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Sister Outsider and Audre Lorde in the Netherlands: on transnational queer feminisms and archival methodological practices

Chandra Frank

abstract

This article takes direction from the transnational feminist lesbian encounter that took place between the Dutch collective Sister Outsider and Audre Lorde in the 1980s to reflect on the role of archives within transnational feminist research. Drawing on archival materials from the International Archive for the Women's Movement (IAV) at Atria (Institute on Gender Equality and Women's History) in Amsterdam in the Netherlands, and the Audre Lorde Papers at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia in the United States, I consider how fragmented archives offer stories on kinship, intimacy and loss. Taking into account the 'absences' and 'presences' (Lewis, 2017) produced in this archival research project, I propose an archival research methodology that is rooted in a practice of 'orientation' (Ahmed, 2006a, 2006b), 'listening' (Campt, 2017) and 'intervention' (Appadurai, 2003).

keywords

archives; race; transnational feminism; BMR movement; queer methodology

introduction

I begin with evoking a transnational feminist lesbian encounter that took place in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, in the 1980s. Gloria Wekker, professor emerita, who remains one of the only Black woman professors in the Netherlands,[1] stumbled on a purple book called *Zami* in a Rotterdam bookstore in 1983. *Zami* was the very first book Wekker read by a Black lesbian author: Audre Lorde (1982). Born to Afro-Caribbean parents, and a self-described 'Black, lesbian,

[1] There are no official numbers that break down the percentage of women professors by race in the Netherlands.

mother, warrior, poet', Lorde's (2009 [1989], p. 214) work continues to offer significant contributions to Black feminism, queer theory and critical race studies. *Zami* soon began circulating around Wekker's community, which inspired her to call upon her Black lesbian consciousness-raising circle and invite Lorde to the Netherlands.[2]

Four women, Gloria Wekker, Tania Leon, Tieneke Sumter and Jose Maas,[3] had been informally organising literary events to make visible (politically) Black[4] lesbian culture[5] in Amsterdam; they formally adopted the name Sister Outsider after reading Lorde's (1984b) well-known publication.

The need to render Black lesbian culture visible should be understood as both an intervention and response to the absence of an analysis and of activist politics that attended to Black lesbian sexualities within the Dutch context. In 1984, these four women had learned, through a mutual connection, that Lorde would be teaching Black women's literature as a visiting professor at the Free University of Berlin, whilst receiving homeopathic care from a German doctor for her cancer diagnosis. Sister Outsider wrote to Lorde, care of Kitchen Table Press, to ask her to consider a visit to the Netherlands:

> Dear Ms. Lorde,
>
> [...] We are a non-formal group of Black lesbians, living in Amsterdam. We come from different parts of the world, South-Africa, Suriname, Netherlands Antilles—countries that are or have been colonies of the Netherlands. [...] We'd like to hear more of our Black sisters across 'The Great Divide' and would like to tell you also of our situation here in the Netherlands.
>
> (Sister Outsider, n.d.a)

Reflecting, Wekker recalls Lorde sharing the story of how the letter inspired an immediate reaching out to her (Lorde's) girlfriends to exclaim, 'that of all places there were Black dykes in Amsterdam' (Ellerbe-Dueck and Wekker, 2015, p. 58). Lorde visited the Netherlands in 1984 and 1986, forming a close bond with the women from Sister Outsider and the Dutch Black, Migrant and Refugee (BMR) movement, which operated from about the late 1970s until the early 1980s.[6] This account of a transnational feminist 'gathering' was largely pieced together from research

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[2] I do not suggest, however, that Lorde's arrival signalled the beginning of transnational feminist organising in the Netherlands, e.g., recent work by Mitchell Esajas (2018) and Jessica de Abreu (2018) points to early modes of transnational exchange in the early twentieth century.

[3] Jose Maas was later succeeded by Joyce Spies in Sister Outsider.

[4] Sister Outsider used 'Black' in the political sense, similar to Black feminists in the United Kingdom, as a political organising tool and practice of solidarity. The use of political Blackness in the 1980s was common in the Netherlands, and largely initiated by Moluccan and Indo women (who were inspired by the use of political Blackness in the UK). Not all Black, Migrant and Refugee (BMR) women embraced this term; the concept remains contested, and more in-depth research is required on the inclusions and exclusions of political Blackness. Notably, the use of the term by Sister Outsider has a historical intention that is different from the way Audre Lorde used 'Black'.

[5] This goal is stated in several unnamed documents and newsletters held in the Archive of Ruth Naomi (Tania) Leon, inv. nr. 23, Collection of the International Archive for the Women's Movement (IAV), Amsterdam: Atria, Institute on Gender Equality and Women's History.

