

Introduction

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This book, originally published in Croatian and Serbian, approaches the current migration regime shaped by proscribed and criminalized migrant movements through Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia, and the surrounding countries, by identifying keywords, their various meanings, genealogies, overlaps, and ambivalences. *Keywords of the Balkan Route: The European Irregularized Migration Regime at the Periphery* joins the growing corpus of critical keywords in social sciences and humanities in general (e.g., Bennett, Grossberg, and Morris 2005; Burgett and Hendler 2007; Nel and Paul 2011; and the Keywords series by NYU Press). More specifically, it accompanies other keywords in the field of migration and border research, to which it also refers in the following pages.¹

This keywords, as a collective work of all involved authors, starts from the understanding of migration as a layered and fluid phenomenon, as emphasized by the use of the term “regime” in its title. In this context, the term is not primarily associated with authority or governance, as is common in everyday language, or with systems of rules, regulations, and measures imposed from above. Instead, its meaning is the one it most often carries in critically oriented migration research (e.g., Pott, Rass, and Wolff 2018). In such research, “regime” refers to a complex interplay of diverse practices and actors. This includes those who, in various forms, intensities, and levels of power, seek to control migration, as well as those who aim to evade such control. It encompasses everyone who is directly or indirectly, overtly or less explicitly, connected to irregularized movement. By using the term “regime,” we thus evoke not only an understanding of migration as complex and heterogeneous interactions but also a decentralized conception of power in the migration context (cf. Tsianos, Hess, and Karakayali 2009: 2).

This book is about one of the migratory pathways at the European periphery. Periphery is here understood also in a layered and decentralized manner. On the one hand, “periphery” carries the meaning of geographically, politically, and economically marginal areas of Europe and the European Union; on the other, it implies the specificities of social relations and processes that are spatially, symbolically, discursively, and in other ways established in the contrast between the periphery and the center, but other peripheries as well: internal and external, coming from within an area and from the surrounding areas (e.g., Kojanić 2020). These relations and processes are variable and multidirectional, allowing us to perceive the periphery as a dynamic and relational category, but also as a liminal area with its own dynamics—a stage for encounters, recognition, negotiations, and conflicts (e.g., Majstorović 2021). As a space that, with its own time, events, and memories, disrupts the “global flow of history” (cf. Vidmar Horvat 2020: 21), the periphery further reveals itself as a propulsive site for a critical approach to repressive practices associated with migration.

Another concept from the title of this book is related to this critical approach, the notion of “irregularization.” This term, used in the form of an adjective derived from a verb, is used to indicate that migrations are not inherently illegal, unlawful, or irregular, as they started to be called around the turn of the century. It emphasizes that such categorizations are constructed and produced through a series of practices and diverse processes of (il)legalization or (ir)regularization (e.g., Squire 2011: 5). The use of a passive past participle (*irregularized*) as an adjective instead of a simple adjective form (*irregular*) emphasizes the departure from the normative and established use of the term. It also affirms the constructivist perspective according to which irregularized migration is not a socially and culturally neutral phenomenon bounded by stable and clear boundaries, reducible to the question of the legal status of a person’s stay in a territory or the legality of them crossing the border. Much the same, analytical attention in the field of irregularized migration research—or, in the same vein, illegalized migration (e.g., Bauder 2013; De Genova 2002)—focuses on the ways in which certain movements are constructed and lived as irregular. As such, aided by the processes of normalizing the understanding of irregularity, they are regulated and controlled more strictly. This is closely linked to the securitization and criminalization of migrant movements (Squire 2011), as well as the recent proliferation of borders (Jansen, Celikates, and de Bloois 2015: ix).

The terms of regime and irregularized migration are analyzed in detail, along with numerous other terms, on *e-ERIM* (<https://e-erim.ief.hr/?loCALE=en>), an online platform of keywords closely related to this book of keywords. *E-ERIM* is a repository of keywords, short texts on theoretical and methodological concepts, actors, places and objects, events and everyday

expressions related to the European irregularized migration regime at the southeastern periphery of the EU. Although the keywords in this book can be read independently and separately from *e-ERIM*, and vice versa, they complement each other in a significant manner. Certain keywords discussed here have originated as extensions of texts initially published on *e-ERIM*, or have been shaped through the adoption, modification, and connection of its shorter texts. At the same time, some texts written for this book have been subsequently adapted into shorter pieces for *e-ERIM*. In line with the characteristics of digital media, in some instances they were further developed, not only textually, but also visually, with photographic and video materials, as well as with audio material, sound recordings and conversations. The close relationship between the two keywords on a material level is evident through numerous references (written in lower-case **bold letters**) in this book. These references point the readers to terms included and described on *e-ERIM*.

