

**(K)not Building**  
**Fabrics, Walls, Gender and Domestic Space in Nigeria**

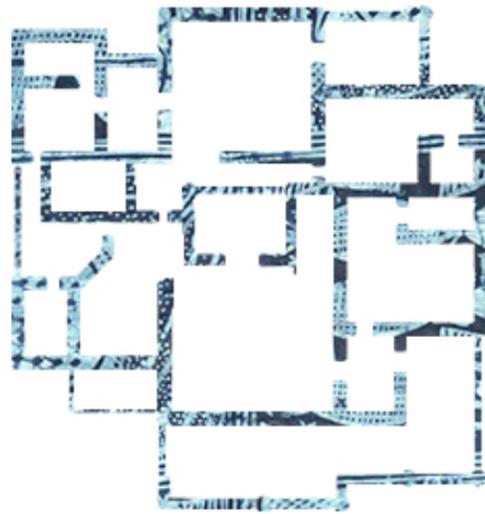
By  
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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs in partial  
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**Figure 1:** Women, Domesticity and Fabric, 2021

## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the reconceptualization of domestic space through fabric. Walls in domestic spaces function as apparatuses of control, capturing, orienting, and influencing the behaviours of its inhabitants.<sup>1</sup> In patriarchal societies, the partitioning of domestic space is used to perpetuate and reinforce patriarchal constructs via the gender assignment of space.

are still prescribed to the domestic realm. I explore the agency of making, walls, and fabric. The traditionally women-led production of fabrics in Nigerian societies prompts the proposal for textile walls as soft and permeable dividers that suggest more malleable gender divisions.

Key terms : *domestic, walls, patriarchal, partitioning, fabric, gender*

This thesis is contextualized by my Nigerian heritage and is a reckoning with the legacy of Nigeria's British colonization. Nigeria's existing patriarchal nature intensified, and as a result, Nigerian women

<sup>1</sup> Giorgio Agamben. *What is an Apparatus?" and Other Essays.* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 14.

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**Figure 2:** Themes Swatch Board, 2022

“The ultimate hidden truth of the world is that it is something that we make and could just as easily make differently”.<sup>2</sup>

*David Graeber*

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<sup>2</sup> David Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy* (Brooklyn: London: Melville House, 2015).

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The architecture of the domestic space is complicit in enforcing gender roles. In patriarchal societies, domestic architecture is used as a tool to further perpetuate and reinforce patriarchal constructs and the gender assignment of space. In this thesis, Nigeria is used as a case study due to its long-standing patriarchal nature. According to philosopher Giorgio Agamben, an apparatus is, “literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviours, opinions or discourse of living beings”.<sup>3</sup> In this case, architecture and its walls are an apparatus. Since we interact with walls everyday, how they work can be almost undetectable. For example, when analyzing Nigerian domestic designs before and after British colonization, the influence of Victorian living is evident in the partitioning of space. Theories such as biological determinism and separate spheres aid in presenting the relationship between patriarchy and partitioning in the domestic space. If architecture has the power to reinforce such ideologies, can it do the reverse? How can architecture blur the lines between gender roles in the home and be an emancipatory practice?

### Architecture and Gender

According to author and professor

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<sup>3</sup> Giorgio Agamben. *What is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 14.

Ada Uzoamaka Azodo, African feminism, and written historical recognition as public “not only raises the issues of sex and gender buildings funded by wealthy patrons.<sup>6</sup> but also the questions of race and canon Feminist and feminist architects are striving formation”.<sup>4</sup> It intersects with architecture to create more inclusive spaces (in terms of in the form of gender relations and space. race, class, and gender), by first exposing the Feminist architects like the Matrix Feminist biases and inequalities currently existing and Design Cooperative (active from 1981-1994) learning from them.

note the subordination of women in space and architecture’s complicity (refer to Figure 3).<sup>5</sup> “Everyday” spaces like the domestic, housing, and interiors, often prescribed to women, should be given the same accolades,

Many African cultures place a preference on male children over female children. According to author Adu Funmilayo Modupe, “The preference for a male child

4 Ada Uzoamaka Azodo, “Issues in African Feminism: A Syllabus,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 25, no. 3/4 (1997): 201–7, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40003384>.

5 Rima Aouf Sabina, “Barbican Celebrates Matrix Feminist Design Group in How We Live Now Exhibition,” *Dezeen*, June 16, 2021, <https://www.dezeen.com/2021/06/16/barbican-matrix-feminist-design-group-how-we-live-now-exhibition/>.

6 Iain Borden, Barbara Penner, and Jane Rendell, *Gender Space Architecture: An Interdisciplinary Introduction* (London, United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis Group, 1999), 227.



**Figure 3:** Members of the Matrix Feminist Design Co-Operative in the 1990s

cuts across African traditions. Many African states are patrilineal.<sup>7</sup> In Nigerian culture, factors like culture, kinship, economics, and institutions have given rise to a preference for male sons. As a result, the preference of men over women presents itself in many ways through different institutions, including the domestic space. Consistent with this idea, in French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville's book titled, *Democracy in America*, he notes observing the separation of male and female spheres while on a trip to the United States.<sup>8</sup> Though this book was published in 1840, the notion of gender segregated spheres had existed years before. The "separate spheres" ideology refers to the different spatial environments men and women occupy, and this is one of the many stereotypes preventing women from entering the workforce. This paradigm consists of a public male realm (like the city) and a private female realm (like the home), and it exists in many societies other than the west.<sup>9</sup> In fact, the Nigerian Men and Gender Equality Survey (NIMAGES) conducted in 2015, evaluated that 94% of men and 91% of women agreed that "a woman's most important role is to take care of her home and cook for her family" (refer

7 Adu Funmilayo Modupe, *Gender and Power Relations in Nigeria*, ed. Ronke Iyabowale Ako-Nai (Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 87.

8 Linda K. Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 1 (1988): 9, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1889653>.

9 Borden et al., *Gender Space Architecture: An Interdisciplinary Introduction*, 103.

to Figure 4).<sup>10</sup>

The institutionalization of the separate spheres ideology and more specifically the relegation of women to the domestic, is difficult to unteach. The invisibility of women's work in the private spaces of the domestic result in the work being seen as secondary or less important.<sup>11</sup> After all, 'seeing is believing' and the far more visible work of men in the public spaces of the domestic increase the value of their work.<sup>12</sup> Author Oluwatomisin Oredein of the article titled, "Hospitality and

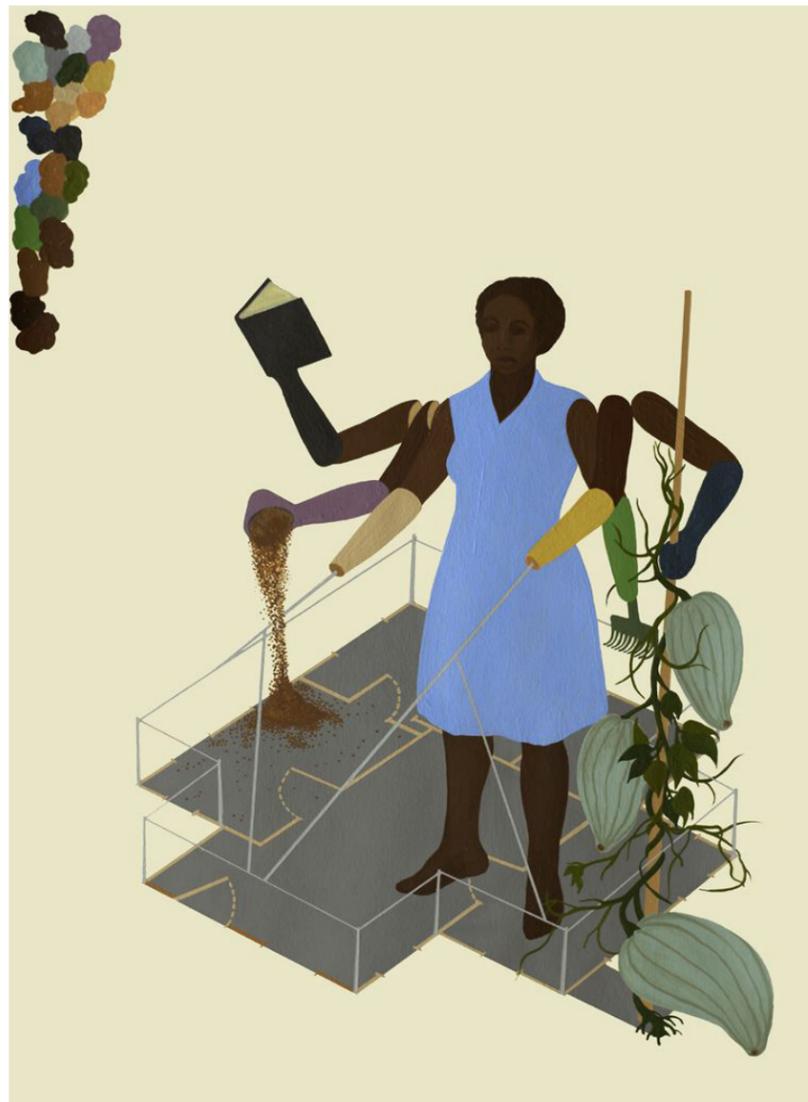
Domesticity: Where can these Black Women Live?", contends that, "In the patriarchal landscape of Christian hospitality, the female's being is diminished while her work remains advantageous to men...In this way, female human beings become human doings. They are reduced to actions".<sup>13</sup> What is the difference between public and private space and why can the limitation of women to one place over the other be harmful? The main difference between spaces that seem public over private is visibility. As reported by author Andrea Brighenti, "asymmetries of visibility

10 Patience Ekeoba, "Nigeria Men and Gender Equality Survey" NiMAGES, accessed September 12, 2021, <https://promundoglobal.org/resources/nigeria-men-gender-equality-survey-nimages/>.

11 Sharon R. Steadman, *Archaeology of Domestic Architecture and the Human Use of Space* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

12 Ibid., 213.

13 Oluwatomisin Oredein, "Hospitality and Domesticity: Where Can These Black Women Live?," *The Other Journal*, October 6, 2014, <https://theotherjournal.com/2014/10/06/hospitality-and-domesticity-where-can-these-black-women-live/>.



**Figure 4:** Survival, 1990-91 F.G.C. Shagamu by Otobong Nkanga

are asymmetries of power...”.<sup>14</sup> Visibility can be defined as the state of being able to see or be seen, but that definition is far too simplistic because visibility goes beyond sight.<sup>15</sup> The two-opposing outcomes of visibility are recognition and control. Lack of recognition renders a group powerless whereas recognition is often a mark of control.<sup>16</sup> In order to give women control over their lives and enhance their role in societies, recognition and value must be given to the work they do inside and outside of the domestic.

