

Attempting Education ‘Otherwise’ – Re-collecting the Kuruman Field School

Chris Wingfield, Sainsbury Research Unit, University of East Anglia



Figure 1 Chumani Maxwele's 2015 protest that initiated #RhodesMustFall

In 2015, as students at South Africa's oldest university (UCT – est. 1829) came together to call for the fall of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes then dominating their upper campus, students at the country's newest university, Sol Plaatje University in Kimberley (est. 2014), began their engagement with the history and heritage of their region, the Northern Cape. If the ongoing celebration of Rhodes as a benefactor brought pain to a new generation of UCT students, his legacy at Kimberley manifested as an undeniable open wound - the big hole, or in Afrikaans the *groot gat* - the result of late nineteenth century diamond diggings from which Rhodes built his fortune, and around which the city remains precipitously perched. If the realities of South Africa's extractive mineral economy needed to be made visible on campus in Cape Town by Chumani Maxwele's protest, shirtless and wearing a miner's hard hat, they cannot be escaped in Kimberley, a city which owes its very existence to the discovery of diamonds in the late 1860s.

As #RhodesMustFall protests spread to Oxford, where another statue continues to commemorate donations by the mining magnate to Oriel College, his alma mater, I became aware of discussions at the University of Cambridge, where I worked at the time, that would culminate in the establishment in 2017 of the Jennifer Ward Oppenheimer Chair in the Deep History and Archaeology of Africa. Ernest Oppenheimer (1880-1957) arrived in Kimberley as a young man, in 1902, where he became mayor in 1912, and in 1917 established the Anglo American Corporation with backing from J.P. Morgan. By 1927 Oppenheimer had control of

Rhodes's company, De Beers Consolidated Mines, which was only finally taken over by Anglo American in 2011, when the Oppenheimer's 40% family stake was purchased for £3.2 billion pounds.

What this brief sketch, shifting between four Universities, two in South Africa and two in England, over the past seven years highlights, are the patterns of patronage through which wealth generated from South Africa's extractive mineral economy has been and continues to be reinvested in elite educational institutions, at some remove from sites of extraction, to serve as benefactions that commemorate their benefactors, rather than the generations of African miners whose labour enabled these concentrations of wealth and power – a form of remembering involving simultaneous processes of forgetting and erasure.

The parallels between these forms of wealth extraction and the knowledge extraction on which many North-South academic partnerships are based are hard to avoid – particularly in archaeology where excavations frequently involve African labour. The disconnect between forms of labour and forms of credit, with academic publications frequently commemorating the names of European directors and managers rather than the names of those whose hands got dirty, are familiar and uncomfortable. But is it possible to escape from these recurrent modes of coloniality?

What would Decolonial Education look like?

While statues have continued to fall around the globe in the wake of #RhodesMustFall, what is sometimes forgotten was the student call for 'Free, Decolonial Education' associated with the #FeesMustFall movement that followed. But what would this look like?

One fairly straightforward response, increasingly installed as an operational answer to this demand by Universities is to 'decolonise the curriculum'. In practice, what this frequently means is the diversification of reading lists, with the inclusion of more non-European voices and authors of colour, alongside the inclusion of a few more non-Europe centred optional/elective modules (Muldoon, 2019). While most reading lists could do with refreshing and the structure of many degrees should certainly be reframed in less Eurocentric terms, it seems unlikely that this approach alone will be sufficient in meeting the demand for 'free, quality decolonial education' (Feris, 2017), even if it does fulfil Fanon's (1967, 27) definition of decolonisation in a straightforward sense, 'as quite simply the replacing of a certain 'species' of men by another 'species' of men.'

One issue that arises is the precise verb form used in relation to decolonisation. Is it important to be 'decolonising' the curriculum, to have a 'decolonised' curriculum, or to have a 'decolonial' curriculum? In some quarters there is definitely an impatience around the project of decolonisation, which manifests as a demand for a past-tense decolonised curriculum (Swain, 2019), but this potentially risks a superficial or hurried approach that potentially fails to recognise the magnitude of the task. 'Decolonising' on the other hand adopts the present participle to place the focus on the process itself, whether pursued through faculty working groups, student-led projects or administratively driven projects. There is a risk of a slip into the gerund, so that 'decolonising' becomes an activity to pursue in its own right, the fashionableness of which has prompted some to ask whether "Decolonising has become the new black", at least in academic circles (Rodriguez, 2018).

