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### Counternarratives of Color: Race in Queer Archiving

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*SIT Study Abroad*

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“Counternarratives of Color: Race in Queer Archiving”  
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## ABSTRACT:

This research aims to better understand how race figures into the policies, processes, and materials at IHLIA LGBT Heritage, Europe's largest LGBT-focused archive. By situating IHLIA within the broader history of alternative archives and Dutch homonationalism, the different ways in which race is an important consideration for the archive is examined. Particular attention is paid to the history, organization and location of the archive as well as the publicly funded nature of IHLIA to better understand the possibilities and limitations posed by the notion of an LGBT archive as opposed to a queer(ed) archive.

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## INTRODUCTION:

This project employs a queer of colour critique to examine an LGBTI-focused alternative archive, paying particular attention to the centrality of race. This is an analysis of the archive as a site of memory, futurity, power, and authority. It examines critically the notion of queer ‘alternative archives’ as sites for generating counternarratives that challenge hegemonic cisheteronormativity by recording, remembering, and constructing queer histories, as well as building community-based spaces for queerness to be celebrated rather than relegated to the margins. This project aims to excavate the ways in which even alternative archives that seek to challenge traditional archives’ marginalization of queerness can reproduce patterns of exclusion and harm, focusing particularly on race. Another significant component of this project is articulating the distinction between an LGBT archive and a queer archive, and exploring the ways in which even alternative archives with an LGBT focus can reify a normative version of queerness that placates rather than disrupts.

Rather than mining IHLIA for materials about race, then, this research seeks to situate the LGBT archive within broader formulations of alternative archives, to think more deeply about what it means to ‘queer’ the archive, to look under the banner of ‘alternativeness’ in order to resist the normativizing and de-radicalizing impulses of mainstream archiving. Particular attention is paid to the history of IHLIA as the combined product of several smaller archives with more specific points of focus, the impact of the intended audience, the sources of funding that support the archive, and the extent of government influence over its materials. The formation of Dutch national identity in terms of homonationalism and exceptionalism with regards to race and ethnicity also informs this project significantly, providing the background context that helps better position IHLIA within a broader landscape.

This research is important for other queer people of colour who want to have their stories be part of queer archives, but also for the curators of queer archives that want to be more inclusive or to re-evaluate their existing collections and curatorial practices. The expected outcome of this study is greater critical engagement not just with archives in general but particularly also with archives that claim ‘alternativeness’ in order to resist the reproduction of hegemonic power structures.

These are some of the questions underlying this project: How does race figure into the project of IHLIA as an LGBT archive? How does broader homonationalist discourse about The Netherlands impact or figure into IHLIA? Does the publicly funded nature of IHLIA curb its radical potential or grant greater possibilities for curation and expansion? How can we re-conceptualise the archive in a way that challenges White-Western understandings of queerness as well as archival practices and procedures?

## LITERATURE REVIEW:

Archives function as essential repositories of historical knowledge and artifacts, making them not only a space where history is recorded but also where it is negotiated and constructed. The archive requires a number of processes such as selection, curation, and organization, that all involve value judgments of what is ‘archivable.’ The history of archiving is bound up in power relations, with dominant groups having the ability to dictate not only the narrative being told, but also how it is told and who is allowed access to it. Meaning must further be extracted and interpreted from the archive, a process which is also not value-free. Hierarchical power relations in this manner can be reified and maintained in the process of archiving. The archive is therefore bound up in a series of decisions about inclusion and exclusion, of deeming some materials

worthy of inscribing into the historical record and not others; it is an exercise of power and authority. “The archive is, therefore, not a piece of data, but a status” (Mbembe 2002, 20).

Challenging the narrative of the archive as a neutral space is therefore of interest to any group with an investment in ‘history from below’ or for groups whose collective memory has been hidden, left out, or erased—including colonized populations, queer people, those that are targeted by state violence, and especially for those that lie at the intersection of all three (for further discussion of history from below see Guha 1983; Said 1993) . Considering how mainstream archives can uphold a colonial and heteropatriarchal version of history is therefore of interest for postcolonial, feminist, and queer theoretical perspectives.

Alternative archives such as queer archives engage in this process of ‘history from below,’ challenging mainstream archives’ claims to neutrality and recovering histories that have been wiped out, hidden, relegated to the margins of historical narratives. As institutions inscribing collective memory and making it publicly accessible, excavating the inclusions and exclusions embedded therein is a crucial part of critical engagement with the archive.

The reclamation of subjectivity and agency is a major component of alternative archives, reflected in their history of formation as community and grassroots initiatives. Mainstream archives’ materials about marginalized populations do not often reflect self-portrayals and rather are told from outside and above. Attempts to merely locate queerness within dominant archives, for instance, result in a limited and one-sided narrative that only engages with queer people as objects of study rather than subjects with agency to tell their own stories. So while criminal records of sodomy arrests in colonial India serve as ‘proof’ of queer existence, for instance, it still legitimizes colonial historiography and a narrative of queer history where “the subject

cannot be found” (Arondekar 2005, 22). Even when queer experiences are not denied or buried in mainstream archives, they largely are only represented in laws about cross dressing, sodomy arrest records, and gay bar busts (Hosfeld 2019). This documentation of queer lives in history for the queer scholar can therefore be considered “too tainted with hegemonic power...not ‘our own’ material” (Edenheim 2014, 41). The emergence of queer archives is often deeply tied to community efforts, and can be conceived as opposition to the largely cisheteropatriarchal exclusive practice of mainstream archiving. Community and grassroots archives thus act as “a kind of corrective to a hegemonic historiography that excludes marginalized positions” (Junginger and Dörk 2021, 71). Particularly in light of this institutional erasure and the stripping of agency, the queer archive as a site of recovery, remembrance and queer worldbuilding is especially meaningful; it not only collects and preserves, but also creates the opportunity to affirm and celebrate queer history, collective memory, identity and culture (Orr 2021; Halberstam 2005). Queer archives then represent materially the ability for queer people to assert their existence in the historical record, and thus are about “taking up space—the physical space of the archive itself, and the social space of being deemed archivable” (Orr 2021, 1).

