

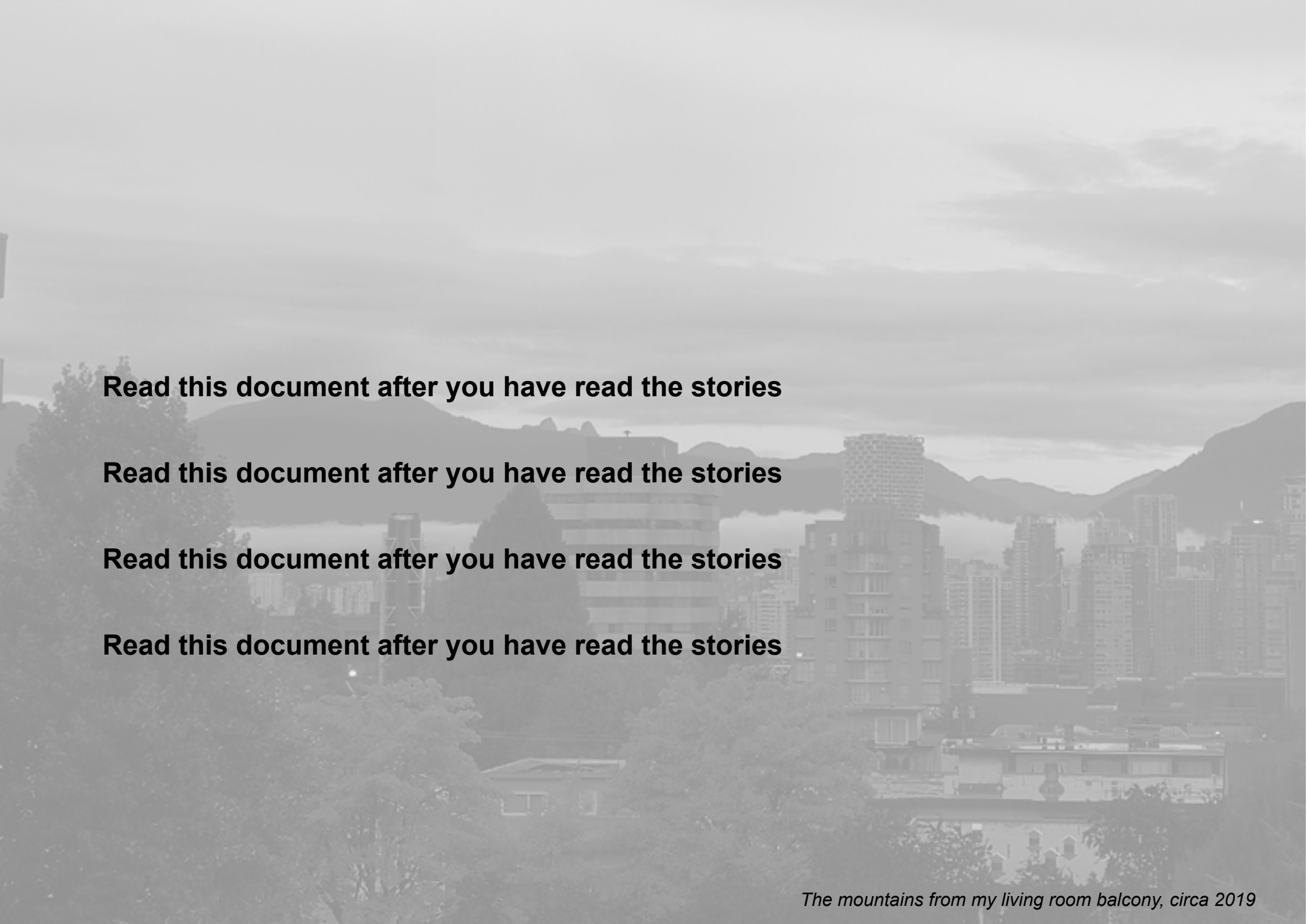


# The Spectacle.

a way to teach and entertain through performance.

**Processes: Thesis. Dance. Clothing**

*by: Olúwáṣọlá Kẹhìndé Olówó-Aké*



**Read this document after you have read the stories**

**Read this document after you have read the stories**

**Read this document after you have read the stories**

**Read this document after you have read the stories**

**Olúwásọlá Kẹhìndé Olówó-Aké**  
**BA, Nottingham Trent University, 2019**

**Supervisor: Helene Day Fraser**

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF DESIGN  
[INTERDISCIPLINARY]

EMILY CARR UNIVERSITY OF ART + DESIGN  
2021

**© Olúwásọlá Kẹhìndé Olówó-Aké, 2021**



# ***ohun ti n bọ***

*what is to come*

The Spectacle:  
The Gẹlẹdẹ Festival

Dance & Clothing

Sketchbook

To You

**dnayal** (Denial)

**fasad dafasiti** (The Facade: Diversity)

**bọs glas** (The Glass Box)

Next Steps

## The Spectacle

The aim of my thesis is to embody stories through the lens of my Nigerian Yorùbá culture in order to contribute Yorùbá perspectives on social harmony to this 'multicultural' environment. In order to do so my work is grounded on the Yorùbá idea of 'the spectacle'- the show that is put on to teach and entertain. This framework is borrowed from the Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ Festival and is explained by Babatunde Lawal in his book 'The Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ Spectacle', 1996.

## Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ Festival

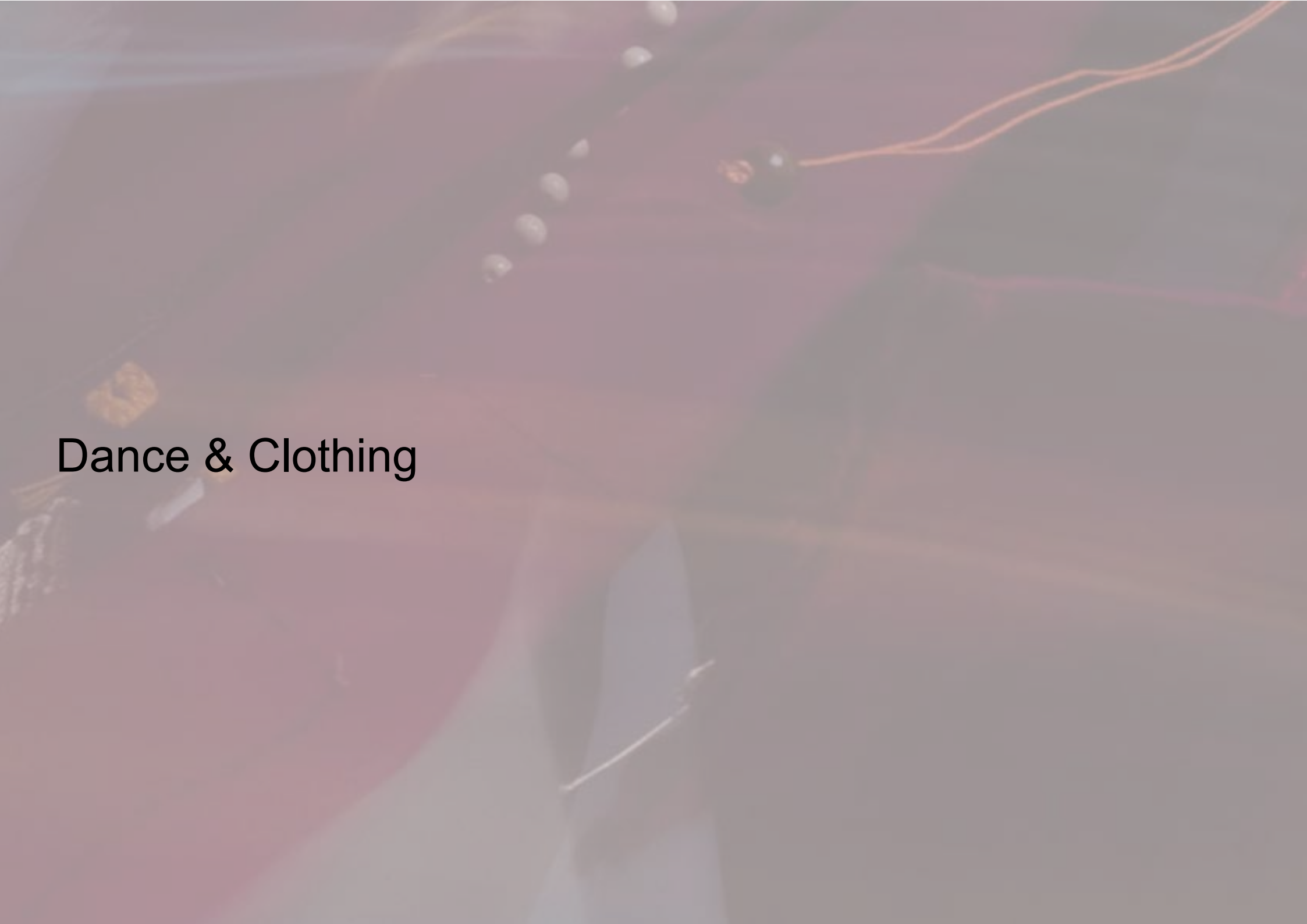
The festival is celebrated to conciliate powerful mothers- deities, ancestors and living elderly women alike- and it references Yemoja, the goddess of fertility, as a matriarch of this celebration. Lawal explains in his book that a part of the festival involved the performance aspect of it which entailed Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ maskers dressing up to put on a show for the people.

