In this article, I expand on Coquery-Vidrovitch’s observation (1991) that to understand each African urban milieu, we must view it as more than a fusion of European, American, or traditional culture. Rather, we must see each African city as unique, that is, in fact, internally differentiated, containing a multitude of enclaves that vary one from another in their respective social, physical, and architectural spatial forms. I focus on one community in Accra known as Sabon Zongo. Founded by migrant Hausa from northern Nigeria almost a century ago, it is neither typically southern Ghanaian nor Hausa, having adapted to a mixed cultural milieu. Laid out by the British as part of their town plan, its manner of growth has blurred the original scheme. I examine a number of components that define the uniqueness of this particular urban community, including physical delineations (within Sabon Zongo and between it and the city at large), local knowledge, the landscape, the infrastructure, market and street trade, and centripetal socio-spatial structures such as the family compound. [Ghana, zongo, social-spatial linkage]

Contemporary African urbanism no longer can be viewed simply as the direct result of European, American, or traditional culture. Rather, each city is unique and in each case it has developed as a creation of its own. Secondly, each African city can be defined according to its linked spatial and cultural dimensions (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1991).

Enclaves in the colonial city, in Africa and elsewhere, are spatially delineated as well as culturally differentiated. I illustrate this significant yet still little investigated concern (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1991:39) by focusing on Ghana’s capital city of Accra and one of its migrant communities, Sabon Zongo (Figure 1). Zongo is the Hausa word for “stranger quarter.” Such quarters are found throughout West Africa and are typically an agglomeration of Muslim migrants. Sabon Zongo, or “new zongo,” was founded in the first decade of the twentieth century as a refuge for Hausa wanting to get away from the religious squabbling of Accra’s downtown Muslim community.

Sabon Zongo was laid out by the British as one element in their town-planning scheme, but its manner of growth has blurred not only its original religious and ethnic basis but its physical delineation of streets and house plots as well. While Sabon Zongo is clearly part of the larger urban landscape, and is a named community on local maps, it is also culturally and spatially separate.

Accra can be characterized as a Westernized, “modern,” and outward-looking city where Christianity predominates. Telephone service and computerization are omnipresent. The central business district houses the home branches of the banks, multi-storey office buildings, and foreign exchange bureaus, alongside the colonial-era main post office and small stores, the main market (Makola), and a sprawl of kiosks and hawkers. The city center is bounded by a semi-circular dual carriageway, with traffic circles (“round-abouts”) to several main north-south arteries. There is an overabundance of vehicular traffic in Accra, with spectacular jams at the circles and alongside Makola Market.

Sabon Zongo, in stark contrast, has the look and feel of a rural village. Because there is little automated traffic, the roads are playgrounds for children, and goats and chickens also roam without concern. As I detail in later sections, its infrastructure is minimal and the predominant landmark is a blue and pink electrified mosque.

In this paper I use Sabon Zongo to illustrate how a city can encompass specific cultural traditions and spatial layouts, along with the manner in which they are linked. My
point is that the specifics of the spatiality are culturally defined. Thus, we can examine the relationship between people and different spaces. As it happens, Sabon Zongo is an urban community, and I examine a number of components that define the uniqueness of this particular community within Accra’s larger urban domain.

But the social-spatial/people-place linkage I am theorizing holds for nonurban places as well. Thus the framework of the analysis is applicable to communities at different levels of society. I focus on physical delineations (within Sabon Zongo and between it and the city at large); the landscape; “local knowledge” that informs community understandings, defining elements of its infrastructure, market and street trade; and centripetal Hausa socio-spatial structures such as the family compound.

**Linkage between People and Place**

Anthropologists have traditionally treated the spatial, temporal, and social as separate analytic categories. In fact, space and even place, made up of the significant nodes and points of space (Shields 1991:47), are often taken for granted and used as a backdrop. In a seminal article published almost thirty years ago, Kuper (1972) observed that “because members of different cultures structure the same physical phenomena through different perspectives and techniques, we cannot assume that they have a concept of space equivalent to our own” (p. 411). Kuper substantiates her point through an elegant analysis of several key sites in Swaziland and their manipulation through political events by different sets of people. Defining a site as a particular piece of social space, that is a place “socially and ideologically demarcated and separated from other places,” she observes that it becomes a symbol within the total and complex system of communication in the total social universe. Social relations are articulated through particular sites, associated with different messages and ranges of communication. . . . The importance of these sites is not only their manifest and distinctive appearance, but their qualifying and latent meaning. This can be derived only after studying both the social relations and the ideational system of ordering places within the universe of the particular society or group with which one is concerned. [pp. 420–421]

Decades later, in many ethnographies place “is simply location” “where people do things,” that is, not necessary to problematize (Rodman 1992:640). And yet, people in non-Western, less industrialized countries, the places where many anthropologists still work, “may have even more immediate and full relationships with place insofar as time-space relations are less fragmented and they retain more local control over their physical and social landscapes” (p. 640). This is the thrust of my argument for Accra’s Sabon Zongo.

The perspective that frames this paper, like contributions to Feld and Basso’s edited volume (1996), pushes beyond space as “simply location.” I assert that the social and spatial are not separate; rather, they are two integral dimensions (along with the third, temporality) of one system. Space, like time, is socially constituted and as such carries meaning. People socially produce their spatial environment, their places, thus it is a full partner in their social life. I see spatial meanings as cultural productions, integral to the built form and the kinds of lives people lead. I illustrate their integration through the dailiness of street life and house life in this particular African urban place. The theoretical problem is how to locate the spatial and how the spatial is intertwined with social relations. Relations are embodied in things, and things (objects or artifacts) become active in relation to people (Harvey 1996:220 f.). As the built environment is socially produced, it is an exemplar of material culture. Social values, roles, and behaviors are embedded in this spatial environment, and the two-dimensional system facilitates life in the city for the residents.

I examine spatial practices as part of the social system and as instrumental in building a coherent community. The community of Sabon Zongo is delineated through interaction and exchange. Not only are social composition and physical form reflective of social and cultural value, they
are also concurrently implicated in the routines people engage in and the manner of exchange. In Sabon Zongo, exchange is localized and occurs through time and space, through genealogical/fictive connections of the families resident there, through business relations with traders, marriage ties with neighbors or newly arrived migrants, or through ritual and collective activity. The redistribution of foods at festivals and life-cycle events articulates the interconnections. Exchange helps define the boundaries of the community.

I am looking at two levels of social order: the public spaces of the community, as in streets and markets, and the private or semi-private spaces of daily life in the compound. The two levels may be separate, but they communicate. For example, the control of “things” through trade and gift exchange links the house with the world outside (Cooper 1997:201), as does using children as runners or as sellers (see Schildkrout 1983) or “lending” children to other households.

People organize their lives around spatial routines and around spatial and territorial divisions (Shields 1991), thus we must look both at social actors who intend to act and place meanings on their actions (Moore 1986) and at the socio-physical structures (including social institutions, places) that enable the generation and reproduction of meanings and action, of social strategy and behavior. Rapoport (1980:68) speaks of the facilitating environment and its cues. Space itself works as a mnemonic, enforcing, enabling, maybe even structuring, the exchange that is already ongoing.

