

‘Boys wear blue and girls wear pink’: Critical Discourse Analysis on ‘gender ideology’ in the Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights

‘Meninos vestem azul e meninas vestem rosa’: Análise do Discurso Crítica sobre a ‘ideologia de gênero’ no Ministério da Mulher, Família e Direitos Humanos

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ABSTRACT This article investigates what was the main ideology guiding the public policies of the Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights (MMFDH) in the Jair Bolsonaro administration (2019-2022). In his inauguration speech, Bolsonaro stated that one of his government’s objectives would be to combat ‘gender ideology’ and defend ‘true human rights’. Thus, this research starts from the perspective that there is a dispute in Brazil around the notion of human rights, and the use of the phrase ‘gender ideology’ is a key element to understand how this dispute occurs in the political scenario, especially with regard to creating moral panic regarding LGBTIQIA+ people. With the aim of understanding the guiding ideology of public policies developed by the MMFDH, a state sector where this dispute seemed to be a central element, Critical Discourse Analysis was used as an analytical methodology. To compose the research corpus, the speeches of the main representatives of the MMFDH, Damares Alves and Angela Gandra, were analyzed from January 2, 2019 to March 31, 2022. We concluded that, in the period analyzed, the MMFDH was a promoter of ‘gender ideology’.

KEYWORDS Human rights. Gender ideology. Sexual and gender minorities.

RESUMO Este artigo investiga qual foi a principal ideologia norteadora das políticas públicas do Ministério da Mulher, Família e Direitos Humanos (MMFDH) no governo Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022). Em seu discurso de posse, Bolsonaro afirmou que um dos objetivos de seu governo seria combater a ‘ideologia de gênero’ e defender ‘os verdadeiros direitos humanos’. Assim, esta pesquisa parte da perspectiva de que, no Brasil, existe uma disputa em torno da noção de direitos humanos, e a utilização do sintagma ‘ideologia de gênero’ é um elemento-chave para compreender de que modo essa disputa ocorre no cenário político, especialmente no que diz respeito à criação de pânico moral a respeito das pessoas LGBTQIA+. Com o objetivo de compreender qual é a ideologia norteadora das políticas públicas desenvolvidas pelo MMFDH, setor estatal no qual essa disputa parecia ser um elemento central, foi utilizada a Análise do Discurso Crítica como metodologia analítica. Para compor o corpus da pesquisa, foram analisados os discursos das principais representantes do MMFDH, Damares Alves e Angela Gandra, no período de 2 de janeiro de 2019 a 31 de março de 2022. Concluiu-se que, no período analisado, o MMFDH foi promotor de ‘ideologia de gênero’.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE Direitos humanos. Ideologia de gênero. Minorias sexuais e de gênero.

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Introduction

Former president Jair Bolsonaro's inauguration speech highlighted a relevant issue with regard to safeguarding human rights, especially in the context of the rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transvestite, Transsexual and Transgender, Queer, Intersex or Intersex, Asexual people and others (LGBTQIA+). By stating that one of his government's objectives would be to combat 'gender ideology'¹, Bolsonaro introduced this empty phrase into the government structure, which has served, in the last decade, to produce moral panic in relation to LGBTQIA+ people. The term 'ideology' was mentioned several times in his speech, always referring to something negative, a legacy from previous governments, which the country would need to get rid of. Weeks later, during his speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos, by stating that he would defend 'true human rights', Bolsonaro signaled that his government and its ideological foundations would enter into a dispute of meanings in relation to who would be the subjects of human rights.

According to Eagleton², the most common definition about ideologies has to do with the way in which they legitimize the power of a certain group or dominant class and maintain relations of domination. From this perspective, the phrase 'gender ideology' plays a central role in the dispute over other forms of existence in the social context. Understanding this phrase as an offensive to the gender perspective in public policies implies state negligence towards the population of women, LGBTQIA+ and any other social group and/or individuals who do not correspond to heteronormative and hegemonic gender norms. Apparently, this was exactly the effort undertaken by the Bolsonaro government and, more specifically, by the Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights (MMFDH). Upon being announced as minister of this government department, Damares Alves stated through a public statement that, from that moment on, it would be a

new era in Brazil, in which "boys wear blue and girls wear pink"³, in a clear affirmation of the roles and heteronormative gender markings.

