



## **A Lifelong Love: Marta Halusa (1910–1999) and Margot Liu (1912–1993)**

The Edgwarebury Jewish Cemetery in northern London is the last resting place of Marta Halusa and Margot Liu, who are buried there in a double grave.<sup>1</sup> The two women, who were born in Germany, had been a couple since the 1930s. During the twelve years of the Nazi regime, from 1933 to 1945, they had also been persecuted by the police and Gestapo.<sup>2</sup>

Marta Halusa and Margot Liu did not manage to immigrate to England until 1949. Once there, they spent more than 40 happy years together. Margot died at the age of 80 in 1993, and Marta lived to be 89 until she passed away in 1999. According to their wishes, they were buried in a grave together. They wanted to ensure that they would remain as one even after death. For anyone paying closer attention, their grave also visibly identifies them as a lesbian couple.

Who was Marta Halusa, and who was Margot Liu?

Marta Halusa was born on October 3, 1910, in Brunsbüttelkoog (now part of the town of Brunsbüttel). She was one of eight children in a communist, working-class family. Her parents, Berta Gritzka (1877–1944) and Johann Halusa (1876–1969), were Protestants born in Skalung near Oppeln, now Skałagi and Opele in Poland.<sup>3</sup> They moved to northern Germany to find work in 1907. After Marta completed elementary school, at the age of 14, she began working as a kitchen help in a household in the Holstein area. In the early 1930s, she moved to Hamburg, the city on the River Elbe, where her sisters were living. While continuing to work as a kitchen help, she also began to dance professionally, apparently in her spare time. She performed in various dance theaters in Hamburg and was given a part in the “Alcazar” variety show.<sup>4</sup> It was in this show that she got to know the dancer Margot Holzmann. Perhaps it was love at

---

<sup>1</sup> Many thanks to David Uri, Margot Holzmann’s nephew, for kindly providing me with information and pictures.

<sup>2</sup> The historian Claudia Schoppmann published interviews with contemporary witnesses from the Nazi era in her book *Zeit der Maskierung. Lebensgeschichten lesbischer Frauen im Dritten Reich* from 1993. One interview is with Anneliese Wulf, who mentions knowing Margot Holzmann and that she was persecuted as a Jew.

<sup>3</sup> Stadtarchiv Brunsbüttel.

<sup>4</sup> According to Halusa’s victim of fascism (*Opfer des Faschismus*) file: Opfer-des-Faschismus-Akte Halusa, Landesarchiv Berlin (LAB), C Rep. 118-01, no. 302; and her restitution (Entschädigung) file: Landesamt für Bürger- und Ordnungsangelegenheiten (LABO) Entschädigungsakte Halusa, no. 65462.

first sight, because after the two women went on various tours together, they shared a home in Berlin.

Margot Johanna Liu, née Holzmann, was born on January 12, 1912, in Ratibor in Silesia, now Racibórz in Poland. She was the eldest of three daughters in a Jewish family. Her parents were Hulda Bernstein (1892–1925) and Paul Holzmann (1879–1942), a market trader and travelling salesman. The family moved from Ratibor to Breslau, now Wrocław (Poland), and from there to Halle (on the River Saale). In 1925, Margot's mother died from miscarriage when she was only 32 years old. Her father put his three underage daughters, Margot (13), Charlotte (11), and Ilse (8), in the care of the League of Jewish Women's Home for Girls in Neu-Isenburg, south of Frankfurt. The home had been established by Bertha Pappenheim (1859–1936). Margot's father wanted her to train to take care of children (*Säuglings- und Kinderpflegerin*) there, but her dream was to be a solo dancer. When Paul Holzmann married his second wife Lea (Leonore) Grünbaum (1883–1941) in 1929, his children returned to Halle. After graduating from middle school, the 16-year-old Margot attended the Wegner ballet school, where she stayed from 1929 to 1931, hoping to make her dream come true. She then traveled on several dancing tours in Germany, including the one in Hamburg already mentioned, and toured other European countries. However, she primarily performed in Berlin.<sup>5</sup>

During this time, the Nazis and their inhuman, anti-Semitic policies were on the rise. When Adolf Hitler (1889–1945) and his Nazi party (NSDAP) came to power in 1933 and the first laws against Jews were passed, the two women realized they were running out of time to launch their dance career together as they had planned.<sup>6</sup> They decided to design cards to advertise themselves, especially for foreign countries. At least one of these cards presents them as the dancing duo "Pepita & Peter."<sup>7</sup> In 1938, Margot's father Paul Holzmann was deported to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp near Oranienburg, north of Berlin. After this, she intensified her plans to leave the country and go to Switzerland. However, Switzerland rejected her on the basis of "Ueberfremdung"<sup>8</sup> (fear of too many foreigners entering the country). By then, it was too late, and she was no longer able to leave.

