


**The homeschooling network in Brazil: the conservative alliance in action**


**A rede da educação domiciliar no Brasil: a aliança conservadora em ação**

**La red de la educación domiciliar en Brasil: la alianza conservadora en acción**


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**Abstract:** In this article, we present a network of actors who defend homeschooling in Brazil. Our objective is to contribute to the identification of actors, the understanding of homeschooling, and of the Brazilian conservative movement that is manifest in a conservative alliance. To do so we present the context of the advance of conservatism in Brazil, through a complex theoretical framework. We then provide an overview of homeschooling in Brazil and the world. In the following section, we present the research methodology that generated this article, and how the data used to elaborate the mapping of the network was collected.

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Finally, we present the homeschooling network in Brazil, situating actors and offering final considerations. We conclude that the defense of homeschooling relies on arguments characteristic of different groups, and show the potential of the concept of conservative alliance and articulation for the analysis and understanding of Brazilian conservatism.

**Keywords:** Homeschooling. Conservatism. Network analysis.

**Resumo:** Neste artigo, apresentamos uma rede de atores que defendem a educação domiciliar no Brasil. Nosso objetivo é contribuir para a identificação dos atores e para a compreensão da educação domiciliar em si bem como para o entendimento do movimento conservador brasileiro, que se manifesta em uma aliança conservadora. Para tanto, trazemos o contexto do avanço do conservadorismo no Brasil, por meio de um complexo referencial teórico. Na sequência, trazemos um panorama sobre a educação domiciliar no Brasil e no mundo. Na seção seguinte, tratamos da metodologia da pesquisa que gerou este artigo, apresentando a forma como foram coletados os dados utilizados na elaboração do mapeamento da rede estudada. Por fim, apresentamos a rede da educação domiciliar no Brasil, situando atores e oferecemos considerações finais. Concluímos que a defesa da educação domiciliar conta com argumentos característicos de distintos grupos, mostrando a potencialidade do conceito de aliança conservadora e de articulação para análise e compreensão do conservadorismo brasileiro.

**Palavras-chave:** Educação domiciliar. Conservadorismo. Análise de redes.

**Resumen:** En este artículo, presentamos una red de actores que defienden la educación domiciliar en Brasil. Nuestro objetivo es contribuir para la identificación de los actores y para la comprensión de la educación domiciliar en sí, así como para el entendimiento del movimiento conservador brasileño, que se manifiesta en una alianza conservadora. Para ello, traemos el contexto del avance del conservadurismo en Brasil, por medio de un entramado teórico complejo. A continuación, traemos un panorama de la educación domiciliar en Brasil y en el mundo. En la siguiente sección, tratamos la metodología de la investigación que generó este artículo, presentando la forma en que fueron recolectados los datos utilizados en la elaboración del mapeo de la red estudiada. Finalmente, presentamos la red de educación domiciliar en Brasil, situando actores y ofrecemos consideraciones finales. Concluimos que la defensa de la educación domiciliar cuenta con argumentos característicos de distintos grupos, mostrando el potencial del concepto de alianza conservadora y de articulación para el análisis y comprensión del conservadurismo brasileño.

**Palabras clave:** Educación domiciliar. Conservadurismo. Análisis de red.

## Introduction

Various researchers have demonstrated a conservative advance in Brazil, with impacts in the educational realm<sup>1</sup> (Albuquerque; Zanardi, 2021; Lima; Hypolito, 2019; Lacerda, 2019; Miguel, 2016; Oliveira; Oliveira, 2021; Piaia, 2019). Projects and actions such as the Schools without Political Parties movement, the militarization of education and home schooling have existed in Brazil since 2014 (Miguel, 2016; Pinheiro-Machado, 2019), but gained even more strength with the ascendance of Jair Bolsonaro to the Presidency of the Republic. The militarization of education was promoted in the Civil-Military Schools Program; the Schools without Political Parties movement supported Bolsonaro's candidacy, given that he was the only candidate to commit to the implementation of the program if elected<sup>2</sup>; and home schooling is one of the agendas that is strongly defended by Damares Alves, who was his Minister of Women, the Family and Human Rights (Brasil, 2019a). Considering the advance in conservative agendas in education in Brazil, we affirm that it is necessary and urgent to document and analyze them based on theories that can capture the conditions that allowed their rise and the alliances that were forged so that they could gain this space. In this article we conduct a review to present and analyze a network with the main

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<sup>1</sup> This article is, in part, the result of a research project that studies these advances, entitled "A Aliança Conservadora, o Estado e as Políticas Educacionais no Brasil: um mapeamento de atores e ações conservadoras", [The Conservative Alliance, the State and Educational Policies in Brazil: a mapping of conservative actors and actions] financed by CNPq.

<sup>2</sup> Available at: <https://twitter.com/escolasempartid/status/1028007495988600833>. Accessed on: 6 Oct. 2022.

actors that have been responsible for disseminating the home-schooling agenda on a national level. By mapping this network, we hope to contribute to the understanding not only of home schooling itself – by mapping the actors – but also to the understanding of the Brazilian conservative movement, which is manifest in a conservative alliance.

We will first present the context of the advance of conservatism in Brazil and analyze it based on complex theoretical references. In this section, we use Brazilian authors who have studied this movement in the national context as well as the studies of Michael Apple, which have been fundamental to the characterization of the conservative alliance and its dis- e re-articulations. We thus present some relations between that which Apple mapped in the United States and what has been experienced in Brazil. Our objective is also to demonstrate the foundations of a conceptualization that addresses this conservative alliance in a way that accounts for its complexity. We then present an overview of home schooling in Brazil and the world, showing some of the main issues on this agenda. In the following section we introduce the research methodology that generated this article, presenting how the data used in elaborating the mapping of the network studied were collected. We also indicate, in this section, the complementarity between network ethnography and social network analysis. Finally, we present the home-schooling network in Brazil, situating some of the actors in this network and then the final considerations.

### **The context of the advance of conservatism**

Before more specifically addressing the issue of home schooling, it is important to indicate that this agenda gained centrality in Brazil through the conservative advance, which some authors call the conservative wave (Miguel, 2016; Piaia, 2019) or the New Right (Lacerda, 2019; Rocha, 2018), which has been present in the educational field (Miguel, 2016; Lacerda, 2019; Lima; Hypolito, 2020; Lima; Golbspan; Santos, 2022). We understand that this advance is the fruit of a conservative alliance (Apple, 2003), which in Brazil includes groups and actors with characteristics similar to those mapped by Michael Apple in the United States in the 1980s. The concept of conservative alliance is used to indicate a tense coalition of forces and indicates heterogeneity. Thus, this concept is central to understanding the complexity, historic contingency, and contradictions related to conservatism.

According to Apple (2003), the conservative alliance in the US is constituted by four groups: neoliberals, neoconservatives, authoritarian populists and the new professional middle class. Based on the reading of this author – combined with other readings specifically about the Brazilian context (Lacerda, 2019; Miguel, 2016; Rocha, 2018) – we affirm that the Brazilian conservative alliance is dominated particularly by fundamentalist religious groups and neoliberal groups. Considering the importance of these two groups, especially in relation to home schooling, we will briefly examine some of their characteristics.

The religious fundamentalists are those who Apple (2003) calls authoritarian populists. This group bases education and social policy positions on certain visions of Biblical authority, such as “Christian morality”, the roles of gender and family (Apple, 2003). Apple (2003, p. 67) affirms that in the US, this group’s platform includes issues related to gender, sexuality, family and about what should be considered legitimate knowledge in schools. In the view of religious fundamentalists the state’s interference in the family represents a danger presented by the multi-culturalism that wants their children to be required to coexist with the “different” and often the “immoral”.

