

Processional Aesthetics and Irregular Transit: Envisioning Refugees in Europe

All river-like formations, such as processions and demonstrations, want to be *seen*.

—Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power* (1962)

With roots in the Latin *procedere*, meaning to go forward, advance, or proceed, “procession” bears comparison with its derived terms “process” and “procedure” vis-à-vis the technologies of status determination – protection applications, biometric registration and other administrative processes – that adjudicate refugee status. But the crisis of en masse appearance alters the functioning of political borders and associated procedures. In this way, a persistent mode of envisioning of refugees as processional collectives – in the contemporary EU context, certainly – connotes something additional to the normative, legislated administration of transiting bodies. This was exemplified in August 2015 when German authorities announced their suspension of the Dublin II regulation¹ as it pertained to Syrians, leading to an effective moratorium on border controls along refugee transit routes, but ultimately to opposite unilateral approaches when Austria, Macedonia, and the Balkan states closed their borders the following year. Almost a century earlier, a young Ernest Hemingway, working as a foreign correspondent in the same region, penned several columns on the escalating refugee crisis during the Greco-Turkish War. In a 1922 dispatch from Adrianople, “A Silent, Ghastly Procession,” he describes the “never-ending, staggering march [of] the Christian population of Eastern Thrace ... jamming the roads towards Macedonia”:

The main column crossing the Maritza River at Adrianople is twenty miles long. ... They don't know where they are going. They left their farms, villages and ripe, brown fields and joined the main stream of refugees when they heard the Turk was coming. Now they can only keep their places in the ghastly procession while mud-splashed Greek cavalry herd them along like cow-punchers driving steers.²

Adrianople, or Edirne, as it is known today, is a border city in northwestern Turkey, at the crossroads of Greece and Bulgaria. It lies on one of the so-called Balkan routes into Europe, which have seen a dramatic expansion of footfall precipitated by the Syrian conflict. Hemingway's clear, bleak prose projects refugees into a visual and spectatorial paradigm as figures who enter public space through processional collectivity. He uses the word "procession" three times in his short piece. By deploying this word, whose primary meaning is a ceremonial, formalized, and intentional transit, Hemingway proposes an element of stylization – if not intention – that partly renders the abject movement he sees in symbolic terms. He renders it representational.

We can detect quite a lot about how or what "procession" signifies for Hemingway by studying the language in which he nestles his triplication of the word: the "main column ... is twenty miles long" (*the refugees are massive, architectural*), the processants are "never ending" (*they are inexorable, like the weather or birth or a river*), "staggering" (*their bodies denote exhaustion*), they "can only keep their places" (*they have the quality of a mobile human assemblage, each person part of a whole*), their procession is "ghastly" (*they occupy the interstices of life and death*), and they are "herd[ed] ... along" (*like livestock, they are without volition*). This last observation is particularly suggestive of a pre-UN Refugee Convention vision. The formalization of refugee identity set out by the UN in 1951 defined

the terms, still applied today, on which a person may make a *claim* for refugee status.

Hemingway's refugees are not claim-making agents. They are non-volitional bodies subject to geopolitical forces: "They don't know where they are going." In contrast, when in September 2015 the route through Edirne was blocked by Turkish authorities, several hundred refugees staged protests,³ enacting a determinedness to defy state authority that remains a source of simmering perturbation across Europe.

Nevertheless, Hemingway's descriptive techniques as one looking upon refugee suffering perform historiographic, affective, and crucially, *imagistic* work that has cognates in recent responses to refugees entering and transiting Europe. In the context of what might be called the European refugee panopticon (in which the production of images via migration policing and by various media has constructed totalizing orders of surveillance), procession is central to the visual economy associated with refugee transit, and its prevalence goes some way toward elucidating the perceptual binary that situates refugees as objects for the scrutiny of the non-displaced. The movements of asylum seekers and migrants into and across Europe are more intensively imaged and spectated than ever, forming the basis of dominant aesthetic dispositions. This essay traces a mode of looking and responding, which I term "processional aesthetics," in the context of narrative and photographic representation, chiefly within news media, and in collective embodied responses via processional pro- and anti-migrant practices, including community marches, walks, parades, religious ceremonies, and performance art. Perceiving these representational domains as interlocked (that is, linked as aestheticized traces of Europe's "migrant crisis," if not necessarily co-constitutive of one other) gives rise to key questions: what is the disposition of processional bodies, and perhaps more importantly, what is the disposition of *seeing* that manifests the visual economy of migrant crisis?

The following discussion pays attention to the discursive and aesthetic imbrications of pro- and anti-migrant performativity, but not by situating news media as hegemonic representation against which embodied practices push. Europe's migrant crisis has generated some nuanced political and field journalism; except for the most hostile, recent reports in English, especially those occupied with the complex dynamics of movement into and across Europe, have tended to construct refugees in neither wholly sympathetic nor wholly condemnatory terms. A good deal of global reporting from the field has sought to render refugees and migrants emotionally legible – to *characterize* them, in effect, if not to advocate for them. Some such characterization is generated out of a mode of observation from inside: a CNN piece from September 2015 reported that “[t]he migrant trail is improvised, illegal and constantly evolving. For two weeks, a CNN team followed the procession of migrants and refugees on the move from Turkey through the Balkans.”⁴ This echoes the in-situ methodology of Hemingway's first-person, who “walked five miles with the refugee procession along the road.”⁵ The so-called “embedded” journalist gestures toward a participatory framework, to report on the spectacle from within. Looking upon the mediated other, then, is negotiated by the mediator's (temporarily) being with the other. The journalistic relation differs from more common modes of refugee encounter, the humanitarian or the law-enforcing. Reporters are not present to assist, nor to intercept, identify or return. Sometimes, though, they will briefly join the procession that they envision.