The performances were used as an avenue to not only entertain but to teach the community about social harmony by enacting it in theatrical-like styles of narrative telling.

As a result, through my thesis, I have been exploring the idea of the spectacle as an avenue to relay my experiences and encounters with the lack of black communal culture in Vancouver. One layer of this is in the written stories but there are many more ways I have explored the idea of 'the spectacle'. This document aims at explaining two other forms I have used, namely; dance and garment making. This document also explains their interaction as a narrative.

*Gelede masks from Ibooro, 1982.*

*Source: 'The Gelede Spectacle' by Babatunde Lawal*



## Dance & Clothing



## Dance & Clothing

### Dance

Qudus Onikeku taught me to see dance as a language of its own- as a way to connect and communicate to the audience. He also taught me through his explanation of his own practice, that dance is an avenue that can be used to access body memory. He explained in our conversation that our body stores information and a way to access these pieces can be through the embodied practice of dance. Our body is our last resort and resource and still exists despite all that has occurred in our personal and general histories. Qudus's practice involves working collaboratively with people to rewrite the past while remembering the original future through dance performances.

Although my practice is not a replica of his own, through this thesis development process, dance has been an underlying medium I have used to: process my feelings, further explore my emotions and explore the person of my character- Ahon Dudu. I have used it to define words when sentences and phrases fail to communicate effectively the messages I am trying to convey.

In my Yorùbá culture, we use dance to express ourselves. So growing up, I not only danced when I had to perform in school, at a party or in church during praise and worship, I danced when I received good news of any sort- from news that my cousins were coming to visit to being accepted into university. Dance is an extension of self- a way to further show emotion without speaking. That is what dance does in this thesis- it brings forth that extra body knowledge that would otherwise be lost in verbal communication because it is not verbal.



## Clothing

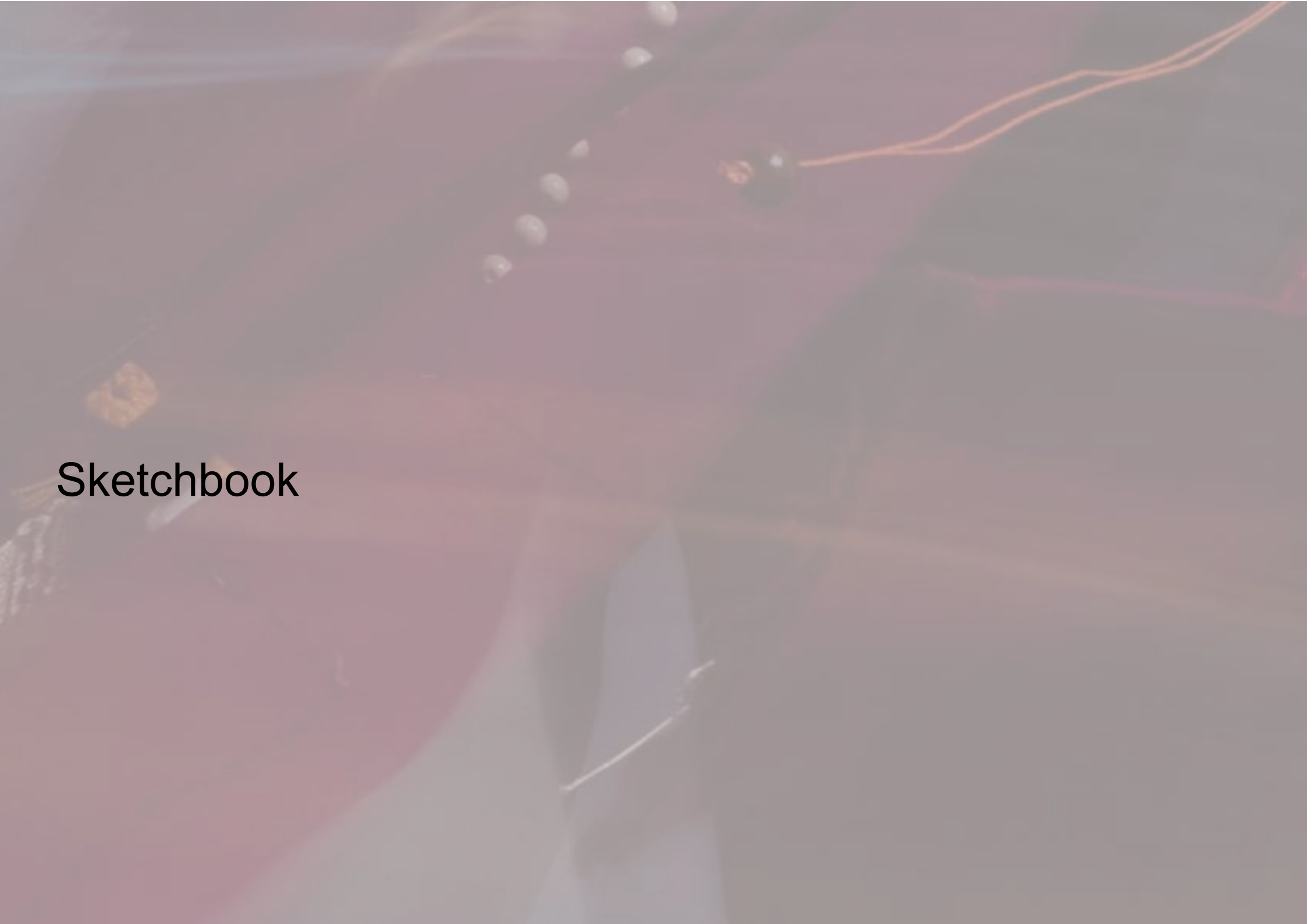
Gelede Maskers' way of dressing is through a process called 'Idira' which means 'to tie up the body'. As part of my stories, I have created a set of garments for each story to visually illustrate Ahon Dudu's narrative. These garments were primarily influenced by body movement and all adjustments and final decisions were made as a result of the fluidity of the garments in dance and how well they responded to story-informed gestures such as running.