We know that material things, like houses, do not have intentions and thus cannot behave like agents; that is, they do not have the capacity to initiate causal events. And yet, we also know that human agency operates in the material world. Here, Gell’s theory of artefacts as secondary agents is particularly helpful. He distinguishes between “primary’ agents, that is, intentional beings who are categorically distinguished from ‘mere’ things or artefacts, and ‘secondary’ agents, which are artefacts, dolls, cars, works of arts, etc., through which primary agents distribute their agency in the causal milieu” (Gell 1998:20). In other words, people as primary agents create and use the houses, the walkways in front of mosques, the street corners, and so on; each of these built places, then, is an agent that connects one person or group of persons to another. They are mediators in that they also carry messages of fame, genealogy, occupation, and so on (Harvey 1996:221). The unchanging nature of the product, for example, house form (Gell 1998), reinforces the message.

But we also know that when people and cultures travel and mix, messages change, as do the habitats of meaning—the cultures and the spaces (Hannerz 1996). The parameters, contents, and contexts of exchange alter. Intersections shape cultural process, in which agency operates.

As Gabaccia has shown in her study of Sicilian immigrants in the United States (1984), residential patterns are products of culture but they are also adaptations: the density of habitation, who lives with whom, how space is allocated and shared. People create the life typical of a given area and they do it socially and spatially.

**Urbanization and the City of Accra**

For centuries, West Africans have moved around, migrating from countryside to city and from city to city, looking for new opportunities. From the late fifteenth century on, European powers arrived on the coast, vying amongst themselves for trading hegemony and looking to create new political dominions and markets. Coincident with the European arrivals were great migrations to the area of new African populations. The various African émigrés established national urban systems. Colonial powers founded colonial cities early in the twentieth century and developed them to promote their own interests (Rayfield 1974:173).

In colonial settlements, urban districts reproduced the cities of the European home country, effecting a standardized colonial plan (Castells 1979:45). The emerging process of urbanization and colonial domination became “the expression of this social dynamic at the level of space,” functioning to administer and fix political sovereignty and exploit the colony’s resources (Castells 1979:44).

In such a city, the colonizer’s program had a particular impact on the indigenous people’s social and physical space, and on the urban system. Social and cultural heterogeneity became the norm in many West African colonial cities, and the colonial city consisted of two or three major areas: the indigenous, often precolonial, settlement; the so-called westernized, modern, or European sector, which King refers to as “the colonial urban settlement”; and in some colonial territories, there was a “stranger” sector, occupied by migrants (King 1976:33). The quarters varied one from another not only socially and culturally but also in their physical and architectural spatial forms (see also King 1976, 1990).

During the fifteenth century, the Ga people, of whom the Accras form one group, established “a series of contiguous settlements,” which make up the Ga whole
The consequence is that the streets are uniformly narrow, crooked, and oppressive... [quoted in Acquah 1958:27]

In contrast, the house of the principal European merchant of the town rose three stories above the gray thatched roof huts.

The modern growth of the city of Accra began when the British transferred their administrative headquarters from Cape Coast to Christiansborg Castle, Accra, in 1877, officially making it a colonial city and stimulating commercial activity (Brand 1973:114). The European traders and administrators increased in numbers and began to segregate themselves; living among the Africans was deemed unsanitary and unhealthy due to malaria, especially once the male administrators were joined by their wives. In 1885 new sanitation policies were put into effect (Acquah 1958:23). The principle of "health segregation," used in Sierra Leone, was the proposed solution. In 1908, after the bubonic plague hit Accra, Governor J. P. Roger initiated a three-year program of town planning, renewal, and clearance.

Land ownership in southern Ghana is tied to sacred objects known as "stools," symbolic of lineages. Among the Ga, stools are in the possession of particular extended families. Within one political unit or clan, there may be a number of stools; even one extended family may possess more than one stool (Pogucki 1954:14).

According to the Gold Coast native laws, "a person of a different tribal origin is regarded as a stranger" (Pogucki 1954:31). Strangers could not aspire to true land ownership, that is, ownership of stool land. However, Ga native policy toward strangers such as the Hausa was welcoming, "knowing the worth and value of strangers." Like others of African origin, they could "be given the opportunity of obtaining land by gift or grant upon payment of a presta-
tion" (Pogucki 1954:32). Ga land allotments to others were, however, subject to British approval. Moreover, in 1892, the British Administration gained rights to land acquisition through a Towns Ordinance. The Accra Municipal Council was also set up in 1898 to oversee sanitation, markets, and street maintenance, and the municipality bracketed Ussher Town, James Town, and Christiansborg (Acquah 1958:24). Because the Gold Coast was a colony of Britain and African foreigners came with no prior rights, their behavior was also moderated by the European administrators.

Accra's spectacular growth began after World War I. Suburban expansion took off in the 1920s. "The interwar period also saw the first major changes in transportation which helped make Accra the major Gold Coast port" (Robertson 1984:33). Municipal bus service replaced mule transport in 1927. Between 1919 and 1927, during Sir Gordon Guggisberg's term as governor, Accra underwent great changes including the construction of the Korle Lagoon Bridge, the European-style hospital Korle Bu, and the
still-prestigious Achimota Secondary School. Between the
two world wars, the administration made significant im-
provements to raise the standards of health care and daily

World War II was the impetus for huge numbers of im-
migrants, and after the war the government residential area
expanded greatly. During the 1950s the city boomed, with
a great deal of building taking place, all subsidized by co-
coa (Robertson 1984). The new suburban area Airport
Residential Area was established.

In 1958, a Master Plan of Accra was developed, which
divided the city into exclusive zones: commercial, light in-
dustrial, heavy industrial, educational, civic and cultural,
high-class residential, middle-class residential, low-class
residential, and recreational (Asabere 1981). Given the
prevalence of favoritism and backdoor connections, the
zoning of new homes and businesses has not always fol-
lowed the letter of the law.

The migration process has significantly molded Accra’s
demographic and spatial structure; as the city expanded,
neighborhoods with distinct locations, names, and housing
types grew up. The earthquake on June 22, 1939, destroyed
much of Central Accra, prompting the Ghanaian govern-
ment to build housing estates to rehouse the victims.

Sabon Zongo: Physical Delineations

Sabon Zongo is located in Accra, and its residents par-
ticipate in the city’s social, business, and institutional life.
City public transportation vehicles and taxis make pick-ups
within and alongside the community. Many of its residents
go to work elsewhere in Accra, and there are businesses in
Sabon Zongo patronized by people from elsewhere in Ac-
дра. But Sabon Zongo is also unique. It is a product of the
mix of different social and spatial understandings and tra-
ditions: Hausa (northern Nigeria), southern Ghanaian (Ga
and Akan in particular), British colonial, Muslim/zongo,
and African urbanization. This combination plays out on a
daily basis and constitutes Sabon Zongo’s uniqueness and
its boundedness.

