



# INTRODUCTION

## The Productive Potential of Moral Failure in Lived Islam and Christianity

---

---

*David Kloos and Daan Beekers*

This volume investigates the dialectical relationship between pursuits of religious coherence and experiences of moral fragmentation by focusing on self-perceived senses of failure. Our premise is that senses of failure offer an important and productive entry point for the study of lived religion in today's world, where religious commitments are often volatile, believers are regularly confronted by alternative lifestyles, worldviews or desires, and religious subjects tend to be self-reflexive. While the experience of failure in religious life has always been a central theme in theology and religious thought, it has long received little attention in the study of lived religion by anthropologists and others. In recent years, however, there has been a growing interest in various modes and moments of (self-perceived) failure, including feelings of incoherence and imperfection in religious life (Lechkar 2012; De Koning 2013; Jouili 2015; Strhan 2015), uncertainty about one's religious identity and the risk of falling back on pre-conversion relationships or habits (Marshall 2009; Pype 2011), doubt about religious truth claims (Luhrmann 2012; Liberatore 2013), ambivalent moral commitments (Schielke 2015), suspension or lack of religious meaning (Engelke and Tomlinson 2006), and unsuccessful careers of aspiring religious leaders (Lauterbach 2008).

We focus on Islam and Christianity, not only because these are the main religious traditions in terms of adherents, but also because the anthropology of

Islam and the anthropology of Christianity have in recent years seen reconfigurations that speak to the question of moral failure in crucial ways. A dichotomy has emerged in this literature between two broad positions (in sketching these positions, we do of course acknowledge the heterogeneity of approaches in each one of these): on the one hand, a strong focus has been developed on the cultivation of religious virtues and dispositions, as taking place in the context of religious activist movements, moments of (mass) conversion, and other instances in which religious truth claims take center stage (see, e.g., Harding 2000; Robbins 2004; Mahmood 2005; Hirschkind 2006). On the other hand, a growing body of literature has taken a critical stance toward this emphasis on the pursuit of ethical perfection in anthropological work. By pointing out the tensions, struggles, paradoxes, contradictions and ambivalences central to processes and instances of religious revival, conversion or the cultivation of piety, these studies challenge the suggestion, explicitly or implicitly advanced within the other perspective, that Muslims and Christians lead coherent, consistent or stable religious lives (see, e.g., Marsden 2005; Scott 2005; Engelke and Tomlinson 2006; Soares and Osella 2009; Schielke 2015). Indeed, the relatively recent interest in failure in religious life on the part of anthropologists can at least in part be seen as a response to the turn to personal piety and ethical formation in the anthropologies of Islam and Christianity.

We embrace the heightened attention for the contingency of everyday religious practices and experiences. Yet, we are critical of the tendency we observe in this scholarship to maintain a separation between religious practices and aspirations on the one hand and alternative moral frameworks or the sobering realities of everyday life on the other. Such an approach risks analytically placing experiences of imperfection and incoherence outside of the domain of religious experience “proper,” rather than examining the dynamic and productive interactions between the two. By contrast, we aim to explore how, and to what extent, self-perceived failure is part and parcel of processes of ethical formation in lived Christianity and Islam. We suggest that senses of failure—defined as experiences that religious adherents themselves understand in terms of shortcoming, inadequacy, or imperfection, and that may include feelings of struggle, the perception of sins, negligence of religious obligations, and lack of religious confidence, faith, or belief—constitute a useful avenue for further developing the anthropology of Islam and Christianity in a broader framework of the anthropology of religion. The central question of this book, then, is how senses of failure feed back into Islamic and Christian ethical formation, by which we mean attempts at becoming “good” or “better” Muslims or Christians.

In contrast to the hitherto largely separated fields of the anthropology of Islam and Christianity, this volume approaches the problem of failure comparatively. We seek to move beyond the bifurcated study of religion (Soares 2006; Beekers 2014; Janson and Meyer 2016), by taking a particular concern—in our case everyday experiences of failure in religious life—as a productive entry point for an analysis of lived religion across religious boundaries. The next two sections serve to position this volume in current debates about the study of

religious practice and ethical self-formation within the anthropologies of Islam and Christianity. By placing these debates side by side, we trace similar—though not identical—developments in each of these research fields. The subsequent section elaborates our proposition that self-perceived senses of failure are often constitutive of the ways in which many Muslims and Christians shape their faith. We close by introducing the individual contributions, each of which discusses different—but complementary and mutually enriching—dimensions of the role of failure in ethical formation.

We should note that there is neither space nor need to present comprehensive overviews of the anthropologies of Islam and Christianity here (see Kreinath [2012] for a recent overview on the anthropology of Islam, and Robbins [2014] for one on the anthropology of Christianity). Our intention is rather to point out similar debates in both fields about the primacy and effectiveness of religious modes of self-fashioning and world-making. We should also point out that, for the purposes of this volume, we have found it unnecessary to make an analytical distinction between the concepts of ethics and morality, as is often (though in different ways) done in philosophy and sometimes in anthropology (e.g., Zigon 2008). We agree with Michael Lambek (2010: 9) that, due to the disparate distinctions made between ethics and morality, opting for one of these—let alone introducing our own—risks creating more, rather than less, confusion.

## **The Question of Piety in the Anthropology of Islam**

The anthropology of Islam has been concerned, from its early beginnings, with the relationship between particular (or locally specific) expressions of Islam and the complex of texts, scholarly disciplines and rituals that is generally, and across cultural and geographic boundaries, referred to as “Islam” or “Islamic.” On the question of how to approach this relationship, conceptually and methodologically, positions have varied (see, e.g., Geertz 1968; El-Zein 1977; Eickelman 1982; Asad 1986). Particularly relevant for our purposes is Talal Asad’s (1986) influential argument that Islam constitutes a “discursive tradition,” and that religious disciplinary practices (or what he called, following Marcel Mauss, “body techniques”) play a central role in the creation of religious subjects, and must be treated, analytically, as a mode of agency (Asad 1993).

