

How Communities Thrive and Foster Sustainable Livelihoods
– An Exploratory Community-based Research with Koforidua Zongo

by

Danae Zachari

B.A. University of Victoria, 2017

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment
of the requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
in the Department of Geography

© Danae Zachari, 2024

University of Victoria

All rights reserved. This thesis may not be reproduced in whole or in part,
by photocopy or other means, without the permission of the author.

We acknowledge and respect the Ləkʷəŋən (Songhees and Esquimalt) Peoples
on whose territory the university stands, and the Ləkʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ
Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

Supervisory Committee

How Communities Thrive and Foster Sustainable Livelihoods
– An Exploratory Community-based Research with Koforidua Zongo

by

Danae Zachari

B.A., University of Victoria, 2017

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Crystal Tremblay, Supervisor

Department of Geography, University of Victoria Geography Graduate Studies

Dr. Jutta Gutberlet, Committee Member

Department of Geography, University of Victoria Geography Graduate Studies

Dr. Francis Adu-Febiri, Committee Member

Department of Sociology, Camosun College and UVic Graduate Studies Adjunct

Executive Summary

Abstract

In this thesis, I present an explorative community-based research with members of the Zongo community in the city of Koforidua, Ghana. Drawing on the community-based participatory research (CBPR) theoretical framework, including principles on co-production of knowledge and Indigenization of research, I use in-depth conversations and photo-narratives to explore, with participants, factors that enable individuals and their community to foster health, wellbeing, and sustainable livelihoods. The portrayal of Zongo communities in academic and grey literature has traditionally focused on socioenvironmental issues, thus creating a deficit-based, and incomplete, story of the dynamic lifeworlds and multiple worldviews within Koforidua Zongo (KZ). In contrast, participants' insights highlight the community's vibrancy, and its multidimensional sociopolitical, economic, and cultural wealth.

The study amplifies participants' voices on the multiple, interconnected, positive factors fostering health and wellbeing at a personal, and community level. Participants' insights show how shared language, belief system, values, and cultural practices stimulate social cohesion. In addition, they offer narratives of mutual aid and empowerment through examples of how the community operates and mobilizes to support one another. Drawing on what participants shared, I discuss how community members perceive health and wellbeing in a relational manner, in addition to how they understand thriving as a communal process, with the shared responsibility to build mutually supportive and beneficial relations for all.

Research Questions

The central research questions guiding the inquiry include:

1. What is important for residents in their KZ community that helps people thrive?
2. What factors (social, economic, cultural, etc.) foster health and wellbeing, and how?
3. What factors, including material, cultural, and relational aspects, stimulate social cohesion and promote sustainable livelihoods, and how?

Methodology

The preliminary research of this study mainly involved literature review and building relations with community partners, who I consulted before designing the research plan and completing the ethics application with the UVic Human Research Ethics Board (HREB). The study required two community visits: i) first, to present my proposal to the local assembly (including the Zonal Council and Zongo Chiefs); ii) then, to collect data by employing semi-

structured, in-depth, conversations, and photo-narratives to engage participants. The in-depth conversations were audio recorded, and a journal was used to keep notes and record reflections.

I conducted 29, 1-hour-long, conversations and I facilitated photo-narrative activities with a group of 12 participants/co-researchers. After transcribing the in-depth conversations, I used thematic analysis to outline central themes and their key elements. For the photo-narratives, in collaboration with the 12 participants/co-researchers, we applied thematic analysis and identified three overarching themes. Also, we co-produced a short video showcasing the study's purpose, the photo-narrative activities, and the key findings from our collaborative analysis.

Key Findings & Discussion

Participants' insights show how:

1. a strong *sense of unity*, the *extended family support system*, and cultivating *shared ethical standards* facilitate communal thriving.
2. a *shared identity*, *Zongo community's positive characteristics*, and *education/employment opportunities* are foundational, and catalytic, in fostering health, wellbeing, and sustainable livelihoods.
3. *shared values* play a central role in forging strong human connections and bonds, which in turn stimulate social cohesion, and promote sustainable livelihoods.

The study helps highlight communal assets and show how Koforidua Zongo's social cohesion—facilitated by a shared identity, and shared values—enables people to meet fundamental needs (e.g. housing and food security), and to enhance educational and employment opportunities. The strong *sense of unity* and *peace* participants experience, and practices of cooperation and of care offer mutual aid on an everyday level, as well as during adverse events and experiences. A shared sense of responsibility encourages the community to mobilize to act on matters concerning one, a group, or the whole community. Participants' responses and narratives demonstrate a communal perspective and worldview, where people consider the wellbeing of their fellow human beings (the collective) as essential in attaining their own. This study contributes to the limited literature on Zongo communities by providing counternarratives to the widespread single-story, deficit-based, portrayal of Zongo communities. Further, local voices offer diverse perspectives on what fosters health and wellbeing, in addition to how one conceptualizes and experiences notions, such as *quality of life*.

Table of Contents

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE	II
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	III
TABLE OF CONTENTS	V
LIST OF TABLES	VII
LIST OF FIGURES	VIII
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	IX
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	X
DEDICATION	XII
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 MY RE-INTRODUCTION TO ZONGOS, AFRICAN HISTORY, AND CULTURES.....	1
1.2 RESEARCH CONTEXT AND PURPOSE.....	6
1.3 KOFORIDUA ZONGO GHANA – SINGLE STORIES AND PERCEPTION BIAS.....	9
1.4 RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE	12
1.5 OVERVIEW OF ZONGO COMMUNITIES AND THEIR EMERGENCE IN WESTERN AFRICA.....	15
1.5.1 <i>Trans-Saharan Trade</i>	16
1.5.2 <i>Contemporary Migration and Trade</i>	18
1.6 THESIS STRUCTURE	20
CHAPTER 2: AXIOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS GUIDING EPISTEMOLOGY	24
2.1 KNOWLEDGE DEMOCRACY	27
2.2 CRITICAL THEORY – SOCIAL CHANGE AND JUSTICE.....	32
2.2.1 <i>Ethical Considerations: Horizontal Intercultural Community Engagement</i>	34
2.2.2 <i>Debunking Misleading Narratives on Zongos, African History, and Cultures</i>	35
2.2.3 <i>Critically Examining Approaches to Community Development</i>	38
2.3 <i>Relational Worldviews</i>	45
2.3.1 <i>Ubuntu</i>	47
2.3.2 <i>Values and Leadership for Socioeconomic Sustainability</i>	49
2.3.3 <i>Popular Education and Human Factor Competency</i>	50
2.4 REFLEXIVITY TO DECOLONIZE RESEARCH – SHIFTING STORIES AND PREMISES.....	51
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK	54
3.1 DEVELOPING A SENSE OF PLACE IN KOFORIDUA, GHANA.....	55
3.2 CASE STUDY: ZONGOS IN GHANA	59
3.2.1 <i>Diversity, Identity, and Belonging – Spaces of Diaspora</i>	61
3.2.2 <i>Socio-spatial Organization of Zongos</i>	64
3.2.3 <i>Zongo’s Forging of Trust and Ethics - Building Reciprocal Relationships</i>	66
3.3 COMMUNITY VISIT AND PRELIMINARY RESEARCH.....	68
3.3.1 <i>Ethical Considerations – Who Decides When a Study Proposal Meets Codes of Conduct?</i>	71
3.3.2 <i>Community Consultations</i>	73

3.3.3 Reflexivity and Positionality – my journey to the research questions through CBPR.....	75
3.3.4 From problem-solving to identifying strengths.....	76
3.3.5 Developing the research Plan: Proposing an Explorative Study	77
3.3.6 Exploring Zongo Lifeworlds Through the Indigenous Paradigm	78
3.4 DATA COLLECTION STAGE: USING CONVERSATIONS AND PHOTO-NARRATIVES.....	79
3.4.1 Re-reconnecting with the Community: Further Community Consultations.....	79
3.4.2 Participant Recruitment.....	81
3.4.3 Approaches and Methods.....	84
3.5 POST ACTIVITIES: NOW WHAT?	98
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS FROM PARTICIPANTS' INSIGHTS.....	99
4.1 IN-DEPTH CONVERSATIONS	100
4.1.1 Participants.....	100
4.1.2 Thematic Analysis: Steps to Identify Key Themes.....	102
4.2 PHOTO-NARRATIVES	118
4.2.1 Introducing Co-researchers (photo-narrative Participants).....	119
4.2.2 Small-group Discussions: Participants' Photographs, Narratives, and Reflections	119
4.3.3 Brainstorming and Identifying Key Themes.....	130
CHAPTER 5: VIBRANT COMMUNITIES FOSTERING HEALTH AND WELLBEING THROUGH SOCIAL COHESION.....	133
5.1 VIBRANCY AND UNITY IN AFRICAN COMMUNITIES – ZONGO CASE STUDY	134
5.2 EXPERIENCING A SENSE OF COMMUNALISM	136
5.3 SENSE OF BELONGING IN DIVERSITY	137
5.3.1 Welcoming Nature.....	139
5.3.2 Unity and Support	140
5.3.3 Care and Safety.....	142
5.3.4 Shared Values	143
5.4 SOCIALIZATION AND EDUCATION – THRIVING AS A COMMUNAL PROCESS AND RESPONSIBILITY	143
5.4.1 The Community as a Large Family.....	145
5.4.2 Celebrating and Grieving Together.....	148
5.4.3 Religious Duties of Giving	151
5.5 SOCIAL CONNECTIONS ENHANCING EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT FOR COMMUNAL THRIVING	153
5.5.1 Communal labor	155
5.6 NETWORKS OF MUTUAL-AID PARTNERSHIPS	155
5.7 COUNTERNARRATIVES: STRENGTHS IN NEGATIVE REPUTATIONS	160
5.8 CENTERING THE HUMAN EXPERIENCES AND RELATIONSHIPS.....	161
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION	163
6.1 CONTRIBUTIONS AND DISSEMINATION	165
6.2 LIMITATIONS.....	168
6.3 POSSIBILITIES AND FUTURE RESEARCH	169
6.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS	171
REFERENCES	173

List of Tables

Table 1 Research Questions Guiding in-depth Conversations	86
Table 2 First Tabulation of Transcripts' Keywords.....	103
Table 3 Second Tabulation of Transcript Content Under Three Sections	104
Table 4 Looking for Themes within the First Section of Conversations. Compiling Participants' Input.....	105
Table 5 Looking for Themes within the Second Section of Conversations. Compiling Participants' Insights	110
Table 6 Looking for Themes within the Third Section of Conversations. Compiling Participants' Insights that Address Research Questions	113

List of Figures

Figure 1 Regions and their Capital Cities of the Republic of Ghana. State border and neighbouring countries	7
Figure 2 Zongo Community in the City of Koforidua, Ghana. Locations Mentioned in Thesis .	10
Figure 3 Trans-Saharan Trade Routes, 8th to 19th Centuries Showing Main Trade Routes and Trading Stations.	17
Figure 4 In-depth Conversations Thematic Analysis Concept-map	118
Figure 5 Personal Photograph Provided by Alhassan Hamdawey to Discuss Family and Unity, n.d.	120
Figure 6 Participants' Photograph on Family and Unity. Photograph of extended family provided by Faiza Shittu, with the permission of the family illustrated.....	121
Figure 7 Members of a Local Association Giving Blood Donation, A Photograph provided by Yussif for Photo-narratives, n.d.	122
Figure 8 Shoes to Symbolize the importance of Exercise and Active Lifestyle. Photograph taken by Hussein Yahuza in 2022.....	123
Figure 9 Common Local Dish: Jollof Rice with Fried Fish, n.d.....	124
Figure 10 Palmnut Plantation. Photograph taken by Alimatu Dauda in 2022	125
Figure 11 Hussein Mubarak Engraving an Exterior Royal Design in Nigeria, n.d	126
Figure 12 Exterior Royal Design in Nigeria n.d.	126
Figure 13 Hajara Ibrahim Working as an Apprentice, n.d.....	127
Figure 14 AbdulAziz Fixing Electrical Appliances, n.d.....	128
Figure 15 Ibrahim Lawal Electricals Apprentice with a Coworker at a Job Site, n.d.....	128
Figure 16 Ibrahim Lawal Fixing Electrical Equipment, n.d	129
Figure 17 Animal Rearing. Photograph taken by Ousman Kamal-deen, n.d.....	129
Figure 18 Venn Diagram Showing Three Overarching Themes – Analysis with Photo-narratives co-Researchers.....	130

List of Abbreviations

ABCD	Assets-based Community Development
CBPR	Community-based Participatory Research
CBR	Community-based Research
HF	Human Factor
HFC	Human Factor Competency
ICZD Fund	Inter-city and Zongo Development (ICZD) Fund
KZ	Koforidua Zongo
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
US	United States
UVic	University of Victoria
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
WM	Waste Management

Acknowledgements

This graduate study was possible with the input of so many whose names, unfortunately, I cannot all list. I thank the Koforidua Zongo community, my supervisory committee, and people throughout the years—professors, colleagues, family, friends—who have inspired me to learn, to grow, and to be an engaged community member. First and foremost, I express my gratitude for Eleni, Vasillis, Giorgos, and Fani Zachari-Koutava who not only offered me a blessed childhood, but also instilled in me, by example, and through their guidance and advice, values and life lessons I am grateful for and strive to carry with me in all I do, including the relationships I build, and the ways I engage and relate to people and the world.

Thanks to my supervisory committee, and to all my teachers, from martial artists to academic professors, to teachers without degrees; for the lessons, understandings, and experiences others have been sharing and co-creating with me. Starting with Grandmaster Professor Don Jacob who through his martial arts, philosophy, way of life, and societal contributions, introduced me to African worldviews and rich knowledge. Moreover, to all the faculty and staff at the UVic Geography department who have aided my learning, and who help create a positive and inspiring environment for all—including Janette DeLong whose work ethic, kindness, and warm smile made a difference, Dr. Jennifer Mateer who aided my learning in navigating a new environment as a TA and student, and late Dr. Jim Harold who created a positive and inspiring learning environment for his TAs and provided us with opportunities to grow. Moreover, a big thanks to my family and friends for their support along the way, with a special shout out to Ioanna, Yannis, and Nicolas, as well as Dylan and Sophia for taking great care of Dayako when I was in Ghana.

It has been a privilege and a pleasure to participate in the work of the Community-based Research Laboratory, at UVic, where Dr. Jutta Gutberlet (director) and members have inspired and provided me with guidance, and with opportunities to collaborate and co-learn, throughout this journey. The lab has played a key role in my learning, including the Speakers Series connecting people internationally who engage with CBPR in a variety of research focus areas. Also, each members' research, and the labs' collective work and projects continuously offered inspiration, learning, and opportunities to collaborate and co-create. The dynamics in the lab reflect principles of CBPR and the Zongo community's experiences of mutual support. Thank you all for the good times, the thought-provoking discussions, and the ideas and resources we

shared, as well as the snacks, smiles, and encouragement that helped us make it through long days—Maeva, Bitu, Ana, Carol, Wuni, and James, alumni, visiting scholars, new members—Hazim and Lenin—and many other CBRL friends.

A special heartfelt thanks and recognition to my supervisory committee—Dr. Crystal Tremblay, Dr. Francis Adu-Febiri, and Dr. Jutta Gutberlet—for their unwavering support, trust, and patience that allowed me to see through my graduate research and to complete this thesis. Your collaborative, compassionate, and encouraging supervising has been invaluable and inspirational. Crystal, thank you for the countless meetings, forms, and all the resources you have been sharing over the years. Jutta, thank you for all the opportunities to participate in projects, to develop new skills, and to meet scholars from around the world and to learn about the endless examples of community-driven research, initiatives, and collaborations. Francis, thank you for challenging me, while supporting me, to link theory and practice, as well as to work towards decolonizing my worldview. Thank you, all, for making the time to review my work, to hear my tangents and to offer helpful suggestions, and for all the constructive feedback throughout. Further, I am deeply grateful to Dr. Janet Sheppard for her thesis coaching that helped me navigate the uncharted waters of grad school and thesis writing, as well as for her kindness and resourcefulness that has helped foster my personal thriving. Also, a special thanks to Dr. Cheek for her encouragement, and compassion all these years, as well as her enthusiasm in hearing about my studies and writing.

Lastly, a big thanks to the Koforidua Zongo community, especially to the research assistants and participants. I am grateful to community partners, including the Zongo Chiefs, the local assembly members, and other community leaders, who have been welcoming me to their community and whose input was invaluable in conducting this study. Thank you, to all community members, for their time, for sharing their experience and knowledge, and for all the beautiful memories we share. Badia, thank you for the delicious meals, and Osumanu (trust Dboy), Basit, Ibrahim, and Sallawudeen for co-facilitating community meetings, interpreting during discussions, and for making it possible to organize and carry out research activities. Thank you to all the photo-narrative co-researchers for their active engagement, their insightful narratives and discussions, and for all the fun moments we shared. With love and respect to all, I express my gratitude; nagodi (Hausa), medawoase (Twi), thank you.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to members of Zongo communities; fellow global citizens whose contributions, historically, have been and continue to co-shape society. To Zongo communities, particularly Koforidua Zongo, who kindly welcome strangers as myself—hosting, assisting, entertaining, and supporting visitors—yet to whom I cannot equitably reciprocate this welcoming spirit. Not only due to unaffordable accommodation, but also as restrictions make it challenging for (if not prevent) certain passport holders to travel internationally. To the countless fellow humans who have been tragically losing their lives in the efforts to travel to places where implemented laws create detrimental, unjust, barriers. As a result, forcing people to resort to ‘services’ of smuggling agents—in their attempts to exercise their mobility rights to explore and experience our home planet—with the risk of falling victims to present day slavery, domestic labour exploitation and/or sexual exploitation, in their efforts to seek greener pastures abroad.

Chapter 1: Introduction

"Thus it can be said that, until the fifteenth century, Black Africa never lost its civilization. Frobenius¹ reports: [...] More to the south, in the Kingdom of the Congo, a teeming crowd clad in silk and velvet, large States, well ordered down to the smallest detail, powerful rulers, prosperous industries.

Civilized to the marrow of their bones!"

– Diop, 1989, p. 160

1.1 My Re-introduction to Zongos, African History, and Cultures

Zongos, found throughout western Africa, are historically Hausa speaking migrant communities from northern Nigeria (Pellow, 2002). The emergence of Zongo settlements was initially temporary when Islamic traders formed transient dwellings during the trans-Saharan trade period of the Middle Ages (Casentini, 2018), while today, these vibrant communities have become the permanent homes for a large heterogeneous population (Mensah & Teye, 2021).

Zongo communities, in Ghana, tend to be stigmatized because of their underdeveloped infrastructure and underprivileged water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) conditions (Owusu, 2010). Popular perceptions refer to Zongos as poverty-stricken, unsanitary, and violent communities (see Owusu, 2010; Williamson, 2014; Casentini, 2018; Abdullah et al., 2021).

While the dominant narrative on Zongo communities focuses on challenges, it overlooks community strengths and Zongos' vital socioeconomic and cultural roles in Ghana's history, as well as their contributions in the region and Africa at large. These communities are far more special than the common descriptions portraying them and reducing them to 'slums'. Zongos are comprised of unique socioeconomic, and cultural, relations and practices. Although, for example, illiteracy rates are high, the majority of residents are multilingual as they speak Hausa (most

¹ German humanist philosopher and ethnologist, whose doctoral thesis on The Origins of African Culture was rejected by a German faculty (The UNESCO Courier, 1973).

widely spoken language among Zongo residents), as well as Twi, and English (Ghana's major languages), and/or numerous other ethnic languages.

Academic and grey literature discussing social ills with reference to Zongo communities is widespread. Increasingly, however, particularly over the past decade, there are studies going beyond topics of poverty—for example, examining immigrants' contributions to Ghana's economy (OECD/ILO, 2018), reggae-dancehall in Ghana and the Zongo identity (Alleyne, 2022), systemic resilience (Abdullah et al., 2021), immigration and trade networks (Kirikoshi, 2022), as well as research in the fields of religious studies (Pontzen, 2017; Khamis, 2021; Owoahene-Acheampong & Prempeh, 2021).

Nonetheless, Williamson (2014) suggests “the Zongo phenomenon is understudied” (p. 17), which can be said for a wide range of African places, cultures, and history. For instance, libraries across the African continent tend to reflect an imbalance on knowledge sources and topics of interest. This disparity includes the tendency to be filled with irrelevant—to local realities—books, written by non-Africans (see conference paper by Zimu-Biyela & Chisita, 2023). Similar perspective inequities, in various fields, include prioritizing research on study-areas most relevant to a western context, or historiographic gaps and biases in exploring African cultures and civilizations. Dominant scholarship has traditionally excluded voices and experiences from the ‘global south’, perpetuating the false idea of a normal and ‘standard identity’, as well as a way of life from a European perspective, reflecting a given set of characteristics, values, and ideologies.

Normative texts on the history of humanity have, for long, systemically oppressed and presented the continent of Africa and an African identity as inferior to the ‘white-skinned’, Euro-American identity. Europeans created the idea of an inferior Africa, and as Asante (2018)

discusses, “[they] never accepted the idea that African civilizations predated those of Europe or that Africa is Europe’s equal as far as inventiveness, ethical thought, aesthetics, philosophy, or science are concerned” (p. 5). Moreover, Asante (2018) highlights the Hegelian (us versus them) thinking promoting the story of European superiority, and how scholars recorded history in such a way to establish the idea that Europeans ‘found’ Africans in an ‘underdeveloped’ state, despite all increasing evidence of complex civilizations’ existence.

Africa is the world’s second largest and second most populous continent, and home to more than 1.4 billion people, who speak over 2,000 languages and who consist of more than 3,000 ethnicities (UN data, 2021). Home to the *Cradle of Humankind* (UNESCO World Heritage Convention), and subsequently to humanity (see Diop, 1991), this landmass exemplifies both social and ecological diversity. While most non-Africans are aware of the continent’s biodiversity and vast natural resource wealth, the majority tend to be less informed about its multi-cultural, -ethnic, and -lingual landscapes. Academic disciplines, including geography, have traditionally silenced the understanding and recognition of Africa’s complex civilizations and societal contributions—through their association with, and application of, theories that enabled and helped justify the colonial, Eurocentric, doctrine (Peet, 1985).

For generations, Africa’s social and environmental strengths² have been fueling socioeconomic transformations, at local and global scales, with vital socio-environmental resources, and ground-breaking innovations in all aspects of life. The rise, fall, and revolutions of significant African kingdoms and empires, however, have been either omitted from dominant literature, or have been portrayed in prejudice and discriminatory terms. Consequently, rendering

² In this thesis, the terms *strengths*, *assets*, *wealth*, *capital*, and *resources* are used interchangeably to denote social or physical aspects, at an individual and/or community scale, that have a positive effect in fostering socio-environmental justice and wellbeing.

any optimistic reality absent in the worldviews of many and/or enabling the construction of racist narratives. Eurocentric historical accounts have determined public education curriculum worldwide, and have thus, been shaping how one understands, or more accurately, how one misunderstands Africa, its people, history, and cultures—as a result influencing how one perceives Africa’s role in the building of society’s collectively accumulated knowledge over millennia.

False representations of people and places, through the lens of scientific racism, construct hierarchical socio-racial classifications, which have helped legitimize practices of domination, by 'justifying' colonial atrocities. The social constructions of race and biological superiority enable the *othering* and subjugation of a population, as well as the belittling and disregard of knowledge sources from different locales. The *dangers of single stories*³ concept, in the context of African communities, include the false and/or partial portrayal of populations, places, and historic events, as well as the disregard of periods and examples, throughout history, of resurgence and positive sociopolitical, cultural, and economic transformations. These incomplete, single, stories fail to give justice to the long, complex, and dynamic history of the continent, as well as to the interconnectedness of humanity across time and space.

Contemporary misrepresentations of the continent, its cultures, and people, continue flourishing through the reproduction of generalized false imageries on the living conditions in African communities. This study aims to explore counternarratives in the context of Zongo communities in Ghana, by capturing participants’ insights on factors enabling their community to thrive—this includes looking at *what*, and *how*, fosters health and wellbeing. The aim is to explore and learn from local knowledge and perspectives, aspects members of the community

³ Nigerian writer Adichie in her 2009 “The Danger of a Single Story” TEDx Talks Speech, states, “[t]he single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.”

perceive as positively affecting their lifeworlds. Conventional methods of measuring and tracking socio-environmental welfare, tend to reinforce the rhetoric of poverty and of lagging behind, thus continuing to *other* African communities. Moreover, prejudice narratives influence one's own self-image and identity, which leads to a sense of internalized oppression and to disconnecting one from their own history. It would be an error, however, to assume the lack of wealth, abundance, longevity, sustainable resource management, and wellbeing among people, communities, and nation-states of the continent. In fact, African countries are increasingly reaching various targets of a plethora of socio-economic indicators (see UN Africa sustainable development report, 2023). For instance, Ghana is experiencing a decrease in the prevalence of undernourishment, and a higher survival rate of infants (Sachs et al., 2024). Moreover, the country is making progress in various areas, including access to energy, infrastructure, gender equality, and economic growth.

Despite examples of quantifiable, and often capital-based, measurable improvements, disparities across the continent and within states are pervasive. Major challenges remain, as the UN notes a significant variation across world regions in their progress to achieving the SDGs, as well as reports a widening gap between the rich and the poor in meeting targets (Sachs et al., 2024). Growth and development models that prioritize market interests do not bring about improved, and sustainable socioeconomic conditions, for considerable proportion—mostly consisting of marginalized groups—of the population (Mahlatsi, 2021). Nonetheless, there is more to the stories of poverty, and by following an appreciative approach and applying the strengths-based lens, this study strives to highlight narratives of empowerment⁴, and how communities

⁴ Israel, Checkoway, Schulz, and Zimmerman (1994), cited in Tremblay and Jayme (2015, p. 299), describe *empowerment* "as the development of a critical understanding of the social and political contexts, and the cultivation of individual and collective resources and skills for social action" (p. 152). Conceptualizing *empowerment's*

foster health and wellbeing amongst members. As Chilisa (2012), an Indigenous scholar, explains, to decolonize⁵ research involves avoiding the tendency to focus on issues, and to instead strive bringing to focus individual and community⁶ strengths and assets.

1.2 Research Context and Purpose

This research is community-based and place-specific, involving a case study with residents of the Zongo⁷ community, situated in the city of Koforidua (Figure 1), the capital of the Eastern Region of the Republic of Ghana. My work takes a strengths-based approach, with the premise that research participants and their community have the potential to offer lessons and diverse knowledge, not only for their locality and context-specific circumstances, but also on matters that are common, and in some ways recurrent across time and space—for instance,

nuanced nature is not the focus of my research analysis, however, it is an important concept in CBPR. For in-depth, analysis of the concept, see Sayu and Chanmuga (2016), and Völker and Doneys (2021).

⁵ Decolonial/decolonizing research has no one fixed definition, as there are multiple ways to decolonize research in theory and practice, as well as various elements making a study decolonial. In striving to decolonize my work, thinking, and worldview, I engage with interdisciplinary literature, especially from scholars with first-hand experience in the places relevant to their research. Decolonizing (debunking Eurocentric research methods, and any dominant ideas that marginalize a population, and/or undermine diverse ways of knowing) is a continuous process, requiring self-reflection and constant learning. See Moyo (2021) on Ubuntu as decolonizing discourse.

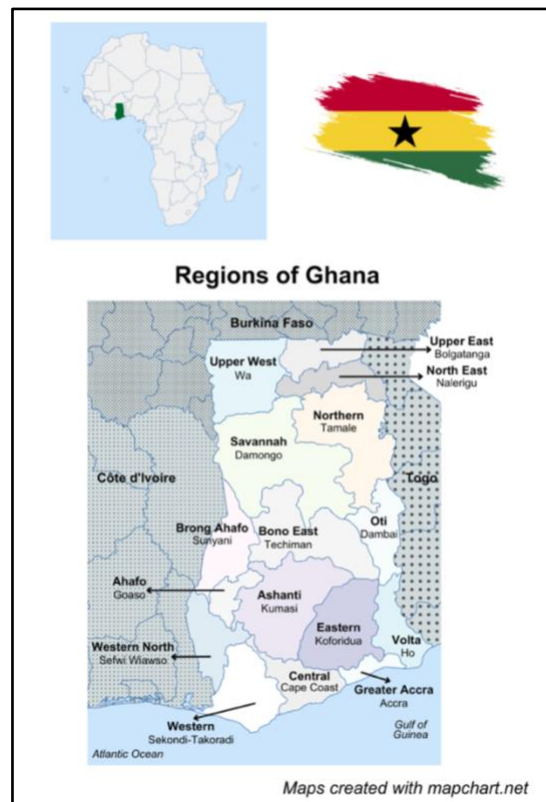
⁶In the context of this thesis, the notion of community is understood in socio-spatial terms, to refer to population groups living together, interacting, and sharing common characteristics, as well as to refer to a particular locality that transcends physical boundaries and is interconnected with other locales. Phillips and Montello (2017) discuss how a "community of interest" constitutes of both thematic and cognitive qualities; for instance, demographic and land-use parameters, and shared identity and perspectives, respectively. Also, Tremblay and Jayme (2015) adopt Israel, Schulz, Parker, and Becker's (1998) definition of community, consisting of the following six elements: 1) "membership – a sense of identity and belonging; (2) common symbol systems; (3) shared values and norms; (4) mutual influence [...]; (5) shared needs and commitment to meeting them; and (6) shared emotional connection – members share common history, experiences, and mutual support" (p. 309).

⁷Zongo communities can be conceptualised and discussed in both spatial and socio-contextual terms, since they are urban neighbourhoods found in most, if not all, Ghanaian cities, ranging from a few streets to a couple of kilometers long, in diameter, surface area. Casentini (2018) states that a "Zongo is [...] definitely a location, with its own specific urban features, although it incorporates social notions that go beyond its spatial connotations." (p. 453). In following chapters I explore a set of shared historical, cultural, and socio-economic elements making them distinctive from other groups of the Ghanaian population, as well as diversity in urban landscape of each city where they are situated. Although Zongos are increasingly becoming diverse, the "dual-minority identity" of foreign lineage (including lingual diversity) and following Islam in a predominantly Christian country, have traditionally been two key distinctive characteristics of a Zongo (see Pontzen, 2021). Moreover, Zongo communities are generally associated with impoverished conditions, and being home to the urban poor (Casentini, 2018; Mensah & Teye, 2021; Brady & Hooper, 2019; Pellow, 2002; Owusu, 2010). Virtual Zongo community (Williamson, 2014).

improving living conditions, sustainable resource management, and fostering health and justice, which are prevailing concerns and goals of known civilizations.

Figure 1

Regions and their Capital Cities of the Republic of Ghana. State border and neighbouring countries



Note. Both maps were created using the machart.net online application. The maps were compiled using the Canva application, where I retrieved the flag from the Canva photo collection on September 20, 2024.

Community knowledge could give valuable, transferable, insights to other populations and localities without dominating the world, engaging in knowledge appropriation, nor perpetuating epistemicide⁸. Asabere-Ameyaw et al. (2014) argue that there is a need to "connect localized knowledges to larger theoretical frameworks" (p. 42) and to emphasize that

⁸ What Santos (2014) refers to as the "murder of knowledge" (p. 92), when the hegemonic group imposes a system of knowledge over other, and which involves the silencing, devaluing, and destruction of other epistimologies.

"localization and internationalization (or Indigeneity and globalization) do not need to necessarily be seen as inherently opposite." (p. 43).

This study explores and shares stories beyond the widespread *single*, and deficit-based, perceptions some may hold of Zongo communities in Ghana. Learning from participants' lived experiences, helps recognize strengths and innovations that are already enhancing people's opportunities to stay, and thrive, in their community. The aim is to explore *what*, and *how*, motivates people to live in their community of residence, which includes identifying factors enabling individuals and communities to meet their needs of subsistence, and to foster sustainable livelihoods and wellbeing. Looking at how participants perceive their community, what is important to them, and the collective effectiveness in responding to communal concerns, could provide insights about assets individuals and groups of people may take for granted.

This research aims to invite Koforidua Zongo (KZ) community members to share their views on what helps individuals, families, and their community at large, to thrive, and to foster sustainable livelihoods and wellbeing. This includes encouraging participants to share examples of how people are cultivating growth, happiness, and wellbeing. Moreover, the aim is to better understand from a local perspective, the characteristics making a place, a Zongo community—that is, if there are any unique features and elements, according to local views and voices, to refer to when describing their Zongo community.

The overall purpose of this study is to gain insights on positive aspects fostering good health, wellbeing, and sustainability. Instead of constructing the notion that external interventions are required to address and solve community challenges and to help impoverished communities 'catch up' to the conditions and practices of the global north, this research is driven by the objective to explore the given community's multidimensional wealth (including the

sociopolitical, economic, material, cultural, and spiritual, among other, dimensions). Focusing on what is working well, allows for a better understanding and appreciation of the community's significance, and to emphasize factors that have enabled Zongos to thrive for generations, even at times of facing adversity. Accentuating the positive does not mean there is no truth in stated issues and negative stereotypes, nor is it an effort to romanticize people and places, which de Souza (2019) urges not to; however, being cautious not to make some realities the only stories, is what encouraged me to conduct an explorative study striving to engage with overlooked narratives and to help document an array of lived realities, experiences, and perspectives.

The central research questions guiding the inquiry include: i) What is important for residents in their KZ community that helps people thrive? ii) *What* factors (social, economic, cultural, political etc.), and *how*, foster health, wellbeing, and sustainable livelihoods? iii) *What* factors, including material, cultural, and relational aspects, stimulate social cohesion and promote sustainable livelihoods, and *how*?

1.3 Koforidua Zongo Ghana – Single Stories and Perception Bias

Zongos have a rich history, are constantly transforming, and are increasingly gaining representation in the state's socioeconomic and political spheres. Examples of well-known Ghanaian Zongos, include Sabon, Nima, and Madina Zongos in Ghana's capital Accra, Mossi Zongo in the city of Kumasi, Zongo of Tamale, and Zongo of Koforidua, among other. KZ (Figure 2) is considered the most well demarcated Zongo in the country, houses a big market of local produce, and is home to tens of thousands of residents. In KZ there is an array of low- to high-income households, therefore multiple experiences allowing various points of references. Zongos in general, however, can be characterized as physically marginalized sites (Brady & Hooper, 2019) that receive minimal government attention and support, as well as have

historically held less (or none) decision-making power in state matters. In fact, Zongo communities in Ghana have been marginalized, at times, in all spatial, social, and political terms (Williamson et al., 2018).

Figure 2

Zongo Community in the City of Koforidua, Ghana. Locations Mentioned in Thesis



Note. Google, (n.d.). [Google Earth Pro map of Ghana in two different zoom levels]. Retrieved September 1, 2024.

Maps created using Google Earth Pro (version 7.3).

Image copyright: first image depicting Koforidua and Accra (Data SIO, NOAA, U.S. Navy, NGA, GEBCO, Image Landsat / Copernicus, Map Data 2023 AND), and second image of KZ (Image c 2024 Airbus)

In 2017, the government of Ghana established the inter-city and Zongo Development Fund (Act 964) to provide financial resources for initiatives aiming to bring social and economic changes in Zongo communities, therefore recognizing that Zongos are underserved communities demanding upgraded infrastructure, better health, and improved sanitation facilities, among numerous improvements to other basic services. Furthermore, the development of this fund

reflects documented issues of inequality and injustices in these communities, but also the ongoing advocacy of civil society actors demanding government action to address issues. In their study, Brady and Hooper (2019) show that while many responders stated they believe the creation of the ministry was a result of political interests (to gain votes), others also perceived it as an initiative aiming to address the uneven development across Ghanaian communities.

Despite societal challenges, there are numerous university graduates, entrepreneurs, teachers, scholars, farmers, artists, religious leaders etc., as this thesis will show (chapter 4 and 5) who live in, and *make*, Zongo communities. Also, as I discuss in later sections, several research participants mentioned the frequency, and importance, of religious celebrations and practices commemorating milestones such births, marriages, and other holidays, special events, and activities⁹—using these as examples to explain how KZ experiences unity and mutual support. Multiple stories that relate to socio-environmental activities, and which help emphasize the relational aspects that foster health and happiness.

Moreover, revisions to the criteria of the conventional community development framework (as I further discuss in chapter 2) could alter the socially constructed categories and hierarchies of development. For instance, a focus on multilingual abilities rather than on literacy, or comprehensive agricultural, and technical knowledge, over specialized theoretical, and business oriented. Other examples include paying greater attention to the available assets, such as social support networks, or medical practitioners' ability to perform in medical settings with limited resources and personnel (instead of emphasizing what is lacking), which could challenge commonly held views about African countries that are influenced, and shaped, by the reporting

⁹ E.g. While staying in the community, I learned about "communal labour" activities, which is when community associations and/or the local assembly organize clean-up exercises; including the monthly clean-up exercises inspired by the National Sanitation Day initiative of 2014 (Mensah, 2020). In addition, it is common for groups of residents to organize weekly health walks, as well as periodical entertainment programs.

of data inferring an image of social ills. Furthermore, these examples show the subjectivity of declaring something developed, just, or healthy.