In addition to the formation of queer archives, there is also the movement to “queer” the archive itself. Queering the archive and queer archives are different but not incompatible processes, often but not always occurring hand-in-hand. The legacy of postcolonial, feminist and queer theoretical engagement with the archive as a space of possibility as well as the increasing attention being paid to the work of queering the archive suggest an ‘archival turn’. A significant theoretical focus point for this archival turn includes Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s seminal work “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988), where she questions whether the voice of the subaltern women can even be retrieved from historical record given the formulation of the record without



the voice of those who were being recorded and narrativized. Particularly, she analyzes how the negotiation of the legality of *sati* (widow self-immolation) is between British colonials and elite Hindu Bramins, both of which instrumentalize the figure of the woman for imperialist and nationalist goals respectively. In this negotiation, women themselves are conspicuously absent, “one never encounters the testimony of the women’s voice consciousness...one cannot put together a ‘voice’” (Spivak 1988, 297). This erasure of agency is thus conceptualized as a form of patriarchal, imperial violence. In Ann Cvetkovich’s transformative “An Archive of Feelings,” also an essential part of the archival turn of queer theory, she argues for trauma and the affective as deeply meaningful in the queer cultural archive and collective memory. Cvetkovich thus challenges the capacity of the traditional archive by her consideration of means of expressing queer sexuality and intimacy that are not easy to document, that require a rethinking of what an archive is and what it has the potential to be. Queering the archive is thus about more than archiving queer lives, it is also about challenging the structure of the traditional archive itself, about “resisting the mainstreaming of queer culture which would normalize certain bodies, behaviors, and modes of being while pathologizing others” (Orr 2021, 3). Without challenging the broader ideologies and structures that have made it possible for the traditional archive to be exclusive and marginalize queer lives, even queer archives risk creating or reproducing patterns of harm and exclusion.

Queer archiving and queering the archive both raise certain complications in terms of organization and narrativizing. ‘Queer’ encompasses a wide range of experiences and identities, many of which intentionally defy straightforward labeling and categorization, even linearity. Thus, “queer community archives are confronted with the challenge to categorize identities, while queer identities are diametrically opposed to the unambiguous classification that are

associated with archival procedures” (Junginger and Dörk, 2021, 67). Thus, queer archives must confront this tension between traditional archival practices and queer ambiguity; Junginger and Dörk (2021) draw on Spivak’s (1988) term ‘strategic essentialism’ as a potential means to navigate this tension. This term refers to the ways in which social movements and groups present themselves as homogenous for the sake of political mobilization; fixed categories may not reflect fully the complexity of queerness, but can still be useful in the context of queer archives. In fact, the categorizations can be worthy objects of investigation in themselves, reflecting various underlying assumptions, judgements, and processes of selection.

Still, there is here an imperative to queer the queer archive, and to depart from traditional modes of archiving as a means to better reflect the complexity of queer lives. As Juana María Rodríguez notes in a roundtable discussion about queering archives, “queer archives are all about the soiled and untidy—about leaving your dirty *chonies* on the kitchen table” (Arondekar et al., 2015, 213). This focus on the personal, ephemeral, ‘soiled and untidy’ means that traditional archival practices may not adequately encompass the needs of a queer archive; particularly given that “queerness and racialized queerness disrupt the historical structure and organization of archives, they confront and often exceed the limitations delineated by ‘standards and best practices’” (Zepeda 2018, 98). Thus, queering the queer archive may mean having to construct new ways to catalog and organize, new ways to make queer histories accessible. In this process, however, care must be taken to ensure new patterns of hierarchy and exclusion are not generated. Queering the queer archive must challenge and disrupt, but more importantly must create radical new possibilities for how history is remembered, the present recorded, and the future imagined.

*THE DUTCH CONTEXT: THE CULTURALIZATION OF CITIZENSHIP,  
HOMONATIONALISM, AND GAY 'EQUALITY'*

Emerging from the 'sexual revolution' in the 1960s, the Netherlands came to be known in the following decades as "the most liberal nation in the world on issues of sexual morality" (Hekma and Duyvendak 2011, 625). The sexual liberation narrative was further cemented when, in 2001, it became the first country to legalize same-sex marriage. While this verdict can be considered *a* victory for gay activism at the time, it came to signify much more and began to be understood as *the* victory, and indeed the end point or completion of gay emancipation. This allowed Dutch identity to be equated with certain norms of morality and culture, and the ensuing 'culturalization of citizenship' meant that culturally essentialist sentiment was deepened, and gay rights were "heralded as if they have been the foundation of European culture for centuries" (Mepschen and Duyvendak 2012, 2). However, the legal recognition of same-sex marriage while often assumed to mean full gay emancipation, did not necessarily mean complete social equality—homophobia remained structurally ingrained, and instances of homophobic violence continued to occur.

