



*The Concept of youth:  
a sociological eye*

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**Abstract :**

*This study attempts to elucidate the problematic nature and the issues surrounding and framing the concept of youth. This is done through the trends of definition, delimitation and differentiation, highlighting the sociological theoretical contributions relating to youth. Indeed, this will facilitate the task of media, psychological, and sociological studies that are interested in youth.*

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## 1. Introduction:

According to Francis Bacon, science consists of propositions, and propositions are composed of concepts and terms. Terms serve as symbols for ideas (Crane, 1984, p. 135). Defining the terms and concepts of this study involves refining the meaning of the research topic. Defining the concepts aims to clarify their intentions and the characteristics they possess. The epistemology of concepts is one of the mechanisms that supports scientific research and provides the necessary epistemological coherence.

Ludwig Wittgenstein rejects the idea that there is a fundamental essence of meaning underlying all uses. His exploration for a common thread among them led him to liken the human understanding of these diverse uses to his comprehension of the rules that must be followed in each particular "game." Terms find their meaning through their respective uses. According to Wittgenstein, the foundational theory in science is the theory of meaning in use, where any idea derives its meaning solely within the context in which it is employed. As contexts are in a constant state of change, it becomes imperative to acknowledge the relativity of knowledge that underlies our science and culture (Zakaria, 1998, p. 272). This raises the question of relativity in the utilization of concepts, meanings, and connotations that individuals associate with them. Consequently, scientific research is necessary, focusing on concepts as a starting point upon which research problems are formulated. Such research serves as the basis for the semantic fields that encompass a specific treatment approach, encompassing comprehensive theoretical, methodological,

and procedural perspectives and strategies, facilitating the study of these subjects.

Based on this foundation, this theoretical study aims to explore the concept of youth, which is one of the most complex and contentious concepts in the humanities and social sciences. By examining the existing literature and Arab studies in general, particularly in the fields of sociology, media, and communication sciences, we have observed a significant divergence and variation in the definition of this concept within the research community. Additionally, there is a lack of comprehensive conceptual analysis, as it often gets replaced by a procedural research category without sufficient methodological justifications. This poses several issues concerning the depth of analysis, the credibility of results, and their applicability to the broader scope of "youth". Al-Sadiq Al-Hamami argues that the marginalization of concepts in much of the research conducted in the humanities and social sciences, particularly in the Arab world, demonstrates that the emphasis on concepts is often neglected in favor of traditional, safe, and politically advantageous research paths that offer immediate benefits. However, considering that youth represents the most promising social segment of society, as asserted by "Johann Goethe," as it holds the future of nations dependent on the energy of its young members (Saliba, 1983, p 41). there remains limited Arab scientific and cognitive effort devoted to sociological studies focusing on the youth category within what can be referred to as the sociology of youth (Wafwa and Zahlouq, 1995, p. 9). In contrast, developed societies recognize the significance of youth as a pivotal social actor in processes

of social change, providing it with the attention it deserves by establishing specialized research centers and groups. For instance, we can mention the "Youth and Communities" category formed in France in the late 1980s, comprising predominantly sociologists dedicated to studying youth from various perspectives using multidisciplinary approaches (Al-Zaidi, 2002). , p. 27). Young people from various countries around the world are currently undergoing a series of lifestyle, mindset, and behavioral transformations. These changes involve a blending of traditional and modern elements, impacting social relationships, culture, and prevailing values (Galland & Roudet, 2005, p. 329). Essentially, young people are recognized as a category that is particularly susceptible to change, as the dynamics of transformation are evident, particularly in their case. They reside at the core of social transformations, navigating a realm that encompasses both traditional and modern cultures (Boutefnouchet, 2004, p. 32). These transformations are likely interconnected with technological advancements, the remarkable progress in the field of technology, and the emergence of new communication channels. Consequently, there is a pressing need for research that focuses on studying this reality, its manifestations, and its multifaceted dimensions.

In the field of human and social sciences, in general, serious research and studies that tackle the topic of youth encounter the inherent problematic nature that characterizes youth as both a phenomenon and a concept. This challenge arises from the task of defining the concept of youth, elucidating the nature and boundaries of this stage, and distinguishing its unique features. The studies

conducted by Romanian sociologist "F. Mahler," aimed at addressing the issue of the youth concept by examining researchers' perspectives, have revealed significant variations among researchers in their definition of youth. These differences highlight the existence of various criteria and trends that contribute to the delineation of this concept (Watfa and Zahlouq, 1995, p. 46). Thus, the objectives of this study come together to answer the following questions :

- 1/ What are the most important trends in the definition of the concept of youth?
- 2/ What is the validity and stability of the biological trend? Does it provide the scientific precision necessary for its adoption to identify young people?
- 3/ Are the numerical (chronological) age ranges fixed and objective, and therefore able to identify and distinguish young people?
- 4/ Is it possible to rely on the biological trend and the digital age category to identify and distinguish young people?
- 5/ What are the foundations and pillars of the sociological point of view in his perception of youth?

## ***2. Linguistic Definition of Youth:***

In "Lissan al-Arab," the Arabic language dictionary, it is mentioned that youth is associated with notions of youthfulness and juvenility. A young boy progresses through stages of growth and eventually becomes a young man, It is also mentioned that it is permissible to refer to young boys as witnesses to testify for adults, specifically those who have reached puberty and matured. The term used for youth is "Al-Shabiba," which is the opposite of "Al-Shiba," referring to old age. Additionally, youth can be used as the plural form of a young man, encompassing

multiple young individuals. The word youth primarily indicates the early stages of a person's life, such as encountering someone in the youth of the day or during the youth of the month (Ibn Mandhour, 1968, p. 257).

