

# Machbuba's Voice (Legacy)

*A Memorial Journey in Cottbus*



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## Table of Contents

|                                                                   |           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>List of Figures</b>                                            | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>1. Introduction: Context &amp; Aims</b>                        | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>2. Personal Motivation</b>                                     | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>3. Design Concept &amp; Sketch</b>                             | <b>6</b>  |
| 3.1 My Vision                                                     | 6         |
| 3.2 The Big Idea: Walking the Quiet Thresholds                    | 6         |
| <b>4. Practical Development</b>                                   | <b>8</b>  |
| 4.1 Ethiopian Origins: warm beginnings                            | 8         |
| 4.2 Displacement: the uneasy middle                               | 9         |
| 4.3 Life in Europe — complex everyday                             | 10        |
| 4.4 Legacy (Machbuba's Voice): the quiet center                   | 11        |
| 4.5 Visitor Experience Summary                                    | 12        |
| <b>5. Reflection on Process: Challenges, Decisions, Materials</b> | <b>13</b> |
| 5.1 How I approached the work?                                    | 13        |
| 5.2 Challenges                                                    | 13        |
| 5.3 Decisions                                                     | 13        |
| 5.4 Materials (mood first, simple)                                | 13        |
| <b>6. Learning Outcomes: What I Achieved</b>                      | <b>14</b> |
| <b>7. The Project in Reality : FrauenOrt at BTU (2025)</b>        | <b>15</b> |
| <b>8. Conclusion</b>                                              | <b>16</b> |
| <b>References</b>                                                 | <b>17</b> |

## List of Figures

|                                                                                                         |           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Figure 1 Concept sketch with thresholds and stations of the Machbuba Memorial.....</b>               | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>Figure 2 Ethiopian Origins : Welcome Circle .....</b>                                                | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>Figure 3 Displacement: Fractured Ground.....</b>                                                     | <b>9</b>  |
| <b>Figure 4 Life in Europe — Dialogue Station .....</b>                                                 | <b>10</b> |
| <b>Figure 5 Legacy (Machbuba’s Voice): Quiet Center .....</b>                                           | <b>11</b> |
| <b>Figure 6 Location on BTU Zentralcampus (satellite view) &amp; Tree-Ring Bench Zentralcampus.....</b> | <b>15</b> |

## **1. Introduction: Context & Aims**

This report sets out a memorial landscape for Machbuba, instead of a single statue or plaque, the design unfolds as a guided walk. Visitors move through four distinct stations Ethiopian Origins, Displacement, Life in Europe, and Legacy, that translate a complex history into clear, spatial experiences. The place invites contemplation teaches without overwhelming, and treats the site lightly: surfaces stay permeable, materials are durable and repairable, and interpretive media are concise and bilingual. Methodologically, the project draws on place-based research, memory studies, and environmental design.

It follows the critical turn in memorial practice, which privileges process over monumentality and invites active public engagement (Young, 1993; Smith, 2006; Williams, 2007). The sequence is intentionally asymmetrical and varied in tone. Each station speaks with clarity yet leaves room for interpretation, acknowledging the fragmentary archival record on Machbuba. The proposal also respects the parkland character of Cottbus through low walls, recessed lighting, and compact, carefully sited interventions.

The central design question is how to honor Machbuba's personhood without aestheticizing harm or repeating colonial frames. The response is abstraction: vertical fields of color, fractured textures, and weathered steel evoke life episodes rather than illustrate them literally. Text remains brief and invitational, paired with QR codes offering deeper materials in German and English. In this way, the memorial functions both as a public room and a learning platform that can grow with community input (Rothberg, 2009).

## 2. Personal Motivation

My starting point is a question urbanists ask again: how can a city acknowledge painful, contested histories while strengthening the ties that hold people together?

As a student of Environmental and Resource Management, I focus on the quiet mechanics of care materials, maintenance, and ecological performance that keep public spaces alive. When memorials are accessible, legible, and easy to care for, they keep their promise; when they are neglected, they quickly lose both dignity and educational power.

A second driver was to move beyond the usual binary of celebratory versus accusatory monuments. This memorial refuses heroic simplifications and instead invites quiet attention. It sets up cues for conversation seating rings, readable paths, and small interpretive panels so schools and community groups can use the site as a forum for thoughtful dialogue.

On a personal level, Machbuba's story is deeply sad: a young African life uprooted and filtered through colonial power, too often told by others. As a Moroccan and an African, I recognize echoes of displacement and misrepresentation that still shape our region and its diaspora. This project is my way to honor her personhood without spectacle—to foreground dignity, listening, and shared learning.

