*‘Illegals’ in the Law School of
Athens: public presence, discourse,
and migrants as threat*

Giannis Gkolfinopoulos

IN THIS CHAPTER I examine how the unexpected mobility and public presence of migrant bodies is discursively productive of a threat to the nation that merits another instance of mobility, only somewhat less unexpected: strong police intervention on university premises in Greece in 2011.¹ Both these instances evince a similarly uneasy balance between (in)security and mobility.² The strong police presence that followed almost immediately after the beginning of a hunger strike of undocumented migrants in the Law School of Athens placed the bastion of state forces of security at a site wherein, in this national context, their standing is pronouncedly *insecure*, given the history of Greek university occupations and a strong political tradition that prohibits police intervention within university facilities.

With a focus on this exceptionally publicised event, I analyse textual and visual images used by the press to report on the event. My main question is: what was it that in only two-and-a-half days led to a massive police operation and the rapid ‘voluntary’ evacuation of the building? The analysis identifies five themes around which the press coverage of the hunger strike is articulated. The argument put forward is that the public presence of undocumented migrants and the direct negation of their illegal status is considered a threat to the established national order that undermines the deep-seated division between what is considered normal and natural, and what is not; between Greeks and aliens. By analysing formulations deployed for reporting on this crisis, the chapter traces parts of the social context that makes them possible. In short, these culturally specific representations stem from, and contribute to, a nationalist project that aims to deny the authority of migrants as political agents, and thus secures the established social and national hierarchy. One crucial aspect of this hierarchy is permissible mobility. The active use of fixed, immobile structures of specific public spaces such as the building of the Athens Law School by illegal(ised) migrants

was considered unacceptable and the police were mobilised to restore the temporarily destabilised social regime of migrant illegality.

The migrant hunger strike as social event

The subject of this chapter is one specific moment in what is usually called ‘the problem of illegal immigration’ in public discourse in Greece. On 25 January 2011, approximately 300 undocumented male migrants – mostly of North African origin – in coordination with Greek student organisations as well as some left-wing, anarchist, and migrant solidarity groups started a hunger strike demanding legalisation of all migrants living and working in Greece. The hunger strike started simultaneously in Athens and Thessaloniki. Most of the migrants entered a central building of the Law School of Athens, which was empty and in the process of being renovated. They settled there as the place where the strike would take place. A smaller number of migrants (around fifty) went to Thessaloniki and entered the trade union building (the ‘Workers Centre’). This analysis focuses on the events at the Law School of Athens, the site that was widely conceived in public discourse as the real centre of the first phase of what became known as ‘the strike of the 300 migrants’.

The entry of undocumented migrants into the Law School generated a fierce discourse that saturated the public domain. It was as though the visible presence of illegals in this seminal public building was not just deemed unacceptable, but also at the limit of the imaginable. The ensuing crisis was such that two-and-a-half days after the strike began, during the evening of 27 January, a large area of downtown Athens around the Law School was cordoned off by police forces, who, in coordination with juridical and university authorities, issued an ultimatum to those inside the building (migrants and others in solidarity with them) according to which they should either exit voluntarily or they would be forcibly removed. After hours of negotiations, the police allowed the migrants to exit the building. Migrants walked out and on to another site to continue their strike. The hunger strike ended on 9 March 2011 in a different space, a vacant private building called ‘the Hypatia mansion’, also in downtown Athens, the owner of which agreed to let it be used for this purpose during the negotiations.³

The declared demand of the hunger strike was the general legalisation of migrants in Greece and ‘the same political and social rights and obligations as Greek workers’.⁴ Of course, neither general legalisation was achieved, nor were the specific strikers themselves legalised. After forty-four days of hunger strike (from 25 January until 9 March 2011), they achieved an agreement with the Greek state, the basic points of which were: (a) the strikers were granted a six-month postponement of their deportation and a promise that they could get a renewal of that status, (b) they would be permitted to travel to their countries of

origin and then return to Greece, (c) the number of years after which a migrant is eligible to apply for legalisation dropped from twelve to ten, and (d) the number of work stamps required for renewing the residence permit and for securing health insurance was reduced (the latter for Greeks too). Beyond doubt, the agreement, even if it were to be fully respected, did not constitute a break with the current illegalisation regime. The strikers' status continued to be that of illegals.

The politics of news coverage

This chapter is not about the hunger strike itself, considered as a political project (i.e. its preparation and organisation, or its internal political debates).⁵ Rather, I focus on the almost three-day snapshot (25–28 January 2011) of the Law School crisis as presented by the press. The object of analysis is the hunger strike and the undocumented migrants as they appear in Greek public discourse.⁶

The translation of the migrants' actions into a threat is inherent in the mobilisation of police forces, but is not always explicit in public discourse. Taken in isolation and without the subsequent police intervention, the examined representations do not fit easily into the category of threat. Their contribution to the construction of that threat is clarified when they are perceived as different though interrelated parts of a social process that led to the eviction operation. What caused this response from the authorities is not identical to what was publicly said about it and there is no linear relation between the two. The analysis turns to the news coverage in order to unpick the process that led to this crisis by identifying specific discursive aspects of what is at stake.

