



# Teaching to forget - history teaching and extreme right

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**ABSTRACT.** The article aims to analyze how the extreme right wing has sought to transform the teaching of history, displacing it from academically accepted historiography to glorious narratives in the form of a national tale (Citron, 2017). The research is based on a theoretical framework built with the contribution of several authors, with emphasis on Cesarino (2022), Nunes (2022), Pelbart (2019), Traverso (2021), Stanley (2020). After presenting an overview of the rise of the extreme right in Brazil and the world, we analyze documents from the French and American extreme right that propose changes in history teaching. Then, we discuss the productions of Brasil Paralelo in the form of public history and we tension this version from an ethnographic study of school culture. The article shows approximations between the historiographical forms and the methods of dissemination of the proposals by the extreme right in the three countries, but also indicates some departures.

**Keywords:** history teaching; extreme right-wing; transnational network; Brasil paralelo.

## Ensinar a esquecer – ensino de história e extrema direita

**RESUMO.** O artigo visa a analisar como a extrema direita vem buscando transformar o ensino de história, deslocando-o da historiografia academicamente aceita para narrativas gloriosas no formato de um romance nacional (Citron, 2017). A investigação apoia-se em um quadro teórico construído com a contribuição de diversos autores, com destaque para Cesarino (2022), Nunes (2022), Pelbart (2019), Traverso (2021), Stanley (2020). Após apresentar um panorama da ascensão da extrema direita no Brasil e no mundo, analisa-se documentos da extrema direita francesa e estadunidense que propõem mudanças no ensino de história. A seguir, discutimos as produções da Brasil Paralelo na forma de história pública e tensionamos essa versão a partir de um estudo etnográfico da cultura escolar. O artigo mostra aproximações entre as formas historiográficas e métodos de divulgação das propostas pela extrema direita nos três países, mas também indica alguns afastamentos.

**Palavras-chave:** ensino de história; extrema direita; rede transnacional; Brasil paralelo.

## Enseñar a olvidar - enseñanza de historia y extrema derecha

**RESUMEN.** El artículo tiene como objetivo analizar cómo la extrema derecha ha buscado transformar la enseñanza de la historia, desplazándola de la historiografía académicamente aceptada a narrativas gloriosas en formato de novela nacional (Citron, 2017). La investigación se basa en un marco teórico construido con la contribución de varios autores, con énfasis en Cesarino (2022), Nunes (2022), Pelbart (2019), Traverso (2021), Stanley (2020). Después de presentar un panorama del surgimiento de la extrema derecha en Brasil y en el mundo, analizamos documentos de la extrema derecha francesa y estadounidense que proponen cambios en la enseñanza de la historia. Luego, discutimos las producciones de Brasil Paralelo en forma de historia pública y tensionamos esta versión a partir de un estudio etnográfico de la cultura escolar. El artículo muestra aproximaciones entre las formas historiográficas y los métodos de difusión de las propuestas de la extrema derecha en los tres países, pero también indica algunas desviaciones.

**Palabras clave:** enseñanza de la historia; extrema derecha; red transnacional; Brasil paralelo.

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Don't get me wrong  
Whoever discovered Brazil  
It wasn't Cabral  
(Não Foi Cabral, MC Carol,  
Lyrics: Léo Justi/MC Carol, Album Bandida, 2016)

## Introduction

For several years now, there has been a noticeable uptick in the extreme right's presence across various countries, forming what could be called a transnational network. The planning of an event on May 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023, orchestrated by Portugal's far-right party 'Chega,' to congregate leaders from diverse countries like Brazil, Italy, Spain, France, and the Netherlands (Carmo, 2023), indicates an ambition to solidify such network. The establishment of far-right entities globally come in diverse forms, spanning social movements or structured party systems. Regardless of the form, there is a consistent focus on influencing the educational field. According to Boaventura de Souza Santos, education stands as a prime target of right-wing extremism. In an analysis spanning multiple countries, the author underscores that the education of ethnic-racial relations, sexual education, citizenship education, inclusive education appreciating diversity, and the teaching of national history are primary targets facing attacks from the far right. The author expresses concern, stating: "[...] it is not an option to regress. Setbacks in education are always an ill omen for society" (Santos, 2020, p. 10).

This article aims to scrutinize how the extreme right-wing has endeavored to reshape the teaching of history, shifting it from academically acknowledged historiography to narratives glorifying a national tale, which persists despite historiographical studies, recognized in academia, presenting a history devoid of the desired linearity in this field, interwoven with contradictions, and stamped by violent processes. To this end, we initially present a broad perspective on the ascent of the extreme right-wing globally and in Brazil. We then delve into an analysis of how the far-right has been actively reshaping the teaching of national history in France and the USA. Following this, we scrutinize the presence of the production company Brasil Paralelo in Brazil and its role in constructing a public history that opposes conventional school history. We proceed by presenting facets of an ethnographic study of school culture, intertwining it with history education, and challenging the historiographical framework presented by Brasil Paralelo based on this study. We close the article with our final considerations.

## Far-right about-turn! – Global perspective

In recent years, there has been a gradual rise in the extreme right across numerous countries, resulting from the emergence of social movements aligned with the ideology and the establishment of political parties clearly endorsing the right-wing bias in electoral disputes. In some countries, the extreme right successfully attained power, notably in the USA with Donald Trump (2017-2021) and in Brazil with Jair Bolsonaro (2018-2022), securing significant electoral mandates and governing for a standard four-year term. Subsequently, they were succeeded by politicians with centrist or center-left leanings.

Conversely, in other nations, political factions and leaders with a conservative inclination who came to power progressively adopted closer affiliations with the far right and persist in power today. Examples include Hungary, under the tenure of Prime Minister Viktor Órban since 2010, and Türkiye, where Recep Tayyip Erdoğan served as prime minister from 2003 to 2014 and, from then to the present day, is the president with full powers. In these instances, the rulers implemented measures that transformed initially democratic political systems into quasi-autocracies. Here, "autocracy" refers to a high concentration of power in the hands of the ruling executive, sometimes extending to the appointment and dismissal of members within the judiciary and legislative branches.

Autocracies are not exclusive to right-wing regimes. Venezuela, for instance, experienced a left-wing autocracy characterized by successive alterations in legislation enabling the re-election of the paramount leader and undermining the independence of other governmental powers. Nicaragua, under the leadership of Daniel Ortega since 2006, represents an extreme case of left-wing autocracy, consolidating immense authority within the ruler and his family's domain. Cuba continues to be a country where political leadership remains in the hands of a restricted group, regardless of its high-quality indicators in health, education, and well-being.

Poland echoes the situations in Hungary and Türkiye, with the Law and Justice party ruling under Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki since 2017. They uphold conservative national agendas closely aligned with global far-right ideologies. In France, Emmanuel Macron secured victories in both the 2017 and 2022 presidential elections. While initially associated with left-wing parties, he is currently regarded as a centrist. Despite this, significant votes were consistently garnered by Front National candidates, notably Marine Le

Pen, advancing to the second presidential round in both instances, with an increase in vote percentages and championing ideas aligned with the extreme right. The 2021 Chilean presidential elections witnessed José Antonio Kast of the far-right Social Christian Front reaching the second round, although ultimately defeated, but showing substantial voter support. Across Europe, the Swedish Democrats in Sweden, Spain's Vox Party, Germany's Alternative for Germany party, and the Austrian Freedom Party have been steadily gaining electoral ground, alongside parties demonstrating clear neo-fascist and far-right tendencies.

In Italy's recent ballot, the far-right party *Fratelli d'Italia* triumphed in 2022, enabling the appointment of Giorgia Meloni, known for openly manifesting neo-fascist political inclinations, as Prime Minister. Her historic ascent as the first woman in the country's political leadership—a milestone resonating with feminist struggles—was accompanied by unequivocally conservative moral and political stances. In Latin America, Uruguay, Paraguay, Guatemala, and Ecuador are governed by right-wing leaders and parties, advocating conservative and anti-feminist agendas, creating space for the emergence of far-right groups and leaders.

Back in Brazil, the election of Lula da Silva (2023–2026) did not represent a decline in far-right groups. They continued to wield influence, even leading to an attempted coup against the duly elected government at the beginning of his tenure. Surveying Latin America, a recent wave, termed the 'pink wave,' unfolded with the presidential victories of Lula da Silva in Brazil, Pedro Castillo in Peru, Gustavo Petro in Colombia, and Gabriel Boric in Chile, all achieved with exceedingly narrow vote margins—in some cases, nearly resulting in a tie. In Chile, following the election of the youngest president in the nation's history with a relatively larger vote margin, a turnaround occurred with the referendum on the new constitution—prominent in the campaign—ending in defeat. Meanwhile, in Peru, President Pedro Castillo, inaugurated in July 2021, faced impeachment and subsequent arrest in December 2022.

