

CHAPTER REPRINT

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**ILLUMINATING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE
FROM AN INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVE:
INSIGHTS FROM A QUALITATIVE STUDY
WITH DAGARA COMMUNITIES
OF LAWRA DISTRICT, GHANA**

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THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF AFRICAN AND GENERAL
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CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the ontological and epistemological perspective of indigenous knowledges, and the methodological approach that guided this study, a qualitative case study. I briefly profile the study community and then introduce the five phases of the research design and the specific methods that were used. I also include a section on ethical vigilance, a critical element for research that uses a decolonizing indigenous knowledge paradigm.

As a postmodernist, and one who subscribes to a constructionist axiology, ontology and epistemology, it is imperative that I forefront the philosophical beliefs that guided this study before articulating the methodology. These aspects of underpinning values, the nature of being, and the theory of knowledge transcend methodology as they frame the very nature of this work.

3.1 Ontological, Epistemological and Ethical Perspective

A philosophical understanding of reality (ontology), and a perspective on how knowledge is learned and acquired (epistemology), are important dimensions in academic scholarship. Ontologies, and epistemologies are complex and diverse; each hold their own body of literature, seminal works, key proponents and critics, and frame knowledge in a specific way.

Social scientists often choose to work within the parameters of a specific frame to investigate phenomena in the world. There are advantages and limitations in using such a bounded approach. All philosophical frames carry with them hidden assumptions, biased understandings, and historical 'baggage' of how they have been used in the past. Increasingly,

a multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary approach is considered an option to provide an in-depth and robust understanding of social phenomena (Creswell, 2007).

Academic knowledge philosophies are usually framed in two broad ontological camps, that of positivist research and interpretivist/constructivist research. Positivist, reductionist, quantitative research that delineates the object of inquiry and finds a ‘correct’ answer is privileged in academia and has the greatest number of adherents. In the development context, positivist research is promoted as research that gives ‘true’ answers, that then can be applied to policy and program initiatives. Interpretivist research, which accepts multiple truths and is often qualitative in nature, is accepted as providing deep meaning and understanding, but is often accused of cultural relativism and of not providing the quantitative evidence to guide change. In searching for a frame more aligned to the intentions of this research I found inspiration in a new emerging philosophy of research that critiques both the positivist and interpretivist forms of academic research from an indigenous perspective and advocates for a new, ethically based, creative form of inquiry and knowledge making. As I challenged myself to work within the concept of endogenous development, it made sense to investigate, and ultimately claim, this indigenous research philosophy as a frame that would guide this inquiry into community resilience with Dagara people.

Indigenous knowledges and research philosophy has been greatly influenced by the seminal work, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, written by Linda Tuhiwai Smith in 2001. Smith, an indigenous Maori educator and scholar from Aotearoa in New Zealand, argues that, “research is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism” (p. 1). Indigenous Mi’kmaq scholar Marie Battiste (2000) made similar arguments when she wrote of cognitive imperialism, and many others articulate a critique of the western, scientific, positivist bias of academic scholarship (Castellano, 2004; Dei, 2000; Little Bear, 2000). The discussion that

follows will introduce this relatively new indigenous research paradigm that guided the unfolding of this study.

3.1.1 An Evolving Decolonizing Indigenous Knowledges Perspective.

To engage in this research, I claim an indigenous paradigm incorporating both critical and interpretivist theories. Since about 2000, this indigenous paradigm of research has emerged and been claimed as an equally valid approach to social sciences research as the conventional paradigms (Battiste, 2000; Castellano, 2004; Denzin, Lincoln & Smith, 2008; Millar, 2005; Smith, 2000; Wilson, 2008). This evolving paradigm does not have rigid rules nor does it have a narrow, prescribed approach; it is a complex, multifaceted approach to inquiry that draws on the specific accumulated wisdom of indigenous people in their specific place at particular times. It is developing in reaction to, as an alternative to and as complementary to other research paradigms. It is a relevant paradigm for exploring community resilience with Dagara communities in Ghana.

Two eminent scholars of qualitative research, Denzin and Lincoln (2008), who identify themselves as constructionists, introduce the discourse on indigenous methodologies as a dialogue between critical methodologies and indigenous inquiry. They resist definitions and yet radically challenge conventional theoretical paradigms by outlining the complex nature of what indigenous inquiry could be:

Such inquiry should meet multiple criteria. It must be ethical, performative, healing, transformative, decolonizing and participatory. It must be committed to dialogue, community, self-determination and cultural autonomy. It must meet peoples' perceived needs. It must resist efforts to confine inquiry to a single paradigm or interpretive strategy. It must be unruly, disruptive, critical, and dedicated to the goals of justice and equity. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008: 2)

Denzin and Lincoln (2008) negotiate the tensions of proposing such an understanding of inquiry by first exposing the historical damage done by both qualitative and quantitative, by

interpretive and positivist research, that alienated and marginalized indigenous people and their knowledge and served the purposes of colonizing power.

Numerous indigenous scholars have articulated this understanding (Loppie, 2005; Millar, 2005; Smith, 2001; Wilson, 2008) and have envisioned an approach of the heart that privileges indigenous knowledges, voices, and experiences. Within accepted academic discourse, however, Denzin and Lincoln (2008) struggle to locate indigenous inquiry, oscillating somewhere between the explicit political purposes of critical qualitative research and more interpretivist research that uses devices such as life stories, narrative, field notes, photos, and other devices as dialectical representations or performances.

Critical theoreticians recognize the different perspectives and frames from which one sees the world, yet name a universal understanding of power in the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Lather, 1986; Smith, 1987). They are prescriptive about the purpose of research to expose the power differentials and provide knowledge to contribute to changing them (Creswell, 2007). In comparison, interpretive theorists (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Gubrium & Holstein, 2003; Reason & Bradbury, 2001) focus on recognizing the multiple perspectives and frames from which one sees the world and advocate that naming and providing opportunities to voice and express these perspectives is valuable in itself, and engaging in dialogue in the shared spaces between these perspectives is the performance of knowledge creation (Creswell, 2007).

Critics contend that this interpretivist position is ahistorical and apolitical, running the risk of becoming pure relativism where there is “no truth” or overall societal meaning to the world (see Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). On the other hand, interpretivists see a danger in the critical theorists’ position on power and justice that they argue strays to an almost positivist / post positivist position of believing there is a reality out there in the world. They name that reality as one of power over, exploitation, and subordination and that reality orients

knowledge generation work in the world (Fine, 1994; Smith, 1987). This theoretical debate challenges one to respect, honor and accept others' knowledge claims at face value (interpretive) and yet still critically engage with interrogating and attempting to understand the play of power within human and social interactions. Where does indigenous inquiry fit?

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2008: 5), "we locate indigenous methodology in an intersection of discourses". They are averse to indigenous methodologies simply becoming some kind of quaint folk theory, however, and veer much more closely towards a critical stance. They (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008: 3) argue that:

These [indigenous] epistemologies are forms of critical pedagogy; that is, they embody a critical politics of representation that is embedded in the rituals of indigenous communities. Always already political, they are relentlessly critical of transnational capitalism and its destructive presence in the indigenous world.

Smith (2000: 229) reminds us, however, that:

Critical theory must be localized, grounded in the specific meanings, traditions customs and community relations that operate in each indigenous setting. Localized critical theory can work if the goals of critique, resistance, struggle and emancipation are not treated as if they have "universal characteristics that are independent of history, context and agency".

I appreciate this solidarity with a local critical stance, from an indigenous frame, because it is quite different than a non-localized critical stance. Framing inquiry from a non-localized critical stance or exclusively power-over perspective can still locate indigenous peoples in a historical cage of oppression from which one will not be able to fly out, even if the door is opened. Owning a perspective that knows and envisions flight and has no recognition of the walls or doors of any cage enables forms of knowledge and being to be expressed from their own location. This perspective is captured in the work by Graham Smith (2000), Linda

Tuwihla Smith (2001) and other Maori scholars who articulate Kaupapa Maori research, one form of indigenous research:

Kaupapa Maori research is a local theoretical position that is the modality through which the emancipatory goal of critical theory, in a specific historical, political and social context, is practiced. However, critical theory is fitted to a Maori worldview, which asserts that Maori are connected to the universe and their place in it through the principle of Whakapapa. This principle tells the Maori that they are the seeds or direct descendants of the heavens. Whakapapa turns the universe into a moral space where all things great and small are interconnected, including science and research. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008: 9)

Maori research is not a traditional, 'frozen in time' way of doing research; like culture, it is a dynamic, performative process that has appeared at this time. Other indigenous research paradigms may therefore link themselves to different understandings of power realities in society. Tensions in how indigenous methodologies and indigenous knowledges can be understood are a reminder of the wisdom of two-eyed seeing (Marshall, 2007); recognize the paradox and potential dissonance generated by viewing things from multiple perspectives, and, also celebrate the complementarity and deeper nuanced meaning that is revealed.

Compared to other theoretical paradigms, indigenous approaches are being claimed and valued as a reaction to the colonizing influence and cultural and cognitive imperialism of academic discourse. Transcending the internal debates and discussions about knowledge and truth, indigenous approaches critique all academic discourses as being Eurocentric and arising out of a colonial mentality (Battiste, 2000; Castellano, 2004; Dei, 2000; Little Bear, 2000; Smith, 2001).

Contributors to the indigenous perspective endeavor to carve out a unique, holistic, participatory, multi-voiced understanding of the world to challenge and potentially replace more conventional perspectives (Apusigah, 2008; Henderson, 2000; Wilson, 2008). This

indigenous frame draws on academic scholarship of the past, and is creative in the sense of articulating a paradigm that draws from the accumulated wisdom of indigenous people. This perspective does not try to essentialize indigenous approaches to a fixed, definable view, but rather tries to claim the territory of an indigenous paradigm while respecting its diversity.

Defining the parameters of an indigenous frame or world view is therefore problematic because there is not a single set of beliefs, understandings, or knowledge that informs this frame. By its nature it is multifaceted, specific, unique to time and place, holistic, open to paradox and contradiction, dynamic, and changing. There are multiple indigenous knowledges and sciences that can be valued for their uniqueness.

While acknowledging the risk of contradicting this diversity and complexity, there are some propositions that can be put forward that set parameters around the space within social science that indigenous scholarship occupies. It remains the right of indigenous peoples within their contexts to decide whether these propositions hold true for them at a specific time or whether they do not resonate with their own knowledges, or whether something has been revealed through these studies that requires an expansion or change to the parameters inside which research is undertaken. Table 3.1 proposes characteristics of an indigenous research paradigm. It is these characteristics that guided the ontological and epistemological orientation of this study.

Table 3.1 Proposed Characteristics of an Indigenous Research Paradigm

Characteristic	Brief Explanation	Major Proponents
i. Decolonizing	-interrogates historical relations between indigenous and non-indigenous	Battiste, 2000 Henderson, 2000 Little Bear, 2000 Smith, 2001

	-transforms relationships by appreciating indigenous ways as inherently valuable and not “other”	
ii. Respects Diversity	-diversity respected and celebrated within community and beyond -learn from biodiversity	Battiste, 2000 Marshall, 2007 Smith, 2000
iii. Renaissance of Knowing	-honour different epistemologies -reclaim what has been lost including spiritual, intuition and metaphysical knowing	Dei, 2000 Millar, 2004 Wilson, 2008
iv. Explicit Value Base	-Axiology is central to paradigm -Values such as communality, reciprocity, and interdependence with nature are important	Caastellano, 2004 Loppie, 2005 Millar, 2006
v. Pragmatic	-research must be useful for indigenous people being “researched”; -supportive of improvements in culture and socio-economic conditions	Mi’kmaq College Inst, 2006 Smith, 2001
vi. Relational	-relationships central to the process of research; before, during and after -must be mutually respectful, honor diversity; including with nature -solidarity and maintenance of relationships important	Battiste, 2000 Bishop, 2005 Wilson, 2008

Source: Author, 2017

3.1.2 My Location and Gaze

I am claiming an indigenous knowledges paradigm and an ontological and epistemological stance that straddles interpretivist, constructionist and critical approaches and therefore it is important to locate myself in relation to this research. It is important because I believe all knowledge is socially constructed, it is not a body of knowledge “out there” to be discovered, but only exists through the conscious and unconscious negotiations between societal constructions, individual’s perceptions and the fluid, complicated spaces within which that negotiation takes place.