The design choices permeable ground, repairable materials, modest, carefully sited elements are ethical as much as technical: they model care, responsibility, and a civic space where remembrance and cohesion can grow together.

### 3. Design Concept & Sketch

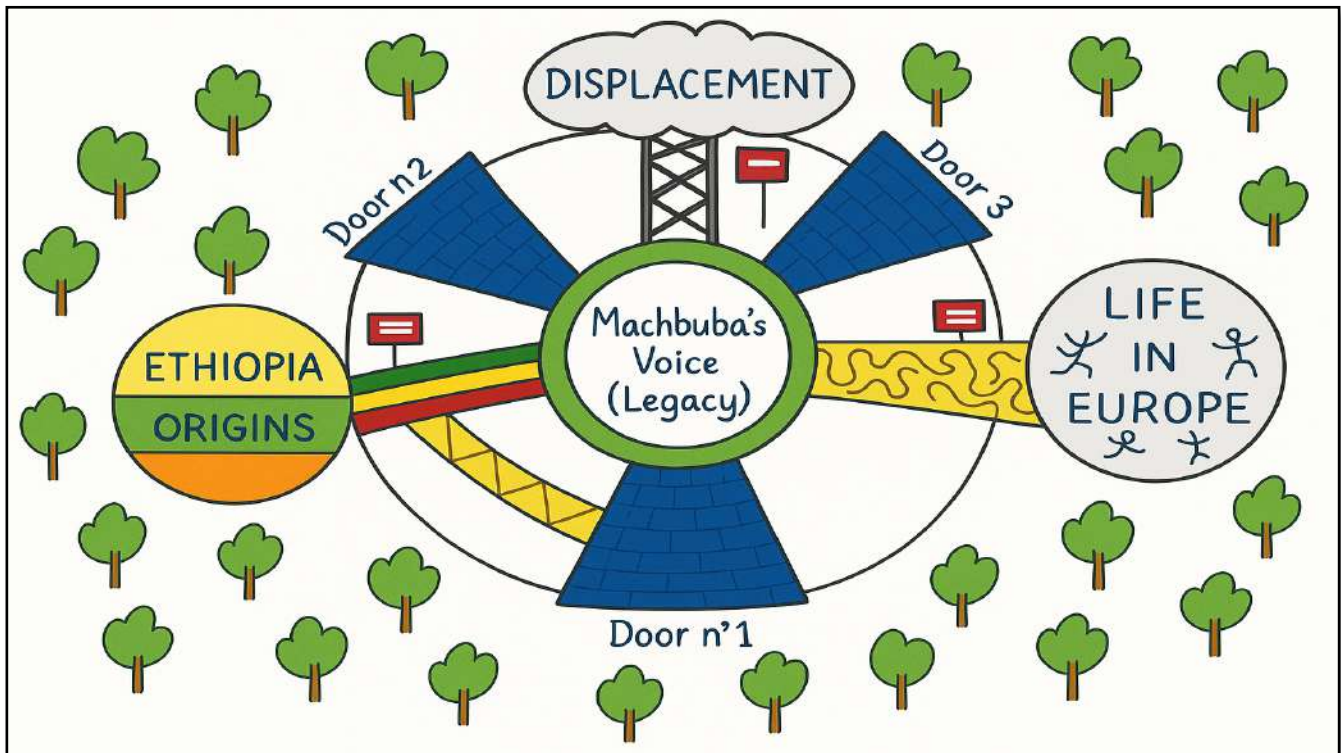


Figure 1 Concept sketch with thresholds and stations of the Machbuba Memorial.

#### 3.1 My Vision

I approach Machbuba's story with feeling before form. As a Moroccan and an African, I refuse to let a young life be flattened into dates and plaques. My creative practice sits with grief without turning it into spectacle. I choreograph thresholds, pauses, and conversations so dignity can speak. This project is my own reading of a sad, often mis-told story quiet, insistent, and deeply human.

#### 3.2 The Big Idea: Walking the Quiet Thresholds

This memorial is a journey of gentle "doors." Each threshold changes the tone without raising its voice. Wherever you are, you know how to pause, breathe, and think. Nothing is grand for its own sake; everything is scaled to care the care for Machbuba's memory, for visitors, and for the place that holds them.

#### Part 1:

- **Door No. 1: Arrival and Welcome.**

You enter as if taking a first soft breath. The place meets you calmly and seems to say, you're safe to be thoughtful here. From the very first steps you sense that this experience is about listening, not performance. (see Figure No. 1).

