

University of Groningen

## What do Dutch nobles think about themselves?

Kuiper, Yme; Schijf, dr Huibert

*Published in:*  
Virtus. Journal of Nobility Studies

**IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.**

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Publication date:*  
2017

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Kuiper, Y., & Schijf, D. H. (2017). What do Dutch nobles think about themselves? Some notes on a 2016 survey on the identity of the Dutch nobility. *Virtus. Journal of Nobility Studies*, 24, 173-186.

### Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

### Take-down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.

# VIRTUS

24 | 2017



Yme Kuiper and Huibert Schijf

## What do Dutch nobles think about themselves?

Some notes on a 2016 survey on the identity of the Dutch nobility

173

In the late 1980s, the French sociologist Monique de Saint Martin started her research on nobility in modern French society with a pilot study among noble families. Many of her noble interlocutors, she noticed, answered her request for an interview with the following puzzling statement: ‘La noblesse n’existe plus.’ (The [French] nobility does not exist anymore).<sup>1</sup> Over the years, the authors of this article have spoken with many people belonging to the Dutch nobility, but they have never heard this statement in their conversations with elderly or young nobles. What did strike us, however, was that many of the Dutch nobility do not use their titles in public, and that some hand over business cards both with and without their noble title (or noble title of respect) on it. Another observation: the current Dutch deputy prime minister and minister of internal affairs Kajsa Ollongren has a Swedish-Finnish noble background, but the general public is not aware of this biographical fact. In a recent interview she asserted: ‘I don’t feel noble. I don’t even know what it is or how it feels. It’s just there, I have always known it, there is a coat of arms in Stockholm, and that’s all.’<sup>2</sup>

Does the French nobility have an even more hidden character than its Dutch counterpart? Or did the French nobles who spoke with De Saint Martin give her a sort of socially acceptable (i.e. noble) answer? One of the crucial insights of her study, however, is that noble identity is not a permanent, monolithic and unchangeable phenomenon, but rather that

<sup>1</sup> M. de Saint Martin, *L’espace de la noblesse* (Paris, 1993) 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Vogue*, 26 Oct. 2017. Ollongren (1968) studied history and economics at the University of Amsterdam; she took a further degree at the École Normale d’Administration in Paris. ‘Stockholm’ refers to the House of Nobility (*Riddarhuset*) in Stockholm, built in Dutch classicist style in the 1640s.

identification with being a member of the nobility is situation-bound and conditioned by meeting people at specific places and on specific occasions. In the past, nobles were ‘masters of visibility’ who cherished a particular, exclusive lifestyle; nowadays, in a more meritocratic and individualistic society and culture, this group’s habitus no longer seems self-evident. The conditions under which a noble identity (or perhaps more adequately formulated, the identification of men and women with their noble birth and background) is currently constructed, differ strongly from those of a few generations ago.<sup>3</sup>

### Nobility in the Netherlands

Today the Dutch nobility numbers around 10.000 individuals, of whom a fifth lives abroad.<sup>4</sup> Recent statistics also show that no more than a quarter of the nobles living in the Netherlands is a member of an exclusive noble organisation or order. This begs the question of group identity among the Dutch nobility. How strong is the identification with their noble origins and status in modern, meritocratic Dutch society? What are the most important identity markers among the Dutch nobility nowadays? And what about recent trends: is there a downward trend in noble group (or self) identity? Or, perhaps, is it the other way around: are more and more nobles becoming members of exclusive noble organisations, trying to hold on to or revitalise some sort of collective noble identity in the Netherlands?

It is a remarkable fact that it is easier to find statistics and solid genealogical data about living Dutch noblemen and women than about their peers elsewhere in Europe. Viewed from a long-term historical perspective, this seems even more puzzling. In comparison to many other European societies, Dutch society was less strongly dominated by feudal conditions and noble families in the early modern period. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Dutch nobility profited significantly from the new political order in the young Kingdom of the Netherlands, created by the 1814 Congress of Vienna and ruled over by King William I. The Dutch nobility was reinvented as a political elite and the new king ennobled many rich and influential bourgeois families. After a liberal constitutional amendment, this privileged position ended formally in 1848; the noble and patrician presence in parliament

174

3 Compare Y. Kuiper, ‘Towards a comparative history of nobility in twentieth-century Europe’, in: idem, N. Bijlleveld and J. Dronkers, eds, *Nobilities in Europe in the twentieth century. Reconversion strategies, memory culture and elite formation* (Leuven-Paris, 2015) 1-26.