This sociological concept of location recognizes that the systems, structures and ruling relations of society shape the way that people see and experience the world. One's location is temporal, situated in the context and always limited in some way. This concept is hinged on the constructivism, that each of us sees and thereby constructs the world we experience. One's location is value laden. Each location develops from "socially constituted, historically, embedded and valuationally-based" life experiences (Lather, 1986: 259). My embodied location as a "white-looking", multi-racial, male, middle class, able-bodied North American speaks of privilege. My experiences in this embodied location have made it possible for me to assume and seize opportunities in this society as "normal" without questioning, or having others question, my entitlement. This includes my experiences as a male growing up in a patriarchal society; as well as my experiences as a Canadian living on land historically taken from the indigenous people of this continent. There are the experiences as a Canadian working in other places in the world wherein others give me status and power, and white privilege, due to their perceptions of me and my birthplace. These experiences have shaped the way I experience the world.

Each person has multiple locations (Manias and Street, 2000). Although I am the child of a first generation immigrant of mixed racial background, I was not always aware of this and did not own this identity while growing up. My mother is from Guyana, South America and is of mixed ancestry that includes various European, Amerindian and African connections. Others' perceptions of me may be predominantly of my "whiteness", yet my mixed ancestry has influenced who I am. In my work in Africa and North America over the past thirty years I have experienced a resonance with African and indigenous cultures and have begun to claim this as part of my identity. This 'claiming' complicates my location and the gaze I take on the world.

In creating an understanding of the world, the viewpoints of marginalized people are essential if one wants to more deeply appreciate the context and location of people within the bounds that limit them. I choose purposefully to try and see the world through such a gaze. In this research, I recognize that the location and standpoints of the people in communities in Ghana were different from each other, and from mine. Uncovering their standpoints was an important ongoing element of the research process. The whole inquiry was designed to help me see the world through their eyes. I recognize that my location influenced my ability to adopt another's gaze, and influenced the relationships between myself and those in the research group, no matter what my best intentions were (Lather, 1994). Therefore, I began this research journey by trying to understand an indigenous paradigm for inquiry, and by adopting an endogenous development approach. In addition, by recognizing that as people with different backgrounds we each have multiple locations, as the researchers that conducted this inquiry, we explored how our locations influenced us, by being reflexive, by engaging in dialogue, and by discovering the "space between" our various standpoints (Smith, 1987). Therefore, my gaze in this work was to be appreciative and respectful of the indigenous way of being, without romanticizing, and I privileged the standpoints of the Dagara people with whom I interacted. This location and gaze influenced the co-construction of knowledge and the interpretation and illumination of an understanding of community resilience throughout this study.

3.2 The Methodological Approach: A Qualitative Case Study

The ontological and epistemological stance I have taken to explore community resilience points towards a broad qualitative research orientation as being most appropriate. A quantitative approach utilizing surveys or experimental methodologies would not have provided rich description of the phenomena of resilience, and probing for quantitative

information may have alienated participants (Charmaz, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; DePoy & Gitlin, 1994). There are many different qualitative methodological approaches that could have been chosen for this research project, each necessitating different methods, tools and techniques of data collection, analysis and reporting. Creswell (2007) for example, categorizes five major qualitative research methodologies: narrative, phenomenology, case study, grounded theory and ethnography. Each of these methodologies have their strengths and weaknesses (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). All of these methodologies are limited and problematic, however, when viewed from the frame of a decolonizing indigenous research paradigm (Battiste, 2000; Dei, 2000; Smith, 2001; Wilson, 2008). Much of the ‘rich tradition’ of many of these qualitative methodologies come with philosophical stances and practices that can be considered colonizing. These methodologies, and the knowledge and experience they represent, cannot be put aside to await new decolonizing methodologies. Some negotiation and reconstruction of the knowledge within these methodologies is necessary to go forward that builds on the strengths of those approaches and stays true to the emerging indigenous paradigm.

The methodological approach utilized for this study was a qualitative case study approach. Using this approach provided the opportunity to build on the scholarship around case studies while also negotiating some of the tensions that the indigenous paradigm exposes in this approach.

A case study is described by Yin (1989: 4) as a way in which researchers can “retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events”. A case study is a respected research design that yields a detailed in-depth description of a phenomenon. Case study method is considered appropriate when a researcher is “interested in examining a phenomenon in its current context, interested in contributing to theory and wanting to explore in-depth a

case that is atypical or different” (Depoy & Gitlin, 1994: 154). Stake (1994) recommends the first methodological step of case selection and the opportunity to learn something are of primary importance. A case is best explored *in situ*—within its own world where its own issues and interpretations are in context. As Stake (1994: 239) describes:

With its own unique history, the case is a complex entity operating within a number of contexts including the physical, economic, ethical and aesthetic... holistic case studies call for the examination of these complexities ... that social phenomena, human dilemmas, and the nature of cases are situational and influenced by happenings of many kinds.

Depoy and Gitlin (1994: 150) explain that the purpose of the case study is “to combine different methods to reveal an additional piece of the puzzle or to uncover varied dimensions of one phenomenon. Referred to as the “completeness function” different methods are purposely chosen because each assesses a different aspect of the dimension of the problem under study”.

Exploring the phenomena of community resilience with Dagara people can provide an in-depth description of community resilience within the context of the Dagara people. This case study can contribute to the transcending of existing theories on community resilience, in that it honours and values the diverse world views of the Dagara people, a unique ethnolinguistic group in the world that has valuable wisdom to share about community resilience. The research study design combined different methods, literature review, research assistants, in-depth interviews, focus groups, participant observation, collective analysis, community meetings, and take from constructivist, critical and transdisciplinary perspectives to reach a deep understanding of the complexities of community resilience.

This multifaceted, yet bounded, case study methodology provided an understanding of community resilience with Dagara people that no single approach could provide (Flyvbjerg,

2004). Case study often straddles the space between quantitative and qualitative methodologies and its researchers are sometimes viewed as following a pragmatic theoretical paradigm. The intention was not to be simply pragmatic, however, but that the case study would draw on the indigenous research paradigm and meet all of the characteristics outlined in table 2.1. In order to complete a research initiative that demonstrates those characteristics of a case study emphasizing in-depth qualitative approaches is appropriate. A case study of a phenomenon can be bounded in many ways: by the actors involved, spatially, temporally, sectorally, and/or epistemologically (Stake, 2003; Yin, 1989). This case study is a contemporary, transdisciplinary exploration of community resilience with Dagara people in Lawra District based on an indigenous paradigm.

It is important to note that the localized context comes first in a case study approach and that in this case study the research is grounded in the indigenous Dagara realities of time and place. A case study method ensures that the context receives extensive attention and that findings and interpretations are made within that context, and are not theorized to an abstract level separated from the context. Within the bounds of this particular case study, there were still certain methodological issues that needed to be negotiated to ensure the study was informed by the indigenous paradigm. These issues are concerned with dialogue, representation, reflexivity, triangulation and usefulness.

Dialogue. Conventional positivist and post-positivist research argues for distance and objectivity between the researcher and the researched (Creswell, 2003), whereas using dialogue to develop a case study as suggested in this research required a very different relationship between the two. From a constructivist viewpoint it is important to explore issues like; how does one not impose one's ideas on another in dialogue? how does one avoid bias at the stage of analysis?, in conversation as the research takes place (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003; Minkler,

2003; Reason & Bradbury, 2001). Indigenous scholars (Loppie, 2005; Millar, 2005) recommend that one needs to enter into dialogue with empathy and love and through respectful, active, deep listening and sharing, challenge oneself to understand the indigenous perspective. Smith (2001: 8) is clear that any research on ... [i.e. community resilience] ... should be emic and community based and that the process “is more important than the outcome ... and processes are expected to be respectful, to enable people to heal and educate”. One should not just silently accept another’s views (as that can lead to misinterpretation), but one needs to dialogue with others and explore differences.

Representation. The issue of *representation*, also receives significant attention in the research literature (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Researchers need to explicitly ask whose story is this and for what purpose is it being told. Case studies using participatory research methods strive to locate control of the research process with the people being researched, in this case the Dagara community (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991). To assume that any interview, for example, will discover discrete facts is a myth; everything is colored through the lens of the researcher (Fontana, 2002). There is a place for non-indigenous researchers to work as allies, however, and by working with together to negotiate a representation based on interviews, useful insights can be gained. Checking information with research participants and asking them if interpretations truly represent their intentions is therefore essential (Laws, Harper, & Marcus, 2003). This member-checking can still be problematic, however, as the researcher has the option to put many stories together, while community members often are limited and disempowered when their own representation is confined to a specific time and place (Gatenby & Humphries, 2000). The sequencing and triangulation of individual, focus group, and community meetings within the context of a qualitative case study can help negotiate this tension.

Triangulation is an accepted practice in qualitative research to enhance and verify the quality and legitimacy and to find alignment or essence to capture meaning of a case study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation can entail gathering information from different sources, gathering information using different methodologies, and / or gathering and analyzing information at different times and then comparing to each of the others to observe the interconnectedness. Some qualitative researchers argue for a process that goes beyond triangulation and searches for a ‘crystallization’ of perspectives (Richardson, 2000). This metaphor captures the beauty of various different perspectives that are reflected and refracted when light is shown on an issue from different angles. It also captures the clarity of different perspectives coming together in a myriad of ways to provide an accurate, focused, complementary yet complex understanding. Finding ways to capture such holistic complexity fits the indigenous paradigm.

Reflexivity is also crucial because various social and cultural expectations and norms will play out in every research interaction. Any text or performance capturing a case study is constructed within an interaction, yet there are always other, subtler issues not captured in text that also need to be considered. Research is about relationships. It is important for researchers to be reflexive to ensure texts are contextualized to enhance their trustworthiness, and that one’s own location is interrogated. This is essential for decolonizing research. Overly reflexive confessional stories of researchers can become self-therapy and nihilistic, however, and a balance must be struck between reflexivity and the purpose of the research (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003).

Usefulness. Finally, pursuing a qualitative case study also demands *usefulness* as a step of decolonizing (Battiste, 2000) and can lead to some tensions with the more conventional paradigms. Drawing on the principles of an indigenous and a more action- oriented research

approach makes the usefulness of the work a primary, defining characteristic (Fals Borda & Rahman, 1991; Reason & Bradbury, 2001; Smith, 2001). Using a qualitative case study approach ensures the interpretation of community resilience remains contextualized, and therefore more apt to have insights translated into action.

Alternative Approaches. The case study methodological approach was chosen over ethnography, one of the most common approaches in investigating phenomenon embedded in culture, because reaching a comprehensive understanding of all aspects of the culture in this situation is not necessary or practical. Ethnography has limitations in transitioning into action for social change. Ethnography also continues to encourage the separation between researcher and researchee. Phenomenology, although also attractive, was put aside for similar reasons. Phenomenology demands prolonged engagement for deep understanding and theory building, and abstracts knowledge and concepts from the actors, or subjects of the research. It does not usually promote engagement or action. Narrative is a popular methodological approach for many researchers subscribing to the indigenous research paradigm. Narrative was seen as an appealing approach because it emphasizes the *voice* and contextualized *story* of research subjects, yet aspects of peoples' lives are often silenced by colonizing discourses. Since the desire was to explore community resilience at a meso level and co-construct an understanding of a conceptual phenomenon that would be useful to people, a narrative approach alone did not seem sufficient. Finally, although aspects of participatory action research were certainly drawn upon to implement this research, since it was not initiated by the community, and there were logistical limitations, this approach was not adopted.

