

## Comparing Two Memory Organizations, The “Fight” for Survival: Museum of Barricades in Riga, Latvia & The Irish Hunger Memorial in New York City

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In Greek mythology the goddess Mnemosyne is the goddess of memory. Memory is the origin of history, history the product of memory. Memory belongs to the individual. It is something that is personal, distinct, and subjective.<sup>1</sup> History belongs to society, not the individual, it is public not private. History does not die with individuals because it exists in the archives, museums, and books. National identity, either in Latvia or Ireland, or in any country, is part of a cultural identity and heritage. For these things to carry on through time there must be two things that carry them, ceremony and an audience.

Managing memories is a part of both these living museums and memorials. Michelle Bachelot, the outgoing (former President of Chile), said of a similar type of an organization/museum, “The Museum of Memory & Human Rights” in Santiago, that “only injuries thoroughly cleaned can heal.”<sup>2</sup> Memory organizations are created, usually, from a tragic event that people need to be educated about, remember, grieve about, think

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<sup>1</sup>Anne Eriksen, “Memory, History, and National Identity,” *Ethnologia Europaea, Journal of European Ethnology*, 27:2 (1997), p 129-130.

<sup>2</sup>Lucy Conger, “The Politics of Memory Museums: The Art of Darkness, In Latin America, honoring victims of the dirty wars can be a political act,” *The Daily Beast, Newsweek*, Last modified March 31, 2010, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2010/03/31/the-art-of-darkness.html>.

about, have a sense of belonging to, or experience what it must be like to live through a particular event or ritual.

The two memory organizations I will be examining will be the Museum of Barricades in Riga, Latvia and the Irish Hunger Memorial in Lower Manhattan. Both of these organizations are centered recalling an event that provokes a focus on national identity and both have a common thread of death and murder. A political slant is heavily weighed on both memory organizations by opposing governing and aggressor countries. This experience and ritual of going to each one of these places of memory can bring about a different experience of memory or a whole new feeling of learning what it might of felt like to experience these events. People who are from Ireland and Latvia that go to their respective memory organization in their own country might have a different experience of history or identity especially if their relatives or ancestors had gone through these events firsthand. This condition of attendance by this particular audience at their respective cultural and national memory organization would be “given identity” through the relationship to memory via knowledge of the past.<sup>3</sup>

The challenges of both of these organizations are posed through questions I would like to ask are; How are they surviving? How do they stay visible? How they stay viable? What is their experience like? I will compare their similarities and their differences, and also look at the “why” they exist through their particular historical events.

### Experience of the Barricades

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<sup>3</sup> Eriksen, 132.

The Museum of Barricades is small museum on the second floor of building on a very quiet street in the Old Town section of Riga that has minimal signage and virtually no marketing. The feeling of walking up steep marble steps to a small, two-room museum has a little of an eerie and creepy feeling when you venture in from the cobble stoned street outside. The museum is mainly one big room with simulations of the events that took place in Riga in January 1991.<sup>4</sup> There are recreations of a street scene in Riga with regular Latvian citizen mannequins posed around a makeshift fire pit with barbed wire, with a vehicle (a van), concrete blocks, and metal girders to form a barricade. There is a mannequin of a Russian soldier with a machine gun placed near by the Latvians. Photos of the casualties of this event have their photographs on a wall with a small display with examples of clothing they wore. There are some videos playing of newscast from time of the events in Riga, the newscasts were from Western Europe when it was reported what was taking place in Riga and the rest of the Baltics at that time. The whole walkthrough of the museum can be done in about 15 minutes if you take your time. The special feeling and fact about this location is that the actual museum building and space was used during the time of the Barricades for warm and safety. The Museum was actually part of the event.

