

# Archiving queer of colour politics in the Netherlands

*A roundtable conversation*

Gianmaria Colpani, Wigbertson Julian Isenia, and Naomie Pieter

TVGEN22 (2): 163–182

DOI: 10.5117/TVGN2019.2.004.COLP

## Abstract

This roundtable stages a conversation amongst activists and cultural producers involved in feminist and queer of colour politics in the Netherlands from the 1980s to the present. Its primary focus is on the collectives and initiatives that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, such as SUHO (Surinamese Homosexuals), Flamboyant, Zami, Sister Outsider, and Strange Fruit. The roundtable participants – Anne Krul, Tienieke Sumter, Andre Reeder, Marlon Reina, and Ajamu – reflect on several issues, amongst which the political organising around blackness in the 1980s and 1990s, the relations between queer of colour collectives and other movements, the links between political organising and cultural work, the differences between activism and archiving in Curaçao and the Netherlands, and, finally, the possibilities and limits of archiving queer of colour histories in the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The roundtable also discusses two exhibitions held at IHLIA LGBT Heritage in Amsterdam: *We Live Here* (2009), on the history of the black lesbian and gay community in the Netherlands, and *With Pride* (2018), on the history of Dutch sexual politics.

**Keywords:** Dutch sexual politics, queer of colour, queer archives, Flamboyant, Zami, Strange Fruit

This roundtable stages a conversation amongst activists and cultural producers involved in feminist and queer of colour politics in the Netherlands from the 1980s to the present. Its primary focus is on the collectives and initiatives that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, such as SUHO (Surinamese Homosexuals), Flamboyant, Zami, Sister Outsider, and Strange Fruit. The roundtable is partly based on the panel 'Black Queer Archive Meetup',



*Figure 1* Panel discussion 'Black Queer Archive Meetup' at the Amsterdam Museum. From left to right: Naomie Pieter, Anne Krul, Andre Reeder, Tienke Sumter, and Wigbertson Julian Isenia (2018).

Source: Black Queer Archive.

organised by the collective Black Queer & Trans Resistance NL at the Amsterdam Museum on August 2, 2018. Naomie Pieter and Wigbertson Julian Isenia moderated the panel and the panellists were Anne Krul, Tienke Sumter, and Andre Reeder. For this roundtable, the conversation was extended to two other participants: Marlon Reina and Ajamu. The new rounds of questions and answers were conducted via email.

**Can you start by telling us who you are, what was your involvement in the groups that emerged in the Netherlands in the 1980s and 1990s, and what were the key activities of these groups?**

*Tienke Sumter:* I was an active member of SUHO, Sister Outsider, Kenki, and I was one of the first coordinators of Flamboyant. In Baarn, not far from Amsterdam, there were weekends for Surinamese women and they also published the magazine *Ashanti*. It must have been in the year 1980 or 1981 when



*Figure 2* Founding members of *Sister Outsider*. From left to right: José Maas, Tania Leon, Gloria Wekker, Tienieke Sumter (1984). Picture by Robertine Romeny.

Source: Collection IIAV-Atria – Institute on Gender Equality and Women's History, Amsterdam.

I came into contact with them. That is how I ended up at SUHO (Surinamese Homosexuals).<sup>1</sup> At that time, SUHO mainly consisted of men, and we thought, why are there so few women? So, together with Carla Bakboord and Maureen Tardjopawiro, I started SUHO Women. At one point I went to do an internship in Suriname. When I came back in 1983, I was asked to become the chairperson of SUHO. So I became the first Surinamese chairwoman of the first Surinamese gay organisation in the Netherlands. I also became a member of *Sister Outsider*. At one point, Gloria Wekker and Tania Leon asked me to get on the board of *Sister Outsider*. They then invited Audre Lorde to come to the Netherlands. This must have been in the years 1984 or 1985.<sup>2</sup> I also became one of the first Flamboyant coordinators. Flamboyant was the first black and migrant women's centre in Amsterdam, and that's how I got to know Anne Krul. Flamboyant had a library and a documentation centre.<sup>3</sup>

These were the topics we addressed at Flamboyant: how do we organise ourselves, how to set up a group for women, how do we talk about racism? We were working with Dutch white women and also internationally. When you look at the issues of the *Ashanti* magazine, we talked about the position of women in Guyana, and we talked about the position of women

**OEMA OEN OPO!**

**HAM SAB SARNAMI AURATON JAGO!**

**ASHANTI BESTAAT 5 JAAR  
WE VIEREN DAT OP  
ZATERDAG 16 NOVEMBER**

Diskussie - bijeenkomst

14.00 Thema:

**Wat is de relatie tussen zwarte + migranten vrouwenstrijd  
in Nederland en de strijd van vrouwen  
in de derdewereld**

**Spreeksters:** Gharletje Choenni (overzicht 5 jaar Ashanti )  
Sitla Bonoo ( relatie vrouwenstrijd hier / en vrouwenstrijd 3e wereld )  
vrouw uit Zuid - Afrika - over de strijd daar

15.00 **Daarna Diskussie**

17.00 optreden BAI THAK GHANA GROEP  
*s'avonds FEEST*

**Optredens:** Meisjesgroep Jayanti met toneel  
Zuid-Afrikaanse Strijdlieiders koor **Jan + Alleman**  
**Gedichten en zang: Annie Grens**  
Daarna dansen

Plaats: Gebouw Stichting Surinaamse Jongeren Loosduinse weg 833 ( naast moskee )

DEN — HAAG  
Te bereiken vanaf C.S. met tram 2  
Voor informatie: 070 - 64 98 74 / 64 60 98

Figure 3 Meeting for the fifth anniversary of Ashanti, with the theme 'What is the relationship between the black and migrant women's struggle in the Netherlands and the struggle of women in the third world' (1986).