[6] See Botman, Jouwe and Wekker (2001) for a comprehensive overview of the movement. The term 'BMR' is no longer in use in the Netherlands, and was shaped by postcolonial and labour migration. The term 'Black' was predominantly used by women from former Dutch colonies, the category 'Migrant' was added to account for Moroccan and Turkish women, including women from countries surrounding the Mediterranean who did not always feel comfortable with the use of 'Black'. Lastly, the category 'Refugee' was added to include women who had fled war-torn countries. The BMR movement is known for its unique constellation and widespread organising. Collectives organised either along ethnic lines, or around a particular theme or media form, resulting in radio shows, magazines and lesbian and gay groups. Examples of active organisations during this period are: Flamboyant, Marokkaanse Vrouwen Beweging, HTKB, Suho, Ashanti, Black Orchid, Tres Oemas, Strange Fruit, Zwarte Vrouwen Krant Arnhem and Zwarte Vrouwen Radio Amsterdam.

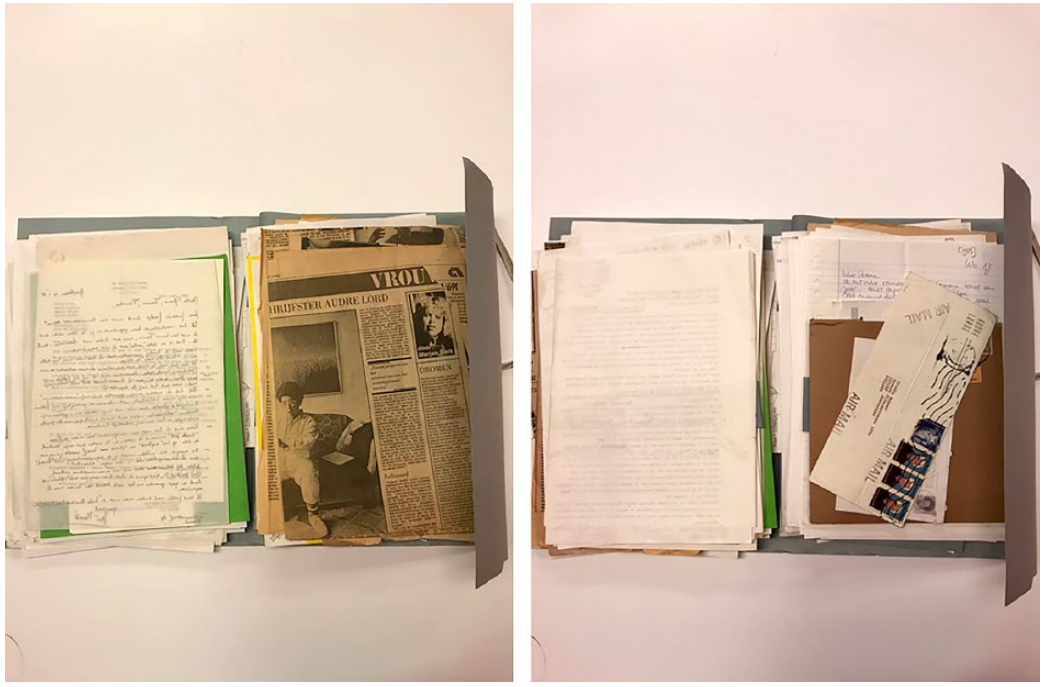

Figure 1 Sister Outsider materials at Atria
Source: Courtesy of the author

I did inside the archival reading rooms of Atria (see Figure 1), the Institute on Gender Equality and Women's History, which holds the Archive for the Women's Movement (IAV) in Amsterdam, and the Spelman College Archives at the Historically Black College of Spelman in Atlanta, Georgia. In my archival research diary, I note down:

> At Atria, in the city centre of Amsterdam, I look through the thick blue carton binder of materials that is labelled Sister Outsider and part of Tania Leon's personal archive.[7] Leon arrived in the Netherlands in 1973 after leaving apartheid South Africa, and became active in various collectives and organisations during the BMR movement. The binder is held together with a cotton string and contains a wide variety of materials; flyers, a button, newsletters, photographs, funding requests, correspondence exchanges, newspaper clippings and a variety of memorial tributes to Audre Lorde.
>
> I carefully sift through the documents and photographs while piecing together bits of information on one of the first Black lesbian collectives in the Netherlands. After reading several of Lorde's typed letters, graciously signed 'in the hand of Afrekete', I am curious as to whether the responses from the Sister Outsider collective might be part of the Audre Lorde Papers housed at the Spelman College Archives in Atlanta. In the finding aid, a descriptive tool that contains detailed information about a collection, for the Audre Lorde Papers provided to me by the Spelman College archivists, I enter the names of Tania Leon and Gloria Wekker, and indeed find a match under the section of 'personal correspondence' boxes, which later inspires my visit to Spelman's campus.

Having researched sections of the personal archives of Tania Leon and Audre Lorde, I was immediately struck by the interconnectedness of both women's lives that is present in the archival materials. Leon and Lorde were both diagnosed with cancer and died respectively in 1992 and 1996. Accounts of health, political work, relationships and death

[7] Sister Outsider Folder, held in the Archive of Ruth Naomi (Tania) Leon, inv. nr. 23, Collection of the International Archive for the Women's Movement (IAV), Amsterdam: Atria, Institute on Gender Equality and Women's History.

become the stories of what is left behind. Leon's decision to preserve two years' worth of Sister Outsider organising materials at Atria in Amsterdam, and Lorde's meticulous archiving process, reflected and held in the Spelman College Archives, made possible the construction of a transnational feminist archival project.

