

## Article

# Problematizing the Official Athens Mosque: Between Mere Place of Worship and 21st Century ‘Trojan Horse’

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**Abstract:** This article investigates the ‘problematization’ of the recently inaugurated mosque in the city of Athens, the capital’s first ‘official’ mosque since the country was liberated from the Ottoman Empire almost two centuries ago. Building on and developing the existing scholarly literature on the problematisation of mosques in the contemporary European setting, this article generates new knowledge by focusing on the Greco-specific context of that same problematisation: an amalgam of history, geography, religion and culture, that asymmetrically shape and inform how and why the new Athens mosque is—and indeed continues to be—a site of conflict and opposition. Presenting new empirical data, this article uses an innovative and original approach to bring together two separate pieces of fieldwork undertaken first-hand by the authors in 2001/2 and 2019/20. Analysing the two sets of data, a threefold thematic structure is employed that focuses on Greece’s history, Christian Orthodoxy and global terrorism. This article first explores the existing scholarly canon relating to the contemporary problematisation of mosques through a focused overview of Greece’s history, religion and culture appropriate to mosques and in part, Muslims and Islam. From there it sets out the findings from the two periods of fieldwork to illustrate and evidence discourses of opposition towards the mosque and how these serve to function both symbolically and tangibly. Using the thematic analysis, theories relating to the ideological processes of Islamophobia are deployed to elucidate a better understanding of the Athens mosque. In doing so, this article makes a timely contribution.

**Keywords:** mosque problematisation; Islamophobia; Greece; Greek Muslims; Athens; Islam in Greece



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## 1. Introduction

According to Göle (2011), mosques in ‘the West’ are no longer mere places of worship but instead function as cultural-political constructions that symbolically embody difference and ‘Otherness’. Accordingly, mosques have become sites of conflict through which the symbolic ‘problematization’ of Muslims and Islam is made known. For Allen (2017), this problematisation is further intensified in relation to the building and development of new mosques. As sites of conflict, the discourses of opposition directed at new mosques are informed by these very same symbolic functions and processes. Such is true of Greece’s first new ‘official’ mosque since the country was liberated from the Ottoman Empire almost two centuries ago. Located in Athens and having opened its doors for the first time in late 2019, Greece was previously the only European country in which the capital city did not have a state-recognised mosque. A 350-person-capacity building, albeit without any ornate or Islamic features, the city’s new mosque marks the culmination of a long-fought battle. With the first attempt to build a mosque dating back to 1890 (Speed 2019)—a century before contemporary debates about the integration of Muslims in Europe began—the problematisation of mosques as indeed the presence of the religion of Islam and Muslims in Greece more generally would seem to have a longer and deeper history of contestation than elsewhere in Europe.

Investigating the new Athens mosque to build on and develop the existing scholarly literature on the contemporary problematisation of mosques, this article generates new

knowledge by focusing on the Greco-specific context: an amalgam of history, geography, religion and culture, that asymmetrically shape and inform how and why the new Athens mosque is—and indeed continues to be—a site of conflict and opposition. Presenting new empirical data, this article is the first scholarly study to investigate the new Athens mosque since its official opening. In doing so, an innovative and original approach brings together two separate pieces of fieldwork undertaken first-hand by the authors in 2001/2 and 2019/20. Analysing the two sets of data, a threefold thematic structure is employed that focuses on Greece's history, Christian Orthodoxy and global terrorism. To ensure the findings and analyses are contextualised, this article first explores the existing scholarly canon relating to the contemporary problematisation of mosques before providing a focused overview of Greece's history, religion and culture appropriate to mosques and in part, Muslims and the religion of Islam. As well as contributing to what is a relatively embryonic body of work this article generates new knowledge and thinking about the new Athens mosque specifically and the Greco-specific social, political, cultural and theological determinants that shape and inform its contestation and opposition. Importantly, this article also makes a timely contribution to the limited academic literature investigating Muslims and Islam in contemporary Greece.

## 2. Methods and Approaches

The approach to the research underpinning this article was fourfold. The first comprised detailed reviews of the literature relating to the problematisation of mosques in Greece and Europe, historically and contemporarily. Non-specialist resources were also reviewed including those available in the mainstream media and online spaces. The second comprised a secondary analysis of empirical data gathered by one of the authors as principal investigator of a project funded by the now defunct European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC), and its successor, the Fundamental Rights Agency. Gathered while investigating Islamophobia post-9/11 in the then 15 European Union (EU) member nations, the project drew together 75 nationally focused reports—four per member nation—from which a synthesis report was published (Allen and Nielsen 2002). As an EU member nation then and indeed now, a feature of the empirical data gathered in Greece centred on what was at the time a proposed new mosque in Athens. As only the synthesis findings were published, much of the empirical data gathered across the 15 nations were not made publicly available at the time or indeed since. Through revisiting the data from Greece and the mosque specifically, this approach affords a unique opportunity to present findings that are new and original.

The third approach analysed primary data gathered by one of the authors while undertaking fieldwork in Greece from January to July 2019. This included interviewing 29 individuals and stakeholders identifying as Muslim, 21 of whom were permanent residents of Athens where the interviews were conducted. The others resided elsewhere in Greece. As with the previous approach, while primarily focusing on Islamophobia in Greece, a significant feature of the data gathered centred on the newly constructed and inaugurated Athens mosque. Both the data and findings are therefore original, not having been published in any format elsewhere. The final approach was to thematically analyse the two datasets. Thematic analysis was preferred due to it being a qualitative method that can be consistently and coherently used across different epistemologies and research questions (Nowell et al. 2017). For Boyatzis (1998), this is especially important when researchers analyse data gathered using different research methods but who wish to communicate with each other across the data. Likewise, Braun and Clarke (2006) and King (2004) also highlighted the value of thematic analysis as an effective method for examining data gathered at different times and in different ways. There are disadvantages to thematic analysis, however. As Nowell et al. (2017) noted, thematic analysis can be afforded less credibility than other qualitative approaches given its potential for inconsistencies due to its inherent flexibility. In seeking to minimise any potential disadvantages or detrimental impacts, the authors acknowledge the observations of Holloway and Todres (2003) and the

need to ensure empirical claims are appropriately evidenced. Doing so, three primary—and importantly, comparative—themes were identified across the two datasets: the role and function of history, the role and function of Christian Orthodoxy, and the perceived threat of terrorism.