At the centre of the perspective deployed here lies the recognition of the critical role of discourse in the formation of the very reality it supposedly just reflects (Fairclough 2003: 203–4; Hall 2001: 72–3). As Michel Foucault (1972: 49) put it, the field of discourse is a field of 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak'. The notion of representation deployed refers to the general use of signs (words and images) for the production of meaning (Hall 1997). Although discourse cannot be analysed as a stable and fixed object but 'as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies' (Foucault, 1991: 100), dominant media texts do have a 'preferred reading which ... will tend to reconstruct dominant values of a society' (Van Zoonen, 1991: 45).

In a different register, the constitutive dimension of discourse regarding the objects to which it (allegedly just) refers is also illuminated by Robert Karl Manoff and Michael Schudson (1986: 4), specifically with regard to the news: '[r]eporting is inevitably a part of a double reality, both separate from the world it tells stories about and a constituent of that world, an element of the story'. What follows from the above is that it is by becoming an object of

reporting, by entering the public sphere, that an issue actually becomes an issue, taking its specific form as something that really matters and its position in the hierarchy that defines how much something matters.

The analysis here is concerned with the coverage of the mainstream daily press. Certainly, television and the Internet constitute the largest part of the public sphere. However, newspapers continue to play a dominant role in setting the agenda of public discourse in Greece. It is common for questions discussed in parliament to be posed by politicians quoting articles from the Greek press. Also the popular morning news shows of major television and radio channels routinely rely on reports and opinions published in the daily newspapers. The examined newspapers, with all their historical transformations and discontinuities, are the oldest part of nationwide mass media in Greece and comprise hegemonic actors of the public sphere.

The newest among them, *Eleftherotipia* (Freedom of Press), a newspaper of centre-left origin, was founded in 1975, the first to be founded after the fall of the military junta (1967–1974). *Rizospastis* (The Radical), the newspaper of the Communist Party of Greece, is the oldest of the examined newspapers and was first published in June 1916. *Kathimerini* (The Daily) is one of the main conservative newspapers in Greece and was founded in 1919, while *Eleftheros Tipos* (Free Press), right-wing as well, was published for the first time in August 1916 although its recent history starts in 1983. Finally, *Ta Nea* (The News), *To Vima* (The Podium), and *Ethnos* (Nation), founded in 1931, 1922, and 1930 respectively, are three newspapers of the political centre.⁷

Moreover, it needs to be noted that the notion of the newspaper has undergone significant transformation. Printed material of one edition (rarely two) per day is now only one part of what a newspaper is. The other is its online content. The daily newspaper *To Vima* has moved even further, abandoning its paper edition altogether in November 2010. Furthermore, many of the traditional mainstream newspapers in Greece are part of larger media organisations, present at the same time in the fields of television, radio, and the Internet. While the press maps on to the tripartite political spectrum (left–centre–right), this research focuses on representations that tend to traverse conventional political positions, thereby appearing as non-political or somehow natural. The analysis takes as its object the configurations of discourse, not the newspapers, nor the persons who actually produced the texts or appear in them, moving in a direction similar to Alexandra Halkias' (2004) study of the public designation of the low birth rate in Greece as a major problem for the nation. The material I examine in this chapter focuses mostly on the conservative and centre-left newspapers that represent the core of the mainstream press in Greece.

The Law School crisis resonated with the general problem of illegal migration in Greece. By representing the public presence of migrants in the Law School of Athens as a serious problem, the press constitutes a specific discursive

Greece and, by the same move, a social field that is external to it. In analysing crucial segments of the coverage, I examine what was deemed unacceptable and even scandalous in the situation.

Migrant illegality as a security risk

In Greece, 'illegal immigrants' constitute an emblematic form of the modern stranger whose arrival and presence is widely considered a serious security problem. However, neither illegal migration nor (in)security issues are natural phenomena. Migrant illegality is conceived here as a historically formed social regime. It is a configuration dependent on power relations and especially state power. It is dependent on the law, which sets the criteria of legality and, in so doing, carves out the space of illegality (Balibar 1993: 72–3; Tapinos 1999: 229; De Genova 2004: 166; Baldwin-Edwards 2008: 1449). As Catherine Dauvergne (2008: 15) argues, '[i]n the absence of law, there can be no illegal migration. In the absence of state enforcement attempts, illegal migration is no more than the proverbial tree falling silently in the forest'.

As laws and state institutions' choices do not remain identical over time, migrant illegality is a shifting, although lasting, aspect of social life and national order. Three legalisation processes have recently taken place in Greece: in 1998, in 2001, and in 2005/07 (see Triandafyllidou 2009). As Philippe Fargues puts it (2009: 544–5), a person can be legal in country A and illegal in country B, as well as legal at time frame A and illegal at time frame B. Some of the illegal migrants of the past ceased, at a certain moment in time, to be illegals and managed to attain the status of legal(ised) residents. This transformation works the other way around, too. Many fall from legal residence status to illegality because they cannot meet the criteria for renewing their residence permit. The same holds for many asylum seekers whose applications are denied (Düvell 2011: 288–9; Maroukis 2009: 10). Even though migrant illegality does not refer to the same persons over time, illegality constitutes a continuous reality.

