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Memory Studies of Pandemics: Cultural Scripts, Forgetting, and Commemoration

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the memory politics of pandemics through the lens of cultural scripts, collective forgetting, and practices of commemoration. It investigates how major pandemics including the 1918 Influenza, HIV/AIDS, SARS, and COVID-19 are differentially remembered, selectively silenced, or actively commemorated within public history, media systems, and institutional archives. Drawing on theories of cultural and collective memory, the study argues that pandemic remembrance is not neutral but is structured by cultural scripts that determine what is narrated, omitted, or transformed into official memory. These scripts operate through state narratives, media framing, archival practices, and grassroots memorialization, producing uneven memory landscapes across time and geography. The paper further explores how forgetting functions as both an unintended consequence of trauma and a deliberate political and institutional strategy that shapes public understanding of past health crises. It highlights the emergence of digital memory cultures, including online memorials and social media grief practices, which complicate traditional forms of commemoration and challenge institutional control over historical narratives. By integrating case studies and theoretical approaches from memory studies, the paper demonstrates that pandemics are not only biomedical events but also deeply cultural phenomena whose meanings are continuously negotiated. It concludes that understanding pandemic memory requires attention to the interplay between narrative power, silence, and evolving commemorative practices in both physical and digital spaces.

Keywords: Pandemic Memory; Cultural Scripts; Collective Forgetting; Commemoration; and Public History.

INTRODUCTION

The rise of global pandemics compels reflection on the conditions necessary for the commemoration of widely shared events. Since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, a vast body of literature has explored the impact of past pandemics on collective memory [1]. Research has grown around twinned phenomena: the relative absence of the 1918 Influenza pandemic from public discourse, and the striking memorial onboarding of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in second-order knowledge systems (i.e., archives, museums), and across state narratives, policy frameworks, and societal practices [2]. Such inquiries lay the groundwork for understanding pandemic mechanisms that inhibit cultural scripts or confer disproportionate prevalence [3]. They invite exploration of other societal events and histories collectively deemed invalid, devalued, or commodified through the negotiation of cultural-collective memory [1, 2, 3]. These settings shape collective memory formation, adopting a wider view of memorialization through the epistemic lenses of public history, media archives, and communications policy [4]. Scrutiny of memory contracts covenants, both overt and covert, that condition forgetting and silence in the midst of overwhelming prior suffering. Some pandemic experiences shaped contemporary state formation, national

identity articulation, or pre-existing governing logics [5]. In dominant narratives of national trauma, specific communal pain is frequently submerged, eliciting further remembrance work outside institutions and conventional memorial practices [6]. Events deemed collectively or individually traumatic may induce states of amnesia, enabling persons to live outwardly and averting the permanent alteration of inward conceptualizations. The pandemic's extraordinary temporality establishes a disjunctive cradle for the examination of prevailing collective memory modalities and pandemic-memory circulations across multiple communicative environments [7].

Theoretical Foundations

Empirical accounts of memory frequently draw on constructs of public memory, collective memory, or cultural memory [8]. These theories overlap, so the foundational ideas shaping pandemics' emergence as cultural scripts warrant focus. Attention to mediation, materiality, contingency, and collective rather than individual techniques frames cultural scripts as a structuring principle [9]. Further, pandemics enable scrutiny of script emphasis and selective omission. A vibrant copyright and wealth of sensitive practice frames memoirs of the COVID-19 pandemic as culturally determined rather than personal nor individual experiences [10]. Cultural scripts scholars regard collective memory as a social construction critical to social integration and cohesion, but not exclusive to such integrative, consensus-building processes [1]. Memory being transmitted through culturally provided mediums enables consideration of micronarratives omitted within canonical treatments [4]. Commemoration enables societies subsequently traumatized by disaster or epidemic to narrate that disaster's broader societal implications; omitting a sanitized recollection of the past that champions excessive consumption on behalf of the deceased's former, repressive regime [2]. A memorialization trend enabling posthumous "counter-memorials" to past public works concomitantly emerges that, although influential in other domains of remembrance, warrants separate study in that such works' influence and cultural significance within "counter-memorialization" pursuits vastly diverges [3]. Conversely, reckoning with forgotten pasts currently constitutes an urgent societal challenge. Disasters often prompt societies to return to commemorative parades celebrating the initiate calamity. Within such circulatory rhythms of mourning, recovery, and exuberance, intensive contributions from multiple, primarily non-official actors develop infrastructures underpinning citizens' actions [4].