The 'sexual emancipation' narrative, however, had started to become so integrated into the Dutch national self-identification that the persistent social homophobia in the country had to be explained, and the so-called threat of multiculturalism was a convenient scapegoat. Muslims, and particularly Dutch-Moroccans were marked as the source of this homophobia as even far-right and populist politicians embraced gay rights as the vessel to justify their anti-immigrant and Islamophobic rhetoric and policies (Hekma and Duyvendak 2011; Puar 2007, 19-20). Gay rights were thus instrumentalized in the multiculturalism debate in order to both justify Islamophobia and cement the idea of the Netherlands (and Europe more broadly) as a paragon of

progressiveness. Thus, individual instances of homophobic Muslims are “highlighted, epitomized as archetypal, and cast within Oriental stereotypes that underwrite the superiority of European secular modernity” (Mepschen and Duyvendak 2012, 2). Neo-colonial scripts of Western superiority and progressiveness as opposed to the backward ‘other’ were thus being rewritten and reproduced, invoked in the name of the nebulous ‘sexual liberation’ and a de-radicalized and non-threatening version of gay rights (Aydemir 2011). Thus, the legalization of same-sex marriage, while often only described in terms of being a liberatory turning point for gay activism, can also be understood as a “steep but necessary insurance premium in Europe...another marker in the distance between barbarism and civilization, one that justifies further targeting of a perversely sexualized and racialized Muslim population” (Puar 2007, 20). Islam is therefore culturalized and racialized in broad, homogenising strokes that allow for a reductive bifurcation between the East and West to be drawn that cast the West as developed, superior, and the East as inferior and backward (Said 1979, 300). Thus, the Dutch landscape of gay rights is inextricable from the co-construction of racialized and racist anti-immigrant sentiment and Islamophobia, and cannot be understood separated from its role in constructing the tolerant, progressive image of the Netherlands.

Jasbir K. Puar’s (2007) concept of homonationalism is particularly pertinent here, and is helpful in conceptualizing the relationship of this emancipatory narrative to the culturalization and racialization of Dutch citizenship and, more broadly, the imbrication of gay identity and politics with whiteness, and the consequent exclusion and double marginalization of queer people of color. Puar argues in *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* that the national recognition and acceptance of homosexuality is a form of ‘sexual exceptionalism’ upon which the image of the nation is constructed and is “contingent upon the segregation and

disqualification of racial and sexual others from the national imaginary” (2007, 2). Thus, even as widespread acceptance of homosexuality is regarded as indicative of progress and progressiveness, only a narrow subset of homosexuality is actually being sanctioned and marked as acceptable.

The consequence here is that articulations of non-normative sexuality and gender that fall outside this subset are marked as doubly ‘other’—neither fitting into the broader cisheteronormative society, nor the sanitized version of white homosexuality that is deemed ‘acceptable’ by the state. Therefore, this narrow “brand of brand of homosexuality operates as a regulatory script not only of normative gayness, queerness, or homosexuality, but also of the racial and national norms that reinforce these sexual subjects” (2), and rather than truly liberate, such a conditional acceptance of homosexuality actually reinforces marginalization and reproduces patterns of exclusion and violence.

## METHODOLOGY:

The initial methodology of this study was going to include a comprehensive quantitative analysis of materials about queer people of colour in the archive as well as qualitative interviews with IHLIA staff and volunteers. The goal was to employ the quantitative data about archive materials to better understand processes organization and cataloging, as well as examine access and availability of materials about queer people of color and the history of Dutch colonialism. Additionally, open-ended interviews with staff and data would provide further information about the history of the organization and archiving practices, processes of collection, as well as sources of funding, which would all be explored in terms of the implication for queer people of color in terms of content and access. The extensiveness of the archive materials and the time constraints of this project, however, meant that analysis of materials is focused on what is on display and

accessible to the public on the top floor of the archive, the digitized part of the archive, the current exhibit on display, as well as interviews with staff and volunteers.

This methodology was chosen in order to collect a variety of data. The quantitative data, engagement with the archive materials, and the analysis of the exhibition on display allow for more direct information to be collected about racial inclusion and exclusion in archival practices at IHLIA and the ways in which these materials are categorized and presented, as well as the accessibility of the materials. The interviews provided more qualitative information that helped better understand if and how there is change or progress happening at the archive, and helped provide a fuller picture from people that work at the archive than quantitative data alone can provide. The interviews also allowed for more information to be gathered about funding, organization, and collection policies and practices. The interviews provided insight into both the processes behind the archive as well as the people involved.

The section of the archive on the library's third floor is the part that is publicly accessible without an appointment. The books that have been highlighted and placed on the top shelf were examined in terms of subject matter and author, with considerations of language, geography, race, and articulations of identities marginalized under the LGBTI umbrella. This is also where the exhibit 'Het Archief in Ontwikkeling' (The Archive in Development) was on display at the time this project was conducted (22 February-1 May 2022). This exhibit charts the decision-making processes behind archives and challenges the idea of archives as neutral institutions. The IHLIA website and online catalog also serve as important sources of data for this project, as do the financial reports and policy plans. The website and catalog were used to understand the organization's self-representation, while the financial reports and policy plans were important in understanding the extent to which race and diversity are represented in their

goals and objectives as well as to explore if and how much influence or input exists from the funders on the archive itself.