Despite regional disparities among countries, an examination of the primary programs, slogans, and agendas enables the identification of a collection of somewhat common political directives: 1. There is a strong emphasis on restoring order across nations, seen as a revival of moral values from the past and a restructuring of political governance and societal norms; 2. In some countries, migration becomes a focal point, especially in European far-right discourse, colored by neo-fascist ideologies, asserting national race superiority, defending territorial integrity, and highlighting an external enemy corrupting ethical, moral, and religious values; 3. There is an evident appeal to religious traditions, in most countries linked to Christianity and Roman Catholicism, in the form of mottos such as "God above all," "God, country, and family," "God ahead of all"; 4. Criticism of globalization, labeled as globalism, is frequent, advocating against economic bloc affiliations, deemed 'Euro-sceptic' in Europe and translating into disconnection or weakening of associations such as Mercosur and Unasur in Brazil; 5. Economic nationalism and extreme-patriotism are common themes, despite the implications of deindustrialization and reliance on foreign economies in many instances; 6. The far-right positions itself as a champion of freedom and anti-establishment, and accuses democratic and left-wing forces of sustaining a corrupt and obsolete system, which allegedly restricts citizens' initiative and encourages laziness via subsidies and aid; 7. The discourse on the law centers on the agenda of punitive measures, including support for the death penalty, leading to mass incarceration and a substantial increase in the prison population; 8. Associated with the anti-establishment discourse, the political ideology of the extreme right-wing is characterized as populist, centered on individual personalities, and anti-political, consistently criticizing political activities as predatory, with public management being carried out by private or market institutions, or inspired by principles derived therefrom; 9. There is a denial of socio-historical inequalities related to race, gender, and poverty. Instead, there is an ardent defense of meritocracy and individual entrepreneurship, advocating for a minimal state structure to grant entrepreneurs maximal freedom of action; 10. Democratic norms and practices are under attack or discarded in favor of autocratic regimes, where power shifts to armed forces, police—if not militias—, or business groups, consolidating authority under a single ruler; 11. The emphasis on freedom takes on a warlike tone, promoting slogans such as "armed people will never be enslaved," advocating for widespread gun ownership and access to ammunition; 12. The fostering of moral panic is actively encouraged, with LGBTQIAP+ issues and feminism portrayed as a central threat, allegedly undermining family values and societal moral coherence; 13. The family is portrayed as a pivotal institution responsible for caregiving, welfare, education, economic sustenance, roles taken over by the State but gradually delegated back to the family unit; 14. Anti-intellectualism is broadly encouraged, impacting educational institutions as schools, universities, and scientific research. This attitude influences public policies, such as vaccine acceptance and mask-wearing for

COVID-19 prevention, seen skeptically with suspicion, as either ineffective or undue interference of State power over individuals, affecting their personal freedom; 15. Educational institutions, including public schools, universities, and State educational media, are viewed as infiltrated by ‘cultural Marxism’ and thus necessitate censorship or monitoring by families and individuals. These themes have direct implications for school culture and the teaching of humanities, notably History.

## Far-right about-turn! — Brazil

In Brazil, the movement toward the extreme right-wing began to emerge in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, with a significant milestone marked by the conception of the ‘Movimento Escola sem Partido’ (School Without Party Movement) in 2004, which brought forth a visible surge in radical conservatism. However, as some analysts suggest, the turning point will effectively occur in 2013. In June of that year, a series of demonstrations catalyzed by the ‘Movimento Passe Livre’ (Free Fare Movement) broke out, due to the increase in urban public transport fares. The insurgency started in Porto Alegre and swiftly spread nationwide, transcending a mere 20-cent fare increase dispute<sup>1</sup>. Inspired by the Arab Spring, diverse placards surfaced, reflecting an array of demands: “*Meu cu é laico [.....]*” (My asshole is secular [.....]), “*Depois da cura gay, só falta o alvejante para negros [...]*” (Following conversion therapy, where’s bleach for Black people?), and “*É uma vergonha, passagem mais cara que a maconha*” (The reason for the fuss? Pot is now cheaper than the bus!) (Pelbart, 2019, p. 126). While some of these placards echoed left-leaning demands during former President Dilma’s government, others hinted at future trends: “We want FIFA standard hospitals [...]”, “The giant has woken up [...]” and “The united people don’t need a party [...]” “*Queremos hospitais padrão FIFA [...]*” (The people wants FIFA standard hospitals), “*O gigante acordou [...]*” (The giant has woken up), and “*O povo unido não precisa de partido [...]*” (United people have no need for [political] parties) (Pelbart, 2019, p. 126). The first statement, although not explicitly addressing corruption, hinted at the mismanagement of public resources, a pillar later exploited by right-wing demonstrations, notably triggered by the Lava Jato operation<sup>2</sup>. The latter two reflect an anti-establishment sentiment (Cesarino, 2022), opposing traditional politics and advocating for popular power against elites, especially political party elites. This sentiment ultimately led to the election of Jair Bolsonaro as president in 2018, leveraging his 27-year tenure as a federal deputy to craft an image as a political outsider.

Amidst the 2013 protests, PT’s (the Brazilian Worker’s Party) government promised to heed popular demands, securing the re-election of President Dilma. However, their attempts to contain the uprising were aimed at restoring the conditions for governance that had been previously in place. “Governing, primarily and beforehand, involves purging the ungovernable, irreducible dimension, residing in the realm of the unseen and unspoken, through the continuous reaffirmation of the status quo” (Pelbart, 2019, p. 127). Black blocs protesters and those linked to positions on the left of the government were arrested and handed criminal sentences. During the 2013 protests, for a brief period, there occurred a widespread eruption. The street supplanted the screen, while outrage transitioned into anger. It is solely anger that can incite insurgency. However, anger is a high-intensity yet transient emotion. It disrupts subjectivities, which are swiftly re-established. It was within this movement that the extreme right-wing found its triumph.

Subjectivities in revolt against ‘things as they are,’ along with their anti-establishment rhetoric, were re-established within a political spectrum that is deeply conservative concerning societal norms and profoundly individualistic and anti-government in economic terms. Anti-establishment sentiments were appropriated by factions opposing the modest changes implemented by PT administrations, calling for an end to social policies addressing inequality and the meager strides in confronting misogyny, racism, and LGBT discrimination. If PT failed to pacify and align the crowd with its own agenda, the extreme right-wing then mobilized to

[...] eradicate definitively this untamed, incomprehensible, steadfast magma, which persists in rejecting the White, Eurocentric, heteronormative civilization, consumerist subjectivity, and the market’s hegemony—ultimately, [to ensure] the extortion of existence. It is an established mode of existence that must prevail, eliminating the others—residual, smaller, insignificant, experimental—that persist in carrying on barbaric legacies (Pelbart, 2019, p. 140, free translation).

<sup>1</sup>The mobilizations were triggered by left-wing movements, mainly students, who protested against a 20 cent increase in Porto Alegre’s urban bus fares.

<sup>2</sup>Conducted by the Federal Police and notably led by judge Sérgio Moro, Lava Jato operation entailed investigations into alleged corruption, with relevant participation of prosecutor Deltan Dallagnol. It resulted in several convictions, including that of Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, which prevented him from running for president in 2018. Subsequently, Lula’s convictions were overturned by the STF due to procedural errors and Judge Moro’s perceived bias.

This movement undertook what could be termed as a gentrification of subjectivities, expelling non-conforming modes. This purging of the political sphere should extend to a purification of History, creating unified, heroic narratives devoid of contradictions or the negativity associated with minor, divergent, residual voices. While the constitution of the extreme right-wing has regional nuances, it is feasible to assert that this gentrified reestablishment of subjectivities, aspiring to craft a glorious history that excludes those divergent elements marring its brilliance, remains consistent across various movements.

As previously highlighted, according to Boaventura Santos (2020), education stands as one of the prime targets of the extreme right-wing. The teaching of Brazilian history emerges as a pivotal point in numerous discussions within the field, intending to produce a sanitized and illustrious rendition, free from the shadows of defeats, weaknesses, and shameful deeds. One tactic to contain or constrain the influence of social groups in today's landscape is to discredit their legitimacy in the taught history, whether in schools or within the realm of what is known as public history disseminated through social media, the press, political groups, and cultural artifacts, all of which inherently contain pedagogical elements. Keeping the objectives of this article in mind, it is noteworthy to preliminarily observe that both in the USA and France initiatives are focusing on the curricular content to be taught in schools.

## Far-right about-turn! – History

As we have demonstrated, the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century witnessed the proliferation and fortification of far-right movements across the globe. These movements are heterogeneous, embodying “[...] erratic, unstable, and contradictory ideological content, blending antithetical political philosophies” (Traverso, 2021, p. 18). While most of these movements do not overtly align with fascism, traces of fascist principles can be identified in all, albeit expressed through varied practices. According to the author, austerity measures, characteristic of neoliberal thinking<sup>3</sup> and enforced by left-leaning governments, left the working classes disillusioned, paving the way for the extreme right's populist rhetoric targeting the elites.