In the Arabic language, there are numerous synonyms for the word "youth." For instance, a teenager, a boy, and a little boy can all denote aspects of strength, activity, movement, and enthusiasm (Al-Atri, 2004, p. 12-13). It is also often said that grey hair represents maturity and wisdom, just as youth represents a period of enjoyment and playfulness. The term "young person" implies a presumption of ignorance, as their house and thoughts revolve around limited experiences. This representation or perception of youth encompasses notions of impulsiveness, lack of experience, carelessness, haste, recklessness, and risk.

Furthermore, it is evident that the linguistic meanings associated with youth also convey connotations of modernity. In many cases, the words used within this semantic field do not specifically denote detailed age stages, but rather encompass the physical and psychological attributes characteristic of a particular phase of life.

The corresponding term for "Youth" in English and "Jeunesse" in French, despite having distinct definitions, reveals a close association with the concept of juvenility and denotes the transitional period between childhood and adulthood. It encompasses notions of juvenility and youthfulness, encapsulating the phase of life that bridges the gap between childhood and maturity.

### **3. Trends in The Definition of the Concept of Youth:**

#### **3.1. Biological Trend:**

When does the youth phase begin and when does it end? Determining the precise onset and conclusion of the youth phase is a subject of varied opinions and perspectives. Despite the seemingly straightforward nature of this question, divergent viewpoints make it challenging to establish a specific age as the definitive starting or ending point. Consequently, some individuals refrain from relying solely on age limits as defining criteria for this category and instead consider certain biological characteristics that set youth apart. Indeed, it is not feasible to establish a single biological standard for defining youth, as multiple standards exist across various disciplines and fields of knowledge. In the realm of general medicine, the end of adolescence and the commencement of youth are often associated with the attainment of sexual characteristics, typically occurring around the ages of 14-15 for females and 15-16 for males (Grawitz, 2004, p. 244). However, neuroscientists may consider the full development of the nervous system at the age of twenty as the marker for entering youth, while specialists might point to the completion of skeletal system development around the age of twenty-five. The matter becomes more complex when we consider the onset of "puberty" or "adolescence" as a defining moment marking the beginning of the youth stage. Scientific studies have unequivocally demonstrated the relativity of this stage and its variation across different geographic regions, races, physical and physiological structures, and individuals genetic makeup. These variations and uncertainties surrounding the concept of youth pose a significant risk when attempting

to rely solely on puberty as the defining threshold. It does not contribute to alleviating the confusion and ambiguity surrounding the notion of youth. Puberty represents a biological boundary separating childhood from youth. The imprecise and variable nature of data pertaining to youth, along with its natural and physiological characteristics, prevent it from having a fixed character. At times, it overlaps with childhood or adolescence, leading to its continuation beyond the age that is conventionally associated with "youth." If we consider puberty as a stage where an individual acquires sexual and physiological characteristics, primarily related to reproductive function, it becomes challenging to pinpoint a precise identification. Modern medical understanding suggests that puberty begins from the moment of birth and progresses internally before its external signs become apparent. Consequently, it does not represent a specific moment but rather a complex process comprised of multiple stages (Toublanc, 1994, p. 06). Moreover, observations in Europe have indicated that the age at which the "menstrual cycle" begins, marking the onset of puberty in girls, has progressively shifted over a century. In the early 19th century, this physiological event occurred at the age of 17, whereas now it typically occurs at the age of 13, with a three-month advancement every ten years (Toublanc, 1994, p. 08).

Comparative studies involving groups of adolescents of the same age and similar social backgrounds have revealed that the stage of sexual maturity, as determined by measuring hormonal ratios, does not significantly impact mental, intellectual, and psychological development. Moreover, physiological

criteria vary even within homogeneous categories, influenced by sociocultural factors such as lifestyle and dietary habits. Research has demonstrated that the challenges related to social integration experienced by young individuals are more closely linked to their social status rather than their level of biological maturity. Consequently, it remains necessary to perceive youth not as a purely natural phenomenon but as a cultural construct, given the absence of objective and measurable elements or criteria that precisely define the stage of youth. Instead, it is associated with a collection of representations, opinions, and aspirations attached to this category, rather than being solely linked to a set of biological markers revealing physiological changes in human life. Doctors, educators, and psychologists have come to recognize the impossibility of defining youth solely based on age-related indicators, intellectual growth coefficients, or other objective measures. Nowadays, they prefer to adopt the concept of stages of growth or development. Thus, Madeline Grawitz argues that the concept of adolescence or youth contradicts strict definitions, and any attempt to quantify it using arbitrary biological indicators proves challenging. Furthermore, being young implies being in a phase of social integration construction, characterized by a delicate balance and a readiness to acquire learning roles, fulfill functions, and take on responsibilities.

According to Rousselet, the stage of youth prompts us to critically examine the future outcomes of societal investments in education, vocational training, and personality development (Grawitz, 2004, p. 245). This highlights the social implications and dimensions of the concept of youth, along



with the relative and unstable nature of biological criteria that lack the precision required for identifying and differentiating young individuals.

### 3.2. *Psychological Trend:*

This exploration delves into the category of young individuals concerning the formation of their personalities and the psychological structure of youth. It acknowledges the interplay between the biological aspect in personality development and the accompanying motives, needs, instincts, and value orientations that young people assimilate from the broader cultural milieu of their social context.

