



## ВОПРОСЫ ИСТОРИИ, ТЕОРИИ И МЕТОДОЛОГИИ

## HISTORY, THEORY AND METHODOLOGY OF SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH

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### Towards a cosmopolitan social theory: An epistemological inquiry\*

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**Abstract.** The increasing significance of transnational and global phenomena determines the need in a new social theory that, while considering the particularity and unique characteristics of social phenomena, makes them scientifically meaningful on a transnational and global scale and in relation to each other. The fluid, indeterminate and multi-dimensional nature of global phenomena, which has become the basis for deep uncertainty and insecurity throughout the world, has increased the need to understand transnational and global phenomena. This made social and global studies revisit and reformulate social theory in relation to globalization and ever-increasing global interconnectedness [1; 33]. In general, there are two approaches: the revisionist approach seeks to reformulate and modify social sciences based on the new ontology of the contemporary world and referring to the roots and foundations of social sciences, especially sociology, to be reconstructed and restored [2; 17; 30; 34]; radical approaches argue that, given the historical-social background of social sciences and their epistemological-theoretical characteristics, it is impossible to modify and adapt them to the contemporary world; thereby, they strive to substitute these sciences [1; 4; 18; 23; 35–37]. The paper presents an attempt to find a balance between these two extremes, criticizing the epistemological foundations of social sciences and retrieving them from post-foundationalist philosophy, in order to develop a cosmopolitan social theory. Global cosmopolitanization and the increasing role of indeterminacy, mutual communication and interdependence of social phenomena, determine the need in a social theory that takes into account singularity and conceptualizes it in relation to transnational and global trends through concepts of fluidity and indeterminacy. The author argues that social sciences and theories are based on three epistemes — modern, national, and imperial — as the epistemological-historical foundations. Any cosmopolitan social theory

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needs primarily to criticize and go beyond these epistemes, which the author shows by interrogating two epistemological antinomies — universalism/singularism and essentialism/relativism. Post-foundationalism and the idea of social configurations are presented as the cores of cosmopolitan social theory, which can overcome the predicaments imposed by three epistemes and provide a solution for the above-mentioned antinomies. .

**Key words:** cosmopolitanization; episteme; post-foundationalism; indeterminacy; social configurations; migratory realities

Modern social science, especially sociology, emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century at the peak of the first wave of modernity, in the era of certainty in the colonial metropolises and nation-states of Western Europe, in which the modern immanent reason promised to rebuild the world with science, technology and the idea of progress [1; 18; 35; 38–40]. This social science was affected by the historical and social conditions of the time and was a part of the promises of its age. Like natural sciences, this science claimed to be universal, trans-historical and objective and to make objective phenomena in different times and places meaningful with a specific conceptual-categorical apparatus [18; 35; 38; 41]. This apparatus had fundamental features that not only highlighted certain types or aspects of phenomena as objects of inquiry but also participated in their (re)construction. For instance, when the social became an object of investigation, some characteristics were defined for it a priori and it was made meaningful in relation to the non-social [42]. This meant setting aside or reconstructing many phenomena in terms of determined and given categories that were supposed to make sense of the world and then reorganize it like natural sciences. However, this conceptual apparatus has encountered serious epistemological, ontological and normative challenges in understanding social phenomena in different societies and times. Therefore, many contemporary social theories attempt to reform, deconstruct or reconstruct social science based on the ideas of second modernity [43; 44], globalization [15; 32], global culture [24], postmodernism [29], world society [45; 46], world system [31], civilizations [39; 47], post-colonialism [2; 8], global south [1], indigenous and local communities [48; 49], world risk society [50], late capitalism [51], post-nationalism [52], etc., and aim to propose both theoretical and empirical alternatives.

Based on Foucault's concept of episteme [53; 54], this paper shows that social sciences in general and sociology with dominant social theories in particular are epistemologically based on the modern, colonial, and national epistemes. The entanglement and simultaneity of these three epistemes allowed a certain conceptual apparatus to dominate in social sciences. However, today it has greatly reduced the effectiveness of social science in making sense of fluid, indeterminate, and global social phenomena. The paper describes the characteristics and operation modes of these epistemes in social sciences; shows that any social science and theory that intends to overcome the predicaments of these three epistemes under the current cosmopolitanization [3; 4; 23; 37; 55–58] (globalization of uncertainties, indeterminacies, and interconnectedness) will face two epistemological antinomies

(essentialism/relativism (as extreme form of constructivism) and universalism/singularism) and is to provide a solution to overcome them. Such a solution can be found in post-foundationalism [9; 10; 59] — while suspending these dualities, it attempts to highlight contingency and indeterminacy as the key characteristics of social phenomena in the era of uncertainty and fluidity. Thus, social phenomena are conceptualized in a process of becoming based on the conditions of their possibility and within a constellation of relations and categories. Thereby, the idea of social configurations will be considered as an object of cosmopolitan social theory and global inquiries. Finally, focusing on migration as an example of social configurations, their modes of construction in the age of cosmopolitanization will be described.