While contemporary far-right movements exhibit parallels with fascism, they also diverge significantly. In this context, Traverso (2021, p. 14) argues that “[...] the concept of fascism appears both inadequate and necessary to comprehend this new reality.” The author proposes employing the term “post-fascism” to characterize the present-day extreme right-wing. One of the key differences from classical fascism is the emphasis that most current movements place on economic liberalization, advocating for reduced State intervention in the market. However, they strongly endorse nationalism and typically oppose what they often call ‘globalism,’ as mentioned.

Stanley (2020), despite acknowledging the differences between current far-right movements and those of the 1930s, categorizes all ultranationalist movements as fascist. In his book, he delineates 10 characteristics that pervade fascism, encompassing anti-intellectualism and the fabrication of a mythical past. According to him,

Fascist leaders validate their ideologies by eradicating a collective historical consciousness and fabricating a mythical past to bolster their present vision. They distort the people's perception of reality by manipulating idealized language through propaganda, fostering anti-intellectualism by targeting educational institutions that might challenge their ideals. Over time, these tactics in fascist politics culminate in a state of unreality, where conspiracy theories and fake news supplant rational discourse (Stanley, 2020, p. 16).

This mythical past is steeped in tales of wars and conquests, inhabited by heroic, valorous warriors—always White, undisputedly heterosexual—tethered to a Christian warrior tradition that the nation proudly claims. The author contends that Mussolini's fascism was founded on this construction, which continues to underpin contemporary post-fascist movements. Utilizing this mythical past as a tool, fosters nationalism and reverence for traditions, altering the current milieu. According to the author, this constructed past adheres to the logic of the patriarchal family, with male leaders symbolizing the father figure. The few women depicted typically assume secondary roles, often linked to motherhood and nurturing. Instances where women hold prominent positions are often associated with so-called ‘barbarian’ groups. The construction of this mythical past seeks to garner male adherence to the patriarchal model while also aiming for female adherence, aligning the preservation of gender roles with the preservation of the nation and, consequently, the family. Ultimately, the patriarchal sociopolitical structure of the nation is purportedly the guarantor of family preservation.

<sup>3</sup>As per Casara (2021, p. 33), “[...] rationality encompasses both the act or quality of reasoning and the elements that clarify, condition, and validate these actions and intended objectives.” Neoliberal rationality establishes a truth regime that assumes and normalizes neoliberal principles as the guiding principles for individual behavior and state policies.

In this sense, the analyses by Garcia, Lazarini, Barbieri, and Mello (2017) highlight the creation of public schools in 19<sup>th</sup>-century France, notably the Jules Ferry school, emerging amidst robust worker struggles. Even as a substantial segment of the bourgeoisie resisted funding the proletariat's education, Ferry advocated for it as a means to cultivate a sense of citizenship, linked to defending the homeland against external threats. Consequently, the public school shifted the focus from the internal enemy of class struggle, which could lead to civil unrest like the Paris Commune, toward an external adversary—the enemy nation. This process of forging national identity contributed to diluting class identity, substituting the potential for revolutionary transformation with the aspiration to become a soldier. We recognize that this kind of association can be employed to comprehend some strategies of the extreme right as nationalism, which leads to the advocating for homeland defense, and the defense of family—values not only deeply ingrained in our society but also reinforced by this political apparatus—conveying the notion that prioritizing a supposed larger war forces overlooking fights for rights, gender equality, the overcoming of racism, and homo/transphobia.

Hence, far-right movements strongly adhere to a past that does not align with widely accepted historiography in academic circles but rather reinforces myths of a heroic and patriarchal society. As per Stanley (2020, p. 29), the historical narratives they endorse “[...] diminish or completely erase the nation's past sins [...],” categorizing academic knowledge as conspiratorial and manufactured by elites seeking to penalize the people. The construction of this mythical past is closely tied to anti-intellectualism or, according to Cesarino (2022), the crisis in the expert system formed in Modernity, which previously regarded science as the primary source of truth—acknowledging scientific methodologies as the most reliable means of establishing a valuable truth. In today's digital landscape, modern methods of ascertaining truth are being undermined by technological capabilities, blurring the lines between authentic and falsified texts and images. In this sense, trust in experts for establishing the truth is diminishing, giving way to forms typical of an attention-driven economy mediated by algorithms.

According to the author, policies surrounding truth have been restructured based on three elements: self-epistemology, conspiratoriality, and the friend-enemy divide. Self-epistemology pertains to first-person validation based on immediate sensory experience. It is conceivable that the digital environment, with its broad capacity to proliferate statements, brings forth a marketplace of diverse truths, tailored to the consumer's preferences. As stated by Han (2012), contemporary society demands transparency, often relinquishing trust in the process. The expert system, however, remains far from transparent and immediately comprehensible to the majority, demanding specific training and expertise to access the truth. Self-epistemology could be perceived as an extension of this modern imperative to believe solely in what is graspable to individuals, emphasizing the idea of personal freedom of choice. This marketplace of truths thrives on strategies aiming to alter established concepts and scientifically endorsed knowledge. These strategies range from straightforward and blatant falsifications of accepted truths to more sophisticated methods employing techniques and experts acknowledged by the academic community, inducing doubt to undermine faith in scientific knowledge.

In their studies of Natural Sciences, Oreskes and Conway (2010) revealed how respected researchers were co-opted by the tobacco industry in the 1950s to manipulate results and thwart government attempts to regulate it. They show how similar manipulation occurred at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century concerning global warming, fostering the misconception of dissent among scientists on the subject. The authors called such scientists ‘merchants of doubt.’ This concept can be expanded to the humanities, as the researchers defending a mythologized version of history, embraced by the extreme right, typically are not prominent academic figures.

The second element Cesarino (2022) presents is ‘conspiratoriality.’ The allegedly unmediated truth of self-epistemology finds mediation through trust transfer from experts to images and first-person narratives, often diverging from conventional media outlets aligned with experts. These materials disclose a concealed truth accessible only to the initiated—those who have “taken the *Red Pill*.” As per the author, these contents are not just presented from a conspiracist perspective, aiming to unveil truths suppressed by a powerful group. They also carry a hint of spirituality, purporting to reveal truths to the chosen ones.

Saraiva and Zago (2021) pinpointed this trend within the extreme right, where truth is not positioned against falsehood but is seen as something waiting to be uncovered. The authors proposed replacing Foucault's concept of ‘truth politics,’ which defines the rules separating true from false in a specific truth

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<sup>4</sup> The reference to the *Red Pill* originates from The Matrix movie, where the character Neo faces a choice between the Red Pill and the Blue Pill offered by Morpheus. The Red Pill unveils the true reality hidden by a plot of the elite's agenda for their interests, while the Blue Pill allows the taker to remain oblivious. The extreme right utilizes this term to signify access to supposed knowledge and information withheld from the majority, accessible only to a select few.

regime, with ‘truth politics,’ strategies aimed at exposing hidden truths that could challenge the system. Cesarino (2022) addresses anti-establishment audiences immersed in a form of conspiratoriality arising from specific truth politics.

Lastly, Cesarino (2022) explores the friend/enemy divide. In this scenario, the world is simplified into a binary division, where everything from the recognized ‘friendly’ field is accepted as true, and anything from the ‘enemy’ side is deemed false. The ‘friendly’ realm is that which shares similar worldviews, values, and thus, the same truths. Drawing from social psychology, Carvalho (2019) argues that individuals have a strong inclination to accept as true whatever aligns with their beliefs. This is called ‘confirmation bias.’ The political scientist also asserts that encountering new information conflicting with our beliefs causes discomfort, leading to denying or downplaying its veracity, known as ‘cognitive dissonance.’ The friend/enemy divide aligns entirely with this logic, and the extreme right’s radicalized acceptance of this strategy characterizes its stance. In early 2023, there were frequent encouragements in Telegram groups or near barracks to avoid traditional media for information, urging connections only with ‘friendly’ media.

The teaching of History is a matter of contention amidst this crisis of experts. Unlike Brazil and the United States, France has never been governed by an extreme right-wing president. However, there has been a significant surge in votes for this faction in recent years. In 2002, the *Front National* candidate, Jean-Marie Le Pen, secured 17.8% of the votes in the presidential elections’ second round, marking the far right’s first advancement to this electoral stage. In 2017, Marine Le Pen, Jean-Marie’s daughter, attained 33.9% of the votes in the second-round while representing the same party. In 2022, she garnered 41.5% of the votes while running for the *Rassemblement National* party. Notably, the performance of the *Reconquête* candidate, Éric Zemmour, a far-right politician whose rhetoric is often more radical than that of Marine Le Pen and secured 7.07% of the votes, attaining fourth place at the end of the recent election. Given the context of the French extreme right’s ascension, analyzing its educational propositions for history teaching becomes pertinent. Marine Le Pen’s (2022, p. 13, free translation) government plan proposes a “[...] reinforcement program in French and History within the priority education network.<sup>5</sup>” This network aims to mitigate social disparities by offering supplementary classes in schools situated in socially vulnerable areas. It is crucial to highlight that immigrants and their descendants, socioeconomically more vulnerable, could be disproportionately affected by this policy, potentially fostering nationalist sentiments.