Some argue that the stage of youth entails both quantitative and qualitative transformations in personality traits. During this phase, individuals experience a heightened level of complexity, as they grapple with the desire for self-assertion intertwined with the quest for a meaningful social role and a tendency to challenge established norms. Furthermore, there is a sense of responsibility and a yearning for an ideal society, which fuels an incessant pursuit of change. The presence of these elements in an individual's disposition is often regarded as indicative of what some might refer to as the "youthful personality".

According to "Ali Laila", youth is perceived as a stage of hardship due to its association with the process of maturation. If we agree to divide the human life cycle into childhood, youth, adulthood, and old age, we observe that the initial stage primarily pertains to biological aspects. However, the second stage represents a phase of biological, psychological, and social fulfillment, while

the third stage is seen as an extension of this fulfillment, reaching its peak levels of maturity. Nevertheless, this level of maturity gradually declines during the fourth stage (Laila, 1995, p. 35).

In this context, Sigmund Freud attributed the stage of youth to biological factors and referred to it as the reproductive stage. According to Freud, young people experience conflicts and disturbances driven by their pursuit of sexual gratification. He emphasized that these dynamics occur independently of environmental, social, and cultural influences (Hijazi, 1985, p. 40).

According to the psychological perspective, the youth stage is seen as a manifestation of biological maturity accompanied by emotional and psychological states such as boldness, curiosity, a desire for change, concern for the future, emphasis on appearance, and a tendency to reject reality, often referred to as the "youth crisis." George Stanley Hall, in his theory of "stress and strain," describes youth as a period marked by suffering, pain, and challenging transformations (Hijazi, 1985, p. 39). On the other hand, Margaret Mead's research in Samoa and Manus societies revealed a different perspective. In these societies, she observed the absence of a similar crisis, as children enjoyed greater freedom as the society was liberated from oppressive constraints on youth, be it due to customs, traditions, or religion, the Manus community declares the onset of puberty, whether in males or females, through special social ceremonies. These ceremonies serve as a declaration of the transition from childhood to adulthood, free from any societal pressures. childhood to adulthood occurred without

significant social pressure (Hijazi, 1985, p. 44).

Indeed, the transformations associated with youth are influenced by various cultural, social, historical, and economic contexts rather than solely being determined by internal individual psychological states. Youth is not solely defined by internal psychological and biological conditions, but is strongly connected to the concurrent social changes that occur in terms of roles, functions, social situations, and relationships with societal institutions such as the family, educational institutions, and training centers. These institutions play a crucial role in preparing and shaping individuals during their youth. Consequently, youth can be seen as a social construct or a product of society, highlighting the importance of adopting a sociological perspective in understanding and studying youth.

### **3.3. Sociological Trend:**

The sociological perspective on youth emphasizes the inherent ambiguity of their social status within society. Young people find themselves in a transitional phase, no longer children but not yet fully grown into responsible adults. This state of ambiguity often leads to the perception of youth as being problematic or in trouble (Al-Jawhary et al, 2001, p. 17). The challenges and complexities faced by young individuals in navigating this phase contribute to the recognition of their unique social situation and the need for specialized attention and support.

In sociology, there is a prevailing understanding that the boundaries between age categories are arbitrary (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 143-154). Attempting to define the

concept of youth based on various biological measures across different disciplines may be seen as futile (Al-Zaidi, Youth Culture In Media Society, 2006, pp. 202-203). Instead of solely relying on biological perspectives that focus on physical growth and aging, sociology considers age as a social construct that is shaped by living conditions and social experiences. Age carries diverse consequences and outcomes for practices, representations, and situations. The sociological study of age emphasizes the succession of social roles throughout the life cycle. Age is associated with social status dimensions (such as being a student, being employed, being married), as well as normative dimensions that dictate the behaviors expected by society in different situations. Within this conceptual framework, youth is seen as a stage that differs from childhood primarily in degree rather than kind. Young people are considered to be children who have a greater degree of independence from their families and schools (Largée & Louche, 2001, p. 12). The sociological eye, as advocated by American sociologist Everett Sherrington Hughes (Hughes, 1997), raises several important questions and considerations regarding the concept of youth, that we list as follows:

#### **3.3.1. Between "Adolescence" and "Youth":**

In the Arabic language, adolescence is a stage of life that signifies the approaching of puberty. In French and English, the word "adolescence" has its roots in the Latin language. The term "adolescens" is derived from the verb "adolescere", which means "to grow up" or "to mature." In the Latin-French dictionary, the word "adolescentia" is used to describe organisms or plants that experience

growth and development. It can also be used to refer to children who have reached an age that qualifies them for military service (Gaffiot, 1934, p. 51). According to the French dictionary "Le Petit Robert", the word "adolescence" was first used in the year 1327. The origin of this term and its description as "hazy" can be traced back to its borrowing or derivation from an earlier source. In Latin, the term can even encompass age categories beyond 50 years old. In the fifteenth century, the term "adolescence" was used to refer to a young, naive, and inexperienced man. However, the concept of adolescence as we understand it today emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Its meaning is closely associated with "adulthood" or "puberty" as it represents a stage of biological maturation. Moreover, adolescence encompasses psychological, emotional, social, and even economic dimensions that are linked to the transition from childhood to adulthood (Hauswald, 2016, pp. 13-15).