4 In 2012 the total number of noble families was 566; E.J. Wolleswinkel, *Nederlands adelsrecht. Wettelijke adelom als historisch gegroeid instituut* (’s-Gravenhage, 2012) 285. According to official statistics (2015), the Belgian nobility includes about 1200 families, that is 32.000 individuals; see B. Maus de Rolley, ‘La composition actuelle de la noblesse belge’, *Driemaandelijks bulletin van de Vereniging van de Adel van het Koninkrijk België*, CCLXXXIV (2015). In comparison to the Dutch nobility these numbers are striking. The crucial factor here is that Belgium is one of the few modern nation-states (and monarchies) in Europe where hereditary ennoblement still occurs regularly. Ennoblement was already rare in the Netherlands in the twentieth century and nowadays is hardly possible anymore. The Belgian nobility, including many wealthy ennobled entrepreneurial families, is also richer than its Dutch counterpart and more strongly represented in the national economic and landed elites.



175

Knight's Day of the Order of St John in the Netherlands (*Johanniter Orde in Nederland*), Castle Zeist 2016  
(private collection)

withered subsequently, but very slowly.<sup>5</sup> Even in the period 1888-1918, a quarter of Dutch ministers had a noble background. As a reaction to permanent threats to their original high position in society, and due to internal fragmentation and declining prosperity, the Dutch nobility began to organise themselves, including reinventing old chivalric orders, from around 1900.<sup>6</sup>

In 1899 the Dutch Nobility Association (*Nederlandse Adelsvereniging*; NAV) was founded. The main goal of the Association was to give financial support to impoverished nobles, usually noble widows who had great difficulty running their households without a serious drop in the noble lifestyle. The most prominent member of the Association was the young Queen Wilhelmina. It was her spouse Prince Hendrik of Mecklenburg-Schwerin who initiated the revitalisation of a Dutch branch of the German Protestant Order of St John in 1909. Two years later followed the foundation of a Dutch association of the Catholic Order of Malta. In addition to the much smaller and very exclusive Bailiwick of Utrecht of the Teutonic

5 Y. Kuiper, 'Eine rein bürgerliche Nation? Adel und Politik in den Niederlanden im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert', in: J. Leonhard and C. Wieland, eds, *What makes the nobility noble? Comparative perspectives from the sixteenth to the twentieth century* (Göttingen, 2011) 201-217.

6 N. Bijleveld, 'The revival of Dutch nobility around 1900', in: Y. Kuiper, N. Bijleveld and J. Dronkers, eds, *Nobilities in Europe in the twentieth century. Reconversion strategies, memory culture and elite formation* (Leuven-Paris, 2015) 97-116.

Order, which had already been saved from a state of decay in the mid-eighteenth century, these two orders still exist and together they currently have over 800 members.<sup>7</sup>

The Dutch Nobility Association experienced a growth spurt during the 1990s. This rise in popularity can partly be attributed to the foundation of a specific branch for young members of the nobility in 1991. Since the equity capital of the NAV had grown substantially thanks to major legacies, in about 1990 the board also decided to fund the extra costs for young members of the nobility who had plans to study abroad. At the same time the NAV began to cooperate financially with the three noble chivalric orders in the Netherlands by supporting charitable projects.<sup>8</sup> In 2000 the NAV had 1000 members and it currently has about 1400. Another astonishing fact is that an official registration of the Dutch nobility and of the Dutch patriciate started in 1903 and 1910 respectively. Many scholarly publications by sociologists, anthropologists and historians have been based on these series since the late 1990s. A last striking observation in this context is that since 2000 noblemen and especially noblewomen have started to write their recollections of family life in the nobility, even writing about dramatic scenes and events in the family during the Second World War. It looks as if this is a growth spurt towards individualisation and an extension of memory culture in noble circles.<sup>9</sup>

176

### The 2005 survey

In 2005, the NAV took the initiative for a survey among its members. In the 1960s and 1970s, the boards of the NAV had seen that the influence of a noble background became increasingly marginal in Dutch society, and they also felt mocked by information about noble events and institutions in the Dutch press and media. This situation changed in the 1980s and in particular in the 1990s. The media took a more serious interest in the Dutch nobility and considered the NAV to be the well-informed mouthpiece of the organised Dutch nobility. To adapt adequately to this changing situation, the NAV wanted even more information about its members in order to communicate a realistic image of the current Dutch nobility, based on facts and not on one-sided, biased impressions. If the NAV wanted to represent the whole of Dutch nobility, then it had to answer this crucial question: who and what do we represent? The most important source of inspiration for the 2005 survey of the NAV was the inaugural address of the sociologist Jaap Dronkers (1945-2016), given at the University of Amsterdam in 2000.<sup>10</sup> Dronkers showed that the nobility was still surprisingly successful at reaching

