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CHILDHOOD IN CULTURE:
Navigating Between India and Brazil

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Introduction

Academic life in the present globalized world has been gradually modelled after hegemonic economic principles of efficiency, productivity and competitiveness. These have insidiously slipped into the social practices, discourses and teleologies that have so far oriented the search for knowledge, the love for discussion and exchange of ideas and the relevance of transmission, altering altogether the meaning and fate of what academy in our present world is for. Jacoby (1987) cautions us that present academic life is more akin to credentials, titles and celebrating one's self-reputation than interested in securing the freedom of thinking. It seems that we are heading for an academic life whose insignia of distinction lie on the competence for celebrity and egocentric entrepreneurship incommensurably distant from the cherished ideals of solidarity, critical thinking and political engagement.

The present volume of felicitation for Professor Deepak Kumar Behera opens-up for us a precious opportunity to celebrate an intellectual and an academic life that has remained faithful to his ideals. As Hannah Arendt has noted, courage is a public quality (2002), which today very few are willing to cultivate as it may put in risk one's public esteem. We praise Professor Behera for his unremitting courage as he stands as an

inspiration for all of us who feel sometimes impotent before the imperatives of this new era. Those who have had the privilege of belonging to the circle of Professor Behera's colleagues have had a chance to share and learn from his serene standpoint against such a prevailing academic reality of competitiveness. His zest to share with colleagues what he has been able to obtain for himself was remarkable: his knowledge, know-how, projects, ideas and whatever useful information. He practised what he professed, and generosity with colleagues was his mark. He could maintain along his life a compassionate and acute outlook on disagreements and disputes, providing a third party standpoint of oxygenation and support so that none could find him/herself put aside on account of his/her beliefs. The faith in others and in their good judgement makes him, not only a distinguished colleague, but one who is able to integrate wisdom and professional knowledge.

In the contribution to this volume, we undertake a dialogue with Professor Behera's work on children and tribal people. His extensive research on these two social groups has produced a unique understanding of the social issues that affect these groups today, specially in face of the new legislation that is purported to safeguard their rights and demands. Notwithstanding advances formally coded in legal dispositions, the question that needs to be asked remains: to what extent people's lives in these groups have been improved? If not, what accounts for the resistances to change the *status quo*? We have brought forth the notions of culture, vulnerability and marginalization as key theoretical concepts in Professor Behera's work to discuss these questions. These notions make up a three-fold analytical stance from where to highlight present challenges concerning the plight of these social groups.

In order to enhance the discussion in view of a trans-national frame of analysis, we have navigated between Professor Behera's contribution and Brazilian scholarship on children and tribal people. As India and Brazil stand as two emergent countries in the international capitalist order, part of the BRIC' countries, they share multiple similarities in terms of the present social, economic and political conditions. The purpose here is to establish a potent dialogue on common problems and dilemmas that are interposed in these two countries' search for social equality and development.

CULTURE AND THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF TRIBAL CHILDREN: NAVIGATING BETWEEN INDIA AND BRAZIL

It seems quite evident that within the scope of present anthropological scholarship revisiting the concept of culture should consist of an important task. In the extensive contribution of Professor Deepak Kumar Behera, it is possible to identify such a concern as a leading aspect of his ethnographical work and research projects, specially those related to tribal and indigenous peoples in contemporary India. In different moments (Behera, 2003; Behera and Pfeffer, 2009) he has addressed the significant and structural difference between the culture of tribal[1] peoples and that of urban westernized societies, emergent in interethnic contexts such as those of state intervention and tribal educational institutionalization.

The effort to converge the concern with the concept of culture and the study of tribal peoples can be taken for granted to some extent, in that the contact with these peoples, as these stand for a "radical alterity" in relationship to the anthropologist or to the national society, would imply a process of objectification of the latter's culture and values (Wagner, 2009). However, it is important to consider that today culture consists of a fundamental notion to describe differences and act thereupon in an ever increasing globalized world; in this sense we can affirm that such a notion does not belong mainly or solely to academicians, but also to tribal and indigenous people themselves. It is possible then to raise the issue about the demand of an ampler discussion in the human and social sciences about its meanings and the political and social consequences of its uses (Carneiro da Cunha, 2009).

