The Fortuyns of Europe:

Immigration and the Changing Politics of Europe

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“They can get rid of me, but they won’t
be able to get rid of my ideas.”

-Pim Fortuyn
INTRODUCTION:

Few politicians in the Netherlands have received the kind of international recognition and dramatic an impact on Dutch society as Pim Fortuyn. His country developed a reputation for handling controversial subjects that typically confounded other governments. “Soft drug” use, euthanasia, and legalization of Gay marriage have all been tackled head on by the Dutch, making them one of the most tolerant and open democracies in the world. Fortuyn’s fame does not stem from his role in these progressive politics, but rather from his prejudiced and xenophobic arguments against Islamic immigration. His surprisingly narrow-minded view of the country’s Islamic minority runs counter to the image of tolerance and acceptance in the Netherlands. Despite this glaring contradiction, Fortuyn rose from obscurity to become one of the most influential figures in Netherland’s history.

An outside observer might have trouble seeing how a politician like Pim Fortuyn would be able to garner widespread support in a country like the Netherlands. His strikingly intolerant view of immigration, influenced by the growth of the Islamic population in his country, earned him a reputation as a right-wing radical. Yet by 2003, the country had bestowed upon him many positive honors, awards, and accolades. Fortuyn had a tulip named after him, been featured as the “best dressed Dutchman” on multiple occasions, and been named “greatest Dutchman of all time” by a prestigious national survey (beating the founder of the country, William of Orange).¹ The perplexing correlation between the positive images these honors suggest and the undeniably prejudiced behavior Fortuyn exhibited seems bizarre. A further look at the development of Islamic immigration and the political environment of Europe helps reveal his complex character.

In addition to his infamous stance on Islamic immigration, Fortuyn also strongly supported much of the liberal legislation already in place in the country. As an open homosexual, he became a figurehead for gay rights, strongly supported female empowerment and gender equality. Fortuyn supported and upheld almost every form of minority tolerance, save for Muslim immigrants. In fact, he argued that the religion of Islam posed a direct threat to the tolerant and liberal society developing in Europe, and for that reason encouraged intolerance for Islamic immigrants. A politician with such a strange and ambiguous political stance would find difficulty existing, let alone succeeding, in a political atmosphere easily divided into a Left and Right. The Europe that Fortuyn ascended to prominence in, however, did not operate with these traditional political categorizations.

As Tony Judt identifies in his book, Postwar, Europe emerged with a lack of political identity in the years following the 1945 Armistice Peace Treaty. This paper will further explore the validity of Judt’s claim by focusing on the growth of Islamic immigration in the Netherlands, and how it contributed to the rise of figures like Fortuyn, who operated outside of traditional political divisions. The facts and figures used to identify the changes in immigration mostly pertain to Muslim men from Turkey and Morocco. As such, this paper is limited in its assessment of other immigrant groups, the female immigrant experience, and the distinctions among different practices within Islam. Some of the sources used in this paper include works by historians, sociologists, and former politicians. These authors include Chris Allen, Tufyal Choudhury, and Sylke Viola Schnepf. Figures for recent immigration statistics have largely been drawn from Parsons and Smeeding, and Gallya Lahav. Specific information regarding Islamic immigration and Fortuyn in the Netherlands came from Sam Cherribi. Although all these authors contributed in the development of this paper, its conclusions are my own.
The first part of the paper reviews Islamic immigration in the Netherlands and Europe. The second part traces the development of Fortuyn’s views with the pattern of Islamic immigration. The third section describes Judt’s analysis of postwar European evolution in the absence of clear political divisions. Additionally, the validity of his argument with reference to Islamic immigration and Fortuyn will be assessed. Finally, the paper will put forward my conclusions based on this evidence.

PART I:

*The Immigration Question*

Racial and religious prejudices against Muslim immigrants in the Netherlands reached an all-time high in the 1990s. It is important to understand that this fear and intolerance had not been the direct consequence of the low-level Islamic presence that had long existed in Europe. Instead, the blame for this sudden explosion of prejudice should reside with the negative portrayal of these immigrants in the media and the presence of figures like Fortuyn in politics. Before all dark skinned people were labeled Islamic immigrants, they were simply called “*Buitenlanders*” (“foreigners”) in the Netherlands. The negative association with foreigners would come later. In order to discern how the image of immigrants declined so rapidly and with such fervor, this section will look at immigration in three distinct periods; the successful integration of Indonesian immigrants in the immediate post war years of the late 1940s and 1950s, the tumultuous role of Islamic guest workers in society during the 1960s and 1970s, and finally the transition to the modern perception of immigrants in the 1980s and 1990s. These categorizations highlight the changing view of immigrants in the Netherlands and Europe.

