

Lotte (Charlotte) Hahm (1890–1967)

Lotte Hahm was one of the most prominent and colorful figures of the lesbian, gay, and trans* subculture in Berlin during the Weimar Republic. Born in Dresden, she appears as an activist in many publications about the history of LGBTIQ subculture in Berlin during the Weimar Republic.¹ Although a biography of her life has not yet been written, new research was conducted about her private and professional life as part of a larger research project.² Recent discoveries concerning Hahm's subcultural activities could also be made, in particular concerning her work during the German Empire, the Weimar Republic, and the Nazi era.

Altogether six different photographs and illustrations from various lesbian magazines could be found of Hahm. Some of these were printed several times, often in connection with Hahm's advertisements for bars and clubs. A list of primary sources can be found here: https://lesbengeschichte.org/material_hahm_d.html.

Lotte Hahm was born Charlotte Hedwig Hahm on May 23, 1890. She was from a protestant family in Dresden. Her mother was Alwine Wagner (1866–1920), and her father was the salesman Carl Hahm (1864–1931). Lotte had three siblings. In 1916, her youngest sister Agnes Hahm (1897–sometime after 1943) had a note added to her birth certificate when she was approximately 18 on order of the district court that she was “not female but male,” and that her name would from this time forth be Joachim Karl Hahm.³ We can only speculate as to the reasons for this, but it is possible that Agnes was born intersexual and was identified or defined as female at birth. Or Lotte's brother could have regarded himself as transsexual. Perhaps Joachim wanted to exercise his right to determine his own gender. In any case, the decision of Hahm's

¹ For more information about Lotte Hahm and the current state of research (2021), see Ingeborg Boxhammer and Christiane Leidinger, “Offensiv – strategisch – (frauen)emanzipiert: Spuren der Berliner Subkulturaktivistin* Lotte Hahm (1890–1967),” *GENDER – Zeitschrift für Geschlecht, Kultur und Gesellschaft* (Jan. 2021): 91–108, here 93.

² The micro research project “Neue Spuren zu Leben und Wirken der Berliner Subkultur-Aktivistin* Lotte Hahm (1890-1967) und ihres persönlichen Umfelds” (New Findings Regarding the Life and Work of Lotte Hahm (1890-1967), an Activist in the Subculture of Berlin and Her Immediate Environment) at the University of Düsseldorf was generously funded by the Berlin Senate Administration of Law, Consumer Protection, and Anti-discrimination, Department LGBTI, October – December, 2018.

³ StadtA Dresden, 1083/1897. Many thanks to Ralf Dose for pointing out this reference. Joachim Karl Hahm married the clerk Anna Klara Prätorius (1893–1963) from Dresden on September 11, 1926. See ancestry.de, accessed July 23, 2021.

sibling to change his name can be assumed to have influenced her own self-perception regarding her gender.

After graduating from school, Lotte Hahm trained to be an office clerk. Around 1920, she opened her own mail-order bookshop.⁴ She is then believed to have moved to Berlin shortly after her mother died the same year.

Founding subcultural clubs and networks in Berlin

After moving to Berlin, Hahm founded the Violetta Ladies' Club (*Damenklub Violetta*) in 1926, probably in December. It was called a "Damenklub" (Ladies' Club) because, in the 1920s, if not before, the German words *Dame* for "lady" and *Freundin* for "girlfriend" were code for "lesbian."⁵ Hahm published witty advertisements for events in lesbian magazines accompanied by portraits of herself nonchalantly wearing a tuxedo, her hair very short. Her club was also referred to as a "leading organization" in the magazine *Frauenliebe* (Women's Love) at the end of 1927.⁶ Famous women like the comedian Claire Waldoff (1884–1957) and the actress and feminist Senta Söneland (1882–1934) are said to have frequented the club.⁷ As a multifunctional event manager, Hahm successfully organized a huge variety of events: from a moonlit steamboat ride, to letters sent around the club, a "polonaise with hats," and a "cream puff eating contest," for which she often performed humorous interludes.

Hahm's political and visionary goal was apparently to turn the Violetta Ladies' Club into a kind of cultural and political base for an effective movement that fought for the rights of lesbians and possibly also 'transvestites'.⁸ Hahm wanted to establish a broad

⁴ See Directory of Dresden and its suburbs 1913-1921.

