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What's Missing? Gender, Reason and the Post-Secular

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Abstract

This article considers whether contemporary debate about the "post-secular" has overlooked the extent to which, as a concept or epoch, it may be "gendered." Jürgen Habermas has suggested that there is something "missing" from secular reason in the shape of transcendental and metaphysical values; but I will contend that the debate is in danger of neglecting the central role of gender—so integral to the conceptual and political formation of modernity—in any rethinking of the symbolic of the post-secular. As feminist theorists have long been reminding us, many of the same processes that gave birth to modernity's elevation of public reason, impartial and non-contingent subjectivity, and models of the free, self-actualizing autonomous agent facilitated by the formation of liberal democracy, were not actually neutral or universal; but highly gendered. They rested on binary representations of women and men's differential nature; and they conceived of differential and gendered division of labour which often precluded women's claiming full humanity, let alone full and active citizenship. So gender, and women, are also in danger of disappearing from this new post-secular chapter in the debate about religion, politics and identity. This article examines how this omission might be corrected, and will outline what might be some of the most significant issues at stake.

Keywords: gender; Habermas; post-secular; religion.

We are currently witnessing a radical reappraisal of the way in which, for over two hundred years, Western philosophy and politics have conceived of the nature of the body politic and the character of civil society. At the

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root of this lies contested and often fraught debates about the proper role of religious faith—considered at the level of personal belief and conviction in determining matters of conscience and civil conduct, as well as the constitutional position of religious representatives, through to the legitimacy of religious institutions to intervene in public affairs. Yet the current situation is characterized above all by complexity and ambivalence. While the resurgence of "religion" and things of the spirit may be interpreted as posing a challenge to modernity's emphasis on rationality, contemporary discourses founded on the continuing triumph of reason, science and secularism endure, potent as ever.

Jürgen Habermas's recent work has spearheaded this new turn in social theory and political philosophy, with his talk of the "post-secular" as an expression of the newly prominent—and problematic—role of religion in the public square.[2] Habermas's earlier, classic work on the origins of modernity traced the emergence of a distinctly "public" space in which citizens could debate without prejudice, fashioning through open and rational interchange a community of discourse capable of sustaining a free and democratic social order. Yet this was essentially a public space in which reason reigned, and from which arguments based on religious insights were excluded.

Habermas has suggested that there is something "missing" from secular reason in the shape of transcendental and metaphysical values.[3] It is my contention, however, that religion is not the only factor that's "gone missing" in the post-secular reconfiguration of belief, civic identity and the body politic. In this article, therefore, I will consider whether contemporary debate about the "post-secular" has overlooked the extent to which, as a concept or epoch, the post-secular may be "gendered." As feminist theorists have long been reminding us, many of the same processes that gave birth to modernity's elevation of public reason, impartial and non-contingent subjectivity, and models of the free, self-actualizing autonomous agent facilitated by the formation of liberal democracy, were not actually neutral or universal; but highly gendered. They rested on binary representations of women and men's differential nature; and they conceived of differential and gendered division of labour which often precluded women's claiming full humanity, let alone full and active citizenship.

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2.   Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere: Cognitive Presuppositions for the 'Public Use of Reason' by Religious and Secular Citizens," in Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Jürgen Habermas, *et al.*, *An Awareness of What is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010); E. Mendieta and J. Vanantwerpen, eds, *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

3.   Habermas, *An Awareness of What is Missing*, 15–23.

So gender, and women in particular, are also in danger of disappearing from this new post-secular chapter in the debate about religion, politics and identity. It seems to me that we are in danger of neglecting the central role of gender—so integral to the conceptual and political formation of modernity—in our rethinking of the symbolic of the post-secular; and with that, of failing to notice how the co-existence of the sacred and the secular in public life is affecting the lives and prospects of women and girls around the world. I want to ask how that might be corrected, and to outline what might be some of the most significant issues at stake.