Cultural Scripts and Collective Memory

"Memory is a tool in the power struggle. What is at stake in Australia, as elsewhere, is to take control of the memory itself or, more precisely, to claim the right to narrate the past [5]." Cultural scripts offer a powerful framework for analysing contemporary global, national, and communal pandemic experiences. Drawing on insights from sociology and cultural anthropology [1], the concept of cultural scripts refers to shared cognitive-cultural blueprints for social life compositions in a quasi-syntactic notation that articulate the sequences of actions, across individual and collective levels, setting out the participants, the goals, the instruments, the settings, the scenes, the conditions, and the constraints [2]. Cultural scripts can function to delineate collective pandemic-specific memory work alongside established global-national trajectories. They encompass the contents, the forms, and the technologies of official and grassroots commemorative media in public discourse, suggesting which elements of past pandemic events have been salient wherever the pandemic manifests, which actor(s) have been championed, and which form(s) the response has taken [3]. The cultural arrangements of forgetting and memory associated with the COVID-19 pandemic mirror those forming around previous outbreaks [4]. In 1980s Australia, policies regarding the international trade of used blood products together with concerted attempts to ensure that AIDS did not become a topic of public discourse reflected the federal government's wish to foster a culture of silence around the pandemic [5]. Only later did governmental and institutional activities supporting collective-memory formation attempt to support a dominant pathway, whereby institutional practices sought to provide answers to the question of why individuals caught the infection [6]. In neighbouring New Zealand, memorial practices surrounding the pre-1977 HIV/AIDS pandemic, including memorial plaques and the reconceptualisation of hazardous areas containing traces of HIV-related substances as sacred sites, were eventually adopted into the cultural script, drawing recognition from the Australian scene. [7] During both the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the COVID-19 pandemic, health authorities' framing of the epoch and particular subjects played a central role in shaping collective-memory practices [4].

Forgetting in Disaster and Pandemic Contexts

During and after disasters, including pandemics, wars, terrorist attacks, earthquakes, and floods, there exist pressures to forget or silence aspects of the collective experience [1]. Such forgetting may occur within months or years, rather than the decades often associated with practices of unmemory [5]. Media reports, memorial events, artworks, and official policies address the unavailability of memorialization at various sites, highlighting the fragility of, and demand for, collective remembrance during pandemics and disasters [1]. Pandemics may also lead to mechanisms and specific sites of silencing that differ from those evident in other disasters [6]. Pandemic memory formation occurs according to distinct temporal trajectories; salient events may fade, remain present, or resurface, and the writing of memorial histories may commence in conjunction with the unfolding event [7]. Since global pandemics transcend national borders and affect all societal segments, they are pronounced collective

experiences; where they intersect with prior trauma, whether personal or societal, the presence of disaster such as colonialism or war is evoked [8, 9].

Commemoration, Memorial Practices, and Public History

Particular events may coincide with dramatic changes in societal patterns of memory, outpacing the economy of grief and the claims for remembrance which may accompany them [1]. Although the mechanisms of turning points and shifts in registers of memory remain uncertain, societies continue to inscribe traumatic experiences into narratives and talk about them in multiple modes of discourse, periods, and formats [2]. Thus, rather than establishing fixed points of societal transmission, pandemics or disaster events mark particular historical moments temporary conditions in the geographies of forgetting and remembering [3, 6]. Consequently, a limited number of commemorative practices emerge and expand in societal discourse, providing necessary contours to public remembrance and inscribing past events into a easily retrievable cultural frame [4]. In this theoretical framework, commemoration designates the activity of bearing witness to the duration or lapses from a past event, either by publicly explicit callbacks to that particular event or by the inscription of distinct facets of an experience into broader narrative transitions, without evoking a precise past-bound chronicle [5]. Commemoration may include distinct yet interconnected dimensions of public history, monumentality, and accountability [6]. All three dimensions of commemoration can be inscribed into wider societal temporalities, for instance, into cycles of frequently repeating routine. Concomitantly, diverse forms of commemoration and public history can coalesce alongside pandemic experiences [7]. Cultural memory and public history constitute the broader horizons of the memorial discourse in regard to these practices [8]. Public memorialization, likewise, derives from the same domain but is already incorporated into more exact protocols [4]. The designation of memorial lively denotes the act of ongoing engagement, a dynamic remaining discernible even through the cyclical reiteration in the commemoration practices mentioned. Accordingly, observance of an emergency timeline not only can testify to a new disaster experience but simultaneously offer opportunities to unite distinctive events of prior crises that have arisen, allowing collective memory to continually expand over so-called gilded 'golden times' of untroubled normality [9, 10].