Participants for interviews were contacted via email, and snowball sampling was used to recruit subsequent participants. The research aims were stated in the recruitment text of the emails, and participants were asked to sign an informed consent form that also included all research aims. Participants were not deceived about any part of the research. Participants had the option to request to remain anonymous and could also terminate the interview at any point. There is the possibility that staff and volunteers may seek to present IHLIA in a more positive light than is truthful, or that they would hesitate to answer in ways that are critical of the archive. However, since multiple people were interviewed, quantitative data was collected based on the archive materials, and data was not limited to only interviews, this was not anticipated to be a major concern.

The participants were also either offered or themselves requested a copy of the final product of this research. A few of them also expressed that they hoped this project would help IHLIA, or that it would encourage people to visit IHLIA. Thus, I had to consider that the staff and volunteers at IHLIA would likely read this project, and had to think about what it would mean in terms of how I presented my research. Ultimately, this piece is intended less as a disavowal of IHLIA's work and more as a critical engagement with it, and I have attempted to balance the ways in which IHLIA is attempting to do better in terms of curating a more diverse collection with this critical approach.

## FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS:

### *HISTORY AND FOUNDING*

The founding of IHLIA LGBTI Heritage (also referred to as IHLIA) can be traced back to 1978. It began as Homodok or the Documentation Center for Gay Studies by male students and teachers at the University of Amsterdam (Sibbel 2021). The aim was to make publications about homosexuality publicly and more easily available, including research, magazines, posters, grey literature, and newspaper cuttings (Littel 2022a). Homodok was also connected to initiatives trying to set up university infrastructure for gay studies in the Netherlands (Van der Wel 2021). At around the same time, there were also lesbian women setting up lesbian archives such as the Lesbian Archive Leeuwarden, which was later renamed the Anna Blaman Huis. These alternative archives, documenting gay and lesbian lives, emerged as a result of activist movements and organizing in the Netherlands. These archives were formed as a result of gay and lesbian activists wanting to archive their communities' stories and lives, and making it visible and accessible to others in the community; it was largely by and for gay and lesbian community members.

IHLIA was formed by the merging together of Homodok, the Lesbian Archive Amsterdam, and the Anna Blaman Huis. The individual archives did have “fears of losing autonomy and respective styles,” but still merged together with Homodok in 2000 (Littel 2022a). This merging meant that the collection of materials at IHLIA was both broader and more expansive than any of the individual archives or documentation centers. The incentive for these projects of ‘alternative archives’ originate in finding queer histories lacking or missing in traditional archives and “wanting to make that history visible” (Littel 2022b). These projects were deeply tied to the gay and lesbian communities that founded, maintained, donated to, and ran them; this involvement from everyday community members rather than professional archivists was a radical departure from traditional archives.



When interacting with archives as visitors, viewers, or researchers, it is the final product that we come into contact with, and many of the processes behind it remain invisible.

Considering the history and formation of these archives is thus important to better understand these processes; “a lot of implicit moments of decision making is where these moments of inclusion and exclusion happen” (Littel 2022b). It is important to consider questions of inclusion and exclusion both in terms of the archival materials collected and displayed as well as the people in charge of maintaining and displaying said materials.

The idea that LGBT archives had to do better with regards to diversity both in terms of content and staff is not new; “there is a certain historical amnesia about queer archives and diversity” (Littel 2022b) such that historical attempts to make queer archives more racially diverse become lost or forgotten. Efforts to diversify archives in terms of including materials about trans and intersex lives, race and ethnicity, nationality, as well as disability and making archives accessible spaces are an integral part of alternative archiving history. Those marginalised within the queer community have always been engaged in transforming LGBT spaces for the better, and the efforts of today are a continuation of these historical attempts rather than a novel interjection.

Countering this ‘historical amnesia’ is important not just so that current efforts can be connected to a long history of similar efforts, but also because it makes it clear that queer people of colour have always resisted the White-centric exclusivity of queer archives. It challenges the idea that diversity is some kind of novel fad, but makes clear that this is a historical struggle that is still ongoing, and that when archives claim their lack of progress with regards to race, it cannot simply be chalked up to the recency of such considerations. Queer people of color have been integral to queer activist movements as well as some of the earliest critics of traditional archiving

methods (Spivak 1988; Arondekar 2005). The exclusion and further marginalization of this community within LGBT archives is a disservice to the radical history of alternative archives and queer activism and politics.

### *ORGANIZATION: STAFF AND STRUCTURE*

Those who participate in the process of selecting, curating, managing, and displaying the archive have the power to decide what story is told and how. These processes, perhaps even more so than the materials themselves, are what turn a set of materials into a story; these processes are what weave together disparate artifacts into a coherent narrative. Particularly when we consider that “the archive is primarily the product of a judgement... fundamentally a matter of discrimination and of selection” (Mbembe 2002, 20), the authority wielded by the archivist in how it will be interpreted is undeniable.

Any meaning or coherence gathered from the archive is mediated, therefore, by those who decide where and how materials are placed, how the space of the archive is set up, where it is located, who is interpreting the meaning, and whose authority makes all of these possible. The archive alone is not necessarily free of meaning, but the processes of interpretation and those with power to mold the structures to encourage or privilege certain interpretations over others are crucial in eking out and making legible this meaning, and thus in constructing at least a version of it, and this is the version that is granted the most legitimacy.

IHLIA is currently run by a team of 11 staff members and 8 volunteers (IHLIA LGBTI Heritage n.d). The organization also has a 6-member executive board, an executive manager, and a head of collections. My interviews were with a volunteer, the head of collections, and a staff member; the perspectives in my findings thus reflect a range of different experiences across the organization. For alternative archives, particularly community archives, identity and agency play

an important role; many alternative archives began as projects ‘by and for’ the communities whose histories they intended to archive. Furthermore, archives reflect the interests, biases, aims and assumptions of the archivists.