A key aim of this discussion is to make sense of processional aesthetics as a way of seeing refugees and as an embodied practice responsive to refugees. As a studied convergence of spatial patterning and representational embodiment, procession involves the appearance of processional and spectating bodies (or “live” footage and media consumers), and can bear an accompanying iconography (sometimes comprising static renderings of traditional “stations” in a narrative). In their introduction to *The Drama Review's* special

issue on processional performance in 1985, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Brooks McNamara set some taxonomic parameters. The first establishes that “procession is not simply a means of getting from Place X to Place Y, but a means of getting there in ways that have ceremonial and symbolic importance.”⁶ They add, “the procession employs distinctive elements to distinguish it from everyday movement through space,” and “is designed to compete with the existing environment around it, becoming for a time the dominant element.”⁷ Essays in the issue apply performance studies and ethnographic methodologies to analyses of Shia Muslim practices, Irish pilgrimages, processions practiced by Italian Americans, the Palio in Siena, work by a British street theatre collective, and strike parades in antebellum Philadelphia. In *A Short History of Western Performance Space*, David Wiles identifies four aspects and functions of processional theatre: *pilgrimage* (communal movement in and toward sacred space, engendering heightened perception within the pilgrim); *parade* (the symbolic, hierarchical arrangement and display of persons before an audience); *map* (the processional route as marking a boundary or axis, reaffirming traditional ownership of a site); and *narrative* (wherein a story coheres temporally, in sequence, as viewed by static spectators).⁸ Implicitly, all of these characteristic modes and ends depend upon the collective desire identified by Elias Canetti in his strange, compelling study of human groupings, *Crowds and Power*: “All river-like formations, such as processions and demonstrations, want to be *seen*.”⁹ When refugees in transit are seen as processional, they tend not (or no longer) to be moving clandestinely, and reporters ostensibly perform a duty, a bringing to light. As claim-making collectives, “river-like formations” of people can be strategic formations, *wanting to be seen*.

The terms and consequences of being seen are, of course, fraught. To differing extents, the representational forms that I shall discuss push the limits of prevailing taxonomies of procession, testing its meaning as a charged visual signifier for refugee and

migrant crises. To begin with, this essay proceeds laterally by asking what kind of visual economy is delineated when a phenomenon is repeatedly accounted for as processional when it is not *intended* or *designed* to be. What are we to make of a cultural habit of designating human trajectories as processional that are neither ceremonial nor symbolic, but insistently *actual* insofar as “getting there” is concerned? In what sense can refugee collectives be understood as processional when they are strangers to the land they traverse? What kind of mapping does a refugee procession accomplish? Journalistic uses of the term procession to refer to refugees might initially look like semantic drift, or sticky metaphor (neither of which are, anyhow, arbitrary). But when understood as embedded in a wider field of representation, which includes processional community and activist practice, a persistent mode of seeing and of responding to refugees takes shape, bringing encounters between refugees and spectating “hosts” into cognitive association with the complex illustrative purposes of ceremonial transit. Conversely, theological and ceremonial senses of procession tell us something about how representation negotiates and substantiates public consciousness on refugees.

To understand with more precision what the invocation of procession *does* in the context of irregular migration, it is important to clarify the cultural and ontological work of representative bodies. Orthodox Christian and Catholic theologies of procession concern a *bringing into being* understood as the emanation of unified Holy Spirit,¹⁰ a creative capacity that may be represented in and through the processional body. Refugee corporeality, on the other hand, is made representational according to the secular, administrative paradigms and processes that cast bodies (as much as trajectories) as “irregular,” “unauthorized,” or “illegal.” The undertaking of a procession in both of these otherwise disparate contexts involves the spatio-temporally limited *appearance of an illustrative body*. I want to dialogue here with Sophie Nield’s lucid conceptualization of political border-crossing as generating conditions of being “beside oneself” – the body disaggregated from its representation, chiefly

its identity documentation¹¹ – and propose that the kind of looking that materializes a “refugee procession” *aggregates* bodies (plural) and symbolic forms of representation. While Nield shows how the border machine can produce the “disappearance” of a refugee whose documentation does not facilitate a sanctioned crossing, procession describes the optics of a spatio-temporal suspension of regulated passage. Recalling Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and McNamara’s definition of procession as “compet[ing] with the existing environment around it, becoming for a time the dominant element,”¹² we are reminded of the symbolic exceptionality of a thing called procession. David Payne-Carter observes that over the course of several centuries that saw the spread of Benedictine monastic orders, “A significant shift in the performative perception of daily life has occurred. Procession is no longer implicit; it has become explicit. The monks do not use unified physical movement simply to get to one place from another. *The ‘getting there’ became an event in itself.* As liturgy became elaborated, labor became liturgized.”¹³ This analysis of monastic procession can elucidate the stylization of refugee transit: in the secular paradigm of asylum in an era of immigration patrols, transnational surveillance and photojournalism (all of which comprise the European panopticon) the *getting there* – getting to a European host (desti)nation – becomes an irregularized or “illegal” event that is also an administrative appeal.

