

The Study of Childhood and Youth in Brazil: Dilemmas and Choices of a “Southern” Academic



Lucia Rabello de Castro

Abstract The present contribution seeks to unravel the personal, institutional and ideological underpinnings of an academic career devoted to the study of childhood and youth in Brazil. One of the main themes is in what ways an academic career in Southern countries should bear the conditions of its own production: how the singularities of the academic work in the periphery of western countries are (or, should be) reflexively reckoned and incorporated in theory, research and practice. In this vein, looking backwards and allowing that the present can illuminate and provide some sort of coherence to past dilemmas and choices, my motivations, ideals, as well as life-events will be foregrounded to account for my involvement in the area of childhood and youth. Other themes in this contribution will tackle the daily involvement and social practices with students and colleagues in Brazilian universities and the role they played in the construction of my academic career. As this contribution unfolds, a balance of what goals were possible to achieve and how, what was abandoned and why, and what else moves one towards finalizing one's career before retirement will be discussed.

Introduction

In the exercise of looking backwards and reconstructing one's own academic career there is the inevitable risk of assuming the present as the enigmatic condition to be deciphered by past events and choices. Somewhat bewildered by the status quo which keeps asking—how is it that things are as they are? how come has one's life taken such a course? one is triggered to find out missing connections in order to integrate discrete (maybe discrepant!) personal events in a whole consistent history. However, the narrative thus obtained can flatten out discrepancies, ambiguities and misfortunes giving the false impression that one's life unfolds as a linear and

L. Rabello de Castro (✉)

Instituto de Psicologia, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

e-mail: lrcastro@infolink.com.br

harmonious sequence of planned choices and is fully and truly accountable. Nevertheless, the path one takes in life is more hazardous and erratic than the one resulting from the effort to backwardly frame it into a coherent narrative and, possibly, other different narratives might as well been possible depending on what type of questions one is searching for. My attempt here was rather to “refigure the past in the present” (Boulaga 2014, p. 155) as the past seems as enigmatic as the present.

In my contribution to this book I will attempt to highlight some key issues in the intellectual pursuit that I have taken along the decades of my academic career. In delineating this intellectual trajectory will not only stand as significant the academic questions and problems to which I have dedicated my attention, but also I will also try to show how the construction of my intellectual pursuit is indebted to the social encounters—colleagues, mentors, students—that I was fortunately, or not, able to have. Also, as part and parcel of the vicissitudes of my academic opportunities and realizations, stands of importance the institutional setting of academic careers in Brazil that take place mainly in universities, public and private. This institutional setting concurs to model, both in constraining and enhancing ways, the possibilities of research endeavours and dedication to intellectual tasks.

The Study of Children and Youth in the Guise of “Development”

A major aspect of my academic career consists in the lifelong dedication to the study of children and youth. From the 1970s when I graduated as a psychologist in the Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro to this day this subject matter has been not only the most important topic of intellectual interest for me, but also as time elapsed, a major arena of advocacy and institutional action.

The political climate in Brazil in the 1970s has been labelled as that of “years of lead” because Brazil was then under a military dictatorship which had banned civil liberties and all institutional means of democratic opposition to the regime. The Parliament (both the House of Deputies and the Senate House) had been closed down. Persecution of supposed opponents was rife and university life was kept under vigilance. Even if coercion and persuasion were instrumentalized for the legitimation of the military autocracy, resistance, albeit alive, was constrained by the permanent menace of imprisonment. Thinking about those initial university years, I feel a great regret for the two long decades of military rule (1964–1985) which meant a severe political retrogression for the Brazilian society in its way to construct and consolidate its fragile democracy. This is especially grievous for the youth because university years present a formidable opportunity to enter and fully participate in the political debates and momentum and, thus, in the destiny of society in all aspects. Consequently, constraints on the freedom to think and to act in those years, especially in universities, have also had the effect of postponing and disarticulating projects with regard to the construction of both an indigenous scien-

tific knowledge and a free society. In this vein I would like to foreground the political climate in Brazil in the 1970s and articulate it with the possibilities of producing scientific knowledge about children and youth in Brazilian universities in general, and, specifically, in my own career.

In the scope of the discipline of Psychology the study of children and youth was at this time subsumed under the paradigm of development, ontogenetic development. A biological and evolutionary perspective on the individual was of paramount importance of conceptualizing psychological development. The apparent naturalness provided by the sheer empirical observation that children and youth “grow” and “develop” constituted inspiring directions to construe the psychological version of development. In sum, *children were developing creatures and to develop was their existential condition*. Therefore, the answer to the “child question” (Alanen 1992) was searched in terms of understanding how individuals developed and what end-states (Peters 1980) should be attained. As a matter of fact, the notion of development was at the time a most conspicuous and ubiquitous idea. Post-war economies struggled to reconstruct their economic growth, accelerate industrialization and improve living standards, aspects which materialized the aims and points of arrival towards which they should strive for, as the supposed “universal” destiny of modern societies. The latter were accordingly classified as developed, developing and underdeveloped as measured by indexes of level of industrialization and *per capita* income. This was an era of intense debates on economic and social development, both internationally (Gunnar Myrdal’s *Economic Theory and Underdeveloped Regions* was published in 1957) and nationally (Celso Furtado’s *Desenvolvimento e Subdesenvolvimento* was published in 1961). But it was Psychology, among human and social sciences, that took up the task of mapping out what human development was about resonating at the level of human biography the foremost importance of universal end-states for individuals.

The regulation of the professional activity of psychologists in Brazil which took place in 1962 (Autuori 2014) favoured the creation of undergraduate psychology courses. The first existed since from 1954 in the Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro and another was created at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro in 1964. I entered as an undergraduate student of Psychology at the Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro in 1971 when in Brazil there was an enormous on-going investment in the training of university staff at the postgraduate level. At the Catholic University I had the opportunity to study under the guidance of one of the foremost pioneer mentors in the area of Development Psychology, Professor Biaggio (1975), who had been trained in the USA, having obtained her Ph.D. at the University of Wisconsin in 1967. Angela was a passionate researcher and I attribute to her my first not so casual encounter with Developmental Psychology.

