

Failed promises of modernization: Temporal trends in religiosity, postmaterialism and Ethno-nationalist attitudes in the Netherlands

Abstract

The process of modernization is understood to imply changing trends in prevalence of certain value orientations. Theoretical accounts dealing with the processes of global value changes include notions such as secularization, modernization, and postmaterialist value shift, among others. The paper analyzes trends in prevalence of the basic value or ideological orientations: religiosity, postmaterialism and nationalist attitudes. The classical theories of value transformation imply decrease in religiosity and nationalist orientations, and increase in post-materialism. The problem is examined using data from the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies (DPES). The Netherlands is an especially appropriate case to address these problems. The trend of the initial sharp secularization and then persisting religious cleavage is particularly clearly outlined here. The Dutch have also been found to be among the most postmaterialist nations. Finally, the new trend of anti-immigrant politics has also been early and very vividly expressed in the Netherlands, indicating the importance of nationalist attitudes.

The main findings indicate that modernization and 'post-modernization' theories are imperfect explanations for the observed trends in values. Decrease in religiosity is observed only for some indicators, while trends in nationalist and post-materialist orientations do not follow the expected course.

Key words: *values, ideology, modernization, secularization, post-materialism, Netherlands.*

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Introduction

Modernization has failed to keep some promises. The process of secularization stopped short of eliminating religion out of the public and political spheres. Although belonging to the ‘premodern’ world, religion remains a key political factor throughout the post-modern world. While ethno-nationalist ideology originated with modernity,² it was supposed to lose its appeal in the post-modern, globalized era. Yet, it seems alive and well at the end of the modern world just as it was vital at its beginning. Post-modernization follows the suit. Despite the exhilarating announcements of the ‘silent revolution’³, post-materialism appears increasingly silent, and decreasingly revolutionary.

In general, the contemporary political and social spheres seem to be shaped by values and ideologies that come from rather different historical and cultural periods – from pre-modern, through modern, to postmodern. However, the present was supposed to look differently - to be done away with the pre-modern and modern, and blossom in the post-modern. This paper examines the implications of the grand theories of value change, i.e., modernization and post-modernization for the levels of the aforementioned orientations. More specifically, this paper analyzes temporal trends in the prevalence of religiosity, postmaterialism and nationalist attitudes among the Dutch public, using relevant public opinion surveys.

The Netherlands is an especially appropriate case to address these problems. The trend of the initial sharp secularization and then persisting religious cleavage is particularly clearly outlined here. The Dutch have also been found to be among the most postmaterialist nations.⁴ Finally, the new trend of anti-immigrant politics has also been early and very vividly expressed in the Netherlands, indicating the importance of nationalist and/or ethnocentric attitudes. An additional benefit of focusing on the Dutch case is the availability of high-quality survey data. The current version of the paper relies on data from the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies (DPES).

The analyses presented in this paper will provide descriptive evidence about the changing trends concerning secularization, ‘postmaterialisation’ and national/ethnocentric attitudes.

² Gellner, Ernest, *Nations and nationalism*, Cornell University Press, 2008. Greenfeld, Liah, *Nationalism. Five Roads to Modernity*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992.

³ Inglehart, Ronald, *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles in Advanced Industrial Society*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977.

⁴ Inglehart, Ronald, and Paul R. Abramson, “Economic Security and Value Change”, *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 2 (1994): 336-354.

What values are considered important?

The choice of values and orientations analyzed in this paper comes from the major sociological theories about global value changes. The inclusion of religious values seems obvious from the perspective of classical sociological theories, including Durkheim and Weber. In a nutshell, industrialization and enlightenment are seen as undermining religion from its central place in providing axiological orientation in the world. Hence, modernization has been expected to gradually remove religion from the political sphere.

According to the political sociology perspective, religious cleavage is seen as one of the key factors structuring political competition, especially in the early stages of mass democracy. The role of the religious cleavage is expected to decline, but not necessarily disappear. In light of the Lipset-Rokkan 'freezing' hypothesis, the cleavage may continue exerting certain degree of political influence.