Examining Brazil, Miguel (2016, p. 593) presents a perspective close to that of Apple, and affirms that fundamentalism can be defined “by the perception that there is a revealed truth that annuls any possibility for debate”. Miguel affirms that this group is active in opposition to the right

to abortion, the defense of the heteronormative family and in opposition to policies to fight homophobia. Miguel (2016, p. 593) also highlights that religious fundamentalists “align themselves with different conservative forces in Congress, such as the latifundistas and those who defend weapons”.

The centrality of religion in Brazil’s conservative advance is also highlighted by Lacerda (2019) who identifies an active Christian right – which is not only Evangelical – that proposes the defense of the “traditional family” as a response to any diagnosis of social anomaly. This is revealed, for example, by the quantity of debates the author identified in the national Congress about the issue of women’s reproductive rights and the legal definition of the family, which with the enactment of bill N° 6.583, de 2013 that created the Statute of the Family defined the family as the social nucleus created by the union between a man and a woman, through marriage or stable union (Brasil, 2013).

The characteristics of the group of neoconservatives mapped by Apple (2003) are also identified in the Brazilian conservative alliance. However, we understand that neoconservatism is an intellectual and political movement that is quite specific to the US (Rocha, 2018). Therefore, more than identifying neoconservative groups in Brazil, it is possible to verify some of their characteristics, especially that concerning a “romantic view of the past, a past in which ‘true knowledge’ and morality reigned supreme, where people “knew their place” and in which stable communities, guided by a natural order, protected us from the harms of society” (Apple, 2003, p. 57). This notion of a past in which everything functioned well is quite present in conservative discourses in Brazil, which affirm that in the past there was an established order that has been corrupted. As Lacerda (2019) highlights, this disorder is often blamed on issues related to sexuality and gender.

In addition to the conservative perspective of morals and customs, there is also an economic conservatism, which is primarily expressed in the conservative alliance by neoliberals. This group works with the premise that the private is necessarily good and the public is bad and insufficient. Neoliberals defend economic rationality and the cost-benefit principle as a form of maximizing efficiency and quality and consequently meeting the demands of capital (Apple, 2003). Another nodal point for neoliberals is the “freedom of choice”, which is understood as the true democracy. In relation to social policies, in the neoliberal view, the market is responsible for offering employment to all who want, according to the merit of each one, to assure equity and a better future for citizens, who come to be understood as consumers (Apple, 2003).

Miguel (2016) identifies this group in Brazil as libertarian ultra-liberals. Like Apple (2003), Miguel highlights that this group defends a state as small as possible in terms of social policies, and affirms that in the neoliberal perspective “any situation that that is born from market mechanisms is just by definition, as unequal as it may appear” (Miguel, 2016, p. 592). We should also emphasize that these ideas are actively promoted by think tanks in Brazil (Miguel, 2016; Rocha, 2018).

In relation to neoliberalism in Brazil’s conservative advance, Rocha (2018) offers important contributions, indicating that the new Brazilian right widely promotes pro-market ideals, highlighting an important role that is performed by neoliberal and or ultraliberal actors. Rocha defines neoliberalism as that which defends an active role of the state as promoter of the free-market, which should actively regulate the economy “to create a legal-juridic apparatus to support the good operation of the free market” (Rocha, 2018, p. 46). Rocha affirms that what is found in Brazil today is a conservative-ultraliberal amalgam.

As is clear, the two groups that we described have distinct characteristics, but are able to articulate their interests and establish an alliance. The concept of the conservative alliance allows

us to understand these combinations of interests as a currently firm but contingent connection. Differences between them exist but are minimized and the possible points in common are maximized due to the ultimate interests of each group. Thus, when Christian fundamentalist authoritarian populists argue that “human nature *is* the market; and the unbridled expansion of such a market to all of the world’s nations [...] is God’s will” (Apple, 2003, p. 193), or when neoliberals affirm that education should not be political or involve values, but focus on the education of workers prepared for the world of labor, it is clear that articulations are being forged.

The concept of the conservative alliance is based on theorization about hegemony, which we come to examine in the next section.

### **Hegemony as economic and cultural leadership**

According to Hall (2005), the use of analyses that are based on the premise that social relations are determined solely by economic relations provokes unilateral explanations, that is, those that consider only a part of the whole, and are thus distorted. Based on the incorporation of contributions from Gramsci (1971), Hall (2005) uses the concept of hegemony, demonstrating that this concept allows a more complex analysis of social phenomena.

Hall (2005) emphasizes that hegemony is a process that must be actively constructed and maintained through struggle for leadership and social power, in which different groups compose alliances based on common objectives. Among the groups that constitute alliances, there is an hierarchization, which is to say that some groups have more power than others. Hall (2005) highlights that hegemony is multidimensional and thus cannot be constructed or sustained based on a single dimension (for example, the economy). Hegemony “represents a degree of command over an entire series of different ‘positions’ that occur at a single time” (Hall, 2005, p. 424).

Even when indicating the importance of other dimensions that go beyond the economic, Hall (2005) highlights that its powerful role in social analyses cannot be neglected: groups that have greater material conditions also have an important leadership role in hegemonic alliances and the relations of production are still central to the analysis of hegemony, with mediations. According to Apple (2000, p.43), hegemony implies obtaining consensus, “by forming an ideological umbrella under which different groups who might not totally agree with each other can stand” (Apple, 2000, p. 43).

Hall offers a key contribution for understanding the complexity that the concept of hegemony provides to the notion of the conservative alliance. Together with the concept of Critical Cultural Political Economy, which will be examined more deeply below, we came to understand that

some discourses are more powerful than others in society because discourses are linked to material conditions. This hierarchy of discourses, though, is not produced by a one-way determination from the material conditions. Instead, Hall helps us to understand that this is a process of constant movement, where the hegemonic groups must struggle to establish their discourse as the dominant one. This is not automatically guaranteed by the fact that those groups have the economic power (especially because groups without economic power could be brought inside the dominant alliance). Hall defends a non-necessary correspondence between the economy and culture, between dominant classes and dominant ideology, and not a necessary non-correspondence, as some poststructuralists propose (Gandin, 2015, p. 293).

The strength and expansion of the conservative movement, which has attained political hegemony in the contemporary context (Apple, 2013), are sustained and driven not by an isolated

sector, but by the collaborative action of the groups that compose this alliance. Thus, the notion of alliance is central to understanding the phenomenon in question in its complexity, historic contingency, and contradictions. The term conservative alliance is used by Apple (2003) to describe the provisory and tense articulation of the different groups that compose this new hegemonic block and that have brought to the foreground conservative proposals and projects in various fields, including education.

The notion of alliance proposed by Apple (2003) is intimately anchored in Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony and its use by Hall, given that this coalition arose and is sustained precisely in the effort to maintain certain social groups in privileged positions. The maintenance of hegemony requires investments and systematic efforts to retain a certain social position. In the dispute for hegemony, the various groups and social forces remain in permanent tension, to the degree that the favored groups must find ways to maintain and update their hegemonic conditions, even if to do so they must form alliances, under certain conditions, with groups with conflicting interests. Moreover, an important lesson from Apple's theory (2003) about the hegemony of the conservative alliance is the critical and relational aspect of his analysis: he understands that the actions of this hegemonic block have concrete consequences and emphasizes that while certain privileged groups reproduce their hegemony, groups that are subalternized in terms of race, class, gender, and sexuality are continually harmed by the permanence of the hegemonic project of the conservative alliance.

