



Traditional Burial Reinterpretation Centre in Katima Mulilo:
Investigation of Vernacular Burial Practices in an Urban Context within the Zambezi Region

By: Ishmael J. Nawa

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Traditional Burial Reinterpretation Centre in Katima Mulilo:
Investigation of vernacular burial practices in an urban context within Zambezi region.

Ishmael Nawa
Mini-thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Architecture (Professional) at the Namibia University of Science and Technology.

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I, Ishmael Nawa, hereby declare that the work contained in the mini-thesis Traditional Burial Reinterpretation Centre in Katima Mulilo: Investigation of vernacular burial practices in an urban context within Zambezi region, is my own work and that I have not previously in its entirety or part submitted it at university or other higher education institute for the award of a degree. All illustrations / figures are by the author unless otherwise indicated.

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Abstract

As with most cultural groups, the people of the Zambezi region have burial practices unique to them. These practices have been passed down through the generations. In recent years these processes are less practiced, predominantly due to the influence of conventional Christian burials which have resulted in traditional methods becoming taboo. This has caused tension around the allocation and use of burial spaces in the Zambezi region.

This thesis aims to understand the ritual typology brought about by opposing beliefs affecting existing grave spaces and contemporary cemeteries in the Zambezi region and how this could inform an intervention aimed at improving the cemetery space in Katima Mulilo. The intervention will aim to create a space where traditional burial practices are represented in relation to conventional methods. This will be achieved through reinterpretation of traditional methods in a proposed architectural intervention. It will showcase traditional methods in a gallery space and provide a memorial for the countless buried in unmarked or forgotten graves.

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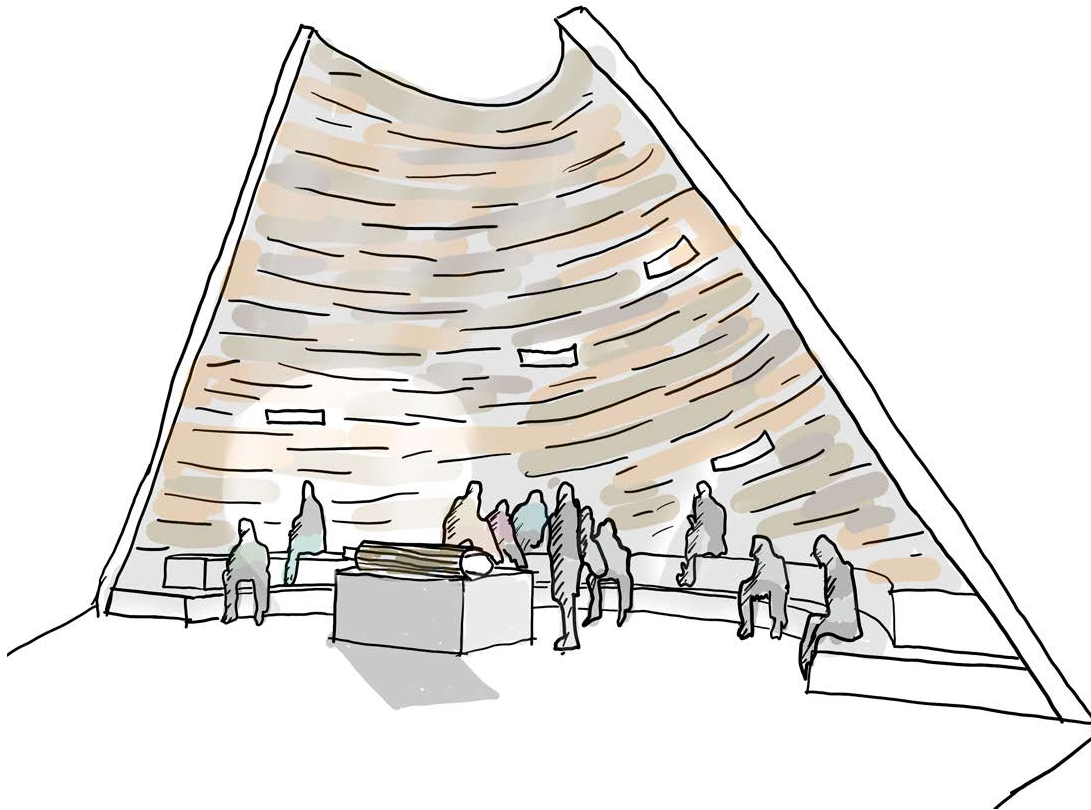


Figure 1.1. Requiem hall

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CHAPTER

Background of study
Problem statement
Objectives

01

Death is a natural part of life, through it we are returned to the earth. In many cultures this means burial and through that, a space is created. In the northeastern region of Zambezi, people have unique burial methods and spatial selection processes that involve ritualistic dance, use of herbs, and cleansing through fire.

These processes have a complicated, but rich history of rituals that are slowly fading away. The current conventional method of Christian burial has become the cultural status quo and burial spaces have adapted to cater for them.

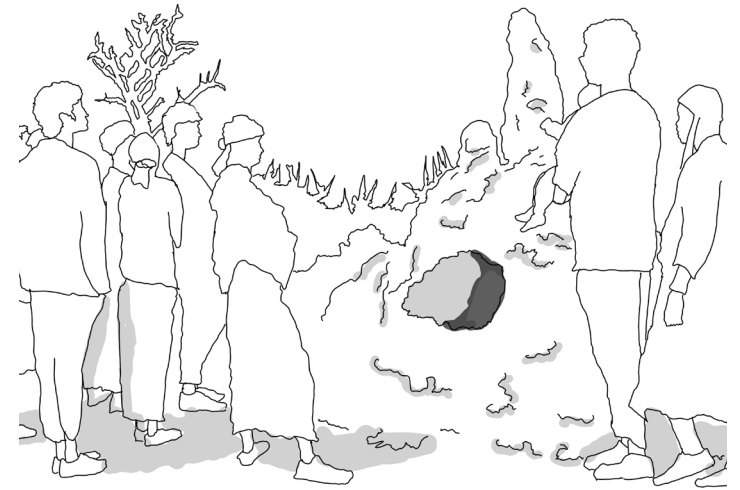


Figure 1.2. Child being buried in termite mound.

Background of study

Like several other northern Namibian tribes, the people of the Zambezi Region have traditionally not made use of demarcated cemetery sites. Traditional spaces have been dictated through cultural practices and taboos. In recent years a more conventional method of burial has been adopted, primarily due to the influence of Christian missionaries in the 19th century. Though this method is prevalent in the region, traditional burial rituals are still practiced.

This has caused direct clashes within communities on how the process should be done and how these spaces should be used. An example of this is the case of a one-year-old baby interned at the Katima Mulilo Cemetery earlier in August, whose grave was illegally exhumed by an undisclosed party, as reported by NBC (Simasiku, 2021). This shows the tension in the region. Through this study, I aim to bridge the gap between the traditional and the conventional practices on urban and rural cemeteries.



Figure 1.3. Police investigate grave of illegally exhumed child.

Problem statement

- Research Objective – To research and document the burial process of the people of the Zambezi Region.

Research Question – What are burial processes followed by communities in Katima Mulilo?

- Research Objective – To bridge the traditional methods and conventional methods of burial through a spatial intervention.

Research Questions – What spatial intervention can be designed that would bridge the two burial methods?

- Research Objective – To research other occurrences of opposing beliefs affecting grave spaces in contemporary cemeteries in the global south.

Research Question – How did these societies in southern Africa overcome tension around grave spaces between opposing cultural groups?

Objectives



Figure 1.4. Traditional Burial of Chief.

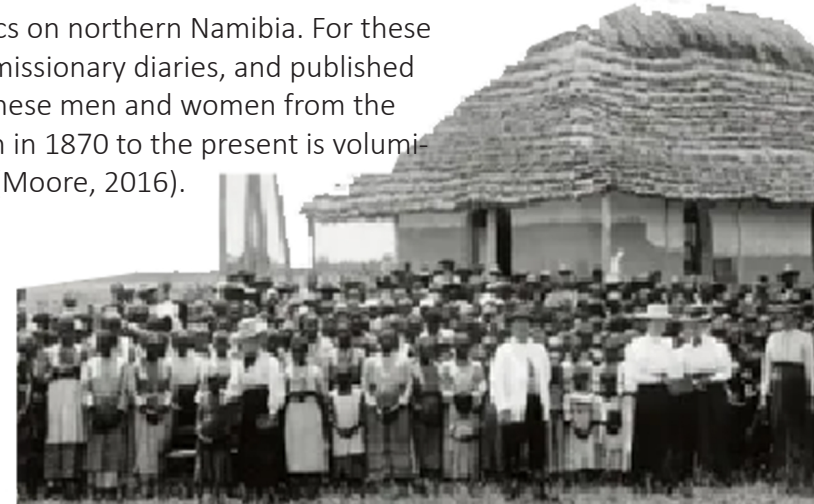
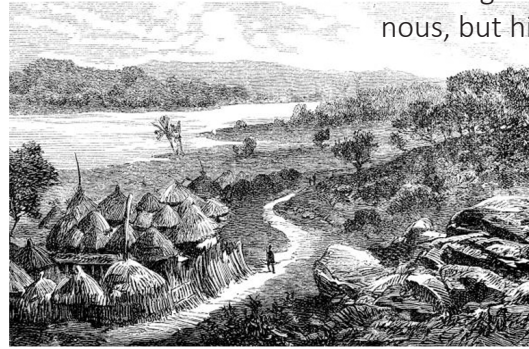
CHAPTER

Timeline
Traditional burials
Contemporary burials
Literature review
Research methodology
Theory

02

1600

It is said that the Empire of Barotseland (modern-day Zambezi basin) was established by Queen Mbuyamwambwa over 500 years ago. It was made up of people from the Congo, Angola, Namibia, South Africa and Botswana (Otto, 2014). Expanding from what is today northern Zambia, they reached the Zambezi in the 1700s. In 1845, they were conquered by the Makalolo who are from Lesotho, explaining why the Barotse, or Lozi people, speak Silozi, a variant of Sesotho.



1870

In 1870, a missionary group of Four Finnish ministers and a German, Carl Hugo Hahn from the German Rhenish Mission Society, began the first known expedition into Namibia. These ministers and missionaries were regularly contacted by the Germans and their South African successors for information and statistics on northern Namibia. For these reasons, the archival information, missionary diaries, and published accounts of northern Namibia by these men and women from the founding of the first mission station in 1870 to the present is voluminous, but highly difficult to access (Moore, 2016).

1884

During the Berlin Conference, which took place between November 1884 and January 1885, Africa was split into its different colonies. Germany took control of South-West Africa and began to administrate German laws on the colony.

Timeline

1920

In 1920 South-West Africa became a protectorate of South Africa, and two decades later established apartheid. Through the decades of colonialism, the Bantu education system was established. This undoubtedly eroded cultural practices and made them taboo.

1990

In 1990 Namibia became an independent nation, however, funerary norms of colonial and apartheid regimes have become prevalent.



1915

in 1918, Germany lost WWI and as part of the Treaty of Versailles, they were forced to give up all their territories, ending their occupation of the country. This period began the changing cultural norms among the tribes of the Zambezi region, which took the name of the German explorer who was the first European to visit the area.

1966

In 1966 the liberation struggle began, a war to free Namibia from apartheid rule. This lasted until 1989.

Figure 2.1. Timeline Collage

The burial process begins with the family informing the Induna (Headman) of the death of the family member. The Induna will then come to inspect the body. Afterwards, women begin mourning and the Induna, with other village men, remove the body from the home.

Due to the lack of preservation technologies, burials would happen in quick succession of death: if someone had died in the night they would be buried in the morning. At this point the Induna will locate a burial site – these sites were often grouped into family burial spaces.



Figure 2.2. 1: Induna informing village men of death.



Figure 2.3. 2: Gravesite being dug outside village.

Traditional burials

Limbs are straightened to lay parallel with the body. If not possible due to rigor mortis, the limbs are broken into place. Furthermore, if someone is in the process of dying, their limbs are straightened to make it easier to wrap them in the reed mat. They are also prevented from exhaling their last breath, keeping it inside them.

The wrapped body is then moved to the burial site. The body does not move through the front entrance of the home as a new one is made through the rear. The body is supported by timber poles with four men carrying it.

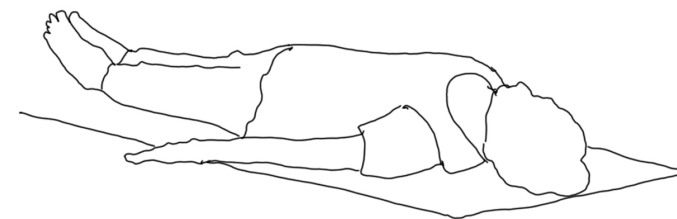


Figure 2.4. 3: Limbs straightened or broken into place.

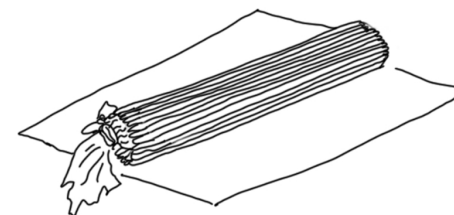


Figure 2.5. 4: Last breath being preserved in corpse, body wrapped in reed mat.

It was customary for men to face west and women to face east when buried. Grave-sites are located outside the village. The most common burial method was to wrap the body in a mat made of reeds. Graves are roughly 2m deep but have a separate chamber within the grave itself to hide the body. No ceremony is held at the grave-site; the body is placed into the grave and hidden away in the special area inside the grave. This along with the burial orientation are dogmatic practices with origins that have been forgotten.

The grave is then filled with earth, a process done completely by hand. Women and children are not allowed to take part or see this process. Moreover, there are no significant rituals or ceremonies performed at the burial. There is also no identification such as tombstones or markers at the graves. This is mainly because no one was to return to the graves as this was deemed a sign of someone performing witchcraft.

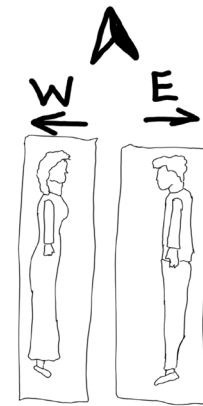


Figure 2.6. 5: Men face west and women face east when buried.

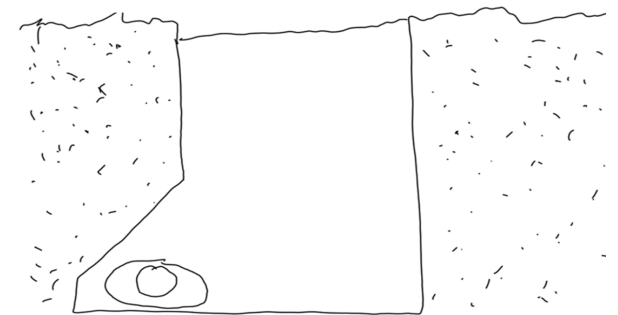


Figure 2.7. 6: Body hidden away in grave.

After the burial, the family and those involved will be washed with local herbs to cleanse them of any lingering spirits and prevent death from returning to the family. It is believed that the dead join the ancestors in a spiritual realm, and that the ancestors can influence those in the land of the living to do their bidding, and instruct and protect their descendants.

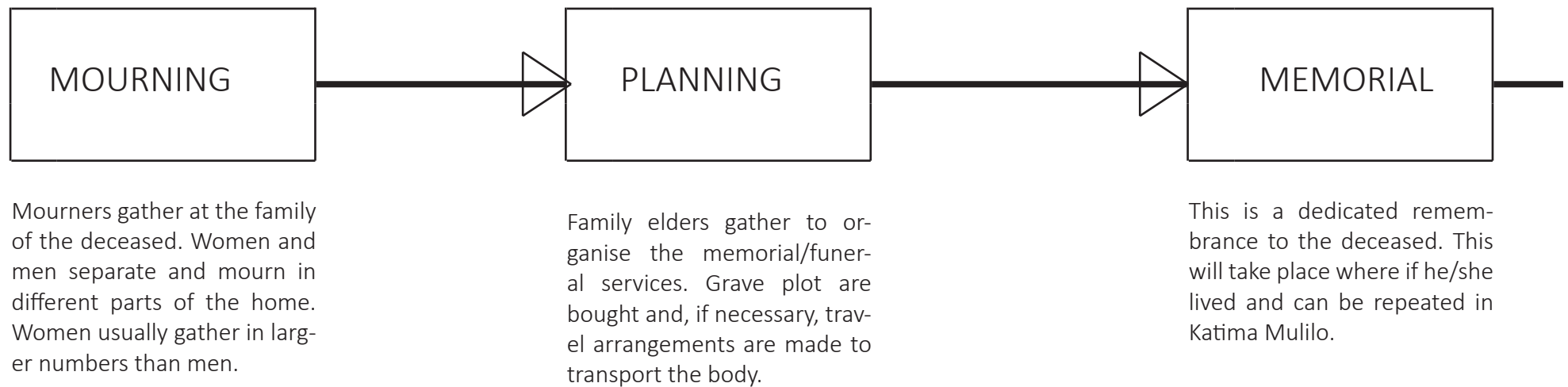
After one month, someone in the family is selected to perform a channeling ritual, during which the spirit of the deceased is transferred to that person. Finally, the branches of the “chibobo” tree, more commonly known as *Commiphora Myrrha*, are used as vernacular gravemarkers.



Figure 2.8. 7: All family members washed with traditional herbs to prevent bad spirits from coming.



Figure 2.9. 8: Channeling the spirit of deceased.



Conventional burials



After the memorial the family will directly escort the body to Katima Mulilo or it will be flown there. This is because a significant number of people wish to be buried in their home region.

This is the process of putting the body in the ground. In the rural areas these are usually in a familial grave-site, whereas in the urban area there is a dedicated cemetery.

Bridging the traditional methods and conventional methods of burial

As mentioned in the problem statement, within Namibia there is a great deal of tension between Christian groups and those who support traditional burial methods. To further understand this topic, literature that investigated this issue in other countries was explored, along with how new burial methods were introduced in societies and the tension that arose from this. Furthermore, the manner in which this tension affected the existing spaces and what new policies and architecture arose from this is also explained more in depth. Where possible, it was also examined if workable solutions were developed in which the heritage of such rituals in a changing world were maintained.

Influence of conventional means of burial

Settlement development varies around the world and is dictated by the needs of their respective societies. With globalization there came a change in the way we design our cities. This change in some instances was brought about the gentrification of large districts of cities. This undoubtedly had a lasting impact on burial spaces. A case study for this is Malaysia's capital Kuala Lumpur where a rich history of Muslim and traditional burial practices were forced to adapt to the rapidly growing city. Afla (2012) in his article, Sustainability of Urban Cemeteries and the Transformation of Malay Burial Practices in Kuala Lumpur Metropolitan Region, he elaborates on this in more detail.

Literature review

In the late nineteenth-century Malay burial grounds were located outside village settlements, commonly known as “kampung”. The establishment of Malay cemeteries around Kuala Lumpur followed the same pattern. Well removed from human interaction with the establishment of more kampung settlements around the city, public cemeteries were progressively marginalized within the city’s urban plan (Afla, 2012, p.21) as the city became more congested, and as a result, burial grounds became more compact.

It became increasingly difficult for them to perform rituals and bury the dead as per customs. The conditions in Kuala Lumpur serve as a warning for cemeteries in the Zambezi. The informal settlements are rapidly growing and with rapid urbanization, traditional burials will become more uncommon and will finally not be practised anymore.



Figure 2.10. Body being removed from a homestead.

Tension from spatial / cultural changes.

Tension is a by-product of a changing urban environment, as there are always those who wish things to remain as they are, whereas others will look to the future to reimagine their city, this naturally causes conflicts. Afla (2012) goes on to state that in the last few decades, people possess less freedom than in the past. Authorities have begun to take control over grave-side rituals by reinforcing strict regulations at the cemetery. Francis (2000) states that public cemeteries have been controlled largely by the management, which is eroding the sustainable aspect of funerary culture (Afla, 2012, p.4). This is in direct correlation to changing spatial policies requiring more efficient burial spaces.

These policies have negatively affected the way people carry out their rituals and burials, however, in this context this was not detrimental to people's cultural practices due to the taboos and stigmas around grave sites. Malays usually avoid cemeteries due to superstitious reasons, only visiting during funerals and anniversaries. However, for Malay families who observe *tahlil*, a funerary ritual requiring subsequent visits to the burial site to deliver prayers and supplications for the deceased, these policies constitute an infringement on their practices. Symbolic action and discursive data strongly suggest that grave visiting expresses concerns that occupy internal, metaphysical as well as material domains. Observation of these aspects of grave visiting provides insight as to the varied, but ongoing, dialogues between the living and the deceased (Francis, 2000, p.11).

Additionally, Covid-19 has caused a paradigm shift in the way burials are carried out. There are diverse burial rites in Africa that have been practised for decades depending on the deceased's place of origin, culture, religion, and position held in the community. Unlike the developed countries where burials are usually conducted as private ceremonies, funerals in Africa are elaborate and are usually public ceremonies involving the entire members of families, friends and well-wishers (Omonisi, 2020, p.3). Unlike those in Malaysia, this tension is not derived from the spatial conflicts between the city and its urban burial spaces, but directly from policy mandating social gathering restrictions.



Figure 2.11. Image depicting cultural tension.

This montage in Fig. 2.11 aims to depict the cultural and religious tension around the different burial practices in the Zambezi region. Here one can see the polarization between the two, and the meandering path one takes to navigate these tensions, as well as a depiction of the blind following of Christianity and the fading away of cultural beliefs.

Research and document the burial process of the people of the Zambezi region

To truly understand the scope of the research and provide the most contextually appropriate solution an in-depth explanation of the practices and culture of the people is needed. This will greatly improve the research methodology and be a cornerstone of the theoretical framework. Thankfully, there is a great deal of literature on the region and surrounding areas. Due to common ancestry, the practices of the people in neighbouring areas are similar. This will be informative in mapping settlement development and the movement of cultural practices on burial sites of different people.

Movement patterns and settlement development

The movement of people is fundamentally linked to settlement development. They settle where resources are plentiful. These patterns give an insight into how grave sites are chosen and how they fit into the rural or urban fabric. Land use describes activities that take place on the land and represent the current use of property, while land cover describes the natural and anthropogenic activities that can be observed on the land. Thus, land use goes deeper than cover by describing the actual use of the land. Remotely sensed data has been used to identify and derive land use through observations of land cover. Changes in Land Use and Land Cover (LULC) may affect ecosystem services that sustain livelihoods and services such as food production (Kamwi et al, 2018, p.2).

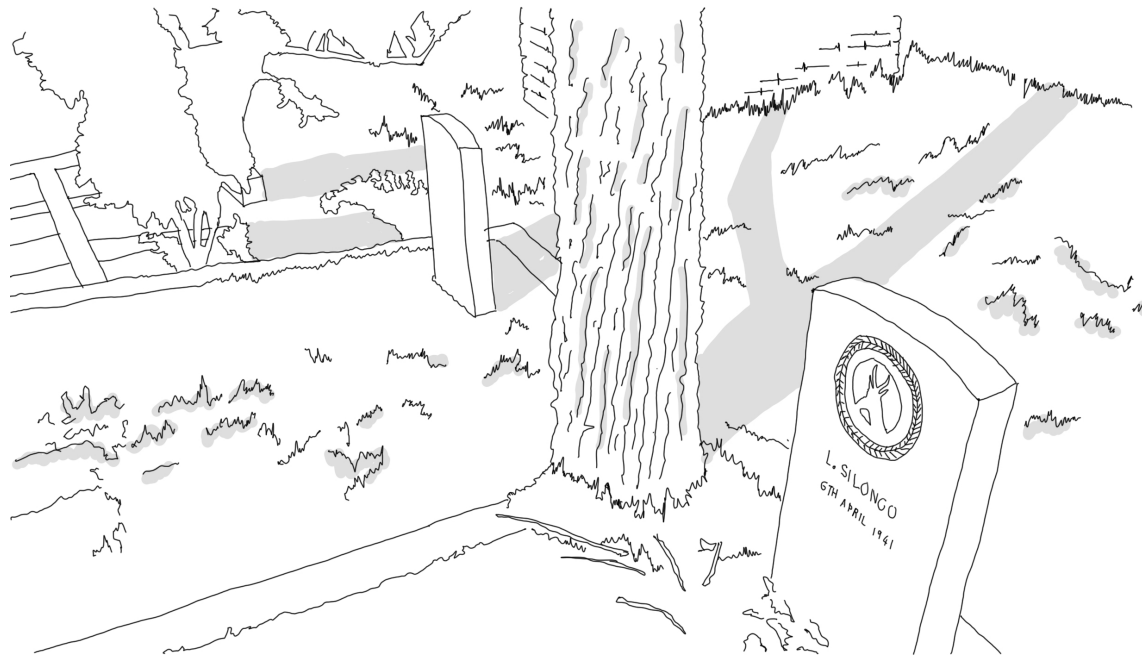


Figure 2.12. Graves in Katima Mulilo.

Literature review conclusion

Literature is the bedrock of any research, and through reviewing it we receive a holistic view of pertinent issues relating to the research topic. The articles that have aided in writing this literature review have been extremely useful in understanding this research and focusing ideas and concepts into a theoretical framework, towards improved spatial planning and architecture of cemeteries in rural and urban Zambezi. Through this literature insight was gained into the complex nature of burial practices and the spaces involved.

Interviews

For this research structured, semi-structured and open-ended interviews were used. The structured interview is a verbal questionnaire in which the interaction is limited by a script and a fixed set of questions (Wilson, 2014). Structured interviews were utilised to establish a baseline within the data. Semi-structured interviews reveal quantitative and qualitative outliers in the data, while open-ended interviews were primarily employed to allow unforeseen data to be collected.

This interview method is crucial as most of the history and cultural practices of the Zambezi region are passed down through oral tradition. Documenting this will be beneficial to the region and future researchers. Data from the interviews greatly informed this research, among the interviewees was the induna/headman of Linyanti village Beaven Muyawuka. He was instrumental in sharing information about burial methods, his seniority and leadership position meant that oral knowledge had been passed down from previous generations to him. This data then formed the basis for the process driven intervention. Additionally, he acted as a guide showing the different familial burial sites around the village. The aim was to show the differences in burial practices and the consensus of people's opinions on current methods concerning the traditional methods. Also, this provided insight into how people perceive burial spaces and how they interact with them spatially.

