



The New Brazilian Conservatism and Education: Mapping its Lines of Force¹

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Abstract: In the last decade, demands for greater order and the defense of traditional moral values have grown in Brazil within the scope of what authors have been calling the new Brazilian conservatism. Conservative and neoliberal leaders and religious groups stand out, acting on different fronts in politics and social relations, including education. Within this context, the article aims to map the different manifestations, actions and agents of the new Brazilian conservatism in the educational field through theoretical reflection and the construction of a conceptual map. First, we discuss different conservative currents, especially the new conservatism in the USA and its influences in Brazil. Based on Almeida (2017), we outline a conceptual map of the new conservatism in education, highlighting four lines of force: moral, economic, security-related and interactional. These lines are interconnected and are articulated according to the interests of their defenders. On the educational front, they propagate a technical, banking and authoritarian vision of education, emphasizing the role of the family and restricting teachers' work and students' autonomy. We conclude that these multiple lines of force

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lead to significant setbacks in the construction of plural educational proposals, affecting pedagogical practice, curricula and teacher education.

Keywords: conservatism; Christian conservatism; neoliberalism; education policy; public school

O novo conservadorismo brasileiro e a educação: Mapeando suas linhas de força

Resumo: Na última década, o Brasil viu crescer demandas por aumento da ordem e a defesa de valores morais tradicionais, no âmbito do chamado novo conservadorismo brasileiro. Lideranças e grupos religiosos conservadores e neoliberais se destacam, atuando em diferentes linhas de frente na política e nas relações sociais, incluindo a educação. A partir desse contexto, o artigo objetiva mapear as diferentes manifestações, ações e agentes do novo conservadorismo brasileiro no campo educacional, por meio de uma reflexão teórica e da construção de um mapa conceitual. Inicialmente, discutimos diferentes correntes conservadoras, em especial o novo conservadorismo nos EUA e suas influências no Brasil. A partir de Almeida (2017), delineamos um mapa conceitual do novo conservadorismo na educação, ressaltando quatro linhas de força: moral, econômica, securitária e socialmente intolerante. Elas possuem conexões entre si e se articulam de acordo com os interesses de seus defensores. No plano educacional, propagam uma visão tecnicista, bancária e autoritária de educação, enfatizando a atuação da família, cerceando o trabalho docente e a autonomia discente. Concluímos que essas múltiplas linhas de força levam a reveses significativos na construção de propostas educativas plurais, afetando a prática pedagógica, currículos e formação de professores.

Palavras-chave: conservadorismo; conservadorismo cristão; neoliberalismo; política educacional; escola pública

El nuevo conservadurismo brasileño y la educación: Mapeando sus líneas de fuerza

Resumen: En la última década, Brasil ha visto crecientes demandas por un mayor orden y la defensa de los valores morales tradicionales, en el contexto de lo que expertos han llamado el nuevo conservadurismo brasileño. Se destacan los líderes y grupos religiosos conservadores y neoliberales, que actúan en diferentes frentes en política y relaciones sociales, incluida la educación. Desde este contexto, el artículo pretende mapear las manifestaciones, acciones y agentes del nuevo conservadurismo brasileño en el campo educativo, a través de la reflexión teórica y la construcción de un mapa conceptual. Inicialmente, presentamos diferentes corrientes conservadoras, especialmente el nuevo conservadurismo en Estados Unidos y sus influencias en Brasil. A partir de Almeida (2017), trazamos un mapa conceptual del nuevo conservadurismo en educación, destacando cuatro líneas de fuerza: moral, económica, de seguridad y socialmente intolerante. Tienen conexiones entre sí y se articulan de acuerdo con los intereses de sus defensores. En la educación, propagan una visión técnica, bancaria y autoritaria, enfatizando el papel de la familia, restringiendo la labor docente y la autonomía del alumno. Concluimos que estas múltiples líneas de fuerza conducen a retrocesos significativos en la construcción de propuestas educativas plurales, afectando la práctica pedagógica, los planes de estudio y la formación docente.

Palabras-clave: conservatismo; conservadurismo cristiano; neoliberalismo; políticas educativas; escuela pública

Initial Considerations²

In the last decade, Brazil has seen an increase in the number and intensity of demands for increased order and changes in the current political regime. Mobilized by an “anti-system” agenda, especially after 2013, increasing numbers of demonstrators have taken to the streets to demand that the state end corruption, strengthen the penal system and increase social morals (Tatagiba, 2018). After experiencing periods of intense political and social unrest that culminated in the impeachment of the president elect in 2016, Brazil became even more polarized in 2019, when it came to be governed by an ex-military man who declared himself to be conservative and strongly aligned with evangelical political leaders.

In general, conservatism can be characterized as a universal political perspective endowed with aversion to change and a strong attachment to “things as they are.” According to Crowther (1996), conservative thinking originates from conservative feelings, since the concrete perception of reality afforded by the former is based on the feelings of comfort and security arising from the latter. In this sense, conservatives see progress as possible only when it is based on values and knowledge that are established and thus are known to be safe. Any exception is considered a degeneration of the ideal social fabric.

“Conservative in customs, liberal in economics,” the catchphrase used by supporters of the victorious side in the last Brazilian presidential race, clearly summarizes the agenda of the political project that came to power: a restrictive moral agenda conjoined with an economic policy focusing on a free market and minimal state intervention, key elements of the new Brazilian conservatism (Lacerda, 2019). Specifically in relation to the field of education, the conservative agenda gained political space and defenders. Its expansion compromises both the quality of national public education and students’ training for serving as citizens and agents of social change (Penna, 2018).

Fiery discourse purporting that schools have promoted “ideological and gender indoctrination,” “distortion of good family values” and “subversion of the basic Christian values of the nation” have become part of bills and curriculum proposals throughout the country, as revealed by draft bills (DBs) no. 1859/2015 and no. 867/2015 (Marafon & Castro Souza, 2018). The former addresses the so-called gender ideology and proposes that “*education will not develop educational policies, nor adopt school curricula, compulsory subjects, even in a complementary or facultative way, that tend to apply gender ideology, the term gender or sexual orientation.*” The latter proposes the inclusion of guidelines from the Non-Partisan School Program, claiming that there is “*growing political-ideological contamination*” of the entire process of formal schooling that has led to a need to take preventive measures against such practices of political indoctrination.

