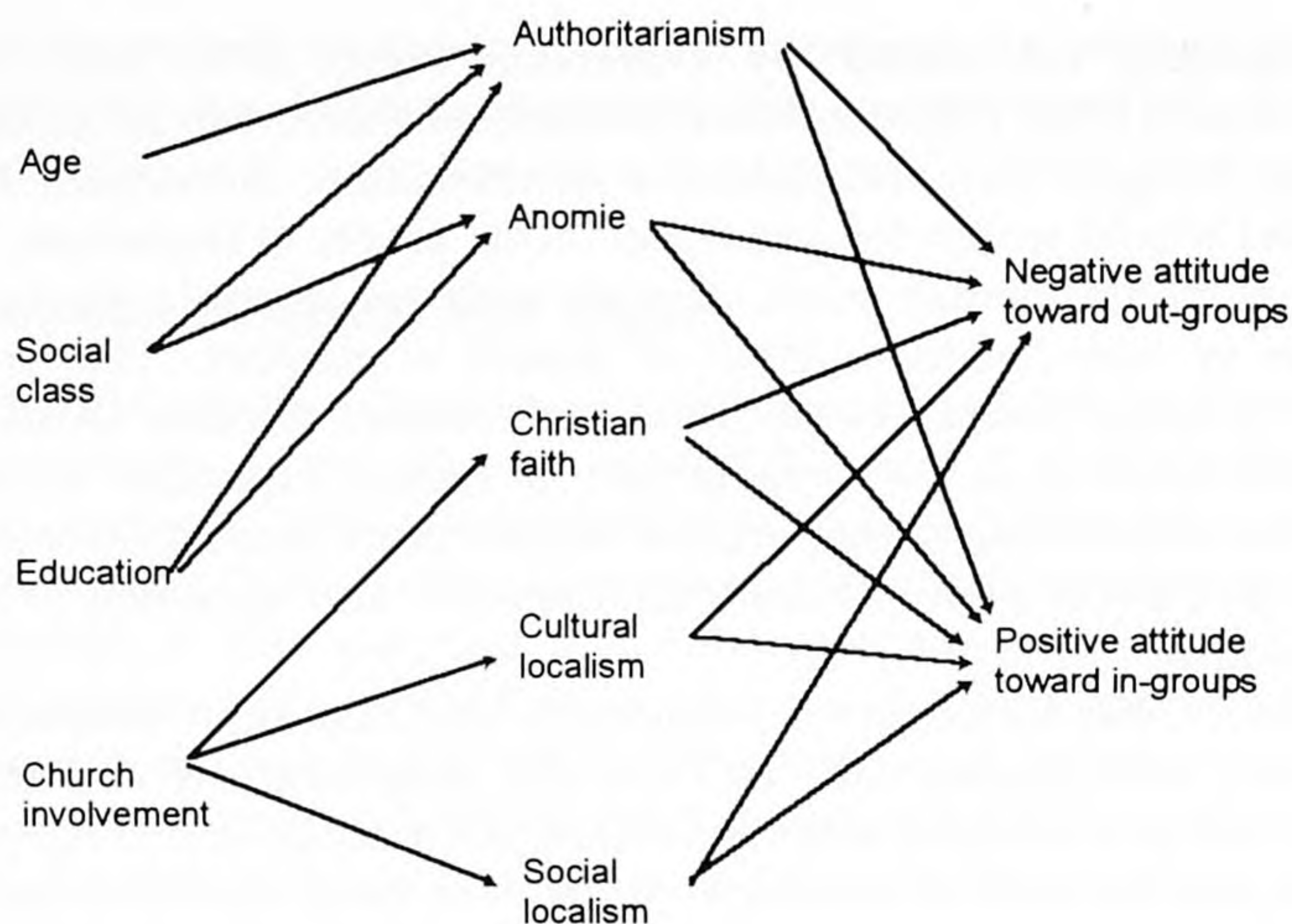


Figure 1. Theoretical model for the explanation of ethnocentrism

positions and both aspects of ethnocentrism are mediated by certain dispositions, i.e. attitudes that instigate social identification and social contra-identification in the subjects concerned. The outcome of these mental processes consists of ethnocentrism (cf. Eisinga and Scheepers 1989; Billiet *et al.* 1990).