### Barricades User

I would say a user of this museum would gain some insight into what happened during this event, since it is possible that no one remembers the actual event especially if they are not from Latvia or the Baltics. A user not having prior knowledge of these

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<sup>4</sup>“Museum of Barricades 1991, about us” Barikades.lv. accessed May 2, 2012.  
<http://www.barikades.lv/en/Museum/>?

events could be swayed into seeing what it was like to live on the street for two weeks during the Barricades. A personal connection to ordinary people giving their whole time and possible life for the independence of their country is a powerful thing. This thing is the impact of the connection I experienced while there. It makes you think out of your comfort zone. Would you defend your nationality though an event or ceremony like this? During the time leading up to the Barricades, the actual event, and the immediate time following the event could be misplaced in the minds of Western European Museum of Barricades patrons and tourists from the Western Hemisphere. I myself did not know of the Barricades event until I was in Riga. It was possible that in 1991, in the United States, I maybe saw a fast moving news clip of what was happening in the Baltics but failed to register it some seventeen years later while in Riga.

Currently, Eastern Europe is currently in the midst of a huge recession that has gripped the Baltic Countries of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. *The Guardian*, in an article from 2011, entitled “End of the USSR: Visualizing how the former Soviet Countries are doing 20 years on,” states that each Baltic country has lost between 10%-15% of their populations. So what does this mean for a small museum in the Old Town section in the Capital of Latvia, Riga?

### History of “Why” the Barricades Museum Exists

Leading up to the events of the Barricades, the Baltic countries had been under Soviet rule since 1944. In Latvia, the Capital of Riga has a strong Russian population to this day. There is a neighborhood in Riga called the Moscow Suburb, Maskavas Forštate, still comprised of a mainly Russian population who speaks Russian and many businesses

and advertisements are still in Cyrillic. When the Soviets took control of the Baltics, Stalin wanted many Russians to move into the Baltics to “Russify” each country, mainly the capital cities and larger industrial areas.<sup>5</sup> Stalin even commissioned a building that resembles the seven sisters buildings in Moscow, the academy of science building in the Moscow Suburb, a.k.a., Stalin’s Birthday Cake. Having a museum that is so opposed to Russian rule with an event that directly opposes 30% of the population, that is a big number of the population to be cut out of the potential patron pool since the events directly opposed the Russian perspective and political stance of the Soviets. This event that is named after the museum in Old Town Riga is called the Barricades Museum. The Barricades was an event that took place mainly over the course of the month of January 1991. The exact dates are cited on the Museum website (<http://www.barikades.lv>) as January 13-27, 1991. Latvia was declaring their independence from the Soviet Union. With Gorbachev looking to restructure the Soviet Union out of its economic mess of the 1980’s, the Baltics saw an opportunity in shifting stances on socialism and political democratization within the Soviet party.<sup>6</sup> The Latvian government refused many referendums by the Soviet for control of political freedoms. Many Latvians protested and formed a group called the Latvian Popular Front.<sup>7</sup> In late 1990, when the Soviet regime sent in troops to control the political dissent and strike fear into the masses of Latvian citizens with bombings for scare tactic, the Popular Front of Latvia had decided that after

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<sup>5</sup>Neil Melvin, *Russians Beyond Russia: The Politics of National Identity* (London: Chatham House Papers: 1995), 53.

<sup>6</sup> Jerry F. Hough, “Gorbachev’s Plan for the Republics,” *Chicago Tribune*, (Chicago, IL), January 14, 1991.

<sup>7</sup> “Adoption of the Declaration of Independence, the Barricades (1990-1991)” Ministry of Defense/Republic of Latvia.gov.