7 T. Versélewel de Witt Hamer, *Geloven verplicht. Een elite-onderzoek naar ridderlijke orden in het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden (1965-2015)* ('s-Gravenhage, 2017) 324.

8 E. Ketelaar-de Vries Reilingh, 'De geschiedenis van de Nederlandse Adelsvereniging', in: idem and Y. Kuiper, eds, *Edel voor adel* ('s-Gravenhage, 1999) 62.

9 Compare Y. Kuiper, 'Memory, residence and profession. Aspects of the process of reconversion of a Dutch noble family in the twentieth century', in: idem, N. Bijleveld and J. Dronkers, eds, *Nobilities in Europe in the twentieth century. Reconversion strategies, memory culture and elite formation* (Leuven-Paris, 2015) 117-148.

10 J. Dronkers, 'Has the Dutch nobility retained its social relevance during the 20<sup>th</sup> century?', *European Sociological Review*, XIX (2003) 81-96.



higher elite positions in Dutch society during the twentieth century, despite their very weak legal status since the mid-nineteenth century. How can this strong advantage in achieving elite positions, which Dronkers referred to as retaining social relevance in Dutch society (until circa 1980), in particular in the fields of public administration and justice, business and banking be explained? Dronkers found his answer in ‘the modernisation of social and cultural capital’ by noble families in the course of the twentieth century. Notwithstanding the decline in the public visibility of the nobility, its tenacity in holding on to elite positions remained remarkably strong. The main goal of the 2005 survey was to discover the crucial differences between members of the nobility with and without elite positions. Another important goal was to answer the question about the prosperity of the Dutch nobility.<sup>11</sup>

A third topic in the survey was noble identity, including, of course, life experiences and self-images of the nobility, such as the question whether there is much contact within the Dutch nobility? Do members see themselves as noblemen and noblewomen? Do they follow a noble lifestyle? And when and whether do members use their noble titles? One conclusion from the survey was that the nobility was not seen as old-fashioned by its members. There was an awareness of noble status, although this was not strongly emphasised. A noble collective identity was not a key element for the members, but was seen more as a kind of mentality. More important forms of identification that were mentioned were family and tradition.<sup>12</sup> Although Dronkers, Huistra and Kuiper have criticised the representativeness of the survey, their conclusions based on a reanalysis of the data have confirmed that NAV members belong to the most active and successful part of the Dutch nobility in Dutch society.<sup>13</sup> Here we follow these earlier reports by focussing on the differences between members of the NAV and non-members and by addressing the same general questions as were raised in 2005. The 2005 survey was to a large extent replicated in 2016. Again, the NAV took the initiative for the survey.

177

## The 2016 survey

The survey in 2016 was based on three samples: 363 members of the NAV, 296 members of the Dutch nobility who were non-members and did not overlap with the first group, and a group of 500 respondents who were not nobles.<sup>14</sup> The last sample consisted of 400 respondents seen as representative for the general Dutch population. The last hundred respondents were selected based on level of education, level of occupation and income to be as comparable as possible with noble respondents on these three criteria. This last sample is not helpful

11 See, for the discussion of the goals of the 2005 survey, F.F. Baron de Smeth van Alphen et al., ‘Adel in Nederland: “niet meer zichtbaar, wel merkbaar.” Resultaten van de enquête onder leden van de Nederlandse adel, november 2005’, *Virtus*, XIII (2006) 7-43.

12 De Smeth van Alphen, ‘Adel in Nederland’, 27.

13 J. Dronkers, A. Huistra and Y. Kuiper, ‘Hoe “adellijk” is de adel in het huidige Nederland?’, *Virtus*, XIII (2006) 44-61. The authors also discuss homogamy, religion, and politics in detail.

