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The historian influencer: Mediating and transmitting Holocaust memory on social media in Brazil

1 Introduction: On reconnecting with the past

On a night like any other, the hacker under the nickname of Neo uncovers the most harrowing truth. By taking the red pill offered by Morpheus, he finally sees the world as it is: Earth has been dominated by artificial intelligence, and under a black sky, giant machines walk and rule the streets once filled with people. This scene is known to many: the movie *Matrix* (1999) presented us with a dystopian future where humans lost control of the planet and were subjugated by a dictatorship of computers that tampered with reality. Although we are certainly not living in such a situation – at least not yet – *Matrix* raises a meaningful question: What is reality? Living in a century surrounded by and built upon technology, the answer may not be as straightforward as we would like. Nowadays, computers, cell phones and numerous other electronic devices play a central role in our lives, and we relate ourselves to the world through its screens.

Perhaps the most significant turn of this century regarding human relationships happened because of the invention of social media. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok and many other social networks have drastically changed how we connect to others and the world. In his text *Past and Present in Digital Public History*, historian Marcello Ravveduto calls our attention to the inseparable connections between ours and the digital world by using the concept of interreality: “[A]n environment in which to live, an extension of the human mind, a mixture of algorithms and interfaces that intertwine with what is real, conditioning everyday life”.¹ Interreality is undoubtedly not as frightening as the malevolent robots of *Matrix*. Still, it indicates something Neo, and we have in common: today, it may have become impossible to completely separate what is virtual from what is real because one conditions the other, as they are both in permanent exchange, architecting a reality where human cognition and algorithmic calculations meet.

¹ Marcello Ravveduto, “Past and Present in Digital Public History,” in *Handbook Digital Public History*, ed. Serge Noiret, Mark Tebeau and Gerben Zaagsma (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2022), 134.

Philosopher-biologist Donna Haraway offers a similar perspective in many of her works, most famously in *A Cyborg Manifesto*. Her approach to the idea of the cyborg – a human-machine hybrid – stems from the notion of relationality. That is, rather than existing as a separate being, the cyborg emerges from the meeting between people and the digital environment “where worlds get reconstructed as information”.² Thus, a certain cyborg-ness of humanity concerns the information systems that emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century and the specific forms of relationality that came with them. In an interview where she was asked about her response to Jacques Derrida’s idea of the wounds to human narcissism, Haraway reinstated her proposal of a fourth wound concerning digital technology, dismissing human *autopoiesis*. In other words, the constitution of the reality we inhabit does not end with us but instead extends to and encompasses the relationality between humans and non-humans (which includes the digital world). Therefore, as Haraway states, “social relationships include nonhumans as well as humans as socially (or, what is the same thing for this odd congeries, sociotechnically) active partners”.³

In this world changed by digital technological advances, where the new gains more space every day, we, historians, are hounded by an uncomfortable question: What place does the past hold in our present time? To answer this question, we must look deeper into its central aspect – time – and ask how do people relate to time in this new and inter-reality? Ravveduto points to how, in the forever gleaming world of social media, where something new emerges at every second and where a touch of our fingers endlessly refreshes the feed of posts, photos and news, Western man “runs after the present, anxious at not being able to grasp it while it is going around”.⁴ Therefore, we face a bizarre situation in which, on the one hand, the present is so short we cannot grasp it, but, on the other, because it is constantly updated, it becomes infinite. We live, thus, in an era of presentism: “[A] dilated and one-dimensional present that chases after itself and sets in motion a series of mechanisms of sterile self-reproduction”.⁵ Hence, in this new context, our perception of time is shaped by the sense of an eternal present that is ever-changing but perpetual, nonetheless. However, “beneath the surface of the fleeting present, the traces left by the information conceal a darkly static and

2 Nicholas Gane, “When We Have Never Been Human, What Is to Be Done?: Interview with Donna Haraway,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 23(7–8) (2006): 140.

3 Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium. FemaleMan_Meets_OncoMouse: feminism and technoscience*, second edition (New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 8.

4 Ravveduto, “Past and Present,” 132.

5 Ravveduto, “Past and Present,” 132.

stagnant past that is always ready to resurface, preventing it from being filed away forever”.⁶ Whilst chasing the present, we cannot run from our digital past: it is recorded, easily accessed – and it can haunt us.

