

Decolonizing the LSHTM Archives Service

This article will give an in-depth analysis of our journey in decolonizing the archives of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) which began in 2019 and is ongoing. It will give readers the opportunity to understand how an institution created by the Colonial Office is confronting its history and its colonial legacy, and how the Archives Service is changing its practices in a way that seeks to confront and disrupt the colonial narrative. This has been achieved through an overview of the colonial history of the School by a research fellow and the development of decolonizing principles covering cataloguing practice, archival practice, dissemination, education and inclusion.

Keywords: decolonization; archival practice; colonial history

Introduction

In this article we reflect on whether it is possible, and if so how, to ‘decolonize’ the archives of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM). We argue that while the LSHTM archives cannot be fully decolonized, adopting a critical empathy and Black and postcolonial archival approach to researching and organizing an archive, can create more inclusive, open spaces, in which the colonial and racist history of the materials contained in this archive are openly acknowledged. Our reflections are based on two sets of complementary practice: that of an archivist and that of an archival researcher. Here we seek to bring these two perspectives and sets of experiences into conversation with one another to generate thoughts on how to critically engage with a colonial archive.

The London School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM) was founded in 1899 by Sir Patrick Manson with the object to facilitate British colonialism and white settlement through research and the treatment of tropical disease. It was established with funding from the Colonial Office. At the beginning of the School's first teaching session in October 1899, Manson welcomed the first cohort of students with the following words:

‘You are welcome for many reasons, but more especially because you are the first instalment of what we hope will grow in the course of years into a numerous and important band; a band that shall not only leave its mark in the history of tropical medicine, but shall exercise an influence for good in the development of the empire’.¹

From its very foundation, LSTM's purpose was deeply entangled with the maintenance and expansion of the British Empire. In 1924 the School became the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM). In practice, adding ‘Hygiene’ to the title meant that public health subjects were taught and researched, however the School also included staff who embraced ideas around social hygiene and eugenics.

The LSHTM Archives Service was established in July 2002 when a professional Archivist was employed to catalogue, preserve and make accessible the historic collections of the School. It currently employs two part time Archivists and one full time Archives Assistant. The histories told by the archives are generally those of white, male, colonial medical professionals. These include Sir Ronald Ross, the *discoverer* of the mosquito transmission of malaria; Sir Patrick Manson, founder of the School; and Sir Andrew Balfour, first Director of LSHTM in 1924.

The paper begins with a short overview and definition of the term decolonization. We pay particular attention to its meaning in institutional and archival contexts. The paper then splits into two parts. We start by presenting reflections of a Black archival researcher, trying to tell anti-colonial stories and challenging the white supremacy inherent in many archival documents. In the second part we hear from the archivist on what can be done to decolonize the archives to allow the telling of different stories. Our conclusion is a joint reflection on the opportunities that decolonizing the LSHTM archive brings with it, and some of its challenges and limitations.

Decolonizing archives

The Washington Post defines decolonization as ‘a process that institutions undergo to expand the perspectives they portray beyond those of the dominant cultural group, particularly white colonizers’.² While useful in capturing the ‘institutional turn’ that decolonization has undergone in recent years, this definition obscures the political and violent context of decolonization in formerly colonised countries in the second half of the twentieth century.³ However, given the institutionalized nature of archival services generally, our references to processes of decolonization are, in this paper, institutional in nature. Jansen et al. argue that with regards to universities, decolonization corresponds to ‘an undoing of colonial legacies at the nexus of knowledge and power’.⁴ Here we argue that archives, as the repositories of historical and the legitimator of contemporary knowledge, play an important, yet often overlooked, role in this nexus and are therefore prime sites in the process of institutional decolonization. Our definition of ‘decolonization’ in an archival context broadly overlaps with Jansen’s, but also goes beyond it. We question to what extent an ‘undoing’ of colonial legacies is possible in an

institutional context, yet acknowledge the relative liberty the LSHTM Archives Service possesses, in comparison to the rest of the School, to implement changes.

Political decolonization, that is to say independence from European tutelage, occurred, in a majority of countries in Asia and Africa, between the 1940s and the 1970s. Ann Laura Stoler, Trish Luker and Jordanna Bailkin among others have pointed to the important role archives and archival practice played in upholding colonial rule and subjugating colonized populations.⁵ Colonial governance relied on elaborate systems of categorisation (racial, ethnic, national) and these systems in turn relied on widespread archival practice.⁶ The study of settler colonial archives in Australia and Canada revealed ‘bureaucratic record keeping [a]s a technology of control [...] and affirmation of sovereignty’.⁷ Given the pivotal role archives played in upholding colonial rule, they have almost been entirely overlooked in processes of institutional decolonization in British archives.⁸ British colonial governments undertook every effort to maintain control over colonial records, wilfully destroying archival documents that reflected badly on colonial governments and refusing colonized populations’ access to politically sensitive files.⁹ A great number of files pertaining to former British colonies are still held by The (UK) National Archives (TNA) in Kew, rather than by respective national archives in former colonies. .¹⁰ This colonial dismemberment contributes to the documentary imbalance and differential ability of researchers based in the UK and researchers in former colonies to contribute to the historical canon.