I want to suggest that 'free, quality decolonial education' means something slightly different – that education itself should become decolonial, and this, I think, is a more ambitious, if perhaps less obvious goal. A. Khaym Ahmed (2017, 8) who completed at PhD on

#RhodesMustFall at Columbia has suggested that the movement found its theoretical inspirations in Steve Biko's (1978) ideas of black consciousness, Frantz Fanon's (1967) decolonisation thesis and Kimberle Crenshaw's (1991) intersectionality theory, framing the struggle as a resistance to the dehumanisation of black people.

However, in the call for 'decolonial' education specifically, I think it is also possible to detect the influence of the Argentine scholar, Walter Dignolo, who along with other Americanists has been central to developing ideas around 'decoloniality' in recent decades. Dignolo has been a key reference point for Nick Shepherd, who until recently was based at the Centre for African Studies at UCT, so it is not hard to see how these ideas would find their way into South African student thinking. Dignolo has been keen to draw a distinction between 'decolonisation' as a political state-level project, 'decoloniality' as an epistemic project, and the more familiar theories associated with 'postcolonialism', suggesting that:

Briefly stated: post-colonialism and decoloniality have the history of Western colonialism in common. But while post-colonialism is based on the Indian and Palestinian experiences, they both are consequences of the enlightenment in 18th century Europe. While for us, the historical experiences are the colonization of America and the European Renaissance. That is what concerns the historical differences between the 'post-' and the 'de-'.

Conceptually, the 'post' keeps you trapped in unipolar time conceptions. As far as for Western (since the Renaissance) cosmology "time" is one, singular and universal, you have no way out: you are trapped in a universal time that is owned by a particular civilization. Therefore, what comes after X has to be conceptualized as post-X. Decoloniality instead opens up to the multiple times of cultures and civilizations upon which Western Civilization imposes its conceptualization of time. The 'de-' indicates above all the need and the goal of the re-: epistemic reconstitutions, re-emergence, resurgence, re-existence. That is, neither new nor post.

(Hoffman, 2017)

Postcolonial education, then, would acknowledge and recognise colonial histories and the ways in which they have shaped contemporary conditions and systems of thought, without proposing any means of escape. But decolonial education would seek to challenge and unpick the assumptions and frameworks upon which colonial forms of knowledge have been built, primarily through re-introducing alternative perspectives, suppressed through the 'coloniality of power'.

This concept was developed by Anibal Quijano (2000) to describe forms of racial, political and social hierarchy and discrimination that have outlived formal colonialism, but which are nevertheless constitutive of 'modernity' and the capitalist world system. Indeed, Dignolo (2011) has suggested that coloniality can be understood as the darker side of modernity, relying on a logic of extraction and accumulation by dispossession. Race emerges from this conceptualisation as a naturalisation of the colonial relations between Europeans and non-Europeans, assigning knowledge production to Europeans, while disqualifying other forms of knowledge through recategorising them as 'tradition'. For Dignolo (2007), decolonial praxis involves delinking from dominant and universalizing Western epistemologies that centre narratives of European modernity, civilisation or development, through acts of epistemic disobedience. These should ideally attempt to conceive and create institutional

organisations that are at the service of life, rather than putting people at the service of institutions (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018, 127).

Doing Education ‘Otherwise’

For Mignolo (2018, 113), decoloniality is not a concept or theory that can be readily assimilated into existing disciplinary conversations, but is rather a practice of ‘thinking and doing otherwise’. What would it mean, then, to think or do education ‘otherwise’? For #FeesMustFall protesters, it was clear that neoliberal models of marketised higher education were marked by an inherent coloniality – mining them and their future lives to support and sustain Universities as institutions. As a member of the very last cohort of students to receive a fee free higher education in the UK, I am intensely conscious of the ways in which the introduction of ever higher student fees has transformed student experiences of education. But doing education ‘otherwise’ doesn’t simply involve the removal of fees.

