CHAPTER SEVEN

ATTITUDES TOWARD MINORITIES

Previous researches have shown that the rising number of ethnic minorities in this country has evoked negative reactions from its native Dutch population. These negative feelings towards minorities are perceived to be coupled with an increasing positive attitude towards their in-group. Sociologists label these complex processes of a positive attitude towards in-groups on the one hand and a negative attitude towards minorities on the other hand as ethnocentrism. Previous studies have also pointed out that religious people are more ethnocentric than the non-religious ones. Hence, in this chapter, we shall examine the ethnocentric attitudes of our respondents who are composed mainly of native Dutch church members. The central question that we pose in this chapter is: to what extent are the Dutch church members in our population ethnocentric?, and what is the social location of these attitudes? We shall develop this chapter by first presenting the conceptual structure of the attitudes towards minorities in section 7.1. Then, in section 7.2, we shall give a report of the analysis of these attitudes in the empirical part of this chapter. And finally, we shall investigate the social location of these ethnocentric attitudes in section 7.3.

7.1. Theoretical structure of the attitudes toward minorities

During the past century, the phenomenon of immigration created a dramatic change in the socio-demographic make-up of the Dutch society. An important offshoot of this phenomenon is the rapid increase of ethnic minorities who are now living in the country. Statistics reveal that the proportion of ethnic minorities in the Dutch society has swollen sixfold within one-quarter of a century to nearly 10% of the population and is still increasing rapidly. Between 1971 and 1997, the number of ethnic minorities grew from 200,000 to 1.5 million, or from 1.6% to 9.4% of the entire population.¹ These profound

¹ According to recent counts of the Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), there are about 1.7 million non-western allochtoon living in the country since the beginning
socio-demographic changes that are happening in this small but densely populated country, the Netherlands, have generated disquieting reactions with alarming social consequences. Studies show that many people belonging to the native Dutch population are unhappy about the presence of immigrants or ethnic minorities in their neighbourhoods.\(^2\) Inevitably, some social problems crop up, like outburst of aggression or violence, segregation, extreme right voting, etcetera. (Hello 2003:2). All these events add up to the increasing tension and antagonism in Dutch society not only between allochthonous and autochthonous groups but also between various groups among the autochtonous. The outburst of aggression and violence can be illustrated for instance by the killing of Pim Fortuyn on May 6, 2003, a politician known for his anti-immigration platform. The issue that he stood for continues to spark debates in various parts of the country. His persuasion even gained influence among the policy makers in some cities. In Rotterdam for instance, a city council member belonging to the party *Leefbaar Rotterdam* commented on the construction of a huge mosque in the city, saying: “There’s no reason the minarets have to be that high—it will not be Rotterdam; it will be the Mecca on the [river] Maas”. Another instance of this violence was the killing of a controversial film director, Theo van Gogh, on November 2, 2004 by a suspected muslim extremist who accused the latter for his anti-Islam rhetorics. Ethnic segregation can likewise be exemplified, on the one hand, by the presence of neighborhoods comprising of immigrants who live in the older and less prosperous section of the large cities, and on the other hand, by the ‘white flight’ phenomenon wherein most natives moved to the suburbs in order to flee from the swelling number of immigrants living in their neighborhoods in the cities. What results is that ethnic minorities and the majority Dutch population live highly segregated from each other. This segregation, however, is reported to be different for each ethnic minority group. Turks and Moroccans, for example are found to be considerably more segregated from the native Dutch population than the Surinamese.

\(^2\) Hereafter, the native Dutch population will be considered as the ‘majority’ group, which we define in this case as the dominant ethnic group of this country in terms of political power, economic status, and demographic number. As in most western european countries, these majority group coincides with the indigenous or native ethnic group (Gijsberts et al. 2004:6).