Sabon Zongo was the first stranger enclave in Accra
consciously created by the single ethnic group for whom it
was intended, in this case the Hausa from Northern Nige-
ria. The Hausa had been drawn to Accra after 1874 as sol-
diers in the Gold Coast Hausa Constabulary (G.C.H.C.),
as traders (following the break-up of Salaga in the north as a
major market), and as teachers (Adamu 1978:166).

At the turn of the twentieth century, there was a vibrant
Muslim community in the old Ga section of town. The
preeminent ethnic groups were the Hausa and the Yoruba

![Figure 2. Original plan of Malam Bako’s “new zongo.”](image-url)
James Zongo's family to the nity, pediments of cashew where time, 

One of the Hausa elders in the old Central Accra zongo was Malam Bako. In 1907 he decided to relocate his followers. The early Hausa community had outgrown the space at Zongo Malam and Horse Road, and there were religious tensions among the Muslims. He approached the James Town (Alata) Ga chief, Kojoe Ababio IV, who found him a piece of land. Meanwhile, in 1908, the plague hit Accra and Governor J. P. Roger initiated a three-year urban plan. His administration supported Bako's proposed new zongo, because it served the British plan of social and spatial compartmentalization, though they envisioned his zongo as a heterogeneous stranger enclave rather than one for the Hausa alone (Pellow 1985, 1997, 1999, n.d.).

Malam Bako launched his plan in 1910 and was awarded custodial rights by the stool that owned the land. He named the 75-acre lot Sabon Zongo. It was formally surveyed, based on a grid, and divided into parcels (see Figure 2). As the custodial grantee, the Bako family could divide and distribute the land given them by the Ga and rule over it (interviews with Chief English [1982], Chief Bako [1982], Chief Braimah [1982]).

Sabon Zongo lies only about two miles northwest of Zongo Lane, across the Korle Lagoon. But at first it was a town apart, outside Accra's city limits. There was no bridge across the Korle Lagoon. "At that time, if you were going to Sabon Zongo, you came to a river—they called it Korle. You paid a penny before you could cross. At that time, there was no street" (interview with Chief Braimah [1982]). Some Hausa chose not to come because of the physical wildness of the new community: "They had animals, bad animals even ... wolves..." (interview with Chief Braimah [1982]). The community was "bush," where Ga people who farmed the land had mango and cashew trees and grew cassava, okra, and hemp. The impediments of the natural environment emphasized its separateness from Central Accra.

Around 1912, one hundred or so of Malam Bako's followers moved to Sabon Zongo. No longer forced to live among, pray with, and trade with the embattled members of Accra's ethnically diverse downtown Muslim community, they could maintain Hausa institutions without interference. The Sabon Zongo people built their own mosques; the first, Masalaci Malam Bako, was constructed adjacent to Malam Bako's palace.

Malam Bako was never enstooled as chief, though he was acknowledged by the majority of Ga stools and British as leader of the community. The British reinforced Sabon Zongo's spatial and political separateness, the right of the James Town Ga to acclaim its headman, and of a Bako family member to be that headman, with all of the office's responsibilities, pomp, and circumstances. Moreover, the Bako family was given "proprietary rights . . . in Sabon Zongo lands as Founders of the Hausa settlement thereon." Malam Bako's eldest son, Idrissu, was formally installed as chief of Sabon Zongo in July 1933, and Malam Bako died on January 16, 1938.

Sabon Zongo continued to be socially and spatially separate, in part due to economic institutions, in part to the inherent inequalities built in by the colonial government. Sometimes the British cordoned off sections according to ethnic differences among the Africans in order to control labor. For example, Nima Village was settled in 1931 by a Hausa man from Central Accra who had been grazing his cattle there. Like Sabon Zongo, it was Ga stool land and like Malam Bako, he was given the land by the Ga chiefs (Arn 1996:436–439). Nima at that time, like Sabon Zongo, was outside the city. It was situated between a military base and a European residential area, and those Africans who worked in those two neighborhoods as cooks, stewards, laborers, and prostitutes moved to Nima. Migrants, primarily Muslims and northern Ghanaians, moved there as well. By the end of World War II, with rapid rural-urban migration, there were over 21 tribal heads (and their followers) in Nima.

After independence, Accra grew considerably. There is no doubt that colonial influence left its mark on the city's planning, development, and the differentiation of residential land use (Brand 1973:206). The spatial shifting of the Muslim constituency echoed that of the population at large, harmonizing with the expansion and fractionation of Accra's physical parameters and the diversification of the city's inhabitants. The social organization of the colonial city and the spatial organization of the colonial society were part of the same system, a "pastiche of zoned functions, land uses and populations" (Blair 1971:229), with six zones typical of the colonial society—five controlled by Europeans, one encompassing the old city and stranger community. In Accra as elsewhere in West Africa, this created a de facto social and spatial compartmentalization of the town (Brand 1972), including the establishment of zongos.

Sabon Zongo was incorporated into the city of Accra in 1943, but its social and spatial separateness and inequity reflect the early ecological effect of European influence, fostering a pattern of neglect by municipal authorities, traditional leaders, and private houseowners in the years that followed (Brand 1972). It persists as one of the "highly traditional tracts" and a "low status migrant sink" (Brand 1972:296, 292). Non-zongo Accra dwellers still consider it spatially and socially peripheral to the city.

Sabon Zongo is no longer simply a Hausa village. According to provisional figures from the 2000 census, Sabon Zongo's population is 17,838. The ethnic diversity is enormous. The main languages spoken are Hausa, Ga, and Twi (and English for the educated), but the extraordinary array also includes Fulani, Yoruba, Kanuri, Zabrama, Wangara, (Dretke 1968). While the Hausa were not in the majority, they had a disproportionate influence on the others in religion and learning, economic affairs, roles and offices, dress, and language.

Accra, a colonial administrative center, is surrounded by a sprawling network of ghettos, each with its own history and social organization. Along the coastline and around the Korle Lagoon, the social and political organization of the city's non-European communities has been largely the result of European policies. The colonial city grew around the periphery of this network, with administrative centers and residential neighborhoods stretching toward the sea. The spatial growth of Accra is thus a combination of the city's colonially imposed organization and the growth of the city's non-European communities.
Buzu, Kotokoli, Mossi, Ewe, Dagomba, and Dagati. The community is marked by its array of 29 mosques, some quite visible and even audible from afar. Each mosque has a group of men who can be seen lounging about on mats or benches at all hours of the day, eating, talking, napping (see Figure 3). The community is also home to a Christian minority, although they must go elsewhere to attend church.

Yet, Sabon Zongo does function more generally like a village: people know each other and their property and genealogical connections to the past continue to be influential; they have a traditional chief as the community head; the community is commercially alive, and it is unusual even for a zongo insofar as it is the oldest of the zongos in Accra and the only one with a proper site plan (Elliot Barbour-Sackey, Technical Services Corporation 6/17/1996).

The Landscape

Sabon Zongo has evolved a spatial identity over the last 87 years. This is manifest in the landscape. Even from the turn-off at Ring Road, one can see the profile of two of its mosques: Zana, built on the side of Oblogo Road, and Abokin Ango, a block in from the main road but a tall structure, with distinctively blue ornamentation. This aspect of the built environment carries a distinctive voice: at 4:45 a.m., one hears Al-laah Ak-baar! as the electrified voice of the muezzin at Abokin Ango mosque wafts through the air.

