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## THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE HETEROPATRIARCHAL REALMS OF HISTORY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY: A QUEER HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF ALAN HOLLINGHURST'S *THE SPARSHOLT AFFAIR*

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### ABSTRACT

In the last decades, a renewed scrutiny and interest in the outsiders' histories and identities attract attention in the literary and academic milieu, especially contemporary historical fiction. Within this frame, Alan Hollinghurst has been a notable figure for the configuration and depiction of homosexuality for not only historicization but also fictionalization. He has also been a prolific historical novelist from 1988 to explore multiple sexualities by uncovering their marginal status through various historical periods as opposed to the heteropatriarchal realms of history and historiography. In *The Sparsholt Affair* (2018), Hollinghurst presents an alternative flow of history from the period of the Second World War to the present day from the perspective of sexual minorities. This study aims to shed light on the transformation of the attitudes to homosexuality and its evolution through the various historical events and decades via the descriptions of diverse queer identities. Furthermore, it focuses on the interrogation of the representations of marginal histories and identities by exploring the rediscoveries of underrepresented voices in a harmony with the indispensable desire to retrieve an imaginary past and visible identities.

**Keywords:** Alan Hollinghurst, Queer history, Queer identity, Postmemory.

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## TARİH VE TARİHYAZIMI HETEROPATRIARKAL ALANLARININ DÖNÜŞÜMÜ: ALAN HOLLINGHURST'UN *SAKINCALI YAKINLIK* ADLI ROMANININ KUIR TARİH BAĞLAMINDA İNCELENMESİ

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### ÖZ

Son yıllarda, dışlanmış bireylerin tarihlerine ve kimliklerine yönelik hem akademik camiada hem de edebiyat dünyasında ilgi artmaktadır. Bu bağlamda çağdaş İngiliz romanlarındaki artış -özellikle de çağdaş tarihsel kurgudaki artış- dikkat çekicidir. Bu çerçevede Alan Hollinghurst, kuir kimliği hem kurgusal hem de tarihsel açıdan tasvir etmesi sebebiyle çağdaş İngiliz tarihsel yazınında dikkat çeken yazarlardan biridir. Buna ek olarak 1988'den günümüze, tarih ve tarihyazımı heteropatriarkal alanlarına karşıt olarak, eşcinsel kimliğe çeşitli tarihsel dönemlerdeki marjinal durumlarını betimleyerek tarihsel bir boyut kazandıran üretken bir romancıdır. Hollinghurst, *Sakıncalı Yakınlık* (2018) romanında cinsel azınlıkların perspektifinden İkinci Dünya Savaşı döneminden günümüze alternatif bir tarih akışı sunmaktadır. Bu çalışma, eşcinselliğe yönelik tutumların çeşitli tarihsel olaylar ve farklı tarihsel dönemler çerçevesinde geçirdiği dönüşümüne, farklı kuir kimliklerin tanımları üzerinden ışık tutmayı amaçlamaktadır. Ayrıca, bu çalışma, hayali bir geçmişi ve görünür kimlikleri geri kazanma yönündeki vazgeçilmez arzusuyla uyum içinde, yeterince temsil edilmeyen seslerin yeniden keşfedilmelerini araştırarak, marjinal tarih ve kimliklerin temsillerinin sorgulanmasına odaklanmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Alan Hollinghurst, Kuir tarih, Kuir kimlik, Post-bellek.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

As a contemporary postmodern historical approach, “queer history” aims to establish itself as a recognised academic discipline that raises the voices of marginalised which have been historically overlooked. Since the 1990s, it has propounded to critically examine the concepts of history, identity, and difference. This approach involves reinterpreting the past events in light of current conditions through a historical inquiry. An increased fascination with the histories and identities of underrepresented individuals attracts attention in intellectual and literary circles, especially in contemporary British historical fiction. Alan Hollinghurst plays a significant role in exploring and representing homosexuality both through fictional narrative and historical context by portraying a range of sexual orientations. In addition, he has been a notable and productive writer for nearly forty years by exploring the marginal position of individuals in a community within the context of the heteropatriarchal realms of history and historiography. Hollinghurst offers an alternative portrayal of the Second World War years and afterwards in *The Sparsholt Affair* focusing on the experiences of sexual minorities as a means of presenting an alternative history. Consequently, this study aims to examine how Hollinghurst reimagines a certain era of British history through the lens of queer individuals, discovering the connections among history, identity, loss, and sexuality to reveal the gaps, silences, and exclusions within the conventional historical narratives. Essentially, its objective is not only to analyse the different portrayals of marginalised individuals and uncovering their hidden narratives throughout the war era but also to recover visible fictional accounts of in/visible identities.

