

# KEYWORDS, KEYWORDING, AND EUROPEAN IRREGULARIZED MIGRATION REGIME AT/ON THE PERIPHERIES

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The article introduces the special issue *Keywording the European Irregularized Migration Regime: Reflections from/on the Peripheries*. It maps the itineraries of “keywords” from their origins as an introductory reading framework to their development into a distinct methodological approach. The analysis traces the conceptual journey from Raymond Williams’s seminal work *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976) to their contemporary uses. It follows and comments on two main traditions: a philological one, focused on linguistic histories, and a cultural studies one, viewing keywords as sites of social struggle and transformation. Particular attention is given to keywording in the context of migration, highlighting contested issues and divergent approaches in this field. The discussion concludes with reflections on keywords developed within the ERIM research project – *The European Irregularized Migration Regime at the Periphery of the EU: from Ethnography to Keywords*, of which this special issue is an outcome.

Keywords: keywords, keywording, cultural studies, philology, migration

In everyday use, keywords are understood as significant words or phrases that encapsulate the main topic of a given content.<sup>1</sup> In more professional contexts, such as in the field of information technology, they serve as tools for organizing and retrieving information, facilitating connections between people, machines, and the content they seek. Whether this process is termed searching, indexing, or tagging, their function is to connect

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<sup>1</sup> This introduction, as well as the special issue, is the result of the project *Poetics and Politics of Ethnography Today* (NextGenerationEU) conducted at the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research in Zagreb.

textual, visual, or virtual objects – such as documents, images, or even digital applications – with their intended users, readers, or consumers. In academic articles, keywords have an additional function beyond summarizing, organizing, and retrieving information. Together with the abstract, references, title, and name of author(s), they frame the text. Drawing on Gérard Genette's (1997) concept of paratext, we could say that keywords help establish the academic article as a distinct genre of writing. Specifically, the keyword section functions as a recognizable marker of academic article publishing. As an element of academic writing, keywords arise from an act of self-abstraction of a sort. In today's market-oriented academia, scholars “brand” and “pitch” their work through keywords to reach from peripheral positions of knowledge production toward the center. We condense our research into up to five words, carefully considering which current “keywords” will connect us with other works and make our knowledge relevant, visible, influential, perhaps even read and reflected upon. This prompts us to ask what answer today's expansion of academic publishing – with its centers and subalterns – offers to the question: “Can and to whom the *subaltern* keyword speak?” And ultimately, is the keyword alone enough for knowledge to truly stand out, be seen, and connect?

The keyword section of academic articles, understood in the outlined sense, parallels books that foreground “Keywords” in their titles – volumes of keyword collections that, similarly to various “short introductions” or “companions” – aspire to provide an entry into the complexities of a specific academic field or topic. While these publications might be dismissed as exemplifying automated and commodified academia, for readers – especially newcomers – they serve as a “lifeline” in a sea of overwhelming hyperproduction and specialized knowledge. From the authors' point of view, they may be seen as a form of fostering transgenerational exchange of knowledge, perhaps even as a gesture of academic solidarity. Regardless of their background, motivations, or stakes, keyword collections serve as keys for understanding a particular field of human activity, offering, as formulated by Alan Durant, “privileged ways into something (a small door into a large room, lifting the lid off a casket)” (2006: 3). In such publications, the focus is on words that offer particular conceptual leverage for comprehending specialized fields of inquiry. Durant's examples of the genre are *Canadian Constitutional Keywords* and *Keywords in Language and Literature*. “Implicit in such collections”, he writes, “is the idea that what you unlock with your keyword will be enriching or at least worth unlocking, despite being complex, tangled, or otherwise blocked from easy access – hence my room and casket imagery rather than keys to garden sheds or parked bicycles” (Durant 2006: 3–4).

Today, keyword volumes abound in countless academic disciplines and themes – particularly in the social sciences and humanities – ranging from composition and literary studies to sound and children's literature, some appearing as part of series featuring “Keywords” in their titles.<sup>2</sup> Within this realm of “keywords publishing”, Ben Highmore observes

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<sup>2</sup> E. g. *Keywords* series <https://keywords.nyupress.org/>; <https://otherpress.com/product/keywords-identity-9781590511053/>

significant differences in scale, with some volumes encompassing hundreds of entries and others focusing on just one; some single-authored and others collective. They also differ in their attitude towards history, with some oriented towards historical inquiry and others more presentist, as well as in their objectives, with some oriented towards discipline building and consolidation, and others towards “more general philological or language cluster” concerns (Highmore 2021: 3).