Asad’s framework has been put to use most effectively in the study of the “Islamic revival,” a category of different socioreligious movements emerging since the 1970s, and engaging, one way or another, with the goal of strengthening and propagating the faith, often (but not always) in combination with a literalist approach to Islamic norms and a commitment to increase or “restore” the role of Islam in the public sphere. In her influential study of the revivalist women’s “mosque movement” in Cairo, Egypt, Saba Mahmood (2005) argued that through their religious practices and disciplining of their bodies these women exercise a particular kind of agency, even when they choose to adopt

the “non-liberal” and patriarchal notions of Muslim (feminine) personhood prevalent in the Islamic scriptural tradition (such as chastity, shyness, modesty, endurance, and perseverance). Charles Hirschkind (2006), in his study of the use of recorded cassette sermons in Cairo, also made use of an Asadian framework, as he argued that the act of listening to sermons constitutes a virtuous practice, a mode of disciplining ethical selves “predicated on the developability of the body as an auditory instrument” (Hirschkind 2006: 79). Thus, both Mahmood and Hirschkind have been concerned with excavating the forms of agency implied in practices central to pious Muslims’ attempts at reaching a state of ethical perfection, and with investigating the ways in which this agency is rooted in individual and communal engagements with the Islamic (textual) discourses disseminated by religious authorities.

We single out these studies because they have inspired an important trend in the anthropology of Islam, which is characterized by a turn to personal piety and a focus on practices of self-cultivation. Of chief concern is the centrality in the Islamic revival of the concept of *da‘wa* (Islamic propagation, lit. to “call” or “summon”). *Da‘wa*-based discourses are grounded in the proposition that Islam offers a complete way of life and that all Muslims have a duty to actively and consciously subscribe to and disseminate this perspective. Earlier, the popularity of *da‘wa*-infused language was primarily a topic of political scientists seeking to explain the rise of political Islam (see, e.g., Roy 1996; Kepel 2002). The innovation of Mahmood and Hirschkind (and those inspired by them) was, for a large part, the fact that anthropologists began to take seriously *da‘wa*-based, Islamist (and other distinctly normative) discourses as important sources of self-formation. This shift toward the study of pious agency includes collections on the “pursuit of certainty” (James 2003) and on Muslim piety (Turner 2008; Amir-Moazami, Jacobsen, and Malik 2011), ethnographies of Muslim women in urban public spheres in Beirut (Deeb 2006) and Kuala Lumpur (Frisk 2009), studies of (especially young female) Muslims in Europe (Jouili and Amir-Moazami 2006; Fadil 2008; Jacobsen 2011; Jouili 2015), as well as work on Islamic education in Egypt (Starrett 1998) and on Islamist movements in urban Pakistan (Iqtidar 2011).

However, this focus on pious discipline and activist attitudes has also become the subject of mounting critique. Three, closely related, issues stand out. Firstly, it has been argued that the focus on the pursuit of ethical perfection presents the views and practices of a specific group—typically a minority segment of the urban middle class—as representative of observant Muslims. In the words of Magnus Marsden (2005: 9n), this distortion is accompanied by the problematic assumption that “‘revivalist’ Islam is the most powerful dimension of Muslim thought and identity in the contemporary Muslim world.” And as Samuli Schielke (2010: 2) put it, the emphasis has been “on the very pious in moments when they are being very pious.” Secondly, the narrowing down of the lives of Muslims to the cultivation of pious selves—including the implicit or explicit suggestion that Islam’s foundational texts are the only or primary source of moral values for Muslims—has been said to constitute a case of ethnographic poverty. As one of Mahmood’s reviewers

put it, “her focus on the micro-practices inside the mosque seems to prevent her from looking at the micro-practices outside the mosque, since she does not follow the women she studies through all their various encounters with education and media,” or “[relate] religious practices to the social fabric of Cairo” (Van der Veer 2008: 812; cf. Schielke 2010; Bangstad 2011). The studies on Muslim piety, in other words, have been criticized for their failure to address the ways in which religious practices and dispositions are shaped and compromised by the social, political and economic contexts in which these are embedded.

Thirdly, it has been argued that the religious lives of most Muslims are not governed by an internally coherent ethics or by a certainty about the place of religion in both public and private spheres. This is not so much a plea to contrast “revivalist” Muslims with people “unaffected” by religious transformation as it is an argument against the interpretation of the contemporary Islamic revival as a pervasive, uniform or constant force. Moving away from a focus on normative Islam and pursuits of ethical perfection, anthropologists working in different Muslim societies have highlighted the prevalence of moral ambivalence (Peletz 1997; Fischer 2008), the ways in which individual believers deal with and oscillate between conflicting “moral registers” (Schielke 2015: 53ff.), the complex process of making “ethical decisions” and the role of Islam therein (Marsden 2005: 260–62), and the tensions involved in the construction of “unstable” (Marsden and Retsikas 2013b: 8) or “multidimensional” (Simon 2014) selves.

One of the implications of this shift away from a focus on discipline is a general reframing of the anthropology of Islam in terms of broader ethnographic inquiries into Muslims’ reflexive, creative and affective engagements with the world in which they live (Marsden 2005; Soares and Osella 2009; Schielke and Debevec 2012; Dessing et al. 2013). The studies cited above observe that many (or most) Muslims do not, or at least not primarily or continually, engage in the cultivation of a “pious self.” They do not “walk around in a religious bubble,” as Nancy Ammerman (2014: 194) stated in reference to religious adherents generally, but are rather driven by a range of concerns, desires, and interests—the “changing and often contradictory quandaries of everyday life,” as Marsden and Retsikas (2013b: 8) put it—of which the aspiration to engage in pious practice is an aspect, not a sole determinant. The important point is that religiosity cannot be detached from this broader context of multifaceted and often unpredictable everyday lives. Yet, it is precisely on this point that we signal a tendency within this body of work to maintain an, in our view, unhelpful separation between the pursuit of religious coherence on the one hand and the fragmentation of everyday life on the other.

There is a resemblance between our discussion of this literature and Nadia Fadil and Mayanthi Fernando’s (2015) recent polemical critique, directed primarily at the work of Schielke. The turn to “everyday Islam,” they argue, has created a problematic opposition between “piety” and “the everyday.” The proponents of this turn “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” (ibid.: 70). Although our critique resonates with theirs, we approach the debate differently. Unlike Fadil and Fernando, we believe that the critical response to “the piety turn” (2015: 81) does offer an important corrective by acknowledging the complexity and multiplicity of everyday lives. Fadil and Fernando mention that their aim is not to invalidate this critical body of work. Yet they do in fact question its very postulates and maintain that everyday practices had already been given ample attention in the study of Islamic piety (ibid.: 65)—an observation we do not share. We also disagree with their claim that the focus on the everyday privileges or presupposes resistance to norms (at least, we do not see this in Schielke’s work, on which much of their criticism rests).