14 *Identiteitsonderzoek onder Nederlandse Adel 2016* (Zoetermeer, 2016) 6.

as a control group. In their discussion of the 2005 survey, Dronkers et al. were in favour of a follow-up survey that would use the data in *Nederland's patriciaat* (the Dutch Patriciate) as a control group.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately this advice was not followed. This means that it is impossible to compare the nobility with the Dutch patriciate as a well-defined non-noble high-status group to gain better insight into the specific features of the nobility. Therefore, the focus in this article is on the differences between the members and non-members of the NAV and their opinions of the Dutch nobility. All the tables are based on the 659 noble respondents, although missing data means that the number is sometimes smaller.

The members and non-members differ hardly at all in gender and age; in both groups the age is relatively high.<sup>16</sup> However, in terms of wealth tax, they differ substantially. Almost fifty per cent of the members of the NAV are liable to wealth tax based on a fortune of 250.000 Euro or more, whereas only 25 per cent of non-members fall in the same category. Another significant difference can be found for the highest level of education. Sixty per cent of the members have a university degree, whereas the percentage for non-members is just under forty per cent. Members of the NAV are thus wealthier and more highly educated than nobles who are not members of the NAV. Finally, a significant majority of the NAV members (nearly sixty per cent) voted for the VVD (the liberal-conservative political party of Prime Minister Rutte) in 2012 compared to only 38 per cent of the (noble) non-members of the NAV. The latter voted relatively more often for D66 (the social-liberal party: twenty per cent versus fourteen per cent) and much more often for three left-wing parties (PvdA, SP and GL): eighteen per cent versus five per cent. Very relevant in this context are the extremely low percentages of nobles who voted for the populist right-wing party PVV (of Geert Wilders), respectively two per cent and one per cent for members and non-members. The percentage of non-voters is also very low among nobles: six per cent.

178

### Continuity and membership

Continuity of a group over time requires a strong self-identity, and rules and rituals to be followed. Marriage homogamy among many of its members is a necessary step for the reproduction of its culture. Therefore, an important indicator of continuity within the nobility is how many members of the nobility marry a noble partner, and how often both their parents belong to the nobility as well. Twenty per cent of the men or women who have a noble partner have two parents who also belong to the nobility, as Table 1 shows. At first sight twenty per cent of the NAV members does not seem very high, but that is misleading because the number of noble partners is very limited compared to the huge number of potential non-noble partners.<sup>17</sup> As the table also shows, there is a substantial difference between members

15 Dronkers, Huistra and Kuiper, 'Hoe "adellijk" is de adel', 48.

16 There might be an underrepresentation of the younger nobility, as Dronkers, Huistra and Kuiper have already pointed out. A simple Chi-square was used to test statistical significance. All reported tables are statistically significant.

17 The correct way to calculate this would be to use odd ratios, but the necessary data are not available.



and non-members. Nevertheless, if we regard marriage patterns as a way of reproduction for the nobility, the high percentage of people with parents who both belong to the nobility but who do not marry a noble partner shows that marriage homogamy can no longer be taken as something which is, in a manner of speaking, natural or traditional.

TABLE 1 A NOBLE PARTNER WHEN BOTH PARENTS BELONG TO THE NOBILITY, IN PERCENTAGES

Noble partner?	Both parents belong to the nobility	
	Yes	No
Yes	20	9
No	80	91
Total	100 (n=125)	100 (n=340)

179

Table 2 indicates that continuity in noble families is significantly related to gender. Twice as many women marry a noble partner than men. Although we can only speculate about personal reasons, the relative high percentage of noble females who marry a noble might indicate that the continuity of the noble culture runs through the female line. On the other hand, the heredity of nobility runs only through the male lineage. The low percentage of homogamy in Table 2 confirms earlier research by Schijf and Dronkers that shows that marriage homogamy was in decline, especially for the generation born between 1910 and 1940, but that the pace of decline has become slower for the younger generations.<sup>18</sup>

TABLE 2 A NOBLE PARTNER DIVIDED BY GENDER, IN PERCENTAGES

Noble partner?	Gender	
	Male	Female
Yes	11	23
No	89	77
Total	100 (n=299)	100 (n=100)

Finally, Table 3 shows that more than three times as many members have a noble partner than non-members. The percentage of members with a noble partner has increased compared to 2005.<sup>19</sup> It is an indication that the NAV attracts a 'core' part of the Dutch nobility (nobles who identify themselves strongly with 'nobility').

See Dronkers, Huistra and Kuiper, 'Hoe "adellijk" is de adel', 50.

