



Childhood and its Regimes of Visibility in Brazil

An Analysis of the Contribution of the Social Sciences

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abstract: This article analyses the contribution of the social sciences to the visibility of children's issues in Brazilian society from the 1960s to the present day. The first regime of visibility considered childhood a relevant structural component of social inequalities, a 'social problem', stimulating social scientists to support social policies. Studies of children's labour and, most importantly, of educational issues stimulated a variety of research directions. The second regime of visibility disclosed the actor behind the child, revealing the child as a social actor and a subject of rights. Childhood studies gained impetus on account of new legislation following the internationalization of children's rights. Despite the broader scope of issues that social research on childhood has addressed, more sustained investment is needed so that childhood can attain a more equal position vis-a-vis other more salient research topics, and secure, de facto, the role of active participants in social life for children.

keywords: Brazil ♦ childhood ♦ children's rights ♦ social image ♦ social problem ♦ social sciences ♦ society ♦ visibility

Introduction

The size of the population of children (0–14 years) in South America – about 140 million – should suggest the importance of this social category in society and a corresponding participation in society's resources. In

Brazil, the population of children up to 14 consists of approximately 48,600 million, out of 170 million inhabitants, comprising almost 30 percent of the total population (IBGE, 2003). The social reality of children's lives shows a situation of increasing gravity: there is high infant mortality (average of 28.7 deaths per thousand infants), malnutrition, prostitution and truancy (1.6 million out of 27 million between seven and 14 years of age).¹ Problems affecting children are taken for granted and do not invoke the urgent attention they demand, while macro-economic issues, such as inflation indices, the decrease or increase of the national gross product and so forth, are emphasized as priorities on the public agenda. Children seem to represent the recondite aspect of national problems, placed within a nebulous frame that combines zealous domesticity, self-indulgent national pride and a casual political attitude.

Wintersberger (1996), in his analysis of modern childhood based mainly on data from Western Europe, concludes that, despite some optimistic perspectives, children, in comparison to all other social categories, have benefited least from economic growth and the expansion of social policies and rights. The child, as an object of provision and protection of modern societies, has not been emancipated into a subject of participation as stated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, since the practical material conditions and the balance of power continue to discriminate against the child. If this is the situation in Western Europe, it is still worse in South American countries, where even for large numbers of the adult population redistributive mechanisms, if they exist at all, have had low impact on eradicating poverty and illiteracy.

In such a scenario, our purpose here is to examine the contribution of the social sciences in Brazil towards the visibility of children as subjects and social actors and the nature of their contribution to society. How have children's issues redirected and engaged Brazilian social scientists' interests and investments in an attempt to revert the 'structural inconsiderateness of society vis-à-vis children' (Kaufmann, 1990, quoted in Qvortrup, 1993)? We examine how children have been taken up as an object of enquiry and concern, and how children's issues have been constructed, establishing thereby the nature of the academic status of children in the Brazilian sociological debate. In this vein, we are interested in accessing the impact of children's issues in the social sciences' scientific production and on current public policies concerning children. The analysis allows us to articulate children's issues and crystallized values and beliefs about Brazilian society, and the ways in which social scientific debates have contributed to such normative understandings.

The general picture that emerges in our analysis shows the very timid investment of sociological contribution to 'revert the structural

inconsiderateness of society vis-à-vis children'. We consider some possible reasons to account for such a situation, highlighting the historical formation and the establishment of the field of the social sciences in Brazil, its main theoretical undertakings and the status of children in sociological reflection from past to the present moment.

To be noted as well is the fact that children's issues in Brazil are embedded in the tensions brought about by the peripheral location of Brazil in the world system. Situated in the periphery of the western world, Brazilian scholarship is indebted to European and North American production, which confronts it at first glance with a difficult task: that of establishing the particularities of the 'child question' in Brazil given the overall identification with how the child question is dealt with internationally. As with any identification process, this can result in either over-identifications or under-identifications, the former qualifying as a relationship of absence of critical distancing, and the latter, as a retraction/closure from the external world and an illusory omnipotent control over its influence.

In the case of children and childhood, tensions derive, for instance, from the historical trajectories of childhood constructions which are likely to be criss-crossed by international developments, such the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, positing a universal conception of children and their universal rights. The rhetoric of modernization and, today, of globalization can exert a seductive effect on peripheral countries keen to assume modernized indices of social development, even if they do not reflect deep and enduring changes in their long-established cultural practices.