### **Modern social science and modern, national and imperial epistemes**

When it comes to sociology, the world consists of entities called societies. Societies and the social are considered the main objects of social inquiry, but their quiddity has always been a source of dispute as the basis of various sociological theories and paradigms [60]. Sociology developed in the time when order and progress were two fundamental ideals and presuppositions of the modern thought, foundations of a new ontology of the social world [1; 18]. Based on this ontology, separate, given and distinct entities were considered as outside and independent of subjects (sociologists, according to Auguste Comte), with law and order that could be recognized and regulated [18; 41; 61]. At the level of epistemology, it is assumed that, on one hand, these standardized and separate entities can be scientifically known based on a kind of categorization system (theoretical-logical systems and empirical evidence); on the other hand, there is a correspondence between these external entities and cognitive categories. Indeterminacy, contingency and accidentality were supposed to be controlled by regulated and rational categories and foundations [18; 35; 41; 59; 62; 63]. The modern episteme [10; 53; 54] cognitively, the imperial [1; 2; 64] and national epistemes [10; 40; 65] historically provided the conditions for modern social science.

For Michel Foucault, episteme is a general system of understanding in a period of history that “imposes on each branch of knowledge the same norms and postulates, a general stage of reason, a certain structure of thought that the men of a particular period cannot escape” [54. P. 211]. Episteme refers to the historical a priori of an epoch [66. P. 22] which provides grounds for truth, knowledge, sciences, and discourses [67]. Epistemes are conceptual and epistemological regimes for suspending the indeterminacy of the objective world and for rationalizing or imagining some order for it. Each episteme possesses a system of regulations and principles; based on the order in which these rules and principles are placed in that system, provides conditions for discourses and sciences; identifies their internal, conceptual, and fundamental relations; determines instruments and possibilities

for consolidation and dominance of discourses; constitutes true and false, central and important, secondary and unimportant categories, insiders and outsiders. Thus, epistemes are cognitive contexts for understanding the order of the universe or the order of things.

In any given culture and at any particular moment, there is always only one episteme that defines the possibility of knowledge and discourses, being expressed in a theory or implied in a practice [53. P. 183]. In *The Order of Things* [53], Foucault identifies three epistemes in the Western culture, each dominated in a specific period, determining a specific form of the structure, arrangement and pattern of knowledge. The first episteme, in the pre-classical period (Renaissance), developed in the Medieval Ages and continued after the Renaissance to the early 17<sup>th</sup> century — its basic principle was analogy and resemblance. The classic episteme was the second — from the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century — and claimed that rather than resembling things represent each other. The third, modern episteme developed in the modern epoch — since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, seeking to discover a rational and universal order embedded in regulated facts and events of the universe, i.e., a kind of essence, origin and, thus, history are imagined for phenomena, being comprehended by the subject. Order was grasped in the episteme; however, primarily based on differentiation rather than resemblance or cognition of representations. Differentiation, presupposed essence and history were the central principles of this episteme for suspending the indeterminacy of reality based on a kind of foundationalism [10; 53].

According to the requirements of the modern episteme, objects of knowledge are established and standardized units, each has an origin and a history [54] based on a rational and universal order which can be understood based on a regime of foundationalist differentiation [10; 42; 68]. Foundationalism epistemologically implies that there is a complete, fixed and independent foundation outside the research object, and knowledge of phenomena requires knowledge of this foundation. On the contrary, anti-foundationalism seeks to criticize and negate foundations (as opposed to foundationalism) and non-foundationalism denies the claim of any foundation [9; 10; 59; 65; 69]. In modern social theory and sociology, foundations (order, progress, state, nation, etc.) were invented and referred to for understanding and making sense of the external world. The objects of social sciences, like objects of natural sciences, could be made meaningful in an ordered and logical system of categories, and then laws of a high degree of universality and certainty could be formulated. This level of universality, certainty and determinacy were as if granted to the modern man by the immanent and critical reason of the enlightenment [9], at the moment of the Western culture's transition from representation to differentiation. Man became a subject who made himself an object of his knowledge, which, according to Foucault [53], created the modern human science. Categories of citizen, society, people, state, nation, right, justice, class, progress and so on were (re)constructed to identify

and make sense of the modern social and personal life in Western Europe and then in the global North.

The question is how we can make sense of the relationships between a concept like nation, with deep roots in the Western political philosophy [38], and real social structures in Western Europe in other times or in non-Western societies? According to the modern episteme, the construction of a category such as nation or society implies the definition of non-nation and non-society [10; 42]. Therefore, the issue of threshold is the most important element in many social categories. In the same token, each conception or definition of order and progress implicitly and explicitly includes a conception or definition of disorder and non-progress. Considering nation, the evolution of the concept implies the exclusion and disregard of many social actors, times and spaces that are somehow not incorporated into the social analysis of nation, which was the basis for various regimes of regulation. The relationship between these categories and realities presents both epistemological and ontological challenges, raising the question of whether it is possible to accurately define social phenomena beyond the modern Western European episteme. For instance, if the modern episteme determines the object of research, its characteristics and the method for its study, how can we assess the effectiveness of the category “nation” for explaining social phenomena in different temporal and spatial contexts?

