

Youth on the Margins: An Analysis of Youth Exclusion and Juvenile in the Latin American Context *

[English Version]

Juventudes en los márgenes: análisis de la exclusión juvenil y del juvenicidio en el contexto latinoamericano

Juventudes às margens: uma análise da exclusão juvenil e juvenicídio no contexto latino-americano

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Cristian Horacio Jaramillo García**

<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-8763-1384>

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Colombia

Diana Marcela Bustamante Arango***

<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-6796-2041>

CvLAC https://scienti.minciencias.gov.co/cvlac/visualizador/generarCurriculoCv.do?cod_rh=0000482110

Colombia

Óscar Armando Jaramillo García****

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6580-7847>

CvLAC <https://scienti.minciencias.gov.co/cvlac/>

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** PhD Candidate in Childhood and Youth Social Sciences. Lecturer at Fundación Universitaria COMFAMILIAR Risaralda. Email: chjaramillo64@gmail.com

*** PhD in Humanities. Lecturer in the Doctorado CINDE and at the Universidad de Manizales. Email: diana.bustamante00@gmail.com

**** PhD and Postdoctoral Researcher in Childhood and Youth Social Sciences. Lecturer in the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira. Email: oscar.jaramillo@utp.edu.co

Abstract

Objective: To identify the contemporary mechanisms of domination used to marginalize, criminalize, and render youth invisible, with particular emphasis on the intersection of concepts such as *biopolitics* and *necropolitics*. It also seeks to examine how young people develop forms of agency through resistance and symbolic creation in response to the discourses and practices that exclude them. **Methodology:** A qualitative methodology was employed, based on a bibliographic review and document analysis, using a critical hermeneutic approach. This approach established a categorical dialogue among diverse theoretical perspectives in order to understand current trends in youth discrimination. **Results:** The concept of *youth* should not be understood solely as an age-based category, but rather as a situated sociohistorical and cultural construct. **Conclusions:** Discourses that criminalize and render youth invisible were identified, including phenomena such as *juvenile* and *iuvenis sacer*. Recognizing youth agency and resistance is therefore essential for promoting inclusive policies that foster the participation of this social group.

Keywords: youth; identity; social inequality; violence; adolescence (obtained from the UNESCO Thesaurus).

Resumen

Objetivo: reconocer los métodos de dominación contemporáneos usados para marginar, criminalizar e invisibilizar a las juventudes, con especial énfasis en la intersección de conceptos como «biopolítica» y «necropolítica». Así mismo, presentar la forma en que los sujetos jóvenes establecen sus agenciamientos a partir de la resistencia y creación simbólica, para hacer frente los discursos y prácticas que los excluyen. **Metodología:** se hace uso de una metodología cualitativa, a partir de la revisión bibliográfica y análisis de documentos, con un enfoque hermenéutico crítico, estableciendo un diálogo categorial entre diversas perspectivas teóricas que permitan comprender las tendencias actuales de discriminación juvenil. **Resultados:** el concepto de «juventud» no debe ser comprendido exclusivamente como un rango etario, sino que se debe entender como una noción sociohistórica, cultural y situada. **Conclusiones:** se identifican discursos de criminalización e invisibilización hacia las juventudes, como el *juvenile* y el *iuvenis*

sacer, siendo necesario reconocer la agencia y la resistencia juvenil para promover políticas inclusivas que permitan la participación de este grupo social.

Palabras clave: juventud; identidad; desigualdad social; violencia; adolescencia (obtenidos del tesoro de la UNESCO).

Resumo

Objetivo: reconhecer os métodos contemporâneos de dominação utilizados para marginalizar, criminalizar e invisibilizar as juventudes, com especial ênfase na interseção de conceitos como *biopolítica* e *necropolítica*. Da mesma forma, apresentar a maneira pela qual os sujeitos jovens constroem suas formas de agenciamento por meio da resistência e da criação simbólica, a fim de enfrentar os discursos e práticas que os excluem.