From Invisibility to Visibility: Childhood as a 'Social Problem' between the 1960s and 1980s

Important social thinkers in Brazil in the beginning of the 20th century were qualified doctors and lawyers who generally went abroad to study. Worthy of mention is Nina Rodrigues, considered a precursor of the social sciences in Brazil for his work in anthropology. Rodrigues was the mentor of a 'school', one of the main tenets of which posited the relationship between biological predispositions and criminality at a young age (Rodrigues, 1904, 1957 [1938]). Influenced by Spencer's positivism and hygienic paediatrics, Rodrigues and other doctors like Moncorvo Filho (1917, 1926) proposed a medicalized view of society, considered an organism that needed to be looked after and treated. Moncorvo Filho's ideas about child-rearing were widely disseminated, having become an important normative reference for the nascent bourgeoisie of early 20th-century Brazil. Another important reference is Manoel Bomfim, a doctor and an educator, whose works (Bomfim, 1926,

1931, 1932, 1993) point to the importance of educating children in order that Brazil overcome its positionally developmental deficit in relation to other countries, such as the US.

Social sciences have been institutionally established in Brazil as academic departments since the late 1950s as one sole department. In the 1980s, a division between sociology, anthropology and political science was gradually established. One of the first social sciences departments was created in the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of São Paulo (USP) which has had a leading role in the development of the field in Brazil. Florestan Fernandes and Caio Prado Júnior are the foremost references in this regard, Fernandes trained as a social scientist and Caio Prado as a lawyer. Both of them became professors at this same university.

The political and economic momentum of the country directed social scientists' investments towards the more salient themes of a teetering democracy that, since the proclamation of the Republic in 1889, had undergone several periods of military and civil dictatorships (1891–4; 1937–45 and 1964–84). The role of the state and its institutions, as well as issues deriving from the establishment of a modernized economy, became the foci of social sciences' endeavours. The 1960s were fertile for studies that analysed the structural determinants of underdevelopment of peripheral economies like Brazil – the contribution of Celso Furtado (1956, 1958, 1959, 1961, 1962, 1966) is one example² – and the social and political tensions resulting from industrialization and urbanization, transformations taking place in a predominantly rural and oligarchic society based on slave labour for almost 400 years (Fernandes, 1958, 1959, 1960, 1968, 1973; Prado Jr, 1954, 1966, 1975, 1987).

Social sciences thus mapped their initial research interests guided by macro issues related to the impasses and contradictions of a wanting-to-be modern nation marked by its historical underpinnings of colonization, slave labour and a sugar, later coffee, monoculture of exporting commodities. Social inequalities have remained to the present day the inescapable problem facing social scientists. In this context, childhood issues have remained captive and subordinate to this grand theme, making sparkling appearances only here and there in the social sciences debate, which was firmly situated in the Marxist theoretical analytical tradition.

One important focus of research interest centred on the formation of the working classes, especially in the state of São Paulo, where the first industries were installed recruiting immigrant labour. Studies of socialization processes became one of the first ways of highlighting children, as shown by the seminal study of Fernandes (1961), written as a discipline report when he was still an undergraduate student, and later published with the aid of his supervisor, the French sociologist Roger Bastide. In this study of children's

social life, he examined how children of immigrant workers in the city of São Paulo played and learnt old Luso-Brazilian songs. In a clear attempt to see children as active participants in social life, he considered the importance of children in transmitting their knowledge to their immigrant parents, suggesting a sort of 'inverted socialization process' from children to parents. Quite a while before that, in the 1930s, Freyre, another eminent Brazilian social scientist, wrote an extensive sociohistorical study of Brazil (Freyre, 2005 [1933]), where children were depicted as relevant actors in reinventing, together with their slave nannies, linguistic, social and cultural practices. Portuguese vocabulary, syntax, semantics, as well as eating, dressing and sleeping habits were transformed in the privatized and secluded territory of the home as the result of the continuous and intimate interaction between children and women slaves. Thus, even considering the subordinate position of both slaves and children in a patriarchal rural society such as that of colonial Brazil, Freyre provided insightful inspiration about the active role of children in the reproduction of cultural and linguistic social practices.

Unfortunately, such seminal inspirations were not followed systematically, providing no salient research guidelines for other researchers in the decades afterwards. As far as Fernandes is concerned, the theme of childhood did not even return in the whole of his important oeuvre as a social scientist. For many reasons that cannot be developed here, Freyre's work has stood apart from mainstream sociology, so that his important contribution on children remained very limited.

As a general point, it is possible to say that, between the 1960s and 1980s, issues concerning children and childhood for Brazilian social scientists were subordinate to topics such as the formation of social classes, migration and urbanization. During the first half of the 20th century, a contingent of non-qualified, unemployed, migrant or formerly slave people increased the bulging problems of Brazil's major cities, such as Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. The problem of abandoned and neglected children was associated with the overall contradictions of the Brazilian modernization process, which failed to provide basic education, housing and employment for the increasing numbers of poor urban masses.

