

From the Editors

In June 2025, Budapest witnessed the largest pride parade in its history. According to competing estimates, between one and two hundred thousand people gathered in the Hungarian capital in response to, and defiance of, the country's government, which a few months earlier had passed a law banning the "promotion of homosexuality" in front of minors. Since the law specifically sought to put an end to Budapest Pride, substantial protest already had erupted in April in the form of an ironic "Gray Pride," mocking President Viktor Orbán's authoritarian homophobic campaign with flags that replaced the familiar rainbow with monochromatic shades of gray.

These events are paradigmatic for queer experiences around the world, including Central and Eastern Europe, where rulers such as Orbán and Vladimir Putin have declared the LGBTQ+ community the national enemy and where queer people nonetheless continue to organize and staunchly hold on to their culture, which finds ever new outlets in literature, film, art, music, and digital media. In the summer of 2024, when we decided to launch SQS, we intended for it to lend further visibility to the issues and creative forces of the pertinent region's LGBTQ+ individuals and communities today and across history.

Indeed, when Russia first introduced the law now widely known as the "Gay Propaganda Law" (imitated by Orbán and autocrats elsewhere), it referred to the prohibited not explicitly as homosexuality, but merely as "non-traditional sexual relations." Consequently, the law not only provided a foundation for wide-ranging and, potentially, arbitrary censorship. It also made an ignorant claim about history and culture—namely, that non-heterosexual sexuality and expressions of gender beyond a conventional, hierarchical binary are foreign to the national tradition.

By declaring a rich cultural heritage alien, politicized homophobia proposes grayness instead of gayness, gender and sexual uniformity instead of the historical reality of trans and queer people that has a verifiable cultural record. The task of our journal as we see it is to engage with this dimension of Central and Eastern European cultures through scholarly articles and forum essays, and to amplify the existent record by publishing translations of original source texts, reviews, and a chronicle of events. Many scholars around the world are currently contributing to the thriving field of Queer Studies focused on the Slavic region, and we anticipate, with considerable enthusiasm, their participation in SQS.

At the same time, our own academic world, albeit sheltered from many of the harsh realities that LGBTQ+ people experience elsewhere, is facing its own challenges regarding scholarship in Queer Studies. In Ohio, where we reside, a recently introduced new law seeks to regulate, *inter alia*, the teaching of "controversial belief and policy" and prohibits "diversity, equity, and inclusion offices or departments." In compliance with

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the law, The Ohio State University recently shut down its LGBTQ+ resource website. And while the content of teaching and research so far has been left untouched, fears are rising here, as elsewhere, that more and possibly worse may come.

To maintain integrity on multiple fronts, from the outset we agreed to keep *SQS* autonomous, unaffiliated with any institution. We envisioned *SQS* as the collective effort of a community free from academic censorship and volatile state support. Accordingly, the journal is hosted independently online, embracing what, optimally, will be a long and vibrantly unrestricted existence. As editors we welcome submissions from colleagues who conceive of Queer Studies in a kindred vein.

Philip Tuxbury-Gleissner and Helena Goscilo