It is better to live for one day as a lion than for a thousand years as a sheep.
– Tibetan proverb

1 Introduction

During recent decades, much progress has been made in the scientific study of children and their varying environments across a broad spectrum of non-Western and Western societies. Relevant studies include those conducted by anthropologists, sociologists, demographers, economists, cross-culturally oriented psychologists, an increasing number of psychologists and other social scientists working in non-Western countries, members of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as Save the Children interested in furthering the welfare of children in various parts of the world, important United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) publications including the annual overview titled *The State of the World's Children*, and Max Roser's (2018c) extensive website, *Our World in Data*. It is our purpose to integrate some of these ecosocial, demographic, and sociocultural studies. In addition, it is our aim to present a selective overview of the world's 2.3 billion children and youth from a long-term, dynamic, and globally oriented perspective. The perspective highlights the joint impact of ecological, technological, economic, demographic, and sociocultural forces on children's lives. A major emphasis is placed on non-Western societies where more than 85% of all children live. However, this Element is less concerned with individual psychological differences, neither does it assess the cross-cultural validity of commonly discussed developmental theories such as Piaget's. Rather, its main focus is on the general nature of children's lives as these are shaped by diverse ecological and sociocultural contexts.

In order to provide sufficient ecological variety and context, we initially distinguish between four types of societies that rely on different kinds of subsistence activities: (1) small foraging bands of hunter-gatherers that until about 11,000–12,000 years ago were the only existing societies but that are now facing radical challenges and approaching extinction in their original forms; (2) nomadic pastoralists who herd livestock and seasonally move them to different pastures; (3) peasant societies whose populations are mostly engaged in farming based on formerly traditional but now evolving techniques; and (4) postindustrial, digital information societies that have made headway during recent decades especially in East Asia, Europe, North America, and Australia. We then describe in more detail the changing lives of children, adolescents, and their families in four evolving societies representing different forms of subsistence economy: Australian hunter-gatherers, Tibetan nomads, Maya peasants and farmers residing in Mexico and Guatemala, and education-obsessed modern South Korean families and their tech-savvy offspring. After

discussing in some detail the broader contexts of childhood in these representative societies, we analyze some recent transformations in the nature of childhood both in these societies and around the globe. These include the rapid increase in the number of children in the world's poorer countries due to their rapidly declining mortality rates, the pervasive impact of schooling on the length, nature, and cultural meanings of childhood and adolescence, the declining prevalence and shifting nature of child work, and the effects of the digital revolution and globalization on the hybrid and "glocal" (both global and local) identities of many modern adolescents. Around the world societies are on the move, which means that the nature and sociocultural contexts of childhood are changing rapidly in many of them.

The average length of childhood in the narrow sense as well as of adolescence and youth varies considerably from society to society. Here, we pragmatically adopt the definition used by the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child. In this important convention, the first international, legally binding, and comprehensive legal document protecting the rights of children, a child is defined as everybody prior to his or her eighteenth birthday (United Nations Assembly, 1989). Keep in mind, however, that in many nonindustrialized societies, both past and present, central aspects of a girl's childhood were or are only operative until she reaches her early to mid-teens. At that time, she is probably already fulfilling many adult duties and might even be married – or she might have been promised to an older man since her early years. In most preindustrial societies, girls experience greater continuity between childhood and adulthood than holds true for boys. Still, adolescence does display some universal biological, cognitive, and psychosocial features. Thus, preindustrial societies typically recognize some intermediate period between childhood and adulthood that acknowledges a person's physical and cognitive growth, sexual maturation, improving social skills, and ability to assume new responsibilities (Schlegel & Barry, 1991). Moreover, many preindustrial societies, such as various Australian Aboriginal societies and African age-graded societies, have established puberty-related initiation rituals designed to help young people deal with major changes in their lives as they approach adulthood. In contrast, modern adolescents are frequently among the first to be exposed to, and to selectively embrace, major technological and sociocultural changes. They are therefore of special interest when assessing the impact of globalization on the development of human behavior (Gibbons, 2000).

In the interest of arriving at an overall and dynamic picture of global childhood, we highlight the broad impact of subsistence activities, technological factors, modern health practices, schooling, changing family systems and gender roles, digitalization, and globalization on the lives of children.