[http://www.mod.gov.lv/en/Ministrija/Vesture/Barikades\\_1991.aspx](http://www.mod.gov.lv/en/Ministrija/Vesture/Barikades_1991.aspx)

the Soviets had sent in their special fighting unit, OMON (Otryad Mobilinii Osobogo Naznacheniya, special purpose mobile unit) they needed to take action. This was their time to defend the memory of their country, their heritage, their being, their legacy, their communications means, and their country. The Popular Front of Latvia called for citizens of Latvia to protect government buildings, communication centers, and churches. With the developments of Perestroika and Glasnost from the Gorbachev administration, the Latvians, as well as the whole of the Baltics saw an opening in the relations and wanted to make their move into their own government rule. Massive demonstrations in the capital city of Riga by thousands of Latvians from all across Latvia had been happening for the last six months. The force behind organizing the demonstrations and the eventual barricades was the Popular Front of Latvia. After months of negotiating stood at a stand still with Latvians signing petitions against a new treaty proposed by the Soviets. The Soviets called the situation in December of 1990 a state of emergency and would retaliate if there was more civil disobedience. The Soviets made no hiding of calling in more OMON units and KGB troops to the capital of Riga. This escalation of military force vaulted the Popular Front of Latvia into action to call for the “Barricades.” This led to over fifteen thousand Latvians to come to Riga and other possible suspected targets, such as the towns of Liepaja and Kuldiga, with heavy farm equipment such as tractors, dump trucks, pay loaders, municipal refuse trucks, concrete barriers and blocks, bales of hay, sand bags, and steel I-beams to create a ring of solitude around important government buildings and telecommunication centers like the TV tower on the Daugava River across from Old Town. The Latvians were ready to give their lives for the independence of Latvia. People actually stayed in and around the city centre for the two

weeks of the Barricades. They had makeshift camps on the streets warmed by the fires, wives and mothers would bring hot tea and meals.<sup>8</sup>

### Experience of the Irish Hunger Memorial

In lower Manhattan, at the end of Vesey Street and bounded easterly by North End Ave sits the Irish Hunger Memorial. This Memory Organization has no admission cost and is free to the public. It is a very unique structure that you can walk under, on top of, and read all the tributes to worldwide hunger, like in Somolia, and information on educating the public on the subject of famine, mainly the “An Gorta Mor,” the Great Hunger.

The Irish Hunger Memorial was established in March, 2000, under the leadership of Governor George E. Pataki, along with James F. Gill, chairman of the Hugh L. Carey Battery Park City Authority (BPCA), and Timothy S. Carey, BPCA President and CEO, the Authority commissioned the design of "a contemplative space, devoted to raising public awareness of the events that led to the Great Irish Hunger and Migration of 1845-1852." The Memorial was intended to serve also as a catalyst for addressing current issues of world hunger. This project is cared for and maintained by the Battery Park City Authority and the Irish Hunger Memorial Fund. The overall cost was \$5 million dollars to create, design, and install.<sup>9</sup>

### Irish Hunger Memorial User

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<sup>8</sup> “Adoption of the Declaration of Independence, the Barricades (1990-1991)” Ministry of Defense/Republic of Latvia.gov. accessed April 23, 2012, [http://www.mod.gov.lv/en/Ministrija/Vesture/Barikades\\_1991.aspx](http://www.mod.gov.lv/en/Ministrija/Vesture/Barikades_1991.aspx)

<sup>9</sup> “Memorials, Irish Hunger Memorial” Battery Park City.org. assessed April 23, 2012, [http://www.batteryparkcity.org/page/page4\\_6.html](http://www.batteryparkcity.org/page/page4_6.html)

This memorial is an open-air structure with no roof so you are always outside in the elements. Since there is no attendant or turnstile at the Memorial, there is no way to determine an accurate attendance count daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly. Walking down the Hudson River embankment and discovering this mixture of architectural art and memorial weaved together is a very unique experience. The architect, Brian Tolle, did not want this memorial not to become “mute, by not having enough information about the event it commemorates.”<sup>10</sup> So he added all the wrap-around text along the base of the structure. There is also a speaker system that plays spoken word audio of poems and information about famines and famine related Ireland when you walk through the western portal of the Memorial. By using media and technology for this memorial, the user can get a blending of contemporary messages with a historical sense. The relationship of being outside and connecting to its natural terrain of this half-acre of an actual stone farmhouse cottage from Attymass, County Mayo and sloped, fallow field gives the user a sense of being in Ireland in the same exact size of land people lived on during the Famine. The ability to view the structure from all sides, a 360-degree view of all the writings and phrases along the base of the structure can be inspiring enough. The Memorial also brings the user closer to the actual feeling of being present in a potato field in Ireland because all of the plant, grass, flowers, stones, dirt are from Ireland. Someone visiting the Memorial from Ireland would have a special connection to this feature since it also represents a celebration of Ireland and the placement of the structure over looking