The sequence in which they were created:

**freehand patterning- on the body- structured patterning-on the body- body movement- adjustments- drawings**

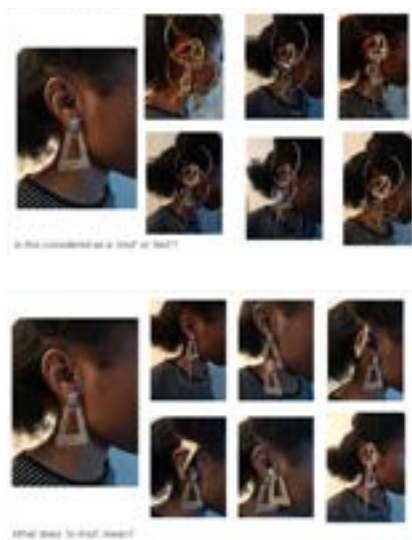






Sketchbook

# Idira Development 'Sketchbook'



The garment making process of this story started off as an exploration into knotting and what it means. The first explorations and embodied understandings of knots were through iterations of knotting fabric for and on the body- with George wrapper (Delta cultural wear) and Gele (Yorùbá headtie). The exploration also included abstract iterations of what it means to 'knot'- with placement of earrings on the ear.



*freehand patterning x on the body x patterning x on the body x  
body movement x adjustments X drawings*



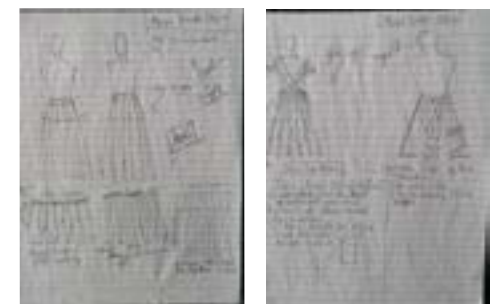
The skirt started off as a freehand pattern of a basic A-line wraparound skirt. It was wraparound because of the concept of Idira (tying up the body).



After making this and embellishing it with beads I realised that it was still quite rigid. So I added another layer of fringes and began to play with movement of the skirt & illustrations.

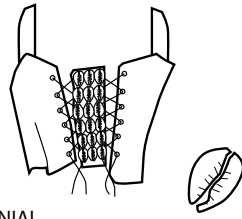
Initial illustrations

Initial illustrations



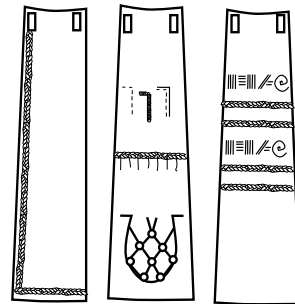


## dnayal



DENIAL

Ahọn Dudu is a character from the not so rich part of Oke and so his garments for denial comprise of a mixture of scrap fabric put together and sentimental heritage cloth. The top is held together by ropes.



DENIAL

1st layer of the skirt in 6 panels [2 of each], held together by a belt. Each panel is embellished with needlework and knots. It is held together by a knot.

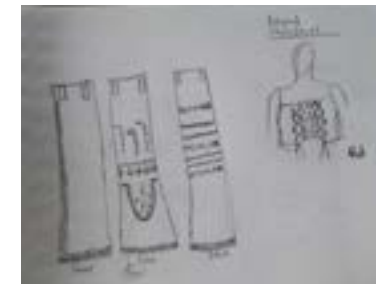
## Idira Development



Stages of dnyal top  
(patchwork/ upcycling)



Final top held together by strings- reflective of the lifestyle in 'Okan'.



rough sketch of outfit



Ahọn Dudu's movement  
on the mountain.



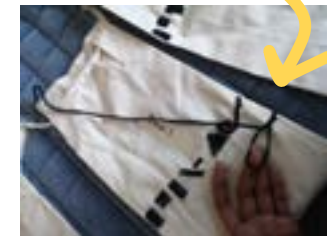
Front view



Back view



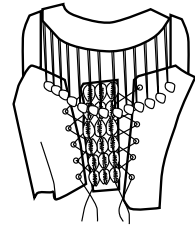
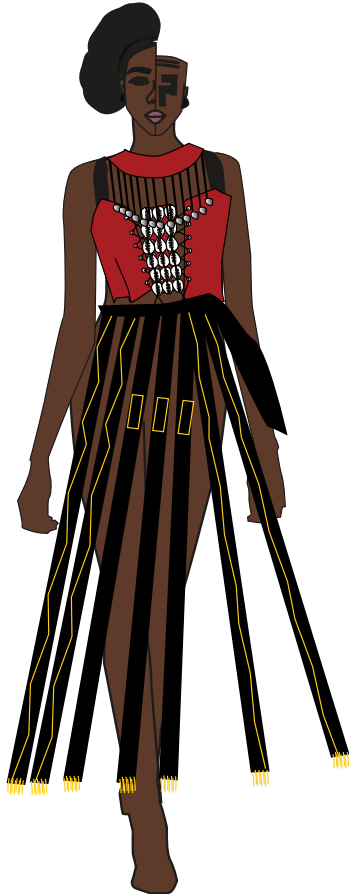
Side view



Needlework on the back of the skirt- illustrating part of the story.

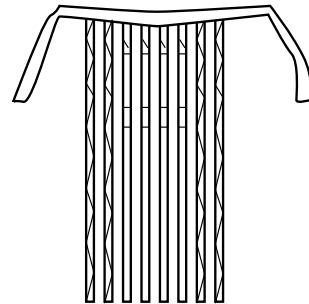
# Idira Development

## fasad dafasiti



THE FACADE: DIVERSITY

The 2nd layer skirt is accompanied by a neck piece embellished with silver bells so that Ahon dudu is heard as he is going up the mountain.

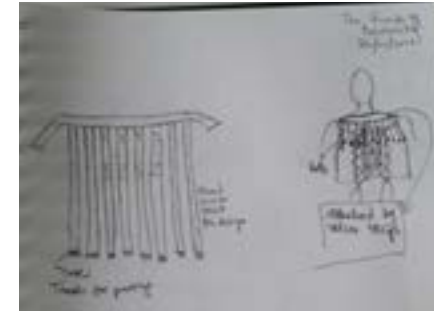


THE FACADE: DIVERSITY

2nd layer skirt- fringes embellished with threadwork- to go on top of layer 1. And gold tassels on bottom.



