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## PROPAGATING ISLAMIC CREATIONISM ON THE INTERNET\*

by

MARTIN RIEXINGER

*Although negative reactions accompanied the reception of Darwinism in the Islamic World from the beginning, a full fledged Islamic creationist movement did not appear before the 1970s. Originally it was restricted to Turkey, where Islamic groups attempted to undermine the materialist foundation of Marxism and Kemalism. From the late 1990s onwards the subject became popular among Muslims in the diaspora. This was due to the efforts of Adnan Oktar alias Harun Yahya, a hitherto marginal figure in Turkey, to propagate his ideas via the Internet. The Internet allows him to adapt his propaganda constantly to new issues and creationist and anti-creationist publications and to recruit volunteers willing to translate his books. Thanks to the combination of a neglected subject with the innovative use of new media Oktar gained the opinion leadership in this field. Even movements, the founders of which had attacked Darwinism, now refer to Oktar as main authority on this issue. However, he failed to gain an equal degree of attention for topics like conspiracy theories and eschatology. In these fields he had to compete with a bulk of existing material in conventional media. The success of his former disciple Mustafa Akyol shows that using the Internet as main means of propaganda may restrict the political impact. He became the chief Muslim ally of Christian creationists in the USA by managing to get published by respectable "old media". For him the Internet only fulfils an auxiliary function.*

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\* The article is based to large parts on material collected during my participation in the research project "Nurculuk – fundamentalistische Theologie in der Türkei" directed by Jens Peter Laut, Freiburg, and funded by the German Research Council (DFG). If not specified otherwise the webpages quoted were retrieved on July 25 2008.

## KEYWORDS

*Theory of evolution, creationism, Islam, Turkey, Europe, Harun Yahya, Mustafa Akyol, Nurculuk, materialism, fundamentalism, USA, Intelligent Design.*

## INTRODUCTION [1]

In the early 2000s a phenomenon that most Western Europeans tended to consider a specific aspect of Mid-Western hillbilly culture made its appearance in Western Europe: creationism. However, the new kind of opposition to Darwinism was not promoted by indigenous Christian circles. In 2005 The Dutch "Volkskrant" reported about Muslim students objecting to the teaching of the theory of evolution<sup>1</sup> and in the same year the Obin Report, a internal document of the French Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, which was leaked to the public, listed opposition to Darwinism as one of the symptoms for a growing disaffection of Muslim youths in the banlieue with French society.<sup>2</sup> With regard to the United Kingdom the Guardian reported that both Evangelical and Muslim students increasingly oppose the teaching of the theory of evolution even in institutions of higher learning.<sup>3</sup> Bogaerts documented that a vast majority of Muslim students in Antwerp objects to theory of evolution because they see it at odds with the Qur'ān.<sup>4</sup>

The appearance of Islamic creationism took most academic islamologists by surprise. Three major reasons may account for this. The apologetic assertion that Islam is the religion which is in accordance to science is often taken at face value. One professor, when confronted with the Islamic creationism, was utterly surprised because to his view, the Qur'ān does unlike the Old Testament not contain an account of creation.<sup>5</sup> Such a view ignores that the Holy Book of Islam is quite explicit on the creation of man, and moreover that the prophetic tradition (Hadīth), the second authoritative source for

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<sup>1</sup> van Raaij, B. April 9 2005, 'Darwin is de profeet niet', De Volkskrant.

<sup>2</sup> Ministère de l'éducation Nationale, de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche. 2004, Les signes et manifestation de l'appartenance religieuse dans les établissements scolaires, Paris, [ftp://trf.education.gouv.fr/pub/edutel/syst/igen/rapports/rapport\\_obin.pdf](ftp://trf.education.gouv.fr/pub/edutel/syst/igen/rapports/rapport_obin.pdf), pp. 27f.

<sup>3</sup> Campbell, D. Feb. 21 2006, 'Academics fight rise of creationism at universities', The Guardian, <http://education.guardian.co.uk/higher/news/story/0,,1714171,00.html>.

<sup>4</sup> An Bogaerts, A. 2005, De Ontkenning van de Evolutietheorie door de Islam, Lessius Hogeschool, Antwerpen <http://www.fondspascaldecroos.org/uploads/documentenbank/ea9506cfae2e8a79902f80141558a589.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Sjoerd van Koningsveld quoted in van Raaij.

both religious and legal concepts, contains even more material.<sup>6</sup> The second reason is the arabocentrism which still dominates Islamic studies and supports the neglect of developments in other countries. As will be demonstrated in the next paragraph, Islamic creationism originated in Turkey. The third reason is the phenomenon of “neglected media”: Islamic creationism owes its popularity not to respectable printed publications but to the Internet.