In 2019, the Non-Partisan School Program was presented as a new bill, DB 246/2019, authored by Deputy Bia Kicis (former member of the Liberal Social Party, LSP, currently a member of the Liberal Party, LP) as an update of previous proposals. The new bill covers only public schools and, among other provisions, guarantees students the right to record their classes to favor parents’ supervision of the pedagogical process developed in the classroom. In addition, it institutes the creation of official anonymous reporting channels for noncompliance with the current law and the prohibition of school associations. Although the capillarity of authoritarian values and ideals goes

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beyond the federal legislative sphere and can also be found in bills and municipal and state education plans throughout the country, federal legislation is an important call to action for social movements, progressive politicians in general and the Federal Supreme Court (FSC) itself in combating projects of this type. An example of this is the challenge of the so-called Free School Law of the state of Alagoas, which the FSC considered unconstitutional because, among other reasons, it sought to restrict the freedom and autonomy of the subjects involved in the educational process under the supposed defense of political neutrality in teaching (Pereira & Lira, 2019).

Given this context, it is important to ask the following questions: who are the actors associated with the new Brazilian conservatism? What are their fronts of action in politics, society and education? In this article, we aim to map and discuss the new Brazilian conservatism's main groups, demands and implications as they relate to education through theoretical reflection and the construction of a conceptual map of this phenomenon. For this purpose, the article is divided into three main sections: i) a discussion of the definitions of conservatism and its main schools, ii) an analysis of the main characteristics of the new Brazilian conservatism and iii) the mapping of its demands and relationships in the educational field. In this map, constructed according to the analytical framework developed by Almeida (2017), we present four lines of conservative action in the educational field: i) moral, ii) security-related, iii) economic and iv) interactional. Finally, we point to the possible consequences for Brazilian education, with special attention to pedagogical practices, curricula and everyday school life.

Conservatism and its Different Schools

In the search for definitions that allow us to operate within the category of conservatism, we refer to the discussions prepared by O'Sullivan (2013). The author states that modern conservative ideology is underestimated when it is regarded as an anti-ideology that acts only according to its self-interests and a fear of change, without offering any alternative. From his point of view, moderate conservatism offers a propositional agenda that consists of limiting governmental political power and opposing the desire for political and social change that emerged in the Enlightenment and is still present today as a mark of current progressive thinking. This belief had its first political expression in the French Revolution and would prove to be overly optimistic in the ability of political action to transform society into a rationally order in which power survives only as a benign instrument for facilitating desirable ends. In this sense, conservatives claim that the following are erroneous assumptions of this belief: that human nature is highly malleable; that humans can change history in the way that their ideals demand; that society is the artificial product of a contract between autonomous individuals to implement their vision of good society and that evil is a contingent and eliminable characteristic of human existence, caused mainly by social oppression and deprivation (misery).

Based on these assumptions, four schools of conservatism stand out: 1) reactionary; 2) radical; 3) moderate; and 4) the New Right. In some respects, these different schools may be similar or intersecting. However, following O'Sullivan (2013), we will seek to highlight the striking traits of each of them.

According to the reactionary school, no society can survive unless its political institutions are based on a consensus of fundamental religious and moral values. Thus, according to Juan Donoso Cortes, a Spanish reactionary conservative writing in the first half of the nineteenth century, there are two forms of control: religious (internal) and political (external) (O'Sullivan, 2013). If religious control decreases—as in secular and/or lay societies—political control begins to grow, paving the way for tyrants who occupy the spiritual void at the heart of modern democracy, a void created by optimism about the ability of human beings to abandon religion and pursue happiness through

creative political action. Conversely, for Charles Maurras, a French monarchist and anti-Semite who was active from the turn of the 19th century, the combination of democracy and capitalism legitimizes a ruthless, selfish ethics that makes a consensus regarding fundamental values even more difficult to achieve; in fact, modern democracy has only replaced the oppression of the aristocracy with the oppression of the business plutocracy. A contemporary and close colleague of Maurras, Maurice Barrès, a French politician and writer, extended these reactionary reflections to education, arguing that the democratic egalitarian ideal dulls educational standards in such a way that it becomes impossible to transmit a common heritage to each new generation (O'Sullivan, 2013).

O'Sullivan (2013) highlights that the main criticisms of the reactionary school center on the essentially snobbish nature of its political analysis, its utopian goal of a perfect and harmonious hierarchical society and its convergence with the structures of extremist ideologies that favor conspiracy theories. Consequently, movements of this type are relegated to the margins of politics, where they claim to be above party interests. They may also use extraconstitutional methods (including willingness to join revolutionary movements) to overthrow the established social order or adopt a charismatic approach to leadership with the aim of unifying the people.

The radical school (O'Sullivan, 2013) is located at the opposite end of the reactionary school: its members insist that relevant conservatism should embrace democratic modernity instead of viewing the masses with hostility. This can be achieved by uniting the masses behind leaders who reject both the liberal commitment to parliamentary institutions and the socialist emphasis on class conflict in favor of an ideology that fuses nationalism and socialism into a synthesis that aims to integrate the entire population. Thus, while the reactionary school is built “from above,” in an elitist manner, the radical school is built “from below.” In short, the radical conservative school rejects parliamentary democracy in favor of the direct involvement of the masses in politics.

Its first proponents were interwar thinkers who were critics of the Weimar Republic and identified with Nazism, such as Arthur Moeller van den Bruck and Carl Schmitt (O'Sullivan, 2013). After World War II, the advocates of this school of thought tried to make it more respectable by adopting three intellectual strategies: the rejection of the principle of the leader as an individual, the rejection of a nationalist doctrine in favor of a supranational ideal of European unity as the main safeguard against domination by the USA and the rejection of extraconstitutional political methods in favor of a gradualist program of mass political education.

O'Sullivan (2013) highlights that the main criticisms of radical conservatism are based on three points: faith in a national leader who cannot be held politically accountable (i.e., unaccountability); refusal to accept the tendency of modern populations not to become politically involved, which ends up exacerbating the distance between elites who are politically involved and the indifferent majority; and the inevitable demonization of groups that oppose the leader as the exclusive representative of national unity.

The third conservative school described by O'Sullivan (2013) is the moderate school, which is committed to the ideal of a limited state governed by the law, with representative institutions and a constitution that provides checks on executive power. This ideal has intersections with liberal ideology, but conservatives reject its abstract rationalist concepts.

