

THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF NOSTALGIA

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Tobias Becker and Dylan Trigg

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Chapter 18

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Jessica Stanier

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18

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Jessica Stanier

Introduction

There is little that can be said in a strictly universal sense about older age, except that it entails having lived a long time relative to other people (cf. Butler 1963). Other characteristics that are stereotypically attributed to older age—decline in health, silver hair, lined skin, etc. (Segal 2014)—are determined by a variety of intertwined biological and social factors. Indeed, in some cases, these characteristics might not manifest at older age at all. As Gilleard (2014) puts it, “[e]ven interpreted as a biological process, human aging is only realized within a social and cultural context, expressed and made salient through its embodiment within the social” (37; cf. Dewey 1939, xxvi). Even the longevity that defines older age does not necessarily map a linear trajectory—the cliché of moving from youthful open horizons to later life foreclosed by mortality—as depictions of ageing throughout history would suggest. Cultural and political contexts, personal and historical circumstances, and non-linear long-term health challenges substantially complicate the picture.¹ These, of course, include intersections of power relations such as “[r]ace, class, gender, sexuality, [...] ability, nation, ethnicity, and similar categories of analysis” (Collins 2015, 14).

As such, the phenomenon of older age resists being rendered in straightforward terms of cause and effect. This sense of overdetermination is echoed by Beauvoir in *The Coming of Age* (1996 [1972]), in which she claims that

The individual is conditioned by society’s theoretical and practical attitude towards him. An analytical description of the various aspects of old age is therefore not enough: each reacts upon all the others and is at the same time affected by them, and it is in the undefined flow of this circular process that old age must be understood.

(9)

Characteristics associated with ageing thus manifest differently across social and historical contexts, and vary according to the kinds of lives older people have lived.² Ageing involves an accrual of experiences throughout the life course, together with a changing sense of self (Tengelyi 2004). Specifically at older age, ageing is often associated with mortality, loss,

health conditions, and altered social roles. The prominence of these phenomena at older age differentially shapes negotiations of selfhood, finitude, and belonging across cultural contexts (cf. Stoller 2014). Indeed, these associations can sometimes overshadow more positive aspects of ageing and older age—something that scholars in the fields of critical age studies and critical gerontology have sought to untangle (cf. Gilleard 2014). The lived realities of ageing and older age are thus highly complex, and it can be problematic to assert claims about ageing and older age in general beyond their temporal expansiveness.

To evade the complexity of ageing and older age, however, runs the risk of crude generalisation and ageist simplification.³ This certainly applies to analysis of nostalgia—a phenomenon often associated with older people in a pejorative sense. Older people’s nostalgia is sometimes understood as pertaining to a denial of the present, “refus[ing] time because they do not wish to decline; they define their former I as that which they still are – they assert their solidarity with their youth” (Beauvoir 1996, 362). Sometimes older people’s nostalgia is framed as more politically problematic, harkening back to “the good old days” without heeding the salient historical differences, sensitivities, and needs of contemporary contexts and their peoples (cf. Bristow 2021). These stereotypes tend to reflect broader cultural prejudices about older people (Gullette 1997), and they call for clarification: what is the relationship between older age and nostalgia?

In this chapter, I offer an overview of connections between nostalgia, ageing, and older age, and attempt to make a case for engaging with the complexity of older age when analysing nostalgia. I draw from a range of academic literature to explore structural and existential factors that can co-constitute a sense of nostalgia at older age. In the first two sections, I sketch out the significance of temporal belonging in ageing, older age, and nostalgia, making a distinction between reminiscence and nostalgia at older age. Later in the chapter, I explore how *multiple* nostalgias—from various generational standpoints—can influence perceptions of intergenerational conflict. My account in this chapter thus attends to the phenomenon of nostalgia in relation to older age, while attempting not to replicate the ageist reification of nostalgic “old age”—something which can so often obscure both the complex lived realities of ageing and more multifaceted politics of nostalgia at play.