Postmaterialism can be seen as representing a new cleavage taking over the role of the traditional divisions. According to this school of thought, growing affluence, absence of wars and the high level of education turn an ever increasing number of people towards postmaterialist values.⁵ The growing governmental involvement in social and economic matters, the expanded educational opportunities, and the expansion of informational resources led to secular growth of political skills and resources, appearance of new issues, and non-conventional modes of participation. All these phenomena are usually labeled together as the "new politics"⁶. In the new politics those citizens and political forces who give priority to self-actualization, aesthetic needs, global responsibility and full scale democratization challenge those who keep on emphasizing economic growth and physical security. While the classic issues related to redistribution of wealth may still dominate official party politics, the electorate is more and more polarized along this new dimension.

The impact of the postmaterialism theory on political science is well indicated by the fact that most contemporary analysts of party systems include postmaterialism as one of the principal defining dimensions. While some observers find the power of postmaterialist vs. materialist opposition falling behind the influence of class, religion and left-right identification in terms of affecting the vote,⁷

⁵ Inglehart, 1977, op. cit. Inglehart, Ronald, *Culture shift in advanced industrial society*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990.

⁶ Dalton, Russell J., *Citizen politics in Western democracies: Public opinion and political parties in the United States, Great Britain, West Germany, and France*, Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 1988.

⁷ Oppenhuijs, Erik, *Voting Behavior in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of Electoral Participation and Party Choice*, Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 1995. Middendorp, Cees P., "Models for predicting the Dutch vote along the left-right and the libertarianism-authoritarianism dimensions", *Inter-*

others argue that at least in such countries as The Netherlands postmaterialism both shapes and rivals Left-Right identification in importance.⁸ The meaning of left and right was found to go through a transformation, being increasingly filled with connotations of the materialist-postmaterialist value opposition.

Many theorists of national and ethnic orientations have emphasized its relationship with modernity.⁹ The implication from these theories, though not necessarily explicitly formulated by the respective authors, is that nationalist ideology should diminish in importance, especially as a value orientation among the public, as the national state becomes established and unquestioned site of political sovereignty. Facilitated by the theories about different character of the ‘Eastern’ and Western’ nationalism,¹⁰ where the latter is supposed to be civic and democratic in content, while the former would be ethnic and oppressive, research on the political role of nationalist and ethnocentric ideologies has been neglected in the post-WWII era. At least concerning the role of nationalist and ethnocentric ideology in the Western Europe.

As a result, the recent rise of political ethnocentrism and nationalism throughout the developed world made it seem as if ethnic nationalism jumped directly from pre-modern times into the post-modern era. In light of the growing tension between multicultural realities and ethno-nationalist identities, it is especially important to pay attention to the prevalence of ethnocentric sentiments in the public.

Religion, post-materialism, and ethnic nationalism, therefore, clearly belong to the core set of values and orientations that define the contemporary world, and thereby shape the political process. The relevance of these values is also emphasized by studies dealing with the structure of general social and political attitudes. In most models, from Thurstone to Wilson and Middendorp these values are among the key dimensions defining mass political attitudes.¹¹

national Political Science Review 10, no. 4 (1989): 279-308. Middendorp, Cees P., “Left-Right Self-identification and (Post) materialism in the Ideological Space; their Effect on the Vote in the Netherlands”, *Electoral Studies* 11, no. 3 (1992): 249-260.

⁸ Deth, van Jan W., and Peter ATM Geurts, “Value orientation, left-right placement and voting.” *European Journal of Political Research* 17, no. 1 (1989): 17-34.

⁹ Gellner, op. cit. Greenfeld, op. cit.