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2 Cherribi, Sam. *In the house of war: Dutch Islam observed*. Pg. 69
In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, Europe saw some of the largest migratory flows in history. Prior to WWII, European countries consisted of an eclectic mix of ethnicities, races, and religions. The victorious Allied Powers sought to eliminate the mixing of these groups in order to prevent future conflict. They achieved this goal by simply forcing ethnic minorities out of countries and moving them to their ethnic countries of origin. The result of these population transfers led to the creation of homogeneous states consisting of one or two ethnicities similar in race, religion, and culture. Therefore, many of the people who grew up during this period lived in communities consisting of people that looked, acted, and prayed just like them. The cultural norms did not last and the introduction of people who looked and acted differently would have mixed results.

The immigration of Indonesians to the Netherlands in 1949 posed the first challenge to ethnic homogeneity in the country. Losing the Indonesian colonies to the anti-European leader, Sukarno, led a large number of Indonesians of Dutch heritage to flee. Sukarno labeled this mixed heritage group as “undesirables” and left them little choice but to leave for Europe. Most of these immigrants had never been to Europe and, after arriving in the Netherlands, this group of Indo-Europeans was labeled as an “outsider” once again. Their darker skin, preference for East-Asian food, and oriental clothing, set them apart from the Dutch citizens living in the Netherlands.³

A large majority of these Indonesian immigrants possessed Dutch citizenship due to their European heritage, which posed a problem for the left-wing and right-wing branches of the government who initially wanted to avoid this mass migration. The politicians worked together to address this issue, because both parties felt that the introduction of this immigrant community

³ Judt, Tony Postwar pg 281
could destabilize the country. The politicians first encouraged Indo-Europeans to renounce their citizenship and accept Indonesian citizenship instead. When it became clear that Indo-Europeans could not survive under the Sukarno regime, Dutch politicians abandoned this policy in favor of integration, and Indo-European citizens assimilated into their new environment.

Despite the differences between Indo-Europeans and native Dutch citizens, the immigrants propitiously melded with the local population. This minority group integrated into Dutch society better than the later Islamic immigrants from Turkey and Morocco. The Indo-European immigrants prospered, with average incomes rivaling that of natural born citizens. The Indo-Europeans also occupied higher wage jobs in government, education and health care. Marriage between native Dutch and Indo-Europeans represented further integration; over fifty percent of first-generation Indo-Europeans married a native born Dutch citizen.4

There were at least three explanations for the successful integration of Indo-European immigrants in the Netherlands. First, the new immigrants were few in number relative to the native population. Second, the Dutch government supported this new minority group. The Dutch Parliament viewed these immigrants as a part of “Dutch culture” because of the longstanding colonial relationship between the Netherlands and Indonesia, extending to the late 16th century. Thus, the Parliament promoted the inclusion of this group into their society. Third, and perhaps most importantly, this first wave of foreign immigrants wanted to assimilate into Dutch society. They largely abandoned their Indonesian cultural heritage in favor of their new homeland.5 Although their culture, complexion, and religion offered a contrast to that of the Netherlands, many immigrants downplayed and even renounced this former part of their

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5 Cherribi, Sam. *In the house of war: Dutch Islam observed* pg. 26
heritage. The presence of Muslims within the country could hardly be seen as a threat at the onset of the 1960’s.

1960-1980

Western Europe experienced an incredibly large economic boom during the 1960s. The economy grew at such an accelerated rate that labor could not keep pace with job demand. Governments realized how precarious and volatile this situation could become. High labor demand meant an increase in the power of labor unions and, with it, the potential for large strikes that could paralyze industries.⁶ Left-wing politicians would have pushed for labor-based political advantage before WWII, but in these years of reconstruction, parties of both the Left and the Right had been more interested in domestic stability. In order to prevent civil unrest resulting from labor strikes, the government and large companies worked together to seek a quick and easy solution. They resolved the labor imbalance by importing low-wage workers from abroad. These laborers filled the large number of low-skilled positions “temporarily” and, in theory, would only stay for a short duration while their labor was needed. After the demand for these positions subsided, European countries expected these immigrants to return to their countries of origin. These false expectations led to an absence of care and legal rights for these workers and, as a result, many did not have the ability to return home when they lost their jobs.

The Netherlands began signing contracts with Spain, Italy, Turkey, and Morocco to import workers as early as the 1950s.⁷ While the incoming workers from Italy and Spain seemed familiar to the native populations of the Netherlands, Turkey and Morocco sent immigrants that appeared alien. The Turkish and Moroccan guest workers brought with them a different language, culture, and religion that many of local inhabitants had not previously been exposed to.

