

PREDECESSORS AND PILGRIMS:
LESBIAN HISTORY-MAKING AND BELONGING
IN POST-SOCIALIST HUNGARY

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Nearly two decades after its promising beginning, Hungary's sexual politics movement is in a paradoxical state. Although the movement got off to an early start compared with most other post-socialist countries (Hungary's first "homosexual" organization was formed in 1988, a year before the official change of system, lesbians and gays were included very early on (1996) in domestic partnership legislation, and the notorious Paragraph 199 of the Hungarian Criminal Code, mandating different ages of consent for homosexual and heterosexual relations, was revoked in September, 2002), lesbian and gay activists still struggle for a coherent political identity and to build a broad-based movement.¹ Most importantly, despite these gains, the development of everyday tolerance of lesbians and gays in Hungary has been far more problematic. The exclusions that many lesbians and gays feel most deeply affect them are thus not primarily legal in nature. Rather, they occur on the level of everyday cultural behaviors and attitudes: the freedom to be visible participants in daily life; the right to *belong* in Hungarian society.

In this chapter I will examine two different types of history-making project undertaken by Hungarian lesbian activists—a book recuperating lesbian ancestors, and two pilgrimages involving recent historical figures—and explore their consequences for lesbians' sense of their own identities, communities, and relations to Hungarian society as a whole. I will argue that these projects construct complex lesbian histories which ground present-day lesbian identity and community in

¹ The Hungarian term of closest equivalence to the English "gay" is *meleg* (lit. "warm"), for "lesbian," *leszbikus*. These terms have their own meanings and histories. Here I translate them simply as "lesbian" and "gay," hoping that this purely practical gesture will be understood as it is intended. If I do not use the terms GLBT, it is because in my experience bisexuals and transgendered people are nearly invisible in the context of Hungarian sexual politics (although the recent publication of a volume addressing the issues facing transgendered people—(see Takács 2006)—should do much to correct this situation). All the projects described in this chapter are the work of lesbian activists. Interestingly, however, in the past few years there has also been an important history-making project involving gay men and a gay male ancestor, Kertbeny Károly.

intimate connections to the past. Critically, however, they do so in very different ways. The first constructs Hungarian lesbians as vital parts of a transnational lesbian history, suggesting that their primary bonds of identity and connection are to a global lesbian community. The other projects articulate lesbians into the dominant structures of specifically national-historical narratives, thus legitimating their presence in present-day Hungarian national community. In creating both these effects, these history-making projects situate Hungarian lesbians ambiguously with respect to national and transnational borders of belonging. Yet because this position is, ironically, emblematic of many tensions currently facing Hungarian society, they therefore produce true belonging.

Efforts to reshape history are a new development in Hungarian sexual-political activism. They appear to demonstrate an increasing concern with history and memory on the part of lesbian and gay activists in Hungary. In my view, this reflects an increasing disillusionment on the part of many activists with more explicitly legal and political approaches to improving the situation of lesbians and gays. One result has been a turn to what, in an anthropological sense, might be seen as more broadly "cultural" methods. These projects thus speak to recent attempts to reframe current understandings of the notion of "citizenship." Developed in response to critiques of traditional views of citizenship centering on legal or social rights and obligations, the concept of "cultural citizenship" seeks to draw attention to other, critical aspects of the ways people actually experience citizenship and belonging, such as their ability to take part equally and openly in everyday forms of public and private life. Such approaches to citizenship also strive to take into account the concrete, everyday cultural practices through which belonging and societal membership are confirmed or denied to certain people and groups according to whether they are seen to participate in fundamental networks of culturally-established connections or not (Pakulski 1997; Richardson 1998; Stevenson 2003). In creating histories that link them to specific pasts, I argue, Hungarian lesbian activists are constructing claims to share in the kinds of connections that determine particular forms of "cultural citizenship."

This chapter is based on ethnographic research undertaken as part of a larger project from 1999 to 2004. Approximately 30 interviews were conducted with members of the Labrisz Leszbikus Egyesület (Labrys Lesbian Collective), participant-observation fieldwork was carried out at a number of events during which these history-making projects were discussed, and textual analysis was performed on published materials associated with the projects.