Source: Collection IIAV-Atria – Institute on Gender Equality and Women's History, Amsterdam.

in Trinidad. But also the first groups of women from Turkey and Morocco were discussed there. So we were making links with each other and discussing different topics. Then I left to live in Suriname in 1987. But after I left Zami came, so maybe it's good that now Anne continues.

*Anne Krul:* Zami was actually the daughter of Flamboyant.<sup>4</sup> Zami also has a physical place where women could meet, study together, and educate each

other and ourselves. So Zami was mostly a centre for learning and empowerment. It officially started in 1991, so actually I think there was a short period between the end of Flamboyant and the beginning of Zami. The women who were running Flamboyant were working very hard to organise Zami – not only the centre but also the archive and the magazine. They also did a newsletter that was a binding medium, because in those years Zami (and Flamboyant before) were functioning as a national but also sometimes as an international point for women of colour to come together, empower each other, and sometimes also to organise actions.

In 1989, Jong Sook Ahn started an international support network for Asian lesbians within ILIS (International Lesbian Information Service). She took the initiative to organise a two-day multicultural festival in Amsterdam in 1990, which brought together many lesbians of Asian descent and other lesbians of colour. I participated in the organising group. One evening preparing this festival, Sook and I were surprised to hear steel drums in the COC: it was the first Strange Fruit evening! Feeling very at home, we immediately joined the group to connect with other LGBT people of colour, promoting lesbians/women interests, sharing information, and skills.<sup>5</sup>

### **Andre and Marlon, you also met at Strange Fruit. Tell us about your trajectory and how you got involved in the group.**

*Andre Reeder:* I was born in 1954 in the village of Moengo in Suriname, a Dutch colony in South America. I finished the Dutch Film and Television Academy in 1982. At the moment I work in the community of the Bijlmermeer in Amsterdam, where I support citizens and their organisations in setting up and funding their social activities. I have a long history of activism. My first experience of activism was from 1972 till 1982 in an organisation called LOSON (National Organisation of Surinamese in the Netherlands) and later called SAWO (Surinamese Workers Organisation). It was an organisation of the Surinamese community in the Netherlands against racism in the broadest sense of the word: against racism in the field of housing, education, police brutality, and so on.<sup>6</sup> At the beginning of the 1990s, the organisation was dying down. People were going back to Suriname and people's lives took over, but all that time I had neglected my developing gay side, so to say. And, of course, it will catch up with you. So, I'm a filmmaker and had to make a film about a black gay boy in the Bijlmer and that's how I met Strange Fruit and I got heavily inspired. Later, in 1996, I also made a film about HIV and AIDS in the Surinamese community in

collaboration with Strange Fruit called *Aan Niets Overleden* (Cause of Death: Nothing, 1996). I was an activist in Strange Fruit from 1990 till 2000. Ten years. Strange Fruit started as a self-help organisation founded by boys who love boys and girls who love girls of black or migrant descent. It started with a group of Surinamese and Moroccan boys who were friends and who wanted to support each other and later it expanded.

*Marlon Reina:* I am now the chairman of Fundashon FOKO, an LGBT organisation in Curaçao. But before coming back to Curaçao in 2014, I worked as a cultural producer in Amsterdam and I was an active member of Strange Fruit and Sabana, a local group in Amsterdam advocating for the rights and wellbeing of the Antillean migrant community in Amsterdam.

I became a core member of Strange Fruit immediately after arriving in Amsterdam in 1992. I started as a volunteer helping with the organisation of social and cultural events and safer sex education events. Later I became very active in the monthly radio programme of Strange Fruit called *Global Perspective*, which was broadcasted at the local LGBT media club MVS. I was an editor/producer, presenter, and columnist for the programme. After the group was institutionalised, I became the secretary of the board of Strange Fruit and was amongst others responsible for fundraising.

*Global Perspective* started with a team of four members, with Andre Reeder as presenter and me as producer. The group prepared topics and did research and production together. Kenneth McRooy started as our columnist; later I took that role. In the first years MVS provided us with a technician, later we were trained to do it ourselves. The radio was important as it was (in the pre-internet period) Strange Fruit's only communication tool. The themes that were discussed in the programme were: LGBT culture, with a lot of attention to African American literature, theatre, dance, music; LGBT struggles and events in Amsterdam; Black and migrant cultures in Amsterdam, and being gay in our communities; news and developments from our countries of origin – Suriname, Morocco, Curaçao, Turkey, Ghana; and HIV and AIDS in a black and migrant as well as global perspective. A collection of cassette tapes with a lot of years of *Global Perspective* programmes is stored privately with Andre Reeder. I have some digital recordings in my personal archive.

