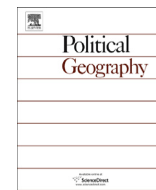
Political Geography 46 (2015) 21–30

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Political Geography

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/polgeo



Post-secular geographies and the problem of pluralism: Religion and everyday life in Istanbul, Turkey

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Available online 11 December 2014

Keywords:
Post-secularism
Pluralism
Religion
Public space
Public sphere
Feminist geopolitics
Turkey

ABSTRACT

The concept of post-secularism has come to signify a renewed attention to the role of religion within secular, democratic public spheres. Central to the project of post-secularism is the integration of religious ways of being within a public arena shared by others who may practice different faiths, practice the same faith differently, or be non-religious in outlook. As a secular state within which Sunni Islam has played an increasingly public role, Turkey is a prime site for studying new configurations of religion, politics, and public life. Our 2013 research with devout Sunni Muslim women in Istanbul demonstrates how the big questions of post-secularism and the problem of pluralism are posed and navigated within the quotidian geographies of homes, neighborhoods, and city spaces. Women grapple with the demands of a pluralistic public sphere on their own terms and in ways that traverse and call into question the distinction between public and private spaces. While mutual respect mediates relations with diverse others, women often find themselves up against the limits of respect, both in their intimate relations with Alevi friends and neighbors, and in the anonymous spaces of the city where they sometimes find themselves subject to secular hostility. The gendered moral order of public space that positions devout headscarf-wearing women in a particular way within diverse city spaces where others may be consuming alcohol or wearing revealing clothing further complicates the problem of pluralism in the city. We conclude that one does not perhaps arrive at post-secularism so much as struggle with its demands.

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The political role of religion has emerged as one of the most urgent philosophical and practical questions of our time (Berger, 1999; Casanova, 1994; Gorski, Kim, Torpey, & VonAntwerpen, 2012; de Vries & Sullivan, 2006). One of the buzzwords of an upsurge of attention to the role of religion in politics has been post-secularism. Post-secularism refers primarily to European contexts where religion is playing a renewed role in pluralistic public spheres (Habermas, 2008). Yet the term has also been applied beyond Western Europe, and recently scholars have begun grappling with the implications of the post-secular in Turkey as well (Göle, 2012; Kömeçoğlu, 2012; Rosati, 2012; Walton, 2013). An institutionally secular, democratic state in which religious lifestyles have been ascendant within the public sphere in the past decade, Turkey has been governed since 2002 by a political party (the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP, or Justice and Development Party) that has disavowed its roots in Islamist politics but has effectively combined Islamic values with neoliberal economic policies. Because of the seeming success of this accommodation, when popular uprisings rocked the Arab world in spring of 2011, many observers suggested that Turkey might be a model for the new Middle East (Tait, 2011). But is the Turkish model destined to flounder on the problem of how religious and non-religious ways of life can accommodate one another in a pluralistic public sphere? Key to Habermas' idea of post-secularism is the integration of religious ways of being within a public arena shared by others who may practice different faiths, practice the same faith differently, or be non-religious in outlook. Yet the problem of pluralism has proven to be a thorny one, not only Europe (see Cesari, 2005; Ehrkamp, 2010, 2012; Gale, 2005; Hancock, 2008) but in the Middle East as well (Muashar, 2014).

Despite the importance that religion is theoretically accorded in politics today, few studies attempt to bridge the gap between the transformations of secularism and religion writ large and the daily practices and ordinary discourses through which these are dynamically and spatially constituted. Indeed, Michele Dillon (2012:

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http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2014.10.006
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5391) has argued that what is missing from Habermas' idea of the post-secular is an appreciation of "how religion manifests and matters in everyday life." Approaching the problem of post-secularism and the practice of pluralism from the perspective of devout Sunni women in Istanbul, our study performs a feminist geopolitics of religion, both attending to the "mundane every-day practices of … religions in relation to politics" (Agnew, 2006, 2010: 44), and the "materialities of everyday life as they constitute the substantive foundations – the bodies, the subjectivities, the practices and discourses – of constantly unfolding geopolitical tensions and conflicts" (Dixon & Marston, 2011: 446; see also Dowler & Sharp, 2001; Hyndman, 2001, 2004; Fluri, 2009). This nexus between religion and feminist geopolitics is a fertile one. Just as feminist geopolitics has relocated the political within practices of everyday life, a revitalized geography of religion has moved beyond the 'officially sacred' to include previously under-examined spaces and scales of religion and religious identities (Gökarıksel, 2009; Holloway, 2006; Hopkins, 2009; Hopkins et al., 2013; Kong, 2001, 2010; Morin and Guelke 2007; Olson, 2006; Olson & Silvey, 2006; Silvey, 2007). One of the concerns of this scholarship has been to show how religion interacts with the secular and the political in public space and how these categories might be questioned (Ehrkamp, 2010; Howe, 2009; Tse, 2013; Wilford, 2012). Tracing globally significant questions of religion and public life through the quotidian practices of devout, headscarf-wearing women in Istanbul, our research thus takes root within the space opened up by feminist geopolitics and new geographies of religion. Such a grounded approach has much to contribute to broad debates (which have too often remained theoretical, bound up with official politics and religion, and Eurocentric) about how religious ways of being interact within and are constitutive of public life in different contexts.

This paper draws upon research with headscarf-wearing women who identify themselves as moderately to very devout (*dindar*)[2] to provide a first step towards a broader understanding of the reconfiguration of religion and secularism in Turkey. Our choice to focus here on those who identify as devout Sunni Muslim is based in the particular importance of this sector for the reconfiguration of Islam and Turkey's public sphere over the course of the past two decades (Göle, 2002; Gümüşçü, 2010; Navaro-Yashin, 2002; White, 1999).[3] According to a 2006 nationally representative survey, approximately 60% of the Turkish population identifies as very or extremely devout (Çarkoglu & Toprak, 2007). Amongst those who do not identify as devout Sunni Muslims will be Alevis,[4] non-Muslims, the non-practicing, or the non-religious. As a group, headscarf-wearing women have been negatively affected by state-imposed restrictions on personal freedom and religious belief, and have actively and publicly resisted these restrictions (Göle, 2003; Kavakci Islam, 2010; Secor, 2002, 2005; Şişman, 1998). Headscarf-wearing women are therefore an important constituency with whom to discuss encounters with difference in urban spaces. Thus with the goal of opening new perspectives on the significance of post-secularism for the case of Turkey, we conducted four focus groups in Istanbul with headscarf-wearing ('covered' in Turkish parlance) women who self-identified as devout Sunni Muslims in July 2013.[5] A total of thirty-nine women participated in focus groups, which we grouped according to age (below 30 or above) and socioeconomic status (working class or middle/upper-middle class). Of course, Istanbul is a very particular Turkish city. Embedded as they are in the fabric of everyday life in the city, our findings – much as we feel that they speak to larger questions about the role of religion in as constitutive of a spatially variegated 'public' sphere – are also particular to this context. As a small slice of a much larger picture, the research presented here is preliminary to a multi-method, nation-wide project on religion in public life in Turkey.[6]