## Data

### Samples

In the winter of 1985/86, a sample ( $n = 1,799$ ) in The Netherlands was questioned about ethnocentrism and related opinions. This survey was conducted as part of the project on 'Socio-cultural developments in The Netherlands'. The sample was formed by means of a two-stage random procedure and was representative for the Dutch population (cf. Felling *et al.* 1987). These subjects were then asked to participate in a second interview. A proportion of the people who were willing to collaborate were again interviewed in the winter of 1990–1991 with the same questionnaire ( $n = 350$ ). These panel respondents – all autochthonous Dutch – did not differ from the original sample as regards the combination of the characteristics of sex, marital status, and age (cf. Felling *et al.* 1992).

The sample of autochthonous Flemings ( $n = 664$ ) was formed by means of a similar two-stage random procedure. It also turned out to be representative (cf. Billiet *et al.* 1990). A number of items were presented to this sample that were comparable to the Dutch sample. In order to expand a comparison between The Netherlands and Flanders, these Flemings were again approached in the spring of 1991. The respondents who were again prepared to fill in the questionnaire ( $n = 444$ ) did not differ from the original sample as regards the characteristics of age, sex, and education.

### Data collection and measurement

The Dutch questionnaire consisted of an oral and a written part. The interviewers were instructed to act as discretely as possible to enable the respondents to



express their opinions freely. The Flemish questionnaire was mailed to the respondents. Dillman's 'Total Design Method' (1978) was applied strictly. The respondents were asked to fill in the entire questionnaire and return it.<sup>3</sup>

The measurement instruments were derived from the original studies (cf. Felling *et al.* 1987, 1992). The formulation of the items was slightly adapted in Flanders in a number of cases in order to phrase them more simply without losing their original semantic meaning and to be able to assume the same semantic content in Flanders as in The Netherlands.

Since all the items and the measurement scales constructed on this basis have already been justified and documented in detail in previous studies, a brief description will suffice here. In order to determine whether the items were sufficiently indicative for the latent concept they were intended to measure, all of them were subject to principal-factor analysis both for The Netherlands and for Flanders. These factor analyses showed that the items without any exception were indicators of the concepts concerned. The reliability of the measurement scales was evaluated by Cronbach's  $\alpha$  which was sufficient in all cases and sometimes excellent.

The *out-group* scale ( $\alpha = 0.81$ ) was based on five negatively worded statements (stereotypes) about Moroccans, Turks, and Jews. Five items expressing a positive orientation towards one's own people (proud and positive stereotypes and feelings) formed the *in-group* scale ( $\alpha = 0.69$ ). The *anomie* scale ( $\alpha = 0.70$ ) was measured by three items reflecting feelings of fatalism, distrust of the government, and isolation. The five-item *authoritarianism* scale ( $\alpha = 0.74$ ) contained items about the acceptance of authority, adherence to conventional norms, conformist ideas, and the repression of norm violators. The *Christian faith* orientation ( $\alpha = 0.92$ ) was measured by means of five statements that place all the meaning of life and death in the hands of God. The four items *cultural-localism* scale ( $\alpha = 0.64$ ) represented the value that individuals attached to local news, local newspapers, and the local community in general. Four items dealing with feelings about the neighbourhood and the people living there formed the *social-localism* scale ( $\alpha = 0.76$ ).

Some of the social positions considered relevant were determined identically for both samples: age and church involvement (cf. Felling *et al.* 1987, 1992). The division of social class was taken from the division of Erikson, Goldthorpe and Portocarero (1983), since this division is intended for international comparisons (cf. Ganzeboom *et al.* 1989). The educational levels in The Netherlands and Flanders were categorised in such a way that they would be as comparable as possible. In this study, the variable 'education' has been used as an ordinal variable.