**Architecture and Race**

Spatial violence refers to “the manifolds of harm mediated through the built environment which architecture inflicts even as it follows its own practices and protocols”.<sup>17</sup> Nigerian women are affected by the spatial violence enacted through domestic architecture. Through the gender assignment of space, domestic architecture inflicts spatial violence on Nigerian women. The gender assignment of space is harmful because it indirectly places women at a disadvantage in terms of social and economic stability.

14 Andrea Brighenti, “Visibility: A Category for the Social Sciences,” *Current Sociology* 55, no. 3 (May 2007): 338, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392107076079>.

15 Ibid., 325.

16 Ibid., 323.

17 Andrew Herscher and Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi, “Spatial Violence,” *Architectural Theory Review* 19, no. 3 (September 2, 2014): 269, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13264826.2014.1037538>.



**Figure 5:** The Victorian Philanthropist's Parlour, 1997 by Yinka Shonibare

According to architect Christa Kamleithner, “architectures of colonialism... were used to dominate and segregate people, exploit labour, and structure land”.<sup>18</sup> The spatial violence of colonial architecture and architectural spaces serves to reinforce gender roles and the subordination of women. It is no surprise that patriarchy and colonialism are strongly related given that heterosexism, eurocentrism, racism, classicism, and religio-centrism are intrinsic to both.<sup>19</sup> From the introduction of colonial places of worship to colonial prisons, colonial architecture was a means to enforce foreign ideologies, surveil and control the colonized (refer to Figure 5). Architecture allows for the organization of bodies in spaces, and inherently the organization of power dynamics. “Othering” is essential to both colonization and patriarchy. Colonialism underlines othering based on race whereas patriarchy underlines othering of the basis of gender. The Decolonizing Art Research (DAAR) manifesto reads, “If architecture is a weapon in a military arsenal that implements the power relations of colonialist ideologies, then architecture must burn. If architecture is a weapon in the military arsenal of colonial

<sup>18</sup> Christa Kamleithner, “Architectures of Colonialism (Cottbus, 16-19 Jun 21),” ArtHist.net, accessed October 30, 2021, <https://arthist.net/archive/34083>

<sup>19</sup> Suzanne M. Spencer-Wood, “Feminist Theorizing of Patriarchal Colonialism, Power Dynamics, and Social Agency Materialized in Colonial Institutions,” *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 20, no. 3 (2016): 478, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26174303>.

rule, then architecture must burn”.<sup>20</sup> This acknowledges the power of architecture, but it also acknowledges our responsibility to dismantle oppressive architectures. This thesis is there by lighting a match to such architecture.

### Architecture and Space

The term “domestic” is derived from the Latin word “domus” which translates to “dominate” and has come to relate to the terms, home, house, or household.<sup>21</sup> Why has the domestic space been linked to a

woman’s body? Could it be that the domestic space and its constructs have been used to “dominate” a woman’s body? There are several western theories that have linked a woman’s body to domestic space. The theory of “biological determinism” was introduced by biologist Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thompson in 1889. It was the idea that women were genetically inferior to men due to how biologically they conserved energy as opposed to men, who expended energy.<sup>22</sup> Conserving energy, according to these biologists, made women passive, conservative

and uninterested in politics, as opposed to men that were the opposite.<sup>23</sup> This analysis has been discredited, but traces of its logic persist today. Even prior to the formalization of this theory, European society was socially structured on the premise of gender and the performance of gender. Authors Pier Aureli and Maria Guidici note in their article titled, “Familiar Horror: Towards a Domestic Space” that, “women were confined to productive and reproductive activities while men managed resources and engaged in trade and hospitality. The organization of early homes reflected this gendered division of labour by separating space devoted to production

and reproduction from those devoted to hospitality and storage”.<sup>24</sup> The partitioning of the domestic space was a means of assignment and reinforcing prescribed roles to both men and women.

In *Archaeology of Domestic Architecture and the Human Use of Space*, Sharon Steadman asserts that the spaces people do or do not occupy, can project, their status, power, and privilege.<sup>25</sup> This emphasizes the notion of positionality with respect to architectural space. Oreidin also observes that, “[women] are the keepers of the house and of central importance to the maintenance of the home

20 DAAR, “DAAR”, accessed October 18, 2021, <http://www.decolonizing.ps/site/>.

21 Chiara Briganti and Kathy Mezei, *The Domestic Space Reader* (Toronto, [Ontario]; University of Toronto Press, 2012), 5.

22 Mari Mikkola, “Feminist Perspectives on Sex and Gender”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2019 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2019/entries/feminism-gender/>>.

23 Ibid.

24 Pier Vittorio Aureli, and Maria Sheherazade Giudici. “Familiar Horror: Towards a Critique of Domestic Space,” 105–29. Accessed 2016. [https://researchonline.rca.ac.uk/2464/1/AureliGiudici\\_Log38\\_1011.pdf](https://researchonline.rca.ac.uk/2464/1/AureliGiudici_Log38_1011.pdf), 107.

25 Steadman, *Archaeology of Domestic Architecture and the Human Use of Space*, 212.

system, but they are never in control of the house or the home; rather, they are a product of the house and the home”.<sup>26</sup> This means that the work done by women in the domestic is seen as necessary for the home to function and not as work. The segregated nature of the domestic serves to hide certain bodies at work and reveal others at work. When observing the spaces of traditional Nigerian domestic plans, one can see a commonality between the connection of the living and dining spaces (gendered men’s public spaces) and segregation of other spaces (gendered women’s private spaces) that confirms this idea.

Figure 6 is a timeline providing additional context to the themes addressed in this thesis. Certain events, art installations and book publications relating to the themes of gender, space and power are highlighted. For instance, the different waves of western feminism are highlighted. The first feminist wave in the 1800s addressed women’s right to vote and the second feminist wave in the 1960s to 1980s addressed rape, domestic violence, and reproductive rights.<sup>27</sup> Documenting the different western feminist milestones against African feminist milestones is extremely powerful in that it shows that all feminist efforts feed off one another. In the

timeline, events like the 1929 Aba Women’s Protest are acknowledged as significant feminist achievements in Nigeria. This protest was against colonial market taxation. Unfortunately, after several days of peaceful protesting the colonial powers shot and killed over 40 women after which they ultimately dropped their plans to impose the tax.<sup>28</sup> Architecturally, the works of visual artist Olalekan Jeyifous speaks to afro-futuristic urban spaces and explorative architecture via installations, drawings, and sculptures. The project presented in the timeline called “Deconstructure” (2009) was made for DAAS Decolonizing Architecture Art

<sup>26</sup> Oredein, “Hospitality and Domesticity.”

<sup>27</sup> “Feminism | Definition, History, Types, Waves, Examples, & Facts,” Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed October 18, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism>.

<sup>28</sup> Marissa Evans, “Aba Women’s Riots (November-December 1929)”, Black past, March 27, 2009, <https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/aba-womens-riots-november-december-1929/>.

<sup>29</sup> “Vigilism,” accessed October 5, 2021, <http://vigilism.com>.



Figure 6: Thesis Timeline, 2021

## 2. AGENCY OF WALLS

The primary function of architecture or more specifically walls is to protect or conceal. In the placement of a wall, purpose is assigned to space. According to Simon Unwin in, *An Architecture Notebook: Walls*, “Once you think about the walls around you and what they are doing, you start to understand some of the ways they condition lives, affect experience, make somethings possible and deny others”.<sup>30</sup> Walls can serve multiple purposes, be embedded with meaning, reflect society, conserve, hide, define, or obscure. In Figure 7, several architectural walls are catalogued to show their agency and their multi-functionality. For example, The Great Wall of Benin was a boundary wall protecting

the city from invasion, but the Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall functions as a monument with rooted meaning. In addition to documenting a set of walls, I began an exploration of fabrics (refer to Figures 8-11), inspired in part from an earlier study of Nigerian domestic space. In that spatial study of traditional house plans, I learned about the fabric and textile associations with each tribe, and this prompted an investigation of fabric, which subsequently became a key part of the thesis. Fabric works in opposition to the rigidity of a wall and like walls, fabric can tell stories concerning the user and their identity but are more flexible when it comes to creating spaces.

<sup>30</sup> Simon Unwin, *An Architecture Notebook: Wall* (Psychology Press, 2000), 27.