⁵ Christiane Leidinger, *LSBTI-Geschichte entdecken! Leitfaden für Archive und Bibliotheken zur Geschichte von Lesben, Schwulen, Bisexuellen, trans- und intergeschlechtlichen Menschen. Wege zur Identifizierung und Nutzung von relevanten Quellenbeständen Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts bis Anfang der 1970er Jahre*, published by the Senatsverwaltung für Justiz, Verbraucherschutz und Antidiskriminierung, Berlin 2017, 23.

⁶ *Frauenliebe*, 1927, no. 52. See also Heike Schader, "Die Gemeinschaft frauenliebender Frauen in den 1920er Jahren in Berlin – eine soziale Bewegung?" in *Politiken in Bewegung: Die Emanzipation Homosexueller im 20. Jahrhundert (Geschichte der Homosexuellen in Deutschland nach 1945, vo. 5)*, ed. Andreas Pretzel and Volker Weiß (Hamburg: Männerschwarm Verlag, 2017), 117–144, here 135.

⁷ See *Die Freundin*, 1930, no. 43.

⁸ For more on the term "lesbian" throughout history, see Christiane Leidinger and Ingeborg Boxhammer, "'Lesbian like' Geschichte – Vom Wettstreit richtiger Bezeichnungen, Verdächtigungen, Lesbensex und einer Vermisstenanzeige" in *History is unwritten. Linke Geschichtspolitik und kritische Wissenschaft*, ed. AutorInnenkollektiv Loukanikos (Muenster: edition assemblage 2015), 144–159, available online at: <https://historyisunwritten.wordpress.com/history-is-unwritten-als-pdf/>, accessed July 10, 2021. – By placing transvestite in quotation marks, the term is meant as a direct reference

network for women by women. She therefore initiated a “correspondence circle” in the ladies club in 1929, which was meant to serve as a platform for women to get to know each other. The correspondence circle had the character of a network, and the Violetta acted as an exclusive hub for like-minded women to meet and talk to each other. The networking idea was apparently a success, because Hahm wrote, rather grandiloquently, that the Violetta had received “hundreds of letters from all cities.”⁹ Hahm even occasionally traveled to places herself¹⁰ to help found local chapters of the network and “give directives for the organization and the expansion of our women’s movement.”¹¹ Hahm’s goal was to establish lesbian clubs in different cities – also abroad – that were connected each other and formed a strong, effective organization. As she said, “not just dances and social events will bring you equality; you also have to fight if you want respect and dignity. The eagerness to fight must fill your hearts and shine in your eyes. That is why you should organize yourselves in the Bund für ideale Frauenfreundschaft [Association for the Ideal Friendship of Women].”¹² Hahm also developed new practices of solidarity in subculture, including the redistribution of money among lesbians. She also did not charge an entrance fee for lesbians who were unemployed and/or lived in poverty, and out of solidarity she often gave them the earnings from parties in her club.

In early 1928, the Violetta Ladies’ Club also began calling for the organization of ‘transvestites’ on several occasions.¹³ In 1929, “about 60 ladies and gentlemen” met at an organizational event led by Hahm that was initiated by the Bund für Menschenrecht (Union of Human Rights).¹⁴ Despite there being a group headed by Hahm, attempts to organize were apparently difficult, and there were many conflicts. A few months later, in 1930, the association D’Eon was also founded, apparently as

that indicates how this group referred to itself, how it was founded, and how it evolved. We do not use it as a term of description here, which is why we always use it in quotation marks.

⁹ Lotte Hahm, “Klubnachrichten über Violetta. Korrespondenz-Zirkel,” *Die Freundin* 1929, no. 5. See also the list of previously unknown writings by Lotte Hahm, available online at: https://www.lesbengeschichte.org/material_hahm_d.html.

¹⁰ Lotte Hahm, “Klubnachrichten über Violetta. Korrespondenz-Zirkel,” *Die Freundin* 1929, no. 5.

¹¹ *Ledige Frauen*, 1929, no. 7.

¹² Lotte Hahm and Friedrich Radszuweit, “Aufruf an alle gleichgeschlechtlich liebenden Frauen,” *Die Freundin*, 1930, no. 22.