Modern social sciences have developed gradually from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, while sociology as an academic discipline and public discourse — from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in European and American metropolises [1; 18; 39]. According to Michael Burawoy, “sociology was born with civil society at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was born with the rise of mass education, mass parties, the expansion of media and transportation, the police and postal service, newspapers and new means of transportation, all of which linked populations to their nation-state. The topics of sociology — family, organizations, political parties, culture, deviance and social control, etc. — presume a space for society alongside but also intimately connected to market and state” [70. P. 5]. This sociology developed within the culture of imperialism and in urban metropolises. The new science embodied an intellectual response to both modern and colonized worlds [1]. The rapid and revolutionary transformations of Western European societies due to the idea of progress made understanding of these changes and of the issue of order more problematic. This is why such categories as society, community, norms, cooperation, authority, solidarity, status, sacred/profane, alienation, division of labor and various types of social changes stem from the idea of progress together with such categories as revolution, industrialization, competition, secularism, modernity, etc., and became the central objects of modern social sciences. As many post-colonial thinkers argue, sociology was born in metropolises and colonial nation-states of the West to face their imperialist problems [1; 2; 5–8]. The search for universal laws for progress and later for modernity allowed “the

idea of global difference” to dominate sociology through the imperial episteme, which assumes “differences between the civilization of the metropole and other cultures whose main feature was their primitiveness” [1. P. 7]. Therefore, social theory transposed “a temporal-chronological scheme (modern vs pre-modern) onto a spatial-ideological construct (occident vs orient); thus, the non-Western became pre-modern, and modernization implied Westernization” [64. P. 367].

Foundations is also a fundamental issue for the imperial episteme and especially for its idea of global difference as another representation of the foundationalist differentiation, which can be traced in the works of most classical sociologists on the natural state of society and its progress[64]. Therefore, since August Comte, the universal laws of progress and the problem of order have become the basic agendas or foundations of sociology. In the light of the modern episteme, a regime of foundationalist differentiation is at work in the imperial episteme. On the one hand, in metropolises, the dominant sociological understanding of order and progress as constitutive elements of society allowed to exclude a majority of groups, relations, times, and spaces; on the other hand, sociology defined a kind of non-society for colonies through the bias of methodological nationalism and national episteme [10; 23; 71–73]. In this conception, history has only one path with universal laws represented in the scientific idea of progress. Western and modern societies were the only societies of progress, while other communities were forced to follow these universal rules as much as possible. Sociology was the leading scientific discipline that formulated the universal laws of progress and order [1].

Thus, sociology was a discourse of society articulated in a certain period of transformation of western societies, but then it claimed to be scientific and universal and, relying on a regime of power/truth of the time, managed to impose its epistemic requirements on the understanding of all types of communities. In general, the imperial episteme developed in the epistemology and methodology of sociology through its four major features that every critique of sociology focuses on: the claim of universality; definitions ‘from the center’; gestures of exclusion; and grand erasure. Sociological theories and methods claim to be universal and suppose that “all societies are knowable, and they are knowable in the same way and from the same point of view” [1. P. 44], while any ideas outside metropolitan universities are classified as local or indigenous. General social theory always tries to provide a solution to the antinomies, dualities, problems and weaknesses of previous and existing theories that were formulated mainly in the global North and address the social world based on the dominant categories of Western modernity. In addition to the regime of differentiation embedded in the modern episteme, there is a kind of direct exclusion or deliberate choice in the assumptions, references to other theories and empirical data in sociology.

Another foundation on which modern social sciences have attempted to explain the world is the nation-state as the basis of the national episteme. Modern social

science and its major analytical categories, including society, state, nation, solidarity, rationality, class, territory, power and so on, have developed during the era of nation-building. Fundamental categories of social sciences were integral to the developing idea of the nation-state or the ideal of the state/nation congruency in Western Europe [23; 40; 72; 74–77]. These categories and the logic of their analysis implied the strive of the age to reorganize communities as different forms of nation-state or national entities.

The ‘national episteme’ in the epistemology of modern social sciences refers to a specific and historically contingent system of understanding that governs knowledge, truth, sciences and discourses within a particular nation-state. This episteme is a comprehensive system of thought that shapes and constrains the way individuals in the given historical period perceive the world. The national episteme establishes norms, postulates and a fundamental structure of thought through various fields of knowledge and inquiry based on the epistemic boundaries of nation-state and congruency of nation/state. It embodies the historical a priori of that nation-state, which means that it is deeply intertwined with the historical and cultural context of the specific society and period. This national episteme not only influences how knowledge is produced and organized but also determines the conditions for the development of sciences and discourses within the national context. It establishes the rules and principles that structure the knowledge system in the nation-state and determine the internal, conceptual and fundamental relationships within the knowledge system. The national episteme shapes the very foundations of social sciences based on the presuppositions of the global regimes of nation-states, influencing what is recognized as valid knowledge, how it is categorized, and who or what is defined as an insider or outsider by the intellectual community of that nation-state.