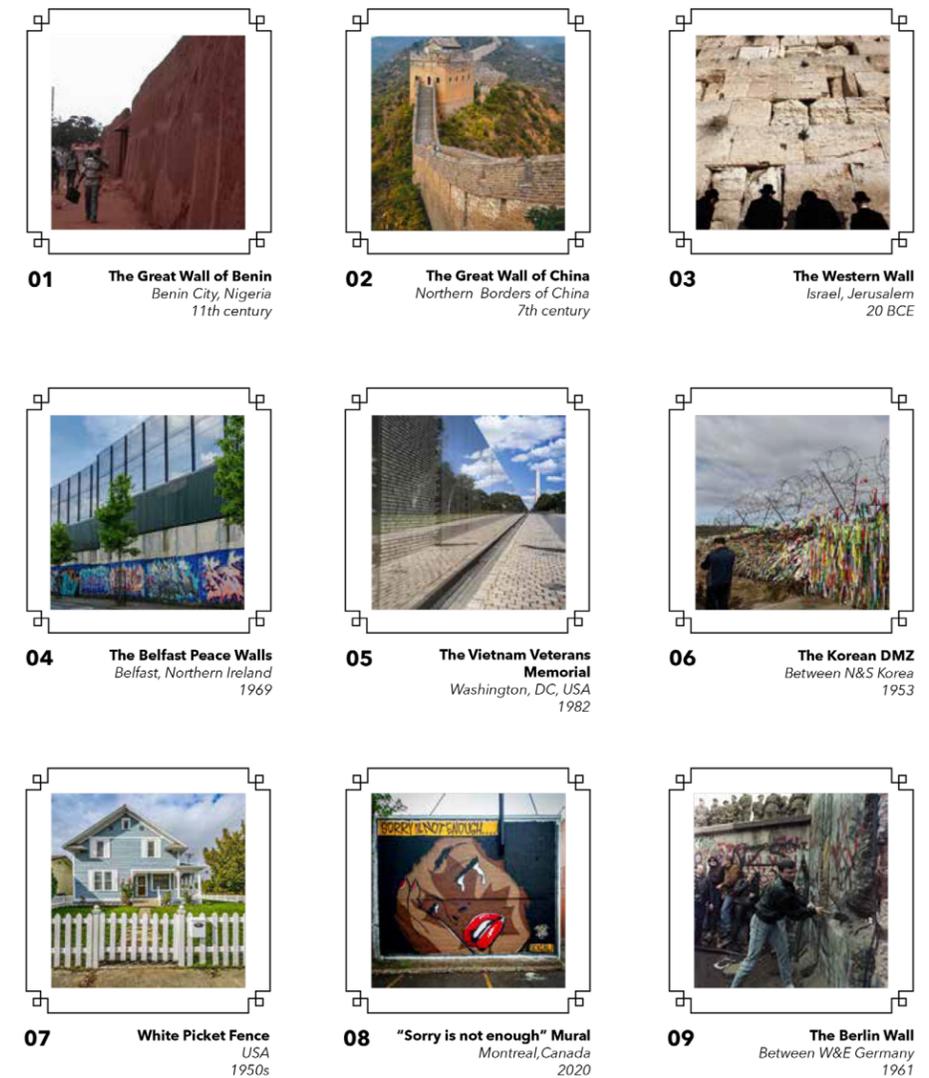


Figure 7: Walls, 2021



Figure 8: Surfaces-Domestic, 2021

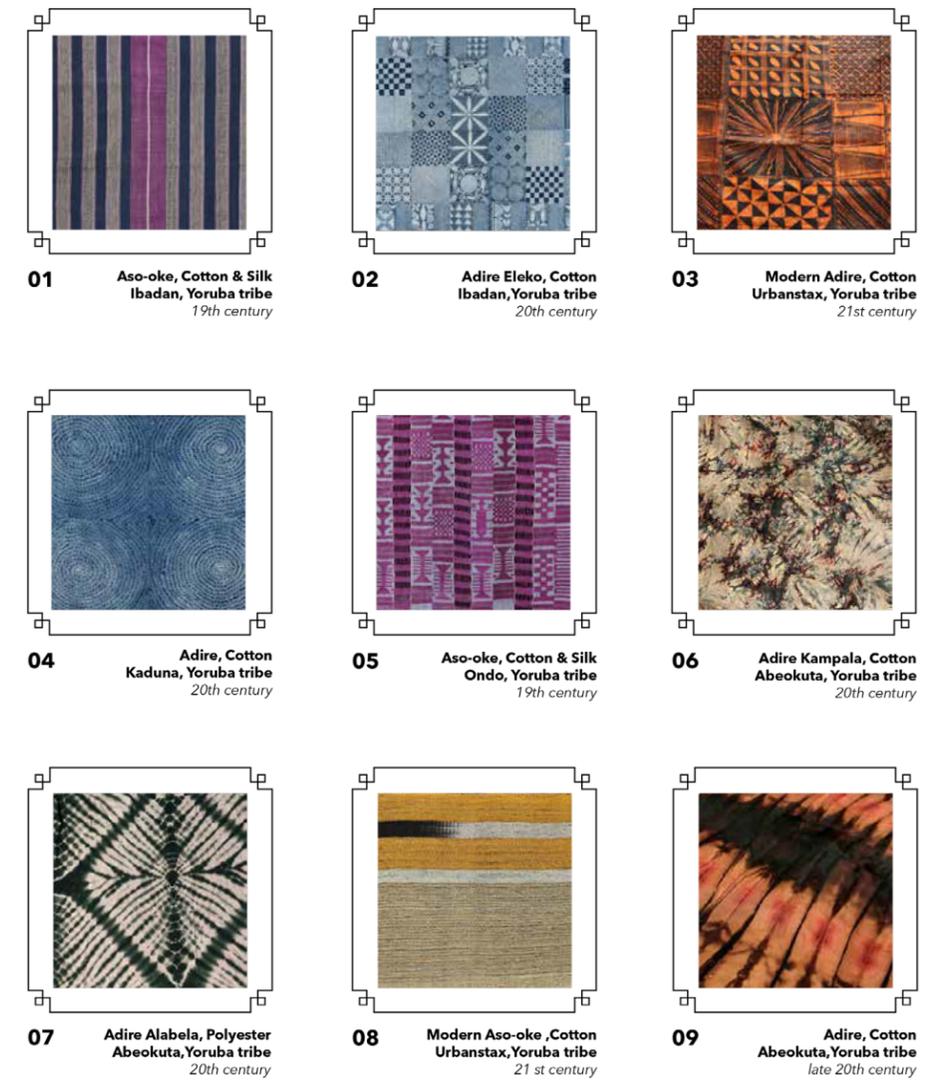


Figure 9: Surfaces-Fabric (Yoruba), 2021



Figure 10: Surfaces-Fabric (Igbo), 2021



Figure 11: Surfaces-Fabric (Hausa), 2021

### Walls and Psychology

Spatial psychology functions as a bridge between the disciplines of architecture and psychology.<sup>31</sup> Disciplines like spatial and environmental psychology, “investigate human behaviours within the context of built and natural environments....to find out how the physical environment affects emotions and behaviour...”.<sup>32</sup> From such investigations environmental psychologists have determined optimal patient room layouts in hospitals.<sup>33</sup> According to feminist anthropologist Shirley Ardener, “A person’s environment imposes certain restraints on their mobility, and, in turn, their perception of space is shaped by their own capacity to move about.... So, behaviour and space are mutually dependent.”<sup>34</sup> Architectural space and its partitioning can affect human behaviour directly and indirectly. Apart from the obvious curation of movement, the treatment of spaces can affect a person’s mood and well being. Colour, surface treatment and variation in wall height can influence the perception or

31 Courtney Ackerman, “What Is Environmental Psychology?”, PositivePsychology.com, December 19, 2018, <https://positivepsychology.com/environmental-psychology/>.

32 Nalina Moses, “Environmental Psychology: Building with Feeling - AIA,” accessed October 30, 2021, <https://www.aia.org/articles/1616-environmental-psychology-building-with-feelin:31>.

33 John Reiling, Ronda G. Hughes, and Mike R. Murphy, “The Impact of Facility Design on Patient Safety,” in *Patient Safety and Quality: An Evidence-Based Handbook for Nurses*, ed. Ronda G. Hughes, Advances in Patient Safety, 167, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK2633/>.

34 Borden et al., *Gender Space Architecture: An Interdisciplinary Introduction*, 113.



**Figure 12:** Home within a Home by Do So Huh, 2013-2014

behaviour of inhabitants of a space (refer to Figure 12).<sup>35</sup>

### Walls and Power

In precolonial Nigeria most individuals were either of ancestral faith or Muslim. The Islamic faith is believed to have reached Nigeria as early as the 14th century.<sup>36</sup> Both religions had pre-existing gender specific constraints and constructs. Religion and seniority both played a significant role in the social structuring of society and more specifically in the household dynamic.

Categorization by seniority meant that, “the social ranking of persons [were] based on their chronological age”.<sup>37</sup> So, religion and seniority deemphasized social structuring based on gender alone. Gender relations in precolonial Nigeria were generally described as “separate but complimentary”.<sup>38</sup> This meant that even though labour inside and outside the home was divided based on gender, superiority was not placed on one role over another. For example, if men were farmers, women were traders and if men did long distance trading, women did short

distance trading so they could easily tend to their children and home.<sup>39</sup>

When Nigeria was colonized by the British in 1885, the usage of gender to categorize and structure society increased. Due to the introduction of Christianity and western education, British social views in terms of women’s subordination were now integrated into Nigerian society. Pre-existing distinctions in gender roles and gender dynamics both in ancestral and Islamic religious practices made for a smoother transition. For instance, in the precolonial

Nigerian households, both men and women

contributed financially. There was no belief that the husband of the family would be the sole provider for all expenses of the household. But, under colonial rule the idea of the “male breadwinner” was presented, purporting that “male earnings were to be [solely] supportive of wives and children”.<sup>40</sup> This was done to remove women from wage earning positions and prevent the “[diversion] of maternal attention from the home and family needs”.<sup>41</sup> The change in the perception of women, spearheaded by colonization, is visible in the evolution of the domestic plan during this period.

As noted above, precolonial

35 Ulrich Exner and Dietrich Pressel, *Basics Spatial Design*, (Birkhäuser, 2017).

36 Karen Tranberg Hansen, *African Encounters with Domesticity* (Rutgers University Press, c1992), 77.

37 Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, NED-New edition (University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 40, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.cttt0vh>.

38 Sefinatu Aliyu Dogo, “The Nigerian Patriarchy: When and How,” *Journal of Cultural and Religious Studies* 2, no. 5 (October 28, 2014), 273, <https://doi.org/10.17265/2328-2177/2014.05.002>.

39 Oyèwùmí, *The Invention of Women*, 71.

40 Catherine M. Cole, Takiwaa Manuh, and Stephan F. Miescher, *Africa After Gender?* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 242.

41 Ibid., 246.

and postcolonial domestic designs from dominant tribes in Nigeria were diagrammed, exploring levels of privacy and the kitchen (refer to Figures 13-15). A fabric swatch affiliated with the tribe was used to highlight the kitchen because it is the most gendered space in the home and because fabric and textile production was still seen as a gendered practice. For the most part when transitioning from precolonial to postcolonial domestic design the footprint of the home decreased, and the overall form consolidated. The kitchen, in every case study, is partitioned off and located in a corner of the home, on the periphery.



**Figure 13:** Precolonial versus Postcolonial Yoruba Domestic Design, 2021



Figure 14: Precolonial versus Postcolonial Igbo Domestic Design, 2021



Figure 15: Precolonial versus Postcolonial Hausa Domestic Design, 2021

### 3. AGENCY OF FABRIC

The usage of textiles in architecture can be traced back to Paleolithic times. From simple tents to complex tensile structures, fabric has persisted in architecture due to its lightness, flexibility, and cost efficiency in comparison to other modes of construction.<sup>42</sup> Technological advancements have allowed fabric to become more durable and it can be used for permanent and temporary constructions. Architects like Frei Otto have exploited the draping nature of fabric and created large scale pavilions whereas mix media artists like El Anatsui (refer to Figure 16) and Victoria Udonian (refer to Figure 17) have used fabric at a smaller scale and

highlighted its transparent and textured nature. Walls and fabric both relate to one another in that they provide shelter and protection for our bodies and can express ideas of personal, social, and cultural identity.<sup>43</sup> Fabric is thin in cross section, allowing for an element of exposure or closeness not normally present in walls. It is in a way skin-like and can be altered and manipulated to change the environment. Textile making is a craft that is also uniquely associated with women.

#### **Fabric Treatments: Pleating and Layering**

Through the process of pleating and layering, a once two-dimensional fabric

<sup>42</sup> Susanne Fritz, "The Very Fabric of Architecture: Textile Use in Construction," *Architonic*, accessed January 9, 2022, <https://www.architonic.com/en/story/susanne-fritz-the-very-fabric-of-architecture-textile-use-in-construction/7000625>.

<sup>43</sup> MOCA, "Skinbones\_exhibition\_guide.pdf," 2, accessed January 9, 2022.