- ***Ethiopian Origins: Warm beginnings (left circle)***

To the left, warmth gathers. This is a place for beginnings—names spoken clearly; a life centered before any later storyline. The atmosphere is gentle and bright, encouraging people to linger. Nothing is over-explained; the silence is generous, leaving room for personal memory and pride. (*see Figure No. 1*).

## **Part 2:**

- ***Door No. 2: The look-back (left blue wedge)***

This threshold is a turning point. It doesn't stop you; it frames a moment. Looking back, a question rises quietly: What did I just learn? What did I almost miss? Even your pace shifts—just a little—enough to feel that understanding is an active choice. (*see Figure No. 1*).

- ***Displacement : The uneasy middle (top cloud)***

Here, the air changes. The story feels unsettled, like a sentence that won't quite finish. Absence is present, but never dramatized. Some visitors linger; others move on. All of them sense a thread of unease that asks for care rather than spectacle. (*see Figure No. 1*).

## **Part 3:**

- ***Door No. 3: Crossing and reconsidering (right blue wedge)***

This door leans you gently back toward the city. Its message is simple: carry this with you. There is no triumph and no tidy closure—just an honest crossing that ties the past to the steps you're about to take. (*see Figure No. 1*).

- ***Life in Europe : Complex everyday (right circle)***

Here the line of memory bends. Feelings are mixed: small joys, contradictions, the weight of ordinary days in a new place. The space invites conversation—classes, families, friends. Voices can meet without competing. Nothing resolves neatly, and that honesty feels respectful. (*see Figure No. 1*).

## **Part 4:**

- ***Machbuba's Voice (Legacy) : The quiet center (central circle)***

At the heart is a circle for being together. People face one another; stories can be spoken, sung, or simply held in shared silence. The center is not loud—it is steady. It asks for presence more than opinion and lets remembrance become part of daily life. (*see Figure No. 1*).

## 4. Practical Development

This section walks through the four stations shown in the sketch. For each one, I outline Form & technique (what visitors encounter) and Colors & mood (the feeling the place should carry).

### 4.1 Ethiopian Origins: warm beginnings

*(Sketch: "left circle" · Photo ref: Fig. No. 2)*

- **Form & technique**

A ring of tall, faceted color posts rises at varied heights, like a chorus you can step among. The ground is a firm, lightly textured circle with a clean edge so the shape reads briefly. A gentle, cream-toned path bends you in and out, while the name/QR line sits just outside so the color speaks first. *(see Fig. No. 1 & No. 2).*

- **Colors & mood**

Bright reds, yellows, deep blues, and a fresh blue green make the space feel joyful and proud. The warm buff ground lets the colors sing without glare.

- **Overall**

Open, welcoming, and confident, a beginning that centers dignity before explanation.



Figure 2 Ethiopian Origins: Welcome Circle

## 4.2 Displacement: the uneasy middle

*(Sketch: top "top of diagram" · Photo ref: Fig. No. 3)*

- **Form & technique**

The ground reads as a quiet break: plate-like paving with crack-like joints, sloping almost imperceptibly toward a shallow center. In the hollow, loose stones and dark fragments gather placed with care, not chaos. The perimeter stays level and walkable, with seating just beyond the rim for anyone who needs distance. (see Fig. No. 1 & No. 3).

- **Colors & mood**

Stone greys and dusty beige underfoot; at the center, charcoal and near-black fragments. A small violet bloom appears like a fragile insistence of life.

- **Overall**

Somber, unsettled, quiet a pause that refuses to turn grief into a show.



Figure 3 Displacement: Fractured Ground

### 4.3 Life in Europe — complex everyday

(Sketch: right circle · Photo ref: Fig. No. 4)

- **Form & technique**

Cut steel silhouettes rise on slender stems, with readable panels close by so text and figure stay in conversation. A low arc of stone offers informal seating; a sand-toned island gathers the sculptures into a loose room. Simple line drawings are set flush into the path so people discover them as they walk. (see Fig. No. 1 & No. 4).

- **Colors & mood**

Rust-brown steel feels earthy and worked-by-hand. Pale cream paths keep the scene clear; cool grey stone adds calm weight; the sand center brings a touch of warmth. The small path drawings add a light, human note.

- **Overall**

Balanced, conversational, layered care and contradiction held together.