The LSHTM archives are similar, yet distinct. Set up as training ground for British medical colonial officers, LSHTM was, from its onset, intricately involved with the British colonial project. Until the 1960s a majority of research was funded by the Colonial Office and research projects overwhelmingly took place in British colonies. Political

decolonization led to a shift in funding from Colonial to Commonwealth funding, not however to a break in the geography of research projects, which continue to be largely situated in former British colonies. The collections held within the archive are to a large extent made up of personal collections of former staff, many of which, especially in the School's early years, worked in the British Empire and whose income was derived from colonial exploitation. They also contain the School's administrative files, which at first glance may seem separate from the British Empire. How does the nature of the collections, and the original owners' intent in bequeathing them to the School's archive, influence the histories we can tell from both the archive's content and its form?¹¹ With what uses in mind was the archive set up; what implicit thoughts and practices shape the understanding of the archive?

Decolonizing has become a buzzword in academic and research institutions. The need for a more balanced engagement with Europe's colonial past and the demands for radical approaches to deal with its legacies place archives front and centre. The ways in which racism, settler colonialism and white supremacy have shaped archival practice goes beyond the content of archival materials: decolonization work also needs to encompass the archive's form.¹² Decolonizing the archive needs to critically examine what it does not contain and why; how the archive was set up and why. Black archival strategies, for instance, have long encompassed critical approaches to dealing with archival silences and the erasure of non-white perspectives from historical documents.¹³ Once we accept that archives are incomplete we can start assessing how to make the archive useful for anti-colonial and anti-racist purposes.

Through LSHTM's colonial history project, a one-year research project into the School's colonial history, the LSHTM archives became a site in which debates around, and processes of institutional decolonization, were tried and tested.

Decolonizing the LSHTM Archives? A user's perspective

In this section I (archival user) argue that although the racist and colonial violence I encountered in the LSHTM archives cannot be undone, there are useful strategies emerging from postcolonial and Black studies, which allowed me, a Black researcher, to engage with the School's colonial history on my own terms without being victimised by the racism I encountered. Broadly speaking, these strategies can be summarised under the terms *entanglement*, *use*, *contextualisation* and *foregrounding*. These strategies allow the telling of anti/decolonial stories in that they point to the violence and structural racism of the colonial era and the ways in which the archive's set-up and its uses have worked to obscure them.

Entanglement

My research in the LSHTM archives was related to a research project on the School's colonial history. The archival material which I studied consisted of largely institutional documents, such as the School's and its founding bodies' committee minutes, correspondence between various members of staff at the School and external organisations, internal communication, research and expedition reports, syllabi, annual reports, lectures, calendars, funding applications and reports, student registers, and speeches. In focusing on entanglements, the 'condition of being twisted together or entwined, [...] even if it was resisted, or ignored or uninvited', I was able to reinsert the racism of the colonial context, often removed from institutional minutes and reports of scientific discoveries, into my reading.¹⁴ For example, in order to guarantee jobs to all

LSTM graduates, the Colonial Office amalgamated the Colonial Medical Services of its West African colonies to create the West African Medical Service (WAMS) in 1902. The foundation of LSTM and the WAMS are detailed in a Colonial Office memorandum, kept at TNA.¹⁵ However, service in the WAMS was barred to individuals of non-European descent, making it the first openly-racist UK-government department.¹⁶ The School archives omit a history of this policy, which was conceived to directly benefit the School and its students. Only by linking documents from two physically distinct archive institutions and putting the creation of the WAMS and of LSTM in relation to one another, was I able to foreground the School's entanglements with racism and white supremacy. The vagueness of the term *entanglement* serves an important purpose when working with colonial archives. The School's history and the archival documentation which attests to it is made up of facts and dates, of written agreements between School staff and senior officials at the Colonial Office in the UK or colonial governments. But it is also made up of hesitations, of sentences deleted from a previous meeting's minutes, of contradictions in letters and reports, of pages missing in departmental collections. The colonial context is not always front and centre in the archival materials I reviewed, yet it undoubtedly shaped discussions at the time. Much like today, it simmers in the background without being openly addressed, yet contributes to how we make sense of the everyday. Colonialism and the British Empire were the canvas on which the LSHTM was painted, yet that canvas habitually disappears into the background. The term 'entanglement' alludes to historical constellations, power structures and hierarchies, which are taken for granted, and to the ensuing silences from which we need to deduce the political and societal effects, which make up *history*.