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<sup>10</sup> Roberta Smith, “Critic’s Notebook; A Memorial Remembers,” *The New York Times* (New York, NY), July 16, 2002.



Lower Manhattan Bay and the route many Irish immigrants encountered on their inaugural journey into New York City and America.

### History of “Why” the Irish Hunger Memorial Exists

This memorial remembers the Irish Famine brought on by a potato blight that caused countrywide famine, death, and eventual emigration by millions of Irish. Over 1 million people died in this famine, coupled with political and economic factors leading to over one fourth of the population of Ireland dying or immigrating to another country. Because of the hard economic times of mid 19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland, the Irish Poor Law Act of 1838 was established by the ruling British government to assist with poverty, taxation, and emigration.<sup>11</sup> The tenant-landlord relationship during these years of 1838-1852 had added to the dependency on the potato as the main food source for many families.<sup>12</sup> If a landowner had many acres of property, the government would section the land into half acres for families to live and grow crops. These crops on this half-acre were mainly potato fields. This system also allowed for taxation, an increase in the tax base of all these families would alleviate some economic burden on the country and the crops, the ones that would not be consumed by the tenant-families would be payment to the landowner that he could sell for profit. With so many families using potato as their base crop, when the blight first affected the potato crops, the famine had an immediate impact on the culture of Ireland at that point in 1845. The lack of assistance by the English government to provide adequate food to starving Irish people further increased the death

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<sup>11</sup> Christine Kinealy, *The Great Irish Famine; Impact, Ideology, and Rebellion (British History in Perspective)* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 20,31.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 189-90.

toll by not acting fast enough or not acting at all. They provided cornmeal that was not processed correctly, so when it was prepared it irritated the bowels of many famine stricken people leading to dysentery and then eventually to death. Soup kitchens were established, but the British government-run soup kitchens made “government soup” which had 12 pounds of beef for every 100 gallons of water and the same unprocessed corn that made people ill. On the opposite side of the government-run soup kitchen were the Quaker soup kitchens. The Christian based Quakers made a more nutrient-rich soup with 60-70 pounds of beef for every 100 gallons of water.<sup>13</sup> As the famine continued year after year, the British government did not take the necessary steps to rectify the problem. There were reports of food aid being held in port towns and cities in Ireland and not being distributed to feed families. There were other reports of monetary aid not being accepted by the Queen because the donations sent in from other countries was a much greater amount than what the Queen herself had donated, so she did not want to be shown up or appear weak.<sup>14</sup> The emigration route was a way for the British government to eradicate more Irish citizens. These citizens were totally insolvent, the British government gave these landowners money to force emigration on them. To add insult to injury, these landowners still harvested “cash crops” such as barley to export to sell on the open market as Free Trade was coming into its own in the world market at the time.<sup>15</sup> The British government had suggested that if the Irish could not sustain themselves or survive on they way they lived then only the fittest shall survive in a Free Trade market.

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<sup>13</sup> Roberta Smith, “Critic’s Notebook; A Memorial Remembers,” *The New York Times* (New York, NY), July 16, 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Cormac O Grada. *The Great Irish Famine*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 50.

<sup>15</sup> Kinealy, 101.

So it was the Irish to blame if you asked the English, their way of life, their culture was the downfall and root cause of the Irish famine of 1846-1852. So what did this mean for the culture or memory of culture for the immigrated Irish in America or England? To speak Gaelic was pointless, since the Irish were the only ones using this language when they reached London, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Canada. They needed to speak English to get along and survive. Part of their culture was also dying a slow miserable death.