Le Pen’s pronounced focus on teaching national history sparked concerns among teachers’ associations about the resurgence of the ‘romantic nationalism’ approach through a mythologized history, glorifying France’s victories, heroism, and grandeur. This approach originated in the late 19th century, being adopted across French elementary schools (Morin, 2022)<sup>6</sup>. The candidate herself explicitly stated this objective in a *tweet*, expressing, “[...] our schools will ensure that our children not only acquire fundamental knowledge but also learn the romantic nationalism” (Le Pen, 2017, free translation)<sup>7</sup>. However, this intention to redirect history teaching towards romantic nationalism is not explicitly outlined in the current campaign. Established in 2016 and associated with the *Front National*, the precursor to Le Pen’s party, the Racine Collective aims to restore the principles of the Republic’s schooling, founded by Ferry (Racine, 2013) and perceived to be under threat due to the reforms stemming from the ideas of the May 1968 movement. Among its proposals, it advocates for: “Introducing a chronological teaching of history, primarily focusing on France, especially at the primary level, to promote the romantic nationalism through narratives that build memory, cultivate a sense of national belonging, and impart guiding values” (Racine, 2013, free translation)<sup>8</sup>.

The passage above outlines the aims of teaching a mythologized history in schools: fostering patriotism as advocated by Ferry, a key figure in founding the Republic’s educational system and cultivating moral conduct to alleviate internal social tensions.

In contrast, Zemmour’s (2022c, p. 3, free translation) government plan doesn’t directly address history teaching but proposes a “[...] refocus on fundamental knowledge (reading, writing, and arithmetic) in primary

<sup>5</sup>From the original: “Renforcement en Français et en histoire dans les Réseaux d’éducation prioritaire (REP)”.

<sup>6</sup>As per Citron (2017), the teaching of French history was significantly influenced by Ernest Lavisse’s work, notably his 1895 manual “History of France,” widely regarded as a reference in French schools. The publication employed emotional appeals, using inspiring imagery and stories to engage students. From Lavisse’s perspective, history was presented as linear and absolute truth about the past, depicting France in a glorious and pristine light—a nation upholding noble values and fervently advocating for their acceptance. Until the 1920s, Lavisse’s work was predominant in most French schools and continued in use until the 1950s. Other guidance manuals were written and this was the dominant version of French history until the 1980s, when the emergence of a ‘new history’ challenged this perspective, delving into problematic aspects such as forced Christianization, racism, colonial violence, and Vichy collaborationism. In 1992, Pierre Nora dubbed Lavisse’s account ‘romantic nationalism.’ With the advent of the new history, the teaching of History gradually shifted in perspective. The extreme right intends to set back this process.

<sup>7</sup>From the original: “Notre école sera l’école qui fera acquérir à nos enfants, outre les savoirs élémentaires, la connaissance du roman national”.

<sup>8</sup>From the original: “Instaurer, tout particulièrement à l’Ecole primaire, un enseignement chronologique de l’histoire, pour l’essentiel celle de la France, faisant toute sa place au roman national présenté sous forme de récits, lesquels forment la mémoire, forment le sentiment d’une appartenance à la nation, et sont porteurs de valeurs propres à orienter la conduite”.

schools.<sup>9</sup>” However, in a *tweet*, he declared: “Yes, I aim to reintroduce romantic nationalism in schools, to instill a love for France through its history, just as I was taught to love it. School textbooks are a breeding ground for anti-French propaganda”<sup>10</sup> (Zemmour, 2022b).

The inclination to intervene in history education is also observed within the American extreme right. During his July 4th, 2020 speech, Trump<sup>11</sup> asserted that schools were teaching children to despise their country by imparting a radicalized history rooted in falsehoods, tarnishing heroes, and eradicating national values. According to the former president, this amounted to an indoctrination process leading to societal conflicts. At that time, Trump was referencing the widespread protests triggered by the murder of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man, by the police. These demonstrations included the toppling of statues commemorating Confederate leaders or figures associated with racism (Seipel, 2020).

However, in September of that year, Trump established a presidential advisory commission tasked with formulating guidelines for what he called ‘patriotic education.’ It aimed to counter anti-American historical narratives. Even though the US school curriculum is regulated by state guidelines, the federal government wields influence through funding distribution. The Commission, comprised of 18 members lacking expertise in US history, produced a report seeking to diminish the significance of slavery in the nation’s founding and condemned progressivism, likening it to fascism (Crowley & Schuessler, 2021). Named the 1776 Commission—a reference to the year of US independence—the initiative served as a counter to the 1619 Project developed by the *New York Times*, signifying the year enslaved black individuals first arrived in the country (NYTimes, 2019). The 1619 Project aimed to “[...] Reframe the country’s history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of our national narrative (NYTimes, 2019). The 1776 Commission’s report was unveiled on January 18, 2021, just two days before the conclusion of the Trump administration and three days after Martin Luther King’s birthday.

The report spans 45 pages, with the final 25 comprising appendices. It crafts its rendition of the American romantic nationalism. The initial chapters delve into redefining the significance of US independence and the foundational principles of the nation. Subsequently, it examines five challenges to these principles: slavery, progressivism, fascism, communism, racism, and identity politics. The text then outlines tasks essential for national rejuvenation (USA, 2021). In its introduction, the report expresses its intent to “[...] recounting the aspirations and actions of the men and women who sought to build America as [...] an exemplary nation, one that protects the safety and promotes the happiness of its people, as an example to be admired and emulated by nations of the world [...]” (USA, 2021, p. 1), signaling alignment with the concept of romantic nationalism akin to the French perspective. However, the report also acknowledges that “[...] The American story has its share of missteps, errors, contradictions, and wrongs. These wrongs have always met resistance from the clear principles of the nation, and therefore our history is far more one of self-sacrifice, courage, and nobility” (USA, 2021, p. 1). In essence, it concedes that there were past errors, but these were specific deviations contrary to the founding principles. Consequently, they could not endure and had been rectified. Thus, by definition, the report asserts that the USA boasts a history of greatness rooted in irrefutable values.

According to the document, post-US independence, unity prevailed among the people through an “[...] The assertion of universal and eternal principles of justice and political legitimacy” (USA, 2021, p. 3, our translation). The document extensively emphasizes the principle that ‘all men are created equal’ as a counter to what it terms ‘identity politics.’ In its section addressing slavery, it explains that the nation’s founders lived during a time when slavery was normalized and only beginning to face repudiation. It disputes the argument that Northern states, which prohibited slavery, might have hesitated to unite with the Southern states, where the practice persisted, asserting that the country’s union held greater significance. Furthermore, it notes that although most founders opposed slavery, the Constitution did not explicitly ban it. This omission, the document argues, stemmed from a respect for the principle of consent, foundational in a non-authoritarian society. The abolition of slavery is portrayed as a consequence of the nation’s progress, seen as a restoration of its original founding values. Notably absent from this account are mentions of abolitionist movements, and the Civil War is indirectly referenced only concerning the loss of lives: “This conflict was resolved, but at a cost of more than 600,000 lives. Constitutional amendments were passed to abolish slavery, grant equal protection under the law, and guarantee the right to vote regardless of race” (USA, 2021, p. 12).

<sup>9</sup>From the original: “Recentrer l’enseignement autour des savoirs fondamentaux (lire, écrire, compter) à l’école primaire”.

<sup>10</sup>From the original: “Oui, je veux refaire le roman national à l’école, faire aimer la France par son Histoire comme on me l’a faite aimer. Les manuels scolaires sont un tissu de propagande anti-française”.

<sup>11</sup>Trump’s 2016 government program made no mention of school curricula, and the same happened in 2020.



The publication not only glosses over the struggles but seemingly disregards that even after abolition, black individuals faced continued discrimination despite their constitutional rights.

It seems the document acknowledges that despite these measures, racism and unequal treatment persisted: “[...] But it did not bring an end to racism, or to the unequal treatment of blacks everywhere” (USA, 2021, p. 15). There, it references the Ku Klux Klan, the Jim Crow laws enforcing racial segregation in public spaces, and the prolonged barriers imposed to hinder black voting rights. However, it asserts that “[...] a national movement composed of people from different races, ethnicities, nationalities, and religions to bring about an America fully committed to ending legal discrimination” (USA, 2021, p. 15). In other words, the document somehow suggests a widespread rejection of discriminatory practices, which conflicts with historical evidence indicating significant support for such strategies among the white population.

