

Introduction

The accelerating transformations of the contemporary world—characterized by intensifying globalization, fluid identities, transnational mobilities, ecological crises, the proliferation of digital technologies, the rise of algorithmic governance, the fragmentation of collective solidarities, deepening economic inequalities, the resurgence of populist and authoritarian politics, and the dissolution of conventional political, social, and cultural boundaries and relations—have not only unsettled the epistemological foundations of modern social analysis but have also exposed a profound epistemic paralysis at the heart of social sciences and theories. As the global terrain becomes increasingly defined by complexity, hybridity, indeterminacy, interconnected crises, multi-scalar dynamics, rapidly shifting power configurations, technological disruptions, and contested knowledge regimes, dominant theoretical and epistemic frameworks remain stubbornly entangled in the cognitive scaffolding of first-wave modernity in the Global North—where and when the modern social sciences emerged, grounded in an episteme shaped by assumptions and guiding principles of certainty, linearity, determinacy, order, universality, and the privileging of Western-centric knowledge systems.

Modern social sciences, forged in the intellectual crucible of Enlightenment rationalism and nation-state formation, continue to prioritize given and universal categories, determinable structures, and spatially bounded entities. Yet, these epistemological assumptions increasingly stand in stark opposition to the emerging realities of the contemporary world—a world

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characterized by fluid boundaries, multi-scalar interactions, and unstable social configurations. The result is an ever-widening gap between the ontological dynamism of the cosmopolitanized world and the epistemological inertia of social theory and the social sciences—a gap that renders the latter ill-equipped to comprehend or engage with emergent phenomena that transcend, dissolve, and reconfigure traditional as well as dominant categories and frameworks of analysis.

It is this epistemic disjuncture—between a cosmopolitanized world in flux and the static epistemic frameworks of modernity or the groundlessness approaches of post-modernity—that lies at the heart of this book’s inquiry. “Social Theory and Encountering Indeterminacy in the Flux of Cosmopolitanization” directly addresses this rupture, providing both a systematic critique of the limitations inherent in the modern epistemologies of the social sciences and social theory, and a conceptual and methodological reconfiguration more attuned to the complexities of contemporary social life. In the various chapters of this book,¹ this gap has been examined and analyzed specifically in relation to “indeterminacy”—a variable that modern thought and the modern episteme, and particularly the social sciences at their inception, sought to suspend in favor of establishing a determinate and fixed framework as its foundation. At stake in this book is not merely a critique of modern epistemology and the epistemic foundations of the social sciences and theories but a far more urgent task—the construction of an alternative epistemic horizon capable of grappling with indeterminacy, relationality, and contingency as fundamental features of the current cosmopolitanized social world.

¹ The various chapters of this book, which constitute the author’s doctoral dissertation at the Department of Social Sciences, Humboldt University of Berlin, have previously been published as separate articles in different journals.

The aim is straightforward: addressing this epistemic gap in the social sciences requires a critique of the epistemic order that underpins modern social theories and the social sciences. Within this order, the suspension of indeterminacy in various ways has served as a central epistemic foundation, deeply rooted in the modern episteme. Thus, reintroducing and incorporating indeterminacy into social analysis necessitates a critical review of modern epistemology and the modern episteme itself. This reintroduction also demands fundamental epistemological and methodological revisions in the social sciences—revisions that would, in turn, lead to a profound transformation in the analysis of social objects and carry far-reaching implications for conceptualizing the external social world. In this regard, this book not only explores the theoretical and methodological means of integrating indeterminacy into social analysis but also critically examines how such integration redefines the boundaries, assumptions, and practices of social inquiry itself.

The book begins with a fundamental diagnosis: contemporary social theory remains captive to the epistemic residues of (first) modernity or the modern episteme, including methodological nationalism, structural determinism, and essentialist dichotomies that privilege stability over fluidity, universality over particularity, determinacy over indeterminacy, and closure over openness. Yet, as this book argues, these epistemic orientations are increasingly incapable of making sense of the metamorphosis of the social—a process in which the ontological coordinates of social life are continuously destabilized and reconfigured by the forces of cosmopolitanization. From global ecological crises to transnational migrations, from the fragmentation of traditional political structures to the emergence of hybrid cultural and social forms, from the rapid evolution of digital governance to the destabilization of economic, political and geopolitical or-

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ders, the contemporary world reveals patterns and processes that exceed the analytical reach of established categories and modes of thought.

To confront this epistemological lag, the book advances a post-foundationalist turn—an epistemic and methodological shift that prioritizes contingency, fluidity, indeterminacy, and hybridity as foundational principles for understanding social phenomena. Rejecting both the essentialism of foundationalist approaches and the nihilism and groundlessness of anti(non)-foundationalist critiques, this book charts a third epistemological path—a path grounded in configurational thinking. Central to this approach is the concept of social configurations: dynamic, relational, and emergent formations that resist closure and determination, yet render social phenomena meaningful in their relationality at specific moments of their actualization. Unlike traditional categories, which treat social realities as fixed and bounded, configurations emphasize the historical and contextual conditions through which social phenomena are constituted, reconstituted, and transformed.