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: THE DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAMIC CREATIONISM IN TURKEY [2]**

The theory of evolution became a concern for Arab and Turkish intellectuals approximately two decades after Darwin had published his *The Origin of Species* in 1859. It developed into a mark of distinction between secularists, even such which did not endorse atheism and materialism, and religious conservatives, both Christian and Muslim. The first refutation of the theory of evolution from the Islamic point of view to be published was the *Risāla al-hāmidiyya* by Husayn al-Jisr from Tripoli (nowadays Lebanon) in 1888.<sup>7</sup> However in the following decades the theory of evolution remained a subject of secondary importance.

This changed in Turkey in the 1970s and this development was initiated by leading members of the Nurcu (“disciples of the divine light”) movement, which is in spite of its religious conservatism opposed to the politicisation of Islam by the Islamists. Its founder, Said Nursi, (1876? – 1960) objected to the Kemalist modernisation policies. But instead of becoming a political activists he attempted at undermining the materialist worldview, which he considered the basis of Kemalism. In this context he never explicitly referred to Darwinism, but because he frequently refers to al-Jisr it is unmistakable at what he aims when he ridicules the concept of self-organising matter.<sup>8</sup> But it took almost one and a half decade after the death of Said Nursi for the theory of evolution to become a major issue for the Nurcus. In 1973 one of their exponents, Fethullah Gülen, who at that time served as

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<sup>6</sup> Sura 15 verse 27 ‘surely we created man of a clay of mud moulded’ (Arberry); Pedersen, J. s.n. ‘Adam’, *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), Brill, Leiden et al., 1960ff., vol. i pp. 176 - 178; Schöck, C. 1996. *Adam im Islam*, Schwarz, Berlin, pp. 83 – 88.

<sup>7</sup> Ebert, J. 1991, *Religion und Reform in der arabischen Provinz: Ḥusayn al-Ġisr aĠ-Ġarābulusī (1845 – 1909) ein islamischer Gelehrter zwischen Tradition und Reform*, Lang, Frankfurt am Main.

preacher of the Directorate of Religious Affairs in İzmir, the country's most Westernised city, delivered a series of sermons, in which he attacked the theory of evolution as untenable. In the following years other Nurcus introduced the writings of Protestant creationists from the US. Moreover authors from other Islamic currents joined their efforts. The main reason for the emergence of creationism in the 1970s seventies was the confrontation between the "Left" and the "Right" which brought the country on the brink of a civil war. While the Nurcus positioned themselves on the "Right", they refrained from militant actions as they were advocated and perpetrated by several Marxist groups on the one side and the Islamists and the nationalist right on the other. Instead they attempted to challenge the Marxists and the often indistinguishable left wing Kemalists by undermining the alleged philosophical underpinnings of their ideologies, among them "Darwinist materialism".<sup>9</sup>

In the 1980s Islamic creationism had an impact on the educational policy in Turkey. Already the military leadership under Kenan Evren which ruled after the Sep 12 1980 coup strengthened the importance of a quietist interpretation of Islam in the curricula in order to combat leftist tendencies. After its electoral victory in 1982, the Motherland party (ANAP) of Turgut Özal, which consisted in parts of former Islamists and other religious conservatives, continued this policy even more vigorously. The Ministry of National Education sponsored a white book which called for the deletion of the theory of evolution from the biology textbooks arguing that this world-view undermines the national morale by promoting atheism. This led to the deletion of the most controversial aspects of Darwinism (the descent of man, natural selection) from the biology textbooks, plus the insertion of cre-

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<sup>8</sup> Nursi, S. 2002, *Asâ-yı Mûsâ*, Yeni Asya Neşriyat, İstanbul, pp. 142-144; an analysis of the Nurcus' theological views on science: Edis, T. 2007, *An illusion of harmony: Science and religion in Islam*, Prometheus Books, Amherst N.Y., pp 86 – 90. An in-depth analysis of their ideology, activities and the historical background will be found in my forthcoming Habilitationsschrift.

