

Nostalgia in Life Writing: Tracing the Uses of Nostalgia in Select Holocaust Trauma Memoirs

Naina A. Sabu¹, & Vineeth Radhakrishnan¹

¹ School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Chennai, India

Correspondence: Dr. Vineeth Radhakrishnan, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, India. Ph: +91 9969605043. E-mail: vineeth.r@vit.ac.in

Received: November 22, 2023

Accepted: January 15, 2024

Online Published: February 27, 2024

doi:10.5430/wjel.v14n2p535

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v14n2p535>

Abstract

The article seeks to develop a theoretical analysis and interpretation of the role of nostalgia in German Holocaust memoirs. The intervention of advertising by appropriating nostalgia into marketing has led to an effacement of 'algia' or the pain that nostalgia implicates. The modern perception of nostalgia as a positive emotion has affected the idea of yoking nostalgia to traumatic experiences. The current paper analyses whether nostalgia plays a conspicuous role in the trauma narratives of Holocaust survivors. The paper is divided into three sections: first, an overview of the term 'nostalgia' through the ages is attempted to comprehend the problem of attaching nostalgia to trauma narratives. Second, textual analysis of *The Boy on the Wooden Box* (2013) by Leon Leyson and *I will Plant you a Lilac Tree* (2005) by Laura Hillman is undertaken to establish the presence of nostalgia in the narratives. Third, the major uses of nostalgia in the select texts are condensed into five categories: nostalgia functions as a tool of Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), relieves survival anxiety, improves resolute decisions, aids in preserving nostalgic objects and operates as an intermediary between individual and collective memories in the primary texts. Svetlana Boym's binary classification of nostalgia is applied to the texts to provide an insight into the nature of nostalgia invoked. The study concludes that restorative nostalgia disrupts progress but augments the nostalgic individual's determination to survive and recreate the perfect past. Reflective nostalgia provides the awareness that the past is irrevocable, and that change is inevitable.

Keywords: Nostalgia, Holocaust memoirs, reflective nostalgia, restorative nostalgia, memory studies

1. Introduction

The collective memory regarding nostalgia as a positive emotion that comes along with an unwavering contemporary existence has affected literatures of trauma, including the Holocaust, to abstain from analysing the presence of nostalgia in trauma literatures. Tinatin Japaridze, in her text, *Stalin's Millennials: Nostalgia, Trauma and Nationalism* (2022), specifies why an inquest into nostalgia within trauma narratives might become problematic. Japaridze writes, "Exploring nostalgia as a tool denying the present in the name of the past produces a void between the sanitized nostalgic reproductions and the actual traumatic history" (Japaridze, 2022). The "sanitized nostalgic reproduction" in war narratives is fuelled by the failure of collective societal innocence and despondency caused by shattered fantasies of ideal nationalism (Japaridze, 2022). Hence, the nostalgic retelling tends to reconstruct the perfect nationalism by distorting the traumatic, individual, or societal memories. Gizela Horvath, in her essay 'Faces of Nostalgia: Restorative and Reflective Nostalgia in the Fine Arts' (2018), helps reaffirm this perspective by vocalizing that 'nostalgia presupposes a comparison between overrated past and an underachieved present' (Horvath, 2018). Horvath clarifies the binary relating to nostalgia as the one with an exaggerated past of an ideal utopian world against an underperforming post-traumatic present. The Holocaust essentially deals with the forceful underperformance of Jews in society, which naturally leads to the magnifying of their past before the Holocaust, in a post-Holocaust era.

1.1 Literature Review

Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer coined the term 'nostalgia' (1688) in his dissertation titled 'De Hydrope Uteri', which elaborated on an illness he had traced in Swiss soldiers. Carolyn Kiser Anspach translates the title page of his dissertation as 'Nostalgia or Homesickness' (Anspach, 1934). Hofer coined the term 'nostalgia' from Greek, which combined two words: *Nosos*, 'return to the native land' and *Algos*, 'suffering or grief'. Hofer defines nostalgia as "the sad mood originating from the desire for the return to one's native land" (Anspach, 1934). Hofer found it a 'wasting disease' (Anspach, 1934) that perturbed soldiers in foreign lands. The symptoms of the aforementioned 'illness' that Hofer traced down included both physiological and psychological disturbances. Hofer posits, "men thus oppressed are moved by small external objects and nothing creates a stronger impression than the desire recalling the homeland" (Anspach, 1934). According to Hofer, "the wasting disease" or nostalgia mostly affected the minds of young people who moved into foreign lands. The 'imaginative affect' of nostalgia makes it difficult for people to cope with an unfamiliar environment.

Krystine Irene Batcho, in her article 'Nostalgia: The Bittersweet History of a Psychological Concept', affirms that nostalgia as a psychological concept is not more than a century old (Batcho, 2013). Batcho quotes from Tuke and Griesenger to point out the minimal

attention nostalgia received in the 19th century. The discussions on nostalgia in the 19th century were attached to conversations about insanity. Batcho identifies that the rise of industrialisation, the decline in military power and innovations in transportation led to the disappearance of nostalgia in academic discussions (Batcho, 2013). The psychologists of the 20th century found nostalgia akin to depression and posited that it was an uncompromisable longing to return to the past.