The Paradox of the Post-Secular

Over the past decade, Habermas—in the company of other political theorists such as John Rawls, Jose Casanova and Talad Asad—has renewed the classic debate about the legitimacy of religion as a form of public reason. This is in part a reaction to new social and cultural trends, which Asad, Habermas and others term the "post-secular." This represents the co-existence of two seemingly incompatible developments, the first of which is the public resurgence of religion and a changing consciousness of its public significance. "A society is 'post-secular' if it reckons with the diminishing but enduring—and hence, perhaps, ever more resistant and recalcitrant—existence of the religious."[4] According to the logic of Western theories of secularism and secularization, articulated in the classic theories of sociology of writers such as Marx, Weber and Durkheim, through to the orthodoxy of sociological studies of religion till the late twentieth century, religion will inevitably decline as society becomes more complex, technological and differentiated. Such analysis, however, now appears to be breaking down:

> The apparent triumph of Enlightenment secularization, manifest in the global spread of political and economic structures that pretended to relegate the sacred to a strictly circumscribed private sphere, seems to have foundered on an unexpected realization of its own parochialism and a belated acknowledgement of the continuing presence and force of "public religions."[5]

But the second dimension of the post-secular is that it defies simple talk of a reversion of secularization, since religious observance and participation, at least in the West, is still on the decline. Furthermore, via the polemic of celebrated scientists and atheist philosophers such as Richard

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4.   H. de Vries, "Introduction: Before, Around, and Beyond the Theologico-Political," in *Political Theologies: Religion in a Post-Secular World*, ed. H. de Vries and L. E. Sullivan (New York: Fordam University Press, 2006), 3.
5.   H. de Vries and L. E. Sullivan, "Preface" in *Political Theologies*, ix.

Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens and Anthony Grayling, a classically post-Enlightenment critique of religion and the inevitability of secularism has gained a new generation of advocates and supporters. In many quarters, then, the classic trajectory of "secularization" as denoting the decline of long-established faith traditions and the marginalization of religious and theological language and values from the public mainstream still predominates, albeit conditioned by the impact of global diasporas and global political forces. As Hent de Vries observes, therefore, this may be a sign of the simultaneous pluralization and homogenization of our social, economic and cultural lives.[6]

What many commentators on the post-secular underplay, however, is its very paradoxical and novel quality. It transcends the binary of mere religious revival or sociological revisionism, and represents the unique juxtaposition of *both* significant trends of secularism and continued religious decline (not only in Northern Europe, but certainly undeniably so), *and* signs of persistent and enduring demonstrations of public, global faith. For me, that is the essence of the post-secular, and what makes it unprecedented and—to both advocates of secularization and religious orthodoxy alike—uncomfortable and theoretically intriguing. Post-secularism is not about straightforward religious revival, then, so much as a paradoxical condition in which currents of disenchantment and re-enchantment co-exist, amidst a climate of pluralism which makes the achievement of universally accessible and intelligible public discourse all the more problematic.

But if modernity was characterized by a particular understanding of the public, rational sphere, one that insisted on its own neutrality and impartiality—and thus its own secularist agenda—what happens to our understandings of public life within the post-secular context? In recent writing, Habermas has conceded that religious reasoning can and must be included in the "flows of public communication,"[7] since they constitute powerful and irreducible sources of "the creation of meaning and identity."[8] For Habermas, the global resurgence of religion, coupled with significant critiques of the sovereignty of reason, make the case for constructing a "postmetaphysical" account of communicative reason and of public discourse. In conversation with members of the Jesuit School of Philosophy in Munich in 2007, Habermas alluded to a kind of melancholy in late modernity, a sense of lack within secular communicative reason—as he says, "an awareness of what is missing," namely any sort of metaphysical or transcendental grounding of its commitment to things

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6.   De Vries, "Introduction" to *Political Theologies*, 1.
7.   Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 131.
8.   Ibid.

such as justice, progress and human dignity.[9] Habermas has called for a re-evaluation of the secular nature of the public square and the introduction of religious sources of reasoning (albeit mediated or moderated via processes of "translation" into common terms) as an enrichment of our social and political imaginary, a means of incorporating "what's missing" into a renewed vocabulary of civic virtue.