Continued stages of Ahon Dudu's top + bells on neckpiece



rough sketch of outfit



Front view



Side view

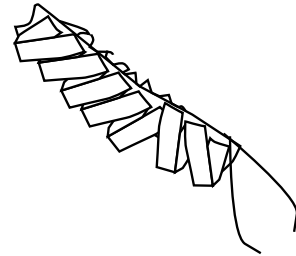


Side view with belt



Back view

## bos glas



### THE GLASS BOX

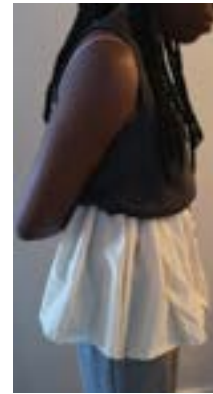
The skirt is paired with a sleeve that is tied around the hand to sit and relies on its movement to function.



### THE GLASS BOX

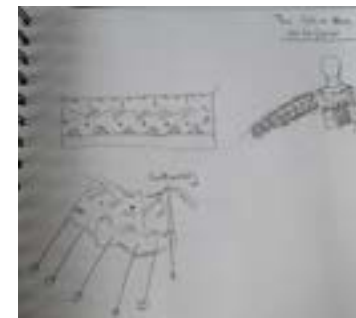
3rd layer- gathered with cord strung through holes in the denim fabric- embellished through drawing.

## Idira Development



Gathered skirt  
calico & denim

trouser leg gathered for  
skirt



rough sketch of outfit



Made up sleeve on the  
body- held together by  
ropes



Flat made up sleeve



Sleeve with attachments



*To You*







## ***To You,***

I studied Fashion Design for my Bachelor's Degree and was prepared extensively for the industry. However, throughout my degree I struggled tremendously because I understood that I had the abilities to be a designer but somehow my abilities never seemed to conform to the requirements of the education I was receiving.

*And I tried, I tried to make it fit but it never worked*

The process in Fashion:

primary research

secondary research

market research: audience research: style and persona, prediction of trends, market level research, brand research: brand marketing, competitors.

concept development: creation of concept, and moodboards that visually represented what your concept was.

process and stand development: experimentation of silhouettes on mannequins.

2D development: sketches, designs and evolution of designs

3D development: designs, development of finalised sketches, fabric samples/ swatches.

Spec drawings: speculation drawings for factories/ manufacturers.

This list does not allow me design from my Nigerian Yorùbá subjectivity which probably gives reason to why I struggled in my undergraduate degree. In the sections below, I will show you my process and what I hold as priority:

# ***My Process***

***Experience:*** my experiences are always foundational to my work and are usually an entry point for my research process.

***Embodied explorations:*** this was done in order to understand what I was experiencing, e.g painting through dance, action 10- walking barefoot, painting through childhood games.

***Initial Research:*** how would Yorùbá respond to this?

Conversations with my Father about our Yorùbá histories- and oral history.

Conversations with Dimeji Onafuwa on the act of dress and the ceremony of dressing

Conversations with Qudus Onikeku on dance as a message revealer, Geḽeḽe Festival and the Spectacle.

***Later Research:*** who else has contributed to this and what have they said?

Research into what Gelede is and the ways of being and dressing (Idira) in and for the ceremony.

Research into Yorùbá ways of settling conflict, Yorùbá ethos.

## ***Journaling my experiences and mapping***

***Analogy:*** a way I was understanding more readings from black writers and some indigenous writers was through the creation of analogies.

This enabled me to give names to what I was experiencing/ the stories.

***Story forming/ writing:*** disguising my experiences in story form on the framework of Yorùbá folktales.

This also included story writing the details of the mountain

***Dance:*** using dance to explore the character of Ahọ̀n Dudu and his gestures and demeanours

And also using dance to explore ways in which garments should sit, be tied and can move on the body.

***Freehand patterning:*** creating clothing from already existing garments or shapes.

-Body: moving the clothing to the body to check how it reacts to movement- dance, gestures such as jumping.

-2D designs: drawings of Ahọ̀n Dudu's garments after seeing them on the body.

**Dance:** after the garments were made, I had to dance to figure out the intensity at which I would have to move for them to respond as fabric weight, embellishments such as beads play a huge role in movement.

Examples of Embodied Practice



*Action 10: this prompt involved me tying Gele (headscarf), lying down instead of sitting and walking around barefoot in order to experience my environment differently.*

*This prompt was centred around understanding misrepresentation. I was using 'play' and paint to explore marks and residue.*

*Painting out emotions through dance. This prompt involved me dancing on a long piece of paper to explore embodied practice.*

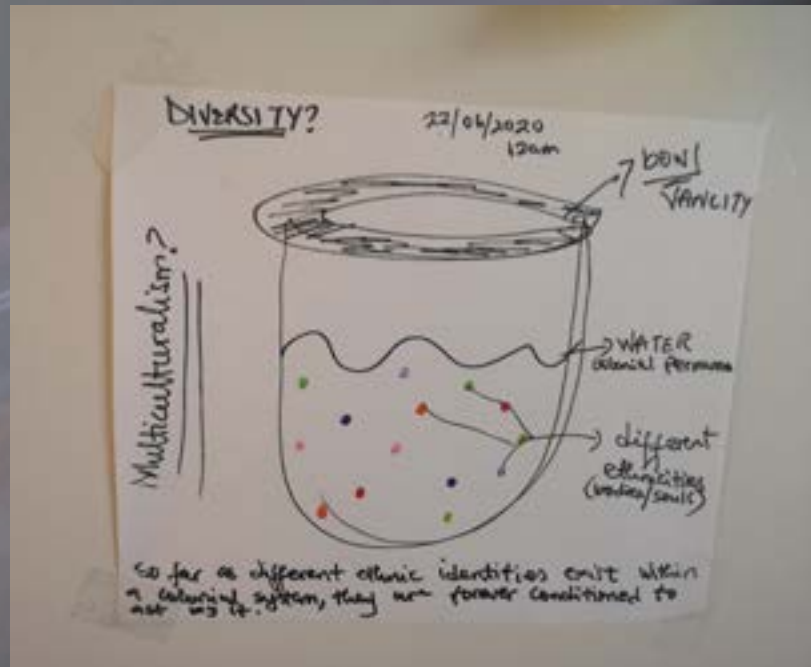
## Mapping



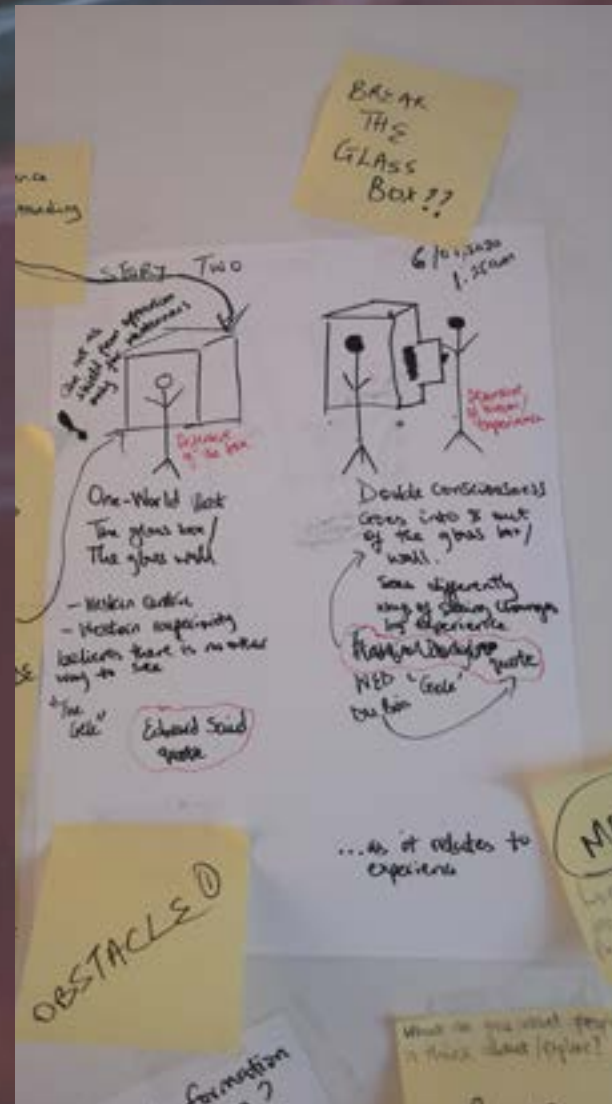
Mapping of my living room wall.



