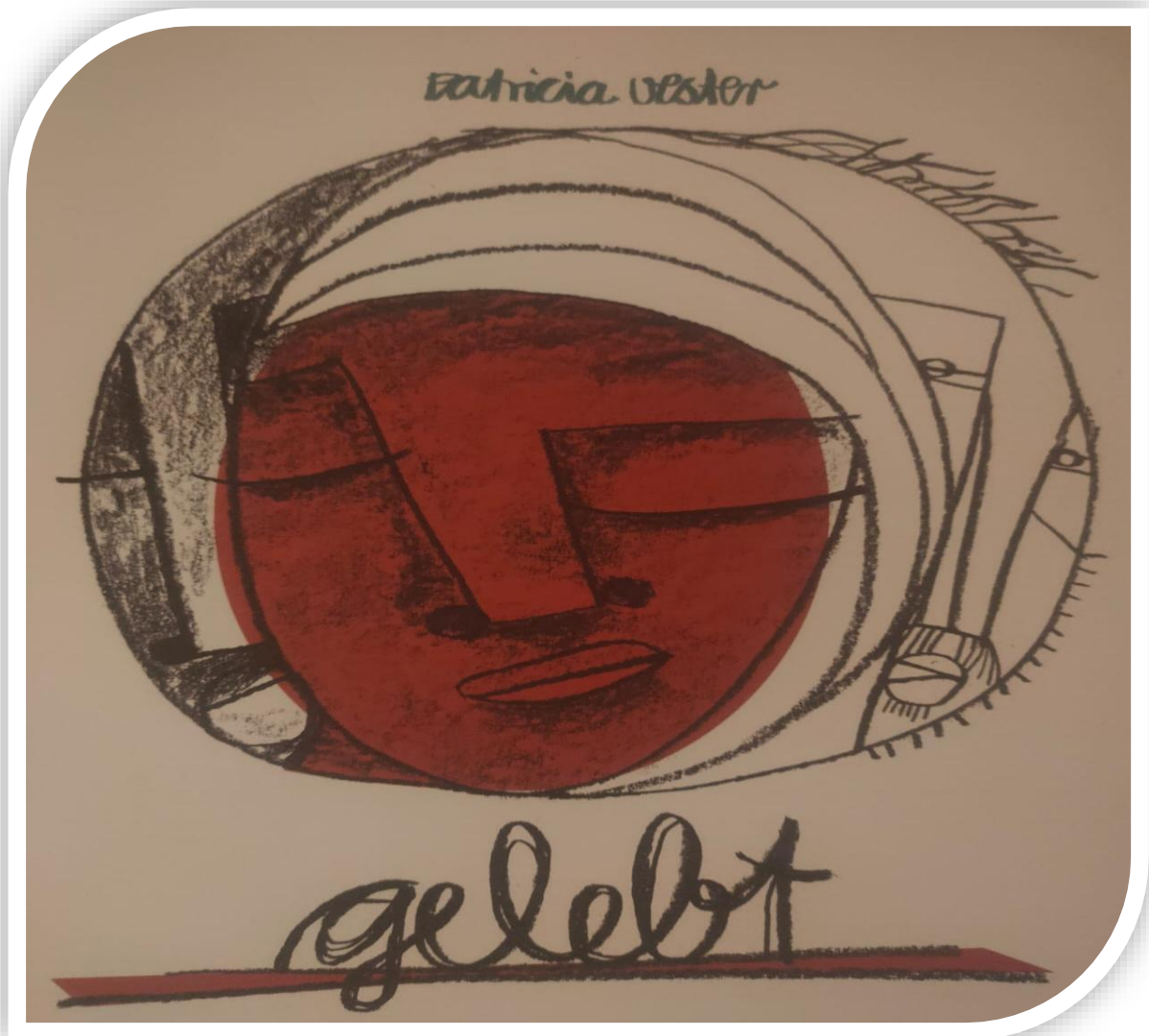


PROJECT REPORT

BTU For Future-Summer semester-2025

A small tribute to Bilillee Ajiamé Machbuba



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Table of Contents

1	Introduction.....	2
2	Our Journey Through the Semester-with Btu4 Future.....	2
	2.1 Timeline of btu4 future.....	3
	2.2 In the Machbuba's Space.....	3
	2.3 Mapping our shared vision for the memorial.....	4
	2.4 The excursion day.....	5
	2.5 Our proposed idea-a living memorial for machbuba.....	6
	2.6 Financial plan for our proposal.....	6-7
	2.7 Final proposals under consideration.....	7-8
	2.8 Turning our efforts into reality.....	8-11
3	The final outlook: the civic perspectives on the memorial site.....	11
4	our Reflections.....	12
5	Centring Silenced Voices: An Anti-Racist Space for Dialogue and Recognition.....	12-13
6	- Together in Action: Civic Society and Community Acknowledgements.....	13
7	What We Learned.....	13-14
8	References.....	15