A systematic analysis of the social sciences' contribution to children's issues in the period between 1960 and 1985 was carried out by Alvim and Valladares, who published a review article in 1988 titled 'Childhood and Society in Brazil: An Analysis of the Literature'. They content-analysed 212 publications, both academic as well as governmental, which tackled poor children's fate, such as abandonment, neglect and delinquency. The relevant literature focused on themes which included: delinquency

and criminality, child labour, legislation on the 'minor', the poor child's family, the institutionalized minor and its problems, socioeconomic characteristics of the poor child, history of poor childhood, street children and social policies for minors. As an anthropologist and a sociologist, respectively, Alvim and Valladares pioneered the mapping of the social sciences literature on childhood with a view to make a point about the importance of social demands coming from the neglected poor child population. For Alvim and Valladares, it is to the poor child that social sciences must turn to provide relevant knowledge to those who make policies and deal directly with children. Thus, giving visibility to childhood as a 'social problem' was central to putting children on the agenda of public and political concerns. It is noteworthy that only poor children could be made visible through this operation. Childhood, confined to lower class children, is reconstructed as the victimized social actor of adverse and grave social problems, which despite referring to the majority of the Brazilian population, made of children their most defenceless victims, thus pleading for society's concern and the state's attention.

The increasing number of children wandering about the streets and the significant incidence of crimes committed by children led the Justice Court of the state of São Paulo to demand an inquiry by the Brazilian Centre of Planning and Analysis (CEBRAP, 1972) to back up social policies for this group. The resulting work, *The Child, the Adolescent and the City*, became a reference in the study of marginalized children. Most importantly, it discussed issues such as the relationship between working families' organization and children's deviant behaviour, poverty and criminality. Children's idleness and abandonment in the big cities became crucial 'social problems' for which social policies were urgently demanded. The institutionalization of 'deviant children' was the most prevalent social policy at the time, backed up by the increasing judicialization of the relationship between poor children and society (two 'Codes of Minors' were introduced, one in 1927 and the other in 1979). Poor children were considered imminent offenders, i.e. liable to commit crimes and be punished according to legal provisions. Data published by FUNABEM (1984), the federal agency for the assistance and care of minors, revealed the gravity of the situation. It was estimated that about 30 million minors (children and youth up to 19 years of age) were in a situation of neglect in 1981, i.e. one out of every two Brazilians in this age stratum.

A significant number of studies, related to both the social and human sciences (e.g. Campos, 1984; Carvalho, 1977; Castro, 1978; Fausto and Cervini, 1991; Ferreira, 1980; Guirado, 1980; Kosminsky, 1994; Ribeiro

and Barbosa, 1987), tackled the complex problems posed by children's criminal offences, remedial institutionalization (which meant, most often, just locking them up in the governmental units of the State Foundations for the Welfare of Minors, 'FEBEMs') and by the absence of effective governmental policies to deal with poor children's issues.

Whereas the visibility of children in the social sciences was effected through the 'poor neglected child' perspective, in the human sciences, specially psychology, the paradigmatic vision was focused on the 'developing child' (Castro, 1992), who was considered a not-yet-fully-capable subject and, consequently, in need of socialization and education.

Children as 'social problems' or 'future adults' were the prevalent images of childhood in Brazilian society in the aforementioned period, as was the case in other countries (Corsaro, 1997). However, most often researchers who work with feminist or minority issues have indirectly drawn attention to the marginalization of children in social studies (Alanen, 2001). In Brazil, the relationship between gender/feminist and childhood studies has not been evident; however, children's issues have been considered to some extent in studies of migration. Immigrants constituted a large part of recruited labour in the first established factories in Brazil. In the first half of the 20th century, immigrants – men, women and their children – worked in small and big industrial plants producing food, drinks, shoes, tiles, textiles and so forth (Moura, 1982). Children's labour was also extensive in commercial establishments and on the street. Thus, via migration studies, children's labour was made visible, in factories and otherwise.

Child labour was slowly established as a topic of research. Two seminal articles were published by Machado Neto in 1979 and 1980, who, from a Marxist perspective, provided a critical discussion of the relationship between the invisible labour carried out by girls and boys in households and on the streets and its articulation with a capitalist economy. These articles stand as a major reference, not only as conceptual landmarks with respect to children's domestic labour, but also for their innovative methodology using participant observation and open-ended interviews. They have influenced other researchers (Dauster, 1991; Kosminsky and Santana, 2006; Rizzini and Fonseca, 2002; Saboia, 2000; Stengel and Moreira, 2003), and have remained as early precursors of subsequent studies.

The work of Pierre Bourdieu, *La Reproduction*, published in Brazil in 1975, exerted a profound impact on Brazilian educators, many of whom were working, during the 1980s, on topics such as educational inequalities and public educational policies (Brandão and Bonamino, 1994; Brandão and Siqueira, 1985; Brandão et al., 1983; Cunha, 1979; Gadotti, 1983, 1987; Saviani, 1983). Structuralist analyses of the educational system inspired a

significant number of studies (Catani et al., 2001), opening up a relevant research area in the interface between sociology and education, dealing with topics ranging from educational opportunities and social mobility to the analyses of children's educational contexts. Children were rather viewed as pupils and objects of pedagogical instruction. Two important scientific journals – *Educação e Sociedade* and *Cadernos de Pesquisa*, the former launched in 1978, the latter, in 1971 – greatly contributed to the establishment of an important area of reflection on issues about education and society.

