Rediscovering the "everyday" Muslim

Notes on an anthropological divide

Nadia Fadil, *KU Leuven*

Mayanthi Fernando, *University of California, Santa Cruz*

This article critically examines recent calls by anthropologists to focus on what they call "everyday Islam." We locate this new literature within two tensions central to anthropology: first, its dual commitment to humanity's heterogeneity *and* commonality, and second, its dual imperative to account for dominant social structures *and* individual resistance. We argue that the concept of everyday Islam emphasizes one side of these paradigmatic debates, highlighting the universality of humans and emphasizing opposition to norms. We then take up the distinction this literature makes between everyday Muslims and Salafi Muslims. We suggest that a reinvestment in everyday Islam ends up discounting the validity, reality, and ontology of those framed as Salafi Muslims and invalidates ethnographic inquiry into ultra-orthodox Muslim life. Even as scholarship on everyday Islam attempts to expand the anthropology of Islam, then, it restricts the field instead by demarcating anthropology's proper object of study in a very narrow way.

Keywords: Everyday Islam, anthropology of religion, ethics, alterity, Salafism

Two central tensions lie at the heart of the anthropological endeavor. The first is between the desire, on the one hand, to delineate the multiple and heterogeneous ways in which human beings live and make sense of their lives, and, on the other hand, to underscore the commonalities and shared conditions of seemingly different life-worlds in order to define the human. The second tension is between, on the one hand, the imperative to identify powerful social structures and norms that mediate individuals and, on the other, the attempt to account for individual creativity, agency, and resistance. While these two underlying tensions have played out in

various ways throughout the modern history of the discipline,[1] they seem to have found a new site of articulation in the contemporary anthropology of Islam.

Over the past two decades, Islamic revivalism, defined as the unprecedented worldwide engagement with exegetical texts and theological reasoning by Muslims untrained in traditional Islamic institutions, has become a major field within the anthropology of Islam. Dispensing with earlier modernist accounts that predicted the secularization of non-Western societies and pathologized the supposed Islamic exception,[2] much of this literature has sought to make sense of the discourses and practices of revivalist Muslims from within the network of concepts on which these Muslims draw. In so doing, it has equally sought to dismantle a common set of binary oppositions—modernity and tradition, politics and religion, rational deliberation and religious discipline, autonomy and authority—that have long informed studies of the Muslim world. Recently, however, a growing number of scholars have begun to criticize this apparent overinvestment in Islamic revivalism and especially the focus on ethical self-cultivation through the inhabitation of Islamic norms, which, they argue, presents two major problems. First, these scholars hold, the focus on piety and Islamic norms constitutes a reductionist account that privileges religion at the expense of political, economic, and other structures mediating Muslim life. The second, related critique is that the focus on piety lacks complexity; what critics mean is that ethical self-cultivation is never a totalizing project, nor are its outcomes easily predictable. Rather, "struggle, ambivalence, incoherence, and failure must also receive attention in the study of everyday religiosity" (Osella and Soares 2010: 11). This call for complexity entails emphasizing the internal contradictions, ambiguities, and incoherences that inform the discourses and practices of ordinary Muslims, an approach framed as attending to "everyday religiosity" or "everyday Islam."

Our essay is an attempt to think through this new investment in the "everyday" and grows out of our own experience as anthropologists of the Muslim world. We have noticed over the past few years a remarkable uptick in panels, conferences, articles, and edited collections in Europe and the United States that bear the title of "everyday Islam," such as a 2014 online curated collection with that very title by *Cultural Anthropology*,[3] a forthcoming issue of *Ethnologie Française* on "everyday aspects" of Muslim life, the edited volume *Ordinary lives and grand schemes: An anthropology of everyday religion* (Schielke and Debevec 2012b), and the already cited *Islam, politics, anthropology* by Filippo Osella and Benjamin Soares (2010),

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1. Perhaps the most familiar instantiations of the diversity/unity question are the debates between Bronislaw Malinowski (1922) and E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1976) and then between Marshall Sahlins (1987, 1996) and Gananath Obeyesekere (1992), about "native" rationality. Debates between poststructuralist anthropologists inspired by Foucault and Bourdieu and anthropologists of "practice theory" remain a prime example of the power/agency problem (cf. infra).

2. Early examples include Max Weber's examination of Islam's theological difference from Christianity; for a fuller account, see Turner (1978) and Huff and Schluchter (1999).

3. The collection includes essays published previously in the journal by Al-Mohammad (2012), Osanloo (2006), Rouse and Hoskins (2004), Khan (2006), and George (2009), as well as interviews with the authors.

which emerged from a 2009 special issue of the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. Rather than simply dismiss this framing, we wish to take it as the starting point for a deeper conversation about a number of important questions raised by this literature on the everyday, questions we believe are central not only to the anthropology of Islam but to anthropology itself. Indeed, the global Islamic revival and the growing public visibility of Islam in the West has generated a great deal of debate in academia and beyond, with significant analytical, epistemological, and methodological implications for the discipline of anthropology, and especially for the study of religion and ethics. "Ordinary" or "everyday" ethics[4] has become a site of anthropological attention (including within this journal) and much of that work engages with the seminal contributions from anthropologists of Islam like Saba Mahmood and Talal Asad, even if to refute them.[5] Michael Lambek (2012), for instance, has insisted on the need to locate ethics outside the religious domain; James Laidlaw (2014) has called for highlighting the complexities and contradictions intrinsic to ethical deliberation; and Michael Lempert (2013, 2014) has cautioned against any easy locatability or immanence of ethics, including in the everyday.

This turn to ordinary ethics has found its translation in the anthropology of Islam through the idea of everyday Islam. Our essay is therefore an implicit engagement with the aforementioned literature on everyday ethics, although we are less interested here in the second term of this pairing ("ethics") than in the first ("everyday"). Our aim is not to theorize what ordinary or everyday ethics mean to us, but rather to interrogate the underlying assumptions and resulting effects of framing certain phenomena as "everyday." We will argue throughout this article that the concept of the everyday, and the way in which it has been recuperated within the anthropology of Islam, seems to emphasize one side of the paradigmatic agency/power and unity/diversity debates within anthropology, reiterating human creativity against the weight of norms and highlighting the universally shared conditions of the human subject. We suggest, moreover, that beyond merely rearticulating a commitment to agency and human unity, the turn to everyday Islam has (sometimes unintended) conceptually, methodologically, and politically problematic effects. Calls for a reinvestment in the "everyday" or "actual" lives of Muslims explicitly or implicitly mark revivalist or pious Muslims as exceptional and, more insidiously, not "real." As a consequence, this new scholarship discounts certain forms of Muslim life, invalidates anthropological inquiry into those ways of being Muslim, and redefines anthropology's proper object of study in a very particular way. In other words, even as this scholarship attempts to expand the anthropology of Islam, it significantly narrows the field instead. In pursuing this line of analysis, we seek not only to understand how a tacit attachment to a set of secular-liberal sensibilities and norms underpins a profound political and affective discomfort

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4. As Michael Lempert observes, the terms "ordinary" and "everyday" are largely interchangeable in this literature (2013: 387n1).

5. James Laidlaw's *The subject of virtue* (2014) nicely illustrates how the current "ethical turn" in anthropology has been directly influenced by ongoing debates within the anthropology of Islam, and a large part of his book is devoted to recent developments in that field. For example, his chapter "The 'question of freedom' in anthropology" (138–78) is largely a critical engagement with the work of Saba Mahmood.

with (certain tendencies within) Islamic revivalism but also how social-scientific narratives—in this case a commitment to the everyday—can play a crucial role in adjudicating the ontological truthfulness, authenticity, and, ultimately, humanness, of various life-worlds.

Islamic piety and everyday ethics

Starting in the 1980s, the anthropology of Islam began to focus on revivalist tendencies in various parts of the Muslim world. Much of this research initially emerged to account for why Muslim societies were not fulfilling modernist expectations of increasing secularization and decreasing religiosity. For some analysts, Islamic revivalism indicated Islam's theological incommensurability with secular modernity (Gellner 1992). Others insisted on the failed promise of modernity and the limited capacities of newly established nation states in the Arab world for economic and political integration after independence (Kepel 2012). These studies were soon replaced by works that problematized such a one-dimensional understanding of the routes modernization might take, and especially the notion that modernization would necessarily entail secularization. Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori's influential *Muslim politics* (1996), for example, argued that revivalist tendencies do not signal a rupture with modernization so much as represent an instantiation of it, and that what often passes as a return to tradition is, in fact, a complex articulation of modernization. Rejecting the well-established polarity between modernity and religion, this scholarship found that postcolonial, modernist transformations, including mass media and mass education, facilitated rather than prevented various forms of Islamic revivalism.[6]

Taking a somewhat different approach to the relationship between tradition and modernity, but with a similar commitment to make sense of Muslim subjectivities from an emic perspective, and drawing on Talal Asad's (1986b) framework of Islam as an always evolving discursive tradition, other studies began to demonstrate how processes of modernization enabled the renewed cultivation of older, "traditional" ethical sensibilities and authoritative practices (Agrama 2012; Hirschkind 2006; Mahmood 2005; Salvatore 2007).[7] It is against this approach that much of the new literature on everyday Islam positions itself, so it seems worthwhile to sketch some of the former's core interventions using two exemplary texts: Saba Mahmood's *Politics of piety* (2005) and Charles Hirschkind's *The ethical soundscape* (2006). Both

6. See Deeb (2006); Salvatore (2007); Starrett (1998). Gregory Starrett, for instance, argues that mass education in postcolonial Egypt led to the "objectification" of the Islamic tradition, i.e., its construction as a separate and clearly demarcated entity to be harnessed for economic, political, and social development. The resulting ability of ordinary Muslims to participate in debates about Islam and its role in social and political life led, in turn, to the Islamic revival in Egypt.

