

Islamophobia in Western Media: A Case Study

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With the development of globalization, cross-border population flow has become a common phenomenon. According to the data released by the United Nations, the total number of global migrants to other countries reached 272 million by 2019, an increase of 51 million since 2010, accounting for about 3.5% of the global population (UN, 2019). Immigrants enter other countries, which brings labor force to these countries and promotes social and economic development, but at the same time, a series of problems caused by immigration cannot be ignored.

I use critical discourse analysis to do a case study of the article “Londonistan”, written by Giulio Meotti. Giulio Meotti points out that in London, 500 Christian churches have been replaced by 423 new mosques. He believes that Islam is gradually replacing Christianity and becoming the mainstream religion in London. Also, Giulio Meotti revealed deep concern. When I googled “Londonistan: 423 new mosques; 500 closed churches,” were reprinted by other international websites. It can be seen that this article is widely spread on the Internet. However, Tencent News, one of China’s largest news websites, pointed out that the article was not true. The term “fake news” has attracted wide attention. Critics believe that fake news includes pure deception, bait and deliberate political rumor activities (Funke, 2017). The continued use of fake news will weaken people’s trust in real news (Aljosha, 2018). The article “Londonistan” comes from the right-wing anti-Muslim website, reflecting the intention of Western media to guide netizens to strengthen Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism.

On April 2, 2017, an article entitled “Londonistan: 423 New Mosques; 500 Closed Churches” written by Giulio Meotti, was published on the Internet, which attracted people’s attention. Giulio Meotti is an Italian journalist and focus on Middle Eastern and Jewish issues. He is a

strong advocate of Israel and writes articles for the rightwing think tank Gatestone Institute.¹ The original text in Gatestone Institute has been forwarded more than 23000 times.

At the beginning of the article, Meotti quotes two public figures and shows that there are many Islamists in London today. Maulana Syed Raza Rizvi, one of the Islamic preachers who now lead “Londonistan”, said that London is more Islamic than many Muslim countries put together. Also, Wole Soyinka, a Nobel Laureate for Literature, called the UK “a cesspit for Islamists”. He compares the Muslim gathering place to a “cesspit”, which shows that he is totally disgusted and opposed to Muslims. The author quotes Wole Soyinka’s words here without any comment in a de-contextualized manner, which also can reflect the author’s negative attitude towards Muslims.

Meotti positions himself in opposition to British multiculturalism, despite its nearly 50-year history and its ongoing support from some current political leaders. Since the 1970s, multiculturalism has been practiced in Britain (Parekh, 1974). Successive governments have also encouraged the development of different cultures, advocated against racial discrimination and aimed to protect the rights and interests of ethnic minorities. In 1965, the British government issued the *Race Relation Act*, focusing on the fight against racial discrimination. In 1976, the Commission for Racial Equality was established in Britain. In 1985, the British government published *Swann Report*, which recognized the implementation of multicultural education in public schools (Modood, 1992). However, the British government’s kindness to immigrants and encouragement of the common development of multiculturalism have been questioned. In the article “Londonistan”, the author refutes the claim of the mayor of London, a British Pakistani Muslim, Sadiq Khan. On May 6, 2016, Sadiq Khan was elected the first Muslim mayor in London history, also known as an important event for European Muslims to participate in politics (Kellner, 2019). Khan said, “terrorists cannot stand London multiculturalism”, while the writer thought British multiculturalism promotes Islamic fundamentalism and British multiculturalism is the main cause of the development of Islam. In fact, in order to avoid being accused of racism, the existing laws in the UK cannot be effectively implemented, especially those involving ethnic minorities. Firstly, in the case of forced marriage of Muslims, the foreign and federal government will refuse to hear the case on the grounds that young women are foreign members. Secondly, police and social workers will refuse to intervene in Muslim internal violence in the UK. Arijan Haider, a Muslim social worker, explains that his non-Muslim or white colleagues often see violence as part of Muslim culture. Because of their own particularity, Muslim groups are not really protected and restricted by British law,