The conservative conception of limits, however, varies. For Edmund Burke, limits were based on a theological point of view: the source of moderation should be the ordered structure of the universe, reflected in the balanced constitution of the British, in which there is correspondence and symmetry with the order of the world and the decreed mode of existence is one of a permanent body composed of transient parts (Burke, 1982). Benjamin Constant started from a tragic point of view: human nature in its modern form is inevitably divided by complex interests that prevent any commitment to a singular value or passion. It is impossible, therefore, to achieve a unified self (Constant, 1957, as cited in O'Sullivan, 2013). Conversely, David Hume adopted a skeptical view of

the requirements of political prudence. He assumes that, in political matters, every person is a possible traitor (knave), regardless of whether this is literally true; this necessitates the elaboration of several checkpoints and controls of the constitution to prevent people from being caught by surprise by abuses of power in politics or by weaknesses of the political order and severe limits of government action (Hume, 1987).

The biggest problem with these views is that they are linked to an organic vision of society, in which social order tends to be characterized by a natural harmony. Burke, for example, referred to a natural aristocracy whose authority would be universally accepted. Even among conservatives, criticisms of these views emerged. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, an English writer who worked at the turn of the 18th century, believed that, for this organic view to be sustained, greater state intervention and distance from the political power of the aristocratic leadership proposed by Burke would be necessary (Coleridge, 1972, as cited in O'Sullivan, 2013).

In Europe in the 20th century, this conservative view gave rise to a “social market economy” articulated with religious views. This resulted in a combination of sympathy for socialist policies, a rejection of secular humanist culture and a conservative emphasis on authority and traditional institutions, such as the traditional patriarchal family and church, and was characteristic of Christian Democratic parties in Germany, Italy, Belgium, Holland and Luxemburg during the postwar era.

The New Right and the New Conservatism: Philosophical Influences and Action in Society

The New Right is the fourth school described by O'Sullivan (2013). In the United Kingdom, it emerged in response to the fear that the parliamentary constitution was being replaced by a system of corporatist government that consisted of private bargains between government, large industrialists and unions, none of which took responsibility for the country. Added to this were economic problems and the loss of a distinct conservative identity in the political spectrum of that country.

In that country and in other contexts, the ideas of Roger Scruton and Friedrich Hayek spread. The former held that a shared sense of national identity (which he called prepolitical loyalty) is the only possible link for modern European states, which he described as societies of strangers (O'Sullivan, 2013; Scruton, 2019). For the conservative philosopher, this is distinct from belligerent nationalism, which uses national symbols to recruit people for war. O'Sullivan (2013) pointed out that this perspective seeks a difficult consensus that ends up becoming merely formal and legal.

In turn, Hayek (2010) defended the free market rather than the commitment to a national cultural identity and criticized conservatism for its hostility to the development of knowledge, on which the progress of civilizations depends. Even so, his criticism of collectivist positions and “middle ways” served as inspiration for New Right politicians due to his belief that it is possible to plan the economy and social order and that it is not possible to objectively define social justice. In contrast, he stated that only the market can coordinate practical thinking and can develop and allocate resources efficiently and therefore, he advocated a focus on production and not on distribution (Hayek, 2010). Although he opposed a laissez-faire approach, Hayek did not propose universal social welfare services based on the collection of taxes; instead, he advocated for insurance without a state monopoly. Criticisms of Hayek center on his distorted view of social democracy as a directive system of planning, when in fact, it is based on regulatory techniques that do not substantially restrict freedom. In addition, he was accused of not realizing that the market economy stimulates the erosion of moral values on which its very existence depends (O'Sullivan, 2013).

In the United States, New Right intellectuals began criticizing the collectivist consensus throughout the 1950s and 1960s, inspired by their dissatisfaction with the legacy of Roosevelt's New Deal and Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. For O'Sullivan (2013), American conservatism was characterized by two extremes: i) the Libertarian defense of the minimal state by thinkers such as

Robert Nozick and ii) the attempt to apply European conservatism to the USA, as proposed by Russell Kirk. From a practical point of view, Milton Friedman, the most prominent name of the Chicago School, stands out; he shared a defense of the free market with Hayek and James Buchanan, who also criticized state planning (O'Sullivan, 2013).

The Chicago School, especially the figures of Friedman, Gary Becker, Theodore Schultz and James Heckman, applied economic thought to education. The “economization of education” (Spring, 2018, p. 14) refers to the “involvement of economists in education research, in the evaluation of the efficiency of schools and family life according to cost-benefit analyses, and in the promotion of competition among schools in a competitive environment.” Thus, this approach proposes that education is as an investment in human capital and emphasizes that schools should focus on teaching skills that are useful for economic activity. Spring (2018) criticized the emphasis on these skills, saying that they do not encourage individuals to fight for social justice, compassion or altruism. He also noted that only skills in the physical and biological sciences are valued, and the humanities and arts are neglected, which directly impacts resources and incentives for higher education in these areas.

In addition, in the essay “The Role of Government in Education” (1955), Friedman gained considerable notoriety with his proposal of educational vouchers based on the assumptions of the rational choice paradigm, which would allow families to choose the schools that their children would attend according to their desires. This would allow students living in areas with poor schools to enroll in areas with better facilities - public or private - thereby overcoming a negative neighborhood effect. Additionally, competition among schools would stimulate improvements in the quality of education that the schools offered (Friedman, 1955).

Spring (2018) emphasized that the voucher policy would not eliminate the existence of racially segregated schools, and indicated that Friedman himself recognized this. Ladd (2003) argued that experience with vouchers in the USA is limited, as is the evidence of their effects on the quality of traditional public schools; consequently, much of the debate on this topic in that country revolves around ideological disputes. In Chile, where the voucher policy was applied nationwide, research shows that there has been significant growth in private, nonreligious and for-profit schools. However, the students at these schools did not perform better than those at traditional public schools. Only the students who attended Catholic schools had better results, and Carnoy and McEwan (2003) attributed this difference to the greater resources that were available to these establishments. The authors emphasized that parents tended to choose schools based on their socioeconomic and ethnic characteristics, which deepens previously existing inequalities. In general, the voucher program tended to favor students from high-income families (Ladd, 2003). In a recent study, Hofflinger and von Hippel (2020) examined whether the increase in the performance of Chilean students between 2002 and 2013 was due to school choice, school resources or family resources. The conclusion of the study was that the main contributing factor was higher parental education, followed by smaller class size. The school choice system had no statistically significant impact.