7. Armando Salvatore (2007), for instance, analyzes how notions of *islah* or *maslaha* are recuperated in postcolonial Egypt and connected to notions of public interest. Hussein Ali Agrama (2012) likewise examines how the concept of *hisba* is assimilated into modern conceptions of state sovereignty.

are ethnographic studies of the ethical engagements and daily struggles of ordinary pious Muslims in Cairo. While Mahmood's work concerns pious women who participate in mosque study groups, Hirschkind's looks at male city dwellers who rely on audio cassette sermons in their projects of ethical self-reform. Mahmood and Hirschkind argue that through various practices of ethical self-cultivation—which they understand as bodily practices of self-discipline aimed at restructuring a set of moral, sensorial, and affective dispositions in accordance with authoritative Islamic norms—their interlocutors remake themselves into virtuous Muslim subjects. Although Mahmood and Hirschkind do not use the everyday as an analytical frame, they detail the daily ruminations, conversations, and difficulties these women and men encounter in their ethical journeys and demonstrate how these are informed by a constant engagement with the Islamic tradition. Indeed, everyday life presents a series of challenges that require ethical decision-making: should one meet a colleague in a café that serves alcohol? Should a woman alone ride in a taxi with a male driver? Should one got to a mosque study group one's husband is firmly against it? These are all questions that pertain to piety as much as they do to the domain of the everyday. They are also all questions that are usually answered through some reference to Islamic authority, to the exegetical tradition and, ultimately, to the Quran and the Sunna.[8] This does not mean that these kinds of ethical questions are easily answerable via a "literalist" reading of the sources and without debate, or that ethical action is simply a question of following the rules. Rather, it means that the opposition between piety and the everyday—and the concomitant opposition between textual norm and individual practice—is untenable.

Consequently, Mahmood's and Hirschkind's monographs engage with the broader anthropological study of ethics and religion. Recent work has defined ethics as an essential condition of everyday life and of the human (Das 2010, 2012; Lambek 2010b). This scholarship has tried to reconfigure older debates on ethics by showing how ethical considerations are an intrinsic part of everyday life and do not necessarily rely on moral (or religious) frameworks. While Mahmood and Hirschkind similarly problematize any differentiation or temporal suspension between ethics and everyday life by showing how ethical commitment is at once deeply political, societal, and individual, they also refute the notion of an immanent ethical realm, and therefore any stark distinction between the domain of "religion" and that of the "everyday."[9] This remains a crucial point of differentiation within the scholarship on ordinary ethics. In contrast to those scholars—including scholars

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8. John Bowen (2009) examines similar kinds of questions that emerge for Muslims in France. These debates, Bowen shows, occur on two levels. On the first, more mundane level, French Muslims have to determine how to live, work, marry, and sacrifice according to Islamic norms in a non-Muslim environment. The second level—what Bowen calls metareasoning—concerns how best to think about the questions posed at the first level, that is, how best to determine which tools and traditions Muslims should draw upon to figure out how to live, work, marry, and sacrifice in a non-Muslim context. Lara Deeb and Mona Harb (2013) consider a similar process among Shi'ite Muslims with regard to pious forms of leisure in Beirut.

9. Lempert makes a similar critique of much of the work on ordinary ethics, arguing that it can often harden "dichotomies of small and large, micro and macro, implicit

of the Muslim world—who posit a strong distinction between ethics and religion and seem invested in emphasizing that people behave ethically outside the domain of religion and without reference to explicit moral norms (e.g., Al-Mohammad 2012; Al-Mohammad and Peluso 2012; George 2009), Mahmood and Hirschkind argue that conduct becomes ethical to the extent that it is situated—by the implicit or explicit intentions of the actors themselves—within a broader moral horizon such that ethical practice is constantly self-transformative.[10] This latter approach has been influential in shaping new directions in the anthropology of religion in general, and of Islam in particular. A number of recent studies have attended to the way individuals constantly make and remake themselves into what they consider good Muslims through ordinary actions (Deeb and Harb 2013; Fernando 2014; Jacobsen 2011; Jouili 2015). While these actions (like not getting angry at a sibling or being kind to one's neighbors) are not immediately recognizable as "religious" (unlike, say, wearing a headscarf or praying five times a day) they are nonetheless fundamental to the kind of ethical subjectivity many Muslims attempt to cultivate in themselves.

Finally, Mahmood's and Hirschkind's work on ethics, in conjunction with their de-naturalization of the conventions of secular thought and praxis, paved the way for new scholarship that has sought to unravel how liberalism and secularism—and not just Islam—operate as moral fields enacted through everyday practices. For instance, our own scholarship has turned to the secular as a site of specific norms with attendant forms of ethical self-cultivation. We have argued that, like various forms of religiosity, secularity too includes a range of ethical, social, physical, and sexual dispositions, hence the need to apprehend the secular via its sensorial, aesthetic, and embodied dispositions and not only its political ones.[11] In other words, by radically provincializing secular concepts, categories,

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and explicit" and that we should take care "not to sever the entanglements that make [ordinary ethics] seem quotidian in the first place" (2013: 386).

10. In her account of ethics, Mahmood relies on the distinct Aristotelian tradition drawn on by her interlocutors, for whom everyday behavior is connected to a process of ethical self-transformation. Although she distinguishes between morality and ethics, she sees them as interlinked, deploying Foucault's differentiation between ethical substance and modes of subjectivation or techniques of the self. Mahmood does not see morality as a set of abstract rules to which the subject acquiesces; "Rather, Foucault's framework assumes that there are many different ways of forming a relationship with a moral code, each of which establishes a particular relationship between capacities of the self (will, reason, desire, action, etc.) and a given norm" (2012: 234). Thus "the piety movement has a strong individualizing impetus that requires each person to adopt a set of ascetic practices for shaping moral conduct" (235).

11. By examining secular criticism of and punitive action against veiling, Mayanthi Fernando (2014; see also Selby and Fernando 2014) analyzes secularity's underlying sex/gender norms and secular power's investment in and interpellation of female bodies. Similarly, Nadia Fadil (2011) considers not veiling as an aesthetic of the self intimately tied to a moral subjectivity grounded in liberal ethical norms. By understanding not veiling as an everyday practice of ethical self-cultivation, Fadil challenges a hegemonic secular-liberal viewpoint of the non-veil as a natural way of being.

and attachments, Mahmood's and Hirschkind's work—and that of Asad (1993, 2003) before them—enabled scholars to make secularism and secularity not just the background condition of their intellectual work but instead an object of observation and analysis.

Such epistemological volte-faces have a long history in anthropology. Yet this ethnographic attention to pious self-cultivation, the critical analysis of the relationship between morality and ethics, and the provincialization of secular norms and values have provoked an antagonistic reaction—sometimes quite vociferous—among a number of scholars within and outside the discipline of anthropology.[12] The turn to everyday Islam is part of this reaction. The following sections therefore attend to key texts and key claims in this turn. Our aim is not necessarily to invalidate this work or even its critiques of the (over) focus on Islamic piety.[13] Rather, we seek to understand the scholarly as well as the moral-political purchase of this explicit turn to the everyday. In sum, we are interested in why "everyday Islam" has become such a popular analytical framework for so many anthropologists of Islam.[14] We are particularly puzzled by the opposition between piety and the everyday posited by much of this literature since, as we made clear above, everyday practice and ordinary Muslims are a central part of the earlier scholarship on Islamic piety and ethics. We want to suggest that the everyday acts here less as an empirical site of observation than a normative frame that enables the restoration of a conceptualization of agency primarily understood as creative resistance to (religious) norms. It is to that argument we now turn.

Practices of everyday resistance

The notion of the everyday has long been central to anthropology as one of the most privileged sites of analysis to examine the "imponderabilia of actual life," to

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12. See Abbas (2013); Bangstad (2011); Gourgouris (2013); Mufti (2013); Robbins (2013).