Many studies often confuse adolescence and youth or use them interchangeably, considering one to encompass the other. However, a critical reading of the specialized literature reveals that adolescence is primarily based on physiological and psychological changes, making it a biological and psychological concept. On the other hand, youth is primarily a philosophical, political, and sociological concept, as it encompasses the social conditions (such as school, work, and family) that accompany this stage. Youth serves as an intermediate phase between adolescence and adulthood, arising from the transformations occurring in contemporary societies. It is characterized by a multitude of

experiences, including emotional, academic, and professional aspects. The nature of youth varies across different societies, social classes, and categories. The social and economic developments in Western societies have given rise to an intermediate stage between adolescence and adulthood. Similar to how reforms in legislation, labor systems, and the introduction of retirement in the 20th century contributed to the emergence of the "third age" as a distinct life stage, the emergence of youth was driven by social necessity and the need to address new situations and roles that require diverse experiences. Youth is thus considered a stage aimed at preparing individuals for integration into adult life or adulthood. (Lebaron, 2009, p. 7-8).

### 3.3.2. "Youth" is an Elusive Concept:

According to Pierre Bourdieu, youth can be encapsulated in a single word (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 143-154). However, "Al-Munji Al-Zaidi" views it as a problematic term, akin to a labyrinth, due to its extensive usage in various fields of study, including social, economic, psychological, educational, political discourse, and mass media. The versatility of its use has resulted in confusion and ambiguity regarding its meaning and purpose (Al-Zaidi, *Introductions to the Sociology of Youth*, 2002, p. 28). Jean-Claude Chamboredon emphasizes the elusive nature of the concept of youth, stating that it lacks a precise definition or reference point. It is often associated with being a student, but this definition fails to capture the diversity and complexity of youth experiences. Chamboredon suggests that youth can also be understood in terms of apprenticeship or as a young worker (Chamboredon, 1991, p. 13). The lack of consensus on the criteria used to



define and differentiate "youth" is a major reason for the confusion surrounding the concept. Studies conducted by the General Secretariat of UNESCO in preparation for the regional conference on youth indicators in Colombo in 1983 revealed that there is no internationally agreed-upon minimum standard for defining youth. This observation was further emphasized during the World Youth Conference held in Barcelona in 1985 as part of the International Year of Youth. The committee tasked with studying youth indicators found that the concept of youth suffers from limitations and is understood in different ways depending on the specific cultural and historical contexts (Watfa and Zahlouq, 1995, p. 9). In psychology and sociology, Madeleine Grawitz explains in her Dictionary of Social Sciences that the concept of youth refers to the stage that separates childhood from adulthood. However, consensus disappears when it comes to defining the boundaries of this stage, as the limits and characteristics associated with youth vary depending on different viewpoints and objectives. In traditional societies, rites of passage play a crucial role in defining the different stages of life and the corresponding roles and functions (Grawitz, 2004, p. 245). Among the various functions that rites fulfill, one of them is ensuring the continuity of social cohesion by fostering solidarity and support around a specific social ideal. (d'Allondans 2002, p.11). In the case of complex modern and industrial societies, the multiplicity and interweaving of functions and the evolution of needs that is independent of physiological changes, make precisely the age-stage divisions blurred. This is what causes, according to Mr. Gravitz, what is

called the adolescent crisis or the suffering of youth, the malaise of youth.

### ***3.3.3. Relativity and Instability of the Categorization of Chronological Age Categories:***

The issue of age limits for young people is the most controversial topic related to this concept. The literature review presents us with significant and unjustified variations in the start and end of each classification associated with this stage. Some have specified it as the 14-25-year-old range, or 18-30-year-olds, or even 16-28-year-olds...

The question is not limited to researchers and specialists in the field, as there is confusion and hesitation from international bodies when defining the stage of youth. While the United Nations General Assembly in 1995 determined the age range as 15 to 24 years old, we find that it was acknowledged in the year 2000 that this range varies across different countries. The development program of the same organization extended the upper end of this range to 25, then 30, and finally 35 years (United Nations Development Program, 2015, pp. 6-7). As for the World Health Organization, it has defined this stage between the ages of 10 and 24 (World Health Organization, 2015, p. 1). To avoid confusion and resulting misunderstandings, the same organization indicated that this range changes with different aspects of the study.

The situation is no different in the Arab region. While the Conference of Arab Ministers of Youth defined the youth stage as the period from 15 to 25 years of age (Al-Otaibi et al., 2008, p. 41), we observe fundamental differences in the definition of this stage among Arab countries according to United

Nations statistics. The youth stage extends from 10 to 30 years in Iraq, and from 12 to 30 years in Jordan. In Tunisia, Lebanon, Morocco, and Palestine, it is determined from 15 to 29 years, while Sudan, Yemen, Algeria, and Djibouti specify it as 15 to 24 years. Saudi Arabia's definition ranges from 15 to 34 years old, and in the Emirates and Mauritania, it is from 15 to 35 years old. Egypt and Oman define it as 18 to 29 years old. In Bahrain, there are some who consider it from 0 to 35 years old. Furthermore, the youth stage in Somalia can extend up to the age of 40 (Arab Youth Center, Dr. T, p. 7). Additionally, these differences in definition are also present within the same country based on different times, sectors, and contexts, including the legal level: puberty age, legal adulthood, criminal or political majority, and the field of rights or protection of young workers... that have different age limits.

The politicization of the concept and its constant inclusion in political discourses and agendas has heightened its ambiguity and the absence of a objective consensus on its boundaries.

In Algeria, for instance, numerous slogans circulate regarding the rejuvenation of power and political space, the integration of young individuals into political life and work, granting a percentage of housing to youth, and rejuvenating the parliament. However, in each domain, a different age is set to define youth (35, 40, 45, or even 50 years old), further blurring the concept's boundaries. Consequently, many researchers consider "youth" as a distinct psychological, social, and economic position or situation rather than a precisely defined age range.