What is also subject to change is the dominant perception of the illegal immigrant. Two decades ago the figure of the clandestine migrant in Greece predominantly referred to persons from Eastern Europe, mainly the dangerous male Albanian (Konstantinidou 2001; Pavlou 2001). Today, many Eastern European countries (such as Bulgaria and Romania) are members of the European Union and the public discourse has recently shifted attention from migrants coming from neighbouring countries to those from Asia and Africa. Today's abstract image of the illegal migrant in Greece is that of a person who is non-European, non-white, and predominantly non-Christian.⁸

As with migrant illegality, migration as a security issue is not an indisputable natural object. According to the dominant perception, migration constitutes a threat to the nation against which security practices are not only legitimised

but considered unavoidable. This perception, by taking both the nation and what threatens it as given, obscures the processes of their social constitution and secures their (re)production. The constitution of national (in)security as a problem is the result of social processes. Security questions, as Jef Huysmans points out (2002: 42), 'result from a work of mobilization in which practices work upon each other and thus create an effect that we call a security problem'. A security issue emerges as the product of a securitisation process which works through 'the identification of existential threats' (Huysmans 2000: 757). Today, the term migrant, as Didier Bigo argues (2002: 63, 71), designates 'a threat to the core values of a country, a state', both internal and external to national territory.

According to Bigo (2002: 65), '[s]ecuritization of the immigrant as a risk is based on our conception of the state as a body or a container for the polity'. In the already securitised dominant discourse on migration, illegal migrants – the exact opposite of citizens – represent the extreme of national danger. Being radically excluded from the polity and the domain of legality, illegal(ised) migrants constitute one of the main objects of police activity. Their physical presence in the public space of the city is already considered an alarming element of disorder. Similar to Georg Simmel's (1950 [1908]: 402) stranger, today's illegal migrant is not 'the wanderer who comes today and goes tomorrow but rather the person who comes today and stays tomorrow'. Or, as Zygmunt Bauman (1995: 2) writes, modern strangers are produced as the 'waste' of the 'state's ordering zeal'. Illegalised migrants do not belong to the national body and, even though they are not citizens and they do not fit into any of the official taxonomy positions (legal resident, refugee, etc.), they live on national territory, and thus expose state power as incapable of fulfilling its pretensions for exhaustive control over that territory. Seen from this perspective, the specific and explosive character of the illegal migrant figure is that he or she 'stays tomorrow', and that this 'waste' does not lie outside national territory but within it.

Constructing the problem

In what follows I discuss five themes that were identified in the analysis. Their differences notwithstanding, they converge to form a continuum ranging from the migrants' mere presence as a serious discomfort, to a basis for establishing them as a threat as national/religious enemies, and a threat to so-called public health.

Occupying the university?

One of the dominant representations of the hunger strike in the Law School, especially by the conservative press, was that of an 'occupation'. On 25 January

Figure 4 Article in *Kathimerini*, 25 January 2011.

2011, the day the strike began, *Kathimerini*, one of the main conservative newspapers, presented the issue on its front page under the title: '[r]enovated Law School of Athens occupied' (figure 4).⁹

The deployment of the notion of a university occupation sets aside the deed performed by the migrants themselves, namely the hunger strike, by inscribing it in a quite different context, the familiar set of university problems in Greece. University occupations in Greece were part and parcel of the dominant narrative of the *transition to democracy*. The occupation and uprising of Athens Polytechnic, which was crushed by the army on 17 November 1973, constitutes the apogee of the resistance to the military regime and 17 November is (still) an official national holiday. Thus, democracy in Greece is intertwined with a university occupation and its antipode with the suppression of that occupation. This specific historical process made it difficult for the Greek state during the following decades to openly suppress – with the use of force – university occupations.

The point made is that this surely is a problem, one that needs to be solved, but it is somehow familiar, at least at first sight. Moreover, it is not about the migrants' struggle but about university space and university functioning, as well as an implied laxness of previous and present governments in ensuring the proper framework for its governance. During the forty-year period that followed the fall of the military regime in 1974, the practice of university occupations was a common tactic used by the student movement. This involved taking over facilities and disrupting the normal functioning of the university. Both university authorities and the state in general are used to this practice, which, however, has been viewed as more and more intolerable in the dominant public discourse during the last few years.

Yet the undocumented migrant hunger strikers did not perform a university occupation. They entered a public building that was empty and out of use at

the time, and they did not disrupt any university functions. If the threat posed by university occupations lies in the blocking of all normal campus activities, then what was the threat posed by those who did not block any university functions? An answer is given by the title on the front page of *Ta Nea*, 25 January 2011: '[u]niversity occupations performed even by migrants!'¹⁰ Surprise expressed by the use of the exclamation mark points directly to the subjects of this alleged occupation: 'even by migrants!' What manifests itself here is the *excessive* character of the specific occupation. A university occupation by students (or university staff) is a real problem, but, as this discourse indicates, at least they are nationals. An occupation by migrants is something totally different. The basis of the surprise expressed in the above title, and also the basis for the general discomfort of public opinion, is what emerges as the natural exclusion of migrants from the university as an institution. If it is natural for them not to be part of the university, if they have no place there, then it is natural to be surprised by their occupation of one of its central buildings. Further, as is implied in this rhetoric, it is now clear that state leniency with occupations of university facilities has gone far enough.

However, the representation of the hunger strike under the rubric of a university occupation also transforms the very notion of the occupation, by detaching it from the practice of deliberately blocking normal university activities. In this context, it is just by being present and visible in the university that the undocumented migrants perform an occupation. In fact, this transformed notion of occupation is widely accepted as common sense, forming a crucial aspect of the official state discourse on undocumented migrants in contemporary Greece.