Metodologia: utilizou-se uma metodologia qualitativa, baseada na revisão bibliográfica e na análise documental, com uma abordagem hermenêutica crítica, estabelecendo um diálogo categorial entre diferentes perspectivas teóricas que permitissem compreender as tendências atuais de discriminação juvenil. **Resultados:** o conceito de *juventude* não deve ser compreendido exclusivamente como uma faixa etária, mas como uma noção sócio-histórica, cultural e situada. **Conclusões:** identificam-se discursos de criminalização e invisibilização dirigidos às juventudes, como o *juvenicidio* e o *iuvenis sacer*, tornando necessário reconhecer a agência e a resistência juvenil para promover políticas inclusivas que favoreçam a participação desse grupo social.

Palavras-chave: juventude; identidade; desigualdade social; violência; adolescência (obtidas do Tesouro da UNESCO).

Introduction

The concept of *youth* has undergone various transformations, both in its methodological and epistemological approaches, within the debates that have occupied the social sciences (Chaves, 2010). Historically, young people were understood through a purely age-based classification; however, contemporary perspectives embrace more complex notions that take into account cultural, social, and political factors (Vommaro *et al.*, 2021). Consequently, the evolution of the concept allows young people to be understood as a collective shaped by diversity rather than homogeneity, situated within specific historical moments and adapted to distinct geopolitical realities (Jaramillo *et al.*, 2025). From this perspective, youth has become the subject of multiple academic and political debates, given its dynamic character and its capacity to embody social tensions (Muñoz, 2003).

The recognition of youth as a social condition constitutes one of the contemporary approaches advanced by authors such as Brito (1998) and Reguillo (2010), whose work focuses on identifying the power dynamics that shape youth identities. This perspective moves away from biologically determinist definitions and instead reaffirms the importance of understanding the political contexts in which young people live.

Nevertheless, pathologizing and criminalizing discourses about young people continue to prevail, often associating identity formation with problematic behaviors (Chaves, 2012). Such adult-centered narratives have sought to reduce youth experiences to a period of social moratorium, in which young people are merely preparing to enter adulthood, thereby legitimizing practices of control and heightened surveillance (Alvarado & Jaramillo, 2023). Concepts such as *iuvenis sacer*, developed by Valenzuela (2016), contribute to understanding the forms of exclusion generated by the socioeconomic structures embedded within neoliberal capitalism. These structures render young people disposable and strip them of their social value.

Likewise, the concept of *juvenile*, which seeks to account for the systematic forms of violence faced by young people (González & Nateras, 2023), has become particularly relevant in contexts marked by marginalization and inequality. This phenomenon reveals how young lives may be sacrificed through their exclusion to the margins of society, as a result of systematic practices stemming from policies that construct them as subjects who can be eliminated without social or political consequences (Valenzuela, 2019). Furthermore, Jaramillo (2020) argues that, in the face of exclusion, young people construct alternative identities and territorialities that challenge the narratives through which they are stigmatized, a crucial insight for rethinking the policies that shape their lives.

Against this backdrop, the primary objective of this article is to identify, from a critical hermeneutic perspective, the various contemporary forms of domination that marginalize, criminalize, and even render young people invisible. In doing so, it seeks to uncover the power structures traversed by biopolitics and necropolitics, as well as by critical concepts such as *juvenicide* and *iuvenis sacer*. The article also aims to examine the meanings and perspectives that underpin adult-centered discourses used to socially construct youth, while problematizing the effects of exclusion and precarization. Finally, it seeks to recognize the ways in which young people develop forms of agency, resistance, and symbolic creation that enable them to re-signify their position within social and political life. Through these processes, they challenge hegemonic logics that reduce them to disposable lives, thereby reconstructing horizons of possibility grounded in dignity, recognition, and new forms of social and cultural organization.

Methodologically, this reflection article is situated within a qualitative approach characterized by a critical and situated interest in understanding social phenomena. It is guided by a critical hermeneutic method aimed at unveiling the constitutive meanings embedded in social structures that emerge within historically and geographically situated contexts (Herrera, 2023), while acknowledging their location within broader global-local dynamics. These meanings are understood as being crossed by relations of power; therefore, critical inquiry seeks to identify the forms of power that become intertwined with the meanings used to define Latin American youth (Jaramillo, 2020). This exercise is grounded in the understanding that social truths, as well as the theoretical categories and public policy frameworks used to name and define youth, may respond not only to scientific methods but also to strategic forms of governing life and youth populations.