When the volume of transiting bodies rendered their transit hyper-visible in 2015, border-crossing developed new mediated dramaturgies. A report from November yoked what it described as the “sorrow of this daily procession” of refugees with the accelerated administrative event of preregistration, which corrals bodies as if in a secular rite of passage: “The camp gates creak open and a procession of buses arrive, depositing group after group of refugees. They are funneled through metal stiles, security checked and names and dates of birth taken, before being marched back through the rain on to yet more vehicles bound for trains connecting to the Slovenian border.”¹⁴ The preregistration process described here is, as

I have suggested, distinct from the encounters with the law's border machine about which Nield writes; witnessed in this report and in other accounts of so-called processional movements across Europe seems to be a suspension of the border machine, which demands identity documentation, and an improvised, though still more or less codified, response to irregular appearance. (While significant numbers of asylum seekers and migrants have been able to "appear" in Europe under such circumstances, the law's scope to effect disappearance¹⁵ may manifest in deportations once refugee status claims have been processed, or in forced return from Greece to Turkey, as indicated by the deal agreed between the EU and Turkey in March 2016.)

The envisioning of refugee movements as processional seems to betray deeply-rooted motifs of thought and culture to sacralize or make illustrative the journeys of seafaring and perambulating travelers. More than this, though, the image of procession can situate refugees as *calling* to prospective hosts – for Hemingway, certainly, the repetition of the term seems to impart an abstracted mode of looking accompanied by emotional receptivity. Procession is of a different quality from comparable metaphors of "waves," "hoards," or "swarms," which communicate an unwillingness to permit refugees to move unchecked and unimpeded. But perceiving and aestheticizing refugee movements as processional is not always accompanied by spectatorial receptivity. More consistently clear is that it signals a way of seeing refugees as a conglomerate *idea* (whose Greek root, *ιδέα*, denotes the faculty of vision) that is affixed to symbolic antecedents, and to structural conditions (currently, ad hoc EU biopolitics and a Schengen Treaty that is fragmenting-in-practice). I understand processional aesthetics not in terms of how status legitimacy is enacted via the self-stylization or comportment of refugees, but in terms of what it tells us of *how refugees are seen* within European space. In other words, this discussion is oriented toward dispositions of response. I aim to investigate what perceptions of refugees and migrants are symptomatic of. How far, for instance, might a

processional aesthetics of migration indicate that refugee arrival plays a function in European imaginaries akin to that activated by intentional procession? To what extent are processional aesthetics continuous with other cultural practices that formalize images of suffering and grief, pattern human relationships to place, or spatialize social hierarchies?

Angela Merkel's announcement in August 2015 that Germany would accept all Syrians that arrived at its borders led to an increase in refugee movements and the proliferation of processional metaphors. A serialized report in the *New York Times* in September 2015, "Traveling in Europe's River of Migrants" drew from the work of a team of journalists documenting the journeys of Syrians from the Balkans to Hungary, on to Germany, and in one family's case, Sweden. Several small maps schematically marked the refugees' routes across Europe. The report featured photographs and videos of refugees, always in groupings – at train stations, on trains, along motorways – but also frequently in close-up. References to satellite-charged cellphones coalesced with descriptions of processional transit that leaned toward the pastoral: "The Majid group joined a ragged procession of other migrants walking along the wooden slats, an old woman limping along behind everyone else, stopping only to pick a few yellow wildflowers."¹⁶ Of the interception of a group en route to Sweden, a reporter observed, "before they had the chance to walk to Malmo, the Danish police swooped in and separated the laggards from the larger procession ahead."¹⁷ The serial isolated quotidian details – an expression on a man's face, the way a woman applied eye makeup, another's dress snagging on wire – that glimpsed individual lives. But the clarity with which it delineated processional aesthetics derived from its emphasis on collective volition: references to the migrants' formation of a human chain were accompanied by embedded video of a long line of people walking shoulder to shoulder, some hand in hand, down a road, passing beneath a road bridge from which supportive locals tossed items of food and drink. The caption for this video (which also showed refugees

negotiating with police) stated, “A group of migrants, who were aiming to go to Sweden but were being detained by the police in Denmark, defiantly marched on.”¹⁸ If the refugees and migrants envisioned in this report are not necessarily processional by intent, their determined corporeal conglomeration, and apparent lack of concern to evade journalists’ cameras, provides the framework for their aestheticizing as such.

The envisioning of refugees and migrants as processional, their modes of volition or agency conglomerate, can produce descriptive regimes and object metaphors that isolate a thing-like quality. A *Guardian* report in September 2015 observed, “On Wednesday, the bottleneck was at Horgoš on Serbia’s border with Hungary, where Hungarian police fired teargas at crowds of refugees who tried to rush a border gate when they suddenly found their northward procession blocked.”¹⁹ This report was accompanied by two hectic videos of migrants clambering into train carriages through windows, jostling at platforms, and pushing through police barriers. A BBC report in October stating, “The procession of those seeking a route north is leading to bottlenecks in parts of southern and eastern Europe,”²⁰ was accompanied by a map approximating migrants’ paths across Europe and indicating where borders had been closed. A report in *The Australian* from Hungary’s Keleti station described a protest by refugees and migrants waiting to be allowed to continue to Germany, and characterized their processional collectivity in terms of transnational organization: “all of the migrants had a common voice despite their historic differences, and Kurds, Afghanis joined Indians, Syrians and Iraqis to plead to be allowed out of the country. ... ‘Allemagne, Germany’ the refugees chanted in a winding procession through the station.”²¹ Reporting from the same train station, a piece in the *Telegraph* imagined the refugees with a curious improvised collective noun: “Half protest-march, half procession, the dismal crocodile of refugees left the Keleti station at 10am carrying what meagre possessions they could.”²² These stories were illustrated by photographs and videos of hundreds of refugees walking

