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HUSTLING IN A GHANAIAN DIGITAL AFTERWORLD: A PSYCHOSOCIAL EXPLORATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL INEQUALITY AND YOUNG ADULTHOOD

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To the boys-boys who dey hustle.

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Abstract

Amidst rising global and national inequality, electronic waste (e-waste) management has emerged as a livelihood strategy for some marginalized youth in Ghana. Regional social and economic inequalities that encourage migration from rural areas in the northern part of the country to urban southern areas sustain the e-waste industry. In Accra, a neighborhood called Agbogbloshie hosts the country's primary repository for domestic and imported e-waste (Oteng-Ababio, 2010). There, workers rely on manual recycling and scavenging practices that disproportionately expose them to health-threatening environmental hazards. Since the early 2010s, Agbogbloshie has received significant attention from national and international media outlets. It was (and sometimes erroneously still is) described as the world's largest e-waste dump. Many e-waste workers in Agbogbloshie are between the ages of 18 and 29. This period, commonly described as emerging adulthood, is critical for psychosocial development. As youth transition to adulthood, the identity development process that initiates in adolescence intensifies as they develop a greater capacity for self-reflection and increased awareness of societal perspectives and expectations (Arnett, 2010; Arnett, 2008; Spencer et al., 2006).

Grounded in ecological systems theories and African perspectives, this case study uses qualitative methods (i.e., interviews, focus groups, observation, and photovoice- a participatory action photography activity), to explore how intersecting global and national inequalities shape developmental contexts and influence the pursuit of valued adulthood. Specifically, it explores how migration and subsequent involvement in e-waste work texture the experiences of young Dagomba men living at the economic, environmental, and ethnic margins of Ghana, as they navigate key life-stage milestones and developmental tasks amid rapid urbanization, technological advancement, and environmental degradation.

Data was collected on migration histories; local conceptions of adulthood; psychosocial developmental goals; developmental risks; protective factors; and coping methods. Consistent with the literature on emerging adulthood, the men conceptualized their current life stage as a critical time for establishing independence. However, their pursuit of independence was not characterized by an intense focus on the self, as described in Western accounts of emerging adulthood. It was seen, rather, as a necessary step towards fulfilling familial and social responsibilities. Amidst limited opportunities, migration and short-term work (i.e., hustles) served as rites of passage, enabling the men to demonstrate independence, maturity, and responsibility. The young men in Agbogbloshie faced many challenges including housing insecurity, health risks, and stigma. However, the young men drew strength from community ties—both in their cultural enclave in Accra and their hometowns- for support and grounding.

The study captures rich accounts and visual counter-narratives that challenge dominant portrayals of Agbogbloshie as a mere "digital graveyard." It highlights how culture shapes conceptions of self and community, meaning-making processes, interpretations of distress, and coping mechanisms. The study calls for a reconsideration of Western models of young adulthood when examining diverse populations, and emphasizes the importance of culturally-informed approaches to psychosocial development.

Chapter One: Introduction

Youth in Ghana are coming of age in a time marked by grave inequality at various ecological levels. Scholars note that inequality is increasing between and within countries worldwide (Cooke et al., 2016). Ghana is no exception to this pattern. Since the 1990s, the nation has experienced steady annual economic growth. In 2010, it graduated from categorization as a highly indebted poor country (HIPC) to a lower-middle income country. In 2019, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) dubbed Ghana as the world's fastest growing economy. Despite this, there has been a widening income gap between the small middle class and the growing lower class (Cooke et al., 2016; Osei-Assibey, 2014).

As has been the case since the precolonial times, there has been uneven development and distribution of resources among the nation's regions. The northernmost regions of Ghana have historically had the highest poverty rates and continue to be less resourced than other parts of the country (Cooke et al. 2016; Ghana Statistical Service, 2014; Ghana Statistical Service, 2015). The country is also experiencing rapid urbanization, which has further contributed to economic disparities between rural and urban areas (Anlimachie, 2019). These forces lend impetus to economic migration from the former three northern regions (i.e., Northern, Upper East, and Upper West regions)[1] to central and southern city centers. Regional inequalities in Ghana are also associated with ethnic affiliations, contributing to the overrepresentation of Northerners in particular job categories common to economic migrants. Inequality has consequences for

[1] At the time this research commenced, Ghana had 10 subnational government administrative regions. This changed in a 2018 referendum that partitioned the nation into 16 regions. Prior to the 2018 referendum, "northern Ghana" referred to Northern Region, Upper East Region, and Upper West Region. It now refers to Northern Region, North East Region, Upper East Region, Upper West Region and Savannah Region.

developmental outcomes and pathways for young people to fulfill life-stage developmental tasks associated with adulthood.

The quest for meaningful work is a major part of achieving valued social adulthood status. It is associated with other key milestones and psychosocial markers of adulthood such as home-leaving, establishing independence, and starting a family (Egondi et al., 2013). Economic liberalization policies and economic restructuring since the 1980s have led to changes in labor conditions (Grant, 2009; Grant & Oteng-Ababio, 2012; Thieme, 2017). In addition, structural adjustment policies have contributed to the abandonment of public projects such as education (Cole & Lukose, 2011; Hansen, 2005; Johnston, Taylor, & Watts, 2002). In Ghana, as in many African countries, insufficient formal educational and occupational opportunities exacerbate the disjuncture between developmental tasks and available societal supports for youth to realize them. The resultant extended liminal space between childhood and the adoption of valued adulthood roles has often been described as a period of "waithood" (Jeffrey, 2010; Honwana, 2013), a time when some African youth "find themselves trapped in a state of dependence akin to social childhood" (Cole & Lukose, 2011). At present, few opportunities for formal employment exist in Ghana, and an estimated 80% of Ghana's workforce is in the informal sector (Reilly et al., 2023). In the past decade, the youth unemployment rate has nearly tripled from 5.3% in 2010 to 13.4% (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). However, despite the lack of access to formal jobs and viable educational opportunities, Ghanaian youth have devised innovative ways to survive and strive towards their life goals.

Amidst the rapid urbanization in Ghana, many Northern youth flock to Accra and other southern cities to engage in makeshift survival practices and livelihood strategies. The term "hustle/hustling" has arisen in the everyday vernacular of Ghanaian and African youth to signify

the quotidian ways in which young people in the Global South cope with precarity, informality, and a lack of formal institutional support (Esson, 2021; Thieme, 2017). *Hustling* is characterized by "shrewd improvisation" and innovation in navigating the opportunities and constraints presented by one's environment (Esson, 2021; Thieme (2017). In Accra, the capital city of Ghana, electronic waste (e-waste)[2] work has emerged as one such hustle for marginalized youth from Northern Ghana. The Agbogbloshie community hosts a scrapyard that serves as the country's main repository for domestic and imported e-waste.

The Agbogbloshie area is a socio-spatially complex setting that illuminates how an amalgamation of global and local forces shape developmental contexts (Afenah, 2012). Ghana's e-waste industry is situated within concentric circles of inequality. Global inequalities make disproportionate amounts of discarded electronics available for repair, reuse, and disposal in the developing world. Lacking tools, protective gear, formal training, and infrastructure to facilitate safe waste processing, e-waste workers in Ghana resort to extracting valuable metals (e.g., aluminum, copper, and iron) and printed writing boards (PWBs) from electronics in ways that threaten human and environmental health (Adanu et al., 2020; Schmidt, 2006; Manomaivibool, 2009). Ghana's e-waste industry is estimated to directly employ between 4500 and 6000 people in Accra and support the livelihoods of nearly 200,000 people countrywide (Oteng-Ababio,

[2] Electronic waste (e-waste), also known as e-scrap or waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE), describes discarded, surplus, obsolete, or broken electronic products intended and other forms of disposal. Computers, electronic equipment, entertainment devices (e.g., televisions), mobile telephones, and refrigerators are among the most commonly discarded items in the Ghanaian waste stream.

2012; Prakash et al., 2010). E-waste processing in Agbogbloshie is accomplished through the coordinated efforts of collectors, dismantlers, scrap dealers, burners, refurbishers, repairers, intermediaries, blacksmiths, and toolmakers (Amoyaw-Osei et al., 2011). Despite the immense risks associated with this work, young men who work in Ghana's e-waste industry often earn nearly four times less than international market prices (New York Times, 2010). The majority of the e-waste industry workforce comprises young men under the age of 29, with an average age of 21 (Oteng-Ababio & Amankwaa, 2014; Grant & Oteng-Ababio, 2012). Women play a minor role in the industry; they mostly provide complementary services (e.g., food and water provision) and supplies (e.g., hammers, chisels, spanners) to meet workers' personal and occupational needs (Oteng-Ababio & Amankwaa, 2014; Grant & Oteng-Ababio, 2012). The lower-level e-waste workforce is overwhelmingly comprised of young Dagomba men who hail from the Northern and Savannah regions, both located in northern Ghana. These migrants face many issues, including discrimination related to inaccurate narratives about e-waste work and the places and people that make it possible**.**

Study Context: Agbogbloshie Area

My research took place in the Agbogbloshie area. Many of the e-waste workers here live in the adjacent slum of Old Fadama. These neighboring locales are closely related and often conflated in reporting. Agbogbloshie and Old Fadama are located southwest of Accra's Central Business District in the Odododiodoo district. They border the Korle Lagoon and the Lartebiokoshie residential area and are traditional Ga[3] areas. Agbogbloshie is less than a mile away from Accra's main business, tourism, and administrative centers. Over half of Old Fadama

[3] Part of the Ga-Adangbe ethnic group primarily from the Greater Accra Area of Ghana.

residents work within the community (Grant & Oteng-Ababio, 2012; Housing the Masses, 2010). An estimated 90% of workers in the Agbogbloshie scrapyard live in the Old Fadama (Akese & Little, 2018; Prakash et al., 2010). Most residents work in the Agbogbloshie market, which is one of the largest open-air food markets in Accra. It is particularly known for its onion and yam markets, with produce transported directly from northern and rural Ghana. Second to retailing, scrap metal work[4] represents the largest employment category in Agbogbloshie.

Due to the large demand for labor, particularly short-term and informal work, the Agbogbloshie area attracts a sizable itinerant population from northern and rural Ghana, as well as West African nationals from Niger, Benin, and Burkina Faso (Grant & Oteng-Ababio, 2012; Housing the Masses, 2010). Residents here live in an informal settlement devoid of the urban planning needed to avoid overcrowding and support the safe construction of dwellings. Consequently, homes are vulnerable to frequent fires. As the area lacks adequate public sanitation services, a significant portion of the area's domestic and industrial refuse ends up in the nearby Korle Lagoon. The lowland location of the community also makes the area susceptible to flooding. Furthermore, the area has long been a site of many struggles over land rights, leaving residents under constant threat of being uprooted (Akese & Little, 2018). For several years, the Accra Metropolitan Assembly has attempted to gentrify the area by forcibly removing residents in order to integrate it into Accra's Central Business District (Afenah, 2012).

Around the mid-2000s, the issue of e-waste in Ghana became widely recognized. By the 2010s, Agbogbloshie received significant attention from national and international media outlets over concerns of environmental degradation related to the unregulated manual recycling and

[4] Scrap metal work and e-waste work are sometimes used interchangeably in literature about Agbogbloshie as end-of-life electronics are often stripped for their metal interiors.

scavenging practices that take place at the site (e.g., New African Magazine's 2011 article "Ghana Burns Away its Health"). Much of the concern surrounding e-waste processing centers on the impact of unsafe practices such as burning e-waste to reveal underlying metals and for volume reduction, and pouring hazardous liquids onto the ground (from discarded electronic parts such as cartridges and batteries) (Boateng, 2011; Fujimori et al., 2016; Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022). Metals scavenged from used electronics are purchased by middlemen and exported; they contribute to the international raw metals market (Gabrys, 2011; Porter, 2002). The practice of burning electronics emits toxic substances that threaten air, soil, and groundwater quality (Dagan et al., 2007; Grossman, 2006). Many of these substances have been found to be potentially environmentally persistent[5] (Ni, Zeng, Tao, & Zeng, 2010). Agbogbloshie workers and residents are disproportionately exposed to these health-threatening environmental hazards. Asante et al. (2012) investigated human contamination by multi-trace elements in the Agbogbloshie e-waste dump by analyzing the urine of e-waste workers. Concentrations of iron, antimony, arsenic, and lead in the urine of e-waste workers were found to be higher than those in reference sites after controlling for age and other factors (2012). The Agbogbloshie community and its surroundings are vulnerable to developmental neurotoxicants and cancer-promoting chemicals (e.g., cadmium, chromium, polybrominated diphenyl ethers [PBDEs], polychlorinated biphenyls, and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons) (Chen et al., 2011; Kaifie et al., 2020; Tue et al., 2016). Many of these chemicals have also been linked to poor cognitive development outcomes (Washington, 2019).

[5] Once introduced, chemicals emitted from e-waste remain in the environment for a lengthy period.

Global Electronic Waste: Waste and Inequality

The formation and management of waste have implications for social organization, labor, and human development. In 2005, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) reported that approximately 20-50 million tons of global e-waste were generated annually (Brigden et al., 2008; Robinson, 2009; UNEP, 2005). In 2019, 53.6 million metric tons (Mt) of e-waste was reported to be produced worldwide (Forti et al., 2020). A mere 17.4% of this e-waste was documented as being properly acquired and recycled (2020). Due to rapid technological advancement and economic strategies like planned obsolescence, an unprecedented volume of e-waste enters the global waste stream and contributes to the growing imbalance between global recycling activities and production of e-waste worldwide.

Waste is a by-product of the "globalisation of contemporary capitalism's logic of production and increasing consumption." Strasser's (2000) research on the social history of trash in the United States explored the linkages between consumption and disposal. She discusses how contemporary consumption is embedded in *throwaway culture*. Likewise, Gabrys (2011) notes in an investigation of the material life of electronic waste (in the forms of physical devices and digital information) that the production and subsequent disposal of electronics occur within a culture of disposability. This culture is facilitated by the limited lifecycle of electronic products, as many manufacturers build obsolescence into their products by designing them to break down prematurely (Packard, 1960; Slade, 2006; Grossman, 2006). Marketing strategies designed to encourage consumers to consistently buy new products also contribute to this disposability culture (Slade, 2006; Strasser, 2000).

Inequality is embedded in various parts of the economic value chain of electronics, situating young e-waste workers in the Global South within multiple spheres of disadvantage. As

many scholars have discussed, waste seldom flows through the world in an equal manner. It often flows from the rich to the poor within and among countries. As sociologist Strasser mentions in her book *Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash,* "trashmaking both underscores and creates social differences based on economic status [...] What is rubbish to some is useful or valuable to others, and the ones who perceive value are nearly always the ones with less money" (Strasser, 2000). Although new electronics are largely consumed in the Global North, a significant portion is disposed of in the Global South through both legal and illegal means, despite many recipient countries' lack of infrastructural and technological resources to support safe disposal. The majority of this waste is sent from the United States, Europe, and Australia to evade waste management costs (Robinson, 2009; Levinson et al., 2008; Greenpeace, 2015). It is estimated that 60%–90% of global e-waste is shipped to developing countries, primarily in Asia and Africa (UNEP, 2015; Caravanos et al., 2011). Of the portion shipped to Africa, 25-75% is estimated to be irreparably damaged upon arrival (Carmin & Agyeman, 2011).

History of Hazardous Waste in Africa

The transboundary movement of hazardous waste has long been articulated as an environmental justice issue in Africa. By the 1980s, the direction of the international toxic waste stream (i.e., from developed to developing nations) became apparent (Brooke, 1988). Increasingly stringent environmental regulations in developed countries and higher costs associated with disposal incentivized governments and corporations to dispose of waste in developing countries, where regulations are generally less strictly enforced (if at all existent) (Robinson, 2009; Levinson, Folman, & Lietzmann, 2008; Greenpeace, 2008). For example, a study conducted in the 1980s revealed that the mean costs associated with disposing of hazardous wastes in industrialized countries ranged from 100 and 2000 United States dollars

(USD). Similar costs in Africa fell between 2.50 and 50 USD (Park, 1998). Communities in the Global South have consequently been burdened with environmental hazards associated with goods primarily manufactured and consumed in the Global North (Carmin & Agyeman, 2011; Conca, 2001; Westra & Lawson, 2001). The inhabitants of these recipient communities are often disadvantaged in other ways. Many are poor members of historically marginalized ethnic groups (Westra & Lawson, 2001).

In the 1980s, the increased awareness of the dangers associated with imported hazardous waste prompted African leaders to challenge the morality and legality of what they termed “toxic terrorism” and “garbage imperialism” (Park, 1998). Between 1980 and 1986, there were three known incidents of illegal dumping in Africa; however, by about 1988, this number had increased over ten-fold (Mpanya, 1992). To further support the idea that Africa was regarded as a global dumping ground, a memo from December 1991 by the then-chief economist at the World Bank, Lawrence H. Summers, was released advocating for dumping hazardous waste in Africa and other parts of the developing world. Summers argued that it made economic sense as "underpopulated countries in Africa are vastly underpolluted” (Special to the New York Times, 1992).

In 1988, the Organization of African Unity (predecessor to the African Union) signed a resolution in which they identified hazardous waste dumping as a “crime against Africa and the African people” (1998). Following this, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) passed a resolution demanding the penalization of parties responsible for dumping toxic waste in West Africa. Two international treaties negotiated under the auspices of the United National Environmental Programme emerged to combat problems associated with the transboundary shipment of waste. The first was the Basel Convention on the Control of

Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal (commonly referred to as the Basel Convention). Adopted in 1989 and made effective in 1992, the Basel Convention aims to reduce the transnational movement of hazardous and other wastes, especially those transferred from developed to less-developed nations (Kummer, 1995; Lloyd, 2008). It regulates this flow by requiring parties to develop national and domestic legislation to prevent and penalize illegal importation. It further requires its parties to ensure that all waste is managed and disposed in an "environmentally sound" fashion, although it is not specific about what this actually means.

Unsatisfied with the outcomes of the Basel Convention, leaders of 12 African nations negotiated the Bamako Convention on the Ban of the Import into Africa and the Control of Transboundary Movement and Management of Hazardous Wastes within Africa (Bamako Convention), a treaty that came into force in 1998. Unlike its predecessor, the Bamako Convention emphatically bans the importation of hazardous wastes into Africa, without making concessions for radioactive waste. Some international law experts (e.g., Park, 1998) have argued that the existence of the Basel Convention and the Bamako Convention serves as evidence that environmental racism does not accurately characterize inequities associated with the transnational movement of waste. Rather, they contend that these treaties demonstrate that (unlike minority communities in developed nations) leaders of developing nations have the political power to affect change on the global stage by banning the importation of hazardous wastes altogether. Along the same lines, these scholars hold that national sovereignty affords developing nations the agency to align their political and economic agendas with their environmental concerns (1998). However, an examination of the current international waste stream suggests that ethnicized environmental inequality remains a by-product of the global political economy, despite such conventions (Szasz & Meuser, 1997). Illegal imports continue to

constitute a considerable proportion of the electronic waste in African nations (Baldé et al., 2022).

Electronic Waste in Ghana

The historical legacies of unequal global flows of toxic waste remain relevant and exist against the backdrop of a complex social landscape. Currently, it is difficult to characterize the world using clear-cut dichotomies of consumers and disposers. Worldwide, people are increasingly dependent on electronic devices and digital technologies. Yet, there remains great inequality in people's ability to afford and access electronics. This phenomenon is commonly referred to as the "digital divide." Despite Ghana's growing participation in digital economies and society, many cannot afford to pay full price for digital devices. An estimated 23.4 percent of Ghana's population live below the poverty line (Ghana Statistical Service, 2018), though the country has made significant strides to reduce poverty rates over the past decades[6]. Consequently, there has been an increased demand for used electronic devices as a means to provide low-cost technology to local people. Relaxed restrictions on the importation of computers enable e-waste to enter the country via many pathways (i.e., charity, extralegal means, legal means). Several post-millennial national policies and campaigns were introduced to increase the number of people with access to technology and facilitate the mass importation of second-hand electronics. Examples include the 2004 elimination of import duty on used computers (Grant & Oteng-Ababio, 2012), the 2009 "one laptop per child initiative" (Kotey,

[6] Since the 1990s, the nation has steadily experienced annual economic growth. Between 1992 and 2013, Ghana's national level of poverty decreased from 56.5% to 24.2%. (Cooke et al., 2016). In 2010, Ghana graduated from categorization as a highly indebted poor country (HIPC) to a lower-middle income country (Osei-Assibey, 2014). Alongside this economic growth, there has been a widening income gap between a small middle class and a growing lower class (Cooke et al., 2016; Osei-Assibey, 2014).

2010) and the "laptop per household project" (Ghanaian Times, 2009). Consequently, computers occupy a large portion of Ghana's e-waste shipments (Grant & Oteng-Ababio, 2012). Given the complexity of e-waste streams and their multiple paths of origin, it is difficult to ascertain the exact percentage of global e-waste shipped to Ghana. Each month, the Tema Harbor is estimated to receive anywhere from 300 (PBS, 2009) to 600 40-foot-long containers of e-waste (Afrol News, 2010; Grant & Oteng-Ababio, 2012). Even functioning donated electronics present challenges similar to non-operational ones, as they soon become defunct and enter the waste stream (Basel Action Network, 2005; Fishbein, 2000; Gabrys, 2011). In Ghana, nearly 80% of imported used computers are believed to enter the waste stream shortly after they arrive (Grant & Oteng-Ababio, 2012). These shipments arrive amidst a critical sanitation problem. Ghana has inadequate infrastructure and technological resources to effectively manage domestically produced waste (Amoah & Kosoe, 2014; Boadi & Kuitunen, 2003). In fact, it was not until 2016 that the Hazardous and Electronic Waste Control and Management Act was enacted in Ghana to explicitly address electronic waste. The shortcomings of national sanitation efforts create a precarious context for the healthy maturation of youth, as evidenced by the fact that nearly five million children in Ghana die annually from illnesses associated with poor environment (Grant & Oteng-Ababio, 2012; World Bank, 2007).

Agbogbloshie: Misrepresentation of Place and People

The Agbogbloshie area occupies an interesting place in the Ghanaian imaginary. On the one hand, it is seen as a booming place for commerce; on the other hand, it is seen as a condemned area. Given the immense ecological risks posed by informal e-waste management practices, and the growing concern in the environmental advocacy community, Agbogbloshie became touted as a key site for examining the latent costs of technological advancement. High-

profile international news media and TV outlets, including the Guardian, New York Times, Al Jazeera, and Scientific America covered Agbogbloshie. The community has also attracted local and international researchers, journalists, photographers, non-governmental organizations, and slum tourists (Akese & Little, 2018; Bormann & Agyeman-Duah, 2015).

Inaccurate characterizations remain central to the narratives created and used by media and environmental justice advocates, despite the lack of evidence to substantiate them. For instance, the Agbogbloshie scrapyard is described as uniquely large in size. In many accounts, it is described as the "world's largest e-waste dump," despite being less than half a square kilometer large[7] (Amankwaa et al., 2017; Oteng-Ababio & van der Velden, 2019). For comparison, the Guiyu e-waste scrapyard, located in China, is approximately 52 square kilometers. These accounts also often oversimplify how e-waste flows into the Agbogbloshie scrapyard by creating the impression that it is transported directly from the West. What is missed in these stories are the complex, socially classed ways electronics moved through Ghana and how Ghanaians are increasingly becoming digital consumers. An estimated 85% of imported e-waste is used within the West African region before final discard.

Popular narratives of Agbogbloshie purport to be people-centered, but too often only provided surface-level accounts of the lived experiences of e-waste workers. Agbogbloshie is popularly framed as a mere "graveyard" for the West's electronic waste, a place "where electronics go to die," and/or an apocalyptic society- positioning it not merely as a place where e-waste is recycled, but as *itself* a condemned wasteland (Brouck & Galindo, 2019). One of the most acclaimed and widely viewed documentaries on Ghana's e-waste situation is entitled

[7] Amankwaa and colleagues (2017) reports that Agbogbloshie scrapyard measures 31 hectares (approximately 0.312 km^2).

"Welcome to Sodom." In the film, sensationalized pictures and stories–primarily featuring burning electronics and piles of trash–present a narrow account of the occupational tasks associated with e-waste work and their significance in shaping young adults' lived realities. Even the title of the film is fraught with negative assumptions about the space and the people in it. For years, Old Fadama has pejoratively been nicknamed Sodom and Gomorrah due to uncritical associations with crime, deviance, and substandard living conditions. The filmmakers' use of "Sodom" also reflects a conflation of the Agbogbloshie scrapyard with the bordering residential zone, a "slum" called Old Fadama (Akese, 2019; Oteng-Ababio & van der Velden, 2019). This conflation ignores the intelligence and intentionality that local residents put into organizing physical space in response to environmental stressors and risks (e.g., avoiding smoke, recognizing linkages between contagion and waste), all of which are notable displays of human resilience.

The sort of representation often displayed in reports and photographic documentations of Agbogbshie- in which landscapes of decay and ruin are highlighted - has been critiqued for the manner in which histories that produced such ruin are elided and sometimes referred to as "ruin porn" (Akese, 2019; Liboiron, 2015; DeSilvey & Edensor, 2013; Wanenchak 2012). Such narratives perpetuate negative tropes about Africa, its people, and their relative value. Furthermore, as Afenah (2012) notes, negative stereotypes embedded in normative discourses on the harsh conditions of informality and the associated itineracy of community members reinforce justifications for gentrification in Agbogbloshie.

Current Project and Study Objectives

Intersecting global and national inequalities embedded in the proximal and distal developmental contexts of youth produce challenges and opportunities that are meaningful to

their achievement of key markers of adulthood. This case study examines the everyday life experiences of electronic waste workers in Agbogbloshie to gain insight into how overlapping inequalities jointly texture the psychosocial developmental trajectories of young adults living at the economic, environmental, and ethnic margins of Ghana.

I bring environmental justice issues in conversation with psychosocial life course development to explore how "hustling" - migration and subsequent e-waste work– in Agbogbloshie influences the developmental trajectories of young men in Ghana. I am interested in the varied ways Agbogbloshie serves as a significant developmental context - a place where young Dagomba men "work, live and play" as they strive to meet psychosocial developmental goals.

This study lends ethnographic and qualitative focus to the phenomenological experiences of young men from Northern Ghana engaging in electronic waste work in the Agbogbloshie area (i.e., Old Fadama and Agbogbloshie) of Accra, Ghana. Data were generated from non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and a focus group. Additionally, I employed photovoice, a participatory action photography technique. Sensationalized narratives about environmentally hazardous locations hinder the development of effective strategies to address the growing problems associated with global e-waste. As is evident from the case of Agbogbloshie, images are important in the creation of social narratives about places and the people in them. As such, this study used images as a tool to reframe the Agbogbloshie area from the phenomenological perspectives of workers.

Theoretical Framework

My dissertation uses a phenomenological ecological perspective to understand how multisystemic inequality influences the developmental tasks associated with young adulthood.

Environmental justice literatures- particularly by urban geographers- have discussed the need for a "situated e-waste justice" approach to be taken in media reporting, academic, research and environmental advocacy to understand how human lives are configured in environments where e-waste disposal activities take place (Akese & Little, 2018). This contextualized environmental justice framing considers the international, national, and local contexts of workers and acknowledges the histories implicated in producing toxic landscapes (2018). This understanding of human embeddedness in social systems, histories, etc. is central to human development perspectives. I use Spencer's Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) as a guiding framework to explore how people understand and make meaning out of their daily lived experiences. PVEST enables a comprehensive examination of the experiences of young people living in developmental contexts encumbered by global and national-level societal inequity by employing a dynamic conceptualization of contextual influence to consider how social, historical, and cultural forces factor into the daily lived experiences of youth. It adds a phenomenological lens to Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1989) ecological systems theory to highlight the critical role of meaning making in identity development outcomes. This framework conceptualizes identity development as an ongoing process of negotiating psychosocial risks with available protective factors and supports across various developmental contexts. I explore how the interaction of social, environmental, ethnic, and economic contexts constitutive of e-waste work impacts the psychosocial development of emerging adults.

Research Questions

My dissertation seeks to answer the following research questions:

1) How do young men in Agbogbloshie conceptualize their current life stage (i.e., young/emerging adulthood)?

2) How do young men understand and experience living in the Agbogbloshie area and working in the e-waste industry? And how do these understandings and experiences intersect with their psychosocial trajectories?

a) What challenges and developmental risks do young men associate with living and working in the Agbogbloshie area?

b) What coping strategies, protective factors and supports help to offset these challenges and risk contributors?

Study Significance

The lives of young men in Agbogbloshie are inscribed in a matrix of inequalities that shape their developmental contexts and opportunity structures. This case study offers a glimpse into how young adults navigate these conditions and make progress on life-stage psychosocial developmental tasks. Scholars note that inequality is increasing between and within countries worldwide (Cooke et al., 2016). However, little is known about the psychosocial dimensions of inequality in the Global South. Claims about human psychology and behavior are often derived from studies conducted in Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) societies and are assumed to be universal (Henrich, 2020; Henrich et al., 2010a; Henrich et al., 2010b). There is limited information available on the paths young people take to achieve valued adulthood in non-Western societies.

Informal work and varied livelihood strategies are increasingly becoming features of young people's life trajectories amid increased economic and social precarity. In Ghana, electronic waste work has become a growing industry for marginalized groups. E-waste is the fastest growing waste stream in the world. Its formation, movement, and management have implications for social stratification in Ghana and globally. Discarded goods enter the Ghanaian

waste stream through a complicated network of pathways. Once in Ghana, it flows along class and ethnic lines. A growing body of research has investigated the human health costs of rapid technological advancement in an unequal world. However, knowledge is sparse regarding how the global proliferation of e-waste influences psychosocial developmental trajectories.

Studies on African youth contribute significantly to our overall understanding of normative human development. Demographic shifts over the past decades make sub-Saharan Africa a key area for examining youth development in context. Africa is home to the largest population of youth globally (Yingi, 2023; ILO, 2020). Seventy percent of sub-Saharan Africa's population is under 30 years of age. The continent's population has been steadily increasing, and is projected to continue along this path. Africa's population in 2017 constituted 17% of the global population, a significant increase from 9% in 1950 to 14% in 2005 (Hartmann & Biira, 2020). Researchers believe that by 2050, Africa will be responsible for nearly 50% of global population growth (Osei-Appaw & Christian, 2022; Yingi, 2023). Furthermore, it is important to study urban African youth, as cities are increasingly becoming key developmental contexts. It is projected that by 2050, 55% of Africa's population will reside in urban spaces (Cleland & Machiyama, 2017; Yingi, 2023).

Organization of Dissertation

Chapter One provides a brief introduction to the study, research questions, broader significance, and dissertation organization. I provide a brief overview of inequality in Ghana; the e-waste issue in global and national contexts; and the research site - the Agbogbloshie area (i.e., Agbogbloshie and Old Fadama). I explain how misrepresentations of the area by environmental advocacy groups and international media have popularized pejorative social narratives of residents and workers. Chapter Two examines psychosocial development throughout the life

course, with a particular focus on the transition to adulthood across different cultures. A central theme of this stage is identity development, which is influenced by a variety of factors. I review literature that highlights the interplay of psychosocial, cultural, and environmental influences on developmental trajectories within the Dagomba traditional context, paying special attention to the roles of uneven development and inequality. This analysis draws on theories, including Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Spencer's Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory, along with environmental justice frameworks, to illustrate how developmental contexts influence psychosocial outcomes. Chapter Three is the methodology section. I discuss my positionality, recruitment, data collection methods (i.e., observation, interviews, focus groups, photovoice), and data analysis process. I also provide a participant profile. Chapter Four is the first results section. I use participant narratives about pre-migration family, work, and home life to provide background information on the developmental trajectories of young e-waste workers. I present participants' conceptualizations of developmental tasks that mark their current developmental stage (i.e., young adulthood). Extant narratives of e-waste workers in Ghana typically focus narrowly on migration and subsequent e-waste work as economic survival strategies. However, using a life course approach, I highlight how migration and short-term work may be developmental tasks that allow for the fulfillment of other key markers of valued adulthood (e.g., marriage and supporting aging parents). I also present information on the challenges and opportunities that youth face living and working in Agbogbloshie. Chapter Five is the second results section. I discuss how participants make meaning of their lives and work in Agbogbloshie. They broadly conceptualized Agbogbloshie as a temporary place for young people to hustle and progress towards life goals. I recount the post-migration experiences of young Dagomba men in Agbogbloshie. I highlight the developmental

risks and stressors they face as well as the protective factors and supports that enable coping. I veer away from the common narrow depiction of occupational tasks in Agbogbloshie (e.g., burning trash) to explore how other experiences (e.g., the process of obtaining goods from other neighborhoods commonly described as "going to the bush) impact young Dagomba men's daily lives. Chapter Six comprises the discussion and conclusion sections. It provides an overall discussion of the findings and details limitations of the study as well as implications for theory, policy, and practice.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Culture and Development: Dagomba Cultural Context

Cultural, geographical, social, and economic factors both influence and constrain various aspects of an individual's development (Nsamenang, 1992). When examining human development, it is important to consider the sociocultural contexts in which families, communities, and other essential institutions are situated. These contexts have a significant impact on behavior and cognition. Cultural norms and traditions play significant roles in defining how developmental tasks are conceptualized, available supports, social expectations, and personal goals.