In the history of the anthropological sciences the concept of culture emerges tinged with a certain ambiguity expressing both a totalizing phenomenon, once everyone belongs to a culture, and a particularizing one, as all cultures all unique and distinct. Irrespective of the genealogical dimension of the concept, we argue that over and above its different meanings the idea of culture introduces a social relationship, one that is constituted in the encounter—absolutely asymmetrical—between West and East, or still, between "primitive" and "modern" peoples. Insofar as a relative conception of culture has introduced the equivalence among different cosmologies and ways of living, it is noteworthy that invariably the notion of culture is likely to produce limits, geographies and alterities that introduce a division between "us" and "them". This should not lead

to a total rejection of such an important concept, but brings forward the urgency to analyse its implications in anthropological research, mostly in ethnographic work.

If the notion of culture is embedded in a colonial heritage as it was coined in this asymmetrical encounter between the West and indigenous peoples, producing thus a hierarchical separation between them, nonetheless it is possible to say that its contemporary use has been recognized and appropriated by a great number of indigenous peoples as a way to affirm their autonomy in search of their rights. This tribal and indigenous process of updating the concept of culture is present in distinct contemporary interethnic relationships, encompassing recent endeavours to rescue and affirm the value of tribal and indigenous cultures and languages, to deal with tribal and indigenous demands for territory and to legitimate indigenous and tribal representativeness in political disputes. In this context of "reinvention of culture", to borrow an expression from Roy Wagner (1981), a process that calls our attention, on account of its importance in public debate and as a good point to illustrate our argument, concerns the educational institutionalization of indigenous peoples and tribal communities.

The relationship of indigenous peoples with the Brazilian state—or with the "whites", as the non-indigenous are usually called in Brazilian ethnology—has been qualified by disrespect and violence towards their ways of living, as part and parcel of a more comprehensive colonizing enterprise in other parts of the globe as well. In Brazil it is esteemed that before the arrival of the Portuguese colonizers in the 15th century there were between 3.5 to 6.0 million indigenous peoples (Denevan, 1992)[2] scattered in the whole national territory. Today, indigenous groups count a little over than eight hundred thousand people. During the 20th century, specially in the 1970s, when the future of the indigenous peoples became a topic in the public debate of the country, the disappearance of these populations was even cogitated as an irremediable fact. Nevertheless, in the last thirty years, demographic data have in fact shown a steady increase in the number of these peoples[3] who, though they represent only 0.4 per cent of the whole Brazilian population, possess a great cultural diversity spread in two hundred and forty six different peoples, and one hundred and eighty different languages.

It is also possible to affirm, without incurring in an exacerbated optimism, that indigenous peoples have so far not only *not* disappeared, but also have succeeded in organizing themselves in different social

movements that have had a strong influence on the elaboration of the Brazilian Constitutional Law of 1988. By this Constitution, called by some as "Citizen Constitution", indigenous peoples in Brazil have succeeded in obtaining both the legal recognition of their original territories, as well as the right to a differentiated education that is attentive to their ways of living and social organization. According to the official documents that establish the "Directives for a National Policy of Indigenous Education" (MEC, 1994), indigenous schools should be planned in view of the particularities of each people or community, devising methods and pedagogical materials different from those of conventional schooling so that it is possible to teach and develop mother indigenous languages. These principles express thus a novel perspective on the relationship between the state and the indigenous peoples that is not based, at least formally, in the attempt to assimilate and incorporate the indigenous peoples into the national society, but to recognize them as a cultural alterity and seek to respect their social organization, languages, customs, beliefs and traditions.

Despite its promising rhetoric, there is still a great distance between legal dispositions and the concrete reality of indigenous peoples in Brazil. In order to have a more realistic dimension of the schooling situation of the indigenous peoples, it is necessary to analyse the extensive ethnographic work dedicated to this topic that allows us to establish an interesting comparison between the Brazilian and the Indian contexts. In general, the overall issue—that very much relates to the concern with the concept of culture that we mentioned earlier—consists of interrogating about whether the school as a social space meant to support the cultural transmission processes of Western societies can be changed to serve the process of cultural transmission of indigenous cultures.

