

## Editorial

The Western model of science, as it has developed since the early modern period, gained momentum at the end of the nineteenth century and became established as the global standard during the twentieth century, is based on the division of subject areas, each of which corresponds to different methods of observation, measurement, and interpretation. This has resulted in a widely accepted classification of disciplines, which, however, has undergone repeated expansion and differentiation and finds its limits above all in the fact that the questions and problems emanating as challenges to current societies and pressing for scientific answers have a different focus than the disciplinary subject areas. This dilemma affects, among other things, the production of knowledge about different regions of the world, which has massively grown since the Age of Enlightenment with the intention of systematically cataloging knowledge about the entire world and, in parallel, as colonial science in various European countries with the aim of learning more about the only vaguely known conquests and being able to use this knowledge in practice for exploitation, settlement, and mission.

Due to the different regional orientations of the colonial expansion undertaken by major European powers, colonial studies did not develop in a systematic direction, but followed a strong regional focus. They began to see themselves as regional studies and were assigned a special place in the classification of disciplines, depending on the disciplines from which they drew their methods and theories. This did not fundamentally change with the approach of area studies, which was developed in the US as a consequence of the two world wars and envisaged a broader mobilization of disciplinary knowledge. The defining feature remained the focus on a specific region – however crude and arbitrary this imagined geographical unit may be defined as a political, cultural, or economic entity. The Cold War provided an opportunity to superimpose the scheme of a global systemic conflict over this puzzle of ill-defined entities.

With the paradigm of globalization, which began to establish itself as a new basis for social theories in the late 1980s and is fundamentally based on the assumption that the entire world is in an indissoluble (but strengthenable or weakenable) network of interdependencies, this knowledge order became precarious. For a brief moment, the US believed itself capable of steering this entire network and controlling its tensions. The already wide-ranging production of knowledge in area studies now had to be reorganized in line with the global interconnectedness of the subject areas. It was no coincidence

that the US became the leading center of global studies and global history in the 1990s. However, it soon became apparent that this was not a neutral observation and management of all global entanglements but just another globalization project with its own geopolitical priorities. Other such projects were not only pursued by their sponsors, but also brought to public attention with varying degrees of determination, which in turn required an expansion of knowledge production that was highly uneven, as this thematic issue demonstrates with a couple of speaking examples.

In its strategic documents, China's political leadership not only describes its own rise to become one of the world's leading powers, but also presents itself as a new guarantor of global interdependence, which it monitors more closely using the capacities of a large series of newly established centers for regional studies. Various actors in Africa are initially focusing on strengthening their autonomy and sovereignty vis-à-vis external globalization projects, but with their growing integration into world markets and geopolitical conflicts, they are also being forced to reflect on their localization in the concert of globalization projects and require knowledge that has not been produced by African academic institutions so far, for which research centers are now being established at various universities of the continent. The European Union, which can draw on a wealth of knowledge and experience with the non-European world regions dating back centuries, initially focused on consolidating its own territory and expanding its knowledge base about Eastern and Southeastern Europe, not least in the context of renewed European studies. Concerns about controlling migration from the North African coast broadened the horizon somewhat. However, it was only the very fundamental change in the geopolitical situation with Russia's war against Ukraine and resulting change in energy supply patterns, the questioning of the US's European commitment under Trump, and the priority given to Sino-North American competition in the Pacific, which had been foreseeable since the Obama administration, that challenged the European Union to formulate its own globalization project more precisely and to become aware of the knowledge required to do so.

Regional studies and area studies have clearly provided a sufficient knowledge base for a long time, and many of these advantages continue to be in demand. However, this thematic issue raises the further question of whether a new order of knowledge is necessary in order to find one's way in the emerging world order. World knowledge is still an unfamiliar term, but it allows us to take a more comprehensive stock of what we want to know, what we can observe, and how we analyze it. This is a necessary prerequisite for the critical study focusing the strategic alignment of the globalization projects of political and economic actors with the knowledge production of academic actors. The fact that different conclusions can be drawn from the congruence or difference between the two is in the nature of things, which can also be understood as the partial autonomy of different spheres of society and the resulting different logics. This provides an interesting intellectual starting point for further debate on what knowledge about the world is needed or should be sought by whom.

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