Living Care-Fully: The Potential for an Ethics of Care in Livelihoods Approaches

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Summary. — This article explores the potential contribution of a feminist ethics of care to livelihoods approaches. Current critiques argue that considerations of material outcomes have been prioritized at the expense of social well-being. I argue that autonomy and independence frame our current approaches to understanding how people support themselves. This has obscured the interdependent and contingent nature of connections that found our social lives and reduced social connections to an instrumental role. The potential for taking a *care-full* approach to livelihoods is examined through the unfolding negotiations of livelihood strategies between an elderly woman and her daughter-in-law in rural northern Ghana.

Key words — livelihoods approaches, ethics of care, interdependence, contingency, Africa, Ghana

1. INTRODUCTION

In this article I draw on a feminist ethics of care to consider how a perspective oriented toward the connections and relations between people has the potential to change our approach to studying livelihood strategies. Livelihoods are studied by a range of scholars who tend to focus on the documentation of activities and resources that support individuals and their dependents, or the "capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living" (Chambers & Conway, 1992, p. 6). Within livelihood studies, emphasis tends to be on the material outcomes of these activities, and on the various strategies entailed in securing a livelihood. While providing important insights into the complexity of making a living in a diversity of contexts, these studies, even when the highly social nature of the strategies is acknowledged, tend not to investigate the quality and character of the relational and interdependent nature of livelihood strategies. Thus, extant studies have tended to miss the complex webs of caring in which people seek to secure their livelihoods. I build on recent critiques of livelihoods approaches that seek to rectify the pervasive focus on material outcomes that has marginalized social life to an instrumental position within livelihood strategies. I further argue that livelihoods have also been influenced by concepts of individual autonomy and independence resulting in analyses that prioritize the pursuit of self-interests. As a result, interdependency and the contingencies associated with interdependent living and caring for one another have been overlooked in livelihood studies. In this article I ask what a care-full approach to livelihoods could look like and how taking such an approach, one that accords interdependence a central place, could change the ways in which we understand people and their strategies for making a living. Drawing on qualitative research conducted in a rural village in Ghana's Northern Region, I recount the story of an elderly woman and her daughter-in-law to illustrate how these women have negotiated livelihood strategies that are interdependent. This story exemplifies that interdependency is a contingent arrangement, despite relationships being defined

through formal cultural expectations of responsibility and obligation. These two women's relationships, and thus their livelihoods, are built through negotiations that shift as circumstances change.

In social science, considerations of an ethics of care arose as part of broader feminist criticism of masculinist understandings of moral reasoning, often unproblematically assumed to be at work in societies around the globe (Gilligan, 1982; Held, 1993; Noddings, 1986; Tronto, 1993). By raising the issue of care, critics sought to challenge the assumed autonomy of individual subjects. Privileging the twin concepts of autonomy and independence failed to account for the deeply relational nature of everyday experiences. Feminist theories of care have pressed for a re-valuing of the many responsibilities and relationships shaping an individual's life, stressing the importance of contingencies, rather than rules, that influence not only moral reasoning (Gilligan, 1982), but the practices of everyday life (Tronto, 1993). An ethics of care directs our attention to care values and practices of support and care, practices that sometimes indeed enable a sense of independence, but do not take such a state as a starting point. The intentions and practices of caring and being cared for permeate and sustain our lives. Livelihood studies, however, have tended to overlook the interconnectedness of people's lives, and how caring—both as an activity and a value—is an important component of those lives. In order to capture interdependencies, we need to understand how people are interconnected. I draw on feminist ethics of care to provide a deeply relational ontology from which to critique livelihoods analysis. An ethics of care allows the conceptual space to open up what it means to make a living, incorporating values and work of care, as well as carelessness, in the decision-making and practices of everyday life. We can identify interpersonal relationships and subsequently explore how these relationships impinge upon the construction of livelihood strategies—not only how relationships are instrumental to fulfilling one's own needs, but how our own needs and the needs of others are inextricably embedded together in complex negotiations of our strategies.

In the first section of the paper, I build on recent critical work which questions the overwhelming focus on material outcomes while marginalizing social well-being in livelihoods analyses. Toward building an argument for a relational ontology, I explore the ways in which livelihoods analyses have approached social relations and social connectedness, including in the discussion a consideration of social capital and social networks, the household as the scale of analysis, and gender and intra-household dynamics. In the second section, I introduce feminist ethics of care, upon which I draw as a foundation for a relational ontology that conceptualizes social relationships as human connectedness rooted in interdependence and contingencies. The third section is a case study from Northern Region, Ghana, which considers shifting circumstances and strategies of an elderly woman and her daughter-in-law, in order to understand how their livelihoods are interdependent. This case study is drawn from both individual and focus group interviews and participant observation conducted between November 2011 and June 2012. I close with a discussion of this case study, and reflect on the potential of taking a care-full approach to livelihoods. An ethics of care, I argue, can productively reorient the focus of the frameworks used to study livelihood strategies. There is the potential to add new complexity to livelihood studies and better reflect what it means to make a living in particular places.

2. ARE LIVELIHOODS CARE-LESS?

Livelihoods approaches are one of the various approaches applied to understand the ways in which people support them- selves and others. The appeal of livelihoods approaches lay in part in their broad scope. They encompass not only income-generating and subsistence practices, but also account for larger social and environmental contexts. Livelihoods approaches emerged in the early 1980s out of a tradition of highly localized and in-depth understandings of how people make a living in particular places, a tradition that included, among others, household economics and gender analyses, political ecology, sustainability science, and agro-ecosystem studies (Scoones, 2009). They grew to prominence in the 1990s in reaction to staunchly economic macro-level approaches and the dominance of income-based poverty and employment-focused development policies that often failed to account for social and political complexity in rural development work (Chambers, 1995; Chambers & Conway, 1992; Ellis, 1998; Scoones, 2009). Livelihood approaches also gained some acceptance in prominent institutions, including the World Bank, (Fine, 1999; Scoones, 2009) and by the late 1990s, sustainable livelihood approaches were promoted by the UK-based Department for International Development and the Institute of Development Studies. The popularity and institutionalization of the approaches led to the development of livelihoods approaches as a standardized, comparative approach in rural development.

The adoption and development of livelihoods approaches within these prominent institutions required effective dialog between economists and the ecological and anthropological work they relied upon. Livelihoods approaches applied the language of institutional economics, and livelihoods came to be understood in terms of assets, reduced to a five-part framework of 'capitals'; social and material life were partitioned into natural, physical, human, financial, and social capitals (Bebbington, 1999; DFID, 1999). Access to these assets was regarded as critical. Livelihoods approaches proposed that various institutions—social systems and structures that define and delimit behavioral expectations—mediated access. For example, and somewhat awkwardly, social life found itself expressed in two ways; first as social capital (see below) and second as the social context in which livelihood strategies are negotiated. The social dimensions of life, instead of embedded within livelihood strategies, were reduced to an instrumental role in accessing assets.

