

Final Project Report

Machbuba's Voice



Pic private

BTU for Future – Summer Semester 2025

Group Members

Nejla Kuebra Cosgun- 5011735

Abnet Mengesha Bekele - 5014248

Table of Content

Introduction 2

Our Process: Step by Step Through the Semester 3

 April – Starting Out, Meeting Machbuba 3

 May – From Research to First Sketches..... 4

 June – Designing & Presenting Our Idea, producing website and content 6

July – Inauguration & Community Responses 8

Concept and Design..... 12

 Overview 12

 Location 12

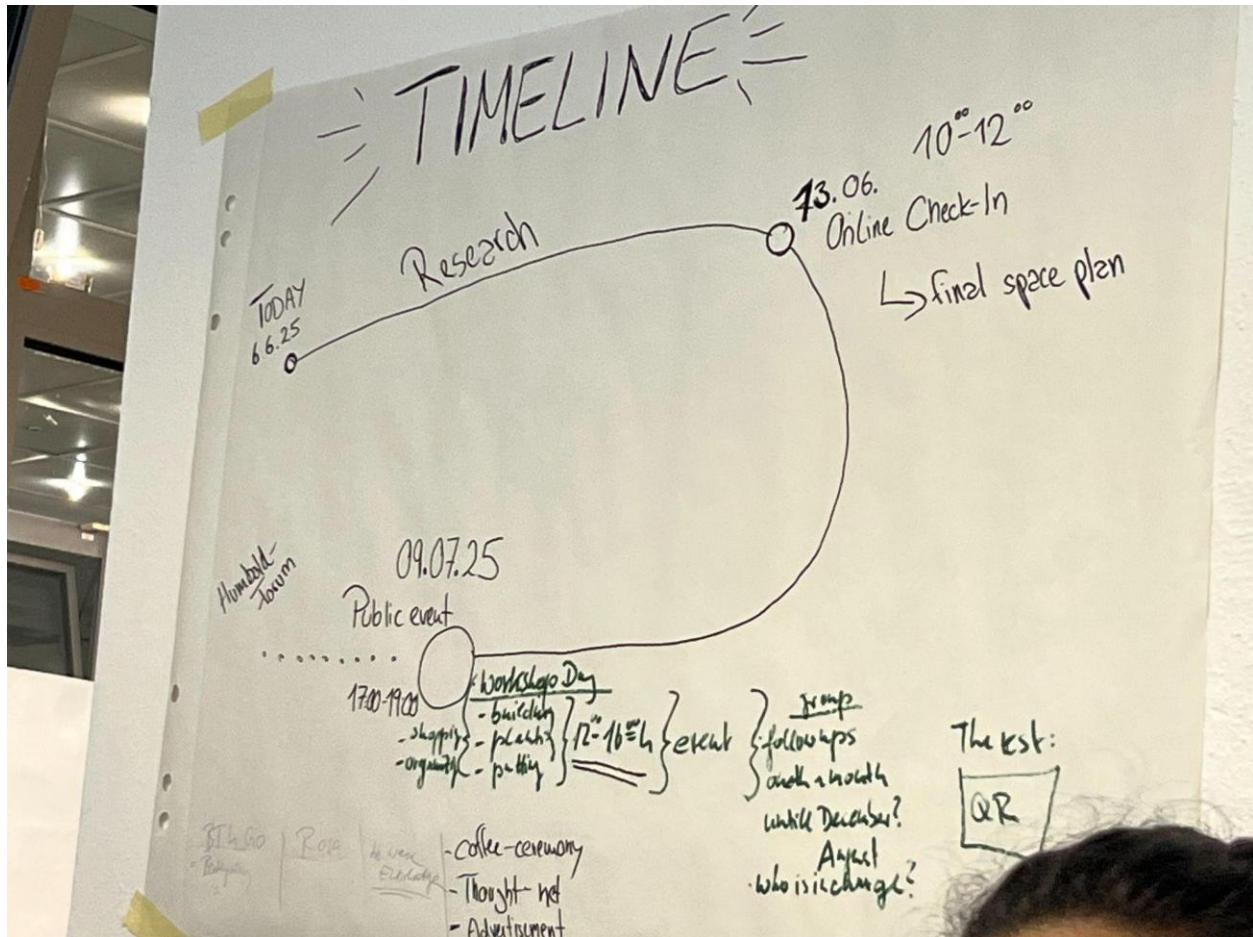
Reflections from Us 12

Collaborations & Acknowledgements 13

What We Learned 13

References 15

Introduction



Pic private

This project started as a question: how can we remember someone whose story was never fully told? Through “Machbuba’s Voice,” we wanted to give space, voice, and visibility to Bilillee Ajiamé Machbuba a young Ethiopian girl whose life was shaped by colonial violence, displacement, and silence. But we also realized quickly that this was about more than one person’s story – it was about the many voices still unheard, especially among international, migrant, and BIPoC students in Cottbus today.

For us, this project became something very personal. It wasn’t just a task for class it was a chance to rethink public space, to question whose memories are made visible, and to

co-create a place that feels safe, empowering, and inclusive. Throughout the semester, we often discussed our own experiences and emotions. We talked about the difficulty of speaking up, the feeling of being out of place, and the deep wish for representation. In many ways, Machbuba's silence mirrored silences we've experienced ourselves in academic spaces, in city streets, even in casual conversations. That's why giving her a voice felt so urgent.

Our Process: Step by Step Through the Semester

The BTU4Future course guided us through each step of this project, combining practical work with deep reflection. It was a mix of learning about colonialism, talking about racism today, working with art and design, and collaborating with inspiring people like Patricia Vester and FrauenOrte Brandenburg.