The dominance of the national episteme in social sciences led to methodological nationalism. In the broadest sense, it is any kind of equality or correspondence between society and nation-state, i.e., “naturalization of the nation-state by social sciences” [71. P. 301; 72. P. 576]. By assuming a regime of state/nation congruency [77], methodological nationalism considers states and their governments as the primary focus of social-scientific analysis [33] and defines the nation, state and society as the natural social-political forms of the modern world: humans are naturally organized into a certain number of nations, each constructs itself internally as a nation-state and sets exterior boundaries to separate itself from other nation-states [23; 56]. Even in comparative studies, society, its components and history are considered as the nation-state, its elements and history, and social conflicts of interests are interpreted in terms of national conflicts. “It is a nation-state point of view on society and politics, law, justice and history that governs the sociological imagination. And it is exactly this methodological nationalism that prevents the social science from getting at the heart of the dynamics of modernization and globalization, both past and present” [55. P. 287]. While this nationalistic

perspective continues to provide insights for considering and even criticizing various social phenomena, it selectively highlights some aspects of political, social and economic phenomena and disregards or distorts others. Here the modern regime of foundationalist differentiation is also at work. By excluding the (internal and external) non-national (religious, irrational, traditional, ethnic, oriental, contingent, singular, transnational, minor, etc.), the modern social theory — under the influence of the national episteme — ignores the conceptualization of singular non-national or transnational phenomena, non-national rationalities and ideas, mobilities and transnational interdependency, immigrants and strangers, transnational and global organizations and forces. Through understanding how methodological nationalism has formed the modes of categorization and conceptualization of the social world, we can grasp the epistemic implications of nationalism and nation- or state-building for social sciences.

The simultaneity and dominance of three epistemes provided the epistemic basis for the emergence and consolidation of modern social sciences in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and for the first wave of modernization which promised the global reconstruction based on immanent reason and with the help of science and technology in overcoming uncertainties and indeterminacies. This modernization and its epistemological and historical foundations face serious challenges in the current era, especially under cosmopolitanization return of uncertainties; therefore, modern social sciences as a product of modernity have lost their functional roles [23; 43; 50; 56; 78–82] in the world of more fluid and indeterminate forms, units and boundaries [3; 9; 10; 23; 36]. We witness transformations of social phenomena and their subsequent reconstruction in the era of uncertainty, indeterminacy and interconnectivity. Fundamentally, cosmopolitanization entails globalization of crises, uncertainties and indeterminacies, which made prominent institutions, such as state, family, religion, economic and educational institutions that guided the first wave of modernization and structured the modern society face the most formidable challenges in fulfilling their functions. Thus, determinacy, order and rationality that the modern episteme previously applied for understanding external phenomena are no longer effective, since social phenomena have become fluid and indeterminate. The ontology of the contemporary world is not transitioning or progressing toward a new or other (determinate) order; rather, it steps into the realm of uncertainties and indeterminacies. For instance, the state can manifest itself in different forms that it cannot be easily categorized as democratic, religious, autocratic, socialist and so on. A social phenomenon can emerge as economic in a specific time and place, but immediately disintegrate and lose its functionality, turning into a cultural phenomenon; it can no longer be defined as economic or cultural due to being heterogeneous and indeterminate. Consequently, such social categories and units have become ‘zombies’, since they lack any inherent meaning in the external world after their production.



On the other hand, with the imperial episteme under cosmopolitanization, we witness the agency of entities, rationalities, cultures, actors and — more broadly speaking — facets of the non-Western world, subjugated and expelled under modernity, its rationality and institution, and under the modern, imperial and national epistemes. Today a radical Islamic group in the Middle East or East Asia can create major global crises; post-colonial movements, suppressed civil society actors or forces previously marginalized as non-democratic, non-scientific, non-modern and non-secular can play a role in cosmopolitanization, challenging many established global relationships and orders. Ultimately, cosmopolitanizing realities mean transnationalizing world, which contradicts the national episteme and determines mutual global interactions of social phenomena. This implies that a national or local phenomenon possesses facets of transnationalism, since it is influenced by global and transnational trends and relations and can contribute to the creation of transnational or global phenomena. However, national entities/actors and states are not the only influential players on various national, regional and global scenes, which signifies a shift and suspension of robust categorizations and boundaries of the national episteme. Thus, three forces shape the ontology of the new cosmopolitanizing world — indeterminacy, transnationality and global interconnections that contradict the epistemological foundations of social sciences within the three dominant epistemes. Today social theory, a prisoner of these epistemes, needs to be reconstructed in order to be epistemologically able to reconceptualize social phenomena.

### **Preconditions of a cosmopolitan social theory**

Is it possible to formulate a new understanding of society in social theory and sociology to solve the problems imposed by the modern, national and imperial epistemes and to present a more realistic picture of the contemporary world? How is it possible to analyze social phenomena after incorporating the indeterminate and suspending the regime of foundational distinctions that operates throughout these epistemes? How can uncertain elements lead to the suspension of the foundations of these epistemes? What will be the consequences of such efforts for social actors? Within the ontology of cosmopolitanization, how can one make sense of social phenomena with their unique, singular and local characteristics in relation to global and universal processes as inherently uncertain and indeterminate? How can this conceptualization escape the trap of essentialism, extreme relativism or groundless and non/anti-foundationalist approaches and produce knowledge about fluid and heterogeneous social phenomena? There are various answers to these questions [1; 8; 18; 21; 37; 41; 45; 83–85].