To this end, a selection of texts was compiled from scientific databases, primarily Web of Science, Scopus, ScienceDirect, SciELO, Redalyc, Google Scholar, Dialnet, REDIB, and Latindex. The corpus included research articles and reflective essays, with priority given to publications issued between 2010 and 2024 in indexed journals. Additional selection criteria included open-access availability, publication in Spanish, and a focus on Latin America and the Caribbean. These texts were placed in dialogue with foundational authors in the field in order to provide greater interpretive depth and theoretical density to the categorical framework developed in this study.

Brief Context of Discourses and Representations of Youth

The origins of the modern conception of *youth* can be traced to pedagogical and educational discourses, in which this stage of life was understood as one characterized by dependence on the family and the school (Charlot, 2009). In France, for example, the 1960s witnessed a significant emergence of youth as a social category, marked by the establishment of specialized groups devoted to sociological research on youth (Charlot, 2009). This development was complemented by the contributions of Bourdieu and Passeron during the same decade, while the creation of academic networks such as *Youth and Society* in 1982 further consolidated the field of study.

Another perspective that contributed substantially to youth studies was the generational approach, which opened new analytical possibilities during the first half of the twentieth century. Referring to youth, Ortega y Gasset (1966, 1970) proposed that generations should be understood as key elements for interpreting the rhythms of history, whereas Mannheim (1993) developed a sociological framework for examining the formation of generations as social phenomena rather than merely age-based categories (Álvarez, 2018). These contributions positioned youth as a historical agent embedded in social conjunctures and disputes, rather than simply as a biological stage of life.

More broadly, Aguilera (2014) argues that concern with youth emerged and became consolidated during the early decades of the twentieth century. According to this author, studies conducted in the United States included urban research associated with the Chicago School and Whyte (1971), cultural anthropology through Mead (1985), and developmental psychology through Hall (1915). Aguilera (2014) further notes that in Europe, both Ortega y Gasset and Mannheim played a pivotal role in advancing youth studies. Subsequently, British cultural studies contributed important insights into the relationship between mass media, the cultural industry, and youth identities. Aguilera also highlights the existence of a Latin American tradition that approaches youth as a situated social subject, as reflected in the contributions of scholars such as Barbero, Muñoz, and Reguillo.

Muñoz (2006) reinforces the argument that youth has been historically configured through discourses that assign meanings varying according to time and context. From this perspective, he identifies multiple ways of understanding *youth*: the biological perspective, focused on age and life cycle; the pedagogical perspective, linked to dependence on school and family; the sociological perspective, concerned with deviance and social control; the cultural perspective, which emphasizes youth subcultures, consumption, and lifestyles; the marketing perspective, which constructs young people as consumers; and, finally, the public policy perspective, which recognizes youth as a social actor assigned

specific roles (Muñoz, 2006). Today, the Ibero-American field of youth studies continues to enrich these debates through the contributions of scholars such as José Manuel Valenzuela, Rosana Reguillo, Maritza Urteaga, Alfredo Nateras, Pérez Islas, Germán Muñoz, and Carles Feixa, among others, whose situated theoretical approaches have significantly expanded the conceptual tools available for understanding youth worlds.

In light of the above, it can be argued that the category *young person* does not have a single definition; indeed, it has largely been understood through hegemonic perspectives and remains the subject of ongoing contestation. Following Muñoz (2003), it may be stated that the concept of *youth* lacks a universal meaning, since it is a dynamic social construct that emerges under specific historical conditions and at particular moments in time. It is equally important to recognize that multiple approaches to youth coexist. On the one hand, there are adult-centered perspectives, and on the other, age-based definitions. Biological approaches are also common. Alternatively, as Castells (cited in Muñoz, 2003, p. 26) argues, young people are often inadequately reduced to labels such as *minors* (“which places them in a condition of inferiority”), *adolescents* (“lacking maturity or in transition toward adulthood”), *at-risk subjects* (“rather than subjects with agency and therefore with genuine rights”), *irresponsible*, *apathetic*, or *without a future*.

