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Youth and social exclusion: A sociological analysis of multiple forms of exclusion and the dynamics of social integration

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Abstract

This paper addresses the need to rethink prevailing definitions of youth that remain largely anchored in biological age categories. While existing research has acknowledged social influences, there is a persistent gap in fully conceptualizing youth as a sociocultural constructed and historically contingent life stage. The objective of this study is to reconceptualize youth by foregrounding the social, cultural, and structural conditions that shape the transition into this phase of life. The study employs a comparative historical and theoretical sociological methodology, drawing on systematic conceptual analysis and critical synthesis of classical and contemporary sociological literature. The findings demonstrate that youth cannot be treated as a universal or homogeneous category, as its meanings and boundaries vary across social contexts and historical periods. These variations influence social positioning, often producing fluctuating experiences between marginalization and integration. The study underscores that understanding youth requires attention to structural constraints, temporal transformations, and contextual dynamics. The implications highlight the importance of adopting sociocultural grounded frameworks in research and policy to more accurately capture the lived realities of young people and to address the social challenges shaping their trajectories.

Keywords: Life course; social construction; sociological theory; social inequality; youth.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Youth exclusion constitutes a pervasive social issue affecting societies worldwide, from Europe and the United States to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Unemployment rates among young people, particularly those who are neither in education nor training, consistently surpass those of the middle-aged population. This condition deprives them not only of the structuring role of education or work in their daily lives, but also of a clear and legitimate pathway to adulthood. In addition, unemployed young people often experience restricted access to full political rights, a circumstance that can foster disenchantment and, in some cases, push them toward protest or even radicalization (Kovačič et al., 2025).

Addressing this challenge requires fostering greater openness and trust in youth, ensuring equitable treatment, and creating meaningful opportunities for civic and social participation. This includes encouraging young leaders to engage in political parties, volunteer in social services, and participate in sports, cultural, and recreational activities. Such avenues not only build trust and nurture optimism but also channel youthful energies into constructive practices (In doing so, societies reduce the appeal of destructive or deviant behaviors and, instead, provide young people with a critical springboard toward maturity and full social integration.

The concept of social exclusion first emerged in France during the 1970s before spreading to other European and American contexts, where it signaled the advent of a “new poverty” generated by economic development that systematically left certain groups behind, such as addicts, offenders, school dropouts, women in vulnerable circumstances, and workers in precarious employment. Several scholars have examined the phenomenon of social exclusion, including Castel (2000), Paugam (2012), Giddens (1987), and Silver (1994), among others. It is important to note that social exclusion is not confined to a single disciplinary lens; rather, it constitutes an interdisciplinary concept mobilized across sociology, education, social work, economics, and social psychology (Faik, 2025).

From a sociological perspective, social exclusion refers to the partial or complete marginalization of individuals or groups from meaningful participation in the society in which they live. This process generates individual frustration, collective disaffection, and diminished confidence in the future (Frétigné, 1999). It is also characterized by persistent insecurity, particularly linked to unemployment and precarious labor (Guta et al., 2025; Kim et al., 2024). Large segments of the workforce remain employed but under unstable conditions, producing a constant sense of vulnerability and fear of job loss. In this way, social exclusion functions not only as an economic deprivation but as a multidimensional social process that destabilizes identity, belonging, and integration within society.

The concept of youth should not be confined to a biological definition, such as the age range between 15 and 35 years. Rather, it represents a social state in which individuals transform their identities, roles, and positions within the society they inhabit. In this sense, youth is contingent upon the socio-cultural context, and the dominant discourses and institutional frameworks of a society play a decisive role in determining whether an individual is recognized as “young” (Bourdieu, 1993).

The roles assumed by young people may vary; they can be socially active, contributing to integration and the reproduction of social cohesion, or they may be socially dependent, experiencing marginalization and vulnerability. Accordingly, a sociological distinction emerges between two broad categories of youth: those who are integrated and possess high self-confidence, and those who are socially excluded and exhibit low self-confidence. This duality underscores the relational and context-dependent nature of youth as a social category.