Cohn's (2004) analysis of an experience of schooled learning in a Xikrin village, indigenous people in the North of Brazil, questions whether and how it would be possible to accommodate "an indigenous education" with "an indigenous school education". The Xikrin understand, differently from the "whites", that learning is something that takes place in every moment of life and that it involves the teaching of a specific repertoire of behaviours associated with each learning situation. Respect (*pia'am*) consists of a central aspect of the adult-child teaching for Xikrin people, since it entails the necessary silence and humility before those who teach, the elders. The question then is how to incorporate such an important aspect of a schooling educational project insofar as the latter demands

that indigenous children actively participate in learning (for instance, responding and making questions, something which is in conflict with the notion of respect—*pia'am*). In this sense, there are challenges to be faced in the project of an indigenous school education.

The insightful contribution of Professor Behera (2003) on the process of educational institutionalization of tribal children in Orissa, India, poses this challenge in still more concrete terms alongside his detailed and acute ethnography of the daily life in *Ashram* schools. His main argument points to the fact that this institutionalized educational process positions children between two cultures, the tribal and the modern westernized one, as the school does not seem receptive to native experience and values. Differently from the tribal context where learning takes place through the transmission of familial traditions and alongside the daily activities of social and material reproduction, the process of educational institutionalization is confined within a specific institution separated from the village and the family and directed at the disciplinarization of child bodies and the time of childhood.

Although situated quite far away from Orissa, the ethnographic work of Benites (2013) on the indigenous school education of the people Ava Kaiowá, inhabitants in the Centre of Brazil, also points to this tension between education in the community and education at school. The social and territorial organization of the Kaiowá people is based on extended families which are kin groups relatively autonomous linked by relationships of affinity, mostly consanguinity. These groups possess a unique history and tradition that is considered a valuable heritage to be transmitted to the younger ones, in order to perpetuate the indigenous way of good living (*teko vy'a*). Children's education is centred on the figure of the grandmother, taking place at different social spaces, but mainly through domestic work, play, and ritual situations (sacred and profane). It is noteworthy that, similar to those tribal contexts studied by Behera (2003), the processes of learning, socialization and value transmission of these indigenous children are not exclusive to a single institution but cut across all daily activities.

As we have remarked before, despite institutionally legal dispositions in Brazil to assure a differentiated education to indigenous peoples, ethnographic work (Benites, 2012) has shown how in the real context of village schools indigenous education remains controlled by Christian missionary organizations in which a civilizing and assimilationist perspective prevails. The loss of control over the educational process by

the family and the imposition of values and educational syllabus completely decontextualized from their own are frequent complaints of the Kaiowá people in relation to these schools. This distance between family and school is also remarked by Behera (2003), who indicates the need for a reorganization of the division of labour in tribal communities as children have to attend school and be absent from their homes.

Behera (2003) not only draws attention to the fact that as tribal children have to leave for school they have to separate themselves from their family and their native territory, but also to the problematic meaning of the future that this educational institutionalization process allows them to construct. Behera emphatically affirms that from children's point of view (and sometimes also parents') school teaching in *Ashram* schools does not allow them to draw plans for the future. As he describes, school curricula are meant and serve the purposes, demands and values of urban modern societies, and not to what is valued in local communities. Chemistry, physics, geometry and geography are taught instead of hunting, agriculture, ethnomedicine and fishing. Furthermore, the process of learning is seriously jeopardised as teachers do not speak the native languages of their pupils frequently imposing their own language which children do not understand.

Such an intergenerational relationship between students and teachers is thus problematized by Behera's ethnographic work (2003). The teachers in *Ashram* schools come from a non-tribal context; they not only do not speak their students' native languages, but also demonstrate a negative judgement towards their customs and traditions. As teaching is often a secondary activity for these adults, their dedication to the task becomes fragile weakening interpersonal relationships with children. In an engaged and committed attitude towards children's well-being, Behera notes that abuses are sometimes committed by adults in these schools, such as attributing to students their own (teachers') domestic labour, deviating school material and applying too severe punishments for students' trifle errors.