---

<sup>5</sup> According to Liu's victim of fascism file: Opfer-des-Faschismus-Akte Liu, LAB, C Rep. 118-01, no. 6438.

<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, no further information exists about the two women's careers and performances as dancers.

<sup>7</sup> Marta Halusa also went by "Peter" after the war. LABO Entschädigungsakte Liu, no. 64829, C28.

<sup>8</sup> LABO Entschädigungsakte Liu, no. 64829, C26. The rise of Nazi ideology in Germany also led to the rise of right-wing, conservative groups in Switzerland and growing xenophobia. This in turn resulted in more restrictive asylum policies that especially targeted Jews. In order to immigrate to Switzerland, people usually had to prove

Trapped in Berlin, the two women began to be subjected to persecution by the Nazis. Because she was Jewish, Margot was especially watched closely by the police. Her marriage to the Chinese waiter Chi-Lan Liu (1906-1951),<sup>9</sup> who lived in Berlin – a decision she probably made with the approval of Halusa – granted her Chinese citizenship in 1941. However, this provided her only limited safety from imminent deportation, because her husband soon felt betrayed and filed for a divorce in court at the expense of his Jewish wife. He also reported her to the Berlin police in September 1942. Living as a lesbian was not punishable, so her husband's lawyer brought arguments against Margot that he believed would effectively criminalize her in the eyes of the court. For instance, he claimed that Margot was a professional prostitute and practiced "lesbian love" with the "Aryan" Marta Halusa, who also was a prostitute.<sup>10</sup> Prostitution and lesbian activities between a Jew and a woman who was regarded as being higher in the hierarchy because she was "Aryan" was all worthy of punishment, according to the lawyer.

The two defendants admitted to the prostitution, but denied the charge of homosexuality. It is possible that Margot Liu and Marta Halusa wanted to protect their private, intimate relationship in this way and safeguard it from outside interference. Also, they had already been convicted of prostitution in 1939, so perhaps they believed it was generally wiser to be regarded by the Gestapo as prostitutes, and not as lesbian and/or defiant women. Nonetheless, the police criminal investigation unit M.II2 in Berlin filed a "memorandum (...) for the suspicion of lesbian love" for Margot Liu in October 1942.<sup>11</sup> However, the marriage that Margot had entered for her own protection did not end in divorce until after the war.

For several years, Margot Liu and Marta Halusa continued to be reported to the police, arrested, and released, only to be reported again. Sometimes, they were released after bribing an officer; sometimes an officer would extort them. They finally went underground together, moving frequently from one place to another. 1943, Liu found

---

that they were politically persecuted and/or belonged to the cultural elite. Anti-Semitic persecution did not appear to be relevant for the authorities. For more on this, see for example Astrid Pohl's "Salomé auf der Flucht. Tilla Durieux und das Exil deutschsprachiger Schauspielerinnen in der Schweiz," *Augen-Blick. Marburger Hefte zur Medienwissenschaft*, no. 33 (2002): 71-107, especially 84-88.

<sup>9</sup> Many thanks to Claudia Schoppmann for information about the year of Chi-Lan Liu's death.

<sup>10</sup> LAB, A Rep. 358-02, no. 61616.

<sup>11</sup> LAB, A Pr. Br. Rep. 030-02-02, no. 90.

work in a dental laboratory. The owners Schorn & Schöning<sup>12</sup> secretly printed flyers with information they heard on English and Russian radio stations. Halusa agreed to distribute the flyers in the northern part of Berlin, although this put her and Margot in grave danger. In April 1945, the two women were lured into a trap, betrayed, and arrested again. This time they were accused of propaganda against the state, so-called treachery, and high treason.<sup>13</sup> After their arrest, Liu was especially severely mistreated, according to Halusa's recollections. As a Jew, she was subjected to massive anti-Semitic hatred. Fortunately, while they were being transferred to another prison, the two women were able to escape, and they managed to stay in hiding until the Red Army arrived.

