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Notes for a Study on the Ethical and Political Dimensions of Nostalgia in the Public Sphere

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Abstract: *Owing to its social and political ramifications, nostalgia has become a focal point in contemporary discourse and is interpreted differently in various academic disciplines. In psychology, nostalgia is used to provide a sense of continuity in personal and collective histories. In political and social thought, nostalgia is often viewed as a regressive sentiment that fosters conservatism, reaction, and populism, re interpretations of history, and the closure of identities under the guise of fear of the other. However, some in the same field also highlight the positive aspects of nostalgia, such as caution against uncritical belief in progress, the possibility to give voice to subaltern and marginalized groups, and a sense of belonging that challenges the illusion of radical autonomy and does not act as a boundary against difference. This study explores the ethical-philosophical reasons why nostalgia is used in the public sphere and identifies criteria to distinguish between destructive and constructive uses of such feeling. The following three-pronged approach is adopted: 1) current state of the art of the research concerning nostalgia as a collective feeling in the social and political sphere, 2) historical development of the concept and its ethical-political implications if considered in its relationship with collective memory and history, and 3) search for a criterion that allows for the recognition between destructive and constructive uses of nostalgia in the public sphere. Finally, concluding remarks on nostalgia and imagined justice are presented.*

Keywords: *ethics and politics of nostalgia, memory, absence, future, otherness*

1. State of the Art: Nostalgia in the Public Sphere

Words with a single meaning and few uses sometimes become overused and lose their meaning; "nostalgia" is an example. As its usage grows, so do related studies and its ethical, psychological, social, and political implications. Each discipline draws its own often contradictory conclusions, without adopting a holistic view of the problem. We must analyze the nuances of nostalgia in the public sphere to determine its danger and beneficial effects. This study examines the social and political implications of nostalgia, and supports an understanding of it as more than a signal to be listened to; it is anchored in a precise ethical-anthropological vision.

To examine the abovementioned implications, a focus on the ambivalence of the uses of such feeling in the public sphere is necessary and clarification of the conditions under which nostalgia can be useful or dangerous for the life of communities and, vice versa, the conditions under which it can be very dangerous. Accordingly, this study critiques its dark side and risks and traces them back to a precise mode of experiencing passing time, change, and absence. Purified of its identitarian, authoritarian, and regressive tendencies, nostalgia can be defined as the emotional tonality that accompanies our transience and accepts passing time, otherness, and change without claiming to go back. From the ethical-anthropological viewpoint, nostalgia is a matter of accepting finitude, which is signaled by the experiences of loss, and tracing these experiences back to the different modes of experiencing absence, which cannot be forcibly filled.

Nowadays the concept of nostalgia has entered the collective discourse and many studies have been devoted to it. It occurs in a wide range of contexts from nostalgia for a golden age or a *Heimat* (homeland), to the current idea of solastalgia (Albrecht 2019), to mention two examples. Nostalgia is alternatively seen as a conservative feeling, as the sentimental side of populism (Gandini 2021; Campanella and Dassù 2020) and far-right movements spreading across Europe and beyond, especially by scholars coming from social and political studies (Betz and Johnson 2004; Bauman 2017), or as a way of resisting and "provincializing" the mainstream narrative of a progressive history, leaving room for the "heteroglossia" of the experiences of time and heteroglossic memory (Cunningham Bissel 2015:

218). The current nostalgia revival has been effectively described as an "overdose of nostalgia" or a process of "nostalgification" (Angé and Berliner 2014: 2, 6). Nostalgia's pervasive "presence" in public discourse can be observed in both the personal and socio-political spheres where it can influence and manipulate memories. On a more sinister note, it can be weaponized to idealize the past and defend rigid identities and a sense of entitlement or destiny, all at the expense of the common good.