In parallel, neoconservatism made a strong cultural and moral mark, as in the work of Irving Kristol, who believed that contemporary American civilization is inclined to spiritual nihilism (O'Sullivan, 2013). This was also reflected in a broader conservative belief that the social welfare project of the Great Society would destroy citizen's sense of individual responsibility, since state actions to reduce poverty and increase educational opportunities would never be sufficient. It was emphasized that welfare policies failed to distinguish between the “deserving” poor and the “unworthy” poor.

Lacerda (2019) pointed out that these conservative intellectuals gradually aligned themselves with other agents and values to create a neoconservative coalition in the 1970s. On the one hand,

representatives of the economic elite were concerned with re-establishing their class power; on the other hand, a considerable portion of the working class aligned with a strong moral traditionalism, over which Pentecostalism had considerable influence. The author emphasized that neoliberalism and conservatism have divergences, such as an emphasis on the market as a stimulus versus the creation of an order oriented toward the repression of desires and the vision of a future in which borders are erased by the monetary nexus as opposed to the strengthening of nationalism. However, neoliberalism and conservatism converge on basic issues, such as the rejection of the government as the basis for decisions, the opposition to political freedom and equality among citizens, the devaluing of people according to market criteria and the use of the state for moral ends. Finally, and probably most importantly, neoconservatism served as a response to the erosion of morality in capitalism, filling this void with rigid moral values that are anti-communist and opposed to income distribution. Thus, cultural nationalism, the defense of the traditional patriarchal family, moral rectitude and the emphasis on Christian values, in addition to opposition to state interventionism in the economy, became part of the ideological political construct (Harvey, 2007).

It is of great importance to highlight the role of the Christian Right's reaction to advances in the rights of women and gay people in the USA, its defense of traditional gender roles and the traditional patriarchal family as central to the construction of society and the spread of its actions to other Latin American countries. Formed by Evangelicals with ties to the Catholic charismatic renewal, the Christian Right invested in organizational structure, social capillarity and the ability to circle the religious masses around neoconservative issues. Although the Christian Right is a minority from a statistical point of view, the dissemination of the idea of the universality of Christian values ensured that the neoconservative movement would gain the validation of a moral majority. By linking religion and politics, this movement was able to act on two fronts: i) by persecuting any individual who dared to transgress traditional gender roles and ii) by financing the confrontation of ideologies that it opposed (such as liberation theology) and more progressive governments in countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru and Uruguay in the 1960s (Lacerda, 2019; Lima & Hypolito, 2019).

In the educational field, the agenda of the Christian Right in the United States was dedicated to reestablishing parental, local and religious control over students, arguing that parents' biological and ideological prerogatives should override the state's prerogatives. Among the measures proposed by the pro-family groups were the reintroduction of prayer in public schools; the teaching of creationism; opposition to any federal government intervention in private and religious schools; tax incentives for the enrollment of school-age children in private and religious schools; opposition to the unionization of public school teachers; the elimination of all programs related to sex education, homosexuality and critical views of traditional gender roles; the dismissal of gay teachers from public schools; and the promotion of homeschooling when, in the 1960s and 1970s, schools were perceived as impregnated with the counterculture environment (Lacerda, 2019).

Regarding homeschooling in the USA, Apple (2010) argued that its advocates are mostly conservative evangelical religious groups linked to the New Right and are primarily what the author describes as authoritarian populists. As part of a growing trend in that country, most families that choose to homeschool are white and are more educated and wealthier than the average population. The programs and teaching materials that they adopt have content and pedagogical and moral orientations that are deeply marked by religious values. It is noteworthy that in most cases, the children's mothers are responsible for homeschooling, which is consistent with the gender roles advocated by their religious denominations. It is interesting to note, however, that the role of women in this case should not be seen as purely submissive, as there is an implicit discourse that states that mothers are responsible for equipping their children with weapons to shape society according to values consistent with those of the traditional patriarchal family. To this end, a

profitable market of handouts, books, CDs and, especially, internet resources offers material and psychological support that, while instilling knowledge and values aligned with conservative Christianity, helps these women develop the skills necessary to teach their children and to perform the psychological work of homeschooling (Apple, 2010).

Over the years, American neoconservatism has remained active. Activism against abortion and the rights of gay men and lesbians gained momentum in the 1990s, even during the Democratic administration of Bill Clinton. The War on Terror waged by Republican George W. Bush triggered militarism among neoconservatives. However, it was during the administration of Barack Obama that the neoconservative identity gained new momentum. Protests against social programs aimed at needy communities were touted as “government alms for unworthy groups” (Lacerda, 2019, p. 57). The formation of the Tea Party and its advance and subsequent predominance in the directions and actions of the Republican Party, strengthened an agenda of opposition to minority rights and resistance to any Democratic proposals in the form of blockades and obstructions in the House of Representatives and the Senate. This scenario, coupled with the great economic power and popularity of the Tea Party, allowed Donald Trump to break through barriers in the presidential candidate selection system and to bypass the traditional leadership of the Republican Party (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018).

The Trump administration promoted a neoliberal government, supported military intervention in Bolivarian Venezuela (understood as the new center of communist power to be fought) and presented anti-feminist positions. In summary, Donald Trump summarizes modern neoconservatism: privatist, neoliberal, conservative, militarist, and right-wing. Authors such as Lacerda (2019) and Lima and Hypólito (2019) described parallels between the historical processes that occurred in the USA and the current Brazilian situation. In Brazil, one can see the rise of neoconservatism especially since the protests of 2013, which were accentuated by the contestation of the 2014 elections by the defeated party, followed by the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff (Workers Party) in 2016 and culminating, in 2018, in the election of Jair Bolsonaro (former member of the LSP, currently a member of the Liberal Party, LP).

The New Brazilian Conservatism: Resurgences and Updates

The Federal Constitution of 1988 recognizes collective rights and social demands that go beyond the individual sphere. To ensure the maintenance of these rights, social movements have organized themselves around socially and culturally egalitarian political agendas. In this context, the identity issues of social subjects who were subordinated, were made invisible or faced social discrimination, such as feminist social movements, black communities, peripheral communities, gay men, lesbians, bisexual individuals, transgender individuals and other marginalized groups, gained strength in the public sphere starting in the 1990s (Machado, 2006; Miguel, 2016).