⁶ Judt, Tony Postwar pg. 330
⁷ Judt, Tony Postwar pg. 330
Indeed, this group of migrants could not have been more foreign after experiencing cultural and racial homogeneity for almost twenty years. Nearly an entire generation grew up without encountering these different-looking peoples and their foreign practices. This cultural clash had long-lasting effects on “host” countries like the Netherlands. The negative repercussions of this encounter did not surface, however, until the end of the century.

The flourishing Europe that attracted so many foreign workers did not extend to them many of the benefits from its success. Although Europe possessed many “pull” factors that drew foreigners to immigrate such as high wages, a safer environment, and a more tolerant society, the host countries rarely delivered on these attractive features. As a result, many guest workers ended up in shabby communities, experienced discrimination, and found themselves completely at odds with the rest of society. Few learned the local languages, and those that desired to learn couldn’t, since they had not been provided with any educational opportunities. The expected impermanence of these immigrant workers led to governmental failure to provide laborers with basic care and services. The Netherlands, for example, did not create its first governmental agency to help these migrant workers until 1973, even though the country had been importing labor as early as 1957. The mentality that these workers would soon return to their native countries did not dissipate until the mid-1970s, after many of these laborers had already overstayed their temporary visas and established roots in their communities. This period would present the first challenges to host European countries like the Netherlands.

The rapidly expanding European economy met its end in the 1970s. The plethora of jobs that had existed a decade earlier began to evaporate and the expectation that guest workers would return to their countries of origin grew. By this point, however, many immigrant families had

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8 Cherribi, Sam. *In the house of war: Dutch Islam observed* pg. 69
settled into their new residences. While at times unpleasant, overall conditions in host countries improved the quality of life for many immigrant workers relative to their homeland. In addition, workers in the Netherlands who had been able to bring their wives and families over on visas between 1965-1975, wanted to remain in their new European home. By this time, Muslim immigrants formed communities in the poorer parts of industrial European cities. Many of these communities had mosques, sold food, and practiced their culture customs rather than that of the new society they lived in. Although they may have lived in “ghettos” that were relatively poor when compared to the general population (the parasitic effect of which the Dutch media never tired of pointing out), they had succeeded in forming nascent communities of their own, legitimating their claim to a permanent place in Dutch society.

A combination of factors led local Europeans to view these foreign workers as a threat to their own society. The first negative association with these workers stemmed primarily from the economic downturn. Low-wage industrial jobs first felt the impact of this economic downturn. Guest workers who typically held these positions subsequently became the first to lose their jobs. Their continued presence in European countries, however, led local populations to view this group as a burden on society that had overstayed its welcome.

The association between foreigner and Muslim began during this same time period. Since these guest workers easily stood out in the predominantly white and Christian areas of Northern Europe, they could easily be identified as outsiders. As the economic recession progressed, hostility towards Muslim populations increased. Their prolonged presence was viewed as threatening not only because many lost their jobs and the government had to care for them, but

9 Cheribri, Sam. In the house of war: Dutch Islam observed pg. 66
10 Karich, Imane “Economic Development of Muslim Communities” pg. 75
also those who had employment were seen as occupying jobs that legal citizens needed. Both scenarios offered a lose-lose situation for immigrants, especially those groups that could not blend in like the Muslims from Turkey and Morocco. Although the 1970s saw little active violence or public condemnation of these people, the mood surrounding these foreign groups during the 1970’s would set the tone for a backlash against them in the coming years.

1980-2000

The end of the century brought with it an incredible array of complex issues for Western Europe to tackle. Economic recovery had been slow and prosperity seemed incapable of reaching the levels of the 1960s. Nevertheless, the Western European economy still vastly exceeded the Eastern part of the continent. While Eastern Europe’s future remained unclear in the early 1980’s, the Muslim population of Western Europe established themselves further into the European Community. It became clear that many of these migrant workers would not be returning to their home countries. Many families had already been raising children in European countries and these kids grew up knowing nothing of their parents’ countries of origin. In addition, some immigrants were able to build businesses and find jobs that paid well enough to get by. In other words, for many immigrants, Europe had become their home.

The native Dutch populations in the 1980s increasingly felt the presence of foreign immigrants in news reports, political arguments, and in their daily lives. The media often represented Muslim communities negatively as culturally backwards, impoverished, and intolerant. These depictions heightened awareness of the presence of this group in society. This new exposure from the media, in combination with the fact that Muslim communities grew larger and made up sizable portions of the population in major cities like Rotterdam, added to

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11 Karach, Imane pg. 67
their visibility. Unfortunately, the attention these groups often received almost always carried a negative or hostile tone. Whereas before the 1980’s Muslim populations operated as a small minority, their growing size called that nominal status into question.