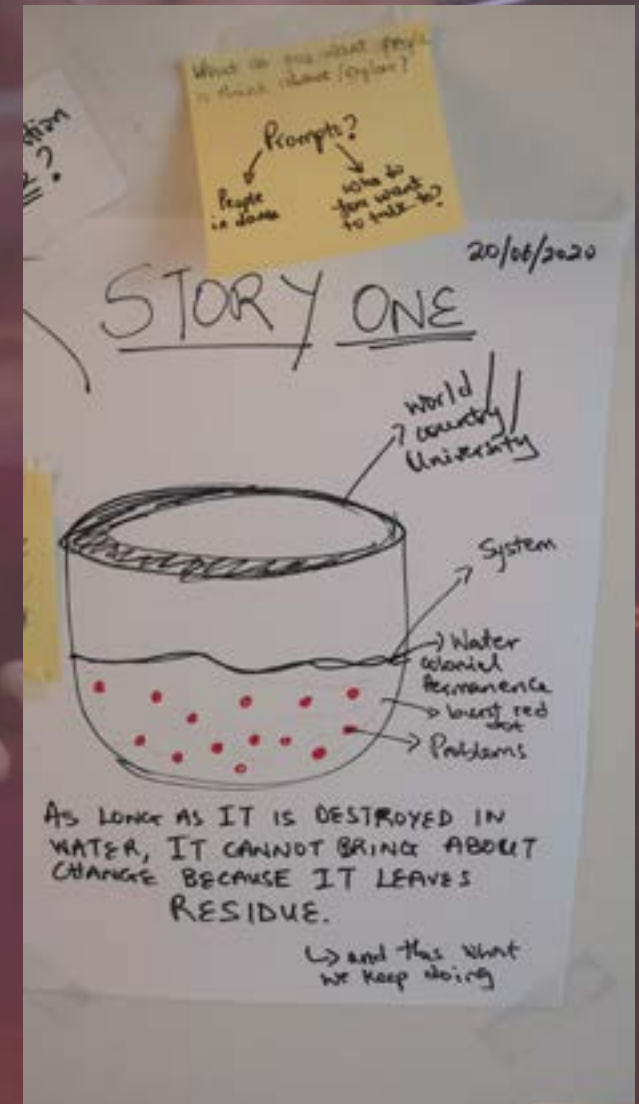
## Analogy



Mapping of my living room wall.

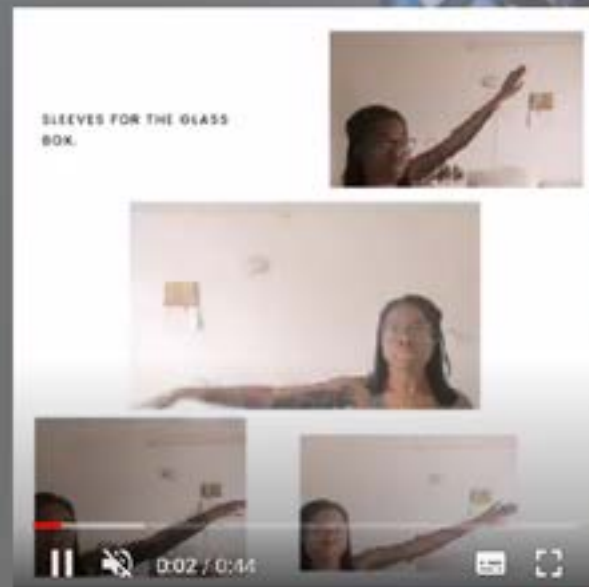
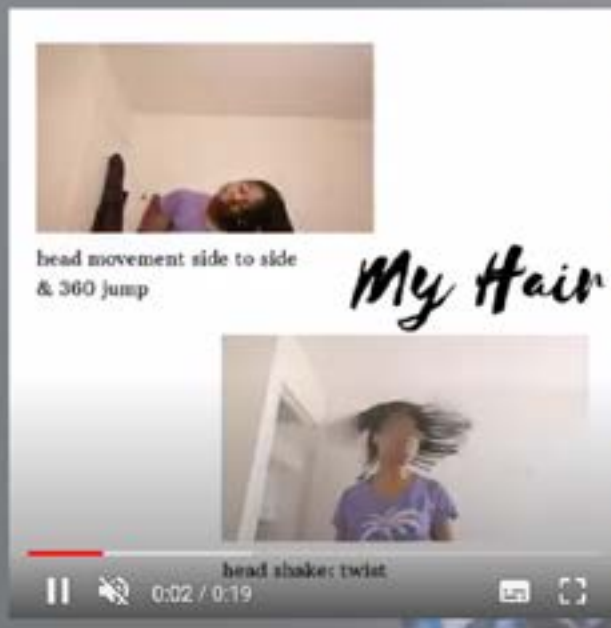


The Glass Box: Understanding W.E.B Du Bois concept of Double Consciousness



The Bowl of Water: Understanding colonial permanence

## Dance & Gestures







head movement side to side  
& 360 jump



*My Hair*



head shake: twist

SLEEVES FOR THE GLASS  
BOX.



## Talking- Sharing- Moving

1.

Podcast

...into words with Sola is

a space to explore the words we speak, write and the thoughts that surround them.

To discuss culture, poetry, music and to explore these themes in depth as they relate to how we engage with them.

You can listen to the episodes [here](#).

2.

MA Blog

I used this space to document the underlying development to my thesis work.

You can read it [here](#).



3.

'Gestures' [lofi] film

For my open studio, I planned a number of events. One of the events was a screening of the lofi film I made documenting my thought process through dance and gestures and my long-lasting relationship with them. You can watch it [here](#).

4.

a few of the times I documented that I relied on body movement throughout this project

I have made a compilation of videos that I recorded showing how the garments respond to body movement.

You can find it [here](#).



# Ahõn Dudu



dnayal



fasad dafasiti



bõs glas

I personally was never interested in the culture of making for consumer culture- for me, it meant that my work lost value. In my final year of my undergraduate degree, everything switched when I visited the British Museum and saw stolen artefacts from Nigeria on display. While that annoyed me, it showed me that there was a rich heritage that I had been overlooking all this while- the culture of storytelling and the ways in which Nigerian creatives of ages past worked that they thrived in. I was suppressing that in myself as a designer because I was being taught western ways of design in Fashion and had come to believe somehow that this way was the only way I could engage in Fashion Design.

I switched completely from relying on market levels and market research to give meaning to my work to what I believed mattered. My experiences as a Nigerian student at that time in the UK, I realised that there were things I wanted to say through garment making still but I wanted to take a different route. I definitely still use most of the processes I have listed above but I don't necessarily hold them as priority in my work. I started to use dance to express my emotions but also to give life to the garments I was making and, through film and photography, I presented them in spaces I saw fit to convey the message.