As he analyses the institutional arrangement of these schools based on an extremely rigid routine, bad conditions of hygiene, housing and eating, an excessive workload undertaken by students, and above all, an evident incompatibility of the school ethos with the values held by the tribal peoples, Behera (2003) criticizes the colonial and authoritarian dimension in the process of educational institutionalization of tribal children: "…. why should tribal children today be exposed to an

educational system that was devised one hundred years ago in Victorian colonial times and is thoroughly authoritarian?" (Behera, 2003:191). After students have passed through their educational years, which is supposed to offer them perspectives and possibilities of social mobility, these youth return definitely to their communities as they cannot find well paid urban employment. Above all, they are subjectively divided, or as Behera puts it, they are positioned "in between two cultures, the civitas and the tribal".

Despite the fact that indigenous school education can be criticized to contain a colonial dimension, both Cohn (2004) and Benites (2012) suggest that there may exist an indigenous interest in these new spaces of learning, the schools, in the Brazilian context. This interest, apparently paradoxical, reveals that though indigenous peoples may have quite distinct values and modes of living from the urban middle classes, they consider that the mediation and contact with the world of the "whites" is necessary for their own survival and for the reproduction of their peoples and cultures. To be able to use certain codes and languages, specially written language (for the Kaiowá people, the "language of the paper") propitiated by school learning, is regarded as a possibility to negotiate with a world characterized by the logic of laws, propriety and contract. These populations which have been historically marginalized from public decision processes, see in school learning the possibility that their children can inhabit these two worlds, the indigenous/tribal and the civitas, in view of safeguarding their recently obtained position of rights holders.

The issue at stake here, which is directly related to the discussion of the concept of culture as suggested earlier, is whether such a mediation can be possible. As schools are generally organized as an institution modelled after the Westernized modern project as far as transmission and socialization are concerned, how is it possible to conceive it as a locus of transmission of cultures that do not necessarily organize their knowledge and traditions in a corpus to be transmitted by a specific institution? This question, raised here with the intention to provoke discussion, leads us to our initial concern: the idea of culture forwards similarities and differences once it maps out differences between distinct social groups. These relationships thus produced find expression in the case of the educational institutionalization of tribal and indigenous peoples. For indigenous/tribal peoples, the demand of schooling brings about an impasse of two quite incompatible world visions, one related to their own indigenous/tribal education and the indigenous/tribal school education. To adhere to the latter can mean the distancing, and even the

rejection, of their original cultural values and also the appropriation of a system of thought and values that is alien to their own origin.

As insightfully notes Behera (2003), to be between two cultures leads to social and subjective sensitive issues, even in face of the fact that the relationship between "modern" and "primitive" groups today is less asymmetrical than used to be a few decades ago. Indigenous and tribal peoples have struggled bravely and resisted to "disappear" or, to "become whites". Considering that the educational institutionalization of indigenous and tribal peoples may hinge on aseemingly insoluble problem today, it seems at least necessary to recognize the singularity of the processes whereby these tribal peoples learn and teach to make the case for what can be named as an indigenous/tribal pedagogy.

THE VULNERABILITY AND THE MARGINALIZATION OF CHILDREN: NAVIGATING BETWEEN INDIA AND BRAZIL

The issue of the vulnerability and the marginalization of the child is at once associated with the acknowledgement of the legal status of children as 'minors' before the law. As such, children are considered to be not yet full human beings capable of independent choice and decision-making. Their vulnerability stands for their not fully developed cognitive and moral capacities, which seems to legitimate social and cultural practices of protection and regulated participation in social life (Kulynych, 2001). The reality thus created by legal dispositions is mainly subsidised by a gamut of psychological theories which, along the 20th century, have produced a theory of the human subject as a developing being, born under-socialized and immature, whose lifelong trajectory will lead him or her to maturity and psychological completion. 'Developmentalism', as a widely diffused scientific paradigm, has contributed to ground the repertoire of juridical and cultural representations and practices about children's lesser capacities and restricted involvement as co-partners in the construction of the social world (James & Prout, 1990).