Many keyword volumes, particularly those from the social sciences and humanities, reference or implicitly connect to Raymond Williams’s *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Published almost half a century ago, it remains perhaps the most emblematic keyword compendium of all. Williams’s work on this book, as he explains in the introduction, began with his engagement with words used in general discussions in “interesting or difficult ways” (Williams 1983: 14). From approximately two hundred such words he had collected, Williams selected sixty and wrote notes and short essays on them, intending them as an appendix to his seminal 1958 book *Culture and Society*. However, upon the publisher’s insistence to shorten the text, the appendix was taken out of the book. Over next twenty years Williams worked on these remnants, adding new examples, new points of analysis, and new words. The idea was, as he elaborates in the introduction to the *Keywords*, to provide discussions of words that could be termed keywords in two related ways: they are crucial terms that hold together particular activities and how we interpret them and they are telling signs of certain ways of thinking (Williams 1983: 15). Published in 1976, the book strived to offer insights into continuities and discontinuities, as well as deep conflicts of values and beliefs throughout “inquiry into a *vocabulary*” or “throughout the vocabulary itself” (Williams 1983: 15, 23).

Concentrating on the common vocabulary and concepts used in English-language discussions of what we collectively understand as culture and society (Williams 1983: 15), Williams’s book differs from most contemporary books on keywords, which typically center on particular areas of culture or society. Williams explicitly highlights that his book is “not a dictionary or glossary of a particular academic subject” (1983: 15). In contrast to the abovementioned idea of keywords as keys for understanding a particular field of human activity, Williams orients himself toward words that stand out in “most general discussions” (1983: 15), not in specialist debates and domains. This focus reflects his broader analytical understanding of language, particularly his view that “some important social processes occur within language, in ways which indicate how integral the problems of meanings and of relationships really are” (1983: 22). Here, words are understood as agents of social change rather than mere reflections of it. In the elaboration of this aspect, two elements become crucial: the history of words and the mapping of relationships between words and their usages. Williams himself best explained this in the following passage:

New kinds of relationship, but also new ways of seeing existing relationships, appear in language in a variety of ways: in the invention of new terms (capitalism); in the adaptation and alteration (indeed at times reversal) of older terms (society or individual);

in extension (interest) or transfer (exploitation). But also, as these examples should remind us, such changes are not always either simple or final. Earlier and later senses coexist, or become actual alternatives in which problems of contemporary belief and affiliation are contested. It is certainly necessary to analyse these and other consequent problems as problems of general signification, but my emphasis here is on a vocabulary of meanings, in a deliberately selected area of argument and concern. (Williams 1983: 22)

In accordance with this problem-oriented approach to words, Williams explicitly distances himself from the definitional or historical-semantic role of his analyses – *Keywords* “is not a series of footnotes to dictionary histories or definitions of a number of words” (1983: 15). Moreover, he sees defining as an irrelevant and ultimately impossible procedure for words that involve ideas and values. This is why, as noted by Gargi Bhattacharyya, “*Keywords* is a book which reveals the extent of modern life’s mystery” (1998: 48). This is also why, as Deborah Cameron reminds us, Williams’s book, despite its scholarly impetus and non-ironical stance, “might seem closer to ‘anti-dictionaries’ as Bierce’s *Devil’s Dictionary* and Flaubert’s *Dictionary of Received Ideas*” (1998: 35) than regular dictionaries and lexicons.

Williams’s emphasis is “deliberately social and historical” (1983: 21). He views language through the lens of polysemy, where meanings are shaped by different classes and particular professions. Words thus retain – both within themselves and in relation to other words – the tensions between different meanings and uses. Consequently, his analyses of selected words are “not a neutral review of meanings”, but “an exploration of the vocabulary of a crucial area of social and cultural discussion, which has been inherited within precise historical and social conditions and which has to be made at once conscious and critical – subject to change as well as to continuity” (1983: 24). This is in line with the activist dimension of *Keywords* to which Williams explicitly points at the end of the introduction. It is also aligned with a tradition fundamental to cultural studies – one predicated on the understanding that academic work is neither conducted in a vacuum nor ideologically neutral (see Duda 2002). Therefore, for Williams the analyses of individual keywords are,

not a tradition to be learned, nor a consensus to be accepted, nor a set of meanings which, because it is “our language”, has a natural authority; but as a shaping and reshaping, in real circumstances and from profoundly different and important points of view: a vocabulary to use, to find our own ways in, to change as we find it necessary to change it, as we go on making our own language and history. (Williams 1983: 24–25)

Interpreters of Williams’s work stress this aspect of *Keywords*. Highmore, for instance, describes it as a “project that was dedicated to a socially critical philology, aimed at providing ‘resources of hope’ to those struggling to find ways of not just describing the world as fully as possible, but of making aspects of it newly visible and thereby open to challenge and change” (Highmore 2021: 3).