Most participants in this study belonged to the Dagomba ethnic group. Dagomba is a sub-ethnic group of Mole-Dagbani. There are estimated to be over 3 million Dagomba people in Ghana. Dagbon's economy is chiefly agrarian, with crop and livestock farming as common occupations. Staple crops include millet, sorghum, and yams. Their traditional home, Dagbon, is located primarily in the Northern Region, though it has comprised parts of the Northern, Upper West, Upper East, Savannah Region and North East regions at various points in time. The Ya Na is the paramount chief (i.e., highest traditional authority) of Dagbon. Below the Ya Na is a hierarchical structure of chiefs who aid him in governing. This system is a critical component of local governance and administration in Dagbon.

Historically, many Dagomba practiced African traditional spirituality. Nearly 60 percent of Dagomba people identify as Muslims, though it is common for individuals to incorporate aspects of African traditional spirituality into their religious practices (Abdul-Hamid, 2010). The Dagomba are primarily a patrilineal ethnic group. As such, sons (particularly first-borns) are particularly valued and may be bestowed with special heritance rights such as larger portions of

family-owned land than younger brothers (Oppong, 1973). They may also be tasked with making burial/funeral arrangements for deceased parents; dividing a father's property after death; and/or providing support for immediate and extended family (1973). Many Dagomba children live in households and on compounds with adult relatives other than their parents. Thus, biological parents are not always the sole or main socializing agents of children. This is common in West African communities (Nsamenang, 1992). It is also not uncommon for children in traditional Ghanaian communities to be sent to live with other relatives for rearing and training (Goody, 2021; Oppong, 1973). As they are a patrilineal ethnic group, Dagomba children are typically sent to live with paternal relatives (Oppong, 1973). Less frequently, however, they may be sent to live with maternal grandparents or uncles (1973).

Scholars have widely acknowledged that the boundaries separating childhood, adolescence, and adulthood in West African societies are not defined in the same ways articulated in Western psychosocial literatures. The assumption of adult responsibilities is typically an incremental process that commences in early childhood. In *Growing up in Dagbon*, Oppong (1973) discusses the traditional processes through which Dagomba children assume and/are recruited into adulthood roles in traditional Dagomba society. Given the agrarian nature of many Dagomba communities, children as young as five are given tasks to do around the house (for girls) and on the farm (for boys) under the supervision of parents and other older members of the family. Children progress to more complicated tasks over time commensurate with their increasing abilities. Oppong (1973) explains,

> "By five years or so a small boy can begin to help to care for his father's or uncle's chickens. Small boys also scare birds from seed beds and begin to care for sheep and goats. By twelve or more a boy is old enough to herd the cattle, which is a job beneath

> the dignity of a grown man […] One criterion of maturity for boys is the ability to make a hundred yam mound in a day. When he has achieved this a boy may be given his own hoe to show he is now a farmer and the use of a piece of land of his own to cultivate in his spare time."

Children often engage in family work as a part of their upbringing, but distinguishing between family responsibilities and what is often termed as "child labor" can be challenging. According to the Ghana Statistical Service (2013), child labor rates are notably high in Ghana, with nearly 30% of both male and female children reported to be seeking employment opportunities. Agricultural activities and informal work in the private sector were the main sources of employment for adolescents and youth. Approximately 6-8% of adolescents earned wages in these sectors (2013). These trends pose significant challenges to educational attainment.

Psychosocial Development Along the Life Course

Erikson is widely recognized for his significant contributions to developmental psychology, particularly through his formulation of a life-span theory of development. His *Eight Stages of Man* (1950) builds upon Freudian stages of psychosexual development. His work delineates a series of eight psychosocial stages that an individual navigates from infancy to old age. He adds to Freud's theory a heightened recognition of the social context in which development occurs as well as the emotional aspects of development (Corradi, 2024; Jones & Waite-Stupiansky, 2022; Muuss et al., 1996). According to Erikson's theory, individuals develop according to the epigenetic principle of development in which "anything that grows has a ground plan, and out of this ground plan the parts arise, each part having its time of special ascendancy, until all parts have risen to form a functional whole" (Erikson, 1968, 92). At the heart of this theory of development is the importance of acquiring ego identity (Muuss et al., 1996). Erikson

proposed adolescence as the developmental period when identity issues are most prominent. In his model, identity formation is theorized as a dynamic interplay between identity synthesis and identity confusion. Although Erikson's work has been criticized for being abstract and not empirically testable, it has sparked a great deal of research and theory (Côté, 1993). Marcia's (1966) identity status model was one of the early empirical operationalizations of Erikson's work. Marcia postulated that the defining dimensions of identity are exploration and commitment. Exploration is the process of questioning and searching various potential identity alternatives. Commitment refers to adopting one or more identity alternatives or value ideologies (Gfellner & Bartoszuk, 2015; Schwartz, et al., 2013). In Marcia's model, exploration and commitment are divided into "present" and "absent" levels to create four identity statuses: 1) *diffused* (neither exploration nor commitment), 2) *foreclosed* (commitment without exploration), 3) *moratorium* (exploration preceding commitment), and 4) achievement (commitment after a period of exploration) (Gfellner & Bartoszuk, 2015; Schwartz et al., 2013). Recent studies have linked the four identity statuses in this model to broader domains of psychosocial functioning. For instance, achievement is associated with balanced thinking and mature interpersonal relationships; moratorium with openness and curiosity as well as anxiety and depression; foreclosure with low levels of flexibility, but high life satisfaction; and diffusion with general poor psychosocial functioning including low self-esteem, a lack of self-direction and agency (Schwartz, et al., 2012).

Though widely used, the identity status model has received criticism. Specifically, it has been argued that the primary emphasis on identity status categories distorts Erikson's original formulation of identity (Côté & Levine, 1988). Erikson held that identity emerges from "transactions between individuals and their social contexts" (Schwartz et al., 2013). However, it

has been argued that Marcia's model does not adequately account for contexts and "appears to frame the identity development process as a set of individual choices" (2013). For instance, the exploration of multiple identity alternatives is often prized as evidence of adaptive identity development. However, this may not accurately reflect identity development in non-Western contexts, particularly those that value conformity, interdependence, and hierarchical relationships (2013). In such cases, young people are likely to internalize and model the values and beliefs of authority figures (Cheng & Berman, 2012), rendering foreclosure contextually adaptive (Berman et al., 2011; Bosma & Kunnen, 2001; Dwairy, 2002).

Transitioning to Adulthood Across Cultures

Erikson's theory of life-span development was initially formulated at a time when social expectations of young people were markedly different from what they are today. Subsequent broad-scale social and economic shifts have had significant implications for how psychosocial developmental periods are expressed (Arnett, 2000; Chisholm & Hurrelmann, 1995). Such shifts have prompted a growing area of research which explores the paths young people take from late adolescence and young adulthood to full adulthood. Most of this research has been conducted in developed countries such as the United States (Arnett, 2005; Arnett, 2006). Findings generally indicate that the transition from adolescence to adulthood is becoming longer. In Western society, it was common for youth to enter the workforce and get married soon after finishing high school (Côté & Allahar, 1994). However, industrialization has led to delayed entry into the workforce and prolonged schooling. (Arnett, 2004). People are getting married and having children later. Typical post-adolescent trajectories often include formal education (e.g., university or trade school) or employment within formal institutions. However, less about non-Western societies for whom these typical trajectories are unavailable.

In order to address the changes in developmental trajectories, Arnett (2000) suggested the concept of emerging adulthood as a unique transitional phase that bridges the gap between late adolescence and full adulthood. This theory was guided by psychological, sociological and anthropological literatures. Emerging adulthood is marked by the postponement of marriage and parenthood, longer schooling and career training, cohabiting, pre-marital intimate relationships (Arnett, 2000). It extends adolescence as a key developmental period for identity development. In this period, young people explore their identities and life paths related to love, work, and worldview (Arnett, 1998, 2000; Arnett & Taber, 1994). Emerging adulthood generally spans from 18 to 25 years of age, although some researchers suggest that it might extend up to 29 years old. The period is characterized by instability, an intense focus on one's self, the feeling of being "in-between" adolescence and adulthood, and an openness to many life possibilities (Arnett, 2010;2004). Emerging adulthood also extends adolescence as a critical period for psychosocial and cognitive development in which youth develop greater capacity for self-reflection and increased awareness of societal perspectives and expectations (Spencer et al., 2006; Arnett, 2010; Labouvie-Vief, 2006).

There remains a paucity of research on the paths young people take to achieve valued adulthood status in non-Western societies. Just as there have been changes to life course developmental trajectories in Western societies, there is evidence to suggest significant changes in the transition from childhood to adulthood in sub-Saharan Africa. Findings from various studies reveal that factors associated with early adulthood are configured and weighed differently around the world (e.g., (Galanaki, & Leontopoulou, 2017; Leontopoulou et al., 2016; Piumatti et al., 2016; Wängqvist & Frisén, 2015). There are also great cultural differences in when young people are expected to assume adult responsibilities and tasks (Schlegel & Barry, 1991). In West

Africa, adulthood is determined socially, rather than merely chronologically, and marked by particular milestones (Nsamenang, 1992). Throughout many regions of West Africa, traditions have long been established to symbolize the shift from adolescence to adulthood through puberty rites or rites of passage (Golomski, 2011; Nsamenang, 1992; Mahama et al. 2018). However sociocultural forces such as colonialism, western education, and globalism have led to such practices becoming obsolete. Scholars indicate that the absence of these customs contributes to the progressively ambiguous demarcation between childhood and adulthood (Mahama et al. 2018; Golomski, 2011). Marriage is widely recognized as a significant milestone in adulthood across many non-Western societies (Mahama et al., 2018; Schlegel & Barry, 1991). Additionally, having and rearing children are important to the attainment of full adulthood. As noted by Nsamenang (1992), in traditional West African communities, "an unmarried, childless person is never accorded full adult status, and marriage alone confers only proto-adult status." However, in sub- Saharan Africa, much like Western settings, people are getting married and having children later. In Ghana, these changes have been attributed to economic conditions, cultural practices, and changing perceptions of marriage's role in adult life (Adjei & Mpiani, 2023; Eshun et al., 2024). The Ghana Statistical Service (2013) notes a growing tendency among Ghanaian women to delay first births. They note a rise in the proportion of women having their first births at ages 25 and above between 1988 and 1998. Similarly, Baruwa and Amoateng (2023) analyzed the Ghana Demographic and Health Surveys from 1988, 1998, and 2014 to identify patters in the age at which women between 15 and 49 years old first gave birth in Ghana. They found that the median age increased from 17 years in 1998 to 19 years in 2014. Similarly, the Ghana 2021 Population and Housing Census General Report on Fertility and Mortality (Ghana Statistical Service, 2022b) reports an increase in the national mean age of first-time

mothers to 22.8 years in urban areas and 20.9 in rural areas. Postponed childbirth has been linked to better personal health, job security, and higher educational attainment (Baruwa & Amoateng, 2023).

Inequality and Migration

Factors contributing to the out-migration that supports the e-waste industry (i.e., from northern to south and rural to urban) include uneven development; poverty; chieftaincy and political conflicts; climate variability; and the pursuit of livelihood opportunities. Like many parts of West Africa and the world, rapid urbanization has been occurring in Ghana over the past few decades (Mahama et al., 2018; Nsamenang, 1992) Young people are drawn to urban centers that may offer better educational and employment prospects, along with enhanced economic and food security, and a more stable political atmosphere (Mahama et al., 2018; Nsamenang, 1992). Migration has consequences for the developmental contexts in which young adults are embedded. As Behrman and Sengupta (2005) notes, rapid urbanization in developing countries brings about various "opportunities for human capital investments, employment, sexual relations, entertainment, marriage, autonomy, and other related factors for youth."

Though national poverty rates have decreased in recent years, regional income inequality remains a significant concern (Tsiboe et al., 2023). Poverty and exclusion have intensified in the northern savannah regions (Cooke et al., 2016; Government of Ghana, 2003; Norton et al., 1995). The three former northern regions, namely the Northern Region, Upper East Region, and Upper West Region, represent the most under-resourced segments of the country (Anlimachie, 2019; Cooke et al., 2016; Ghana Statistical Service, 2018; Ghana Statistical Service, 2007). Farmers in rural savannah enclaves, as well as the women and children in these areas are especially vulnerable to poverty (Abdulai, 2021; Adam, 2020; Badu-Nyarko, 2013).

Spatial income inequality is present on a national scale and also on the neighborhood level in Ghanaian cities. Owusu and Agyei-Mensah (2011) studied ethnic diversity and segregation in 12 neighborhoods in Accra and Kumasi with high populations of migrants from all over the country and West African region. The neighborhoods were classified into four socioeconomic groups: migrant low-class neighborhoods, indigenous low-class neighborhoods, middle-class neighborhoods, and high-class neighborhoods. One key finding was that the neighborhoods inhabited by low-income migrants in the two cities had a notable concentration of ethnic groups from northern Ghana. Owusu and Agyei-Mensah also note that with an exception of Old Tafo, all the migrant neighborhoods they looked at were established as migrant communities for people from northern Ghana, but over decades have attracted residents from other ethnic groups.

In comparing the root causes of ethnic residential segregation in Ghana to other parts of the world, particularly the United States, Owusu and Agyei-Mensah (2011) assert that institutional and ethnic discrimination do not exist in Ghana. They, rather, attribute ethnic residential segregation in Accra and Kumasi to socioeconomic factors. However, it is difficult to disentangle class and ethnicity in Ghana. Furthermore, as noted in this chapter, the literature reveals a long history of relative disadvantage and systemic marginalization of northern ethnic groups.

Historical Factors

It is worth noting that young people in Northern Ghana have long engaged in migration in response to uneven development and related inequalities. Scholars note that colonial policies had a lasting impacts on the socioeconomic landscape of Ghana, particularly in shaping migration patterns (Ghana Statistical Service, 2023; Adepoju, 2005; Nabila, 1985, and Songsore,

1983. The colonial regime created specific centers to produce raw materials like gold, cocoa, timber, rubber, and coffee, which were needed by Britain's industries. These hubs required large workforces and were mostly located in the central and southern parts of Ghana. During Sir Frederick Gordon Guggisberg's tenure as Governor of the Gold Coast (1919-1927), his development plan encouraged the recruitment of workers from the Northern Ghana to support the growing needs of central and southern industries. Ghana experienced a surge in cocoa production during the 1930s, resulting in a heightened demand for labor and a reduction of laborers in other industries (Ofosu-Mensah, 1999). Oftentimes the local workforce could not meet the demand. Additionally demographic shifts and cultural factors engendered labor shortages in the central and southern. Notably, Kru workers and other West African nationals left Ghana to work in Liberia's growing rubber industry. The Akan locals in some mining communities were reluctant to work underground due to their spiritual beliefs. Also, Ofosu-Mensah (1999) notes that a 1922 famine triggered an influx of migrant laborers from Northern Ghana. Many boys and young men were subsequently employed in the mines. Over time, these patterns of migration became entrenched, contributing significantly to the demographic and labor dynamics we see today.

Chieftaincy and Political Conflict

Chieftaincy conflicts in Ghana involve intricate interactions among various actors and political dynamics at both national and local levels (Bukari et al., 2021). While the precise number of chieftaincy disputes in Ghana remains elusive, Bukari (2016) estimates over 230 such conflicts. In 2017, the Minister Chieftaincy and Religious Affairs, Samuel Kofi Dzamesi, reported 352 protracted disputes throughout the nation (Ghana Business News,2017; GhanaWeb, 2017; Peace FM Online, 2017a; Barimah, 2017). Many of the most violent and intense are in

northern Ghana. In Dagbon, for instance, there has been a long-drawn-out dispute over the rightful successor of the Ya Na. In 2002, the dispute reached its zenith, culminating in the assassination of then-Ya Na Yakubu Andani II and 40 others including royal court elders, as reported by both the *Daily Graphic* and the *Ghanaian Times* (Issifu, 2015; Tonah, 2012). Ripples of this conflict still generate unrest among some youth from different factions and prompt some to leave the area to travel to places like Accra. National politics also sometimes play a role in conflicts associated with out-migration. Some young people strongly align themselves with major political parties in Ghana (primarily the New Patriotic Party and the National Democratic Congress). There have been incidences of zealous party supporters inciting violence and vandalism. The complexity of the situation is exacerbated, as pointed out by Bukari and colleagues (2021), by the involvement of party politics in local chieftaincy conflicts. They argue that in such cases, traditional institutions that are typically meant to be non-partisan become politicized.

Environmental and Climate Factors

The factors that drive migration are multifaceted and include environmental elements, as demonstrated by several studies (Addaney et al., 2022; Amadou et al., 2018; Kumasi et al., 2017; Luginaah et al., 2009; Nakuja et al., 2012; Subaar et al., 2018; Zakiya, 2014). Rising temperatures and altered precipitation patterns have been identified by Subaar et al. (2018) to have significant effects on agricultural productivity, and subsequently on exacerbated poverty rates. Amadou et al. (2018) and Kumasi et al. (2017) note that migration serves as an adaptive response to climate variability in the Upper East Region. Luginaah and colleagues (2009) explore this trend in the Upper West Region, noting that individuals may migrate to more fertile areas in response to environmental conditions and food insecurity. Relatedly, Addaney and

colleagues (2022) examine how climate-induced migration among minority linguistic groups may threaten their cultures and languages.

Climate change is a major push factor for migration to urban and peri-urban locations (Zakiya, 2014). However, for many Northern youth, migration does not offer refuge from the burdens of environmental degradation; it may, rather, increase their vulnerability.
For instance, Owusu and Nursey-Bray (2019) found that people living in the Agbogbloshie area contend with environmental hazards associated with climate change such as fire outbreaks, heatwaves, windstorms, rainstorms and sea erosion.

Educational Inequality

In many parts of Africa, the popularization of formal Western-style education and the development of modern economies (from colonial times until 1970) have introduced youth to alternative paths to valued social adulthood (Cole & Lukose, 2011). In Ghana, however, significant inequality exists in access to these paths, with Northern and rural areas being most marginalized. According to the Ghana Statistical Service (2021b), the national literacy rate for people over 6 years of age is 69.8%. However, nine of the sixteen regions have literacy rates lower than the national rate. Literacy rates have remained lowest in Ghana's northernmost regions (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012). According to the most recent census information, the Savannah Region has the lowest literacy rate at 32.8%. In contrast, the Greater Accra Region has the highest literacy rate at 87.9%. This pattern is long-standing. In a study of social and ethnic selection into secondary schools conducted in 1962, Foster surveyed 963 pupils (775 boys and 188 girls) and determined that access to secondary school was "extraordinarily limited" in northern Ghana. He also mentioned that regional disparities in schooling might have implications for ethnic conflict.

According to research conducted by Anlimachie (2019a), sixty percent of Ghanaians did not demonstrate successful completion of basic education as indicated by Ghana Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) scores. These poor outcomes were attributed mainly to socio-economic barriers, which were found to be more pronounced in rural Ghana. Two-thirds of students who did not successfully pass the BECE were from rural areas. Scholars like Bonney (2022) and Allotey and colleagues (2023) point out that rural students are disproportionately affected by the neglect of Ghanaian languages and cultures in educational reforms. English is Ghana's "official" language- that is, its foreign *lingua franca*- and serves as the language of instruction in most Ghanaian schools. Students who lack English proficiency are effectively excluded.

Grant and Oteng-Ababio (2012) found that young men from the northern regions with limited education were overrepresented in the e-waste industry. Nineteen percent of the participants in their study had no formal education, and forty percent had either primary or secondary school education. The men's limited educational attainment hindered their ability to secure more gainful employment in the formal sector.

Livelihoods, Work and Identity

Routine institutional operations on global and national levels engender heightened vulnerability for developing African nations dependent on foreign investments and aid often accompanied by conditionality. In 1983, Ghana launched its structural adjustment programs negotiated with the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) following economic decline in the 1970s and 1980s (Anyinam, 1994; Hutchful, 2002). This arrangement brought about economic restructuring and the introduction of policies encouraging trade liberalization, the privatization of state-owned enterprises, the elimination of government subsidies, as well as

other austerity measures (Grant, 2009; Grant & Oteng-Ababio, 2012). These conditions made informal work a more prominent feature of the Ghanaian economy.

Despite their scarcity, formal jobs and wage labor have increasingly become associated with valued adulthood status (Cole & Lukose, 2011). Even university graduates, who constitute a relatively privileged minority, experience difficulty securing reliable work (Esson, 2021). This challenge exists across social classes, but is exacerbated in poor communities. For marginalized youth in Ghana, there are few viable pathways to formal job opportunities and the training needed to pursue them.

The process of selecting and committing to an occupation is an important part of the transition to adulthood and is tied to identity processes (Erikson, 1968; Arnett, 2004; Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011). Occupational identity -or "the conscious awareness of oneself as a worker" - is a central element of one's general sense of identity, though the centrality of this domain in relation to other domains of identity varies from person to person (Brown, Kirpal, & Rauner, 2007; Kroger, 2007; Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011). Occupational identity is a key factor in determining occupational choice and attainment (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011). It plays an organizational role in the lives of developing youth, as it orders and gives meaning to daily experiences and sets the foundation for goal setting and self-assessment (Christiansen, 1999; Phelan and Kinsella, 2009; Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011). It also serves as a means of self-definition and as a blueprint for future action (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011).

Both proximal social ecological contexts (e.g., individual characteristics, interpersonal relationships) and distal broad-scale forces (e.g., societal norms, social expectations, economic and technological changes) influence identity development related to occupation. Skorikov & Vondracek (2011) note that "contextual factors can have direct effects on identity via social

stereotypes, modeling, perceived opportunity structures, and environmental constraints." By acknowledging the contextual determinants of occupational choice, scholars have problematized the idea that occupational choice and associated identities are determined by free choice (Brown, Kirpal, & Rauner, 2007; Phelan & Kinsella, 2009). Côté and Levine (2002) argue that this notion is rooted in Western cultural values, which assume occupations to be freely chosen as opposed to emanating out of obligation or duty.

Most young migrants from the North relocate in search of better livelihood opportunities and increased access to resources (Kumasi et al., 2017; Luginaah et al., 2009). The livelihoods of households in northern Ghana are heavily dependent on the migration of young people. Researchers (e.g., Awumbila & Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2008; Agarwal et al. 2007; Agarwal et al., 1997) have documented the recent mass southward migration of female youth to serve as *kayayei*[8]. Much like e-waste work, head porting is a transient economic activity that young people enter into with short and long-term goals. Some work to be able to afford the items required for marriage and to remit funds to their families in the north (Agarwal, 2007; Awumbila & Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2008). Some enter the *kaya* business in order to save enough money to invest in future businesses in hopes of someday switching to more profitable and less taxing jobs. The financial contributions they make to their households have significant implications for interpersonal relationships, intergenerational power dynamics, and societal expectations of them.

A well-established occupational identity is often associated with psychosocial functioning, wellbeing, and life satisfaction (Christiansen, 1999; Kroger, 2007; Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011). On the other hand, one's occupation can be as source of discrimination and

[8] *Kayayei* is a term that describes people who transport goods on their heads for a negotiated fee.

developmental risk. Northern youth who migrate to southern cities may often face discrimination on the basis of their work. In Ghana, waste collection is a stigmatized occupational category. Grant and Oteng-Ababio (2012) note that descriptors for waste workers such as *kaya bola* (a derogatory term for "waste man") connote both occupational and societal roles.

Group Membership and Discrimination

As young people who migrate from northern Ghana to Accra and other southern cities learn to navigate their destination cities and find work, they experience novel inter-ethnic encounters with people who may have preconceived ideas about them based on their ethnic and/or religious group memberships as well as their perceived socioeconomic status. These experiences are all meaningful to key developmental tasks (e.g., identity formation) of adolescents and young adults.

Northern youth often migrate from places where they comprised the majority ethnic group to one where they were considered ethnic minorities. As Spencer (1990) elucidates, minority status extends beyond mere non-belonging to a dominant or majority group; it often entails negative assumptions, stereotyping, and societal expectations, which pose developmental risks. The stigma associated with minority status may exacerbate adverse developmental outcomes. Stigma is a social process of stereotyping, labeling, judging, and discriminating that significantly impacts the lives of those who experience it (Link & Phelan, 2001). Goffman (1963) originally conceived social stigma as a quality that is "deeply discrediting". The stigmatized individual is perceived to have an "undesirable difference", relegating them "from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (Goffman, 1963, p. 3). Their perceived difference is entangled with negative assumptions to form a virtual social identity. In this social process, the actual identities of stigmatized individuals are overlooked. Stigma influences the

feelings and behaviors of those affected and is associated with status loss and unfair treatment (Link & Phelan, 2001).

Ethnic discrimination, often termed *tribalism* in the local parlance of Ghanaians, remains an understudied topic and there is little consideration of its systemic nature, though many everyday Ghanaians and scholars alike acknowledge its existence. Young migrants who relocate from Northern Ghana to Accra encounter microaggressions including being expected by locals to speak Twi (Akan language) and having their national identity questioned if they cannot do so proficiently. In Ghana, Twi functions as an unofficial *lingua franca*, However, its use is not value neutral; it is laden with ideas about class, superiority/inferiority, citizenship, and belonging. The prominence of Twi language in Ghanaian commerce and everyday social life privileges those for whom it is a native language.

Understanding ethnic discrimination in Africa provides a useful glimpse into how systemic discrimination can manifest in national contexts that are largely racially homogeneous. Intra-ethnic unity and inter-ethnic conflict are often deduced from public statements of public figures such as political and journalistic leaders and by analyzing voting patterns (Arthur, 2009; Price, 1973). However, little is known about the extent to which it factors into the daily lives of those who experience it.

Group membership plays a significant role in the identity formation process (Konstam, 2015; Phinney, 2006; Cokley, 2007; Phinney & Ong, 2007; Quintana, 2007; Syed & Mitchell, 2013). This significance is in part rooted in individualism-collectivism value orientations (Adams et al., 2016; Hofstede, 2001; Phinney 2000). Adams and colleagues (2016) note, "in sub-Saharan Africa, individuals are considered collectivistic; emerging adults are faced with extensive multi-ethnic contexts, and they emphasize group membership, and goals, norms, and

values that promote such membership (p. 240). Group memberships constitute particularly important domains of identity among those who are culturally and/or visibly different from the dominant cultural group (Umaña-Taylor, 2011). This significance is particularly pronounced in heterogeneous, urban, multi-ethnic settings, where individuals must navigate a complex "negotiation of self in relation to other groups, particularly if they have encountered discriminatory attitudes and evidence of their lower status and power in society" (Phinney, 2006). Understanding issues that lie at the intersection of various cultural group memberships is essential, particularly in individuals with "multiple oppressive identities" (Constantine, 2002). Ethnic identity is a particularly important subsection of identity. Ethnic identity refers to the extent to which one "has considered the personal significance of and feels a sense of solidarity with his or her ethnic or cultural group" (Schwartz et al., 2012). It also serves a potentially protective function in the development of youth from diverse backgrounds, as they often derive positive self-regard and tools to cope with adversity from ethnic group membership and identification (Rivas-Drake et al., 2008).

Though ethnic affiliation is a salient aspect of personal and social identity in sub-Saharan Africa, we know little about the ethnic identity development of young adults in this part of the world-especially that of those who belong to ethnic groups that have been historically marginalized. Many scholars note linkages between ethnicity identity and psychological well-being. However, few studies explore these linkages in African contexts. Adams and colleagues (2016) looked at salience of ethnic identity and linkages between ethnic identity and psychological well-being (e.g., life satisfaction and mental health) among various African emerging adult groups. Data was collected from 1255 university students from Cameroon, Kenya, South Africa (divided into Black and white groups), Zambia, and the United States (also

divided into Black and white groups) using the Multi-Ethnic Identity Measure. Across the various groups, no consistent correlations were observed between sociodemographic variables and ethnic identity, life satisfaction, and mental health, highlighting the complexities associated with ethnic identity processes among young Africans. Ethnic identity was found to be most salient among Black and White South African emerging adults and least salient for White emerging adults in the United States. With the exceptions of the United States and South Africa, the study did not compare or discuss ethnocultural groups within African countries. In the exceptional cases of the United States and South Africa, ethnocultural groups were based on broad racial categories (Black and white). Specific self-identified ethnic categorizations were obscured. Furthermore, as the authors point out, the participants largely comprised a privileged group (i.e., university students) and may not be representative of their national populations.

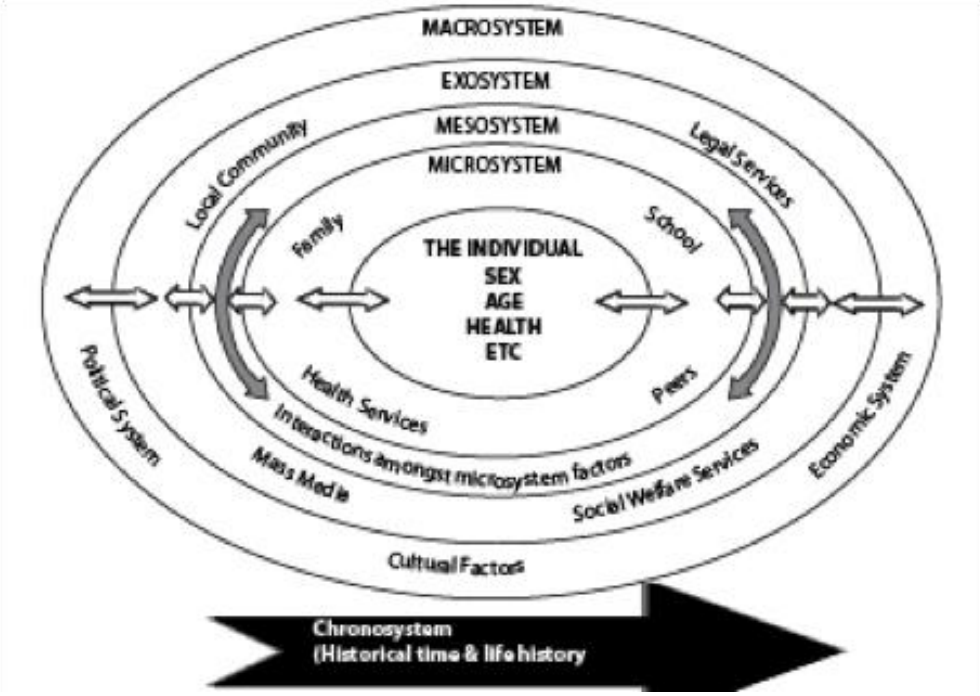
Developmental Contexts and Environments

Bronfenbrenner Ecological Systems Theory

Though Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (EST) initially focused on child development, is has been foundational in how psychologists and sociologists understand contextual influence. It offers a comprehensive framework for examining the multifaceted influences on human development, ranging from the most proximal surroundings (e.g., family, home environment) to more distal contexts (e.g., national and international policies, economic systems, cultural factors).The theory delineates five interrelated systems: 1) the microsystem, involving direct interactions with immediate surroundings; 2) the mesosystem, encompassing interconnections between microsystems; 3) the exosystem, which includes settings that indirectly influence the individual; 4) the macrosystem, reflecting broader societal and cultural influences; and 5) the chronosystem, which incorporates the dimension of time as it relates to an

individual's experiences over the life course. This includes life transitions in one's life, historical events, and broad-scale societal changes. In Bronfenbrenner's formulation of Ecological Systems Theory, these systems are deemed to be nested within each other. However, later interpretations of EST emphasize the interconnectedness and the overlapping nature of these ecological structures (Crawford, 2020). In building on this theory, some scholars (e.g., Elliott & Davis, 2018; Hertler et al., 2018) have suggested that EST is anthropocentric and overlooks human-nature interconnections.