## Analysis and results

A calculation was made to establish whether the mean scores on each of the attitude scales differed significantly between The Netherlands and Flanders. In terms of both the items and the measurement scales it appeared that there was significantly more approval of the negative attitude toward out-groups, the positive attitude toward the in-group, authoritarianism, anomie, and cultural localism in Flanders. This is shown in Table 1, where the mean scale scores are significantly higher in the Flemish sample. The strength of relationships is evaluated by the eta's (see Table 1). As regards assent to the Christian faith and



**Table 1.** Mean scores\* of the attitude scales: differences between the two populations

Population	Social localism	Cultural localism	Christian faith	Authoritarianism	Anomie	Out-group	In-group
Flanders	0.03	0.27	0.01	0.21	0.34	0.35	0.30
The Netherlands	-0.03	-0.33	-0.01	-0.26	-0.42	-0.42	-0.37
Eta	ns	0.30	ns	0.24	0.37	0.38	0.33

ns:  $p \geq 0.05$

\* All variables with means equal 0 and standard deviations equal 1 for the combined samples of the Dutch and the Flemish.

social localism, the differences were not significant. This finding of difference between The Netherlands and Flanders in terms of ethnocentrism in the early 1990s is in agreement with the findings of the international comparative study by Dekker and Van Praag (1990). They demonstrated – on the basis of exactly the same items – that xenophobia occurred in Belgium about twice as much as in The Netherlands.<sup>4</sup>

#### *The Netherlands and Flanders together*

In order to test whether the bivariate differences between The Netherlands and Flanders would be maintained also in a multivariate context, the full model, based on Figure 1, was subjected to multiple regression analysis (cf. Berry and Feldman 1985). Variables that were on the nominal measurement level (social class and church involvement) were entered as dummies.

The most important conclusion of this analysis is that the bivariate results hold in multivariate analysis. The consequence of this finding is that the theoretical model will be analysed separately for the Dutch and for the Flemings in order to be able to compare differences in between the two populations.

#### *The Netherlands and Flanders separately*

The results of this analysis are presented in Table 2. All the variables are standardised on the basis of the two sub-populations so that the non-standardised regression coefficients (*b*'s) can be used to indicate differences in effect *between* The Netherlands and Flanders (cf. Kim and Ferree 1981), while standardised regression coefficients ( $\beta$ 's) indicate, as usual, effect differences *within* The Netherlands and Flanders. The following description of the results will start by identifying the factors that are directly responsible for the two aspects of ethnocentrism in The Netherlands and in Flanders.

As regards the explanation of the negative attitude toward out-groups, it is first of all, striking that this attitude was not induced by social localism nor by Christian faith, either in The Netherlands nor in Flanders. On the contrary, in the two populations, this negative attitude was generated by cultural localism (The Netherlands,  $b = 0.18$ ; in Flanders,  $b = 0.15$ ) and by authoritarianism (in The Netherlands:  $b = 0.29$ ; Flanders:  $b = 0.32$ ). But within the two respective countries, authoritarianism was a strong predictor of the negative attitude toward



out-groups (The Netherlands:  $\beta = 0.29$ ; Flanders:  $\beta = 0.32$ ). A difference between The Netherlands and Flanders must be associated with anomie as a factor responsible for this negative attitude toward out-groups. In The Netherlands ( $b = 0.30$ ), the effect of this factor was much stronger than in Flanders ( $b = 0.11$ ).

There was also concurrence between the Dutch and the Flemings in relation to the explanation of the positive attitude toward the in-group, in neither of these two populations can Christian faith and anomie seen as responsible for this attitude. The effect of social localism was equally prevalent in both populations ( $b = 0.11$ ). The differences between the two populations are found in the factors of cultural localism and authoritarianism. Whereas the effect of cultural localism was not significant in Flanders, this was the case in The Netherlands ( $b = 0.17$ ). And as regards authoritarianism, it is striking that its effect in Flanders ( $b = 0.35$ ) was stronger than in The Netherlands ( $b = 0.26$ ).

Having established which factors were directly responsible for the two aspects of ethnocentrism in The Netherlands and in Flanders gives rise to the question of the social basis for these phenomena.