We now return to our first question: In light of this presentist temporal regime, what place does the past hold in our present time? To start, with the interreality of social media emerges a new type of past distinctive from the one studied by historians: a static past that is largely personal rather than collective because it is impregnated by individual memory. Thus, as Ravveduto affirms, “the link between the past and the present is no longer delegated to historical research, whose scientific rigor in the reconstruction of facts is too slow in comparison to the speed of the digital present”.⁷ In that sense, the historical past’s place has been usurped by memory, “the immediate use of which lends itself to the emotional experience of the interconnected public”.⁸ From this perspective, we can certainly claim social media is not the most favorable place for historians, since it reduces history “to a sum of disintermediate, emotional opinions that prevent critical thinking from arising”, and allows an “editing of the past, without distinction of sources or historical contextualization”.⁹ Furthermore, by publicising an individualistic memory, social media causes “a wave of collective nostalgia,” in which yesterday was always better than today.¹⁰ The temporal depth of history is crushed under the supremacy of memory. Furthermore, the loss of historical time “dissolves any sense of posterity, inducing them [people] not to safeguard the inheritance of their ancestors, nor to conserve any legacy for their descendants”.¹¹ In other words, it becomes arduous to see the past’s roots in the present and project life into the future. Nevertheless, how can we correct this temporal misperception?

Although only sometimes welcome in social media, historians must put themselves out there to build a bridge between history and the public. Digital public history may offer a path to overcoming the temporal misperception caused by interreality. The bridge between the real and digital worlds, Ravveduto suggests, can be “founded on the active role of a new professional figure: the historical influencer, whose task will be, through debunking, to create narratives and content that is appropriate for the ‘interconnected public’”.¹² By creating content based

6 Ravveduto, “Past and Present,” 135.

7 Ravveduto, “Past and Present,” 135.

8 Ravveduto, “Past and Present,” 135.

9 Ravveduto, “Past and Present,” 136.

10 Ravveduto, “Past and Present,” 135–136.

11 Ravveduto, “Past and Present,” 137.

12 Ravveduto, “Past and Present,” 137.

on critical thinking and rigorous methodology, it becomes possible to react first-hand to the emotional dominion of memory in the networks. It also becomes possible to build a new memory anchored not on individualistic experiences but on a collective and ethical memory of the past. Moreover, when it comes to traumatic past experiences – such as war, authoritarian regimes, political persecution and genocide – the need for ethical commitment becomes even more evident, as we intend to explore in this chapter's discussion.

To resist the conservative waves of nostalgia, challenge the temporal misperception of interreality and build critical knowledge online about traumatic pasts of the twentieth century: this is the mission of the Brazilian Center for Nazism and Holocaust Studies (NEPAT). NEPAT was created in 2019 out of the need to open space for academic dialogue in Brazil in the field of Nazism and Holocaust Studies, as well as produce accessible content covering such topics on social media. Since 2020, we have also been producing a podcast called *Desnazificando* [Denazifying], which is, to this date, the only podcast exclusively about these themes in Brazilian Portuguese. Our scientific dissemination project on social media is an essential part of our public-facing activity and is founded on values we are committed to upholding. In this chapter, we intend to discuss NEPAT's production on Instagram. Based on the propositions of both Digital History and Media Studies, we will dedicate special attention to the interactions between users and digital interfaces, as well as the participatory culture fostered by social media networks.

2 History and social media, the historian in social media

In *Digital Holocaust Memory, Education, and Research*, British scholar Victoria Walden opens with a pressing question: “What can the digital do for Holocaust memory, education, and research?”¹³ The surge in interest in the potential digital media and digital technologies may offer to the transmission of Holocaust memory is undeniable and continually growing. As Walden aptly observes, it undoubtedly concerns the “increasing ubiquity of the digital in our everyday lives”.¹⁴ Digital media has thus become a valuable platform for disseminating scholarly

¹³ Victoria Walden, ed., *Digital Holocaust Memory, Education and Research* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 3.

¹⁴ Walden, ed., *Digital Holocaust Memory*, 2.

research, producing memorial and educational initiatives, and encompassing a broader audience. In this new and flourishing landscape, however, we must foreground the research practices now shaping Holocaust memory and education and how researchers and educational institutions create digital outputs and reach their intended audiences. Therefore, as suggested by Walden, this chapter will be a methodological work of self-reflexivity, using NEPAT's Instagram production as primary source materials for analysis.