Memorable Pandemics: Case Studies

The behaviour and trajectories of collective memory are shaped in the wake of each phenomenon or disaster. Memory shapes the course of history and the unwritten elements in the aftermath of an event since it continues to evolve over time [4, 5]. The 1918 influenza pandemic left a profound mark on collective memory; it has shown the importance of interpreting the subject of events such as disease [6]. Current memory analyses, with events such as COVID-19, HIV/AIDS or other crises, are important landmarks in the maintenance of collective memory. The dynamics still shape present time, and with recent events the understanding of pandemics and its global experience have greatly varied [3, 7]. In contemporary society, the devastating effects of multiple forms of pandemics are increasingly resurfacing in public discourse, whether through collaborative memory practices, commemorative artefacts, specific commemorative events, or other forms of public history [5]. HIV/AIDS, which originated in the early twentieth century, models how a communicative, international, and enduring public memory was successfully formulated [6]. Attention to this pivotal period demonstrates how memory of multifaceted pandemics realigned in the face of global outbreaks of 1957-8, 1968, and SARS in 2003, emphasising the absence of an extended-death pandemic directly relevant to the memorious compute, whereas COVID-19 illustrates challenges to democratic, decentralized, public memory [1, 7].

The 1918 Influenza Pandemic and Its Remembrance

The 1918 influenza pandemic caused unprecedented mortality, and collective memory of it decisively exhibits forgetting [6]. Memorialization efforts, such as plaques or dedicated themes in graveyards, nevertheless persist. Caloric and industrial production estimates indicate fatalities of approximately 75 million worldwide (about 5% of the world population). Complete silence greeted the pandemic at the time [7]. It closely followed an extended period of combat on the Western Front and culminated in the signing of the Armistice, the centenary of which is publicly noted in France; the fierce subsequent enforcement of secondary school discipline is also remembered and officially commemorated [8].

The HIV/AIDS Pandemic and Narrative Shifts

The narrative surrounding the HIV/AIDS pandemic continues to evolve, with a notable reduction in stigma and the emergence of new public health issues [3]. Onset narratives describing HIV/AIDS as a "gay cancer" and an epidemic of unprotected sex with multiple partners have given way to stories emphasizing individualization, clinical care, treatment, and transmission in pursuit of disease prevention [8]. For example, a report provided to the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1986 characterized HIV as a "socially conditioned" epidemic affecting population dynamics within the "sexual revolution." One decade later, WHO's epidemiological update published in the Global Programme on AIDS similarly highlighted the existence of "different-persons-epidemics," reflecting disease transmission according to distinct socio-demographic factors [9]. Subsequently, the journey toward broader global engagement and the endorsement of "treat all" recommendations further illustrated an epidemic

shaped by larger social forces rather than solely the behaviours of affected populations [10]. While notable advances have been achieved, further work remains imperative in terms of political action, global monitoring, and story-shaping [1].

COVID-19 and Digital Memory Cultures

Digital memorials, online mourning rituals, and data-driven digital remembrance practices are among the modes of memory work developing in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic [7]. Platforms and formats multiplying even within legacy media, like video games, also underscore the importance of addressing pandemic memory across historical periods and media types [8]. The parameters of ethical commemoration in a digital age require consideration as well [1, 3].