The most pivotal shift in the study of nostalgia was geared by W. H McCann (1941), who indicated that the longing for nostalgia is not confined to the physical home. Modern transportation has lessened geographical distances, detaining the term nostalgia from the notion of a rigid place (Batcho, 2013). McCann argued that nostalgia could also be a longing for specific objects or particular people (Routledge, 2015). McCann's study shifts the locus of nostalgia from a spatial point of view to a broad spectrum of animate and inanimate objects that confer on the sentiments of home. McCann's idea of nostalgia was still confined to a psychological illness, for which his suggested treatment was the introduction of any component that would reduce the individual's "emotional fixation to home" (Batcho, 2013).

Dirk Klopper, in his essay 'The Problem of Nostalgia', argues that the reason behind the tendency to consider nostalgia as a retrograde emotion is the "legacy of the hermeneutics of suspicion" (Klopper, 2016). Klopper believes that the world, shaped by the intellectuals Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud, would unequivocally find nostalgia degenerate, as Marx and Freud considered nostalgia ineffective in fuelling visible progress. Freud found an obsessive form of nostalgia problematic, as it results in "ambivalent melancholia" – on the one hand, the individual disowns the memory, and on the other, deifies what is lost (Klopper, 2016). Marx considers nostalgia a "reactionary sentiment" that must be overruled for progressive politics (Klopper, 2016). Klopper's argument serves in understanding the early 20th-century animosity towards nostalgia.

A. R Martin (1954) brought a transition to the negative frame of mind given to nostalgia when he proposed that a return to humanism would help in a "healthy respect" towards nostalgia (Batcho, 2013). Fred Davis, in his text *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (1979), contends that the term nostalgia has not only been 'demilitarized' and 'demedicalized', but also 'depsychologized' (Fine & Davis, 1978). Davis stresses that nostalgia no longer adheres to the archaic meaning of the term as a disease but rather 'positively tinged' with 'familiar emotions as love, jealousy and fear...' (Fine & Davis, 1978). When Davis wrote his text, nostalgia was no longer a 'wasting disease' or 'homesickness', but a healthy adaptive mechanism in human beings which would be experienced by all at some point in their lives (Batcho, 2013).

According to Clay Routledge, nostalgia became a discipline of interest in marketing by the 1980s (Routledge, 2015). Researchers realised that movies, music or advertisements evoked people's nostalgia. The audience was ready to rebuy and rewatch any piece of media that helped them relive moments from the past. Marco Pichierri, in the text *Nostalgia Marketing: Rekindling the Past to Influence Consumer Choices*, writes, "in the consumer behavior domain, nostalgia has been conceptualized as a time-related preference for experiences associated with items or elements that were more widespread or popular in one's youth" (Pichierri, 2023). According to Pichierri, consumers are often allured by components that "positively evoke the past", superimposed against a negatively visioned present (Pichierri, 2023). Exploiting the concept of nostalgia in the name of marketing strategy led to the erasure of 'algos' or 'the ache' associated with nostalgia. Srivastava et. al., in their 'Nostalgic advertising in India: a content analysis of Indian TV advertisements', studied 700 Indian TV advertisements across five broadcasting channels to conclude that: "Out of 613 emotional ads analysed, humour appeal was most commonly used (70 per cent), followed by status/luxury (29.9 per cent)" (Srivastava et. al., 2017). According to the study, nostalgia is a happy emotion through recurrent media usage. The negative emotion—the longing for the past—that nostalgia entails got lost in this process of etymological evolution. The current understanding of nostalgia considers a person seated in a luxurious office cabin more entitled to nostalgia than a person starving to death.

Aleksander Stević in the essay 'Intimations of the Holocaust from the Recollections of Early Childhood: Childhood Memories, Holocaust Representation, and the Uses of Nostalgia in Danilo Kiš and Christa Wolf' (2014) attempts to show how nostalgia's ability to sentimentalise and create a 'sanitised' version of the past could be methodically analysed to understand the mechanisms of remembrance and suppression of memory (Stević, 2014). The human mind tends to replace vexatious memories with less intense reality versions, later stored as nostalgia. Therefore, an analysis of what was omitted in nostalgia points towards the direction of a memoriographer's study.

Stević's research hints that the erasure of discussion regarding nostalgia in traumatic narratives leads to lacunas in understanding memoriography related to the traumatic event. Memoriography "reflects theoretically about techniques of representing memory" through various sources (Carrier, 2014). It is a metagenric study which depends on individual memories isolated from the dominant narrative of the times to comprehend the politics of memory, or as Peter Carrier calls it, "that which is remembered of what happened" (Carrier, 2014). According to Carrier, Holocaust Memoriography is a "body of professional historical writings which deals with the way in which this event is recalled and understood in the present" (Carrier, 2014).

The current paper aims to address the memoriography of the Holocaust created and retained through nostalgia in recent memoirs on the Holocaust. The study discusses the uses of nostalgia within traumatic narratives, by taking Holocaust as the historical context. The paper attempts to address nostalgia and its association with memory in two memoirs by Schindler survivors or *Schindlerjuden* – Holocaust survivors who were part of Schindler's List of Jews and to identify the mentioned events as part of restorative nostalgia or reflective nostalgia.

2. Method

The current study attempts to comprehend the uses of nostalgia in two Holocaust trauma memoirs: *I will plant you a Lilac tree* by Laura

Hillman and *The boy on the wooden box* by Leon Leyson. Textual analysis of the primary texts meets the requirements of the study. The theoretical framework for textual analysis is based on the theories of three major theorists: Svetlana Boym, Louis Althusser and Maurice Halbwachs. Boym's binary division of nostalgia is used throughout the texts to identify the nature of nostalgia involved within the texts. Louis Althusser's concept of Ideological State Apparatuses is used to understand the manipulative effect of nostalgia on individuals. Maurice Halbwach's concept of collective memory is adapted to apprehend the role of nostalgia in bridging individual and collective memories.