In Europe's imperial history, white supremacy, racism and colonialism were intricately linked.¹⁷ Foregrounding the relationship between the three and naming them boldly

became an important strategy in confronting the implicit, subtle or normalised racial hierarchies I encountered. When the colonial context was front and centre it became important to point out that colonialism, has always been justified and motivated by the belief in the invading country's ethnic, cultural and intellectual supremacy. As a consequence, white supremacy was part and parcel of British colonialism even when framed as *mission civilisatrice*.¹⁸ This belief is visible in the archival materials I reviewed. Anti-Asian, anti-Black, anti-Indigenous racisms in the School's colonial history are most aptly described as a by-product of white supremacy. Racisms were present in the texts I analysed, but the focus of the authors whose writings I perused placed indigenous populations and colonized subjects at the margins and focused on how the School's mission could enable the scientific progress necessary to improve Britain's colonial rule.

Use

The introduction to Sara Ahmed's book *What's the Use? On the Uses of Use* is entitled 'A useful archive'.¹⁹ In it she details her approach to following the word *use* through history and philosophy: how it points to an object's or activity's function, its affection and impression. She writes:

'A miserable fate follows falling out of use, becoming an item in a museum display, disappearing into "the memory hole that is unwritten history". We can note how quickly use can turn from being a description of an activity to a prescription: in positive terms, use becomes an obligation to keep something alive; or, in more negative terms, use becomes necessary in order to avoid something being lost'.²⁰

Ahmed's description must resonate with anyone involved in archival practice and especially with those of us who struggle with the one-sided telling of colonial histories that many archives allow. The work to reclaim critical colonial histories takes place in the absence of oral histories and is subject to the perspectives and decision-making of long-gone actors. We are kept in thrall to historical figures' ideas for the future; their vision of the past dictates our access to it. At the same time, the title of Ahmed's chapter acknowledges that archives are of use to the people conceiving them and to archival users.²¹ An important question then becomes what an archive's original use was. How was it conceived to be useful and what was it for? But also: how can we make a colonial archive useful for anti-colonial and anti-racist purposes?

The archive that Ahmed describes here is one she has assembled herself. It is useful to her purpose, designed and catalogued according to the uses she wants to get out of it. Yet, the paragraph above also hints at a darker side of an object's use or disuse. Not being used, 'falling out of use', relegates an object to 'disappearing into "the memory hole that is unwritten history".' What is lost is not just the object's usefulness, but also its associated histories and perspectives. The archives of the LSHTM are testaments to the uses of history and are in themselves histories of usefulness. What entered the archives, where cataloguing was prioritised and what creators of archival documents deemed useful for posterity to have access to, all shape how we encounter this archive and what we can draw from it. Foregrounding the archives' uses – past and present – becomes a way of telling counter-histories, histories of subversion, but also histories of silence.

While this sounds tempting in theory, it is more difficult in practice. The authors of a majority of documents contained in the LSHTM archive are dead. Confronting their voices, and the racism and white supremacy inherent in them, is difficult.

Contextualisation

The School's colonial history was sometimes straightforward and easily discerned and sometimes needed to be inferred from historical context and associations. One early member of staff, Italian mycologist Aldo Castellani, for instance, was friends with Benito Mussolini and his family and advised Italy's sanitary strategy during the second Italo-Ethiopian war. This is not visible in the archival material held by the School, which focuses on Castellani's scientific endeavours. Yet, it speaks to the political environment in which work at the School was carried out and to the School's initial purpose. The LSHTM archivists provided a lot of context about the people whose work I was reading and analysing, and they told me about Castellani. The positionality and openness of the archivist is an important tool in working to decolonize archives. Although not always written down in letters or minutes, the politics of the time undoubtedly shaped attitudes, discussions and opinions at the School. It is also a reminder that archives are not neutral, that they skirt over history's sticky spots, especially when LSHTM and its staff and students were involved in said history. The illusion of archival and archivists' neutrality reproduces a coloniality of knowledge.²² Archives do not tell neutral histories and archiving is a political practice too long intent on maintaining the status quo.

