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Modernization and cleavage in Dutch society. A study of long term economic and social change

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SUMMARY

Since its sixteenth century origins the Netherlands has been a society of minorities. Pluralism has always been the hallmark of its institutions. However, the content of pluralism changed over time. In the sixteenth and seventeenth century pluralism was primarily manifested in geographical de-centralism. From the late nineteenth century onwards Dutch society became divided along vertical rather than horizontal lines of cleavage. In the literature this process of vertical division is known as pillarization (in Dutch: "verzuiling"), i.e. the conception that Dutch society was built on pillars. They were sovereign in their own domain but shared a national identity.

When pillarization had matured in the first decades of the twentieth century, Dutch society comprised four pillars: a Protestant, a Roman-Catholic, a social-democratic and a liberal pillar. Each had its own political parties and social organizations. With regard to individual behaviour, social distance between the members of different pillars was large. In the 1960's a process of de-pillarization is alleged to have set in.

This study investigates the long term changes in Dutch pluralism and how these are related to interdependent processes of economic and social change, which can be labelled as modernization. In particular two major issues are treated in this book: 1) How is Dutch pillarization as a specific type of institutionalised pluralism related to long term processes of modernization in the Netherlands?; 2) To what extent did Dutch society de-pillarize in the last decades and, if so, how can de-pillarization be related to the progressive modernization of Dutch society?

The study has a long term perspective. It covers the last four hundred years. The approach is multi-disciplinary. It uses studies from the economic, historical, political and social sciences, and tries to connect these so that the sum total will gain.

The first chapter was introductory. The frame of reference is sketched. The problems to be investigated are presented and the research method described.

Chapter II deals with the independent variable, modernization. The problem of this concept is its catch-all character. The sources of scientific thinking on modernization were explored and the major theories were reviewed. Modernization was defined as the process of interdependent changes in the social, cultural, political and attitudinal domains of a society rooted in the transformation of its economy by the purposive development of technology. Modernization has to do with a complex of intertwined variables in which either congruent or discongruent changes may appear as a result of progressive technological development.

The variables involved in the process of modernization relate to each other in a circular causal way. Without adherence to technological determinism, the purposive nature of technological development was considered to be the nucleus of the whole process. In this context "purposive" means the deliberate development and application of technology with the aim to raise productivity. In modern society technology is institutionalised to a high degree in order to raise economic growth.

The concept of compatibility was introduced. Modernization should be conceived as a complex of variables that under specific historical conditions may be mutually more or less compatible. The latter can help to explain acceleration, stagnation and decline in modernization processes. Modernization is the progressive process of the solving of incompatibilities.

The fact that processes of technological and economic development have a logic of their own was not denied. However, it was seriously doubted whether convergence theory is right by stating that modernization is an unilinear process. Instead, the

emphasis was laid on social codes as products of historical experience that explain why different societies may choose different solutions to identical problems.

Next to technological development and economic growth chapter II identified six parameters of modernization: 1) the expansion of the division of labour; 2) enlargement of scale (economically and socially); 3) the increase of geographical and social mobility; 4) the bureaucratization and formalization of social and economic relations; 5) the growth of the public sector of the economy; 6) the standardization and greater accessibility of information.

Chapter III monitors Dutch modernization along the lines presented in chapter II. It generally concluded that Dutch society saw three waves of accelerated modernization. The first was concentrated in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. The second wave lasted from 1870 till the 1920's. The third wave started in the 1960's and lasted till 1973.

The period from the last quarter of the seventeenth century till 1820 was one of stagnation and decline, which could be explained by the incompatibilities between the economic, social, cultural and political domains caused by changes in the country's external environment. The period 1820-1870 was considered transitional because while per capita income started to rise the social concomitants of modernization lagged behind.

Chapter IV analyses the relation between modernization of the Netherlands and the associated changes of institutionalised pluralism from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. It described the origins of Dutch pluralism as it was born out of the Revolt against the Spanish.

Till the nineteenth century Dutch pluralism was primarily of a geographic nature. The Dutch Republic had a highly fragmented and de-centralized power structure and was in fact a loosely integrated federation of autonomous provinces and cities. The external geo-political conditions of the time forced it to minimum unity. Gradually institutions arose that made decision making at the national level possible while at the same time safeguarding the autonomy of the parties involved. The most important of these institutions was a culture of "living-apart-together".

In the sixteenth and seventeenth century the Republic's de-centralism was a favourable condition for the economy to flourish. As external economic conditions changed, it became a barrier to adaptation that could not be removed till the French occupation of the country.