### 3. The Contemporary Problematisation of Mosques in ‘the West’

It was little more than a decade ago that the first scholarly studies investigating the contemporary ‘problematisation’ of the building and construction of mosques in Europe emerged. Spanning different geographical locations, these studies explored problematisation through discourses of opposition and new mosques as sites of conflict. [Cesari \(2005\)](#) for instance focused on France and how discourses of opposition reflected wider societal tensions about the perceived growing influence of Muslims and the religion of Islam in the public and political spaces. As she pertinently noted, rarely did these discourses focus on the actual buildings. Likewise, [Saint-Blancat and di Friedberg \(2005\)](#) noted how discourses of opposition in Italy were linked to broader questions about the presence of Muslim communities, how they were seen to be changing Italy, and what the ramifications might be. For them, new mosques performed a symbolic function: a means to direct expressions of anger that reflected wider concerns and fears about the cultural and religious ‘Otherness’ of Islam and Muslims in the contemporary setting. [Landman and Wessels \(2005\)](#) and [McLoughlin \(2005\)](#) agreed in the context of the Netherlands and England, respectively, noting how new mosques were fuelling pervasive discourses about the perceived ‘Islamification’ of individual countries and Europe more widely.

[Jonker \(2005\)](#) developed this with her study investigating opposition towards the proposed new mosque in Berlin-Kreuzberg, Germany. An orchestrated opposition dating back to 1999, her research highlighted how 9/11 increased the voracity of discourses of opposition. Most striking, however, was the marked change in the content and justification of that same opposition. Describing 9/11 as catalysing a ‘curve of anger’, she noted a greater sense of mistrust and suspicion being expressed about Muslims and Islam. From this, a new narrative emerged that centred on the ‘true’ motive for building mosques in the European setting. Reinforcing the notion that mosques perform symbolic functions, [Jonker’s \(2005\)](#) findings illustrated the extent to which geo-political factors and incidents became as determinative as did any local or national equivalent. Developed by [Allievi \(2009\)](#), [Göle \(2011\)](#), [Kassimeris and Jackson \(2012\)](#), [Tamimi Arab \(2013\)](#) and [Kuppinger \(2014\)](#) among others, new mosques became proxies for all that was perceived to be problematic about Muslims and Islam.

Similar findings were evident in the various studies investigating opposition towards the proposed new mosque in Dudley, England. While Reeves, [Abbas and Pedroso \(2009\)](#) and [Kassimeris and Jackson \(2012\)](#) offered competing perspectives, [Allen’s \(2013, 2014, 2015a, 2015b\)](#) studies afforded particular insight into the breadth of opposition including allegations that included the mosque having a detrimental impact on the town’s medieval skyline, its minaret being problematically taller than a nearby church steeple, as evidence of the ‘Islamification’ of Britain, as a hub of radicalisation and a destination for Islamist terror groups. An amalgam of the local, national and international, Allen’s studies evidenced the extent to which the perceived, albeit deemed ‘real’, threat posed by the ‘Otherness’ of Muslims and Islam informs these discourses. As one local resident put it when justifying his opposition to the mosque: the minarets resemble “look out posts . . . ” and “ . . . the design of the [mosque] seems more fortified castle than spiritual house” ([Allen 2014](#)).

The contemporary problematisation of mosques found political form in Switzerland in 2009 when 57 percent of voters voted to ban the building of minarets, despite only four of its existing 150 mosques at the time having them ([Stüssi 2008](#)). For [Nussbaum \(2012\)](#), the vote evidenced how largely irrelevant ‘problems’ associated with Muslims and Islam can be easily and rapidly transformed into national crises that find form in the discourses of opposition against mosques. As [Stüssi \(2008\)](#) explains, the Swiss referendum was therefore symbolic: an opportunity for the public to voice its opposition to a range of concerns and

fears about Muslims and Islam in their country. While the outcome of the referendum was little more than a hollow victory, it was simultaneously an overwhelming success: a victory in the process of halting Muslims and the religion of Islam and by consequence, relentless Islamification. Göle (2011) was therefore right to suggest that the problematisation of mosques and discourses of opposition associated with them are symbolic of the Otherness of Muslims and Islam.

#### 4. Greece in Context: History, Religion, Culture

Greece has a long historical relationship with Muslim communities, dating back to at least 1000 CE. Over time, the number of Muslims in Greece has fluctuated, correlating with various historical junctures, including the Ottoman Empire's reign over the area, the exchange of populations regulated by 1923's Treaty of Lausanne, and the 1947 annexation of the Dodecanese. Today, it is difficult to posit a precise number for Greece's Muslim population, not least due to the state's decision to cease collecting religious affiliation data in 2001. Nonetheless, recent estimates suggest that while approximately 90 percent of the country's residents self-identify as Christian Orthodox, 2–5 percent self-identify as Muslims (Pew Research Centre 2017). Throughout history, Muslims in Greece have been largely overlooked or invisibilised (Hatziprokopiou and Evergeti 2014). One of the principal reasons for this is that unlike its European counterparts, Greece is not a secular country. Following 1821's Greek Revolution and the liberation from Ottoman rule, modern Greece emerged whereby notions of nationhood, nationality and national identity were highly interdigitated with Christian Orthodoxy. Accordingly, Christian Orthodoxy and the shared history of Ancient Hellas became the two defining factors used to segregate and demarcate those who were deemed to be rightfully Greek from those who were not. Active in defending Greekness throughout Ottoman occupation, the Orthodox Church<sup>1</sup> did so through preserving its religious and cultural heritage while also upholding the Greek language. This was formalised in the first constitution of the new Greek nation, defining a Greek citizen as one who lives within the Greek territory and who believes in Christ (Sakellariou 2017a). Ineluctably, Muslims were duly branded as former oppressors, alien enemies and indeterminable Others who could fulfil neither the necessary ethnic nor religious homogeneity that afforded membership of the nation and what it meant to be Greek (Brunnbauer 2001).

To the present day, Christian Orthodoxy remains an integral component of what it means to be Greek. While in recent years debates have ensued about the need to separate Church from state, all have been to no avail given the social and political privileges the Church has been primordially afforded in relation to a broad range of social, political and cultural issues including religious freedom, the formal recognition of minority religious communities, and education among others (Sakellariou 2011). The strength of the bond between the Church and state is none more eminent than in Article 3 of the Greek Constitution. Regulating the relationship between the Church and state, the Article not only states but so too legitimises that the "predominant religion in Greece is the religion of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ" (Greek Constitution 2019). The aforementioned Article is, however, neither prohibitive as far as religious freedom is concerned nor hindering of religious pluralism in any way. Nonetheless, it illustrates and duly evidences the embeddedness of Christian Orthodoxy in the modern Greek nation and the complex interwoven relationship that contemporarily exists between the Church and state in the formation of Greek identity, society and culture (Anagnostou and Gropas 2010).

