

**Winners and losers: a bare account of five centuries of immigration**

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*Abstract*

Since the late 1980s a number of influential politicians and commentators have voiced a deep sense of pessimism with regard to the long term integration process of immigrants in the Netherlands. An important turning point was the Rushdie affair in 1989, when Muslims in the Netherlands (as well as surrounding countries) took to the streets demanding that Rushdie's novel *Satanic verses* be banned, yes even burnt. For the first time many people realized that core liberal values, like freedom of speech, but also gender equality and democracy were not automatically shared by a (voiceful) part of the new immigrant population, that had increased dramatically since the late 1970s.

Both from the left and the right anti-Islam sentiments quickly increased, but it were predominantly right wing (often former left wingers like Fortuyn) commentators who started to mobilize the anti-Islam and anti immigrant voice. Starting with Bolkestein in 1991, soon Fortuyn and other followed in his wake. Portraying the Islam, and its followers, in an essentialist way as an ideology that was fundamentally opposed to liberal values. At the same time social problems attached to the mass immigration of low skilled workers from Northern Africa and Turkey – and the simultaneous immigration from the colonies in the West – became apparent. Especially the relatively high unemployment figures among the first generation migrants and poor school results and criminality among the second generation (often adolescent boys) attracted increasingly the attention of the media and became subject of public debate.

Especially Fortuyn was very successful in convincing his audience that these social and cultural problems were the result of the failed and naïve multiculturalism of the left. They were accused of having enabled the mass migration of Turks and Moroccans in the mid 1970s and having supported a disastrous cultural relativist policy. The idea that this integration policy, best known by the slogan 'Integration while retaining one's own identity', was a principal and long term multi-culturalist choice soon became widely accepted. Pessimism about the integration process gained

momentum with the publication of the newspaper article 'The multicultural drama' by Paul Scheffer, the Islamist terrorist attacks on 9/11, and the murders on Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh. Finally, a few years later Geert Wilders and his party ideologist Martin Bosma made the position of Muslims in Dutch society the centre of his political programme. Although the tone of this pessimism differed, the main message was widely shared: the leftish church was responsible for the mass immigration, the failed multicultural policy and Muslims posed a threat to society. In our book we systematically test these and other opinions, who are seldomly backed up by facts, nor put in their historical context.

We first of all find that the migration dynamics in the 1970s and 1980s (mass immigration during an economic recession) was historically unique and was bound to lead to social problems. But we also find that this badly timed immigration was not caused by a leftish conspiracy, but was the result of unintended and unexpected effects of policies that were already implemented in the early 1960s. They were proposed and implemented by right wing and Christian parties in Parliament and in the long run enabled the settlement and family reunification of guest workers and their families. Their decision to stay and call for their family members was highly stimulated by the restrictive aliens policy that was put in place from 1973 onwards. Many guest workers realized that leaving meant that they would give up their social and legal rights and therefore decided to stay.

Moreover, we argue that the integration policy de facto was meant to fight unemployment, bad housing and problems at schools, and that the multiculturalist aspects were highly symbolic and financially marginal. Moreover, the policy was designed and carried out by center right governments that ruled the Netherlands until 1989. When it comes to the children of immigrants we signal on average positive trends in most domains of integration. They still lag behind their native peers, but given the (economically) very unlucky timing of the immigration combined with the fact that guest workers were recruited on the basis of their low human capital, the results are even better than could be expected. We therefore find no reason for pessimism and conclude that the debate lacks a sound empirical underpinning and can only be decided when put in its proper historical context.

Finally, we show that in itself justified criticism on problems with integration was for a long time impossible due to a – politically widely shared – conviction that this would play into the hand of the extreme right. We show that this taboo to discuss obvious problems was the effect of the ethical revolution. This set in during the 1960s due to

the rising awareness and collective guilt feeling of the high number of Jews who were killed during the Second World War, the atrocities committed during the decolonization of Indonesia, the American Civil Rights Movement and South African Apartheid. In other words a taboo on racism. When this ethical revolution finally evaporated at the end of the 1980s, speeded up by the Rushdie affair, frustration among people who were confronted with the problems of immigration could find a way out and be politically mobilized. Together with the fear for Muslims after 9/11, accelerating globalization and the decreasing legitimacy of the European Union, this created a perfect breeding ground for populist anti-immigrant parties.

<http://www.hum.leiden.edu/history/staff/lucassen.html>