

## ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis:                    **DECOLONIZATION THROUGH  
REPATRIATION: A NEW GLOBAL  
HERITAGE MUSEUM FOR AFRICA**

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Preservation

This thesis investigates and examines the impact of European colonization and imperialism on West African cultural identity through the tracking and placing of items back into their historical contexts. The museum facility aspires to be a symbol of pride and awareness for West African arts and culture, serving and celebrating the West-African community and its arts and cultural heritage beyond borders by repatriating and, in effect, decolonizing its art and artifacts. The establishment of a facility to exhibit and recontextualize looted and returned art and artifacts is a long-awaited, challenging request that would allow them to be seen in its native West African gestalt. As a focal point for international engagement and reflection across a variety of urban contexts, The Museum and Cultural Center facility, through simultaneously redistributing and rehousing, caters to more culturally invested populations, where there is an eagerness for ethnically diverse representation as well as access to people and civilizations the broad populace may not typically engage with.

DECOLONIZATION THROUGH REPATRIATION:  
A NEW GLOBAL HERITAGE MUSEUM FOR AFRICA

by

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Advisory Committee:

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## Dedication

This thesis exploration is dedicated to Caroline Olufunke Okubadejo, a wonderful mother, grandmother, and teacher- a major advocate for education of Nigerian and Yoruba language, culture, and learning as a whole. The thesis is also dedicated to young Nigerians who strive to learn about their culture and heritage in new, exciting ways, through a lens of growth and progress.

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## Chapter 1: Historic Site Context: Colonialism

### Colonial history

Many communities in West Africa are still reeling from the loss of countless cultural artifacts which European and American colonizers ripped from the continent throughout their centuries-long occupations. To this day, the entrustment of West African countries with the stewardship of artifacts from their communities has not been fully achieved, actively denying them the right to tell their own stories and history through their material heritage. The European race to partition and colonize African territory is often dismissed as a minor facet of the political and economic conflicts that erupted between Europe's new industrial states from about 1870 to 1914<sup>1</sup>.

The Berlin Treaty included a clause called "Effective Occupation," which granted Europe carte blanche to use armed forces to conquer West African countries.<sup>2</sup>

Between 1885 and 1914, Europe conquered and merged pre-colonial territories and societies into new states. European imperialists continued to follow their past treaty-making processes, which resulted in the creation of European protectorates in West Africa. Protectorates were a tense interlude between the ultimate European military takeover of West Africa and the establishment of protectorates. Protectorate treaties posed severe threats to West African freedom; therefore, they were inevitably rejected

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<sup>1</sup> “*Western Africa - Colonization | Britannica.*” Accessed December 17, 2021.  
<https://www.britannica.com/place/western-Africa/Colonization>.

<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey Herbst. *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control* - Second Edition.

by most West African rulers. To avoid this, West African rulers used several tactics to prevent occupation, including diplomacy, alliances, and eventually, military conflict were used to combat European occupation.

As a consequence, by the end of the 1870s, France and the United Kingdom had made significant advancements in western Africa. The essential effect of the new forces resulting from European domestic power struggles was to exacerbate and accelerate existing French and British inclinations to exert political and military authority over traditional African rulers.

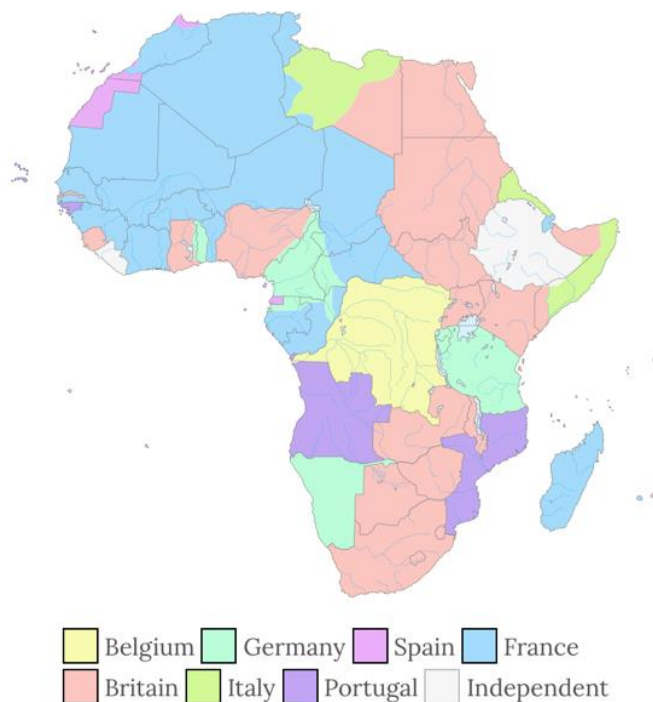


Figure 1 1913 Colonial Map (Source: Wikipedia Commons)

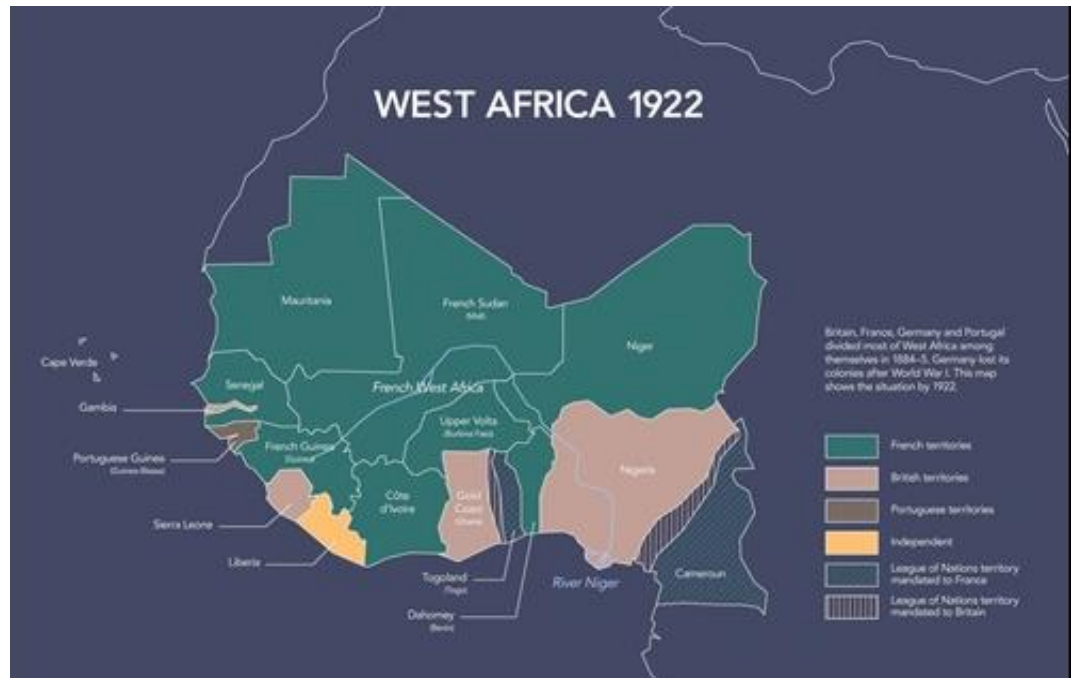


Figure 2 Map of West Africa in 1922 (Source: British Library)

### The British in West Africa

The colonial policy of Britain in West Africa was one of assimilation of African culture into that of the Europeans. Within their policies of indirect rule, the approaches were that of entitlement to their “conquests.” The English identified administrative policies, particularly the decentralization of authority and continuity of infrastructure.<sup>3</sup> The principle of decentralization was particularly geared towards ruling people through their indigenous authorities; specifically looking at advising African rulers on the alienation of land, taxation, and use of military force. In terms of continuity, the British were focused on using local institutions and authorities to have

<sup>3</sup> Amy Nolan, “Decentralization, Democratization, Deconcentration--a Theoretical Perspective with Emphasis on the African Experience.”

a connection with the past while erasing integral cultural aspects for what was proposed as an improvement of African society.

British West Africa became a region of widely separated territories Under distinct administrative machines further divided into provinces under the leadership of the European commissioners advising indigenous rulers. These territories included Sierra Leone, the Gambia, Nigeria, Cameroon, and the Gold Coast. Smaller ethnic groups were included in the jurisdiction of their larger, more well-organized neighbors as a result of the British indirect Rule policy, which saw the charting out of relatively broad territories that were subject to a single authority. Frederick J.D. Lugard implemented it clearly in Nigeria, where district chiefs, particularly in the Igbo and Ibibio lands, were assigned to defined territories with little regard for their relationship with the populace under their charge.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Utuk, "Britain's Colonial Administrations and Developments, 1861-1960: An Analysis of Britain's Colonial Administrations and Developments in Nigeria"

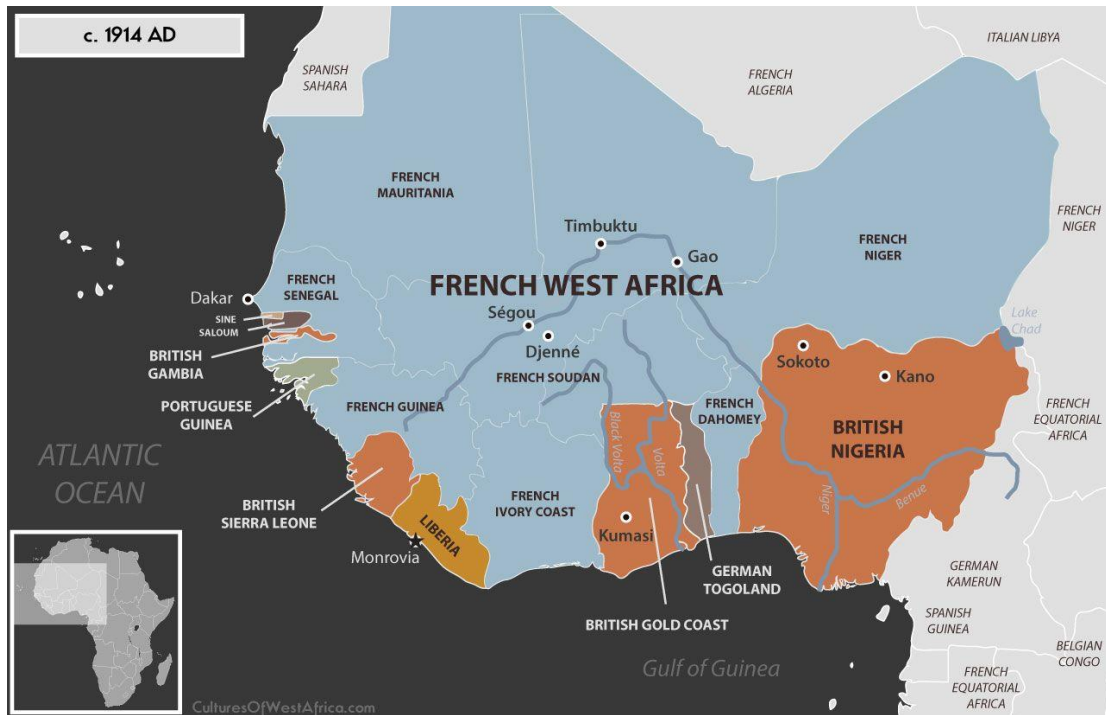


Figure 3 West Africa Colonial Territories (Source: Cultures of West Africa)

Lugard's system was adopted throughout British West Africa as a model. Northern and Southern Nigeria were formed as independent entities in 1906, but under Lugard's guidance, they were combined in 1914. An appointed governor, an executive, and a legislative council made up his central government whereas traditional rulers and institutions were responsible for local governance and jurisdiction. The most glaring weakness in the Indirect Rule system was the entire isolation of the West African educated elite from local administration: the educated elite was excluded from both Native Administration and colonial government, and as a result became an alienated class. Frequently this meant depriving the new generation of Western-educated Africans of their authority and stifling the social transformation that had already begun.



Indirect rule as a whole aided authoritarian and corrupt rulers and exacerbated social divisions: The system strengthened the elite in Northern Nigeria, increasing the odds of a revolution by the exploited masses. Because the Igbo and Ibibios had no chiefs and instead had egalitarian systems of governance that regarded authority as originating directly from the people, corrupt warrant chiefs were formed to fill leadership roles in their lands.

Furthermore, another disconcerting fault of British tactics was the subjugation and dispossession of traditional monarchs in favor of British officers. This was done out of the fear of the ruling class and traditional rulers becoming nationalized and to inevitably weaken traditional rule and prevent them from coping with the issues plaguing the colonial society.

#### The French in West Africa

Direct European encounters with West African coastal peoples stretch back at least to the fifteenth century A.D. when Portuguese traders established their initial contacts. Historically, Europeans were aware of West African peoples and had interacted with them to varying levels through trans-Saharan trade. The Spanish, Dutch, British, and French all started to establish a foothold in West Africa during the later fifteenth century. The rise of maritime capacities, increased interest in economic activities with Africa and the Far East, religious expansion, and the Age of Exploration all play an important role in the chronology of these inaugural encounters. Additionally, during this time, Europeans sold slaves, sugar, pepper, ivory, wax, and gold. Europe's rising reliance on gold, as well as the rise of merchant capitalism that accompanied it, strengthened Europe's ties to West Africa. Africa, and

particularly West Africa, became significant opportunities for European nations' imperialistic strategies throughout the next five hundred years.

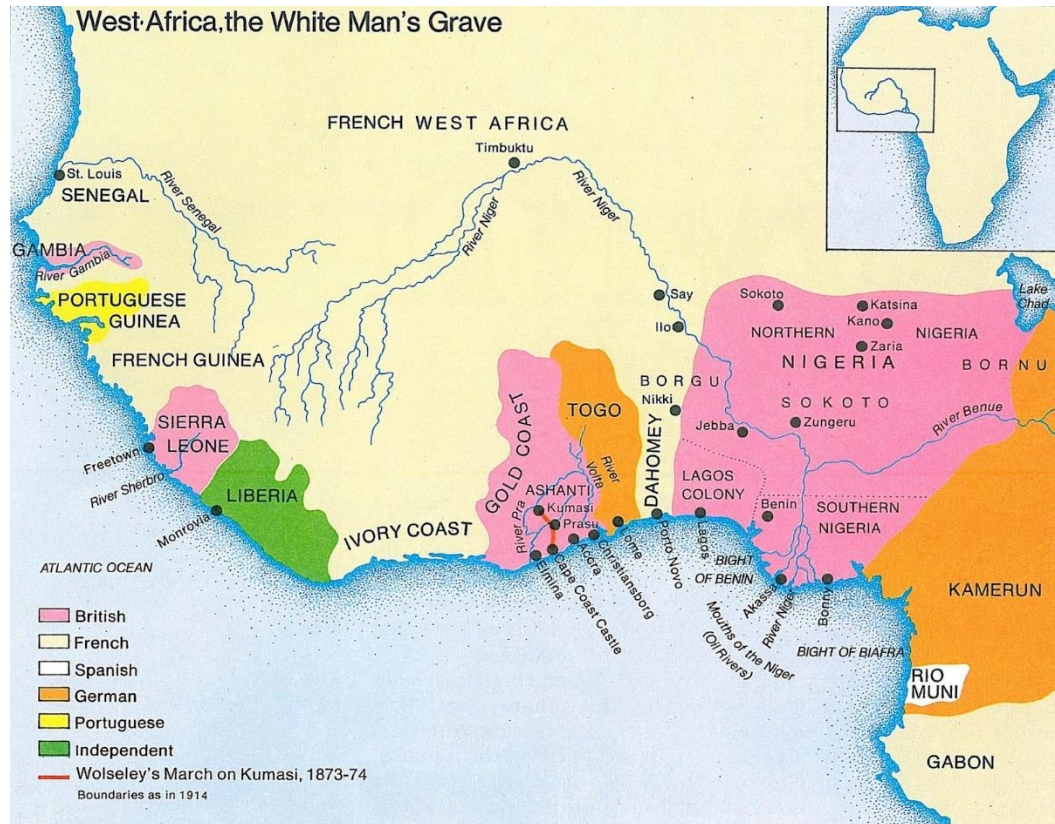


Figure 4 West Africa and European Colonies (Source: The British Empire)

As the trans-Atlantic slave trade expanded, so did European interaction with African slave traders. The emerging warfare and rivalry between pre-colonial states increased also increased the dominance of the economic activity created by the slave trade with its rising demand. French participation in the scramble increased substantially later in the 19th century with their focus on the creator of raw materials

originating in the interior regions, though their participation in the slave trade was consistently less significant than that of the Portuguese, Dutch, and British.<sup>5</sup>

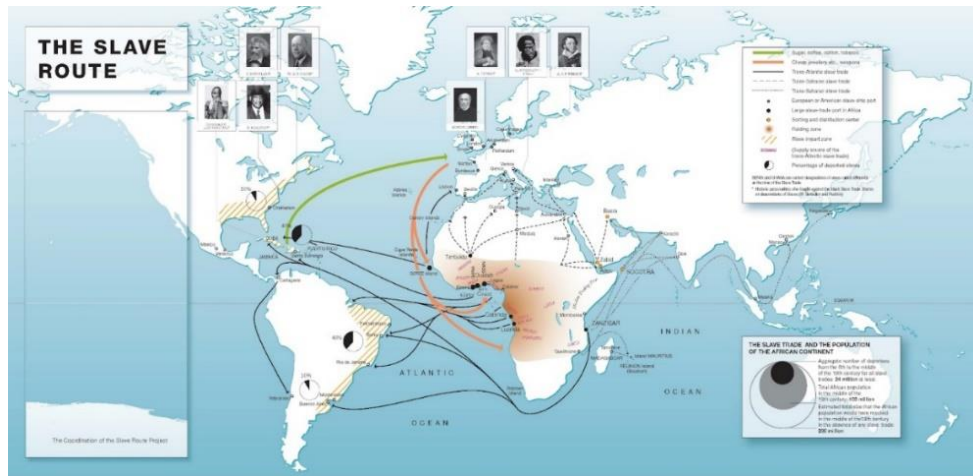


Figure 5 The Slave Route Map (Source: UNESCO 2006, J. HARRIS (USA))

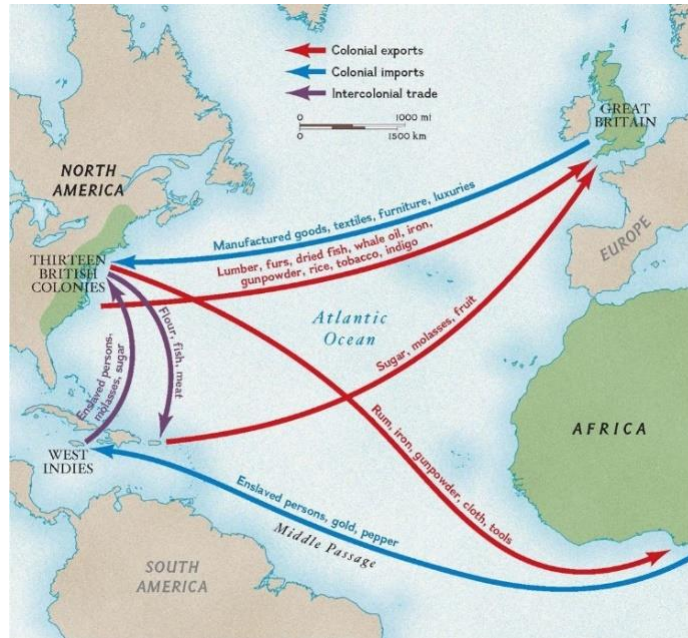


Figure 6 Colonial Trade Routes and Goods (Source: The Making of America)

<sup>5</sup> “The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade · African Passages, Lowcountry Adaptations · Lowcountry Digital History Initiative.”