Rather, archives were always set up with a purpose.²³ Anderson argues that 'the philosophy of [archival] stewardship made the future itself a sort of metaphysical customer'.²⁴ An LSHTM archivist told me on one of my first visits that Ronald Ross curated his collection before selling it and before it was ultimately bequeathed to the Ross Institute of Tropical Hygiene. Ross wanted the future to read him in a particular light.

And so my task was not necessarily only to unveil secrets hidden in the bowels of the archive, but rather to introduce doubt into the ways in which the men – and they were almost exclusively white men – whose documents lay before me wrote and understood the School’s history and its relations with British colonialism.

Foregrounding

Historians of European colonialism and its legacies have devised archival techniques to read colonial histories critically by reading archival material *along* and *against the grain*.²⁵ This means familiarising oneself with the language and discourses of power of the time of writing to better be able to critique them. It also means interpreting the silences and language of the archive productively. Black archival strategies have long employed this method to foreground Black experiences from the historical void in which they tend to disappear.²⁶ They are familiar with the fact that archives were not set up to tell marginalised stories. Black, Indigenous and People of Colour experiences and agency are often obscured and silenced in the archive, appearing only as deviance, dependency and absence. As I wrote above, the biological and social worlds that made up the British Empire were the canvas on which the School’s members of staff and their students painted stories of success, scientific discoveries and improvement. The colonies were there to be improved according to the tenets of European science, a principle still reflected in the School’s motto today. In the archives, colonies and their inhabitants are seldom described except as problems to be overcome.

Writing the School’s colonial history became a task of interpreting what is said and what is not said in archival documents. This is also always an emotional process. The school’s staff, from its foundation, was overwhelmingly white, even though a vast majority of its

expeditions took place in British colonies in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. While most staff and students didn't concern themselves with the social lives of research subjects or the political conditions that British imperialism created in the colonies in their letters, reports or in archived meeting minutes, their fleeting references nevertheless reflect British colonialism's casual violence. Offensive and condescending language is used to describe colonised subjects, their culture, living conditions, and territories. In my report on the colonial history of the School I abstained from repetitions of such violent language, unless absolutely necessary. Instead, I drew attention to the structural and subtle ways in which colonialism – and attendant beliefs around white European supremacy – shaped research, teaching and working at the school.

I analysed the documents with two basic questions in mind:

- 1) What does the document tell me?
- 2) What did its author intend me to see?

The first is quite straightforward; the second involves a degree of inference. Inference here did not refer to reading racism or white supremacist thought into a document; of putting words into the mouths of dead scientists. Rather, it consisted in putting the context in which these documents were produced and the context in which they were bequeathed to the LSHTM archives back into the analysis. At the same time, researching the colonial past also always necessitated a questioning of authority. To what extent do we trust the written accounts before us, knowing that the author's understanding of the world was one of white supremacy? And so I stopped giving authors the benefit of hindsight. Colonialism, imperialism and racism have always encountered resistance.²⁷ Racist views were never normal, just more normalised. As a consequence, I confronted the historical

account that the archives provide and foregrounded the small glimpses I got into the lives of colonised populations to counteract the overwhelming silence in which they threaten to disappear.

History cannot be undone and so the possibilities of truly ‘decolonizing’ LSHTM’s archive are slim. A complete restructure of the existing catalogue might change the way in which users interact with the archive, but it would not be able to reverse epistemic power imbalances predicated on racist hierarchies and their ensuing consequences. The voices of historically colonised populations will remain absent from LSHTM’s and other archives. Working in and with those archives will mean being confronted with that exclusion and the racism which justified it. The telling of critical, anti-colonial stories can showcase the true violence of colonial racism and white supremacy and their entanglements with the development of European science. Indigenous agency can be reconstructed from archival fragments, but no amount of decolonizing can change the past, nor the documentary traces that reveal the past.

This section has shown that although there is no way of escaping the racism inherent in the LSHTM archives, there are strategies archival users can deploy to tell critical, anticolonial histories. In the next section we offer an archivist’s perspective to show that even though decolonization should never be a tick box exercise, undertaking concrete actions can counteract the coloniality of archival practice.

Background to Decolonizing the Archives principles

In July 2020, the LSHTM Archives Service developed a set of *Principles for decolonizing the archives* and an *Action Plan* which cover five areas: cataloguing practice; archival practice; dissemination; education; and inclusion.

This initiative was originally inspired by the research work of my fellow author, [Name], and by the global response to the Black Lives Matter movement. Recent discussions in the record-keeping profession on structural racism, oppressive practice and white supremacy have been inspiring in terms of highlighting issues in our profession that we need to act on.²⁸

The team initially began to study resources in Lucy Brownson's "*Anti-Racism Resources for UK Archivists*"²⁹ document, and then in the dismantling oppressive practice and diversity channels on the Archives and Records Association (ARA) Together Discord resource.