By and large, the period from the 1960s through the 1980s demarcated an incipient field of childhood studies characterized by a variety and spread of seminal contributions, most of which were not, however, systematically pursued as consistent research topics. Childhood was made visible both as an occasional topic in the insightful work of many researchers and as a still relatively unstable object of scientific interest scrutinized from different research perspectives. What stands out is the visibility of childhood as a 'social problem', understood as a structural component of social inequalities in Brazil. It reinforced the apartheid present in the Brazilian social imaginary of childhood: on the one hand, poor and neglected children, made visible as 'minors', considered imminent criminal offenders for whom judicial measures should apply; on the other hand, well-off children seen as the still-not-socialized subject and made visible as pupils. In both ways, children are not regarded as subjects, but objects of protection, care and control, victimized or not by their circumstances.

Despite the timid investment of the social sciences in children and childhood, crucial issues could be explored. First, the necessary relationship between childhood poverty and criminal behaviour was severely questioned, even though not to the extent that it was possible to transform social practices and juridical understandings. Second, the notion of 'disorganized families', specially those of poor fatherless children, was an object of critical enquiry. Finally, the view of child labour as a straightforward expression of exploitative class relationships was shown to obliterate other positive meanings of work accorded by children themselves and their families.

The regime of visibility under which childhood was then constructed by the social sciences, despite the attempts which focused on putting poor and neglected children on the political and social agenda, understates the complex and multifarious contexts, problems and contributions of childhood in Brazil. It was only in the decades that followed that a more diverse scenario emerged, constructing childhood from different perspectives, and most importantly, envisaging a novel way to conceive children, other than as objects of care or control.

Childhood and Society at the Turn of the 20th Century: The Child as a Cultural Actor and a Subject of Rights

In the course of the redemocratization process of Brazil after 20 long years of military dictatorship and the promulgation of the new Constitution of 1988, children's rights to be protected and educated were foreseen and established under the Federal Law 8069/90, most commonly known as the Statute of the Child and the Adolescent (ECA), introduced in 1990.

Accordingly, the juridical conception of the child as a 'subject of rights' made Brazil, at least on a rhetorical level, a modern society. The new agenda promoted by this legislation had the virtue of establishing the judicial equivalence of all children, de-characterizing, at least de jure, the derogatory status of 'minors' attributed to poor children, who, in the course of the 20th century, had been regarded primarily as abandoned and possibly delinquent.

Worthy of mention as an important social actor in the defence of children's rights is the social movement 'the National Movement of Street Boys and Girls' (Movimento Nacional de Meninos e Meninas de Rua – MNMMR), created in 1985 and providing an institutional platform for alternative care for street children. The MNMMR articulated different social actors, such as those militating in governmental organisms, such as FUNABEM, in international organisms, such as UNICEF, and those of civil society related to NGOs. In 1986, the First National Encounter of Street Boys and Girls took place in Brasilia (capital of Brazil) gathering, among others, 430 street boys and girls who represented different children's social movements nationwide. The Encounter brought an enormous visibility to the MNMMR, which strengthened the National Movement for the Defence of Children's Rights (FNDDC), also created in 1985 and constituted by progressive civil and governmental sectors of the Brazilian society. Such a national mobilization in favour of children's rights was decisive in the changes first introduced in the Brazilian Constitution passed in 1988³ and, later, in the promulgation of the aforementioned Statute of the Child and the Adolescent (ECA) in 1990 (Pinheiro, 2001, 2006).

However important such a change in the legislation on children has been to bury, once and for all, the derogatory connotation of the word 'minor' and its nuance of marginality, its impact on renewing social practices and remedial treatment for children has remained somewhat limited. As with other changes in Brazilian legislation, this one reflected rather an idealized state of affairs, in the suddenly oxygenated air of political freedom and the civil rights movements of the time, leading to an enormous gap between the compromises reached at the level of legal formulations and the political

and social practices that continue to be reproduced and constitute the 'reality' of children and youth in Brazil. In fact, the ECA legitimated a thorough attack on all sorts of social prejudice against poor children, most often mulattoes or blacks, who idled around in the city surviving as best they could. However, the social imaginary about underprivileged children would not change by decree, but only if effective measures could be taken so as to improve the length and the quality of their education. The fate of a great contingent of poor children, specially in urban areas, has not changed very much, as several studies have shown (Castro et al., 2005; Craidy, 1998; Guimarães, 1998; Kosminsky, 1991; Minayo, 1993; Rizzini, 1989, 1993; Sawaia, 1999; Zaluar, 1994). Today, more and more children at younger ages are seduced into drug trafficking and theft as a way to earn money easily (Dowdney, 2003), instilling moral panic in the urban population eager for public safety and horrified by the mounting urban violence committed by children and youth. Although the ECA identifies 18 as the age of criminal responsibility, there has been an important nationwide discussion to review and lower that age threshold. The importance of this debate cannot be underestimated, as it has had an extensive impact on research topics, as well as justifying a certain militant aspect to social and human scientists' activities, such as signing petitions, public declarations and so on, against lowering the age of criminal responsibility.