Queer history challenges the methodologies of historical inquiry and knowledge by establishing new avenues to render previously obscured identities accessible, serving as a project for historical reconstruction. To grasp the concept of queer history, one must first understand queer theory as queer history is based on the theoretical foundations of queer theory. This study attempts to examine queer history in terms of its theoretical context and relationship to queer theory. Therefore, the contributions of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler to queer theory should be reconsidered in this context.

Foucault is a pivotal figure in the poststructuralist conceptualization of history, identity, and sexuality with his works, particularly *The History of Sexuality*. His publications might be regarded as crucial sources of queer theory. In view of Foucault, knowledge, power and discourse are crucially interactive notions in terms of historical constructions of the subjects. Foucault explains sexuality as “the name that can be given to a historical construct [. . .] a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power” (1978, p. 105-6). From this perspective, sexuality manifests as a complex domain due to the power dynamics and discourses imposed on genders and bodies, leading to diverse sexual identities.

Butler is another notable figure in queer theory since she combines Foucauldian theory of discourse with psychoanalysis. Butler articulates her viewpoints on the poststructuralist ontology about the formation of the subject. She asserts: “The subject is constituted by power, that power does not cease at the moment the subject is constituted, for that subject is never fully constituted, but is subjected and produced time and again” (1995, p. 47). Additionally, Butler explains that there are certain “theoretical products” and “fully embedded organizing principles of material practices and institutional arrangements, those matrices of power and discourse” which produce “a viable subject” (1995, p. 42). In other words, Butler underlines the constructed core of the subject through historical discourses and institutions. Butler further states, “it is important to remember that subjects are constituted through exclusion, that is, through the creation of a domain of deauthorized subjects, presubjects, figures of abjection, populations erased from view” (1995, p. 47). With the influence of power and discourse, the role of exclusion is emphasized by Butler as the subjects are formed through exclusion by establishing a realm of invisible identities.

### 1.1. A Queer Historical Analysis of Alan Hollinghurst's *The Sparsholt Affair*

Alan Hollinghurst's novel *The Sparsholt Affair* explores how attitudes toward homosexuality have changed in British culture over several decades. The story revolves around the lives of a family, the Sparsholts, and it contains five sections, each of which portrays a different era and point of view. It starts in Oxford in the 1940s, where a group of friends are fascinated with the enigmatic personality and sexuality of the dynamic and athletic student David Sparsholt. The elements of desire, concealment, and social expectation are hinted at this first attraction and interest in this part of the story. On the other hand, the story follows Johnny, the openly gay son of David Sparsholt, as he grows up and enters the art world through the post-war age. The two generations are very different from one another: Johnny's life exemplifies the more open, layered, and varied views on sexuality in modern society,

whereas David's homosexuality is concealed, characterized by scandal, and limited by social shame. Hollinghurst skilfully presents the issues of identity, heritage, public perception, and the evolution of British social and sexual conventions via this intergenerational perspective. The novel's complex narrative structure, varying points of view, show how society's perceptions of homosexuality have changed over time and how the issues of history and family are interwoven with personal identity.

Queer history is recognized as a legitimate discipline that enhances the perspectives of marginalized groups historically underrepresented. In "The Challenge of Lesbian and Gay Studies", Jeffrey Weeks asserts that identifying a singular theoretical framework which integrates queer studies is challenging. Over the past twenty-five years, the history of labour in queer studies has exhibited some significant theoretical divergences. In the 1980s, the predominant discussions on this field of study revolved around the tedious dichotomy of essentialism versus constructionism, specifically regarding the extent to which homosexuality can be perceived as a fundamental core identity and minority experience that remains consistent across time and space, or as a historically contingent and culturally specific phenomenon, a "historical invention." In this context, queer history has interrogated the rigidity of sexual and gender boundaries, presenting sexual categories as fluid and mutable and enhancing and deliberately radicalizing constructionist perspectives. It proposes a personal and critical perspective that is intentionally subversive and transgressive of conventional categories of thinking and experience, so creating a place for "alternative voices." Weeks highlights the constructionist rise of queer history, which reclaims a disregarded past that incorporates alternate viewpoints, highlighting its significance in establishing historical continuity and a shared collective queer identity (2000, p. 2). In this sense, Hollinghurst's *The Sparsholt Affair* provides a rich atmosphere to examine various ideas pertinent to queer history. The novel addresses the historical reclamation of marginalized queer voices, the examination of essentialist versus constructionist perspectives on identity, and the intentional violation of conventional societal standards. It portrays the issues of invisibility, silence, and the coded presence of queer identities. Concerning "suppressed, oppressed, silenced and excluded" identities, Çıraklı & Aldemir state that "there is a close relationship between the denial of their body and voice, sexuality and writing" (2017, p. 119). Through the novel, Hollinghurst depicts the sexual affair between Evert and David:

This Sparsholt affair, which had consumed my friend's life and pressed for a few weeks so oddly on my own, was surely quite unknown to the rest of the world. Evert, I felt certain, had no other confidant, and it was unthinkable that Sparsholt himself would speak of it. It had already assumed its true scale, something fleeting, and entirely personal, too hidden to rate even a footnote in the history of its time. I doubt anyone has spoken a word of it till now" (2018, p. 80).