¹⁰ Kohn, Hans, *The Idea of Nationalism*, Macmillan, New York, 1945. Brubaker, Rogers, “Myths and Misconceptions in the Study of Nationalism”, in John Hall, editor, *The State of the Nation: Ernest Gellner and the Theory of Nationalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

¹¹ Thurstone, Louis L., “The vectors of mind”, *Psychological Review* 41, no. 1 (1934): 1-32. Wilson, Glenn D., ed. *The Psychology of Conservatism*, New York: Academic Press, 1973. Middendorp, Cees, P., *Ideology in Dutch Politics: The Democratic System Revisited, 1970-1985*, Assen: Van Gorcum, 1991.

Trends in values over time

Despite the classical sociological theories, and the decades of empirical research on values, the question about trends over time is not an uncontroversial one. Theories of global value change (modernization, secularization, post-materialism) suggest unidirectional transformation over time: the decreasing levels of religiosity, materialism, and ethnocentrism/nationalism. Yet, empirical evidence often does not show such uniform tendencies. For instance, despite the cumulative evidence in support of Inglehart's claims,¹² it is not difficult to find evidence that the trends in levels of post-materialism are not so consistent and uniform.¹³

Starting from religion, it is clear that its role has declined over the past decades, but it is far from disappearing. This applies equally to the global level, where it has been argued about the religiously-based 'clash of civilizations'¹⁴, as well as the politics at national or sub national levels. For instance, the Netherlands could hardly be described as non-modernized, but religiously based political parties and religious values continue to play central role in Dutch politics¹⁵.

Despite the arguments about the distinction between civic/Western and ethnic/Eastern nationalism, nationalist ideology, at least in Europe, appear to often be ethnically based.¹⁶ Rather than being historic remnants, ethno-nationalist attitudes and values seem to be playing an increasingly important political role. This can be observed in the rising strength of the extreme right parties throughout Europe, growing anti-immigrant sentiments, as well as in changing political platforms among the mainstream parties. The Netherlands is one of the cases where such trends are clearly visible. The electoral earthquake caused by the success of LPF (Lijst Pym Fortuyn) in 2002 and 2003 proved to be not only a one-time phenomenon. Ethnocentric attitudes can be found not only in the subsequent anti-immigrant parties, but also in the rhetoric's of the mainstream

¹² Inglehart and Abramson, 1994. Inglehart, Ronald, and Paul R. Abramson, "Measuring post-materialism", *American Political Science Review* 93, no. 3 (1999): 665-677.

¹³ Clarke, Harold D., and Nitish Dutt. "Measuring value change in western industrialized societies: The impact of unemployment." *The American Political Science Review* 85 no. 3 (1991): 905-920. Taniguchi, Masaki, "A time machine: New evidence of post-materialist value change", *International Political Science Review* 27, no. 4 (2006): 405-425. Majima, Shinobu, and Mike Savage. "Have there been culture shifts in Britain? A critical encounter with Ronald Inglehart", *Cultural sociology* 1, no. 3 (2007): 293-315.

¹⁴ Huntington, Samuel P., *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996.

¹⁵ Aarts, Kees, and Jacques Thomassen, "Dutch voters and the changing party space 1989-2006", *Acta Politica* 43, no. 2 (2008): 203-234.

¹⁶ Ceobanu, Alin M., and Xavier Escandell, "East is West? National feelings and anti-immigrant sentiment in Europe", *Social Science Research* 37, no. 4 (2008): 1147-1170.

parties. Hence, one could expect that the degree of association between political preferences and ethnocentric values is at least not declining, if not increasing.

In any case, the persisting controversy about the trends in values suggests that it is still important to carefully examine evidence from single-case studies. The analyses presented here are intended to provide answers to the question of whether the trends in values continue the way the (simplified) theories of (post) modernization and secularization predict.

Method

The analysis are based on the Dutch Parliamentary Election Study (DPES)¹⁷ data. The DPES studies are based on face to face interviews using probability samples of Dutch population, typically conducted in at least two waves – before and after parliamentary elections. The number of respondents per survey in all cases is over one thousand. The samples are constructed so that they are representative in terms of basic socio-demographic characteristics, such age, gender, education. The cumulative data set, with studies from 1971 to 2006, is freely accessible through the DANS archive.¹⁸ Further methodological information about these surveys can be found there. The analyzed variables are described at relevant places throughout the subsequent sections of the paper.