2.1 *The Boy on the Wooden Box and I will Plant you a Lilac Tree*

The texts taken for the current study are: *The Boy on the Wooden Box* by Leon Leyson (2013) and *I will Plant you a Lilac Tree* (2005) by Laura Hillman. Both the memoirists belong to Schindler's survivors list. They belonged to the youngest survivors on Schindler's list of Jewish prisoners. Their memoirs begin with referring to a timeline before the Holocaust and their family backgrounds and move into the Holocaust years. Leon Leyson was the youngest of his family, whereas Laura was the eldest child. Leyson's memoir ends briefly by portraying his life as a schoolteacher after the Holocaust, whereas Laura's memoir culminates with the liberation of Schindler's women from Auschwitz. In both texts, nostalgia functions differently according to situations; hence, it is implausible to categorise the whole text into one nostalgia category. Therefore, the paper attempts to identify individual examples from the analysis as restorative or reflective nostalgia.

2.2 *Restorative and Reflective Nostalgia*

Svetlana Boym defines nostalgia as 'a longing for a home that no longer exists or never existed' (Boym, 2001). The problem with the definition lies in the fluidity of the term 'home'. Roberta Rubenstein, in her text *Home Matters: Longing and Belonging, Nostalgia and Mourning in Women's Fiction* writes that home is, 'Not merely a physical structure or a geographical location but always an emotional space, home is among the most emotionally complex and resonant concepts in our psychic vocabularies...and often most ambivalent, elements of our earliest physical environment' (Rubenstein, 2001). Home can be geometrical spatial imagery or a temporal abstract concept – any object that makes an individual feel the comfort of what they would define as 'feeling at home'. Thus, nostalgia is treated as a fluid space for the current study rather than a place of fixity.

Boym's study demarcates nostalgia into two classes: restorative and reflective. According to Boym, 'Restorative nostalgia puts emphasis on *nostos* and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps. Reflective nostalgia dwells in *algia*, longing and loss, "the imperfect process of remembrance"'. 'Restorative nostalgia manifests itself in total reconstruction of the monuments of past' (Boym, 2001). To a restorative nostalgic, the past is not a period that has gone, rather, it is an imperishable 'perfect snapshot' (Boym, 2001) which remains immortal. A restorative nostalgic does not consider themselves as a person with a quest for memories, rather they perceive themselves as one with a quest for truth. Restorative nostalgia provides a 'paranoic reconstruction of home' because it is entirely oblivious to reality and invests all potency into creating a 'delusionary homeland' (Boym, 2001). Thus, restorative nostalgia becomes a detrimental factor towards any form of progress. Restorative nostalgia leads to Japaridze's concern of a 'sanitized past', devoid of references to atrocities or obscenities that are essentially part of actual history.

Reflective nostalgics sceptically approach the image of the past that visibly seems perfect. Boym writes, 'Nostalgics of the second type are aware of the gap between identity and resemblance; the home is in ruins or, on the contra ry, has been just renovated and gentrified beyond recognition. This defamiliarization and sense of distance drive them to tell their story, to narrate the relationship between past, present, and future'. Reflective nostalgics do not attempt to recreate the past in the present but consider the past as 'a multitude of potentialities...of historic development' (Boym, 2001). Reflective nostalgia corresponds to Martin's vision of a return to humanism, where nostalgia is no longer considered an alienating illness, but accepted as a normal human cognitive response.

3. Discussion

3.1 *Nostalgia as an ISA Tool*

Both the memoirs explain how nostalgia manipulates individuals or groups into subjection. Any experience situated in emotionality is vulnerable to manipulation. Nostalgia, which is an emotional experience, is also susceptible to manipulation. Thus, nostalgia which is generally comprehended as a positive emotion becomes a weapon in the hands of Nazis to manipulate the victims to follow their orders without the use of physical force. In Louis Althusser's terms, nostalgia becomes a tool of 'ideological state apparatuses' (ISA). Althusser writes, 'I shall call Ideological State Apparatuses a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions' (Althusser, 1981). The major factors that distinguish Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) from Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) are their plurality and significant presence in the private domain, such as families or churches (Althusser, 1981). In addition, ISAs function primarily through ideology and secondarily through repression. From the definition, it is intelligible that any tool used by a government or army to exercise their power over the masses without the use of violence is a tool of ISAs. The following paragraphs aim to show how nostalgia was used as a tool of ISA by the Nazi Germans.