Turkey is a prime context for studying the new configurations of religion, politics, and public life that mark our current era. While critical attention to secularism may provide a fresh viewpoint on Western Europe and the U.S., the topic has no less than dominated Turkish studies since the second part of the 20th century (Kuru & Stepan, 2012; Mardin, 1981, 2006, 2011; Navaro-Yashin, 2002; Özyürek, 2006; Tarhanlı, 1993; Yavuz, 2009). The Turkish mode of "strong secularism," in which the constitution both removes religion from the public sphere *and* gives the state control of religious activities, is similar to French laicism in its emphasis on the protection of the political process from the influence of religion (Berkes, 1964). At the time of the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923, this meant not only pushing religion into a newly designated 'private sphere' (Çınar, 2005), but extending the arm of the state to the administration of mosques and the training of religious personnel through the Directorate of Religious Affairs (DRA). Further, all religious activities that did not fall under the control of the DRA, such as Sufi sects, brotherhoods (*tarikats*), and religious schools (*medrese*), were outlawed. Yet with Turkey's transition to democracy in 1945–1950, religion quickly found its way into the populist strategies of party politics. Since the 1980s, many have considered religion and secularism to be a primary political division in Turkish politics (Kaya, 2012; Keyman, 2007). In fact, this way of parsing society has become so overworked that more visionary scholars have called for moving beyond the secular/religious dichotomy to fresh understandings of Turkish society (Kandiyoti, 2012; Göle, 2012). This call is not only academic; the redefinition of the secular is also a political project for the AKP. In October 2010, a member of the AKP charged with drafting the new constitution was quoted in domestic and international media stating, "We respect Turkey's principles of secularism, but these need to be re-interpreted" (HaberTürk, 2010).

As the devout Sunni political and economic elite has begun to reshape politics and public life in Turkey, questions remain regarding the extent to which difference and pluralism are accommodated in the evolving of public sphere. Our purpose is to take the problematic of post-secularism beyond an analysis of institutional politics and the ideology of the ruling elite. We begin by situating the concept of post-secularism and attendant notions of pluralism and the public sphere within the field of their uptake and critique. Taking post-secularism as a problematic that poses certain questions, we then turn to our fieldwork to show how these questions give rise to multiple contingent and embodied solutions in the lives of devout Sunni women in Istanbul. One of the outcomes of this analysis is that we can see how the 'public sphere' of engagement and encounter traverses spaces typically coded as public and private in women's lives. Further, while mutual respect mediates relations between neighbors, coworkers, friends, and family, women often find themselves up against the limits of respect, both in their intimate relations with Alevi friends and neighbors, and in the anonymous spaces of the city where they sometimes find themselves subject to secular hostility. Finally, further complicating the expression of pluralism in Istanbul, we argue that the gendered moral order of city spaces creates ambivalence for devout headscarf-wearing women when they enter into diverse arenas. Building upon geographical approaches to religion and public space, we thus examine the everyday geopolitics of post-secularism, not as an objective statement about the world, but as a problematic that allows us to deconstruct the very categories upon which it is based.

Post-secularism and the problem of pluralism

The concept of post-secularism, which Habermas (2006, 2008) uses to describe a heightened awareness of the role of religion in the public sphere that has come about in response to broader social

and political developments (such as immigration and Islamist politics), has spurred ongoing debate (Gorski et al., 2012; Mendieta & Vanantwerpen, 2011; Taylor, 2011; Reder & Schmidt, 2010). Without doubt, the idea of post-secularism as Habermas formulated it can be faulted for embedding the assumptions of secularization theory (even as it suggests their failure), for exaggerating the distance between current configurations and those of the past, and for perpetuating a mistaken understanding of the uniqueness and discrete space of religion (Asad, 2003; Joas, 2008; Reder, 2010; Taylor, 2011). Yet post-secularism can also be an energizing concept, one that forces us to recognize the contingency of the secular and its dependence on a particular delineation of the categories of 'politics' and 'religion' – a recognition that critical scholars such as Talal Asad have been promoting for some time (Asad, 2003; Scott and Hirschkind, 2006). It is to this end that we deploy post-secularism in this paper.

Post-secularism, as presented by Habermas, assumes a non-theocratic state, but one that is different from the secular states of the past insofar as it is inclusive of religious voices and logics within the public sphere. But rethinking secularism must go beyond questions about the form of a state. Just as the concept of citizenship has come to include aspects of identity and belonging beyond official state membership (Isin & Turner 2002; Staeheli, Ehrkamp, Leitner, & Nagel, 2012), secularism has been critically resituated as a problematic that goes beyond the formula for 'the separation of church and state' (Asad, 2003). As Charles Taylor (2011: 36) points out, an institutional definition of secularism that focuses on the relationship between the state and religious establishments is far too narrow to capture the ethos of secularism, which must be understood to include the broader question of "the (correct) response of the democratic state to diversity." A critical assessment of secularism – and post-secularism – therefore requires looking beyond the institutionalized relationships between the state and religion to examine the everyday practices through which religious ways of being and other moral systems interact within and are constitutive of pluralistic public spheres.