A brief analysis of the usages of nostalgia in political science reveals that nostalgia is frequently associated with regressive sentiments, political conservatism, restoration, and reactionary views and policies; it is also endemic to populism. In a recent dictionary on social passions, edited by Origgi, we read that "the social dimension of nostalgic passions is one of the core elements of the populisms that are shaking up the 21st century political scene" (2019: 418). According to the socio-political and cultural analysis of Lilla, the feeling of nostalgia can be channeled and weaponized on a political level, since it is a "very potent political motivator, maybe far more potent than hope. Hopes can be disappointed. Nostalgia is irrefutable" (13). Similarly, the progenitor of which may be considered the "restorative nostalgia" as coined by Boym (2001),[i] nostalgia is also described as the feeling of an "emotionally immature collective" (Quill 2024: 178), which has never wanted to come to terms with otherness. That is, turning to a past as pristine as it is imagined, nostalgia looks back toward a state in which the negative, the other, and conflict do not exist. In this sense, the "other" is also past as well as future time; the rejection of the other thus also means that of impermanence.

The dichotomy between nostalgia and hope, in terms like those expressed by Lilla, has also been pointed out by Norocel, Hellström, and Jørgensen (eds. 2020), according to whom "*hope is the opposite master frame, which is often associated with movements that build their identity around progressive narratives that embrace solidarity and diversity*" (5).

The consideration of nostalgia in its potential openness to the future appears to be a minority, albeit a suggestive one, since it conveys the idea of a return "to where one has never been," of a justice to be fulfilled without redemption through suffering, but by remembering the errors of history, trying not to repeat them. The authors of the first generation of the Frankfurt School and of the Critical Theory[ii] of Society are perhaps among the few exceptions who read nostalgia in a utopian key. Another exception, albeit in a diametrically opposite sense, is Shklar (1965), who recognizes the connection between nostalgia and utopia in order to criticize both. I argue that conservative uses of nostalgia are tuned to a past that never happened as we remember it; they appeal to a golden age fueled by a rhetoric of the purity of origins, of the sacredness of roots, distorting memory and history in service of xenophobia and racism. Thus, conservative nostalgia has real "negative" potential.

2. A Brief History of Nostalgia: From Place to Time, Memory, History

In 1688, physician Joannes Hofer deemed nostalgia as a disease, a pathology that affected soldiers far from home, ultimately leaving them without the force to live and go on.,[iii] nostalgia's gradual acquisition of a sense of ambivalence and possibility can be traced back to different time periods. However, in more modern times, especially in the 17th and 18th centuries up to Romanticism, this collective feeling was the counterpoint to an inexorably linear and rational vision of history and progress. Furthermore, the fact that nostalgia has recently been defined as "modernity's shadow" (Quill 2024, 184), or, coming back to Boym, as one of the "side effects of the teleology of progress" (2001, 10). During the Enlightenment, nostalgia was considered to be an illness that stopped or slowed the march of progress. During the Romantic period, nostalgia was revived by poets and philosophers to refer to the tension toward infinitude, origins, and authenticity. This philosophical paradigm shift is recorded by the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, according to which the feeling of nostalgia—German *Sehnsucht*—[iv]can be traced back to a tension, a desire vividly described and experienced by Romantic philosophers, who felt nostalgia for the infinite, in the sense that they wished for it, but were simultaneously aware that such a dimension was not reachable, an impossibility that provoked suffering. Between Johannes Hofer and the Romantics, Kant recognized that nostalgia does not deal with space, but rather with time, an unavoidably lost time. He viewed it as a dangerous pathology that makes us remember the past as much better than it actually was. For Kant, nostalgia is analogous to the *Schwarmerei*.

Almost all scholars recognize the bond between nostalgia and memory (Starobinski 1966). The ethical-political implications of nostalgia concern the way memory is understood and its relationship with history. A least three types of interaction exist between nostalgia and memory. Nostalgia can invent

memories by longing for the past and trying to repeat it, thereby hindering memory by forcing repetition (Chrostowska 2010). Merged pain calls for returning, reopening the past, and resuming interrupted paths, not to redeem, but to imagine a future free from suffering and injustice.