Research methodology



Figure 2.13. Burial site in Linyanti village

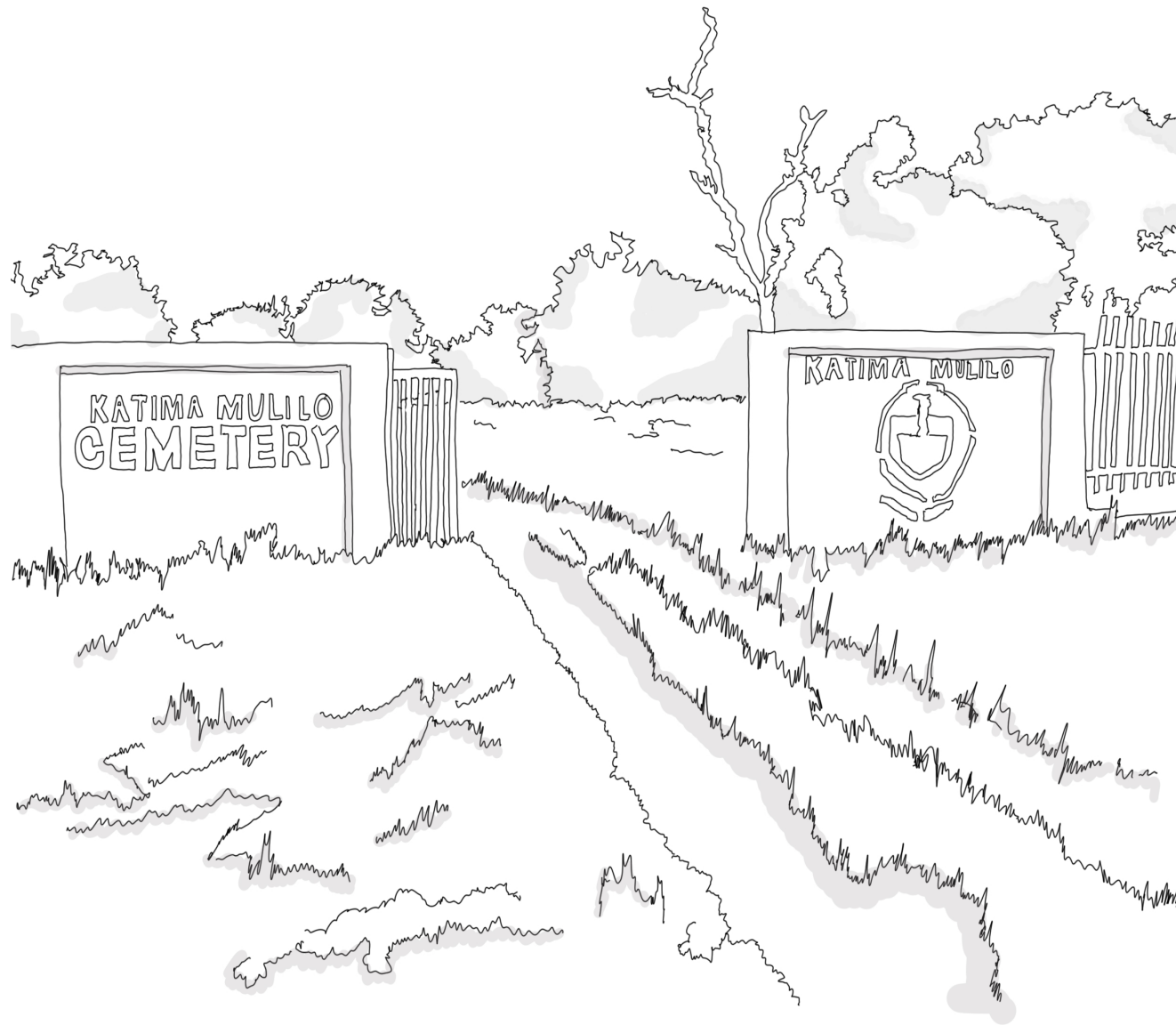


Figure 2.14. Entrance to Katima Mulilo cemetery.

Ethical considerations

Due to the sensitive nature of this research, ethical considerations are one of the most important aspects of the study. It is crucial to document people's practices and spaces while not belittling their beliefs, thus requiring consent beforehand to use the data collected in this research. With all questionnaires and interviews, written consent was acquired.

These forms included the contact details of the researcher, the purpose of the research, the steps taken to ensure confidentiality, such as the right to anonymity, and signatures of participants. As mentioned, the sensitive nature of this research means minors were not involved. Moreover, respecting the anonymity of the participants was of foremost importance.

Memory

To understand memorial making as a struggle for visibility and self-representation, it is a construction process wherein competing 'moral entrepreneurs' seek public arenas and support for their interpretations of the past (Costello, 2013). Memory is the bedrock of any culture. It is what ensures continuity and safeguards identity for future generations. This provides a bedrock for understanding cultural norms and fosters deeper communal connections.

Historically, memorials have aimed to create a bond between memory and space. The essence of such "art of memory" consists of imaginary contents of memory codified in compressed images associated with the formula of the structure of space with which the images are combined (Dimković, 2016). In her article Memorial Architecture as the Symbol of Remembrance and Memories, Dimković writes about several conceptual forms of memory. These are remembrance, community and cultural continuity. Cultural memory can further be broken into mimetic memory which relates to habitual and repetitive actions, and memory of objects.

Theory

Memories are often related to a material object that represents the semiotic signifier and the memory of that moment. Memory is mainly needed as an intermediary and signifier; it is a memorial building, which is a document, evidence of the past, and an archive that will be transmitted to future generations (Dimković, 2016). The author speaks of the importance of symbology and its power to strengthen the memory of a place in a person's mind.

If one accepts the importance of memory and remembrance within the mechanism of presenting memorial architecture, it is necessary to comprehend the approach to structuring the space of remembrance. An archived memory stops existing as a memory once separated from the only mediator able to revive it (Dimković, 2016). By creating unbroken threads from memory to memorial, the symbolic significance of memory can be preserved, be it through mimetic memory or object memory.

Application

Moving forward, elements of object memory will be incorporated into the memorial component of the intervention. There are strong ritualistic themes associated with burials and objects linked to that. One example is the *Commiphora myrrha* colloquially known as the “Chibobo” tree, the branches of which were used as grave markers symbolising a burial place. By using this concept one can symbolically pay homage to those graves.

Ritual

Theoretical description of ritual generally regards it as an action which distinguishes it from the conceptual aspects of religion, such as beliefs, symbols, and myths. Ritual is then described as particularly routinised, habitual, obsessive, or mimetic (Bell, 2009). Ritual methods can be expressed through thought and action. These can be further explained as beliefs and rites: beliefs are representations of the sacred whereas rites are modes of actions representing the sacred. The dichotomy of these two elements form the cornerstone of ritualistic practices. The two often follow each other – beliefs create the space where rites can be performed and thus create rituals.

In contrast, other avenues of theory classify ritual theory as no different to religious theory. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, religious scholars debated the primacy of religion and ritual (Bell, 2009). The predominant view was based on reconstructions of past events. Theoretical positions were used to determine historical narratives that eluded to strong similarities between ritual and religion. Ritual is religion in action; it is the cutting edge of the tool; it is ritual that accomplishes what religion sets out to do.

In this formulation, a ritual is a form of human action determined or shaped by underlying religious views (Fogelin, 2007). However, these theories were eventually abandoned because of a lack of archaeological evidence to back these claims. Although no serious scholar in any discipline argues that ritual and religion is completely determinative of the other, different scholars tend to emphasize one over the other. These differences in emphasis lead to important differences in approaching the study of religion and ritual (Fogelin, 2007).

Dichotomy of religion and ritual

A component of religion is a system of symbols that aims to establish powerful and lasting motivations and moods in people. Through these symbols, the idea of existence that is both realistic and powerful is created. It aims to establish a connection between the mortal person and an immortal deity. On the other hand, ritual is a broader sphere outside religion. These can be thoughtless, habitual or instinctive actions.

Moreover, all religious beliefs have rituals but not all rituals require a belief. Ritual is often the physical manifestation of religious practices. People transform and change underlying religious beliefs through the creation and practice of rituals. Rather than focus on stable meanings of ritual actions, practice theorists emphasize the experiential aspects of ritual and the effects of ritual on the social relations between ritual participants (Fogelin, 2007).

Rituals can be any of the following

- Rituals are often more formal activities than that people use in their daily lives. They employ various codes of speech and actions that people rarely use.
- Ritual usually involves a public display.
- Rituals regularly employ mimetic anachronistic or archaic themes reminiscent of trial activities.
- Rituals can follow strict repetitive actions.
- Rituals can incorporate sacred symbolism.

Application

Ritualistic practices often strongly incorporate a narrative in their processes. By taking these processes and framing an intervention around them one can encapsulate the essence of the ritual. This thesis attempts to achieve this by creating spaces that were directly inspired by the practices of the people in the Zambezi, these being strong themes of cleansing with water and fire. These have been incorporated into the traditional practice burial hall. Furthermore, the ritualistic act of placing a “Chibobo” tree branch on the grave-site has been done in the memorial space.

Genius Loci

A concrete term for the environment is place. It is common usage to say that acts and occurrences take place. In fact it is meaningless to image any happening without reference to a locality. Place is evidently an integral part of existence (Norberg-Schulz, 1980, p. 6). In his works, Norberg-Schulz adopts the idea that spaces, where life happens, are “places”. A place is a space that has a unique character that evokes feelings and emotions to a person. This character or “Genius loci” is the fingerprinting of space. A place is therefore a qualitative, “total” phenomenon, which we cannot reduce to any of its properties, such as spatial relationships, without losing its concrete nature out of sight (Norberg-Schulz, 1980, p. 8).

Conclusion

Researching the theory behind memory, ritual and sense of place gave a deeper understanding about the themes of the project, it shed light on these existential themes, the importance of linking memory and space and its physical manifestation of memorial and its importance to people. An understanding was gained of the dichotomy of religion and ritual, and how the concept of rituals can exist outside religion, because all religions have ritualistic elements but not all rituals are religious in nature. Lastly, the reciprocal relationship between space and place were investigated, how it evokes feelings and emotions in people and how theses can give a place its unique fingerprint.

CHAPTER

Precedents

03



Figure 3.1. Image of Igualada cemetery <https://www.archdaily.com/103839/ad-classics-igualada-cemetery-enric-miralles>

Introduction

This project was first imagined as an architectural competition held in 1984 by the city of Igualada just outside of Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain. The Igualada Cemetery is a project that challenges the traditional notions of what constitutes a cemetery. Miralles and Pinos conceptualised the poetic ideas of a cemetery for the visitors to begin to understand and accept the cycle of life as a link between the past, present, and future (Kroll, 2011). The architects envisioned the space as “the city of the dead” where the dead and living can come closer together.

Traditional Burial Reinterpretation Centre

Typology

The primary function of the space is a burial site. However, there is a pathology laboratory adjacent to the chapel. This created a streamlined method from preparation, to church and finally to the grave. This was built into the architecture of the intervention. In this manner, it differs from conventional cemeteries which usually do not have any body preparation facilities on site.

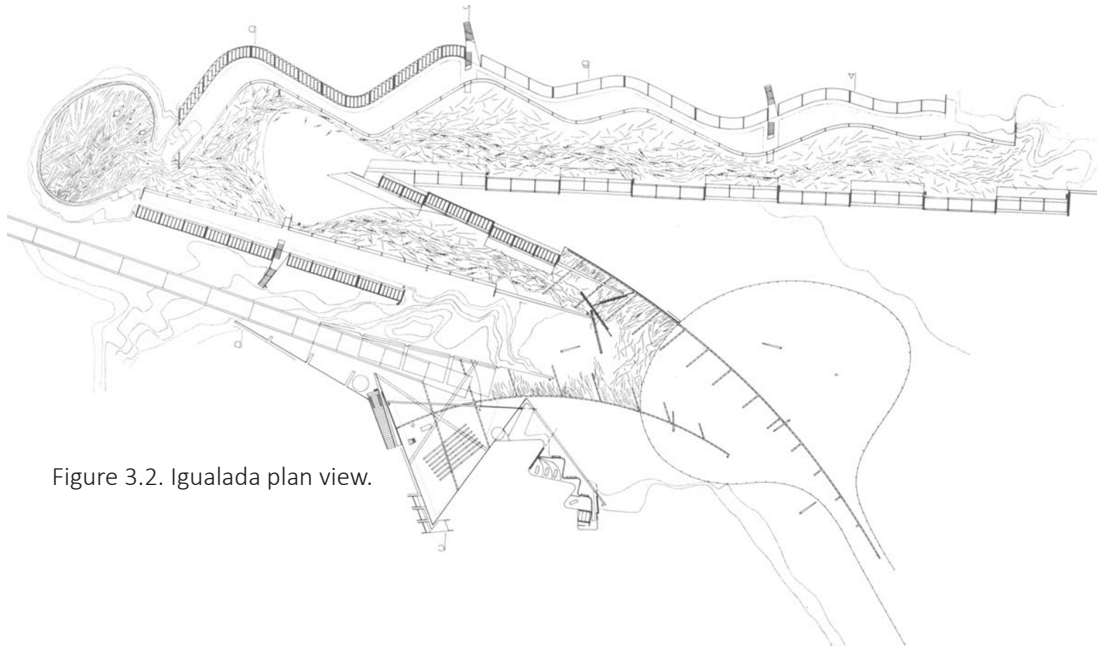


Figure 3.2. Igualada plan view.



Figure 3.3. Vegetation section.

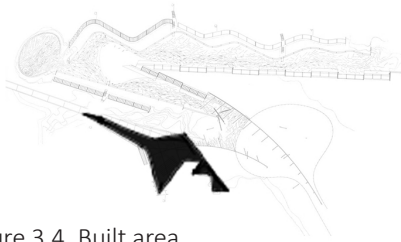


Figure 3.4. Built area.

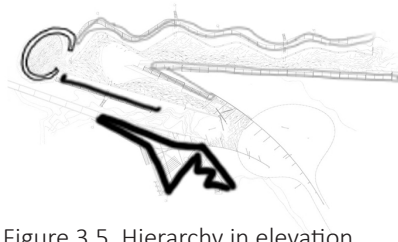


Figure 3.5. Hierarchy in elevation.

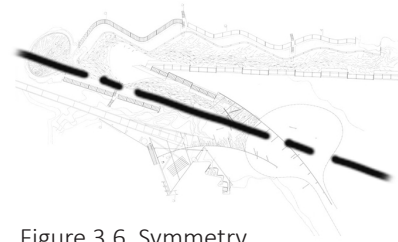


Figure 3.6. Symmetry.

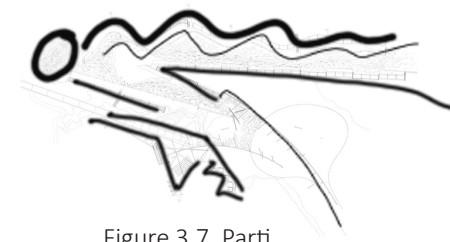


Figure 3.7. Parti.

Structure

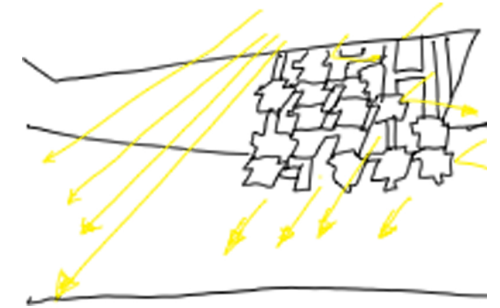
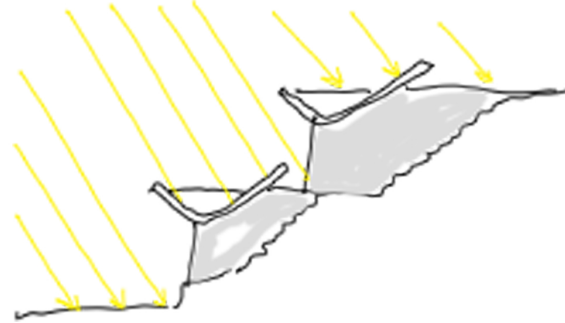
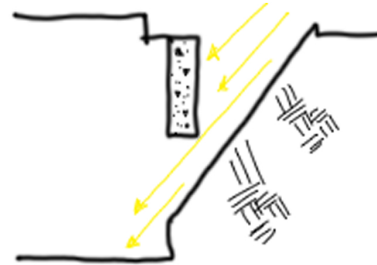
The structure is different from most cemeteries as it is built into the Catalan hillside. It is a 3 tier linear structure with burial spaces. The site tries to be in harmony with nature. The upper tiers all have roof-top gardens. The different levels step back making the burial space more related to humans. This also makes the intervention site appropriate. The decomposition method is built into the structure, wherein bodies are sealed in tombs with an opening into the hill for the drainage of fluids.

Material

The cemetery makes use of a lot of concrete; it is the primary material alongside the gabion walls and some steel elements. The concrete and steel are uncoated and are meant to weather and show signs of aging. This symbolises the decay of all things. The architects drew inspiration from the works of Le Corbusier and is brutalist in their design.



Figure 3.8 . Natural permeation.



Thresholds

The architects explored with the idea of thresholds, the first being the obvious transition between life and death. This was done by creating a space representing the relationship the living have with death, and allowing the families of the dead to interact with the tomb itself and be separated from the body by only a concrete slab.

This is different from most cemeteries where bodies are buried in the ground: in contrast, here they are buried in the structure. The architects emphasized the layering of life and death by locating the burial spaces on the lower levels with the chapel on the highest tier.



Figure 3.9. Gabion wall.

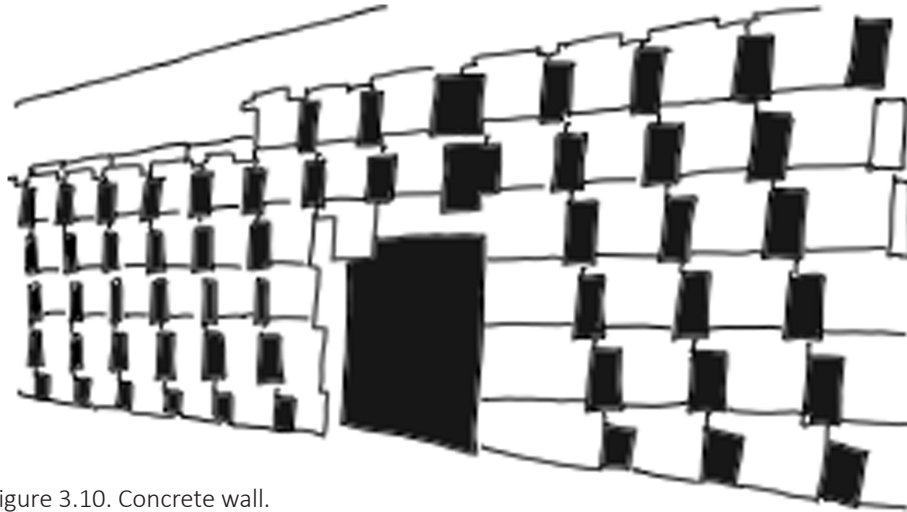


Figure 3.10. Concrete wall.

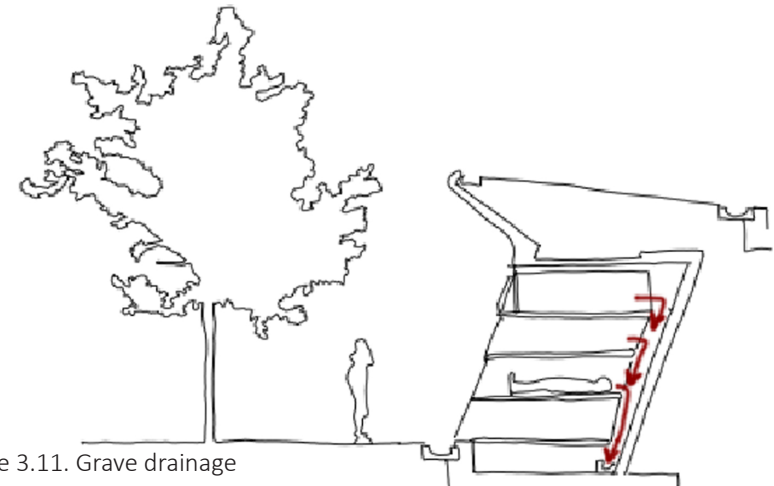


Figure 3.11. Grave drainage



Figure 3.12. Image of Hall of Immortality, Source: <https://www.archdaily.com/953025/hall-of-immortality-at-longshan-cemetery-studio-10>

This building is purely driven by function, with its high walls and triangular shape ensuring the privacy of the occupants. The architect claims the spaces are quiet and introverted, intending to make people contemplate their mortality. The fundamental elements of nature are also expressed in the architecture; light, water, soil, sky, clouds and rocks. The form of the building allows for a single flow movement that symbolizes life's journey. A strong theme of cleansing is used in the building: water is used to cleanse people at the entrance and there are water channels running through it.

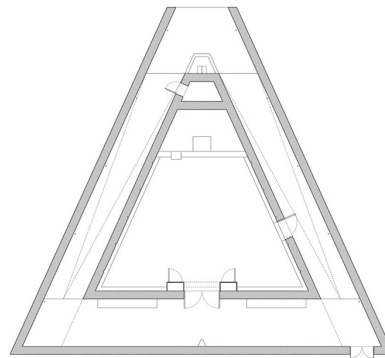


Figure 3.13. Plan view



Figure 3.14. Elevation

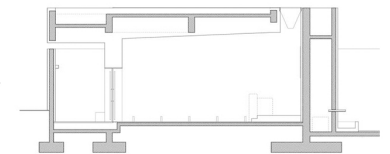


Figure 3.15. Section

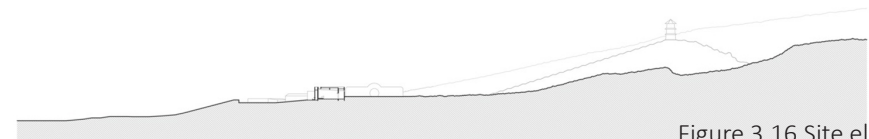


Figure 3.16. Site elevation



Figure 3.17. Circulation

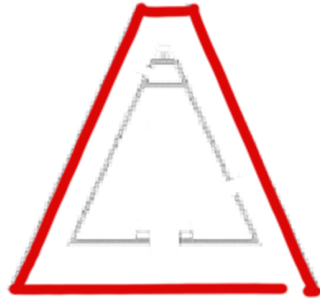


Figure 3.18. Building outline



Figure 3.19. Hierarchy

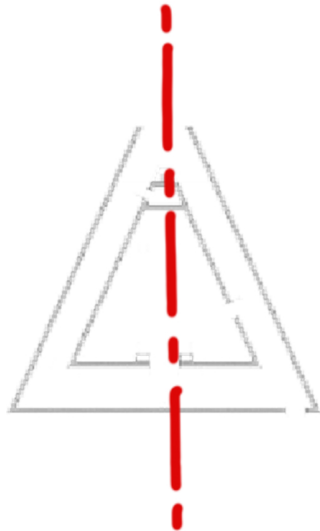


Figure 3.20. Symmetry

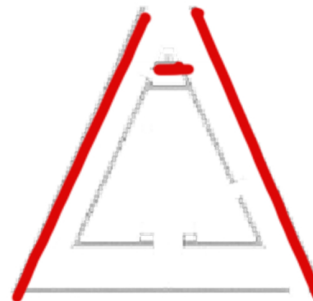


Figure 3.21. Plan & Elevation

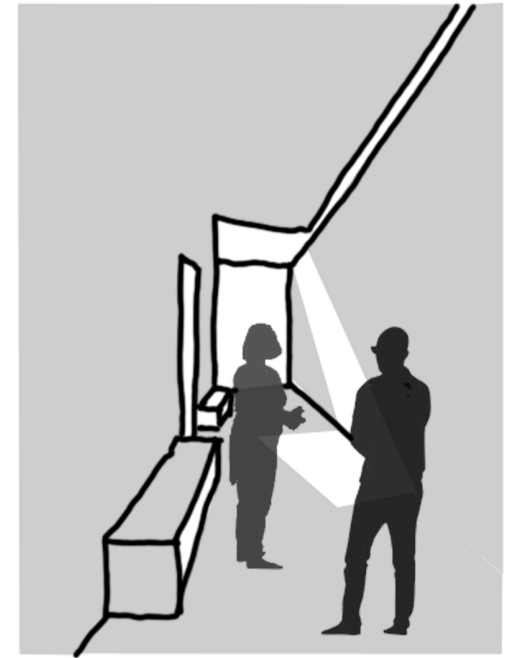


Figure 3.22. Perspective of internal hallway

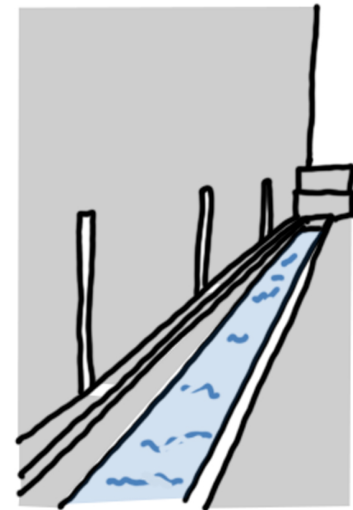


Figure 3.23. Perspective water feature

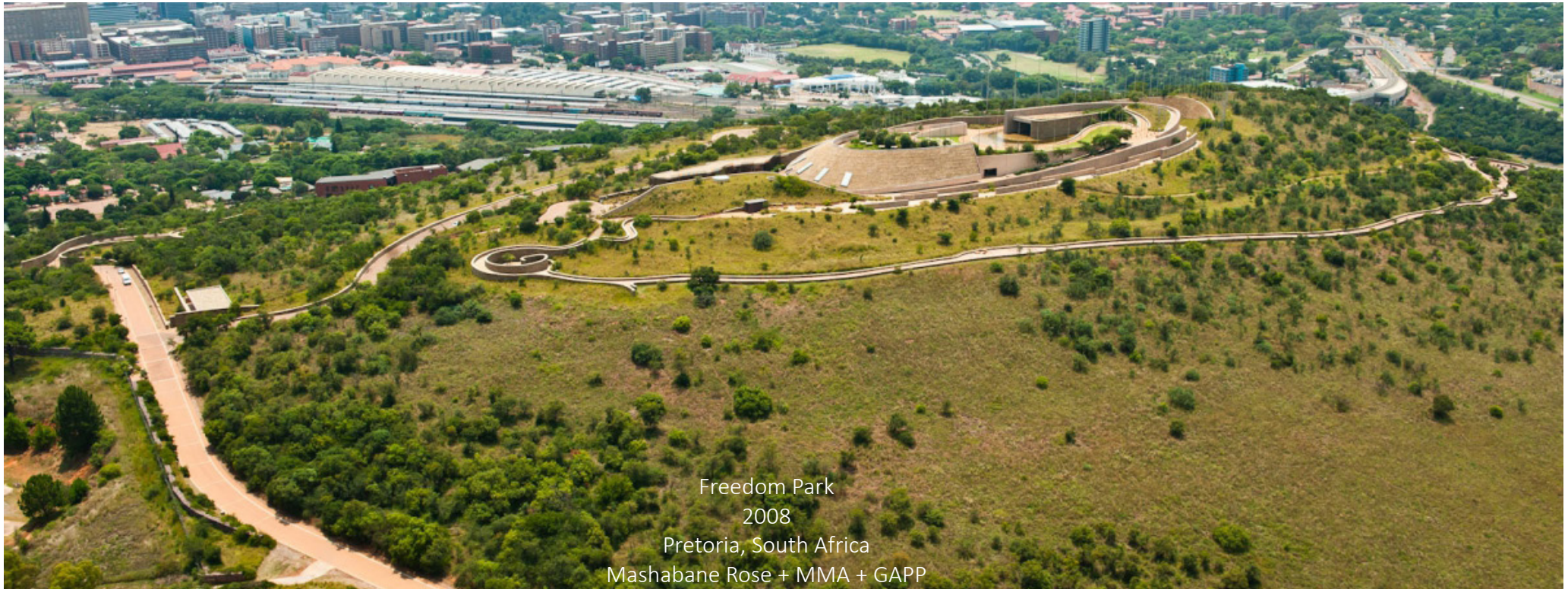


Figure 3.24. Image showing freedom Park, Source: <https://mashabanerose.co.za/freedom-park>

Freedom Park was designed as the final resting place of South African freedom fighters, its design was inspired by indigenous knowledge systems. The circle of boulders that form the isivivane, the misting spray and input of traditional healers all played part in establishing an architectural language. The voortrekker monument, creates a dialogue with Freedom Park as there is a route directly linking the two creating a strong statement of peace and togetherness. The architectural elements used were water, fire, stone and indigenous trees and plants. This grounded the project and emphasised the importance of culture and history.

