

A FLAWED ASSESSMENT OF BRITAIN'S MULTICULTURAL ISLAMIFICATION

Londonistan

Melanie Phillips

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xxv plus 213 pp.

Reviewed by Edward Dutton

In many ways, *Londonistan* is an extremely depressing book. This is not a criticism. It is depressing because it summarizes so trenchantly, in just over two hundred pages, the reasons why Britain is now on its knees before Islamic radicalism and why its democracy and traditions are in such terrible shape. Melanie Phillips's thesis is that an historically naive attitude toward the rise of Islamic extremism in the United Kingdom, combined with British lack of self-belief and the reason-strangling grip of political correctness, all mean that, "London has become the epicenter of Islamic militancy in Europe." It is now a breeding ground for future Islamic terrorists unparalleled in the rest of Europe, rendering Britain a serious threat to the United States. *Londonistan* charts, in pains-taking detail, the rise in Islamic extremism in the UK and the fear and oppression that has concomitantly been meted out to those who would dare to criticize. Early on, it reviews the recent case of Muslims marching through London inciting the murder of cartoonists: "And those who tried to photograph the man dressed as a suicide bomber were threatened with arrest" – while the marchers were left well alone by the police.

In other ways, the book fills one with incredible optimism that a British journalist who writes for the *Daily Mail* (a popular, "mainstream," right-wing newspaper) should now be saying what authors for publications like *TOQ* have been saying for decades. But overall, despite being eminently readable, interesting, and rather brave, the book is flawed in numerous respects. The author contradicts herself again and again – normally in order to take part in the very political correctness she claims to despise. She censors her evidence

to this end. Furthermore, she oversimplifies her arguments, uses the very shoddy methods that she criticizes in others and, perhaps most significantly, is basically trying to reinvent the wheel without acknowledging the contribution of anybody else.

As already stated, however, there are positive aspects to *Londonistan*. Most important of these is that it is replete with new and interesting information about the rise of Islam and political correctness in the UK that has obviously been well researched and which many readers—even those with a strong interest in this area—may not know. The first chapter examines the historical rise of Islamic fundamentalism in some detail; other chapters examine the rise of the multiculturalist ideology in Britain or the relationship between Britain's extreme left and Islam. A further chapter looks at the left's apparent scapegoating of Israel and the connections with Islamic groups in this regard. A particularly interesting chapter, "On Their Knees before Terror," examines the Church of England's seemingly rampant political correctness, inability to criticize Islam and, in Phillips's view, virulent "anti-Semitism" or, at the very least, anti-Israel rhetoric. She cites the example of a particular cleric commenting, of the 9/11 attacks, that America "has brought this judgement on herself." She also looks at how scholars of religion are afraid to teach Islam in the analytical manner that they would Christianity and have been warned off doing so by their deans.

Equally, Phillips should be commended for her bravery. She may well be the first mainstream author in Britain to have voiced these concerns in a detailed book. As recently as a few years ago, this would have been career destroying for a journalist on a national newspaper like the *Daily Mail*. In the UK, such arguments were confined to obscure right-wing journals. But Phillips has presented them to a far wider audience, and for this she must be commended. She pulls apart multiculturalism and political correctness and paints them as what they are: profoundly oppressive, intolerant, and damaging ideologies which have, effectively, resulted in Londonistan (her term for the Islamified UK), oppression of the indigenous population, and the July 7, 2005 attacks on London's tube system. Moreover, you cannot deny Phillips's skill as a writer, or at least in the art of writing. *Londonistan* is a scintillating read. I started reading as I sat waiting for a plane at JFK and couldn't put it down. By the time I finished reading it, I was somewhere over Greenland. But perhaps its very readability underscores the book's problems. It is the kind of book to read on a plane in order to pass the time because it's entertaining and interesting and there's little else to do. But it is flawed in many ways, such that I would ultimately not recommend it.

Aspects of Phillips's argument are very shoddily presented, whether you agree with her or not. It is no hyperbole to claim that *Londonistan* is riddled with contradictions. The most obvious contradiction is her treatment of political correctness and multiculturalism. Chapter Four is entitled "The Multicultural

Paralysis." Multiculturalism is condemned as "immoral," "individualistic," and "illogical." She argues that the accusation of "racism" is simply a way of stifling debate and that the whole ideology simply reflects the left's hatred of any group in a position of power and its love of the perceived "powerless," including Muslim immigrants:

Multiculturalism and antiracism were now the weapons with which minorities were equipped to beat the majority. Not all minorities mind you...because of the prevalent Marxist analysis that racism necessarily involved power.

Multiculturalism is ripped to shreds. Yet Phillips's writing reflects this very ideology. Albeit paraphrased, we read the very mantras of multiculturalism: "Of course, racism's wrong," and so forth. Thus, in her discussion of the Mohammed cartoon furor she writes, "Of course it is wrong to gratuitously insult a religion." Here we see the priorities of the PC perspective: More important than anything is not upsetting an identity group. She is equally at pains to emphasize that hundreds of thousands of Muslims in Britain are "law abiding" before laying into Islam in the UK.

However, *Londonistan* is not merely contradictory on this broad level. Individual arguments are contradicted.

