Cough sweets and angels: the ordinary ethics of the extraordinary in Sufi practice in Lebanon

One day in 2007 I met my friend Muhammad by the mosque in West Beirut where we would often get together during my fieldwork.[1] Despite his almost constant unemployment he was, as ever, dressed smartly in a black short-sleeved shirt, grey slacks and good shoes, with a green knitted cap in his hand indicating his adherence to the Rifa'i Sufi way. The first thing he wanted to tell me was that he had eaten a light bulb (a fluorescent tube, to be exact) that day. 'How was it?', I wondered. 'Fine', he answered in a matter-of-fact tone. He had been practising. Such feats were to be expected of an aspiring virtuoso Sufi, follower of a path (*tariqa*) known for its practices of self-mortification. I was nevertheless somewhat taken aback, not least by the conjuncture of what seemed to me an extraordinary claim and the common-place context in which it was situated.

This was not the only instance of the simultaneity of the ordinary and the extraordinary in my experience of Sufi practice in Lebanon, which developed through and alongside my main research focus, the wider ecology of sharia discourse. In what was to become for me a defining image of this sometimes bathetic wonderful, packets of powerful cough sweets would be passed around at devotional sessions in order to maximize the chances of an angel attending. Angels do not like strong unpleasant smells like onion and garlic, which one would ideally avoid eating beforehand. But Halls Mentholyptus lozenges and super-strong mints serve as effective prophylactics.[2]

In this paper I am interested in exactly this simultaneity of the extraordinary and the ordinary. Although I confine my discussion to religious settings, one would hardly need to. Much the same matter-of-fact tone was often employed in Lebanon when discussing the series of car bombs and political disasters of that time, as Sami Hermez (2012) has described. Hermez cites a distinguished body of work that documents people's attempts to live ordinary lives in the midst of extraordinarily unsettled times, full of troubles and violence that may themselves become ordinary for those that endure them (e.g. Das 2007; Kelly 2008). Times were indeed turbulent in Lebanon in 2007 and 2008. Given the tragic destruction in neighbouring Syria, they are still more so now. But ordinary religious lives continued, and I hope that it is not misplaced to document them here, in the shadow of the current disaster.

More than simultaneous, the ordinary and the extraordinary, in these religious settings at least, would seem interdependent. On the one hand, it is through its very difference from the ordinary that the extraordinary takes on its defining quality and power. In an analysis of 'wonder discourse' in the Solomon Islands, Michael Scott (n.d.) draws on the work of Mary-Jane Rubenstein (2008), writing on the place of wonder and awe in the philosophical tradition. Rubenstein notes a possible etymological link between 'wonder' and 'wound': wonder can thus be seen as 'a kind of wound in the everyday', an 'originary rift' or 'unsuturable gash' that can 'open thought' (ibid: 10-11). Wonder is productive of philosophical and scientific endeavour. The same is clearly true of other traditions. Political anthropology has described how the extraordinary,

in the form of revolutions and other great historical events, can lead to novel crystallisations of identity and action (see e.g. Humphrey 2008).[3] And wonder is religiously productive too. Max Weber famously located the source of charismatic (not necessarily religious) authority in a break with everydayness (Adair-Toteff 2005: 194). The production of charisma – 'specifically outside the realm of every-day routine' – thus depends on the performance of the extraordinary and 'is very often thought of as resting on magical powers', 'guaranteed by what is held to be a "sign" or proof, originally always a miracle' (Weber in Eisenstadt 1968: 48-49, 51). In this regard, Rubenstein's image of the wound in the everyday resonates powerfully with some of the Sufi practices I discuss here, notably techniques of bodily (non-) harm including the piercing of the body with spikes and blades (*darb al-shish*, or *darb al-silah*). In witnessing such wounds in the body – wounds that do not wound in the ordinary way – one sees proof of the transcendent divine order, the hidden esoteric (*batin*), lying beyond everyday understandings of the universe. Only with divine assistance could one perform such extraordinary feats: in Arabic, *karamat*, 'miracles' or, better perhaps, 'marvels' (Gardet 2013) or 'grace acts' (Gilsenan 1973: 21), which constitute a 'breaking of the normal order' (*khariq li-l-'ada*).[4]

On the other hand, one can also learn to see the extraordinary in the seemingly ordinary, as Michael Gilsenan (1973, 1982) has so eloquently described for the Hamidiyya-Shadhiliyya Sufi path he studied in Egypt. Everyday miracles can include finding a banknote when one needs one, or even catching an unusually fast bus, if only one learns to recognize them (1973: 31; 1982: 80, 83).[5] Others

might miss them. The extraordinary does not, then, necessarily speak for itself. As Weber says, 'It is recognition … which is decisive for the validity of charisma' (Eisenstadt 1968: 48-49). Or in Gilsenan's terms, 'The "miracle" is in the eye of the believer' (1973: 32).

First one has to come to learn to perceive the miraculous: there are pedagogies of the extraordinary. And then such a perception must be recognized by others so as to be put to work socially. In this regard, as Stephan Feuchtwang notes (2008: 93), discussions of charisma after Weber often contrast the charismatic moment with its subsequent routinization and institutionalization. But this is to obscure a necessary condition of the charismatic moment itself: 'Charisma is always dependent on what is routine and institutionalized at the time.' That includes techniques and disciplines for producing visionary experiences, but also their appropriate precedents, or what Feuchtwang terms the 'repertoire for expectations of the extraordinary' (ibid.: 94). The extraordinary must also be reproducible: it must bear repetition – even every day – without it becoming ordinary. And conversely, for the virtuoso practitioner of the extraordinary, for whom such things are routine, a certain nonchalance, or matter-of-factness, may at times be the most appropriate aesthetic with regard to one's powers, as in Muhammad's casual noting of his consumption of a light bulb. Producing and maintaining the wondrous nature of the extraordinary, while harnessing it, thus requires careful work, on the self and with others.

In this article, echoing Scott's interest in wonder discourse, I follow Gilsenan's example in mapping out something of the social life of the extraordinary, in its

more banal manifestations, but also the more spectacular ones of *darb al-shish*. If it seems redundant to revisit Weber's hugely influential discussion of charisma (and I largely leave it aside in the remainder of this paper), it must nevertheless be worthwhile to remember that even miracles have their social dimensions. In recent anthropology, and especially within the anthropology of Islam, there has been much discussion of these sorts of work on the self and others, framed as 'ethics' (see e.g. Laidlaw 2013; for my own contribution see Clarke 2012). James Faubion, a notable contributor to this new anthropology of ethics, takes up Weber's charismatic moment as the site of ethical change and innovation, Weber's 'primal sociological scene' in Faubion's terms (2010: 88). For Weber the charismatic moment is one where rules cease to apply (Eisenstadt 1968: 52), or as Faubion puts it, 'there is no such thing as ethics' (2010: 88). While fully acknowledging that Weber and Faubion have in mind an ideal type of such a moment, I want to suggest that in practice the extraordinary surely has its ethics too, as I will go on to illustrate.