But what do we mean by pluralism and the public sphere? As Staeheli and Mitchell (2007) have noted, 'the public' is a term that has multiple spatial and metaphorical meanings. In political philosophy, the question of religion's public role is often linked to the idea of the public sphere, a term that Habermas uses to refer to a realm where all citizens of a democracy are free to confer "in an unrestricted fashion … about matters of general interest" (Habermas, 1974: 49). In his turn to the post-secular, Habermas reconsiders his previous position that religious identities and logics must be checked at the door of a secular, democratic public sphere (Habermas, 2006, 2008). The absurdity of the premise that religious, gendered, and other differences *could* be bracketed for the functioning of a democratic public sphere is well captured by a cartoon by Latif Demirci, published in the Turkish daily newspaper, *Hürriyet*, on November 10, 2003. In the cartoon, a middle-aged woman in a headscarf is riding a city bus. She calls out to the driver, "Sir, let me get off before coming to a public sphere …" (reprinted in Saktanber, 2006: 29). As Ayşe Saktanber points out in her analysis of this cartoon, the idea that the headscarf can only be worn in the private sphere – an idea embraced until recently in Turkey in the name of secular democracy – makes no sense, both because there is no clear-cut geographic distinction between public and private spheres, and because democratic rights cannot be realized without access to the public sphere.

As it turns out, rather than being baggage that can be left at home, identities are themselves constituted (often agonistically) within the very public sphere from which Habermas projected their exclusion (Mouffe, 1996). For example, Kabir Tambar (2010: 675) has argued that, in the name of pluralism, Alevis in Turkey have felt pressure to adopt particular modalities of public presence, participating in an "aesthetics of visibility" (such as public performances of rituals that are both festive and worshipful) that sometimes comes into conflict with the demands of communal worship and religious ritual. Thus when we ask questions about attitudes towards and practices of pluralism in Turkey, we move beyond the classical sense of pluralism as the competition of interests within a singular public sphere (with these interests assumed to be tied to pre-constituted identities) (Benhabib, 2002). Rather, the pluralism that we examine concerns the interactions between different ways of being in the world, different moral systems, and different lifestyles that both produce and contest a multiplicity of intersecting and competing publics. We therefore follow Justin Tse (2013: 2) in his call for geographers to "reveal spaces, places, and networks as constituted by grounded theologies, performative practices of place-making informed by understandings of the transcendent" – whether those understandings are 'religious' or 'secular.' In the case of Istanbul, such spaces are linked both to the metaphorical public sphere (that is, the arena of societal participation and recognition) and to actual, variably accessible and contested urban spaces (Mitchell, 1995). At the same time, our analysis will show how the embodied practices of encounter and interaction destabilize notions of 'private' and 'public' space (see also Iveson, 2011).

Given the centrality of pluralism to Habermas' post-secularism, one might question whether it represents merely an expansion of liberal tolerance discourse, a concession that religion is now to be tolerated (if still understood as the 'other' of reason and philosophy). If post-secularism is interpreted as no more than the expansion of religious toleration within a secular framework (McLennan, 2010), we will unfortunately miss out on the more radical potential that inheres in our current conjuncture to break down the ideological wall between religion and secularism. This is because liberal tolerance, rather than being a panacea for the challenges of pluralism, is bound up with the basic premises of the secular state and its exclusion of religious voices. The common conclusion of studies of political tolerance that the devout are intolerant (Froese, Bader, & Smith, 2008; Sheepers, Gijsbers, & Hello, 2002; Yeşilada & Noordjik, 2010) – and therefore presumably intolerable within liberal democracy – is tautological, an artifact of secularist assumptions that posit liberal tolerance as a virtue available only to self-regulating, individual subjects and secular states (Brown, 2006: 173). Further, tolerance as a political discourse regularly and cross-culturally involves "the marking of subjects of tolerance as inferior, deviant, or marginal vis-à-vis those practicing tolerance" at the same time as it whitewashes these exclusions (Brown, 2006: 13). Indeed, Amy Mills' (2010) work in an Istanbul neighborhood demonstrates how a nostalgic discourse of tolerance enables a neighborhood identity to be built upon the disavowal of past mistreatment of non-Muslim minorities. Likewise, the European Commission-funded project *Accept Pluralism* offers little encouragement for Turkey, noting that despite a vibrant official discourse of tolerance, "[T]olerance is nothing but a myth in Turkey … [functioning] to conceal the mistreatment of ethno-cultural and religious minorities other than the majority of Sunni-Muslim-Turks" (Kaya & Harmanyeri, 2010: 2). In short, discourses of tolerance may do more to maintain structures of exclusion and oppression than to advance the more radical project of rethinking the secular/religious dichotomy.

Post-secularism for us is not a declaration of a new era or even a new fracture in the edifice of secularization so long assumed to describe Western political development. We do not begin our study from an assumption that Turkey was purely secular and now it is not, an assumption that would indeed be difficult to sustain considering the varied and potent role that both secularism and religion have played and continue to play in the Turkish polity.

Instead, we engage post-secularism as an idea that poses a set of problems or questions in response to which local, momentary, and variable solutions continuously emerge. These questions, as we have traced above, concern how different religious and non-religious ways of being in the world interact – through what idioms, constituting what kinds of spaces, in conflict or cooperation – within a diverse polity. Like other emergent post-secular geographies, our project seeks out the potentialities that inhere in a "reflexive critique" of the assumptions of secularization (Cloke & Beaumont, 2013: 44; Beaumont & Baker, 2011). Beginning from the premise that a democratic public sphere cannot be built on the exclusion of religious (or other) voices (Habermas, 2008), we move beyond this starting point to engage with post-secularism as a problematic that may potentially open up the very categories (religion, secularism) upon which it is based, thereby dismantling the justifying discourse of liberal tolerance at the same time as it thrusts the problem of pluralism to the fore.

Thus it is not the purpose of our study to determine whether devout Sunni Muslims in Turkey are tolerant or intolerant, tolerable or intolerable. Instead, we begin from the minimal assumption that they (like Alevis, those of other faiths, the non-practicing, and the non-religious) are active players in the socio-spatial organization of the Turkish polity. Our goal is to provide a fresh perspective on the dynamics of pluralism by going beyond the measurement of political tolerance to ask *how* different religious ways of being interact with one another and with other moral systems to shape public life in Turkey. Pluralism, in our study, is therefore not simply a measure of 'regulated aversion' (Brown, 2006) but a question of the specific modes and practices through which people coexist and reflect upon that coexistence (for example, through a discourse of respect rather than tolerance). Our work thus follows upon critical examinations of the practices and discourses of tolerance and pluralism in Turkey (Mills, 2010; Tambar, 2010; Walton, 2013) in order to contribute to "the contemporary reassessment of the pragmatic and philosophical conditions for pluralist democracy" (Hirschkind, 2008:124).

