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Toward a Decolonial Archival Praxis: Digitizing the Lloyd Best Archive in Trinidad and Tobago

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Toward a Decolonial Archival Praxis: Digitizing the Lloyd Best Archive in Trinidad and Tobago

Abstract

This article explores the implementation of a decolonial archival praxis through the digitization of the Lloyd Best Archive in Trinidad and Tobago. Traditional archival practices, rooted in colonial attitudes, have historically marginalized Indigenous knowledge systems and narratives. Through a post-custodial approach, this project challenges the colonial structure inherent in archival practices by prioritizing collaboration with local communities and empowering them to maintain control over their own stories.

The partnership between Trinity College and the Lloyd Best Institute of the Caribbean exemplifies a new approach to archival digitization, one that prioritizes cultural context and community involvement. By providing resources, training, and support, Trinity College enables the local team to digitize and describe their own materials, ensuring that the archive remains rooted in its cultural origins.

Overall, the digitization of the Lloyd Best Archive serves as a model for decolonial archival praxis, enriching our understanding of Caribbean history and culture while advancing equitable and inclusive archival practices worldwide. By centering marginalized voices, initiatives like this work towards a future where epistemic sovereignty is recognized and respected, and where archives serve as instruments of empowerment and social justice.

Keywords

Digitization, image management, digital curation, collection access, preservation, technology, collaboration, training, metadata, workflow, subject indexing, digital asset management systems, presentation software, archives, praxis, decolonization, decoloniality, archival, social justice, Trinidad and Tobago, Caribbean, coloniality.

Author Bios

Christina Bleyer, PhD, is the College Librarian, Associate Vice President for Libraries & Digital Learning and Director of Special Collections and Archives at the Watkinson Library at Trinity College.

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Introduction

This article examines the role of the archives in maintaining coloniality and proposes methods for the development of a decolonial archival praxis through a case study of the partnership between the Watkinson Library for Special Collections and Archives at Trinity College (Hartford, Connecticut) and the Lloyd Best Institute of the Caribbean in Trinidad and Tobago. Archival praxis includes collecting, preserving, and making archival materials accessible, but it also includes the ways we teach with archives. In the co-authored book chapter “Speaking for Ourselves: Teaching *Borderlands/La Frontera* Through Primary Materials,” Patricia García and I explore the ways that teaching with primary sources can be a decolonial praxis.¹ In this article, the focus is on practices surrounding collecting, preserving, and making archival materials accessible.

The concept of coloniality and decoloniality that guides our thinking in this article is best described by our colleague Maurice Wade as, “whatever else coloniality might be, it is an epistemic enterprise that both sustains colonialism by dominating how colonized and formerly colonized peoples collectively understand themselves, their past(s), their present(s), their future(s), and their aspirations.”² Dr. Wade’s description is informed by his work on Lloyd Best’s concept of “epistemic sovereignty.”³ Here we will explore how coloniality is present in archival practices and how post-custodial archiving is aligned with epistemic sovereignty. Epistemic sovereignty refers to the right of Caribbean people to create and control their own knowledge systems, free from external influences and colonial impositions.

Lloyd Best argued that the Caribbean’s history of colonization had resulted in the marginalization and erasure of Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of knowing.⁴ This loss of epistemic sovereignty had profound implications for the region’s development, as it hindered the ability of Caribbean societies to address their unique challenges on their own terms. To reclaim epistemic sovereignty, Best emphasized the importance of recognizing and valuing Caribbean perspectives, experiences, and traditions in all areas of intellectual inquiry, including economics, politics, culture, and education. He advocated for the inclusion of Caribbean voices and narratives in academic research, policymaking, and cultural production, arguing that this was essential for building a more just and equitable society. In essence, Best’s concept of epistemic sovereignty calls for a decolonization of knowledge and the establishment of systems that empower Caribbean people to define their own truths, theories, and methodologies. It is a call to action for the recognition and celebration of Caribbean epistemologies and the restoration of agency and dignity to Caribbean communities.