Both Bolsonaro's and Alves' statements highlight the dispute and reaffirmation of gender norms as guidelines for public policies during this period. In particular, they reinforce an ideological dispute over a certain conception of the world and ways of life, and that there are no power relations that are not permeated by ideologies. In this sense, the use of the phrase 'gender ideology' is central to the creation of moral panic and political and social mobilization. According to Junqueira⁴, 'gender ideology' is an invention of Catholicism, coined as an antagonistic reaction to sexual and reproductive rights, which has been circulating in Catholic publications since the 1990s; and in the second decade of the 2000s, it took on the shape of a transnational offensive.

In general terms, 'gender ideology' refers to a set of ideas and beliefs in the divine nature of men and women and their innate roles, such as motherhood as natural for women and the role of provider for men. This syntagma can be understood as the belief that these roles considered 'natural' can never be called into question, just as other alternative perspectives other than the dominant heteronormative one cannot be considered. All discourse in this sense points to gender, 'gender theory' or 'gender ideology' as an enemy, which intends to destroy the family and the innocence of children. This strategy gives an ideological character to any discussion or possibility of questioning gender norms, which reaffirms hegemonic structures of oppression as natural⁵.

In Brazil, this phrase was massively activated following the vote on the National Education Plan (PNE), in 2013, and was a very important element in strengthening the extreme right in the country. The moral panic triggered by 'gender ideology', regarding the alleged early sexualization of children, associated with the political crisis of the Workers' Party government and the rupture of democracy related to the impeachment of

Dilma Rousseff, paved the way for the emergence of conservative and anti-democratic speeches that culminated in the election of Jair Bolsonaro at the end of 2018⁶.

Bolsonaro’s election represents the consolidation of ‘gender ideology’ in the structure of the State and its influence on the production of public policies, in which the MMFDH stands out as one of the privileged places for this dispute over human rights, in particular, sexual and reproductive rights. Thus, the objective of this research was, through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), to understand what ideology was present in the speech of the ministerial representatives and which guided the policies developed by this ministry.

Methodology

This is a qualitative, transdisciplinary study that uses the CDA⁷ methodology, which aims to understand how the use of discourses and language operates power relations in order to perpetuate certain ideologies and social arrangements. This methodology proved to be a powerful tool for evaluating the guiding ideology of the policies and coalitions carried out by the MMFDH. Discursive strategies

that claim to be non-ideological and that use resources such as unification, euphemism, purging of the other, personification, among others, are the main points in which CDA served as a tool for analysis. The research covers the period from January 2, 2019 to March 30, 2022, time in which Alves was in charge of the MMFDH. In the research and selection of this content, were analyzed speeches and statements that could have connections with ‘gender ideology’, in which the use of key expressions was identified when carrying out the search: “LGBT”, “abortion”, “gender ideology”, “family defense” and “family protection”. From these markers, five speeches and some ministerial policy documents that relate to the mentioned speeches were selected.

To compose the *corpus* of analysis, official statements, interviews and participation in events of the main public agents representing the MMFDH – the then minister Damares Alves and the family secretary at the time, Angela Gandra – were selected. Using this methodology, a textually oriented analysis of the selected speeches was carried out and transcribed into texts. The speeches selected to compose the analysis are listed in *table 1*. All speeches were transcribed, and the last one was translated into Portuguese.

Table 1. Speeches transcribed and used in the analyzes

Discurso	Date	Available in
Speech by Damares Alves at the opening of the high-level segment of the 40th session of the UN Human Rights Council ⁸	Feb 25, 2019	https://www.gov.br/funag/pt-br/centrais-de-conteudo/politica-externa-brasileira/discorso-da-ministra-damara-alves-no-conselho-de-direitos-humanos-da-onu
Interview by Damares given to federal deputy Silas Câmara about the 200 days of work ¹²	Jul 30, 2019	https://www.facebook.com/fparlamentarevangelica/videos/933222353679748/
Interview by Damares given to BBC Brasil ¹⁵	dec 18 2019	https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/internacional-50800983
Interview given to journalist Karina Gomes, from Deutsche Welle Brasil ¹⁸	feb 28 2020	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fYTLsV4SEKU&t=28s
Damara’s statement on the review of PNDH 3 ²¹	mar 3 2021	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k3OUAnbtOvE
Angela Gandra’s participation in the webinar ‘PNFV transatlantic dialogues: a political response to gender ideology’ ²⁴	mar 12 2021	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cfp8nHse7vo

Source: Own elaboration.