There is a growing recognition of the need for a new orientation to livelihoods approaches, where the social is not seen as a merely peripheral concern, but where complex socio-economic practices lie at the very heart of livelihoods strategies. It has been argued that there is a need for a critical injection focused on knowledge, scale, politics, and dynamics if the approaches are to remain relevant to questions of rural development (DeHaan & Zoomers, 2005; Scoones, 2009). Most significant here, is the recognition that there has been a cost to the economic-orientation in livelihoods approaches. Livelihoods analyses have largely been reduced to economic decision-making, with material outcomes being accorded primary importance and social life relegated to an instrumental position (Carr, 2013; Jakimow, 2013; Scoones, 2009). In what follows, I discuss where and how social and material well-being have been incorporated or marginalized in livelihoods approaches.

Contemporary work has criticized livelihoods analyses for establishing an instrumental approach wherein the actors are positioned as rational decision-makers (DeHaan & Zoomers, 2005) whose economic well-being and social well-being are dissociated from one another. These critiques demonstrate that a rationalist approach overlooks the complex social influences that shape livelihood opportunities and outcomes. Jakimow (2012, 2013) and Carr (2013) are noteworthy because they offer alternative theoretical approaches—'serious games' and intimate government, respectively—that give equal consideration to how material and social concerns affect livelihood strategies. Carr (2013) argues that despite livelihoods approaches' acknowledgment that both social and material goals factor into the negotiation of livelihood strategies, there has been little effort toward systematizing an approach that studies the convergence of these goals. Carr (2013) puts forth an approach—based on the concept of intimate government—where livelihoods are seen as a form of government. Livelihoods are thereby the efforts to influence the practices of individuals or larger social units toward meeting outcomes that may be in flux or contradictory. This allows the researcher to focus on the negotiations of social and material well-being without unduly privileging material well-being in an individual's strategies. Revisiting earlier work that considered the competing interests of men and women within a household (Carr, 2005), Carr argues that this approach will allow us to understand decision making that seeks to satisfy social needs that may not support positive material outcomes. Through the lens prominent in livelihood analysis, such behavior appears "illogical" (2013, p. 102) albeit as social processes with non-material yet essential outcomes that contribute to decision-making with respect to people's livelihood strategies. Carr demonstrates how livelihood strategies of men and women can operate at odds to one another, negatively impacting household-level material well-being. By decentering material well-being and avoiding assuming a priori the most meaningful scale of analysis, Carr demonstrates that social outcomes can be pursued to the detriment of material ends, broadening the approach to livelihoods strategies beyond the economic.

In a similar vein, Jakimow (2012) uses Sherry Ortner's concept of 'serious games', which posits that people negotiate social, cultural, and material factors through the 'games of life'—'serious' due to the power plays involved and the high stakes for many of the players (Ortner, 1999, as cited in Jakimow, 2012). Jakimow argues that paying attention to 'serious games,' where the rules of play exist, but are subject to resistance, fosters an analytical approach where livelihoods can be understood as the dynamic social and material contexts that exert pressure on actors even as those actors reshape them. Her approach, like Carr's (2013), aims to develop the integration of material and social well-being in livelihoods analyses.

The concepts of intimate government and serious games attest to the need to understand the social and material well-being goals and potential outcomes of particular livelihood strategies. These approaches decenter the rational actor from the core of livelihoods analyses. Actors are conceptually refigured as individuals who are deeply embedded in society; their everyday behaviors, which aim toward a variety of material and non-material ends, do not resemble the mechanistic image of the rational, autonomous economic actor. These frame- works continue livelihoods approaches' long tradition of attending to social and political complexities while insisting that we challenge the assumption that social life is merely instrumental to achieving material outcomes. Here, I draw on

these interventions to suggest that livelihoods approaches can be opened up to explore interdependencies and inter-personal relationships.

Making the assumption that actors are autonomous and independent expresses a particular understanding of how an individual relates to others. While autonomy and independence do not negate the existence of social relations and relationships, they do create distance from realities of connectedness, dependence, and vulnerability. This blocks the potential to consider how these relationships impinge upon the pursuit of self-interests. These underlying assumptions mean that even when the analysis presents itself as relational, relationships are regarded as largely instrumental to fulfilling self-interests. In this following section I work through the ways in which livelihoods analysis has addressed relationality—specifically through (a) social capital and networks, as well as (b) the household as scale of analysis and gender as a critical entry point into intra-household dynamics. I also consider how, despite speaking to relationality, these approaches continue to ignore values of care through the unstated assumptions that prioritize self-interests and one's material needs, demoting relationality to a superficial and instrumental role. I will regard the relationality thus presented as a starting point within livelihoods approaches from which to explore how our decision-making and strategies incorporate the needs of others.

(a) Social capital and social networks

Social capital is an ambiguous concept that lacks a clear definition, however we can trace the meaning it has acquired within development discourse to a few key works (Harriss, 2001; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). The concept is frequently attributed to Bourdieu, who rooted the idea in 'connections' (Bourdieu, 1977). Coleman, a sociologist, defined social capital as the social-structural resources that are inherent within relationships between people and are an asset to them (Coleman, 1988). Within development discourse, however, a different definition of social capital gained a strong foothold, following from the work of Robert Putnam (Fine, 1999; Harriss & De Renzio, 1997). Putnam (1993) argued that social capital is a feature of collectivity, defined by norms, networks, and trust that promotes the pursuit of common goals. Social capital refers to connections between individuals, but not endowed in individuals themselves. Having social capital enables access to resources through relationships of trust and reciprocity that bring individual and collective benefits.

The concept of social capital gained prominence in development studies as researchers sought to identify the social relations that produce material benefits. Social capital has been touted as the 'missing link', although some critiques express concern that the focus on microeconomic processes would ultimately fail to rectify the problems of macroeconomic politics (Fine, 1999). Researchers have, nonetheless found that connections forged between organizations and networks play an important role in development project success (Mohan & Mohan, 2002). In livelihoods approaches, social capital found itself a willing supporter—the local emphasis and holistic approach to socio-economic life provides the opportunity to understand how social connections offer opportunities for asset building (Bebbington, 1999). However, social capital, as non-tangible assets continually redefined based on the social context, is a dynamic, intangible entity that is difficult to approach in a standardized way. As a result, social capital was applied at the organization and institutional level, all

but ignoring smaller scale social connections that abide between and within households and between individuals. Despite the optimism surrounding its application, social capital has come to exist overwhelmingly between networks and between organizations. This emphasis on broader scale units that marginalize micro-scale and informal connections such as the household (Lansing, 2009) and the individual. Furthermore, social capital has largely relied on a rational economic actor that further alienates other social motivations that appear illogical within this framework (Rankin, 2002).