1.1. Purpose of study

The objective of this study is to reconceptualize youth by foregrounding the social, cultural, and structural conditions that shape the transition into this phase of life.

2. METHODS AND MATERIALS

This study employs a qualitative, non-empirical sociological methodology based on comparative–historical and theoretical analysis. The primary method consists of conceptual and interpretive analysis aimed at

reconceptualizing youth as a socially and culturally constructed category rather than a fixed biological stage. The analysis examines how the meaning, social positioning, and experiences of youth vary across historical periods and socio-political contexts, with particular attention to Europe and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. By situating youth within broader temporal and national frameworks, the study identifies structural patterns of inclusion, exclusion, and social integration shaping young people's transitions to adulthood.

The research materials comprise classical and contemporary sociological literature, including foundational theoretical works and empirical studies in the sociology of youth, social exclusion, education, labor, and cultural change. Key contributions from authors such as Durkheim, Bourdieu, Galland, Elias, Goffman, Maffesoli, Castells, Willis, and others are systematically reviewed, compared, and synthesized. Secondary sources such as policy reports, historical accounts, and region-specific studies are also mobilized to contextualize youth experiences within shifting economic, political, and cultural conditions. Through this literature-based synthesis, the study develops an integrated sociological framework that highlights the evolving meanings of youth, the mechanisms of social exclusion, and the role of young people as agents of social change.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Youth between value and cultural conflict

Youth life is characterized by fluidity and individuality, particularly regarding values, moral systems, and religious frameworks within society. This fluidity manifests in the non-standardized experiences of young people, who display a persistent need for exploration, adventure, and mobility, often accompanied by a lack of stability. Their values increasingly occupy indeterminate and shifting spaces, reflecting a search for meaning and purpose in the present rather than adherence to deferred promises of the future.

Consequently, contemporary youth are predominantly oriented toward the "here and now," emphasizing shared experiences and immediate social engagement over long-term aspirations. From the perspective of symbolic interactionism, young people enact their lives as performances, staging identities before a social audience (Goffman, 2023). This orientation contributes to renewed expressions of religiosity, which function as strategies for navigating uncertainty and reconciling conflicting value systems, encompassing aspects of piety, morality, wealth, music, fashion, and modesty (Halpern, 2004).

This dynamic often positions young people in a mode of resistance and potential conflict with prevailing social norms, rituals, and laws, which frequently manifests in the public sphere and generates tensions with established values. Durkheim (1956) emphasized the significance of dominant religious frameworks in interpreting social life and understanding the forms and evolution of religiosity. Similarly, Maffesoli (1995) stressed that no single model can encapsulate the religious or moral order of society, highlighting the inherent pluralism and diversity of social observation.

Several interrelated factors contribute to ongoing value conflicts between youth and adults. Socially, intergenerational gaps structure conflicts over values, as young people navigate family hierarchies governed by norms of experience and authority. Authoritarian parental attitudes can suppress individual autonomy, limit engagement with reality, and constrain freedom, producing feelings of oppression and frustration (Al-Zyoud, 2011).

Culturally, globalization and modern technology, particularly social media, have reshaped youth subcultures and cultural norms. Contemporary youth increasingly participate in transnational networks where geographic proximity, class, or nationality are secondary to shared cultural orientations, or "the sense of belonging. As Castells (2017) argues, the communication and information technology revolution, together with global capitalism, has generated a networked society in which globalized forces coexist with strong assertions of collective identity. Scholars broadly concur that these transformations create profound uncertainties, as technological and cultural shifts produce tensions between continuity and change (Al-Zayoud, 2011).

Economically and politically, global restructuring has fostered consumerism, materialistic values, and precarious labor, altering family dynamics and limiting parental socialization. At the same time, states face diminished capacity to regulate information flows and maintain political legitimacy, constrained by multinational corporations and indebtedness (Ould Aoudia, 2006). Authoritarian regimes and systemic corruption in some countries further limit youth agency, channeling protest and social mobilization into constrained or controlled avenues (Castells, 2017).