LESBIANS WRITING HISTORY

In the summer of 2003, the Labrisz Leszbikus Egyesület (Labrisz hereafter), Hungary's leading lesbian activist organization, published a book called *Előhívott Önarcképek: Leszbikus Nők Önéletrajzi Írásai* (Developed Self-Portraits: Lesbian Women's Autobiographical Writings).² The book traces emotional connections between women from medieval times to the 19th century, highlights romantic correspondences between well-known literary and artistic women in the early 20th century, and then moves on to autobiographical writings and the more explicit concerns with issues of politics and identity of the later 20th century and the present-day. Primarily comprised of writings by non-Hungarians, such as Emily Dickinson, Virginia Woolf, Marlene Dietrich, and Audre Lorde, only towards the end of the third section do Hungarian contributions begin to appear. The last two writers—the first openly lesbian activist in Hungary, and the owner of Hungary's first, unofficial, lesbian/gay cinema—discuss circumstances they have faced as lesbians in Hungary. The final section of the book combines Hungarian with non-Hungarian voices, and melds the book's opening mood of emotional intimacy with explicit awareness of the social conditions in which many lesbians live. Bringing the book fully into both present moment and local cultural context, this last section begins with an autobiographical short story by Hungary's only current writer of lesbian-themed novels, moves to reminiscences of adolescence and old age by American and Australian lesbians, and ends with observations by Hungarian, Czech, and Polish lesbians. *Előhívott Önarcképek* thus presents a compendium of lesbian self-description stretching across great expanses of space and time. As its editors describe the volume: "It speaks to diverse languages, time periods, social strata, and generations: from the emblematic figures of the beginning of the century, to the contemporary Western lesbian writers, to Eastern European experiences" (Borgos et al. 2003, 7).³

THE LABRISZ BOOK AS HISTORY-MAKING PROJECT

When we undertook to research, select, and publish a set of autobiographical writings by lesbians, our goal was that in this way we might do something to create a lesbian narrative, a history, that still didn't exist. That is to say, that besides the documentation

² All translations are by the author.

³ *Előhívott Önarcképek* is not an isolated effort. Although the book was widely hailed as the first of its kind in Hungary, it is actually the third book in a series of books published by Labrisz. Together these construct an essentially unified vision of lesbian history. *Előhívott Önarcképek* thus builds upon already-existing foundations. While I focus here on one text, then, my analysis pertains to a larger project.

and preservation of stories and texts, [we were interested in] the creation of a broader narrative/history as well (Borgos et al. 2003, 7).

The search for "ancestors" has been a central element in lesbian and gay projects of identity and community-building, and for supporting claims for rights and acceptance. Following the appearance of a gay liberation movement in the United States of the late 1960's and early 1970's, scholars began to document the existence of lesbians and gays in history (Katz 1976; Chauncey, Duberman, and Vicinus 1989). Arguing that they had been ignored by dominant, heteronormative narratives, these researchers strove to recover the historical presence, conditions, and perspectives of such people and groups, and their equally-ignored contributions to society. Since then, a vast edifice of work has grown on these foundations, chronicling the involvements of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered people in a range of historical moments (D'Emilio 1983; Faiman-Silva 2004; Kennedy and Davis 1993; Newton 1993).

Analyses of these kinds of history-making projects have shown them to function in several important ways. They correct the impression given by culturally-dominant historical narratives that same-sex relationships and the people involved in them did not exist in the past. Further, the representation of such "forerunners" asserts historical continuity: the presence of lesbians and gays in all historical periods. The sense of temporal depth thus created serves to both strengthen present-day lesbian and gay identities and to establish a sense of trans-temporal community (Boswell 1980; Norton 1997). At the same time, the recuperation of history makes lesbians and gays valid historical agents. By reducing the definitional passivity that accompanies the cultural invisibility of groups excluded from history, the knowledge that they are not alone in time offers present-day lesbians and gays the possibility of responding to their oppression. Finally, the construction of such histories enhances the cultural legitimacy of lesbians and gays. By emphasizing notable "ancestors," lesbian and gay histories constitute embodied counterarguments to hegemonic negative images of same-sex relations and the people involved in them.⁴

