■ Arie Molendijk, Justin Beaumont, & Christoph Jedan (Eds.), *Exploring the Postsecular: The Religious, the Political and the Urban,* Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2010, 426 p.
Reviewer: Cüneyt Dinç*

Religion is back in the academic agenda. It was Jürgen Habermas who first introduced the term *postsecular* in a German Peace Prize lecture in 2001, which he further elaborated in his later writings (Habermas 2001, 2008a, 2008b). For Habermas, we live in a postsecular society where the classical assumption of secularization thesis, whereby religion would disappear from public life has been shown to be wrong. Two important elements – within the societal context of Germany and Western Europe – refuted the former theory: first, the appearance of public normative debates, like abortion, steam cell research, which also involved the churches as legitimated public actors. Second, the visibility of Islam in Europe and its claim for Muslims' rights within the frame of citizenship based rights (Habermas 2008b). While other authors also have dealt with the return of religion into the public sphere, namely Peter L. Berger (1999), Klaus Eder (2002), Jose Casanova (1994), and Charles Taylor (2007), and authors who have criticized the term postsecular, such as Lilly Kong (2010), it was Jürgen Habermas who was able to name this new religious phenomenon.

Like all newly introduced terms, there has been, nonetheless, a need for a period of academic adaption, after which other academics started to further substantiate this term. Arie Molendijk`s, Justin Beaumont`s and Christoph Jedan`s (2010) omnibus volume "*Exploring the Postsecular: The Religious, the Political and the Urban*" is the first interdisciplinary attempt to specify the term postsecular, and is supplemented with case studies. Steaming from a joint conference of the Faculties of Spatial Sciences and of Theology and Religious Studies, held in November 2008 at the University of Groningen, The Netherlands, the articles in the book try to display the interrelation of religion, politics, and urban societies in a postsecular age (ix). Furthermore, through their central thesis, "that within the secularized social structures of late modern capitalism religions are very much present and will not disappear" and that "the label of the postsecular refers to the limits of the secularization thesis and the continuing realization of radically plural societies in terms of religions, faiths and beliefs within and between diverse urban societies" (x), the authors also state that it is the urban environment where societal change and the emergence of the postsecular can be best observed (ibd).

The anthology consists of four parts, which will be described briefly here. In the first part, the two articles of Justine Beaumont and Kim Knott attempt to analyze the concepts of postsecular and the urban sphere or urban politics from two different points

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of view. Justin Beaumont tries to enlarge the term of "postsecular city" from an urban religious scientific perspective by presenting a distinct operational definition (pp. 3-17). Kim Knott illustrates the spatial interrelation between the religious, the secular, and the postsecular within an urban context (pp. 19-39). The second part of the book attempts to test the term of the postsecular from various perspectives. For instance, while Michiel Leezenberg (pp. 91-111) asks just "how ethnocentric the concept of the postsecular is," Willhelm Grab (pp. 113-129) analyses the transformation from secular to the postsecular from the perspective of religious change. The third part of this book focuses on the urban environment and its relationship to religious groups and practices, with special focus on religious groups, like Pentecostal churches, their importance in an urban area and/or the social politics and the influence of neo-liberal globalization, as well as new governmental arrangements based on this relationship. The final part deals with the public role of religion and focuses on the question of moral restraints and political justifications of the political role of religion in the public. It is supplemented by two cases from Ankara by Nihan Özdemir Sönmez (pp. 243-267) and Brazil by Martjin Oosterbaan (pp. 281-309).

While all of these articles are very important, I will pick - in my humble opinion - the two most important articles of this book and try to discuss them in detail within the given spatial limits given to me. Both give valuable inputs for future discussions and application in diverging contexts. The first article is the leading article of Justine Beaumont in the first part of the book. Beaumont provides his readers with an operational definition for the relationship of the postsecular and urban (politics): Beaumont states that the sacred has re-emerged in the urban space, as the locus where the dynamics of religious secular change have evolved and have been expressed. Moreover, he recognizes the return of a language of virtue in respect to public life, accompanied with a re-emergence of faith and politics in the areas of public service and administration. Finally, he sees a relationship between the growth of Pentecostal Christianity and neo-liberal globalization (pp. 9-11). While Beaumont gives a good definition about his understanding of the postsecular and detects the most visible areas of it – urban politics – there is still a question of reliability. On examination of Beaumont's definition, it can be said that his definition fits very well in the neo-liberal Anglo-Saxon context of the USA or UK, where non-governmental organizations traditionally take up public tasks. Nonetheless, one must ask if Beaumont's thesis is not too much ethnocentric and how much it can be applied to states with strong secularist state traditions, such as Turkey.