Instead of perpetuating the *single story* and a colonial approach highlighting issues, the aim is to pay attention to, and celebrate people, as well as the knowledge coming from local perspectives and experiences. Zongo residents may be a minority of the state's population but nonetheless play an integral socioeconomic, political, and cultural role. Suleman (2018), in an opinion piece, highlights the issues of the “single story of Zongo”, where these communities are talked about in terms of poverty, unsanitary conditions, and other social challenges, while being blind to success stories and societal contributions of the same people and communities. Increasingly, however, there is more written, focusing on topics other than impoverishment, for example on the historical emergence of Zongo communities, or the role of migration, their diasporic nature, diversity, discrimination and belonging, identity, the socio-spatial organization of Zongos, among other (see Casentini, 2018; Williamson et al., 2018; Mensah & Teye, 2021; Pontzen, 2021).

1.4 Rationale and Significance

The portrayal of Zongo communities in academic, and especially in grey literature, focuses on identifying and addressing community issues, which creates a deficit-based, and incomplete, story of the dynamic lifeworlds and multiple worldviews within KZ—or any community for that matter. In addition to the literature, popular public perceptions across Ghana, about Zongo communities are influenced by, and in turn re-create, similar deficit-based views. Moreover, conducting community research is widely driven by the perspectives of outsiders (and their subjective experiences), specifically from a western-based worldview where there is prevalence of research focusing on understanding and describing phenomenon, with the aim to

solve a problem or issue. Being an outsider myself, influenced by Eurocentric values and worldviews, this research aims to engage with local knowledge and insights, while practicing reflexivity, to highlight community strengths that foster community resilience¹⁰ and vibrancy.

Local voices, from various perspectives and positionalities, could offer multiple views on what is positive in their own community, and to highlight what each participant sees as important in sustainably supporting their personal, and communal, needs and wellbeing. Decolonizing the research praxis, for instance, by enabling Indigenous epistemologies to inform and shape the research, is crucial for cultivating fair interactions and inquiries. While challenges for practitioners exist, especially when trying to practice decolonial research through a colonial, capital-generating institution, scholars are increasingly shifting perspectives and breaking barriers to apply and engage with critical and decolonial methodologies. Decolonizing research, and enabling equitable access and participation to available resources and knowledge production sources and processes, are increasingly seen as responsibilities and not merely preferred or welcomed approaches in research. Cahill (2007) argues that participatory action research (PAR) developed as an ethical commitment, which scholars and practitioners need to see as such, whilst he cautions reader to not consider it a mere possibility in research (Amauchi et al., 2021).

Collaborating with research participants to explore community strengths would offer the opportunity to share experiences and celebrate positive characteristics of their community that help people thrive, sustain their livelihoods, and foster good health. An appreciative and strengths-based research approach could capture the material, cultural, and relational aspects that

¹⁰ Similarly to concepts and notions such as empowerment and decolonizing, there is vast literature on resilience theories and frameworks. The use of the concept *resilience* in this thesis reflects the immediate understanding of the term denoting a system's ability to adapt, to persevere, and survive, to recover (etc.). It underlines the ideas of effectively adapting and coping to change, or to the experience of any significant event having a notable impact in one's life.

provide social cohesion and promote resilience, and sustainable livelihoods¹¹. Uddin and Gutberlet (2018) who apply a sustainable livelihoods framework refer to it "as a general interdisciplinary methodology that seeks to capture the many everyday life aspects that shape a livelihood" (p. 134). Further, the authors explain how a sustainable livelihoods analysis "comprises the capabilities, material and social assets and the activities required for a dignified living." (p. 134).

Actively participating in such reflective activities may encourage insightfulness, self- and social awareness, strengthen social ties, and inspire direct action. Awareness of the resourcefulness present, of the coping skills, and the factors positively affecting one's life, can motivate and foster a sense of empowerment amongst the participants. In examining communal assets, participants may identify and strengthen social capital and the resourcefulness already at play within their community and existing social relations, at multiple scales. Paying attention to ways of fostering dialogues on self-determination and resilience, as well as trust, solidarity, and reciprocity, can be transformative in improving participant's quality of life. Further, in addition to offering their perspectives on what is working well, participants would provide informed local accounts on qualities particular to Zongo communities in Ghana, through their diverse narratives.

¹¹ The literature on Sustainable Livelihoods as a conceptual framework is vast and relevant to this study. I do not, however, aim to explore, nor apply, a specific theory and framework, but instead aim to explore how participants perceive the ideas, "sustainability", and "livelihood", while acknowledging my own understanding that stems from the UNDP (2017) definition: "The Livelihoods framework encompasses the skills, assets (both material and social) and the approaches which will be used by individuals and communities in order to survive." (p. 2); also, with the Sustainable Livelihoods approach as outlined by Serrat (2017).

1.5 Overview of Zongo Communities and their Emergence in Western Africa

“Zongo” derives from the Hausa¹² word “zango¹³”, used to refer to a “temporary settlement” (Casentini, 2018, p. 452). Although commonly associated with the Hausa ethnic group, it is also the Yoruba, Fulani, Wangara, and other groups, who make up substantial portions of Zongos’ populations (Brady & Hooper, 2019). Key characteristics of Zongo communities, since their inception, are the predominance of the Islamic religion, and the prevalence of migratory practices and trade activities. Coming from multiple diverse regional backgrounds, and at different points in time, the people of Zongo are often characterized as ‘strangers’ (Brady & Hooper, 2019) to the Asante¹⁴, to contemporary Ghana, and to each other (Pontzen, 2021). Mensah and Teye (2021) draw on Page’s (2009) work and discuss Zongo communities as a “complex system”—one that experiences continuous change and novelty, and as a result operates like a network consisting of “[diverse], inter-connected, interdependent and adaptable [components]” (p. 68).

Zongos are constantly welcoming new visitors/residents from national destinations, and of people relocating to Ghana from neighbouring countries (Mensah & Teye, 2021). As a result, life in Zongos continues to be dominated by ‘strangers’, migrants, and other transient workers. With some engaging in trading activities, and others providing interpretation services to assist cross-cultural and -linguistic trade networks to form (Mensah & Teye, 2021). While contemporary migratory practices differ—for instance, due to changes in modes of transportation,

¹² Most widely spoken language in Zongo communities. According to a dictionary definition, Hausa is "A people of the Sudan and northern Nigeria; (also) the language of this people, used, esp. in commerce, over much of West Africa." (OED, 2023).

¹³ In fact, zango is the correct spelling (Lovejoy 1980, cited in Pontzen, 2017), but due to the prevalence of the spelling Zongo in the literature and colloquially, in this thesis I continue with the use of the contemporary widespread spelling ‘Zongo’ as to not differentiate and create confusion.

¹⁴ Located in the Ashanti region of modern-day Ghana. The Asante is a matrilineal socio-cultural subgroup of the Akan people (Gedzi, 2014).

different *pull*- and *push*-factors for relocation, geopolitical power shifts and travel disparities (e.g. passport and financial power)—all and all, mobility remains central to the livelihoods and lifestyle of Zongo residents. Also, what I discuss in following chapters is how travel, migration, and cross-cultural interactions continue to play an important role in socioeconomic activities, as exemplified by people’s lived experiences with national, regional, and international migration.

1.5.1 Trans-Saharan Trade

The Sahara, in the imagination of someone in the twenty-first century, may only consist of endless sand-dunes; however, fossils show that there were once rivers, lakes, swamps and wetlands (Williams, 2021; Kirikoshi, 2022). Even today, the landscapes tend to be diverse, and everchanging, with one stumbling upon unique geological wonders, such as mountain ranges, rocky plateaus, and Oasis. Systems and networks of trade, migration, cultural exchange, transfer of knowledge, innovations, and resource management in the African continent go back to prehistoric times, with archaeological, textual, and iconographic studies of objects such as ceramics, textiles, crops, and jewellery, allowing scholars to understand the origins and exchange patterns of goods (Manzo, 2020).

A long-lived point of contention has been whether commercial networks existed prior to the Arab conquest of North Africa (Schörle, 2012; Magnavita, 2013). Magnavita (2013) explains how it was not until the 1996 discovery of the Iron Age cemeteries of Kissi in Burkina Faso that the possibility of exchanges crossing the Sahara in pre-Arab era awoke in the minds of scholars. Society’s understanding of Saharan trade in antiquity (Figure 3) is limited, which Schörle (2012) argues is the result of research gaps, and lack of cooperation and collaboration of archeological teams. Winchell et al. (2018) claim these multidirectional networks indicate “a series of dynamic societies and subsistence innovators across the Saharan and Sahelian belt, through southern

Arabia and semi-arid India that developed new cultivation economies quite distinct from those of western Asia and the Mediterranean” (p. 500). Evidence from relics has, therefore, delineated various connections and relations between ancient civilizations, such as between ancient Egypt and the kingdom of Kush.

Figure 3

Trans-Saharan Trade Routes, 8th to 19th Centuries Showing Main Trade Routes and Trading Stations.



Note. Map by Eric Ross in *The Trans-Saharan book trade: Manuscript Culture, Arabic Literacy and Intellectual History in Muslim Africa*. (2011).

Since antiquity, as with practices of *othering* in recent centuries, assumptions, and views of non-Africans such as Herodotus¹⁵, shaped views and beliefs about Africa’s conditions and interconnectedness to the world, and helped disregard, or appropriate and exploit advancements, resources, and knowledge coming from Africa to the rest of humanity. Data, however, is increasingly emerging, supporting the idea that exchange of goods between west African Sahel

¹⁵Greek historian who in the 5th century B.C. wrote extensively on trade in Africa, as well as he provided ethnographic accounts about the places he visited and population groups he came across during his travels (Sommer, n.d.).

and the wider world existed as far back as the late Roman and Byzantine times (Magnavita, 2013). Despite the lack, in many cases, of finding trading items, examining botanical records provide evidence of crops traveling north through the Sahara. Moreover, analysis of glass beads found in Nubia, confirm relations between Northeast Africa and south Asia during the third and second millennium BC—similarly to how crop (e.g. sorghum and pearl millet) examinations indicate trade from the Sahel to the Indian Ocean via the Red Sea (Manzo, 2020).

Optimal climate conditions in the Sahara before desertification, or early in the process, would have facilitated travel through the Sahel, with trade routes being well established (Magnavita, 2013) and forming the trans-Saharan trade network. In the context of Zongos, the most relevant period begins in the 7th and 8th century AD, when Islam started to spread across western Africa. Also known as the caravan, the trans-Saharan trade reflects an early form of global connections where regional networks of exchanging ideas and resources formed, and over time became interconnected to eventually expand trans-continently; connecting African regions to each other, and developing links between Africa, the middle east, Mesopotamia, and with areas further into Eurasia. The use of camels expedited travel and trade (Chilisa, 2012), and the development of trade centres and key junction points (e.g. Zongos) also facilitated travel, economic activities, and socio-cultural exchanges (Boahen et al., 1986).

1.5.2 Contemporary Migration and Trade

It is common for Zongos to attract national rural-urban migrants and non-Ghanaians who are seeking work opportunities. Migration and trade continue to be central to the Zongo identity and way of life, as residents actively engage in contemporary commerce activities, and for many, their livelihoods are closely tied to migration and/or trade (Casentini, 2018). Mensah and Teye (2021) emphasize the importance of migration and trade, when they cite the late Ghanaian

historian Kwame Arhin who spoke about the residential nature of Zongos, but at the same time, acting as a "commercial institution" (1971, p. 73), where residents partake in trade related activities—for instance, acting as agents to facilitate transportation of goods but also to assist traders with organizing transportation, accommodation, and interpretation services.

Pontzen (2021), in his book, examines Islam in Asante, as a shared identity among Zongo members, but also indicates the diversity of Islamic practices, and of understanding the religion. Zongo members are navigating both how to belong within Zongos, and at the same time, how to adhere to and relate to what makes the national Ghanaian identity. While Zongonians come from diverse backgrounds, they also reinforce their common identity (e.g. Northerner¹⁶, Hausa speaking, Muslim) that has historically struggled to gain representation and recognition as an element of the national Ghanaian image—Williamson et al. (2018) show how "Zongo have over time gone through many circles of socioeconomic, political, and spatial inclusion and exclusion depending on the prevailing political economy [of the time period]" (pp. 10-11).

Despite the diversity, as the following chapters explore, shared linguistic, ethnic, and other cultural characteristics bring people close together; where Zongos experience peaceful coexistence, with strong social ties among residents in Zongos nationally, and transnationally. Africa's collectivist society and the ethos of the Islamic religion that every Muslim is a brother/sister add to the welcoming nature of Zongo communities, where long-term residents are happy to help newcomers (Mensah & Teye, 2021), including new non-Muslim residents and visitors. As a result, the prevalence of traveling and being a welcoming community, has enabled

¹⁶ Common term used to refer to Ghanaians (of numerous tribes) from the upper north regions. Discussed in chapters 4 and 5, it is common for people to travel from north to south in search for work opportunities. Moreover, there is often a negative connotation to referring to someone as "northerner", because of association to poverty; at the same time, as participants share (chapter 4), positive stereotypes are that northerners are hardworking people, fair, and honest.

Zongos to develop into spaces of wide diversity in terms of language, religion, and ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

1.6 Thesis Structure

After introducing the research context and purpose, I provide an overview of Zongo communities by outlining key historical transformations and briefly discussing the development of Zongo communities in western Africa. In addition, a historical background of the region, and a discussion on politics of knowledge and processes of *othering*, situates the study and paradigm guiding the inquiry. Earlier in this chapter I also introduced central theoretical underpinnings, including community-based participatory research (CBPR) principles and Indigenizing¹⁷ research, which I further discuss in the next sections where I speak to the study's theoretical and methodological framework (chapter 2 and 3 respectively).

In chapter 2, I discuss central Indigenous and CBPR principles that shape the theoretical framework that guides the research process. This chapter entails literature review on theories including critical theory, CBPR, decolonial approaches to community engagement, human factor (HF) theory, and sustainable livelihoods. In addition, I discuss the common elements that make research distinctively community based, decolonial, and appreciative, as well as the benefits of using in-depth conversations and photo-narratives to engage participants.

Through a literature review, I draw on studies that help inform the diverse context for this place-based study. Discussing and describing Zongos, or any community, especially when you are not a member of it, is to be approached with caution. There cannot be a single, fixed, definition for something so complex and ever evolving. The literature about Zongo communities is constantly expanding, within academic and non-academic sources, and through this thesis the

¹⁷ Indigenous/indigenizing (interchangeably to denote application of African Indigenous knowledge systems); engaging with African scholars and academic literature; incorporating non-traditional research approaches.

goal is to capture and share insights, from participants' lived experiences, reflections, and narratives, on their community, its people and history, culture, and values.

The focus of chapter 3 is to lay out the community-based methodological framework applied in the study to engage local participants whose input is central to the inquiry. The focus for CBPR, if not for all types of inquiries, is on both the process and outcomes and how the undertaking may be transformative to enrich wellbeing and foster socio-environmental justice. Therefore, following a CBPR defines how I apply the research methods/tools. Research should not necessarily begin with, or involve, a problem to solve. Hence, in the aim to better understand a phenomenon and collectively work to improve quality of life within a community, discussions must go beyond exploring social issues and structural inequalities, to also foster dialogues on self-determination and resilience, empowerment, as well as trust, solidarity, and reciprocity. From problem solving, where the premise is that there is an issue to be solved and external intervention can assist, shifting towards an explorative and appreciative study—in this case, exploring with participants their perspectives to highlight assets and take-away lessons on the factors that enable them to meet their needs and lead good lives.

I begin chapter 3 with discussing the KZ case study by presenting key topics, from reviewing the literature on scholarly work relevant to Zongo communities in Ghana. This section—on what is written about Zongos in academic and grey literature—delves deeper on topics already introduced, such as migration, trade, sense of place and belonging, and overall, the dynamic socio-spatial landscapes of Zongo communities. After summarizing relevant literature to provide a clearer context, I share key reflective accounts on my positionality and worldview.

The main part of chapter 3 is discussing the two key phases of the research process: a) the preliminary research where I outline the process of forging trust, building relations, and

developing a research proposal to review with community stakeholders—for revisions and to request their approval to commence the study; b) the data collection stage of the research, where I revisited the community to recruit research participants and to facilitate in-depth conversations and the photo-narratives activity of the study. For both stages (preliminary research and data collection), I outline the main steps, including the interactions with the community of interest, ethical considerations and procedures, and reflexivity. The 'data collection' section puts emphasis on how each method (i.e. conversation/photo-narratives) was applied, by summarizing the logistics and the steps for each.

Chapter 4 highlights the key ideas, narratives, and quotes gathered through in-depth conversations and photo-narratives by organizing and categorizing the data, which arose during one-on-one conversations and/or group conversations (with photo-narrative participants), into key themes, topics, notions, and terms relevant to the study. Figure 4 presents these overarching themes, subthemes, and examples of corresponding quotes from the conversations with participants. The photo-narratives part of the chapter displays some of the photographs participants shared, with quotes and descriptions from their narratives. Here, I also include the Venn-diagram (Figure 18) showing the three overarching themes identified with co-researchers to summarize what participants highlighted in their photo-narratives and groups discussions. The thematic analysis then leads to chapter 5, where the discussion focuses on data interpretation and on the take-away lessons, as well as the understanding developed through the study, to help answer the research questions introduced earlier in chapter 1.

In chapter 5 I look at participants' narratives and what they shared through research activities, which highlight the community's vibrancy, to explore factors that enable KZ to thrive. In this chapter I discuss the results in connection to the literature on community development,

critical and decolonial research, as well as African worldviews. Here, I present key themes participants focused on, to interrogate normative perspectives on community development and wellbeing, by highlighting participants' insights on what fosters healthy, sustainable, livelihoods. Drawing on participants' input, I develop a discussion on how KZ perceives health and wellbeing in a relational manner and understands thriving as a communal process, where all have the right to realize their needs, enhance their lives, and reach their potentials, along with having the communal responsibility to build mutually supportive and beneficial relations.

Drawing on the CBPR, Indigenization of research, and the co-production of knowledge theoretical frameworks, I discuss the data in relation to the research questions. Therefore, I look at how the community's social cohesion—facilitated by a shared identity, and shared values—enables people to meet their needs of subsistence and to foster health and wellbeing. Moreover, I discuss how access to educational and employment opportunities are also facilitated by the social cohesion KZ experiences. In summarizing the research context and findings that provide answers to the research questions, I examine and underline the study's contributions to the literature.

Chapter 6 is the conclusion where I summarize key aspects from the literature and this study's findings, specifically on re-imagining the idea of *community development*, and offering counternarratives to portrayals of Zongos as breeding grounds of social ills and poverty-oriented spaces. In contrast, participants help provide an understanding of positive factors enabling them to build strong relationships, which are mutually empowering. Overall, research participants shared the richness of their cultures, worldviews, and relations, and offered critical perspectives on what quality of life is, and what it necessitates. Finally, the concluding chapter covers a brief discussion on the study's limitations, and on potential areas of further research.

Chapter 2: Axiological and Theoretical Underpinnings guiding Epistemology

Scholarly, western accredited, work is commonly perceived as comprehensive, superior, and unbiased knowledge, while it excludes other sources which could be of equal, or greater, significance. Colonial powers brought destruction to the political, social, and economic systems of Africa by robbing and displacing people from their territories, and simultaneously from their knowledge systems, beliefs, cultures, and ways of life (Odora-Hoppers, 2002; Chilisa, 2012; Odora-Hoppers, 2021). Imperial powers enabled the westernization of the globe, where worldviews local to western Europe have, overtime, been imposed elsewhere, while subjugating other perspectives and knowledge sources (Chilisa, 2012). Central to knowledge production is access to decision-making-processes and the variations in “the ontological and epistemological authority of scholars” (Radcliffe, 2015, p. 856).

This intellectual imperialism constructed the ‘*other*’—the colonized—as incapable of producing useful knowledge, and fostered the tendency to exclude, and dismiss, knowledge from cultural experiences as irrelevant. In other cases, it meant appropriating Indigenous knowledge systems without acknowledging the sources. To resist the perpetuation of oppressive structures, requires an understanding of how traditional research and development theory, and practices, have misrepresented, and excluded, competing narratives and marginalized voices. Further, for scholars who are increasingly challenging long held to be true, dominant views and representations of the colonization of Africa, to continue amplifying excluded voices.

As Quinless (2022) argues, “[the term] “Indigenous” encompasses a variety of approximately 370 million place-based peoples around the world and can be applied in international, transnational, or global contexts.” (p. 7). Although African socialization may not be reduced to a single and fixed description, the importance of family and social ties, the notion

of responsibility toward ancestors and future generations, as well as the relational nature of being and interacting with others and the world, are the basis, and the common thread among non-western, in this case, African worldviews and cultures. In the context of this study, I engage with African conceptual and theoretical frameworks, including Ubuntu¹⁸ and Sankofa¹⁹, to discuss how these concepts convey central elements of the African socialization, philosophy, and worldview.

Further, I explore the *human factor* (HF) theory. Adjibolosoo (1995) defined the HF as “a spectrum of personality characteristics and other dimensions of human performance that enable social, economic and political institutions to function and remain functional overtime” (p. 33). The HF theory provides a transformative perspective in understanding and working towards sustainable socioeconomic wellbeing and reflects pre-colonial African ways of being and relating to the world and others; driven by reciprocity, collaboration, and relational existence and interactions—principles that align with theoretical foundations of community-based participatory research (CBPR), based on Freire's popular education model, and which an Indigenous relational paradigm consists of, along with other Indigenous-based values and ethical standards.

The Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (2000), whose work has become central in conceptualizing and embracing a critical discourse in development studies and CBPR, encourages one to advance (in solidarity), a critical pedagogy *with (not for)*, those experiencing the impacts and consequences of poverty (p. 4). Freire’s critical pedagogy, the HF theory,

¹⁸ Ubuntu: Often translated as “I am, we are” to mean being through others. An African philosophy of community-centric ethos and collectivist virtues. The epitome of humanness, that recognizes oneness and unity. – Murove (2012) refer to Ubuntu as “humanistic ethic”, and “humanness” (p. 37). (See Murove (2012) on Ubuntu and Health; Chilisa (2012) African Relational ontology, and Indigenous methodology; Naude (2019) on Ubuntu and decolonizing knowledge; Moyo (2021) *Africanity and Ubuntu as Decolonizing Discourse*; Chigangaidze, Matanga, and Katsuro, 2022.

¹⁹ Sankofa: A Twi word meaning “Go back and fetch it”. An Akan proverb that encourages continuous forward growth and quest for knowledge, while learning from and embracing past lessons. (See Jeffers, 2020)

principles of Indigenizing research, and following a critical CBPR approach, all include a focus on human relationships and interactions. Hay (2016) reminds qualitative geographers who are building a critical understanding on structures and processes, to not overlook the *human experience* and as a result risk to dehumanize human geography.

Critically approaching this study and with the goal to be informed by relational-based approaches, necessitates I become familiar with the history of the place of inquiry, and with the wider academic literature on the place and population I am working with. This includes examining *single stories* and narratives that *other* African communities by misrepresenting the sociopolitical and economic conditions of pre- and post-colonial Africa. Throughout history, *single stories* have played a key role in disruptions of African civilizations, where false portrayals of communities, the people, significant sociopolitical events, and living conditions, have helped enable atrocities to be committed.

In this study I apply a critical lens to development studies, and discuss knowledge democracy, and CBPR principles. Following a critical and decolonial perspective in theory and praxis, calls for the revitalization of marginalized sources of knowledge—with the aim to learn, apply, and share information and lessons derived, while continuously observing ethical principles in conducting research. Further, it becomes essential to engage with overlooked and marginalized sources of knowledge and perspectives, on community wellbeing or any other focus area. Critically engaging in CBPR relevant to community development²⁰, while adhering to

²⁰ Later, in chapter 2, I discuss the ineffectiveness, for the most part, of development initiatives in Africa, while introducing development theories (e.g. industrialization and modernization) that have been guiding these initiatives. Other than offering an overview of the development theories and development initiatives in the continent, in this thesis, I do not analyse development theories. The term *community development*, however, is relevant and used interchangeably with wellbeing, good health, thriving, flourishing, growing, to denote positive aspects at a communal level. Moreover, where the term is in single-quote symbol (i.e. 'development'), I aim to emphasize the difference between dominant top-down ideals of development with how, in the thesis, it denotes non-extractive, -transactional, and -linear, understanding of thriving, wellbeing, and quality of life for all (human and non-human).

Indigenous-based research principles, helps decolonize the research process.

2.1 Knowledge Democracy

Western research paradigms—from positivist (with its inherent fixed and measurable-based view) to critical and post-colonial (that aim to deconstruct, politicize, and decolonize academia) – as discussed earlier, have silenced theoretical perspectives, cultures, and philosophies that contradict, or oppose, the status quo of US hegemony and dominant western research paradigms. Even radical academic geography, in north America, has “since its origins, excluded various marginalized voices, such as “the voices of women and [Black people] who continue to be underrepresented in the discipline and, overall, in academic institutions” (Peake & Sheppard, 2014, p. 319). Despite the acknowledgement, the efforts, and the struggles of academics, at a global scale, to decolonize their research work, there are numerous examples of exclusion, such as the peripheralization of critical theories and geographies from non-western vantage-points, for instance from Latin America scholars (Finn & Hanson, 2017).

Lepore et al. (2021) discuss the increasing calls for decolonizing universities, and argue that what encompasses knowledge in universities is a small part of the existing global knowledge. Knowledge is not neutral, and academia has systemically marginalized diverse sources and ways of knowing by either excluding, dismissing, or distorting knowledge coming from them (Lemkes, 2018). Knowledge is powerful and transformative and plays a critical role in actions for social justice (Hall & Tandon, 2017). Knowledge democracy discourse embraces key principles that aim to bring justice to processes of knowledge production and of using knowledge (Hall & Tandon, 2017; Lepore et al., 2021). Knowledge democracy means acknowledging the importance of multiple ways of knowing and recognising the diverse ways to collect and disseminate knowledge. Knowledge democracy framework promotes the engagement

with marginalized and excluded knowledge systems, values knowledge coming from lived experiences, and advocates for open access to research findings and products. Lepore et al. (2021) discuss CBPR as an approach to knowledge creation that can benefit the community (i.e. knowledge source) itself.

For this study knowledge democracy discourse is relevant in several ways, as principles of recognizing knowledge plurality and amplifying voices of lived experience are key for both conceptual and methodological frameworks. The perspectives and insights of KZ research participants is rich knowledge that informs academic inquiry and provides examples of first-hand lived experiences. Further, CBPR's commitment to promoting co-learning and co-creation of knowledge (Amauchi et al., 2021), among other principles, presents the central objective of knowledge democracy discourse. In promoting access, involving participants in the knowledge dissemination process is important for a democratic study. Participation levels may vary, but the goal is for full participation in not only the dissemination stage, but throughout the process of research design, data collection, and analysis. In following chapters I touch on ways participants actively engaged in knowledge mobilization, while in chapter 6, I acknowledge limitations. Moreover, valuing local language and paying attention to making research material available in the community's main language, are values and practices I explore and apply as I discuss below.

In contemporary critical studies, although there is a focus on addressing the exclusionary nature of knowledge production and scholarly work, barriers in terms of *whose views are heard*, and *who can access, influence, and benefit* from collective academic knowledge, remain. Not only are there, for example, more scholars from the 'global north' writing about Latin America than vice-versa (Finn & Hanson, 2017), but there is also a perpetuation of top-down, patronizing relationships where the 'north' (the 'west') is constructed as the 'knowledge holder' capable to

liberate the ‘developing nations’, the ‘poor’, and ‘uneducated’. Such exclusionary views pose risks to academic integrity and research, by enabling the rise of ideologies and practices that threaten human dignity, survival, and socio-environmental justice.

A critical perspective encourages the deconstruction of binaries (e.g. knowledge holder/aid recipient, developed/developing), and the embracement of non-normative approaches, in not only development studies but in methodological frameworks across disciplines. Notably, deconstructing binaries and categorizations that may enable practices of *othering*, helps dismantle colonial, embedded, and often taken for granted, narratives that differentiate and hierarchize lives, communities, and populations against one another. Increasingly, scholars within western institutions are engaging in research that challenges orthodox practices by blurring the line between researcher ('expert') and participant ('subject') (Gutberlet et al., 2014). In fostering a horizontal dialogue and solidarity, “talking about us/about them”, is subordinate to “talking to us/to them”, in an ethical and political sense (de Souza, 2019, p. 11). The nature of the relationships between research participants and what can be known should be non-hierarchical as participants, inclusive of the researcher/research team, are collectively conceptualizing, producing, and collecting data; gathering information and tapping into deep knowledge that would be unavailable to the 'researcher' without the ‘researched’.

Western modes of thinking, nonetheless, continue dominating scholarly work and knowledge production, thus silencing, and subjugating diverse sources and ways of knowing. Germes and de Araujo (2016, p. 2) discuss the “anglophonic hegemony [of critical studies]” and how the dominance of one language results to "asymmetric power dynamics”. Uncovering and engaging with marginalized linguistic and cultural perspectives are key in critical inquiry (Johnson et al., 2006; Germes & de Araujo, 2016) that aims to address issues of power dynamics

in academia and research. Local language and knowledge, play a crucial role, as do "distinctive regional and national scientific/research traditions" (de Souza, 2019, p. 7).

In the effort to be inclusive in academia, there is a rise in multilingual, collaborative, cross-cultural studies, for instance, through joint publications and translations of texts (Germes & de Araujo, 2016). At the same time, Germes and de Araujo (2016) recognize the importance of having a common language that goes beyond speaking the same linguistic, to entail the ability to communicate issues from one's perspective, and to address language barriers and miscommunication that stem from multidimensional social-cultural variations, rather than linguistic differences. De Souza (2019) argues, the "internationalization of technical scientific language, social science and English" (p. 6), goes beyond language and terminology, to characterize a standardization of "agenda setting, [methods] and concepts, [as well as] ways of reasoning" (p. 6), and ultimately the way of understanding research, and seeing the world and one's role in it.

Working in an intercultural context, as visitor(s) to a community, scholars and practitioners strive to engage with local perspectives, knowledge, and ways of being. This does not mean having to abandon, or eliminate, western methods and worldviews. Western approaches are Indigenous to the west, and in combination with other Indigenous methods can be transformative (Chilisa, 2012). However, the imposed hierarchical dominance of the socially constructed 'western methods', which rely on mixed approaches and appropriation of Indigenous knowledge, has robbed Africans and the whole of humanity, from other Indigenous (locally born/inspired) methods and philosophies (Chilisa, 2012). Moreover, the so-called 'western methods', or any knowledge production for that matter, does not arise in isolation at a specific locale, and is instead a result of relational interactions across time and space.

Framing all knowledge from the west under the constructed, and well established, single western, Eurocentric, neoliberal, violent paradigm, first reflects the social construction of binaries west/east, global north/global south; second, it ignores the possibility of other western-based thoughts that do not align with the dominant paradigm mentioned above, and which, are therefore, also subjugated—thus, reflecting knowledge imperialism also within the west. Parker (2011) discusses the evolution of European powers and points to the diversity of multiple powers, in comparison to the constructed European/American identity, grounded on protestant values, and the identity of the liberated individual. Further displaying how the imagery of American territory expanded to a global scale, where the US began claiming authority and power to establish 'free' relations and structures in the sociopolitical, and economic spheres. Diop (1986) explains how a conscious awakening, where *allies*, as Asante (2018) urges, would “help fracture the idea of a globalized west as we free ourselves from its clutches” (p. 12). For Diop, this can be achieved through interdisciplinary teamwork, and similarly to the Freirean framework, through critical transformative pedagogy.

The principles of collaboration and ownership are also important, as all participants should have equal ownership of the data, and equal opportunities to actively engage in the analysis of it, as well as the use of, and dissemination of findings (Deviovic, 2013)—which is absent in the actual application of western knowledge generation, especially in terms of data ownership and giving due credit to participants/ informants/ responders etc. who often provide highly sought-after data. Despite the intrinsically exclusionary emergence and establishment of critical discourse within western academia, contemporary critical approaches aim to challenge normative oppressive patterns and structures—doing so, by engaging with political questions about power relations and structural inequities. As Peake and Sheppard (2014) argue, at the core

of critical social theory and inquiry is how to improve living conditions, as well as to question what justice is and how to achieve it; thus, involving ethical and moral considerations, and questions, on both rights and responsibilities.

Indigenizing research, as this section highlights, involves engaging with subjugated knowledge systems to conduct research that is inclusive of Indigenous worldviews and ways of knowing. Similarly significant, a decolonial research implies a commitment to eliminate barriers hindering inclusion of marginalized voices and sub-minorities of the population, throughout the research. Since accounts of other people's culture miss the local accumulated perspectives and knowledge, the aim of decolonial research is for Indigenous voices to be heard, and to thus "restore cultural practices, thinking, beliefs and values that [have] become suppressed" (Chilisa, 2012, p. 11). Furthermore, Indigenizing research involves constantly questioning well-established ideas and assumptions in academic literature, by *researching back* with communities to articulate their views on topics, coming from their point of reference.

2.2 Critical Theory – Social Change and Justice

Critical geographical perspective encompasses a social justice and emancipatory ethos, committed to social transformation for the betterment of the commons. Critical theory and activism, through research, aim to dismantle oppressive structures by challenging rigid and exclusionary theoretical frameworks guiding research theory and practice. In critical geography, Finn and Hanson argue (2017) issues must be politicized to uncover power relations and dynamics permitting the rise of socio-environmental problems. Kallio (2014) also suggests that critical political geography's overall aim is the problematization and politicization of matters, while noting how adhering to a critical approach is not a linear process with an end-goal, but

rather a continuous commitment to consider, and re-consider, various perspectives, and positionalities; therefore, the various needs and views of one another.

Critical and decolonial approaches require an understanding and openness to the plurality of ontology and phenomena, as well as their fluid, non-fixed, and intersectional nature. A critical perspective, in theory and praxis, embraces a comprehensive and intersectional approach to inquiry, where multiple dimensions of identities, various sources of knowledge, and ways of being, are considered. To imagine the existence of other practices and to cultivate non-power-based relations calls for paying attention to individual experiences that are overlooked (Holmes et al., 2015). Trying to make marginalized experiences visible, an anti-colonial inquiry engages in communal and individual analysis of lived experiences with systemic and ongoing oppression, poverty, and ontological erasure.

Peake and Sheppard (2014) argue that “radical critical geography has advanced critical geographic theory but has been less successful in increasing access to the means of knowledge production” (p. 306). Increasing access to the means is central to the desires and struggles towards social change. Focusing on relationships and responsibilities among all research participants, the research must be committed to “creat[e] conditions for social change to be used by the community” (Cahill, 2007, p. 362). Decolonial practices suggest a commitment for participants’ control of produced knowledge and for changes to the material conditions in their community (Chilisa, 2012)—as the goal is to address and change, in solidarity, the given living reality where one experiences oppression and faces barriers in fulfilling a good life (Freire, 2000).

2.2.1 Ethical Considerations: Horizontal Intercultural Community Engagement

De Souza (2019) encourages readers to think critically about “subtle forms of colonialism even among progressive [perspectives]" (p. 3), as she argues that “prejudices are not only part of cultural matrixes but also of ideological discourses" (p. 4). She explores how to avoid ethnocentrism and sociocentrism²¹ and suggests following three key principles: “i) become aware of the history and culture of the people towards whom you cultivate empathy and solidarity. ii) remember what South African Abahlali base Mjondolo activists²² emphasize: do not speak ‘for them’ (or simply ‘about them’), but first and foremost ‘to them’; iii) be always cautious about your own interpretations about the meaning(s) of their struggle” (de Souza, 2019, p. 21). Similarly, Chilisa (2012) argues that the one facing marginalization should be at the center of the gathering and production of knowledge and must have control over the storing and dissemination of information. Therefore, as Hopkins (2007) shows, research ethics must go beyond receiving approval from institutional ethics committees, to work with differences in ethical perspectives and practices.

Sylvestre et al. (2018), argue that “enacting an anti-colonial research agenda within the institutional settings of an inherently colonial and neoliberal institution creates inherent tensions” (p. 770). Further, they question how conflicting responses, between offices of research ethics and local ethics, may foreclose potential paths of responsible action. Collaborative community work

²¹ de Souza (2019) explain the use of "ethnocentrism" and "sociocentrism", in their work and how the key difference between the terms "is a matter of scale". On the one hand, "ethnocentrism means judging another culture (understood as a qualitatively specific cultural matrix in terms of language, customs, etc.) solely by the values and standards of one's own culture [...]" (p. 4). On the other, "[...] Sociocentrism is the tendency to look at the world primarily from the perspective of one's own social group within the framework of a given cultural matrix." (p. 4); in contrast to sociocentrism "[...] is usually related to class and group differences (and prejudices) within a concrete country or ‘society’ (though some use the term also to refer to a perspective biased by ‘national’ peculiarities and ideologies)" (p. 4).

²² Grassroots movement in South Africa (Visit the official social movement's site: <https://abahlali.org/>)

needs to account for participants' different perspectives that may reflect contested and competing views and interests, by considering important ethical concerns and questions throughout the research process. CBPR is meant to address ethical considerations that go beyond the institutional liability protection process universities adhere to.

De Souza (2019, p. 21) encourages researchers to commit engaging in true, considerate, and open dialogues, while being mindful to not, even unconsciously, project any embedded learned prejudice. In critical participatory research, scholars think of power relations and reflect on their motivation to facilitate a CBPR, as well as pay attention to and consider the impact of their presence, and of the proposed research, in the community. This reflexivity includes considering issues of positionality and power relations that exist between the individual initiating the research and community participants (some of whom may become co-researchers in the process).