In response to the advances obtained by these groups, antagonistic agents intensified their demands for greater moralization of social relations by the state (Almeida, 2017). Moved by their feelings in reaction to what they understand as the decomposition of the social fabric and the need to resume order, groups of a heterogeneous nature (right-wing politicians, religious leaders, influential social media personalities, among others) began to demand a morally conservative and economically neoliberal state orientation and a justice system with greater punitive capacity (Lacerda, 2019).

It is important to note that the conservative wave did not originate in or remain confined to the chronological and geographic limits of Brazil. According to Burity (2018), European and American international policies that recognize minorities and expand social well-being generated different levels of resentment and antagonism among the elites of these countries. Burity further

stated that, after the globalization of the neoliberal version of capitalism, the intensification of conflicts among economic powers over resources, economic crises and the growing terrorist threats in recent decades led to simultaneous processes of self-immunization (limitations of democratic rights in the name of combating terror from outside) and internalization (understanding that the enemy integrates into society and should be excised by repression or prevention) in the international scenario.

Although conservatives are located to the right and extreme right of the political spectrum of in the Brazilian scenario, Lacerda (2019) draws attention to the fact that these concepts should not be confused. While the right (since there are different ways of doing politics, whether on the left or the right) generally places greater emphasis on the economic and security issues of the state, neoconservatism goes further. In addition to economic factors, positions related to the role of women in society, the minimization of the rights of those who do not adhere to traditional gender roles and the radical defense of Christian values comprise the neoconservative political ideology (Burity, 2018).

In Brazil, the following scenario is outlined: The promotion of the family as the nucleus of society continues to gain adherents inside and outside of Congress; reactions against the LGBTQIA+ agenda and discussions of the decriminalization of abortion are becoming increasingly aggressive; parliamentary action in favor of prosecutorial rigor (the intensification of calls to lower the age of criminal responsibility and, to a lesser extent, the institution of the death penalty) and demands for privatization and the reduction of state powers find defenders in organized caucuses, such as the so-called BBB (Boi [ox], Bala [bullet] and Bíblia [Bible]) Caucus, named in reference to the interests of those who compose it: the agribusiness, civilian and evangelical caucus.

These aspects point to more than superficial similarities between international neoconservative movements, especially American movements, and groups that advance the national neoconservative agenda. In this case, what is new in Brazilian conservatism? According to Burity (2018), the conservative wave that overtook Brazil and spread to across politics, religion, social media and interpersonal relationships is conceived as an idea that has been damaged by social degeneration, but at the same time, it presents itself as a reaction and a restoration of what was lost and is worthy of being recovered. In a global scenario fueled by crises and insecurities, social agents with different origins that are aligned in their combative view toward the inversion of hierarchies, the subversion of moral values and growing demands for rights and a discourse that focuses on the restoration of order (moral and religious) in the path toward progress (especially economic). Thus, legal, political, media, economic and religious components coexist in the current conservative scenario.

In this sense, Miguel (2016) and Lacerda (2019) stated that Brazilian conservatism relies on updates and adaptations of foreign neoconservative ideas. Neoliberal management relies on the privatization of state services after deliberate scrapping. The defense of the traditional family, composed of a heterosexual couple and their children and identified as the only valid family structure, has gained prominence in the action of a group of Christians (composed mainly of evangelical Christians, but with a reliance on conservative Catholics to defend their interests, such as the denial of abortion and LGBTQIA+ rights) and a federal executive who has adopted a moralizing and conservative religious discourse. Finally, anticommunist militarism was transformed into the struggle against the left and, especially, against Bolivarian Venezuela, understood as a new communist threat that aims to dominate Latin America.

In this context, education is an important field in a dispute that involves specific actions and programs. The different instructional demands, curricular disputes and orientations of the educational perspective to be adopted present different conceptions of society and cultural and socioeconomic organizations that cannot be ignored. The right to quality and democratic public

education should be understood as a permanent struggle of educators, social movements and students that is a slow historical process marked by advances and setbacks (Rosa, 2018). We seek to argue that the advancement of the new conservatism compromises proposals for human, democratic and secular rights in education.

Education as a Field in Dispute: A Map of the New Conservatism in Brazilian Education

A concept map aims to visually represent the relationships among ideas and concepts. The use of this methodological resource as a tool to help understand different aspects of the new Brazilian conservatism seeks to deepen reflections, as it provides a schematic presentation of the topics addressed and their connections (Tavares, 2007). In this map, we seek to attribute relationships to actions and programs currently underway in the field of education. We understand that not all of these actions and programs were created or instituted by the current government, but we believe that it had a great influence on the consolidation of many of the programs that we present below (Figure 1).

The map establishes four lines of force, subdivided into actions or secondary manifestations, and their unfolding. They are i) moral, ii) security-related, iii) economic and iv) interactional. These divisions are based on the segments used by Almeida (2017) to describe the conservative wave that operates in different directions in Brazil. For the author, the conservative wave is actually a “broken wave,” not because it has little strength, but because its actors, ideologies and goals form a movement with multiple interests that sometimes approach and sometimes distance from one another.

The line of force related to morality bears the strong influence of traditional and charismatic Catholicism but is increasingly intensely influenced by Pentecostal evangelicals. Almeida emphasized that Pentecostal evangelicals demonstrate active—not merely reactive—conservatism, and like Catholics are interested in maintaining their status quo in society. Although there are pluralities of positions within the Pentecostal evangelical movement, their goal is perceived as “not only the protection of their morality, but the struggle for it to be included in the legal order of the country” (Almeida, 2017, p. 18). In the field of education, this line of force is quite explicit around agendas such as the Non-Partisan School bill and the fight against so-called gender ideology. Both focuses have a strong moralist brand, reinforcing traditional and reactionary conceptions of education, teaching and family.