Social class had a direct impact on the two components of ethnocentrism, but the character and strength of this impact differed in the two populations. In The Netherlands, all social classes subscribed more strongly to the negative attitude toward ethnic minorities than did the people who had never had paid work, i.e. the reference category. In Flanders, the effect of social class was barely significant, and only the routine non-manual workers were less prejudiced than those who had never had paid work. The effect of social class on the in-group component of ethnocentrism was completely different in the two populations. In The Netherlands, those who had never had paid work identified more strongly with the national in-group than people in other social classes. In Flanders, the 'non-active' in the reference category identified least of all with the in-group. Is this an indication that the in-group variable has a different social meaning in the cultural and structural context of the two populations?

In The Netherlands, authoritarianism was strongly reinforced by a low educational level ( $b = -0.34$ ), while its effect in Flanders was, strikingly enough, not significant. The linear treatment of the 'education' variable in Flanders might have been responsible for this unexpected finding.<sup>5</sup> In the two populations, authoritarianism is seen to become stronger as one grows older ( $b = 0.02$  and  $b = 0.03$ , respectively). In The Netherlands and in Flanders, authoritarianism was stronger among church members than among non church-goers. There were differences, however, within the group of church members. In The Netherlands, the modal members and core members were more authoritarian than the non church-goers, whereas in Flanders, core church members, and, in particular, marginal church members were more authoritarian than those who did not practise. A striking concurrence emerged between The Netherlands and Flanders in terms of social class. In both countries, the self-employed were most clearly differentiated from the reference category with respect to authoritarianism, i.e. this class of self-employed individuals subscribed relatively strongly to authoritarianism. On the other hand, executive class members dissociated themselves relatively strongly from authoritarianism in Flanders more so than in The Netherlands.

The social basis of cultural localism was predictive in The Netherlands for both aspects of ethnocentrism, but in Flanders only for the negative attitude toward out-groups. Cultural localism was strongly fostered in both populations



Table 2. Predictors of ethnocentrism in The Netherlands and Flanders separately\*

	Social localism		Cultural localism		Christian faith		Authoritar- ianism		Anomie		Negative attitude towards ethnic minorities		Positive attitude towards national in-group			
											Direct effect	Total effect	Direct effect	Total effect		
Dutch ( <i>n</i> = 275)																
Self-employed	0.13	(0.03)	0.44	(0.12)	0.06	(0.02)	0.39	(0.10)	-0.23	(-0.07)	0.23	(0.06)	(0.09)	-0.61	(-0.16)	(-0.11)
Manual workers	-0.20	(-0.09)	0.02	(0.01)	0.04	(0.02)	-0.50	(-0.02)	-0.50	(-0.26)	0.43	(0.20)	(0.12)	-0.29	(-0.13)	(-0.15)
Routine non-manual work	0.04	(0.02)	-0.12	(-0.06)	0.03	(0.01)	-0.13	(-0.06)	-0.62	(-0.34)	0.31	(0.15)	(0.05)	-0.30	(-0.15)	(-0.16)
Executives	-0.08	(-0.04)	-0.32	(-0.17)	-0.02	(-0.01)	-0.23	(-0.12)	-0.68	(-0.42)	0.32	(0.17)	(-0.01)	-0.35	(-0.19)	(-0.23)
Reference**																
Marginal church members	-0.16	(-0.06)	0.22	(0.09)	0.63	(0.27)	0.03	(0.01)	-0.04	(-0.02)	-0.01	(-0.01)	(0.01)	0.10	(0.04)	(0.10)
Modal church members	0.23	(0.10)	0.22	(0.10)	1.03	(0.46)	0.13	(0.06)	-0.11	(-0.06)	-0.02	(-0.01)	(0.01)	-0.08	(-0.04)	(0.01)
Core church members	0.23	(0.08)	0.13	(0.05)	1.53	(0.58)	0.10	(0.04)	-0.05	(-0.02)	-0.07	(-0.03)	(-0.01)	-0.03	(-0.01)	(0.02)
Reference***																
Age	ns	(ns)	ns	(ns)	0.01	(0.13)	0.02	(0.33)	0.02	(0.25)	0.01	(0.11)	(0.21)	ns	(ns)	(0.09)
Education	ns	(ns)	-0.38	(-0.29)	ns	(ns)	-0.34	(-0.26)	-0.36	(-0.32)	ns	(ns)	(-0.22)	ns	(ns)	(-0.12)
Social localism											ns	(ns)	(0.00)	0.11	(0.12)	(0.12)
Cultural localism											0.18	(0.18)	(0.18)	0.17	(0.17)	(0.17)
Christian faith											ns	(ns)	(0.00)	ns	(ns)	(0.00)
Authoritarianism											0.29	(0.30)	(0.30)	0.26	(0.26)	(0.26)
Anomie											0.30	(0.27)	(0.27)	ns	(ns)	(0.00)
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>		0.02		0.18		0.42		0.24		0.22			0.47			0.19

ns:  $p \geq 0.05$ .