Media in the Netherlands portrayed the growth of these Muslim groups as posing two major problems for Dutch society. The first problem built on the old fear that foreign immigrants had the potential to become economically dependent on European taxpayers. The constant portrayal of Muslim immigrants as a poor and downtrodden group, reliant on the state, and not contributing to its advancement, reinforced this fear.

While it may have been true that the disparity between local families and foreign immigrants remained quite large, their drain on the economy proved questionable. Most families struggled hard to get by, but many managed to make their own way. Many Muslim immigrants became small entrepreneurs opening small shops and stores that catered to local Muslim communities. In addition, women began earning their own incomes. The number of Turkish and Moroccan female entrepreneurs grew from 16% to 23% from 1985 to 1995.\textsuperscript{12} All-the-while, the unemployment rate of Turkish and Moroccan immigrants remained a full 2.5-3 times that of the national average. Those fortunate enough to have employment earned an annual income one-third the national average.\textsuperscript{13} Many struggles resulted from a lack of opportunities including a failure to create institutions to encourage literacy. Some foreigners could still not speak Dutch or English.\textsuperscript{14} The lack of dealing with immigrant integration in the 1970s led to their volatile position in Dutch society in the 1980s.

\textsuperscript{12} Karach, Imane pg. 69
\textsuperscript{13} Choudhury, Tufyal “Muslims and Discrimination pg. 79
\textsuperscript{14} Cherribi, Sam. \textit{In the house of war: Dutch Islam observed} pg. 31
The second threat that received a large amount of publicity was the “Islamization” of Europe, an idea that began circulating with greater intensity during this period. Real or perceived, the increasing presence of Islamic immigrants with their traditional Islamic values and ideals would threaten to overtake the progressive ideals of Europe. The right to vote, granted in the 1980s to certain Muslim residents living in the Netherlands, did much to heighten this fear.\(^{15}\)

The proponents of this second threat of Islamic immigration increasingly put these immigrant groups at odds with the rest of the population. This view also prompted the issue to take on a higher profile in politics and began serious discussions within the intellectual community.

The fall of the Soviet Union and liberation of Eastern Europe greatly exacerbated the Islamic immigrant question. Suddenly, Western European countries had to deal with an influx of immigrants from Eastern Europe. Although there had been tensions between Eastern and Western Europeans, local populations were quick to accept the like-minded, white, and Christian Eastern Europeans over the Muslim groups that had already taken root in their countries. Public opinion during the 1980 and 1990s increasingly supported the removal of the Islamic immigrants in the country.

How is it that Islamic immigrants became subjects demonized by the native Dutch population, while other immigrant groups like the Indonesians had successfully integrated? The Indonesians typically had a European heritage, and had previously lived in a colony of the Netherlands. Most also possessed Dutch citizenship, and if they did not the government eventually sanctioned their integration. Furthermore, they willingly gave up many Indonesian cultural practices in favor of Dutch ones. In contrast to this the Islamic immigrants had been brought in for a temporary purpose. As such the government did not supply them with the ability

\(^{15}\) Cherribi, Sam. *In the house of war: Dutch Islam observed* pg. 63
to integrate properly. They also never adopted Dutch cultural practices and refused to abandon their own religion and customs. Finally, their high poverty rates and religious morals received negative attention the media and politics. It was in this context of fear and uncertainty that the relatively unknown figure of Pim Fortuyn, would emerge with resounding popularity in the Netherlands.

PART II:

*Fortuyn Life and Legacy*

This section will focus on the rise and fall of Pim Fortuyn, a Dutch politician who embodied the complex nature of European politics in the postwar years. In framing his political agenda around the controversy of Islamic immigration, Fortuyn gained a broad voting base loyal to him rather than confining himself to one particular party. The touchy topic of immigration helped to increase his appeal in three major ways. The first was the common distrust of foreigners among Dutch citizens, which allowed him to promote a nationalism based on liberal Dutch ideals. In a second instance, immigration helped him to enhance his own personal appeal by contrasting the “backwardness” of Islam with his own visions of modernity, progressiveness, and freedom of speech. Thirdly, he used the problems of immigration to attack the “Purple Coalition,” the previous political majority in Parliament, and tap into the dissatisfaction of a variety of voters.