The growing number of resources, which incorporated material from other sectors including museums and general anti-racist resources, was starting to become overwhelming, and there was discussion on how to apply our knowledge to the archives service. We decided to put our thoughts into themes, and these developed into the principles. We also acknowledged that it is straightforward to write a Black Lives Matter statement, but this needs to be supported by actions, as raised by Dr Safina Islam, Head of the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah RACE Centre and Education Trust: 'There is a lot of genuine goodwill and a desire to change, but many organisations made statements in solidarity and support without any evidence of how they were going to follow through on these commitments.'³⁰

Once we started to become more aware of issues in the archival profession and within our own service, we felt that we couldn't *not* work on decolonization: it would be a risk, in terms of our reputation and integrity, to do nothing. This was partly because of our colonial history and partly as we realised we were colluding in the problem through our archival practice.

The LSHTM Archives Service is part of the Library & Archives Service (LAS); each year, our key objectives feature in the LAS annual operational plan which is reported to LSHTM senior management. Decolonization activities feature in this plan, and a separate detailed plan was created to monitor our achievements in each area. Although the Archives Service operates fairly autonomously, it is helpful that LSHTM has become proactive in institutional decolonization and that we can contribute to this process. We are contributing members of the LSHTM Decolonising Global Health Group and are working with Library colleagues on how to incorporate decolonization principles into LAS activities more widely. This initiative has helped to develop our relationship with colleagues that we may not have normally encountered and to demonstrate the value of the archives and our service to the institution.

Although we prioritised decolonization activities in our operational plan, it has been easier to devote time to these while working at home due to the Covid-19 pandemic, as we were not undertaking the usual daily activities of running the archives and records management service.

Principles for decolonizing the archives

In our discussion of the principles, we will highlight the critical thinking that led us to these and some of the issues that have arisen, either practically or from our continuing research. In this article we focus mainly on cataloguing, archival practice, and dissemination.

Area 1: Cataloguing practice

- Create cataloguing guidelines for decolonizing current collections and future collections.
- Review current catalogues in terms of terminology, language, emphasis and omissions.
- Use secondary sources more critically, e.g. School histories.

There is much guidance on creating anti-racist catalogues³¹ although no comprehensive set of guidelines for UK archivists. These resources have been used to create the LSHTM guidelines for the description of offensive language and content, covering the following areas:

- Present offensive racial terms taken directly from the record and put in quotation marks and ensure that the creator's language and the cataloguer's description can be differentiated.³²
- Include an explanatory passage on the catalogue homepage, outlining why offensive terms appear in records and why archivists repeat these in catalogue descriptions.³³

- Add content and sensitivity warnings to all relevant levels, understanding that users will often just look at an item level description so there does need to be repetition of the statement.
- Ensure that changes are made without losing the integrity or authenticity of the item. As Jass Thethi states, ‘Removing the language completely would deny the subject their history by “whitewashing” the narrative, removing any indication of insensitivity/marginalisation’.³⁴
- Be mindful of the normalisation of terminology and language. As Melissa Bennett states, ‘When working with colonial collections, it is easy to become over familiar with, and absorb the language they use’.³⁵ Another team member will conduct an extra step to the proof-reading process, to review word choice and language.
- Include practical examples in the guidance as these make it easier to demonstrate the problem with the original descriptions and how to rectify it. A good example by Bennett shows how language can imply the superiority of colonial authorities or western culture: “the African soldiers were unable to speak English” should be written as “the English and African soldiers did not share a common language”.³⁶
- Ensure consistency with country names, especially former British colonies. For example, in the catalogue the country Tanzania is sometimes referred to as Tanganyika or Tanga, without any context, alternative or previous names which prohibits discoverability. The Archives team will refer to the Barnard classification scheme which lists this geographical information.
- Consider how Africa is referred to: remember that it is a continent comprised of 54 countries with a diversity of languages and cultures.³⁷

- Evaluate existing administrative histories and person authority files for celebratory language such as pre-eminent, distinguished and renowned as these impose a value judgement and due to the nature of our collection are usually related to white men. Ensure that this language is not used in future cataloguing.
- Be conscious of the secondary sources that are used to create administrative histories. There are two official school histories; one that is often referred to for biographical information was written by Philip Manson-Bahr, the son-in-law of the founder of the School. We can assume that there is a certain amount of bias present here as he personally knew many of the individuals that he writes about in the book.

These guidelines will continue to develop as we gain more knowledge and will be used to review all our collections, not just those relating to our colonial legacy. For example, we will be reviewing our HIV and AIDS collections to ensure that the terminology and language used is not offensive.

