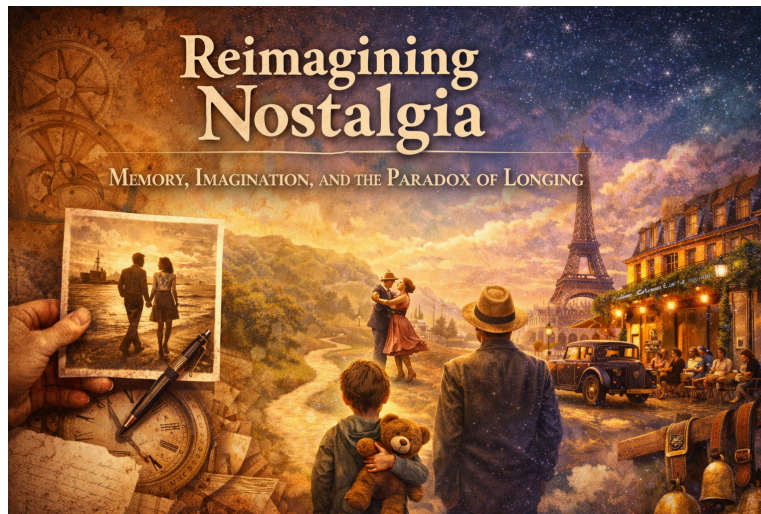


CATMOCK DAILY

March 7, 2026

Nostalgia Beyond Memory

- AEON



When Gabriel García Márquez described the deceptive charm of nostalgia in *Love in the Time of Cholera*, he captured a familiar psychological tendency: memory often filters experience, diminishing the unpleasant while amplifying the pleasant. This distortion enables individuals to endure the burden of the past by transforming it into something emotionally tolerable. Yet such transformations also raise a conceptual puzzle. People frequently experience nostalgia for periods of life they would never willingly relive. The feeling of longing for something one simultaneously rejects suggests that nostalgia cannot simply be explained as a desire to return to a past reality. Understanding this paradox requires reconsidering what nostalgia actually is.

The word 'nostalgia' was introduced in 1688 by the Swiss physician Johannes Hofer to describe a medical condition resembling severe homesickness. The term combined the Greek *nostos* (return home) and *algos* (pain), reflecting the belief that the condition involved distress caused by separation from one's homeland. Early physicians associated nostalgia with symptoms such as insomnia, melancholy, and loss of appetite. Because it appeared frequently among soldiers stationed far from home, some doctors speculated that geographical or environmental factors were responsible. At one point, it was even proposed that the ringing of Alpine cowbells or changes in atmospheric pressure caused the disorder. As cases emerged among soldiers from diverse regions, however, the idea that nostalgia was geographically specific gradually lost credibility.

By the early twentieth century, nostalgia was reclassified as a psychological rather than neurological condition. Psychoanalytic theorists interpreted it not as literal homesickness but as a displaced response to deeper emotional disturbances. In their view, nostalgia symbolised unresolved longing rooted in early developmental experiences, particularly separation from the mother. Later interpretations softened this view by broadening the meaning of "home". Nostalgia could now refer not only to physical places but also to lost experiences, relationships, or

moments in time. Despite these revisions, a widely accepted framework eventually emerged: nostalgia was thought to involve three elements—a cognitive component consisting of autobiographical memory, an affective component characterised by sadness, and a conative component defined by a desire to return to the past.

However, empirical research suggests that this traditional model is incomplete. Studies conducted by psychologists such as Krystine Batcho and Tim Wildschut indicate that people frequently report nostalgia for things that are not specific places or precise autobiographical episodes. Individuals often feel nostalgic about friendships, cultural artefacts, general time periods, or diffuse experiences such as childhood security. Moreover, people sometimes experience nostalgia for eras they never lived through. The popular fascination with imagined pasts—such as the romanticised Paris of the 1920s—illustrates how nostalgia can arise without direct personal memory.

These findings suggest that nostalgia's cognitive foundation may not be memory itself but rather a broader process of mental simulation. Contemporary cognitive science increasingly recognises that remembering the past and imagining hypothetical events rely on overlapping neural systems. Research beginning with Endel Tulving's work on amnesic patients revealed that individuals who struggle to recall past experiences also often struggle to imagine future scenarios. Subsequent neuroimaging studies have shown that both activities engage the brain's "default network," a system associated with internally generated simulations, mind-wandering, and imaginative projection.

