# „THE MAKING OF A POSTSECULAR SOCIETY. A DURKHEIMIAN APPROACH TO MEMORY, PLURALISM AND RELIGION IN TURKEY"

(Ashgate, 2015, pp. 318, ISBN: 978-1-4724-2312-2, £70.00) [1]

My comments are going to be organized around three main themes. First, I will review Rosati's analysis of the contemporary transformation of Turkey towards a post-secular society. Secondly, I'll offer some critical comments concerning the category of post-secular society and its restricted validity. Finally, I will examine the tension between a Durkheimian theory of the sacred and post-axial religious communities.

Let me begin, as it is customary, with the well-deserved praise for an extraordinary book.  In my view, the most important, and truly significant contribution of the book, resides in the analysis of the transformation of contemporary Turkey, as a paradigmatic post-secular society in the making.  Many people have contributed to the development of the theoretical-analytical framework of "multiple modernities" pioneered by Eisenstadt and in the process have offered different types of analyses which serve to decenter, relativize, or even provincialize Western European developments in a way that challenges the hegemonic claims of Western secular modernity as a singular and universally valid model of development for all contemporary societies.[2]  Many people, including myself, have made contributions to what could be called the post-secular turn in the social sciences and in religious studies and following Habermas have begun to use the category of post-secular societies.[3] But as far as I know, nobody had yet done an in-depth sociological study of the making of a post-secular society which also serves to

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1    A version of this paper was presented at the Memorial Conference for Massimo Rosati, at  Università Tor Vergata, Roma, January 30, 2015

2    Cf. Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities," in Special Issue on Multiple Modernities, *Daedalus*, vol. 129 (1) 2000: 1-29; and *Comparative Civilizations and Multiple Modernities* 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Eliezer Ben-Rafael and Yitzhak Sternberg (Eds.), *Comparing Modernities. Pluralism Versus Homogeneity*. Essays in Homage to Shmuel N. Eisenstadt (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

3    José Casanova, "The Secular, Secularizations, Secularisms," in Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeier and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, eds., *Rethinking Secularism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) pp. 54-74; Jürgen Habermas et al., *An Awareness of What is Missing.  Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010); Eduardo Mendieta, "A Postsecular World-Society? : An Interview with Jürgen Habermas," *The Immanent Frame.* Available at: ‚http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2010/02/03/a-postsecular-world-society/>

illustrate the construction of a vernacular non-Western form of modernity.

This is undoubtedly Rosati's most significant and pioneering contribution. It is not simply the application of an already developed framework to a different society, in this case Turkey. But it is rather an examination of the transformation of Turkish society in all its concreteness in order to develop the theory and the analytical framework in the first place. From such a perspective, contemporary Turkey becomes the paradigmatic model of a post-secular society from which Western secular societies may draw some fruitful lessons, as they also are in the process of becoming post-secular societies in the making. Turkey becomes through Rosati's analysis an "exemplary case."

In this sense, it is Part II of the book on "The Turkish Laboratory" which stands out as a most compelling form of analysis, even for people like me who may not share some of the Durkheimian sociological premises, which are developed with a clear articulation in the first theoretical part. Given my limited knowledge of Turkish society, I will let the experts have the final judgment, but I find Rosati's sociological interpretation of the Turkish ongoing transformation both illuminating and compelling. Moreover, Rosati interweaves most convincingly three different types of analyses, the macro-sociological historical reconstruction of the transformation of Republican Kemalism, the insightful discursive critical analysis of the emerging "Neo-Ottoman (Democratic) Narrative," and the ethnographic thick description of three symbolically charged arenas, - the iconic image of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the contested sacred space of Aya Sofia and the agonic memory politics around the commemoration of the life and death of Hrant Dink - where one can grasp micro-sociologically the phenomenological live experience of an emerging post-secular Turkey. Besides being written in a beautiful prose, it offers an insightful sociological analysis as well as a forceful normative plea for co-existence and *convivencia* between religions and cultures, which according to Rosati is the hallmark of a post-secular society. There are many suggestive parts of the analysis one could underscore. Rosati only claims that Turkey is a post-secular society in the making, without guarantee that such a condition will become successfully institutionalized.

Let me offer a lengthy quotation from Rosati's conclusion that captures the fluidity of his evaluation of the contemporary open and indeterminate Turkish situation:

After the weakening of the Kemalist old central value system, and after the weakening of the reformist centre led by the AK Party's coalition with liberals and democrats that until 2011 raised high hopes and partially democratized the country, it seems that we are left with a new form of polarization, precisely at a time in which old polarizations become meaningless. The new polarization is that between two competing centres, both of them the outcome of the blurring of borders between religious and secular forms of life and actors…Between them there are antagonistic relationships, but even here borders can be fluid,

and at the present time no one can easily predict future directions (p.261)

In the remaining, I want to focus on two important questions raised by Rosati's analysis, that in my view remain ambiguous and not fully clarified. Those are questions which I would have loved to have had the opportunity to discuss with Maximo and which I now present as an intellectual challenge to all of us.