At the same time as reviewing the literature, we reviewed collections for problematic language. We have become more aware of our own preconceptions, as initially it was assumed that there were not many problems with the catalogue as the Archives Service was established in 2002 and we did not inherit legacy catalogues. However, we are aware that this preconception is coming from a place of white privilege, so we are trying to be as open minded as possible.

We understand that terminology and language is constantly changing, so rather than a one-off exercise, this process needs to be incorporated into regular reviews of our catalogues: 'documentation should not be regarded as finished resources but as living

documents, able to adapt to the changing and evolving language that communities use to describe themselves over time'.³⁸

We are also in the early stages of planning a process where researchers using the collections are encouraged to inform the Archives Service of language that they find insensitive or problematic. It is important to gain the viewpoints of a wide range of users to ensure that we are not putting our prejudices into the cataloguing, although how to incorporate these comments into the catalogue is still to be decided.

When planning cataloguing projects, we will also be considering more carefully the time it takes to catalogue. With deadline focused projects, there can be an emphasis on the Green and Meissner's More Product Less Process approach to archival cataloguing, which advocates minimal processing to reduce backlogs and provide access to archival collections as quickly as possible. The approach of slowing down is discussed by Anderson and Christen: 'Slowing down creates a necessary space for emphasizing how knowledge is produced, circulated and exchanged through a series of relationships. Slowing down is about focusing differently, listening carefully, and acting ethically.'³⁹ This theory relates not just to cataloguing but to all areas of archival practice, discussed below.

Area 2: Archival practice

- Review and amend Archive policies, statements and procedures and consider how these have contributed to the erasure and marginalization of underrepresented groups.

In this area, we are critically engaging with new theories of archival practice such as archive fragility, cultural humility, radical empathy, and slow archives, and questioning how we have done things in the past which have contributed to the colonial legacy of the institution.⁴⁰ Our new knowledge will inform the development of revised policies, statements, and procedures especially in terms of access, collection development, and collection information.

The issue of the lack of neutrality in archives has been widely discussed in the profession and touched upon in the previous section, so although it will not be explored in depth here, it is underpinning our thoughts. Jessica Tai in her article on cultural humility describes ‘an archival practice undertaken within a framework of cultural humility actively denouncing archival neutrality, requiring the continual and visible disclosure of one’s own positionality.’⁴¹ Cultural humility is described as ‘the need for process-oriented approaches that are iterative, flexible and acknowledge the inherent biases that impact both our everyday work, and the structures from which that work is carried out’.⁴² While this article is focused on archival description, the idea of cultural humility will be used to shape our future archival practice. As will radical empathy, described as ‘a willingness to be affected, to be shaped by another’s experience, without blurring the lines between the self and the other.’⁴³ The authors identify archivists as caregivers whose responsibilities are not primarily bound to records but to records creators, subjects, users, and communities through ‘a web of mutual affective responsibility.’⁴⁴

The themes that emerge from these theories are to put people at the centre of the archive, rather than the strict bureaucratic structures of the past that have been used to select, appraise and organise records. Our policies and procedures will be designed to ensure that we are collecting and preserving the records of all people and not just the powerful

individuals that have traditionally been collected in the past. This is not to say that we will not be collecting the records of individuals who have made contributions to science and our institution, but we will take a more inclusive approach.

The process of reviewing our documentation has started with collection development by asking the following questions:

- What are we collecting?
- Who are we acquiring collections from?
- How do we prioritise collections for cataloguing?
- How do personal relationships influence acquisition and cataloguing priorities?
- Who is not being represented?

This information will be sourced from our collections information documentation including the accessions register and cataloguing priorities matrix, as well as honest discussions within the team about how we can change our archival practice.

Area 3: Dissemination

- Tell a different story with our collections.
- Acknowledge colonial history and racism within certain collections without appearing to excuse it.
- Create opportunities for discussion and critical engagement from a decolonization perspective.

- Create opportunities and work on events in partnership with colleagues in the School including Decolonising Global Health Group and Centre for History in Public Health.
- Re-evaluate the content of current regular events such as Open House, Student Open Day and History Day and how decolonizing principles/content can be included.

In Katie McDonald's thesis on the commemoration of the First World War she states, 'commemoration has the ability to both affirm some national identities and alienate others, as well as reinforce rather than re-examine well-worn narratives. Commemoration can be divisive, and archivists should evaluate why they are undertaking such projects, and the intended outcomes'.⁴⁵ This reflects how we are approaching dissemination activities going forward; questioning and evaluating our participation and being mindful of how we are presenting information to our users and the public.