Particularly when many alternative archives emerged from the desire for marginalized populations to write, collect, and record their own stories and histories rather than be misrepresented and treated as objects rather than subjects in archiving (Arondekar 2005; Spivak 1988), it is clear that the goal of diversifying the contents of the archive cannot be abstracted from diversifying those who run, maintain, curate, and display these contents. Thus, when staff at IHLIA express that “diversity and inclusion are two of the most important things” (Anonymous staff member 2022) and the Long-Range Policy Plan 2017-2022 lists as one of its priorities a “new personnel policy with an eye for inclusiveness and diversity of our own employees and volunteers” (IHLIA LGBT Heritage n.d., 6), it is imperative to look at not just the collection but also the staffing policies and practices.

This is what interviewees had to say about staff diversity:

“We have two people of color working here. We have at least one member of the board that is a person of color. So yeah, we do our best” (Van Buuren 2022);

“Sometimes we just have to think about... either you want to hire someone for [being] people of color or without any qualifications; the combination is not easy, people of color who are qualified... it’s not easy, but we are trying” (Anonymous staff member 2022).

The diversity of the IHLIA staff is voiced as a priority, and is noted as important to the organization's goals and objectives. There is recognition of the importance of having a racially diverse staff at IHLIA, but the desire to do better does not seem to match the actual staffing practices.

Trans inclusivity is also touted as an important value for the archive, and they say “in trans we really did something [in] the last years, but yeah, it could be better still” (Van Buuren

2022). While “there is still no transgender [staff] working in IHLIA” (Anonymous staff member 2022), IHLIA has been paying more attention to trans issues in their collections and exhibits, having had three exhibitions about trans people in the past few years, the last one of which was about trans people in the Netherlands (Van Buuren 2022).

In thinking about staffing, it is interesting here to note these comments as an indication of the development of alternative archival staffing practices over time and with increasing size, recognition, and professionalization. Community gay and lesbian archives were not often run by professional archivists or those trained in archival methods; the focus was less on creating a professional archive as the end point, but rather the community archive as a vessel to the goal of making visible the movement and community (Little 2022a).

IHLIA is far from being a small or regional community archive, and there are clear benefits to this: the collections at IHLIA have a far wider global reach than any of the individual archives subsumed; many of those archives were also heavily volunteer-run, which meant that staffing was limited to those who had available time and capacity to do the work without pay. Maintaining and running an archive, no matter how large or small, is expensive and time-consuming; the increased funding and professionalization makes it possible for IHLIA to do much of this work, but it is clear that IHLIA is a deeply institutionalized site of LGBT archiving, and the many upsides do not come without a cost. In this case, it means that their desire to further diversify their staff is at odds with the increasingly professionalized and institutionalized nature of the archive.

IHLIA collects a wide range of materials and media, including fiction and non-fiction books, gray literature, objects and textile forms, scientific and academic articles, posters, photos, audio materials, physical and digital video materials, leaflets and flyers; they have also recently

been working on developing the ‘what and how’ of archiving social media (Van Buuren 2022). This is an impressive and extensive collection, and the archive has materials in several languages and from different countries across the world. The head of collections at IHLIA says about the materials brought in, that:

“The main groups of people coming with materials are homosexual men, and then lesbian women, and they are mainly white and old. They know us and they come with their stuff. So we said a couple years ago, that’s fine, but still we want other groups as well. We call it the marginalized groups within our LGBTI community. So that can be trans people, or people of color.” (Van Buuren 2022).

Thus, there is an explicit push to try and get donations and materials from people within the LGBT community that are underrepresented or ‘marginalized within’ the community. This demonstrates clear effort on the part of the archival staff to diversify their collections, but Van Buuren does note that, for populations like the Latino community in the Netherlands, “they are not that visible, at least not for us, so this takes more effort to have a connection with them and have these materials” (Van Buuren 2022).

The shelves on the third floor of OBA by the IHLIA information desk act as “more of a showcase” containing “mainly standard works or new books” (Van Buuren 2022), so the analysis of the books that were placed on top of these shelves—a showcase within the showcase—is intended as a non-representative and small-scale exploration of what is highlighted in the most publicly accessible section of the archival collection. Particularly in thinking about the casual visitor, this is the section that is most visible and is likely their first point of engagement with the archive’s collection, it is thus helpful to look at these books as a select self-representation. This is also a section that is changed and rotated out fairly frequently and thus this analysis is specific to the data collection period of this study; nevertheless, it holds value as a temporally-situated and specific analysis of the selected materials.

18 books are highlighted, of which 8 prominently deal with trans issues, 5 with race and/or ethnicity, with 2 that overlap across these categories. 6 of the highlighted books are in Dutch, 11 in English, and 1 in Spanish. While it is not possible to extrapolate any argument from such a small section that applies to the entire extensive archival collection at IHLIA, this brief insight into the books they select and highlight in the most public-facing section of the archive does demonstrate a wide and diverse range of experiences. This can be interpreted as an attempt to make the collection seem more diverse than it actually is, but alternatively can be understood as aspirational: while the collection is yet to include as much material about queer people of colour and is still working on better including trans lives, the materials that they do have are showcased and highlighted.