The taken-for-granted truth of children's vulnerability confers an essentialized nature to children, one which inescapably positions children as inferiors as regards to their elders on whom they must depend, trust and be subordinated to. However, a more critical outlook on children's vulnerability should interrogate about its conditions of possibility, that is, how is it that children are vulnerable? Or, what are the historical, cultural and political conditions which are responsible to produce

children's vulnerability? Therefore, the issue of vulnerability as a moral and psychological condition of the human (child) subject should entail a more analytical perspective conducive to a less simplistic understanding of its process (= when and how one becomes vulnerable), its cultural and political underpinnings (=what are the conditions which produce vulnerability) and its mode of subjectivization (=who are those that become significantly vulnerable).

We take Deepak Behera's rich scholarship on children's vulnerability and marginalization as an insightful approach to tackle this issue in view of deconstructing the regime of truth that has been consolidated about children and childhood. Furthermore, we take this opportunity to establish a dialogue between Behera's contributions and Brazilian scholars concerning the issue of vulnerability and marginalization of children.

Children's vulnerability and marginalization have been two important themes in Behera's scholarly contributions in the area of child studies. His analytical perspective is deeply entrenched in his view of children as agents and co-partners in the social construction of the world we live in (Behera & Trawick, 2001). This may sound today as quite a well-established idea espoused by child researchers all-over the world emulated by the ideals set by international conventions on the rights of the child (Cohen, 1996). Accordingly, the acknowledgement of the equal worth of the child *vis-à-vis* her adult counterpart represents a paradigmatic shift in the way modern societies have come to consider children and their social presence. However, as pointed out by Behera and Pramanik (2012), "this treaty can at the most be regarded as a provisional result" (p. 80). Rather than considering the sufficiency of legal dispositions, the authors underline their instrumental value in terms of bringing about new social practices and altering customs and traditions. After all, it is the latter which proves crucial in determining children's position and well-being. Significantly, thus, stands the authors' observation that legal frameworks can have small impact on the practices they are meant to regulate and change, and in this case, the status of equal worth legally prescribed to children mostly represents an abstract norm rather than an enforced reality. If representations about children's moral and legal positions seem resilient to top-down definitions of their worth, dignity and competence, one should examine how other concurrent definitions are produced in daily social interactions between children and their elders. Through the ethnographer's labour of bringing out the tensions, contradictions and conflicts in the daily lives of children, it may be possible to extricate the

views that inform how relationships between adults and children are constructed and which values and normative ideas they tend to affirm.

Children's social lives in schools have been a significant dimension of Behera's vast ethnographical work. If children have been granted new entitlements by recent legal dispositions, it is in schools, better than anywhere else, that one should look for the advances in conferring children their due worth: "There is no place, more suitable than school to show this respect", note Behera & Rashmi (2012:81). As a norm-bound institution, modelled by ideals, schools should incorporate new challenges resulting from the recent normative changes in children's legal status, so as to give them a place of genuine respect in disputes, conflicts, disciplinary measures, the examination system as well as in the participation of the school in general. Nevertheless, the authors' conclusions point that schools tend to reproduce certain deep-engrained beliefs that corroborate a highly hierarchical and authoritarian child-adult relationship based on the sole authority and power of the latter.

The plight of school children is that of being entrapped by a totalitarian system of oppression corroborated by both parents and school staff who are in unison in producing "over-burdened children" (Behera & Pramanik, 2012; Behera & Pramanik, 2001). It is this central concept in Behera & Coll.'s work that characterizes the process of producing vulnerability in children, not as an essentialized attribute of their supposed nature, but as the result of diverse social and cultural practices in which children are positioned. Two encompassing practices account for the production of "over-burdened children" in modern childhood in India: the overall competitiveness that qualifies adults' expectations and demands from children, and presides over the organization of all school activities; and, the unfair structure of power relationships that dominate child-adult relationships in the school and the family contexts.

Diverse ethnographic studies conducted by Behera and Collaborators have highlighted the pervasiveness of competition as a cherished value held by parents who want to make their children "achievers and performers" (2012:87), despite whatever emotional and existential costs this might engender. For children, complying with parental demands and expectations seems a must in face of other imminent negative consequences, such as disappointing them and losing their own self-esteem. On the other hand, teachers and school staff act in accordance with parents' wishes, "… Principals of the schools today have become like film producers. They give what the audience wants", affirm the

authors (2012:86). Rote learning, a huge academic overload and a child unfriendly atmosphere altogether are used to instil in children the idea that the only possible alternative left is compliance with the elders' expectations even if this might mean giving up their own personal projects and dreams and experiencing school learning as a pointless and irrelevant activity. The ideological legitimation for such an endeavour is made under the plea of "the best interests of the students". Although negotiation, resistance and non-compliance do occur, children are left with little scope for altering this oppressive context in view of yet another element that concurs to consolidate the social imaginary that there is no way out: discipline and physical and psychological punishment.

