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10

Visibility of Protest at the Margins: The Thatcher Funeral Protests

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Baroness Margaret Thatcher's death in April 2013, at the age of 87, brought an outpouring of emotion in the UK and beyond, but this was not simply an occasion of national mourning for a retired stateswoman who had long ago exited the political stage. With the rare honour of having a political ideology named after her during her lifetime, Thatcher was a towering figure in UK political culture whose name could inspire hatred as well as admiration. As her official biographer Charles Moore writes in volume one of her biography, the interest in Thatcher's character has not diminished in her death: 'She is someone about whom it is almost impossible to be neutral. People are fascinated, appalled, delighted by her. Many think she saved Britain, many that she destroyed it. The only thing that unites them is their interest' (2013: xvii). So the occasion of Thatcher's funeral on 13 April 2013 was never simply going to present a moment for respectfully marking the passing of a wife, mother and grandmother; it also offered the moment when a nation reflected on how contemporary society has been decisively and divisively shaped by 'that woman'.[1]

This chapter does not intend to rehash the disputed claims over Thatcher's legacy but to focus on the media coverage of the protests which accompanied her funeral. The service was held on 17 April 2013, reportedly costing £1.2 million to stage, despite higher estimations at the time (BBC, 2013), and was broadcast and blogged 'as it happened' across various national media. Where such ritualised media events, especially of the 'coronation' kind (Dayan and Katz, 1994), can bring feelings of reconciliation and national pride to the fore, Thatcher's funeral opened up old wounds and represented a divided UK.

I explore the photographic coverage of the funeral protests in mainstream online news galleries, and especially the 'image politics' (Deluca, 1999) of those who chose to line the streets alongside the mourners and to quietly express their outrage at the ceremonial event. Following Dayan's proposed 'paradigm of visibility', I analyse how the protesters challenged the narrative offered by mainstream media as 'uninvited intruders' (2013: 145). Media visibility for citizens is often awarded on a conditional basis in mainstream media, but innovative forms of expression attract media attention and subsequent circulation across

varied media forms. Thatcher's funeral provided a key moment through which to investigate contentious politics at the margins of a national media event.

The above paragraph hints at a few interrelated research contexts, which in turn provide three questions which guide this chapter. First, in what ways was this a political event and how did the media portrayal work to emphasise or de-emphasise its political nature? One key starting point for political activity is the recognition of who counts as a legitimate political actor, but there is also a consensual understanding of *when* and *where* politics and 'the political' are appropriate (Mouffe, 2005). One way to marginalise the protests is to make the *reasonable* claim that a funeral is not the time for politics. Second, this was an intensely mediated event, but how did the protests appear alongside the ceremonial event? Notions of visibility and visuality are at the heart of an 'image politics' (Deluca, 1999) which embraces the theatrical and symbolic power of images to challenge notions of control and power. Third, taking a small slice of this national coverage, how do online news galleries tell the story of the day, for mourners and protesters? The use of 'in pictures' photographic slideshows provides a visually focused sample of a condensed form of storytelling. The selected images from both professional and amateur photographers provide at least three layers of visual communication through which to explore how participants perform political subjectivity: the materials prepared by the protesters and their visual display; the content of photographs selected to represent the day 'in pictures' by each media outlet; and the broader narrative offered through the layout and accompanying text. While the analysis is primarily image-led, it is recognised that all media texts are multimodal in nature (Machin and Mayr, 2013; Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001).

The next three sections briefly present the research contexts for the areas listed above: the space for politics; visibility as an expression of citizenship from the margins; and photographic news slideshows as an emerging news genre. Following this, the chapter explores the online news galleries of the BBC, *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph*.