Media, Rituals, and Memory Technologies

Mass media and policy frame collective perception of pandemics, enabling remembrance or forgetfulness. Each media relies on archival technologies tailored to its archive and audience [2]. Print newspapers capture collective response through selected news, specialized journalism, and the dual framing of case counts and mortality; some also facilitate individual and local remembrance [3]. Museums preserve memorials, testimonials, and memorabilia, often augmenting these materials with texts from institutional or general historical accounts. Archives safeguard documents, audiovisuals, and online repositories, participating in scholarly communication of message, context, remembrance, and forgetting [2]. Social media constitute an independent archival network, save for the original post's timestamp. On these platforms, viral digital memorials cultivate public grieving by representing the deceased alongside life stories, biographic details, and loss statements [3]. The virus's anonymous transmissibility democratizes the spotlight; mourning affirmation and narrative must resonate with each viewer's experience to achieve proliferation. Social media enable the unmediated interjection of alternative memory, decoupling public discourse from institutional control and contesting official silences. Virtual memorials remove geographical constraints on the act, though uncertainty persists regarding their mnemonic efficacy [2]. The rise of online media and an increasingly digital archive provoke a rereading of distinctions among memorial sites, with virtual counterparts emerging in tandem with physical commemorations [7]. Physical memorials anchor vectors of attendees' experiences, yet problematic constructs, unrepresentative fullness, cumbersome arrangements, social deprivation afflict collective grieving [3]. Conversely, digital channels efface temporality and spatiality from mourning, further concealing author and producer agency. Instead of viewing pandemic memorials solely as historical markers, attention must extend to their terminus, influence, exposition modality, and liable constituents [9].

Newspapers, Museums, and Archives

Archive sources are mostly conventional materials, collections of newspapers, pamphlets, letters, reports, press clippings, maps, or commemorative books [1]. For example, the more extensive pandemic-related newspaper holdings will be located in the Provincial Archives of Vojvodina in Novi Sad, while the collection retained in the Archive of Vojvodina in Subotica is smaller [2]. Archives offer a different perspective: newspapers retain attention for a limited time span and visitation figures correlate with the pandemic curve, whereas commemorative caricatures express preoccupations with use of masks and social distancing [1]. Multiple exhibitions explore the 1918 influenza pandemic and its impact on Vojvodina, Hungary, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes [2]. The first opened at the City Museum of Subotica in October 2020, coinciding with the reintroduction of restrictive measures. Organizers extended an invitation to upload and share related archival material. Designated submissions included copies of original documentation published in a local newspaper alongside modern commentary on the illustrations' capacity to "introduce new culture" [3].

Social Media, Memes, and Public Grief

Public mourning during COVID-19 manifested online through the early spread of "funeral meme" social media posts across several platforms [4]. Often marked by viral hashtags and the repetition of popular meme formats, these artifacts rapidly became popular as users employed humor to share relatable and even absurd aspects of pandemic life. Such posts encouraged collective engagement with mourning by acknowledging the importance of shared rituals even amid enforced distance [5]. On Twitter, for example, the #funeral2020 hashtag parodied typical funerary rites and incorporated images of the deceased. As the pandemic progressed, the practices associated with funeral memes began to evolve, and they were succeeded by a range of other honest yet humorous approaches to public grief [6]. Such interventions illustrate how contemporary media operate to democratize memorialization and public expression of grief on a massive scale. Alternative memorial practices emerged alongside viral trends such as the 10yearchallenge or the distractingly sexy hashtag within the Twitter and Instagram form of online culture [7]. Social status impacted the virality of memorials, with certain figures such as athletes gaining initial reach from already popular "celebration" posts. Grief spread geographically as geographically-limited yet universally customizable memes appeared to users across different regions [8]. Ethical complications also accompany these memorial technologies; undue or intermittent popularity risks trivializing the

deceased. The memorialization and celebration of unwarranted deaths stories sometimes hazard re-traumatizing their communities [9, 10].

Memorial Sites, Plaques, and Virtual Memory

Commemorative activities have occurred across diverse material and virtual sites since the outbreak of COVID-19. Temporary roadside memorials with flowers, photographs, candles, handwritten notes, stuffed animals, and other personal artifacts have materialized at the homes and workplaces of deceased individuals, alongside memorials comprising a small selection of these same objects [4]. Outside of private domains, national memorial efforts have taken varied forms. In Canada, for instance, the National Arts Centre commissioned the composition of a Reflections Song to commemorate those lost; this was performed at the outset of every January and July for two years following the declaration of the pandemic [5]. Dedicated pages within public websites, such as Canada.ca, have provided a digital space for memorialization, while full-volume cards introduced by Canada Post allow individuals to send memorial messages for free. From Spring 2020 onward, many memorial events in online formats, including virtual vigils and community storytelling, have been actively documented to foster public involvement [6]. Initiatives encompassing these diverse practices and media have emerged, developed, transformed, and adapted over the pandemic era, advancing novel digital memorial practices, ethnographies of online-memorial storytelling, and other measures to register memory-work as it materializes in real time [7].