The boundary established by the Enlightenment, between the public sphere of economic and political processes, and the private realm of faith, is thus dissolving under the paradoxical currents of religious resurgence and enduring secularism. Talal Asad's exploration of the post-secular is concerned to expose the artifice of modernity, via a kind of Foucauldian genealogy, which sees it as founded on a system of binary thinking between "belief and knowledge, reason and imagination, history and fiction, symbol and allegory, natural and supernatural, sacred and profane—binaries that pervade modern secular discourse, especially in its polemical mode."[10]

Asad's argument is that "secularism" thus constructs "religion" as its negated Other in order to establish its own coherence. "Secular" brands religion as a matter of "faith" as belief relating to an ontological category of the "supernatural." Secularism by contrast deals with the natural and the social, in which the citizen is supreme public reality, and anything to do with transcendence or values is consigned to the private and the interior. But in common with other writers, Asad fails to acknowledge the extent to which these binaries were also configured within a gendered symbolic, in which public and private, reason and faith, autonomy and dependency, are mapped onto gendered types of man and woman, masculine and feminine. Yet this has far-reaching consequences for our analysis of secular modernity and is crucial to our deconstruction of such binaries within a post-secular condition.

The Gendered Nature of Modernity

As Jane Flax has observed, "Few writers appear to notice that the dominant stories about modernity and modernization have necessary but repressed or split-off gendered components."[11] The coherence and normativity of

9.   The impact of advanced technologies, especially in the biosciences, represents for Habermas a particularly acute challenge in this respect. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, trans. W. Rehg, M. Pensky and H. Beister (Cambridge: Polity, 2003).

10.   Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 23.

11.   Jane Flax, "Is Enlightenment Emancipatory?" in Flax, *Disputed Subjects: Essays on Psychoanalysis, Politics and Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1997), 75.

modernity rests on "what is not explicitly articulated or included…upon the unacknowledged and unexcavated elements remaining disturbed."[12] (Or as I might venture, on "what is missing" from modernity's account of itself: in this context, it has its roots in a particular context of gender relations and representations).

Flax and other feminist philosophers such as Genevieve Lloyd have identified the characterization of Enlightenment writers such as Kant, Hegel and Rousseau as a fundamentally gendered narrative about modernity, in which women and men represent (stand for) particular relationships to reason, self-actualization and freedom. Echoing binary and gendered constructions of nature and culture, body and spirit, affect and reason that can be traced back to Pythagoras, reason is coupled with transcendence and control over the things of nature, and thus construed as the antithesis of the feminine.[13] The distinction between form and matter in Platonic and Aristotelian thought was similarly gendered and hierarchical, and shaped Western Christian thought to the Scientific Revolution. Nature has endowed the sexes with differential properties, including the endowments of Reason that guarantee the advancement of humanity to Enlightenment.

Morality and virtue pertains not to the individual but to the public corporate sphere and universalized rational principles. In gendered terms, this externalization of the self in order to discover self takes place in the world beyond domestic, familial, affective relationships. The vision of the rational, self-actualizing subject did not extend to women, who were still regarded as governed by nature. If the critical power of reason dethroned privilege, superstition and tradition and paved the way for a new social order governed by principles of freedom, human perfectibility and self-improvement, then anything regarded as its antithesis—emotion, superstition and religion—was labelled as suspect, by virtue of its appeal to unexamined authority and supernatural truth.

Women may be the guardians of the world of affect and sensuality—along with that of reproduction—but the advancement of reason is a male task. If men are to attain to the highest exercise of Reason, they must abandon the world of nature, embodiment and emotion, which are the preserves of women as befits their roles as carers and nurturers. By the early modern period, a similarly gendered demarcation of public and private is beginning to emerge, in which the responsibilities of women and

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12. Ibid.
13. Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy* (London: Methuen, 1984); Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution 750BC–AD1250* (Montreal: Eden, 1985).

men are separate, but complementary. For women to participate in the public realm would disrupt this arrangement, since private concerns must not threaten public virtue. Women must live vicariously through the men on whom they are dependent. Thus the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment wove an implicitly gendered narrative into their analysis of the relationship between the cultivation of Reason and the advancement of public virtue and good citizenship. This presupposes a gendered subjectivity, in which the human project is all about breaking with the infantile ties with the maternal in order to achieve an autonomous, reasoning and independent self.