Figure 1: The Ecological Systems Model



Ecological Framing in Environmental Justice

According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Environmental Justice (2024), "environmental justice" entails ensuring "fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, in the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies." Environmental justice as both a field of study and practice highlights the environment

as a crucial determinant of lived experiences and developmental pathways. It recognizes the role that physical environments play in creating both opportunities and barriers for individuals. Insights from environmental justice offer valuable perspectives on the connections between minority groups and environmental concerns, revealing the significance of systemic marginalization in the unequal distribution of environmental burdens (Pulido, 1996).

Contemporary environmental justice activism emerged in the United States in the 1980s. It has its roots in grassroots organizing, specifically in the civil rights, labor, and housing rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Environmental justice arose as a response to institutionalized anti-black racial discrimination, disenfranchisement, and racial segregation, developing into a movement that considers how inequalities (e.g., along racial and class lines) influence individuals' vulnerability to environmental hazards. A classic report by the United Church of Christ (UCC) Commission for Racial Justice determined that race was the “most significant among variables tested in association with the location of commercial hazardous waste facilities” across the United States (UCC, 1987:9). Bullard (1987, 1990, 1994, 1996) similarly found that the placement of landfills, garbage incinerators, and toxic dumpsites followed distinct racial patterns in southern United States. The term “environmental racism” emerged from such activist scholarship to highlight the systemic inequalities that expose communities of color and low-income populations to greater environmental hazards. As articulated by Bullard (1993), "whether by conscious design or institutional neglect, communities of color in urban ghettos, in rural 'poverty pockets,' or on economically impoverished Native American reservations face some of the worst environmental devastation in the nation" (p. 17). Factors that contribute to ethnic minority communities’ excessive exposure to pollution include the availability of inexpensive land in such communities; limited political resources (e.g., information, representation,

influence, policies); and the inability to mobilize because of poverty and housing discrimination (Bullard, 1998; Chavis, 1993; Park, 1998; Taylor, 1992).

While the discourse on environmental racism initially focused on the United States, it has since expanded to address global issues, such as the transnational movement of hazardous waste. This shift underscores the need for a broader understanding of environmental injustice on an international scale, including the specific challenges faced in Africa and other regions where ethnic inequalities are less researched. In the pursuit of environmental justice, it is essential to recognize how various physical environments—natural and built—serve as developmental contexts for young people. Understanding these contexts can inform efforts to create equitable and sustainable environments for all.

Before the emergence of the EJ movement, environmental groups primarily concentrated primarily focused on the conservation of non-human life (e.g., air, soil, water, forests, wilderness). This focus often depicted the environment as a distant entity. In response, EJ leaders redefined environmental issues in a way that located "nature" within the contexts of people's everyday lives, particularly the places that serve as containers for quotidian phenomenological experiences – places where individuals "*work, play, and live"* (Novotny, 2000; Taylor, 2000). They adopted a broader perspective on environmental concerns to include neighborhood housing conditions, workplace safety, community health, and access to public services. This reframing, as suggested by Novotny, underscores the environment as a "cultural formation" and "an expression of social relations" (2000, p. 86). It emphasizes the interconnectedness of nature and ideology, which are woven together through the meaning-making processes of people (individually and collectively) (2000).

Conceptual Linkages between Physical Environment and Identity

A number of theoretical perspectives explore how various dimensions of developmental context influence psychosocial processes. For example, environmental psychologists have sought to understand the interplay of human environments and psychological factors, paying particular attention to the linkages between physical environment and identity. According to Gieseking (2014), "place and identity are inextricably bound to one another. The two are co-produced as people come to identify with where they live, shape it, however modestly, and are in turn shaped by their environments" (Gieseking, 2014). Seminal papers in this field, "The City and Self-Identity" (Proshansky, 1978) and "Place-identity: Physical world socialization of the self" (Proshansky et al., 1983), developed the concept of *place identity,* which is theorized as a domain of personal identity that highlights how physical location/environment contributes to personal identity. More specifically, place identity describes "those dimensions of self that define the individual's personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, feelings, values, goals, preferences, skills, and behavioral tendencies relevant to a specific environment" (1978). Though place identity theory makes explicit the interconnections between environment, socialization and identity, it does not adequately describe *how* environments contribute to personal identity. That is, the theory does not describe the structures and processes by which environments shape identity (Twigger-Ross et al., 2003). Furthermore, place identity does not address the impacts of environments on developmental trajectories.

Integration of Psychosocial Development and Context: Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory

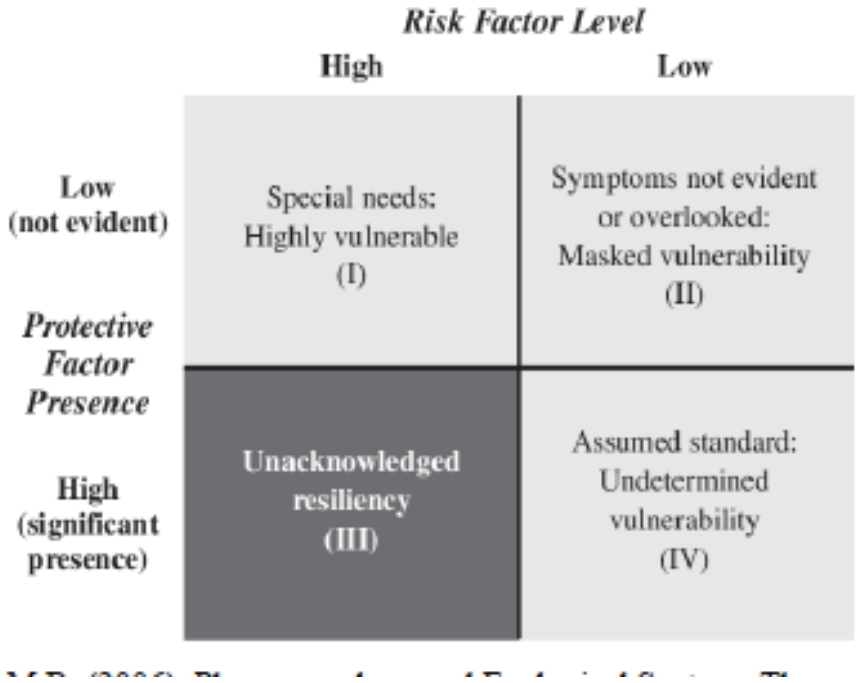
The Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory includes the following ideas:

1) Social narratives are meaningful to self-understanding and to the opportunities structures that shape behaviors and life decisions.
2) Integration of self-understandings and developmental tasks with the various developmental context in which young adults grow
3) Challenges and opportunities that the developmental contexts present for completing developmental tasks associated with their stage

Spencer's phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST) explores how contextual factors (e.g., physical and social environments, structural environmental racism) impact the process of identity formation among emerging adult e-waste workers in Ghana. PVEST is a cultural-ecological framework that has been widely used to study identity development along the life course of ethnically diverse youth. Building on identity theories (e.g., Erikson's theory of identity development, Marcia's identity status model, racial identity theories, symbolic interactionism, and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, PVEST employs a dynamic conceptualization of contextual influence to consider how social, historical, cultural, and environmental forces factor into the daily lived experiences of youth (Spencer et al., 2006). It highlights the roles of perceptual and meaning-making processes in psychosocial development (Spencer et. al, 2006; Spencer & Dupree, 1996; Spencer, 1995). PVEST assumes vulnerability to be a normative part of youth development. Spencer and colleagues (1996) theorize that low-risk environments can serve to counterbalance the manifestation of high vulnerability, while high-risk environments may facilitate it. PVEST also integrates a phenomenological approach to highlight the roles of perceptual and meaning-making processes in psychosocial development. Spencer and colleagues (2006) hold that "it is the combination of experiencing micro- and macrocontextual influences, normative developmental processes, salient interpersonal relationships, and the

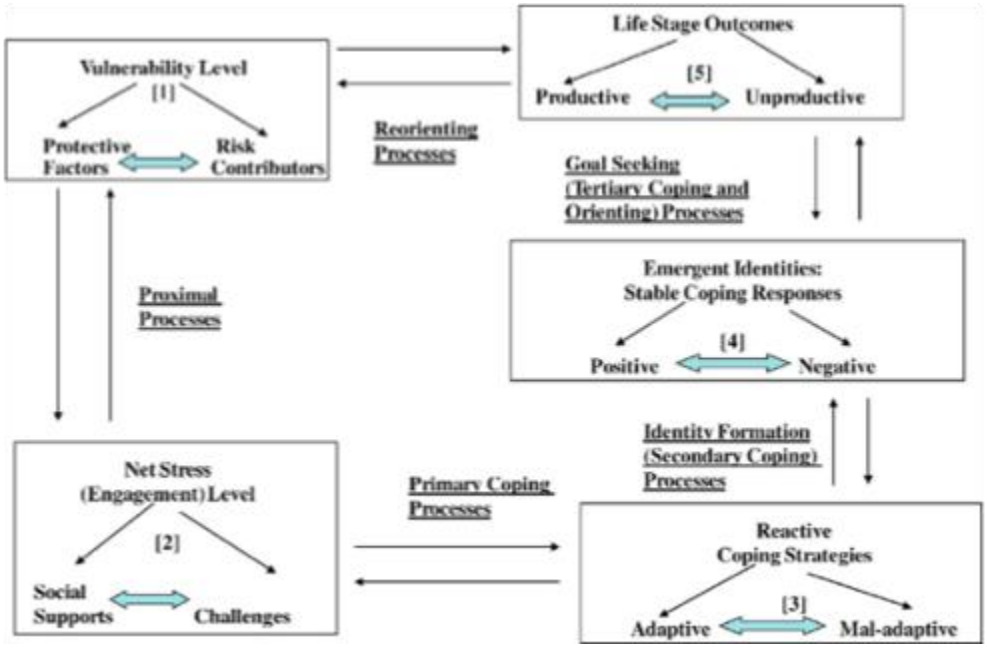
cognition-based perceptions and phenomenological experiences that delineate identity formation and eventually yield resilient or adverse outcomes."

Figure 2: Dual Axis Model of Human Vulnerability



Source: (Spencer, 2006)

Figure 3: The Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Model



Source: (Spencer, 2005)

PVEST divides identity formation into five components to form a cyclic, recursive model. These components are net vulnerability, net stress engagement, reactive coping methods, emergent identities, and life-stage outcomes. *Net vulnerability* is determined by the net balance of risk contributors and protective factors. In PVEST, risk represents "the exacerbation of normative challenges encountered in the pursuit of myriad stage-specific competencies and is linked to broad sociopolitical processes" (e.g., racism, sexism, environmental injustice) (Spencer et al., 2006). In the case of emerging adults in Agbogbloshie, notable risks include living in poverty, occupational health hazards, poor environmental sanitation, and ethnic discrimination. Protective factors describe "mechanisms that moderate (ameliorate) a person's reaction to a stressful situation or chronic adversity so that his or her adaptation is more successful than would be the case if the protective factor were not present" (Werner, 1995). Protective factors may

foster positive outcomes by offsetting the negative impacts of risk contributors (Spencer et al. 2006; Werner, 1989; Werner, 2000). “Perceptions of the risks one faces and the protective resources available are central to the process of identity formation. Self-appraisal involves constant scrutiny and evaluation of these risks and resources” (Spencer et al., 2006). Also important to identity formation are self-other appraisals (i.e., what one thinks others think of him or her) (Bandura, 1978; Spencer, 1995; Spencer & Dupree, 1996). *Net stress engagement* describes the actual experiences that threaten an individual’s wellbeing. Actualized protective factors in the form of supports can mitigate the impacts of negative experiences (Spencer et al., 2006). Much like Erikson’s concept of *crisis*, stress is conceptualized as potentially adaptive, as it provides youth with opportunities to mobilize and hone coping abilities (Spencer et al., 2006; Muuss et al., 1996). *Reactive coping methods* are the problem-solving strategies youth use to resolve dissonance produced by stressful situations. Depending on contextual factors, these strategies may produce maladaptive or adaptive solutions. *Emergent identities* are coping strategies that are repeated over time within and between developmental contexts. Lastly, *life-stage coping outcomes* are formed and solidified through one’s experiences and employed coping strategies over the life course (Spencer, 1997). These may be productive (e.g., good health, high self-esteem, positive interpersonal relationships) or adverse (e.g., poor health, self-destructive behavior) (Spencer & Harpalani, 2006). Healthy identity development is characterized by resilience defined as positive adjustment to adverse conditions using available resources and protective factors. Through the use of PVEST, this study further integrates a human development perspective to discuss how contextual factors impact individual level psychosocial development among young adults in Ghana.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Design

This study employs an exploratory qualitative research design. Specifically, data were generated using a demographic questionnaire, non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and a participatory action community-based photography activity. According to Creswell (2013) and Patton (2002) qualitative research is characterized by naturalistic inquiry. That is, its aim is a comprehensive understanding of how humans experience social phenomena in natural settings. Patton describes qualitative research as "an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there." Flexibility and emergent design are other key features of qualitative research. It is iterative in that decisions about each part of the research process (e.g., data collection, analysis) take into account previous learning throughout the course of the study (Creswell, 2013; Mack et al., 2005; Patton, 2002). As emerging adulthood in the context of multisystemic inequality in Africa is a relatively underexamined phenomenon, such flexibility allows for the emergence of new understandings that can contribute positively to extant theories of human development. To this aim, the current study employs an exploratory design. Stebbins (2001, p.3) describes exploratory research as "a broad-ranging, purposive, systematic, prearranged undertaking designed to maximize the discovery of generalizations leading to description and understanding of an area of social or psychological life. [...] The emergent generalizations are many and varied; they include the descriptive facts, folk concepts, cultural artifacts, structural arrangements, social processes, and beliefs and belief systems normally found there."

Previous studies on the overlapping categories of youth, young adulthood, and emerging adulthood in Ghana vary in research design. However, the limitations of quantitative research in

these populations have been well documented. Mahama et al. (2018) used the Markers of Adulthood Questionnaire (MAQ), a Likert-type measure, to investigate Ghanaian university students' criteria for being considered adults and their perceptions of their own adult statuses (by gender and years in university). Similarly, Obidoa et al. (2018) used the MAQ to investigate conceptions of adulthood among university students in Nigeria and Ghana. However, as noted by Mahama et al. (2018), the quantitative and cross-sectional designs of such studies may not sufficiently explore the culturally specific experiences of young people and likely give "less developmental insight" than a qualitative design. Unlike the current study, these two studies were conducted in university settings where students are highly educated and likely to be familiar with Likert-type measures. Many researchers have discussed the challenges associated with the use of quantitative measures in certain non-Western populations. For instance, scholars describe how in some non-Western populations, people often prefer to give anecdotal information rather than select from predetermined answers (Agans et al., 2006; Flaskerud, 2012; McQuiston et al., 2002). Other researchers (e.g., Hamamura et al., 2008; Hui & Triandis, 1989; Lee et al., 2002; Smith, 2004;) also note that responses to Likert-types may reflect cultural differences in construals of self and the social world rather responses to the constructs of inquiry.

Semi-structured interviews served as the primary method of inquiry in this study. Focus groups, non-participant observation, and a photographic activity were used as supporting data sources to enrich and contextualize interview findings. Similar qualitative techniques have been used to capture various culturally-situated dimensions of youth, young adulthood, and emerging adulthood in Ghana. For instance, Ungruhe (2010) used observation and field interviews to

investigate how Frafra[9] adolescents and other young men from the Upper East region understand and utilize migration to southern Ghana cities (i.e., Accra, Ashaiman, Kumasi) and its impact on the social structures of their home communities. Hall et al. (2019) used a descriptive qualitative design to study how adolescents and young adults perceive poverty-related stressors in Ghana, Malawi, and Tanzania. Frimpong-Manso (2018a and 2018b) employed phenomenological qualitative designs using semi-structured interviews to study resilience, challenges and coping strategies of emerging adult care leavers (i.e., people who have transitioned from orphanages to independent living) in Ghana. Afutu-Kotey et al. (2017) used various field methods such as biological interviews, life trajectory interviews, and a mapping exercise to study the lived experiences of youth transitioning into adulthood and entrepreneurship in the informal mobile telephony sector of Accra, Ghana. In an investigation of the lifeworlds of urban Ghanaian male youth, Esson, et al. (2021) used interviews and focus groups to examine the thoughts, actions, and experiences of young adults residing in the Accra metropolitan area. In all of these studies, qualitative research techniques helped to illuminate participants' perspectives and to uncover understandings and concepts that had previously largely gone unexamined.

Positionality and Reflexivity

The researcher is a key instrument in qualitative research. This is especially the case in observational studies and interviewing (Creswell, 2013; Flick, 2009). My identity affected the lens through which I designed the study and collected and analyzed data. During data collection, I remained conscious of how historical linkages between members of my perceived social groups (e.g., western-educated, rich, Asante/Akan) and theirs (e.g., not formally educated, poor,

[9] An ethnic group primarily originating from the Upper East region of Ghana and southern Burkina Faso.

Dagomba) may influence trust and rapport. People related to me differently depending on their own positionality and contextually salient group memberships. Participants' perceptions of my intentions and opinions of their identity statuses influenced the information they are willing to share and the access they granted me into their worlds (Bhopal, 2010; West, Stewart et al., 2013). They were also likely to filter my interviews and other research activities through those layers of understanding (Raikhel, 2009). As a Black, Akan (Asante with Nzema and Akyem roots), Ghanaian American woman who has resided in Ghana for a significant portion of life, I occupied an "insider-outsider" position. As noted by Ergun and Erdemir (2009), "the insider-outsider relationship can be conceived as a dialectical one that is continuously informed by the differentiating perceptions that researchers and informants have of themselves and others."

How I looked and sounded impacted my interactions in the field. Upon initial entry to the field in 2012 for my master's thesis, I stood out with my boots, backpack and N95 face mask. I was called names like "roots girl," "Rasta[farian] girl," "natural woman" and asked questions such as "Are you a Rasta?" "Are you from Jamaica?" "Are you a musician?" At the time, I wore my hair in dreadlocks and almost always wore African print clothing, which was uncommon for young citydwellers in Ghana at the time. Black hair is political and/or politicized worldwide (Mutukwa, 2016). Dreadlocks were often associated with pro-Blackness, "authentic" African aesthetic expression, and/or Rastafarianism. As Campbell (2007) notes, Rastafarianism is a global pan-African sociopolitical and cultural movement that arose in resistance to white supremacy, imperialism and anti-blackness. It emphasizes the need for social change. In popular media, it is often associated with reggae music. However, the spread of reggae music has depoliticized and popularized some Rastafarian cultural practices and iconography (e.g., ceremonial uses of marijuana; Rastafarian flag colors). Marijuana, commonly referred to as

"wee" or "ganja" in my research setting, was prevalent. While not intended, my dreadlocks signaled to the young men that they need not be concerned with respectability or alter their daily practices while I was observing them in the field. This perception allowed me greater access to intimate and casual social spaces that were significant to the men.

Ghanaian returnees and Ghanaians living abroad are assumed to have foreign understandings of how Ghanaian cultural practices should be and to project these understandings on to their experiences in Ghana. This idea has been captured in popular Ghanaian media and literature (e.g., novelist Alba Sumprim's *Imported Ghanaian* and *Place of Beautiful Nonsense*). My accent when speaking English gave away my American upbringing. Ghanaians who lived abroad for many years and their children had increasingly been relocating to Ghana at the time of data collection. Many local people assumed them to be rich. This is possibly due to many having (or know people who have) relatives abroad that provide them some financial support. In fact, remittances from Western countries in North America and Europe make up a significant portion of the country's GDP. According to the World Bank's 2020 Migration and Development Brief, in 2020 alone, over $3.5 billion were remitted from key destinations for African migrants, such as European Union, the United Kingdom, the United States, the Middle East, and China.

As documented by scholars such as Akosua Perbi (2004) and Haas (2017), the Asante and Dagomba have a complicated historical relationship, which include invasions, occupations, and trading. In Ghana, my name is immediately identifiable as Akan (and oftentimes more specifically as an Asante[10] name). Collectively, Akans form the majority ethnic group, making up about 45.7% of the Ghanaian population (Ghana Statistical Service, 2022a). Twi[11] is the

[10] a subgroup of Akan
[11] Akan language

unofficial *lingua franca*, which is a privilege. Non-Akan ethnic groups often experience microaggressions in the form of being expected to speak Twi, even in places such as Accra that are not sociogeographically Akan. I was very mindful of this and allowed interactions to take place in participants' preferred language(s). Surprisingly, for some participants, my Asante identity and ability to speak Twi served as an avenue for establishing rapport. For instance, one man, Abdul,[12]grew up in Kumasi (Asante Region). Despite my never living in the Asante Region for more than a few months at a time, we occasionally reminisced about Lake Bosomtwe and Kumasi's commercial center. Another man, Chief[13], often referred to positive historical connections between the precolonial Asante and Dagomba empires as a means of demonstrating ethnic pride and solidarity. In his words, "Dagomba and Asante people are the same." As I mentioned in Chapter 2, throughout colonial times, laborers from the North have migrated independently and been recruited to work in southern city centers. In fact, my paternal grandfather was a cocoa farmer in the Asante Region starting in the 1940s, and recruited and employed many laborers from Northern Ghana. Despite my ethnic identity, my familiarity with some Northern Ghanaian customs from past experiences as a student researcher and non-governmental organization worker was a welcomed surprise to my participants.

At times, blackness [outside the context of a particular ethnicity] emerged as a salient shared identity. Participants were concerned about the treatment of black people abroad following mainstream reports of anti-black violence in the United States and the Middle East as well as anti-black discrimination within Ghana by expatriates. Examples at the time of data

[12] This is a pseudonym.
[13] This is a pseudonym.

collection included national media reports of Chinese immigrants engaged in *galamsey*[14] enacting violence upon local residents and workers (e.g., The Ghana Report 2022; MyJoyOnline, 2013; News Ghana, 2012; Peace FM Online, 2017b), and a 2017 incident in which a Lebanese business owner shoved his female employee's face in blended hot pepper in an attempt to "discipline" her (Modern Ghana, 2017). Some of the young men aspired to travel abroad and had reservations about navigating foreign social terrains as ethnic minorities.

Many of my interlocutors did not have much formal education. In Ghana, schooling beyond secondary school connotes privilege and status, as there is little access to public programs to fund tertiary education. Shared identity and rapport established over years, led some individuals to see me as a messenger of their authentic stories. Participants would often request, "write it in that your small book," when giving accounts of events, their opinions, and stories. It is noteworthy to emphasize the importance of intersectional identity when reflecting on my own positionality. Dagomba culture, like many African cultures, is patriarchal. However, though I am a woman, I was not treated as the women in their community. There were different expectations of my conduct (e.g.., expectations of deference) due to my perceived privileged status (e.g., ethnicity, education, perception of wealth etc.).

As an Accra resident at the time of research, I was embedded in the local ecology of e-waste (as a waste maker). When initially setting parameters for this study, I planned only to collect data in the Agbogbloshie area for safety reasons; I decided not to accompany participants to "the bush"[15] .Over the course of this study, however, I grew increasingly aware of the idea that

[14] Galamsey is a local term for illegal small-scale gold mining in Ghana. Etymologically, it comes from the English phrase "gather them and sell."
[15] The *bush* describes the urban landscape outside of Agbogbloshie from where old electronics are sourced. Going to the *bush* entailed roaming from community to community in search of used and non-working electronics to purchase from individuals and businesses.

my family home was in “the bush;” it is located approximately less than 10 miles away from Agbogbloshie. Many weekends, men with wheelbarrows would walk down my street yelling “Condemned! Condemned!” in search of discarded metal and electronic goods to take to scrapyards like the one in Agbogbloshie for further processing, repair, or reuse. Often, scrap dealers provide nominal compensation to the e-waste workers in exchange for these items.

Participants and Recruitment

Prior to data collection for this dissertation, I had already established rapport with members of the Agbogbloshie community through my master’s thesis work. Despite the significant passage of time between studies, some of the individuals still worked and resided in the Agbogbloshie scrapyard and were receptive to my return to collect data. One interlocutor, Yacob, introduced me to his cousin, Yusef, who was also an e-waste worker. Yusef was well known among e-waste workers and other members of the Agbogbloshie community. He assisted me in identifying initial participants. Though my participants lived in an informal settlement, defined social networks and hierarchies existed. Thus, Yusef also helped me to identify and seek clearance from informal authorities and elders in the community prior to data collection. Electronic waste work is a male-dominated industry. A total of sixty-four male young adults working and living in the Agbogbloshie area were selected for inclusion in the study. In accordance with prior research which suggests that the bulk of workers in Agbogbloshie’s e-waste industry fall between the ages of 18 and 29, with an average age of 21 (Grant & Oteng-Ababio, 2012; Oteng-Ababio & Amankwaa, 2014). I targeted males ages 18 to 29. Participants were purposively selected and recruited using snowball sampling or chain referral sampling. Snowball sampling is a recruitment technique that uses participants’ social networks to identify people to take part in the study. This is particularly useful in close-knit, hard-to-access, and/or

marginalized populations that may be suspicious of outsiders (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Browne, 2005; Cohen & Arieli, 2011; Handcock & Gile, 2011). At each stage of the research, participants were asked to identify others who matched the research criteria and may be interested in taking part in the study. These participants then introduced recruits to me on days I collected data or gave them my contact information so that they could contact me directly for more information.

Procedure

Data were collected between 2017 and 2019. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 64 young men. To allow for a better understanding of concepts raised in interviews and social dynamics in Agbogbloshie, I also conducted a focus group after interviews. Lastly, 10 of the 64 young men interviewed took part in Photovoice, a participatory action photography activity. Photovoice protocol included a series of brief meetings to discuss photography techniques and ethics and concluded with a focus group. As this study posed minimal risks to participants, verbal consent was sought before all phases of the study. This method of obtaining consent was ideal as alternative methods of obtaining consent (e.g., asking for thumbprints or signatures) were likely to make people uncomfortable and arouse undue suspicion.

Individual Semi-structured Interviews

Individual semi-structured interviews elicited narratives concerning personal migration histories and antecedent circumstances leading to the adoption of e-waste work. Such narratives gave insight into how people experience regional inequalities in Ghana and the conditions that lend impetus to Ghana's rapid urbanization. Information about hometowns, traditional communities of origin, and families were key to understanding sources of societal expectations

and gender roles. Understanding the relationships participants have to their hometowns and villages also helped to contextualize other issues covered in the interviews such as participants' conceptualizations of key developmental tasks (e.g., marriage, childbearing, securing employment), occupational goals, and aspirations. The semi-structured interviews also revealed information about social support networks, and how participants perceived and managed stigma related to their various social categories (e.g., work category and ethnicity). A semi-structured interview guide can be found in Appendix A.

Focus groups

Three focus groups were conducted with male e-waste workers in the Agbogbloshie scrapyard between the ages of 18 and 29. I aimed to recruit no more than ten participants for each focus group. The first two focus groups helped to categorize thematic areas of interest, gain clarity on information elicited from individual interviews and to refine the interview guide for the subsequent stages of data collection. Participants discussed several topics including local and international portrayals of Agbogbloshie, experiences with researchers and slum tourists, determinants of adulthood, Dagomba culture, religion, marriage/courting, societal expectations, life in Accra, social organization, and strategies for coping with adversity. The final focus group was part of the participatory action photography activity, which will be discussed in the participatory action photography activity section. The focus group guide can be found in Appendix B. The "share and compare" model of focus groups enabled the emergence of insights that were not possible in individual interviews (Morgan, 1996). Some individuals who were hesitant to disclose intimate details of their lives were more willing to share in a group setting.

Non-participant Observation

As noted by Creswell (2013) observation is "one of the key tools for data collection strategy collecting data in qualitative research" (p. 166). In this study, non-participant observation helped to generate data about the social ecology of the Agbogbloshie and Old Fadama neighborhoods in which the target group (i.e., e-waste workers) work and live. It provided opportunities to witness participants' interactions, behaviors, and cultural and religious practices in a natural setting. It also provided rich data about the constituents of routine daily life, community concerns, and economic practices that texture developmental trajectories. Witnessing aspects of routine life *in vivo* also helped to the frame data gathered using other methods. It allowed for relevant new themes to emerge that were not reflected in data from other methods and, in some cases, helped to gauge the fullness of the data. Due to the heavy smoke emitted from processing used electronics and the general toxicity of the area, observation was carefully scheduled under the advisement of participants. Observational data were collected in a variety of social gathering areas including convenience stores; the open-air food market; formal and makeshift workspaces for dismantling used electronics; homes of workers; pubs and other recreational centers. I took notes during field work using thick description to capture additional information on e-waste workers' experiences. "Thick description refers to the researcher's task of both describing and interpreting observed social action (or behavior) within its particular context" (Ponterotto, 2006, p. 543).

Participatory Action Photography Activity

The participatory action photography activity allowed participants to actively engage in the knowledge production process as they reflect on experiences both individually and collectively. This medium of documentation was particularly apt in this research setting because though most participants could neither read nor write, most had prior experience taking photos

and sharing photos with cellular phones. Given that visual images have been central to the international portrayal of Agbogbloshie, the photography activity also presented an opportunity for participants to create a counternarrative to dominant representations of the Agbogbloshie area and its inhabitants. The activity yielded two types of data. Initially, it generated visual data when participants took photographs in response to targeted prompts or questions. Subsequent discussions about the photographs elicited narratives concerning the primary research questions (Lykes, 2001).

The procedure of the participatory action photography activity was modeled after photovoice, an established research technique used internationally by researchers in social sciences and public health (e.g., Booth & Booth, 2003; Lykes, 2000; Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang et al., 1996). It has been used in diverse communities to investigate environmental influences on health (e.g., Harper & The Sajó River Association for Environment and Community Development, 2009) and on youth behavior (e.g., Tanjasiri et al., 2013). Theoretically, photovoice is rooted in community photography research techniques, feminist theory, and Paulo Freire's concept of critical consciousness (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001; Jurkowski & Paul-Ward 2007). Freire noted that "the visual image" provides a means of enabling people to think critically about their community (Wang & Burris, 1997). Photovoice enriches phenomenological inquiry by serving as a medium for documenting and sharing meaningful experiences, places, people, and objects (Plunkett, Leipert, & Ray, 2013). It facilitates a rich understanding of how participants self-represent and comprehend their lives. It also provides information about the contextual influences that condition their daily experiences. Photographs serve as "lay sociograms" - pictorial representations of how people envision their environments and relationships (Bourdieu and Bourdieu, 2004). The photovoice process enables

researchers to gain insight into the ways people categorize and organize understandings of cultural domains. This multiphase process prompts participants to "reflect on and record aspects of their own identity and experience" (Booth & Booth, 2003). Harper and The Sajó River Association for Environment and Community Development (2009) identifies three signature elements of photovoice: 1) photography is used as a medium of research and as data 2) photos are used as tools to unearth people's perspectives about the world 3) photos are exposed to a wider audience of community members and policymakers. Similarly, Wang and Redwood- Jones (2001) identify three key constituents of photovoice: to "record and reflect their community's assets and concerns," "discuss issues of importance to the community in large and small groups to promote critical dialogue and produce shared knowledge," and "reach policymakers."

Cameras were distributed to participants after a discussion of basic photography techniques and ethics (including the process of obtaining consent from human subjects). Participants agreed on a schedule for taking pictures, returning the cameras, and reconvening to share and discuss photos in focus groups. Upon return of the cameras, pictures were stored to a secure storage device and printed. Printed photos were analyzed in focus groups.