Finally, a happy nostalgia looks back to the past, and reaffirms a sense of belonging that transcends geographical boundaries. This relationship between memory and nostalgia helps us understand the question of possession; an object can be recovered, but people, relationships and time cannot, that is, to belong is the opposite of to possess. By referring to the work of memory, nostalgia acts as a connecting feeling (McDonald 2016, 61). This work of connection applies to both personal and community. History as fact-finding can help to limit nostalgia because it can disprove the idyllic view of the past and pluralize narratives; conversely, nostalgia itself can act as a sentiment that feels the need to look further into history, ultimately protecting memory and forgetting public manipulation. Even in this case, nostalgia can be ambivalent because it can alternatively lead to repetition or transfiguration of the past, both what happened and what could have happened but did not.

These perspectives on nostalgia open up the possibility of a critical rather than triumphant philosophy of history: indeed, nostalgia has the capacity to reject static histories and invite us to re-open unexplored possibilities. It can enable the imagining of different futures, one where sufferers' experiences have a place and can be refigured. It can resist both progressive and conservative adages: that the future will inevitably be better than the past, and that the past was innately better than the future and should be repeated.[v]

If we consider Walter Benjamin and his philosophy of history, it is precisely the suffering of the people swallowed by the past that can be a motivator for emancipation in the present toward a more just future: here nostalgia is the condition of redemptive actions toward suffering and injustices, the ruins left by the triumphant march of history.

The paradoxical trait of the human temporal experience is evident here: On the one hand, it is irreversible and what is gone is unavoidably gone; on the other hand, even in the way in which we recall events, rewriting the past so as to include traces of it in the future is always possible, and this gesture is an act of imaginative transfiguration. Thus, the work of memory and the texture of nostalgia are not something added from an external perspective, but are an integral part of our relationship with the world. This does not mean renouncing the truth, but acknowledging its social and relational construction.

The relationship between nostalgia, memory, and history at the public level has several implications for the interpretation of the past. If viewed as a lost property, defined once and for all, nostalgia seeks to recover it and anchor belonging to a community in terms of common origins. If the past is considered as something to reopen, never definitively completed, in need of constant critical attention because it is useful for future coexistence, it cannot be objectified, "lost," and repeated identically; instead, its absence needs to be accepted, that is, to accept that it has become something else and that it has left open different paths, thus signaling possible futures entrusted to the community that includes and is not afraid of difference. Desmond (1987: 116) clearly explains this point:

Since intermediation tries to acknowledge the other in its irreducible difference, it cannot be defined by any notion of identity relative to which plurality plays a subordinate role. Intermediation does establish a bond between self and other; but this bond does not emerge from some metaphysical nostalgia for the obliteration of difference. […] Our desire for a bond with otherness is fundamental, of course, but this kind of nostalgia grows out of a perspective on difference that regards it as ultimately a privation of identity.

The voids, the space of difference cannot be fulfilled; this assumption means that even if we cannot avoid trying to fill in the gaps, we should acknowledge that these attempts are imaginative and fictive, always renegotiable, and not imposed.

Thus, there is the possibility of reading nostalgia not as the temptation of a unity that erases differences, but quite the contrary; the feeling of resistance to such temptation, the antidote to identification at all costs, and an antidote that manifests itself as disorienting. From such a perspective, nostalgia is always directed to something never experienced as such—something impossible to re-experience—, an absence that fosters the possibilities of imagination and is able to ground common life: nostalgia deals with returning to a home where we never dwelt. When we experience nostalgia, we double our experience

of time and desperately try to fix it by rendering it self-enclosed, not opened to the future. The challenge is to recognize these forms of nostalgia and make them open to the future. In the fictive space that interrupts our experience of a present oriented toward the future, a search for home is displayed, a home that exists as radical, unfulfillable impermanence. Therein, every experience of loss is a trace, and which forces us to deal with absence[vi] without pretending to fill it, without seeking an identical, monolithic, absolute, and ultimately violent totality at all costs.

Thus, nostalgia implies the management of absence, which can lead to different and even contradictory outcomes. The distinction between nostalgia and openness to the future depends on how communities experience absence and understand their identity. If origin is inadequate, communities from different contexts cannot claim to belong on the basis of these roots but must build themselves up by opening to the future. Origin is home, the point of departure, and the historicity that reaffirms human interdependence.