## KEYWORDS DEBATE

Since its publication, *Keywords* has prompted widespread proliferation. Williams himself published a revised edition in 1983, conceiving of revision as an open ended, necessarily incomplete process (Williams 1983: 27) that was apparently terminated by his death in 1988. However, this only seemed to be the case. The book has inspired countless intellectual, political, or merely nominal successor volumes bearing its title – to which we shall return in our discussion of keywords and migration. It has also spawned several direct continuations, including revised vocabularies related to culture and society in general discussion. In the 2000s, at least two teams worked on revisions of *Keywords*. In 2005 *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society* was published, edited by Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg, and Meaghan Morris building on the tradition of cultural studies, which in many aspects derives from Williams's book. Partly established in reaction to the *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, a complementary endeavor framed for a decade as the *Keywords Project* (2007–2017) was taken up.<sup>3</sup> In its framework, more linguistically and philologically oriented work on new keywords and their elaboration was undertaken and published online and in the book *Keywords for Today: A 21st Century Vocabulary* (MacCabe et al. 2018). The mentioned books of keywords correspond to two broadly defined traditions – philological and cultural studies – within which Williams's work on keywords has been interpreted, contextualized, and understood.

In the philological tradition (encompassing both linguistics and literary studies), Williams's deep engagement with language and his commitment to tracing the histories of words find a clear echo in Jeff Wallace's introduction to the inaugural issue of *Key Words: A Journal of Cultural Materialism* (1998), launched under the auspices of the Raymond Williams Society, where he observes that:

starting out as a literary critic, Williams's methodology was always fundamentally about language, and his first major work and seminal re-writing of the modern British cultural tradition, *Culture and Society 1780–1950*, was built around the emergence of five key terms: industry, democracy, class, art, and culture. (Wallace 1998: 8–9)

Wallace emphasizes language itself, guided by the idea that for Williams, writing functions as a distinct form of historical practice – specifically a cultural materialist one – in which language is understood not as a passive vessel of pre-existing meanings, but as an active social force in its own right (Wallace 1998: 9).

At the turn of the twenty-first century, within the field of literary studies and linguistics, *Keywords* became the subject of focused scholarly attention through seminars, discussions, and articles that examined both the theoretical and methodological dimensions of

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<sup>3</sup> The *Keywords Project* was multi-year joint venture of the Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences, University of Pittsburgh and Jesus College, Cambridge. For more information on the project see <https://keywords.pitt.edu/index.html>.

Williams's work and keywords as an analytical project. Notable contributions include those published in the *Critical Quarterly* special issue from Spring 2007, in particular discussions about Williams's influences and predecessors. In this context, Alan Durant (2006) connects Williams's work to the doyens of literary-critical thought from the first half of the twentieth century, such as C. S. Lewis, I. A. Richards and William Empson, leading figures of Cambridge Criticism school of "close reading" (Durant 2006: 18–19). Systematic criteria were also established for determining which words may be identified and analyzed as keywords, whereby keywords were defined as words that are currently used, polysemous, categorical, and actively contested. Some discussions within this strand engaged with conceptualizations of keywords and adjustments to Williams's vocabulary in the context of new social configurations and technological changes. Deborah Cameron, for example, opened up debate about the future of keywords discussions and revisions in relation to computer technology available for storing and manipulating abundant corpora and large amounts of linguistic data. Far from technological optimism or normativism, she identifies:

the positivist's paradox: because size matters, because you care about representative sampling, because you can produce such impressive statistics given a sufficiently large and representative sample, you do not hear, or even think it worth trying to hear, the obscure and unrepresentative "minority" voices who may really have defined a historical moment, even if later they lost out in the struggle for the sign. (Cameron 1998: 44)

Discussions about Williams's *Keywords* within the literature studies and linguistics camp emerge from a sense of its doubly misguided reception at the turn of the century. In Durant's view, *Keywords* has suffered apparent neglect in (corpus, historical, etc.) linguistics, while being "now taken mostly seriously in cultural studies", where the emphasis is more on the "history of ideas" (2006: 19; see also Adamson and Durant 2007: 1). From his perspective *New Keywords* is "a wide-ranging glossary of contemporary cultural studies" inconsistent with Williams's work in both the word list and overall approach (Durant 2006: 2). Instead, Durant argues, the emphasis in the production of new keywords should be placed on the contested and world-making aspects of words, that is, understanding keywords as "a cluster of interlocking, contemporary senses whose interaction remains unresolved across a range of fields of thought and discussion. Interaction between the senses can lead to cross purposes and confusion in public debate" (Durant 2006: 4). In this view, the ruptures and misunderstandings that stem from the polysemy of words are constitutive of the ways in which meaning is negotiated and contested within culture.

