

Research Now: Tchiliwande and the Making African Connections Project

Making African Connections: Decolonial Futures for Colonial Collections is an exciting project looking at the Powell-Cotton Museum's Angolan and Namibian collections in a different way. Working with the Sussex Africa Centre and researchers in the UK and Namibia, the project is re-examining this vast collection (over 2600 objects) in the context of its colonial history and discovering fascinating stories in the process.

Historically, Africans were not publicly recognised for their work in creating museum collections. As a result, the stories we tell about our objects often don't include the people who made or used them. As part of the Making African Connections project we want to change that. Thanks to the detailed records kept by sisters Diana and Antoinette Powell-Cotton, we're recovering details about the people who helped them travel and collect, putting these Angolan and Namibian men and women back into the public eye.

One of those people is Tchiliwande, a Soba (chief of a small community) who helped the sisters collect about 100 objects from people in and around his village. He arranged for the sisters to watch important activities, such as milk churning, and gave them access to his homestead to take photographs. He and his family feature in many of the sister's photographs and notes.

The project aims to highlight people like Tchiliwande for the important work they did. Without them, the Powell-Cotton Museum wouldn't have such a significant collection. Tchiliwande was just one man. Many of the people associated with our collections remain unrecorded.

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