Post-Custodial Archival Praxis

One way of nurturing and maintaining epistemic sovereignty is by collecting, preserving and making archives accessible through a post-custodial model. In this article, we will move from the description of post-custodial archival theory to a post-custodial praxis in and through our description of implementing a post-custodial archival praxis to digitize and make the Lloyd Best Archive in Trinidad and Tobago available. Through these descriptions, we will reveal what it means to have epistemic sovereignty.

In relation to archives, we see the colonial epistemic enterprise Dr. Wade describes happening in many ways. First, the impetus to collect an archive is usually rooted in the possession

¹ Patricia M. García and Christina Bleyer, “Speaking for Ourselves: Teaching *Borderlands/La Frontera* Through Primary Materials,” in *Teaching Gloria E. Anzaldúa: Pedagogy and Practice for Our Classrooms and Communities*, eds. Margaret Cantu-Sanchez, Candace de León-Zepeda and Norma E. Cantú (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2020), 183-194.

² Maurice Wade, “Lloyd Algernon Best: A Caribbean Decolonial Thinker,” (paper given at Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy, San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, March 2020).

³ Lloyd Best, “Independent Thought and Caribbean Freedom,” *New World Quarterly* 3(4): 16-24.

⁴ Ibid.

of something valuable, in most cases the monetary value of the archive, and it is focused on the archive as an object, not as a force for social change. Archives are generally purchased by institutions from other institutions or individuals where often there is only a transactional relationship. In addition, traditionally it is the story of the oppressor that is usually collected and preserved in archives. Whether by donation or purchase, it is the stories of the dominant class that are usually preserved in archives. This privileges one story over another or erases the experiences of the unrepresented people entirely. What is conveyed to the underrepresented and others is that their stories, their experiences, and their contributions – or even suffering – do not matter. As Paulo Freire explains, this privileging of one story over another can block or prevent *conscientização*.⁵

Conscientização involves developing a critical awareness of one's social reality through reflection and action (praxis) and results in the conviction that the oppressed must fight for their liberation. Freire explains that the oppressed absorb social myths created by the oppressor which convince the oppressed that they embody the negative images created by the oppressors. In other words, the oppressed see themselves in how they are described by the oppressors, and the only way out is to become the oppressor. By leaving the reality and lived experience of the poor and marginalized out of the archive, the archive is central in preserving and promoting these myths. It participates in the “culture of silence” and makes the oppressed identify with the oppressor to the point of becoming the oppressor. Exiting the oppressive structure becomes impossible since, instead of creatively developing the praxis to change the structure of domination, it is merely reversed and repeated. The traditional methods of collecting archives leave out marginalized people, those who are not part of the dominant discourse or the discourse of domination. We will discuss how these methods alter the lived sense of documents and objects by preventing those who created them from describing them.

The dominant traditional archival theory and practice is based upon colonial attitudes and presuppositions. We can see this in the way that archival collections are usually taken from the place where they were created, put in an archive, and then described not by the people or community that created them but instead by an archivist or museum professional who usually is not from the community where the materials were created. Besides often leading to mistakes in the description of material, a lack of metadata, or an imposition of an incorrect idea about what something is, this practice also makes that description part of the historical record. This ascribes to a culture or community a history that may not be their own but instead what someone else thought it was or should be. This takes away the agency of the person or community who created something since they are prevented from speaking for themselves about themselves. It alters the lived sense of documents and objects by preventing those who created them from describing them. Besides violating the meaning of the objects or documents and thus the historical record, this archival practice does violence to the creators by erasing or crossing out their perspectives, ideas, lived experiences, and humanity.

Archives and museums have been relegated to an alleged “neutral position.”⁶ Much like museums, archives have been constrained by this myth of neutrality, making them very cautious about engaging with ethical and social justice issues so as to not appear biased. The assumption implicit in this attitude is that the archive is merely supposed to collect, preserve, and make resources accessible. Though this may seem neutral, it is saturated with value-laden presuppositions that make neutrality impossible. Simply put, the archive as an “impartial” custodian is impossible given the inherent preferring and value judgments that pervade archival practice, from what

⁵ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum Press, 2000), 67.