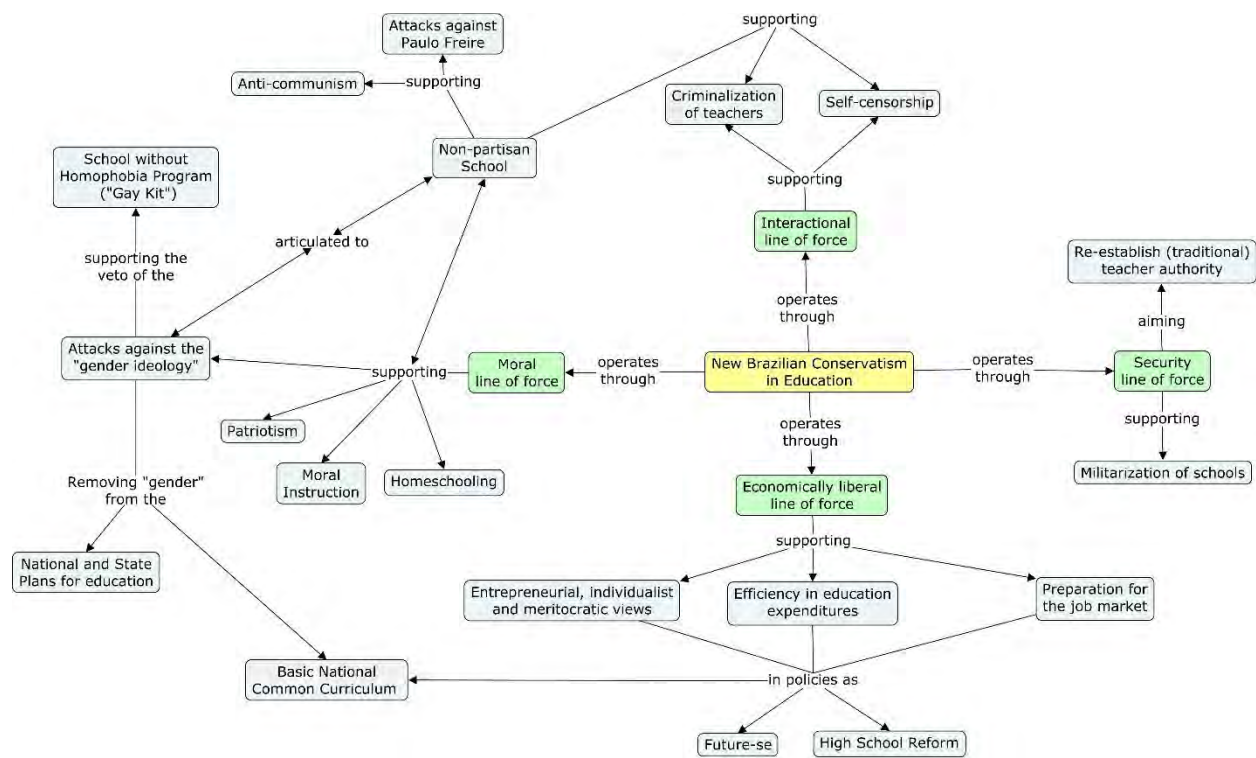
The Non-Partisan School bill has its genesis in the Non-Partisan School Movement (Movimento Escola sem Partido [MESP]), created in 2004 by the lawyer Miguel Nagib. Nagib, who is Catholic, stated that his motivation to found the movement came from his daughter’s claim that her history teacher had compared Che Guevara to St. Francis of Assisi in one of her classes. Thus, the movement’s first aim is to fight against “Marxist” and “communist” indoctrination in schools. However, it was not until 2010 that the movement gained strength and visibility. As Miguel (2016) pointed out, this occurred when the MESP added the fight against the so-called gender ideology to its agenda.

Starting in the 1970s, studies on gender, understood as the roles assigned to men and women, began to be developed. In the following decades, with the growth of this academic field and of the feminist and LGBTQIA+ movements, the leaders of the Catholic Church promoted a series of conferences and documents aimed at combating “gender ideology” (Miguel, 2016). The discussions around gender as a social construct are viewed by the Vatican as that is unnatural, opposes divine will and is anti-family. In this sense, a reactive agenda was established to oppose laws

and public policies that represent gains for women and LGBTQIA+ people in different countries. In Brazil, this movement quickly mobilized Pentecostal and parliamentary evangelical sectors in the National Congress and state and municipal legislative bodies. In education, this mobilization was clear in the pressure to veto the School without Homophobia Program (which then-federal deputy Jair Bolsonaro called “the gay kit”) and in the removal of the word “gender” from the national and state plans for education and the Basic National Common Curriculum (BNCC). In the “Manifesto for the Nation” published by the Evangelical Parliamentary Front shortly before the second round of the 2018 presidential elections, this opposition was evident in its association of the ideology of gender with an “ideology of pornography” (Evangelical Parliamentary Front, 2018, p. 54).

Figure I

Concept Map of the Lines of Force of the New Brazilian Conservatism in Education



Source: authors.

The offensive against the discussion of gender and sexual diversity in schools is aligned with the agenda of the MESP, reinforcing a view that defends the primacy of the family over the school in deciding what should be taught. Thus, bills such as Non-Partisan School that, since 2014, have expanded to different cities, states and the National Congress emphasize that schools should only teach values with which families agree, especially in relation to issues surrounding sexuality and religious beliefs. As Penna (2017) highlighted, it is argued that the family educates and the school teaches; that is, the school as an institution should dedicate itself only to instructing students in certain content, while the family is responsible for the transmission of values. It should be noted, however, that the aforementioned Manifesto for the Nation proposes that “moral instruction” be instituted across all disciplines, with the objective of shaping and sustaining morality, ethics and

civility in future generations. This would help fight organized crime and stimulate love for the country and for national heroes and symbols (Evangelical Parliamentary Front, 2018).

Also related to the defense of the family's values over the values of others is the concept of homeschooling. Cury (2019) shows that until the 1988 Constitution, Brazilian law allowed families to not enroll their children in public or private schools as long as they guaranteed the child's education at home. Since the redemocratization, the Constitution, as well as the Statute of the Child and Adolescent and the understandings of different judicial branches - including the Federal Supreme Court - have regulated that enrollment in and attendance at school are mandatory. However, in April 2019, the Ministry of Women, the Family and Human Rights sent a bill to Congress (DB no. 2401/2019) that aimed to legalize homeschooling, claiming that it is the natural right of parents to decide whether their children will be educated within the family or in public or private schools (Cury, 2019).

There is also a critique of public education since redemocratization that associates students' low performance on evaluations such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) with the influence of Paulo Freire in Brazilian schools. As stated by Kohan (2019, p. 19), since the 2013 demonstrations, the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff and the government agenda of then-presidential candidate Jair Bolsonaro in 2018, Paulo Freire was perceived as

responsible for a supposed "Marxist indoctrination" in schools and the root of almost all the problems with education in Brazil, even though the actual Brazilian educational reality has very little to do with the teachings of the Pernambuco educator and disregarding the fact that he himself would certainly agree with many of the critical assessments of the system.