"There has to be respect": the demands of pluralism

Insofar as post-secularism poses a set of problems that have the potential to challenge secularism/religion as a socio-spatial binary, its various solutions are manifest in emergent formations of religion and 'the public' in everyday life. These formations, moreover, must necessarily embed within them a solution of some kind to the problem of pluralism – that is, to the question of how different religious ways of being are constituted in relation to one another and to other moral systems within a polity. And taking this argument one step further, we suggest that this pluralist co-constitution in turn contributes to particular socio-spatial configuratons, such as those that demarcate the 'public sphere,' its spatiality and its normative exclusions (Staeheli & Mitchell, 2007). When we bring these questions to the specific case of devout Sunni Muslim women in Istanbul, we find that their contingent solutions to lived pluralism traverse the topography of daily life, from the spaces of home and neighborhood to the shared forums of the city, and in doing so trouble the socio-spatial delineation of a public sphere.

To explore how the practices and narratives of devout Sunni women in Istanbul might help us to reflect on the problem of pluralism, we began by posing to them the question of whether their social environments were diverse – a question that left participants to define diversity as they chose. Women in our focus groups often responded by specifying the presence of Alevi relatives, friends, neighbors, and colleagues in their social networks. The discussion frequently expanded to include non-covered (*açık*, i.e. no headscarf), non-religious, or non-Muslim people with whom they had close relations as well. Notably, across all focus groups, women described their social interactions with those whose religious beliefs or lifestyles are different from their own in terms of respect (*saygı*). Mutual respect enabled women to cultivate relationships with those who do not share the same faith or practice Islam in the same way. Yet women also found that they themselves were not always treated with respect in what they call 'secular' neighborhoods – that is, those generally upper-to upper-middle class areas of Istanbul where secular lifestyles[7] predominate – despite their often long-term ties to and sense of belonging in such places. Finally, we find that the call for respect, like the discourse of tolerance, sets expectations of proper conduct that work to regulate social interactions and to reiterate lines of difference. Respect has its limits as a principle and practice of pluralism.

The following focus group discussion among young working-class women in their early thirties illustrates the discourse of respect and its contested parameters. Following a discussion about whether one should intervene in a friend's consumption of alcohol (a practice prohibited by commonly accepted Islamic injunctions), Remziye argues that one cannot force anyone to behave differently and asserts the significance of respect, defined in religious terms: "There's respect in religion. There's no insistence that everyone is going to be a Muslim, everyone is going to follow the rules of Islam. There has to be respect." Seher takes this opportunity to describe her friendships with people "of other faiths," referring to Alevis. She lives in the close-knit neighborhood of Sarıyer in Istanbul, which includes Alevis and Sunnis. For Seher, as long as the person is good and there is mutual respect, differences in faith do not matter; she says she talks about everything, "even religion," with her Alevi neighbor. Others in the group chime in to claim that they also have Alevi, non-covered Sunni, and Christian friends and relatives. Selma explains her close friendships with Christian immigrants from Macedonia who are in Istanbul working to care for children and the sick, as well as with non-covered women, some of whom she considers deeply religious. She positions herself "against people who are extremely covered and who get mad at a non-covered young woman passing by. Being a Muslim is not only about covering your hair." For Selma respect is key:

> **Selma**: [referring to her Christian friends]. But during Ramadan … they act as if they're also fasting, just like me. They respect me. Because they respect me, I also respect them.
>
> **Seher**: Friendships continue as long as there's mutual respect.
>
> **Remziye**: My neighbor right across from me is Alevi. According to our religion, it's not *caiz* (acceptable) to have neighborly relations [with Alevis]; if one does research about Islamic law, [one would find that] it really is not permissible.
>
> **Seher**: Even to look into her eyes.
>
> **Remziye**: But we don't visit each other. We just say hello when we run into each other on the street. We're not that far apart [not to say hello] either. They're good people. But we're not appropriate for them, and they're not appropriate for us in some ways … For example, I cannot eat the food they cook.
>
> **Moderator**: Why not?
>
> **Remziye**: Pardon me but because they don't perform ablutions. They don't do them. You can't eat even if you wanted to. One or two times she brought *börek* (fluffy pastries) to my door but you can't take it. If you take it, you know you can't eat it. Why should I throw away someone else's food, you ask yourself …
>
> **Seher**: We eat our neighbors's food. We can't behave disrespectfully. Because she treats you well. She eats your food. If you don't eat hers, then she'll be excluded.

Remziye: I don't exclude them.

Seher: If she feels excluded, then she will react to you, because she eats your food. Then you have to go and eat her food. It may not be acceptable in our religion, but that doesn't matter if you break your neighbor's heart.

Remziye: But you don't break her heart.

Berrin: There was a foreign woman where I worked. I was fasting. She wouldn't eat or drink when I was there. She would go out to eat and drink. I had specific hours and left when I was done. She'd bring her fruit, vegetables, and food and eat then. Sometimes she'd put food in containers and give it to me for breaking my fast. She wasn't of my religion but I thank her to this day. She doesn't have to be of my religion. She was good inside.

Selma and Seher mix comfortably with their Alevi, non-covered, or Christian friends and cultivate close relations with them as long as they are good people and there is mutual respect shown towards their different beliefs and religions. This respect includes being aware of different religious obligations, being considerate of the other person's religious practices, and not tempting or offending her by, for example, eating in front of her when she is fasting. In other focus groups, similar examples abound. For example, Perihan, in the group of older working class women, states that her best friend is Alevi and she gets along with her much better than most of her covered friends. Similarly, Aynur in the same group has three best friends who are all Alevis, and they continue to be friends even as occasional disagreements arise about religion or politics. The 49-year-old Hülya explains how her Alevi friend went as far as purchasing a prayer mat for her just so she could comfortably pray in her friend's house whenever she went to visit. This was a sign of the deep respect her Alevi friend had for her and how she went to great lengths to accommodate her religious practice. In the focus group with older middle-class women, Sevgi, whose uncle is married to an Alevi, gives details for her intimate relations with her Alevi aunt, all hinging on mutual respect.