As an undergraduate I collaborated with her in different ways: as a tutor of undergraduate courses in Developmental Psychology and as an assistant researcher in this area. It was under her supervision that I and my colleague Ruth Naidin, still as undergraduates, published our first paper in an international journal (de Castro and Naidin 1978). Despite the major significance of this encounter for my academic career, I reckon that my academic endeavours were to go astray from the scientific

perspective on children and youth that Angela passed on to me. I was deeply dissatisfied with a vision of children and youth supported by the developmental perspective which purported to be universalist but was clearly made in the USA. A case in point was the study of moral development, a topic that deeply concerned Angela (Biaggio 1976, 1988, 1997). Although the claim of universalism in psychological theories was not quite so problematical as it is now, for me it seemed insufficient; the way the specificities of the social and cultural context were articulated to produce generalizable theories about the way children chose to act and why. Another aspect of the developmental paradigm that aroused my discomfort and doubt was its entrenchment in an individualistic framework of understanding human subjectivity: on the one side, the individual as a self-contained whole, on the other side, the “outside” corresponding to the “environment”, the “social context”, or, the “not me”, both of which were taken as separate and opposed realities. Notwithstanding the malaise, I still would have to wait some time in order to envisage what appeared to me as better answers for these theoretical discomforts.

The Shortcomings of Development: Ways Towards “Finding” Children and Youth

The decade after I graduated was significant in different ways: politically and academically. It was the period of time when I carried out my postgraduate training in the United Kingdom, University of London; before going to London I occupied a job position as Visiting Lecturer and Fellow, at the University of Asunción, Paraguay, two very different places which deeply affected my worldview and my academic experience. The training in London for the M.Sc. and the Ph.D. was significant in providing acquaintance with a well-established and firmly grounded institutionalization of scientific activities in universities which demanded from the student discipline, autonomy and full dedication. The dominant expectation that one should do one’s best and work hard came hand in hand with the sense of pursuing a most valued and important social activity whose investment was long range and difficult. On the other hand, the postgraduate training in London acquainted me with the armour of academic social relationships and the veiled negative prejudice against South American students both of which needed to be understood as part and parcel of the British scientific establishment.

Work in Paraguay put me again in close contact with the impasses and difficulties of university life under a military regime. I had many students who disappeared from one day to the next and all knew they had been detained by the police. Nevertheless, it was in Paraguay, as I taught a postgraduate course and carried out a community project together with the students, that we had ample and long discussions about the relevance of psychological theories with regard to local social demands. I have good remembrances of those days when, many a times gathered around *parrilladas* (barbecues), quite often at the students’ tiny residences, we had

good discussions on Psychology, Politics and how to be and work as a psychologist in Paraguay, and in Latin America.

These two very different scenarios, pregnant with quite diverse social and affective relationships and academic inspiration, as I recall now, were important to determine major personal commitments along my academic career: firstly, a very worldly view that academic activity should make itself relevant to society, academics should not think too highly of themselves; secondly, an interest in articulating Psychology and Politics in a way that at that moment did not yet seem quite clear to me.

Back to Brazil I began my academic career at the Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro and very soon I was in charge of the course of Developmental Psychology. The military regime in the beginning of the 1980s showed signs of ineptitude in improving socio-economic indexes (the rate of inflation was very high, the GNP had fallen down) leading to increasing dissatisfaction controlled by intense and violent repressive forces against strikes and popular manifestations. Other military regimes in many Latin American countries, besides Brazil, were also doomed to crisis and collapse along this decade. “Development” in Latin America, as a destiny to be fulfilled much in the way that other Northern countries had succeeded in doing, seemed at odds with the political history of the subcontinent. Development began to sound like a highly problematic notion, both at a macro and at an individual level (Marini 1973).

To find children and youth as an object of scientific inquiry, in their own terms and not under the guise of development, became a tortuous endeavour. I got immersed in the contributions of Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School, specially the works of T. Adorno, M. Horkheimer, H. Marcuse, W. Benjamin and their commentators, like Martin Jay, Peter Dews, Miguel Abensour, Olgária Matos and others. These authors provided me with the critical ground to spell out the fundamental tenets of “traditional theory” (Horkheimer 1974) that had modelled the way that scientific psychology had constructed its object. Such a critical provision helped me to revisit the way the subject of knowledge and its object were paradigmatically constructed (Adorno 1984), the notion of the sovereign rational subject and of western rationality itself (Adorno and Horkheimer 1985), the impasses about modern culture as entertainment rather than criticism and the reconciliation of the individual in the consumption society (Adorno 1962; Benjamin 1984; Marcuse 1969). Therefore, my theoretical move at that moment was to create a critical distance in relation to the notion of development which had for almost a century conformed the theoretical perspective on children and youth in psychology. To be in charge of the course Developmental Psychology at the Catholic University from the beginning of the 1980s enhanced the opportunity to deepen my reflexion on the topic (de Castro 1990, 1992, 1993).

Two fortuitous encounters consolidated this initial movement towards envisaging new theoretical possibilities in the study of children and youth in psychology. I happened to come across some working papers of John Morss, a New Zealand child researcher with whom I established a long academic interaction during the following years. Morss was also very much concerned with foregrounding a critical appraisal of the notion of development and its impact on the psychological study of

children (Morss 1990, 1992, 1995). I never met Morss personally but we exchanged papers and were able to have very productive, though distant, interaction. Together with Morss, a key reading at that moment was the book edited by John Broughton, *Critical Theories of Psychological Development*, published in the late 1980s (Broughton 1987). The collection of authors that Broughton brought together in this book and the discussion they provided on major aspects of children's and youth's lives have made this book an outstanding and distinctive contribution to any scholar interested in forwarding "the child question" in non-conventional ways. Interestingly, many contributors to this book were not child scholars as such, but were able to explore theoretical issues that deeply concern the understanding of children and youth. Some of these authors, like Jessica Benjamin and Susan Buck-Morss, to quote just two examples, have been my companion authors since then for other topics of interest that have emerged later on in my academic life.