Learning about the historical and sociopolitical landscape in a place-based study provides better context to form a comprehensive understanding, which includes looking at the history of the place of focus, and the interconnected relations with other places, as well as the socio-environmental forces shaping and influencing a locality and a given population. Moseley (2012) highlights the importance of understanding the history of the region at various scales relating to global dynamics. This tracing can be informed by the literature but also through the views, memories, experiences, and narratives of participants and co-researchers.

2.2.2 Debunking Misleading Narratives on Zongos, African History, and Cultures

Diop, a pioneer scholar of African studies and advocate of African Renaissance²³, poses

²³First discussed by Cheikh Anta Diop, with contemporary discourse on African Renaissance often attributed to former South Africa's President Mbeki who popularized the concept in the 1990s (See: *The African Renaissance: A Brief Historical Orientation* by Evaldsson and Wessels, 2004; *African Renaissance and Pan-Africanism: The Ethical Leadership Nexus* by Daudu, 2019.)

critical questions challenging Eurocentric falsifications of African history, civilizations, and culture (Asante, 2018). According to Diop (1986), it is critical to restore cultural awareness (p. 227), to foster African pride and recognition of African contributions (p. 137), because it is the “colonization of the African minds [that] was more dangerous [...]” (Carew in Diop, 1986, p. 21). Restoring Africa’s true role in world history and in people’s minds, Diop claims (1986), “leads to a veritable reversal and to fundamental transformation of our cultural relationship with the rest of the world” (p. 265). Asante (2018) highlights that Africans must tell their own stories as an important first “[step] towards renaissance, re-emergence and resurgence in Africa” (p. 9). This, he argues, “is because for as long as scholarship continues to be conducted on Eurocentric, profit-driven, terms, there will never be any fundamental change to the constructed dominant Eurocentric values that remain exclusionary. Everything and everyone else will exist on the margins” (p. 13).

Zongo communities, being part of African history and cultures, have been influenced by, and influencing, other African populations, and similarly to other African topics also misrepresented in dominant narratives. As mentioned in chapter 1, Zongos are generally portrayed as communities in need that are lacking socioeconomically, politically, and culturally. The significance of these communities has been overlooked by highlighting issues and problem areas. These communities have been playing an important role in enabling transcontinental interactions and communication, as well as trade and knowledge exchange. Nonetheless, just as Africa at the large scale has been misrepresented, Zongo communities have also been misrepresented.

2.2.2.1 Disruptions and Resurgence Transforming African Lifeworlds. External disruptions –notably colonialism–influenced trade, communication, and the political and economic

landscapes, as well as the social organization of African communities. Colonial practices and imposed rules fundamentally transformed the way of life and being, by fostering a shift away from relational and communal life towards an individualistic, competitive, and capital-accumulation-driven one. The education system based on western-European worldviews, and other legacies of imperial powers, have disconnected people from African history, knowledge, cultures, and practices (Chilisa, 2012). Eurocentric perspectives on historical accounts emphasizing the transformations and advancements of European clans and societies, helped make remarkable civilizations such as the Mali and Songhai less known globally. The erasure of the sophistication and complexity of African kingdoms, empires and civilizations enabled oppressive actions to be advocated as a ‘civilizing mission’ or ‘development assistance’. The continuous development of political confederations and federations across the continent was drastically interrupted by external interventions (Khapoya, 2012); where European colonialism undermined the growing African city-states and nations, as well as the thriving cross-continental trade relations, of material resources, ideas, and cultural practices.

Despite the long history of active trade networks and interactions in sub-Saharan Africa, which are central to Zongo heritage and contemporary livelihoods, today regional trade is highly hindered. Bensassi et al. (2019) look at the relationship between trade barriers and informal trade, and argue informal trade persists as trade impediments continue. Numerous commodities are exclusively traded through informal channels, and therefore, significant trade flows go unrecorded, thus, falsely showing low trade amongst African countries (Bensassi et al., 2019). Turkson et al. (2022) discuss how complicated administrative import and export procedures, lack of coordination amongst regional partners, and having similar export economies and commodities, contribute to the low levels of recorded regional trade. They also emphasize the

need to identify and remove trade impediments, to further integrate and strengthen regional markets in sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, informal trade persists, mainly because of the excessive costs to comply with formal trade regulations, and the delays in bureaucratic processes to clear products through borders (Bensassi et al., 2019). Although trade is important for communities, and for society at large, to thrive, by enabling people to prosper and build sustainable livelihoods, post-independent Sub-Saharan African states have not been able to utilize trade for domestic sustainable welfare (Turkson et al., 2022).

2.2.3 Critically Examining Approaches to Community Development

From a critical development studies approach, exploring alternative paradigms, while interrogating dominant ones and the politics of knowledge production, allows to uncover and engage with multiple sources of knowledge (Radcliffe, 2015). Engaging with the actual/possible, a critical approach investigates forms of domination while looking for emancipatory possibilities (Brenner, 2009). Critical approach means a focus on the possible, as critical theory looks at struggles and processes of social transformation. Brenner (2009) remind us though, it is “[not] intended to serve as a formula for a particular course of social change” (p. 201). A critical theoretical perspective does, however, provide conceptual tools to better understand *what* fosters, and *how*, sustainable livelihoods; therefore, it could facilitate the exploration of how individuals and communities protect themselves from the risks of poverty, and of unequal development and accessibility to services and resources.

The emergent business corporate state coalition on sustainable development perpetuates social issues that the profit-driven sociopolitical system has created in the first place, by “[doing] business as usual [...]” (Hunter, 2012, p. 505). Development across the globe, as a top-down project of progress and aid, has followed a western capitalist model fostering privatization and a

liberated economy, as well as an individual-centred education and approaches that privilege and build good, resilient, neoliberal subjects (Radcliffe, 2015). Radcliffe (2015) also highlights how hegemonic paradigms tend to depoliticize social issues and instead present *technical fixing* requiring *expert knowledge* as the solution to social matters. By exploring the economic, political, social, and cultural aspects of phenomena, critical approaches aim to address normative community change tactics, in research and implementation, which perpetuate colonial western domination, systemic inequality, and exploitative relations. In conceptualizing and analyzing matters, critical inquiry strives to “mak[e] the invisible visible” (Radcliffe, 2015, p. 862) by considering multiple perspectives, especially marginalized views of those living the geographical phenomenon under focus.

Post-independence African nations' development paths involved the pouring of resources into mega-projects, especially ones facilitating resource extraction and exportation (Adjibolosoo, 1995). Prioritizing such initiatives was rationalized by traditional economic development schools of thought (e.g. modernization, dependency, industrialization, and urbanization theory), which have informed economic-development conceptualization, planning, policies, and practices, for decades. However, by ignoring the different contexts, post-colonial economic strategies have been irrelevant and have failed to truly address communal issues. For long, the ‘development’ strategy of transactional ‘aid’ in the form of loans has been driving unsustainable household and national debt, while strengthening the development/corruption nexus (Hope & Chikulo, 2000); thus, perpetuating unjust, destructive, practices and structures. Ezeale-Harrison and Adjibolosoo (1994) emphasized key factors, of the time, leading to socioeconomic and political issues and therefore perpetuating inequity—including mismanagement of resources, taking advantage of

one's position of power, lack of long-term provisions, and lack of HF elements—of strong, moral, and just leadership and decision-making—especially among state leaders.

A focus on capital growth and on the material wealth, without considering the human experience and needs, or the human virtues that uphold justice, cooperation, and sustainable growth, is *development on paper* rather than reflected and experienced in people's quality of life, sense of wellbeing, or socio-environmental sustainability. In other words, there is the risk of achieving economic growth without social development growth; 'economic success' that is blind to aspects of social and human capital, if not detrimental to it. Radcliffe (2015) questions key assumptions and theoretical foundations of contemporary mainstream development practice and policy and shows how ineffective practices continue. Further, she discusses how mainstream development interventions tend to perpetuate and reinforce inequality and oppressive structures; where African resources, including material extractions, as well as a brain- and workforce-drain, have enabled western development while driving underdevelopment in Africa (Ezeale-Harrison & Adjibolosoo, 1994; Asabere-Ameyaw et al., 2014).

The legacies of the ineffective approaches to development discussed, perpetuate inequity through similar, imposed, strategies that are blind to the realities of African *lifeworlds*. More relevant aspects for African development and resurgence, Adjibolosoo (1995) explains, include fostering HF qualities, and developing an education system that goes beyond human capital in terms of technical skills, to equally strengthen all human dimensions. In contrast to transactional partnerships, the HF theory fosters human qualities and relations that reflect societal goals of justice, sustainable development, and equity. Bartle (2008) discusses how capacity within a community cannot be built but could be stimulated. He goes on to explain the difference between *community development* and *community empowerment*, where the former has colonial origins

and orientation, and the latter is strength based and results in personal and communal growth through, lived experiences, interactions, exercise, and struggle.

Ubuntu and other Indigenous bodies of thought, provide ways of advancing the idea of *mutual empowerment*, which more accurately "reflects the multidirectional relationships which are required that enable people to move from feeling powerless to having influence in their lives" (Mayaka & Truell, 2021, p. 10). Moreover, to pay attention to peoples' contributions and potentials. Jaeger-Erben et al. (2023) discuss examples of *citizen scientists* in both academic and community settings to show the importance of investing on *humans* and major sectors such as agriculture, housing, and infrastructure, to sustain life and to meet the needs of the local population

Asabere-Ameyaw et al. (2014) "see[k] to re-theorize African development from the standpoint of African and Southern scholars using local knowledge, everyday peoples' experiences and scholarly research data." (p. 2) and assert a "more effective approach to African development must start from within, what Africa peoples know best, and working with our own culture, environments and local knowledge base." (p. 23). Therefore, advocating for African nation-states to set their own development agendas that are accountable to and serve all, across the continent. An approach that helps destruct relations that continue—as Hope and Chikulo (2000) said over two decades ago—benefitting non-Africans abroad, or the self-interests of corrupt African leaders. National policies that exclude the poor and lead to further poverty (Hope, 2004).

Similarly, Tremblay and Jayme (2015) argue "it is an understatement to say that we urgently need new strategies for organizing ourselves built on democracy, equality, and compassion" (p. 299)—as with Asabere-Ameyaw et al. (2014), who advocate for the

reconstruction of the conventional Eurocentric idea of development, which they argue has shaped contemporary perception of modernity. They claim "an alternative idea of 'development' should be rooted in the values and local cultural systems of knowledge" (p. 29), and discuss how "[this] approach to development would have as its primary (p. 217) goal to enrich the social, spiritual and the non-material circumstances of people and allow them to develop and utilize their full potential. Asabere-Ameyaw et al. (2014) argue,

"We need a critique of cultural and material imperialism of conventional development. We must understand and conceptualize the colonality of development through the on going professionalization of development in which a whole cadre of "foreign" experts, specialists and scholars are let loose on the global south" (p. 30).

Moreover, they advocate for, an

"[an approach to development rooted in the values and local cultural systems of knowledge, which] would have as its primary goal to enrich the social, spiritual and the non-material circumstances of people and allow them to develop and utilize their full potential." (p. 217).

In summary, a critical perspective is concerned with interrogating knowledge production processes, fostering critical pedagogy, and self- and social- awareness, as well as exploring and deconstructing dominant practices and narratives, in this case, on community development, health, wellbeing, and sustainable livelihoods. The ancient Kemetic concept of Ma'at (signified by various terms amongst different African languages and communities), Asabere-Ameyaw et al. (2014) explain, is "one of the oldest known principles of Indigenous governance in Africa (p. 185). It is governance rooted in responsibility to act. "[...][A] shared belief across the continent] in the sacred power of speech," as what one says is attached to the "expectations of social

responsibility and a commitment to action" (p. 186). Moreover, development focusing on the material and missing the people—the human experience—where the Rule of Law favours and protects businesses, mega projects, and trade for economic development, over human rights, dignities, and life itself, misses the objectives to enhance human interactions, capacities, and experiences.

2.2.3.1 From Needs to Assets. The conventional needs-based rhetoric of community development helps create a one-sided negative view, which Mathie and Cunningham (2003) argue compromises capacity building by fostering internalized oppression and encouraging a national leadership driven by attracting and receiving aid. In other words, starting with a community's needs and problems can cultivate "a self-perception of inadequacy and dependence [on] 'experts' for solutions" (Mathie et al., 2017, p. 56). Mathie and Cunningham (2003) discuss assets-based community development (ABCD) as an alternative to such needs-based approaches that are traditionally entrenched in government and non-government service providing frameworks.

Following the premise of Mcknight and Kretzman—who coined the acronym in their 1993 book looking at effective community organizing and mobilization (see Mathie et al., 2017)—the ABCD alternative approach "recognizes [the] capacities of local people and their associations that build powerful communities" Mathie & Cunningham (2003, p. 476). Further, it holds that that communities can drive development process themselves by identifying and mobilizing existing assets (Mathie & Cunningham, 2005). Exploring stories of community-driven direct action, Mathie and Cunningham (2005), highlight the role of change agents who are catalysts in mobilizing their community through their associations and social networks.

ABCD is a strengths-based approach found across disciplines, and approaches community and economic development by first looking at existing assets that can be used for collective action (Mathie et al., 2017). This approach recognizes that people, acting in cooperation, can bring about positive, transformative, change by shifting power from top-down institutions to communities, as well as it provides a set of methods for community mobilization (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). ABCD's premise—also a key principle of CBPR—is that members of communities can organise to identify and mobilize existing assets, and to therefore drive the development process themselves (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003).

ABCD is a transformative approach that encourages the active role of citizens and provides tools (e.g. participatory mapping) to identify and link assets (Mathie & Cunningham, 2005). ABCD “aims to strengthen citizen relations and their capacity for people to claim their rights of access to assets for their livelihoods” (p. 475). For the ABCD approach relationships are assets (i.e. social capital), including the “formal and informal associations, networks, and extended families” (p. 481). As the discussion (chapter 5) shows, KZ research participants emphasize their community's strong social capital, by reiterating the vital role of human relationships, and of having a tight extended family support system, in fostering communal thriving. While centering the human and a focus on strengths, rather than problem areas, are key element of this thesis' theoretical framework—as they are of the ABCD approach—a key distinction remains. ABCD emphasizes on what is already working well with the aim to indirectly foster problem-solving. It is an effective approach that can further existing assets, create linkages, and promote positive changes. The premise of this thesis, however, is that as a visitor to the community I can learn from the community without the objective to initiate an intervention aiming to address an issue.

While some may fairly argue that barely looking at assets without some transformation would be a superficial application of the ABCD approach (see Mathie et al., 2017), given the scope of the thesis and the limitations (see chapter 6), it was important to approach this graduate research as an explorative one aiming to celebrate assets rather than to uncover and strengthen them. This, meant to not presume that the community is unaware and waiting for assistance to understand and utilize its assets. While the study did not aim to increase capacity or to spark change, these could be indirect outcomes emerging over time. Moreover, drawing on a number of theoretical frameworks rather than strictly adhering to a given one, such as the ABCD or sustainable livelihoods approach, allows for greater flexibility and for the inquiry to explore participants' diverse perspectives on what an asset is, and how it is understood.

2.3 Relational Worldviews

While the continent of Africa is home to hundreds of distinct cultures and languages, there are numerous shared values, virtues, and characteristics (Khapoya, 2012). *Communalism* and *collectivism* capture African traditional values (Chilisa, 2012) as Africans define themselves by the group, "I am because we are" (Gouda, 2000, cited in Chilisa, 2012, p. 109). These perspectives and principles are foundational to African socialization and worldviews, which are founded on relational exchange and interactions, and in turn, resist transactional ways of being with one another and our surroundings. Such relational perspectives of ontology, epistemology, and axiology are present in African, and other Indigenous cultures globally, which recognize and promote relational existence amongst people; the living and nonliving (Wilson, 2008, cited in Chilisa, 2012).

A relational worldview reflects a way of living and being in the world that is based on nurturing harmony among people, between not only the human, but other species, and the

ecosystem, as well as the cosmos and the spiritual dimensions of life. Indigenous research builds on a relational understanding and accountability to the world, focusing on an epistemology of place and lived experience, as well as the interconnectedness of the human and nonhuman, and the past, present, and future (Odora-Hoppers, 2002, 2021). Social organizing for the precolonial Akan and Indigenous people of Canada, for example, was based on the inseparability of individual and community, where people are not separate from neither the commons nor the ecosystem (Adu-Febiri, 2008). In addition, for Akan people “community represents a symbiotic rather than dialectical relationship between persons embodied in the lineage and the commons” (p. 15).

Pre-colonial African socialization was based on relational, reciprocal, and appreciative practices and values, while colonial influences have been fostering transactional relationships, shaping the organization and nature of social networks, institutions, and personal relationships (Adu-Febiri, 2008). Vampire states of colonial and post-colonial Africa, for example, characterized by extraction for protecting self-interests while undermining social needs and rights of the population, are upheld by human qualities enabling the given exploitive practices and relationships to form and to spread (Adu-Febiri, 2016). Developing the positive aspects of the six dimensions of the HF model, including “spiritual capital, moral capital, aesthetic capital, human capital, human abilities and human potentials” (Adjibolosoo, 1995, p. 34) and more, is necessary for long-term, equitable, progress.

In contrast, failure to develop human capital, abilities, and potentials in line with collective interests—in other words, the failure to develop positive HF qualities—perpetuates social ills, and antisocial and destructive practices; including war, corruption, and violence that are detrimental for oneself, others, and the ecosystem. In addition to the above human dimensions,

other humane qualities that build strong, resilient, and sustainable communities, include the quadrangle of hope–love, grace, compassion, and forgiveness (Adjibolosoo, 2020)—qualities that foster health in people and their relationship to the world, where individuals and groups of people strive to improve themselves and surroundings—both their social and material worlds—in a symbiotic manner. This focus on the human experience, and the interrelations amongst beings and the natural world, is foundational to Indigenous worldviews, including the African philosophy of Ubuntu.

2.3.1 Ubuntu

The Ubuntu worldview is an ontology that highlights the intertwined human relations “I am, we are”, and “I am human therefore I belong, I participate, I share” rather than Descarte’s “I think therefore I am” principle (Desmond Tutu, 1999, cited in Chilisa, 2012, p. 22). Ubuntu encourages a relation between the *I* and *we*; where if *one hurts, I hurt*, if *one thrives, I thrive*. It holds a group at a higher importance than the individual, but without erasing the uniqueness and un-duplicability of each member. Ubuntu is a dynamic and vibrant philosophy—foundational to an African worldview and belief system—which centers on the idea of being with others and on the ethos of communal living (Nabudere, 2005).

Ubuntu promotes ethical principles of community, belongingness, togetherness, and wellbeing, reflecting an appreciative approach that aims to recover moral, economic, socio-cultural, and political concepts from Indigenous knowledge systems and people’s lived experiences; with the objective to highlight suppressed knowledge or value systems that could inform research processes and findings. To embrace and cultivate the Ubuntu philosophy, requires creating space for inquiries based on relational realities and forms of knowing, and for

contemplating them, to therefore consider undermined values/concepts such as family, spirituality, and humility (Chilisa, 2012).

African-based laws and socialization aim to restore, not to criminalize and incarcerate, and thus the western based prison-complex is foreign to Ubuntu and African worldviews, which teach to not dehumanize a member or group of society (Nabudere, 2005). While Ubuntu is foundational to African-based ethics, Naude (2019) offers a critical assessment of the general claim differentiating African and western moral philosophies, by arguing that personhood and autonomy are inherent in all societies, including Africa. Similarly, sociality or being-through-the-other is also integral to western-based philosophy (p. 29). Naude (2019) argues Ubuntu is universal, same as individualistic tendencies, but also highlights that non-African scholars are less likely to engage with the Ubuntu philosophy (p. 28). There are no geographical boundaries in perceptions, and perspectives, as Ubuntu and individualism can be found everywhere (Naude, 2019). Mayaka and Truell (2021) see Ubuntu as one of many Indigenous approaches, in line with many cultures around the world, and their values, and which could be meaningful no matter the context or one's culture, nationality, or location.

Western moral philosophies and specifically the social contract theory²⁴, in contrast, assumes individualism to be the natural state, while Ubuntu philosophy shows the natural state of humanity to be based on communal principles (Adu-Febiri, 2008). Adu-Febiri (2008) argues the original state of society is community life where HF competency is present, rather than the assumption of social contract theory claiming the uncivilized individual entered society—for, the individual is not separate from the community, but rather a part making the whole. The individual and community are at a constant interplay, and it is important to recognize and respect

²⁴ Social contract theory framework developed by Hobbes *Leviathan* arguing the natural state of human is uncivilized, and competitive, (<https://www.britannica.com>).

the humanity of others and of oneself, while acknowledging the power of entities collaborating and struggling to transform dominant cotemporary views that perpetuate individualistic practices. It is individuals working together who can transform common ways of life by fostering different relations and outlooks.

Adu-Febiri (2008) argues that *HF decay* is the inability to solve problems that go against social justice and social harmony. In addition, it implies deterioration from the 'norm' and exists when individual and a group's self-interests are met at the expense of another (person/group); thus, impacting the whole. A pessimistic view in western conceptualization speaks of the “tragedy of the commons”²⁵, while failing to show how privatization separates individuals from the commons through (Adu-Febiri, 2008). Non-western individualistic conceptualizations, however, view community as the natural state and show the tragedy to be the deviation from communal principles—the tragedy of losing our humanness.

2.3.2 Values and Leadership for Socioeconomic Sustainability

Economic, social, and political institutions function effectively when a network of committed people stand firmly to uphold them (Adjibolosoo, 2020). Seeking the background of the culturally approved and upheld evaluators systems, of the *dos* and *don'ts* in the social structure, could reveal the premises guiding the nature of relationships and institutions of the society (Assimeng, 1981) at a given time and space. Social conditions stemming from cultivating mutually beneficial relational connections with others, involve human factor competency (HFC) —desirable human characteristics—that promotes positive social-environmental practices for the wellbeing of all (Adu-Febiri, 2003).

²⁵ Coined in 1968 by Garrett Hardin.

To develop all dimensions of the HFC, Adu-Febiri (pc, n.d.) explains, we must first become aware of their existence in our communities—to nurture them by celebrating and affirming their existence, and thus to first develop such qualities further within us, and our own relations. This research, by bringing to light KZ strengths, could encourage community members to consciously identify existing assets, and to further nurture and utilize them. This process calls for attention to what we collectively desire to foster, rather than fixating on what we wish to eliminate. While violence is real, and groups of people have, and continue to, be treated differently from one another, and experience diverse forces of oppression and privilege, there is a collective human drive to eliminate social ills, and countless examples of relational, constructive, and transformational relationships among individuals and groups of people.

2.3.3 Popular Education and Human Factor Competency

Paulo Freire laid the groundwork for the Popular Education approach, which uses collective dialogue to facilitate “critical consciousness” and allows citizens to become agents of change (Johnson et al., 2006) and to apply a praxis for social change (Wallerstein et al., 2017). De Souza (2019, p. 5), also emphasizes the role of awareness and self-critique for *emancipatory praxis*, as well as the importance of being aware of how heteronomous imaginaries have political-pedagogical influence to create and sustain oppressive structures and practices. As exemplified by the hegemonic development approaches that seek to produce and sustain development’s instrumental and reduced readings of social heterogeneity (Demiovic, 2013, p. 375).

Communal action and community resilience, with strong HFC reflects African socialization that precedes the contemporary dominant education system and western-based governance across African states. Adu-Febiri (2014) advocates for the HFC education model as a

transformative pedagogy in the context of African resurgence, but while reflecting universal pedagogical principles, echoing those of the popular education model, and of CBPR and decolonial methodologies. Critical inquiry can help one gain a better understanding of their life experiences and enable one to become aware of the relationship between their *personal problems* and *public issues* (Mills, 1959), but also of the present personal and communal strengths promoting good health, sustainability, and resilience. Finding commonalities to increase awareness of the interconnectedness and to embrace, rather than attempt to control and isolate, HFC could foster equitable, mutually beneficial, relationships.

2.4 Reflexivity to Decolonize Research – Shifting Stories and Premises

Central to the methodology of this study are practices of reflexivity, collaboration, building partnerships, and critically rethinking about research, community development, and sustainability. Striving to engage in horizontal partnerships with knowledge transmitted back and forth (Amauchi et al., 2021), and to decolonize the research process, demands conscious self-reflections on positionality²⁶ and biases (Chilisa, 2012), to break down any embedded misconceptions about the community and the population. In addition, reflections on, and an understanding of, my intersectional identity, and how intersectionality influences people's lives, help uncover privileges, oppressions, and discrepancies.

The use of Indigenous research paradigm facilitates data gathering, analysis, interpretation, and reporting in African diasporic communities (Chilisa, 2012), such as Zongos in Ghana. Exploring the lifeworlds of Zongo members with a decolonial approach, requires engaging with how people produce, store, and disseminate knowledge. Indigenous languages can contribute to and inform advancement of new knowledge, and Indigenous knowledge systems

²⁶See Linda Alcoff (1988) on "positionality" and Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) on "intersectionality".

should provide answers on how knowledge is validated, the sources of evidence, the credibility of research findings, and the methods of dissemination. Further, Chilisa (2012) says Indigenous knowledge driven research can enable reclamation of cultural traditional heritage and the dissemination of African practices and worldviews. Asabere-Ameyaw et al. (2014) conversely reminds readers that Indigenous knowledges and practices are not exclusive to the past, when stating,

"[Africa's] Indigeneity is alive and interactive within the world today. It informs everything from our sense of storytelling and knowledge production, to our diet and family structure; our history and trans-generational education, to our political struggle in the current context. Africa's Indigeneity continues to reaffirm what colonialism sought to destroy: our sense of history and spirit and how they continue to survive the present moment. Our pursuit of decolonization is, more than anything else, the struggle over the validity of our Indigenous knowledges and identities and their place in the world today." (p. 184).

Chilisa (2012) argues that by looking at history and exploitation to explain contemporary issues, postcolonial theory can often lead to *pathologizing*. A decolonial approach, however, should avoid damage-focused research and to instead pay attention to explore strengths and the values and knowledge of local communities (Tuck, 2009, cited in Chilisa, 2012, p. 50). A focus on *what is lacking*, instead of on *what is*, stems from western worldviews, and as mentioned earlier, deficit narratives disregard discussions on positive transformations and experiences within and across African states, or African contributions at a global level (Chilisa, 2012). Postcolonial Indigenous theory and critical race theory, as paradigms informed by a relational ontology of Ubuntu—an epistemology that views knowledge as relational and not owned by

individuals, and an axiology based on relational accountability—offer tools to decolonize research.

Conducting multilingual and multifocal research, guided by local experiences and Indigenous theories and perspectives, therefore, become common strategies of Indigenizing research. Moreover, partnerships between the researcher and 'researched' is important in reconstructing researcher-participant dynamics and to allow the exchange of knowledge and perspectives, where Indigenous people are the knowers (Chilisha, 2014, p. 148). Moore (in Asabere-Ameyaw et al., 2014) brings to readers' attention the paradox of encouraging people to “hel[p] Africa” (p. 30), however, she explains, it would fuel condemnation to encourage Afrocentric values to empower white children. This is what the thesis strives to bring to its head, by shifting away from problematization towards cultivating solutions. Applying the theoretical and epistemological underpinnings discussed in this chapter, the aim is to follow principles and theories fostering the mobilization of knowledge on community assets. In the context of this thesis, it means to first highlight and celebrate the multidimensional, interconnected, strengths that are present in the KZ community, and shared through participants' insights.

Chapter 3: Methodological Framework

A critical engagement in CBPR, relevant to community development, encourages ethical, collaborative, and inclusive practices. This means seeing all knowledge to be contextual, affected by sociopolitical and historical conditions, which allows one to engage with normative questions and to critique commonly accepted truths and ideas (Brenner, 2009). There are countless examples of how applying a participatory approach leads to more inclusive studies, though, it does not mean participatory research is intrinsically good. De Souza (2019) explains that a critical approach must focus on true dialogue and Springett (2013) shows that this requires horizontal discussions on how a common, sustainable, future, and good life is envisioned. The author also reinforces the paramount importance for all participants to actively hear each other while conversing and producing new, innovative, ideas and setting mutually beneficial goals.

To provide context and show my personal perspectives and subjectivities influencing what I focus my research on, the CBPR methodology I adhere to, and why I conduct a research with the KZ community, I start by sharing reflexive accounts. Looking at what influences, and shapes my approach, by engaging in critical reflexivity, throughout, helped me develop a research plan that aligns with the community's interests and overall context, as well as with the axiological stance echoed throughout this thesis. I begin this chapter by presenting the case study to restate the purpose of the research, and to revisit key principles guiding the study's procedure. Here, I highlight key concepts and points of discussion, from the literature review, specific to Zongo communities. Developing a better understanding of the historiography—including the social, political, cultural, and economic dimensions—was part of the methodology I followed to better inform myself about the community, to which I am a visitor, and a friend/ally to.

Following the summary of what I learned about Zongo communities through the literature, I then outline the three key stages of the study: i) The preliminary research and community visit, when I contacted and connected with community leaders to express my interest to conduct a CBPR with their Zongo community—a process involving multiple dialogues, drafting plans, consulting local stakeholders on ethical considerations and on what study (topic and type of empirical research) may potentially benefit the community. ii) The data collection phase of the research, when I re-visited the community to work towards recruiting participants and conducting the in-depth conversations and photo-narratives. Once more, first, reviewing ethical considerations and engaging in community consultations—as prerequisites to commencing the research—before inviting prospective participants to learn about the proposed study. iii) The dissemination stage, meant to continue past the completion of this thesis, includes the thesis itself, which is a way to distribute information and to share insights, experiences, reflections, and approaches from the study. Mainly speaking to academic audience, it becomes paramount for the thesis content to be communicated with the participants/co-researchers and the wider public.

3.1 Developing a Sense of Place in Koforidua, Ghana

Establishing connections in the community is a prerequisite for a CBPR study. For this thesis, initial community connections date back to 2012, when I participated in a voluntour²⁷ placement at the Koforidua Regional Hospital. This experience motivated me to re-visit the city, further my studies, and pursue this research. Along with other accumulated lived experiences, it fuelled my interest to better understand the spatial contrast in public health provisions within the city of Koforidua, within Ghana, and across the world. Increasingly seeing the realities—of how one's life-course development and health vary, based on their passport and location of birth, in

²⁷Derives from voluntourism, denoting: "Tourism in which travellers spend time doing voluntary work on development projects, usually for a charity." *Oxford English Dictionary*.

addition to how socioeconomic and political aspects influence people's access to quality health care—invoked questions about my positionality and responsibilities. Deep questions, fueling the overarching drive of the curiosity²⁸ to learn, and make sense of phenomena of our interconnected world, and to engage in ongoing collective efforts making it a better place for all.

Eye-opening experiences triggered a more conscious awareness of *space, territoriality*, and *power*, as well as of mobility rights infringements—reflecting the banal reality (taken for granted and seen as natural situations) of power dynamics and violations, by uncritically accepting what *is*, rather than 'fighting' towards *what ought to be*. This first experience in Ghana was the catalyst to build connections with KZ residents for over a decade now, and influenced my academic interests, but it also helped create in my imagination an incomplete and simplified image of the community.

My first brief lived experience in the country centered the setting of a hospital's emergency department, where public health issues, cases of consequences of preventable socio-environmental hazards, and the tragic realities of social determinants of health, became clear to me. In combination to pre-exposed Eurocentric worldviews (embedded misconceptions that are to be constantly, and consciously, debunked) pushed me closer to following a colonial and *white saviour*, deficit-based, approach I intended to challenge. These experiences influenced how I see the community and what I perceived as priorities to address²⁹ in bringing about improved living conditions and better public health.

²⁸ Freire in a 1996 video refers to himself as "a curious being" where he highlights the importance of critical thinking and shares about his work on transforming the teacher-student relationship to enhance learning [<https://freire.org/paulo-freire>].

²⁹ The focus of my graduate research, initially, was on how to improve access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and waste management (WM) resources, services, and facilities. Then, it shifted, from a focus on problem-solving to an explorative undertaking aiming to learn from the community what residents view as important in sustaining a good life.

This visit, as mentioned, occurred through a rather problematic, in retrospect, NGO-volunteer-placement program. In reflection, such volunteer/travelling opportunities may perpetuate the savior mentality for one group, internalized oppression and dependence for another, and profit for the organization/business arranging these trips. If anything, such programs not only perpetuate the underdevelopment of communities but also put people's wellbeing and lives at risk; since often, without any training or security screening, one is allowed to work, for example, with children in orphanages³⁰, and with patients in serious health conditions, among other vulnerable populations.

Exploring my first connections and lived experiences in the city of Koforidua has a three-fold purpose. First, these reflections and realizations of earlier experiences motivated me to learn about ethically and effectively engaging in community development work and stirred my commitment to approaches and practices of decolonizing and Indigenizing research paradigms. They also echo the *place-making* process, where through memories, meanings, emotions, and perspectives, I developed a *sense of place*. Lastly, this form of self-locating has been helping me build trust with community partners, as such reflections were often points of discussion on the purpose of my visit and research focus. While there is merit to further, critically, examine the unbalanced power dynamics—the impact and role of such volunteer programs—it is beyond this study's scope; nonetheless, briefly mentioning the above provides context as to *when*, and *how*, I was first introduced, in practice, to contemporary global socioeconomic realities, but also to the rich history and culture of Zongos. This reflexivity provides background information on what motivated, and permitted, me to meet local leaders and build relationships over years.

³⁰ There are countless examples of cases where children at risk of exploitation have been abused through the institutions and people who are meant to protect and support them (e.g. *The Gap Year Paedophile*, 2017). van Doore, Martin, and McKeon (2016) provide an overview of international volunteering, and the associated risk of child sexual exploitation, particularly in residential care centers.

The pre-graduate community connections also indicate my privilege to travel with minimal, if any, barriers regarding my identity, citizenship, visa status, and financial standing. In contrast, community partners and research participants I am working with, would have to go over hurdles just to increase the likelihood of receiving a visa permitting them to travel outside the country, let alone the continent. A fair question I am often asked, is how to travel abroad the way I am visiting and being welcomed in Ghana. Traveling to a new destination, experiencing a different culture and landscape, than I am familiar with, making new connections and expanding my world's horizon is a privilege but also a human right of free movement (as stated under article 13 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights). In addition to travelling abroad, the chance to volunteer and gain practical experience, in my then field of interest, would have helped me in pursuing a career in health-care services. There are extensive issues to discuss and analyze regarding aid dependence, unequal power dynamics, and ineffective development related programs and partnerships in bringing about equitable socio-economic transformations. Although not the focus of this research, better understanding the above mentioned, helped my journey of learning about decolonizing community research and the notion of community development.

In the process of self-reflections, I was also questioning *what*, and *how*, has influenced my sociopolitical perspectives, my worldview, which consequently impact the methodological framework I chose to follow. Hence, self-locating consisted of reflections focusing on the drivers to pursue this graduate study, in addition to acknowledging privileges that permit me to undertake this cross-cultural research. While not trying to dominate, nor extract, I am still taking on the roles of the facilitator (gaining professional experience) and of the student with the opportunity to acquire an official recognition for my work with this community. Although, from

the start, I was approaching the research from a strengths-based perspective to explore local solutions (i.e. to identify and exemplify strengths relevant to WASH and WM), my overall approach remained *deficit-driven* that aimed to *problem-solve* and was guided by my personal views and prior experiences.

In the case of this study, I was holding the assumption that water-borne hazards and poor sanitation is the most pressing issue hindering residents' quality of life and should therefore be a priority to address. This may not completely be an assumption, as of the evidence and countless examples that can support poverty-related problem statements. At the same time there are, equivalently, examples of how the community is aware, and has been working and struggling to address such communal issues, as well as of how it thrives despite challenges. Therefore, the study's objective shifted, and more emphasis was put on adhering to a decolonial approach where I am not interfering, nor initiating an intervention that aims to solve, fix and improve, or to address an issue. Instead, the research focus became one where participants co-explore and co-learn to highlight community strengths.

3.2 Case Study: Zongos in Ghana

My research is situated in KZ and aims to explore what participants perceive as the strengths helping them lead healthy lives, while discussing the subjective notion of sustainable livelihoods and of thriving communities. Further, by looking at participants' *sense of place* and how residents meet their needs of subsistent, the goal is to emphasize local perspectives on community priorities and assets enhancing collective wellbeing. Looking at strengths (inclusive of material and relational aspects) in a diverse, yet connected, community, means participants' perceptions and interests could be multifaceted.

Learning more about the people I am working with, their backgrounds, cultures, and socialization, helps put responses and views into context; that is, to better understand people's references, as well as to allow me to anticipate what Zongo residents deem important in their lives, and thus to better prepare for this study. Examining present conditions in a community requires an understanding of past sociopolitical and economic processes and transformations, which this thesis discusses, in the context of Zongos in the region, and particularly in Ghana. Furthermore, a better understating of the diversity within the community will help to ensure people from all backgrounds are welcome to take part, and to prepare for anticipated translation/interpretation support needs.