Over a year later, during the election campaign of 2012 and talking about the so-called migration problem, former Prime Minister Antonis Samaras was widely quoted as saying that it was necessary to 're-occupy' our cities that were already occupied by illegal immigrants.¹¹ Also, former Minister of Public Order Nicos Dendias went even further at a press conference in 2012, when he presented the largest ever police 'sweep operation' against undocumented migrants, stating that Greece was a country facing an invasion comparable only to the Dorian one in antiquity. Most striking in both formulations is the radical detachment of the notion of invasion from war and armed conflict. Today's migrants, unlike their ancient counterparts, perform the invasion only by coming to Greece. Ironically, the code name of this police operation was 'Host Zeus'.¹² As with regard to the hunger strike at the Law School of Athens, undocumented migrants are considered as invading and occupying Greek cities simply by being there. Thus, when Greece is facing a form of mobility (undocumented migrants) entering its territory that is equated as being part of an ongoing war, it is necessary to react actively and directly. What logically follows from this as the next step is the intervention of police forces.

The supposed threat is not connected to political agency but to mere existence. It is not about what the migrants really do, but about their mere bodily existence on Greek national territory. In order for someone's physical and social presence to be considered a threat, it is necessary that he or she be radically excluded from the domain of so-called normal social coexistence. In the case of the Law School of Athens, however, migrant strikers acted as political subjects. By entering the Law School they challenged the mobility regime in place in Greece, which considers such an entry as a delinquent activity. By performing a hunger strike in this space, they publicly refused the very exclusion from public space. Their action made them political subjects and this is what was deemed excessive in their case.

The Law School of Athens as an illegal migrants' camp

In the Greek context, the term camp (katavlisimos) stands as a general signifier of messiness and dirt, directly related to social outcasts.¹³ Being a standard part of the dominant discourse on Roma people for decades, the notion of camp easily migrated to the supposed problem of illegal migrants. In both cases, the notion refers to living conditions deemed abnormal, to spaces inhabited by the abject,¹⁴ living at the margins of society and at the margins of Greek cities. In both, the term camp designates a site of misery and danger – related to crime and hygiene issues – which is and should be cordoned off from the space occupied by normal national subjects.

Thus, the representation of the migrants' presence in the Law School of Athens in the form of an illegal migrants' camp was already inscribed in a discourse formulating an unacceptable situation. One of the main daily newspapers, *Ethnos*, used this as its general title on the front page on 25 January 2011: '[t]he Law School became an illegal migrants' camp'.

The pictures that were used by the newspaper showed migrants lying on the floor with blankets and sleeping bags, emphasising disarray and the messiness of a camp. The notion of the camp was also used by Minister of Education Anna Diamantopoulou who, according to the 26 January 2011 edition of *Kathimerini*, made the following statement: '[t]he transformation of the Law School into a migrants' camp lies beyond the limits of tolerance. University authorities ought, according to the law, to defend the functioning of the university. Laws should be enforced with the assistance of all enforcement bodies of the State'.¹⁵

What is at stake in the above passage is both 'the functioning of the University' that should be 'defended', and nothing less than the enforcement of state law. This utterance is interesting due to the fact that the migrants did not disrupt any aspect of the above-mentioned functioning, given that the building they used was already closed for restoration work. In order to identify the threat implied in the Minister's statement, attention needs to shift to the 'transformation' of the Law School. The specific character of this

transformation, according to the mainstream press, is that of a degradation. The entry of the undocumented migrants into the university, a space from which they are excluded, and their use of it as a base for political action transforms this space into a makeshift migrants' camp. It is as if the shadowy margins of social life rushed violently into the bright centre of the public stage. In so doing, as the quoted statement indicates, they maximise their illegality by directly affronting unnamed laws of the state.

In a context in which migrant illegality has become natural, active negation of that very illegality appears as a threat, even though the strikers did not use any form of physical force against university facilities. If the law, studied and served in the Law School, is one of the main forces that constitute the division between legality and illegality, then to stand against that division is to directly attack the law. From the standpoint of the state and the established social order, precisely at the site of its reproduction, this is something, as stated above, 'beyond the limits of every possible tolerance'.

A milder form of the exclusion of undocumented migrants from the established social order, which is nevertheless pointing in the same direction, can be traced in the coverage of the leftist newspaper *Avgi* on 26 January 2011. The story quotes the Rector of the University of Athens (of which the Law School is a part) Thanasis Pelegrinis saying that '[o]n the one hand, you see those miserable humans trying to survive and, on the other, you should preserve the decency of the university'.¹⁶ Even though the first issue posed here is a sort of humanistic one (miserable humans trying to survive), the second is the decency of the university. However, if the decency of the university is to be understood as a dimension counterposed to those 'trying to survive' (whatever this nebulous utterance means), then, logically, the university is to be understood as an institution the decency of which is preserved *by the exclusion* of those who are at the bottom of the social hierarchy, in this case the undocumented migrant strikers. Their exclusion emerges as a constitutive element of the university's decency, and that is the reason why those struggling to survive are considered as undermining its decency just by entering it. While leftist *Avgi* avoids the parallels of the hunger strike and the camp, and although it chooses to present the specific part of the Rector's statement which refers to the migrants as human, the binary wherein their mere presence is seen as a problem to the domain of decency, clearly belonging to the Law School, is neatly preserved.