My interest in the ethics of the extraordinary runs somewhat counter to some recent moves in the anthropology of Islam and the wider anthropology of ethics, which are oriented more towards the quotidian. Samuli Schielke (2009, 2010), for instance, has argued for a turn to the ordinary and everyday within the anthropology of Islam, as he has elsewhere, writing with Liza Debevec, for the anthropology of religion more generally (Schielke and Debevec 2012, here as an alternative to the problematic category of 'popular religion'). This is, I should say, not so much in opposition to an interest in Sufi wonders (in which he also has a stake: see Schielke 2012), as in reaction to a perceived privileging

within the anthropology of Islam of religious specialists and virtuosos over ordinary folk, in particular in the high-profile work of Saba Mahmood (2005) and Charles Hirschkind (2006), which focuses on coherent projects of virtuous self-fashioning within the terms of the Islamic tradition. This, Schielke claims, is unrealistic: ordinary Muslim moral lives are incoherent, ambivalent and fragmented; their projects of virtuous improvement often end in failure; one needs instead to 'do justice to the complex and often contradictory nature of everyday experience', and how ordinary people try to make sense of the 'grand schemes' of religion within it (2009: S26; 2010: 14). And the anthropology of ethics, to which Mahmood and Hirschkind's studies of religious virtuosos have made an important contribution, has also taken a recent turn towards the quotidian in the form of calls for a focus now on 'ordinary ethics'. In a programmatic introduction to a wide-ranging collection of essays of that title, Michael Lambek tells us that for ordinary ethicists, 'the focus is less on special cases, unusual circumstances, new horizons, professional rationalizations, or contested forms of authorization than on everyday comportment and understanding'.[6] This might itself entail a shift away from studying religious ethics, for 'Through religion, the ordinary is transcended and ethics intellectualized, materialized, or transcendentalized' (Lambek 2010: 3).

In response, I have taken up these terms, if rather against their grain: my subject here is the ordinary ethics of the extraordinary (cf. Lambek 2010: 20; Joosse 2012; Rey 2012; Seale-Collazo 2012). That somewhat paradoxical formulation serves, I hope, to point up the interdependence of the ordinary and the extraordinary to which I have already alluded, and thus also some

discomfort with the notion that one could frame the anthropological project in terms of one as opposed (by implication) to the other. It is not just that, as Gilsenan (2000: 599) says, 'There is too much magic and enchantment in the world to be ignored'. It is also that under closer examination the nature of the ordinary, like that of the extraordinary, becomes impossibly elusive. I start with some background on Sufi devotional practice, before presenting my ethnography of the ordinary ethics of the extraordinary in Lebanon and then ending by thinking through further the notion of a turn to the ordinary in the anthropology of Islam and ethics.

Sufi ways and marvels

Sufism (*tasawwuf*) is commonly thought of as the mystical tradition in Islam (see e.g. Baldick 1989). In my friend Muhammad's broad-brush account for me, a layman, while the basic demands of Islam are clear, there are further, 'extra' or 'bonus' (using the English) possibilities, prayers and other devotions over and above the required, some people praying 'all night'. Certain formulae are like keys (*mafatih*, sing. *miftah*) opening new horizons: verses of the Quran, replete with its own secrets, but also rosaries (*awrad*, sing. *wird*) – concatenations of prayers and repeated formulae such as 'There is no God but God' (*la illaha ill-Allah*) and 'Glory be to God' (*subhan Allah*). Such rosaries could, according to Muhammad, stretch to 33,000, even 55,000 repetitions or more, told off against a *misbaha*, a string of prayer beads like his plain wooden one. Through such practices Muslims can gain access to experience of the divine, as mediated through God's Prophet, Muhammad, and then a further chain (*silsila*) of mediators stretching through his companions, his family (*ahl*

al-bayt), and the great saints down to today. Distinct chains of mediators, imagined in a genealogical mode, correspond with distinct 'ways' or 'paths' (*turuq*, sing. *tariqa*) towards the divine – or 'orders' in an older formulation that perhaps over-concretized their social solidarity (Baldick 1989: 73-5). Although all the paths are directed towards the same end, there is some competition as to their relative merits.

Such practice is thus both an individual project directed towards personal experience and salvation, and one that is socially mediated. In contemporary Lebanon at least, besides the need for a teacher, groups of devotees come together more or less regularly for communal worship, in events in celebration of the Prophet (*mawlid*s) with beautiful poetry, or more restricted sessions to 'presence' the divine (*hadra*s) through remembrance (*dhikr*) of God. Such remembrance is, depending on the order, sometimes silent, 'in the heart', but more often vocal and frequently musical, although to use the terms 'music' or 'song', both formally suspect in Islamic legal discourse, is to point to the potentially controversial nature of such practices (Johansen 1996: 74-82). Worshippers can come to experience ecstasy, which may be expressed in dramatic forms, again often controversial.

My own involvement grew organically out of wider research into the social life of the sharia, which centred on Lebanon's sharia courts and the offices of its major religious authorities (Clarke 2010, 2012). One of a number of sharia court judges I was working with, who I call here Shaykh Mahmud, was also leader of the local branch of a path founded in Iraqi-Iranian Kurdistan. Shaykh

Mahmud invited me to attend the branch's sessions at the path's lodge in West Beirut, and I became a regular, attending some 30 sessions over nine months of fieldwork. The saintly shaykh of this way, with whom Shaykh Mahmud had studied, had been initiated into two important paths, the Qadiri and the Naqshbandi. From the Naqshbandis, the circle took a silent remembrance of God; from the Qadiris, they took remembrance out loud, chanting the name of God with ever-greater passion until many of the initiates reached states of ecstasy, exuberantly expressed. This union of the more restrained with the more exuberant spoke to the different styles and status of Shaykh Mahmud and some of his more middle-class followers on the one hand, and the bulk of the initiates on the other, not so well off, some coming from the Palestinian refugee camps. (My experiences were all with men; a women's circle would meet simultaneously in an adjacent room.) Shaykh Mahmud would refer to himself with me as Naqshbandi pure and simple, attracted to the path because its *dhikr* is silent, 'in the heart', and thus more personal and private.[7]

From my own, admittedly relatively limited observations, I would say that Sufism more generally is something of an intimate matter in contemporary Sunni Lebanon, if certainly not a rarity.[8] In the wider Middle East, Sufi practices and practitioners have been the target of polemic and intermittent persecution from both Salafist Sunnism and contemporary Twelver Shi'ism, and have been eschewed by modernist (secular and religious) discourse as superstitious, backward and in some sense embarrassing (De Jong and Radtke 1999; Gilsenan 1973: 71-72; 2000). Mainstream Lebanese Sunni Islam, is, in my largely Beirut-centred experience at any rate, shot through with practices

that might be termed ‘Sufistic’, theological niceties aside: many mosques hold *mawlid*s; supererogatory prayers and other devotions are widely performed. But dedicated *tasawwuf* is, I would say, nevertheless marked as something apart, and perceived by the devotees I met at least as under attack from vaguely defined (if certainly not illusory) ‘Wahhabi’ forces.

---

[1] Given the controversial nature of some of the practices I describe, I have changed people’s names throughout. My fieldwork built on a previous project in Lebanon (Clarke 2009) and was carried out in 2007 (3 months) and 2008 (6 months). It centred on Lebanon’s sharia courts and the offices of major religious authorities, mainly in Beirut. But I followed my subjects, mostly Islamic religious professionals (shaykhs), into the mosques where they worshipped and preached and, in some cases, into the Sufi circles they led as I describe here (and see Clarke 2013).

[2] For the same reason, services are also accompanied by the ubiquitous use and sharing of perfume (‘*atr*). Angels are all around us, if only we can learn to see them: see also Mittermaier 2011: 84ff., 101.

[3] As one reviewer pointed out to me.

[4] Miracles proper (*mu‘jizat*) are the preserve of prophets. See also Johansen 1996: 45-49, 115-19. Gardet (2013) suggests that the word *karama* was shaped as a distinctive form of its Arabic root (*k-r-m*) through assimilation to the Greek *charisma*. ‘Ordinary’ and ‘everyday’ might be *‘adi* in Arabic, ‘extraordinary’ *khariq li-l-‘ada*, as above, or, less stiffly, *‘ajib*.

[5] For other examples see De Jong 1976: 34, Biegman 1990: 81, Hoffman 1995: 101, Schielke 2012: 24.