To explore community strengths and perspectives on fostering sustainable livelihoods, I used in-depth conversations and photo-narratives. Below, I highlight background information, from the literature review, that helps provide a better understanding of the context of Zongo communities and population in Ghana. I first discuss topics such as *diversity*, *identity* and *belonging*, which are also relevant in chapter 5 where I share research participants' perspectives and *sense of place* in their KZ community. Moreover, I look at the socio-spatial organization of Zongo communities, and later, with research findings, develop a discussion on how grassroots, community associations, and interpersonal relationships help people thrive, making KZ a vibrant community.

On the one hand, I explore the literature on inadequate social provisions in Zongos, as well as realities of prejudice, and discrimination. But on the other, I highlight real examples of community solidarity, wellbeing, and social cohesion. While engaging with the literature, ongoing community consultations played a key role in constructively influencing the research focus and processes. In addition, practices of reflexivity, and ethical considerations are

constantly at play, influencing the research steps and the exchanges amongst all involved in carrying out this study.

The first method employed to engage participants was in-depth conversations between me (the research facilitator), and the community knowledge keepers. The second research method involved group activities, discussions, and reflections with young adults, using photo-narratives. The information gathered, key themes that arose, and points highlighted by participants were shared with the wider public through written, visual, and oral formats on, or through, various online platforms (e.g. YouTube, WhatsApp). In collaboration with participants (co-researchers) of the photo-narratives, we co-produced a video to share the experience with, and findings from, the CBPR and photo-narrative activities that took place. The video, and in some cases voice messages or texts (clips or written content from the video), were specifically sent to community leaders, such as the assembly members, the health association chairman, and chiefs and elders of the community.

3.2.1 Diversity, Identity, and Belonging – Spaces of Diaspora

Ghana formed as a nation-state in 1957, after gaining independence from the British colony, under the ruled name ‘gold coast’ (See <https://www.britannica.com/>), and today is home to hundreds of Zongo settlements. During Nkrumah's³¹ leadership, people from Zongo communities could receive Ghanaian citizenship but after his overthrow, the Aliens Compliance Order of 1969 and politics of nationalization re-classified them as ‘aliens’. For thousands of residents it meant losing their citizenship claims, thus forcing them to leave Ghana and seek refuge in neighboring countries. At the same time, since the early 1950s, politicians have increasingly been paying attention to Zongos as a source of voters (Brady & Hooper, 2019).

³¹ Ghana's first president after independence from the British in 1957 (<https://www.britannica.com/>)

Similarly, Casentini (2018) argues "[Zongos are] an integral part of the contemporary Ghanaian political landscape and have been since independence" (cited in Mensah & Teye, 2021, p. 85).

KZ is comprised of multiple ethnic groups³², who speak numerous diverse languages. Zongos can be characterized as diasporic spaces, where inclusion and exclusion are constantly at play, as members "[carve] out new forms of identity, community and belonging" (Creese, 2011, p. 10). From an African perspective, ethnic groups are fluid social categories (Pellow, 2002), and while Zongo communities are diverse and increasingly heterogeneous, Islam, the Hausa language, and strong kinship bonds remain key characteristics of the Zongo identity (Brady & Hooper, 2019). In post-colonial times, Ghana's independence brought to light the question of who belongs to the newly established nation-state and who is a foreigner, and therefore, whether people of the Zongo 'belong' to (i.e. are considered members of) the emerging state of Christian majority, or not.

Not only were most people of Zongo not following the country's predominant religion, but especially at the time of independence, they (or their parents) were also born outside of the newly established state borders—two characteristics for which Zongo people (while considered legal residents), were initially excluded from receiving citizenship (Pontzen, 2021). The struggle to form the state, a governing body that is inclusive of its members, simultaneously creates an organization of exclusion. A nation-state gives birth to an identity that is dialectic, and which constructs through contrast and differentiation between the one 'fitting' the national identity versus the 'other' (Creese, 2011). Through Hegelian negation (providing meaning through what is not) members of the majority use minorities as a reference point to define the host identity of "the positive, law-abiding, hardworking and superior" citizen, versus the immigrant, the *other*;

³² In African literature, and colloquially in KZ, referring to one's lineage in terms of their "tribe" or "ethnic group" is a statement of pride, and often (as in this thesis), these are used interchangeably with the term "Indigenous Nations".

who are “crime-prone, lazy and inferior people” (Mensah & Teye, 2021, p.72)–where the Zongo migrant, or ‘stranger’, reflects the non-mainstream Ghanaian identity, which in contrast has helped reinforce the dominant national 'Ghanaian' image that increasingly aims to follow western standards.

In the Ghanaian context, indicators such as religion, language, and ethnicity are the most significant ones in terms of social groups' identities. Although within a Zongo community, there is cohesion, there is also wide diversity of intersectional identities. In non-Zongo spaces, however, this diversity is often lost by the construction of a *single* Zongo identity. Depending on one’s point of view, it could be based on religion, language, ethnic background, social standing, and it could help construct a positive image or a negative connotation. Similarly, Zongo residents may vary in the degree of embracing non-Zongo practices, especially when spatial segregation encourages socialization mainly with people in one’s neighbourhood. In addition, people’s perceptions, and sense of belonging and identity, could vary within, and between, Zongos.

For Zongo communities, where most adhere to the Islamic religion (in contrast to Islam's minority status at the national level), religion can be a distinct and unifying factor. Pontzen (2021) argues that the Islamic religion is informed by, and in turn informs, the lifeworlds of residents. At the same time, religious practices could vary among Zongo residents, as there are increasingly more Christians living in Zongos. Moreover, there are major differences within the Muslim population in terms of their belief system, practices, and points of reference. Pontzen (2021) explores the diversity of Islam within Zongos, where although inhabitants share common foundations, there is no single understanding of Islam. In fact, what some refer to as African Islam, he explains, is a colonial label that is ignorant to the heterogenous nature of religious practices and beliefs. The complex diversity of Islamic “imagination, practices and conceptions”

(Pontzen, 2021), is a result of the long history of various groups migrating to sub-Saharan Africa in various time periods, reinforcing different sects of Islam.

The people of the Zongo are constantly involved in ongoing debates on how to practice, conceive, and imagine their religion (Pontzen, 2021). The construction of mosques, the presence of Islamic/Arabic schools (i.e. makarantas), and local associations become spaces of inclusion and belonging. Zongos' spatial concentration can function as a place of protection from ethnic discrimination and allows residents to maintain their cultural values and practices, and to strengthen their social networks and intra-group social capital (Mensah & Teye, 2021). The communal lifestyle and welcoming nature of Zongos, among other positive attributes of Zongo socialization, while influenced by neoliberal global forces and trends, remain strong attributes that foster cohesion and sense of belonging.

3.2.2 Socio-spatial Organization of Zongos

Fundamental social groups for African communities are based on kinship (a relationship that binds one through birth or marriage), age, skills, craftsmanship and residency or locality (Chilisa, 2012). At the centre of African social organization systems, historically to now, is the family which is an important socialization agent. Group interests supersede those of individual, and when one does something wrong, for instance, it reflects bad on the family who are also considered accountable. In African communities, family, beyond its nuclear members, highly contribute to family affairs, including the upbringing of youngsters, and often function as a welfare system (Chilisa, 2012). Strong relations and support systems enable people to travel with liable accommodation, often in hopes to access new opportunities. Moreover, older siblings play a significant role in caring for younger ones, as well as grandparents who engage in looking after and raising their grandchildren. In addition, the community at large also acts as socializing agent,

for example, by supporting the raising of children, and contributing to mediate marital, and other forms of domestic conflict (Creese, 2011).

Zongo communities are also characterized by these strong social ties, where the family plays an important role and where respect for elders is well established in people's socialization. Elders are vital and can offer answers, as well as share their wisdom on Indigenous ethical frameworks, methods, and practices (Creese, 2011). A child's parents are the primary educators, but the community members also take responsibility and an active role in supporting a child's development (Mayaka & Truell, 2021) and instilling in them desired values and virtues.

3.2.2.1 Social Provision, Discrimination, and Prejudice. Zongos in Ghana could be understood as physically marginalized sites that receive minimal attention from the government and hold less decision-making power in state matters. These communities tend to be populated mainly by the urban poor, ethnic minorities, immigrants, transient workers, and itinerant traders, and thus share characteristics with low-income enclaves in most Western cities (Mensah & Teye, 2021). The spatial assimilation model (Park et al., 1925, & Burgess et al., 1925, cited in Mensah & Teye, 2021, p. 73) applies to Zongo communities, where immigrants find themselves to access cheaper accommodation and a welcoming environment to the 'stranger' aspect of their identities.

In Ghana, Zongos are commonly referred to as 'informal settlements' (Brady & Hooper, 2019) and members of the community tend to engage in work that is characterized as 'informal' and precarious. Residents may face barriers within the country in accessing housing and employment opportunities outside of the Zongo sphere. In addition, people face obstacles when their work is not recognized, and as a result is reduced to 'informal'. Zongo communities experience high rates of poverty-related issues, such as high child-mortality-rates, and high illiteracy rates, as well as, most residents lack adequate access to toilet facilities and safe water

sources (see Owusu 2010; Casentini, 2018); all of which are common indicators, of socioenvironmental (in-)justice, and are reflected in the United Nations (UN) 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Agenda.

Mensah and Teye (2021) discuss the stereotypes of Zongos depicting them as places of social deviation and criminal activities, and/or associating them with overcrowding, urban, social, and environmental degradation. As with most stereotypes there is some truth to the presence of degradation, for example, as these communities tend to be underserved and neglected by the state (e.g. lacking social provisions, health and educational facilities' infrastructure breaking down—lack of maintenance, equipment, and supplies). What is clear, is how the *majority* uses such negative characteristics to differentiate themselves from *minorities*, and how these stories create barriers for Zongonians to thrive as they face spaces of exclusion and social problems stemming from structural conditions of inequity.

The preliminary phase (further discusses below), for CBPR is a lengthy process that involves building partnerships with community members in addition to reviewing the literature to develop one's theoretical and methodological framework. Therefore, while I was reviewing the literature to gain a better understanding of the available research relevant to Zongo communities, and consequently learning about the dynamic cultural, socioeconomic, and political landscapes of Zongos in Ghana, I was also contacting municipal and regional representatives to express my research interests and to converse on how a CBPR could benefit the community and the ongoing civil society activities and objectives.

3.2.3 Zongo's Forging of Trust and Ethics - Building Reciprocal Relationships

Following a critical approach involves engaging in dialogues, embracing empathy, and striving for greater inclusion and equity. Tremblay and Harris (2018), for instance, in their

community-based study involving video production, discuss and show the importance to build trustworthy, mutually beneficial relationships. Similarly, Tremblay and Gutberlet (2010) state "trust, reciprocity, and mutual interest become powerful agents of collective identity and can facilitate empowering outcomes for those involved" (p. 296).

CBPR, where there is collaboration amongst parties, involves multiple actors from any sector or organization. A collaborative project presumes some form of prior connection(s) amongst members of participating groups. Cultivating established connections helps forge long-term relationships where, through dialogue, there is sharing of ideas and perspectives, to evaluate the relevance and feasibility of proposed ideas and projects, while negotiating and working towards building equitable, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial relationships and research plans. Over the years, visiting the community and collaborating on small community projects, striving to actively stay connected via phone-calls, video-calls, and social media messaging, has allowed me and community members, to better get to know each other and to cultivate trust. Having open and honest conversations, for instance expressing my limited research experience, as well as constraints regarding the proposed project (e.g. funding, time spent in the community etc.), was central in how I related and conversed with others to engage in community work.

CBPR practitioners must pay attention to their own positionality, motivations, and drivers to engage in the research, by reflecting on those incentives and the influence of lived experiences on their views and decisions. Acknowledging gaps in one's understanding, and the disconnect from other people's lived experiences, and most importantly, communicating these reflexive accounts, with research participants, is a reminder to be transparent and true to our humanity, rather than *performing* the constructed professional and expert role on a given matter and topic of inquiry. *Listening to what the community has to say*, lies at the core of Indigenizing research,

therefore the central focus during community consultations and the preliminary research stage was to learn, from those living in the community, what they perceive as priorities; to understand what they consider assets to protect, enhance, celebrate, and share with the world.

From my first time in Ghana, I became familiar with Zongo communities, and since, I have been building relationships with community leaders and learning about local affairs and the community's rich history. Prior trips and the preliminary research community visit, discussed next, allowed me to build a social network, enhance my cultural awareness competencies, and learn about—specific to the KZ community—cultural norms, practices, and values. Further, local contacts helped me learn, and follow, the proper consultation protocol with local governing bodies, as well as supported me to reach out to, and meet with, key community informants.

A decolonial, community-based, study aims to highlight and amplify the voices and perspectives of community partners; making this an ongoing, long-term, collaborative process, that requires open communication, respect for different worldviews, and willingness to learn from, and support one another, to establish equitable partnerships. Borba et al. (2024) present their collective synthesis of research, showing how through drama, participants critically and creatively apply their own knowledge. Similarly, this study aims to stimulate participation, where community members share and apply their own knowledge. Here, I break down the research into two key stages:

1. preliminary research and community visit in September 2019, and
2. empirical data collection phase in the summer of 2022

3.3 Community Visit and Preliminary Research

I began my graduate studies a few years after my latest visit and engagement in other community projects and it was therefore necessary to first revisit KZ and to introduce, in person,

my proposal to conduct research. Friends and acquaintances, including opinion leaders and former assembly members, introduced me to the (then) current serving elected members and assisted me to reconnect with other local stakeholders. Interrelations among various partners is central in CBPR, and forging strong respectful partnerships requires time to build trust, and to work towards a communal understanding and action-plan. Key objectives of the preliminary research community visit were, therefore, to reconnect with my local contacts, to expand my network, and to meet with community leaders³³, with the aim to propose facilitating a CBPR project with KZ.

The pre-data-collection stage of this study mainly involved literature review and building relations with community partners, who I consulted to brainstorm and discuss how a study could align and support the community's ongoing civil engagement and activism. Before designing the study, including the ethics application for the UVic Human Research Ethics Board (HREB), it was paramount that I connect with community members and speak with those living in, and making, Zongo. Hence, I first had to introduce to the community the idea to carryout a study engaging 40-50 community members. Even though completing my university's online ethics application was a helpful process, where I revisited previously learned concepts and responsibilities in conducting research, a CBPR is about going beyond an overarching institutional framework, to pay greater attention to the relational ethics³⁴ being cultivated with others through respectful and righteous conduct.

³³ In the KZ, context, a community leader could refer to assembly members, ethnic-based chiefs, opinion leaders, and any other respected community members, such as religious leaders, elders, and teachers.

³⁴ Relational Ethics: Philosophical concept that underpins egalitarian relationship between individuals; based on care for and support of one another. A concept often discussed in reference to the educational philosophy by Nel Noddings (1929) and to Emmanuel Levinas' (1906-1995) philosophy.

Cahill (2007) distinguishes the responsibilities between participatory research and Institutional Review Boards (IRBs), where the former focuses on praxis of care, relationships, and responsibilities, and the latter, on meeting firm (non-negotiable) ethical standards. IRBs' framework derives from a medical model, paying particular attention to whether the research poses a risk of harm to individual(s) and on obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, and most importantly, on protecting the academic institution from legal and financial liabilities. In contrast, for critical, relational, participatory research, ethics is a praxis understood as a collective, flexible, and fluid process involving dialogue, and where marginalized and excluded voices are to be, actively, heard. Facilitating research activities that adhere to cultural, and context appropriate ethical research procedures, is a responsibility that requires going beyond institutional ethics frameworks and practices, to learn about and follow the community's norms, principles, and protocols.

Moreover, ethical considerations from an African worldview of '*We over I*' (p. 109) differ from western-based institutional ethical guidelines, and thus ethics need co-exploration, and openness to co-develop codes of conduct according to context. Raghuram (2016) highlights the domination of global-north conceptualization of care ethics and practices, to argue that recognizing the multiplicity in health care and care ethics is not enough. Rather, he encourages the theorization of the array of historical and cultural variations of care, and therefore, how health care ethics are relational and dynamic; thus, showing their non-fixed, negotiated, nature.

The main purpose of the 'official' ethics application, as argued, is to safeguard individual participants from harm and institutions from liability. Whereas, relational ethics focus on standards of collective care transcending individuals, to encompass looking out for the best interest for the individual who is simultaneously embedded in the collective. In addition,

perspectives on ethical matters can vary among people and be context specific, for example, how in this study participants are identified (with their permission), and their contributions are acknowledged rather than establishing anonymity (chapter 4).

3.3.1 Ethical Considerations – Who Decides When a Study Proposal Meets Codes of Conduct?

Open communication and trustworthiness can strengthen partnerships and enable collaborations driven by reciprocity and equity. Ethical considerations are at play not just during research activities but in all interactions and exchanges with communities, which cannot be outlined and standardized, yet are founded on moral principles transcending cultures and communities, such as *compassion, respect, integrity, honesty, justice, accountability, peace, and love*. Kirkness and Barnhardt (2001, as cited in Stanton, 2014) promote following the 'four Rs' of *respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility* in the planning and implementation of research activities; with Stanton (2014) emphasizing the need for meaningful and genuine collaboration, and for the researcher to be flexible to re-consider what they may be interested to focus their research on. Not only during the research design phase, but also in the analysis, the idea of making the research 'relevant' is important to consider, as for example the themes I (as an outsider) identify from a transcript may not be of any significance and relevance to participants and their community (Santon, 2014). Dialogue and negotiation are thus integral to CBPR—what Thomas et al. (2016) say, in terms of being accountable to the relationships (i.e. *relational accountability*) forming between researcher(s) and communities, during the negotiation process, where transparency and openness are central too.

Most community representatives I approached with the idea of conducting research asked whether I was suggesting distributing questionnaires and how/who would need to complete them. The participatory approach seemed new to the majority of those I spoke with. Key topics

highlighted in conversations included going over the nature of the study I was proposing by explaining my commitment to conduct a decolonial, non-extractive, participatory study and providing examples of what an unethical and extractive study would be.

I talked about the overarching goal being to identify social innovations relevant to community health and development, with the aim to focus on what is working well and to build onto it. For example, in terms of adequate WASH, looking at how the community is working to bring positive relevant transformations and taking an asset-based research approach to map strengths in the community and how to enhance them. It was also important to not create false hopes/expectations about the outcome of the study. My presence in the community alone, based on peoples' experiences and the contemporary context, often creates expectations that I am there as a 'philanthropist' to donate for a project. In multiple occasions I would talk about how the proposed study is different from trying to finance essential upgrades to public facilities and instead, is to learn from participants what is working well and how we may advocate, and share, with policy makers what those living in the community deem important and a priority to continue enhancing.

Visiting the community entailed contacting members of the municipal assembly, such as having informative discussions with the Municipal Chief Executive and an officer of the department of Environmental Health and Sanitation. Meeting with the municipal education director, however, was a dissimilar experience. I approached the regional Ministry of Education to explore the possibility of conducting a study on WASH and WM with participants from the Zongo public primary and secondary schools. I was, however, perceived as a threat aiming to expose problem areas and how undeserved and overlooked public facilities are in KZ. I then paid greater attention to highlight in multiple interactions that I am not looking at problem areas, but

to instead focus on *what is there* that is needed and beneficial, and how to continue working towards *what it is ought to be*.

I was interested to learn how residents of KZ are engaging in community development efforts, and therefore discussed with local leaders, who informed and introduced me to four grassroots associations (one focusing on communal labor, and the other ethnic-based and/or employment/business oriented). Collaborating with a community and engaging in equitable constructive interpersonal relations requires time to build trust, and to actively listen to gain local knowledge and insights that are communicated directly from local people's point of view. A vital component of the planning and development of the research design was, thus, reflecting on *what*, and *how*, I decided to do 'research', and therefore questioning my perceptions and conclusions on what would be a feasible, beneficial, and noteworthy study; first, and foremost, for KZ.

3.3.2 Community Consultations

The preliminary study visit provided me the opportunity to better understand ongoing civil society activism and mobilization by exploring local governance and grassroots initiatives. This included grassroots groups that organized community clean-up exercises, associations supporting young people to start and/or maintain sources of livelihood, as well as to help each other in various other personal, family, and employment matters. The KZ Zonal Council members, composed both of elected and appointed (or designated by customs) community leaders, are highly respected by the community and tend to be well informed about the interests and needs of the local population. In addition, the Zonal Council provides community visitors as me, with ethical guidance on how to engage with community members and to learn cultural codes of conduct that may differ from what I am familiar with.

Multiple discussions with local leaders focused on identifying where, and how, CBPR activities could support local efforts, needs, and goals. Community consultations involve the sharing of ideas and goals, and negotiation to build commonly held understanding and objectives. I would, for instance, converse on how I understand and refer to key topics and notions such as *wellbeing*, *sustainability*, *livelihoods*, and *thriving*, which characterize the study. These conversations allowed us to exchange ideas and perspectives, and to try to understand each other's views, how they may align and/or contradict each other. While sharing my ideas and the purpose of my presence in the community, I would invite locals to share their thoughts on them—I would, however, also encourage conversations on other topics, relevant to community health, which participants wished to talk about. Topics I paid attention to, such as WASH and WM, quickly led to discussions on livelihoods, education, and employment that participants showed greater interest to discuss.

Consultations may at instances shed light to different perspectives and priorities among participants and could as a result fail to result in a productive outcome (Wilson et al., 2010). Because research questions and priorities can change over the course of the project, flexibility and adaptability are key requirements in CBPR and decolonial studies, as the research facilitator needs to adjust the study according to the community's needs, ideas, and priorities. Moreover, Tremblay and Gutberlet (2010) discuss how conflict could at times be an important aspect of the empowerment process, which tends to be “political and by nature non-linear, often controversial, and subjective” (p. 285). Consultation meetings between the researchers and the community could unveil challenging power struggles, where there could be competing views, conflicting interests, or various priorities in a community.

3.3.3 Reflexivity and Positionality – my journey to the research questions through CBPR

As CBPR is often open to changes in the study process, and since this study did not involve a community invitation for a specific scope of inquiry, I was open to, if not obliged (pragmatically and ethically) to revise the focus and scope, according to the context, interests of the community, and the capacity (both mine, and other participants'). Being open to revise the approach, while continuously engaging with ethical and moral considerations requires time to build trust, negotiate, compromise, and enter dialogue to achieve mutual understanding and co-shape the purpose and process of a given study. Conversations may involve debates, without the aim to 'defeat the other', but to instead find common ground between parties. Revisions need to focus on making the research project relevant, in line with community values and visions, as well as accessible to community members—therefore, often requiring the researcher to rethink and reconsider their perspectives and the approaches they are adapting.

While developing the research question and refining the study's scope, I was reflecting on my motives, prior experiences, and interests, as well as on the community's feedback and all I learned during the preliminary community visit. Moreover, the following question inspired me to rethink and re-evaluate my inquiry: “What factors have enabled Zongo communities to develop and survive over thousands of years?” (Adu-Febiri, pc, 2022). The perspective, this rhetorical question was alluding to, encouraged me to reflect on and review my initial research proposal. In addition, while the preliminary research introduced me to grassroots initiatives, and to policies and approaches relating to WASH and WM, at the same time, it highlighted numerous other concerns, priorities, and interests, which in many cases local stakeholders regard more crucial compared to the research topics that interested me.

Although the intention was to follow a decolonial approach, I was perpetuating colonial practices where the inquiry was mainly driven by my perspective—in addition, reinforcing the following limited view and partial understanding: that these communities are poverty-stricken and that with external support conditions could improve. In short, this encouraged me to alter the study's topic and to explore community strengths that are enhancing good health, sustainable livelihoods, and quality of life. That is, looking at people's experiences and narratives to better understand what factors foster *good life* and enable people to *thrive* in their community.

3.3.4 From problem-solving to identifying strengths

Holmes et al. (2015) urge us to imagine and enact scholarship and activism that resist and do not perpetuate colonial practices of problematizing matters. The notion of taking an optimistic approach to the questions and the curiosity driving this inquiry, encouraged an antithetical perspective, where instead of focusing on what hinders good, healthy life, the emphasis is altered to instead explore what *thriving* and *quality of life* entail and require. Collaboration to address issues, between communities and universities, is vital and often effective (as it can bring about solutions, policy changes, and foster a sense of empowerment).

Initially, the plan was for the research activities and data collection to follow the preliminary work within a 12-month-period, but given the COVID-19 pandemic travel restrictions, the aim to return by the fall of 2020 had to be postponed. In the meantime, I continued communicating and keeping in touch with the community, reflecting, reading, planning, and consulting my academic supervisory committee and KZ community leaders. Through reflections, trial and error, and multiple consultations, I revised the scope of this study, which resulted to designing the data collection stage outlined in the following section.

3.3.5 Developing the research Plan: Proposing an Explorative Study

The approach in developing the research questions guiding the inquiry, allowed for a bottom-up process, where the goal was to facilitate a co-exploration of concepts such as sustainability, livelihoods, health, among other, without setting specific parameters to guide the study. The curiosities driving this inquiry—to learn from local perspectives, and to explore the simultaneous, relational, multiple lifeworlds within the Zongo community—meant a key objective of the research was to engage with local knowledge and insights, while practicing reflexivity, to highlight community strengths.

The research aims to explore the views of KZ youth and elder residents on what helps people thrive in their community, which includes to better understand people's lived experiences, build on their strengths, and identify innovations that are enhancing their opportunities to stay in Zongo—making the study's central, overarching research question: “What is important for residents in their KZ community that helps people thrive? (with two sub-questions listed at the end of chapter 1).

The portrayal of Zongo communities in academic and gray literature, as already discussed, has generally focused on community issues, which creates a single, deficit-based, and incomplete story of the dynamic lifeworlds and multiple worldviews within KZ. Local voices could offer diverse views, not limited to the research facilitator's positionality and outsiders' perspectives, on local community matters and assets. Collaborating with research participants to explore community strengths would provide the opportunity for residents, with various perspectives and roles in their community, to share their experiences and celebrate positive characteristics of Zongo that help people and their community thrive.

3.3.6 Exploring Zongo Lifeworlds Through the Indigenous Paradigm

The use of Indigenous research paradigm could facilitate data gathering, analysis, interpretation, and reporting in African diasporic communities such as Zongos in Ghana. Conducting multilingual and multifocal research, guided by local experiences and Indigenous theories and perspectives, therefore, become common strategies of Indigenizing research. As such, an important part of this study has been to orally translate documents, discussions, and later, striving to translate (from English to Hausa) a summary of the research and/or the thesis itself .

The Indigenous paradigm encourages the integration of methods (Chilisa, 2012), for example, Indigenizing the interview process to make it context sensitive and relevant to the participants, where traditional 'interview' takes the form of a conversation or talking circles. Even better, as Chilisa (2012) encourages readers, to approach it as a form of narrative where the research facilitator invites people to tell their stories and share their life experiences. Both reflecting a more horizontal discussion, rather than a dynamic of an interviewer 'examining' what the interviewee responds to questions. Furthermore, these conversations should occur in familiar places to the participant and be relevant to the topic. In addition to one-on-one or group conversations, storytelling is an effective method for both producing and sharing knowledge.

Chilisa (2012) explains how stories are used to collect, deposit, analyze, store, and disseminate information (reflecting and communicating societal values), but also how they function as socializing instruments, data sources, and analysis tools. Local narratives and storytelling are thus powerful methods that provide opportunities for different voices to be heard, and for each narrator to engage with the knowledge being brought to light through the coming together of people to learn and share ideas, views, and experiences.

3.4 Data Collection Stage: Using Conversations and Photo-narratives

In July 2022, I visited KZ for 8-weeks and lived within the community in the A/B electoral area (one of three in the KZ jurisdiction). During this trip, but also in previous ones, I felt welcomed and safe, always surrounded by people wishing to strike intriguing educational and philosophical conversations, sharing our experiences and each other's cultures, discussing about global sociopolitical matters, as well as people wishing to share/teach me about their community, family, and religion. Living within the community has helped me meet people and build trust and has allowed me to experience local daily life. Although in total I have spent less than a year in Ghana, living within the community rather than at a hotel elsewhere in town, has enabled me to feel more connected. Moreover, it has helped me learn more about the history, the culture and to witness the communal lifestyle. All which in turn, inspired the curiosity to explore what has allowed Zongo settlements to develop across western Africa and to grow over time.

3.4.1 Re-reconnecting with the Community: Further Community Consultations

The preliminary community visit in 2019, as explained earlier, introduced me to civil society and local government members and procedures, and most importantly I got to learn more about the vibrant and active nature of community relations and strong social networks. I talked about the aim to facilitate a participatory research project to explore what is working well in KZ and to document community strengths, and how this project's purpose is to shift focus away from what is missing in the community, to instead highlight how people meet their socioeconomic, physical, and emotional needs. This includes exploring how community members thrive and what fosters a sense of belonging and wellbeing in KZ.

Being a participatory project, the aim is to conduct research in a way that participants actively engage with the research process. After proposing the application of two research

methods to engage participants—through in-depth conversations with community knowledge keepers, as well as by using photo-narratives to engage youth and young adults—I explained how both components aim to highlight participants' views on community strengths helping people thrive, as well as to disseminate and celebrate findings with the wider public. The local Zonal Council and other community leaders assisted to finalize logistics, such as where to meet with photo-narrative participants, what would be an appropriate honorarium, and how to best recruit participants.

3.4.1.1 Local Ethical Principles and Codes of Conduct – Requesting Permission. Before recruiting participants and commencing research activities, my proposed research required feedback from, and approval by, local government and community partners, including: the Zonal Council that is composed of the assemblymembers (one for each of the three Zongo electoral areas), and Chiefs (head regional Chief, the Chief Imam, opinion leaders etc.). Before travelling to the community for the field work, I provided a letter of introduction and the research proposal to members of the Zonal Council and Zongo Chiefs. I shared these, along with copies of the consent forms (one for the conversations, and another for the photo-narratives), with community members acting as research assistants, who would help share what I was outlining and proposing. This first required multiple conversations, between research assistants and me, to make sense of the documents and the study, as well as to consider how to translate concepts and ideas to Hausa. Through this process, I would also hear research assistants' feedback on how to best make the study relevant to the community. Following, they helped deliver printed copies (in English), or orally translated the documents to Hausa, for members of the Zonal Council and of the local traditional council (i.e. Sarkin Zango of Koforidua and the Paramount Chief of Zango, Eastern Region).

When I arrived in the community, I met, in-person, with the Zonal Council to formally discuss the research proposal and to request permission to conduct the research and recruit participants. Moreover, I requested the Zonal Council's support to invite potential participants to an information-session about the proposed research. Similarly, I met with traditional leaders and members of the Council of Zongo Chiefs in KZ, who both welcomed me to their community and offered their support. For foreigners affiliated with a non-Ghanaian university, there is no known regulatory system requiring research visas. Established ethics committees for biomedical research is widespread, however, for social science and policy research, ethic committees are usually affiliated with the student's university where they are registered and apply for research ethics approval.

3.4.2 Participant Recruitment

Once I received feedback from the community and further tweaked the plan, and once ethical approval was granted (Ethics application #19-0174 and community letters of approval) to commence the study, the participant recruitment phase began, where I applied the snowball sampling method (Hay, 2016). For recruiting participants to have one-on-one conversations, the goals were to reach community members who self-identify as elders and/or community knowledge keepers. I explained how there is no strict criteria but, rather, one's voluntary willingness to speak about their community, which is of paramount importance.

In asking for support to identify prospective young people interested to participate, I highlighted that we wish for young people of any ethnic background, any language, education level, or other socio-economic indicator. The only requirement was that they self-identify as youth (young adults; approximately 18-36 years of age) and residents of KZ. According to Ghana's National Youth Policy (2010), youth are those between 15 and 35 years of age. It was

during the preliminary visit, when I became aware of the community's different (to mine) perception on who is considered "youth".

It is not so much one's chronological age that matters, which in fact community residents do not pay much attention to, but one's experience and 'stage' in life, and/or social position and social roles. For example, someone in their early thirties who is studying and working and may be living with family but be single, would likely be referred to as "youth" (or a young adult), whereas someone else of similar age who is married and has children, and a well-established work, may be considered older. I consulted the Zonal Council, to better understand who would be considered "youth" or "young adult". This is an example of how researchers must pay attention to context and for aspects of the study to be relevant to the community rather than to mainstream views and/or how I personally understand something (Stanton, 2014).

Considering the local perception helped in terms of which activity (conversations or photo-narratives) would be most relevant for each participant. Stanton (2014) emphasizes how scholars must respect participants' time and other commitments they have, which I had to consider too. For example, there were three participants in my study, who were in their early thirties. I shared about both activities and my suggestion, while emphasizing they could choose either. For two of them, I recommended having a conversation which is less time consuming than participating in the photo-narratives, when I became aware of their family and occupational responsibilities.

Further, another key method employed to *spread the word* was to make announcements about an information session, scheduled a week later at a local school, and/or to call the contact provided for further details. It is common in Zongo communities to have information centers, often conjointly with a mosque, where anyone could submit a request for a message to be called

through the megaphone, with other community announcements. We visited eight mosques where we met with the Imam, or someone else in charge at the time, and submitted our request, which was granted. In addition, the Zonal Council's and executive members of grassroots associations assisted by introducing the study and inviting potential participants to the information section or by sharing our contact information (i.e. research assistants' or mine).

3.4.2.1 Providing an overview of the study to prospective participants. Before scheduling the research activities, we held a community information section at the Mahd-de-dee secondary, where I provided an overview of the proposed study and answered questions to prospective participants. Two translators helped by translating from English to Hausa and to Twi, and vice-versa. The purpose of these meetings was to provide an overview to prospective participants on the purpose of the study, and of the methods (i.e. conversations and photo-narratives) and procedures. In addition to this organized meeting with prospective participants (the majority who eventually took part in the in-depth conversations), I held about eight other ad hoc meetings with groups of 2-5, mostly for the photo-narrative participants. There was no need to seek participants' family's permission and consent, as the youngest participant was over the age of nineteen-years.

Going over the purpose of the proposed research, does not only help the study be context-appropriate, but also to acknowledge and address linguistic barriers, different views, definitions, and meaning people give to something. These meetings and discussions provided research assistants and me with a better understanding on how to proceed. Furthermore, we discussed with those who attended, the rationale of the study and highlighted how participants are invited, but not in any way expected, to participate in conversations and/or activities seeking to reflect and express their perspectives on existing community strengths. Also, we explained how the goal

was to learn from participants' lived experiences, and from the *sense of place* they have developed, in their KZ community. In turn, for these local perspectives, and any other insights from the study, to contribute to, and inform, academic literature, on CBPR, and most importantly, on Zongo communities in Ghana.

3.4.3 Approaches and Methods

The research methods employed in this study to engage participants included semi-structured, in-depth, conversations, and photo-narratives. For both, the aim was to explore with research participants, and to learn from their lived experiences and perspectives, what factors foster healthy, sustainable, livelihoods. That is, to explore with them any relations, places, activities, and practices that may be having a positive impact, and thus, to look at how existing strengths and innovations are enhancing people's opportunities to stay, and thrive, in their KZ community. Nykiforuk et al. (2011) who touch on the history of using photo-voice (photo-narratives), highlight the prevalent use of this method by qualitative researchers, to specifically explore social issues and community health. Making this an appropriate application of the method, in a study relating to health, sustainability, community wellbeing, and quality of life.

Discussions, with both one-on-one conversation participants and those partaking in the photo-narrative group and conversations and activities, aimed to better understand positive attributes of Zongo communities, and how these foster community resilience and cohesion. The purpose was to capture local perspectives on the notions of sustainability, livelihoods, good health, and prospects. This would include people's views on how community values, relations, innovations, and practices enhance their wellbeing and help individuals and the community thrive. Lopez et al. (2018) state that photo-narratives may exclude elders, for instance, who may be less familiar with using cameras, but they also remind readers that the methods can and

should be modified according to context. It was, therefore, important to consider any limitations/exclusions the research methods and tools may cause, from having access to cameras, to participants' familiarity with using one.

3.4.3.1 In-depth Conversations. I conducted semi-structured, 1-hour-long conversations where participants reflected on, and shared, what they deem important in their lives and their community; then, in turn, how that aspect may be enhancing their health, and providing the means to thrive and to live a good life. I was accompanied by a community member hired (from a total of five interpreters I was working with) to translate, when necessary, and who also supported with various logistics, such as scheduling meetings with participants for the in-depth conversations.

The procedure was to first review with each participant the purpose and objectives of my graduate research and specifically of the conversation we were about to have—we would go over the consent form, which broke down the purpose, objectives, and procedures, but which also highlighted participants rights and the research facilitator's responsibilities. We also looked at key themes for our conversation, including main concepts and ideas such as livelihoods, sustainability, thriving, and what factors foster health and wellbeing, to discuss how participants understand these nuanced concepts. Participants were each invited to share, from their lived experience, about their community, by reflecting on, and narrating, what they deem important in their lives that enhances their health, provides the means to thrive, and to live a good life.

Conversations (1-hour long each, on average) were audio-recorded, which I then transcribed, coded, and through thematic analysis, highlighted key, repeated, keywords and ideas, and then, created Tables 2, 3, 4, and 5, as well as a concept-map (Figure 4), which I discussed in chapter 4. After 12-15 conversations, it was already becoming clear I was reaching

saturation, as participants were echoing similar themes. During the conversations I would sometimes refer to the conversation guide I drafted (including Table 1), but overall, the conversations tended to be a natural dialogue, flowing organically. Only the main conversation, after going over and signing the consent forms, was audio-recorded, and later transcribed for analysis and discussion. I would, however, note any points, observations, and/or reflections from the process of going over the consent forms.

