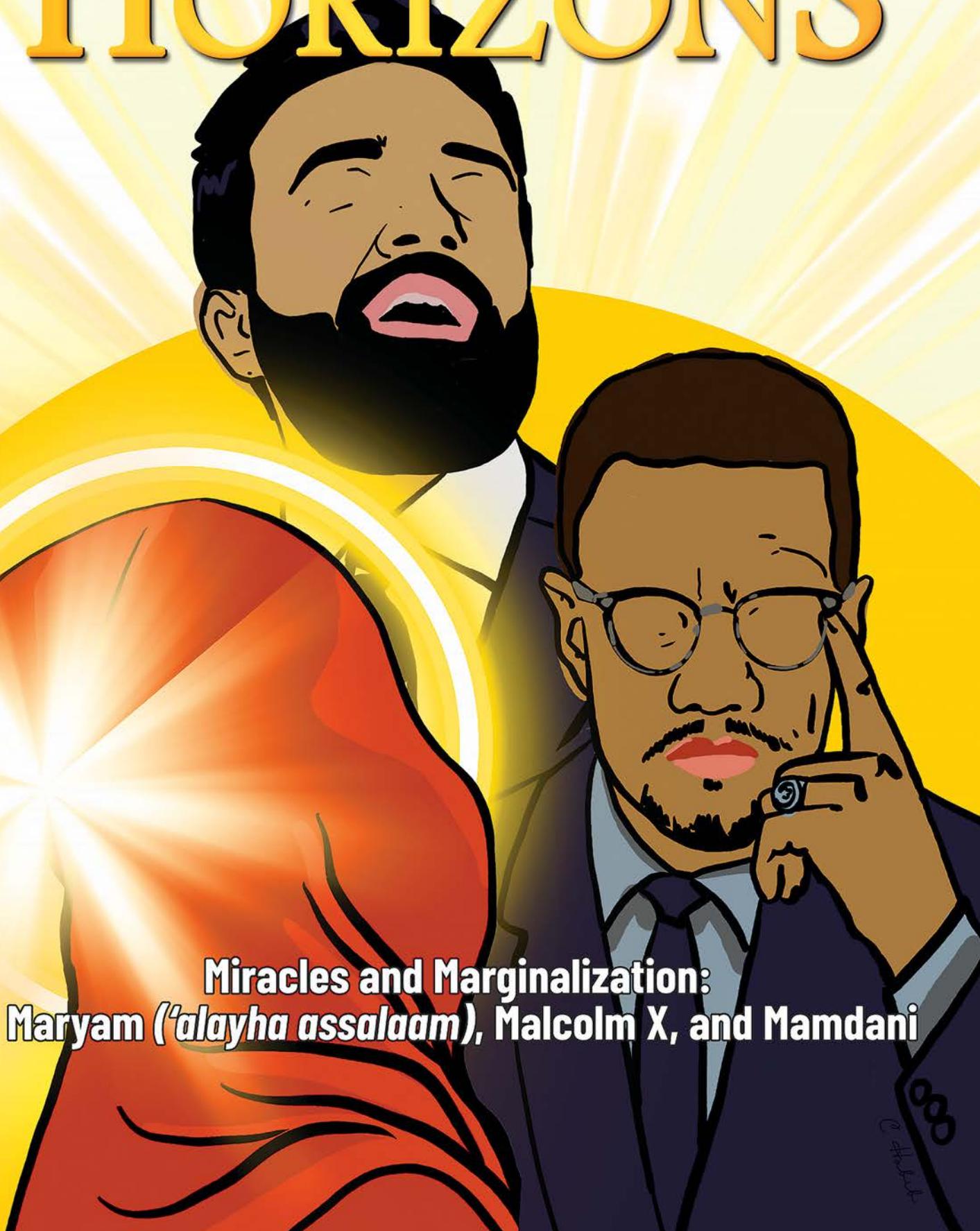


ISLAMIC HORIZONS



**Miracles and Marginalization:
Maryam ('alayha assalaam), Malcolm X, and Mamdani**



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Has Islamophobia Become a Vote Getting Tool?

HUMZA YOUSAF, THE FORMER First Minister of Scotland, speaking in Washington, D.C. on Nov. 6, 2025, stated the reality that conspiracy theories and lies told about Muslims today are “hauntingly reminiscent” of the language used to discuss Jews in the 1930s.