My thinking about how we might approach education ‘otherwise’ has been significantly shaped by two short books, one by Tim Ingold, *Anthropology and/as Education* and the other by the Brazilian philosopher, Paulo Freire in 1970, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Ingold’s book developed from a series of lectures given in honour of John Dewey, so engages explicitly with the educational ideas of the American pragmatist philosopher, without citing Freire directly. Freire’s book also emerges out of dialogue, but in his case with Frantz Fanon’s argument in the *Wretched of the Earth* on the centrality of violence to decolonial liberation. A number of scholars have drawn attention to commonalities between Freire and Dewey’s ideas, as I propose with those of Ingold.

Freire criticises what he calls the “banking” concept of education, where students are understood as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge, while Ingold attacks the widespread assumption that education is about the *transmission of information*. Ingold argues that instead, education is a practice of attending to the world, while Freire suggests that it involves cultivating a critical consciousness to reflect on reality. Ingold (2018, 4) draws on Dewey to develop a notion of education as ‘commoning’, a mutual participation in each other’s varied lives through attending to a mutual environment, in which senior and junior parties share a stake in the outcome – the absence of which marks training, rather than education. Education, Ingold (2018, 17) suggests ‘is what allows us humans to collectively make ourselves, each in his or her way’ – a process of human becoming.

For Freire, the Pedagogy of the Oppressed is also marked by communication through dialogue, even dialectic, as a means of overcoming the dehumanisation that results from violence in both the oppressed and their oppressors. He suggests that:

Dehumanisation, which marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, is a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human.

(Freire, 2017 [1970], 18)

For Freire (2017 [1970], 18), education can be a practice of liberation and freedom, but he suggests that the ‘great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed’ is to liberate themselves as well as their oppressors, since only the power that springs from weakness is strong enough to free both. Attempts to ‘soften’ their power by the oppressor manifest as paternalism, a form of false generosity, which perpetuates injustice, since according to Freire, freedom is acquired by conquest, rather than by gift, and must be pursued constantly and responsibly.

In contrast to Fanon's ideas about the liberating effects of violence, Freire (2017 [1970], 30) suggests that it only an act of love can oppose the lovelessness which lies at the heart of the oppressors' violence, and while now not unchallenged, I think one can see the impact of Freire's ideas on Mandela's approach to reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa – indeed, copies of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* were circulated illicitly among activists in apartheid South Africa.

Freire might agree with Fanon that decolonisation consists of the replacing of a certain "species" of men by another "species" of men', but in his case he wants to achieve this through transformation of both oppressors and oppressed into new kinds of person, since the immediate model of humanity for many of the oppressed remains becoming like their oppressors. Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed as a form of decolonial education attempts to overcome the dialectical contradiction between oppressors and oppressed through the humanisation of all.

While oriented in different directions, both Ingold and Freire agree that education is not something we do 'to' other people, but, as a process of 'humanisation' or 'human becoming', is something we do 'with' them – in the process turning othering into what Ingold (2018, 66) calls 'togethering'. This proceeds through response-ability and paying close attention to our shared world, and in Freire's case to the nature of forms of oppression, not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which can be transformed through praxis; reflection and action upon the world.

The inherent danger for those of us located in Universities is the trap outlined by Freire, where awareness of the conditions of oppression, and our ongoing participation in them, leads to rationalisation of guilt through paternalistic treatment that maintains the dependence of the oppressed. Decolonial education is clearly not something we can do 'to' others, but is something we must do 'with' them – paying attention together to the conditions of coloniality and oppression in our world, being prepared to be personally transformed by the process, and as a consequence working towards a world that enhances human flourishing – affirming life, growth and movement.

Both Ingold and Freire make a distinction between two types of education. For Freire (2017 [1970], 28) it is between *systemic education*, which can only be changed by political power, and *educational projects* carried out with the oppressed. For Ingold (2018, 37), the distinction is between education in the major key, the education of the school which immunises and provides security through knowledge, and education in the minor key, a practice of disarmament, enabling us to break out of the security of our defensive positions in the pursuit of wisdom. It is this latter form, Ingold suggests, that fulfils the etymological meaning of education as *ex-ducere* – leading out. Anxious, unsettling and inquisitive, education in the minor key is an act of care, a gift, that nevertheless exposes us all to significant risk.