Instagram is the leading platform hosting NEPAT's virtual content. Instagram is an image-based social network where pictures can be combined with subtitles, allowing us to mix relatively longer texts with visually appealing image cards. Furthermore, it provides features for and encourages direct interaction with our audience; it is, in fact, necessary for this interaction to be constantly sustained so that our posts reach our followers, boosted by the platform's algorithm. Interactions with the profile's followers can happen in a few different ways: through direct comments on the posts; through the *story* function, which supports polls, surveys, emoji reactions, and direct responses; or through an individual chat function, known as direct messaging. The *story* function also allows sharing other profiles' posts and chain interactions and is the most dynamic form of user interaction within the platform. Instagram *stories* only stay on a user's profile for 24 hours; thus, unlike a regular post, it is a far more ephemeral form of content output and sharing. Additionally, maintaining a constant and daily stream of *stories* is one way of feeding Instagram's algorithm and facilitating the dissemination of regular posts.

The content on NEPAT's profile page is organised based on different categories of posts, each with its own concept and finality. These are: Movie Recommendations, Book Recommendations, *Calendário Histórico* [Historical Calendar], *Dicionário de Conceitos* [Concept Dictionary], and *NEPAT responde* [NEPAT answers]. Movie and Book Recommendations, as the name implies, are suggestions of new audiovisual and literary productions regarding the Nazi regime, the Holocaust, and correlated topics. The *Calendário Histórico* is a carousel post about a historical event that occurred on the day the post is published. For example, every September 15th, we release a post about the Nuremberg Laws,¹⁵ established that day in 1935, representing a turning point in antisemitic legislation and persecution in the Third Reich. The aim of the *Calendário* is not only to introduce the public to important dates in the history of the twentieth century but also to place these events in their respective historical contexts, helping our followers to build a repertoire of relevant episodes that substantiate their understanding of the Nazi regime and this period of history.

15 "Leis de Nuremberg," accessed 26 April 2023, <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cih-EcXM45Q/>.

The *Dicionário de Conceitos*' proposal is inspired by entries in historical dictionaries, where the definition of a historical concept is presented. In this type of post, we choose a relevant concept from academic scholarship and introduce it to our audience. Although we live and work in a fast-paced digital environment where many claim creators should sacrifice information to hold their audience captive, we do not believe this is the right approach in our case – nor is what our community expects. On the contrary, even though we provide an editorialised view of a complex concept, such as the “banality of evil” by philosopher Hannah Arendt,¹⁶ this view is by no means simplistic. *Dicionário de Conceitos* posts usually have up to ten cards combining long texts and images, instigating the public to learn more about the topic. It is important to emphasise that many of these concepts are from authors not translated into Portuguese. In this sense, we perform a double translation: not only from a foreign language into Portuguese but also from scholarly terminology to a more accessible language.

A category of post that gained prominence in our production in 2022 is *NEPAT responde*. Since starting our profile, and as we gained more followers, we realised our audience had recurrent doubts, such as: Was Nazism a left or right-wing regime? Why do you not talk about communism? Did Hitler really die in the Second World War? Questions such as these reflect Brazil's population's lack of education regarding the Nazi regime and the Holocaust in general. When we look at elementary education, for example, the Brazilian Common National Curriculum Base mentions the Holocaust once and only as an appendix of what is considered more relevant: the Second World War. At universities, specialists in the field are few and far between, and this situation only worsens due to the lack of specialised literature. These are only a few examples of how Brazil has insufficient critical knowledge and memory about the Nazi regime and the Holocaust. Although Brazil is not the only place lacking a robust and critical Holocaust memory, our situation is not the same as in Europe for the reasons we just outlined. While it may be true that there is insufficient critical knowledge about the Holocaust there, Europe is still at the centre of the Holocaust Studies field.

However, let us look at it from a comparative perspective. One of the challenges of teaching and working with the memory of the Holocaust in Brazil is that, metaphorically, it often seems as if we are working from zero, unlike in Europe, where there is a sense of direct connection through national or familial history, and where a certain amount of knowledge can be assumed. Regarding Holocaust education in Brazil, we continually build from the ground up since there is no assumed knowledge; we start from this place of presumed and perceived distance

16 “Banalidade do mal,” accessed 26 April 2023, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CGSbjkFIUPs/>.

from the Holocaust. NEPAT's content production is organised around this notion. We seek to help our followers build up their repertoire of relevant events and information to substantiate their understanding of the Nazi regime and this period of history. At the same time, we present and discuss more sophisticated concepts, which tie together and form the base for a more meaningful understanding of the events beyond factual knowledge. As previously mentioned, our work executes a double translation: from foreign languages to Portuguese and from academic language to an accessible one. However, we are also translating the Holocaust from a European reality into our Brazilian context. This translation work is particular to what we do. It is a unique dimension of teaching about and working with the Holocaust from an outsider's perspective, as Brazilians and Latin Americans, and something that the Eurocentric academic outlook of the Holocaust Studies field often fails to consider.