In contrast, Remziye above draws a firm line against neighborly relations with Alevis no matter how good they may be as people or how respectful they may be of her religious orientation. For Remziye, there are clear religious rules against mixing with Alevis and it is best to keep them at a distance. Refusing to eat a neighbor's food is disrespectful according to Seher, whose Alevi neighbors participate in regular neighborhood gatherings where food is prepared in turns and consumed by everyone attending. But for Remziye, eating the food prepared by an Alevi is religiously unacceptable and she sees her refusal of her neighbor's offering of food as neither disrespectful, exclusionary, nor breaking any hearts, since it is something that she accepts as a religious obligation and also because she has carefully averted forging any close relations with her neighbor that may lead to expectations of sharing food. What Seher understands as showing respect, in this case, runs against what Remziye perceives as a religious obligation.

The 40 year-old Efil among older working class women offers another example of the limits that come into play in women's relationships:

I had an Alevi neighbor in Gaziosmanpaşa. I like her a lot and still see her. One day she came to me and said, "I fast following your faith, why don't you come to our *cemevi* [Alevi religious space]?" I told her that I didn't force her to fast. It's up to you to fast or not to fast. But I don't want to come to your *cemevi*. She was upset. I didn't want to go.

Even though Efil's friend respected her Sunni religious practice so much that she fasted for/with her, Efil didn't reciprocate the gesture by visiting her friend's *cemevi*. As Efil explained to the group that her friendship continued despite a period of pique, others joined in to state that they have very close Alevi, Russian, Kurdish, Armenian neighbors, and one countered Efil's refusal by sharing that she has been to a church. As Aynur (who is 47 years old, grew up in Şişli, and works as a sales distributor of herbal products) put it: "When someone is a human being, [religion] really doesn't matter much. I have a lot of friends who are Russian, Alevi, Armenian, and mixed. We live together as a synthesis and get along very well." The 42 year-old Züleyha who grew up in the ethnically and religiously diverse neighborhood of Beyoğlu accused political leaders of dividing people according to religion and ethnicity. In contrast, she sees her own experience as inclusive of different religious and ethnic groups and believes people in general share similar attitudes. According to her, it is politics that divides people.

Efil's reluctance to visit a *cemevi* also resonates with a discussion that took place in another focus group regarding *cemevis*. The status of *cemevis* has been a topic of intense debate in Turkey. Many Alevi activists have argued for the recognition of *cemevis* as places of worship, yet the Directorate of Religious Affairs (DRA) continues to recognize *cemevis* only as cultural centers (Es, 2013; Köse, 2010; Soner & Toktaş, 2011). In the focus group with older middle class women, Ayten (40 years-old) took a position that, similar to the decision of DRA, questions the legitimacy of *cemevis* as places of worship: "I went and saw [a *cemevi*], I'm a witness. There's no worship in *cemevis*. They play the *saz* [a string instrument], perform *semahs* [ritual dancing], turn and turn, then take the dead body and bury it. What kind of a place of worship is this?" Havva in the same group objects: "Everyone must live according to her beliefs," and Neşe supports her by stating that no one, not even the state, should interfere with the religious practices of Alevis.

Certainly, covered women, as a group, have themselves engaged in a protracted struggle for both rights and respect in Turkey. Though Turkey's secular democractic framework has, following 12 years of AKP rule, become more accommodating of devout Sunni identities, the recognition of religious identities in Turkey remains frought with deep tensions that not only find expression in the struggles between political parties but also unfold in the neighborhoods and public spaces of the city. In the group of older middle-class women, Sevgi calls for respect to mediate these tensions:

Let's say you are *açık* [non-covered], I am covered. Now if you respect me, I have to respect you. Essentially the solution is respect. People need to be respectful of each other's rights and freedoms. As I said, I live in this way [as a covered woman], the person who sees me should not look down on me because I live like this. She should not be disrespectful. She should not tell me to dress this way instead [of what I'm wearing] and not to wear that. She can't tell me how to dress just like I can't tell her how to dress.

Yet despite the increasingly prominent role of covered women in Turkish society, women in all of our 2013 focus groups complained of being discriminated against and even directly attacked by anonymous strangers in shared urban spaces. For example, Semra, who is 32 years old and a housewife with a college degree, described being put down in the secular middle/upper class neighborhood of Suadiye in Istanbul when she asked a woman for directions and was told, "You are covered, I won't engage you to give you directions. Get out of my way." Though Semra's story dates to 2006, when the headscarf ban was still in place and public

religious voices and appearances were not as prominently present as in 2013, many women shared stories of more recent incidents of discrimination, from being ignored by salespeople who favor non-covered customers to more confrontational and even violent public attacks. For example, Aynur (quoted above) shared her experience of waving a flag on the street at a public celebration of a national holiday in the upscale neighborhood of Nişantaşı where she grew up when the woman next to her turned and said, "First uncover your head, then celebrate." In the group of older working class women, Ayşe relates a painful story of her humiliation and confusion on the playground at Bebek, an upscale Istanbul neighborhood, where a stranger actually struck her and said,"People like you destroyed Istanbul, destroyed Turkey, you put a scarf on yourself." Semra expresses her frustration: "No one sees you as just a normal citizen who has chosen [the headscarf] for religious reasons."

Women in our focus groups draw lines of social difference along religious boundaries with Alevis, non-covered, non-Muslim, and non-Turkish others. By narrating these interactions in both intimate and anonymous spaces, women's stories map the city as a contested public-private realm within which they consider respect to be the key to pluralist coexistence. At the same time as it implies greater mutuality, respect may simply be a more meaningful term for our research subjects than tolerance (*tolerans* in Turkish). In practice, respect may function not much differently from the concept of tolerance; like tolerance, the discourse of respect demarcates difference at the same time as it mediates social boundaries. Mutual respect makes possible the establishment of intimate relationships with women of other faiths, beliefs, and practices, even while some women did admit that they were closer to those who were similar to themselves: devout, headscarf wearing Sunnis. Even as they describe and defend their close relationships with Alevi, Christian, or non-devout individuals, it is clear that differences did matter. Such boundaries were reinforced by negative encounters with strangers aggressively attempting to exclude covered women from the 'public' spaces of the city. Thus in some situations, even respect cannot enable the building of bridges across differences. Indeed, what counts as respect is not given, but rather constituted within the particular socio-spatial relationships of Sunni, Alevi, and secular communities sharing neighborhoods, workspaces, and public life in Turkey.