along roadsides and camping outside train stations. The oscillation noted in the reports between police authority and refugee resistance envisages a more complex spread of agentic capacities and modes of volition than were evident in Hemingway's processional imaginary of nearly a century before. This suggests that a processional aesthetics in the context of looking upon refugees may or may not inhere in capacities that would signify self-determining politics – for Hemingway, it did not – but that instead, what such aesthetics identifies is the *inexorability* (and sometimes, violent desperation) of arrival in extremis.

The aestheticization and narrativization of arrival feeds a contemporary politics that places the volitional subject – the too strident or selective subject – in a condemnatory frame. In the UK, widespread antagonism toward occupants of the so-called “jungle” at Calais is legitimized by combative modes of political leadership; by, for example, David Cameron's dismissal in 2016 of “a bunch of migrants in Calais,” by his description in 2015 of migrants as a “swarm,”²³ and by Theresa May's characterization the same year of people at Calais the “wealthiest, fittest and strongest,”²⁴ who were, as such, less worthy of protection than refugees in UNHCR camps. Notwithstanding the criticism these comments attracted, community indignation over refugees is robust. In the left-leaning *Guardian*, thousands of online comments were overwhelmingly opprobriative in response to a 2015 report of refugees refusing to disembark from a bus in a remote Swedish village.²⁵ *Daily Mail* readers were similarly incensed by a story on road and transport closures precipitated by refusals of large numbers of refugees to register in Denmark, demanding to continue on to Sweden; a highly rated below-the-line commenter asked, “Are these people refugees or migrants???” Genuine refugees are generally not selective about where they claim asylum but these people seem very selective about which European country they wish to settle in.”²⁶ Undoubtedly, refugees remain most acceptable within contemporary paradigms of humanitarianism when they appear passive and recipient, not knowing or intending about their destination. But as

Hannah Arendt perceived within the context of fascism in Europe, the image of non-volitional refugeehood is rooted in a profound political violence; as she writes of refugees in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, “Innocence, in the sense of complete lack of responsibility, was the mark of their rightlessness as it was the seal of their loss of political status.”²⁷ There is, Arendt saw, a cost associated with refugee “innocence” (a term she uses not in the sense of moral character, but political agency). Today, if the image of a refugee procession can imply a thing-like quality, describing transit that is independent of the intention of individuals, processional *group* volition can also describe willful protestation. In this capacity, procession can describe a kind of disordered coordination: surveilled movement en masse that is seen as an uncontrollable – even offensive – encroachment, even as it is recognized as a *claim to rights* by refugees. Contemporary reporting seems to be registering a shift in prevailing ideas about refugeeness, away from the rightless innocence of which Arendt wrote, and away from Hemingway’s vision of lament.

At the geographical vanguard of recent maritime arrivals, Greece is the locus of distinct modes of processional envisioning, centered on the palimpsestic character of the Mediterranean coast as site of both leisure and death, wherein a tension exists between public spectacle and an unwillingness to look. A *Guardian* piece in June 2015, describing the refugee influx on the Greek island of Kos, opened with a sentence that might have been describing an esoteric rite: “Tourists must get up early to catch a glimpse of the morning procession that is now part of the daily summer routine.”²⁸ This story was accompanied by two photographs, the first a faintly picturesque image of two refugees wading ashore in pink dawn light, wearing life jackets and carrying their belongings in black rubbish bags. The man in the foreground looks directly into the camera’s lens, a half-smile on his face, while the second man, walking several meters behind, occupies the picture’s middle distance. The second photograph is of a tourist riding a bicycle down a road as migrants, to whom her gaze

does not turn, stand shoulder to shoulder at the pavement, within touching distance. The photographer zooms in close, creating a narrow, claustrophobic scopic field. In October, a *Daily Mail* report from Lesbos described “another procession of rubber dinghies crammed with migrants, including an elderly woman in a wheelchair.”²⁹ This story resembled a dystopian photo-essay, with images of rescue vessels and rubber dinghies carrying large numbers of people, as well as close-up images of frightened adults and children, accentuating a mood of excess, disorder, and distress. Complicating the notion that close-up visual framing typically connotes sympathetic humanization in photojournalism about refugees,³⁰ this was precisely the kind of report that instantiates Rogier van Reekum’s reading of the Mediterranean as “a zone of interception and capture” where visual representations “do little more than reiterate a border spectacle of European invasion.”³¹ A *Guardian* piece in May, on the other hand, which was particularly attuned to visual resonances, drew connections between the “studiously averted faces” of holidaymakers on Kos with a British government that “also averts its eyes,” and invoked an image of procession as a way of placing refugees in continuity with histories of persecution: “nobody at all wants to see trailing refugees with no luggage whose processions insistently recall earlier movements of the persecuted, from a period when escapees were evidently less likely to be viewed as the authors of their own misfortune.”³² This piece was illustrated with a single photograph, of a rubber dinghy carrying Afghan refugees, some waving tentatively to unseen figures on shore, out of frame. By perceiving refugees both as themselves and as evocative of images that precede them, this story identified the stakes of being seen to harbor ambition, and historicized the disavowal mechanisms at play when would-be hosts ascribe self-mastery to refugees.