Today, Greece is home to two distinct Muslim communities, each of which are perceived in ways that impact their formal and political visibility as also the rights afforded to them. The first of these communities is the native Muslim minority that live in Western Thrace; the second are the rather more diverse communities centred in Athens having arrived in Greece in recent decades as migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. As regards the former, the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne between Greek and Ottoman-Turkish states not only regulated mandatory population exchanges, but also afforded Western Thrace's in-

digenous Muslims the status of an official religious minority (Tekin 2010). With this came certain privileges including the right to the full practice of their religion, build places of worship, uphold religious hierarchies and construct burial sites. All, however, are geographically constrained to Western Thrace. Accordingly, if Western Thracian Muslims move to any other part of Greece, they immediately lose those same rights. As regards the largely migrant Athenian Muslims, not only are they invisibilised by the state through being afforded no official recognition, but they also have no rights whatsoever in relation to the practice or fulfilment of their religion.

From fieldwork undertaken in 2019 by one of the authors in Western Thrace, it is locally estimated that there are currently around 320 mosques. Fieldwork in Athens around the same time highlighted a vastly different situation. Unlike in Western Thrace, Athenian Muslims had to practice their religion in privately rented, unlicensed properties, many of which were housed in basements or warehouses. From field inquiries, of approximately 120 sites that function as ‘makeshift mosques’, only nine were estimated as having received a licence to operate as a place of worship<sup>2</sup>. Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of Athens’ makeshift mosques are not only unfit for purpose but also fail to resemble anything akin to an Islamic place of worship. The situation is further compounded by the fact that worshippers attending the makeshift mosques are vigilant not to draw attention to themselves or the unofficial places of worship for fear of provoking the attention of right wing and populist groups that see Muslims and the religion of Islam posing a ‘threat’ to Greece, its people and culture (Hatziprokopiou and Evergeti 2014). While the state is fully aware of these makeshift mosques, they, like the people who use them, are tacitly ignored; their invisibility ensuring they do not evoke opposition from the political mainstream or Church (Sakellariou 2011).

However, the impetus to construct an official state-recognised mosque did not emerge out of the religious needs of Athenian Muslims. Contrariwise, the first bill regarding the construction of an official mosque in Athens was passed more than a century ago in 1890 (AONA’ 1890). Since then, the issue has recurred on countless occasions, with new pieces of legislation being drafted and subsequently passed, each of which has been vehemently contested to the extent that none have been enacted or enforced. This process changed—and importantly ended—with the mosque’s construction being brought to completion in 2019. While this would appear to have changed more recently, at the time of finalizing the research for this article, the mosque was not used for religious worship, or indeed anything else, despite there being a real and tangible physical structure in place. Irrespective, the building did fulfil the legislation. While so, the aforementioned legislation also included provisions for the construction of a Muslim cemetery in Athens, a provision that has yet to see any initiation, let alone progress, at the same time of writing. Accordingly, Athenian Muslims continue to worship in the city’s makeshift mosques while being forced to resort to expensive funeral alternatives that include transferring of the bodies of loved ones to countries of heritage or having them buried in cemeteries in Western Thrace (Sakellariou 2015).

## 5. A Trojan Horse: The Athens Mosque Following 9/11

Prior to the 2001 fieldwork and the 9/11 attacks in the US, a number of plots of land across Athens had been identified as potential sites for the official mosque. One driver at the time was the hosting of the Olympic Games in Athens in 2004, with plans to build the mosque being finalised for a plot of land in the suburb of Peania, 20 km east of Athens. The response from Athenian Muslims was threefold. The first focused on location. Given it was some distance from any of the areas of the city where large numbers of Muslims lived, many felt that building the mosque in Peania would render it unusable. Some believed this to be quite deliberate<sup>3</sup>. The second response focused on how the building of an official mosque then was little more than a cynical public relations initiative. Wanting to communicate a message of openness and tolerance to an onlooking worldwide audience, some felt that had the Olympics not been on the horizon, there would have been no

progress on building the mosque<sup>4</sup>. The final response focused on how the construction of an official mosque would afford an opportunity to clampdown on the city's makeshift mosques. Premised on the fact that any official mosque would be unusable due to it not having the capacity to accommodate all of Athens' Muslims, some voiced concern that far from being beneficial the official mosque had the potential to be wholly detrimental<sup>5</sup>.

One of the reasons for looking to build the official mosque away from the city centre was to alleviate opposition from the Church. At the time of the fieldwork, the Church was led by Archbishop Christodoulos of Athens and All Greece. Having ardently proclaimed that "our faith is the foundation of our identity. If you abolish one, you abolish the other" (Smith 2008), Christodoulos routinely stated that he would only agree to the mosque being built if it was away from the city's Orthodox Cathedral and unequivocally not 'below the Acropolis' (Speed 2019). However, Christodoulos' objections to the official mosque went beyond location; believing it would fuel the de-Hellenisation of Greece, its history and culture. Aside from Christodoulos and the Church specifically, the fieldwork showed many ordinary Athenians held largely similar views<sup>6</sup>. This was evident in the findings of a poll commissioned by the *Athens News*. As well as suggesting that ordinary Athenians were overwhelmingly supportive of plans to build the mosque outside the city centre, so too did those same Athenians believe that once the official mosque was built it would be the first of many. For the majority, this was untenable given its perceived potential to destabilise Greece and all that it entails<sup>7</sup>.

Akin to Jonker's (2005) 'curve of anger' a number of new strands of opposition were catalysed by the 9/11 attacks. The first followed a combined request from the United States' Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Interpol for Greece to identify the whereabouts of several hundred Muslims believed to be living in the country (Speed 2019). In response, police raided a number of Athens' makeshift mosques; a move that attracted significant and overwhelmingly negative political and media attention<sup>8</sup>. As the fieldwork showed, this was due to the popularly conceived message the raids conveyed: that terrorists were at large in Athens' Muslim communities and were hiding in the makeshift mosques. The raids also gave credence to the view that Athenian Muslims were engaging in 'separatist behaviours' that many believed were intended to undermine and destroy the city and subsequently the nation<sup>9</sup>. Accordingly, opposition to the official mosque grew on the basis that as well as 'officially' sanctioning religious practices it would also 'officially' sanction separatist and dangerous social and political behaviours also. Within weeks of 9/11 therefore, the official mosque took on a much greater—wholly symbolic—focus in the public and political spaces.