Behera and Pramanik state that "…Traditionally in our society, children are viewed as the property of their parents" (2012:89) which already positions children as dependent on authority figures, seen as knowledgeable and omnipotent individuals. Physical punishment, as well as humiliation, stands as an acceptable way to persuade children to acquiesce to adults' demands, at home or at school. As noted by the authors, "it was observed that some teachers punish the students on a regular basis. It appears as if giving punishment has become their habits" (2012:87). The authorised and legitimated position of adults to act as the sole arbiter over a child's behaviours structures the position from where children can act and respond in their social relationships with adults. The taken-for-granted truth of adults' omnipotence entails the impotence of children, their *vulnerability,* as an effect of a mutual understanding of the lesser position of the child and her limited possibilities of action. Thus, the projected surplus of power and knowledge on the adult's figure simultaneously implies the imagined frailty of the children's, an already given décalage that fixes the latter in a condition of impairment and vulnerability. Children's resentment, fear and psychological breakdown seem to be other side effects of such a structuring of child-adult relationships, also to be found in other social relationships of oppression and domination (Scott, 1990).

"Over-burdened children" understood as an iconic expression of a complex process of producing acquiescent, fearful and vulnerable children interrogate the legitimacy of the sovereign rule of adults over them. Acting on behalf of children and in their best interests can lead, as Behera *et al*. have shown, to claim what is not defensible: the silencing of subjects and their moral and psychological degradation. Furthermore, it is argued that what seems important—children's zest and enthusiasm for learning—

is lost along the educational process meant to foster only ambition, competitiveness and a non-compassionate self. One can wonder how these cognitive and moral choices can serve a democratic society much in need of human capabilities such as solidarity, cooperation and compassion (Young, 2002).

Besides the ills inflicted to children and the creation of dubious conditions for self-realization, Behera & Pramanik remark on the cultural inadequacy of the present educational system in India. They ask: "Why Indian students have to be exposed to an educational system invented over a hundred years ago, in colonial India, that is wholly authoritarian?" (2001:172). We would add, why is it that southern colonized countries seem so reluctant to re-invent their present and futures? In a way, the sovereign position of Europe and North America in dictating what development or education consist of seems to be reproduced alongside intergenerational lines, adults dictating what children should do in the name of their best interests. The authors argue then for a more culturally sensitive way of reinventing the intergenerational tie, instead of maintaining the one originated in colonial India characterised by its harshness and authoritarianism. We quote the authors at length: "It is necessary to invent pedagogical methods not based on competition as the main motivational factor which leads to self-realization… […] if a child is raised in a non-competitive context, she has more chance to attain success even in a competitive world. The fact of not being the first does not break her down emotionally. Thus, she can be more successful. If she is more successful, she can do it at her own pace, with a healthy understanding of others. She is not devoured by anxieties of comparison with others and competition…. The understanding and the acceptance of one's own and others' talents is something that is worth cultivating. Cooperation with others contributes to harmony within oneself and in relationships with others" (2001:173). Thus, this cautionary observation points to the fallacy embedded in the prevalent ideal of competitiveness which from very early takes hold of children's lives. For Behera, educational practices informed by such a perspective can only bring about worn-out and overburdened children incapable of loving learning and self-defeated, very much like the plight of modern adults under unattainable demands described by Ehrenberg (2010).

In what follows we try to establish a dialogue between Behera's seminal concept of children's vulnerability, understood as the production of a structure of practices and norms, that seem to go unquestioned under

the legitimacy of the ideology of the best interests of the child, a naturalised power structure between adults and children, and an oblivious adhesion to an ethos of competitiveness in social relations.