The population’s movement is different—the men in this predominantly Muslim community beginning to make their way to the mosque (as Rukaya, one of the community residents, says, mosques are men’s business)—and the men look different than men in much of the city in their flowing robes or pajama-like outfits and hometown-specific head coverings.

Like most of Accra’s neighborhoods, Sabon Zongo is not delimited by walls or gates. Technically, it is bounded on the north by a main road that is traveled by commuters into Accra from other urban and suburban areas; on the south by a market; on the east and west by minor streets. But according to the aerial map from 1969 (the last drawn), not all of the market is included, and part of Blacksmith (the southwest edge, beyond the market) is also excluded (Figure 4).

Local opinion on boundaries varies, often following ethnic, religious, and status lines. Thus some who live on St. Thomas, the western boundary, who are neither Muslim nor Hausa, resist being defined as part of the community; others living on the same street, who are both Muslim and Hausa and whose home is close to the lane that enters the community near the public toilets, believe that they are. Those who look down on the enclave, including those who live in Sabon Zongo but outside of the core, are less likely to self-identify as zongoese than those who take pride in their genealogical ties to Sabon Zongo.

It is really through the social and physical qualities of landscape that the boundedness of Sabon Zongo is evident, as has been true for other Accra city neighborhoods: for example, early Victoriaborg was home to colonial administrators and their nuclear families (and servants), who lived in bungalows (and “boys’ quarters”), surrounded by luscious gardens; modern-day James Town still has extended family members, who continue to live in densely populated family houses, built in colonial style but barely holding up against age and the elements.

In 1950’s Sabon Zongo, there was little built up between their community and the Lighthouse area of James Town (about two miles due east by the sea). At night, they could hear the sea, rough and rumbling. In those days, there were lots and lots of trees. It was a pretty and shady community (Alhassan Sulley 7/1/1996); however, as the trees died, they were not replaced. Bushes or flowers are absent; they would be eaten by the sheep and goats wandering the streets. Among the Hausa and many of the other groups who migrated into Sabon Zongo, keeping animals is desirable and many are left to roam. People say that the sheep must be penned, because otherwise they will wander off. Goats, on the other hand, are allowed to roam freely. And they often graze the streets, eating anything, including greenery, but refusing the plastic wrappings used more and more by food sellers. Owning cows has always been a sign of wealth among the Hausa. Until the 1980s, residents in
Sabon Zongo “with capacity” kept cattle in pens alongside residences. The municipality no longer allows cows to be raised within the city limits (though one does see them being grazed in open spaces, and almost daily, a herd is driven through the community, though no one seems to know where they have been or where they are going). Along with sheep and goats, poultry is still legal. Thus, unlike in the lovely suburban areas of Accra, or even in adjacent Larte Biokarshie, with its elegant homes, gardens are not possible. Indeed, there is a distinctly rural feel to Sabon Zongo in terms of sights, smells, and sounds of animals.

An important element in the landscape is the infrastructure: the streets and their layout, the gutters, electricity and water, waste disposal, telecommunication, and schools.

We learn a lot about the status of the community and where it lies by virtue of their condition. Many of the roads have lost their alignments and are impassable for vehicular traffic. Three roads were re-paved and guttered in 1999 as part of President Rawlings’s urban development plan, in part to fix the road links within Sabon Zongo to major roads on the outside: Market Road, which runs through Sabon Zongo; Korley Street, one block south of Oblogo Road running east-west; and Malam Bako Street, at the core of the old neighborhood, running from Oblogo Road down past the current chief’s house and ending at Malam Bako’s palace.

Over the years, buildings have been put up right in the path of a sited road without authorization by paying off a
city official. Korley Street, for example, at its western edge is disrupted by houses and the public toilet. Before the gutters could be laid on Malam Bako Street and the road paved, the walls on a number of houses that protruded into the road literally had to be demolished.

Most of the “streets” in Sabon Zongo are narrow, unpaved winding lanes, similar to the alleys of the downtown zongo area but unlike the commercial district or the suburbs. Ancobra, a main internal north-south road with public transportation stops, can be impassable during the rains because it is rutted and slick. On one occasion when I was sitting outside of Idrisu’s Mosque, some passenger lorries got stuck in the mud and ruts on Ancobra. A community elder who keeps sheep and goats in a pen by the mosque had boys carry over decaying peels of cassava, yams, and plantains (brought to him by neighbors for his animals to eat) and dump them on the road as filler. Most of the roads are more like lanes or alleys. During the rainy season, Sabon Zongo suffers from mud. The Gangare section near Oblogo Road is called *unguwan laka* (the mud quarter) because of the problem.

Generally when Sabon Zongo people complain about their community, the first thing they refer to is the condition of streets and gutters (see Figure 5). Unlike the roads in much of the municipality, planned drainage exists only along major streets and a minority of residential roads. “Where drains exist, they are exposed and tend to be used for the disposal of litter and, thus, become blocked” (Tipple 1999:271). Wide (too wide to jump) and deep gutters line both sides of Oblogo Road. They fill with silt, litter, and garbage, so that a stench permeates the air, and during the rainy season the water overflows. According to one of Sabon Zongo’s financially successful residents: “*Zongo bai da kyau, saboda titi*” (zongo is bad because of the streets) (Alhaji Adamu 6/9/1996).

Other elements of infrastructure include electricity and water. In the 1960s, there was no electricity in Sabon Zongo. The Sulley twins would walk a half mile or so to Town Council Line to study under the streetlights (Alhassan and Huseini Sulley 6/18/2000). Even today, there are no streetlights. Night traders illuminate their stalls or tables with small kerosene lanterns crafted from recycled tin cans. Water was piped into Abossey Okai, across Oblogo Road, before it came to Sabon Zongo, whose residents would carry it in buckets (Baba Mai Doki 6/13/1996). Water now is readily accessible, which is of particular ritual significance to the predominantly Muslim population. But there are still compounds without a pipe, thus the sight of boys and girls and men and women carrying buckets of water on their heads is common. The real problem with water is related to soil erosion. Since Sabon Zongo is sited on a slope, few of the streets are paved, and there is little vegetation to anchor the ground; there has been considerable erosion. With erosion, water pipes are exposed, eventually break, and homes and businesses lose their water connection.

The Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) is responsible for solid and liquid waste management throughout Accra, and there have been problems servicing containers all over the city. In Sabon Zongo, they were picking up solid waste maybe once a week, more likely once in two weeks, at three collection points. Each is next to a set of public toilets: at Freedom Market, Gaskia Cinema, and Ayigbetown. Because the waste was not collected frequently enough, the massive containers overflowed with trash and garbage. Because many residents did not bother to deposit their refuse, one person observed, “The rain is our AMA . . . one block up they send down their garbage” (M. Barko 6/4/1996). As with the mud, so with the refuse: the rain brings it down the hill. I ask how they know where it is coming from: “Everyone has their own garbage.” For example, when grass is washed down the hill, they know it belongs to those who keep sheep; similarly, the husks that float by are the rubbish of the corn sellers.