In her response to Fadil and Fernando’s piece, Lara Deeb (2015) suggests a helpful way to move this debate forward. She proposes to think “piety and the everyday together” by examining “both the ways the everyday is shaped by religious discipline and normativity *and* the ways that religious discipline and normativity are themselves produced through and change via everyday social life” (ibid.: 96; emphasis in the original; cf. Elliot 2016). We follow a similar line of inquiry by tracing the ways in which experiences of fragmentation in everyday life can be found to affect and even invigorate the pursuit of religious ideals. Before moving on to elaborate on this, however, we will show that this debate is not only relevant to the anthropology of Islam. The maturation within the past decade or so of an “anthropology of Christianity” has entailed similarly opposed positions.

## **The Question of Coherence in the Anthropology of Christianity**

The “anthropology of Christianity” has only recently been developed as a field in and of itself—that is, a field characterized by a degree of theoretical and conceptual coherence, a global comparative perspective, and a sense of academic community (see especially Robbins 2003 and 2014). Self-consciously modelled on the longer existing “anthropology of Islam” (Robbins 2003, 2007; Garriott and O’Neill 2008), the anthropology of Christianity is driven by the view that anthropologists have, for various reasons, neglected the relevance of Christianity as a culturally constitutive force in the lives of the people they studied. The proponents of this field, many of whom are researchers of non-Western societies that have seen (mass) conversions to Christianity, argue that full attention should be given to the ways in which Christian theological models, textual traditions and embodied practices shape local communities and individual subjectivities (Cannell 2006b; Engelke and Tomlinson 2006; Robbins 2007; Jenkins 2012).

The work of Webb Keane (1997, 2007) constitutes an important early contribution to this discussion. In his analysis of conversion in Sumba, Indonesia, he shows that the adoption of Calvinist ideas challenged and transformed indigenous (*marapu*) concepts of agency. Indicating the Protestant insistence

on replacing objects by language as the main locus or signifier of divine agency, Keane argues that Protestant conversion served to “draw a clear line between humans and nonhumans, between the world of agency and that of natural determinism” (2007: 7). A similar position has been developed by Joel Robbins (2004) in his work on the Urapmin, a highland community in Papua New Guinea. Like Keane, he is interested in exploring the relationship between “inner” beliefs and changing moral and social orders. Religious experience, Robbins argues, must be regarded as a driver of cultural change. While Robbins does not deny the influence of political and economic factors, he makes a powerful argument for taking seriously the emotional concern of the second coming (central to the Urapmin’s attachment to a form of millenarian Christianity) as a force that shapes the ways in which people organize their society and lead their lives.

Thus, an important trend within this budding field has been—in line with Keane, Robbins, and other influential contributors (e.g., Harding 2000)—the analytical move to give full attention to Christian culture and theology “in their own right” (Chua 2012: 12). The proponents of this perspective claim that earlier work tended to perceive Christianity as a second-order phenomenon: a tool of economic or political gain, or a superficial, foreign construct superimposed on a more “authentic” indigenous culture (Cannell 2006a; Robbins 2007; Jenkins 2012). The “non-reductive” approach to Christianity that is advocated instead has been strongly formulated by Ruth Marshall (2009) in her work on “Born Again” Pentecostals in Nigeria (itself not presented as a contribution to the anthropology of Christianity). “Religious change,” she writes, “is not merely the sign or the effect of change in other domains of human practice, but constitutes rather, in and of itself, a mode of historical and political transformation” (2009: 34). Accordingly, Marshall draws attention to the ways in which Pentecostalism shapes particular moral and political subjects. A central trope in this field, then, is discontinuity, denoting the transformative consequences of Christian belief, practice and tradition within social communities and people’s individual lives, particularly through narratives of conversion, rebirth, and historical rupture (Robbins 2007; Marshall 2009; Engelke and Robbins 2010).

Yet, this scholarly quest for an analysis of Christianity as a force of cultural change has been shot through with critical voices. Even some of the protagonists of this new field have expressed doubts as to whether Christianity can be studied as a coherent religious tradition (Cannell 2006b; Engelke and Tomlinson 2006). A first issue raised in these critical contributions is the great diversity of manifestations of Christianity across different sociohistorical contexts. Thus, Fenella Cannell points out that her edited volume *The Anthropology of Christianity* provides “accounts of particular, local Christianities as they are lived” (2006a: 5), while Michael Scott calls for distinguishing between local variations of Christianity by examining “ethno-theologies” by which (convert) Christians “evaluate indigenous ideas and practices in relation to those of Christianity and situate ancestral identities and histories within biblical history” (2005: 102).

A second key point of critique of the notion of Christianity as a force of cultural change is that such transformative power of religion is limited because of (long-standing) economic and political conditions. Debra McDougall (2009) makes this argument in her critical discussion of Robbins' description of the onset of individualism among the Urapmin as a result of their conversion to Christianity. She draws attention to Robbins' insight of a disjuncture between the new ideology of the Urapmin and the unchanged material and social conditions of their lives, arguing that "[r]egardless of how much Urapmin would like to overthrow the trappings of their old way of life and embrace what they understand to be the unrelenting individualism of Christianity, this desire alone will not make them individuals until their mode of subsistence changes" (ibid.: 15). Ruth Marshall makes a similar point when she states that the transformative project of Pentecostalism in Nigeria can never be fully achieved, because it cannot overcome long-standing modes of kinship, political organization and economic relations. Instead, the "prescriptive regime" of Pentecostalism remains largely "strategic and programmatic" (2009: 10–11), retaining its force as a promise and potentiality. Note, here, that quite similar arguments have been made with regard to the future-oriented (and ultimately rather impracticable) attempts of revivalist Muslims to create a "perfect" Islamic society (see, e.g., Feener 2013).