The place and space of politics and 'the political'

> I think in a way we're all Thatcherites now because – I mean – I think one of the things about her legacy is some of those big arguments that she had had, you know, everyone now accepts. No-one wants to go back to trade unions that are undemocratic or one-sided nuclear disarmament or having great private sector

> businesses in the public sector. (David Cameron on the *Today* programme, Radio 4, 17 April 2013)

On the morning of Thatcher's funeral, Prime Minister David Cameron appeared on Radio 4's *Today* programme suggesting that we were 'all Thatcherites now', immediately prompting criticism from both left and right for his use of the term. He was accused of making political propaganda out of the funeral, of exploiting the memory of Thatcher where before he had distanced himself. What this debate reveals is how 'Thatcher' – and what it means to be Thatcherite – still offers a contested term against which we nevertheless identify and measure ourselves. So Cameron's seemingly impromptu remark is particularly provocative given the divisive rhetoric associated with Thatcher – for example, whether a Cabinet colleague was 'one of us', the miners described as the 'enemy within' – so this use of 'we all' and 'everyone' in an off-the-cuff manner ('in a way') is particularly disagreeable for her opponents. Cameron's rhetoric attempts to define the nation together as Thatcherites while simultaneously reminding us of the bygone era of strong party identification and of other collective identities now seemingly diminished in UK political culture.

I include this quotation here because it highlights the ways in which this kind of political talk works to define a consensus, position segments of its audience as included or excluded and possibly constrain debate. But to cast such a divisive figure as some kind of unifying symbol, and Thatcherism an umbrella we can all fit under, only serves to rankle those who blame her for destroying their communities and contributing to a more individualistic society. In stating that 'those big arguments' are behind us, Cameron asks us to put politics aside and commemorate her life. The notions of 'politics', 'the political' and, indeed, the kind of 'post-political' vision as offered cheekily here by Cameron have attracted much academic debate in recent years (e.g. Hay, 2007; Mouffe, 2005). James Martin delineates 'politics' from 'the political', defining 'politics' as the activities and instituted procedures of organised interests, as distinct but dependent on 'the political' dimension: 'the abstract frames or principles that define, for example, who gets represented, and what kinds of issues are legitimate topics of dispute and which social groups are recognised as "acceptable" participants in politics, or not' (Martin, 2014: 4).

Addressing the assembled mourners at St Paul's Cathedral, Bishop of London Richard Chartres said that 'here and today is neither the time nor the place' to debate policies and legacy; that it was instead 'the place for the simple truths which transcend political debate'

(Chartres, 2013). As *The Guardian* reported the day before the funeral, Dean of St Paul's Cathedral Dr David Ison said the ceremony was 'not a political demonstration' but rather a demonstration of 'how we respond in the face of death' (cited in Davies et al., 2013: 2). For both, to engage in political debate would be to debase the Christian service. Those keen to protest were seen by some to be undermining the respectability associated with the solemn occasion of a funeral. We can note here how various authority figures attempt to define the parameters for legitimate contestation, political talk and activity, while presiding over a state funeral in all but name.

Protest and image politics

For those struggling to gain attention on the political stage, 'image politics' (DeLuca, 1999) offer a striking way to promote a cause and spark imagination. Operating with a freedom of expression that traditional political party politicians are unlikely to risk, the politics of dissent can embrace the symbolic and theatrical. The Thatcher funeral protests are unusual, if not unique, given that they *appear* to be tied up with historical grievances rather than immediate needs or future possibilities. This is not an emergent social movement demanding radical change but rather the creation or re-creation of some kind of transient community of solidarity through which new and old affinities and identities are expressed. The most infamous response to Thatcher's death was the attempt to get the Wizard of Oz song 'Ding Dong! The Witch is Dead' to the top of the charts – a social media campaign which emphasised a deliberately callous celebratory response, along with spur-of-the-moment parties organised across the country (Valentine, 2013). The mode of expression here was through a reappropriation of a popular culture classic which casts Thatcher as the witch, merely through the action of downloading the song. But the funeral itself warranted a different tactical approach and attracted those angry at the perceived harm inflicted on the country by Thatcher's policies, and at the pomposity and expense of the funeral. The day of the funeral was the wrong kind of space and occasion for dissent *vocally* expressed (alongside the funeral procession at least). Instead, protesters held up banners or turned their backs on the funeral procession. Kevin Deluca and Jennifer Peeples' suggestive idea of a 'public discourse of images' (2012: 133) is relevant here, in that it recognises the performative role of images in bringing the 'public' into being, and the potentials for political agency and citizenship beyond the traditional emphasis on dialogue and voice.