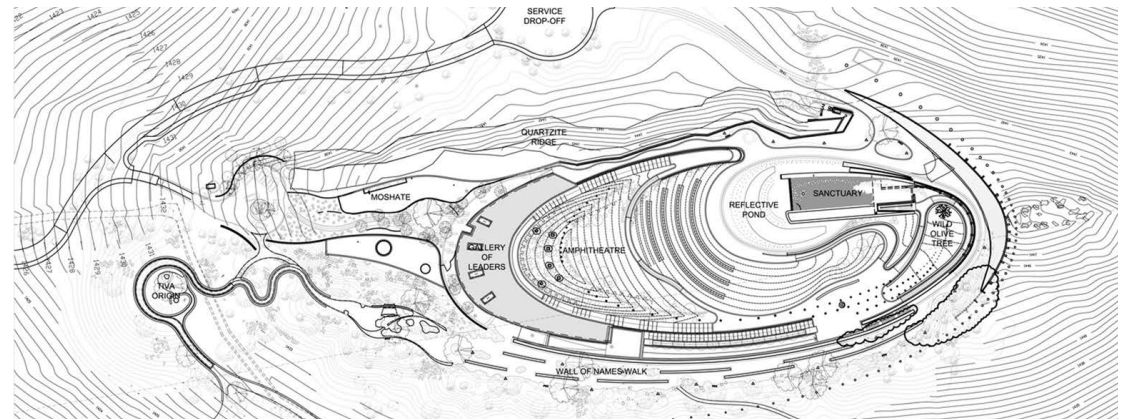
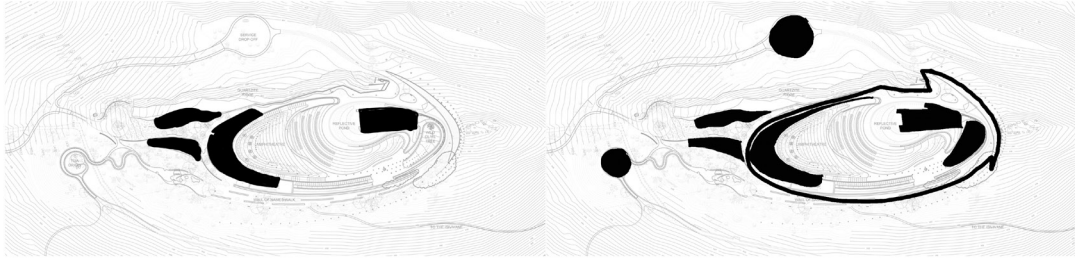


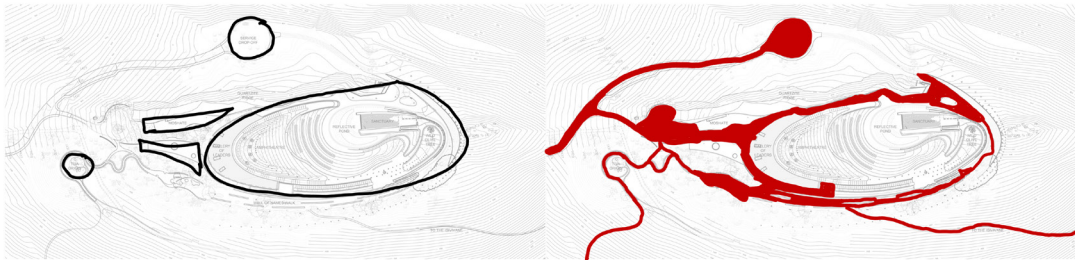
Figure 3.25. Plan of freedom Park, Source: <https://mashabanerose.co.za/freedom-park>

Build



hierarchy

Part 1



North

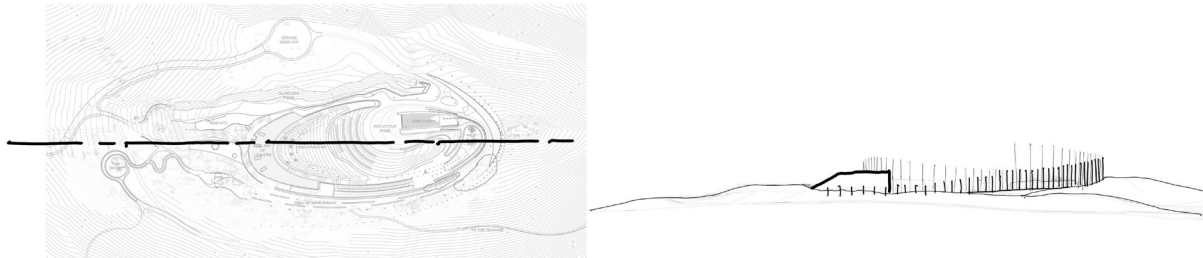


Figure 3.26. Diagrams showing plan analysis.

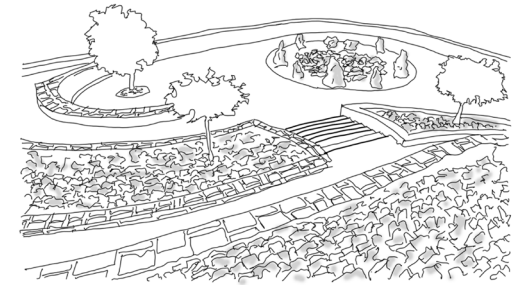


Figure 3.28. "Isivivane". isivivane means mound of stones symbolic burial ground

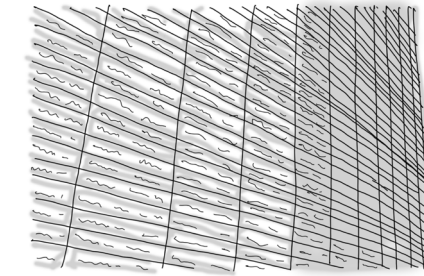


Figure 3.29. Wall of names.



Figure 3.27. Reeds of birth.

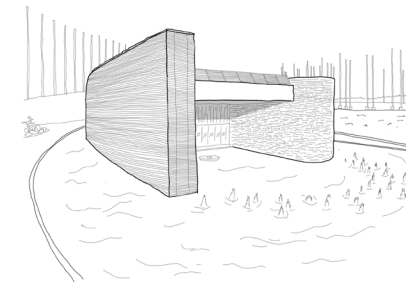


Figure 3.30. "Skhumbutho". Siswati word mean to remember eternal connection to unknown hero

CHAPTER

Site
Site Conditions
Client
Brief
Programme

04



Figure 4.1. Map of Africa

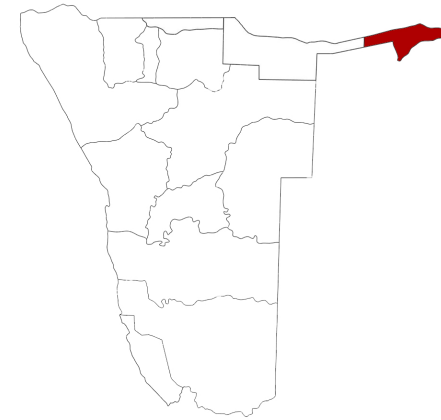


Figure 4.2. Map of Namibia, indicating the Zambezi Region



Figure 4.3 Map of Zambezi Region, indicating the location of Katima Mulilo

Site



Figure 4.4. Map of Katima Mulilo

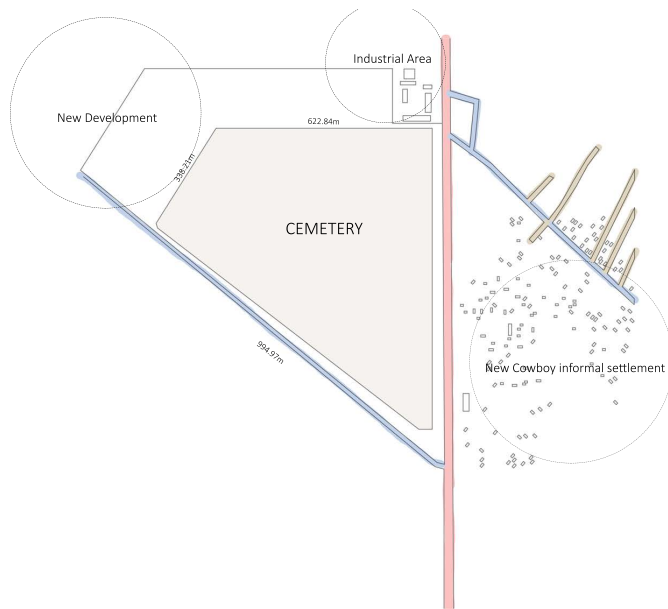


Figure 4.5. Site location and surroundings

To the north of the site lies an industrial complex, to the west a new housing development, and to the east an informal settlement called “New Cowboy”.

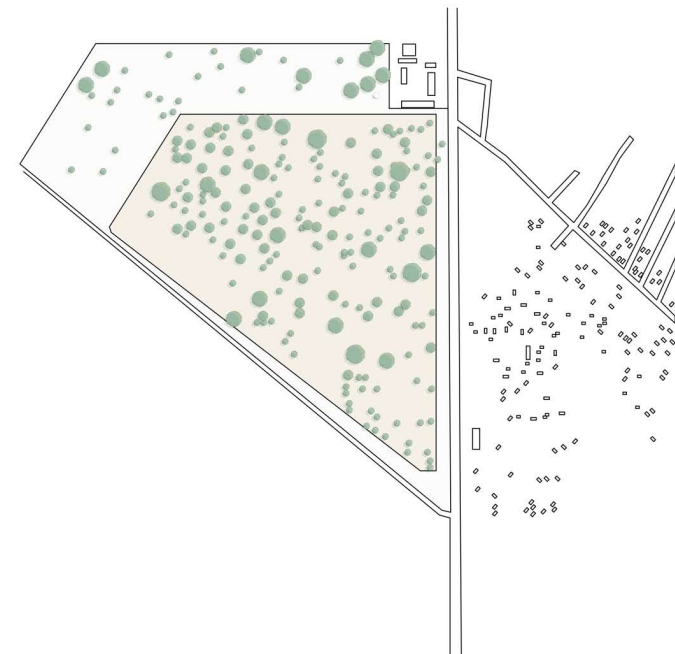


Figure 4.6. Trees on site

Unlike other cemeteries, Katima Mulilo cemetery is covered with wild trees and dense bushes. The cemetery has no grid and the layout is only known by the groundskeeper.

Site





Organic pathways are flanked by graves, no order or structure is present in this planning.

Figure 4.7. Pathways and grave locations

Site Conditions

Within the cemetery there is no existing grids or layout for grave spaces. The exact location of new graves is only known by the groundskeeper.

There are graves which have completely been engulfed by the bush. It is not uncommon for grave diggers to dig into an existing grave.

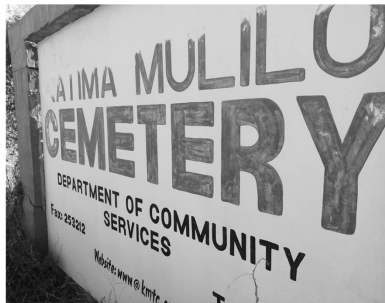


Figure 4.8. - 4.13. Site conditions

During the rainy season the bush grows in an uncontrolled manner. It grows so high one cannot see the graves. These rains often result in trees being knocked over, blocking routes.



It is custom to leave some memorabilia belonging to the deceased at graves.



Figure 4.14. - 4.18. Site conditions

According to the 2011 census, the Zambezi region has a population of roughly 90 000 people, equating to a population density of 6.1/km² (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2011). The region comprises of 7 ethnic tribes – Subia, Yeyi, Mafwe, Totela, Mbukushu, Mbalangwe and Khwe – each with their own language. Though there are 7 tribes, only 4 have official tribal authorities recognised under the Traditional Authorities Act No 5 of 2000 in the Zambezi region, these being the Masubia, Mafwe, Mashi and the Mayeyi Traditional Community.

They all have their respective areas of jurisdiction which have some areas overlapping. For this project the 4 recognised traditional authorities have decided to come together for the sake of creating an intervention that represents a reinterpretation of burial culture in the modern age, a gallery that showcases the history of burial practices, and a memorial to the countless unmarked or forgotten graves.

Client

Mafwe



Figure 4.19 Mafwe chief. source: <https://www.namibian.com.na/186008/archive-read/Chief-Mamili-defends-land-dispute-decision>

Chief Gerge Simasiku Mamili

Language : chifwe

Location: : chinchimane,
Zambezi region



Masubia



Figure 4.20 Masubia chief. source:

Chief Gilbert Muhongo Mutwa

- Language : ciSubia

- Location: : Bukalo, Zambezi
Region



Mashi



Figure 4.21 Mashi chief. source: <https://neweralive.na/posts/chief-mayuni-condemns-secessionist-group>

Chief Joseph Tembwe Mayuni

- Language : chifwe,

- Location: no area of
jurisdiction

Mayeyi

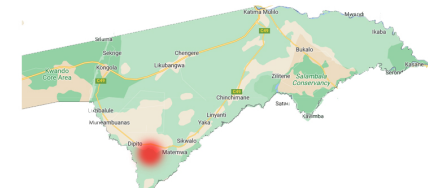


Figure 4.22 Mayeyi chief. source: <https://neweralive.na/posts/liuluta-batabela-mukiti-wa-batshara>

Chief Boniface Lutibezi Shufu

- Language : shiYeyi

- Location: Sangwali, Zambezi
Region



Client details

Brief

People of the Zambezi region have historically not made use of demarcated cemeteries. These spaces have been historically dictated by cultural practices and taboos. With the introduction of Christianity these practices have been dying out and these spaces have become derelict and forgotten. Often new settlements are built atop forgotten grave spaces and the region is littered with these graves. This project aims to:

- Foster representation: through representation cemeteries can be inclusive parts of the urban fabric
- Celebrate culture: by creating a space that educates people about their history and breaks cultural taboos around traditional practices

This project is comprised of three components, a traditional burial practice hall, an exhibition space and a memorial.

Traditional Burial Reinterpretation Centre

This space will be used to perform traditional cleansing for mourners, by means of fire and water. As previously mentioned these are key elements of burial practices. When someone has died people would jump over a fire symbolizing them separating themselves from the dead. This would also be done with water and herbs. Additionally, the space will be used as a gathering space for loved ones after a death has taken place. Today there is a hybridization of practices where traditional practices fuse with more contemporary practices. For this reason, it is appropriate to have a hall for performing “requiems”.

Exhibition space

This space aims to educate the public on burial practices and related intricacies, including how spaces are chosen, the burial practices of chiefs and cleansing methods.

Memorial

As mentioned there is a myriad of lost or forgotten graves. The memorial space will aim to remember the lost.

Programme

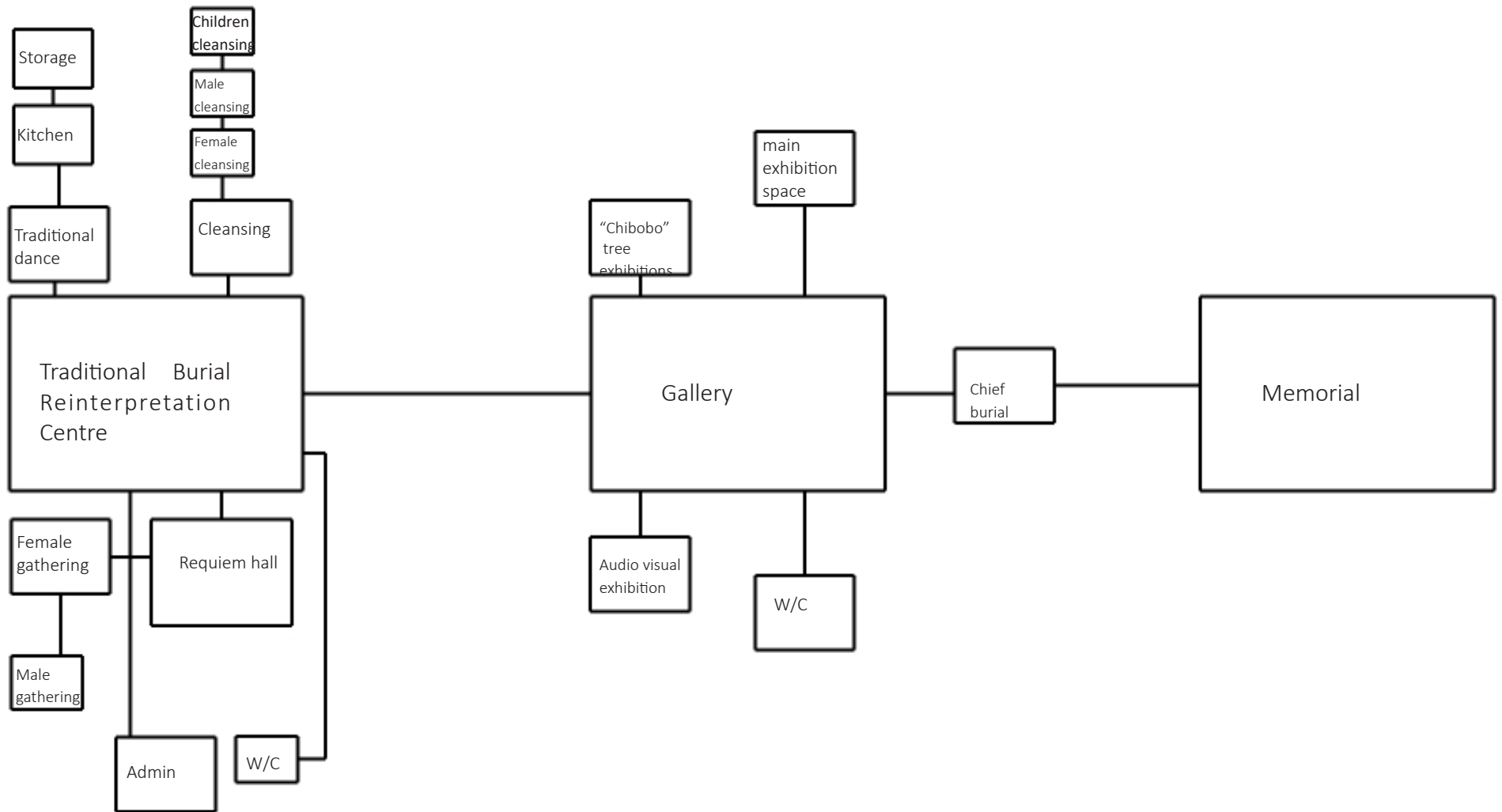


Figure 4.23 Intervention Programme.

Programme

CHAPTER

Touchstone
Concept
Design Development

05

This touchstone revolved around taking a twig from the cemetery and using this to generate a 3D form, it symbolises the relationship between the traditional practices and conventional ones. It was further translated into a plan exploration through an abstract deconstructionist exercise to create plan forms, reminiscent of the works of Kazimir Malevich.

Touchstone

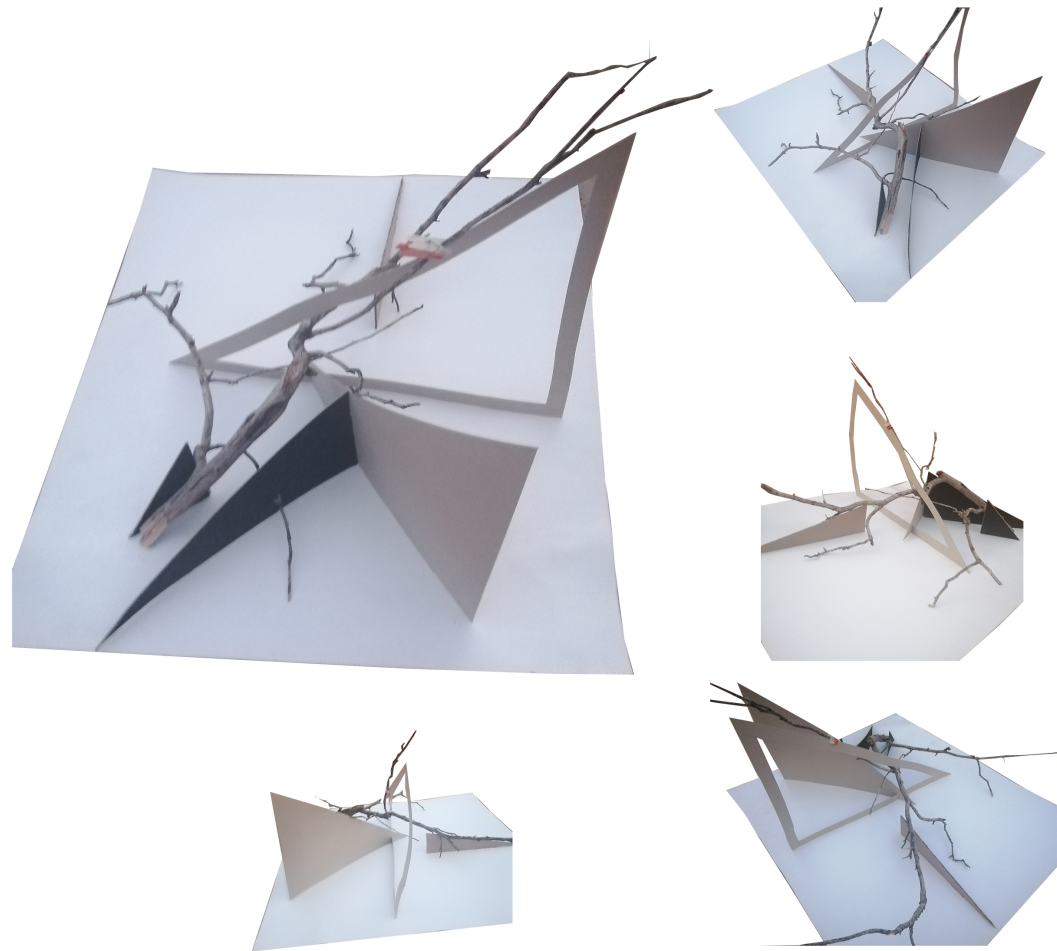


Figure 5.1. Images of touchstone model.

Site interpretation

The reasoning for choosing this area of the site was to minimize interference with the graves, ensuring that the dead are not disturbed. The area of the intervention would be accessed by the gravel road to the southwest of the cemetery.



Figure 5.2. Aerial view of cemetery



Initial concept

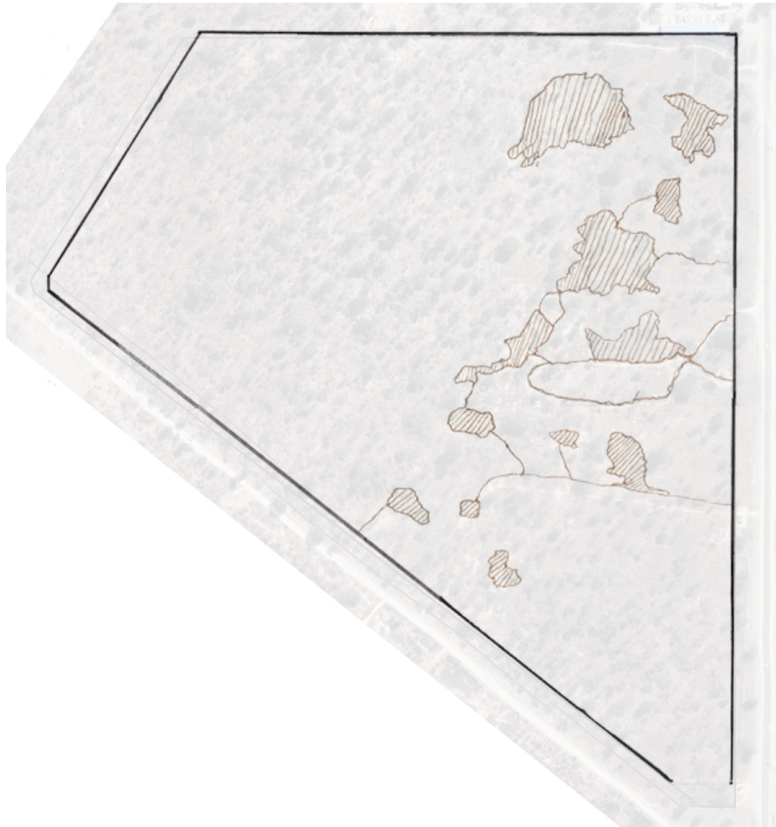


Figure 5.3. Map of graves

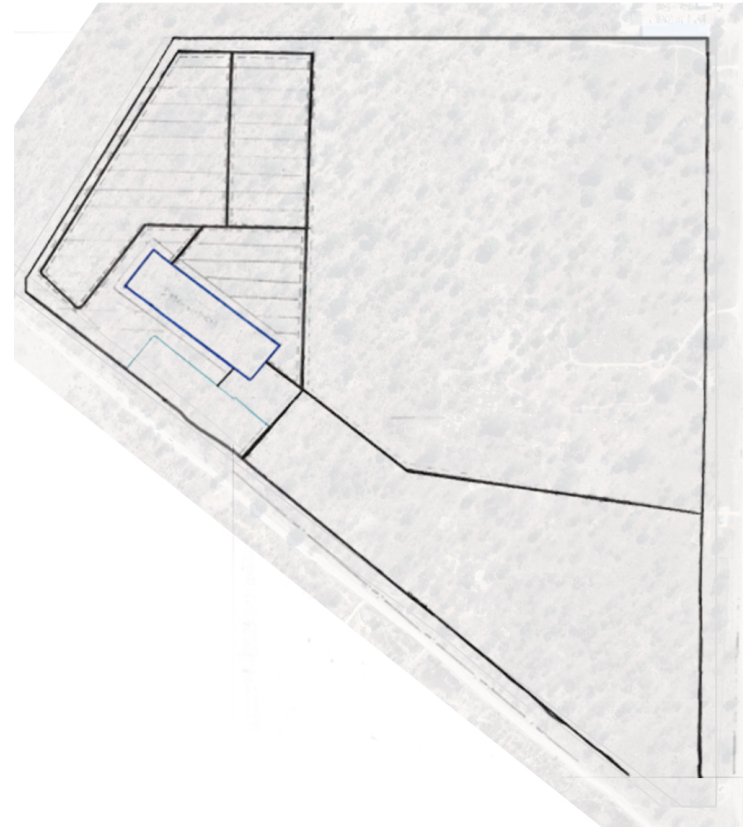


Figure 5.4. Proposed site layout



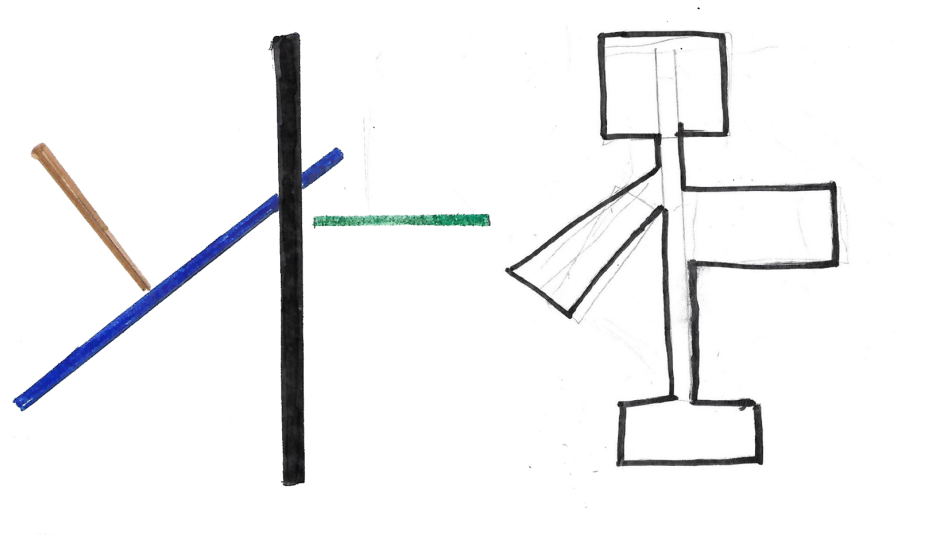


Figure 5.5 Plan extrapolation from sketch

For the initial concept, a plan was extrapolated from the plan view of the touchstone. This allowed for the creation of the initial investigation into morphology. This subsequently evolved into a space that incorporated all functions allocated in the programme.