From this viewpoint, the distrust of several political theorists towards nostalgia can be understood; in fact, some prefer to speak of melancholy (Traverso 2016; Winters 2016) as a disenchanted view of the determinism of historical progress and as a motor for imagining a coexistence free from conservative or identitarian temptations. Winters (2016: 248), for instance, posits that nostalgia is the yearning for a past (or future) completeness: "Nostalgia […] marks a longing for a lost time, or place marked by completeness and plenitude; it imagines some harmonious state that exists before some fall or decline […]". In contrast melancholy dwells on the dissatisfaction surrounding the innate incompleteness: "It cultivates a difficult attunement to the ruins and remains that cannot be fully integrated into unifying narratives and projects […] Instead of trying to recover a more complete and happy past, 'melancholic hope' imagines a tension-filled interaction between the past and present Nonetheless, while the fact that nostalgia often operates in the public sphere in the terms described by Winters is true, a nostalgia capable of bearing the weight of absence, replacing the language of origins with that of common ends, and the interweaving of histories to be written, would coincide precisely with the melancholic disappointment to which Winters refers. In contrast to the Freudian view of melancholy, nostalgia activates a desire for the future; it is dynamic, whereas melancholy risks becoming synonymous with despairing resignation.

We tend to fill in a void to reconstruct fictitious and fusional identities precisely when we do not come to terms with the absence and interpret it as a loss of an "object" which could be somehow regained. Since it is also valid for our experience of the past, this applies to our everyday experiences as persons and communities. The question of memory also comes back into play here. If the past is interpreted as a possession to be recovered in an identical manner to what has already happened, its transience is not sufficiently considered and it is intended to be repeated unchanged; in this way, the work of memory is impeded because it recovers the past, but makes it alive in the present, thus noting similarities and differences between past and present situations. When we say that the past is irretrievably so, we do not necessarily mean to cancel its effects on the present and its constant repetition. If nostalgia understood in the sense of identity consists in an operation of mere recuperation, that which comes to terms with absence indicates the need to return to the past to look back on or draw inspiration from it but starting from the awareness that we cannot relive it identically, that we cannot return to the place of origin of our collective ties and histories.

In this sense one can speak of an "indissoluble 'rest' of the past, which is not constructed," and which "keeps stirring and changing the production of cultural memory; […] the past is not entirely beyond our reach. We must act for the concrete traces and sources of past events in order to understand their *nachleben* in contemporaries or later generations" (Molden 2016: 139).

In this sense, to redeem past suffering is not possible, but to redeem the future is, that is, to free it from the evil that has already been, and to remember past happiness to imagine others with similar but never identical characteristics. One cannot burden the future with the expectations of a past that no one knows if it was exactly like that. Here, the famous exchange between Horkheimer and Benjamin concerns the "completeness" of the past and the redemption, which in turn recalls the Adornian (Adorno 1974: 247) idea of redemption. For both, the past is irreparably gone, and neither thinks that a return would be healing. What is gone is unavoidably gone; what is absent cannot be restored, but a sensitive glance toward the past gives the opportunity to re-open the past, not to repeat it, but feed the future.

Walter Benjamin, in his *Berlin Childhood*, writes: "We can never entirely recover what has been forgotten. And this is perhaps a good thing […] the more deeply what has been forgotten lies buried within us, the better we understand this longing." This detachment also enables us to selectively incorporate behaviors and forge a way forward, "[…] everyone has encountered certain things which occasioned more lasting habits than other things. Through them, each person developed those capabilities which helped to determine the course of his life" (2006: 140).

The impossibility of recovering all that has been forgotten helps going out from the logic of possession and to articulate the issue of identity from the standpoint of something similar to the *Unheimlich*. Nostalgia as a collective feeling should be something disorienting, not aimed at recovering what is lost to regain a fusional state. According to Benjamin, longing makes sense only if we do not recover everything from the past and in that absence lies its force and its understandability. The forgotten is intermingled with the present, this means that absence is interweaved with presence and we cannot but live by burdening it, without desperately trying to fill it in.