If the contemporary social theory intends to adapt its ontology to cosmopolitanization, first it needs to overcome the dominance of three epistemes. There is a disparity between the ontology of the contemporary world, i.e., cosmopolitanization, and the epistemology of social; therefore, the social theory

should suspend the dominance of three epistemes and consider indeterminacy, transnationality and global interrelations in comprehending current phenomena and configurations, i.e., we need a coherent and epistemologically deconstructive approach to reexamine and revise the core issues in the epistemology of social sciences based on the antinomies of essentialism/relativism and universalism/singularism, which would set the ground for a cosmopolitan social theory.

By discarding indeterminacy and relying on solid and rational foundations, the modern social theory and sociology of the 19<sup>th</sup> century aimed at making sense of the world scientifically and then at reconstructing it mainly at the national level. Today, after the era of global modernization, the world faces the unintended consequences of modernization, trends that have ontologically transgressed many categories, boundaries and epistemic characteristics of the modern world [78; 82]. Instead of the certainties of the first modernization, the contemporary world faces global risks, crises and threats that go beyond national and state boundaries. Indeterminacy and uncertainties that were supposed to be controlled by three epistemes seem to return, which changes the configuration of the world. The dominance of three epistemes has reduced the analytical efficiency of social sciences and turned many of its categories into zombie categories [36; 86]. A mere reformulation or modification of these categories and theories will not lead to a better understanding of the contemporary world — we need to suspend the dominance of the epistemes and their central logic, particularly foundationalist differentiation, to make social theory address indeterminacy when analyzing social phenomena — of a transnational or global character, in fluid and indeterminate relationships with each other. Cosmopolitanization as globalization of risks and indeterminacy [50; 55; 56; 80; 87] determines the need in a cosmopolitan social theory that would consider multiplicity and particularity of different social phenomena in their totality, in relation to each other and in transnational and global contexts.

Epistemologically, cosmopolitan social theory is to delineate the subject of social inquiry and elucidate the nature of knowledge in the new global context. This paper introduces the idea of social configuration as an alternative and solution to the above-mentioned challenges and uses migratory realities as an illustrative example to demonstrate the relevance and efficacy of the idea in the analysis of social phenomena within the cosmopolitanized spaces of action.

Basically, the idea of regulated, isolated, standardized and determined external entities as independent units with specific laws together with the assumption that these units are knowable and correspond to epistemic categories, is the very manifestation of essentialism [35; 41] based on the unified set of knowledge and logical prepositions with a common genesis. According to the modern episteme [53; 54], since the subject shares a common origin and foundation with the object of analysis, we can grasp a certain truth and knowledge. Any progress in knowledge would be accomplished by “the application of logic and mathematics to the known and the unknown. The ultimate goal consisted of reducing reality to propositions

that were both timeless and universal” [88. P. 79]. This mode of study of nature was transferred to the study of society.

Such a foundation together with the ratio of the objective world and cognitive categories in different epistemic apparatus determines whether it is essentialist or relativist. In radical constructivism or relativism, objective realities are suspended in favor of subjective categories [41] (no direct and valid correspondence between cognitive categories and objective entities). In general, the idea of an entity called society in the objective world, as a unit with discernible order and law, is a representation of essentialism in the works of many sociologists. On the other hand, the claim of the impossibility of society and the social has also been expressed by many constructivist approaches in social sciences [89]. The essentialist conception, which always presupposed an external foundation of society, was dominant since the birth of sociology. In classical sociology, society was founded on order and progress and functioned like a set of mechanical or organic units; events and forces contrary to the dominant perceptions of order and progress were excluded as contingent, indeterminate, uncertain or even abnormal and disruptive. In constructionist approaches, the existence of any regulated and given society in the objective world is basically rejected, and the demarcation and regularization of many social units is attributed to mental and linguistic categories [90]. In extreme constructivism, we enter the realm of anti/non-foundationalism, groundless nihilism that claims everything to be imagined, which makes society impossible, its history plural, discrete and unbalanced, and scientific knowledge of the social world suspended [9; 41]. Michel Foucault [54] defines this antinomy as a duality between norm, rule and system — function, conflict and signification, i.e., even extreme constructivism, or anti-foundationalist philosophy, is also subject to the requirements of the modern episteme.