*Anne Krul:* Creating connections has been important for Strange Fruit, not only to find adequate help for diverse needs (safe houses, lawyers, health professionals), but also to make our existence and interests known in our ethnic communities, the Dutch LGBT organisations, and international



*Figure 4* Members of Strange Fruit. Standing in the back from left to right: Andy Garton, Marlon Reina, Reggie Williams, and Jerry Haimé. Sitting in front from left to right: Anne Krul, Gilbert-Jean Francourt, Oebele Kooistra, and Andre Reeder (1997).

Source: personal archive of Jerry Haimé.

initiatives like ILIS (International Lesbian Information Service), ILGA (the International Lesbian and Gay Association) and IGLHRC (the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, now called OUTRIGHT). Cooperation with LGBT people of colour in Germany (Adefra, ISD, Afrekete) and in the UK (through the Zami conferences and the International Lesbian and Gay People of Colour Conference) brought awareness about common experiences and (survival) strategies, but also about diversity and the need to organise more inclusively.

From the 1980s onwards, Black LGBT writers, artists, and educators visiting or moving to the Netherlands connected with Sister Outsider, Zami, and Strange Fruit. Empowerment and celebration through culture and art has always been vital. An example is *Unestablished & Unexplored Channels* (1999), an exchange programme curated by videographer/activist Kagendo Murungi. The programme ran for two weeks and offered screenings of independently produced black LGBT videos, roundtable talks, workshops, dinners, and open stages as well as a special *Global Perspective* edition.

*Andre Reeder:* Another initiative we dedicated a lot of energy to was AIDS prevention. We had parties that combined information about safe sex in the most creative ways that were never seen before in the Netherlands. We had very creative artists amongst our activists. I made a film about gay and lesbians in the Netherlands: *Glad to be Gay, Right?* (1992). It was in collaboration with Strange Fruit and some of the activists are in the film. Another initiative was a workshop where we learnt to do Afro-Surinamese head wraps. This tradition was developed during slavery by the enslaved women and travelled to Suriname and the Caribbean. The way you tied the head wrap showed different meanings. One of our activists organised a workshop for how to tie those head wraps and he involved women from the Bijlmermeer who are the bearers of this culture to help and give this workshop. So that's a totally different thing.

Another thing that was very important: our Arab activists developed an Arab night for Arab gays and lesbians to organise themselves. At a certain point we also had a Turkish night and a self-help initiative amongst the Turkish activists who set up a house in the Bijlmer for abused Turkish LGBT people.

We had a historical tori evening, 'tori' meaning 'story' in the Surinamese language. It was historical in the sense that for the first time, let's say, the black gay community told their personal stories to themselves. Not to a general public. It was a closed meeting, five of us. Men and women prepared their personal stories: whom they thought they were, where they felt at home, what meant most in their lives, how they experienced love, and it was almost a kind of sermon. They presented their stories for a black audience. It was full. It was in the Cosmic Theatre.<sup>7</sup> But it was so impressive because for the first time you saw a reflection of yourself in the human stories in all the diversity of the people who were telling their stories. So that's also a historical thing that we did.

**Tieneke mentioned that in the *Ashanti* magazines one could find discussions about the struggles of Black women but also Moroccan and Turkish women in the Netherlands and Andre talked about Strange Fruit's Arab and Turkish groups. Could you say something about how these collectives defined themselves, especially in relation to the category 'Black'?**

*Tieneke Sumter:* I'm not sure. I can remember that in *Sister Outsider* and in *Flamboyant* we had a lot of discussion on how to define ourselves. Can we say black migrant women? What is black? Anne take it away.



*Anne Krul:* You really hit a point. Because this is still going on. When it's about naming, I think as black and other people of colour we face different challenges. Do you want to reveal and signal your ethnic background? Do you use the words that your parents used for your ethnicity? Would you like to claim your background and also in a political way? And then how to name your gender? Do you want to use the words that are common: male and female and all the other variations? We know that in a lot of African contexts before colonial times there were a variety of gender expressions.

And today I would say I am a cisgender woman with lesbian feelings, I'm a black feminist with Afro-European roots. I might say some things but I also exclude other things in this naming. I also heard that some people and some archives are already saying, 'oh but then we have to keep up with all these new self-namings'. I think when you want to be open for history and current history, then listen to and accept how people define themselves. I understand that organisations – especially if they want to organise a political front against something – sometimes have to summarise. And still I think that black as a 'political' term including all people of colour can still work. But I'm very open to all these new names. And I think self-definition is a political act, so I would like to hear all those definitions.

*Andre Reeder:* I completely agree with Anne. And I also hope to bring into remembrance the term black. Of course, the term black is used because it stems from racism against black people of African descent for hundreds of years in the most vicious and psychological manner and in all fields of society. And which has been unprecedented before. But this is why it plays such a major role in the antiracism struggle and the vocabulary we use in that struggle.