The first question has to do with the limits of the category of a "post-secular" society. Is it a general category in principle applicable to all contemporary societies? In other words, could one say that we may be entering a global post-secular age and that all contemporary societies are undergoing (or, expressing it in even stronger normative terms, perhaps ought to undergo) different yet similar transformations towards a post-secular condition? Or, rather does its use seem legitimately applicable only to societies which may have been characterized most emphatically as "secular" and are now undergoing a reflexive reconsideration of their "secularity"?

I cannot offer here a full elaboration of the argument presented in my debate with Habermas.[4] I can only assert that I am in full agreement with Rosati's description of the main features of what he calls a postsecular society:

a. the co-presence of secular and religious world-views

b. the active presence of deprivatized religious movements

c. a condition of vibrant religious pluralism that undermines any monopoly and forces religious and secular movements to increase their reflexivity

d. increased reflexivity, historicity and agentiality

e. secular citizens that recognize the rights of fellow citizens to their religious conceptions of the world, without presuming that such conceptions are non-rational and therefore have no place in discursive deliberations within the public sphere

f. the presence of genuine (transcendent) axial visions as expressions of the sacred

But does one need the qualifier "post" for such a society or could these be the main features of a genuine "secular" society, which does not need to have passed through a "secularist" phase? I fully agree with Massimo that "postsecular" should not be identified with Peter Berger's category of "desecularization of the world," in the sense that "post" does not indicate a superseding of secularity. In fact, the "post" does not refer so much to a new stage that supersedes a previous secular stage, but rather to an increase in reflexivity that helps to correct what now *post factum* can be understood as a secularist or laicist misunderstanding. The misunderstanding consisted in the fact that "the secular" was erroneously conceived, temporally, as an age after religion, as an stage in human development that superseded and left behind "the religious" stage, and spatially, as an sphere

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4    José Casanova, "Exploring the Postsecular: Three Meanings of 'the Secular' and Their Possible Transcendence," in Craig Calhoun, Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, eds., *Habermas and Religion* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013) pp. 27-48.

of sheer *laïcité,* that is, as a public sphere freed and devoid from religion.

In this respect, the term post-secular ought to be restricted to those societies which have gone through a "secularist" or "laicist" phase and which are now undergoing corrective reflexive transformations in the direction of increasing religious pluralization, deprivatization of religion, and reflexive rethinking of their secularist philosophies of history.  The term is rightly, indeed, paradigmatically applicable to a reflexively post-Kemalist and post-laicist Turkey. It is also rightly applicable to Western European societies insofar as many of them had undergone processes of secularization that were characterized by transitions from conditions of relatively homogeneous religious confessionalization to conditions of relatively homogeneous secularity.  Such a historically peculiar process of European secularization was conducive to an erroneous secularist self-understanding of "modern secularity" as a universal stage of human development after "traditional religion." European societies are becoming post-secular insofar as they are undergoing new processes of religious pluralization, are reflexively correcting their secularist misunderstandings and are readjusting their patterns of church-state relations, either because they may still be too confessional privileging the national religion(s) over new religious minorities or because they are still too secularist in their insistence on a laïc public sphere free from religion which tends to discriminate against all religious citizens.

The category is also rightly applicable to all post-Soviet and post-Communist regimes, if an when they not only abandon their policies of forced secularization from above, but also incorporate the main features of a post-secular society stressed by Rosati, namely de-monopolization and increasing pluralization of secular and religious world views, accompanied by reflexive learning and mutual recognition.  The category post-secular is applicable to a certain extent to contemporary China despite the attempts of an still authoritarian state to preserve its millennial Caesaro-papist prerogative of defining orthodoxy and heterodoxy. But it is hardly applicable to contemporary Russia where one can witness the alliance of an imperial secular authoritarian state and the Russian Orthodox Church which through the Moscow Patriarchate maintains its canonical territorial claims over many of the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union.