Temporal Belonging and Nostalgia

Others have no doubt also commented in this handbook on how the word “nostalgia” was first coined as a term by Johannes Hofer—the young physician who, in 1688, expanded on the concept of “homesickness” by combining the Greek terms νόστος (*nóstos*: homecoming) and ἄλγος (*álgos*: suffering, grief, or sorrow). For Hofer, the term “nostalgia” altogether described “the sad mood originating from the desire to return to one’s native land” (1934 [1688], 381). His use of this word offered a “diagnosis” for the severe symptoms experienced by Swiss soldiers during a military campaign abroad (cf. Lems 2016, 420; Fuentenebro de Diego and Valiente Ots 2014)—medicalising what had, in many ways, been regarded as “the norm, even admirable or noble” in earlier historical contexts (Batcho 2013, 166). The meaning of nostalgia has evolved substantially since Hofer’s neologism, shifting from a physical pathology, to a psychiatric category, to a psychological concept used in understanding loss, transition, and grief (ibid., 167). In its more contemporary usage, while nostalgia certainly can, as in Hofer’s original example, pertain to spatialised homesickness or geographical displacement, *memory* is understood as a crucial condition of possibility for nostalgic feelings. Memory enables the temporal comparison between the present “here” and the past “there”

to which one longs to return. This view of nostalgia therefore entails a contextually situated attitude towards the past, often accompanied by the ambiguous awareness that one longs for an *idealised* past which one understands cannot come to pass again—and was perhaps never truly present (cf. Lowenthal 2015, 31). It is this latter understanding of nostalgia on which I will be focussed in this chapter.

As the etymology of the word suggests, nostalgia is specifically oriented towards a past (or pasts) during which the nostalgic subject felt *at home*, or, in other words, a sense of *belonging* (Trigg 2017, 123). The nostalgic subject, in a sense, longs for a time “marked by the complete absence of nostalgia itself” (Trigg 2018, 53). Some scholars have, in fact, argued that nostalgia can be drawn upon in a positive sense, orienting the nostalgic subject in the present towards activity that might establish a future sense of belonging based on prior norms of familiarity (Hems 2016, 431; cf. Vess et al. 2012; Routledge et al. 2013). As Tannock (1995) writes, “nostalgic individuals” are not necessarily always stuck in loops of regressive or conservative fantasy, as some critiques of nostalgia might suggest, but instead “may equally, in the face of a present that seems overly fixed, static, and monolithic, long for a past in which things could be put into play, opened up, moved about, or simply given a little breathing space” (455–456). Indeed, initial feelings of discomfort, or homesickness, can give rise to future-oriented expressions and actions that accordingly foster a new sense of belonging. While, as Trigg (2018) notes, “nostalgia’s ‘value’ does not reside in its capacity to invoke an actual homecoming” (57), the affective orientation afforded by nostalgia can be generative. No actual return to the past is possible, but the habitus established in that past has a bearing on the present; some modes of living thus present wider horizons of future possibility than others, and aspects of nostalgic experience can serve as a guide in this regard.⁴ It is perhaps where this activity of reestablishing familiarity is *not* possible, then, that nostalgia manifests with its most painful and problematic chronicity. This kind of nostalgia underscores loss and displacement since they cannot be adequately addressed in the present.⁵

Various circumstances can precipitate nostalgia of this latter kind, as explored across many chapters in this volume. As Boym (2001) notes, extended nostalgia like this can manifest in a contradictory refusal to “surrender to the irreversibility of time that plagues the human condition” (13)—a refusal that arises specifically in *recognition* of the fact that life has indeed lapsed into the past. The allure of an idealised past, in a problematic present, can cultivate a resistance to change and remaining open to the future, despite the fact that such resistance cannot alter time’s passing. This fundamental existential dimension of lived experience—the passing of lived time—is both that which makes possible enduring experiences of *belonging*, and also that which displaces those moments into the *longing* at the heart of nostalgia. While this dynamic plays out across the life course, older people are perhaps especially acquainted with this process—having lived for a long time. Moreover, while not all older people experience chronic nostalgia, there are structural and existential factors at older age that can contribute to nostalgic feelings and a lost sense of temporal belonging.

Nostalgia and Reminiscence at Older Age

The passing of time is integral to the structures of both nostalgia and older age. Nostalgia involves a specific attitude towards the past—i.e., a longing for temporal belonging—and older people have a much more extensive past on which to reflect. To understand nostalgia at older age, it is therefore important to distinguish between reminiscence and nostalgia, and to avoid equivocating between the two. Reminiscence can be understood as the *act* of

recollecting past experiences (not as straightforward “access” to a “copy” of prior events, but through partial reconstruction of perception and narrative—Bluck and Levine 1998, 187; cf. Tengelyi 2004). The affective hue of reminiscence can be highly variable; I can reminisce with regret and remorse, with pride and satisfaction, etc. By contrast, as discussed above, nostalgia specifically involves associative relations in which some aspect of feeling at home in the past informs feelings of longing in the present.⁶ Indeed, feelings of nostalgia need not entail active recollection, as in reminiscence, but can instead be more passively underpinned by unconscious bodily memories (Fuchs 2012). Reminiscence *can be* nostalgic, but is *not necessarily* so; while reminiscence is also motivated by a connection to the present, not all acts of recollection are put into relief against a lack of temporal belonging in that present.