The document, when dealing with the Civil Rights Movement led by Martin Luther King, states that its principles of defending equality between whites and blacks were later distorted:

The Civil Rights Movement was almost immediately turned to programs that ran counter to the lofty ideals of the founders. The ideas that drove this change had been growing in America for decades, and they distorted many areas of policy in the half century that followed. Among the distortions was the abandonment of nondiscrimination and equal opportunity in favor of ‘group rights’ [...]. The justification for reversing the promise of color-blind civil rights was that past discrimination requires present effort, or affirmative action in the form of preferential treatment, to overcome long-accrued inequalities (USA, 2021, p. 15, original emphasis).

Aligned with extreme right-wing principles, the passage above depicts mechanisms aimed at fostering equality as a privilege. Moreover, it launches an attack on the progressive movement while deliberating on the rights to be assured: “Instead of securing fundamental rights grounded in nature, government—operating under a new theory of the ‘living’ Constitution—should constantly evolve to secure evolving rights” (USA, 2021, p. 13, original emphasis). Furthermore, it highlights that “[...] Progressives held that truths were not permanent but only relative to their time” (USA, 2021, p. 13).

To substantiate this critique, the report draws upon the opening statement of the US Declaration of Independence, considering it validated by the “[...] The Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God [...]” (USA, p. 21), refusing to acknowledge that truth and rights could be contingent. According to the report, this would be disrespectful to the people, who were not consulted regarding a shift in the foundational principles. And it goes further, as it equates progressives with fascists: “Like the Progressives, Mussolini sought to centralize power under the management of so-called experts” (USA, 2021, p. 13). The publication critiques both fascism and communism, labeling them as totalitarian systems that negate the individual freedom endowed by God. It is worth noting that the document does not reference indigenous peoples and their history of genocide.

Criticism and ridicule from historians were directed at the report due to its outlandish assertions (Crowley & Schuessler, 2021). The dissolution of the 1776 Commission followed Joe Biden’s assumption of office in January 2021. However, this has not halted efforts to promulgate historical denialism, as the extreme right remains influential, and educational policies fall under state jurisdiction. In Florida, for instance, Governor Ron DeSantis, a Republican contending in the primaries against Trump for the 2024 presidential candidacy, sanctioned legislation passed by the state’s legislature compelling teachers to conceal books associated with the so-called ‘woke culture’ (Bermúdez, 2023). This term encompasses social movements advocating for increased awareness surrounding social, racial, and justice issues. These movements emphasize the need to ‘awaken’ society to the prevailing oppressions and discriminations across various facets of social life.

The notion of national romanticism, replacing historically grounded country narratives, underpins proposals for Disney-esque national parks across the USA, which aim to provide enjoyable experiences for children and young people, featuring pivotal moments of the nation’s conquest and colonization. However, this raises concerning questions about how the extermination of indigenous populations could be trivialized into something entertaining within such theme parks.

Bolsonaro’s (2018, p. 41) government plan emphasized a curriculum focused on “[...] more mathematics, science, and Portuguese” without directly addressing history. Yet, it hinted at the Brazilian extreme right’s apparent inclination toward a nationalistic and romanticized view of history.

It is worth noting that the Brazilian Armed Forces’ history is a source of national pride. Brazilian heroes fought against National Socialism during World War II, being the sole Latin American country to combat the Nazis. Subsequently, other heroes thwarted left-wing forces attempting a communist coup in Brazil in 1964 (Bolsonaro, 2018, p. 34).

The 2022 plan outlines Bolsonaro's intent for his second term to "[...] increase actions focusing on key subjects like Mathematics, Portuguese, History, Geography, and general Science, allowing students to exercise critical thinking devoid of ideological influences" (Bolsonaro, 2022, p. 25). This declaration hints at a desire to shape the school curriculum to align with far-right ideologies, possibly endorsing a narrative of national romanticism, which raises concerns about directing geography toward market-focused perspectives and potentially introducing denialist viewpoints or rebranding creationism as intelligent *design*. Government initiatives aimed at shaping the foundations of certain subjects often reflect characteristics of authoritarian regimes.

During Bolsonaro's administration, the educational reforms initiated by Michel Temer between 2016 and 2018, which diminished the emphasis on teaching History and other social sciences, particularly in high schools, were upheld. At the same time, a surge in resources emerged intending to educate on the 'actual' history of Brazil—portraying a version 'omitted by conventional education.' There seemed to be a push to extract History teaching from what was perceived as potentially indoctrinating educators and hand it over to entrepreneurs capable of presenting a particular version of Brazil<sup>12</sup>. While in the USA and France, efforts lean towards altering historical narratives outside academic norms, here, the focus appears to be on deinstitutionalizing History education. Essentially, the extreme right in Brazil may either advocate for a nationalist reinforcement or a weakening of History education in schools, creating space for a public rendition of history. Furthermore, we delve into the case of Brasil Paralelo, a prominent Brazilian media outlet producing a public narrative aligned with romantic nationalism.

### Far-right about turn! – Brasil Paralelo Productions

Brasil Paralelo (Tudo começa com uma..., n.d.), registered as a legal entity in 2016 according to its *website*, identifies in 2023 as an 'entertainment and education company' committed to uncovering historical truths grounded in factual reality. Its founders, Filipe Valerim, Henrique Viana, and Lucas Ferrugem crossed paths while studying at the Escola Superior de Propaganda e Marketing (ESPM) in Porto Alegre. The content disseminated by the company aligns with conservative and ultra-liberal ideologies, falling in line with the principles of the extreme right. It includes various articles and *eBooks* accessible for free. Primarily, Brasil Paralelo's business model revolves around audiovisual content. As per their website, 10% of their content is freely accessible on YouTube, while the remainder is reserved for subscribers who pay monthly fees ranging from BRL19.90 to BRL59.90. Subscription prices fluctuate based on the content available, with the highest-tier subscription encompassing films, series (both in-house and third-party productions), and courses. Additionally, this tier includes content tailored for children. "Operated through algorithm-driven content propulsion, the company maintains a robust presence on various social networks such as Twitter, Telegram, and Facebook, although its primary engagement occurs on YouTube, hosting a total of 1,717 videos" (Gonzalez, 2022, p. 55).

In the 'About us' tab, we find relevant information about the company. It reveals that in 2022, the group's audiovisual productions garnered over 6.9 million unique viewers and amassed more than 550 thousand subscribers, marking an extraordinary growth of 8000% in six years. Media surveys showcase Brasil Paralelo as the foremost Brazilian advertiser for Meta group products, particularly emphasizing promotions on Facebook and Instagram. According to Granjeia and Almeida (2023), in a report for the Núcleo Jornalístico outlet, between August 2020 and January 2023, the production company spent BRL16.3 million on 48,843 advertisements. Brasil Paralelo's expenditure surpasses Meta's own product promotions—BRL14.1 million on Whatsapp ads and BRL3.4 million on Facebook. Former President Jair Bolsonaro takes the fourth place, with an expenditure of BRL2.7 million.

This substantial investment underscores not just the promotion of Brasil Paralelo but also the far-right field at large, spotlighting its robust financial backing. Besides advertising investments, Brasil Paralelo allocates resources to a team dedicated to enhancing the brand's visibility on search engines like Google. It is crucial to highlight the outcomes of this assertive strategy, which not only draws an audience beyond direct advertisements but, according to the same report, organic engagement would equate to approximately BRL45 million if monetized.

<sup>12</sup>More specifically, we examine Thomas Giuliano Ferreira dos Santos in the episode 'A Cruz e a Espada' (The Cross and the Sword), part of the series 'Brasil, a última cruzada' (Brazil, the Last Crusade). Presently, the company has restricted access to subscribers (<https://www.brasilparalelo.com.br/episodios-series/a-cruz-e-a-espada>), but users share the episode on other YouTube accounts, making it widely available.

Another report, featured in Forbes Magazine in 2021 by Alejandro Chafuen (2021), surveyed leading *think tanks* and companies globally producing educational videos advocating for pro-free market ideologies. Topping the *rankings* is the PragerU platform (short for *Prager University Foundation*), an open-access platform aimed at “[...] promoting American values through creative educational videos to reach millions of people” (PragerU, 2023). Similar to Brasil Paralelo, PragerU does not mandate a subscription fee but relies on voluntary donations. Its video section includes brief productions covering economics, politics, race, culture, American values, environmental issues, freedom of expression, and history. These subjects align closely with far-right discussions, emphasizing denial of racism, climate change skepticism, concerns regarding cultural conflicts, staunch defense of unrestricted free speech, and a heroized version of history devoid of negative connotations. In this report, Brasil Paralelo is referred to as the “free society’s Netflix.” Interviewed by the report, Lucas Ferrugem stated: “We are frequently targeted by false accusations, smears, and cancellation attempts by partisan and ideological groups. However, [...] this has little impact on the general public and only strengthens our stance against the Brazilian *establishment*.”