In this context, French sociologist Olivier Galland argues that youth represents a

category with fuzzy and uncertain borders. The exact age at which it begins and ends remains unknown. Sociology has demonstrated that the stage of youth is a transitional period with evolving definitions and boundaries throughout history. It is characterized by flexibility and change in response to evolving social conditions (Galland, *Sociology of Youth*, 1997, p. 63). Olivier Galland also emphasizes the importance of delving into history to define this concept and its specificities, as we need to examine the historical perspectives on youth's ways of thinking.

In this context, "Philippe Ariès", in his study on the status of children and the role of the family in traditional European society from the Middle Ages to modern times, concludes that childhood is an idea and a social perception closely associated with dependence and reliance, rather than being a precisely defined age range. Transitioning out of childhood does not simply mean reaching puberty but attaining independence, which can be delayed until the age of 18 or even beyond in many cases. Thus, an individual remains a child throughout this stage. Ariès also notes a category that hinders understanding and realization; he uses both the terms "child" and "young man" to refer to the age group of 16 to 20 years old. Subsequently, he opts to label them as "young child" without specifying their exact age (Ariès, 1960, pp. 63-73).

The same conclusion was reached in a study on royal pardons for prisoners in 15th-century France, based on the examination of amnesty letters, "Les lettres de rémission." The researcher Pierre Charbonnier observes that he identifies perpetrators of crimes through the words "enfant" (child) and "jeune enfant"

(young child). However, there is no clear and distinct boundary between them, as there is mention of children aged between eighteen and twenty.

The author of the study also discusses the manipulation of the boundaries of the youth stage in relation to the use of age as a condition for mitigating penalties for crimes committed. The classification of an offender as a young person is considered a significant factor in determining mitigating circumstances. In this context, age is mentioned multiple times to include the accused in the category of young people, and this category has been continuously expanded, sometimes reaching the age limit of 35 years (Charbonnier, 1981, p. 72). This manipulation of the youth stage boundaries serves specific purposes and aligns with what Laurent Thévenot refers to as the social functions of ambiguity, correctness, or strictness in age-related classifications and divisions. This manipulation is particularly evident during times of special circumstances such as wars and crises, where the youth stage is extended to include both adults and children, making everyone eligible for conscription. In this regard, Laurent Tifno argues that young people do not fit into any structured logic that allows statisticians to count and distinguish them as a separate category with well-defined boundaries. Young people cannot be strictly categorized; instead, they "play" between categories and occupy intermediate or transitional positions such as bystanders or idlers. Furthermore, unemployed young individuals under family guardianship, students, and employed or active young individuals are often classified differently, even if they are of the same age. This is due to their varied social and economic situations

and their level of independence from their social environment. For example, a person who is twenty years old and still living in the family home, regardless of whether they continue their studies or not, is often described as a young man or a teenager. On the other hand, their peers who have entered the workforce and assumed the freedoms, responsibilities, roles, and jobs associated with it are often referred to as adults. Additionally, young people do not neatly fit into approved classifications; instead, they are often included as special categories under various names such as "the unemployed" or "the marginalized" (Thévenot, 1979, pp. 3-18). Laurent Thévenot further highlights the challenges faced by statisticians in classifying the category of unclassifiable young people. These difficulties often lead them to adopt the arbitrary criterion of "age," which appears to carry meaning. However, the apparent numerical precision of this variable is used to circumvent the blurred definitions and subjective nature resulting from the division between young and adults. This practice institutionalizes, legitimizes, and perpetuates the social uses, representations, and connotations accompanying this dialectic between young people and adults.

For example, when examining the representations, meanings, and stereotypes associated with young adults working in the same profession, the criterion of age serves to obscure or neutralize the social issues arising from the establishment of these boundaries. Tunisian sociologist Abdelkader Zghal asserts that many studies tend to reduce the word "youth" to merely an age range, a transitional period, or a natural phase between childhood and old age. This reductionist approach fails to clarify the boundaries of this category and

its social position. Moreover, depending on the issues and perspectives, different age norms are adopted, which can diminish the notion of youth and strip it of its social dimensions (Zghal, 1984, p. 10).

Consequently, it is challenging to find a precise meaning for the term "youth," and establishing definitions for it is equally complex. While the question of when youth begins and ends may appear simple and self-evident, the variation in answers reflects the different attempts to define it, which differ based on the nature of the research and the specific field of specialization (Al-Zaidi, *Introductions to the Sociology of Youth*, 2002, p. 28).

### ***3.3.4. The distributions According to the Age Categories are Relative and Always Subject to Manipulation:***

Pierre Bourdieu argues that the stages of youth, maturity, or old age are not inherent or quantifiable data but rather social constructs. In the conflict between young people and adults, the relationships between social age and biological age are highly intricate. Young people from various segments of the dominant class within society embody the characteristics of adults, nobles, and elites more than others. They are closer to the power pole, and the distinctive attributes of youth, such as clothing and hairstyle, disappear for them. Within each field of the same society, there are specific laws and boundaries for different stages of life, and age is a biological factor that can be manipulated and socially controlled.