The second article of importance is Michiel Leezenberg's theoretical considerations regarding the ethnocentric nature of the concept of the postsecular in terms of Habermas. Despite the importance of the term, Leezenberg states that Habermas's understanding of the postsecular is not neutral but a normative notion with deeply secularist and modernist assumptions, in which the Western Liberal nation state is used as a framework (pp. 95-96). Leezenberg promotes an empirically more sophis-

ticated understanding of the postsecular. For rescuing it from its Habermasian ethnocentric point of view, he pleas for a heuristic approach which traces the history, genealogy, the meta-discursive regimes, and the constitution of the spheres between religion, politics, the secular, and moral for various other non-western contexts (p. 111). Leezenberg's article can be seen as the most valuable contribution in this book. It places in front of us the problem of applying the postsecular onto other contexts, like the Muslim world, where the Public, the Secular, Moral, etc. have different connotations than in the Christian Occident. In addition, historical developments in these diverging contexts must be taken into consideration. Nihan Özdemir Sönmez's contribution regarding the postsecular transformation of Ankara can be seen as way to analyze the postsecular in a non-European context. Nonetheless, Özdemir- Sönmez's article is lacking due to her Kemalist secularist - modernist tone, claiming that this westernized modernization process in Turkey has never been completed and is in danger by "Islamist" urban policies (p. 246). While the article provides a good overview as to how the urban shape in the frame of Islamist / Post-Islamist political power has changed, it concludes in mourning the end of the Kemalist ideology.

How can we finally evaluate the book? First of all, it presents valuable theoretical considerations and implications about the relationship between the postsecular and the urban setting. Thus, it not only provides valuable points on how to apply the term postsecular but also tries to present an operational term for further research. Moreover, it presents examples for applying the term in a concrete area, i.e. urban development policy. This makes the term itself, which was more of an abstract term in the area of social philosophy, much more concrete and visible.

Nonetheless, the book has some flaws. First of all, the presented theories and examples are too ethnocentric. Despite Leezenberg's discussion about the problem of ethnocentricity, all articles focus more or less on cases from western societies, with the exception of Özdemir-Sömez's article. More non-western cases would enrich the applicability of the term postsecular. Second, while the authors are correct that the transformation from the secular to the postsecular is most visible in the urban context, it is doubtful as to whether the area of urban policy is the best choice for demonstrating this transformation. Two points feed my doubts. In my humble opinion, we must first discuss the prefix "post" in postsecular. A scholar of the postsecular must analyze the characteristics of the preexisting secular and the discursive change of the meta-narratives within a given society. For example, it is obvious that the public display of secularism in Turkey has changed, and one must therefore ask what has changed in Turkey that enables us to speak of a postsecular Turkish society. The fact the women may now enter university wearing headscarves has become accepted more or less within the Kemalist ideological sphere? Is this enough to speak about a postsecular change in Turkey? This shows us that we must also understand the historical political frame of power relations in which the secular element of a given society evolves and what changes occur within it. Second, I doubt that the field of public policy is the only

field for detecting the emergence of the postsecular. The secular, and in the Turkish case, secularism have had an important influence on shaping people's everyday lives. As such, to discover the postsecular and its influence, we must enter into the realm of the everyday life of people and must understand the changes which have occurred therein. For instance, is the emergence of Islamic cafés in Turkey, where religious conservatives can organize their public leisure activities, an expression of the postsecular? If yes, how does this affect, for example, the relationship of men and women in public, the way of everyday consumption, etc? The authors in this book have not completely succeeded in presenting such an everyday life perspective, which can be regarded as its main weakness.

To sum up, Molendijk, Beaumont, and Jedan's work makes a very significant contribution to the new emerging phenomena of the postsecular. With their attempt to apply it onto a concrete policy field, they are successful in putting it into concrete terms and to 'free' it from the hands of social philosophy. Nonetheless, the focus of the authors solely on the field of urban (policy) is too narrow for substantiating the term postsecular. A focus more on everyday life situations would be more helpful. Yet, the authors have opened a new path within the research of the postsecular, a new research topic in the field of religious studies. This makes the book very important, despite its flaws, and it is hoped that it will initiate new research within this area.

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