

## **Being a Scientist and a Muslim: Authority in the Islam-Science Debate**

Zeynep M. Gültekin

In 2004, there was consternation in the Netherlands when some Muslim students in the department of Biomedical Sciences at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, expressed their disbelief in evolutionary theory and criticized it in their essays for one of the courses. The incident was followed by public discussion about the ability of Muslims to be good scientists, respecting scientific methodology.

Alleged tensions between an Islamic worldview and scientific views concern values and principles and the places of religion and of science in modern societies. The debate on Islam and science often revolves around the authority of revelation (the Qur'an) versus science, and how these sources are interpreted. It is also tied to socio-political struggles, leading to defensive stances that seek to preserve the relevance of Islam in the modern world.

This research explores the relationship between Islam, science, and evolutionary theory, with a special focus on Muslim scientists in the natural sciences: How do they engage with perceived conflicts between Islamic teachings and modern scientific views, especially evolutionary theory? It highlights differing theological and philosophical approaches to understanding the origin of the universe, God's relationship with creation, and human nature. It examines the authority and legitimacy of religious and scientific sources, and how Muslim scientists navigate this complex intersection.

The views of the Muslim scientists are contrasted with the approaches presented by the adherents of two modern Muslim approaches: Islamization of science and the "scientific" inimitability of the Qur'an. The analysis shows not only how contemporary Muslim thinkers approach this issue, but also how their views both reflect and contribute to broader debates about modernity, identity, and the place of religion in the modern world.

This study shows that it is not possible to speak of a uniform Muslim response to science in general, evolutionary theory in particular. There is significant intrareligious diversity, with different scholars and scientists proposing various ways of integrating or separating science and Islam. The study emphasizes that the discussion is not just about reconciling faith and science, but also about the authority of religious texts versus scientific methods, and the role of both in shaping contemporary Muslim identity in a global, modern context.