**Marlon, you already mentioned that a few years ago you moved back to Curaçao and became the president of the LGBT organisation FOKO. What are the differences in terms of organising between Curaçao and the Netherlands?**

*Marlon Reina:* Strange Fruit was like a group of friends working together, organising things. In that respect, FOKO is much more formal. Strange Fruit managed to maintain a guerrilla form of working in the 1990s even though at a certain point it was working within the structure of municipal policy. FOKO is strongly organised around one, sometimes two, very dominant leaders who decide on strategies and activities, trying to organise support.

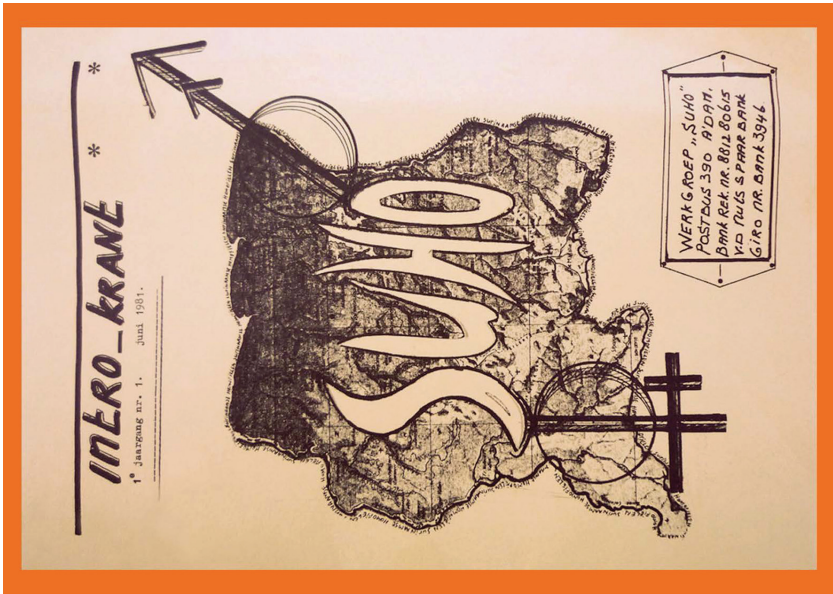
FOKO has had better times in the past, the volunteer base is decreasing. The current two-member board of FOKO and its volunteers are mostly educated people and mostly men. FOKO has always made an effort to be accessible to people of all social backgrounds. The members of Young and Diverse, our youth group, are a better reflection of the society. Typical of Curaçao is the fact that young people leave the island for studies abroad, making it very difficult to build in continuity. The inclusion of women is also a challenge, but FOKO has always had women on the board.

Strange Fruit was in Amsterdam, one of those destinations of students. A very important distinction is the 'migrant experience', which was key to the core and ideology of Strange Fruit. The group was very aware of the intersectionality of oppressions and struggles, which I see less here in Curaçao. Strange Fruit was also very diverse, culturally and class wise.

**Ajamu, in 2009 you curated the exhibition *We Live Here* at the IHLIA LGBT Archive in Amsterdam, which focused on the history of the Black lesbian and gay community in the Netherlands since the 1980s. Can you talk about your work, how you got involved in the Dutch context and how the idea of *We Live Here* came about?**

*Ajamu:* I work in London and I'm a fine art photographic artist, archive curator, and radical sex activist. I've shown work in museums, galleries, and alternative spaces worldwide. Through portraits, self-portraits and nudes, in my work I unapologetically celebrate difference, desire, and pleasure. *We Live Here* came on the back of another exhibition I curated in London called *Outside Edge*, which was showcased at the Museum in the Docklands in May 2008. If I remember correctly, I met Jack van der Wel from IHLIA at the Annual LGBT Archive Conference at London Metropolitan Archives in 2007 and floated the idea in progress to him. I have a long history of being connected to Amsterdam from the early 1990s; staying in the Bijlmer which always reminded me of Brixton – where I live.

I had met Marlon Reina and Anne Krul at Strange Fruit in early 1999. Topher Campbell and I went to meet them both when we were thinking about creating our own Black queer organisation rukus! Federation.<sup>8</sup> Strange Fruit was my template to build on. I used to visit the odd event when I went to Amsterdam and loved their energy, feisty attitude, and politics. I always knew I wanted to work on a project with Marlon at some point. Marlon through our many conversations triggered so many ideas and



**We Live Here** - is a journey through black lesbian and gay history since the 1980's to the present day. Many individuals and community organisations have been vibrantly active for a long time but have not always been well represented culturally. This exhibition seeks to redress the balance and acknowledge the presence of the black Lesbian and Gay community in the Netherlands.

Ajamu X, an internationally acclaimed photographic artist and one of Britain's leading specialists on black LGBT history, is curator of this exhibition. In cooperation with Ihlia-Homodok.



**OPENING** | 30 juli 2009 om 17.30 uur  
**LOCATIE** | Ihlia-plein, 6de verdieping OBA  
**OPENINGSTIJDEN** | 10.00 - 22.00 uur  
**TOEGANG** | vrij  
**EXPOSITIE** | 30 juli – eind september 2009

[www.ihlia.nl](http://www.ihlia.nl)



Figure 5 Flyer of the exhibition *We Live Here* (2009).