<sup>9</sup> Published in book-form as: Gülen, F. 2003, *Yaratılış gerçeği ve evrim*, Nil Yayınları, İstanbul. Originally the sermons were distributed as audio-cassettes; Translations of Western creationist literature: Field, A.N. & Moore, J.N. 1978, *İlmî gerçekler ışığında Darwinizm*, Otağ Yayınları, İstanbul; Gish, D. 1984, *Fossiler ve evrim*, Cihan Yayınları, İstanbul; its influence is apparent in the book by a right wing nationalist: Beyaz, Z. 1978, *Darwinizm'in yıkılışı*, Sağduyu Yayınları, İstanbul.

ationism as alternative theory, as well as unabashed polemics against Darwinism in the new compulsory subject "Religious and Ethical Education".<sup>10</sup>

After the Motherland party was ousted successive coalition governments ruled Turkey throughout the 1990s. During this time the theory of evolution regained its place in the biology curricula. In general the importance of this subject in the religious camp declined considerably, because of the almost complete demise of the Marxist Left. Therefore the polemics against Darwinism were continued only at the margins of the Islamic camp. Nevertheless they reappeared with new vigour several years later.

**ADNAN OKTAR (HARUN YAHYA),  
FROM A FRINGE FIGURE IN TURKEY  
TO AN INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC CELEBRITY [2.1]**

Adnan Oktar is neither a religious scholar nor a scientist. According to his CV he had begun to study architecture in the 1970s but he later shifted to philosophy. Towards the end of the decade he began to address İstanbul socialites, actually not a very responsive audience, with religious sermons which were centred around four subjects:

1. Refuting the theory of evolution.
2. Eschatology, especially signs predicting the coming of the Mahdi.
3. Anti-Semitic and anti-masonic conspiracy theories (including holocaust denial until 2002).
4. neo-Ottomanism.

In the 1980s he began to publish pamphlets on the issues,<sup>11</sup> which in the case of creationism simply copied the models produced by the Nurcus. In spite of his small following his activities were widely covered with disdain and ridicule by both secular and religious media. In the early 1990s interest in him declined. Ruşen Çakır the most important observer of Turkey's Islamic scene even considered his movement a phenomenon which will disappear soon.<sup>12</sup> A total misjudgement. In the 1990s he was able to institution-

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<sup>10</sup> Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Milli Eğitim Gençlik ve Spor Bakanlığı. 1985, Evrim Teorisi hakkında Rapor Özeti, Ankara; on the teaching of the theory of evolution in Turkey in general: Öztürkler, N. 2005, Türkiye'de biyolojik evrim eğitiminin sosyolojik bir değerlendirmesi, Ankara Üniversitesi (unpublished yüksek lisans thesis).

<sup>11</sup> All aspects of his early activities are covered in: Yahya, H. 1987, Yahudilik ve Masonluk, Araştırma Yayınları, İstanbul.

<sup>12</sup> Çakır, R. 1995, Ayet ve Slogan: Türkiye'de islami oluşumlar, Metis Yayınları, İstanbul (8<sup>th</sup> edition), p. 246.

alise his effort in the “Bilim Araştırma Vakfı” (Science Research Foundation) and in 1999 Harun Yahya discovered the opportunities offered by the Internet.<sup>13</sup>

### **HARUN YAHYA’S INTERNET PAGES [2.2]**

Unfortunately Harun Yahya blocked his websites for the Internet Archive in October 2007, hence it is impossible to give historical account of their development. Harun Yahya’s main websites are harunyahya.org (Turkish) and harunyahya.com (English). Nevertheless, the almost simultaneous start of an English version demonstrates that Harun Yahya intended to reach out beyond Turkey right from the start of his Internet activities. In the following years he launched further websites in other languages which allow to draw conclusions on both his target audiences and the most significant gaps. The websites in German, French and Dutch were launched in order to attract the readers from the Muslim migrant population.<sup>14</sup> The fact that the majority of (Germany, Austria) or at least a significant part (Netherlands, Belgium, France, Switzerland) is of Turkish origin also seems to be important from the practical point of view. On his websites he calls not only for financial contributions but also for volunteers to translate his books in the languages of their countries.<sup>15</sup> Swimming on the popular wave of Turkey’s new relations to her “brothers and sisters” in the Turkic republics of former Soviet Central Asia and Caucasia, Harun Yahya also targets this area. However, the only advanced website in another Turkic language is the one in Azeri, which is closely related to Turkish. Surprisingly its contents are partially written in the Latin (official since 1993) and in the Cyrillic script.<sup>16</sup> Only some books have been translated into Uzbek and Uighur, none into Kazakh or Kyrgyz. This does however not mean that this area is neglected. One has to assume that the extensive Russian website has above all been designed to reach out to a Central Asian audience, because in most of the former Soviet Republics Russian has held its sway in higher education, especially in the

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<sup>13</sup> Riexinger, M. 2002, ‘The Islamic Creationism of Harun Yahya’, ISIM-Newsletter, no. 11, p. 5. Numbers, R. 2006, *The Creationists: From Scientific Creationism to Intelligent Design*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, pp. 421 – 427.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.harunyahya.de>; <http://harunyahya.fr>; <http://harunyahya.com/nl/index.php>, this website has been launched relatively recently, major rubrics have yet to be filled.