In their volume on "the limits of meaning" in the lives and rituals of Christians, Engelke and Tomlinson (2006) have pointed out the instabilities within Christian ideology itself. They argue that if "ultimate religious meaning" constitutes a key theme in lived Christianity (cf. Robbins 2003), then this "emphasis on meaning entails the potential of its absence, negation, or irrelevance" (Tomlinson and Engelke 2006: 23). Instances of failure, such as a ritual going wrong because the words or acts are not remembered, allow scholars to "approach meaning not as a function or as a product to be uncovered, but as a process and potential fraught with uncertainty and contestation" (ibid.: 2).

A third concern with regard to the focus on Christianity "per se" (Hann 2007) parallels the criticisms of the turn to piety in the anthropology of Islam; it is that the personal lives as well as the social worlds of Christian believers entail much more than religious concerns alone. Simon Coleman (2013: 255), among others, has pointed out that studies in the anthropology of Christianity have focused on committed, often evangelical, Christians and their religious practices, while activities that take up a great part of most Christians' lives—such as work and leisure—are often given (much) less attention. Katrien Pype puts it succinctly in her work on born-again Christians in Kinshasa: "Social life in Kinshasa makes it impossible to be a 'perfect' Christian all the time" (2011: 301; cf. Strhan 2015). Adding a cultural historical dimension to this, Liana Chua (2012) shows that the Bidayuh in Malaysia have converted to Christianity in large numbers but still seek to maintain continuity with their "old rituals" (*adat gawai*). In the next section, we show how an analysis of widespread experiences of moral failure may open up new critical perspectives within the anthropology of Christianity and Islam.



## Moral Failure and Ethical Formation

While the anthropology of Islam and the anthropology of Christianity have for a large part developed separately from one another (despite the latter having taken the former as its model), we signal a common debate at the heart of both. On the one hand, scholars have posited that Islam and Christianity provide—what we will here call—distinct ethical “scripts” that, once adopted and acted upon, strongly affect the ways in which people live their lives. They argue that these scripts, emanating from textual interpretation, theological debates, and the interaction between ordinary believers and religious authorities, should be taken seriously in ethnographic studies of religious modes of self-fashioning and world-making. This position has been significantly strengthened by the organization of the anthropology of Islam and Christianity as distinct fields of study. On the other hand, researchers critical of the position that analytical primacy should be given to religious tradition have warned against placing disproportionate emphasis on such religious modes of self-fashioning and world-making. They point out that Muslims and Christians are generally affected as much by “nonreligious” ethical scripts and dispositions as by religious ethics. Religious aspirations, they argue, often remain unfulfilled because of the contingencies of everyday life or because ordinary believers frequently prioritize other concerns.

In parts of the literature, especially within the anthropology of Islam (cf. Fadil and Fernando 2015), these two perspectives have tended to develop into opposite and even mutually exclusive positions. Even analyses that give explicit attention to both perspectives tend to maintain a separation between the fields of “religion proper” and “lived reality,” or between religious moral frameworks and nonreligious ones. Thus, Samuli Schielke (2015: 53ff.) emphasizes the separate “moral registers” that rural Egyptians draw on as they shift between different social contexts and move from one life stage to the next. Benjamin Soares and Filippo Osella (2009: S12), on their part, advanced the concept of “Islam mondain” to analyze how Muslim practices of self-fashioning draw simultaneously on Islam and on a desire to be, or to become, “modern” (implying a range of essentially non- or not necessarily religious concerns related to “politics, morality, family, consumption, employment, media, entertainment, and so forth”). We agree with the observation that religious believers often distinguish between religious and nonreligious domains, drawing from both as sources of moral subjectivity. Yet, we feel that analyses of ethical formation in both the anthropologies of Islam and Christianity have not given sufficient attention to the dynamic and productive *interactions* between religious and nonreligious concerns, moral frameworks, and practices.

The goal of this book is to move beyond this dichotomy by taking the interplay between religious aspirations and the contingencies of everyday life as a point of departure for our ethnographic analyses. Our approach may be viewed in relation to a number of recent attempts to explore the effects of, and

creativity inherent in, expressions of moral uncertainty, doubt, and imperfection. A notable example is Oskar Verkaaik's (2014) study of the architecture of synagogues in Germany and the Netherlands, in which he draws attention to the ways in which senses of "rupture," or "everyday degradation," are integrated in the design of these buildings. He makes a case for taking seriously the "religious art of imperfection"—that is, for seeing "modern religiosity ... as an ongoing engagement with a fragmented and unsettled reality, both historically and existentially" and for "develop[ing] a view on how modern religious subjects deal with and incorporate imperfection" (ibid.: 488). Yet, in addition to Verkaaik's inquiry into the ways in which religious adherents address and cope with failure, we are concerned with the question of how self-perceived senses of failure feed back into pursuits of religious coherence and truth, or in other words, how senses of failure constitute productive grounds for believers to reflect and work on their moral selves. To put it differently, we are interested in what Matt Tomlinson and Matthew Engelke term "the productive potentialities of failure, misunderstanding, ignorance, chaos, and uncertainty" (2006: 26n).

Our approach builds on the recent volumes by Elizabeth Cooper and David Pratten on the "productive potential of uncertainty" (2015: 1) and by Mathijs Pelkmans (2013a) on the ethnography of doubt. Uncertainty, according to Cooper and Pratten (2015: 2), may be approached as a "social resource" and a "source for imagining the future"—and, as such, as a basis for action (cf. Horst and Grabska 2015). Doubt, according to Pelkmans, energizes human thought and action. He argues that "doubt and belief should not be seen as opposites, but rather as co-constitutive parts" (Pelkmans 2013b: 4). Thus, "convictions are not simply present, but are rather produced in dialogue with challenges (challenges which may take the form of doubt)" (ibid.: 26). In her contribution to Pelkmans' volume, Giulia Liberatore (2013) shows that her interlocutors—young Somali Muslim women in London who have only recently started to practice Islam—occasionally suffer from doubts about the after-worldly rewards for their efforts and sacrifices in this world. These anxieties, Liberatore argues, do not only threaten their faith but also invigorate it. Within their communities of Muslim peers, these women learn to signify and manage their doubts as instances of "low *iman* [faith]," thereby encapsulating such doubts within their "system of faith" (ibid.: 245). Doubts, then, are acted upon and taken by these women as stimuli to strengthen their faith.