This glaring lack of knowledge in itself is a good enough reason for us to produce this type of content. However, deepening the public's understanding of the Nazi regime and the Holocaust becomes even more pressing in light of the recent rise of right-wing movements that often make appropriations and allusions to Nazi discourse, spreading fake news and false information about this period of history. According to Brazilian historian Odilon Caldeira, Brazil is "part of a new global wave of extremism, but it would be wrong to think that it is a mere importer and reproducer of this international agenda".¹⁷ As one would expect, Brazilian right-wing rhetoric frequently shields its ideology from criticism by diverting attention to unfounded criticism of communist and socialist ideas. One of the ways they do that is by claiming that Nazism was a left-wing regime: in doing so, they associate the horrors and crimes perpetrated by Nazis to the left, acquitting the extremist right-wing tradition of any political responsibility. By insisting that the left is actually to blame for such crimes, it is easier for the right to justify their own conservative position. It is also a way to shut down political debates because if the left wing is indeed composed of Nazis in disguise, it would have no legitimacy or speaking ground to defend its ideas. Of course, this inverted reality is nothing but a red herring. However, on social media, fake news spreads fast and one must have the tools to see through the fake part of the news.

Thus, through our systematic analysis of keywords on Twitter and Instagram, we observed an escalation in the popularity of this type of discourse. We then proceeded to identify the main arguments employed by the right and constructed

17 Odilon Caldeira Neto, "Brasil é um laboratório da extrema direita global". Entrevista com Odilon Caldeira Neto," 2023, <https://www.ihu.unisinos.br/categorias/625477-brasil-e-um-laboratorio-da-extrema-direita-global-entrevista-com-odilon-caldeira-neto>. Passage translated by the authors.

one of our *NEPAT responde* posts based on this research: *NEPAT responde: O nazismo era de esquerda?* [NEPAT answers: Was Nazism leftist?] (See Figure 1).¹⁸ We started by mentioning why the term “socialist” appears in the name of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party (NSDAP). An essential first step was explaining to our audience the meaning of the word “socialist” in that context since 1) it was a term under dispute and 2) it was not the most recurrent one to refer to leftist or communist movements in the 1920s. In short, “socialist”, for the Nazis, was every posture or action that was embraced or done in favour of the racially defined “community of the people”; that is, everything that helped safeguard the German race would be a socialist attitude.¹⁹ The term’s appropriation was also strategic since, with the growth of Marxist ideas in post-war Germany, the parties fought bitterly for working-class adhesion. Thus, as historian Richard Evans points out, it would be a mistake to see Nazism as a form of socialism affiliated with Marxism or the left since it was, in fact, a counter-ideology to the principles defended by these political strands.²⁰ To summarise, the centre of the Nazi’s ideological proposal was race, not class struggle.

Communism has already appeared in another *NEPAT responde* post – *NEPAT responde: E o comunismo?* [NEPAT answers: What about communism?]²¹ – in which we felt the need to address why we do not discuss this topic in our social media content since both ideologies often appear in the Brazilian public debate as two sides of the same coin. In this post, we briefly explained the Socialist Revolution and talked about authors that seek to make a revisionist history of the Soviet Union, such as Sheila Fitzpatrick.²² While addressing the actual experience of socialism, we argued that neither communism nor socialism were restricted to the period of the Soviet Union (1922–1991). Nor is it a property of Soviet Union leaders, such as Vladimir Lenin or Joseph Stalin. Additionally, our post reinforced that Nazism is a right-wing ideology based on white supremacy and racial prejudice and by no means anti-capitalist; whereas communism is a left-wing ideology based on economic analysis and against capitalist exploitation of the working class.²³ Finally, we explained that we are not specialists in the Soviet regime and

18 “O nazismo era de esquerda?,” accessed 26 April 2023, https://www.instagram.com/p/Ch8C1hFM_uy/.