The mediated space for politics and for political performances therefore offers a space to be *seen* acting as a disgruntled or morally disgusted citizen, in addition to finding out about the activities of elite political actors. Rather than thinking about conditions of visibility from the politicians' perspectives, Daniel Dayan's 'paradigm of visibility' (2013) helps us to conceptualise online and physical spaces as contested sites of political meaning, values and identity, in dialogue with other more traditional mediated forms:

> Media are institutions that confer visibility on events, persons, groups, debates, controversies, and narratives. Media make situations visible … You are showing me this? Why are you showing it to me? Why are you showing it this way? What is it? Where is the rest of it? What have you chosen not to show? These are naive questions. These are key questions. (Dayan, 2013: 146)

In asking these naïve but key questions, we can investigate the different patterns of visible citizen involvement and the kinds of visual display produced and circulated across the mediascape (Parry, forthcoming).

We might also ask of any protest: What is at stake here? Central to this particular protest is the right to be acknowledged as a politically motivated citizen who is not a mourner, within the *shared public space*, and the right to make visible shared moral objections to the symbolic power of the ceremonial state-sanctioned event. And the involvement of senior figures in the monarchy, military and government along with international representatives places the funeral firmly in the scripting of a reverential coronation media event (Dayan and Katz, 1992). In other words, the protest is about the right to share (mediated) public space without adopting the unified values or narrative offered by the state institutions. In thinking about mediated public spaces in this way, this chapter acknowledges that inclusions and exclusions of visibility are crucially about a political struggle, with first TV (Thompson, 1995) and now the internet shaping the way we see the world and our right to look, and be seen, as citizens (Mirzoeff, 2011; Dayan, 2013).

'In pictures': Online news galleries

The selected media genre for this study is the online photographic slideshow, or news gallery. Admittedly this offers only a small window into the intense media coverage that the funeral attracted across many platforms, but it continues the focus on the visual and allows for an

analysis of an easily delineated and compact form of storytelling. The study surveys the online news galleries of the BBC, *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph*, noting the degree to which the protests were pictured within the 'in pictures' galleries.[2] In some cases this is about how the protesters appear in the general funeral 'in pictures' coverage, or in the separate slideshow dedicated to the protests, if one exists. Online news galleries as a genre reflect the convergent, multiplatform approach of news organisations and the shift to the visual in online news presentation (e.g. increased numbers of images, video links and infographics). Following Helen Caple and John Knox's detailed overview of various related terms and genres (e.g. picture essay and photo story), I use 'online news gallery' to denote where a news organisation displays a collection of images online which are organised 'through some underlying principle or purpose' (2012: 215).

While other forms of alternative or social media offer the protesters visibility 'on their own terms' (Dayan, 2013), presence in mainstream media still confers a sense of validation or legitimacy. It is the 'subjectivity of the collective, institutional author' of online news galleries (Caple and Knox, 2012: 214–215) which is of interest here. In the news galleries' presentation of the day 'in pictures' they act as performative manifestations of the most significant moments. In terms of journalistic production, the photographic displays are updated promptly on the day while also serving as an easily accessible but lasting archive of a memorable day, collected together for posterity. Similarly, Anna Roosvall's study of global May Day demonstrations uses three influential news slideshows for their 'visually striking and popular' qualities (2013: 56), from Swedish, US and UK newspapers, noting how the genre or subgenre of slideshows offers a 'blatant' example of how pictures accumulate meaning from each other, with images designed to be viewed together 'in a row' (61).

Multimodal and multilayered visual communication: Notes on methods

The three chosen websites, BBC, *The Guardian* and *Telegraph,* represent popular online UK news sources and a mix of both newspaper and broadcasting organisations (including a left-wing and right-wing broadsheet and a public service broadcaster). In considering how the images individually and collectively accumulate meaning through representational form and mode of address, I follow a multimodal critical analysis approach, exploring layout, image and text, and their interplay in telling the story of the day (Machin and Mayr, 2013). As Caple

and Knox (2012) point out, the sequence, spatial organisation and navigation functions of news galleries all work to affect the narrative and rhetorical potentials, and we can note differences and similarities in each news website by exploring such features. In addition to looking into the technical and presentational affordances of the online galleries, a multimodal approach examines the semiotic choices and how they communicate certain ideas. Admittedly we might only be able to claim 'meaning potential', but images are particularly effective in enacting inclusion and exclusion, and in making visible social relations and patterns of legitimation and marginalisation (Machin, 2013).