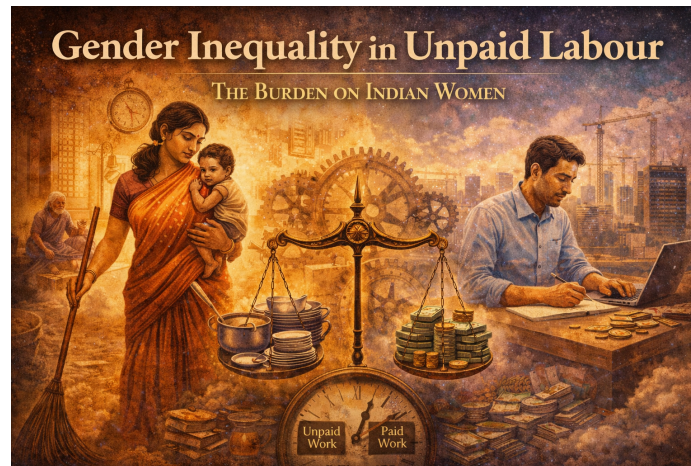
If nostalgia involves such mental simulations, its apparent contradictions become easier to explain. A nostalgic episode may involve constructing an imaginative representation of a past—sometimes accurate, sometimes idealised, and sometimes entirely hypothetical. The emotional quality of nostalgia also becomes clearer under this framework. Traditionally, nostalgia was treated as a negative emotion akin to melancholy. Yet many researchers now describe it as "bittersweet," combining elements of sadness and pleasure. This dual character arises because two emotional processes occur simultaneously: the present awareness that the past is irretrievable can produce sadness, while the imagined scenario itself can evoke warmth or satisfaction.

The motivational dimension of nostalgia also appears less mysterious when understood in terms of imagination. Rather than expressing a literal desire to travel back in time, nostalgic longing may reflect a wish to recreate certain valued features of past experiences within present circumstances. Someone nostalgic for childhood friendships, for example, might not truly want to return to childhood but instead seek similar forms of connection in adulthood. In this sense, nostalgia can function not merely as passive reminiscence but as a psychological mechanism that guides behaviour by highlighting what individuals perceive as missing in their current lives.

This reinterpretation of nostalgia carries implications beyond personal psychology. Political movements frequently appeal to a collective longing for a supposedly better past. Yet many supporters of such movements are motivated not by direct memories but by imagined narratives about earlier eras. Nostalgia, therefore, can operate less as a recollection of historical reality and more as a simulation shaped by cultural storytelling and political rhetoric. Recognising this distinction may be crucial for understanding why appeals to the "good old days" can exert such powerful influence—even among those who never experienced those days themselves.

Economic Growth, Gender Norms, and the Redistribution of Work

- ECONOMIC TIMES



India's Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, through its 2024 Time Use Survey, offers a revealing account of how labour is distributed within households. According to the survey, women between the ages of 15 and 59 devote approximately 283 minutes each day to unpaid domestic work, alongside an additional 58 minutes on caregiving activities such as cooking, cleaning, fetching water, and tending to children or elderly family members. Men, by contrast, spend only about 26 minutes on domestic work and 16 minutes on caregiving. In total, women allocate around 341 minutes daily to unpaid labour, compared to roughly 42 minutes for men. This imbalance creates a form of "time poverty" that constrains women's ability to participate fully in paid employment and reinforces entrenched gender norms.

The consequences of this imbalance extend beyond the household. When large portions of women's time are absorbed by domestic responsibilities, their capacity to engage with the formal labour market diminishes. Women with young children in particular often find it impossible to adhere to rigid work schedules demanded by many formal-sector jobs. As a result, they frequently gravitate toward part-time, home-based, or informal work arrangements that offer flexibility but are typically poorly paid and lack job security. Rural women encounter an additional constraint: many are reluctant to migrate even short distances for better employment opportunities because domestic obligations anchor them to their households.

India's female labour force participation rate has increased in recent years to around 42 percent, but this improvement must be interpreted cautiously. Much of the increase has been driven by self-employment in agriculture or other low-productivity activities rather than by access to stable, higher-paying jobs. Consequently, the persistence of domestic responsibilities continues to shape women's economic opportunities. Evidence from surveys reinforces the depth of these norms. One study by the Pew Research Center found that a substantial share of respondents believe that earning money should primarily be a man's responsibility, and that men should have greater access to employment when jobs are scarce.