13. In fact, we are sympathetic to this critique: as Fadil argues, the idea of "veiling as an idiosyncrasy that needs to be explained or accounted for" is inadvertently confirmed by even sympathetic research on the veil. As she notes, "Restricting the analysts' lens to orthodox Muslim conduct like veiling, and leaving other forms of (pious) conduct unexplored, results indeed in a situation wherein only practices that *fail* to correspond with 'secular ways of life' are turned into the object of research" (2011: 85).

14. Although we focus on the work of Samuli Schielke and Magnus Marsden as the oft-cited proponents of this turn to everyday Islam, our interest also extends to scholarship as diverse as Al-Mohammad (2012); Al-Mohammad and Peluso (2012); Das (2012); Debevec (2012); Khan (2006, 2012); Mittermaier (2012); and Simon (2009). We do not suggest any homogeneity to this literature and recognize the very different orientations and analytic attachments that animate these studies. We are nonetheless interested in how all these works frame the everyday as a site of complexity, ambiguity, or encounter (in contrast to religious institutions and norms), what effects this framing has for the anthropology of religion, and what normative sensibilities might underlie—even inadvertently—this framing.

cite Bronislaw Malinowski's well-known phrasing (1922: 18).[15] This concept, together with its twin "the ordinary" (Lambek 2010a; Stewart 2007), have anchored attempts to understand the vicissitudes of large-scale structures by examining their enactments in daily speech and practice.[16] Ranging from Irving Goffman's seminal *Presentation of the self in everyday life* (1959), which examines the different frames individuals use to locate and construct themselves as social subjects, to Henri Lefebvre's *Critique de la vie quotidienne* (1958), which calls for a de-familiarization of the everyday, the everyday has been understood as a space of contradictions that help us unravel the ways in which social structures or systems are materialized or contested (or both). A structural tension therefore animates the analytical focus on micropractices: while the concept of the everyday seeks to understand the operation of power, it does so by accounting for its mutability through daily iterations.

Michel de Certeau's *The practice of everyday life* (2011) remains one of the most popular and influential illustrations of such an approach. There, de Certeau attends to the creative poetics of the "common man" in his patterns of consumption, offering a microanalysis of the operation of power in its daily enactments and renegotiations. At the same time, for de Certeau, strategies of everyday resistance to power rely on existing (though nondominant) repertoires of action, such as folktales, myths, epic legends, and games. De Certeau's account of the everyday thereby foregrounds creativity and resistance while simultaneously inscribing them within, rather than dislocating them from, existing norms and values. Rather than opposing agency to power, de Certeau reconceptualizes agency as a tactical deployment of power. Lila Abu-Lughod's *Veiled sentiments* (2000), a powerful ethnography of everyday Bedouin life in Egypt, is another example of this approach. Abu-Lughod traces how Bedouins use poems to articulate sentiments of vulnerability otherwise impermissible within the honor-driven moral framework of ordinary social life. Rather than posit moral discourse as the site of powerful social rules and Bedouin poetic expression as the site of agentive, creative resistance to them, Abu-Lughod underscores how poetry is also a social convention, a "cultural repertoire" of sentiments and actions (180). She thereby reads the situation as one in which moral discourse and poetry constitute two competing social conventions within which Bedouins are produced as subjects, rather than as one convention (morality) constraining the human spirit (expressed in poetry). And, importantly, Abu-Lughod does not portray Bedouins as contradictory or incoherent subjects. Instead, through

15. In the introductory passages to *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, Malinowski uses this expression to insist that analysts should attend to the "routine of a man's working day, the details of his care of the body, of the manner of taking food and preparing it; the tone of conversational and social life around the village fires, the existence of strong friendships or hostilities, and of passing sympathies and dislikes between people" (1922: 19). These details, he explains, are crucial to understand the way structures work and are maintained.

16. Michael Sheringham (2009) argues that the focus on the everyday as a distinct scholarly perspective emerged as part of the postwar French intellectual movement that relied on Surrealism and sought to decenter and reimagine political life. For a further overview of the theoretical deployment of the everyday in cultural theory, see Highmore (2002) and Kaplan and Ross (1987).

careful attention to the networks of concepts that underpin the honor code and poetry, she tries "to explain the logic of the system [as a whole]" (xxi). In a more recent ethnography that follows Abu-Lughod's lead, Lara Deeb and Mona Harb examine how Shiʿite Muslims in southern Beirut draw on multiple moral rubrics to create new modes of pious leisure. They describe a "complex moral landscape" (2013: 10) within which young people "who don't view their lives as necessarily bifurcated [between religious norms and everyday leisure] . . . are striving to bring fun and faith together in ways they feel are more compatible—striving for a greater level of consistency in their lives across these dimensions" (32).

Although Deeb and Harb do not explicitly foreground the everyday as an analytic, other recent anthropological works have been more explicit in invoking the everyday. Samuli Schielke stands out as an influential proponent of this turn to everyday Islam, and his essay "Being good in Ramadan" (2009), on the experiences and daily practices of "ordinary Muslims" in a northern Egyptian fishing village during the month of Ramadan, is often cited by other scholars as an analytical touchstone.[17] While Schielke has since published a more expansive monograph (Schielke 2015), we mostly focus on the essay here because it concisely represents both the major claims and attendant pitfalls of the turn to everyday Islam. In his essay, Schielke describes Ramadan as a time not only for fasting and praying but also for festive forms of sociality and fun, like football. Although "there is a general sense of increased social, moral, and pious commitment during Ramadan," he writes, such a "focus on reward and piety" is temporally exceptional (2009: S26–27). Daily fasting is followed by nightly entertainment and conspicuous consumption. Moreover, the month itself stands apart from the rest of the year: Ramadan is a "time of exceptional morality that, by its nature, will last only as long as Ramadan lasts . . . and this exceptional nature indirectly legitimizes less consistent approaches to religion and morality for the rest of the year" (2015: 50). As Schielke explains, "This is a highly utilitarian understanding of religion that implicitly allows Ramadan to be established as a moral and pious exception from not so perfect everyday life. If Ramadan is a time of exceptional reward when God forgives one's previous sins, one may commit some sins and slip a little from one's obligations during the rest of the year" (2009: S28).[18] Thus, Schielke concludes, "The ways in which most people

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17. Samuli Schielke is cited as such by, among others, Debevec (2013: 211); Deeb and Harb (2013: 16-17; Laidlaw (2014: 173); and Mittermaier (2012: 250). We concentrate on his two essays "Being good in Ramadan" (2009) and "Being a nonbeliever in a time of Islamic revival" (2012), which distill the central claims made in his longer monographs and edited collections. While Schielke's monograph is certainly ethnographically richer than his articles, it retains the main problems we identify here, namely, the notion of religion as a set of abstract rules in opposition to everyday life, and the understanding of Salafism as an impossible and unnatural way of being.

18. Schielke's discussion of Ramadan in *Egypt in the future tense* (2015) is more nuanced than the earlier article version, emphasizing the complexity of non-Ramadan morality. As he writes, "the power of the moral shift of the feast lies not simply in the falling back to bad habits. More important, it marks the shift from a period of observance during which the sins of the previous year are erased to a more complex order of morality" (51). Nonetheless, a dual structure that opposes a time of exceptional morality

practice Ramadan do not require an ethical subjectivity that aims at the perfection of a purified, God-fearing self capable of keeping right and wrong clearly apart" (2009: S28). Indeed, Schielke takes explicit issue with the recent focus on Muslim piety and what he considers the "problematic tendency to privilege the aim of ethical perfection" (2009: S35). Rather than aiming for ethical perfection, he contends, his Muslim interlocutors usually contradicted or evaded strict moral norms: when the holy month ends with the feast of 'id al-fitr, the same young men who pray and fast during Ramadan go back to smoking hashish, watching porn, and sexually harassing women in public parks and promenades (2009: S29). He therefore argues that ethnographic focus should be redirected toward the "ambivalent nature of most moral subjectivities," and to "conflicts, ambiguities, double standards, fractures and shifts" (2009: S38). Doing so enables the analyst to understand better how religious norms operate on a day-to-day basis, an approach Schielke frames as attending to the distinction between "grand schemes" and "the actual paths people take" (2015: 127).

Schielke's emphasis on ambivalence, ambiguity, and contradiction echoes other scholarship that similarly seeks to underline the complexities of Muslims' everyday religiosity. Liza Debevec, for example, writes on "moderate" Muslims in Burkina Faso who, although they recognize the importance of *salat* (daily prayer) for their religious practice, nonetheless postpone these *salat* until a later stage of their lives. Like Schielke, Debevec wants to complicate prevailing accounts of piety by taking into account not only moments in which explicit moral aims are realized but also those in which they fail to take hold: "The demand that Muslims must pray regularly, and the discussion about how to do it properly, is part of everyday religious life just as much as the claim to postponing piety until a more appropriate moment is" (2012: 35). Other scholars write in similar terms of the "critical engagement" Muslims have with the norms by which they seek to abide (de Jorio 2010: 92), of the moments of doubt that are as integral as moments of faith to Muslims' lives (Aishima and Salvatore 2010), of "internecine tensions and ambivalences" that underpin pious discourse (Huq 2010: 165), or the "experience of uncertainty, tension, and anxiety" that accompany the ritual performance of prayer (Simon 2009: 270). In so doing, they underscore how Muslims' ethical and moral lives are marked by fracture and failure, inconsistency and incoherence. And attention to these "everyday experiences" remains essential, these scholars argue, for a comprehensive understanding of the complex relationship Muslims hold to religious norms and the contradictory desires that persistently animate Muslim subjects.