The concept of an ongoing war is prevalent in the rhetoric of the extreme right and extensively exploited by Brasil Paralelo, as we will illustrate in our analyses. Specifically, the Crusades hold a position of reverence. We posit that the extreme right views the Crusades as a blueprint for life—an ongoing holy war, not merely confined to moral realms but extending to combat ideologies like communism. Sauvêtre, Laval, Guéguen, and Dardot (2021, p. 23) assert that neoliberalism, “[...] from its inception, is rooted in a fundamental choice: the embracing of a civil war.” As highlighted by authors such as Brown (2019) and Lazzarato (2019), neoliberalism inherently opposes the well-being of the people and necessitates opposition to democracy for its sustenance. Extending this principle, associating radical free-market advocacy with politically authoritarian regimes, we argue that the extreme right intensifies this inclination toward war.

Neoliberal civil war operates on multiple fronts: against democracy, social policies, and workers’ rights. However, on the extreme front, the battles over moral values and ways of life take precedence. That which Hunter (1991) termed ‘cultural wars’ in the early 1990s is unfolding. Cultural wars, as defined by the author, are “political and social hostilities rooted in distinct moral systems” (Hunter, 1991, p. 42), leading to political divides based on moral authority. For the extreme right, winning the cultural war is imperative to preserve an idealized world under threat. “[They] envision unconventional paths to a pristine past, a redeeming human agency, and a hierarchically ordered world” (Harding & Steward, 2021, cited in Cesarino, 2022, p. 230).

An examination of data from Chafuen’s report (2021) asserts that platformization and algorithmization play crucial roles in disseminating and solidifying the ideas of what can be termed a transnational far-right network, which exhibits substantial overlaps in fostering adherents to its principles, ideas, and anti-systemic stance. In ‘The Engineers of Chaos,’ Empoli (2021) explores the phenomenon through the lens of the 5-Star Movement in Italy. Its rise is based on the charismatic figure of comedian Beppe Grillo. However, the architect behind this sophisticated endeavor was Gianroberto Casaleggio, a discreet expert in digital *marketing* who envisioned Grillo as the ideal figure to materialize his political vision. The 5-star self-identifies as anti-establishment, presenting as a movement rather than a traditional party, despite its positions aligning it closely with the extreme end of the political spectrum. It chiefly embodies populist ideologies, challenging the existing system and decrying elite exploitation of the State. According to Empoli (2021), Casaleggio asserted that his interest lay not in politics but in public opinion. Their efforts were dedicated to shaping public opinion, transforming politics into a product targeting voter-consumers. Casaleggio engineered an intricately designed digital campaign, utilizing the comedian’s charisma to infuse it with warmth and passion.

The initial offensive began with a *blog* in 2005, rapidly becoming Italy’s most visited *website* of the kind. In 2007, they integrated a platform named *Meetup*, facilitating discussion group organization. The notion they sold was one of an organization streamlining political participation by sidestepping cumbersome party bureaucracies and where anyone could voice their opinion. Participant numbers surged, displaying fervent engagement. However, active involvement in online networks did not translate into effective participation within the Movement’s direction and saw instances of censorship for dissent. Casaleggio centralized decisions, operating from the background while handpicking leaders to represent the Movement. Gradually, they navigated their way into the political system. Continuous monitoring of networks involved analyzing followers’ reactions to posts and determining subsequent actions based on these insights. Publications were tailored for different segments to boost engagement, with no restrictions on *trolling*, fake news, or conspiracy theories. Studies consistently reveal that false content, particularly with conspiratorial elements, generates significantly higher engagement than factual content.

In 2013, Grillo/Casaleggio secured 25% of the votes, making their party the most voted in Italy. While the study primarily focuses on the ‘5 Star Movement,’ it illustrates that a similar *modus operandi* is employed by other far-right politicians. Arguably, Grillo served as the essential figurehead to endorse a heavily platformed and algorithm-driven strategy, akin to what unfolded during the rise of Trump or Bolsonaro. In this context, we can view Brasil Paralelo as a constituent of a broad digital ecosystem bolstering the extreme right in Brazil.

In a 2022 post (“Why do they call Brasil Paralelo...,” 2022), the *website* articulates that the company was established with the goal of “[...] reclaiming the positive values, ideas, and sentiments residing in the hearts of all Brazilians.” Gonzalez (2022) emphasizes that Brasil Paralelo adopts a militant business model, indicating that it profits by advocating for a specific ideology. According to Nunes (2022), the fact that political entrepreneurs profit from their ventures does not mean that they have an instrumental relationship with the defense of their ideas. They effectively believe in a society in which ‘everyone knows their place’ and argue that survival must be guaranteed by the merit of those capable of beating the competition. According to the author, Bolsonarism evolved as a movement supported by entrepreneurship, owing to its advocacy for this practice and its pivotal role in its establishment. The middle class, although benefiting from the years of PT governments, cultivated a series of resentments, directed both at those who were better off and at the humblest. This demographic resented the economic elite for its wealth and the cultural elite for its symbols of distinction. Simultaneously, they felt animosity toward the poorest, perceiving a diminishing gap between them. It’s within this segment that the extreme right finds its most devoted audience—individuals who perceive new career avenues through their activism. *Influencers* and *YouTubers* championing traditional values, combating communism, and praising patriotism resonate deeply with this audience. They leverage social networks to amass political capital that often translates into economic gains.

Nunes (2022) highlights a difference from historical fascism: while it was founded on highly organized mass groups, the contemporary extreme right comprises a swarm of entrepreneurs catering to a demographic fueled by hurt, grudges, and frustrations, while sheltering each other through offering simplistic solutions. The author draws a parallel between far-right agitators and *coaches*, positioning themselves as objects of admiration, fostering a form of ‘cruel optimism’ among their audience. A significant portion of far-right entrepreneurs’ gains stem from presenting exclusive truths accessible only to a select few officials, aligning with the spiritual aspect discussed by Cesarino (2022). They portray themselves as rebels, capable of diverging from common beliefs, promoting *freelance* thinking (Nunes, 2022).

As observed, Brasil Paralelo heavily invests in advertising. However, for their business to thrive, there is the need to create a public perception of organic content, shared and accessed spontaneously. The producer, amassing a growing content library, focuses on “[...] creating multiplatform communication ecosystems that form a closed circuit, progressively constructing parallel worlds” (Nunes, 2022). Yet, this parallel Brazil diverges from the Brazil depicted in schools and on the streets, with its cultural diversity and marginalized communities.

## Diversity about turn! – Educational Culture

In a sizable public elementary and secondary school situated in Porto Alegre’s eastern zone, near one of the city’s radial avenues. First half of 2023. One of our team members arrived early in the morning for an ethnographic observation, finding students already gathered around the central gate, awaiting access to the school premises. The external walls adorned with murals painted by student groups depicted themes encompassing the environment, sustainability, traffic education, ethnic-racial relations, forthcoming projects, school appreciation, countering hate speech and urban violence, cultural and musical elements representative of youth cultures, and concerns regarding religious intolerance. Engaging the students in conversation revealed the deeper meanings behind these artistic expressions. Then the gates open. We are allowed to entry upon identification, as our visit had been previously arranged. Inside the expansive cafeteria, male and female students enjoyed their first meal of the day. The food was sourced from family farms in the Metropolitan Region of Porto Alegre, following national public policies. The cafeteria staff mentioned that for mid-morning and mid-afternoon meals, mothers’ clubs in two nearby neighborhoods provided snacks and sweets via a community fund, thereby financially supporting these families. Conversations took place with teachers at various intervals throughout the morning. There are two African-American teachers adorned with accessories resembling African clothing. The music instructor is a young African-American man with *dreadlocks* similar to those sported by other African-American male students. The school boasts four musical

collectives and a small band. Observations were made during two periods of high school History classes. The class predominantly consists of girls, including those of brown and black ethnicity, actively engaging in discussions. Two openly *gay* students are visible, along with a girl who, while participating in the teacher-led debate, draws a connection between her experience as a lesbian facing prejudice and the topic of the class—racism, seen as a foundational aspect of Brazilian society. The class collectively recalls recent instances of ‘slave labor’ in wineries in Rio Grande do Sul. During the session, the morning shift’s vice-principal enters the room to announce the availability of a ballot box for student representation elections on the school council during recess. Both individual students and candidates are participating in the elections.

