

30 YEARS AFTER THE BARRICADES OF JANUARY 1991: MEDIA EVENT FOR THE TRANSFER OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND KNOWLEDGE OF HISTORY

Laura Ardava-Āboliņa

University of Latvia

ABSTRACT

In the middle of pandemic, January 2021 marked the 30th anniversary of the Barricades of January 1991. Media events have the function of transmitting social memory and teaching history to an audience of children, young people, and people who do not have these memories in their personal experience. Sociologist John Thompson introduced the concept of 'mediated historicity' almost two decades ago. He explained that most individuals in Western societies gained their knowledge on 20th century history primarily from media products (Thompson, 2004).

The study analyzes the discourses of remembrance of the Barricades in the most popular media in Latvia: "Latvian Television", www.delfi.lv, Channel TV, www.tvnet.lv, "Latvian Radio 1" (Media Literacy of the Population of Latvia: Quantitative Research, 2020), paying particular attention to the content of the remembrance (exhibitions, concert programs, memories, documentaries, photo competitions for young people, book openings, etc.).

The theoretical basis of the research is formed by the theoretical approaches of media event and mediated historicity. Media messages was analyzed with the discourse historical method by Ruth Wodak. The research results confirm the impact of the current epidemiological situation on the sense of the commemoration forms and the emotions of the participants, new educational dimension and orientation towards the past.

Keywords: *Barricades of January 1991, commemoration, media, media event, mediated historicity pandemic*

Introduction

Past three decades represent sufficient distance in time so that an academic view of events is possible; at the same time, as these events are still recent enough individual memories are accessible, in terms of experience, collective memory and sense of identity, and these are exchanged within a community of memories. Moreover, the time of the pandemic adds

an additional emotional dimension to this anniversary. As momentous historical events recede ever further into the past they often lose their enduring presence in individual thought, in communication with other involved individuals and the public in general. The media, on the occasion of significant anniversaries provide an impetus for both remembering the past and reassessing it.

Barricades of January 1991 in history and social memory of Latvia have not only the significance of a historical turning point, but also a special emotional tone.

Collective memory of the period of the Third Awakening and, in particular, of the Barricades of January 1991, greatly contributes to constituting a positive identity, as this historical period was characterised by great national self-sacrifice and heroism. The historian Daina Bleiere with colleagues considers the January Barricades to be the highest point of confrontation with the opponents of independence. Soviet military units attacked the Television Tower in Vilnius the night of January 12/13th seeking in this way to repress the independence movement in Lithuania, killing 14 individuals and injuring a further 110 civilians. They continue explaining that, as soon as the news of this attack reached Riga, Dainis Īvāns, the first leader of the Popular Front of Latvia (PFL) called upon the residents of Riga, to protect strategically important installations. On January 13th approximately 500 000 persons took to the streets of Riga to protest violence which had taken place in Lithuania. Streets leading to key installations were barricaded by heavy goods vehicles and by heavy farming machinery. Individuals came from all over Latvia to man the barricades. The barricades in Riga were manned until January 27th. Members of the OMON unit often clashed with the defenders. The most aggressive attack took place on January 20th when this unit took the building of the Ministry for the Interior by assault. A total of six lives were lost during the period of the barricades (Bleiere et al., 2005). Historian Talavs Jundzis explains, that non-violent resistance was the only real force that Latvia was able to use against the political, economic and military power of the USSR. At that time, Latvia was not proud of theoretical knowledge in the field of non-violent resistance, however, the name of Mahatma Gandhi and the movement of non-violent resistance led by him was well known from the books (Jundzis, 2008). In the context of regaining Latvia's independence, the parallels with Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent resistance in the struggle for India's independence in the first half of 20th century are drawn frequently both in media and academic environments thus emphasizing the importance and global scale of the events in Latvia and in the Baltics.

When history is told through media events, media become as history teachers. Sociologist John B. Thompson defined mediated historicity almost

three decades ago. Mediated historicity means that people's sense of the past become increasingly dependent on an reservoir of mediated symbolic forms; most individuals in Western societies have derived their sense of the major events of the 20th century primarily from books, newspapers, films and television programmes (Thompson, 2004).

At its core, research is based on the classical approach to media event analysis by the theoreticians Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, considered to be a fundamental framework in media and communications research. It was developed in the 1970s, seeking to explain the effect of television. Mediation practices for the Olympic Games, the funeral of US President John Kennedy, the wedding of UK Prince Charles and Lady Diana, the funerals of Princess Diana and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, and other significant events were analysed based on this approach (Dayan & Katz, 1995). D. Dayan and E. Katz define media events as breaks in routine that interrupt the normal broadcasting flow and lives of the audience, are broadcast live, are organized outside of the media, and are planned in advance. They describe media events as the 'high holidays' of the mass communications, contrasting them with the day-to-day routine of media work. Theoreticians write that the audience perceives these events as invitations, almost as direct orders to interrupt the daily routine, engaging in the 'holiday' experience. Classical theory can be applied to researching media event in the press or in textual digital media.