Behavioral manifestations of value conflicts among youth frequently take the form of dualities. Young people may articulate beliefs verbally while acting contrary to them, producing behavioral contradictions and internalized remorse. Their conduct may vary across contexts, differing within family settings, among peers, or in broader social spaces. Additionally, youth may transgress prevailing societal norms to satisfy personal desires, often seeking cultural legitimacy to justify their actions and mitigate social condemnation. Collectively, these dynamics illuminate the complexity of youth experiences, underscoring how young people navigate multiple, often contradictory, social, cultural, and economic pressures within contemporary society.

3.2. Youth and the cultural challenge

When examining the cultural norms of young people, it becomes evident that they often resist and challenge the dominance of adults, seeking to distinguish themselves from established cultural practices and lifestyles. This generational opposition highlights differences in attitudes, behaviors, and worldviews, giving rise to what is commonly referred to as “generational conflict.” Such conflict manifests socially within families, as tensions arise between parents and children, and extends to workplaces, where older and younger employees navigate competing perspectives and experiences.

Adults frequently critique young people for impulsiveness, rebellion, and recklessness, socially stigmatizing them as inexperienced or incapable of problem-solving (Morin, 1962). However, the significance of raising the issue of youth and cultural conflict lies in its broader implications for understanding the interactions and contributions of young people, particularly in light of the revolutionary and transformative contexts experienced by Arab countries, including Morocco. The phenomenon of youth cannot be reduced solely to cultural or generational conflict; rather, it encompasses socio-political, economic, and cultural dimensions, reflecting struggles over power, influence, governance, and access to material and symbolic resources. Therefore, theoretical and methodological caution is necessary to avoid reducing generational conflict to a mere clash of values, neglecting its pragmatic and structural implications (Moradi & Safarian, 2012).

Although youth is often associated with vitality, activity, and academic engagement, young people are not solely responsible for the perceived superficiality of their thinking or negative attitudes toward life’s challenges. Arnett (2000) argues that many adults accuse young people of lacking critical thinking skills, yet this criticism overlooks the absence of guidance and education on how to cultivate such skills. Generational conflict, therefore, reflects the misunderstanding and divergence of attitudes and values between young and older generations, often exacerbated by the rapid pace of social change. Galland (2007) suggests that generational conflict should not be understood merely as a confrontation between youth and elders but also as part of the maturation of social relations and the exchange of experiences between generations.

Despite the emergence of new youth cultures, young people remain connected to their cultural heritage and national identity, which continues to influence social institutions, education, training, and socialization processes. This duality produces a cultural and value-based tension among educated youth, who navigate between a modern, Western-oriented identity valuing structure, rationality, democracy, human rights, and social justice, and a subjective, national identity shaped by tradition, dependency, and uneven access to modernity and democratic governance. Yet, elements of tradition and national identity retain psychological and cultural appeal, including religious and patriotic values that emphasize heritage, history, cultural identity, and core human values (Ould Aoudia, 2006).

In contemporary society, youth are prominent users of the internet, engaging with rapid social and technological changes. Saddek (2012) identifies this generation as the “internet generation,” noting their ability

to interact, socialize, and construct digital identities, which distinguishes them from previous generations in terms of technological proficiency and social competencies. Lerbet (1967) further observes that generational conflict often begins with young people expressing dissatisfaction with social norms, which they do not fully understand, resulting in feelings of disorientation but not despair.

Such dynamics weaken traditional mechanisms of social control and complicate the socialization process within families. Many young people report that parental methods and authority are perceived as restrictive, and the absence of dialogue exacerbates emotional and personal developmental challenges. Nonetheless, some researchers note that young people's attitudes toward prevailing culture may also include tendencies toward stubbornness and aggression (Marghad, 2013).

3.3. Youth and social exclusion

Young people around the world continue to experience multiple and interrelated forms of exclusion that impede their full participation in various domains of adult life. Such exclusion may lead them to migrate, deviate, or seek alternative spaces where they can find refuge and fulfilment. The extent and nature of this exclusion are shaped by a range of indicators, including age, educational attainment, social class, gender, and ethnic or sectarian affiliation, among other characteristics, with absolute exclusion varying according to specific social dimensions.