I situate and analyse this encounter between Lorde and Sister Outsider as a fragmented narrative that sheds light on the making of transnational feminist solidarity at a particular moment in time. I use the idea of transnational feminism as a framework to understand how solidarity was forged across difference within global white patriarchal capitalist societies. I draw inspiration from M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2010, p. xix), who state that the transnational offers 'a way of thinking about women in similar contexts across the world, in *different* geographical spaces, rather than as *all* women across the world'. Providing a detailed account of these '*different* geographical spaces' is imperative in order to prevent the overuse of 'transnational' to analyse modes of exchange (see Grewal and Kaplan, 2001; Nagar and Lock Swarr, 2010). The danger of such overuse is that the analysis of political solidarity may become trapped in a vacuum of 'transnational' without giving specific meaning to its use.

Taking up the specificity of my own geographical location informs the overall research design of this endeavour. While the absence of knowledge production on the BMR movement inspires me, this is not a recovery project of Sister Outsider and their relationship with Audre Lorde. Rather, I am invested in both addressing the complexities of conducting archival research and, inspired by Clare Hemmings (2011), asking why these stories matter. Transnational feminist research has the potential to make visible the intricacies of the making of solidarity, the articulation of Blackness and the construction of a lesbian feminist subjectivity.

Therefore, I argue that a transnational feminist archival methodology that is rooted in a practice of 'orientation' (Ahmed, 2006a, 2006b), 'listening' (Campt, 2017) and 'intervention' (Appadurai, 2003) is best placed to analyse the political solidarity forged between Sister Outsider and Audre Lorde. I take this approach to ask larger questions of how feminist and queer stories are told when contending with the complexities and unruliness of archives. Hemmings (2011) urges feminist scholars to take into consideration how narratives are constructed. Similar to and beyond the academic institution that Hemmings locates as a primary stakeholder in this process, the archive greatly impacts how stories and their afterlives are reckoned with. I argue that the archive and other sites of knowledge production, such as BMR collectives, are in fact more generative sites to pose questions on how feminist stories are made and remade.

I stay as close as possible to the language used by Sister Outsider in the archival materials, whilst being cognisant of the tensions such an approach produces. Sister Outsider used the identity category and framework of political Blackness, which in contemporary feminist and anti-racist organising is no longer actively used in the Netherlands. Being a non-Black woman of colour, I do not see the use or potency of the revival of political Blackness, as it does not attend to racialised hierarchies of difference and does not contribute to a wider analysis of anti-Blackness in Europe. Therefore, contending with these tensions is a necessary outcome of this project, which might inform how solidarity is shaped in the present.

In order to grapple with the inquiries outlined above, in the first part of this article I demonstrate how Sister Outsider involves the Netherlands in transnational currents. In the latter part, I contend with archival practices at Atria and Spelman, and finally I provide insight into the methods and methodology devised to make sense of how these materials might relate to each other.

'across the great divide': articulations of transnational feminism in the Dutch context

The making of transnational alliances within the Dutch context is directly influenced by its colonial history. The Dutch empire comprised what is now known as Indonesia (previously referred to as the 'Dutch East Indies'); territories in 'the West Indies', including Suriname; and the Caribbean Islands of Aruba, Curacao, Bonaire, Saba, St. Eustacius,

St. Maarten and the former Cape Colony in South Africa. Within the present-day Dutch Kingdom, there is a violent colonial construction of citizenship, which requires an analysis of who constitutes a citizen within the Dutch imaginary (see Jones, 2012, 2016). This division in the Dutch imaginary relates to the long use of the terms '*allochtoon*' (meaning from elsewhere, i.e. being of colour) vis-á-vis '*autochtoon*' (meaning native to Dutch soil, i.e. being white) by the Dutch government, which applied these categories in official policy and research (*ibid.*). The 'instabilities of citizenship', which Guno Jones (2016, p. 606) contends with in his work, trouble the geopolitical understanding of place within the Dutch Kingdom (Jordan, 2014; Wekker, 2016). Sister Outsider's writing also grappled with processes of exclusion to make sense of what it meant to inhabit space in the Netherlands. In the archival document titled *Survivors: A Group Portrait of Sister Outsider* (Sister Outsider, n.d.b, my translation), the women offer individual accounts of their trajectories, making a connection between the colonial project, migration, racist encounters and being a Black lesbian in a predominantly white society.