Digital memorialization was also prominently observed during the 1918 influenza pandemic. Memorialization across varying temporal scales continues to evolve in response to COVID-19 [8]. The shifting circumstances of a given time period reveal different media effects of memorialization [9]. Despite its expansions, physical memorialization and the associated cultural mechanisms still remain profound; their deployment socio-historically retains significance in commemorative endeavors [6]. A comparative assessment of physical and virtual memorialization highlights an interlinkage whereby virtual memorialization often supplements broader initiatives. While the temporalities, accessibility, and mnemonic elsewhere pertaining to these two forms of mobilization diverge, both avenues within distinct frameworks prevail [7]. Through reflection on the diverse physical and virtual sites of memorialization engendered across various phases of the pandemic, computer-mediated communication, and the emergence of significant online communities engaged in memorialization, it becomes feasible to assess how these phenomena contribute to a more nuanced understanding of COVID-19 memorialization [8].

Memory Pacts: Forgetting, Silence, and Resistance

National historians and media often represent pandemics in utilitarian speeches underscoring economic recovery, public health action, and similar state matters [7]. The priorities of such narratives matter: current state focus is on re-emergence despite extensive COVID-19 damage. By missing far-reaching public health, sociopolitical, and public-private sector lessons, these strategies repeat earlier pandemic omissions [8]. During HIV/AIDS, for example, policy concentrated on minimal actions to maximize silence and halt campaign damage, deepening visibility [9]. Silence and voluntary amnesia thus serve as collective memory strategies within governmental and broad public narratives [2, 10]. Omission, censorship, and educational exclusion constitute expansive forms of trajectory elaboration: while prominent and subaltern trajectories progress, wider remembrances recede. Such counter-memorials and activist actions contrast accumulatively addressed and broadly remembered trajectories, even outside established and practiced public or communal forms [4].

National Narratives versus Subaltern Voices

National narratives have a dual function of unifying populations and legitimizing regimes, and they contain various subaltern memories that occupy more peripheral spaces [5]. In both cases, memory and narrative are intimately connected to politics and power. Excluded memories are still powerful, even if they have lower profiles, and regimes are characterized by the narratives they try to impose and those they silence. Official mainstream narratives disappear from institutions and public discourses, leaving traces in the memory of political elites, but subaltern memories remain vibrant, if not dominant [6]. Public memory and cultural orientation are shaped by cultural scripts, historical narratives commemorated in public space and throughout the mass media. Most of the « collective » memories about which people are concerned are cultural rather than individual; they are not held in personal archives, but in the public domain [7]. A large part of the public memory available for transmission consists of culturally legitimized segments of former experiences, commonly known as cultural or mnemonic scripts [8]. Scripts delimit the kinds of events, their significance and interconnections, the actors involved and their array of possible designs and intentions [1]. Cultural scripts informed the memories arising from the 1918 Influenza pandemic which contrasted sharply with the development of collective memory around the contemporary HIV/AIDS pandemic: the first received little public attention, the second promoted active counter-memorialization. The COVID-19 pandemic heightened interest in the mechanisms of cultural scripting, offering a unique opportunity to probe collective memory [9].

Silence as Political Strategy

The previous section outlined collective-memorial forms and public-memory functions that augment the documentation and transmission of otherwise overlooked experiences [1]. Current deliberations shift focus to state discourses that uphold forgetfulness [2, 3]. Memorialization often emerges in reaction to the authoritative shaping of public memory by governments or medical institutions under the pretext of effective pandemic response [4]. State or institutional influence tends to occur following disruptive events of societal scale, and pandemic histories offer rich yet underexposed perspectives on its culturization. A pandemic described by the Davidson paper suffices to define “political silence” as both an existential political and policy act. As objectives change from public health surveillance to epidemiological history, materials articulated around pandemics acquire significance different from other events[5]. Vacuums in pandemic-death monitoring become apparent despite leisure bounds, sounding alarm to avoid productive cycles of major events subsequently deflected into forgetfulness[6].