⁶ Cesare Cuzzola, “Materiality in the Socially Engaged Museum: The Role of Collections Within Socially Purposeful Museum Practice at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery” (doctoral thesis, University of Leicester, 2020).

collections are acquired, to how access is provided, to what language is chosen to describe the materials. This restricts the scope and power of the archives and maintains the colonial attitude.

Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of *Nepantla*,⁷ or being or existing in between, can be applied to archival practice to allow it to act upon social inequality and political injustice. If the archive can be *Nepantla* such that it can stay in the community where it was created, be described by those who created the materials, and also made accessible to those outside of the community, it is now in between. This decolonizes the archive and reshapes our relationships with creators of the historical record.

Archives tell stories. There is an intimate act of creation that occurs between author or creator, text or object, and reader or archival researcher. Anzaldúa described storytelling as a shape-shifting act: "My 'stories' are acts encapsulated in time, 'enacted' every time they are spoken aloud or read silently."⁸ She transposed this with Western traditions in which works of art are placed "in the best structures designed by the best architects [...] servicing them with insurance, guards to protect them, conservators to maintain them, specialists to mount and display them, and the educated and upper classes to 'view' them."⁹ Archives have also been treated in this way, preventing an intimate creative relationship from forming.

One way to fray coloniality is through post-custodial praxis. Here the archive can "live in the crossroads"¹⁰ and this decolonial praxis dismantles the colonial structure. To show how this new way of collecting, preserving, and providing access to collections takes place, I will draw on my experience with human rights documentation at The Benson Latin American collection. The post-custodial theory of archives envisions that "archivists will no longer physically acquire and maintain records, but [...] will provide management oversight for records that will remain in the custody of the record creators."¹¹ The post-custodial archival model departs from the traditional theory and practice of acquisition based on physical custody of records and recognizes that information is not always contingent on its original physical form. To implement this idea, the Archive partners with organizations who are creating and/or collecting born-digital human rights documentation but lack the resources or technical expertise to ensure the preservation of and access to their materials. Within the partnership, organizations maintain physical and intellectual custody over their materials while submitting digital copies to the Archive for long-term preservation and access. This post-custodial model practiced by The Benson is rooted in the establishment of deep collaborative relationships – horizontal and reciprocal in nature – with colleagues and sister institutions around the globe. The Watkinson Library at Trinity College has adopted this model in our work to digitize the Lloyd Best Archive and we will explain how we have incorporated these features into our praxis.

In the post custodial model, both archivists and partner organizations are experts. Archivists share their professional expertise in preservation, description, and access in order to help develop the partner organization's preservation capacity and infrastructure; partner organizations draw upon local labor for digitization work and harness their subject expertise to provide in-depth description of their materials. The resulting product serves the partner organizations' programming, meets established standards for preservation, and serves as a valuable primary resource for teaching and research. Incorporating the partner organization into the archival process empowers and further invests the local community in the preservation of its cultural heritage and helps ensure that the historical record is not altered. Both the archivist and the partner organizations are active

⁷ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Society of American Archivists Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology. n.d. <https://dictionary.archivists.org/entry/postcustodial.html>

participants in the collection, preservation, and access to the historical record, unlike the traditional ways of acquiring and preserving collections.

By privileging the possession of physical materials, excluding the creators of the materials from playing an active role in their description and preservation, and excluding poor and marginalized people from being represented in the archives, traditional archival theory and practice is colonial. It dominates how colonized and formerly colonized peoples collectively understand themselves, their past(s), their present(s), their future(s), and their aspirations. By developing archival theories and practices that do not privilege physical materials and instead involve the creators of the archival materials, allowing them to maintain both physical and intellectual control over their stories, the archive ceases to dominate and instead allows those who may not usually be represented in the historical or scholarly discourse to speak for themselves and choose how they are represented in the historical record. This methodology allows collections to remain where they are created and used and where they support larger societal processes concerning transition, recuperation of historic memory, and reconciliation, all while still meeting preservation and access goals. In addition, it frees the archive from being constrained by neutrality because post-custodial praxis is acutely aware of the transmission of values that takes place in and through archival praxis and affirms that it is impossible for an archive to be neutral.