### The Differences

The main difference between these two memory organizations is the time line of establishing the physical space and the dates of the actual event of “memory” event. The Irish Hunger Memorial was established (opened) in 2002. The actual dates of the Irish Famine and Migration was 1845-1852. That is a difference of 157 years. The Museum of Barricades event of memory happened in January of 1991. The Museum also opened in 2002. That is only a difference of 10 years. For a memory organization to stay visible after a time span of 157 years can be challenging, but being in a highly trafficked urban setting will get people to see and experience this memorial in terms of location alone. The real estate it sits on is part of the Battery Park City Authority. The costs per square foot of this particular half acre of real estate is \$1042.00, as reported by Miller Samuels 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter Manhattan Real Estate Assessment Report.<sup>16</sup> The plot it sits on is 172ft x 96ft. This would value this piece of land at just over \$17 million, including air rights. This is a state run agency that has its own conservancy, the Battery Parks City Conservancy. It is a non-profit that accepts many donations from corporate and private

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<sup>16</sup> Miller Samuels, Inc. Real Estate Appraisers & Consultants assessed April 30, 2012, <http://aggregate-data.millersamuel.com/>.

sectors, as well as individual donations. The major part of the Authority's operating revenue comes from land leases to major developers, like Brookfield Properties, who have developed some of the residential high-rise condos with commercial space on the ground floors. The purpose of the mission of the Authority and Conservancy is to provide park, commercial, residential, and retail space in this 92-acre site. This park is separate from New York City Parks. The Memorial is cared for by park rangers and staff gardeners out of the Conservancy budget.<sup>17</sup> The Irish Hunger Memorial Foundation is a separate fund set for the care of the structure in perpetuity, as described on the brochure one can get at the Memorial itself. The Barricades Museum is housed in a building in the Old Town section of Riga with the portal of the stone building dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. There is nothing that says open and park-like about this building. The building is owned by the Association of the Participants of the Barricades of 1991. This Association is headed by people who were actually involved in the Barricades (police officers, politicians, city officials,) events in January 1991. Considering the Soviets were still in power in 1991, I did not get an answer from the Museum concerning the current assessed value of the building at 3 Kramu Street, nor the value of the property in 1991 dollars, lats, or rubles. I think I can safely say that property is not worth \$17 million in Riga, Latvia 2012, due to the economic and financial strife happening in the Baltics currently.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Mrs. Sidney Druckman, Director of Special Projects for Battery Park City Authority, interview with author, May 8, 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Zane Supulniece (former employee Museum of Barricades), email to author, May 6, 2012.

To stay visible in this day of competition with so many things competing for your dollar and attention, both Memory Organizations have websites. Both have different media available on their websites. The Irish Hunger Memorial has different tracks of audio of Irish poetry. The Barricades website has a newer link to a flash site that has graphics of fires burning of locations during the Barricades. If you click on the Barricade fires it opens up to video that you can watch of that location with facts that detail what happened at that site in 1991. Both websites give information on where you can find each memory institution. The user interface and graphics of the Barricades websites are much more appealing and current than the website for the Irish Hunger Memorial. The Memorial has its own website which is just the exact information and layout of the brochure you can get at the site itself. The link through the main page of the Battery City Park Authority has the feel of any municipal organizational site, basic text and photos with information that is to the point. The Barricades websites have a feel of a well-produced site with photos, information detailing the events, and “clickable” graphics that detail what happened when and where at points on the map or karte heading. The Memorial/Battery Park website might be more straight information so I would call it more user friendly but the Barricades websites are definitely more aesthetically pleasing and creative.