Another instructive account of religious doubt is provided by Tanya Luhrmann's (2012: 375) work on American evangelicals. She points out that these Christians are confronted by an inevitable presence of doubt and skepticism when it comes to "accepting God's real reality" (ibid.: 375). In their "secular-sited Christianity," faith is lived with "the acute awareness that one can choose not to believe—not only in this specific faith, but in the transcendent at all" (2012: 378). Luhrmann argues, however, that their doubt and skepticism trigger these evangelicals to cultivate a deliberately imaginative and playful experience of God. They effectively sidestep their doubts by construing a conception of a "hyper-real" God. Thus, for Luhrmann, the very inevitability

of doubt and skepticism in these believers' lives fosters the creation of this particular kind of miraculous Christianity.

These accounts are innovative, because they show that religious doubts may not only impede but also have a revitalizing effect on religious belief and commitment. Building on earlier anthropological engagements with the constructive potential of uncertainty and doubt for religious beliefs (see, e.g., Goody 1996: 678; Engelke 2005: 783–84), Liberatore and Luhrmann investigate the intricate ways by which experiences of doubt serve to re-establish, retrace or invigorate religious convictions. The chapters collected in this book elaborate on these important insights by examining the ways in which not only doubt and uncertainty, but also (other kinds of) self-perceived shortcomings, practical struggles, sins or negligence may play a productive role within religious pursuits. While the recognition of, and response to, failure takes a central place in core doctrinal traditions in both Islam and Christianity, the varied ways in which senses of failure can be found to propel processes of ethical formation have—apart from the aforementioned studies—received too little attention in anthropological studies of everyday religious lives.

What counts as “moral failure” in our approach is what is experienced and designated as such by our interlocutors in the field. By this we do not mean to say, of course, that the definition of failure takes place in some kind of detached mode. Experiences of failure result from the individual and collective “grappling” with religious “texts, ideas and methods” (Bowen 2012: 3) under such contemporary social conditions as globalization, consumer capitalism, neoliberalism, and secularism (see, e.g., Soares and Osella 2009; Hefner 2010; Rudnyckij 2010; Elisha 2011). Senses of failure, moreover, are embedded in the complex social, political and historically shaped interactions between individual believers and the normative forces—organized religion, states and religious bureaucracies, popular preachers, et cetera—that claim the authority to formulate and disseminate the “proper” content, the boundaries of religious traditions, its codes of conduct, and its routes to salvation (see, e.g., Eickelman and Piscatori 1996). As Thijl Sunier argues in his contribution to this volume, the focus on failure works in two ways. It allows investigating how religious adherents reflect and act upon religious norms and their own perceived shortcomings, but also how the engagement with religious norms, including reflections on perceived shortcomings, serve to “authenticate” and “authorize” particular interpretations and their proponents.

Before providing, in the final section, an outline of the individual contributions to this book, we will briefly comment on the connections between our project and the broader turn to the study of ethics in anthropology. While ethics has long been a concern of anthropologists, in recent years there has been a marked increase of attempts to deal with this dimension of human life in a more systematic way. Michael Lambek (2010: 9), for instance, has advanced the concept of “ordinary ethics,” to denote “the ethical in the broader sense, referring to the field of action or practical judgment rather than to what is specifically right or good” (cf. Das 2007; Sykes 2008). Others have engaged with what Mahmood (2005) calls positive ethics—the (ritual or other)

practices, or what Foucault termed “techniques of the self,” through which particular virtues are cultivated (Asad 1993; Mahmood 2005; Hirschkind 2006; Faubion 2011). Others again have centralized the problem of how to distinguish or “locate” the realm of ethics within wider complexes of social and cultural structures and processes (Zigon 2008; Laidlaw 2014) and the question of how to approach specific moments of ethical formation in the lives of individual people (Zigon 2008; Mattingly 2014). This literature derives much of its urgency from the suggestion that the turn to ethics could inspire a reconfiguration of anthropology more broadly (see, e.g., Laidlaw 2014) and from the question of how anthropology might relate, productively and creatively, to other scholarly and scientific disciplines with strong traditions in the study of morality (Lambek 2010; Keane 2015).

The contributions to this volume speak to this literature in different ways, and it is not our intention to present another position in the debate over what an “anthropology of ethics” should entail. Yet, we emphasize that in their approaches to senses of failure among Muslims and Christians, the contributors rest neither with moral deliberation nor with techniques of the self as a dominant framework of analysis. Our interest in moral failure resonates with recent analyses of moral “perils” or “tragedies” (Mattingly 2014), suffering (Throop 2010), and especially Jarett Zigon’s (2008: 165) conceptualization of “moral breakdown”; that is, instances in which people become—sometimes suddenly or unexpectedly, but nonetheless consciously and astutely—“reflective and reflexive about their moral being in the world” (*ibid.*). However, in contrast to Zigon’s approach, which focuses on specific moments of failure that prompt people to act on their moral selves, most of the chapters collected here engage with senses of failure as a more recurrent feature of Muslims’ and Christians’ everyday religiosities. Our specific contribution is that we investigate the dialectical relationship between Muslims’ and Christians’ experiences of moral instability, fragmentation or ambivalence on the one hand and their attempts to achieve a level of moral coherence grounded in religion on the other.

## **The Contributions**

The contributions to this book show that failure plays a central role in processes of ethical formation within both Islam and Christianity, and that it does so in many different ways. The first two chapters explore religious practices and narratives in which failure is purposively placed at the very heart of faith, rather than its margins. Joel Robbins and Leanne Williams Green explore a particularly prominent religious discourse on moral failure: the Christian conception of human fallenness grounded in the idea of original sin. Examining the ways in which experiences of sinfulness constitute a motivating force for engaging in religious practice, they begin by distinguishing between two different patterns of accounting for moral failure and sinfulness in Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity: an “internal” pattern that attributes individuals’

susceptibility to sinning to their personal moral shortcomings, and an “external” pattern that takes sinfulness to be the result of demonic influence and temptation. These patterns are not mutually exclusive and may also appear in hybrid forms. Robbins and Williams Green subsequently argue that the particular conceptualization of sinfulness in Christian communities importantly affects Christian ritual life: the “internal” pattern motivates believers to invest in practices of moral self-improvement, while the “external” pattern tends to motivate practices of deliverance and protection against demonic powers. In both cases, as the authors put it with regard to Urupmin Christianity, the recognition of human failure can be seen as “the engine of their Christian ritual life.”