\* Non-standardised and (in parentheses) standardised regression coefficients.

\*\* The reference category are individuals, among them housewives and students, who have never had paid work.

\*\*\*The reference group here are non church-goers.



Table 2. (continued)

	Social localism		Cultural localism		Christian faith		Authoritarianism		Anomie		Negative attitude towards ethnic minorities		Positive attitude towards national in-group			
											Direct effect	Total effect	Direct effect	Total effect		
Flemings ( <i>n</i> = 365)																
Self-employed	0.20	(0.08)	0.36	(0.14)	-0.19	(-0.07)	0.20	(0.08)	0.20	(0.08)	-0.00	(-0.00)	(0.06)	0.54	(0.22)	(0.26)
Manual workers	0.28	(0.12)	0.43	(0.18)	-0.15	(-0.06)	-0.05	(-0.02)	0.16	(0.07)	-0.04	(-0.02)	(0.01)	0.25	(0.11)	(0.12)
Routine non-manual work	0.10	(0.05)	0.32	(0.15)	-0.12	(-0.05)	-0.13	(-0.06)	0.16	(0.07)	-0.16	(-0.08)	(-0.08)	0.29	(0.14)	(0.13)
Executives	-0.23	(-0.10)	0.04	(0.02)	-0.13	(-0.05)	-0.51	(-0.21)	-0.50	(-0.20)	0.00	(0.00)	(-0.09)	0.23	(0.10)	(0.01)
Reference**																
Marginal church members	0.27	(0.13)	0.26	(0.12)	0.59	(0.25)	0.31	(0.14)	0.10	(0.05)	0.01	(0.00)	(0.08)	0.14	(0.07)	(0.13)
Modal church members	0.44	(0.20)	0.35	(0.15)	1.20	(0.50)	0.06	(0.03)	0.03	(0.01)	0.02	(0.01)	(0.04)	0.11	(0.05)	(0.08)
Core church members	0.37	(0.12)	0.44	(0.14)	1.27	(0.39)	0.22	(0.07)	-0.23	(-0.07)	-0.04	(-0.02)	(0.03)	0.10	(0.04)	(0.07)
Reference***																
Age	ns	(ns)	0.01	(0.12)	0.01	(0.16)	0.03	(0.38)	0.01	(0.15)	ns	(ns)	(0.17)	0.01	(0.16)	(0.30)
Education	ns	(ns)	-0.31	(-0.24)	ns	(ns)	ns	(ns)	-0.28	(-0.21)	ns	(ns)	(-0.06)	ns	(ns)	(0.00)
Social localism											ns	(ns)	(0.00)	0.11	(0.11)	(0.11)
Cultural localism											0.15	(0.16)	(0.16)	ns	(ns)	(0.00)
Christian faith											ns	(ns)	(0.00)	ns	(ns)	(0.00)
Authoritarianism											0.32	(0.34)	(0.34)	0.35	(0.36)	(0.36)
Anomie											0.11	(0.11)	(0.11)	ns	(ns)	(0.00)
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.11		0.18		0.32		0.26		0.23				0.27		0.35	

ns:  $p \geq 0.05$ .

\* Non-standardised and (in parentheses) standardised regression coefficients.

\*\* The reference category are individuals, among them housewives and students, who have never had paid work.

\*\*\*The reference group here are non church-goers.



by a low level of education ( $b = -0.38$  and  $b = -0.31$ , respectively). In Flanders, age also played a role ( $b = 0.01$ ), while this was not the case in The Netherlands. As with authoritarianism, cultural localism again appeared to be subscribed to more strongly by church members than by non-practising individuals. And as regards social class, this phenomenon correlated more clearly in The Netherlands with the self-employed, while in Flanders predominantly manual workers displayed this trait, followed by the self-employed and routine non-manual workers.