These lines illustrate the cultural silence on homosexuality in mid-20th century Britain and the ways in which queer individuals managed their identities beneath legal and social repression. With this narration, Freddie Green contemplates unspoken nature of homosexuality during that period and depictions of the contemporary social and cultural environment. Hollinghurst describes the coded behaviours and collective repression of queer identities in the mid-20th century, particularly in the Oxford-set opening chapters, through David Sparsholt's relationships and the dynamics among male characters during their university years, highlighting themes of secrecy and repression. Such instances illustrate the conflict between normative repression of queer identities and the subtle expressions of these identities through covert signals and implicit understandings. The novel examines how queer individuals manoeuvre their lives in eras and environments where public recognition was unattainable, especially during the mid-20th century. Such kinds of events from the introductory chapter of the novel explore the clandestine mechanisms of queer desire inside a repressive cultural framework.

Queer history expands constructionist viewpoints, depicting sexual categories as fluid. It offers the background and framework for comprehending the expression, repression, or transgression of queer desire throughout history (Week, 2000, p. 6). Consequently, queer desire shapes the narratives, environments, and resistances that create queer history. Queer desire denotes emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction that transcends heteronormative paradigms and interrogates rigid identity classifications and social norms. It frequently highlights fluidity, transgression, and opposition to binary conceptions of relationships and sexuality. Throughout several historical epochs, queer desire often manifests in clandestine forms due to societal stigmatization (Halperin, 2002, p. 92, 103). Hollinghurst's *The Sparsholt Affair* examines the pursuit of queer desire in the 1940s, highlighting characters who lead double lives to align their desires with cultural norms. In terms of the affair between Evert and David, Hollinghurst writes: "Surely it was a mean and wicked game, to encourage a belief without putting it in words, ready to rebuff it if Evert dared to act on it. But not to dare would leave him with tormenting regret. Their element was the night and the unspoken, in all its queasy ambivalence" (2018, p. 77). It is obvious that queer desire is often repressed, coded, and unspoken. This quotation encapsulates the clandestine nature of queer longing in historical contexts where open expression is impossible due to legal and social constraints. The novel reveals how queer individuals navigate these constraints through implicit communication and hidden desires, reinforcing the constructionist argument that identity and sexuality are shaped by historical and cultural forces rather than fixed,

innate categories. Moreover, it conveys the emotional cost of repression as Evert oscillates between desire and fear, which refers to a struggle shaped by public expectations. His hesitation and “tormenting regret” underscore how queer individuals in the 1940s had to negotiate their desires within restrictive norms, illustrating the broader historical realities of queer existence. Queer history provides a framework for understanding not only queer desire itself but also the mechanisms of its suppression and resistance. In this way, Hollinghurst’s novel becomes a literary manifestation of the historical struggles that queer history seeks to reclaim and interpret.

Queer desire highlights a divergence from traditional norms, creating opportunities for unconventional manifestations of love, relationship, and identity. Butler posits in *Gender Trouble* that desire is associated with “a site of subversive multiplicity” functioning as a site of subversion and challenging the culturally constructed norms of gender and sexuality (1990, p. 26). Queer desire further deals with invisibility and erasure, especially in historical contexts where same-sex attraction and gender nonconformity have faced stigma or criminalization. Consequently, it functions both as an individual experience and as a political catalyst, contesting systems that exclude or oppress non-heteronormative identities. In literature and theory, queer desire typically arises as an investigation of longing, concealment, and the quest for authenticity under oppressive settings, demonstrating its dynamic interplay with power, autonomy, and resistance (Butler, 1990, p. 44). Hollinghurst describes:

It was on their brief walk back to college, in the barely penetrable dark, that the new possibility took shape, unseen, between them. That it couldn’t be happening, was only a possibility, gave it a kind of terror to Evert. The walk by the bickering river, that had been stiff and self-conscious on the way out, now was hurried along home on a giddy-making swirl of altered meanings. When David abruptly took his arm Evert stumbled to get into step—“Shape up!” said David, and the unstated promise of the light grip and then squeeze of his elbow against David’s ribs had to struggle with the wild unlikeliness that anything further could happen (2018, p. 76).