The first level of manipulation involves portraying youth as a social unit or a predefined category with shared interests that

are tied to a specific biological age. It is important to analyze the differences between various categories of young people, as there are many of them. A comparison can be made, for instance, between the living conditions, labor market dynamics, and ways of spending time for young people who have jobs and teenage students of the same biological age. On one hand, the former face the constraints of a challenging economic environment, which they can navigate with the support of family solidarity. On the other hand, the latter benefit from the facilities provided by the economic system, such as subsidies, assistance with food, housing, and subsidized services... The differences between young people from various backgrounds and social classes are evident in all aspects, including the realm of entertainment. On weekends, some young people spend their time in nightclubs, enjoying the available entertainment options, while others opt for more modest activities like cycling around the streets in simple attire. Depending on their social and economic empowerment, young people have access to diverse models, opportunities, and entertainment resources. However, security authorities often exercise control, inspection, and monitoring over young people from disadvantaged and vulnerable social backgrounds, perceiving them as a potential source of deviant behavior and crime. (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 143-154). Therefore, Pierre Bourdieu argues that the concept of youth represents a linguistic and conceptual fallacy because it attempts to bring together disparate cognitive abstractions under the same name. It encompasses diverse social worlds that have nothing in common. In the first case, we have the true meaning of youth, which implies a temporary lack of



responsibility. These young people are in a state similar to transitional or neutral zones, where they are adults in certain situations and children in others, constantly playing on both roles. Bourgeois adolescents tend to prolong the stage of adolescence, a phenomenon referred to as the Frederick complex in affective education, where the adolescent phase is perpetuated. On the other hand, those who are less fortunate face more severe social conditions and lack the same abilities and resources. Their childhood, adolescence, youth, and educational opportunities are cut short, pushing them into practical life at an early age and forcing them to take on responsibilities. These two categories of young people represent opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of potentialities and resources granted to them. Laurent Thévenot's significant contribution highlights that at these extremes, we have the bourgeois student who is commonly labeled as "young," and on the other hand, the young worker who has not yet reached adolescence but is considered an "adult." Between these two cases lie various modes and intersections. (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 143-154). According to Arnold Van Gennep, the French ethnologist and founder of the concept of rites of passage, it is not possible to consider a "young society" or "youth" as a homogeneous unit with the same composition, characteristics, and destinies. Van Gennep emphasizes the importance of recognizing the diversity and differences within the concept of youth. Treating youth as a homogeneous and fixed category is an illusion that conflates entirely different and disparate social worlds under a single term. From a sociological perspective, understanding youth as heterogeneous and variable is crucial as it varies across societies. This understanding is

part of a broader context that views age as a biological datum that can be socially manipulated and acted upon. "Thierry Blöss" and "Isabelle Feroni" further contribute to this discussion by highlighting that in modern societies, social status plays a more significant role in determining the age range than biological age alone. The prevalence of academic challenges, longer study cycles extending into one's mid-twenties or beyond, along with issues such as job market uncertainties, unemployment, social precarity, and difficulties in securing employment, housing, and financial independence, have expanded the duration of the youth stage. In some societies, this extended period can reach up to the age of fifty. This perspective supports the notion that age categories, particularly regarding young people, are more closely linked to social situations and contexts rather than being solely defined by biological or numerical divisions of age stages (Bloss & Feroni, 1991, pp. 3-23). Yes, we can say that age categories are a social structure or organization of life stages, and society imposes this structure on its members along with the associated roles, responsibilities, and functions. Deviating from these age categories is often discouraged or disallowed. For instance, "Nancy Munn" has demonstrated that in certain Australian societies, a particular form of magic known as the magic of youth, which is employed by the elderly, especially women, to attain a more youthful appearance, is viewed as socially unacceptable and even considered demonic. This perspective stems from the disruption it causes to the established social order, which is symbolized by the boundaries between age classes (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 143-154).

Indeed, the social structure of age categories, and specifically the stage of youth, is a subject of concern for Pierre Bourdieu. He argues that youth is merely a linguistic construct, and sociology's role is to highlight the arbitrary divisions and classifications of ages. Bourdieu also explores the dialectics and generational conflicts embodied in the "Pareto paradox." According to the Pareto Paradox, we do not have a clear understanding of when youth ends and old age begins, just as we cannot definitively determine when poverty transitions into wealth. Bourdieu contends that the border between youth and old age in all societies is a contested terrain influenced by existing conflicts, socialization models put forth by adults to young people, and subject to various manipulations.

An illustration of this can be found in the relations between young people and notables in sixteenth-century Florence, Italy. The elders, positioned in a place of power, imparted values and ideologies such as chivalry, virtue, and even violence to young people, as a means of preserving their own authority. Georges Duby also echoes this idea by showcasing how the boundaries between youth and maturity are manipulated by those who temporarily hold material inheritance. In the case of youth, this manipulation serves the purpose of delaying the process of transmitting inheritance and maintaining the irresponsibility associated with youth. The categorization of age groups, particularly in relation to young people and adults, raises issues tied to the distribution of wealth and power within society. Classification based on age, gender, or social class enforces boundaries and a particular system and status that compel individuals to conform to societal expectations.

### 3.3.5. *Youth is a Product or a Social Construct:*

François De Singly argues that within the social structure, the stage of youth is a crucial period during which the process of individualization occurs. This process enables young people to construct and shape their own identities, granting them the social authorization to adopt and develop an independent and distinct personal identity. In other words, the youth stage serves as a socially recognized phase where individuals have the opportunity to establish their unique identities (De Singly, 2006, pp. 368-378).

