

Of the two books, *Religion and the Technological Future* is more likely to prove a valuable resource; it maintains a healthy scepticism while still drawing on our enthusiasm for technology's gadgets to explore a variety of entanglements between them and religion and to examine more significant ethical and societal issues such as freedom of choice, economic inequality, monopoly, justice, and philosophical and theological anthropology. *Spirit Tech* echoes a particular moment in an ongoing history of religion and technology but veers too close to being a cheerleader for specific products, people, and institutes. Scholars of contemporary spirituality or the New Age might learn where spirit tech was at the beginning of the 2020s and who the critical charismatic voices were. Indeed, it provided updated information on some of the figures of the New Age community I had paid attention to in my *The Indigo Children: New Age Experimentation with Self and Science* (Routledge, 2019), and material for my current research on the spiritual and religious hype surrounding AI and robots. Otherwise, *Religion and the Technological Future* will be more helpful to the religious studies scholar or person of faith wanting to know more about the relationship between these two fields, so often framed as being in opposition.

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<https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfac044>

*Transformations of Tradition: Islamic Law in Colonial Modernity.* By Junaid Quadri. Oxford University Press, 2021. 264 pages. \$74.00 (hardcover), 58.39 (e-book).

*Defending Muhammad in Modernity.* By SherAli Tareen. University of Notre Dame Press, 2020. 506 pages. \$125.00 (hardcover), \$35.00 (paperback), \$27.99 (e-book).

Talal Asad's "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam" is one of the more influential articles in the study of Islam, generating vociferous critique as well as favorable elaborations. Asad argues that to write an anthropology of Islam requires that we formulate the right concepts and, he continues, "discursive tradition" is such a concept. An Islamic discursive tradition is, Asad writes, "simply a tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of the Islamic past and future, with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present" (*Occasional Papers Series* [Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1986], 14). The concept of "discursive tradition" requires that scholars attune themselves to the correct processes of teaching and what is to be learned, which are necessarily processes of argumentation and reasoning that demarcate what is and is not Islam. For Asad, then, argument and contestation, crucially, do not signify a tradition in crisis but a sign of persuasion as well as power. SherAli Tareen's *Defending Muhammad in Modernity* and Junaid Quadri's *Transformations of Tradition: Islamic Law in Colonial Modernity* expand upon as well as challenge Asad's intervention in their compelling histories of Islamic reasoning and polemics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They offer divergent methodological approaches to the idea of a history of Islam—approaches intended to adequately conceptualize the effects of colonialism on Islam.

In his emphasis on Muḥammad Bakhīt al-Muṭīī (1854–1935), Mufti of Egypt, Junaid Quadri asks us to consider how argumentation within Islam became indelibly marked by the epistemological coordinates of the modern, and he goes as far as to say that tradition might have been “abandoned” in its transformation (17). Quadri explores these epistemological commitments of the modern by centering how Bakhīt “absorbed,” “acceded to,” and “internalized” what Quadri calls “key presuppositions of modernity” (13). Quadri documents how Bakhīt often internalized in “unconscious and imperceptible ways” (20) an understanding of history as marked by progressive movement, a new scientific ontology and epistemology tied to objectivity, a compartmentalized notion of the concept of *religion* as including primarily ritual practices and private belief, and a distinction between the public and private. Quadri’s conclusion is bold: the status and nature of Islamic law in modernity has been fundamentally altered because of the “irresistible” nature of modern epistemological commitments. The question that rises for Quadri then is: how do we conceptualize the transformation—or even the death—of a tradition (13)?