Sister Outsider provides a rich reading of belonging, race and sexuality, and yet historically there is a consistent lack of knowledge production on the BMR movement. For instance, recent scholarship on queer-of-colour mobilisation in the Netherlands and the US does not make mention of these queer and feminist collectives of colour within the Dutch context of the 1970s and 1980s (see Boston and Duyvendak, 2015). I argue that the lack of theorisation of these early collectives is directly related to what Wekker (2016, p. 2) refers to as 'white innocence', a dominant way of operating and being in the world that is rooted within a paradigm of colour blindness in the Netherlands. Wekker (*ibid.*, p. 23) deliberately uses this framework to highlight how the 'not-knowing' and 'not-wanting to know' result in wilful ignorance and failure to take into account how race operates as a 'fundamental organising grammar in Dutch society'. The implementation and maintenance of 'white innocence', through what Egbert Alejandro Martina and Patricia Schor (2018, pp. 149–150) call 'white order', is made clear in 'how populations and capital are spatially and socially "ordered" in the Netherlands'. Using these two frameworks helps to explain the mechanisms of structured exclusion, which not only informs how we can reimagine collectives such as Sister Outsider to cause rupture but also speaks to the normalisation of this 'white order' unjustifiably positioning histories such as the BMR movement as 'forgotten'. I argue that the production of the 'forgotten' narrative is the result of the violent structures that inform how space, knowledge production and, therefore, institutional archival sites are organised in the Netherlands. Ultimately, then, the use of Sister Outsider materials does more than just activate the history of this specific encounter—the use of these archives in fact becomes the embodiment of the refusal to be part of a 'forgotten archive'.

This article opens up questions on the use of transnational feminism in relationship to histories that speak to 'the intersections of racial formation, sexuality, empire, capitalism and colonialism' (Desai, Bouchard and Detournay, 2010, p. 49). In order to address how transnational feminism can be used to contend with these intertwined processes, I will turn to how Audre Lorde and Sister Outsider made sense of difference within their solidarity practice.

travelling cultural work as transnational feminist practice

In the document *Survivors: A Group Portrait of Sister Outsider* (Sister Outsider, n.d.b, my translation), mentioned above, the women embrace the popular phrase 'we are here because you were there'[8] to articulate their postcolonial presence in the Netherlands. The women state that they come from three different continents, 'Africa, Asia and Latin America', and have diverse ancestry: 'Jewish grandmother, Sikh father, Afro-Javanese mother, Chinese grandfather, Indian-Creole mother, Cape Coloured' ancestry (*ibid.*). Wekker writes that their personal histories function as social documents: 'they say more than just something about us, they share something about the arrival of the groups we belong to in the Netherlands' (*ibid.*) In the few available documents on Sister Outsider's organising, the women offer insight into how their arrival in the Netherlands from different Dutch colonies marked their subjectivities (*ibid.*). While

[8] Commonly used slogan in the 1970s and 1980s in the UK, attributed to, amongst others, A. Sivanandan (for example, see Younge, 2018).

going through the archival materials, I paid specific attention to how this encounter impacted the development of a transnational feminist practice between the women.

Audre Lorde's partner, Gloria Joseph (1992), aptly spoke of Lorde as a 'travelling cultural worker'. The embodiment of this term is noticeable in the way that Lorde travelled through making community with Black women and indigenous women across the globe. Recent scholarship places Lorde firmly within a transnational framework, which sheds a different light on previously understudied forms of coalition-building (see Bolaki and Broeck, 2015). Lorde's poetry, essays, speeches and teaching illuminate how Lorde offered 'theoretical articulations of solidarity, difference and responsibility' that further shape our present-day understanding of who and what is understood to be 'transnational' (Bolaki and Broeck, 2015, p. 4). Definitions of the 'transnational' are privileged within a Western context as they are bound up with questions of mobility. In considering Lorde's coalition-building with Black women in Europe, we need to be observant of how diasporic power dynamics operate and influence what becomes read as 'transnational'. I will further explore this through analysing how Sister Outsider and Audre Lorde engaged in conversations on difference that formed their articulations of a transnational feminist consciousness.

For Lorde (1992, pp. 276–281), who frequently engaged with Black women in the diaspora, it became part of her praxis to ask: 'Who are we? What are the ways in which we do not see each other? And how can we better operate together as a united front even when we explore our differences?'. Lorde's theorisation of difference further becomes visible in the conversations with Sister Outsider. The collective noted down, in reference to solidarity-making: 'One-Way traffic is not enough. Lorde is doing her work, but she wants us to do it [ours] too. She needs our histories, we need to spit out our swallowed pain and turn it into weapons in the struggle to survive and change society' (Wekker, n.d.). Here the significance of cultural work is not just about interpersonal exchange; it also constitutes the making of transnational constellations. The women of Sister Outsider write that their 'shared outsidership' functions 'as a protective barrier against their own internalised forms of oppression, the impossibility of discussing racism, the loneliness of being Black women in the movement' (*ibid.*).