Brazilian scholarship echoes Behera's views on children's overburden (Castro, 2014) understood as a process constituted in social relationships between children and adults. However, the context of production of vulnerability is mainly located within structural social inequalities which positions children, specially those of the lower classes, in the least favourable place to negotiate a better off deal for themselves. Vulnerability, or as it is often referred to in Brazilian literature (Janczura, 2012), concerns "social vulnerability" part and parcel of the social issues and contradictions originated under the capitalist mode of production which tend to deepen social differences and legitimate them under the guise of inherent natural differences among individuals and social groups. Studies of social vulnerability focus on the social violence inflicted on some groups of children that, despite their legal rights concerning basic education, health and provision, are left to their own (ill) fate to respond to social demands and aspirations of self-realization.

The promulgation of the Statute of Children and Adolescents in Brazil in 1990 (Brazil, 1990), following a period of intense public debates, contributed to a reconfiguration of discourses and issues concerning poor and abandoned children (Castro & Kosminsky, 2010), whose fate was often criminalized and institutionalized. The main thrust of the Statute consisted in promoting a significant detour from an elitist image of 'the child', based on the habitus of the upper classes, to encompass under the categorization of children and adolescents all of those under the age of 18. Thus, a reordering of the social imaginary was forwarded firmly established on clear-cut State and society's obligations towards children under this new legislature. Despite many advances in this respect, as cautioned earlier by Behera & Pramanik (2012), laws do not change social practices only by decree. If criminalization and institutionalization of poor children came to be under scrutiny, or yet, outlawed procedures, universal rights to education, health, provision and leisure have not become so far cherished values and unquestioned prerogatives for all children, irrespective of their social class, gender and ethnic origin.

The new legislature made special provision for those children who, on account of their social and ethnic condition, suffer more adversities and disadvantages. Risky social conditions have comprehended a gamut of situations: from abandoned children to school drop-outs, from ill-fed

or undernourished children to drug-addicted adolescents, all of them demanding from the state specific public policies and welfare programmes. Therefore, two main tenets emerge out of the recent configuration of social issues concerning poor children in Brazil: they are expressed in the notions of social risk and children's pro-activism (CNPD, 1998). The former assumes implicitly that children in these situations may fare less successfully if not granted with special provision from the state (ironically enough, the state claims to grant special provision when it has not been able to grant children with their basic universal rights). The latter regards children as necessarily motivated and driven to change their situation in the direction of a more universal norm of childhood based on middle class habitus and ideals. Once these expectations concerning these children fail, the understanding of what constitutes social risk approximates that of a social problem. From being looked after in a special way these children can be looked as potential social problems whose remedial treatment is often institutionalization and criminalization (Teles, 2008). Therefore, the notion of social vulnerability produced in the context of the new legal arrangements of the 1990s in Brazil faces challenges concerning these novel forms of marginalizing children even if the present context seems more aware of their plight offering them more legal provision and protection.

Brazilian scholarship on the social vulnerability of children articulates the notions of social risk and public policies in order to access and evaluate how conditions of poverty and social disadvantage *disable* children from their own aspirations of self-realization and social dignity. It is important to note that such a scholarship has often highlighted the multiple and severe shortcomings of recent public policies which have been implemented to counter the effects of social risk in childhood (Paiva *et al*., 2013). As such, social vulnerability has remained a perverse effect of structural adversities that, though understood in light of determining social conditions rather than of inherent deficiencies of individuals, have jeopardised the plight of many Brazilian children to this day.

Final Considerations

The closing of the present contribution on the notions of culture, vulnerability and marginalization for a volume that celebrates and honours the life and academic trajectory of Professor Deepak Kumar Behera could not but refer, even if briefly, the relevant implications between

anthropological research and academic engagement. As we noted earlier, in an academic world regulated by the imperatives of social competitiveness, individualism and efficiency, the distinct commitment of Professor Behera to his values and beliefs is of paramount importance, as it makes it possible to sensitize society with respect to the wider political implications of issues, such as tribal children's education and children's overburden in schools.