Researchers have also used the heuristic of social networks to understand how people gain access to resources through their interpersonal relationships. This concept recognizes that social relationships create and preclude opportunities for individuals. Building on the work of Sara Berry (1989, 1993), who argued for the crucial role of social networks for accessing resources, MacLean (2011; see also MacLean, 2004) shows that the dynamics of particular familial and extra-familial relationships have shifted in response to different state policies on cocoa production and the need to maintain successful livelihood strategies. In Ghana, reduced demand for land has eroded familial inter-generational relationships and support while increasing investments in extra-familial relationships that can yield monetary and labor support. In Côte d'Ivoire, land remains a vital resource and is accessed via inter-generational relationships, and therefore retained their importance. MacLean's work demonstrates the need to understand how we situate our daily lives in relation to the lives of others by looking at the dynamics of the intersection of livelihoods and relationships. We can draw on MacLean's work to reinforce the ideas that people are not fixed into predetermined, immutable relationships of support to access land and labor. Instead, the negotiations of social relationships—in this case, prioritizing of particular inter-personal inter-and intra- generational relationships—are navigated to simultaneously address issues of social and material well-being, albeit in some cases, to the detriment of the needs of certain people.

Studies of changing familial arrangements also highlight that supportive relationships are not immutable. Instead, people continually negotiate both material and social factors to address their needs and the needs of others. For example, families can come together in times of hardship or when there is a deficit of certain resources, and separate once the stress passes (Agurto & Guido, 2001 and Ariza & Oliveira, 2004, both cited in Franzoni & Voorend, 2011). Families can depend upon the movement of extended family members between places and homes as circumstances change, drawing upon often distant relatives for material support (Young & Ansell, 2003). Equally important are the ways in which people are creating families in forms that defy the nuclear family norm, and may therefore veer from the standard hierarchical structure expected in families and family-based households. This may include single parent families and co-habiting adults (Filgueira, Gutie´rrez, & Papado´pulos, 2011), multi-family situations such as those often formed around men engaging in migratory labor (Bunlender & Lund, 2011), or families with no adults (Evans, 2010, 2011). In addition, families where grandparents play the role of primary caregiver and provide the majority of support have been recognized as vital for securing livelihoods (Aboderin, 2004; Case & Menendez, 2007; Ingstad, Brunn, Sandberg, & Tlou, 1992; Madhavan & Schatz, 2007; Ssengonzi, 2007; Zimmer, 2009).

(b) The household and gender

As its pervasive use would suggest, the household is an attractive unit of analysis within livelihood studies (Barrett, Reardon, & Webb, 2001; Ellis, 1998; Whitehead, 2002), touted as both cross-culturally relevant (Netting, Wilk, & Arnould, 1984) and convenient (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Niehof, 2004). We know of the importance of our connections with others in determining responsibilities, opportunities, and constraints, and the household has allowed for the recognition of potentially common interests among household members (Ellis, 1998). However, problems associated with the concept of household and its applications have been well demonstrated. Generally, a household is bounded within a common dwelling and connected by the pooling of resources and labor. Although this can simplify the research process and ease comparative work, we also know that resources and labor move between people or are constrained by complex relationships beyond a common dwelling or cooking pot (Ekejiuba, 1995; Fortes, 1958; Guyer, 1981; Guyer & Peters, 1987; Netting et al., 1984) and even extends to connect people trans-nation- ally (Yeates, 2011). The second problem is also one of definition—the household is often defined as a hierarchical structure, headed by the person acting as the primary decision-maker or the bearer of financial responsibilities (Collier, Rosaldo, & Yanagisako, 1982; Guyer, 1981; Varley, 1996) and underwritten by a concept of a generalizable (masculine) economic actor (Beneria, 1999; Folbre, 2001; Waring, 1999). Posel (2001) demonstrates that decision-making, while tied closely with income, is not necessarily tied to headship. An emphasis on headship imposes a picture of internal cohesion, hierarchy, and homogeneity that obscures the interplay of multiple actors in hierarchical and horizontal relationships and marginalizes non-normative arrangements, such as economically active women living with men, elderly women living alone, women and men with adult children, widows, single working women, and divorced women living without their children, and children without adult support. Additionally, social markers such as age may be more important in self- definitions of headship than decision-making and financial responsibilities (Posel, 2001).

Finally, the third problem lies in understanding the internal dynamics of the unit identified as the household—a problem that arises in part to address the difficulties encountered when working with the household unit. Intra-household dynamics, particularly along the lines of gender division, have been extensively studied and have mitigated concerns over cohesive and homogeneous conceptualizations of the household. Gendered analyses have repeatedly demonstrated that internal incoherence exists within households—women and men have unequal access to key assets (e.g., Bassett, 2002; Bryceson, 1995; Carney, 1993; Carr, 2008; Chant & Jones, 2005; Gray & Kevane, 1999; Grier, 1992; Grigsby, 1996; Mackenzie, 2003; Moser, 1993; Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, & Wangari, 1996; Schroeder, 1993). Furthermore, women often face very different obstacles not only from their male counterparts in earning income and doing productive work, but also from one another, along lines of class (Grigsby, 2004), ethnicity (Mandel, 2004) and life course (Hapke & Ayyankeril, 2004; MacLean, 2004; Mandel, 2004). These critical gender studies within the livelihoods approach have highlighted that men and women have different interests and opportunities that shape their livelihoods. Importantly, women make essential contributions to supporting themselves and others. As such, women's abilities and needs cannot be subsumed under those of a household nor negated on account of men's social position and contributions. This work has largely

focused on how this creates competition within households—women and men's strategies are practiced in specific places and spaces and the complexity of negotiating the social terrain is critical to understanding how livelihood strategies are constructed, how they are successful and how they are vulnerable. Furthermore, these studies favor particular forms of labor and many forms of women's work—such as unpaid care labor—has been ignored (Razavi, 2011) and yet undoubtedly shapes livelihood strategies.

The problems with the household addressed here, in addition to considerations of social capital and social networks, have allowed us to grapple with the complexity of social connections as it relates to livelihoods. We know that individuals participate in and rely on diverse relationships that over time prove fluid and mutable, and livelihoods analyses have relied on the household, social capital, social networks, and gender dynamics to recognize relationality within our everyday lives.

A focus on relationality, however, is not allowed to penetrate too deeply into how socioeconomic life is conceptualized. Taking intra-household dynamics, particularly along the lines of gender, into consideration here due to the popularity of this analytical focus, I argue that an ambivalence has been left underexplored. Individuated interests working within a large unit with certain shared interests and resources do compete—but it is a competition that arises, at least in part, out of the negotiation of varied needs and interests. Women and men are not solely competing to fulfill self-interests. Because they engage in various relationships of obligation and responsibility—as a result of social expectations and personal decisions—they build livelihood strategies that take into consideration the needs of others. We need to understand not only how gender and other social dynamics shape opportunities and relations, but what kinds of relationships are built and maintained, what kind of support emerges from those relationships and how these relationships create both opportunities and burdens for those involved. Furthermore, we need to approach interpersonal relationships not as constant but as contingent and actively fostered. Interpersonal relationships are negotiated, maintained, abandoned, and rebuilt. Interpersonal relationships may arise because a person needs to fulfill their own material and social needs, or to address the needs of others. They may not always appear rational or logical. I argue that by reorienting how we understand the world and the position of people within it—as fundamentally linked with the needs of others—we can begin to explore how individuals are embedded into the lives of others, and how these relation- ships influence livelihood strategies. It is the negotiation of obligations, responsibilities, love, and care that connect people to each other. If we shift the focus to the ways in which people are oriented toward the needs of others, then we can identify the ways in which people are interdependent within their lives—competition and care can find a place in our approaches toward understanding livelihood strategies. This will strengthen livelihoods approaches' engagement with a relational ontology. In the next section, I draw on feminist ethics of care to define what a relational ontology rooted in everyday experiences can contribute to how we conceptualize the connections with others that fundamentally shape our lives and livelihoods.