The concept of Critical Cultural Political Economy and its use in the field of education, as developed by Robertson and Dale (2015), incorporates the discussions proposed by Hall, and demonstrates the importance of operating with categories that go beyond the economic. Critical Cultural Political Economy of Education, according to Robertson and Dale (verbal information)<sup>3</sup>, in addition to highlighting the importance of including in social analyses categories that go beyond the economic, has the objective of conducting educational analyses in a more specific manner. The idea is not to add education as an aspect beyond the economy, politics, and culture, but to place it at the center of the investigations, examining how these three dimensions work at the interior of and by means of education.

In elaborating this theory considering educational analyses, Robertson and Dale indicate the important role that education has for the production and reproduction of cultural, political, and economic aspects. Critical Cultural Political Economy of Education consists in using a critical perspective to study education as a phenomenon that has implications for the cultural, political, and economic fields.

Critical Cultural Political Economy of Education is concerned with providing tools that allow new understandings of modern social formations and their relations, bringing the economy and politics to converse with a cultural perspective. Its main characteristic is to indicate that social phenomenon cannot be analyzed by only considering the economy, and it is necessary to include politics and culture in a critical perspective. Thus, like the concept of hegemony and the conservative alliance, one of the contributions of Critical Cultural Political Economy of Education is to analyze educational policies through a more complex vision, which involves cultural, political, and economic aspects. The development of this theory responds to the still existing preponderance, in some social analyses, of an economist bias – even if this is a question that has been discussed since the 1980s and 90s. Robertson and Dale (2015), like Jessop (2008), indicate that many studies still raise the economy as the element through which social relations can be explained, leaving in a distant second place issues referring to culture and politics. As we showed, Stuart Hall indicated

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<sup>3</sup> Information obtained in meetings with professors Roger Dale and Susan Robertson at the *University of Bristol*, from October 2014 to June 2015.

the need to include in analyses of social phenomenon elements that go beyond the economist logic. Thus, Critical Cultural Political Economy of Education also benefits from Hall's contributions. As one of us affirms in a text about Hall's contribution to the analysis of educational policies:

There is a famous quote from Margaret Thatcher, the former Prime Minister of the UK, which, in my opinion, summarizes the reason why it is so important to use all these concepts together in order to understand the movements of the hegemonic alliance. She said, "Economics is the method, the aim is to change the soul" (as cited in Apple, 1996, p. 98). This sentence, I think, summarizes the task of any researcher interested in social regulation and social transformation. It is necessary to address the structural conditions where the "economics" is established: the materiality still counts. But it is also necessary to understand how neoliberal and neoconservative groups gained hegemony and how this discourse articulates the fears and beliefs of the dominated groups. Finally, it is necessary to analyze how "souls" are being changed, how the most cherished beliefs are being reconstructed, how social memory is being erased, and how consent is being won sometimes not rationally, but through a politics of feelings and desire. (Gandin, 2015, p. 295).

This combination, proposed by Hall, provides a large epistemic gain, making even more potent the use of the concept of the conservative alliance. The use of this concept, supported by the theories of hegemony and Critical Cultural Political Economy, provides, as we show, a theoretical lens that is capable of capturing the complexity of the conservative hegemonic blocks in Brazil today and their actions in the discursive field and in the field of politics.

With the discussion proposed in the two past sections, we will analyze the foundations of the construction of the conservative alliance in the world and in Brazil and characterize the groups that compose it, particularly the religious fundamentalists and the neoliberals. An understanding of the principles that guide these two groups is essential for the analysis of the network that will be realized in this article. We affirm that the current conservative movement in Brazil is the fruit of alliances between different interests and objectives, represented by distinct actors (which can be seen through the analysis proposed here), who are particularly linked to neoliberal ideas and those of fundamentalist religions.

### **Home schooling in Brazil and the world**

The practice of educating children at home, whether by family members or by hired tutors is not new in the modern world. To the contrary, it was the traditional way to teach reading and educate children until the nineteenth century, when schools became a "compulsory phenomenon" (Silveira, 2018). In fact, according to Silveira (2018, p. 10), "the first state with records of establishing mandatory schooling for all was a German duchy in 1592". Homeschooling became widespread during the Nazi dictatorship in Germany: Jewish families tried to remove their children from schools during this period to escape indoctrination from the totalitarian regime. The practice then gained strength in the United States in the 1970s, where it is now regulated in all 50 states (Silveira, 2018). Beyond the US, the practice is legalized in other countries such as South Africa, Spain and Italy.

In Brazil, despite a few attempts, homeschooling is still not regulated by the federal government. The first bill about the issue, prepared by federal deputy João Teixeira, was proposed in 1994, but rejected that year (Silveira, 2018). Twelve other bills have been presented in the federal Chamber of Deputies, but the only successful one was PL N° 3.179, of 8 February 2012 (Brasil, 2012), by deputy Lincoln Portela, which was approved in the Chamber of Deputies in May 2022,

and is now awaiting review in the federal Senate<sup>4</sup>. Other bills were annexed to it, including PL N° 2.401, of 17 April 2019, (Brasil, 2019b), signed by members of the executive branch of the Bolsonaro government, by then Minister of Education Abraham Weintraub and then Minister of the Family and Human Rights Damares Alves – who are central figures in the network of actors who worked to disseminate *homeschooling* in the country.

With the support of the Bolsonaro government, there was a large political effort to legalize homeschooling at a national level. According to an article in the digital news site Poder360 from February 2020, the bill for the legalization of homeschooling was that most accessed on the site of the federal Chamber of Deputies, in this legislative session, in the field of “education, culture and sports” (Alves, 2020), which indicates that it is not only of interest to politicians, but that part of the population is also interested in the regulation of the practice. In December 2020, Governor Ibaneis Rocha, of the Brazilian Democratic Movement party (MDB), approved a law that established home schooling in Brasilia, the Federal District, and which took force in February 2021 (Cruz, 2020). A year later, in December 2021, Santa Catarina Governor Carlos Moisés (w/o party), also sanctioned a law to regulate homeschooling in the state (Borges; Battistella, 2021).

It should be emphasized that educating children at home was not always illegal in Brazil. Homeschooling only came to be irregular and education a responsibility of the state under the Constitution of 1988 (Cury, 2006 *Apud* Casanova, Ferreira, 2020). Casanova and Ferreira (2020) recall:

Under the Constitution of 1988, art. 208, in its § 1º, defines that: “access to free and mandatory education is a subjective public right” (Brasil, 1988, p. 139). Its §3º emphasizes that: “Government is responsible for censusing students in fundamental education, recording their presence, and insuring, together with their parents and responsible parties, that they attend school (Brasil, 1988, p. 139). (Casanova; Ferreira, 2020, p. 5).

However, Vieira (2012, p. 30) indicates: “Even after the promulgation of the Constitution of 1988, homeschooling would be permitted in Brazil for two more years. The first Brazilian law to prohibit the practice was the Statute of the Child and Adolescent, of 1990, which, in article 55, required registration in the regular school system”.

Yet, despite legal obstacles, homeschooling is a growing phenomenon in Brazil. According to data from the National Association for Homeschooling (Aned), more than 7,500 families now practice homeschooling, with a growth rate of approximately 55% a year since 2011 (Aned, 2022). In this article we understand that homeschooling is a practice characteristic of groups that constitute the conservative alliance (Apple, 2013) and arose as a response to affirmative action policies and the implementation of social rights, especially during the federal governments of the Workers Party (PT) (Lacerda, 2019). It can be seen that home schooling grew in Brazil along with the advance of Brazilian conservatism, as highlighted previously.