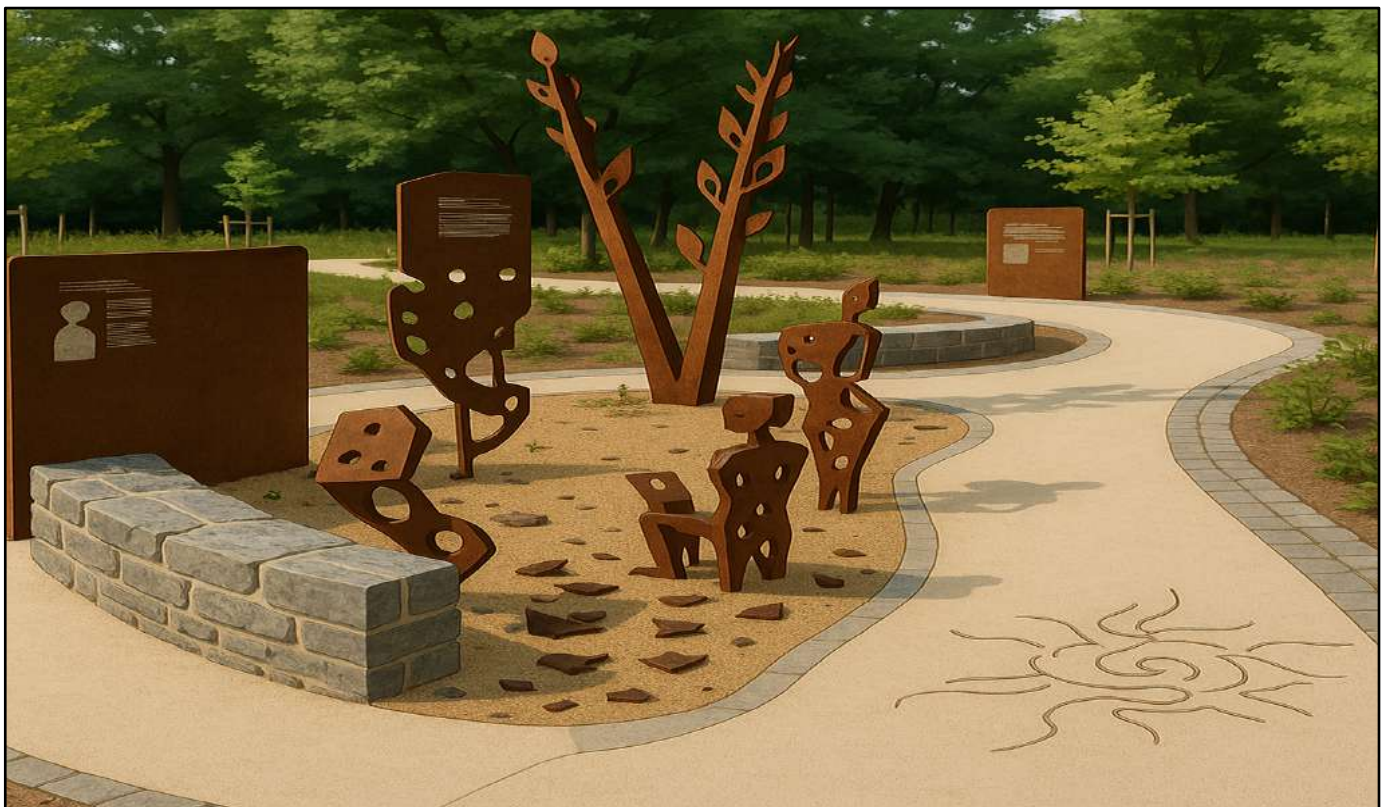


Figure 4 Life in Europe — Dialogue Station

#### 4.4 Legacy (Machbuba's Voice): the quiet center

*(Sketch: central ring · Photo ref: Fig. No. 5)*

- **Form & technique**

At the exact center, three smooth, tapered fins rise from a small plinth one form voiced in three tones. A round stone ring frames the heart, while the wider open plaza reads as a clear public room with evenly spaced benches. Planting stays low so faces remain visible across the circle. (see Fig. No. 1 & No. 5).

- **Colors & mood**

Red, orange, and yellow-green in the vertical—alive but not loud, like a steadily held flame. The plaza rests in soft terracotta; the ring is light grey; benches read as dark charcoal.

- **Overall**

Centered, calm, hopeful a place to face one another and let the voice carry.



Figure.5: Legacy (Machbuba's Voice): Quiet Center

#### 4.5 Visitor Experience Summary

This design is a walkable story. It guides visitors gently from where Machbuba came, through what she endured, to how she lived in Europe, and finally to the place where her voice remains.

- Each stop has its own feeling:
- Origins are warm and bright,
- Displacement is quiet and heavy,
- Life in Europe is lively and conversational,
- Legacy is calm and shared.