The classical analysis of media events focuses on three participants. Organizers of the event who bring its elements together and propose its historicity; the broadcasters who re-produce the event by recombining its elements; and the audiences, on the spot and at home, who take the event to heart. The investment of time and resources of each element determines the scale of the media event (Dayan & Katz, 1995). Media events can be classified into three dimensions or scripts: conquest, contest, and coronation. Conquest includes live broadcasting of "giant leaps for mankind". These are rare events, great achievements like first man on the Moon. Contests are linked to sports and politics like Olympics or presidential debates. Coronations are parades (funerals, remembrances), they are all ceremony (Dayan & Katz, 1995). All anniversaries correspond to the coronation dimension, as ritualized remembrance and expression of honor are at the heart of the event.

Methodology

30th anniversary discourse was analysed using discourse-historical method by Ruth Wodak. 44 media messages dedicated to the 30th Anniversary of Barricades from January 2021 was analysed in the most

popular media in Latvia at that time: LTV1, Delfi.lv, TV3, TVNet.lv, 1st Baltic Channel, LTV7, LR1 (Media Literacy of the Population of Latvia: Quantitative Research, 2020).

Discourse–historical method is interdisciplinary, problem-oriented, allows combining different theories and methods. During the research process the study is constantly moving between theory and empirical data. Historical context is taken into account when interpreting texts and discourses. The usefulness of the results is an important goal of the method; they must be accessible and usable and communicated to the society (Wodak & Reisigl, 2009). Methods main advantage is its ability to bring researcher close to the results, as the process of data interpretation is continuous, from data acquisition to the formulation of conclusions in written form.

Results

The 30th anniversary of the barricades is marked by the time of the pandemic. This could be called the victory of mediated forms. The format of the commemorative events in the context of this year was characterized by virtual or outdoor nature.

The Minister of Justice Jānis Bordāns explained at the time that *“taking care of public health and observing epidemiological safety measures, we had to change our initial intentions on how the January 1991 barricades commemoration events would be organized. However, no one had cancelled the opportunity to remember, tell and be aware of what a great importance have the events of 1991 barricades in the history of our country. These events must not be forgotten and must be passed on to future generations as an integral part of a Latvian’s identity. Therefore, this year, I invite individually everyone to proudly pay homage to the memory of our people’s heroes, because our main objective is to remember their investment in the recovery of Latvian state independence”* (Delfi.lv, 2021b). Only flowers were allowed to be laid on Bastion Hill in front of the memorial stones of the fallen. On the contrary, the range of virtual and outdoor events was very wide and full with content. For example, a scientific on-line conference “X-Hour. Barricades are 30”, a virtual exhibition “Fifty unique photo documents” took place on the barricades commemoration days, in turn, outside of the capital an outdoor installation “Memories and Honour” was exhibited in the historical Dobeles Market Square, while a musical sound and light performance “Barricades are 30” took place in Kocēni Municipality after dusk, as well as a museobus dedicated to the remembrance of barricades visited Latvian regions. Public television LTV1 broadcast the concert performance “Reconstruction of the feelings of 1991 barricades” and the concert story “Burn, my fire”, as well as the ecumenical worship from the Dome so important in the annual

commemoration ritual, on the days of remembrance of barricades. Without participants, with only a pastor and two television reporters present.

In the context of media event theory, there has been a debate for many decades as to whether the mediated forms of events are equivalent, less complete or perhaps superior to those taking place in reality. Already two decades ago, several authors have placed special emphasis on the course of communication on two parallel levels, namely the real and the mediated level. In the context of 'media rituals', a theoretician of ritual communication Nick Couldry mentioned as the main paradox that individuals' hopes, myths, moments of togetherness or conflict are no longer separable from the mediated forms they almost always acquire (Couldry, 2003). A theoretician of communication John Fiske, in turn, has made an even stronger assertion, saying that events that are not mediated do not receive attention at all or only gain it at local venues. He has explained that the term 'media event' confirms that it is no longer possible in the postmodern world to clearly distinguish the 'real' event from its mediated representation. As a result, the idea that the 'real' is more relevant, significant, or even more real than the representation is no longer usable. The media event is not at all a clearer representation of what happened, but includes its reality (Fiske, 1999). In the circumstances of the pandemic, some kind of victory of the mediated forms of communication has happened, because along with individual outdoor solutions, virtual forms of remembrance were the only safe and epidemiologically permitted ones.