For this study, I took a notable departure from standard photovoice methodology. In standard photovoice procedures, participants hold an exhibition to share pictures with politicians and policymakers in an attempt to incite social change. However, this was beyond the scope of the current study. Furthermore, there was great political polarity in the community; inviting individuals perceived to be affiliated with a particular political party could have negatively impacted participation. Participants identified political affiliation as a determinant of access to resources and protection, as well as, in some cases, a source of discrimination and violence. According to some community members, attendance of policymakers at a community event did

not translate into tangible social change. As people living in poverty are often targeted for development interventions, such visits from representatives of donor organizations, non-governmental organizations, and political figures were commonly understood as meaningless symbolic gestures.

In the spirit of photovoice's prioritization of community needs, desires, and participation in the knowledge creation process, participants opted to invite members of the community to the final gathering of the photovoice procedure in lieu of inviting policymakers and other stakeholders. The group collectively regulated attendance and managed disruptions throughout the event. Community members spontaneously joined the event and contributed to discussions, when prompted. The ten participants who took part in the photography activity presented selected images and welcomed discussions and questions from the audience. Images were projected on a wall using a projector.

In many iterations of Photovoice, researchers use the SHOWED method to help participants describe their photographs (Gant, et al., 2009). The five sample prompts that comprise the SHOWED methods are below:

1. What do you **S**ee here?
2. What is really **H**appening here?
3. How does this relate to **O**ur lives?
4. **W**hy does this condition **E**xist?
5. What can we **D**o about it?

Translation and Transcription

Many of the participants could neither read nor write adequately, thus, questionnaires were administered orally. Participants were given the option to speak Dagbani, Twi, and/or

English throughout the study. Though most participants were native Dagbani speakers, many also spoke Twi (the unofficial native *lingua franca*), and Pidgin English (a West African variation of English). Through funding from the Bernice Neugarten Award, a team of three (two men and one woman) native Dagbani speakers with intermediate-to-advance knowledge of Akan (Twi) translated the research tools (interview guides, focus group prompts, consent scripts) from English to Dagbani and assisted with translation for participants who chose to be interviewed in Dagbani. Two of these three individuals provided translation assistance during focus groups and aided in the transcription processes. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were audio recorded. Interviews were subsequently translated into English and transcribed.

Coding and Analysis

The use of multiple data sources allowed for different levels of analysis. On one hand, data generated from observation, interviews, focus groups, and the photography activity were triangulated to establish validity and ensure consistency across data sources. However, each method also elicited unique data, enabling a richer understanding of interconnections among themes.

Analyses of participant descriptives were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 24. Thick descriptive notes from fieldwork as well as transcripts from interviews and focus groups were entered into ATLAS.ti for coding and analysis. ATLAS.ti is a tool used to analyze unstructured data (e.g., text, graphic, audio, and visual data files). In accordance with established thematic analysis procedure (Braun & Clark, 2006), I began by reading the transcripts and notes several times to familiarize myself with the data. Each time, I jotted down impressions and ideas that came to mind. I coded the data by searching individual narratives for data concerning topics of interest to the primary research questions. Categorizing involved organizing coded data units

into groups identified as having similar characteristics. To identify major themes, a "case study" process (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996) was used in which thematic sub-narratives were derived from each transcript and then compared across interviews.

I used a combination of inductive and deductive coding techniques to analyze the data. Utilizing a deductive approach, I generated an initial set of predefined codes using the research questions as a guide. To also enable ideas to emerge directly from the data, rather than from a priori understandings and theoretical concepts, I subsequently used an inductive approach to generate codes (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). As noted by Roberts and colleagues (2019), "Combining these approaches allowed the development of patterns from the unknown parts that may fall outside the predictive codes of deductive reasoning and allowed for a more complete analysis" (p.2). This blended coding technique also allowed me to both work with a manageable number of codes while capturing the complexity and diversity of the data.

Participant Profile

Demographic questionnaires were verbally administered to all individuals who took part in semi-structured interviews and/or the photography activity. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 29 (M= 22.94, SD= 3.028) and had spent between a month and 25 years in Accra (M= 6.19 years, SD= 5.306 years). Consistent with literature on scrap work and e-waste workers in Agbogbloshie, all but one of the participants identified as being from northern Ghana (by birth or ancestry). Specifically, 93.8% (n=60) were from the Northern Region; 3.1% (n=2) were from the Savannah Region; 1.6% (n=1) were from the Upper West Region; and 1.6% were from the Greater Accra Region. Relatedly, 95.3% (n=61) were ethnically Dagomba; 1.6% (n=1) were Dagare; 1.6% (n=1) were Ada; and 1.6% (n=1) were Gonja. Table 1 contains the participants' regions of origin and Table 2 contains the ethnic distribution of the study sample.

Table 1: Region of Origin

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Greater Accra	1	1.56	1.56
	Northern	60	93.75	95.31
	Savannah[2]	2	3.13	98.44
	Upper West	1	1.56	100.0
	Total	64	100.0	

Table 2:Ethnic Background of Participants

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Ada	1	1.56	1.56
	Dagare	1	1.56	3.13
	Dagomba	61	95.31	98.44
	Gonja	1	1.56	100.0
	Total	64	100.0	

Two participants reported being born in Accra, but growing up in northern Ghana. Of the 24 people who reported first migrating to Accra below the age of 18, 14 migrated alone, 3 migrated with a parent, 2 with siblings, and 4 with friends. It is important to note that respondents identified their hometowns, rather than their birthplaces, as their places of origin. As explained by Njoh (2006), for Africans, the concept of hometown locates the individual within an ancestral lineage. “Consequently, in patrilineal societies, all children in a family tend to identify with only

one place, the one in which their father and/or grandfather/great grandfather were born, as their birthplace. This is certainly not the case in Western societies such as the United States, where a family may have three children with each of them identifying a different locale as his/her place of birth" (p.136).

Sixteen (25%) of the men had received no formal education. Twenty-three men (35.9%) attended school up to the primary level (kindergarten to fifth grade). Seventeen men (26.6%) left school in junior secondary school (grades seven to nine). Eight men (12.5%) left school in senior secondary school (grades 10 to 12). In the Ghanaian educational system primary school comprises grades 1 through 6. Junior secondary school (JSS) -or junior high school (JHS) as it is often referred to more recently- begins in 7th grade and ends in 9th grade. Entry into SHS is limited and, therefore, competitive. One key determinant of young people's entry to SHS is their performance on the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE), which is administered yearly. Towards the end of JHS Form 3 (9th grade take the BECE, and are evaluated in seven core subjects (i.e., English Language, General Science, Mathematics, Religious and Moral Education, Social Studies, Career Technology and Creative Arts and Design). They may also be evaluated in elective subjects depending on the requirements of their chosen schools and/or programs of specialization. Elective subjects include Ghanaian languages[16], French, and Arabic (WAEC, 2024; Modern Ghana, 2024). Senior secondary school, or senior high school, begins in 10th grade and ends in 12th grade. Students who seek to matriculate into university. Table 3 contains the distribution of participants' highest educational levels.

[16] Options for Ghanaian languages are Dagaare, Dagbani, Dangme, Ewe, Fante, Ga, Gonja, Kasem, Nzema, Twi (Akuapem), and Twi (Asante).

Table 3: Participants' Highest Levels of Education

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No education	16	25.0	25.0	25.0
	Primary	23	35.9	35.9	60.9
	Junior high	17	26.6	26.6	87.5
	Senior high	8	12.5	12.5	100.0
	Total	64	100.0	100.0	

Two participants (3.1%) identified as Christian and sixty-two participants (96.9%) as Muslim. Evidence from observations and field interviews suggests that many of those who identified as Muslim simultaneously engaged in traditionalist rituals and/or believed in tenants of traditional spirituality. Table 4 displays the distribution of participants' religious affiliations.

Table 4: Participants' Religious Affiliations

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Christian	2	3.1	3.1	3.1
	Muslim	62	96.9	96.9	100.0
	Total	64	100.0	100.0	

Most of the men were unmarried. Fifty-seven (89.1%) were not married and seven (10.9%) were married. Table 5 shows participants' marital statuses.

Table 5: Participants' Marital Statuses

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Unmarried	57	89.1	89.1	89.1
	Married	7	10.9	10.9	100.0
	Total	64	100.0	100.0	

Forty-seven participants (73.4%) had no children; thirteen (20.3%) had one child; and four (6.3%) had two children. Table 6 shows the participants' parental statuses and Table 7 contains participants' reported number of children.

Table 6: Participants' Parental Statuses

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	47	73.4	73.4	73.4
	Yes	17	26.6	26.6	100.0
	Total	64	100.0	100.0	

Table 7: Participants' Number of Children

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	47	73.4	73.4	73.4
	1	13	20.3	20.3	93.8
	2	4	6.3	6.3	100.0
	Total	64	100.0	100.0	

Participants spent between a month and 18 years (M=5.81 years, SD=4.639 years) working in the e-waste/scraps industry. Some participants reported engaging in e-scraps recycling work as children in northern Ghana prior to migration to Accra or as children in Accra.

Chapter 4: Migration and Psychosocial Development

This chapter presents an overview of participants' perceptions of their own psychosocial developmental trajectories and how migration to the Agbogbloshie area figures into their personal journeys to valued adulthood. Findings from individual interviews and a focus group are presented. Participants discussed formative experiences in their home, school, and work lives prior to moving to the Agbogbloshie area. Their stories help to contextualize key elements of their psychosocial trajectories, particularly their perceptions of opportunity structures, challenges, and available resources, as well as understandings of culturally normative developmental tasks and how these tasks evolve over the life course.

4.1 Conceptions of Psychosocial Development

The men identified their current life stage as a critical time in the life course for achieving the following primary developmental tasks:

1) Establishing independence (i.e., financial and social)

2) Assuming leadership roles in their families

3) Getting married and having children

The men reflected on the roles, responsibilities, social expectations, and aspirations they associate with their current life stage. Participants' beliefs about their own developmental stage were, in large part, influenced by the social expectations of people in their age group held by their families and hometown communities. The men believed that the quest for social and financial independence and growth was a precursor to fulfilling their key social roles, including taking on leadership positions within their families of origin and expanding their families

through marriage and having children. These social roles were salient sources of personal meaning.

Establishing Independence

The men discussed various aspects of their transition from social and financial dependence to independence. As illustrated in their responses, the overwhelming majority of participants viewed establishing their independence as a characteristic feature of their current life stage. A key distinguishing feature between social childhood and adulthood was the extent to which they were able to secure their own basic needs (e.g., shelter, food, clothes). Many of the participants described being too old to receive pocket money- or "chop money"[17]- from parents and senior family members. The men understood that there is a social expectation for them to take care of themselves and rely less on family. Accordingly, they deemed their current stage in life as a time to be "serious," "focused," "hard working," "to get established" and "to struggle" towards a life of greater ease in later years. Such descriptions emphasize agency and the recognition that their current actions and decisions impact their futures. The men perceived themselves as being at the points of their lives when one has the maximum physical strength needed to perform occupational tasks needed to secure their futures. The men envisioned later adulthood as a time when one has less strength to work and gain resources.

> At my age one needs to be working and saving money to be able to take care of himself. At least by age 40, the person should be able to take care of himself and the family without much struggle. *Mashud, 19-year-old from Tamale/Do Ha Naa*

> It's the search for freedom and my own decision that brought me here.[...] The level I have reached [in life] , my parents are no more and my uncles have supported me enough so I am expected to be able to take care of yourself." *Lamasi, 18-year-old from Nawuni-Dalon.*

[17] Pidgin English term for "spending money"

> [Someone my age] has to be hard working to be able to take care of his needs in future. *Jawad, 25-year-old from Bimbilla*

> People my age should be serious about their life because this is the time you have strength, and you need to work hard to plan for the future." *Mansuru, 21-year-old from Tamale*
> At this point, a person should be doing something in preparation for the future. For instance, building a house and getting a source of livelihood. *Adamu, 25-year-old from Tamale*

The men recognized the ability to tend to one's immediate needs (e.g., shelter, food, clothes) as an important marker of independence. However, their narratives also emphasized a future orientation. They focused largely on cultivating skills, establishing sources of livelihood, saving money to invest in assets such as houses, land, businesses in their hometowns. The men envisioned these assets as not only benefitting themselves, but their nuclear and extended families as well. Many of the men grew up in multigenerational family houses and/or on land inherited from their forefathers. The passing down of land and properties often cements one's legacy as virtuous, hardworking, and deserving of remembrance. As such, many of the men strove to one day purchase land and build houses to pass down to future generations. The acquisition of assets such as land, houses, and businesses were believed to advance their social standing within their families and hometown communities and signal to elders that they were ready to take on leadership roles within their families.

Social Independence. A key part of becoming an adult was distinguishing themselves from authority figures in their lives such as parents, family elders, and respected hometown community members. Establishing oneself as a unique autonomous person served as the foundation for the subsequent adoption of adult leadership roles in the family (e.g., extending the family blood lines and legacy [which will be further discussed in following sections on leadership roles within family of origin and marriage and having

children]). This sentiment was captured in Napare's (25-year-old from Tamale) decided to move to Accra, he explained "It is because of life changes. Also, because you want to make a name for yourself, get married and have children." The idea of "making a name for oneself" reflects a desire to forge a unique life path fueled by personal ambition and the pursuit of recognition.

Moving to Agbogbloshie and adopting e-waste work provided the men avenues to social independence from their families. The cultural imperative to revere elders and prioritize their desires and instructions allowed little room for the men to establish their individual identities unencumbered by control from family and community members. Yumzaa, a 28-year-old from Tamale, explained how he moved to Accra to escape parental control and seek freedom to explore myriad life possibilities. He described the many demands of his parents to do household chores and other tasks as a "disturbance." In addition to explaining his reasons for relocating to Accra, he explained how some e-waste workers decide to move to Accra to distance themselves from verbally abusive authority figures in their lives.

> INTERVIEWER: Why do people leave their hometowns to come here?
>
> PARTICIPANT: Some people are here because of insults. Some are here and they are not orphans. They have no problems. They just don't want their parents to bother them with work a lot, that is why some of us have come here. Some of them do not know their left and right that is why they have come to be here. For me, I didn't really have a problem, but the control [from parents] was too much.
>
> INTERVIEWER: Control?
>
> PARTICIPANT: Yes. I mean disturbance. You understand what I mean? I mean the way you are supposed to do this work and only rest a little. If you are done with this, you must go and do that…so that is what has brought some of us here.

The young men wanted to live in a place where they felt they could have more control over their own lives. Some interviewees explained how the close-knit nature of their hometown

communities made them feel as though they were constantly being watched and judged by others. Such feelings were experienced as stressful. Ahmed, a 29-year-old from Karaga, described how he moved to Accra to be free of the gossip in his hometown. Ahmed no longer wanted to live in a community where he or his actions could likely be a topic of community discussion.

> INTERVIEWER: How was life back in your hometown?
>
> PARTICIPANT: Life was tough back in Karaga and that's why I migrated. During the farming season, people used to farm and when they were tired, they gossiped about people a lot. It is because of this that I left my hometown to come to Accra.

Much like Ahmed, the men largely described the community gaze as a prohibitive force as they progressed through life and developed their individual sense of self. It prevented them from being able to redeem their reputations after making mistakes. Samir, a 22-year-old from Tamale, echoed this sentiment as he recounted his experiences in his hometown prior to moving to Accra. As a teenager, his family arranged for him to apprentice with a local welder. During the tenure of his apprenticeship, he began stealing from customers for whom he made replacement keys. This behavior led to his hometown community viewing him in a shameful manner. Samir moved to Accra to escape public scrutiny. He believed that relocating to Accra would give him a fresh start- a chance to repair his tarnished social image and garner the respect that he believed he had lost. Samir hoped that after years of working in Accra, he could return to his community with money and to start his own business. He believed that his hometown community would then view him as a responsible person rather than a "rascal."

> I suddenly just lost interest in school and so I was handed over to a welder to learn welding. He used to make keys for people who lost their keys or wanted spare ones. That was where I started learning to be a criminal because we made keys for people. The master who taught me is now mentally ill at home. When someone lost their key, he would send me to go and break the lock for the person for a fee and make a new key. I

> quit working with him when he lost his mind. At the time, I had not been to Accra yet, so I started breaking into people's homes and stealing from them. I went as far as UDS (University for Development Studies) to break locks and I stole students' motorcycles. The university is close to where I live. My father also has a house in that area, but I have been there to steal. I want to go back home as a different person so that all those people will not recognize me anymore. They will not see that rascal in me anymore because I will return home with money to start a business for myself.

Another participant, 21-year- old Sayibu from Gushegu, similarly expressed how moving to Accra provided him a fresh start after a negative experience in his hometown. Sayibu was working as a motorking driver[18]. His boss fired him after learning that he smoked marijuana. As smoking marijuana is viewed as a social taboo in many Ghanaian communities, Sayibu describes experiencing a great deal of disgrace when news of the circumstances surrounding his dismissal spread through his hometown community. To help him rebuild his life and find work, Sayibu's sister funded his relocation to Accra. Sayibu, like Samir, hoped to repair his reputation/social image upon return to his hometown.

> I had the strength to do hard work… like, any kind of work…You know, as a motor king driver, if anyone asked me to do something, I did it all the time. Eventually, because of some things…the things we smoke [marijuana]... and now where is the motor? When my boss heard I was taking in those things [marijuana], we had misunderstandings and he took it [the motorking] away from me. That was why. So my sister gave me money to come here.

Financial Independence and Establishing Livelihoods.

> I was fed up with life in the north, and besides I was not working. Every day, my mother was always nagging that my friends have all gone to work and I am sleeping at home and watching TV. She was always asking me what I planned to do with my future and how I intended to get married and take care of a whole family. She said when my elder brothers get married, they will concentrate on their families and forget me. My mother always told me to also stand up and do something for myself. For me, I don't really like to talk much, so it is better you hit me than complaining to me. All these made me fed up and so I left for Accra. *Samir, 22-year-old from Tamale (Lamashegu)*

[18] A motorking is a motorized tricycle used to transport goods.

Samir's narrative highlights the social expectation for young adults to pursue financial independence. As a last-born son, he had long benefitted from the financial support of his older siblings. However, time was running out for him to remain dependent on them. Samir's mother believed that once his older brothers got married, they would no longer assistant him. Samir grew fed up with her comparisons of him to his mates and decided to move to Accra to "do something for [him]self"- that is, take steps towards adulthood tasks (e.g., work and marriage).

Many believed they should have a job or have established a business by this point in their lives. Searching for work was one of the main reasons young men in this study migrated to the Agbogbloshie area. They associated work with valued adulthood and manhood. Working and making money was identified as instrumental to one's ability to enjoy life. The overwhelming majority of participants hoped and planned to start their own businesses. Only a few, participants like Salisu, 20-year-old from Nanton, however, hoped to be employed by a company- rather than be self-employed.

> If you have grown to this level, then you need to pray to God to guide you to get a better job that will yield cash for you and serve as a source of livelihood. Aside from robbery, everything is work. *Napare, a 25-year-old from Tamale*

The men hoped to eventually find work that was more lucrative than e-waste work. As Ahmed, a 29-year-old from Karaga expressed,

> My goal is to get a job and am I working towards a bigger job. Regarding e-waste, you only get the money that can feed you which is not enough. Also, it is the job you have that will show how your life will be.

In Ghana, low-income communities generally have no access to consumer credit. Thus, people must generate and save money in order to make large life purchases such as land, a home, as well as materials for needed for business and/marriage ceremonies. Saving money ensured stability amid job insecurity and infrequent income. Some of the men reported saving money for

future purchases of land, materials to build a house for themselves and/or families, and occupational investments (i.e., buying scrap electronics to deal; items needed to start their own future business). Amir, a 26-year-old from Bimbilla, for instance, mentioned that people his age should be saving money to purchased real estate. "A person should be saving money to buy properties for his future and working towards making life better for himself." Naseem, a 27-year-old from Tamale (Nyohini), also noted that one should have money saved. He shared that he fell short of his own saving goals. He hoped to have more money to invest in in his scrap metals business:

> Myself, I should have had my money. I should at least have almost 5000 Ghana cedis by now, so that I can also deal (scraps) and have the money to pay back when, for instance, someone's 1000 cedis is with me. I could just go into my room and bring it out to give to him, hmmm but it [money] is not there. The money that I have right now is not even 400 cedis, you see? But I should have like 5000 cedis. We are still managing, so we will see what will happen as time goes by.

Similarly, Sumani believed he should have saved enough money to purchase a vehicle for business like his age-mates in his hometown. He believed he was off-track compared to his peers.

> My colleagues that I used to move with back in the North all these years have secured 2 taxis each while others have one each. Some too have 207s [kind of vehicle], tipper tracks…I should have also had at least one taxi and been driving it…or motor king or 'yellow-yellow' too. I should have had some too but I don' t have them. *Sumani, 25-year-old from Damongo*

Mahmud, a 19-year-old from Savelugu, explained how he is saving money to open up a business in his hometown:

> When I was in school, I wasn't that intelligent, so I diverted to working as a motor mechanic. I worked there for a while before I came here. I intend to work more and save money, then I will go back home and start up my own mechanic shop. Overall, life is not easy. There are days that are good days and there are bad days living in Accra. *Mahmud, 19-year-old from Savelugu*

Hamid, a 23-year-old from Yendi, explained how he saw the relationship between his current e-waste work and his long-term goals.

> "Society expects that by now you should have a house, work, and other things, but I wish I had that stuff now […] I have fixed everything in my room and now I have bought sheep for rearing. The reason I am doing that is for my future. I want to have my sheep farm. My goal is to work more here and make more money to invest in livestock back home. That would be used to solve my problems. *Hamid, 23-year-old from Yendi*

Assuming Leadership Roles in Families

The social and financial independence the men pursued were not characterized by an "intense focus on oneself" as described in Arnett's formulation of emerging adulthood. Rather, seeking independence was seen as a necessary step towards adopting leadership roles in their families. Familial roles served as major sources of personal meaning for the men. Virtually all the men expressed that their families and hometown community members expected them to assume more responsibility for the welfare of their parents, siblings, and extended family as they advanced into manhood. The men worked hard to add value to their family systems and took pride in their ability to do so. Participants moved to Accra in hopes of increasing their ability to financially support their families. Many of their families relied on this support.

> My challenge is how to get money to feed my family especially my parents. I also need to get a woman to get married to and give birth, build a house and let them all live without any life disturbances. *Mahamadu, 28-year-old from Tamale*

> If you are 20 years old, when you or your family has a challenge, you should be able to work and solve it yourself. *Yakub, 21-year-old from Karaga*

> Life in my hometown, honestly… I just had nothing to do at home. And I am also too old for my mother to still give me pocket money […] My father was there but he is not working so I can't burden him with my own problems. He has to collect [money] from me and I am no longer supposed to collect [money] from him. So that is the reason I came here to do little by little and see what God will do for me. *Naseem, 27-year-old from Tamale (Nyohini)*

> You can be home and things are not going well as expected but your parents are looking up to you to take care of them. Definitely you would have to move out and work hard to get money to take care of them. *Hussein, 24-year-old from Karaga*

> My family is dependent on me. If anything comes up, you are the first point of call. They also pray that you should have something to do to be able to take care of them." *Issah, 18-year-old from Karaga*

> I take responsibility for everything; there cannot be a problem or a challenge that I would not be called to contribute to. I am concerned about my family. *Hamid, 23-year-old from Yendi*

> Okay, my younger siblings are going to school, some are in training college and other programs. When they go home, my father will call me and say "school fees." The school fees can be 2500 cedis…If I am doing the scraps work small small, I can get 300 cedis here, 500 cedis there to add and they will pay the rest. *Sumani, 25-year-old from Damongo*

In addition to helping their families secure their immediate needs, they also strove to contribute to their families' long-term goals. Their families regarded the young men as instrumental to building their family legacy through their monetary contributions to projects such as building family homes and establishing family businesses. Mustafa, a 21-year-old from Karaga , for example, explained that was working towards building a house for his parents and starting a business for them. He explained, "[Someone my age] should be working hard to build a house to put his parents in and to get something like a shop for them to be engaged in business while he is also engaged in something else."

Karim, a 21-year-old from Tamale (Datooyili) also reported helping his father to build a house in addition to providing basic necessities for his family members in his hometown.

> Since my arrival, my only challenge is that I am currently helping my dad to build a house. That's my challenge now. The challenge also is I have my family to take care of. I normally buy clothes, other food items and sometimes send them cash for their upkeep. *Karim, 21-year-old from Tamale (Datooyili)*

Family dynamics such as number of siblings (and perhaps uncles and cousins in multifamilial/multigenerational households) and relative age factor into the social expectations that families have of young men in their families. For instance, a few of the men's accounts demonstrated how birth order may influence one's feeling of obligation to take on leadership roles within their families. Naseem and Saani described how their first-born statuses made them feel responsible for taking care of their parents. Naseem expressed that his chief responsibilities to his parents were to get married and build them a house. Saani similarly mentioned that he moved to Accra primarily to earn money to take care of his parents.

> Honestly, in my life I just want to do this work and get money to go home so I can build a house for my parents because we are in a family house…now we're in a family house. I am the first born, so I have to get money and build a house for my parents to live in. So that is my responsibility…to get money to build a house and to marry a woman so that she will join my family. That is just it. *Naseem, 27-year-old from Tamale (Nyohini)*

> I am the first child…so I planned to come and search [for money] to take care of them. That is why I have left to come here…Life is the reason that I am here. *Saani, 20-year-old from Yendi*

Though most of the participants believed they should be financially independent and should be able to take care of family members, there was some variation in the extent to which the men perceived themselves as full adults with expectations to take on these roles. Chronological age did not always determine the men's adoption of adult roles. Rather, family dynamics and expectations were central determinants in how dependent one could be on their family members. Despite being in their mid-twenties, a few individuals described how their families did not expect them to be financially independent or to contribute monetarily to the family unit. These men's families still accepted responsibility for assisting them with their basic needs. They also made life decisions on their behalf. Andrew (age 24) and Gariba (age 25) explained that their families did not expect monetary contributions from them. He reported

helping his family by choice rather than obligation. He came from a large extended family and had many older male siblings and cousins. He explained, "I do not help that much but I help in terms of small money in case they are in difficult times (*Andrew, 24-year-old from Ningo/Prampram).* Gariba's account shows how student status can delay social expectations of independence. His family expected him to eventually finish school and obtain well-paying job. Afterwards, familial expectation of him may change. Like Andrew, Gariba's birth order could also influence this delayed expectation. He mentioned how his father had many children of which he was among the youngest. Thus, he still received some financial support from older siblings. Gariba explained:

> My father has 7 wives and there are more than 30 of us [children]. I am still young, and they do not expect a lot from me because they are still taking care of me […] At this my age, I am still under control [of family]. So my family…I am still a student so my family cannot expect much from me yet because I am still schooling. If I were not attending school and I were a real hustler or I had completed school, at my age, they would have been expecting something from me. […] Honestly, my family…my mother still expects me to continue schooling. *Gariba, 25-year-old from Tamale*

The men's views on familial leadership roles were also influenced by societal gender ideals. Traditional gender roles (i.e., males as providers) influence their feeling of obligation to take care of family. Zabaya, for instance, expressed that there were different social expectations of similarly-aged women.

> For my mother's side, she was the one supporting my education. That was the good thing at home. For my father, he did not encourage my education. He didn't even have [money] not to talk of him giving me money for school. So, my mother was the only good thing that happened to me and now that she is old, I can't still depend on her…besides I am not a female, I am male. If I were female, she would have still taken care of me but I am male so she will say I am disturbing her…I don't tell my father my problems and every day she is the one I am telling them to, but my father never contributed. She supported me until I got to JHS 2. So I also have to find something to do. That is what brought me here. I do things for [my mother and sisters] because I am rewarding my mother for looking after me so far. Sometimes when I get money or save money, I give her 800 cedis and she uses it to take care of herself and my sisters. *Zabaya, 24-year-old from Zilindo*

Zabaya also described "rewarding" his mother for raising and supporting him through his childhood in spite of his uninvolved father. He believed that at his age, he should be reciprocating the care she provided. Reciprocating the care of parents and other senior family members was viewed as a critical developmental task of adulthood. Another participant captured this notion by explaining, "they watch us as our teeth grow in, we watch them when their teeth fall out." In this statement, he was referring to the Akan proverb which is shared in various forms by other ethnic groups "*Aberewa hwɛ abɔfra ma ofifir se nna abɔfra nso hwɛ aberewa ma ne se tutu*," which translates to "the old woman looks after the child as his/her teeth grow in and the child in turn looks after the old woman as she loses her teeth." Accordingly, most participants described the importance of providing parents material resources. Such support aimed to relieve them of the burdens of sourcing their livelihood and also to share responsibility of taking care of younger siblings. For some participants a part of caring for parents involved tending to their spiritual welfare. A few participants aspired to someday to send their parents to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, on *Hajj* (Holy pilgrimage). In Ghanaian Muslim communities, significant social status and respect are ascribed to men and women who have gone on *Hajj*. By raising their parent's social standing, they were also raising their own.

Though the responsibilities associated with leadership roles presented challenges for the men, there were benefits to accepting leadership roles. Specifically, it provided opportunities for the men to elevate their social standings within their family and hometown communities. A common understanding among the participants was that men who took care of others were respected by their family members and communities. Gunsi and Sadat described how they gain positive recognition within their families by regularly purchasing farming equipment during farming season.

> We are in the farming season, so I sent 200 cedis home to be used to purchase fertilizers and weedicides for the farming because I am not at home to help them. When I do that, they can also appreciate my role in the family." *Gunsi, 18-year-old from Savelugu*

> [Life] has been better, at least, because whenever it is farming season, I can go home to offer my assistance in terms of finances so that they can be proud of my achievement here and also pray for more blessings for me. *Sadat, 23-year-old from Tamale (Kukuoo)*

Sadat, who was married with a child, believed that he should be able to help support his parents at his current life stage. He also believed it was his duty to create a stream of income for his wife. According to him, these deeds would enable him to be proud and gain positive regard from those around him:

> At my age I should have had a house because I have a wife and child. If I had a house and had my own business, it would help me support my parents too. That is why I have a wife now …so I am supposed to find something for her to do to earn some income. When I get money, I can also build my house and buy a car so that when I get home every day, I can sound my car horn and they will open the gate for me. In that sense, they will see that I have proudly returned home from work [laughs]. These are the things I am working towards achieving in life. *Sadat, 23-year-old from Tamale (Kukuoo)*

Some men shared how taking care of their families would increase their success in life and their favor with Allah (God). They believed that Allah rewards people for efforts made in good faith. Like Sadat, some of the men also believed that if their families were pleased with them and prayed on their behalf, they would receive additional blessings. Jamil echoed this sentiment:

> What I would want to do for my family is to get money for them. They will also be happy that, as I am here, I'm trying to make ends meet…that I have been able to do something for them. In that case, when they pray for me, it would come to pass. But I have not been able to do any of that. *Jamil, 25-year-old from Mogulaa*

Getting Married and Having Children

The men's vision of a successful future involved the ability to manage the affairs of both one's family of origin and one's matrimonial home. Nearly every participant believed that they were at a stage in their lives where they should have a wife and children. However, interviewees differed in the extent to which they prioritized pursuing these developmental tasks over other

markers of adulthood (e.g., financial stability; acquisition of material resources; ability to take care of family). Both personal and social factors contributed to the men's views on marriage. The men came from communities in which marriage is viewed not only as a personal achievement, but as a communal matter. Parents and extended family, therefore, play a large role in a man's decision to marry and in the marriage process. The men expressed that their families and broader hometown communities expected them to be married at their current ages. As a result, some of the men felt immense pressure to prepare for marriage and find a suitable partner. Many of the men moved to Accra as a step toward achieving these goals. Sibidoo (27-year-old from Tamale) and Seidu (19-year-old from Salvelugu) expressed how their mothers urged them to find wives.