Results: Trends in values over time

Religious orientation over time

Answer to the question about temporal trends in religiosity depends on what aspects of ‘religiosity’ one has in mind. The DPES surveys contain a number of religiosity indicators, which indeed show not entirely consistent trends over time.

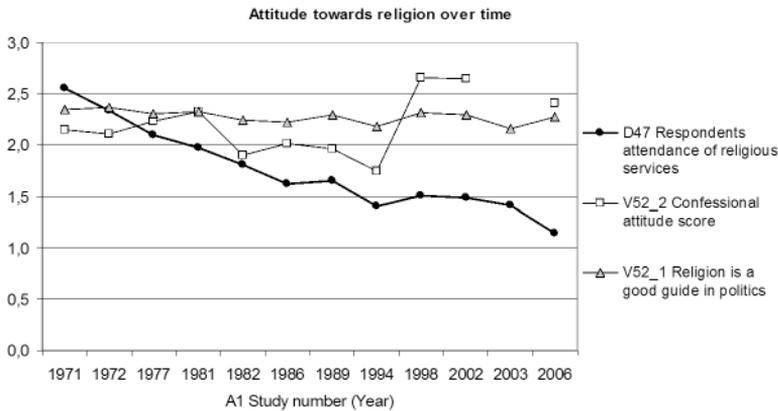
Frequency of religious service attendance is one of the most frequently used indicators in survey research. Presently, this variable is coded on a scale from 0 meaning ‘not religious’, to 5, meaning attending religious service at least once a week. As shown in Figure 1, trend of decreasing frequency of attending religious services, over the last 35 years in the Netherlands, is unmistakable. This piece of evidence, therefore, suggests that the modernization theories are correct in predicting the continuing trend of secularization.

¹⁷ For more details, see <http://dpes.nl/>.

¹⁸ Data Archiving and Networked Services - <http://www.dans.knaw.nl/>.

However, less frequent average religious service attendance does not have to imply the decreasing *political* role of religiosity. DPES studies include additional religious indicators, that tap those aspects of religion that are more political in nature. One example is the belief that ‘Religion is a good guide in politics’ (variable V52_1). The same graph shows very little variation in the average agreement with this item.

Figure 1 *Religiosity indicators over time*



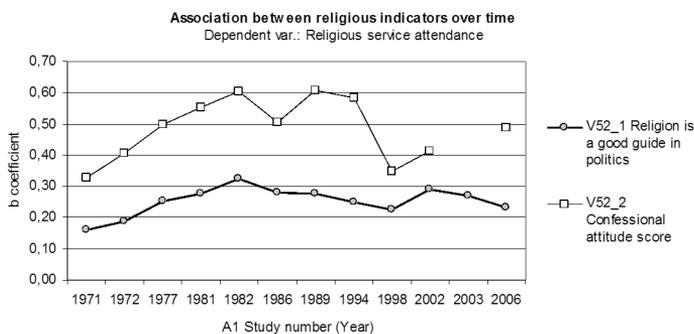
The confessional attitude score is a composite measure that combines several items that ask about the support for the existence of confessional political parties, trade unions, schools, and broadcasting organizations, plus the aforementioned belief that religion is a good guide in politics. According to the same graph, there is a certain degree of temporal variation in this attitude that makes it difficult to read a consistent trend from it, but it would be difficult to find much support for the decreasing trend. Until the early 1990s, it seemed that there is a declining trend in this attitude, but from 1998 it rouse to a level even higher than before.

Thus, it seems that just because the average Dutchwoman can be encountered in churches less often than before, one does not have to conclude that religion is out of Dutch politics. The Dutch believe, on average, that religion has a place in politics, and that belief has not changed much over the last several decades.