The postponement of traditional adult roles has led to the conceptualization of "early adulthood" in both European and MENA region contexts, a period marked by experimentation and creativity, particularly in cultural activities from which adults themselves are often excluded. While recognizing regional differences in cultural practices and institutions, this paper also highlights commonalities between youth in the MENA region and Europe, most notably the persistent high rates of youth unemployment (Silver, 1994). For example, the age of eligibility for military service may not align with the age at which young people can legally marry, drive, or consume alcohol.

Policies aimed at youth integration have historically emphasized economic concerns, including youth employment guarantees, vocational training, minimum wage increases, and quality education. Yet, the political, social, and cultural aspirations of young people should not be underestimated. Economic exclusion, unemployment, and poverty do not automatically predict political radicalization, even though youth have been central actors in protest movements across the Arab world.

Economic exclusion often intersects with social exclusion, as social networks, class, and residential location influence access to employment opportunities. Successful initiatives in countries such as Sweden, Belgium, and Germany have provided unemployed youth with training, personalized guidance, and supervision, creating protective networks that mitigate the risks of social marginalization. Nonetheless, women, youth, and minority groups frequently encounter compounded forms of economic, political, and social discrimination, as institutional barriers limit their opportunities.

In this regard, education plays a critical role in equipping young people to understand and navigate these structural challenges. Rochier (1983) defines education as the process by which an individual acquires the social and cultural elements of their social environment, incorporates them into their personality, and internalizes them throughout life, under the influence of meaningful social experiences and worlds. From this, they can adapt to the environment in which they must live.

At the Arab regional level, nearly a decade has passed since the onset of street protests in Tunisia and Egypt, which rapidly led to regime changes and inspired similar demonstrations across the Middle East. These movements were initially celebrated as peaceful expressions of youth demanding democracy, political participation, and economic justice. However, hopes were soon undermined by counter-revolutionary measures, regional and international interventions, and civil conflicts in Syria, Libya, Bahrain, and Yemen.

Political theorists, including Touraine (1996), have emphasized the potential of young people as agents of social change, contingent upon supportive public policies, government programs, and measures that ensure their

social, cultural, and political integration within a framework of civil rights. The social significance of youth is thus inseparable from the political and human rights landscape, particularly in contexts marked by protest and transformative social movements.

In Morocco, for example, the Arab revolutions of 2011, metaphorically termed the "Arab Spring," highlighted the alignment between youth vitality and demands for social and political change. The February 20th Movement, emerging within this context, became emblematic of Moroccan youth dynamics, expressing a new youth identity and contributing to the emergence of a new generation of protestors, despite differences and local specificities relative to other Arab youth movements (Al-Jamaoui, 2014).

Across historical and contemporary contexts, popular demands reflect legitimate aspirations for improved living conditions, democratic governance, and the protection of citizens from the adverse effects of entrenched oligarchic structures. Understanding these dynamics necessitates careful sociological analysis of youth movements, both in general and specifically within the February 20th Movement, acknowledging the interplay between local expressions of protest and broader regional patterns of youth mobilization. Such analysis emphasizes that youth are not merely reactive actors but agents actively shaping social, cultural, and political landscapes.

3.4. The effectiveness of youth in social change

There is no doubt that young people symbolize change and a renewed flow of energy and vitality that brings about social transformations in their various manifestations. Perhaps it is youth activism that drives human societies to transition from a societal model led by others (adults with sound judgement) to an individualistic, rebellious model eager for change, driven from within, according to a system tailored to the needs of young people. This natural youthful readiness for change calls on the individual to deepen their differences, uniqueness, and narcissism (Moscovici, 1995).