⁴ It is critical to note here that the claim that people from very different times and places are essentially identical to present-day lesbians and gays is highly problematic for many researchers (McIntosh [1968] 1990; Epstein [1987] 1998; Seidman 1993; Vance [1989] 1998). Such congruence of identity, nonetheless, is actively insisted upon by others (Boswell 1980; Norton 1997). Whatever the truth may be, history-making projects often center on precisely such claims. As long as there are people in the present who are willing for a

In many ways, *Előhívott Önarcképek* is a typical example of a lesbian and gay “history-making” project. Like other such histories, it depends on the identification of women in history who are depicted as having had same-sex romantic/erotic relationships. Through their expressions of same-sex interest and connection, the volume’s writers are claimed as “lesbian”: essentially similar in desires, perspectives, and circumstances to the readers of their accounts—lesbians in present-day Hungary. As the introduction to the book’s first selection states: “The two 12th century verses published here . . . have to do with us; they prove that centuries before this, there were those who felt as we do” (Borgos et al. 2003, 13). Through the identification of such figures, from the 12th century through the 20th, *Előhívott Önarcképek* asserts the depth of lesbian presence in history: that they are not beings merely of the present, but have existed in all periods. Challenging the erasure of such feelings and relations by traditional histories, then, *Előhívott Önarcképek*’s selections present women who despite existing in different times and places possess fundamentally similar identities and relationships. As a result, these figures from the past become embodied “anchoring points” of a history of present-day lesbians; they are not merely relevant to them, but directly connected and leading to them: they are “ancestors.” The book thus establishes a coherent “lesbian history.”

This combining of different histories into one history critically inflects the book’s construction of its vision of history—and that vision’s effects. Perhaps the most striking feature of *Előhívott Önarcképek* is the overwhelming presence of writers who are not Hungarian, but American and Western European. The impression this dominance gives is a powerful one: the writings of present-day Hungarian (and other Eastern European) women join with those of canonical lesbian figures from “Western” history, as well as with other, more recent figures of Western European and American lesbian activism. 12th century German nuns, the Ladies of Llangollen, and Audre Lorde become icons of a past shared by Hungarian lesbians, while at the same time, the Hungarian and other Central and Eastern European writers become part of the ongoing history of all lesbians.⁵ The book’s editors make this interpretation clear,

variety of reasons, strategic and otherwise, to treat such claims as real, they will have cultural consequences. It is these which concern me here.

⁵ This is, of course, not at all unusual in terms of Eastern European (and other) sexual politics. Yet while in this sense the publication of *Előhívott Önarcképek* represents a conventional lesbian history (and, indeed, contributes to the “Western”-driven character of much of what has come to be called the “globalization of sexuality”—see Altman 2001; Binnie 2004), in their other history-making projects, as we shall see, Labrizsz seems to be challenging precisely this formulation of “global lesbian history.”

stressing that despite the apparent distinction between Hungarian and non-Hungarian lesbians a fundamental unity exists, that "[t]he tones of the canonized Western lesbian writers are the same as those of the diverse, though nameless, [other] experiences" (Borgos et al. 2003, 7). This is not just any history; these figures share a unified, universal lesbian history. Explicitly invoking the transnational and trans-temporal connectedness of Adrienne Rich's "lesbian continuum," the editors insist that between all of these different accounts "the continuum is multidimensional: each writer represents her own individual viewpoint, yet the attraction and commitment to women connects them all" (Borgos et al. 2003, 7). Paradoxically, then, at the same instant that they create them, Hungarian lesbians enter the ranks of both universal lesbian history and the global lesbian community it implies.