Modern science has always claimed to be universal [88], and universal categories or propositions with the highest level of inclusion and certainty have been the most important criterion of being scientific. This science was to provide universal explanations for natural and social phenomena through both logic and empirical evidence. This conception of science has been criticized both in the global North and the global South. Basically, the idea of universal laws for the social world is a modern idea based on immanent reason, but are these universal laws and categories valid for other societies and times both in the past and the future? [88; 91] In radical post-colonialist approaches criticizing the basis of any universal laws, this understanding of knowledge is considered western, universalist and totalitarian. It states that everything is a singular event that is fundamentally and incommensurably different from any other; for instance, principally, modernity was a singular event in the West, but the Western regime of truth/power strived to promote the singular as the universal, as a general law to be imposed on other times and places [8; 92]. Secularism was a local idea that emerged in “the 17<sup>th</sup> century as a political solution intended to end the European Wars of Religion

by establishing a lowest common denominator among the doctrines of conflicting Christian sects and by defining a political ethic altogether independent of religious doctrines” [93. P. 324]. But this local and historical doctrine was turned through the secular episteme into a universal, self-evident, trans-temporal idea and one of the main pillars of universal modernity.

In post-colonialism, post-modernism and various types of constructivism/constructionism, society is considered as a special arrangement in a certain period of modernity in the global North, which became a universal category with cosmopolitan characteristics. In this post-metaphysical or anti-foundational approach, the scientific understanding of society (sociology) is rejected [90; 94] and substituted by its interpretation as a set of singular categories [29]. The main concern of social analysis is to deconstruct the foundations of the dominant regime of power/knowledge in order to identify the events and ruptures that are the basis of such regimes and present them as truths or trans-historical and trans-spatial realities [8]. The only universal foundation is the difference between the singular(s) [90], because only this idea makes the singular meaningful and plausible.

Another important issue is history and historicity. It is still unclear whether general social categories have a universal and shared history (of progress) or we deal with multiple histories of different categories in different societies. This issue is clearly illustrated by the debates on modernity as one of the key categories of sociological theory: does modernity have a universal rule and a unified, teleological, linear and universal history, or are there multiple modernities and non-modern histories? Is it possible to talk about history/sociology and its categories, with the level of determination implied in the Western modernity? Many anti-foundationalist approaches strive to define themselves precisely in opposition to the Western modernity and its universal history based on local historical conditions. These are questions and dilemmas that have determined the history of sociology due to the dominance of the modern, national and imperial epistemes [7].

### **Post-foundationalism and social configurations**

According to post-foundationalism [9; 10; 59; 95; 96], many problems determined by the antinomy of essentialism/relativism and universalism/singularism can be solved by suspending the national, colonial and modern epistemes. First, the idea of complete, solid and given foundations should be replaced by the idea of incomplete, partial and indeterminate foundations [59; 95], i.e., society is an incomplete and partial category [59; 90; 97]. Put it differently, each foundation determines one possibility out of many and the impossibility of other foundations. Therefore, the abyss or groundless is embedded in every realization of the foundation because it implies the non-realization of other foundations [9]. Accordingly, social phenomena are contingent, and contingency means that any social analysis must prioritize the possibility or impossibility of a socially determined phenomenon [98]. Moreover, phenomena are determined at a certain moment and space and under

a certain historical constellation, which means that historicity must become a part of social analysis [99], i.e., social units should be considered neither given, nor prior and completed. Thus, the corresponding social categories would be incomplete, relational and ongoing within the temporal-spatial horizon. Sociologists study the temporary moment of determination of the social, which means that the idea of regulated, self-founded, self-contained and standardized units in the social world should be discarded. Second, the idea of the correspondence of cognitive categories to external units should be suspended as the idea of any final and solid foundations for these categories. But what is the object of social inquiry in the post-foundationalist approach? What phenomena are supposed to be represented by social categories instead of given objects?

The modern science aimed at knowing the unknown by overcoming uncertainty and indeterminacy [18]. If the social is only an incomplete effort of society in the path of determination, this determination can display different levels of universality or singularity. The issue of determination as based on the verification of conditions of possibility is another layer that must be included in social analysis to simultaneously consider the universal and the singular. For instance, in the regime of nation-states, this means determination by the requirements of power and truth in the form of the nation. Therefore, if we consider migration in the regime of nation-states, it has such universal characteristics as moving from one nation-state to another, but, according to Theodor Adorno [100], cannot be completely understood in its general unity in a scientific way. Migration implies different and even diverging determinations in different moments and spaces [88]. Moreover, the moment of determination of social reality, a mediator between the universal and the singular, can be grasped neither in the form of universal categories nor as a field of singular events — only as a set of heterogeneous configurations.

By considering social units as particular configurations (between the universal and the singular) and relational entities, we can overcome the antinomy of both universalism/singularism and essentialism/relativism. Social configurations are contingent units determined by social actors in a particular time and place under certain conditions. Unlike regulated social units, interconnectivity, incompleteness, fluidity and indeterminacy are the key features of configurations. Many categories, elements, relations, variables, etc., which social theory located as its objects in the context called society, become meaningful as social configurations — constructed, consolidated, reconstructed and deconstructed. This does not mean a simple replacement of one analytical unit with another, it is rather giving up determined units and making sense of indeterminate phenomena. The level of determination, universality, stability, continuity, generalizability, historicity, agency's quiddity, normativity or descriptiveness, coloniality, locality, nationality or transnationality, etc., are specified within a configuration at the level of the particular in a temporal-spatial context. When configurations are considered particular units 'between' the universal and the singular, they differ in degree of determinations/foundations

and family resemblances (in the Wittgensteinian sense). As a result, these configurations, while preserving their distinctive characteristics and singularities in various relationships with other configurations, manifest different levels of universality. Different networks of relations and connections can contribute to more comprehensive, universal, inclusive, and structurally sound, larger-scale configurations.