Speaking ahead of an address at Georgetown University hosted by the university’s Center for Contemporary Arab Studies and the Muslim Public Affairs Council, Yousaf warned that there has been a “frightening rise” in Islamophobia on both sides of the Atlantic in recent months. He stressed, “It is therefore incumbent on those, both Muslim and non-Muslim, who abhor Islamophobia, to stand together, united in defiance of hatred. We must get organized and mobilize across borders to tackle this growing threat. (Amy Watson, “Former first minister Humza Yousaf warns of ‘frightening’ rise in Islamophobia in UK and US,” Nov. 6, 2025. *The Scotsman*).

But still, the world saw wild flames of hatred raging when Zohran Kwame Mamdani campaigned for, and won, the mayoralty of New York City. And even after his decisive victory, nothing much has changed. It remains tragically ironic that the racial and religious hatred directed towards Mamdani has come, at least in part, from the descendants of those who were at receiving end of racial bigotry and fascist ideology in Europe roughly a century ago.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott (who has been in office nearly a decade), reached new lows of putridity when he repeated his thoroughly unfounded accusations about Muslim communities regarding non-existent Sharia law being mandated in that state. Whether or not he actually believes the lies he continues to peddle about Islam in Texas, his main aim in this latest Islamophobic attack seems to be the proscription of action for the nation’s prime defender of Muslim civil rights, the Council of American Islamic Relations, in his state.

Texas governors do not have term limits, so Abbott’s consistent use of Islamophobic rhetoric seems to come from the notion, however misplaced, that supporting Islamophobia is a surefire way of attaining higher office in the American South. Thankfully, Abbott does not

have the authority to designate FTOs (“foreign terrorist organizations”); only the federal government can do that. But again, the point was not legal accuracy.

And it’s not just Abbot or Florida Governor Ron DeSantis. In fact, not only a parade of Texas politicians, but also numerous others too, seem to be intent on recreating racist and segregationist laws that would have been recognizable in the American South of the 1950s, or even in Germany in the 1930s. In Texas in the 21st century, though, Muslims are the targets for legalized discrimination.

The status quo in Texas is emblematic of the fact that Muslim Americans today face a similar situation to the one faced by African Americans who still struggle to be accepted as fully equal, with the same rights and respect due to others. This bleak picture is addressed by Jimmy E. Jones in this issue in his article titled “Marginalization and Miracles: Maryam (‘alayha assalaam), Malcolm, and Mamdani.” Still, through the apparent darkness, one can agree with Prof. Jones that “there’s one thing that gives me radical hope — God’s use of marginalized people.”

Luke Peterson sheds light on the misuse of 501(c)(3) status by American groups funneling aid to Israel for the purposes of stealing land and colonizing Palestine through the expansion of illegal settlements. Not only are these groups making a mockery of American tax laws, but they are in plain violation of international law as well. Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territory, as well as in the Syrian Golan Heights, are illegal under international law. These settlements are in violation of Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and in breach of numerous international declarations. In a 2024 advisory opinion by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) relating to the Palestinian territories, the court reaffirmed the illegality of the settlements and called on Israel to end its occupation, cease its settlement activity, and evacuate all its settlers. Is the IRS undermanned, neglectful, or are there other reasons for the U.S. federal government shrugging their shoulders at such illicit transfers?

Last year, Muslim Americans said adieu to five of their prominent figures: Imam Jamil Al-Amin, Imam Al-Hajj Talib ‘Abdur-Rashid, M. Yaqub Mirza, Mazhar Kazi, and Mamdouh Mohamed. *ib*

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ

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Higher Education in Light of Tawhidic Epistemology