Remembering Ethical Lessons and Future Responsibilities

The COVID-19 pandemic demands ethical reflection on insight gained and responsibility assumed in a state of mourning. A community’s collective memory derives from cultural scripts for remembering the past, which in turn guides its response to present challenges and future crises [5]. The socio-political narratives governing collective memory vary widely from one community to the next; thus, examining a community’s reminiscences on prior pandemics may shed light on its stance toward the current episode and its action plans for forthcoming ones. Ethically informed policy and education are preconditions for a more mindful shared remembrance of the continuing pandemic, in turn engendering greater community accountability for public health, social well-being, and related issues [6]. Even for abundant data, memory restricts the scope of transmission; norms governing sharing practices thus shape the circulation of testimony, and memory cultures evolve in response [7]. The unprecedented global scale of the COVID-19 pandemic permits a broader scope in determining constituent actions before a crisis, though the enumeration of individual responses depends on the socio-political dynamics of the community. A distinction arises between collective memory encompassing individual accounts and general theoretical frameworks dictating normatively appropriate modes of remembrance [8]. Knowledge learned for particular situations or particular communities generally transcends community boundaries; theoretically inspired understandings may constitute adjacent cross-situational lessons, even when community-specific considerations take precedence [9]. During binary debates in a context of ignorance, proposal outreach and solicitation of counter-proposals are preferable to shared querying regarding general principles; inquiry into what others contemplate or desire to know about seeking communal action in one’s situation remains germane [4].

Ethics, Policy, and Collective Duty

Memory, as a concept and a word, often highlights the fleeting nature of the possible meeting point between the past and the present. Furthermore, memory is framed as a social product built through the pathway of exchange and interaction [4]. The specificity of remembering, the particularities of what is remembered and preserved, and the importance of the surrounding context, what is sometimes called “the archives of memory”, become crucial understandings to promote discourses of memory regarding the COVID-19 pandemic’s experience(s) and aftermath(s) [1]. Remembrance as a frame for collective experience, understanding, practices, theretofore and hereafter is examined through a specific lens oriented toward memory and its cultural scripting [2]. Memory carries a significant burden of representivity as it presents a narrative that is repeated and disseminated that in some cases, could convey a set of themes or messages of epidemic coverage; yet, at the same time, memory can also exist in a broader socio-historical context in which exchange, availability, and endorsement are equally pivotal and in which representation is not simply or entirely the properties of the represented or the representation itself [3]. A historical turn is accordingly taken to identify and problematise the circulation of COVID-19 memory as contingent upon an anchored but transitory topology of historical engagement that, beyond the alteration of contents and details when differently issued to the same locality and at the same epoch, can also entirely disappear out of active engagement when discarded from the archive [4]. To translate the concepts and insights outlined hitherto into avenues for contributing to the shaping of the COVID-19 remembrance discourse in Hong Kong, attention-zeroing paths or proposals that are resistant to the frames of cultural script transmission, anticipated use of linguistic framing, and sectoral remapping are put forth such as adaptability of each script and consideration of COVID-19 references that were absent from local engagement [5]. For a long-term perspective on the environmental sustainability of the scripted assembly, ranging from the medium of composed contact to the settings for dissemination that became available during the past few years, such themed recollection already attains a higher likelihood of obsolescence than the emerging virus and accompanying debates regarding its origin, effective treatment and preventive measures, and places of suspected leakage on the national and international fronts; and subordinate to resource allocation but consistent with thematic and proffering experiences, consideration regarding the continuation of the assembly would therefore dwell upon co-pact underpinning the cultural script of another theme[6].