The colonial history of the Netherlands is also a point of interest in thinking about the diversity of materials at the archive. These materials when present, are:

“mainly from these groups when they came here. So we have this group SUHO, Surinamese homo, that was founded here in the Netherlands in the 80s, and then we have materials from the 80s. But we don’t have materials from the queer life in the colonies. Hardly and that’s very hard. Because that was not open, so it’s hard to find anything about it...there was some scandal in the 30s, but that was about white people having sex with younger coloured people but...there’s hardly anything to find...it’s lost. It’s gone.” (Van Buuren 2022)

Thus, while IHLIA states they are trying to reach out to organizations and get more materials about colonialism, this selection remains sparse, and it remains “hard to find anything about it.” This is particularly of note when considering that the push for diversity and inclusion, in part, is from the government agency in charge of providing the subsidies that fund the archive. If IHLIA is considered as being an extremely public representation of the Dutch state’s desire to appear tolerant and accepting of homosexuality in the vein of homonationalism, it would then also reframe the lack of materials about colonialism as part of a national self-image of liberal

tolerance without meaningful accountability when it comes to the imperial, colonial, and violent history of the Netherlands.

### *FUNDING AND GOVERNMENTAL INVOLVEMENT*

Many independent and alternative archives are often volunteer-run and not supported by government funding, which can limit their scope and capacity but also allow for a greater freedom of operation. IHLIA began as several smaller archives, but has since grown to become the largest LGBTI archive in Europe, and is funded through subsidies from the Dutch government. Specifically, IHLIA receives funds from the Department of Emancipation in the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science (Van Buuren 2022; Anonymous staff member 2022). This subsidy is renewed every five years, and “there’s a program, target, and point of interest every year for what we have to reach” (Anonymous staff member 2022). Thus, the funding available is, at least to a certain extent, contingent upon adherence to the program set out by the government.

Archives cannot be understood isolated from their sources of funding; implicitly if not explicitly, the desire to maintain the funding and relationship with funders can impact the areas of focus; “funding and the powers behind resource allocation have massive power over the archive, and, by extension, the history that goes into and out of it” (Hosfeld 2019, 41). Particularly in the context of government funding, the radical potential of a queer archive can be diluted into an assimilationist collection of LGBT narratives. IHLIA’s Long-Range Policy Plan 2017-2022 even notes part of the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science’s emancipation policy includes “LGBT mainstreaming” and “increasing awareness and social acceptance” (IHLIA LGBT Heritage n.d., 3). These goals are clearly geared not towards the LGBT

population engaging with the archive, but rather towards the general cisgender and heterosexual audience. In the objectives section, it even clearly states that “IHLIA contributes to better information for various groups in society – *especially non-LGBTI people* – about gender and sexual identity” (IHLIA LGBT Heritage n.d., 3; emphasis added). While creating resources for non-LGBTI people to access information about gender and sexuality is an important and valuable endeavor, it does depart from what many of the original archives that make up IHLIA set out to do—to create sites to build community and allow queer people to record their stories and access their community’s histories. This approach raises questions about the transformative potential of the archive: if the government funding and objectives of the organization prioritize the non-LGBT population, it risks reproducing a sanitized version of LGBT histories, rather than one that leans into the ways in which queerness is radical and challenges structures of cisheteronormativity.

Speaking about the general pattern of government funding for smaller archives, Littel (2022b) notes that “government funding and subsidies are often conditional...they don’t want these archives to have a narrow focus, they want it to be centralized.” Thus, while IHLIA’s broad scope and its consolidation of a wide range of subjects means that material is perhaps more easily accessed or that patrons need not go to multiple places for their information, it can also be problematized as possibly reflecting the aims of the Dutch government more than the needs of the community it seeks to serve.

This approach of IHLIA as an archive for the non-LGBT population can also be examined in terms of the broader context of the Netherlands as a country that has a history of drawing on the narrative of gay emancipation in order to cement its place as a ‘progressive’ nation. It demonstrates the desire to portray a version of LGBT history that is focused on



equality as opposed to radical liberatory social change. The framework of Dutch homonationalism contextualises the national recognition and acceptance of homosexuality as conditional, contingent on a version of homosexuality that is sanitised and whitewashed, and the racial ‘other’ is excluded from this narrow and tenuous acceptance. The endorsement and funding of IHLIA by the government clearly and certainly expands its reach and scope, but arguably at the cost of making it a space for the reproduction of an image—that of a tolerant, accepting and progressive Netherlands—that is an incomplete and exclusive representation of queer existence. Such an acceptance is at the same time an erasure, and the liberal fixation on equality and acceptance reproduce patterns of harm and exclusion, at the cost of conceptualising a queerness and the queer archive in all its radical and liberatory potential.

#### *LOCATION AND CENTRALIZATION*

IHLIA has, since 2007, been located in the largest Openbare Bibliotheek Amsterdam (OBA) public library. It is the largest LGBT-focused archive in Europe, and receives visitors from across the world (Van Buuren 2022; Anonymous staff member 2022). Amsterdam has been referred to as the “gay and sex capital of the world” (Hekma and Duyvendak 2011, 625), and the largest LGBT archive being located in the city fits in with that image.