¹³ *Liebende Frauen*, 1928, no. 7.

¹⁴ [Käte] Kroneberg, “Bericht über die Transvestitenversammlung, am 11. Oktober Gründung einer Transvestitengruppe, Berlin,” *Die Freundin*, 1929, no. 18. – “The Bund für Menschenrecht (Union of Human Rights) should not be confused with the earlier Bund für Menschenrechte (Human Rights Federation), although the latter also (but not exclusively) represented the interests of homosexuals.” See Christiane Leidinger, “Der anarchistische Bund für Menschenrechte 1903-1906 – eine fragmentarische Spurensuche”, *Mitteilungen der Magnus Hirschfeld Gesellschaft* (35/36, 2003), 43-50.

an alternative, at the Institute of Sexology (Institut für Sexualwissenschaft) in Berlin.¹⁵ This parallel development suggests that Hahm was not involved in, and did not found, the transvestite association D'Eon, as was previously assumed. Meanwhile, trans people became more and more present in the lesbian press, despite the potential for conflicts within and between the different transvestite groups. In the beginning of 1931, there were hardly any clubs that did not offer evenings for 'transvestites'. This cultural representation and participation was also a result of Hahm's work.

Thoughts on Hahm's gender self-identification

In her subcultural activities, Hahm apparently regarded herself as a homosexual woman and also as a homosexual transvestite¹⁶ – in other words, as a woman who wore pants and kept her hair very short. This appearance and behavior did not correspond to the norms of her gender at the time. Her self-confidence in the photographs present one form of many possible "feminine masculinities"¹⁷ and can be interpreted as being on the *spectrum of femininity*, or femininities, which for her also meant "being" a *woman*.¹⁸ It is unclear whether, and to what extent, Hahm saw this performance, which deviated from her role "as a woman," which is always defined as heterosexual, as relating to her own homosexuality.¹⁹ Obviously, she did not adhere to the norms regarding her gender in general and her style of clothing and hair in particular. She simply looked how she wanted to look. She continued to refer to herself as "Lotte" – a clearly feminine nickname for Charlotte (and one she chose herself) – and she used the feminine forms of German words such as "leader" (*Leiterin*) along with "girlfriend" (*Freundin*), "ladies" (*Damen*) and "women" (*Frauen*), for example. It

¹⁵ For more on this, see also Rainer Herrn, *Schnittmuster des Geschlechts. Transvestitismus und Transsexualität in der frühen Sexualwissenschaft* (Gießen: Psychosozial-Verlag, 2005), 153.

¹⁶ This view is shared by Laurie Marhoefer in her *Sex and the Weimar Republic. German Homosexual Emancipation and the Rise of the Nazis* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 62.

¹⁷ Claudia Breger, "Feminine Masculinities: Scientific and Literary Representations of 'Female Inversion' at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* (2005, 1/2): 76–106. For more on this term used in singular with a reference to forms, see Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, (5th edition) (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005 [1998]), 46f. See also Katie Sutton, *The Masculine Woman in Weimar Germany* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013 [2011]), 13.

¹⁸ Hahm was also possibly involved in normative discussions about "virile" and "feminine" "types," "roles," and "patterns of behavior." See also Heike Schader, *Virile, Vamps und wilde Veilchen. Sexualität, Begehren und Erotik in den Zeitschriften homosexueller Frauen im Berlin der 1920er Jahre* (Königstein/Taunus.: Ulrike Helmer Verlag, 2004), 107–117, 122–126.

¹⁹ We do not know how Hahm behaved outside of the club and how she reacted when people assumed she was a certain gender. If she wore pants and a blazer or something similar in public, she risked being reported and prosecuted according to § 183a RStGB. Whether she owned a so-called transvestite certificate, for which she would have needed an evaluation by a sexologist, as Jens Dobler surmises must be left unanswered. See Jens Dobler, *Von anderen Ufern. Geschichte der Berliner Lesben und Schwulen in Kreuzberg und Friedrichshain* (Berlin: Bruno Gmünder Verlag, 2003), 114.

therefore seems unlikely that Hahm did *not* identify herself as a woman. Her political and emancipatory writings also demonstrate that she shared feminist views – however, with some exceptions. On one occasion, she signed her name “Lothar Hahm”²⁰ – in other words, with a male first name – and twice she used the male form of “captain” (*Kapitän*) in ads for the moonlit steamboat trip.²¹ She also used the male form of “master of ceremonies [*Konferencier*] L. Hahm.”²² However, these references rather point to the feminist and lesbian appropriation of male professions, positions of authority (“captain”, “master of ceremonies”), and attributions.