E-ERIM and this book are part of a four-year research project titled “The European Irregularized Migration Regime at the Periphery of the EU: From Ethnography to Keywords” (2020–24) conducted by the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research. The project brings together collaborators from Croatia, Slovenia, and Serbia, spanning various academic disciplines, united by their interest in ethnographic research on the irregularized migration regime and engaged in critical perspectives and formats. The research process that underlies our approach to the keywords involved multi-year, multi-sited ethnographic research conducted over years and across the borders of our countries. This research was spatially dispersed, involving one-time, successive, or prolonged presence at various locations. It also included continuous and situational exchanges with different actors, individuals, and communities. Diverse research approaches, methods, and techniques were used throughout this process. Our research has been not only collaborative, but truly collective, in many aspects. As such, it took shape at different levels, including collective fieldwork, mutual readings, joint writing, coordination, sharing of field and other insights and materials, group discussions, and conceptualizations relevant to the current migration regime of the Balkan route. Therefore, the words written in this book in upper case **BOLD LETTERS** in order to indicate that they are included in this book as keywords, as well as those, as mentioned, that use lower-case bold letters in order to indicate that they are included in *e-ERIM*, are not just technical in nature. They have emerged from our way of writing and thinking, always guided by collectively discussed ideas about what, how, in what context, why, and for whom. Additionally, many of the citations found within each chapter will not be found in the References, but in a separate Appendix at the end of the book, which has been specifically reserved for “Legal Documents, Reports, and Other Sources.”

Despite the large number of keywords included, this book does not aim to encompass the entirety of the regime it addresses; but with its format and selection of discussed terms, it tends to highlight the fragmentation of the regime in question. Moreover, the elaborations of keywords included in this book show that violence and coercion in the context of migration are not only connected with the reasons for emigrating from the countries of the Global South. For people on the move—refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented migrants, and other European undesirables—violence, forced movements, and immobilities continue to be part of life along the external and internal borders of Europe. In the context of the Balkans as one of the European buffer zones, forced movements and immobility are manifested on a daily basis, first of all, in the form of pushbacks, deportations, readmissions, and involuntary relocations to camps as specific forms of forced movements, as well as practices of encampment, and facilities, that people on the move have occupied themselves. Immobility can also be forced on people, in the sense that they may be forced into staying in a certain territory.

This book is a result of ethnographic research, and field insights further fragmented by the logic of the embeddedness of irregularization in practices that strive for invisibility. The included keywords come from various levels, visibilities, and histories, shaped primarily by our long-term or more recent research experiences and knowledge. In addition to keywords primarily derived from our recent research context and approach, this book also examines and contextualizes established theoretical and other keywords. Some keywords elaborated in this book come from previous research and publications, and present a kind of synthesis of thoughts on specific topics related to irregularized migration. However, both these keywords and those derived entirely from the project's research are always tied to a specific and current research context—the Balkan route marked by the experiences and practices of the periphery. Regarding the terms omitted from this book, some of them have been covered in academic papers written as part of the mentioned project, and independently published.

Just as this book as a whole is fragmentary, the keywords discussed in it are also fragmentary and partial. This is, among other reasons, because they stem from deliberate, ethnographically grounded, and critically positioned research perspectives. This is a critique that does not hide behind the neutrality of an academic work but constitutes an integral part of research and writing. This is also one of the elements that distinguishes this book of keywords from, for example, lexicons as a type of publication. However, certain formal and content characteristics of lexicons are intentionally partially applied, as they also typically include the alphabetical arrangement of texts, cross-references, single-word titles in singular form, a list of acronyms, and the incorporation of a larger number of sources and literature, as well as etymological and broader historical dimensions. On the other hand, this book

is closer to a collection or anthology of ethnographically based academic texts than a lexicon. This is primarily due to the relatively comprehensive elaboration of the keywords, openness to examination and research, and a clear rejection of neutrality. In addition to being read as an anthology, these keywords can also be approached as an authored book with twenty-two chapters that are explicitly (through references) and implicitly (through perspectives, themes, and examples) interconnected. These chapters do not have to be read sequentially, as is typical for authored books. Although part of a whole, they can be approached as individual texts. Regardless of how it is read, this book represents our attempt to look at contemporary migration realities on the southeastern periphery of the EU beyond the usual patterns of securitization, victimization, and spectacularization.

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Note

1. The keywords "Externalization," "Spectacularization," "Zone," and, in part, "Route" were translated by their respective authors and proofread by Simon Campbell and Juraj Šutej. We are grateful to our colleague Bojan Mucko for providing the cover photograph, taken in Bihać in 2021.

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