In the analysis of configurations, all actors, entities and relationships involved are considered through their roles and centrality explicitly delineated. There is no prior differentiation in the analysis of configurations at any level, and an inclusive approach can be applied. According to post-foundationalism and the idea of social configurations, the modern, national and colonial epistemes and their representations in social sciences have been historical configurations that managed to self-perpetuate by representing themselves in a transhistorical manner and in various regimes of power/knowledge, thus, having transformed into dominant, given and natural epistemes. Therefore, an empty signifier like society is a set of configurations in a certain time, space and place. By considering the contingency of these configurations, the social theorist first scrutinizes the conditions of their possibility and then analyzes their main features. For a thorough understanding of configurations, a priori categories and universal theories must be deconstructed, and extreme singularism and empiricism/presentism embedded in many social approaches must be avoided. Since all categories are defined a posteriori in relation to configurations, in their verification the gap between theory and method would be closed. Therefore, in the epistemological perspective, configurations are understanding tools beyond the wrong assumption that there are pure universality and mere singularity.

### **Social configurations and the case of migration**

Social configurations as the main object of social inquiries can be an epistemological solution for the above-mentioned predicaments and incorporate indeterminacy into social theories in the age of cosmopolitanization. Unlike regulated, standardized, fixed and determined social entities (state, nation, institution, family, etc.) or given and prior categories (culture, religion, migration, economy, etc.), social configurations are indeterminate and posterior due to the engagement of different actors at different levels with different goals. These actors interact to meet some needs, pursue some interests or based on structural conditions, which requires some pre-existing social positions and learning some social roles (exposure, acquaintance, internalization and then action or position, disposition and practice) [9; 101]. These interactions and practices result in a network of relations ‘around’ constructive categories. The types and orders of categories and their discursive expressions become the basis for different regimes of boundaries and for the construction of social entities or configurations. In general, the grammar of configurations, whose fluidity,

relationality and indeterminacy are their most important features, determines their quiddity [9; 102].

Social configurations are built on distinct foundations, but these are incomplete, non-given foundations partially determined in a constant process of grounding under special historical conditions. Therefore, configurations display different levels of determination, and the only thing the researcher has access to is the moment of such determination. Therefore, configurations are basically contingent and determined under special conditions of possibility, which should be taken into account to understand these configurations. The contingency of configurations and the incompleteness of their foundations indicate that this determination is accompanied by the indeterminacy of other possibilities, which should also be incorporated in social analysis. Thus, when a social configuration in terms of categories and their orders finds an economic articulation, other foundations and characteristics become impossible, which entails different levels of stability, durability and scales. A configuration may be formed at the national level but have transnational implications [102]. A configuration may be economic and transnational, but it can be globalized on another level and become cultural. The scale, stability, durability and grammar of a configuration can make it manifested in the form of a nation or a short-term economic community consisting of various actors in the cyberspace. All these features are comprehensible a posteriori — by empirical or historical investigation of configurations, their grammar and relationship with the structural foundations and other configurations. Social configurations can be compared based on non-foundationalist and non-essentialist approaches, like family resemblances, and the degree of particularity of configurations and their components can be identified in relation to each other [88].

International migration is an excellent example of a transnational phenomenon resulting from cosmopolitanization and determining fundamental transformations. Based on different economic, political, cultural, geographical and social foundations, in many social theories, various aspects of migration have been studied [103–107], including with implications of the three epistemes. Most migration theories are mainly foundationalist and fall into the trap of methodological nationalism and Eurocentrism. Even multidisciplinary, transnational, postcolonial and cultural approaches that tried to criticize foundationalist approaches have also been caught in a kind of anti/non-foundationalism [103; 108]. By suspending the category of migration as complete and given and considering it as an interconnected set of social configurations, the fluidity, indeterminacy and relational nature of migratory realities can be revealed. The actors of these configurations (immigrants, asylum seekers, workers, groups, capitals, families, states, transnational organizations, etc.), from the time of their movement to the time of their settlement in a new society, participate in several social configurations

or become the creators of new configurations. Therefore, migration is not just a matter of mobility from one nation-state to another under certain structural factors, we need to identify the contingency of configurations and the conditions of their possibility, because there is no universal or trans-historical factor to understand migration patterns and phenomena as indeterminate and fluid under the current globalized risks.