<sup>18</sup> H. Schijf and J. Dronkers, 'Huwelijken tussen adel en patriciaat. Een middel om hun elitepositie in een moderne samenleving in stand te houden?', *De Nederlandse Leeuw*, CXXII (2005) 144-155.

<sup>19</sup> See Table 2 in Dronkers, Huistra and Kuiper, 'Hoe "adellijk" is de adel', 51.

TABLE 3 A NOBLE PARTNER FOR MEMBERS AND NON-MEMBERS, IN PERCENTAGES

NAV Membership		
Noble partner?	Member	Non-member
Yes	16	5
No	84	95
<b>Total</b>	<b>100 (n=268)</b>	<b>100 (n=174)</b>

### Noble identity

180

Well-established elite families are usually fully aware of their past and continuity, and therefore of their genealogy. Table 4 measures this knowledge with the question: ‘Do you know all the family names of your great-grandparents?’ In general, genealogical knowledge among the nobility is remarkably high: 59 per cent for the whole group of respondents.<sup>20</sup> Again, the percentage is much higher among members than non-members: seventy per cent as opposed to 45 per cent. This is another indication that the NAV attracts the most motivated part of the Dutch nobility.

TABLE 4 KNOWING THE FAMILY NAMES OF ALL GREAT-GRANDPARENTS, BY NAV MEMBERSHIP, IN PERCENTAGES

NAV Membership		
Family names of great-grandparents?	Yes	No
Yes	70	45
No	30	55
<b>Total</b>	<b>100 (n=358)</b>	<b>100 (n=293)</b>

TABLE 5 LIVE IN ORIGINAL FAMILY HOME, BY NAV MEMBERSHIP, IN PERCENTAGES

NAV Membership		
Live in original home?	Yes	No
Yes	8	2
No	92	98
<b>Total</b>	<b>100 (n=361)</b>	<b>100 (n=292)</b>

<sup>20</sup> There are no percentages for the entire Dutch population, but some anecdotal evidence makes it likely that the percentage is much lower.

Austrian Ball (Debutante Ball) at Grand Hotel Huis ter Duin, Noordwijk aan Zee, 2013 (photo R. Hulshof)



181

Another indicator would be whether people still live in the original family home, sometimes dating back to the eighteenth century. Overall this is quite a rare phenomenon among the respondents, as might be expected. It occurs only for five per cent of the respondents, but again there is a significant difference between members and non-members (eight as opposed to two per cent) as can be seen in Table 5.

Unger and Dronkers already used data from the 2005 survey to show that the possession of family houses, country houses, castles and land among the Dutch nobility is highly correlated with financial wealth; however, they did not find such a correlation with annual income. It is not surprising, they argue, that rich nobles possess such historical objects of considerable wealth, but these nobles are not rich *because* they own such forms of heritage.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> S. Unger and J. Dronkers, 'Do you really need a castle? Material inheritance and noble status in present-day society', *Virtus*, XXI (2014) 129-149.

## Contacts among the nobility

Regular contact with other nobles outside one's own family ('internal noble networking') is yet another indication of how much respondents live within the world of the nobility. A high number of contacts might be helpful for maintaining the noble identity. As with the other tables, there is a striking difference between members and non-members. Table 6 shows that almost 57 per cent (together with 'sometimes' the total percentage is 89) of the members report that they regularly meet other noble individuals, whereas only fourteen per cent of the non-members say the same. The membership of orders of chivalry among the NAV members contributes to the much higher level of contacts with other nobles.

TABLE 6 MEETING NOBLES OUTSIDE THE OWN FAMILY, BY NAV MEMBERSHIP, IN PERCENTAGES

Meeting last five years?	NAV Membership	
	Yes	No
Never	3	36
Rarely	8	22
Sometimes	32	28
Often	57	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>100 (n=359)</b>	<b>100 (295)</b>

182

## Visibility of noble identity

One aspect of a more visible pride in and presence of noble identity is the use of noble titles in daily life. Members of the NAV use their noble titles more than twice as often as non-members. Table 7 shows another strong contrast for the use of noble titles in daily life. Combining the answers 'never' and 'very little', this comes to almost 75 per cent for non-members, whereas that percentage is only 41 for members, as the first row in Table 7 indicates. Overall, Table 7 shows a significant reluctance to use noble titles.