Out of the three smaller archives that combined together to form IHLIA, two of them (Homodok and the Lesbian Archive Amsterdam) were local to the city. The third, Anna Blaman Huis, was located initially in Leeuwarden. For many smaller archival institutions such as these, it is “not always easy...to stay afloat, due to a lack of subsidies, accommodation, and volunteers” (Littel 2022a), and merging to form a larger and more centralized archive makes it easier to ‘stay afloat’. Government funding also favors centralized archives as opposed to those with narrow focuses, and “without government funding they [smaller archives] often have to shut down or get

subsumed” (Littel 2022b). The centralisation of archives thus seems to be something that is favored by the Dutch government, and since it is extremely difficult if not impossible for these archives to maintain themselves without some degree of government support and subsidy, it essentially means that they get pushed down the ‘shut down or get subsumed’ pathway.

The government funding that can be gained from giving into the push toward centralisation can go a long way—it means that the people who work at archives can be paid for their time and labor, the materials can be preserved and stored in better conditions, the archive may have greater abilities in outreach and can be accessed by more people, and have more funds to plan community building programs and activities. However, for archives that have to not only get subsumed but also move locations to do so, it can also mean that the history being archived becomes separated from the community that created, curated, donated to, maintained and preserved the regional archive.

The Anna Blaman Huis in Leeuwarden (formerly known as the Lesbian Archive Leeuwarden) is one of the archives that got subsumed and moved to Amsterdam. LAA began by collecting primarily materials about lesbian identity and community, but began to diversify their collection in the 1980s, collecting materials about emancipation in general “on the basis of a solidarity principle” (Littel 2022a). Thus, they collected materials about Black women, Jewish women, women of color, and women of the Eastern Bloc alongside materials focused on lesbianism alone; by the time the archive formally moved to the Anna Blaman Huis, they only passively collected materials about emancipation in general and only actively collected “pink” materials (Littel 2022a). However, the work they had done on collecting general emancipation-related materials clearly demonstrates that questions of inclusivity, allyship and solidarity across lines of marginalization were already being considered, and that the archive

even in the 80s was working on creating a diverse and inclusive archive that represented a range of experiences.

When this archive was subsumed and included into IHLIA, “only explicitly ‘pink’ materials were brought in, and many of these other race related materials did not get included” (Littel 2022b). The centralisation meant that some historical points of focus for the individual archives were not retained in the larger cumulative archive. Furthermore, for the lesbian community of Leeuwarden “it is still a pain point that the archive got subsumed, moved to IHLIA in Amsterdam” (Littel 2022b). The community that was served by the Anna Blaman Huis now had to go much further to access the materials that had previously been housed in a regional archive. Of course, much of the IHLIA archive today is digitized and available to be accessed online, and while “still the older people know that we exist and they can find us” (Van Buuren 2022) but they “cannot guarantee that youngsters from Leeuwarden know about this.” Thus, while the centralisation and combining of the three archives to form IHLIA can be understood as expanding the scope and reach of the LGBT archive in many ways, it is not an expansion without its downsides. The fact that this decision was made at least in part because it was one of the only ways to continue functioning and gain funding as well as the separation of the Leeuwarden archive from the local community add important nuance and context to this process.

## DISCUSSION:

Through the course of this project and my research into the nuances of archival theory, I developed my theoretical framework and approach, and challenged many of my initial goals and assumptions. Consequently, the final shape of this project differs significantly from what was initially imagined, and seeks to reflect a more complicated picture of race and queer archiving. The initial goals for this project took the form of a recovery approach, attempting to find traces

of queer people of colour within the LGBT archive and trying to think about what these materials could indicate about the ways in which queer people of colour exist as a marginalised minority within a larger marginalised group. I was interested in the processes within an LGBT archive that were functioning to either challenge this double marginalization or to further legitimize internal processes of exclusion. While my interest in race within the queer archive remained at the forefront of this project, the approach changed significantly.

My engagement with archival theory demonstrated that such a recovery frame has resonances across the historical formation of alternative archives, but also made clear the various meaningful and incisive criticisms of such an approach. Recovery approaches have been a common instinct for marginalized people; in looking at a collection of history that is being preserved for future generations, it is only natural as a marginalized person to wonder: Am I in here? Is my story, or the story of my community, present in this archive? Who is telling this story, and how?

This was also my initial instinct going into this project, but as I explored further the history of alternative archives, this became more and more unappealing as a way to adequately engage with the question of race in the queer archive. Even if these stories can be found in the dominant archive, a recovery framework is not enough to challenge the systems that have made this marginalization possible, it does nothing to counter the distortion and misrepresentation that likely abounds, and legitimizes the structure of the archive and really only poses a critique to the final point of the archive and its contents.

In fact, the origins of many alternative archives lie in moving *away* from recovery approaches, finding that this only yielded limited and one-sided versions of our histories. These archives emerged from the conviction that marginalized people deserve better than to hunt for

traces of our existence in the dominant archives, deserve better than to hunt and only find stories that reinforce our marginalization, to only find stories that we did not have a hand in crafting. Alternative archives are an assertion of agency, a reclamation of the authority over our own narratives.

Thus, although my interest in thinking about race in the queer archive stayed central to my project, my approach changed considerably. This project focuses more on an analysis of the history of formation, current structures and staffing practices, processes of funding and the push toward centralizing the archive as a way to better understand narratives of inclusion and exclusion within the archive, thinking about the ways in which race plays into all of these areas instead of only thinking about archival materials about race within the collection. The final product of the archive is only a small part of what makes up the archive as an entity, and involving considerations of race throughout all the decisions, processes and histories that make up the archive yields a fuller and more nuanced exploration of race in the LGBT archive.