Reminiscence and the narration of life history are important means through which many older people make sense of their lives, in light of diminished futural horizons and an accrued lived past. This thesis was famously forwarded in “The Life Review: An Interpretation of Reminiscence in the Aged”—an influential paper in gerontology and age studies in which Butler (1963) posits “the universal occurrence in older people of an inner experience or mental process of reviewing one’s life” (65). Butler suggested that reminiscence can confront individuals with challenging personal truths and contribute to “certain late-life disorders, like depression,” as well as offering “candor, serenity, and wisdom” (65). He posited that older people, prompted by an encroaching sense of mortality, are “naturally” inclined to reminisce and make sense of their lives anew.⁷ While the universal status of Butler’s claim is perhaps contentious—not everyone experiences their life predominantly in retrospective narrative form (Woods 2011)—acts of storytelling can, as Lems (2016) puts it, “create the possibility to not just narrate but also experientially rework ourselves” (427). For older people, reminiscence can thus sometimes offer a means by which to navigate transitions and changes at older age which can precipitate new senses of self, such as retirement, relocation, bereavement, grandparenthood, and care. Gullette (1997), a founding figure in age studies, relatedly emphasises the importance of having “a life story, a long tale in the telling” (213) for many older people, as an autobiography of sorts that makes possible the articulation of an “age identity” (216) as continuity through changes across the life course (cf. Bohlmeijer et al. 2011).

This kind of reminiscence and review can, however, be tinted with nostalgia at older age. The more negative sense of nostalgia can emerge especially where transitions and changes give rise to an overall sense of loss rather than renewal of self. As Beauvoir writes in *The Coming of Age* (1976), a loss of “ontological security” (469) in one’s sense of self at older age can give rise to nostalgic reminiscence: “[s]ince it is no longer the old person’s role to cause himself to exist by doing, he wishes to have in order to be” (470; cf. Laing 1960, 42). There is a suggestion here that memory, regarded as a possession of past time, would form the basis of an “ontologically secure” age identity, shored up against challenges to prior senses of selfhood.⁸ As much as older age is heavily shaped by social factors, it is worth bearing in mind that older age is a phase of the life course that does offer a structural propensity to various kinds of rupture and loss. Bereavement of friends and family members (irreplaceable relationships), emergence and diagnosis of illness and disability, the potential necessity of altering or moving home, etc. can all pose serious challenges to a sense of belonging and can precipitate a longing for a time when life was easier. This longing is likely to be amplified by certain social and political contexts, including the ageist construal of later life as an unequivocal period of foreboding, decline, and decay (cf. Higgs and Gilleard 2020). With ample resources and strong relationships, nostalgic reminiscence might help to guide and facilitate “healthy” transition in response to these changes at older age. In the absence of sufficient care or support to address these difficulties, nostalgia may emerge in its more chronic and painful forms.⁹

The predicaments faced by older people in many ways underscore “the impossibility of being-at-home in a rapidly changing world” emphasised in broader accounts of nostalgia and its social significance (Lems 2016, 424). The necessity of adapting to changing social and embodied realities across the life course, perhaps especially at older age, troubles the notion of being at home in the present. Opportunities to adapt to these losses and ruptures are sometimes curtailed precisely by their accrual, as well as by tapering future prospects. So while no single one of the examples above will *necessarily* impact on any single given older person’s life, and none of these circumstances *inevitably* leads to a nostalgic outlook, it is important to acknowledge how older age is associated with a distinctive set of challenges that can give rise to nostalgic feelings.

This makes it all the more important to resist depictions of older people’s nostalgia that straightforwardly conflate a wistfulness for an easier past life with a politically problematic or conservative nostalgia. This would also amount to equivocation between nostalgic reminiscence concerning specific episodic memories and more abstract rhetorical gestures (e.g., “back in my day...”). Campanella and Dassù (2019), for instance, claim that “[o]lder people are the most likely to fall victim to nostalgia” (2), since older people “remember their youth” as associated with “happy moments and youthful thoughtfulness” (34), suggesting that this phenomenon contributes to populist political nostalgia—in particular, where the future seems more uncertain and prospects for future generations seem diminished (35). Analysis that links older age and particular kinds of nostalgia needs to be handled with care. As Tannock (1995) importantly observes,

[n]ostalgia approaches the past as a stable source of value and meaning; but this desire for a stable source cannot be conflated with the desire for a stable, traditional, and hierarchized society. [...] The type of past (open or closed, stable or turbulent, simple or inspired) longed for by the nostalgic subject will depend on her present position in society, on her desires, her fears, and her aspirations.