Tensions between the avoidance of face-to-face encounter, the desire to “catch a glimpse,” and the paradoxical intensity of mediated looking jostle in aesthetic dispositions adjacent to journalism that situate refugee movements as processional. At Berlin Fashion

Week in January 2016, Serbian fashion designer Sasa Ko'vacevic seized on the visual semiotics of the refugee crisis, using them as a pretext for his own secular, commercial parade. Explaining that his new menswear collection was inspired by refugees, he said, "I was trying to ... make a statement about this ... procession of people who are passing through the different countries."³³ The nature of Ko'vacevic's statement remains ill-defined, but his desire to co-opt refugee transit into the visual culture of fashion demonstrates that the migrant crisis has facilitated the transmutation of refugeeness to pure stylization. A more decisive co-optation of an image of refugee transit is the now-infamous poster devised by the UK Independence Party during their Brexit campaign in 2016: overtly anti-immigration, it presented a photograph of a large number of young, mostly Middle Eastern men walking along a grass verge, the words "BREAKING POINT" in red, capital typeface. A Getty Images spokesperson confirmed that the picture was legitimately licensed and had been taken in Slovenia in 2015, but expressed dismay at the photograph's political subjectification: "It is always uncomfortable when an objective news photograph is used to deliver any political message or subjective agenda."³⁴ While techniques of representation and avowed semantics differ, images of procession cast refugees into regimes of visibility, rendering irregular transit as *mise-en-scène*, and the appeal for asylum a looked upon event marked by grim aestheticization.

As a deliberate embodied practice, meanwhile, procession is one of the most prominent and frequently used collective strategies by which regional response to the refugee and migrant crisis across Europe has been spatialized. Often originating in small, close-knit communities, solidarity events make connections between local resettlement and hospitality activities and wider transnational politics, engendering a kind of participant-spectatorship of the migrant crisis. I want to consider recent initiatives within smaller communities (villages, towns and small cities) in order to underscore an expanded appreciation of refugee

“activism,” beyond the metropolitan, cosmopolitan contexts that are sometimes assumed to be its bastion. Today, the representational work of community events spills over into online documentation, with photographic images and video records archived in news reports and by event organizers. Some events are dramaturgically akin to secular protests: a march undertaken by Malvern Hills (West Midlands, England) residents in October 2015 involved some 200 people, placards and petition in hand, urging the District Council to resettle Syrian refugees.³⁵ Other solidarity events engage in modified grief or remembrance practices that are more explicitly processional, including the lighting of candles or lanterns, the recitation of prayers, and the measuring of silences. Such events borrow from sacred or liturgical forms as they manifest collective attentiveness to the lives of others: another West Midlands initiative, the Bearwood Action for Refugees’ Procession of Light, in October 2016, is an example.³⁶ Community-generated responses to refugee crisis, however designed, constitute embodied registers of geographically distant but temporally simultaneous movements of people. They offer corporeal cognates of the immediacy that Hemingway sought to render lexically in a report from Sofia, almost a month after witnessing the exodus at Adrianople: “The evacuation still keeps up. No matter how long it takes this letter to get to Toronto, as you read this in *The Star* you may be sure that the same ghastly, shambling procession of people being driven from their homes is filing in unbroken line along the muddy road to Macedonia. A quarter of a million people take a long time to move.”³⁷ Like this writerly vision of refugees, embodied expressions of support for refugees may be understood as activating or intensifying affective envisioning of the non-proximate refugee via the “right now” of aestheticized, processional encounter.

Processional activity in this context can serve to define community character and establish new rhythms. First enacted in September 2015, at the height of the migrant crisis, *Light up the Law* was a procession-cum-memorial in Dundee, Scotland, that was repeated in

September 2016. The events were organized by Dundee Refugee Support and documented by photography and video records, posted online, of bagpiper-led processions of several hundred people, all carrying torches, candles or lanterns, up the city's prominent hill, the Dundee Law. The 2015 event was livestreamed on YouTube.³⁸ In addition to fundraising, an explicit purpose of Light up the Law was to remember the refugees who have drowned trying to reach Europe and to pledge a commitment to assist locally with resettlement needs. Both were family-oriented events, with children prominent both as high-vis wearing assistants and as processants. During the 2015 event, a number of individuals spoke at the hill's summit as representatives of the city council, churches, trade unions, youth and women's organizations and political parties. The first speaker linked the current crisis to the city of Dundee's openness to refugees from Guernica in 1937, as well as Chilean, Vietnamese and Ugandan Asian refugees in the 1970s and 80s, while another spoke of western military intervention in the Middle East. Both events ended with a minute's silence, followed by celebratory applause. Light up the Law utilized the topographical features of the local area in order to spatialize as well as render through collective, symbolic appearance a desire to extend welcome and to remember refugees. Processional walking became here an act of representative labor-for-others, and Light up the Law's occurrence at night brought people and place into a co-encounter distinct from the everyday, momentarily rendering the landscape – itself already the site of a war memorial – an illuminated processional installation.