Early on in our relationship, Shaykh Mahmud had asked Muhammad, who was not a follower of Shaykh Mahmud's way but had happened to be near at hand, to keep an eye on me. Muhammad had recently entered into practice with another shaykh, a teacher of the Rifa'i way, Shaykh 'Ali. Shaykh 'Ali was relatively young, in his thirties to Shaykh Mahmud's fifties I would estimate, and Syrian, perhaps adding to his authenticity (Lebanon often being seen as less 'Islamic'), but also, given his lack of Lebanese identity papers, contributing to the precariousness of his existence. He was based in Tripoli, north of Beirut, which made him relatively inaccessible due to the very difficult security situation following the major confrontation between the extremist Salafi group Fatah al-Islam and the Lebanese army in the nearby Nahr el-Barid Palestinian refugee camp. Movement between Beirut and Tripoli was restricted; Shaykh 'Ali and his largely working-class followers, many again, according to Muhammad, drawn from the Palestinian camps, were not well connected; and any involvement in Islamic religious activity was, in the climate then prevailing, somewhat suspicious. The difficulty of course added to the sense of occasion when we did manage to visit Shaykh 'Ali, although the opportunities were limited. In this case I could only visit four times in all –

[6] Contrast Zigon's (2007) Heideggerian notion of ethics emerging from everyday, unreflective morality at (extraordinary?) moments of 'moral breakdown'. Cf. Laidlaw 2013: 116-9.

[7] The Naqshbandiyya, by contrast with, say, the Rifa'iyya, have become known for a 'reformist' orientation (Weismann 2007). The contrast is, however, over-simplistic (Eich 2003).

[8] There is very little literature on Sufism in Lebanon that might help me to provide a more fully contextualised account, but see e.g. Habibis 1992.

and my knowledge of Shaykh ‘Ali’s circle is not as detailed as one would ideally want – although these were field experiences of great richness and intensity.

The Rifa‘i way has something of a special notoriety due to some of its more extreme reported practices, including the *darb al-shish* and other extraordinary feats like fire-eating and snake-charming, although these are not, it should be stressed, unique to it.[9] These practices have a long and controversial history, appearing in early Arabic accounts of the way (Trimingham 1971: 37-38) and an object of fascination for European travellers and Orientalists. Edward Lane, in his celebrated account of nineteenth century Egypt, described Rifa‘i practices of snake-charming, body-piercing, fire- and glass-eating, and, most famously, the *dawsa* of another path, the Sa‘di way, where the shaykh of the order rode on a horse over the unharmed prostrate bodies of his followers.[10]

[9] There is next to nothing on the Rifa‘iyya in Lebanon, but for Syria see De Jong 1985: 215-216, Pinto 2010, and Weismann 2004: 306-7; for Egypt see Bannerth 1970 and De Jong 1976, 1978. I owe several references to Popovic (1993: 43). For analogous practices elsewhere see e.g. Crapanzano 1973.

[10] Lane 1860: 241-2, 245, 383, 483. In an excellent example of what Edward Said called the ‘citationary’ nature of Orientalist writing, Brown’s *The dervishes* (1868) cites Lane at length, and also reproduces the section on Sufism in d’Ohsson’s 18th c. *Tableau général* of the Ottoman Empire, including its rich account of Rifa‘i practice. That is then further reproduced, without comment or indication that the author is drawing on material of more than a century previous, in Garnett’s *Mysticism and magic in Turkey* (d’Ohsson 1791: 641-8; Brown 1868: 219-23; Garnett 1912: 128-31).

These Sufi practices became incorporated into European practices of spectacle and tourism, the 'Howling Dervishes', as the Rifa'iyya became known, a must-see for the traveller to Constantinople, alongside the 'Whirling Dervishes', the Mawlawis.[11] A famous North African order, the 'Isawiyya, even toured Europe, with shows in Paris and London (Trumbull 2007: 468-73; Jones 2010: 85-89). Performance, especially for money, entailed, for Europeans, inauthenticity. And in keeping with what Graham Jones (2010: 68) calls 'the normative ontology of Western modernity', Europeans were often sceptical of these Sufi claims to the extraordinary.[12] For Lane, for instance, such feats as inserting spikes into the eye without apparent harm were 'jugglery', 'a very clever piece of deception' (albeit 'inferior to the most expert of the Indians') and a 'trick … very well performed' (1860: 241, 483). As Jones fascinatingly describes, the French went so far as to dispatch their leading magician, Jean Eugène Robert-Houdin, to Algeria in 1856 in order to discredit the purported miracles of the Sufi *marabout*s, feared as possible leaders of anti-colonial revolt, by performing his own amazing illusions. Others, such as Mesmerists and Spiritists, sought to explain these feats not as miracles or tricks but as

[11] Brown 1868: 51; Gautier 1854: 145; Anderson 1923: 181; for Egypt see Johansen 1996: 25-26; and cf. Dirks 1997 on similar displays in colonial India.

[12] Brown 1868: 223; Jones 2010: 67, 74, 81; Trumbull 2007: 475-77; Trimingham 1971: 39n4. For Gautier (1854: 155-6), a disciple's transfixing of his cheeks with a spike 'would have seemed like some trick of a pantomime, but for the horrible consciousness of its reality'. Among the 'stunts', Anderson finds '*bona-fide* cases', the performers 'being so close we could easily see there was absolutely no deception' (1923: 184-5). For a discussion of such scepticism in different contexts see Taussig 2003.

'natural effects with an unknown cause' (Jones 2010: 91-2; see also Trumbull 2007: 473-75).

Public performance of such acts, such as at processions on saints' days (*mawlid*s), was not, however, a mere function of European involvement; and the long-standing polemical exchanges within the Islamic tradition over the propriety of various aspects of Sufi practice had included similar accusations of trickery (Eich 2003: 80; Gardet 2013). But, in an era of emerging nationalist cultural intimacy, the fascinated disapproval of Europeans led to attempts to ban such practices, and similar concerns continue today: the official heads of the Rifa'i way in Egypt, for instance, police public gatherings to eliminate performances of the spectacular; a distinction may, however, be drawn between public and private practice, where different standards might apply.[13] Such feats continue, as I saw in Lebanon.[14] But their current intimacy and contestability need to be recognised and remembered when I turn to discussing them below.

[13] De Jong 1978: 94; Johansen 1996: 22-23, 72-73, 82-8, 164, 166; Trimingham 1971: 247; Trumbull 2007: 478-80; for the Rifa'iyya, Biegman 1990: 115, 118; Eich 2003: 79; Pinto 2006: 191, 193; Schielke 2012: 182. 'Cultural intimacy' is Herzfeld's (1997) term: cf. Pinto 2010: 472. The 19th c. restrictions in Egypt specifically banned 'the use of the sword, the eating of live coal, serpents, glass, the striking of oneself with cannon-balls and the like *in public processions or fairs*' (De Jong 1978: 197, my emphasis).

[14] Pinto (2010: 468-9) very well describes a Rifa'i *darb al-shish* in contemporary Syria. See also de Jong 1976: 33-4, 1985: 213; Biegman 1990: 118, 160-4. Hoffman (1995: 98-101) reports an underwhelming instance.

Everyday enchantment

The bulk of the extraordinary is, however, of a more everyday nature. Muhammad, then in his early thirties, was educated, trained in hotel management, but not at all well off. With no employment to be found in Lebanon, he had not had a job for years (although he later did obtain work in Saudi Arabia): sometimes he would go without food for days; he perforce remained single, living some way out of town in the ramshackle suburb around the shrine of Imam ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Awza‘i (d. 774), where he loved to spend hours at prayer. So he would take me to the West Beirut apartment of his older brother Ahmad, also long out of work, the tiny flat a modest home for his growing family. And yet Ahmad of course provided embarrassingly lavish dinners in my honour when we visited. ‘We don’t think about tomorrow’, he would say. ‘God will provide.’ I can only hope so.