(455–456)

Older age can factor as a contributing factor to nostalgic feelings, since longevity presents opportunities to recall when times seemed better or easier—but this can manifest in many complex ways. Jean Améry (2009), for instance, famously reflected on the specific and painful sense of nostalgia he experienced as a survivor of Auschwitz while growing older away from a home that had been destroyed (58–59). To take another example, Rasch (2018) analyses how various white memoirs from Zimbabwe express a particular kind of “postcolonial nostalgia,” involving a “contemporary discursive distancing from the colonial record” at odds with other affects associated with the remembered past—“*a nostalgia in spite of itself*” (150). Older age itself thus does not directly drive how nostalgia comes to be expressed or articulated; the “position in society” of the “nostalgic [older] subject” is highly relevant (Tannock 1995, 156), not to mention the historical norms shaping what it is like to be an older subject in that period.¹⁰

The assumption that older people are existentially or essentially predisposed towards problematically nostalgic attitudes, less able to respond with freshness and attentiveness to contemporary issues, “has been taken up by younger generations throughout history” (Mannheim 1952 [1928], 297; cf. Batcho 2013, 170). As Mannheim writes in his influential essay “The Problem of Generations,” any attempt to “establish a direct identity or correlation” between conservatism and being older, or progressiveness and being younger, will be ill-founded; chronological age may “initiate certain formal tendencies” or attitudes, he

says, but “the actual manifestations [...] will ultimately depend on the prevailing social and cultural context” (ibid.)—much like many other aspects of older age. A given older person’s response to conditions precipitating nostalgia arises out of manifold networked relations pertaining to their life and outlook. Some older people do, indeed, harbour political views underpinned by exclusionary nostalgic tendencies. The key analytical point to stress here, though, is that politically regressive nostalgia is not driven or determined by longevity or older age themselves. For example, while it is absolutely crucial not to shy away from the legacies and present consequences of racism among some older people, it is also important not to crudely regard attitudes among older people as homogenous nor to regard racism as an issue attributable primarily to older people. After all, the historical inheritance of racist ideology also entails participation and appropriation by new generations (Phillips and Webster 2013).

To further elucidate these dynamics, I offer some illustrative reflections in the next section, focused mainly on the contemporary UK context, to explore how the connections between older age and nostalgia are sometimes misunderstood today, and why this matters for an analysis of the politics of nostalgia.

Nostalgia, Intergenerationality, and Ageism

The political context which frames the reception of older people’s nostalgia as intrinsically problematic or conservative is far from incidental. Increased life expectancy and declining fertility are driving population ageing. According to the UN’s “World Population Prospects” report (United Nations 2019), by 2050 the proportion of people in the world aged over 65 will have risen from 1 in 11 people to 1 in 6. In Europe and North America, this is likely to be closer to one in four people (cf. United Nations 2020). This demographic change—the “greying of society”—has magnified negative social attitudes towards older people in general (Segal 2014, 2). Indeed, this phenomenon is often referred to as the “ageing tsunami,” or through other ageist metaphors that invoke the sense of an impending catastrophe (Barusch 2013; cf. Gilleard and Higgs 2013). These factors have coalesced in ways that not only construe older age—particularly towards the end of life—as undesirable and unsightly, but also crucially as a *problem* for everyone else. Especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the growing numbers of older people have been cast as a burden on the economy, accessible housing, friends and family, demographic productivity, and perhaps especially health and care services (Brooke and Jackson 2020; Leahy 2020).