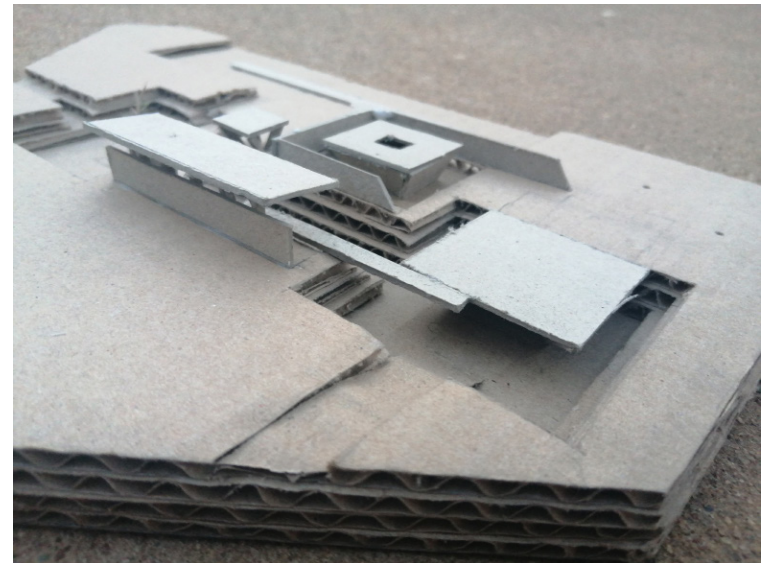


Figure 5.6 Morphological exercise

Initial concept

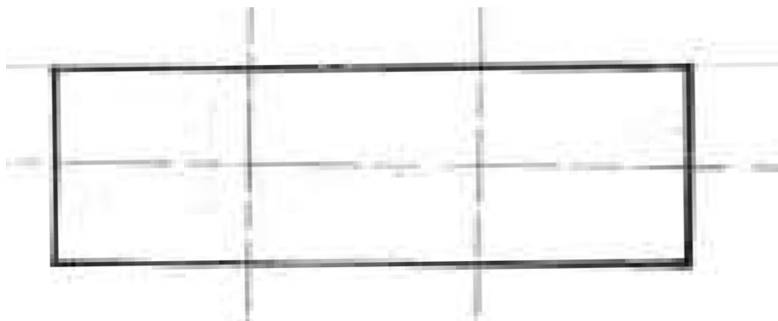


Figure 5.7 Site boundaries

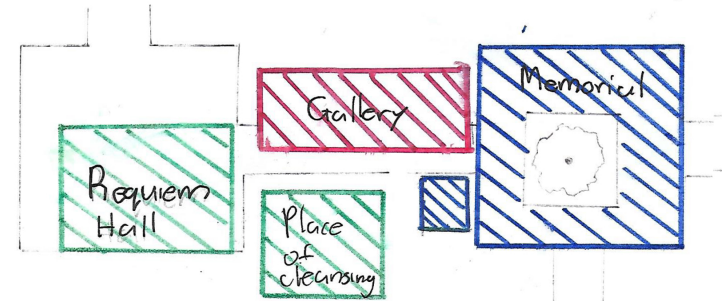


Figure 5.8. Functions

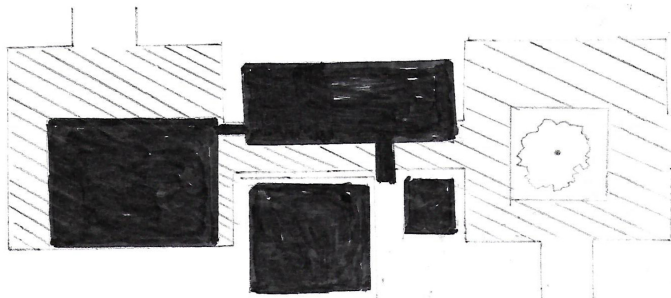


Figure 5.9. Built layout

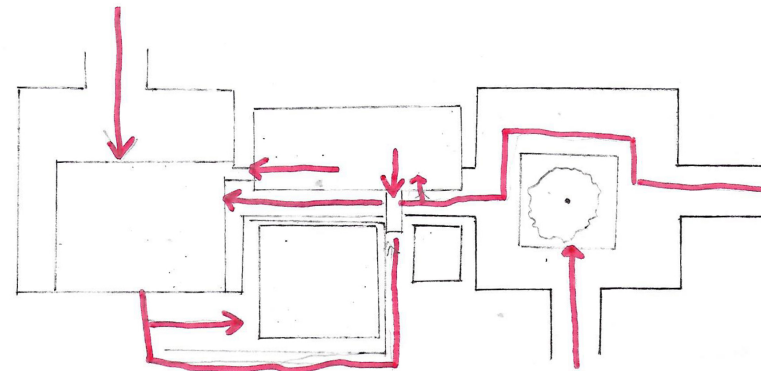


Figure 5.10. Access

This design iteration was helpful in establishing a stronger narrative basis for the project. Reflecting on this design allowed this author to develop a design routed in the process.

For the final concept, the focus area of the intervention shifted. The reasoning behind the design was that the current proposed area was affectively an island separated from the greater site and had very little interaction with how the site is currently being used.

To change this, it was proposed that the intervention be on the main access of the site and will stretch most of the way to the west. Furthermore, the intervention will partly be on the opposite side of the road on the New Cowboy's informal settlement. Historically, this was a burial site before people came and settled atop the graves.

Final Concept



Figure 5.11. Concept 3 site, Aerial view.

The traditional burial practices hall was inspired by the traditional homestead consisting of several circular shapes reminiscent of a vernacular hut. The biggest of these is the “requiem” hall where services can be held. The second-largest is the gathering space for women, followed by a smaller gathering space for men. This is also beneficial to the community of New Cowboys informal settlement who might not have the facilities required for the aforementioned burial practices.

The spaces for gathering are sized differently due to women gathering in larger quantities than men. The cleansing spaces for fire and water are to the south of the building. Additionally, a traditional dance space will be accommodated in the building as this is also part of the burial ritual process.

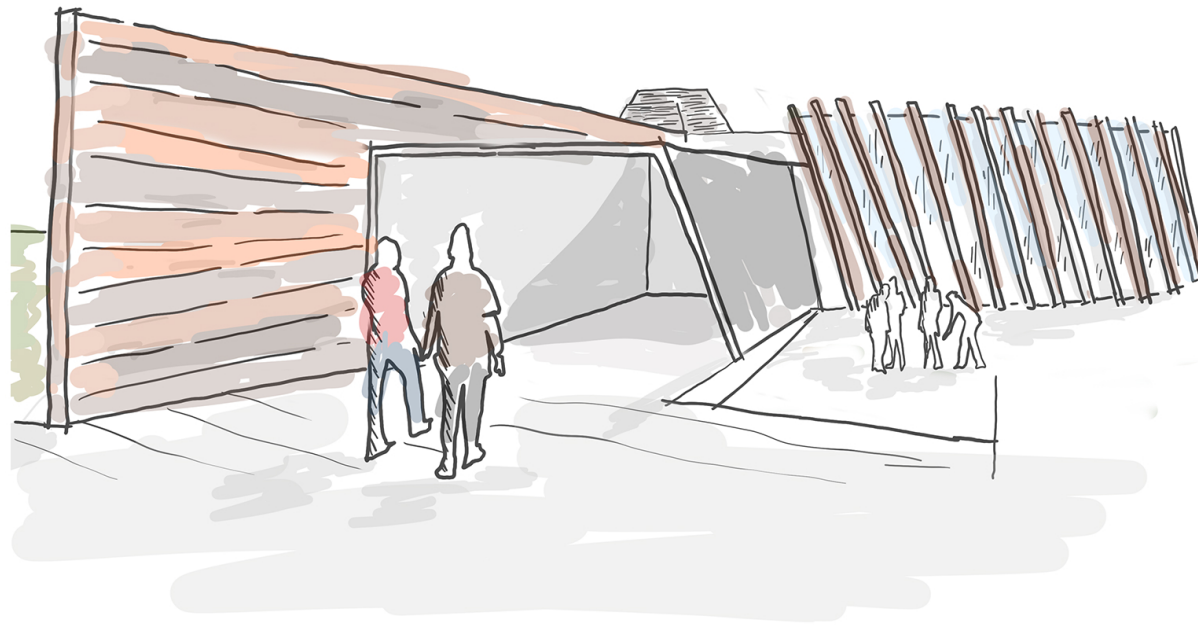


Figure 5.12. Approach to traditional burial practice hall- Sketch

This space is where people will jump over a fire symbolizing the separation of the living from the dead. Such separation ensures that the dead do not follow/haunt the living, allowing them to live normal lives.

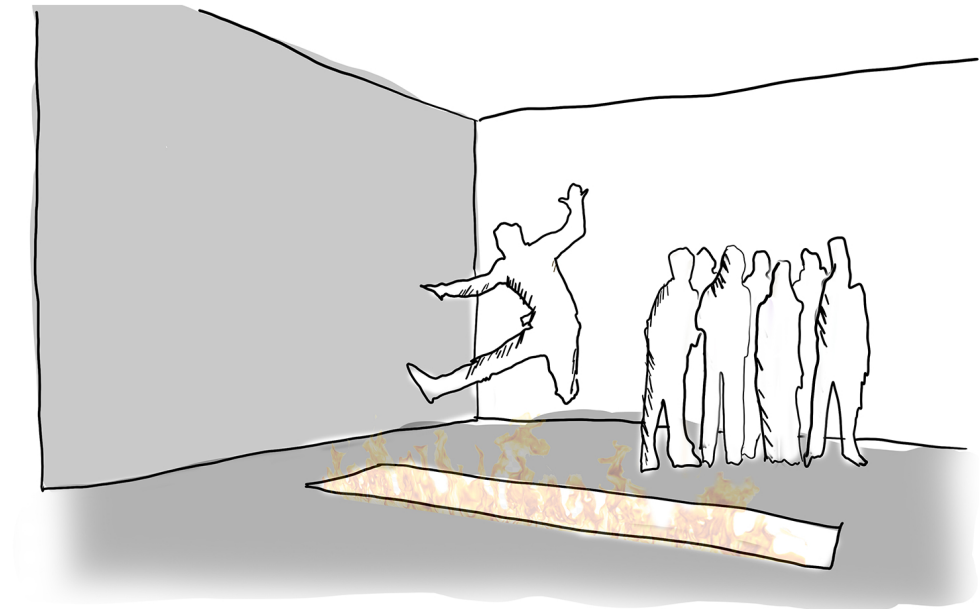


Figure 5.13. Traditional burial practice hall fire cleansing

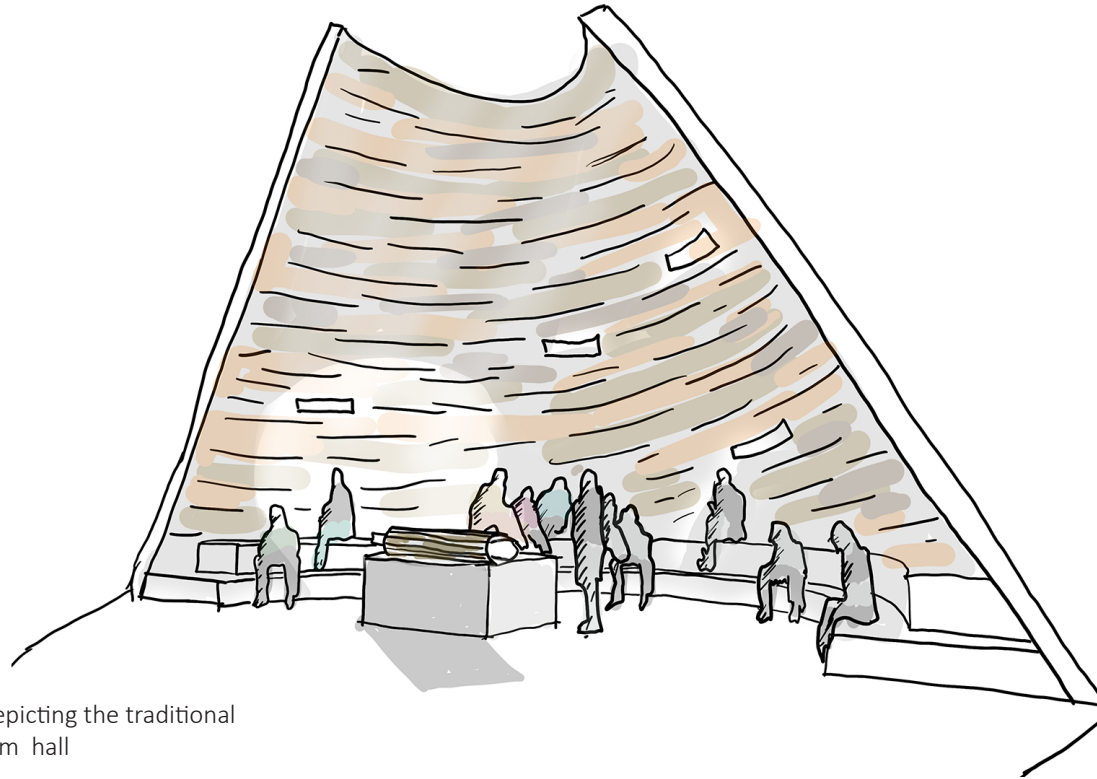


Figure 5.14. Sketch depicting the traditional burial practice requiem hall



Figure 5.15. Image of vernacular home stead, Source: <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/b5/33/5d/b5335d2fca45d7f32dee940b3e838bfc.jpg>

The plan for the Traditional Burial Reinterpretation Centre was inspired by vernacular homesteads comprised of several huts enclosed with a timber/river reed boundary wall. In this typical layout the different enclosures have specialised uses such as storage, bathing, and living, with a centralized space reserved for cooking.

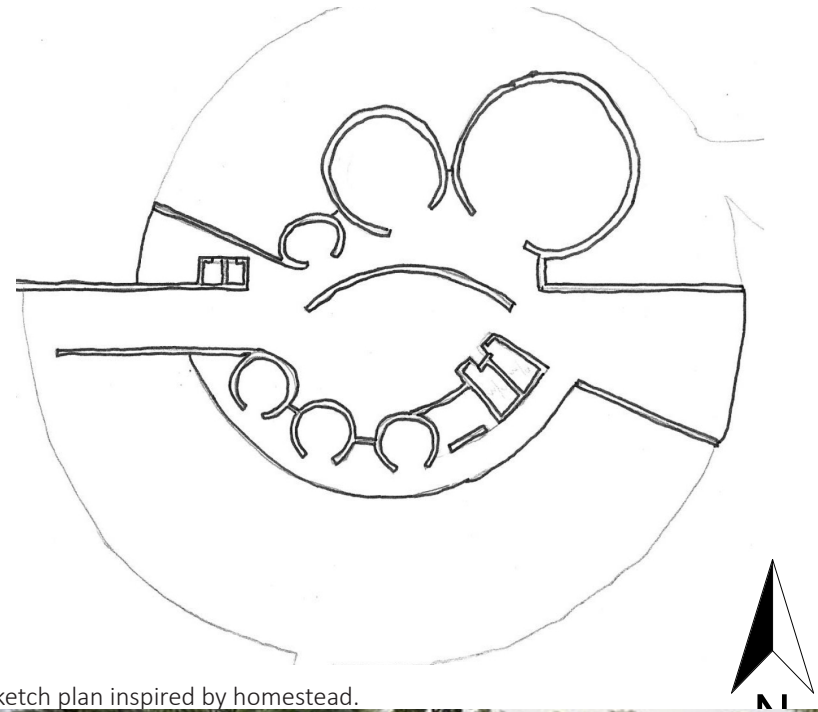


Figure 5.16. Sketch plan inspired by homestead.



Figure 5.17. A family's Homestead in the village at Lizauli near Kongola, Namibia.

Source: <https://www.alamy.com/kraal-einer-familie-in-dem-dorf-bei-lizauli-bei-kongola-namibia.jpeg>

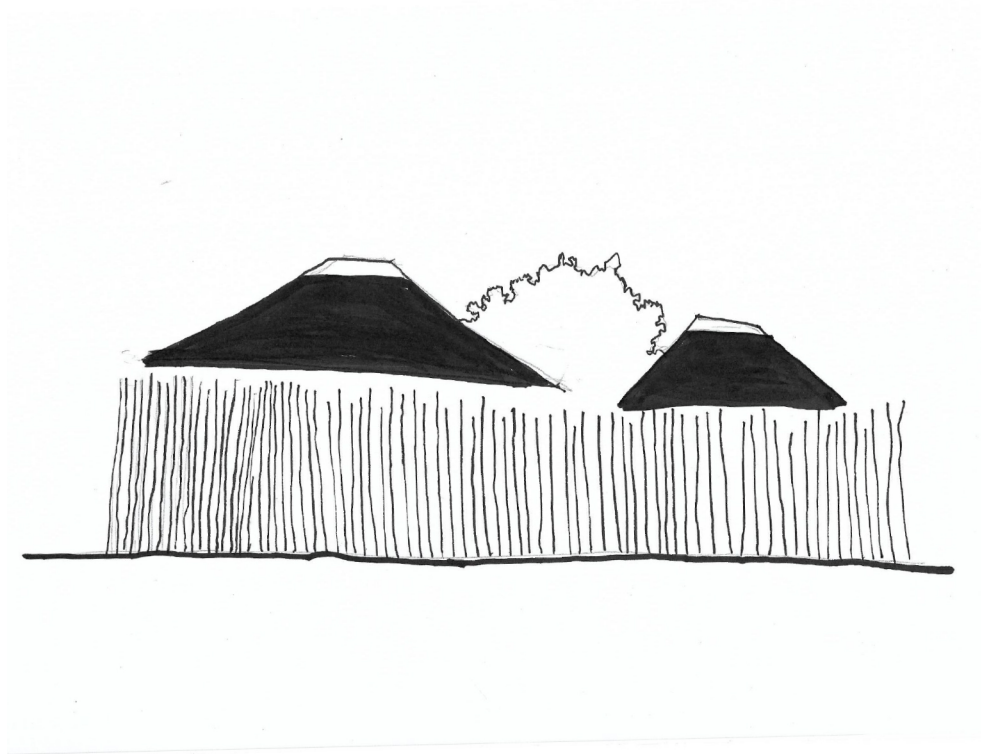
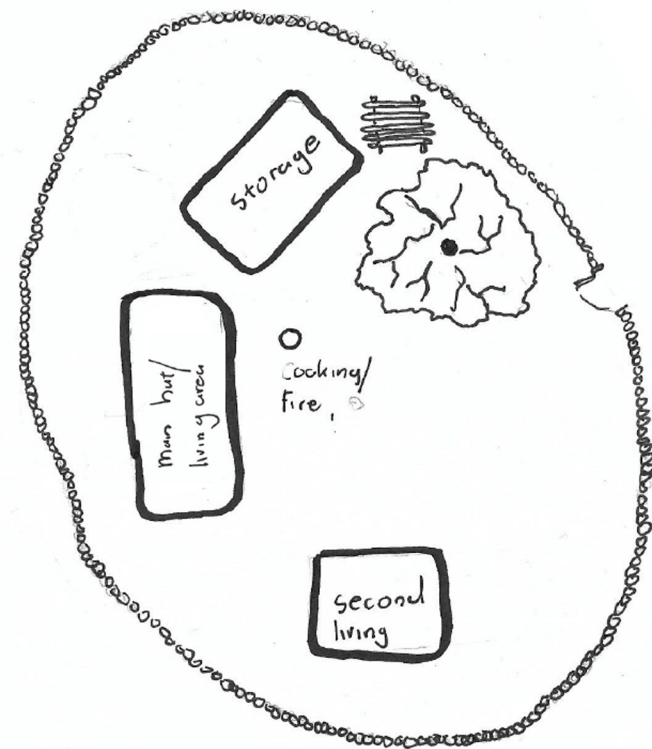


Figure 5.18. Sketch depicting typical layout of homestead.



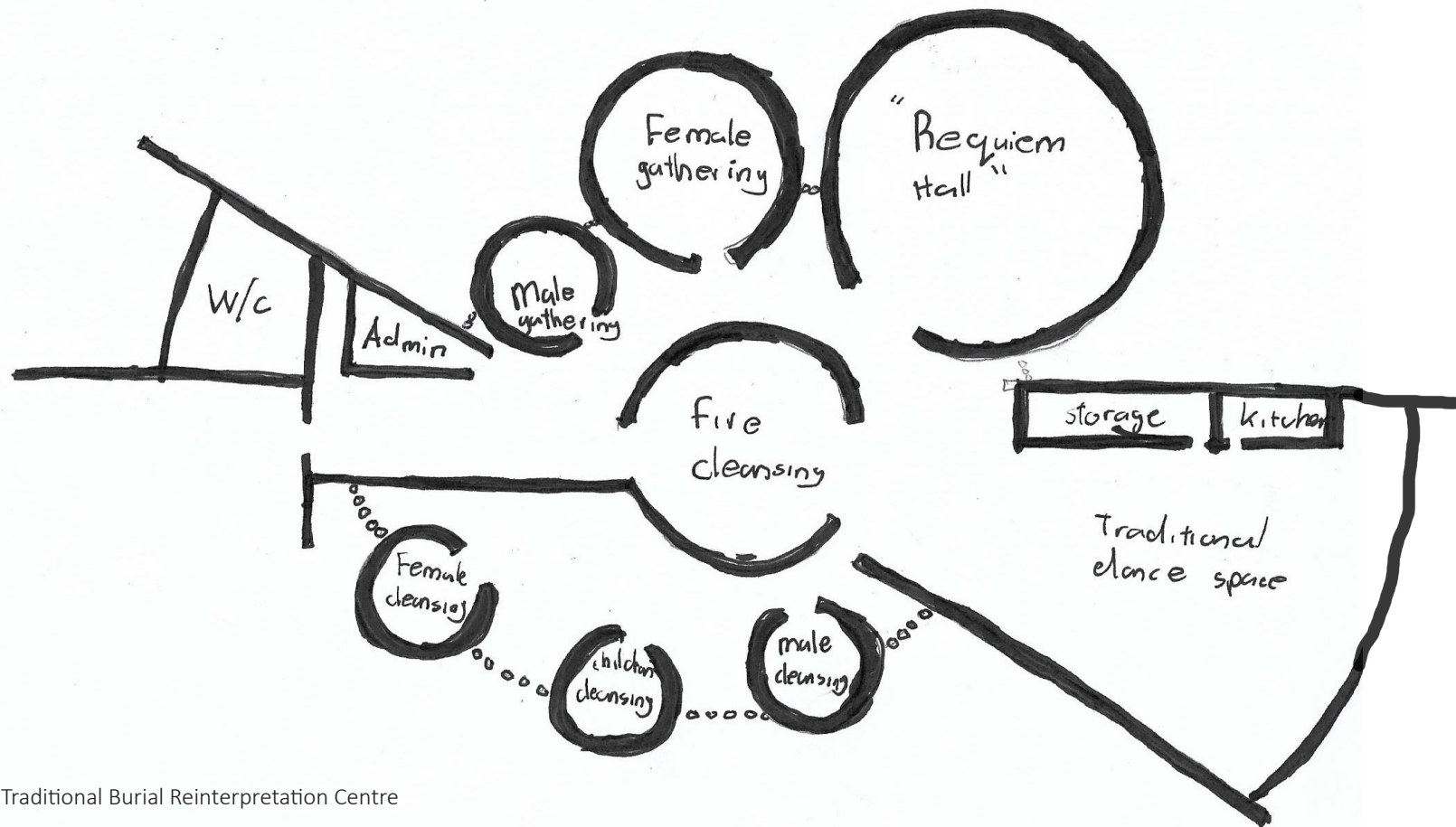


Figure 5.19 Traditional Burial Reinterpretation Centre



The gallery space will be an underground installation at the entrance of the cemetery. This is to emphasize the theme of death and the rituals surrounding it. The installation will be beneath the main access route for the cemetery.