Martijn de Koning examines what Robbins and Williams Green might describe as an “internal” pattern of understanding human failure among Salafi Muslims in the Netherlands. While his interlocutors assert that Salafism is the only correct and true version of Islam, they simultaneously present themselves as “weak servants.” Examining this paradox, De Koning turns the common view of moral inadequacy as an impediment to piety upside down. He shows that senses of failure form an innate part of Salafi practices and discourses of ethical cultivation, stimulating Salafis to improve their personal piety. Thus, among Dutch Salafi Muslims the state of weakness “gains a virtuous moral value.” By presenting themselves as weak and failing in interaction with others, moreover, they are able to fashion themselves as “sincere” Muslims, who recognize their shortcomings and strive to become better Muslims.

In the third chapter, Linda van de Kamp discusses Christians in Mozambique who attend Brazilian Pentecostal churches and adhere to the “Prosperity Gospel” propagated within these churches. Several of her interlocutors, however, fail to realize the promises of prosperity in their lives: rather than an increase of economic success and happiness, their (financial) sacrifices to the church bring about downward economic mobility and an unhappy family life. Van de Kamp shows how these experiences are framed by a strong discourse of personal responsibility that focuses on her interlocutors’ own perceived lack of religious determination and sincerity. She shows that the adverse effects of Pentecostal adherence do not stimulate them to turn away from faith, but rather to develop a “rational” or “intelligent” faith. By emphasizing notions of personal responsibility, Van de Kamp draws attention to the important question of how (both worldly and religious) failure is accounted for. This issue of responsibility, which Robbins and Williams Green describe as failure’s “unexpected sibling,” emerges in several chapters collected in this volume. Van de Kamp argues that her interlocutors’ focus on personal responsibility indicates that their Pentecostal Christianity dovetails with the increasingly neoliberal economy of Mozambique.

Daan Beekers also looks at the ways in which religious pursuits interact with a neoliberal, capitalist economy. He shows that young Sunni Muslims and Protestant Christians in the Netherlands struggle with feelings of inadequacy and failure because they often do not manage to make as much time for prayer and other worship practices as they want to. Beekers argues that

these struggles should be understood in the context of the quickened pace of life in today's fast capitalist culture in the Netherlands. In his analysis, however, there is more to the dynamics between religion and capitalism than mere antagonism. He demonstrates that fast capitalist culture also endows his interlocutors' worship practices with a renewed value, as these practices are felt to bring about tranquility and thereby a release from the very acceleration of everyday life. By explicitly analyzing Muslims and Christians within one framework, Beekers' contribution shows most directly that an inquiry into everyday struggles under particular social conditions allows for a productive analysis across different religions.

The theme of failure in worship is also the central concern in David Kloos' chapter on prayer in rural Aceh, Indonesia. He seeks to explain why, in a part of Indonesia where public discourses of Islamic morality are particularly strong, the negligence in prayer among some of his interlocutors raised so little disapproval within the village community. Closely examining the case of a young man with an outstanding reputation as someone who "didn't pray," Kloos argues that his negligence in prayer did not signal a lack of faith, but rather an "uncultivated faith," contingent on a broadly shared ethical mode centered on expectations and hopes of future self-improvement. In this religious ethics, it is the intention to improve oneself that counts above all—a concern that these Acehnese villagers share with the more reformist Muslims in De Koning's contribution. Kloos further shows that the emphasis on personal responsibility not only makes religious endeavors more demanding, but also allows for flexibility. Here, then, moral flexibility and ambivalence are shown to result not only from the quandaries of everyday life but also from a particular kind of religious ethics.

Thijl Sunier further elaborates on the question of maneuvering space in ethical practice. Compared to the other contributions, his analysis more explicitly centralizes a collective level and what he terms the "total ethical scheme," of which senses of failure may or may not be part. Sunier draws attention to the question when—and under influence of what kind of developments, situations or events—something comes to be defined as moral failure. Focusing on everyday religious experiences of Muslims in Western Europe, he argues that while the frictions and dilemmas they experience as a result of changing social conditions often bring about senses of failure, they may also trigger a reflexive reconsideration of the normative frames that undergird the very evaluation of failure and success. Thus, he argues that the study of moral failure also necessarily involves an inquiry into religious authority. While moral dilemmas often work to reproduce or affirm religious authority, in some cases they lead to its reconfiguration.

The collection closes with an epilogue in which Mattijs van de Port responds to the ideas put forward in the contributions to this book. Extending the volume's central premise that moral failure is part and parcel of religious modes of self-fashioning, he argues that experiences of failure can be understood to be inherent to all human world-making, be it religious or otherwise. Van de Port suggests two trajectories for further research—one based on Lacanian thought,

the other on affect theory—that could be undertaken to analyze failure as an “authentically” human experience. Taken together, the contributions to this volume show that experiences of contingency and pursuits of religious coherence cannot be seen as separate or isolated domains of action or consciousness. They actively influence and operate on each other, producing religious subjectivities in the process.

## Acknowledgments

We thank Victor Kal, Birgit Meyer, Bruno Reinhardt, Annemarie Samuels, Pooyan Tamimi Arab, and an anonymous reviewer for their helpful comments on a draft of this chapter. We are also grateful for the useful questions and suggestions we received during a research colloquium at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Utrecht University.

---

**David Kloos** is a researcher at KITLV/Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies in Leiden, The Netherlands, with a focus on the history and anthropology of Islam in Southeast Asia. His current research explores the ways in which female Islamic authorities have become part of the public sphere in Malaysia and Indonesia. His publications include *Becoming Better Muslims: Religious Authority and Ethical Improvement in Aceh, Indonesia* (Princeton University Press, 2018).

**Daan Beekers** is an anthropologist working on religious pluralism in the Netherlands. He obtained his Ph.D. at VU University Amsterdam in 2015, based on an ethnographic study of religious commitment among Muslim and Christian young adults in the Netherlands. He is currently a postdoctoral researcher within the project “Religious Matters in an Entangled World” at Utrecht University, where he is conducting research on emerging concerns with Christian heritage in the Netherlands, specifically with regard to abandoned church buildings.