In the *Daily Mail*, a comparison of the mosque and the Christian Church in London was

¹<https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/10124/london-mosques-churches>

published, showing that the mosque was overcrowded while there are few people in the Christian Church. In addition, Meotti uses a series of demographic figures to illustrate the rise in the number of Muslims in Britain and the fact that believers in Islam are very young. Young European Muslims are increasingly seen as a real threat to security, social democracy, pluralism and “western” universalism (Kepel, 2004). Roy (2004) also said that in the European context, it has been claimed that the chaos of globalization and the consequent identity crisis have led to the rise of radical Islamic politics among young people.

Meotti used the term “Islamize” to describe the developing major cities of Britain. Once again, Islam and Christianity are put in the same sentence in sharp contrast. He says, “Christianity declines and Islam advances”. People take religious belief as the main classification basis, and then use skin color, nationality, language and other standards, so as to divide Muslim groups into a special ethnic group different from the mainstream society. Islam has been racialized as ‘Brown’ and foreign (Galonnier, 2015).

Racialization of religion is common in Britain. Christianity is defined as the “white” religion, even though Jesus Christ was a Jewish carpenter in Galilea, i.e. Christianity is from the Middle East but has been whitened in Europe (Akbar, 2002). Christianity represents freedom, peace and advancement. However, Islam is regarded as the “colored” religion, representing oppression, violence and backwardness. Therefore, when the author says that Islam will become the future religion of Britain, he shows deep concern and exclusion.

In the second half of “Londonistan”, Meotti mentions the laws and regulations of the UK on Muslims and implies the query on multiculturalism. Not only Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, and Chief Justice Lord Phillips proposed to incorporate Islamic law into the original laws of the UK, but also universities in the UK have Islamic activities. Meotti’s mention of such laws and regulations forms part of a wider discussion of these issues taking place in the British press. Also, the fear about Islamic activities in universities are representative of the Islamophobic discourse that Meotti presents.

Akinyemi (2004) reported in *International Business Times* that Rowan Williams, speaking at the annual Living Islamic Festival in Lincolnshire, said Muslims brought “open, honest and difficult public discussions” back to the UK as one of their “greatest gifts” to the UK. Williams believed that Islam restored the traditional values of Britain. In 2008, Williams was attacked for saying that the application of Islamic law in British courts was “unavoidable” and in 2012, he resigned as Archbishop of Canterbury and became master of Magdalene College. In addition, Willgress (2015) pointed that according to a report released in June 2015, Queen Mary has topped the list of universities that have hosted the most extremists in the past three years. The *Times* (2015) reported that the student union suspended the Islamic society (Isoc) at Queen Mary’s college, University of London, on suspicion of bullying and misconduct.

The group used to be accused of receiving radical missionaries.

Meotti shows his dissatisfaction and fear of Muslim groups in the UK from three aspects. Firstly, Meotti believes that British cultural pluralism encourages British Islamic fundamentalism because they are not completely controlled by English law. Secondly, Meotti is concerned about the young Muslim community, who are seen as a threat because they are considered likely to inspire radical Muslim politics. Thirdly, Meotti is full of exclusion from the decline of Christianity and the rise of Islam in British cities, because of the stigmatization of Islam.

Through the case study of “Londonistan”, using critical discourse analysis, this study challenges Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism. Firstly, in terms of content, the western mainstream media has the guiding role of anti-Muslim racism. Reports compared Christianity with Islam and blamed the decline of Christianity on the rise of Islam in London, which caused people’s dissatisfaction of Islam. Secondly, British multiculturalism is widely questioned and dissatisfied. It is generally believed that the substantial increase of Muslim immigrants and the rise of Islam in the UK are closely related to the multiculturalism policy of the UK. In addition, the racism and stigmatization of Muslim groups are still popular in the mainstream media and public opinion. Radicalization and Islamophobia have also become one of the main causes of violent terrorist acts.

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