3.2.1 Validity, Relational Accountability and Limitations

It was important to ensure the case study methodology was as valid and trustworthy as possible. Conventional positivist and post-positivist researchers do not consider any research

legitimate if it is not valid, generalizable, and reliable. These principles for research legitimacy are taken-for-granted by the research establishment, yet they stem from quantitative research in the natural sciences and a positivist ontology and epistemology. With a constructivist or critical stance, other principles of validity need to be looked at (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) and strategies for checking the accuracy of findings such as triangulating different sources of data, using member checking, and emphasizing thick description are encouraged (Creswell, 2003; Depoy & Gitlin, 1994; De Koning & Martin, 1996).

Much has been written within the qualitative research literature on validity, to distinguish it from notions of validity within conventional research approaches (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Whittemore, Chase & Mandle, 2001). In the indigenous methodologies literature, issues of ethics and axiology receive more attention than validity per se, but there are complementary developments in both discourses that challenge researchers to take particular actions to ensure validity (Canadian Institutes for Health Research, 2007; Mi'kmaq Ethics Watch, 2005; Schnarch, 2004; Smith, 2001; Wilson, 2008). The most important issues related to validity are credibility and authenticity, criticality and integrity and relational accountability.

Credibility and Authenticity. Credibility concerns demonstrating effort to accurately interpret meaning from qualitative data, while authenticity relates to the resonance of written interpretations to the meanings and experiences as perceived by participants (Whittemore, Chase and Mandle, 2001). Credibility of this study was enhanced within a design that included competent research assistants, comprising male and female Dagara representatives from the area, and putting community validation procedures in place as recommended (Ellis & Berger, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003). During the study itself, the researcher and the research assistants lived in the community for an intense period of four-and-

a-half months and relationships extended beyond the intensive period, as researcher and assistants continued to work in the area. These kinds of engagement and participatory observation strategies are suggested (Creswell, 2007; Ellis & Berger, 2002; Holkup, Reimer, Salois, Weinert, 2004).

Built into the research strategy was an ongoing reflection and debriefing strategy that engaged the researcher and assistants and a field study advisory committee (Depoy & Gitlin, 1994; Lather, 1986; Reason & Bradbury, 2001). This reflective practice and the regular ongoing member checking following interviews, focus groups and community meetings provided evidence of credibility.

Researchers (Charmaz, 2002; Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Fontana, 2002) recommend a design that includes speaking to both individuals and groups (e.g. men's group and women's group), speaking to some informants multiple times, and then bringing their information together for discussion in a focus group or community meeting to enhance people's awareness of their own context, and thereby their understanding of phenomena like community resilience. The endorsement of the work done by the researcher and assistants during community validation activities also enhanced authenticity.

Criticality and Integrity. Criticality captures notions of reflexivity and critical analysis to explicate different viewpoints within the research endeavor, and integrity relates to the confidence that the investigators interpretations are grounded with data (Whittemore, Chase & Mandle, 2001). Conducting regular reflexive journaling and discussions to take place at a number of levels: individual researchers, dialogues and discussions with ad-hoc advisory committee members (researchers from the University of Development Studies) was valuable. Interview protocols to encourage the researcher assistants and myself to probe for different viewpoints and critical differences can be illuminated in the text (Lather, 1994; Whittemore et

al, 2001). The researcher and assistants were included in the processes of open coding, and thematic analysis to contribute to integrity (Huberman & Miles, 2002), and checking, community validation and audit trails of the data and interpretations are available for review (Creswell, 2007).

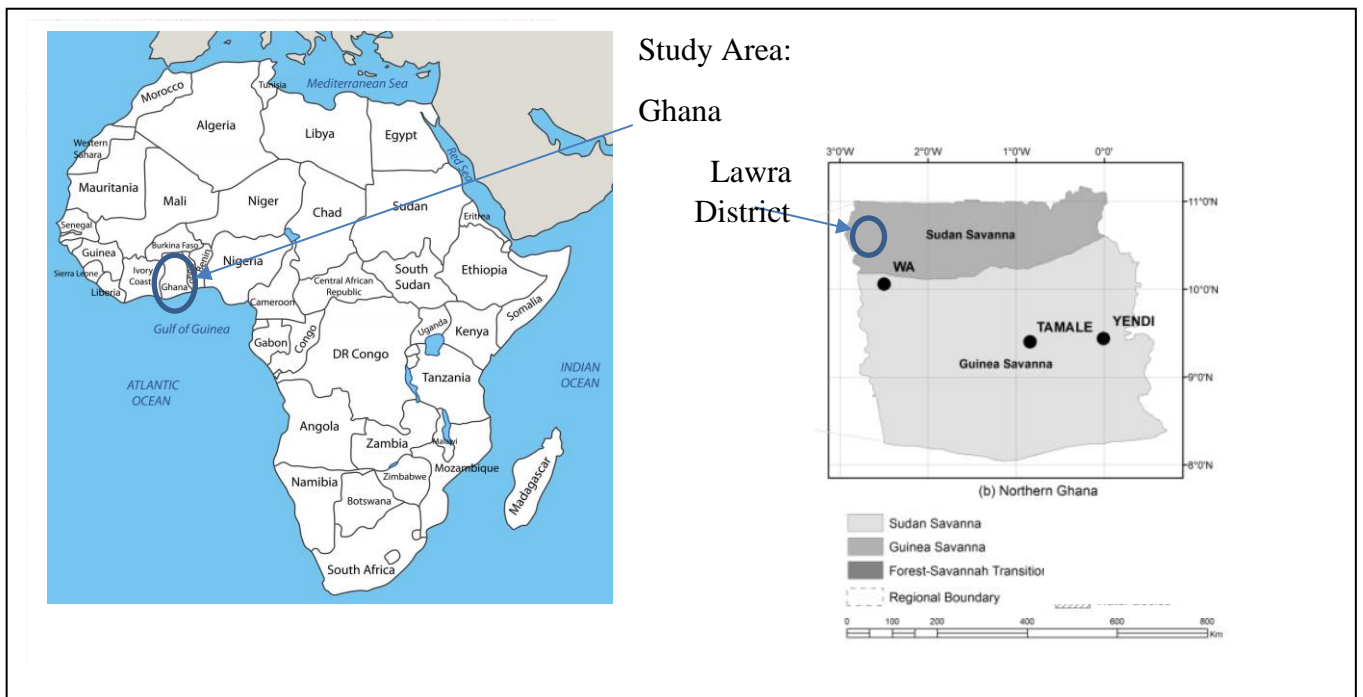
Relational Accountability emerges from the indigenous methodologies discourse. As Wilson (2008: 99) states, “[relational accountability] means that the methodology needs to be based in a community context (be relational) and has to demonstrate respect, reciprocity and responsibility (to be accountable as it is put into action)”. Designing a qualitative case study methodology that starts with a preliminary study, has Dagara associates involved and includes a commitment to ongoing work in the area ensures relational accountability is considered. Ongoing connections with CIKOD are built into the design to help ensure there is an avenue for useful knowledge translation, dissemination and implementing follow-up.

As in any research initiative there are certain limitations to the approach used. Community resilience is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. This research will only happen at a particular time of the year and respondents’ visceral understanding of resilience could be very different in different seasons. A qualitative case study can be designed, however, that will ensure sufficient data and information can be collected to provide valuable meaning and insights on community resilience from the Dagara perspective. That research design is presented in section 3.3 below. It is important, however, as with any case study, to present a justification and a preliminary profile of the case study area where the research is going to take place. Setting that initial context of the research location is the purpose of the next section.

3.2.2 Initial Profile of Study Community - The Dagara People of Lawra District

As I began having conversations about researching community resilience my attention was drawn to communities living in the Guinea Savannah vegetation belt of West Africa. I have had the privilege of working in community development in different countries of Africa and in Canada, since 1985, and communities in this belt had always represented contrasts and transitions for me, both practically and metaphorically, which I thought would be a rich environment for learning about community resilience. The Guinea Savannah/Sudan Savannah

Figure 3.1 Map of Research Location



Source: Ripon, *et al.*, from Ghana Statistical Service, 2000

vegetation belt extends across Africa from The Gambia in the west to the eastern border of Nigeria in the east (World Wildlife Fund, 2013). I had worked with people in this ecological zone in Nigeria and the Gambia, and had previously visited that region of Ghana in the early 1990s and the land and people resonated with me. In these times of climate change, increasing natural and human made disasters and chronic stress, this ecoregion, and the people who make their lives here, experience different kinds of vulnerability on a regular basis (WFP-MOFA, 2013; WWF,

2013).

The peoples of this region may be vulnerable, but in my experience they are also vibrant and hardworking, have continued to honor their rich history and cultural traditions, and may be strategically placed to bounce back and contribute to a transformation of negative socio-ecological, economic and cultural trends. Figure 3.1 shows the research area.

3.2.2.1 The Ecosystem. This ecoregion suffers specifically from declining soil fertility, declining and erratic rainfall, both which can be exacerbated by some farming practices, bush burning, and fuel wood harvesting, and is susceptible to flooding and other extremes. This zone is particularly vulnerable to natural and human change (WFP-MOFA, 2013; WWF, 2013). The guinea / sudan savannah zone is a transition zone to the sahel, which is an even more vulnerable socio-ecological zone to the north. Certain ecological resources can still be accessed in the guinea / sudan savannah, however, and perhaps with careful human nurturance and conservation this could become a richer, less vulnerable ecosystem for future generations. UWR has an area of 19,375 square kilometers, 914 square kilometers of this is Lawra District (Ghana Statistical Service, 2002). Lawra District has an international border with Burkina Faso to the north and west.

3.2.2.2 The Economy. Most people earn their livelihoods through subsistence rain-fed farming of crops such as millet, pulses, yams and some maize and rice. Livestock are kept, often as a form of security for when crops fail. Seasonal migration to the forest and mining zone of Ghana is common for 20 % of households, and this is causing the fragmentation of social and religious structures (Blench, 2005). For the Dagara community access to health and schooling is very poor and disease incidence is quite high. This region of Ghana is known as the poorest and most vulnerable in the country and, with changes in climate, lack of road infrastructure and increasing population, both acute and chronic challenges to people's

livelihoods continue to grow (Blench, 2005; WFP-MOFA, 2013). The economy of the area and families' livelihoods, traditionally based on agriculture and trade, are also vulnerable. This economic vulnerability is related to the stresses on the environment, but also to the global economy which dictates terms of trade, with no negotiation with the peoples' of the area (WFP-MOFA, 2013). The economy here, like other marginalized areas, is influenced by decisions made at capital cities hundreds of kilometers away, yet the zone's economy was once rich in trade in livestock, groundnuts and cereal crops, and as a place of exchange for goods travelling from the forest zones to the south, with the peoples of the Sahel and the far reaching trans-Saharan routes to the north (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013).

3.2.2.3 Social and Cultural Background. This study focused on Dagara communities in Lawra District, Upper West region, Ghana to explore and illuminate community resilience. Dagara communities may be considered some of the poorest and most isolated in the Ghanaian context, but there is something about their pride and determination that attracted me to them. The Dagara people are one of eight main ethno-linguistic groups in the Upper West Region (UWR). Their kinship and clan structures remain very strong. Families are intricately linked through both patri and matri lines, for example, and there are specific roles and responsibilities for men and women and family members of different generations. Many Dagara people migrate to other parts of Ghana on a seasonal basis to work and supplement their incomes. Dagara people are considered the original inhabitants of the district, the indigenous people of the area, although historically they migrated into the area from elsewhere. Table 3.2 presents some basic indicators on Lawra District, UWR, Ghana. UWR has a population of approximately 702,110 people, approximately 101,000 live in Lawra District (Ghana Statistical Service, 2002). Table 3.2 presents some basic indicators on Lawra District.

Unfortunately, the cultures and languages of people in the area are also at risk. People are marginalized socially and culturally because they are far from where decisions are made and new trends are fashioned in the capital. On the other hand, there is that pride and connection with history and culture as well. As I considered studying communities in this ecological zone more deeply out of curiosity about community resilience, I heard of, and read inspiring works (Apusigah, 2006; Guri, 2003; Millar, 2004, 2005; Some, 1995) that led me to believe there might also be hidden survival wisdom, and a cultural revival of sorts percolating in the northern part of Ghana.