**Figure 16:** "Gli" (Wall) by El Anatsui, 2010



**Figure 17:** Tokunbo pores by Victoria Udondian, 2014

embraces three- dimensionality. The pleating of fabric dates to Ancient Egypt, where the garments of the wealthy were pleated as a show of their class and status.<sup>44</sup> Ancient Egyptians used two techniques to achieve pleats: the first being that fabric was folded (accordion like) and wet and once the fabric had dried, it would retain the pleated shape. The second technique was that fabric was placed into a grooved mould lined with a glue-like solution that imprinted the shape into the fabric. Unfortunately, both techniques did not hold pleating for long, so they had to be done after a single wash, but that also speaks to the expense involved to maintain this look.<sup>45</sup> According to Catherine Dormor, author of *A Philosophy of Textile*, folding, “as a structure and an action, resists occupying a singular space preferring space that has the capacity to stretch, fold and inflect”.<sup>46</sup> Folding is required to make pleats and the idea of spaces being able to stretch, fold and inflect, is precisely what is being investigated in this thesis. Layering, as an additive act, is done to make use of the material qualities of several materials. Whether it is for contrast, increased thickness or insulation, layering allows for the absorption of characteristics, assimilation

<sup>44</sup> Nina Azzarello, “Unfolding the Art of Pleating: History + Techniques That Have Fascinated the World of Fashion,” *Designboom* | architecture & design magazine, May 9, 2021, <https://www.designboom.com/design/unfolding-art-pleating-history-techniques-fashion-05-09-2021/>.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Catherine Dormor, *A Philosophy of Textile: Between Practice and Theory* (London; Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2020), 11.

rather than segregation.

### **Fabric Treatments: Adire**

“Adire” is a textile belonging to the Yoruba tribe of Nigeria. Originating in the southern portion of Nigeria, Adire translates to “tie dye” in English. Women were traditionally the ones who made and wore Adire clothing and moreover it is a trade that was inherited and passed down through women in Nigerian families (refer to Figure 18).<sup>47</sup> There are different techniques used to achieve this tie dye effect, which also allow

for variations in appearance. Those different techniques are Batik, Alabere, Oniko and Eleko. These techniques implement different materials to resist dye in the dyeing process. Adire Batik is the use of wax to resist dye, Adire Alabere is the use of stitching to resist dye, Adire Oniko is the use of raffia string to resist dye and Adire Eleko is the use of cassava flour paste to resist dye (refer to Figure 19).<sup>48</sup> Traditionally indigo coloured dye is used on cotton fabric for textile creation. For Adire Eleko, symbols and patterns are painted on the fabric with a feather using cassava paste

which repels dye, thus leaving the desired effect.<sup>49</sup> These symbols and patterns painted on cotton fabric have their own meanings and associated proverbs. The fabric is therefore used to tell a story about its user.

<sup>47</sup> The Centenary Project, “Adire: The Art of Tie and Dye”, Google Arts & Culture, accessed January 9, 2022, <https://artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/adire-the-art-of-tie-and-dye/NQJysVP8AxQtIw>.

<sup>48</sup> Jane Barbour, *Adire Cloth in Nigeria: The Preparation and Dyeing of Indigo Patterned Cloths among the Yoruba*, 1st edition (Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, 1971), 4.

<sup>49</sup> Jennifer Sefa-Boakye, “Inside The Yoruba Textile Art Of Adire With Chief Nike Davies-Okundaye,” OkayAfrica, November 5, 2014, <https://www.okayafrika.com/chief-nike-davies-adire-yoruba-textile-art/>.

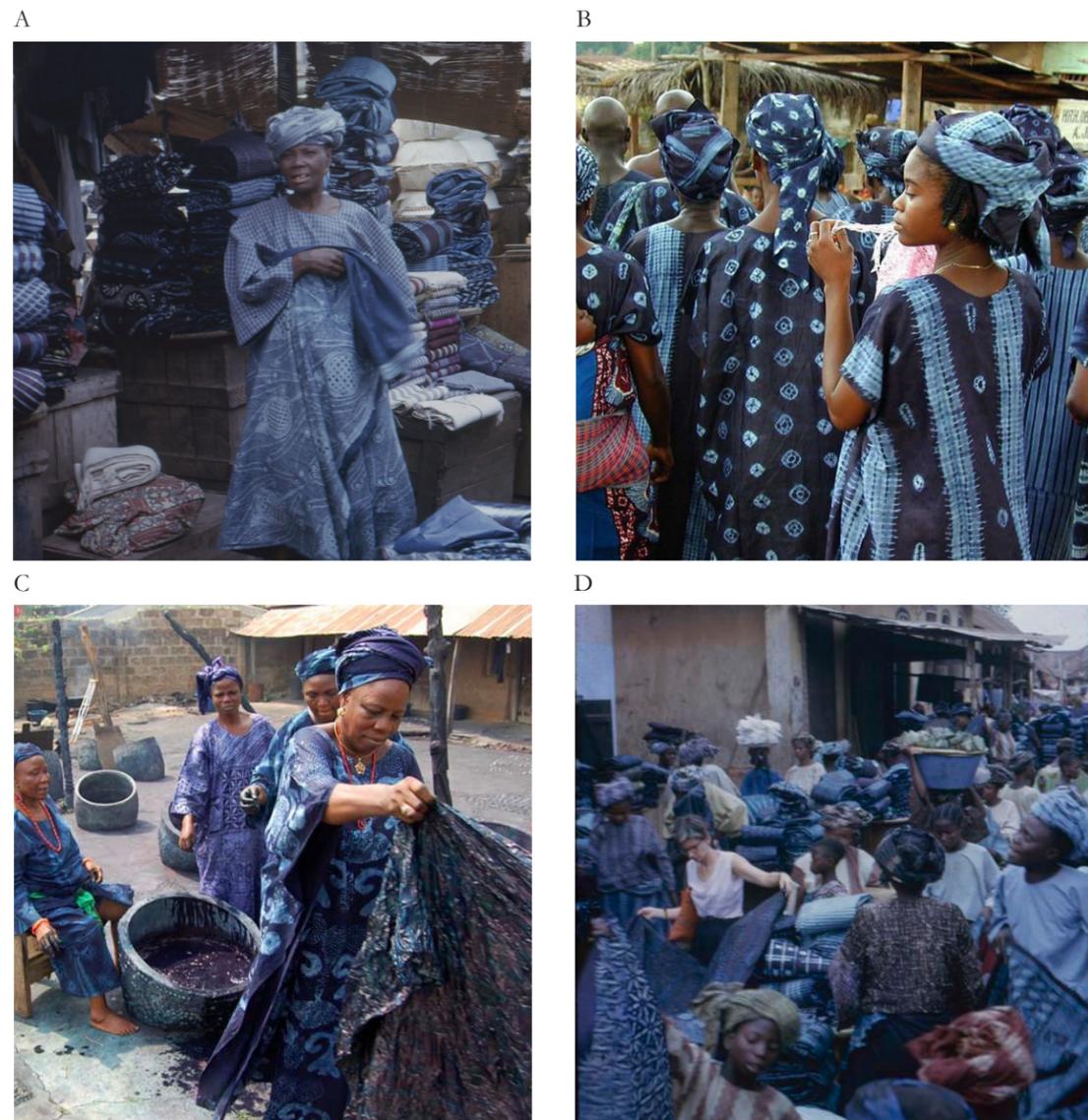


Figure 18 A-D: Adire Fabric and Textile Makers



Figure 19: Different Resist Dye Methods, 2018

## 4. AGENCY OF MAKING

Guest curator of the “Power of Making” exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum (2011) Daniel Charny, noted that, “Making is the most powerful way that we solve problems, express ideas, and shape our world. What and how we make defines who we are and communicates who we want to be”.<sup>50</sup> There are different types of making processes using additive, subtractive and transformative techniques.<sup>51</sup> In choosing to make Adire textile, I am engaging in a form of emotional labour. I am also acknowledging one of the many traditions of Nigerian women, their contributions to placemaking, and affirming the agency of emotional labour as architectural work. Architect and professor Menna Agha argues that the emotional labour performed by women in the domestic, like care labour, childcare labour and household labour, shapes material culture and therefore is productive labour.<sup>52</sup> This also includes all labour in the shadow economies that function from within the domestic space.<sup>53</sup> The value given to productive labour (gendered for males) should be the same value given to emotional labour because emotional

50 V&A and Crafts Council, “Power of Making”, Victoria and Albert Museum, July 12, 2012, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/p/powerofmaking/>.

51 Ibid.

52 Menna Agha, “Emotional Capital and Other Ontologies of the Architect,” *Architectural Histories* 8, no. 1 (December 18, 2020): 5, <https://doi.org/10.5334/ah.381>.

53 Menna Agha, “The Non-Work Of The Unimportant: The Shadow Economy of Nubian Women in Displacement Villages,” June 19, 2019, <https://kohljournal.press/non-work-unimportant.,105>.

labour can yield wealth just as productive labour.<sup>54</sup> As emotional labourers, Nigerian women are place makers because, “emotion is capital in the process of making the built environment”.<sup>55</sup>

—*I am textile-making and place-making.*

### Textile-Making: Adire

I replicated three traditional Adire pattern motifs to try to understand the lives of the women textile makers (refer to Figure 20). Most of the materials required to create Adire Eleko textile are often found in the average Nigerian household. The paste used to paint symbols and patterns on the fabric is made from cassava, a crop commonly grown by farmers in South Nigeria. In this case, I went to my local African food store to obtain the cassava flour after I experienced difficulties locating it in big name grocery stores. The feathers used as a brush to apply the cassava paste are likely plucked from livestock kept within a local domestic compound. The stick used for fine details is broken off from a traditional broom used for cleaning. I had the same style broom in my home and used a straw stick from the broom in the process. One can assume that the availability of these materials in a Nigerian home made it easier for women textile makers, juggling multiple roles, to work. Once the cassava paste is made, either a feather, stick, or sponge is used to apply