Born February 19, 1948, Fortuyn entered into a racially homogeneous, conservative, and overwhelmingly Christian country.16 His strict Roman Catholic upbringing initially led him to the priesthood, but he soon found his passion in sociology and anthropology in college. Nevertheless, this early period of his life undoubtedly shaped his ideas about the period in the

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Netherlands before the presence of a large Islamic population. As Fortuyn grew he watched the ethnic changes occurring in the country, just as other Dutch citizens did in the postwar years. As the economy began to change, the presence of darker-skinned foreigners became more prevalent in daily life and the media. Whether mentioned or not, the association between economic downturn and the increase of foreign immigrants had been unmistakable. These observations, in combination with Fortuyn’s conservative background, shaped his ideas that would surface in his articles, books, and political philosophy later in his life. The shared experience of distrust for foreign immigrants, led many Dutch citizens to feel they could relate to him.

Despite Fortuyn’s conservative and religious upbringing, he had been quite liberal in college. He first received his degree in sociology at Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam and then continued to finish a doctorate in sociology at the University of Groningen. In college, Fortuyn had been a supporter of communism. He later joined the Labor Party before eventually turning to the right-of-centre People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) in the early 1990s. His background in sociology provided him with the ability to make sound and legitimate arguments in support of his controversial viewpoints. Although he held traditionally liberal values in regards to personal freedoms and gender equality, his stance on immigration found a larger support network among the right-leaning conservative parties. These Right parties felt that immigration posed a threat to job security and the Christian majority of the country. They agreed with Fortuyn that Islamic immigrants should not be allowed in the country. Fortuyn had a different set of justifications for blocking Islamic immigration. His reasoning had been framed around liberal policies rather than economic ones.

17 Wim, “Islam versus homosexuality? Some reflections on the assassination of Pim Fortuyn”.
Fortuyn incorporated the issue of immigration into his liberal agenda by framing Dutch nationalism with the liberal, modern, and progressive qualities of the postwar years. His earlier writings included the publication of books such as Against the Islamization of Our Culture, which argued that Islam posed a great danger to Dutch progressive ideals. He feared that the influence of Islam on Dutch society left little room for freedom of expression, individual autonomy, and the emancipation of women and homosexuals. In a sense, Fortuyn associated the core values of Western culture, such as gender equality, as inherent to Dutch culture. In making this connection he attempted to draw upon a Dutch nationalism based on its white and Christian past.

The most poignant point that resonated with the Dutch population was his argument that the modern secular and Christian democracy of the Netherlands and the “backwards” and dated laws of the Koran and Islam are not compatible. In an interview Fortuyn stated, “We want equality for homosexuals and other minorities. We stand for our freedom of speech; we want a developed democracy and a developed law system. The Islamic culture everywhere on earth has different viewpoints on these points.” He pointed to the legalized subordination of women to men in Islamic countries and the inequality that resulted from their patriarchal households. Fortuyn also emphasized the homophobia of many Muslims, and the discrimination of homosexual men and women in Islamic countries like Iran. By contrasting these views with the progressive steps taken by the Netherlands in gender rights and equality, he simultaneously promoted a Dutch identity based on liberal values. The Muslim “outsider” who, in Fortuyn’s view, sought a society entirely different from the Netherlands, became a threat to this Dutch

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identity. Fortuyn garnered his support by associating liberalism with Dutch nationalism. In doing this, he mobilized a highly diverse voting base united out of the fear of Islam’s intrusion into Dutch society.  

Fortuyn sought to publicly show the incompatibility of Islam and modern Europe whenever possible. He continually took measures to make controversy in his provocative (and often times offensive) statements about Islamic immigrants. During rare instances of violence involving Islamic youths, he would immediately point it out to the public as evidence of the rising tensions caused by the different Dutch and Muslim lifestyles. In addition, Fortuyn actually sought out discussions with Muslim leaders in the Netherlands in highly publicized settings. He would then instigate arguments in these conversations, resulting in a reaction from the Muslim guest.

The provocation he got out of the interviewers he encountered served two purposes for him. The first was it gave Fortuyn a sense of legitimacy in his claim that he was “hearing out the other side” so to speak. The second advantage for Fortuyn was the negative reaction Islamic men typically had to his provocative statements, often misrepresenting them as extremely intolerant. In one instance, Fortuyn flaunted his homosexuality to such an extent that an Islamic Imam eventually exploded in anger. Fortuyn responded to this by calmly turning and smiling at the camera stating, “You see, this is the Trojan Horse we are letting into our country.” His collected nature during this outburst contrasted sharply with that of the Imam, leaving the viewers with a clear depiction of the lack of tolerance exhibited by this Muslim leader. He orchestrated events like these on multiple occasions, each time reiterating his point that he was a

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21 Tjikste Akkerman (2005): Anti-immigration parties and the defence of liberal values: pg. 341-342
22 Rod Dreher"Murder in Holland", National Review, 7 May 2002 pg. 1
defender of western values from the “threat” of Islam. These provocations, came at a price for him, however, as he began receiving a larger number of threats from both disagreeing Dutch natives and foreigners.