For Sister Outsider, the commonalities of the collectives are that they are 'Black and lesbian'; apart from these categories, the collective notes that there are a lot of differences. In the British context, Nydia A. Swaby (2014, p. 24) argues that 'gendered political blackness was entirely the product of articulating histories of enslavement and colonisation'. This informs a focus on geographic locality shaped by colonialism instead of an analysis of racial difference. Lorde wrote about the pitfalls of political Blackness and pointed the women to the possible use of the term 'women of colour' that would be more inclusive, but which did not gain much traction in the Netherlands. The archival materials clearly show how the collective grapples with difference. While there is a commitment to understanding difference as an enhancement of solidarity practice, during Lorde's visit the women also question the politics of naming and what possibilities the categories of 'Black' and 'Women of Colour' hold (*ibid.*).[9] These discussions exceed the past as they inform how archival materials in the present are engaged. I will now look more closely at the two archival locations with which I worked.

archival desire paths: from Amsterdam to Atlanta

Drawing on Sara Ahmed's use of queer phenomenology, I consider what it means to be orientated towards these two specific archival sites, the IAV Collection at Atria in Amsterdam and the Spelman College Archives in Atlanta, and how the archival materials have orientated me in the research process. Ahmed (2006b, p. 6) argues that 'it is by understanding how we become orientated in moments of disorientation that we might learn what it means to be orientated in the first place'. Archival research is inherently a process of 'disorientation'. We might set out with tools to orientate ourselves, such as finding aids and a database, but in most feminist and queer archival research projects we are caught off guard by what we find—or do not find.

[9] Gail Lewis (1990) notes that what is lost in this debate is a critical analysis of the term 'woman', which remains unchallenged by Lorde.

Figure 2 Sister Outsider, from left to right: Tieneke Sumter, José Maas, Gloria Wekker and Tania Leon; Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 1984
Source: Photograph by Robertine Romeny; courtesy of Atria

Historically, feminists and queer people of colour have been locked out of dominant history-making processes and, therefore, as Muñoz (1996, p. 9) argues, out of 'material reality'. For me, the materials of Sister Outsider and Audre Lorde speak to the embodiment of a queer politics as well as the necessity of the embodied practice of memory. Jack Halberstam (2005, pp. 169–170) notes that, 'the archive is not simply a repository, it is also a theory of cultural relevance, a construction of collective memory, and a complex record of queer activity'. Halberstam's words resonate as they demonstrate that the 'queer archive' is not static but traverses multiple temporalities. To locate the Sister Outsider materials as a queer archive means to account for what is not represented in the imaginary of what is 'queer'. Thus, I use the image in Figure 2 as a point of orientation to start mapping queer-of-colour activity in the Netherlands. It is a photo taken of the women in the city centre of Amsterdam, one of the few actual photographs that are present in the IAV Collection, speaking to the complexity of tracing and documenting queerness for collectives of colour.

I spent four months researching in the IAV Collection at Atria in Amsterdam, between 2015 and 2018, and one week at the Spelman College Collection in Atlanta looking at the Sister Outsider correspondence. These two archival sites are vastly different in terms of their histories, locations and the materials they hold. It is not my aim to offer a detailed comparative analysis of these two archival sites. However, by simply working in two different locations, questions pertaining to the use of transnational feminist methodology immediately arise. I will therefore briefly address the specificity of both collections that have shaped my transnational feminist research design.

Since the Netherlands does not have a Black feminist and queer institutional archive,[10] Atria is one of the primary sites for conducting research into the BMR movement. The IAV collection was started in 1935, after what is called the 'first wave of feminism' in the Netherlands, making IAV one of the oldest collections about women and gender

[10] This will change with the recent emergence of the Black Archives in Amsterdam; see http://www.theblackarchives.nl [last accessed 20 February 2019].

worldwide.[11] The collection has historically been white-focused, which led early BMR archivists of colour such as Cisca Pattipilohy and Troetje Loewenthal to develop a strong critique of the racialised institutional memory practices of white archival institutions. This eventually inspired the start of Flamboyant, the first national documentation and research centre for BMR women, where Sister Outsider was known to organise too.[12] The critiques by BMR women were directly related to the way that white institutions would engage, code, catalogue and make available materials that pertain to racialised feminist and queer histories. The earlier critiques, voiced on the accessibility of materials, still resonate today as the lack of specialised knowledge on the BMR movement informs how materials can be found at Atria. For example, within the IAV Collection there are similar collectives and publications that were all part of the BMR movement and are either coded as <black women> or <black women's movement>; yet these two terms signify a different historiography when constructing a genealogy of the BMR movement. The first term indicates that the archival materials will be about Black women, while the second suggests that the materials in this particular record are part of a broader movement. These different coding systems make it impossible to have an understanding of the scope of materials that are related to the BMR movement in the IAV Collection.

In 1995, Atria started a project, *Information Service within the Field of Black and Migrant Women*, under the guidance of Pattipilohy, which set itself the task of working towards an anti-racist women's thesaurus.[13] This project offered an important attempt to challenge the racial information service structures of the archive, but it has not been continued, leaving the BMR archives (even more) vulnerable and scattered within the wider IAV Collection. I argue that due to these racialised power structures at play that determine how materials are processed, the act of archiving here turns into an institutionalised act of disappearance. Scholars have long noted the power dynamics that inform the selective processes within the archive; here I am specifically concerned with how the white feminist project (at Atria, in this case) continues to uphold and reproduce these power dynamics. After conducting research at Atria, Spelman College offered a different type of archival engagement. The way that we engage the spatiality of archival sites equally informs our relationship to the materials. When I first arrived at the Spelman College Archives, I entered the small reading room and saw several Black students engaged in archival research practice. The Spelman College Collections include the personal papers of, amongst others, Lorde,[14] Selma Burke and Toni Cade Bambara. As a Historically Black College, Spelman is not only a highly regarded college for women but also an epicentre for Black feminist thought. Spelman College offers an important model for how archives can be actively used through educational projects and thereby contribute to different forms of cultural and knowledge production. Furthermore, as both archival institutions were unaware of links between their materials, I propose that the very embodiment of this transnational feminist research project creates a new archival arrangement.