Part of showing that Muslims are not saturated by normative religious requirements entails highlighting the agency of ordinary Muslims. Consider, for instance, Magnus Marsden's (2005, 2010) ethnography of Chitrali Muslims in northern Pakistan. In an article on the touring practices of young Chitrali men who traverse the local countryside, Marsden regards these tours as an escape from or resistance to doxic social norms: "Chitrali tours are an everyday social practice that are often purposefully deployed by people—albeit temporarily—to distance themselves from the concerns of sectarian difference and status distinction that permeate

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(Ramadan) to "everyday temporality" (outside of Ramadan) continues to inform his analysis. It is to this dual structure that our critique attends.

everyday village life" (2010: 66). Moreover, in contradistinction to village life, these tours offer Chitralis a space for creativity and critical reflection:

> Chitrali touring . . . cultivates a modality of understanding and perceiving the wider world founded not on the active cultivation of embodied ethical dispositions but in the appreciation of a mindful, if often sceptical, curiosity about heterogeneity. . . . In spite of the pressures placed upon Chitrali Muslims to conform to Islamic doctrinal standards, during the course of their tours Chitralis expect one another to question, to reflect upon, and interrogate the conditions of their everyday lives. (68)

Touring is a temporary tactic against social convention. Marsden's article draws on his monograph *Living Islam* (2005), which is driven by an explicit desire to show that Chitrali Muslims lead "intellectually vibrant and emotionally significant lives" (1), and there he expands on the critical engagements his interlocutors have with revivalist tendencies in the region. They do so not only through intellectual arguments but also through poetry, dance, and musical performances, as well as through esoteric customs like amulet-wearing, all of which reformist trends consider illegitimate. Practices like touring, poetry, music, and dance, Marsden argues, are based on an appreciation of skepticism, self-reflection, heterogeneity, wit, irony, and humor, all values that he posits against social convention and the homogeneity cultivated by revivalist Islam.

The different contributions sketched above present the everyday as a site of creativity, individuality, and transgression, a space in which Muslims negotiate and, importantly, contest the normative requirements to which they are subjected by enacting a set of alternative desires. Everyday practices thereby appear as moments of disruption, of *not conforming* to religious norms. But this invocation of the everyday as only a site of contingency or resistance can lead to an oppositional distinction between domains that are saturated by power and social conventions (Islamic doctrine and morality) and those that are not (everyday practices). Consider, again, Marsden's ethnography of Chitrali touring. "Chitral's landscape," he writes, "is injected with abstract religious concepts that posit the possibility of experiences of moral, selfless, and devotional-like feelings of love to one's beloved—human or divine" (2010: 61). He continues: "Abstract and Sufi-derived conceptions of other-worldly love sit jaggedly alongside feelings of lust, desire, and love that are widely considered as being illicit" (62). For Marsden, religion (as a moral discourse) occupies the space of conceptual abstraction, while the everyday is constituted by sensibility and affect, by experience and feeling unmediated by discourse. Such an understanding posits the individual as separate from power and processes of socialization, bifurcating discourses and norms from the raw experiences of the subject. This approach neglects the ways in which individual experiences and actions, even those that transgress dominant norms, are always produced within and mediated by discursive norms and power relations. After all, rather than only an escape from custom or village tradition, touring could equally be viewed as a social convention, a tradition of sorts, especially given that "Chitralis talk about tours as providing complex opportunities to hone their capacity to enact and cultivate diverse modes of sociality and moral, aesthetic, and intellectual sensibilities" (55). Indeed, touring, like musical performance and poetry, seem to be standard practices of subjectivation, central to learning how to be a proper Chitrali male. Instead of a temporary escape from norms,

then, as Marsden argues, touring, music, and poetry seem to be as integral to normative Chitrali social structure as Islamist morality and village social conventions.

The opposition between social/moral norm and individual agent upheld here parallels an opposition between religion and other societal domains assimilated to the everyday (like love or family). Islamic traditions and normative discourses are posited as an abstract, otherworldly moral system, in contradistinction to everyday practices that often contradict or do not live up to the values of that system. Recall Marsden's description of Chitral's landscape as "injected with abstract religious concepts" that "sit jaggedly alongside feelings of lust, desire, and love" (2010: 61). Marsden never explains why these concepts are abstract rather than real, especially since Chitralis clearly seek to live and experience them. Regardless, religion here occupies the space of the abstract and otherworldly, while lust, desire, and love exist in the real, the everyday. Debevec understands her interlocutors' continual deferral of *salat* in similar terms: "The conflict which people try to postpone could also be understood as a conflict between the real and the ideal world of the people of Bobo Dioulasso" (2012: 45). The distinction between the ideal and the real, the abstract and the everyday is an attempt to "account for the complex duality of religion as an everyday practice and a normative doctrine" (Schielke and Debevec 2012a: 1) and to correct the emphasis on "normative doctrines as the primary field of religion" by attending to how people "actually live religious lives" (2). Marsden, Debevec, and other like-minded scholars therefore foreground what they see as a tension between what people say (their ostensible commitment to moral rules or "grand schemes") and what they "actually" do. As a result, they are critical of anthropologists of ethics who "focus on the declared aim of pious discipline rather than its actual outcome" (Schielke 2009: S24). Schielke's reference to "actual outcome" is telling in that it reveals a broader approach: any gap between moral rules and "actual" practices is seen as evidence of the inefficacy, failure, or rejection of Islamic norms, rather than as an indication of the complex ways in which those norms are lived and enacted, a view that only confirms the distinction between a moral system and individual agents who exist outside that system. While it is certainly important to attend to the everyday practice of religious life, the scholars examined here end up simply inverting what Schielke and Debevec call the "hierarchy of a primary and secondary field of religion" (Schielke and Debevec 2012a: 2). By privileging "everyday practice" over "normative doctrine," a strict distinction between those two domains is reiterated, reproducing Robert Redfield's (1956) distinction between great and little traditions and Ernest Gellner's (1981) differentiation between high and folk Islam. In fact, these scholars do more than reiterate these classical distinctions: they also conceptualize normative doctrine and everyday practice as unconnected and, indeed, as opposed. Yet the fact that a commitment to a particular norm is often imperfectly achieved does not refute the importance attached to that norm. The need to work with, through, or against other inclinations remains central to any ethical commitment. The efficacy of norms is not only determined by their realization but also by conscious and unconscious discursive and affective attachments to them, irrespective of one's "actual" practices. The fact that Schielke's interlocutors watch porn does not imply that they do not define such conduct as morally wrong. It is by considering the complex discursive and affective attachments one holds to religious prescriptions and practices, and not only the extent to which they

are being realized, that one can have a full grasp of their weight and impact on an individual.[19]

In the aforementioned articulations of everyday Islam, however, religion emerges as a set of abstract rules that are lived very differently "on the ground," that is, within the realm of the real, the human, the everyday. This split produces contradictory conceptual and methodological effects for the study of religion: on the one hand, religion stands outside individual conduct as a set of abstract doctrinal rules demarcated in texts and by religious authorities; on the other, "real" religion is found precisely in individual, everyday conduct recorded by the ethnographer. The analyst's role consequently becomes one of accounting for the ambiguities and contradictions of Muslims' ethical journeys, and of giving voice and legitimacy to these seemingly repressed realities resulting from the impossible demands made by religion. One finds such an approach in the work of Debevec (2012), who offers an otherwise compelling account of the practice of postponing prayer until later in life. Her essay traces the different reasons her interlocutors give to account for this "failure" to practice correctly, which range from demonic temptations to the absence of a stable and settled life. However, while her own interlocutors understand the practice of postponing prayer as an effect of their spiritual or social weaknesses, Debevec appears reluctant to accept her interlocutors' own explanation—one might even call it resolution—of this "contradiction." She prefers, rather, to regard it as a tactical move—an act of conscious or unconscious agency—that helps her interlocutors negotiate "the very strict and detailed prescriptions of a proper life as a Muslim" (2012: 44).[20] Postponing prayer, she writes, is "a successful solution to the potential conflict of pious ideals and a complex life" (2012: 45). Debevec seems analytically committed to restoring the agency of her Muslim interlocutors, whose religiosity might be seen as questionable in the eyes of preachers and purists (see also Debevec 2013: 231).