"That's a matter of attitude": the limits of pluralism in public space

The problem of pluralism is crystallized in the challenge of sharing of city spaces with those who lead different lifestyles and live according to different moral systems. Political contestation over inclusivity, multiculturalism, and plurality often center on the presence and visibility of religion in shared city spaces such as streets, parks, or places of consumption and leisure (Herbert, 2003; Mitchell, 2003; Staeheli, Mitchell, & Nagel, 2009). In Istanbul today, the most incendiary political conflicts often involve questions of religion and the symbolic dimensions of public space (Kömeçoğlu 2012; Tuominen, 2013; Turam, 2013). Such contestation was at the heart of the 2013 Istanbul Gezi Park protests, sparked by the planned construction of a neo-Ottoman style shopping mall that was viewed by protesters and their supporters as emblematic of the AKP urban projects that have privatized urban space and shaped it to the tastes of a certain Islamically-oriented, bourgeois segment of the population (Karaman, 2013). With the emergence of more spaces that cater mostly to the devout Sunni lifestyle, such as cafes, restaurants, entertainment spaces, and hotels that don't serve alcohol (but may draw a mixed crowd with good prices and prime locations), urban space in Istanbul is under constant renegotiation. Understanding the micro-geographies of pluralism in Istanbul therefore requires recognizing the varying demographics and cultural characteristics of particular neighborhoods, such as the historically secular upscale neighborhoods of Suadiye, Nişantaşı, or Bebek in the above examples. In our focus groups, women discussed a variety of public spaces in Istanbul where they encounter non-intimate others. Their narratives uphold an ideal of personal freedom to live, to dress, and to do as one likes. Yet, at the same time their discussions also expose the conditions under which respectful sharing of such spaces might occur and thereby, the limits of pluralist coexistence.

The serving and consumption of alcohol play an important role in the sociospatial delineation of the boundaries of pluralism in Turkey. Despite Islamic injunctions that ban the consumption of alcohol, the sale, marketing, and consumption of alcohol have been relatively free in Turkey. In the absence of state regulation, the last two decades have seen a proliferation of 'alcohol-free' entertainment spaces, from cafes and restaurants to hotels and holiday villages, that explicitly target a devout Muslim clientele. The absence of alcohol has been an important part of the branding of these new venues as 'Islamic.' Given the rising demand for such spaces among the devout (indeed, our younger focus group participants desired more alcohol-free music venues), it is not surprising that public debate erupted when, in summer 2013, the AKP government passed legislation restricting the sale and marketing of alcohol. Whether this legislation was an imposition of a devout Sunni way of life on the public or was merely an attempt to bring the regulation of alcohol sale and marketing to EU standards was being widely debated in Turkey at the time of our research. In our focus groups, most women expressed their support for the 2013 legislation, pointing out that it was really no different from the restrictions present in EU countries. Very few saw the new restrictions as an infringement on personal freedom, and several voiced their discontent that the new law did not completely ban alcohol.

The presence of alcohol and its consumption in restaurants, places of entertainment, and at weddings poses the problem of pluralism in a particular way for devout, headscarf-wearing women in Istanbul. While some women had friends or relatives who drank and themselves did not mind going places where alcohol was being consumed, for others alcohol consumption was not only forbidden in itself but being around it was uncomfortable and even frightening. For example, in the group of young middle-class women, Semra emphasized the significance of respect between friends who lead different lifestyles. The discussion in the group then developed to show how this respect might or might no carry over to relations in public spaces of different parts of the city:

> **Semra**: My best friend of fifteen years enjoys drinking [alcoholic beverages]. When I was single, I used to go with her to Çiçek Pasajı [a famous historic arcade in Beyoğlu that houses taverns]; I used to drink a Coke, she drank rakı [an anise-based alcoholic drink]. Then I had to carry her back home. But we're still very good friends; I would never give up my friendship with her … She doesn't interfere with my life. When it's *kandil* [Islamic holy night] she doesn't drink alcohol and comes to pray and worship with me. I don't chastise her … when she drinks either. She doesn't try to draw me to her lifestyle and I don't try to impose a religious way of life on her. She does whatever she wants anyway; she wanted all kinds of books [about religion] from me, and I know she read them.
>
> **Gülsüm**: That's a matter of attitude.
>
> **Semra**: We are forced to turn against one another.
>
> **Sultan**: There are also those among us who are very strict.

Semra: Of course, that's for sure … Those from Fatih [a conservative low-middle income neighborhood] know this very well, they know it the best. The Fatih of fifteen years ago is not the same Fatih of today. Fifteen years ago my dress style would be completely out of place in Fatih but today, I blend in … Fatih changed a lot … When I was in high school, an old man struck my friend's legs with a stick because she was wearing shorts … But no one would do that now …

There's no pressure [anymore]. Look, what does this friend [Yeşim] say, "I drink alcohol"; of course she will.

Yeşim: Who cares? [But] everyone stares at me strangely.

Semra: No one can interfere with your life, that's what I meant.

Yeşim: But even some waiters say "Ah, you're drinking alcohol".

…

Sultan: Each person is responsible for her own helal and for her own haram.

Semra's friendship takes her even to the infamous taverns of Çiçek Pasajı in the cultural and entertainment district of Beyoğlu in Istanbul, the very location that Yeşim – who is the only woman in our study to say that she herself drinks alcohol – identifies as a favorite place of hers. Semra accompanies her friend who is not a devout Sunni Muslim and sits with her as she consumes alcohol. The 26-year-old Gülsüm's (who has a college degree and works at a small business) interjects her perception that Semra's attitude is radical. Gülsüm later describes how she wouldn't feel comfortable if she had someone drinking at her table even if she did end up going to a cafe where alcohol is served. Many women in our focus groups completely avoid places of entertainment (and even weddings) where alcohol is served and consumed. Those women who go to places where alcohol is served often admit that, like Gülsüm, while other people drinking around them may not be an issue, they would not want alcohol to be consumed at their own table. The table at which they sit becomes an intimate space that they carve out as theirs within a larger space that they may not have any control over. Given the complexity of these negotiations, it becomes easy to see how the chain of alcohol-free cafes and restaurants run by the (AKP-governed) Istanbul city and district municipalities offers women a care-free choice.