During a controversial interview on live television, two women ambushed Fortuyn on March 14th in 2002. They threw cakes made of feces, vomit, and urine at him as reporters stood by and watched in shock and silence. After this event, the political atmosphere took on an increasingly volatile nature. He used immigration as a means to denounce and deligitimize the power of the previous ruling parties in the Dutch government, the “Purple Coalition.” His attitude became terse and accusative of the current Parliament. He blamed them for his unpopularity stating in a foreboding comment that if, “something happens to me, they are partly responsible, and saying ‘well I didn’t kill him’ wont be a valid argument. Because they created a horrible atmosphere around me.” This kind of talk put him at odds and distanced him from the current ruling coalition, which by this point many Dutch citizens wanted to stray away from as well.

Playing up the fear surrounding the “threat of Islam,” while displaying the government’s lack of action on the subject, made it appear that the ruling parties in parliament didn’t even care about the native Dutch population. His depiction of a slow and bureaucratic government that was not relatable to everyday Dutch citizens had some validity. Many people were dissatisfied with the current political coalition, which seemed to be operating with little input from Dutch citizens. Fortuyn used that dissatisfaction to promote a very different image of himself; playing up his role as a civil servant of the people. In his announcement of entering politics with the Liberal Netherlands Party, he ended his speech with the now famous line, “At Your Service,” complete
with a salute and wave to the cameras and audience. \(^{23}\) His charisma, combined with his confidence, led many to admire him. He represented something different than most existing politicians; his relatability led him to be viewed as an advocate for the people.

In contrast to Fortuyn’s connectedness to the electorate, the old parties seemed calloused, uncaring, and elitist. Fortuyn’s approach sparked conflicts within the many parties he previously attempted to join. At first he ran with the liberal Livable Netherlands party, but when he declared in an interview that if he had his way “no new asylum seekers would be allowed in the country” and continued stating “…if necessary to protect freedom of speech, the first article of the Constitution [which prevented the discrimination of religion and race] should be repealed.”, the leaders in the Livable Netherlands party asked him to leave. He then decided to run with his own party the, List Fortuyn (LPF) and, to the country’s surprise, people followed him. In leaving the Livable Netherlands, he took a large portion of voting base along with voters from other parties. Instead of rallying around a party, it appeared that people voted for a person. \(^{24}\)

Another factor adding to Fortuyn’s widespread support can be attributed to the character he promoted of himself. Fortuyn went to great pains to display a self-image that embodied the freedoms of the modern man, in particular the freedom of speech. In a way, his personal and public image had been almost as complex and confusing as his political beliefs. Joop Holsteyn sums up the quite intriguing qualities of Pim Fortuyn: “A former university professor of sociology and political columnist, an outspoken homosexual with a flamboyant lifestyle – Ferrari, Bentley with chauffeur, butler, two lap dogs, portraits of John F. Kennedy in his lavishly


\(^{24}\) Joop J.M. Van Holsteyn Never a dull moment: Pim Fortuyn and the Dutch parliamentary election of 2002 pg.46
decorated Rotterdam home which he referred to as Palazzo di Pietro.”

His flashy lifestyle, openness in discussing his own homosexuality, and machismo character, sparked a new and exciting approach to politics in the Netherlands. His cult of personality attracted a wide following. Combining his charisma with his self-established role as defender of the freedom of speech brought him even wider support.

The widespread appeal of Fortuyn never appeared more obvious than on May 6th 2002 after his assassination in a parking lot after a radio interview. His killer did not come from an Islamic extremist group, or even an Islamic sympathizer. The assassin was an animal and environmental rights activist. Volkert van der Graaf, murdered Fortuyn for the threat he posed to political stability and his use of controversial issues to attain power for himself. Whatever the killer’s intentions had been, Fortuyn’s death resulted in mass hysteria and overwhelming sympathy for his cause.