Focusing on the Senegal River area and its hinterland, France's colonial project started to have a similar foundation to that of the British assimilation. The goal there was for West Africa to become an extension of France, with British and French imperialism happening concurrently. The Berlin Act was a major contributor to the organization of French Colonial expansion as it formalized the process for the partition of Africa; with the French signing treaties to further define and negotiate their territories.<sup>6</sup> The resulting conquest of West Africa was primarily achieved with significant military firepower in their campaigns, hoping to gain economic benefits by increasing the amount of land they had acquired under their control.

Subsequently in the twentieth century, in contrast to British authority, the French started to establish their colonial policy as direct rule. This dynamic arose from the French's growing recognition of the African peoples' unsuitability as French citizens. French West Africa developed into a highly centralized federalist administration, with lieutenant governors reporting to the governor-general and overseeing the regions. They attempted to control rather than work with indigenous rulers. They used forced labor and incarceration to further their goals under their stringent regime.

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<sup>6</sup> Ocheni and Nwankwo, "Analysis of Colonialism and Its Impact in Africa."

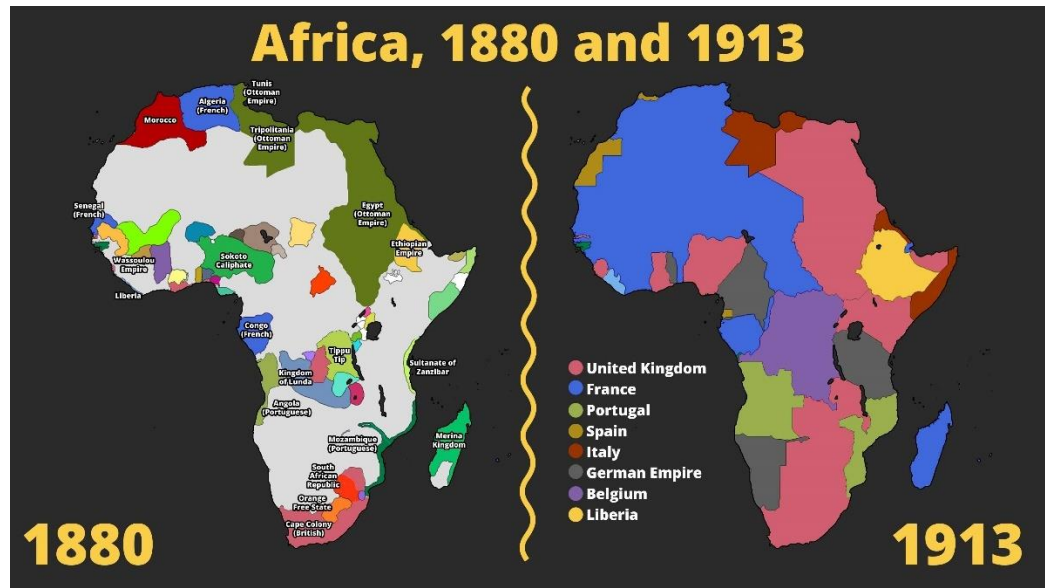


Figure 7 Africa, 1880 and 1913 (Source: Globalyceum)



Figure 8 A gathering of former Governors of Senegal in Paris, 1950s (Source: Nigerianscholars.com)

The necessity that the colony pays its way as a colony was one of the most essential features of the French colonization of West Africa. The French government wanted to boost productivity and gain access to precious resources; encouraging the cultivation of groundnuts and cotton in areas where the conditions were favorable and encouraging migration to wage-earning locations where crops could not be cultivated. They also imposed taxes to encourage involvement in the cash economy.

Furthermore, even though slavery had been abolished in Europe and the New World by the middle of the nineteenth century, some types of servitude remained on the French West African landscape in their pursuit of economic profit, with the French often turning a blind eye to ensure the success of their projects. Commercial concerns and, to a lesser extent, a civilizing goal drove the French colonial venture in West Africa. Throughout the colonial period, the governmental administration and economic interests were fairly consistent in most regions. Although attempts were made to provide basic medical and educational services, little was done to better the lives of West Africans.

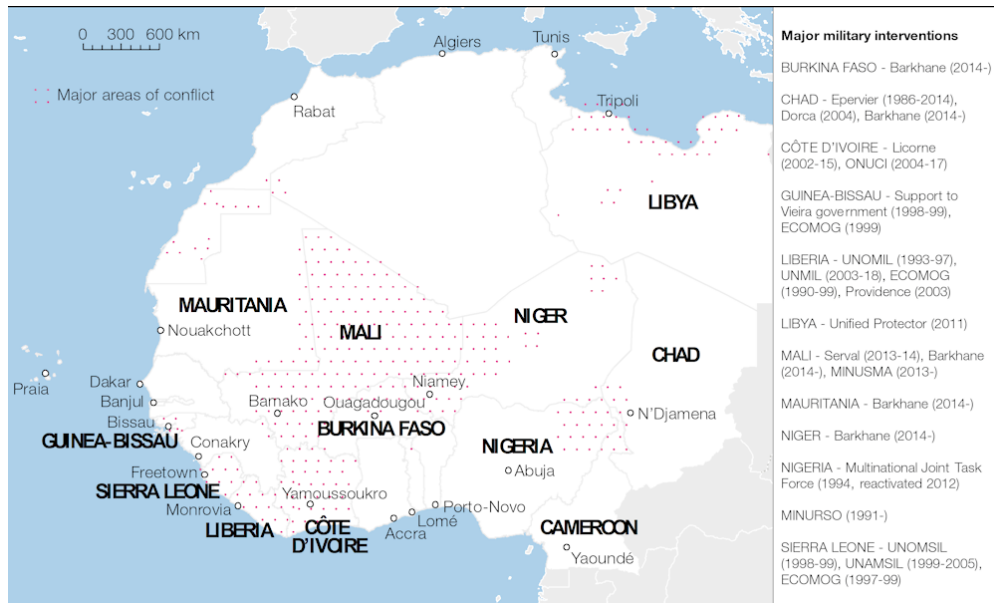


Figure 9 West Africa Major Military Interventions in North and West Africa, 1997-2020 (Source: Conflict Networks in North and West Africa)

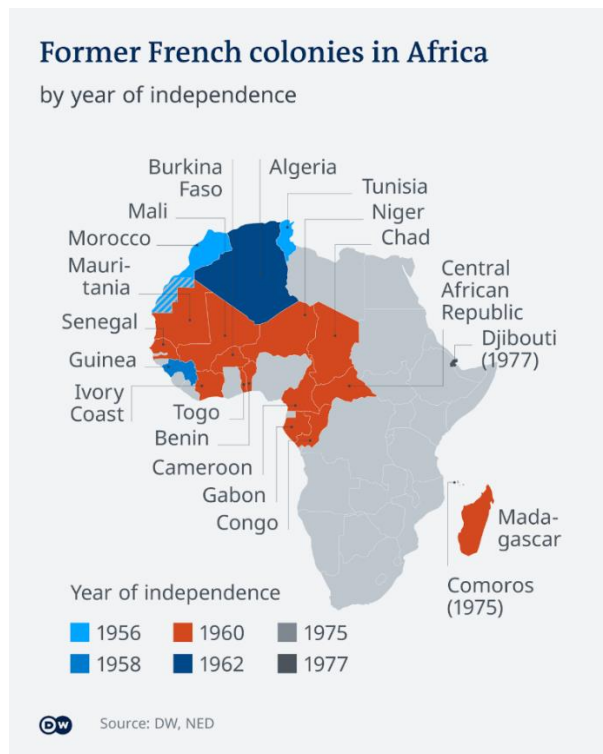


Figure 10 Former French Colonies in Africa (Source: dw.com)

*History of Benin City, Nigeria*



*Figure 11 The Walls of Benin (Source: Ancient Origins)*

Benin City, originally known as Edo, was once the capital of a pre-colonial African empire located in what is now southern Nigeria. The Benin Empire, which dates back to the 11th century, was one of west Africa's oldest and most established empires. Between the 14th and 19th centuries, the Kingdom of Benin, in modern-day Edo State, Nigeria, was rich in sculptures made of various materials such as iron, bronze, wood, ivory, and terra cotta. The royal palace was mostly decorated with ivory artifacts and bronze reliefs used to depict the heads of kings and queen mothers, which were popular types of art in the Kingdom of Benin. Other bronze objects, often overshadowed by figurative bronze sculptures, exhibited the expertise of their craftsmen.





Figure 12 The Benin Empire (Source: *A Popular History of Benin. The Rise and Fall of a Mighty Forest Kingdom*)

Benin City, which was built on a plain, was surrounded on the south by enormous walls and on the north by deep ditches. Beyond the city walls, numerous further walls were built, dividing the capital's environs into about 500 independent settlements. The king's court stood in the city's heart, from which 30 exceedingly straight, broad streets, each about 120 feet wide, spread. Underground drainage was provided via a subterranean impluvium with an outlet to carry away stormwater on these principal roadways, which ran at right angles to each other. They were flanked by a slew of narrower side and connecting roadways. Turf in the middle of the streets was used to feed the animals.



Figure 13 Ancient Benin Kingdom (Source: African Diaspora Maps)



Figure 14 Map showing the location of Benin City (Source: British Museum)

The planning and design of Benin City followed strict standards of symmetry, proportionality, and repetition, which are now known as fractal design. The city and its surrounding villages were purposefully laid out to form perfect fractals, according to mathematician Ron Eglash, author of African Fractals, which examines the patterns underpinning architecture, art, and design in many parts of Africa. Similar shapes were repeated in the rooms of each house, the house itself, and the clusters of houses in the village in mathematically predictable ways.

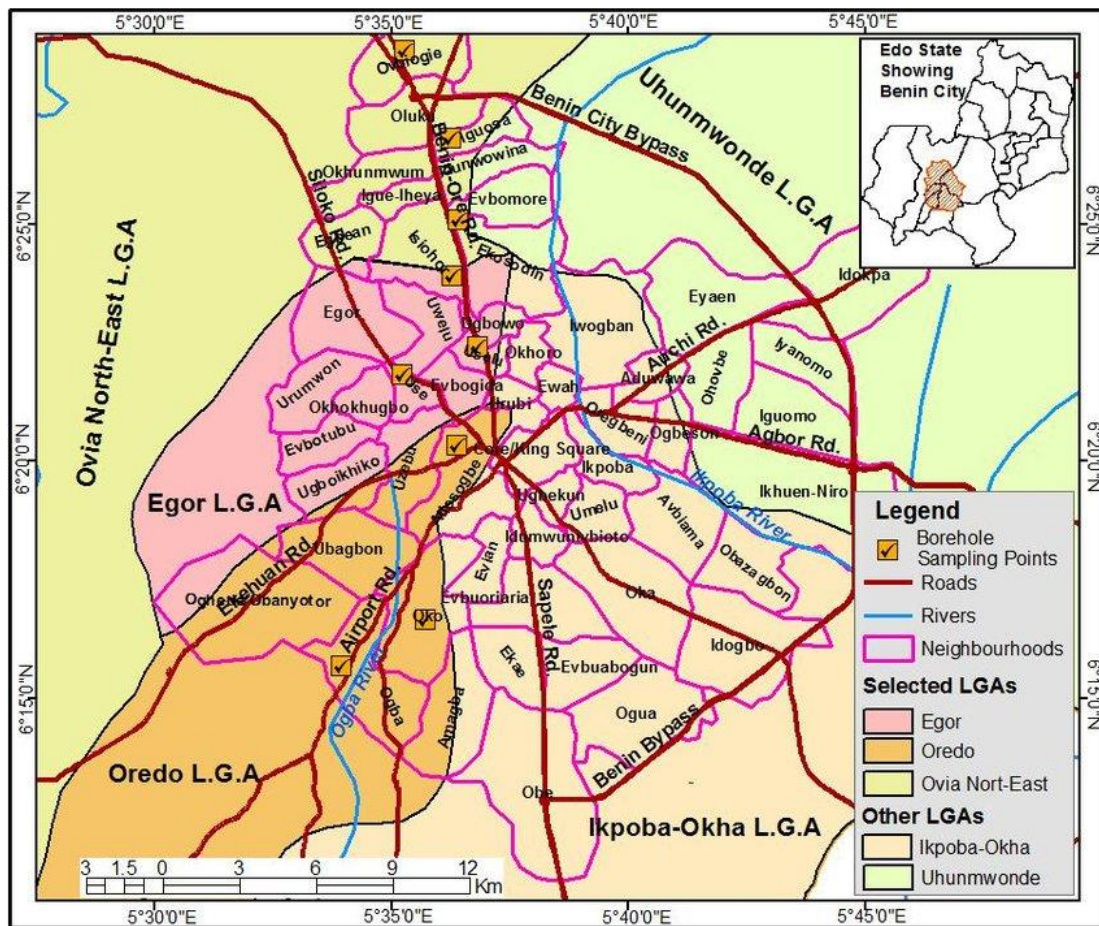
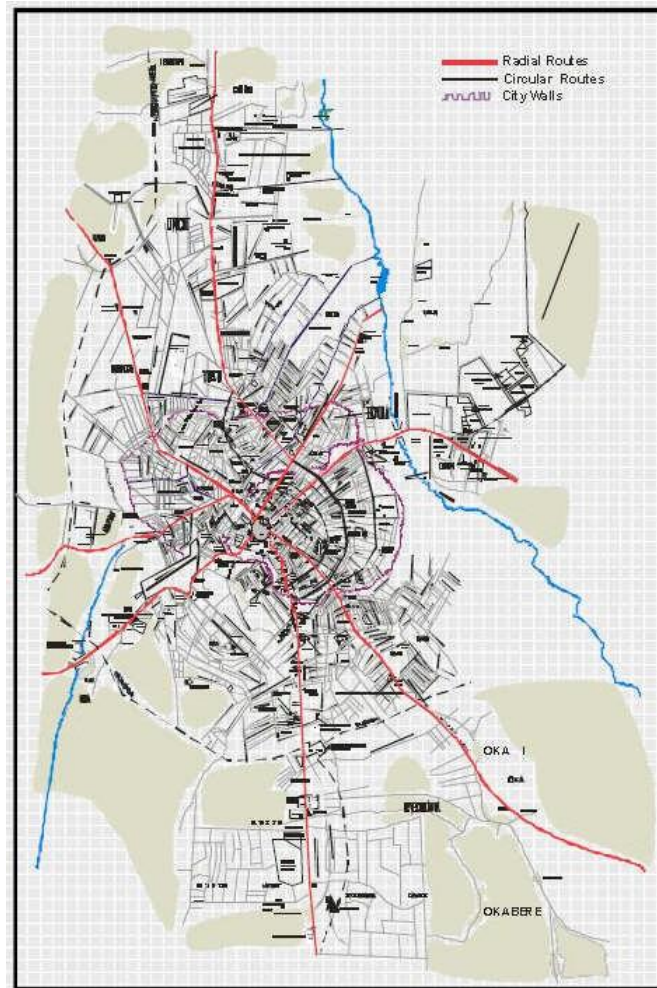


Figure 15 Map of Benin city showing local government areas and borehole water sampling locations (Source: Go to School Limited, 2018)

The city was divided into 11 divisions, each of which was a smaller replica of the king's court, consisting of a sprawling series of compounds containing residences, workshops, and public buildings – interconnected by countless doors and passageways, all intricately carved with the art that made Benin prominent. The external walls of the courts and compounds were adorned with horizontal ridge designs and clay carvings of animals, warriors, and other emblems of authority, which created contrasting patterns in the light. Natural elements (pebbles or mica fragments) were also pressed into the wet clay, and pillars in the palaces were coated with bronze plates depicting previous kings and nobles' victories and deeds. The kings and nobles of Benin City patronized craftsmen and lavished them with gifts and wealth in exchange for depicting the kings' and dignitaries' great exploits in intricate bronze sculptures at the height of their greatness in the 12th century – well before the start of the European Renaissance.



*Figure 16 Map of Benin, showing the city form and road network (Source: Benin domestic architecture “a tabula rasa” for transition: From pre-independence to contemporary architecture.)*

The city's richness, aesthetic beauty, and splendor most impressed the city's early visitors. Importing ivory, palm oil, and pepper – as well as exporting weapons – European nations saw an immediate chance to expand trade with the affluent monarchy. At the beginning of the 16th century, word of the exquisite African city soon traveled throughout Europe, and new visitors flooded in from all over the continent, leaving glowing testimonials that were recorded in various voyage notes and pictures.

The great Benin City, on the other hand, is now lost to history. Internal conflicts tied to increasing European penetration and the slave trade at the empire's frontiers began its demise in the 15th century. The city was then looted, blown up, and burned to the ground by British soldiers in 1897. While a modern Benin City has emerged on the same plain, the history of the iconic city is lost in the ruins.



*Figure 17 A drawing of Benin City made by a British officer in 1897 (Source: akg-images)*



*Figure 18 Aerial view of Benin City (Source: Wikipedia Commons)*

### *Colonial Cultural Impact*

Colonialism in West Africa was first and foremost political domination, a direct imposition on African culture with the immediate consequence of the introduction of such values as rugged individualism, corruption, capitalism, and oppression. Simply looking at its impact on physical cultural symbols, indicators, and artifacts on identity, the stripping away of these constructs has led to a major loss of knowledge, heritage, and cultural identity that is still being felt today.

With the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade in the 19th century, European imperialism turned its attention to Africa as a source of raw materials and marketplaces for industrialized nations' commodities. The European powers partitioned Africa during the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, which was attended by

no Africans. As a result, the continent was defined by artificial borders, with little regard for ethnic, linguistic, or topographical realities.

### *Impacts of Colonialism on African Art*

Other African antiquities were also violently taken. During the colonial period, successive waves of European conquerors pillaged the continent's cultural assets. The recovery of these artifacts will provide Africans with an opportunity to learn about and connect with their history and identity.

As another study of the impact of the disappearance of pieces of such significance, one could look at the Nok culture in Central Nigeria that existed around 1000 B.C. and disappeared around 500 A.D; the earliest known sculptures in the region. The social system of the civilization is regarded to have been very advanced; thought to have evolved into the later Yoruba Kingdom of Ife. The Nok civilization is known for its distinctive life-size terracotta sculptures depicting animals and humans; said to be its first sub-Saharan maker. Although their function is uncertain, fragments of the figures have been uncovered. Because the majority of the finds are made of alluvial mud on terrain produced by water erosion, the formerly detailed and sophisticated statues are in fragments. The original purpose of the pieces is unknown, but hypotheses include ancestor depiction, grave markers, and charms to avoid crop failure, infertility, and disease. They could also have been employed as finials for teepees, based on the dome-shaped bases seen on some figures.