> By now, I should have had my own house, you understand? Or had a wife because currently I live alone and so from work I only come here to sit. Even when I go home, my mother also disturbs me that 'you should look for a wife' *Sibidoo, 27-year-old from Tamale (Lamakara)*

> At this age, my mother normally tells me, 'Get a wife to get married and even if the money you are making cannot take care of both of us, please try to work to take care of yourself and the wife you marry.'*Seidu, 19-year-old from Salvelugu*

Social comparison played a major role in the pressure they felt to get married. With few exceptions, the unmarried men interviewed described feeling as though they were not on par with their peers. As Yakub, a 21-year-old from Karaga, explained "All those I have grown up with… some of them are married and have children, others have built their houses, have motorbikes and I am still here." Additionally, some of the men received criticism from their families and community members who compared them to their age-mates who were already married with children. The men described such comparisons as stressful. Moving to Accra and being away from their hometowns shielded them from some of the complaints and judgment they

received. A few of the men reported this as a factor in their decision to stay in Accra despite wanting to return to their hometowns. For instance, Muhazu expressed:

> Every day [my mother] calls me and she prays for me. She calls me every day. She says that my colleagues at home now have 2 children each, while others have 3 each. So when my mother calls, she talks to me about coming home…that I should come home and she will get a wife for me, but I have also thought that I still don't have money so I cannot go home now." *Muhazu, 21-year old man from Diyali*

Marriage was seen as a way to gain respect and prestige from one's family and community. Not receiving this respect was experienced as stressful for many of the men interviewed. Zabaya, a 24-year-old from Zilindo, for instance, expressed that though he would like to be married in order to earn respect from his community, finding and courting a wife was a complex process. He explained that his family was so eager for him to be married that they were willing to pay for all the traditional rites if he found someone to marry. Zabaya believed, however, that it was better to wait until he was in a better financial position to get married so as to not create unrealistic expectations for his new wife and jeopardize the stability of his new marriage.

> They [my family] say that if I find a woman, I should marry her. They have said that several times. They say if we find a woman and like her we should bring her home and they will marry her for us. But finding a wife has to do with fate. If you shower her with money, when it is not there you will see that if she doesn't leave you then you will leave her. So that is how it is. At my age, I should have had a wife. That is the first thing. That is what will earn me respect because some of my younger brothers are married and some have given birth twice and thrice. All those [men] that I am older than and all those that I watched grow up… some of them have two wives and I even don't have one yet. All of these things bother us.

Like Zabaya, most of the men identified financial insecurity as the main barrier to marriage. Many of the unmarried men said that they wanted to get married after they find a means of financially supporting themselves and their future wives. As Nuru, Andani, and Sayibu explained:

> To be frank, they look at us like…if you and your colleagues are there…like most of my colleagues have wives. When you go home [family members] say you should look at your colleagues who have wives and so on and so forth. But it is all about money. If you don't have money, you cannot marry a woman. If you get a wife, you will suffer with her. When you come home empty-handed, they will not mind you. [Family members] will say your colleague at home has a wife and children and other things. *Nuru, 21-year-old from Karaga*

> I should be married like my colleagues, but that is what I have not done yet. I think I do not have what it takes. That is why I seem not to be interested in that now [...] I pray that God should bless me with the knowledge and skill to develop myself and amass wealth before I get married so that my wife and I will not be living in poverty. *Andani, 27-year-old from Tamale (Shishiagu)*

> In my life…to be frank when I was coming here I had intentions that if I came and God blesses me, I will buy a new motorking and use it to work at home. My father and I …there was this small girl that we promised [to marry] but because I have not succeeded yet …if I had [money] I would have come out to marry her. So I came here to work, whatever God has for me. So, if it turns out well, it is the motorking business that I will do because that was what I used to do, but because someone bought it for me, the way I was working, I wasn't really getting much for myself…*Sayibu, 21-year-old from Gushegu*

It is noteworthy that marriage is a multi-step process in traditional Northern Ghanaian communities. Some people, like Sayibu, began the process, but were unable to afford to perform all the traditional rites required to be viewed by society as legitimately wedded.

> PARTICIPANT: I have a wife because I have paid her bride price, but I have not married her officially yet
> INTERVIEWER: Do you have a child?
> PARTICIPANT: Yes, I have one
> INTERVIEWER: What are you waiting for before you marry her?
> PARTICIPANT: I do not have enough money that is why I have not married yet. *Sibiri, 29-year-old man from Shebo*

The men associated marriage with many positive traits. They viewed it as an institution that increases one's chances of success in life. According to them, married men are blessed by Allah (God). Ayariga, a 28-year-old man from Tamale (Lameshegu), for instance, expressed that finding a wife was the most important life goal for him at the time. When asked what his current

focus in life was, Ayariga responded. “The wife is the first thing. It might turn out that God says my success is with her. So the wife is the first.”

Some of the men like Ibrahim, a 19-year-old from Tolon, believed they could multiply the blessings and benefits associated with marriage by marrying more than one wife. Ibrahim strove to marry two women in the future. He described marriage as a stabilizing force in a man’s life that facilitates “good behavior.” Similarly. Sayibu (21-year-old from Gushegu), suggested that many of the men who lived in Agbogbloshie lived “wayward lives” because they were unmarried and lacked a woman’s influence in their lives:

> Oh, that thing is disturbing…as we are living here, some of our brothers that we see, you can tell that they are very grown but the way they are behaving is not the way he should because…at this stage, there should have been a wife.

While most unmarried men interviewed reported planning towards marriage, a few men like Samir, Mbie, and Azindoo described not being ready for marriage. They expressed how their lack of urgency to marry conflicted the expectations of their families and communities. Samir, a 22-year-old from Tamale (Lamashegu) described that though he does not prioritize marriage at this stage and chose to focus on acquiring a plot of land or a store, his friends often advise him to get married. Azindoo and Mbie described not being ready for marriage despite pressure family and the society at large:

> Society expects that by now you need to be married. There is a lady that my father says I should get married to, but I do not think that I am ready for it. (18-year-old Azindoo from Karaga)

> People talk about a wife…that I should find a wife because I am old enough to have a wife. That is what they disturb me about. It is a wife they disturb me with, but I’m not interested now. (Mbie, 26-*year-old from Karaga*)

4.2 Contributing Factors to Migration

This theme reflects the participants' reported decisions to leave their hometowns to reside and seek work in the Agbogbloshie area. Participants recounted their experiences growing up in Northern Ghana and the circumstances that lent impetus to their southward migration. The most common motivations and antecedent conditions that the men associated with their decisions to move the Agbogbloshie area were low educational attainment, limited occupational prospects, and family challenges (e.g., lack of support, ill treatment from family members, concerns of enmity and spiritual attacks).

Low Formal Educational Attainment

Most of the participants (87.5%, n=55) had below a secondary school education. Sixteen (25%) of the men interviewed had never attended school. Twenty-three men (35.9%) attended school up to the primary level (kindergarten to fifth grade). Seventeen men (26.6%) left school in junior secondary school (grades seven to nine). Eight men (12.5%) left school in senior secondary school (grades 10 to 12). Only one participant reported completing secondary school. The men shared factors that they believed influenced or contributed to their low educational attainment. While the specific circumstances surrounding their limited access to education varied, the men identified personal choice, affordability, family decision or obligations as key barriers to completing formal and informal (e.g., vocational) educational training.

Personal Choice/Loss of Interest. For some participants, leaving school was a personal decision rather than a familial one. Though most of the men attended some primary school growing up, many of the young men were not pressured by their families to remain enrolled through secondary school. Families differed in the extent to which they prioritized formal education over other forms of education. As children and adolescents, when some participants

opted to no longer attend school, they were rerouted to vocational training programs or apprenticeships through their families' social networks. Despite the centrality of parents and senior family members in major life decisions concerning children and adolescents, many of the young men had a say in choosing their educational and career paths. Abdulai, a 22-year-old from Savelugu, for instance, described how he left school due to his own lack of interest in formal education. He stated, "I just decided to stop on my own due to waywardness. My parents really wanted me to continue with school, but I had no interest in it." Similarly, John, a 25-year-old from Wa, lost interest in school in the seventh grade and decided to quit. At the time, a group of his close friends had dropped out of school and opted to engage in paid work. Given the limited jobs available in their hometown, the group migrated from Wa to Kumasi (a major city in central Ghana) to find work. John decided to join his friends during a school holiday break. He initially planned to only work over the break and return to school and life in Wa. However, the autonomy that he experienced in Kumasi was a major draw to him. When he returned to school in Wa after the break, had difficulty concentrating in on his studies. John subsequently decided to quit school.

> Interviewer: Can you tell me why you stopped schooling?
> John: Ooye! Hmm…it was due to peer influence. My friends stopped going to school and traveled to Kumasi. When we vacated, they told me to come and join them and return home when we reopen school. So when I went there and experienced their life there, I lost interest in returning home to go to school.
> Interviewer: What were they doing in Kumasi?
> John: They were doing scraps work there and so I went to join and later lost interest in going back home. When I eventually went home, I felt my life was different. Even when I was in class, I couldn't pay attention so it got to a time that I told my mom that I wanted to quit school and find some work to do instead. I came here to Accra and they asked me to go back home. When I got back home, a friend of mine came home from Accra and bought me a bag. I looked at how nice the bag was and then felt interested in going to Accra also, so I followed my friend to Accra when he was returning. So I abandoned school.

Sumani, a 25-year-old from Damongo, left school in the sixth grade in search for paid work much like Abdulai and John. However, unlike the others, his decision to leave school was related to his belief that he did not have the skills required to be a successful student. At the time, school was not free, and Sumani felt as though he was not clever enough to warrant his parents paying school fees. His ultimate decision to leave school was prompted by his younger brother advancing to a higher grade level than him.

> Sumani: I stopped school because…honestly, it was because of reading that I stopped school.
> Interviewer: You did not like reading?
> Sumani: I was not good at it. I was attending the school until…I was in primary 5 and my younger brother came to overtake me in class and proceeded to primary 6. So I thought to myself that this is my younger brother who has overtaken me in class and because I didn't also know how to read it was better that I stopped. I don't have to punish my parents with paying fees when I am not doing well. So, I stopped school and they found work for me. I worked until I thought that I must come here to Accra. Some people who come here and go and I see the way their lives are. I said to myself, I must also come here. Maybe God will let my life change too.

Both John and Sumani's stories illustrate the significant influence of peers in the decisions to move to Accra.

It is important to mention that some of the men reported leaving their educational programs as teenagers to help with family needs (e.g., helping mom take care of twins).

> INTERVIEWER: So at which level did you leave school?
> PARTICIPANT: I stopped in primary 5. My mother gave birth to twins so I had to quit school and help her take care of the babies. She had a problem using her hand.
> INTERVIEWER: Are you her first child?
> PARTICIPANT: No, I am not her first child. The first born is there… then another one before me, but I was the only one living with her. I saw that it was just my mother and I living together, but we were both not working so I decided to come here to work because there is nothing at home. *Farouk, 18-year-old from Sankpala*

Affordability. Most of the men reported leaving formal school and vocational training because they and/or their families could not afford the associated fees. As the men come

from very traditionally patriarchal homes, it is common for fathers and other male senior family members to be chiefly responsible for financially supporting the entire family. Major life events such as paternal death therefore introduced considerable financial instability into households and impacted families' ability to afford education and/or vocational training for children. Three men shared their experiences of having to leave school after the deaths of their fathers. Said (21-year-old from Karaga) explained how his father's death catalyzed his decision to leave school. Said's father died before he turned 8 years old. Until his death, Said's father was the one who paid his school fees. Though his mother worked, her wages did not cover major family expenses such as school fees. After his father's death, Said engaged in petty trading in attempts to earn money to pay his school fees, but was unable to keep up with the payments. He ended up leaving school in the sixth grade. He explained:

> Life in Karaga is good because there are skilled jobs there. I am a skilled worker but the way my family's lifestyle is… I cannot do so much. I didn't get to 8 years before my dad died. I was still attending school then. I was the one struggling to pay my own school fees until I got to the point where I had no money, so I decided to move here to work.

Like Said, Guru, a 25-year-old from Lamashegu, lost his father at a young age and subsequently left school. After his father's death, his mother continued paying school fees for him and his siblings. Over time, she was unable to manage all the fees. Being the eldest son in his household, Guru felt compelled to leave school and find a job so that he could assist his mother with paying his siblings' school fees. He eventually relocated to Accra, found work, and regularly sent money home to support his family.

> Life in my hometown was not good. I have lost my father and so it is just my mother that I have. And I realized that my siblings and I were all going to school, but my mother couldn't support all of us. So that made life not so good. That is why I came to Accra.

Paternal decision-making, resources, and involvement were influential in young men's life trajectories during adolescence and young adulthood. Other family influences were important,

especially when a young man's father is not available, able, or willing to make decisions and/or provide funds. In such cases, there existed complex family structures, with hierarchies of responsibility and authority, to fulfill these roles. In the absence of a father, young men expect to be able to rely on other senior male family members such as elder brothers or uncles. Salifu, a 25-year-old from Karaga explained that he expected his older brothers to take his father's place and provide him with support. However, because he had a strained relationship with his brothers, he never received the financial and moral support he needed to finish high school.

> INTERVIEWER: How was life back in your hometown?
> Salifu: Life was tough that is the reason why we migrated. My dad was not well and I am not free with my brothers too so there was no one to support me with my school. Life back home is tough.
> INTERVIEWER: How has life changed as a result of coming here?
> Salifu: Life was tough back then but we are making progress. *Salifu, 25-year-old from Karaga (Pishigu)*

Napare, a 25-year-old from Tamale, attended school until he was about 10 years old. His father unenrolled him from school due to financial hardship. According to Napare, his father believed that it would be more beneficial long-term for Napare to enter the workforce and learn a trade. Napare's father relocated from Tamale to Accra in search of work and took Napare along. During his first couple of years in Accra, Napare did some scrap metal/e-waste work. Napare's father enrolled him in a sewing apprenticeship but was not able to pay all the fees necessary for him to complete the training. The tailor Napare worked eventually let him go as a trainee, as he could no longer absorb the costs associated with Napare's apprenticeship. Unable to find work, Napare returned to working in the informal scraps/e-waste industry. His uncle gave him money to invest in the business, which enabled him to make his initial purchase of used electronics from which to extract scrap metals.

> I was little when I came to Accra. My father brought me to Accra when I was 10 years old. He told me I was born here. I then started working in scraps. He initially made me start doing tailoring work, but he had not paid the tuition and the master said he cannot continue giving his money to me also, so he sacked me. Through this incident, I started working with Sikkens. I used to take money from one of my uncles to do business.

What is notable about Napare's account is how young he was when he first engaged in e-waste work. He was barely a teenager at the time. Though most of the e-waste workers I interviewed did not begin working in the e-waste industry this young, when in the field, I occasionally witnessed young children working to earn petty cash. Discussions with people in the field revealed that, it is not uncommon for young children who are not in school and/or ineligible to enter apprenticeships due to their age to do short-term work in e-waste. In the Agbogbloshie e-waste community, these children were nicknamed *dadeɛ*[19] *police* for their uncanny ability to detect small pieces of metals on the ground. They often roam Agbogbloshie with magnets aimed at the ground in order to attract small pieces of metal left behind by older e-waste workers. Some *dadeɛ police* scavenge for days until they accumulate enough metal to sell to middlemen in Agbogbloshie who in turn sell to larger corporations. Some more senior e-waste workers mentioned that on occasion they intentionally leave small scrap metals on the ground to enable *dadeɛ police* to also profit from the e-waste business in their limited capacity. Senior e-waste workers also choose to take *dadeɛ police* under their wings, providing advice on how maximize profits from the scrap metals they sell. Lamisi, a veteran scraps/e-waste worker expressed these sentiments when describing his relationship with some of the young boys:

> They be my friends, plus my boys. I show them the iron-inside weh get… dey do am small small get money weh they dey chop. The boys, if they dey here when iron come nor, I can take one small boy say "Go buy this one. Go sell am like this". (They are my friends and my boys. I show them the ins and outs of the iron business so they can do it gradually do it and earn money. When the iron arrives, I take a small boy and tell him, "Go buy this one. Go sell it this way".)

[19] Akan/Twi word for "metal."

Family decision. Parents and extended family members are heavily involved in making decisions about a child's entry into the workforce and early career trajectories. These decisions are often reached after senior family members take the child's individual characteristics as well as the needs of the family into consideration. In many traditional Northern Ghanaian communities, young people are not only raised by biological parents, but by extended family as well. For example, Ayariga, a 28-year-old from Tamale (Lamashegu) describes how his uncle unenrolled him from an educational program. In junior high school, Ayariga began selling second-hand clothing to earn pocket money. When his uncle learned of his after-school job, he interpreted Ayariga's decision to sell clothes as an assertion of his adulthood status and believed that, as such, he was better suited for work than school.

> INTERVIEWER: When did you stop?
> PARTICIPANT: I stopped in Lamashegu JHS 'I no go die'. My uncle stopped me…my uncle made me stop school.
> INTERVIEWER: Why?
> PARTICIPANT: He used to mold blocks and guard houses as a security man. He wanted me to come home and help him mold blocks after school. I also used to sell second-hand clothes after school because that is what I used as my pocket money… He did not give me pocket money. So because I used to go to sell second-hand clothes, he said it means that I can take care of myself then he went to withdraw me from the school. I swear! *Ayariga, 28-year-old from Tamale (Lamashegu)*

Similarly, Mpanko's father asked him to stop school in junior high school. According to Mpanko, this decision was not because his family could not afford the fees.

> Interviewer: Have you been to school?
> Mpanko: Yes, I have. I stopped in JHS 2.
> Interviewer: Can you tell me the reason you stopped going to school?
> Mpanko: It was my father that asked me to stop but I had no idea why he wanted me to stop school. I was just attending school until he asked me to quit one day.
> Interviewer: Was it because of financial difficulties?
> Mpanko: No. it was not that. *(Mpanko, 25-year-old from Diyali)*

Hamid was unenrolled from primary school (4th grade) to study bicycle repair. He worked as a bicycle repairer for several years before moving to Accra to do e-waste work.

> My father took me from school and I started working on bicycle repairs then I moved and came to Accra. I came with a friend to Accra. He is my best friend, and he is also still working in e-waste. (Hamid, 23 from Yendi)

Limited Job Opportunities in Hometown

The men explored many career and vocational/educational options prior to moving to Agbogbloshie and entering the e-waste industry. Their accounts demonstrated persistence in the face of challenge. The men migrated to Accra due to under employment and/or employment. Many studied multiple trades with the intention to pursue entrepreneurship but lacked the funds to complete training, certification, or licensure processes. Even those that were able to complete formal and informal apprenticeships or training programs were often unable to turn their skills and knowledge into financially sustainable businesses. Abubakar, for example, learned electrical work, but could not complete training. He then trained to become a tailor, but did not have money to purchase the equipment and pay for the working space required for a tailoring business.

> I started the scraps work in Tamale and I worked with scraps in Tamale. With this scraps work, it's all about the money, once the money is there, you can do it forever but because of the money issues. I learnt how to sew but I have not used it for anything. I completed Accra Technical Training Institute but could not move on because I didn't pass. I did electricals back in school. Because of the cost, I could not go back to write exams. For the tailor work, I am good at it but there is no cash to start up a business. For now, I'm doing scrap work to start my business. *Abubakar, 25-year-old from Tamale*

The men who were able to find employment were unable to secure jobs that enabled their desired quality of life. Khalid, a 24-year-old from Yendi/Bolgatanga worked as an electrician during high school, but decided to move to Accra when he was unable to make a livable wage.

INTERVIEWER: Please tell me about Bolgatanga?
PARTICIPANT: Bolga was the place I was raised. I started my school there and I was struggling. There were times I needed certain things for myself, but I couldn't get it because I was not working. So I joined an electrical shop to work after I finished with my WASSCE. I took electricals in senior high school and I can wire a whole apartment. I still have customers who can me.(Khalid, 24 year old from Yendi/Bolgatanga)

The men held a wide variety of jobs prior to their migration. A few participants worked as transporters of goods and supplies for work prior to moving to Accra. These men worked as "truck pushers" hauling goods manually on a cart or "motor king" (motorized tricycle) drivers. Other jobs held by the men prior to moving to Accra included second-hand clothing vendor, miner, barber, steel burner, motor mechanic, and welder. Many of the men also worked for their family businesses- mostly farming crops and livestock. However, they reported not being adequately compensated for their labor. Gunsi, a 18 year old man from Savelugu, for example, worked for his family business as a fisherman.

INTERVIEWER: How was life back in your hometown before you came here?
PARTICIPANT: Life at home was that…my family is made up of fishermen, so every day they take us to the dam to catch fish. On our way home, we take the fish to sell to buyers. When we get home, our elder brothers will give everyone their share of the money…my own was too. That's what I used to do at home. That was what I was taught when I was growing up, so I fish at home. *Gunsi, 18-year-old man from Savelugu*

Challenges with Family and Community Members

Challenges in family life were identified as major contributing factors to individuals' decisions to migrate to Agbogbloshie. Many men reported having "disturbance at home," to describe a host of interpersonal challenges with family members and hometown community including poor treatment; strained relationships, perceived lack of support, and spiritual attacks.

Lack of Support from Family. The young men sought out moral support in the forms of encouragement and approval of their life goals from parents and senior family members. Not receiving such support created tension between them and their families. Moving to a new city

became a way to escape some of this tension. Abubakar, a 25-year-old man from Tamale, for instance, described how though life was already challenging for him in his hometown, his father's lack of interest in his career goals catalyzed his decision to chart a new path in another city. He explained, "Life in Tamale was tough, I completed school in 2010, Lamashegu JHS in Tamale. I completed SHS but because of the attitude of my dad, I separated from him." Similarly, Lahari also shared his father's refusal to contribute to school fees, despite being able to do so. He interpreted his father's refusal to fund his education and his family's refusal to give him pocket money as signs of neglect.

> I was in school and I needed school fees to continue with school and I told my father and refused to give me. My being here is better than being in Savelugu, especially with regards to money. When you are home and you ask for money, they would refuse to give it to you, not because they do not have it… they do have the money. (*Lahari, 20-year-old from Savelugu*)

Like Abubakar and Lahari, 24-year-old Zabaya from Zilindo explained that he and others moved to Accra in part due to a lack of parental attention, which made them feel as though they were on their own to navigate life's challenges. They lacked the supervision and guidance that they expected to accompany living with parents and senior family members, but were still bound by the constraints of living at home as junior family members. This combination serves as a hindrance to exploring new life possibilities. While they could not control their parents, through migration, they could achieve greater autonomy to aid this goal.

> Interviewer: Why did you leave your hometowns to come and live here in Agbogbloshie?
> Zabaya: It is because of our mothers and our fathers. This [parent] looks after you and the other [parent]doesn't care about you. You go out and come back and he does not care. Unless your mother says they should look in the ghetto to see if you are there [nobody will]. Whether you have returned from school or not, he doesn't mind. Your father does not even care if he has a child or not. So that was what brought me here.

In Dagomba family systems, like other patriarchal societies, the father's role is particularly significant. Both Abubakar and Zabaya's situations revealed the particular importance of paternal approval. Zabaya reported having a mother who gave him attention and looked out for his wellbeing; however, he was still bothered by his father's lack of interest in his wellbeing.

Polygyny. Polygyny is an institution that played a large role in paternal involvement and availability. Polygyny is a form of polygamy in which a man has multiple wives. This family structure is common in northern Ghana's Muslim community. In traditional societies where polygyny is practiced, husbands are often responsible for managing the welfare of multiple wives and their children. It is common for these wives to be financially dependent on their husbands. This is particularly challenging when men have limited financial and social resources. Polygyny may manifest in various living arrangement configurations. Some polygynous families live in one compound. Others are arranged such that each wife has her own house. A common theme discussed by the men were stressful interpersonal relationships related to the polygynous structures of their families. The men described how polygyny engendered jealousy and competition among co-wives[20] for time, attention, and money. These sentiments were reported to complicate their relationships with their stepmothers, half-siblings, and fathers.

The men often described the co-wives as "rivals" and relationships between them as "rivalries." Their stories highlighted how competition among co-wives led to complex social dynamics within a household, as they vied for the attention and resources of their shared husband. This competition can manifest in various forms such as seeking to demonstrate superior domestic skills (e.g., keeping a tidy/welcoming home, preparing the best meals), social status,

[20] Cowives is a termed used to describe women who share a husband.

and/or ability to bear/rear children. The men discussed jealousy among women who believed their husband's other wives and children received a disproportionate amount of love and favor. More recent (and often younger) wives were often accused of stealing attention and negatively influencing men's decision-making.

The stress brought about by this complicated family structure served as a push factor for some of the men to move to Accra. John, for instance, explained how he migrated to Accra, in part, to avoid his antagonistic stepmother. John was the lastborn son of his mother and father. His father was stationed in another town for work, and his mother left the house to avoid confrontations with his father's second wife. John's older full siblings were adults who no longer lived at home. In his father's absence, he resided with his stepmother and her children. John explained how his stepmother would tell lies about him to get him in trouble with his father. This pattern damaged the relationship John had with her. John also expressed disappointment in his father's initial belief of his stepmother's false stories. John also claimed that his stepmother's influence on his father contributed to his inability to finish school. According to him, it led his father to withhold school fees. Before leaving for Accra, John felt alone and undefended at home. He ultimately made the decision to leave his hometown in order to distance himself from his stepmother. According to John, even after the truth was revealed about his conduct and his father learned of his second wife's lies, he no longer felt comfortable around her.

> For life at home, I know I am still a child but to be frank, the reason that I came here…I don't want to reveal all my personal life, but my family has many issues because of rivalry [in polygamy]. My father has two wives and my mother is the oldest wife. My mother doesn't want any problems so she works in the agricultural sector in Wa. My father has been posted to Nyankpala in the Northern region to work. He is the national director in Chereponi. So he is not always at home and whenever he comes home he believes whatever the other woman tells him. Although he has discovered the truth now, I still don't feel comfortable when the other woman is speaking to me. I am the oldest at home now because my elder siblings are not at home. That woman is the reason that I even had to leave school because I didn't want to stay at home any longer. It even came

to a time that my father ignored me whenever I told him about anything related to my school fees. (*John, 25-year-old from Wa*)

Like John, Sayibu described feeling neglected and unsupported by his father growing up. Sayibu described his father as a wealthy traditional ruler (or chief) who had many wives and children. Historically, it was customary for Ghanaian chiefs (both Muslim and non-Muslim) to marry more than one wife. Though less common now, polygyny is still practiced by many Ghanaian chiefs. Sayibu lived with his mother in a separate house from other co-wives. He had limited contact with his father, who managed several households in addition to his royal duties and had little time to spare. According to Sayibu, though his father could afford his school fees, he did not prioritize his education because he was not the child of a favored wife. Sayibu attributed his decision to quit school in part to his father's lack of support and attention. It is also important to note that even though Sayibu's father's chieftaincy conferred him significant status, social connections, and wealth, these privileges were not necessarily extended to other members of his family. This is often the case in large royal families. Sayibu learned that he could not rely on his father or his father's status for opportunities in his hometown. He therefore moved to Agbogbloshie to chart his own life path.

Sayibu: I have attended a little school…I stopped in primary 6.
Interviewer: Can you tell me the reason you stopped?
Sayibu:Yes…The reason I stopped was that our school…in school, whenever they were requesting for parents, my father had no time for that and my pocket money, so it was my own choice to not attend it.
Interviewer: But he paid your fees?
Sayibu: Nothing. He was not paying. Whenever it got to that, he didn't care. So those were the things that made me lose interest in school…in that sense he did not care about it. And the thing is, he did not give birth to us alone. We are very many! His wives are 10 and they are all from different places. My mother was the first wife and when he married more, he didn't mind us. He was a chief.
INTERVIEWER: A chief in Gushegu?
Sayibu: He is a chief of one of the communities in Gushegu. (*Sayibu, 21-year-old from Gushegu*)

Spirituality. Family dynamics were not only impacted by social relations in the physical world, but also in the spiritual realm. A common reason given for migrating to Accra was to escape enmity, jealousy, and ill-will of family and community members. Enmity or enemyship describes a personal relationship characterized by (actual or imagined) hatred, malice, and[/or] sabotage (Adams, 2014, 2005, 2000). The men identified these negative traits as risks to their safety and future goals. Travelling to Accra was believed to mitigate the impacts of enmity from family and community members in back home.

> We migrate in search of livelihood. For someone, it is enmity that drove him here. For another person, he just wants to enjoy life… and some are here, they came to hustle. *Ayariga, 28-year-old from Tamale (Lamashegu*)

> It is not necessary for us to move to Agbogbloshie here, but the issue is …the North is such that, for some people, it is just their own curiosity that drives them to come here. Others too, have no other choice, as in, life is tough for them, that is why they come here. Some people too have so much enmity at home, that is why they move away from home to come here. *Abdulai, 22-year-old from Savelugu*

> Some people come here to Accra to search for a wife, and others come because of challenges back home with enmity and witchcraft. Everyone has his reason for coming here. (*Mbo, 22-year-old from Karaga*)

The men explained how greedy and/or selfishness family and/or community members could ruin others' destinies and even bring about their demise for personal gain. According to the men, this was often achieved using supernatural forces or witchcraft. Witches are believed to be able to spiritually steal or divert money and other material possessions, favor, and blessings meant for another person. The men explained how witches sabotage others and hinder them achieving their full potential. Hussein and John provided hypothetical examples to illustrate how witchcraft operates.

> Immediately they give birth to you, [witches] know what you will grow up to become, so if they see that you will become a great person in future, they start to do things that will bring you down and prevent you from being what you are supposed to be. They will make you be scared to even come out in public to present yourself, and if you do you will be killed. For instance, if we were having this discussion in the North and they [witches] realize that this discussion you are having with us will be beneficial to us someday, they would make sure that none of us appear the next time you come to summon us like this and all that will be the work of human beings. We would be willing to come, but those humans wouldn't let us be. (*Hussein, 24-year-old from Karaga*)

> For instance, in my house…no, let's say we seated here are family and this guy seated here is a witch. We all live together in the same house but I don't take to them. I will realize that I always see him in my dreams trying to harm me. That is when my mind will tell me that I should go far away from the house and if I do, they won't be able to do that to me anymore. So, if the person leaves home, it would be hard for him to return because if he does, he will face those problems again. That makes people remain here in Accra to avoid such encounters…I know a lot of people who have experienced this before. (*John, 25-year-old from Wa*)

As in John's account, witches are believed to sometimes be identifiable through dreams. Hussein similarly shared how he experienced many nightmares related to witchcraft before relocating to Accra. According to him, the witches interfered with his e-waste/scraps work by hindering his ability to profit from it. He, therefore, had to take a break from the work to do waste collection until he is able to save enough to invest in e-waste/scraps.

> I, or instance…in my house, [witches] are still there, and not dead yet …And I will only return home when they die. I went home several times and they were still disturbing my life, so I came back here because when I go home to sleep, the kind of things I see are scary and you can tell that it is the hand of humans and not God. I used to deny the fact that such things existed until I came to experience it myself but all the same, I have not abandoned them at home. I still went to visit them and since I returned, my work and everything have been retarded. That is the reason I have resorted to collecting the waste now but I used to do the scraps work and it was fetching me money but they don't want me to prosper in life.

Witches were thought to have the power to affect a person's physical health, potentially causing symptoms of illness. Individuals sometimes attributed unexplained ailments or discomforts to their actions Salifu shared that before migrating he experienced a strange illness that he suspected to be spiritually induced. Moving to Accra stopped his symptoms.

> For me, that was the reason that drove me here in Accra for the first time. What happened for me to suspect it was that [witchcraft] was that I couldn't sit or stand and it was happening to me for a long time. I decided one day to leave home and that was what made me believe that a witch was after me. On my way to Accra on the bus, all the pain in my body was gone. That made me believe someone was behind it…since I came, I have gone home, but I don't usually stay at home for long. I don't even reach two months, then I come back. (*Salifu, 25-year-old from Karaga)*

Those accused of witchcraft are often elderly women. The reasons for such accusations are varied and numerous. Some include mental illness; disability; death of family or close contacts; misfortunes afflicting family members or contacts; confirmation from traditional

spiritual leader; and general dislike. In the Savannah, North, and north East regions, such accusations can result in alienation or even banishment from one's community. A number of settlements informally dubbed "witch camps" offer sanctuary to such women who have been exiled[21]. Ayariga described his experience living with a witch who was eventually banished from the community.