Finally, while the media genre under investigation is natively digital, the funeral protest itself has significant physical and material attributes to consider. This is clearly not an online protest in the 'Ding Dong' mode but one which exists in a certain time and place (or places), and for which the participants prepared their own signs and banners to hold up. As recent studies of activism in the digital age have argued, the excitement over the potential for mobilisation and organisation enabled by new communication technologies should not distract attention from the importance of embodied, collective, physical gathering and resistance (Gerbaudo, 2012). Indeed, the material objects used by activists possess potent aesthetic and symbolic power, as recently explored in the V&A Museum's exhibition and book about disobedient objects (Flood and Grindon, 2014). Axel Phillips' analysis of protest materials reminds us that even text-based banners have a visual dimension:

> A text is structured and represented in a specific way; thus, the representation and reception of a text is influenced by its composition, the size of the letters, the space between lines, the type of letters, etc. … Therefore, an examination of visual protest material should take into account *how it is designed*. (Phillips, 2012: 8)

The following section gives an overview of the multimodal but primarily visual communication at each aforementioned level: the organisation and design of the gallery; the selected photographs; and the protest materials depicted within. Although small-scale and exploratory in nature, this study attends to the nature of visibility afforded to the protesters in the news galleries and how their activities are contextualised within the script of the main media event. Due to space limitations, I present a summary of the galleries' features and analysis of selected recurrent images.

Patterns of inclusion and exclusion

The design and associated mode of address differs to some degree in each of the galleries. The BBC's main gallery offers 18 images with captions appearing below. The emphasis here is on the ceremonial splendour and ritualised aspects of the day, picturing the coffin draped in the Union Flag on its procession journey and within the funeral service. Along with the Church of England, monarchy, family and government figures, the military role stands out: the three services are each represented and the coffin travels on a horse-drawn gun carriage. This was indeed a 'ceremonial funeral with full military honours', with military bands accompanying the cortege and a gun salute over the River Thames during the procession (also pictured in the BBC gallery). In addition to the formal and sombre rituals, the BBC pictured crowds, with Union Flags featuring heavily within their clothing or draped over, and a close-up on the chest of one supporter displaying a blue rosette and Maggie badges (this is a cropped image of Gloria Martin, whose full image appears in the *Guardian* gallery and shows her wiping a tear (photographed by Kevin Coombs)).

In the BBC's main gallery there is only a single protest image included, taken by Carl Court. The crowd appears as a sea of bobbing heads, out of focus and at the bottom of the frame. In the top centre of the image, a sign is held up in sharp focus; we see only the arm of a woman (with visible nail varnish and large ring) holding aloft a sign which reads 'I am not happy to pay for Thatcher's funeral', spelled out in capital letters in black marker pen, except for 'not', which appears in red and is larger than the rest of the statement. Additionally there are some smaller words in the white space, seemingly penned as an afterthought or with no effort to make them visible from a distance. I cannot be sure but it looks like 'I'm bloody livid'. Is this another voice in conversation with the main slogan (reminiscent of a graffiti conversation scribbled on a toilet door), or a quieter addition which visually whispers this more anger-filled statement? In fact, the published image has also been cropped to omit some of the crowd and strengthen the composition. In making comparisons across galleries we are able to note the repetition of similar images and to document the cropping practices which further work to omit or emphasise elements in the representational form.

Reflecting its 'public value' principles, the BBC website offers a second gallery titled 'Baroness Thatcher's funeral: Your photos', with nine images sent in by members of the public. In terms of subject matter, they offer a similar focus for the day, but without the access to the 'great and good' within the funeral service. Each image is either credited to the

named amateur photographer or includes a direct quotation adding context or reflection. There is a degree of visual balance, with a group of protesters pictured in one image and then a supporter in the following image. The selected 'Your photos' generally lack the compositional clarity and artistry of the professional photographers' images, with the single protest photograph depicting a crowd from behind, holding up identical banners produced by the Socialist Workers' Party, rather than the more creative examples in other galleries. The caption also plays down the numbers: 'There were some protests but not the large demonstrations some had predicted.' Another photo depicts a military band with the caption: 'Alan Aiken was watching from Ludgate Circus: He said "Slightly down the road from me a group of protesters were chanting and the crowd around me began clapping to drown them out." ' The direct quotation from the citizen-photographer refers to action not depicted within the frame, so that its inclusion simultaneously affords recognition of the off-screen protest while signalling the disapproval of 'the crowd'. This oblique reference to the protest employs the voice of a named citizen to invoke the disapproval of his fellow crowd members and so works to further diminish the unseen protesters.