Furthermore, the policy documents and actions carried out directly and/or indirectly by the MMFDH and which transversally make up the *corpus* of existing texts analyzed were selected on the official website of the

federal government, they are: the Family at School Project; the Strong Families Program; the Capes Family and Public Policies Notice; the Human Rights Taxonomy Manual; and Ordinance No. 457/2021, as shown in *table 2*.

Table 2. Cross-sectional texts cited in the analyzes

Text	Available in
Ordinance No. 457/2021 ²⁰	https://www.gov.br/mdh/pt-br/aceso-a-informacao/institucional/portarias/portaria-no-457-de-10-de-fevereiro-de-2021
Strong Families Program ²⁵	https://www.gov.br/mdh/pt-br/navegue-por-temas/familia/familias-fortes-1/SEL_MDH3023059Edital0322.pdf
Family at School Project ²⁸	https://www.gov.br/mdh/pt-br/navegue-por-temas/familia/acoes-e-programas/projeto-familia-na-escola
Capes Family and Public Policies Notice ²⁹	https://www.gov.br/capes/pt-br/aceso-a-informacao/acoes-e-programas/bolsas/programas-estrategicos/formacao-de-recursos-humanos-em-areas-estrategicas/familia-e-politicas-publicas-no-brasil
Human Rights Taxonomy Manual ³¹	https://www.gov.br/mdh/pt-br/centrais-de-conteudo/publicacoes/ondh/manual-da-taxonomia-de-direitos-humanos-da-ondh.pdf/view

Source: Own elaboration.

In this case, it is worth highlighting that a critical analysis of the policies was not carried out, but rather how these policies are directly connected to the minister's and secretary's speeches and are guided by the speeches that comprise 'gender ideology'.

Results and discussion

From the five selected speeches, the analysis of the main points of each one and their relationship with ministerial policies stands out.

The government's formal presentation

The first speech analyzed was the speech by then minister Damares Alves at the 40th session of the Human Rights Council of the United Nations (UN), held on February 25,

2019⁸. In the speech under analysis, the minister presented the Bolsonaro government and the actions that would be developed in the coming years in relation to human rights in Brazil. Alves covers at least two topics directly linked to the discourses of 'gender ideology', which are abortion and homeschooling.

By affirming the "*defense of life since its conception*", Damares indirectly signaled the confrontation of 'gender ideology' and highlighted the ideological position of the Brazilian government regarding abortion. For the purposes of this research, the understanding of 'gender ideology', in the field of sexuality and gender, also includes in its sense the anti-abortion agenda, which was present in the speech of Jair Bolsonaro's electoral campaign for the Presidency of the Republic⁹, with clear moralizing bias. The inclusion of these agendas in a UN event, given the global visibility of this international organization, serves as a signal

to other countries for the possible construction of transnational ideological alliances with ultra-conservative sectors.

Homeschooling is an agenda present in the ultra-right group School Without Party Movement (Mesp). The discussion of this topic seeks to point to the radicalism of the guardians that choose not to place their children in schools with the 'justification' of selecting the content discussed in the classroom. Thus, the desire to manage school content is precisely what was at the basis of moral discussions, both involving the controversy over the 'School without Homophobia' project designated by far-right groups as the 'gay kit', as well as speeches about 'gender ideology' during the PNE discussion in 2013⁹.

In addition to being connected to 'gender ideology', home education also brings elements of what has been called neoliberal dedemocratization¹⁰, based on projects to shrink the functions of the State and in families assuming responsibilities historically developed by the State through public policies. Homeschooling aims to provide education based on content considered by its defenders as 'non-ideological', guided by Christian principles, and the replacement of 'gender ideology' for 'genesis ideology'¹¹, which would be based on content that is in accordance with Christian morality.

The presentation of the MMFDH and its flags

The second speech analyzed was a brief conversation in an informal tone, which the minister gave to federal deputy Silas Câmara (Republicanos-AM), president of the Evangelical Parliamentary Front (FPE) and evangelical pastor¹². The topic of the conversation revolved around the actions of the 200 days of the Bolsonaro government and the importance of FPE's support for the MMFDH. The excerpt below stands out, which contains a series of intertextual elements that serve for analysis:

All our banners, deputy, all the flags that you and I in the Chamber have been raising for more than 20 years, are here: defense of life, the family, religious freedom, the elderly, children. There are eight national secretariats and we are proposing, deputy, that great dream of ours, a cultural counter-revolution in Brazil, a reinterpretation of human rights in Brazil¹³⁽¹⁸⁰⁾.