## References

- Amir-Moazami, Schirin, Christine M. Jacobsen, and Maleiha Malik, eds. 2011. “Special Issue: Islam and Gender in Europe: Subjectivities, Politics and Piety.” *Feminist Review* 98(1).
- Ammerman, Nancy T. 2014. “Finding Religion in Everyday Life (2013 Paul Hanly Furfey Lecture).” *Sociology of Religion* 75(2): 189–207.
- Asad, Talal. 1986. “The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam.” *Occasional papers series*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Center for Contemporary Arab Studies.

- . 1993. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Bangstad, Sindre. 2011. "Saba Mahmood and Anthropological Feminism after Virtue." *Theory, Culture & Society* 28(3): 28–54.
- Beekers, Daan. 2014. "Pedagogies of Piety: Comparing Young Observant Muslims and Christians in the Netherlands." *Culture and Religion* 15(1): 72–99.
- Bowen, John R. 2012. *A New Anthropology of Islam*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cannell, Fenella. 2006a. "Introduction: The Anthropology of Christianity." In *The Anthropology of Christianity*, ed. Fenella Cannel, 1–50. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Cannell, Fenella., ed. 2006b. *The Anthropology of Christianity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Chua, Liana. 2012. *The Christianity of Culture: Conversion, Ethnic Citizenship, and the Matter of Religion in Malaysian Borneo*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Coleman, Simon. 2013. "Afterword: De-exceptionalising Islam." In *Articulating Islam: Anthropological Approaches to Muslim Worlds*, ed. Magnus Marsden and Konstantinos Retsikas, 247–258. Dordrecht: Springer Science & Business Media.
- Cooper, Elizabeth, and David Pratten. 2015. "Ethnographies of Uncertainty in Africa: An Introduction." In *Ethnographies of Uncertainty in Africa*, ed. Elizabeth Cooper and David Pratten, 1–16. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Das, Veena. 2007. *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Deeb, Lara. 2006. *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- . 2015. "Thinking Piety and the Everyday Together: A Response to Fadil and Fernando." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5(2): 93–96.
- De Koning, Martijn. 2013. "The Moral Maze: Dutch Salafis and the Construction of a Moral Community of the Faithful." *Contemporary Islam* 7(1): 71–83.
- Dessing, Nathal M., Nadia Jeldtoft, Jørgen S. Nielsen, and Linda Woodhead, eds. 2013. *Everyday Lived Islam in Europe*. Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate.
- Eickelman, Dale F. 1982. "The Study of Islam in Local Contexts." *Contributions to Asian Studies* 17: 1–16.
- Eickelman, Dale F., and James Piscatori. 1996. *Muslim Politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Elisha, Omri. 2011. *Moral Ambition: Mobilization and Social Outreach in Evangelical Megachurches*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Elliot, Alice. 2016. "The Makeup of Destiny: Predestination and the Labor of Hope in a Moroccan Emigrant Town." *American Ethnologist* 43(3): 488–499.
- El-Zein, Abdul Hamid. 1977. "Beyond Ideology and Theology: The Search for the Anthropology of Islam." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 6(1): 227–254.
- Engelke, Matthew E. 2005. "The Early Days of Johane Masowe: Self-Doubt, Uncertainty, and Religious Transformation." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 47(4): 781–808.
- Engelke, Matthew E., and Joel Robbins, eds. 2010. "Special Issue: Global Christianity, Global Critique." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109(4).
- Engelke, Matthew E., and Matt Tomlinson. 2006. *The Limits of Meaning: Case Studies in the Anthropology of Christianity*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Fadil, Nadia. 2008. *Submitting to God, Submitting to the Self: Secular and Religious Trajectories of Second Generation Maghrebi in Belgium*. Ph.D. dissertation. KU Leuven.



- Fadil, Nadia and Mayanthi Fernando. 2015. "Rediscovering the 'Everyday' Muslim: Notes on an Anthropological Divide." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5(2): 59–88.
- Faubion, James D. 2011. *An Anthropology of Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Feener, R. Michael. 2013. *Shari'a and Social Engineering: The Implementation of Islamic Law in Contemporary Aceh, Indonesia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fischer, Johan. 2008. *Proper Islamic Consumption: Shopping among the Malays in Modern Malaysia*. Copenhagen: NIAS press.
- Frisk, Sylva. 2009. *Submitting to God: Women and Islam in Urban Malaysia*. Copenhagen: NIAS press.
- Garriott, William, and Kevin Lewis O'Neill. 2008. "Who is a Christian? Toward a Dialogic Approach in the Anthropology of Christianity." *Anthropological Theory* 8(4): 381–398.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1968. *Islam Observed*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Goody, Jack. 1996. "A Kernel of Doubt." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2(4): 667–681.
- Hann, Chris. 2007. "The Anthropology of Christianity Per Se." *European Journal of Sociology/Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 48(3): 383–410.
- Harding, Susan Friend. 2000. *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics*. Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Hefner, Robert W. 2010. "Religious Resurgence in Contemporary Asia: Southeast Asian Perspectives on Capitalism, the State, and the New Piety." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 69(4): 1031–1047.
- Hirschkind, Charles. 2006. *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Horst, Cindy, and Katarzyna Grabska. 2015. "Introduction: Flight and Exile – Uncertainty in the Context of Conflict-Induced Displacement." *Social Analysis* 59(1): 1–18.
- Iqtidar, Humeira. 2011. *Secularizing Islamists? Jama'at-e-Islami and Jama'at-ud-Da'wa in Urban Pakistan*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Jacobsen, Christine M. 2011. *Islamic Traditions and Muslim Youth in Norway*. Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill.
- James, Wendy., ed. 2003. *The Pursuit of Certainty: Religious and Cultural Formulations*. London: Routledge.
- Janson, Marloes, and Birgit Meyer, eds. 2016. "Special Issue: Studying Islam and Christianity in Africa: Moving Beyond a Bifurcated Field." *Africa* 86(4).
- Jenkins, Timothy. 2012. "The Anthropology of Christianity: Situation and Critique." *Ethnos* 77(4): 459–476.
- Jouili, Jeanette S. 2015. *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints: Women in the Islamic Revival in Europe*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Jouili, Jeanette S., and Schirin Amir-Moazami. 2006. "Knowledge, Empowerment and Religious Authority among Pious Muslim Women in France and Germany." *The Muslim World* 96(4): 617–642.
- Keane, Webb. 1997. "From Fetishism to Sincerity: On Agency, the Speaking Subject, and their Historicity in the Context of Religious Conversion." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 39(4): 674–693.
- . 2007. *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- . 2015. *Ethical Life: Its Natural and Social Histories*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Kepel, Gilles. 2002. *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.