As Flax remarks of Kant,

> Modernization…depends upon and reinforces a series of splits and renunciations. The world is split into two private spheres: the world of work and the family and two public spheres: the world of scholarship/knowledge and the state… The family guards children until they are able to develop the capacities of reason and autonomy. It is primarily a world of duty and obedience marked by the absence of reason.[14]

Does this mean that the Enlightenment was irredeemably rooted in a gendered and patriarchal narrative? One answer would be that, on the contrary, feminism emerged as a movement of modernity and, despite these critiques, it shares the core principles of Enlightenment. Certainly, an early feminist such as Mary Wollstonecraft called for such principles to be equally open to the aspirations of women, protesting against the triviality of women's ambitions and the harmful effects of their being made to bear the burdens of virtue on behalf of men. This was the true crime against nature. The Introduction to *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* establishes her claim to "consider women in the grand light of human creatures who, in common with men, are placed on this earth to unfold their faculties."[15]

Wollstonecraft was using the logic of Enlightenment thinking to expose its own contradictions. She argued that the confinement of virtue into the private and domestic sphere impoverished the ambitions of the public domain, which could benefit from it. If women were permitted to be active citizens, they could humanize society more effectively than simply being restricted to domestic and intimate affairs. Both the domestic bourgeois sphere and the public world are distorted and one-dimensional.

Modern feminism was built on a protest against women's exclusion from public virtue and rational, autonomous subjectivity. Simone de Beau-

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14. Flax, "Is Enlightenment Emancipatory?" 80–81.

15. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: Random Century, 1992 [1967]), 2.

voir suggested that women are "Other" to men's normative being, but they must seek transcendence from such objectification.[16] De Beauvoir challenges the idea that woman is "Other" to male identity, the antithesis of sovereign, self-authenticating reason, by arguing that she must claim "authenticity," transcendence and "being-for-self." Women must become subjects not objects. Yet arguably, such a strategy colludes with dualism in which embodiment is denigrated as inferior, chaotic and contingent. Thus even this idea of women's achievement of full personhood is gendered.

Other feminist theorists, of course, took a different view, challenging the assumptions underlying Enlightenment humanism, and in particular its privileging of the virtues of individual autonomy, of transcendent and sovereign reason and the goals of self-actualization, not to mention its neglect of difference and context.[17] Feminism has always been divided, therefore, towards the achievements of modernity and especially the legacy of the binary configurations of public and private, reason and affect, universalism and contingency. The Enlightenment, the scientific and democratic revolutions of the eighteenth century may have liberated humanity and emancipated individuals in the name of reason and self-determination, but its legacy in terms of affording women the status of free and active citizens has been ambivalent.[18]

Feminist Critiques of Religion: Modern and Postmodern

In its rejection of authority that rested on the power of things other than reason and consent, Reason was both source of critique and arbiter of freedom. It dethroned privilege, superstition and tradition and paved the way for a new social order governed by principles of freedom, human perfectibility and self-improvement. In commending a neutral, universal uncontingent public realm, the Enlightenment was politically if not theologically "secular."

Similarly, in their protest against the confinement to the private, domestic world of affect and piety, modern second-wave feminists saw themselves

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16. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. C. Borde and S. Malovany-Chevallier (London: Jonathan Cape, 2009).

17. Flax, "Is Enlightenment Emancipatory?" 86–91.

18. Although, as the recent comparative study of religion in North American and Europe reminds us, measures to separate Church and State and to establish a neutral public square under the Democratic Revolutions of the eighteenth century could take very different forms, from the secularist *laïcité* in France to the religious pluralism of the United States. See Peter Berger, Grace Davie and Effie Fokas, *Religious America, Secular Europe? A Theme and Variations* (London: Ashgate, 2008).

as continuing and expanding the Enlightenment commitment to emancipation and self-improvement. Hence much of Western second-wave feminism was secular, or anti-religious, seeing religion (at least in its orthodox, institutional forms) as a primary source of control of women, of the defence of their roles as "natural" and God-given and thus as a major protagonist in perpetuating gendered division of labour and women's subordinate status to men:

> As the secular and rebellious daughters of the Enlightenment, feminists were raised on rational argumentation and detached irony. The feminist belief system is accordingly civic, not theistic, and is viscerally opposed to authoritarianism and orthodoxy.[19]

But there were always exceptions to that, and from the 1960s, feminist studies of religion attempted to reintegrate the "missing" elements of religion, theology and spirituality into feminist theory. It worked at developing "post-patriarchal (re)interpretations of religious texts, traditions, practices, representations and histories."[20] Similarly, by the end of the twentieth century, strands of postmodern feminist theory emerged—including, of course, feminist Continental philosophy—that did anticipate the turn to the "post-secular." I am thinking of the neo-Lacanian psychoanalysis of Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, not to mention the neo-vitalist and decidedly Catholic sensibilities of Donna Haraway's post-humanist feminism. These contradicted the conventional stance of Western feminism which claims exclusive descent from European Enlightenment and its critique of religious autocracy and superstition. They may not be conventionally theistic, but they did re-introduce concepts of the divine, transcendence and spirituality back into mainstream feminist theory.[21]