Előhívott Önarcképek's claim of such connection, however, is not based on merely abstract similarity. As the book's editors state: "[T]he significant part of the narrative[s] document . . . conflicts with, fears of, and self-subjections or oppositions to the outside world" (Borgos et al. 2003, 8). Its writings emphasize the uncertainties of the writer about her own feelings of attraction and trust and the responses of others to those feelings, as in the letters of Emily Dickinson to her sister-in-law, or mourn losses that seem inevitable in the face of surrounding social oppression, such as the story of Lilly Wust and Felice Schragenheim (the Nazi wife and Jewish journalist made famous in the 1999 movie *Aimee and Jaguar*), whose "love finally fell victim to persecution" (Borgos et al. 2003, 10). As expressed in numerous interviews and informal conversations, these are doubts and losses that many present-day lesbians in Hungary confront amid the everyday tensions of living in a homophobic society. Such shared experience of oppression is mirrored by the emphasis of the writings on other strictures that society places on these women's attempts to live their lives in ways that satisfy their desires and senses of self, such as relentless pressures to conform to a heteronormative path. Here the book explicitly indicts both society in general, and its dominant histories, which "completely ignore, or only mention as accidental 'indiscretions' the feelings of these women for other women, or their lasting relationships with women" (Borgos et al. 2003, 70), for amplifying these tensions by persistently refusing to recognize either such pressures or their objects. It is their critical reactions to such constraints on their desires that *Előhívott Önarcképek* reveals its protagonists as women powerfully aware of their fundamental difference from their societies. They are not figures naively pursuing unusual or marginal lives; they are conspicuously conscious of their marginalization. And if this consciousness is presented as in part

responsible for the emotional and psychological difficulties they share with many present-day Hungarian lesbians, it is also presented as causal of their critical perspectives.

Problematic though they may be in terms of historical accuracy, the political effects of such assertions of conscious lesbian identity are powerful. By representing well-known artistic and literary figures as lesbian, *Előhívott Önarcképek*'s vision of lesbianness counters culturally-dominant images of lesbians as absent or isolated from, and harmful to, society. And by creating a unified image of what "lesbian identity" has been, the book constructs a more specifically defined, if wide-ranging, image of what "lesbians" are for its readers. In this way the book not only provides present-day individuals with models for positive engagement with both their communities and society as a whole; it offers them a stable foundation for both self-conception and action. Most importantly, the sense of a shared past the book invokes does more than simply build bonds between present-day lesbians; by presenting an image of a community united across time and space by similar qualities and experiences, it reinforces perceptions of connection between past and present lesbians. It thus fundamentally transforms the ways in which lesbian community is imagined.

Yet along with these effects on present-day lesbian identity and community, *Előhívott Önarcképek*'s representations have a corollary consequence for Hungarian sexual politics. This is because the book's isomorphism of both lesbian identity and lesbian experience revolves around a very specific notion of "lesbian." By representing the writers in the volume as women expressing clear and stable preferences for same-sex involvements, the book's editors depict them as having securely-defined sexual identities. By further emphasizing these women's consciousness that their different desires and interests not only bring them into repeated conflicts with the people around them but also create in them awareness of generalized societal oppression, the book constructs them as lesbians for whom these characteristics are central aspects of both their identities and their politics. The result is that even the early exemplars of the book appear to share a complex understanding of their social, cultural, and political situation that is only later expressed explicitly by late-20th-century writers such as Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich. The image of lesbian identity that *Előhívott Önarcképek* constructs is therefore very particular: emerging from and conscious of a primary context of oppression, and specifically politicized in order to resist that oppression. The history and identity framed by the book thus inescapably link lesbian identity and sexual politics.

This specifically-inflected imagining of lesbian identity and community is, unsurprisingly, conducive to the development of an explicitly political lesbian and gay movement. By encouraging identification with historical figures who are depicted as politically or socially engaged, the collection promotes a politically-expressive lesbianism. In doing so, however, this vision potentially implies certain boundaries for present-day lesbian identity and community. Such a vision of history may not resonate well with less well-educated, less cosmopolitan lesbians, many of whom are both more suspicious of political activism, and less likely to see themselves as connected to global networks of lesbian community than are activists. Indeed, the project's definitions may actually function to alienate such women, by suggesting that they if are not willing to be politically-engaged lesbians, they cannot be part of either lesbian history, or the community that history binds together—and thus that they cannot be "proper" lesbians at all.