Alves' statement "*all our banners*" considers in intertextuality the reference to the evangelical flags that became political flags of the FPE deputies and MMFDH. The second 'banner' mentioned, the "*defense of the family*", is the one that brings in the intertextuality the direct reference to 'gender ideology'. As advances in sexual and reproductive rights in Brazil are highlighted as a threat, with the supposed 'destruction of the family', in which the reaction with the 'defense of the family' stands out, the mention of this phrase highlights the non-explicit perspective of 'gender ideology', as a counterpoint to advances in rights. In terms of semantic choice for political purposes, mentioning the protection or defense of the family seems to produce more political engagement than directly mentioning 'gender ideology', as it offers a more comprehensible and more immediate notion of the enemy to be fought. In this context, it is possible to state that Alves' mention of 'defense or protection of the family' constitutes an indirect reference to 'gender ideology'.

The subsequent excerpt is one of the most significant in this corpus, as it highlights the perspectives of the Bolsonaro government and the MMFDH, specifically, in relation to human rights. First, it is worth highlighting Alves' statement "*that dream of ours*", which leads to the understanding that it highlights not only a personal dream, but also a dream of the evangelical group, and this dream would be a "cultural counter-revolution in Brazil". This 'counter-revolution' seems to oppose the social changes that have occurred in the field of sexual and reproductive rights over the last few decades, which have certainly

had an impact on culture, especially when the State promotes the protection of specific social groups, such as women and LGBTQIA+ people.

Among the advances in the sphere of public policies, it is possible to highlight the National Policy for Comprehensive Health for Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transvestites and Transsexuals, launched in 2011, as a major social and cultural milestone in the field of public health. Ensuring access and attention to the specific health demands of this social group has an impact not only on the culture of the health field but also on the culture itself. These cultural changes in relation to populations historically neglected by the State are one of the effects called ‘cultural Marxism’ by conservative ideology¹⁴. When Alves highlights the “*cultural counter-revolution*”, she is referring to the attempt to stop these advances and the proposition of a social and political culture based on Christian and ultra-conservative ideologies.

The notion of ‘reinterpreting human rights in Brazil’ is directly linked to a dispute over the meaning of human rights, which have historically served and still serve to guarantee the status of humanity to populations, bodies and people traditionally seen as non-human, such as LGBTQIA+ population for example. The reinterpretation of human rights that the minister enunciates brings in her text the idea that work on human rights perhaps should no longer prioritize discriminated populations, as well as intending to re-signify who the human rights subjects are. This notion is deepened and will be revisited in a later speech by Alves.

The cultural counter-revolution

The third text analyzed is the interview given to journalist Ricardo Senra, from BBC Brazil, published on December 18, 2019¹⁵. It is an interview given in Rome, during the meeting between first ladies of some States and Pope Francis, in which Alves also participated. The

first point of this interview that we highlight refers to a supposed universalization of human rights undertaken by the MMFDH:

Look, human rights are for everyone. For everyone. [...] We universalize human rights and speech. [...] For a period, the fights were very segmented. People thought that human rights were only for minorities or the prison population¹³⁽¹⁸²⁻¹⁸³⁾.

When Damares relies on the 1948 Declaration and states that human rights are for everyone, she seeks precisely to legitimize the choices that the MMFDH makes in the development of public policies. It is well known that a significant part of the population has their human rights recognized and that State public policies in this area have traditionally focused their actions on social groups that have had their rights systematically violated. This tradition of action is described by Damares as “*segmented struggles*”, which brings up the idea that the rest of the historically privileged population, who are not part of these segments, would be outside the guarantees of human rights.

When Alves mentions “*universalization*” of human rights, she brings into intertextuality the symbolic relationships related to the supposed loss of rights by part of the population, now restored by the MMFDH. ‘Universalization’ also connects with the idea defended by Bolsonaro about “*true human rights*”, which refers to the ultra-conservative reaction that has as its matrix the Vatican’s strategies against the advancement of sexual and reproductive rights and in which ‘gender ideology’ is a central element¹⁶.