19 Ian Kershaw, *The “Hitler Myth”: Image and Reality in the Third Reich*, reissue edição (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

20 Richard J. Evans, *Terceiro Reich no poder*, 2ª edição (Planeta do Brasil, 2014).

21 “E o comunismo?,” accessed 26 April 2023, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CgKvzycsdhG/>.

22 Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Revisionism in Retrospect: A Personal View,” *Slavic Review* 67/3 (2008): 682–704.

23 John Lukacs, *O Hitler da História* (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1998).

finished this post restating that since communism and Nazism are not the same thing, we do not discuss the former. We have had a positive response from our community, which claims their social demands are being heard. In conclusion, through *NEPAT responde*, we can foster direct dialogue with the public, giving our audience the tools to resist multiple kinds of fake news.

3 Sharing authority, creating authority

Although we recognise, as historian Meghan Lundrigan points out, that “social media sources are integral to our understanding of how Holocaust memory functions personally, spatially, and transnationally in our current digital age”,²⁴ it is undeniable that such a sensitive topic does not come without its own challenges when communicating it to digital audiences. In a world with the continuous and alarming growth of neo-Nazi groups and Holocaust denial, the internet becomes fertile ground for harmful theories.²⁵ That is an even greater concern in Brazil, a country that, as previously stated, does not have a strong Holocaust memory. Therefore, a project that deals with this topic on the internet should have several methodological angles in mind.

Lundrigan highlights how Instagram is a constantly shifting source and how Instagram photos can be seen “both as individual visual reminders of place, as well as the communication of a historicized memory”.²⁶ In that sense, Instagram hashtags illustrate different expanded forms of public engagement with this memory, diverging from traditional forms of memory-making. When people visit Holocaust spaces, for example, Auschwitz and later use hashtags such as #auschwitz or #nowords in their photos, this manner of engagement makes the individual feel part of this shared memory and connected to a global network of remembrance. Because of the way the platform is built – although it is constantly changing to follow recent trends among users and consumers – Instagram is an

²⁴ Meghan Lundrigan, “#Holocaust #Auschwitz: Performing Holocaust Memory on Social Media,” in *A Companion To The Holocaust*, ed. Hilary Earl and Simone Gilioti (New Jersey: Wiley Blackwell, 2020), 639.

²⁵ Naturally, Brazilian far-right extremist discourse is not limited to references to Nazi ideology. Looking at and pushing back against the manipulation of Brazilian history is just as important. However, that falls outside the scope of our work at NEPAT. Our goal is to make high-quality content with proper academic rigour, and since our area of expertise is the Nazi regime and the Holocaust, that is what we focus on. We do this in a way that is connected to Brazilian reality, but we do not talk specifically about Brazilian history.

²⁶ Lundrigan, “#Holocaust #Auschwitz,” 640.



Figure 1: VIANA, Anna Carolina. *NEPAT Responde: O nazismo era de esquerda?* 2022. Instagram post screenshot. Screenshot by authors, March 21, 2024.

ideal place to comprehend new forms of documentation: “For the historian, social media is an archive made coherent through hashtags – among other things”.²⁷

Although visitors/users feel called to engage with Holocaust memory and now have the space on social media to do so, the public’s contribution is often regulated by institutions that employ “educational frameworks to guide visitor interpretation through Instagram in appropriate ways”.²⁸ However, one must bear in mind that most Instagram profiles with educational projects toward Holocaust memory are Holocaust institutions known worldwide. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) and the Auschwitz Memorial Museum are probably the most recognisable examples. Those places encompass the archival and the memorial aspect – after all, the Auschwitz Memorial Museum is in the former Auschwitz-Birkenau camp complex. In that sense, the educational material produced on these institutions’ social media is widely supported by an authority that is physically accessible. Instagram’s users can personally visit these sites, record, and share their experience (the “language of online belonging” of “I was there,” as Lundrigan names it²⁹) and also use these institutions’ profiles to

²⁷ Lundrigan, “#Holocaust #Auschwitz,” 640.

²⁸ Lundrigan, “#Holocaust #Auschwitz,” 643.