LESBIAN PILGRIMS—PERFORMING PLACE IN HISTORY

3rd Labrisz Pilgrimage

Szatina Pilgrimage, or Why Should I Make a Pilgrimage to Lesbian Szatina? Among the invisible threads of the lesbian past some lead to the little village in Baranya [county], where 20 houses stand, many deserted, perhaps fifty people live, and there are lovely hills, garlanded with plants. Here and in the surrounding area the novel *Kecskerúzs* took place – one part of both the writing and the tale. And here took place the amateur experiment to make a "lesbian village" utopia in the fierce '90s of the last century.⁶

This happened on the Galgóczi pilgrimage:

On May 11, 2002 the association [i.e., Labrisz] traveled to Ménfőcsanak, near Győr, to visit the memorial room of Galgóczi Erzsébet. By previous agreement the wife of the writer's brother received us. She spoke in detail—but unfortunately, not about everything!—about Galgóczi Erzsébet's life, achievements as a writer, family, and about her personal memories of her. We spent a long time in the memorial room, which was in the local castle, which was G.E.'s workroom and bedroom not so very long ago. In the afternoon we rested in the castle park, and talked. Thirteen people took part in the pilgrimage, and we would have been happy to see still more new faces. Visit this place if it's at all possible.⁷

⁶ Description from 2004 Hungarian Gay and Lesbian Festival program.

⁷ Labrisz Leszbikus Egyesület, Newsletter, vol. II, 6 June 2002.

At the same time that they have pursued this literary making of history, however, the women of Labrisz have worked to create lesbian history in very different ways as well.

Gordon Agáta's novel *Kecskerúzs* occupies a special place in the Hungarian lesbian world. Published in 1997, it is considered by many lesbians the first work of Hungarian literature to deal explicitly with lesbian themes. The novel tells the story of a young Hungarian lesbian and her lover. In the early 1990's, after living secretly for many years amongst the environs of family and school, the two move to the rural village of Szatina with the dream of living openly together as lesbians. When another lesbian couple joins them, their dream expands to an attempt to form a larger, openly lesbian community. Their idealism, however, is met with suspicion and distrust by the villagers, who can find no place for their relationship in the rigidly conventional social structure of the countryside. Before long, the combined pressure of local animosity and romantic conflicts destroys the women's relationships and friendships, and drives the protagonist into a psychiatric institution (Gordon 1997). A graphic depiction of the difficulties lesbians face in attempting to live within the constraints of Hungary's heteronormative culture, *Kecskerúzs* stands as the only present-day text in the Hungarian lesbian canon.⁸ The village of Szatina thus represents a particularly significant site in Hungary's lesbian symbology: one which evokes both a specific literary-historical moment and core ideals of lesbian identity and community.

Every year since 2002, small groups of lesbians have made the short journey to the site of the novel in order to commemorate this brief moment in lesbian history. All of the trips to Szatina have followed a similar pattern: the women, mostly members of Labrisz, meet early in the morning at Budapest's Southern train station, and travel to the nearest stop, roughly half an hour by foot from Szatina itself. After walking to the town, the group tours around the village, visits nearby farms, and meets with some of the remaining lesbians who settled there around the time *Kecskerúzs* was written.⁹

⁸ In 2006 another volume by Gordon, containing two short novels, *Ezüstboxer* and *Nevelési kisregény* was published by Budapest's Alexandra Press. I thank Judit Takács for bringing this publication to my attention.

⁹ Like the publication of *Előhívott Őnarcképek*, these trips have been more than isolated events. In 2004, for example, the visit to Szatina itself, which took place as part of that summer's Gay and Lesbian Festival, was accompanied by a photo exhibition of the village, which spread word of the project to many who did not participate in the pilgrimage. In 2005, members of Labrisz even made their own documentary film of the pilgrimage.

Lesbian activists have undertaken other pilgrimages as well. Galgóczi Erzsébet (1930–1989) was a highly-recognized writer of Hungary's state-socialist period. She was also politically inclined. A minor dissident figure, her opposition to the country's regime increased, and became increasingly controversial, towards the end of her life. Galgóczi has come to be seen as a figure of central importance to present-day lesbians because of her 1980 novel *Törvényen belül* [literally: "Within the law"]. Set in the tumultuous period of mid-1950s Hungary, the novel traces the story of a journalist doomed by her refusal to compromise either in speaking the truth or in her rejection of traditional constraints on gender and sexual identity. Assertive, politically outspoken, and a lover of women, she blends in her person gender, sexual, and political transgression. Unable to adapt to her society in any of these areas, she finally commits suicide by openly walking across the guarded Hungarian border. In interviews, discussions, and in published texts, members of Labrisz have argued that the book is semi-autobiographical, claiming Galgóczi as an exemplar of the difficulties faced by lesbians in Hungary's past, as well as the first Hungarian writer to deal with lesbian themes.