methodological considerations: on orientation, listening and intervention

Archival methods and methodologies are central to feminist research because they evoke questions on what archives are and do for feminist and queer knowledge production. Scholars have called for archival theory and practice to more

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[11] The Atria website states: 'In 1935 Rosa Manus, Johanna Naber en Willemijn Posthumus-van der Goot founded the International Archive for the Women's Movement (IAV). They did this to collect and preserve women's heritage, and to encourage scientific research on the position of women' (Atria, Institute on Gender Equality and Women's History, 'Collection', https://institute-genderequality.org/library-archive/collection/ [last accessed 14 December 2018]).

[12] Flamboyant was shut down due to lack of funding in the early 1990s and continued under the name Zami.

[13] See 'Naar een anti-racistische vrouwenthesaurus' ('Towards an anti-racist women's thesaurus', my translation) (van Groningen *et al.*, 1995), a brief written as a result of the sub-project adjustment women's thesaurus Project Informatieverzorging op het terrein van Zwarte en Migrantenvrouwen (Project Information Service within the Field of Black and Migrant Women, my translation).

[14] Dr Beverly Guy-Sheftall (2009), founder and director of the Spelman Women's Research and Resource Centre (WRRC), states that it was the friendship between Audre Lorde and Dr Johnetta B. Cole, Spelman's first woman president from 1987 to 1997, which led to Spelman becoming a home for Lorde's materials.

firmly engage with feminist practice to ensure an adequate representation of women in archives (Cifor and Wood, 2017). Recently, feminist archival scholarship has challenged traditional archival research through drawing on experimental approaches to methodology (Pester, 2017), the materiality of the archive and queer bodies (Cifor, 2017) and the need for an archival consciousness when dealing with the histories of Black feminists (Burin and Sowinski, 2014). I follow Yula Burin and Ego Sowinksi (*ibid.*, p. 115) in making the question 'Who's archiving and why, and for whom?' pertinent to the development of an archival consciousness and to the call for transparency. The 'Archives Matter Conference: Feminist, Queer and Decolonial Encounters', which I co-organised at Goldsmiths, University of London in 2016, made clear that this racialised and gendered question is not asked enough by archivists, researchers and artists who draw on archives within a shared transnational framework. The archive is a living site in constant flux, both desirable and contradictory for its potential and limitations. Questions posed by the generation active during the BMR movement on where to house materials, and the interest of younger generations in the archive, challenge the silence on race in archival information service practices and speak to the 'aliveness' of archives in a way that is pertinent for intergenerational cultural knowledge production (see Hall, 2001). The 'aliveness' of the BMR archives therefore urges necessary conversations with present-day feminist and anti-racist organisers who tackle similar issues.

The way that we 'orientate' towards specific archival materials is a self-reflexive process that shapes our desire to conduct archival research. In Ahmed's (2006a) conceptualisation of queer phenomenology, 'orientation' is sexualised in the same way that queer geographers understand space to be sexualised (e.g., Browning, 1998). Following Ahmed, I understand both the process of 'orientation' by and towards materials, as well as the actual archival spatial site, to be racialised, gendered and sexualised. The ability of materials to 'orientate' us is bound up in where they are housed. Sitting at tables surrounded by materials detailing the exchanges between Black lesbian women makes the space I inhabited inherently a sexualised site.

By drawing together archival materials that existed separately in two collections, inevitably new connections started to emerge across oceans, buildings, boxes and folders.

> After our elaborate meal, forging the bond with her [Audre Lorde] and each other, we walk to the nearby market, that I had promised her in letters and over the phone. [...] The colourful population of the market make Audre feel like she is in Benin or Kano; also after months in Berlin she gets a kick out of the large variety of fresh fish, vegetables and fruit. (Wekker, n.d., translation mine)

The photograph in Figure 3 shows Lorde and the Sister Outsider women at the Albert Cuyp market in Amsterdam. The photo was in an unlabelled envelope that is part of a bigger folder with snapshots of Lorde's European travels in Amsterdam, Berlin and Zurich. Together the snapshots connect, as Siona O'Connell (2014, p. 2) describes, 'memories, histories and languages in a very real way'. Going through the contents of the unnamed envelope, I recognise Amsterdam in the images and the events described in the written accounts that I had found during my earlier research in Atria. I am enticed when I come across a detailed written ethnographic account by Wekker (n.d.) on Lorde's visit to the Netherlands, from which I have shared a brief excerpt above. In situating these materials together, I purposefully let the archives 'speak', as neither material is fixed in the moment of their production. The juxtaposition of text and image gives a new meaning to the photograph that resides in the subtlety of the construction of kinship, and intimacy in the making of transnational feminist solidarity practice.