Islamic Obligation in the Pursuit of Academic Knowledge

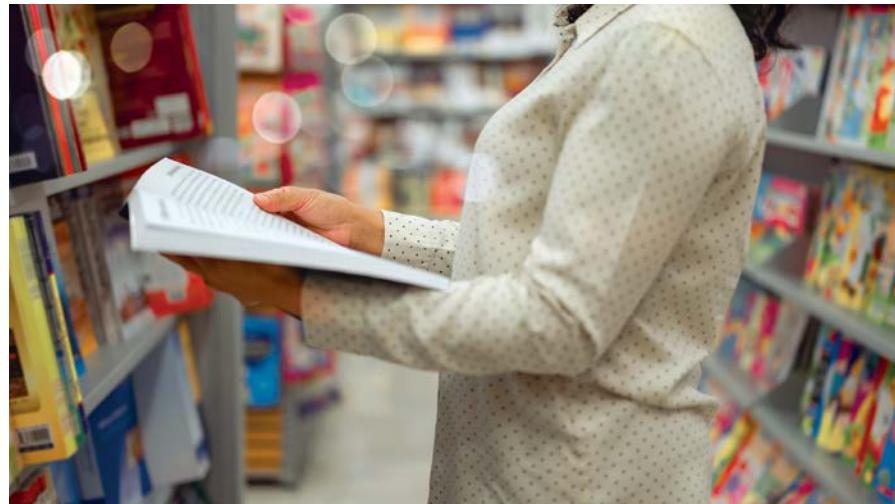
BY MD MAHMUDUL HASAN

INTELLECTUAL PRACTICES ARE INTEGRAL to the Islamic religion and way of life. The first revelation from God to Prophet Muhammad (*salla Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) begins with the command to read and mentions the pen as a means to produce and distribute knowledge. Therefore, for Muslims, going to institutions of learning is not simply career preparation, it is also a religious obligation. The Prophet said, "The seeking of knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim" (Sunan Ibn Majah).

However, this raises the question of which fields of study are warranted in Islam and which are deemed wasteful. Those who study religious sciences such as the Quran, Sunnah (hadith), Islamic jurisprudence, Islamic literature, and related subjects often feel connected to their religious-cultural roots and may claim to have a greater sense of belonging. Conversely, those who choose secular subjects often rooted in Western origins like anthropology, Euro-American literature, geography, history, or philosophy may be confused about the religious validity, invalidity, or value of their academic disciplines.

Early Muslims distinguished disciplines inherited from pre-Islamic civilizations, such as philosophy and medicine, from Islamic religious sciences. During the precolonial period, Muslims excelled in "philosophy, astronomy, medicine, and the like" (Berkey, p. 203), but such disciplines are currently imbued with Western tenors thanks to the European colonial education strategy. Hence, these subjects are perceived by some largely as extraneous to Islam (Jonathan Berkey (2004). "Education" In Richard C. Martin (ed.). *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*. Macmillan Reference USA.).

In an essay titled "Islam, Coloniality, and the Pedagogy of Cognitive Liberation in Higher Education" (2025), Joseph E. B. Lumbard of Hamad Bin Khalifa University in Qatar said, "The establishment of Western educational models in most Muslim



countries. . . replaced the Islamic model, which is grounded in the cultivation of ethical beings" (pp. 4-5).

Conversely, there has been a growth in the number of Islamic educational institutions in countries around the world including the U.S. From elementary to tertiary levels, these seats of learning cater to Muslims' urge to be oriented in Islamic theology and sciences. While students of such institutions are thought to be grounded in the Islamic intellectual tradition, their Muslim peers who learn non-Islamic subjects like English literature might be viewed as distant from their religion. In an essay titled "English literature at English-medium schools of Bangladesh" (*Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2010), English professors Golam Gaus Al-Quaderi and Abdullah Al Mahmud contend that students of English literature in Muslim-majority Bangladesh become "culturally confused" and "unconscious agents of Western cultural imperialism" (p. 212).

Although Muslim students of Islamic sciences may receive praise from fellow coreligionists, they are often perceived as out of place in a modern context. On the contrary, their peers who are oriented in Western

sciences may have misgivings about the validity of their pursuit of learning because Western education prevalent in Muslim nations is considered "secular" and "materialistic" (Abdullah Sahin, "Critical Issues in Islamic Education Studies: Rethinking Islamic and Western Liberal Secular Values of Education," *Religions*, 2018, vol. 9, p. 3).

Such confusion regarding the pursuit of education reflects the doubts and uncertainties of some Muslim learners in the modern age. In a PhD thesis titled "Faith with Doubt: American Muslims, Secularity, and the 'Crisis of Faith'" completed at Duke University in 2017, Zaid Adhami summarizes this phenomenon:

"[T]he presence of Muslim intellectuals trained in the Western academy has increasingly become part of the contentious debates over Islamic authority and authenticity. Overall, these developments have produced deeply conflicting reactions. On the one hand, a body of intellectuals, trained in the Western academy, is often looked upon with deep suspicion by those who see themselves as having been trained in more 'traditional' knowledge paradigms" (pp. 48-49).

This dichotomous and mutually exclusive view on education is structural, not cognitive.

Another reason for this intellectual crisis among Muslim students is their unfamiliarity or lack of clarity about *tawhidic* epistemology which Professor Osman Bakar regards as “central” to Muslim identity. Its absence among them or lack of understanding thereof creates a crisis in educated Muslims’ relationship with their religion.