I will Plant you a Lilac Tree presents an instance of Hillman detailing how he became a Polish soldier working for the Nazis. He explains:

One day the Germans made us an offer, announcing that all Jewish prisoners would be free to go home. I was eager to get back to my mother and sisters, knowing they could use my help...I should have known better than to believe the Germans. As soon as we

stepped forward, they herded us onto trains, where SS men awaited us. We knew then that it had been a trick. I ended up here. (Hillman, 2005)

Using nostalgia as an ideological state apparatus result in the “interpellation” of individuals as subjects (Althusser, 1981). The moment these Jewish prisoners were addressed to become Polish soldiers, they were being interpellated into subjects. The promise of a return to an individualistic past became their trap into collective subjection. In Dick Hillman’s case, it was the promise of home and his uncontainable nostalgia; the longing to go back home, that affected his decision-making, leading him to wilfully comply with the ‘offer’ that was made to him. Even after knowing that it was a promissory fraud, they did not respond because staying as soldiers provided them with a thin protective sheath from death with which they could still hope for a safe return. The moment Hillman responded to the offer made, he was leaving his individuality behind and got “interpellated” into a subject. According to Althusser, every subject is ‘endowed with a “consciousness”’ (Althusser, 1981), where the subject becomes part of the collective consciousness of Polish Jew soldiers. From this moment of interpellation, Hillman enters the collective consciousness of Polish Jew soldiers, leaving behind individual memories. The intermediary that affected this shift was nostalgia. Here, the nostalgia that prompted Dick Hillman to join the Polish Jew army is restorative. Dick Hillman, at this point, is dwelling on his past sense of perfect home and aims at a reconstruction of the perfect past when he says, ‘I was eager to get back to my mother and sisters, knowing they could use my help...’ (Hillman, 2005). As a restorative nostalgic, Hillman was not looking forward to progress in his life, but he attempted to return to things before the war.

A similar form of deportation technique is mentioned in Leyson’s *The Boy on the Wooden Box*. In the May of 1940, Nazis started sending Jewish victims from ghettos to concentration camps. Leyson notes, “Most went voluntarily, glad to be able to take a few possessions with them and relieved to escape the constant harangues and threats of the Nazis” (Leyson, 2015). Jewish population that was traumatised by acts of violence in the ghettos complied with going back to their villages when they received Nazi reassurance that they would be sent back to their hometowns. Most of the Jews from Krakow obligingly followed, believing that they were travelling back to safer homes. Leyson later explains, “Those deported were not being sent to the countryside, but to their deaths” (Leyson, 2015). Here, the hope of a secure home, like the one Hillman had, was also initiated by nostalgia. They were given a false promise of moving back to their villages when they were being deported to death camps.

The nostalgia evoked in this instance is also restorative. Restorative nostalgic is obsessed with the re-establishment of the perfect past. This ingrained obsession with perfection hinders their ability to comprehend the depth of reality. The impaired decision-making leads the suppressed into having false hopes of survival when fuelled with nostalgia.

3.2 Nostalgia and Its Relation to Anxiety

The second use of nostalgia is related to anxiety. Nostalgia and anxiety can be related on two levels within these texts: anxiety triggered by nostalgia and anxiety relieved by nostalgia. Freud believed that anxiety was the state of ‘expecting danger or preparing for it’ (LeDoux, 2014). Freud defines two different types of anxiety: primary anxiety, which is essentially fear, which is related to an object in the present and secondary anxiety, which is an ‘uncertain feeling that harm may come in the future’ (LeDoux, 2014). In both memoirs, secondary anxiety is projected, as the Jewish prisoners are crippled by an objectless uncertainty regarding their survival. According to Freud, anxiety results from unlikely thoughts, especially childhood memories. Concerning Freud’s view, nostalgia becomes an anxiety-triggering agent.

The text *I will Plant you a Lilac Tree* narrates the family’s journey of survival after her father’s demise. Hannelore and family shift to the ghetto, and while on the train, heavy with the burden of uncertainty, she remembers her home at Aurich – ‘How I longed to see it one more time to remind me of the happy hours I had spent there. I visualised the house now, with its massive front door and the weathervane perched on top of the chimney—a circle with a pierced arrow through the centre. When I was little, Grandmother Rosette told me about weathervanes and how they worked as lightning rods’ (Hillman, 2005). The nostalgia took her to a spatial remembrance of home and her memory of her grandmother Rosette.

Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, in her essay ‘Remembering the Past: Nostalgia, Traumatic Memory, and the Legacy of Apartheid’, states, ‘Two key characteristics are considered central in nostalgic constructions. The first is the tendency to cling to idealised images of the past. This entails an inner dialogue between the past and present...’ (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2012). Laura Hillman’s longing to see her childhood home again is part of the idealization of the past. Hence, the nostalgic memory falls into a restorative form of nostalgia here.

At the same time, both texts show instances of the authors finding solace in nostalgia when they were under the clutches of anxiety. In *The Boy on the Wooden Box*, Leyson details his days at Plaszów camp. They were divided by gender, and he got separated from his mother. One night, somebody stole his blanket, leaving him cold and lonely. He writes, ‘I was left to wrap my arms around myself, thinking of my mother’s embrace, and will myself to sleep’ (Leyson, 2015). Here, the anxiety of being alone in a concentration camp was countered by the nostalgic remembrance of his mother.

In her article, Donna Bassin writes, ‘The holding on to the nostalgic memory is a holding on to the lost mother. The nostalgic object—the mother—is perceived as a needed object for transformation’ (Bassin, 1993). Here, the mother becomes the comfort of the lost home, indicating a nostalgic moment as consolation. The nostalgia for the event mentioned above is restorative because the boy holds on to a memory from the past and recreates an idealised past in the present with his imagination to find relief from anxiety.

3.3 Nostalgia and Courage

Nostalgia gave the trauma victims the courage to save themselves or others in the face of a crisis. According to Julia Yang, courage is ‘a

response to danger, despair, or fear. Fear is central to courage; it must be present for courage to exist' (Yang & Milliren, 2009). Stanley J. Rachman distorts the notion that courage is synonymous with fearlessness. He believes courage is 'the perseverance despite fear' (Rachman, 2003). In Holocaust narratives, the courage that cuts through fear can be inspired by many factors, but nostalgia is one of the most pivotal factors.