Another excerpt from the interview that is worth highlighting is when Alves states that “the left is not the father and mother of human rights”¹³⁽¹⁹¹⁾. In this statement, she once again uses the strategy of legitimizing her ideology, leading to the understanding that human rights can be interpreted differently by the left and the right, which is what the MMFDH

proposes. Unification¹⁷ is a strategy used to build a homogeneous collective in relation to the political left, as an antagonistic opponent, as if the political left were not heterogeneous among themselves. In this discursive strategy there is a cultural and political dispute to re-signify the meanings of already existing concepts and terms, or, as Alves states, a "cultural counter-revolution"¹³⁽¹⁸⁰⁾. The reinterpretation of human rights then seems like a linguistic and rhetorical strategy to justify the State's omission in relation to the LGBTQIA+ population.

The 'Satan's Ideology'

The fourth text under analysis was the interview given by Alves to the Deutsche Welle Brasil portal, on February 28, 2020, to journalist Karina Gomes¹⁸. Unlike the interview given to the BBC, this one has a harsher tone, in which the minister is questioned about complaints against the government presented at the UN regarding human rights violations.

President Bolsonaro, he was legitimately elected by the majority of the Brazilian population, the majority of the electorate and he came with a new proposal, the universalization of rights. [...] If you look at who is making these generic complaints, it is the left [...] there has never been a discussion for society about human rights like today, this is the merit of President Bolsonaro, it is the merit of this government that is here, universalization of rights¹³⁽¹⁹³⁾.

Here, it is possible to observe the recurrence in the use of the term 'universalization of rights', which leads us to consider that this term is a euphemism that points to negligence in the elaboration of policies for social groups. It can be assessed that this is yet another mode of operation of an ideology that uses dissimulation and euphemization¹⁷ to hide the real meaning of what is meant. In this case, instead of stating that it will not promote human rights for LGBTQIA+ people,

for example, it is stated that human rights are for everyone, which produces a positive linguistic and symbolic meaning. In addition to reaffirming the 'universalization of rights' euphemism, Alves attributes any questioning about the government's attitudes and positions to the political left. It is observed that Alves' speech exposes the government's conservative right-wing ideology, which created a radical antagonism with the political left, and attributes only negative elements to it, producing a symbolic and ideological differentiation. It can be confirmed, therefore, that the symbolic construction of the enemy does not only refer to gender, but also to the political left.

The statement "*there has never been a discussion 'for' society about human rights like today*" does not allow us to conclude whether there was a Freudian slip¹⁹ on the part of Alves. However, the symbolic importance of her statements stands out due to the institutional position at the head of the MMFDH. The universalization of human rights carries this symbolic representation: a group in power that affirms or determines for society what these rights are and who are the individuals worthy of accessing them, essentially proposing a 'reinterpretation' based on their own ideologies.

In the following highlighted excerpt, Alves uses the unification strategy¹⁷, first when she mentions "*gender theory*", as if gender theories were just one and there was an absolute consensus from all perspectives. By unifying all gender productions and perspectives into one, this seems to facilitate the construction of the symbolic enemy that is wished to combat. Still in this text, it is clear that the ideology that Damares represents comprises 'gender theory' and 'gender ideology' as synonyms, as already pointed out by Junqueira⁴. When Alves refers to 'gender theory', she is referring to 'gender ideology':

There is a very big difference between gender theory, gender ideology, homosexuality, bisexuality, they are totally different things. Gender

theory transcends all of this, and I am against this theory, this ideology that arrived in Brazil strong and I resisted, led the residency movement and still do¹³⁽¹⁹⁸⁾.

In this excerpt, Alves reaffirms ‘gender theory’ as a synonym for ‘gender ideology’ and begins a narrative that attempts to separate, in a negative way, the expressions of sexuality in relation to gender. She continues: “A theory that arrived in Brazil saying that you could no longer have dolls and toys for boys, the toys had to be neutral in Brazil”¹²⁽¹⁹⁸⁾. In this excerpt, Alves uses personification as a figure of speech to refer to ‘gender theory/ideology’, as a character, one that would represent a law or type of moral conduct. The use of personification in this situation can be understood as an unfolding of the unification strategy of gender theories, which ‘become a person’, and this use of the figure of speech is fundamental in the construction of the enemy and in the production of moral panic. It is an operation that removes, from the producers of moral panic, the implication in this process, as it refers to someone or something that comes from outside, an ‘Other’, an outsider who approaches and announces his threat.