Quadri traces the absorption of these modern presuppositions by exploring the famed “traditionalist” versus “reformist” debates in Egypt. Though acknowledging the bitter partisanship of these debates, Quadri posits that the traditional Islamic jurists, the *ulamā*, were not so opposed to their modern reformist counterparts as might appear. Instead, he argues that the ground of the debate—constituted by new modernist understandings of time, science, and religion—was a common terrain, absorbed by both sides. Each chapter details these transformations and new commitments to modernist ideals. Quadri, for example, shows how Bakhīt adopted an “entirely new temporality, a historical consciousness that upended that traditional manner of understanding the nature of the *madhhab*’s [juristic school’s] authority” (66). This temporality is marked by a sense of surpassing—a linear, teleological temporality. Once Bakhīt could historicize the *madhhab*’s claims, the *madhhab* was no longer a mediating institution through which interpretation proceeded; rather, it became “a social institution carrying the prestige of a revered past, but one interpretive resource among many (albeit an important one) which facilitates his direct encounter with the foundational texts” (91). The transformation wrought by a new temporality underscores how the opposition between modernist reformers and traditionalists is not what it seems since, in his historicization, Bakhīt naturalized the “transformative Reformist ideals within the language of Hanafism,” thereby “unforming” or “re-forming” the Hanafi school in a “detraditionalization of the tradition” (85). References within a tradition were no guarantee that a tradition had not been transformed.

Alongside temporality, modern science was crucial to this transformation. Bakhīt, for example, valorized a new science and created a crucial distinction between the person of religion and the person of science (132). There was little that Bakhīt could do, however, since the seduction of the new science was “*fait accompli*”; modern science required assent (131). Quadri argues that Bakhīt’s assent to modern science also had embedded within it an “ontology of objectivity” and “a representationalist epistemology” in which the objective structure of the world took precedence over the phenomenal experience of it (139). Yet, rather than a direct conflict between Islamic legal circles and this new science, we see interpretive decisions that recast Hanafi doctrine in accordance with the new world tied to colonialism. Quadri suggests that, even when drawing upon prior jurists from the fourteenth century, Bakhīt abstracts arguments away and expands their scope into a “thoroughgoing scientism” (148).

These new commitments are forged together when Quadri turns to the category *religion*. For example, when examining reports of crescent sightings, Quadri suggests that there is a shift from set procedures and court oversight to the truth value of reports. Religious matters, thus, become primarily epistemic matters (196). In so doing, Bakhīt reformulated the recognized yet hybrid and complex category of the *umūr dīniyya* (religious matters/matters oriented toward

the afterlife) into a category that dealt primarily with abstract matters of the mind and epistemological judgment rather than matters of juristic procedure for qadis and their courts. This thinking transformed *din* as something outside this world—an immaterial realm—that transmuted the very category to fit within the modern religious/secular binary.

In his emphasis on transformation, Quadri explicitly challenges Asad's understanding of a discursive tradition as accommodating rupture and change. In contrast, Quadri asks, "When does a claimed tradition become so different from previous incarnations that we are justified in speaking of it as having been transformed altogether?" (13). To answer this question, Quadri insists that we must draw "distinctions between a given tradition and other streams of thought—often traditions in their own right—as well as an account for when that given tradition ceases to be one" (13). To write a history of Islam, then, requires that we pay attention not only to continuities but also to fundamental changes that transform the essence of a given tradition.

In contrast with Quadri, SherAli Tareen questions the very validity of the transformation-versus-continuity issue altogether in his learned book on the debates between two prominent orientations within Islam: the Bareilvi and Deobandi schools. According to Tareen, the contested terrain of Islam cannot be understood through binaries such as reformer/non-reformer or modern/traditional because these binaries obscure the competing claims within a discursive tradition in the Asadian sense. Tareen thus foregrounds "rival narratives on the boundaries of religion as competing rationalities of tradition and reform" (4). Refusing to indulge in predictable answers of "continuity and change," Tareen concentrates on "competing political theologies," which he defines as "the contrasting ways in which the relationship between divine sovereignty and prophetic authority is understood during junctures of political uncertainty" (28). Notably, it was precisely the loss of political sovereignty that generated this "unprecedented intellectual fermentation" (169).