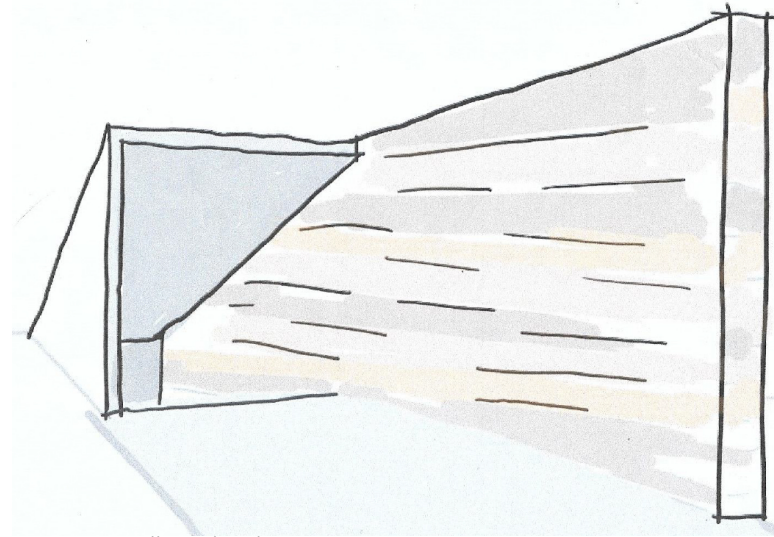


Figure 5.20. Gallery sketch

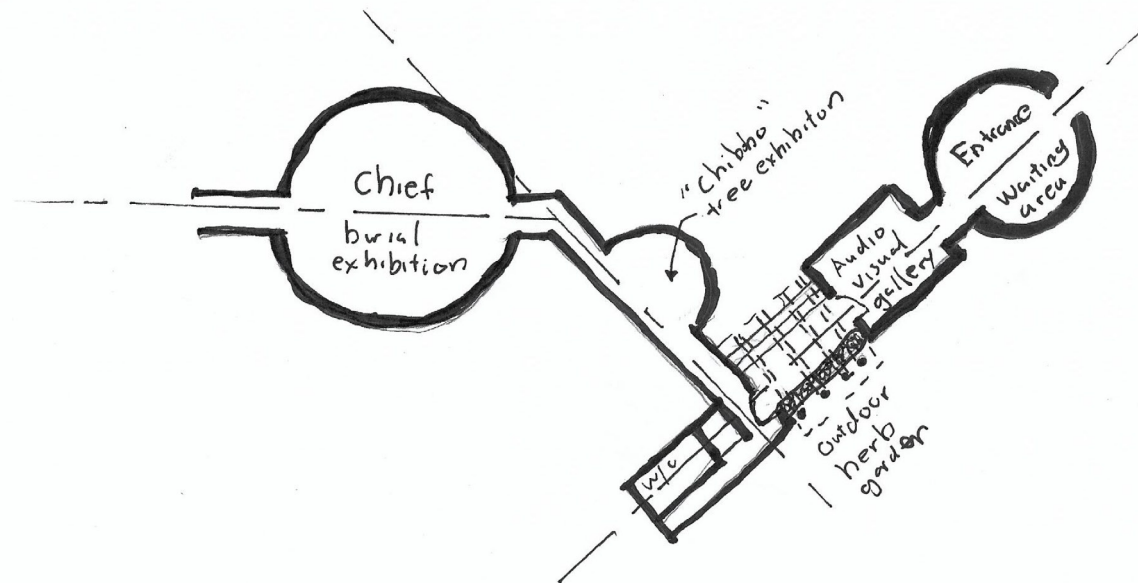


Figure 5.21. Sketch Gallery plan

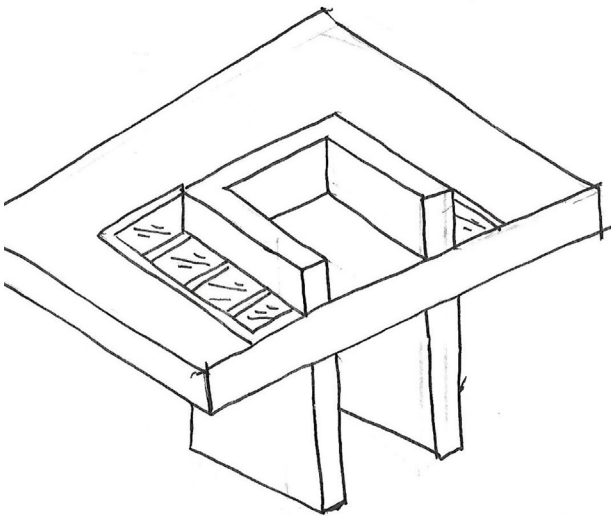


Figure 5.22. Sketch of light chief exhibition shaft

The chief burial exhibition will comprise of four empty thrones. This is a nod to the four major tribes involved. The exhibit will aim to show the final resting position of the chief which is always in a seated position.

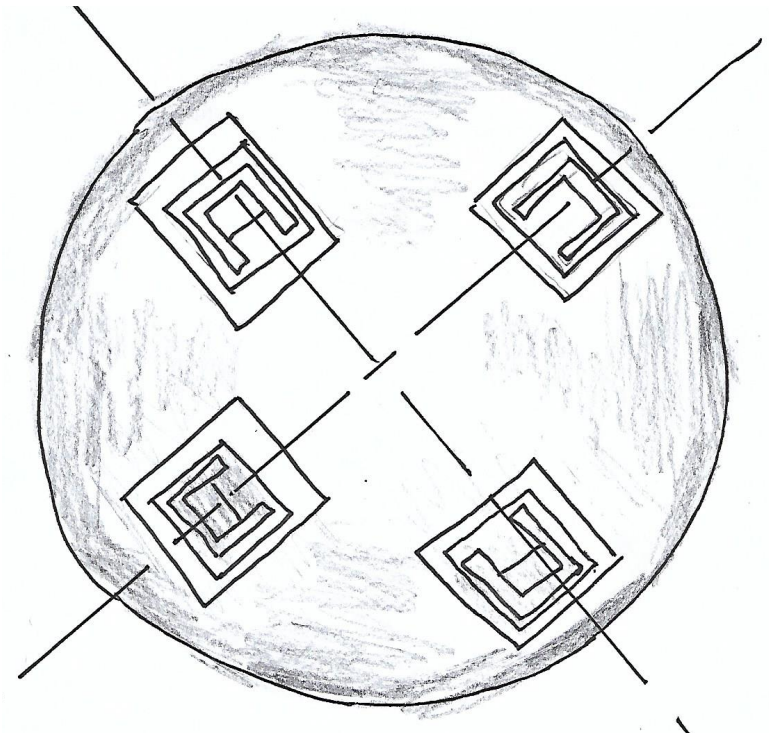
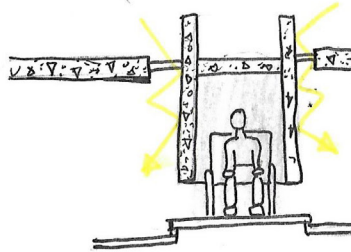


Figure 5.23. Sketches depicting chiefs' burial.

An image of the “chibobo tree” (or myrrh tree in English) is illustrated in Fig. 5.23. The branches of this tree were used as grave markers to signify a grave site. The gallery will have an exhibition dedicated to showcasing this tree and educating about its importance. The exhibit will be made of the husk of this tree, symbolizing its significance in death.

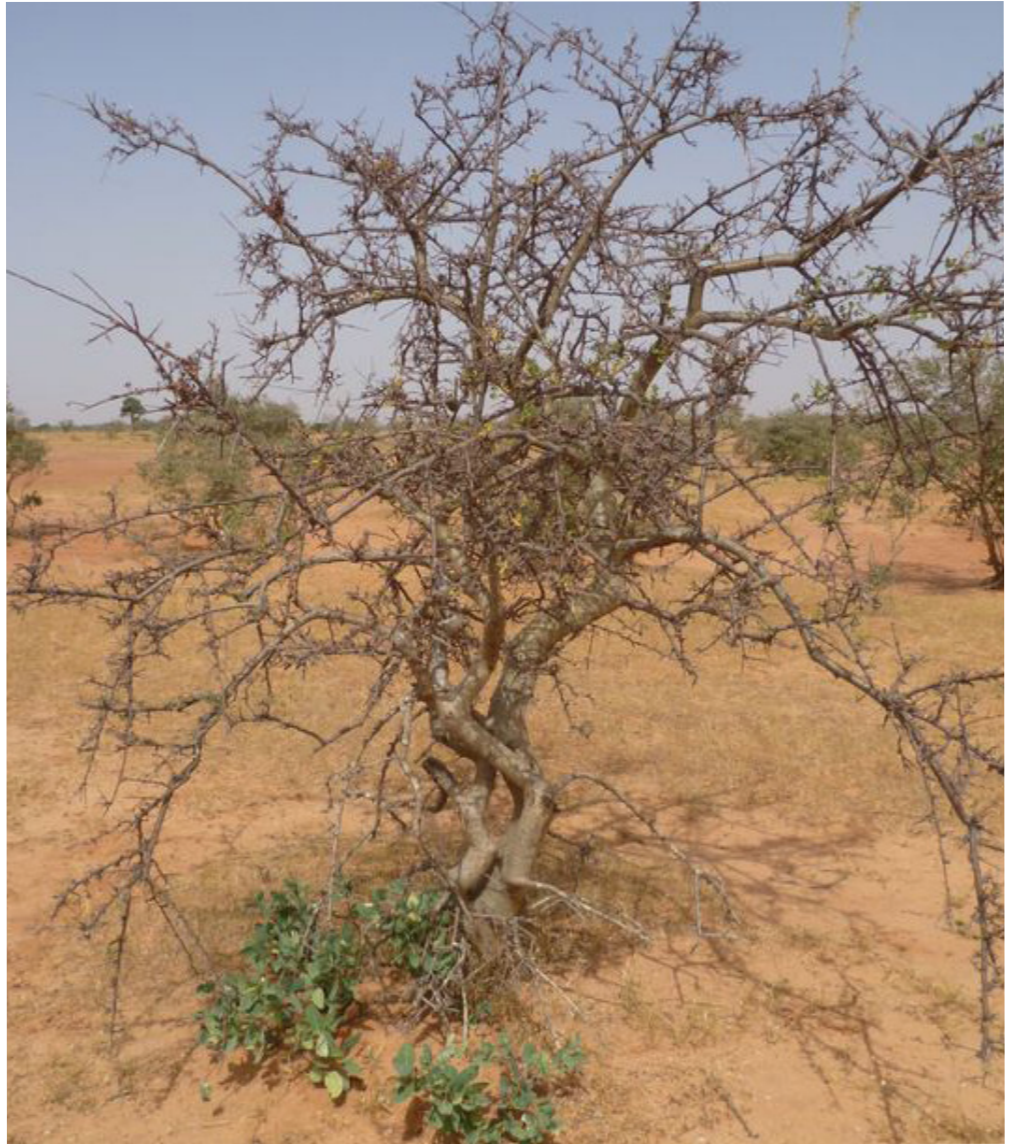


Figure 5.24. Image of “Chibobo tree”, Source: © Tilman Musch



Figure 5.25. Image of "Kaonza tree"



Figure 5.26. Image of aloe

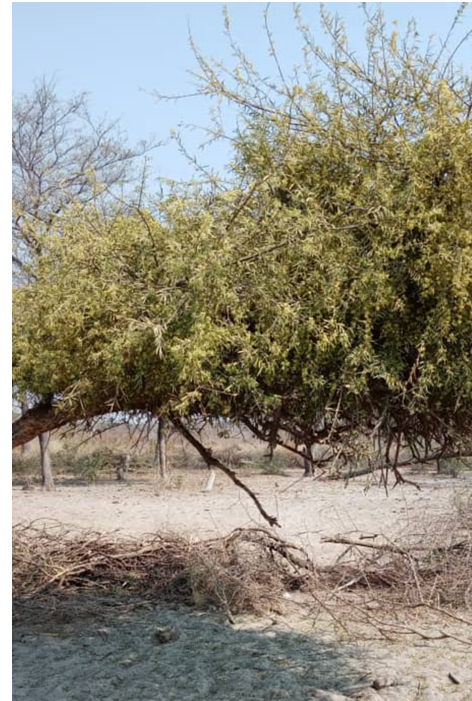


Figure 5.27. Image of "Nkutala tree"



Figure 5.28. Image of "Katope tree"

Fig. 5.24- 5.27 depict some trees which are used in traditional cleansing after burial procedures. Their leaves are mixed with water to create a solution used to

cleanse the person of bad spirits. The gallery will have an outdoor exhibition space showcasing these plants. Additionally they will serve as active ingredients in the cleansing at the traditional burial practice hall.

The memorial will act as the symbolic “chibobo” tombstone for the lost and forgotten graves. At the centre will be a memorial made of vertical metal spikes reminiscent of the thorn branches of the “chibobo” tree that will be the heart of the memorial and marker to the forgotten.

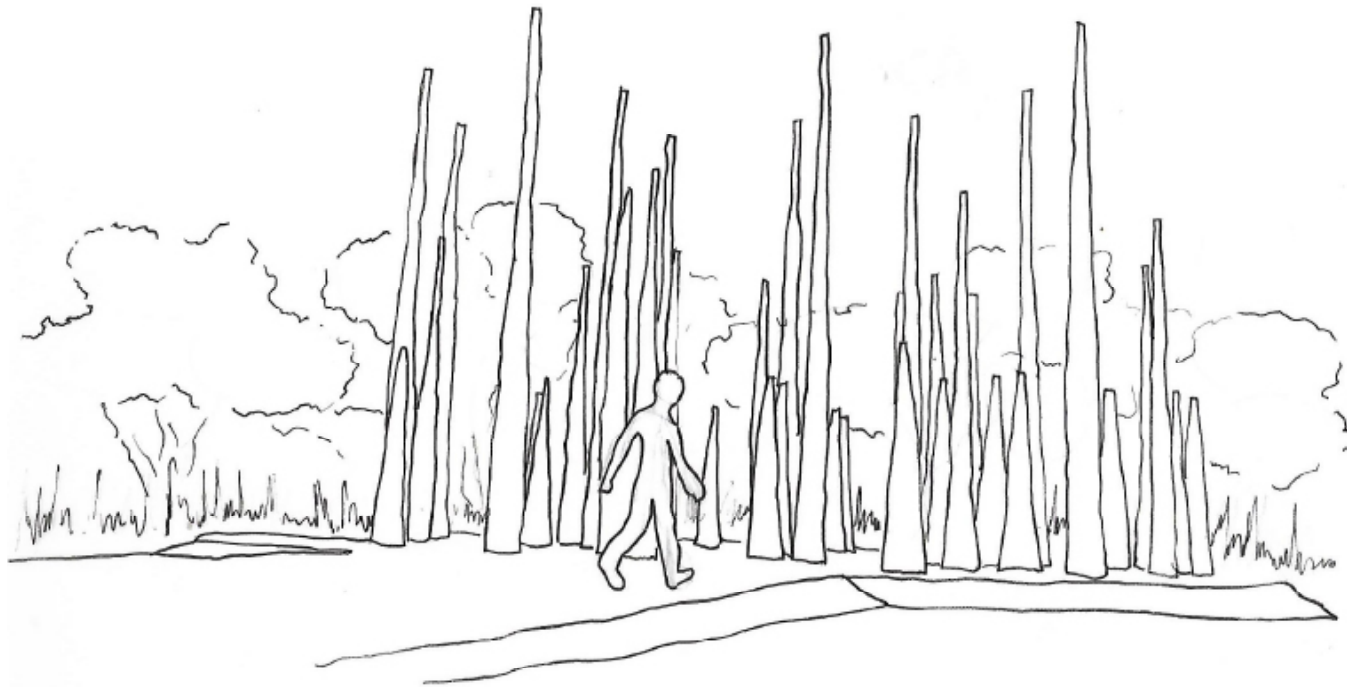


Figure 5.29. Sketch of memorial

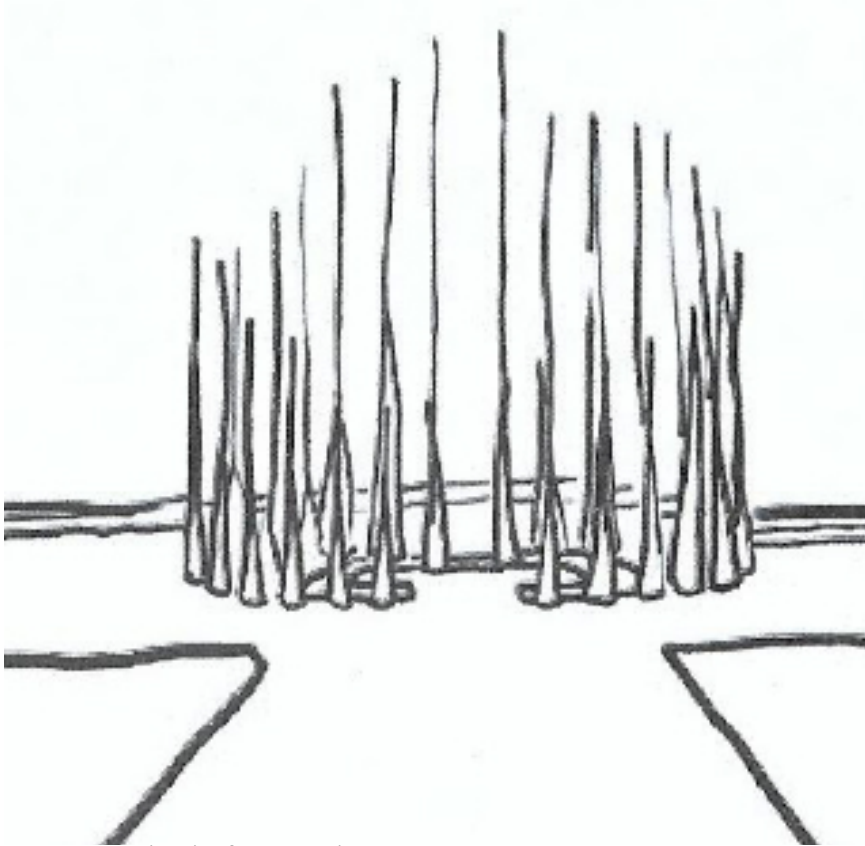


Figure 5.30. Sketch of memorial



Figure 5.31. Image of "Chibobo" tree, Source: <http://biologicalexceptions.blogspot.com/2015/12/one-myrrh-acious-christmas-gift.html>

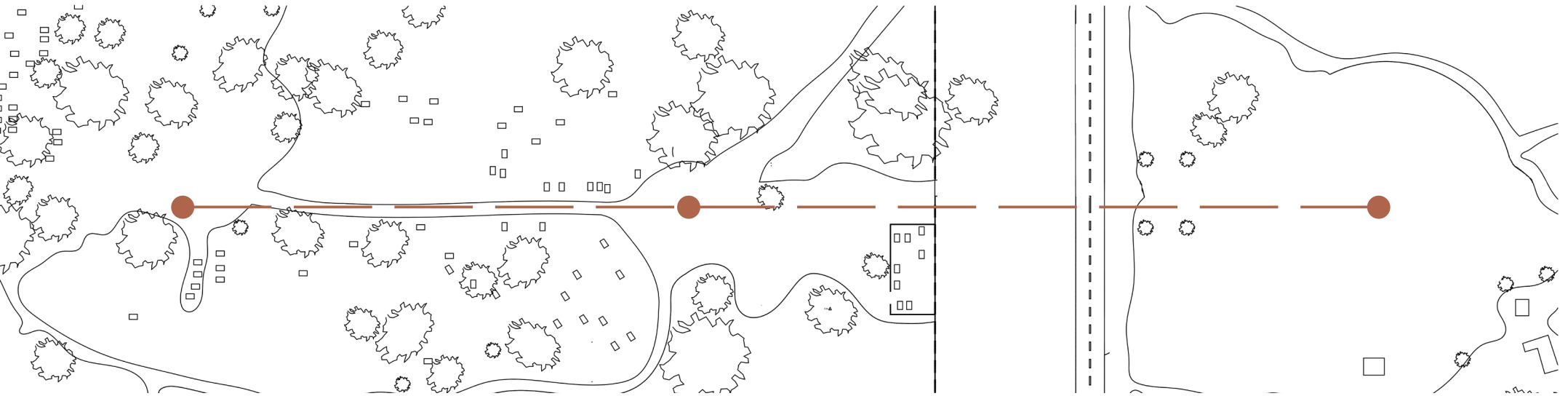


Figure 5.32. Axis

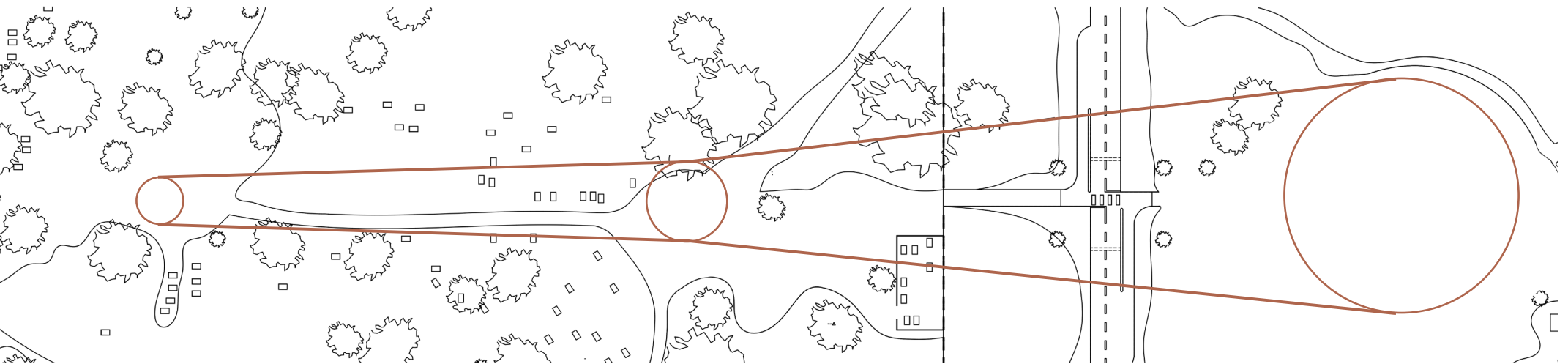


Figure 5.33. Hierarchy and moving to greater intimacy through scale.

Design development

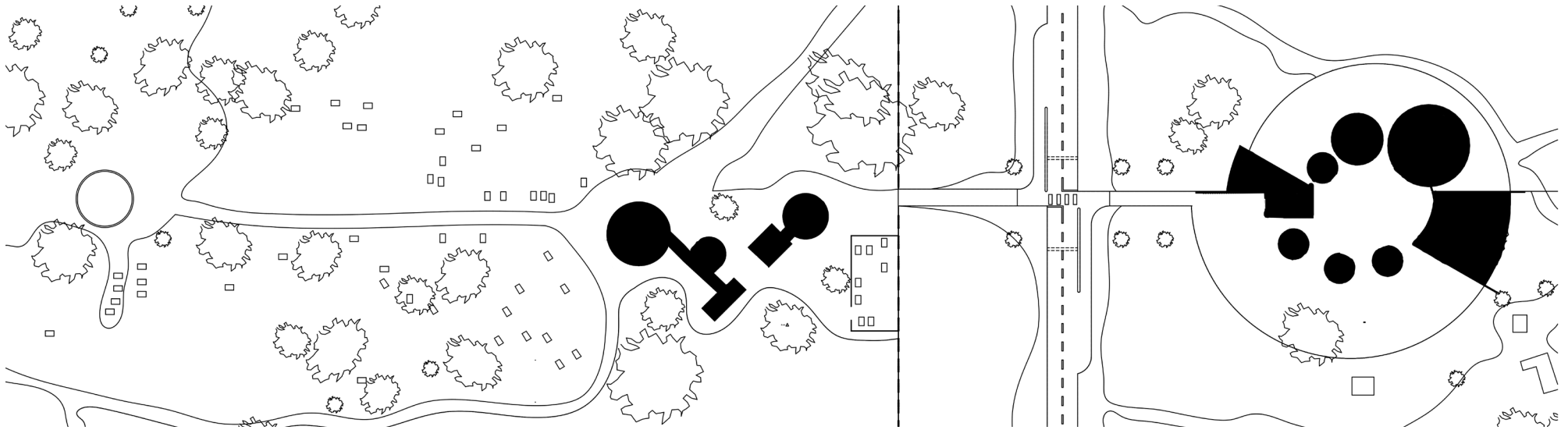


Figure 5.34. Mass

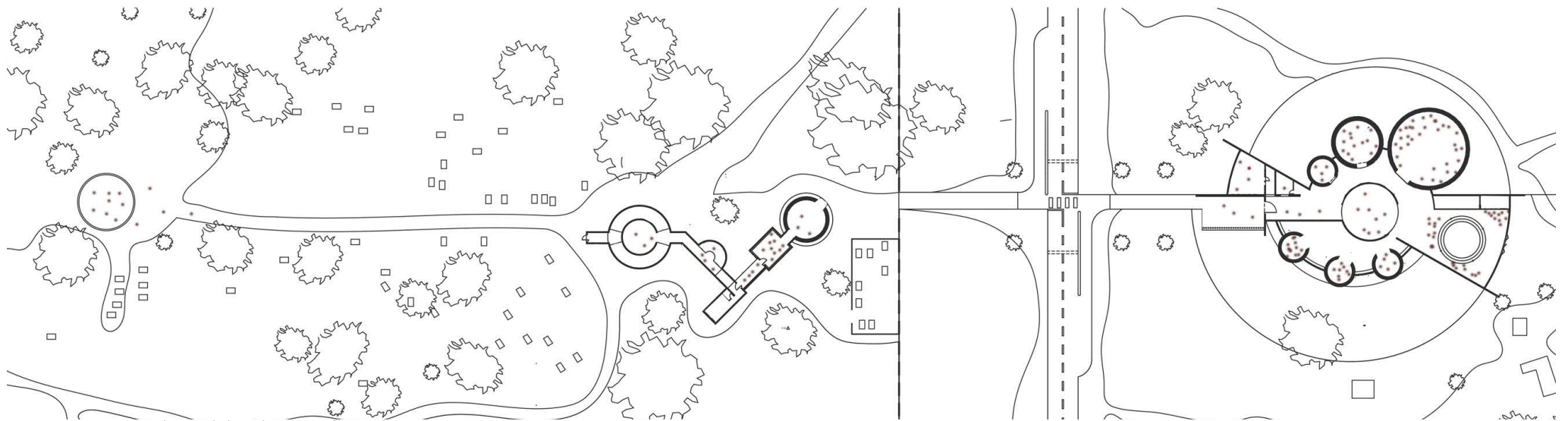


Figure 5.35. Predicated distribution of people

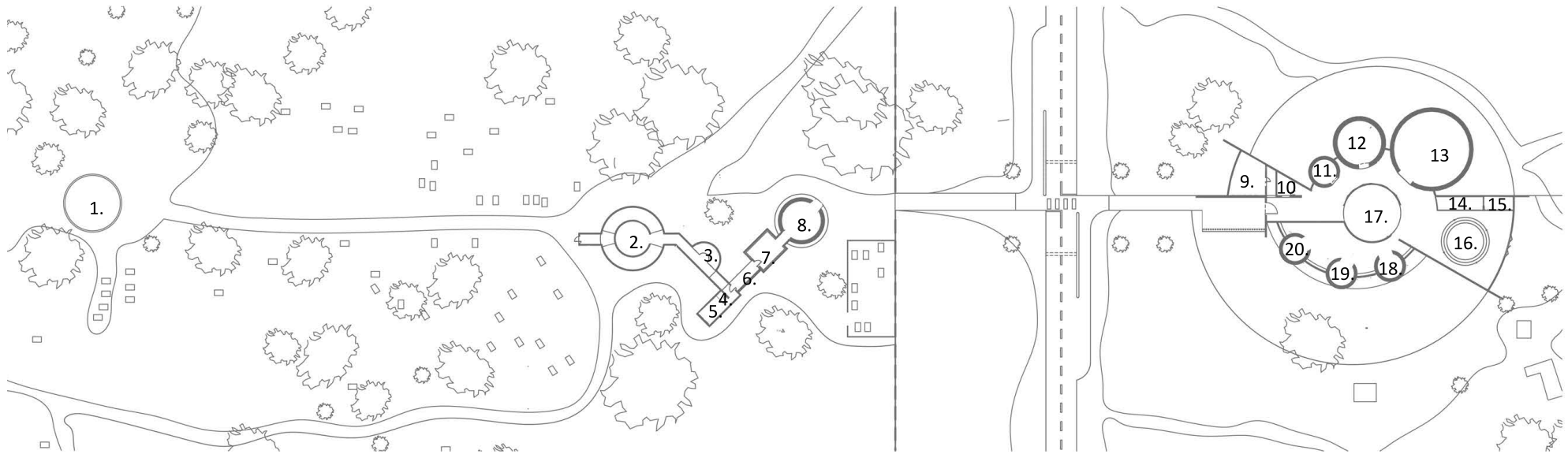


Figure 5.36. Programme

Legend

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Memorial | 11. Male gathering area |
| 2. Chiefs burial | 12. Female gathering area |
| 3. "Chibobo" exhibition | 13. "Requiem hall" |
| 4. Storage | 14. Storage |
| 5. W/C | 15. Kitchen |
| 6. Outdoor herb garden | 16. Traditional dance place |
| 7. Audio visual gallery | 17. Fire cleansing area |
| 8. Entrance/waiting area | 18. Male cleansing area |
| 9. W/C | 19. Children cleansing area |
| 10. Admin | 20. Female cleansing area |



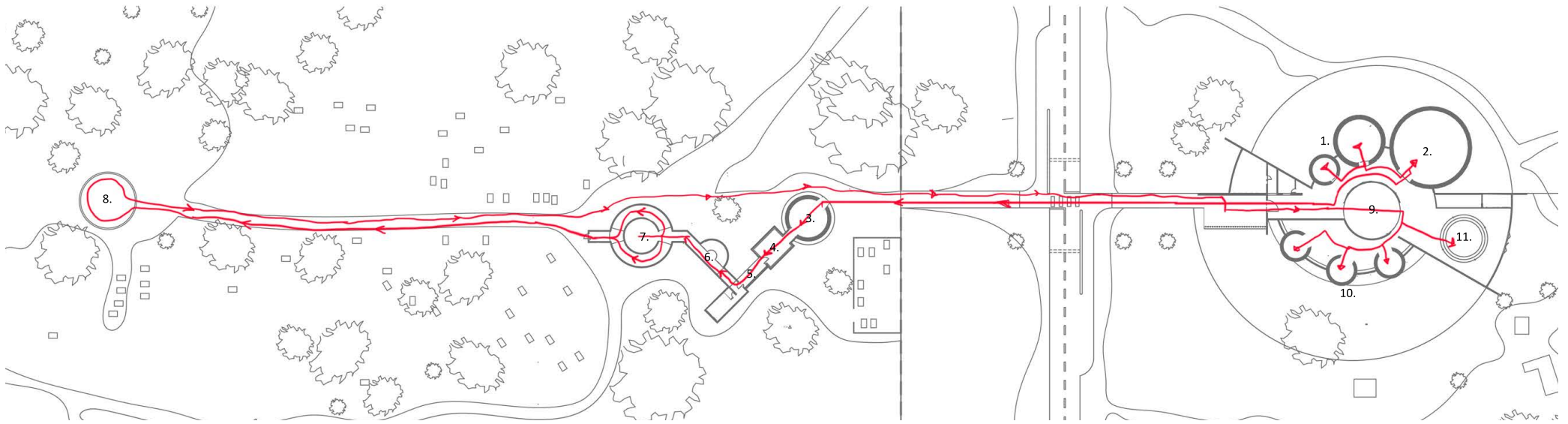


Figure 5.37 Use case scenario

This scenario begins with the death of an individual, for the sake of this scenario he'll be called Simataa. He lives in the New Cowboys informal settlement opposite the site. He is a Christian but occasionally makes use of traditional medicines and visits a traditional healers.