In 1999, because the AMA simply could not cope, they decided to find a private organization with experience in waste management. They brought in Country and City Waste (CCW), a Canadian company, and it is making a difference all over the city, even Sabon Zongo. There are now large waste containers in more locations and CCW trucks come regularly to empty them. The question, of course, will be how to shift the cost onto the citizenry. The

![Figure 5. Community elders crossing a road that lacks a proper gutter.](image-url)
AMA is working out how the households will be taxed. The question is also how to socialize the populace.

“The existing toilet facilities in Accra, both private and public, include pan (or bucket) latrines, pit latrines, septic tank latrines, KVIPs, and WC’s with or without connection to the central sewage system” (Obiri-Opareh 2000:26). Since the central sewage system in Accra covers only a small area, for the private household there is considerable cost and logistical difficulty in emptying the liquid waste. Public toilets are therefore more than a simple convenience. A HUDA (Housing and Urban Development Associates) study cited by Tipple (1999) reports 77.5% of houses with a toilet. Yet, in Tipple’s study “only 30.8 percent of [Accra’s] households have the use of flush toilets. Almost as many rely on removable buckets for domestic sanitation. Less than 20% have functioning indoor plumbing” (Tipple 1999:256). Even given this low percentage, the situation in Sabon Zongo is worse. Sewage lines were never created, so anyone wanting flush toilets has to install individual septic tanks. In theory, septic systems could be brought in (though the main core of the area is so densely settled there is little room to do so); however, an engineer estimated in 1995 that to build a WC and roof would cost upwards of 500,000 cedis (in September 1995, $415) — “How can they afford it?” (Alhaji Babba Alhaji 5/12/1995).

In Sabon Zongo, there is a handful of flush toilets. There are also compounds with pan toilets and some with KVIPs. But the vast majority depend upon the public toilets (latrines), of which there are four sets, one for men and women, respectively, at each location. In 2000, the cost of relieving oneself at a public toilet was 100 cedis (during the summer, the exchange rate for $1 fluctuated between 4,800 and 6,500 cedis), and at the new, cleaner private toilet built next to one set behind the Gaskiya Cinema, the cost was 200 cedis. At each of the public toilets, there is a person on duty 24 hours per day. He or she collects the toilet fees and sells toilet paper (newspaper) to those who want it.

The toilets are for defecation only; residents urinate in their shower rooms (and children and grown men also use the gutters, as is the case throughout Accra). Children begin using the public toilets when they are as young as four; initially they are taken by an adult, but even at age five, there are those who go alone. One set of toilets is situated at the western boundary of Sabon Zongo near Ojo Primary School. Their pungent scent is the source of the site’s nickname, Lavender Hill (Tudun Tulare). But this does not discourage the small barefooted boys from using the adjacent empty space to play football. Curiously (to this outsider), the toilet situation does not elicit from residents the pejorative remarks applied to the streets and gutters.

Ghana’s telecommunications system is one of the least developed in Africa. In 1994 there were about 50,000 telephones in the entire country, with the telephone service concentrated in Accra. Even there, only government offices, large commercial firms, and well-to-do houses had service (Berry 1995:184). As bad as the service may have been, in Sabon Zongo it was, and continues to be, worse: in 1994, not one of four private telephones worked. Ghana Telecom Company, Ltd. subsumes Sabon Zongo within Larte Biokarshie, which has old, weak, underground cables that need replacement. The alternative for individuals in Sabon Zongo is the WLL (pronounced “wheel”), the Wireless Local Loop. Anyone who requests WLL will get it easily—as long as he or she can afford the initial payment (500,000 cedis in 1997, when the equivalency was about $1 = 2,242 cedis). For poor people, this is a big “as long as” and so far only the Communications Center across the street from Gaskiya Cinema has WLL.

According to Alhaji Foster Faruk (assistant manager of Human Resources Management Department with Ghana Telecom, who has lived in Sabon Zongo about 23 years), there have been plans to put in telephone lines. But by the end of 1999, the only working telephone lines had been brought in earlier in the year from Abossey Okai by a private individual who opened a new communication center. Yet, Ghana Telecom was wiring all of Sabon Zongo (putting up poles) in 1999. By summer 2000, there were 12 communication centers. Only five use regular lines; another five use the WLL. There were no working telephones in private homes.

Sabon Zongo’s bad roads have made it difficult to survey and install phone lines. Foster Faruk observed that you cannot have phones where areas are not well developed. Indeed, even Foster, as an area manager, is privileged to have a phone and fax, yet he has neither. “The phone people would come, but the roads are bad and the person says ‘The roads are another person’s job; we can’t do the lines till the roads are done’ . . . . Because he [the phone line man] can’t trace the house, he will go back [to the office without installing the lines]” (Alhaji Foster Faruk 5/30/1996). Foster Faruk is a Fanti (southern Ghanaian) who became interested in Islam, married a Zabra woman, and settled in Sabon Zongo. Looking around, he observed that government upon government have neglected “them”: “they [the government] call them the Hausa people—that they live in unhygienic conditions—not knowing they have neglected them” (Alhaji Foster Faruk 5/30/1996).

Sabon Zongo’s distinctiveness is largely due to its Muslim tenor, visible not only in the mosques scattered throughout but also the Koranic schools (makaranta) for Muslim children. There are currently eight makaranta operating in Sabon Zongo, with a student population of about 1,100; the other children are sent to makaranta outside. Of the eight, five are tied to a mosque. One of the latter is actually two schools in one: the old part is the Quranic school, the new part is secular and thus overseen by the Ghana Education Service. The classrooms are unadorned, with a chalkboard at one end. If there is electric light, it emanates
from a naked bulb hanging out of the ceiling. Some of the schools have several classes going on simultaneously in an unpartitioned room. The oldest, which belongs to the Bako family, maintains two classes, both conducted on the veranda of Malam Bako’s Mosque.

Parents send their children to makaranta the moment they start to talk, by two or three years of age. They attend five days per week, Monday through Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday. Once they are old enough to enroll in Western school, they attend makaranta on Saturday and Sunday only. Thus the weekday makaranta is composed mainly of very small children and those who do not attend regular school. The system of teaching is the old-fashioned rote recitation, with the malam reading a line and the children repeating it. The children sit on benches, boys and girls separated, while the teacher wanders among them. Walking past, one hears their high-pitched voices and the occasional thwack! of the teacher’s stick against a distracted child’s body.

About 60% of the students are Hausa. They are joined by Kotokoli, Zabrama, Fulani, Yoruba, and Busanga, generally considered to have Muslim affiliation, as well as small numbers of southern Ghanaian Ga, Akan, and Ewe converts, more characteristically Christian.

Sabon Zongo’s sociocultural distinctiveness as a zongo is its genealogical base. Everyone trades on genealogy and everyone keeps track of genealogy. Several “big families” are key to Sabon Zongo’s social and spatial organization, and it is their descendants who are the primary landlords in Sabon Zongo. In addition to Malam Bako’s line, there are the offspring of Garuba, chief imam in Accra. There is also the family of Kariki, the first of whom was Idrissu Bako’s official “linguist” (sarkin fada), and whose son is “linguist” to the current chief. And there is the Dan Malley family, the first of whom was Malam Bako’s chief barber but gathered followers and took on Malam Bako as headman. Members of all of these families and others were allocated land, giving them ownership rights and a say in community affairs. Many have also intermarried with Bako family members.