In this section, we will examine examples from our collections that we have previously promoted heavily, and how this has contributed to the colonial legacy of the School.

There are lessons to be learnt from the current contested histories debates in terms of how we address individuals who have made considerable contributions to science but also have problematic histories in terms of colonialism, racism and eugenics.

The approach of focusing on significance, firsts and discoveries is a problematic part of how we disseminate and celebrate historical events at LSHTM. The institution recently celebrated its 120th anniversary; the Archives Service worked with our Communications department to create an exhibition which focused on firsts and discoveries of LSHTM

staff. This focus meant that there was an emphasis on the achievements of white men and, due to space restrictions, colonial period contextualising was omitted; in the future it is planned to include this information.

Even our Keppel Street building promotes the celebration of individuals: the frieze contains the names of 26 pioneers of public health and tropical medicine. Originally there were 23 names, which were all white male, and in 2019, as part of LSHTM's 120th anniversary celebrations, the names of three women were added. In the past we have heavily promoted these individuals, regularly Tweeting on birthdays and dates of death in a celebratory rather than a critical way. We are now being more mindful of what, why, and how we Tweet.

As well as Twitter, we are being more mindful in our blogs, by providing a more critical analysis of archival material. We intend to shift the focus away from the stories and successes of colonial researchers and instead present an account that recognises the imbalance of power inherent in the colonial encounter. *The Carpenter Diary* blog details the experiences of Geoffrey and Amy Carpenter who were researching sleeping sickness in Uganda in the 1920s. It provides a rich account of the daily lives of the couple as they navigate life in Uganda, as well as the relative luxury of the colonial lifestyle. Inevitably, this version of 1920s Uganda reflects the experiences and privileges of the diarists. As a result, the journal presents an unbalanced account of colonial history. In the past, this has been promoted as an illustration of colonial life and an interesting item, without providing the context in which they were in Uganda.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, the Archives team had been discussing how we could work with more diverse audiences such as writers and theatre groups to develop creative responses to some of our colonial material. These plans were put on hold, however a film of an expedition by LSTHM staff to East Africa in 1930s was used in a Black Health and Humanities workshop, and a participant wrote a poem reflecting the marginalised African perspective as a response.⁴⁶ The idea of using these resources more creatively is something that we will continue to develop.

Area 4: Education

- Archives team to undertake training in diversity, inclusion and intersectionality.
- Read and study resources provided by groups and networks such as Decolonising Global Health Group, the ARA and TNA in order to continue our professional development in this area.

The team has increased their knowledge through training courses including Anti-Racism Training for the GLAM sector, Cultural Diversity Competency (Society of American Archivists) and Understanding Diversity and Inclusion (Future Learn).

We have appreciated the knowledge sharing on the ARA Discord channel and Activist Archivists Discord channel. We have attended many events on decolonization and related topics. This has been made possible due to working at home during the Covid-19 pandemic and events being arranged virtually.

It is planned to improve our knowledge of the history of the British Empire and the colonies to ensure that we understand the material that we are custodians of and provide access to these collections in an inclusive way.

Area 5: Inclusivity

- Ensure that the LSHTM Archives Service is inclusive to all of our users.
- Review our recruitment practices for future posts.

The LSHTM Access statement and procedures will be reviewed and edited to ensure that they are inclusive to all users. We will review our guidelines for users - currently a long list of rules that may be prohibitive - although this needs to be balanced with security and preservation requirements. The team would like to think that we are open and receptive to new and existing users, but we will undertake a customer journey mapping to highlight areas where we could improve. There may be improvements that can be made to our search room and user experience such as less strict security measures, balancing user surveillance with customer service, and more user-friendly policies.⁴⁷

One important area that we are considering is our recruitment processes to ensure that we contribute to the efforts to diversify the archives profession.⁴⁸ We have already reviewed our recruitment practices in terms of our Assistant Archivist post. This used to be recruited with a view that candidates would want to train to become archivists but is now recruited for the skills that the candidate can bring to the role. We will also be regularly reviewing the essential and desirable competencies required for each role, for example questioning the requirement for an undergraduate degree for the assistant role and the need for previous experience which could disadvantage certain marginalised groups. These examples demonstrate how small changes could make a big difference to the candidate pool for those interested in the profession.

Future plans

Going forward, these principles will continue to be included in our annual operational plans and incorporated into our working practice until they become ‘business as usual’ activities. The principles will be reviewed regularly and updated with our newly acquired knowledge. Up to now, it has not been difficult to prioritise this work over other activities due to working at home and building on the momentum we have gained through educating ourselves. In the future, tough decisions may need to be made on what to prioritise, but it is felt that this work is too important to ignore. It is hoped that we will continue to receive institutional support for this work and build these principles into future internal and external funding proposals. Improvements to our service in terms of increased accessibility, inclusivity, and changes to working practices will lead to benefits to the Archives Service, our institution, us as members of the archives profession and most importantly to our current and future users.