While Ingold's book in part emerges as a reaction to and critique of the contemporary University – following the campaign at Aberdeen '[Reclaiming our University](#)' in which he played a prominent part – it is striking that the book finds its focus in a final chapter on 'Anthropology, Art and the University'. Ingold (2018, 58) argues for Anthropology (but also Art) as a form of Education, defined as 'a generous, open-ended, comparative and yet critical inquiry into the conditions and potentials of human life in the one world we all inhabit.' What is striking, however, is that he suggests that this is true whether considering

anthropology in the classroom or in the field – both involve close attention to the world in co-responsibility with others.

Personally, I have grappled with doing field research in Africa in the wake of challenges such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (2012 [1999]) *Decolonizing Methodologies*, which suggested that 'from the vantage point of the colonised... the term "research" is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism'. But recognising time spent with others in Africa as a significant element in my own decolonial education has felt transformative. Over the past five years, as the consequences of #RhodesMustFall have unfolded globally, I have been involved in setting up what Freire might call an *educational project* – *Recollecting the Missionary Road* – with colleagues at Sol Plaatje University.

Education on the Missionary Road

As an institution named after an African intellectual and writer, rather than premised on the patronage of mine owners, does Sol Plaatje University hold a promise of decolonial education that becomes harder to imagine from Cape Town, Oxford or Cambridge? Is it possible to use Kimberley's position, on the edge of the *groot gat*, with students recruited from among the descendants of mine labourers rather than their owners, to think about what it might mean to approach education as a decolonial project of repair, in relation to the wounds inflicted on the northern Cape and its people over the past 150 years.

In the months after the fall of Rhodes, I was in the process of putting together a project that built on previous work on the museum of the London Missionary Society, an organisation active in southern Africa from 1799. I began to discuss the possibility of integrating this with a partnership with Sol Plaatje University that might attempt to embody the possibilities of decolonial education, both intellectually and practically.

Rather than just developing a North-South research collaboration, I was keen to try to put education and its emancipatory potential at the centre of our efforts – partly in response to the limits placed on education by the 1953 apartheid era Bantu Education Act that focused opportunities for non-whites on practical and manual labour, resulting in the closure of Tiger Kloof, a missionary higher education college in the Northern Cape, where two presidents of independent Botswana as well as the mother of Archbishop Desmond Tutu had been educated. The immediate result was a field school, funded initially by the Cambridge-Africa ALBORADA Research Fund at Kuruman in July 2018, involving students and staff from both Cambridge and SPU.

This became an strand a wider project, *[Re:]Collecting the Missionary Road*, so it is perhaps important to situate the origin of the phrase 'missionary road' – a term used by Cecil John Rhodes, who identified the chain of missions that stretched into the interior of Africa as a key avenue of British influence, a "Suez Canal" from the Cape to Central Africa (Rotberg 1990, 152). Having completed a project of what would now be called state capture, becoming Prime Minister at the Cape in 1890, Rhodes saw the missionary road as key to his plans for the expansion of the British empire into the interior of the African continent. This included sending the son of the missionary Robert Moffat to negotiate a mining concession with Lobengula, King of the Matabele, which was became the basis for Rhodes to invade what is now Zimbabwe and Zambia, but which he immodestly named 'Rhodesia', through a British charter for the British South African Company, which he controlled.

The 'missionary road' then, was something established in a precolonial context, under African forms of political authority, but which became central to subsequent colonisation,

military occupation and the implementation of colonial authority. It was something that exerted significant influence on colonial history, but which was nevertheless subsequently eclipsed by the settlements that grew up around sites of mineral extraction, such as Kimberley, and the railways built to serve them. [Re:]*Collecting the Missionary Road* was intended as a project of recollection, but also of re-collection - a way of rethinking the entangled histories of Europeans and Africans in the region, but also the ways in which these encounters are commemorated and remembered today.

Achille Mbembe has recently suggested that the losses suffered by Africans as a result of colonialism are so irreparable that they will have to learn to live with them, but that Europeans will also have to learn to live with what their ancestors did. Attempting to address this generates what he has called the challenge of learning to remember together, and it is here that the project has been located. A field school at Kuruman became the practical means to bring together students and educators who were implicated in this history, to create a space in which we could attempt to find a common basis to explorations this shared history.

Through a field school at the Moffat Mission in Kuruman, a London Missionary Society station established in independent African territory in 1824, and subsequently colonised, we attempted to attend together to the contemporary landscape as a means of understanding how the processes of colonisation had transformed coloniser and the colonised alike.