I became a designer as messenger/ storyteller amongst other things and I prioritized what it demanded of my practice. For instance, the creation of the experience for the viewer/ on looker, they had to be invited into an experience that would allow for proper engagement with my stories so, I chose not to put them on the runway, instead, I put them on exhibition and invited people through prompts to sit and listen, to watch, to touch, to read.

This had different effects on the audience:

- for the black audience, there was a sense of empowerment that came with pictures black bodies blown up in environments that they often had to suppress their identities in.
  - for the non-black audience it invited them into epistemes they were not familiar with- invitations to sit, to touch allows them to engage.
- This is what this story, Ahon Dudu's story is here for.











# dnayal- Denial

## /di-n-ah-yi-ah-li/

### Story 1- dnayal [Denial]

In order for Ahon Dudu to warn the people on Oke (the mountain), he has to have a loud presence. As a result, his people give him some of their own garments that he can wear. These people are not so well to do and so they give him the best they can offer.







## Outfit

***Red signifies danger***

***Red jersey top seamed together by tied ropes***

Patchwork and upcycling are skills that this level (Okan) uses a lot because they are not in comfortable financial situations that allow them to always buy expensive clothes and so, they tend to replace worn out or damaged clothes by merging the 'presentable' parts of different clothing into one to create a new garment and embellish them with needle work and beads. Ahon Dudu's top for this story is one example of this practice.







### ***Sash Skirt***

This idea was drawn from the communal practices that Gẹlẹdẹ festivals usually operate on. Gẹlẹdẹ maskers' costume often comprises of tied baby sashes and female headwraps contributed by members of the community to the masker. And so the story mimics the practice of giving owned garments to the story conveyor/ teller/ messenger. Ahon Dudu however collects all the sashes and strings them together on a belt so he can tie it on his waist.

For the sake of this story however, the sashes are identical in colour because red signifies danger. Some of the symbols on the skirt serve as story charts of Denial and the repetition of the symbols on the skirt are for emphasis.









## fasad dafasiti- The Facade: Diversity /f-ah-s-ah-di: di-ah-f-ah-si-ti-i/

### Story 2- fasad dafasiti [The Facade: Diversity]

This story narrates Ahon Dudu's experience with warning **Eji**. He starts at the bottom- **Ile keji akoko**- which houses people who formerly resided in **Okan** but were called to work for the King. Throughout the story he encounters different people from the different subdivisions of **Eji** and their different reactions. His garment for this story gives him a loud appearance partly because he is going into a space that he is not as familiar with and so the noise brings attention to him which his people hoped would hasten the warning process.

The facade here does not lie within the clothing, it is in the story. However, the garments for this story act as an aid to the narrative that is being brought to light. As a speeding driver would honk the horn if a pedestrian was in the car's way, so do these garments alert the receiver of this story.







## Outfit

***Black is useful for communication and generally used to signify evil***  
***Yellow is also used for communication***

## Neckpiece

The neckpiece is worn as an added layer to his first outfit. The neckpiece is a simple strip of fabric that is embellished with bells along its base. This is so that when he moves they not only make noise but they also hit the cowries beaded on his top.





### ***Black fringed skirt***

The second skirt takes the form of a fringed belt. It is fringed because during my experimentation I realised that having basic skirt silhouettes were not as fluid when I danced- it's lightweight form allows for easy bounce. This layer has thinner and more spaced out strips embellished by thread work that illustrates the mountain and is adorned with gold tassel fringes to signify prestige- as Eji is above Okan geographically and in status.







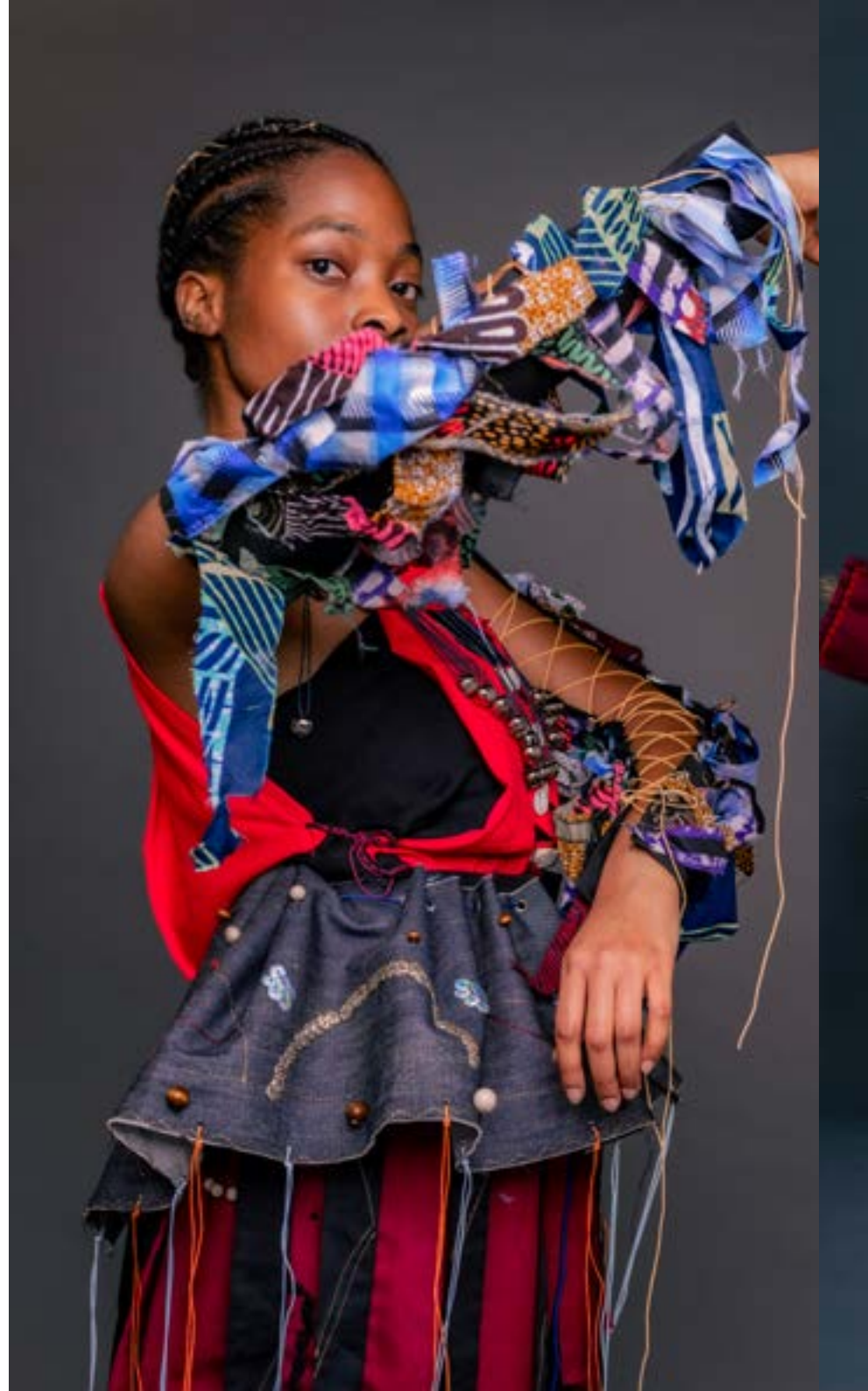




# **bọs glas- The Glass Box** **/bi- oh- s gi-li-ah-si/**

## **Story 3- bọs glas [The Glass Box]**

This story shows the extensive conversation Ahon Dudu has with the King. One of the many protocols for going to see the King is that the person is well-dressed.