3. Regression toward the Same or Progressive Openness? In Search for a Criterion

Thus, nostalgia raises problems to the extent that it is closely related to certain models of identity that privilege continuities and rigidities in the maintenance of imaginary boundaries. The fact that the public and political rhetoric of nostalgia today often goes hand in hand with the exaltation of borders to be protected, identities to be preserved, communities (imagined according to Anderson) that must retain their original purity. This link between nostalgia and border protection is both factual and symbolic; understanding identities and belonging as an object over which one can claim a property right makes people wary of otherness, puts them in a defensive position, and fuels social fear. Similarly, the fact that nostalgia is the privileged tool of populism, which feeds on the malaise of the people, is no coincidence. This makes them believe that they can return to the pure place of their origins, where no elites exist, and that the commonality of roots is sufficient to ground and legitimize the pure and always good will of the people.. According to Elçi, "Similarly, displacement is offered to be healed by returning to a collective home, which people wish to return to, free from enemies, corruption, and disruptions. In our case, populists offer negating distance by fighting against the elites – the enemy – while constructing the people – we-ness. Populists also claim that returning to a collective home would heal the people's suffering." (2024: 315). Precisely such an attitude toward identity draws the difference between conservative and progressive nostalgia (Davis 1979: 116). At the same time, starting from its relationship with identity and sameness, and reflecting upon such temptation, nostalgia can be seen also a resisting feeling, a feeling that respects and values differences (Bonnett 2016).

This is where the ambivalence of nostalgia becomes even more evident. A legitimate need for shelter becomes pathological when it switches to self-destruction or that of "the other" in all its forms. Nostalgia is proof of the human need to find shelter, especially in "dark times". This feeling can lead to a distortion of the past and home where they are imagined as comfortable shelters, better than they actually were.

Criticizing a feeling makes no sense since it is not a voluntary action. One can and must criticize its instrumentalization, just as one can recognize that some "social passions" and politics can be rhetorically induced. However, recognition of this is crucial to assess its negative effects and potential. As the case studies demonstrate (Campanella and Dassù 2019; Galston and Hilhorst 2018, Kalinina and Menke 2016), not only in Europe, but also in post-colonial thought (Dipesh Chakrabarty is a case in point), which recognizes how much the colonized have idealized their pre-colonial past to the point of forgetting the evil done by the powerful, nostalgia creates divisions based on rigid belonging and yearns for a return to a stage of absolute purity, uncontaminated by otherness. On the other hand, nostalgia can be a sign of the relevance of the sense of belonging for communities, of rootedness, which belies the illusion of independence and favors a relational reading of personal and political autonomy as it has been understood in modernity (Quill 2024). To reject any kind of nostalgia on the grounds of its dangerousness, however, would be to 'throw the baby out with the bathwater.'

If we examine forms of nostalgia linked to exile or subaltern memories, for example, how nostalgia is not merely an identity refuge in a mythical and fusionist past, but rather a memory of a provenance to be remodeled emerges. Such memory follows us wherever we live and is not lost, but has to be reinterpreted and experienced otherwise, without making it an obstacle to weaving new relationships and building communities oriented toward justice. Moreover, nostalgia can also act as a counter-

hegemonic mnemonic device. Only by authentically pluralizing memories and letting nostalgias emerge can the revolutionary force of nostalgia be recognized and effective.[vii]

An inclusive public sphere should be trained to detect nostalgic discourse and practices rather than ignore them. Listening to and collecting stories and histories of nostalgia could be the first step in discerning distinct types and identifying uses and abuses. Unexplored possibilities in the past could be mined to understand if and under what circumstances nostalgia could function as a resource rather than a threat to an ethics of memory.

I suggest that constructive nostalgia is able to manage our relation to time by balancing the effects of irreversibility and taking the responsibility of counterfactually imagining time as not definitively past, even if irremediably gone. One of the most effective pictures of such a relation to time is Sebald's idea of the tightrope walker (2001) to signify the attitude that humans should develop towards the tragedies of history; something always again possible to return, even in different forms. There is an awareness of the irreversibility of time, but one should act and live as if the past could come back, both in a positive and a negative sense. As for the positive meaning, we should act as if we had the possibility of redeeming the past, being completely aware of its impossibility and completeness, and then move our expectations of justice forward, ultimately aiming at the future generations.