The conditions of a temporarily constituted field school, like the temporary Bogwera and Bogale initiation schools of the Tswana people, provided an 'other' places in which to pursue education in the minor key – attending together to the circumstances under which South Africa had been simultaneously racialised and tribalised through missionary, colonial and apartheid projects. But the constitution of the field school immediately raised questions about the continuing coloniality of the racial order in contemporary South Africa.



Figure 2 1835 images made by Charles Davidson Bell near Kuruman, showing young men and women dressed for Bogwera and Bogale

Overall Uniformity

As plans for the field school advanced, one of the staff members from Sol Plaatje University suggested that African students participating in the field school would expect to be provided with overalls in which to work. In much of Southern Africa, overalls are a marker of manual labour, worn by miners, gardeners and road workers, the vast majority of whom are not racilaised as 'White'. What would it imply to have all the South African students wearing overalls for the field school, if the English students did not?

Uncomfortable about this unanticipated development, I stalled on committing to purchasing overalls but began to talk to as many people as I could about this request, as a way to unpack and understand my own discomfort. Some people suggested that it might be a question of not damaging the students' personal clothes while undertaking fieldwork, an argument that made sense given the limited economic means of many of their families.

I was aware that one of the more radical political parties in South Africa who favour land redistribution, the Economic Freedom Fighters, had adopted red overalls as a uniform when attending parliament, in stark contrast to the suits and ties of the governing ANC. Given the Sol Plaatje colours are also red, I asked, with my tongue only slightly in my cheek, whether we might get the students red overalls, emblazoned with Sol Plaatje University logos, but was informed the potential association with the EFF would be unwelcome.

When the students arrived in Kuruman for the field school, I asked them what they thought about the overall question, and was told they did want to be provided overalls, but part of their logic was that previous years of students had also been given these. Rather than only purchase overalls for the students that wanted them, which would likely reinforce the distinctions between Cambridge and Sol Plaatje students, I decided we needed to buy an overall for all undergraduate participants participating in the field school. I pondered getting them for staff as well, but the budget made this impractical.

As a result we spent the first morning transporting the students to a nearby agricultural supplier and them trying on the basic blue overalls that are ubiquitous across South Africa. Just as transporting the students to the mission station, a location away from their home universities, located them in a liminal place evocative of other ritual and educational settings, the purchasing of overalls provided the students with a uniform that emphasised and marked their common identity.

This reminded me of the images made in the 1830s of initiates at the Bogwera and Bojale initiation schools, held in the region during the precolonial period. Was the field school rather more like one of these temporary educational institutions than it was the 800-year-old permanent institutions from which some of us had joined the field school? Were the processes of paying attention to artefacts and features of the material world as a way of reflecting on the social conditions of contemporary human life an extension of European or alternatively African educational practices?

The question and discussion of uniforms became an important part of the process of discussion and reflection as the field school proceeded, in the process of which, many uniforms gradually disintegrated through contact with dirt, thorns and digging. While the students chose dormitories that reflected the England/South Africa divide and began the week eating their meals at separate tables, as time passed some of these divisions began to soften as relationships were through working together.



Figure 3 Students just after overalls were purchased

Attending to Servitude

During an after-dinner lecture one evening, a colleague showed a late-nineteenth century lantern slide showing European missionaries sitting under the famous tree at Kuruman where David Livingstone proposed to Mary Moffat. At the end of the talk, Andy Kars, one of the more politically active and outspoken SPU students asked who the man standing in the background of the image was.



Figure 4 Missionary lantern slide & Andy Kars leaning on what remains of the Kuruman Almond tree

The skintone of the figure in the lantern slide suggested the man was Black. The logic of South Africa's system of racial subservience suggested this was an African servant, waiting on the missionary family. Central to missionary ideas was that domestic service would inculcate values of diligence and hard work, a part of the imagined civilizing project.

We discussed histories of domestic service at the mission, and the small structures built at the back of British missionaries to house their African servants, and it became clear that the students wanted to know as much about these people were as they did the better known European missionaries such as Robert Moffat and David Livingstone.

As we talked about the missionary civilizing project, the SPU students suggested that from their perspective, it had been an African achievement to civilize and humanise European colonists – a notion captured in Setswana by the proverb - *motho ke motho ka batho* – a person becomes human through other people.