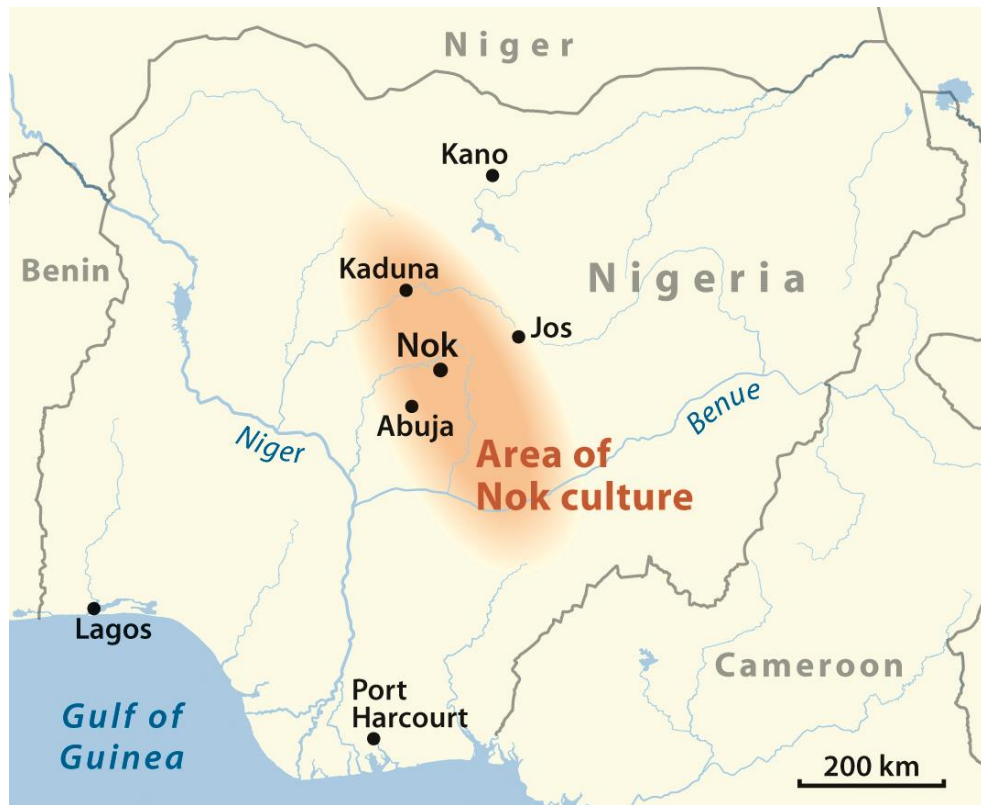
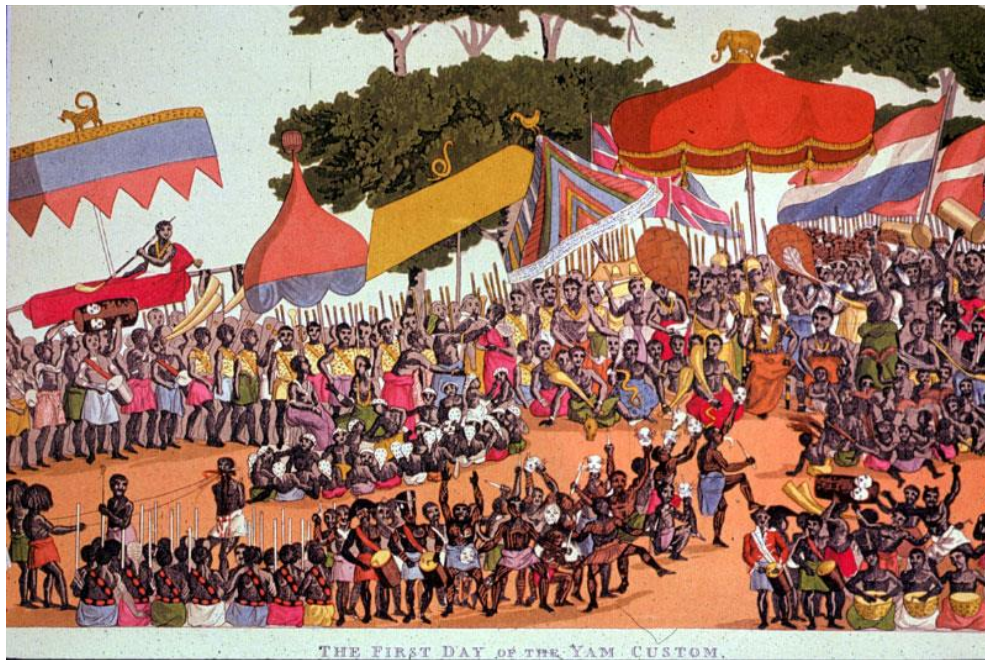


Figure 19 Area of the Nok culture (Source: Wikipedia Commons)

The origins of African art history predate documented history and have been lost to the passage of time. According to research into African art history, the earliest sculpture forms discovered are from Nigeria and date back to roughly 500BC. The throwaway nature of the raw materials utilized in the manufacture of art objects has resulted in an untold amount of artwork disintegrating over time. Furthermore, because these artifacts were not regarded as artistic achievements, little to no effort was made to conserve them; their worth was sometimes negligible when their role was completed.

Orally and in the visual arts, Africans recorded their actual and received experiences. In diverse mediums, they sculpted figures and masks depicting European

slave traders, missionaries, soldiers, clerks, and men, women, and children for usage in traditional African contexts and the export trade. The intersection of cultural property theft and destruction/iconoclasm and the erasure of culture is an argument needing recognition as one discusses the subject of art and cultural heritage. Fundamentally, the ability to take ownership of the cultural heritage of Africa was violently stripped away with its looting and erasure; especially where the destruction and removal of those artifacts have been a precursor to or a consequence of the annihilation of an entire culture.



*Figure 20 The first day of yam custom (Source: SlaveryImages)*

## Chapter 2: The Stealing of the Benin Bronzes

### *History of the Bronzes*

The Benin Bronzes are a collection of more than 3,000 figures and other decorative pieces looted by the British in 1897. Today they are housed in at least 161 public and private collections scattered around the World. The British Museum has about 900 artifacts from the old kingdom of Benin in its collection with most being on show in its galleries in a constantly changing display.

The Benin Bronzes are a collection of sculptures made of brass, bronze, as well as carved ivory, and carved wood, made using the lost-wax casting technique. They comprise ornately decorated cast plaques, commemorative heads, animal and human figures, royal regalia, and personal ornaments. They were made by specialized craftsmen working for the royal court of the Oba (king) in Benin City during the two golden ages of Benin's art: in the mid-1500s during the reign of Oba Esigie, and from 1735–50 during the reign of Oba Eresoyen, using a similar process used in the nearby Nok Kingdom of Ife to make brass heads. The tight cultural and economic ties between the various groups in the area are evidenced by examples found throughout the region.



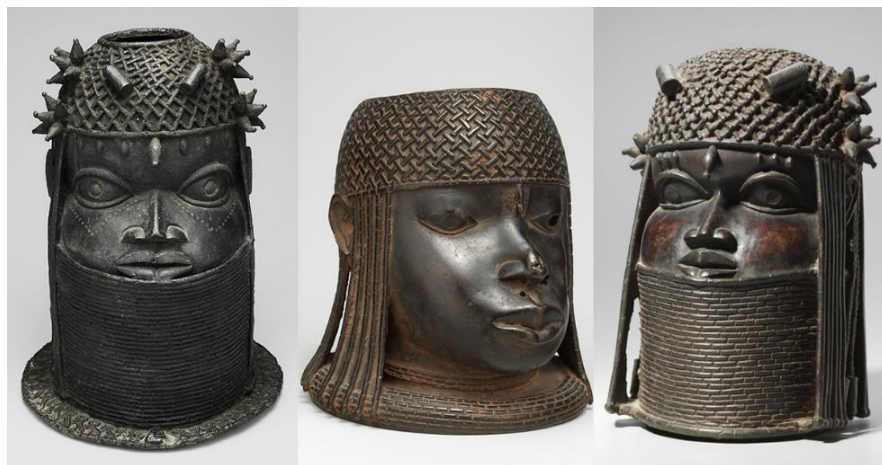
*Figure 21 Nok Culture (Source: HistoryToday)*

The Benin Bronzes are from the medieval city-state of Benin City in West Africa, which served as the Kingdom of Benin's historic capital. Benin was a part of the British Empire from 1897 to 1960, and it is now part of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Despite the fact that the city-state is still in existence and many of the rites and traditions linked with Benin's past kingdom are still practiced today, two-thirds of the museums in which the bronzes are housed are in Europe, 38 in the United States, museums in Australia, Japan, and the United Arab Emirates, and nine in Nigeria.

However, only a few of the original relics can be found in Benin City, where they were created.

### Cultural significance

Within these figures, stories were told about who the people of the Kingdom of Benin were, and these artifacts demonstrated their strength and identity. They told the stories of their kings, revealing a considerable measure about the kingdom's evolution and continuance, with recurrent imagery in the bronzes illustrating the cultural references that Benin's artists expected their viewers to recognize. An image of a leopard on royal stools, for example, was an allusion to Oba Ewuare's escape when in exile. Overall, they provide a significant record of the Kingdom of Benin's history, also talking much about its interrelationships with other neighboring civilizations, history, and court practices. They reveal information from dress and religious rituals to architecture and military conflict in the country.



*Figure 22 Benin Bronzes (Source: PittRivers Museum)*



*Figure 23 Queen Idia mask (Source: Wikipedia Commons)*

The obas also commissioned the plaques to further strengthen their power by reminding court members of their place, rank, and proper customs. Images of courtiers carrying taxes to the palace, warriors serving the monarchy, and allegorical portrayals of the oba, often with animal features, can all be found among them. They provided a depiction of ritual life that relates to a kind of cycle of existence inside the kingdom, at and beyond the court system. The commemorative brass heads were also primarily designed as remembrances of deceased monarchs.

Sculptures of the commemorative busts can still be found on the altars of Benin City's royal palace. They, like the plaques, are made using the lost wax casting

method, which is a time-consuming and technically challenging technique that members of Benin's brass casting guild have mastered for decades. The enormous amount of expertise required to create these sculptures contributes to their historical relevance, and its appeal to Western collectors. These Benin sculptures are notable for being among the pinnacles of European casting, particularly at the peak of technological achievement.

*Taking: The Benin Punitive Expedition of 1897*

The Sacking of Benin City

Benin has been formally requesting the restitution of anthropomorphic brass statues taken during the invasion of the Abomey place in 1897 since 2016. The statues have spiritual and historical significance for the Nigerian historic city and are valuable cultural artifacts and heritage. The famed Benin bronzes were stolen in 1897 and ended up in museums and private collections all over Europe. The bronzes, currently housed in the British Museum in London, more than any other series of artworks, made African art visible to Europeans, piqued the curiosity of researchers, artists, and the general public. They have, however, become a kind of shorthand in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa for colonialism's murderous era - and its libelous legacy.

During the Benin Expedition of 1897, when the imperial authority of Southern Nigeria was being reinforced, British forces looted the majority of the plaques and other items. These statues are part of a collection of 26 artifacts that Benin has requested from France, but whose repatriation is hampered by legal issues.

Their requests have been repeatedly turned down by France, which claims that they are now part of French cultural property and heritage.



*Figure 24 Benin Expedition (Source: Wikipedia Commons)*

The Benin Expedition's goal was to directly invade the Kingdom of Benin, capture the Benin Oba, and destroy Benin City. The Benin Punitive Expedition, which took place between February 9 and February 27, 1897, resulted in the sacking of Benin city. Imperialist envy for the sacred urban landscape and its royal artworks led to this brutality in the kingdom's capital. The raid, which was organized as a naval operation, featured the mobilization of both European and African forces, was directed by Vice-Admiral Sir Harry Rawson, the Commander-in-Chief at the Cape of Good Hope at the time. The three simultaneous column assaults across the city used a total of ten Royal Navy ships, with the ultimate motivation to harass and destroy towns and villages while the main operations persisted, and thereby maximize the



punishment inflicted on the nation. Their orders were to destroy all towns along their river routes, attacking them from ships and setting fire to them, including the systematic destruction of the Jakri town of Ologbo and trading villages, along with numerous other towns and villages such as Egoru, Sapoba, and Gill-Gilli.



*Figure 25 Benin Expedition (Source: Wikipedia Commons)*

## Chapter 3: West-African art and the effects of European Contact and Colonization

Traditional sculptures, masks, vivid textiles, and jewelry are all part of West Africa's cultural legacy, which is inextricably linked to the land and its people. In their original form, most of these paintings were depictions of the natural and spiritual realms. West African art is far from arbitrary, relying on dynamic intersections of materials, techniques, and motifs that are vital to West African identity. The motif and patternmaking are essential to its culture as it carries powerful meaning and references significant cultural identities, evident in the region's textiles, arts, and craftwork.



Figure 26 (Source: *Conflict Networks in North and West Africa*)

Prior to the arrival of the Europeans, the different peoples that existed in the West-African regions had specific means of expressing their culture, values, and life expectancies. Most of these were through art. A comprehensive analysis of Nigerian art gives you a glimpse of the prevalent stone carvings, terracotta works, bronze castings, potteries, and different forms of glassworks used to decorate palaces where the heads of government were located. African cultures were never isolated; there was always migration, trade, and intellectual interchange. African art is fluid and has evolved in form, function, and symbolism over time. Still, the concept of "traditional" African art exists in the Western art market and academics. Often, this refers to indigenous art traditions that existed and were active before the European colonization of Africa in the late 1800s. The presumption implicit in the term "traditional" is that the works it represents are rigid and inalienable. For many collectors, professionals, and academics in this field, pre-colonial arts are wrongfully considered far more highly; evoking a purist, timeless era when artists created works for their own communities, undisturbed by the outside world. These objects are frequently juxtaposed with contemporary work created with Western materials and norms by artists who are engaged in a global dialogue and create works of art for sale.

#### *Historiography of West African Art: Fundamentals of the technique*

In contrast to "Western" communities, the level of innovation when it comes to formal techniques is truly unmatched. Whereas in Western art, artworks are often made using rigorous representational edicts, many African civilizations allow artists to experiment with form and style. This diversity and creativity may be witnessed not just across great periods of time and vast geographies, but also from across villages.

Furthermore, visual abstraction is far more prevalent in African art than realistic depictions. Many African artworks, regardless of media, choose to depict objects or thoughts rather than exhibit them directly (with there most notably being an exception in the brass sculptures of the royalty of the Yoruba people of Ile-Ife). For example, within Mende and Sherbro culture, helmet masks serve as a representation of the guardian spirit of Sande -- a powerful pan-ethnic women's association responsible for education and moral development -- the work alludes to an idealized female beauty.



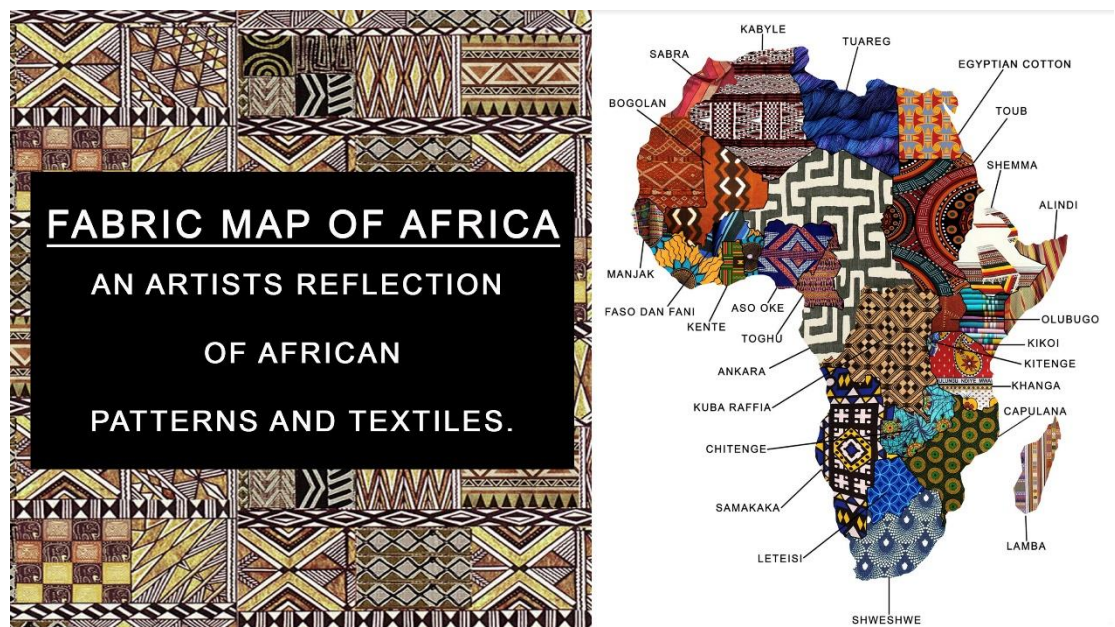
*Figure 27 Ife Artifact (Source: Artblot.wordpress)*

In addition to this, African arts typically gravitates towards three-dimensional artworks as opposed to the two-dimensional, with numerous illustrations and textiles designed to be viewed in three dimensions. Paintings created for the home are frequently interpreted as a continuously wrapped pattern requiring the observer to walk around the piece in order to properly appreciate it. Similarly, textile designs were approached typically with a ceremonial or ornamental consideration, converting the user into a living sculpture.

Few, if any, modern societies place a higher priority on art, craft, and creative expression than African societies. As a result, their freedom of expression and the value they place on their work is a distinguishing feature, imitated by many but only perfected by African artists. The emphasis on art as performance and craft is also a major theme indicative of art in this region. In particular, performance contexts as opposed to static are frequently seen in precolonial African masks and sculptures. The name alone typically references not only the sculpture itself, but its meaning, the ceremony that it is associated with, and its connected spiritual inhabitation. The three cannot be distinguished in African ideas, and this is something to keep in mind when examining any type of African art. whichever shape, it takes. Finally, the multiplicity of meaning in West African works has been a theme that has been a subject of discourse within its context and mystification towards Western spectators outside of it. The diversity of applications, connotations, and social settings that can be contained in a single piece of African art will quickly confuse those looking for a particular description of its meaning.

### West-African textile pattern making

West African textiles are an important aspect of African art. Their distinctiveness in terms of symbolism in the patterns and motifs employed reflects their cultures, as well as various types of art and design. African textile arts have played a major role in a variety of African societies, with key designs that flourished in the twentieth century, which are cherished locally and increasingly coveted by collections and exhibitions worldwide.



*Figure 28 Fabric map of Africa (Source: Minds-Africa.org)*

The textile industry has a long history in Africa as many indigenous and local communities use fabrics in their everyday routines and rituals. Just looking at West Africa as a huge region with various cultures, the range of textiles is infinite and

fascinating. Cotton, raffia (fibrils from a species of palm tree), bast (natural fibers created from plant reeds soaked in water, loosened, and woven into linen), and tree bark are all used to make textiles in West Africa. Wool and silk are also used in several cultures. Fabrics made from these fibers are frequently woven with colored threading or dyed after they have been woven.

Craftsmen may dye clothes to create patterns, often using a resist, a material placed on the surface of the fabric that deflects the stain. African textiles also frequently use patternmaking; also using stencils or stamps to print designs, paint images with tools, or embroider them. Some techniques incorporate multiple methods, weaving and dyeing, as well as painting and imprinting. Each African culture has its own preferences, and various areas of the region favor various techniques.



*Figure 29 Kente textiles (Source: Howstuffworks.com)*

Two types of Ghanaian textiles, andinkra fabric with stamped designs and kente cloth, woven in vibrant colors, are examples of African textiles. People in Mali make bogolan fabric out of river mud; Nigerians make adire cloth out of indigo dye and resist-paste; and two different cultural groups in Ghana make bogolanfini or bogolan cloth also out of river mud.

Several African tribes place a high value on weaving. Twisting and weaving thread, for example, is compared to procreation and the concept of reincarnation by the Dogon people of the central plateau region of Mali. Textile hue also has a lot of implications and may symbolize a multitude of distinct characteristics and attributes. For instance, black and white kente fabric is commonly used at burials of aged persons among the Ewe and Ashanti to indicate both a celebration of life and grief of mortality. In the majority of situations, a widow is forced to wear her deceased husband's clothing for multiple days.