Moreover, the category of post-secular is hardly applicable, for instance, to such diverse secular regimes as the United States, India, or Senegal, which have always been characterized by vibrant forms of religious pluralism with different forms of "passive" secularism (or, as they say in Senegal, *laïcité bien entendue*).[5] This does not mean that such societies that have not passed through a historical phase of assertive secularism may not be transformed also in similar directions of further pluralization of secular and religious options, increasing reflexivity, historicity and agentiality, and further multicultural reflexive learning.  But in my view,

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5    On the concept of "passive" secularism see, Ahmet T. Kuru, *Secularism and State Policies Toward Religion. The United States, France, and Turkey* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

*ПРИКАЗИ, НАУЧНА КРИТИКА И ПОЛЕМИКА*

the category of post-secular would not be appropriate to such a transformation. It would be appropriate, for instance, for a post-confessional post-Catholic Quebec which had adopted a rigid model of *laïcité* and is now uneasily confronting new religious pluralization, but it would not be equally appropriate for a post-Catholic secular Brazil which is undergoing a dramatic pluralization of secular and religious options, but never had an assertive secularist phase.

Originally the pre-Christian Latin term *saeculum* only had a temporal connotation, that of an indefinite periode of time, as in *per saecula saeculorum,* a term equivalent to the Greek concept of *aeon*. It was Augustine who turned the term into a central Christian theological category, adding to it a spatial connonation. *Saeculum* as first used by Augustine now referred to a temporal space, this world between the present and the *parousia*, the Second Coming of Christ, in which both Christians and pagans had to live together and learn to work together towards their common civic goals in the *saeculum*, in the City of Man.[6]

In this respect Augustine's concept of secularity has some similarities with Rosati's conception of the postsecular. Only that the contemporary postsecular refers to a modern secular political sphere, that of the constitutional democratic state and that of a democratic public sphere, which is or at least ought to be neutral with respect to all worldviews, religious as well as non-religious. Such a conception does not equate the secular with the "profane", as the other of the "sacred", nor is the secular the other of the "religious". It is precisely a neutral space that can be shared by all who live in a not religiously homogeneous or in a multicultural society, which by definition will have different and most likely competing conceptions of what is "sacred" and what is "profane".

This brings me to the final and most critical question I would like to pose to Rosati's analysis, namely whether his own post-secular analysis would not need to become at least in some respects more reflexively historicist and post-Durkheimian. This seems to me to be the direction to which Rosati's analysis is pointing, at least implicitly, when he refers to Axial transcendent visions of the sacred that cannot be contained by civic symbols or by a self-limiting immanence which is not open to any real transcendence. Durkheim's identification of the social, the sacred, and the religious needs to be put into question. There is a fundamental tension between Durkheim's theory of the sacred as nothing more than the symbolic sacralization of the social and the axial sacralization of transcendence that per force leads to some kind of de-sacralization of the pre-axial sacred. If the social is the sole source of the sacred and religious transcendence is nothing but the power of the social sacralized and symbolically represented, then the irruption of genuine Axial dualist transcendence must be understood from a Durkheimian perspective either as a categorical mistake or as historical evolutionary detour until modern humanity reaches the new ontic monism grounded

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6    R. A. Markus, *Christianity and the Secular* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2006).

in epistemic positivist naturalism. The ontic immanent monism of pre-axial societies fused into a single cosmos the world of supra-empirical spirits, the world of nature, and the social world of human culture. Axial transcendence breaks this ontic monism and leads at the very least to a differentiation of the three sacred realities of *physike, politike*, and *mythike,* or to Varro's tripartite conceptualization of *religio* or *res divinae* into *theologia naturalis*, *theologia civilis,* and *theologia fabulosa or mythica*.[7]

Durkheim's naturalist monism leads to a problematic identification of the socially sacred and religious transcendence which ends almost necessarily in a secularist immanentism that tends to sacralize the collective and public secular and to privatize transcendent religious symbolization and religious communities, relegating them to the private sphere of individual "magic." What is at stake is not Durkheim's categorical atheism, but the conception of society which it entails bounded by a sacred center and its periphery. In line with his own truly openly reflexive post-secular sociological vision and with the reality of the de-centered multicultural and multireligious global secular age we are entering, Rosati's conception of the post-secular entails in my view societies which ought to be not only post-secularist in that they become reflexively pluralist, and not only reflexively post-national, but also reflexively post-Durkheimian. I agree with Roseti that a post-sacral and de-centered conception of social networks offers no real alternative to Durkheimian conceptions of the social. However, the social vision that could offer a post-Durheimian alternative for our global age is that of fluidly open societies without clear boundaries, with multiple de-sacralized centers, with minimal distances between those centers and the peripheries, and with multiple conceptions of the sacred.

**José Casanova**[8]

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7    For an elaboration of this argument see, José Casanova, "Religion, the Axial Age, and Secular Modernity in Bellah's Theory of Religious Evolution," in Robert N. Bellah and Hans Joas, ed., *The Axial Age and Its Consequences* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012) pp. 191-221.
8    Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, Georgetown University, Washington, DC. E-mail: jvc26@ georgetown.edu