Today, we can observe a similarity that almost reaches the point of identification between the behavior of young people (even in its conservative form) and that of celebrities in music, cinema, and sport, rather than with political leaders, trade union leaders, and intellectual scholars. Perhaps Elvis Presley, the American pop music star, was the first to realize the strange and unusual influence he had on audiences, inspiring the tastes and feelings of young people around the world as a self-made rebel against the prevailing social norms. He always wore colorful, mismatched clothes that defied prevailing social aesthetic tastes, flaunting himself with arrogant selfishness and narcissism, unideological and materialistic to the core. He was not without sarcasm and mockery of major superstitions, the monotony of reality, excessive consumerism, and morally utopian ideas that were socially and politically abandoned.

According to Maffessoli (1995), the individualism of young people does not negate the emotional and affective similarities among them, which are based on something common that moves us all at the same moment. There is a general feeling that is experienced collectively to such an extent that we identify with others and seek ourselves through them as a form of collective experience. This philosophical affirmation of the ego's need for the other, especially when the latter is in the process of cultural and social construction and formation, makes it necessary to start from the other at the heart of the ego to understand postmodern societies.

Today, a general view prevails in our societies, represented by Dionysus, the god of a hundred faces, the god of tragic vicissitudes and loss of self, where Apollo, the rational heavenly god, is no longer dominant, but rather another image that is more worldly, ambiguous, and confusing. Contemporary youth society has thus become a "Dionysian" society, rebelling against prevailing norms and the culture of their ancestors (Maffessoli, 1995).

Young people have historically been regarded as agents of social change, often confronted with the choice of aligning themselves with the guardians of public order, proponents of mainstream culture and normative social systems, or with rebels and revolutionaries. The construction of youth social identity is therefore deeply

influenced by social institutions through processes of socialization, while simultaneously being contested by adults and elders who wield social authority, enforce norms, and challenge the transformative potential of youth.

From this perspective, it is crucial not only to define the concept of youth but also to recognize the inherent ambiguity of the term. Contemporary youth are characterized by a preoccupation with self-identity and social recognition, and their interactions with societal institutions, whether spontaneous or compulsory, become a critical dimension of their experience. The proliferation of higher education degrees, often devalued in practice, coupled with unemployment, marginalization, communication crises, and the perceived disconnect between governments and young people's expectations, has eroded trust in state institutions, particularly educational systems, occasionally fostering conditions conducive to extremism, fanaticism, or social disengagement (Melliti & Draoui, 2009).

These dynamics are further exacerbated by the difficult macroeconomic environment confronting many countries in the MENA region. Addressing the economic constraints that shape the transition to adulthood remains as critical today as it was before the Arab Spring, when young people mobilized to express widespread economic frustrations across the region. Effective solutions to these structural economic challenges are essential for achieving stability and fostering a more prosperous future for all populations in the region (Hassan & Dyer, 2018).

Contradiction is a defining feature of youth experiences, reflected in stark disparities in economic, technological, social, and cultural resources, which vary according to geography, neighborhoods, and population groups. Consequently, youth constitute a distinct social category facing multiple constraints, necessitating their central consideration within collective action strategies. While the growth of the youth population can challenge existing political and social structures, it simultaneously represents a potential economic opportunity, as an expanding working-age population increases the pool of those capable of contributing productively to the economy (Hassan & Dyer, 2018).

At the national level, Morocco's youth strategy seeks to ensure meaningful investments in young people, akin to investments in children, as these investments constitute the foundation of economic and social development. Conversely, neglecting or marginalizing this human capital carries costs not only for young people but for society as a whole, manifesting in poor academic performance, unemployment, underemployment, and heightened social risks such as addiction and delinquency. The economic consequences of underutilizing human capital, including increased public expenditure and lost productivity, underscore the importance of proactive investment in youth (Ministry of Youth, Culture, and Communication, Morocco, 2015).

Hijazi conceptualizes the youth crisis as a complex sociocultural phenomenon, reflecting intertwined cultural and societal challenges. He argues that much of the existing research on youth, particularly in Arab countries, is influenced by political and ideological agendas, addressing youth issues superficially rather than critically examining the underlying realities (Hijazi, 1985).