Two dedicated subcultural activists: Lotte Hahm & Käthe Fleischmann

During this time, Hahm was together with the restaurant proprietor Käthe Katharina Fleischmann (1899–1967).²³ Fleischmann had rented the club rooms in 1930 and placed them at Hahm’s disposal. Thanks to Fleischmann’s support, Hahm was able to run her lesbian bars independently. This meant that, from then on, she was no longer “just” a club manager who had to negotiate the right to temporarily use locations, most of which were owned by heterosexual men. She then opened the Monokel Diele (Monocle Vestibule) in March 1931 and the Manuela Bar in February 1932. It was important to Hahm to establish a welcoming atmosphere and reach as many people as possible. She also wanted to reach out to lesbians who lived isolated lives, saying: “In my clubs, I will make sure that all girlfriends feel comfortable and that they have the chance to talk about all the issues we are especially interested in. Also, those among us who are lonely will find entertainment in a nice *Kabarett* [form of cabaret] and other surprises.”²⁴ Hahm not only established new locations where the door was always open; she also created many jobs in service and for all kinds of artists. Many people worked for Hahm, including the grotesque dancer Walt Carmer/Walfried Ka(r)mer (1900–1998), the designer Toni Ebel (1881–1961),²⁵ the vaudeville lecturer Lola Gray (born 1893), the writer and artisan Elsbeth Killmer (1890–1957), the musical whistler

²⁰ *Die Freundin*, 1930, no. 35.

²¹ Lotte Hahm, “Mondschein-Dampferpartie von ‘Violetta’,” *Die Freundin*, 1930, no. 27.

²² *Die Freundin*, 1931, no. 32.

²³ Landesarchiv Berlin (Berlin State Archive: LAB) A Rep. 358-02 no. 125038, Bl. 1. For more information about Käthe Fleischmann, see the Entschädigungsakte (restitution file) of Katharina Käthe Fleischmann no. 4159, Landesamt für Bürger- und Ordnungsangelegenheiten (LABO) Berlin.

²⁴ Lotte Hahm, “Geschäftliche Mitteilungen,” *Die Freundin* 1932, no. 17.

²⁵ See Lotte Hahm, “Japan in Berlin,” *Die Freundin*, 1930, no. 15. For more on Toni Ebel, see Raimund Wolfert, “*Sage, Toni, denkt man so bei euch drüben?*” *Auf den Spuren von Curt Scharlach alias Charlotte Charlaque (1892 -?) und Toni Ebel (1881-1961)* (Berlin, 2015), available online at: https://www.lesbengeschichte.org/bio_charlaque_d.html.

Lea Manti (1886–1960),²⁶ and the musicians Siegfried Robert (born 1903) and Walter Rosen (1903–1943) who specialized in entertaining music.²⁷

Denunciations, closures, and new establishments

Hahm and Fleischmann were unable to enjoy their shared achievements for very long, however. Already in the fall of 1932, SA men from the Nazi Party began demolishing Fleischmann's businesses. The disenfranchisement and persecution of Jews during the Nazi regime meant that Fleischmann was also ultimately forced to sell her liquor licenses and other possessions at a huge financial loss.

During the Nazi regime in 1933, the magazines of the homosexual movement were prohibited, and subcultural venues that were not already closed were used for observation. Some groups continued to meet in secret under different names, and Hahm immediately changed the name of the Violetta Ladies' Club to the Sonne (Sun) Sports Club. As its chairwoman, she worked hard to keep it running until the end of 1934/beginning of 1935, if not later.²⁸ In this way, she, Fleischmann, and others continued to organize secret dance evenings for lesbians and trans*(vestites). However, they were denounced in 1935 to the police, who then controlled the meetings through surveillance, raids, and arrests.²⁹ After the club was banned, the ever resourceful Hahm found new ways to bring women together. She opened a bed and breakfast on the small, isolated island of Hiddensee in the Baltic Sea, probably for lesbians. She also worked as a trader of textiles in the Berlin metropolitan area in 1937, but business was not as she had hoped and she did not pay her hired driver. He then sued her for fraud and told the police things that, in his opinion, would paint Hahm a criminal who should be persecuted, saying: "Ms. Hahm is exceptionally perverse in a