Sabon Zongo’s boundaries are thus physical, social, and cultural, and they play out in visual, auditory, and even olfactory terms. While the community shares some of these qualities with other zongos—the clothing worn, the institutions supported, the animals raised—it is also different. Unlike Nima, for example, it has not benefited from World Bank funds to improve roads, toilets, gutters, and other infrastructural elements. Unlike Shukura, it is closer to the city and less countryfied. Unlike Lagostown, which is in the city, it has a proper site plan and none of the labyrinthine alleys and byways also typical of the old downtown zongo.

“Local Knowledge”

“Memories saturate the common air; they are inscribed on the land in names–become–places” (Steady 1993:22). In Sabon Zongo, the memories are often tied to genealogy and are spatialized. They showcase the “big families” who were allocated land and who have mattered in the events that make up Sabon Zongo’s history. But the memories also record the specialized populations who have moved in, the occupations that are practiced, and the activities pursued. The spatialization of these cultural elements is marked by Sabon Zongo’s informal division into neighborhoods (unguwa), not physically bounded yet known to all (Figure 4). Each is named and each encompasses linked social and physical differences. Like the community as a whole vis-à-vis the larger city, the unguwa represent geographically reconstituted social meanings.

The streets in Sabon Zongo, “large” and small, have names that appear on maps; as elsewhere in Accra, residents either do not know or do not use them. In the more densely built areas, both old and new, local knowledge alone enables people to find someone’s house. Most generally lack an address, and following the lanes can be confusing as they may lack clear delineation because houses spill over outside of their plots. As elsewhere in Accra, location is provided in terms of commonly recognized landmarks. But what is different from much of the rest of Accra are the types of landmarks used. For example, there is “sikopaa,” a men’s informal club that meets in a lean-to; the daily late afternoon card games in Kariki in the middle of the lane under a canopy; the bright yellow Lotto kiosk in Zabarmama, underscored by flashing electric Christmas lights and blaring popular music; the community institutions such as mosques or the corner barber opposite Makafai Mosque. Some of the institutions like the mosques may be found in the other zongos but they are distinguished by name and pedigree. All prepared-food sellers are at particular spots at particular times of the day, and many sell Hausa specialties (like wagash, a kind of fried cheese) available nowhere else in town.

These interlinking socio-spatial delineations carry meaning for the residents and include placement along various axes: up/down, core/margin, landlord/lodger. People here, as elsewhere, often use direction words to refer to places; they are “idioms of orientation” (Gaffin 1996:75).

The three main neighborhoods are Kan Tudu, Gangare, and Ayigbeto. Kan Tudu (which literally means on “top of a hill”) is at the top of the slope coming up from Oblogo Road. It is the old core of Sabon Zongo where Malam Bako’s palace is located; indeed, all residents regard Kan Tudu as the center of the community today. It is the most densely populated with the oldest structures. Night Market field is on Malam Bako Street. A worn path follows its southern edge, picking up the lane from the west that ends at Malam Bako Street, the corner of Chief Sha’aibu Bako’s
house. The lane continues on through Ayigbetown, in some spots obstructed by a building.

Kan Tudu is associated with the Bako family, although most Garuba family property is located there as well. The Night Market field, perhaps the most used public space in the community (see “Street Activity”), actually belongs to descendants of the Garuba family. Kan Tudu incorporates a number of sub-quarters, including Tripoli and Ojo (locale of the secular primary school).

Gangare is at the bottom of the slope, near Oblogo Road, and means “downhill” (which it is, relative to Kan Tudu). It incorporates areas known as Zabarama where the Zabarama once were concentrated), Damaley (home of Malam Bako’s chief barber who became a pretendee to the Sabon Zongo chiefcy), Kariki (two of the family’s men have been the chief’s linguists), and Municipal. As Kan Tudu is associated with the Bakos, Gangare is associated with non-Bakos and the followers of Damaley: as some have said, Bako had the land, Damaley had the people. Gangare is also associated with Nkrumah’s Convention People’s Party (CPP): the major CPP activists lived in Gangare and the CPP supported the second generation of Damaleys competing with a Bako for the Sabon Zongo chiefcy.

Ayigbetown is the most recently and least densely populated area, originally settled by Ewe people (Ayigbetown is a corruption of Ewetown): “That’s where formerly every Ewe went to stay. Whenever there was Ewe in Zongo, yes go there, you will find Ewe man. That’s why they call it Ayigbetown” (Mohammed Bako 6/6/1996). Ayigbetown’s spatial and social situation must be understood in terms of Kan Tudu and Gangare, since it was built later and for a “foreign” (non-Hausa) population. It also incorporates sub-areas, such as Stable (where stables for horses used to be located) and Katifa (Hausa for “mattress”): grass mattresses are stuffed here). Ayigbetown has some of the broadest roads, the newest construction, and the least street activity. There are few people on the street, eating or drinking and tossing their refuse.

The Municipal-Sunshine area at the Oblogo side of Ayigbetown has more of a southern Ghanaian population (Ewe, Akan, even Ga) than the core part of the community. And Timbuktoo Mosque on Korley Street in Municipal is named after the large number of Malians resident nearby.

North of Timbuktoo, near Zana Mosque along Oblogo Road, there are car mechanics, some with fairly large establishments. People from all over Accra come here. And dismembered parts of useless vehicles often end up in a scrap area (ungevwan Tula, named after the local politician Malam Tula) on the other side of Timbuktoo. For example, one afternoon in June 2000, a mini-van pulled up; a Rasta man who works with the scrap helped the driver empty the vehicle of all of the scrap on the main road. He periodically scared off the interested children gathering to watch, ultimately having it all dragged piece by piece to his location about fifty feet away.

The house owner/renter distinction among Sabon Zongo’s residents ties into the spatial delineation, insofar as it was Malam Bako who allocated all of the land to his followers. He and his sons were the original landlords and lived at the top; the renters who began to move in were not (as today’s are not) descendants of the landlords and initially were more likely to be housed peripherally to the old core.

Specialized populations like makafai (the blind), kutare (lepers), and gurugu (cripples) have also been mapped onto the community’s landscape. Ever since Malam Bako turbaned a sarkin makafai (chief of the blind), they have had a quarter in the community. Makafai, the enclave for the blind, straddles Kariki and Ayigbetown. As an area, with its twists and turns, it resembles the old Zongo Lane in Accra Central. What would be inside of an involuted compound house in Sabon Zongo (where the courtyard has been lost to house extensions) are actually very narrow lanes, with very minimal housing and even more minimal decoration, as might be expected for those who are both poor and cannot see their surroundings. Many of the structures are one-room affairs with a door, but only a few have a window—a simple piece of wood on two hinges. Electricity is brought into the rooms by bootlegging it on wires from outside. “Houses” are locked from outside by padlock. Kutare were also allocated an area, clearly justified as long as there were any actively contagious lepers. Both of these groups also maintain their respective mosque, open to anyone, but more often frequented only by the specialized population.