According to Tunisian sociologist Abdelkader Zghal, youth is a stage that follows childhood and is characterized by spending a significant amount of time in institutions and non-family structures that are somewhat specialized for young people. These institutions, such as high schools, colleges, and cultural and sports organizations, provide a transitional space where individuals have emerged from childhood but have not yet fully integrated into the economic and social structures of adulthood. Zghal emphasizes that without these specific youth institutions, there would be no concept of youth as we understand it. These institutions play a crucial role in shaping the experiences and identities of young people during this transitional period. Indeed, it is evident that young people are socially constructed within society. The stage of youth provides a space where individuals are granted a certain level of freedom, independence, and the opportunity to engage in a variety of experiences. It is during this period that young people have the chance to develop and shape their personal identities. Moreover, youth encompasses crucial

opportunities for education, training, as well as professional and social integration, taking into account the division of labor within modern societies. This stage plays a significant role in the process of personal growth and preparing individuals for their future roles and responsibilities within society. Studies conducted on tribal societies in Black Africa, where formal education and industrialization are absent but social structures revolve around generational divisions, have shown that during puberty, boys and girls undergo a process of segregation. They are separated from their families and placed in private spaces where they are initiated into the religious rituals, customs, and skills of their community, such as hunting techniques. As a result, they develop a subculture that resembles what is now referred to as youth culture. The historical experience of Western society helps us understand the origins of the phenomenon of youth, which persists alongside adolescence due to social relationships. This is also supported by research published by UNESCO. Youth as a social phenomenon did not exist before the industrialization stage; it is a consequence of societal transformations towards industrialization. In non-industrialized societies, there is no distinct period between childhood and adulthood. Children were primarily under their parents' care and would attend school for a limited time before entering the workforce for economic production. In such cases, there is a lack of what can be termed as generational conflict, as evidenced by the absence of specialized cultural institutions for young people in non-industrialized societies (Zghal, 1984, p. 12). The notion of crisis and youth problems does not arise in these contexts.

However, as societies progressively undergo industrialization, with the accompanying division of labor and extended periods of education, training, and socialization, a distinct social status for youth emerges. This newfound independence allows young people to engage with their peers, leading to the formation of unique behaviors and a culture specific to youth. Therefore, it can be argued that the social, economic, and political changes associated with the organization of modern societies have given rise to the concept and perception of "youth" as we understand it today.

Arnold van Gennep's study of the Massai community, particularly their rites of passage, highlights the significance of undergoing three stages to achieve integration and acceptance in society. These rituals encompass values such as respect, responsibility, species preservation, and the transfer of knowledge, experiences, and skills from one age group to another. However, social changes associated with increased dependence on agriculture as a primary source of income, reforms in property and agricultural systems, the impact of climate change on livestock, and openness to other cultures have gradually weakened the practice of rites of passage within the Massai society. Consequently, the distinct boundaries between the three life stages have become less clear, and an intermediate stage—resembling what we now refer to as youth—has emerged. This intermediate stage serves the purpose of acquiring knowledge and experiences, yet its precise boundaries have become blurred due to the fading of the rites of passage system and accompanying social transformations. In addition to the spread of external migration and some new practices within the same

category, which can be included in what contemporary societies call a "crisis" or "youth problems".

The social dimension or the social structure of the age categories and the accompanying characteristics or descriptions according to physiological changes are manifested by differences in the level of needs, roles and functions of adolescents and young people within different societies... For example, Margaret M Mead noticed the absence of the so-called crisis of adolescence or puberty on the Samoa Islands. This indicates its association with a specific social and cultural context. Therefore, we can say that youth and adolescence do not represent a natural state, just as we note that the phenomena associated with youth in general, with what are called youth problems or the crisis of youth and adolescence, are mainly linked to patterns of social organization and appear mainly in contemporary industrial societies and urban residential agglomerations. Complex models of social organization do not facilitate the professional and social integration of individuals. The excessive division of labor and the successive changes associated with modern society have contributed to the emergence of various forms of social fragility, the difficulty of integrating individuals, unemployment, the inability of social institutions to educate, social control and behavioral deviations. these situations are covered and expressed politically and socially by the term youth or youth crisis.

All these considerations make us relativize chronological and biological age and admit that youth is a social production. In this regard, "Natalie Dupont" says that the stage of youth is only a social construction or a social organization of the stages of life (Dupont,

2014, p. 21-34). Thus, Karl Mannheim proposed a sociological conception of the concept of generation, according to a particular paradigm. For him, generation is not determined by age and biology, but by what he calls the "generational moment", that is, that historical event that determines the course of a particular generation that affects its culture, its vision of events and its interaction with other generations. In short, he defines his identity. He also wants to link the "generation" to the "social status" of any category, which must be identical and similar to form what he calls "generational unity". (Mannheim, 2011)

### ***3.3.6. The Concept of Stages of Life and Reactionary Social Conditions in Contemporary Societies:***

The concept of life cycles in sociology refers to how society defines, structures, and regulates the progression of ages throughout an individual's life. It is based on the idea that individuals transition from childhood to old age through distinct stages, be it in terms of family, career, or social roles. Traditionally, the theory of life stages has revolved around a tripartite division based on professional activities, namely youth, adulthood, and old age. This organization and structuring of life stages were closely tied to social patterns that emphasized the linear progression of professional life. However, modern sociological studies have moved away from this framework, embracing a new paradigm of understanding life that recognizes its increased length and challenges reactionary or regressive viewpoints. On the one hand, the triple perception of life stages has been challenged due to the emergence of new temporal stages within youth itself. This



includes transitional phases such as education, the anticipation of finding a job, experiences of depression, and periods of unemployment. On the other hand, the notion of linear life stages has become outdated due to the instability and regression of family situations (e.g., marriage and divorce) and professional circumstances (e.g., employment and unemployment). The divisions of social time have also been disrupted or extended, with education and ongoing studies sometimes encompassing the entirety of one's life. There is also a greater fluidity in career paths, as individuals may change their activities or experience multiple professional transformations. These contemporary shifts and resilient adaptations to life circumstances have weakened the ability to discern clear distinctions and thresholds that were once seen as marking irreversible transitions between different life stages. Thus, several new conceptual tools have appeared to describe this reality, such as: "Paths" or "Biographies", which, in addition to the theoretical and empirical approaches that emanate from them and include them, attempt to account for the specificity and uniqueness of the structure of life in contemporary societies while preserving its links with the social institution (Paugam, 2018, pp. 60-61).