Solidarity processions are frequently connected to religious imperatives and integrated into calendars of worship. In September 2015, the St. Peter and St. Paul Parish Church in the town of Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, staged *A Hard Journey to Freedom*, incorporating prayer, procession and an art installation. The church's explicit rationale for the

event highlights the cognitive, affective, and spiritual work that it sought to achieve, linking the current refugee crisis to biblical narrative:

The story of the Holy Family's Flight into Egypt was read from Matthew's Gospel. Father Paul gave images of St Joseph, Our Lady and the Christ Child to members of our youth group. A procession was formed. Father Paul encouraged everyone to walk with the Holy Family (who were themselves forced to become refugees) and to hold their cardboard signs of welcome and think and pray for the Syrian families making a hard journey to freedom. Our servers led the way with the ancient parish processional cross and incense. Father Paul carried a relic of St Vincent de Paul: that great Apostle of the Poor. As we processed around the west end of the Church, Richard, with his guitar, sang the song 'When I need a Neighbour where [*sic*] you there?'³⁹

Here, both the sensation and display of concern for refugees are continuous with the formalization of religious narratives centered on suffering or endurance. The above account implies the intersubjective function of procession as unifier of thought and affect, and describes a corporeally sanctioned compression of imagery: that is, the improvisation of a contemporary political context for the carrying of a relic, incense, and ancient parish processional cross – objects already embedded with meaning, made receptacles for new symbolic but still identifiably Christian purpose. A similar event was initiated in September 2015 by Trócaire and Cobh Cathedral, County Cork, whereby a candlelit procession followed a bishop's homily on the obligation of local communities to respond to Syrian and Iraqi displacement. As in Wisbech, this procession overlaid established devotional practices

associated with Christ's life, teachings, and suffering with the remembrance of migrants who have drowned attempting to reach Europe. Culminating in the launch of a commemorative wreath in Cobh Harbour, the Cork procession spatialized and displayed links between local maritime topography and the maritime deaths to which participants focused attention. A report on the event invoked continuities with histories of migration, identifying the harbor as the site "where just four generations ago, coffin ships departed carrying Irish emigrants escaping the Great Famine."⁴⁰

The group volition detected in media reports on so-called processions of refugees appears differently potentiated in these community-initiated processional events. Their dramaturgy is often linked to local histories of community-cohering display, and they are impelled by bodies that are purposeful, public and co-agentive *as collectives*. Refugee support processions resonate within communities and activate a reaching-out beyond. Participants make meaning symbolically, entering into a willing coherence of allegiance via spatio-temporal convergence, and abbreviating the arduous transit of refugees into the processional route. In the context of denominational or interfaith events, allegiance may be just as political as it is religious.

In the weeks and months following the drownings of some 900 migrants en route to Italy from Libya in April 2015, a number vigils were held across Europe. Events in Malta, where bodies and survivors were transported in the aftermath of the tragedy and whose coastal communities therefore perceived with relative immediacy the horror of the shipwreck, were attended by Italian and north African communities, many of the latter having familial ties to the dead.⁴¹ A funeral service was held at Msida, Malta for the twenty-four people whose bodies were retrieved. This mediatized ceremony took place inside a tent that had been raised outside the Mater Dei hospital morgue. News reports displayed photographs from the funeral, of plain wooden coffins laid out in rows on a red carpet, which was flanked by

photographers, and of bouquets of bright flowers lining the improvised processional route along which members of the armed forces, acting as pallbearers, transported the coffins for private burial at the Santa Maria Addolorata cemetery.⁴² The interfaith ceremony was jointly led by a bishop and an imam, attended by international journalists and photographers, as well as the president and prime minister of Malta, and other European politicians.⁴³ It entered the public domain as a spectacle of mourning, occupying an ideological space somewhere between grief ritual and the politicized optics of potentially avoidable tragedy.

An even more explicit political orientation underpinned two “funeral” events undertaken in June 2015 by German activist collective Center for Political Beauty (hereafter CPB) in their performance intervention, *The Dead are Coming / Die Toten Kommen*. Like the interfaith funeral in Malta, *The Dead are Coming* exceeded the usual limits of religious representation, participation, and visibility, but it generated a more ethically and politically dubious optics. It involved the transportation of drowned migrants’ bodies from Sicily, reportedly with the agreement of families of the deceased, to sites around Berlin for burial. The flamboyantly titled work forged a grotesque vision of inexorability concerning migrants’ capacities to be impelled, post-mortem, into German territory. The activists used the codes of a burial march to crystalize their linear vision of failed obligation between the Mediterranean zone of maritime death and the German capital, identified in this context as the symbolic center of a European political union failing in its obligation to refugees (the intervention occurred just weeks before Merkel’s opening of German borders to Syrians). As funeral processions that were also digitally documented activist performances, recordings and photographs of the events have circulated widely, attracting the attention of high-volume news outlets such as the *Daily Mail*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and *Al Jazeera* (all linked to the CPB website).⁴⁴

Public (and publicized) mourning always involves the instrumentalization of the dead, and by constructing public performances of mourning, *The Dead are Coming* highlighted the way differentials of grievability may be mapped on to the state-sanctification or occlusion of public memory. Given CPB's insistence that the deaths of drowned migrants are state-produced, it is useful to contrast *The Dead are Coming* with the formality of state commemorations of so-called "beautiful death" in military contexts. Military funerals, repatriations, burials and cemetery guard changes are all spectacles that underscore the state's capacity to choreograph the mourning of state-produced death, and *The Dead are Coming* co-opted some of the visual registers of state theatricality in order to show how public remembering happens (or fails to). CPB's burials were simultaneously artistic performances, political convocations and religious events. The activists/performers purported to be engaged in *real* burials of *real* corpses and the event choreography was religious in its optics. The ceremonies merged funereal and corporate dress codes: German men acted as pallbearers, dressed in black suits, black ties, white gloves and white name badges, while the processions and services themselves were led by an imam. At the same time, the burials were attended by journalists, framed by political speeches, and recorded for public dissemination. A collection of EU flags fringed the burial sites, while empty seats were set out on red carpet for Merkel and other politicians. Of this configuration, CPB state via their website:

We invited politicians to the funeral. Members of the government, Secretaries of State and representatives of the Federal Ministry of the Interior were all on the guest list. The seating arrangement was fixed in advance: Federal Minister of the Interior Thomas de Maizère with his wife and Chancellor Angela Merkel in the front row. Their eulogies had also been prepared beforehand.⁴⁵

The faces of CPB's "chief negotiator," Phillip Ruch and those of affiliate members were smeared in a black oily substance, ostentatiously signifying toil (the same makeup is used in the activists' online headshots and in other interventions). The overall effect was a collision of quiet respectfulness and political radicalism, with visual juxtapositions that were flippantly incongruous.

Among the political purposes of *The Dead are Coming* was to stake out transnational lines of association and to generate visual "evidence" of the unseen deaths of migrants. In an essay that evaluates the function of grief in migration activism, including *The Dead are Coming*, Maurice Stierl contends that the efficacy of such interventions ultimately emerges not despite but because of their ethically and emotionally risky strategies: "Turning collective grief into a 'resource for politics', in these practices in which identification remains in question, those involved risked themselves at the limits of intelligibility where solidarity is rife with impossibility but where, and maybe therefore, an emergent community is cautiously formed."⁴⁶ This argument regarding the forging of imperfect cross-cultural community is persuasive, though in respect to *The Dead are Coming* it is undermined by CPB's own simplified reading of affiliations across EU member states. In accompanying online documentation for the intervention, a series of photographs taken at morgues in Sicily where cold storage has malfunctioned are captioned with a caustic moral judgment: "*This is how Europe is treating its victims.*" The photographs are clearly meant to incite a spectator's indignation, but they fail to account for economic differentials between Sicily and Germany, not to mention the efforts made by Sicilians locally and by the Italian state⁴⁷ to treat in a dignified way large numbers of deceased persons, many of them unidentified. The cost, then, of CPB's construction of a totalizing picture of death in the EU border regime is that the greater magnitude of burden faced by specific Mediterranean communities is glossed as a generalized, shameful neglect.

Given the ways processional acts have a co-affective function of intensifying the sentiments of participants, it should not be surprising that procession has also emerged in Europe as a technique in anti-migrant and refugee demonstrations. In such a context, the superficially pagan cosmography of the anti-immigrant organization, Soldiers of Odin signals a claim to indigenous belonging. Founded in Kemi in northern Finland in 2015 and now established across Scandinavia, with emergent international affiliates,⁴⁸ Soldiers of Odin has risen to prominence, undertaking vigilante patrols and participating in nationalist processions. The group's rapid spread owes much to their distinctive, merchandized optics: black hoodies, jackets, hats, and other items branded with a horned Viking helmet design and the regional chapter printed beneath. In response to the Soldiers of Odin, a Finnish parody group calling themselves Loldiers of Odin (the name a portmanteau playing on the acronym LOL, for laugh out loud), have staged resistant performatives with the aim of mocking their nationalist namesakes. In January 2016, the Loldiers filmed their subversion of a Soldiers of Odin street patrol through the city of Tampere and posted the video on their website and on YouTube (its English subtitles facilitating wider circulation), from which media outlets picked it up.⁴⁹ Members of the comic troupe appear in brightly coloured clothing and pajamas, gaudy clown makeup, silly hats, and in one man's case, a striped dressing gown paired with a Viking helmet (the man issues intermittent, satirical proclamations such as, "I am Odin, my soldiers are keeping the streets safe" as he high-fives members of the public). The clowns engage in whimsical iconographic bricolage, branding a unicorn toy, a hula hoop, musical instruments, and a red flag on which a wobbly, childish swastika and the words "Sieg Fail!" are scrawled. Trailing a group of fifteen to twenty men clad in Soldiers of Odin uniform, a similar number of Loldiers of Odin form a prancing, cartwheeling procession, clamber up a pile of ploughed snow and at one point encircle the Soldiers of Odin. A week later, when the clowns crashed a "Close the Borders" demonstration, two were detained by Tampere police for disorderly

conduct.⁵⁰ Loldiers of Odin has established an aesthetic that is as striking as the anti-immigrant organization that they seek to antagonize, using bright colors, visual mimicry, and linguistic parody, posting cheeky text on their bilingual, photo-illustrated website, including, “We brought safety to the night by collecting banana skins [...] from the streets, so that no human, dog or clown would slip on them,” and “Clowns’ start of spring season culminated to a confettirence, where extremity of the extreme, the bliss of borderlessness and multicoloured multiplicity were deeply discussed.”⁵¹