Nevertheless, most of the traffic between feminist theory and feminist studies of religion has been one-way. Sometimes, exceptions are made when it comes considering women in the two-thirds world, or in acknowledging the inescapable themes of spirituality and faith in much post-colonial feminist and womanist thought; but it leaves the default position of most Western feminism untouched, leaving religion and reli-

19. Rosi Braidotti, "In Spite of the Times: The Postsecular Turn in Feminism," *Theory, Culture & Society* 25, no. 6 (2008): 3.

20. Niamh Reilly, "Rethinking the Interplay of Feminism and Secularism in a Neo-Secular Age," *Feminist Review* 97 (2011): 13.

21. Morny Joy, Kathleen O'Grady and and Judith L. Poxon, eds, *Religion in French Feminist Thought: Critical Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2003); Grace M. Jantzen, *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991).

giousness as the province of those "marked by 'religiousness as difference' or *vis à vis* contexts that have yet to 'modernize'."[22]

Such a perspective inhibits new explorations of how globalization affects feminism as a political project and as a movement which proclaims and upholds human dignity and freedom, by insisting that religion is always and everywhere an enemy of autonomy, authentic identity and progress. It grants little credibility or political credit to faith-based movements both in the West and in the global South that struggle against autocratic power in the name of religion.

The Post-secular as Inscribed on the Lives and Bodies of Women
One way of conceiving of the post-secular is as a kind of "third space" between secular reason and religious revival. It certainly causes us to re-evaluate the uncritical hegemony of secular reason not least in the way it served to occlude the experiences, contexts and identities of those excluded from the Enlightenment project. Yet, just as Daniel Whistler and Anthony Paul Smith warn against the post-secular becoming a triumphalist return of reactionary theology,[23] so too we must be aware of the risks of the post-secular simply to become squeezed between the immovable object of secularism and the irresistible force of religion, especially religious fundamentalism. And one of the tests of that, I would argue, is the way that both can be seen to inscribe themselves on the bodies and lives of women. Neither position provides sympathetic spaces for feminism, since one promotes reason, autonomy, individualism at the expense of lived experiences of contingency, embodiment and spirituality, while the other seeks to limit women's freedom in the name of obedience to traditional or "natural" ways of life.

Part of the public anxiety over Islam has been its ability to disrupt assumptions about a secular public sphere. The veiled Muslim woman who brings her religious faith into her public, civil identity is targeted and demonized as the symbol of irrational fundamentalism. Judith Butler has criticized occasions when progressive causes have invoked secularist arguments for religious tolerance in ways that are dismissive, even defamatory, of religious minorities and serve as a sanction for state violence.[24] The spirit of human autonomy at the heart of Enlightenment, paradoxically,

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22. Reilly, "Rethinking the Interplay of Feminism and Secularism," 7.

23. Anthony Paul Smith and Daniel Whistler, eds, *After the Post-secular and the Post-modern: New Essays in Continental Philosophy of Religion* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010).

24. Judith Butler, "Sexual Politics, Torture, and Secular Time," *British Journal of Sociology* 59, no. 1 (2008): 1–23: Reilly, "Rethinking the Interplay of Feminism and Secularism," passim.

actually colludes with racist and Islamophobic politics to deny Muslim women the right of self-determination: of the freedom *to wear* or *not to wear* traditional Islamic dress as a gesture of self-determination.

> [T]he post-secular turn challenges European feminism because it makes manifest the notion that agency, or political subjectivity, can be conveyed through and supported by religious piety, and may even involve significant amounts of spirituality.[25]

Tina Beattie has attempted to make a specifically feminist theological response to the "new atheism," observing that very often the "God" against whom Dawkins and co. protest has already been deconstructed by feminist, queer and other liberationist critiques. She describes the debate as "a small clique of white English-speaking men staging a mock battle about rationality and God"[26] and wonders whether the enemies and defenders of "good old God" are simply playing the same game, as mirror-images of one another, trying to prove their sexual potency.