Galgóczi's study in the town of Ménfőcsanak, in the northwestern corner of Hungary, has been maintained in its original condition, including the writer's original writing-table. In May of 2002, a group of Labrisz members traveled there. On their return, some of them gave a slide presentation at one of the group's official meetings, describing the journey and their experiences in detail. Deeply moved by the trip, the participants spoke of it as a unique opportunity to visit the home and workspace of a writer at the core of the Hungarian lesbian canon.

PILGRIMAGES AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

Both organizers of and participants in these events consistently refer to them as "pilgrimages" (*zarándoklatok*), as in the texts quoted above. In an anthropological sense, they are also formally similar to other pilgrimages in that they are ritualized and repetitive journeys, made in order to commemorate significant historical sites and figures. Research on religious pilgrimages and their effects has focused on how they bring individuals into intimate contact with sacred figures and spaces, strengthening religious belief through tangible practices enacted in concrete spaces (Turner 1969; Morinis 1992), how their shared experience of contact with the sacred creates solidarity between pilgrims (Turner and Turner 1978), and how they incorporate those who make them into the organized structures of religious and other communities and institutions

(Herz [1913] 1983; Morinis 1992). Because they bring pilgrims into contact with sacred figures and sites of the past, however, pilgrimages also draw them into intimate connection with that past. For pilgrims, the process of pilgrimage constructs the sense that not only does their religion as a system of belief extend continuously back into the past, but that an actual community of believers does so as well—a community of which the act of pilgrimage makes them feel integral parts. The past they evoke thus becomes the collective history of their participants (Dubisch and Winkelman 2005).

As pilgrimages, then, the Labrisz journeys to Ménfőcsanak and Szatina can also be seen as history-making projects. Like the Labrisz book, by identifying figures and events of the past as lesbian, they create a past which present-day lesbians can identify as theirs. That this history is meant to be understood by Hungarian lesbians as “our history” is confirmed by references in Labrisz publications to *Törvényen belül* and *Kecskerúzs* as “our novels” (Labrisz Lesbikus Egyesület 2001, 32). Like the book project, then, these pilgrimages create history, and so also build identity and community both in the present and trans-temporally. Yet precisely because they are “pilgrimages,” which visit concrete sites in particular ways, they construct a lesbian history in other ways quite different from that created by *Előhívott Önarcképek*.

Critically, the spatial nature of the connections to the past which pilgrimages create allows them to be used for specific political purposes. In his vastly influential analysis of how national communities are imagined, Benedict Anderson addresses the relationship between the rooting of pilgrimages in space and their political meanings (Anderson 1983). Anderson notes that just as earlier religious pilgrimages brought pilgrims from many different places together, linking them in vast sacred geographies, the educational and administrative journeys required by modern states brought people from distant areas together and made them feel part of a larger community. While the communities thus imagined were distinctly “national” in character, it was the ritualized nature of these secular pilgrimages that, like other pilgrimages, gave them their power to constitute both people’s experience of community, and their sense of identity within that community. This creation of community, however, was temporal as well as spatial—with crucial consequences. Highly-choreographed rituals such as secular pilgrimages, Anderson argues, were used to legitimate national communities through the assertion of their continuity with the past and its community, an assertion confirmed by the vision of history their association with symbolically-significant sites made manifest. In this way, imagined national communities of the

present produced cultural legitimacy by grounding themselves in the imagined national communities of the past. Pilgrimages are thus central to the creation of imagined national communities, and the identities that make them meaningful. Their participants gain from them the sense of a specifically-located past and past community to which they are intimately linked, and a sense of present community especially coherent because it is rooted in both time and space. Moreover, because of this historical association of such sites and territories with specific social groups, the grounding of historical narratives in concrete spaces gives rise not to an *abstract* connection to the past, but to the perception of a specifically *genealogical* connection to that past—a particularly intimate relationship of imagined kinship, ancestry, and descent between past and present communities (Anderson 1983; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Malkki 1992; Verdery 1999). Thus, because they are grounded at once in both space and time by rituals such as pilgrimages, national histories are more than merely histories per se; they are genealogical explanations for the Nation's existence, which justify both that existence and the privileged participation in it of certain people and groups.