Phillips criticizes Islam because it is destroying British democracy and then, effectively, condemns British judges for trying to apply the law objectively and remaining independent of political influence (a perceived hallmark of democracy in the UK, although she does give an example of a clearly biased judge). She condemns Islam and political correctness for destroying freedom of speech in the UK, and then rails against freedom of speech if it involves Muslim clerics preaching things that she doesn't agree with: "The sacred principle," she wryly notes, "of freedom of speech...trumped all other considerations." Most important, she emphasizes that the overwhelming majority of Muslims in the UK are not extremist and are just peaceloving ordinary people but, in the previous breath, presents statistics indicating that that view is palpable nonsense, with 32 percent of British Muslims wanting to bring Western society to an end and 15 percent supporting the 9/11 terrorist attacks. She later tells of a survey that found that 61 percent of British Muslims want to be governed by Islamic law. Yet she insists that the majority are not radicalized. Phillips condemns political correctness for using terms like "racist" and "Islamophobe" to stifle debate, but does exactly the same thing herself when she pontificates about anti-Semitism among the hard left. Criticizing Israel is "scapegoating the Jews," for Phillips. Can't she see the irony of criticizing the left for suppressing debate with the term "Islamophobe" while she does exactly the same with the even more charged accusation of being anti-Jewish?

Phillips is very selective in the way she presents information. She is obviously desperate not to be compared to the British National Party — the only party in the UK which would agree with, and has been saying for decades,

almost everything she writes. Thus, she refers to the “toxic prejudices of the far right” before advocating exactly the same viewpoints. Moreover, when examining how radical Islam has suppressed free speech in the UK, she completely ignores the trial of BNP leader Nick Griffin for “inciting racial hatred” because he criticized Islam. This was reported all around the world and was happening at the exact time she wrote her book (the introduction is dated February 2006). Yet the trial is not even mentioned...perhaps because she is so influenced by the dogmas she condemns. Moreover, she presents her arguments as if pretty much nobody has ever thought of them before. This is obviously nonsense. They’ve been propounded by writers for *Right Now!*, *The Salisbury Review*, and a host of British academics – such as Dr. Frank Ellis or Professor Roger Scruton – as well as by the BNP. Phillips’s argument, at every level, is utterly unoriginal, but she cites nobody. Of course, this may be a ploy to make her arguments more persuasive to the PC indoctrinated British public and, if so, there is perhaps some merit in her decision. Yet her practice is intellectually dishonest and, at the very least, means that the arguments will be bordering on cliché for most readers of *TOQ*.

Londonistan is not only contradictory but also, in many places, overly simplistic or dramatic, misleading or just plain wrong. She writes, in amazement, that you can go into extremist Muslim bookshops in London and find copies of *Mein Kampf* “openly on sale,” as if you couldn’t find this in a normal British bookshop. She implies that nobody has dared talk about immigration since Enoch Powell in 1968, when Mrs Thatcher talked about being “swamped” by immigrants ten years later. She refers to a “senior Conservative politician, the Marquess of Salisbury” although he was almost always called “Viscount Cranborne” when he was in the public eye. She argues that the IRA’s cause was not Catholicism, even though it arose out of a society segregated along denominational lines by which it is heavily influenced. She refers to the London bombers being university educated when most went to former polytechnics, really the equivalent of community colleges in the USA. Oddly, she asserts, without any evidence, that religion in Britain has been replaced by “therapy.” Surely this is slightly oversimplifying a complex and fascinating topic.

Phillips, while condemning “prejudice,” expresses forthright views on a number of occasions with little attempt to substantiate them. This is especially true as regards her views on the Iraq War, perhaps because she is mindful of the American audience for her book. For example, she asserts that, “The view is widely shared...that the London bombings were caused by the Iraq War. Clearly this cannot be so since Islamist terror not only preceded that war.” Surely, she can see what an illogical argument that is. It implicitly acknowledges that there was no Islamic terror against Britain before the Iraq War, which is half-way to disproving it. And how can it “clearly” be wrong when one of the bombers stated that his reason for carrying out the bombing was the Iraq War? Finally, despite the manifold holes of the official explanation of 9/11 and the July 7

bombings, she condemns alternative explanations without even examining them or pointing the reader in the direction of someone that does.

Of course, this is not an academic book. It is journalism. But for the sake of the interested reader she might occasionally cite something other than newspaper articles, particularly when she's looking at the history of Islam or political correctness. But no literature is cited at all. There is no bibliography, and the references that she does provide are incomplete. Considering the events and personalities she mentions, such as Abu Hamza (the Muslim cleric who incited terrorism and had hooks for hands) preaching outside Finsbury Mosque with police looking on and Ray Honeyford, the Bradford headmaster sacked for criticizing multiculturalism in the 1980s, some photographs might have been useful. But other than the cover picture, of Hamza, no photos are provided.

However, that is a minor gripe. The book is littered with prejudices, simplifications, and contradictions. Its central argument is brave – though it is unoriginal and afraid to acknowledge its real sources. Moreover, the book is highly politically correct in itself, which, as I have conceded, may well be a sales ploy. That said, it is an interesting read and I learnt some fascinating and shocking things from it. However, it is notable mainly because of who is saying it rather than what is being said. A good book to get through a long-haul flight, but not worth sacrificing your time to read, especially as the arguments, for most readers of this journal, are very familiar.

Edward Dutton, Ph.D., is a British freelance writer and frequent contributor to political oriented publications.