Memory as Public Good

Referral to the works of Pierre Nora, who with the concept of the lieux de mémoire initiated a momentous turn of the academic discourse on collective memory, paves the way to a series of questions addressed in social, cultural, and urban studies [1]. Yet, in defining memories, environments, and traces in a variety of disciplines, structures of memory used and grasped constitute the focal point on which collective memory elaborates [2]. Contemporary theoretical discussions highlight a broad range of interpretations, each urging to return to foundational definitions of collective memory and individual memory in the work of Henri Bergson by establishing the difference between the 'objective' conservation of individual memory files and their socialized re-configuration in collective memory well before media, technological, and individual conditioning frames collective memory elaboration in increasingly tight circuits [3]. The echoes of these foundational reflections resonate in contemporary queries about pandemics and their objective, subjective, and collective thermal feature when accompanying, in both art and writings, the experiences of the collapsing Empire of the Habsburg Monarchy, of the Great War, of the Virus, and of AIDS [4]. The Social Sciences, Culture Theory and Political Philosophy undertaken by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie and Michel Des Wovracq privileges from the study of rural communities in the face of mercantilism, the Great French Revolution or the splendour of the Habsburg Monarchy at the era of Frédéric II of Prusse, Cabo or Floods, Drought and Magic, Mass Hysteria or Rupture and Continuity, along the sequence and sequences, the floating length and floating lengths by identifying respective Time Layers [5]. When indirect analogies cherish the charms of Carmen Miranda, the Outraged, and Saint-Amand reveal individuals and collectives alternating or alternating between mainstream and subter or mannered achievements tackling the structure of their Language, the Graphic Sequential Addresses, apart from Forms, Rabble and Rescript show Civility by masses but plotting conditions sketch on narrow not for Envelop messages Factographies inscribed en ce devenu suggest subterranean equilibria [6].

Policy Implications for Education and Health Communication

The foregoing investigation of socio-political dynamics that shape the memory and commemoration of pandemics has notable implications for policy formulation, community outreach, and memory-related curriculum development in public education [2]. Collective remembrance necessarily implies ethics and responsibility toward succeeding and other susceptible communities; such obligations and corresponding duties provide a framework through which to translate the lessons of pandemics, in particular crises of forgetting and omission, into actionable policy measures for public health agencies, educational institutions, and related societal stakeholders [3]. The most urgent requirement, immediately translatable into health messaging, analyses the societal and ethical consequences of impending and intervening operations [4]. Recognition of certain lessons and obligations prompts a series of straightforward educational prescriptions, suitable for pedagogical and outreach sectors, regarding the selection of curricular content and method of delivery [1].

Community-Based Memorialization Initiatives

During the COVID-19 crisis, various community-based memorialization initiatives emerged, often organized by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society [4]. The aim was to facilitate memorialization practices while respecting local remembrance traditions and implementing culturally sensitive structures [5]. Key activities included online and outdoor events designed to express mourning collectively, combat social isolation, and provide spaces for sharing memorial narratives [6]. Other initiatives involved collecting folklore accounts to preserve and pass on personal experiences [7]. Collaborating with local stakeholders, evaluating activities' resonance with communities, and determining whether practices should continue or transform were also prioritized [9, 6].

Methodologies in Pandemic Memory Research

Collective memory is shaped by cultural scripts that determine which influences are accented, omitted, or forgotten from the past [6]. This idea, inspired by social constructivism and collective memory studies [2], suggests that social institutions, organizations, and movements work to control the past through discourses, documents, and artifacts [7, 8]. The social environment, discursive possibilities, and cultural institutions together construct and constrain what can be thought, said, or remembered [9]. Emerging from cultural scripts, two core topics forgetting and commemoration, connect collective remembrance and pandemics. Forgetting can be viewed as the failure to remember something that society wishes to commemorate, or as the erasure of inconvenient influences or views that the status quo ignores [10]. A commemorative practice typically authenticates a topic as a legitimate and worthy focus of memory work. Memorialization initiates a society-wide discussion of the past and basic memory pacts, marking the attempt to combine remembrance and forgetting [10].

Ethnographic Approaches and Oral Histories

Research on living memory and cultural traces of pandemics necessitates ethnography with individuals, families, and institutions [7]. Oral histories can deepen understanding of direct experiences with illness, loss, isolation, care, digital memory, and memorialization [2]. Researchers pursuing this approach are encouraged to articulate a sampling strategy, define an organizational frame (individuals, families, communities, institutions), and seek authorization from prospective participants prior to interactions [4]. Ubiquitous contemporary documentation

implies meaningful traces may reside in texts, objects, and data; archival studies can thus disclose pandemic memories embedded in records and materials, extending across locations and eras [5]. Investigating technology, theory, and culture requires inquiry into remembrances embedded within machines, languages, visual codes, and institutions such as schools, archives, and government [6]. Digital humanities methodologies including data source identification, text mining, network construction, simulation, and multimodal narrative composition permit exploration of how pandemics influence and become embedded in cultural and social formations extending beyond human cognition [7].