In *The Guardian*'s 'Picture Desk Live' gallery, the head and deputy head of photography are named in the byline, making this a more visibly curated page of photographs. It is usual practice in slideshows or galleries for the institutional authorship to be placed in the background. Additionally, rather than a gallery format where the reader clicks through photo by photo, here the images are arranged vertically on a single page, with the option to start from the oldest or the latest image. The timeline feature is much more apparent in this organisation and the 'live' updating of the website highlighted, so that a curated and sequential presentation is brought to the fore: 'The *Guardian*'s award-winning picture team brings you the best photo coverage from today's events in central London.' Another key difference is the openness for comments – and the 328 comments collated during the collection period are still accessible. In contrast, the comments are closed on the *Telegraph* and BBC pages.

The Guardian's approach allows for a larger selection of images and is most inclusive in its presentation of mourners, supporters and protesters in one mediated space. There is also a greater emphasis here on the protests across the country, rather than those in London. These are news agency-sourced images (Getty, the Press Association, Reuters) which provide a sense of narrative and even exact times for each image, while contrasting the sombre but

spectacular formalities of the day with the often low-key and low-tech protest materials. This is also a heterogeneous space which includes the more spectacle-driven protests – for example, in the mining town of Goldthorpe, where an effigy of Thatcher is burned in a coffin with a 'Scab' wreath. The pictures of protest beyond Central London provide a critique of the funeral spectacle delivered through the creation of their own counterspectacle: 'Critique through spectacle, not critique versus spectacle' (Deluca and Peeples, 2002: 134).

Figure 10.1 A protester holds up a banner as guardsmen line the route of the funeral procession. Credit: Kevin Coombs/Reuters

Whereas *The Guardian*'s Picture Desk Live integrates the photographs from the funeral procession and service itself; supportive mourners; *and* protesters into a single chronological space, *The Telegraph* provides a separate gallery for the protesters – organisationally enacting a detached mediated public space for the reporting and remembering of the protests. There is a single photograph which connects the two *Telegraph* galleries, appearing in both (Figure 10.1). The image depicts a crowd positioned behind a barrier and a line of Welsh guardsmen in front of them, on the right side of the frame. The foreground is slightly out of focus, with the focal point being a protester's sign which simply reads 'boo!' in large black letters. We can only see a few left-hand fingers of the person holding the sign aloft, its height increased with what look like two bamboo gardening canes as support. In the main *Telegraph* gallery the caption reads 'A protester holds up a banner', while there is slightly more information in the protest gallery caption: 'A protester holds up a banner as guardsmen line the route of the funeral procession.'[3] In the main gallery this image is then countered with the subsequent image which depicts an older man, frontal view, as he squints into the direction of the camera, positioned above the surrounding crowd. His sign, which reads 'But we loved her' in capital letters, appears to be a long piece of white paper with the letters made out of blue tape or plastic, a piece of which is peeling off. He is the central and focal point of the image, with smiling office workers indistinct in the background. In each case the focal length is employed to make the sign appear sharply in the image, with the surrounding crowd cast as bit-players in the scene. It is also worth commenting on the signs themselves. The 'boo!' sign clearly expresses the traditional sound of audience disapproval on an occasion when audible booing would be considered disrespectful. But it also suggests a second meaning – one which is sparked by its positioning in the photo, behind the backs of the guardsmen and with the originator hidden from view, the kind of 'boo!' one shouts in a hiding game. The uncertain-looking crowd and the obliviousness of the

guardsmen add to the humour of this image. This is a wry take on the reticence demanded by the occasion and therefore captures something of the mischief which arguably characterises the protests. As Gemma Edwards argues, 'misbehaviour' can offer individuals a politically and culturally significant way to challenge or destabilise authority (2014: 213–234). The Thatcher supporter's banner also offers a poignant image. The inclusion of 'but' at the start of the phrase 'but we loved her' contains a plaintive retort which would not otherwise be apparent in the expression 'we loved her'. This sad recognition of others' hatred or anger is also seen in the man's grimace and his determination to be visible above the crowds.