Beyond here outlined philological and linguistic approaches, a second major tradition of engagement with Williams's *Keywords* has developed within cultural studies. Here, responses to earlier critiques and broader reflections on keywords have been more elaborately articulated in the last decade, particularly by Marie Moran (2021) and Ben Highmore (2021). In his article "Keywords and Keywording", Highmore returns to the question of influences, predecessors, and intellectual traditions and disciplinary affiliations. From this perspective, he challenges the philological positioning of Williams as an extension of so-called "Cambridge English" emphasizing that to "position Williams as an

heir of Cambridge English erases Williams's attempt to break with Richards, Empson and Leavis" (Highmore 2021: 18). Along these lines, he demonstrates the connection between Williams and Marxist theories of language, and knowledge production from the other side of the then Iron Curtain, in the center of another world, in the East, particularly highlighting Valentin Vološinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*.<sup>4</sup> The publication of Vološinov's book in English in 1973, according to Highmore, may have motivated Williams to publish *Keywords* after so many years of working on it. It is indisputable that it is referenced in *Keywords* and plays a crucial role in Williams's *Marxism and Literature*, published in 1977 (Highmore 2021: 7).

Several key points of convergence between Vološinov and Williams emerge from Highmore's analysis (2021: 8–11). These include the openness of inquiries into words, the understanding of language as a concrete conception of the world which is socially embedded and defined, and the recognition of the word as what Vološinov terms "the most sensitive index of social changes" (Vološinov in Highmore 2021: 9) – capable of both anticipating future meanings and recalling previous ones. Both Williams and Vološinov apparently understood the sociality of language as struggle within heteroglossia, as heteroglot struggle.

Highmore, from a different position than those in the philological strand, emphasizes the ordinariness, contested nature, and intersections of *Keywords*. As he highlights, foundational to *Keywords* is Williams's engagement with the everyday and with culture as a way of life, alongside his concern with language as ordinary, lived practice "bringing an anthropological optic to bear on your own culture" (Highmore 2021: 6). This orientation is to some extent visible and implied in the revision of Williams's *Keywords* coming from the cultural studies camp, more precisely in the aforementioned *New Keywords*. In this publication, Williams's legacy is evident in the editorially encouraged effort to emphasize, despite the field's strong theoretical orientation, at least in the introductory discussion of each word, "the keyword itself, its history, and its everyday meanings" and to give precedence to the meanings of words in public rather than specialized usage (Bennett et al. 2005: xxiv). All of this entails understanding "keywords as a matter of social practice and social relations" and paying attention to "semantic clashes" between different histories of words that have different origins and have been "forged simultaneously in different places" (Highmore 2021: 6). Similarly, Highmore, who emphasizes keywording in the sense "of undertaking keyword analysis" (2021: 2), is echoed by Marie Moran. She writes about "keywords as a method" with the aim of illustrating how certain words acquire their meanings and significance only within the context of wider practices and beliefs present in a given sociohistorical moment, and, consistent with viewing language as a mode of social production, examining how these developing meanings and applications create

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<sup>4</sup> Vološinov was a member of the so-called Bakhtin Circle, and his book *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* has occasionally been attributed to Mikhail Bakhtin, as was the case with the translation published in Belgrade in 1980.

new opportunities for participating in social action and structuring social relations (Moran 2021: 1026). For Moran, the key questions are:

Here, the developed cultural materialist philosophy encourages digging deeper into the context, and asking, what *else* was going on where this change of meaning started to manifest and then consolidate? *Why* did a keyword emerge when it did, and what this has to do with the changing shape of capitalist societies in which it came to prominence? And what new practices and experiences are being enabled and shaped by this emergent and novel use of language? (Moran 2021: 1026–1027)

In line with the future-oriented and political inclinations of cultural studies, work in this area has not focused on defining what keywords are, but rather on envisioning future directions for the keywords project or keywording. The emphasis has been placed on moving “towards a more heteroglot *Keywording*”, meaning: 1) shifting the focus from the literary to the multidisciplinary, the interdisciplinary, and the experimental; 2) reimagining the corpus from the published text to all forms of media; 3) widening the voices that author examples to include world “Englishes” and subaltern voices; 4) paying more attention to the relationship between words and material culture, understanding the latter as a form of accentuating (Highmore 2021: 15–17).