In the following sections, we will explore how we have implemented a post-custodial praxis in our work to digitize the Lloyd Best Archive with the Lloyd Best Institute of the Caribbean. Before looking at the details of our process, it is necessary to give a brief overview of Lloyd Best and his significance to the Caribbean and beyond. Lloyd Best's concept of epistemic sovereignty is especially relevant to our project and guides our post-custodial praxis.

Lloyd Best and His Archive

Lloyd Best (1934-2007) was a prominent Caribbean economist, thinker, and political activist whose work significantly influenced the region's development and intellectual discourse. Born in Trinidad and Tobago, Best dedicated his life to understanding and reshaping the Caribbean's trajectory. His significance lies in his relentless pursuit of a Caribbean identity and development, free from the shackles of colonialism. Best advocated for the liberation of the Caribbean imagination, stressing the need for the region to define its own terms of development. Central to his philosophy was the belief that the Caribbean's unique history and cultural diversity should serve as the foundation for its future growth.

Best's seminal contribution came in the form of the Plantation Theory of Economy and Society which contextualized the Caribbean's modern challenges within its historical legacy of slavery and colonial exploitation.¹² This framework provided insights into the region's economic, social, and political dynamics, offering culturally relevant solutions to its myriad issues.

Beyond theory, Best was deeply engaged in grassroots activism and intellectual discourse. He founded influential discussion groups and political movements such as the New World Group and the Tapia House Movement which sought to mobilize Caribbean people towards self-determination and empowerment.

As an economist, Best worked with organizations like the United Nations Development Programme and served as a senior lecturer at the University of the West Indies. However, he resigned from academia to establish the Trinidad and Tobago Institute of the West Indies, later renamed the Lloyd Best Institute of the West Indies, and now the Lloyd Best Institute of the Caribbean, which continues his legacy of research and advocacy.

¹² Lloyd Best and Kari Levitt, *Essays on the Theory of Plantation Economy: A Historical and Institutional Approach to Caribbean Economic Development* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of West Indies Press, 2009).

Best's passing in 2007 marked the end of an era, but his belief in the potential of Caribbean people and his unwavering commitment to their empowerment continue to inspire generations. Through his work and institutions like the Lloyd Best Institute of the Caribbean (LBIC), Best's vision for a liberated, self-reliant Caribbean lives on, resonating not only within the region but also among scholars and activists worldwide. His archive contains publications including the *Trinidad and Tobago Review* and the *Tapia House Newspaper*, pamphlets, reports, photographs, correspondence, and videos.

In keeping with the post-custodial model just described, the Watkinson Library at Trinity College partnered with the LBIC. In this partnership, we provided digitization equipment and storage media and training and resources for digitization, processing, metadata collection, and best practices, as well as access to a platform which will provide public access and long-term digital preservation. The LBIC provided a team from the local community¹³ who would digitize, process, and describe the collections; they created the digital files according to archival standards and uploaded them, provided guidance on the creation of a custom metadata template, and worked to process the physical collections so that a finding aid could be created. The physical collections will remain in the custody of the LBIC, in the location and community where they were created. In implementing this post-custodial praxis, the teams from Trinity and Trinidad were equal partners, each providing their own expertise to create a digital archive.

LBIC and Collections

Trinity's relationship with the LBIC was formed through Trinity's study away program, Trinity in Trinidad, founded by Milla Riggio, a Trinity English professor interested in the connection between Shakespeare and Mas.¹⁴ During a project to digitize over 20 years of archival materials from the program, discussions began with Sunity Maharaj-Best, Lloyd Best's widow, and Carmel Best, his daughter and manager of the LBIC, regarding the possibility of working together to digitize the Lloyd Best Archive. Trinity could provide the resources that LBIC lacked – equipment, training, and funding – and Carmel could hire staff from the local community to be trained in digitization and metadata collection so that the materials would be described as accurately as possible. Carmel hired Saryiah Mohammed, a family friend, to assist with metadata creation while she took the lead in digitizing the newspapers. While the team is currently small, there are possibilities to include other members of the community for the purposes of creating image metadata.