Through this brief history, we want to show that homeschooling is growing in Brazil and was an important agenda in the Bolsonaro government. As mentioned, we understand that the growth in this issue is related to the advance of conservatism in Brazil. This aspect will be addressed in greater depth with the network analysis. However, before analyzing the network elaborated with the theoretical perspectives proposed, in the next section we present the research methodology.

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<sup>4</sup> See the most recent legislative action in: <https://www.camara.leg.br/proposicoesWeb/fichadetramitacao?idProposicao=534328>. Acesso em: 28 dez. 2022.



## Methodology

This article will use two techniques of scientific research that are understood to be complementary in the case studied: network ethnography (Ball, 2014; Howard, 2002), to guide the model of data collection and their qualitative analysis; and social network analysis of a quantitative nature, which will allow analyzing and visualizing the data collected by means of graphs of the actors and their relations. Social network analysis is a multidisciplinary analytical technique, (used both in the human sciences and in the hard sciences), whose main characteristic is the use of graphs and quantitative indicators to describe relationships among actors using concepts from the social context (Souza; Quandt, 2008).

Social network analysis is generally applied to identify the most central actors in a network and those who intermediate important relations, to visualize the concentration of actors as a grouping or in isolation, and to identify communication flows among actors by means of the relations that they establish (Serrat, 2017). To understand the application of this technique, it is important to emphasize two important concepts, nodes, and links, which are the main elements of a network or graph. The nodes, which are visually indicated by “bubbles” are the points of the network that represent the entities, for example, people, institutions, groups, parties, etc. Meanwhile, the links, which are visually represented by straight lines or curves, are the representations of relations between the nodes, for example, some type of tie, friendship, coauthorship, collaboration, ideological support, and others (Cherven, 2013).

In addition to the concepts of nodes and links, social network analysis allows measuring indicators based on the distribution of the relationship between nodes. Below is a list of the definitions of the indicators used in this study and based on Recuero (2017):

- Density: this is a metric of a network that describes a network’s potential to form relationships. It is calculated considering the ratio between the maximum possible number of relationships between nodes and the number of relations found in the network (in *Gephi*<sup>5</sup>, the indicator calculated varies from 0 and 1, with 1 the maximum number of possible relations in the network).
- Diameter of the network: this is also a metric of a network, it indicates the number of relations needed to cross the longest path between the nodes of the network. It is a measurement that is complementary to the density and allows understanding how difficult it is for the most distant nodes to relate.
- Modularity: this is also a metric of a network and is presented both graphically and quantitatively. It is an indicator of a network’s tendency towards grouping and describes how many possible groupings exist, according to the frequency of the relationships between the nodes.
- Degree: this is a metric of nodes that basically refers to the number of relationships of a given node. Its objective is to indicate the most important actors according to the number of relationships that they have.

Along with the quantitative indicators of network, social network analysis allows generating graphic representations between the nodes. By means of visualizations generated by algorithms of the layout of the network, the nodes and relationships are presented based on the distribution of relations and groupings. To analyze the data in this study, the visualization algorithm Force Atlas

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<sup>5</sup> *Gephi* is *software* that allows visualizing and exploring the types of graphs and networks. It is available at <https://gephi.org/>. Accessed: 28 dec. 2022.

2 (Recuero, 2017) was used, with the objective of leaving the nodes of a higher degree at the center of the network, while expressing the groupings of nodes formed by the relationships.

To complement the social network analysis technique, which has characteristics for quantitative research, network ethnography was also applied, which according to Howard (2002), is different from social network analysis, because the latter is not able to capture details about relationships that are not measurable, but which are significant. Thus, network ethnography is applied to contribute to social network analysis, making use of new forms of virtual and electronic communication, which “offers a broader and richer access to the ‘social’ in social networks than has been the case using just terrestrial data” (Ball, 2014, p. 28).

The data collection was thus based on this methodological strategy. Network ethnography constitutes “a mapping of the form and content of policy relations in a particular field” (BALL, 2014, p. 28). Therefore, for the data collection, we used the internet as the main tool to elaborate the network of actors who disseminate homeschooling in Brazil. We conducted extensive searches on various sites, including videos, interviews, *PowerPoints*, *Facebook*, *blogs*, *tweets* etc. Through this search we identified important actors in Brazil who are related to this theme. The period of the research was January 2018 until May 2020.

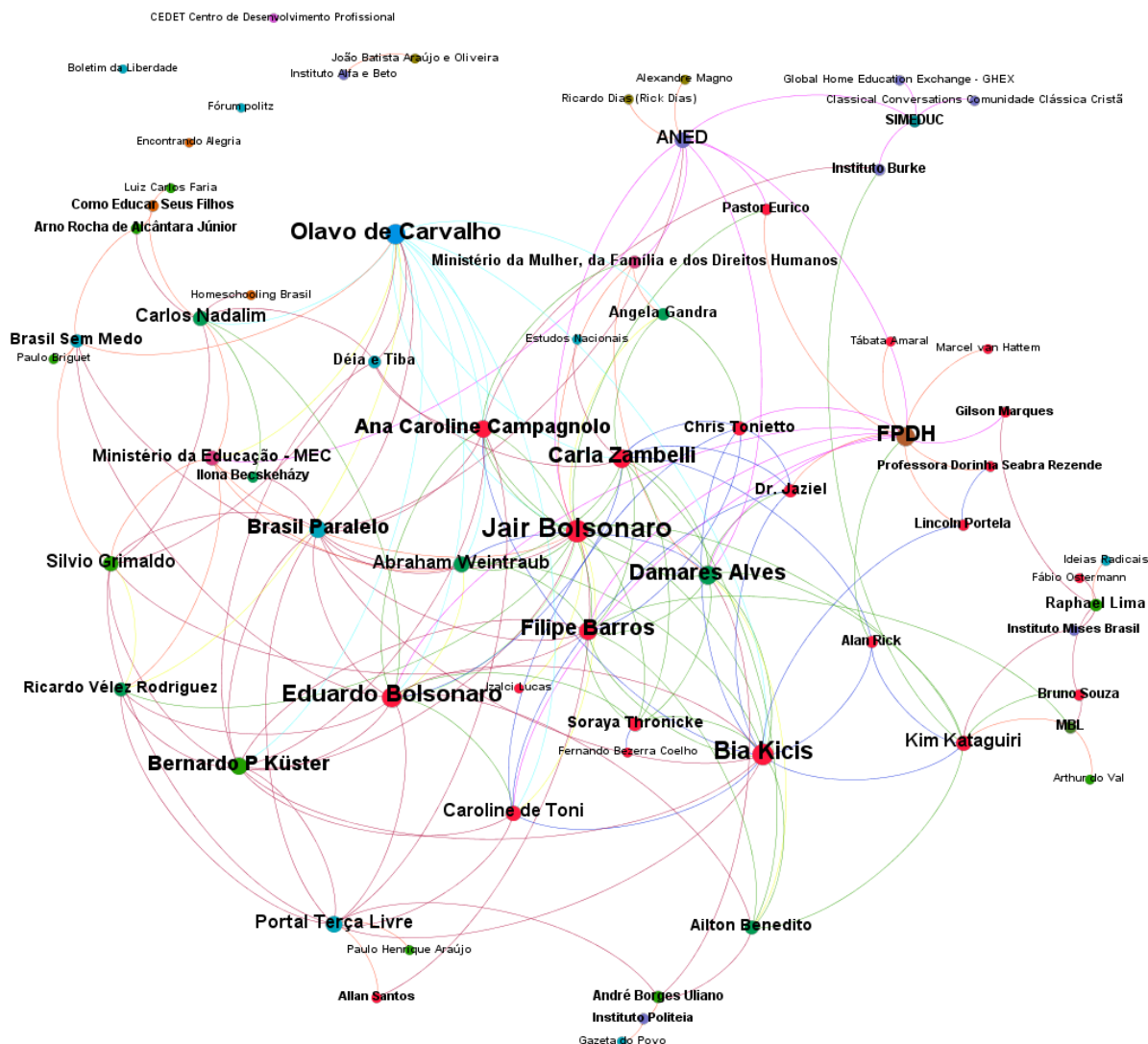
The selection of actors analyzed in this research began by choosing those who currently stand out for their political defense of homeschooling, along with actors related to them, found in the search mentioned in the previous paragraph. These relations between the actors are characterized in different ways, whether familiar or professional, and were constituted through a collection technique focused on the actors found that is analogous to the snowball sampling technique (Bienarcki; Waldorf, 1981).