Unlike its EU counterparts, Greece's politicians were as condemnatory about American imperialism following 9/11 as they were Islamist terrorism (Allen and Nielsen 2002). While so, emerging from both the left and right of the political spectrum was the view that the presence of Muslims and Islam in Greece was increasingly problematic. This was especially pronounced in the discourses of the political right, in particular the nationalist *Hellenic Front* and centre-right *New Democracy*. For the former, the mosque afforded an opportunity to ground its anti-Muslim rhetoric. To illustrate this, a *New Democracy* poster campaign in the city used words attributed to Syed Mohammed Jamil (President of the *Pakistani Cultural Organisation*) to 'prove' the mosque was a security threat and that the city's Muslims were an 'enemy within'<sup>10</sup>. Another illustration is how the *Hellenic Front* described the mosque as a 'Trojan Horse', a deliberate attempt to conjure Hellenic mythology in accordance with Allen's (2010) theory that history provides a seedbed from which contemporary Islamophobic discourses seek credibility. Citing the Trojan Horse myth, where a subterfuge was used to enter the city of Troy in order to overthrow its people and win the war, was a deliberate ploy by the *Hellenic Front*. Affording credibility to the pernicious view that the official mosque had an ulterior function, the inference was that it too was a subterfuge from which Muslims would seek to overthrow the city.

Similarly, discourses about the mosque were also evident in the mainstream media<sup>11</sup>. These were especially prominent in the content and focus of numerous debate-style

programmes broadcast on television channels including Alter Channel, Alpha TV, Extra Channel, High TV and TeleCity. Two discourses were particularly recurrent. The first focused on the cultural and religious Otherness of Muslims and the religion of Islam. Noting that none of the debates were explicitly Islamophobic, the fieldwork nonetheless highlighted how debates on High TV and TeleCity drew on populist—and nationalist—rhetoric to infer credence on the threat both pose to Greece, its people and Orthodoxy<sup>12</sup>. Drawing together the views of academics, politicians and Church leaders among others, the mosque was routinely referred to as an example of all that was culturally and religiously ‘foreign’ about Muslims and Islam. The second discourse, focused on national and ethnic Otherness whereby markers of Muslimness were routinely interchanged with markers of Turkish or Albanian nationality and ethnicity. Again drawing on history’s seedbed, such discourses often focused on how the Turkish and Albanians had been enemies of Greece for centuries. Blurring the lines between history and the contemporary, such discourses reinforced post-9/11 concerns about Muslims being ‘an internal security threat’ and ‘enemy within’. An illustration of this was how some mainstream media sources alleged the Albanian paramilitary group *Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës* (Kosovo Liberation Front) had infiltrated Athens’ Muslim communities; in turn, giving credence to concerns about the makeshift mosques<sup>13</sup>. Similarly too in how some media outlets spoke about how the building of a ‘Turkish temple’ in Athens would provide a ‘hiding place for terrorists’<sup>14</sup>.

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, Christodoulos and the Church were commended for being quick to state that terrorism and religion should not be conflated: “this terrorism is not the true image of Islam. We must not develop hate even suspicion against the Muslim world who are moderate peace-loving people (Allen and Nielsen 2002). Christodoulos reiterated similar via the Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate which was quick to organise an extraordinary summit in Brussels in December 2001. Attended by almost 100 Christian, Muslim and Jewish leaders from around the world, they collectively denounced those who used religion to justify terrorism<sup>15</sup>. To an internal Greek audience however, Christodoulos remained vehemently opposed to the Athens mosque. Having previously claimed he would only support the mosque if it was some distance from the centre of Athens, he also withdrew his support for building the mosque in the suburb of Peania following 9/11. For him, and by default the Church, Peania was too close to Athens’ airport meaning that first time visitors to the city might see a minaret on the skyline and misleadingly think that Greece was an Islamic nation. Clearly resonating with and duly influencing the wider public, within a few weeks of Christodoulos’ comments residents in Peania erected a large cross at the highest point of the proposed location (2003).

From the fieldwork, there was a clear difference in the message conveyed by Christodoulos and the Church hierarchy about Muslims and Islam as also the mosque to external audiences as there was Greece’s internal audience. To understand this, Roussos (2010) revisits Christodoulos’ views about the complex relationship between Orthodoxy, nationhood and identity; best captured in the statement “if you abolish one, you abolish the other” (Smith 2008). Finding form in the discourses of opposition expressed towards Athens’ mosque, whether seen ‘below the Acropolis’ (Speed 2019) or on the skyline of Peania, both disrupt the view that Orthodoxy shapes and defines Greece and Greek identity. Similar too in discourses of opposition that centre on the de-Hellenisation of Greece and Greek culture. Whether as a Trojan Horse functioning to disguise those seeking to destroy Athens, or a catalyst for the ‘Islamification’ of Greece, the building of the Athens mosque is indeterminably disruptive. Irrespective of the discourse, the internal message conveyed was always of preservation and defence. Accordingly, the internal message was far removed from the externally conveyed equivalent.

## 6. Unaccessible, Guarded and Forgotten: The Official Mosque in 2020

The legislation permitting the construction of the official Athens mosque was ratified half a decade later in 2006. Despite the state agreeing to finance its construction and subsequently control it (Law 3512 2006) the legislation was met with a further decade of inaction. After two further amendments to the legislation, a legal agreement was

finally signed between the state and a consortium of four private companies in 2016 (United States Department of State 2017). Shortly after, Nikolaos Michaloliakos—the leader of the far-right, Neo-Nazi political party *Golden Dawn*—denounced parliament and its serving politicians as ‘traitors’ to Greece: the nation, its citizens, culture and religion (Verousi and Allen 2021). Drawing on the same historical seedbed, Michaloliakos aligned the new mosque with the oppression experienced under Ottoman rule. Describing the Athens mosque as a ‘shrine to slavery’ he added:

“A mosque in the shadow of the Acropolis. Are we returning to Turkish occupation? Because the Parthenon too was a mosque. We cannot rule out that they [Muslims] demand it becomes a mosque once again . . . Illegal immigrants are immune, uncontrolled in our fatherland” (Speed 2019)