The Szatina and the Galgóczi pilgrimages construct exactly these sorts of concretely grounded relationships to the past. The women who took part in the Galgóczi pilgrimage were able to experience the rural environment of the village-born writer—the scene of Galgóczi's own life and writing, as if it were their own. As the Hungarian historian Rév István has put it, this sort of intimate contact with the symbolic representatives of the past operates to "annihilate time," fusing past and present so that they seem to be one (Rév 1995). To visit the site—and symbolic scene—of Galgóczi's life and writing *is*, experientially, to visit that life, writing, and time itself. Through the concreteness of site and experience, the connection to the past visited becomes so close that it becomes not merely connection, but identity. This annihilation of time is visible in the way the Labrisz newsletter, quoted above, particularly emphasizes the fact that the room the pilgrims visited had been Galgóczi's workroom and sleeping room "not so long ago."¹⁰ The visit thus allows its participants to imagine themselves present in that "not-so-long-ago" past, sharing Galgóczi's everyday labors, and even her slumber.

In similar ways, the women who performed the pilgrimage to Szatina went to considerable effort in order to insert themselves imaginatively into the past. In part this occurred simply through their physical presence in the space defined as central to that past. Yet they also did so

¹⁰ Labrisz Leszbikus Egyesület, Newsletter, vol. IV, 5 May 2004.

through the specific activities in which they engaged during their visit. In 2004, for example, the Szatina pilgrims held a “nomadic nest-building/house setting-up contest.”¹¹ In this event the women actually created their own small, imaginary dwellings (“nomadic” because they were only the temporary constructions of visitors). They thus enacted their own inhabitation of this site of their past—and their imagined participation in that past’s Utopian project.

As do the dominant national-historical myths of Hungary, these pilgrimages and the histories they create take as their foundational sites and symbolic centers—the imagined roots of their pasts and past communities—the rural villages and countryside within whose welcoming and inclusive space one can be one’s true self. Villages such as Szatina and Ménfőcsanak—are the very places that in dominant national narratives appear as the originating sites of national culture and authenticity. The sites used to ground the production of alternative, lesbian history thus mirror in key ways those used to ground dominant national histories. As a result, the historical narratives of lesbian history produced by these pilgrimages do more than link their participants to a general “lesbian past.” In their rooting of their lesbian past in these specific kinds of spaces, they weld the lesbian history they create, and its inhabitants, to the underlying structure of dominant national-historical narratives.

These two pilgrimages, however, do not insert lesbians into the legitimizing framework of national-historical narratives solely on the basis of space. They also do so through their uses of time. Paralleling the use by national-historical narratives of heroic figures as legitimating ancestors, the pilgrimages structure their genealogical relationships to the past through the representation of central figures intimately involved in key cultural-historical moments and events. Here it is significant that the writings at the center of both these pilgrimages depict sexually and politically oppositional figures. Like Galgóczi herself the protagonist of *Törvényen belül* is a political dissident, struggling to come to terms with the culturally and politically-charged moments surrounding the revolution of 1956. At the end of the novel she is shot trying to escape, after getting into trouble both because she tries to “speak the truth to power” and because of her “dissident” sexual identity. Similarly, the characters in the novel *Kecskerúzs* are disillusioned and disaffected, embittered by their experiences of trying to set up a life as lesbians and by the economic, social, and cultural upheavals of the “difficult” 1990s. For many lesbians

¹¹ Description from 2004 Hungarian Gay and Lesbian Festival program.

they seem to embody images of both resistance to heteronormative culture, and the personal consequences of that resistance. These particular characterizations tie the histories created here, and the trans-temporal lesbian communities they imagine, directly to certain moments which are also pivotal to historical narratives hegemonic in post-socialist Hungary. Critical aspects of dominant Hungarian narratives of post-socialism, for example, center on the repositioning of the story of the 1956 Uprising as both proof of Hungarian national resistance to Soviet domination, and of Hungarian rejection of state-socialism itself. Cultural narratives of the experience of 1956, and the post-1956 reactions of alienation and resistance are at the center of some of the most powerful politically and culturally legitimating claims of post-1989 Hungarian life (Király 1995; Tökés 1996). One of the other core narratives of the post-socialist period in Hungary has been the narrative of the experience of the upheavals of the "difficult" 1990s. Tales of attempts to negotiate the myriad troubles of these years therefore intimately reflect the everyday experiences, and the stories told of them, of many Hungarians.¹² Thus, by constructing their insertion into history through pilgrimages, which connect them not merely to a lesbian past, but also to a past that is centered on pivotal national-historical places, moments, and experiences, the women of *Labrisz* effectively map their history onto the dominant national-historical narratives of post-socialist Hungary.