It is important to highlight that the network that will be presented represents a “photograph” of a given moment and that its objective is to identify actors important to the dissemination of the homeschooling agenda in Brazil. It is probable that in a new actualization of this network, other actors would be incorporated, while some of those that are present here would lose significance. However, we understand that this network helps to understand an important moment in the trajectory of this agenda and can support future studies that complement this discussion.

### **The homeschooling network in Brazil**

The application of the techniques indicated in the methodology cited allowed elaborating the graphic presentation of the network of actors (Figure 1). The nodes represent the actors, and the various colors represent the different types of actors that compose the network. The size of the nodes vary according to the degree of the actor in the network, which in the results obtained ranges from 0 (no identified relationship), in the case of actors that are isolated on the network, to 20 relations, in the case of the actor with the highest degree. Thus, the larger the node, the more important the actor in terms of its ability to establish relations with other actors on the network, and for this reason, the actor’s capacity for defense and reproduction of the agenda is potentially higher. This graph allows us to identify and analyze not only the main actors, but also the different groups that compose this network, which occurs by means of the metric of modularity.

Figure 1 – Homeschooling network in Brazil



Source: Graph elaborated by Gabriel Dias dos Santos and Luis Felipe Rosa, with data inserted in Gephi, 2021.

Before approaching the network analysis, we will highlight some methodological issues. This network represents a “photograph” of a certain moment in which some actors are present. As mentioned, the time frame of the study was January 1, 2018, through May 31, 2020. This period was selected because we understand that the election of President Jair Bolsonaro was crucial to the advance of conservatism in Brazil (Lacerda, 2019). Not by coincidence, he appears as one of the central actors in the network, as can be seen in the graph in Figure 1. However, some actors may not exercise the same roles or be in the same positions today. Nevertheless, we understand that the network presented helps understand an important moment in the trajectory of the promotion of the homeschooling agenda in Brazil and can support future studies that complement this discussion.

The first analysis that can be made from an initial observation of the graph refers to the greater presence of certain types of actors. As can be seen in Figure 2, more than 33% of the network is formed by partisan political actors, and another 26% only of actors linked to the media. We understand that this is because homeschooling is a political agenda that is still developing in Brazil; it requires legislative politicians as activists in its support, and actors linked to the media to

serve as actors to disseminate the idea among society, considering that it is still a polemical issue (Silveira, 2018).

**Figure 2** – Types of nodes and the percentage of their presence on the network

Político partidário	(33,82%)
Veículo midiático	(13,24%)
Influenciador midiático	(13,24%)
Instituição não Estatal	(10,29%)
Representante de órgão governamental	(10,29%)
Site de venda de serviços e produtos	(4,41%)
Representante de inst. não estatal	(4,41%)
Órgão governamental	(2,94%)
Ideólogo	(1,47%)
Editora/distribuidora de livros	(1,47%)
Movimento político	(1,47%)
Frente parlamentar	(1,47%)
Evento/Encontro	(1,47%)

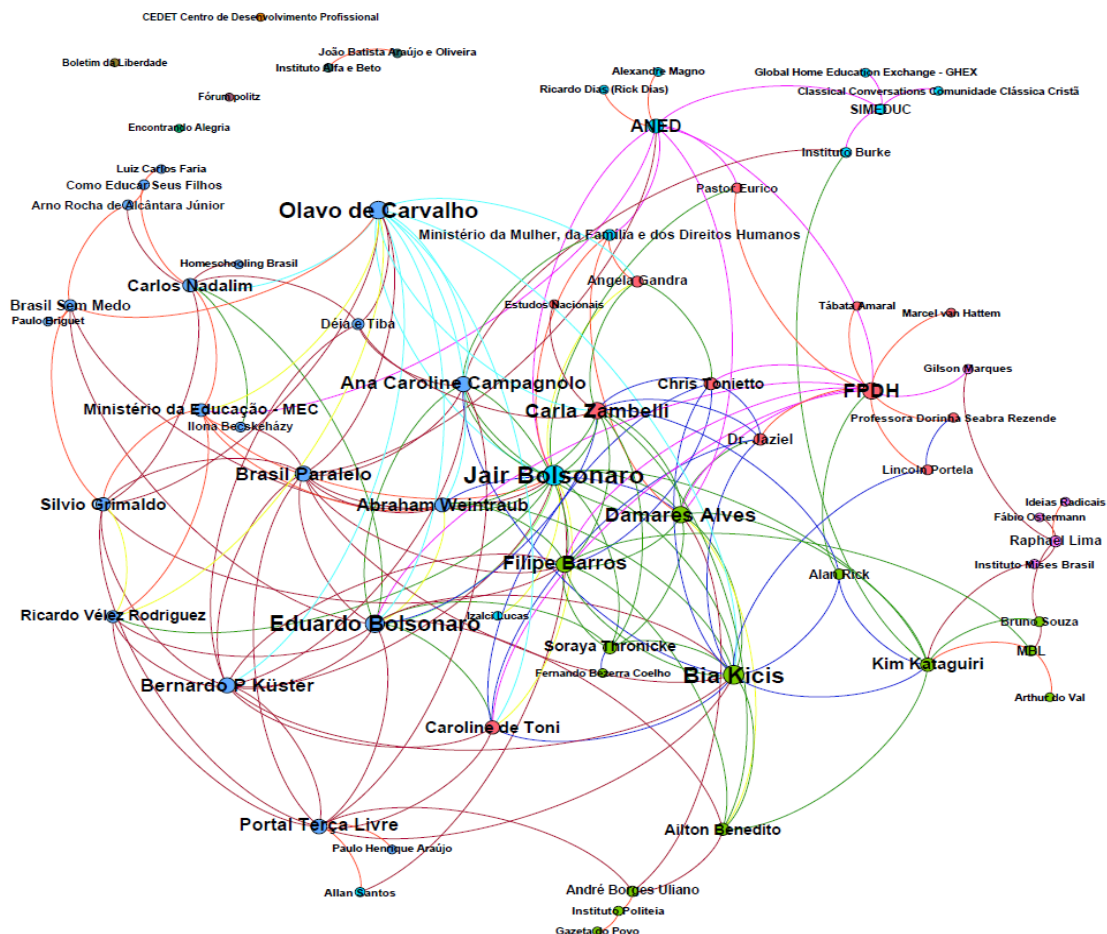
Political party. Media vehicle. Media influencer. State institution. Representative of government entity. Site for sale of services and products. Representative of non-state institution. Government entity. Ideologue. Book publisher/distributor. Political movement. Congressional caucus. Event/Encounter.