Social localism appeared to be equally responsible both in The Netherlands and in Flanders for a positive attitude toward the in-group. Age and education had nothing to do with this form of localism in either of the populations. However, this phenomenon was encountered more strongly in both populations among church members than among non church-goers. As regards social class, social localism was found primarily among the self-employed in The Netherlands, while in Flanders both the manual workers and the self-employed stood out in this respect.

The social bases of anomie were responsible for the negative attitude toward out-groups much more strongly in The Netherlands than in Flanders. Both in The Netherlands and in Flanders, anomie was strongly associated with a low-level education ( $b = -0.36$  and  $b = -0.28$ , respectively). In both populations, feelings of anomie were stronger with age ( $b = 0.02$  and  $b = 0.01$ , respectively). In contrast to the predictors of ethnocentrism mentioned above, anomie occurred less strongly among church members in The Netherlands than among non church-goers. In Flanders, however, only core church members reported less anomie than non church-goers. As regards social class, in The Netherlands anomie prevailed most strongly among people who had never worked for pay, i.e. the reference category, followed by the self-employed, whereas in Flanders the self-employed followed by the manual workers and the non-manual workers reported feelings of anomie more strongly than the reference category.

## Discussion

An attempt to place this large number of findings in perspective follows below. An interpretation of the global differences between the Dutch and the Flemings will allow for a discussion of the differences and the common ground which exist in the explanations of ethnocentrism.

It has been found that both aspects of ethnocentrism were subscribed to more strongly by Flemings than by the Dutch. That the positive attitude toward the in-group, in other words, nationalism, seems to be stronger in Flanders than in The Netherlands is not a surprising observation. A previous historical study already showed that the search for nationalistic sentiments in The Netherlands is a laborious one (cf. Te Velde 1991). Insofar as one can still speak of it, nationalism is expressed virtually only at major international sports events, according to Te Velde.

In Flanders, however, the desire for more independence and power is a constant factor in Belgian politics. Flemish militants have always agreed that Flanders should become monolingual (Kossman 1986). This 'flamingantism' has known many variants, but the organisations involved in it appeal without exception to Flemish nationalistic sentiments, albeit with varying degrees of



success and extremism. The breeding ground for this ongoing Flemish nationalism among a minority within the Flemish population is probably to be found in the existence of the Walloon and Francophone 'out-groups' within their own borders with which the Flemings have a competitive and sometimes antagonistic relationship. The specific nature of this relationship is likely to have fostered the Flemish 'we-feeling' and the solidarity within the linguistic community. This, at least, is what is suggested by the studies of Sherif and Sherif (1953/1979), which since have been replicated in many other contexts (Harvey 1956; Blake and Mouton 1961, 1962; Johnson 1967; Diab 1970; Konecni 1979). These socio-psychological experiments demonstrated that competition between groups, also when they are part of one and the same organisation, lead to a strengthening of the group cohesion and also to a rejection of the other group. That this form of Flemish nationalism is accompanied by a negative attitude toward the Walloon out-group has been confirmed by Billiet *et al.* (1990). The specific situation in Belgium may be supposed to have kept Flemish nationalism continuously simmering, as it were, and the pan of negative attitudes toward the Walloons can also be brought to boil with respect to other groups.