Lorde stands closest to the fish stall, while the Sister Outsider women stand together speaking amongst themselves. We do not see the women's faces, which somehow makes the photograph more of a representation of an everyday experience. The writing by Wekker on Lorde's visit details the joys of sharing food and the political conversations that took place during this visit in 1984. I place these exchanges within the context of heteropatriarchal capitalism that does not provide adequate structures for queers of colour to inhabit (see El-Tayeb, Haritaworn and Bacchetta, 2015). A queer spatial mapping arises from reimagining the space that Sister Outsider took up in Amsterdam.

The way that domestic space becomes lived and filled with transnational diasporic meaning becomes clear through Wekker's writing:

Figure 3 Audre Lorde and the Sister Outsider Collective at the Albert Cuyp Market in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 1984
Source: Courtesy of the Spelman College Archives

> At a quarter past nine, Audre, in a colourful African poncho, and I, in my turquoise t-shirt, are drinking tea and coffee respectively with apple pie. It turns out that Audre has been awake since six and has written in her diary and read. [...] Audre found books on Suriname in my bookshelf [...] and the next few hours I tell her, while she's making notes in her diary and supports me with sighs such as 'I hear you, woman', and 'say it out loud', about the history of 500 years of Suriname, the different populations and their customs, the languages, and the political situation. (Wekker, n.d., translation mine)

The description above is part of a feminist history-making process that requires a close listening to what happens in this moment in time. In developing this methodological framework, I follow Tina Campt's (2017) critical engagement with images within the archive of the African diaspora. The practice of 'listening to images' is proposed as an intervention that offers both a description and a method (*ibid.*, p. 5). Informed by Paul Gilroy's conceptualisation of the Black Atlantic, Campt interrogates how images of the African diaspora hold a sonic quality, which allows for a sensory interaction with photographs. Adopting a practice of 'listening' to the Sister Outsider and Audre Lorde archival materials is about tuning in to subtle qualities of the papers, the photographs and ephemera, to allow for a sensuous awareness of the fragmented stories they carry. Extending intimate listening from photographs to correspondence and documentation is not about 'giving voice' to those who are forgotten within the archive, but rather seeking to understand how the materials of BMR women might 'orientate' us. This listening practice attends to the genealogies of how the materials of Sister Outsider and Lorde relate to each other, and what kinds of insights they provide in the present. For instance, in going through the materials in both collections, I 'listen' for everyday experiences that articulate intimacy and the forging of solidarity practice in a multiplicity of forms; the sharing of space and food, and the snippets of political conversations that happen during this time. 'Listening' here becomes a way to tune into what Campt (*ibid.*, p. 4) calls the 'quotidian', an everyday practice of refusal. In this sense, these archival materials of Sister Outsider and Lorde offer an exploration of this practice of 'refusal', each of the materials performing this in its own way.

I suggest that this form of 'intimate listening' is about listening to materials as much as it is about these materials being listened-to. New forms of relationality emerge that shift our perception of where transnational feminism takes place. Mariam Fraser (2012) speaks to the different modes of relationality that exist between the materials and ourselves. The relationality with archival materials is more than just 'a relating to materials', as the very act of

'relating' brings about questions on the forms of possible relations (*ibid.*, p. 86). For Fraser (*ibid.*, p. 88), the potential transformative element of relating becomes evident in this question: 'How do I open this letter? How does this letter open me?'. By bringing together materials from two archival collections, a new transnational feminist relationality emerges. For instance, the exchanges between Leon and Lorde on politics and health produce a particular affect, and in my listening process I sense the genealogy that underlies these stories.

Alexander and Mohanty (2010, p. 31) describe 'stories' as 'maps' in that they mobilise both histories and geographies of power. Listening then also becomes a way of storytelling, a way to grapple with the mourning, loss, survival and sense of rupture in the archive. Towards the end of the Sister Outsider archival binder there are flyers and clippings on the memorial services held for Audre Lorde. Leon also kept the cassette tapes of the memorial service held for Lorde in Amsterdam. The materials that remain present a geography that is made out of these transnational feminist relations.

The 'relationality' to materials is therefore bound up with the movement, orientation and travelling we permit the materials to do with us. We orientate towards the materials as much as the materials orientate us. What does it mean to be moved by a letter? Where does a photograph take us? How might we imagine these sites beyond the archival reading room? In my archival research diary, I write:

> I am moved by how Leon's archive presents the anticipation of loss—the small exchanges on homeopathic medicine for the cancer diagnosis with Lorde [they used the same medicine]. Yet, I don't read this as an archive of just 'loss'. The connections that appear make me think of what it means to exist transnationally. Some materials are not so different from my own family archives—letters with South African stamps, photographs of family members and friends, a copy of a South African ID book.

There is a queer sense of displacement in working with these two archival collections; while new connections emerge, other connections might get lost or not picked up on. Part of a 'listening' practice is incorporating this sense of displacement as a queer-of-colour practice. We might need to unlisten to some of the narratives with which we are most familiar.