Laura Hillman's memoir begins with a courageous decision prompted by nostalgia. Chapter 2 of *I will Plant you a Lilac Tree*, begins with a letter from Laura's mother informing her that the family is being deported to the East. On the arrival of this letter, Laura gets into an anxious chain of concerns: 'It meant being in labor camps, where life was difficult, where there was never enough food, and where beatings took place. How could Mama stand up to that? And what about Wolfgang and Selly?' (Hillman, 2005). Her nostalgic dream about her papa breaks the anxiety chain: 'In the dream I smelled the chicken soup, the stewed carrots, and prunes. At the end of the feast, it seemed as if Papa was trying to tell me something, but I could not hear him...' (Hillman, 2005). The next day, teenager Hannelore writes a letter to Gestapo headquarters in Weimar asking her to accompany her mother and brothers. Hannelore finds the courage to leave her comparatively safer boarding school in Berlin to join her family in distress, which shows how nostalgia invokes courage in individuals.

An essential factor in this nostalgic dream is the presence of olfactory reminders. Meghan Holohan, in her article 'Smells like Nostalgia: Why do Scents bring back Memories?' (2012) quotes Howard Eichenbaum, 'Olfactory has a strong input into the amygdala, which processes emotions. The kind of memories that it evokes are good, and they are more powerful' (Holohan, 2012). The olfactory system and its relation to the amygdala are why smells evoke specific nostalgic memories and vice versa; memories of smell become part of particular nostalgic recollections. This is why Laura could smell the homemade chicken soup even in her nostalgic dream.

In the event as mentioned above, the nostalgia evoked is rather reflective. When restorative nostalgia seeks to recreate the past in its entirety, reflective nostalgia understands that the past is inevitably lost. Hal McDonald, in his 'Two Faces of Nostalgia' points out, 'This acknowledgment of the irretrievability of our autobiographical past provides an aesthetic distance that allows us to enjoy a memory in the same way that we enjoy a movie or a good book' (McDonald, 2016). Here, Laura fails to hear her father's words because of her distance from the memory. Such a distanced recollection helped her think practically and choose to accompany her family through the Holocaust.

Similarly, in *The Boy on the Wooden Box*, Leyson explains an event where his father went missing, and he goes in search of his father at odd hours, which is illegal. One day, as he returned from work, he saw the Gestapo who had beaten up his father, and the boy confronts the Gestapo, 'I don't know what possessed me, but I chased after him and begged him to tell me where he had taken my father. The intimidating figure stared down at me...had I known better, I would have been scared for my life. But I didn't and maybe my boldness impressed him, because he told me my father was at St. Michael's prison' (Leyson, 2015). Leyson expected his father's presence to recreate the restorative nostalgia – the idealised image of a complete home. The drive towards restorative nostalgia becomes the spectre that possessed him to face a near-death experience to know the whereabouts of his father.

3.4 Nostalgic Objects

Another significance of nostalgia is to preserve nostalgic objects. Donna Bassin, in her article 'Nostalgic Objects of our Affection: Mourning, Memory and Maternal Subjectivity' (1993), writes, 'Collectors of nostalgia are doing more than just recycling, collecting, or hoarding these fossilized objects; they are attempting to collect material reminders of an utopian past' (Bassin, 1993). Bassin defines nostalgic objects in clinical terms as 'an incomplete mourning, an attempt to re-enact reunion with the lost object...The nostalgic object...is perceived as a needed object for transformation' (Bassin, 1993). In simpler terms, a nostalgic object helps an individual through a phase of 'imagined metamorphosis' (Bassin, 1993). So, nostalgic objects simultaneously become a symbol of mourning and a hint of hopefulness, which aided the survivors in not giving up their lives.

Laura Hillman in *I will Plant you a Lilac Tree*, mentions three different nostalgic objects that she retained to remember her past and helped in her transformation – Rilke's poetry, the lilac trees and photographs. While leaving her boarding school to join her mother and siblings in deportation, Hannelore leaves all her books behind, except Rilke's poetry. 'Keep my books till I get back. I will take only Rilke's poems' (Hillman, 2005). In earlier pages, she had already specified the importance of Rilke's poetry, 'Papa's artistic lettering was on the flyleaf' (Hillman, 2005). Rilke's collection was her nostalgic object of mourning the loss of her father, and at the same time, it provided her with an illusionary reassurance that she was not alone.

The titular lilac tree is the most important nostalgic object in the text. While inside the deportation train, Laura's mind wanders, '...I wanted to see the Lilac tree, imagining it full of blossoms. I had always liked the fragrance of lilacs. Besides, the tree always bloomed around Mama's birthday. It was almost that time again, only now Mama lived in Weimar in cramped quarters' (Hillman, 2005). The same lilac tree later appears in a conversation between Hillman and Laura, "What do you remember the most about home?" ... "A lilac tree", I said... "One day when this is over, I'll plant you a lilac bush. Perhaps it will grow old and become a tree, like the one you remember" (Hillman, 2005). Thus, the lilac tree becomes a nostalgic object of promise for Laura and Hillman to regain their lost life together.