Youth is a dynamic category constructed through sociohistorical and cultural perspectives; it is always contextual and relational. Consequently, it may be understood as a lived experience defined primarily through social relationships rather than through age-based or biological characteristics (Vommaro & Cozachcow, 2023). Chaves (2010) argues that the concept of *youth* acquires meaning only when situated within a specific temporal and spatial context that is, when recognized as a category embedded in the social world.

In this regard, it is important to identify the discourses that have been constructed around the category of *youth*. To this end, the following discussion presents a conceptualization of the various ways in which the category is currently understood and employed. Through this analysis, the processes of criminalization, infantilization, and invisibilization of youth are brought to light, while also exposing the stigmatization, precarization, and mechanisms through which young people are governed and, in some cases, rendered disposable.

Youth as a Contextualized Category

The positioning of the category *young person* has undergone significant theoretical and epistemological transformations, given that neither cultures nor scientific

disciplines understand and approach young people in the same way. For this reason, the scope and meaning of the category have been interpreted differently throughout history. It is important to recognize the multiplicity of perspectives through which youth has been approached. From the earliest attempts to identify behaviors that deviated from dominant social norms—such as the urban studies of the Chicago School—to contemporary critical methodologies, youth has become a central topic in both scientific and political debates (Sánchez & Hakim, 2014).

In this regard, it is also important to note that a variety of interpretive frameworks have been applied to young people (Kropff, 2010). At the beginning of the twentieth century, youth was viewed as a potential solution to social problems due to its capacity to revitalize institutions. Following the Second World War, however, discourses emerged that criminalized young people. By the late 1950s, amid growing youth mobilizations and protests, narratives portraying youth as a generation without a future gained prominence (Machado, 1993).

It is therefore not possible to homogenize the meaning of *youth* through a strictly age-based classification, since being young cannot be reduced to a mere stage in the life cycle. Bourdieu challenged such age-based classifications by arguing that age is both a manipulated and manipulable datum. Through this notion, interventions are generated that present young people as a homogeneous social unit—a group supposedly sharing common interests. By linking these interests to a biologically defined age, a clear conceptual manipulation becomes evident (Bourdieu, cited in Duarte, 2000).

Similarly, Bourdieu's statement that "*youth is nothing but a word*" (cited in Muñoz, 2003, p. 26) clearly illustrates that the category acquires meaning depending on the theoretical perspective from which it is approached. Over time, young people have been described as individuals in transition, lacking a stable identity and searching for one; as symbols of social change; as vulnerable subjects prone to risk; or even as dangerous and maladjusted individuals (Muñoz, 2003; Tatar & Díaz, 2018).

Youth Understood Through the Concept of Adolescence

The etymology of the word *adolescent* originates from the Latin term *adolescens*, *adolescentis*, which may be interpreted as "someone who is in a period of growth." Fernández (2025), in *Hispanoteca*, notes that the term derives from the present participle of the Latin verb *adolescere*, meaning "to grow," "to mature," or "to develop." Suárez (2009) further explains that the root of the word *adolescent* is the same as that of *adult*. The past participle of *adolescere* is *adultum*, implying

that while the adolescent is the one who is in the process of growth, the adult is the one who has already reached full maturity.

It should be noted, however, that the word *adolescent* is often associated with the idea of “suffering from” or “lacking something.” Several authors, including Hernández (2011) and Suárez (2009), argue that this association is inaccurate. The Spanish verb *adolecer* refers to suffering from a condition or deficiency, whereas *adolescencia* derives from a different Latin root associated with growth and development. Consequently, the meaning of *adolescence* is etymologically unrelated to notions of deficiency or suffering.

The origins of the concept of *adolescence* can be traced back to eighteenth-century psychology. Nevertheless, it was not until the late nineteenth century that G. Stanley Hall’s studies on the biological and psychological dimensions of adolescence contributed to the widespread adoption of the concept within educational sciences and the social sciences more broadly (Manzano, 2018). Hall (cited in Manzano, 2018) argued that adolescence is characterized by significant sexual, social, and biological changes, marking a period of turmoil and stress. Thus, although adolescence is filled with promises of development and growth, it also involves risks such as distortions, disproportions, and dissociation.