Some of this sentiment can perhaps be attributed to what Bristow (2021) terms “Boomer blaming,” wherein responsibility for a variety of social problems is attributed to older people in the Baby Boom generation—including “economic crises, cultural conflicts and political divisions” (759)—the Brexit referendum being emblematic of this kind of “conflict” in a UK context.¹¹ In this view, the “outdated,” “closed-minded,” or “*nostalgic*” attitudes of older people can be depicted as “stealing” time that is regarded as *belonging* to younger people, thereby depriving them of opportunities and failing to secure a better future for generations to come.¹² These frustrations can be directed at older people as individuals—not only for their participation in a past which has contributed to present problems but also for an alleged nostalgia that centres their own concerns and needs. Equivocation between being older, nostalgic, and conservative highlighted by Mannheim (see above) can play a role in these grievances. As Pitts et al. (2022) write, while age is a relevant factor in understanding evolving political attitudes, there is a tendency to reify nostalgic conservatism at older age,

which “liquidates the complexity that cuts across classes and generations” (86). An extreme version of these frustrations is depicted vividly in Margaret Atwood’s fictional short story “Torching the Dusties” (2014), in which protesters in baby-faced masks attempt geronticide by burning down nursing homes amid cries of “Time to Go” (274) and “Our Turn” (280 cf. Kriebeneegg 2018).

This framing of intergenerational differences, partly rooted in the inflammatory idea that older people are always nostalgic to the detriment of young people, suggests that intergenerational conflict is somehow inevitable and that intergenerational solidarity is inherently rare. It also effaces examples of older people, many of whom are marginalised in other ways, whose nostalgic reminiscence is directed as generative critique (Lang 2015; Villar and Camesa 2018). Mannheim (1952 [1928]), however, argues that generational division does not happen through an inevitable sequence or cycle, but rather that

[a]s a result of an acceleration in the tempo of social and cultural transformation basic attitudes [...] change so quickly that the latent, continuous adaptation and modification of traditional patterns of experience, thought and expression is no longer possible.

(309; cf. Milburn 2019, 15)

While it may indeed be the case that older people can harbour older “patterns of experience, thought and expression” (ibid.) that differ significantly from younger generations—some of which are indeed harmful—the kind of “social and cultural transformation” to which Mannheim refers is experienced, if differently, by people of all ages in a given society. For example, the Centre for Ageing Better (2021) has reported that those at “the tail end of the post-war baby-boom” in the UK are facing considerably worse prospects now, as a result of societal shifts such as “longer working lives and the growth of the gig economy, a crisis of housing supply and quality, and increasing demand to provide care for family and loved ones” (4).¹³ While the challenges faced by younger British people—such as declining wages, being part of “Generation Rent,” student debt, and many other issues (Milburn 2019, 12)—manifest differently, the structural factors driving these contemporary changes are experienced by people across the life course. Issues like financial and welfare inequalities within generations are obscured by narratives which generalise about age and pit younger and older people against each other (cf. Bristow 2021, 766).

Indeed, another kind of nostalgia—nostalgia for an idealised past when younger people might not have faced these issues—may equally be at play, expressive of very real struggles in the present and hopes for temporal belonging. Such a nostalgia still risks leaving the disenfranchisement of many older people out of its purview. In that sense, we might ask how multiple nostalgias, across generations, can influence the perception of intergenerational conflict. As Halbwachs (1992) observes, “there is a kind of retrospective mirage by which a great number of us persuade ourselves that the world of today has less color and is less interesting than it was in the past”—“[n]ot only the old” (94). The past is rendered available to people across the life course as a resource for nostalgic longing and, as I have sought to explore in this chapter, certain constellations of relations can amplify this potentiality. We can therefore recognise how some structural and existential factors contribute to nostalgia at older age in particular, and, at the same time, appreciate how the diverse kinds of nostalgia experienced by older people are shaped within social contexts—not inevitably driven by chronological age.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has offered an overview of connections between nostalgia, ageing, and older age, attempting to encourage engagement with the complexity of older age when analysing nostalgia. I offer some conclusions here. First and foremost, older age is not a straightforward determinant of nostalgia, though connections between longevity, nostalgia, and reminiscence can mean that older age is a contributing factor to particular nostalgic complexes. Second, as explored in the section above, it is important to maintain that by no means do older people hold a monopoly on the politics of nostalgia. As much as some circumstances can precipitate nostalgia which are especially associated with older age, as I have explored in this chapter, this does not inevitably lead to a regressive political outlook. Longing to feel at home in the present, to inhabit a now that affords possibility, is a sentiment that cuts across hugely diverse social and political positions; “the presence of multiple and different nostalgias [...] has to be acknowledged” (Tannock 1995, 454). As we address the many contemporary issues pertaining to intergenerational justice (e.g., climate crisis; cf. Fritsch 2018), we can remain curious about the cultures and environments which foster nostalgia in their subjects, accordingly attending to our own nostalgic tendencies, construals of the life course, and fantasies of belonging.