Following the field school, a visit to the mission archives in London brought me face to face with a photograph, pasted into an album, from which the lantern slide had clearly been made. Closer inspection revealed that the man in the background, leaning on the tree, was in fact not African, but of European descent. Indeed, his cross-armed posture would have been unusual for an African, at least at this period. Was it us who had assumed he was a black servant, or the colourist producing the lantern slide? At what point did an image of people reading in a garden come to appear emblematic of South Africa's relations of racialised labour?



Figure 5 Album page from CWM Archive, SOAS London

In the same archive box, another series of photographs featured named portraits of a number of servants who had worked for Robert Moffat, the missionary most associated with the Kuruman mission. The significance of these photographs became immediately clear to me as a consequence of having my attention drawn to the conditions of service under which Black residents of the mission operated by Andy Kars.

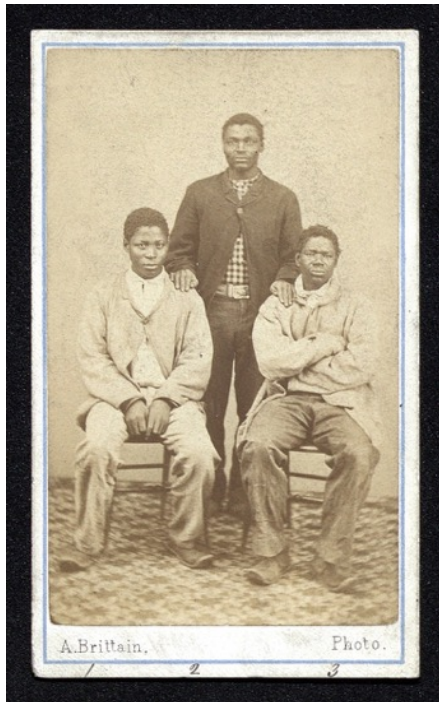


Figure 6 Mr Moffat's Servants Hano, Gaseitswe & Molai



Figure 7 Mr Moffat's Servants Totor or Tolwe, Olehile & Sederase

Occupying the Foreground

As I bring this [Re:]collection to a close, I wonder about the nature of the process I am engaged in. One of the most well-known images of Kuruman comes from the frontispiece of Robert Moffat's 1842 *Missionary Labours and Scenes in South Africa*, showing Moffat and his European missionary colleague Hamilton at the foreground of the image, Moffat holding his Setswana translation of the bible open in his hand.



Figure 8 Frontispiece from Robert Moffat's 1842 *Missionary Labours and Scenes in South Africa*



After Baxter 1841 (24 September 2017)

THE GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY TEAM AT THE KURUMAN STATION

Figure 9 2017 Re-creation of the Frontispiece Image

In 2017, when conducting initial survey work at Kuruman, we attempted to recreate this image. I ended up taking Moffat's place, holding my laptop in my hands, while Nicho, who was employed as a groundsman at the mission, and who greatly assisted us in our work joined the photo having gone to find a wheelbarrow, as one had featured in the 1842 image. While the missionary houses are now mostly regarded as historic buildings of interest to visitors, Nicho himself slept in the servants room, built at the back of Moffat's house in the mid-nineteenth century – I accidentally disturbed him once while investigating the building.



Figure 10 Image of Kuruman mission by Charles Davidson Bell, 1835

In 2019, I encountered the original image on which Moffat's frontispiece had been based. It had been produced in 1835 as part of an expedition of exploration from the Cape led by

Andrew Smith, the Curator of the South African Museum. In this version of the image, however, Moffat and Hamilton are nowhere to be seen. The only human figures in the image are the silhouettes of African workers, pushing a wheelbarrow, carrying a space, as well as loads of wood on their heads. In creating an image for his book, Moffat literally superimposed himself into the foreground of the image.

In providing this account, it is possible for me to do otherwise? Does acknowledging the way that I was educated by the student participants in the field school make a difference if my name is still the one at the top of the page?

Biography

Chris Wingfield is Associate Professor in the Arts of Africa at the Sainsbury Research Unit for the Arts of Africa, Oceania and the Americas at the University of East Anglia. Born in South Africa but educated in the UK, Chris has worked at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, the Open University and the Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology in Cambridge. In 2017, Chris was awarded a South African National Research Foundation fellowship at the University of Cape Town's Archive and Public Culture Research Initiative to develop the [Re:]collecting the Missionary Road project.

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