The line of security and repressive force refers to "a series of political movements, collective demands, governmental measures that point to a more repressive and punitive attitude and actions by the state's security apparatus" (Almeida, 2017, p. 21). Among these measures are the lowering of the age of criminal responsibility from 18 to 16 years of age, antiterrorism efforts, incarceration policies and the fight against drugs. Almeida emphasized that evangelical parliamentary action in this line of force is not as expansive as actions related to morality. However, it has served as an auxiliary line for public and private security forces (such as military corporations and companies), and as Lacerda's research (2019) demonstrated, the evangelical caucus supported all these bills in the chamber's plenary. "The mechanisms of social aggregation are religion and the family; deviation should lead to rigorous punishment" (Lacerda, 2019, p.143).

In the field of education, this line of force is manifested in government policies such as the implementation of the civic-military school model and discourses that favor rescuing the lost authority of teachers. The implementation of civic-military schools, one of the promises of Jair Bolsonaro's campaign, links the improvement of educational quality to military values and school administration. PECIM, the National Program of Military Civil Schools, created by Decree 10.004/2019 by the Ministry of Education in partnership with the Ministry of Defense and the Armed Forces, materialized this ideal (Ricci, 2019). In a debate in the Education Committee of the Chamber of Deputies in May 2019, Cristiane Antunes, advisor to the Undersecretariat of Fomenting Military-Civil Schools in the Secretariat of Basic Education of the Ministry of Education (SEB-MEC), made a presentation in which she emphasized that military teaching contributes to the construction of values, civism, patriotism, respect for hierarchy and discipline, pride in being Brazilian and the appreciation of meritocracy (Antunes, 2019).

It is possible to perceive the presences of traditional elements of conservatism in this proposal (an emphasis on traditional values, patriotism and hierarchy). As noted by Almeida (2017),

when moral and security-related lines are compared, religious discourse is not as explicit in calls for security as in the fight against the so-called gender ideology, although parliamentarians from the evangelical caucus, such as Congressman Eduardo Bolsonaro (former member of LSP, currently member of LP), support such security-related measures (Nobre & Chalub, 2019). However, Commander Paulo Neves of Brazilian Civic School also participated in the abovementioned debate. Brazilian Civic School is an institution that has partnered with different entities to implement schools with a civic-military model and that bears references to God on its coat of arms and has frequently cited the presidential campaign slogan of Jair Bolsonaro (“Brazil above all, God above all”) on its Facebook page (Brazilian Civic School, 2019).

PECIM has received criticism from researchers because there is no evidence that it improves student learning, because the military personnel involved lack adequate pedagogical training and because it separates school management from student behavioral management. In addition, these schools have selective processes in place for determining their student body and emphasize rigid hierarchies and punishments that do not stimulate the development of the autonomy in children and young people (Ricci, 2020).

The new Brazilian conservatism, in its liberal economic dimension, approaches pro-minimum, neoliberal positions, cutting public policies and endorsing privatization (Lacerda, 2019). This agenda is echoed in Protestant Pentecostal theology, which emphasizes an individualistic, meritocratic and entrepreneurial ethic (Almeida, 2017) that, as discussed above, fills the moral void of capitalism with rigid moral values. Although neoconservative parliamentarians rarely explicitly indicate that they are in favor of these agendas, Lacerda (2019) indicated that their favorable votes on issues such as changes in Petrobras’s participation in the exploration of the pre-salt layer and the public spending ceiling make this ideological orientation clear. This stance changes, however, in regard to the labor reform approved by the government of Michel Temer (Brazilian Democratic Movement (BDM), which received less support from these parliamentarians. Lacerda (2019) emphasized that labor reform is more immediately perceptible to the electorate: A large part of the support base of the aforementioned congressmen comprises Pentecostal evangelicals from the popular classes, and the changes envisaged in the reform would directly reduce their rights.

In the educational field, this line of force in Brazil is expressed, in part, in the advancement of privatization of education management, the educational supply and, especially, the curricula, which can be observed in the formulation and implementation of policies such as the BNCC, the Secondary School Reform and the Future-se program (Adrião, 2018; Avelar & Ball, 2019; Corti, 2019). As Adrião (2018) and Avelar and Ball (2019) indicated, philanthropic groups have been expanding their networks of action to different spheres of government, with notable participation in the formulation of the BNCC, which is articulated around the Base Movement. This movement – led by the Lemann Foundation but with the participation of members of other institutions, such as All for Education, the Ayrton Senna Institute and the Natura Institute – actively seeks to form alliances with members of the government and agencies such as the National Council of Education. It is noteworthy that if we compare the first and second semesters of 2016 (the periods before and after the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff, respectively), we can observe an increase in the number of members of the Base Movement who were also affiliated with state institutions, which reflects the onset of a more conservative management profile (Avelar & Ball, 2019).

In addition, in January 2020, the Minister of Economy, Paulo Guedes, stated during the World Economic Forum in Davos that the government would support a “gigantic” voucher program for early childhood education (Vieira, 2020). Guided by the Chicago School, Guedes followed the reasoning described above, which, as studies indicate, has a limited impact on student performance and may deepen pre-existing inequalities. As of the writing of this article, this voucher program has not been implemented. In Brazil, scholarship programs that offer subsidies for private

programs to compensate for omissions of the state are common, but these programs are not associated with parental choice (Adrião, 2018).

The emphasis on education as an investment is an approach that religious political leaders, especially Pentecostal evangelicals, have used more explicitly of late. In the Manifesto for the Nation, there are multiple references to the value of merit as a key element for overcoming the communist indoctrination in public education over the last three decades and as a catalyst for the technological innovation necessary for Brazil move beyond being simply an exporter of commodities. The Manifesto for the Nation also advocates for the efficiency of resources allocated to basic and higher education, stating that the cost of sending students to public universities is excessively high and its return to society is small. It recognizes that Brazil invests less in basic education per student than the average for Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries but states the analyses developed to date cannot confirm with certainty whether the current disbursements by the public sector for education are sufficient and adequate to allow comparisons between Brazil and the rest of the world. Finally, it reiterates that the investment of 6% of the GDP in education is greater than the average of countries with an integrated organization; therefore, it is necessary to resolve inefficiencies in the system, mainly through management changes (Evangelical Parliamentary Front, 2018).