Source: personal archive of Ajamu.

I wanted to learn more about a Black queer Dutch experience. What better way to learn about it than through its 'archive'? And Marlon is an embodied archive. My questions centred on what are the Black queer narratives within the context of Europe (Afro-Berlin, France). In one of the issues of the SUHO newsletter, for example, there is a mention of a visit to London to meet activists, so my curiosity has always been around where is information on these conversations which took place across Europe in the 1980s and early 1990s.

If there is no record, then how do we re-imagine what took place. We have not even scratched the surface yet of our Black queer stories and narratives in Europe through its artistic, cultural, and archival production. The intention of *We Live Here* was to kick-start a wider trans-European conversation. *We Live Here* in Amsterdam was the first leg of this grand project; I was not able to access funds to begin the Berlin and French legs of the project, so it was put on hold.

**Tell us something more about the topics you wanted to discuss and the process of assembling the exhibition. Whom did you work with? Was the material you needed well archived and easily accessible?**

*Ajamu:* The overall theme was what did Black queer culture look like within a Dutch context through its ephemera – flyers and posters of clubs, community activism, literature and books, and what did IHLIA have in its holdings. Marlon was my adviser. His apartment is an archive and I think in regards to a Black queer Dutch experience both him and Anne are a fountain of knowledge. And I drank it all in.

My reading of Dutch is not that great, and I am putting it mildly. Marlon would read some of the texts to me and I would be making notes. Knowing some of the artists, activists, and cultural producers helped, and I would go to their houses and ask for spare material they may have had for the exhibition. Daniel Green, an African American who sadly died years ago, gave me many materials and filled in the gaps for me as he had moved to Amsterdam in the early 1980s. Regillio Talaway was a club/party promoter back then and he was one of my interviewees. As part of the process, I also attended and photographed the 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary reunion of SUHO and managed to meet some of the founders, Lionel Johkoe for example.

I spent time in the holdings of IHLIA, they were really helpful at every stage of the project development. Their holdings were accessible to me and



*Figure 6* Picture of members of SUHO in a display at the exhibition *We Live Here* (2009). From left to right: unidentified, Max Lievendag, Egmond Codfried, unidentified, Lionel Jokhoe.

Source: personal archive of Ajamu.

Jack and his colleagues provided all the information I needed. The exhibition was never intended to be *the* exhibition, but a taster to this rich history. There are huge gaps which I think the time is ripe for them to be highlighted and contested.

**Recently, to celebrate its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, IHLIA organised the exhibition *With Pride* on the history of sexual politics in the Netherlands. The exhibition received critiques from Black activists in the country. What are your thoughts on the exhibition and the discussion it provoked?**

*Ajamu:* I did see the recent display at IHLIA, I visited the show with Anne Krul and Amal Alhaag. I am ambivalent on many levels and only know about the critique from a handful of activists whose views I respect. I would love to hear a wide range of views from others within, across, and beyond the community. My initial thoughts were the exhibition's limited production value and its lack of accessibility (wheelchair access, text for blind or partially sighted visitors). It felt hidden away, which is ironic. I personally did not find the display vibrant and full of energy and I think that has much to do with the space and the layout. I recognised some of the gaps immediately, partly from curating *We Live Here* and from my time of travelling to and from Amsterdam/Rotterdam over the decades.

I am not aware of the consultations which took place and how the work was selected. Who selected the work? Were there any Black and Brown queers involved in the process of selection and if any, who refused to participate? If so, why?

*Tieneke Sumter:* To me it is important that the perspectives and action of activists of colour are always included. We were there then as we are here now and we have participated and contributed. IHLIA knew this but failed despite the efforts. The sorry we received is not enough. I want them to do better. And we will continue to hold them accountable.

*Andre Reeder:* I collaborated with other black LGBT activists in giving information about our struggle during the past 40 years and others gave materials to IHLIA for the exhibition. I was astonished that, except for a few inconspicuous remarks, the struggle of black LGBT people during the past 40 years was left out of the exhibition. I wrote an angry reaction on the Facebook page, which was: '[In the preparatory meetings, IHLIA] wanted to pay attention to the struggle of the black LGBTI movement as part of the general struggle of LGBTI people in the Netherlands. [...] Activists brought material to these meetings, and shared countless experiences and stories about those decades of black LGBTI movement in the Netherlands. Movements that also arose in the face and in response to the racism and exclusion of black people and people of colour in the white Dutch LGBTI movement. Movements that have

meant a lot for the shelter, development, self-awareness, and emancipation of LGBT black people and people of colour in the Netherlands. And besides the organisations that were present during those meetings, there used to be actually many more organisations at that time [in the 1980s and 1990s], such as Brown Blossom, Black Orchid, IPOTH (in the Turkish community) and Secret Garden, which is still very active in the struggle for Muslim and refugee LGBTI people. In addition to these meetings, the director [of IHLIA] also had several conversations with former black LGBTI activists. In the exhibition nothing of this was present. What was then exhibited? Buttons from Sister Outsider in a display case. And a text with a quote by Gloria Wekker about the foundation of the mainly lesbian Sister Outsider. And that striking yellow poster of Strange Fruit with a pineapple (without text or explanation).