The other encounter to which I feel indebted in my pursuit to consolidate an inflection of my initial viewpoint on children was the acquaintance with a group of Nordic scholars, mostly of sociological background, who happened to be organizing themselves around the research topic of children. In 1988 I was invited to deliver a key speech at the first International Interdisciplinary Childhood Conference organized by the Norwegian Centre for Child Research recently established in Trondheim (de Castro 1988). This Conference gathered a group of scholars who, in the years to come, were to play a significant role in institutionalizing most important academic and scientific networks on childhood, which renewed and expanded what was considered mainstream knowledge about the subject. Jens Qvortrup and Leena Alanen, both sociologists, were there, as well as scholars like William Corsaro, Barry Thorne, Marjatta Bardy and others who, since then, acted as key persons in consolidating this new area, eventually called, New Studies of Childhood. This event, and others that the Norwegian Childhood Centre organized, contributed to enhancing international scholarship on childhood and established a worldwide forum of discussion. Furthermore, Jens Qvortrup and Leena Alanen were to lead the institutional establishment of a Working Group in "Sociology of Childhood", in 1994, and eventually, a Research Committee in 1998, at the International Sociological Association. Qvortrup admits that "the 1980s was the decade for discovering childhood as an interesting sociological category" (Qvortrup 2015, p. 4), as one looks at the profusion of contributors to this "new" field in this decade, such as Heinz Hengst, Chris Jenks, William Corsaro, Viviana Zelizer and Barrie Thorne.

From the 1988 Conference in Trondheim to the other meetings organized by the ISA along the 1980s and 1990s I participated in all of these scientific encounters which nucleated scholars interested in discussing new theoretical and methodological approaches on children and childhood. Besides that, I also have had an active role in the Scientific Board of this Research Committee, twice as Executive Board Member and at present as Newsletter Editor. The significant fact is that this group of scholars, trained in the social sciences, proved to be good companions in my quest of other pathways to the study of children and youth since my interlocutors within the field of psychology were very few and did not constitute a solidarity network. The construction of this dialogue across disciplines, Psychology and the

Social Sciences, namely Sociology and Anthropology, entails constructing a complex and multi-faceted academic and scientific relationship, and most importantly, it also gives visibility to theoretical impasses to be explained. This group of scholars took off as very critical of the psychological perspective on children based on development, though they also provided fresh theoretical ground for the “child question”. However, as I will later on explain, my theoretical affiliation to this new paradigm does not lose sight, and remains critical of, the very frail theory of the subject that these new studies of children and childhood generally presuppose.

This group has had a worldwide impact in the consolidation of new theoretical perspectives on childhood and youth: it has had, for instance, a major influence in the area of education in Brazil so that Brazilian educationalists today are not conversant with Piaget as they used to be, but rather with Qvortrup, Corsaro, Jenks and so forth. The institutional organization of this area also unfolded into the publication of a most important international journal—*Childhood*, launched in 1993, of which I am a member of the Editorial Board, and it has been since then a main forum of research exchange on children.

If children and youth could then be scientifically investigated other than from a developmental point of view, the problem was to construct an institutional basis from where research, academic exchange and training according to this new way of understanding could be carried out.

Researching Children and Youth in Their Own Terms and the Construction of an Institutional Basis for Scientific Activities

During the 1980s some colleagues and I joined efforts to establish an academic network for discussing *contemporary modes of subjectivization in childhood and youth* at the Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro. It was a difficult battle to progress because the study of childhood and adolescence in Psychology was not only named as Developmental Psychology, but to understand otherwise and not to think about children and adolescents in developmental terms sounded at least bizarre. Thus, not to acknowledge adherence to the development concept was a daily struggle. To teach a course in Developmental Psychology, for instance, was most challenging since the deconstructive discussion of this notion often caused fierce opposition and doubt on the part of students. However, to be in companionship with those who shared the same views and commitments was of paramount importance. My good friend and colleague, Solange Jobim e Souza, whom I had met in England, both of us in our Ph.D. training, was a partner in discussions, projects and publications at this time (de Castro and Souza 1995; Souza and de Castro 1998). Despite being academic *gauches* in the mainstream discussion of children and youth, both in the local and national contexts, we managed to set up a group of undergraduate and graduate students to discuss how contemporary social and cultural conditions,

especially consumption culture, media and informational technology, modelled children's and adolescents' subjectivities (de Castro 1996, 1998). This network prospered attracting many eager for a renewed debate on childhood allowing us to ground our work firmly in the collective *modus operandi* whereby students played a foremost role. We succeeded in obtaining the approval of a joint research project by the National Council of Scientific Research and Technological Development in Brazil (CNPQ). This was rewarding and reassuring and stimulated other academic activities such as the organization of local and national events. One of them, a National Conference on Childhood and Contemporary Cinema, held at the Modern Art Museum in Rio de Janeiro, resulted in a publication titled *Infância, Cinema e Sociedade (Childhood, Cinema and Society)*, one among the very few that to this day exist on this topic (Garcia et al. 1997).

During the 1980s the political regime under the military dictatorship showed prospects of releasing the constraints and coercion upon civil life which did eventually occur. Already in 1984, about 1.5 million people occupied the streets of the city of São Paulo to campaign for direct free elections. In 1987 a National Constitutional Assembly was installed in charge of elaborating a new Federal Constitution, and in November 1989 the first free elections for president since 1960 took place in Brazil. The feverish political climate during this decade also impacted on university life which was now much more capable of exploring the unforeseen pathways of free thinking and engaged action. For those interested in childhood and youth, it was also the time to problematize the enormous social inequalities that characterized the diverse social, cultural and ethnic groups of children and youth in the country in terms of how theories about childhood could, or could not, account for such a diversity and their social and educational demands. Many Brazilian writers who had been banned and exiled under the military regime began to come back, reviving the impoverished public debate of the earlier period. An important figure was Paulo Freire, who published his *Pedagogia do Oprimido (Pedagogy of the Oppressed)* in Chile in 1970 though it was not allowed in Brazil till 1974. During this decade in preparation for the drafting of the Federal Constitution a rich debate with different social sectors evolved on the subject matter of the rights of children, which was to constitute an important aspect of this Constitution.