Much of the inaction in the decade preceding legal ratification can be attributed to the growth and increased vociferousness of nationalist and populist right-wing political parties and movements. At street level, this found form in protests at the proposed site of the mosque. At one *National Front* protest in 2013, supporters waved Greek flags and chanted “We do not want sharia, we want Greece and Orthodoxy” (2013). Positioning the interchangeability of Greek identity and Orthodoxy against the Otherness of Muslims and Islam, the protestors distributed pamphlets condemning Islam, wrote anti-Muslim slogans on nearby buildings, and attached crosses to surrounding fences. At a *Golden Dawn* protest in 2016, protesters set up a makeshift Orthodox Church on the site while wearing military-style uniforms (Kitsantonis 2016). In the same year, at a protest by *Old Calendarist Orthodox* followers chanted anti-Islamic slogans that inferred a link between Greece’s ‘Islamic invasion with ‘international Zionism’: “resist the plans of Jewish Zionists who want you servants in the world empire of the anti-Christ” (United States Department of State 2018). More recently, in 2018, a *Golden Dawn*’s MP, Ilias Panagiotaros, declared that “with the help of God . . . this mosque will not have a good end” (2018).

Nationalist and populist right-wing political parties and movements were also active at the institutional level, manifested in explicitly Islamophobic parliamentary discourses that called for ‘resistance’ and ‘defence’. While *Golden Dawn*’s street level supporters were known to be behind a series of violent attacks against immigrants, refugees and non-Orthodox places of worship, its newly elected parliamentarians capitalised on its newfound political legitimacy to routinely attack Muslims and denounce Islam. Its parliamentarians simultaneously delivered hateful speeches while down-voting the legislation to build the mosque. With a number of its prominent members and leader having stood trial since 2015 charged with participating in a criminal organization—finally losing their appeal in 2019—some of its supporters moved to the ultranationalist far-right political party, *Greek Solution* (Elliniki Lisi). Replicating its predecessors’ parliamentary success in national elections, it too has adopted an explicitly hostile stance against what its parliamentarians refer to as the threat posed by ‘extreme Islam’ and Muslims that are variously labelled as ‘jihadis’, ‘enemies of the nation’ and ‘Islamofascists’, the latter a commonly deployed discursive neologism among Europe’s political right (Kundnani 2008; Bloomfield 2011; Flores 2012). This has been coupled with vehement opposition to the mosque, accusing the government of treason and of submission of the country’s sovereignty. At the parliamentary level, similar discourses have also emanated from populist right-wing parties *LAOS* (Popular Orthodox Rally) and *ANEL* (Independent Greeks). Like *Golden Dawn*, they too have denounced the building of the mosque at the same time as down-voting the legislation at every opportunity.

While the growth and prominence of populist and nationalist right-wing parties demarcates the latter fieldwork from the former, the discourses of opposition have remained largely constant: focusing on Islamification, the terrorist threat, and ethnic and national Otherness. This was borne out in Triandafyllidou and Gropas’ (2009) study of five ‘quality’ national newspapers. In relation to the mosque, the study illustrated how violent Islamist extremism and terrorism was commingled with references to Turkey, the indeterminable Other and ‘chronic enemy’ of Greece. Similarly, Sakellariou (2017b) who in analysing



the proceedings of the Greek parliament between the two periods of fieldwork, found discourses about threats to national identity posed by multiculturalism and immigration, Islamic criminality and terrorism, and links to Turkey being recurrent in debates about the mosque. While so, Sakellariou's study shows that such discourses were far from the preserve of the populist and nationalist right-wing. Nonetheless, despite Athenian Muslims not comprising Turkish nationals nor those of Turkish ethnicity (Triandafyllidou 2010), the enduring and indeed ongoing political and military tensions between Greece and Turkey dating back to Ottoman occupation were common and, at numerous junctures, at the forefront of parliamentary debates about the mosque.

One hundred and twenty-nine years after the first piece of legislation regarding the construction of an official Muslim prayer site was put before the Greek parliament, an official mosque was finally dedicated in June 2019. A few days after the end of Ramadan and the festival of Eid al-Fitr, a ceremony took place at the new mosque that was attended by journalists, government officials and members of the 'Ruling Committee of the Athenian Islamic Mosque', all of whom had been duly appointed by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. Resonating with recurrent discourses of opposition, Costas Yavroglou—then Minister of Education and Religious Affairs—described the mosque as a “dignified place of prayer for Muslims, whether they are citizens, migrants or visitors” (2019a). While the Minister announced the mosque would not be fully operational until September 2019, the government-appointed Imam of the mosque—the Moroccan national, Zaki Mohammed—thanked the Greek people “who accepted us as Greek citizens and Muslims and the State which helped us to get this place” (2019a). Similarly, just two months prior, in a public interview, Ashir Hyder—member of the Ruling Committee—declared his gratitude for this “gift from the Greek state” before describing the new mosque as “the Mecca of Athens” (Zaharis 2019).

The location for the mosque was finally settled in Athens' Votanikos district, a suburb west of the city centre. A former naval base, the site is home to a 1000-square metre building, grassed area, newly planted young trees, a children's play area and a fountain that does not currently work. With a capacity to accommodate approximately 300 male and 50 female worshippers, the rectangular and barely decorated building has no external identifying features of a mosque: no dome or minaret nor any loudspeakers from which to issue the call to prayer. Having visited the site during fieldwork in 2019 and 2020, the mosque and surrounding areas are largely obscured from view due to high walls having been erected, most of which are heavily reinforced with barbed wire<sup>16</sup>. In combination with the locked grey metal gates through which access to the mosque is controlled, the impression is one of a barricade rather than a place of worship. With no signage to confirm what stands behind the locked gates and high walls, it is difficult to comprehend how potential worshippers might enter the site in order to access the mosque or how those wishing to visit it might know they had arrived at their expected destination.

For those who have visited it, most are underwhelmed. According to Naim Elghandour—president of the *Muslim Association of Greece*—“the mosque resembles the toilets in the freeway or a kiosk” (Zaharis 2019). During a radio interview he said, “is this the mosque that we've been hearing about for years?” before adding, “. . . we will not complain, I just feel embitterment” (2019b). Anna Stamou, a Greek convert to Islam and marketing and public relations manager to the *Muslim Association of Greece*, expressed a similar disappointment:

“not having a minaret is a representative example of how it is degraded, just like ourselves [the Muslims]. Minarets are Islamic, they are not Turkish. The mosque could have been built following the European standards, having embedded the Greek traditional architecture, just like all other mosques in those respective countries” (Zaharis 2019)

Although the vast majority of Athenian Muslims interviewed during the fieldwork had not had a chance to visit the mosque at the time, most were unimpressed by what they had seen. As one Muslim woman put it, “I went to the mosque in Votanikos twice and took a look at it. Ok, it is alright. It doesn't look like a mosque though”.