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19. Our argument here draws on Talal Asad's seminal critiques of Ernest Gellner, developed in *The idea of an anthropology of Islam* (Asad 1986b) and "The concept of cultural translation in British social anthropology" (Asad 1986a). In both works, Asad takes issue with the authority of the analyst to decipher and decode subjects' behavior while disregarding the meaning and signification attributed to it by the subjects themselves. The first essay problematizes a Gellnerian perspective that represents actors as involved in a dramatic struggle without any consideration of the meaning and discourses that orient their conduct (1986b: 8). The second essay critically explores Gellner's work in relation to the privileged position the anthropologist accords himself to decipher and decode the "real meaning of what Berbers say (regardless of what they think they say)" (Asad 1986a: 155).

20. Maria Louw provides a different account of similar declarations by ordinary Muslims in Uzbekistan that they hold little knowledge about Islam. Louw takes these declarations as a starting point to understand "what it means to be Muslim in post-Soviet Uzbekistan, and to understand and conceptualize which experiential realities people are actually referring to when they talk about ignorance and oblivion" (2009: 19). Deeb and Harb (2013) also take a different approach by trying to understand how seeming contradictions are resolved by those who experience them, usually by inquiring into the emic reasoning of their interlocutors and in so doing foregoing the framework of contradiction.

In the case of Schielke's article on Ramadan, we witness little effort to account for the ways his interlocutors conceive of their ambivalent relationship to, and non-fulfillment of, moral norms. The reader gets little sense of how, for example, the young men who fast during Ramadan and watch porn during the rest of the year explain this seemingly discrepancy. How do these men negotiate their competing desires? How do they make sense of or resolve for themselves what Schielke sees as contradictory behavior? Even when his interlocutors do try to explain their comportment, Schielke seems to reject their explanations. He gives us the example of Mustafa, a former Salafi who "now regularly shaves, has returned to smoking, prays irregularly, and maintains contact with female friends in a way in which Salafis would consider unacceptable" (2009: S33). Mustafa himself sees his behavior as a temporary suspension of piety and hopes to return to a more pious lifestyle eventually. He is not ambivalent about or uncommitted to the ideal of piety; rather, he has a sense of past, present, and future, and he understands his comportment in the present in orientation to a more perfect but deferred future of more rigorous practice. Schielke, however, reads Mustafa's trajectory as a transition from "commitment to ambivalence," an example of "everyday lives loaded with ambiguities and contradictions" (S33).[21] The absence of an emic accounting makes the framework of contradiction and ambivalence seem external, unrecognized as such by "everyday Muslims" themselves.

This positions the analyst as someone who not only records tensions and conflicts that might arise from conflicting demands but also resolves some of these tensions by turning any discrepancy between norm and practice into either a tactic demarcating human agency (in the case of Debevec) or a sign of the consistent opposition between moral norm and individual behavior (in the case of Schielke). Either way, religious norms and everyday practices emerge as distinct realms, one a space of abstract rules that are impossible to realize fully and the other a space of complexity and "actual" human conduct, where agency and choice are enacted in opposition to (religious) norms. Within this binary, the analyst emerges as the voice of authority who can in some cases even objectively determine the truth of her interlocutors better than they can. Schielke's claim that Ramadan is objectively a time of exceptional morality, for example, relies on ignoring "religious authorities and ordinary citizens" who "argue that Ramadan should be a time of spirituality and moral cultivation that helps create a committed Muslim personality and

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21. Schielke significantly expands on Mustafa's reasoning in his later monograph, though he still does not accept Mustafa's declaration of his Salafi path as a choice, arguing, "this choice was extremely limited from the start. None of the many other currents of Islamic piety and practice was on his list of options. More important, all the options were explicitly Islamic" (2015: 142). Schielke's understanding of choice as action unconstrained by norms appears again in a discussion of Mustafa's refusal to go against the wishes of his mother, who does not want him to marry a divorced woman. Schielke does not understand Mustafa's refusal as an ethical commitment to family but rather as a lack of "real choice" (101). As he writes, "Mustafa repeatedly sought a space of freedom in his marriage plans, but he faced powers too great to overcome" (101). There is no sense that that "power"—i.e., his mother's will—is part of a broader ethical paradigm that marks a particular commitment to family, and that Mustafa's decision to obey his mother is also a choice, albeit one made in relation to ethical or moral obligations.

society free of vices and unnecessary spending, oriented toward individual and collective self-improvement" (2015: 50). In other words, he mentions only in passing a very different Muslim understanding of Ramadan, then dismisses this perspective in the very next sentence. At the same time, part of the reason there seems no need to explore ethnographically how one's interlocutors might make sense of the discrepancy between moral ideal and actual practice—what many of these anthropologists understand as contradiction, ambivalence, and ambiguity—is that this discrepancy seems natural (a point we will elaborate in the next section). If fasting, praying, and sexual abstinence are forms of exceptional behavior that occupy the realm of religion, then playing football, watching porn, smoking, and praying irregularly are forms of "everyday" practice that do not need to be explained or theorized beyond marking, first, their empirical facticity and, second, their status as conduct that implicitly and explicitly resists doctrinal norms and thereby signals the creativity, critical spirit, and agency of the human being.

Our disagreement with this approach, one that posits a distinction between norms and individual agents and between religion and the everyday, replays an older debate in anthropology between proponents of practice theory and poststructuralist critics. In an essay representative of the former group, Sherry Ortner calls on anthropologists to "see people not simply as passive reactors to and enactors of some 'system,' but as active agents and subjects in their own history" (1984: 143), and to focus not on "the hidden hand of structure" but rather on "real people doing real things" (144). In response, Jane F. Collier and Sylvia J. Yanagisako point out that "an emphasis on agency, strategy, and the interest of individuals in practice approaches can easily lead to an implicit opposition between the 'practical' and the 'symbolic.' Such a scheme overlooks the fact that people's 'practical' concerns and strategies are as culturally constructed as so-called 'symbolic' ones" (1989: 30). Moreover, they argue, the distinction between the "symbolic" (or structural/normative) and "practical" makes nonsymbolic practices ostensibly transparent: "They are simply what they are" (31). This has a number of effects: "when we define certain actions as symbolic, we risk setting ourselves the task of ferreting out the 'true' meaning of these actions," with the concomitant presumption that "actions not labeled as symbolic have obvious—i.e., pragmatic and equally familiar—aims" (31). As Michelle Rosaldo once observed, by "'separating out the symbolic from the everyday, anthropologists quickly come upon such 'universal' facts as correspond to their assumptions'" (quoted in Collier and Yanagisako 1989: 31). Rosaldo's and Collier and Yanagisako's critiques apply, we find, to much of the anthropology of everyday Islam and its understanding of what constitutes the real and the universal. Although this anthropology explicitly aims to counterbalance scholarship it finds overdetermined by a focus on norms, it draws on a set of universalizing claims about what constitutes the everyday by relying on a tacit distinction between, on the one hand, exceptional or extra-ordinary subjects who have a strong commitment to religious norms (usually labeled "Salafis") and, on the other, "ordinary" or "everyday" Muslims who do not.

The everyday Muslim thus emerges as a familiar figure, one whose behavior does not need to be explained and who, in her ambivalent, critical, and even contestatory relationship to Islamic norms, seems very much like the mostly secular-humanist analysts who study the Muslim world. Even those anthropologists not

invested in liberal-humanist conceptions of religion as a set of abstract norms, or of agency as the active resistance to norms,[22] or even of the everyday as the site of the "real," seem to invoke this figure when they deploy the everyday as an analytical frame. Naveeda Khan (2006, 2012), for example, posits the everyday as a paradigmatic site of skepticism, ambiguity, and uncertainty; Veena Das (2010) sees it as a site of encounter and unexpected possibility; Amira Mittermaier, for her part, writes of the "experience of contingency and vulnerability that marks much of everyday life" (2012: 260). The everyday thereby emerges as a space in which norms *fail* to take hold rather than are (also) reiterated. In these different accounts, then, the everyday becomes not only an analytical frame but also a normative one: as a space characterized by friction, contestation, uncertainty, and subversion, the everyday stands as a recuperative site of humanist possibility. Concomitantly, the everyday Muslim emerges as a familiar humanist subject who looks very much like her anthropologist interlocutor.

In the particular geopolitical context in which we write, it may make sense to insist on such similitude, one that incorporates Muslims "others" into the realm of the human. Yet this insistence on sameness via the paradigm of the everyday comes at a cost, namely, the banishment of the exceptional or extra-ordinary Muslim—the pious Salafi—not just from the realm of the everyday but also, concomitantly, from the realm of the human. It is to this process that we now turn.

The impossibility of the "Salafi" Muslim

In the previous section, we attended to the opposition between social/moral norm and individual agent at the heart of this turn to everyday Islam. We did so not simply because we have a number of theoretical disagreements with this approach but more importantly because we see in this differentiation a tendency to naturalize certain comportments as both valuable and fundamentally human, and, as a result, to determine the ontological status of different forms of Muslim life.[23] Put another way, the paradigm of the everyday operates here as a normative modality of onto-logical differentiation, distinguishing between real and unreal (or impossible) ways of being.