It could be argued that the observed discrepancy between the employed religiosity indicators reflects the increasing inconsistency in the public’s relationship toward religion. Such inconsistency could be taken as a sign of the decreasing role or religion, or at least of the seriousness with which the citizens relate to religious matters in politics. While a complete examination of this proposition

is beyond the scope of this paper, the evidence presented in Figure 2 shows that the strength of the association between the three religious orientation indicators is not really decreasing over time. The graph shows changes in b coefficient, where dependent variable is religious service attendance and independent variables are the other two indicators. Both associations show some variation over time. The trend actually seemed increasing until early 1980s, but there is not much of a consistent trend afterward. The associations in 2006 are clearly not lower than in 1971.

Figure 2 Association between the indicators of religiosity over time



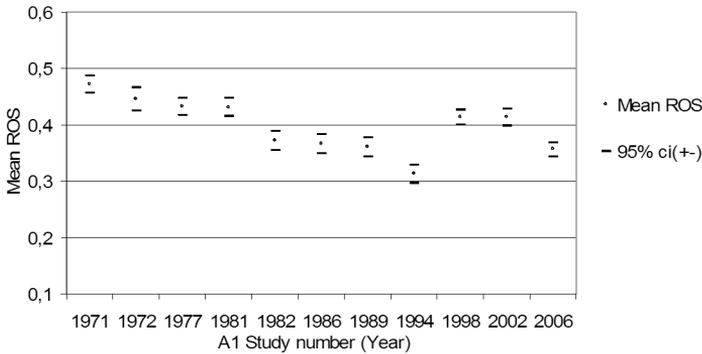
The presented evidence shows that there is not much evidence of the declining political significance of religiosity. Although the religious service attendance has been consistently declining over the last three decades, the confessional attitude is not.

Religious Orientation (ROS) Scale

In order to construct an index of religiosity that captures both the behavioral aspect of one's relationship to institutional religiosity (religious service attendance), and views on the political role of religion (the confessional attitude score), I constructed a summary measure of religious orientation that will be used throughout the remainder of the paper. This Religious Orientation (ROS) Scale is defined here as the average score on the religious service attendance item and the confessional attitude score. Both input measures were first rescaled to the range from 0 to 1, hence the ROS scale has the same range. The goal was, on the one hand, to obtain a more reliable measure, and, on the other, to obtain a measure that is more general, i.e., which includes both initial aspects.

Overall, religiosity defined by the newly constructed ROS scale shows some decline in religiosity over time, but with considerable fluctuations (Figure 3). The difference between 1994 and 1998 is almost the same as the difference between 1971 and 2006.

Figure 3 Mean scores on the Religious Orientation Scale scale over time

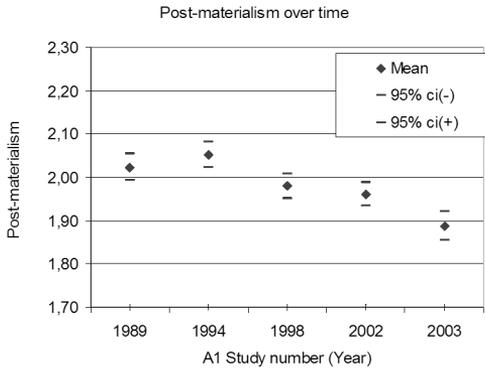


Post-materialism over time

The DPES surveys from 1989, 1994, 2002, and 2003 employed the standard 4-item operationalization of materialist vs. postmaterialist value orientation. Respondents are asked to rank four political goals according to their order of preference. Those who chose reducing inflation and maintaining order as their first two preferences are classified as materialists. Those selecting ‘More say in politics’, and ‘Freedom of speech’ as the most important goals are classified as postmaterialists. Respondents with value priorities that mix the two categories are coded as ‘mixed’ type, and placed in-between the two former categories on the continuum from materialism to postmaterialism.