From Williams's initial intention to map words that reflect and shape social processes, through philological and linguistic reinterpretations, to cultural studies and intermedial expansions, keywords function as a conceptual crossroads between language, society, and knowledge. What connects these different lines of thoughts is not only an interest in the meanings of words, but also an awareness of language as a site of conflict, negotiation, and social change. In this sense, keywords are tools for understanding the dynamics of cultural production and power, enabling critical insight into the ways that societies produce and reorganize their own vocabularies of meaning.

## KEYWORDING BORDERS AND MIGRATION

Migration – the word that now fractures political and economic alliances (Brexit), effectively suspends interstate agreements (Schengen), and determines electoral outcomes – was not a keyword for Williams. This speaks to the thesis that contemporary society's focus on migration is of recent origin, as it seems, symptomatic of deeper societal crises and transformations. The keywords volumes published in this field over the last decade have emerged from attempts to understand contemporary debates on migration from specific disciplinary and political standpoints. Besides *Keywords of Mobility: Critical Engagements* (Salazar and Jayaram 2016), *States of Refuge: Keywords for Critical Refugee Studies* (Nyers 2019), *Humanitarianism: Keywords* (De Lauri 2020), and *Keywords on Forced Migration and Refugee Studies* (Banerjee et al. 2023), a set of interrelated keywords volumes with shared editorship and, to some extent, a shared analytical approach and activist stance

has been published. These include, in order of publication: *New Keywords: Migration and Borders* (De Genova et al. 2015), *Europe/Crisis: New Keywords of “the Crisis” in and of “Europe”* (De Genova and Tazzioli 2016), and *Minor Keywords of Political Theory: Migration as a Critical Standpoint* (De Genova and Tazzioli 2022). Additionally, there are more artistically, museologically, and literarily oriented glossaries (e.g., Schimanski and Wolfe 2017), some from outside the Anglophone sphere, such as *Devedesete: rečnik migracija / The Glossary of Migrations of the Nineties* (Knežević 2019) and *ABCCČ migracij* (Mlekuž 2021) which engage photography and drawings, while drawing upon textual fragments. This special issue builds on these traditions – the critical and activist perspective (De Genova et al. 2015; De Genova and Tazzioli 2016, 2022), the anthropological foundations (Salazar and Jayaram 2016), and the peripheral positionalities (Banerjee et al. 2023). It builds more directly on the several keywords published within the international research project ERIM – *The European Irregularized Migration Regime at the Periphery of the EU: From Ethnography to Keywords* by the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research in Zagreb, publisher of this journal.<sup>5</sup> The articles gathered in this issue arise almost in full from contributions at the ERIM final project conference held in Zagreb in April 2024, which brought together researchers to engage with the conference’s central theme: “Keywording the European Irregularized Migration Regime: Reflections from/on the Peripheries”. The conference offered a forum for empirically grounded, predominantly ethnographic research, fostering both comparative and historical contextualizations, as well as theoretical and critical discussions of keywording and the “key” words shaping the irregularized migration regime on and from the peripheries. Given both the richness of conference contributions and our commitment to the often complex polycentric anchoring of our work that we endeavored to cultivate throughout the project’s duration, a complementary special issue – a second collection of articles arising from the conference – will be published next year in  *Glasnik Etnografskog instituta SANU* (Bulletin of the SASA Institute of Ethnography) and edited by ERIM associates Teodora Jovanović and Duško Petrović.

The earliest and most recent ERIM keywords appeared as elements of printed brochures: the brochure accompanying the countermemorial for people who died because of borders *Prijelaz/The Passage* (2021) curated by selma banich,<sup>6</sup> and the brochure accompanying the ERIM ethnographic research map displayed at the exhibition *Putnici/Travelers* (2024–2027) curated by Marija Živković and displayed at the Ethnographic

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<sup>5</sup> This four-year research project was funded by Croatian Science Foundation (IP 2019-04-6642, 2020–2024) and coordinated by the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research in Zagreb. The project brought together collaborators from Croatia, Slovenia, and Serbia representing various humanities and social science academic institutions, ranging from ethnology and cultural anthropology institutes and departments to the Academy of Music of the University of Zagreb and the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Ljubljana. Over the course of the project, collaboration was also established with institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, notably the Faculty of Education in Bihać and the Faculty of Philosophy in Banja Luka. For more about the project, project collaborators, and results see the project webpage: <https://erim.ief.hr/en/>.