As part of their critique of the ostensible overfocus on pious self-cultivation, Osella and Soares offer the concept of *islam mondain*, which they translate as "Islam in the present world." As they note, "*Islam mondain* does not privilege Islam over anything else, emphasizing instead the actual world in which Muslims find themselves" (2010: 12). It is not clear how Islam could be anything but lived in the

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22. Naveeda Khan (2012), for instance, understands the skepticism and striving present in everyday life as inherently social phenomena, produced through social relations and philosophical-cultural traditions rather than emanating naturally from the individual self; importantly, she also does not see skepticism as opposed to religious belief but as internal to Islamic practices and traditions. Mittermaier's (2012) meditation on divinely inspired dreams presents a Muslim subject-agent integral to Sufi strands of the Islamic tradition who does not act but is rather acted upon by dreams and the divine.

23. By ontology and ontological we mean a mode of being or existing (see Fanon 1952).

actual world. Nevertheless, Islamic traditions—the focus of scholarship on piety against which they propose *islam mondain*—do not, it would seem, constitute the actual world in which Muslims live. For Osella and Soares, there is little sense that actively cultivated piety might be a response to, and therefore part of, the "actual world in which Muslims find themselves." This framework is dangerously close to the common secular critique that ultraorthodox or "Salafi"[24] Muslims are, as is often put, "living in the Middle Ages," that is, mistaking one epoch for another. It is also related to the conception of religion at work in the anthropology of everyday Islam discussed earlier, whereby religion (in this case Islam) exists outside real space and time as otherworldly and abstract, to use Marsden's terminology.

What, then, constitutes the real, actual world, the space and time of the everyday? Osella and Soares lay out a series of revealing oppositions in articulating the difference between what they call the "'piety' turn" (2010: 10) and the kind of anthropological analysis (captured by the term *islam mondain*) found in their coedited volume. Referring to Schielke's essay on Ramadan, they write that in contrast to "some studies [that] over-privilege the coherence and disciplinary power of Islam . . . we learn here about the ambiguities in young Egyptian men's lives and everyday practice, with all its contradictions and imperfections" (12). If the earlier studies emphasize certainty, they continue, their volume's contributors focus on doubt. Where the piety turn focuses on "the active cultivation of embodied ethical dispositions," the anthropology of everyday Islam attends to practices that foster "the appreciation of a mindful, if often sceptical, curiosity about heterogeneity," and to Muslims who are "reflexive and outspoken on religious matters" (13). Thus certain sensibilities and attitudes—curiosity, self-reflection, ambiguity, contradiction, imperfection, doubt, skepticism—constitute the domain of the everyday, of the real or actual world. Osella and Soares (2010) and Marsden (2010) explicitly state that they are not grafting "liberal secular standards onto unsuspecting non-liberal subjects" (Marsden 2010: 68), and that these values emerge from and are just as germane to non-Western cultural traditions. We do not disagree. We are nonetheless struck by how the sensibilities and attitudes that comprise the everyday—the domain of the real—are precisely those sensibilities and attitudes most valued by the secular-humanist tradition. If one of the goals of these anthropologists is to dismantle the ontological exceptionalism often ascribed to Muslims by the secular West (an exceptionalism they believe is reiterated by scholars of Islamic piety), the reincorporation of Muslims into the realm of the ordinary hinges on showing how Muslims—or at least "everyday Muslims"—cultivate and celebrate values that are deeply familiar to secular sensibilities.

Those values, sensibilities, and attitudes are not just universalized but also naturalized as the normal state of human nature—a naturalization that contradicts these anthropologists' explicit calls to account for the diversity of Muslim life and results in an ontological differentiation between what counts as real and what is

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24. Though "Salafi" now circulates in academic, political, and media discourse as a catchall term for ultra-orthodox and/or Wahhabi-inspired Muslims, we use the term with caution, and usually to refer to other scholars' terminology. For aesthetic reasons we do not continually use scare quotes around the term, but they are always implied. See note 25 for more on the term and our reasons for caution.

unreal or exceptional. Consider, once again, Schielke's article on Ramadan, which, he argues, is an exceptional period of reinforced ethical commitment that enables a more flexible relationship to religious norms during the rest of the year. Ramadan, he writes

> is a time of exceptional morality [that] demonstrates and enforces the supremacy of God's commands by constituting a time in which morality is not situational but strict and in which religious obligations must be fulfilled. But in the end it is precisely the temporary rigor of the holy month that establishes and legitimizes the flexible nature of norms and ethics for the rest of the year. (Schielke 2009: S28)

Schielke here opposes the exceptional time of Ramadan, when moral rules are obeyed, to the time of everyday religiosity or everyday practice—the rest of the year—when morality is not strict but situational, religious obligations are not fulfilled, and individuals' relationships to norms and ethics are flexible in nature. But the conceptual/methodological contradiction elaborated earlier—i.e., that religion is defined as, on the one hand, abstract moral rules and, on the other, individual practice unrelated to and even resistant to those rules—remains. After all, the rest of the year, which is not exceptional but rather normal, is precisely not the time and space of religion, but of the everyday. For the other element of Schielke's argument (one echoed in his longer monograph and by many of his colleagues) is that playing football, having fun during Ramadan, getting bored, traveling abroad, falling in love, striving for material success, being good to one's parents, or watching porn are all illustrations of everyday conduct, and that Muslims are not solely guided by religion. Consequently, these practices represent a nonreligious realm ("the everyday"), whereas other types of practices (such as sexual restraint, praying, or fasting) are framed as religious. Within the anthropology of everyday Islam, an ontological distinction becomes established between the domain of religion (of Islam) that, paradoxically, becomes restricted to those types of conduct that are recognized and framed as disciplinary and understood as exceptional to social life. In contrast, the everyday becomes the site of flexibility, spontaneity, ambiguity, and ultimately secularity.

We see this ontological differentiation and naturalization equally occurring in the differentiation between types of Muslims. Recall that the focus on everyday Islam has emerged as a corrective to what this scholarship regards as an overemphasis on piety and ethical self-cultivation, seeking ways "to account for views that are neither clearly nor consistently in line with any grand ideology, and lives that are full of ambivalence" (Schielke 2009: S24). It ostensibly seeks to broaden the picture, to account for Muslims whose lives are not dedicated to ethical self-cultivation and self-perfection. And, beyond the simple fact that there are diverse ways of being Muslim, another justification for broadening anthropologists' analytical frameworks concerns representativity: part of the problem with the piety turn, according to its critics, is that even though "actual activists in Islamist or piety movements are relatively few" (Schielke 2012: 318), scholars of the piety turn take these "committed religious activists as paradigmatic representatives of religiosity" (Schielke 2009: S35; see also Bangstad 2011). In other words, anthropologists of everyday Islam seek to reorient the focus from the demographically minoritarian pious subject and

to bring into view ordinary Muslims, understood as the overwhelming majority in Egypt and elsewhere. As Schielke writes, "we must be careful, not to take the way from ambivalence and imperfection to clarity and commitment as the regular and typical one. . . . People always live complex lives: a person's identity is in practice dialogical, made up of different voices and experiences. . . . In consequence, people commonly shift between different roles and identities" (2009: S33).

Schielke's is a particularly interesting passage because it shows how a stated desire to expand effectively results in the exclusion of certain life forms. Schielke begins by noting that an orientation toward clarity and pious commitment is not a regular or typical one—a claim about representativity (the pious subject is a minority one)—but then quickly moves into a different kind of argument, namely, a universalist claim about the *human* subject or, as he puts it, "people"—not some people or many people, but rather *people*. He continues: "Salafis, *just like everybody else,* live everyday lives loaded with ambiguities and contradictions" (S33, emphasis added). Later he writes: "Piety does not proceed along a unilinear path. It is an ambivalent practice that is often related to specific periods in life, especially those marked by crises. . . . This is, of course, common knowledge in Egypt, as it is probably everywhere. . . . I posit that it is precisely the fragmented nature of people's biographies which, together with the ambivalent nature of most moral subjectivities, should be taken as the starting point when setting out to study moral discourse and ethical practice" (S36). Schielke has gone from a call to attend to the varied dimensions of Muslim life (which would call for varied analytical frameworks) to a series of normative claims: anthropologists should study Islam and Muslims in a very specific way because all forms of piety proceed in the same way and Muslims (like all people) are the same everywhere. The methodology proposed by Schielke and others—studying religious life as an ambivalent and contradictory endeavor—relies on stronger normative claim about human nature ("people").