3.5. Towards a sociology of youth

There is no doubt that the sociological study of youth requires a generational approach, given the different cultural, social, educational, and professional dimensions that shape the lives of young people. Mauger (1991) stresses that most research and surveys on youth cultures and lifestyles tend to focus either on young students or on young workers, without always capturing the full heterogeneity of youth experiences. Lapeyronnie & Marie (1992) observed a shift in students' attitudes toward education, noting that university is now largely seen as a means to obtain credentials that may secure employment rather than a transformative intellectual experience. In a similar vein, Molinari (1992) underscores the heterogeneity of student life, drawing attention to the influence of social and cultural determinants on young people's behavior. Building on this, Dubet & Martuccelli (2014) categorize secondary school students into four broad models that reflect both social origins and educational trajectories.

The first model describes the "ideal" students, those who are diligent, come from bourgeois backgrounds, attend prestigious institutions, and pursue elite training. The second type includes "good" students from middle

or upper-class families, who attend reputable schools and adopt a strategic, career-oriented relationship with their studies. A third model corresponds to the "new" students, generally from marginalized or lower-class backgrounds, often enrolled in schools located in peripheral areas. These students are typically channeled toward vocational or technical tracks and lack proficiency in artistic or extracurricular activities. Finally, Dubet & Martuccelli (2014) identify students from working-class families who are oriented toward becoming future employees or manual workers. This group is marked by a sense of academic failure, anxiety about unemployment, and a widespread rejection of formal education.

The cultural dimension of school life has also been addressed by Pasquier (2010), who highlights the role of gender in shaping youth experiences. Girls, for instance, often negotiate friendship and romantic relationships through the consumption of television series and reality TV, developing "best friend" cultures based on strong dyadic bonds. Boys, by contrast, tend to form larger peer groups centered on shared activities and often articulate a critical discourse toward popular media. Molinari (1992) notes that these dynamics are further complicated by tensions between familial cultural values and the pressures of conforming to the weaker social ties formed in the school environment.

The issue of resistance within school culture is vividly illustrated by Willis (1978) in his ethnographic study Learning to Labor. He shows how working-class boys create an "anti-school culture" as a form of resistance, which paradoxically socializes them into the very manual labor trajectories they ostensibly reject. As Mauger (1991) explains, resisting school culture becomes a mechanism of adaptation to the workshop culture that awaits them. Pialoux (1979) also draws attention to the formation of youth subcultures in urban contexts, often rooted in feelings of inferiority and exclusion. Many of these young people resist unskilled jobs but end up in temporary, insecure work that reflects their unstable integration into both the labor market and school culture.

Studies of working-class and rural youth have been relatively scarce, but Renahy's (2010) long-term ethnographic research in Bourgogne offers significant insights. He documents the impact of industrial restructuring on rural youth, whose parents had once benefited from industrial paternalism but who now face bleak futures marked by exclusion and instability. Known locally as the "local lads," these young men often delay leaving the parental home, struggle to form stable relationships, and are prone to deviant behaviors such as substance abuse, reckless driving, and even suicidal tendencies. Renahy's (2010) work demonstrates how structural transformations in industry and employment not only undermine youth integration but also reshape intergenerational relations within these communities.

3.6. Youth and the classical sociological conception

It is no surprise that the social meaning of youth requires us to begin with fundamental questions: What does it mean to be young today? Is the social meaning of youth in the twenty-first century the same as it was in the sixteenth, eighteenth, or even twentieth century? Does the definition of youth, commonly regarded as an intermediate stage between childhood and adulthood, remain stable across time, or does it vary with different economic and social contexts? If it does change, how can we distinguish between the chronologically divergent sociological meanings of youth? Is it by extending this transitional period in an individual's life, or by narrowing its temporal scope?