Nevertheless, the promising agenda that the ECA has left to social scientists concerns the enormous range of issues that derived from the restructuring of the legal and, consequently, the social and psychological aspects of child-adult relationships by the new understanding of the child as a subject of rights. So far such issues have reverberated in a multiplicity of research topics, such as children as citizens, alternative institutional care for children, children and youth's criminal responsibility, parental responsibility, violence against children, participation of civil society in children and youth's assistance boards, children's adoption and so on. A significant number of studies has so far been produced, establishing a convergence of various discipline areas (like social work, education, psychology, law, public health, arts and last but not the least, the social sciences) on the above-mentioned topics, revealing a certain fluidity of discipline boundaries as far as concepts and methodologies are concerned. For instance, the area of child citizenship has been taken up by lawyers, psychologists, anthropologists and social workers actualizing, *de facto*, a truly interdisciplinary field of research (Gohn, 1997; Velho and Alvito, 1996).

The direction of childhood research and action during the 1990s and 2000s was also influenced by the significant participation of international organisms like UNICEF, UNESCO, the ILO and various NGOs. The financing of research on childhood was influential with respect to the choice of

themes and topics of research, and the organizational aspects of the research process, for instance how and when to circulate the results. UNESCO, for instance, has supported quite a few studies on youth, violence in schools, children and television (Abramovay and Castro, 2006; Abramovay and Rua, 2002; UNESCO, 2004).

It is estimated that there are over 276,000 NGOs in Brazil (IBGE, 2004), a significant number of which work in the area of childhood and youth. A great many, like Save the Children, are branches of international networks, entirely or partially funded by foreign entities. Research topics financed by NGOs reflect 'hot' issues that circulate in the public agenda, especially the media, so that enduring investment in the same research topic seems infrequent.

Big national banks, like Bradesco and Itaú, and private and state enterprises, like Petrobrás, Vale, Odebrecht, Votorantim and many others, have set up their own foundations both for the support of research on children, as well as for providing alternative caring, educational or recreational facilities for underprivileged children.

This new scenario should provoke feelings of satisfaction as regards the welfare of children, considering the amount of funding and the institutions involved. It would also, at least, indicate civil society's investments in knowledge about children and their needs. However, this seems to be far from the truth. The advancement of NGOs, international and national organisms in the domain of children's research and action is accompanied by the waning role of the state, which, increasingly, looks for partners to carry out its former obligations. The re-dimensioning of the Brazilian state and the redirection of investments according to neoliberal policies puts in question the understanding that education, health and care for children and youth should be predominantly carried out by state agencies and institutions.

The conventional wisdom present in the social sciences in the earlier period, that the state should provide effective responses to the social issues relating to children, is now subtly contested by the avalanche of institutions and agencies that direct efforts in a multiplicity of directions with the financial support of either government or private resources. Furthermore, it seems that the output of the research investment of NGOs and international organizations renders more amenable knowledge to be publicized by the media and included in public debate, rather than that produced by academic social sciences, since the former is more often capable of providing immediate responses to social demands and 'fast knowledge'. Furthermore, a point to be noted is the sort of relationships that governments and the third sector are likely to establish whenever childhood becomes both a suitable item for political propaganda and an item for which it is essential to raise funds and resources for research.

In the meantime, new theoretical and disciplinary perspectives have expanded their contributions to children's issues. The novelty is provided, above all, by anthropological studies of children (Cohn, 2005; Nunes, 1999; Silva, 1987; Silva et al., 2002), coming out as among the very first publications identified as an 'anthropology of childhood'. Inspired by the theoretical perspectives on cultural differences, children, as well as negroes or Indians, were investigated in terms of their contribution to mainstream culture. The perspective of the child as a social actor and a contributor to the cultural world underpins a myriad of empirical studies, targeting primarily the examination of children's contexts in face of contemporary cultural transformations. Many of these studies focused on the production of urban subcultures by children (Castro, 2004), consumptive practices by children (Castro, 1998; Vasconcelos and Freitas, 2005), children's geography and situational contexts (Lopes and Vasconcellos, 2005; Martins, 1993), the production of daily practices by children (Faria et al., 2002; Kosminsky and Daniel, 2005; Souza, 2000) and children and the media (Fischer, 2001; Pacheco, 1998). It is noteworthy that such studies originate from a variety of disciplinary traditions, mainly anthropology, education and social psychology, but converge on the theoretical perspective of considering the child as a competent social actor, and on the methodological use of research techniques that take into consideration the ethical and the political underpinnings of the asymmetrical relationship between adult researcher and child.