TABLE 7 USE OF NOBLE TITLE IN DAILY LIFE, BY NAV MEMBERSHIP, IN PERCENTAGES

Uses title in daily life?	NAV Membership	
	Yes	No
Almost never	41	75
Sometimes	31	13
Almost always	28	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>100 (n=360)</b>	<b>100 (n=293)</b>

## Nobility as elite: positions versus perceptions

A noble title increases the chances of reaching an elite position in the public and private sectors, as has been demonstrated by Schijf et al.<sup>22</sup> Their data were collected from a rich public source, the *Nederland's adelsboek*, and their argument was also based on comparisons (between nobles and patricians). Their analysis might be called an outsider's view based on 'objective' data. The NAV survey provides an insider's view based on the answers to the statement: 'The nobility belongs to the Dutch elite'. These are essentially perceptions. As Table 8 shows, 58 per cent of the members agree with the statement, whereas only 39 per cent of the non-members agree. Compared to the answers to the same statement in 2005, the responses given in 2016 are less outspoken.<sup>23</sup> There is still a significant gap between the two groups, however. Both groups agree with the statement in the same positive direction, which implies that a substantial part of the entire nobility sees themselves as belonging to the Dutch elite. However, regarding oneself as part of the Dutch elite does not necessarily imply that everybody will reach an elite position.

183

TABLE 8 NOBILITY IS PART OF THE DUTCH ELITE, BY NAV MEMBERSHIP, IN PERCENTAGES

Nobility as elite?	NAV Membership	
	Yes	No
Agree	58	39
Neutral	18	21
Disagree	24	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>100 (n=361)</b>	<b>100 (n=295)</b>

Recent research by De Hart and Van Houwelingen, entitled 'The lonely elite', shows a spectacular rise in the use of the term 'elite' in Dutch newspapers, especially the highbrow ones, but also the negative connotations it has for many people.<sup>24</sup> After the 2002 murder of the popular politician Pim Fortuyn, who fiercely criticised the Dutch political elite, the term was negatively framed by the media and new political leaders. The respondents in their survey (based on a sample from the whole Dutch population) saw the gap between the elite and ordinary people widening during the last decade, and they also blamed the elite for mis-

22 H. Schijf, J. Dronkers and J. van den Broeke-George, 'Recruitment of members of Dutch noble and high bourgeois families to elite positions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century,' *Social Science Information*, XLIII (2004) 435-475.

23 'Agree' is a combination of three scores: absolutely agree, agree and agree more than disagree. 'Disagree' is also a combination of three scores: absolutely disagree, disagree and disagree more than agree. For the comparison with 2005, the original data from the 2005 survey were reanalyzed.

24 J. de Hart and P. van Houwelingen, 'De eenzame elite', in: C. Vrooman, M. Gijsberts and J. Boelhouwer, eds, *Vershil in Nederland. Sociaal en cultureel rapport 2014* (The Hague, 2014) 204-224.

conduct and problems in Dutch society. In their view influential people in politics and economics form the elite. Many respondents, including highly educated respondents and more women than men, also consider the nobility as part of the elite – much more than successful sportsmen, scientists, artists or media stars. Most sociologists agree that elites – they prefer to point to a differentiation between elites in modern society – are linked to decision-making institutions in society; anthropologists are more aware of the processes of self-recognition and consciousness that exist among elites. Elites function more as an institution than as a class, so an elite has a common culture that is recognisable to its members and functions as a frame of action and thought for them. Some scholars argue that the word ‘elite’ should only be used in relation to those groups that have a degree of power.<sup>25</sup> For the noble respondents in the 2016 survey, ‘the elite in the Netherlands’ refers more to power and influence in politics, administration and business than in the media or in all sorts of associations.

184 TABLE 9 NEW ENNOBLEMENTS WOULD BE DESIRABLE, BY NAV MEMBERSHIP, IN PERCENTAGES

New ennoblements?	NAV Membership	
	Yes	No
Totally agree	11	3
Agree	17	19
More or less neutral*	40	39
Disagree	18	17
Totally disagree	12	16
Do not know	2	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>100 (n=363)</b>	<b>100 (n=295)</b>

\* ‘More or less neutral’ is a combination of the categories: ‘agree more than disagree’, ‘neutral’ and ‘disagree more than agree’.

## Continuity

An effective way to ensure the continuity of the Dutch nobility would be new ennoblements. Nowadays, there are severe legal restrictions on new ennoblements. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to look at the desires of the nobility itself regarding new ennoblements. Compared to the same table in 2005, the opinions on this topic are far less outspoken in 2016, although this is partly due to a larger number of categories in 2016.<sup>26</sup> More than a quarter (totally agree and agree) of NAV members support new ennoblements, whereas 22 per cent of the non-members support new ennoblements. Both percentages seem remarkably high.