The National Movement of Children in Streets that was created in 1982 called attention to the engrained injustices—social destitution, lack of access to good educational and health services, abandonment, inflicted violence—of poor children's lives that seemed a flagrant contradiction with the cherished ideals of a progressive nation. For me, this was a fertile opportunity to look at the glaring contradictions of the country's history wherein exogenous ideals for development had been pursued throughout our republican history whilst at the same time the State had been unable to fulfil very basic republican ideals of social equity and justice. These concerns were beginning to assume for me an important status directing my research interests in two complementary directions. One which wondered about the partiality of any scientific account being it conditioned by major aspects of its own production, be it the subjective formation of the scientist and scholar (her historical, territorial, cultural background), or the objective institutional framework of scientific activi-

ties. The other source of interest was related to theory construction in the field of childhood and youth: in what ways available theories, being a product of the Northern industrialized and “developed” countries, reflected an enunciative point of view conditioned by those places and agents from where these theories were themselves a product.

In 1995 I was approved in a public selection and entered the Institute of Psychology of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro looking forward to a novel institutional climate and fresh challenges. One important task ahead was to set up a new network of academic collaboration among colleagues and students which had to wait till 1998 to take place when, together with two other colleagues, we founded the Interdisciplinary Centre of Research and Scientific Exchange on Contemporary Childhood and Youth (NIPIAC). This Centre has provided the institutionalized academic framework in this federal university for research, training and community services activities, in the area of childhood and youth at a local, national and international level from then to this day. As co-founder of this Centre and its general director from 1998 to 2011 together with colleagues and students we were able to initiate and consolidate academic activities to foreground relevant scientific issues of childhood and youth and their importance in the national public agenda and debate. Collaboration with the public sector—the state and the municipal government—was also included in the programmatic agenda of the Centre not only in the direction of informing public policies but also of enhancing the academic relevance of the area of child and youth studies combining training and research activities (de Castro and Correa 2005a).

The first international congress on Brazilian youth, called JUBRA, was held in Rio de Janeiro in 2004 bringing together almost 1,000 participants organized by NIPIAC (de Castro and Correa 2005b). The JUBRA congresses have become since then part and parcel of the academic agenda of national events taking place every 2 years in different parts of Brazil, co-organized by NIPIAC. Such an enormous institutional effort to construct a nationwide interdisciplinary network of scientific discussion on youth has allowed the very recent foundation of the National Association and Network of Brazilian Researchers on Youth (REDEJUBRA) at the 7th JUBRA in August 2018 of which I have the honour to be the current president. The multifarious activities undertaken by NIPIAC are based on an understanding that scientific activities based at universities should maintain permanent capillary links with societal demands and issues, in this case, issues that affect Brazilian childhood and youth. The vision that a science of childhood and youth in Brazil must evolve to critical knowledge and relevant contribution entails an “organic”¹ awareness and partnership with these actors, most specially those who constitute the majority of such group, and has been a main principle and directive of our academic motivations and actions.

¹In the sense A. Gramsci employs the term in his well-known expression of an “organic intellectual”.

From “Development” to “Action” and to “Politics”

The study of children and youth from a developmental point of view has focused on individual change patterns that are considered relevant to the attainment of desirable end-states of human capacities in western industrialized societies. Therefore, instrumental rationality, capacity to decide and select a course of action, to act independently and autonomously, to be able to decentre cognitively and morally, to control one’s impulses and emotions and to assume responsibility for oneself were seen as the quintessential hubris of the modern individual. The study of individual development should then account for the process of how children would develop towards these full capacities taking into consideration the relevance of key aspects of the social environment.

The interrogation of the provinciality of end-states taken to be universal and adequate for all children problematized the kernel of the developmental paradigm, viz. the univocal, linear, sequential and teleological way of mapping biographical as well as historical trajectories. Accordingly, if children were taken as the baseline of human evolution, then by interrogating development, their destiny and statute—the “child question”—had to be revisited. My own and other colleagues’ studies of contemporary modes of subjectivization in childhood and youth foregrounded the contribution of children, *qua* children to present day culture and society: as co-partners in everyday culture and consumers (Zelizer 1985; de Castro 2006), as competent users of TIC devices (Buckingham 2000), as part of the working labour force (Qvortrup 1985; Nieuwenhuys 2005), as soldiers in wars (Honwana 2005), as claimers of better education, health and leisure (Solberg 1994), as co-partners in caring (Becker et al. 1998; Orellana 2001), as co-producers of the urban environment (de Castro 2000, 2001b) and in a plurality of situations that had been veiled as they were made mere school learners and future beings. Children’s destiny and statute could not be framed in the scope of their future lives but rather had to be spelt out as part of the complex production of different subject positions among different generations in the present. Following this line of thought, the concept of action seemed to me the cornerstone towards an understanding of children as makers, co-partners and contributors to the present cultural and social worlds (de Castro 2001a). Long before social and human sciences had foreseen other subject positions for children other than the “waiting child” (Qvortrup 2004), world cinema had already highlighted the acute, sensitive and innovative ways whereby children made their presence significant and singular in the making of society.

The theoretical notion of action needed further inquiry in psychology, a science which had prioritized the key notion of behaviour. However, this notion seemed unsatisfactory to me because of its clear individualistic bias and self-centred focus. The reading of Hannah Arendt and her masterpiece *The Human Condition* (Arendt 1995), followed by a deep inquiry into her outstanding contribution as a social and political philosopher in contemporary culture, instigated me to pursue the examination of the notion of action whilst approaching it to the study of childhood and youth. This consists of a major intellectual task with many and diverse theoretical

offshoots and lines of inquiry which, to this day, has been a source of inspiration for my own research and my students' dissertations and theses.

