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NewsNote: Muslim Creationists and Western Elites — Get Out Much?

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Every individual human being is embedded in a complex of culture, language, relationships, and ideas. What we see as normal is a product of our perception from within that embedded social location. It takes considerable intellectual effort to escape our own cultural cage. Furthermore, it is far easier to notice when others reveal their cultural assumption than when we reveal our own.

That said, there is something very strange and revealing about the response of the intellectual elites to the fact that their cherished theory of evolution is held by such a small percentage of the world's population.

Indeed, polls indicate that Americans reject the theory of evolution by a significant margin, leading observers like Nicholas Kristof of *The New York Times* to express public exasperation.



We know that about half of all citizens in the United Kingdom now want intelligent design taught alongside evolution in the British schools. In America, evolutionary scientists are trying to explain why young children seem “hardwired” to see evidence of intelligent design in the world around them. And a quick look around the globe will demonstrate that belief in the worldview of evolution is actually held by a very thin demographic slice of the world's population.

Now, a really interesting slant on the global perspective comes as the Western media discover that (can you believe it?) Muslims tend not to be evolutionists. That accounts for between 20 and 25 percent of the world's population.

From a report by Drake Bennett in *The Boston Globe*:

Americans familiar with the long and bitter battle over the teaching of evolution in our schools likely have a set of images of what creationism looks like: from the Scopes trial, and its dramatization in “Inherit the Wind,” to more recent battles over textbooks on school boards in Kansas and Georgia and in federal court in Pennsylvania. The doctrine of creationism, and its less explicitly religious cousin intelligent design, are extensively developed counter-narratives of the origin of life on Earth, fed by Christian concerns and shaped by Christian beliefs.

And then:

But there is another creationist movement whose influence is growing, and which is fueling challenges to science in countries where Christianity has little sway: Islamic creationism. Campaigners in countries like Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt, and Indonesia have fought the teaching of evolution in schools there, sometimes with great success. Creationist conferences have been held in Pakistan, and moderate Islamic clerics are on record publicly condemning Darwin's ideas. A recent study of Muslim university students in the Netherlands showed that most rejected evolution. And driven in part by a mysterious Turkish publishing organization, Islamic creationism books are hot sellers at bookstores throughout the Muslim world.

According to the report, the existence of an Islamic version of creationism “has raised concerns among scientists and

educators.” Salman Hameed, a scientist at Hampshire College, predicted that “the next major battle over evolution is likely to take place in the Muslim world.” That is a long way from Dayton, Tennessee and the Scopes trial.

The Islamic form of creationism is different in key respects from the Christian version, which can only be expected. Common to both, however, is the central belief in a divine Creator who designed and made the cosmos and all therein.

You can expect to see more about this, but consider a key question that the media coverage of Islamic creationism raises: How could the fact that Muslims generally reject naturalistic evolution come as a surprise to Western intellectuals?

Get out much?

Drake Bennett, “Islam’s Darwin Problem,” *The Boston Globe*, October 25, 2009.

Salman Hameed, “Bracing for Islamic Creationism,” *Science*, 322 (December 12, 2008) [PDF file].

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