Despite their material frustrations, their everyday lives were saturated with enchantment, our conversations rich in swapped dreams and portents.[15] When we first came, unannounced, to Ahmad’s flat, Ahmad said straight out, ‘I knew you would come!’ ‘Ah ha!’ replied Muhammad knowingly. Such claims of pre-cognition were repeated. When a car bomb exploded in the nearby area of Verdun, I was told, Muhammad had rung Ahmad from Tripoli a few minutes later asking, ‘What’s this bomb in Verdun?’, before it had been in the news and anyone knew.

[15] For a detailed study in Egypt see Mittermaier 2011. As Mittermaier notes, like much of the extraordinary, dream visions are ‘tricky’, because they lack witnesses but need recognition by others (2011: 124).

In this respect, the powers of Muhammad's shaykh, Shaykh 'Ali, were considerable. When we first met, he told me that he had had a vision, a message (*risala*), of my activities beforehand: 'You ask a lot of questions', he knew already. All our meetings with him would be unpredictable, nominally unscheduled. But whenever we finally did make it to Tripoli, he would be completely unsurprised. He knew we were coming. In a quintessential example of the inextricability of the ordinary and the marvellous, it is of the essence of such extraordinary power that it not be marked as such. It is precisely not a surprise that a man of such gifts should know such things. For him, the extraordinary is ordinary. Hence the appropriate aesthetic for its performance is that of the matter of fact, just as it was for Muhammad in recounting his routine exercise of eating a light bulb. 'Normal' (*'adi*), one says, shrugging one's shoulders.

The Sufi present is, however, it was felt, less extraordinary than the past. The powers of today's shaykhs are of a more mundane nature than those of yesteryear, which were in themselves a pale shadow of the feats of the prophets. As Muhammad told me, the prophets performed miracles (*mu'jizat*). Jesus made people walk who could not walk, people see who could not see. Their shaykh can do that 'a little'. If people cannot see, then, with his intervention, they can see a *little* bit better. Shaykhs before would throw themselves off buildings and get up and walk away, or would walk into ovens with a *bismillah* ('In the name of God'). One looks now for the extraordinary in more ordinary times.

One thus has to be careful not to claim too much for one's own powers, lest one overreach. (And the enlightened know the virtue of humility.) Muhammad told his shaykh one time in my presence about how he had had a vision while praying in the mosque: the wall was shaking; he was flying. Shaykh 'Ali was curt. One should not be having visions during prayers; this could be a case of enticement (*istidraj*) from the way. A seeker (*murid*) should know this. Maybe he had not had time to explain it; maybe they had been in too much of a rush, he mused, going on to complain about the impatience of today's disciples. In the old days someone might have had to sweep the shaykh's doorstep for twenty years before even being allowed to attend the *dhikr*, to teach them patience (*sabr*). Nowadays, people have just started out and talk about flying! In Shaykh Mahmud's circle, it was more than once recalled how during the 1975-90 Lebanese civil war the circle had gathered 'every day – not like now!', people walking through the city to the lodge despite the danger. The faithful (*al-mu'min*) have no fear. One adept recounted how, one day, there had been gunfire. He heard the voice of their saint, and a bullet shot through the room – and went through his trousers not the flesh. 'I swear it by Almighty God [*Wallah al-'azim*]!' But Shaykh Mahmud poured cold water on this tale: such things might happen to the great saints (*al-awliya'*) maybe – but not mere epigones.

Indeed I only ever heard Shaykh Mahmud refer explicitly to one personal extraordinary event. It was just before the end of my fieldwork and I was taking some photographs in the courts, including of him. He insisted I take one

of a treasured photograph he had taken of his saintly teacher at the lodge in Kurdistan, which he keeps on his desk in a frame, protected behind another of them together. The picture is a good one, in vivid colour, and it came out strikingly well in my own photo of it. That was no surprise to Shaykh Mahmud. When he took it all those years ago, there were no fancy cameras like the digital one I was using. He just had a very simple one, without even a zoom. He had looked in the viewfinder, and his shaykh's face had filled it, as though it had suddenly and mysteriously been transported to right in front of him. This was, then, a modest, but tangible, piece of the extraordinary.

The vulnerability of the extraordinary

Shaykh Mahmud's circle would meet two or three times a week between sunset and evening prayers for a *hadra* at the lodge, on the ground floor of an apartment building on a back street, the spacious but somewhat airless room served by a temperamental air-conditioning unit. Ten or more disciples would sit on cushions on the floor with the lights off, to be led usually by Shaykh Mahmud through the regular set of rituals. Almost from the beginning of the service, some of the keenest devotees would be groaning, then later shouting out loud, calling on their saintly shaykh. By the end, they would be banging their heads on the floor, barking and shivering in ecstasy.

There is an appropriate ethic for participation, as Shaykh Mahmud would remind us after especially powerful sessions. Self-control, even in the midst of extraordinary experience, must be exercised (see also Pinto 2010: 466). (Getting up to answer one's mobile telephone in the middle of the session,

however, did not seem to be a problem.) Worship together promotes a high 'temperature' (*harara*). Maybe the very great could reach such ecstasy on their own, Shaykh Mahmud told me, but for the normal person it is found in company. So although experience is individual, performance should be communal. The *dhikr* should be in unison and at the same volume. Not, one person is at 100, another at 200, and – Shaykh Mahmud mentioned a particularly exuberant young disciple – a third at 1000. 'One million', quipped someone. 'And [someone else] I don't know what!' Everyone grinned in recognition. But if fellow-worshippers can provide mutual support – helping (*musa'id*) each other – they are also rendered vulnerable to one another's weaknesses. God would know if one of the circle had sinned, whether there was sincerity (*ikhlas*) in everyone's hearts, and would withdraw his blessings accordingly. Someone, who knows who, might hold everyone back.

Given my own status as a non-Muslim, I was concerned lest it be me that was the drag. 'No, no, not at all! The opposite!', I was reassured. Could one not just hand pick the circle to ensure a good temperature, I wondered. Shaykh Mahmud was very clear not. Unlike other branches of the Naqshbandiyya, who lock the door during their *dhikr*, they left it open for God to choose who would attend. This openness, however, raised the further question as to the appropriate attitude of others, less committed, attending. Shaykh Mahmud felt impelled to remark on this after one session at which a number of young lads had been present and had clearly found the affair surprising, not to say amusing. It is forbidden during the *dhikr* to look to see what people are doing; you should have your eyes closed, Shaykh Mahmud told them.

The expression of experience is thus an intimate, and so sensitive, matter. But the privacy of such experience combined with its nominal social grounding renders it vulnerable in other respects too. One week, Shaykh Mahmud was away. The *hadra* went according to the usual routine, but, some time after the beginning of the service, an unfamiliar shaykh entered and sat in Shaykh Mahmud's spot, his figure indistinct in the dark. The session was warm pretty much straight away, and it got hotter and hotter, the new shaykh punctuating his *dhikr* with much groaning and whooping, ending shaking very fast from side to side, barking his ecstasy, which carried on well after the session had wound down. He finished with sobbed prayers, calling on God to 'look upon us'; we were 'at the door'. The lights came up, everyone blinking, to reveal a young shaykh, who I knew as a minor functionary in the sharia courts. Rather strangely, I felt, given the previous intense temperature, the atmosphere was quite subdued. No one dashed over to kiss the shaykh's hand or pick him up from the floor as they would Shaykh Mahmud. But he was asked to say a few words. Still quite emotional, he quoted scripture on *dhikr*, talked of how no pure heart could be unaffected by it, talked also of visions that might be revealed and of angels. 'One of us could be a saint [*wali*]', he noted, even while acknowledging his youth.