- (1.) After Simataa has died, his family will come to grieve together. Given that informal housing is not always spacious enough to accommodate a large grieving family, his family decided to use the Traditional Burial Reinterpretation centre to grieve and plan the funeral.
- (2.) Due to his mixed beliefs his family have decided to do a hybrid burial practice, incorporating Christianity and traditional practices. A Christian service is held in the requiem hall.
- (3.) After this his body is taken to the Katima Mulilo Cemetery across the road via car to be buried, followed by mourners on foot. On the way members of the funerary party may decide to visit the gallery of traditional burial practices where they can learn about vernacular burials through an audio visual exhibition (4.), and be informed about the different plants used in cleansing practices (5.). They can also learn about the significance of the chibobo tree and its relevance to traditional burials (6.), and experience a representation of how their chiefs are buried, something commoners seldom get to see (7.). Afterwards, they will move westward to the memorial space honouring those with lost or unmarked graves (8.), something that often occurs. After this reflection, Simataa is finally buried in the cemetery at the selected grave site. They will then return to the Traditional Burial Reinterpretation centre where they will jump over the central fire places cleansing them of any bad spirits that may want to follow them (9.). After this, the funerary party will separate into different gender groups, and adults and children to wash themselves with the herbal solution, further protecting them (10.). The final step in this journey is to perform a traditional dance to further ward of any unwanted spirits. (11.)

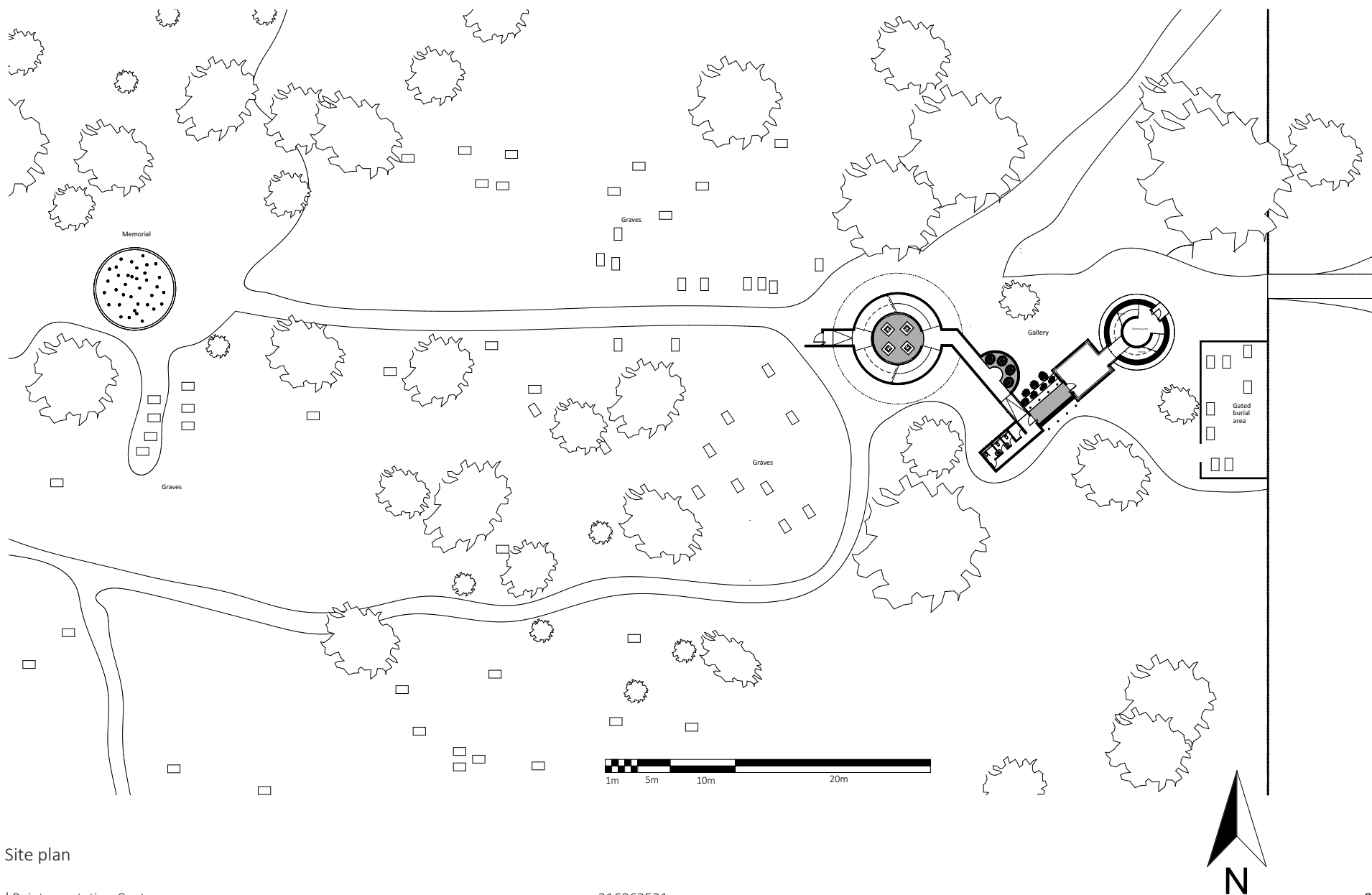
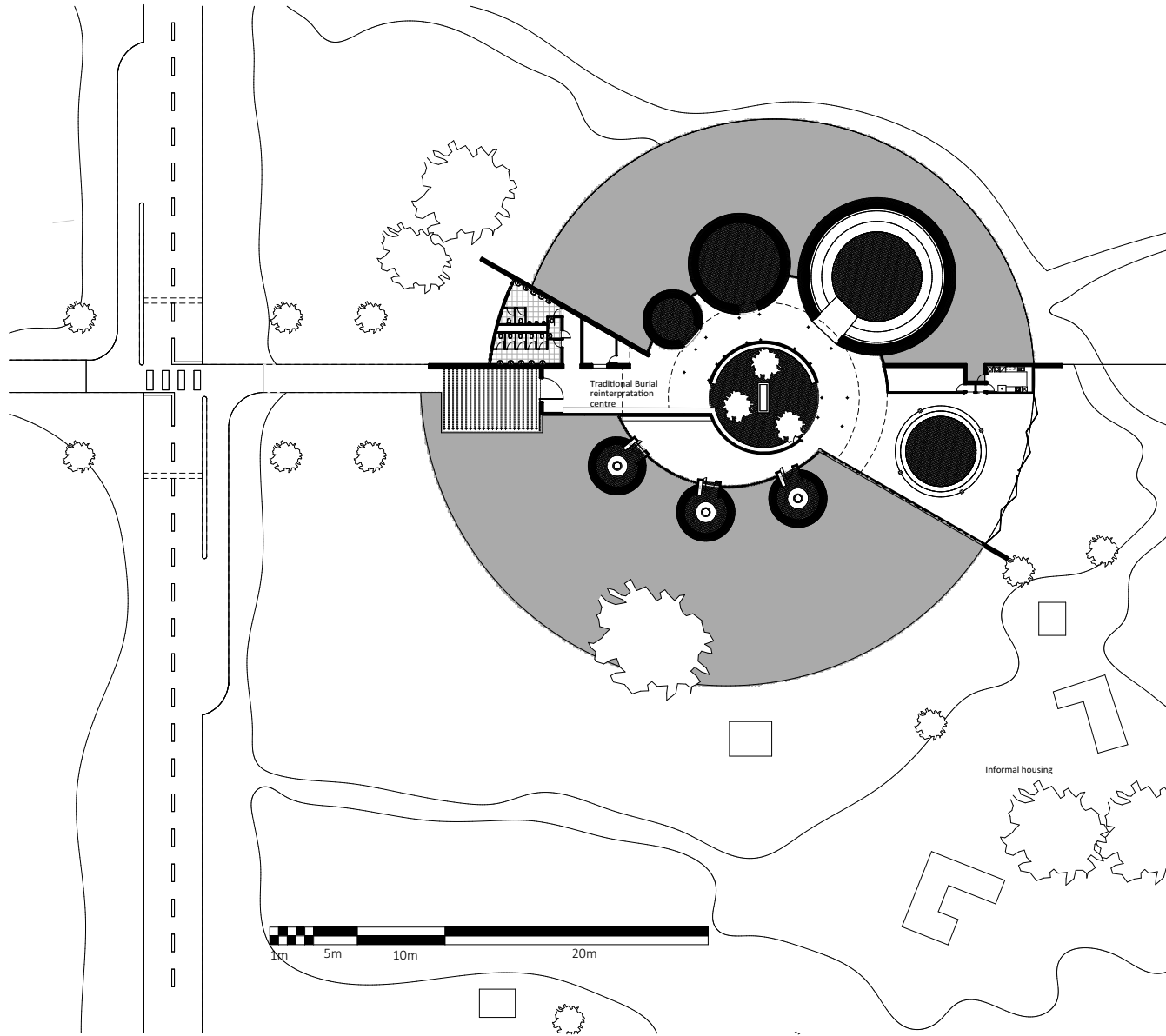


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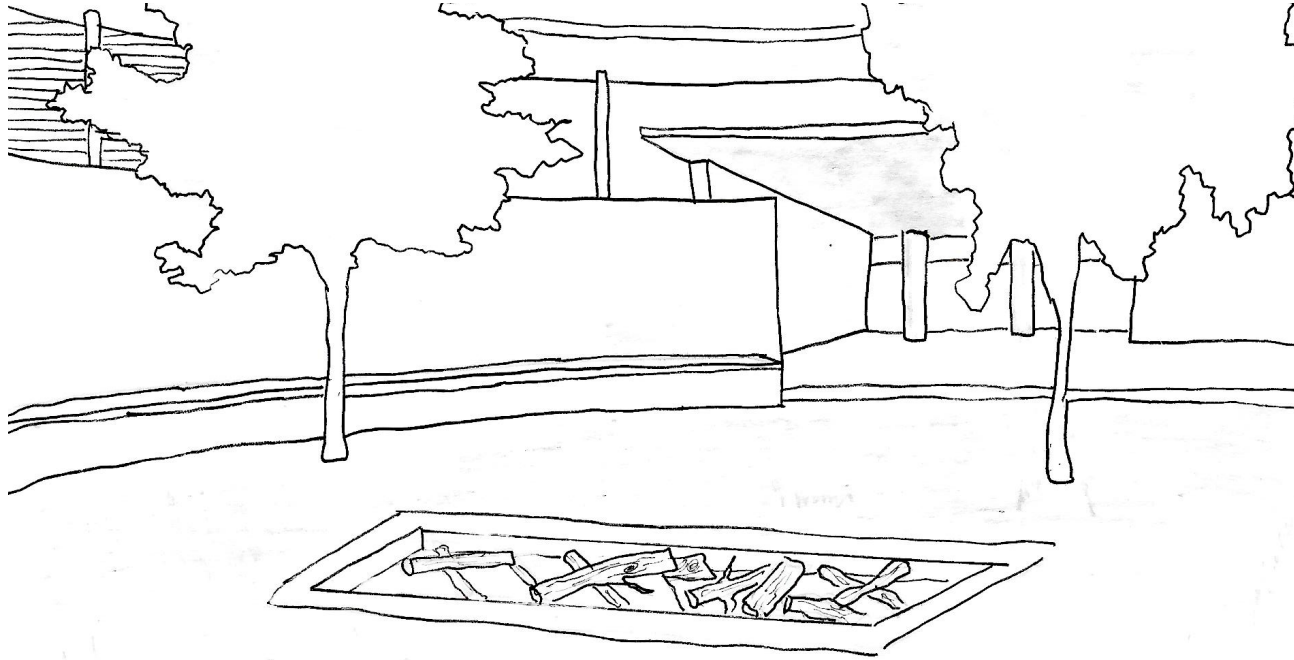


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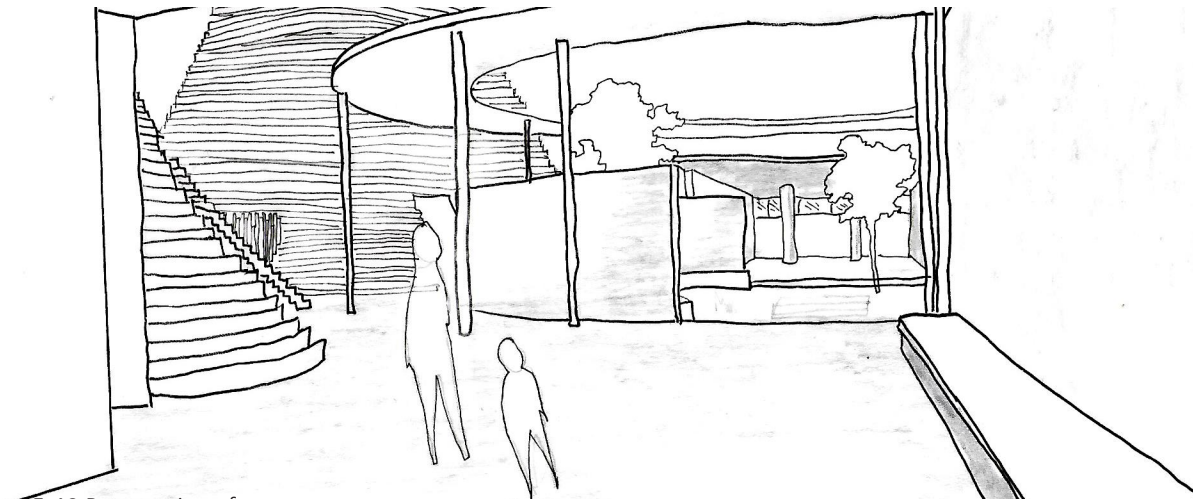


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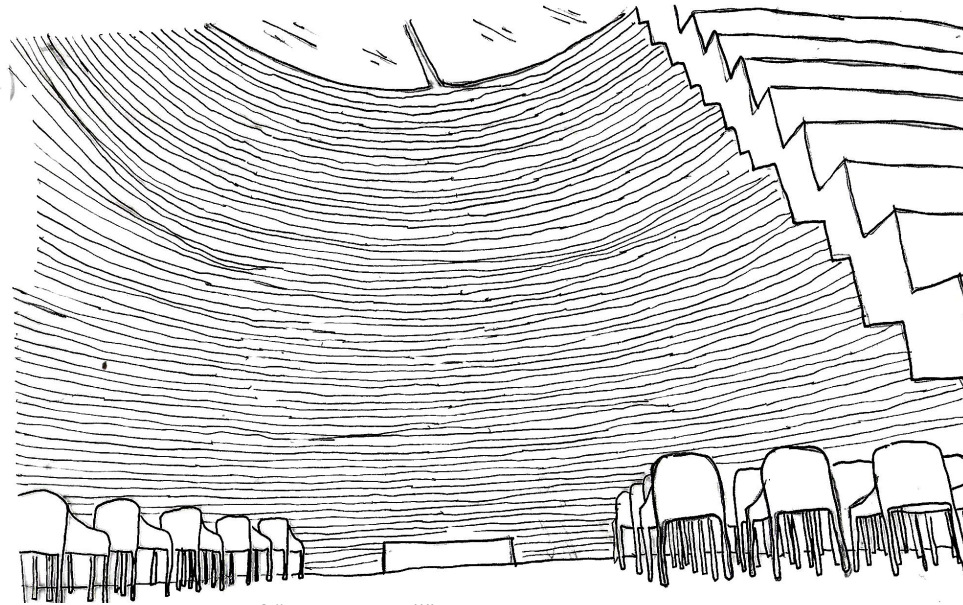


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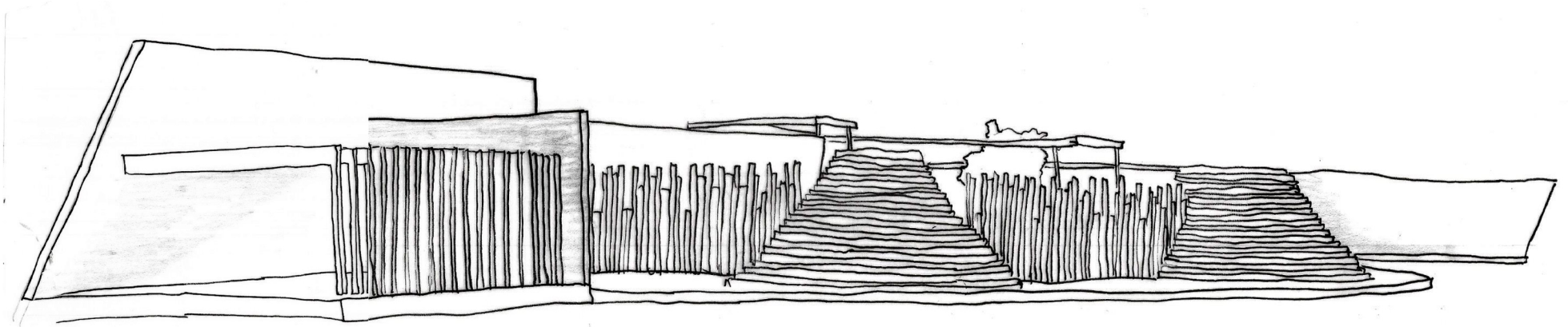


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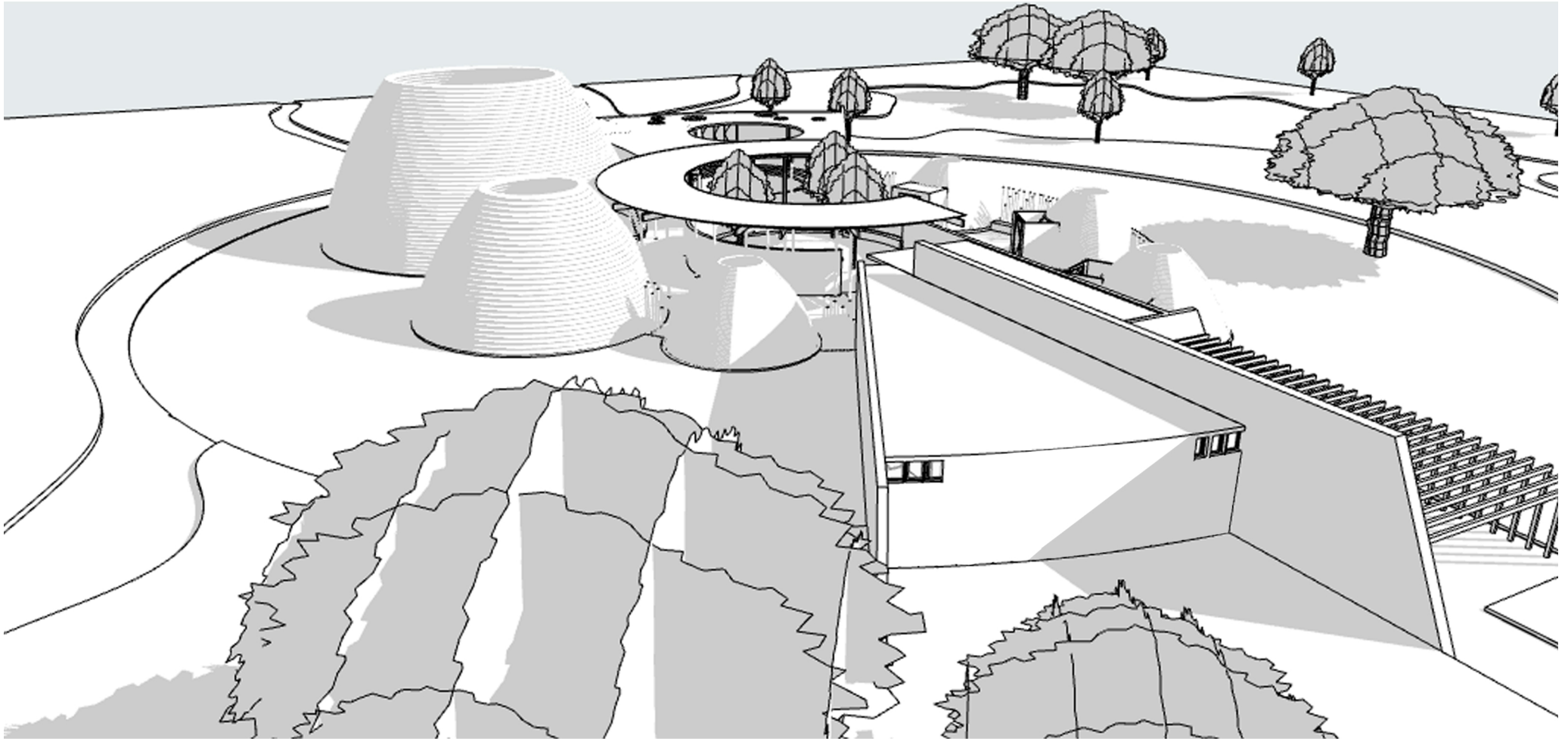


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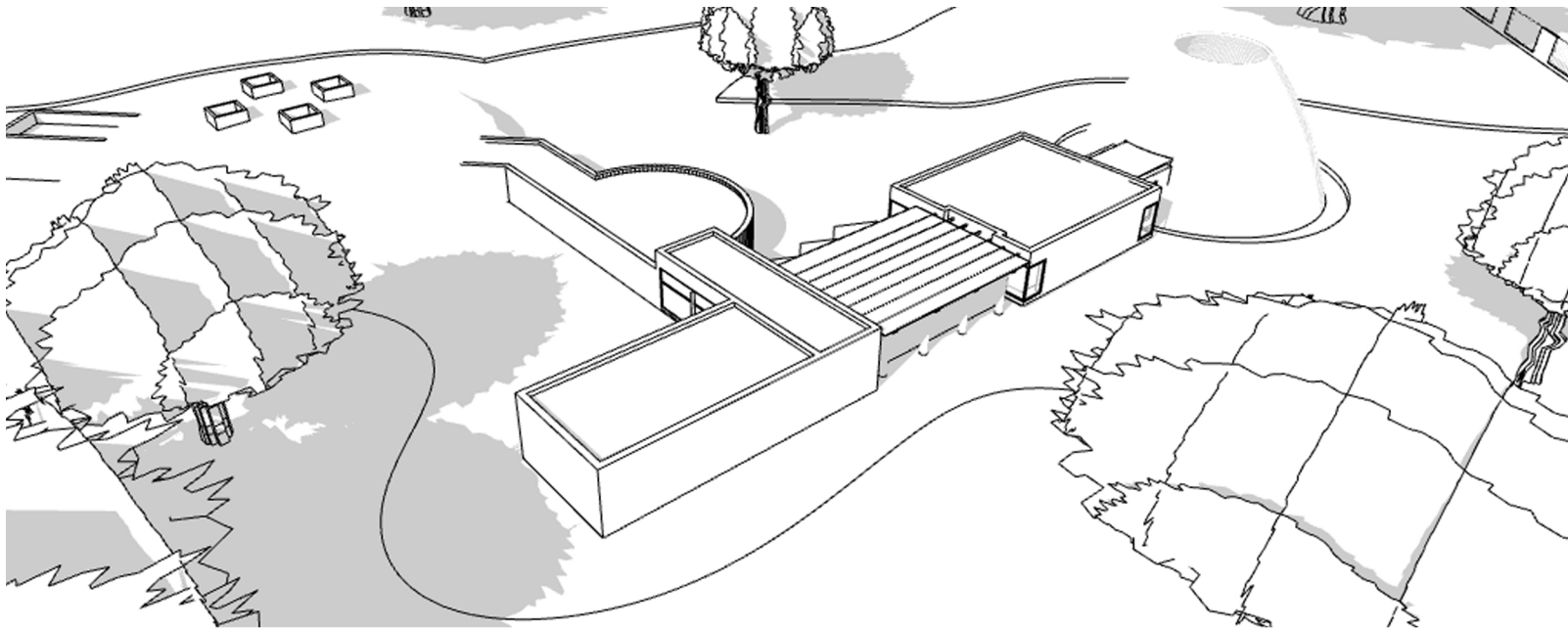