> Concerning witchcraft… my grandmother used to ride my grandfather, her husband, until he developed a stroke. So those of us who were taking care of my grandfather were also targeted. Sometimes at night when I would sleep and wake up, I would notice I have bruises all over my arms and legs. It meant she used to actually ride me too at night. It was one soothsayer who came to our house to reveal that my grandmother was a witch and that was the day that she was banished and I also left for this place. (*Ayariga, 28-year-old from Tamale [Lameshegu])*

Ayariga attributed his late grandfather's stroke to his grandmother who was accused of witchcraft. According to him, his grandmother spiritually possessed, or "rode", his grandfather's body at night. He further claimed that his grandmother did the same to him, as evidenced by the odd bruises he seemed to develop during his sleep. In many traditional West African and Afro-Caribbean spiritual systems, "riding" or "mounting" refers to the process in which a spirit or other supernatural force attaches itself to a human body. While under such spiritual possession, the way one looks, sounds, and/or acts may deviate from their typical state. They may also experience significant alterations to pain tolerance and physical strength (PushBlack, 2024; Brown, 2006). Ayariga's family arranged for a traditional priest/seer to assess the situation,

[21]Many witch camps have existed in Northern Ghana including the Bonyasi, Gambaga, Gnani, Kpatinga, Kukuo and Naabuli camps. In the 2010s, the Government of Ghana made efforts to discourage the practice of labelling people as witches. Some prominent witch camps were disbanded and accused women were reintegrated into their respective communities. A yet-to-be-signed Anti-witchcraft Bill was introduced to Parliament in 2023.

which resulted in a confirmation of the grandmother's witchcraft. His grandmother was later exiled from the village.

Chapter 5: Agbogbloshie Area as A Hustle Place

This chapter explores several themes beginning with how the men conceptualize Agbogbloshie as a transitional space in the broader context of their life goals and aspirations. It delves into the unique challenges (social, health, etc.) and opportunities of living and working in the area, emphasizing the various forms of sociality that foster community connections and coping. The chapter examines work life and social life, highlighting significant social spaces. It also addresses how the young men maintain positive individual and collective identities despite negative social messaging. The chapter centers the Photovoice activity with supporting evidence from interviews and focus groups. Ten people participated in photovoice activity. The pseudonyms and demographic information for the 10 participants are below in Table 4.

Table 8: Photovoice Participants Descriptives

Name	Age	Hometown	Time in Accra	Marital Status	Number of Children	Highest level of education
Guru	25	Tamale (Lamashegu)	8 months	single	none	high school
Yumzaa	28	Tamale	14 years	married	two	5th grade
Sumani	25	Damongo	5 years	single	none	6th grade
Ayariga	28	Tamale (Lamashegu)	8 years	single	none	junior high school
Ahmed	29	Karaga	12 years	single	none	never attended school
Sherif	22	Savelugu	3 years	Single	none	senior high school
Amandi	20	Karaga,	5 years	single	none	junior high school
Baba	25	Tamale	5 years	single	none	senior high
Yakub	21	Karaga	5 years	single	none	primary school
Samir	22	Tamale (Lamashegu)	11 years	single	none	5th grade

Imagining the Return and Visiting Home

Agbogbloshie was often described as a "place to look for money"- a "hustle place" characterized by the use of various short-term livelihood strategies. As Hussein, a 24-year-old from Karaga put it, "Living in Agbogbloshie is enjoyable if one has a job to keep occupied. Agbogbloshie is a place where you would need to have work to do, that's when you would enjoy living and working here." Despite the post-migration difficulties they experienced, the men recognized many positive aspects of Agbogbloshie. For many, being in Agbogbloshie presented new life possibilities. It exposed them to a variety of industries; gave them opportunities to learn job skills through apprenticeships (both formal and informal) and casual day labor jobs; and built their professional networks. Though they lived in an ethnic enclave, being in Accra exposed participants to people from various ethnic groups and walks of life. The men believed their time in Agbogbloshie would not only bring financial benefits, but also broaden their worldviews and yield valuable life skills and knowledge. They envisioned their stint in Agbogbloshie as a transient phase in the broader arch of their lives. They considered it as a steppingstone to a more stable and secure future, which many anticipated would be spent in or near their hometowns. Only one person, Amadu (age 23) from Tamale, explicitly reported preferring to stay in Accra long-term rather than returning to Northern Ghana sometime in the future. Even those who did not have concrete plans to return to their hometowns envisioned their time in Accra as temporary. Twenty-four-year-old Khalid from Yendi, for instance, imagined his time in Accra as temporary, but explained that he was at a stage in life where he was willing to settle wherever opportunities for work were. He characterized places where one can make a stable living as their "hometown" to highlight how steady work anchors one to new communities. Khalid also

mentioned that his access to social independence (e.g., freedom and privacy) would also be a determining factor in his decision to return to Northern Ghana.

> INTERVIEWER: How many years do you plan to stay in Accra?
>
> PARTICIPANT: If something good happens, I will go back home but I temporarily live here. If I have a good place to stay and work going well, there is nowhere to go for now. When you are young, where you are making your money is your hometown. Whether I go home or not also depends on the freedom and privacy I would get there.

There was great variation in participants' imagined length of stay in Accra. Some participants reported that they had no specific timeline for returning to their hometown. Others reported that they intended to stay in Accra for a period ranging from 2 years to 9 years. Nearly all the men, however, reported that they planned to return to their hometowns only after amassing enough money to move on to better economic opportunities (e.g., starting their own businesses) and meet other personal goals. Twenty-four-year-old Haruna from Karaga, for instance, explained how he had no definite timeline for returning to his hometown. He planned to return have whenever he had enough to meaningfully invest in his and his family's farming businesses. He saw immense value in the farm work he did back home, but believed that without additional capital, his family business could not grow or sustain itself. Its earning potential would be limited.

> INTERVIEWER: How many years do you plan to stay in Accra?
>
> Haruna: My living in Accra depends on money. If I get money, I will go back to my hometown regardless of the day or month I get the money. When I am home, I do a lot of farming and it helps me a lot. We mainly farm in Karaga. When I am here and I go back home, I see that farming has helped [my family] a lot more than the work I am doing is helping me.

Though many of the men desired to ultimately move back to their hometowns or nearby towns and cities up north, they believed like they could not return home empty-handed or

without evidence that their time in Accra had augmented their life circumstances. Muhazu, a 21-year-old from Diyali, believed his hometown to be a place where career opportunities existed if one had the financial resources to take advantage of them. He explained that he could not move back to his hometown until he had acquired enough financial resources to be financially independent. His family expected him to contribute meaningfully to expenses. He was considered too old to be a dependent and would not be respected by his family if he returned home in such a role.

> Interviewer: How is life back home?
> Muhazu: Life back home is changing in a very good way. When we go back home, we witness the changes ourselves. It's great.
> INTERVIEWER: So why have you not gone back home?
> Muhazu: Going back home has its own time. Once you have not yet acquired resources, then you have to keep working. You must have enough money to be able **to survive.** If we go back home it will be trouble because you cannot go back and be looking up to your family to feed you again. We will become a burden to our family and in critical conditions, you might be forced to steal somebody's cow or goat because you do not have enough money on you.
> Interviewer: How would your family receive you?
> Muhazu: They will have a bad perception about you because they feel that at your age, you should have had enough to take care of them, but they are rather spending more on you. It is not a good practice and they will not respect you. We don't have other jobs to do so this is what is supporting us now. That is why we are here. We have it in mind that if we don't get money, we are not going home now because we came to look for money.

Hustling in Agbogbloshie

Electronic Waste and Scrap Metal Work

In the absence of adequate public institutions to collect and safely dispose of used electronics, the e-waste and scrap metal workers provide necessary services to Ghana and the West African region. Various occupational tasks comprise e-waste/scrap metal work, and there was significant overlap in the tasks the men performed (e.g., sourcing, selling unprocessed e-waste, dismantling, bagging, weighing, loading trucks). After being sorting, dismantling, and

processing e-waste, extracted scrapped metals were transported to other parts of the country, West African region, and other parts of the world to be used as raw materials. The men took pride in the global linkages their work had. The descriptions the men provided of the pictures they took highlighted the knowledge and technical skills acquired from their involvement in e-waste work including an understanding of the how used electronics move along the supply chain and make their way into the raw materials market; the ability to decipher between profitable and unprofitable used goods; knowledge of the value and properties of different metals; and techniques for separating metal from plastic and other unusable parts of e-waste. Photovoice offered a broader view of e-waste processing and life as an e-waste worker that extended beyond the popular focus on workers' roles in pollution and other negative social portrayals. It provided a glimpse of the complex ecology of the Agbogbloshie scrapyard area and e-waste industry.

Figure 4: "Burning Copper" by Ayariga

Ayariga: Here, what we call copper was what was being burnt here. Can you see what the guy has raised? That is how they do it until the tires burnt out. After removing the copper,

Figure 4 cont'd

they take it for weighing. […]You can see animals at the dumping site searching for food while there are some children found there also looking for rubbers and the leftovers from scraps workers who sometimes mistakenly discard them. The children also pick them up to exchange for money.

Figure 5: "Pile of Unsorted Scrap Metals" by Ahmed

Ahmed: The pile of scrap metal still has a lot of valuable parts to be separated before someone can take it to sell and find out how much profit he will get. There are even plastics in them and they will also have to be removed. We sell the scraps in their raw state to them, so they go to dismantle and sell them too. However, we could also dismantle before we sell, but that usually reduces the quantity of the goods and so we might not get much money from it.

The metals here, they look like aluminum and they call it 'zingle[22]'. The next one is copper, and the rest are 'zingle'. If you go for weighing, they will remove the copper, 'zingle' and brass. The others here are metals. They load them all to sell.

Baba: As for these ones here, it is the Moshis[23] who come to buy them to make spoons, pots, bowls and others. They transport them to Burkina Faso and Mali. When we used to weigh things, they used to come and weigh a lot of things. As we already mentioned,

[22] a metal that resembles aluminum, albeit less hard and durable

[23] Moshi is a variation in spelling and speech of "Mossi", an ethnic group mainly found in Burkina Faso.

Figure 5 cont'd

these are different kinds of metals so you will separate the various metals including the ‘zingle’ and they buy the ‘zingle’. They use it for cutlery.

Ahmed: Sometimes you can just try bending a spoon and then it breaks. It means that is ‘zingle.’

Figure 6: Removing Motor from Fridge by Yumzaa

Yumzaa: In this photo, these refrigerators are to be dismantled to remove their motor. After dismantling, they will bag it and put it down. This photo also shows how the goods are dismantled, and I wanted to show the pain we go through in dismantling the scraps.

Figure 7: "Men Dismantling Old Car Parts Together" by Guru

Figure 8: Weighing and Bagging Scraps by Yakub

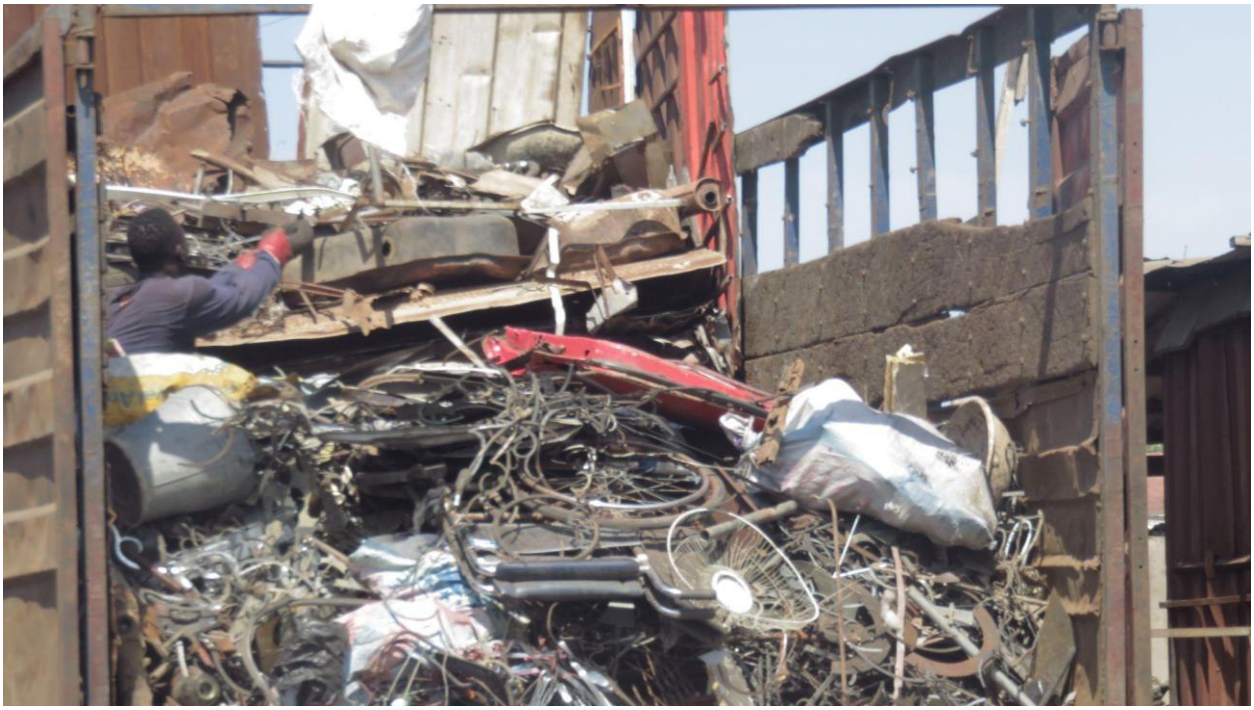
Yakub: This photo shows how we bagged the scraps and packed them onto the truck. You see this person here, there is another person on the other side and they both help in

Figure 8 cont'd

lifting the metals up onto the truck. So that is how we transport the scraps to Tema […] This thing there in the photo [referring to a scale] is an important tool we use in this work that we do. That is what we do to separate useful materials from the unwanted ones…the man over there seemed exhausted and so he was drinking water to cool down.

Figure 9: Guiding Truck to the Scrapyard by Amandi

Figure 10: Packing metals for loading by Baba



Baba: While we were loading the goods on a truck, I took a break to come here. I wanted to show you the work I do. There were some people in front of the truck throwing metals up for those at the top to catch and arrange properly. Personally, I'm involved in dismantling, loading, burning copper and all other metals. We usually dismantle them and take them to burn and remove the useful materials. You can gather and store the little useful materials you get every day until you have as many as you see in the photo here. You can also load a truck and take them to Tema. Have you seen how they have packed them very well into the truck? That is how they do it. I saw them packing the goods in the truck so well and decided to take a photo of them.

Figure 11: Copper Dealer and Dismantler Resting by Sherif

> Sherif: This man is a copper parts dealer, this other one dismantles electronics. I took this photo of them to show that they are also scrap dealers. That is their workplace. These people dismantle the scraps and take it to another person for weighing. They work for an Ibo[24] man and so when they bring the scraps to him, he buys from them and they get money to go and search for more.

In Figure 4, Ayariga shared a picture of three men burning e-waste in an area surrounded by piles of rubbish. Among the burning items were an old computer monitor and a tire full of old electric wires. Ayariga's picture of the burning e-waste resembled many of the popular images of Agbogbloshie. However, Ayariga's purpose for taking the image was not to highlight the pollution, but to show the process of separating plastics from the metals contained in electronics. He showed how both human and non-human lifeforms comprised the Agbogbloshie community

[24] Ibo/Igbo refers to an ethnic group native to southeastern Nigeria. However, the men sometimes used the term when referring to Nigerians generally.

and how they all interacted with e-waste. The scrapyard provided an opportunity for children to make money from metals left over from older scrap workers. It also presented challenges to animal life in the area as grazing animals came into contact with the rubbish. In Figure 5, Ahmed displayed a picture of a pile of unprocessed unsorted scrap metals. He explained that part of his job entailed sourcing and selling assorted metal goods to dismantlers who separated the plastics and other unwanted parts from valuable parts. Ahmed explained the variety of metal that could be found in the pile such as copper, brass, and "zingle" (a metal that resembles aluminum). At the mention of "zingle," others filed in to the conversation to contribute further details about those who purchase it. According to them, it is a low-cost alternative to aluminum and it often shipped to Burkina Faso and Mali to make affordable cutlery. Figure 6 shows a picture of a man dismantling an old refrigerator in order to remove its motor. Yumzaa reported taking this picture to demonstrate how tediousness of dismantling large electronic objects. Similarly, Guru's picture (Figure 7) depicts men working together to dismantle old car parts. Figure 8 shows processed scrap metals being separated into bags and weighed before being resold. Individuals and companies often purchase large quantities of scrap metals from Agbogbloshie. In such cases, trucks are sent to the scrapyard to pick up the load. Figure 9 shows a scrap worker guiding a truck to the scrapyard. In the absence of well demarcated roads and other proper infrastructure, the worker had to go to the main road by foot or motorcycle to guide the truck driver to the scrapyard. The truck was loaded with scrap metals and transported to Tema shortly thereafter. In Figure 10, Baba presented a picture of men working together to load scraps onto the truck. The men who loaded the trucks are not always the same ones who sourced or processed the waste. Loading the truck provided additional financial compensation, with the team of men being paid separately for their services. In Figure 11, Sherif displayed two scrap workers. The man on the

left was a copper dealer who had a team working under him to source and process e-waste. The man on the right was one of his dismantlers. Sherif pointed out how the e-waste industry also attracted businesspeople from other West African nations, particularly Nigeria. Both of the men pictured were said to work for a Nigerian man who bought used electronics and other goods in bulk and hired locals to process them.

Other "Hustles" in Agbogbloshie Community

E-waste was one of many hustles young men engaged in after moving to Agbogbloshie. Agbogbloshie hosts many different industries and offered young people opportunities to engage in and learn about various forms of work. The men lived in an ethnic enclave with people from various parts of Northern Ghana with similar goals of acquiring money, and in some cases, returning to or investing in their hometowns. Participant photos provide a glimpse of the many types of work in Agbogbloshie. Their photos also emphasized community ties. Given the limited access that many of the men had to in-home water and sanitation services and equipment for food preparation, they relied on services provided by community members (e.g., purchasing food; washing clothes; bathing; using the restroom,) and thus regularly came into contact with others in the course of their everyday activities. Over time, many of these people became trusted friends and fictive kin. Pictured are examples of short-term work and other livelihood strategies of people in the participants' community.

Figure 12: Trunk Markers by Amandi

Amandi: These men manufacture metallic trunks for sale. They buy old refrigerators, roofing sheets and others and transform them into trunks. This is where they make these trunks, so I took a photo of them.

Facilitator: Are those people the manufacturers?

Amandi: These are the boys who work there, but the masters were not around.

Baba: They are being trained to make the trunks.

Amandi: You see these people here? They spray the trunks when they are done. They spray them with designs to make them nicer. Then they sell them to students going to boarding schools.

Baba: They sell them in bulk, so they are suppliers.

Figure 13: Our Sisters in the Onion Market by Guru

Guru: Here, they are picking onions. This is what some of our sisters who come here also do for a living. They are separating the onions from the skin.

Facilitator: Where are the onions brought from?

Guru: They are brought from Niger. [Speaking of people not pictured] The people standing there own the onions and buyers are also there.

Facilitator: Do some of the women there buy the onions to sell?

Guru: Some of them are able to buy to sell, while others just help the wholesalers to pick and package them.

Yumzaa: I think what he said says it all, but I have something to add. You know when they offload the onions from the truck, there are a few that fall on the ground unnoticed. Some of these women gather them to sell in the market; they don't buy the onions from the wholesalers. That is the work they do because they have nothing else to do. They clean the discarded onions that look dirty and take them to the market to sell.

Figure 14: Clothing Designer Friend by Sumani

Figure 14 cont'd

Sumani: Here he is making and designing clothes. He sells to us scrap workers and to his friends. We took this photo in front of the door to his workplace.

Facilitator: How much does he sell the shirts he makes for?

Sumani: To us, because of friendship, he sells a shirt that costs 30 cedis for 25 cedis. When he takes them to the market, he sells the shirt for 30 cedis and the trousers for 40 cedis. If I have shirt like this [pointing at his shirt], he can make a design on it for me or he can change the colour of your shirt at a fee.

Facilitator: Does he do scraps too?

Sumani: No, he does designs [clothes] and also has a barbershop.

Figure 15: Our Senior Brother at the Public Bathhouse by Samir

Samir: [Pointing to man on the far left] This man here… he made us take a photo of him at his workplace. He works at the public bathhouse. That is what he does besides scrap work. He fixes things there when there is a problem with the taps or when the drains are choked. When there is no work for him there, he goes to the 'bush' in search of scraps.

Figure 16: Ladies who wash our clothes by Ahmed

Ahmed: These people here also wash people's clothes for money. You know some of us here are very busy and have no time to wash their clothes and so we bring them here to be washed. You know most of us are bachelors, so we have no time to do laundry. The men here are responsible for cleaning the bathhouse. It is the guys who take care of the drains. They also sell water here, while the ladies do the laundry there.

Figure 17: Food Seller by Ayariga

Figure 17 cont'd

Ayariga: The reason I took this photo was because this is my younger brother's wife and she sells food. She sells food to most of the workers here. She sells fried yam and plantain with meat and fish. If you are eating right there too, she will serve you in a bowl and you enjoy yourself there. That was someone who came to buy food from her and was telling her to add a lot of the pepper. The one who is buying the food lives just here [pointing to a nearby cluster of homes] and her husband is the owner of the scraps she is standing next to. That was why she gave me permission to take a photo of her standing next to them.

In Agbogbloshie, salvaged metals are manufactured into many products. For instance, in Figures 12, Amandi showed apprentices making storage trunks from metals salvaged from fridges and roofing sheets. These trunks are popularly used by boarding school students throughout Ghana. Wholesalers at Agbogbloshie sell them to retailers in other parts of the city and country. In Figure 13, Guru showed a picture of women in his community whom he endearingly refers to as the men's "sisters." A shipment of onions had arrived to the market and Guru wanted to capture the work that some women in his community did. The onion market is one of the main attractions of the Agbogbloshie market. As Guru explained, the women participated in the onion business at different levels depending on their ability to invest money. Some could afford to purchase onions for resale. Others only prepared the onions for sale by removing the excess skin and packaging them. Yumzaa, another participant, also pointed out that even those unable to purchase onions from the wholesalers were able to gather onions that fell off the truck. This is another example of how Agbogbloshie offers ways for individuals to earn meager pay, even absent of formal employment or money to invest in business.

In Figure 14, Sumani presented his friend, a local designer, clothing maker, and barber. Sumani's friend sometimes gave him and other scrap workers discounts on clothing. Like many

young men in Agbogbloshie, though he primary worked in clothing production, he also did other work concurrently to make ends meet.

Figure 15 showed Samir's friends who worked in the public bathhouse as a handyman. Samir spoke at length about the man pictured on the far left who he referred to as their "senior brother" due to his adopting a big brother role to many of the young men in the community. As handywork was not consistent, Samir's friend also did scrap work. He worked at the bathhouse at night and went to other parts of town in the day to search for discarded e-waste and other metal goods to later be dismantled and resold for parts. Given the limited access the scrap workers had to water in their places of residence, community residents used bathhouses to take showers get clothes washed and fetch water. All these services and amenities came at a fee. Thus, the bathhouse was a central space in the daily lives of participants. Ahmed also shared a picture he took of the same bathhouse, which showed a couple of the women who did laundry for community members (Figure 16).

In Figure 17, Ayariga captured an image of his younger brother's wife, who worked at a popular food spot[25]. Many scrap workers, their families, and other community members frequent this food seller according to Ayariga. Also pictured was the wife of a fellow scrap worker.

Life in the Agbogbloshie Area: Post-migration Developmental Risks and Stressors

Upon arrival and settlement in Accra, the men faced numerous challenges. Some of the men appraised their living conditions in Accra as less favorable than in their hometowns. They identified stressors including housing insecurity; adverse living conditions; health and sanitation

[25] In Ghana, a "food spot" refers to casual dining places or small roadside stalls run by street vendors, typically serving local dishes.

concerns; social challenges; and daily hassles at work. Though the men might not have immediately experienced better quality of life than in their hometowns, they took pride in knowing that they were making progress on key life-stage milestones. They understood adversity and sacrifice as normative aspects of life at their current age. They believed they were in a period of their lives where they must "struggle" towards greater possibilities in the future. They believed that they were sacrificing their immediate comfort for a more secure future. In return for their sacrifices, they believed they would receive the respect and regard conferred onto valued adult men in their families and home communities. The challenges the men experienced were offset by protective factors and coping strategies which will be discussed in a later section.

Living Conditions and Housing Insecurity

The men reported lack of access to safe and affordable housing as a major stressor living in the Agbogbloshie area. Living spaces in Agbogbloshie were described as scarce and expensive relative to the income the men earned. In order to increase affordability, many men often lived with others in crowded living spaces.

> I do not have my own permanent place here in Accra to stay in. I stay with my friends. Sometimes at night, I go to the mosque here [pointing towards next room] to sleep. *Napare, 25-year-old from Tamale*

> There are a lot of challenges here because we sleep in one room with a lot of us, and while you are sleeping, you cannot turn around because you are likely to hit someone when you do *Bukari, 24-year-old from Savelugu*

Even those who were able to raise adequate funds to rent a living space often had difficulty finding spaces to rent. As Rahman noted,

> We have difficulties getting rooms because if you do not have one, then you have to hire and it is even difficult to hire. There is money, but there is no room to rent. *Rahman, 19-year-old from Tamale.*

Some who were able to find accommodations lived in single-room homes and described them as uncomfortable with insufficient space; poor sleeping conditions; limited access to clean water; and sanitation and hygiene facilities. Yumzaa and Yakub photographed their homes. Though they acknowledged the adverse living conditions, they were proud to be able to amass enough money (and in some cases have enough luck) to secure housing in Agbogbloshie.

Figure 18: Living Quarters by Yumzaa

> Yumzaa: I went into my bedroom and decided to take a photo of how it looks at night. These are my children's drugs on the top here. I live with my wife and children in the same room. These are my clothes hanging there. I sleep on the floor. That is the life we live here. The things we sleep on are very uncomfortable.

Figure 19: My Mattress by Yakub

Yakub: This place is where I sleep. I went home that day and when I was about to sleep, I decided to take a photo of my room. That is my mattress. Those in the corner are my clothes. That was just one side of my room. I live alone.

Water, Sanitation, Hygiene and Health

Generally, the men's living quarters lacked toilets, bathrooms, and running water. The men also did not have access to public services to collect garbage. It is important to note that the absence of municipal services (particularly water and sanitation services) was not unique to the Agbogbloshie area. However, these conditions were more pronounced here due to the informal nature of the settlement. People in the community burned their trash as a means of disposal, which presented air quality issues. There were few gutters to capture rain water. The trash and lack of gutters gave way to flooding and stagnant water,

which bred mosquitoes and *balenkperi*[26]. Many of the men lived in structures made of materials that lacked protection from the weather and other external elements such as plywood. One participant pointed out that the houses were easily destroyed by termites and *balenkperi.* These conditions made the men particularly susceptible to malaria and other health challenges. A couple of interviewees reported having to constantly block or redirect water in front of their living quarters when it rains.

> When it rains, you can't walk around because it's flooded. *Bukari, 24-year-old from Savelugu*

> When it rains, we cannot go out and the rain causes stagnant waters that breed mosquitoes. Those mosquitoes disturb a lot and you cannot sit here without wearing trousers and socks to protect yourself. If you don't do that, you will get malaria the following day. When it rains, we redirect the running water away from our homes so that it doesn't become stagnant and breed mosquitoes. So, you can see that people have blocked the water ways from their homes. That is what we do so that we can also sleep peacefully at night. *Haadi, 29-year-old from Tamale*

> Our main challenge was the large [amount of] waste that was being poured behind us. It used to give us diseases like malaria. This affects us a lot being here. *Seidu, 21-year-old from Savelugu*

> There are some harmful insects around here that can make you sick. *Azindoo, 18-year-old from Karaga*

> There are some days that they can dump rubbish right next to you and you can't even sit to eat outside. When it rains, the water carries the waste into your surroundings, and you can't sit outside. If you clean it up, the rain will draw the waste back into your surroundings again. You can't sit out to eat. A lot of people do not like the way the waste is dumped. *Wunpini, 25-year-old from Tamale*

> Honestly, the waste really disturbs us. It gives us malaria and other complications. Some people have even lost their lives in this market due to the waste and filth around us and we know it. You can't sit outside here at night because of the waste and the mosquitoes it brings. I usually get malaria[…] The waste disturbs our work too. Sometimes, we must work in the filth, but we have no choice because it is all part of the hustle for a better life. *Kasi, 24-year-old from Tamale*

[26] *Balenkperi* is the Dagbani name of a local insect, though the direct English translation is unclear.

> Sometimes we gather the waste around and burn them, so the place can be clean a little. Some people do not care about cleaning their surroundings and they even sell food in such environments, which puts us at risk. In some areas, they are very clean and everyone takes an active part in the cleaning. When they clean up the place you will also be happy to sit in such an environment, but if you are sitting in a filthy place, you will not feel comfortable with yourself. *Abdul Mumin, 29-year-old from Tolon*

Participants employed various insect control strategies. For instance, they purchased mosquito nets, insect sprays, repellent coils, and hired fumigators when necessary to reduce the number of insects in their living quarters. Understanding the linkages between environmental sanitation and illness, the men made great efforts to clean their homes and surroundings. Some reported encouraging their neighbors to do the same. The men also purchased and applied body creams and lotions to their skin to avoid insect bites. When necessary, they found alternative uses of easily accessible health products. For instance, a few men mentioned using *rubb/robb*[27] as a repellent, as it was more accessible and affordable than skin products explicitly marketed as insect repellents.

> For me, I take care of myself. Before I go to bed, I set a mosquito net and we all sleep under it. Also, there are insects that destroy our rooms because they are made of plywood. When they enter the room, we always cannot sleep. They disturb a lot, even if you spray them, it does not work. They come back again after you spray them. *John, 25-year-old from Wa*

> With the *balinkperi*, we spray them with insecticides. When we get money, we hire people to fumigate our rooms. After they spray, it is better for us for some time. *Andani, 27-year-old from Tamale (Shishiagu)*

[27] This product is a mentholated ointment commonly used throughout West Africa for body aches and to alleviate cold symptoms.

Coping with Health-Related Challenges

The most common ailments and health issues reported were malaria; "white,"[28] body aches, cuts and bruises; sun overexposure. Some health issues were directly linked to collecting and processing e-waste. For instance, some of the men reported accidents; pain; cuts and bruises; sun overexposure; and darkened skin from smoke:

> My challenge is what I have to do to get money from the scraps for business. With the scraps work, you get pains and other cuts on your body. *Abubakar, 25-year-old from Tamale*
>
> It is difficult because working in e-waste gives us cuts on our body *Bukari, 24-year-old from Savelugu*
>
> With the work, I have experienced accidents…yes, I have had cuts all over my body. *Yakub, 21-year-old from Salelugu*
>
> We have a lot of accidents doing e-waste work and there is a lot of money in it. We are doing it all because of the money. *Tidiya, 18-year-old from Diyali*
>
> I do not have any health challenge living here, but I usually gets cut on my body. *Ismail, 18-year-old from Karaga*
>
> I sometimes get cuts, bruises, and pains. You can be working in e-waste and within one week, your body can break down. *Baba, 25-year-old from Tamale*
>
> Living and working in Agbogbloshie is tough. The smoke gives us diseases. The smoke makes us very dark and where we sleep is usually dirty. *Mahamadu, 28-year-old from Tamale*

The interviewees reported going to the hospital to seek treatment for malaria and other sicknesses as well as for cuts and bruises from work. Many only went when experiencing acute or severe health problems. More commonly, the men sought out

[28] This local term may refer to tuberculosis, although the exact medical condition it denotes is unclear.

traditional medicines and natural remedies as alternatives to allopathic medicine. They consulted local healers and medicine vendors (e.g., street hawkers) to identify the correct course of treatment for their health challenges. These options were preferred due to their relative affordability and availability. Some also believed traditional approaches were superior to allopathic ones. Only one participant mentioned going to the hospital for regular check-ups to prevent illness.