Likewise, the concept of *adolescence* emerged historically from the need to classify populations according to age, particularly in relation to their capacity to participate in the labor market. Feixa (2011) points out that the notion of adolescence emerged in the United States and Europe in connection with major social transformations associated with the Industrial Revolution, age-based labor classifications, and the establishment of compulsory schooling.

Fridman (1999), for his part, argues that adolescence has been understood as a stage in which individuals, still free from adult responsibilities, are able to explore a variety of social, cultural, and sexual roles. This exploratory phase requires a degree of freedom but also adult supervision, as it is crucial to the formation of personal identity, a process that is both individual and social.

It is therefore evident that the category of *adolescent* is primarily defined through biological and psychological perspectives (Manzano, 2018). On the one hand, it has been described as a stage characterized by the absence of something, insofar as it represents a period in which one is no longer a child but not yet an adult. It is a time of transformation and self-definition that prepares individuals to assume responsibility for themselves, and may therefore be understood as a form of social moratorium (López *et al.*, 2024). On the other hand, criminalizing discourses have frequently portrayed adolescents as rebellious and problematic individuals (Chaves, 2010).

Being Young in Times of Neoliberal Capitalism in the Global South

Today, multiple discourses can be identified that stigmatize, discriminate against, and criminalize youth, as well as practices that lead to the systematic elimination of young people. To describe these phenomena, various scholars (Valenzuela, 2009; Amador, 2013) have examined the concept of *iuvenis sacer*, while others have focused on the concept of *juvenile* (Valenzuela, 2009, 2016; Reguillo, 2015; Muñoz, 2015). The study of these categories makes it possible to understand processes of precarization and exclusion, as well as the materialization of the State's sovereign power within social realities through the stark designation of young people as disposable subjects and through the power to make die or let live.

From *Homo Sacer* to *Iuvenis Sacer*.

Agamben (2006) argues that, strictly speaking, *bare life* is a life that may be stripped of its existence while simultaneously remaining unsacrificable. López (2018) expands upon this idea by stating that *bare lives* are those whose vulnerability exposes them both to death and to abuse because there is no one capable of intervening on their behalf. This conception is closely linked to the figure of the *sacer*, an ancient notion in Roman law that permitted the exclusion or even annihilation of an individual's life. As Amador (2013) explains, this juridical institution of Roman law implies that an individual is incorporated into the State's social and legal order precisely through exclusion, thereby enabling, if necessary, the possibility of their death.

To further examine the figure of the *sacer*—a concept rooted in Roman law—Rodríguez (2016), drawing on Agamben, explains that when a person committed a particularly serious offense, they became a *Homo sacer* (*sacred man*), thereby losing the protection of both human and divine law. As a consequence, they were excluded from the community, and anyone could take their life without being guilty of a crime. However, such a death could not be offered as a sacrifice to the gods. Thus, behind the *Homo sacer*, endowed with the quality of sacredness, lies the possibility of death, while at the same time the inclusion of that death within a sacrificial ritual is prohibited (Rojas, 2010).

In this sense, the *Homo sacer* is excluded by both civil and divine law. Yet these exclusions also produce indirect forms of inclusion within the civil order, insofar as civil law determines that anyone may take the individual's life without committing a crime, while divine law prohibits offering the sacred man as a sacrifice to the gods. Rodríguez (2016) argues that Roman legal frameworks, by

defining what is permitted and prohibited in relation to the *Homo sacer*, reveal a form of inclusion through exclusion.

According to Agamben (2006), the condition of *Homo sacer* is defined less by the supposed ambivalence of sacredness than by the state of double exclusion in which the individual is trapped and the violence to which they are exposed. The subject becomes vulnerable to the exclusions imposed by sovereign power, which, while claiming legitimacy, leaves the individual unprotected and stripped of the safeguards ordinarily provided by law.