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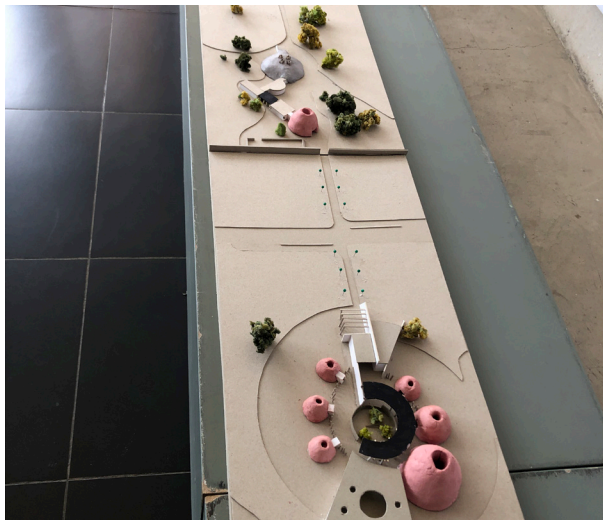


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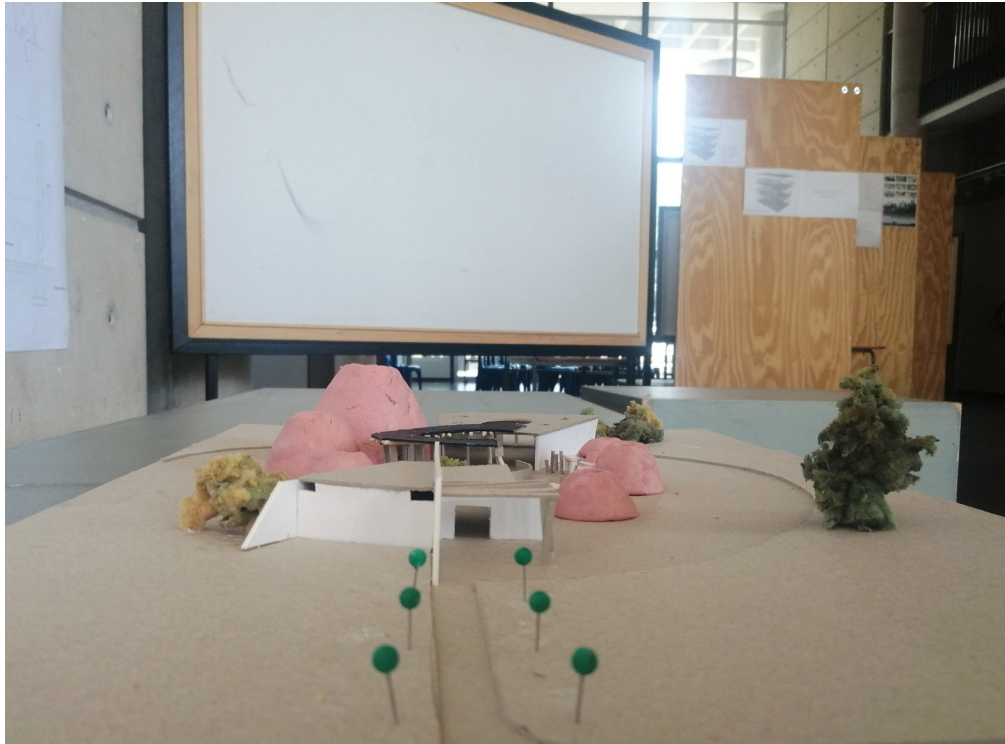


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Figure 5.51. Image showing Traditional Burial Reinterpretation Centre on model

Traditional Burial Reinterpretation Centre

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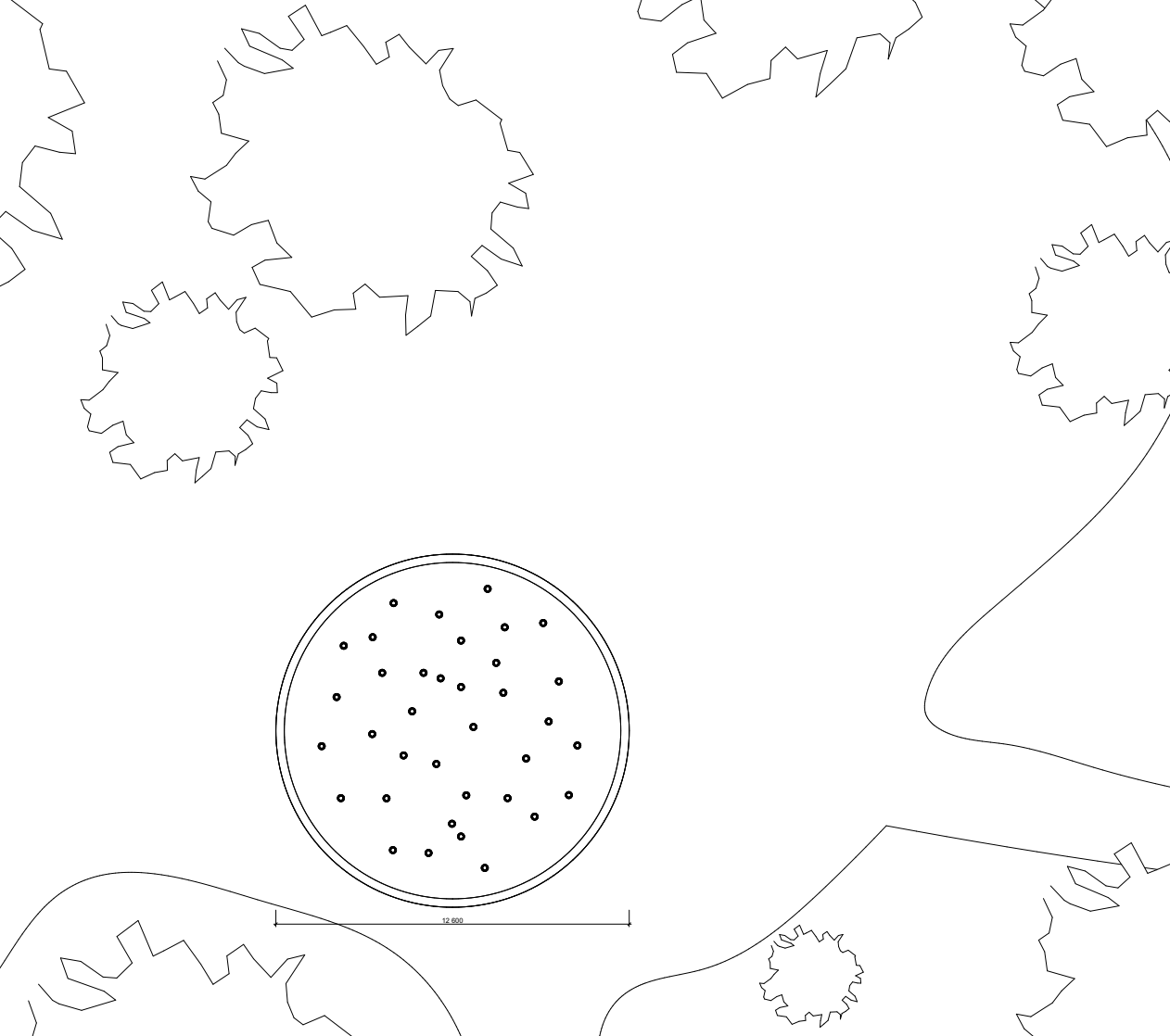


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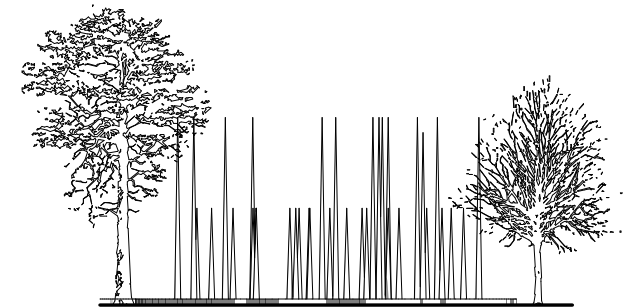


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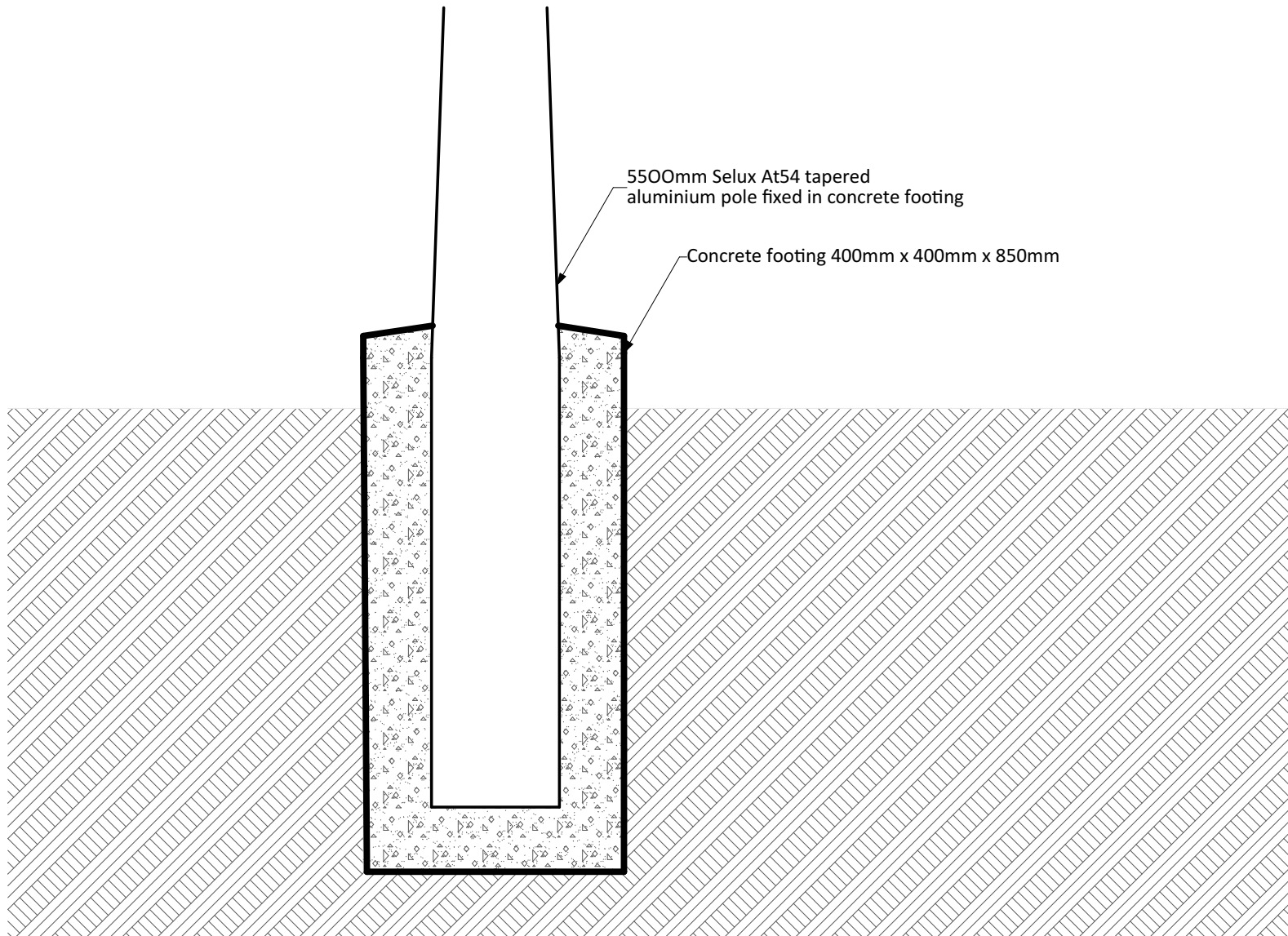
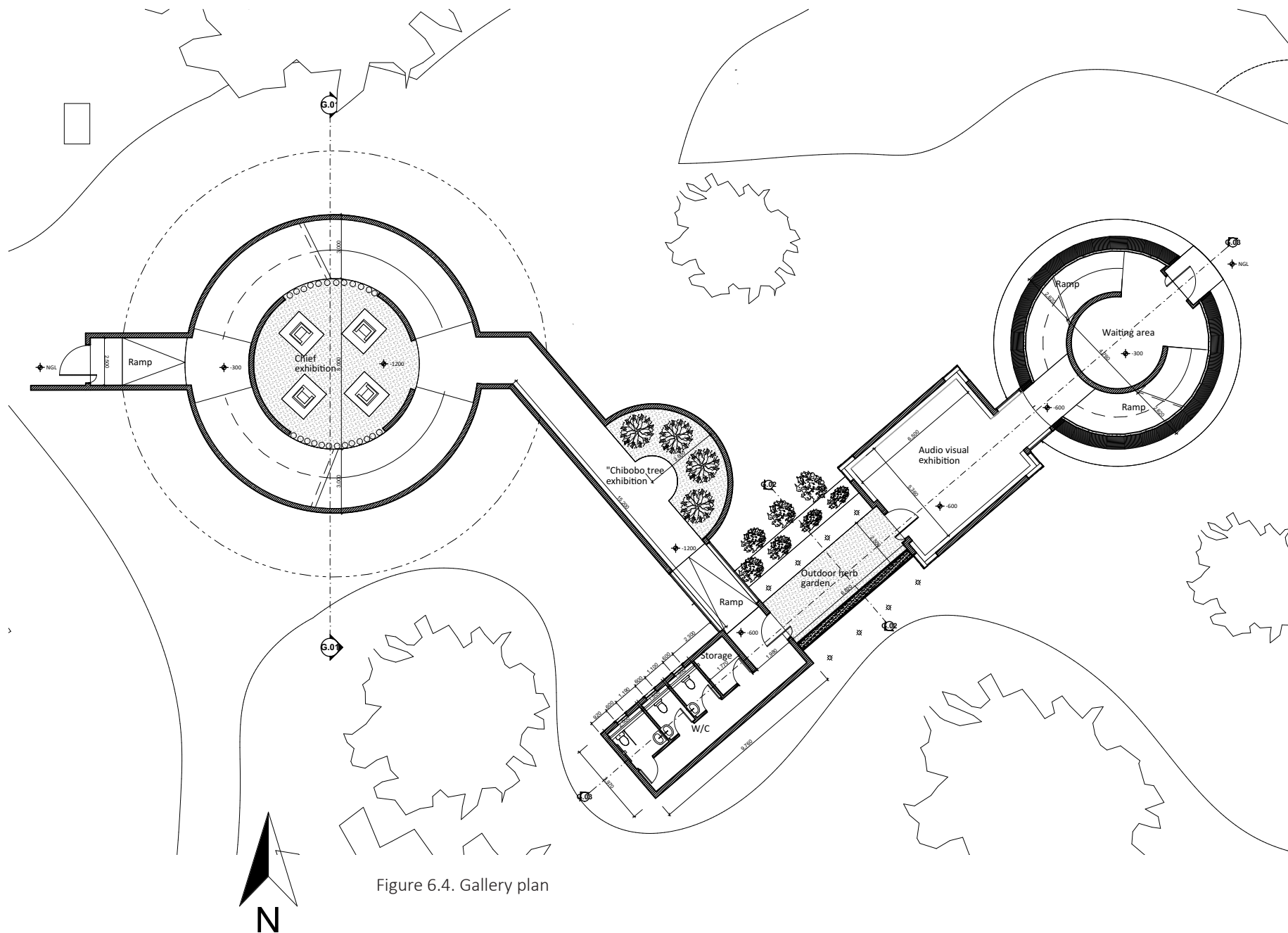


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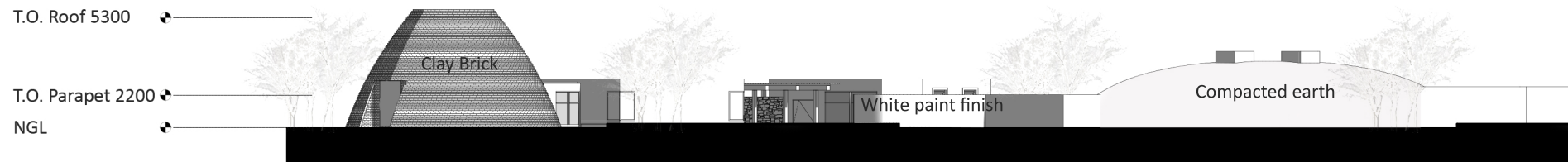


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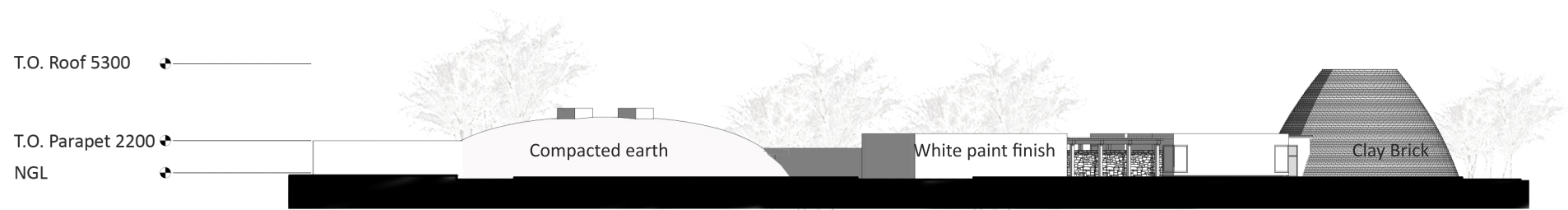


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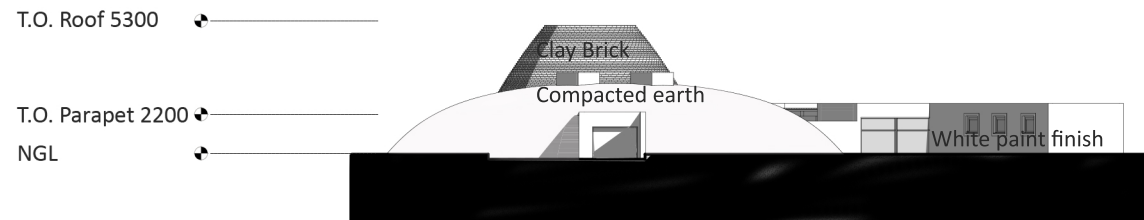


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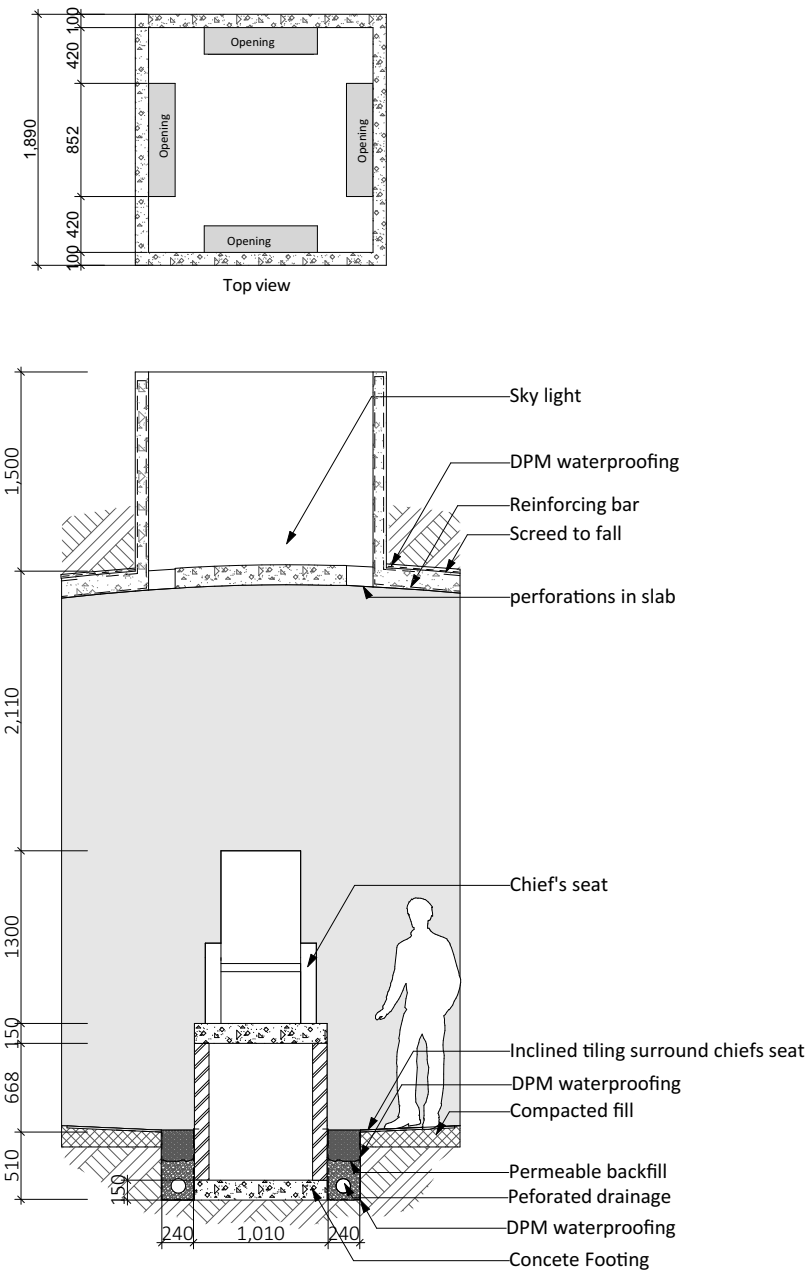


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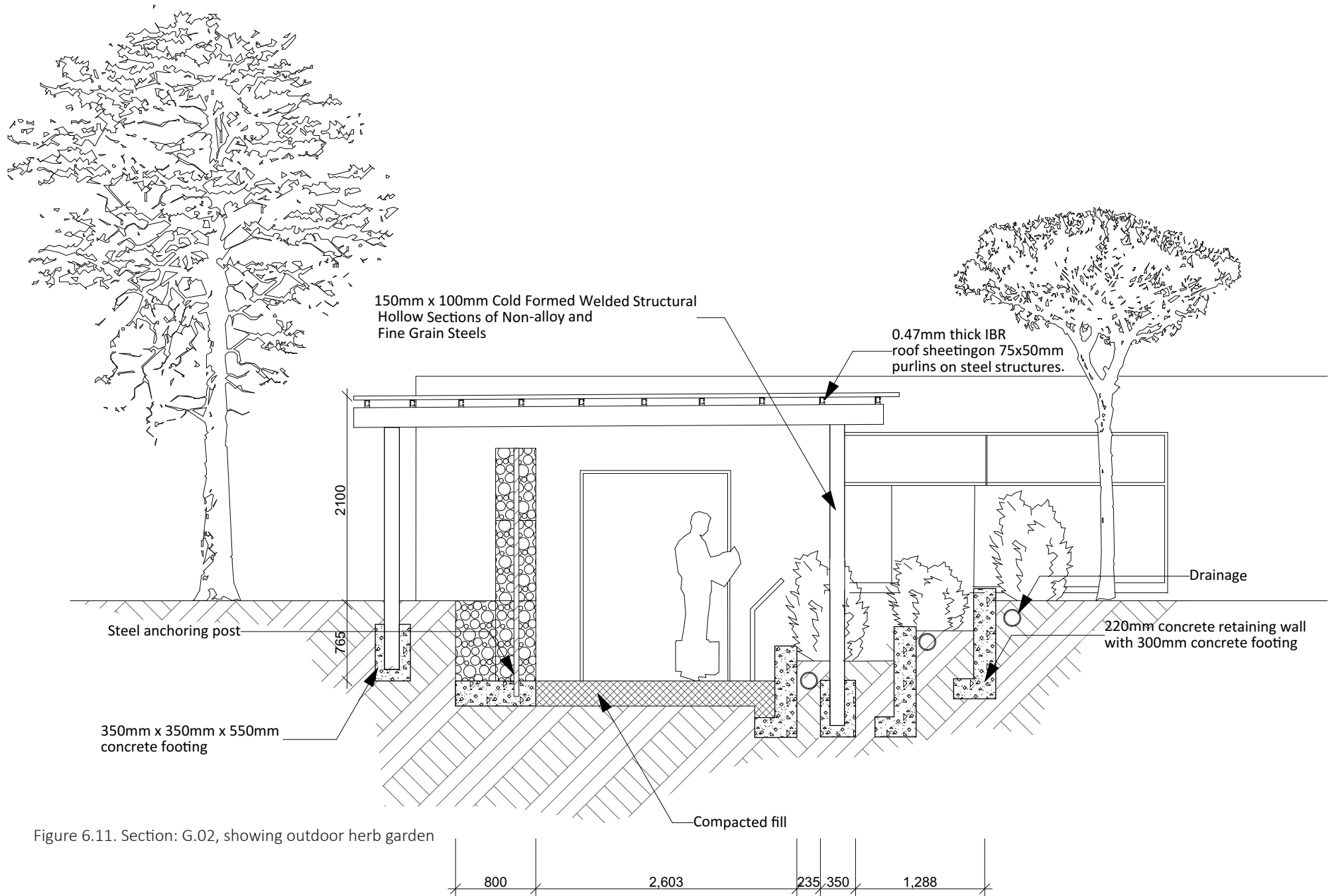


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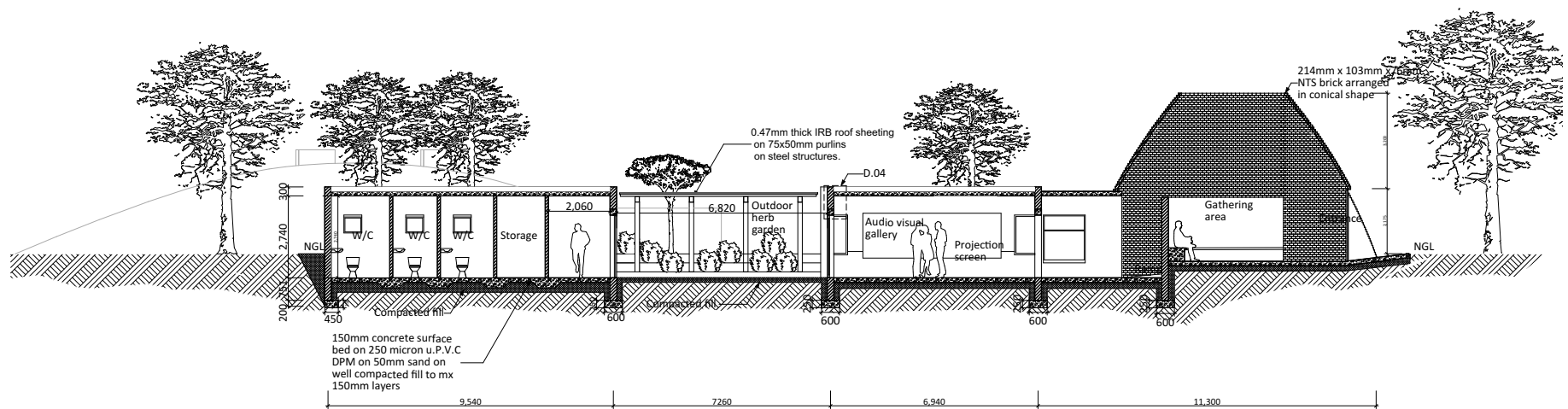