> I do not take medicine, but I do like local medicine. If I feel pains, I just take quick action. I have been working for the past three days and it's really difficult for me because I feel pains. I plan to buy the local medicine to sort that out. *Abubakar, 25-year-old from Tamale*

Given the prevalence of illness, some preemptively bought medicines and herbs.

> All the time we have to buy medicine. You cannot do without buying the drugs whether you are sick or not, you might need them later when you are sick and there is no one around you. Sometimes this is the reason we usually want to sleep in a room with other people, especially when you also have no wife. *Haadi, 29-year-old from Tamale*

Haadi's account also highlighted the importance of social support in mitigating the health challenges that accompany poor living and work conditions. He explained that some men sleep in a room with others to ensure that that are not alone in the event of illness, especially when unmarried. The roles of social support in the lives of participants will be discussed in greater depth in a later section.

Politics and Housing Insecurity

According to participants, even when someone was able to find a place to live in the Agbogbloshie area, they still faced a great deal of uncertainty. Some of the men reported political violence in the area, particularly during election seasons and when issues arose between the two major political parties in Ghana, National Democratic Congress (NDC) and New

Patriotic Party (NPP). The men explained that the social organization of their neighborhood was such that people with (often informal) ties to political leaders had power over those who did not. Such individuals sometimes used their influence to uproot others from their homes. As their homes largely existed in informal settlements, uprooted individuals could not seek recourse from government institutions or agencies. Dikpong, a 25-year-old from Sabongida, characterized Agbogbloshie by saying, "*Freedom dey plenty, but justice no dey* (There is a lot of freedom, but there is no justice)." This statement references the motto of Ghana, "Freedom and Justice," which can be found on the coat of arms. According to him, powerful individuals were free to oppress others in Agbogbloshie. He believed that some unscrupulous individuals were attracted to the neighborhood for that reason. Wunpini described how, at some point, he had to move away from Old Fadama due to his house being taken away in this manner. He later returned to the area:

> When I was here, I really didn't understand some of the things that were going on. I had my own home and it was taken from me due to party politics. I really want to get a job outside of the country. Life here is not easy, but I pray for better life someday. (*Wunpini, 25-year-old from Tamale*)

Others had similar experiences:

> Because of this party issue, they collected my room, and there is no one I can go to to fight for me. If you are outside [of] Ghana, it's better. (*Farouk, 18-year-old from Sankpala)*

> Some people think that Agbogbloshie is a hard place, but others do not believe that. There are problems here, especially with party politics. The day I was evicted, there were a lot of people around and they were firing guns everywhere, especially NDC and NPP. *Azindoo, 18-year-old from Karaga*

> What I have seen is that people are using force to take other people's property. For instance, someone can just send his boys to take somebody else's property. *Neindow, 23-year-old from Adibo*

Challenges in the Social Climate

Though the overwhelming majority of participants identified their social networks as a key protective factor, it is noteworthy that some men shared the shortcomings of their community. (The protective aspects of the men's social networks in Agbogbloshie will be detailed in a later section of this chapter). Some of the men described community member's hyper focus on "hustling" as problematic in that people were often in a rush and had little consideration for others. According to the men, those who were better resourced did not adequately help others with their time and money when in need. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 4 on perceptions of their developmental stage and family dynamics, the men also spoke about enmity and jealousy as a common feature of the Agbogbloshie area social landscape.

> In Agbogbloshie, good lifestyle is not here. Those who are rich do not help others. *Dikpong, 25-year-old from Sabongida*

> People [are] jealous[of] me at the place I stay. *Ahmed, 29-year-old from Karaga*

> Jealousy is not a good thing because you can be in the same workplace and people do not like you. Sometimes you can be in a room and people come around to ask questions about the community you are from. If you mention a community that does not suit them, they would beat you. So most of the time, you would have to lie to be able to escape this maltreatment. *Issifu, 20-year-old from Tolon*

> They [i.e., people in my hometown] think that this place is a nice place and they know you can make good money here and go back home. But we those who come from Tamale, we do not like each other, we envy each other and there is so much enmity amongst us. *Napare, 25-year-old from Tamale*

Just as in discussions about social dynamics in their hometowns (in Chapter 4), spirituality found its way into understandings of enmity and jealousy in the men's post-migration lives in Accra. Many of the men who discussed witchcraft back home described it as a push factor for migration. However, accounts like Gunsi's showed that moving to Agbogbloshie did not necessarily free one from being spiritually pursued by saboteurs:

> Some of the people here [in Agbogbloshie] do not behave appropriately. Some people are jealous and envious of others while others are loving and caring. I think …as for us Dagombas, we don't love one another. I can just have money and then people will keep talking about it and they will plot to bring you down and all your money will be gone all of a sudden. Too much *juju*[29]. That is how we, Dagombas antagonize each other. *Gunsi, 18-year-old from Savelugu*

Work-related Stressors and Daily Hassles

The men reported that electronic waste work was not consistent seldom provided a steady income. Though most participants interviewed expressed being in better financial positions than they were in their hometowns, overall, they still struggled to make ends meet. Some days, they did not make any money. Many of the men reported not having enough money to purchase old electronics from which to extract metals and make a profit. They hoped to find business partners that would help them to buy old electronics. According to the men, success in the electronic waste industry was partially rooted in luck; some people succeeded, others did not. Despite the difficulties in Accra, participants felt unable to quit e-waste work because they were yet to meet their personal goals of raising capital and purchasing the equipment needed to start their own businesses back home. Many of them also reported being unable to meet the financial needs of their families as much as they wished.

[29] In West Africa, *juju* refers to spiritual practices that use various objects and rituals to summon supernatural forces, which are believed to provide protection, facilitate healing, and influence the course of events.

> Some people sell the waste at a high price thinking that when you also sell it, you are likely to make money, but you end up not making any money and that makes the business slow. If he didn't sell it to you, though, you might not also get the little money you would get from it. *Rahman, 19-year-old from Tolon*

> Because we buy from the bush, you can go and buy from the bush but it would not yield anything, but others can buy and get a lot of profit from it. That's our challenge in e-waste and there are instances where you do not have the money to buy e-waste. *Ismail, 18-year-old from Karaga*

> My challenge is to get somebody to help with the work I do. Until then, I try to solve my problems in my own way by running around and doing menial e-waste work and if I am not able to do it, I just let it go. *Shakur, 20-year-old from Yendi*

> I am working and the money is not coming up as expected. That is my biggest challenge. *Mustafa, 21-year-old from Karaga*

> What is difficult it that sometimes when you need something, you cannot afford it or sometimes when the family needs something from you , you cannot provide it. *Shakur, 20-year-old from Yendi*

> Even with all the scrap work, I do not have a motorbike to go to work. That's my headache. *Ziblim, 18-year-old from Savelugu*

The e-waste industry comprises various levels and occupational tasks. Some of the men I interviewed worked independently, while others worked as apprentices. Some specialized in "going (to the) bush," that is, sourcing old electronics from homes and businesses throughout Accra. Others, however, bought goods from such people in hopes of making a profit after metal extraction, repair, or refurbishment. Some of the men reported that sometimes scrap collectors cheated them by paying them less for collected goods than their worth. Those with experience working as apprentices also expressed that their bosses also cheated them sometimes by exploiting their labor. According to Mahamadu, such exploitation was sometimes accomplished with the help of spiritual forces. During the focus group, others shared his view.

> Agbogbloshie is a hustle place. Some people are into black magic[30] and they use that to cheat some of us. Others also would like to sit for you to work for them. We bring the scraps for our bosses to buy and when they are going to buy, they cheat us. *Mahamadu, 28-year-old from Tamale*

Negative Stereotypes and Discrimination

Many of the men I spoke with described "going to the bush" as one of their main occupational tasks. Given the popular focus on burning e-waste in Agbogbloshie, risks associated with this activity are often overlooked in discussions of electronic waste work. The *bush* describes the urban landscape outside of Agbogbloshie from where old electronics are sourced. *Going to the bush* entailed roaming from community to community in search of used and non-working electronics to purchase from individuals and businesses. The men reported rummaging through discarded items in public spaces in search of usable discards. The *bush* also represented a site for the experiences of place-related, work-related, and ethnic-related stigma. Going to the *bush* required the men to interact more intimately with people outside of their cultural enclave. Through such interactions, the men were exposed to and made aware of the negative stereotypes that existed about some of their salient social identities and statuses. Extant stereotypes that the men reported as problematic concerned Dagomba (and other northern Ghanaian) culture, waste work and Islam. These negative stereotypes were often conflated with ideas about Agbogbloshie and Old Fadama residence, as these communities are ethnocultural enclaves. The men expressed being misunderstood by non-Northern Ghanaians and not being

[30] The term "black magic" describes the use of magic of supernatural forces for malevolent or selfish reasons.

seen as individuals. The men were pejoratively associated with unsophistication, provinciality, and black magic[31].

> People think that I just came here without the consent of my parents but is because of the challenges I faced back home, that is the reason why I am here working, but people have different thoughts […] People think that we are all the same and that we are fools *Hussein, 24-year-old from Karaga*

> Other Ghanaians think about people from Suung we are villagers but we do not care because we are all the same. *Hafiz, 24-year-old from Karaga (Suung)*

> Southerners think that we like black magic, are quarrelsome, and other things… that we are not together, but divided. *Abubakar, 25-year-old from Tamale*

The men also reported being looked down on by others and seen as "useless" and/or "bad" people. Accordingly, the negative living conditions of the Agbogbloshie area were interpreted as a reflection of the destructive and dysfunctional nature of its inhabitants. Thus, the men were viewed as destructive people. Many also commented on how the occupational tasks they carried out in *the bush* such as roaming and rummaging through trash were interpreted by others as signs of mental illness.

> Some people have positive thoughts and others have negative thoughts. When go out of this place, people see me to be a mad man walking because I pick e-waste from bins. *Lahari, 20-year-old from Savelugu*

> When we are working in town, they see us to be mad men. When they see someone with his fertilizer bag looking for metals and they do not even count him among men. Unless you follow him to see where he is, you cannot judge him. *Bukari, 24-year-old from Savelugu*

> People think that we are mad men because we go around picking stuff from dust bins around the city. It is because we are poor, that's why I am here struggling to make money. *Hussein, 24-year-old from Karaga*

[31] "Black magic" describes the use of magic of supernatural forces for malevolent or selfish reasons.

> People think that we are bad people, thieves, or mad people. These are people who do not know better. But someone who knows what you are doing knows that you are working hard to make money. *Mustafa, 21-year-old from Karaga*

> Some people come to the market to find out the way life is here. People also think that we are nobody and we have no value. People think that we are bad people due to how we work and the kind of work we do and also our attitude. *Tidiya, 18-year-old from Diyali*

> People think that we are bad people here, but it is because they are not here with us… that is why. Even if there are bad people here, they have their own place. *Shakur, 20-year-old from Yendi*

> We, those [who live] here, do not see Agbogbloshie to be a source of disturbance. We do not see life to be always be that tough here. But people outside (Agbogbloshie) think we will destroy this place so that everyone would have to go back home. They think we are bad people. *Baba, 25-year-old from Tamale*

> Some of them think that, we are not useful people because we go round collecting waste. Once, we were going to Kasoa and we used public transportation. Anyone who came to sit by us would get up because of the way we are dressed, but that is how we also get our daily bread. *Said, 21-year-old from Karaga*

> They think that we are thieves, they keep killing people in the bush especially for those who are walking with their small sacks carrying waste. They have killed a lot of Savelugu people. Because of the way things are, if you are in this town and you do have that lifestyle, our parents do not like us being here, they would have preferred you being home even though you do not have money. *Seidu, 21-year-old from Savelugu*

The men believed that the media played an important role in popularizing negative social representations of the Agbogbloshie area and the people who live there. According to the men, Agbogbloshie and Old Fadama were often labeled as violent crime-ridden neighborhoods that bred deviance. As 25-year-old Napare explained:

> Most of them think that we are working tirelessly here and sometimes when you listen to radio conversations, people say a lot of negative things about Agbogbloshie especially in relation to armed robbery and other social vices. Also, they like fighting, killing people and also that there floods everywhere. *Napare, 25-year-old from Tamale*

The men believed such representations tarnished their collective reputation and threatened their personal livelihoods and safety. They were stigmatized and treated poorly by people outside their neighborhood on the basis of these popular social narratives. Associations with theft and crime were particularly problematic and were deemed to increase the potential for bodily harm against them while in *the bush*. Being accused of theft is particularly dangerous in Ghana. Due to inefficient institutional structures in place to ensure public safety in Ghana, mob justice is common. A few men recounted stories featuring an accuser yelling "thief" in a public space and the accused being chased down and beaten by people in the neighborhood. According to them, some were seriously beaten and even killed while sourcing old electronics in other communities.

Life in the Agbogbloshie Area: Post-migration Protective Factors, Supports, Coping Strategies

This section presents the various protective factors, supports, and coping strategies the men employ to offset challenges and risks associated with living and working in the Agbogbloshie area. I discuss how the men make use of their home and host communities. Additionally, I present personal factors that may be protective such as the men's worldviews, the meaning they make of adverse conditions, and spirituality.

Forming Community in Agbogbloshie: Friends and Fictive Kin

Some of the men reported having some family members in Accra. However, they differed in terms of how close they were to Accra-based family members and in the level of support they could receive from them. Few men reported receiving significant and/or consistent support from their family in Accra. Help was mainly in the form of helping the men get situated after their initial arrival in Accra and occasionally lending small amounts of money to invest in their e-

waste businesses. Many like 24-year-old Khalid, from Yendi, explained that when they initially arrived in Accra, their relatives helped them settle initially, but could not sustain the support due to their own financial and social situations. Khalid explained how when he initially arrived in Accra, his brother did not have a place of his own to host him, but had access to a network of people who could provide support. Khalid was referred to a friend with space to spare in his room for a limited time.

> I came alone, but already I had a brother staying here. So immediately when I got to the station, he picked me up and introduced me to his friend who let me sleep in his room until I found another room. (*Khalid, 24-year-old from Yendi*)

The men generally had faith that upon arrival in Accra, they would encounter an empathetic community to help with integration. Mbo, a 22-year-old from Karaga, for instance, had no friends or family when he first migrated to Accra. Shortly after arriving, he explained his situation to community members in Agbogbloshie and was linked to temporary lodging. According to Mbo, his situation was not out of the ordinary.

> INTERVIEWER: How did you manage when you first arrived here?
> PARTICIPANT: When I came here the first time, I didn't know anyone.
> INTERVIEWER: Where did you sleep because you didn't know anyone?
> PARTICIPANT: As for a place to stay…once you get here, you will definitely get someone to help you get a place to stay. I just talked to people around.

Similarly, Issifu, a 20-year-old from Tolon explained how a newcomer might go about integration into the Agbogbloshie area. Members of the community may help the individual make initial contact with people from their hometown and nearby towns/villages from whom they can expect to receive some form of help such as monetary donations and/or connections to other needed resources.

> If you are a stranger here [in Accra] and I meet you first, I would take you along, so we greet people who are all from your hometown. When you go around greeting people, you are likely to get money from people as a result of greeting people. So that's what they manage with initially. We help you start your life here.

Similarly, 24-year-old Seidu from Savelugu explained how people from the same hometown help to link newcomers with economic opportunities:

> Some people, they just leave home, get a bus, and come to Accra directly. Then people here would show you the market to go in. You would definitely find someone from around your hometown who would help you get work. You start working with the person until you can also afford to do business on your own.

Without family present, the men formed new networks and community in Agbogbloshie, which included other young people with whom they had shared backgrounds and goals. Shared identities such as ethnic affiliation and hometown of origin provided safe pathways for the men to access necessary resources and information after their arrival in Accra. In Agbogbloshie, there were both formal and informal "hometown associations" that connected people with others from their hometowns. Some men, like 22-year-old Abdulai from Savelugu, knew people from their hometowns who relocated to Agbogbloshie and other parts of Accra prior to their relocation. He explained, "I have friends here. Those that I grew up with back in my hometown and those I have come to meet them here." Others, like 23-year-old Sadat, met people from their hometowns after relocating to Accra. "I don't have family here. It is just my 'brothers' that I live here in this market with. Some of them came from the same village as me to look for a livelihood." Through interacting with their new community, the men developed an expansive idea of who constituted family. In Sadat's case, his use of the word "brother" is not literal, but rather signifies a fictive kinship he has built with other men in his community. Similarly, 24-year-old Zabaya from Zilindo explained how he found his "aunt" in Accra:

> "Family? I saw one woman at Korle-Bu police station and we had a conversation. During the conversation she said she knew us and that her father is from my hometown. So, she is the only one I know here…I call her my aunt now. She lives around the Korle-Bu police station."

Many of the young men's narratives pointed to the significant roles of friends and fictive kin in supporting their migration to Accra. Social support from friends and fictive kin were commonly acknowledged as protective against many of the challenges the young men faced. Friends and fictive kin and friends served the purposes of providing the social, emotional, economic support, and informational support needed to support the men's arrival, settlement and adaptation to life in the Agbogbloshie area. Through these networks, the men learned of other short-term jobs to hold them over until they are able to raise enough money to invest in scraps/e-waste work or to supplement earnings from e-waste work. The men also reported borrowing money from friends when in need and collectively gathering money to help others in need.

> Since I moved here, life hasn't really changed much because I am still struggling here. It can reach about 2 weeks and I have no job to do, but it is only God who knows how I am able to feed within that period. In addition to my own efforts, my friends help to support me, by the grace of God […] I have a particular friend that I can always count on for financial assistance to cater for my wife and children. As for myself… I find a way to get something to eat. For me, I can decide not to eat from morning to evening before I take a meal for the day and go to bed. That is the will of God, that is what must happen. *John, 25-year-old from Wa*

John further described the importance of friendship in day-to-day life in Agbogbloshie by saying:

> I have friends here. Some of them are very good and supportive, but not all of them. I don't make friends with just anyone because there are friends and then there are *friends*. A true friend is one that is always supportive and loyal to you. I mean with such a person, when you have a problem, he feels your pain and will not rest until you get better, while you knew him from nowhere. That is the one we call a true friend.

Gunsi described how the men sometimes came together to raise funds to purchase medicine for ill individuals and to send people back to their hometowns if they were unable to be looked after in Accra:

> What we do is that, when someone falls seriously ill and has no money to go back to his hometown, those of us around will contribute money to take him home and also cater for his drugs. Also, if it is not very serious, he is our friend so we will take him to the hospital at Korle-Bu for treatment. *Gunsi, 18-year-old from Savelugu*

Community Meeting Spaces. Many of the pictures the men presented for the photovoice activity were of their friend groups and fictive kin in communal spaces. These meeting places included open-air spaces such as food joints; pubs; stores; and home compounds. Other photos displayed people in their communities who provided quotidian yet important services and those from whom they purchased goods. These community members were people with whom the men shared language and ethnic traditions. They helped to create a sense of "home away from home". One such place photographed by participants was a store and pub owned by Yumzaa, a 28-year-old man from Tamale. Yumzaa's establishment was an important fixture in the lives of many of the men in the photovoice group. Yumzaa initially came to Accra to do e-waste work eight years ago, and eventually earned enough money to change industries. He pulled his money together with friends to build, open, and stock a shop that sold drinks and other provisions. Yumzaa's wife also prepared traditional Dagomba dishes for sale at the establishment. The pub filled a gap in the local market by serving as a place for the e-waste workers and other laborers to relax and commune after work. Together with his business partners and wife, Yumzaa created a space that fostered a sense belonging and safety among young Dagomba men in the community.

Figure 20: My Store by Yumzaa

Yumzaa: We sell a lot of 'nice things' here, you understand? [Gesturing towards a man smoking]. We also sell drinks like Malta Guinness and others. When you have a hard day at work, you can come over here for a break and destress then get back to work. So, people come here to relax and then go back to work. Everyone enjoys being here because they get to do whatever they like. Usually around noon, a lot of the guys come around to have their break here. That is the reason I took this photo in order to show you how we relax and what we do during our leisure time.

Facilitator: Do you do this business alone or you have others you work with?

Yumzaa: We are many. I cannot mention everyone's name but we are a team. Each person has what he does in this business. For instance, someone is out here selling the drinks, while another is inside selling weed and others, you understand?

Facilitator: So, what was your aim in setting up this kind of establishment?

Yumzaa: I thought that whenever someone is stressed from work, they would have to travel a long distance just to find a place of refreshment. So, we decided to establish a place like this that will enable us around here to access these services in our own environment. You see even when you were coming here, we had to come and pick you up as far as the main road and that required a motorcycle? So, it is this kind of distance that we wanted to eliminate so we put this up to save ourselves from going far. This unfinished room that we are sitting in is supposed to be a mosque, but we still manage to pray here. We also created this place of worship so that customers who might be here during prayer times can worship.

Figure 20 cont'd

Sherif: This is the store here where we come to sit and enjoy ourselves. You see here, that is where 'our wife' [referring to Yumzaa's wife] sells food to us. This is where she prepares the most sumptuous meals for us to enjoy a decent meal. These over there are my friends and the motor cycle there is ours.

Baba: When we are exhausted from work, we come here to enjoy, relax and eat.

Sherif: These are all memorable moments that we wanted to capture on camera. That is why we took the photos.

Facilitator: How do you see this place that you come to relax?

Baba: It is a very nice place and important to us.

Sherif: It is very useful to us.

Baba: We even wished we had more of such places here.

Sherif: The importance is that, if you are stressed you can come here and stretch a little and relax without having any problems with anyone, but if you go somewhere that no one knows you, they can easily get fed up with having you around. This place is home for us and we sit and do whatever we like to do and then go to work or go home.

Guru: Even if there are two people who already have personal issues here, they can't really fight here because there is someone who is above them.

Guru's use of the phrase "there is someone who is above them" highlights the presence of respected peers and other senior community members. Such individuals served as stabilizing forces in the social lives of the men in Agbogbloshie. Agbogbloshie was a place where there was little familial supervision and guidance to regulate social behavior. Though many of the young men relocated to Agbogbloshie as a means to escape parental control and seek social independence, they still valued social hierarchy in maintaining order in the community. Though Yumzaa was still fairly young, his relative success and service to the community earned him status and respect among his peers. Many of the young men in the study looked up to him. Samir

and Sherif also photographed Yumzaa's pub/store and identified it as an important part of their social lives in Agbogbloshie.

Figure 21: Creating Memories with Friends by Samir

Samir: The reason I took this photo was that we were sitting together as a group and wanted to have fun so I brought the camera to take a shot of them to be kept for memories.

Facilitator: What were you doing here?

Samir: We were just relaxing, smoking weed and having drinks too. We were taking alcohol too that day. We came back from work very exhausted and we also needed

Figure 21 cont'd

appetite to eat well. It is the weed that gives us the appetite, but the alcohol helps induce sleep. After drinking you can go home and sleep well. For this photo… those are my younger brothers and when I saw them together, I was so happy so I decided to take a photo of them which made them happy too. Can't you see they were broadly smiling?

Facilitator: Are they also scrap workers?

Samir: Yes, there were scrap workers among them but not all of them do scraps. Some of them collect waste for a living. There is another guy who doesn't do scraps too, but sells alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks.

Yumzaa's business was a full-day operation. Sherif's photograph (Figure 22) shows Yumzaa's wife and her assistant preparing an evening meal for purchase. Many of the young men gathered at her food stand after work to purchase dinner and socialize with friends and community members. She was respected and viewed endearingly for her hard work and ability to cook the traditional foods they were accustomed to eating. Accordingly, Sherif refers to her as "our wife." Many of the men in the study were unmarried or lived far away from their partners, who would ordinarily be responsible for cooking dinner. They, therefore, reported having to purchase cooked food regularly.

Figure 22: "Our Wife" Cooking at Night by Sherif

Facilitator: What was happening here?

Yumzaa: That was at night and my wife was setting fire. [Laughing] I think the guys were disturbing her about heating their food for them because it had gone cold. It was "dumsor[32], and she prepared the food earlier which made it cold by the time it got dark. She heated the food for them and they enjoyed it that night.

Sherif: That is "our wife" cooking and she is mixing all the strong spices to make us a sumptuous meal. You see the fire there? That is what is used to cook the best food for us to enjoy.

Baba: This is what she does to bring out a good meal for us to eat and heat up our bodies and make our food hot. You can go to work after that or you can also relax. Here, it was almost bedtime so when your food got heated you could take it home to relax.

Facilitator: Her meals must be very delicious from the way you describe it.

Sherif: Yes, she serves us very well when we buy from her. She serves the food in large quantities and then she also adds all the nice ingredients to make it fantastic.

[32] Dumsor [dum sɔ] is a term used to describe the consistent unreliable and unpredictable electric power in Ghana. Power outages, or blackouts, are prevalent due to shortages in the power supply. The term is derived from two Akan words, "off" (dum) and "on" (sɔ). a persistent, irregular, and unpredictable electric power outage.

Figure 22 cont'd

Baba: She also understands how we want the food because we tell her to prepare it the way we want it. She does it so well and so we enjoy it.

Apart from Yumzaa's business, the men photographed other significant social spaces within the Agbogbloshie area. Amandi, Yakub, and Samir photographed informal hangouts and meetings, which provided problem-solving support and camaraderie. Their pictures (Figures 23-25) highlighted the significant role of women in the community.

Figure 23: Night Meetings by Amandi

Amandi: It was at night and we were at one of our meeting places so I decided to take a photo of us to show that we are supportive of each other as we are living here. Some people think when you come to live here, you become a bad person so we have these meetings to help each other […] Here, we meet as "boys-boys[33]". After a hard day's

[33] "Boys-boys" is a colloquial term that refers to young men and implies a sense of camaraderie or brotherhood among the group.

Figure 23 cont'd

work, we have particular spots where we gather. We discuss supporting one another when someone is in need and we also talk about life. We meet with ladies too, so it is not just about the boys. When one of us is not feeling well or if someone has a naming ceremony, you know we have no parents here, so we contribute to support one another. That was one of the meetings we were having.

As Amandi mentioned, women played a significant role in the social lives of the young men. Yakub's photograph (Figure 21) displays some of the young women in their community.

Figure 24: The Ladies by Yakub

Figure 24 cont'd

Yakub: You know where there are men, there must be ladies too. They also have needs just like we do, so we sit with them at night to discuss. They are our sisters and we help each other to meet our needs. For instance, if you have dirty clothes, you can give them to one of them to wash for you.

Figure 25: The Ladies We Live with by Samir

Samir: This is where we sit at night. That is our group and those are our ladies with whom we live. When someone has a problem, we all discuss it to find a solution. It could be money issues or anything. We help one another. For instance, if someone is getting married, we can support the person so that they can go home to do it.

Community Events. Dagbani is not widely spoken outside of Northern Ghana; thus, the men had limited access to media and entertainment in their native language after migrating to

Accra. Given the large Dagomba diaspora, Agbogbloshie area served as an important fan base for notable Dagomba artists. When in Accra, these artists often performed in the Agbogbloshie area and toured the community to greet and thank fans for their support. Such occurrences fostered a sense of ethnic pride. The men appreciated the recognition and were reminded that despite popular social narratives to the contrary, they constituted a valued and well-respected diasporic group that provided great value to their home communities. Sumani and Guru shared pictures of a day when a notable northern music and theater troupe performed in the area. Figures 26 and 27 depict the artists touring the community after their performance before returning to northern Ghana.

Figure 26: Actors in Agbogbloshie by Sumani

Figure 27: Actors in Agbogbloshie II by Guru

Guru: For this one…we had a music show one Saturday and the performers came around to visit us in the market the following day. They were passing by when one of us called them and they came to say hi to us. They were northern artists who came to Agbogbloshie to have a show. They were very excited to know that they had fans here and we wanted to say hi to them. They encouraged us to work hard and support each other.

Sumani: That day we were very excited too. It had been 5 years since I set my eyes on this artist, and so I was eager to take a photo with him, which I did. [Figure 26]

Guru: This one is who we call Anokye 'Zimboo'. I was so happy and seriously taking the photos that was why I did not appear in it. The show was held at the Konkomba market. [Figure 27)

Facilitator: What kind of show exactly was it?

Guru: It was a drama show and they also had music performances.

Facilitator: Do they often come here to organize these kinds of shows?

Guru: They do not usually come here so when they come around the whole market is excited to receive them. When they came, we warmly received them they decided to come round and thank us for our support. There are other groups of artists that come here more often. I mean the northern artistes but the southern artistes don't come here.

Communal Living. The importance of community was also apparent in the men's home lives and how living spaces were configured. Many of the men were accustomed to living with both nuclear and extended family members with whom they shared land. Similarly, in Accra, the men shared yards -or compounds- with others. The men spent a significant amount of their spare time with these neighbors as one would with family members in their hometown. The camaraderie they shared acted as a buffer against the harsh realities of life in Accra, offering a sense of belonging and shared understanding. Ayariga, Baba, and Sumani took pictures displaying aspects of home life and communal living in Agbogbloshie. Ayariga and Baba lived in the same compound.

Figure 28: Our Compound House by Ayariga

Figure 28 cont'd

Ayariga: This is our house compound. These were guys who were back from work and were relaxing at home.

Baba: Can you see our pets with us? That is what we use to entertain ourselves.

Ayariga: That is my elder brother and his pet.

Baba: We live with them here and they are our companions. I sleep in the same room with the dog. He is my prince. The dog is called "bulldog." We even celebrated his naming ceremony here. The lady in the photo sells porridge. She brought us some porridge so I told her to join us in the photo.

Facilitator: What is the refrigerator doing outside there?

Baba: We keep goods in it. When we buy goods, we keep them in it and dismantle them the following day. That is why we have fixed a lock on it to secure the goods.

Figure 29: Relaxing with Roommates by Baba

Figure 29 cont'd

Baba: Here is where we live as he said, when we are exhausted from work, after taking our bath that is our MP3 which we use to listen to music while we eat and drink. You see these are some of the guys. We live together. You can see we are making calls to our mothers and ladies as well. […] We come here to relax after work. Can't you see our cigarettes there? This person [man in white] deals in motorcycle parts. Every day, he roams around the scraps area and if he sees any old motorcycle part, he buys it to stock his shop. This one too [man in red shirt] just came from work and came here to eat. He sells clothes.

Facilitator: Are they your friends?

Baba: They are my friends and we live together. This guy and I have our rooms next to each other so when he calls me from his room, I can hear him. This is still our base so I took a shot of it because my friends were all around.

Figure 30: Ɔware in the Compound by Sumani

Sumani: After eating, we played *ɔware*. We sometimes play to forget about the day and relieve our minds. Ɔ*ware* also makes your mind sharp. I swear! We don't have the wood[en] one here, so we use the aluminium one.

Sumani also shared a snippet of his home life. Figure 30 shows a group of his friends in his compound engaging in a common pastime, *ɔware,* one weekend. *Ɔware* is a traditional West African game in the mancala family usually played with a wooden board containing two rows of six pits. Players take turns placing pebbles, marbles, or seeds in the pits, aiming to capture more pieces than their opponent through strategic means. The game also hones critical thinking and mathematical skills. *Ɔware* is played in several African and Caribbean countries, and referred to by various names including *ayo* (in Nigeria), *awale* (in Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso), and *warri* (in the Caribbean). Despite being a two-player game, it encouraged rich social interactions from spectators who humorously critiqued poor moves and discussed the moves they would have made were they participating. Also notable, as Sumani points out, Ghanaian *ɔware* boards are typically made of wood. However, the neighborhood has an abundance of recycled aluminum and numerous metalsmiths, making it common to find household items and other objects crafted from aluminum for sale.