April – Starting Out, Meeting Machbuba



Pic private

We began the semester by learning about the life of Bilillee Ajamé Machbuba. Through online discussions and readings, we talked about remembrance culture and how often it excludes voices like hers. Learning about Machbuba's life made us think about how history is told and who is left out. Her story became a starting point for imagining a space that centers voices usually pushed to the margins.

We reflected a lot in these first weeks: How many Machbubas have been forgotten? What does it mean to commemorate someone? How do you create a space that speaks, not only for the past, but for those in the present? These were not easy questions, but they grounded our commitment to this work.

May – From Research to First Sketches



Pic private



Pic private

We visited several places in Cottbus including the university grounds, the city museum, and Branitz Castle. These experiences helped us understand how colonial histories are often presented sometimes sanitized, sometimes avoided. We asked ourselves: what kind of space would international students feel seen in? What would Machbuba want today? This is when we started shaping the idea of a small, open memorial space grounded in warmth, nature, and storytelling.

Those moments made us determined to bring her memory closer, into the daily rhythm of the university, where students from around the world walk, study, and live.

June – Designing & Presenting Our Idea, producing website and content



Pic private



Pic private

THE MEMORIAL STATUE OF BILILLEE AJIAMÉ MACHBUBA



SITTING AREA FOR AROUND 20 WOMEN STUDENTS

SENSORY SPEAKER

LAVENDER AND MARIGOLDS

Even Though for so many reasons our idea could not be implemented in the area, our ideal statue looks like this (pic AI generated)

In June, we prepared our concept draft and shared it in presentation. We called it **“Machbuba’s Voice.”** Our goal was to create a memorial that is quiet but powerful using a statue, a recorded voice, flowers, and seating to invite people to pause and reflect.

After presenting, we received feedback that helped us revise the tone and refine the visual details. We worked on making the space more accessible, emotionally inviting, and clearly connected to decolonial ideas. We made sure every element from the language of the script to the types of flowers supported the purpose of the project.

Our group discussions at this point were very intense. We asked ourselves, is this respectful? Is it inclusive? Are we really centering Machbuba, or just using her as a symbol? These moments of doubt were hard but important. They pushed us to think deeper and be more honest.

July – Inauguration & Community Responses

The final event took place on July 9, 2025, at the memorial site near the International Office at BTU. We were joined by the president, guests, fellow students, faculty, representatives from FrauenOrte Brandenburg, and members of the local community. The atmosphere was warm and respectful with the Ethiopian coffee ceremony. Many people shared their reflections and emotions about the project. Some students said they felt “seen” for the first time. Others thanked us for creating a space that brings conversations about race, memory, and identity into the public eye.



Pic private

We have planted flowers and herbals with our fellow students which is also directly related to the stories of Bilillee Ajjamé Machbuba.

This event showed us that small interventions can create big emotional impacts. What started as an idea on paper became something real, shared, and alive. Many participants expressed the hope that more such projects will follow in the future.





Pic private

We also distributed flyers with QR codes leading to more information, a feedback form, and a space where international students can share their own experiences anonymously. These stories will be added to the online page as part of an evolving digital memory archive.

Concept and Design

Overview

The memorial is a meter space near the BTU International Office, designed as a warm, safe area for international women students to gather, reflect, and discuss. It includes four key elements:

Location

Located on a grassy area near Konrad-Wachsmann-Allee 4-6, the site is accessible, visible, and calm, ideal for fostering a sense of safety and inclusion. Its proximity to the International Office ensures engagement with international students.

Seating Area: Five chairs, arranged in a circle around the fixed sign for the memorial, are made from recycled wood and painted in red.

Lighting: four solar-powered lamps provide soft light, ensuring safety and highlighting the area at night.

Reflections from Us

Nejla: Building the Machbuba memorial was like bringing her story back to life. It showed me that sharing forgotten stories helps make a world where everyone's voice counts and we all feel connected. There were moments where I felt unsure or overwhelmed, but being part of something meaningful made it worth it. Seeing our design become real was an emotional moment I won't forget. It was also a way to claim space not just physically, but emotionally, historically.

Abnet: I feel very fortunate to have been able to help rewrite this history. Creating this memorial taught me how memory work can be a form of justice. I also learned a lot about teamwork, how to listen, and how to be open to different perspectives. I believe we have created a space that welcomes and heals one that speaks quietly but with strong meaning.

This space is small, but we believe it opens up something much bigger: the idea that remembrance can be active, creative, and community-driven. Working on this project changed how we see public spaces not just as physical places, but as emotional and political ones.

Collaborations & Acknowledgements

- FrauenOrte Brandenburg – historical guidance and partnership
- Patricia Vester : Patricia Vester is an Illustrator, museum consultant critical of colonialism and guest lecturer.
- Luisa Stuhr: As part of this course, we were also supported by Luisa Stuhr, who brought in valuable perspectives and 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

What We Learned

- That remembrance isn't just about the past it's about justice in the present
- That artistic work can be political, educational, and healing at the same time
- That university campuses need spaces like this to reflect diversity and care
- That student-led initiatives can leave a lasting impact

- That memory can be shaped with intention, creativity, and respect
- That listening is a powerful political act
- That we can connect art, history, sustainability, and activism into one space

We came into this course unsure of what a “memorial” could be. Now we leave with a new understanding: that to remember is also to act. We hope “Machbuba’s Voice” becomes a lasting space for listening, learning, and resisting silence.

Thank you for reading and reflecting with us.

We hope that this memorial becomes a place of comfort, courage, and conversation, not only for those who pass by it every day, but for those who carry stories like Machbuba’s within them.

References

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

“Machbuba.” Wikipedia, 2024.

“Die Geschichte der Afrikanerin Machbuba.” Wien Museum Magazin, 2023.