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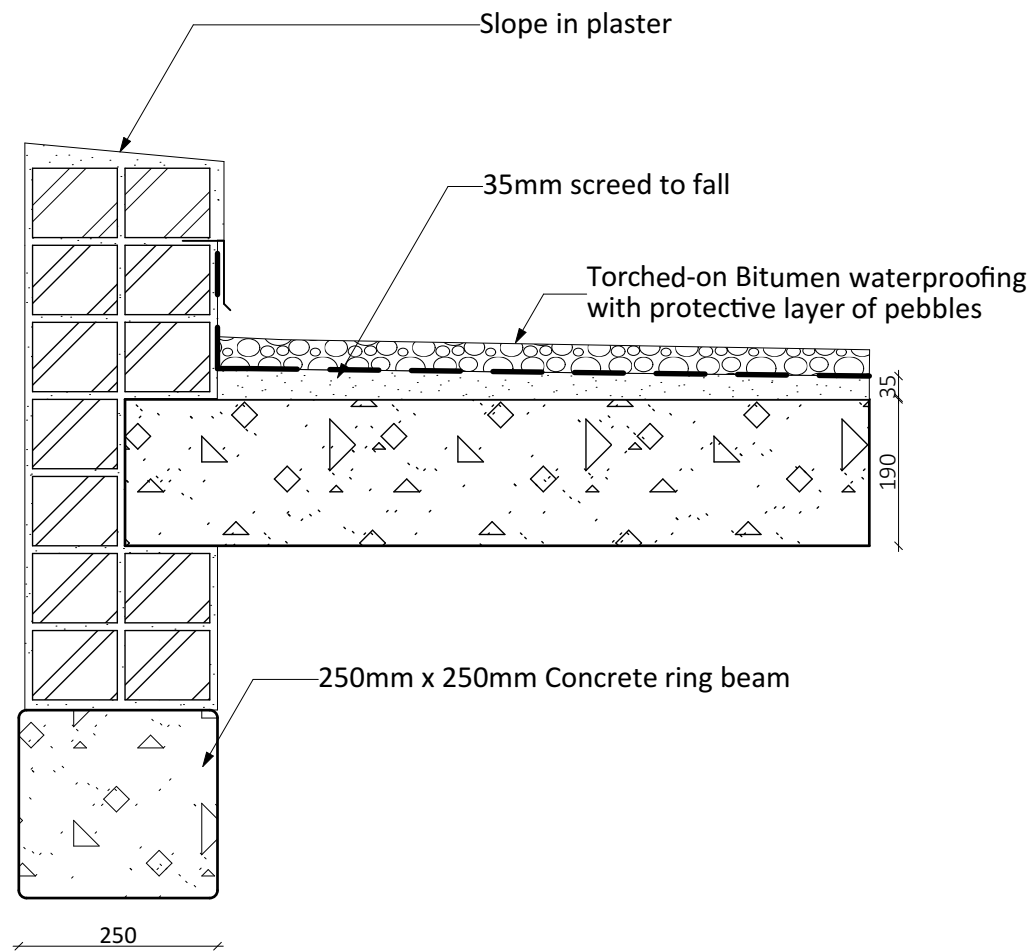


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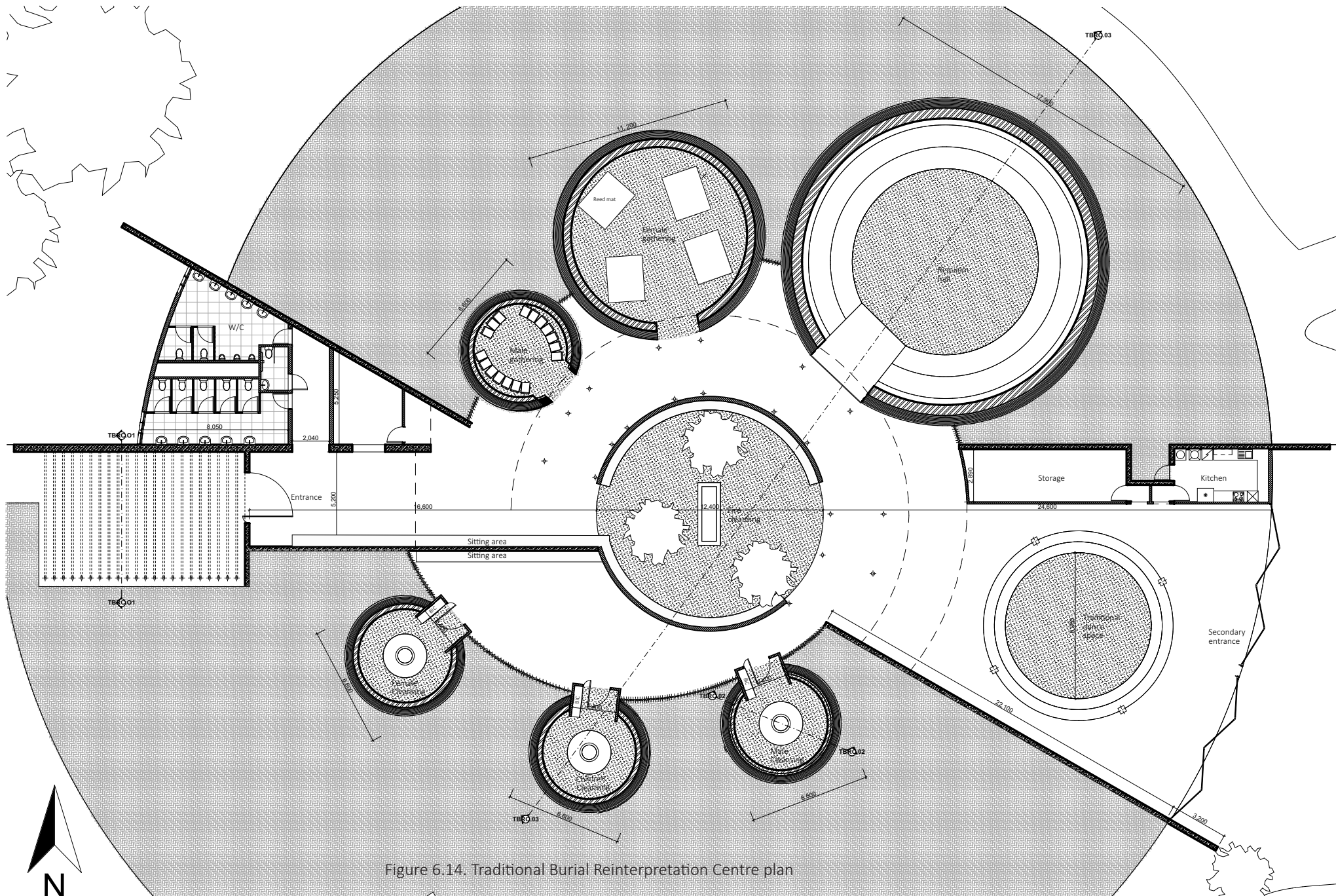


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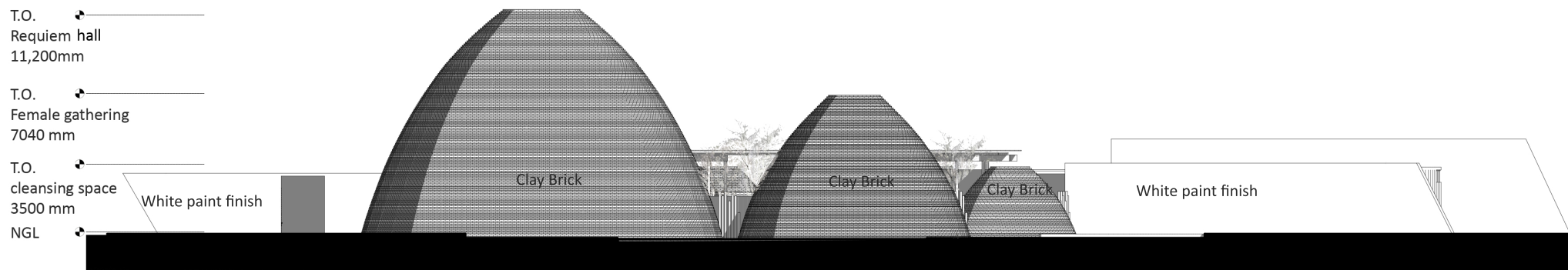


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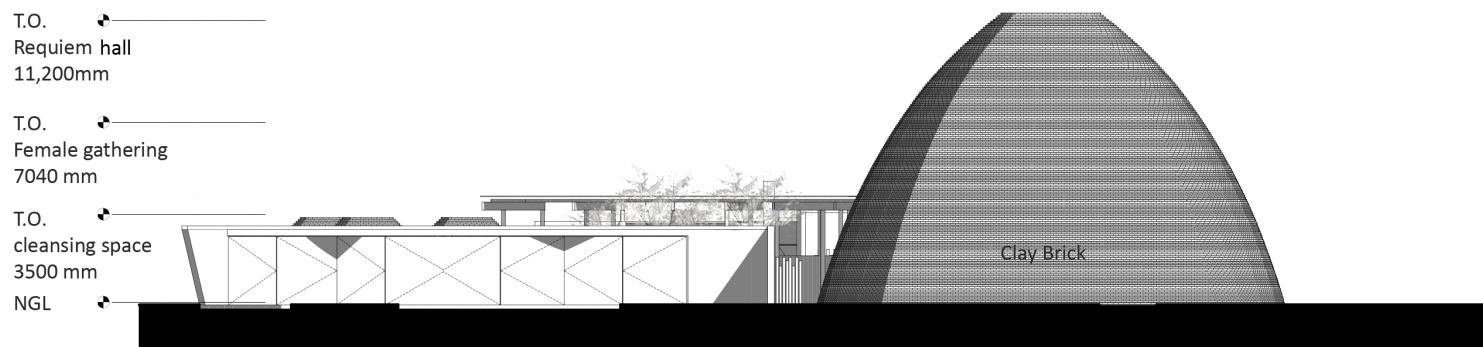


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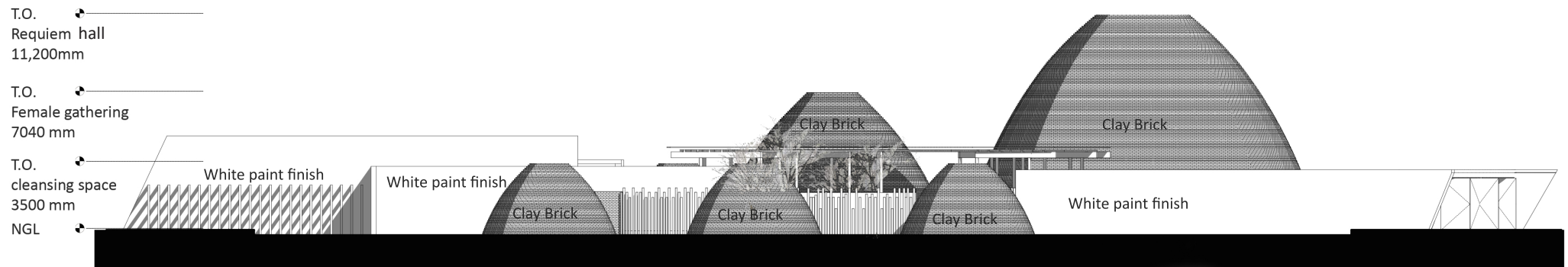


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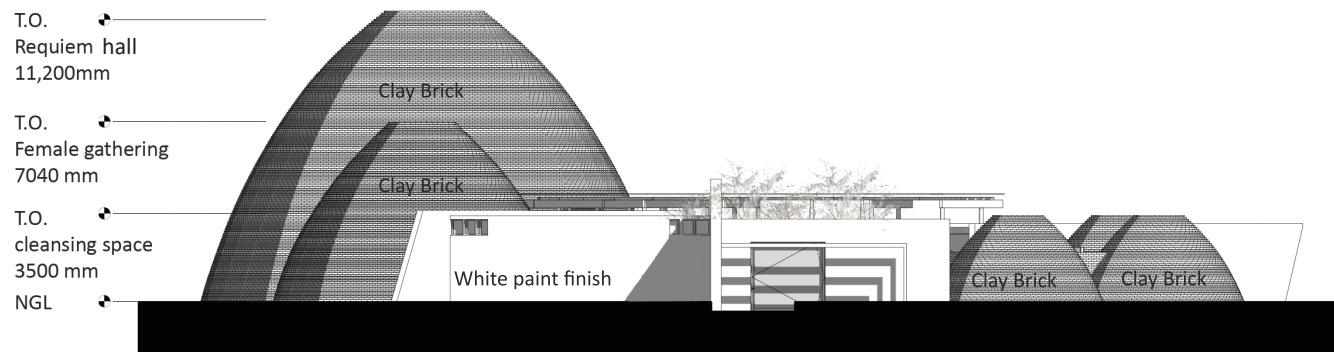


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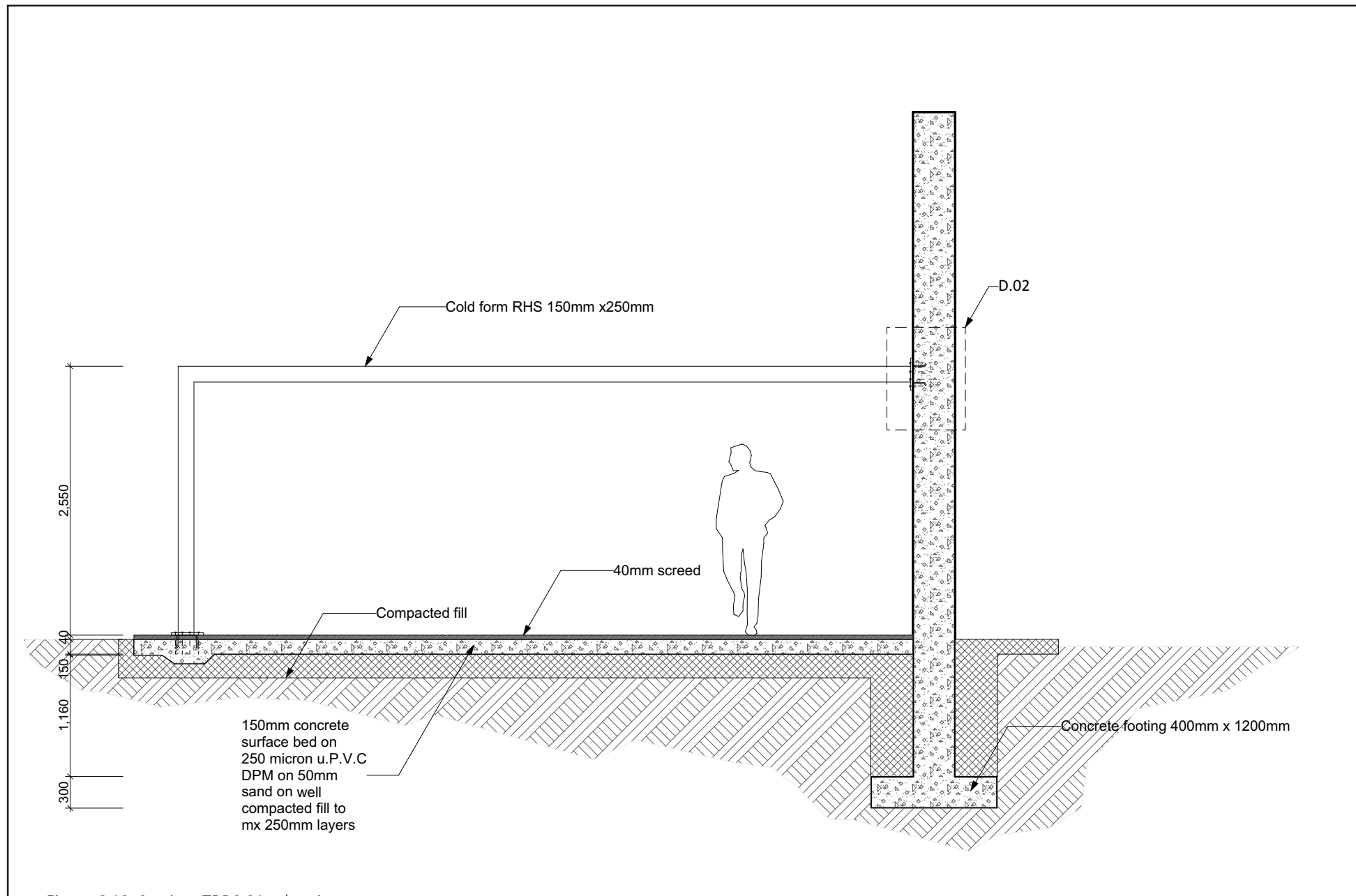


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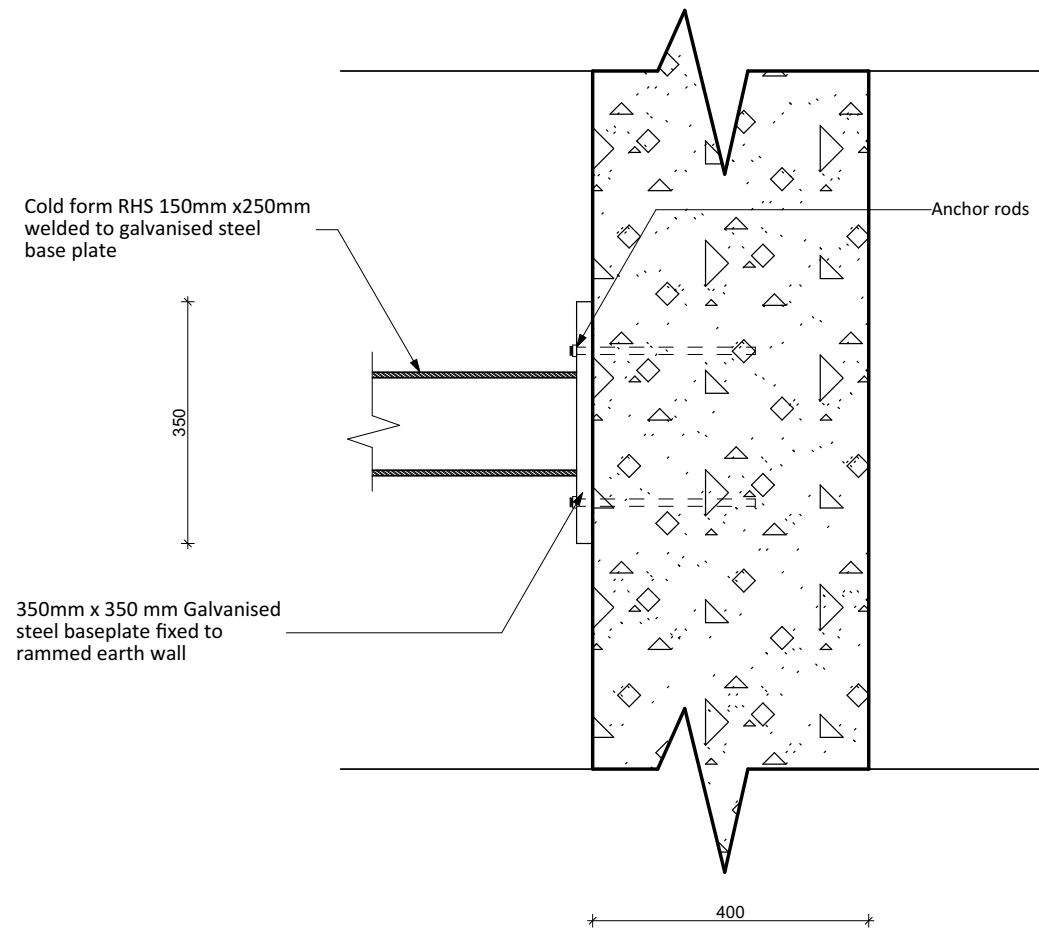


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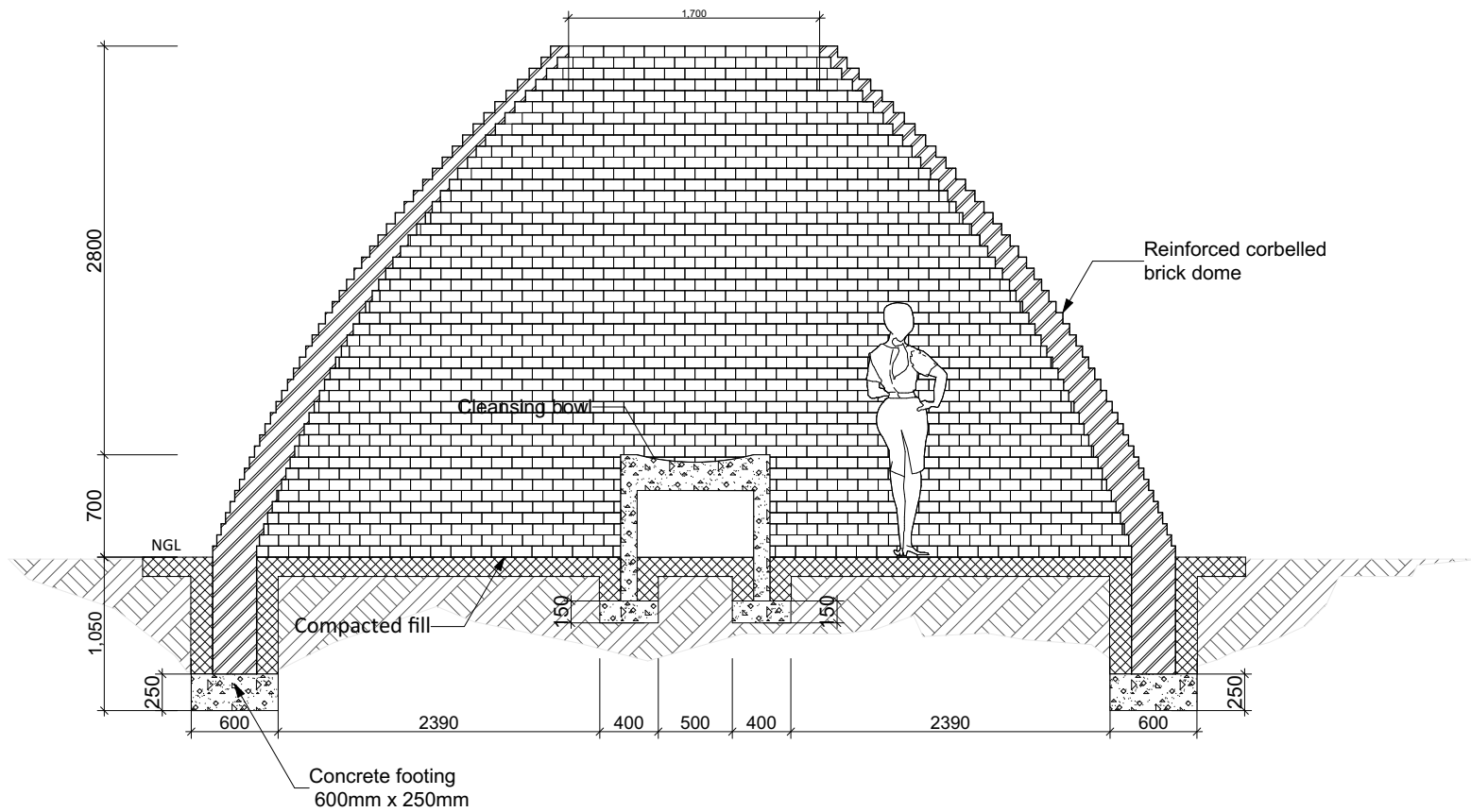


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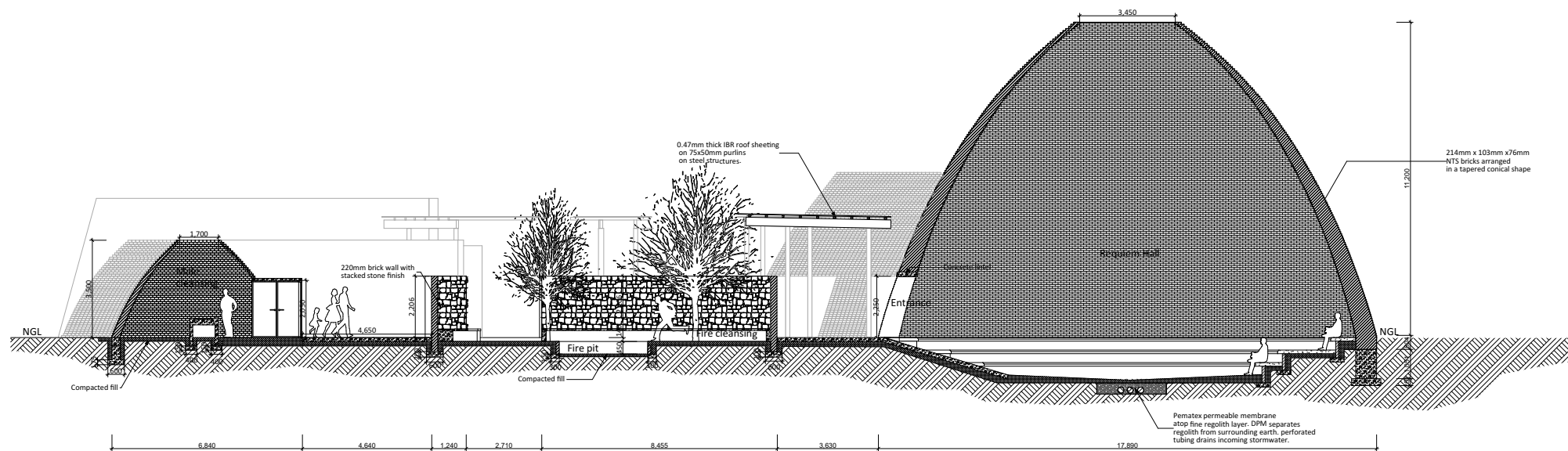


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CHAPTER 07

Conclusion

Inclusivity and cultural representation are growing themes within many aspects of our lives. The expression of tradition identity and making a place for ourselves in this world are key tenets of any society. This is true about the people of the Zambezi region. The identity of small groups is under great threat as they face an ever changing world that promotes hegemony. Practice, remembrance and memorial, are key words that have resonated personally throughout this project. Attempting to capture the essence of traditional practice, and not necessarily changing them but creating a space for them, is one of the themes I experimented with as a method of burial practice preservation. This project aims to create a safe space for the disenfranchised to Believe, Practice and Remember as they see fit.

END.

CHAPTER

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