#### **4. Conclusion:**

Through this research thesis, we have attempted to study one of the most problematic concepts in the human and social sciences: the concept of youth. The concept of youth has always been surrounded by a multitude of challenges, difficulties, and obstacles. These challenges manifest themselves through the arduous task of defining and designating youth. Constantly,

there are interactions, maneuvers, manipulations, and attempts at deception and control, all of which contribute to the complexity of subjecting youth to a scientific framework. The purposes, requirements, and efforts of definition, distinction, and control are particularly relevant in the stages of political learning and childhood. As such, young individuals lack the capacity to direct and manage public affairs.

Thus, through this work, we aim to address various conceptual aspects related to youth and shed light on the areas of confusion and ambiguity associated with it. It is a common practice in most scientific research within the humanities and social sciences for scholars and researchers to commence their studies without adequately acknowledging or addressing the problematic and intricate nature of youth, both as a phenomenon and as a concept. However, it is crucial to pause and give serious consideration to this matter, as emphasized by Emile Durkheim. Before embarking on the search for an appropriate method to study social phenomena, it is essential to understand the reality behind the phenomena referred to as "youth" by society. (Durkheim, 1961, p. 232).

It became clear to us, through this study, that there are multiple paths and directions for the perception and definition of youth, the most important of which is the biological tendency, which does not offer the necessary scientific stability and precision and therefore cannot be adopted to identify and distinguish young people. The numerical age ranges are subjective and relative, and differ according to historical and geographical contexts. In addition, the psychological tendency reduces youth to internal physiological and psychological situations and phenomena, with

exclusion or neutralization of social manifestations. Therefore, it is not possible to rely on these trends to identify, identify and distinguish young people. This is what caused the sociological current to build its perception of youth, considered as a given heterogeneous social that changes according to societies, depending on the social situation in the first place, which turns out to be characterized in contemporary societies by regression. In this perspective, ages and age groups are considered as social facts or constructs resulting from contexts, social experiences and living conditions, and they have variable consequences on practices, representations and social situations.

After studying this concept, it turned out that specialists in the field of youth agree that this stage is a decisive turning point on the path to the formation of the human personality and the construction social integration and identity of the individual (Al-Hassan, 1998, p. 19). There is also a consensus among researchers in the field of humanities and social sciences that the concept of youth is one of the elusive and difficult concepts to master, and in this regard, the two German researchers "Lessing and Liebg" affirm that the concept of youth is a pure mental constructive concept. In comparison, the concepts of class, power and growth are characterized by clarity and rupture, which the concept of youth does not offer (Venedictov, 1988, pp. 228-239).

Others would go so far and argue that youth is not easily identifiable, defined, or distinguished, as it can be seen as a "portmanteau" word, as described by Robert Castel. This means that it functions as a compound word that encompasses various uses in political, media, and academic contexts. Furthermore, it allows for a complex

and heterogeneous mixture of positions, often neutralizing or erasing specificities (Castel, 1995, pp. 13-21). For instance, Pierre Bourdieu observed that in public discourse in France, intellectuals have started using the term "youth" to avoid social stigmatization associated with terms like "deviants," "unemployed," "immigrants," "North Africans", and "Arabs." This reduction to the concept of "youth" limits the scope of understanding the intricate and complex reality. Valade Bernard's concept of inclusivity seeks to integrate all components of social reality, acknowledging its complexities, within a single concept and asserting that it is the concept capable of interpreting this reality.

Whereas the contrasts, the differences, even the contradictions contained in the concept of youth make Georges Balandier prefer to use the concept of "youth community" which exists within a broad or inclusive society (Balandier, 1995, p. 87). Youth, according to Olivier Galland, a French sociologist who specializes in youth issues, does not constitute a harmonious unity. Instead, it is a broad category encompassing diverse and contradictory intellectual, cultural, and religious tendencies, as well as conflicting class affiliations (Galland, *Les jeunes*, 1987, pp. 6-7). In the sociological sense, youth is a social construct intricately tied to social and symbolic frameworks, and its definitions evolve and transform with societal changes. In this context, "Marc Dechaud" argues that youth is a nonexistent concept, and considering it as a homogeneous and distinct entity is not only risky but also an oversimplified perception of social reality. It is crucial to recognize that youth is diverse and heterogeneous in terms of age, gender,

social background, psychological characteristics, and personal history, just like the dynamic and ever-changing society they inhabit. Engaging in hasty generalizations about this category hinders understanding, while acknowledging and embracing its particularities and diversity can offer greater opportunities for comprehension. The ongoing societal transformations render familiar landmarks fragile and unstable, significantly altering the relationships between youth and society, its institutions, history, and religion. No one can escape the profound impact of this reality (Dechaud, 1985, pp. 07-08).

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