After the war was over, Margot Liu and Marta Halusa were officially recognized as *Opfer des Faschismus* (victims of fascism). Just after the war in 1945, while Berlin lay in ruins and countless people were looking for relatives who had been deported, murdered, or displaced by bombs, Margot learned that her father Paul Holzmann had been forced to do hard physical labor in 1942 and had died the same year.<sup>14</sup> Marta reported in her own victim of fascism file that her mother, Berta Halusa, had also died a violent death. She had been transported in September 1944 from the Schleswig mental institution to an institution east of Berlin in Meseritz-Obrwalde, now Międzyrzecz-Obrzyce, Poland, where she was killed.<sup>15</sup>

Marta Halusa and Margot Liu had to wait until 1949 to finally immigrate to the UK, where Margot's sister Ilse lived. Ilse had been able to flee Germany before the war. She had married in 1940 and taken her husband's last name Uri. Ilse, Marta, and Margot all had difficulties with English and found it hard to settle in and feel at home.

For the next two decades, Marta and the two sisters fought from their home base in London for some kind of appropriate restitution, if such a thing is possible, for the injustices they suffered during the Nazi regime. The abuse Marta and Margo had endured left them with long-term health problems that prevented them from working for longer periods of time. Margot especially desperately needed the so-called restitution

---

<sup>12</sup> No research has yet been conducted on the lives and resistance activities of the married couple Mr. and Mrs. Martin Schorn and Mr. Schöning.

<sup>13</sup> Opfer-des-Faschismus-Akte Liu, LAB, C Rep. 118-01, no. 6438.

<sup>14</sup> Opfer-des-Faschismus-Akte Liu, LAB, C Rep. 118-01, no. 6438.

<sup>15</sup> Opfer-des-Faschismus-Akte Halusa, LAB, C Rep. 118-01, no. 302.

as financial support. However, it was a long time coming, and the fight cost her a lot of energy.<sup>16</sup>

Ilse Uri's son David was born in 1948 and spent much time with his "aunts" Margot and Peter (his name for Marta) when he was a small boy and teenager. David even lived with them for a while when both of his parents were working. He listened to them talking and learned many different expressions and sayings in German. He also overheard things that were not meant for his young ears and picked up the names of lawyers, people, cities, and fragmented details that would not make sense to him until later, when he pieced together their life stories.

Halusa's claim for restitution was granted in 1961, but only in a limited form. When the two women finally did receive larger sums of money, they bought a small house with a garden, where they spent many happy days together. Old friends from Germany also came to visit them. As they grew older, the couple decided they wanted to remain as one in death, so Halusa, who was Protestant, converted to Judaism in the late 1980s at the Belsize Square Synagogue in London, a congregation that had been founded in 1939 primarily by German refugees. When the time came, David Uri took care of their burials and made sure their wish to be buried together was fulfilled.

Margot Liu and Marta Halusa were commemorated for the first time at a ceremony held at the Memorial to Homosexuals Persecuted under Nazism in Berlin in 2014.

Ingeborg Boxhammer (Bonn, September 2020)

Michelle Miles & Ingo Maerker (translation, Freiburg, October 2020)

Photo: Marta Halusa, Margot Holzmann and dog Fuschi © private archiv

Suggested citation:

Boxhammer, Ingeborg. "A Lifelong Love: Marta Halusa (1910–1999) and Margot Liu (1912–1993)." Bonn, 2020. Available online at: Online-Projekt Lesbengeschichte. Ingeborg Boxhammer & Christiane Leidinger. [https://www.lesbengeschichte.org/Englisch/bio\\_halusa\\_liu\\_e.html](https://www.lesbengeschichte.org/Englisch/bio_halusa_liu_e.html)

Further reading:

Boxhammer, Ingeborg. *Marta Halusa und Margot Liu – Die lebenslange Liebe zweier Tänzerinnen*. Jüdische Miniaturen 175. Berlin: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2015.

---

<sup>16</sup> LABO Liu, no. 64829; Entschädigungsakte Halusa, no. 65462.