Furthermore, NOTHING about 38 years of LGBTI activism of the black and people of colour community. Not in picture or text, not even on the website or printed texts on paper. A terribly uncomfortable, almost nauseating feeling of whiteness crept over me. [...] An old activist said to me: "Our struggle and history has been obscured". [...] In the meantime, all the material donated by black activists is about this struggle and IHLIA owns the material that IHLIA collected about it themselves. Also a copy of two of my then pioneering films in this area, *Glad to be Gay, Right?* and *Cause of Death, Nothing*. I wonder, do all of this material and stories belong in this national, government-subsidised "heritage organisation and information mediator in the field of homosexuality and sexual diversity"?<sup>9</sup> Of course, they belong there as part of the national LGBT history of the Netherlands. Yet I ask myself the question: do they really belong there? If they are dealt with like this, like in this exhibition? Don't they belong better in an organisation like The Black Archives?<sup>10</sup> Or for my part, Imagine IC?<sup>11</sup> Who will absolutely appreciate this material? Who will use it as testimonies of the decades-long struggle of the black and people of colour LGBT community in the Netherlands? And with that also tackle the exclusion, institutional racism, white supremacy, white privilege, which is also part of the LGBT community? Who will say it? F\*\*k this exhibition. F\*\*k IHLIA!<sup>12</sup>

*Anne Krul:* I have been outraged about this IHLIA exhibition. Positively, the exchange amongst black activists intensified. This brought new elements in the discussion about the needs and possibilities of archiving our LGBT queer lives, struggles, organising, cultural productions, etc.: Where is a fruitful HOME? What is fruitful? Who can organise and nurture these archives? Where will these be (re)presented? How accessible? How sustainable? Where is a fruitful home for *personal* archives?

## **Are there other thoughts you would like to share both on the importance and the limits of archiving?**

*Marlon Reina:* It is important to begin talking about the LGBT archives in Curaçao. FOKO does not have a position regarding that yet. I suppose people like Norman de Palm and Gibi Bacilio and La Pop will also have materials. The first step should be making people aware of the importance of those archives, in the still very hostile society of Curaçao. The labelling of archives as 'LGBT' will be a challenge, like all challenges regarding LGBT struggles on the island. Since LGBT identities are not always perceived in the Western way, also by people of the LGBT community, LGBT organising is sometimes difficult. Looking at the current reality, I think making people aware of the importance of archives in general by activists and artists would be a better way to start this. FOKO must be vigilant to make sure the archives of the LGBT community, individuals, and organisations are included and made visible.

*Andre Reeder:* I think the experience with IHLIA shows us as black LGBT people: the only ones who can take care and write our history are ourselves. It is as simple as that. It serves the consciousness of ourselves in our struggle, and it should serve as a tool for directing our actions for progress.

*Ajamu:* I think archival displays/exhibitions don't work for many reasons as they collapse under the burden of archival representation. First, I think there is a myth we have to question, which is: can an archive be truly representational? And where is the tipping point (and who decides) which would make it inclusive and diverse?

Second, I think what the display at IHLIA highlights – and I have seen it also here in the UK – is the limitations of only looking through a rights-based narrative; then it discounts other ways how the archive can be experienced through its materiality. Archival displays/exhibitions as they become more mainstream tell the stories of 'queer rock stars', or the same kinds of stories/images year in year out, which to a large extent will rarely include Black and Brown folks. Black and Brown folks are peppered throughout to make these shows appear diverse and inclusive, or the organisers to have done some 'work'.

Third, I think we are the ones who have to tell our stories in all their complexity and nuances and not wait for institutions – Black, queer, or otherwise – to do that work for us. That is not what they are interested in and their frame of reference. My concern will always be first and foremost what are we doing as Black and Brown queer folks. It takes a lot of labour, energy and stress to tell organisations they have not done their homework, and frankly, they do



not have to do that work, period. Maybe we should stop being romantic on what we expect queer archival displays/exhibitions to deliver. There will always be gaps, there will always be exclusions and usually the first exclusion will be around racialised Black bodies, trans, and non-binary identities. We have the skill set, talent, energy, fierceness within our own communities to do this work, and dare I say much better in most cases. The display at IHLIA has generated heated debate, which is a good thing in a strange way. Next time another show comes along and maybe they and others will take some things on board, but until then my concern will always be how are Black and Brown queers archiving their histories, conserving their histories, preserving their histories for those Black and Brown queers now and into the future.

*Anne Krul*: I totally agree with Ajamu: ‘...we are the ones who have to tell our stories in all their complexity and nuances and not wait for institutions – Black, queer, or otherwise – to do that work for us’. Recently Ajamu and I re-connected, contributing to the exhibition *Diasporic Self: Black Togetherness as Lingua Franca*.<sup>13</sup> This experience gives me a new push: to focus more on creating and claiming alternative safe queer people of colour spaces, to invite each other to tell stories, enjoy artistic and cultural productions, including radio shows, to connect her/histories with the joys and struggles of today. In doing so, we can create living archives.