Juxtaposed against the largely ‘invisible’ mosque stands a building that is far more ‘visible’ in its outpouring of opposition and hate<sup>17</sup>. To the left of the mosque’s locked gates stands an old derelict building emblazoned with a vast array of graffiti that embody many of the discourses of opposition evident in the fieldwork from 2001. In relation to Orthodoxy, the message is explicit: ‘Jesus Christ is resurrected’, ‘In this sign thou shalt conquer’ and ‘Jesus Christ the Conqueror’ among others. Another unequivocally reads ‘Orthodoxy or Death’. Reflecting the discourses of defence that emerged post-9/11, another piece of graffiti declares ‘Stop Islam’. As for the primacy and importance of Greek history and culture, one word in particular is scribbled repeatedly: ‘Hellas’. So too is the derelict building awash with various Christian symbols and black painted crosses that symbolically reiterate much of that which is written. Similarly, a wooden cross is attached to the metal bars covering the building’s windows. Other nearby buildings on the main street leading to the mosque have also been vandalised; the now largely discoloured graffiti bedeck the walls, providing a constant visible reminder of the mosque’s fierce opposition. To passers-by unaware of the mosque that is largely invisible from the street, it is unlikely many would see this as the ‘dignified place of prayer’ referred to previously or as evidence that Muslims and the religion of Islam have finally been ‘accepted’.

Having again tried to visit the mosque during fieldwork in January 2020, access was denied by the four armed police officers guarding the site. According to them, they did not know if the mosque would ever be opened to the general public and if it was, when that might be<sup>18</sup>. From conversations with the officers, the only way to gain access to the building was via the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. Recommending a direct approach to the Ministry, the officers explained that an official ministerial permit would need to be secured and shown to them before they would contemplate allowing entry to the site. This was explained as being necessary at all times, reflecting how the metal gates to the mosque were manned 24 h a day, seven days a week. Despite a spokesperson from the Ministry having previously claimed that “the building is ready” and merely required ‘necessary’ work to be completed in the area surrounding the mosque (Speed 2019), the reality was clearly somewhat different. Irrespective of whether the ‘necessary’ work remained outstanding, the mosque, at the time of our visit, was in no way a fully functioning place of worship.

From interviews with Athenian Muslims, widespread feelings of mistrust and relinquishment about the mosque were apparent. As one put it:

“I have heard about this mosque so many times that I do not believe that it will ever be finished. I believe that we will be dead before it does and none of us will ever live to see a [functioning] mosque in Greece. I do not believe [the politicians when they say] that the work is almost done. It will not be done. They will not allow it to be done”

For many, the mosque has and indeed continues to be an ultimate, albeit wholly unattainable, entity: a symbol of acceptance by a nation for whom its history, culture and religion has been for so long in contention with Muslims and Islam. “They might be giving us rights, which they have to give us, but as far as [the mosque] is concerned there is still nothing” one respondent explained. “Greece, because of Turkey, does not want a mosque here. They do not want it, they do not want it because of Turkey” added another. To this end, most of the Athenian Muslims interviewed during fieldwork openly expressed a sense of resignation. Despite a physical structure clearly existing and external audiences being told that Athens has an official mosque, many questioned the sincerity of the Greek government and the notion that the mosque was not only operational but more importantly, open to all.

Similar views were expressed about the makeshift mosques most Athenian Muslims have continued to use. Problematic since 9/11 as potential ‘hiding places for terrorists’, some fear the official mosque might be used to justify the eventual closing down of the makeshift mosques. Such concerns were borne out by Ioannou (2019), who claimed the inauguration of the official mosque will undoubtedly hasten their demise. In line with

the findings from the fieldwork about how only a few of the makeshift mosques are recognised by the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, he suggests that no more than six may survive. Despite the official mosque appearing to currently be open and functioning at full capacity, the permanent closure of almost all the makeshift mosques would mean that the majority of Athenian Muslims would no longer have a place to pray. That the official mosque has the very real potential to make worship for Muslims in Athens even more difficult than it already is appears as unfathomable as it does untenable, and is far removed from the official state narrative.

## 7. The Interweaved Other: History, Orthodoxy and the Threat of Terrorism

### 7.1. History

As evidenced, the interweaving of Greek identity, history, culture and religion is deeply and complexly embedded in the findings from both periods of fieldwork. Accordingly, it was not always possible to disentangle that complexity in order to thematically constrain and thereby analyse the discourses of opposition and problematisation. While so, the prominence of Greece's history in relation to its interaction and relationship with Muslims and Islam was readily apparent. As such, the contemporary problematisation of the Athens mosque was—at times—indistinguishable from its historical forebear. Seen through the lens of the historical visibility and invisibility of Muslims and Islam in Greece (Hatziprokopiou and Evergeti 2014), both the actual and symbolic visibility of the mosque conjured memories that duly informed discourses that spanned the near two decades separating the two periods of fieldwork. Post-9/11, the fieldwork illustrated how the alleged Muslim terrorists thought to be hiding in the makeshift mosques conjured memories of the historical Muslim enemy that was deeply embedded in the Greek consciousness. As Brunnbauer (2001) noted, since liberation from Ottoman rule Muslims have never been able to be a part of Greece or even Greek. True post-9/11, the perceived threat has been exacerbated more recently with large numbers of Muslims arriving in the country as refugees fleeing war in Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. Asymmetrically explicit and implicit, the Athens mosque whether prior to and since being built functions as a symbol of this threat, both historic and contemporary.

Both periods of fieldwork evidenced this. In the first, this was evident in the discourses asserting how the mere presence of a mosque in Athens had the potential to not only destabilise the city but so too the nation. So too was destabilisation seen to have the potential to disrupt—even eradicate—Greece's history, society and culture. This was evident in the discourses of opposition expressed by the *Hellenic Front* which drew on history's seedbed to afford credence to its pernicious view that were any mosque built, it would have an ulterior function: providing the city's Muslims a bolt-hole from which to once again plot to take-over and oppress Greece. Similar findings were apparent in the latter fieldwork when *Golden Dawn's* Michaloliakos denounced the Greek parliament and politicians as 'traitors'. Aligning Ottoman rule with the new mosque, Michaloliakos drew on historical notions of oppression, 'slavery' and 'Turkish occupation' to gain traction for his party's contemporary opposition. Likewise, Kyriakos Velopoulos, leader of *Greek Solution*, who frequently made reference to Turkey when pointing to the mosque as a means to warn against the 'betrayal of the State and Orthodoxy'. Accordingly, an emergent discourse of opposition focused on resistance and defence; as much against the historical Other as indeed it was the contemporary equivalent. Reiterating Triandafyllidou and Gropas (2009), the Muslim Other will always be the 'chronic enemy' of the Greek homeland.