This epistemological reorientation is not developed in isolation but emerges through critical engagements with existing theories—particularly Ulrich Beck’s theory of Risk Society and Cosmopolitanization, Michel Foucault’s notion of epistemes, Norbert Elias’s figuration theory, and Pierre Bourdieu’s field theory and practice. Building upon and critiquing these frameworks, the chapters collectively develop an innovative epistemic architecture that reimagines the analytical tools of social theory and the social sciences for a cosmopolitanized world. Each chapter contributes to this broader agenda, moving in a cumulative and systematic arc—from diagnosing the crises of modern epistemology to constructing a new conceptual grammar grounded in post-foundationalist and configurational analyses.

Thus, at its core, this book is both a critique and an intervention. It critiques the epistemological inertia of modern social theory and the social sciences but does not stop at critique. It intervenes by constructing an alternative framework—one capable of engaging with emergent phenomena, global complexities, and transnational dynamics without retreating into reductionism, relativism, or empiricism.

1. Diagnosing the Crisis: The Epistemological Lag and the Fractures of Modern Social Sciences

The epistemological crisis explored in this book is not simply a theoretical dilemma but a symptom of the cognitive collapse within the social sciences—a collapse rooted in the epistemic scaffolding of first modernity and the modern episteme. Emerging alongside the rise of nation-states, industrial capitalism, Enlightenment rationalism, European colonialism, and scientific knowledge, modern social sciences were built upon an ontology of determinacy and an epistemology of certainty. At its core, this framework sought to discipline and regulate social phenomena, treating them as bounded and standardized entities, reducible to universal laws, to rational and determinate orders, and categorizable within stable hierarchies of knowledge.

This disciplinary rationality, modeled on the natural sciences, produced a taxonomy of social life structured around dichotomies—state versus society, individual versus collective, secular versus religious, rational versus irrational, order versus disorder, national versus trans-national, progress over decline, and structure versus agency, among others. These binary logics not only constrained the conceptual imagination of the social sciences but also perpetuated exclusions—rendering indeterminacy, fluidity, irrationality, non-social elements, transnational dynamics, and, more broadly, the unknown and the undesirable, invisible or marginal.

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Yet, as this book argues, the ontological coordinates of the social world have shifted decisively. The rise of cosmopolitanization, global risks, and hybrid identities—marked by displacements, ecological ruptures, unintended consequences of modernization and progress and multi-scalar interactions—exposes the inability of modern epistemologies to apprehend the fluidities and complexities of contemporary social life. In this context, the modern world—particularly in the Global North—has encountered the unintended consequences and side effects of the first wave of modernization and progress, processes that were once envisioned as tools to tame the chaos and indeterminacy of the unruly natural world and bring it under human control through rational and determinate coordinates. However, with the expansion of modernization, profound risks and threats have emerged from within its unintended consequences, rapidly taking on transnational and global dimensions and deeply impacting regions far beyond the confines of any single nation-state.

Now, with the globalization of risks and threats stemming from these unintended consequences, both modern societies and those undergoing modernization are profoundly impacted. The world is undergoing an accelerating and deeply entangled process of reconfiguration shaped by globalized threats and uncertainties. In the modern era, this indeterminacy—which humanity and various civilizations have sought to suspend and control for centuries—is gradually emerging, with new coordinates, as a central force shaping social life on a global scale. This trajectory also stands in stark contrast to the premises and promises of early modernity, ushering in a new form of modernity where cosmopolitanization does not signify greater integration or convergence but rather the intensification of globalized threats and indeterminacy within an increasingly interconnected world. Here at a global scale, instead of stable, standardized and bounded structures, the social world increasingly reveals itself as emergent, uneven,

relational, indeterminate, and contingent—a state that resists the deterministic metaphysics and essentialist dichotomies of frameworks inherited from the first modernity in the Global North.

Chapter one begins by confronting this epistemological disjuncture through a critical engagement with Ulrich Beck's theory of risk society and cosmopolitanization. Beck's diagnosis of global risks and uncertainties as defining features of contemporary modernity highlights the ontological destabilization of the social world. Yet, as this chapter argues, Beck's conceptual apparatus remains internally fractured—oscillating between an ontology of contingency and an epistemology rooted in universalist and foundationalist assumptions. While Beck's work calls attention to the indeterminacies produced by globalization of risks and uncertainties, it remains anchored in foundationalist epistemologies that obscure the relational complexities of cosmopolitan realities.