**Source:** Prepared by Gabriel Dias dos Santos.

In addition to the characteristics of the typology of actors involved, the metrics of the network allow quantitatively characterizing the set of relations existing by means of indicators, such as the diameter of the network, which is 7. This means that this network has a relatively high complexity of connections between the actors from one extreme to another, the interaction of an actor in a distant corner must trigger seven other actors to reach the other distant actor. This indicator of the diameter is complemented by the metric of density of the network, which, in this case is, 0.0790. This amount indicates that this network is quite far from its maximum potential of relations and that the actors in the network have very specific relations, they interact little among each other, in the context studied here. This data is corroborated in the analysis by means of the concept of conservative alliance and articulation: the network shows that there is a series of distinct actors that make contingent alliances in defense of the agenda. However, because they do not completely agree, and often do not support the same proposals, the interaction is not as great among the actors, because they act more specifically in some clusters – as indicated by the metric of modularity that will be explored below. It also shows the importance of the analysis based on the contribution from Critical Cultural Political Economy of Education, given that it clearly reveals the need to focus on economic as well as cultural aspects in the articulations of the alliances.

Another interesting metric is modularity, which indicates how many groupings exist in the network, according to the number of relations that the actors have among each other. Ten modules/groupings were identified in this network (Figure 3). This means that the 68 actors of this network are distributed in ten smaller groups. Two of these groups are dominant on the network, and include more than 50% within them. One of them (in blue) includes as its main actors Eduardo Bolsonaro, Olavo de Carvalho and the entity Brasil Paralelo. The other (in green) includes Bia Kicis, Filipe Barros and Damarens Alves as the main actors.

Figure 3 – Homeschooling network in Brazil - modularity



Source: Graph prepared by Gabriel Dias dos Santos and Luis Felipe Rosa, with data inserted in Gephi, 2021.

Returning the focus to the analysis of actors in the network, those that stand out most are precisely the partisan political actors. Jair Bolsonaro, the president at the time (2022), belongs to this group of actors, and as mentioned, is positioned as the central actor in the network as seen in Figure 1. However, his prominence is not only limited to his centrality: Jair Bolsonaro has the largest node in this network (indicator with a degree of 20). Thus, in addition to being positioned at the center, which indicates a balanced distribution of relations across the network, Bolsonaro has the most relationships in the network, and is the actor with the highest power of interaction. It should be highlighted that many of Bolsonaro’s alliances established in the period from January 2018 to May 2020 became disarticulated or rearticulated. This is the case for example of Kim Kataguiri, who supported Jair Bolsonaro during his first presidential campaign, but later broke off from him. These separations reinforce the use of articulation (Hall, 2005) as an important concept for understanding the conservative movement in Brazil, showing that the hegemonic alliances are provisory and tense, and moreover: are contingent on the interests of different groups and subjects in certain moments and spaces.

According to Miguel (2019), Bolsonaro’s election to the presidency of Brazil can be seen, to a certain degree, to be a consequence of the advance of the far right after the defeat in the elections of 2014 and the opening of the impeachment process against then President Dilma Rousseff. In terms of defense of homeschooling, Jair Bolsonaro had already used “school at home” as a campaign promise<sup>6</sup>. As president, he signed the bill that sought to regulate the practice, a

<sup>6</sup> Available at: <https://youtu.be/8GxX76v4NPI> Acesso em: 28 de abril de 2022.

proposal that was among the priorities of his first 100 days in government (Oliveira, 2019), that is bill PL N° 2.401/2019 mentioned above.

Other partisan actors who stand out in the network are the federal deputy Bia Kicis (indicator with a degree of 18) and federal deputy Eduardo Bolsonaro (indicator with a degree of 16). Both are presented on the lower portion of the network as central actors in the more peripheral relations. On the left side, Eduardo Bolsonaro appears to be connected with actors such as Portal Terça Livre (degree 11), Brasil Paralelo (degree 12), Bernardo Kuster (degree 12) and Bia Kicis, who in turn, appears connected with actors such as Felipe Barros (degree 13), Damares Alves (degree 14) and Kim Kataguri (degree 9). Their positions and measurements indicate that they are influential actors who relate with other actors with medium potential (degree of approximately 12) for relations on the network.

Bia Kicis, who is considered one President Jair Bolsonaro's leading defenders (Quem..., 2021), is one of the most prominent activists in the homeschooling agenda among the parliamentarians on the network. She is coauthor of PL N° 3.262, of 3 June 2019 (Brasil, 2019c), working together with deputies Chris Tonietto and Caroline de Toni — both affiliated to the Social Liberal Party (PSL). In a column published in the newspaper *Jornal Pleno News*, in October 2020, Kicis presented her arguments in favor of the issue:

Homeschooling is based on freedom. Freedom of parents to educate their children; educational freedom; freedom of parents to choose the educational model for their children. I add, the basis of homeschooling is the pluralism of ideas and pedagogical concepts, as foreseen in the Constitution.

It is nearly absurd that in the year 2020 we are struggling so that something that is constitutionally guaranteed and recognized as a human right by the Pact of San José, Costa Rica, to which Brazil is a signatory, is no longer a reason for persecution of families who opt for a different educational model. (Kicis, 2020, n.p.).

In addition to the strong action in defense of homeschooling, Kicis is also an activist in other conservative agendas: she was the author of a new version of the project *Schools without Political Parties*, which calls for ideological control of teachers in classrooms, and a bill that called for a return to the use of printed ballots, and was a suspect in the investigation into fake news opened in 2019, and was charged with racism before the Federal Supreme Court (STF) (Quem..., 2021).

The second legislator who deserves attention is Eduardo Bolsonaro, the federal deputy with the most votes in the history of Brazil (Eduardo..., 2018). He was crucial to the alliance between his father, Jair Bolsonaro, and the late philosopher Olavo de Carvalho, who was considered the family's "guru" (Entenda..., 2019) – and an important name in the network of actors elaborated in this study. Deputy Bolsonaro is the author of bill PL N° 3.261, 8 October 2015, which would authorize homeschooling in basic education at a national level (Brasil, 2015), and which is annexed to PL N° 3.179/2012 mentioned above. Moreover, he is the author of other conservative bills, such as: one to allow advertising for the use of guns on television – PL N° 5.417, of 7 December 2020a (Brasil, 2020b); a bill that criminalizes support for communism in Brazil — PL N° 5.358, of 23 May 2016 (Brasil, 2016); and a bill that would require toxicology exams for public school teachers – PL N° 3.298, of 24 July 2020 (Brasil, 2020a).