Table 1

Research Questions Guiding in-depth Conversations

Zongo Identity and Establishment	Local Perceptions on Key Study Concepts and Notions	Community Strengths and Innovations
• What could you tell me about the establishment of Zongo in Koforidua? • How about your connection to KZ?	• How do you perceive the notion of sustainability? • How about the idea of sustainable livelihoods?	• What do you deem important in your life that enhances your health, and provides you the means to live? • What are some community strengths and innovations?
• How would you describe what makes a community a Zongo (to an outsider who has never been to, or heard of, a Zongo community)? • What makes a Zongo unique? Are there any unique characteristics differentiating them from other Ghanaian communities?	• How do you understand/ conceptualize the idea of 'thriving' (or 'to thrive')? • In your opinion, how would you describe health and wellbeing? Or • How are you experiencing (what helps you to experience) health and wellbeing?	• How does what you have identified (a relationship, an activity, a place etc.) support you to thrive? • How, are unique characteristics you have mentioned of your community fostering health, wellbeing, and/or sustainable livelihoods?
• What makes you proud about KZ?	• What does quality of life mean to you? What makes (or would make) your life good?	• How do these [what mentioned] enrich your life?

Often, for example, participants were not interested to cover this part (i.e. reviewing and signing the consent form), and in a couple of cases they had questions, for me, as to why I was even going over such documents. Something I struggled with, as on one hand I respected the different approach to becoming informed and to consenting – what one participant, the primary school's headmaster (i.e. principal), put as "[I am consenting by being] here and speaking to you" (Roufai, pc). – but on the other, I felt responsible to fully inform each participant and to pay

attention not to skim through this process out of my own convenience. Reviewing the consent form included highlighting why I am requesting to audio record, how all data will be stored and used, and most importantly highlighting that I will be using findings from this research, with credit given to the source, to write my graduate thesis. Therefore, we also discussed about anonymity, the use of pseudo name, or the choice to be identified; while clarifying I would first ask for their permission to reference their input in any written or other format.

The in-depth conversations, once transcribed, were each divided into sections, for example, in the first part (i.e. first few minutes of the discussions) I would review key sections of the consent form (e.g. research purpose). I would then usually begin with asking participants how long they have lived in KZ and their domestic travel experience (e.g. if they know other Zongos in Ghana), before discussing with them what, in their opinion, makes a community a Zongo community, to learn from participants the unique characteristics of Zongos but also how for me to best describe their community, as informed by local views. While touching on important characteristics of their community, I would note them down to then explore with participants if any attributes they mentioned play a role in positively impacting people's livelihoods and wellbeing.

Being semi-structured, and striving for organic, context specific, conversations, relevant to each participant, the conversation structure varied depending on what participants discussed and the focal points of the conversation. For example, when participants discussed the role of religion during the first several minutes of our conversation, then in some instances, religion became the focus of the remaining conversation; often, in terms of exploring the role and impact of religious practices and values in the health and wellbeing of people; in turn, leading to discussions on building sustainable, resilient, communities. Others would focus on the Zongo

culture and communal socialization, despite one's religion, ethnic background etc., with a couple of participants highlighting the importance of having a common language (in this case, Hausa). Conversations evolved and focused on certain aspects according to the participants' unique perceptions, experiences, and their own examples. Nevertheless, reviewing the conversations, and as discussed later in the thesis, indicates commonalities, in peoples' views, such as on the role of religion, language, unity, family, employment, migration, and much more.

3.4.3.2 Photo-Narratives. The second method of the study involved group work, where in collaboration with the participants (co-researchers) we conducted a photo-narrative project. This was a participatory, creative, and visual process where participants were able to work together and build new (or strengthen existing) relationships with one another. The photo-narratives included a workshop, as well as small and large group discussions where participants shared their thoughts and narratives. The goal of this part, as with the conversations, was to explore the views of participants on *what*, and *how*, helps people thrive in their community. Looking at what participants value and consider important, in their everyday lives, for their health and overall wellbeing, provided insights on the existing strengths and innovations enhancing people's livelihoods. This included exploring participants' *sense of place*, and how they perceive and experience their community.

Initially I had planned a couple of ice-breaker activities for a maximum of half an hour, however, it turned out to be a beneficial process and by the end of Day 1 we had, in total, spent a couple of hours on such activities, practicing public speaking, and engaging in team-building exercises. Borba et al. (2024) who created a playful inquiry framework to engage participants in an experiential educational process – using drama, in combination to play, narrative, and research – show the importance to familiarize participants, and how “[t]hrough playful activities

[...] participants collectively build narratives and texts full of meanings according to a critical and creative perception of the theme, needs, desires, and overlapping ideologies" (p. 12).

Similarly, exercises I facilitated allowed participants to get to know each other and helped to build trust and to form connections. One of the activities included participants standing in a circle, blindfolded, and holding a rope, with the aim to communicate and collaborate to make a given shape (e.g. circle, square, triangle) with the string—a conversation I had with some residents about those in the community with complete loss of sight, and the shame many feel, leading them to withdraw and isolate, inspired this exercise. After the activity, we had a conversation on the strengths people develop using their other senses and the importance to break down barriers for all to be able to participate in community affairs, and reap the rewards that come with socializing, building a strong supportive community, and actively engaging in one's community and family affairs.

All the activities for this component of the study took place over a period of almost three weeks, consisting of a total of 5-days outlined below. With participants we formed a WhatsApp group discussion where we exchanged ideas and communicated to schedule group meetings. Since participants worked or attended school during the week we agreed to schedule most meetings on weekends. In planning the research activities and scheduling meetings, it was important to consider participants' commitments and needs. This included taking into considerations public holidays and any local celebrations, such as a local event that resulted in us skipping one weekend. In addition, when organizing each day of activities, I noted when we would break for prayers, and when participants wished to have breaks. In respecting people's dietary requirements, I consulted locals about what snacks and drinks to offer, what to provide for lunch, and where to buy supplies from, in efforts to support local businesses as much as

possible. During activities I would keep handwritten notes. When we had the small group discussions where participants shared their photo-narratives, I would audio record each participants reflections and narratives. These audios were approximately 15-30 minutes long and were quickly transcribed and summarized (in point form) as we used the information in our large group discussion, and for the purpose of putting together a video of the project (day 4 and 5).

Day 1: Introductions

During the first day, we covered the purpose and aim of the study, without completely covering and signing the consent forms, until the following day. Participants remained uncertain about what it means to engage in a research study, with almost half of those present at the time expressing feelings of intimidation regarding participating in research. As a result, we continued our discussions from the information meetings we previously held. Initially, we were missing about half of the participants for the first half, and to not waste participants' time, we watched two short videos: one on the philosophy of Ubuntu and the other on the symbolism of Sankofa. Starting on time was a challenge, especially when we met on weekends as a whole group, and while culturally common and accepted, it was difficult for participants who arrived on time and had to wait. With the community research assistants, we would try to keep the group engaged while waiting for everyone to arrive, and then highlighted the voluntary nature of the study, while it assumes accountability and respecting each other.

Once all participants arrived, we began with introductions and icebreakers, as explained earlier. I briefly shared with participants about my experience visiting KZ and what inspired me to pursue this study. We then looked at the following questions: i) What is research and its purpose? ii) Who can conduct research? iii) Who can be a photographer, and what is the purpose of photographs? We explored these points as a group, where most contributed their thoughts and

ideas. I facilitated the discussion by providing examples and asking probing questions, guiding the conversation to look at diverse ways one could do research, and talking about the vital role of citizen scientists (see Jaeger-Erben et al., 2023), before elaborating on the use of photography, and other visuals to express ideas, perspectives, stories, findings, experiences, lessons and more.

As a group, we reflected on "what is the purpose of research?" where participants noted that binchike nhwihwemu³⁵ offers: "thinking, vision, skills, gathering, solving, knowledge, observing, analysis, understandings, information, learning, challenging, curiosity, findings". Another question that stimulated overlapping group discussion was on how participants conceive the notion of "health and of wellness", with some key words noted from participants' responses including: "peace, hope, family, unity, religion, nutrition, togetherness, love, exercise, socialization, sanitation, education, and entertainment". Another theme we looked at is the idea of principles and values (i.e. qualities one values in themselves, others, and their community).

For all the discussions and activities, we had community members interpreting from English to Hausa, and vice versa, as well as someone translating from English to Dagomba, and sometimes Twi; since one participant did not speak Hausa but also had no preference between Twi and Dagomba and would often interchange between the two languages. After a lunch break, we came back to discuss what the following days would involve and to explain how in small group conversations, participants would showcase their photograph(s) and use them as a 'tool' to discuss what is important to them; the strengths, according to them, which foster sustainable livelihoods, health, and wellbeing in their lives and community. Further, we discussed about the idea of *single-stories* and how this project aims to learn from their perspectives about positive

³⁵ Participants agreed Binchike nhwihwemu, in their language, Hausa, best correlates to the idea of "researching".

aspects in and about their community, and to inform the public on the realities of wellbeing and assets in Zongo communities, and in turn contribute to academic literature too.

Although we covered most sections of the consent form, it was not until Day 2 that we covered all content and signed them—while I would daily remind participants that they are free to withdraw at any time, without any consequences. One participant did not come back, but the rest (twelve) actively participated in all sections. Initially for the second step of the study I was planning to go with participants on community walks to capture photographs. Near the end of the first day, I had to abandon this plan, and in communication with participants, I announced that due to time constraints I am making slight changes as to how we would proceed. Also, we did not have to provide cameras, as all participants were able to bring their own cellphone, or in one case, to borrow a cellphone with a working camera. We concluded the day of our first meet highlighting the research questions, and encouraging participants to reflect on what places, relationships, people, activities, ideas, objects etc. play a key role in each participant's lives.

Day 2: Research and Photography

We started with team-building exercises, and we then drafted principles, and codes of conduct (e.g. on safety, respect, and responsibilities). Using a poster, we wrote "values" in the middle and asked participants to share what comes to mind; with contributions including the following key words: "helping, awareness, kindness, selflessness, boldness, sharing, creativity, self-confidence, courage, compassion, well mannered, passion, loyalty, respect, integrity, and honesty". This then led to a discussion on codes of conduct, how to respect each other and create a safe space for all participants. In addition, I shared about my responsibilities as a research facilitator and how I plan to use the information gathered—for example, that I may reference

participants' work in the thesis, but only after the consent and approval of the "teller" and/or photographer.

I explained anonymity will be respected for the dissemination of findings, but we also talked about how the nature of this study limits anonymity and confidentiality, when participants are attending group conversations and activities, and may decide to share their work with the community through the medium of collaborative decision-making and planning. At the same time, I reminded everyone they were not obliged to collaborate on disseminating information, and that each would be free to use their work as they wish (e.g. sharing it on their online platforms), because they have ownership over their image and narratives, and can publicly share, with respect to anyone else who may be portrayed in the image. We briefly explored examples of possible ways to disseminate information, such as through a booklet, a public forum, an exhibition, a video, among other methods.

The focus of the day included completing the consent forms and elaborating on points covered the previous day on the research purpose and using photo-narratives. For instance, we chatted about what makes a picture appealing, and ethical considerations when photographing other people. Moreover, we reviewed the research proposal, focusing on the central research question and the sub-questions, as well as paying attention to making sense of key concepts in the study. Overall, we would take discussion back to uncovering aspects of living in KZ that are positive, and emphasizing how the nature of the study is to explore and celebrate the resourceful positive aspects. Participants were then asked to reflect on the following: i) What is important for residents in their KZ community that helps people thrive? ii) Why and how is it important? iii) How does it help people thrive? and iv) What within your life and experiences in Zongo supports your wellbeing, your quality of life?

Once we had reviewed the study proposal and introduced the method where one takes a picture and attaches a narrative to it (which may be a description, a memory, an idea, a story etc.), I invited participants to brainstorm what potential images could help them capture the ideas the above stated questions sparked. To better explain, I provided the examples: a) How I value meeting people with diverse backgrounds and experiences and learning from each other—to capture an image of this, I could, for instance, photograph various flowers, and when sharing my narrative, I could use that photograph to explain how it symbolizes diversity and beauty; then elaborate on the idea. b) If I wish to discuss about the importance of education in my life, I could take a picture of a book, or of a school. I reminded participants how we are more interested on the narratives and ideas, not the photographs, and therefore to not feel pressure about the resolution and quality of images.

Day 3: Small-group discussions sharing photo-narratives

The third step involved participants, an interpreter, and me, where co-researchers used their photograph(s) (1-3 per person) as a tool to aid their narratives and reflections, with a subsequent small-group discussion on the personal and community assets participants mentioned. Each participant shared their photo to discuss why they chose it, what it means to them, and how these factors/aspects/characteristics enhances their health and wellbeing, and how it provides the means to thrive and to live a good, healthy, and sustainable, life. We would then finish with questions and comments, while summarizing key themes that stood out to all of us during the entire process of the day.

Further, we discussed how each participant has ownership over the data they collect (i.e. photographs and one's own narrative) and may directly, and independently, use them for their own analysis and dissemination purposes. In addition, I explained that when drawing on the

knowledge participants bring to discussions, as the research facilitator I would first require to obtain their consent on the specific reference (visuals and/or narratives) I wish to include in any dissemination material, and to give credit to the source(s), included in this thesis.

Day 4: Large group discussion exploring the key themes

Following, all groups would meet for a large group discussion, where each participant got to share their top photograph and key aspects of their narratives. The large group discussion took place on the fourth day of activities, after each group had met independently, for the purpose of each participant to briefly summarize their narratives to other groups. We played a slideshow with each participants' photo, and each shared their thoughts and reflection with their colleagues, who then had the opportunity to comment and ask, each other, questions. At times, one's narrative would spark a discussion where others shared their opinions and/or elaborated on similar aspects important in their lives too. For example, a couple participants discussed about their work as electrical apprentices, and other highlighted how important it is to build a skill and to secure a source of income.

Later, as a group, we looked at the method of analysis I am using and together practiced it. The initial plan was to spend more time with participants in focus groups to explore in-depth the key themes that each highlighted thought their narratives, and then to collaborate on disseminating findings. Once again, time constraints meant I had to revise the plan to collaborate in the analysis and dissemination part of the photo-narratives. We were still able, nonetheless, to exchange narratives and ideas, and to elaborate on them. I then asked participants how we may group the various themes, and we developed the following three categories: family and unity, natural resources, and skills-building and employment (Figure 18).

Using these categories, we broke into three groups and each group chose a theme to focus on.

Each group was asked to create a concept map and/or a bullet-points list about the theme they were working on; by encouraging them to consider the photographs and narratives of all participants, and the discussions we had over the past couple of meetings. Participants used a poster to list examples, such as various natural resources people value, and to write key words/short sentences indicating how it is used (e.g. as food source, medicine, in manufacturing etc.), and the role/importance it plays. Each group provided insights inspired from the various reflections and conversations, while through this exercise they also elaborated on the points they were noting. Participants were then asked to consider why and how the aspects/examples they noted are significant in peoples' lives. This is where, for example, in exploring the local cuisine, participants also talked about the medicinal and employment dimensions of foods and natural resources. Next, I asked participants to consider how to best protect and enhance the assets they have identified. In short, we summarized points highlighted during conversations and what we learned from each other, while further reflecting on participants' experiences, perspectives, and ideas they have been sharing during photo-narrative activities. At the end, each group rotated to allow all to provide their input to each of the three categories.

Unfortunately, there was only one day left for all of us to meet, without the capacity to extend my trip, and therefore we concluded Day 4 with the plan to put together a short video of our work. This meant we were unable to spend the time required to fully collaborate and create a dissemination plan, and to co-determine, and co-design, how we would share the research with the wider public. For instance, we had briefly talked about example of ways to disseminate information, such as through an online platform, publishing an article, a presentation, a community event, a pamphlet, an exhibition, a theatrical play, through art, a public forum etc. While on the last day we would not have the time required to complete the video, nor for all to

fully participate in the process, we made the plan to bring (share through WhatsApp and email) footage we would use on the last day to begin the video production process.

Day 5: Dissemination Plan

The final group meeting involved all participants, where we brainstormed and outlined key aspects we wished to include in the video. Participants provided footage (photographs and video clips), we gathered material, and co-drafted a film script to compile our work and share participants' views and perspectives on what is working well in their KZ community, and to celebrate how members thrive in their community. The last day participants also worked in small groups to record scenes for the video, to take photographs, find music, and record audios of each other to use in the video. Overall, it was a day of enjoyment, where we shared a meal, took photographs, exchanged contact information, and tried to wrap-up what we worked on over the last couple of weeks. Also, participants were reminded they could contact me if they are interested to participate in the video editing process. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, we were not able to all collaborate in completing the video. However, there were a few days left of my stay, and as I would also be available online after I return to Canada, participants, who wished to, were invited to further engage with the project. The main step left to finish the video, included translating everything to Hausa and audio recording these translations.

Following Day 5, I collaborated with five others, including photo-narrative participants and community research assistants, to gather more footage relevant to the content of the script we outlined, as well as recording the translations. Then, a couple of days before leaving for Accra to return to Canada, I met with eight of the twelve participants who were available to screen the first draft of the video we composed. Later, and through long-distance, we finalized the video showcasing the photo-narratives process and findings. The result was a 20-minutes-long video

that we shared with each other and then each spread it by sharing with their contacts and/or posted it on online platforms, as well as sharing it with community leaders.

3.5 Post activities: Now what?

Communication with participants did not end after the activities. While I am responsible to respect that some may not wish to continue contact, part of the relational, ongoing, ethical and interpersonal commitments is that while I proceed with the analysis of data and writing of the thesis, I would keep participants informed about the process and the outcome. For instance, especially during the first few months following research activities, when I was transcribing audios and familiarizing myself with all the information gathered, we stayed connected through WhatsApp group messages and calls—at times, for example, I reached out to research assistants for clarification when I was transcribing the conversations. Moreover, part of my commitment to reciprocity meant I would remain accessible to communicate long distance in case participants had further questions or concerns for at least a couple of years following the study. This also included me providing references to anyone who may request them, or my support regarding places I am familiar with and have called home. For example, one participant reached out to discuss about university scholarships and his challenge receiving a US study permit/travel visa when he had received acceptance letters from a couple of universities. It simply meant I was mindful of not only my privileges to travel, but also how local contacts have been supporting my visa application to travel to Ghana, organizing my stay, and assisting me to carry out the study.

Chapter 4: Results from Participants' Insights

Here, I present key themes, topics, concepts, and ideas that arose from the conversations and the photo-narratives, by laying out the information gathered during the 2-months field visit in 2022. The data mainly included handwritten/typed notes, and audio transcripts, which provide local insights regarding the thesis' inquiry and objectives. At this stage the material collected is "raw data" – except for the collaborative thematic analysis with photo-narrative co-researchers, as explained in chapter 3 and further discussed below. In this chapter, I present what participants shared during research activities to give meaning to the 'data', by looking for patterns, overarching themes, sub-themes, and theme elements. The 'data' I present and how I understand and give meaning to it, consequently, reflect my subjectivities influencing how I outline, describe, and analyze what participants shared.

This chapter is divided into two sections, as I first look at the in-depth conversations, to provide an overview of the participants and the insights they provide. I discuss the keywords, overarching themes, and subthemes, as well as the elements they consist of, which I identify through inductive thematic analysis (open coding)—that is, reviewing the transcripts to organize the data by identifying repeated themes (Hay, 2016). While my subjectivities influence how I understand people's response and narratives, and therefore the themes I identify, in this chapter I merely introduce these premises before further analyzing the content (i.e. data from conversations and photo-narratives) in chapter 5, where I explore participants' input in relation to the literature and to the study's research questions. In addition to discussing the key themes and ideas with extracts from the conversations, I also describe how I reviewed the conversation transcripts and the steps I followed in the analysis of the content.

In the second part of this chapter, I outline the information collected from photo-narrative activities, including photographs that participants chose to aid their discussions. Here, I also share background information on who participated in the photo-narratives, and list key points and/or highlight quotes, per image, from discussions and conversations amongst all participants. Since there was a simultaneous interpretation through group discussions and dialogues with participants (co-researchers), below I include a brief section where I present the key themes as depicted in the collaboratively produced video³⁶.

4.1 In-depth Conversations

4.1.1 Participants

In total there were 29 participants, whose ages ranged from 28 to over 65 years. Two of them were female leaders (known as Queen Mothers), other participants included the community outreach nurse, schoolteachers, local assembly members, the chairman³⁷ of the local health committee, among other respected residents. There were no specific characteristics or traits required for research participants to meet, other than living in KZ, and therefore the group was quite diverse, as to peoples' socio-demographics, such as ethnic background, language preference, education level, one's profession, family structure, and marital status. Most participants were over the age of thirty-five, with several of them being considered elders (usually above 50-60 years old). One exception was a young schoolteacher, whose work schedule and commitments meant she would have been unable to join the photo-narrative group

³⁶ Participants have ownership over the video and could obtain a copy in the format they chose (e.g. on usb-stick, via email, etc.), which they could also share with their contacts and/or post on their personal social media platforms.

³⁷ In the context of KZ, it is common to gender roles (e.g. chairman/chairwoman). I use the terms familiar to the community, and also because as one conversation suggests (chapter 5) discussing the dichotomy holds relevance when females, for example, are underrepresented in decision-making roles, however, there is increasingly a collective encouragement to remove barriers and encourage women to become assembly members (another instance, where I have not met an assembly-woman but only assembly-men during my interactions with the local assembly).

of participants. Since she was interested to take part in the study, I urged to meet her in the effort to balance the gender disparity underrepresenting female residents—with less than one third of participants being females. Therefore, including this participant in the conversations' group was reasonable, even though she was still a couple of years away from turning thirty. Moreover, being a member of the community over the age of sixteen years, she met the age criteria, but most importantly, since age is not a determinant demographic characteristic of the study (other than the minimum age), partaking in either research method was appropriate.

Some in-depth-conversation participants were born in KZ, while others relocated from elsewhere. Few studied abroad (e.g. Egypt and Nigeria), one holds a master's degree, many are parents, others not, and the majority were in marital relationships. Some were managing their private businesses in the community, while others worked in the public service sector or in the trades. The only important participant criteria were that they each considered themselves members of the KZ community, and were voluntarily, and freely, interested to discuss with me about their community, and to share and reflect on their experiences.

Not for the purpose of analysis, but to provide a picture of participants' backgrounds, I note three descriptive characteristics of participants (gender, language preference, and religion). Although not a question I asked participants during conversations, these characteristics were explicitly stated during, or inferred through, the conversation. For example, participants' responses to questions, such as on what makes Zongo communities unique, or on how unity is experienced and fostered, indicated the role of Islamic teachings, and practices, as fundamental. As discussed in chapter 2, religion and language are two characteristics that are commonly used as defining factors of the intersectional identities of Zongonians, and it comes to no surprise that only six of the twenty-nine participants discussed about their experience as "a Christian living in

a Zongo community", compared to the higher proportion (twenty-three participants) discussing the important role of Islam in their lives.

In terms of language, everyone could speak at least several words/sentences in English and were fluent in Hausa, and/or in Twi—a couple of participants primarily spoke Twi and English but were also comfortable communicating in Hausa. Nine of the twenty-nine participants were fluent and comfortable to converse in English without the support of the Hausa interpreter who, nonetheless, was present. Another five also decided to speak in English, who would just confirm a couple of terms with the interpreters in Hausa and/or Twi. Therefore, almost half of participants were able, and decided, to speak in English, as to accommodate my language limitations. From the fifteen remaining, only three asked for a Twi interpreter, and the rest (twelve) spoke in Hausa with a research assistant interpreting to/from English.

4.1.2 Thematic Analysis: Steps to Identify Key Themes

Since I followed a semi-structured conversation approach, it was not surprising that participants would touch on various focus areas and discuss diverse topics, nor that the structure of conversations would vary. It was clear, however, that participants were touching on similar topics, and by the end of 29 conversations that we reached saturation with specific themes being repeated and without new additional ones emerging. The process of identifying key terms and concepts, as well as relevant quotations, required me to first familiarize myself with each conversation. Although I did not follow a systemic structured approach as do Naeem, Ozuem, Howell, and Ranfagni (2023), who outline a six-step process for developing a conceptual model, I followed a similar process of first familiarizing myself with each transcript, and then identifying key terms and quotations, from which I was then able to develop themes.

After transcribing the in-depth conversations, I would review each transcript (often while simultaneously re-listening to the audios) to highlight and note down key relevant terms, notions, ideas, and concepts from each conversation (Table 2). I followed these steps for the first few transcripts, and then, I would pay attention to pinpoint similar ideas across all the conversations—at the same time, however, I would look for topics and ideas not discussed in the transcripts I had already reviewed, and by the end I would note any topics that were only mentioned by one or two participants, as well as any examples of, or discussion on, unexpected topics. After analyzing all transcripts to identify keywords, I re-reviewed each transcript and divided them into three sections of overarching focus-areas reflecting how the conversations unfolded (Table 3). Then, repeating the step of looking for keywords I listed them according to the overarching section, which later allowed me to identify and tabulate topics and themes that emerged.

Table 2

First Tabulation of Transcripts' Keywords

Connection to KZ and Zongo Identity	
Sample Questions	Prevalent responses
1) What makes a settlement a Zongo settlement?	Narrating one's personal experience living in the community; discussing: • Unity • Islam • Hausa • Northerness
2) What are Zongo's unique features?	• Islam (makaranta and mosques) • Housing (compound family homes)
3) What makes you happy in/about your community?	• Unity and peace • Fighting spirit • Giving spirit
	
Discussion Topics	Prevalent Responses

1) Positive Community traits ↑ interconnected / overlapping ↓ 2) Community Strengths	• Widespread presence of mosques and makaranta schools • Unity, support, care • Safety, security, peace • Common language (Hausa) • Protecting each other; having one's back; being each other's keepers; looking out for one another and their interests • Accommodation • Kids staying with extended family • Sharing material • Celebrations • Hard working; positive peer pressure • Togetherness • How one addresses challenges in finding employment • Strong connections, network • Responsibility to family • Education through family and community; Formal education; Apprentice work • Mentorship; looking out for each other's children; giving advice and correcting
---	--

Table 3

Second Tabulation of Transcript Content Under Three Sections

Data Source		Overarching Conversation Topics		
		Connection to KZ and Zongo Identity	Local Perceptions of Study Concepts/Notions	Community Strengths and Innovations
Participant's name*	Audio length: ____ File name: ____ **RA: ____			

*According to each participant's choice on the consent form regarding anonymity, or identification, for reference purposes

**Research Assistant's name

Beginning with the first section of the conversations on *Zongo Connection and Identity* (Table 4) and using my brief discussion that follows, I provide examples to outline the steps of the analysis process aiming to develop themes. In addition, I discuss how I identified and traced connections amongst these diverse, yet interconnected topics of discussion, in relation to the research questions. To start, as explained in chapter 3 and shown in Table 2 and 4, I would ask participants to share their connection to KZ, and then what, in their opinion, makes a community a Zongo community.

Table 4

Looking for Themes within the First Section of Conversations. Compiling Participants' Input

Connection to KZ and Zongo Identity		
<u>*Duration in Zongo (born and raised) or moved to KZ (and how/why they relocated?). What attracted them to move to KZ?</u> One participant shared details about KZ's earlier location by the General Hospital, which was dismantled in 1974, and then how gradually the Zongo's current location in the city was established. Others: • Born and raised • Because of marriage • Looking for greener paster • Family connections • Affordable Accommodation	<u>What makes a settlement a Zongo settlement? Or</u> <u>What is unique about Zongos?</u> • Unity • Language • Migration; Foreigners • Multi-ethnic groups, with a shared identity/background (<i>northerners</i>) • Morality (in one conversation) • Giving spirit • Complex family structures: examples of kids staying with extended family • Presence of Mosques and Makaranta schools • Sense of care; Support • Sharing material • Safety; Peace, Security	<u>What makes you happy in/about your community?</u> <u>What are you proud of?</u> • Belonging • Protecting each other; having one's back; being each other's keepers; looking out for one another and their interests. • Accommodation; homelessness as a rare phenomenon • Unity: Family and community • Advice; mentorship • Strong social network • Oneness and togetherness • Language and unity

* Underlined are the questions and points of clarification I stated during conversations, according to the transcripts.

In terms of sharing about their own experience and connection to KZ, almost everyone, unsurprisingly—given how I would begin conversations asking participants "for how long have you lived in KZ?"—shared about *duration*; with many saying they were born and raised in Zongo, others naming a different place of birth, and instances where participants shared about time spent elsewhere and/or what attracted them to relocate to KZ. In the cases where I followed by asking what motivated them to move to KZ, the conversation touched on themes such as *family connections, relationships, and employment*, which in other conversations were also discussed when exploring the idea of *thriving, health, and wellbeing*, as well as *sustainability and livelihoods*.

Responding to my questions aiming to learn from participants how members of KZ would describe Zongo communities, is where participants discussed unique features and key

characteristics that mark a neighborhood as a Zongo. These unique elements/features included the ideas of "unity", "religion", "language", "ethnic background", and "northernness" among others. Crystabel's response, for instance, clearly states how the notion and experience of *unity* helps describe life in Zongo communities; a characteristic which most participants discussed in-depth. "The very unique thing about Zongo is the unity. There's kind of unity in every Zongo community. They are together. There is this togetherness there" (Crystabel). The follow-up, often, was for me to ask participants to explain what they mean, for instance, by *unity*; that is, to share how they experience *unity*, and/or to discuss what this sense of *unity* means to them. This would lead to other relevant themes such as discussing the idea of *belonging*, of *protecting each other*, and of *mentorship*. Moreover, participants explained how unique features, such as the prevalence of mosques and makarantas (Islamic schools), reinforce *unity* and a *sense of belonging* by being sources of knowledge exchange and knowledge production, as well as spaces to build a support system and to cultivate a shared identity.

In asking "what features are unique to Zongo communities", responses focused on "Islam", "strong connections", "unity", "togetherness", "safety", "peace", "business" etc., which I first noted as separate topics. During the step of identifying key terms and topics I would add columns (using excel) to list the continual subject areas arising from each conversation. Sisi, for instance, "[...] she mentioned trading [...] [and] the fact that the people of the Zongo are very religious." (p.c. translated³⁸). During the conversation, she expanded to emphasize trade and to provide examples, when responding to my follow-up questions touching on how these

³⁸ Quotes in this section are from what participants shared during conversations and/or photo narratives in 2022. In this section, according to fieldnotes and audios, I indicate the quotations coming from translated responses which may be paraphrased by the interpreter and/or myself.

characteristics help people thrive. Others, such as Headmaster Roufai, also described their community, by saying,

"[...] there may be other definitions but what I read about Zongo, the linguistic department [inaudible] was talking about Zongo as a parking place for caravan. That's what Zongo is. And we are foreigners [...] mean[ing] [we] are not indigenous. So, the indigenous, the Ashanti, the Uco, the Afranti they call us [...] straightforward people. Similarly, Moro, explained, "[...] [A] place is called Zongo for the simple reason that it's being occupied or settled by foreigners and predominantly Muslims" (pc, translated). Yet another participant, Sagiru (pc), stated,

"[...] [we have a] common background we are mostly from the same, like northern region; let's say northern region almost all these tribe you find them in one in one region that is the northern region which they have so many common things among them. Maybe how they live their lives how their culture is really similar [...] so in Zongo [it] really makes it easier to relate to each other".

Mr. Yusif (pc, translated), echoing others' responses, "[...] said a Zongo is a place where foreigners, or we call them settlers, stay." Mansoo (pc) also talked about foreigners settling in Zongos when he explained how,

"Zongo is an environment that is understood to be where [a] category of people who come into one community to settle. For instance, if here, as New Juaben South in Koforidua is an establishment by the Akan community, but people of different category of tribes come to here. So, when they come to settle with different tribes, we call that environment Zongo. When we say Zongo, where category of people settle [...] in that place, in that community, we term that Zongo. That is where every kind of tribes can be

found, aside from the indigenous."

In addition to topical analysis (i.e. coding by identifying topics), I highlighted questions I asked and/or any prompting statements I made in response to participants' discussion, as shown in Tables 2 through 6. Then, I reviewed each table per section/segment of the transcripts across the columns indicating topics and focus areas, where through descriptive, experiential, and inferential analysis of the data I was reviewing, I would once again try to identify key themes. Moreover, I would go back to the transcripts and highlight key relevant quotes (i.e. any statements showing and effectively communicating points and the connections amongst key elements of each theme)—in addition to highlighting quotes on the transcripts, I would note examples of quotes (in a table) by indicating the approximate timeframe of the audio, in order to go back to the transcripts for clarification and confirmation of what participants said.

When looking at the various keywords and themes, in some instances, I would combine overlapping ones such as “migration, foreigners, northerness” which initially I noted as single standing, but nonetheless, fitting under the umbrella notion of *a shared common background*, with strong connection to discussions on the idea of “unity”, or those touching on how people cultivate a *sense of belonging*. The themes identified allowed me to develop a concept map (Figure 4), I discuss below, where I organize and present the multi-faceted points participants raised. As Naeem et al., (2023) argue, "themes identified in the narrative data guide the creation of a conceptual model that respects individual perspectives and captures the complexity of personal experiences." (p. 14).

During conversations, in addition to discussing unique features of the community, I asked some participants what makes them happy in their community. Responses lead to discussions on "celebrations/ceremonies", the idea of "open invitations" for all to attend, and overall, the

customary practice to "support" the one holding such "events". Further, of how supportive people are in general by "giving" and "helping out" those who may be less fortunate. Others touched on "education", especially after asking responders to elaborate and explain what may be cultivating this generosity. Some participants focused on family instilling such virtues and values, with most also discussing about Makaranta schools, and how they foster a sense of belonging, and of unity, by teaching moral values and principals of the Islamic religion, such as "giving", "sincerity", "honesty", to "seek knowledge", and to "be each other's keepers".

After exploring with participants their connection to KZ and perceptions of factors making a community a Zongo, I would welcome participants to share their understanding and perspectives on key study concepts and notions, such as *health*, *wellbeing*, *sustainability*, *livelihoods* etc., therefore looking at the second section (as Table 3 depicts) of the conversations to discuss study concepts/notions. Here, as summarized below (Table 5), I would for instance ask what these concepts mean to them, and when applicable, how they attain the notion they mentioned. As explained in chapter 3, in practice I ended up sharing my own subjective understanding and definitions of the above-mentioned concepts, however, several participants shared their views (providing their own definitions and/or explanations) on good *health*, and on the concept of *thriving*. In discussing *thriving*, the notions of *health* and *happiness* would come up as the objectives, and *employment* and *social relationships* as the means to attain *happiness* and *wellbeing*. Sisi, for example, "[...] said there's happiness, there's peace, people love each other." (p.c. translated). When Sagiru mentioned happiness, he prompted me to raise a follow-up question to elaborate on what happiness means to him and how to attain it, where he responded, "Defining happiness to me [is] just waking up healthy waking up healthy and seeing my body okay, you see I may wake up happy. Like maybe I have what to eat, what to drink.

But let's say I just woke up and went to the community where we used to sit as friends. And we just go and hear bad news about someone being sick or someone being dead. A friend we sit with. It doesn't go well for me. So my happiness is to see me and my other friends always okay. That's how I define my happiness." (Sagiru, pc, 2022).

Further, Sagiru (p.c., 2022) and I conversed on the ideas of basic needs for survival and happiness, where he explained his view that,

"Maybe if I have the place to sleep, the food to eat, knowing the next day if I wake up, I have what's money to buy what to eat. That's the basic thing for me. We are striving to Get more, but these are the basic things. First you wake up and I don't have what to eat. [...] I don't think I'll be even thinking very right. [...] So, if I have the basic need, food, water, electricity, that's my happiness. [...] [It helps] everyone to strive to grow."

Table 5

Looking for Themes within the Second Section of Conversations. Compiling Participants' Insights

Local Perceptions of Study Concepts/Notions	
Happiness	"Waking up healthy and seeing my body okay..." "But let's say I just woke up and went to the community where we used to sit as friends. And we just go and hear bad news about someone being sick or someone being dead. A friend we sit with. It doesn't go well for me [...] my happiness is to see me and my other friends always okay." - on "basic needs for survival. [...] and striving to get more [...]. - One's personal health and of others (health of their loved ones)
Thriving	<u>"Now I would like to focus with you on the central question that I have. Which is what is important for residents in the Zongo community that helps them thrive?"</u> <u>And how would you say [these mentioned] principles, attributes and practices help people thrive?</u> "You know, once you are living with people and then you feel you are one, you always feel that motivation to do what you are doing and do it best. [...] Because people are going to benefit from it." people reaching out to him (a teacher) to help them study/prepare to further their education with the aim to find a good job

	"So motivation is key thing that we get from living in this harmonious manner." You see, so it's that our living together that will make the person. But if you don't live together like that, it will be hard for you to just walk into someone's door and tell the person I need help (e.g. "I was told your cousin is in Japan can you [...]") "He understands the idea [to] thrive. But he said if there is peace, he calls it thriving." "If you want to thrive, then you have security." <u>Okay. So thriving, you see that's synonymous to security. So, security in terms of what?</u> "You are not at war with anybody. You are in no conflict with anybody." [participant elaborated to discuss peace @] <u>And how about economic security?</u> "The economic security, that one is debatable." [participant explained how he focused on caring for his family, for the children to go to school and to support them until they can support themselves.] "Because I thought I had to give my children at least up to graduate level education. And I have been able to achieve that. But let's say I'm fortunate I was gainfully employed, a dream teacher, [and] have access to bank loan and so on. But let's say Mr. Issa who stays here, who is not doing government work. Maybe he goes to the bush to cultivate a few things. How can that go? The security is a problem. <u>Review for the example/narration</u> he provided on raising his children to gain the competencies for employment and to thus become secure. <u>Defining thriving:</u> "Thriving means you are doing well, you are not having any major problems [...] thriving because I was at..." where participant shares his life story... education.. work.. raising family served one pound at that time. So because of that [the training and education], I am thriving, I have no problem. So if you take formal education seriously, then you thrive. And even you can translate it, if you are not a bad father or mother, you can help your children to also thrive."
Sustainable Livelihoods	<u>On thriving, sustainability and livelihoods:</u> He mentioned unity. He mentioned peace. And then he also mentioned business. (transl.) <u>How does this sense of unity enhance your life? In what ways?</u> "There are many strong people that are coming from Zongo. According to him, he doesn't benefit financially from those aspects. But the social events are useful to understand that when it is your turn, people will just swoop in as you go to the areas. And then also because it's one aspect of the religion that people have to come together and do things in common. don't do that, when it is your turn, you will not get, you are not likely to get the number of people you are expecting."