Anthropology is also responsible for more systematic investigations concerning racial differences and their implications in educational contexts, peer relationships and children's ethnic constructions (Oliveira, 1999; Ribeiro, 2006). The topic of racial relationships and inequalities has lately been revisited (Fazzi, 2004); a timely undertaking in view of the current governmental policies to bring about a debate around racial equality in Brazil. The Statute of Racial Relationships is one of the items on the public and political agenda at this very moment under discussion in the National Congress. Lula's government has established the National Secretary of Racial Equality, which has enforced various regulations, such as the inclusion of a self-declaration item concerning race in all forms that are addressed to governmental institutions. As far as children are concerned, changes have been introduced in school curricula and books, so that a 'fairer' perspective on different races, especially blacks, now renamed as 'Afro-descendants', is presented. Although racial questions were the topic of classical studies by the very first social scientists, for instance, Fernandes (1955) and Nogueira (1985), the debate is now tinged with political overtones and has stirred up nationwide debate.

In addition to anthropologists, historians have also increasingly focused on childhood (Freitas, 1997; Marcilio, 1998; Priore, 1991, 1999; Venâncio, 1999)

as an object of investigation, providing growing scholarship on the history of childhood in Brazil in different historical periods from colonial times up to the present.

During the 1990s and early this century, a more consistent picture of the research agenda of the social sciences on children emerges. The research perspective of children as a 'social problem' demanding policies in terms of education or institutionalization has been certainly widened and invigorated on account of the new representation of children as a subject of rights enforced by the ECA and the public discussion that followed. Furthermore, anthropological and historical studies took up significant and up-to-date empirical studies, which, though not numerically abundant, were significant enough to establish a new research field in these discipline traditions. The combined value of these studies indicates an innovative conception of children as social actors, and active contributors to their social worlds.

Sociological discussion of children's issues is, however, very limited indeed. References to a 'sociology of childhood' are, de facto, very sparse. Three published articles were found, two of them in the journal *Cadernos de Pesquisa* and the other in *Educação e Sociedade*, which is oriented towards educational issues. Interestingly enough, all three were translations (Montandon, 2001; Plaisance, 2004; Sirota, 2001), and not written by Brazilian sociologists. An unpublished article by Quinteiro (2003) focusing on the 'emergence of a sociology of childhood in Brazil' was eventually presented as a paper in Working Group of Sociology of Education in the National Encounter of Postgraduate Programmes of Education (ANPED). Therefore, it seems likely that the slow and uncertain construction of a sociology of childhood will benefit from, and rely on, the institutionally established educational journals and associations. De facto, the interface between education and the social sciences has long been established in Brazil, as discussed earlier. However, the educational grip on childhood sociology may prove to confine research topics to the educational agenda and hinder interlocution between sociology of childhood and other subareas of sociological knowledge.

At present, there are about 64 accredited social sciences postgraduate programmes in Brazil,⁴ 38 in sociology, 14 in anthropology and 12 in political sciences. Many undergraduate social sciences departments still congregate around these three areas, although postgraduate training is most often carried out within a specific disciplinary tradition. Thus, as far as the institutional academic establishment of the field is concerned, a thoroughly consolidated process has taken place.

In order to evaluate the contribution of the social sciences, specifically sociology to childhood issues, we conducted a survey of the scientific literature of the field.

Table 1 Frequencies of Papers on Childhood/Children in the Social Scientific Journals 2001–6

Journal	Year						Subtotals
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	
<i>Acervo</i> (Rio de Janeiro)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Alca</i> (Online)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Alea Est. Neolatinos</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Anuário Antropológico</i> (UnB)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>BIB</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Cadernos de Antropologia e Imagem</i>	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
<i>Cadernos CEDES</i>	0	5	3	2	2	5	17
<i>Campos</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Campos</i> (UFPR)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Cebrap</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Civitas</i> (PUC-RS)	0	1	0	0	0	1	2
<i>Comunicação e Sociedade</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Dados</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Ciência da Informação</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Comunicação e Educação</i>	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
<i>Comunicação e Sociedade</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Comunicação, Mídia e Consumo</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Contracampo</i> (UFF)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Datagramazero</i> (Rio de Janeiro)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>E-Compós</i> (Brasília)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Educação e Sociedade</i>	1	2	1	4	8	2	18
<i>Enfoques</i> (UFRJ)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Estudos Linguísticos</i> (São Paulo)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 1 (Continued)

Journal	Year						Subtotals
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	
FAMECOS	1	0	1	1	0	0	3
Fronteiras	?	?	?	0	1	0	1
Galáxia (PUC SP)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
História Ciências, Saúde- Manguinhos	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
História Questões e Debates	0	1	1	0	1	1	4
Horizontes Antropológicos	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ilha (UFSC)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Informação e Sociedade	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
INTERCOM	0	1	0	0	1	0	2
Interface	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
InTexto (UFRGS)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Letras de Hoje	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Lua Nova	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
MANA (UFRJ)	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Natureza Humana	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Organizações e Sociedade	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
PAR'A' TWA (UFPB)	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
Política e Trabalho (UFPB)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Prolam (USP)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Revista Brasileira de Estudos da População	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Revista Brasileira de História	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Revista Científica Digital – PCLA	0	1	0	0	0	0	1