Textiles in this region can and have been utilized as historical accounts. Frequently, fabrics can be used to honor a person, a historical event, or even a political agenda. A large part of the material recounted focuses on how foreigners effected African nations rather than the African tribes themselves. The tapestries depict Roman and Arab conquests, as well as how Islam and Christianity influenced African culture. Major events like colonization, the African slave trade, and even the Cold War can be seen depicted in textiles. Historical evidence can be seen in these fabrics, providing viewpoints where traditional means of recording history are not available recorded. Also, Throughout the colonial period, Western African trend for cotton fabrics spurred early South-South trading.



### Cultural context: motifs and symbolism

West African arts were and are not designed to stand alone; rather, they were intended to be active cultural components of thriving communities, displaying evolving interactions of materials, themes, techniques, and motifs in West African contexts. West African arts were and are not designed to stand alone; rather, they were intended to be active cultural components of thriving communities, displaying evolving interactions of materials, themes, techniques, and motifs in West African contexts.

The visual and socio-political relevance of a single piece would be amplified, not obscured, by this confluence of multiple forms of art and its corresponding symbolism. The study of the interconnections between these distinct objects is used to broaden the comprehension of the depth of West African arts as a whole by contrasting art mediums that share common components. Notwithstanding its tremendous diversity, while looking at the entirety of West African visual culture, there appear to be certain uniting creative characteristics.

The human form has historically been the primary focus of African artisans. Deviating from natural proportions, figurative sculpture utilizes a conceptual underpinning with the simplification and exaggeration of human characteristics. In many paintings, as an illustration, the head is framed to be proportionally bigger than the body. Across many African communities, the head is seen to have a specific role in steering one's fate and prosperity, hence this formal focus has symbolic value. In multifigure compositions, African painters frequently use size for symbolic impact, a technique known as hierarchical representation. The most significant member is

portrayed as the biggest figure in these circumstances, while others of lesser significance progressively shrink in scale.



*Figure 30 Nok head (Source: Thoughtco)*

Animals having unique characteristics, such as antelopes, elephants, e.t.c are frequently depicted in art. The nineteenth-century Fon (southern-Benin tribe) ruler Guezo, for example, is symbolized by a buffalo, an animal that symbolizes power and resolve, and was chosen as his iconic image through Ifa divination (a key component of religious practice). Animals eating other animals might also be a metaphor for opposing spiritual or societal forces. Their portrayal is supposed to urge others to try alternate, less damaging methods of resolving a pressing social situation.

Animal characteristics can also be merged to create new forms that integrate intricate concepts. Ci wara headdresses, for example, are modeled after the traits of numerous antelope species and may also include those of other species, all of which are extremely significant creatures among the Bamana. The fabled Ci Wara, a heavenly entity seen as half man and half antelope who gave agricultural practices to the Bamana, is evoked by the ensuing fusion of animal shapes.

Abstraction is apparent in sculptures depicting animals as well, with pendants depicting spiders, a sign of divine insight, while diamond-shaped patterns portray frogs, which symbolize reproductive success and growth in the Cameroon Grass fields. Plants are used as reference points in several types of symbolism in African art.

## Chapter 4: The Weaponized Museum: Siting Culture without Context

Cultural heritage is the tangible legacy of a group or society's physical artifacts (such as structures, landmarks, natural landscape, literature, artistic works, and artifacts) inherited from previous generations, preserved in the present, and gifted for future generations' gain. Because cultural legacy is one-of-a-kind and unrepeatable, it falls to the modern generation to preserve and restore it. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines heritage as “the product and witness of the different traditions and of the spiritual achievements of the past and . . . thus an essential element in the personality of peoples.”



*Figure 31 Relevant Cityscapes (Source: BBC)*

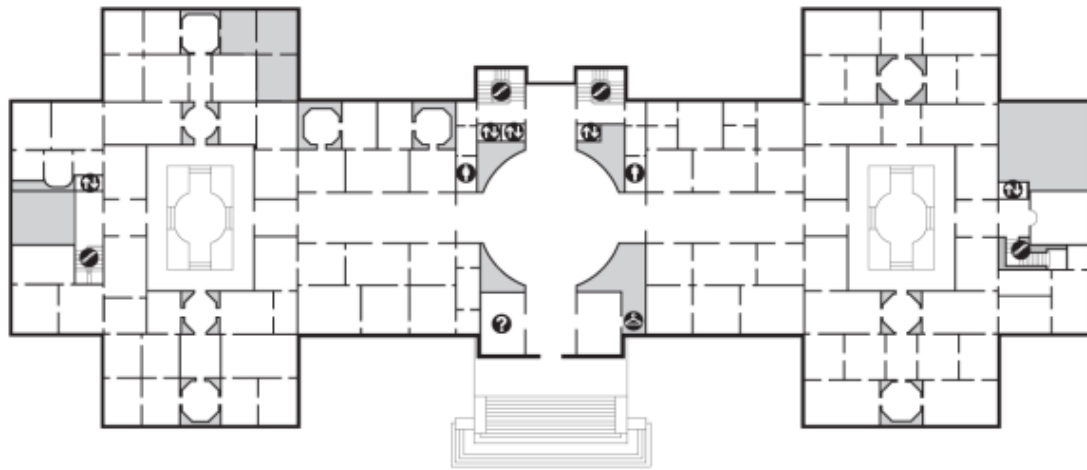
Cultural heritage assets are extremely valuable historically and culturally, hence protecting them against stealing, looting, unauthorized procurement, displacement, and damage is imperative. Monumentally, cultural heritage objects are significant for modern civilization because they reflect humanity's heritage, pre-colonial past, and cultural shifts. An assessment of society's adaptations, including all forms of social, spiritual, economic, and scientific advancements, is possible with the help of a documentation of its history. Furthermore, items of cultural property are extremely valuable to varied ethnic and cultural groups as they help to foster a sense of national identity and pride, which is an asset that ought to be protected to the greatest extent possible.

Third, cultural heritage is a commodity that creates a stream of revenue through tourism, branding, and educational structures. The value that derives from cultural heritage can last for centuries in the future. Fourth, cultural heritage should be protected for equitable reasons; thieves should not be able to gain exclusive access to these objects and reap their value while simultaneously depriving the world from experiencing their value. Lastly, cultural heritage theft should be policed because of its link to global terrorism, imperialism, and colonialism.

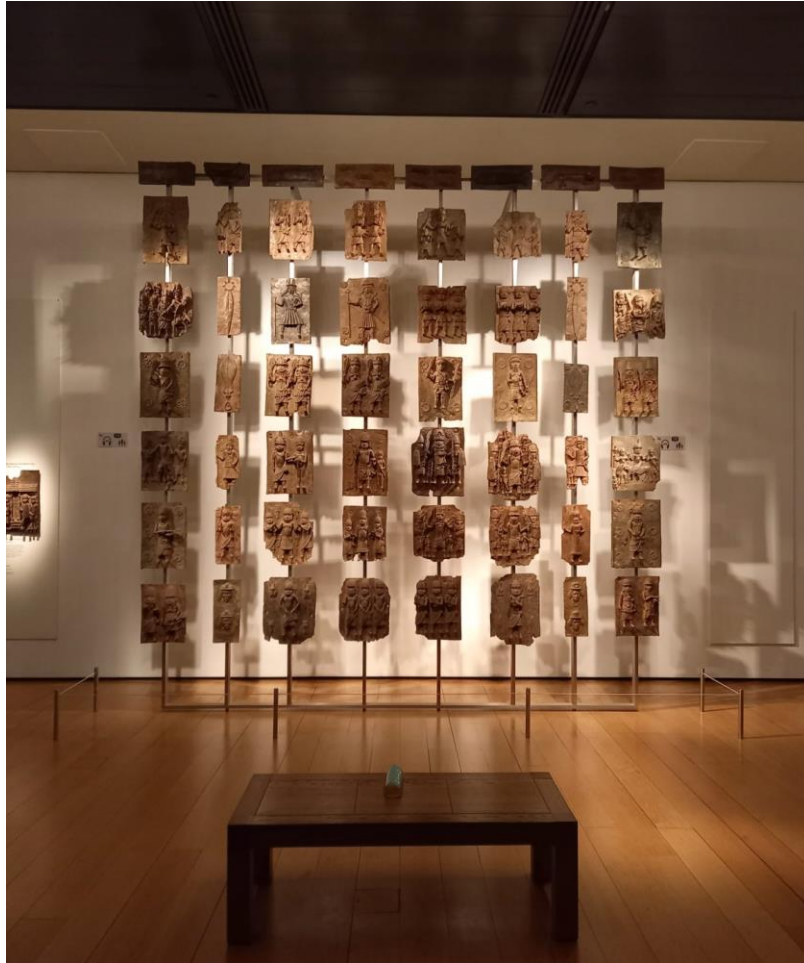
### *Critiquing the Linear Museum typology*

This thesis exploration sits as a post-Colonial critical approach to what a museum is and how it functions in a city and a community. In defining what a postcolonial museum approach is for a modern West African context, we must first set up the basis of a critique of the linear narrative, decontextualized museum narrative.

In a precedent comparison of the west wing of the National Gallery of Art, the approach to the museum is very linear, where the exhibit/gallery spaces are defined, perfect, dimensioned spaces. The objects that sit within make no reference beyond themselves to where they are being housed, sitting isolated.



*Figure 32 National Gallery of Art West Wing Plan (Source: nga.gov)*



*Figure 33 Benin bronzes exhibit, British Museum (Source: Hyperallergic.com)*

The development of the museum as a space of ideological fantasy, specifically focusing on representations of other cultures and peoples, is where European traditions and conventions of representing West African culture are historically rooted. The formation of museums as displays of state power and privilege is intrinsically linked to this mode of exhibition- the voyeuristic appropriation of West African culture. In the case of the Benin bronzes, this can be seen in the way they are viewed in the figure above of the British museum exhibit; isolated and entirely void of understanding how the objects were used, their significance to the people, and a general cultural/ historical context other than a plaque on a wall.

Functional/ideological precedent analyses

The New Acropolis Museum

The museum will serve as a permanent home for Acropolis archaeological artifacts. The building's shape evolved in response to the difficulties of designing a structure suitable for storing the most striking sculptures from Greek antiquity while also doing it in a location that was extremely ancient and colossal.



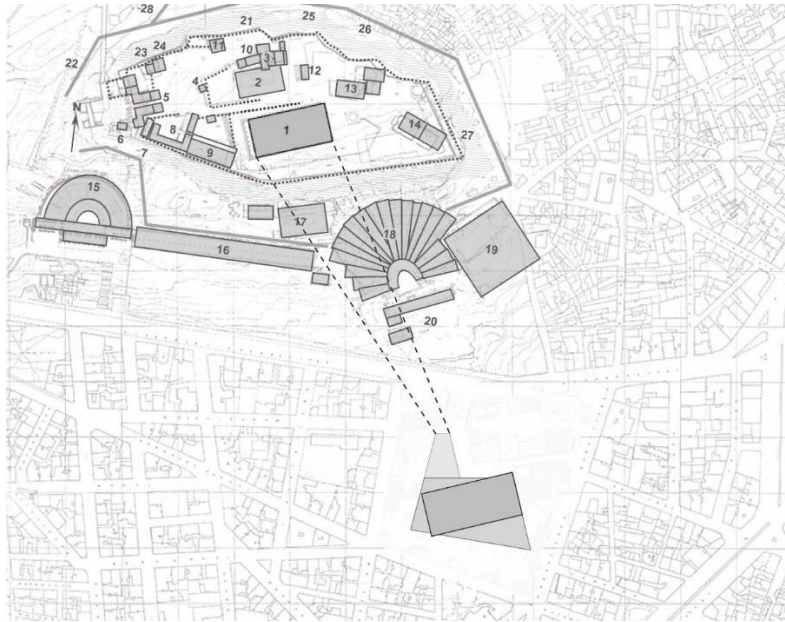
*Figure 34 The New Acropolis Museum (Source: ArchDaily)*





*Figure 35 The private bath of an Athenian city villa; the remains of a round tower from a late date surround it  
(Source: Giorgos Vitsaropoulos, Greece-is.com)*

The form of the museum becomes a key piece of contextualization of the museum to its artifacts, particularly in its orientation. The New Acropolis Museum, which has more than 150,000 square feet of exhibition space, highlights the Acropolis artifacts still in existence and act as a catalyst for boosting global interest in the ancient era. The 226,000 square foot Museum serves as a significant cultural landmark for Greece and a global hub for the art world; constructed as a purposefully unimpressive building to display the exceptional collection, drawing inspiration from classical Greek architecture with its straightforward and precise form. The problems of designing a structure fit for storing the most striking sculptures from Greek antiquity gave rise to the building's architecture.



*Figure 36 New Acropolis Museum Site Plan (Source: ArchDaily)*

The Parthenon, one of the most significant structures in Western history, lies in front of the museum at the foot of the Acropolis. The design into account the fragile archaeological sites, and the development of the modern city grid.

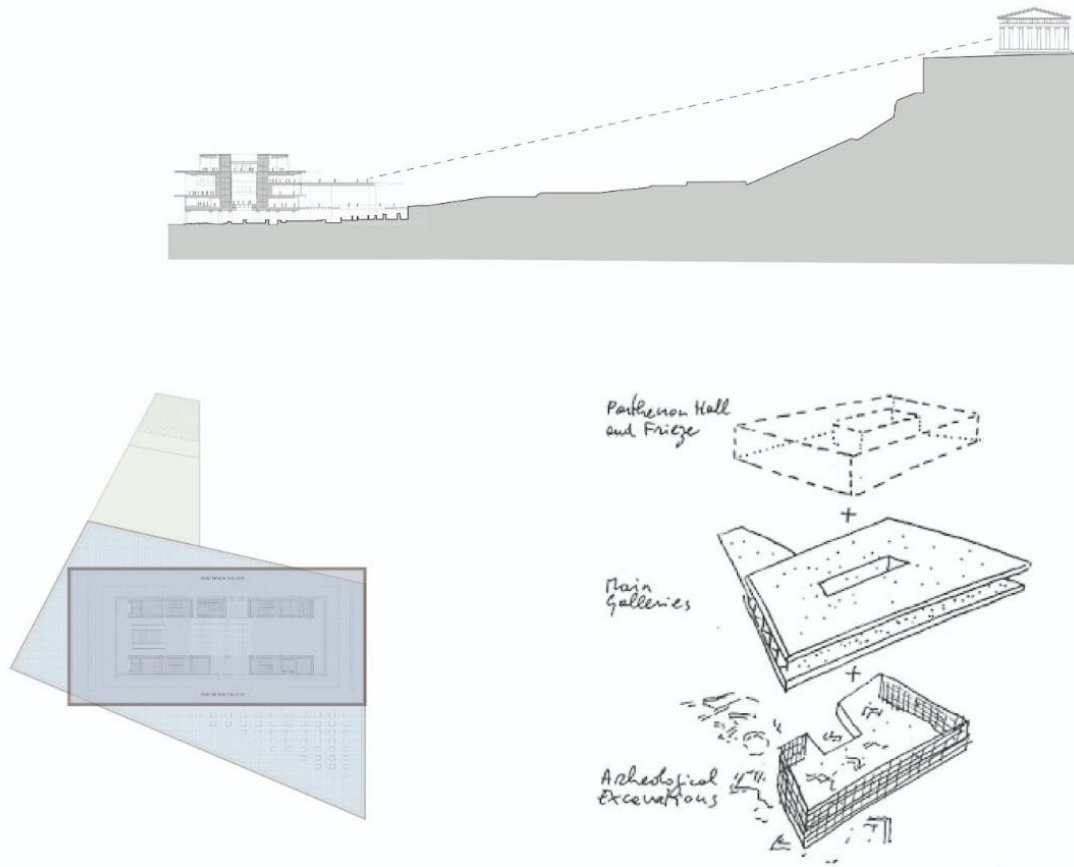


Figure 37 Museum development (Source: *Representational and Authentic: Sustainable Heritage Message through Architectural Experience in the Case of Bernard Tschumi's Acropolis Museum, Athens*)

### Edo Museum of West African Art

“From an initial glance at the preliminary design concept, one might believe this is a traditional museum but, really, what we are proposing is an undoing of the

objectification that has happened in the West through full reconstruction - David Adjaye<sup>7</sup>

The proposed EMOWAA museum will exhibit a variety of West African works of art and cultural artifacts, including the largest collection of Benin Bronzes to date. The institution will showcase both modern and historical items next to the Ob's (king's) palace. Showcasing artifacts that are now being returned to Benin from European museums and galleries will be its central focus.



*Figure 38 EMOWAA (Source: Adjaye Associates)*

EMOWAA takes design cues from earlier iterations of the same architectural typologies, creating its own courtyard in the shape of a garden—a reversal of the traditional courtyard typology. The pavilions in each of the raised volumes that make up the galleries, which hover above the gardens, are inspired by pieces of historically

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<sup>7</sup> “Edo Museum of West African Art (EMOWAA).” Adjaye Associates

recreated compounds. Additionally, by bracing and infusing the remains of the walls of the city, Adjaye's museum and the surrounding landscape seeks absorb those ruins-surviving portions of walls, moats, or entryways as a means of contextualization. Visitors may better grasp the actual meaning of these items within the customs, political economy, and rituals ingrained within the culture of Benin City thanks to these pieces that allow the objects themselves to be organized in their pre-colonial context.



*Figure 39 Edo Museum of West African Art; Volumetric Synthesis (Source: Image by author)*

#### National Museum of Roman Art, Merida, Spain

The preservation of Emerita Augusta's ruins while providing access to the theater and amphitheatre was the new museum's top priority. Much of the museum is housed inside a tall, above-ground structure that takes up the area across from the theater. The building's interior is defined by a number of soaring brick arches. With upper-story display rooms in place of clerestory balconies along an open, magnified

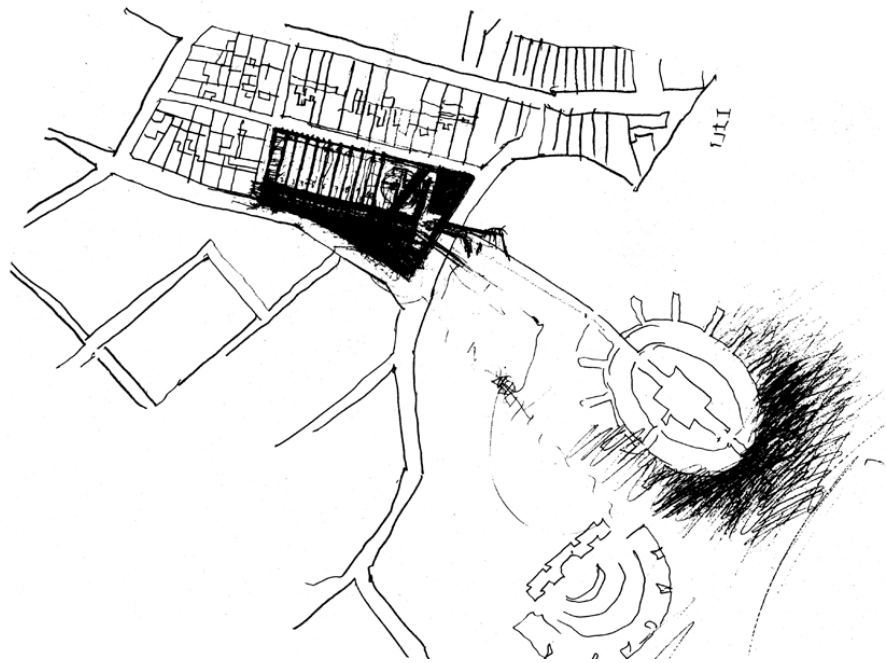
center "nave," this portion of the structure is a contemporary interpretation of the basilica style. Warm natural light floods the room through skylights located above the skinny arches. A underground "crypt" underneath the main level immerses visitors in a spotless Roman-era excavation of the old city, enabling the museum to both interpretively replicate the site's design and protect and show its archaeology.