In addition, for several societies, we discuss in some detail certain religious and other belief systems that are exerting a major influence on children's socialization practices. Several of our examples pertain to the children and families of minority groups such as Aboriginal groups in Australia, Tibetan nomads in China, and indigenous Maya in Guatemala and Mexico. Like many other nations, Australia, China, Guatemala, and Mexico are multiethnic countries that must face the difficult and ethically challenging task of integrating children and adults from a considerable range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Children from minority groups are frequently forced to struggle with economic and sometimes racial discrimination, linguistic challenges, educational institutions in which they may not feel at home, cultural differences conducive to multicultural identity conflicts, and discontinuities between their own lives and those led by their elders.

Approaches emphasizing the impact of ecological, demographic, economic, and technological factors tend to favor a more functional analysis of children's lives than those preoccupied with differences in cultural belief systems (Barry, Child, & Bacon, 1959). An example is that hunter-gatherer societies tend to have total fertility rates (TFRs) of four to eight children per woman per lifetime, whereas the rates of almost all postindustrial information societies in East Asia and Europe have now dropped below the fertility replacement rate of 2.1 children per woman per lifetime (UNICEF, 2017, table 4.1). One fundamental reason for this striking difference is that in traditional hunter-gatherer societies, only an average of 57% of all children survive up to age fifteen (Gurven & Kaplan, 2007: 326; see also Volk & Atkinson, 2013), whereas in postindustrial societies, the percentage hovers around 99%. Moreover, teenage girls in hunter-gatherer societies tend to get married around the age of twelve to eighteen years. This age is close to the time of their menarche, which tends to occur at an average age of eleven to seventeen years depending on a society's food supply and ecological circumstances. Once they become mothers, they breastfeed their children for two to four years and soon thereafter they are likely to get pregnant again. Despite this pattern, the overall population growth of such societies can be precarious and sometimes quite slow, in part because their fertility replacement rates typically exceed three children due to the prevailing high mortality rates for both children and adults. It is "functional" for the members of small foraging societies to culturally embrace their fertility-enhancing practices because if they do not, such societies will sooner or later die out. In contrast, women in postindustrial societies spend many years in school and tend to get married much later, commonly around a societal mean age of twenty-seven to thirty-two years (United Nations Population Division, 2017). Given that these women and their partners are surrounded by many millions of co-citizens and,

not rarely, immigrants, they do not have to worry that their respective societies are going to become extinct anytime soon. Still, these societies are now aging and a few of them such as Japan have already begun to shrink in size. Moreover, in most pastoralist and peasant societies as well as in many hunter-gatherer bands, girls in particular begin to help out their parents around the ages of four to seven years, whereas in postindustrial societies, the practical contributions of most middle-class children to family survival are quite limited in scope. Indeed, modern parents typically find it quite expensive to bring up their children, adolescents, and "emerging adults" – and because of that, they are having fewer and fewer children (Kağıtçıbaşı & Ataca, 2005). This pattern holds true in culturally highly diverse countries such as Bosnia-Herzegovina (TFR in 2017 = 1.3), Italy (1.44), Singapore (0.83–1.16), and South Korea (1.26), all of which have very low birth rates almost never before seen in history (UNICEF, 2017, table 4.1).

Although this Element adopts a functional and long-term approach, this is not meant to imply that contradictory and dysfunctional practices are missing from the behavioral repertoires of most individuals and cultural groups. Indeed, motivational trade-offs within individuals and conflicts of interest between individuals or groups of individuals are unavoidable. For instance, it is of economic advantage for most modern adults to bring up only a few or maybe no children at all. However, that also means that prosperous societies such as Japan, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan are aging rapidly while unsuccess-fully trying to convince their young women to marry earlier and to have more children. Thus, what might be economically functional for individual parents or single persons can be biologically dysfunctional for society at large. Moreover, having few, if any, children is clearly detrimental to the inclusive fitness of individuals when seen from an evolutionary perspective. Such a perspective emphasizes an individual's biologically anchored interest in transmitting his or her genetic blueprint to numerous descendants. Interesting, this also means that parents from religiously motivated groups emphasizing the desirability of bringing up many children (e.g., the Amish, Hassidim, Hutterites, Mennonites, and Mormons) are well adapted from a biological and evolutionary perspec-tive. In contrast, politically progressive advocates focusing extensively on girls' education and gender equality in the worlds of work and politics tend to have fewer children and therefore lower levels of inclusive fitness. Such a trade-off, however, is only rarely discussed given the politically progressive rather than traditionally religious leanings of many social scientists. Moreover, at the global level, the morally laudable and increasingly successful campaigns to reduce child mortality rates especially in the poorer countries are never-theless leading to historically unprecedented population increases. These are