In another excerpt, Alves states that ‘gender ideology’ “betrayed homosexuals and used the LGBT movement”¹³⁽¹⁹⁸⁾, and it can be interpreted that the former minister understands that the advances of the LGBTQIA+ movements were only possible because of the biologically based demands, in which people are ‘born gay’, the affirmation of a gay, lesbian, trans nature, etc. The nature of heterosexuality as an organizer of society is the basis of this ‘gender ideology’, which does not break with the notion that any deviation from heterosexuality would be pathological, negative, undesirable, abject. When Alves states that the biological paradigm would be the legitimate one, she is not only making clear the use of the rhetoric of ‘gender ideology’ but also defending the

maintenance of non-hegemonic sexualities as the abject opposite of heterosexuality.

And I will say one thing: this ideology belongs to Satan! [...] So I am a critic of gender ideology, I was in the past, I am now and, let me tell you: the gay movement agrees with me, for sure!¹³⁽¹⁹⁸⁾.

‘Satan’ is a term commonly used by some Christian religions, especially evangelicals, to name the biblical figure of the devil, a linguistic resource to make reference to without mentioning his name directly. Here there is a clear intention to demonize any discussion or theory about gender. The question that arises is that political discourse should be connected to Brazilian democratic and republican values while religious discourse has no commitment to the State or even the truth, but rather to faith. In this excerpt, Alves explicitly states her ideological orientation based on ‘gender ideology’ and makes even more visible one of the elements that molds this perspective, which is the Christian orientation for the formulation of public policies. By naming the ‘gender’ as Satan and positioning herself in an antagonistic way, Alves uses yet another element to operate her ideology, also linked to the production of an enemy, which is the purge of the other¹⁷. This strategy constitutes the production of the enemy and an invitation to resist him. If Satan must be purged from the house of God, debates about gender must be purged from the state machinery.

The ‘reinterpretation’ of human rights

On February 10, 2021, the MMFDH published Ordinance No. 457²⁰, which established a working group to carry out the *ex ante* analysis of the National Human Rights Policy. This decision caused considerable controversy precisely because of its undemocratic nature, as the working group was formed

only by members of the government. After all the controversy, Alves decided to publish a video on the MMFDH²¹ page as an attempt to justify and clarify the decision. In her statement, Alves states that the idea of this working group is to “propose new human rights actions in Brazil”¹³⁽²⁰³⁾, of which we can understand in the intertextuality that it refers to what was repeatedly stated during the government, which is the reinterpretation of human rights in Brazil. If Bolsonaro, Alves and the members of the MMFDH were already suggesting this reinterpretation in terms of ideas, this working group seems to be an effort to formalize this review in official terms, documents, ordinances and other similar documents.

In this text, Alves justifies the ‘reinterpretation’ of the third National Human Rights Program (PNDH-3), fostering distrust in relation to the period in which it was created and indirectly stating that there was no popular participation in the construction of the Plan: “How many Did you participate in the construction of PNDH III? Tell me, was there really broad popular participation? Well, now there will be!”¹³⁽²⁰⁴⁾.

PNDH-3 was the result of broad discussion with society and was structured from 137 municipal and state meetings, in addition to the 11th National Human Rights Conference, involving around 14 thousand people, both from public authorities and civil society²². When Alves asks how many people participated in the construction of PNDH-3, the former minister asks a question that she knows will not be answered, not because many people did not participate, but because of the format of the communication itself, which does not allow contradiction. Alves’ intention at this moment seems to be to use her position of power to provoke doubt in relation to the transparency and legitimacy of a policy produced based on the democratic rule of law. This disinformation strategy seems quite effective in post-truth times²³, which was adopted by Bolsonaro on a recurring basis, especially with regard to electronic voting machines, for example.

Explanation of the neoconservative project

The sixth and last text analyzed refers to the speech by the National Secretary of Family, Angela Gandra, during the webinar entitled ‘A response to Gender Ideology’, promoted by the conservative organization Political Network for Values (PNFV), on May 28, 2021²⁴.

From the beginning, Gandra explicitly states that the MMFDH is working on public policies against ‘gender ideology’. Next, the secretary explains what public policies Brazil is developing to combat ‘gender ideology’, in which the first mentioned is the Strong Families Program²⁵, which is a Brazilian adaptation of the Strengthening Families Program, developed by the University Oxford Brookes, from the United Kingdom. Although the original program focuses on preventing early drug use among adolescents, the text does not explain what ‘risky behavior’ would be.