This would mean learning from history. The negative meaning of the metaphor of the tightrope walker is that the suffering and the pain coming from the past can always be actualized, just as the work of memory does, and this has the same effect as the void and fear of falling into it has for the tightrope. Walking as if we were suspended within the void is the same as experiencing reflective nostalgia, which does not want to come back but feels an unavoidable pain toward what the past contains, which could come back. Perhaps nostalgia is not only a suffering from irreversibility, but the fear of the reversibility of time, accompanied by something like the perception that nothing has really and definitely passed by. Nostalgia, in particular reflective nostalgia, then, is not only something aimed at coming back, but also at avoiding the past becoming present again by perpetrating the same mistakes.

When carelessly applied, nostalgia can remain oblivious to the evil that has actually transpired. It can distort the memory of the past, imagining it as a lost state of beatitude. It can selectively remember only the positives and forget the suffering. Therefore, nostalgia appears to be much more complex than might be thought at first: It is like a gravitational force that pushes people downwards and, simultaneously, it is a force that pushes people in the opposite direction, running toward the future to find home and shelter, and find the justice claimed and not obtained by and in the past.

Nostalgia is not only a restorative feeling aimed at repairing unavoidable damage. It is and should be used as a "critical" feeling, aimed at entering into discussion the linearity and unavoidability of progress and of time, together with the persuasion that coming back is always possible in the sense of making the same mistakes and provoking suffering. There is a side of nostalgia that is dangerous, to the extent that it is attracted toward what provoked suffering among individuals or communities. Only the awareness that this attraction could be destructive can transform nostalgia into a critical feeling that accompanies time and our experience in the world and with others. Simultaneously, nostalgia indicates a way of coming to terms with memory and history: the former is an action, and history is in no way a coherent and cumulative path toward justice. Only by starting anew and trying to relativize the idea of happiness as wholeness can we avoid the risk of perpetrating injustice.

Even if overly rigid conceptual distinctions tend to ignore the nuances of experience, to hypothesize one or more criteria for distinguishing good and bad uses of nostalgia, when it is linked to regression, populism, exaltation of origins, and identity as belonging by birth, rejection of change, and distance, then its use is arguably deleterious. Conversely, the use of nostalgia is positive when it evokes the memory of a non-idealized belonging, invites us to return to the wounds of the past rather than its glories, is opposed to the idea of automatic historical progress, helps to understand people's feelings, and open to the possibility of accepting absence and change.

4. Concluding Remarks: Nostalgia For Justice To Come

If these are the social and political experiences of nostalgia, from an ethical-anthropological viewpoint, the criterion for distinguishing its uses and abuses can be identified, prima facie, in its constructiveness or destructiveness. Digging even deeper, one can hypothesize that its destructiveness derives from a lack of acceptance of an absence with which the human must come to terms and with which they cannot

fill with their finite being; above all, one cannot think of re-appropriating something we have never possessed nor would it be right to possess, for example the other and relationships. Whenever reference is made to origins, to purity that excludes and is often invented, nostalgia becomes a weapon to destroy diversity and undermine the construction of a polyphonic and inclusive public sphere. Whenever one reifies an identity, turns it into an object with immutable characteristics, and pretends that it is immune to any contamination,[viii] nostalgia corrodes and destroys. When nostalgia is an imaginative exercise that opens up to unprecedented forms of cohabitation and coexistence, is sheltered from any proprietary and acquisitive temptation, but is only sorrowful for human finitude, then it can serve to build imaginative and real worlds in which memories do not exclude each other, differences may conflict, but must never advocate the destruction of the other.

The good can vary and surprise, while the bad, in its impersonality and banality, can repeat itself close to what happened in the past. Imagination can act as a faculty that helps open up new possibilities or vice versa, as a pitfall that deceives subjects into shaping the past according to their desires. Thus, the uses of nostalgia in reconstructing the past and designing the future are closely related to the uses of imagination; even remembering is a form of imagination.