<sup>6</sup> selma banich’s *Prijelaz/The Passage* was made in collaboration with Marijana Hameršak and the collective Žene Ženama/Women to Women. More at: <https://selmabanich.org/the-passage>.

Museum in Zagreb.<sup>7</sup> Whereas the keywords published in the *Prijelaz/The Passage* brochure at the very beginning of the ERIM project tended toward the definitional – presenting distilled summaries of established literature – the keywords in the brochure related to the exhibition *Putnici/Travellers*, published after the project was finalized, though equally minimalist in terms of word count, emerge from year-long fieldwork. The latter is shaped by extensive ethnographic practice and keywording work, rooted in multi-sited fieldwork along the so-called Balkan Route and informed by two broader keywording projects undertaken within ERIM. The first is the multilingual *e-ERIM: An Online Platform of Keywords of the European Irregularized Border Regime at the Periphery of the EU (2022–2025)*.<sup>8</sup> The second consists of article-length elaborations of about twenty keywords related to irregularized border regime at external southeastern borders of the EU, originally published in Croatian and Serbian (*Balkanska ruta*, 2024), and subsequently translated into Slovenian (*Balkanska pot*, revised edition, 2025), and English (*Keywords of the Balkan Route*, 2026).<sup>9</sup> In these and other publications emerging from the ERIM research group, the concepts foregrounded in the project and conference title – periphery, migration regime, and irregularized migration – are specifically addressed and analyzed. This introduction, however, centers on keywords and keywording, thereby bringing full circle not only the title but also our collective journey, since we began our internal project conversations precisely with a discussion of keywords and keywords collections as a writing genre, method, and approach.

*e-ERIM* is an abundant online collection of over one hundred short texts, video, and visual materials addressing agents, spaces, objects, and practices, as well as theoretical, methodological, and vernacular concepts related to the European irregularized migration regime at the southeastern periphery of the EU. Some of them are, in alphabetical order: “Aggressive Humanism”, “Backpack”, “Candy”, “Distro”, “Emptiness”, “Fair Distribution”, “Garbage”, “Humanitarian Power”, “Krnjača”, “Lipa Protest”, “Migration Industry”, “Onion”, “Paromlin”, “Roda Tent”, “Schengen”, “Šid” and “Transit as Lived Experience”. Contributions included in *e-ERIM* are based on fieldwork, archival, and theoretical research conducted by ERIM project members, as well as external associates, some of whom are authors in this special issue.

*e-ERIM* was envisaged as a platform for experimentation, both in content and form, and for sharing and communicating research insights without the substantial temporal delays

<sup>7</sup> The brochure accompanies the exhibition *Putnici/Travellers* segment “Epilogue: The Unwanted”, curated by Marijana Hameršak, Bojan Mucko, Mojca Piškori, and Iva Pleše. More at: <https://emz.hr/izlozbe/izlozba-putnici/>.

<sup>8</sup> <https://e-erim.ief.hr/?locale=en>.

<sup>9</sup> The editors of editions in Croatian and Serbian (publisher: Sandorf, Zagreb) and English (Berghahn, New York and Oxford) are Marijana Hameršak, Iva Pleše, and Tea Škokić (2024, 2026), while the authors are ERIM project members: Marijana Hameršak, Teodora Jovanović, Uršula Lipovec Čebren, Bojan Mucko, Duško Petrović, Mojca Piškori, Iva Pleše, Romana Pozniak, Marta Stojić Mitrović, Tea Škokić, Jelka Zorn, and Drago Župarić-Ilić. The edition in Slovenian was published by Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete Univerze v Ljubljani in collaboration with Uršula Lipovec Čebren and Jelka Zorn (2025).

characteristic of academic publishing. Contributions published in *e-ERIM* are textual and visual reflections and sketches, interconnected through interlinks, with an emphasis on the processual, connecting different perspectives, experiences, and knowledges. Here the focus rests on everyday interactions as experienced by researchers during ethnographic fieldwork, as well as on the reflections about concepts encountered in the literature. *e-ERIM* could be understood as a compendium of terms that came to prominence during the research process, subsequently contextualized visually, theoretically, comparatively, within *e-ERIM*. The disciplinary diversity of *e-ERIM*'s contributors – literary scholars, ethnomusicologists, social anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers, and others – comes distinctly into view. Through its multidisciplinary ethos, its experimental work with media beyond the textual, and its care for vernacular expressions across languages and material culture alike, *e-ERIM* finds itself in striking alignment with the future-oriented directions for keywording that Highmore outlines (2021: 15–17) – a convergence arrived at independently, which makes it all the more suggestive.