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.harunyahya.de/m\\_supportus.php](http://www.harunyahya.de/m_supportus.php); <http://harunyahya.com/translators.php>; [http://harunyahya.fr/m\\_supportus.php](http://harunyahya.fr/m_supportus.php); <http://www.harunyahya.es/translators.php>.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.harunyahya.com/az>.

field of science.<sup>17</sup> The small numbers of translations in the respective Turkic languages might indicate that the population of this area is not very responsive. As to be expected for an Islamic activist there is also a website in Arabic.<sup>18</sup> The Urdu website, however, links primarily books and articles in English, which hints at a dearth of translators.<sup>19</sup> A Farsi website is announced but it does not yet exist. The most extensive website in another major “Islamic” language other than Turkish is Bahasa Indonesia, notably the language of another country where the state and large parts of the population are secularly oriented.<sup>20</sup> The launching of websites in Spanish and Italian can hardly be explained by Turkish migrants. In this context a culture of intellectual converts influenced in by the conservative and eclectic cultural pessimism of the traditionalist school founded by the convert René (Yahya) Guénon might have to be taken into account.<sup>21</sup>

The harunyahya.xx-websites serve to connect Adan Oktar’s activities on the Internet and beyond. They link to the other websites in the respective languages and usually to all English ones. Moreover he advertises his books, but not with a commercial intention. Although they can also be bought, it is possible to download them for free or to read html-versions online. The same holds true for his video “documentaries”, which generally consist of uncredited BBC or Discovery-Channel material with an audio comment reflecting the Harun Yahya’s creationist concepts. Moreover the many articles existing only as online version are to be found on these sites. The Turkish website contains at bottom a feature for which formerly a website of its own was dedicated: A constantly updated refutation of media reports supporting the theory of evolution. The respective websites netcevap.org (“Net answer”) and darwinism-watch.com which were originally launched to serve this purpose are currently no more than archives for such refutations. Further websites are dedicated primarily to one particular aspect, which often corresponds to that of one of his books.<sup>22</sup> But in the Inter-

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.harunyahya.ru>.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.harunyahya.com/arabic>.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.harunyahya.com/urdu>.

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.harunyahya.com/indo>.

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.harunyahya.it>, <http://www.harunyahya.es>; Sedgwick, M. 2004, *Against the Modern World. Traditionalism and the secret intellectual history of the twentieth century*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

net versions he makes use of the fact that on a computer additional features such as animation can be used.<sup>23</sup>

On the website “The Secret beyond matter”<sup>24</sup> does not only present a specific doctrine of Adnan Oktar with which he even baffled other Islamic creationists: the idea that matter is a mental illusion. This sites documents that by using the Internet, he constantly updates his message by integrating new material, in this case the movies like the “Matrix”-trilogy and “Vanilla Sky”. Another website deserves particular consideration: “Islam denounces Terrorism” with its versions in various languages. Here he alleges that the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks were not be motivated by Islam but by the Darwinist misconception ‘life is conflict’.<sup>25</sup>

Apart from the websites designed to promote content, further ones are dedicated to organisational purposes. On “Harun Yahya Conferences” he announces where speakers provided by his Science Research Foundation are currently lecturing,<sup>26</sup> and he informs how their services can be ordered.<sup>27</sup> The Websites “Dünya’dan yankıları” (Reactions from all over the World) is intended to prove the worldwide success of his campaign by referring to press articles and TV-newsclips.<sup>28</sup> However, only the headings plus brief abstracts are presented, but no links to the respective news items themselves so that the negative tendency of most of the press coverage is hidden from the reader.