In terms of touching on the ideas of “unity” and “support”, Mr. Bawa, for example, mentioned how he feels a sense of unity in Zongo, by sharing about the unity reflected through events and celebration, where people welcome each other, and if there is a problem, people help each other out. Ibrahim Walakia touched on this by saying, “So there is that sense of brotherhood, sisterhood, that you know you have each other's backs. [...] there is a verse in the Quran that says the rich should support the poor.”

The central focus of the conversations, which I noted as the third section (see Table 3), was on what fosters good health and sustainable livelihoods, and to explore examples of community strengths and innovations. It is important to note that the three conversation sections I present were not sequential, nor separate from one another. In addition, they were not clear-cut sections, as for instance, there were conversations I would characterize having two sections (focus-areas), or more than three, or a single overarching topic being the primary focus of a given conversation. This latter part, as identified in most transcripts mainly looked at *community strengths and innovations* (Table 5), which often interlinked to earlier parts of the discussion that led to highlighting *what* and *how*, enables the community and people to thrive. This is where most themes emerged, with participants discussing the role of “human relations, socialization, education, celebrations, ceremonies, religion, collaboration, care, support, togetherness etc”—all speaking to the numerous ways individuals and the community foster *health, wellbeing, and sustainable livelihoods*. As noted, not all conversations followed this structure. Often, for instance, when participants shared about unique features (Table 4), they would discuss notions which they would then elaborate on in relation to how these aspects, in their experience, help people in the community thrive.

Table 6

Looking for Themes within the Third Section of Conversations. Compiling Participants' Insights that Address Research Questions

Community Strengths and Innovations	
<u>How does (what participant mentioned) have a positive impact?</u> • Feeling supported and looked after • Collaboration to address safety concerns; "escorting" one another • Hardworking/encouraging each other (by being each other's "role model") • "Togetherness" being essential as humans are social creatures. • Dispute resolution – helping each other solve their problems or misunderstandings with one another • Fighting spirit • Traditional dances", and other performances: teaching values, passing on elder's knowledge	<u>How do residents navigate the challenges in finding employment? How do they respond?</u> (a focus on innovation and initiatives) • Employment oriented: [@] "everyone does something" "you rarely see people moving about doing nothings" • "Food sellers" – cuisine, traditional knowledge, traditional remedies • Entrepreneurship, business, trade • Strong connections and network • Responsibility to family (to others)

I would end interviews by asking participants if they had any questions and/or comments, as well as to share their brief response(s) to the question(s): "what makes you proud about your community, what would you like others to know about KZ (and/or Zongo communities generally)?"", or in other words, "what would you like me to share with others who do not know the community?". Since this part relates to the content covered early in the conversations, I tabulated participants' last remarks (Table 4) with the first section exploring one's relation to KZ, as well as their understanding and perceptions of what a Zongo community entails and reasons to be proud of one's heritage and community, which in turn could reflect strengths fostering *sustainable livelihoods, health and wellbeing*.

4.1.2.1 From tabulation to flow-chart. Once I tabulated the transcripts in a single excel document and according to the various overarching themes, and by reviewing the tables' headings (themes that remained as overarching, others that I combined, and one's identified as subthemes), I created a concept map (Figure 4) to present participants' insights in a relational manner (showing connections amongst themes). This concept map illustrates three overarching themes: *identity and belonging*, *positive community traits*, and *knowledge transfer*. For each overarching theme I indicate the most discussed elements for each theme, as identified from reviewing and analyzing the 29-transcripts from the in-depth conversations, as well as reviewing the tables I show above. These elements, derived from participants' insights, show the interrelated socioenvironmental factors, including the temporal and spatial dimensions, enhancing sustainability and quality of life.

Under the theme *identity and belonging* participants' responses included the idea of "unity", a *shared identity* connected to "migration", "trade", "religion", and "language", as well as relating/identifying as "foreigners", yet Ghanaians. In addition, during this part of the conversation, participants discussed their personal connection to KZ (e.g. if they were born there or moved, leading to discussing what is keeping them in the community or what attracted them to relocate to KZ). Having noted from this early part of the conversation any unique characteristics participants mentioned (as explained above and in the previous chapter), would become steppingstones to consider the central overarching study questions and objective to better understand how members of KZ foster *health, wellness, sustainable livelihoods*, and how people experience the notion of *thriving*.

The second overarching theme of discussing *positive community traits*, although often blended with discussions on *belonging and Zongo identity*, is depicted as its own theme, where I

note key elements that participants touched on. Participants shared with me *what*, in their opinion, *thriving* means and what (or *how*) helps them to thrive, by touching on the importance of “human relations”, and on the ideas of “security”, “safety”, and “peace”. A number of participants said how in their community “you find peace”, and how they feel a sense of safety and security. The topic on *social relations* included discussions on “unity”, which led some participant to explore strong relational partnerships, including discussions on the role of family (nuclear, extended, and chosen) play in peoples' lives, for examples, providing “support”, “care”, “accommodation”, and opportunities for young ones to relocate (temporarily or long term) for the purpose of furthering their education and/or their career. Overall, emphasizing the significant role *human relationships* play for each other to meet their needs, and often to establish income-generation activities. Participants talked about local “businesses” and “entrepreneurs”, as well as the impact of “trade” in allowing people to make ends meet. Most importantly, they highlighted how one's social connections and networks, help people thrive, by allowing them to establish their businesses and to find employment opportunities, or often, to start their own ventures.

In discussing “unity”, how it is fostered, and how it plays a role in people's health, livelihoods etc., participants not only highlighted the role of family and community, but also discussed “socialization” and “education” at large, and particularly the significant role of family and the proxy-community. Through my analysis I identified a third overarching theme, *knowledge transfer*, as most discussions touched on the topic of *education*. In addition to learning through family and community interpersonal relations, three other relevant educational spaces of which participants talked of include “formal education” (government recognized, often western-based school system), “makaranta” schools (offering Arabic and Islamic studies), and “apprentice” opportunities to build skills and gain experience in a specific trade.

Moreover, a couple of participants talked about the role elders play in helping resolve any disputes amongst family and community members, maintaining peace and unity, as well as in passing down knowledge from one generation to the next, such as about the local cuisine and traditional health remedies. The focus on *elders* was prompted by me, as I directly asked about elders as knowledge holders. Whereas, in retrospect, participants highlighted how people are sources of knowledge, of support and suggestions, but they did not necessarily focus on one's chronological age. The ideas of past/future were discussed in how intergenerational knowledge is passed on and shapes our lives. In addition, a couple of participants shared about events and celebrations that hold a religious and/or cultural significance – for example showcasing diverse traditional clothing amongst tribes—and about performances that often teach, about one's tradition, diverse cuisine, and/or moral values.

In the flowchart/concept map below (Figure 4) I strive to visualize the overarching themes mentioned above and to show the interconnectedness of the thematic elements identified. Starting with the circles, I note the study's focus on *health*, *wellbeing*, and *sustainable livelihoods*, where I chose to depict *thriving* in a separate circle to note how the notion of thriving became central during the conversations. Although all four concepts are interrelated, for example, one's health and their sense of wellbeing being influenced by and influencing their livelihoods, the objective was not to compare and to contrast these notions. Rather, these terms were used interchangeably to provoke conversations, thought, and reflection, on what participants deem important in their lives and in their community that allows them to lead a good life. To each participant these concepts meant something different yet encompassing the study's focus on *thriving sustainably*. In several conversations participants touched on *health*, others on *wellbeing*, and/or *sustainable livelihoods*, however, it was the idea of thriving that was most

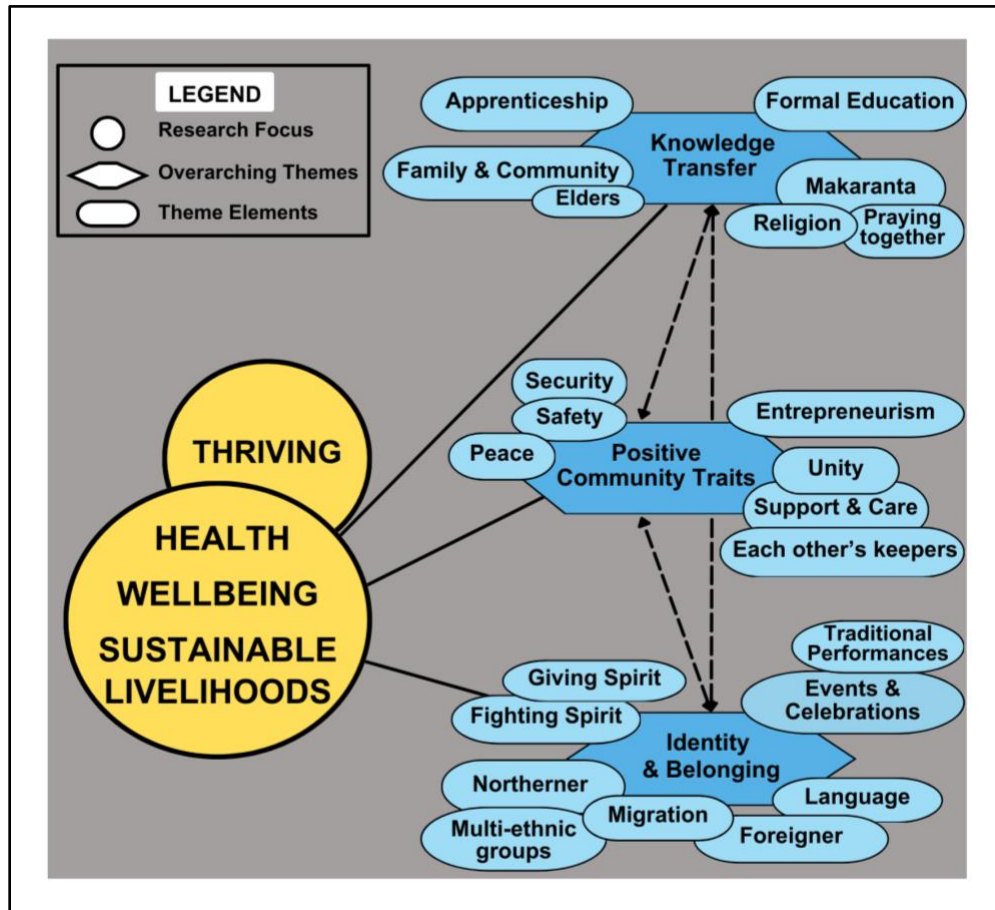
discussed, and overall, had greater relevance to participants' narratives and points of discussion. These concepts together reflect the study's and conversations' focus and allowed the three key overarching themes to emerge.

As explained earlier, these three overarching themes are not mutually exclusive, as for instance, discussing how one would describe their community would touch on one's sense of belonging and on the positive characteristics of their community. Moreover, in discussing how these positive aspects allow one to thrive would lead to conversing about human relationships and knowledge exchange. I have therefore used the dotted arrows in the figure below (Figure 4) in the effort to depict some of the complex, multi-dimensional, and interrelated connections amongst what participants explored and discussed.

There are numerous direct connections, not depicted in the concept map that are worth mentioning. For instance, the positive traits participants touched on, such as "unity" and "support" relate to the widespread practice of undertaking and “apprenticeship”, as it is one's contacts and connections who know our strengths and needs and who may help us expand our networks to find beneficial study and work opportunities. I could have also illustrated a connection between “apprenticeship” and “entrepreneurism” to acknowledge how youth often build skills and competencies through apprentice work, allowing them to then find full time employment or to start their own business. Other key characteristics of Zongo communities, according to participants, which I do not show in the concept map (included in the analysis tables but omitted here for clarity and simplicity) such as how common it is for people to help each other find housing (accommodation) would fall under support and care but is also interconnected with *family and community*, as well as with *education* and *employment*—as mentioned earlier, one's social network offers support for one to relocate for studies and/or work opportunities.

Figure 4

In-depth Conversations Thematic Analysis Concept-map



4.2 Photo-narratives

The photo-narratives method allowed to capture participants' views and reflections on *how* residents thrive in their KZ community and *what*, to them personally, fosters *health*, *wellbeing*, and *sustainable livelihoods*. In other words, what elements help people thrive. The steps and procedure of the photo-narratives are discussed in chapter 3, whereas here, I present participants' insights from group discussions. In addition, I touch on how we approached and structured the video content, to show the main overlapping themes we, as co-researchers, identified in participants' photo-narratives, and which as a group reflected on and discussed.

4.2.1 Introducing Co-researchers (*photo-narrative Participants*)

In total there were 12-participants—one nineteen-years of age, one in their early thirties and the rest ranging from early to late twenties. All participants were employed and/or studying, and spoke Hausa, Twi, Dagbani, and/or English. Recruitment of the participants was diverse: two of the participants were recruited through the public announcements (discussed in chapter 3) and after attending the information session. One participant attended the information session on behalf of her mother for the in-depth conversations and eventually participated in the photo-narratives herself. Some heard about the research through snowballing and decided to take part. Two participants came from a local association, and the son of the head chief who assisted to access the venue (Zongo Chief's palace) for meetings and activities, also decided to join the research activities.

4.2.2 Small-group Discussions: *Participants' Photographs, Narratives, and Reflections*

Each of the four groups met to have small group-discussions, where they shared the photograph(s) they selected and discussed what each image represents. As discussed earlier, participants were given a few days to reflect on the research questions introduced and discussed over the first two days of research activities (see chapter 3), as well as to capture an image symbolizing/reflecting the focus of what they deem important in their lives and community. Below I showcase photographs participants used to share their thoughts and narratives in relation to factors fostering *health, wellbeing, and sustainable livelihoods*. Here I present a photo (or two) selected from each participant, and I summarize the topics, and themes, of each participant's narratives (for both the pictures included and ones omitted³⁹ from this thesis).

³⁹ Certain images are omitted due to copy-right restrictions, for example images participants obtained from the internet, and which they used to guide their narratives. Once more, reminding me the need to adapt the study according to context and collaborative decisions.

Each small group met during the week, following the first weekend of workshops with participants. A repeated topic among participants' narratives, as with conversation participants, was the focus on “human relations”, and the notion of “unity” and the importance of “family” in one's life. Hamdaway (pc, 2022), using shared a picture of himself with a group of people (Figure 5), talked about the “support” people provide to each other, and how he experiences a sense of “security” and help from him his family, for who he strives to work and provide for. He also showed a photograph he found on the internet, which displays a mother and three children sitting together and reading a book–this prompted his focus on how it is “[our family members, those we live with, spend time with, grow with, who teach us, instill values in us], and help us grow into good people.” (Hamdaway, pc, translated). His reflections focused on the importance of *family* and *unity*, and he shared how the wellbeing of his parents, siblings, grandparents, and other loved ones brings him happiness.

Figure 5

Personal Photograph Provided by Alhassan Hamdaway to Discuss Family and Unity, n.d.



Similarly, Faiza (pc) used a photograph of her extended family (Figure 6) to speak on "unity and family". She described family as "a group of one or more parents and their children living together as a unit [...] formed by blood, marriage, or adoption." (Faiza, pc). She then explained the importance of family, by saying how "You feel free, you feel at home." (Faiza, pc).

These are "[p]eople who help you, motivate you, encourage, and advice you. [...] sharing their life experiences, the negative and the positive. [People who] are accessible [to you]." (Faiza, p.c.). Following, she used a photograph of Ghanaian currency bills to highlight the invaluable nature of *humans* in our lives, *over money*.

Figure 6

Participant's Photograph on Family and Unity. Photograph of extended family provided by Faiza Shittu, with the permission of the family illustrated.



Along the lines of discussing *human connections*, be it one's inner circle of family and friends, or acquaintances and *strangers*, Rahina (p.c.), discussed about events and celebrations and how important it is for people's health to come together, and to socialize and celebrate each other's milestones and be present in other significant events (be it of joy or sorrow). Rahina highlighted how people coming together to celebrate and socialize can positively impact one, such as by boosting their mood, but also by providing opportunities "to share struggles and grievances" (p.c., translated), to receive support and to find solutions. She explained how during social gatherings people have the opportunity to catch up, to discuss and help each other resolve issues, rather than internalizing some concern and letting it negatively affect them.

Rahina (p.c.) shared photos from community celebrations she took during recent celebrations she attended—portraits depicting people's happiness, smiles, and interactions with one another. Further, Rahina (pc) explained that "[she chose these photographs because] she

knows that everybody has his/her own problems that he/she is secretly dealing with, but every time she goes to a program⁴⁰, she sees her parents, or maybe siblings, friends, family coming together; they are all looking happy as if they have no problems.” (p.c., Rahina). Moreover, she shared examples of people resolving issues during such community programs and events. Rahina shared a story of a time when she saw "an elder [who] noticed [a group of friends] neglecting the one lady, and [stepped in] to help resolve a misunderstanding, [as she helped them all realise] that it was [a] miscommunication." (pc, translated).

Yussif (p.c.) also shared about *unity, community and togetherness*, while speaking about the grassroots association he is a member of, and how they often organize themselves to do good things for their community, for example, blood donations (Figure 7). Yussif's (p.c.) discussion touched on the importance to *give back* to your community, and to support one another. He explained how this is a way to help others, but also yourself, by sharing a story of how a friend, and member of the same association, was once admitted in the hospital and needed donors' blood. Further, Yussif (p.c translated) stated, "Donating blood for improvement of human life [...] he is happy to be doing it for humanity."

Figure 7

*Members of a Local Association Giving Blood Donation, A
Photograph provided by Yussif for Photo-narratives, n.d.*



⁴⁰ Common way, locally, to refer to outings, celebrations, and other social gatherings and events.

Hussain discussed two topics important to him, including having access to a cellphone, as it allows him to communicate with his family in northern Ghana, to ask for and to receive support, as well as to research and to learn things. As he states, "[...] helping me communicate with my family [in the] north. To take pictures and save things to not forget" (Hussain, p.c., translated). Another topic he discussed was on the importance of an active lifestyle, and how he plays European football (i.e. soccer) and participates in community exercise walks and runs (Figure 8).

Figure 8

Shoes to Symbolize the importance of Exercise and Active Lifestyle. Photograph taken by Hussein Yahuza in 2022

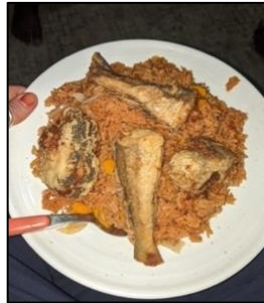


Another umbrella theme that emerged related to food and natural resources, in terms of the *health benefits of their local cuisine* and its health benefits. Further, a participant talked about increasingly common meals (e.g. instant noodles) to highlight foreign local-fusion and how important it is, for her, to consume balanced meals (Faiza, pc). Zikira (p.c.) showed images of a popular Ghana Ashanti dish, egg stew with boiled plantain, she also showed us a video of herself cooking, and other similar photographs on her phone. Zikira (pc, translated) said "[s]he chose this because food is life. Everything that lives on this earth needs food to survive. [...] It gives you energy, [and] the ability to move around." (p.c., translated). She explained how she has learned from other matriarchs, and how it is an important skill for all. While she is not necessarily interested to cook as a vocation, she would like to occasionally prepare food for

events and celebration, and highlighted that "as a lady, you are expected to know how to cook for your family [...]. Zikira also focused on how *cooking is a livelihood activity*. Further, during the conversation with her peers, we discussed how innovative and common it is for women in the community to make a living by selling home-cooked meals. We talked about waakye (rice with beans), for example, and how it is a common choice for breakfast or lunch, and one would always find someone selling it in a Zongo community; in addition to other popular foods across the country, such as Jolof rice (Figure 9).

Figure 9

Common Local Dish: Jollof Rice with Fried Fish, n.d.



Relating to nutritious food, participants also mentioned the medicinal properties of plants that are abundant in their cuisine, as well as other uses and benefits of natural resources, Alimatu (p.c., translated) talked about palm-nut plantation (Figure 10) and how important it is for the community. She explained that there are several uses of palm-nuts, including the production and consumption of red palm-nut oil that is nutritious (as it is less refined and a non-bleached version of commercial palm nut oil). She also explained that from the tree people make broomsticks and other wood-based products. Palm-nut tree is important, she explained, "to prepare palm-nut soup which contains vitamins and keeps us healthy. We use it to make oil [...], the fiber can be a fire-starter, [...] the wood to make brooms, the leaves can be boiled and drunk for cardiovascular and kidney diseases, [and branches/leaves] to build a roof etc. (Alimatu, p.c.).

Figure 10

Palmnut Plantation. Photograph taken by Alimatu Dauda



Moreover, after I acknowledged my ignorance of the health benefits, and how the first time I got to consume unbleached palm-nut oil was in Ghana, I shared how I have, previously, only become aware of socioenvironmental issues caused by deforestation and lack of biodiversity, driven by western production/consumption systems and habits. I then asked about cultivation of palmnut oil in Ghana and Alimatu (p.c.) explained how she believes it is common for people in her community to have access to a few palm trees, and for palm trees to exist in biodiverse environments, rather than their presence as the contemporarily typical mass monocultures of commercial farming.

Education, employment, and overall, any *vocation* generating income, as briefly mentioned, was another top theme explored with photo-narrative participants. Hamdawey (p.c.), with a sentiment of gratitude and care for others, shared how his work as a driver helps support his livelihood and family's needs. Mubarak, similarly, discussed how he and his family benefitted when someone taught him the art of royal architectural design. Sharing photos (Figure 11 & 12), Mubarak (p.c., 2022, translated) explained that,

"He chose this symbol [depicted in Figure 11 and 12] because when you see it, it makes you feel proud of Arewa [i.e. Arewa knot symbolizing *unity in diversity*], and Hausa

clans of Northern Nigeria. He learned this work [in his spare time] when he was studying in Nigeria. [...] He knows definitely he will be coming back to Ghana and has [to have] some skill. [...] he said this work he learned he didn't learn it for himself alone, [but] for the community. So, one day if anyone comes to learn it from him he would [teach them]".

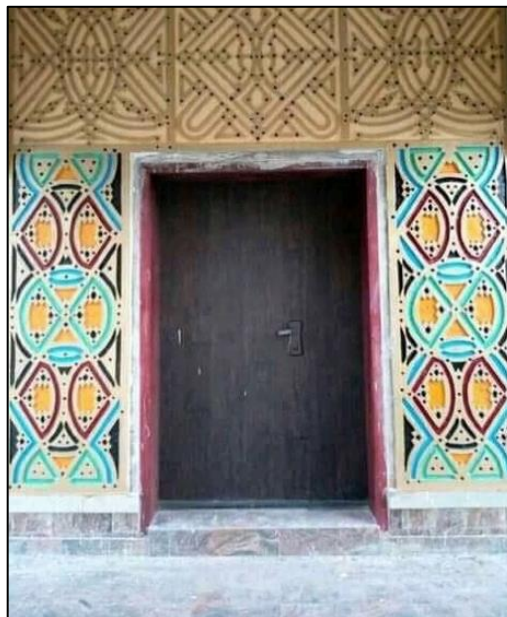
Figure 11

Hussein Mubarak Engraving an Exterior Royal Design in Nigeria, n.d



Figure 12

Exterior Royal Design in Nigeria n.d.



Elaborating on the topic of education and employment, Hajara (p.c.) shared about the *apprentice* work she is currently doing as a seamstress (Figure 13) and how she is developing skills allowing her to provide for herself. She hopes to one day open her own shop, and to also help other young people learn. It makes her happy and proud to see people wearing her clothes, or when people recommend her to others. "[This work] makes me proud. [It is something I am good at]. No matter how she is and does, nobody can look down on her. Even if she did not get the opportunity to further herself [in 'formal' education]" (Hajara, translated).

Figure 13

Hajara Ibrahim Working as an Apprentice, n.d.



In addition to providing a source of income, participants discussed about their work environment, and relations, that foster a sense of *togetherness*, and how *unity* plays a significant role in their lives. AbdulAziz (p.c., translated) shared photographs of himself fixing electrical equipment (Figure 14) and explained how he benefits from the skills he is developing. Further, he highlighted the importance of relationships, for example how someone is now teaching him the trade, but also how a *well-done job* would mean clients would help him build his clientele by recommending him to others. He also spoke about the significance of building good relationships with suppliers. – people he can trust for affordable and quality supplies, so he can provide his

own clients the best service. AbdulAziz (p.c., translated) said he wants to be proud of his work, which means building partnerships with people having similar sentiments and work ethics.

Figure 14

AbdulAziz Fixing Electrical Appliances, n.d.



Ibrahim Lawal (p.c., 2022), who is friends of, and sometimes works with, AbdulAziz, also discussed about his apprenticeship as an electrician (Figure 15 & 16). He shared about his journey learning the trade and how it is an important part of his life, where he gets to provide a service and to create a source of income for himself. Similarly to AbdulAziz, he shared his aspiration to develop his own business and help younger people learn the trade. In addition, he explained about the apprenticeship process and how having a good employer is essential; otherwise, one remain in the position working for someone else and making partial earnings.

Figure 15

Ibrahim Lawal Electricals Apprentice with a Coworker at a Job Site, n.d.



Figure 16

Ibrahim Lawal Fixing Electrical Equipment, n.d



Next, Ousman Kamal-deen (p.c., translated) discussed about the work he is engaging in where he rears animals; and how he is using these learned skills from his father and continuous developing through practice and experience. He sometimes travels to other cities, such as Accra where he can purchase new livestock (Figure 17). Kamal-deen talked about the care that goes into raising the animals, respecting them for the food and livelihood they provide, and briefly touched on what consists of halal killing of animals for consumption.

Figure 17

Animal Rearing. Photograph taken by Ousman Kamal-deen, n.d

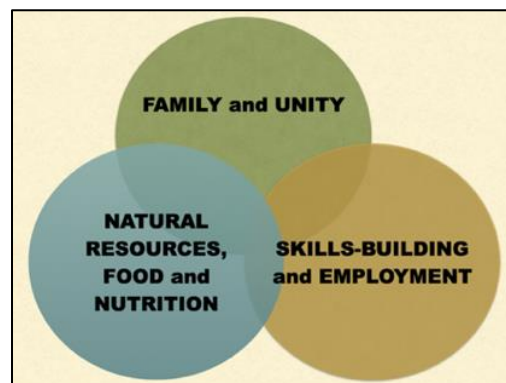


4.3.3 Brainstorming and Identifying Key Themes

The thematic analysis with photo-narrative participants did not follow the analysis process of transcribing, coding, and categorizing as with the in-depth conversations. Instead, when all members met to share a summary of their narratives, we brainstormed and highlighted keywords to describe each participants contribution—by giving a title to each picture and in a few sentences sharing why they chose the image and what it represents. We then reviewed what was outlined by each participant to identify the top 3-5 overarching themes, entailing similar ideas highlighted amongst participants. The final 3 umbrella themes we concluded on are illustrated in Figure 18.

Figure 18

*Venn Diagram Showing Three Overarching Themes –
Analysis with Photo-narratives co-Researchers*



Unity/family was an overarching theme identified, from unique narratives, yet from similar sentiments participants discussed around the importance of their nuclear and extended families, but also how friends and the community is perceived as their family. The idea of *togetherness* and *being each other's keepers* was highlighted in both the photo-narratives and during several in-depth conversations. Some participants paid attention discussing *communication*, and how *healthy communication*, *unity*, and *family*, foster *happiness*, *security*, and a *sense of belonging*. In their narratives, participants shared about ceremonies and

celebrations such as Suuna (naming ceremony), Maulud celebration, Awure (wedding ceremony), the Salah/Eid celebration, and Jannaiza (funeral), and as a group explained they provide "blessings, support, consolation, sympathy, socialization, recognition, and the coming together acts as a healing agent".

Moreover, celebrations offer opportunities for multi-cultural displays (*cultural exchange and knowledge sharing*), as well as "sharing"⁴¹ and "giving" (during Ramadan, Iftar, Zakart etc. when people give to each other, especially to the less fortunate in their community). Co-researchers also noted "volunteerism", and example of community engagement, such as joining "health walks "and national/regional sanitation events (clean-up exercises), as well as "giving events" such as "blood donation, community health outreach programs, Ramadan food donations, fundraising for community projects" (e.g. a new classroom for the middle school, expanding the health center). These examples, co-researchers explained, are important as they provide mutual aid, self-fulfillment, support, and in other cases entertainment too (e.g. sports, homecoming, inter-ethnic football matches etc.). In their study, Procentese et al. (2023) find that Sense of Responsible Togetherness and the trust among its members, along with hopeful attitudes, play a critical role when it comes to Civic engagement behaviors (CEB)—the activation of citizens' resources to face community problems.

Another focus area was on *natural resources*, as sources of "food (*abinchi*), nutrition, and medicine". Several participants discussed how their local cuisine includes various examples of nutritious meals rich in vitamins, such as "miyan kuuka soup" (using baobab leaves) that is rich in vitamin A and C, and contains antioxidants, and has anti-inflammatory and anti-allergic

⁴¹ Words and phrases, in these sections, in quotation marks are from collaborative notes participants drafted during activities. E.g. when participants were asked to reflect on the role, celebrations, and community events they listed, play on health, wellbeing, and sustainability.

properties. In addition, how natural resources are used as medicines, for example, the "palm-nut leaves" and shiwaka (bitter leaves) which are boiled and consumed for medicinal purposes. Furthermore, discussions touched on examples of natural resources used to construct material and household items.

The third theme we identified was *education, skills-building, and employment*. A few participants discussed their apprentice work and how the skills, experiences, and relationships are enabling them to have a positive input in community affairs and needs, to be financially independent and stable to raise their own families. In addition, participants noted how working together "promotes unity among themselves in the workplace", as well as the important community services they offer. Participants reflections/responses were not surprising, given the stage they are at in their lives, where all twelve are building their skills/competencies and spend a significant amount of their time engaging in educational and employment activities.

In this chapter, I present the main themes that participants shared, during the in-depth conversations and the photo-narrative activities. All the participants provided important insights highlighting positive aspects of their lived experiences in KZ, as well as cultural characteristics that foster support, health, and wellbeing. Each participant provided rich stories and narratives that help provide answers to the research question on "what, and how, their community fosters health, and wellbeing, and enables members to thrive?". In the next chapter, I draw upon theoretical framings relating to CBPR, sustainable livelihoods, and geographies of health, to further examine and analyze reflections, insights, and stories the research participants provided that emphasize their community's vibrancy.

Chapter 5: Vibrant Communities Fostering Health and Wellbeing through Social Cohesion

Creating space to share experiences and perspectives on what fosters *sustainable livelihoods and wellbeing*, at both the individual and community levels, provides insights on what makes and sustains *quality of life*; the idea of Buen Vivir (or sumak kawsay)⁴², conveying the notion of a good and sufficient life. As a decolonial paradigm, Buen Vivir is an alternative approach to the western capital-centric view of wellbeing, development, and innovations, where it promotes harmonious relationships with others and the ecosystem, encompassing the social and solidarity economy model of progress and wellbeing (Jimenez et al., 2022). What quality of life is, as well as, a quality life (existence) is, would be subjective and influenced by societal laws, norms, and values.

In this chapter, I strive to amplify participants' voices by highlighting their insights to gain a better understanding of the multiple, interconnected, positive factors fostering health and wellbeing, at a personal, and community level. In answering the three central research questions (chapter 1) guiding the inquiry, I draw on the concept map (Figure 4) to emphasize participants' perceptions, understandings, and experiences that allow: i) to first gain an understanding of how family, unity, and cultivating ethical standards, are important in participants' lives, as well as how these features facilitate communal thriving. ii) to outline three overarching themes (Figure 4)–*shared identity, positive community characteristics, and education/ employment*–which encompass aspects participants identified as foundational, and catalytic, in fostering health, wellbeing, and sustainable livelihoods. These include their sense of unity, and the nurturing of relationships forming a strong extended family support system. iii) to explore how forging strong

⁴² Buen Vivir or sumak kawsay: a worldview similar philosophical across the world concept found in various cultures (see: Acosta & Abarca, 2018)

human connections and bonds, and sharing values and social principles stimulate social cohesion, and promote sustainable livelihoods.

I begin the chapter looking at the vibrancy in KZ this study captured—this, entails discussing how participants experience *unity*, and living a communal way of life. African socialization rooted in values of Ubuntu philosophy, promotes communal social relations and connection to develop, which in turn, fosters a strong sense of belonging. Then, I introduce misconceptions and/or generalities about Zongos, which help portray them as places of violence and criminality. Following the brief discussion on stereotypes, I highlight qualities that demonstrate strengths enabling one to survive and thrive; thus, offering counter-narratives to any well-established, normative, single stories. I close the chapter by emphasizing key take-away points from participants’ insights and the study’s knowledge exchange—to discuss human dimensions associated with healthy communities, and how scholars and policy makers aiming to cultivate change that fosters health and wellbeing could consider.

5.1 Vibrancy and Unity in African Communities – Zongo Case Study

This study shows how strong human relations and networks of mutual aid enable people to meet fundamental needs (e.g. housing and food security), as well as enhance educational and employment opportunities that enable communities to thrive. Schiefer and van der Noll (2017) show how three core dimensions of social cohesion in the literature include *social relations*, *sense of belonging*, and *orientation towards common good*. Participants’ insights reinforce the idea that a strong sense of belonging, networks of mutual aid, and a shared value system promote social cohesion. In addition, stories they share exemplify the role of mutual relations, unity, and cohesion in enhancing the quality of their lives.

African socialization fosters social capital where people work together, depend on each other, and look after one another. The extended family system is prevalent in Africa, which goes beyond kinship to include relationships with neighbours and friends (often referred to as brothers/sisters). The idea of private, of what belongs to one, including private property, privacy of physical space, time, and one's whereabouts—aspects valued in western communities – were not points of discussion during conversations, nor photo narratives. Instead, participants, highlighted the communal lifestyle, the importance of communal shared space, of spending time together, of looking after one another, and of having a vested interest in others' wellbeing, as fundamental in their own experience of health and wellbeing.

Moreover, community engagement, knowledge mobilization, and direct action in KZ are not only present but central in participants' worldviews and way of life—participants offer multiple examples of how the community mobilizes to support one another, and how grassroots groups take initiatives to construct public facilities, such as school classrooms. Further, they emphasize how *unity* and *peace* in the community are important aspects allowing them to lead good lives and to thrive, at a personal and communal level.

All and all, participants discussed often disregarded, yet fundamental qualities that foster wellbeing and enable people and communities to thrive. The *human factor competency* (HFC) concept (see chapter 2) encourages a focus on overlooked notions—especially in western academia—such as principles of building a good character and strong values (e.g. integrity, honesty), as well as of fulfilling social obligations. Moreover, the HF theory emphasizes human dimensions that tend to receive less attention in terms of fostering community development and wellbeing, including the importance of “spiritual capital, moral capital, aesthetic capital, human capital, human abilities and human potentials” (Adjibolosoo, 1995, p. 34).

Research findings provide evidence of how participants consider ethical principles as fundamental in enriching their lives and enabling their community to foster health and wellbeing for all. Through multiple examples, this study shows how reciprocal, and non-transactional human connections, are central factors enabling people to thrive. Whereas the focus of typical contemporary community development theories and practices, has for long, focused on improving the material without centering the people—that is, putting focus on strengthening the economy, while disregarding the needs, and desires of humans—participants’ insights illuminate how putting lives at the center enable one and the community at large to thrive. People form strong bonds that function as a support network; a social support system founded on reciprocity, thus allowing mutual benefits.

5.2 Experiencing a Sense of Communalism

While communal oriented worldviews and lifestyle remain strong in many communities such as KZ, it can be argued that collectivism is overall eroding locally and globally. Not only in western states, but within African nations, socioeconomic changes are eroding the collectivist ethos of African communities—this reflects a wider global trend, where people's lifeworlds significantly transform, as family relations, ways of relating with the community, the ecosystem, and with one another drastically change over time. For example, African immigrant families in Canada, who are under pressure to adjust to different expectations and institutional practices in different locales, are noticing the shift from communal responsibility to individual parents' responsibility for children, and as a result see how it has transformed the way youngsters relate and communicate with elders (Creese, 2011) and others in society.