That normative claim about human nature produces, in turn, a normative claim about natural (that is, proper) attitudes toward religion and, concomitantly, about the exceptionality of the Salafi Muslim. As we argued earlier, scholars like Marsden, Schielke, and Debevec seem to understand religion as a set of moral rules and as temporally exceptional—that is to say, under normal circumstances, a strong commitment to fulfilling these moral rules is restricted to exceptional ritual circumstances (for example, Ramadan). The natural attitude toward religious rules is one of ambivalence and contestation, hence the discrepancy between moral rules and actual behavior. This conceptualization of religion results in the normalization of forms of conduct that are characterized by a loose and flexible relationship to Islamic traditions and an exceptionalization of conduct that strictly adheres to, or attempts to adhere to, Islamic norms. And the term "Salafi"—a term whose analytical usage has been contested[25]—plays a central role in this delineation of Muslim

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25. The recent edited collection *Global Salafism* (Meijer 2009) represents the clearest and most explicit attempt to grasp the phenomenon of Salafism and determine its precise characteristics as a distinct tendency within Islamic revivalism. In a recent paper, however, Henri Lauzière radically historicizes the term, arguing that *salafiyya* emerged as an analytical category in the first half of the twentieth century within French Orientalist academic literature. While the term did have medieval antecedents, it was not used

life. The term "Salafi" functions as a mark of exceptionality, not merely with regard to demography—i.e., as a religious minority—but also to ontology—i.e., as a human aberration. It is used to refer to forms of religiosity seen to stand outside the domain of the everyday, that is, forms of religiosity that are extra-ordinary. More than simply an analytical or explanatory term, therefore, "Salafi" operates as a normative category to qualify which kind of actions, habits, and conduct are to be considered spontaneous and thereby natural, and which are, in contrast, the product of a strict regime of self- or other-imposed discipline and therefore the product of ideology, not "real" religion but rather politics.[26]

Indeed, Schielke's article on Ramadan and portions of his subsequent book on youth in post-2011 Egypt are as much a critique of Salafism as they are an analysis of everyday Muslim life. Schielke takes the figure of the Salafi as the paradigmatic revivalist, despite the hermeneutical and political diversity of the Islamic revival. According to Schielke, Salafism entails a commitment to absolute perfection: "To be 'committed' (*multazim*), in the dictionary of revivalist Islam, is not just to obey God's commands. It is to develop a character completely devoted to God's commands in every respect and in every moment. It is to overcome all ambivalence and to form a comprehensive and consistent God-fearing personality" (2015: 63).[27] Yet if "complexity is the normal way morality works" (53), the ostensible coherence demanded by Salafism is an impossible demand. As Schielke puts in the earlier article, the demand for moral perfection "does not mean that people would actually live this way, and therein lies both the power and the fundamental trouble of the Salafi ideal of religiosity" (2009: S32). Thus Salafism "is inherently unstable because it includes the attempt to impose on oneself a way of being that stands in contradiction with the way human personality and subjectivity actually work" (2015: 147). What is striking here is how Schielke's normative critique of Salafism relies on the universalist-naturalist understandings of both religiosity and human nature discussed earlier. Salafis, according to Schielke, make the mistake of thinking that one's life should and can be lived such that "moral rules" and "actual practice" might be aligned as much as possible. But, Schielke argues, "people" do not and cannot live this way. The "fundamental trouble" with Salafism is that it is an unnatural way to live; Salafis not only misunderstand the place of religion—as an abstract and other-worldly phenomenon, it should remain outside the real and

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to determine and qualify distinct religious tendencies but rather to point to certain theological disagreements. It is through the work of Louis Massignon that the term emerged as a distinct category that would come to be adopted within and outside the Arab world (2010: 384).

26. Sindre Bangstad (2011) criticizes Mahmood for not calling her interlocutors by their proper name—Salafis—and thereby occluding their true (and dangerous) political orientations.

27. It should be noted that despite the ethnographic richness of *Egypt in the future tense*, Schielke's ethnography of Salafism is quite thin. Schielke's account of Salafism seems to rely almost entirely on three former Salafi activists, and even though he notes that "not all experiments with Salafi (or other) commitment are transient" and that "[many people join the movement and stay for the rest of their life" (2015: 146), we get no sense of these people.

actual world of everyday life—but they also fundamentally contravene human nature itself. Their advocacy of coherence, certainty, and the active commitment to a pious and virtuous life impinges on everyday Muslims' inclinations—that is, natural, human inclinations—toward contradiction, doubt, curiosity, self-reflection, ambiguity, imperfection, and skepticism.

Moreover, the unnaturalness—the inhumanity—of Salafism makes it dangerous not only to non-Salafis but also to Salafis themselves. Schielke writes,

> the Salafi discourse of piety with its tremendous emphasis on purity makes it very difficult to find a balance with different desires. . . . There is neither a return to the relative comfort of the negotiated ambiguity of living for God in Ramadan and for oneself for the rest of the year, nor comfort in the rigid understanding of religion. Since religion stands totally beyond critique, people can only search for faults in themselves. . . . As a consequence the wave of Salafi religiosity with its insistence on purity and perfection actually intensifies the fragmentation and contradictions in young people's lives. (Schielke 2009: S34)

Thus a central danger of Salafism—other than posing a problem to everyday Muslims—is that it is *auto*-destructive, both psychically damaging and, ultimately, ontologically unsustainable. Despite Schielke's earlier claims that ambiguity is an essential part of life itself, it is now Salafis who become responsible for fragmenting the everyday subject. Salafism, Schielke contends, puts considerable pressure on an individual's psyche by proffering an unattainable model of ethical perfection: "On the one hand, people can hold to it without having to fully realize it, and its being unrealized allows it to remain pure and simple while life is messy and complex. On the other hand, however, it can become a serious obstacle in people's lives, a debate-killing argument that can lead people into serious crisis and dead end" (2009: S32). The ostensible escape Salafism offers from the messy reality of life ends up causing the practitioner serious psychic harm. And in so doing, Salafism reveals itself to be an unsustainable ideological project: "Salafis, just like everybody else, live everyday lives loaded with ambiguities and contradictions. . . . The rigour of Salafi piety that makes it so attractive in the mess of the everyday also makes it difficult to maintain in the face of ambivalent feelings" (Schielke 2009: S33). Salafism, it turns out, is not only unnatural; it is also difficult to sustain precisely because it is unnatural. Over the long term, Salafism and the pious Muslim subject aiming at ethical perfection are ontological impossibilities.

Let us reiterate that we have no interest in a defense of Salafism. Nor is our critique of the scholarship we have discussed prompted by a desire to dismiss the ethnographic quality of many of these studies or to do away with the concept of the everyday. As noted earlier, the concept has long had an important and critically vital place within anthropology. Our disagreement lies in how this concept has come to be used to differentiate empirically between practices seen as representative of everyday life and those that are not in some of this literature. We are disturbed by the way in which such use of the everyday reproduces a series of cascading normative distinctions between everyday and exceptional, real and not real, natural and unhealthy, human and ontologically impossible. Rather than shedding light on the various ways in which religious—as well as other—constraints and

commitments inform and structure human conduct, and how these are continuously negotiated, the concept of the everyday here assumes that some practices are more natural—more human—than others. In so doing, it delegitimizes—renders unnatural—particular modes of conduct and forms of life, which are regarded as psychically damaging, ontologically impossible, and an effect of political ideology rather than proper ethics or religion.

Conclusion

Scholars have long argued that the subjective commitments of anthropologists play a central role not simply in analyzing their objects of study but also in determining and defining them in the first place. Several authors have focused, for instance, on the way authoritative discourses construct the distinct social phenomena—religion, rationality, the economy, village life—under ethnographic study (Asad 1973, 1993; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Hymes 1972; Scott 1991; Trouillot 2003). Others have addressed the problem of cultural translation—i.e., the difficulty of rendering particular concepts, life-worlds, and imaginaries intelligible in the language of the social sciences (Asad 1986a; Chakrabarty 2000; Evans-Pritchard 1976; Leenhardt 1979; Strathern 1990). These critiques have enabled much-needed reflection about anthropology's particular epistemological and semiotic commitments (or lack thereof). They have led to the understanding that various social phenomena do not merely exist in the world as first-order empirical realities but are, rather, always already mediated—for the "native" and the anthropologist. Finally, these critiques have prompted an ongoing conversation about the discursive and structural conditions under which social phenomena are turned into discrete objects of observation and analysis. Discussion of anthropology's epistemological, semiotic, and political conditions of possibility is far from exhausted, of course, and new scholarship continues to contribute to our critical awareness about the ethnographer's role in determining her object of study, about the epistemological and semiotic relevance of "native" concepts and categories, and about the vocabularies and scripts through which we understand and frame particular phenomena.