Archival Studies and Material Culture

Pandemic memory research may employ archival methods to study objects, documents, and materials produced or collected during past outbreaks, as well as contemporary objects with communicative or mnemonic value in the wake of COVID-19 [6]. Archival studies may also consider wider information ecologies and the interactions between different media. Such an approach makes the provenance, cataloguing, and analysis of objects a priority, along with ethical issues relating to the conveyance of provenance to broader audiences [7]. Global physical or digital archives comprise a variety of pandemic-related materials that an archival studies approach can elucidate, while the pandemic contributes distinctive communicative forms to the material culture of commemoration [8]. Informants are invited to share pandemic materials acquired during and after the COVID-19 outbreak in accordance with community-based memory initiatives [9]. Such materials may serve as primary data for a single case study or as probes that shape a wider consideration of pandemic archival practices or communicative forms. These items can fruitfully complement oral histories collected on the same topic [2, 1].

Digital Humanities and Computational Memory

Memory research into the COVID-19 pandemic has engaged a range of data sources spanning texts, images, audio-visual materials, and ephemera [7]. Methods used include text mining, computational text analysis, and network analysis. As much of the associated data is born-digital, the archival practices tend to differ from those typically associated with media objects that are rendered visible through their circulation [8]. Instead, online media, including social media, digital memorials, memes, and open-source material such as data sets, collectively engage with the pandemic as a broader multi-layered cultural phenomenon [4]. Digital forms of commemoration, participatory data collection, and algorithmic data-driven projects often utilize these memorial materials for wider analytical purposes [9]. The digital and computational approaches are interconnected and share overlapping temporalities with offline archival efforts addressed in preceding sections; they are nevertheless distinctive enough to warrant separate consideration [10].

DISCUSSION

Pandemics reveal the enduring relevance of memory studies and their cultural determinants when history seems to call for forgetting [8]. The early efforts to remember severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in 2003 appeared to have been in vain, yet the COVID-19 pandemic prompted extensive and varied memorialisation 1. Similar to the time elapsed following the 1918 influenza pandemic, forgetting and selective remembrance of the HIV/AIDS pandemic began to prevail in the 1990s and re-emerged by the early 2000s [9]. Commemoration serves not only to remember the dead but to reflect on rights, responsibilities, and ethical lessons. Just as individuals respond to memorable events, pandemics marked by death and disruption leave an indelible collective imprint 2. Memory studies, cultural scripting, and investigation into the selective forgetting of pandemic narratives and memorialisation continue to derive their analytic impetus from contemporary developments [10].

CONCLUSION

Pandemics function as critical sites for examining how societies construct, negotiate, and sometimes suppress collective memory. The comparative trajectories of the 1918 Influenza pandemic, HIV/AIDS, SARS, and COVID-19 reveal that remembrance is unevenly distributed, shaped by cultural scripts that govern which experiences are elevated into public discourse and which are relegated to silence. These scripts are embedded in political narratives, media systems, archival infrastructures, and community practices, collectively influencing how pandemics are interpreted across generations. A key finding of this study is that forgetting is not merely a passive loss of memory but often a structured process influenced by institutional priorities, political interests, and social discomfort with trauma. At the same time, alternative commemorative practices particularly those emerging from grassroots and digital spaces challenge official silences and expand the boundaries of public remembrance. Online memorials, social media tributes, and participatory archives demonstrate that pandemic memory is increasingly decentralized and pluralistic. However, these evolving forms of remembrance also introduce new tensions, including issues of authenticity, permanence, and ethical representation. The coexistence of institutional and digital memory cultures underscores the need for more inclusive and reflexive approaches to commemoration. Ultimately, the study argues that pandemic memory is best understood as a dynamic cultural process shaped by power, technology, and social negotiation. Recognizing these dynamics is essential for ensuring that future commemorations foster ethical reflection, historical accountability, and a more inclusive understanding of shared global crises.

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