Arendt has been a major intellectual companion since then and her concerns about politics as a human activity in modern societies have discussed the enormous transformations of the public arena under recent economic developments. It was with Arendt that I could envisage the theoretical possibility of the notion of action, both in its radical social (and political) nature and in its subjective singularity. However, human action, differently from human labour, was destined to take place in arenas where at stake was the discussion and decision about where to go, what paths to choose and what common goods to pursue as human societies. From those public arenas of struggle, interlocution and decision children *should* be kept apart (Arendt 2004, 2005). Thus, notwithstanding Arendt's inspiring and major contribution to my own work and engagement, I was to depart from her on this point. Paradoxically, I owe Arendt this first *rapprochement* of action to politics, only to refuse her conventional way of thinking about children as not yet political subjects on account of their incapacity to cope with the hardships of public life.

The interrogation about the statute of children in contemporary societies could not dodge the issue of the relationship between children and politics. After all, on what basis had children been considered not yet full citizens and political subjects? Conventional political science was grounded on a specific notion of political subject whose subjective profile was couched in an adult male, white, literate, westernized version already criticized by feminist scholarship. The horizon of inquiry that was opened up by problematizing this specific imbrication between politics and adulthood has instigated the past 15 years of my own research activities, my students' and of colleagues', in Brazil and outside, whose work is interested in spelling out the complex and unorthodox interfaces between politics and childhood.

This task counted on other important companions whose work contributed to revisit the notion of politics and of the political: Jacques Rancière, Chantal Mouffe, Alain Badiou and Ernesto Laclau, to quote some of them. Although these authors did not have a specific interest in childhood and youth, their theoretical discussion about politics, political action and contemporary culture allowed fresh insights about "the" political outside its institutionalized and statist reference.

An important academic network developed on this account was in charge of carrying out a national project on "Youth and Politics" bringing together different research leaders of universities all over Brazil and their research groups. This national project was supported by the National Scientific Research and Technological Development in Brazil (CNPQ). Along 5 years research leaders and their students met periodically to discuss empirical findings and theoretical issues concerning political and social participation of youth and childhood, citizenship, social movements in youth and childhood and the production of political subjectivities. A main publication ensued from this national partnership (de Castro et al. 2012) and a number of other publications of my own (de Castro 2007, 2010a, b, 2012), of my research group (de Castro 2010a, b; de Castro and Nascimento 2013; de Castro and Grisolia 2016) and colleagues'. The partnership of this wide national group has evolved into other forms of scientific interaction and collaboration within other

academic institutional settings, such as the National Association of Postgraduate Training in Psychology (ANPEPP) and the Brazilian Association of Political Psychology (ABPP).

An important turning-point was reached along this project which provided me with the opportunity for an intense and instigative discussion with colleagues, such as Jaileila Araújo Menezes, Claudia Mayorga, Marco Aurélio Maximo Prado, Katia Maheirie and Andrea Zanella. It became evident the role of Brazilian politics, history and culture in contextualizing our debate and in indicating particular key aspects relevant to grapple with the issues of political participation of Brazilian children and youth. This was also felt whenever I happened to present my own work and discuss it in an international audience, specially with colleagues from the “North”. It became increasingly pressing the (internal) demand for theories that accounted in some way for the specificity of the political produced under the very particular conditions of the periphery of developed western countries.

Theories of Childhood and Youth: In Search of a Point of View from the “South”

The past can have recurrently different forms to be in the present. Back in the 1970s I felt extremely uneasy about carrying out my Ph.D. training in England as I thought that it was a too large amount of Brazilian public expenditure to be sent and spent abroad; another reason was that I would be doing research on a topic that would concern more directly my host country rather than my own. Different forms of uneasiness concerning what an academic life in “underdeveloped”, or periphery countries of the globalized capitalist economy, should concern itself with recurred in different ways in my academic life. Back in the 1970s I decided to leave England and carry out my research work in Brazil, which resulted in serious shortcomings—financially and personally—in finishing and submitting the thesis back in England. More recently, the recurrent theme of being an academic in the “South”—and what distinguishes it—seems to have taken on a more theoretical slant pushing my interests towards what is named as “Third World criticism”, in the words of (Dirlik 1994), or, decoloniality of knowledge, as Quijano (1992, 2000), Escobar (1996) and others have named it. This consists of the process of making an epistemological turn (the decolonial turn) not only in terms of the critical deconstruction of Eurocentric logic, syntax and rationality but also in terms of the process of personally working through one’s own “double consciousness” (Du Bois 1990) of being a non-European scholar. European modernity and its colonizing/civilizational mission has produced in periphery countries the experience of colonial difference in that whatever other forms of living and rationality became scrutinized and compared, being rendered subaltern, inferior and mute. Therefore, the institutionalization of academic life in the South is prone to engender a “white creole consciousness” (Mignolo 2011) which tends to affirm the geopolitical, cultural and epistemological affiliation and

adhesion to eurocentrism whilst maintaining a prudent distance in relation to indigenous values and forms of living. To make explicit such an unacknowledged duplicity means to admit the longing to be what one is not. In this vein, Dirlik affirms about the Indian context: “Colonialism created a new class of cultural hybrids, the ‘babus’, to use the term from the Indian context, alienated from their own cultures in their feelings of superiority toward their societies, and yet despised by the colonialists with whom they strove to identify” (2000, p. 262).

The social movement in scholarly circles towards a postcolonial or decolonial turn is wide ranging encompassing a variety of epistemological, political and cosmologic visions from Southern Asia, Africa and Latin America. This perspective informs where I stand concerning my present scientific research. To “navigate towards the South” in order to re-position myself as a scholar and an academic consists of an open-ended project for which I cannot envisage a point of arrival. This project has entailed so far a decolonial agenda concerning the study of children and youth. Theories of childhood and youth whose scientific conditions of production are based in the authority centres of Northern countries have widely circulated in the South faring at most to be empirically tried out. A wide range of concepts currently and mimetically employed such as the concepts of children’s rights, agency and social competence have earned dogmatic acceptance notwithstanding their specific eurocentric conditions of production. Thus, theorizing about children and youth from a Southern standpoint seems required in a world whose encroaching global economy seems to leave no space for alternatives, be they economic, ideological or existential.