This essay is part of that broader conversation, and it has sought to examine the conceptual and epistemological contours of recent calls to study "everyday Islam." As we observed, this scholarship emerged as a critique of what it sees as a scholarly overemphasis on piety and ethical norms. It seeks to show that the pious Muslim is neither paradigmatic nor representative, hence its investment in demonstrating the moments of discontinuity, fracture, ambivalence, and incoherence in Muslims' lives. Yet these scholars' insistence on ambiguity and their concomitant critique of norms rely, we suggested, on a particular understanding of agency that posits the self as external to and independent of structure of powers (i.e., religion). Moreover, we argued, subjects, practices, and ethical orientations not characterized by celebratory incoherence and ambiguity are relegated outside the everyday and become, as a consequence, unworthy of ethnographic attention. As we demonstrated in the latter part of the paper, the language of the everyday results in the ontological disqualification of a strong commitment to religious norms. Terms such as *Salafi* or *activist* have a normative rather than analytical function: they serve to dislocate

such commitment from the realm of everyday life, framing it as the outcome of political or ideological manipulations. The language of the everyday, we concluded, does not merely operate as a descriptive account that unravels the imponderabilities of life; it is also a normative vocabulary that serves to disqualify the ontological validity of particular life-worlds by delineating them as not-everyday, and, ultimately, as unreal.

It is worth noting how much that normative vocabulary retrenches a series of secular-modern ethical-political commitments. As Hirschkind (2014) writes in a short commentary for the curated collection on "Everyday Islam" by *Cultural Anthropology*, the space of the everyday "bears a strong affinity to what has conventionally been called the secular; namely, a domain of ambiguity, contingency, skepticism, and pragmatic concern, one relatively immune to the powers of religious discipline and normativity." Hirschkind also perceptively points to the ongoing significance of Edward Said's (1979) critique of Orientalism in the study of Islam and Muslim societies. Writing against a tradition of Orientalist scholarship that conjured Muslims as intractably attached to an ossified, text-based set of religious norms, many contemporary anthropologists insist on attending to practice instead of text, doubt instead of certainty, resistance instead of submission to norms. But there is a certain irony to Said's long intellectual shadow over this work, for the anti-Orientalizing gesture of much of the scholarship under discussion produces not only the familiar everyday Muslim but also the Salafi or activist Muslim—secular modernity's radical Other. Indeed, as Susan Harding (1991) argues in her important essay "Representing fundamentalism," the secular-modern subject is secured through the "fundamentalist" and an accompanying series of polarities: belief versus doubt, literal versus critical, backward versus modern. Although Harding was writing about Christian fundamentalists in the United States, her analysis applies equally well to the figure of the Salafi. Harding writes that certain "repugnant" groups do not come in for the same anti-Orientalizing gesture of progressive social scientists, whose "tools of cultural criticism are better suited for some 'others' and not other 'others'—specifically, for cultural 'others' constituted by discourses of race/sex/class/ethnicity/colonialism but not religion." In other words, "many modernist presuppositions still operate uncritically within contemporary studies of politics and culture . . . generating a radically parochial imaginary of the margins in which only sanctioned cultural 'others' survive." Moreover, given the secularity of the social sciences' epistemological commitments, disrupting "academic representations of fundamentalists . . . may provoke charges of consorting with 'them,' the opponents of [secular] modernity, progress, enlightenment, truth, and reason" (Harding 1991: 375–76). Unsurprisingly, anthropologists of ultra-conservative Muslims have been accused of, at best, downplaying the deleterious effects of Salafism or, at worst, being apologists for Salafism (see, e.g., Abbas 2013; Bangstad 2011; Gourgouris 2013; Robbins 2013).

Yet the piety turn, as it has been called, and the more general turn to ethics within the discipline of anthropology, have opened up avenues of inquiry that we as scholars continue to find productive, not only for better understanding the nature of certain forms of religiosity but also for critically interrogating the secular-liberal presuppositions that underpin much of our lives and, as a result, for better understanding the nature of certain forms of secularity. We therefore find some

anthropologists' dismissal of Salafis as incoherent and even inhuman subjects particularly troubling for its refusal to engage with and be engaged by "the systematicity and reason of the unfamiliar, the strange, or the intransigent" (Mahmood 2005: 199). That dismissal recalls anthropology's fraught relationship with so-called local knowledge and what Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2003) called "the epistemological status of the native voice." Trouillot contended that "anthropologists never give the people they study the right to be as knowledgeable or, more precisely, to have the same kind of knowledge about their own societies as ethnographers" (2003: 129). At the same time, according to the discipline's own laudatory self-narrative, much of what distinguishes anthropology from its sister social sciences is precisely its commitment to taking native voices seriously. That commitment, we want to argue, must remain even when faced with interlocutors we might initially find abhorrent. Moreover, taking our interlocutors seriously means accepting them as sources of knowledge and as theorists in their own right, whose visions can critically interrogate, unsettle, and remake—and not only confirm—our own understandings and theorizations of the world. As Tim Ingold argues, the distinction between subjective participation and objective observation is untenable: participant observation is an ontological commitment to learning from and with others, and "to practice anthropology is to undergo an education, as much within as beyond the academy" (2014: 392). Participant observation is therefore an "unnerving" enterprise and one that "entail[s] considerable existential risk" (389).

We recognize that at a time in which the "Muslim question" (Norton 2013) has emerged as a civilizational fault-line, accounts that underscore Muslim alterity in order to de-familiarize dominant secular-liberal assumptions can sometimes be recuperated as evidence of a clash of civilizations. In fact, many of the anthropologists of everyday Islam we have discussed see themselves as working against the unrelenting de-humanization of Muslims by highlighting similarity rather than radical difference and offering an account of the ordinariness of Muslims the world over. Yet, as we have argued, attempts to emphasize (most) Muslims' sameness in order to undermine a clash of civilizations framework can end up producing certain Muslims as aberrational, unnatural, and even inhuman. Ben Highmore reminds us in the introductory notes to *The everyday life reader* that reiterating sameness comes at a double cost: the first is that of normalizing and universalizing one's own values and worldviews; the second is that of creating what he calls "implicit 'others,'" or those "who supposedly live outside the ordinary, the everyday" (2002: 1). The anthropology of Islam, it would seem, faces an impasse in which Muslims only serve as evidence in a conversation between Western interlocutors about the unity or diversity of humankind. One way forward, we want to suggest, might entail finding analytical language that does not reproduce the sameness/difference paradigm seemingly endemic to anthropology. Another might be an analytical and methodological volte-face, one that inquires into why certain phenomena become problems or questions (the Muslim question, the Jewish question) in the first place. In conclusion, then, we want to reiterate that our critical engagement with anthropologists of everyday Islam is meant to be just that: critical *engagement*. Although we may disagree on certain analytical and methodological approaches, we nonetheless share a sense of dismay about the neo-imperialist nature of Euro-American engagement with the Muslim world. Indeed, the everyday might be the

proper starting place for any ethnography committed to critical de-familiarization precisely by making legible and viable the imaginaries, hopes, and aspirations that guide the everyday conduct of people considered odd, exceptional, or extraordinary, without simply rendering them as similar to "us." That commitment has long been the lynchpin of the discipline of anthropology; it remains vital to any serious consideration of the Muslim world.

Acknowledgements

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Redécouvrir le musulman « ordinaire » : notes sur une scission anthropologique

Résumé : Cet article examine de manière critique les incitations récentes, formulées par des anthropologues, à étudier ce qu'ils appellent « l'islam ordinaire ». Nous situons cette littérature récente au carrefour de deux tensions centrales de l'anthropologie : d'une part, ses engagements avec à la fois les similarités et les différences au sein de l'humanité dans son ensemble, et d'autre part, sa volonté de témoigner simultanément des structures sociales dominantes et des formes de résistance individuelle. Nous suggérons que le concept d'islam ordinaire souligne un aspect de ces débats paradigmatiques, en mettant en avant l'universel et en insistant sur l'opposition aux normes. Nous étudions alors la différence faite dans cette littérature entre les musulmans ordinaires et les musulmans salafistes. Nous mettons en avant le fait que l'investissement actuel dans la notion d'islam ordinaire discrédite la validité, la réalité et l'ontologie de ceux qui sont présentés comme des musulmans salafistes, et met à mal les ethnographies de la vie musulmane ultra-orthodoxe. Alors même que les études de l'islam ordinaire tentent de développer l'anthropologie de l'islam, elles limitent son expansion en définissant très étroitement son objet légitime.

Nadia Fadil is Assistant Professor in the Interculturalism, Migration, and Minorities Research Centre (IMMRC) at the Anthropology Department of the KU Leuven. Her research interests revolve around questions of secularism, religion, and Islam.

Nadia Fadil
Anthropology Department
Interculturalism, Migration, and Minorities Research Centre
KU Leuven
Parkstraat 45—Box 3615
3000 Leuven, Belgium
Nadia.Fadil@soc.kuleuven.be

Mayanthi L. Fernando is Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Her first book, *The republic unsettled: Muslim French and the contradictions of secularism* (Duke University Press, 2014), addresses the intersection of religion and politics in contemporary France. She has recently begun to work on law, embodiment, and the sex/gender norms of secularity.

Mayanthi L. Fernando
Anthropology Department
361 Social Science 1
University of California, Santa Cruz
1156 High Street, Santa Cruz, CA 95064 USA
mfernan3@ucsc.edu