A focus on competing political theologies, Tareen contends, demands that we consider how the boundaries of a discursive tradition are contested as normative concerns shift within colonial modernity. Tareen contextualizes these contestations by elaborating on the relationship between God and the Prophet. Tareen, like Quadri, focuses on the *'ulamā* in relation to these contestations. In Tareen's reading, the *'ulamā* emerge as "complex and complicated beings, not easily available for neat categorization and canonization" (78). These debates, therefore, do not produce a colonized grammar or episteme. Though operating under colonial power, the *'ulamā* cannot be subsumed by that logic; rather, understanding the *'ulamā* requires attention to the "internal workings of a discursive tradition"—internal workings that reveal the limits of modern demarcations and categories (381).

Tareen begins his examination of these internal debates by analyzing the influences upon and the arguments of two Sunnī scholars in Delhi, Shāh Muhammad Ismā'il and Fazl-I Haqq Khayrābdī, in the early nineteenth century—a polemic centered on prophetic intercession. Whereas Ismā'il established the primacy of divine sovereignty, Khayrābdī emphasized the proximity between the Prophet and Divine Sovereignty that allowed the Prophet to intercede, making him an exceptional being. By situating these debates together, Tareen argues that the two thinkers cannot be divided as each is the other's condition of possibility (163). Tareen, therefore, rethinks scholarly assumptions about modern reform—an especially important task since Ismā'il presents an understanding of divine sovereignty that parallels "a modern Protestant understanding of religion" (159). Though Tareen insists we need to attend to "the power dynamics and differentials of the terms and terrain on which the native allegedly enters into dialogue with the colonizer, we cannot reduce Ismā'il to a modern colonial episteme (161, 159). The diffusion of power is such that it "cannot be seamlessly accommodated into a hierarchical grid of colonial imposition and indigenous absorption" (161). We find instead "entanglements" and a

“distinctive and particular” relation to colonial power irreducible to the logic of transformation as contestations refuse to be settled into pre-given grids. It is by reading Khayrābdī together with Ismā’īl that we learn that Ismā’īl’s understanding of sovereignty was animated by very different concerns than Protestant conceptions of sovereignty.

These competing understandings within the ‘*ulamā*’ only grew in the latter half of the nineteenth century, especially after 1857 and the inauguration of Crown Rule in the subcontinent. Given a lack of legitimate political authority, the Prophet emerged as a discursive arena where “opposing factions of North India ‘*ulamā*’ articulated and contested their religious authority” (175). The Deobandi and Barelvi polemics are situated in that context. Tareen importantly observes how, though oppositional, Deobandis and Barelvi cannot be completely separated as there was an “epistemic neighborliness” underlying the dispute (177). Indeed, both were invested in Hanafī law and Sufism. Yet, the differences were crucial in how they “read and approached a common intellectual lineage” (275). This is especially evident in their relation to Ismā’īl. The Deobandis valorized Ismā’īl and stressed the humanity of the Prophet alongside the alterity of divine sovereignty, whereas Barelvis condemned Ismā’īl and emphasized the love that characterized the relationship between the Prophet and God, allowing the Prophet to intercede into the world.

Tareen tackles these polemics by tracing how over the course of the nineteenth century, “the category of *rusūm* or customs [such as the celebration of the Prophet’s birthday (*mawlid*)] became increasingly synonymous with that of *bid’a*, heretical innovation” (197). Tareen here does demarcate a transformation. He writes there was “a subtle yet profound transformation not only in the category of *rasm/rusūm* but in the intellectual and social careers of South Asian Muslim thinkers more broadly from the eighteenth and nineteenth century” (197–98). One aspect of the transformation is precisely what Quadri notes: the importance of modern history. For Tareen, historical reasoning is noticeable in the work of Ismā’īl and of the famed Deobandi scholar Muḥammad Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī. We learn that their historicist posture—one in which the historian stands apart from society to mark a historical context—made visible the “contingent authorization” of ritual—now tied to a particular moment in time—in order to “disrupt its unquestioned necessity;” history became crucial in “the formation of a community’s normative boundaries” (203, 205). The importance of a historicist posture lay in creating a separation between the contingencies of everyday life and an authentic religion that became tied to the life of the Prophet. Thānvī’s hermeneutical framework, therefore, involved an *a priori* demarcation of what was and was not categorized as *religion* separated from contemporary custom. In short, the individual came to stand apart from society while striving to transform it—a crucial tenet to modern reform in the subcontinent (299).