The ERIM book *Keywords of the Balkan Route*, in English translation (Hameršak et al. 2026), brings together article-length discussions of some twenty keywords. They approach the current migration regime shaped by proscribed and criminalized migrant movements through Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia, and the surrounding countries through keywords that emerged from fieldwork and literature on the subject, their various meanings, genealogies, overlaps, and ambivalences. The emphasis is on the interconnections between keywords published in the book, but also on *e-ERIM* and the experiences and knowledges of the periphery. The perspectives offered in the book are deliberately engaged and partial, grounded in ethnographically-informed and theoretically-engaged critical research that identifies particular concepts as critical junctures. Rather than aspiring to a comprehensive account, it embraces fragmentation acknowledging that keywords are, as Williams formulated in the preface to the second edition of *Keywords*, “necessarily unfinished and incomplete” (Williams 1983: 27). In other words, this keywords collection does not seek to capture the regime in its entirety; instead, through its format and selection of terms, it foregrounds the fragmented nature of the regime itself. This fragmentation stems from how irregularization produces invisibilization and erasure through criminalization of practices related to movement and border crossings. While most contributions in *e-ERIM* are single-authored, collaborative contributions prevail here. Additionally, the book focuses on more abstract, general terms such as camp, death, detention, defense, fence, industry, health, refugeehood, solidarity, and waiting, alongside two emic, vernacular terms: pushback and game. The former refers to deportations specific to peripheral EU contexts, while the latter denotes clandestine border crossings in the context of the so-called Balkan route. Readers will frequently encounter both in the articles of this special issue.

The ERIM keywords volume was authored and conceptually shaped through collaborative discussions among project group members. It served as a platform for envisioning diverse forms of knowledge exchange, imagination, and writing. With the ERIM final conference,

the project opened space for dialogue that extended beyond the collective and individual voices of project members, welcoming colleagues who investigate various internal and external peripheries – political, economic, material, symbolic, and others – within and beyond the EU. Several of these contributions have been further developed for this special issue, made possible thanks to the support of an expanded group of peer reviewers, themselves part of the broader community gathered around the theme of migration. Only through this expansion – moving beyond the temporal and structural boundaries of the four-year project – was it possible to achieve wider scope. After all, as some accounts note, Raymond Williams worked on *Keywords* intermittently for thirty years, while the collaborators behind the *Keywords Project* took more than a decade to bring their volume to publication. As editors, we are deeply grateful to everyone who made this continuation of the ERIM keywording work possible, extending it across space and time, themes, and methodologies. Beyond the authors and reviewers already mentioned, our thanks go to all conference participants and to all our colleagues who co-organized the conference.

## POSITIONING OF THIS SPECIAL ISSUE

Just as our colleagues at the beginning of mass computer usage inquired into how information technologies would transform keyword research, we today might pose a similar question regarding artificial intelligence and its capacity to write keywords. Like them, we too face a paradox. While artificial intelligence can certainly generate keyword descriptions, its predominant reliance on statistical and representational premises means that such descriptions would, to invoke Cameron's previously cited observation, invisibilize "obscure and unrepresentative 'minority' voices who may really have defined a historical moment, even if later they lost out in the struggle for the sign" (Cameron 1998: 44). Furthermore, reconnecting here with Williams's fundamental position, keyword analysis is precisely concerned with discerning conflicts between meanings within specific circumstances and from particular perspectives – a zone of specificity where human actors remain indispensable, with all their positionalities. This special issue reflects precisely this aspect of keywording. In presenting keywords through scholarly articles that engage new and complex debates, it demonstrates the centrality of specific perspectives and positions to keyword analysis. Compared to *e-ERIM* and the keywords book, it marks a sort of return to unconstrained ethnographic elaborations, as the scholarly article format enables more space for ethnographic insights. In this way, we have avoided the dictate of brevity, which, incidentally, compelled Williams to excise his appendix. We have also partially avoided the dictate of uniformity – the equal length of all entries, which presumes a kind of egalitarianism among the included terms and ensures a certain regularity. A maximum character limit was imposed instead, a threshold that could not be exceeded, which proved constraining for some broader topics. Our gratitude goes to the authors for accepting this limitation in the interest of the collective outcome and the coherence of the special issue.

