

# A 'Clash of Civilizations', Sending Pink Sparks Flying

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**D**O YOU remember Pim Fortuyn, a gay Dutch politician who rose to notoriety with his call for a moratorium on immigration and whose political party Lijst Pim Fortuyn received 1.6 million votes and 26 seats in the 150-seat parliament nine days after his assassination on 6 May 2002?

It is common today to automatically associate white gay male politics with the left. From Oscar Wilde, Magnus Hirschfeld, Sergei Eisenstein, Jean Genet, Harry Hay, Michel Foucault, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Guy Hocquenghem, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, John D'Emilio, to Tony Kushner, the finest and queerest of queer male intellectuals have been resolutely of the left (even when political parties on the left didn't welcome them, they remained radically pinko), and landmarks of gay men's activism from the Stonewall Uprising, le Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire, Act-Up, to Queer Nation stand on the left side of the political spectrum. While we know that some white gay men have espoused a range of right-wing politics (from Nazism of Ernst Röhm to Cold-War anticommunism of Roy Cohn to Log Cabin Republicanism of Andrew Sullivan), we (especially those of us on the queer left), noting that right-wing gay men are generally marginalized (and sometimes purged) by their fellow right-wingers, think that right-wing gay men have found themselves on the wrong side of the political spectrum, *against their own interests*.

The rise of Pim Fortuyn, however, signaled a new era of white gay male politics. By promoting anti-immigrant politics vigorously and marketing it with anti-Muslim prejudice demagogically, Fortuyn showed that right-wing populism can very well be gay and enormously popular to boot, as LPF votes in 2002 attest, in the Netherlands, "the first country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage (in March 2002)" (Wim Lunsing, 'Islam versus Homosexuality? Some Reflections on the Assassination of Pim Fortuyn', *Anthropology Today* 19.2, April 2003, p.19). It is ironic that the conservative thesis of Samuel Huntington finally

found its most charismatic advocate in the most liberal nation in the world:

"A prolific author, as far back as 1997 he [Pim Fortuyn] had published *Against Islamicization of Our Culture* (reissued as *The Islamicization of Our Culture: The Centrality of Dutch Identity* in late 2001, following 9/11 ...), in which he portrayed Islam in conflict with modern values and norms. He argued that because Islam does not tolerate separation between state and religion, it comes into direct conflict with liberal values. Already in August 2001 he had gone on record saying that 'I am ... in favour of a cold war with Islam. I see Islam as an extraordinary threat, as a hostile society'. He liked to call himself 'the Samuel Huntington of Dutch politics' because he endorsed Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations* (1998)... [I]n an interview in the *Volkskrant* of 9 February 2002, he declared that there was no room for immigrants and asylum seekers in the Netherlands, that he was in favour of complete abandonment of the principle of non-discrimination, and that Islam was a backward religion: 'If I can legally manage it, I would say: no Muslim comes in[to this country] any more'." (Lunsing, p. 20)

While Fortuyn's life came to an end at the hands of a mad animal rights activist Van der Graaf, immigrants and asylum-seekers in the Netherlands live with his legacy:

"The Dutch parliament voted February 17 to expel some 26,000 asylum seekers from the Netherlands over the next three years, marking an escalation in the brutalisation of immigrants across Europe.... The bill affects all asylum seekers who arrived in the country before April 2001. They include Afghans, Somalis and Chechens facing civil wars or a return to regions with no functioning government. Many of those affected have been in the country for more than five years and have had children who have been raised within Dutch communities. Some have spent up to 10 years applying for residence, and consider themselves Dutch.

"All those who arrived before April 2001, and whose asylum applications have been rejected, are to be offered plane tickets and given eight weeks to leave the country. Levels of payment offered are to be assessed on circumstance by special committees. If asylum seekers refuse, they will be rounded up by immigration officers, supported by armed police if necessary, and taken to a departure centre. Here, for up to another eight weeks, they will come under pressure from lawyers and civil servants to leave voluntarily. The government has already opened deportation centres for the detention of families.