## Outfit

***Ankara, which is widely known as 'dutch wax print' has become a staple piece of clothing in Nigeria and is widely accepted and described as cultural wear. It is worn in the everyday.***

## Denim skirt

The skirt is made from a trouser leg and is gathered on the waist with a belt. The skirt mimics a Yoruba King's crown which is a cone shaped beaded crown that sits on the head with beads hanging from the base. The string of beads usually cover the King's face but out of respect for the crown and its heritage, the skirt is not designed to be a replica- the beads are spaced out so they can hit each other as they move.







The bright colours sewn on to the skirt pay homage to the liveliness and vibrancy of Nigeria. The mode of dressing in Lagos is quite different from the one in Vancouver as people tend to wear brighter colours more and quite frequently too. The skirt is shorter than the first two because when experimenting, I realised that the first and second layer needed an extra piece that could move easily with the waist and the lengths of both do not necessarily play to that strength.

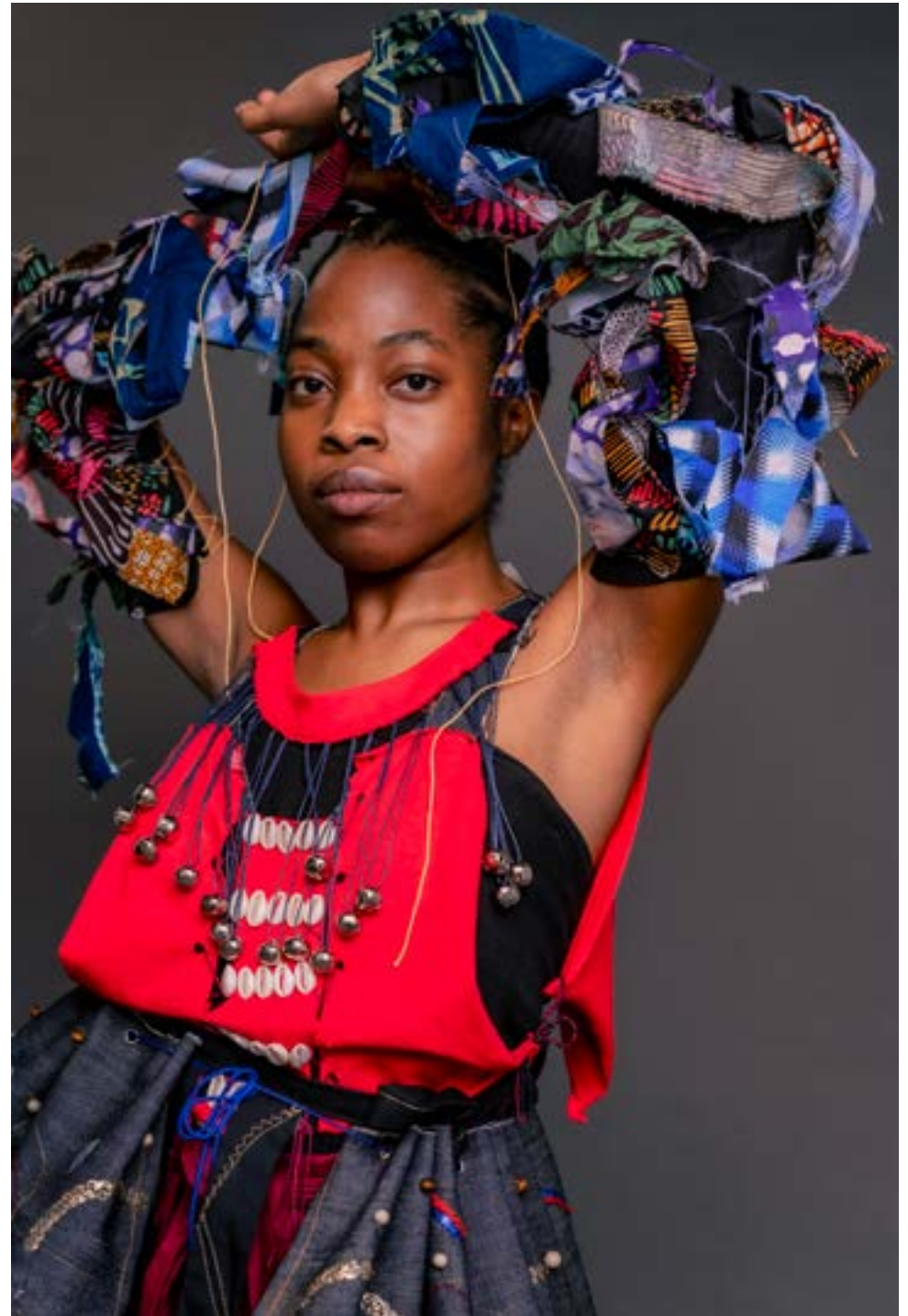


### **Sleeves**

The sleeves serve as an appendage. They are tied on the arms and the extensions attached to them are made of different Ankara fabric scraps that I've been keeping with me for a while- all from clothes I own or my sister's clothes that I have altered. The extensions are made up of Ankara because they tie the garments back to the place I come from- Nigeria. And, they are a visual depiction of my black Nigerian consciousness that exists in this environment.

















## Next Steps

Over the course of this process, I sought out ways to allow for people to engage with the stories that I am telling in order to give my audience or hearers agency to interact with them. I developed a few ways to do this but have not included it in my stories because I believe there is a lot I would be overlooking.