The Dagara people follow a complex land tenure system where different forms of land, and trees on the land are controlled by different traditional institutions. Compared to other parts of Ghana this means there is a relatively well conserved natural environment with fertile soils and substantial tree cover (Blench, 2005). Tendaanba, or earth priests/guardians, exercise dual authority over land with chiefs and these indigenous structures wield much influence (Millar, 2004).

Since the 1990's elected Assemblymen have become a competing arm of authority in villages as part of decentralized government structures and indigenous institutions are being challenged. The Dagara, Sisala, Wale, Fulani and other peoples in this area of Ghana have been marginalized from national governance and economic structures since colonial times, and formal education and other trends in the region are increasingly confronting the viability and respect for the indigenous way of life. At the same time, a recent appreciation for indigenous knowledge and the indigenous world view has been attracting attention in academic discourse (Battiste, 2000c; Dei, 2000; Smith, 2001) and the area is a unique one to investigate change and sustainability, particularly within a conceptual framework such as community resilience

(Guri, 2003, Millar, 2004). Certain Dagara communities have been surviving and thriving for generations and they may provide important lessons related to community resilience.

Source: Data extracted from Ghana Statistical Service, 2013

There is danger, risk and vulnerability in this zone that has ecological, economic, social and cultural dimensions. There is also hope and opportunity, and the chance to learn something

Table 3.2: Background Indicators on Research Area

Indicator	Lawra District, UWR		
Population	100,929	48,641 (male)	52,288 (female)
Household Size	5.9 people		
Percent Urban (Towns)	13		
Percent 18 and over	53.8		
Percent of economy in Agriculture	80		
JHS Completion rate	74.4	75.4 (male)	73.9 (female)
Top 3 most prevalent diseases	52.2 % malaria	11.6% Acute Respiratory	6.7% Skin Diseases

about community resilience. Chance phone calls and meetings, seeming coincidences, and random opportunities, then pointed me specifically to the Dagara people of Lawra District, Upper West Region. This district is not considered the most vulnerable according to selected indicators, but it has a unique combination of features that made it clear a study with people in this area on community resilience would provide some insights.

3.3 Research Design

3.3.1 Research Initiation and Planning

I have traced the seeds of this study back to earlier experiences I had been working in the Guinea savannah zone of West Africa and my involvement in community development spanning three decades that spawned my deep interest in community resilience. At times, I believe it was inevitable that I would do a research project like this and many circumstances seemed to conspire to put me in place to conduct this study over the past few years.

Within the confines of this research activity on revealing community resilience with the Dagara community I benefitted greatly, and the study became a reality, because of the relationship I have developed with the Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Organizational Development (CIKOD) and its founder and Executive Director, Mr. Bernard Y. Guri. CIKOD is an organization that works throughout Ghana, and has strong ties in the Dagara area. Bernard is a Dagara man who grew, was educated in the area before completing graduate studies in Europe. He has worked in the development sector for 30 years, and founded CIKOD in 2003 to support endogenous development. As a community development facilitator and researcher, he seeks ways to find synergy between creative solutions for the development challenges faced by communities today and the wisdom and indigenous knowledge of the Dagara cosmivision (Guri 2003, 2007). It is through discussions with him, and members of an ad-hoc advisory committee that this study coalesced.

CIKOD as an organization has also been supportive of my research in other ways. CIKOD staff provided introductions at the community level as part of the 2008 preliminary study and served as language and cultural interpreters. Relationships with CIKOD staff have been developed through workshops I co-facilitated in Ghana. The two research assistants, a Dagara man and a Dagara woman, were recruited with CIKOD assistance, and have done other work with CIKOD in the past. These connections helped ensure this study was based on relationships of mutual respect and trust, was cognizant of indigenous research principles of

ownership, control, access and participation and was pursued with love, as a kind of ceremony of mutual learning. The overall design of the research was iterative. I was the principal researcher in Ghana with a Dagara man and woman as research assistants, with suggestions from CIKOD and advisory committee on issues of community entry, relevance and respect. We, myself and the research assistants, were flexible in accommodating the concerns and priorities of the key informants, household members and various focus groups of Dagara women and men, girls and boys with whom we explored concepts about community resilience from their place in the community.

As an exploration of community resilience with Dagara people, this study was a subtle negotiation for space within an evolving understanding of both the academic discourse on community resilience, and a growing appreciation and connection to the Dagara community discourse on resilience. This imagined space was constantly fluctuating and shifting, filling with different ideas and propositions and being massaged by my own changing understandings. My research politics compelled me to choose to privilege Dagara perspectives, and as an outsider not knowing the language, I knew I would have conscious and unconscious biases, and power and privilege that would manifest in different ways throughout the study experience.

In addition to revealing Dagara perspectives on community resilience, I also wanted this work to be useful and connected to broader discourses on the topic. This put me in a challenging position to acknowledge and interpret the co-constructed knowledge of community resilience with the perspective of the Dagara, while simultaneously keeping up with the literature. In order to meet these demands, I designed a qualitative research exploration of five phases, that are itemized in Figure 3.3. A significant aspect of the design of the research plan was to practicalize an indigenous research approach to data collection, by choosing to carry out the research in collaboration with two research assistants, a young Dagara man and a young

Dagara woman. With the research assistants, I planned, executed, analyzed, presented and validated findings with the community.

Figure 3.3 The Five Phases of this Research Initiative

- I. Literature Review and Preliminary Study
- II. Establishing and Empowering the Research Assistants
 - a. identification and building of the research assistants
 - b. field advisory committee
 - c. identification of communities that would participate in the case study
- III. Engaging and Interacting with Communities
 - a. In-depth interviews
 - b. Focus groups
 - c. Participatory observation and engagement;
- IV. Participatory Analysis and Community Validation
 - a. preliminary analysis, interpretations, and meaning-making;
 - b. community checking, validation and deepening propositions;
- V. Final Case Study Articulation

Source: Author, 2017

In Appendix A, I present details of the original chronological timeframe of phases II – IV. Tentative timelines were set and the schedule of activities in the field emerged as people and circumstances allowed.

3.3.2 Phase I – Literature Review and Preliminary Study

The review of the literature for this study on resilience and community resilience has been ongoing. There has been a burgeoning of research and published literature on resilience in recent years and it informed this research at four critical moments: i) my initial exposure to the literature as I worked on and reflected on my past community experience captured in my funding proposal in 2003, ii) a literature review on the subject as part of academic studies in 2006, iii) an updated literature component in 2009 as part of my proposal prior to conducting

field work, and (iv) the updating of this literature in 2015 for this dissertation. This relationship with the literature focusing on the discourse of resilience was significant, and influenced my understanding and interpretations of what I was learning from the direct interaction with Dagara people.

I consciously keep concepts from the literature at bay, however, to ‘bracket’ them (citation) in order to stay open to a cultural understanding of community resilience with the Dagara people. This stance was part of the decolonizing framework in the research design. Learning about the history and context of the Dagara people was important, as was the language of the Dagara, *Dagare*, which is the carrier of knowledge and wisdom in a community.

Early on, as this research idea took root, it became clear that in applying a decolonizing framework, some of the ideas I was learning about resilience and others’ interpretations of the Dagara people, would need to be set aside to more directly explore with the Dagara people their own perspectives on resilience. As the design emerged it was clear it needed to be iterative and that getting a first-hand introduction to Dagara people and Dagara communities would be a beneficial starting place. This realization, led to preliminary investigation of “contextual and indigenous issues of community resilience in northern Ghana”. This preliminary study, completed in 2009, was the beginning of interactions and relationships with Dagara communities. In this study, approved by the Dalhousie University Research Ethics Board, I interviewed 13 key informants (8 men and 5 women) about indigenous and contextual issues related to community resilience. These discussions provided many insights around issues of community resilience particular to Dagara communities and helped frame the specific questions of this study and some unique areas for follow-up (Fletcher, 2008; 2010). The preliminary study was supported by CIKOD and their Regional Coordinator for the Upper West Region, Mr. Daniel Banuoku, who helped set up interviews and provided introductions. These

interviews became building blocks for the relationships that followed for conducting the research study.

3.3.3 Phase 2 - Establishing and Empowering the Research Assistants

3.3.3.1 The Research Assistants. As described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and others (Smith, 2001; Wilson, 2008) the primary instrument for conducting a qualitative constructivist study of this nature is the human instrument: the individual researcher. In this inquiry, because of the deep contextual factors and particular cross-cultural issues, I was inspired to find research assistants from the area. CIKOD helped recruit a man and a woman who knew the area intimately, spoke local dialects, had skills to gain community entry, and experience in interviewing and note taking, to be research assistants. It was also important the individuals had some openness to indigenous knowledge and would be willing to take initiative and disagree with me and each other if necessary. Mrs. Vida S Gum and Mr. Zuma S.M. Gbedi, both graduating students from the University for Development Studies (UDS) in Wa, were recruited and turned out to be excellent research assistants.

From my early understanding of what the research approach would entail, the role of the research assistants with the principal researcher, was carefully constructed so as not to be only assistants to the principal researcher. The research assistants played full roles, including that of cultural interpreters and guiding the final design of the research. Given the context of northern Ghana, having a woman as a research assistant was essential to engage female community members. Research assistants had input into the final research instruments, their involvement in the preliminary analysis and synthesis of findings, and their direct participation in the feedback and clarification sessions was essential to understand the contextual realities of

resilience in this region. Establishing full roles for the research assistants is supported in the literature (Fals Borda & Rahman, 1991; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008; Minkler, 2003; Townsend, Birch, Langley, Langille, 2000). The research assistants also became subjects of the overall research process and our joint journey of learning became part of the shared analysis and final outcomes of the research initiative.

Mrs. Vida S. Gum (Vida), is a well-connected, mature woman from the town of Lawra, who has worked as a Junior Secondary School Teacher for 10 years. She has experience facilitating women's groups and is a poetic speaker of Dagare. Mr Zuma S.M. Gbedi (Zuma) is from a village in Jirapa district not far from Lawra. He attended Nandom Boys Secondary School and grew up in Eremon, the son of a School Principal. He knows many people and many parts of the district well. Both Vida and Zuma had been trained and gained practical experience in community entry and establishing respectful relationships with community members. Vida and Zuma knew each other and had a positive relationship between them. They had attended CIKOD training courses over the years and had worked as assistants with CIKOD on other research initiatives.

The extensive work with full roles as research assistants meant that co-construction of knowledge about community resilience happened at numerous levels: between the principal researcher and the research assistants, between research assistants and their friends, families and colleagues, between research assistants and various interviewees (both individual and in groups), and in dialogue when we reviewed, analyzed and interpreted discussions from the communities we visited.

The approach of recruiting research assistants from the area helped provide both outsider and insider perspectives on the exploration of community resilience. Using the decolonizing frame was an innovative way of devolving power out of the hands of the outsider.

Setting up full roles for the research assistants drew on my understanding and experience with participatory action research (PAR) (Fletcher, 1993) and the rich academic discourse in this field (Hall, Gillette, Tandon, 1982; Fals Borda & Rahman 1991; Maguire, 1998; Minkler, 2003). Although this was not a PAR project, I knew forming full roles for the research assistants and sharing some of the power for designing and conducting the research, would build capacities and be decolonizing.

The research assistants were intimately involved with me in the overall design of the research exploration, the selection of illustrative communities and households, conducting interviews and focus groups, documenting interviews and focus groups, engaging in thematic analysis and interpretation, preparing and presenting initial findings to the communities for validation, and engaging in reflexive activities on their own learning. Appendix F provides examples of how research assistants enhanced the quality of the research through relational accountability. In addition, Vida's rapport with women and girls and her facility with Dagare, Zuma's connection to youth, and his note taking and analytical skills were some of the various ways they contributed to the research and deepened our connections to the Dagara community. The research assistants and the principal researcher had multiple locations from which we functioned, both outsider and insider relationships, and we encouraged and viewed these different subjectivities as strengths. This diversity of locations allowed us to have discussions, and for the direction of the research not to be dominated by anyone's individual voice or bias.