Both Bia Kicis and Eduardo Bolsonaro are part of the "ideological wing" of the Bolsonaro government, also known as the "Olavista wing" (Fonseca, 2019). More than an advisor to Jair Bolsonaro, Olavo de Carvalho was responsible for various indications to important positions in

key sectors of the federal government. In addition to making direct nominations, such as Bolsonaro's first Minister of Education, Ricardo Vélez, Olavo de Carvalho was a teacher of other people in the network such as federal deputies Carla Zambelli, and Marcel Van Hattem and the former secretary of literacy of the Ministry of Education Carlos Nadalim (Fellet, 2019). He also taught the former Minister of Education Abraham Weintraub (Aluno..., 2019), and other legislators who follow the teachings of the so-called "master"<sup>7</sup>. He also provided ideological support to actors who were not part of government entities, but who are essential to the dissemination of conservative agendas, such as: Bernardo Kuster, a Youtuber and far-right journalist who is the Director of Opinion of Olavo de Carvalho's site *Brasil sem Medo* [Brazil without Fear] (Bernardo..., 2020). His texts are also indicated for reading by the Youtube channel of Déia and Tiba, which is focused on families adept at homeschooling and that now has more than 400,000 subscribers. Déia and Tiba are Catholic actors on the network, and in addition to defending education based on Catholicism, use a neoliberal discourse. They use the site to sell Catholic didactic material and to promote videos in which they argue that no one should be required by the state to justify how they educate their children. They understand, based on their neoliberal premises, that families should be free to choose what is best for their children. In this case, we can see, in a single actor, the defense of the homeschooling agenda both through a discourse that would be understood both in the scope of the neoconservative or authoritarian populist [religious fundamentalist] group and by a discourse closer to neoliberals. The argument thus has a religious, moral, cultural, and economic perspective. Déia and Tiba also affirm that the didactic material from the Catholic publisher is better than that provided by public schools, which is based on the neoliberal premise that the private is better than the public.

Olavo de Carvalho thus proves to be an important actor in the network, with a measurement of 16. Carvalho appears more at the periphery of the central group of the network, in the upper left portion, which indicates that he is not a central actor, but has a strong measurement, because of his many relationships on the network. We can gather that the fact that Olavo de Carvalho is in a more peripheral area of the network is due to his particular position in the context of the issue, giving him a characteristic of a specific relationship with some nodes of actors with high measurements, such as Jair Bolsonaro (degree 20) and Eduardo Bolsonaro (degree 16), and in relation to the structure of the agenda such as the Ministry of Education.

Olavo de Carvalho does not stand out for his right-wing militancy in support of homeschooling, his presence on the network is because of his ideological support. Olavo declares himself to be a leader of the "Brazilian revolution" (Mariutti, 2020), and in fact, part of the far right that advanced not only in the streets, but in the federal government was inspired by his ideas. They are ideas that are based on a *spiritual* principle, given that for Olavo de Carvalho, "we are witnessing a generalized weakening of the Christian spirit in the world" (Mariutti, 2020, p. 9), which is similar to the discourse of many religious actors on the network who, although they do not cite Carvalho, use religion as an argument in favor of legalization of the practice. It should be highlighted that this argument of "generalized weakening of the Christian spirit in the world" is characteristic – as indicated in the first section of this article – of religious fundamentalists and is used to justify practices such as homeschooling, which support the return to "true" values, which would be those linked to Christianity.

According to Vieira (2012, p. 26), it is estimated that most families who practice homeschooling in Brazil and other countries are Christian. This makes considerable sense, given that the Christian right is one of the central actors of current Brazilian conservatism (Lacerda, 2019; Miguel, 2016). It is a fact found on the network, given that many of the people on it identify

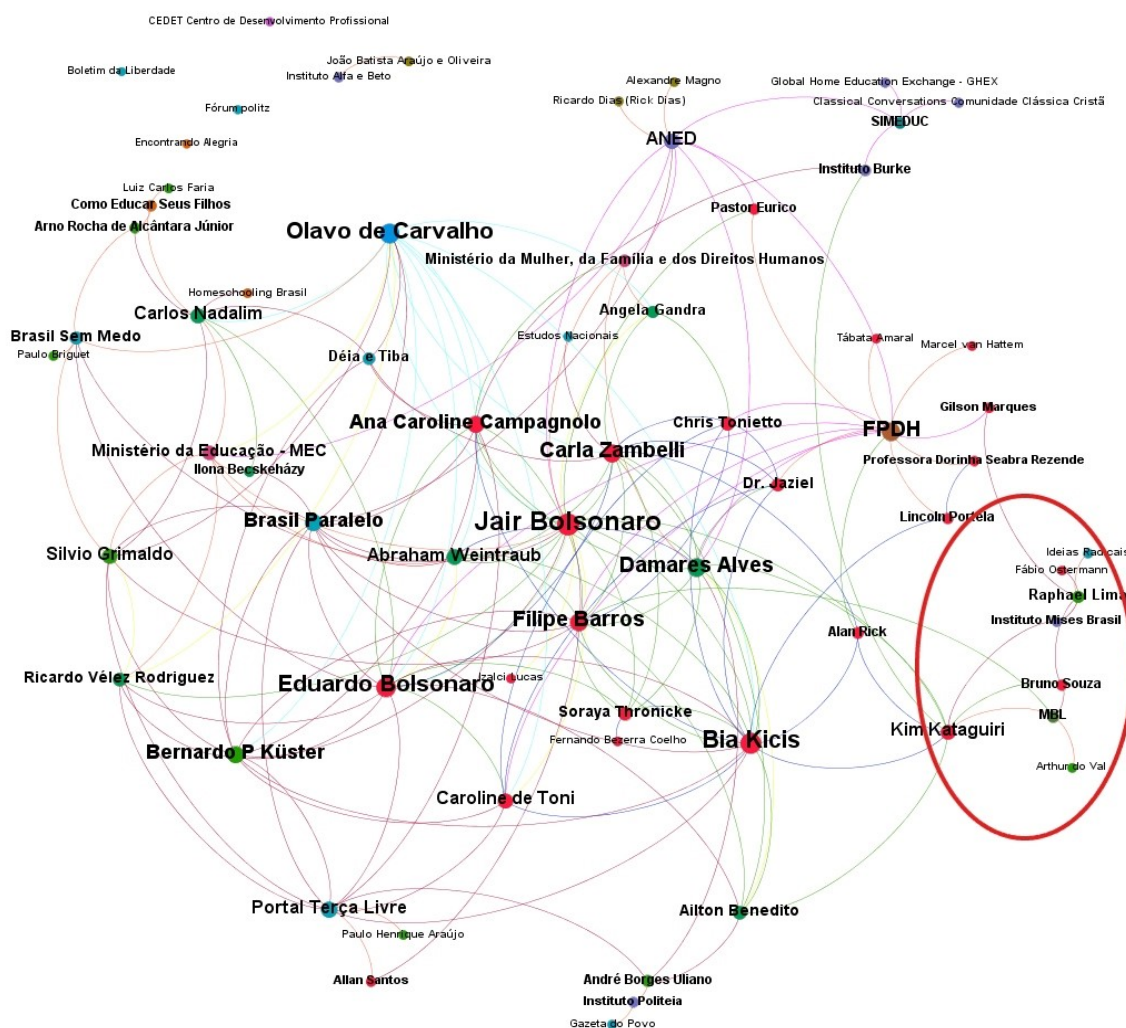
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<sup>7</sup> Olavo was frequently called the "Master" by his followers.

themselves as Christians, and most of them are evangelicals. Among the religious actors we highlight Minister Damares Alves: the “terribly Christian” actor and defender of traditional customs (ALÉM..., 2019) she is one of the leading political activists in support of homeschooling in Brazil. In addition to signing the bill together with Bolsonaro and Weintraub, Alves actively defended the issue in debates in the Chamber of Deputies. In a discourse for the launching of the Parliamentary Front in Defense of Homeschooling, Damares even emphasized that the legalization of the practice is a question of human rights (Brasil, 2019a).