This dynamic illustrates how time poverty does not merely reflect traditional gender norms—it also reinforces them. When women are unable to participate meaningfully in paid employment, the male breadwinner model becomes more entrenched. Over time, this arrangement reproduces the same inequalities that initially generated it, creating a self-perpetuating cycle.

Policies designed to address gender disparities must therefore consider the distribution of unpaid labour as well as access to formal employment.

One widely proposed policy response is the expansion of childcare infrastructure. Public crèches, community childcare centres, and employer-supported daycare facilities are often viewed as mechanisms that could reduce women's domestic burdens and enable greater workforce participation. However, international evidence suggests that the outcomes of such interventions are mixed. In some cases, subsidised childcare services remain underutilised due to concerns about quality and safety. Studies in developing countries have documented instances where access to daycare did not significantly alter women's employment outcomes, even when facilities were available.

Legislative interventions aimed at protecting working mothers have also produced complex results. Laws mandating maternity leave, flexible working arrangements, or employer-provided childcare facilities are intended to support women in balancing professional and family responsibilities. Yet such policies can sometimes produce unintended consequences. For example, when maternity benefits are financed primarily by employers, firms may become reluctant to hire women because of the perceived cost associated with providing leave and related benefits. Evidence from India following the extension of paid maternity leave to 26 weeks suggests that some firms responded by reducing the hiring of women.

Comparative evidence from other countries further complicates the picture. Even in societies widely regarded as leaders in gender equality, disparities in unpaid household labour persist. In Sweden, for instance, women still spend significantly more time on unpaid work than men despite comprehensive welfare policies designed to promote equality. Studies in the United States similarly indicate that women continue to shoulder a disproportionate share of domestic responsibilities, even in households where both partners earn comparable incomes.

These patterns suggest that norms governing household labour are deeply embedded and resistant to rapid transformation through policy mandates alone. A different mechanism may therefore prove more effective: economic growth that expands employment opportunities. When economies generate sufficient demand for labour, firms must broaden their recruitment base and are more likely to hire women. Rising wages can also alter household calculations by making women's participation in paid work economically advantageous.

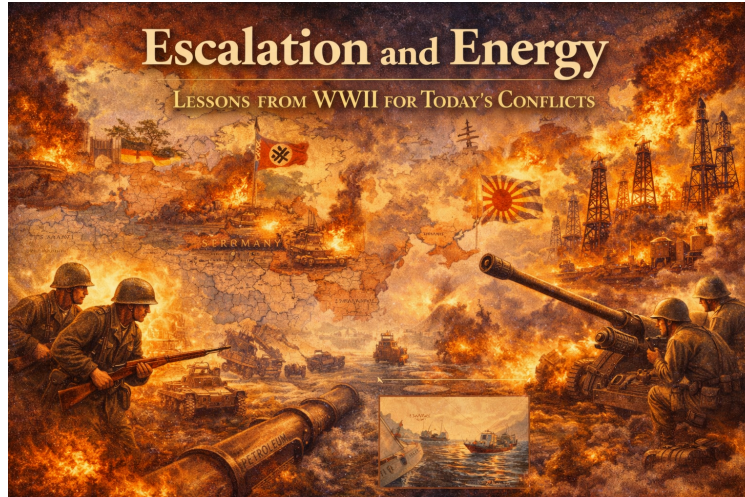
Historical experience supports this interpretation. Export-oriented industrialisation in several countries has drawn large numbers of women into the workforce, even in societies with deeply conservative social norms. Bangladesh's garment industry, for example, employs a workforce composed largely of women despite prevailing cultural constraints. As employment opportunities expand, social attitudes gradually adjust, and the economic logic of women's labour participation becomes increasingly difficult to ignore.

For India, the implication is significant.

The most transformative policy for gender equality may not necessarily be a narrowly defined "gender policy." Instead, broad-based economic growth that generates employment opportunities and increases wages may do more to integrate women into the labour force than isolated regulatory measures. By making women's labour economically indispensable, such growth has the potential to reshape both workplace practices and household norms over time.