²⁹ Lundrigan, “#Holocaust #Auschwitz,” 644.

learn more about the Holocaust even if they cannot visit the place. As Lundrigan points out:

Social media usage expands the authority of engagement with Holocaust memory and its interpretation to broader public audiences, both online and offline; this expansion of authority raises important concerns over competing forms of historical narration, memory, and engagement as these themes relate to the Holocaust's representation. While this issue is not new to visual Holocaust representations and their reception, these competing forms of narration claim substantial public attention, sometimes shifting the lens of authority away from scholarly interpretations to populist ones.³⁰

This goes in hand with Victoria Walden's usage of the notion of "entanglement" to understand digital Holocaust memory. She borrows this concept from quantum physicist Karen Barad. Entanglement can be understood as a "lack of self-contained existence" in the sense that individuals do not pre-exist their interactions but rather emerge through and as part of a relationship. Barad argues that "existence is not an individual affair", making "creation and renewal, beginning and returning, continuity and discontinuity" essentially indistinguishable.³¹ Employing this concept in Holocaust memory allows us to grasp its dynamic movement, as memory is not fixed or unchanging. It also provides insight into the tensions between "official" institutionalised memory and "unofficial" laymemory proliferating in digital spaces. "If institutional Holocaust memory is fixed with particular 'rules' about what is and is not appropriate", Walden suggests, "these guidelines are not known or often considered by non-expert creators. Thus, the actual memoryscape is far more varied than many experts would like, and this will only increase".³² Hence, the necessity of examining the "multiple different actants working at different levels of the digital: computational, interface, institution, (prod)user, and cultural".³³ Therefore, the relationship between institutionalised and unofficial memory must be examined and reconceptualised in light of the realities of the digital era to ensure that the ethical commitments and integrity of Holocaust memory are preserved and continue to be perpetuated.

Regarding our work at NEPAT, this leaves us with two problems: First, we are not an institution in the same way USHMM, Yad Vashem, or many others are – far from it. We do not have a physical location; even if we did, it would not be a memorial site or archive. Therefore, we lack that kind of authority. This brings us to the second concern: We only produce educational content. That is to say, we do

³⁰ Lundrigan, "#Holocaust #Auschwitz," 641.

³¹ Walden, *Digital Holocaust Memory*, 6.

³² Walden, *Digital Holocaust Memory*, 6–7.

³³ Walden, *Digital Holocaust Memory*, 7.

not possess, for example, historical documents to display on our social media to engage our followers. That impacts the way we organise our content and editorial line, after all, our production is based on scientific dissemination, on bringing what we learn in academia and translating that to a general audience – and let us bear in mind that we are speaking of a largely non-academic and unknowledgeable audience, as we have already mentioned.

Speaking from a digital marketing point of view, that means that we must build our authority based on the quality of our content alone. Even as specialists on the theme, as our academic degrees establish, that is not a sufficient guarantee for the public that our content will be accessible or attractive, even if it is well-founded. In that sense, one of our primary concerns is how we communicate this specialised knowledge. Although Holocaust scholars and institutions have been using new technological advances, such as digital databases or virtual tours, that does not necessarily entail the use of new communication strategies. Therefore, our authority has been constructed on how we ‘communicate’ this authority, as well.

To this end, we use digital marketing methodologies and operate according to what social media networks require of content producers. As we mainly work with reputational content, we must guide our production with different Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) than the regular creator. For us, the number of likes on a post, one of the most used KPIs on social media, for example, does not necessarily mean that this content was relevant to our audience. Thus, we must guide our success by understanding the kind of community we have built on social media. To evaluate engagement, for instance, we analyse the type of discussion a post generated in the comment section, the number of times a post was shared, or we use polls and questions on our Instagram ‘stories’. Calling back to a previously cited post, *NEPAT responde: E o comunismo?*, one of our commenters informed us of the usefulness of the post as a resource to share with others, helping to explain a complex topic in a simple – but not simplistic – way. For us, this is an undeniable touchstone of success. All of these measures are part of a Business Intelligence strategy we must be aware of to sustain our relevance in online spaces. In that sense, we do not simply post content on the internet. We are also constantly analysing its resulting interactions and repercussions to understand what resonated with our audience and listen to what they are demanding of us. Therefore, we continually apply self-reflexivity. As an outcome of this well-thought strategy, we formed a very engaged community and are in uninterrupted open dialogue with the public.