Here, the nostalgia evoked is reflective. Hillman is not venturing to recreate the past in its totality. She remains aware that a perfect reconstruction of the past is irrational. Hence, his words reflect the same: instead of replying, 'I will plant you a lilac tree', Hillman says explicitly, 'I will plant you a lilac bush' and hopes that it would grow into a lilac tree like the one she had at her mother's home. Hillman speaks from the knowledge that recreating an entire past is inconceivable, but attempting to create something similar might be pragmatic.

In *The Boy on the Wooden Box*, Leyson has two nostalgic objects that he attempts to save while in imprisonment: a thermos bottle and

pipes that were gifted to him by one of his neighbours. Mr. Luftig left it for the boy when they were being deported into a ghetto, “He left you this” replied my mother handing me an old-fashioned, glass lined thermos bottle...I saw that he had left something else, his exquisite pipes” (Leyson, 2015). In the later pages, Leyson comments that giving away Luftig’s pipes hinted at Luftig being aware that he was going into a place where he would not need his pipes. The pipes became a metaphor for an unverballed farewell. This self-realisation from Luftig made the pipes esteemed by Leyson. The thermos bottle and pipes were his only possessions when he left home and shifted to the ghetto since he could not abandon the legacy left behind by his honourable neighbours.

Another nostalgic object that can be found in both *I will Plant you a Lilac Tree* and *The Boy on the Wooden Box* is photographs. In her seminal essay ‘On Photography’, Susan Sontag writes, ‘Through photographs, each family constructs a portrait-chronicle of itself—a portable kit of images that bears witness to its connectedness’ (Sontag, 2021). This is the reason why the prisoners hid their photographs from the Nazis. Saving their photographs with them reassured the sense of connectedness to a nostalgic past. In *I will Plant you a Lilac Tree*, Laura mentions saving her photographs from the Nazi soldiers, ‘Luckily, I had hidden the photos of my family under a loose plank in the bench. Without the attendant noticing it, I slipped the photos in my shoe’ (Hillman, 2005). A few chapters forward, she mentions the photographs again:

I still had a few crumpled photographs of my family hidden in my clogs. I remembered every detail of those pictures...Mama, beautifully dressed in a steel gray outfit that hugged her small waist and flared out into a full skirt. Her hair was piled on top of her head, as had been the fashion. Papa, looking handsome, held a cane in his right hand. He stood behind Mama, one hand draped protectively around her shoulder. (Hillman, 2005)

These photographs helped her recreate the home that she had long lost. It helped her keep alive the memories of a healthy and beautiful mother and a confident and protective father—both of which prevailed only in the past. The preservation of photographs as nostalgic objects also helped them to prove that the stories they narrate are in fact, real. Sontag writes, ‘photographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we are shown a photograph of it’ (Sontag, 2021). The credibility of their memoirs also relies on these photographs that they were able to preserve long after the Holocaust.

Photographs as nostalgic objects have two significant advantages over other nostalgic objects. Every other nostalgic object mentioned previously requires human intervention to relate the object to a nostalgic event from the past, whereas a photograph speaks for itself. Physical objects tend to disintegrate, ruining the object and nostalgia, whereas photographs are inherently nostalgic. Every photograph carries a visual message embedded in the physical rectangular two-dimensional object. The physical two-dimensional object might disintegrate, but the embedded visual message stays imperishable.

3.5 Nostalgia and Memory

The final use of nostalgia in the two memoirs is exclusively applicable in texts with intertextual elements. Genette, in his text *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (1982), defines intertextuality as “a relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts...the actual presence of one text within another” (Genette, 1997). Genette accepts quoting, plagiarism, and allusion as various forms of intertextuality. Both the memoirs chosen for the current study have intertextual elements as the texts allude to *The Schindler’s List* by Thomas Keneally at several points in narration. The next section of the paper aims to associate intertextuality and the use of nostalgia in both texts.

Nostalgia is an intermediary between individual and collective memory in both primary texts with intertextual elements. The term ‘collective memory’ was brought into academic discussions by Maurice Halbwachs in his *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1925). Halbwachs accepts that memory is individualistic and based on a “lived history” (Halbwachs & Coser, 1992). Halbwachs was highly influenced by his mentor, Émile Durkheim, who highlighted the distinction between premodern and modern societies and their relationship to consciousness. Premodern societies were run ‘mechanistically’, categorising individuals into ‘productive units’, whereas modern societies work ‘organically’ (Halbwachs & Coser, 1992). Even though they are dissociated into fragments through familial systems and division of labour, they are still yoked together as a unified whole using a ‘collective consciousness’ (Halbwachs & Coser, 1992). Halbwachs constructed further on this idea to create the theory of collective memory—the fundamental basis for social comprehension.

Individual memory gets recollected effectively with the assistance of other people who have experienced an event along with the individual. Collective remembrances are built on individual memories, where individuals come together in groups ‘delimited in space and time’ to produce a ‘single record’ (Halbwachs & Coser, 1992). To comprehend individual memory, one must acquaint oneself with ‘the social framework of collective memory’ (Halbwachs & Coser, 1992). According to Halbwach’s elucidation, individual memory is inevitable to produce collective memory. Simultaneously, individual memory gathers its meaning from the existing collective memory. Regarding literary writing, individual or collective memory takes the prime position depending on the narrative viewpoint. Memoirs usually emphasise individual memories as they attempt to narrate a part of the author’s life. The dilemma posed by the chosen primary texts is that the memoirs belong to individual records that help sustain the collective memory of the Nazi liberator who helped Jews, Oskar Schindler.