Galland (2007), a sociologist specializing in youth issues, reflects on this very problem in his now classic work "Sociology of Youth, which laid the foundations of the sociology of generations in France. Galland (2007) situates the concept of youth within a dual comparative framework, both temporal and spatial, drawing on moral discourses of past educational systems as well as more recent institutional reports at the European level. His analysis traces the evolution of how youth has been socially defined, both throughout history and across contemporary European societies, revealing the paradoxes and debates at the heart of social science research. Galland (2007) highlights the competing theoretical orientations within sociology: the perspective that defines youth through fixed age groups, the life-course approach that individualizes trajectories and collapses rigid age thresholds, and the generational perspective that explains social relations by foregrounding intergenerational dynamics and the characteristics of specific cohorts.

Historically, Galland (2007) shows that the meaning of youth in the sixteenth century was radically different from today. Thinkers such as Montaigne (1991) addressed youth as a subject of educational reform, yet the period itself lacked a clear distinction between childhood and adulthood. High child mortality rates and the widespread practice of child labor meant that children were integrated into adult activities from an early age. The category of "adolescent" was absent; "child" and "young person" were the dominant terms, referring to an individual who remained under the economic and moral authority of his parents, and more specifically of his father. Youth was not conceived as an autonomous life stage but rather as a prolonged waiting period, socially marked by paternal guardianship and destined for eventual succession. Indeed, the notion of "youth" at the time was largely a privilege of the aristocracy, whose members had access to education as a means of securing future prestige.

By the late seventeenth century, however, a shift occurred as parents began to express emotional attachment toward their children. Galland (2007), drawing on contemporary educational writings, shows how childhood began to be perceived as a stage requiring care and instruction, with the child reframed as "a being that must be educated." The historian Philippe Ariès, whom Galland (2007) engages with, noted that this newfound affection for children was confined within the private sphere of the family, protected from outside scrutiny. Yet the emergent pedagogical discourse, grounded in notions of responsibility and merit, still had to contend with rival conceptions such as the "ideology of natural education," which remained influential in political and intellectual circles.

In the eighteenth century, education became increasingly tied to questions of social utility. Youth came to be viewed not simply in moral terms but in relation to the needs of the state. The shift from "social education" to "national education" positioned the training of young people as an instrument for enhancing the productive power of the nation, with schools tasked with forming "useful citizens." This reconfiguration transformed the representation of youth. While earlier centuries associated youth with recklessness and irresponsibility, the nineteenth century recast it as a period of active learning and socialization (Durkheim, 1956).

This new orientation materialized unevenly. Bourgeois youth were the first to benefit from systematic schooling, while working-class youth entered the educational system more slowly. Nonetheless, the institutionalization of education at the end of the nineteenth century meant that young people increasingly became defined by their relation to school, as education functioned as a central mechanism of socialization (Galland, 2007). Industrialization further reinforced this development. The demand for skilled labor made prolonged education necessary, which in turn extended youth as a distinct stage of life. The gradual establishment of universal education in Europe and the United States created the conditions for adolescence to be recognized as a socially distinct category, with state institutions taking on the task of preparing this age group.

From the twentieth century onwards, youth was increasingly monitored through two dominant lenses: scientific research and literature. Psychology, in particular, sought to explain and regulate the excesses of this life stage, marking what Galland (2007) describes as a revolution in how young people were conceptualized. Adolescence became the focus of scientific knowledge, framed by both educational and professional institutions as a period requiring guidance and control. Sociology soon followed, initially focusing on juvenile delinquency and the study of "youth subcultures" as a way of understanding deviance and integration.

In the United States, the 1950s marked the emergence of a functionalist perspective, framing youth as a transitional period for acquiring social roles. But after 1968, amid widespread social unrest, this conception shifted. Youth was no longer merely a transitional phase but a social group whose integration into employment and adulthood became a pressing issue. As Galland (2007) notes, sociologists increasingly defined the end of youth in terms of three milestones: entry into the workforce, departure from the parental home, and marriage. Adulthood, in this sense, was not simply a biological inevitability but the outcome of a socially regulated process of socialization.

Thus, the history of youth demonstrates that its meaning has never been static. Rather, youth is a socially constructed category, shaped by shifting educational, economic, and political arrangements. Its definition shifts

between biological, institutional, and generational markers, always reflecting broader transformations in society itself. (Galland, 2007) .