It highlights the remarkable encapsulation of the inherent tensions in queer desire weaving together the themes of longing, invisibility, and socio-cultural constraints. The moment between Evert and David encounters occurs in a liminal space: physically, they walk in near darkness reinforcing concealment, but emotionally, there is a charged, energetic undercurrent of unspoken possibility. Besides, it emphasizes that queer desire often emerges in coded, nonverbal ways. This is consistent with Butler’s notion of subversion in which gender and desire do not always manifest within established cultural frameworks but instead disrupt them through subtle, performative acts. The moment of their encounter in darkness suggests both a protective covering and an enforced secrecy. Moreover, the “terror” Evert feels is significant. It underscores the way same-sex attraction, particularly in historical contexts, has been loaded with fear not only of rejection but also of legal and social repercussions. Hollinghurst explores how queerness must cope with public surveillance, and here, Evert’s internal struggle reflects the historical reality of queer erasure. For this reason, queer desire is associated with a desire for presence in history.

Queer desire is defined as “a desire for history” “among people with same-sex attractions and nonnormative gender identities” (Koskovich, 2016, p. 3). Through *The Sparsholt Affair*, Hollinghurst delicately analyses queer desire as a need for history and identity among individuals with same-sex inclinations and nonnormative expressions. This kind of desire resonates throughout the novel, particularly in its exploration of concealed queer histories and its generational consequences. A notable example is the portrayal of David Sparsholt’s affair and its repercussions over time. His secret relationship is characterized by the mainstream restrictions of mid-20th-century England, where queer impulses were both criminalized and culturally obliterated. David’s affair integrates into a fragmented queer history that is unarticulated but profoundly influences the novel’s later characters. Hollinghurst writes, “the imagined and salaciously reconstructed events themselves. That was all people kept, of a scandal, as time passed and the circumstances were lost—a blurred image or two, the facts partial or distorted, the names eluding memory” (2018, p. 178). *The Sparsholt Affair* posits that queer history relies on speculation and reconstruction with the truth shaped by the biases, silences and omissions of the dominant culture. Through the depiction of the intergenerational impact of David’s affair, Hollinghurst both reflects the ongoing struggle for queer self-definition and invites readers to consider how history itself is shaped by what is remembered and what is deliberately forgotten. Hollinghurst’s multi-layered narrative emphasizes the interplay between queer desire and the yearning for historical significance as the characters endeavour to maintain and comprehend their identities in spite of prevailing limitations and historical obliteration. The intergenerational examination in the novel effectively illustrates Koskovich’s claim depicting queer desire as both a personal yearning and a means of historical and cultural reclamation.

Through *The Sparsholt Affair*, the desire for history is also seen through artistic endeavours since the characters engage with writing and painting to preserve identity and resist historical erasure. Freddie Green, Evert Dax, and Johnny Sparsholt each exemplify distinct strategies regarding this impulse revealing how queer individuals traverse and articulate their existence within historical and artistic heritage. Freddie, as a historian and diarist, represents the chronicler figure who observes, records, and reconstructs the past. His diary functions as a private



form of historical documentation capturing moments that conventional narratives neglect. During a time when queer lives are devalued or criminalized, personal documents such as Freddie's diary serve as subtle acts of resistance asserting identity even in secrecy. As the son of the celebrated novelist A. V. Dax, Evert grows up in the shadow of a literary legacy that he does not fully inhabit. Indeed, he remains a spectator. His engagement with writing is mediated through his father's work, which he struggles to appreciate. On the other hand, his engagement with painting is more sincere. His collecting of paintings serves as a substitute for direct creative expression, as though he attempts to curate a history for himself rather than writing one. This passive engagement with art contrasts with Johnny Sparsholt's active role as a painter. Johnny Sparsholt applies his personal and historical awareness through painting, employing visual art to represent transient moments and personal identities. His work, like Freddie's documentation, aims to protect what is frequently overlooked, standing in opposition to the temporary and encoded essence of queer historical memory. Via these three characters, Hollinghurst illustrates how artistic expression becomes a vital tool in the desire for history offering a way to inscribe queer lives into a cultural and historical framework that has traditionally sought to erase them.