In both memoirs, the dilemma between individual and collective memory is a consequence of falling under the category of ‘Schindler’s survivor memoirs’. On the one hand, it is a memoir and requires the author to share their personal experiences. On the other, the authenticity of these memoirs entirely lies in the fact that they are Schindler’s Jews and, hence, expected to add to the collective memory

of Schindler. The conflict arises between the need to contribute towards Schindler's collective memory and keep the memoir personal; both authors have introduced nostalgic recollections of the past to incorporate the personal into the collective. Davis opines that nostalgia thrives in mental spaces where the individual is challenged by the 'threat of identity discontinuity' (Davis, 1979). When the memoirists find their identity diluted in the deluge of Schindler's collective memory, nostalgia emerges from the identity crisis that agitates them. The following few paragraphs show how both authors have taken an event from *Schindler's List* and added a personal flavour to the existing narrative with their memories through nostalgia.

In *The Boy on the Wooden Box* the pivotal episode of collective memory relates to Leon Leyson's brother Tsalig. Leyson anchors the memory by referencing one scene from *Schindler's List* and adds his memory of the same event in his memoir. The scene from *Schindler's List* is where Oscar Schindler hurries to the deportation trains to save his friend and accountant, Itzhak Stern. First, he provides a familiar memory from the collective memory of *Schindler's List*, 'In the film *Schindler's List*, and there is a scene where Oskar Schindler rushes to the train station to save his accountant, Itzhak Stern, who had been seized in a roundup...' (Leyson, 2015). From this familiar section of collective memory, he slowly delves into the individual memory, 'As he was frantically searching the cattle cars filled with people...Schindler spotted Tsalig and recognized him...He called out to him and told him that he would get him off the train, but Tsalig was there with his girlfriend Miriam' (Leyson, 2015). Schindler offered to get him off the train, but Leyson's brother Tsalig refused to abandon his lover for life. Schindler could not get the girl or her family as they did not work for Schindler; Tsalig accepted his fate and decided to travel with her on the train. Here, Leyson added his memory to the collective memory of *Schindler's List*. The initiation of annexing his most important personal memory to the collective began with a nostalgic remembrance of his brother. Leyson writes, 'Seventy years later I can still see him in my mind's eye as the Nazis dragged him from the room' (Leyson, 2015). The quote shows that nostalgia plays a role in impelling Leon Leyson to change his brother's memory from individual to collective memory, where it would stay immortal.

In the above-mentioned nostalgic recollection, the nostalgia involved is reflective. As a restorative nostalgic, Leyson would have lived in denial that his brother Tsalig had expired. He lived as a restorative nostalgic for the longest time until he got closure. Once he finally receives the information that someone saw Tsalig on the deportation train, Leyson starts accepting reality and realises the past has become irrevocable.

In *I will Plant you a Lilac Tree*, Hannelore explains what happened to the missing women's train while being shifted to Schindler's new factory. The lines from *Schindler's List* read, 'He [Schindler] told the men, that day of their arrival, that the women could be confidently expected. He believed they would arrive after scarcely more delay than there had been with the men. The women's journey would, however, be different. After a short trip from Płaszów, their locomotive backed them, with some hundreds of other Płaszów women, through the arched gatehouse of Auschwitz-Birkenau' (Keneally, 1993). These lines from *Schindler's List* explain the missing women's train, which is already part of the Schindler Jews' collective memory. Laura provides a detailed explication of what happened to the women's train:

After agonizing days and nights of rattling and jousting, the train came to a halt. All of us breathed a sigh of relief...Suddenly dogs barked. Heavy footsteps fell alongside the train. Someone lifted the iron bar and the door opened... "Where are we?" I asked one of the men. "Auschwitz," he whispered back. Auschwitz! That place had been described to me as the worst hellhole on Earth... (Hillman, 2005)

The moment Laura realises that she is at Auschwitz, her 'anxiety increased minute by minute' (Hillman, 2005). At this juncture, she starts pursuing comfort in the form of a person or a lost home. She realises that her only friend from the ghetto, Eva, is nowhere to be found, 'I looked for Eva, hoping she would assure me a mistake had been made in sending us here. Eva was nowhere in sight' (Hillman, 2005). Here, the nostalgic moment is triggered by anxiety. Still, it shifts the narrative from the collective memory of Schindler's women, who were sent to Auschwitz by mistake, to the individual memory of her friend, Eva. Thus, nostalgia becomes a negotiator between individual and collective memories in both texts.

4. Results

The findings of the current paper point out the necessity of exploring the concept of nostalgia in trauma memoirs, especially in German Holocaust memoirs. Nostalgia is a pivotal component that aids survival during uncertainties for survivors. The paper covered five major uses of nostalgia within the two texts: First, the narrative explains how nostalgia functions as a tool of Ideological State Apparatus. The use of nostalgia as an ISA detail how nostalgia in trauma life writing can be a tool for both the oppressor and the oppressed. Second, nostalgia ameliorated the anxiety suffered by the survivors. Third, nostalgia imparted survivors the courage to take severe risks that changed their lives. Fourth, nostalgia led to the preservation of nostalgic objects and finally, nostalgia functions as an intermediary between the individual and collective memories in the primary texts. The first four observations are generic and can be applied to trauma narratives across genres. The fifth observation exclusively comments on texts that function as hypertexts.