3. AN ETHICS OF CARE

An ethics of care finds its origins in Carol Gilligan's work (Gilligan, 1982). Drawing on a feminist approach seeking to overcome masculinist assumptions, she tackled psychological research on morality and decision-making processes. She criticized the understanding that decision-making was rooted in rights and the achievement of justice, arguing that evidence from the analysis of women's decision-making processes indicates a strong sense of responsibility that had thus far been overlooked. Despite being criticized for its essentialism (see, for example, Larrabee, 1993; Tronto, 1993), Gilligan's work has nonetheless been a powerful inspiration. It set the stage for a feminist line of thought exploring how morality and values of caring, which were largely regarded as feminine and excluded from public and political concerns—values including "attentiveness, responsibility, nurturance, compassion, [and] meeting others' needs" (Tronto, 1993, p. 3)—hold the potential for reconsidering political theory and understanding power relations in societies (Crittendon, 2001; Robinson, 2011; Tronto, 1993). Early work in this vein focused on women's experiences, particularly on the care of children and other loved ones as forming the basis of ethical experiences (Gilligan, 1982; Held, 1993; Noddings, 1986; Ruddick, 1989), although this is increasingly understood today as a result of the feminization of caring, not an essential link between women and care (Groenhout, 2004; Robinson, 2011; see also Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2002; England, 2010) and the associated tacit acceptance that men do not care (Kershaw, Pulkingham, & Fuller, 2008). Cross-culturally, the emotional aspects of caring about and the laborious activities of caring for have been feminized and women overwhelmingly perform the labor required for rearing infants and children, tend to those who are ill, provide assistance to those who are disabled, provide for the needs of the elderly (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2002; Noddings, 2001; Robinson, 2011; Ruddick, 1989). This does not, however, mean that women are inherently better at or built to care, nor does it mean that men are incapable of caring. Care values and the work of care—and the persons involved with care—are devalued and non-caring practices on the part of men, who are not often socially obligated to provide care (Kershaw et al., 2008), are even condoned when care is feminized. The result is social and economic practices that leave the labor of care to women while overlooking the social and economic impact this labor has on themselves or others. This labor is not seen as productive or economically valuable, yet caring (and not caring) has social and economic impacts on individuals and their communities, intimately entwined with our livelihood strategies.

I draw on a feminist ethics of care and argue that they can contribute three elements toward helping us to reinvigorate an understanding of human experience into livelihoods approaches: (1) a relational ontology; (2) the recognition of dependency and vulnerability that creates human connectedness and interdependencies; (3) the rejection of universalizing assumptions and highlighting the importance of contingencies. In this section I present a brief overview of these three elements. I then discuss how they complement the broad pursuits of livelihoods approaches and enable us to move toward embracing relationality.

An ethics of care is based upon a relational ontology. It pro- poses that human life is formed through our connectedness with others and that the development of the self is inextricably tied to our relations with others. A relational ontology—and the starting point that our lives are intertwined with

the lives of others—provides an alternative to theories that view individuals as independent, rational, and autonomous—which underwrite mainstream epistemologies in livelihoods approaches. Interdependence and dependence can become fundamental aspects of human existence. Tong characterizes this ontological shift as moving from a "self-versus-other ontology" to a 'self-in-and-through-others ontology" (1993, p. 51, following Carol Whitbeck, 1989; see also Thien, 2011). Defining the self through relations with others produces relationships of responsibility whereas defining one's self in opposition to others produces guarded relationships and obligations.

A relational ontology, however, can be an uncomfortable foundation. While an emphasis on relationships might feel reassuring, by so doing we replace a conceptualization of our-selves as independent with interdependence—entailing the recognition of human vulnerability and dependence. A focus on care reminds us that we will all experience moments of complete dependence during our lives. These dependencies— infancy and childhood, illness, old age, and disability—are part of our lives, and we have relationships with others that support us through these times. Eva Feder Kittay (Kittay, 1999; see also Feder & Kittay, 2003; Kittay, 2001; Lawson, 2007) reminds us that dependency is neither an isolated, nor an exceptional state. Dependency is a state of being that ties together individuals and communities.

> .. .the inevitable dependencies that arise in human life always serve to join us each to one another. We are connected through our own vulnerability when dependent and our vulnerability when caring for dependents, as well as through the potential of each of us to become dependent and to have the responsibility for a dependent.
> [Kittay (2001, p. 527)]

Although many of us will not spend most of our lives as completely dependent on others for our needs, we do in the very least pass through periods of dependency, as well as support others who are dependent. A consideration of dependency is helpful because it clearly illustrates our fundamental connections—we do respond to the needs of others and in so doing, we often put our own needs to the side. Our lives, including the ways in which we support ourselves, are entwined with the lives and needs of others. Dependency requires care, and the provision of care by a person then affects an individual's ability to care for themselves. One of the reasons we create interdependencies with others is to deal with the dependency of others, and our own potential, if not inevitable, dependency.

Ethics of care and livelihoods approaches show convergent interests that open up space for a productive conversation. Importantly, each field reflects a commitment to understanding particular experiences and practices. Livelihoods approaches achieve this by focusing on small-scale analysis attuned to local context. Similarly, an ethics of care aims to understand human life via a full range of experiences. It is not a universalizing ethics—there is no intent to outline principles that will act as a standard for all reasoning in all circumstances. Instead, an ethics of care acknowledges the need for an understanding of contingencies. It concedes that the strategies to provide the best care are not always clear—that conflicting factors are often negotiated, that caring for certain needs may require not caring for others. To address the bias toward the autonomous individual and to adopt a relational ontology, we need to understand what it means to care in a particular context and what the governing

ideologies in that context look like and how they shape care and how care in turn shapes these ideologies—who cares, how they care, what it means to care, as well as who does not care, how they circumvent care and what that means to providing and needing care, attuned also to the ways in which we respond to change—on a day-to-day or more long-term basis, in ways that may or may not be predictable.