Furthermore, queer desire is associated with "a desire for self-affirmation and a common heritage among people with same-sex attractions and nonnormative gender identities" (Koskovich, 2016, p. 18). Hollinghurst's *The Sparsholt Affair* poignantly embodies this association of queer desire. The novel's multigenerational narrative examines how individuals navigate their identities within changing social situations, highlighting their desire for belonging and historical connection. Johnny Sparsholt epitomizes this yearning for self-affirmation. Johnny, an openly queer person, experiences a trip that sharply contrasts with his father's concealed existence, who lived during a time when same-sex relationships were both ostracized and criminalized. Johnny's relationships and artistic work enable him to forge a life that affirms his identity while striving to engage with the wider queer community. His art serves as a figurative endeavour to recover and affirm queer identity, both personally and collectively, embodying the communal dimensions. The novel examines the significance of a collective queer legacy in terms of historical memory. The traces of David Sparsholt's existence including his scandals, connections, and concealments, constitute a fragmentary queer narrative that Johnny must confront. While talking about Johnny and his father, Evert and his young queer friends, Denis and Ivan, discuss in this way:

"No, you're right—he said he wants to be a painter," said Evert, who in the past had loved their treacherous bedtime breakdowns of their friends' behaviour, but now longed to change the subject.

"Very nice bum though," Denis said.

"I really didn't notice."

"You lying old queen," said Denis.

"I am not!"—Evert grinning and running his hand almost nervously over Denis's chest. Denis had acutely sensitive nipples—he scowled but there was a gasp of a smile as he said,

"Ivan was wildly excited to meet the son of a famous criminal."

"I'd hardly call him a criminal—what he did would be quite legal now."

"You're forgetting the detail" (Hollinghurst, 2018, p. 169).

These lines present the intergenerational tensions and shifting cultural landscapes of queer identity and queer desire. The contrast between Johnny's openness and his father's concealed existence is a crucial theme through *The Sparsholt Affair*, and it is obvious that David's past actions, once criminalized, would no longer be considered illegal under contemporary laws in spite of the remnants of social stigma. David's scandal, which involves a Tory MP, Leslie Stevens, and a colleague, Clifford Haxby, has left a lasting impression on public consciousness. Although Johnny is free to exist as an openly queer man, he is burdened by the legacy of his father's scandalous past. This corresponds with the issues of historical memory and queer heritage, as Johnny is compelled to negotiate and reconstruct his identity in the wake of his father's notoriety. Besides, this quote highlights the transmission of queer history across generations and the challenges of reconstructing a past hidden by prevailing cultural norms. It embodies the theme of queer legacy, in which the characters attempt to piece together a history that has been fragmented by secrecy and changing social attitudes. In other words, these lines signify the desire to reconstruct a collective history that has frequently been obscured or suppressed by rules and regulations imposed by society. Moreover, the existence of intergenerational interactions and mentorships in the narrative underscores the transmission of queer history. The characters' relationships serve as a bridge which promotes a sense of unity and continuity among the queer community. Hollinghurst depicts queer desire as both a personal need and a collective act of affirmation and inheritance validating a common heritage.

Queer desire, consequently, functions as a desire for "the emergence of queer heritage initiatives in the traditional field of historic preservation" (Koskovich, 2016, p. 19). In *The Sparsholt Affair*, queer desire acts as a catalyst for the reclamation and preservation of a historically silenced or marginalized queer heritage. The narrative functions as a form of preservation and the physical spaces also function as preservation of queer sites through the novel. Hollinghurst employs narrative as an essential instrument for preserving queer history highlighting how stories, spoken or unspoken, facilitate the survival and endurance of underrepresented identities. The novel covers multiple

generations, connecting interrelated lives and events and explores how storytelling serves as a means of recording and preserving experiences that may be obliterated by historical erasure. Through its form and content, the novel demonstrates how personal and collective narratives are crucial for queer heritage. In other words, it emphasizes the intergenerational transmission and preservation of queer history. Johnny resides in a distinct epoch characterized by increased transparency and recognition of queer identities. Nonetheless, Johnny's existence is influenced by the implicit legacy of his father's deeds. This interaction reveals how queer narratives frequently rely on indirect inheritance via coded stories, implicit understandings, and intergenerational gaps. Hollinghurst's narrative structure emphasizes this continuity depicting the interconnected nature of queer lives across time in spite of external silences. The novel's portrayal of queer spaces such as clubs, gatherings, and private houses serves as a metaphorical account of preservation. These spaces appear to be repositories of lived experiences, reflecting the core qualities of community and resistance. Hollinghurst describes a queer club as: "All around them in the fluent glancing colours of the lights men half their age danced, shoulders rolling, hands rising and pointing; among them Johnny spotted here and there the bald and grizzled pillars of his own generation, and was troubled by them for a second, and then as quickly grateful that some looked older than him" (2018, p. 389). This description stresses the existence of intergenerational relationships within queer spaces illustrating the continuity of queer history. Johnny's recognition of both younger and older men symbolizes the simultaneous existence of past and present queer experiences confirming the concept of a collective heritage and shared historical memory.