3.7. The contemporary perception of youth:

With the expansion of educational systems that promoted equality of opportunity and access, alongside the rising unemployment rates of the 1980s, youth began to be regarded as a stage of life that was somewhat less tragic than in previous decades. Gradually, contemporary pragmatism came to replace the romanticism that had long-shaped twentieth-century perceptions of youth. Adults, however, developed an ambivalent view of this social group, combining expectations of social renewal with anxieties about the weakening of social ties.

In this context, youth emerged not merely as a biological or psychological period of life, but as what some scholars describe as an "ideological and political gamble," situated between dependence on adults and the desire for autonomy, particularly as youth were mobilized within electoral entitlements and broader political projects. This ambiguity gave rise to diverse social support systems: initially through youth movements, then through social work initiatives, and ultimately through state-led social policies of integration. Schools, in particular, played a central role by attributing a distinctive classification to this period of life, situating it within preparatory and secondary education. Through their cultural mission of transmitting values and their economic function of allocating roles within the productive system, schools contributed to shaping youth as a distinctive social category (Galland, 2007).

Building on this, Galland (2007) provides a sociological definition of youth by considering the thresholds that frame it between childhood and adulthood, thresholds shaped by patterns of socialization. From this perspective, young people are prepared for adult roles, yet their self-perception of maturity and identity often reveals a paradox. While they may emulate adult behaviors and claim a degree of "identity autonomy," they frequently remain in economic dependence on their parents due to limited material resources. Thus, although many sociologists regard them as adults, Galland (2007) argues that young people cannot fully claim adult status until they have acquired the key markers of adulthood, namely stable employment, independent housing, and family formation.

Achieving these markers has become increasingly complex, given the extension of the youth stage in contemporary societies. This sociological debate resonates with Norbert Elias's analysis of the prolongation of youth, as he emphasizes that the more complex the social system becomes, the lengthier and intricate the preparation for adult roles is likely to be. In earlier times, intergenerational continuity in social and economic status, often embodied in the father-son model, facilitated a smoother transition into adulthood. Today, however, the growing social distance between generations reflects the fact that identity is more constructed than inherited, leading to the prolongation of youth as a distinct stage in the life course (Delmotte, 2010).

Galland (2007) further elaborates this sociological approach by identifying three structural criteria that define the transition to adulthood: leaving the parental home, securing stable employment, and forming a family with the birth of the first child. Notably, the postponement of family formation, particularly the delay of the first child, has become a widespread trend across Europe, reshaping the temporal boundaries of youth. On this basis, Galland (2007) classifies European youth into four models that illustrate how different societies structure this transition. The Scandinavian model, exemplified by Denmark, reflects the influence of a strong welfare state that provides young people with economic support, encouraging early independence and enabling them to explore diverse social and professional experiences.

By contrast, the Mediterranean model, observed in countries such as Italy and Spain, is rooted in family solidarity, where young people remain in the parental household until much later, achieving independence primarily within the familial context. The continental model, prevalent in countries such as France and Germany, represents an intermediate path: young people often leave the family home relatively early, yet they remain financially dependent on their parents to support student life, while retaining close emotional ties. Finally, the British model emphasizes early independence without the same degree of state assistance; young people

frequently engage in shorter periods of study while combining education with employment, thereby navigating the transition to adulthood with a high degree of individual responsibility (Galland, 2007).

4. CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that the sociology of youth has attempted to provide explanations and models that answer questions related to the social definition of youth. In our view, the transition of young people to adulthood raises questions about the "youth experimentation period" and the extent to which they depend socially on the "three pillars of well-being": state subsidies, family support, and market credit guarantees.

Financial crises can also disrupt these social arrangements, for example, when the state withdraws subsidies for young people, who then collapse economically under the weight of their debts, compounded by the economic difficulties of families that restrict financial transfers within the family. Emphasizing the role of markets, particularly credit, would highlight new social definitions of youth, or at least expand the current definition, by demonstrating the complexity of the transition from youth to adulthood due to the weakening of the pillars that support autonomy.

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