1-Introduction

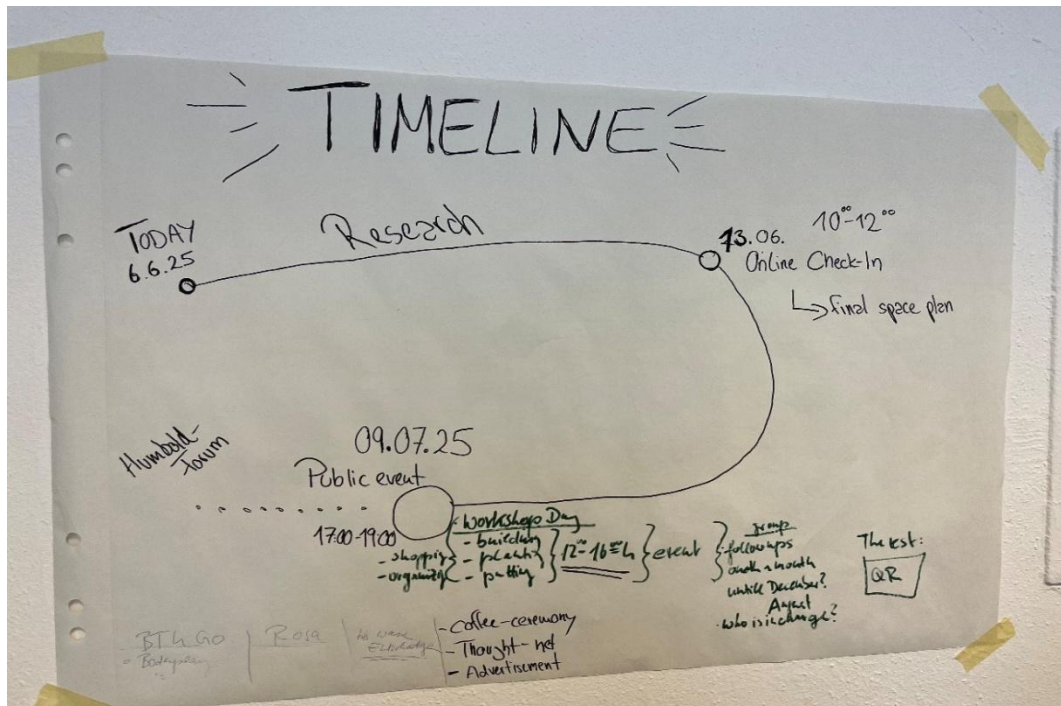
Some of the stories are kept hidden deliberately to erase their presence from history. Bililee Ajiame Machbuba's life is one such story. She was a young Ethiopian girl whose life was completely sabotaged by the ruthless and self-serving decisions of colonial and political forces beyond her control. Her part of the story is largely absent from historical records, but it's almost evident that she had experienced displacement, cultural dislocation, and the challenges of living far from her homeland. Her story reveals a picture of struggles and resilience of people whose voices were silenced and underrepresented.

The project **"BTU4 Future** -creates a living memorial near the BTU International Office in Cottbus to honour silenced and overlooked voices. Inspired by Machbuba's life, it transforms an underused site into a reflective and participatory space that fosters dialogue, memory, and community engagement. The memorial invites students and visitors to rest, reflect, and acknowledge neglected histories. By bridging past and present, it affirms that silence is not permanent and ensures that hidden stories are heard, recognised, and valued as part of a shared commitment to inclusivity and remembrance.

2-Our Journey Through the Semester-with BTU4 Future

This project did not have a definitive plan in the beginning. Just a bunch of ideas and uncertainty on what to do? But BTU4 Future course and our guest lecturers, as well as the faculty members, gave us guidance throughout the semester. The course was mostly practical, which gave a big opportunity for us to look deep into the Machbubas' history as well as into topics like racism, marginalised society, and their representations in the past and future worlds.

2.1 -Timeline of BTU4-Future.



Pic 1- A Strategic Roadmap for BTU4's Future.

2.2- In the machbuba's space



Pic 2- Exploring Machbuba's Space with the Project Team -April-2025

2.4 -The excursion day

May was more focused on practical work, so we travelled to nearby historically relevant places, such as the city museum and Branitz Castle. This experience for us, as international students, was new because we hadn't had the opportunity to visit a museum or palace after coming to Germany. We walked through these spaces, noticing how history was displayed and sometimes how it wasn't. and we started questioning what is remembered here and what is left out? How to improve such public places in such a way that everyone is represented and heard. These impressions really helped us shape our model on how to build a memorial where we can feel safe and included.