The bell rings. The day is designated as an ‘extended recess,’ occurring once a week on varying days, extending for 35 minutes, so students organize various activities during this time. Two *funk* groups occupy a specific area of the large courtyard, engaging in dance and lively exchanges. Meanwhile, a group of black girls stages a theatrical performance elsewhere on the patio, expressing their life aspirations. On one court, two mixed-gender teams engage in a spirited football match with fervent cheers. Simultaneously, the other court hosts young individuals sitting in small groups on the floor, conversing, enjoying music, socializing, dating, playing cards, and flipping through magazines. A group of students takes over the lengthy second-floor corridor, overlooking the courtyard from the building’s balconies. Colorful banners adorned with various drawings and messages express criticism of the New High School system, advocate for diversity in schools, and protest against school violence and the tragic killings of students and educators. Different musical styles compete for auditory attention in the background. Amidst this vibrant scene, students move in and out of the cafeteria for lunch, while others queue up to cast their votes for the school board election. Managed by the residents’ association, the school canteen also sells soft drinks to students. In the art room, three boys work on painting the door under the guidance of their teacher. Two young individuals who identify as gender non-conforming crossdressers create a *performance* reminiscent of a fashion show on a makeshift catwalk, being cheered up by a group of girls.

When the bell rings again, there is a slow movement back to the classrooms. All banners and posters remain exposed. Part of what we observed here, in terms of school culture and daily school life, is the result of the intense participation – and politicization – that this community underwent during the school occupation movement in 2016, as discussed in Seffner (2017). During that time, the students led a culturally and politically charged environment at the school for 45 days, supported by parents, families, and local businesses who kept them fed. The school received coverage on television programs and welcomed visits from politically active figures in the city, as evidenced by the visitor logbook showcased in the lobby.

This snapshot of school culture and daily life, stemming from the intense involvement—and politicization—during the 2016 school occupation movement, is part of the ethnographic work described methodologically in Seffner (2020a; 2020b). It sheds light on key figures, networks, and social movements that presently shape school culture and assert their significance within it. The vibrant tapestry of characters within this school community encompasses black and brown boys and girls, white students, LGBTQIAPN+ individuals, and women among both students and faculty, with distinct youth culture groups revolving somewhat around musical affinities. Noteworthy networks include connections with family farming and community associations of women and neighborhood residents. From the social movements, the activism around the abolition of the so-called New Secondary Education, as well as activism on topics of gender and sexuality and race and youth, and the concern with the issue of violence and conflict, particularly hate speech that circulates in society, as well as the discourse of gender equality, are particularly noteworthy. The school council election aligns with the constitutional principle of democratic school governance, reflecting public policy. The History class delved into sensitive topics, particularly the legacies and contemporary implications of black slavery, sparking discussions on stigma, prejudice, and discrimination.

Within the school culture, we observed the circulation of diverse historical narratives and active participation, aligning with the concepts of democratic intensity, democratic density, and participatory democracy outlined in Santos and Avritzer (2009). While differing political viewpoints exist, they approach each other as adversaries rather than enemies. This fosters affirmation of various voices and dialogues among different perspectives, fostering coexistence in the school culture by valuing cultural, ethnic, and social diversity. This dynamic political environment partly stems from the accomplishments of the 1988 Federal Constitution, commonly known as the Citizen Constitution. It established funding mechanisms for public schooling, enabling an unprecedented process of inclusion of children and young people in schools, a landmark achievement in Brazilian history. Beyond mere access, public policies like the Bolsa Família

Program, Guardianship Councils, school transport, school meals, and provision of textbooks and school materials have actively worked toward ensuring school retention. This shift in the student demographic profile has transformed Brazilian public schools into more diverse institutions, mirroring what could be termed 'the true demographic face of Brazil. Classrooms are now predominantly comprised of girls, black and brown individuals, diverse sexual orientations, varying religious affiliations, emanating from households of different configurations, adhering to multiple ideologies and political orientations. The student body encompasses many youth cultures, embracing a spectrum of musical and cultural idols, from *rap* to nativist music.

The rich tapestry of cultural and pedagogical diversity has profoundly influenced various aspects of education. Curricula have expanded to encompass crucial subjects like gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, sustainability and environmental studies, and the examination of societal inequalities. School regulations now integrate mechanisms aligning with the constitutional principle of democratic school management. The civic calendar has broadened to include celebrations of milestones and figures that better represent the diverse cultures within the United States. Textbooks have transformed, reaching all students and supplemented with digital resources. They now embrace themes reflecting the concerns of communities with more inclusive representation. Humanities classes, particularly History, have evolved significantly. They now include education on ethnic-racial relations, women's history, gender relations, the history of sexuality, African peoples' history, indigenous narratives, and the history of native peoples. These classes navigate sensitive topics and persistent historical narratives. They delve into the complex political and economic realities of the contemporary world, encompassing the histories of China, India, and the Middle East in modern times rather than solely focusing on ancient records. Moreover, there's a decisive shift in handling historical sources beyond traditional positivist biases that solely rely on written documents stored in archives, as discussed in Pereira and Seffner (2008). What we witness here is a battleground for defining Brazil's history. There is an inherent tension between the linear, glorified romantic nationalism—inexcusably white and patriarchal—propagated by Brasil Paralelo and the complex, multifaceted history promoted in schools fostering a democratic and culturally diverse school culture.

## Democracy about turn! – Public History VS School History

This cultural, pedagogical, and equally political movement steers school culture in a markedly different direction from the productions of Brasil Paralelo. According to Nicolazzi (2022) and our review of the production company's materials, Brasil Paralelo constructs a historical narrative shaping public history, affecting present and future projects, particularly for children and young people. Understanding the political utilization of historical narratives and their consequences is crucial. They play a significant role in contemporary political spaces, positioning themselves for or against certain groups while advocating for or criticizing particular societal models. Against whom, and for whom, do they position themselves? What model of society do they defend, criticize, or devalue?

Brasil Paralelo's ideology centers on combatting perceived left-wing influences, labeling them as cultural Marxism pervasive in History classes, academic research, and Brazilian education as a whole. Their approach seems geared toward erasing social markers—race, region, gender, sexuality, religion, generation, class, family, ideology, and party affiliation—abundant in today's school culture. These markers serve as vehicles for political activism among diverse social groups Brasil Paralelo's historical education endeavors carry a clear right-wing bias, at times delving into the extreme right, often promoting hate speech. This historical education takes on two forms: public dissemination aimed at non-school audiences, favoring audiovisual materials and public lectures, and serving as sources for school research. Notably, it disregards traditional textbooks and the teachings of educators. This alignment with initiatives such as the "school movement without a party" and the "gender ideology movement" is highlighted by Barzotto and Seffner (2020) in their analysis of the *website* "De Olho no Livro Didático,"<sup>13</sup> aiming to discredit teaching materials. As analyzed, the story propagated by Brasil Paralelo takes the form of 'romantic nationalism' (Citron, 2017).

The historical narrative presented by Brasil Paralelo deliberately omits and distorts critical aspects of Brazilian history, significantly impacting ongoing contemporary struggles. The assertion that 'there are no indigenous people, only Brazilian people,' recurrent in their works, undermines the long-lasting struggles of indigenous communities. Similarly, Brasil Paralelo's historical narrative treats slavery merely as a moral issue, seemingly overlooking its role in generating lasting structural inequalities within Brazilian society. According

<sup>13</sup>Achieved from [https://www.facebook.com/deolhonolivrodidatico/?locale=pt\\_BR](https://www.facebook.com/deolhonolivrodidatico/?locale=pt_BR)

to their narrative, the moment the ruling, predominantly white, classes recognized slavery as a moral transgression, Princess Isabel ratified the Golden Law, supposedly resolving slavery and granting freedom to black individuals. This perspective disregards slavery's role as a foundational economic and societal element, leaving behind not only a legacy of inequality but also perpetuating mechanisms that sustain the inferiority and poverty experienced by the black and brown populations; mechanisms that persist in the form of a lingering past, contributing to contemporary issues such as modern-day slavery, a prevalent facet of Brazil's economic landscape.

In 'The Last Crusade,' a successful series produced by the producers, the focus lies on elevating the Portuguese monarchy as the key architect of Brazilian identity. Along with that, their narrative emphasizes the contributions of white men of European descent in the nation's construction, in close collaboration with the Catholic religion, which is presented as a unifying force in shaping national identity. The warlike portrayal of the 'last crusade' overtly opposes any political activism aiming to spotlight the pivotal roles played by various social groups in Brazilian history apart from the dominant narrative. Within *Brasil Paralelo*'s storyline, women's presence in history remains limited to figures like Princess Isabel and Empress Leopoldina. Various marginalized groups, such as indigenous peoples, impoverished women, black and brown communities, LGBTQIAPN+ individuals, persons with disabilities, families advocating alternative organizational models beyond the traditional monogamous and heterosexual ideals, Eastern migrants such as the Chinese and Japanese, practitioners of African-based religions, other Latin American communities, among others, are not recognized or often excluded from the tale crafted by *Brasil Paralelo*. Nevertheless, these groups are integral to classroom settings and representative of the demographic makeup of the Brazilian population.