54 Agha, “Emotional Capital and Other Ontologies of the Architect,” 11.

55 Ibid., 10.

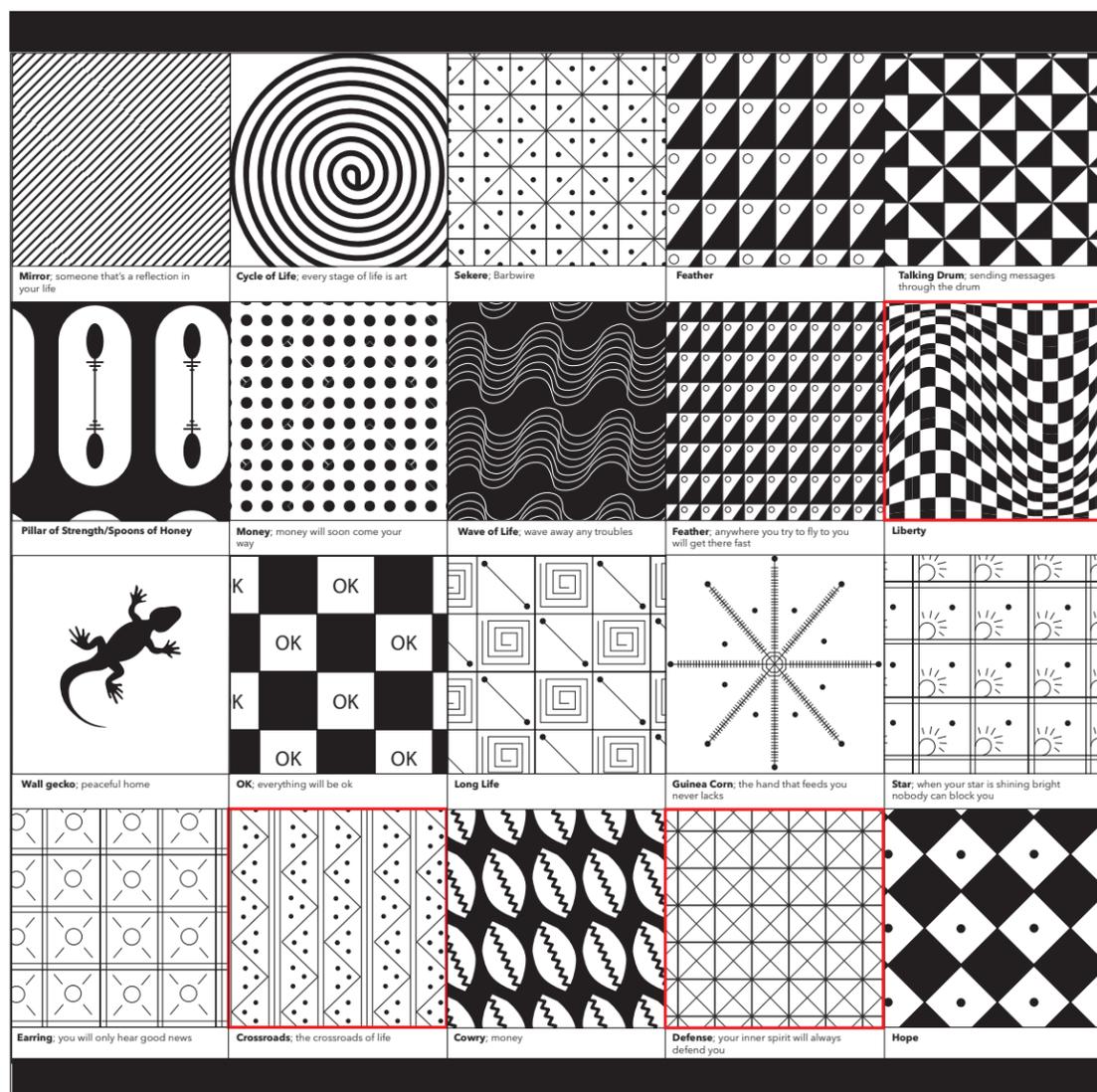


Figure 20: Adire Symbols and Patterns, 2015

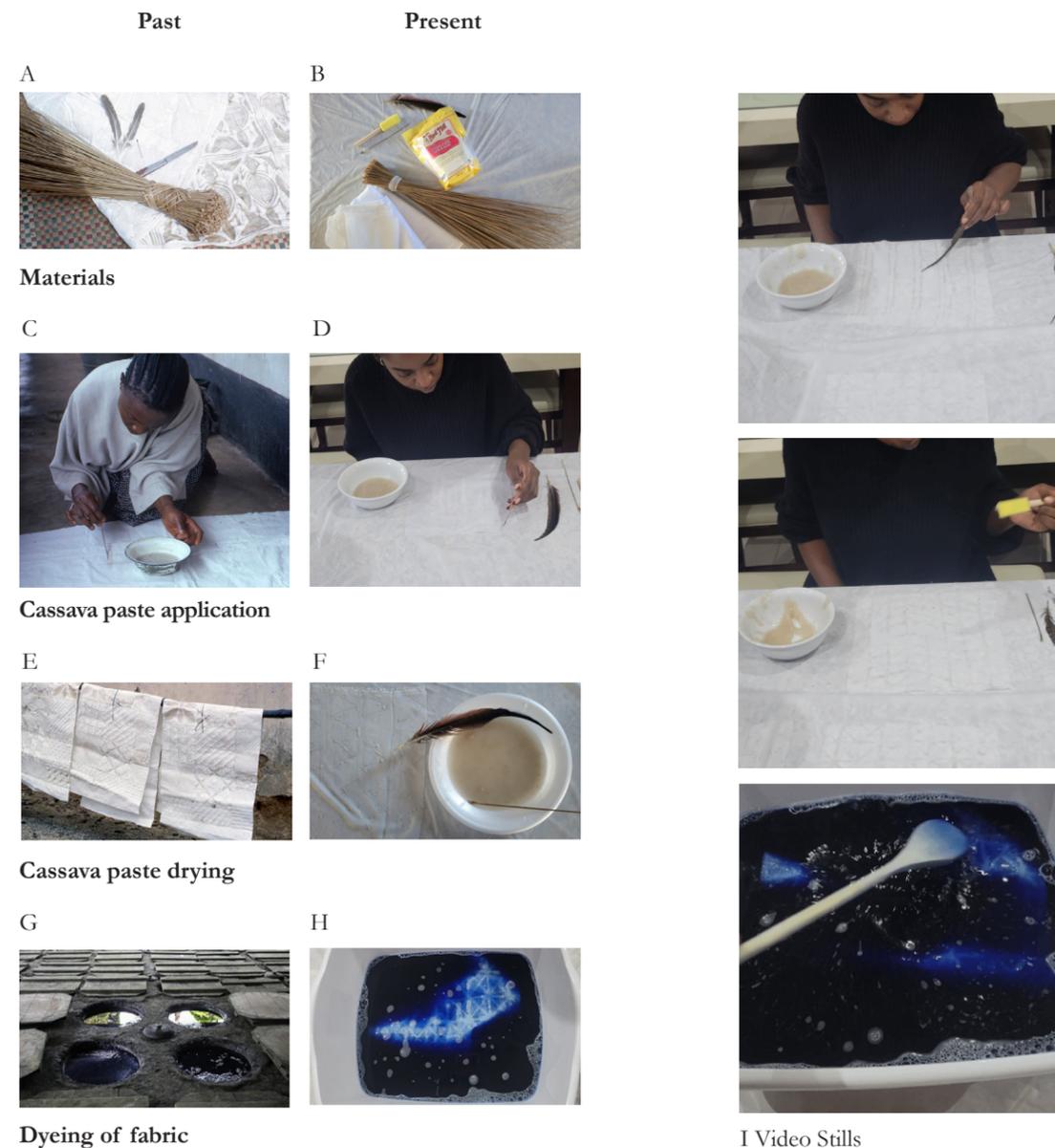


Figure 21 A-I: Adire Eleko Making Process

the paste to the fabric to create the desired patterns. The cassava paste needs 3-5 hours to dry and set completely on the fabric.<sup>56</sup> One can also assume that during the dry time other household chores or duties could be carried out like cooking, or cleaning. Once the paste is dry the fabric is submerged in a dye bath (natural dye and water) for 15-30mins or until the desired colour is achieved (refer to Figure 21).<sup>57</sup> Though Adire making was traditionally done by women, by the 1930s technological advancement led to men entering the trade. Therefore, the mechanization of the trade has removed some of the agency women had with regards to the exclusivity of the practice.

### Textiles and Placemaking

This thesis explores fabric as an alternative to a wall. I analyzed the agency of fabric and how its inherent qualities can inform ways of re-thinking architectural walls. Fabric has more to offer spatially to users than walls. Three different types of fabric are used in the replication of the three Adire Eleko pattern motifs: cotton, linen, and georgette. All three types of fabric are acceptable in the making of Adire, but their distinct material qualities determine the final product. Dormor believes that, “the material is always also a medium and thus apart of the message”.<sup>58</sup> This prompts the question, how do the material qualities

56 “Adire Eleko: The Procedures In Making Adire Eleko,” Adire Lounge - Premium Hand Dyed Textile Company, February 22, 2020, <https://adirelounge.com/adire-eleko-the-procedures-in-making-adire-eleko/>.

57 Ibid.

58 Dormor, *A Philosophy of Textile: Between Practice and Theory*, 43.



Figure 22: “Defense” on Linen, 2021



**Figure 23:** "Crossroads" on Georgette, 2021



**Figure 24:** "Liberty" on Cotton, 2021

associated with cotton, linen, or georgette effect space and what does it mean to use these fabrics to create Adire? In a broader sense, how can fabric qualities and treatment effect or influence the behaviours of users of space?

I documented through photography the material qualities of each fabric against the effect their material qualities have in space. Of the several traditional Adire patterns, “Liberty” was painted on cotton (refer to Figure 22), “Defense” was painted on linen (refer to Figure 23), and “Crossroads” was painted on georgette (refer to Figure 24).

The photographic study, in Figure 25 looks at texture, flexibility and transparency. In terms of spatial effect, surface texture can affect a person’s perception of space, meaning that a space can be read as more comfortable based on surface texture. It also influences acoustics, temperature, and indoor humidity.<sup>59</sup> Flexibility or shape retention of the material is important because it allows for fabric’s customization in space. The transparency of a fabric can be used to control the degree of public access or intimacy and privacy.<sup>60</sup> In Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal, the authors define transparency as, “a simultaneous perception of different spatial locations”.<sup>61</sup> In the

59 Exner and Pressel, *Basics Spatial Design*, 74.

60 Ibid., 65.

61 Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky, “Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal,” *Perspecta 8* (1963): 45, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1566901>.