While Semra's accepting attitude within the bounds of respect may be radical, Yeşim is undeniably an outlier amongst our participants in that she not only feels comfortable in places where alcohol is served and consumed, but she herself drinks. She is 33 years old, single, has a college degree and works in an insurance company where she uncovers her hair to comply with the company's expectations. She admits to her alcohol consumption very early on in the focus group and asserts her comfort in doing so. She presents her consumption of alcohol in terms of her adaptability to different environments—such as her place of work, where she takes off her headscarf, or the upscale Bebek neighborhood where she lives (the same place where Ayşe was slapped by a stranger). However, she repeatedly brings up how she is made to feel uncomfortable by waiters and by other, drinking patrons of the places she frequents. She is wary of the scorn of the presumably non-devout patrons who see her drinking as unacceptable because of the perceived incongruity between wearing the headscarf and drinking alcohol. The headscarf signals her commitment to abide by the Islamic moral code while drinking violates that very code, thereby presenting a paradox for unlookers, even when Yeşim does not understand her behavior as necessarily incongruous with what her scarf represents. Semra says she similarly attracts attention from the clientele as soon as she steps into a place where alcohol is served. The scornful stares, the disapproving comments of those who themselves drink, attempt to discipline headscarf-wearing women like Semra and Yeşim and convey the message that the headscarf and the women who wear it do not belong in such spaces. At the same time, these women's sense that their religiosity per se is no barrier to their participation in such spaces and practices asserts the multiplicity of religious ways of being against the expectations and even demands of the political metaphysic that attempts to fix the socio-spatial boundaries of both secularism and Islam in Turkey.

As in Semra's narrative above, dress emerges as an important indicator of pluralistic coexistence and the degree to which different lifestyles and moral systems are accommodated in public space. The opinion that everyone should be able dress as she pleases predominated among the women but with an important exception: Extremes were to be avoided, whether it was *aşırı kapalı* (extreme covering) or *aşırı açık* (extremely revealing clothing styles). But more than any absolute markers of the limits acceptable dress (which are indeed difficult to establish, as debates in our focus groups attest), the question of when sharing pubic spaces with scantily clad women became a problem hinged not on the dress itself but on men's responses to it. In the following dialogue that took place in the group of older middle-class women, Efil responds to another woman's description of a beautiful young woman walking on the street wearing a dress so short that her bottom is showing. She explains:

Efil: It's not her noncoveredness that disturbs me. It's the men turning around to look at her over and over again …

Zeynep: They [men] also look at covered women.

Efil: I told a man actually. Why are you looking? She could be your sister. She could be your wife.

Asiye: Now it's not only the noncovered. There are some covered women who wear skin-tight clothes. Five or six men, everyone, even I, look at her. It's not only noncovered women. Covered women do the same. This shouldn't be done …

…

Zeynep: I think there's no extreme on either side. Someone may be wearing a *çarşaf* [full veil] or noncovered. I want everyone to respect each other. That's what's necessary.

Women's comfortable presence in the street is contingent not merely on the presence or absence of eye-grabbing women (whether covered or non-covered), but more directly on what they perceive as the sexualization of the street's economy of looking and being seen. Rather than a lack of respect for 'extremely' non-covered women, or even for covered women who wear showy or tight clothes, what women express is a discomfort with the affective milieu that arises when men are staring at attractive women; indeed they feel that they themselves may get caught up in this looking (Gökarıksel & Secor, 2012, 2014). As this discussion evolves into a debate about what role education might play in changing the behavior of men, women come to define the gender dynamics at work for the possibility of a pluralist coexistence in public space. There is more at stake in a short skirt than one might think.

While most women strive to uphold an ideal of individual freedom and respect for different lifestyles in public spaces, it is nonetheless apparent that, for many, the diversity of Istanbul's streets, arcades, and other spaces of leisure and entertainment pose uncomfortable challenges. The ideal of acceptance and accommodation of secular, non-religious, or differently religious lifestyles

runs up against religiously-based injunctions about alcohol consumption or a generally accepted but ambiguous dress code. People drinking alcohol, men staring at women, and couples making out were, for many of our respondents, aspects of public life that they felt that they and their families needed to avoid. The regulation of such behaviors by private or municipal establishments geared towards the Sunni devout provided welcome relief from these complexities, and few women seemed ready to object if such regulations became more widespread or top–down, as demonstrated by their support for the recent alcohol legislation. At the same time, the sociospatial boundaries of what is acceptable and what is not remain fuzzy: Is it acceptable to go to a wedding where alcohol is served? Is it OK to sit at a table where others are drinking? Is it OK to use a clean glass in which alcohol has been served previously? Devout headscarf-wearing women in Istanbul resolve these dilemmas in a range of different ways, individually and in relation to their own circles, contingently and in relation to broader moral principles. The contested gendered moral orders of public space thus further complicate the embodied practices of the post-secular.

Conclusion

Like the cartoon in which a covered woman asks to be let off the bus at the threshold of the public sphere (Saktanber, 2006), women's conversations point to the ambivalent connection between an abstract public sphere and the actual ambiguously public spaces of the city that are unevenly accessible to a range of people and behaviors (Staeheli et al., 2009). The public sphere may be a metaphorical space of democratic deliberation, but it comes into being through the daily spaces of people's lives. In neighborhood spaces shared by Alevi and Sunni neighbors or at celebrations on the streets where citizens adhering to different religious or moral systems come together, difference is produced and encountered across varying levels of intimacy. The geography of pluralism that can be traced from women's discussions is ultimately one in which distinctions between public and private spaces and their degree of linkage to a metaphorical public sphere are not clear-cut. Thus the big questions of post-secularism regarding how religious ways of being and other moral systems interact within and are constitutive of pluralistic public spheres seem to play out both in the anonymous spaces of the city, where women navigate a gendered moral order made taut with the tensions of political and cultural contestation, and in the intimate micro-geographies of offered prayer mats, rejected pastries, a visit to the house of an Alevi aunt, or the refusal to visit a friend's place of worship. Insofar as the question of how to interact across religious differences becomes important in shaping the mode of engagement even among relatives, friends, and neighbors who share intimate spaces, the problem of pluralism – and therefore of post-secularism – cuts across and ultimately undermines the distinction between so-called public and private spaces.