By juxtaposing Beck's insights on the ontological state of the cosmopolitan condition with Pierre Bourdieu's Field Theory, this chapter proposes a relational epistemology that suspends fixed categories and prioritizes configurations of possibility over static structures. In doing so, it establishes a methodological bridge between the ontological turbulence of cosmopolitanization and the epistemological frameworks required to make sense of it. Far from rejecting Beck's insights, it seeks to recalibrate them within a configurational approach capable of grappling with relationality, fluidity, and historical contingency as central features of social analysis.

2. Unmasking Methodological Nationalism: The Epistemic Prison of the Nation-State

If chapter one exposes the ontological ruptures wrought by cosmopolitanization, chapter two sharpens the critique by dissecting and interrogating

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the epistemological residues that continue to haunt the social sciences—most notably, the persistence of methodological nationalism as an invisible yet pervasive bias. This chapter interrogates the epistemic entanglements between the nation-state, the rise of first modernity, and the cognitive architectures of modern social sciences, revealing how categories such as society, state, and nation have been naturalized as the dominant units of analysis. These categories, inherited from the intellectual matrix of first modernity, obscure the fluidity, transnational entanglements, and heterogeneous configurations that define the cosmopolitanized world. It will be shown that the conditions enabling this historical overlap have been epistemically shaped through the modern episteme—a concept borrowed from Michel Foucault.

Methodological nationalism, as this chapter argues, is more than an empirical oversight; it represents a cognitive and ontological prison—one that locks social theory within the territorial imaginaries of the nation-state. It operates through a regime of epistemic exclusions, erasing or marginalizing forms of indeterminacy, non-national phenomena, and transnational processes that resist incorporation into the bounded logics of state sovereignty and national identity. By equating society with the territorial state, this framework universalizes the nation-state form, transforming it into an ontological given rather than a historical and contingent construct.

The chapter situates this epistemic closure within the broader genealogy of modern social sciences, tracing how the convergence of nationalism, sovereignty, and epistemology during the rise of industrial capitalism and state-building projects provided the cognitive infrastructure for sociology. It shows how the nation-state not only served as the empirical unit of analysis but also shaped the conceptual and epistemic grammar of the discipline—from the dichotomies of citizen-foreigner, national-non-national

and center-periphery to the reification of boundaries and the fetishization of unity. In doing so, it reveals how methodological nationalism operates as both a theoretical framework and a political technology—a system of ordering that disciplines knowledge through hierarchies of inclusion and exclusion.

Drawing on Foucault's concept of epistemes, it further highlights the epistemic-historical construction of knowledge regimes and demonstrates how the modern episteme functions as an epistemic order that organizes the conditions of possibility for modern thought, the national episteme, and modern social sciences—along with their overlaps. Therefore, any genealogy of methodological nationalism and modern social sciences must inevitably grapple with the premises and characteristics of the modern episteme. This insight allows the chapter to unmask methodological nationalism as not merely a descriptive framework but a productive force—a mechanism that generates and legitimizes social boundaries while erasing alternative imaginaries.

However, as the chapter demonstrates, this nation-state or national episteme now stands in irreconcilable tension with the global realities of cosmopolitanization. The transnational mobilities, cultural hybridities, and global risks that characterize contemporary social life destabilize the very foundations of this epistemology, rendering its categories of analysis not only anachronistic but also epistemologically violent—reproducing simplifications and distortions that conceal the complexities of the global present. The chapter foregrounds how methodological nationalism excludes, precisely those heterogeneous configurations, non-national agents, and inter-scalar phenomena that define the transformative dynamics of the contemporary world—an epistemic outcome of the dominance of the modern

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episteme in the social sciences and its overlap with first modernity and nationalist discourse within this episteme.

Through a critical review of the modern episteme, this chapter advances a post-foundationalist epistemology that challenges the coordinates of the modern episteme, thereby creating the conditions for suspending key assumptions of methodological nationalism and prioritizing configurational thinking—an approach that captures the contingent assemblages and emergent properties of global phenomena. It argues that configurations, as fluid and heterogeneous units, offer a conceptual alternative to the static categories of the national episteme and provide a methodological framework for analyzing the relational logics of contemporary transformations.

In so doing, chapter two does not simply reject methodological nationalism; it deconstructs its epistemic foundations, revealing its historical contingencies and conceptual limitations. At the same time, it constructs an epistemic horizon that moves beyond the territorial imaginaries of modernity—toward a cosmopolitanized grammar capable of capturing the multi-scalar flows, hybrid identities, and contested fields that define the post-national world.

This intervention lays the theoretical groundwork for the subsequent chapters, which elaborate post-foundationalist epistemologies and configurational methodologies as tools for navigating indeterminate realities. Far from abandoning empirical rigor, this approach challenges social theory and the social sciences to reimagine its conceptual boundaries, embracing fluidity and contingency not as epistemic failures but as conditions of possibility for a new analytics of the social.