"If they still refuse to leave the country, they face a six-month prison sentence. They will then also lose any entitlement to a job, welfare, housing and health care. The government hopes that this will both force their expulsion and satisfy its obligations to support "voluntary" departure under international human rights conventions. (Paul Bond, 'Dutch Parliament Votes to Deport Asylum Seekers', *World Socialist Website*, 21 February 2004)

"Newcomers and settled immigrants will be forced to successfully pass an integration examination to prove they have integrated into Dutch society. The law is primarily aimed at non-EU family unification immigrants – especially those from Turkey and Morocco – who will be required to complete a basic integration test in their country of origin before arriving in the Netherlands. The Netherlands is the first country in the world to demand permanent immigrants complete a pre-arrival integration course. US, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand and Japanese nationals are exempted from the pre-arrival courses.

"The changes come on the back of a Cabinet decision in March requiring Dutch residents earn at least 120 percent of the minimum wage before being allowed to bring their foreign partner into the country. Both the partner and Dutch resident must also be aged at least 21. Moving on, the Cabinet agreed on 23 April that after arriving in the country, a newcomer must report back to the local council after six months to monitor their integration progress. Authorities will determine when they will be assessed again. Those who fail to report will be fined.

"If the immigrant wants to be compensated for course costs, they must pass the integration exam within three years. If a newcomer has failed to integrate after five years, they will be fined.... A residence permit for an indefinite period can only be obtained once a foreigner has passed an integration exam. Settled immigrants will also be required to complete the integration exam except those who have already gained relevant diplomas.

"The Cabinet asserts that about 450,000 settled immigrants have a language deficiency and should

thus be forced to integrate.... To combat the growing problems in socio-economic disadvantaged areas in cities, the government has allowed the four largest cities demand that new residents earn a minimum level income before being permitted to settle in the city.... Taking up the fight against illegal immigrants, the Cabinet resolved on 23 April to boost the capacity of the foreign police and double the cells at deportation centres to about 3,000.

"Rental contracts can be dissolved if inquiries indicate that landlords have rented homes out to illegal immigrants. In the case of illegal subletting, the official tenant might also lose his or her home. Employers will be threatened with stiffer fines if they employ illegal workers. The average fine of EUR 980 will be increased to EUR 3,500 per illegal worker. More raids will thus be carried out and employers will also be forced to pay retrospective social security premiums and taxes if the illegal immigrant has worked there for six months. That bill could reportedly amount to EUR 6,000." (Aaron Gray-Block, 'Changes in Dutch Immigration Policy', *Expatica*, 19 May 2004)

"The Dutch government plans to scrap the law allowing third generation migrants to maintain dual nationality. Immigration Minister Rita Verdonk said it is "not permissible" for this group of people to have two passports. ('Dutch Set to Scrap Third Generation Dual Nationality', *Expatica*, 21 May 2004)

"Dutch political culture is sowing hate and criminalising migrants, former Liberal VVD leader Hans Dijkstal has claimed. He particularly slammed a proposal to publicly identify migrants on how much they have integrated into Dutch society. ('Dutch Political Culture "Cultivates Migrant Hate"', *Expatica*, 7 June 2004)

Will the phenomenon of a gay man successfully popularizing the rhetoric that pits "Islam" (misrepresented as inherently and monolithically homophobic and misogynistic) against "Western Civilization" (made out to be inherently and monolithically feminist and pro-gay) remain unique to the Netherlands? Or will the Netherlands be a harbinger, as more white gay men, now integrated in the militaries and soon to gain the equal right to marriage in most rich industrialized nations, lose the ability to identify with other outcasts like the Palestinians and migrant workers that once defined the politics and aesthetics of Genet (e.g., *Prisoner of Love*) and Fassbinder (e.g., *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*)?