Fortuyn had been the first political assassination in the Netherlands in over 300 years. Demonstrations in front of The Hague in the Netherlands and the worldwide coverage of his death, led to many to see Fortuyn as a martyr for Dutch nationalism, free speech, and a reminder of how far politics had digressed in the Netherlands. The blame that Fortuyn attributed to the Purple Coalition’s “demonizing” of him, along with the lack of security they provided for him after he began receiving threats, led many to blame the current Dutch government for his death. The overwhelming victory of his party at the polls after his death proved this sentiment. The LPF

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26 “Profile: Fortuyn killer.” BBC NEWS, April 15, 2003. Pg1
27 Joop J.M. Van Holsteyn Never a dull moment: Pim Fortuyn and the Dutch parliamentary election of 2002 pg. 49
received seventeen percent of the vote and twenty-six seats in parliament. This had been a record number of seats for a new party, the previous record consisting of only a seven-seat gain.\footnote{Joop J.M. Van Holsteyn Never a dull moment: Pim Fortuyn and the Dutch parliamentary election of 2002 pg. 47}

The fact that a party with essentially no leader could win such a large percentage of the vote proved just how influential Fortuyn had become in the minds of Dutch citizens. The attitude pertaining to his importance continued two years later in 2004, when he was awarded “The Greatest Dutchman” by public poll on KRO (the Netherlands public broadcasting station).\footnote{Brants, Kees. 1985. "Broadcasting and politics in the Netherlands: From pillar to post" pg. 104-121.} His legacy would lead to the rise of right-wing groups in the Netherlands and other European countries. Although uncertainty for the future had never been greater, one thing remained certain; politics in the Netherlands would never quite be the same after Fortuyn.

PART III:

*A Lack of Political Identity*

The fact that such a difficult to define character like Pim Fortuyn could achieve such great success speaks to the larger issue of political identity in Europe. Tony Judt argues that, in the years following WWII, Europe emerged with a more ambiguous political nature. The traditional classification between left- and right-wing philosophies became more convoluted and less easily defined. Before WWII, the Left had traditionally advocated for immigrant and labor rights, and had an anti-clerical message. In contrast, the Right usually had religious affirmation, favored government stability through corporate benefits, and held an anti-immigration stance. After WWII, these distinctions blurred. The left argued for a more active government role in the economy, with a less active role in the lifestyles of individuals. The Right still had a religious agenda, but increasingly wanted a smaller government role in economic matters. The traditional
and predictable classifications between these two parties developed a more confusing and complex nature.

Fortuyn’s use of immigration as an issue points to a place where left-wing and right-wing party lines blur. Fortuyn was an attractive character to the traditional Left because he promoted less government interference in peoples’ lives regarding gender equality, drug policies, and euthanasia. However, his defense of Christian values, anti-Islamic immigration stance, and denouncement of the liberal Purple Coalition could also be associated with the traditional Right. These characteristics make immigration and Fortuyn a prime example of the struggling political identity that Judt refers to. Looking at the development of European politics that Judt traces, how the Netherlands fits into this larger framework, and finally at Fortuyn’s appropriate timing into this foray, the argument for postwar politics emerging without a clear identity is valid.

For Judt, the Cold War provided a strange kind of stability for Western Europe. Particularly after the death of Stalin and the End of the Korean War, Western European countries entered into a period of political stability. With Western Europe no longer at war, the decline of international political strife, and the Communist and Fascist parties retreating to the margins, Governments could now focus on domestic issues.\(^{30}\) Judt suggests that this stability is due in large part to the “internationalization of political confrontations, and the consequent engagement of the U.S. to draw the sting from domestic political confrontations.”\(^{31}\) The big “problems” that threatened European stability, such as Germany’s terms of defeat, territorial conflicts in Italy and Yugoslavia, and the question of Austria, were largely taken on by the U.S.-Soviet power struggle leaving Europe out of the equation. After WWII, Europeans were most interested in rebuilding and creating a state that took care of its citizens. This brought together the traditional political

\(^{30}\) Judt, Tony *Postwar* pg. 242

\(^{31}\) Judt, Tony *Postwar* pg. 242
divisions of the Left and the Right. Political collaboration focused on rebuilding marked a major change compared to the early 20th century when the two parties were ardently divided.

The political landscape of Western Europe began to change yet again during the 1970’s, this time fracturing within the traditional Left and Right rather than between the two divides.32 Up until this point, voters maintained predictable patterns typically falling in line with that of their parents. According to Judt, this changed due to four new factors in Western Europe. The first factor had to do with increased geographic mobility in the post war decades. European countries saw the decline of defined industrial and agricultural regions following WWII. The dispersion of these concentrated voting blocks of workers or farmers resulted in less predictable elections. Thus, the fixed social categories that had previously existed began to dissipate, along with their strength and unity in politics.