This special issue departs from and extends beyond ERIM's initial spatial coordinates and its focus on the so-called Balkan route. The contributions examine various peripheries: internal peripheries in relation to ERIM's and other research on the Balkan route (articles on North Macedonia and Albania), external peripheries (the English Channel as a peripheral space), peripheries of the periphery (Eastern European truck drivers and the English Channel), European peripheries (Poland and Eastern Europe), as well as peripheral communities and processes of peripheralization within these contexts (Tatars, refugees). Finally, they address practices that are central yet remain, given the limited attention afforded them, peripheral – such as informed consent in asylum application procedures. Besides different spatialities, the keywords assembled in this issue engage diverse temporalities. For some, temporality is experiential (as in the articles on rivers or seasonality) and functions as an analytical dimension. For others, it is historical, as in the previously mentioned examples, to which we may add the article on Muslim communities in Podlasie, which explores ruptures between continuity and discontinuity in belonging and presence.

While the contributions gathered here do not primarily address methodological and generic questions about keywords, with the exception of the article on the prefix “geo-”, which both departs from conventional keyword forms and echoes Williams's (1983: 173–174) treatment of “Isms”, their engagement with the keyword tradition remains evident. Connections to the approach or line of thought inaugurated by Raymond Williams are clearly visible in the scholarly literature cited throughout, where cultural studies feature prominently – as in the article on “small boats”. This affinity is equally apparent in articles such as the aforementioned, or those centered on the borderwalk, ketchup, and mayonnaise, which invoke historical precedents – particularly the Second World War – thereby, in a manner akin to Williams, emphasizing historicity, continuity, and disruptions across the *longue durée*. The widespread concern with keyword polysemy, alongside a commitment to advocate for social change – themes running through most of these contributions – further connects this special issue to that broader keyword tradition. Social change is pursued here through interventions in language as well as interventions in practice, as seen in the articles on the keywords of “borderwalk” and “human speech”, while polysemy is often radical. Ordinary words such as “small boats” or “ladders” acquire, within the migration context, meanings entirely different from their everyday usage. They become code words of a sort, symbols of flight, invasion, and the reversal of power relations.

Keywords appear in this issue in several forms, reflecting diverse analytical engagements. In some articles, the keyword identifies a specific object, practice, or everyday phenomenon (such as “human speech”, “ketchup and mayonnaise”, “ladders”, “river”, or “small boats”), while in others it emerges from academic discourse itself (such as “seasonality”, “expert by experience”). Moreover, certain keywords are neologisms (“borderwalk”), while others belong to the established repertoire of the social sciences (“season”, “racializing”, “geo-”). Still other articles deploy keywords as analytical tools for understanding particular phenomena, as seen in the study of liminality and hospitality related to Afghan refugees in Albania or the text on irregularized migration research in North Macedonia. Across these

diverse instantiations, keywords function – as outlined by Williams – simultaneously as interpretative devices for reading society and as constituents of society's substance.

Williams's *Keywords* contain neither “migration” nor “violence”, yet these absent terms weave through the studies collected here like an invisible thread. It is “violence” in particular – epistemic, symbolic, physical; natural (rivers) and human (ketchup and mayonnaise) – that links these contributions together. They emerge as manifestations of the keyword “border violence”, a keyword for the shared and disturbing condition of our times. Naming “border violence”, as an absent yet omnipresent keyword, is thus a political gesture as much as an analytical one: it renders visible what euphemistic policy discourse – “management”, “control”, “protection” – works to obscure.

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## POJMOVI, OPOJMOVLJIVANJE I EUROPSKI REŽIM IREGULARIZIRANIH MIGRACIJA NA PERIFERIJAMA

Članak uvodi u tematski broj naslovljen *Opojmovljivanje europskog režima iregulariziranih migracija: refleksije (s) periferija*. Prati put transformacije pojmovnika od njihovih početaka kao uvodnih pregleda literature do pojmovnika kao zasebnog metodološkog pristupa. Analizira se putanja razvoja od prijelomnog djela *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976) Raymonda Williama do njihovih suvremenih iteracija. Članak opisuje i interpretira dvije glavne tradicije: na povijest riječi usmjerenu filološku tradiciju i tradiciju kulturalnih studija, u kojoj se pojmovi promatraju kao poprišta društvene borbe i transformacije. Posebna se pozornost posvećuje opojmovljivanju (engl. *keywording*) u migracijskom kontekstu pri čemu se ističu sporna mjesta i heterogeni pristupi u tom području. Članak završava osvrtom na pojmove, pojmovnike i procese opojmovljivanja u okviru projekta *Europski režim iregulariziranih migracija na periferiji EU: od etnografije do pojmovnika* (ERIM), iz kojih ishodi i ovaj tematski broj.

Ključne riječi: pojmovi, opojmovljivanje, kulturalni studiji, filologija, migracije