Ongoing conversations among livelihoods researchers, as noted, have sought to move beyond the field's preoccupation with material outcomes and its devaluation of social well-being. An understanding of livelihoods as economic constructions risks ignoring the everyday realities of social needs, interests, and connections imbricated with the emergence of livelihoods. First, we need to consider how our approach to livelihoods has been embedded within conceptualizations of social life as comprised of autonomous individuals, how independence has been valued and where dependency has been positioned with respect to understanding livelihood strategies. We need to think about where care values and the labor of care have been incorporated or excluded from considerations of livelihoods. Then, we need to develop an understanding of the specific context in which the livelihoods are being built and how care is conceptualized within that context. To further explore why a relational ontology drawn from an ethics of care will strengthen livelihoods studies, I now turn to a case study from northern Ghana that illustrates the unfolding negotiation of livelihoods strategies between an elderly woman and her daughter-in-law. This case reveals how two people struggle to meet their individual needs, and the needs of the other person, in a caring yet tense relationship.

4. DISCUSSION

The following case study is part of a study conducted in 2011–12, which focuses on the livelihood strategies of elderly community members in a small rural village in Northern Region, Ghana. This case study is presented to illustrate what I argue is often overlooked in livelihood analyses—the interdependence of people and its effects on building livelihood strategies. Furthermore, it illustrates how this interdependence bears with it a degree of vulnerability. It is not meant to negate the importance of material outcomes, but in its emphasis on interpersonal connections, aims to highlight the importance of social connectedness and decision-making contributing to other forms of well-being.

(a) Research context and methods

This article draws on empirical data collected as part of my dissertation project. I spent eight consecutive months in 2011–12 and an additional 2 months in 2013 conducting qualitative fieldwork—including participant observation, household surveys, and individual and focus group interviews. Those 10 months of fieldwork yielded 50 household surveys, over 150 individual interviews and eight focus group interviews. I worked primarily with elderly persons, but also family and neighbors. Interviews and observations were primarily collected from Binalobdo, a single rural community in Ghana's Northern Region. However, some interviews were conducted with persons living in other communities who have relation- ships of significance to the support of elderly community members, or were perceived to be neglecting their responsibilities of support. Individual

interviews were conducted with the help of an assistant—a non-professional interpreter with whom I also worked for my MA thesis research (Hanrahan, 2007). Focus groups were moderated by my research assistant 1; these interviews were recorded and subsequently recorded as a translation into English, and the English portion transcribed for analysis. Each focus group comprised of 5–8 participants and was roughly grouped by sex, age, and marital status. 2 These are social relations that are cultural significant in shaping labor obligations, socio-spatial mobility, as well as defining intra- and inter-generational relationships.

Binalobdo[3] is a small rural village composed of approximately 50 compounds housing nuclear and extended families located in East Gonja District in Northern Region, Ghana, along the road joining the town of Salaga to the town of Yegi, across Lake Volta (Figure 1). The village was settled in the 1950s by members of a Konkomba lineage who migrated from farther north in Ghana; the area had been previously settled by other ethnic groups, but following conflicts in the 1990s (Bogner, 2000; Brukum, 2001), the Konkomba are the sole residents. Today, residents of Binalobdo farm the surrounding lands with yams and grains, as well as legumes and a variety of vegetables. Farming is done primarily for subsistence, with small-scale trade conducted throughout the year. Some residents also earn income as teachers and preachers, and women engage in sporadic small businesses involving the sale of prepared foods.

Labor is generally divided between women and men, with children, as well as friends and family members contributing supporting labor. Men are responsible for providing the starchy staples—yams, sorghum (guinea corn), maize, and cassava—to their families and others within their care. Women farm a more diverse set of crops, growing vegetables on their husband's farm—okra, legumes, and leafy greens—while also tending separate farms for groundnuts, peppers, maize, and legumes. These vegetables are used for making soup, or for trading for other items that are not locally produced, such as salt, fish, and onions.

The majority of food production activities are labor intensive, and while generally speaking labor is divided between men and women, in practice these divisions are more complex in order to accommodate changing physical abilities (as will be developed further here) and access to resources across the life course (Hanrahan, 2015). Instead, intra- and inter-generational relationships are sources of labor support to help ensure the fulfillment of labor responsibilities toward sustaining individuals, families, and communities. This creates an inherently interdependent web of livelihood strategies in which the needs of others are just as much wrapped into decision making and activities as are one's own needs.

Elderly individuals, who reported experiencing decreasing abilities to engage in the same forms of labor as they had in previous years, explained that they would gradually retire from activities. Both elderly women and men reported pursuing progressively less intensive tasks; for women, this often meant shifting from having their own farms to performing specific tasks on other people's farms and relying on the labor of others to maintain a personal farm, while men turned their farms over to their sons and participated in supervision and sporadic labor, eventually retiring completely from laborious activities. Although focus group interviews with youth and adults all described the work of

the elderly 'to sit and enjoy'—indicating that others should provide for them because of socially-imposed obligations—retirement is more of a social ideal than a lived reality for most elderly persons. These focus group interviews also indicated that it is tradition among the Konkomba that the son supports his mother in old age, providing for all her needs—although, tradition does not dictate practice. Other groups in northern Ghana allow elderly women and widows to return home to their paternal families (Bierlich, 2007; Goody & Goody, 1967) but this is not a viable option for Konkomba women. Elderly women reported experiencing conflict and neglect when attempting to relocate to live with their brothers. Konkomba wives are married into their husband's community, and they do not return to their natal communities. Therefore, in widowhood and old age, a woman is to live with her son.

Figure 1. Map of research area.

(b) Shifting relationships and shifting livelihoods strategies in Binalobdo

One woman with whom I worked was Nyaa Hannah.[4] Nyaa Hannah was an elderly women and a widow of many decades. Nyaa Hannah lived with her only son, Baba. They lived in a small, two-room compound with a walled-in courtyard at the front. She also had three daughters, all of whom lived in other villages with their husbands. Nyaa Hannah's situation was such that she lived alone with her son—he had never married, nor had they succeeded in bringing a young female relative into the house to stay long-term and work. Because she had her son, Nyaa Hannah's needs fell outside of others' immediate scope of awareness and concern; Baba was responsible for meeting all of his mother's needs. Normally her son's wife would be charged with most domestic tasks, but as the only woman of the house, these responsibilities fell to Nyaa Hannah. But her physical limitations restricted her capacity to work, and she was unable to perform many of the daily domestic tasks. Here I want to discuss the shifting strategies that Nyaa Hannah employed to support herself at a time when she was experiencing significant limitations on her physical abilities which had forced her to retire from many of the strategies women engage toward supporting themselves and others. I will look at a relatively short period of time—between November 2011 and May 2012—during which time her strategies shifted.

When I first met Nyaa Hannah in 2011, she was no longer farming; she had not had her own farm for a few years and had stopped sporadically visiting others' farm to labor (an indirect form of begging often employed when people are in need; the owner of the farm will reciprocate your labor with a share of the harvest or allow you to return home having collected items from the farm, such as vegetables). At this point, she was not farming because she could no longer walk the distance to the farm, nor did she have the strength to perform tasks on the farm like planting, weeding, and harvesting, nor finally to carry materials back and forth between home and farm. Nyaa Hannah did not, therefore, have a direct source of vegetables for meal preparation, nor produce to trade when in need of items or money.