## Notes

1. SUHO was founded by Lionel Jokhoe and Max Lievendag in 1980. The group’s main goal was to address racism and homophobia in Dutch society. In an interview in 1984, Sumter comments that the group started out of necessity and needed to set off against the so-called white gay movement since ‘in the white gay movement [they] were also confronted with racism’. The reason to start a SUHO women’s group was that ‘as a black lesbian woman [she] also needed to fight against sexism’ (Peijl, 1984, p. 2, our translation). See also Janssens and Van Wetering (1985).
2. Sister Outsider was founded by Gloria Wekker, Tania Leon, Tienieke Sumter, and José Maas and was active in Amsterdam between 1983 and 1986. The group’s main goal was to create a space for black and migrant women interested in black feminist literature, but it also organised events and parties. The group was a nodal point of the Black, Migrant and Refugee (BMR) women’s movement of the time, to which it added an explicitly lesbian dimension. Audre Lorde visited Amsterdam twice, in 1984 and 1986, invited by the women of Sister Outsider (see Wekker & Lutz, 2001; Ellerbe-Dueck & Wekker, 2015; Colpani & Isenia, 2018).
3. Flamboyant, a meeting place and documentation centre by and for black and migrant women, operated in Amsterdam from 1986 until 1990. After Flamboyant ceased to exist, its archive became part of the IIAV collection at Atria – Institute on Gender Equality and Women’s History, Amsterdam.

4. Zami is a centre that organises meetings, trainings, and radio programmes by and for black, migrant, and refugee women. The organisation is based in Amsterdam but is a national organisation (see also Weiss, 2006).
5. Strange Fruit operated in Amsterdam between 1989 and 2002 and was founded initially as a workgroup within the Amsterdam chapter of the national LGBT organisation COC. The group had a horizontal approach, organised a wide variety of activities, and offered an alternative to the predominantly white Dutch LGBT scene. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the COC engaged in the setting up of municipal workgroups targeting 'ethnic minorities'. However, tensions between the COC and Strange Fruit led the latter to split off from the larger organisation and constitute itself first as a foundation and later as an association, which put further pressure on the group and to a certain extent contributed to its dissolution in 2002 (see El-Tayeb, 2011, pp. 128-137; Colpani & Isenia, 2018).
6. LOSON was a Marxist-Leninist Surinamese organisation active in the Netherlands in the 1970s and 1980s. The organisation initially focused on the decolonisation of Suriname (as well as solidarity with anti-colonial struggles worldwide). Around 1972 to 1973, as the news of imminent independence provoked a wave of Surinamese migration to the Netherlands, LOSON's focus shifted toward the racism experienced by Surinamese people in the former metropolis. Reeder's own movie *Onderneming Onderdak* (*The Shelter Enterprise*, 1982) documents LOSON's struggle around housing. Archival material such as posters, newsletters, pictures as well as the personal archive of Andre Reeder, amongst others, can be found at the International Institute for Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam. See: <http://hdl.handle.net/10622/ARCH03174>, accessed on January 20, 2019.
7. The Cosmic Theatre was an intercultural artists collective that was established as a production house and theatre stage in Amsterdam. It was run by the artist duo and couple Felix de Rooy and Norman de Palm, from Curaçao.
8. rukus! Federation was founded by Ajamu and Topher Campbell in 2000 in London. rukus! is a black LGBT arts and heritage organisation that provides a programme of community-based work with black LGBT artists, activists, and cultural producers. rukus! has focused on organising events, screenings, workshops, theatre performances, club-based events, debates, and exhibitions.
9. This quote is how IHLIA describes itself on its website, in the section devoted to the history of the documentation centre. See: <https://www.ihlia.nl/informatiebalie/geschiedenis-van-ihlia2/>, accessed on January 20, 2019 (our translation).
10. The Black Archives was founded in Amsterdam in 2015 and describes itself as follows: 'The Black Archives is a unique historical archive for inspiring conversations, activities, and literature from Black and other perspectives that are often overlooked elsewhere. The Black Archives documents the history of black emancipation movements and individuals in the Netherlands. The Black Archives is managed by the New Urban Collective. The Black Archives consists of unique book collections, archives, and artefacts that are the legacy of Black Dutch writers and scientists. The approximately 3,000 books in the collections focus on racism and race issues, slavery and (the) colonization, gender and feminism, social sciences and development, Suriname, the Netherlands Antilles, South America, Africa and more'. See: <http://www.theblackarchives.nl/about-us.html>, accessed on January 20, 2019.
11. Imagine IC is a documentation centre that is based in the Amsterdam South-east and is housed within the Amsterdam Public Library. It documents the lives of people and organisations living in Bijlmermeer based on a concept that they call 'collective heritage-making'. Through this concept, exhibitions, archives, and debates are co-created together with particular communities. See: <http://www.imagineic.nl/>, accessed on January 20, 2019.

12. This is a selection and translation of the response that Andre Reeder posted on IHLIA's Facebook page in response to the exhibition (originally in Dutch).
13. The exhibition *Diasporic Self: Black Togetherness as Lingua Franca* at Framer Framed, in Amsterdam, opened on December 13, 2018 and lasted until January 17, 2019. The exhibition was simultaneously held at 198 Contemporary Arts & Learning in London. The exhibition looked 'into the meaning, conceptualization, multiplicities and complexities of the notion of Black Togetherness across Europe'. It asked: 'in what ways does Black Togetherness manifest itself in visual and sonic cultures in various urban and contested spaces, institutions and architectures?' See: <https://framerframed.nl/projecten/black-queerness-diasporic-lives/>, accessed on January 20, 2019.