Queer-of-colour critique offers an important challenge to the construction of what is understood to be normative in society, which impacts how the queer archive might be engaged (see El-Tayeb, 2011, p. xxxv). Furthermore, this framework allows us to see that 'Europeans of color are produced as "queer," "impossible" subjects in heteronormative discourses of nation as well as migration' (*ibid.*). How do we contend with the (im)possibility of a Black lesbian presence within the archive? The existence of the Sister Outsider materials seems to articulate a presence and absence simultaneously.

In Figure 4, the collective poses on one of the Amsterdam canals; it is a close-up shot and the women have clearly posed for the camera, while in the two other photos included in this article they adopt less of a posed posture. The composition of this photograph conveys a 'presencing'. I take inspiration from Gail Lewis (2017, p. 3), who most poignantly describes the process of 'presencing' through asking how 'the black woman is made "present" and declares her presence otherwise'. In drawing from three conceptualisations of 'presence', taken from performance studies, psychoanalysis and decolonial political praxis, Lewis (*ibid.*, p. 4) offers consequential insights on what a 'praxis of "presencing"' would need to take into consideration:

> But what would the possibility of growth in the presence of 'black woman' require? One thing would be to acknowledge what becomes absent in us when we absent or disappear her particularity from our collective histories, current realities, future potentialities. Another requirement would involve development of our courage to acknowledge the harm done to her, historically and in the here and now, by utilising the resources we have in the archive in the interest of practising presencing. (*Ibid.*, p. 8)

Figure 4 Sister Outsider, from left to right: José Maas, Tania Leon, Gloria Wekker and Tieneke Sumter; Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 1984
Source: Photograph by Robertine Romeny; courtesy of Atria

I take Lewis's formulation of 'presencing' to inform the earlier described method of 'orientation' and 'listening', particularly taking into account that the presence of archival materials can contribute to the institutionalisation of absence. This is especially true when we think of how historically, queer histories of colour in Europe are not centred in academic knowledge production. The Sister Outsider materials are illustrative of the process of 'presencing' described by Lewis as they acknowledge and remind of 'the harm done' to Black women in the present and past.

This call for 'presencing' becomes even more urgent when considering the shifts in political organising in the Netherlands, including the meaning of 'Blackness'. For instance, Lorde (1984a) described in a letter to Leon the need for, 'examining the barriers to our working together politically and socially', which indeed attends to the particularities in our collective histories that concern Lewis. Archival research becomes contentious when particularity is erased within institutions such as Atria, which calls for the need for a specialised community-based archive and an engagement with the speculative. I therefore ask: What are other ways to 'know' an archive? How might we imagine other ways of 'knowing'? Can we summon the kitchen table as a witness to the formation of Black feminist speculative thought? In which ways does the archive operate as a site of refusal? As Alexis Pauline Gumbs (2018) demonstrates, a speculative engagement with the archive allows for a reclaiming of archival practice outside the realm of the institution.

conclusion

By way of conclusion, I would like to consider what our relationship to the materials previously discussed can be in the present. In which ways is this newly forged archive an intervention? Arjun Appadurai (2003, p. 16) urges us to 'see all documentation as intervention and all archiving as part of some collective project'. This proposition is made in relationship to the potential of the electronic archive and the role of imagination for a migrant archive. Migration, Appadurai argues (*ibid.*, p. 21), 'tends to be accompanied by a confusion of what exactly has been lost, and thus what

needs to be recovered and remembered'. While electronic archives are increasingly relevant, the idea of loss is resonant for transnational feminist archival work here. Not just the loss due to migration and movement, but loss produced by the limitation of archives to hold more complex forms of memory-making. After two years, Sister Outsider came to an end; the group felt that it was becoming too much of a therapeutic talking place for Black dykes and most of the women quite naturally moved on to do other things. A couple of typed draft newsletters by Sister Outsider with handwritten corrections conveyed the formal end of the collective on paper. The repetition of the same document in different forms signified that one end is not the ending—that somehow this ending is continuous.[15]

Situating the connections made between two archival sites in this article as an 'intervention' is made possible by a listening practice that attends to how loss, kinship and intimacy speak. An intervention might be as simple as sharing a poem, reading a eulogy or asking after dietary needs. This intervention takes on the transnational as a mode of relationality without assigning it a fixed meaning, and allows fragments of these exchanges to matter. Ahmed (2017, p. 17) speaks of feminism as a 'fragile archive, a body assembled from shattering, from splattering, an archive whose fragility gives us responsibility: to take care'. The sense of fragility that Ahmed describes reverberates, and picking up on these vibrations, however slight, might inform and disrupt future orientations and possibilities of archival practice. Perhaps here, in between the 'shattering' and 'splattering', lies an invitation to listen to how archives speak.

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author biography

Chandra Frank interrogates the role of archives, transnational queer kinship, and the politics of pleasure, with an emphasis on the Black, Migrant and Refugee women's movement in the Netherlands during the 1980s. She holds an MPhil in African Studies from the University of Cape Town and is a PhD candidate at Goldsmiths, University of London. Currently Chandra holds a guest lectureship at the California State University Los Angeles Pan African and Latin American Studies Department.

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