### **ADNAN OKTAR’S IMPACT [2.3]**

In Turkey itself Harun Yahya’s ideas are primarily promoted by other media than the Internet. Öztürkler, a Turkish educationist who has analysed the impact of Islamic creationist ideas on the educational system, shows that

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.evolutiondeceit.com>, <http://www.darwinismrefuted.com>,  
<http://www.creationofuniverse.com>, <http://www.perishednations.com> (on the prophets before Muhammad and the punishments inflicted on the people who opposed them),  
<http://www.jesuswillreturn.com>.

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.evolutiondocumentary.com/>.

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.secretbeyondmatter.com/>.

<sup>25</sup> [http://www.islamdenouncesterrorism.com/darwinism\\_materialism.html](http://www.islamdenouncesterrorism.com/darwinism_materialism.html),  
<http://www.islamverfluchtterror.com/darwinismusund.htm>.

<sup>26</sup> [http://www.dunyadanyankilar.com/konferanslar\\_fuarlar.php](http://www.dunyadanyankilar.com/konferanslar_fuarlar.php).

<sup>27</sup> [http://www.harunyahyaconferences.com/How\\_To\\_Organize\\_A\\_Conference.html](http://www.harunyahyaconferences.com/How_To_Organize_A_Conference.html).

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.dunyadanyankilar.com/siteDetay.php?siteId=8>,  
<http://www.dunyadanyankilar.com/haberDetay.php?haberId=665>.

lise (high-school) students who object to Darwinism have derived their ideas from his books and video-CDs.<sup>29</sup>

With regard to his international audience the picture changes considerably. Links to his websites are to be found on a broad array of web-pages. Organisations dedicated to the “Islamisation of Knowledge” refer to his websites to bolster their claims.<sup>30</sup> By avoiding controversial subjects he becomes acceptable for different movements which are extremely hostile to each other. Among Muslims with a South Asian background his English website is linked by both Sufi oriented Barelwīs<sup>31</sup> as well as their archenemies, the puritan Deobandīs.<sup>32</sup> In the West his popularity is not restricted to migrant communities, he also reaches out to converts.<sup>33</sup> His articles are reprinted in “traditional” Islamic media like the “Islamic Voice” from Bangalore.<sup>34</sup> His propaganda superseded to some degree Islamic creationism which has developed independently. Striking examples are provided by the the Jam’iyyat-i Tulabā’-i Islām, the student organisation of the Pakistani Islamist party Jamā’at-i islāmī, and the Islamic Circle of North America, its regional expatriate branch.<sup>35</sup> The founder of this party, Abū l-Alā’ Mawdūdī (1903 – 1979), had formulated a critique of Darwinism in the 1940s, which does, however, play no role in the respective propaganda of these organisations.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Öztürkler, op. cit., pp. 180 – 202.

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.hssrd.org/links.htm> ‘Hazara Society for Science Religion Dialogue’ Mansehra, Pakistan. On the movement for the “Islamisation of Knowledge” cf. Stenberg, L. 1996, *The Islamization of Science. Four Muslim positions developing an Islamic Modernity*, Religionshistoriska Avdelingen, Lunds Universitet, Lund.

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.taibah.nl/NEW/links.html>, a mosque in Amsterdam serving Muslims of Indian origin from Suriname; on the Barelwīs cf. Sanyal, U. 1996, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India. Ahmad Riza Khan and His Movement, 1879 – 1925*, Oxford University Press India, New Delhi.

<sup>32</sup> From Britain: <http://www.central-mosque.com/links/index.htm>; from South Africa: ‘Why does Darwin’s Theory of Evolution contradict with religion’ <http://web.archive.org/web/20060831115344/www.jamiat.org.za/harun/darwin1.html>; on the Deobandīs cf. Metcalf, B. 1982, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband 1860 1900*, Princeton University Press, Princeton; his presence on a website of Salafis from Sweden underlines this aspect, although the latter are most likely not of South Asian origin: <http://www.islamiska.org/s/hy.htm>.

<sup>33</sup> <http://elislam.iespana.es/elislam/argumentos-dios/evolucion.htm>.

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.islamicvoice.com/may.2000/science.htm#his>.

<sup>35</sup> <http://turkislambirligi.net/index.php?Pg=Detail&Number=7111>;  
[http://icnanj.org/index.php?option=com\\_events&task=view\\_detail&agid=21&year=2008&month=05&day=12&Itemid=207](http://icnanj.org/index.php?option=com_events&task=view_detail&agid=21&year=2008&month=05&day=12&Itemid=207), <http://www.fossil-museum.com/globalimpact4.php>.