Based on the secretary’s statement that the program is one of the policies developed to combat ‘gender ideology’, it is possible to carry out two readings of the intertextuality that the notion of ‘strong families’ presents. The first is that, by ‘risky behavior’, is implicit the first manifestations of sexuality in early adolescence, and, in this case, the parental role would be to guide and discipline their children about this type of ‘behavior’. Although it is not Bolsonaro’s speech that is being analyzed, it is worth saying that this intertextual reading is in line with previous statements by the then president, such as when he stated, for example, that if “the son starts to act a little gay, he gets beaten up and changes his behavior”²⁶.

In this sense, this policy could operate as a form of surveillance also in relation to aspects of the psychosexual development of adolescents. The second possible reading based on this neoconservative ideology present in the speech of state representatives in the Bolsonaro government is that homosexual and transsexual children would be the result of maladjusted families, as defended by the

then education minister Milton Ribeiro²⁷. In this context, the very term ‘strong families’ is contrasted with ‘maladjusted families’, and strengthening the family would be a way of supposedly avoiding homosexuality and transsexuality.

The second project mentioned by the secretary is *Família na Escola*²⁸, whose pilot project was carried out in the municipality of Campos dos Goytacazes and soon became a full MMFDH project. According to the Ministry, the Project:

[...] aims to encourage joint actions to promote family and school partnership, through the training of parental skills, guarantees of children's rights and pedagogical support, in order to guarantee the integral development of the child and the strengthening of family bonds²⁸.

Based on the secretary's statement and the text of the project, it can be concluded that ‘pedagogical monitoring’ does not refer to children's learning development, but rather to monitoring the content worked on in the classroom. This idea is directly linked to Mesp, which defends a ‘neutral’ school without content understood as ‘ideological’. In this logic, ‘ideological content’ represents everything that family members do not agree with or believe in, from scientific content to moral values. This is one of the objectives of homeschooling, which is why the MMFDH seeks approval of this modality in Brazil. By ‘pedagogical monitoring’, it is possible to infer the reference to the monitoring of content in the classroom, in particular, those linked to discrimination based on race, religion, sexual orientation and gender identity.

Another family-based public policy not mentioned by the secretary, but which was already underway during this period and seems directly connected to confronting ‘gender ideology’, is the public notice ‘Capes Família e Políticas Públicas no Brasil’²⁹. This notice provides for the promotion of master's, doctorate and post-doctoral scholarships for

research focused on family issues. It is understood that the use of the word family, naming the Ministry and some policies, is not done without ulterior motives. This suggests that, for the MMFDH, there is an ideal family model that must be sought and strengthened, and this model is based on the traditional Christian family, composed of father, mother and daughters and sons.

The notice does not provide any support for research to understand the heterogeneous compositions of families in Brazil, gender inequalities that affect women when raising children, salary inequalities in the job market and LGBTQIA+ families, just to name a few possible examples. It is important to highlight that the Bolsonaro government made a series of billion-dollar cuts to the budget of the Ministry of Education³⁰, therefore, it must be questioned what is the MMFDH's interest in investing in this area, in opposition to these cuts. It can be assumed that this notice is in the field of epistemological dispute over the notions of family and some possible policies around it.

Another ministerial policy implemented that confronts ‘gender ideology’ concerns the federal government's Dial 100 service. This service has existed within the state structure since 2003, and in 2010 it was renamed Human Rights Hotline and also receives reports of human rights violations from underrepresented social groups. This service's processes are structured based on the ‘Human Rights Taxonomy Manual’³¹. The action that will be highlighted here refers to the fact that the manual was modified in 2021 by the MMFDH, which included in item 2.11 ‘gender ideology’ as one of the possible motivations for violence against children and adolescents. Next, Gandra states:

We also took away the vocabulary [gender]. Now it is not possible, in all documents when gender is used it means sex, there are not two sexes, and we are also working on this so that a reality is not altered by language¹²⁽²⁰⁶⁾.

By saying “*we took away the vocabulary*”, she appears to be referring to mentions of the term gender in official government documents. When presenting Brazil’s candidacy to the UN Human Rights Council for the 2020-2022 triennium, the government did not include the term gender in the document; and for the first time she placed the family at the center of public policies, when she stated that “she is developing transversal public policies, which have the family as the focal point of the state’s actions”³². This indicates that, in fact, there is a false antagonism produced between gender and family, and it is no surprise that the MMFDH has created public policies such as those mentioned above.