(Continued)

Table 1 (Continued)

Journal	Year						Subtotals
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	
<i>Revista de Antropologia</i>	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
<i>Revista de Comunicação e Linguagens</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Revista de História da Arte e Arqueologia</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Revista de História (USP)</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Revista Estudos Históricos (Rio de Janeiro)</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Revista Estudos de Sociologia (UNESP)</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Revista MAE (USP)</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Revista Política Hoje (UFPE)</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Significação (UTP)</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Sociologias (UFRGS)</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Sociologia e Política (UFPR)</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Tempo (UFF)</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Teoria e Sociedade (UFMG)</i>	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
<i>Teoria e Sociedade (UFScar)</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Transformação</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Veritas (PUC – RS)</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Vibrant</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

The list of 64 scholarly journals in Table 1 was obtained from two main sources: (1) 22 scientific journals (out of 33) edited by accredited social sciences postgraduate courses nationwide⁵ (11 journals that met this criterion were not surveyed because their content was not available on the web) and (2) 42 journals (out of 67) evaluated as the most important journals in the social sciences, which included the following subfields: sociology, anthropology, political sciences, social work, history, social communication and archaeology (25 journals meeting this criterion were also not surveyed because their content was not available on the web).

The search of articles was carried out either on the site of the journal itself, or through a social sciences database. The search was based on a scanning for keywords in the titles and abstracts of the item, such as child, childhood, childlike and other cognate terms, as well as synonyms such as minors, kids and so on.

The results confirm the dearth of academic publications in the social sciences area on children and childhood in the recent period between 2001 and 2006. The outstanding exceptions are represented by the journals *CEDES* and *Educação e Sociedade*, both at the editorial interface between sociology and education. The journals that show a small and not very significant frequency of articles are those in the anthropological, historical and social communication subfields. Although frequencies in Table 1 may underestimate the number of publications due to eventual errors, e.g. missed articles which did not show the searched for keywords either in the title or in the abstract, the main tendencies identified earlier are nonetheless confirmed: (1) the important interface between education and sociology whereby a 'sociology of childhood' is beginning to emerge; (2) the increasing number of publications in the newly coined subfields of 'anthropology of childhood' and 'history of childhood'; and (3) the dearth of publications in mainstream sociology journals.

A survey of childhood and children's issues in the overall scientific debate of the annual national conference of Brazilian social scientists (ANPOCS) between 1998 and 2004 was also carried out.⁶ Worth remarking upon is the fact that these national meetings, usually lasting for three days, encompass approximately 270 presentations, including oral communications, conferences, videos and forums, assembling about 1300 people including researchers, academics, professionals and students. They represent, in a nutshell, the barometer of the social sciences in Brazil in terms of tensions and disputes between long-established areas of interest and emergent ones.

Table 2 shows the frequencies of papers on childhood according to research topics.

Although one can see a tendency of increased interest, in 2004 childhood issues represented still only about 2 percent of the total number of scientific papers presented at that annual conference (about 250 papers).

Table 2 *Frequencies of Papers Presented at ANPOCS Annual Meetings (1998–2004) by Research Topic*

Research topic \ Year	Year						
	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Street kids	1						1
Childhood poverty and social policy	1						
Adoption policies	1						
Social inequalities and educational opportunities					1	1	
Children and the media						1	
Violence against children						1	2
Health policies for children							1
Subtotals	3	0	0	0	1	3	4

The survey also showed a parallel but important finding: the remarkable increase of youth issues represented in the overall number of oral presentations from 1998 to 2004, culminating in one whole session – approx. 15 papers – dedicated to youth on the topic ‘Embodiment, Sensitivities, Languages and Urban Youth Cultures’ in 2004. This signals hope for a more promising future for the study of childhood, considering that children and youth’s issues usually tend to accompany each other.

The inflexion brought about by youth issues in recent social sciences production raises topics related to privatized domains such as the body and human sensitivities, or to the domain of subcultures. Thereby an important tour de force seems on the way, that of conferring on ‘minor’ social actors their own place in the construction of the social and political world. Nevertheless, grand and conventional social actors, such as the state, political parties, unions, social institutions, professional groups, the media and so forth, continue to the main foci of debates in the social sciences, in the context of macro-level social analysis (problems related to democracy, economic trends, unemployment, institutional changes, migrations, metropolis, public policies and so on).

Concluding Remarks

First conceived as a ‘social problem’, childhood is slowly being approached from different perspectives, although its status in the social sciences awaits a stronger investment vis-a-vis social actors such as the state, the family,

social classes and political parties. A significant and promising area of study lies at the interface between social sciences and education, although it seems that childhood in Brazil is becoming a convergent thematic area for different disciplines in a truly transdisciplinary effort centred on the paradigmatic notion of children as agents and contributors to social life.