For obvious reasons the website 'Islam denounces terrorism' enjoys enormous popularity, especially among Muslim bloggers and in forums in the West,<sup>37</sup> as well as among Western researchers eager to portray Islam and Muslims positively.<sup>38</sup> However, the fact that Harun Yahya denounces terrorism, did not prevent one Turkish jihādī-website from linking to his pages.<sup>39</sup> In general it is remarkable that at least at present websites of Turkish Muslims living abroad seldom refer to Harun Yahya sites.<sup>40</sup> As in Turkey itself his success is due to the dissemination of books and audio-visual materials, in particular through mosque associations of the Islamist Millî Görüş movement and friendly reports in its daily 'Milli Gazete'.<sup>41</sup>

Unfortunately one decisive question has to be left unanswered: Harun Yahya's activities on the Internet and elsewhere demand considerable financial resources. In this contexts the sending of hundreds of copy of his 800 page, six kg, colourful 'Atlas of Creation' to schools in France, pastors in Denmark and the entire staff of the Berlin Museum für Naturkunde deserves a mention.<sup>42</sup> Up to present no data on the amount of money employed nor on the origin of the fund have been made available to the public.

#### **COUNTERING HARUN YAHYA ON THE INTERNET [2.4]**

Harun Yahya's opponents lag far behind in countering his activities. In 1999 some opponents launched a website which contained links to articles and especially a Court Rule granting financial compensation to a number of scientists who had been slandered by Harun Yahya. Moreover it contained the

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<sup>36</sup> Mawdūdī, A. 1998, 'Darwin ka nazariyya-i irtiqā'' Tafhīmāt (19<sup>th</sup> edition), Islamic Publications, Lahore, pp. 277 – 284 (originally in Tarjumān ul-Qur'ān, Feb. 1944); in general there was never a real debate by South Asian Muslims on the theory of evolution, although a number of writers published articles and booklets on this subject. At present anti-Darwinist polemics by South Asian Muslims are totally dependent on Turkish models: Rixinger, M. forthcoming, 'Reactions of South Asian Muslims to Darwinism', *Welt des Islams*.

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.sunnipath.com/bookstore/ProductInfo.aspx?productid=BKAMAL1005>, an British organisation promoting Islamic e-learning (retrieved on Dec. 28 2007); <http://www.iqrasense.com/about-islam/harun-yahya-islam-denounces-terrorism.html>, <http://islamicpoint.blogspot.com/2006/10/islam-denounces-terrorism.html>, <http://www.da3wa.net/index.php?p=showtopic&toid=6&fid=3&area=1>, <http://www.muslim-markt.de/einzelrubriken/muslim-privatseiten.htm>, a controversial website of two Turkish converts to Twelver Shiism in Germany.

<sup>38</sup> <http://martijn.religionresearch.org>.

<sup>39</sup> [http://www.verfassungsschutz-bw.de/kgi/files/kgi\\_arab\\_2005-09.htm](http://www.verfassungsschutz-bw.de/kgi/files/kgi_arab_2005-09.htm).

<sup>40</sup> An exception from Germany: [http://www.islamaufdeutsch.de/deutsch\\_islam/literatur\\_shops/harun\\_yahya/hyhaupt.htm](http://www.islamaufdeutsch.de/deutsch_islam/literatur_shops/harun_yahya/hyhaupt.htm), A Nurcu website.

articles of Turkish scientists, who alerted the scientific community to Islamic creationism in the 'Reports of the National Center for Science Education'.<sup>43</sup> However, this attempt proved out to be very amateurish, the design was awkward and the content was hardly ever updated.<sup>44</sup> A second attempt is represented by 'Evrım bilimsel bir gerçekliktir' (Evolution is a scientific fact) a website produced with an editor, which is again hardly ever updated.<sup>45</sup>

In 2007 two opponents attempted to counter Harun Yahya's campaign by blogging, but their attempts were not continually advanced throughout that year.<sup>46</sup> As one author disclosed in an e-mail, this was due to lack of time and the wish to comply to certain standards of quality and verification, in order to avoid to play on the same level as the creationists.<sup>47</sup> Occasionally Western websites targeting chiefly Christian creationism<sup>48</sup> or promoting a general secular outlook<sup>49</sup> refute Harun Yahya's claims.