²⁶ See Ingeborg Boxhammer, "Lea Manti (1886-1960) 'Who Gives a Damn about Women's Clothing and Whistles with Her Pinky Fingers': A New Approach to the Life and Work of the Musical Whistler" (Bonn, 2020), available online at: https://www.lesbengeschichte.org/Englisch/bio_manti_e.html.

²⁷ LAB A Pr Br. Rep 030-02-05 no. 106: 4. Walter Rosen was expelled from the Reich Chamber of Music in 1935 and was deported to Auschwitz concentration camp in 1943, where he was murdered. See https://www.lexm.uni-hamburg.de/object/lexm_lexmperson_00002227, accessed July 10, 2021.

²⁸ LAB A Pr Br. Rep 030-02-05 no. 106: 4–5. Information about the *Sportclub* was first mentioned by Jens Dobler in *Von anderen Ufern*, 113–114.

²⁹ For more on the denunciations, see Ingeborg Boxhammer and Christiane Leidinger, "Sexismus, Heteronormativität und (staatliche) Öffentlichkeit im Nationalsozialismus. Eine queer-feministische Forschungsperspektive auf die Verfolgung von Lesben und/oder Trans* in (straf-)rechtlichen Kontexten," in *Homosexuelle im Nationalsozialismus: Neue Forschungsperspektiven zu Lebenssituationen von lesbischen, schwulen, bi-, trans- und intersexuellen Menschen 1933 bis 1945*, ed. Michael Schwartz (Munich/Vienna: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2014), 93–100.

feminine as well as masculine way.”³⁰ This means that neither Hahm’s femininity nor her masculinity complied with the norms understood by the driver as respectable. She was sentenced to pay a fine and serve time in prison. However, sources for this have not yet been found, and we can assume that she did not go to prison.

The details stated in her case files are grounds for revising previous assumptions about her case. The secret subcultural meetings, the bed and breakfast on the island, and several civil lawsuits are all evidence that Hahm was not, as contemporary witnesses had assumed and researchers believed, imprisoned in the Moringen concentration camp at the beginning of 1935 or at a later date.³¹ A criminal case like this would surely have been used against her in the fraud case from 1937. This also means that Hahm must have been confused with another lesbian woman who was held prisoner in the concentration camp.

The situation of Hahm’s partner Käthe Fleischmann

Fleischmann was persecuted for anti-Semitic reasons, and she lost her entire livelihood in 1938. From 1939 to 1941, she was forced to do hard physical labor at the East Harbor in Berlin. When she injured her foot in an accident at the end of 1941,³² she escaped during medical treatment. On the run, and with her ankle in a cast no less, she was completely reliant on a steady stream of new people to help her and provide a place to stay. Hahm also helped her at the end of 1941, but she stayed with her for only a short time.³³ Hunted and hiding in different places, Fleischmann barely survived the Nazi regime.

Hahm and Fleischmann went their separate ways in the end of the 1950s. Käthe Fleischmann died in 1967 in the Schöneberg neighborhood of Berlin at the age of 67. After the war, Lotte Hahm managed another lesbian club, and in 1958, she and others tried to reestablish the homosexual Bund für Menschenrecht (Union of Human Rights)

³⁰ LAB A Rep. 358-02 no. 125038: 1.

³¹ See, for example, Claudia Schoppmann, *Zeit der Maskierung. Lebensgeschichten lesbischer Frauen im “Dritten Reich”* (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1998 [1993]), 56f.

³² LABO Entschädigungsakte, no. 4159, M 5.

³³ LABO Entschädigungsakte, no. 4159, C4. Conclusion based on the statements of contemporary witnesses.

from the Weimar Republic.³⁴ Hahm died the same year as Fleischmann, in 1967, in Wannsee at the age of 77.

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³⁴ See for example, Schoppmann's *Zeit der Maskierung*, 56f.