Queer history can be related to memory studies which also deals with "gender- and sexuality-related aspects of memory through the concept and practice of queering memory," as "a practice of innovative and generative history-making, one that has the capacity to reorder time and memory" (Dragojlovic & Quinan, 2023, p. 3-4). In *The Sparsholt Affair*, Hollinghurst intricately explores the dynamic relationship between memory and queer history, demonstrating how individual and collective memories influence the understanding and representation of queer identities over generations. To examine *The Sparsholt Affair* within the frame of memory and postmemory, the intergenerational transmission of queer history and identity is remarkable within the narrative. Hollinghurst's narrative pertains to both memory as personal recollections and direct experiences and postmemory as the inherited, reconstructed, and affective attachment to a past not personally experienced.

*The Sparsholt Affair* is a complex exploration of memory, history, and queer identity, examining the dynamic interaction between individual recollection, collective memory, and the gaps created by social and historical erasure. The novel, spanning several decades, explores how memory, both personal and cultural, affects the understanding of identity, sexuality, and belonging, particularly with regard to the evolving social circumstances of queer existence in Britain. The Sparsholt scandal serves as a crucial example of the novel's engagement with the instability of memory and the erasure of queer history. Although it is a significant moment in David's life, the details remain obscured, fragmented, and reconstructed through rumour and speculation rather than any definitive record. It is variously described via different perspectives as "a dim nexus of provincial misconduct," "a national scandal" and "a horrible mess" (Hollinghurst, 2018, p. 168). In this sense, Hollinghurst underlines how queer histories are often preserved not in official records but in rumours, silences, and private recollections. As Evert reflects, "That was all people kept, of a scandal, as time passed and the circumstances were lost—a blurred image or two, the facts partial or distorted, the names eluding memory" (Hollinghurst, 2018, p. 178). This demonstrates that memory is fluid, shaped by personal biases and cultural narratives reinforcing the novel's broader meditation on how history, especially queer history, is often rewritten, concealed, or forgotten. Underlining the instability of memory, Pierre Nora asserts that "memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived" (1989, p. 8). Paul Ricoeur elaborates on this discussion by highlighting the complex interrelation between memory, forgetting, and historical representation. In *Memory, History, Forgetting*, he argues that forgetting is not merely the absence of memory but an active force that shapes the reconstruction and interpretation of the past. He contends that "forgetting is the emblematic figure of the vulnerability of the historical condition" (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 412), emphasizing that historical narratives, especially those related to marginalized communities, are prone to erasure and distortion over time. This situation is obvious through *The Sparsholt Affair*, as the Sparsholt scandal, while crucial to David's private history, is never completely detailed but rather existing as a fragmented memory, influenced by the prejudices and constraints of those who endeavour to recall it. In Hollinghurst's novel, memory is not a static storehouse of facts but a fluid construct shaped by forgetting and selective remembrance in cultural context. By portraying the Sparsholt scandal as something that is simultaneously present and obscured, Hollinghurst dramatizes how queer histories have often been lost or distorted, surviving only in scattered anecdotes and rumours rather than in any verifiable historical account.

Highlighting the fragile, subjective nature of memory, the transmission of queer history often occurs via informal, unofficial and private channels through the novel. Hollinghurst presents memory not as something preserved in official records but as something that survives through art. For instance, Johnny, as an artist, deals with memory

via visual representation. His work encapsulates transient moments, personal histories, and the ephemeral nature of experience, emphasizing how memory is preserved not through documentation but through affective and sensory traces. In other words, queer history, lacking official archives, exists through creative reinterpretation and interpersonal relationship. This corresponds with Ann Cvetkovich's notion of the "archive of feelings" positing that queer history is frequently maintained through emotions, intimate networks, and transient modes of remembrance rather than official historical records, which can be associated the feelings of traumatic experiences (2003, p. 7).