### **MUSTAFA AKYOL [3]**

Another Turkish anti-Darwinist who rose to a certain prominence is Mustafa Akyol. Originally a collaborator of the Science Research Foundation, he visited the Discovery Institute in Seattle, an institution designed to promote "theistic values" in general and the idea of "Intelligent Design" in

<sup>41</sup> At least according to German intelligence reports: Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz Baden-Württemberg. 2004, Verfassungsschutzbericht 2003, Landesministerium des Innern, Stuttgart, [http://www.innenministerium.baden-wuerttemberg.de/fm/1227/Verfassungsschutzbericht\\_2003.pdf](http://www.innenministerium.baden-wuerttemberg.de/fm/1227/Verfassungsschutzbericht_2003.pdf), pp. 76 – 78.

<sup>42</sup> Mennessier, M. Feb 2 2007, 'Offensive du créationnisme islamique en France', Figaro; Lindqvist, A. Sep. 9. 2007, 'Danske præster modtog mystiske pakker 11. sept.', Politiken; <http://evilunderthesun.blogspot.com/2007/09/ich-mchte-auch-so-einen.html>.

<sup>43</sup> Kence, A , Sayın, Ü. 1999, 'Islamic Scientific Creationism: A New Challenge in Turkey', Reports of the National Center for Science Education, vol. 19 no. 6, pp. 8-20, 25-29, [http://www.ncseweb.org/resources/mcse\\_content/vol19/8300\\_islamic\\_scientific\\_creationism\\_12\\_30\\_1899.asp](http://www.ncseweb.org/resources/mcse_content/vol19/8300_islamic_scientific_creationism_12_30_1899.asp);

Edis, T. 1999. 'Cloning Creationism in Turkey', Reports of the National Center for Science Education, vol. 19 no. 6, pp.30-35, [http://www.ncseweb.org/resources/mcse\\_content/vol19/8371\\_cloning\\_creationism\\_in\\_turkey\\_12\\_30\\_1899.asp](http://www.ncseweb.org/resources/mcse_content/vol19/8371_cloning_creationism_in_turkey_12_30_1899.asp).

<sup>44</sup> <http://web.archive.org/web/20041130175840/www.geocities.com/evrimkurami/>.

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.evrımcık.cjb.net/>.

<sup>46</sup> <http://kodoman.wordpress.com/>, <http://hycarpitmalari.blogspot.com/> ('Harun Yahya Çarpıtmaları'/ Harun Yaha's treacheries); <http://yaratiliscilaracevaplar.wordpress.com/> ('Evrım karşıtı yaratılışçı iddialara cevaplar' / Answers to creationist claims)

<sup>47</sup> 'Salviati Kodoman' of 'Harun Yahya Çarpıtmaları' Dec. 13 2007.

<sup>48</sup> 'Creationist Arguments: Misquotes' <http://www.talkorigins.org/faqs/homs/misquotes.html>.

<sup>49</sup> Taner Edis: 'Intelligent Design a blind ally' <http://www.talkreason.org/articles/ID-Muslim.cfm>.

particular. He was supposed to organise a co-operation of this institution with Harun Yahya. However, he decided to promote his own agenda henceforth.<sup>50</sup>

Whereas Harun Yahya was not taken for serious outside religiously conservative circles, Mustafa Akyol addressed the respectable media in Turkey, in particular the business paper Referans and the daily Radikal, the mouth-piece of the intellectual, anti-statist left. In this context anti-Darwinism plays just a minor role, because he focuses on a critique of the authoritarian aspects of Kemalism. In America he became the Muslim darling of several conservative media, in which he propagated the idea that Darwinism plays a considerable role in fomenting hatred against Western materialism in the Islamic world and hence terrorism. Based on this assertion that both Muslims and Christians should advocate “intelligent design” as alternative explanation for the emergence of life.<sup>51</sup> Mustafa Akyol publishes on two weblogs: mustafaakyol.org in Turkish and thethewhitepath.com in English (the title is a translation of his surname). The content mainly consists of his newspapers and magazine articles.

Hence Mustafa Akyol uses the Internet only as an auxiliary medium. One should hesitate to interpret this as a result of lacking ability or mismanagement. A comparison between Harun Yahya both shows the opportunities and limitations of the Internet for the promotion of an ideological agenda. Well suited for publishing ones own views and for gaining popularity, given the respective demand exists, an empire of self-owned website can not provide the respectability of being published by others. Therefore, in order to become accepted as “expert” and to gain influence on political decision making, courting “traditional” media is a more successful approach. In the case of Mustafa Akyol it did work out. In May 2005 he was invited to testify before the Kansas state caucus for education on behalf of the conservative majority. As a Muslim he seemed suitable to demonstrate that “Intelligent Design” is a reasonable scientific theory and not Christian crypto-theology. Such a confirmation would be necessary to circumvent the

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<sup>50</sup> [http://www.mustafaakyol.org/arsiv/2004/11/mustafa\\_akyol\\_hakkinda.php](http://www.mustafaakyol.org/arsiv/2004/11/mustafa_akyol_hakkinda.php);  
[http://www.thewhitepath.com/archives/2004/01/about\\_mustafa\\_akyol.php](http://www.thewhitepath.com/archives/2004/01/about_mustafa_akyol.php).