The second factor leading to within party fracturing had to do with the welfare state and the prosperity of the 1960s and 1970s. The success of social welfare essentially undermined the arguments of far Left and far Right politics. Therefore, the central debate between the two traditional parties on the role of the state and its economic policy objectives no longer existed.33

The third factor leading to within party fracturing was the ever-growing presence of minorities and new political allegiances. The example of the growing influence of Islamic immigration in Western Europe demonstrates this point well, because it united people on the basis of fear. Some native citizens felt minorities displaced workers or threatened job security, others disliked minorities purely on racial prejudice, while others like Fortuyn argued their presence threatened the progressive advancement of Europe.

32 Judt, Tony Postwar pg. 484
33 Judt, Tony Postwar pg. 485
The fourth factor leading to within party fracturing was the introduction of new issues in politics. New issues such as sexual politics, the environment, and human rights, took on a larger role as European countries rebuilt. These new issues threaded new political territory and offered new allegiances when determining votes.

The political fragmentation that occurred in Europe marked a transition within Dutch politics as well. Van Holsteyn noted this when he stated that, “For perhaps half a century, from the introduction of universal suffrage in 1917 until the mid-1960s, the Netherlands was stable and structured.” Following World War II, the party system was comprised of the Catholic KVP, the Protestant CHU, the Calvinist ARP, the secular working class PvdA, and the secular middle class VVD. These parties captured some 90 per cent of the vote; in particular the Catholics and Calvinists almost without exception voted for the party that belonged to their religious group. The period following the 1960s fractured and destabilized this old structure into even smaller divisions.

At the end of the 20th century, electoral results taking an increasingly unpredictable nature in the Netherlands. The once stable Dutch voters now relied far less on long-term social and ideological divisions, than upon short-term circumstances in determining their votes. The massive support Fortuyn’s LPF had at the polls in the 2002 election became emblematic of this political uncertainty. Had he not been assassinated, he might have become a candidate for Prime Minister. The fact that such a figure could come into politics, and rise to the top so quickly, baffled most politicians. This would not have been possible during the first half of the 20th century.

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34 Joop J.M. Van Holsteyn Never a dull moment: Pim Fortuyn and the Dutch parliamentary election of 2002 pg. 47
35 Judt, Tony Postwar 484
36 Joop J.M. Van Holsteyn Never a dull moment: Pim Fortuyn and the Dutch parliamentary election of 2002 pg. 41
century, and most certainly not before then either. The Left and Right wing political ambiguity in
the Netherlands, as in all of Western Europe, following WWII allowed Fortuyn to succeed.

Governments tackling topics pertaining to sexuality, environmental protection, and
immigration, enabled parties like the LPF to emphasize a small number of advocacy issues. Once
citizens began voting for issues rather than traditional parties, political figures could garner huge
support from people that agreed with their stance on these topics. This effectively scavenged
votes from the larger, more traditional parties like the Liveable Netherlands that Fourtuyn had
initially campaigned with. Without the fall of traditional Left and Right, small parties and figures
like Fortuyn would have had trouble making as large of an impact in politics as he did.

CONCLUSION:

The Netherlands has still not recovered from the shock of Fortuyn’s political incursion.
The complicated nature of Islamic immigration in Western Europe had lasting implications for
the Netherlands. In order to ensure stability during the labor shortage of the 1960s, the Left and
Right worked together to bring this group into the country as temporary workers. When these
laborers did not return home after the economic downturn, the media-hyped fears of this
minority group enabled politicians like Fortuyn to pull in a variety of different voters. Fortuyn
juxtaposed the progressive advancements in the Netherlands with what he deemed the
“backwards” characteristics of a religion like Islam. Establishing Islamic immigrants as a threat
to the liberal ideals of Dutch society, ostracized the group further.

All in all, the linkage between Judt’s analysis of political identity in post war Europe and
Fortuyn’s rise in Dutch society, becomes apparent when looking at the immigration issue.
Operating simultaneously within both the traditional divisions of the Left and Right, Fortuyn
demonstrates the ambiguous nature of European politics that Tony Judt argued developed in the Cold War. The fall of the Right and Left helped to bring about progressive movements such as gender and sexual equality in the Netherlands, however, it also led to the emergence of a prejudiced and intolerant figures like Fortuyn. When looking at the life and death of Pim Fortuyn, complicated questions surely arise. His legacy has led to the emergence of even more radical anti-Islamic politicians like Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Geert Wilders. Yet none of these emerging groups have come close to achieving Fortuyn’s fame or success. His rapid rise in popularity still confounds both Dutch and non-Dutch alike who justifiably wonder how this bizarre character could have such mass appeal in the country? Looking back and tracing the path of Islamic immigration in the Netherlands, and the development of Europe’s lack of political identity, offers one way to better understand this controversial figure in modern European history.
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