In his book *Islamic Civilisation and The Modern World: Thematic Essays* (2014), Osman Bin Bakar, rector of International Islamic University Malaysia, said, “A *tawhidic* epistemology or vision of knowledge affirms the view that all true human knowledge ought to be ultimately related to the unity of God, since all things are ontologically related to their Divine Origin. Unfortunately, Muslims today no longer possess the whole of *tawhidic* epistemology along with its accompanying exemplary thinking culture” (p. 41).

But what is *tawhidic* epistemology?

In one of his poems, Jalaluddin Mohammad Rumi (1207–1273) said, “With two forms and with two figures but with one soul, thou and I” (Translation by A.J. Arberry, “Mystical Poems of Rumi 2”, The University of Chicago Press, 1991).

He suggested human beings (or Muslims) may have different physical features or external manifestations, but all have an undifferentiated goal or purpose in life: obtaining the pleasure of God.

Correlating Rumi’s analogy to *tawhidic* epistemology or the unity of knowledge reveals that Muslim learners may engage in different subject areas but have one goal. As long as they use their knowledge and skills for the pleasure of God in the service of fellow human beings and the environment then their scholarly endeavours and accomplishments are Islamic and will be rewarded by God.

When a student learns a subject to promote good causes, protect human rights and the environment, or prevent harms and injustices, their pursuit of knowledge becomes an act of worship. For example, if a student gains skills in language and literature to challenge epistemic wrongs, their field of studies becomes Islamic and connected with the divine and has the potential to lift them to spiritual heights.

Here lies the unity of knowledge which surpasses the plurality of disciplines. All branches of knowledge are geared to one common purpose.

This Islamic concept of the unity of knowledge corresponds to what Professor

J. Alan Robinson states in an essay, “The Unity of Knowledge” (*Syracuse University Magazine*, Vol. 1, Iss. 1 [1984], Art. 7). “In [a] higher, institutional sense, knowledge is one, single whole,” he said. “Just as the universe is, by definition, the whole of reality — everything that there is — so mankind’s entire knowledge, viewed collectively rather than from wherever each of us individually happens to have taken a stand, is a unity.”

The Prophet divided knowledge between

mathematics (STEM). That is conceivably the reason why such subject areas are considered secular or Western and hence some Muslim students find it hard to relate them to their religion and are not sure if learning such subjects is religiously mandated.

Differing from the modern-day approach to STEM, as Bakar said, “[Early] Muslim scholars succeeded in harmonising the needs of religion with the needs of science... [and] were able to produce, use, and apply [science

When a student learns a subject to promote good causes, protect human rights and the environment, or prevent harms and injustices, their pursuit of knowledge becomes an act of worship ... if a student gains skills in language and literature to challenge epistemic wrongs, their field of studies becomes Islamic and connected with the divine.

beneficial and non-beneficial, rather than religious and non-religious. He often recited, “O God, I seek refuge with You from knowledge that is of no benefit” (Sahih Muslim, Hadith: 2722).

Following in the Prophet’s footsteps, Muslims are required to seek knowledge that is beneficial for them and others and should avoid knowledge that is worthless or causes harm or leads to erroneous decisions or lifestyle choices. After learning the basics of their religion, whatever beneficial subject area they choose to study should bring them closer to God.

The Quran states the responsibilities of Muslims: “You are indeed the best community that has ever been brought forth for [the good of] humankind: you enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and you believe in God” (3:110). The objective of learning should be guided and driven by a desire to fulfil the responsibilities of serving humanity, promoting what is good and beneficial, preventing evils, and establishing connection with God. The Quran regards such responsibilities as a trust that human beings have undertaken and are obligated to deliver (33:72).

“There is hardly any difference between [Muslims’] intellectual perspectives and the secular Western one,” Baker said regarding science, technology, engineering, and

and technology] without transgressing the moral-ethical bounds.”

Conversely, soulless utilitarian approaches to STEM are often antithetical to common good and have caused the gravest offences against moral rectitude.

Because of the absence of higher goals in knowledge acquisition, some Muslim practitioners and students — especially those who study non-religious subjects — are unable to establish connections between their academic work and their religion. The remedy lies in relating all knowledge to the unity of God and devoting it to servitude to Him and other good causes. That is the essence of *tawhidic* epistemology which has the potential to liberate especially Muslim students from uncertainties and misgivings about their programs of study.

As long as the goal and purpose of knowledge seeking is the pleasure of God through righteousness, altruism, and beneficence, all branches of knowledge are good and Islamic. Thus, all academic fields are united and come under the purview of *tawhidic* epistemology. *ib*

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Note: Some sections of this essay were published under the title of “The Need for Tawhidic Epistemology” (IslamCity, April 12, 2025).