Relationship with Hometown Community: Returning Home and Receiving Social Support

While living and working in the Agbogbloshie area, the men kept close ties to their home communities. They strove to uphold cultural and religious customs and ideals as best as they could and to live in ways that would make senior members of their home communities proud- or at least not "spoil their family name." They stressed the importance of being in but not *of* Agbogbloshie/Accra. In describing what becoming *of Accra* might looked like, Sayibu described an old dear friend whose life he hoped not to emulate. According to him, his friend spent some years in electronic and other waste work before pursuing "fast money" and being jailed for some years. Sayibu advised his friend repeatedly about the dangers of veering from the moral code of

their traditional upbringing before ultimately deciding to distance himself. According to Sayibu, his friend had embraced the "local lifestyle" marked by copious freedom absent of order.

> "He will just be there until he starts to grow old, all those things are a worry to us, but he will not be bothered. He will just be there. He cannot even go home anymore because he knows if he goes home, his younger brothers will be better than him. We also think of that a lot and it scares us. That is why I said my father says I should come home in 2 years' time because you can let the lifestyle here *enter your blood* such that you will also not be able to go back to your hometown. I swear! That is what the problem is." *Sayibu, 21-year-old from Gushegu*

By *enter your blood*, Sayibu means that one can get so used to the lifestyle in Agbogbloshie that it becomes an integral part of who they are. He, like others, stressed the importance of not staying away from home too long. Returning home helped the men feel grounded. There was great variation in how often the men were actually able to visit their hometowns. Typical responses to how often the men visited their hometowns included: *a few times a year, yearly, every two years, once every two years, twice or thrice every two years*. Less common, however, one participant reported not having been back to his hometown for four years due to lack of funds. The amount of time they stay when they return home also varied greatly. One man reported staying as long as 6 months on one trip to their hometown and about a year on another trip to their hometown.

The men often contributed towards and tried to return to their hometowns for major family events. Sadat and John, described returning to their hometowns for major events such as harvest season, outdoorings[34], weddings, and funerals and Ramadan (fasting period).

INTERVIEWER: How often do you go to your hometown now?

[34] An outdooring is a traditional ceremony for infants in which they are formally presented to the community and the gods (Christian, Muslim, and/or traditional) for the first time. Infants are also formally given a name at this ceremony.

> PARTICIPANT: Ooii! For that I cannot count! Someone's wife can give birth like a brother of mine had a baby and I went home for the outdooring. Also, I go for funerals and weddings in my hometown. *Sadat, 23-year-old from Tamale (Kukuoo)*

> I can't even count the number of times I have gone home. My friends back home have been doing naming ceremonies at home, so I have gone home over 12 times. I have also gone home for my own reasons on several occasions when my family needs me to be present for some reasons. I even need to go home next week because my grandfather passed on. My younger sister too attends school at Yendi Senior high school, and she says they are writing exams, so I want her to finish her exams then we will go to Wa together. *John, 25-year-old from Wa*

Home communities served as important sources of support. The men believed that their families' prayers provided protection and increased favor from Allah. Family members also provided encouragement to the men during challenging times. Returning home was a safety net. Some participants expressed knowing that they could return to their hometowns whenever they faced difficulty in Accra. Some returned in response to not finding work or not being physically able to work due to illness or injury. As Baba (25-year-old man from Tamale) reported "I normally go on a yearly bases or maybe due to accidents."

Returning was not easy for everyone. Aside from the obvious cost barriers, visiting home was fraught tension between the need to stay in Accra to make money and the desire to engage in family and community life. The men felt unable to return home without evidence of progress. They simultaneously feared "getting stuck" in Accra endlessly "chasing" (but never "catching") money. When returning home, the men felt immense pressure to present themselves as successful. Even before making the decision to visit their hometowns, the men often ensured that they had enough money to tend to family issues for which they took responsibility. Khalid elaborated on the he deemed it important to go home whenever possible to maintain family connections, but how his financial situation played a large role in his ability to travel to and/or stay in his hometown:

> PARTICIPANT: Anytime something better happens or they need me at home, I would have to go because I am under control. When I go, I stay with them for a while and let them know I still have them in mind.
> INTERVIEWER: So, when you get back, approximately how long do you stay?
> PARTICIPANT: I only stay if I make better money because when I go home, I have a whole lot of problems to solve in the family...my small brother's school fees, the farming business, and other things. *Khalid, 24-year-old from Yendi*

The support the men received from home and the extent to which they were welcomed upon return varied due to premigration social dynamics as well as the conditions under which the men left their hometowns. Their families' perceptions of their migration and work also influenced the social support the young men received. Veneration of elders is an important part of Dagomba culture. Thus, it is customary for young adults to seek counsel from elders in the family before big life decisions such as relocating to another part of the country. Some of the men interviewed migrated without the approval of their parents and extended families. In Karim and Haruna's cases, they and their families disagreed about their migration and decision to do e-waste work.

> At home, they do not understand why we are even working here. They would rather tell you to stop the work and come home. But I will remain here. *Karim, 21-year-old from Tamale (Datooyili)*

> "My family in Suung thinks that the work I am doing is not good for me but I think it is good for me" *Haruna, 24-year-old from Karaga (Suung)*

To avoid being discouraged from migrating, some of the men left home without informing senior family members.

> I came on my own. I did not inform anyone that I was leaving, not even my mother. I got here before they found out that I had left…I did not tell my mother because I did not want her to discourage me from going. *Sadat, 23-year-old from Tamale (Kukuoo)*

> I traveled alone when I was coming here at first…it was just my elder brother who was aware of it but we agreed that after I had left, he would inform my grandmother. He was the one that took me to the bus station. *Abdulai, 22-year-old from Savelugu*

Leaving home without the approval or knowledge of family elders complicated the men's access to social support from home. Contrarily, some families supported the young men's decisions to move to Accra for work. Mpanko, a 25-year-old man from Diyali, for instance, decided migrated to Accra the support of his family under the condition that he return to his hometown by 2020.

> PARTICIPANT: I would love to return home hopefully by 2020.
> INTERVIEWER: So have you set a target to meet by 2020 or you will return home in that year no matter what happens?
> PARTICIPANT: Whichever that happens will be fine whether I get enough money or I don't. My parents want me to come home by 2020 so I will leave when the time comes.
> *Mpanko, 25-year-old from Diyali*

Given the limited opportunities available in Northern Ghana, migration served as a rite of passage for many Northern youth. The Agbogbloshie area was a place to find work and generate the resources needed to make progress on important markers of adulthood status. Such progression gained the men respect and increased their social status within their families and home communities. As evidenced by the men's narratives and images, the Agbogbloshie area introduced several opportunities and challenges that textured the journey to valued adulthood. Through the creation of strong social networks and home community ties, the men were able to navigate life in Accra.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion- Re-imagining the Journey to Adulthood Integrating African Perspectives

Sub-Saharan Africa, with its rapidly growing youth population, is becoming an increasingly important context for studying youth development. Recent estimates indicate that 70% of sub-Saharan Africa's population is under the age of 30 (Yingi, 2023; ILO, 2020). This demographic shift is accompanied by rapid urbanization, with projections suggesting that 55% of Africa's population will live in cities by 2050 (Cleland & Machiyama, 2017; Yingi, 2023). Despite the significance of this demographic trend for understanding normative human development, there remains limited knowledge of the psychosocial trajectories of young and emerging adults in Africa. Furthermore, in spite of growing inequality within and between countries (Cooke et al., 2016), much is still unknown about the psychosocial dimensions of inequality in the Global South. Psychological research is largely based on Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) societies, which do not offer a universal framework for understanding human behavior (Henrich, 2020; Henrich et al., 2010a; Henrich, et al., 2010b). This study provides an opportunity to rethink the key elements valued adulthood, personally and socially, and to explore how these processes manifest in cultural context.

This study contributes to the current body of knowledge on young adulthood in urban West Africa amidst rapid urbanization, technological advancement, and environmental degradation. By extending existing research on young adulthood in Ghana, this study emphasizes the complex interactions between cultural norms, economic factors, and individual perceptions of what it means to be an adult. Through this study, we gain insight into the motivations of young men—what drives them to migrate and engage in e-waste work—and how these engagements influence their life trajectories.

Psychosocial Trajectories and Ecological Contexts

Interlinked social, cultural, economic, and political shifts worldwide have led to changes in how life course stages are configured. Young men in Agbogbloshie, like those globally, are shaped by and shape their proximal influences, such as family, friends, and community members, as well as the distal influences, including political, historical, and social contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Spencer et al., 1997). Within these ecological contexts are inequalities at both the macrosystemic and microsystemic levels that affect their opportunity structures. As the fastest-growing waste stream globally, the creation, movement, and management of e-waste have significant implications for social stratification. In Ghana, communities composed primarily of historically marginalized social and ethnic groups bear the brunt of the environmental costs of e-waste processing (Westra & Lawson, 2001; Bullard, 1990).

This case study offers insights into how young Dagomba men navigate their psychosocial developmental tasks and strive to progress through life stages. Identity formation is a key psychosocial task of young adulthood. Meaning-making—interpreting discourses, societal norms, and social expectations related to love, work, and family—plays a central role in this process (Spencer, 2006). The relationships between youth and the interconnected ecological contexts in which they are embedded are iterative; young people construct new understandings of what constitutes valued adulthood as they interpret and negotiate societal expectations.

Psychosocial Moratorium and Migration and Hustling as Rites of Passage

Researchers have suggested a lengthening of the period between childhood and adulthood, as evidenced by later marriage and longer schooling. Emerging adulthood is

described as a liminal space, where individuals are caught between childhood and adulthood, unsure of where they truly belong. However, the men in this study do not express ambiguity around whether they are children or adults, like the western literature suggests. For them, this period does not appear to be an extension of adolescence, but rather the beginning of adulthood.

Arnett's concept of emerging adulthood builds on the idea of the psychosocial moratorium as essential in the transition from adolescence to adulthood. The psychosocial moratorium (PM) represents a critical phase in an individual's identity development. **In** Erikson theorizing about adolescence, it is envisioned as a period when individuals suspend adult roles and responsibilities and try on various identities before making long-term decisions about who they are and want to be. In modern industrial societies, this period is believed to extend into post-adolescent years.

As Erikson theorized, society grants young people relative permissiveness- time and space to experiment with different roles, values, and beliefs, during this time of self-exploration. The time is characterized by a sense of "playfulness" "frivolousness". In this sense, the young Ghanaian adults experience *somewhat* of a psychosocial moratorium. For the young Dagomba men in this study, identity exploration occurs not in isolation from adult responsibilities, but in preparation for them. Unlike Western descriptions of this phase, where individuals are free to explore different identities without the pressure of adult commitments, these men experience a simultaneous sense of urgency and future-orientation.

Young Dagomba men are granted *relative* permissiveness during this period. Participants discussed the enriching aspects of travelling to Accra, particularly that it broadened their worldview, exposed them to different ways of life, and fostered independence. They highlighted how being away from their families and hometown communities made them feel freer and

facilitated personal growth and self-discovery. For those with more checkered pasts, Agbogbloshie provided opportunities for redemption and chances to reshape the future. These young men are not, however, afforded a "time-out" from adult life, as characterized by Erikson (1968) and Western literature on emerging adulthood. They are expected to "be serious," focused and to begin making meaningful contributions to family resources, lineages, and legacies. There is always the looming pressure of adult commitments if even from afar (e.g., nagging family members back home). Most men in the study reported personal feelings of obligation and societal expectations to remit money, care for younger siblings, parents, and other family members. This sense of responsibility and meaning attached to one's familial role is not reflected in Western accounts of emerging adulthood. Lo-oh (2019b) describes this domain of adulthood as "family-related capacities" and notes its importance. In this study, these were themed "assuming leadership roles in families" and "extending family legacy materially and biologically by getting married and having children."

Studies of emerging adulthood in West Africa (e.g., Mahama, et al., 2018; Obidoa et al., 2018) found that many believed they reached biological and chronological markers of adulthood, however, were not yet financially independent nor felt able to care for a family, though they believed this criterion to be a key marker of adulthood. University student samples hinder our ability to understand psychosocial phenomena experienced by socially and culturally diverse individuals (Kirmayer et al., 2018); Heinrich et al., 2010a). In Ghana, students from poor and rural school districts have limited access to quality education (Atuahene & Owusu-Ansah, 2013). Furthermore, it is possible that given their privilege, they may not be tasked with or expected to contribute financially to their families yet. However, their heightened awareness of this criterion contrasts with Western descriptions of this life stage. This tension between freedom and

responsibility reflects the realities of young adulthood in the Global South, where identity exploration is sometimes framed by necessity and culture rather than idealized choice.

In Western literature on the psychosocial moratorium of adolescence and emerging adulthood, travelling and engaging in short-term work are seen as experiences to get out of the way before the constraints of work and relationships. However, in this case study, the men envisioned these short-term commitments as feeding into long-term goals of material stability, to enable marriage and provide security for oneself and family members. The men recognized domestic travel and hustling as precursors to successfully fulfilling roles and responsibilities associated with adulthood. To them, early adulthood is the foundation upon which the rest of one's life is built.

Despite engaging in what might be seen as precarious, anchorless, or futureless work, these young men maintain a deep orientation toward the future. The hustle is not seen as a frivolous or aimless pursuit, but rather as a necessary step toward achieving long-term goals. As they engage in e-waste work and other forms of temporary labor, they hold onto the belief that these sacrifices will eventually lead to greater material security in the future. They are able to dream, to envision a life of more abundance, while holding the realities of now. This future-oriented mindset is central to their psychosocial development and pursuit of valued adulthood.

In many traditional African communities, biological and sociocultural factors jointly mark the transition from adolescence to adulthood. This transition is typically marked through rituals and practices such as initiations ceremonies, puberty rites, rites of passage, alterations in clothing styles, and circumcision (Tchombe & Lo-oh, 2012). Though these formal ceremonies and rituals are less visible, young people are still socialized to seek the respect and recognition from elders, as well as opportunities to prove their manhood, that these rituals once provided.

Migration and hustling are necessary responses to limited opportunities and, as such, recognized as inevitable parts of modern life for marginalized youth. Circular migration, where individuals temporarily move from rural or peri-urban areas to urban centers, has long been a strategy for coping with economic instability throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Consequently, urban centers, such as Accra, have become important developmental contexts for youth. Over time, migration and hustling have come to symbolize rites of passage into adulthood with their own tests and lessons and opportunities to demonstrate independence, maturity, and responsibleness.

In Agbogbloshie, hustling is woven into every aspect of life, and experienced through all the senses. It's a visual experience—wheelbarrows, baskets balanced on heads, traffic jams, pedestrians, motorcyclists, traders, drivers, and the familiar "man dey hustle" bumper stickers. It's olfactory—the sharp scent of burning plastic and smoke or the pungent tangy aroma of onion trucks on a hot, sunny day. It's sonic—the rhythmic sound of hammers striking metal, the calls of street hawkers, and the background music. During the time of data collection, a song called "Hustle" was released by 20-year old award-winning Ghanaian recording artist Ebony Reigns mononymously known as Ebony. Ebony brought a fresh sound that drew on influences from various parts of Africa (e.g., her song, "Kupe" was inspired by Ivorian *coupé-décalé* music) and the diaspora, (e.g., Jamaican dancehall music). To Ghanaian audiences, her dreadlocked hair and general Afrocentric aesthetic represented a particular brand of symbolic African authenticity. She also represented youth counter-culture as evidenced by her nickname "Original 90s Bad Gyal." In addition to making music about common pop culture themes (e.g., partying, love), Ebony's music highlighted social issues relatable to Ghanaian youth such as domestic abuse and youth unemployment. In 2018, Ebony tragically passed away in a car accident. "After Ebony's death,

her image was lionized, sparking campaigns to improve road safety and reduce fatalities, as well as fueling public discourse on the societal issues she covered in her music. Ebony's personal history was just one generation removed from stories of migration and hustling, like those in Agbogbloshie, as she was raised in the Accra metropolitan area with roots in the Brong Ahafo region. Her song “Hustle” symbolized many of the circumstances that drew the young people to places like Agbogbloshie. As one would imagine, its popularity skyrocketed posthumously. The music video for “Hustle” was filmed in a Jamestown market minutes-drive away from the scrapyard. Many a day, one could hear this tune on the local radio in Agbogbloshie:

> [Verse 1]
> I’ve been hustling in the morning,
> In the afternoon and in the evening
> *Bɛsin kɔhwe sika ɛnni fie* (Come on, go and look, there is no money in [my family] home)
> ɛnti me hwehwe diɛ me ne abusua bɛ di (So I’m searching for what my family and I will eat/spend)
> Neɛma me tɔn yi, menhu ano (The things I sell, I don't see the profits.)
> Sika me pɛ yi, ɛmma da oo (The money I desire, it never comes)
>
> [Chorus]
> ɛnti mondi me oo mudi me dwa (So come buy my goods)
> Obi ɛmba di me oo ondi me dwa (Somebody come buy my goods)
> Mese mondi me oo oo mudi me dwa (I said you all come buy my goods)
> Neɛma me tɔn yi, men hu ano (The things I sell, I don't see the profits)

In her “dark, velvety voice” Ebony explained that wealth or financial security are not accessible through traditional means, such as inheritance or family wealth, pushing youth to seek alternatives. The themes of hustle, frustration, and the pursuit of financial stability resonated deeply with Ghanaian youth working in low-wage jobs and in informal economies. The song “Hustle” speaks of striving for a better life despite personal and systemic barriers, as well as the pressure to contribute meaningfully to family. The repetitive melody of "morning," "afternoon," and "evening" mirrored the relentless nature of the work. Yet, despite working around the clock, the money they desire seems perpetually out of reach. Ebony concludes in a powerful refrain

imploring customers to "come buy [her] goods," symbolizing the hope, resilience and tenacity of youth who forge forward in pursuit of their goals, despite disillusionment.

Coping with Challenges in Agbogbloshie: An Overview of Risks, Coping Strategies, and the Role of Social Networks and Community Support

Life in the Agbogbloshie area presented numerous post-migration developmental risks and stressors for the men who settled there. Housing insecurity was a significant stressor, with many men lacking access to safe and affordable housing, sometimes leading to overcrowding. Political violence further complicated their living conditions, as powerful individuals sometimes uprooted others from their homes due to their political affiliations. In Agbogbloshie, there was limited access to clean water and sanitation facilities, which rendered the men vulnerable to health problems like malaria due to stagnant water and poor waste management. The informal nature of the settlement exacerbates these issues. Work-related health problems, such as body aches, cuts, bruises, and sun overexposure, are also prevalent. Other work-related stressors and daily hassles were reported. Electronic waste work was inconsistent and seldom provided a steady income. The men struggled to make ends meet and sometimes faced exploitation from their bosses and other scrap workers. On top of these challenges, young men experienced stigmatization based on their ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and the nature of their work. Negative stereotypes significantly impacted their lives by subjecting them to discrimination and even physical danger. They were often perceived as "mad men," "thieves," or "bad people". These stereotypes led to social exclusion, as people avoided interacting with them or treated them poorly (e.g., refusing to sit near them on public transportation). This stigmatization also posed safety risks. The label of "thieves" increased their vulnerability to mob justice and possible death. Furthermore, the men believed these stereotypes tarnished their collective reputation and

threatened their livelihoods. The media's negative portrayal of Agbogbloshie as a crime-ridden and violent area amplifies these biases, making it harder for the men to be seen as hardworking individuals striving to improve their lives. This stigmatization not only creates barriers to social and economic opportunities outside their community, but also has implications for their developing self-concepts.

Coping strategies, protective factors, and supports are essential in offsetting the challenges and risks associated with difficult environments like Agbogbloshie. Community plays an important role for migrants who often face the challenge of reconstituting social support systems after leaving their hometowns (Van Dyk & Nefale, 2005). The men's narratives highlighted the importance of social networks- both in their hometowns and in Accra- in helping them navigate the challenges of urban life. Upon arrival, many men depended on empathetic community members, friends, and fictive kin for temporary lodging, financial assistance, and connections to economic opportunities. They formed these fictive kinship bonds to foster a sense of family and mutual support in the absence of biological relatives. Participants often spoke of caring for one another and having communal responsibility for "their brothers." The social networks they formed acted as buffers against the harsh realities of urban life, offering emotional, financial, and practical support.

Living in a cultural enclave was protective and helped to mitigate acculturative stress. Ethnic identity is vital for the psychological well-being of individuals, especially in multicultural societies (Adams et al., 2016). Adams et al. (2016) found that ethnic identity is positively associated with life satisfaction and negatively correlated with poor mental health. In Agbogbloshie, ethnic identity reinforced a sense of belonging through cultural ties and shared experiences. Living in a cultural enclave helped the men maintain valid meaning systems.

Community events, such as outdoorings and local performances by Northern artists, further reinforced ethnic pride. The living arrangements in Agbogbloshie (e.g., shared compounds) often resembled those in their hometowns. Community gathering spaces were also important for the men's emotional and social well-being. Establishments like Yumza's store and pub offered space for relaxation, camaraderie, and cultural connection. Such spaces allowed the men to unwind after work, enjoy traditional meals, and engage in communal leisure activities (e.g., smoking, drinking, playing games like *ɔware*).

Despite many challenges, the men's connections with fellow members of their ethnic group in Agbogbloshie helped them preserve their cultural identities as they transitioned into adulthood. The men also emphasized the importance of maintaining ties with their hometown communities. Many of them returned home periodically for major family events, religious observances, or as a safety net during challenging times. Families provided emotional support, prayers, and encouragement. However, returning home was often fraught with tension, as the men felt pressure to demonstrate progress and success.

Lo-oh (2019a) suggests that in African societies, young adults tend to live with their parents longer and rely more on them for emotional support than is typically described in Western accounts of emerging adulthood. Similarly, Mahama, Tackie-Ofosu, and Nyarko (2018) found that Ghanaian youth often maintain stronger ties with their parents due to cultural traditions and economic factors, which contrasts with Western norms of independence. Leaving home is often seen as an important marker of adulthood, but for many young men in Ghana, it does not necessarily imply permanent departure. They do not leave with the expectation that they cannot return home or that they are too old to do so. Many of them grew up in multi-generational family homes, where the concept of living at home as an adult is not uncommon.

Interconnectedness and Spirit: A Comparison of African and Western Perspectives on Personhood and Psychology

African cultures emphasize principles of interdependence, collaboration, and shared responsibility (van Dyk & Nefale, 2005). An example often cited is the concept of *ubuntu*, which encapsulates these principles. *Ubuntu* derives from a Zulu (South African) proverb *"Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu,"* which translates to "A person is a person through other people," or succinctly put, "I am because we are." This philosophy differs from Western perspectives, which often prioritize individualism, self-reliance, and personal success- in other words, "We are because I am" (Kamwangamalu, 1999; Kirmayer et al., 2018; van der Walt, 1997).

In contrast to the collectivistic approach, Western conceptions of personhood emphasize the individual, presuming that self-narration is univocal, and that personhood is defined primarily by personal history and accomplishments. This perspective is referred to as the egocentric self in Kirmayer's (2007) framework of cultural configurations of the self. In this view, the locus of control resides within the individual, rather than with (or shared with) the community. Symbolic meanings of distress emanate from personal history and an individual's unique perspective of the world (Kirmayer, 2007). In more collectivistic cultures, however, symbolic meanings of distress emanate from ruptures in interpersonal relationships and community connection (2007).

The collectivistic aspects of *ubuntu* are commonly cited. However, what is less discussed are the spiritual and cosmological dimensions of the concept. Nobles's (2015) analysis of *ubuntu* brings to light how in traditional African psychological systems, what lies at the core of personhood—and, more fundamentally, at the core of being—is spirit. Nobles explains that the suffix "*ntu*" represents a universal cosmic energy, force, or spirit, that connects all things. He describes this force as a "modal point at which being assumes concrete form." In this sense,

everything is an expression of spirit, and manifests in four categories: muntu (humans -both alive and dead- along with other spiritual beings); hantu (place and/or time); kintu (things or objects- including non-living things and aspects of nature such as plants, animals, and water bodies); and kuntu (modes or states of being- including cognition, emotions, beauty, joy, love, and other emotions) (Nobles, 2015; Nobles et al., 2016).

Dr. Thomas Adeoye Lambo, often credited as the first European-trained Nigerian psychiatrist, similarly highlighted the centrality of spirituality in African psychology and epistemology. He is cited as saying:

> "Reality in the western world has gone the way of attempting to master things: reality for the African traditional culture is found in the region of the soul- not in the mastery of self or outer things, but in the acceptance of a life of acquiescence with beings and essences on a spiritual scale. In this fashion only is traditional culture mystic. Not because of any prelogical function of the mind but merely because the African is the possessor of a type of knowledge that teaches that reality consists in the relation not of men with things, but of men with other men and all men with spirits." (Fernando, 2002)

Western and African psychological systems are grounded in distinct philosophical foundations. As noted, the objectivity and rationality inherent in the logical positivist tradition of Western psychology are not representative of African epistemology. Western perspectives view objectivity and subjectivity (and, by extension, matter and spirituality) as irreconcilable opposites. However, in African conceptions of meaningful reality, both material and spiritual elements are integrated and seen as interconnected. This distinction complicates the assumption that Western conceptions of psychological phenomena are universally applicable.

Implications for Policy and Practice

This case study has important implications for both practice and policy. Firstly, it underscores the urgent need to address widespread unemployment and environmental degradation—issues raised by the #FixTheCountry movement, a recent Ghanaian youth-led, non-partisan, non-political civic initiative. The movement served as a catalyst for raising national awareness of social and political issues, initially emerging on social media (i.e., Twitter). Through online activism, it successfully mobilized youth for collective action, resulting in both online and offline protests demanding better governance and significant societal reforms (Fixthecountry, 2025; Nartey & Yu, 2023).

A crucial aspect of addressing the challenges faced by communities like Agbogbloshie is the implementation of effective water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) policies. Focusing on improving these services can enhance living conditions and reduce health hazards, which pose significant developmental risks for youth living and working in impoverished areas. Additionally, as e-waste is the fastest-growing waste stream globally, stricter regulations for imported e-waste, along with essential infrastructural and technical resources to safely process used electronics, are needed.

Campaigns aimed at reducing stigmatization based on ethnicity, religion, and economic status are needed to foster inclusivity and social cohesion. Finally, targeted interventions are necessary to provide supportive environments and opportunities for skill development, helping youth navigate the complexities of economic instability and urban life, and ultimately build meaningful, fulfilling adult lives.

Limitations

This study has limitations, particularly regarding the sample selection and data analysis. Participants in the study were purposively selected through snowball sampling (also known as chain referral sampling). Snowball sampling is a recruitment technique that leverages participants' social networks to identify additional participants. While this method is particularly useful when working with hard-to-reach, marginalized populations that may be suspicious of outsiders, it is not generalizable other populations and may not capture the full diversity of perspectives within the studied population (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Browne, 2005; Cohen & Arieli, 2011; Handcock & Gile, 2011). Regarding the data analysis process, inter-reliability procedures were not used. Although the need and value of such processes are debated in qualitative research, incorporating an inter-rater protocol in this study could have strengthened the analysis and ensured more consistent findings.

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the psychosocial developmental trajectories of young Dagomba men engaged in e-waste work in Agbogbloshie (Accra, Ghana). By examining their lived experiences using ecological systems theories and African perspectives, this study extends current knowledge on the psychosocial developmental pathways of young men in Ghana. Ethnographic and participatory action research methods allowed for a rich account of life in Agbogbloshie for young Dagomba migrants. The use of photovoice, in particular, offered the men opportunities for individual and collective representation. Their photos served as counter-narratives to popular pejorative framings of the scrapyard as a “digital graveyard” associated with death, hell, apocalypse, and crimes. Rather, the local residents and workers occupied a

"digital afterworld," where end-of-life electronics considered waste in other parts of the world are transformed into valuable resources (i.e., scrap metals) and given the chance to live on. Several key findings emerged:

1. The men conceptualized their current life stage as a critical time for establishing independence, assuming family leadership roles, and preparing for marriage and children. However, their pursuit of independence was not characterized by an intense focus on the self, as described in Western accounts of emerging adulthood. Rather, it was seen as a necessary step towards fulfilling familial and social responsibilities.
2. Migration and engagement in e-waste work served as modern rites of passage, allowing the men to demonstrate maturity and responsibility in the absence of traditional coming-of-age rituals. These experiences were viewed not as frivolous exploration, but as strategic steps towards achieving long-term goals.
3. The men faced significant challenges in Agbogbloshie, including housing insecurity, health risks, and social stigma.
4. Community ties, both in Agbogbloshie and their hometowns, were protective factors The men formed fictive kinships and maintained connections to their home communities, which provided emotional support and cultural grounding.
5. Spirituality was an important theme, reflecting African worldviews that emphasize the integration of material and spiritual realms.

This study highlights the need to reconsider Western models of young adulthood when examining diverse populations. It also emphasizes the importance of culturally-informed approaches to understanding psychosocial development. One's cultural conceptions of

personhood has profound consequences for meaning-making processes, interpretations of distress, and coping mechanisms.

Future research should explore the above themes across different ethnic groups and socioeconomic strata in Ghana and other African countries. Longitudinal studies could provide valuable insights into how the experiences and perspectives of young men evolve as they progress through later adulthood. By deepening our understanding of young adulthood in contexts shaped by global and local inequalities, this study contributes to a more inclusive and nuanced field of developmental psychology.

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Appendix A: Individual Interview Guide

Demographic information:

How old are you?

Where are you from?

Are you married?

What is your educational background?

Do you have children?

- If so, where are they?

When did you come to Accra?

When did you begin e-waste work?

How long to you plan to do e-waste work?

How long do you plan to stay in Accra?

Migration:

What was life like back in your hometown?

How has life changed as a result of working in Agbogbloshie?

Why do people leave their hometowns to work in Agbogbloshie?

Did you travel with your families? If so, with whom?

How often do you go back to your hometown (or to visit your family)?

Do you have family in Accra?

Do you have friends in Accra?

Coping, problem solving:

What are some positive aspects about living and/or working in Agbogbloshie?

What challenges have you encountered living and/or working in Agbogbloshie?

- problems associated with the physical location of the e-waste in Agbogbloshie
- problems associated with working with and near the e-waste
- problems associated with living near the e-waste

How do you mitigate the impact of some of these challenges?

- What are some of the things you do?
- Who are some of the people who help you and how?

Have you experienced health challenges living and/or working in Agbogbloshie?

- How do you mitigate these challenges?

Tell me about the place you are from (i.e., hometown).

How are the people there?

What do other Ghanaians think about where you come from?

What do other Ghanaians think about people who are from your hometown?

Tell me about Agbogbloshie

Tell me about the people in Agbogbloshie

What are some of the stereotypes about Agbogbloshie?

What are some of the stereotypes about people who live and/or work in Agbogbloshie?

What do people in your hometown think about Agbogbloshie?

Tell me about the work you do.

What are some of the stereotypes about e-waste work and the people who do it?

- Are these stereotypes the same in in your hometown?
- Are these stereotypes the same in the rest of Ghana?
- Are these stereotypes the same abroad?

What are some of the societal expectations of people your age?

What do you think a person your age should be working towards or have accomplished?

What is your current focus in life? What goals are you currently working towards in your life?

What responsibilities do you have to your families in and outside of Accra?

Family dynamics

- Do you support people back home?
- How has the support you provide changed your position in the family?

Decision to travel

- Did you decide to come alone, did your family send you or was it a joint decision?

Aspirations

- How do you envision your future success?

- How do you believe working here will help you achieve your goals for the future?
- Do you become discouraged when you see people who have been here for a long time and have not attained their previously envisioned success?

Appendix B: Focus Group Interview Guide

Adulthood

- When do people become adults/men?
- What defines adulthood/manhood?
- Are family responsibilities gender-specific?
- What are the roles of men and women?

Leaving Home

- Many people talked about leaving the North to escape witchcraft at the hands of family members. How does it work? Please expand on this.

Dating and relationships

- What purpose does marriage serve?
  - Are people marrying later than before? If so, why?
  - What is required of a man and woman for marriage?
  - What alternatives exist for young people who do not meet the requirements for marriage?
    - How if at all does may this impact their standing in society?

Politics in Agbogbloshie

- Who do people consider political leaders in Agbogbloshie?
- How do people become affiliated with political parties?
- Are these affiliates supported by politicians?

- How powerful are these political affiliates?
- How do these political affiliates gain enough power to evict people from their homes?