This does not mean, however, that Deobandis can be reduced to modern reform and the divisions it created. To rephrase, the distinctions crucial to modern reform—inner/outer, personal piety/public religion, subject/society—cannot be canonized even though there was, at times, a “striking synergy between [Thānvī’s] reform project and the trappings of the colonial discursive and institutional economy” (243). This is why Tareen finds Asad’s work so valuable. Tareen writes, “a discursive tradition presents a site of ceaseless contestation, never available for empirical or disciplinary canonization” (13). Tareen, therefore, disrupts our understanding of reform by turning to the constant contestations both between and *within* Deobandis and Barelvis that undo boundaries and transformations crucial to conceptualizing Islam in the subcontinent. There is then no singular moment of “reform.” Thānvī’s arguments were not simply accepted but challenged, notably by Ahmed Raza Khan, who emphasized that the individual could not be divorced from social context and, therefore, could not glance down upon history (297, 300). Khan’s opposition to Thānvī does not mean we can draw hardened boundaries between Deobandis and Barelvis to determine the authentic from the colonial. There were

important convergences among Deobandis and Bareilvis as well. The key for Tareen is to work through arguments. There can be no *fait accompli* as the contestations are ceaseless; limits then are only articulated through debate between competing imaginaries on a malleable ground. In his care to describe these debates with attention to detail, Tareen refuses to locate one singular authoritative force as determinative of Islam. Instead, Tareen asks us to listen—a listening that does not mean agreeing with or embodying a logic of life but dwelling within the contours of a discursive tradition.

The difficulties of how to write a history of a discursive tradition remain even as Quadri and Tareen ably forge new paths into this direction with and against Asad. The problem might be that in formulating the idea of an anthropology of Islam, Asad does not ask us to locate the vitality or death of a tradition by distancing from it as historical reasoning requires—to glance at a tradition from an Archimedean point in order to record its becoming or annihilation. Instead, a discursive tradition is an address to practice in the present, not an essence. For Asad, then, the project of drawing distinctions between a given tradition and other streams of thought cannot be answered through modern historical reasoning but within the folds of a given tradition by argumentation and contestation—a process of learning right from wrong, which is necessarily a fragile moment. Historians of Islam, such as Quadri and Tareen, however, sidestep the question of incorrect and correct behaviors within a tradition by, paradoxically, foregrounding precisely the reasoning that their subjects (such as Bakhīt or Thānvi) “absorbed” or “converged upon”: modern historical reasoning. But historical reasoning can downplay the substance of intellectual struggle to think about correct and incorrect behavior as a context comes to envelope historical actors; they become situated within debates. Perhaps alongside the idea of an anthropology of Islam, we need to consider, now, the idea of a history of Islam—an idea that topples history from its privileged place.

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<https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfac042>

*The Aesthetics of Solidarity: Our Lady of Guadalupe and American Democracy.* By Nichole M. Flores. Georgetown University Press, 2021. 184 pages. \$149.95 (hardcover), \$49.95 (paperback or e-book).

*The Aesthetics of Solidarity*, by Nichole M. Flores, is an important work on US Latinx theological aesthetics, adding to a series of recent books seeking to bring out the political and activist dimensions of aesthetic practice. Flores tells the stories of several social movements, actions, and artistic productions touching Latinx communities, wiring them into a theory of democratic solidarity and action that takes the particular experiences of marginalized minority communities to heart. Along the way, Flores levels incisive critiques of liberal social-justice ethics, using a wide range of Latinx theological voices to expand the accounting of difference, particularity, and locality that liberal thought often leaves behind.

At the center of her account is the apparition narrative of the Virgin of Guadalupe, and the Virgin's relationships with Juan Diego and other figures from the traditional Guadalupan stories. Flores constructs an aesthetics of solidarity rooted in attention to how the predicament of each