## Bibliography

- Aan niets overleden (Cause of death: Nothing). (1996). Directed by Andre Reeder. The Netherlands: Migranten TV Amsterdam.
- Ajamu. (2009). *We Live Here*. [display] Exhibited at the IHLIA, Amsterdam.
- Ajamu, X., Albertoe, L., Arnell, J., Din-Gabisi, N., De Jong, A., Vision, I. ... Obolo, O.b.o.l.o. (2018). *Diasporic self: Black togetherness as lingua franca*. [display] Exhibited at the Framer Framed, Amsterdam, 2018 November 30 - 2019 February 17.
- Ajamu, X., & Campbell, T. (2008). *Outside edge: A journey through Black lesbian and gay history*. [Display] Exhibited at the Museum of Docklands, London, February 7 - April 4.
- Colpani, G., & Wigbertson, J.I. (2018). Strange fruits: Queer of color intellectual labor in the Netherlands in the 1980s and 1990s. In S. Ponzanesi & A.J. Habed (Eds.), *Postcolonial intellectuals in Europe: Critics, artists, movements, and their publics* (pp. 213-230). London: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Ellerbe-Dueck, C., & Wekker, G. (2015). Naming ourselves as black women in Europe: An African American-German and Afro-Dutch conversation. In S. Bolaki & S. Broeck (Eds.), *Audre Lorde's transnational legacies* (pp. 55-73). Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- El-Tayeb, F. (2011). *European others: Queering ethnicity in postnational Europe*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Framer Framed. (2018). Black Queerness Diasporic Lives. Retrieved from <https://framerframed.nl/projecten/black-queerness-diasporic-lives/>
- Glad to be gay, right? (1992). Directed by Andre Reeder. The Netherlands.
- IHLIA. (2018). Geschiedenis van IHLIA. Retrieved from <https://ihlia.nl/informatiebalie/geschiedenis-van-ihlia2/>
- Imagine IC. [Home page]. Retrieved from <http://www.imagineic.nl/>
- International Institute of Social History. (n.d.). Archief LOSON (Utrecht). Retrieved from <https://search.iisg.amsterdam/Record/ARCH03174>
- Janssens, M., & Van Wetering, W. (1985). Mati en lesbiennes: Homoseksualiteit en etnische identiteit bij Creools-Surinaamse vrouwen in Nederland. *Sociologische gids*, 32(5-6), 394-415.
- Onderneming onderdak (The shelter enterprise). (1982). Directed by Andre Reeder. The Netherlands: Nederlandse Film en Televisie Academie.
- Peijl, D. van der (1984, July 2). Eenmaal leef je allemaal met potten en flikkers op een grote schaal. *NRC Handelsblad*.
- The Black Archives. (n.d.). About The Black Archives. Retrieved from <http://www.theblackarchives.nl/about-us.html>

Weiss, M. (Ed.). (2006). *Zonder wrijving geen glans: De meerwaarde van de ontmoeting ZAMI 1991-2006*. Amsterdam: Zami.

Wekker, G., & Lutz, H. (2001). Een hoogvlakte met koude winden: De geschiedenis van het gender- en etniciteitsdenken in Nederland. In M. Botman, N. Jouwe, & G. Wekker (Eds.), *Caleidoscopische visies: De zwarte, migranten en vluchtelingenbeweging in Nederland* (pp. 25-49). Amsterdam: Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen.

## About the authors

**Gianmaria Colpani** is a Lecturer in Gender and Postcolonial Studies at Utrecht University. He obtained his PhD in Philosophy and Gender Studies in 2017, from the University of Verona and Utrecht University. His research concerns contemporary transformations in the field of queer theory and politics, in particular the emergence over the past 20 years of the theoretical-political currents of queer Marxism and queer of colour critique. He is the co-editor (with Sandra Ponzanesi) of *Postcolonial Transitions in Europe. Contexts, Practices and Politics* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

E-mail: gianmaria.colpani@gmail.com

**Wigbertson Julian Isenia** is a PhD candidate at the University of Amsterdam in an NWO-funded research project on gendered and sexual citizenship in the Dutch Caribbean. His first book, *The Question of Dutch Politics as a Matter of Theatre: Theatre and Performance after the 2008 Financial Crisis*, was published in 2017 (Marburg: Tectum Verlag).

E-mail: w.g.s.j.isenia@uva.nl

**Naomie Pieter** is a queer and anti-racist activist and performance artist, whose work centres on making space for the intersections of those communities. She is the co-founder of 'Black Queer & Trans Resistance NL', which is currently setting up a Black Queer Archive to make visible stories that are missing in narratives of the history of the Netherlands. She also organises Pon De Pride, a party in Melkweg that offers a safe space for black and other LGBTQIA+ people of colour to enjoy dancehall music.

E-mail: nbpieter@gmail.com