It should be noted, however, that although there is a convergence of interests between corporate philanthropic groups and conservative groups on certain economic agendas, the same cannot be said for moral and security agendas related to education. The implementation of the model of civic-military schools and the fight against the teaching of issues related to gender and sexual diversity are criticized by the All for Education movement but, as previously discussed, they are strongly supported by the military and evangelical and Catholic groups (Ferreira, 2019; Matarazzo & Gonçalves, 2019). Such divergence was already evident when Mozart Ramos, director of the Ayrton Senna Institute, was appointed to take over the Ministry of Education under the Jair Bolsonaro government and was subsequently vetoed by the evangelical caucus (Murakawa & Delgado, 2018). Thus, the oversight of the Ministry of Education in Brazil is governed by neoconservatives.

The fourth line of force highlighted by Almeida (2017) is the interactional one. In this dimension, the author referred to the quality and intensity of social interactions in situations marked by strong political antagonism. It is noteworthy that feelings of hatred, phobia and revenge have permeated interpersonal relationships, especially since the demonstrations of June 2013, and have been expressed in social networks. These feelings are embodied in acts of iconoclasm, vilification and moral constraint, such as those suffered by practitioners of Candomblé, including religious leaders who were forced to destroy their own *terreiros* (temples), in addition to the propagation of homophobic discourses.

Regarding education, we can find marks of this dimension in the devaluation of teaching work and schools as the result of a perspective of constant vigilance and persecution of teachers, who are seen as indoctrinators (Lopes, 2019). Here, the influence of the MESP is also observed. Although the eponymous bills have not yet been approved, in practice, a series of actions and statements by political leaders support this perspective; such actions include the post by a state representative from Santa Catarina urging students to film teachers who demonstrate political partisan or ideological stances and the surprise “inspection,” without prior authorization, of the Pedro II School in Rio de Janeiro by two federal deputies (Boeckel et al., 2019; G1 SC, 2018). These proposals were present in the presidential campaign promises of Jair Bolsonaro and were reiterated by the former Ministers of Education Ricardo Vélez and Abraham Weintraub and by Damares Alves, the Minister of Women, the Family and Human Rights and an evangelical pastor. The latter two, in November 2019, declared that the government would launch a unified channel for

complaints about “excesses” and “indoctrination” in the school environment. However, definitions of these terms and statistical data regarding their frequencies or effects were never disclosed (Rodrigues & Bomtempo, 2019). In response to these threats of surveillance, self-censorship and the avoidance of issues related to politics, sexuality and other topics considered sensitive by conservative groups have been used as protective strategies by teachers who fear being accused of indoctrination and facing punishments such as dismissal (Britto, 2019).

Such demands fall within the scope of defense according to conservative liberals and political and social agents who combine the defense of conservative moral and political agendas with the reduction of the state and the institution of the free market (Cunha, 2017). It is important to understand how these demands affect not only the plurality and richness of the school as a space for socialization and the construction of knowledge but also call into question the very definition of emancipatory public education (Giorgi et al., 2018).

Conclusion

The conservative wave, broken down according to its different lines of force, has impacted Brazilian education in multiple ways. In the different forms, actions, programs and policies mapped here, a predominantly technical, banking, market-based, clientelistic and authoritarian perspective of education is perceived, which has consequences for pedagogical practice, curricula and teacher training. We highlight, therefore, some conclusions of this study.

First, especially guided by Almeida (2017) and Lacerda (2019), we seek to reflect on the advances of the new conservatism into education in Brazil. We note that there are parallels between the emergence and growth of the New Right in the USA in the 1970s and 1980s and the current Brazilian context that have used moral, economic, security-related and interactional arguments to justify their expansion, including into the educational field and public schooling.

From a moral point of view, these conservative forces state that the role of the school and teachers is restricted to instructing students, and the family should be responsible for education; that is, the school should be exclusively a transmitter of content. Any other action by schools and teachers can be considered indoctrination. As Paulo Freire (1978) criticized in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, this is a conception of education that sees students, especially the oppressed, as less than human and unable to think about their reality and transform it. Penna (2017) reinforced this idea, arguing that the Non-Partisan School bill brings with it a neotechnicist conception of schooling by arguing that the teacher should teach and not educate; that is, it is not up to teachers to discuss values or talk about the student’s reality.

Regarding security-related aspects, an emphasis is placed on disqualifying the stance of Paulo Freire and the work of teachers, charging that they bear most of the responsibility for students’ poor results on the PISA evaluations. This argument is used to justify the civic-military schools program and the perspective that school education should be authoritarian to ensure that students learn content; however, these calls include no clear plan of actions for changes, improvements or investment in teacher training.

From an economic point of view, the defense of a meritocratic orientation for education, scrutiny of the per-student investment in education, the Future-se program and the possibility of implementing educational vouchers suggest a neoliberalism that articulates with conservatism, especially the Christian right, in the construction of a neoconservative alliance. There is no sign of a commitment to reducing; in contrast, these stances reinforce the position of making individuals accountable for their own failure in school.

Regarding the socially intolerant aspects, as pointed out by Sepulveda and Sepulveda (2016), it is essential to strengthen the defense of secularism in opposition to conservative views that

propagate prejudice and discrimination in schools. The secular state is not atheistic because it does not promote a religious denomination and respects its citizens freedom of worship. Simultaneously, decisions cannot be guided by the morals of a specific religious group. Given the importance of religious beliefs to the Brazilian population, the maintenance of proportions of atheism and agnosticism at below 10% over decades (Jacob et al., 2013), the capillarity of evangelical churches and the rise of political leaders linked to Pentecostal denominations through the support of the Bolsonaro government, secularism seems to have lost significant space in the public sphere, especially in the last ten years.

Regarding the explanatory limits of the discussion developed and the conceptual map constructed in the present study, it should be noted that the study's objective was to conduct a broader analysis to explain the main components and relationships of the neoconservative advance in Brazilian education in the last decade. This, this mapping should not be considered from a deterministic, linear or fatalistic perspective. We recognize the actions of social movements, collectives, unions, teachers, students, scientific associations and researchers, among other actors who have been building initiatives of resistance and insurgency against neoconservative actions and agendas.

Finally, we hope that the mapping that we have constructed can serve further research to deepen the themes explored here, revealing even more relationships within the complex networks established by the new Brazilian conservatism. Far from aiming to present definitive contours for this set of actors, values and policies, we sought to delineate its advance in education and thus contribute to the discussion of democratic educational proposals that value differences and subjectivities and that combat prejudices and intolerance.

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