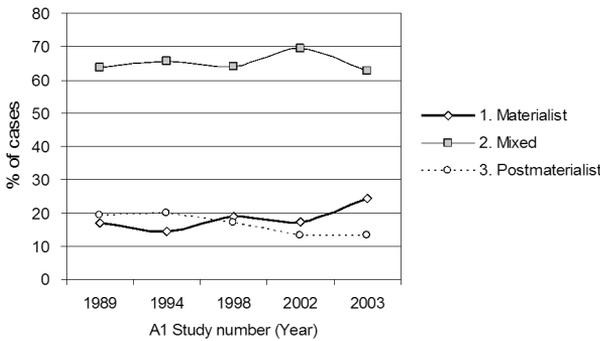
In countries that experienced continued social and economic stability, such as the Netherlands, we would expect also the continuing growth in postmaterialism. According to the Figure 4, which shows mean levels of postmaterialism over time, together with confidence intervals, the trend from 1989 until 2003 was actually in the opposite direction. The level of postmaterialism was lower at the beginning of the 21st century than in previous years.

Figure 4 Average level of postmaterialism over time



If we take a closer look at the changes over time, we can observe that the changes are due to the slowly decreasing proportion of postmaterialists and parallel increase in the proportion of materialists. The proportion of the ‘mixed’ type seems to be quite stable. According to Figure 5, in 2003, the gap was clearly in favor of materialists.

Figure 5 Changing percentage of materialists and postmaterialists over time



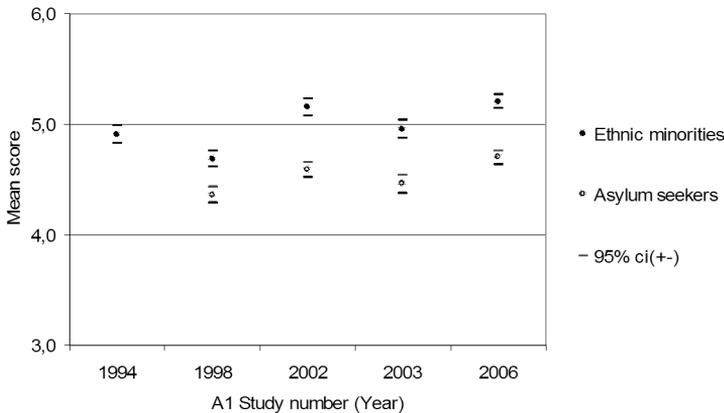
On the basis of these results, it is possible to conclude that there is no evidence of the increasing trend in postmaterialism that the theory of silent revolution would predict. It is certainly possible that the findings show only a temporary deviation from the broader upward trend, but that possibility cannot be substantiated with the examined data.

National/ethnic orientation over time

There are two indicators that are repeatedly used within the DPES studies that could be utilized to operationalize nationalist/ethnocentric orientation. One of them concerns the attitude towards asylum seekers (agreement with this item means ‘Send back as many asylum seekers as possible’), and the other concerns Ethnic minorities i.e., “foreigners and ethnic minorities”.¹⁹ For respondents, this typically means immigrants from Suriname, Morocco, Turkey, and recently Eastern Europe. Throughout the rest of the paper I concentrate on the attitude towards ethnic minorities, interpreting it as a measure of ethnocentric orientation.²⁰

In line with the general expectation, there is some evidence of the increasing ethnocentric orientation over time, according to the evidence presented in Figure 6.²¹ The trend is not very strong, and there are fluctuations. However, the variations follow the same pattern with both employed measures, which corroborates the reliability of the observed findings.

Figure 6 *Ethnocentric attitudes over time*



Note: The meaning of high scores: Asylum seekers: 7. Send back as many asylum seekers as possible; Ethnic minorities: 7. Should completely adjust to Dutch culture

¹⁹ The 2006 study asked about *foreigners*, while the earlier studies referred to “foreigners and ethnic minorities”.

²⁰ I experimented with an index that combined the attitude towards ethnic minorities and asylum seekers, but the measure has not proved more reliable, and is available in fewer studies.

²¹ In fact, there is a small but significant positive correlation between the level of ethnocentric orientation and year of study ($r = .08$).