4 On colours: The Holocaust in black and white?

Another distinctive aspect of NEPAT's production is evident at first glance on our Instagram page: the colours.³⁴ Our content is divided by category, each visually represented by a specific colour from our brand palette (See Figure 2). Our choice of colourful tones goes against the grain of what is usually produced by Holocaust institutions since most rely on darker colours and, as previously mentioned, photographs of their sites or documents from their archives. This source material and presentation style resonates with what people expect from historical places such as concentration camps and this traumatic memory, as "darker colours can trigger feelings of sadness".³⁵ Thus, an Instagram page with this tonality reinforces an aesthetic that communicates: the Holocaust was horrible; but also: the Holocaust is in the past. As Lundrigan points out, when Instagram users apply black and white filters on the photographs they take when they visit Auschwitz, they attempt to convey "a performed sense of historical authenticity and authority". We can read these images "as an exertion of the photographer's understanding of historicism or a wish that the horrible events of the Holocaust remain in the past, grainy and dated". Thus, the monotone Instagram feeds of notorious Holocaust institutions reinforce this impression, fulfilling what the audience expects: the absence of colour symbolises "loss, death, and horror – completely within our stylistic and cultural understandings of Holocaust representation".³⁶

Our work goes in another direction entirely: the use of colour is based on a conscious and studied communication choice. Each of our posts is eye-catching, vying for users scrolling casually through their feeds to take a second look. In a marketing sense, the strategy is, as it always is, to make people stay as long as they can on our profile. Furthermore, since it differs from what people usually see in other Holocaust institutions, it also sparks curiosity. Because although there is an established visual pattern observable on several institutions' Instagram pages, there is no official directive on how we are "supposed to" communicate Holocaust memory. In line with Lundrigan's terminology, this is merely a "digital performance"³⁷ repeatedly reproduced in cultural representations of the Holocaust.

NEPAT's feed may be vibrant, but this does not mean we are representing the Holocaust in a colourful way. Our palette does not represent a romanticisation or

³⁴ For more accurate visual reference with regard to our brand colour palette, we recommend accessing NEPAT's Instagram profile: <https://www.instagram.com/nepat.br/>.

³⁵ Lundrigan, "#Holocaust #Auschwitz," 647.

³⁶ Lundrigan, "#Holocaust #Auschwitz," 647–648.

³⁷ Lundrigan, "#Holocaust #Auschwitz," 649.

beautification of this memory. In fact, any historical photographs we include in our posts remain in their original colours: black and white when black and white, in full colour when coloured, and so on. That is to say, we are not making any intervention in the images themselves or altering them. On this level, our representation of the Holocaust aligns with the traditional conventions of memorialisation. However, the colours from our palette are applied to the post layout. Thus, they are utilised to ‘categorise’ the content we post. Each post category has its own colour: Book Recommendations are blue, Movie Recommendations are light orange, *Calendário Histórico* is bordeaux, *NEPAT responde* is green, and *Dicionário de Conceitos* is lilac. Through this visual coding and colour branding, in the midst of an overwhelming amount of social media posts, our audience can easily recognise NEPAT’s content while scrolling through their feed. In addition, because of the colours, it is also possible for them to identify what category of post they are looking at.

Furthermore, the colour coding of our content was conceived as a way to turn our Instagram profile into a visual archive of our production. As previously mentioned, Meghan Lundrigan proposes an interpretation of social media as an archive “made coherent through hashtags – among *other things*”.³⁸ In our case, when using Instagram, our colours are ‘another thing’ with which this visual archive can be built. Thus, we have transformed the layout of our feed into an archival tool. In contrast with other black-and-white feeds, the singularity of our profile adds another layer to the possibilities created by visually archiving Holocaust memory on social media. Therefore, it becomes easier for us to achieve our educational goals of building an ethically committed Holocaust memory that is also communicative, easy to understand, accessible, and concerned with the collective.

5 Conclusion: More than historical, a ‘historian’ influencer

In *The Matrix*, the turning point in the narrative is Neo’s choice to take the red pill, giving him access to the world as it truly is and uncovering the fact that, up until that point, he was living in an intentionally manufactured reality. However, unlike Morpheus, the historians’ task is not to offer anyone the red pill as an escape from a given reality. Instead, as historians, what we must do is offer the pub-

³⁸ Lundrigan, “#Holocaust #Auschwitz,” 640.

lic tools to understand and face the interreality of the world we live in – the complex product of our collective past, our present choices, as well as the constant and ever-changing interactions between the real and the digital worlds.