Pic 4- A Journey into the City Museum Cottbus-may 2025

Around June, we started designing and researching our own ideas and how they could be implemented while also considering the costs.

2.5 - Our proposed idea - a living memorial for machbuba



Pic 5&6-AI created sketch and design

Our idea was basically building a transparent box structure made of glass with an entrance in which a shelf with literature relevant to racism, colonialism, etc, so that people visiting could sit and relax in the shade while reading the books. It was also our idea to plant some herbs or some type of plants because it was mentioned that Mahbuba had great knowledge of plants.

2.6- Financial plan for our proposal

Due to the higher costs of earlier solutions, we were tasked with identifying more affordable materials to ensure the budget remains under 1,500 euros. A simple wood-framed box with polycarbonate sheet cladding was proposed to minimize expenses, keeping the estimated cost below 1,500 euros.

Estimated Costs: under 1500 euros

1. **Polycarbonate sheets (roofing/covering)**- Source: ECD Germany-Cost: €74.49.
2. **Lumber (pine framing + treated base)**-Cost: €300(Structural framing + long-lasting foundation)
3. **Gravel foundation**- Cost: €200 (Drainage and stable flooring)
4. **Furniture & Storage**-IKEA BILLY bookcase: €50
5. **Basic benches/seating** (festival style): €130

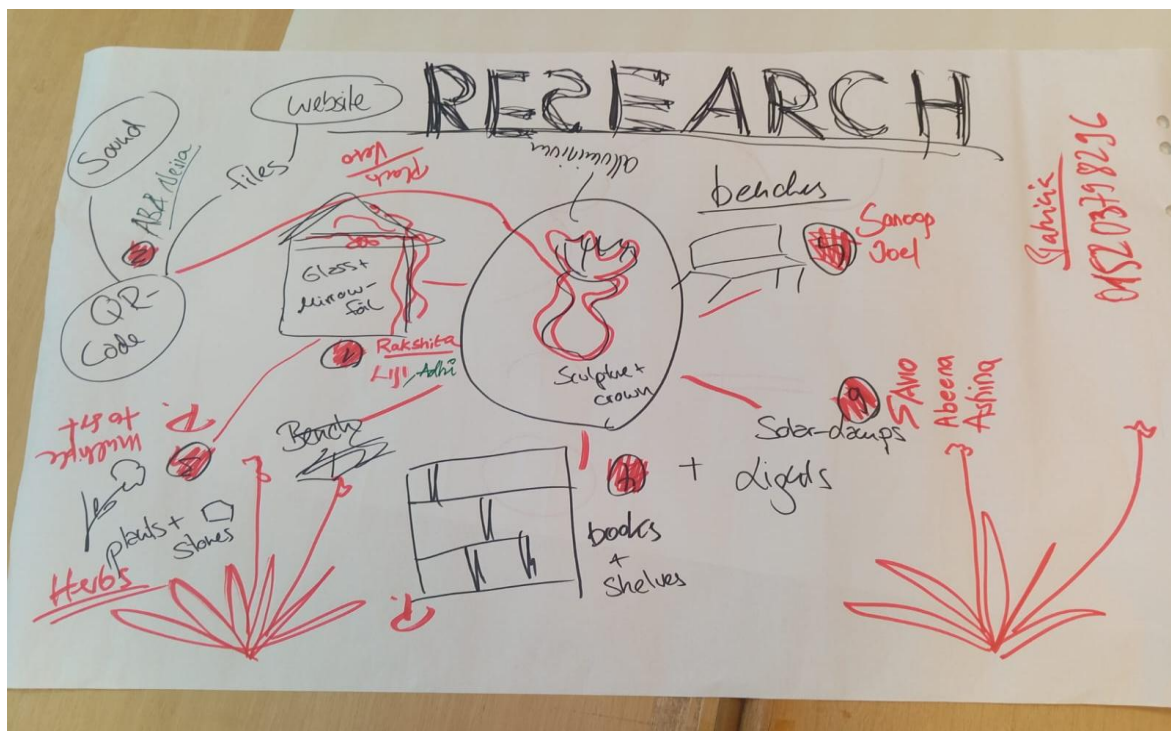
6. **Plants & Garden Inputs-** Herb plants & soil: €150
7. **Tools & Hardware (screws, brackets, sealant, etc.)**-Cost: €200
8. **Volunteer labor**-Cost: €0 (community contribution)

2.7 – Final Proposals under consideration



Pic 7&8-Final discussion on machbuba's memorial

We presented our ideas, some of them were about nature some of them were about sounds others were about intimacy. It was basically a test to find out how creative our ideas would turn out to be.



Pic 9- All raised Proposals Put Forward for Consideration

Implementing every single one of our ideas was not really possible at that moment due to several reasons. We chose to create something which was minimalistic yet meaningful, something that could last for several years and invite others to become part of it. By then, we were no longer imagining a memorial; we were actively building one.