*Figure 40 National Museum of Roman Art (Source: Area-arch.it)*

At the end of the Roman Empire, Mérida was the most significant Roman city in Spain. It was founded by the Augustan Legionaries in 24 B.C. The Theater and the Arena still stand as a striking reminder of this history today.<sup>42</sup> The Museum of Roman Art, which was constructed over a section of the still-underground Roman settlement, is located not far from these impressive artifacts. The project has a strong

ambition to remember and invoke the Roman past. Additionally, it is crucial that the Museum acquire the character and presence of a Roman structure without devolving into a rigid replica of the style; therefore, the priority given to the building as an expression of the style. In this sense, the building of the wall- a substantial masonry bearing wall covered in concrete—allows the physicality of the Roman brick wall to ultimately become the most significant aspect of the Museum. Through the use of a massive arch, a system of parallel walls is hollowed out, creating a virtual viewpoint in the continuity of the space and the primary area for object presentation. This is the major focus of the project. The parallel walls, when viewed perpendicularly, powerfully imply their role as storage barriers and give the impression that the Museum is a massive repository for archaeological artifacts.

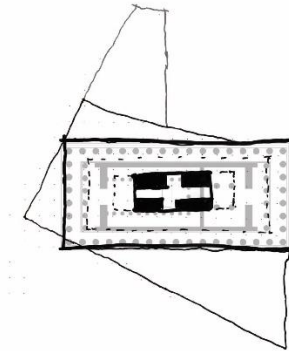


*Figure 41 Analysis of urban context (Source: Rafael Moneo)*

The artifacts are arranged on separate pedestals inside the main nave. In a number of areas adjacent to the main nave, cornices, capitals, statue pieces, mosaics, and reliefs are arranged on the transverse walls or put on exhibition cabinets. This source of indirect light that illuminates the significant collection of Roman statues reveals and partially explains the need for enclosure that permeates the Museum's construction. The area reserved for open space is the lower level where the ruins are located. Here, walls supported by arches that were cut into them provide a fascinating backdrop where the contrast between the ruins and the building that rose above them brought one closer to Roman civilization.

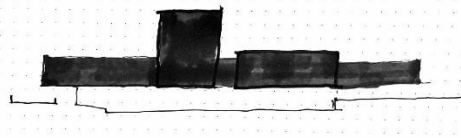


New Acropolis Museum, Athens, Greece 2009  
Bernard Tschumi



- Takes the Greek temple plan typology and skews it to orient towards the Parthenon remains.
- The missing artifacts' place in the museum is highlighted by empty spots.
- It directly responds to the Acropolis as a reference point.

Edo Museum of West African Art, David Adjaye



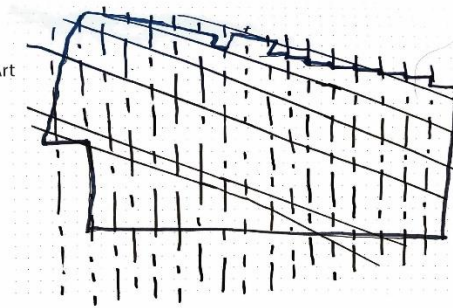
- The galleries float above the gardens and are articulated by a series of elevated volumes – an inversion of the courtyard typology.

-The museum is placed in the ruins of the Oba Palace and braces itself against the walls of Benin City.

- Pavilions which take their form from fragments of reconstructed historic compounds.

-The objects are arranged in their pre-colonial context and offer visitors the opportunity to better understand the true significance of these artefacts within the traditions, political economy and rituals enshrined within the culture of Benin City.

National Museum of Roman Art  
Merida, Spain 1986  
Rafael Moneo



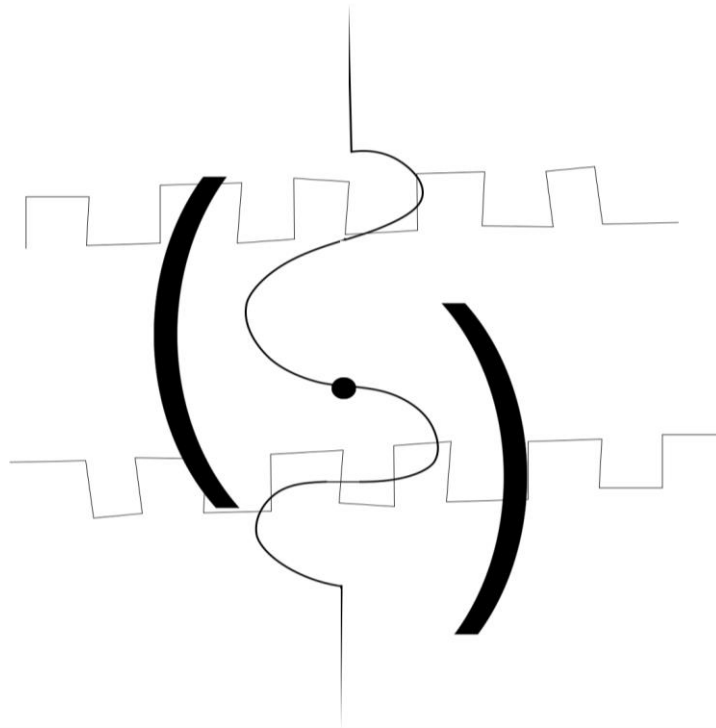
- Small foundations were laced into the ruins at optimal points creating a system of arches that are less regular than those in the galleries above.

- The museum follows the semi-regular grid of the ancient city of Merida, juxtaposing the alignment of ruins with that of the city streets.

Figure 42 Precedent study synthesis (Source: Images by author)

## Motif Concept: Flow

The application of the postcolonialism museum approach is one that is non-linear and layered- the question of if an African museum is capable of undoing this level of institutional violence, going beyond a restaging of the artefacts' abduction? The question of the role of a museum in a post-colonial one become one of showcasing the artifacts not only in regional proximity to their birthplaces, but also in a context that recognizes the multiplicity of use and weaving/layering of cultural contexts in use and symbolism.



*Figure 43 Motif: the postcolonial museum approach (Source: Images by author)*

More importantly, their return presents an opportunity to build on this knowledge and recognize that those who get the tell this history and the extent to which this history is told by an institution — these are not neutral choices. The figure above showcases the motif for this thesis' approach to a postcolonial museum narrative, becoming one of a woven non-linear narrative. The return of artifacts offers a chance to expand on this understanding and acknowledge that who gets to tell this history and how much of it is conveyed by an institution are not objective considerations.

## Chapter 5: The Politics of Repatriation

Artifacts taken from Benin's city are on exhibit in over 160 museums and galleries across Europe and North America. In present day Nigeria, the Oba's Palace of Benin City is located 157 miles east of the country's capital city of Lagos. Rebuilt in the mid-20th century, it sits on the same site as the palace complex built in the early 13th century for the Benin Empire. Although the current palace complex has decreased in size in comparison, the most notable difference would be the absence of the hundreds of bronze plaques that hung on the pillars and lined the courtyards of the Oba's Palace. Today, the bronzes are located in various museums across Europe and the United States. While the third largest collection of Benin Bronzes is dispersed throughout several museums in Nigeria, The British Museum in London and the Ethnological Museum of Berlin hold even more than the country that the bronzes are derived from. While the topic of the repatriation of these plaques is very prevalent in the media today, in comparison, there has been fewer breakthroughs in the repatriation process for the Benin Bronzes than for the repatriation of Nazi-looted art or even Elgin's Marbles.

<b>Where are the Benin Bronzes Now?</b>	
<b>Museums</b>	<b>Number of Objects</b>
<b>British Museum (London, UK)</b>	About 928 objects in two collections
<b>Ethnological Museum of Berlin (Berlin, Germany)</b>	About 580 objects
<b>Pitt Rivers Museum (Oxford, UK)</b>	About 327 objects
<b>Weltmuseum Wien (Neue Burg, Austria)</b>	About 173 objects
<b>Museum of Ethnology, Arts and Craft (Hamburg, Germany)</b>	About 196 objects
<b>Dresden Museum of Ethnology (Dresden, Germany)</b>	About 182 objects
<b>Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (Cambridge, UK)</b>	About 136 objects
<b>Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York City, USA)</b>	About 163 objects
<b>Oxford University's Gardens, Libraries and Museums (Oxford, England)</b>	About 105 objects

*Table 1 Where in the World are the Benin Bronzes? (Source: Author)*

Though the third largest collection of the Benin Bronzes exist in multiple museums across Nigeria, the table above (Table 1) shows a sample of the vast, numerous collections the artifacts belong to presently. The Benin Bronzes sit as a well-known, established, integral example of the placement of these extracted pieces of cultural identity.

While there is no clear answer to the topic of repatriation, especially in the case of the Benin bronzes the question exists whether these objects up for repatriation need to be placed back into their original sites to be viewed with their needed levels of cultural significance. Particularly when these objects become the only records of a past powerful empires.

#### *Colonial authority as it relates to the art and site*

The notion that certain groups are not capable of preserving their own cultural property has been one that have hindered the pursuit for repatriation at least for the last decade.

#### *The Ownership Debate: Ownership vs Original Location*

Who is the rightful owner?

The argument of who owns the objects is one of the guiding premises related to the argument behind their decolonization. Previous attempts at repatriation have been met with push back, arguing that there is no rightful owner as the cultures that previously thrived are non-existent and the museums that they are in now are the rightful owners due to the time spent.



## Chapter 6: Design Approach

### Abstract

This thesis research would lead to the establishment of a museum and cultural center campus dedicated to repatriating and resettling West African artifacts. In order to address this larger concern of the erasure of cultural histories, a master plan will be developed that incorporates not just a facility to house the displaced but also learning areas within the site. The proposal would contain gallery and exhibit spaces, as well as dedicated spaces for digitally displaying objects that are not currently housed in the museum. As part of the programmatic approach, the Museum and Cultural Center would include a library, major event space(s), as well as learning spaces. In its general design approach, the project would primarily be made up of six spheres of programmatic directions: art exhibition, support systems, public space, educational spaces, and curatorial needs. By incorporating craft learning as part of the Arts Center concept, the museum campus would become part of a greater celebration and study of West African arts and culture. To accomplish this, areas near the museum, which serves as the site's main focal point, would be dedicated to craftsmanship, with numerous learning stations teaching carpentry, metalworking, and weaving techniques.



## Site selection

Larger urban scale



*Figure 44 Lagos state (Source: Data Analysis of Land Use Change and Urban and Rural Impacts in Lagos State, Nigeria)*

To this day, the entrustment of West African countries with the stewardship of artifacts from their own communities has not been fully achieved, actively denying them the right to tell their own stories and histories through their own material heritage. The site context of this thesis proposal begs to be one of returning back to the original context. In celebrating West African art through repatriation, the art must sit in its original home, as so should the museum campus that houses them. In understanding the appropriate place to site the project, the site needs to be placed in an area of a similar level of significance to the art that it is housed in.

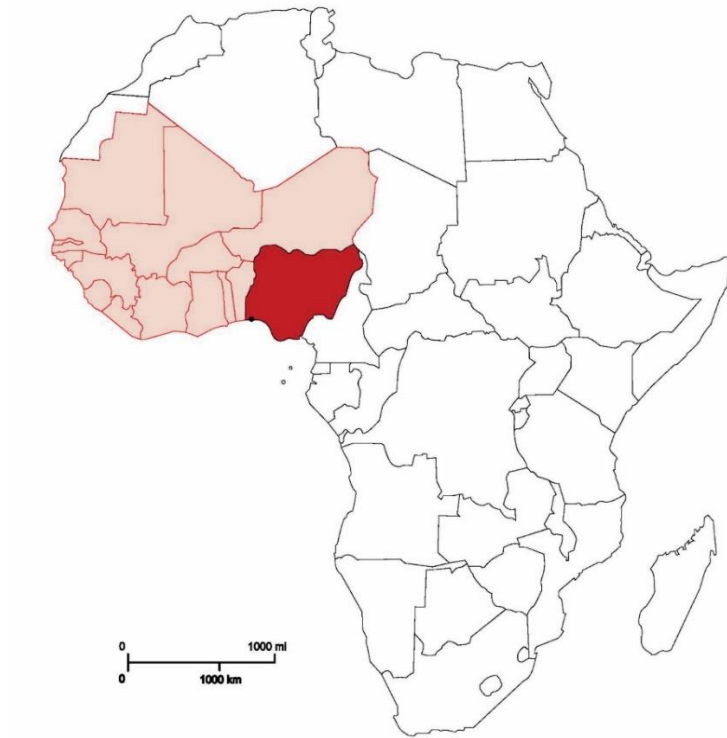


Figure 45 Regional Context (Source: Image by author)



Figure 46 Regional context (Source: Images by author)

Lagos state, Nigeria sits at a really unique point in Nigeria and the West African context. The city is a major African financial centre and is the economic hub of Lagos State and Nigeria at large. Lagos Island's National Museum Lagos displays cultural artifacts and crafts to the north. With 15.4 million people living inside the city limits as of 2015, Lagos is the biggest metropolis in Nigeria and the second-most populated city in Africa. Up until December 1991, Lagos served as Nigeria's capital when the government decided to relocate it to Abuja in the country's center. As of 2018, there were around 23.5 million people living in the Lagos metropolitan region, making it the biggest metropolitan area in Africa. Lagos, the economic center of Lagos State and all of Nigeria, is a significant financial hub for Africa. The city, which has a big impact on business, entertainment, technology, education, politics, tourism, art, and fashion, has been called the cultural, financial, and entertainment center of Africa. Lagos is also one of the 10 cities and metropolitan regions with the fastest rate of growth worldwide. The megacity is home to one of the biggest and busiest seaports on the continent and has the fourth-highest GDP in Africa. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the Lagos metropolitan region is a significant center for education and culture.



Figure 47 Lagos epicenter (Source: 4Umaps.com)

Aspect	ca. 1960	ca.1980	ca. 2000
Population size (in millions)	0.7	3.5	10.5
% of Net migrants	56	65	88
% Residents on mainland	38	80	90
% National industrial employment	20	53	60
Incidence of poverty	10	20	35

Housing stock deficit (in millions)	0.1	0.7	1.2
Solid waste generated (in thousand tonnes per week)	5	17	54
Actual land area (in thousand hectares)	12	23	35

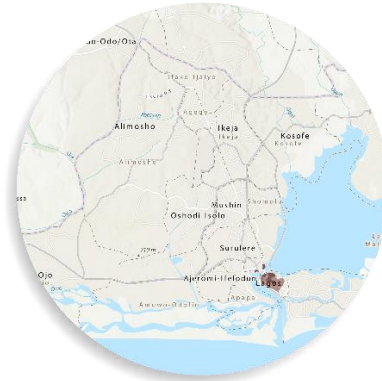
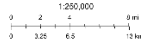
*Table 2 Lagos Survey Data (Source: World Bank)*

The growth of Lagos over time began with its city center, expanding further out into the mainland and into the Lagos island. This map displays the expansion of Lagos' urban area during the last 50 years. The footprints show the tale of the social, economic, ecological, and political variables that have mutually impacted Lagos' urbanization and tell how the city has developed. The lagoon to the east, the marshes to the west, and the rivers to the north now determine the shape of the city and its boundaries. Ikorodu has grown into a large satellite city as a result of the city's expansion over the line between Lagos State and Ogun State due to the city's rising density inside these bounds. Land and housing are under fierce rivalry, and only those in the social and economic upper classes can afford to acquire a home. Urban growth is still influenced by transportation, with the Lekki axis growing quickly thanks to the expressway and the west axis projected to rise as well thanks to the construction of the first light rail line.

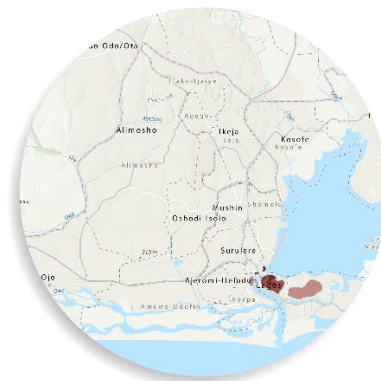
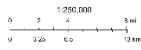
Legend: Lagos, historical boundaries - 1850



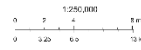
Legend: Lagos, historical boundaries - 1850



Legend: Lagos, historical boundaries - 1850  
Lagos, historical boundaries - 1900  
Lagos, historical boundaries - 1950



Legend: Lagos, historical boundaries - 1850  
Lagos, historical boundaries - 1900  
Lagos, historical boundaries - 1950



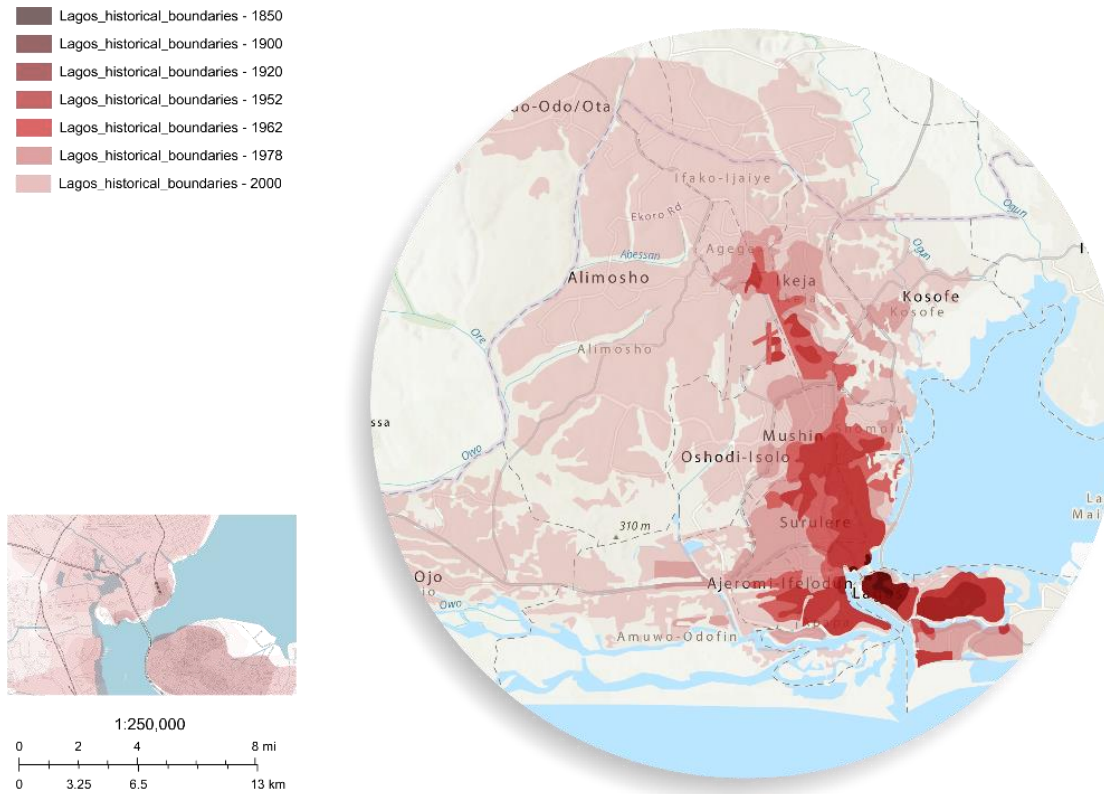
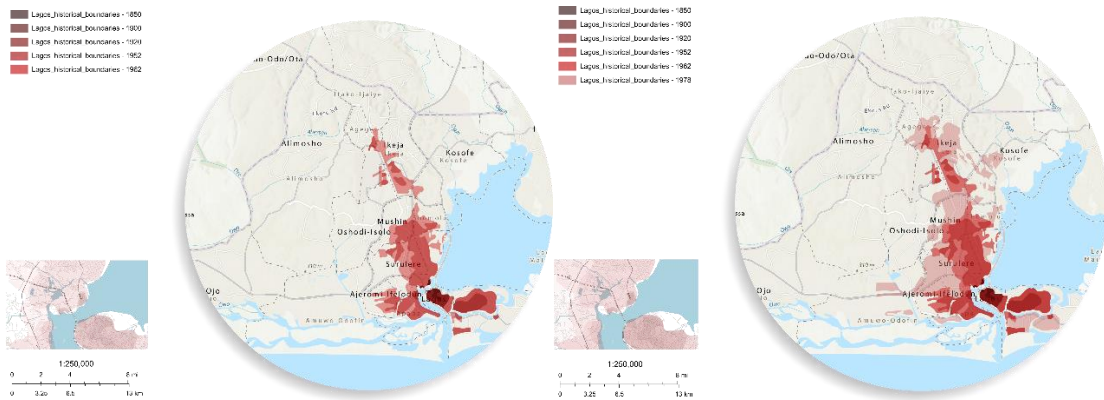


Figure 48 Lagos growth and urbanization (Source: Images by author)

The city considerably evolved for the post-Independence modernization display FESTAC '77 with projects for culture, trade, housing, and industry. It also grew and became denser around the existing settlements and began to extend along the West African Highway. In 1994, the third mainland bridge was also completed, which had a big influence on mainland growth.