But soon afterwards, when I went to court to conduct my usual researches, disaster struck. In one of the side offices where I was to wait to be admitted to the judge's chamber, there was the young shaykh at his desk, looking most unhappy. He asked me straight out, 'When did you enter Islam?' When I

confirmed that I was not a Muslim, he was outraged. How could I have participated in their ceremonies? He denounced me forcefully, in front of the handful of other court functionaries present. This was obviously most upsetting, and put an end to my involvement with the circle. I could not bear to continue. I have discussed elsewhere at length the ethical and methodological dilemmas that this incident threw into stark relief for me (Clarke 2013). But I also speculated as to the distinctive structure of his special outrage. After all, I had participated in such practice repeatedly under the supervision of Shaykh Mahmud, who knew well I was not a Muslim, although clearly hoped I was in the process of reconsidering. Was it that my not being Muslim had told the lie to the young shaykh's individual perception and public claim, despite his relatively junior status, of God's extraordinary blessings that evening? As he had reminded us, such blessings depend on the virtue and sincerity of those present. And yet it had been revealed to him that one of those present had not even been a Muslim! Claims to extraordinary but necessarily interior experience are, I thought, inherently socially fragile – they may not be granted recognition – but still more so where their validity can be conceived as depending on the invisible states of others (sincerity or ritual purity, for instance). Wonder can be betrayed.[16]

Proof practices

[16] Should one want a parallel example, one thinks readily of Gilsenan's (1982: 132-9) classic account, also of Lebanon, of a visiting shaykh whose claims to especial power were made a mockery of by the pretended enthusiasm of a known trickster and sinner.

There are, however, more obviously dramatic, explicit and thus potentially robust evidences of the extraordinary powers of the Sufi way. For the Rifa'i circle that I met in Lebanon, acts of self-harm, or rather not-harm, were the most potent sign of power – the famous *darb al-shish*, piercing the body with skewers or even swords. Muhammad told me that people put skewers through their eye and out the back of the head, or through the roof of the mouth; he puts them through the cheeks and from under the chin, and the knife through his side – he showed me the mark (and even once told me he has put it through the heart). Some can shoot themselves in the head with a gun and then spit out the bullet.

These practices are not mere vainglory. As the Lebanese Rifa'is I met made clear, they have a purpose: to demonstrate the truth and power of Islam, and their way to it.[17] The ability to accomplish such feats is granted through God's grace and assistance: 'Help me God!' (*madad ya Allah*), one sings. They are thus a proof (*burhan*) of the adept's privileged relationship with the divine. Sometimes, as an individual disciple, one might be asked by one's shaykh to perform *darb al-shish* as a test, an examination (*imtihan*), of one's spiritual progress. But these proof practices are commonly also incorporated into grander proof narratives, part of a wider genre, where the truth and power of Islam is demonstrated to the astonishment of the sceptical unbeliever. Muhammad told me of a powerful shaykh, old now, in his nineties perhaps,

[17] Anderson (1923: 187) talks of God's 'seal of approval', Pinto (2010: 468) of instances of 'verification' or 'authentication'; see also Biegman 1990: 83. Others cite different justifications, such as 'the victory of the spirit over the flesh' (Trimingham 1971: 39; Johansen 1996: 293-4).

who could use ‘even a Kalashnikov’. One day a general came to him, with his bodyguards, many men, and demanded to see a demonstration of his powers. The shaykh took the Kalashnikov, put it butt-end down on the floor, leaned his stomach on it and fired: he was unharmed. I could see the holes in his back if I met him. Muhammad’s shaykh, Shaykh ‘Ali, spoke of another powerful master. Some Soviets, atheists, came to him. He connected himself to the electricity, channelling thousands of volts and lighting up lamps. ‘Do you think this is normal?’, he challenged them. The Soviets entered Islam directly. Here Islamic practice should be contrasted with that of others. Muhammad acknowledged that yes, there are ‘Buddhists, Indians and Africans’ who perform similar acts, ‘But that’s not from God, that’s from the Devil [Iblis] – black magic [*al-sihr al-aswad*].’[18] If one of them came and showed off his *darb*, then you, as a Muslim, would have to demonstrate yours.

Witnessing this proof practice was, however, not easy. Like the rest of initiated Sufi practice it is, in Muhammad’s terms, ‘top secret’. And, as much as Sufi practice generally is a matter of discretion, as we have seen, the practice of *darb al-shish* lies at the outer edge of controversy. This is not something one should talk about in public. The wider hostility to such practices is real. At one meeting Shaykh ‘Ali railed against a polemical leaflet he had been confronted

[18] I wondered how this ‘magic’ would work, and was told that it would be accomplished through illusion, such as pushing the hand down the skewer to make it look as though it was going into the body, or hiding it behind cloth. The other is thus critiqued in the same terms as the Islamic and European polemics employed against Sufi practice. Cf. Pinto 2010: 469, where ‘magic’ implies the intervention of *jinn* rather than God.

with on Sufism from 'the Wahhabis', published in Saudi Arabia and distributed locally, that explicitly mentioned those who strike themselves with swords and eat fire, terming them Satan's people (*ahl al-shaytan*) and likening them to the Sikhs and Hindus of India. One performs *darb* then, as Muhammad put it, with the same discretion as when one gives someone some money: not with great show in public – 'Here is $50!', but in the home, where it is received humbly, hand cupped and head and eyes cast down.

At his brother's flat, caught up in the moment, Muhammad was all for giving me a demonstration. A skewer was produced; but Ahmad restrained him: 'It has its [proper] time' (*'ind-hu waqt-hu*). After all, as Ahmad explained, generally speaking in Islam you are not allowed to harm your body. 'I made one mistake in my life', he told me, rolling up his sleeve to reveal spiky, black tattoos covering his massive upper arms. By way of recompense, Muhammad had, he told me, a DVD at his house of disciples proving themselves, one even with a skewer in the eye. Unfortunately, he had not brought it with him. One of the brothers we might meet had some pictures on his mobile phone of Muhammad sticking the sword through his side. But I did not get to see them.

My now keenly anticipated witnessing of *darb al-shish* would instead have to come in the right place, at the right time and in the right way. The journey to Shaykh 'Ali's lodge-cum-home in a dilapidated apartment building in a run-down quarter of Tripoli – by bus and shared taxi, or with fellow travellers in a borrowed car – was already an undertaking. Shaykh 'Ali, outfitted in full 'Arab' dress with patterned headscarf tied with black cord, or a satin black

robe with black skull-cap, would be sitting cross-legged on cushions at the far end of the small but comfortable *majlis*, a little lectern in front of him, above him pictures of Mecca and distinguished shaykhs of the order, as well as the array of skewers, ten or more, all slightly different, obviously for different purposes, and a number of tambourines adorned with slogans of the order. There would be fifteen or so devotees, earthy men with gruff voices, along with some children and the occasional visitor from further afield (Syria, or even Iraq), or a visiting shaykh to boost our devotions. Shaykh 'Ali's young son would wait on us, little glasses of tea circulating, poured from a huge thermos; cough sweets and perfume would be passed around as we waited for people to gather and the service to begin. The *dhikr* here was vocal and active, accompanied by powerful drumming, the worshippers, standing, moving, more and more vigorously, the shaykhs in the centre of the circle urging them on. Devotees would come to lose themselves, rolling their eyes, banging their heads on the floor, calling out to the saints in Iraq, spinning round, even kissing the shaykh's feet.