De Witte (1992) sought the explanation of the negative attitude toward out-groups on the part of the Flemings in the historical developments of the past few decades. He considers that the cultural differences between the ethnic out-groups and the Belgians were generating resentment already in the 1960s and 1970s. The socio-economic crisis in the beginning of the 1980s would have fostered perceptions of being threatened economically. In addition, at the end of the 1980s, 'the further structural implantation and expansion of the activities of the *Vlaams Blok* occurred in a social climate that was – in part because of the *Vlaams Blok* propaganda – rather unfavourable toward foreigners' (De Witte 1992: 17). This structural implantation manifested itself in the involvement of the *Vlaams Blok* in the activities of associations in problem districts, districts from which the Socialist Party had partially withdrawn. It was also evident in that the *Vlaams Blok* forced other political parties to place the immigrant problem on the agenda and to discuss sometimes extreme solutions (cf. Bijttebier *et al.* 1992). In The Netherlands, it is true, similar developments occurred, but there is one important difference. The *Centrum Partij* and later the *Centrum Democraten* did not succeed in 'structurally implanting' themselves in The Netherlands. On the contrary, these political parties were continuously plagued by internal conflict, chaos, and division. Moreover, these parties had to contend with a 'contaminated identity', being under suspicion of harbouring former Nazi collaborators. In addition, in the political climate of The Netherlands, they constantly had to work to show that they were not racist or fascist (Van Donselaar 1991). If a party's political position on ethnic minorities is assumed to be as critical to the vote in The Netherlands as it is in Flanders, this situation may possibly have led to confusion on the part of the potential electorate. Anyway, none of the extreme right-wing parties in The Netherlands have succeeded in effectively propagating their body of ideas. Conversely, the *Vlaams Blok* has done so. It is possible that this has contributed to opinions about 'own' and 'other' people having become less stringently taboo in Flanders. This would be borne out by the comparatively more negative attitude of the Flemings toward out-groups. In conclusion, common ground and divergence in the explanations of ethnocentrism in the two populations will be explored (primarily based on Table 2).



## Conclusion

The adequacy of the predictive models is not the same in the two populations. The present study found relatively large amounts of explained variance for the out-group component in The Netherlands (47 per cent) and for the in-group component in Flanders (35 per cent). The explanation of the attitude toward the in-group among the Dutch is rather weak (only 19 per cent). There were also differences in most explanatory factors of the in-group component between the two populations. Social class, church involvement, age, and social localism all contributed to the explanation in a distinctive way. There were indications of differences in the cultural meaning of the in-group component in Flanders and in The Netherlands.

Neither among the Flemings nor among the Dutch did social localism lead to a negative attitude toward out-groups. This means that this negative attitude is not fed directly by satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the immediate environment. Once again, it appears that negative prejudices need not be nourished by constant irritation and that they can continue to exist, stimulated by other factors. This finding is in accordance with the classic concept of Adorno *et al.* (1950/1982) that negative feelings about other ethnic groups does not *per se* need to be nourished by events, experiences, or contacts in the everyday life world.

For both populations, the theory that the Christian faith in itself would lead to a negative attitude toward out-groups and a positive attitude toward the in-group is, so far, falsified. Therefore, we consider this a spurious explanation. However, it does appear that both aspects of ethnocentrism were stimulated in both populations by authoritarianism, which occurred more strongly among church members than among non church-goers in both The Netherlands and Flanders. The interpretation for this finding goes back to Berger and Luckman (1966), who assumed that believers would consider the world as being given by God, as absolute and unchangeable, as an entity to which one must subject oneself, while non-believers would consider the world to be a social construction that one can change by human action. This Christian world view would lead believers also to subject themselves to other authorities, which is one of the critical characteristics of authoritarianism. In both populations, we found that, within the category of church members, the degree of involvement had a moderating impact on ethnic prejudice: core church members were less likely than marginal church members to support a negative attitude towards out-groups. This was confirmed by larger-scale studies conducted in 1991 (Billiet 1995).

Authoritarianism is one of the most important factors stimulating ethnocentrism among both the Dutch and the Flemings. This disposition promotes social identification and social contra-identification in people on both sides of the border. And in both populations, authoritarianism occurs to be the strongest among the same categories of people: the self-employed and manual workers. In addition, these social classes, both in The Netherlands and in Flanders, turned out to be the most anomic and the most localistic. Why is this conglomerate of opinions so strong in precisely these social classes? In previous studies, we suggested that precisely these social classes consider themselves playthings of fate (Van Snippenburg and Scheepers 1991). In addition, these groups, in particular, feel themselves socially neglected because they are confronted with economic discrimination, declining purchasing power, and job insecurity (Swyn-



gedouw 1992). They probably live with the feeling that it is precisely they who are being presented with the bill for both the economic and the political malaise, while it is precisely they who can hardly defend themselves against the fate that is imposed on them, as it were, anonymously. Thus, their submissive attitude toward authorities (an important aspect of authoritarianism) could be understood but also their feelings of political and social powerlessness (important aspects of anomie). In addition, precisely these social classes are characterised by limited social and geographic mobility, so their social horizon remains somewhat restricted to the immediate residential area or the social network in it. In this way, their localistic orientation becomes understandable. It is then all the more painful when these local networks are subjected to erosion and when the social fabric starts to collapse.