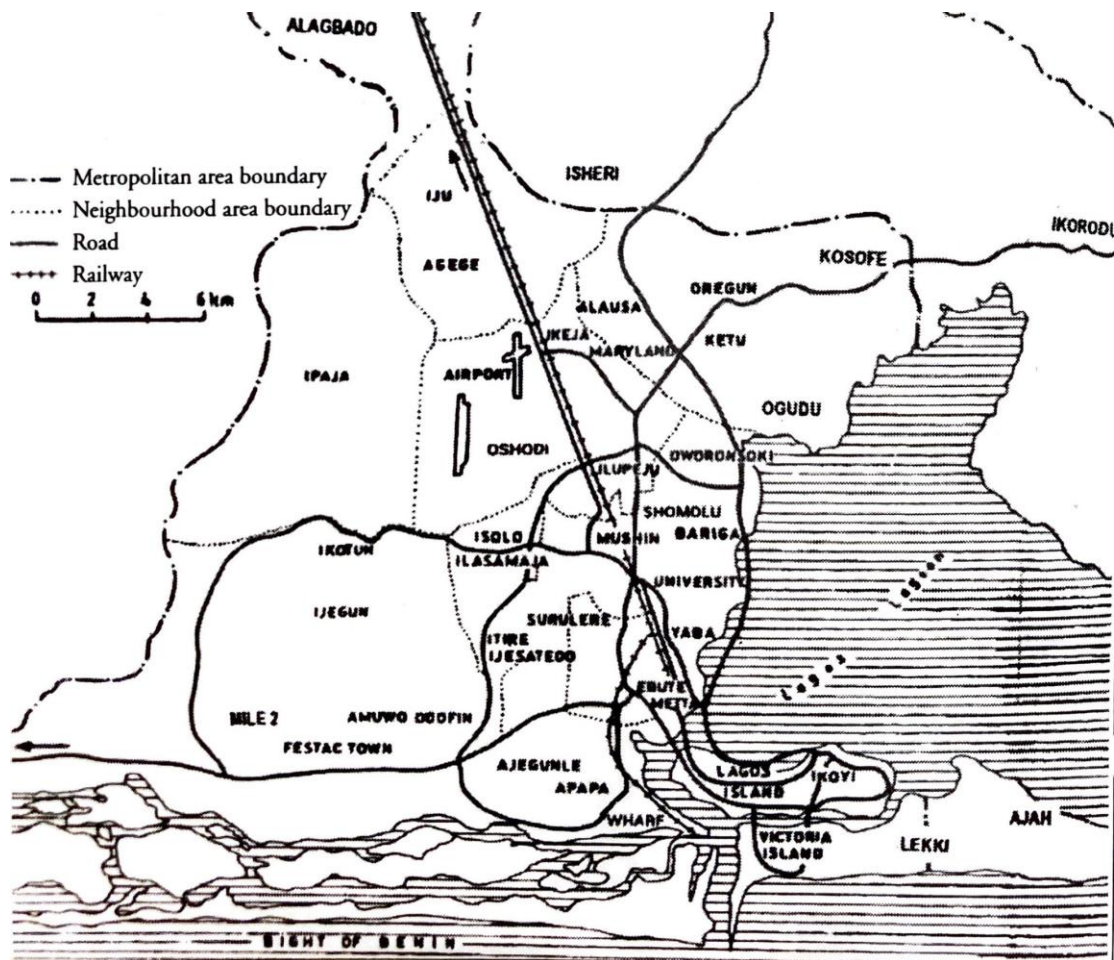


Figure 49 Map of Metropolitan Lagos (Source: Urbanization in Nigeria)

The best site vehicle to test this thesis concept would be one that allowed it to become the epicenter of the city, surrounded by a larger scale urban civic context.



The site would need to respond as a beacon of cultural significance and a celebration of culture by being at a point with not only local but also international engagement for West Africa and beyond. Through the use of a large site scale and major proximities, the Museum and Cultural Center campus will be able to act as a major point of tourism and civic engagement for the nation. The National Theatre site answers these needs by intersecting a primary thoroughfare of the major city. The site also sits in an urban context located next to major points of local and international travel.

#### Site scale / Context

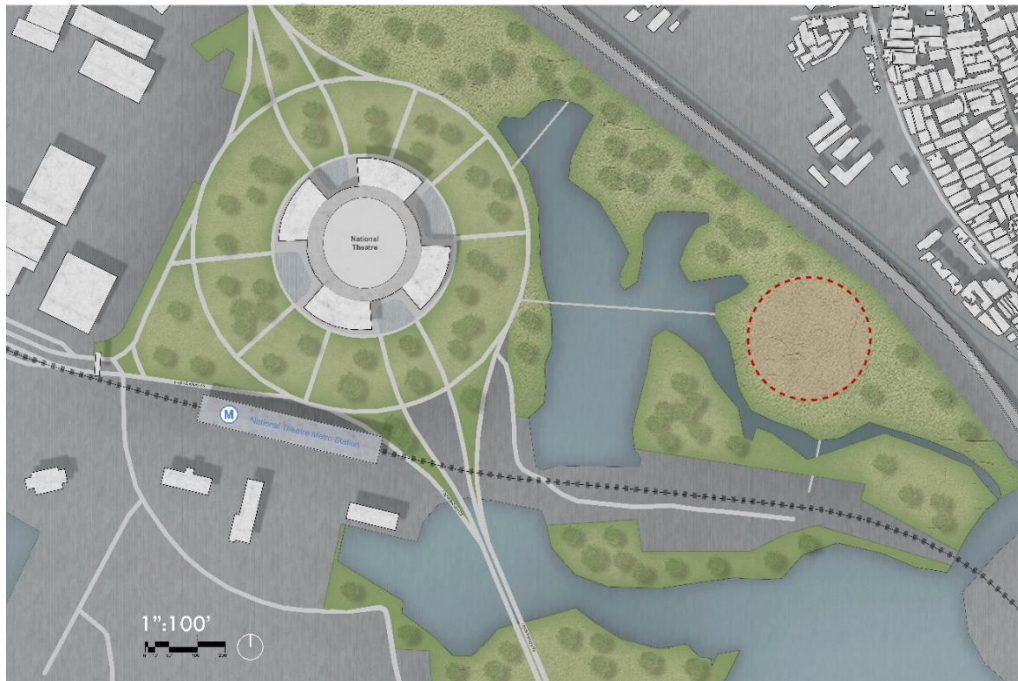


Figure 50 Site Plan of City Center (Source: Image by author)

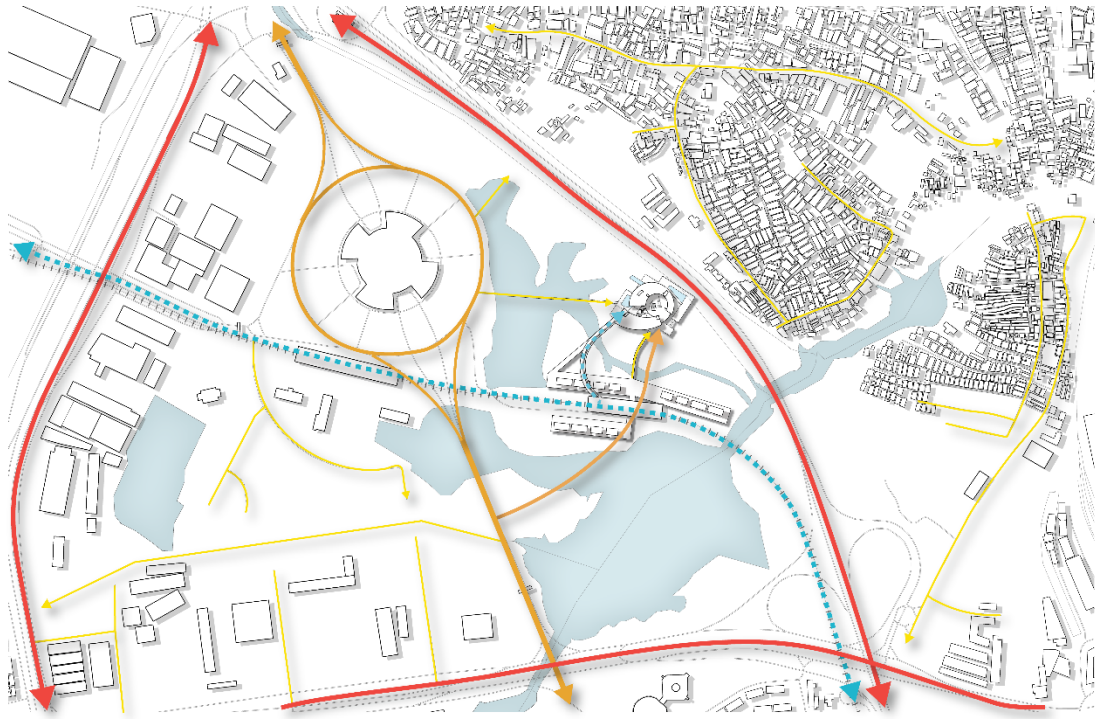


Figure 51 Site Opportunities (Source: Image by author)



Figure 52 National Theatre (Source: Nairaland.com)

Surrounded on the west by dense neighborhoods and on the east by a major elevated highway, the site is a tranquil spot within the bustling city. The site becomes a major civic center with the location of the National Theatre, is the primary center for the performing arts in Nigeria. The National Theatre, located in Iganmu, Lagos, is a legendary performance space created to conserve, present, and advance arts and culture in Nigeria.

The theatre was born in 1976 in preparation of the 1977 Festival of Arts and Culture in Nigeria (FESTAC '77). The National Theatre's façade was created, molded, and constructed to resemble a military helmet, embodying the strength of a nation with its form.

#### Site Topography

The city of Lagos currently has its demerits, namely with the rapid urbanization of the city, along came the levels of development with it. The city of Lagos as it has been developed has been ridden with overpopulation and flooding. It has been described as the “sinking city” where many areas of land are currently at or below sea level and trending downwards. This has come as a result of the methods of overdevelopment through piling on marshlands, a temporary solution for development, a larger issue in terms of the long-term consequences for the city.

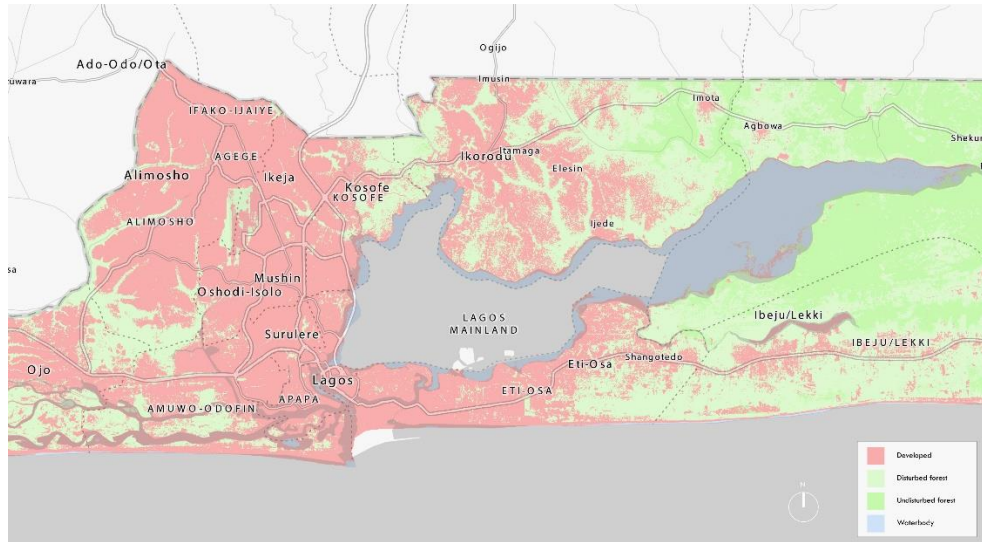


Figure 53 Lagos development (Source: Image be author)

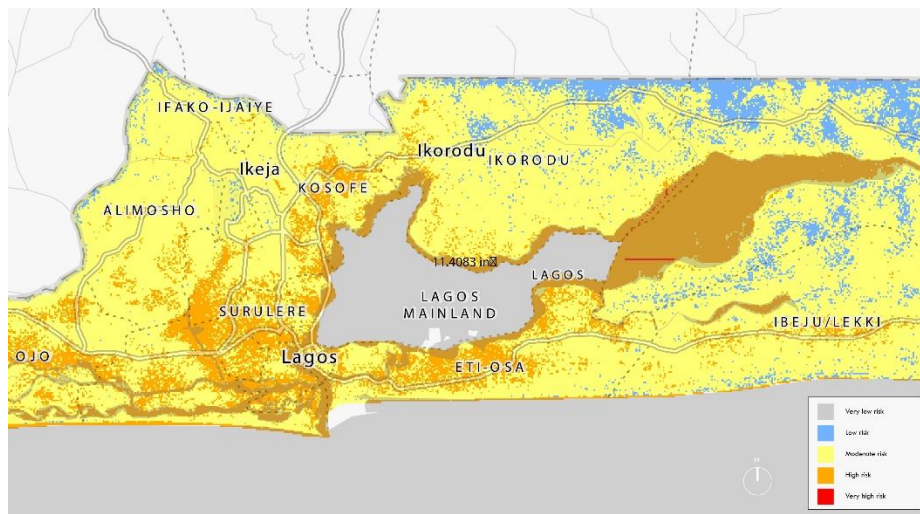


Figure 54 Lagos flooding risk (Source: Image be author)

The National Theatre environs are not an exception to this problem, though the Theatre itself was built on piles and is currently being actively maintained, the rest of the site development has not been so lucky. Being previously developed, the figure below shows the site is currently at and below the current sea level, where the development has blocked inlets to the wetland in the area and has sunk significantly so that it now sits as a polluted, stagnant marshland.

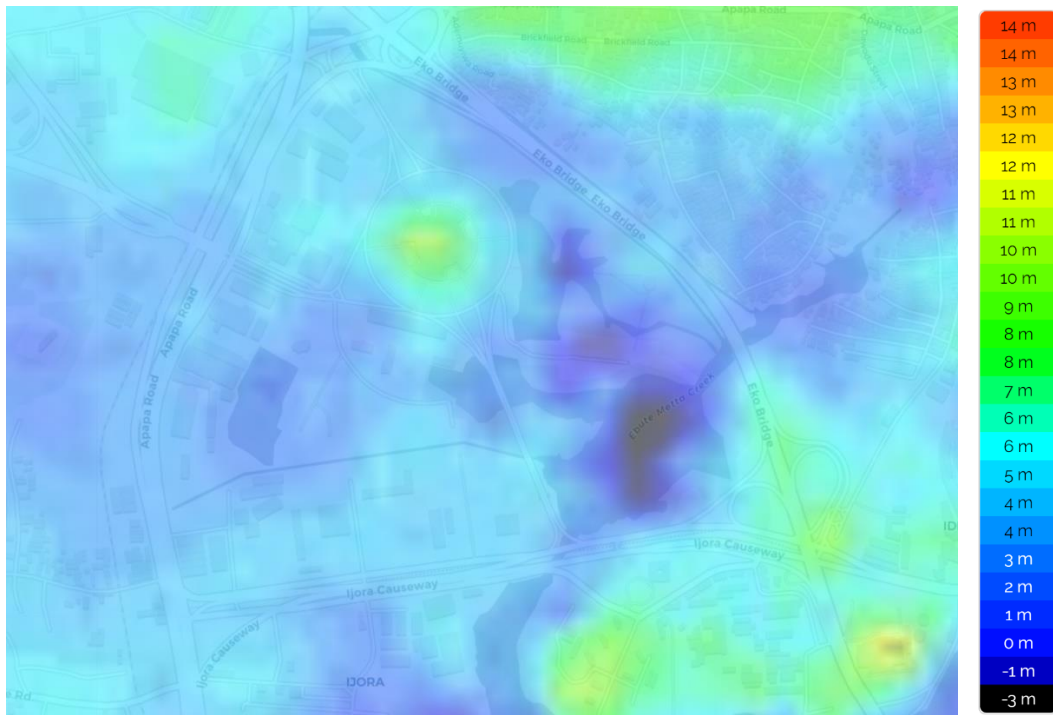


Figure 55 Sea level rise at site (Source: Images by author)



Figure 56 Site Conditions (Source: Images by author)

### Scale of reach

Expanding the reach: rehousing and redistribution

Within the argument of expanding the reach of the museum, the cultural center strives to expand the artifacts to a level of global recognition (with levels of contextualization) by filtering it through the Cultural Center contexts within this city and site. Through this site in Lagos state and its potential for global outreach in the scale of the city and connections outward, the artifacts still act on its ability to reach a global audience; but this time with a richer view and understanding.

### Design Process

Repatriating the Land

An integral piece of the site approach is in its response to the sinking land- as part of this thesis designing for the site conditions becomes a part of the key argument- how do we repatriate the land? Some of the site strategies include:

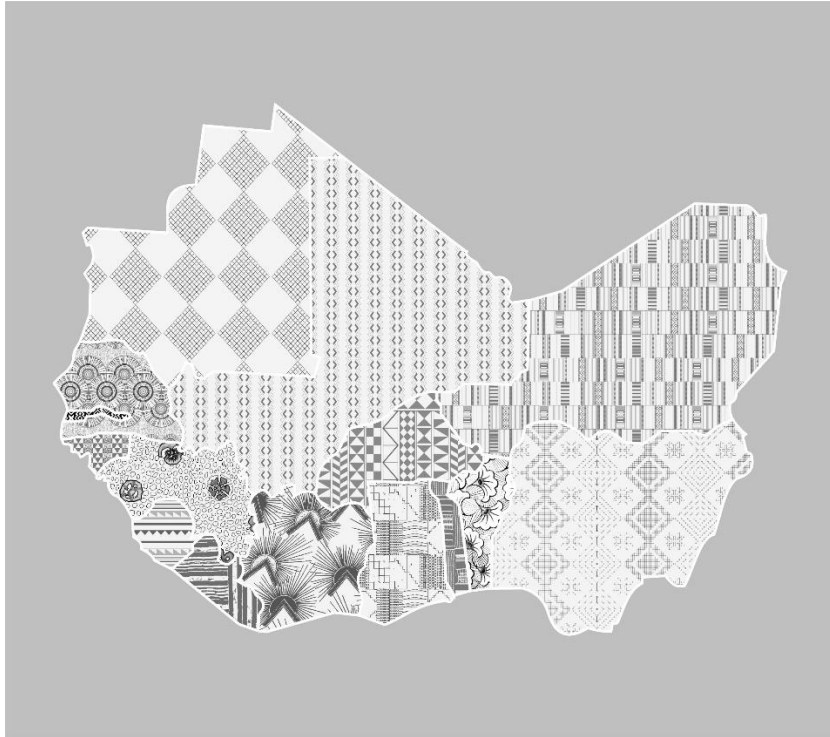
1. Integrating the softscape on the site.
2. Building above the land on plinths.
3. Staging elements within the landscape.
4. Re-opening up key inlets to encourage waterflow.