In this vein, theories of children and youth from the South face a number of challenges. One seems the naturalization of the process of globalization as such, to be seen by the proliferation of expressions such as global South or global North, as if the effects of the global economy were not irrevocably different around the world (Chomsky 1998). In childhood studies scholars seem to have adhered to the idiom of globalization and to its inexorability in determining life conditions, so that in a homogenized world such as ours what is at stake relates at most to the examination of global/local intersections that produce children’s lives (Punch and Tisdall 2012). I see this as highly problematic as, in the South, globalization processes, speeded up by neoliberal governmental policies, have had a tremendous negative impact on the disaggregation of local cultures producing rural exodus, urban poverty, unemployment, social violence and anomie. This overarching rationale engenders, as far as childhood studies are concerned, a reverse double image of the child: either the “universal child” depicted in the international and national conventions of the rights of the child, the schooled and normalized child, or, the exotic child of the periphery, miserable, deviant, unschooled and “in the streets” (de Castro et al. forthcoming). If the former image depicts childhood in Northern countries, but not most children in the South, it follows that the latter image would not serve the South as well.

The international forums of the Sociology of Childhood Research Committee of the International Sociological Association have hosted scientific sessions on the topic of theorizing “other” childhoods, and post- and decolonial childhoods, proposed by myself and other colleagues. Other similar forums were also held at the

Committee of Childhood and Youth of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES). A decolonial agenda for the study of children and youth is a long-standing project and one which entails national and international collaboration. In view of such a programmatic agenda the group of researchers of NIPIAC launched in 2013 the scientific journal *DESIDADES*, an electronic international bilingual (Portuguese and Spanish) refereed journal of childhood and youth.² Working as Chief Editor since then with a host of colleagues' and students' collaboration, this has been for me a most Stimulating Challenge in many frontiers. Firstly, it has called for the need to revisit the orthodoxy about what consists a "scientific" journal, its material and normative basis. Secondly, the challenge of moving forward a Latin American research network about children and youth has met the enormous difficulties of communication and knowledge circulation among Latin American researchers whose scientific networking seems fragmented, disperse and polarized either towards North America or Europe (as much as trade exchange, it seems!).

An international collaboration with the eminent Indian scholar Ashis Nandy was initiated in 2011 when I was a Visiting Scholar at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi, where Nandy is an Honorary Fellow and ex-Director. Nandy is a political scientist and clinical psychologist whose academic interests range on a great variety of topics, including the production of subjectivities in contemporary culture, domination, resistance, development, Gandhian cosmology and politics, secularism and childhood. I was able to organize the translation and publication of a collection of his works which had not been published before in Brazil (Nandy 2015). The stay in India was important to enlarge my references about post-colonial literature and discussion. The issues of domination and resistance, which reverberate with my past readings of Adorno and intellectual incursions in political theory, came again to the fore with respect to the position of children in modernity. Maybe to some it can be an overstatement to say that children's position in modern societies suffers from entanglements that can be subsumed under theories of domination. Nevertheless, to look at children's relationships in modern societies from the specific vantage point of theories of domination (de Castro 2013) allows for a radical questioning of adult-centric institutions such as schools, democracy and institutional politics and modern social division of labour.

Social and political participation of children has continued to be a present topic of research interest for me. However, the *rapprochement* between childhood and politics demands multifarious theoretical investments: not only that the notion of development in child theories be overcome and more promising theoretical notions, such as that of children's social and collective action be worked out. It seems also necessary that other key concepts, forged in the particular conditions of European societies, be problematized. The notion of public sphere, as contrasted to the private, has been attributed a key role in the constitution of the political. What constitutes public-ness in societies in the periphery of globalized capitalism should be a

² DESidades—Electronic Scientific Journal on Childhood and Youth. Accessed at www.desidades.ufjf.br.

matter of inquiry given the enormous differences to be found between Brazil and Europe with regard to the constitutive soil upon which this notion lays: the constitution of the modern individual, of the modern State, the statute of the law in modern states, to quote a few. Furthermore, to inquire about public action and the “public man” entails to articulate, if possible, the presence of those who have stood apart from any public-ness in modern society—children (de Castro 2016). This subject matter has been undertaken as one of the key features of my recent research projects: to analyse children’s public subjectivities and their construction of a “common” world (de Castro 2017). This has generated a wide gamut of theoretical and methodological challenges which have been shared and intensively discussed with students and colleagues. We do hope that these discussions will be shared soon with a wider public through forthcoming publications that are in preparation now.

Final Words

Looking forward I feel that there is still some time left before I definitively quit the university and retire. At the moment I live in a contradictory sentimental mood experimenting both a sense of finitude and loss and of sureness about the next steps ahead.

As a Brazilian scholar I face the daily struggle of the incommensurability of demands of academic life in Brazil. Firstly, the must of the “development” complex of former times has been now re-phrased as the must of “internationalization” demands—hard and many. However, the material conditions of federal and state universities—our public universities—have deteriorated enormously. We face a huge turnover of students, specially those worse off who cannot afford not to have a full-time job while studying. Furthermore, the agenda of internationalization was not based on an exhaustive debate among academics of different research areas in order to spell out what should constitute its tenets and modes of operationalization. Again, we seem to be facing an ordeal for no good cause. Tenure schemes have greatly changed in the past years and more is to come as I write these lines. Recent neoliberal policies urged by IMF and other international agencies are slowly suffocating public universities with clear intentions of privatization. In this context, the future seems sombre and uncertain.