Gandra states that the government is working to ensure that “reality is not altered by language”¹³⁽²⁰⁶⁾. However, it is worth highlighting that, since ‘gender ideology’ appeared on the Brazilian political scene, conservative and religious segments have worked hard to inscribe and define, through language, the concept of gender and the possible social ‘threat’ of this concept. The fact is that language is the main tool for exercising power, and that is exactly why this research proposes to carry out CDA, since social practices shape and are shaped by discourse⁷. The institution under critical discourse analysis is a ministry that uses language strategically to maintain a reality that is defended as the only natural and true possibility for the lives of everyone.

[...] and at the same time, in the government we even have a director of LGBT communities, but to defend and protect the human person. Protect, but not artificially promote a reality that is ontologically an attack on human beings¹³⁽²⁰⁶⁻²⁰⁷⁾.

In this excerpt, the secretary makes clear the ministerial understanding that the lives of LGBTQIA+ people are an ‘attack on human beings’, that is, she affirms heterosexuality as the only expression of sexuality understood as natural and legitimate. As previously

discussed, when the ‘nature’ of sexuality is affirmed, there is in the interdiscursivity the idea of biological discourse linked to reproduction, as well as the religious discourse of biblical Genesis, which also affirms a supposed divine nature for heteronormative gender roles.

Final considerations

In the last decade, the rise of neoconservatism disputed and built, around gender theories, a very Brazilian ‘reinterpretation’ that produced the enemy ‘gender ideology’ associated with the left, the Workers’ Party, abortion and LGBTQIA+ rights – and whose main field of dispute is the school environment.

This discourse is based on the heteronormative family as a reference and the imminent threat to it, through the supposed indoctrination and early sexualization of children, which would be promoted by ‘gender ideologues’. In this sense, ‘gender ideology’ was coined as a rhetorical resource to block advances in LGBTQIA+ human rights and an instrument of symbolic violence against this population, since false and religious arguments are used to maintain sex-diverse populations into a secondary category of humanity and abjection.

The MMFDH, in the period studied, was the main scenario in this dispute between groups with a certain ideological position, proposing the reinterpretation of human rights and attributing to the government a supposed feat of ‘universalization’ of these rights. Through the dismantling of councils and the consequent withdrawal of civil society participation in the policy production process, this ministry acted in an authoritarian and undemocratic manner.

The main hypothesis of this research – that ‘gender ideology’ would guide part of the public policies developed by the MMFDH – was validated without reservations. It was observed that the ministry’s guiding ideologies are organized from essentialist and biologizing perspectives and that its representatives

speak from their personal convictions as if these were the will of the people, not using scientific bases for their arguments and having a religious moralistic discourse.

These assumptions for understanding sexuality based on just one paradigm said to be natural, hegemonic, are not understood by their promoters as ideological, but as linked to human nature and divine creation. It is clear from the speech of the MMFDH representatives that this ministry was responsible, within the government structure, for transforming the banners of the conservative and religious sectors into public policies, in particular, the banner of the FPE. Furthermore, it was possible to observe that the guiding ideology of the MMFDH is directly linked to 'gender ideology'.

It can be concluded that the 'defence of the family' and the 'protection of the family' express the non-explicit character of 'gender ideology'. From the speeches of Damares Alves and Angela Gandra, it is also inferred that, when in political discourse, especially neoconservative ideologies, the 'defense of the family' is stated, in fact, a non-explicit

position against what these groups designate as 'gender ideology'.

The research had limitations, as it was difficult to access and provide transparency to information on official MMFDH channels; hence the choice to follow the speeches of its main representatives in the selected period. Furthermore, despite the new ministerial composition with the non-reelection of Jair Bolsonaro, the MMFDH consolidated the term 'gender ideology' in the state structure and in the political field in general. For this reason, it is necessary to continue monitoring the possible mutations and uses of this discourse in the Brazilian political scenario, as well as its transnational connections.

Collaborators

Bitencourt LO (0000-0003-3271-2590)* contributed to bibliographical research, research, selection and transcription of speeches and preparation of the manuscript. Oliveira MHB (0000-0002-1078-4502)* contributed to the guidance and preparation of the manuscript. ■

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