From migrants' camp to hotel/inn

Representations of an occupation and of a camp were powerful enough, but they were not the only ones in use. Others emerged as well, the common denominator of which was that they all referred to the discursive domain of housing. Thus, an

alternative configuration of the degradation of the university was a representation of the Law School as transformed into a hotel and the strikers as those who, quite rudely it is implied, arranged to stay without telling the hotelkeeper. There is a certain maxim in Greek that serves as a subtext for this representation: 'reckoning without the hotelkeeper'.

On 25 January, the opening day of the hunger strike, *Kathimerini* states:

Floor-bedding for 250 immigrants, who start a hunger strike in order to be legalised, was arranged by left student groups and humanitarian organizations in the currently under renovation, historical entrance-building of the Law School at Solonos Street. This 'hospitality gesture' was organized 'without the hotel-keeper', despite the negative decision of the School authorities and the Rectorship of the University of Athens.¹⁷

The issue here is the floor-bedding and hospitality organised by leftist student groups and humanitarian organisations without the permission or, more accurately, against the will of the hotelkeeper. It should be noted at this point – and this is a general aspect of the public discourse on the Law School crisis – that the migrants themselves are considered incapable of organising their own hunger strike. Their social inferiority is obvious in the above passage as migrants appear to be mere objects of a power play between the real organisers (left-wing student and humanitarian groups) and those responsible for the Law School, or the hotelkeeper, namely the university authorities. All that the hunger strikers could be is hospitality receivers, and, according to the passage, a bad or suspect kind of hospitality because they ignored the hotelkeeper.

The right-wing newspaper *Eleftheros Tipos*, referred to a similar transformation on 26 January 2011: '[t]he transformation of the Law School into an inn, with leftist student groups as innkeeper, places not only the academic community and society before their responsibilities, but also the parties. Up to which point can the political exploitation of the migration problem go? "Sensitivity" cannot be an alibi for the abolition of the state'.¹⁸

Here the Law School is transformed into an inn, less prestigious than a hotel, and the role of the innkeeper is ascribed to the leftist student groups. What stays unchanged in both passages is the hierarchically inferior status of migrant strikers, who maintain the position of the problematic traveller. According to the passage, the danger that the presence of migrants in the Law School represents is grave: what is at stake is nothing less than the abolition of the state. The state's main duty is to secure the boundaries of the predominant social order. This means, among other things, to preserve the stable (re)production of the division between a university, namely a public institution for 'normal' subjects, and an inn, namely a marginal place where marginal wanderers can spend the night. Seen from this perspective, the degradation of the university to an inn undermines what is considered as the core of the state, namely the division between national subjects and illegal migrants.

What this discursive formation implies is that if the state is incapable of keeping migrants out of its most respected institutions, incapable of avoiding the transformation of a Greek university into an inn for clandestine immigrants, then it is a state on the fringe of abolition. This exaggeration notwithstanding, the fear of the abolition of the state was far from marginal in public discourse. This was made explicit at the highest political level. The centre-left newspaper *Eleftherotipia*, on 26 January 2011, quoted Prime Minister Giorgos Papandreou: '[t]he state cannot be abolished. The law should be enforced and all the relevant authorities should take responsibility.'¹⁹

The fact that the above representations are articulated in the realm of habitation is indicative of the social hierarchy between Greeks and illegal migrants. In a national context where home ownership is considered a cornerstone of social respect, migrant strikers are sketched as those who do not own a house. Those who live in a camp are homeless and those who stay in a hotel or an inn are foreigners who do not own a house of their own. The migrants' inferior social position is also marked by their floor-bedding, an undignified way of resting for those who do not have a bed, or those for whom there is no bed available. Being another name for the lack of dignity, floor-bedding in *the Law School* becomes interpreted as a direct threat to the established order.

The Law School of Athens as mosque

Another aspect of the threat that migrant public presence was made to signify was the direct undermining of the Greek-Orthodox nature of the Greek nation state, which is widely considered as its foundational bedrock. It is not accidental that the opening phrase of the Greek Constitution is '[i]n the name of the Holy and Consubstantial and Indivisible Trinity'.²⁰ What is at stake in this cluster of representations is the radical otherness of migrants with regard to religion. The newspaper *Ethnos*, on 25 January 2011, in a two-page story under the alarming, capitalised title '[L]anding of illegal migrants in the Law School', positions a photograph of a migrant on his knees, while three others are sitting near him on a floor covered with blankets, one of them signalling the sign for victory. The man is kneeling on a rag and we can see him wearing his socks. The caption reads: '[t]he migrants state that they will continue their struggle until their demand for legalization is satisfied'.²¹

Another newspaper, *Ta Nea*, on 27 January 2011, in its two-page report on the Law School issue, used a large photo of some strikers lying on the floor among assorted blankets and sleeping bags. This is the background. The photographic lens focuses on one striker, on his knees on a rag, in a position implying prayer. The newspaper positions this photograph on the left of the photo layout. This caption reads: '[i]n the middle of the floor-bedding and the fuss of crowding, a migrant hunger-striker does not forget to pray'.

Figure 5 Article in *Ta Nea*, 27 January 2011.