Zuma and Vida commented on the challenges they recognized as insiders to the community, who should have known answers to the questions they were asking and who may have been identified with particular factions within the community. As the research unfolded, however, we all became clearer about our various locations with respect to the research and found ways to honor those relationships.

3.3.3.2 Field Study Advisory Committee. Another important element of this research design was an ad-hoc field study advisory committee. This committee was set up as a group of elders, or an advisory group, that I could turn to as the research unfolded. They did not have direct involvement in the study, but their advice and suggestions were always valuable and it was morally supportive to know they were there to back us as researchers, should the need arise. Originally this committee had no official status as regards the formal completion of my thesis. They were to be an ad-hoc, volunteer group of three respected, university-based researchers; two Dagara men, and one Gurunsi woman, who made the commitment to serve as advisors. I met and consulted with these individuals a number of times since 2006. They were involved as interviewees in other studies I conducted in Ghana (Fletcher, 2005, 2008). All three are involved in the research discourse around indigenous knowledge and endogenous development. Since 2011 two of these individuals have served more formally as co-supervisors of this dissertation research.

3.3.3.3 Identification of Communities and Participants in the Study. To explore the phenomena of community resilience with Dagara people in the Lawra District, a qualitative case study research was designed. This design took an emic approach, from the perspective of the Dagara people themselves, and included a number of key informants from different walks of life, individual and focus group interviews, interviews with two illustrative communities, and six illustrative households. The illustrative communities were in different parts of the district, and the illustrative households represented some ‘relatively financially better off’ households and some ‘relatively financially worse off’ households. Five of the households were in rural villages and one was in the town of Lawra, the district headquarters. In total 273 people were interviewed (including multiple interviews), 153 men and 120 women. This included some women and men who had migrated from Lawra to other parts of Ghana for

work. Figure 3.4 provides a synopsis of this data set and Appendix C includes a list of the full data set. Pseudonyms are used for all people interviewed to maintain confidentiality and anonymity.

Figure 3.4 Breakdown of People Interviewed by Gender, Generations and Type of Interaction.

	Male	Female	Total
Individuals Interviewed individually or in focus groups *	153	120	273
Individuals involved in individual or pair interviews	77	36	113
Number of Focus Groups			
			24
Range in Size of Focus Groups			
	3 to 14 people		
People involved in Focus Groups	76	84	160
People interviewed by age grade			
Youth	32	23	55
Adults	56	81	137
Elders	57	11	68
Migrants interviewed			
	14	13	27
Number of people involved in two or more interviews			
	13	7	20
Number of people involved in data collection (1 st round)	85	58	143
Number of people involved in community validation (2 nd round)	60	57	117
NB. * Preliminary study included. Multiple interviews counted more than once. Totals do not add up in different breakdowns because of the number of people in multiple interviews.			

Source: Author, field research, 2017.

Participant selection was determined by research principal and assistants. In order to get an overview of the district community we would need to interview men and women, elders and youth and people of different economic classes. Before beginning the research, we

interviewed one another to get acquainted and to acknowledge our biases and our initial recommendations. This bracketing also served as pilot testing for our interview protocols and a practice session for interviewing.

As 70% of the population of the Lawra District lives in small rural villages some distance from the district headquarters (Ghana Statistical Service, 2002), our first task was to select possible illustrative villages in different parts of the district. We chose to do a purposive sampling of rural villages of approximately 500 people which was the median population of villages in the district (Ghana Statistical Service, 2002). We had census data on all the communities, and jointly developed a set of criteria for selection. This criteria included representative of local ecosystems, farming and other livelihood options, proximity to market. Our process included drawing a sketch map of the area and having the research assistants share what they knew of the communities. Four communities were proposed as possibilities and we made reconnaissance visits to those communities to determine if they were interested. Based on this interest, two communities were selected. Within each of these communities we then worked with the chief to draft criteria and select illustrative households within the communities. The chiefs were very helpful in this process, and put their own requirements on the selection. Households in any kind of tension or conflict with the chief may have been excluded. We specifically asked the chief to propose households with a geographic spread across the village and some that were relatively better off economically and some relatively worse off economically. Then within those households we asked to speak to men and women of three generations. For Lawra town, the researchers proposed a small number of families who met our criteria and could possibly be the illustrative household. We decided on the final household by a random draw.

An extensive list of other key informants, both men and women, was developed by the research principal and assistants to achieve a cross section of Dagara peoples' perspectives on

community resilience. This list included elders, women leaders, youth, government officials, civil servants, farmers and business people. From these key informants, we were looking for a diversity of views about communities and community resilience and perspectives on indigenous knowledge. Both the principal researcher and the research assistants had a strong influence on this selection process so there were biases, but they balanced each other off. As the project evolved we checked to ensure we were getting a balance of men and women, elders, adults, youth and people of different socio-economic standing. We did not gather socio-economic data, but relied on the local knowledge of who were well-off families and who were less well-off families.

We were encouraged by a member of the advisory committee to trace people from the illustrative villages or households who had migrated to other parts of the country. The population under 18 years of age is very high in Ghana and many travel to other parts of the country in certain seasons to receive cash wages. We did interviews with people from Lawra district who had migrated to two communities in Brong-Ahafo Region where many Dagara youth migrate.

We recognized there could be a danger of essentializing the Dagara community as thinking or being one way, as this research unfolded. Dagara women and men of different generations have diverse opinions and beliefs about the world, which are influenced by their own upbringing and culture and the current trend towards modernization and globalization in the world. This diversity of individual views would need to be respected and valued in this study. Multiple perspectives from different places of power in the community would need to be exposed and interrogated to ensure the study was credible. As well shared communal values were an additional dimension to an individual's world view. Dagara people, who speak the Dagare language, identify themselves as Dagara, recognize kinship ties, honor ancestral relationships, and consider themselves part of the Dagara community, have a sense of

belonging that may be revealed in explicit ways through this research. Their sense of belonging as members of the Dagara community, the unit of analysis for this study, may supersede their individual interests and perceptions. These shared communal values are an element of the Dagara world view that was explored in this study.

3.3.4 Phase 3 - Engaging and Interacting with the Community

Engaging and interacting with the community on their perceptions of community resilience was what this research process was all about. Although the principal researcher and the research assistants had high expectations about exploring questions around community resilience, we always had at the forefront, the principle that establishing and maintaining the relationships with those who were volunteering their time and energy to share a piece of their lives with us was of ultimate importance. Three primary modes of interacting suggested in the literature were adopted: in-depth interviews (Charmaz, 2002; Creswell, 2007; DeVault & McCoy, 2002; Ellis & Berger, 2002), focus group discussions (Creswell, 2007; Depoy & Gitlin, 1994; Fontana, 2002) and participant observation (Cook, 2005; Creswell, 2007; DeKoning & Martin, 1996).

3.3.4.1 Individual in-depth interviews. As suggested in the literature, in-depth interviews offered a great opportunity for exploring community resilience from the perspective of the community (De Koning & Martin, 1996; Depoy & Gitlin, 1994; Laws, Harper, & Marcus, 2003). Laliberte-Rudman and Moll (2001) for example, recommend in-depth interviews help get participants' meanings, perspectives, definitions, and how they experience the world. We used both constructivist and critical in-depth interviews, which are quite different than conventional interviews. In conventional interviews from a positivist paradigm, the "interviewer" takes center stage to construct meaning. There is discrete information to discover and it is the interviewer's task to "dig" to extract this information (Creswell, 2007;

DePoy & Gitlin, 1994). In constructivist understandings, biography and context of both the interviewer and interviewee are seen as crucially important; as such, in-depth interviews take on much more of a story-telling format and the objective is to gather rich and thick description. Meaning is negotiated and constructed within the interaction of the two parties involved (Fontana, 2002). We also drew on the critical paradigm to probe on issues such as gender dynamics, but remained cautious to balance our interrogation with the recognition that the structures and relations we were asking about are socially constructed themselves. We resisted the temptation to ask interviewees specifically about quantitative information related to economic class such as assets, farm production, or income levels for example, as we decided this would be intimidating and could alienate interviewees. As the literature recommends (Cook, 2005; Fine, 1994; Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001) we had a set of guiding questions and an interview protocol, and tried to uncover the assumptions, social structures, and ruling relations that may have been influencing the issues under consideration, without imposing a pre-existing framework. Our balance of critical and constructivist perspectives implied listening to the interviewee and honoring the relevance of whatever she or he said without prejudice, while gently pushing interviewees to be clear about their meaning.

Building on the work of Millar (2005) and Some (1995) we showed respect and honor to indigenous ways of knowing and indigenous ways of bringing meaning to the world by listening for and capturing peoples' recounting of spiritual ceremonies with nature, consulting with ancestors, and valuing intuition. These often neglected dimensions of what brings meaning to life are considered essential aspects in a constructivist interview situation (see Holkup et al., 2004; Schnarch, 2004; Smith, 2001; Wallerstein, 1999). Charmaz's advice (2002) is to recognize the interview as a dialogue, that can, according to Ellis and Berger (2002: 860), become a "sea swell of meaning making in which researchers connect their own

experiences to those of others and provide stories that open up conversations about how we live and cope”. We, as research principal and assistants, encouraged ourselves to do these kinds of constructivist interviews. At the same time, from the critical perspective, we were reminded one “can’t ignore cultural, historical and political environments that surround and cut through the interview process” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003: 16). We worked together as researchers to find this balance in our interview approaches and to maintain a commitment to open-ended interviews where the interviewee determines the flow of the interaction, as Millar (2004, 2005) insists.

Within the dynamics of a rural Dagara household, it was not always possible to interview people individually, or to construct a focus group with a specific make-up. Flexibility was important to allow different constellations of people to come together, ultimately with the aim of getting household perspectives on community resilience while still respecting issues between gender and generations within the household.

The actual content of the interviews outlined in the question guidelines, were developed with the research principal and assistants, with guidance from my previous studies and experience. A sample of what an interview protocol might look like (for both individual and focus group interviews) is included as Appendix D. Interviews were conducted in Dagare with highlight notes in English provided afterwards, in Dagare with English translation, or in English alone. Early in the process the research assistants with the principal researcher attempted to develop a lexicon of Dagare words related to community resilience based on the concepts that surfaced in the preliminary study. Millar suggested we ask key informants for explanations of Dagara words that relate to resilience such as the following: hardiness, bouncing back, coping, trauma, disaster, crisis (Millar, 2008). This suggestion proved challenging initially, however, so we began asking questions in a more general way to identify

the conceptual vocabulary that interviewees were using most consistently. Even those key informants, university trained in Dagare language, found the conceptual translations challenging. The research assistants had confidence in their own translations in context from Dagare to English and English to Dagare but the literal translations of vocabulary terms became an ongoing process that culminated at the end of the research.

One example that demonstrates the importance of flexibility and openness in the interview process and relationship happened during one interview when a bird flew overhead while the interview was being conducted. The person being interviewed stopped, observed the bird, and explained that bird species was his clan totem. He went on to explain the story behind the significant role this bird plays in the cultural cosmology, and the pride his clan has in being associated with this bird. He also elaborated on other clan totems, the human world - animal world relationships and the significance of clan and kinship systems. The interview relationship that had been established showed flexibility and openness to the interaction taking on its own nature.

3.3.4.2 Focus group discussions. Focus group discussions were conducted with groups of youth, women, elders, family units of mixed generations, farmers and used clothing traders. As stated by Depoy and Gitlin (1994) and DeKoning and Martin (1996) being in a group with others “like you” can give people confidence to speak about their experiences and develop a sense of camaraderie that enables a construction of knowledge that may be difficult to articulate in an individual interview. We certainly observed this in our focus groups. Laws, Harper and Marcus (2003) argued that this collective building of knowledge can be particularly effective in cultures where communal values are important, and thick description can be generated. We also experienced that group interviews are also susceptible to dominating voices. Group interviews run the risk of leading to lowest common denominator responses,

wherein people are overly agreeable and superficial in their discussion (Laws, Harper, & Marcus, 2003; Hollis, Oppenshaw, & Goble, 2002; Zeller, 1993). We observed that both of these scenarios can happen in a focus group and that the structure of the focus group and the skills of the facilitator, cognizant of the pitfalls and the opportunities of group dynamics, can use them effectively to explore the diversity of views on community resilience.