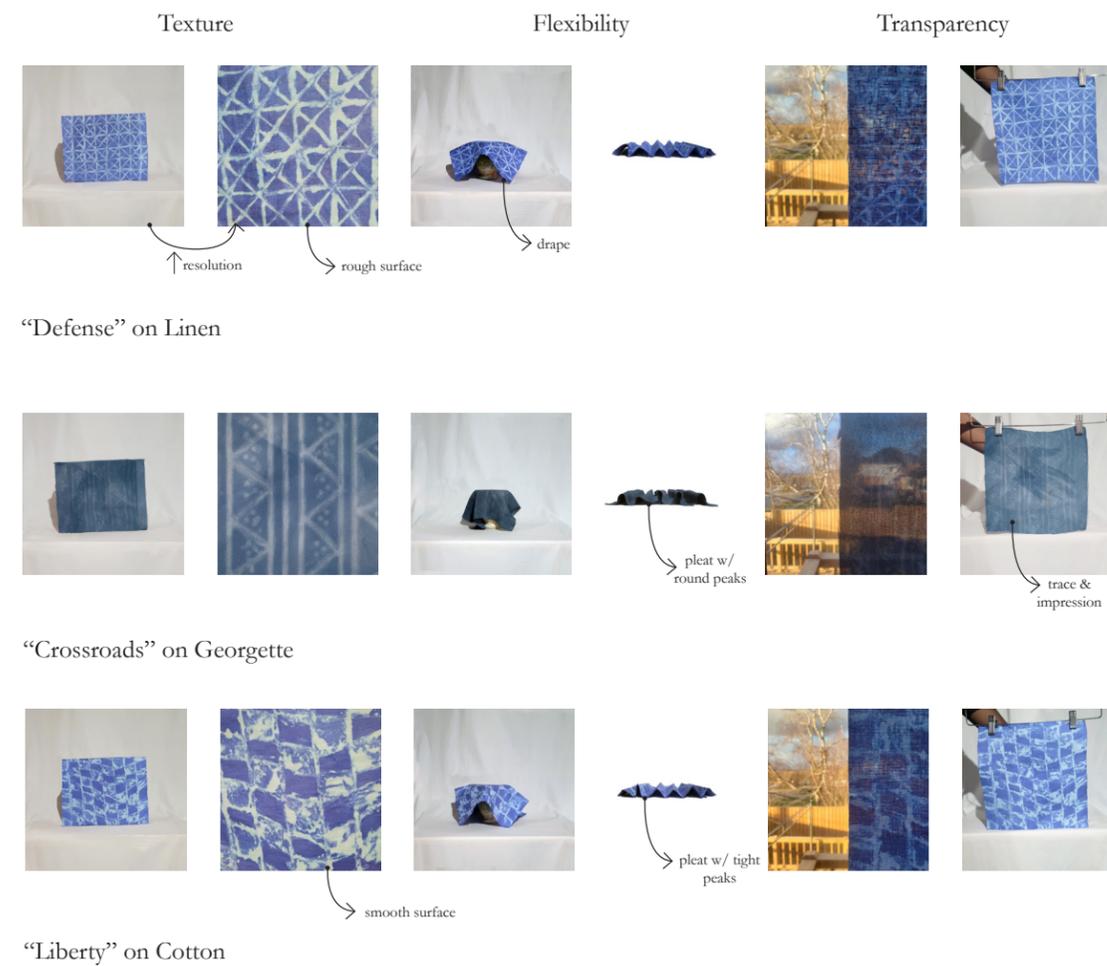


Figure 25: Fabric Photographic Study, 2021

perception of different spaces at the same time, the idea of absorption and assimilation of space relapses.

## 5. CONCEPTUAL PROPOSAL

Fabric is used to create spaces associated with them (refer to Appendix B). like walls, but the inherent difference that lies between walls and fabric is fabric's lightness and thinness. These qualities allow for spatial possibilities that are harder to achieve with walls. Lightness means quick spatial customization and flexibility, whereas thinness presents the opportunity for variations in transparency and surface relief or texture. By creating textile walls, I hope to exploit architecture's capability to influence how we perceive and use space. These textile walls test the idea of creating "neutral spaces" which are spaces devoid of gender prescriptions and the indirect disadvantages associated with them (refer to Appendix B). As eloquently identified by textile architect Mandy Shindler, "The beginning of building coincides with the beginning of textiles and the most fundamental elements of both building and textiles was the knot. So, I am, then, knot building. NOT building".<sup>62</sup> I am not designing in the traditional architectural sense. *I am knot building and placemaking.* Different treatments like pleating, draping, opaque fabrics, transparent fabrics, variation in height and colour are used to reconceptualize the domestic space. Fabric takes on multiple roles; functional, influential, and symbolic. The main question that guides and prompts

<sup>62</sup> Lesley Lokko, "FOLIO: Journal of Contemporary African Architecture Vol 2 by FOLIO *Journal of Contemporary African Architecture* - Issue," 329, accessed January 19, 2022, [https://issuu.com/foliojournalofafricanarchitecture/docs/folio\\_vol\\_2](https://issuu.com/foliojournalofafricanarchitecture/docs/folio_vol_2).

the treatment of fabric is, “How can we stitch together all spaces within the home, and architecturally encourage overlapping of household roles?”

**Textile Walls**

*Fold & Layer*

This textile wall explores folding and layering. Using the Adire Eleko dyeing technique, the areas resisted by the dye create variations in colour and add visual interest. The Adire Eleko symbols representing defense, crossroads, and liberty are used here with the addition of a new symbol, of a wall gecko, meaning “peaceful home” (refer to Figure 26). The dyed sheets of cotton fabric are laid on top of one another with two sheets of batting in between and are sewn together

in a grid pattern to make a quilt. The surface of the quilt is raised due to the thickness provided by the batting. A total of three quilts form the solid panels of the accordion textile wall. Due to the accordion structure of the textile wall, spatial divisions are customizable. Public becomes private, and private becomes public with the expanding and collapsing of the wall (refer to Figure 27).



**Figure 26:** Fold & Layer Making process, 2022



**Figure 27:** Fold & Layer Textile wall, 2022

*Absorb & Repel*

This textile wall looks at the dichotomy of absorbing and repelling, which is intrinsic to Adire tie dyeing. The Adire Oniko technique (raffia string resist dyeing) is used to create a variety of “moons” and “cowrie shells” (refer to Figure 28). The viewer is meant to pull away the silk-cotton fabric and step into the circular ring. Once the curtain is drawn back, the viewer is fully enclosed by fabric, or absorbed by the fabric. Due to the translucent nature of the silk cotton, the viewer’s figure is still somewhat visible within the fabric curtain, thus the material is both absorbing and repelling the viewer at the same time (refer to Figure 29) . A woman’s body has been absorbed by domestic space, and what needs to be introduced are ways in

which a woman can be seen separate from the domestic, just as male bodies.



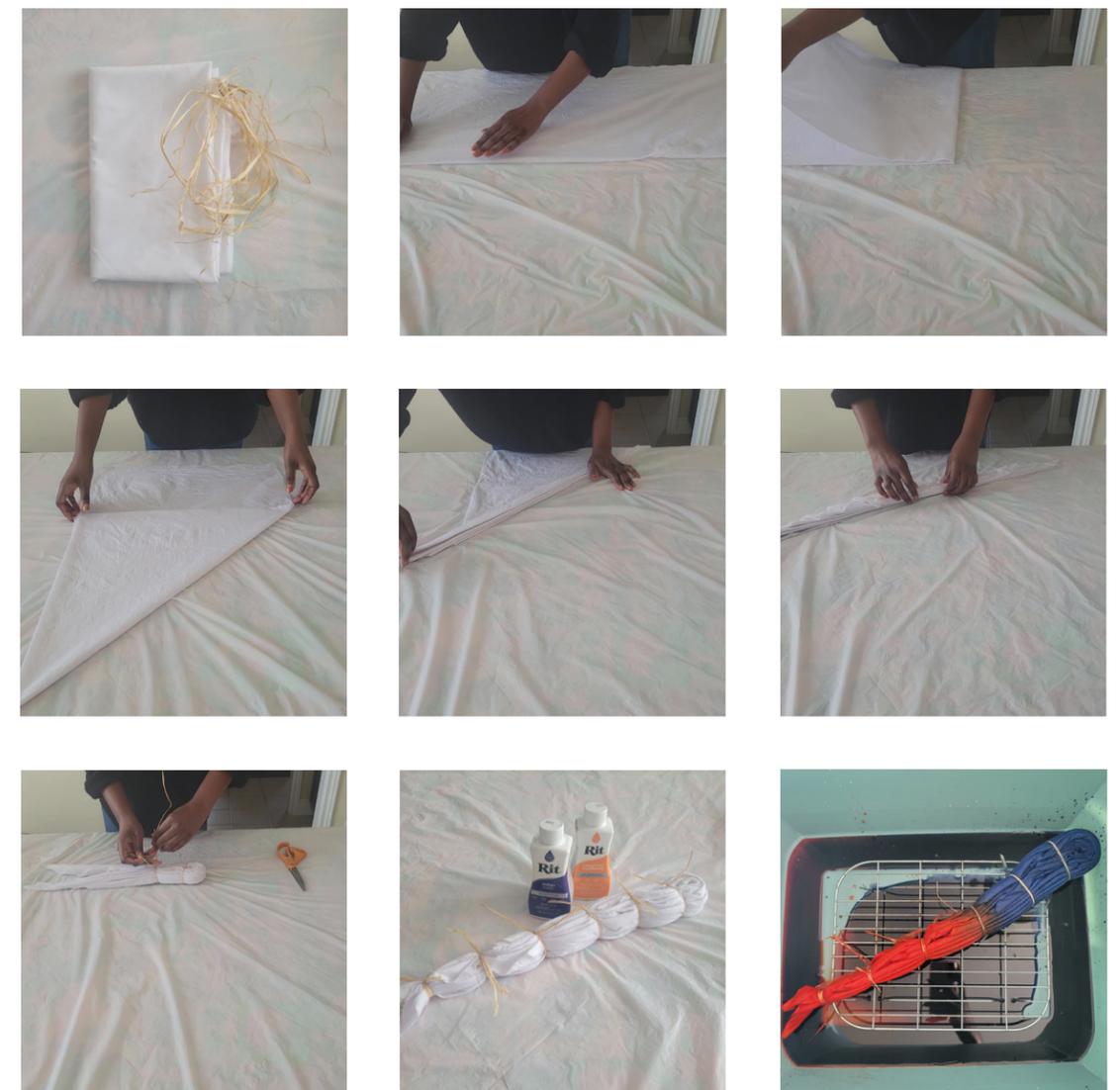
**Figure 28:** Absorb & Repel Making process, 2022



**Figure 29:** Absorb & Repel Textile wall, 2022

*Pleat*

This textile wall places an emphasis on strategic folding to create patterns. To create the diamond shape, the cotton fabric was folded and pleated (refer to Figure 30). Catherine Dormor, notes that folding, “as a structure and an action, resists occupying a singular space preferring space that has the capacity to stretch, fold and inflect”. Folding is required to make pleats and the idea of spaces being able to stretch, fold and inflect, is precisely what is being investigated in this thesis (refer to Figure 31).