Judging by a number of aspects of the classical media event theory, such as the dimension, the place or stage of the event, the presence of an opponent, the roles of the media and the audience, as well as the time orientation, a table has been created (see Table 1).

Table 1. Transformation of the commemoration in the discourse of 30th anniversary of Barricades of January 1991

The selection of dimension of the media event (Dayan&Katz)	Coronation (bonfires of the barricades as one of the most romantic symbols of the national identity narrative; the absolute ideal of unity)
Place (stage)	Victory of the mediated forms of communication (commemorative events mostly virtual or outdoor: ecumenical worship without participants, virtual conference and exhibition, environmental installation, individual layering of flowers, etc.)
Opponents	Pandemic
Role of media	Reverent, priestly (telling and romanticising the history)
Role of audience	Remembering and learning the history
Time orientation	Past (mostly description of historic events or memories of the participants)

Despite the changes dictated by the pandemic in the commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the barricades, the event can be evaluated as a part of the **coronation dimension**, since romanticization of history and homage to barricades is characteristic of the media messages. A significant novelty is related to the place or stage of commemoration, with the mediated forms becoming the only allowed this time. As an **opponent** in the context of this commemoration anniversary undoubtedly stands the pandemic, since it is an obstacle to the full-fledged course of events, robbing a large part of the emotionality from the commemoration ritual. Thus, for example, President of Latvia Egils Levits argued: *“We need to be united in the situation of pandemic. This is our greatest enemy today, thirty years later!”* (Delfi.lv, 2021a). Also journalist Velta Puriņa commented on new forms of commemoration: *“Yes, there is a lack of live contact, a lack of warmth of heart”* (Līcīte, 2021). It should be emphasized that my previous research has shown that the period of Latvia’s independence from 1991 was marked by symbolic barricades between ‘the people’ and the political elite, thus forming the authority elite as an opponent (Ardava, 2015; Ardava, 2017). Evaluating the 20th anniversary of the January barricades in 2010, together with sociologist Daina Eglitis we summarized that the public remembering of the Barricades of January 1991 could be characterized as actually romanticized, emphasizing the value of freedom and memories of bonfires, smell of smoke, and tea brought by anonymous people. However, despite this romanticized remembering there was people’s alienation from the political elite (Eglitis & Ardava, 2014). However, in the context of the 30th anniversary of the barricades, the discourse of alienation does not appear at all.

This discourse is completely out of competition with the pandemic. In turn, when it comes to the roles of the media and the audience, they pay homage to barricades, encouraging remembrance, sharing memories and proposing a new discourse of transfer of social memory to future generations or an **educational dimension**. Historian Edgars Engizers said in an interview: *“In the evening go and talk to your father, to your grandfather. Talk to them about that time. It will be completely different. This is a real history of all families”* (Leitāne, 2021). V.Puriņa emphasised: *“During the lockdown you should talk more to your children, to your grandchildren, talk more about that time. It seems to them that it was a very long time ago”* (Līcīte, 2021). This can be considered a discourse caused by the circumstances of the pandemic, because the messages of the media emphasize that the time of the lockdown can serve as an opportunity for the family to share thoughts, memories and experiences more while being together. Finally, the time orientation of this commemoration anniversary generally stands out in the direction of the past, since the character of media messages is

dominated by a chronological retrospection of history, sharing of memories and the presence of nostalgia can be felt, which is very characteristic of media events in the coronation dimension.

Conclusion

Commemoration of 30th anniversary of Barricades is significant in multiple aspects. Almost all commemoration activities were characterized by virtual or outdoor nature for epidemiological safety, thus giving an answer to a long-time debate in communication science as to whether the mediated forms of events are equivalent or less complete to those taking place in real life. Undoubtedly, virtual commemoration and lack of physical presence leads to incomplete collective resentment, evaluating from ritual process.

The study analyzes the discourses of remembrance of the Barricades in the most popular media in Latvia. The situation of pandemic (great opponent and even enemy) has raised a new aspect of social memory transfer to younger generations and people who do not have these memories in their personal experience. This educational discourse was initiated by lockdown and an opportunity for family members to spend more time together.

Finally, in the context of this anniversary there is one opportunity not taken. In the context of the remembrance of barricades, the special reservoir for the power of the spirit provided by the history of barricades has always been central in media texts. In the pandemic, when great self-sacrifice and patience was required from every inhabitant, this potential for strength would function as an encouragement, a reminder of the nation's historical strength and ability to mobilize at that time.

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