The political agenda has stimulated public discussion of childhood issues, for instance, at the promulgation of the ECA, which established a modernized judicial position for children in the wake of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Academic research has been provoked to enter this debate, in order to catch up with the increasingly more salient role of NGOs and international organizations in the dissemination of knowledge about children and childhood in Brazil.

What seems to be missing, however, are the persistent analyses of childhood issues, which demand longer investments of time and training, a point that could be taken up by social researchers who possess the institutionally established advantages to pioneer such a task. A case in point concerns the limits of legal dispositions to change cultural and social practices related to children. Accordingly, many researchers are examining why and how legal norms established by the ECA have not so far been put into practice, and if they have, what results have been obtained. In this vein, academic research is able to pursue a consistent theoretical and methodological research programme in order to face more pragmatic demands to view children in a variety of ways. Thus, images of childhood, be they objects of care or subjects of rights, must be scrutinized rather than taken for granted.

It seems that, more often than not, in Brazil and elsewhere, childhood has been encoded as a 'good' to be circulated in the society of adults and instrumentalized in a variety of ways, for instance, as innocent creatures to be protected, as victims of adverse circumstances or, more lately, as small heroes that can trick their elders. All these represent patronizing conceptualizations of children who are not given a position to speak for themselves. What can be hoped for, however, is that in Brazil, and elsewhere, the social sciences can increase their investment in childhood, taking pains not to legitimate those tacit social images that are constructed to the detriment of children and without their participation.

Notes

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1. Even the possession of birth certificates, a constitutional right in Brazil, is not guaranteed for thousands of children. According to official statistics (IBGE, 2005) 21 percent of children in 2002 were not registered in the first year after their birth, nor in the first three months of 2004. This figure amounts to 774,000 children.
2. Celso Furtado was trained and became a bachelor in law at the National Faculty of Law in Rio de Janeiro in 1944. One of his most important publications was *Formação Econômica do Brasil* [Economic Formation of Brazil] published in 1959. He worked extensively in governmental bodies and in CEPAL (Economic Commission for Latin America) and his work inaugurated a 'school' in the area of economic historiography on the topic of underdevelopment.
3. In the Federal Constitution of 1988 the following articles concerned children and adolescents: art. 5 para. LXXVI (on the free emission of civil birth certificates); art. 7 paras XXV and XXXIII (on the free assistance of infants in nursing schools and the prohibition of work for children under 14, unless in the condition of apprenticeship); art. 24 para. XV (on children's right to education, culture, learning and sports); art. 203 paras I and II (on the right to social assistance for underprivileged children and the right of families, children and adolescents to be protected); art. 208 paras IV and VII (on free and obligatory fundamental education for children and adolescents); art. 227 (the state's duties concerning children and adolescents, and the eventual participation of NGOs, and the application of public resources, percentage non-specified, on the assistance of children and adolescents); art. 228 (children under 18 are not liable to be tried for criminal offences).
4. Accreditation is carried out by the Ministry of Education in Brazil and is a periodically systematic process of evaluation of the educational quality of the postgraduate programmes. Only accredited educational courses can confer valid diplomas and certificates.
5. See: http://servicos.capes.gov.br/projetorelacaocursos/jsp/areaDet.jsp?cd_garea=70000000andgrandeArea=CIÊNCIAS%20HUMANAS
6. The survey was based on the database of ANPOCS itself: Anais do XXII Encontro Anual da ANPOCS, 1998, CD-Rom; Anais do XXIII Encontro Anual da ANPOCS, 1999, CD-Rom; Anais do XXIV Encontro Anual da ANPOCS, 2000, CD-Rom; Anais do XXV Encontro Anual da ANPOCS, 2001, CD-Rom; Anais do XXVI Encontro Anual da ANPOCS, 2002, CD-Rom; Anais do XXVII Encontro Anual da ANPOCS, 2003, CD-Rom; Anais do XXVIII Encontro Anual da ANPOCS, 2004, CD-Rom.

Appendix

Book Series

The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) published the 'Children and Adolescents: Social Indicators' series in three volumes in 1989. Other series have been published since then by other publishers, such as Nau in Rio de Janeiro. Books on childhood have been widely published in education, psychology and social sciences series.

Study Programmes

Currently there is no specific postgraduate programme on the sociology of childhood at Brazilian universities. However, there are postgraduate courses on childhood and childhood issues at state and private universities in postgraduate programmes of education, psychology, social work and medicine and public health.

Scientific Associations

Working Group on Sociology of Childhood and Youth, Brazilian Sociological Association (SBS), since 2005.

Working Group on Anthropology of Childhood, National Association of Social Sciences Graduate and Research (ANPOCS), since 2007.

Research Groups

Several research groups on childhood and youth studies are registered at the database of the Brazilian National Council of Technological and Scientific Development (CNPQ).

Research State Foundations Nationwide

The International Organization of Labor (ILO) has also supported research on child labour.

The Research Institute of Applied Economics (IPEA) of the Ministry of Planning has also supported research regarding child labour and childhood indicators.

UNESCO.

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