*Figure 57 Repatriating the Land (Source: Image by author)*

### Façade screening

As previously covered within this document, the ideas of motif and texture are extremely integral to an understanding of the cultural context. This thesis exploration pulls on the ideas of patternmaking and the motif in its conceptualization.



*Figure 58 Pattern mapping of West Africa (Source: Image by author)*

The motif for the screening of the bronze façade of the museum came into fruition with the pulling apart of a pattern study of West Africa, taking in concepts of the motif, repetition, forms, and geometry.



*Figure 59 Forming the Motif (Source: Image by author)*





Figure 60 Skin Initial Conceptualization (Source: image by author)

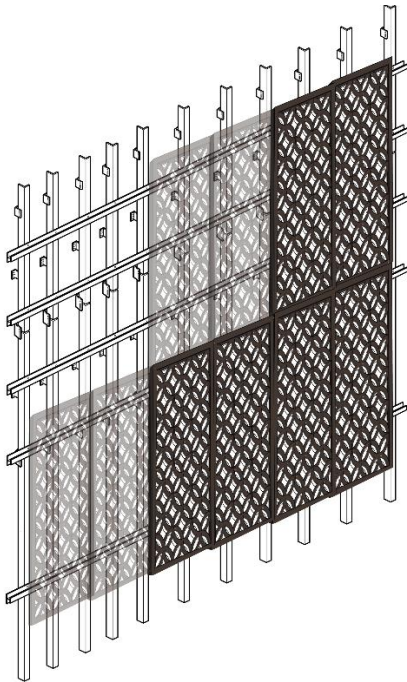


Figure 61 Module Progression (Source: Image by author)

## The Gele



*Figure 62 Gele (Source: unknown)*

For this thesis exploration, symbolism is relied heavily on in the use of the Gele. The Gele is a kind of fabric head scarf worn by women that is popular in various regions of Southern and West Africa. The head tie can be used as a practical item in many contexts or as a decorative head covering or fashion piece. In West Africa, the Gele exists as a representation of prestige and authority. People who could afford the Gele frequently donned more unusual hues and fashions. Practically speaking, the headdress functioned as a way to block out the light.

Within, the context of this thesis, pulling the gele apart and studying its wrapping, it is revealed in its construction the potential for architectural exploration and extrapolation. As a part of the thesis process, the gele was studied in section and plan; revealing opportunities for layering of space and woven narratives.

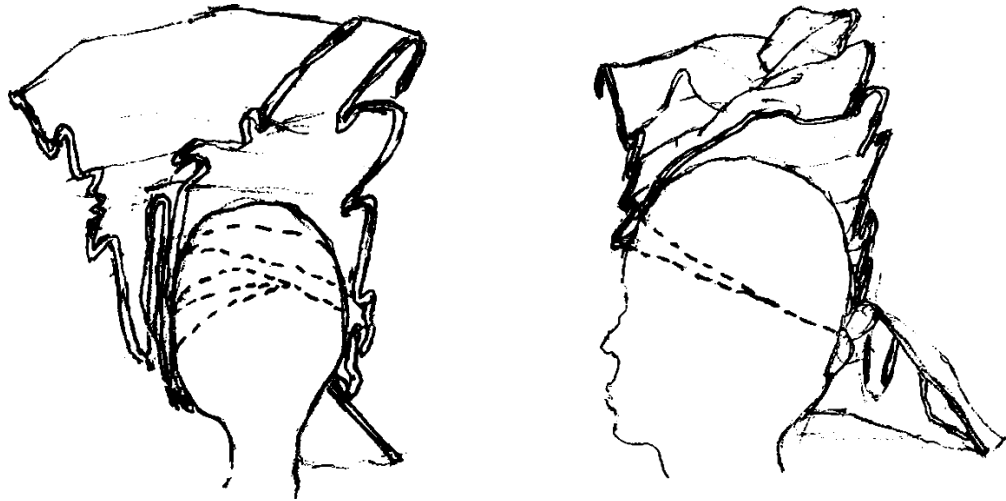


Figure 63 Gele Section (Source: Images by author)

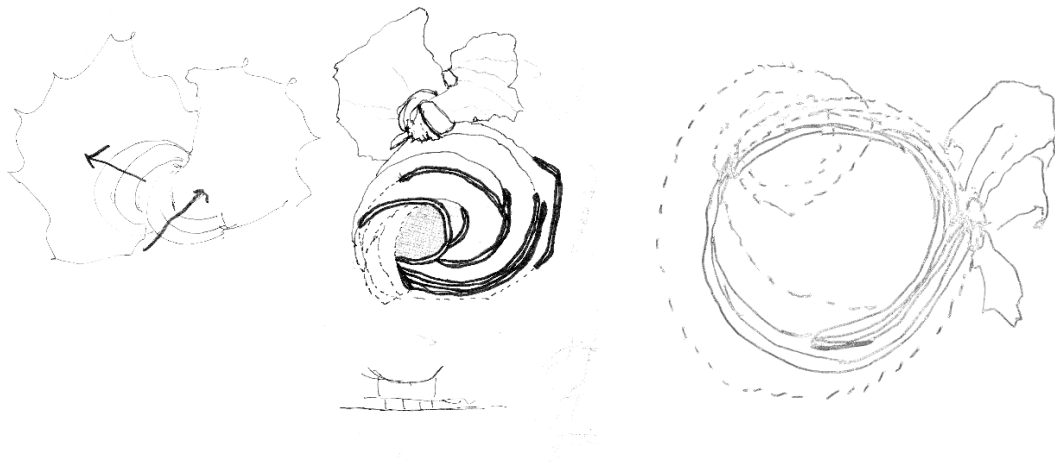


Figure 64 Gele plan (Source: Images by author)

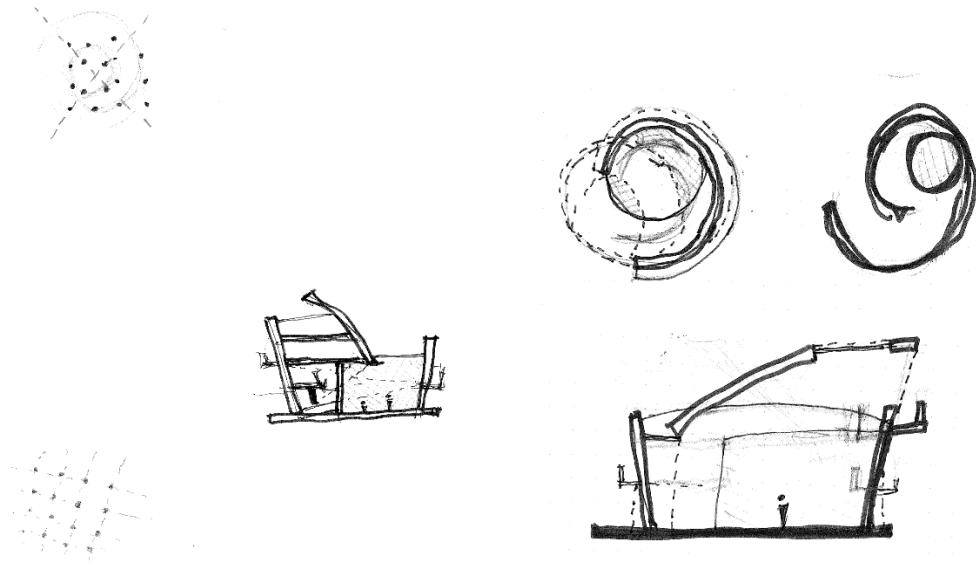


Figure 65 Gele extrapolations (Source: Image by author)

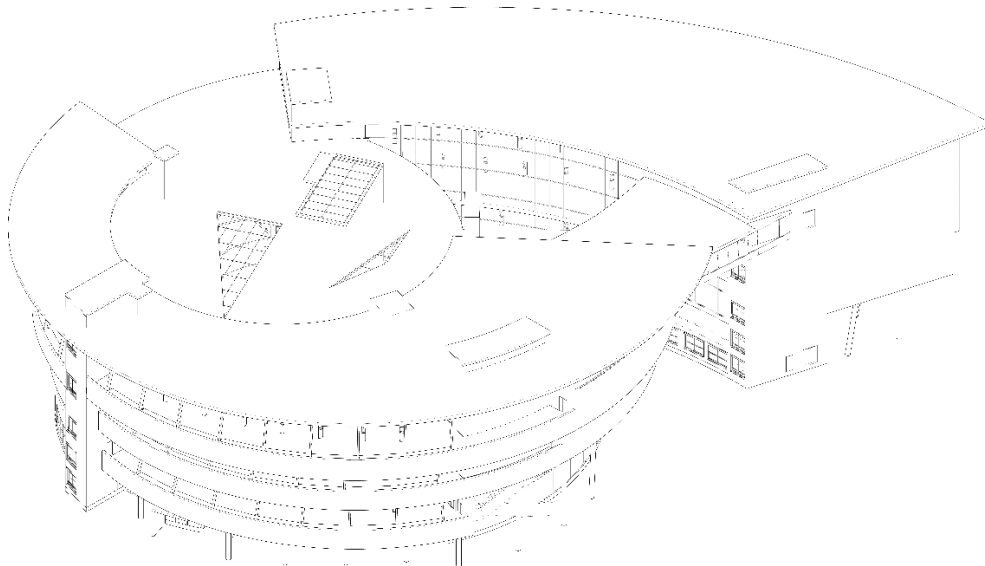
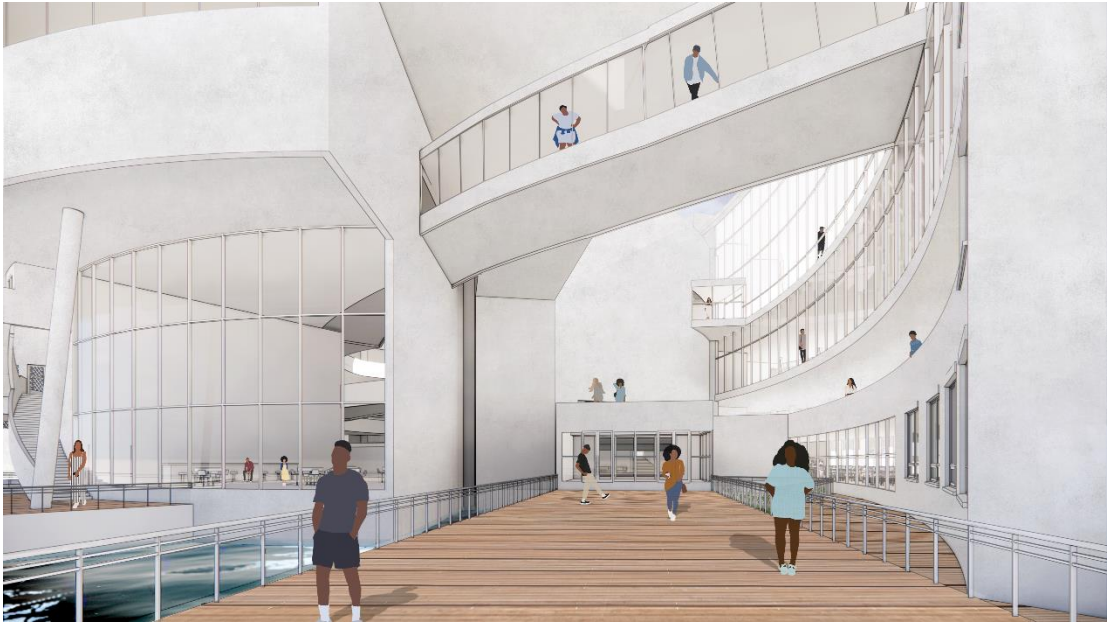


Figure 66 Formulaic Application (Source: Image by author)

## Chapter 7: Design Proposal



*Figure 67 Museum Arrival (Source: Author)*

The Gele Museum and Cultural Center strives to be a poetic addition to what is becoming an active city center for Lagos, but beyond that, it becomes an active starting model of what the repatriation process for West Africa could be. Standing as a model of a postcolonial approach to equitable repatriation and restitution, it intrinsically creates a motif of what a postcolonial, contextualized museum of restitution could be for West African art and artifacts. The Museum further incorporates aspects of West African identity, space planning, and architecture in its use of materiality, incorporation of making and market as key “places,” and prioritizing fluid, multifunctional spaces.

The thesis approach also strives to be a meaningful point of repatriation for its context as well. The water flow and ground conditions at the site have drastically changed with the rising levels of urban development in its vicinity, the lagoon has become stagnant and polluted as the inlets have been blocked. As part of the site approach, the complex is lifted above grade and invites the softscape into the site, using the land as a part of its design language. The thesis response prioritizes unblocking key inlets, allowing for proper flood management in the waterflow and groundcover at the site.

Furthermore, a key piece of the thesis exploration is defining what a contextualized, postcolonial museum is and should be. In comparison to the linear museum narrative, the Gele Museum adopts one that is more about the fluidity and layering of space than the isolation (decontextualization) of the artifact. The thesis exploration becomes the antithesis of extractive colonialism, defined as a story that does not exist in isolation but is woven and layered with varied cultural contexts.

As a whole, major objectives guided the thesis approach, namely to;

1. Highlight the ongoing effects of colonialism of West African cultural identity.
2. Allow for direct, unobstructed access to cultural artifacts and narratives- ownership, restitution, and relearning.
3. Enhance the access to a narrative of artifacts as told by its owners.
4. Critique the decontextualized museum model- new model is a post-colonial approach to what a museum is and how it functions in a city and a community.
5. Celebrate West-African cultural identity as told by its artifacts.

Architectural Fabric

Program: Repatriation Process

Exploring program as a part of the repatriation process problem is integral for this thesis. In developing an understanding of what is needed for the repatriation process-creating spaces to house impermanent objects at various levels of impermanence, spaces that are indicative of the West African architectural context, and spaces for rehabilitation become paramount.

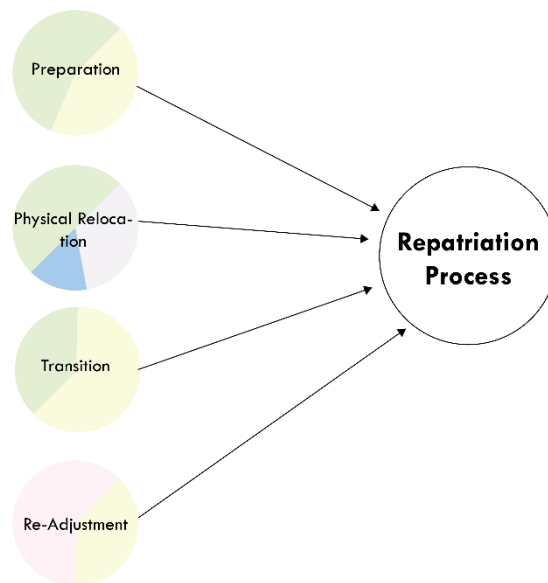


Figure 68 Repatriation process (Source: Image by author)

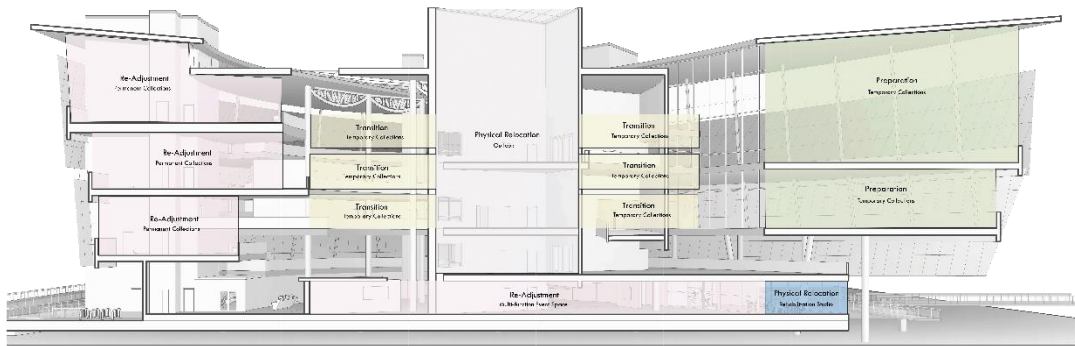


Figure 69 Program (Source: Image by author)

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### Layering of Space and Woven Narratives

Initial explorations of space and the design narrative withing the study of the Gele led to a synthesis of what the space would need to be to house these artifacts. Within this, the gallery/exhibits are designed to be undefined, nonlinear spaces that blur become about the intersection of multiple narratives- the pockets of space.



