

Overall, Gergely Kunt's wonderful work talks about how a traumatized community that is almost fatally divided along various political and social fault lines can be reconstructed. The healing of wounds and the bridging of deep trenches dividing society are only possible through building a democratic society. No lesson could be more relevant in today's Hungary.

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The Alphabet of Discord: The Ideologization of Writing Systems on the Balkans since the Breakup of Multiethnic Empires. By Giustina Selvelli. *Balkan Politics and Society*. Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2021. xv, 304 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. Tables. €39.90, paper; €26.99, e-book. doi: 10.1017/slr.2023.306

It is beyond question that the bond between language and identity in the Balkans has been powerful for at least a century now. Insistence on linguistic autonomy separate from Serbian hegemony was the primary force driving the move for Croatian independence. The recognition of the Macedonian language was (and is) the central factor in that people's continued struggle for self-determination, counter to the claims of Serbs in the pre-Titoist era that it was "Old Serbian," and the claims of Bulgarians yet today that it is a dialect of Bulgarian.

What distinguishes Giustina Selvelli's monograph from the already vast literature on this topic is its exclusive focus on writing systems as representations of national identity, and its structure as a chronological narrative, in which an introduction (Ch. 1) is followed by nine "case studies" spanning the period from 1918 to the present. Of these, three concern attention to linguistic minorities, two concern the proposal that Bulgarian shift from Cyrillic to Latin, two the unique Yugoslav "biscrptal" situation, and two the manifestation of intense national self-identification with a particular writing system.

Within the first group, Ch. 2 describes the Greek government's attempt to fulfill the Treaty of Sèvres and provide schooling for Slavs in Greece in their own language. The choice of a Latin alphabet in the 1925 Abecedar (language primer) dissatisfied those Slavs who could read already and enraged intellectuals in Bulgaria. The project was abandoned; it being assumed that the Greeks had chosen Latin alphabet in that expectation. Ch. 4 describes the considerable vacillation by the Bulgarian government in the 1930s between the Arabic and Latin alphabets for its Turkish minority: should they ban Latin, to create distance between Bulgarian Turks and the new Latin writing in Atatürk's Turkey, or should they ban Arabic and force a break with the Ottoman past? The final resolution, for Latin, came only in 1938. Finally, Ch. 6 surveys the well-known persecution of the Serbian minority in Croatia (1941–45) by the Ustaša, who not only outlawed the Cyrillic alphabet but also destroyed materials written in it.

It was twice proposed that Bulgarians join other modernizing nations (such as Atatürk's Turkey) and adopt the Latin alphabet; both times Bulgarians chose instead to keep the Cyrillic alphabet of their historical past. The first instance (Ch. 3), ran parallel with similar proposals in the USSR in the 1930s, that Latin become "the alphabet of socialism." Had the Soviets taken this path, Bulgaria would have followed, but there was relief when the Soviets abandoned the idea. In second instance, in 2000 (Ch. 9), as Bulgaria aspired to EU membership, a foreign Slavist proposed that Bulgaria follow the Serbian model and use the Latin alphabet alongside Cyrillic,

which outraged Bulgarians so much that they stripped the scholar of a previously conferred honorary doctorate.

In Yugoslavia, where both Latin and Cyrillic were used, it was proposed in the 1930s to adopt a mixed “Yugoslav alphabet,” containing an equal number each of Latin and Cyrillic letters (Ch. 5), but these proposals were unsuccessful and “biscrptalism” remained. After the breakup of Yugoslavia, language attitudes hardened (Ch. 8): Cyrillic was “eradicated from public space” (187) in Croatia, while in Serbia many Serbs desired the legislation of Cyrillic as exclusive; and towns with mixed Serb-Croat populations frequently saw demonstrations against signs written in both scripts.

A major theme of the book overall is the propensity of a group to self-identify with a writing system as national and cultural symbol. This is the central focus of Ch. 7, about Croatia’s rediscovery of Glagolitic and the post-war institutionalization of that alphabet as a unique national symbol; and of Ch. 10, about Bulgaria’s glorification of Cyrillic at yearly celebrations and the intense pride of Bulgarians when Cyrillic was recognized as an official alphabet of the EU.

The book contains many quotations, not all to the point; a more judicious choice would have been preferable. One also wishes they had been cited in the original as well, as the author’s translations do not always inspire confidence (for example, “the Bulgarian character” for “bŭlgarskijat šrift” [12] or “Croatian chakavs” [171], presumably for “hrvatski čakavci”). It is furthermore curious that a book about writing systems should take such an idiosyncratic and inconsistent approach to transliteration.

These caveats aside, Selvelli’s survey of the symbolic power of alphabets covers the Balkans well, even bringing Bulgaria and Croatia together at the end over Glagolitic. The case studies are of great interest, and the chronological presentation of them is intellectually satisfying.

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Staged Otherness: Ethnic Shows in Central and Eastern Europe, 1850–1939. Ed.

Dagnosław Demski and Dominika Czarnecka. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2021. x, 450 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. Tables. \$105.00, hard bound.

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Dagnosław Demski and Dominika Czarnecka’s edited volume, *Staged Otherness: Ethnic Shows in Central and Eastern Europe, 1850–1939*, is the final result of a collective research project begun in 2016. It pioneered a topic little known to students of the Russian and Habsburg empires and the interwar nation-states that succeeded them. “Ethnic/ethnographic shows” (the term consciously used in the collection to underscore their performative component as well as the agency of the performers) have been associated with western modern urbanity, mass culture, science, and colonialism but have remained largely invisible beyond Vienna’s Landstrasse (as in the famous expression attributed to Metternich: “Asia begins at the Landstrasse”). *Staged Otherness* crosses this symbolic border and unearths the ethnic shows’ itineraries, their reception, and cultural functions in “Central and Eastern Europe” (CEE). Concepts that had originated in studies of western Europe such as *ethnic shows*, *Völkerschauen*, or *human zoos* proved utterly unfamiliar to archivists in St. Petersburg, Riga, and Warsaw, necessitating truly creative approaches on the part of the project participants. The multilingual press became their main pass into the