In explaining this, Allen's (2010) exposition of the theoretical function of various ideological components of Islamophobia is useful. Most relevant are those of reification and eternalisation. For reification, Allen (2010) argues that the meaning which is attributed to Muslims is continuous, thereby attributing permanence and normality in ways that seem independent of time or context. History and historical circumstance are therefore not only drawn upon and cited in order to make sense of the contemporary but so too are they drawn on to reify meanings about Muslims and Islam to make them appear permanent

and ultimately, normal. This was clearly apparent across the two periods of fieldwork, the perceived threat posed by Muslims contemporarily—symbolically represented by the mosque—not only indistinguishable from the historical but more importantly, reified by it. In this way, history is evidence enough. Attributed meanings, therefore, irrespective how ‘true’ or valid they might be, are seen as permanent and normal that in turn prompt certain inevitable outcomes. This was evident in discourses of opposition citing a range of ulterior motives for the mosque and its construction: Islamification, take-over, terrorism and more. Through processes of reification, these gained credence through being seen as inevitable outcomes of Muslims and Islam in Greece. A self-fulfilling process, the function of reification not only helps make sense of the world but so too normalises the attribution of Otherness.

As with reification, eternalisation functions by ensuring that meanings attributed to Muslims and Islam are not only understood as stretching back to an indefinite past where origin is lost, but so too are they so embedded and unquestioned that any question of their future end is unimaginable (Allen 2010). Accordingly, these meanings appear ahistorical: timeless and eternal, unquestioned and unchallenged. From the two periods of fieldwork, this was readily apparent in discourses of opposition that inferred what appeared to be the eternal Otherness of Muslims. This was often evident, albeit in myriad discursive forms and manifestations: from the most overt of proclamations through to guarded and covert inferences of Otherness. One illustration is the interweaving of historical events such as Greece’s liberation from Ottoman rule with contemporary graffiti demanding the need to ‘Stop Islam’, both defending and protecting the historical and contemporary ‘Hellas’ via a seemingly eternal narrative. Eternalisation was also evident—albeit inadvertently—as much in the speeches delivered by Muslims at the inauguration of the Athens mosque as indeed it was in the resignations of the Athenian Muslims interviewed. Acknowledging that Greece would never allow a fully functioning mosque, let alone affording Muslims with full and unequivocal rights to practice their religion, many sought to explain this by citing the spectre of Turkey, Albania and Greece’s shared history with both.

## 7.2. Christian Orthodoxy

Across the discourses of opposition, there was something of an interchangeability between history and Orthodoxy. Bi-directional, in the same way the historical re-affirmed and informed the contemporary while the contemporary simultaneously re-affirmed and (re)informed the historical, Orthodoxy performed a similar function being both a central foundation in the birth of the modern Greek nation historically as indeed it is today’s Greece, an EU member state. As mentioned before, however, Greece is not a secular country. Since liberation from Ottoman rule, Orthodoxy and the shared history of the Ancient Hellas have been the defining factors deployed in order to segregate and demarcate who could and could not rightfully belong to the nation: the first constitution’s acknowledgement that to be a Greek citizen is to live within its territory and believe in Christ (Sakellariou 2017a). As such, the Church has not only been integral in narratives about the need to preserve and, importantly, defend Greece, its history, culture, religion and language, but has also been integral to the emergent narratives about who constitutes the indeterminable Other to the nation, its history, culture, religion and language.

This was readily apparent in the first period of fieldwork and the discourses of opposition propagated by the Church under Christodoulos’ tutelage. As much about preservation as they were defence, Christodoulos’ demand the mosque be built away from both Athens’ Orthodox Cathedral and the Acropolis illustrate the extent to which discourses of opposition complexly interweaved Orthodoxy with history. As ‘foundation of our identity’, the Church’s discourses of opposition also evidence the complex interweaving of nationhood, identity, history, culture and more: all of which are deemed necessary to be preserved from Muslims and Islam. In the second period of fieldwork, this was apparent in the chants of those protesting the mosque: “We don’t want sharia, we want Greece and Orthodoxy”. Similarly, the discursive message conveyed by the graffiti. Implicit if not

entirely inadvertent, preservation also found form in the graffiti proclaiming ‘Orthodoxy or Death’ as also the crosses on the derelict buildings and gates, serving to remind anyone attending or passing by the mosque that Greece is Orthodox and that is something that needed to be preserved. As for defence, this was evident in the graffiti stating ‘In this sign thou shalt conquer’ and the accompanying reminder, ‘Jesus Christ the Conqueror’. Far from being a ‘dignified place of prayer’, the mosque is instead a site of problematisation and conflict.

As a site of problematisation and conflict, it was an ongoing feature of the Church’s discourses of the opposition. Whether it was because the proposed site was too close to the Acropolis or in the line of sight of those arriving in the city by air, underpinning this was the belief that nowhere in Athens should there be a mosque because symbolically at least, they can never be a part of the ‘true’ Greece. This was evident in the second piece of fieldwork’s findings, notably the construction of a makeshift Orthodox Church at the proposed site of the mosque in 2016 (Kitsantonis 2016). In doing so, protestors were symbolically reclaiming a small piece of Athenian land for Greece and its people. To reiterate the interweaved embeddedness of the Church in Greek identity and nationhood, it is telling that that a Church was preferred over flags or other national paraphernalia to symbolically preserve and defend. Such activities and discourses have no inconsistency or indeed contradiction with the Church’s externally focused ecumenical activities post-9/11. Speaking to and about the ‘Muslim world’, Christodoulos was merely reiterating the underlying narrative of his internally focused messages: demarcating where Muslims can and indeed do live from those where Greeks do. For him, the Muslim world and Greece can never be one and the same.