2.8 - Turning Our Efforts into Reality

July 9, 2025, marked the moment where our ideas came to life. The memorial space was very modest, yet it gave us the warmth and security. We were not only presenting a project but also creating a space where others could gather, feel, relax, and reflect.



Pic 10-planting the herbs into the machbuba's space



Pic 11-fixing the chairs

We spend hours on the ground together planting herbs, flowering plants, and arranging the chairs. The work was quite challenging, but we made it enjoyable through our little chats.



Pic 12-spreading the taste of traditional Ethiopian coffee



Pic 13- Preparing for the Final Event Day

The inauguration was less of a formal ceremony and more of a shared encounter. We were joined by the president, guests, fellow students, faculty, representatives from FrauenOrte Brandenburg, and members of the local community. Students, teachers, and visitors stopped by, some out of curiosity, others out of solidarity. Some people even shared their stories about being far from home, about feeling unseen, etc.

Seeing people interact with what we build moved us very deeply. Those chairs were now beginning to hold memories, conversations. The space now felt very alive, and there was a sense of pride in us knowing that we created something that could leave a mark in the history of university.



Pic 14-btu4 future team in the space of machububa

We shared flyers containing QR codes that linked to additional information, a feedback form, and a platform where international students could anonymously share their experiences. These contributions will be added to an evolving online memory archive.

3 - The Final Outlook: Civic Perspectives on the Memorial Site

The memorial is located near the BTU International Office, which was designed as a welcome area for people to gather, relax, and engage in conversation. Its location on the calm grassy area along Konrad-Wachsmann-Allee 4-6 makes it easily accessible and visible now.

The chairs are arranged in a circle crafted from recycled wood and are painted red. Surrounding the seating, four solar-powered lamps provide lighting at night, creating a very welcoming and secure atmosphere.

Together, these elements bring a small, minimalistic space that combines sustainability. Every feature was chosen to encourage participation, reflection, making the memorial not just a place to remember but a space to experience and interact with.



Pic 15-inagural day

4 - Our Reflections

Working on this project was very meaningful for us. As people who have never had any experience with creating something, this felt very new and exciting for us. And also, was able to interact with lots of people from different parts of the world, sharing their thoughts and stories made us feel very connected. Each of the stories was so thought-provoking, leading us to brainstorm and work on ideas so that we could make even a small difference.

Machbuba's life is so underrepresented, misled on many platforms, that too little information about her life is available now. This shows us how history often chooses what to preserve and omit. This realisation made us create a small project that could bring everyone together, making not only Machbuba's but everyone's story heard.

We both had several bad experiences after coming to Germany. So, this is also a space for us. And I'm really proud that we were a part of creating this amazing memorial. It reminded me

that even modest interventions can leave lasting impressions and give people a sense of belonging.

5-Centring Silenced Voices: An Anti-Racist Space for Dialogue and Recognition

The memorial's central focus confronts the silencing of marginalized voices, with particular attention to Black and displaced communities. Its collection of literature and resources fosters critical awareness of racism, colonialism, and casteism. An inclusive design process brought together diverse perspectives—international students, civil society, faculty, and community members—ensuring shared ownership of the outcome. A digital archive documenting international student experiences strengthens long-term anti-racist learning and engagement. Symbolic features—such as open-circle seating, communal planting, and collaborative storytelling—embody anti-racist principles of equity, dialogue, and recognition.

6 - Together in Action: Civic Society and Community Acknowledgements

- FrauenOrte Brandenburg – historical guidance and partnership
- Patricia Vester: Patricia Vester is an Illustrator, museum consultant critical of colonialism and a guest lecturer.
- Luisa Stuhr: As part of this course, we were also supported by Luisa Stuhr, who brought in valuable perspectives on organizing the course.
- Ethiopian residents – translation and cultural input
- Our classmates – ongoing feedback and encouragement

We also thank the university administration for their support in permitting the site.

7 - What we learned

- Collaborative work requires patience and active listening: each team member's perspective can shape the outcome in unexpected ways
- Understanding history often means uncovering what has been hidden or overlooked, not just what is already documented.
- Even small projects can create networks of dialogue, connecting people who might not otherwise engage.

- Practical constraints, like time and resources, can inspire creativity and focus on what is truly essential.
- Reflection and discussion are as valuable as the physical work; they shape how a project develops.

Through this project, we gained insights not only about memorial design but also about collaborations and community engagement. Every stage, be it brainstorming or building, we realised how collaborations and listening to diverse perspectives can transform a small area into a place of connection.

8 - References

Vester, Patricia. *gelebt – Das kurze Leben der Bilillee Ajiame Machbuba*. Workbook, 2023.