What can these memory events spaces do to keep things appealing commemoratively speaking? What events can be marketed to keep the “word” out on the streets of the atrocities of famine and hunger and dirty wars against small, non-aggressive countries? For the Museum of Barricades, my friend, Zane, and former employee of the Museum, states on her website, that the Barricades are commemorated each year with

events that re-create at certain points in the city where the barricades were erected with the fires that kept people warm on those January nights in 1991. For the anniversaries of the Barricades each year, the people of Riga gather mainly at places for the transfer of information; the television tower on the west side of the Daugava River, certain radio towers, the International Telephone Exchange Building, and the Supreme Council building. There are also ceremonies where the seven victims were killed. They place flowers and wreaths at the sites of their death. Also, at the largest Cathedral in Riga, the Riga Dome, there is a free Commemorative Service and Concert to honor the anniversary of the Barricades.<sup>19</sup> The Irish Hunger Memorial does not hold any special events or anniversary ceremonies or market any aspect of the Memorial. They have had requests to use the structure as a stage for dance, a one-man play, and musicians. These requests are always directed to use the public walkway plaza (so they are not deemed as official events for the Memorial) directly to the west of the Memorial, as told to me by Mrs. Sidney Druckman, who works for the Battery City Park Authority and was on the Steering Committee that was originally in charge of developing the original idea for the Irish Hunger Memorial.

A major difference in reporting these two events to the world were the mediums they used. Unlike the propaganda of the Soviets, the Latvians made sure these events were recorded by national and foreign press. The events in the capital of Lithuania, Vilnius, on January 13, at their TV tower, with the killing of thirteen unarmed civilians, spawned stress and uncertainty at the Barricades in Riga. But this also provided much

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<sup>19</sup> Supulniece, Zane. "Commemorative events of Barricades of 1991 in Riga" *Zanne*. last modified January 12, 2012. <http://www.zanne.lv>.

needed attention from the rest of Western Europe and the world to take note of what was happening in the Baltics. By the end of the Barricades episodes on January 27, with the OMON trying to establish control of Riga, seven people were dead and four bombs were detonated trying to destroy bridges in and around Riga. These events left a very powerful memory and reminder of what price it took to fight for the independent survival and political freedom of Latvia. The Barricades were left in place until the autumn of 1992, reinforcing for over the next year of daily life in Riga the battle for independence. These events were shown all over the world via TV broadcast.<sup>20</sup> During the 1840's and 1850's, it could take many months to inform other countries of what was happening in Ireland depending who wanted what message to go where. The mediums were different but the sequestering of facts were not different in reporting and recording the truth in both events.

#### SIMILARITIES to COMPARE

The similarities develop when you start to examine exactly what these organizations are. Can you really call them organizations? Do they have members? Well, getting into the similarities, the reveal is both have been spawned by political events and events that still resonate with controversy. Both organizations have a physical place to go and experience, reflect, and learn. Both have an opposition to another aggressor country and government. The Barricades Museum's is the Soviet Union, while the Irish Hunger Memorial's aggressor county is Britain.

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<sup>20</sup> "Adoption of the Declaration of Independence, the Barricades (1990-1991)" Ministry of Defense/Republic of Latvia.gov.

[http://www.mod.gov.lv/en/Ministrija/Vesture/Barikades\\_1991.aspx](http://www.mod.gov.lv/en/Ministrija/Vesture/Barikades_1991.aspx)

In terms of sustainability, the Museum of Barricades is a nationally recognized and accredited museum, which as of this year, qualifies for financial support of the National Museum collection of Latvia. This funding from the government is a new development and 2012 will be the first year of funding from the Ministry of Culture. This funding was awarded to four other institutions, five total. The Barricades Museum was awarded a split of 50000.00 LVL (lats). Their cut was 11434.00, equivalent to \$21347.35. The Museum stated they intend to use this money for the improvement of the infrastructure and their exhibitions supplement. The founder of the Museum, Renars Zalais, is the president of the foundation called "Foundation of Participants of Barricades of 1991." He has also established a fund, like the Irish Hunger Memorial, which also takes in donations from the private sector, from individuals and from corporations. The fund was originally set up to assist families that had a family member killed during the times of the Barricades. The Barricades Foundation was associated in 1995 by men who participated in the Barricades.<sup>21</sup> The Irish Hunger Memorial is also supported by government funds since it is run by a state agency, the Battery City Park Authority.