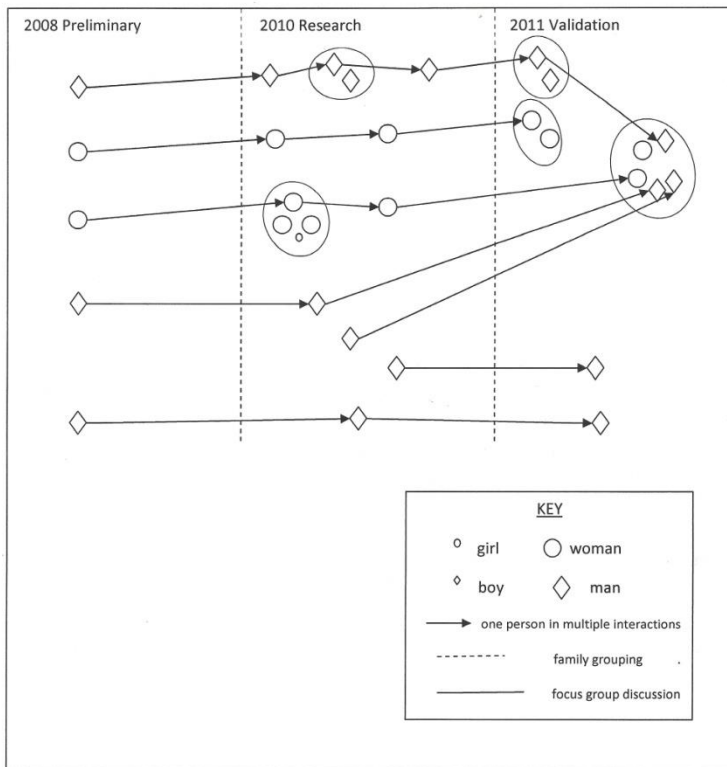
Focus group discussions were useful for getting people to think deeply about changes; and to motivate participants to take action. Often the discussion in our focus groups was more than “gathering data” as participants in dialogue offered analysis and synthesis of information, and brainstormed various action initiatives. Focus groups also had the advantage of reducing the power and influence of the research principal and assistants, as in a few instances wherein the group perceived their own strength and just began talking about what was important to them. We were privileged to listen in on the community discourse. In these moments, it appeared the power within the group enabled them to keep each other honest and true to their own constructed reality and not easily be manipulated by an outside researcher (DeKoning & Martin, 1996; Laws, Harper, & Marcus, 2003). Others have argued that, “By creating and sustaining an atmosphere that promotes meaningful interaction, focus groups convey human sensitivity, a willingness to listen without being defensive, and a respect for opposing views that is unique and beneficial” (Morgan and Krueger, 1993:18). Of the 24 focus groups conducted, those that were part of the community validation discussions were particularly useful. In all cases an instrument for facilitating focus groups, stimulating dialogue and encouraging collective interpretation and analysis was developed based on suggestions in the literature and these proved beneficial (see Arnold, Burke, James, & Martin, Thomas, 1991; Chambers, 1983; Friere, 1970; Laws, Harper, & Marcus, 2003; Pretty, Guijt, Thompson, & Scoones, 1995; Theis & Grady, 1991).

The design and facilitation of these groups also drew on the previous experience of the research principal and assistants and the extensive work done in the development of Participatory Learning and Action tools (Pretty, Guijt, Thompson, & Scoones, 1995). Some tools such as mapping, ranking exercises and seasonal calendars were integrated into our focus groups effectively.

Illustrative Households. Most Dagara people continue to live in large multigenerational households. Therefore, it is illuminating to meet a cross section of male and female family members of different generations from within the same households to compare their perspectives (Guri, 2008; Millar, 2005). Daily life is centered around these household units, values and culture are transmitted at least in part through these structures, and livelihood strategies focus on activities at this level. Conducting in-depth interviews with members of three generations (both men and women) living in such a household provided insight to one of the essential building blocks of community. The men and the middle-aged group is often the group with most power and access. It is imperative that the youth, who constitute the largest percentage of the population in communities and are often excluded from decision-making are also given the space to speak. Elders, who traditionally are respected and considered to hold the wisdom of the community must also be included. It is also important that men and women be involved in an equitable manner. In certain instances, women's voices had to be given additional opportunities to be heard because they are often silenced in research initiatives.

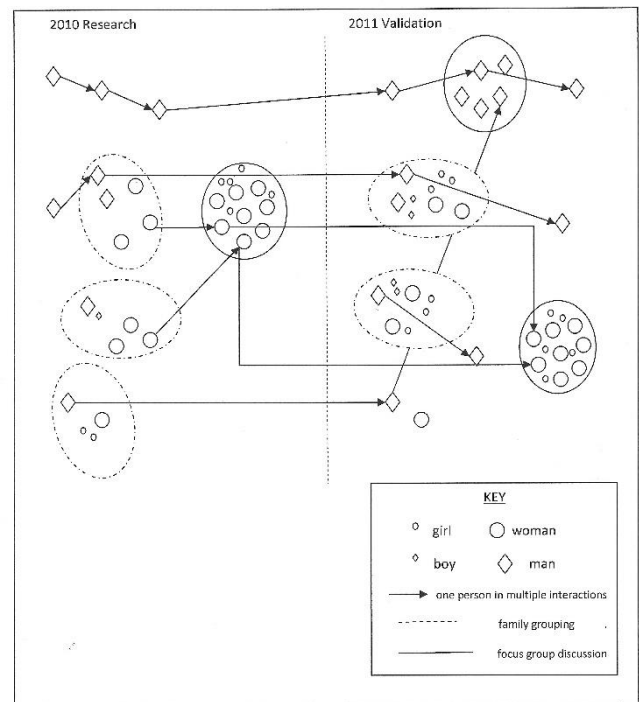
It soon became clear that there are not universal perspectives shared by each generation, or by each gender, yet there is an oral community discourse within each of these groups that was important to capture. This was not always easy to do, however, holding this principle in mind did inspire us to get broad representation over the research data set as a whole, so we heard a range of different perspectives from both genders in three different generations.

Figure 3.5 Discussions in District Headquarters Showing Multiple Interactions with Selected Individuals



Source: Author, field research, 2017

Figure 3.6 Discussions in Village B Showing Multiple Interactions with Selected Individuals



Source: Author, field research, 2017

Multiple interactions with the same Individual. Another special feature that evolved in this research was multiple interactions (interviews, focus groups, informal discussions) with the same individuals. In the original proposal for this study I did not state an intention to interview anyone more than once, although as the research unfolded, it was some of the multiple interactions with the same individuals that proved the most insightful. These multiple interactions enabled discussions to go deeper, to both probe and interrogate and be open to synergistic, spiritual and transformative connections. Once rapport and respect was established in the first interaction, it was possible to quickly go to a deeper place in subsequent interactions, either individually or in a group setting. The subsequent interactions also provided the opportunity to cross-check and to probe about what we had heard from others and if people agreed or disagreed or could help us understand issues we had heard elsewhere. A sample of

these multiple interactions are mapped in figures 3.5 and 3.6 and show continuity between the three field phases of the research.

3.3.4.3 Participant observations and reflective activities. Participant observation and engagement is a common methodology in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007) especially ethnography (DeVault & McCoy, 2002) and was very useful in this case study revealing community resilience. The research principal and assistants drew on this method extensively and it was especially valuable for me as an outsider, to better understand the context and the Dagara world view.

Participant observation and engagement is a qualitative method for informally gathering data while immersing oneself within a cultural milieu to understand the nuances and to contextualize what is being heard. In using participant observation and engagement the researcher must be skilled at deep and active listening. We utilized this method throughout all three phases of the research exploration. Much of the literature that promotes participant observation talks about the value of attending and observing the events of everyday life with an eye for insights related to the topic under study. With informal attendance at funerals, condolences, lunches, drinks after work, visiting people at their homes, and visiting markets we were able to observe certain behaviors and practices. These interactions also build authentic relationships, and trust from which one learns the most.

Figure 3.7 maps selected relationships that were formed by the research principal and assistants and the sites that were created for participant observation and engagement. It was the nurturing of numerous relationships that provided insights directly and upon reflection. Three circles of relationships were the most intimate. First the relationship with the research principal and assistants, such as our professional time together, travel and meals, their connections in the community, their cultural competence, and negotiated interpretations

provided rich opportunities for observation and learning. Second, the relationship with the CIKOD Executive Director that teaching together, writing proposals, informal discussions, and a strong friendship outside the confines of this research provided a sounding board for what I was learning. Third the relationship with the CIKOD Regional Coordinator and his family in Lawra, who welcomed me into their home, served as logistical support, and who were key informants providing ongoing opportunities for learning and cultural understanding. Just being with and observing these groups helped develop an understanding of Dagara community resilience. At another level of relationship was the connection with the chiefs of the two village communities because we followed protocol and went to them each time we were in their community, so saw them multiple times. They were defacto gate keepers to work in their communities and always were welcoming and encouraging.

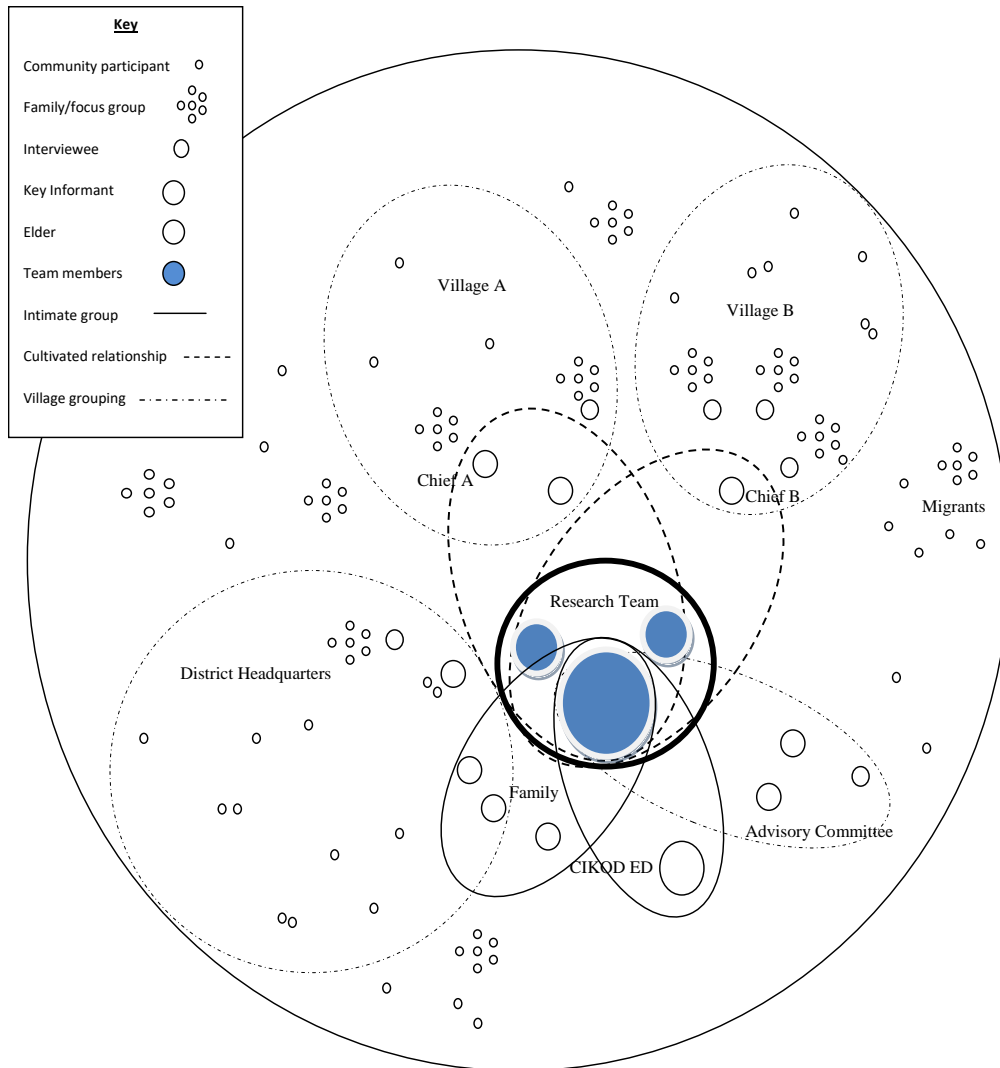
In addition, other key informants, academics, household members and other individuals were interviewed in the community broadly. The literature, media and news reports brought forward from the research assistants based on their connections provided another level of interactions. Observing them and staying in-tune, listening in on the community discourse helped shape our construction of community resilience. All of these relationships, helped inform the understanding and co-construction of knowledge about community resilience with the Dagara. These kinds of observations from relationships were written up in research principal's and assistants' journals, as field memos that were added in to the data base, or most often served as background thoughts to the debriefing discussions we had.