Whether paying their respects or the opposite, the signs and banners captured by photographers tended to be homemade and basic in aesthetic style. As already noted, these materials express moral outrage at paying for the funeral and often refer to famous aphorisms (e.g. 'If there's no such thing as society, pay for your own funeral'; 'The lady is not returning'; 'Thatcher the Iron Lady; rest in rust'). Others take their representative claims more seriously, such as the two young women with scarfs over their faces holding up a fraying sheet which reads: 'I'm here for the people she killed through poverty, despair, policy and war.' This final image appears in the *Telegraph* protest gallery and reflects a more earnest yet vague claim to political expression, the two women posing for the camera but with their faces partly obscured.

Concluding remarks

As discussed above, the varying patterns of inclusion and exclusion – the visibility of the protest within the online news galleries, spatial organisations of the websites where the politically contentious expressions of the protesters are separated or sidelined – provide a snapshot of mainstream media coverage on the day. The *Telegraph* website presents an entire gallery dedicated to the protests, but its separation from the *Hello* magazine-style focus on the 'great and good' attending the funeral organisationally and symbolically removes the dissenting politics from the event. The BBC presents its notion of the public through a selection of amateur images, 'Your photos', while concentrating on the military splendour on display. Perhaps not surprisingly given its traditional left-wing inclinations, it is the *Guardian* gallery which presents a heterogeneous collection in a shared mediated space. Here we can most clearly contrast the ceremonial spectacle with the counterspectacle of dissent and the varied efforts to gain visibility. In creating and holding aloft their signs with DIY aesthetics

and ironic puns, the protesters aimed to disrupt not the procession itself but the haughty sense of authority which pronounced that this was the time for national mourning and not for political demonstrations. Locating their protests at the site of the funeral potentially attracts ire, but the embodied and situated character of the protests is as vital to this mode of political expression as the media-friendly stylistic choices of visual activism. To politicise the ceremonial event was to claim the right to a form of political participation that not only looked back in anger but also prompted current political leaders to contemplate how the consequences of their policies might be seen in the future.

The Thatcher funeral protests are arguably unique and the broader significations remain unclear. But despite their momentary nature, the protests at least represent a challenge to a state-led definition of the event and its political nature. At both the site of the funeral procession and in local communities, protesters expressed a resistance and brought 'the political' to the event – not the political talk of political leaders but the politics which says we are legitimate social actors who deserve to be *seen* and heard.

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Endnotes

1. How Ted Heath, among others, reportedly referred to Thatcher. Vernon Bogdanor notes that Conservative Central Office actually referred to her as 'that bloody woman', initialling papers for her with TBW: she thought it was the title of a TV station and did not realise it referred to her (Bogdanor, 2012).

2. The links to the slideshows are as follows:
The Telegraph, which had both a general 'In Pictures' page with 20 photographs: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/picturegalleries/10001112/In-pictures-Margaret-Thatchers-funeral.html and a protest-specific slideshow with 14 images: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/picturegalleries/10000692/Protests-during-the-funeral-of-Baroness-Thatcher.html. No comments on either page.
The BBC News website had an 'In Pictures' page with 18 photos: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/in-pictures-22179697 and a 'Your Pictures' page with 9 photos: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-22187142. The 'Your Pictures' page had captions written by the editorial team, or quotations from the photographer indicated with quote marks.
The Guardian had a 'picture desk live' feature with 73 pictures and comments enabled: http://www.theguardian.com/news/2013/apr/17/picture-desk-live-the-best-pictures-from-lady-thatcher-s-funeral.
I also surveyed the *Mail Online* but due to lack of space it is omitted from the discussion. The *Mail Online* has 37 images for the funeral itself in a picture story, with a separate page on the protests including 33 photos, two images from Facebook and two videos.

3. The photograph also appears in the *Guardian* gallery and is credited to Kevin Coombs. The caption here is: 'A protester holds up a very succinct banner as guardsmen line the route of the funeral procession.'