Further possibilities opened with the discovery of the [Modern Endangered Archives Program](#) (MEAP), which provides a \$50,000 grant over 24 months. Supported by the Arcadia Foundation and based in UCLA, “the Modern Endangered Archives Program funds projects that document, digitize, and make accessible endangered archival materials from the 20th and 21st centuries.”¹⁵

The Lloyd Best Archive – which comprises newspapers, pamphlets, manuscripts, conference materials, books, correspondence, photographs, copybooks, slides, magazines, VHS tapes, and DVDs primarily dating from the 1960s to the 2010s – is stored in a windowless room that is not climate controlled. During our initial visit, we observed that the newspapers and pamphlets were well-organized, but many other materials were stored in boxes or suitcases on the floor; these materials were moved to shelves and the room swept and cleaned during a later visit.

¹³ This team comprises Carmel Best (Lloyd's daughter), Sunity Maharaj-Best (Lloyd's widow), and Saryiah Mohammed (a family friend).

¹⁴ Mas, short for masquerade, is a central part of Carnival culture in Trinidad and Tobago. It involves participants wearing costumes, masks, and other disguises to dance through a parade route.

¹⁵ “About the Program,” Modern Endangered Archives Program, <https://meap.library.ucla.edu/about>.

Trinidad and Tobago is a tropical island that is hot year-round. Trinidad and Tobago also experiences a natural cycle of rainy and dry seasons, but according to Carmel, climate change is beginning to intensify these. Longer periods of rain and humidity left the collections vulnerable to water damage, especially materials on the floor, while dry seasons were prone to wildfires, putting the collections equally at risk. Some irreplaceable materials had already been lost in a fire at Tapia House, leading to anxieties about further loss. Security and access were also limiting factors. As the collections are not fully inventoried or organized, it would be difficult to ascertain if materials were taken out of the building. Further, the collections can only be viewed in-person in Trinidad and Tobago, but the building does not have regular operating hours and is on private property, behind a locked gate.

During our initial visit to the LBIC, Carmel shared her knowledge of the collections and what was in demand by researchers, namely, the *Trinidad and Tobago Review*. The *TT Review* was a newspaper published by the Lloyd Best Institute in the 1970s and was a continuation of its precursor, *Tapia*. These unique publications included news but were also a cultural spread of art, poetry, politics, advertisements, and images, and many of the articles were written by Trinidad's greatest intellectuals. The LBIC had the only full run of the newspaper, which had never been digitized by any other institution. Some of the issues were in bound volumes, and some were loose copies.

This information, collected across one week of conversations and observations, was integrated into the initial MEAP application and a digitization and processing plan, which was shared with the LBIC and drafted into a memorandum of understanding. This plan included the series into which collections could be organized, archival specs for digitization (which included resolution, file formats, image sizes, and access formats), the recommended equipment for digitization, team member roles and responsibilities, a timetable for completion, and recommendations for digital preservation, including image and PDF file storage and access. When the document was drafted, we planned to proceed with the project regardless of whether we were awarded the grant. However, after a second, detailed application, it was announced that we had been awarded the MEAP grant. As a result, we adjusted our workflows and metadata collection to follow best practices as well as MEAP's requirements.

Equipment and Specs

With the selection of the *Trinidad and Tobago Review* as the first collection for digitization, we decided an overhead copystand camera setup would be ideal for photographing the newspapers. The LBIC had a small flatbed scanner (8.5 x 11") but since many of the newspapers were closer to 18" long, it was not ideal for protecting the materials or capturing an authentic image. Carmel had done some on-demand digitization requests but was hindered by the size of the newspapers. She would use Photoshop to stitch several scans together for each newspaper page, creating double or even quadruple the work to digitize a single issue. A copystand camera would not only be better suited to photograph newspapers, but the lens, tripod, and lighting could be adjusted for many types of materials, allowing for versatility in digitization. Cameras are often recommended for post-custodial archiving projects, as they are easy to transport and can be set up nearly anywhere.