<sup>51</sup> Akyol, M. ‘Under God or Under Darwin? Intelligent Design could be a bridge between civilizations.’ National Review, Dec. 2 2005,  
<http://www.nationalreview.com/comment/akyol200512020813.asp>.

constitutional ban on religious education in state schools in order to establish "Intelligent Design" as subject in biology curricula.<sup>52</sup>

**CONCLUSION: NOT NEW  
BUT SUPPLEMENTARY AUTHORITIES [4]**

As Eickelmann and Anderson have demonstrated the idea (or hope) that the Internet might undermine the both the political and religious authorities in place was futile from the very beginning. In the religious field, in particular legal expertise, had an edge only in the very first years before the necessary technical knowledge had become widespread. Today the fatwas of leading muftis of almost all Islamic currents are to be found online.<sup>53</sup>

However, although the Internet has not toppled traditional authorities it has considerably widened the space for a new kind of religious entrepreneur which for whom the term supplementary authority might be appropriate. These supplementary authorities as such are not a phenomenon related to the emergence of the Internet. Already with the beginning of the age of newspaper and magazine publishing in the Islamic world a new type of writer did emerge whose authority was not based on religious learning but on his ability to bolster religious teachings with elements derived from his secular learning. However, the role of such authors was subordinated to writers with a traditional scholarly background who determined the general line of the respective magazines.<sup>54</sup> Apparently the fact that the number of ideological challenges did not decrease in particular for the emerging groups of Muslim migrant diaspora communities heightened the importance of such supplementary authorities who increasingly tended to promote their concerns independently. Adnan Oktar's obviously claims a degree of religious leadership that reaches beyond such a status of a specialist useful for special purposes. However, all the popularity of his anti-evolu-

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<sup>52</sup> Ortega, T. May 5 2005, 'Your OFFICIAL program to the Scopes II Kansas Monkey Trial', The Pitch, <http://www.pitch.com/2005-05-05/news/your-official-program-to-the-scopes-ii-kansas-monkey-trial/1>.

<sup>53</sup> Eickelman, D., Anderson, J. W. (eds.). 2003, *New media in the Muslim world*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, p. xi; Šisler, V. 2007, 'The Internet and the construction of Islamic knowledge in Europe', *Masaryk University Journal of Law and Technology*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 209 – 212.

<sup>54</sup> Jansen, J. J. G. 1974 *The interpretation of the Koran in modern Egypt*, Brill, Leiden, pp. 35 – 54, Riexinger, M. 2004, *Šanā'ullāh Amritsari (1868-1948) und die Ahl-i Ḥadīṣ im Punjab unter britischer Herrschaft*, Ergon-Verlag, Würzburg, pp. 388 – 390.

tionist campaign notwithstanding the number of those considering him a religious authority remains negligible.

As Anderson and Eickelman have remarked '[the Internet] has the potential to promote greater openness in the Islamic decision-making process as well as to reinforce entrenched views.'<sup>55</sup> The success of Harun Yahya's activities may serve as a proof for the second aspect. As his critics referred to in this text have demonstrated Harun Yahya's argumentation is based on a dogmatic preconception and the proofs he presents are mostly forgeries and misquotes.<sup>56</sup> Apparently the fact that these refutations are easily available on the net does not hamper Harun Yahya's success. Easy access to information alone does not increase the desire to question one own's concepts. The slow and weak response to Harun Yahya's campaigns further highlights the negative aspect of the ambiguity exposed by Anderson and Eickelman: in certain contexts the possibility to publish a lot in a short time works to the disadvantage of scientific thought and rational discourse.

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<sup>55</sup> Eickelman, D., Anderson, J. W. (eds.). op.cit, p. xi.

<sup>56</sup> On this aspect, in addition to the websites mentioned in 3.4.: Glaubrecht, M. Dec. 20 2007, 'Die bildgewaltigen Irrtümer der Kreationisten', Die Welt .