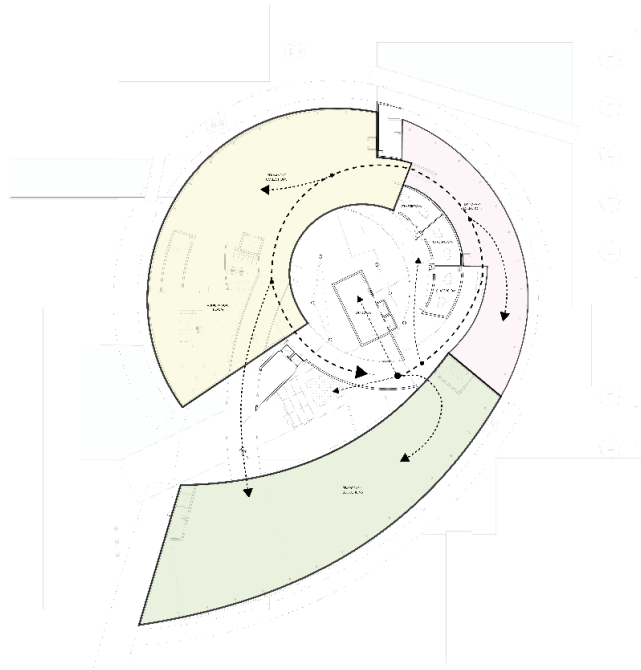


Figure 70 Motif progression (Source: Image by author)

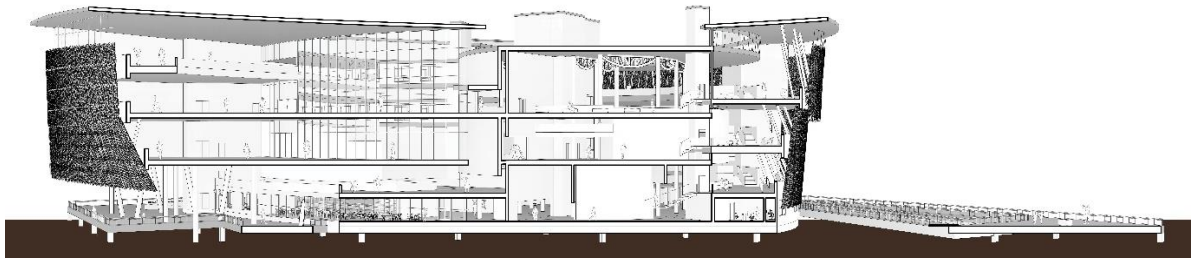


Figure 71 Overlapping Space in Section (Source: Image by author)

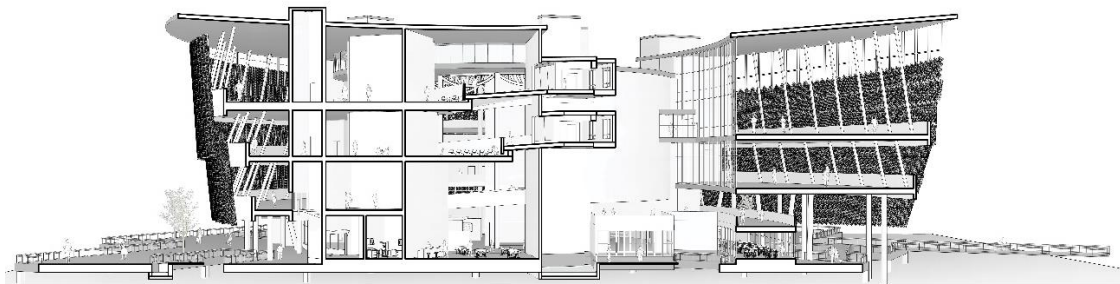


Figure 72 Building Section (Source: Image by author)

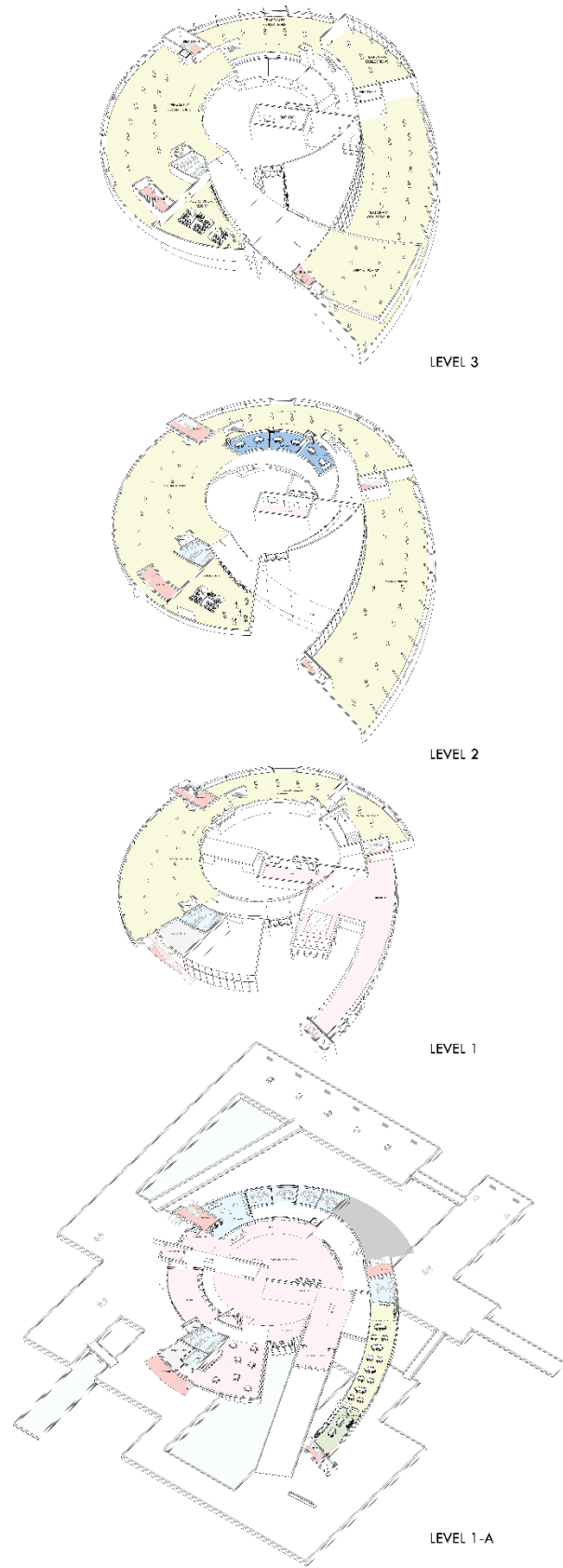
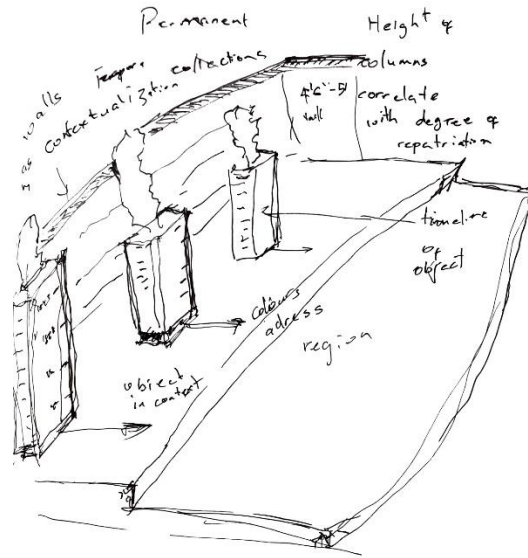


Figure 73 Museum Layering (Source: Image by author)



Permanent collections - stories on the ground leading you  
 Temporary collections - multiplicity

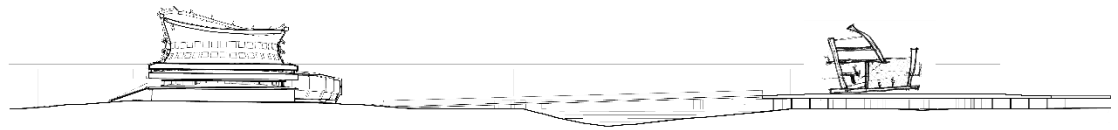
Figure 74 Gallery exploration (Source: Image by author)



Figure 75 Exhibit (Source: Image by author)

## Site as motif

The site also becomes a key investigation as well. The museum and craft complex responds to its context through both form and orientation- pointing back to the National Theatre and playing upon the ideas of the masculine and feminine dichotomies- the helmet versus the headdress.



*Figure 76 Helmet versus Headdress (Source: Image by author)*



*Figure 77 Proposed Site Section (Image by author)*

A key piece of the site response also lies in integrating the marshland below as part of the activity on the site. The Cultural center complex does this by incorporating rain gardens and reflecting pools integrated with and activating the site.

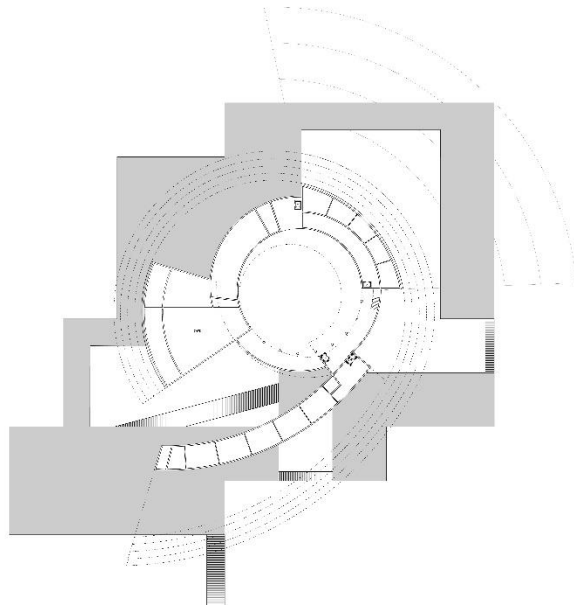


Figure 78 Initial Museum Site Plan (Source: Image by author)



Figure 79 Initial Building Section (Source: Image by author)

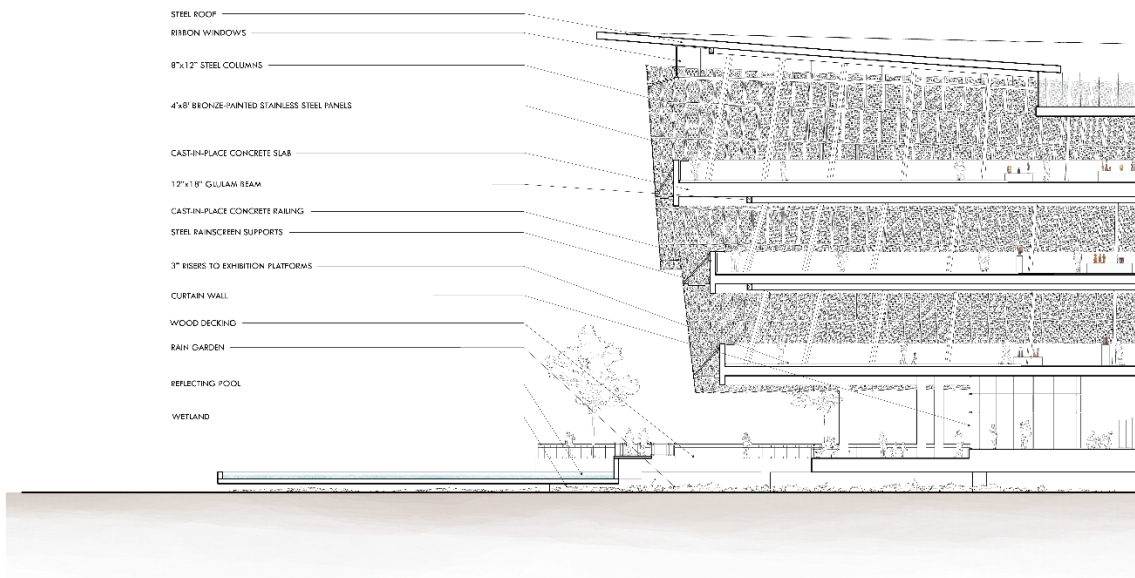


Figure 80 Building Section Proposal (Source: Image by author)

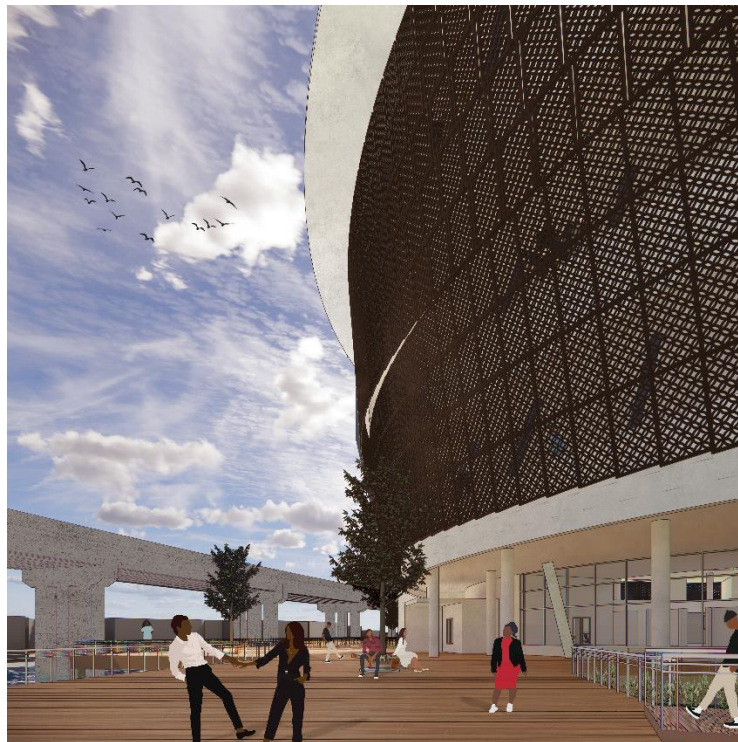


Figure 81 Plinth (Source: Image by author)



Figure 82 Museum arrival (Source: Image by author)

Cultural Center

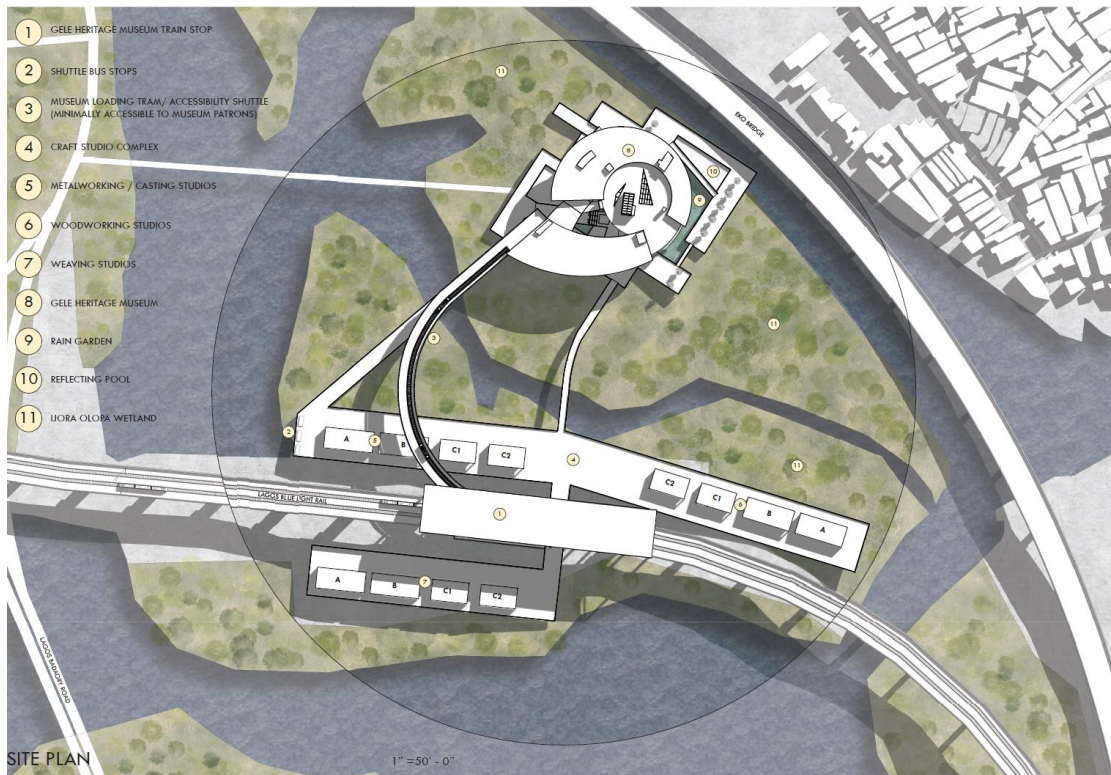
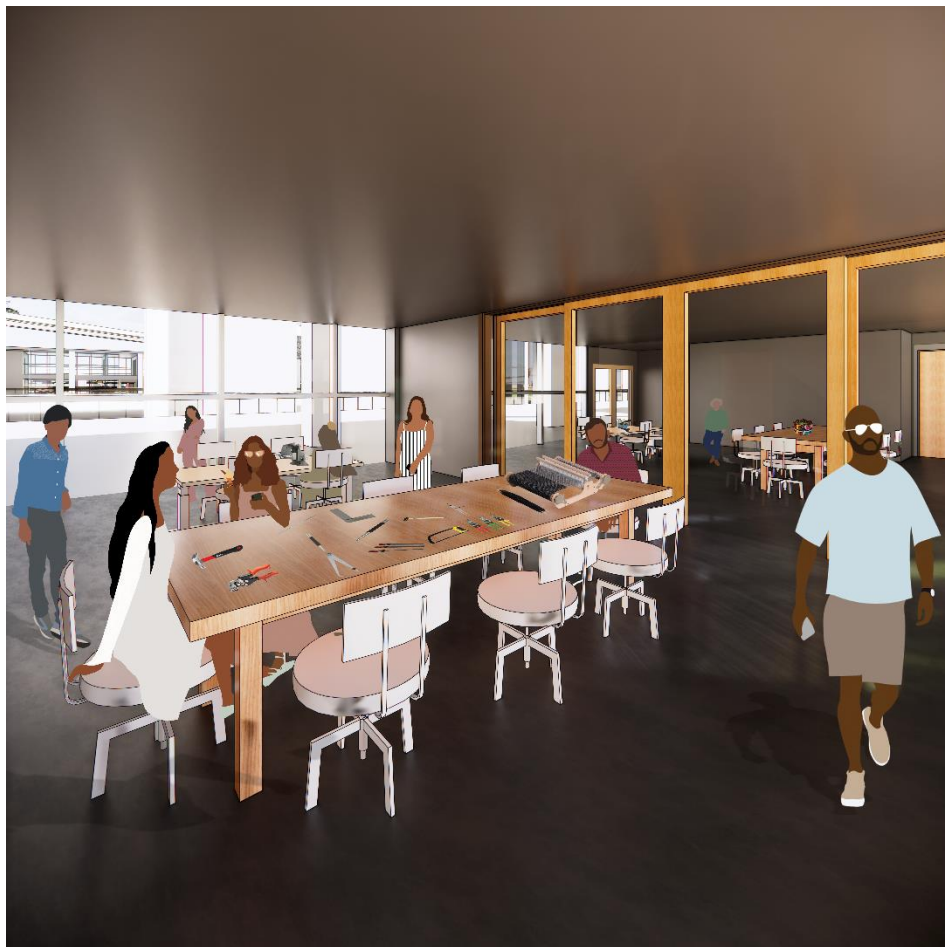


Figure 83 Site plan (Source: Image by author)

## Craft Studios

The Craft studios play an important role in the program as points of rehabilitation and cultural context. The studios within the museum act as both craft and exhibit as they are dedicated towards the rehabilitation and repair of the incoming artifacts. As a museum patron the studios beyond into the site serve as an arrival point filtering you in the context you are about to exhibit.



*Figure 84 Craft Studio (Source: Image by author)*



## Market and Multifunction Event Space

The market and multifunction event space act as spaces that showcase West African ideals with the use of flexible, fluid spaces as well as an incorporation of the prevalence of the commerce and connective atmosphere that is indicative of the marketplace.



*Figure 85 Market (Source: Image by author)*

The Gele Museum draws from many aspects of the West African gestalt, in its formulaic conceptualization, program, and circulation. The form gestures to the National Theatre, but significantly, takes ideas of weaving in the way the galleries overlap with one another from the section of the Gele itself; layering with skin that plays on distinctly West African motifs in patternmaking and wrapping.



*Figure 86 Atrium multi-function event space (Source: Image by author)*

## Chapter 8: Concluding Remarks

In order to truly understand and properly represent contemporary West African identities, one must understand the historic contexts and processes that shaped both the culture- the post-colonial identity. The Gele serves as a reflection of the pre-colonial context and its ideas and how modern West Africa has been shaped as a reflection of and beyond that. It is ad hoc, undefinable, and multiple; it isn't rooted. Therefore, the program for this thesis, a new (redefined) Museum and Cultural Center was especially important.

Further, the conception of this thesis considers the intricate precolonial handling of artifacts, the West African approach to life, and the immersive process of craft fabrication. One may only start to fully comprehend the intricacies of the West African identity motif if they have seen both the methodology adopted in West African art production and its works of cultural identity. This thesis employs weaving and motif as a symbol and technique to uncover and convey concepts about West African identities. It also employs the architectural process as a way of understanding and framing identity. The historic influences on the site are combined with a postcolonial museum and cultural center program in this thesis to provide a physical place for discourse. This thesis also employs architecture as a venue for understanding and exploring cultural identity.

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