HISTORY AND CULTURAL CITIZENSHIP

It is because of their construction of histories with specific genealogical implications, in fact, that these projects have what may be their most important consequences for the position of lesbians in Hungarian society. In this reading, the story of both history and history-making projects is a story about "belonging." By creating lesbian histories the women of *Labrisz* are proposing new historical narratives which do not merely write lesbians into "History" per se, or reinforce their senses of identity and community, they are creating histories which, by revealing their presence in the past, assert the legitimacy of lesbians in present-day national society. Notably, the inclusion that such projects assert operates on a *cultural* level—positing that lesbians share with other, "heteronormatively proper" Hungarians the presence in and experience of national places and moments. It is precisely their ability to assert inclusion on

¹² It should, perhaps, be noted that this emphasis on the connection between lesbianness and cultural/political resistance, so similar to the picture of lesbian political awareness presented in *Előhívott Önarcképek*, may well imply similar consequences for the ability of these histories to shape the borders of lesbian community.

this level—into the nation as a historically-established, cultural community—that makes history-making projects such as those examined here so potentially productive of change. For the belonging they assert is not merely legal or political, but *cultural* belonging. Through these histories, Hungarian lesbians can see themselves (and, perhaps, can be seen by others) as sharing with other Hungarians, in deeply personal ways, the experience of moments central to national-historical narratives, and the understanding of associated social and moral dilemmas as fundamental to their identities. These are cultural phenomena, deeply rooted and, in their historicity, powerfully justifying of those who in the present claim to share in their confirming practices. The sense of citizenship that they speak to is much more than legal or political citizenship: it is the sense of an intimate, “cultural citizenship,” in which membership and belonging are defined in ways at once more diffuse, and more profound.

CONCLUSION: HISTORIES AND THE AMBIGUITY OF BELONGING

When considered together, however, the two kinds of lesbian history-making described here give a rather contradictory impression about exactly where the activists who produce them actually see Hungarian lesbians to belong. Both create “lesbian histories,” and both evoke intimate connections which support claims to cultural citizenship. But *Előhívott Önarcképek* and the pilgrimages propose crucially different genealogies, each informing very different visions of the connections of community of which Hungarian lesbians are part. As we have seen, the pilgrimages suggest a lesbian history specifically connected to national-historical meanings—rooted in the specificities of Hungarian time and space. In contrast, through its transcendence of both space and time, *Előhívott Önarcképek* suggests a network of connections of identity and community—a genealogy—that establishes a vision of connection fundamentally *international* in character, making Hungarian lesbians equal members of a lesbian community global in scope.

This coexistence of different lesbian histories might seem to result in a blurred message—a clash of historical narratives—about exactly which kind of past Hungarian lesbians really want to belong to—and therefore about which present-day community they see themselves to belong to as well. In this sense, in attempting to legitimate the presence of Hungarian lesbians in both Hungarian society and an imagined “universal lesbian community,” these history-making projects may actually make it more difficult for them to stably reside in either. Yet it may be that

the ambiguity of these constructions of identity and community has a deeper significance. For the contradictions these different histories produce for Hungarian lesbians, between national and transnational identifications, connections, and community, also seem to mirror with remarkable precision some of the central tensions of post-socialist Hungary as a whole: the contradictions of a country and people caught between renewed attachment to national meanings on the one hand, and increasingly transnational connections on the other. And it may well be, in fact, more than anything else, this complex and constantly shifting *mélange* of identities and connections that makes it clear that Hungarian lesbians are actually what they are, through these projects, claiming to be. Facing the same dilemmas of identity and community which confront most Hungarians, and responding to them in very similar patterns of ambiguity and contradiction, Hungarian lesbians reveal themselves as equal members of their society—as people who truly belong.

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