Despite the intensity of the services, there was no *darb* at first. The proofs of the powers of the way came gradually. In my first *hadra*, a troubled young man was exorcised of a *jinn*, collapsing and vomiting in the *dhikr*. In the second, Shaykh 'Ali came to me at the height of the devotions and demanded whether I wanted the *darb*. Confused and hesitant, I mumbled something. 'Do you want to see it with your eye or to touch?', he insisted. Again I hesitated, not really understanding, and somewhat apprehensive about, what might be involved. It was clear that I was not ready.

But in my third and final session, in the middle of the *dhikr*, one of the senior men got up, asked Shaykh ‘Ali’s permission, and then took decisively a very large skewer, thicker than a finger and about a metre long. He stood in the middle of the circle and fumbled with it under his clothes, pushing and manipulating it with great concentration. Leaning the spike against the wall, he put his weight on it, thrusting hard. Shaykh ‘Ali gave him a firm shove on his back, and it now pushed out his robe on the other side. Standing in the middle of the circle, he took off his head cloth and loosened the robe so we could see it clearly sticking through the flesh. Then, in what was obviously a very considerable labour, he leant on it on the floor to push it through further, and then paraded up and down, the chanting and drumming still going all the way through. Finally he put a smaller skewer through his lips and another through the cheeks.

When they were then removed, Shaykh ‘Ali superintending, there was no blood on them to be seen. The exit point of the large one initially looked red, bleeding slightly perhaps; but then Shaykh ‘Ali pressed it firmly and it closed up. ‘Oh very good’, commented Muhammad. In a later discussion with a fellow traveller on the way back to Beirut, he noted how the exit wound had turned black straight away. This showed that this was not magic: if it had been an illusion, there would be no mark. But it also had not bled like a normal wound (cf. Pinto 2010: 468-9). This was nothing, Muhammad told me, ‘We have people who can walk on water and fly into the air.’ But now I had seen proofs (*barahin*) of Islam and the power of the way, I had to think most

carefully. Great opportunities were opening up before me, but also great dangers. It emerged, slightly disappointingly from the anthropologist's perspective, that the performance had been arranged especially for my benefit. Muhammad's colleague thought that the last time they had done it had been months ago, when a party came – from Denmark, or perhaps Australia.

The ordinary ethics of the extraordinary

Under disenchanted modernity, nothing can be truly extraordinary. Such spectacular feats must either be a 'trick', or something with a natural explanation, the numbing effects of trance perhaps. With regard to the first, while there may be tricksters, as the Islamic tradition angrily denounces, I am bound to say that I was wholly convinced. With regard to the second, the necessarily elusive nature of transcendent truth allows that door never to be fully closed. How could I be so sure that God had no hand in it, I can imagine my friends replying: can 'science' really explain *everything*? The question is turned back on the witness – as it was on me. But in any case, as Weber stressed in a passing allusion to what he deemed the unedifying 'hoax' that underpinned the charismatic authority of Joseph Smith, founder of Mormonism, 'sociology is not concerned with such questions' (Eisenstadt 1968: 19, 49; cf. Faubion 2010: 88, 2011: 84). People do see miracles. The question is what makes that possible socially.

Those who can see are well aware that others do not. The prophets themselves were doubted. As Gilsenan (2000: 604) reminds us, even in the Qur'an, 'The dialectics of truth are endlessly on show'; Muhammad is dubbed a liar by his

enemies (*kadhdhab*, Q. 54: 24-5), a magician, madman or fraud. But this does not make the miraculous a mere matter of credulity, of letting yourself be fooled. As we have seen, even among fellow travellers, making the ineffable explicit renders it vulnerable to being gainsaid. Rather, it is about agreeing terms. Miracles do not simply speak for themselves – although that is of course the aspiration. That does not make them just a function of agreed classification: these categories have substantial content. The *darb al-shish*, for instance, spoke to me clearly as an extraordinary act. It was impressive. But just sticking a spike through your side will hardly do. It has to be done at the right time, in the right way, to an audience who, even if not captured by its proposition, at least understands the terms in which it is being proposed. Of course, one could try to imagine an ideal type of miracle or world-shattering event that speaks for itself with undeniable clarity: God descending from the clouds or the arrival of an alien civilisation perhaps. But neither social life nor its anthropological study demands quite so much.

I trust that I have succeeded in sketching out some of the lineaments of what an ethics of the extraordinary might look like, in this context at least: its conventions, with regard to its appropriate content and reception; its responsibilities and virtues, of modesty for example (perhaps surprisingly); its techniques, bodily, but also social; its contradictions – the ordinariness of the extraordinary for extraordinary people; and its reasons and aesthetics of success and failure. I hope others find occasion for comparative analysis. But I want also to return to the notion that our attention might be better directed elsewhere, to the ordinary. Aside from genuine concerns over the politics of

representation, obviously salient with regard to Islam and the Middle East, the discipline's interest in prolonged field study has long entailed a valuable and valorised emphasis on the routine, although that has hardly precluded an interest in the exotic or exceptional. As elsewhere in the social sciences and humanities, 'everyday life' and 'the ordinary' have enjoyed a recent vogue, especially through the work of Michel de Certeau (1984).[19] And I have already cited Samuli Schielke's reminder to those of us interested in the anthropology of Islam to attend to 'the complex and often contradictory nature of everyday experience' (2009: S26), and Michael Lambek's 'ordinary ethics', which will focus on 'everyday comportment and understanding' and 'implies an ethics that is relatively tacit, grounded in agreement rather than rule, in practice rather than knowledge or belief, and happening without calling undue attention to itself'. Inspired more by the ordinary language philosophy of Austin and Wittgenstein, 'ordinary ethics' looks at ethics as embedded in everyday practice rather than in the abstract (Lambek 2010: 2-3; and see also Das 2010: 376-8; 2012).

In these terms, the practices I have documented here could look ordinary enough. They are certainly embedded in the business of living. They have their right time, or *kairos*, to invoke the ever-modish terms of ancient Greek discourse (Sheringham 2006: 208, 219). They have their delicate balance between the implicit and the explicit, requiring their own complex and fragile judgements as to what is better left unsaid, and what can be said and done when, between the like-minded and with others. They have their aesthetics that

[19] Abrahams (1986) offers a different genealogy.

must be satisfied, their inter-personal agreements that must be negotiated. They have their failures. They have, in short, their ordinary ethics.

It is not that I think that Lambek and Schielke, for instance, would necessarily disagree with this suggestion. There is much in their writing that might indicate otherwise (e.g. Lambek 2002; Schielke 2012: 5-7, 18 and passim) and their argument is not (I hope) with me. But surely this paradoxical formulation gives pause for thought. If the extraordinary could be ordinary too, then what distinctive analytical work do our invocations of the ordinary and everyday really do, aside perhaps from exerting 'discreet disciplinary pressures' as to what one's proper subjects ought to be, as one reviewer of this paper put it? At root, Lambek and Schielke's calls to the quotidian seem familiar enough. Both urge us not to mistake the map for the territory, to look not to abstracted rules but complex practice. Schielke thus declares the anthropologically pious (but ever-fresh) 'preference for grounded and dialogical ethnography', 'messy but rich' (2010: 6, 8). While 'ordinary ethics' might recall ordinary language philosophy, where Austin (1956: 9) could famously call for 'field work in philosophy' – and Mary Douglas (1980: 13, 31, 33, 35-38) could thus cite Evans-Pritchard as a comparable innovator – today's anthropologist can but yet again call for more of the same.