The paper shows how Schindler's survivor narratives have a farrago of restorative and reflective nostalgia. Restorative nostalgia distorts memories of the past and affects the present by adversely affecting decision-making. Restorative nostalgia is evoked when they require a last resort for comfort, whereas reflective nostalgia is brought forth when they are obliged to commence a progressive action.

The paper contributes insight into the term 'nostalgia' from a literary and theoretical point of view. The paper would help further detailed research in nostalgia coupled with trauma studies. The current paper has exclusively concentrated on memoirs, detailing nostalgia in

trauma narratives. Further scope for research includes a study of how various non-fiction genres incorporate nostalgia within the texts. One limitation of the current study is that it comments entirely on non-fiction. The question of how nostalgia functions across fictional genres remains unanswered. The limitation can be covered by a future study of nostalgia in fictional narratives.

Acknowledgments

Not Applicable

Authors contributions

Primary Author – Naina A. Sabu – selected primary texts, completed the textual analysis and formulated the paper; Secondary Author – Vineeth Radhakrishnan – helped in finalizing the methodology and primary texts; Reviewed and edited the completed paper.

Funding

Not Applicable

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Sciedu Press.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

Open access

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

References

- Althusser, L. (1981). Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses. In B. Brewster (Trans.), *Notes towards an Investigation*, London: Monthly Review Press, pp. 79-87.
- Anspach, C. K. (1934). Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia by Johannes Hofer, 1688. *Bulletin of the Institute of the History of Medicine*, 2(6), 376-391. Retrieved November 17, 2023, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44437799>
- Bassin, D. (1993). Nostalgic objects of our affection: Mourning, memory, and maternal subjectivity. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 10(3), 425-439. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0079453>
- Batcho, K. I. (2013). Nostalgia: The bittersweet history of a psychological concept. *History of Psychology*, 16(3), 165-176. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0032427>
- Boym, S. (2001). *The future of nostalgia*. New York: Persus Book Group.
- Carrier, P. (2014). Holocaust memoriography and the impact of memory on the historiography of the Holocaust. In *Bloomsbury Academic eBooks*. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781849663304.ch-009>
- Davis, F. (1979). *Yearning for yesterday: Nostalgia, Art, and Society*. New York: New York Free Press.
- Fine, G. A., & Davis, F. (1978). Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia. *Contemporary Sociology*, 9(3), 4-5. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2064268>
- Genette, G. (1997). *Palimpsests: Literature in the second degree*. Retrieved from <https://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA34787082>

- Gobodo-Madikizela, P. (2012). Remembering the past: Nostalgia, traumatic memory, and the legacy of apartheid. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 18*(3), 252-267. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029078>
- Halbwachs, M., & Coser, L. A. (1992). *On collective memory*. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226774497.001.0001>
- Hillman, L. (2005). *I will plant you a lilac tree: A love story amid the destruction of the holocaust*. Illinois: Writers Club Press.
- Holohan, M. (2012, July 19). *Smells like Nostalgia: Why Do Scents Bring Back Memories?*, . NBC News. Retrieved December 1, 2022, from <https://www.nbcnews.com/healthmain/smells-nostalgia-why-do-scents-bring-back-memories-895521>
- Horváth, G. (2018). Faces of nostalgia: Restorative and reflective nostalgia in the fine arts. *Jednak Książki, 9*, 145-156. <https://doi.org/10.26881/jk.2018.9.13>
- Japaridze, T. (2022). *Stalin's Millennials: Nostalgia, Trauma and Nationalism*. The Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.
- Keneally, T. (1993). *Schindler's List*. Simon and Schuster.
- Klopper, D. (2016). Introduction: The Problem of Nostalgia. *English in Africa, 43*(3), 9-17. <https://doi.org/10.4314/eia.v43i3.1>
- LeDoux, J. (2014). *Anxious: The modern mind in the age of anxiety*. London: Oneworld Publications.
- Leyson, L. (2015). *The boy on the wooden box: How the impossible became Possible. . .on schindler's list*. New Delhi: Atheneum Books for Young Readers.
- McDonald, H. (2016). The Two Faces of Nostalgia. *Psychology Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/time-travelling-apollo/201606/the-two-faces-nostalgia>
- Pichierri, M. (2023). *Nostalgia Marketing: Rekindling the Past to Influence Consumer Choices*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-20914-7>
- Rachman, S. J. (2003). Fear and Courage: A Psychological Perspective. In *Social Research*, (Vol. 71, Issue 1, pp. 149–176). <https://doi.org/10.1353/sor.2004.0060>
- Routledge, C. (2015). *Nostalgia: a psychological resource*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315669311>
- Rubenstein, R. (2001). *Home Matters: Longing and Belonging, Nostalgia and Mourning in Women's Fiction*. Palgrave MacMillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780312299750>
- Sontag, S. (2021). *On photography*. New York: Penguin Books. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003135630-37>
- Srivastava, E., Maheswarappa, S. S., & Sivakumaran, B. (2017). Nostalgic advertising in India: a content analysis of Indian TV advertisements. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics, 29*(1), 47–69. <https://doi.org/10.1108/apjml-10-2015-0152>
- Stević, A. (2014). Intimations of the Holocaust from the Recollections of Early Childhood: *Comparative Literature Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.5325/complitstudies.51.3.0439>
- Yang, J., & Milliren, A. (2009). *The Psychology of Courage: An Adlerian Handbook for Healthy Social living*. New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003135630-37>