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A long, and occasionally lurid, story about Harun Yahya and the resurgence of Islamic creationism [appears](#) [4] in the September/October 2009 issue of *New Humanist*. "Inspired by the high profile of its Christian American counterpart, Muslim creationism is becoming increasingly visible and confident," writes Halil Arda. "The patron saint of this new movement, the ubiquitous 'expert' cited and referenced by those eager to demonstrate the superiority of 'Koranic science' over 'the evolution lie', is the larger-than-life figure of Harun Yahya," the pseudonymous leader of the Science Research Foundation, headquartered in Istanbul, Turkey.

Although Islamic creationism is often regarded as a curiosity in the West, it is "treated far more seriously across the Muslim world," Arda warns. "From daily newspapers in Egypt and Bosnia to influential satellite TV stations like al-Jazeera and (the Iran-funded) Press TV, to small Muslim broadcasters in the West like Radio Ummah and Radio Ramadan, Harun Yahya's argument, with its appearance of scientific credibility, its crowd-pleasing critique of Western materialism and its promise of the imminent collapse of the 'Darwinist Dictatorship', is enthusiastically welcomed by a new audience hungry for compensatory narratives of Islamic superiority."

But how did a young interior design student named Adnan Oktar transform himself into the undisputed leader of the Islamic creationist movement? According to Arda, "Combining his undoubted charisma (something even his most ardent opponents concede) with a gift for manipulation, Oktar set out to build a cult around himself ... targeting disaffected but affluent and educated young people, insisting they turn their worldly goods over to the cult, and vigorously enforcing rigid hierarchies and punitive rules." As the group coalesced, "discipline was maintained through humiliation, the threat of expulsion and physical violence."

With a cadre of dedicated followers and their resources at his disposal, Oktar was able to gain political

and economic influence with Turkey's Islamist Welfare Party in the mid-1990s. After the party was disbanded in 1997, however, Oktar turned to antievolutionism. In 1998, Arda writes, the Science Research Foundation, founded by Oktar in 1990, "launched its campaign against Darwinism, distributing tens of thousands of free copies of his book *The Evolution Deceit* in Turkey, paving the way for the *Atlas of Creation* and Oktar's new role as the spokesman for Muslim creationism."

The form of creationism adopted by Harun Yahya's group is not constant. The Science Research Foundation originally adopted its antievolution arguments from young-earth creationist organizations in the United States, but discarded claims about a young earth and a global flood not vouched for by the Qur'an or Islamic tradition. Subsequently, it evinced a degree of sympathy for "intelligent design" creationism instead, employing catchphrases like "irreducible complexity" and using the phrase "intelligent design" as equivalent with "creation." Later, however, Harun Yahya denounced "intelligent design" as insufficiently Islamic.

Arda comments, "Oktar's ideological and political promiscuity seem to support the claim that he has no genuine beliefs at all, and merely opportunistically jumps on issues which will further his notoriety, following the lead of smarter followers. As one former follower told me, 'We had something to please everybody: Ataturk, *namaz* (prayer), creationism and, if need be, cocaine.'" But his influence may be waning: in 2008, Oktar was sentenced to three years in prison for "creating an illegal organization for personal gain," and Arda reports that he is expected to lose his final appeal to Turkey's Supreme Court, with a decision expected in October 2009.

Contemplating the rise of Harun Yahya, Arda concludes, "Thanks to the 'War on Terror', Oktar could paint himself as a credible alternative to radical Islam; thanks to our timidity and incompetence around issues of faith he can gain credibility as a representative of Muslim sentiment and a champion of 'inter-faith dialogue'. And, most of all, for many disoriented Muslims, he provides a compelling vision of a superior Islamic science. He is a deluded megalomaniac who has artfully exploited the global resurgence of religious sentiment to cheat us all. A ludicrous man for ludicrous times."

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