The political is thus not entirely ‘public.’ The expectation that it is or should be is itself rooted in a particular, masculinist vision of the political (Cope, 2004; Dowler, 1998; Fincher, 2004; Pateman, 1988; Rose, 1993; Sharp, 2007; Staeheli, 1996) and promoted by a regime of secularism that bolsters a public/private dichotomy by carving out religion as a specific field (Asad, 2003). Our purpose in this paper has been to continue the long work of deconstructing this frame – the one that associates politics, publicity, and the secular – by approaching the problematic of post-secularism through an analysis of how Sunni women in Istanbul discuss their interpersonal relations and their daily decisions regarding where they can appropriately eat, socialize, or enjoy entertainment. By showing how the role of religion in a non-theocratic polity is constituted in and through these quotidian public-private spatial practices, we aim to advance the recent line of inquiry in Turkey and beyond that has pried open the category of religion and begun to examine its multiple and complex interactions with the secular and the political (Arat, 2005; Holloway & Valins, 2002; Ivakhiv, 2006; Kong, 2002, 2006; Tse 2013; Wilford, 2010).

The post-secularist vision of a polity within which religious ways of being participate in a pluralistic public life is not realized on the ground in Turkey; women's stories of being aggressively sanctioned by strangers are enough to confirm this observation, but we can also turn for confirmation, from another angle, to the ACCEPT Pluralism study's conclusion that tolerance is but a “myth” in Turkey for ethnic and religious minorities (Kaya & Harmanyeri, 2010: 2). Yet this is not simply to say that the Turkish polity falls short (though of course it often does), but rather that post-secularism embeds ideals that are better understood as ethical projects towards which a society may strive; one does not, perhaps, arrive at post-secularism so much as one struggles with its demands – for example, the demand for respect in both intimate and anonymous relations. Thus rather than the achievement of a new dispensation wherein the secular and the religious are no longer defined in their opposition, what we find through an examination of the everyday discourses and practices of devout Sunni women in Istanbul is a public sphere that is necessarily contested, uneven, and riven with contradictions and diverse viewpoints. The public sphere that comes into focus here is restlessly mobile: not confined to the abstract spaces of media or material public spaces of the city, but instead knitting together and being made and remade within and across both anonymous and intimate relations and spaces.

In the summer of 2013, a photograph taken at Taksim circulated through social media (Fig. 1). It was of a sign propped up against one of the protestor's barricades, and it read: “Freedom for alcohol and the *türban* [headscarf].” Such could be the rallying call of post-secularism in Turkey, but who will carry this sign? What happens when accepted religious obligations come into conflict with the ethical demands of pluralistic coexistence, as we saw that they can in the case of Sunni–Alevi relations? How will we move forward when we come to such an impasse? We leave you with the wisdom of Feliz, a 43-year-old sales assistant in the group of older middle-class women who has lived in Istanbul all of her life, and an open question:

> **Feliz:** There are a lot of wrongdoings, there really are a lot. There are some good deeds but wrongdoings too. And what is good in our view may be wrong according to someone else.

Fig. 1. A sign photographed during the June 2013 Istanbul protests: Freedom for the Turban and Alcohol. Photo courtesy of Arda Ç.

Moderator: Then what are we going to do? If something is good in our view but wrong in yours …

Feliz: We're going to find a middle ground. Because this country belongs to us all.

Moderator: How are we going to do that?

Feliz: By talking, I think. By debating, talking. Humanely.

Moderator: Do you think we are able to do that?

The conversation then headed in another direction as women discussed state benefits for those caring for the disabled. The question remained unanswered.

Endnotes

[2] We consider religiosity to be a continuum. Individuals will have different ideas about what it means to be devout, and people will also consider themselves differently with regard to this question at different times in their lives and in different contexts (e.g. one might consider oneself relatively religious in one's social circles, but not so highly in an environment of religious training). In this study, research subjects self-identified themselves as moderately to highly devout Sunni Muslims without either the researchers or the subjects defining what religiousity (*dindarlik*) means to them. This is a question for another paper. In this paper, we will use 'devout' as shorthand for the middle-to-upper-end of the spectrum upon which our Sunni Muslim subjects identified themselves.

[3] For an interesting comparison, see the work of Binnaz Toprak (2009) on "being different in Turkey" in which she and a team of researchers interviewed over 400 people (focusing on women, Alevis, those with secular identities, young people who dress in less ordinary ways, leftists, and Kurdish students) across Turkey.

[4] Alevis constitute the largest socioreligious minority group in Turkey. The estimates of the Alevi population vary drastically between 10 and 25 million out of a total of 75 million in Turkey. Roughly two-thirds speak Turkish while the rest speak Kurdish (Dressler, 2008: 281). Alevism is loosely associated with the Shia branch of Islam. In Sunni dominated Turkey, Alevis have long been considered heterodox community. Most Alevis do not follow the five pillars of Islam; they do not pray five times a day, go to pilgrimage to Mecca, or fast during Ramadan (Es, 2013: 25). Instead, many Alevis participate in *cem* ceremonies led by Alevi religious leaders (*dedes*), fast for 12 days during the month of Muharram, and have their own destinations for pilgrimage.

[5] The focus groups took place in a central district of Istanbul near a large shopping center (in Şişli) with the help of an Istanbul-based research firm, Sosyal Arastirma Merkezi. The authors, the focus group moderator, and other female assistants were not wearing headscarves. This difference from our participants may have affected the conversations that ensued.

[6] This project (principle investigators Gokariksel and Secor) has been funded by the National Science Foundation, BCS- 1437132/. Title: Collaborative Research: The Role of Religion in Public Life: Islam in Turkey Today. Duration 8/15/14 to 1/31/17.

[7] A 'secular' neighborhood may be visually marked by the presence of establishments serving alcohol, businesses open during Friday prayer time, young people publically displaying affection, and the predominance of women not adhering to Islamic standards of modest dress. For Istanbulites, certain established high-class neighborhoods are associated with the dominance of such 'secular' lifestyles, despite the fact that in reality they may be more diverse.

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