The paths are easy to follow and step-free, with benches wherever someone might want to pause alone, with a friend, or as a class.

People can sit, talk, and take in different vibes at their own pace, nothing is rushed or forced. Together, these spaces make a respectful place to learn, reflect, and keep Machbuba present inside our eyes and mind.

## 5. Reflection on Process: Challenges, Decisions, Materials

### 5.1 How I approached the work?

I began by turning the story into a walkable sequence: four stations and three gentle doors that pace the emotions (warm → uneasy → mixed → calm). I sketched the route first (Fig. 1), then tested each stop against three questions:

1. Does it honor personhood without spectacle?
2. Is it legible and step-free for everyone?
3. Can it age well with simple care?

### 5.2 Challenges

- Dignity, not drama. Tell a painful story without turning grief into a show.
- Clarity for everyone. Keep routes step-free, text short, wayfinding obvious, and seats close by.
- Pacing the feelings. Let the journey breathe—warm → uneasy → mixed → calm—so visitors aren't rushed.
- Lasting care. Use things that can be repaired and still look good years from now.

### 5.3 Decisions

- Soft thresholds instead of big monuments. You feel the shift; you're never blocked.
- Abstraction, not re-enactment. Fragments, silhouettes, and color fields protect dignity.
- Short, bilingual text with optional audio. Enough to orient; never to overwhelm.
- Four clear stops. Origins → Displacement → Life in Europe → Legacy with benches where pauses naturally happen.
- Quiet at night. Low, warm, shielded light safe, calm, respectful.

### 5.4 Materials (mood first, simple)

- **Ethiopian Origins:** circle of color posts on warm buff ground → joyful, welcoming, proud.
- **Displacement:** cracked circle with dark fragments → somber, held, quiet.
- **Life in Europe:** rust-brown silhouettes, cream path, low grey stone → conversational, every day, layered.
- **Legacy:** three tri-color fins in a calm ring → centered, hopeful, shared.

## 6. Learning Outcomes: What I Achieved

In simple terms, here's what I gained:

- I learned to let space speak.
- I turned ethics into clear cues soft thresholds that shift mood, brief text that guides not lectures, seats where reflection naturally happens.
- I built a compact design language ("Form & technique" / "Colors & mood") so intent reads fast for teachers, visitors, and reviewers.
- I tightened my visuals by linking sketch, figures, and captions into one clear story.
- I became more at ease with ambiguity, using abstraction to protect dignity while keeping a steady narrative.
- I treated accessibility and care as core design: step-free routes, readable contrast, and parts that can be repaired.
- Most of all, I learned to listen to Machbuba's story, to the site, and to the community and to edit until the path felt honest: welcoming, reflective, every day, and shared.

## 7. The Project in Reality : FrauenOrt at BTU (2025)

On BTU's green campus spine along Konrad-Wachsmann-Allee, a circular bench wrapped around a shade tree invites you to pause; beside it, a modest upright plaque reads FrauenOrt – Bilillee Machbuba (*see Figure 7*).

The place feels deliberately quiet space to breathe, sit, and let Machbuba's story surface yet it carries historic weight: this is the 50th FrauenOrt and the first in Brandenburg dedicated to a Black woman, realized with BTU's BTU4Future students and partners (*site context in Figure 6*).

Although my initial concept wasn't selected as a scheme, I worked with my colleagues most notably the welcoming circular bench and the calm, open layout—so the site reads as a gentle clearing along the campus axis (*bench ensemble shown in Figure 7*).

Opened on 9 July 2025, the result turns a familiar walkway into a place of shared remembrance, where everyday movement slows and memory becomes part of the path (*Figures 6–7*).



Figure 6 Location on BTU Zentralcampus (satellite view) & Tree-Ring Bench Zentralcampus

## 8. Conclusion

This project turns memory into a walk you can feel. Four small stations:

- Origins,
- Displacement,
- Life in Europe,
- Legacy,

Arrive one by one through gentle thresholds: warm, then quiet, then mixed, then calm. Words stay short and bilingual. Paths are step-free.

Benches wait where a pause naturally happens. Materials follow mood: bright color to welcome, a cracked circle to hold the hard part, rust-brown silhouettes for everyday life, a steady tri-color heart for a shared voice.

People can sit, talk, listen, or simply keep walking the pace is theirs.

My first concept wasn't chosen for the FrauenOrt site, so I leaned in: I supported the built bench and plaque on Konrad-Wachsmann-Allee and folded that quiet place into the wider journey as a gentle clearing.

In the end, the campus path carries the story with dignity clear to read, easy to care for, and woven into daily steps.

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