**Figure 30:** Pleat Making process, 2022



**Figure 31:** Pleat Textile wall, 2022

*Fray*

This textile wall explores frayed fabric. According to Catherine Dormor, author of, *A Philosophy of Textile*, “To think of fraying cloth is to focus upon its construction being revealed.”<sup>63</sup> Fraying fabric draws attention to its make up, and in this thesis, the making process and its power have been critical. Frayed fabric also draws attention to connectivity and blurs distinctive edges. This idea needs to be more prevalent in the domestic space as it relates to gender roles.<sup>64</sup> The frayed Adire dyed ribbons are placed at varying heights to mimic different ceiling heights. The viewer is meant to stand underneath the ribbon at moments where it is possible due to their own

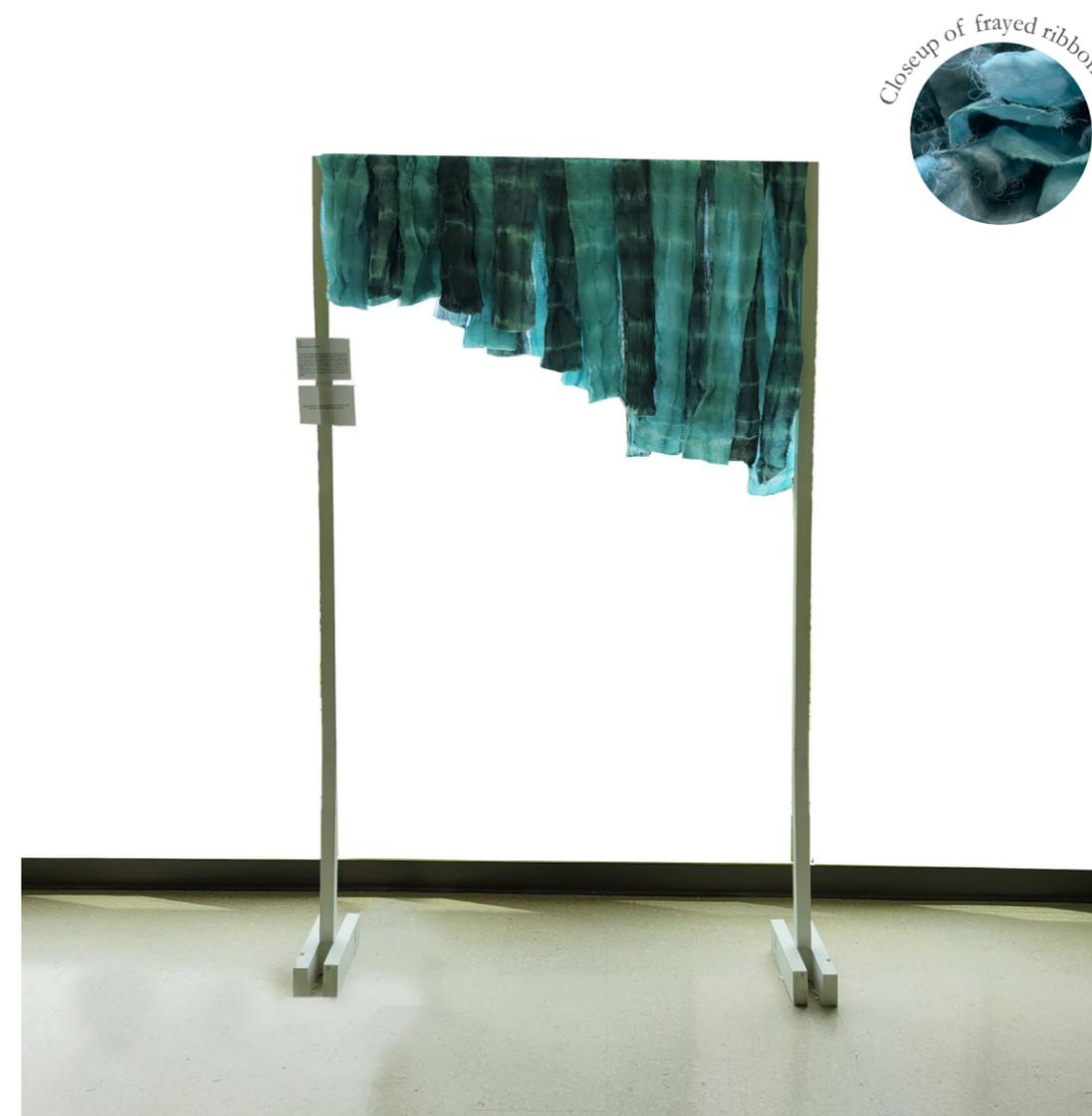
height (refer to Figure 33). This is to draw attention to the way in which architecture can curate the occupying of spaces and prompt a more deliberate designing of spaces.

<sup>63</sup> Dormor, *A Philosophy of Textile: Between Practice and Theory*, 81.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.,81.



**Figure 32:** Fray Making process, 2022



**Figure 33:** Fray Textile wall, 2022

**(K)not Building Thesis Work Exhibit**

spatial capabilities.

On Saturday, April 16th, 2022, I hosted a public exhibition of my textile walls and other thesis works at the Robert McLaughlin Gallery in Oshawa, Ontario, Canada. In holding an exhibit, I was able to make my ideas public and observe the interactions of viewers with the textile walls. By publicizing the idea of emotion labour as architectural work, I am revitalizing the traditions of Nigerian textile makers and giving power and recognition to women's work in the domestic. Exhibition goers were encouraged to fill out an event feedback forms and from the responses 84% strongly agreed that the exhibit topics were relevant today. Exhibition goers commonly noted the expansion of their idea of architecture and its



**Figure 34:** (K)not Building Thesis Work Exhibit, 2022

## 6. CONCLUSION

### Final Thesis Defense

The thesis defense presentation was held virtually on Wednesday, April 20th, 2022. It was important for me to introduce the project with the personal story that sparked this line of interest, and it goes as follows:

When I first started this thesis, my father asked me to mark up a plan for a family home in Nigeria. The home (refer to Figure 35) would be attached to an apartment to be rented to a tenant. I designed our area like our home in Canada, having an “open concept plan” with minimal walls (notice revision clouds around partitions to be removed). For the adjacent apartment, my father insisted that a wall must separate the kitchen from the living room and that the apartment wouldn’t

be desirable with such openness between spaces. I decided to do some research into domestic spaces in Nigeria and found that like other patriarchal societies, there are systems in place regulating the relationship between walls, a woman’s body, and domestic space.

The presentation was presented chronologically from that point forward to show the research that informed the final output. Gifs and short video clips were used to present the making of different textiles and to reinvigorate the now fading practice of hand dyeing. The presentation ended with a current picture of my family house in Nigeria (refer to Figure 36).



Figure 35: Plan of Family House N.T.S. , 2021



**Figure 36:** Family House under Construction, 2022

### Reflections

In precolonial Nigeria, Nigerian women played a pivotal role in economic and social activities.<sup>65</sup> Despite the division of labour being based on gender, women controlled the production of food, cooking, pottery, weaving and textiles.<sup>66</sup> The kitchen space may have been separate or partitioned off from the main house, but the reasoning behind the separation was different from that of their European colonizers. The kitchen, which was separate from the home usually due to function, was seen as the most important

space in the home and the embodiment of the idea of home (refer to Figure 37).<sup>67</sup> Whereas, the separation of the kitchen and the privatization of domestic space by Victorians was to inhibit women's mobility through domestication and confinement.<sup>68</sup> Authors of "The Private/Public Space Dichotomy: An Africana Womanist Analysis of the Gendering of Space", Itai Muwati and Zikifile Gambahaya state, "African women who have been exposed to heavy dosages of western cultural traditions in the school dogmatically and uncritically accept the misuse

65 Toyin Falola. "The role of Nigerian women." Encyclopedia Britannica, November 20, 2007. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/role-of-Nigerian-women-1360615>.

66 Falola. "The role of Nigerian women."

67 Itai Muwati and Zikifile Gambahaya, "The Private/Public Space Dichotomy: An Africana Womanist Analysis of the Gendering of Space and Power," 2012, 3, [https://www.thefreelibrary.com/\\_/print/PrintArticle.aspx?id=305083057](https://www.thefreelibrary.com/_/print/PrintArticle.aspx?id=305083057).

68 Ibid., 2.

of the kitchen as a symbol of confinement.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, the domestic space and the work of women in the domestic, adopted a negative connotation and a position of low value, but this thesis reverses this idea.

Authors Muwait and Gambahaya also note that, “in order to emerge “from the debris of a vast cultural wasteland [“colonization”]” African women and men will have to examine and interrogate their ontological realities in search for a liberated consciousness.<sup>70</sup> Delving into the histories and methodologies of Adire dyeing was my way of examining and interrogating my Nigerian ontological reality and unveiling that knowledge was truly

freeing. After conversations with Nigerian women I respect, I also gained more awareness of how they identify with fabric, textile making and domesticity. My sister mentioned that she has always been enamored with how fabric as an object holds so much history and is such a strong identifier of culture. Though she has not directly made textiles, she has had textile pieces made for her with her direction. My mother also recounts an early memory of being given fabric as a graduation gift from her stepmother. She remembers how happy she was to receive the gift and ended up using the fabric as a blanket. Similarly, my aunt describes a ritual of getting new Christmas outfits in her childhood years. Her siblings and

69 Ibid., 3.

70 Ibid., 4.



Figure 37: Home: Say it Loud by Njideka Akunyili Crosby, 2017

herself would have the option of choosing from textiles like Ankara, Hollandis and Adire. They often chose Adire to sew Christmas outfits due to its beauty and affordability. My aunt also had a friend who had a small business making and selling Adire. I had not thought of the entrepreneurial opportunity and financial independence Adire making enabled. It was beautiful to see the impact and significance fabric had in their lives as Nigerian women. With respect to domesticity, my mom, aunt, and sister all voiced that they take part in housework labour on a regular basis. My sister enjoys organizing her room and other spaces with the house whereas my mom and aunt expressed that they enjoyed cooking. They find pride and joy in preparing meals for their families and seeing people savoring their food. The home then becomes this space that fosters love and dignity and denounces the notion of confinement.

This thesis explored the reconceptualization of domestic space through fabric and more specifically the making of textiles. Distinctively, with this proposal, textile creation (strongly associated with women) was used to rethink architectural walls (architecture being strongly associated with men), thereby highlighting women's relevance to architecture and the built environment at large. Textile walls show that fraying, layering, and pleating are applicable to both the worlds of textile and architecture. In an architectural sense, they can be used as principles to design space, in

that fraying implies the breaking down and dissolution of boundaries and both pleating and layering imply variety and interplay between spaces. It is profound that textile making, a predominantly female profession, is not only empowering, it also provides insight into how the domestic can contain spaces of, "multiplicity, mediation, equality, and freedom of choice" (refer to Figure 38).<sup>71</sup>

71 Hilde Heynen and Gülsüm Baydar, *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture* (Florence, UNITED STATES: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 262, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oculcarleton-ebooks/detail.action?docID=243244>.



**Figure 38:** Songs of Home, 2021 by Marcellina Akpojotor

## GLOSSARY

**Agency:** the capacity, condition, or state of acting or of exerting power.<sup>1</sup>

**Colonization:** the action or process of settling among and establishing control over the indigenous people of an area.

