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

Banu Göktaş Karakösel^{a, 1} ... Anna Secor^b

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Highlights

- â€¢ The project of post-secularism hinges on the form of pluralism in the public sphere.
- â€¢ Findings are based on focus groups with devout women in Istanbul in 2013.
- â€¢ Respect mediates relations with others across public/private spaces but has limits.
- â€¢ Devout women may be uncomfortable with other lifestyles (alcohol) in

- â€¢ Devout women may be uncomfortable with other lifestyles (alcohol) in shared spaces.
- â€¢ Post-secularism is not an achieved state but a project, a struggle with its demands.

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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Keywords

Post-secularism; Pluralism; Religion; Public space; Public sphere; Feminist geopolitics; Turkey

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