Conclusion

There are clear limits to what can be achieved in terms of decolonizing an archive, but engaging in steps towards it is still necessary. Setting up decolonizing principles and taking action can contribute to creating an environment in which researchers of colour feel safe to question, push back and critically interrogate⁴⁹; an environment in which racism and the ways in which it has become entangled with medical and global public health practice are openly acknowledged and do not disappear behind celebrations of racist men’s scientific achievements.

The aim of any such process then maybe is not to decolonzse the archive, but to make it more inclusive. Faced with the difficulty of undoing colonial legacies within institutions built for British colonialism, counteracting the violence of the past for staff, students and researchers sharing the space becomes a necessary imperative, one which rather than maintaining the coloniality of the status quo opens the possibility for telling anti-colonial and anti-racist histories. With such an approach, the focus on whose uses of the archive and whose care is prioritized shifts. At the centre then is the question who the archive is for.

As long as institutions fail to recognize the importance of archives in the reproduction and legitimization of colonial epistemologies, archives will continue to be overlooked in processes of institutional decolonization. However, being overlooked also allowed this particular archive to set up decolonizing principles, which have the potential to change archival practice and encounter.

Notes

- ¹GB0809Admin/11/13, 'Manson's speech' p.7.
- ² Hatzipanagos, "'The Decolonisation.'"
- ³ Hirsch, "Is it Possible."
- ⁴ Jansen et al, *Decolonisation in Universities*, 2-3.
- ⁵ Stoler, "Colonial Archives"; Luker, "Decolonising Archives: Indigenous Challenges"; Bailkin, "Where did the Empire."
- ⁶ Bailkin, "Where did the Empire," 886.
- ⁷ Luker, "Decolonising Archives: Indigenous Challenges," 112.
- ⁸ See note 6 above.
- ⁹ Ibid; Elkins, "Looking beyond Mau Mau."
- ¹⁰ Lowry, *Displaced Archives*.
- ¹¹ Stoler, "Colonial archives."
- ¹² Ibid; Ghaddar and Caswell, "To go beyond."
- ¹³ Hartman, "Venus in two Acts"; Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*.
- ¹⁴ Nuttall, *Entanglement*, 1.
- ¹⁵ FO2/890, pp.14-20, p.40, "London and Liverpool Schools."
- ¹⁶ Johnson, "'An All-White Institution.'"
- ¹⁷ Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Ahmed, *What's the Use?*
- ²⁰ Ibid, 5.
- ²¹ Anderson, "The Useful Archive."
- ²² See note 12 above.
- ²³ See notes 19, 21 above.
- ²⁴ See note 21 above, 85.
- ²⁵ Guha, *Subaltern Studies*; see note 10 above.
- ²⁶ See note 13 above.
- ²⁷ Bressey, *Empire, Race*; Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*.
- ²⁸ Chilcott et al, "Against Whitewashing."
- ²⁹ Brownson, "Anti-Racism Resources."

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- ³⁰ Islam, “Diversity.”
- ³¹ Chilcott, “Towards Protocols”; Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia; Modest and Lelijveld, *Words Matter*.
- ³² Chilcott, “Towards Protocols,” 372.
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ Theti, “Archives and Inclusivity.”
- ³⁵ Bennett, “Decolonising the Archive.”
- ³⁶ Ibid.
- ³⁷ Schmidt, “Africa is Not a Country,” 40.
- ³⁸ Tai, “View of Cultural Humility,” 17.
- ³⁹ Christen and Anderson, “Towards Slow Archives,” 87.
- ⁴⁰ Lewis, “Omelettes in the Stack”; Tai, “View of Cultural Humility”; Caswell and Cifor, “From Human Rights”; Christian and Anderson, “Towards Slow Archives.”
- ⁴¹ Tai, “View of Cultural Humility,” 3.
- ⁴² Ibid, 6.
- ⁴³ Caswell and Cifor, “From Human Rights,” 31.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid, 23.
- ⁴⁵ McDonald, “First World War Commemoration,” 49.
- ⁴⁶ Hirsch, “Decolonising the Archive.”
- ⁴⁷ Buchanan et al, “Towards Inclusive Reading Rooms.”
- ⁴⁸ Fife and Henthorn, “Brick Walls and Tick Boxes.”
- ⁴⁹ Smith, *Decolonising Methodologies*.

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