The boundaries between these quarters are not exact, and individual perceptions of where one ends and another begins come into play. The real significance of boundaries is how they are perceived. A descendant of one of the original, though non-Bako, landlords stated that he does not include Ayigbetown in Sabon Zongo, because of “mixed race.” In Kan Tudu, he goes on, it is not one race as such but one dialect. Ayigbetown contains many languages and ethnicities. Moreover, he says, they don’t follow the chief and there are few Muslims (Papa Carlos 5/26/1996).

The physical demarcations and the identifications with place vary; it is a matter of who feels he or she belongs and to what. Bourdieu (1984) reminds us that social relations within and between groups are tied to their movements through, and appreciation of, spaces. The distribution of people, their location in space, is never socially neutral—it is always related to their political/social position. And I would add not only do they have socio-spatial positions and practices as a consequence of their relationships to social and spatial environment but they create that social and spatial environment and thus produce their socio-spatial positions and practices as well.
Street Activity

Community spaces are fluid, flexible, and multifunctional, and activities are adapted to fit where space is available. The user behavior of residents is what I call “public privacy,” “each allowing the others to carry out daily activities in the open space but as if they were not visible” (Pellow 1991:203; 1996). We see this in the way groups of people share use of the street, for activities that are really semi-public—in the public eye for those who are and are not participants.

The street activities are characteristic of the community overall but also of the respective sub-areas in which they occur. Sabon Zongo supports two formal, spatially defined markets. Freedom Market is a neighborhood market, which is open seven days per week and carries all of the foodstuffs and ingredients that one would find at one of the central markets, but there are far fewer traders, less choice, and, the women say, the quality is lower and the prices higher. However, it saves a trip to town. There is also the Night Market, located nightly on the empty field opposite the chief’s house in Kan Tudu. The traders at the Night Market sell ready-to-eat food, primarily *kenkey*, an Accra staple made of fermented maize.

In addition, and what is distinctive to Sabon Zongo, is the street selling—in terms of the types of goods and foods sold. To the unseasoned eye it appears spontaneous, but in fact it is systematic and ordered. Customers have “local knowledge” as to who is where when they are not visible from the street. The foods available in Sabon Zongo are another defining parameter of the community. On any day, but in this zongo only in all of Accra, one can find virtually any Hausa food and at the time of day that it would be eaten in Northern Nigeria. So the morning food sellers, who begin their trade at first light, have Hausa dishes such as *kosei* (bean cakes), *masa* (a fried cake made from corn), *wake* (beans and rice), *pinkaso* (*funkaso*, wheaten cake fried in oil), and *wagash* (fried cheese). At midday, a couple of women sell *fura* (balls of pounded cooked millet to be added to yogurt) from inside their compounds. In the afternoon and evening, women sell different types of *tuwo* (rice or cassava balls with soup), as well as pinkaso. One woman hawks her specialty, *zogola* (a snack of spinach greens, pepper, and groundnut paste), carried on her head. Nighttime brings out specialized evening foodstuffs: the *cicinga* (kebabs) and *balangu* (grilled side of lamb), both sold by men, and sweet tea and omelets. Traders on the street, in their compounds, and at the Night Market also carry local Accra foods, like *kenkey* (to the Ga), *fufu* (pounded yam, cassava, cocoa yam, plantain or some combination, associated with the Asante), and *banku* (another fermented maize starch), which the zongo residents also eat.

Unguwan Zabra, like Kan Tudu around the Night Market, is a hotbed of food activity, both throughout the day and night. This translates into lots of street life, as evidenced by the discarded plastic and paper prepared-food wrappers that cover the streets and clog the extant gutters. During the day, there are about 14 food sellers on Korle Street, in the heart of Zabra. They decide what to sell and where, depending upon the market for their product and also their ties to the immediate area. But it is only certain areas of Sabon Zongo where food is so available. Walking through Ayigbeto after 8 p.m. on a random night, one sees next to no street life, and as cause or consequence, virtually no food selling either. I assume that is why the roads are so much cleaner.

Like the public toilets, the availability of food on the street is more than simply convenient; for many it is a necessity. Just as the majority of residents have no toilet facilities within their compounds, many families do not have the financial wherewithal to cook meals at home.

Life-cycle rituals, particularly among the Muslims and following the Hausa model, have helped forge links in the community and have set this community apart. As we shall see in the next section, most compounds no longer have the central courtyard. As a result, there is no compound space for the partying accompanying such events as baby outings, weddings, and funerals, and women “appropriate” the street outside. For it is women who celebrate, who hold the *biki*, the traditional festivities where they sing and dance and eat. Because the celebration is in the street, it brings in the whole community. It takes place in the eyes of men, to the extent that any man who is passing by or wishes to watch can observe the dancing. In fact, in line with Muslim practice, not only do male guests not attend, but one does not see adult men hanging around. The only ones present are the “hired help,” the musicians, praise-singers, and perhaps an imam to say a prayer. This is an illustration of public privacy, of engaging in public in behaviors traditionally reserved for the compound yard, while outsiders (men) stay away.

A (Hausa) Muslim wedding is a weekend affair. On Friday night, there is music and dancing for the bride-to-be. From about 7:30 until 10 p.m. there are three different types for three different groups, all simultaneous: pop music (recorded) for the brides and their unmarried girl-friends; modern Muslim music, electrified, with live drumming and singing, for married women in their 20s and 30s; and traditional drumming for the older women. At one such affair in 1995, the first two took place in the street, with a canopy stretched across, while the drumming was inside the entryway in a nearby compound. On Sunday afternoon, there is a repeat of the music and dancing from Friday night: *sha’adi* for unmarries, *fa’ila* for young married, *gargajiya* (traditional) for the elders. The bride appears in her finery, walking to the bridegroom’s house behind drummers who proclaim her arrival.
Salla, the celebration at the end of Ramadan, is a Muslim-specific affair, but throughout Accra people are drawn in because all of the Muslims congregate in the morning at Black Star Square. For Sabon Zongo residents, the celebration continues: after *zuhur* prayer at 1:15 p.m., a parade forms with the chief and his closest advisors at the head and snakes through the community the entire afternoon, with drumming and praise-singing and dancing. Horn players and a man on stilts complete the carnival atmosphere. All of the women in mutual benefit associations join in the spectacle, each group wearing its own design of cloth.

**The Family Compound**

People everywhere design and build housing that suits their form of domestic organization. The built form has embedded cultural values, which are expressed through social relationships. The original compounds in Sabon Zongo still stand, some crumbling, many modified or enlarged. The housing forms commonly found in southern Ghana, which include Asante, Ga, and British colonial traditions, are all absent from Sabon Zongo today. The original housing structures are vestiges of Northern Nigerian Hausa style, cultural templates carried by the early settlers. But they are also part of the urban system, even as they look different and have historically functioned differently than compounds elsewhere in Accra.