Discussion

The analysis of the trends in the examined values and orientations resulted in an inconsistent support for the theoretical expectations. The level of materialism has increased somewhat recently, while there are fewer postmaterialists among the Dutch population. This is not consistent with the view that post-materialist value transformation runs consistently over time, without much temporary fluctuations. However, if the theory allows for temporary fluctuation, for instance, depending on short-term economic factors,²² the obtained findings do not necessarily challenge the postmaterialism theory. Inflation or unemployment²³, for instance, have been theorized as factors that can modify the value change trends. However, if a trend is subject to fluctuations, it remains a question of the magnitude of these fluctuations that are allowed to still be able to speak of a trend.

Religious orientation shows a mixed pattern: religious service attendance is clearly declining, and that is perhaps the clearest trend observed here. However, the political role of religion has not disappeared from the Dutch political horizon. Great theoreticians of modernization, therefore, may have exaggerated in predicting the overall societal secularization. At least, the political role of religion seems remarkably stable over time among the Dutch.²⁴

According to the political sociology tradition²⁵, the process of nation formation opened some of the key cleavages that are still responsible for structuring the political space in Europe. While the 'civic' conception of nation, supposedly predominant in Western Europe, has been often admired (see the debate on civic vs. ethnic nationalisms²⁶), ethnic elements have also been often present²⁷. In fact, the classical center-periphery cleavage is nowadays often interpreted in ethnic terms. In any case, ethnic nationalism, as one of the central early-modern ideologies, has been expected to decline, especially with the progress of supranational institutions such as the EU. Yet, the Dutch public opinion shows that ethnocentric orientation has actually *gained* in significance, although the trend is only moderately expressed. The finding is not surprising given the recent ob-

²² Clarke and Dutt, 1991.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Some of the classical theorists could perhaps interpret this in the sense that religion remains effective as the opium for the masses.

²⁵ Lipset, Seymour M., and Stein Rokkan (1967), "Cleavage Structures, Party Systems and Voter Alignments. Introduction", in *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives*, ed. Seymour M. Lipset and Stein Rokkan, 1-64, New York: Free Press.

²⁶ Kohn 1945. Greenfeld 1992.

²⁷ Hjerem, Mikael, "National sentiments in eastern and western Europe", *Nationalities Papers* 31, no. 4 (2003): 413-429. Todosijević, Bojan, "Dimenzije nacionalizma: struktura nacionalističkih stavova u Mađarskoj i Srbiji", *Teme-Časopis za Društvene Nauke* 36, no. 1 (2012): 27-46.

vious strong influence of ethnic attitudes on politics in the Netherlands. The trend even created sufficient ideological space for successful new parties, such as LPF in 2002-3, and subsequently.

Thus, ethnocentric value orientation is not declining with the rest of the supposedly increasingly obsolete modern and pre-modern values, but is responding to the changing social and political context. As the political discourse became dominated by the inter-group rhetoric, opposing the ethnic immigrants and the indigenous population, so the corresponding value orientations gained in presence and influence.

Conclusion

The goal of this paper was to furnish descriptive evidence about the changing trends in three of basic value or ideological orientations - religiosity, ethnic nationalism, and postmaterialism. The theoretical background was provided by theories and notions of global value change, such as modernization, secularization, and 'postmaterialisation'. The provided evidence, coming from one of the most socio-economically advanced societies in contemporary world (and therefore expected to be ahead in the process of value transformation), gives a mixed support, at best, to these grand theories of value change. Although religious service has been consistently declining, the clerical orientation towards politics seems alive and well. National/ethnocentric orientation deviates from the theoretical expectations even more. Instead of disappearing from the horizon in the contemporary 'united' Europe, ethnocentric sentiments seem to be actually increasing. Finally, postmaterialism seems not to have advanced much after the liberating 1960s and 1970s. In fact, the percentage of postmaterialists has been decreasing in the early 2000s in the Netherlands. The question whether this represents a short-term fluctuation due to economic downturns, or it means that the presumed value change is not really a fundamental process, remains open. In general, it seems that the interaction between societal changes and value transformations are more complex than the theoretical accounts imply.

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