While the Soldiers of Odin’s vigilante patrols are antisocial expressions of opposition to refugee resettlement, other modes of anti-refugee sentiment surfaced in the context of civic engagement during Germany’s 2016 Carnival season. Satirical, playful, and grotesque floats are familiar in the annual pre-Lent parades, but political statements are policed under Germany’s racial incitement laws. In the Bavarian town of Steinkirchen, a float designed as an army tank bearing the slogans, “Ilmtaler Asylabwehr” (“Ilmtal Asylum Defence”) and “Asylpaket III” (“Asylum Package III,” a reference to German refugee legislation), and displaying the black Balkenkreuz cross of the German Armed Forces during WWII, was investigated under incitement laws, amid expressions of regret from the carnival organizer.⁵² Investigators subsequently found that the float was acceptable according to freedom of opinion laws, concluding, “the statements can be understood both as participation in the political discussion about the current refugee crisis and as a pointed, exaggerated, but non-political contribution to a social issue within a carnival parade.”⁵³ In the town of Solingen, a float resembling a U-boat displayed the message, “Sie sollten kämpfen für ihr Land anstatt zu grabtschen mit der Hand” (“They should fight for their country instead of grabbing by hand”), a reference to the mass sexual assaults in German cities during New Year’s Eve 2015-16, which implicated refugees and migrants. This float also bore the Balkenkreuz cross. In Düsseldorf, a float depicted Merkel upside down, hands clasped in a gesture of calm, being

washed away by a large blue wave bearing the slogan, “Flüchtlings-Welle” (“refugee wave”). In the eastern town of Wasungen, processants dressed as lurid green locusts accompanied an elaborate train carriage float painted with the words, “Balkan Express” and “Die Ploach kommt” (“the plague is coming”).⁵⁴ Following complaints, this was investigated by local prosecutors, who found that the float had not violated incitement laws; the decision was appealed by the Jesuit Refugee Service,⁵⁵ but ultimately upheld.⁵⁶ These processional interventions, embedded within community calendars, had as their backdrop the controversial arrival of nearly one million refugees in Germany in 2015.⁵⁷ They fleshed out affective, performative sub-cultures whose suspicions toward refugees did not manifest in aggressive antipathy; indeed, participants in controversial carnival floats denied professing xenophobic or far-right opinions. But the floats affixed local resentments and anxieties to communal, liturgical rhythms (that are also national), and in this capacity seized on the potency of an established season of display in which visibility is momentarily untethered from codes of political propriety.

Finally, it seems necessary to weigh the cost of dedicating critical attention to transit and procession as I have in this analysis. By isolating an aspect of their looked-upon-ness, even if in order to understand what such looking inheres in culturally and does politically, there is a risk of reifying refugees as bodies of evidence: those in whom the negotiation of legislated categories of belonging precedes other unique signs and capacities of a life. Moreover, an emphasis on *transiting* bodies risks distilling refugee subjectivity to beleaguered mobility (when the extended stasis of life within refugee camps is, in terms of scale, a much larger crisis). But an aesthetics of procession pivots on precisely such distillations and thereby highlights some of what is at stake in transnational debates about belonging and territoriality in Europe. Both the identification of refugees in Europe as processional bodies, and the processional practices of activists and community groups

undertaken in response to refugees, situate people and landscapes in a dynamic relation, informed by the paradigms of bureaucratic power that politicize and moralize irregular methods of arrival. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and McNamara characterize processional performance as having meaning within and for its own cultural context, noting, “the procession formalizes and dramatizes some event of importance to the community”.⁵⁸ In turn, perceiving the movements of refugees as processional, or enacting processions responsive to refugees, constitute modes of imag(in)ing by hosts – willing or unwilling – of noncitizen others.

Of a hallucinatory procession of Benedictine monks described in Daniel Paul Schreber’s *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, Canetti writes, “The sight of a procession re-activates in the spectators their own latent belief and they suddenly feel a desire to join on behind it. Thus the procession tends to be increased by all those who see it pass; ideally it should be endless.”⁵⁹ This fevered vision of unending movement recognizes procession’s cohering and attracting power, and speaks to its capacity to forge continuities between geographically dispersed responses to the refugee crisis in Europe. This essay has sought to trace a mode of seeing irregular transit that counterpoints procession’s illustrative event-function. The aesthetic dispositions through which global media filters the crisis are inevitably tied to the ways communities-at-home display, via embodied practices, visions of how refugees may or may not be stitched into the fabric of local life. Marches, walks, parades, patrols, religious ceremonies, and performance art variously infiltrate European political topography, marking out intersections between refugee movement, its envisioning, and its capacity to inform engagement-in-place, where responsiveness becomes routed as processional optics. The relationship between looker and looked-upon in these aestheticized contexts is mediated by processional codes that make lookers visible as both presentational and representational bodies – both activist and symbolic. As they rehearse ways of being-

together and belonging, community processions map performative perceptions of the hyper-visible transit of those who enter a field of unrelenting representation merely by their arrival.

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⁵ Hemingway, "Refugees from Thrace," *Toronto Daily Star*, November 14, 1922.

⁶ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Brooks McNamara, "Processional Performance: An Introduction," *The Drama Review* 29.3 (1985), 2-5, 2.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ David Wiles, *A Short History of Western Performance Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 64.

⁹ Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, trans. Carol Stewart (New York: Continuum, 1962 [1960]), 83, emphasis in original.

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¹¹ Sophie Nield, "The Proteus Cabinet, or 'We are Here but not Here,'" *Research in Drama Education* 13.2 (2008), 137-45, 143.

¹² Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and McNamara, 2.

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¹⁶ Anemona Hartocollis, "Traveling in Europe's River of Migrants," *New York Times*, September 2016, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/cp/reporters-notebook/migrants/march-budapest-hungary>.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

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