But on the other side too, it is the bodies of women that are the sites of the resurgence of anti-modern religion. Issues of sexuality and abortion are frequently the signature campaigns for the religious right, as well as other issues that impinge on reproduction such as stem-cell research.[27] For many women around the world, then, the post-secular does seem to leave them between "a rock and a hard place": between the global resurgence of religion and multi-cultural appeals to difference and tolerance, and the imperative to protect the well-being and self-determination of women and girls in the face of authoritarian theologies.

Post-secular Religion, Culture and Gender—What's Missing?

It has been my contention that the post-secular invites us to think about "what's missing" about secular reason; but it is also an opportunity to acknowledge and correct the (often hidden) gendered nature of our thinking about faith and reason, private and public, sacred and secular, tyranny and freedom. Just as feminist interventions into the discourse of the Western Enlightenment were so much a part of critical debate about the nature and trajectory of modernity, so now "post-secularism offers

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25.   Rosi Braidotti, "In Spite of the Times: the Post-secular Turn in Feminism," *Theory, Culture & Society* 25, no. 6 (2008): 2.

26.   Tina Beattie, *The New Atheists: The Twilight of Reason and the War on Religion* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2007), 10.

27.   See, for example, Rahila Gupta, "Feminism and the Soul of Secularism," *Open Democracy* (online), March 8, 2011, available at: http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/rahila-gupta/feminism-and-soul-of-secularism.

the opportunity more openly to discuss and expose the dualisms…that have so hobbled women's lives, from a sociological, spatial and spiritual perspective."[28]

The silence of western feminist theory on religion is surprising, but not if one considers the affinities, historically, between feminism and the Enlightenment and its view of religion as the antithesis of progress and human self-determination. Yet this is an ambivalent heritage, as many contemporary feminists, quick to see how postmodernism opened up critical spaces for the interrogation of the very constitution of modernity along gendered lines, have realized. While post-Enlightenment first- and second-wave feminism certainly benefited from a modernist appeal to autonomy, freedom from external constraint and self-determination, postmodern feminists have highlighted the extent to which concepts of subjectivity, Reason and personhood were androcentric. However, what feminists have been slower to realize is the extent to which Enlightenment feminism also unconsciously bought into a secularist agenda, with the consequent neglect on the part of most Western feminist scholarship of religion and theology.

Religion in the lives of women has thus been scandalously overlooked and under-theorized within secular feminist thought. But the post-secular, with its narrative of contradictory co-existence of faith and reason, of religion as continuing to exercise a strong influence on people's lived experience, may bring greater freedom of analysis. More nuanced understanding of the complexities of what happens when faith enters the public space may actually rehabilitate women of faith into the body politic as active citizens capable of directing spiritually and theologically grounded reasoning toward inclusive, constructive and emancipatory causes. However, since the post-secular continues to call for critical, reflexive and nuanced accounts of the actual relationships between faith, reason, gender and power, it will continue to expose ways in which religion continues to be an inhibiting force for women, as well as a powerful source of agency:

> Without the prop of secularization as inevitable, and challenged by postmodern critiques of the oppressive discursive logic of the secular-religious binary, there is an onus on defenders of secularism to own its status as a purely normative political principle. This means clearly defining the purpose of secularism and justifying its operation in specified contexts. It also entails moving away from a defence of secularism as a foundational principle [an absolute] and refocusing attention instead on its place in an emancipatory, inclusive account of the democratic polity. From this perspective,

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28.   Clara Greed, "A Feminist Critique of the Post-secular City: God and Gender," in *Post-Secular Cities: Space, Theory and Practice*, ed. Justin Beaumont and Christopher R. Baker (London: Ashgate, 2011), 108.

the principle of secularism is invoked to underpin the conditions of human freedom, including, among other things, respect for religious pluralism.[29]

Analysis of post-secular society must make space for theorizing in a sophisticated or meaningful way about the role of religion in women's lives, and de- and recontextualizations of the relationship between religion, culture and gender. It will be open to religious *and* secular roots (if the two can be properly kept separate) of authoritarian abuses of power, as well as within global emancipatory movements and the exercise of women's agency. It is about the ways both "faith" *and* "reason" might inform discourses around the construction of gender identity, relations and representations.

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29. Reilly, "Rethinking the Interplay of Feminism and Secularism," 25.