Drawing on the figure of the *Homo sacer*, Valenzuela (2016) proposes the concept of *Iuvenis sacer*, emphasizing the exclusion and abandonment experienced by young people. He argues that such conditions generate social inequalities that, in turn, produce precarization. The economic and social precariousness affecting certain sectors of the population also limits their access to justice, as these individuals occupy a proscribed, disposable, and sacrificial condition of life. They are located at the margins of the judicial system, existing as subaltern subjects without voice or representation (Castells, cited in Valenzuela, 2016).

Returning to the notion of sovereign power that determines who should live and who may die, Valenzuela (2019) applies this framework to impoverished young people in Latin America whose deaths occur through violence. Once the lives of young people are deemed expendable, society enters the conceptual terrain of *Iuvenis sacer*. Referring to this phenomenon, Valenzuela (2016) explains that the combination of precariousness and lack of justice produces Agamben's (2006) *Homo sacer*, thereby revealing the existence of sacrificial lives. In this way, the *Homo sacer* is transformed into the *Iuvenis sacer*. Within this context, Amador (2013) adds that the *Iuvenis sacer* is a subject trapped within an adult-centered and deinstitutionalized world, integrated only to be sacrificed—if necessary—through forms of structural violence such as war.

Necropolitics and Juvenicide.

Achille Mbembe (2011) introduced the concept of *necropolitics*, through which he expands and reinterprets Michel Foucault's notion of biopolitics, which he considers insufficient. For Mbembe, *sovereignty*—defined as the right to kill—lies in the capacity to determine who has the right to live and who must die, thereby exercising the power to make die or let live. Control over life and death thus represents the highest expression of sovereignty, since authority possesses the power to decide who lives and who dies (Mbembe, 2011). At the same time, power manifests itself in the lives of subjects by regulating and conditioning the ways in which people are expected to live.

Determining who is made to die and who is allowed to live constitutes one of the central characteristics of necropolitics. However, it would be inaccurate to attribute this capacity exclusively to the State, as multiple actors and phenomena converge in these processes (Jaramillo & Zuluaga, 2023). According to Valenzuela and Borelli (2021), factors such as precariousness, vulnerability, and lack of protection constitute the economic, political, social, and cultural foundations that enable both biopolitical practices—focused on controlling bodies and populations—and necropolitical strategies, which reserve for themselves the power to decide over life and death.

From this perspective, necropolitics allows governments to manage the distribution of risk and, consequently, to decide matters of life and death. It constitutes a complex form of governance guided by a logic of sacrifice that has long been embedded within the core of neoliberalism—or *necro-liberalism*—based on the notion that some lives are worth more than others, and that those deemed less valuable may be discarded (Aguilar-Forero, 2020).

Within neoliberal capitalism, both necropolitics (Mbembe, 2011) and biopolitics (Estévez, 2018) are employed to produce unequal dynamics of life and death. These strategies determine who should—or deserves to—die, including the *Juvenis sacer*: young people whose lives are regarded as precarious and expendable.

Building upon the concept of necropolitics, Valenzuela (2012) and Reguillo (2015) connect it to the notion of *juvenile*, understood as the ultimate act of taking a person's life. However, juvenile should not be understood as an isolated event that emerges spontaneously; rather, it is the result of the materialization of multiple forms of social and economic precarization that disproportionately affect young people.

Thus, *juvenile* emerges as a concept aimed at recognizing and contextualizing the convergence of precariousness, social inequality, non-lives, and sacrificial lives among young people, while identifying a segment of the population considered expendable. In this way, a subalternized population is produced, one that Zygmunt Bauman characterizes as residual or surplus. Such populations are labeled undesirable, superfluous, or disposable because the system has degraded their forms of life and existence (Bauman, cited in Valenzuela, 2016).

Juvenile arises through an analogy with genocide. Both categories seek to identify how the intentional extermination or systematic elimination of a human group takes place. Juvenile, however, specifically refers to the persistent, systematic, and unpunished killing of young people (Valenzuela, 2016). In this regard, Valenzuela (2012) emphasizes that the concept of *femicide* is closely related to that of *juvenile*, since both forms of lethal violence are preceded by symbolic violence that establishes the conditions necessary for the crime to occur. Whereas femicide is rooted in a dominant patriarchal order, juvenile is grounded

in autocratic structures that impose their interests through stereotypical and normative perspectives.