Another possible analysis concerns the different discourses used to support the issue within the network. This takes place because the conservative alliance is not formed by a large homogeneous group. It is a coalition of groups that establish alliances based on common interests, but that often differ in their motivations and final objectives (Apple, 2003). In this sense, one of the groups that deserves highlighting is that formed by the self-declared “liberals” who although they are located at the margin on the graph of the network (Figure 4), represent an important portion of the amalgam of the Brazilian conservative alliance.

Figure 4 – Homeschooling network in Brazil - Liberals



Source: Graph elaborated by Gabriel Dias dos Santos and Luis Felipe Rosa, with data inserted in Gephi, 2021.



This same group appears in the graph of modularity (Figure 3) with two subdivisions, the first in purple, in the upper portion of the group, whose central actor is Rafael Lima (degree 5), and another group in green on the lower portion, with three actors, Bruno Souza (degree 3), Movimento Brasil Livre (MBL) (degree 4) and Arthur do Val (degree 1), who are part of a larger module with actors such as Kim Kataguirí, Bia Kicis and Damares Alves. It is important to remember that these modules are defined by the number of relations that the actors have among each other, indicating in different colors which actors form specific groups (modules.)

It is important to mention the actors of this peripheral group, highlighted in Figure 4, even though they have lower degrees than the other actors in the network and have low influence on the network in terms of the number of relationships. Their ability to trigger more influential actors, as is the case of the path of connections between Rafael Lima, Bruno Souza, and Bia Kicis, which connects this more peripheral group to the center of the network, shows that they are actors with important roles performed in the dissemination of the issue.

This highlighted group is formed by actors who defend free market capitalism, according to neoliberal models and more radical pro-market policies (such as objectivism and libertarianism). However, in recent decades, the term “neoliberal” fell in disuse and the pro-market activists came to describe themselves only as “liberals” (Rocha, 2018). As Rocha (2018) affirmed,

The self-denomination of liberal, especially by intellectuals, can also indicate an intention to signal a link to a much broader network of international militancy that includes various trends that are seen as a continuation of classic liberal tradition. (Rocha, 2018, p. 48).

Thus, although these actors describe themselves as liberals, we understand, following the theoretical support (Apple, 2003), that they are neoliberals.

In the homeschooling network of Brazil, the actors highlighted in Figure 4 are different than others not only because of their pro-market ideology, but mainly in relation to the moral agenda. A good example of this difference is the self-described libertarian<sup>8</sup> Raphael Lima, creator of the entity called Ideias Radicais, which are both actors that belong to the group of liberals on the network. Unlike the more conservative actors, in relation to morals and customs, like Jair Bolsonaro and Damares Alves, Raphael Lima supports the legalization of drugs<sup>9</sup>. He also defends the extinction of the state as a model of governance<sup>10</sup>, unlike other conservative actors who defend strong state intervention in control of society. His discourse in defense of homeschooling is also different from that of the other actors. Rafael defends the practice from a neoliberal perspective, arguing that parents have the right to have the freedom to choose the best educational system for their children<sup>11</sup>. Meanwhile, actors such as federal deputy Pastor Eurico maintain that the practice should be regulated so that children do not suffer a supposed ideological indoctrination in schools (Deputado..., 2018). Thus, we find a difference among arguments used by the different actors who compose the network, demonstrating that an effective conservative alliance exists: a range of subjects with different objectives and arguments is aligned in support of a common objective – the defense of homeschooling in Brazil.

A final analysis that should be made based on the network refers to the profile of the actors who defended homeschooling in the period studied. Only 25.5% of the individual actors are

<sup>8</sup> Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YdUCQjKt9Ho&ab\\_channel=RafinhaBastos](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YdUCQjKt9Ho&ab_channel=RafinhaBastos). Accessed: 18 Jan. 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Available at: [https://twitter.com/ideias\\_radicais/status/1218601223592517634](https://twitter.com/ideias_radicais/status/1218601223592517634). Accessed: 18 Jan. 2022.

<sup>10</sup> Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YdUCQjKt9Ho&ab\\_channel=RafinhaBastos](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YdUCQjKt9Ho&ab_channel=RafinhaBastos). Accessed: 22 Jan. 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xPcQLiEkn\\_U&ab\\_channel=IdeiasRadicais](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xPcQLiEkn_U&ab_channel=IdeiasRadicais). Accessed: 27 Apr. 2022.

women. In addition, the network is formed mostly by white people, heterosexuals, and cisgenders, who use religion as an argument in defense of this and other conservative agendas that are in vogue in Brazil.

The analysis of this network, using concepts such as conservative alliance, hegemony, and Critical Cultural Political Economy of Education indicates that the defense of homeschooling includes various popular discourses. The alliances made among the varied groups that support different arguments do not occur only in the discursive realm, but are supported by economic interests. Groups, such as the self-described liberals, see homeschooling as an opportunity to insert neoliberal economic premises – such as less state intervention in education and the principle of free choice. There are also groups that defend the creation of a new market of educational books. However, a large portion of the actors on the network support homeschooling with moral and religious discourses, which demonstrates that in Brazil the conservative alliance in the current context is led by religious fundamentalists. These alliances, as highlighted in the theoretical discussion, are contingent and therefore can be broken.

### **Final considerations**

The analysis of the homeschooling network reinforces the use of the concept of conservative alliance for the reading of the phenomenon in the current Brazilian context. This concept provides a more complex and relational look at the formation of this movement. By means of the relational alliance, we can understand that different conservative groups make alliances among each other, but do not always agree completely. Therefore, it is important to recognize that the conservative movement in Brazil is heterogeneous and not monolithic, but is composed and nurtured by different segments, and for this reason, permeated by tensions and often contradictions. In the case of homeschooling, there are actors with arguments that are characteristic both of fundamentalist religious groups – who preach a return to morality and good customs – and neoliberals – who defend homeschooling with an argument of freedom of choice of parents and for a state that intervenes less in individual life.

The mapping of the actors who have defended this agenda is important to identify them and to understand the position from which they speak. Our objective was thus, through the presentation and analysis of this network, to contribute to other studies focused on conservatism in Brazil. This mapping represents a first effort for us to understand the Brazilian conservative alliance. It is essential, in addition to identifying the actors, to understand their arguments in greater depth and detail – which is now being conducted.

We also hope to contribute to the use of the methodology presented here. The application of social network analysis and network ethnography helped us to read this data, because the first provides visualizations and indicators about the positioning and importance of the actors on the network, while the second provides more qualitative data about these subjects.

The use of social network analysis, based on a theoretical referential that permits capturing the complexity of the alliances, provides a static and visual abstraction of the network's structure at a given moment, expressed by the data collected. With the collection and organization of the data about the relationships among the actors, we can use tools for visual exhibition (such as Gephi, which was used in this study) and then, in addition to generating indicators that quantify the characteristics of the relationships, allow the visualization of the network with visual attributes of the actors and their relations.

The use of Social Research Analysis allowed us to complement the qualitative factor of the study, given that both the results presented through the visualization, as well as the indicators, enrich the analysis of the structure of the network studied, allowing the inclusion of another set for reflection on the results of the study.

In this way, we understand that the study presented also contributes to the field of education given that in addition to demonstrating the application of the two complementary models for analyzing the results in a quantitative and qualitative manner, it exemplifies the development of a study that analyzes data obtained on the internet, a source of information that is increasingly expressive of an aspect of social representation today. It is the combination of a methodology capable of capturing alliances and their networks, with a conceptualization that considers power relations in a relational manner – in the economic as well as the cultural and discursive fields – which allows us to document and analyze the conservative alliances in Brazil and their impact on education.

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