Nevertheless, the present offers a hectic and, many a times, exciting agenda. I feel most grateful to my daily conviviality with students, under and postgraduate. They are companions with whom intellectual work and political discussion has been shared and enjoyed. This has been a most extraordinary experience of educational transmission whereby education goes truly in both ways and tries out unforeseen pathways. Many colleagues, turned personal friends, have been those essential human beings for anyone to continue to hope when in distress, and to continue to struggle when worn out. Without this affective network intellectual tasks and academic demands seem sterile and pointless. Therefore, along these decades I was able to learn that scholarly work demands the hard toil of research, reading and

transmission but that it must be moved by shared beliefs that knowledge thus produced can respond to societal demands and lead us towards better alternatives to the present.

If one's trajectory can depict a scenario of changes and movements in the pursuit of one's convictions, it must also show how permanence is also acquired by virtue of experience. In times of high speed and obsolescence, many aspects of our lives, including scientific endeavours, run the risk of becoming superficial and fast-made. To resist alacrity, fame and celebrity one has to recall and firmly grip one's passion to learn and to know. But this horizon of novel contradictions calls for new ways to construct this institution named university with its tensions, possibilities and limitations. This is a task ahead of us to be carried out looking back to our tradition and culture and forth to society's most cherished values and imagined destiny.

References

- T. Adorno, *Prismas: la crítica de la cultura y la sociedad* (Ed. Ariel, Barcelona, 1962)
- T. Adorno, *Modèles critiques: interventions/repliques* (Payot, Paris, 1984)
- T. Adorno, M. Horkheimer, *Dialética do esclarecimento* (Zahar, Rio de Janeiro, 1985)
- L. Alanen, *Modern Childhood? Exploring the Child Question in Sociology. Research Report 50* (University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, 1992)
- H. Arendt, *A Condição Humana*, 7th edn. (Forense, Rio de Janeiro, 1995)
- H. Arendt, Reflexões sobre Little Rock, in *Responsabilidade e julgamento* (Ed. Schwarcz, São Paulo, 2004), pp. 261–281
- H. Arendt, *Entre o passado e o futuro* (Perspectiva, São Paulo, 2005)
- M. Autuori, Uma história do Instituto de Psicologia da Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro. *Bol. Acad. Paul. Psicol.* **34**(86), 7–23 (2014)
- S. Becker, J. Aldridge, C. Dearden, *Young Carers and their Families* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1998)
- W. Benjamin, *Origem do drama barroco alemão* (Brasiliense, São Paulo, 1984)
- A. Biaggio, *Psicologia do Desenvolvimento* (Vozes, Petrópolis, 1975)
- A. Biaggio, A developmental study of moral judgment of Brazilian children and adolescents. *Interam. J. Psychol.* **10**, 71–81 (1976)
- A. Biaggio, Desenvolvimento moral: Vinte anos de pesquisa no Brasil. *Psicologia: Reflexão e Crítica* **1**, 60–69 (1988)
- A. Biaggio, Kohlberg e a comunidade justa: Desenvolvendo o senso ético e a cidadania na escola. *Psicologia: Reflexão e Crítica* **10**, 47–69 (1997)
- F.E. Boulaga, *Muntu in Crisis. African Authenticity and Philosophy* (Africa World Press, Trenton, 2014)
- J. Broughton, *Critical Theories of Psychological Development* (Plenum, New York, 1987)
- D. Buckingham, *After the Death of the Childhood: Growing Up in the Age of Electronic Media* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 2000)
- N. Chomsky, Free trade and free market: pretense and practice, in *The Cultures of Globalization*, ed. by F. Jameson, M. Myoshi (Duke University Press, Durham, 1998), pp. 356–370
- L.R. de Castro, Aspects of child care in single and two-parent families of lower socio-economic status of an urban population, in *Proceedings of the International Congress 'Growing into a Modern World'*, vol. II (The Norwegian Centre of Child Studies, Trondheim, 1988), pp. 946–965
- L.R. de Castro, Desenvolvimento Humano: por um retorno ao imaginário. *Psicologia Clínica: pós-graduação e pesquisa* **5**(5), 11–19 (1990)