Diagonally across from this photo, in the upper right-hand corner of the layout, the newspaper has placed a smaller picture that consists of a close-up of one pair of shoes. Despite the portrayed single pair of shoes, the caption reads: '[e]xcept for blankets and makeshift beds, the spaces of the occupied historic building are covered with shoes' (figure 5).²²

In a similar vein, *Eleutheros Typos*, on 25 January 2011, more or less used the same photo of a man praying (figure 6) with the following caption: '[m]igrant prays in the Law School of Athens'.²³

The political differences between the above-mentioned newspapers notwithstanding, these texts and images form a representational continuum. They bring religion to the forefront with explicit references to prayer. The practice of prayer, highly valued in Greek society, is being linked to a frame of messiness. These migrants are Muslims and it is their religious identity that seems to seal the alterity of their presence in the Athens Law School. Floor-bedding and the crowded conditions are put together with images that function as visual proof of what the texts indicate. Thus, spatial disorder is intertwined with the thematic of prayer and Islam emerges at the core of it all, as the reason for the cultural/religious disorder.

In this context, shoes, either present or absent, function as the object that links spatial and cultural disorder. They refer to the religious practice of Muslims, according to which shoes must be removed for prayer. At the same time, shoes invoke the image of cultural Others turning a respectable public place into a makeshift, messy bedroom. Shoes here stand as the object marking the gap

Figure 6 Article in *Eleftheros Typos*, 25 January 2011.

between Christian Greeks and Muslim undocumented migrants. The portrayed messiness of the Athens Law School is not only derogatory but insulting in this national context. This representation is informed by a deep vein of cultural intolerance at the core of which there is a specific physical proximity that is itself deemed filthy. At this point the deployment of visual material is crucial: many images are filled with male bodies side by side in a space that is covered with blankets and sleeping bags. In the Greek context, these visuals punctuated by the element of shoes taken off recall both a certain discomfort of odour and filth on a more general level. The formation taking shape here is a lack of civilisation and, specifically, the inferior level of civilisation of Muslim illegal migrants, a level long ago surpassed by Greek Christians (and Europeans).

It is not just that a much respected historic building was occupied by homeless aliens, but that these aliens, as Muslims, are both *totally* alien and adversaries to Greek nationals. The anti-Muslim stance in Greece is deeply rooted in the national(ist) project of the fight against the Ottoman Empire for the constitution of the Greek state (1830). Turkey, seen as the heir of the Empire, is widely considered an eternal enemy of Greece. Thus, the sentiment of offence, obvious in the deployment of phrases such as a 'migrants' camp', 'floor bedding' and 'hotel/inn' as terms for university facilities, is intensified by the visual and verbal references to the religious practices of migrant strikers. Even though it is not said explicitly, the meaning is that along with a camp, the central building of the venerable Law School of Athens was transformed into a mosque. This

is something unthinkable in a city where there is still no officially recognised mosque, and all efforts to create one meet serious resistance.²⁴

The hunger strike as hygiene bomb

A key frame of reference of public discourse with regards to the migrants' hunger strike was that of public health. Through different, even opposing, positions, public debate exhibited a pronounced medical dimension, pointing to a risk stemming from the very bodies of the hunger strikers. As this discursive framing became dominant, mainly after the strikers had moved out of the Law School, the political agenda was turned upside down. The issue was not the threat to migrants' health from the hunger strike, but the threat to public health from migrant bodies.

According to *Kathimerini*, on 25 January 2011, the Dean of the Law School Mihalīs Tsīnīsizelis 'focused on the dangers for public hygiene and security involved in the presence of the 250 individuals'. In the same article, the newspaper once more refers to what the Dean said: '[y]esterday, migrants were examined by doctors, some of them presenting the symptom of high fever. In the end, five of them were found infected by a virus.'²⁵

Migrants figure as carrying disease, even though this 'virus' proved to be nothing more than common winter infections. Even in less conservative papers, where care seems to be taken to avoid overtly racist designations of the event, the presence of this frame is evident. For example, in centrist *Ta Nea*, on 25 January 2011, a small text-caption accompanying a photo of a large number of migrant strikers (a snapshot from the press conference held at the beginning of the strike) reads: '[s]chool closed. Approximately 250 migrant workers [. . .] who came early in the morning from Crete, are lodging in the building of the Law School of Athens and as a result the School remains closed, no classes are held, while hygiene conditions are intolerable since not even heating is available'.²⁶

The above passage, in which the hunger strikers are positioned as migrant workers, namely the expression they themselves used, deploys the somewhat puzzling formulation of intolerable hygiene conditions with overt reference to the lack of heating. But lack of heating in a public building in Greece during the years of the current crisis is not sufficient for a designation of intolerable hygiene conditions. Thus, the article seems to imply something further, with its designation of not *even* heating. Though the passage is not specific about the hygiene conditions, it clearly posits the closing of the School as a result of migrants staying there. Through this discursive link, intolerable hygiene conditions and School closing become directly related to the migrant strikers' presence in the building.

According to the passage it is the incoming of the migrants 'early in the morning'²⁷ that directly resulted in the shutdown. However, the Law School

actually officially closed as a result of a decision by the School's Deanery,²⁸ as a contingent political response to the migrants' entry. The closing of the School was not an unavoidable necessity. By obscuring this crucial link, this discursive formulation at once depoliticises the closing of the School, representing it as a direct natural outcome of the migrants' arrival, and maximises the disturbance their presence should be seen as causing, given that the building was already temporarily closed for renovations. This is a move that naturalises the threat that migrant strikers represent for the university institution. In the absence of real evidence concerning a health risk, it is rather their very physical proximity, as well as their quantity, we might say by the photo's emphasis on the density of migrant bodies in this space that constitutes an intolerable hygiene condition.