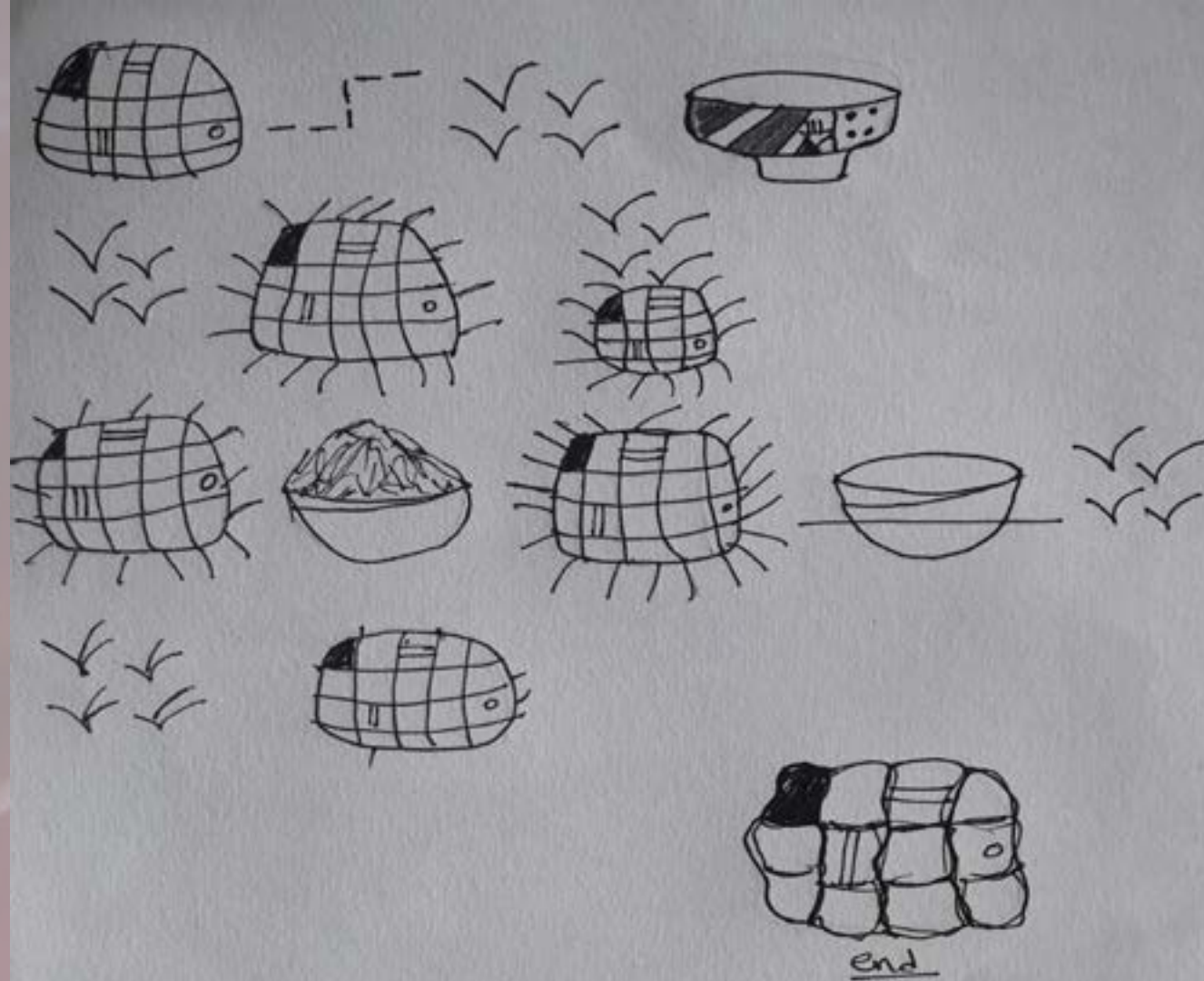
### ***Yorùbá Storycharting as Storytelling***

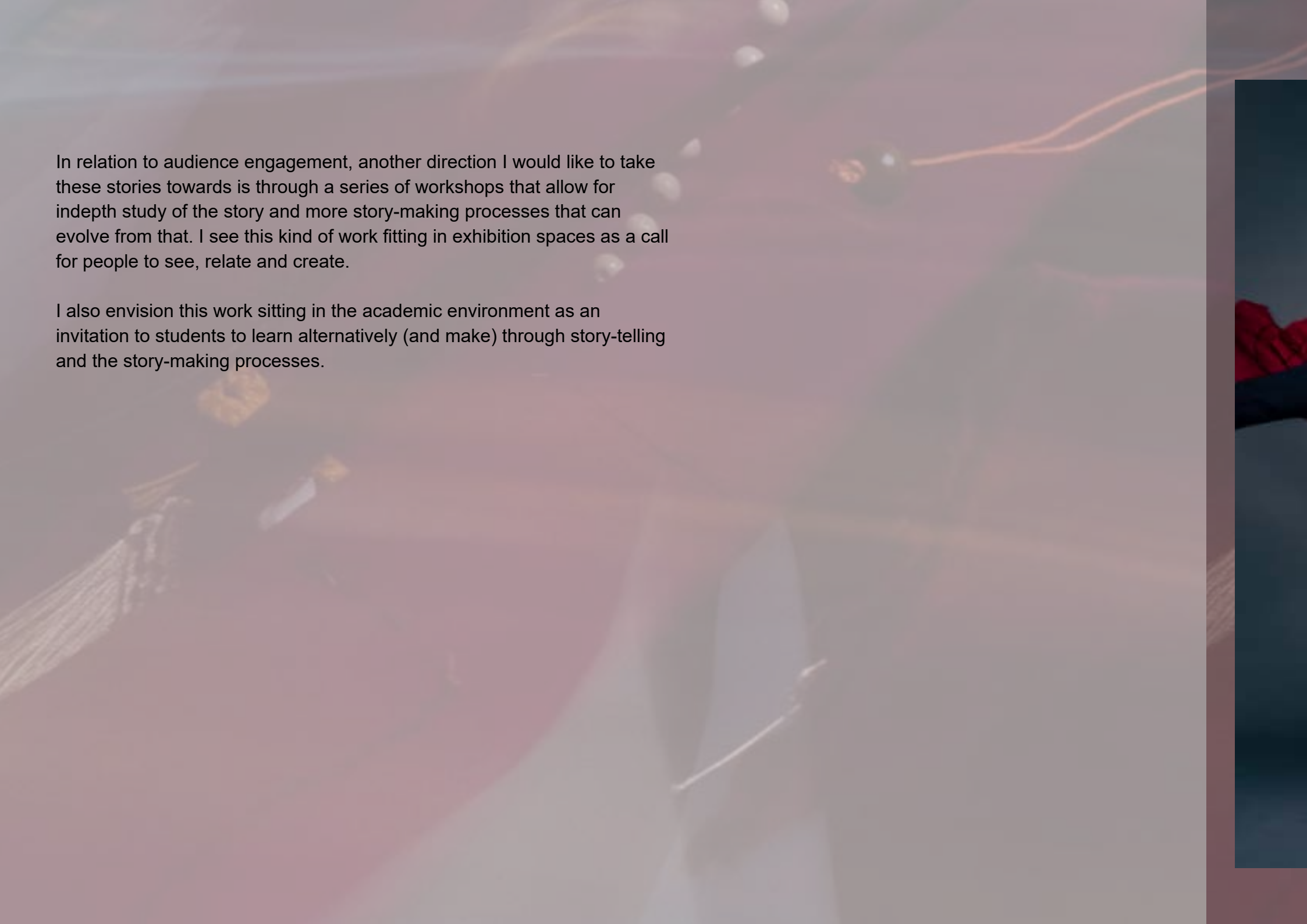
A massive aim I have for this project is that it does not sit only within the confines of pages and the screen. I believe that just like the folktales I learned from, these stories can be applied into everyday life and engaged with. Although I have not fully figured out how to apply this, I have started drafting prompts that serve as a way of engagement for the audience and smaller groups of people in workshops.

The framework of this is borrowed from 'adire'- Yorùbá tie and dye specific to Ogun State. The process of drawing symbols on white fabric through wax application and dyeing it with colours specific to adire making- indigo. The idea of storycharting is to create symbols that pertain specifically to a story and arrange it on a sheet, fabric or another suitable medium and use it to retell the story in workshop settings and encourage people to practice it.

This method was also influenced by the Bronze Plaques of Benin, Nigeria. The artisans casted kingdom life and occurrences in Bronze and they clad palace pillars with these bronze visuals. The symbols created for the stories can serve as visual depictions of the story that help people remember it and can retell it.







In relation to audience engagement, another direction I would like to take these stories towards is through a series of workshops that allow for indepth study of the story and more story-making processes that can evolve from that. I see this kind of work fitting in exhibition spaces as a call for people to see, relate and create.

I also envision this work sitting in the academic environment as an invitation to students to learn alternatively (and make) through story-telling and the story-making processes.