Despite the above-mentioned changes, participants shared multiple examples indicating a sense of togetherness, belonging, and mutual support. Sadiq (pc, 2022) said “[...] you notice we

live like a family here; we have peace here. [...] If something is wrong with any of us here, we do contribute something, money to support the person.” In contrast to the common belief many hold that people are inherently selfish and competitive, Sagiru (pc, 2022) spoke of cooperation and care,

“You know, people are selfless. They do things for each other. They care for each other and I can't think of anything else that is more important in, you know, improving life for each other, you know? And helping everyone thrive in different ways, [also] helps everyone to live a good life”.

In terms of competition, it is not that it does not exist, but rather that it is productive in nature, rather than destructive. For instance, honorable Nana (pc, 2022) explained how assembly members, as himself, strive to be the best they can be, and for people to remember their contributions to the community.

“They want to be the best assembly member. [...] so that they can say, ‘Zongo people are the best.’ [...] but they are not selfish. So, they want to help each other to be the best, so that they can mention Zongo.” (hon. Nana, pc, 2022).

Similarly, Crystabel (pc, 2022) touched on how people positively influence one another, saying:

“[T]here is hard work [as in hardworking]. [I] have not really seen anyone in a Zongo community who lazes around or who depends solely on someone [...]. So, the encouragement is that seeing your fellow [do something], motivates [or pushes you too]”

5.3 Sense of Belonging in Diversity

According to Schiefer and van der Noll (2017), as mentioned earlier, an essential feature of social cohesion relates to identification with the social entity; that is, people’s sense of belonging and a shared identity. Key overlapping themes that emerged in the study include how

the *sense of Zongo identity and belonging* allow people to forge strong relationships and enriches their quality of life as positive feelings are cultivated—these include feeling of acceptance, experiencing a sense of *unity and support*, increasing one’s *happiness and sense of security*. Participants' narratives and conversations show how *language*, people's common backgrounds (*northernness*), and a *shared belief system and values* help people feel they belong.

Hausa, as the most widely spoken language in Zongo communities, plays a role in strengthening the sense of unity and belonging. Crystabel (pc, 2022) explained how as a Christian within the community, by speaking the same language she feels at home and accepted, as she stated that "[t]hrough speaking of Hausa, I was able to make another family there. They accepted me. We related very well." (pc, 2022). Sadiq (pc, 2022) also emphasized how a common language helps foster unity and oneness: “If you go to a place where people speak a language that you understand and you speak, you easily become part of it. [...] The moment you speak the language we see you as part and parcel of us.”

In Zongos, as already mentioned, most inhabitants follow Islam, which becomes clear to one who visits the community; for example, the architectural differences, such as the prevalence of mosques and makaranta schools, as well as unique housing models (compound housing style) exemplify the prevalence of Islam. Participants paid attention to how celebrations and events bring people together, and help one feel a sense of belonging and of being loved and supported. Examples of events mostly had a direct connection to the shared religion, but also to ethnic groups displaying their diverse cultures.

Although there is diversity, they experience unity through cross-religions and cultural celebrations. For instance, Sagiru (pc, 2022) explained that during celebrations, you can see the diversity in the food prepared, the traditional clothing amongst ethnic groups, and unique dances

of each population. In addition, Hon. Sellasie, Sagiru, and Crystabell (pc, 2022), each shared with me about the role of performances, such as dances, drumming, and/or theatrical plays called Takai, which function as stories communicating someone's culture, and/or social values; for instance, teaching not to steal, or cheat.

A shared language and belief system foster a sense of belonging. Christians may not follow the community's predominant religion, however, research participants expressed they feel accepted and a sense of belonging. Mr. Emmanuel, for instance, when we discussed about belonging, he stated, "There is respect and understanding for each other's way of life. They accept us. Our religion, our culture, we also accept them and we tolerate each other." (p.c., 2022). This, however, does not mean there is absence of conflict, nor that everyone feels accepted and experiences a sense of cohesion. It is important to emphasize that while narratives of exclusion are beyond the study's scope, they exist, and an inquiry could indicate diverse levels of inclusion/exclusion amongst community members. This research did not take a comparative approach (e.g. exploring narratives of inclusion versus exclusion), and mainly aimed to examine factors fostering cohesions, however, the voices of those with lived experiences of exclusion, or with absence of support, are valid and deserve attention. In the interest to better understand how participants experience a sense of belonging and what enables community to foster cohesion, the research focuses on experiences and narratives of unity, inclusion, mutual aid, and thriving.

5.3.1 Welcoming Nature

Most, if not all, participants, in one way or another, emphasized unity, hospitality, and friendliness. Aziz (pc, 2022), for instance, spoke of Zongo's welcoming nature: "[T]hese are some of the things that make Zongo a nice place to be and if you're [a visitor in Zongo], everybody tries to know you, to make you happy, make you feel like being part of Zongo [...]".

Another key aspect of social cohesion, Schiefer and van der Noll (2017), explain, is social relations that entail social networks, trust, and acceptance of diversity—aspects that study participants have highlighted as fundamental in how they experience healthy, happy, lives. Putnam (1993, 1995) considers trust a central element of social capital, in addition to social norms and networks that characterize social organizations (cited in Procentese et al., 2023).

This thesis provides examples of how social cohesion can exist amongst diverse groups. While, often, strong social bonds and strong identification with a group, may allow processes of othering to emerge, this case study displays the connectedness, and sense of unity, diverse community members experience. In terms of valuing diversity, and knowledge exchange and co-production, Sadiq, for instance, discussed about the community welcoming visitors to share their knowledge and information, as well as to engage in business, and in trading goods and resources. Sadiq (pc, 2022), said,

“Yes, one key thing that we usually benefit from people who come to live with us is that some of them come with businesses so they make things a bit cheaper [...] [for example], it's hard to find dates, but if you go to the Zongos you will see dates. We don't cultivate dates in Ghana.”

Ahmed (pc, 2022), similarly, explained, “[...] some of the foreigners as they come, they come with much of Islamic knowledge; yes, so we are able to tap that knowledge from them [...].”

5.3.2 Unity and Support

The second overarching theme, from the analysis, covers the set of positive community traits, which participants explained allow people to thrive and to foster health and wellbeing. Participants, for instance, characterized their community as peaceful, where they experience a sense of togetherness and feel supported. Further, others also explained that members look out

for one another, supporting someone to go to school, or to buy medication and/or food. Memunatu (pc, 2022), for instance, shared about her own experience supporting a family member with her husband, as they have offered a relative to stay with them; “[...] one room to come and stay till death. [...] Yes, with nothing in return” (pc, 2022). This form of social cohesion ensures people achieve housing and food security, among other fundamental needs for fostering health and wellbeing. Denney et al. (2017), looking at the role of perceived social cohesion in a residential neighborhood, “[found] that as feelings of social connectedness increase, the odds of food insecurity decrease [...]”. (p. 343).

Sulaiman (pc, 2022) discussed how people support one another with accommodation, which is one significant way Zongonians support one another. He gave an example of a lady who asked for a place to stay, and how his family was then able to provide—“people open their homes to anyone. To anyone. It’s humanity.” (Sulaiman, pc, 2022). Being open and welcoming, however, does not mean letting one take advantage. Sadiq (pc, 2022) explained there needs to be mutual, and reciprocal relationships.

“You know we have some relationship that is parasitic. You always want to benefit while the other loses. So, when we notice you are that kind of person then people will deny you some of these things. [...] All you do is just always benefit from people. [W]ithout giving. People cannot benefit from you. We have people like that. So, when we notice you are such type of person, we try to [distance ourselves].”

Gutberlet (2009, p. 739) speaks of “co-operation and reciprocity [as] building-blocks for social cohesion”. The above discussion exemplifies how Zongonians value both co-operation and reciprocity and strive to cultivate such qualities in their relationships. This study emphasizes how communities, that tend to be stigmatized, offer living examples of groups of people collaborating

and building strong social support networks. In turn, allowing spaces to co-create, and actively engage in one's community, to grow.

5.3.3 *Care and Safety*

Other important positive traits, also discussed earlier, include participants' responses on unity, feeling supported in their employment and vocation endeavors, as well as the significance of experiencing *peace*, a sense of *security* and *safety*. In terms of looking out for one another, for example, Sagiru (pc, 2022) stated that “[we] are each other's keepers [...]”—further explaining that if he was to not attend for a day or two, others would become concerned and look for him to ensure he is well. Ahmed (pc, 2022) reinforced this idea – of how friends show their concern and try to know one's whereabouts – when saying, “If I'm absent today, tomorrow. I'm absent the next day they supposed to find the reason why exactly I'm not there [at the base joint⁴³] [...]” The unity participants discussed also showed how it helps people to not just feel supported and a sense of belonging, but to also feel *safe* and to enhance *peace* and a sense of *security*. Robertson et al. (2022) discuss how feeling connected relates to people feeling safe and secure. Hamdia (pc, 2022) also talked about safety and happiness she experiences, saying,

“In Zongo community what makes me [happy] it's like children for instance they are safe. They are safe in Zongo and you yourself you are safe because you can't hear any gun shooting or any violence like somebody is fighting or any robbery in Zongo, so it makes me happy. I'm free to walk [to] any place and my children too are very free to walk [...] everybody knows they are my children and they are safe even if I'm not around.”

In addition, Crystabel (pc, 2022) gave the example of being escorted by neighbours to keep her safe, as did other participants, who spoke of feeling safe and of how people look after one

⁴³ How Zongo residents refer to the location where a given group of friends usually gather in their neighbourhood to socialize.

another. Overall, participants' input offer examples of prioritizing how one *feels* and *experiences* a sense of safety, rather than paying attention to quantifiable targets of development agendas looking, for instance, to increase access to a service or product, or to decrease occurrences of an event.

5.3.4 Shared Values

The third dimension of social cohesion, as Schiefer and van der Noll (2017) indicate, is orientation towards the common good (sense of responsibility, solidarity, compliance to social order). Numerous participants attributed community values of mutual aid to the teachings of Islam, highlighting the importance of makaranta schools in cultivating social values and their communal way of life. Challenging widespread islamophobia in contemporary society, through counternarratives, participants discuss Islamic values fostering peace, unity, support, togetherness etc. In their work, Ismail and Rasid (2022) encourage the incorporation of Islamic perspectives in sustainable development research, arguing it could help in alleviating poverty and promoting shared prosperity.

Moreover, while there is religious diversity, the strong sense of responsibility towards family and focus on social bonds, cut across religions. No matter one's religious association, participants demonstrate the importance of family relations in their lives, and everyday experiences, as well as their strong sense of responsibility towards social obligations. In KZ, people take care of each other and live-out the interconnectedness that exists—feeling responsibility for one another, celebrating or grieving together, empathizing with each other's pride or sorrows. In other words, consciously experiencing Ubuntu.

5.4 Socialization and Education – Thriving as a Communal Process and Responsibility

Kalkavan et al. (2021) argue that “[t]o be a conscious part of a society requires

responsibility for the society and the people who live together within” (p. 985). Communal practices and perspectives, where people consider the feelings and wellbeing of their fellow human beings as essential in attaining their own, stimulate social cohesion, and promote sustainable livelihoods. It is through strong social connections, as participants explained, that people can meet their basic needs of survival, and to cultivate quality of life.

Robertson et al. (2022), argue that achieving quality of life requires more than attaining a good life at an individual level, to “simultaneously [...] co-produce a good quality of life for the wider communities in which people are located” (p. 559). Emphasizing, in their study, how community influences quality of life, they call for greater attention to the conceptualization of *quality of life* in terms of communal wellbeing, rather than mainstream perspectives over-emphasizing the realization of quality of life for the individual.

KZ participants repeatedly highlighted how their happiness and good health is intertwined with the wellbeing of others. Sagiru (pc, 2022), for instance, stated, “[...] my happiness is to see me and my other friends always okay. That's how I define my happiness." Moreover, the Queen mother (pc, translated, 2022) argued, “once you are living individualistic, death is within you". Participants repeatedly emphasized how building and maintaining a strong sense of community, and of unity, are significant aspects of their lives in KZ. Ahmad and Abu Talib (2016) found there is a positive relationship between community empowerment and sense of community. Further, their analysis shows that the sense of community influences the relationship between community empowerment and sustainability of community-driven projects.

Participants’ attention to the benefits of education and importance of makaranta schools in instilling good principles demonstrate how highly the community values knowledge exchange, as they strongly encourage young people to attain education. Further, participants explained that

students attending makaranta not only learn the Arabic language and study the Quran but also learn about values and building a good character and attitude. Sulaiman (pc, 2022), for instance, claims it is families and makaranta who teach one how to conduct themselves and about values. Hidayat and Janan (2023) explore the integration of academic learning with student character building. - to help students develop their understanding and awareness of positive attitudes, good morals, and ethics. While they focus on the context of Islamic boarding schools, their discussion has merit in other educational settings and systems, where the implementation of character education could shape students' character along socially desired qualities.

Dominant approaches to community development lack consideration of the ethics and morals driving such initiatives. In addition, they lack reflection, and understanding, as to the 'kind' of citizens these improved institutions and services (for example) would in turn help produce. Asutay and Yilmaz (2021) argue that a key reason inequality persists in contemporary economic systems, despite efforts to address poverty, is the denial that morality has a role in the market economy, which is presented as value- and ethics free. Kalkavan et al. (2021) discuss how unconscious investments in a country perpetuate inequalities and injustice. That is, investment that lacks Ubuntu; in other words, investment that fails to consider the human experience, including the investment's direct impact on the individual and through its influence to all the intertwined spheres making the whole.

5.4.1 The Community as a Large Family

The sense of community and responsibility for each other, in KZ, is quite strong. Ahmad and Abu Talib (2016) indicate that one's sense of community is associated with having greater access to resources, and in turn, how their community engagement efforts are more likely to meaningfully contribute to the development of their local area. In addition, as discussed earlier,

the authors show how sense of community and community empowerment are strongly related. Study participants' care and thoughtfulness for each other enables mutual aid, and mutual empowerment, as people actively engage in a relational exchange of giving and receiving support—a beneficial relationship that entails trust, and accountability.

Zongo residents, according to participants, see each other as a large extended family, who care about one another and who can depend on each other. It is common, for example, for young ones to live with relatives for extended period, often moving to different region of the country for better educational and employment opportunities—moving in with relatives, who most often, offer accommodation without a rental fee. The significance of extended family in KZ is quite high as Memunatu (pc, 2022) explained,

“[In Zongo] we are practicing this extended family; we don't practice nuclear families. So maybe if I'm not having, or I'm less privileged and maybe my uncle is well [off] I can follow my uncle [to] just share my problem to him and he can help me with something small to be able to start with something that can earn me at least [something]. So yes, people look after each other within the family to ensure that those basic needs are met.”

Moreover, the raising of children and developing sustainable livelihoods are not seen, nor experienced, as a private matters, but rather, as communal processes where everyone has the *right* and *obligation* to actively engage in realizing healthy upbringing of young ones and improvements in living conditions. Other participants also highlighted the idea of the community being a large family, where everyone looks out for one another and actively participates in the socialization process. Participants' responses show how all members of the community take part in instilling values to younger ones; teaching good manners, and how to best behave and relate

with others in a constructive, respectful, and mutually beneficial way. Aziz (pc, 2022), for instance, explained “It's not only the child that you have given birth [that] is your child”. In turn, local perspectives hold that one must take care of and respect elders as their own parents. – On this, Sulaiman (pc, 2022) said, “Every father is a father. Yeah, every mother is a mother. So you don't have to abuse somebody's mother within the community.”

Roufai (pc, 2022) added, how “[s]omebody can take care of somebody's child [...]”, for example, by inviting someone's child to stay with them in order to access opportunities not present in one's community. It is strong connections and communal values that allow for such practices; Najat (pc, 2022) stated, “So it's through connections, people, that you reach out to your family members, you know. ‘Can I send you my son? He will have better opportunities there’.” Aziz and Najat (pc, 2022), each touched on correcting people's behavior, not just your own child's, with Aziz saying: “[...] because of oneness that exists between us, if you see someone's child especially in the Zongo, you see someone start doing something [going] wayward [it is important] do something about it”. Similarly, the Queen mother (pc, 2022, translated) discussed about teaching children when she explained, “[if you see] someone's child [...] misbehave on their way. [Y]ou have to discipline the child before [they go] home”. She discussed how it would pain her if she did not, for example, talk to a young one who may be doing something dangerous, to later find out they got hurt or have hurt someone else, and she took no action to prevent it.

Other than sharing life lessons and about good behaviour, participants also highlighted the importance of acknowledging one another and engaging in interpersonal conversations. Memunatu (pc, 2022), added, “[u]nity is one of the key, I would say key issue because we take each other to be like a family. She also explained why it matters to acknowledge each other, to

take the time to talk to them, and to ask about their health and family, by giving the example of stopping to greet someone you come across while passing through the neighbourhood.

Supporting young ones goes beyond correcting/advising someone, for example, it often involves providing accommodation to assist someone. Also, it is common for people to offer financial support and help others access material resources. For example, paying another person's child's school fees, offering food, clothing etc. Aziz (pc, 2022), for instance, said,

“[...] we do have the awareness we do help each other financially or maybe [...], maybe putting anything on fire, you could see [...] that this person doesn't have [and] need some support. So maybe if they cook, they give it to the person or maybe they'll send food to the person to cook [themselves].”

Examples in this section that speak to strong family connections, help demonstrate how African communities such as Zongos experience and build social cohesion. During our conversation, Roufai (pc, 2022) mentioned that “[...] when you look at, it's African culture, it's Ghanaian culture. [In Zongos] it is quite stronger. It's the responsibility of the family that makes us so unique.” Similarly, Aziz (pc, 2022) shared his view that “it is part of Ghanaian culture, but it is rampant in Zongo” to practice a communal lifestyle.

5.4.2 Celebrating and Grieving Together

Community celebration and events, be it to celebrate life's milestones or to attend a service for one's passing are significant for KZ residents. Although there are thousands of residents within KZ, such events have an *open invitation*—meaning that, for example, someone who is invited to a relative's wedding, could invite their own contacts who may not know the ones marrying. Najat explained that people attend because of the relationship/connection they have with someone who is invited. You see people within your program, but you don't know

them. [...] But they know your friend. They know your mother.” (Najat, pc, 2022). I asked if it something unique and Najat responded “[...] that is something quite unique. Yes. [Well,] [y]ou know, [I] don't know if it's just Zongo or if it's the Ghanaian culture, the African culture. Even the Christians do that.” Emphasizing, once more, the strong community bonds that exist, no matter one's religion.

When there are funerals, it is common to make public announcements to inform the community of someone's passing, and for almost the whole community to attend. Memunatu (pc, 2022) explained that “Right now when somebody is dead even within 30 minutes the whole Zongo community will get to hear. Because we have public [announcement] system at our mosque.” In addition to supporting each other within KZ, the community also comes together to organize and hold a funeral for a visitor, ‘stranger’, who died in their locale. With Memunatu (pc, 2022) we talked about a recent example, when a woman from a nearby town passed on at the Koforidua hospital, and a funeral was held, how most attendees did not know the deceased. Memunatu (pc, 2022) said,

“They make an announcement that they said a woman, a stranger, passed on. We don't know her, but the world is going to give her the last respect and they will bury her. That's the sense of unity. We [go] to give her the last respect. And I think three or four of her family were here, but all the rest were from [KZ].”

Sadiq (pc, 2022) reinforced how the community takes responsibility for its members, and non-members, when he said, “[W]hat needs to be done when you are in your home, when you die in someone's community, the people over there should be able to do the same thing.”

The factors participants identified as foundational, and catalytic, in fostering health, wellbeing, and sustainable livelihoods, included social values and opportunities to socialize and

be present in each other's lives. The notion of *being each other's keepers* offer people a social support network to enhance their lives. Participants paid attention to how celebrations and events bring people together, and help one feel a sense of belonging and of being loved and supported. Robertson et al. (2022) discuss how socializing within a community provide people with opportunities to maintain and extent their social networks. They discuss examples of get-togethers, participants identified as key to enhancing social relations. Ahmad and Abu Talib (2016) also mention the importance of social gatherings in strengthening the sense of community, “as people socialize and interact with each other, their emotional connections improve” (p. 1044).

One’s presence and support help enhance other people’s lives as they feel cared for. Discussing with Najat (pc, 2022), for instance, he explained how people express their love and care to loved ones with their presence and care through significant life experiences, changes, and events—what Mr. Emmanuel (pc, 2022) put as, “We all go to grief with them. [...] When they are happy [and there is] joy, we share [it] with them.” Community celebrations play a vital role in uniting people. Sagiru (pc, 2022) emphasized the happiness he experiences during celebrations such as a wedding, or a naming ceremony, or other religions/cultural celebrations, explaining: “See [...] I said Islam is really our way of life and our happiness because within these celebrations that is where you show love to your neighbor.”

Social events and celebrations offer opportunities for people to reconnect, as Sagiru, for instance, said “[...] that's the time that we reunite with each other, at the ceremony ground.” It is common for people to travel from other parts of the country to attend a celebration in KZ, and in fact, for the diaspora to visit Ghana. Sagiru (pc, 2022, translated) shared a memory of a celebration when “[as he remembers] there were people from Italy, from Germany who came

specifically to reunite, to celebrate with people”. Moreover, such celebrations allow people to mobilize knowledge, by sharing ideas, and experiences with one another—“On Friday, we go and meet at the central mosque. We exchange ideas.” (Sulaiman, pc, 2022).

Community events, discussed above, are also opportunities for women to socialize, to sell goods they may be producing. Roufai (pc, 2022), for instance, explained that while his wife spends most of her time at home, “[...] during the ceremony [women] gather, during the wedding, during the funeral, they all gather and [converse]”. Mr. Emmanuel (pc, 2022) also emphasized the significance of human connections; "When we say people are sociable, that means they mingle with each other, they share common goods, they share happiness, joy and sadness. That's the system of socialization I'm saying here."

5.4.3 Religious Duties of Giving

Ibrahim Walakia discussed about supporting each other and introduced me to Islamic practices and values called *Fisabilillah* and *Zakat* (one of the five pillars of the Islamic religion). These two concepts were the focus of numerous conversations where participants emphasized the *giving spirit* of the community. Walakia (pc, translated) said “[...] that if somebody is in need here, they can appeal for support and that's what we call *Fisabilillah*. Even if the family are not around, the community can support. They help and support living community members.” Iddrisu (pc, translated) said, “makaranta teaches us to do good and even help people who are in need”. According to Iddrisu (pc, translated), “When somebody is in dire need of something and the person is [to ask for help], like simple mention of [*Fisabilillah*] [...] brings people out to come and help.”

Crystabel (pc, 2022) also talked about *Zakat*, explaining that it is a one’s duty to give a percentage of their savings, each year, to someone who needs it, “who doesn’t have something

going on for themselves. Because within the next year or two, that person is also going to give Zakat to the next person.” Najat (pc, 2022) also said “Zakat is once in a year. Once in a year, whatever you have [it is] 2.5% [of your savings]”. He further explained that you give to someone but “Not your mother. Not your son. Because those people, it's compulsory on you to look after them.” You can give to a family member, but it is not meant for your immediate family, as one would already be taking care of them.

Walakia (pc, 2022) also said, “the Zakat has reported that you have to give to your neighbors before taking it outside.”—meaning to first help those closest to you before supporting a stranger. Sellasie (pc, 2022) also emphasized this point and explained that the purpose is to “bring them up”, to help one, for example, to learn a trade, or with their business. Kalkavan et al. (2021) see Zakat as an important tool to poverty alleviation, where idle capital is transferred and utilized to bring people out of poverty.

Furthermore, Ahmed (pc, 2022) discussed that Zakat is meant to be given to one person, but that it has become a common practice for people to divide the annual corresponding 2.5% amount, for example, giving ten cedis to a hundred people. He explained that this does not help the way Zakat is intended to aid someone to stand on their feet. Insignificant amounts, he added, get squandered easily on one meal, for example, but giving the whole amount could help someone in the long run. Challenges in how to best manage and distribute Zakat is under discussion in the literature too. For instance, Owoyemi (2020) examines the crisis of confidence on states and agencies in effectively managing Zakat funds and recommends ways to build trust. This crisis is also relevant to other taxation and welfare systems worldwide, as well as to whether donations and aid funds are effectively managed to contribute to society as intended.

In addition to these religious-based practices, Mansoo (pc, 2022) shared with me how KZ had established a Zongo educational fund where the community would annually fund someone's education, therefore acting as a community scholarship. In our conversation, Mansoo highlighted the importance of education, saying "because if somebody is educated, the way [they] thin[k] might be different from the one who is not educated." He explained, that even if they are not to pass on the support they received, "he's been exempted from the unemployed".

5.5 Social Connections Enhancing Education and Employment for Communal Thriving

Another overarching theme determined from the analysis (chapter 4) is education and employment, which in turn, is interconnected to the community traits discussed above. When one forges strong relations, and ensures basic needs of survival are met, they have opportunities to further their education and develop skills. Also, it is often through social support and interpersonal relations that people establish and grow their business. Mr. George (pc, 2022, translated), for instance, mentioned that since he moved to KZ, his local contacts have helped him with work opportunities, to increase his earnings. About accessing work opportunities, Sagiru (pc, 2022) mentioned that "the most common thing about the Zongo community is that most people are self-employed." He said it often means people connect with each other, and support one another.

Many young people in KZ sign-up for apprentice work, to gain employable skills that would allow them to find a job. Often, the goal is to open their own businesses, rather than to work for someone else. Tremblay and Harris (2018) research also affirmed the importance of developing employable skills and new capacities as key interests and motivation of South African youth's participation in their CBPR project. During photo narratives, participants highlighted that while some employers may not be supportive for their apprentices to open their

own shops or to have their own clients, in their case, they are able to and feel supported to grow their own clientele.

Honorable Nana (pc, 2022) discussed the benefits of apprentice opportunities for young people and how those who have established their work are willing to hire them. He said, “[S]o they are helping each other [with] apprenticeship so that they can also learn new skills. And the other one is they contribute; they enrich people among Zongo, they contribute to help those who don't have enough to educate. It's like a scholarship; [a community scholarship].”

As with apprentice work, Honorable Nana’s mother, Mrs. Nana (pc, 2022) also shared with me how she conducted vocational training in the community. She taught young people vocational skills to help them with generating their own income, specifically in the food industry. Apprenticeships allow young people to develop skills they can eventually use to establish a source of income. Further, apprentice work enables them to network, both, economically and socially, thus, allowing them to expand their social circle of available resources and support. Participants in photo narratives talked about their cuisine in terms of their health benefits, but also for providing a source of income. Roufai (pc, 2022) mentioned that while there are a lot of food stalls within KZ, a lot of business-women and -men at Zongo travel to sell their goods in other parts of the city. Making work for themselves, it demonstrates examples of people taking initiative and being innovative by utilizing available resources, and their acquired knowledge and skills.

Memunatu (pc, 2022) talked about trading being common, and emphasized the hardworking nature of Zongonians, “No. You don’t see somebody sitting idle. People are very hardworking here. [You] see everybody selling, yeah, just going up and down.” Moreover, it is

common for people to work together, as Roufai (pc, 2022) said, “You hardly see the work person working alone. So they call us in tough work twins, because we always work together. So the security is there.” Sadiq (pc, 2022) talked about the hardworking nature too, saying, “People work. So you work to be able to satisfy your needs. So that's one way people overcome their challenges, by working.” He also talked about the community support so that people meet their needs, and touched on community associations people create, “Secondly is that we have community help where people are into groups. And so when there are challenges, people can come together to help the one who is faced with that difficulty to overcome it.” Such associations help members in several ways, for instance, to find work, or to support one’s existing business.

5.5.1 Communal labor

Engaging in communal labor is quite common in KZ—Meaning that the community organizes itself to act on matters concerning a group within the community and/or the community as a whole. Roufai (pc, 2022) emphasized this by saying “Doing everything in Zongo, in Ghana is communal labor. This school was built through communal labor.” Similarly, community members and groups (associations within KZ and the diaspora) have been playing a vital role supporting the needs of the KZ health center. Mr. George (pc, 2022, translated) also talked about “[...] the [assembly members] organize the community, so people come out willing to work together. Sometimes cleaning up the gutters. Which makes him proud of [KZ]”.

5.6 Networks of Mutual-Aid Partnerships

The importance of unity—that is, of social connections for protection, support, and looking after each other—as the discussion shows, was central in conversations with participants. Mutual-aid partnerships are exemplified during events and celebrations, as already mentioned, where people contribute their time, and sometimes their labor and finances, for someone’s event

to be held. This unity shines on an everyday level too in how people relate to one another, fostering safety and wellbeing. Nana (pc, 2022) said “Zongo is a family. There's peace in the Zongo. We love each other.” Similarly, Crystabel (pc, 2022) explained, "There is this bond that connects everyone together. If you try to harm one person, you've tempered with everybody. Yes, everybody will come after you. And most of the time, it depends on how you relate with each other.”

Conversations revealed how people do not remain neutral in times of personal challenges and/or disputes among parties. Meaning, people would rather step-up and step-in to involve themselves in other’s personal lives—creating a social support network; a grassroots welfare system, and dispute resolution processes. Mansoo (pc, 2022), for example stated that “disputes wouldn't go far, they get resolved. Easily.” Also, Rahina (pc, 2022) in her photo narrative shared a story discussing how people step in to help resolve misunderstandings and for different parties to reconcile.

From a western perspective it may seem as infringing on someone’s privacy, however in a community such as KZ it is common and desirable for people to mobilize when someone is in need; be it to help someone with material resources, with finances, with a word of advice etc. Mansoo (pc, 2022) talked about people involving themselves, by saying,

“People intervene and you have to accept [...]; it simply means I can also intervene if somebody suffers when having problems. We have that belief and understanding that it's okay to intervene. If I am doing something bad, we have the belief that if I'm doing something bad and nobody talks about it, that means I'm neglected. But if somebody should call me, hey, come, why are you doing this? It simply means somebody cares about me.”

In response to what Mansoo (pc, 2022) shared, I expressed my experience of how in some places people value confidentiality and respecting other's personal decisions, but how it also seems that people may feel more lonely and alienated, fueling behaviours and emotions that may have a detrimental impact on their lives and their loved ones. Further, while due to my socialization I would have a hard time accepting such interventions, this relational nature of support has obvious benefits. Also, it is a reminder of the diverse and subjective nature of how one defines and experiences notions such as care, support, and acceptance. When talking about unique characteristics of Zongo communities, Aziz (pc, 2022), as did most participants, discussed about unity and support:

“Yes, this Zongo, one thing unique about this Zongo is, as I mentioned earlier, the oneness that exists between the people in the community. For instance, if you have a problem or maybe somebody is sick in your house, and you call for help, within a tickle of an eye, you see people creeping in to come and help. Yeah. Unlike somewhere you can call for help, nobody will come and eventually whatever will happen to you will happen to you because nobody is trying to come to your house to come and help. And our Zongo communities is not like that.”

Participants discussed how people are mindful and aware of other's needs and willing to offer their support. Aziz (pc, 2022), for instance, said,

“[...] apart from that we do have the awareness we do help each other financially or maybe [...], maybe putting anything on fire, you could see [...] that this person doesn't have [and] need some support. So maybe if they cook, they give it to the person or maybe they'll send food to the person to cook [themselves].

Sagiru (pc, 2022) talked about a similar situation, saying,

“[when you] slaughter and enjoy alone with your family. No, you are obligated to give to the next person. Who haven't really slaughtered anything. You see, just imagine when [...] everyone is slaughtering, maybe cow. And you have the next person who doesn't have anything to slaughter. No one is giving to him. Just imagine the loneliness the person will feel but it's another way Islam teaches us to give because you're obligated to really give to someone who doesn't really have.”

Conversations showed me how responsive people are to each other's needs, to supporting their goals, and overall showing care about each other. Aziz (pc, 2022) said, “The moment you mention you shout for help everybody will tip in to come and see to come and rescue you, to come and help”. He then provided an example of how the community recently assisted a woman in labour, and took her to the hospital. Honorable Nana (pc, 2022) reinforced this spirit of support by saying “if someone yells help, like everyone will respond. And one thing is about the extra classes. Some teachers volunteer to do extra classes for the children in this community”. Roufai (pc, 2022), also gave an example, of how the rain and wind ripped off the roof of a friend's house, and how he took action: “[...] quickly I went there took pictures of the house [to put on some] social media platform that I belong to and he also belongs to. Within one week the house was fixed.”

The support people offer is not only in cases where a challenge is easily observed. It often requires one to spend their personal time thinking about others, and taking the time to consider solutions, as well as to prioritize someone, for instance to offer them a job when looking to hire someone. Sagiru (pc, 2022) mentioned that if there is a neighbor who needs a job, and he is aware of the neighbors' problems, he will prioritize that friend over a stranger. “[...] I can't really go and employ [someone else]. My conscience wouldn't even really serve me right.” He

added that “It's an obligation for us to really care for anybody who comes in your way for assistance.”

Moreover, Aziz shared with me about a girl who he noticed was of working age but had no job, and how he helped her get hired at a gas stations. He said, “So I have to help her write an application letter and then now she's a fuel pump attendant.” (Aziz, pc, 2022), and also stated, “That's how we stay in the Zongo community. Yeah, somebody's problem is your problem”.

It is not only within the KZ that a network of support is present, but it goes beyond the community's borders. I discussed, for example, with Sulaiman (pc, 2022) about trade and connections between Zongos in Ghana with other states in the region, and he explained,

“[...] a lot of them move from Ghana to Nigeria. Yeah, and then they will see what they need [...]. They come and they collect it and send it there. And when they are coming to buy something, they bring [something else] down here. [...] Because look at the economy or may I say the trading barter in Togo [for example] is different from that in Ghana.”

Sagiru (pc, 2022) also spoke with me about Zongo residents travelling and how people assist each other. He said,

“Let's say you are in Nigeria and maybe you are sick. You are very sick. And you need contribution of anyone there to help you with finance and so on. You see we have a Mosque, different Mosque[s] around. As I told you, it's a family, it's a community. So we know each other. When it is time for prayers they make announcements yes that such person is traveling and he's stuck here [...] and within some few hours, within some few minutes, people will just contribute and send it to the person.”

5.7 Counternarratives: Strengths in Negative Reputations

As discussed earlier in the thesis, negative reputations about Zongo communities have been prevalent, helping build misconceptions of the nature of Zongo communities and residents. Some characteristics that are often portrayed as negative, seen from a different light could also indicate strengths. Also, understanding the context allows to see how such qualities could develop in response to insults, and threats. Sharing his view on misconceptions, Ahmed (pc, 2022) said,

“[The] problem people see with the Zongos [is that] we are violent. But how can someone [just become violent without someone provoking [them]]? [...] So, it is an issue. [M]ost of the people who are non-Muslims, when they are going to insult you – a Muslim – they add your identity to [the insult].”

Sadiq (pc, 2022) made a similar point when he provided an example of news reports. He said that if, for example, four robbers are caught, they will mention the names of the three who may have Christian names, and when naming the fourth one, “[...] they [emphasize the one] bearing the name of a Muslim and then they generalize it [...] [as in to say] Muslims are like that”.

Sadiq (pc, 2022) argued that sometimes Zongo residents themselves may help perpetuate misconceptions when they say, “[...] sometimes amongst ourselves someone can just in the course of talking, someone can just say that I will show you that I’m from Zongo”. Then, as our discussion progressed, Sadiq (pc, 2022) helped me understand that it is not about being violent, but rather, being brave, strong, hardworking, and other positive qualities. Sadiq added that “Usually we use it [I’ll show you I am from Zongo] to tell people that we don’t fear.”

Honorable Nana (pc, 2022), a Christian assembly member also talked about outsiders insulting Zongo people and the predominant religion. He then said,

“I don't want you to insult my religion and if you try to insult their religion they will not like you; they will not insult your religion so don't insult my religion if you [do not insult them] they are friendly, they are very good people”.

Sulaiman (pc, 2022) emphasized that Zongonians “have bravery and honor” and that “if you don't touch them nobody will touch you” Roufai (pc, 2022), however, explained that people are learning not to respond to provocations, but also that outsiders may be provoking Zongo people less than before. It is now more common, than in the past, for non-Muslims to live in a Zongo community, which may also be helping dismantle entrenched biases and stereotypes. Aziz (pc, 2022) shared about an experience he had with someone visiting KZ, showing how people are increasingly seeing and experiencing Zongo communities in ways that challenge negative connotations that have historically been widespread. Aziz (pc, 2022) said,

“Even though upon all the negativity that people try to ascribe to Zongo, it's not like that. There's one lady who is not a Muslim. She stays outside Zongo. [...] [S]he came to Zongo for about 10 to 12 years. The last time she saw me she was telling me that she had not known that Zongo is a peaceful place to be. Yeah. If she has not come to stay here because it says that she tells me that she sometimes goes to town without locking her room. She goes because she knows that nobody will enter her room.”

5.8 Centering the Human Experiences and Relationships

The community's socialization and collective practices, which are based on principles of mutual aid, help build a strong community and foster social cohesion. Participants show how their relational lifeworlds allow people and their community to thrive. Education and employment opportunities are presented and sustained through social networks and connections, allowing individuals and families to meet their needs of subsistence, and as a result to foster

health and wellbeing. Further, participants demonstrate the collectivist perspective on health and quality of life by emphasizing how the health and wellbeing of others is a prerequisite for their own wellness. Participants show that strong morals, strong relations and social bonds they form are key factors in fostering health, wellbeing, and sustainable livelihoods. For instance, the family network supports parents in raising their children and provides support to young adults building their livelihoods.