However, the camera posed challenges for our partners who were not used to working with this equipment, and it proved difficult to troubleshoot issues over Zoom. We had given the team operational training while in Trinidad and Tobago, but once we left, the images they were taking were not as crisp and clear as they hoped. It was likely a camera height or focal length issue, but it was not possible to tell without testing and troubleshooting in person. As a result, we decided to ship the team an Epson 11000XL scanner, which was the same brand they were used to working with. The 12.2 x 17.2" scanner bed would fit the majority of their materials. The scanner also

included holders for negatives and slides as well as a removable mat so the team could also digitize images in various mediums.

The newspapers were digitized page-by-page as tiff files at 600ppi. PDF access files were made by combining the tiff files, but the original images were also retained for submission to MEAP and for preservation. Carmel and Sariyah also created a spreadsheet to track which newspapers had been digitized, their location in the archive, whether they were part of a bound volume, who was working on each issue, whether the tiffs and PDFs had been uploaded and backed up to a hard drive, and whether they had been published to the front end. They worked methodically through each decade, working from the bound volumes when necessary and organizing the newspapers in tandem to identify any gaps in the collection. Sariyah entered metadata for each record while Carmel scanned and uploaded the newspapers to their corresponding records. Because JSTOR Forum allowed for various workflows, records could be created and described, regardless of whether that issue had been digitized, as Sariyah could work from the physical material to fill in the metadata fields.

Platform

One of the most important contingencies for the success of such a post-custodial archiving project, aside from equipment and training, is storage, preservation, and access – in other words, a platform. As a small institution of only 2,000 students, Trinity College regularly relies on out-of-the-box platforms to support its digital collections. It does not have the staff to support custom-built or homegrown solutions as larger universities often can. In this case, the hosting platform JSTOR Forum and its front-facing component, Shared and Preserved Collections (SPC), was chosen.

JSTOR Forum originated as Shared Shelf, a hosting service created by Artstor which was rebranded as JSTOR Forum after Artstor's acquisition by Ithaka. As members of Artstor since 2007, Trinity has been working with the platform for many years. JSTOR Forum features robust, customizable metadata templates able to adapt to a variety of schema and material types. JSTOR Forum also allows users to either upload media before describing them, or enter metadata first and add media later, a flexibility that is very helpful for any workflow and which proved useful for our project. JSTOR introduced Shared and Preserved Collections in fall 2019, and we joined as charter members. This front-end, branded institutional landing page allows for customizable organization and support for print, image, and audiovisual materials so that materials are discoverable both to our own institution and global researchers using the JSTOR database. Its appearance is user-friendly and intuitive.

During the pilot project, JSTOR SPC began to offer support for audiovisual materials, made print materials as well as metadata fully text-searchable, and in 2020 introduced a digital preservation module which could be integrated into Forum so that materials would be stewarded as well as stored. The preservation module, utilizing JSTOR's existing technology Portico, pulls materials into a preservation environment where they can be monitored for fixity. JSTOR Forum and JSTOR SPC are still developing platforms, and as longstanding members, we provide regular guidance and feedback on current and forthcoming features to JSTOR.

With JSTOR SPC in place as Trinity's digital archive, we could offer the Lloyd Best Institute a place to store, preserve, and make their digitized collections discoverable and accessible. Through MEAP, UCLA will also store and preserve digitized materials in perpetuity.

The screenshot shows the JSTOR interface for the Lloyd Best Institute of the Caribbean Archive. At the top, there's a search bar and navigation tabs for 'All Content' and 'Images'. The main header features the archive's name, 'Lloyd Best Institute of the Caribbean Archive', and a search box. Below this is a grid of six image-based collection thumbnails: 'Photos', 'Tapes', 'Tapes Booklets', 'Trinidad and Tobago Review', and 'Videos'. The footer contains 'Explore JSTOR' links, social media icons, and copyright information.

Figure 1: The Lloyd Best Institute of the Caribbean Archive's homepage, hosted in Trinity College's JSTOR instance. Each image designates a collection of materials.