leading to dire long-term consequences for the deteriorating environment and for the intensifying climate crisis. Thus, the historical and ongoing changes in global patterns of childhood and adolescence have numerous – and, at times, quite difficult to reconcile – biological, moral, sociocultural, and political repercussions, a few of which are briefly touched on at the end of this Element.

In the following, we examine the impact of ecological differences and cultural blueprints on the lives of children in four highly varied and rapidly evolving types of societies.

2 Children's Lives in Four Contrasting Types of Societies

2.1 Four Kinds of Societies

Alongside many anthropologists, macro sociologists such as Lenski (2005) and Nolan and Lenski (2014) distinguish between different types of societies based on their predominant mode of subsistence and their access to various kinds of technologies. For Lenski, such types and subtypes of societies include hunting and gathering, fishing, horticultural, agrarian, maritime, herding, industrial, and postindustrial societies. Given that these societies do not always have neat and tidy boundaries, some of them evolve in a process of social evolution and grow into larger, increasingly stratified, and technologically more advanced societies. For instance, some of the advanced hunter-gatherer groups grew over time into either nomadic pastoralist or horticultural societies, or they were conquered or displaced by such societies. (Lenski defines horticultural societies as those that are based on domesticated plants and the use of hoes, digging sticks, and similar instruments. We use the term *peasant societies* for settled societies that employ a variety of agricultural technologies.) We have selected four kinds of societies for their contrasting characteristics, some of which are outlined in Table 2.1.

Small-scale foraging bands have presumably existed in some form for hundreds of thousands of years. Today they are changing, shrinking in number, and being pushed by larger and more powerful social groups into marginal desert and jungle areas (Codding, 2016). Foraging for plants and hunting various small and large animals, the members of these small-scale, low-density bands depend on a variety of family systems, gender roles, age categories, socialization practices, and religiously inspired worldviews as the basis of their social organization. They do not know specialized full-time occupations, although part-time healers such as shamans are commonly found among them. Whereas smaller, relatively egalitarian bands tend to lack layers of social stratification, some larger and more stratified hunting and gathering societies have probably

Table 2.1 Four Types of Society

	Small-scale foraging bands	**Nomadic pastoralist societies**	**Peasant societ**
Examples	Australian Aborigines; !Kung (Kalahari Desert, Namibia, Botswana, South Africa); Aka Pygmies (Western Congo Basin)	Traditional Tibetan nomads (China/Tibet); Mongolian pastoralists (Mongolia); Dinka and Nuer pastoralists (South Sudan); traditional Navaho sheepherders (the United States)	Maya (Mexico Guatemala); rural village societies in preindustrial Europe, and States
Average Population Size and Density	Small, fluid bands of fifteen to sixty seminomadic persons; very low population densities but compact settlements; bands form a part of larger cultural-linguistic groups	Small groups embedded in medium to large cultural groups; low to medium population densities; today increasingly embedded in large states	Villagers embe large to very societies wit to very high densities
Subsistence Activities and Economic Basis of Society	Foraging for roots, nuts, vegetables, fruits, honey,	Keeping and herding of animals such as goats, sheep, cattle, pigs,	Agriculture an subsistence keeping of a

	insects; hunting of small and big animals	horses, camels, lamas, and yak for dairy products, meat, pelts, transportation purposes, and sale	crafts; trade; migration to (including s reinforcing socioecono
Division of Labor and Socioeconomic Stratification	Limited to division by gender and age; part-time shamans; no or limited social stratification; emphasis on sharing; egalitarianism common	Moderate division of labor, e.g., herders, medical and religious specialists, traders, soldiers; stratification increases with size	Moderate divis stratification inequality m extreme; soc becoming m heterogeneo
Societal Complexity; Rural vs. Urban Areas	Small bands on the move displaying limited functional specialization mostly according to gender and age	Moderate complexity; life in tents common; increasing seasonal transhumance	Moderate com rural areas; complexity areas
Influence of Religion(s) and Supernatural Conceptions	Polytheistic religions often linked to environmental features and based on oral traditions	Polytheistic and monotheistic religions that may be based on sacred literature	Polytheistic an monotheistic mixture of lc and world re based on sac literature

Table 2.1 (cont.)