Take Peter Tatchell, perhaps the most famous queer activist in Britain, for example. Unlike Fortuyn, Tatchell is still capable of gesturing toward the existence of tolerant Muslims, but a number of his writings suggest a paranoid fear of political powers of Muslims:

“The New Dark Ages are already with us. For hundreds of millions of people in parts of the Middle-East, Africa and South-East Asia, the ascendancy of Islamic fundamentalism has ushered in an era of religious obscurantism and intolerance. The liberal, compassionate wing of Islam – although it still has large numbers of adherents – is being forced onto the defensive and increasingly eclipsed.” (Peter Tatchell, ‘The New Dark Ages’, 1995)

“The political consequences for the gay community could be serious. As the fundamentalists gain followers, homophobic Muslim voters may be able to influence the outcome of elections in 20 or more marginal constituencies. Their voting strength could potentially be used to block pro-gay candidates or to pressure electorally vulnerable MPs to vote against gay rights legislation.” (Peter Tatchell/OutRage! Press Release, ‘The Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism in Britain’, 10 April 1998)

While the politics of extreme Islamism presents indeed a danger (mainly to Muslims themselves rather than white British gay men like Tatchell), alarmist (and factually inaccurate) screeds like Tatchell’s do more damage than good to the very Muslims who are fighting for reforms – both in secular and religious arenas – by giving a gay obscurantist cover to the politics of intolerance. If Muslim voters are so vulnerable to radical Islamists’ persuasion, why not restrict their immigration to England, as the Dutch have sought to protect their “liberalism” and “civilization” by implementing more and more anti-immigrant measures? I won’t be surprised if Tatchell one day crosses the thin boundary between his rhetoric and Fortuyn’s.

Already, Tatchell’s politics may be properly called the advocacy of the Pink Man’s Burden, the White Man’s Burden in queer left drag:

“Peter Tatchell, Britain’s best-known and most notorious gay rights activist, still has ‘severe headaches’ from when he was set upon by President Robert Mugabe’s bodyguards after he tried to carry out a citizen’s arrest on the Zimbabwean leader in Brussels in March 2001. ‘I was battered far worse than most people think’, says Tatchell. ‘Thrown to the floor, kicked, punched.... I still have a bit of brain damage, and damage to my left eye. It’s not serious now, but I’m a bit slower than normal.’

“So can we expect similar sparks to fly during the UK election campaign, or has Tatchell learned his lesson about taking on figures in authority? ‘It’s long overdue that there were strong street protests against Blair’s authoritarian and pro-business policies’, says Tatchell. ‘He will continue to promote a social democratic version of Thatcherism, so long as people let him get away with it.’

“So how about a citizen’s arrest, to stop Blair in his tracks? After all, like Mugabe, Blair has been known to ‘break international law’ and show ‘contempt and disregard for human life’ (think Kosovo and Iraq). ‘Yes, but I’m not sure about arresting him’, says Tatchell. ‘I think you’d have a harder time getting to Blair than you would to Mugabe. And I don’t think there’s any comparison to the murders taking place in Zimbabwe.’” (Brendan O’Neill, ‘Me and My Vote: Peter Tatchell’, *Spiked*, 11 May 2001)

Mugabe is an authoritarian strongman who is no friend to democracy in Zimbabwe, to be sure, but he has not shown as much contempt and disregard for human life and international law as the multinational power elite like Blair who manage the empire of capital under the US hegemony, imposing the Washington Consensus globally with far bloodier results than Mugabe’s human rights violations at home. The Pink Man’s Burden, like the White Man’s Burden, has a way of obstructing the political vision of those who carry it, however.

Having left the Labour Party, which is to his credit, Tatchell has found a new political home in the Green Party. I hope he will at least remain where he is politically, without transforming himself into a British Fortuyn, who will stage a “Clash of Civilizations” that sends pink sparks flying.

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