How do collective crises shape the way communities experience and express nostalgia?

Nostalgia is often described as a longing for the past, but during collective crises nostalgia becomes more intense. Instead of only missing childhood or a decade where things were simpler, people begin to miss stability, routine and places that once felt ordinary become rare. Collective crisis; pandemics, natural disasters, wars, all of that disrupt everyday life in ways that force entire communities to reflect on what has been lost. As a result nostalgia is transformed from a personal emotion into a collective response, a collective crisis shapes not only what people feel nostalgic about, but also how communities express that nostalgia.

A great example of this pattern is the Covid-19 pandemic, which caused a global nostalgia. When lockdowns began all around the world and routines disappeared, people did not just miss the distant past, they missed the stability of their daily life: hugging friends, going to school, going out without fear. In the article *How Coronavirus Made Us Nostalgic for a Past That Held the Promise of a Future*, scholars *Katia Brunk, Benjamin Hartmann, Christian Damsgaard and Dannie Kjeldgaard* explain that the pandemic triggered a longing not just for the past but for the lives people expected to have before crisis changed everything. Their research highlights that nostalgia became a response to uncertainty, offering a sense of comfort when the future became unstable. This shows that the crisis not only creates nostalgia for childhood but also for recent life, lost plans and the feeling of security.

Scientific evidence reinforces this, according to a study published by the *National Institutes of Health*, the reduced contact during the pandemic directly increased people's consumption of nostalgic music. The researchers explain that when

social interaction drops the brain activates memories associated with belonging and connection. This finding shows how nostalgia becomes collective: when everyone loses the same routines and the same forms of connection they turn to similar memories and emotional experiences. The study found that people who felt more isolated were the most likely to seek out nostalgic songs because these memories activated the same feelings of social comfort. This shows that nostalgia becomes collective because a shared crisis triggers the same psychological need for connection across an entire population.

The idea of collective longing also appears in the AP stimulus *My Mother's House.* When Rachel returns to Louisiana, she experiences a deep longing for identity and roots, shaped by historical trauma and erased of black communities. The crisis in this example is not a single event but a long history of loss. Rachel discovers unmarked graves and missing houses, a past that cannot be recovered. Her nostalgia becomes collective because it is a nostalgia tied between an entire community that experienced a similar historical grief. She misses the sense of belonging more than a physical place. This demonstrates how collective crises, whether sudden like covid or long term like rooted oppression towards a race.

Similarly, another stimulus, *Seph lawless's photograph*s of abandoned malls and amusement parks, reveal how cultural and economic crises also created collective nostalgia. These spaces that once represented community, everyday life. Now they are captured in a state of decay, they reveal a world that feels disconnected. The nostalgia these images provoke is not about the buildings themselves, but the experiences and social interactions that they once held. The photographs highlight how the vanishing of familiar spaces can create a collective nostalgia and longing for a time that felt

more communal. This reinforces the idea that nostalgia is stronger when people realize that something meaningful has been lost.

Collective crises also change the way communities revisit the past by encouraging people to romanticize it. In the article for the conversation, the authors explain that during Covid-19, many people didn't just miss the previous routine, they missed the idealized version of the past, and the perspective of the future they had in the past. Consequently this affected the way people consumed during the pandemic, relying on nostalgic products, consuming 90s songs, turning themselves into bread making, knitting or reading, all to escape the reality of uncertainty we were living in. But this romanticism of the past also presents a threat to our memories, leading people to blame everything bad in the present days on the pandemic, creating an unreal idealization of the perfect lives we lived in 2019 and back, misleading people to live in a false sense of comforting memories, and not allowing people to move on. Causing nostalgia to become a comfort and a trap.

Collective crises also shape nostalgia by influencing how communities understand their identity. When the present becomes unstable, people look for a version more stable of themselves, the article from the conversation, explains that during covid times, nostalgia did not only appear in personal memories as a way of escape, it also became cultural. Online communities also started to share and revive symbols, music, traditions, trends and 'aesthetics' and these elements reinforced the sense of who they were before the collapse or who they were trying to become and find themselves during the chaos. This search for identity through memory also appears in the stimulus *My Mother's House*, where Rachel's longing is tied to restoring a narrative of her community lost. Similarly, the reactions to *Steph Lawless's photographs* of abandoned malls show how people use nostalgia to reclaim a sense of

belonging as physical and social spaces disappear. In both of these examples, nostalgia becomes less about the past and more about protecting a collective identity that feels threatened. This crisis creates uncertainty, and nostalgia offers a way for communities to express themselves and say “this is who we were, and this is who we still want to be”. In this sense nostalgia can be not just emotional comfort, but a way to rebuild collective memory.

Overall, collective crisis shapes the way communities experience and express nostalgia by reshaping memory, deepening longing and transforming personal reflection into a shared cultural experience. Whether triggered by a pandemic, historical trauma, war, or cultural decline, nostalgia becomes a way for communities to rebuild stability in uncertain times. It becomes more than remembering but a collective strategy for survival.

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