I hope my ethnography passes muster. But does the ordinary have no more distinctive content?[20] Does complexity, contradiction or a relative lack of explicitness serve to differentiate it? As Jenkins (1994: 444) says, we often invoke the everyday 'for want of a better term'. It is a notoriously difficult one

to pin down, as a survey of the canonical discussions of Lefebvre, Barthes, Certeau or Perec might demonstrate (see e.g. Sheringham 2006). This French critical tradition sought in part to reclaim the humdrum, the banal, and the routine from their neglect and denigration, through resistance and resilience for sure, but more especially – and inspired by anthropology's ethnographic methods – through heightened attention (ibid.: 398). But paradoxically, the more one scrutinises and celebrates the everyday, the less everyday it becomes – 'If we go too far, the everyday ceases to be itself: it becomes the exceptional, the exotic, the marvellous' (ibid.: 23; see also Abrahams 1986: 49) – just as the more one scrutinises the extraordinary, the more ordinary it seems to become in its turn: a trick perhaps or an acquired skill, in my cases here. One does indeed end up by rendering 'the strange familiar and the familiar strange', as the old saw runs.

The content of the ordinary can thus come to seem alarmingly unstable. Between Weber on the one hand and this generation on the other, its import seems to have reversed. What was for Weber the quintessence of the everyday, the schematic and explicit ethical forms of bureaucratic-legal authority, could seem for Lambek and Schielke, as it did for Lefebvre and Certeau, its enemy; where for Schielke, Lambek and the post-Bourdieu anthropological consensus the ordinary cannot be captured by rules, for Weber it was the charismatic moment, the strict contrary of the everyday, which escaped their bounds.[21] For

[20] Admittedly, following the rest of the literature, I have taken 'ordinary' and 'everyday' here as synonymous, although they seem to point to different aspects, normative and descriptive. See e.g. Kelly 2008: 366. In German, Weber's *alltäglich* apparently covers both (Adair-Toteff 2005: 200n13).

Weber, as Starrett (2010: 637) reminds us, it was precisely those 'aspirational religious virtuosi' studied by Hirschkind and Mahmood who brought about the disenchantment of the religious tradition and a turn to the everyday world, where for Schielke, say, it is the study of such virtuosi that takes us away from the ordinary. Thus it is that Robert Orsi, in his postscript to Schielke and Debevec's (2012) volume, finds 'everyday religion' as not this nominally disenchanted form but instead the direct experience of the presence of the divine, the moments when, against the flow of the hegemonic forces of disenchanting modernity and modernised religion, the religious becomes 'really present' to ordinary folk (2012: 156). I see Orsi's point, and he is admirably clear on the difficulties here (ibid.: 151), but touching God as everyday experience? In trying to pin down the everyday, we inevitably seem to end up by turning ordinary language on its head.

It is not that I claim to know better. How would I file the practices I have described? Are they actually extraordinary, as my Sufi friends claimed of the *darb al-shish*, in challenge of my lack of religious commitment? Or are they really just ordinary, like the eating of a light bulb is for an accomplished practitioner? Clearly I do not feel that this is a question that can or needs to be answered. 'Either/or is not the appropriate register' (Orsi 2012: 157). Of course, within the influential terms of the French critical tradition, it made sense to spurn the perceived diminishment of *le quotidian* brought about by the restriction of festivity, *la fête*, to religiously defined and monopolised occasions, and thence to attack Christianity, as Lefebvre did in founding that

[21] Eisenstadt 1968: 51-2; Lambek 2010: 2-3, 11, 14; Schielke 2009: S32, 2010: 4-5; Schielke and Debevec 2012: 1-3, 8-9; Sheringham 1996: 149, 218.

tradition (Lefebvre 1991: 201ff, esp. 207, 209-10, 225-6; see Sheringham 2006: 134-7). But that in itself reminds us that the mundane has a genealogy: the very distinction between the extraordinary and the ordinary comes to us in large part from religious discourse (alongside and within capitalist modernity, no doubt).[22] One might well seek from a nominally post-religious, critical perspective to recuperate the ordinary, or even find the Surrealist 'everyday marvellous' within it (Sheringham 2006: 77), just as one might, through ordinary language philosophy, seek an escape from philosophical conundrums by stepping back from over-extended linguistic usage. But if one is an anthropological student of contemporary religious practice, as I am here, to set out upon a study of the everyday to the implied exclusion of its opposite might seem problematic. It could be to exclude in large part the point of the practices in question, the transcendence of the ordinary, while simultaneously trapping oneself within their discursive terms: the ordinary as opposed to its transcendent other. Look to both then – and expect analytical challenges – or look elsewhere.

To conclude, in the contexts I have described, certain practices aim to take one out of the ordinary. But the extraordinary does not therefore lie beyond the social: rather, it is constituted within it, in ways I have attempted to document. One could even say that such practices are part and parcel of ordinary or everyday life, a step that would seem to have some currency in disciplinary

[22] Taylor 1989: 211-304; Sheringham 2006: 24, 25-6, 40. As Taylor shows, it is not that religious discourse necessarily denigrates ordinary life: on the contrary, in Protestantism, it affirms it. But for my purposes what is important is that the distinction emerges through it, in part at least.

terms if it did not so clearly suggest the problems of the ordinary as a term of anthropological analysis. By itself, what does it add, beyond a rhetorical flourish and a methodological conundrum? In the contexts where the distinction makes sense, the ordinary and the extraordinary emerge together, opposed and intertwined in shifting but productive ways. They should be studied accordingly.

I owe immeasurable thanks to all those who helped me in my researches in Lebanon in 2007-8. That fieldwork was funded by a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship at the University of Cambridge. I am grateful for their comments to Julie Archambault, David Gellner, Katie Swancutt, the ‘Religion in contemporary society’ research seminar at King’s College London, and *JRAI*’s anonymous reviewers. Thanks are also due to Michael Scott for sharing an unpublished manuscript with me.

References

Abrahams, R. 1986. Ordinary and extraordinary experience. In *The anthropology of experience* (eds) V. Turner & E. Bruner, 45-72. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Adair-Toteff, C. 2005. Max Weber's charisma. *Journal of Classical Sociology* 5, 189-204.

Anderson, S. 1923. The whirling and howling dervishes. *The Muslim World* 13, 181-91.

Austin, J.L. 1956. A plea for excuses: the presidential address. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (N.S.) 57, 1-30.

Baldick, J. 1989. *Mystical Islam: an introduction to Sufism*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Bannerth, E. 1970. La Rifa'iyya en Egypte. *Mélanges de l'Institut Dominicain d'Études Orientales du Caire* 10, 1-35.

Biegman, N. 1990. *Egypt: moulids, saints, sufis*. London: Kegan Paul International.

Brown, J. 1868. *The dervishes; or, Oriental spiritualism*. London.

Clarke, M. 2009. *Islam and new kinship: reproductive technology and the shariah in Lebanon*. New York: Berghahn Books.

— 2010. Neo-calligraphy: religious authority and media technology in contemporary Shiite Islam. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 52, 351-83.

— 2012. The judge as tragic hero: judicial ethics in Lebanon's shari'a courts. *American Ethnologist* 39, 106-21.

— 2013. Integrity and commitment in the anthropology of Islam. In *Articulating Islam: anthropological approaches to Muslim worlds* (eds) M. Marsden & K. Retsikas, 209-27. New York: Springer.

Crapanzano, V. 1973. *The Hamadsha: a study in Moroccan ethnopsychiatry*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Das, V. 2007. *Life and words: violence and the descent into the ordinary*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

— 2010. Engaging the life of the other: love and everyday life. In *Ordinary ethics: anthropology, language, and action* (ed.) M. Lambek, 376-99. New York: Fordham University Press.

— 2012. Ordinary ethics. In *A companion to moral anthropology* (ed.) D. Fassin, 133-49. London: Wiley-Blackwell.