The producer's documentaries critique policies like racial quotas, inclusion measures for gender non-conforming crossdressers, transsexuals, indigenous peoples, and students from public schools, all in favor of advocating individual merit. Notably absent from these documentaries is any consideration of historical reparations. Such political manipulation of historical narratives in their productions solidifies patriarchal, monarchical, and Eurocentric ideals, emphasizing whiteness, promoting Catholicism as the defining national religion, highlighting Portuguese dominance while erasing the identities and histories of other peoples, and glorifying 19th-century European traditions. This constructed historical discourse significantly impacts the present, conflicting starkly with the diverse elements observed in the school culture we documented during our visit to a typical public school in Rio Grande do Sul's capital. Situated in a lower middle-class neighborhood, this school draws students from the city's poorest regions due to its proximity to a major radial avenue linking the city center to peripheral areas.

However, the narratives in the producer's works fail to acknowledge diverse approaches to narrating history. Instead, they vehemently defend a Eurocentric, singular, and patriarchal model, glorifying white, male, and heterosexual figures as heroes, clinging to outdated 19th-century European ideals, evident in their focus on the imperial family's portrayal. It is important to note that Brazil spent nearly the entire 19th century as a nation reliant on slavery, a history vastly different from that of most other countries worldwide. As previously mentioned, this 'moral sin' was eradicated by the Golden Law, leaving no lingering traces. Today, we stand as equals—unified as 'the Brazilian people' in our patriotic duty. This accentuates a specific continuity in the essence of our nation, where the privilege of command, exemplified by the country's eminent figures, is perceived as somewhat natural. The diverse social fabric of Brazil, with its clashes, connections, errors, conflicts, agreements, disagreements, regional struggles, centralized and decentralized efforts, federative aspirations versus centralized power, moments of dictatorship, and the return to democracy, is wholly and deliberately overlooked. These episodes are intentionally 'forgotten.' This intentional omission leads to the erosion of educational authority vested in male and female educators, which is a constitutional principle: the freedom to teach and the acknowledgment of pedagogical diversity. The value of democracy as a political regime that upholds the right to have rights, serving as the optimal strategy to manage dissent and achieve temporary and fragile consensus for the governance of political and economic life through pacts, alliances, disputes, and conflict resolution mechanisms, is not duly recognized.

The narrative produced also blurs the lines between private and public spheres, deliberately disregarding the 1988 Federal Constitution's stance that education is a joint responsibility of the state and the family, each with its autonomy. *Brasil Paralelo* views the family as the guiding force behind education, explaining its alignment with homeschooling proposals. It presents itself as a provider of pedagogical resources for fathers and mothers to educate their children about the country's history, bypassing state public policies, and Brazilian public schools. With a notable inclination toward the militarization of political life and the

promotion of extreme right-wing ideas, Brasil Paralelo's productions consistently advocate for a moderating power to oversee democracy, which could potentially be executed by the royal family—a frequent presence in their documentaries—and the institution regarded as the most patriotic and loyal of all: the armed forces. The monarchy is depicted as an enduring system, historically governing the people and fostering dynasties, supposedly grooming individuals better equipped for leadership, relegating the role of being governed to the vast majority. Brasil Paralelo aligns itself with conservative and right-wing movements, with a clear inclination toward the extreme right that is evident in the dissemination of hate speech, notably portrayed in the depiction of the clash between Christianity, portrayed as an eternal presence, and Islam, introduced at a specific historical juncture and associated with notions of barbarism and invasion. Consequently, it is positioned as an adversary of civilization—a theme partly reflected in the title of their most renowned documentary, 'The Last Crusade.'

As a successful public history initiative, Brasil Paralelo competes with formal historical education in schools, offering an alternative narrative of Brazilian history through documentaries striving to convey the 'actual' history. Thus, it contributes to the emptying of formal spaces for research, production, and dissemination of knowledge, in the form of social mediators. Their productions lack the presentation of historical sources and, more significantly, fail to engage with established historiographical research. Consequently, students are deprived of engaging in crucial discussions about the theory of history, such as source validation, methodological selection and application, scientific methodologies, theory interpretation, and the context of discourse. We underscore the epigraph of this article: "Don't get me wrong; whoever discovered Brazil, it wasn't Cabral," by MC Carol. The epigraph is not meant as an act of forgetfulness. Instead, it serves as a reminder of the multifaceted 'Brazils'—the indigenous peoples, the intricate construction of this nation named Brazil—comprising a diversity of forces and influences. The song's lyrics point to the inception of the narrative, while Brasil Paralelo's productions epitomize its limitation. The historical narrative's inception highlights the protagonism of numerous social groups, while its limitation symbolizes the preservation of a singular storyline.

## Final considerations

As delineated throughout this article, the extreme right in France, the USA, and Brazil endeavors to construct a narrative steeped in romantic nationalism (Citron, 2017), adopting linear, heroic storytelling to foster patriotism and uphold traditional values. However, while the extreme right, organized in a partisan fashion in France and the USA, seeks to influence school curricula by reshaping widely accepted historiography into a sanitized version, the movement in Brazil has taken a slightly different trajectory: the teaching of history is gradually diminishing within the school curriculum. Simultaneously, platforms like the production company Brasil Paralelo have been filling this void by presenting a public narrative. In essence, while France and the USA aim to institutionalize historiography that academia no longer supports, Brazil strives to dismantle the institutional teaching of history.

The analyses conducted illuminate various parallels among the extreme right's historiographical versions in the three countries. The treatment of slavery in Brazil and the USA follows a similar pattern: in Report 1776 (USA, 2021), it is depicted as a departure from the nation's foundational principles, with its abolition being portrayed as a natural correction of said mistake. Similarly, Brasil Paralelo views it as a moral failing rectified by the actions of a noble, white woman. In both cases, there is a failure to acknowledge racism as a foundational element in these societies, with the consequences of slavery being depicted as resolved issues.

Brasil Paralelo, through its series 'The Last Crusade,' extols Christianity for its valor in championing the crusades, portraying it as a battle for values. Such crusades allude to engagements in political activism, which may include combatting communism and gender ideology, among others. They are perceived as a lifestyle advocating a perpetual struggle in defense of traditional values. The crusade against the so-called *woke* culture, prevalent among the French and American extreme right, follows the same line of thought. As observed, in 2023, the Governor of Florida, Ron DeSantis, signed a law mandating schools to conceal books falling within this particular spectrum. Trump (Alfonseca, 2023), Marine Le Pen (Sulzer, 2023), and Zemmour (Zemmour, 2022a) champion a battle against what they have labeled as *wokism*. A shared aspect is the use of the notion of universal equality to oppose affirmative action initiatives targeting black individuals, a perspective evident in both Report 1776 and the productions of Brasil Paralelo, portraying these strategies as unjustifiable privileges.



Brasil Paralelo endorses the family as the primary guiding force in education and advocates for homeschooling—a practice widespread in the USA. Conversely, in France, Marine Le Pen supports bolstering history education in schools attended by more vulnerable children, many of whom are from immigrant families associated with Islamic values. In this context, the family does not dictate school actions, and the Islamic family is deemed unable to guide school actions due to its perceived deviation from ‘good Christian family values.’

A noteworthy divergence among the three countries is their relationship with monarchy. In France, a country proud of its revolutionary past that established the republic, there is no inclination toward praising the old nobility or nostalgia for the former regime. Similarly, in the USA, pride is derived from breaking away from England and its royal clutch. “At the time of the American founding, the most widespread claim was a form of the divine right of kings, that is to say, the assertion that God appoints some men, or some families, to rule and consigns the rest to be ruled. The American founders rejected that claim” (USA, 2021, p. 4). However, in its series, Brasil Paralelo portrays a tendency to worship connections with the Portuguese court, suggesting that the colonization bringing Europeans to Brazil was pivotal in enhancing the country’s qualifications.

Simultaneously, while the extreme right in these three nations endeavors to impose a white, Eurocentric, patriarchal, and Christian narrative of history, the populace is diverse and lacks representation in these dominant national narratives. Educators ardently contest these sanitized renditions to reintroduce overlooked subjects<sup>14</sup> into the historical discourse.

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<sup>14</sup> Foucault (2003) delves into the lives of these overlooked figures, those devoid of fame, omitted from historical treatises. These were individuals whose existence is documented in fragmentary records—be it a brief poem or a complaint lodged within the judicial system. Characters long forgotten, who “[...] were themselves obscure; that nothing predisposed them to any flash of light, that they were not endowed with any of these established and recognized greatnesses – those of birth, fortune, sanctity, heroism or genius; that belonged to those thousands of existences destined to pass without leaving a trace” (Foucault, 2003, p. 207).

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#### NOTE:

This article is the result of investigations carried out by both authors. Karla Saraiva dedicated herself to analyzing documents related to Trumpism and the extreme right in France, as well as videos from Brasil Paralelo. Fernando Seffner developed the ethnography of school culture and contributed to the analysis of the productions of Brasil Paralelo. The text of the article was written jointly, with contributions from both researchers in all sections.