She could, however, do some forms of work around the house. She regularly prepared meals—a laborious process that at first appears to be a manageable task for one person. However, in most kitchens the preparation of a meal is the result of the work of a group of girls and women (Hanrahan, 2015). Preparing a morning meal involved roasting and pounding ingredients such as peppers and dried okra, cleaning fish, and stirring a heavy porridge over the fire. It meant fetching water and firewood—both gathered from areas that required walking a distance of at least—and often more—half a mile while carrying a heavy head load. Sometimes women would pass her compound and give her firewood from their loads. Other times, she would wait for her son to bring firewood home from the farm or beg small children to fetch scraps of wood from the nearby bush. She would also walk to nearby compounds to beg for small amounts of water or wood in order to cook or quench her thirst in the short term. Her meals were by necessity simple—a watery soup eaten with a watery porridge because she no longer had the strength to stir the thick porridge. These meals were not meals she wanted to share with others because of their poor quality, nor would her son agree to eat the meals his mother prepared—choosing instead to eat with friends.

As Figure 2 illustrates, preparing a meal is more than a sum product of activities and resources; each task can be accomplished in a variety of ways, depending on what resources are available, who is involved in the transfer of resources or conducting activities. Importantly, the arrows connecting each requirement are founded on interactions that succeed or fail through personal relationships. For example, her plans to prepare a morning meal were often derailed when she failed to solicit a child in the village to provide her with a few pieces of firewood; the same plans were facilitated when her son brought firewood home from the farm. Similarly, the ability to prepare a soup was facilitated when the woman living in the neighboring compound brought her a gift of peppers and okra from the farm, and was hindered when those stores ran dry without new gifts arriving. Resource acquisition and processing were negotiated through interactions that included receiving gifts, begging for items and labor, in addition to independent work. These interactions, in turn, were negotiated through interpersonal relationships that oriented individuals toward each other, directing labor on the farm and in the home toward the needs of another individual.

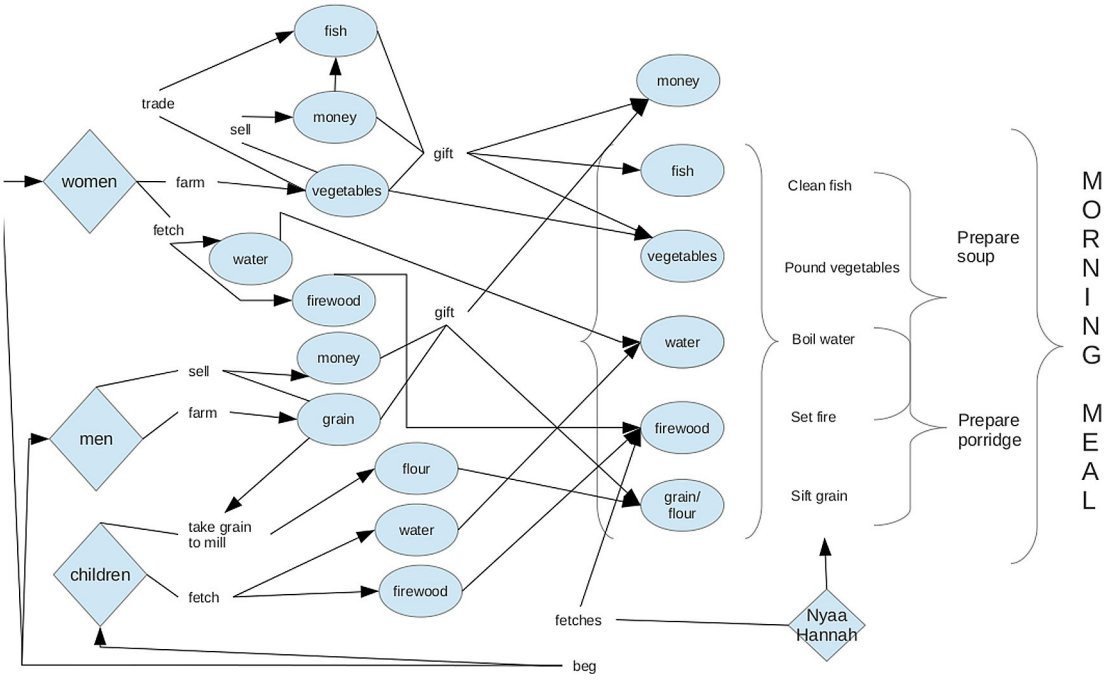

Figure 2. The preparation of a morning meal and the many contingent circumstances contributing to Nyaa Hannah's ability to prepare that meal.

One day in 2012 I went to visit Nyaa Hannah and she told me there had been no water in the compound for two days, and that she had run out of drinking water. This would not be the only time I witnessed this state—on another occasion I happened upon Nyaa Hannah walking to a nearby compound to beg a bowl of water for drinking—a small bowl that she had to hold with one hand, because the other hand held a walking stick—and a small bowl that would likely lose half its contents on the walk back because Nyaa Hannah's hands often shook violently. She told me that she would call to girls passing the courtyard, asking them to fetch her some water, but no one had responded to the requests. The day I met her in the house with no water, I engaged in a heated discussion with my

interpreter; I grappled to understand how this could happen—how is it that no one had responded to her requests for water, a basic necessity? As chance would have it, a woman was passing and asked what was going on. I did not know it at the time, but this brief conversation would lead to a significant shift in Nyaa Hannah's daily activities—and this woman would take on a significant shift in her own livelihood strategies.

The woman passing by was Bipuuteeb, the wife of Nyaa Hannah's husband's second wife's son and she considered Nyaa Hannah her mother-in-law. Because Nyaa Hannah's own son was not married, she was, traditionally, in the position to provide labor support to her mother-in-law. In the past, Nyaa Hannah had lived in the same compound with this son and his wife, but the relationship became strained and Nyaa Hannah returned to live with her own son. Because they were no longer in the same compound, Bipuuteeb and Nyaa Hannah do not have regular contact. Bipuuteeb therefore did not directly witness Nyaa Hannah and Baba's living circumstances.

Some months later, Bipuuteeb explained to me that during the conversation that day, she was reminded of her duties toward Nyaa Hannah, that Nyaa Hannah's needs were to be met by herself and others (Interview, 2012). After this incident, Bipuuteeb started providing supportive labor. Every morning, Bipuuteeb delivered hot water for Nyaa Hannah's bath. These daily visits allowed Bipuuteeb to observe for herself Nyaa Hannah's circumstances and assess any arising needs. Bipuuteeb then began delivering soup and food to Nyaa Hannah regularly. This generally meant she cooked on the days cooking was her responsibility within her rotation with her co-wife; she would try to provide extra food so that Nyaa Hannah would have food leftover to heat later in the day and on the days she would not deliver food. With Bipuuteeb cooking for her, Nyaa Hannah gave Bipuuteeb the vegetables and fish that had been gifted to her. Often, these ingredients went into making Nyaa Hannah's own pot of soup; when Nyaa Hannah did not have anything to contribute, Bipuuteeb used her own stores to provide for her, as well as asking other women to help her by providing ingredients. The starchy staples for porridge were now often provided by Bipuuteeb's husband, not Nyaa Hannah's son, although Nyaa Hannah also shared the yams and grains that were gifted to her from others in the community. While the source of ingredients for her daily meals continued to vary in unpredictable ways, a stability had been introduced as her relationship with her daughter-in-law was engaged.