What if the idea of a lost past, of a lost home, were used to motivate and justify contemporary emancipatory paths of subaltern categories, not to regain a complete unity, but rather to build solidarity-oriented communities anew? This could apply mostly to migrant identities, which are always the outcome of a negotiation (Ritivoi 2002). Home never existed as such. Similarly, Afro-nostalgia (Ahad-Legardy 2021) is referred to as a case of positive nostalgia, which does not mean only regret, but rather the will to keep roots alive and difference flourish.

Nostalgia can serve both the cause of identitarian processes that aim to restore an origin by inventing it and the cause of an openness to the future, ethically committed to uncovering past injustices and not repeating them, even when the traces are no longer present. Nostalgia for a redeemed world is not the attempt to come back, just as imagination of a better world does not mean the hope for it to come back, a hope that would be vain, but rather the prefiguration of a future to construct. Even if it exists, its origin, by definition, is not accessible. The striving for justice is something in charge of the future and something to be constructed instead of recovered.

Nostalgia can be considered progressive when it departs from conceiving of identity as inextricably linked to the historical canon and traditional versions of the past and instead resembles a future-looking desire and hope. This nostalgia for the future frames justice as a task to be imagined and realized through mining the possibilities found in the unexplored and forgotten stories of the past – stories that have been silenced and erased by the traditionally accepted versions of the past. While nostalgia for the future is progressive, it does not embrace the inevitability of progress. Quite to the contrary, it critiques the idea of linear progress since it requires a circling back to re-examine the past to find the path forward.

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[i] The ambivalence of nostalgia can also be explained through the distinction made by Boym (2001) between "restorative" and "reflective" nostalgia. According to Boym, "restorative nostalgia does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition. Reflective nostalgia dwells on the ambivalence of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity. Restorative nostalgia protects the absolute truth, while reflective nostalgia calls it into doubt" (2001, xviii).

[ii] Here I refer to Critical Theory in a broad sense: it can be defined as a transformative approach to social and political reality, which investigates social pathologies, identifies them through an plural analysis of cultural, psychological, social, economic, political phenomena, and tries to propose alternative ways of emancipation and freedom from domination. Critical Theory, nonetheless, uses also a particular methodology, starting from its critique to the Weberian *Wertfreiheit* of the social sciences. I will also draw upon some authors of the Frankfurt Shool, the founders of this approach.

[iii] Nostalgia was long considered a pathology (Roth), or at least a pathogenic and criminogenic emotion (Jaspers 1990 [1910]).

[iv] To be precise, the dictionary also contains the headword nostalgia, which translates the German *Heimweh*. it is as if the German language keeps track of the structural ambivalence of nostalgia, between identity closure and openness to the infinite.

[v] With respect to such a perspective on the philosophy of history, some ideas of Christopher Lasch are useful to locate nostalgia between regression and progression. He writes: "Nostalgic representations of the past evoke a time irretrievably lost and for that reason timeless and unchanging. Strictly speaking, nostalgia does not entail the exercise of memory at all, since the past it idealizes stands outside time, frozen in unchanging perfection" (Lasch 1990: 18).

[vi] As Harris (2015) notes in his book, *The End of Absence*, dangerous nostalgia ignores absence, which cannot live with it and prefers to fill every void.

[vii] in addition to the link between nostalgia and memory, the link between nostalgia and historiography has also been examined recently, highlighting its political implications: "Nostalgia holds at least two problems in its relation to history as an academic discipline. The first problem seems to be rather unfortunate, but negligible, and could be called tastelessness, because the partly explicit rejection of the work of academic historiography sometimes leads in nostalgic circles to productions of the past that can only be described as kitsch. The second problem is much more serious and is, as far as I can observe, much less often discussed in this context. Far from being just a little bit of playing around with an idealized and emotionally charged past, nostalgia also has a political component" (Landwehr 2018: 264).

[viii] In relation to nature, for example, talk of solastalgia exists, which is often understood as a return to a pristine primeval state, without considering that nature is also a social construct and is comprised of interactions. Even in this case, the desire for a different, serene, and untroubled relationship with nature can be oriented to the future rather than to an irretrievable past, and can guide the policies of future generations remains the case.