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Notes

- 1 Indeed, developments in medical and social care over the past century have dramatically altered these trajectories, illustrating how historical context significantly alters “what it means to become older” (cf. Gilteard and Higgs 2017).
- 2 In the UK context, for example, there are “huge ethnic inequalities in wealth, debt, assets and pensions” which determine experiences of ageing for older people of colour (Centre for Ageing Better 2020). The inequalities in life expectancy between those living in the least and most deprived areas of the UK is also increasing (Office of National Statistics 2020)—something that the current cost-of-living crisis is likely to exacerbate.
- 3 Ageism is defined variously as “prejudice by one age group against another age group” (Butler 1969, 243) and “[t]he complex, often negative construction of old age, which takes place at the individual and the societal levels” (Ayalon and Tesch-Römer 2018, 3; cf. Johnson and Bytheway 1993).
- 4 We might consider, for instance, how nostalgia can play a complex role in reckoning with and “repairing the extensive memory of the dispossession and the discrimination that weighs on Indigenous imaginaries” in the context of colonialism (Villar and Canessa 2018, 854). To take another example, while culinary nostalgia can give rise to anxieties about retaining the ontological “purity” of foods, it can also offer creative and “emancipatory” potential for migrants seeking familiarity away from home (Mannur 2007, 28).
- 5 It is, of course, important not to depoliticise the process by which this state of nostalgic inertia is constituted, which arises often not merely affectively or individually but also materially and culturally. I would like to thank Cat Fischer for drawing my attention to Kafer’s related notion of “compulsory nostalgia” in *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (2013, 42), as an articulation of how nostalgia is shaped at the intersection of various socio-political expectations about belonging.

- 6 As Hart (1973) writes, in describing the phenomenology of nostalgia, “[t]he basic condition for the awakening re-presenting of something from the dark remote past is that there is a bond established with the actual present. [...] All awakening of the retained past has its motivating interest in the living present” (400–401).
- 7 Similar claims are made by theorists across the humanities, sometimes more overtly linking this tendency to reminisce to older people’s role in the intergenerational transmission of knowledge (Halbwachs 1992, 91–92).
- 8 Beauvoir’s analysis of older age is linked to her existentialist philosophy, in which she advocates for acknowledging the ambiguity of freedom within finitude to avoid “bad faith.” This more negative sense of nostalgia seems to risk “bad faith” in denying possibilities for being or becoming. However, Beauvoir also seems to suggest, at times, that at older age “it is far better not to think about it too much” (1996, 541), implying that some degree of bad faith is necessary in order to maintain a meaningful connection with a diminishing future—that is, at least, failing a more radical upheaval of the socio-political order (cf. Small 2010, 4).
- 9 Older people’s reminiscence, in this context, can constitute a bid for connection (i.e., visiting a memory together with an other), but can also serve to shore up long-standing attitudes when inflected with a rhetorical use of nostalgia. In this sense, as Lundgren (2010) notes, nostalgia (especially in terms of disagreement with a present state of affairs) can be a means for older people to manoeuvre their subject position as ‘old’ in specific ways—sometimes resisting ageist presumptions, (problematically) appealing for consensus, seeking understanding from others, or lending authority to the speaker (ibid., 254).
- 10 In understanding that the manifestation of nostalgia at older age is heavily contextual, it is also crucially important to recognise how the very process of becoming older has changed substantially. A full review of these historical changes exceeds the scope of this chapter, but for an extensive historical overview of structures shaping older age, including care provision, social attitudes, and the conception of the ‘fourth age’ as a phase of the life course, see Higgs and Gilleard 2017.
- 11 As Bristow (2021) notes, the actual voting behaviour of people of different ages at the UK EU Referendum is more complicated than often depicted, involving other factors such as levels of education and regional location (760).
- 12 The language of “stealing” time has been mobilised in expressions against older people with respect to COVID-19 restriction measures (Spaccatini, Giovannelli, and Pacilli 2022), for example, as well as among young environmental activist groups (Pickard 2021). I do not mean to suggest an equivalence between the substance of these claims, of course, but simply to highlight the rhetorical sentiment of “stealing” time which these intergenerational grievances share.
- 13 Financial inequality in later life is increasing in the UK: it is especially shocking among older people of colour; older women are facing greater financial precarity approaching retirement; long term health conditions among those in their 50s and 60s are limiting their ability to work up to state pension age; huge numbers of these people are also juggling care responsibilities; and community connections have weakened substantially (Centre for Ageing Better 2021, 5).

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