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Australia and Turkey in Postsecular Perspectives

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Introduction

The relationship of mutual respect that Australia and Turkey have built over the past century is remarkable, not just because it is the friendship of former enemies, but because it is the friendship of societies that, according to many social measures, are fundamentally different. This is evident when examining religion in Australia and Turkey. Whereas individual and public religiosity has increased in Turkey in recent decades, were it not for ongoing large-scale immigration and the disproportionately higher birth rates of new Australians from the developing world, the decline of religiosity in Australia (according to every conventional social scientific measure) would be even more apparent than it is.¹ Focusing on some of these measures, and viewing Australia from Turkey or Turkey from Australia, is like looking through a camera obscura. For example, Australians and Turks were asked in the World Values Survey whether the ‘basic meaning of religion’ is to ‘make sense of life in this world’ or to make sense of ‘life after death’.² Three-quarters of the Australians interviewed replied that religion exists to make sense of life in this world and three-quarters of the Turks interviewed held that religion exists to make sense of life in the next. Yet the survey also shows that a significantly higher proportion of Turks view religion as the source of solutions to difficulties within family and society. For most Australians, religion is not only an instrumentalised this-worldly matter, but it is also of limited utility when it comes to anything other than individual morality.

In looking at the different applications of the notion of the ‘postsecular’, this chapter reveals the way a single broad social phenomena – the comparative revitalisation of religion in the public sphere – manifests across these two different societies. In Australia, the postsecular refers to the
Theorising the postsecular

The notion of the ‘postsecular’ emerged in a meaningful way in social science and social policy in the wake of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. In the years following these attacks, debates that had been initiated in the late 1980s by incidents such as the Salman