Metadata

Having community members from the culture of origin describe materials is a cornerstone of post-custodial praxis that we were adamant about implementing. Archives, and by extension metadata and their authorities, are typically Anglocentric, so having the ability to shift metadata collection to include fields and terms which we had not considered was essential. Our ability to describe the materials, even in good faith, would be limited or misguided without firsthand knowledge of the materials' culture and creators. While Carmel and Sariyah are from Trinidad and Tobago, Carmel also has ties to the newspaper's creators and authors which was critical for providing context and accurate descriptions.

Given the geographic distance between us, we conducted training regarding metadata schemas and collection via Zoom. Over the course of one week, broken into several two-hour sessions, we worked with Carmel and Sariyah to develop a custom metadata template based on subject terms that were unique to the culture and the materials while still following best practices for the materials and making the template easily mappable to MEAP. Further, in the spirit of an equal partnership, Carmel has been made an administrator of the Lloyd Best Archive project¹⁶ in JSTOR

¹⁶ In JSTOR Forum, a "project" is a collection of digital materials. An administrator can have many projects, each with unique publishing targets and metadata templates. JSTOR Forum allows tiered access for users so that they can only access particular projects or records in order to keep the collections secure. For instance, the LBIC team has access to all the LBIC projects, but not Trinity-related ones.

Forum so that she can have dual ownership of the digitized materials and the ability to work freely in the platform.

In the JSTOR template, the “Culture” field is linked to the Getty Art and Architecture Thesaurus, which includes “Trinidadian” or “Tobagoian,” and “Trinidadian Tobagoian” as viable options. For someone outside the culture cataloging materials from Trinidad and Tobago, these authorized terms would likely seem perfectly appropriate. However, Carmel and Sariyah alerted us to a term that would not be found in an authority list, because it was not only new but particular to the culture – “Trinbagonian.” This term is the preferred term for people from Trinidad and Tobago as it is inclusive of the two, culturally distinct islands as one nationality. In another instance, Carmel explained that while many of the *TT Review* issues had traditional dates, some did not. One issue was labeled “Guava Season,” leading us to believe that the issue must have been published when guavas were in season. However, Carmel explained that “Guava Season” is a colloquial phrase meaning “hard times,” thus the paper was published during a tumultuous period in history, not a particular time of year. Other *TT Review* newspapers are dated similarly, such as 1985’s the “Long Vacation” issue, described as “Volume 8, No. 01” (Figs. 2 and 3).

Custom fields were also added to the template so that each newspaper’s contents and their authors, advertisements, images, and image creators/artists could be listed. These might traditionally not be included in description of similar materials but were some of the information most requested by interested researchers, and so were important to Carmel and Sariyah to include. As all the metadata would be text-searchable, this would make this information more discoverable.

The screenshot displays the JSTOR Forum cataloging interface. At the top, the breadcrumb trail reads: Forum > Projects > Admin > Cataloging Tools > Success. The main header shows the document path: < LBI Archive: TTR (PDFs) > TTR_1985-00-00_v08_n01_Long-Vacation.pdf. The document is identified as a PDF with 16 pages and a size of 62.43 MB, created on Jan 24, 23 by Trinity College, CT. The metadata form includes the following fields and values:

- Title:** Trinidad and Tobago Review, 1985, Vol. 08, No. 01, Long-Vacation
- ID Number:** TTR_1985-00-00_v08_n01_Long-Vacation.pdf
- Extent:** 16 pages
- Credits:** No credits listed
- Managing Editor:** Not credited
- Creator:** Alleyne, Doodridge; Canbarr, Gillian; Custow, Selwyn; Farnas, Jacqueline; Food Systems Monograph; Gerds, Aubrey E.; Indian and Foreign Review; Matthews, Mickey; Newsweek
- Contents:** p.1: p.18: Law and Disorder in T&T: News Showing: Whiggle's near C.I. and the arrest of Kaiser's killer (Farnas, Jacque - 14); p.3: p.16: Petta Canbarr sees Robinson to political leadership (Matthews, Mickey); p.3: T&T condemns South Africa (Alleyne, Doodridge);
- Advertisements:** Republic Bank: The Real and Messy Group of Companies; Owen General Insurance Limited; L.J.W. - Irene L. 'Ireland', Max Serfouze P and A Limited; Trinidad and Tobago Electric Commission (TTECO); Alkhi G. A. Muhammad and Co.; Kirpalanis; C & I Seetaram Shopping Centre
- Notable Image:** p.1: Headshots: A.G. Russell; Martinique, C.J. Larose Dayaling (4) p.3: 'Marching to cemetery with victims of apartheid' p.7: View of the beach from the coast with piergus on the shore and in the water p.8: A 500-year-old tower on a small island (Shibani) p.8: A village mosque in Mali? p.8: The Dr. Francis of Assisi Mission in New Mexico? p.8: A faculty conference: must break home in Mauritania? p.11: A windmill p.12: Headshot: Dr. Selwyn Custow (p.12: People suffering from sea sickness)
- Subject:** Trinidad and Tobago; Caribbean; West Indies;
- Description:** (Empty field)
- Publisher:** Trinidad and Tobago Institute of the West Indies
- Volume:** 08
- Issue Number:** 01
- Date:** 1985 (likely July or August, the months of long vacation from school)
- Earliest Date:** 1985
- Latest Date:** 1985
- Measurements:** 11 in. x 16.0 in.
- Repository:** Lloyd Best Institute of the Caribbean (Trinidad, Trinidad and Tobago)
- Archival Collection Name:** The Lloyd Best Institute Archives
- Accession Number:** (Empty field)
- Box Number:** (Empty field)
- Folder Number:** (Empty field)
- Creation/Discovery Site:** (Empty field)
- Culture:** Trinidadian; Tobagonian; Caribbean; West Indian; Trinidadian Tobagonian
- Country:** Trinidad and Tobago
- Work Type:** Newspaper
- Resource Type:** Newspaper (based on JSTOR Ingestion Type (1) INPAPER)
- Language Code:** eng
- Alt Title:** T&T Review
- Rights Type:** permission granted for public access
- Rights:** These images are made available for noncommercial educational and scholarly purposes only. Some permitted and prohibited uses are listed in JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use (https://about.jstor.org/terms)
- Citation:** (Empty field)
- Image Date:** (Empty field)
- Source:** (Empty field)
- Container:** Trinidad and Tobago Institute
- Compilation:** (Empty field)
- Placeholder image?** (Empty field)

Figure 2: A view of the cataloging template in JSTOR Forum which has been customized according to dialogues between myself, Carmel, and Sariyah. Note that this issue does not have a traditional numerical date but uses “The Long Vacation.”



Figure 3: The “Long Vacation” issue as viewed from the “item details” page in JSTOR Shared Collections.

Furthermore, the adoption of platforms like JSTOR Forum and Shared Collections facilitates the preservation and accessibility of digitized materials while also offering opportunities for collaboration and feedback. The integration of culturally relevant metadata such as the term “Trinbagonian” demonstrates a commitment to representing diverse perspectives and experiences within the archive.

Overall, the digitization of the Lloyd Best Archive exemplifies the transformative potential of decolonial archival praxis. By centering the voices and narratives of marginalized communities, this project not only enriches our understanding of Caribbean history and culture but also serves as a model for equitable and inclusive archival practices worldwide. Through initiatives like this, we can work towards a future where epistemic sovereignty is recognized and respected and where archives serve as instruments of empowerment and social justice.

Conclusion

The digitization of the Lloyd Best Archive in Trinidad and Tobago represents a significant step toward decolonizing archival praxis and reclaiming epistemic sovereignty. The traditional archival model, rooted in colonial attitudes and presuppositions, has perpetuated the marginalization and erasure of Indigenous knowledge systems and narratives. By implementing a post-custodial praxis which prioritizes collaboration with local communities and allows them to maintain control over their own stories, this project challenges the colonial structure inherent in traditional archival practices.

Through the partnership between the Watkinson Library at Trinity College and the Lloyd Best Institute of the Caribbean, a new approach to archival digitization has emerged – one that acknowledges the importance of cultural context and community involvement. By providing resources, training, and support, the Watkinson Library at Trinity College empowered the local team (Carmel Best, Sariyah Mohammed, and Sunity Maharaj-Best) to digitize and describe their own materials, ensuring that the archive remains rooted in its cultural origins.

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