When after the French occupation the Netherlands had become a kingdom in 1813, liberalism presented itself as a modernizing force. In the first half of the nineteenth century it promoted technological and social innovation and increasing centralization. It succeeded to delete the power of the traditional elites in the provinces of Holland and Zeeland. In the second half of the nineteenth century liberalism came under attack of those Protestants who perceived it as the main representative of the evil of modernity. The first conflicts between liberalism and traditional religious forces took place as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century and centered around the issue of poverty legislation. A second major conflict was the school issue in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Here the Roman-Catholics joined the Protestants.

The Protestant resistance against liberalism - and later rising socialism - was also directed to modern theological ideas in the Dutch Reformed church. Both were regarded as manifestations of modernization. The resistance was led by Abraham Kuyper, who formed the Protestant Anti-Revolutionary movement. It was his idea

that the Protestants should be "sovereign in their own circle" in order to be protected to the evils of modernity. Thus as social differentiation took place as part of the more general process of Dutch modernization, new established organizations were brought under the influence of religious groups, notably the Protestants and the Roman-Catholics. In this way, a triple structure of organizations could arise: Protestant, Roman-Catholic, social-democratic and liberal. For most social functions to be fulfilled, different organizations with different ideological outlooks were founded. This phenomenon of social and political organization around an ideology within the nation state was later on called pillarization. In this way every group could hold an ideological grip on its followers.

Thus at the end of the nineteenth century traditional Dutch geographical pluralism had changed to structural ideological pluralism. Both implied a high degree of de-centralism and autonomy of categories of the Dutch population. In both cases the negative effects of pluralism were overcome by a culture of what I called "living-apart-together".

The first part of chapter V analyses the concept of pillar and the related pillarization process. It concluded that the prevailing pillar concept leads to theoretical and empirical problems because of the implicit emphasis on the religious nature of pillars. A new definition of the pillar concept was given: a subsystem in society that links political power, social organization and individual behaviour and which is aimed to promote, in competition as well as in cooperation with other social and political groups, goals inspired by a common ideology shared by its members for whom the pillar is the main locus of social identification. This definition draws the analysis away from the individual pillar to the relations between pillars as parts of a social system.

A review of the major theories of pillarization led to the conclusion that it should primarily be regarded as a way of social control embedded in Dutch history that resulted from the incompatibilities between accelerated modernization and the traditional ways of power allocation in Dutch society.

Part two of chapter V monitored Dutch pillarization as an historical process. The analysis of nineteenth century pillarization showed that the social groups involved pillarized at different moments in time. Further, a difference in the intensity of pillarization between the relevant groups was demonstrated. From the analysis of time series it was learned that pillarization has never been a broad phenomenon that applies to all sectors of Dutch society to the same degree at the same moment in time. One cannot properly speak of the 1950's as the peak of Dutch pillarization. A specification is needed as to what social groups as well as to what kinds of social behaviour the statement is directed.

The final chapter VI monitors and explains de-pillarization. As with pillarization, without specification one cannot properly speak of the de-pillarization of Dutch society. After the 1950's tendencies of de-pillarization set in. However, the process showed several dissimilarities. After the 1950's pillarization lost its effectiveness as a political strategy to guarantee stable constituencies. At the organizational level developments were diverse. Some social activities de-pillarized, others did not. At the level of individual interaction Dutch society can clearly be considered to be de-pillarized since the 1960's. However, with regard to individual behaviour differences between the pillars were presented with regard to moment and degree of pillarization.

The explanation of de-pillarization concentrated on enlargement of scale, secularization and on the rise of the welfare state. All three factors are part of the modernization process. The rise of the welfare state took place after World War II. The first two factors explained the nineteenth century rise of pillarization. I demonstrated that secularization accelerated after World War II and that post-war enlargement of scale differed from that in the second half of the nineteenth century. It is accelerated secularization, the qualitative change of enlargement of scale and the rise of the welfare state that explain why pillarized groups did not tighten up as one would have expected, but, on the contrary lost control over their followers. Instead of further polarization along the orthodox-secular axis, it led to the partial decomposition of the groups involved and therewith contributed to the individualization of Dutch society.

At the end of chapter VI an inverted U-curve relation between modernization and pillarization was presented. It drew the attention to two phenomena. Firstly, in the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century pillarization was an effective strategy of social control within the conditions of then prevailing modernization. After World War II incompatibilities arose between accelerated modernization and then existing pillarized social control. The very exigencies of post-war modernization eroded pillarization.

Secondly, the question whether or not Dutch society de-pillarized in the last decades, should be specified. It did with regard to individual behaviour. It did only partially on the level of social organization and at the political level the rules of the games were changed.