Once Bipuuteeb started cooking for her, Nyaa Hannah felt less vulnerable on a daily basis. While she would still seek others to collect firewood and fetch water for her, and hint toward the need for gifts of vegetables and starches, her daily meal was not dependent on the success of these strategies. Instead, by continuing to pursue the assistance of others, Nyaa Hannah was able to contribute to the efforts of her daughter-in-law in supporting her, even though her ability to perform physical activities was limited.

(c) Interdependence and a care-full livelihood

The strategies Nyaa Hannah employed day to day in 2011 and early 2012 were not predictable—they did not meet the expectations of intra-household support and familial obligations that community

members expressed in focus group interviews, expectations that are more generally assumed to shape relations in traditional, rural communities with strong foundations in extended family networks (Aboderin, 2004, 2006). Instead, as she experienced new forms of dependencies as her physical abilities decreased, her strategies shifted and came to be defined by day-to-day negotiations and vulnerabilities. Her strategies were to a lesser degree enmeshed in a daily routine that built a more stable, long-term collection of strategies. The obligations of traditions of care within particular familial, inter-generational relationships were not enough to provide the support Nyaa Hannah needed. Fortunately, a shift in her daughter-in-law's sense of responsibility meant that Nyaa Hannah's needs became enmeshed into another person's strategies and daily routine.

Not everyone is compelled to take into consideration the needs of others; while tradition might be interpreted to dictate the provision of care between mothers and sons, as well as between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, it is by no means a guarantee that this support will be exchanged. While her son should have been supporting her, the reality of her experiences was defined more by neglect and vulnerability than support. Furthermore, Bipuuteeb's co-wife, for example, did not help Bipuuteeb with caring for Nyaa Hannah—even though both women consider Nyaa Hannah their mother-in- law. Nyaa Hannah's relationship with her daughter-in-law, Bipuuteeb, also highlights the mutability—and vulnerability—of relying on particular people for support. In this case, the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law were living in different compounds after unsuccessfully attempting to live together. In the past, a tense inter-personal relationship and the pressure of other responsibilities were deemed priorities, resulting in a situation where this care was not reliably exchanged; Nyaa Han- nah remains cognizant of the possibility of once more losing this connection.

Nyaa Hannah is not the typical actor in livelihood strategies. She did minimal work, and provided little to support others. She worked for herself when necessary and to the extent that she could manage; her needs have shaped the daily strategies of others. Nyaa Hannah could not take her relation- ships with others for granted. Tradition itself was not enough to ensure care—being old and being in need were simply not enough. Her personal relationships with people were crucial to garnering the support she needed and desired. Nyaa Hannah was a tough woman, with a reputation for being cantankerous and demanding. Through many interviews with Nyaa Hannah, it was clear that she grappled with her cantankerous nature and the difficulty she experienced in relying on others. This is not the first time Bipuuteeb had done work for Nyaa Hannah—earlier attempts to help her were abandoned, in part caused by frustrations over their tense relationship and the pull toward other work priorities. Bipuuteeb, however, recognized that Nyaa Hannah was getting older and her ability to work for herself was decreasing. Nyaa Hannah had to work to ensure she was appreciative of Bipuuteeb, and she gave what she had to help support their relationships, both socially and materially. She blessed Bipuuteeb's name around the community, raising her social standing—letting people know that Bipuuteeb was a good woman, and reminded people that she was in need of help.

Bipuuteeb, for her part, engaged in current livelihood strategies that included not only her responsibilities toward her husband and their children, as well as her co-wife and children, but she also incorporated Nyaa Hannah's needs into her strategies. The demands on her in her home and farm were many. She was the mother of three young children, including young twins who were still

breastfeeding. She therefore did not have children who were able to help her with her work tasks, and twins in particular were regarded as making it difficult for women to work away from the house because she cannot carry both on her back. She also provided for her mother-in-law living in another compound in the village—not only cooking for her, but fetching and heating water for her, and transporting these items across the village. Undoubtedly, this extra labor impacted how long Bipuuteeb could spend at the farm. She had to acquire extra staples, such as fish, to prepare extra food; she also had to fetch more water each day, which delayed her departure in the morning, and hastened her return in the afternoon. In return, Nyaa Hannah provided what ingredients and fish she could; she blessed Bipuuteeb's name around the community, raising her social standing. There is no clear division between Bipuuteeb and Nyaa Hannah's livelihood strategies and it is clear that each woman's strategies would change significantly were they to become once more untangled.

5. CONCLUSION: A CARE-FULL LIVELIHOODS APPROACH

Livelihoods approaches have overwhelmingly focused on the material outcomes of strategies, marginalizing social relationships to an instrumental position that obscures social outcomes and motivations for social well-being. In this article I started by asking how focusing on the connections and relations between people can change our understandings of livelihoods. Toward this end, I have drawn on a feminist ethics of care to introduce a relational ontology into livelihoods approaches. A relational ontology compels us to see the world as fundamentally built through connections and relationships between people. Notions of independence and autonomy, which I argue undergird current understandings of livelihoods as economic constructions, are displaced by relationality. This makes way for interdependencies, which I argue are more compelling representations of people's lived experiences and can thereby provide an important understanding of the negotiation of livelihood strategies. The second contribution of an ethics of care to livelihoods approaches is a focus on contingencies. Attuned to the lived realities of people embedded within interpersonal relationships pursuing both material and social well-being of the self and others requires the acknowledgment and incorporation of the changing nature of these relationships, as well as the potential changing external circumstances in which these strategies are being negotiated.

In this conclusion I discuss the potentiality of these two contributions for moving away from economic constructions of livelihood toward an understanding of daily strategies that encompass a spectrum of needs based on material and social well-being. Interdependencies and contingencies offer entrance into recognizing new actors in livelihoods; the ability to move beyond normative assumptions of labor division and construction of supportive relationships; and finally embraces the small-scale dynamism of everyday experiences in the face of vulnerabilities. From here, we can begin to imagine a care-full approach to livelihoods.