Finally, it is noteworthy that neither in Flanders nor in The Netherlands did higher education lead directly to a reduction of negative prejudices. This implies, in our opinion, that greater common knowledge of, for example, customs and morals, norms and values of other ethnic groups is insufficient to reduce ethnocentrism in the Low Countries. Campaigns to combat negative image formation of ethnic minorities thus represent an uphill task. In view of the social bases of the factors that instigate ethnocentrism and the interpretation provided here, government policy both in The Netherlands and in Flanders should be particularly concerned with these, perhaps neglected, social classes.

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## Notes

- 1 See Colijn in the *Volkskrant* (29 November 1991), Cammelbeeck and Garscharen in the *Volkskrant* (30 November 1991), de Witte in *De Standaard* (8 January 1992), and Fennema in the *Volkskrant* (4 February 1992). De Schepper succeeded in articulating pithily the body of ideas of the *Vlaams Blok*: 'The *Vlaams Blok* said straight out: own people first. Translated into Antwerp dialect, this is "all blacks out"' (*De Gelderlander* 30 November 1991). Bijttebier *et al.* (1992) distinguish still more elements that would be of importance: conceptions about law, order, and security, criticism on what party politicians call 'banditism', and positions on abortion and other bio-ethical questions. However, they, too, considered that the position on the immigrants constitutes the most important element.
- 2 Eisinga and Scheepers 1989; Eisinga *et al.* 1990a, b, 1991a, b; Scheepers *et al.* 1989, 1990, 1992; Scheepers and Eisinga 1991; Billiet *et al.* 1990; Billiet *et al.* 1995; Pieterse *et al.* 1991.
- 3 The information about social class, age, education, the anomie scale, and some other items came from the face-to-face interviews in the first round. This difference in the manner of recording could possibly have had effects on the response distributions. But, since the effort was also made in The Netherlands to place the respondents in a situation in which they could express their opinions relatively freely, that is, without being directly influenced by the interviewer, we may assume that such interview effects are minor if not negligible. However, we are not absolutely certain about this.
- 4 The large differences in ethnocentrism between Flanders and The Netherlands may be somewhat affected by the cultural climate and the acceptability of verbal expressions in the two populations.



Only one indication sustains this impression. In Flanders, it was found that positively worded statements were less likely to be rejected than that negatively worded statements were accepted. It is possible that the opposite appeared in The Netherlands: positively worded items were more easily rejected than negatively worded items were accepted. The response distributions of two similar items in recent surveys in 1994 (The Netherlands) and 1995 (Flanders) support this: (1) 'We should cordially welcome the foreigners who want to settle in The Netherlands/Belgium' (22.9 per cent agree and 41.6 per cent disagree in The Netherlands; 28 per cent agree and 34 per cent disagree in Flanders); (2) 'The presence of different cultures enriches our society' (37 per cent agree and 40.8 per cent disagree in The Netherlands; 45 per cent agree and 20 per cent disagree in Flanders). These response distributions diverge completely from those used in this study. We are not sure whether those examples illustrate a different response style or a change in attitude in The Netherlands since the beginning of the 1990s (see Muskens 1995: 128–29).

- 5 By measuring education as an ordinal variable – and not as a categorical variable – in the model for Flanders, its effect on authoritarianism is nearly totally taken over by the category 'executive' in the social class variable. This was not the case in the Dutch model. In the Dutch educational system it is more appropriate to use the ordinal measure for education and not a categorical one. This is an example of problems that may arise when the same measurements are used across cultures. In the Flemish educational system, up to the 1970s vocational and professional training was already separated from general education (the humanities) in the first year of secondary education. A substantial number of students who failed in general education switched to professional or vocational education in order to start over. Therefore, the linear relationship with some other variables may be somewhat disturbed or weakened.

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