As in Hausa vernacular architecture (Schwerdtfeger 1982), the early compounds in Sabon Zongo incorporated principles of Hausa social and spatial organization (Pellow 1988, n.d.; Smith 1965). As in most indigenous Ghanaian compounds as well, they were walled on the outside, with a gradation of space from public to private on the inside. Such a house plan facilitated and reflected the gendering of space, the separation between men and women, subscribed to by urban Northern Nigerian Hausa. Their heterosexual contact is circumscribed by rules and regulations, both social and spatial, based upon a code of modesty derived from the Koran. It culminates in *auren kulle*, marriage of seclusion. This form is sanctioned by religious teachings and values, but it is more understandable in economic terms and a statement of prestige—the ability of the husband to provide entirely for the wife and the social prestige of the husband whose wife is secluded and, by extension, of the secluded woman. In northern Nigerian cities, the norm of seclusion is well established and is a means of enforcing the division between men and women. They observe a strict, sexually defined division of labor. They celebrate rites of passage and festivals separately.

The Hausa pioneers of Sabon Zongo brought along the traditions of the extended family and seclusion and built them into their physical and social spaces. In Malam Bako’s day, the married women in the community did not go out, boys did not enter the house, men sat in the *zaure* (the entryway). When Malam Bako was alive, you did not see women selling things in Sabon Zongo. According to Malam Gambo, one of his sons, if he saw a woman out of the house, he would call for her husband. He would take the husband and wife to speak with his *fadawa*, his court.

The practice of wife seclusion in Sabon Zongo is altogether gone. And while the extended family matters, few compounds house family only. Unlike indigenous Ghanaian or Northern Nigerian compounds, many are not bounded. It is in Ayigbetown particularly that houses lack the typical exterior compound demarcation. There are a number of single family bungalows in Ayigbetown, as well as houses with indoor plumbing. In many of the original family houses, the compounds are involved: since owners and residents cannot build up (into multi-stories) or out (beyond their property line), they have built rooms within the compound yards, creating the sense of rooms within rooms and replicating the skinny and winding outside byways within. Throughout the community, but especially in the oldest and most densely populated areas, virtually none of the structures is uniformly shaped because of the rooms and porches added on the outside. Only the newest (and thus unmodified) compounds retain the rectangular shape (straight lines) and inner yard.

Of course, it is the loss of the compound yard that has provided the impetus for taking over (public) street spaces to enact (private) family celebrations. The social gradations facilitated by the physical demarcations have lapsed. The lines between public and private social domains are blurred. Tenancing has come in. And as Malam Gambo asked me rhetorically, “How can you make *kulle* [wife seclusion] with tenants?” (5/4/1982).

**Conclusion**

I have explored the notion that space, in this particular case urban space, is socially produced, that in the colonial city, in Africa and elsewhere, the specifics of the spatiality is culturally defined, and that the spatial and cultural are linked. Any one city encapsulates many spatial and cultural linkages, so that cities are internally differentiated into enclaves, oftentimes culturally based. Spatial and cultural dimensions articulate with political and economic forces. Thus, we can examine the relationship between people and different urban spaces.

This is what I have sought to do in one community in Accra and, in so doing, to delineate how a community’s uniqueness unfolds within the larger urban domain. Accra’s growth and development is largely due to its colonial past: when the British moved their headquarters there in 1877, it became a primary city. Opportunities drew considerable migration from elsewhere in the Gold Coast as well as other African countries. As people arrived, some self-segregated themselves, others were cordoned off by the British who sought to create a healthy and rational plan.
Different communities resulted. There was the Westernized, “modern,” or “European” sector, and in Accra like other colonial territories, there was the “stranger quarter.” Some, like Victoriaborg and Sabon Zongo, evolved under the aegis of the colonizer, but the new settlers (the educated African elite and the Koran-trained migrant, respectively) also incorporated their own cultural imperatives. The British created, and there continues to be, an imbalance in the urban economic base. In the better areas, infrastructure like plumbing, electricity, and roadways is good; in the marginal areas, it is bad.

Economics and politics intersected with socio-spatial traditions of colonizer and colonized. Layouts and physical design are often an amalgam of traditions: Victoriaborg and the burgeoning suburbs, for example, are characterized by proper streets, few pedestrians, and the free-standing, walled single-family house (originally the bungalow) with all the amenities; Central Accra (James Town, for example) is dense with people, the streets wind about, and family and renters live in deteriorated colonial-era storied buildings lacking toilets and often water; and Sabon Zongo is a grid but barely paved, with animals everywhere, and the houses themselves a legacy of Hausa rules on female seclusion.

What I have sought to exemplify is how such sociocultural categories as ethnicity (and its traditions) and gender (and its constraints) help produce the spatial landscape and come to define a community’s boundaries. Place matters to people who live, work, and play in it. Spatial meanings are cultural productions. Thus space is a full partner in social life. Spatial practices have helped build Sabon Zongo. My analysis of this migrant community examines both the public spaces of the community, as in streets and markets, and the private or semi-private spaces of daily life in the compound, and the linkage between these two levels. It includes physical delineations and how the residents’ use and understanding of those delineations define their daily life. Its physical and social space encodes, represents, and enables the traditions of northern Nigeria, southern Ghana, colonialism, and African urbanization. This combination plays out on a daily basis and constitutes Sabon Zongo’s uniqueness and its boundedness.

Notes

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1. Throughout southern Ghana and the Gold Coast, land is vested in the office of the chief and a citizen has the right to cultivate this land, assuming it is not already occupied. This land is referred to as “stool” land (Okali 1982).

2. In fact, the health premises of Freetown’s Hill Station were proved erroneous, serving only to segregate the races (King 1984:203).


4. Documents regarding the composition of the Islamic population at the turn of the century are generally vague about ethnic affiliations and often not reliable when they are specific. For example, many migrants classified as Hausa “were not members of the same ethnic group and many of them took Hausa ethnicity only while away from their homes” (Adamu 1978:15). This included recruits to the G.C.H.C. Two of the better-known officers, Harri Zenua and his brother Danborno, were Kanuri from Bornu (Chief Amida Braimah, 1/18/1982).

5. Malam Bako recounted this episode in a letter to the district commissioner dated July 10, 1933. I obtained a copy from Sha’ibu Bako.

6. Kimble (1963:18) notes that customary law provided for a permanent grant of land to a whole group of strangers who wished to settle; it did not need to be renewed upon the chief’s death.


8. See Campbell (1994) for the “traditional” city town of Koforidua.

9. A KVIP (Kumase Ventilated Improved Pit Latrine) is simply a pit latrine provided with a vent (flue) that channels the odors out of the space. It is usually built with two pits. One is used and when it fills up, the seat is changed to the other pit. (The design provides for a seat and cover, as opposed to the squat version of old.) Most models are designed such that the effluents of the filled-up pit can be harmlessly removed after a number of years (that is while the other pit is being used). Filling one pit can take years (maybe ten), depending on occupancy.

10. Also spelled Zaburma, Zerma, Djerma, or Dyerma, they are a people of westernmost Niger, including also a few who live in neighboring areas of Burkina Faso (formerly Upper Volta) and Nigeria.

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