Both memory organizations have been opened for 10 years. But as stated earlier, the time span between event and creation is vastly different.

The concept of remembering the Irish Famine has been established in other cities and countries. The event occurred in Ireland, but the famine was so traumatic worldwide that it spurred the creation of memorials in the country of eventual emigration for over a

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<sup>21</sup> Ieva Eglīte, 1991.gada barikāžu muzeja ekspozīcijas administrator, email to author, May 7, 2012.



million Irish citizens. There are also Irish monuments for the famine in other countries and cities, like Dublin, Philadelphia, Buffalo, and Sydney.

The Museum of Barricades resides in its home country of record, Latvia. The space that is now a museum was actually used during the Barricades in 1991 as a refuge space for warmth, rest and recharging with warm drinks like tea. The Barricades happened in Riga, the site of the Museum. This is a difference that I would like to call a similarity because of the tribute of Occupations Museums of the Baltics in Lithuania and Estonia that are records and archives of the past histories of invasions by the Nazi's and the Soviets. So having an account of the Barricades in other countries is also a similarity of the two organizations.

Both memory organizations have been organized and formed on the premise of horrific acts, one commencing by man, and one by nature. The length of each of these events varied, one lasted for seven years, and the other lasted for fifteen days, but the ensuing time after has produced a very indelible memory of these highly charged political and cultural events. The events were so memorable that these tributes to their experiences have been created. It is also worth mentioning that one of the major places of relocation for the emigrating Irish was New York City, and this is the first and only memorial to the Famine. The emotional toll it took on the Irish culture and diaspora was still a factor in creating a memorial 147 years after the famine. The Memorial even takes in the whole of Ireland, all counties represented in the field with a stone carved with the county name, even the six Northern Ireland counties. This speaks to the living Irish diaspora when visiting the Memorial that even during the famine, after, and currently, the Irish had to "forfeit" their national identity and speak English, the Memorial recognizes

Ireland as a whole being, even the British controlled North as part of Ireland and the national culture. “The past is almost always constituted and reconstituted by our present historical consciousness.”<sup>22</sup>

When visiting a memory organization that is tied to national identity and political consequences of the event it is hard not to put yourself as the place holder of the experience. Hope, forlornness, and social collective will be feelings associated with these memories and events. The ritual of commemoration will include both the user and the participants, living and dead, of the event in remembrance. This society will exist between user and participant with a “feeling of belonging and giving of national identity, and roots.” This is history. If history takes a leave of memory, it turns cold and will be dead, and then the wounds cannot heal. The cleaning of the wound is the establishment of the memory organization.<sup>23</sup>

Wounds can heal by recognizing certain events and atrocities. People and governments can use death as a commodity in the museum and memory organization business to educate and not make the same mistake again. A few examples are the Holocaust museums throughout Europe, the concentration camps, an Apartheid Museum in South Africa, the 9/11 Museum in New York City, and other soon to open “human rights museums” in Guatemala, Argentina, and Mexico.

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<sup>22</sup> Kearney, Richard. “Memory and Forgetting in Irish Culture.” in *Irish Representations of Past and Present*, edited by Hedda Friberg, Irene Gilsendan Nordin, and Lene Yding Pedersen, 2-20. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007, 9.

<sup>23</sup> Eriksen, 135, 137.

“Memory is a social construction.” Both these memory organizations are reconstructing these events based on “culture and tradition.” Remembering these events is a result of a “social process through interaction and dialogue among people.” Both of these memory organizations show context of their events through storytelling of text and information, video, audio, ephemera, and objects. These places have re-established the memory with a “claim of the past state of affairs by means of a framework of shared cultural understanding.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Eriksen, 129-132.

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