Juvenile therefore reveals how those who hold power have promoted processes of stigmatization and criminalization directed at young people, often with the active participation of cultural industries. These industries contribute to stereotyping and stigmatizing youth behaviors and lifestyles, generating negative predispositions that disqualify young people by portraying them as rebellious, lazy, violent, gang-affiliated, dangerous, anarchic, or criminal (Valenzuela, 2016).

Consequently, juvenile emerges through either the action or omission of the State, which serves as the guarantor of fundamental human rights. For this reason, the systematic killing of young people—or the precarization of their living conditions—may be understood as a State crime. By conceptualizing it in these terms, Muñoz (2015) argues that an epistemological platform emerges through which specific legal claims can be directed toward the State.

Discussion

The literature reviewed on youth studies in Latin America reveals significant epistemological transformations in the category of *young people* within the social sciences. Early approaches relied primarily on age-based classifications to identify youth; however, this criterion has gradually become more complex through the incorporation of chronotopically situated notions shaped by specific social and cultural factors (Vommaro & Cozachcow, 2023). The meaning of youth varies across historical contexts. For instance, in the postwar period young people were frequently criminalized, whereas during the 1960s and 1970s they were associated both with revolutionary movements and with delinquency (Chaves, 2010).

This diversity of approaches demonstrates that youth constitutes not only a scientific concern but also a political one, reflecting social tensions that are constantly evolving (Vásquez & Larrondo, 2020).

Likewise, Brito (1998) and Reguillo (2010) argue that youth may be understood as a social condition in which youth identity is constructed through the cultural and structural dimensions that shape young people's lives. The significance of this perspective lies in its emphasis on young people's interactions with the sociopolitical context, thereby moving beyond biologically determinist views. Reguillo (2010) contends that understanding young people through their

lived experiences, in relation to the structural and cultural mechanisms of their environments, situates them within the concept of the *youth condition*.

This category recognizes that young people cannot be understood as a homogeneous group, but rather as a collective immersed in ongoing processes of insertion into and adaptation to historical and geopolitical dynamics. Consequently, youth must be understood as a relational and situated social construct, influenced by factors that transcend biology and respond to complex realities that vary across time and space (Kropff, 2010).

Approaches grounded in adult-centered and biologically determinist discourses, such as those associated with the concept of adolescence (Manzano, 2018), limit the possibility of comprehensive analyses within the social sciences because they deprive young people of recognition as social subjects with agency. These perspectives are restricted to psycho-developmental theories that define youth as lacking maturity, given that they are assumed to occupy a transitional stage preparing them for adult life. Such narratives reproduce discrimination against young people and perpetuate a reductionist vision that fails to recognize their capacities and contributions within society (Kropff, 2010).

Furthermore, practices of control and surveillance directed toward young people (Jaramillo, 2018) are often justified through criminalizing discourses that associate youth with risk and conflict. These narratives generate forms of identity discrediting that stigmatize and segregate young people by perpetuating the belief that youth should be molded in the image of the adult world. It is therefore necessary to revalue and recontextualize the place of youth in social life by reassessing perspectives that pathologize and stigmatize young people and that frame them as subjects requiring constant intervention from adults (Manzano, 2018).

Youth does not endure only criminalizing discourses. There are also narratives that render young people invisible and subject them to precarization, as illustrated by the concept of *Iuvenis sacer*, advanced, among others, by Valenzuela (2016). This concept offers a profound critique of the ways in which social and economic structures precarize the lives of young people, transforming them into disposable subjects.

Within this same line of thought, the legitimization of structural forms of violence that manage lives and bodies places young people in a condition similar to Agamben's (2006) *Homo sacer*, insofar as it implies that some lives possess rights while others do not. Likewise, the naturalization of youth death as an acceptable outcome forms part of the structural and symbolic violence that validates the sacrifice of certain lives without consequence (Alvarado & Jaramillo, 2023).