The health security aspect of the public debate on the migrant hunger strike did not mean a general acceptance of there being a risk to public health. The leftist newspaper *Avgi*, on 25 January 2011, openly criticised the decision of the Law School's Deanery. 'There is no issue of a hygiene nature' reads a subtitle in bold letters which quotes a statement of the Solidarity Initiative (supporting the migrant strikers).²⁹ The following day, the newspaper reiterates the same position, adding that doctors had examined migrants in accordance with an order of the Rector.³⁰ Though presenting the opposite point of view, this leftist position feeds into the medicalisation of the hunger strike by confirming its very basis. By denying that migrant strikers carry diseases, this kind of discourse in fact accepts that they comprise a possible danger to public health. That is the reason why medical examination was deemed a legitimate move.

But the most characteristic formulation as far as public hygiene is concerned, was that of a 'bomb'. According to *Ethnos*, on 25 January 2011: '[n]obody has the right to occupy the space of the most historical [sic] university of the country, transforming it into a bomb for public hygiene and security', that was the comment of DAP'.³¹

What was only an implication in the first passage of this section now becomes explicit. It is not just that migrants are infected, but that they are infectious. Thus, the unsustainable issue of the intolerable hygiene conditions takes a clear form. It is the incoming of migrants that transforms the building into a figurative bomb. Even though the wording adds security to public hygiene by using the linking word 'and', the horrifying form of a (ticking) bomb renders public hygiene securitised. After strikers had moved out of the Law School, bomb representations became common in public discourse on the hunger strike. A notable instance of this rhetoric occurred in the widespread media reporting of an announcement by Minister of Health Andreas Loverdos who directly connected migrant strikers with the spread of the so-called swine flu. According to *To Vima*, on 14 February 2011, the Minister stated that the hunger strike constituted 'a real infection "bomb" at the centre of Athens'.³² Thus, the invisible threat of an influenza outbreak (of the

H1N1 type), a pressing public issue during the winter of 2011, took the visible form of clandestine Africans. In this manner, the threat their presence in the Law School of Athens represented took on a very concrete and almost unanimously formidable form.

What presents itself in the image of the bomb, I suggest, is radical exclusion. The representation of migrants' physical presence as a bomb threatening public hygiene and security severs the migrants from the very fields of public hygiene and security. A bomb is external to what is threatened by the bomb. From this perspective, migrant strikers as political subjects who deliberately put themselves at risk are either invisible or unimportant. Their medical condition becomes indeed an issue concerning public health, but not as an integral part of it. Their health is posed as the Other of public health, an external reality that threatens to destroy it.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on widespread representations, deployed by the daily press, of the illegal migrants' hunger strike that took place in the Law School of Athens in January 2011. The undocumented migrants' demand for a general legalisation of all migrants in Greece triggered a fierce security crisis, which quickly led to a major police operation in order to drive them out. The public presence of the migrants was considered a threat that should be obviated, and this chapter has traced the discursive dimensions of its emergence. What was considered as threatened was nothing less than the established social/national order. Public space is for national subjects, so the argument goes, and not for clandestine migrants, and the Law School is not and should not be available for them. Thus, their entering this public space and actively negating their illegal status was presented as a dissolution of the social hierarchy.

Five themes were identified in the news coverage of the migrant hunger strike. Though articulated in different ways, all representations of the hunger strike can be seen as refractions of an event that is defined in dominant discourse as an impossible/intolerable situation. The political action of migrant strikers shifts from being defined as a university occupation needing direct state repression, to a transformation of the Law School to a hotel or inn, which is, moreover, being run under shady circumstances, on to a migrant camp and even a form of impromptu mosque. The culmination of these themes can be seen as occurring in the somewhat paradoxical representation of the hunger strike of these migrant men as a threat to the health of the *national* body.

In effect, the unexpected mobility engaged in by the migrants, by entering the building of the Law School of Athens, undergoing renovation at the time, in order to embark on a hunger strike seems to work so as to place the state in a position of unexpected precariousness. This is seen both in the actual

deployment of police forces, and in the specific content of the five identified trends in the representation of the events. While this temporary rupture in the balance of the security/mobility regime currently in place in Greece was ultimately – and quickly – resolved in favour of a consolidation of state security, this analysis of the news coverage indicates that the rupture was nonetheless of a scale that required a massive mobilisation of dominant racist thematics in order to assist the re-establishment of national order. Ironically, perhaps, since traditional national order was quite quickly re-established, the contours and strength of the coverage indicate that an important fault line exists nonetheless in the foundations of the contemporary nation state.