Queer history can be connected to trauma in terms of the omissions or exclusions from the archive. Within queer history and trauma studies, sexuality is correlated with trauma through a queer perspective on the concept proposing a new construction of sexual trauma. Facing institutional neglect and the erasure of history, queer archive has emerged through grassroots initiatives, in tandem with cultural and political movements that seek recognition for marginalized and traumatized histories and narratives (Cvetkovich, 2003, p. 8). Queer history necessitates a radical archive of emotion to accurately document intimacy, sexuality, love, activism, and the domains of experience that are challenging to record using conventional archival materials. Therefore, queer archives confront the profound historical loss associated with sexual existence and the development of sexual communities. Understanding queer archives, which encompass emotional and traumatic records, aids in revealing certain "idiosyncrasies," especially their "queerness." They address certain iterations of the resolve and tenacity to "never forget," which imparts urgency to the archives of traumatic history. The existence of queer history is a contentious reality, and efforts to document and preserve it are frequently complicated by the obscurity surrounding private life, especially sexuality (Cvetkovich, 2003, p. 241-2). In other words, queer history may be regarded as examples of traumatic or repressed narratives due to their invisibility and omissions. It contrasts with the conventional archive due to their queerness resulting from a profound historical loss. Hollinghurst depicts the Sparsholt affair as "entirely personal, too hidden to rate even a footnote in the history of its time" (Hollinghurst, 2018, p. 80). "History" refers to conventional history and mainstream archive while the Sparsholt affair is an instance of queer history, which should be repressed or omitted from the official historical account. It is never fully explained through the novel; therefore, it exemplifies repressed queer narratives that reveal the traumatic experience of invisible identities as a historical loss. Besides, when David was in Oxford, one of his friends, Peter Coyle painted a portrait of him; however, David's head was absent from the portrait. This absence functions as a powerful image for Sparsholt's enigmatic identity and his resistance to be fully recognized or captured. The absent head may signify various issues: David's hesitance to be entirely exposed, his fragmented life, and the difficulties others, such as Johnny, face in constructing an overall perception of him. The exclusion also corresponds with the novel's extensive examination of hidden identities and fragmented facts, particularly with queer history and private legacies. In "Queer and Black Martyrdom in Alan Hollinghurst and Paul Mendez," Yebra describes this portrait as the representation of "the original traumatic event" and he proposes, "for Johnny Sparsholt and his friends, they continue acting out the inarticulacy of David's portrait, especially when encountered by his son. The wounds are open and the new generation, albeit sexually liberated, remains stuck, unable to find redemption" (2022, p. 61-62). The absence of David's head becomes not just a personal or aesthetic omission but a haunting absence that resonates through generations. It functions as an implicit and constant rupture in Johnny's life, reflecting the broader narrative of queer history characterized by gaps, silences, and omissions, constructing personal and collective identities. Hollinghurst's narrative intricately weaves the themes of queer historical loss and generational trauma, suggesting that even in an era of greater sexual freedom, the shadows of omission and repression continue to shape the lives of those who follow.

Concerning the interrelation among queer history, generational trauma, and memory studies, postmemory is another significant concept to analyse *The Sparsholt Affair* in terms of the transmission of queer history. In "The Generation of Postmemory," Marianne Hirsch describes postmemory as "a structure of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience [. . .] as a consequence of traumatic recall but at a generational remove" (2012, p. 6). Hirsch further maintains, "Postmemory's connection to the past is thus not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation [. . .] These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present" (2012, p. 5). *The Sparsholt Affair* intricately engages with the concept of postmemory, particularly in the ways it explores the transmission of queer history, trauma, and social change across generations. Postmemory indicates the influence of the traumas and experiences of preceding generations on the lives of individuals who did not directly experience them. Through the novel, postmemory is evident in the fractured and disguised inheritance of queer identity, as younger generations inherit and reinterpret the cultural and personal experiences of their predecessors. It employs a multi-generational narrative framework to demonstrate the indirect and mediated essence of memory, particularly regarding queer history, which has generally been neglected, repressed, or erased from dominant historical narratives.

Through *The Sparsholt Affair*, queer postmemory can be associated with cultural forgetting. As Johnny endeavours to discover his father's history, he has to cope with a pervasive cultural amnesia. Hollinghurst proposes that the



historical marginalization of queer identities is not accidental but rather a deliberate act of erasure. The novel's structure, which conceals critical details about the Sparsholt scandal and conveys history through fragmented viewpoints, reflects the frequent obscuration or distortion of queer history. Within this frame, postmemory and queer history intersect in profound ways as both grapple with the inheritance of trauma, the reconstruction of silenced pasts, and the creation of alternative narratives that challenge dominant historical accounts. Hirsch's postmemory elucidates how the descendants of trauma survivors inherit both historical awareness and the emotional and psychological burdens of prior experiences. In terms of queer history, postmemory serves as a mechanism for conveying the challenges, erasures, and resilience of queer groups through generations. Due to the frequent exclusion of queer identities from official archives and historical records, postmemory is essential for preserving and reclaiming queer history via cultural memory, storytelling, and artistic expression (Hirsch, 2012, p. 16-18). Hollinghurst states: "Johnny strolled on, with an uncanny sense of knowing this town in a thousand details, the past showing through the present, and of being on the brink of saying goodbye to it for ever" (2018, p. 404). In this sense, the novel interrogates the ethics of not only forgetting but also remembering. Johnny's "uncanny sense of knowing" while being "on the brink of saying goodbye" indicates a liminal position that reflects the fundamental nature of queer postmemory. The town, similar to queer past, is full of familiar details but they are unattainable. This reflects how queer history have commonly been erased, intentionally concealed, or left unarticulated, requiring future generations to reconstruct them from fragmentary evidence. In addition, the phrase of "the past showing through the present" precisely illustrates the function of queer postmemory: it manifests not as a straightforward remembrance but as subtle traces of historical events beneath the surface in current existence. Johnny, as a second-generation observer of his father's history, perceives this intangible presence with an awareness of a past he can sense but never really recover.