De Certeau, M. 1984. *The practice of everyday life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

De Jong, F. 1976. Cairene *ziyara*-days: a contribution to the study of saint veneration in Islam. *Die Welt des Islams* 17, 26-43.

—. 1978. *Turuq and turuq-linked institutions in nineteenth century Egypt: a historical study in organizational dimensions of Islamic mysticism*. Leiden: Brill.

—. 1985. Les confréries mystiques muslmanes au Machreq arabe: centre de gravité, signes de déclin et de renaissance. In *Les ordres mystiques dans l'Islam: cheminements et situation actuelle* (eds) A. Popovic & G. Veinstein, 205-43. Paris: Éditions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales.

De Jong, F. & B. Radtke. 1999. *Islamic mysticism contested: thirteen centuries of controversies and polemics*. Leiden: Brill.

Dirks, N. 1997. The policing of tradition: colonialism and anthropology in Southern India. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 39, 182-212

D'Ohsson, I. 1791. *Tableau général de l'Empire othoman* (vol. 4). Paris.

Douglas, M. 1980. *Evans-Pritchard*. London: Fontana Paperbacks.

Eich, T. 2003. The forgotten Salafi: Abul-Huda As-Sayyadi. *Die Welt des Islams* 43, 61-87.

Eisenstadt, S. 1968. *Max Weber on charisma and institution building*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Faubion, J. 2010. From the ethical to the themetical (and back): groundwork for an anthropology of ethics. In *Ordinary ethics: anthropology, language, and action* (ed.) M. Lambek, 84-101. New York: Fordham University Press.

Feuchtwang, S. 2008. Suggestions for a redefinition of charisma. *Nova Religio* 12, 90-105.

Gardet, L. 2013. Karāma. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (eds) P. Bearman, T. Bianquis, C. Bosworth, E. van Donzel & W. Heinrichs. Leiden: Brill (available on-line: http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/karama-COM_0445).

Garnett, L. 1912. *Mysticism and magic in Turkey: an account of the religious doctrines, monastic organisation, and ecstatic powers of the Dervish orders*. London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons.

Gautier, T. 1854. *Constantinople of today* (trans. R. Gould). London: David Bogue.

Gilsenan, M. 1973. *Saint and Sufi in modern Egypt: an essay in the sociology of religion*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

— 1982. *Recognizing Islam: an anthropologist's introduction*. London: Croom Helm.

— 2000. Signs of truth: enchantment, modernity and the dreams of peasant women. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 6, 597-615.

Habibis, D. 1992. Change and continuity: a Sufi order in contemporary Lebanon. *Social Analysis* 31, 44-78.

Hermez, S. 2012. 'The war is going to ignite': on the anticipation of violence in Lebanon. *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 35, 327-44.

Herzfeld, M. 1997. *Cultural intimacy: social poetics in the nation-state*. New York: Routledge.

Hirschkind, C. 2006. *The ethical soundscape: cassette sermons and Islamic counterpublics*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Hoffman, V. 1995. *Sufism, mystics, and saints in modern Egypt*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.

Humphrey, C. 2008. Reassembling individual subjects: events and decisions in troubled times. *Anthropological Theory* 3, 357-80.

Jenkins, T. 1994. Fieldwork and the perception of everyday life. *Man* (N.S.) 29, 433-55.

Johansen, J. 1996. *Sufism and Islamic reform in Egypt: the battle for Islamic tradition*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Jones, G. 2010. Modern magic and the war on miracles in French colonial

culture. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 52, 66-99.

Joosse, P. 2012. The presentation of the charismatic self in everyday life: reflections on a Canadian new religious movement. *Sociology of Religion* 73, 174-99.

Kelly, T. 2008. The attractions of accountancy: living an ordinary life during the second Palestinian intifada. *Ethnography* 9, 351-76.

Laidlaw, J. 2013. *The subject of virtue: an anthropology of ethics and freedom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lambek, M. 2002. Nuriaty, the saint and the sultan: virtuous subject and subjective virtuoso of the post-modern colony. In *Post-colonial subjectivities* (ed.) R. Werbner, 25-43. London: Zed Books.

— 2010. Introduction. In *Ordinary ethics: anthropology, language, and action* (ed.) M. Lambek, 1-36. New York: Fordham University Press.

Lane, E. 1860. *An account of the manners and customs of the modern Egyptians* (5th ed.). London.

Lefebvre, H. 1991[1947]. *Critique of everyday life* vol. 1 (trans. J. Moore). London: Verso.

Mahmood, S. 2005. *Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Mittermaier, A. 2011. *Dreams that matter: Egyptian landscapes of the imagination*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Orsi, R. 2012. Afterword: religion and the contemporary world; the un-modern, or what was supposed to have disappeared but did not. In *Ordinary lives and grand schemes: an anthropology of everyday*

religion (eds) S. Schielke & L. Debevec, 146-63. New York: Berghahn Books.

Pinto, P. 2006. The limits of the public: Sufism and the religious debate in Syria. In *Public Islam and the common good* (eds) A. Salvatore & D. Eickelman, 181-204. Leiden: Brill.

— 2010. The anthropologist and the initiated: reflections on the ethnography of mystical experience among the Sufis of Aleppo, Syria. *Social Compass* 57, 464-78.

Popovic, A. 1993. *Un ordre de derviches en terre d'Europe: la Rifâ'iyya*. Lausanne: Age d'homme.

Rey, S. 2012. The ordinary within the extraordinary: sainthood making and everyday religious practice in Lesvos, Greece. In *Ordinary lives and grand schemes: an anthropology of everyday religion* (eds) S. Schielke & L. Debevec, 82-97. New York: Berghahn Books.

Rubenstein, M.-J. 2008. *Strange wonder: the closure of metaphysics and the opening of awe*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Schielke, S. 2009. Being good in Ramadan: ambivalence, fragmentation, and the moral self in the lives of young Egyptians. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15(S1), S24-S40.

— 2010. Second thoughts about the anthropology of Islam, or how to make sense of grand schemes in everyday life. *Working Papers* (no. 2). Berlin: Zentrum Moderner Orient.

— 2012. *The perils of joy: contesting* mulid *festivals in contemporary Egypt*. New York: Syracuse University Press.

Schielke, S. & L. Debevec. 2012. Introduction. In *Ordinary lives and grand schemes: an anthropology of everyday religion* (eds) S. Schielke & L. Debevec, 1-16. New York: Berghahn Books.

Scott, M. No date. The wonder of being Makiran: a legacy of Maasina rule in Solomon Islands. Unpublished manuscript.

Seale-Collazo, J. 2012. Charisma, liminality, and freedom: toward a theory of the everyday extraordinary. *Anthropology of Consciousness* 23, 175-91.

Sheringham, M. 2006. *Everyday life: theories and practices from surrealism to the present*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Starrett, G. 2010. The varieties of secular experience. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 52, 626-51.

Taussig, M. 2003. Viscerality, faith, and scepticism: another theory of magic. In *Magic and modernity: interfaces of revelation and concealment* (eds) B. Meyer & P. Pels, 272-306. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Taylor, C. 1989. *Sources of the self: the making of the modern identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Trimingham, J. 1971. *The Sufi orders in Islam*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Trumbull, G. 2007. 'Au coin des rues Diderot et Moïse': religious politics and the ethnography of Sufism in Colonial Algeria, 1871-1906. *French Historical Studies* 30, 451-83.

Weismann, I. 2004. Sufi brotherhoods in Syria and Israel: a contemporary overview. *History of Religions* 43, 303-18.

— 2007. *The Naqshbandiyya*. London: Routledge.

Zigon, J. 2007. Moral breakdown and ethical demand. *Anthropological Theory* 7, 131-50.