NOTES

- 1 The material analysed here is drawn from ‘“Illegals” in press discourse’, chapter 5 of G. Gkolfinopoulos, ‘Social Representations of “Greeks” and “Foreigners” from 1990 to the present: Power and Resistance through the Lens of Violence’ (PhD Dissertation, Panteion University, Athens 2014). The doctoral research was funded by the State Scholarships Foundation/IKY (2009–2013).
- 2 I would like to acknowledge the participants of the workshop Security/Mobility: Between Imagination and Authority, held at the University of Amsterdam, 25–26 September 2014 for their comments. I thank Matthias Leese and Stef Wittendorp for their very useful comments in the process of developing further the workshop paper. Last but not least, I am grateful to Alexandra Halkias for her close reading and incisive comments.
- 3 Vasilis Chiotis, ‘The unwanted of Hypatia,’ *To Vima*, 20 February 2011, www.tovima.gr/politics/article/?aid=385605 (accessed 21 September 2014). All citations from the press have been translated by the author.
- 4 See the ‘Statement of the Assembly of Migrant Hunger Strikers’ (January 2011).
- 5 For academic political reflections of the examined hunger strike, see Regina Mantanika and Hara Kouki (2011), Alexandra Zavos (2011) and Olga Lafazani (2012).
- 6 The main research sample comprises 391 items (articles, comments, and/or images) taken from eight daily national Greek newspapers, for the full time span of the Law School events, from 25 January to 28 January 2011. The newspapers examined include *Ethnos* (Nation), *Eleftheros Tipos* (Free Press), *Eleutherotipia* (Freedom of Press), *Avgi* (Dawn), *Kathimerini* (Daily), *Ta Nea* (The News), *To Vima* (The Podium), *Rizospastis* (The Radical).
- 7 For a detailed history of Greek newspapers see Takis Psarakis (1993) and Dimitris Psychoyos (2004).
- 8 For an account of the role of migrant mobility in the formation of the Greek nation-state over time, see Parsanoglou (2007).
- 9 ‘Renovated Law School of Athens Occupied’, *Kathimerini*, 25 January 2011.
- 10 ‘University Occupations Performed even by Migrants’, *Ta Nea*, 25 January 2011.
- 11 Elli Triandafylou, ‘A. Samaras: We Should Re-occupy the Cities’, *Kathimerini*, 30 March 2012.
- 12 ‘Nicos Dendias on Migration Problem: We Face a New “Dorian Invasion”’, *To Vima*, 6 August 2012. Available at www.tovima.gr/society/article/?aid=469853 (accessed 15 September 2014).
- 13 With the exclusion of army camps and recreational camping sites.
- 14 The notion of the abject articulated by Judith Butler (1993: 3) refers to those who ‘do not enjoy the status of the subject’, to those ‘who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject’.

- 15 Apostolos Lakasas, 'Ms Diamantopoulou Called for lifting of University Asylum', *Kathimerini*, 26 January 2011.
- 16 Dafne Sfetsa, 'Unprecedented Attack on Immigrants and University Asylum', *Avgi*, 26 January 2011.
- 17 'Renovated Law School of Athens Occupied', *Kathimerini*, 25 January 2011.
- 18 Anna Panagiotarea, 'Suffocation ...', *Eleftheros Tipos*, 26 January 2011.
- 19 Panos Sokos, 'Giorgos: The Law Should be Enforced', *Eleftherotipia*, 26 January 2011.
- 20 For the Greek constitution see www.hellenicparliament.gr/UserFiles/f3c70a23-7696-49db-9148-f24dce6a27c8/001-156%20aggliko.pdf (accessed 10 September 2015). Also, for academic work documenting the foundational character of Greek (Christian) Orthodoxy in contemporary understandings of nationhood see, George Th. Mavrogordatos (2003) and Elpida Vogli (2007).
- 21 Mihalis Nivolianitis, 'Landing of Illegal Migrants in the Law School', *Ethnos*, 25 January 2011.
- 22 Giorgos Ch. Papahristos, Nicos Mastoras, Voula Kehagia and Manos Charalambakis, 'All-night Thriller and Ultimatum from Government', *Ta Nea*, 27 January 2011.
- 23 V. Nikolaou, 'Occupation and Hunger Strike in Athens Law School', *Eleftheros Tipos*, 25 January 2011.
- 24 In August 2016, the Greek Parliament voted again for a state-funded mosque in Athens. No other action has yet been taken.
- 25 Apostolos Lakasas, 'Humanism as Prey to Political Exploitation', *Kathimerini*, 25 January 2011.
- 26 Nicos Mastoras, Stelios Vradelis, 'Mass Hunger-strike by 300 Illegal Migrants', *Ta Nea*, 25 January 2011.
- 27 The newspapers' text is inaccurate. The migrants came from Crete on the morning of Sunday 23 January 2011, not on the morning of Tuesday 25 January.
- 28 The decision was taken on 'hygiene' grounds on Monday 24 January 2011. The School was to stay closed until Friday 28 January. According to a new decision of the Deanery, the School opened on Thursday 27 January. Between Monday and Thursday no improvement of hygiene conditions took place. See Anna Andritsaki, 'All-night Negotiations for Another Space', *Eleftherotipia*, 27 January 2011. Also see Pikia Stefanakou, 'Rector Searching for Solution, Government Responds with Ultimatum', *Avgi*, 27 January 2011.
- 29 '300 Migrant Workers on Strike', *Avgi*, 25 January 2011.
- 30 Dafne Sfetsa, '"We are not Criminals, We will Fight for our Right to Life and Dignity"', *Avgi*, 26 January 2011.
- 31 Mihalis Nivolianitis, 'Landing of Illegal Migrants in the Law School', *Ethnos*, 25 January 2011. DAP (in Greek) stands for Democratic Revisionist Avant-Garde and is the name of the main right-wing student organisation.
- 32 'Andreas Loverdos: Given Order to Military Hospitals and Private Clinics to be on Alert for the Flu', *To Vima*, 14 February 2011. Available at <http://www.tovima.gr/%20society/%20article/?aid=384349> (accessed 20 September 2014).

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