While it is important to me to engage critically with the archive, I also do not intend this project to be a rejection or devaluation of the work that IHLIA does. Rather, by engaging with the archive in the capacity of this research and challenging some of the ways in which the archive functions, I intend to encourage critical reflection about their collections, policies, and goals. All the people I interviewed demonstrated the desire to improve IHLIA and to have a more diverse collection that represents a broader range of queer experiences. This desire can only be fulfilled when a more holistic view of archival processes can be included in the consideration of what makes an archive 'diverse' or a space that accurately and adequately understands and addresses the needs of queer people of colour.

**CONCLUSION:**

The queer archive is an almost utopian formulation, wanting to document and preserve queer lives and histories so that queer people today and in the future will be able to access this record of queer activity that makes it clear that we have always existed and will always exist—and not only in criminal records and harmful reductionist ideas, but in our full complexity that, yes, includes a history of pain and trauma and marginalisation, but also is a repository of joy, love, care and community. The queer archive is angry and dissatisfied with the traditional archive that relegates us to the sidelines, and does not simply want to recreate this traditional archive with queer people instead—it seeks to disrupt, challenge, build from the ground up an entirely new way to archive. A queer archive asks not just that we include the queer in the traditional archive, but that we queer the archive itself, that we radically reimagine the possibilities of an archive.

The national Dutch conceptualisation of LGBT identity and community is one that is mired in normativizing impulses that seek to placate and pacify. The narrative of tolerance and progressiveness is one that is deeply liberal, and thus the version of gayness that is accepted is one that constrains the various expressions of queerness within narrow and exclusive boundaries. This acceptance thus still occurs within the broader framework of liberal cisheteronormativity, and it is also deeply conditional. Thus, the queerness of people of colour and of trans and non-binary people are largely absent from this imaginary of a tolerant Netherlands.

As Europe's largest LGBT archive, IHLIA has national and international significance. Understanding the processes at IHLIA that reproduce or maintain systems of exclusion is therefore important in understanding the difference between an LGBT archive and a queer(ed) archive. Although IHLIA bills itself as “*the* heritage organization with a socially relevant and

indispensable collection” (IHLIA LGBTI Heritage n.d.; emphasis original), it largely depicts only a segment of the LGBT population.

While recent efforts particularly in terms of trans inclusion are apparent, the refrain about race in the archive boils down to “we can do better” and “we have a long way to go.” The complacent, normativizing impulses of the Dutch state in terms of queer existence are absorbed and reflected in IHLIA (at least to an extent), meaning that the histories archived in this ‘indispensable collection’ fall short of fulfilling any radical potential it might have had.

The archive being geared towards a primarily cisgender and heterosexual audience is also part of this impulse to make queerness palatable, and is a departure from the origins of the archive as by and for gay and lesbian communities. If an LGBT archive considers its primary audience to be cisgender and heterosexual people wanting to learn about gender and sexuality rather than LGBT people wanting to engage with their own histories, it gives into assimilationist tendencies that limit the radical possibilities offered by the queer archive. By giving into these assimilationist and normativizing impulses, IHLIA may “reinforce the structures that demand invisibility and docility from queer subjects” (Hosfeld 38). The focus becomes cishetero-comfortability rather than an affirmation of queer existence.

IHLIA’s work is undeniably valuable, and documenting and preserving LGBT history in such an extensive collection is an incredible endeavor. The first time I walked into IHLIA, I remember having to catch my breath at the idea that there was all this history, all this material about my community that exists and is being collected. This project and all my critiques of the archive are coming from a place of not wanting to lose that awe and wonder, wanting to see an archive that can sustain that feeling for queer people by focusing on the community whose history it is archiving rather than the non-LGBT audience.

The radical origins of the alternative archive and the community it seeks to represent demand better than the liberal and complacent archive. The queer archive can be a space of incredible promise and possibility, but in order for this potential to be brought to fruition at IHLIA, the archive must not shy away from embracing the messy and complicated reality of queerness. Queerness is not easy to archive, and by its very definition, resists easy classification and organisation. Instead of shying away from this complexity and trying to fit it into the narrow ideal of traditional archival practices and homonormative versions of queerness, maybe the structure archive needs to be reevaluated and radically reimagined.

The desire to have a diverse and inclusive collection cannot be tacked onto the end of a priority list, it needs to be thought about throughout the chain of processes that make up an archive. The queer archive must therefore challenge and move beyond White-Western notions of the queer and the archive to adequately be 'diverse and inclusive.' Queer people of colour are not an extra addition to the community, we are a deeply essential part of it and always have been, and to have a queer archive that truly includes us means that we must have a voice and a role in its creation, maintenance, and future.



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## APPENDIX:

### *INTERVIEW GUIDE*

This is the rough structure of interview questions from which each interview was adjusted depending on the participant's role and area of expertise as well as natural flow of conversation.

- Describe your position at IHLIA (Duration, role, tasks and workload).
- What other archives, if any, do you have experience working with?
  - What, if anything, sets IHLIA apart from other archives?
- In your opinion, what kinds of lived experiences does IHLIA reflect?
  - How representative do you think it is of queer communities (in the Netherlands)?
  - What do you think might be underrepresented or unrepresented?
  - Is there any dominant story being told?
- How would you describe the structure and organization of archive materials?
  - How do you determine how materials are organized? (who is in charge, is it hierarchical, inherited, discussed with members of the team, etc.)
  - How has this changed over time?
- What sources of funding support the archive?
  - Do any of the funders have input about content or structure at the archive?
- What other organizations or archives has IHLIA collaborated with?
- Are there any changes to the archive that you would like to see?