**Domestic space:** Domestic space in the singular has become a generic term for the private space of the house, the household, or the home as opposed to the public space of the street or the urban space of the city as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

**Emotional labour:** the emotional investment that adds value to the built environment, in the form of childcare labour, household labour and care labour.<sup>3</sup>

**Fabric:** cloth or other material produced by weaving or knitting fibers.

**Gender:** refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls, and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl, or boy, as well as relationships with each other. As a social construct, gender

1 Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. “agency,” accessed March 26, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/agency>.

2 Irene Cieraad, “Domestic Spaces,” in *International Encyclopedia of Geography* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2017), 1–3, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118786352.wbieg0133>.

3 Agha, “Emotional Capital and Other Ontologies of the Architect,” 5.

varies from society to society and can change over time.<sup>4</sup>

**Hausa:** a member of a people of northern Nigeria and adjacent regions.

**Igbo:** a member of a people of southeastern Nigeria.

**Partitioning:** divide into parts.

**Patriarchy:** a concept originally deployed by Western, radical, second-wave feminists to describe social structures governed by hierarchical power relations that privilege

masculinity over femininity, and permit the domination, oppression, and exploitation of women by men.<sup>5</sup>

**Productive labour:** labor that creates a surplus product.

**Sex:** either of the two main categories (male and female) into which humans and most other living things are divided on the basis of their reproductive functions.

**Shadow economy:** Small traders, street merchants, trivial services, and other underemployed groups in urban space are

4 “Gender and Health,” WHO, accessed March 3, 2022, <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/health-topics/gender>.

5 Irene Gieraad, “Domestic Spaces,” in *International Encyclopedia of Geography* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2017), 1–3, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118786352.wbieg0133>.

what constitutes shadow economy. Often considered the economy of the poor, the informal sector includes the urban poor, such as people living in slums or squatter settlements of developing countries.<sup>6</sup>

**Textile:** relating to fabric or weaving.

**Visibility:** the state of being able to see or be seen.

**Wall:** a continuous vertical brick or stone structure that encloses or divides an area of land.

**Yoruba:** a member of an African people of southwestern Nigeria and Benin

6 Agha, “The Non-Work Of The Unimportant,” 105.

# APPENDIX A

## Archives and Indexing

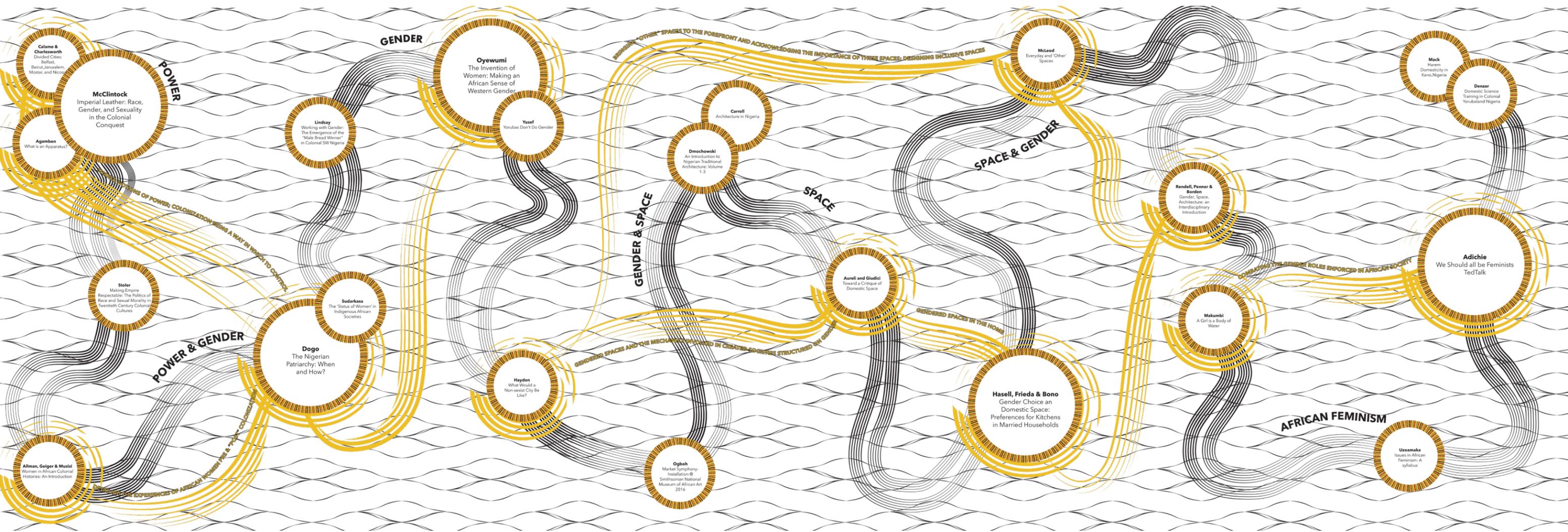


Figure 39: Literature Map, 2021

## APPENDIX B

### Explorations in Embroidery

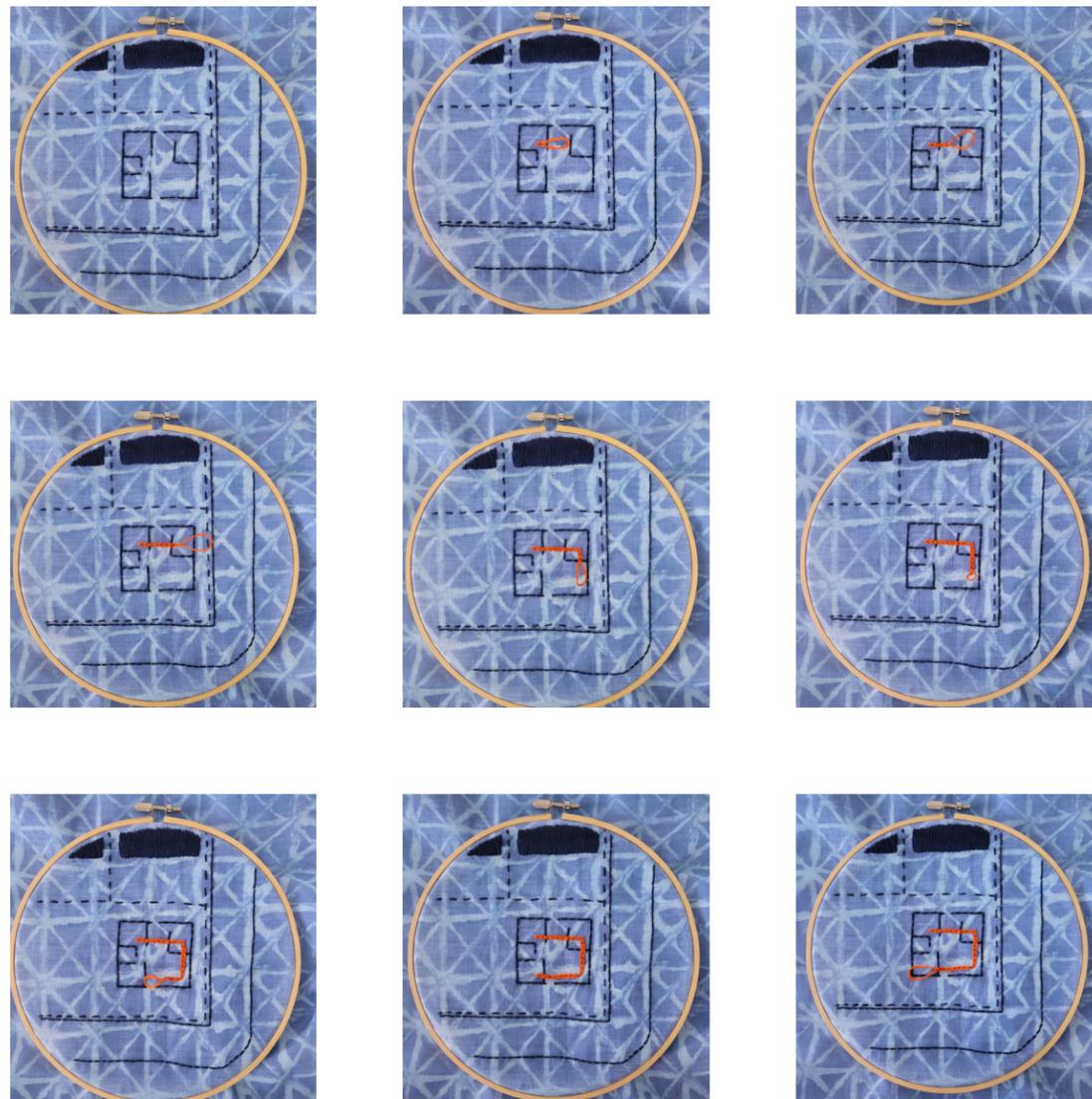


Figure 40: Neutral Spaces ; Embroidered on Adire Eleko hand-dyed Linen, 2022

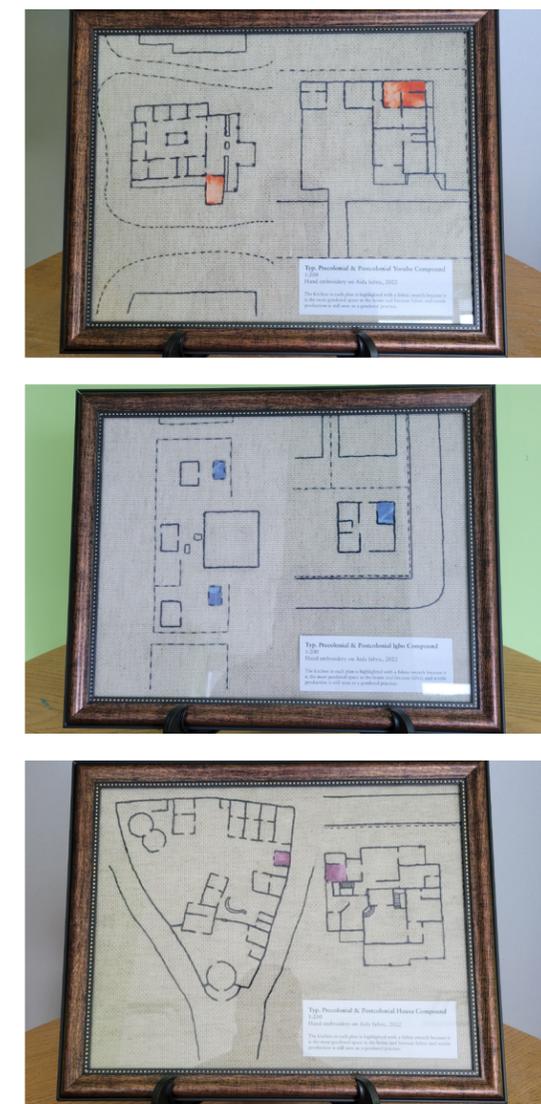


Figure 41: Pre/Post colonial Nigerian Domestic plans Embroidered on Aida fabric, 2022

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