We previously brought up the concept of entanglement³⁹ to discuss the relationship between memorial institutions and online users. The internet affected how people connect with history since it subverted the basis for producing and circulating narratives about the past. As a result, the well-established distinction between historians as producers of historiography and ‘ordinary’ people as consumers of history has become increasingly blurred and flexible.⁴⁰ Thus, the rules about who has the power and legitimacy to talk about the past have changed. In our not-*Matrix* reality, the concept of entanglement extends to the relationship between history and the digital universe as a whole. We, historians, do not have a monopoly on the past and cannot dictate the shaping of collective memory on the internet. However, that is not the goal either. The conditions we operate under are infinitely more complex and engaging than a straightforward producer-consumer relationship. Thus, even if it is a challenging reality, it is also one full of new possibilities.

In that sense, as scholar Eva Pfanzelter points out, producing a public digital history on social media on topics such as the Holocaust (as NEPAT does) is a meaningful task with incredible potential.⁴¹ Nonetheless, all kinds of historiography come with their own risks regarding its uses and appropriations. We historians have immense responsibility over the history we produce, regardless of whether it is in our thesis, in a book, or in an academic paper – and the same applies to social media. After all, we have no control over the public’s reception of our work, whether it be positive appreciation or outright distortion. Therefore, what we can do is stay true to our purpose to produce ethically committed historiography in any form or through any medium we choose to use.

By staying away from the public sphere, historians risk losing our social relevance, and the public is deprived of a richer understanding of the past that could come from our contributions.⁴² Therefore, it seems more productive to seek a shared interpretation of the past built in collaboration between historians and

39 Walden, *Digital Holocaust Memory*.

40 Meg Foster, “Online and Plugged In?: Public History and Historians in the Digital Age,” *Public History Review* 21 (December 2014): 1–19.

41 Eva Pfanzelter, “At the Crossroads with Public History: Mediating the Holocaust on the Internet,” *Holocaust Studies* 21(4) (2015): 250–71.

42 Jill Liddington, “O que é história pública? Os públicos e seus passados,” in *Introdução à História Pública*, ed. Juliene Rabêlo de Almeida and Marta Gouveia de Oliveira Rovai (São Paulo: Letra e Voz, 2011), 50.

the public. We can pursue ways to guide, complement, and inform the narratives, contributing with our professional knowledge to a more critical understanding of the past. This call to action is intertwined with our social role and responsibility as professional historians – with history degree. After all, we do not seek our degrees in vain: the ample and specialised knowledge we acquire and the skills we exercise are relevant and unparalleled when it comes to understanding the past.



Figure 2: DEOTI, Bárbara. Compilation of posts produced by NEPAT. 2024. Digital image.

That said, we are not here to claim that every historian must produce historical content on social media. However, the work of communicating history on social networks should and must be acknowledged for what it is: work. As we have shown in this chapter, producing historically committed content on social media requires a range of methodologies and research that comes from a combination of traditional historiography and marketing and communication strategies. Resuming a previous example, when NEPAT produces a post about the Nuremberg Laws, we need more than just academic study on what the Nuremberg Laws were. In our conception, having scholarly knowledge is just as important as knowing how to transmit it to a specific audience within a particular context. In our case, that means a largely non-academic Brazilian public that lacks basic knowledge of the Nazi regime and the Holocaust and that is accessing this content on Instagram, a social network that has its own logic. Therefore, a post about the Nuremberg Laws must bear all of these layers in mind.

As previously suggested, when writing about history on social media, we enter a not-always-friendly place, often dominated by the right. However, especially when addressing sensitive topics such as the Holocaust, our presence in

these spaces is crucial for fighting denial and fostering democratic principles – much necessary in Brazil’s current political situation. Thus, we agree with Ravveduto’s proposition that Digital Public History may be a path to build a bridge not only between the real and digital worlds but also between historical knowledge and the public. This activity can be founded upon the action of a new figure: the historical influencer, whose task would be to “create narratives and content that is appropriate for the ‘interconnected public’”. The historical influencer would thus be a public *historian* who “intermediates in first person the presence of the past on the Internet”, resisting the emotional dominion of individualistic memory and cultivating critical thinking.⁴³

Seeing memory as a living, transgenerational, and transnational shared experience, the way we choose to communicate this traumatic past offers new forms of engagement with its memory in the digital era. In that sense, according to Ravveduto, we believe that our work in NEPAT is fulfilling “the social mission of the historian in the twenty-first century”.⁴⁴

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⁴³ Ravveduto, “Past and Present,” 138.

⁴⁴ Ravveduto, “Past and Present,” 138.

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