The scale, domain, relations, actors and forces dominating these configurations and, in general, their quiddity should be ‘extracted’ from the empirical study of existing configurations. Whether they are antagonistic or cooperative, economic or cultural, stable or temporary, etc., all are contingent configurations. Migration can be a category in a larger configuration or a platform for the accumulation and formation of other types of configurations. Therefore, understanding these configurations in spatial-temporal contexts and in mutual structural and historical relations, and also their internal grammar is the key task in making sense of migratory realities. Such understanding of a configuration and its degree of particularity can be achieved through comparative studies based on the method of family resemblances. Different actors interact, carrying on their own previous categories and pursuing their imagined interests, which results in the construction of some categories and a temporary agreement on what they are/mean. The category of migration may be constructed during this process or as its result, then these categories are placed in a specific order determining the content of a migratory configuration — national, transnational, political, religious, antagonist, economic or cultural. Then these categories and their orders become the basis of different regimes of boundaries and groupings and represent themselves in different forms of configuration with various types of stability and durability. Migrants may form various configurations with other actors and enter into various relationship with the host society — from cooperation to conflict. Despite being rooted in the existing social, national and economic entities, migratory configurations pass through such entities and obtain various forms [82], including a set of social configurations in close relationship with national, ethnic, gender, religious, etc. realities and their different types of configuration.

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Cosmopolitanization exposed the contemporary world to the most profound global transformations, but the dominant social sciences and theories continue to ignore uncertainty and indeterminacy and to rely on the modern, national and imperial epistemes. The social analyst is either afraid or unable to incorporate indeterminacy into analytical categories because this would collapse the research field that constitutes his profession and discipline. Therefore, the gap between the cosmopolitanized world and sociology, or between the ontology and epistemology of social theories, is increasing, which directly and indirectly leads



to the exclusion and neglect of phenomena, actors, relationships and entities that play an active role in shaping various social configurations. In the traditional social sciences, many actors or phenomena are labeled as accidental, unscientific, irrational, non-modern, non-liberal, non-democratic, non-national, disorderly, regressive and so on. The dominance of these epistemes hinders the understanding of these entities, relationships, actors and configurations, especially by deferring their unique and singular cultural and historical attributes in various societies, rendering differentiation impossible. A few modifications and alternatives have been proposed to overcome this gap, but none rejected the basic assumptions of the modern, national and imperial epistemes for the construction of social theory. Any critique of contemporary sociology must begin with the critique of these epistemes.

Therefore, we need a cosmopolitan social theory that can make sense of the uncertainties, indeterminacy and fluidity in the construction of social phenomena in relation to transnational and global trends. The article assesses the possibility of a cosmopolitan social theory as referring to two epistemological antinomies — essentialism/relativism and universalism/singularism, which allowed to suggest the philosophy of post-foundationalism and the idea of social configurations as the cores of the cosmopolitan social theory. According to the post-foundationalist approach, social phenomena are epistemologically contingent, temporal and based on incomplete and partial foundations at a particular moment of specific social-historical constellations. These foundations are on a constant path of grounding, and their determination coincides with the indeterminacy of many other possibilities. Thus, social configurations should be the object of social inquiries as units reflecting the indeterminacy, fluidity and multiplicity of the world in the ongoing construction of social phenomena. By examining the conditions of determination of these social configurations, the cosmopolitan social theory takes into account their grammar in a posterior and relational way.

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## На пути к космополитической социальной теории: опыт эпистемологического исследования\*

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**Аннотация.** Возрастающая значимость глобальных феноменов диктует необходимость новой социальной теории, которая, признавая уникальные характеристики социальных явлений, способна придать им научный смысл на транснациональном уровне, а также в соотношении с друг другом. Текучая и многоуровневая природа глобальных феноменов, ставшая причиной глубочайшей неопределенности и небезопасности в мировых масштабах, требует особых подходов к изучению новых типов социальности, что привело к пересмотру многих положений социальной теории в отношении глобализации и все возрастающей взаимосвязи социальных процессов и явлений [1; 33]. Здесь можно выделить два основных подхода: ревизионизм стремится модифицировать социальные науки в соответствии с новой онтологией современного мира и опираясь на реконструкцию исходных постулатов социальной мысли, особенно социологии [2; 17; 30; 34]; радикально настроенные исследователи, напротив, утверждают, что на основе исторических и теоретических характеристик социальных наук невозможно изменить и адаптировать их к требованиям современного мира, а потому они нуждаются в замене [1; 4; 18; 23; 35–37]. В статье представлена попытка найти компромисс между этими крайними позициями, сочетая критику эпистемологических оснований социальных наук и используя постфундационалистскую философию для разработки космополитической социальной теории. Глобальная космополитизация и возрастающая роль взаимозависимости социальных феноменов требуют такой социальной теории, которая бы учитывала единичность, но концептуализировала ее в контексте транснациональных и глобальных трендов с помощью понятий текучести и неопределенности. Автор полагает, что в основе современных социальных наук и теорий (возникших в эпоху модерна) лежат три историко-эпистемологических положения, или эпистемы, — модерна, нации и империи. Любая космополитическая теория должна, в первую очередь, критиковать и отказываться от этих эпистем, что автор и делает, апеллируя к двум эпистемологическим антиномиям — универсализма/партикуляризма и эссенциализма/релятивизма. Постфундационализм и идея социальных конфигураций представлены в статье как ядро космополитической социальной теории, которая сможет преодолеть как противоречия, порождаемые тремя эпистемами, так и две антиномии.

**Ключевые слова:** космополитизация; эпистема; постфундационализм; неопределенность; социальные конфигурации; миграционные реалии

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