Here again, Allen’s (2010) ideological processes of reification and eternalisation are useful. As regards the former, from the liberation of Ottoman rule through to the building of the Athens mosque, the meanings attributed to Muslims and Islam can be seen to be something of a continuum: founded on the premise that Muslims and Islam can never be Greek or of Greece. Irrespective of the fact that Muslims are contemporarily Greek and in Greece, the process of reification negates reality to reassert and reinforce the notion that they are not and never will be. As eternalised Others, therefore, so too do they need to be eternally defended against for the preservation of Greece and all that this entails. As before, Otherness becomes eternal and ahistorical. Because Orthodoxy is so complexly interwoven with history, notions of defence and preservation thus become as applicable to Orthodoxy as they do all other facets of Greece and Greekness. It is for this reason that prominent figures within the Church have been opposed to the Athens mosque for almost two decades. It is for this reason that the Church opposed the mosque prior to the first period of fieldwork and is likely to continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

### 7.3. Global Terrorism

The findings from both periods of fieldwork evidence a strong resonance between discourses of opposition expressed towards the Athens mosque and the contemporary problematisation of mosques elsewhere. Symbolic of contemporary societal anxieties and political tensions (Cesari 2005), the two periods of fieldwork resonated with Saint-Blancat and di Friedberg’s (2005) findings about a changing Europe and Landman and Wessels’ (2005) and McLoughlin’s (2005) observations about the threat of Islamification. So too Jonker’s (2005) study and the ‘need’ to investigate the ‘true’ motive for the mosque. As a ‘Trojan Horse’, 9/11 conferred legitimacy on the belief that the mosque was a means to open the metaphorical gates of Troy. Evidenced across the two periods of fieldwork, because the mosque was seen to be more than a mere place of worship, discourses of opposition illustrated how many had already decided what its ‘true’ motive was.

Allen’s (2010) ideological processes are again useful in explaining the embeddedness of the threat of terrorism in the discourses of opposition evidenced. As he explains, rationalisation is a process by which symbolic forms construct chains of reasoning that seek to defend or justify certain social or political relations with the intention of persuading

an audience that it is valid. In relation to the Athens mosque, that process of rationalisation began with the post-9/11 raids on the city's makeshift mosques. Despite the raids finding no evidence of a tangible terrorist threat emanating from within Athens' Muslim communities, the raids simultaneously rationalised the 'there's no smoke without fire' adage as also the need for greater mistrust and fear. A further process of rationalisation was also apparent. If Muslims and Islam were neither in Athens nor Greece more widely, then it was entirely rational to conclude that Greece and its people would be safe from and duly defended against 'their' threat: that is, the threat seen to be posed by Muslims and Islam. The process of rationalisation therefore reinforces and reaffirms that which is concurrently being reified and eternalised, all combining to sustain and perpetuate the necessary demarcation between Greece and Islam, Greeks and Muslims, and 'Us' and the Other.

## 8. Conclusions

Drawing on the original findings from the two periods of fieldwork, this article contributes new knowledge about the opposition and problematisation of the recently built and subsequently launched official mosque in Athens. Positioned within the existing scholarly literature, this article set out new findings that give credence to that same literature through a lens of investigation that illustrated and duly explained how an amalgam of Greco-specific factors relating to history, geography, religion and culture asymmetrically shaped and informed the problematisation of the Athens mosque and the discourses of opposition that ensued. Across the fieldwork, the findings illustrate the nature and content of problematisation and the opposition discourses that were constant and unchanging as also those that changed and transformed. Approaching this from a threefold thematic perspective—history, Orthodoxy and global terrorism—as well as the complex interweaving, so too did they draw upon and resonate with wider contemporary 'problems' at the local, national and international levels. In doing so, this article evidenced the complex, interweaved and asymmetric processes that underpin the problematisation of mosques in contemporary Europe and the discourses of opposition that simultaneously emanate from and duly fuel these same processes. Accordingly, this article makes a timely contribution to a relatively embryonic scholarly literature about the contemporary problematisation of mosques in the European and Western context, as indeed it does to the scant body of academic literature about the role and presence of Muslims and Islam in contemporary Greece.

While this article affords new insights and understandings to the specific context of Greece, one finding illustrates some divergence between the problematisation of the Athens mosque and the existing scholarly canon. This is most evident in relation to [Stüssi's \(2008\)](#) investigation into the Swiss referendum to ban minarets. For him, the referendum was symbolic of the general public's shared concerns and anxieties about Muslims and Islam. While true of the Athens mosque, the fieldwork evidenced that it was not only the general public in the context of Greece: so too was it symbolic of the concerns and anxieties of the Church and some within the political mainstream. Stüssi also acknowledged how the outcome of the referendum was seen to be a major success: a symbolic step forward in halting Muslims and Islam in Switzerland and the relentless Islamification of Europe more widely. As regards Greece, however, the opposite is true. Despite decades of opposition in comparison to Switzerland, failing to halt the building and subsequent opening of the Athens mosque—irrespective of whether functioning or not—can only be seen to be a major failure. Still symbolic, not only have Muslims and Islam established a foothold in Athens and Greece via the mosque but so too has Greece—the state, Church, people and more—failed in its pursuit of halting Islamification. The symbolic significance of the Athens mosque therefore should not be underestimated.

However, the symbolic should be necessarily counterbalanced with the real and the tangible. As such, the Athens mosque is rather more hyperreal than real: a physical construct more akin to 'toilets or a kiosk' than a 'gift from the Greek state' or 'The Mecca of Athens'. In spite of the official state line that fails to distinguish reality from a simulation

of reality, the second period of fieldwork illustrated that Athenian Muslims were acutely aware of this, albeit without the lexicon to articulate it with precision, clarity and coherence. Far from the significant failure suggested using Stüssi's benchmark, the mosque rather more serves the function of remedying Greece's status as being the only European country without an official mosque in its capital city. Such is its hyperreality that this even comes across in the discourses of its opponents. Despite being little more than a simulation of reality, the mosque serves an important symbolic function that enables and duly rationalises the ongoing processes of Othering and the attribution of Otherness to Muslims and Islam, both of which are—as this article has shown—integral to maintaining and reifying the difference and demarcation between Greece—via notions of nation, identity, history, culture and religion among others—and its historical and indeed contemporary Muslim and Islamic shadow-self.

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## Notes

- 1 Henceforth referred to as 'the Church'.
- 2 Research notes, 2019.
- 3 Research notes, 2001.
- 4 Research notes, 2001.
- 5 Research notes, 2001.
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- 13 Research notes, 2001.
- 14 Research notes, 2001.
- 15 Research notes, 2001.
- 16 Research notes, 2020.
- 17 Research notes, 2020.
- 18 Research notes, 2020.

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