Professor Behera's dedication to the study of childhood and tribal peoples has brought to light not only significant empirical and analytical contributions to the humanities, but also has stimulated and widened public debate on the participation of children and tribal peoples in the decision-processes of public life. His work has made it possible, as many are already aware of, the reclassification of tribal communities from "Primitive Tribal Groups" to "Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups", altering the pejorative colonial connotation of the former. This fact, adding up to many others of his extensive and engaged career as a social scientist and researcher, expresses what Asad (1973) affirms about social research as an enterprise committed to knowing about the world *and,* most importantly, being affected by it.

It is in the bosom of our relationship with the world that social research takes place, positioning thus ethnography and field-work as privileged places from which to establish a more proximate contact between the researcher and his or her object, and a research frame that goes beyond the structural and formal categories of knowledge. In this chapter, we have discussed how legal dispositions, such as the Directives for a National Policy of Indigenous Education in Brazil (Brazil, 1994), and the Brazilian Statute of Child and Adolescent (Brazil, 1990), despite the significant social advances they forwarded, have so far neither conduced to a more effective participation of children in their intergenerational contexts, nor a greater respect for tribal cultures in the process of educational institutionalization.

Both the discussions brought forth by Professor Behera, as well as those proposed by Brazilian researchers, have succeeded in revealing the challenges to conciliate a "tribal/indigenous education" with a "tribal/indigenous school education". The separation of the family, the asymmetrical relationship with teachers, the extenuating routine of study and work and the disrespect for the mother language of the students are a few, out of many aspects, which point to the difficulties for indigenous and tribal peoples to make use of an institution whose origin is alien to

their worldview and traditions. What ethnographic work is able to demonstrate is that to effectively evaluate the present situation of tribal education, be in India or in Brazil, empirical studies are necessary to investigate how social relationships are constructed in these social spaces under the impact (or not) of those legal dispositions and state policies.

Likewise, as we examine the notions of vulnerability and marginalization in childhood in interlocution with Professor Behera's contribution, we are led to affirm that they are the product of political, social and historical conditions, and not a natural attribute of children's subjective constitution. Vulnerability and marginalization are produced by, and interact with, other aspects, such as social inequalities. In the same way that tribal education as prescribed by legal dispositions is far from achieving its cherished educational ideals of diversity and equality, children's rights have not inspired different social and educational practices, neither have they changed the adult centric perspective of incapacity and submission attributed to children.

As the researcher critically evaluates his or her methodological and theoretical advantage point to analyse social issues, such as children's and tribal peoples' participation in public life, the social and political dimensions of scientific work are brought to light. If social research is directed at knowing about the world and being affected by it, the ideal of scientific neutrality must be problematized once (political) engagement becomes a constitutive part of the process of knowledge production. We understand engagement here not as an empathic and dedicated attitude of the researcher towards her or his object of study, but, more radically, as a repertoire of multiple responsibilities, affects and moralities that are implied in this devoted commitment.

This commitment, far from distancing the researcher to secure objectivity in his or her work, consists, in fact, in making it possible to gain a more insightful perspective of the wider and more complex net of relationships of one's object of study. This does not seem to be possible in the absence of a committed stance towards what we study, or of a more acute sensitivity to see beyond canonical procedures or established formulations. The radicalism of methodology as a political issue brings us to Gramsci (2000) for whom the research process also consists of a movement of self-constitution and inventory. Professor Behera's sensitive and committed ethnographic work is tinged with this radicalism once we apprehend in his contribution that the subject and the object of inquiry are never absolutely separated.

Notes

1. Throughout this chapter, we will make a distinction between the terms "tribal" and "indigenous" people, as the former is mainly associated with how these social groups are referred to in India and in Professor Behera's work, whereas the latter, in Brazilian anthropological scholarship.
2. These data are based on an estimation made by researchers grounded on archaeological findings and historiographical accounts of Portuguese travellers of the 16th century. They are not deemed exact precision and on that account are object of dispute among anthropologists and researchers of indigenous issues.
3. The census of 1991, 2000 and 2010 have estimated respectively 292,131, 734,127 and 817,963 indigenous peoples living in urban and rural areas in Brazil. Without any doubt, the abrupt increase between 1991 and 2000 does not only represent a population increase, but also concerns an increase in the number of people declaring themselves as indigenous. For a lengthier discussion on the topic, *see* Oliveira, 1999.

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