	Small-scale foraging bands	Nomadic pastoralist societies	Peasant societ
Impact of External and Global Influences	Symbiotic relationships with pastoralists and agriculturalists; external and global influences increasing	Tensions with state authorities and agricultural groups common; global influences increasing	Indirect and dir that is increa
Speed of Societal Change	Formerly slow but now rapidly increasing	Formerly slow and uneven but now rapidly increasing	Formerly slow but now stea increasing
Balance between Tradition and Innovation	Traditions are/were emphasized but innovative influences are increasingly arriving from the outside	Traditions may be valued yet are losing ground	Traditions are but increasin to innovation introduced fi
Gender Roles	Clear differentiation of gender roles; women/ girls tend to collect plants and small animals	Gender roles sharply distinguished; girls do housework and milking while boys look after	Gender roles sl distinguished as part of the sacred order

	while men/older boys hunt big game and defend the group; mixed gender playgroups in early childhood	large livestock and learn to fight; more freedom for boys, girls kept closer to home	more aggres assertive; m for boys, gir closer to hon extreme diff matrilineal s
Gender Inequality and Violence against Females	Low to moderate inequality and violence against women (but violence among Australian Aborigines, North American larger groups, and South American mixed horticultural-foraging societies)	Often pronounced in the widespread patrilineal and patrilocal societies; female infanticide and physical violence against women not uncommon	Patriarchal and hierarchical predominate and female i and neglect patrilineal ar societies but matrilineal a societies

existed for millennia in Australia, South and North America, and elsewhere. For those that rely on fishing as their main form of foraging, Lenski (2005) established a separate category of fishing societies. However, our focus here is on the lives of children in smallish, pedestrian, and more or less egalitarian bands, rather than on children growing up in larger, more stratified, and more sedentary fishing societies, or in larger North American societies that use horses, or in one of the many indigenous groups in the Americas that combine foraging with slash-and-burn horticulture (Roscoe, 2006).

Rather than living in villages, foraging bands create temporary shelters made from local resources such as tree branches or pieces of ice in the Arctic areas. Frequently on the move, they search for roots, nuts, vegetables, fruits, honey, insects, and eggs, and hunt both small and large animals. Embracing oral traditions and the power of environmental forces, their polytheistic religions often turn such forces into at times benign and at times threatening supernatural beings that must be placated. Most modern groups rely on economic relationships with agriculturalists, pastoralists, and nowadays information societies that increasingly serve as conduits for external and global influences (Hewlett & Lamb, 2005). Societal changes, which formerly occurred at a slow pace, are now accelerating and ubiquitous because of the introduction of new technologies, beliefs, and education systems. While men and women are socialized into clearly defined gender roles, early childhood is often characterized by mixed-gender playgroups. Women and girls tend to collect plants and small animals, while men and older boys hunt big game and are expected to defend the group should it become necessary. Inequality between the sexes tends to be low to moderate in the smaller groups, although it is more pronounced in some Australian societies (Jarrett, 2013). Violence occurs fairly frequently within, and between, some Australian Aboriginal groups as well as among larger groups residing in the Americas, but it is less prevalent among several small foraging groups residing in various Central African jungle areas (Hewlett & Lamb, 2005).

Nomadic pastoralists began to emerge around 8,000 years ago in the Fertile Crescent (today's southern Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Israel, and Palestine) and, sometime later, in Central Asian areas as well as the Tibetan Changtang, the world's highest and most extensive plateau. Depending on an area's ecology, pastoralists breed animals such as goats, sheep, cattle, horses, camels, llamas, alpacas, yaks, and reindeer. Today, an estimated 30 million pastoralists still follow this way of life while many others combine it with various forms of horticulture, agriculture, and, nowadays, the use of selected postindustrial technologies (Isom, 2009). Consequently, about a quarter of the world's land