Interdependence requires us to see actors as those influencing and shaping strategies through the coming together of needs and capabilities of connected persons. Kittay (2001) thoughtfully reminds us that dependencies engender new dependencies—when one person orients themselves to addressing someone else's needs, it influences their own degree of in/dependence by shaping their own personal needs which are in their own right part of a fabric of needs and capabilities connected

to the activities and responsibilities of other people. Actors thereby emerge when and where we failed to see them before. Those we characterize as economically unproductive members of societies, and thus position them as dependents—including children, people with physical or mental dis-abilities, the elderly—are instead participants within these interdependencies by asserting their own needs, and to varying degrees, creating and addressing the needs of others. Although the complex positions of children within livelihoods are receiving more scholarly attention (e.g., Chant & Jones, 2005; Young & Ansell, 2003) and a call has been made to examine care within the context of social policies in developing countries (Razavi, 2011), the invisibility of other actors, such as the elderly, persists (an exception is the growing related literature considering the impact of cash transfer and pension pro- grams for the elderly in developing areas; Bertrand, Mullainathan, & Miller, 2003; Case & Deaton, 1998; Case & Menendez, 2007; Duflo, 2000). This work does not, however, address the ways in which economically unproductive participants can be considered livelihoods actors.

A care-full approach can also enable us to move beyond assumptions regarding normative labor division and assumptions of the constructions of supportive and dependent relationships. Normative roles—based on gender, age, ability, or other intersecting factors—are useful to researchers—they allow us to understand social structures that provide certain kinds of opportunities for people positioned in a particular way. But these norms can also act as blinders to situations where norms are consciously subverted or where other social relations complicate the fulfillment of the normative role. People's strategies are not simply the product of normative work division; who is a provider and who is a recipient is not simply determined by tradition, familial ties, and social structure, or even the realities of human dependence and vulnerability. Nyaa Hannah's son did not consistently provide for her needs and among her daughters-in-law, only Bipuuteeb took responsibility. Nor are these relationships fixed within spatial boundaries—Nyaa Hannah acquired resources and called upon labor from individuals outside of her house and in turn Bipuuteeb organized her work and resources around the needs of a woman who lived outside her home. The needs of others are factors that promote and inhibit opportunities, abilities, and needs, creating the circumstances negotiated in daily life toward building livelihood strategies. We free ourselves from the assumption that a particular relationship ensures exchange of these resources and labor.

This includes the assumptions associated with care. It is important to emphasize that caring relationships are in no way confined to positive transmission of resources, labor, emotion, and social support—caring is an ambivalent practice, experience, and quality. The acknowledgment of carelessness is just as important as the acknowledgment of care-fullness. Because we are fundamentally connected with others, the care-less practices are important forces in shaping relationships and needs, just as care-full practices shape relationships and needs. While familial care is expected, especially in societies deemed 'traditional' and where extended families typically live in close proximity (Aboderin, 2004, 2006) there exists also the inability, as well as the unwillingness, to provide for others (Biehl, 2005; Cliggett, 2005; also see, for example, discussions of ambivalence within familial intergenerational relationships; Bengston, Giarrusso, Mabry, & Silverstein, 2002; Curran, 2002). Assumptions regarding social norms and expected behaviors can begin to break down because assemblages can form, dissolve, strengthen, or weaken as one moves between contexts and contingent circumstances.

Finally, this approach will allow us to explore the importance of small-scale changes in strategies that occur in response to the daily dynamics of access and relationships, particularly in vulnerable circumstances. People manipulate their strategies as circumstances change—be it their own ability to work, the results of that work, what they receive from others, and what they choose to provide for others. For a young, strong individual, daily work might proceed in largely predictable ways. However, for individuals in more vulnerable positions—as with Nyaa Hannah—something as mundane as a morning meal can be an unpredictable and uncertain undertaking. While contingencies can emerge in the form of uncertain and constantly negotiated access to resources and labor, as we observed with Nyaa Hannah, inter-personal relationships are also contingent. For Bipuuteeb, her ability and motivation to provide support to her husband's mother's co-wife shifted over time and therefore for Nyaa Hannah, this was a relationship that varied in its reliability. The women shared a relationship that was fraught with frustrations and Nyaa Hannah was aware of the fragility of the connection. This was not the first time Bipuuteeb had worked to assist Nyaa Hannah, and both expressed their desire—and uncertainty—that current efforts would continue indefinitely. Furthermore, my own relationship with Nyaa Hannah enabled me to draw attention to Nyaa Hannah's hardships, thus serving to bring Bipuuteeb back into a space of awareness that led to her shifting her priorities to once again include some of Nyaa Hannah's needs.

Embracing interdependencies and contingencies addresses multiple issues with current livelihoods approaches. By rejecting universals, contingencies allow for an understanding of flexibility and mutability. In addition to moving away from economic constructions of livelihoods and working toward bringing in a fuller and more centralized focus on the intersection of material and social well-being, recent critiques of livelihoods approaches suggest that among other weaknesses, the approach can fail to provide an understanding of change over time (DeHaan & Zoomers, 2005; Scoones, 2009; see also Carswell, 2002; Cliggett, Colson, Hay, Scudder, & Unruh, 2007; Manvell, 2006; Murray, 2002). Interdependence and contingency also provide an alternative entrance into discussing livelihood diversification that has been an important line of inquiry in livelihoods approaches, particularly as issues of sustainability and vulnerability have been tackled (Ellis, 1998; Scoones, 1998; see also Carswell, 2002; Niehof, 2004).

Nyaa Hannah's messy, tangled story of work, care, and the negotiation of relationships illustrates how livelihoods are not simply steady strategies that can be measured over the months and years. One person's everyday practices and activities are not inconsequential to the well-being of others, or to one's self. Strategies are also about personal relationships; these relationships have social, material, and emotional dimensions that result in complex realities of interdependence, where material and social well-being are negotiated among these connected individuals, not in spite of them. Here, contingencies and interdependence intersect in the negotiations that create, maintain, challenge, and destabilize care-full and care-less relationships. If livelihoods approaches are to live up to their intentions of providing in-depth, contextually-specific understandings of the strategies practiced by people, then a relational approach, where social relationships are fundamental to the negotiation of these strategies—not only as an asset that enables the fulfillment of material goals, but

is also a motivation, outcome, and impediment—will bring us toward a care-full approach to studying livelihood strategies.

NOTES

1. Focus group interviews were conducted entirely in Likpakpaln (the local language). Practice interviews were first conducted to explore the potential of conducting interviews with in-situ translation, but the act of translation proved to inhibit the flow of conversation that was desired from the method. I therefore decided to train my assistant to conduct the interviews independently; I was therefore not present during focus group interviews but I did guide the line of questioning and was present for the subsequent translation of the interviews.

2. Eight focus group interviews were conducted. These groups are described as: (1) *unachapɔɔnbo*: male, youth, unmarried; (2) *usapɔɔnbo*: female, youth, unmarried; (3) *unachapɔɔn*: male, youth, married; (4) *usapɔɔn*: female, youth, married; (5) *ujal*: male, adult, married; (6) *upii*: female, adult, married; (7) *ujal pɔɔk*: male, mature adult, married; (8) *upii pɔɔk*: female, mature adult, married. Focus group interviews were not conducted with elderly community members of either sex due to physical limitations that made it difficult for most of them to travel between places.

3. Place name pseudonym, in compliance with Institutional Review Board specifications.

4. Pseudonyms are used to identify all participants. 'Nyaa', meaning 'Grandmother', prefaces Hannah's name to indicate her status as an elderly woman in the community and a mother to the men in the village.

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