Energy, Geopolitics, and the Recurring Logic of Conflict

- BUSINESS STANDARD



Historical observers frequently note that large-scale wars rarely erupt suddenly; rather, they emerge from a series of regional confrontations that gradually escalate. The trajectory of the Second World War illustrates this pattern clearly. Although historians typically date the war's formal beginning to September 1939—when Germany invaded Poland and Britain and France declared war—the conflict had been building for years through multiple regional crises. Long before the global war formally began, China and Japan had already been engaged in a devastating struggle, while various European powers were pursuing territorial expansion across the continent and beyond.

By the late 1930s, geopolitical tensions had intensified across several regions simultaneously. Germany had already annexed Austria and Czechoslovakia, while Japan and Russia had clashed militarily in Mongolia. The Spanish Civil War had concluded with the victory of General Franco, a figure closely aligned with Germany. Meanwhile, Italy had launched military campaigns in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Libya. In Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union annexed Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and seized portions of Finland. These developments created a landscape of overlapping conflicts that would soon converge into a global confrontation.

Energy resources, particularly oil, played a critical role in shaping strategic decisions during this period. Access to fuel was not merely an economic concern but a decisive factor in military planning. Japan's attack on the United States in 1941, for instance, was partly driven by American restrictions on oil exports that threatened Japan's access to vital energy supplies. Without reliable sources of oil from Southeast Asia, Japanese leaders feared that their military capabilities would be severely constrained. Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union similarly reflected the strategic importance of energy resources, including the desire to secure access to oil fields that could sustain prolonged warfare.

Control over energy infrastructure also influenced operations across the Middle East. Britain and the Soviet Union jointly invaded Iran during the war in order to prevent German access to

Iranian oil reserves. At the same time, battles across North Africa were shaped in part by competition over control of strategic routes and resources connected to energy supplies. These historical examples illustrate a broader pattern: geopolitical competition frequently converges around regions that serve as critical nodes in the global energy system.

Contemporary geopolitical tensions reveal striking parallels. The current international environment is marked by several simultaneous conflicts and crises, ranging from prolonged wars to emerging regional confrontations. These developments have raised concerns about potential disruptions to the global energy supply. One particularly sensitive location is the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow maritime corridor through which a substantial proportion of the world's oil and gas shipments pass. Any interruption to shipping through this channel would have immediate repercussions for global energy markets.

Recent tensions in the region have already demonstrated the fragility of energy supply chains. Restrictions on shipping routes, threats to tanker movements, and heightened insurance premiums for maritime transport have contributed to rising costs in energy markets. Liquefied natural gas exports have also been affected in certain instances, with production cuts and logistical disruptions amplifying market volatility. Even temporary interruptions can produce disproportionate economic consequences because global demand for energy remains relatively inelastic in the short term.

Energy markets respond rapidly to perceived shortages. When supply declines even modestly, prices can escalate dramatically due to the difficulty of quickly expanding production. Analysts frequently note that the duration of disruptions plays a critical role. Short interruptions may cause temporary price increases, but prolonged disruptions can lead to substantial structural imbalances in supply and demand. As inventories diminish, the capacity of producers to stabilise prices becomes increasingly limited.

For countries that rely heavily on imported energy, these developments pose significant macroeconomic risks. India, for instance, sources a considerable portion of its crude oil and natural gas through maritime routes linked to the Gulf region. Price fluctuations in global crude benchmarks directly influence domestic fuel costs, affecting transportation, manufacturing and agricultural inputs. Rising fuel prices can therefore transmit inflationary pressures throughout the broader economy.

Governments often attempt to cushion consumers from sudden price increases through subsidies or regulatory mechanisms, but such measures impose fiscal costs. Sustained energy price shocks can strain public finances, widen trade deficits and slow economic growth. Historical experience suggests that major oil shocks frequently coincide with periods of economic turbulence, as rising production costs ripple across multiple sectors.

The broader lesson is that energy remains deeply intertwined with geopolitics. Just as the struggle for oil shaped strategic calculations during the Second World War, contemporary conflicts continue to revolve around access to and control over critical energy resources. In an interconnected global economy, disruptions in one region can rapidly propagate across international markets. Understanding the strategic importance of energy infrastructure therefore remains essential for interpreting both historical conflicts and present-day geopolitical tensions.