- Kreinath, Jens., ed. 2012. *The Anthropology of Islam Reader*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Laidlaw, James. 2014. *The Subject of Virtue: An Anthropology of Ethics and Freedom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lambek, Michael J. 2010. "Introduction." In *Ordinary Ethics: Anthropology, Language, and Action*, ed. Michael Lambek, 1–36. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Lauterbach, Karen. 2008. "The Craft of Pastorship in Ghana and Beyond." Ph.D. dissertation. Roskilde University.
- Lechkar, Iman. 2012. "Striving and Stumbling in the Name of Allah: Neo-Sunnis and Neo-Shi'ites in a Belgian Context." Ph.D. dissertation. KU Leuven.
- Liberatore, Giulia. 2013. "Doubt as a Double-Edged Sword: Unanswerable Questions and Practical Solutions among Newly Practising Somali Women in London." In *Ethnographies of Doubt: Faith and Uncertainty in Contemporary Societies*, ed. Mathijs Pelkmans, 225–250. New York: I.B. Tauris.
- Luhrmann, Tanya M. 2012. "A Hyperreal God and Modern Belief." *Current Anthropology* 53(4): 371–395.
- Mahmood, Saba. 2005. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Marsden, Magnus. 2005. *Living Islam: Muslim Religious Experience in Pakistan's North-West Frontier*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Marsden, Magnus, and Konstantinos Retsikas, eds. 2013a. *Articulating Islam: Anthropological Approaches to Muslim Worlds*. Dordrecht: Springer Science & Business Media.
- Marsden, Magnus, and Konstantinos Retsikas. 2013b. "Introduction." In *Articulating Islam: Anthropological Approaches to Muslim Worlds*, ed. Magnus Marsden and Konstantinos Retsikas, 1–31. Dordrecht: Springer Science & Business Media.
- Marshall, Ruth. 2009. *Political Spiritualities: The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Mattingly, Cheryl. 2014. "The Moral Perils of a Superstrong Black Mother." *Ethos* 42(1): 119–138.
- McDougall, Debra. 2009. "Christianity, Relationality and the Material Limits of Individualism: Reflections on Robbins's Becoming Sinners." *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 10(1): 1–19.
- Peletz, Michael G. 1997. "'Ordinary Muslims' and Muslim Resurgents in Contemporary Malaysia: Notes on an Ambivalent Relationship." In *Islam in an Era of Nation-States: Politics and Religious Renewal in Muslim Southeast Asia*, ed. Robert W. Hefner and Patricia Horvath, 231–273. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Pelkmans, Mathijs., ed. 2013a. *Ethnographies of Doubt: Faith and Uncertainty in Contemporary Societies*. New York: I.B. Tauris.
- Pelkmans, Mathijs. 2013b. "Outline for an Ethnography of Doubt." In *Ethnographies of Doubt: Faith and Uncertainty in Contemporary Societies*, ed. Mathijs Pelkmans, 1–42. New York: I.B. Tauris.
- Pype, Katrien. 2011. "Confession cum Deliverance: In/Dividuality of the Subject among Kinshasa's Born-Again Christians." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 41(3): 280–310.
- Robbins, Joel. 2003. "What Is a Christian? Notes toward an Anthropology of Christianity." *Religion* 33(3): 191–199.
- . 2004. *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- . 2007. "Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture: Belief, Time, and the Anthropology of Christianity." *Current Anthropology* 48(1): 5–38.
- . 2014. "The Anthropology of Christianity: Unity, Diversity, New Directions: An Introduction to Supplement 10." *Current Anthropology* 55(S10): S157–S171.

- Roy, Olivier. 1996. *The Failure of Political Islam*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Rudnyckyj, Daromir. 2010. *Spiritual Economies: Islam, Globalization, and the Afterlife of Development*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Schielke, Samuli. 2010. "Second Thoughts about the Anthropology of Islam, or How to Make Sense of Grand Schemes in Everyday Life." Berlin: Zentrum Moderner Orient Working Papers, no. 2.
- . 2015. *Egypt in the Future Tense: Hope, Frustration, and Ambivalence Before and After 2011*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Schielke, Samuli, and Liza Debevec, eds. 2012. *Ordinary Lives and Grand Schemes: An Anthropology of Everyday Religion*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Scott, Michael W. 2005. "‘I Was Like Abraham’: Notes on the Anthropology of Christianity from the Solomon Islands." *Ethnos* 70(1): 101–125.
- Simon, Gregory M. 2014. *Caged in on the Outside: Moral Subjectivity, Selfhood, and Islam in Minangkabau, Indonesia*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai‘i Press.
- Soares, Benjamin., ed. 2006. *Muslim-Christian Encounters in Africa*. Leiden: Brill.
- Soares, Benjamin, and Filippo Osella. 2009. "Islam, Politics, Anthropology." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15(S1): S1–S23.
- Starrett, Gregory. 1998. *Putting Islam to Work: Education, Politics, and Religious Transformation in Egypt*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Strhan, Anna. 2015. *Aliens and Strangers? The Struggle for Coherence in the Everyday Lives of Evangelicals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sykes, Karen., ed. 2008. *Ethnographies of Moral Reasoning: Living Paradoxes of a Global Age*. London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Throop, C. Jason. 2010. *Suffering and Sentiment: Exploring the Vicissitudes of Experience and Pain in Yap*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Tomlinson, Matt, and Matthew E. Engelke. 2006. "Meaning, Anthropology, Christianity." In *The Limits of Meaning: Case Studies in the Anthropology of Christianity*, ed. Matthew Engelke and Matt Tomlinson, 1–37. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Turner, Bryan S., ed. 2008. "Special Issue: Piety, Politics and Islam." *Contemporary Islam* 2(1).
- Van der Veer, Peter. 2008. "Embodiment, Materiality, and Power: A Review Essay." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50(3): 809–818.
- Verkaaik, Oskar. 2014. "The Art of Imperfection: Contemporary Synagogues in Germany and the Netherlands." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 20(3): 486–504.
- Zigon, Jarrett. 2008. *Morality: An Anthropological Perspective*. New York: Berg.