25 Compare G.E. Marcus, *Elites. Ethnographic issues* (Albuquerque, 1983); H. Schijf, ‘Researching elites. Old and new perspectives’, in: J. Abbink and T. Salverda, eds, *The anthropology of elites. Power, cultures, and the complexities of distinction* (New York, 2013) 29-45.

26 See Table 18 in Dronkers, Huistra and Kuiper, ‘Hoe “adellijk” is de adel’, 58.



However, thirty per cent of the members and 33 per cent of the non-members do not show any desire in that direction: they disagree or even strongly disagree. Table 9 presents a clear overall ambivalence regarding new ennoblements, but the differences in opinion between members and non-members are relatively small.

### Symbolic capital

Following a special lifestyle as a noble can be part of the symbolic capital a noble title provides.<sup>27</sup> However, the results in Table 10 ('noble descent requires a special lifestyle'), when compared with answers to the same statement in 2005, show a sharp decline in the percentage of positive answers for both groups.<sup>28</sup> Members reported 69 per cent agreement in 2005, whereas only 53 per cent (a combination of 'totally agree' and 'agree') agrees in 2016. Whether this indicates a willingness to give up symbolic capital in a meritocratic society is uncertain. On the other hand, a special lifestyle might mean the long-standing expression *noblesse oblige*. The results can then be interpreted as a decline in the willingness to follow that principle.

185

TABLE 10 NOBILITY REQUIRES A SPECIAL LIFESTYLE, BY NAV MEMBERSHIP, IN PERCENTAGES

Nobility requires a special lifestyle?	NAV Membership	
	Yes	No
Totally agree	18	8
Agree	35	20
More or less neutral*	36	41
Disagree	7	13
Totally disagree	4	17
Do not know		1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100 (n=361)</b>	<b>100 (n=295)</b>

\* 'More or less neutral' is a combination of the categories: 'agree more than disagree', 'neutral' and 'disagree more than agree'.

<sup>27</sup> Compare De Saint Martin, *L'espace de la noblesse*, passim.

<sup>28</sup> See Table 15 in Dronkers, Huistra and Kuiper, 'Hoe "Adellijk" is de adel', 58.

## Conclusion

Both surveys offer a unique opportunity to analyse the background and opinions of members of the Dutch nobility, although they are probably more representative of members of the Dutch Nobility Association (NAV) than of other members of the nobility in the Netherlands. As was the case in 2005, the survey in 2016 shows that members belong to the wealthier, higher educated, more active and involved nobility. Over the last decade, opinions concerning the nobility as part of the Dutch elite, new ennoblements and a special lifestyle have become less outspoken, both among members and non-members. On the other hand, awareness of the own family history and contact with other nobles outside the own family increased among members. To sum up in one statement: less outspoken to the outside world perhaps, but still active and involved as members of the Dutch Nobility Association.

186

---

**Professor Yme Kuiper**, anthropologist and historian, is emeritus professor at the University of Groningen.

Groningen – y.b.kuiper@rug.nl

---

**Dr. Huibert Schijf**, sociologist, was fellow at the University of Amsterdam and is now associated with the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.

Amsterdam – bert.schijf@iisg.nl

- Adel en heerlijkheden in Québec. De opkomst en het voortleven van een sociale groep en een feodaal instituut (ca. 1600-2000) 9  
*Benoît Grenier en Wybren Versteegen*
- Handel in heerlijkheden. Aankoop van Hollandse heerlijkheden en motieven van kopers, 1600-1795 31  
*Maarten Prins*
- Beschermd en berucht. De manoeuvreerruimte van jonker Ernst Mom binnen het rechtssysteem van zestiende-eeuws Gelre 57  
*Lidewij Nissen*
- Prussia's Franconian undertaking. Dynasty, law, and politics in the Holy Roman Empire (1703-1726) 75  
*Quinten Somsen*
- Gutsbesitzer zwischen Repräsentation und Wirtschaftsführung. Das Gut Nordkirchen in Westfalen im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert 105  
*Friederike Scholten*
- Adel op de pastorie. Aristocratische huwelijken van predikanten in de negentiende eeuw 129  
*Fred Vogelzang*



24 | 2017