One particular experience of participant engagement in the broader Dagara community, that was quite profound was a two-day earth ritual workshop I attended facilitated by Malidoma Some, a Dagara elder, and scholar from Burkina Faso. Although this workshop did not take place in Lawra District (it was held in Halifax, Canada) the experience was beneficial in better

understanding the Dagara cosmovision and spirituality. I made lengthy journal entries during this experiential workshop and reflections from that experience are brought into the discussions in this study.

The participant observation method was very useful throughout the process and the ability for us as researchers to check observations with each other as a usual part of the debriefing process was valuable in interpreting these observations. Reflexive activities were also used by the research principal and assistants to capture their learnings about the process and findings as they unfolded.

Figure 3.7 Participant Observation Relationships 2008-2011



Source: Author, field research, 2017

3.3.5 Phase 4 – Participatory Analysis and Community Validation

3.3.5.1 Analysis and interpretation. The qualitative analytical framework used was ongoing constant comparison of data, content and thematic analysis (Creswell, 2007). At the same time, we also protected the integrity of peoples’ stories and narratives so that the contextual nature of their comments was not lost (Huberman & Miles, 2002). The intent of the process was to create a participatory approach in which all researchers engaged with the analysis. There was an opportunity for analysis and reflection immediately after the interviews

and focus groups, and further analysis after the community meeting. Research principal and assistants shared their perceptions and interpretations of the data as it was collected and this helped build discernment of themes and delineated unique characteristics.

The most intense time for analysis and interpretation however, was three two day workshops that were conducted at the beginning of the research work together in 2011. When the principal researcher and assistant reconvened after being apart for nine months we started by reflecting on previous years' learning. As we reconnected it was amazing what highlights each remembered from the previous year's interviews and how we each perceived things in different ways. I had been connected to the data as I had the task of organizing the transcripts in the database. Both Vida and Zuma had been disconnected from the interview notes, but still involved in discussions with others in the Dagara community around community resilience. Our initial reflection activity, using a card sort, of what we had learned the previous year became an early attempt at naming possible themes and categories for coding interviews that we built upon later.

All interviews and field memos from interviews had been entered in an Atlas-TI database, and were printed for our reference. The research assistants were asked to read through a few transcripts to get back into the flavor of what we had heard and the wealth of data we had collected. Using a couple of interviews chosen at random, they individually highlighted what they found most interesting, and we then discussed these and used them to develop a possible list of themes for coding. I then shared with them the list of open codes that I had developed using the same process. We discussed the similarities and differences in the naming process and came up with a set of primary codes, agreeing that we could use multiple codes or add new ones if the data demanded it. The research principal and assistants then took several examples of interviews and did a more formal coding of themes. These codings were

then compared with coding I had done earlier and we explored differences in the interpretations. For the most part we were using broad codes and the coding was very similar. We took note of the kinds of differences identified for later follow-up.

I then shared with the research assistants the coded and sorted data set of interviews that included over thirty distinct codes. We discussed how these codes related to each other and formed cluster groups of codes and hierarchies. Each research assistant was then assigned different clusters and asked to go through those notes highlighting what they saw as significant, capturing specific quotations that were insightful and finally drafting a short summary of that theme to share with each other. This task proved challenging, but it certainly engaged everyone in the data analysis and helped us deconstruct and collectively reconstruct an understanding of community resilience based on the perspective of Dagara women and men, girls and boys who we had interviewed. The final stage of our analysis was to go back through the notes to identify any differences based on age, gender, geographic location and perceived socio-economic status. We attempted to manipulate the database to provide these kinds of insights, but found it was just as easy to go through the thematically sorted transcript notes. The principal research and assistants then took on the responsibility to prepare a report of findings, concerns, questions for further follow-up and any recommendations that they had heard for presentation back to the communities for validation. These presentations, were prepared and shared with each other to ensure major issues were captured and presented in a provocative way. Through these deliberations, a simple model was developed to capture the essence of community resilience which was used to guide the feedback to the communities.

This collective analysis was a very intensive time for the research principal and assistants. In a short period, extensive analysis was done of a huge amount of data. Certain subtleties were lost along the way, but they were still in the data and were drawn out in the

secondary level of analysis that I conducted in phase 5 of the research. What we did accomplish was a thorough overview and analysis of the interviews and focus groups, provided propositions to answer the guiding questions for this study and prepared feedback to communities for their deeper input, analysis and validation.

Throughout these intensive workshops various tools and techniques were used to promote the participatory analysis process. One technique we used for doing this analysis was adopted from Total Quality Management (TQM), an organizational development system. The card sort (or affinity tree) diagram is based on individuals having summaries of their interview notes and then writing on index cards short phrases that capture some of the key findings from their interviews. All researchers then put these cards on a table and together we silently sorted the phrase cards until categories are formed based on affinities, or similarities between the phrases. Once the majority of the cards are sorted, individuals can ask questions for clarification about individual phrases to ensure everyone is satisfied with the categorizations. Then the main task is to name the different categories. More discussion can then take place and the raw data can be revisited to check accuracy. We successfully completed this activity where over 100 pieces of data (phrase cards) were sorted into potentially 10 or 12 categories. As a preliminary form of analysis, it was very useful. Other ranking, web charting, and diagramming techniques from TQM and Participatory Learning and Action also helped with preliminary analysis.

Detailed final analysis was done utilizing Atlas TI software. The code list for doing this work was based on the initial categories generated by us, and the final analysis verified the preliminary work, and provided a triangulation of credible results that can be audited.

3.3.5.2 Community Validation. A required element of the research process was to present feedback to the community to clarify understanding and deepen interpretations. This

feedback was done in community meetings where presentation and dialogue was facilitated in a way to ensure the community felt respected and that their views had been accurately captured. Opportunities were given to clarify and to correct information that had been summarized and synthesized by the research. One essential element of checking was whether interpretations were representative of the community as a whole or only of certain “factions” within the community. This was challenging and, ultimately, we were unsure whether supplementary focus groups or individual interviews following the community meeting were needed. Community meetings had been envisioned for validation, feedback, clarification, and deepening discussions. These meetings were held the year after the interviews and focus groups were conducted. The meeting was a great success in one community and less so in another. Elders sat close to the traditional leader, women congregated on one side and men on the other. Children and youth were usually at the back and did not contribute unless asked specifically. To acknowledge the contributions of the community and express our gratitude the research principal and assistants presented tree seedlings to the communities as gifts, and local beer was shared following the meeting.

Preliminary findings were shared with the traditional leader in advance of these meetings, and the research principal and researchers began each session by providing a synopsis of the findings. This presentation was done as a simple verbal report with the principal researcher and each research assistant taking responsibility for drafting and delivering different sections of the report back to the community. An outline of what was reported is provided in Appendix D. Validation meetings were also held with key informants and with the illustrative households. The household meetings were particularly informative because people were also able to provide a sense of what had transpired in each household in the intervening year and how this related to resilience.

3.3.6 Phase 5 - Final Articulation of Case Study

The final articulation of this case study was done in two parts. First an analysis of the conceptual vocabulary around resilience in Dagare, the language of the Dagara was completed. This analysis was based on deep examination of interviews and discussions with the principal researcher and assistants about the lexicon of concepts in Dagara around resilience. This lexicon was supplemented by reference to a Dagare English Dictionary (Durand, 1953) and other relevant documents. I also consulted by email with the research assistants and asked specific questions for feedback for their corrections and / or endorsement of the final conclusions. This work has been published in a collection called *Bridging Worlds: Interfacing Indigenous and Conventional Knowledge for development in Ghana* (Apusigah, 2014). More importantly, it set up the conceptual space for the final articulation of this case study on revealing community resilience with the Dagara people of Lawra District captured in this dissertation.

The chapters of this dissertation were written, with feedback and guidance from my supervisors and support from other colleagues. I revisited the data base extensively identifying quotations to substantiate findings and to broaden and deepen analysis. For the most part, however, the essence of the construction of knowledge on community resilience had been completed with the research assistants and did not change.

3.4 Ethical Vigilance: Monitoring Power in Researcher – Researchee Relationships

The intention of this research design, and the indigenous research perspective I brought to the work, was to make it a decolonizing experience. As a non-indigenous, non-Dagara person researching community resilience with the indigenous Dagara population I cannot take-for-granted the ethical nature of my philosophical standpoint. I therefore had to use processes

to interrogate the power that transcends my location and philosophy and exists in the actual day-to-day relationships encountered in conducting this study.

I learned to monitor the power in researcher – researchee relationships through three lenses: through a pragmatic lens, through an empathetic lens, and through a lens of negotiation – negotiating from a place of difference to co-construct meaning. The power within the relationships can manifest in many forms: who plans, designs, sets the time and executes the project, who makes decisions about who to engage with in which communities and in what ways, who has access to and controls the resources, who engages in analysis, articulates interpretations and names conclusions. My location, as male, outsider, non-Dagare speaker in relation to the location of Dagara people involved in this study was part of this power dynamic. Conceptualization of power is useful here, where was there visible power at play in the relationships, where was there hidden power (manipulation or setting the agenda behind the scenes) and where was there invisible power (ideological influence or internalized oppression) at play (Gaventa, 2006).

3.4.1 Monitoring power from a pragmatic lens

At one level I can look at my role as an outside researcher through a pragmatic lens. Robert Chambers (1983) in his classic book, *Rural Development: putting the last first* challenged those working in development to assess their role as outsiders. He challenged his readers to consider six biases that influence field work (spatial, project, person, dry season, diplomatic and professional), and to consider five reversals in the normal way of doing things to devolve power and reduce privilege. Perhaps his most profound insight, however, is his naming of “we”, as development professionals, as the outsiders and the need to acknowledge the agency of people in communities in the global south as insiders with knowledge, skills and world views that they can contribute to development activities.

Chambers (1983) articulation of the six biases show where both visible and hidden power exist in the researcher (outsider) – researchee (insider) relationship. His recommendations also challenge all of us to be vigilant about reversals. Many of these reversals recommend pragmatic action, but are really about ways to confront ideological or invisible power. Although his work is now 30 years old, and he has been prolific since then, his book serves as a touchstone to monitor and confront power in relationships. In my work as an adult educator and community development facilitator I begin with seeing people as agents of change with their own knowledge, skills and world views. I have cultivated my professional work to be interdisciplinary, culturally-based, oriented towards mutual learning and utilizing participatory decision making. I brought this experience to this research.

Recently scholars have critiqued participation saying it has become so normalized that it could be considered a “new tyranny” (Cooke and Kothari, 2001: 1). Others argue, there are always boundaries created between *us and them* because of the *ruling relations* that become established in carrying out the everyday work (Devault & McCoy, 2002). There are mundane social practices that reaffirm the power differentials between the researcher and the researched and one needs to make tireless strategic efforts to overcome these (Millar, 2005).