This situation can also be associated with the notion of queer temporality. The concepts of postmemory and queer temporality intersect in their challenge to linear, normative understandings of history, time, and inheritance, offering alternative ways to engage with the past and reimagine the future. Queer temporality disrupts the heteronormative timeline, which assumes a progressive life schedule of "birth, marriage, reproduction, and death" (Halberstam, 2005, p. 2), by emphasizing discontinuity, delay, and nonconformity to societal expectations. In *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*, Elizabeth Freeman argues that queer temporalities exist "outside of linear, serial, and end-directed historical time (2010, p. 40), allowing for a more flexible relationship to history and identity. Freeman explores how time disciplines bodies into heteronormative life paths through what she terms chrononormativity as "the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity" (2010, p. 3). By resisting chrononormative structures, queer temporality offers alternative rhythms of living, fostering modes of existence that defy reproductive imperatives. Freeman further asserts that queer temporalities "are points of resistance [. . .] propose other possibilities for living in relation to indeterminately past, present, and future others: that is, of living historically" (2010, p. xxii). This perspective is harmonious with postmemory's challenge to conventional generational inheritance, as both frameworks emphasize non-linear transmission, affective engagement with history, and the potential to disrupt dominant narratives of time and identity. *The Sparsholt Affair* disrupts heteronormative timelines and explores alternative forms of historical transmission spanning multiple decades and shifting between different generations. Johnny, the novel's queer protagonist, inherits a fragmented and obscured past regarding his father's scandal and the broader queer history of his time. In this sense, queer history is not passed down in a traditional linearity. This corresponds with postmemory, which highlights the indirect and affective transmission of history, as opposed to direct experience. Similar to queer temporality, postmemory contests the notion that the past is a straightforward inheritance, revealing how memory is permeated with gaps, omissions, and silences, paralleling Johnny's perception of his father's history.

## 2. CONCLUSION

This study provides a theoretical framework for examining queer history regarding the intersections of gender, sexuality, history, and memory. It scrutinizes the queering of traditional narratives to incorporate diverse viewpoints and experiences, hence challenging conventional interpretations of history and memory. It has concentrated on the discussion about the reimagining of a particular crucial era of British history from the viewpoints of the marginalized identities. *The Sparsholt Affair* is a significant novel as it depicts multiple sexual identities and examines the construction of identity via the contexts of wartime and the post-war period. Hollinghurst depicts not only the constructed nature of history but also the constructed nature of subjectivity through *The Sparsholt Affair*. He meticulously delineates the conventional heteronormative society and profound transformations in gender roles resulting from the wartime conditions. Hollinghurst reinterprets a potential homosexual history shaped by modern queer issues, employing literary and historical sources within the contexts of warfare and its aftermath. He both admires and values historical knowledge and records while simultaneously challenging the conventional norms of conservative historiography. The queer characters in *The Sparsholt Affair*, specifically David Sparsholt, Evert Dax, and Johnny Sparsholt, illustrate the marginalized identities and sexualities in relation to history, loss, identity, and sexuality. Consequently, Hollinghurst seeks to highlight their invisible existence throughout the historical narrative and to reinterpret history by addressing the omissions and gaps from

the viewpoint of the oppressed identities. As a novelist, he disrupts the mainstream historical narratives through his artistic approach aiming to unearth the marginalized voices and overlooked perspectives of the excluded. He elucidates the horrific memories or experiences of the major characters through the narrative of *The Sparsholt Affair*. This novel is a significant literary text which posits queer history, identity, and desire at the forefront of the narrative, challenging the heteropatriarchal constructs and ideologies of British history and culture. It highlights Hollinghurst's capacity, capability, and competence in engaging with original advancements and contemporary theoretical notions in history, identity, gender, and sexuality politics by contesting conventional interpretations of these concepts.

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### **ÇALIŞMANIN ETİK İZNİ**

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Yazar 2: Araştırmanın uygulama kaynaklarını ve uygulamanın kapsamını belirlemiştir.

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