The study illuminates multiple aspects community members discussed, such as a shared language, belief system, values, and cultural practices that stimulate social cohesion. Participants repeatedly mentioned the role of Islamic teachings, and practices, which they perceive as fundamental in enriching their lives, in addition to the outermost importance of their family and other human connections. Values and practices of cooperation, and of care, offer mutual aid, for instance, to support one another in attaining higher education, coping through crisis, or responding to health concerns. Multiple networks of care and mutual aid that people cultivate may be the hardest to understand due to their complexity of the interconnectedness and multitude, yet they offer insights as to how communities thrive. Understanding these complex networks can shed light to aspects that are significant in equitably and sustainably fostering health, and wellbeing.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

“[...] I am happy that you have heard about Zongo and you decided to research in Zongo to know the good things that Zongo can offer; we are very much grateful and I wish you all the best in whatever you do.” (Aziz, pc, 2022)

“I just feel that [...] whatever you're gathering around Zongo, [communities] around the globe [and] people should know [there are these] small communities somewhere [where] we share something very unique. [...] And if what [we] share is to be spread across the world, it will really help humanity at large.” (Sagiru, pc, 2022)

Research in critical geographies of development studies has helped offer an analysis beyond symptoms, to discuss the roots of the issues and the underlying historical socio-political and economic structures that perpetuate injustice and the marginalization of certain populations, sources of knowledge, voices, and ways of living. It is important to examining the historical socio-political and economic structures that allowed, and perpetuate, the relative underdevelopment of places, in this case, Zongo communities. Any understandings formed, however, cannot, on their own, bring about a positive transformation, and could instead foster a sense of victimization and helplessness. Moreover, such approach continues to be blind to the thriving Zongos, and to the endless African success stories, filled with agency and ongoing struggles to bring about justice—for instance, Nelson Mandela leading the struggle to bring an end to south Africa's twentieth-century apartheid (See: <https://www.nelsonmandela.org/biography>), Rwanda's peacebuilding achievements following the 1994 genocide (see <https://neveragainrwanda.org/>), or Liberian women's role in ending their country's civil war in 2003 (Navarro, 2010), amongst other similar acts of social justice. Overlooking and continuing to be blind to stories that challenge the narrative of African impoverishment, violence, and corruption, perpetuate inequitable power dynamics and poverty.

Critical decolonial approaches require reflexivity and flexibility, as well as space to reconsider and to rethink the research goals and activities. For example, as explained early in the thesis, the preliminary visit, and the period of planning the research activities, encouraged me to reconsider the study's focus on understanding and improving WASH conditions. In CBPR, alike, I strove to create space for community members to voice their perspectives and share their experiences and what matters to them. This exchange of ideas and hearing the views of prospective participants helped me be reflective in how I approach the research, and the premises I follow, as well as the research goals I set. Reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the research and knowledge outcomes is an intrinsic part of CBPR, and foundational in Indigenous perspectives of relational existence.

The lifeworlds (the unique experiences) of participants are key sources of knowledge. Applying the Indigenous research paradigm, as well as adhering to CBPR principles, entails paying attention to people's lived experiences and the potential to co-learn and co-create new understandings. Sharing firsthand experiences and insights through narratives and dialogue, promotes the exchange of information, views, and ideas, and often the refining of perspectives and approaches; all of which inform academic inquiry, and generate context-specific, culturally appropriate, and transformative knowledge. In addition to playing a role during the research design stage, the process could also impact participants at a personal level, by invoking innovative ideas, bringing to focus a realization of existing strengths and/or new insights, and enabling positive partnerships to develop amongst participants.

To the best of my knowledge, this is the first participatory research conducted with KZ, offering the opportunity to amplify local voices and perspectives, for scholars and the wider public, to learn from their community. While studies on Zongo communities exist (e.g. in urban

studies, on migration, and religion), it is a focus-area in the literature that is under expansion.

This thesis contributes to the growing research referencing Zongo communities, by providing an overview of Zongo communities in Ghana and of the available literature so far, in addition to, communicating local perspectives on community health, wellbeing, and sustainable livelihoods.

6.1 Contributions and Dissemination

This research, drawing on the CBPR approach, provides another example of countless studies that aim to challenge top-down inquiries, and to instead foster collaborative, non-hierarchical, research. Thus, this thesis contributes to the wide breadth of CBPR literature, while it draws insights from a place specific case study. One of the main contributions to academic literature is helping expand the growing – yet limited for the time being – research and information on Zongo communities.

Zongo communities across Ghana have historically faced political and socioeconomic marginalization, through ambivalent citizen rights and oppressive views and processes of *othering*, as well as lacking social provisions, and engaging in peculiar employment. Zongo identity today remains an enduring stereotype in Ghanaian society, where critical environmental and infrastructural conditions, and a high crime rate, are often linked to the presence of ‘strangers’ (Casentini, 2018). While Zongo communities face numerous social challenges, the common contemporary practice of placing the Zongo under the category of ‘slums and deprived areas’ is often misleading.

There is some positive transformation, however, as scholars are increasingly paying greater attention to the multitude of possible study-areas, and as a result, offer analysis beyond social issues and colonial development targets. Even better, is how participants claimed they are

experiencing a shift in people's (outsiders') perspectives on Zongos, where they start viewing them as places of peace rather than violence.

Inquiries that are not problem-based, nonetheless, have much room for growth, with numerous research topics demanding attention. Identifying, with participants, the positive factors the community finds significant in terms of enhancing health and wellbeing, brings into participants' attention those aspects humans often take for granted, which allow individuals and communities to thrive—this may be significant at a personal level for the participants, but also the community at large learning from fellow Zongonians who participated. Another positive outcome is the experience research facilitators and assistants from the community gained through their engagement in the study. Overall, as with the understandings the study provides, it is the human interactions and relationships during the research process that is often the most significant, even more so than any measurable outcome.

Another central contribution to the literature is the counternarratives participants' insights offer, to the widespread single-story, deficit-based, portrayal of Zongo communities. Moreover, shifting the focus from problem-solving to learning from the community helps shed light to the unresearched area of the strengths and lessons marginalized, yet thriving, communities have to offer. Not only does the research provide an understanding specifically on how Zongo communities foster health and wellbeing, but also acts as a replicable example that could be applied elsewhere and on diverse research topics—this would mean, investing in research that does not only aim to bring people together in taking specific action and collaborating on solving a problem, but on research where participants actively contribute to the focus of a study, to the objectives and are able to utilize outcomes themselves.

In terms of exploring what helps communities thrive, a key finding includes the role of socialization that encourages collaboration and collectivism over individualism. African socialization encouraging mutual-aid and mutual empowerment, helps KZ residents foster health and their wellbeing. Participants showed how collectivism enables members to thrive, and helped emphasize that health, wellbeing, and sustainable livelihoods do not exist in isolation, and how fundamental it is to be collectively reached if society is to ‘develop’. Moyo (2021, p. 84) argues, “[T]he global pandemic of COVID-19 leaves no doubt that we are globally interconnected and that we must act in ways that cultivate this interconnectedness to advance well-being.”

The existing body of knowledge on community development is vast, including traditional, colonial, approaches, but also critical perspectives that aim to decolonize community health and wellbeing. On the one hand, this study supports and is in line with schools of thought that value collaborative research and promote a transformative methodology. On the other, it challenges normative approaches that strive to problem solve in technical and technocratic manners that make the human experience, needs, and relations invisible.

This study contributes to the limited literature on Zongo communities, while it helps challenge normative misconceptions that have come to dominate people’s perceptions of Zongo communities. Further, through this research, local voices are amplified to offer diverse perspectives on what fosters health and wellbeing, in addition to how one conceptualizes and experiences such notions as *quality of life*. Putting an emphasis on the relational dimensions, participants bring to the forefront of the discussion on community development, the human experiences, feelings, and interconnections. Instead of questioning the type of cities we are to build, the material resources necessary to meet material needs and enable everyone’s healthy lifecourse, to focus on the kind of relationships that foster communal health and wellbeing, on

the kind of human characters that could drive positive, equitable, change, and the human qualities required to cultivate in order to foster mutual aid, mutual empowerment, and strong, healthy, happy, thriving lives.

6.2 Limitations

CBPR tends to be focused on local contexts, where case-study-based research methodology and findings cannot always be generalized on a larger scale. While such research is often local in scale and situated in specific local contexts, scholars also need to be concerned with the replicability of their research. The study offers examples of how to engage participants and amplify local voices but being context specific means adjustments are necessary in following a similar methodology.

Traditional research, as discussed in the thesis, has misrepresented, excluded, devalued, and marginalized certain voices and knowledge sources/systems. While aiming to follow the work of scholars who blur the distinction between the researcher and participant, and to fracture conceptualizations and practices of “us versus them”, I remain an outsider to the KZ community and embedded in colonial settings and practices. Moreover, while I strive to challenge my biases, I do not deny subjectivities influencing the research process and findings. For example, it is important to acknowledge that if a local was to analyze the conversations they could have concluded different themes. Also, if I was to co-facilitate this study with a colleague, the results could have highly varied too.

Initially, in designing the study, I aimed to pay greater attention to the dissemination process. For the dissemination of findings, the aim was to go beyond traditional scholarly practices to share research findings through multiple approaches meaningful for the community, including visualizing findings, community forums, to collaborate with participants on writing

proposals to advocate their priorities and perspectives to the local government. At the end, of the photo-narrative activities, as explained, and in collaboration with co-researchers (study participants), we put together a [video](#) to share our work. While this allowed us to share about some research activities and findings, it was limited in reaching a large audience and sparking any anticipated, and desired, follow-up activities.

Being committed to transparency and accountability to the population one is working with, needs considerations on how to best inform the community not only prior and during a study, but also afterwards. Striving to engage in meaningful and long-term reciprocal relations, requires parties to stay connected and view community engagement as a long-term process and commitment. Therefore, making the thesis accessible to the community and further engaging in ways to communicate with locals what I am writing about their community and what participants shared with me, is important. While these efforts can help increase accessibility to the research findings, there are important limitations preventing participants to equally access the means to similar knowledge production processes. Imbalances remain, as for instance, I stand to benefit in furthering my career with the completion of this thesis. Although the information gathered and participants have ownership over the knowledge produced, not everyone may be presented with ways to benefit from it; it may be irrelevant.

6.3 Possibilities and Future Research

The possibilities and responsibility to fully communicate the thesis with participants remain. While the thesis is open source, I must actively make myself available to answer any questions participants may have. Critical PR offers opportunities to learn, often while unlearning and expanding one's knowledge base. Activities connections I have made are seeds to continue,

for any possible co-beneficial and mutually supportive future endeavors. This may mean continuing to work with insights from this study or collaborating on a new project.

Participants insights provide a glimpse to the local knowledge, to the rich history, culture, and social networks of the community. Further engaging with marginalized perspectives and subjugated knowledge systems has much to offer to expand the literature on Zongo communities, on CBPR, as well as on critically examining community development paradigms. Indigenizing research, Indigenizing the multitude of social spheres, is an ongoing process. The study brings to readers' attention human dimensions that are often overlooked yet have the potential to be transformative—this, calls for further exploration as to how social, cultural, spiritual, and other, interconnected human dimensions can enable people and communities to equitably, and sustainably, thrive. Moreover, the study inspires numerous research questions that could guide future research. For example, paying attention to narratives of exclusion, and/or understanding barriers in strengthening inclusive cohesion and how to overcome them. Another inquiry could use the strengths identified as a starting point to examining how policy facilitates, or could facilitate, the cultivation of these assets. Even better, would be if research participants or any other community members carry-out a community-driven study.

Communities that are seen as requiring support, could in fact, be the ones that have answers to global communal enquiries. KZ members offer examples of what is to enrich the social, spiritual and relationship aspects, and how relational living adhering to principles of Ubuntu can foster mutual empowerment. Education systems that go beyond the human capital, to enrich all dimensions of humanity, to foster governance rooted in responsibility and accountability, serving all and adhering to the common good, can be transformative.

6.4 Concluding Remarks

This thesis provides an overview of Zongo communities in Ghana, specifically KZ, in terms of their emergence and establishment over time, as well as their unique characteristics differentiating these settlements from other communities in a given city. This case study, adding to existing literature focusing on Zongo communities, offers insights enhancing one's understanding of these unique, diverse, yet interconnected locales, with shared history and identity. The research helps capture the material, cultural, and relational aspects that foster social cohesion, and promote resilience and sustainable livelihoods. These, include meeting material needs—one's needs of subsistence—in a relational, collective, manner, where community members look out for one another. Participants' insights show how a shared cultural and ethnic identity, and shared values allow strong bonds to form, which create social support networks. The study, mainly, helps shine the relational aspects that enable the community to collectively thrive.

Overall, participants provided examples that help highlight positive factors in the community and in people's relationships, as well as helped show how locals cherish friendships and kinships. Zongos are more than places where poverty exists. Stories beyond the single, deficit-based, ones, the research provides counternarratives highlighting social cohesion and mutual empowerment. Examples participants shared help to better understand the unique characteristics of a Zongo community. Also, they help show, and increase awareness of, the resourcefulness, and the effective coping and response to socioenvironmental issues.

As discussed in the thesis, literature on Africa has for long being biased to the extent that it completely misrepresented the continent's rich history, cultures, innovations, and perspectives. Along the same lines, narratives on Zongo communities have been prejudice, misinformed, and incomplete. The study, in response, aimed to explore and offer counternarratives to build a better

understanding of Zongo communities, and to gain insights on how communities cultivate health and wellness. Moreover, KZ members bring our attention to how community can thrive in line with collective interests—guided by the Ubuntu worldview, participants emphasize relational aspects they aim to continue cultivating, which in turn help eliminate social ills.

I conclude with a participant's response in the hope it inspires others to learn about Zongo communities, and about African cultures, as well as to pay attention to and enhance positive aspects communities across the world can offer. Sagiru (p.c., 2022) said,

“I'm most proud of my community. Because it has really helped shape me in a very positive way. It really prepared me to be the human I need to be. In just few ways, Zongo really brings out the humanity in me today, to the next person, wherever I go in the world.”

Sagiru's reflection, demonstrates the strong connection he experiences to his community, but also participants' attention to building a good character, and strong values, as well as to cultivating healthy, equitable, relations. He, and others, offered examples of African socialization that holds family and social ties to high importance, as well as pays attention to overlooked human dimensions, and to cultivating personality characteristics that are socially desirable for fostering communal wellness.

References

- Abdullah, A., Cudjoe, E., Jordan, L., & Emery, C. (2021). Child polyvictimization in Zongo communities in Ghana: young people's reflections on systemic resilience enablers. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 119, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2021.105075>
- Acosta, A., & Abarca, M. M. (2018). Buen vivir: an alternative perspective from the peoples of the global south to the crisis of capitalist modernity. In: V. Satgar (Ed.), *The Climate Crisis: South African and Global Democratic Eco-Socialist Alternatives* (pp. 131–147). Wits University Press. <https://doi.org/10.18772/22018020541.11>
- Adichie, C. N. "The Danger of a Single Story." TEDGlobal, TED, 23 July 2009, Oxford, UK. Speech. Retrieved from: https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?utm_campaign=tedsread&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=tedcomshare
- Adjibolosoo, Senyo B-S.K. (2020). Strategies for ethno-racial sensitivity and multicultural harmony: the neglected human factor component. *Review of Human Factor Studies*, 26(1), 4-66.
- Adjibolosoo, Senyo B-S.K. (1995). *The human factor in developing Africa*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Adu-Febiri, F. (2014). Educated for a world that does not exist: issues in Africa's education and training programs. *Review of Human Factor Studies*, 20(1), 30-72.
- Adu-Febiri, F. (2016). Microglobalization paradox: encounters of Indigenous poor micro entrepreneurs with microfinance. *Review of Human Factor Studies*, 22(1), 27-63.
- Adu-Febiri, F. (2003). "Putting the human factor to work in African tourism: a human factor competency model." In Victor N. Muzvidziwa and Paul Gundani (eds.). *Management and the Human Factor: Lessons for Africa*. Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications
- Adu-Febiri, F. (2008). Triumph of the commons: human factor and the building of sustainable communities. *Review of Human Factor Studies Special Edition*, 14(1), 9-54.
- Ahmad, M.S., & Abu Talib, N.B. (2016). Analysis of community empowerment on projects sustainability: moderating role of sense of community. *Social Indicators Research*, 129, 1039-1056. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-014-0781-9>
- Alcoff, L. (1988). Cultural feminism versus post-structuralism: the identity crisis in feminist theory. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 13(3), 405–436. <https://doi.org/10.1086/494426>

- Alleyne, O. (2022). Dancehall City: Zongo identity and Jamaican rude performance in Ghanaian popular culture. *African Studies Review*, 65(1), 211-233.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2021.147>
- Amauchi, J. F. F., Gauthier, M., Ghezaljah, A., L. Giatti, L. L., Keats, K., Sholanke, D., Zachari, D., Gutberlet, J. (2021). The power of community-based participatory research: ethical and effective ways of researching. *Community Development*, 53(1), 3–20.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15575330.2021.1936102>
- Asabere-Ameyaw, A., Anamuah-Mensah, J., Dei, G.S., & Raheem, K., (Ed.). (2014). *Indigenist African development and related issues: towards a transdisciplinary perspective* (1st ed. 2014.). Sense Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6209-659-2>
- Asante, M.K., (2018). Meeting Cheikh Anta Diop on the road to African resurgence. *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies - Multi-, Inter-and Transdisciplinarity*, 13(1), 4-15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18186874.2018.1459427>
- Assimeng, M., (1981). *The social structure of Ghana: a study in persistence and change*. Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation
- Asutay, M., & Yilmaz, I. (2021). Constituting an Islamic social welfare function: an exploration through Islamic moral economy. *International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Finance and Management*, 14(3), 524–540.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/IMEFM-03-2019-0130>.
- Bartle, P. (2008). The human factor and community empowerment. *Review of Human Factor Studies Special Edition*, 14(1), 99-122.
- Bensassi S., Jarreau J., & Mitaritonna C. (2019). Regional integration and informal trade in Africa: evidence from Benin's borders. *Journal of African Economies*, 28(1), 89-118.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/jae/ejy016>
- Boahen, A. A., Ade Ajayi, J. F., & Tidy, M. (1986). *Topics in west African history* (2nd ed). Longman Group.
- Borba, J., Bonatti, M., Medina, L., Löhr, K., Tremblay, C., Gutberlet, J., & Sieber, S. (2024). Climate change education through drama and social learning: playful inquiry for building extreme weather events adaptation scenarios. *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/14779714241227833>
- Brady C., & Hooper M. (2019). Redefining engagement with socio-spatially marginalised populations: learning from Ghana's ministry of inner city and Zongo development. *Urbanisation*, 4(1), 9-28. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2455747119868532>
- Brenner, N. (2009). What is critical urban theory? *City*, 13(2–3), 198–207.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13604810902996466>

- Cahill, C., (2015), Repositioning Ethical Commitments: Participatory Action Research as a Relational Praxis of Social Change, *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, 6(3), 360-373. <https://doi.org/10.14288/acme.v6i3.784>
- Casentini, G. (2018). Migration networks and narratives in Ghana: a case study from the Zongo. *Africa*, 88(3), 452–68. DOI:[10.1017/S0001972018000177](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972018000177)
- Chigangaidze, R.K., Matanga A.A., & Katsuro T.R., (2022). Ubuntu philosophy as a humanistic-existential framework for the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 62(3), 319–333. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00221678211044554>
- Chilisa, B. (2012). *Indigenous research methodologies*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Creese, G. (2011). *The new African diaspora in Vancouver: migration, exclusion and Belonging*. University of Toronto Press. Retrieved from: <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uvic/detail.action?docID=4672826>
- Crenshaw, Kimberle (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: a black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 8(1). <http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>
- Denney, J., Kimbro, R.T., Heck, K., & Cubbin, C. (2017). Social Cohesion and Food Insecurity: Insights from the Geographic Research on Wellbeing (GROW) Study. *Matern Child Health J*, 21, 343–350. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10995-016-2119-5>
- de Souza, M.L. (2019). Decolonising postcolonial thinking: ethnocentrism and sociocentrism as transideological and multiscalar phenomena. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 18(1), 1-24. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14288/acme.v18i1.1647>
- Diop, C. A. (1991). *Civilization or barbarism: an authentic anthropology* (H. J. Salemsen & M. De Jager, Eds.; Y.-L. M. Ngemi, Trans.; First edition). Lawrence Hill Books.
- Diop, C. A. (1986). *Great African thinkers*. (I. V. Sertima & L. Williams, Eds.). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.
- Diop, C. A., (1989). *The African origin of civilization: myth or reality*. (Cook, M. Eds.). Chicago. Review Press.
- Ezeale-Harrison, F. & Adjibolosoo, Senyo B-S.K. (Eds.). (1994) *Perspectives on Economic Development in Africa*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Freire, P., 1921-1997 (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th anniversary ed.). Continuum. First published in Portuguese (1968).
- Gutberlet, J. (2009). Solidarity economy and recycling co-ops: micro-credit to alleviate poverty. *Development In Practice*, 19(6), 737–751. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09614520903026892>

- Gutberlet, J., Tremblay, C., & Moraes, C. (2014). The community-based research tradition in Latin America. In: *Higher Education and Community-Based Research* (pp. 167–180). Palgrave Macmillan US. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137385284_12
- Hall, B. & Tandon, R., (2017). Decolonization of knowledge, epistemicide, participatory research and higher education. *Research for All*, 1(1), 6–19.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18546/RFA.01.1.02>
- Hardin, G. (1998). Extensions of “The Tragedy of the Commons”. *Science (American Association for the Advancement of Science)*, 280(5364), 682–683.
<https://doi.org/10.1126/science.280.5364.682>
- Hay, Iain. (Ed.). (2016). *Qualitative research methods in human geography*, 4th edition. Oxford University Press: Canada.
- Holmes, C., Hunt, S., & Piedalue, A., (2015). Violence, colonialism, and space: towards a decolonizing dialogue. *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, 14(2), 539-570. <https://doi.org/10.14288/acme.v14i2.1102>
- Hope, K. R. (2004). The poverty dilemma in Africa: toward policies for including the poor. *Progress in Development Studies*, 4(2), 127–141.
<https://doi.org/10.1191/1464993404ps081oa>
- Hope, K. R., & Chikulo, B. C. (2000). *Corruption and development in Africa lessons from country case-studies*. Palgrave. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780333982440>
- Ismail, N.H., & Rasid, M.E. (2022). Promoting an inclusive economy: the relevance of sustainable development and Islamicist prosperity index. *Journal of Islamic Monetary Economics and Finance*, 8(4), 637-660. DOI:[10.21098/jimf.v8i4.1530](https://doi.org/10.21098/jimf.v8i4.1530)
- Jaeger-Erben, M., Becker, F., Pruse, B., Mendoza, J.N., Gutberlet, J., & Rodrigues, E. (2023). Citizen science. In: Thorsten Philipp and Tobias Schmohl (Ed.), *Handbook Transdisciplinary Learning* (pp. 41-52). Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783839463475-006>
- Jeffers, H.F. (2020, November 29). *Go back and fetch it*. Poetry Foundation.
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/154884/go-back-and-fetch-it>
- Jimenez, A., Delgado, D., Merino, R., & Argumedo, A. (2022). A decolonial approach to innovation? building paths towards buen vivir. *The Journal of Development Studies*, 58(9), 1633-1650. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2022.2043281>
- Johnson, J., Louis, P., & Pramono, A. (2006). Facing the future: encouraging critical cartographic literacies in Indigenous communities. *ACME: An International E-Journal of Critical Geography*, 4(1), 80-98, <https://doi.org/10.14288/acme.v4i1.729>

- Kalkavan, H., Dinçer, H., & Yüksel, S. (2021). Analysis of Islamic moral principles for sustainable economic development in developing society. *International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Finance and Management*, 14(5), 982–999. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IMEFM-07-2019-0271>.
- Khamis, K. (2021). Hijab and niqab: A cross-religious covid-19 safety measure in Madina Zongo. *Entangled Religions*, 12(3). <https://doi.org/10.46586/er.12.2021.9650>
- Khapoya, V.B. (2012). The African experience (4th ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315662596>
- Kirikoshi, H. (2022). The trans-region movement of seasonal labour in Ghana: settlement formation of populations in the upper west region and trade network. *ASC-TUFS Working Papers*, 2, 179-204. https://doi.org/10.51062/ascwp.2.0_179
- Lemkes, A., (2018). *Review on knowledge democracy*, Lankelly Chase Foundation. United Kingdom. Retrieved from: [COI: 20.500.12592/h4nsf5](https://doi.org/10.5000/20.500.12592/h4nsf5)
- Lepore, W., Hall, B. L., & Tandon, R. (2021). The knowledge for change consortium: a decolonising approach to international collaboration in capacity-building in community based participatory research. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies / Revue canadienne d'études du développement*, 42(3), 347-370. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02255189.2020.1838887>
- Lopez, F.R., Wickson, F., & Hausner, V. H. (2018). Finding CreativeVoice: applying arts-based research in the context of biodiversity conservation. *Sustainability*, 10(6), 1778. DOI: [10.3390/su10061778](https://doi.org/10.3390/su10061778)
- Magnavita, S. (2013). Initial encounters: seeking traces of ancient trade connections between west Africa and the wider world. *Afriques*, 4. <https://doi.org/10.4000/afriques.1145>
- Mahlatsi, K. (2021). Achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs) in Africa: challenges and prospects. *The Thinker*, 87(2), 61-69, <https://doi.org/10.36615/thethinker.v87i2.535>
- Manzo, A. (2020). Back to Mahal Teglinos: new pharaonic evidence from Eastern Sudan. *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 106(1-2), 89-104. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030751332096>
- Mathie, A., & Cunningham, G. (2003). From clients to citizens: asset-based community development as a strategy for community-driven development. *Development in Practice*, 13(5), 474–486. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0961452032000125857>
- Mathie, A., & Cunningham, G. (2005). Who is driving development? reflections on the transformative potential of asset-based community development. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies/ Revue canadienne d'études du développement*, 26(1), 175-186. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02255189.2005.9669031>

- Mayaka, B., & Truell R. (2021). Ubuntu and its potential impact on the international social work profession. *International Social Work*, 00(0), 1-14.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00208728211022>
- Mensah, J. (2020). Effectiveness of national sanitation day as a community-participatory approach for improving environmental sanitation in Edina traditional area, Ghana. *Management of Environmental Quality*, 31(1), 235–253. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MEQ-02-2019-0042>
- Mensah J., & Teye J.K. (2021). A geographic theorization of Zongos in urban Ghana: a complex systems approach. *Ghana Journal of Geography*, 13(2), 66-95.
<https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gjg.v13i2.3>
- Mills, C. W. (1959). *The Sociological imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Moseley, W. G. (2012). *Taking sides: clashing views on African issues* (4th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Moyo, O. N. (2021). *Africanity and ubuntu as decolonizing discourse* (1st ed.). Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-59785-6>
- Murove, M. F. (2012). Ubuntu. *Diogenes (English Ed.)*, 59(3–4), 36–47.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192113493737>
- Nabudere, D.W. (2005). Ubuntu philosophy. memory and reconciliation, 1-20. Retrieved from: <http://hdl.handle.net/2152/4521>
- Naeem, M., Ozuem, W., Howell, K., & Ranfagni, S. (2023). A step-by-step process of thematic analysis to develop a conceptual model in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 22, 1–18. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231205789>
- Naude, P., (2019). Decolonising knowledge: can ubuntu ethics save us from coloniality? *Journal of Business Ethics*, 159, 23–37. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-017-3763-4>
- Navarro, K., 22/10/2010. “Liberian women act to end civil war, 2003”. *Nonviolent Action Database*. Retrieved 10/03/2023:
<https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/liberian-women-act-end-civil-war-2003>
- Nykirforuk, C., Vallianatos, H., & Nieuwendyk L.M. (2011). Photovoice as a method for revealing community perceptions of the built and social environment. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 10(2), 103-124.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406911010002>

- Odora-Hoppers, C. (2002). Indigenous Knowledge and the Integration of Knowledge Systems: Towards a Conceptual and Methodological Framework. In C. Odora Hoppers (Ed.), *Indigenous Knowledge and the Integration of Knowledge Systems: Towards a Philosophy of Articulation*. Claremont, South Africa: New Africa Books.
- Odora-Hoppers, C. (2021) Research on Indigenous knowledge systems: the search for cognitive justice. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 40(4), 310-327.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2021.1966109>
- OECD/ILO (2018), How Immigrants Contribute to Ghana's Economy, OECD Publishing, Paris.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264302037-en>
- Owoahene-Acheampong, S., & Prempeh, C. (2021). Socio-legal implications of Muslim Christian conjugal relations in contemporary Zongo communities in Accra. *SN Social Sciences*, 1(283). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43545-021-00293-5>
- Owoyemi, M. Y. (2020). Zakat management: The crisis of confidence in zakat agencies and the legality of giving zakat directly to the poor. *Journal of Islamic Accounting and Business Research*, 11(2), 498–510. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JIABR-07-2017-0097>
- Owusu, G. (2010). Social Effects of poor sanitation and waste management on poor urban communities: a neighborhood-specific study of Sabon Zongo, Accra. *Journal of Urbanism*, 3(2), 145-160. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17549175.2010.502001>
- Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “empowerment (n.),” July 2023,
<https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/4348829585>
- Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “Hausa (n.),” July 2023,
<https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/5711048914>
- Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “voluntourism (n.),” July 2023,
<https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1151034469>
- Parker, N., (2011). Imperialism, territory, and liberation: on the dynamics of empire stemming from Europe. *Journal of Political Power*, 4(3), 355-374,
<https://doi.org/10.1080/2158379X.2011.628565>
- Peake, L., & Sheppard, E. (2014) The Emergence of radical/critical geography within north America. *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, 13(2), 305-327. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14288/acme.v13i2.1009>
- Peet, R. (1985). The social origins of environmental determinism. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 75(3), 309-333.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8306.1985.tb00069.x>

- Pellow, D. (2002). *Landlords and lodgers: Socio-spatial organization in an accra community*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/lib/uvic/detail.action?docID=3000919>
- Phillips, D. W., & Montello, D. R. (2017). Defining the community of interest as thematic and cognitive regions. *Political Geography*, 61, 31–45. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2017.06.005>
- Pontzen, B. (2021). Speaking for Islam: ‘Ilm and religious authority. In *Islam in a Zongo: Muslim Lifeworlds in Asante, Ghana* (pp. 131–176). chapter, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108900706.006>
- Pontzen, B. (2017). ‘Speaking for Islam’ and religious authority in Zongos in Asante, Ghana. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 47, 42–71. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700666-12340098>
- Procentese, F., Di Napoli, I., Esposito, C., & Gatti, F. (2023). Individual and community related paths to civic engagement: a multiple mediation model deepening the role of sense of responsible togetherness, community trust, and hope. *Community Psychology In Global Perspective*, 9(1), 64–83. <https://doi.org/10.1285/i24212113v9i1p64>
- Quinless, J. M. (2022). Decolonizing data: unsettling conversations about social research methods. University of Toronto Press. <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781487530099>
- Radcliffe, S.A., (2015). Debate: Development Alternatives, *Development and Change*, 46(4), 855–874. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12179>
- Raghuram, P. (2016). Locating care ethics beyond the global north. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 15(3), 511–533. <https://doi.org/10.14288/acme.v15i3.1353>
- Robertson, J. M., Gibson, G., Greasley-Adams, C., McCall, V., Gibson, J., Mason-Duff, J., & Pengelly, R. (2022). ‘It gives you a reason to be in this world’: the interdependency of communities, environments and social justice for quality of life in older people. *Ageing and Society*, 42(3), 539–563. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X20000859>
- Sachs, J.D., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G. (2024). The SDGs and the UN Summit of the Future. Sustainable Development Report 2024. Paris: SDSN, Dublin: Dublin University Press. doi:10.25546/108572
- Schiefer, D., & van der Noll, J. (2017). The Essentials of Social Cohesion: A Literature Review. *Social Indicators Research*, 132(2), 579–603. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-016-1314-5>
- Schörle, K. (2012). Saharan trade in classical antiquity. Saharan frontiers: space and mobility in northwest Africa. *Indiana University Press*, 58–72. <https://shs.hal.science/halshs-02966544v1>

- Serrat, O. (2017). The sustainable livelihoods approach. In: Knowledge solutions. Springer, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-0983-9_5
- Springett, D. (2013). Editorial: critical perspectives on sustainable development. *Sustainable Development*, 21(3), 73-82. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.1556>
- Stanton, C. R. (2014). Crossing methodological borders: decolonizing community-based participatory research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20(5), 573–583. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800413505541>
- Suleman, R., (May 15, 2018). The single Story of Zongo. *Modern Ghana News*. Retrieved June 1, 2019.
- Sylvestre, P., Castleden, H., Martin, D., & McNally, M., (2018), “Thank You Very Much... You Can Leave Our Community Now.”: Geographies of Responsibility, Relational Ethics, Acts of Refusal, and the Conflicting Requirements of Academic Localities in Indigenous Research. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 17(3), 750-779. <https://doi.org/10.14288/acme.v17i3.1327>
- The National Youth Policy of Ghana. (2010). Ministry of Youth and Sports Labour Law (Act 561). Section 3.2.
- Thomas, Eggins, & Papoutsaki. (2016). Relational accountability in indigenizing visual research for participatory communication. *SAGE Open*, 6(1), 1-11. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244015626493>
- Tremblay, C., & Harris L. (2018). Critical video engagements: empathy, subjectivity and changing narratives of water resources through participatory video. *Geoforum*, 90, 174-182. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2018.02.012>
- Tremblay, C., & Gutberlet, J. (2010). Empowerment through participation: assessing the voices of leaders from recycling cooperatives in São Paulo, Brazil. *Community Development Journal*, 47(2), 282-302. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsq040>
- Tremblay, C., & Jayme, B.O. (2015). Community knowledge co-creation through participatory video. *Action Research*, 13(3), 298–314. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476750315572158>
- Turkson E., Oduro A.D., & Baffour P.T. (2022). Regional integration and non-tariff barriers to intra-Sub-Saharan Africa trade. *World Economy*, 46(2), 396–414. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/twec.13365>
- Uddin, S.M.N., & Gutberlet, J. (2018). Livelihoods and health status of informal recyclers in Mongolia. *Resources, Conservation & Recycling*, 134, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resconrec.2018.02.006>

- UNESCO World Heritage Centre (n.d.). *Fossil hominid sites of South Africa*.
<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/915/>
- United Nations Development Program (UNDP), (2017). Application of the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework to Development Projects. Guidance Note. Panama City. Retrieved from:
https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/latinamerica/UNDP_RBLA_C_Livelihoods-Guidance-Note_EN-210July2017.pdf
- United Nations. Economic Commission for Africa; United Nations Development Programme; African Union Commission; African Development Bank (2023-09). 2023 Africa sustainable development report: accelerating recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and African Union Agenda 2063 at all levels. Addis Ababa:. © UN. ECA,. <https://hdl.handle.net/10855/49956>
- United Nations, General Assembly, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, A/RES/70/1 (21 October 2015), Retrieved from:
<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>
- van Doore, K., Martin, F. & McKeon, A. (2016). Expert Paper: International Volunteering and Child Sexual Abuse. In *ECPAT Global Study on Child Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism*. DOI:[10.13140/RG.2.2.11174.42565](https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.11174.42565)
- Völker, M., & Doneys, P. (2021). Empowerment as one sees it: assessment of empowerment by women participants of development projects. *Development in Practice*, 31(1), 125-138.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2020.1828284>
- Wallerstein, N., Giatti L.L., Bógus, C.M., Akerman M., Jacobi P.R., de Toledo, R.F., Mendes, R., Acioli, S., Bluehorse-Anderson, M., Frazier, S., & Jones, M. (2017). Shared participatory research principles and methodologies: perspectives from the USA and Brazil – 45 years after Paulo Freire’s “Pedagogy of the Oppressed”. *Societies*, 7(2), 1-17.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/soc7020006>
- Williamson, E.A. (2014). Understanding the Zongo: processes of socio-spatial marginalization in Ghana. [Masters Thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology].
<http://hdl.handle.net/1721.1/91419>
- Williamson, E. A., Falola, T., & Falola, B. (2018). Understanding the Zongo: processes of socio-spatial marginalization in Ghana. In *The African Metropolis* (1st ed., pp. 21–56). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315157306-2>
- Wilson, M.G., Lavis, J.N., Travers, R., Bourke, S. (2010). Community-based knowledge transfer and exchange: helping community-based organizations link research to action. *Implementation Science*, 5(33), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1748-5908-5-33>

- Winchell, F., Brass, M., Manzo, A., Beldados, A., Perma, V., Murphy, C., Stevens, S., & Fuller, D.Q. (2018). On the origins and dissemination of domesticated sorghum and pearl millet across Africa and into India: a view from the Butana group of the far eastern Sahel. *African Archaeological Review*, 35, 483–505. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10437-018-9314-2>
- Zimu-Biyela, A.N. & Chisita, C. T. (2023). Why decolonisation and re-Africanization of librarianship is not an option but a necessity for Africa? *International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)*. <https://repository.ifla.org/handle/20.500.14598/2787>