This abandonment and precarization not only exclude young people from access to rights and opportunities but, in contexts of violence and war, also

transform them into bodies available for elimination or exploitation (Jaramillo & Zuluaga, 2023). From an adult-centered perspective, their lives are valued only insofar as they serve the hegemonic powers of the present, reinforcing relations of domination in which youth—particularly the most vulnerable—becomes a sacrificial, invisible, and disposable life within broader logics of exclusion (Jaramillo, 2020).

Following the logic of criminalizing discourses, *juvenilecide* emerges not merely as a phenomenon of direct physical violence but as a systematic consequence of policies that relegate young people to the margins of society (Valenzuela, 2019). This category helps explain how young people, particularly those from marginalized contexts, come to be viewed as disposable lives—lives that may be sacrificed within a socioeconomic order that privileges production and capital accumulation while neglecting or abandoning those who do not fit its productive schemes (Valenzuela, 2016).

The lives of young people rendered expendable by the system (Amador, 2013) exist in a condition akin to *bare life*, occupying an intersection between biopolitics and necropolitics that, in practice, is ultimately expressed through the phenomenon of *juvenilecide* described by Valenzuela (2016). In this sense, these frameworks enable the implementation of repressive policies that exclude and criminalize young people to the point of deciding over their lives, including their elimination. Such processes radically precarize youth life and assign it a residual value, reinforcing the perception of young people as potential social threats (Bonvillani, 2022).

Adult-centered, state, and market structures embedded within neoliberalism have deployed strategies of permanent precarization that push young people into conditions of extreme vulnerability. These structures have even acquired the power to determine which lives are worthy of being lived, operating through symbolic violence that precedes and legitimizes physical violence (Reguillo, 2015). In this context, *juvenilecide* becomes a State crime, enacted both through action and omission, that not only kills bodies but also destroys futures, possibilities for agency, and human dignity. In doing so, it creates a subcategory of humanity condemned to slow or violent death at the margins of society (Jaramillo, 2020).

Conclusions

Based on the analysis of the categories and concepts developed throughout this article, identified through a rigorous documentary review and examined from a critical, situated, and hermeneutic perspective, several conclusions can be drawn.

First, the category of *youth* has evolved from a simple age-based classification into a complex concept shaped by historical, social, and cultural contexts. This transformation makes it possible to move beyond biologically determinist and adult-centered perspectives that limit the understanding of young people as social subjects. It also enables the recognition of their agency, autonomy, and capacity to participate actively in political, economic, and cultural life.

Second, it is evident that adult-centered policies and discourses continue to criminalize and precarize young people, particularly those living in vulnerable conditions. The structural violence directed against youth makes concepts such as *juvenile violence* and *Iuvenis sacer* valuable analytical tools for understanding the forms of marginalization and exclusion that render this segment of the population disposable. The normalization of youth deaths resulting from systematic violence situates *juvenile violence* within a framework of thanatopolitical governmentality, clearly revealing the dehumanization of youth through economic, social, and cultural exclusion.

The analytical power of the concept of *juvenile violence* lies precisely in its capacity to denounce the violence affecting young people in contexts of inequality, extending to the point of the physical elimination of specific bodies that are treated as social enemies. Such elimination may occur either through direct State action or through State omission.

At the same time, it is essential to recognize the forms of resistance deployed by young people, which demonstrate their capacity to propose alternatives and to challenge the processes of disqualification directed against them. In this regard, recognizing youth agency becomes a central analytical and political axis, as it allows for the construction of an approach that understands young people as protagonists of their own realities, capable of making decisions that influence emerging forms of social and political organization. This implies working *with youth, among youth, and from the perspectives of youth*, fostering participation and creating spaces for listening that value young people's experiences.

Finally, this article seeks to contribute to consolidating the idea that, from a social sciences perspective, youth is not merely an age-based condition but rather a relational and situated category. It therefore advocates an epistemological rupture with psychobiological approaches and promotes an understanding of young people as social subjects endowed with full agency. Likewise, it seeks to broaden discussion and debate surrounding the concept of *juvenile violence* as an analytical category that makes visible the ways in which States, neoliberal markets, and other social actors operating as agents of violence manage the lives they consider expendable. Ultimately, this article calls for the recognition of youth through their strengths, capacities, and forms of resistance.

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