- L.R. de Castro, Uma perspectiva paradigmática sobre a temporalidade. *Psicologia: Reflexão e Crítica* 5(2), 99–110 (1992)
- L.R. de Castro, Revendo a noção de progresso. *Gerontologia* 1(4), 149–151 (1993)
- L.R. de Castro, O lugar da infância na Modernidade. *Psicologia: Reflexão e Crítica* 9(2), 307–335 (1996)
- L. R. de Castro (ed.), *Infância e Adolescência na Cultura do Consumo* (Nau, Rio de Janeiro, 1998)
- L.R. de Castro, Children in the cities: un-invited participants. *J. Soc. Sci.* 4(2-3), 135–142 (2000)
- L. R. de Castro (ed.), *Crianças e Jovens na Construção da Cultura* (Nau/Faperj, Rio de Janeiro, 2001a)
- L.R. de Castro, Cities and social participation: social inequalities from children's and youth's point of view. *Int. J. Anthropol.* 16(2/3), 77–87 (2001b)
- L.R. de Castro, What is new in the 'south'? Consumer culture and the vicissitudes of poor youth's identity construction in urban Brazil. *Young* 14(3), 179–201 (2006)
- L.R. de Castro, Political participation in the school context: youth experiences in collective action. *Child. Youth Environ.* 17(2), 93–111 (2007)
- L.R. de Castro, Etre jeune: une puissance incertaine dans l'espace public brésilien, in *Être en société. Le lien social à l'épreuve des cultures*, ed. by A. Petitat (Presses Universitaires de Laval, Québec, 2010a), pp. 135–152
- L.R. de Castro, *Falatório: participação e democracia na escola* (Contra-capta, Rio de Janeiro, 2010b)
- L.R. de Castro, The good-enough society, the good-enough citizen and the good-enough student: where children's participation agenda is moving to in Brazil? *Childhood* 19(1), 52–68 (2012)
- L.R. de Castro, *O futuro da infância* (7 Letras/Faperj, Rio de Janeiro, 2013)
- L.R. de Castro, Subjetividades públicas juvenis: a construção do comum e os impasses de sua realização. *Estud. Psicol.* 21(1), 80–91 (2016)
- L.R. de Castro, Precisamos falar do recreio! A construção do comum pelas crianças na escola. *Child. Philos.* 14(29), 129–148 (2017)
- L. R. de Castro, J. Correa (eds.), *Mostrando a Real: Um retrato da juventude pobre no Rio de Janeiro* (Nau/Faperj, Rio de Janeiro, 2005a)
- L. R. de Castro, J. Correa (eds.), *Juventude Contemporânea: Perspectivas Nacionais e Internacionais* (Nau/Faperj, Rio de Janeiro, 2005b)
- L.R. de Castro, F. Grisolia, Subjetivação pública ou socialização política? Sobre as articulações entre o 'político' e a infância. *Educ. Soc. (Campinas)* 37(137), 971–988 (2016)
- L.R. de Castro, R. Naidin, Dogmatismo e frustração como determinantes da agressividade manifestada. *Rev. Int. Psicol.* 12, 25–37 (1978)
- L.R. de Castro, M.E. Nascimento, Politizar as relações entre jovens e adultos? A construção da experiência escolar pelos estudantes. *Estud. Psicol.* 18(2), 359–367 (2013)
- L.R. de Castro, S.J. Souza, Desenvolvimento Humano e Questões para um Final de Século: Tempo, História e Memória. *Psicologia Clínica: Pós-graduação e Pesquisa* 6, 99–124 (1995)
- L. R. de Castro, C. Mayorga, M. A. M. Prado (eds.), *Juventude e a experiência da política no contemporâneo* (Contra-capta/CNPQ, Rio de Janeiro, 2012)
- L.R. de Castro, P. Uglione, A.R. Souza, From the countryside to the city: a boy's journey and the world to know, in *The Child in World Cinema*, ed. by D. Olson (Lexington Books, Lanham, forthcoming), pp. 43–62
- A. Dirlik, The postcolonial aura: third world criticism in the age of global capitalism. *Crit. Inq.* 20, 328–356 (1994)
- A. Dirlik, Reading Ashis Nandy: the return of the past, or modernity with a vengeance, in *Dissenting Knowledges, Open Futures. The Multiple Selves and Strange Destinations of Ashis Nandy*, ed. by V. Lay (Oxford, Delhi, 2000), pp. 260–286
- W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Vintage Books, New York, 1990)
- A. Escobar, *La invención del Tercer Mundo. Construcción y deconstrucción del desarrollo* (Grupo Editorial Norma, Bogotá, 1996)
- C. Garcia, L.R. de Castro, S.J. Souza, *Infância, Cinema e Sociedade* (Ravil, Rio de Janeiro, 1997)

- A. Honwana, Innocent & guilty. Child-soldiers as interstitial & tactical agents, in *Makers and Breakers. Children & Youth in Postcolonial Africa*, ed. by A. Honwana, F. de Boeck (Africa World Press, Trenton, 2005), pp. 31–52
- M. Horkheimer, *Teoria Crítica* (Amorrotu, Buenos Aires, 1974)
- H. Marcuse, *One-dimensional Man* (Beacon Press, Boston, 1969)
- R. Marini, *La dialectica de la dependencia* (Era, México, 1973)
- W. Mignolo, La colonialidad a lo largo y a lo ancho: el hemisfério occidental en el horizonte colonial de la modernidad, in *La colonialidad del saber: eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales*, ed. by E. Langer (CICCUS y CLACSO, Buenos Aires, 2011), pp. 73–104
- J. Morss, *The Biologising of Childhood: Developmental Psychology and the Darwinian Myth* (Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc, Hove, 1990)
- J. Morss, Making waves: deconstruction and developmental psychology. *Theory Psychol.* **2**, 445–465 (1992)
- J. Morss, The development complex. *Psychoculture* **1**, 16–17 (1995)
- A. Nandy, *A Imaginação Emancipatória. Desafios do Século XXI* (UFMG, Belo Horizonte, 2015)
- O. Nieuwenhuys, The wealth of children: reconsidering the child labour debate, in *Studies in Modern Childhood. Society, Agency, Culture*, ed. by J. Qvortrup (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2005), pp. 167–183
- M.F. Orellana, The work kids do: Mexican and central American immigrant children's contributions to households and schools in California. *Harv. Educ. Rev.* **71**, 366–389 (2001)
- R. Peters, The development of reason, in *Toward a Theory of Psychological Development*, ed. by S.C. Modgil (NFER Publications, Windsor, 1980), pp. 113–146
- S. Punch, E.K.M. Tisdall, Exploring children and young people's relationships across majority and minority worlds (editorial). *Child. Geogr.* **10**(3), 241–248 (2012)
- A. Quijano, Colonialidad y modernidad/racionalidad. *Perú Indígena* **13**(29), 11–20 (1992)
- A. Quijano, Coloniality of power, Eurocentrism and Latin America. *Neplanta* **1**(3), 533–580 (2000)
- J. Qvortrup, The waiting child. *Childhood* **11**(3), 267–273 (2004)
- J. Qvortrup, Sociology of Childhood Research Committee 53: a brief account of its formation. Newsletter of the Research Committee 53 Sociology of Childhood, 2015, pp. 4–7. <http://rc53isa.blogspot.com.br/p/newsletter.html>
- J. Qvortrup, Placing children in the division of labour, in *Family and Economy in Modern Society*, ed. by P. Close, R. Collins (Macmillan Press, New York, 1985), pp. 129–145
- A. Solberg, *Negotiating Childhood* (Nordplan, Stockholm, 1994)
- S.J. Souza, L.R. de Castro, Pesquisando com crianças: subjetividade infantil, dialogismo e gênero discursivo. *Psicologia Clínica: Pós-graduação e Pesquisa* **9**(9), 83–116 (1998)
- V. Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (Basic Books, New York, 1985)