The ideas of tyranny of participation and the mundane social practices that reaffirm power differentials often manifest in visible power. These may be the easiest to identify and change. For the researcher, sensitivity, reflection on one’s own practice and reflexivity is necessary to help bridge theory and practice (Lather, 1986; Maguire, 2001; Manias & Street, 2000). Two examples of visible power in this research was (a) our foregrounding an interest in indigenous spirituality meant reduced discussion with people on the structures and influence of the Catholic Church and (b) my logistical constraints meant research was conducted over a limited time, during the dry season, convenient to my schedule.

Millar's work (2005) is also helpful at a pragmatic level as he acknowledges the difference between rural, village people and those researching and/or engaging in development initiatives with them. Anyone not currently living a rural, village life, even if they may have grown up in that community, has to recognize themselves as an outsider to those with current life experiences and recognize there will be power at play in the relationships between them. Millar (2005:97) recommends an endogenous way of working to confront various levels of power differentials such as: accept the idea that local communities have indigenous knowledge; accept the rules and regulations set by the community; enter into a respectful and constructive dialogue; and accept the guidance of local leaders.

3.4.2 Monitoring power from an empathetic lens

The empathetic lens challenges an outsider to see community members in an empathetic way, to walk in their shoes, and to bracket and put aside one's own location and its socialized biases, and attempt to understand a phenomenon from the location of another. Attempting to unpack relationships in this way, first interrogating one's own location and its inherent power and privileges and secondly taking on the perspective of another.

Power in My Location. There are structural, systemic and cultural norms that gave me power in the relationship with the people in Dagara communities. As the initiator of this research and the principal researcher the study is perceived as 'mine', even though the research assistants played a major role and members of the advisory committee influenced elements of the research design. My embodied location (Lather, 1986, 1994; Smith, 1987) as a white-looking, middle class, North American male speaks of various levels of power. In conducting this research there were lots of assumptions about my right to make decisions and to control the research. My age and education reinforced this power differential and often put me in places of advantage viz-a-viz the community people wherein they would often refer to me for

decisions and interpretations. This power may not be inherently bad, it is a form of responsibility, but it did mean I was having undue visible influence over the process. Most importantly it may have reaffirmed some biases and stereotypes about who determines the purpose of, and how research is conducted.

Each person has multiple locations (Manias & Street, 2000), however, and claiming my mixed ancestry and being a passionate and committed ally for African and indigenous cultures not only complicates my location, but that complex multifaceted location influences my ability to adopt another's standpoint. My location and gaze influenced the relationships between myself and others involved in the research potentially providing a more equitable ground for negotiating the relationships (Lather, 1994). By recognizing we each have multiple locations, I explored what each location means by being reflexive, engaging in dialogue, and discovering the "space between" various standpoints (Smith, 1987).

Privileging Another's Viewpoint. In understanding the world, the viewpoints of marginalized people are useful in knowing more deeply the context and location of people within its bounds (Dei, 2000; Fine, 1994). In critical theory, and the associated radical approach of participatory research, many scholars have argued that a researcher must take the standpoint of the dispossessed in order to make the changes that are necessary in an unjust world (Hall, Gillette, & Tandon, 1982; Fals Borda, & Rahman, 1991; Maguire, 1987, 2001). Smith (2001: 1) acknowledges that she privileges this standpoint in relation to research with her phrase, "the vantage point of the colonized". Analyzing her actions through a critical lens, she is convinced her research can either be for maintaining the status quo of an elitist and colonizing research or for a new form of liberating research—but it can never be neutral. This echoes Friere's (1970) work in liberatory education where he posited there is no neutral

education. However, to truly bracket and put aside one's own pre-conceived notions and unconscious assumptions and values to take those of another is psychologically challenging.

Smith (2001: 9) describes the nature of conventional academic research *on* indigenous people and its ties to colonialism, and neo-colonialism. She argues that, research has been worthless to indigenous people and has been a power wielded over indigenous people by others. Her (Smith 2001: 74) desire is for research to be more “respectful, ethical, sympathetic and useful”. She describes a distinctly different way of knowing from western science, one that is part of the indigenous world view and insists that “the values, attitudes, concepts and language embedded in beliefs about spirituality represent, in many cases, the clearest contrast and mark of difference between indigenous peoples and the west”.

Reason and Bradbury (2001: 8) writing from an interpretivist frame provide additional insights into power relations by distinguishing between separated and connected knowing. They describe separated knowing as *critical and doubting*, and connected knowing starting with empathy, a receptive eye and entering the “spirit of what is offered and seeking to understand from within”. This relativistic view resonates with a holistic world view (Konadu, 2003; Mbiti, 1969; Millar, 2004; Monteiro, 2000; Some, 1995) and informed my entry point for research in northern Ghana.

To privilege the Dagara world view, Dagara knowledge, or Dagara way of being means starting from their own perspective. The Dagara world view must be understood and articulated with limited interpretation and theoretical analysis by outside agents. This worldview is not one frozen in time (Millar, 2005). It is one that coexists with western, modern world views and evolves on a daily basis, yet must be accepted and appreciated by outsiders, and owned by the Dagara themselves as a decolonizing project (Smith, 2001).

The Dagara women and men, boys and girls in these same communities are not homogeneous. Each have their own unique identities and locations. Many take great pride and strength from their indigenous ethnic origins and are certainly not impoverished victims as others may label them. Others in the Dagara community have grown up in a colonial education system and have succeeded to enjoy certain privilege, or feel they have been denigrated and marginalized economically, politically, and culturally from the globalized world. Their locations are diverse, multiple and complex.

Bishop (2005), who titles his article *Freeing ourselves from neocolonial domination in research*, discusses the diversity and complexity in indigenous peoples lives according to age, class, gender, education and other dimensions and states there is not one *other* in the conventional sense of the term. He represents a new body of scholarship that contests the notion of the *other* and privileges indigenous people as insiders, and the best people to do research on themselves. He quotes Swisher (1998: 113) who proposes that a defining characteristic of the *other*, the new insider in an indigenous research project, is ... “the passion from within and the authority to ask new and different questions based on histories and experiences of indigenous people”. Insiders therefore have an advantage in doing decolonizing research, yet they must also be ethical, respectful and humble. Bishop (2005) does not discount the possibility of an outsider conducting indigenous research, but that the researcher needs to have cultural knowledge to accurately interpret and validate experiences and that as an outsider should only conduct research at the invitation of indigenous people.

From an empathetic lens therefore, I must recognize the different worldview seen through insiders’ eyes, and struggle to be appreciative and respectful of the indigenous way of being, without romanticizing, and being critical when necessary. It is a difficult balancing act, but was worth the effort and the close collaboration with Dagara colleagues helped minimize

some of the outsider – insider power dynamics and overcome some invisible power at play by privileging the standpoints of the Dagara people.

3.4.3 Monitoring power from a lens of negotiation

We can illuminate the power at play in researcher – researchee relationships at another level if we consider what I call a negotiation lens. This lens owes much to researchers who have looked at the researcher – researchee, or outsider – insider, issue from an indigenous viewpoint (Bishop, 2005; Little Bear, 2000; Smith, 2001). This lens forces us to consider these relationships and analyze the power at play at a deeper level.

The discourse on outsider – insider relationships has been taken to a different place by indigenous scholars, and scholars from traditionally exploited groups, who have contested the outsider – insider dichotomies and their stereotypes. All researchers have been challenged to reflect on their own multiple locations and how these locations and the associated power dynamics influence the relationships in research projects, including their own relationships with their multiple selves.

Negotiating to co-construct meaning means to forefront, honor and acknowledge differences, not to judge them, and to celebrate them as unique understandings of how the world works. This co-construction means finding a way to go forward together without losing the richness of different viewpoints. Working from this negotiation lens is not to compromise to a *laissez-faire* cultural relativism, but demands real dialogue to reach new understandings that are not blind to power differentials which can replicate the status-quo.

Smith (2001) describes how indigenous researchers are both outsiders and insiders at the same time. Outsiders in the sense that they receive certain privileges, and at the same time very much insiders who have their own relevant knowledge, experiences and insights to

contribute and a passionate stake in the research process and outcomes. Insiders also have both a perceived and real accountability to their own families and communities about the research findings and conclusions.

Apusigah (2002), in her research thesis on *Reconsidering Women Development and Education in Ghana*, states she privileges the views of Ghanaian women from within and challenges herself as an African feminist to do serious work from the inside-out. However, she states she is also open to other viewpoints and to looking from the outside-in ... to own these multiple locations as there are a myriad of other angles and ways of looking at things and she strives to contest discourses from all locations (p.42).

In this research initiative, the research principal and assistants had different locations at different times along the spectrum of outsider – insider, researcher – researchee, and us - other. What we were hearing and learning from Dagara people in communities was then negotiated through this lens. We had certain power and privilege to be able to shape the discussions, as well as visible, hidden and invisible power, yet we were ever mindful to let the discussions evolve under the direction of those being interviewed and to regularly reflect on the biases and influence we might be introducing in ever so subtle ways.

It was a collaborative co-construction of meaning that we strove for in this research, which meant we focused on relationships and a healthy balance of power within those relationships. As Narayan (1993: 672) articulated:

What we must focus our attention on is the quality of relations with the people we seek to represent in our texts: are they viewed as mere fodder for professionally self-serving statements about a generalized Other, or are they accepted as subjects with voices, views and dilemmas – people to whom we are bonded with ties of reciprocity.

Apusigah (2002) talks about resisting the challenge to over-analyze stories, from the primary author's viewpoint. This research included a saturation of multiple voices in ongoing

analysis within interviews and reflections by the researchers, during analysis workshops and community validation.

Bishop (2005) and Minkler (2003) talk about making transparent the power differentials which realities reveal, including the sometimes divergent and conflicting agendas. Superficially we could say my agenda was to finish PhD research, for the research assistants it was a job, and for the community members it was to get some direct benefit, or maybe just to have the chance to share their stories. It was more complicated than this, however, and the methodology chosen and the design put in place revealed this.

This personal vigilance and interrogation challenged me to look at how I worked with others in phrasing research questions, listening, capturing stories and making meaning. I initially wanted to erase some of the differences between my location and those of the research assistants and the community members. As time went on I clearly accepted the differences and the power and privilege that went with them and worked to negotiate and co-construct meaning in an authentic way. This co-construction meant privileging others voice at times, being acutely aware of the power in the writing, and monitoring relationships with others in the community.

I was aided by the research assistants, my colleagues, and my supervisors to stay honest and maintain integrity in this process. I cannot deem to say anything as an insider, my location is very different from Dagara men and women who live their lives in Lawra District. Yet, the methodology and research design undertaken was valid and I can say there is a spiritual element that I propose complexifies my location and my identity that aided in the co-construction of knowledge and meaning. I approached this work with passion and in solidarity. My spiritual self resonates with the Dagara context, and from my world view there are blood memories (Loppie, 2009) of past life times that connect me with this region and its people.

The methodological approach selected for this study acknowledged these tensions around locations, insider / outsider, indigenous / non-indigenous power within the research. We remained reflexive and vigilant about these continuous tensions. The design of the research process was such that it led to a co-construction of useful knowledge about community resilience with the Dagara. The methodological approach used was a qualitative case study and the research design included working with Dagara colleagues as research assistants, conducting in-depth interviews and focus groups, collective thematic analysis, and community validation.

3.5 Summary

In this chapter I have shared the indigenous ontology and epistemology that informed this study. I discussed the decolonizing stance that was taken and outlined issues of trustworthiness I took into account (credibility, authenticity, criticality and integrity) and relational accountability. The qualitative case study methodology that I drew on in the research study was explained. The five-phase research design was shared with a focus around the process of cultivating relationships with Dagara people, and the establishment and empowering of the research assistants. These research assistants took responsibility for conducting the major elements of the research methodology from design, to data collection to analysis and community validation. I have also included a section on ethical vigilance, and how this was maintained throughout the study process. Employing an indigenous philosophy and decolonizing methodological approach has provided a valid and credible case study of community resilience with Dagara people in Lawra District. The findings and conclusions based on this case study are described in the following two chapters.