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SCRIPTS – CONTESTATIONS OF THE LIBERAL SCRIPT

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Contestations of the Liberal Script (SCRIPTS)

A Research Program

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ABSTRACT

The liberal script is under pressure. Some of the most severe challenges liberal societies are facing today emanate from authoritarian and non-liberal states, thinkers, and activists. These actors challenge the liberal script defined as descriptive and prescriptive knowledge about the organization of society based on the core principle of individual self-determination. Even though contestations of the liberal script are not unprecedented, the amount and globality of current contestations are nevertheless puzzling when measured against the general developments in world society over the past twenty-five years. The Cluster of Excellence “Contestations of the Liberal Script” puts the current contestations of the liberal script in a broader historical, global, and comparative perspective by addressing fundamental questions about the development of politics and society in the 21st century. The concept of a script does not only allow us to analyze the nature and the scope of contestations of liberal ideas, institutions, and practices across time and space. It also enables us to identify possible alternatives rather than mere deviations to, or dissents from the liberal script.

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1 A WORLD IN TURMOIL

Contemporary liberal societies face a loss of confidence in the ability of their core institutions to provide solutions to an array of challenges, which lie at the heart of prominent domestic and international conflicts in the early 21st century. These conflicts are not merely driven by power and interest but include contestations of the liberal script. We define a script as descriptive and prescriptive knowledge about the organization of society. The liberal script is based on the core principle of individual self-determination.

The liberal script competes with alternative scripts for organizing societies, such as fascism, communism, authoritarianism, or Islamic fundamentalism. Competition is not the same as contestation. We define contestations as discursive and behavioral practices that invoke or challenge core components of a script and come with a certain level of social mobilization.

Contestations of the liberal script are not unprecedented. In fact, the liberal script has evolved through contestation, rejection, and resistance both from within and outside liberal societies. However, the amount and globality of current contestations are puzzling in historical comparison when measured against the general developments in world society over the past twenty-five years. There have been few interstate wars, enormous growth rates and poverty reduction in some fast-growing countries in the global South, only modest average unemployment rates in the consolidated economies of the global North as well as a significant improvement of the Human Development Index over time including remarkable advances in health and life expectancy.

In the first years of the new millennium, external forces emanating outside liberal societies have been seen as the main challenges of the liberal order. Rising powers have disputed the liberal international order for being dominated by and biased towards the “West”, and for the double standards that prevail. Authoritarian state leaders characterize the “West” as weak, decadent, and indecisive. Likewise, fundamentalist religious thinkers and activists criticize the secularism, materialism, and moral corruption of liberal societies. Meanwhile internal challenges have mounted as well. Many liberal democracies face a loss of confidence by parts of their citizenry. Globalization has created economic, social, and cultural insecurities. Growing inequalities, fears about social exclusion, and the fluidity of value orientations have nurtured the rise of nationalist movements and populist parties. Where authoritarian populists have seized power, they seek to limit individual freedoms and undermine the independence of the judiciary to consolidate their power. The election of Donald Trump as President of the United States, Brexit, and the growing power of populist movements indicate that challenges to liberal ideas and institutions also come from within liberal societies. Moreover, internal and external challenges are increasingly and transnationally interconnected. Whether they will lead to a demise of the liberal order remains to be seen.

The Cluster of Excellence SCRIPTS puts the current contestations of the liberal script in a broader historical, global, and comparative perspective by addressing three sets of

questions. First, to what extent do current challenges target core principles of the liberal script? Which alternative scripts exist to the liberal model and how does their appeal develop? How do current contestations compare to previous ones? Second, what are the causes of these contestations? Under what conditions does the liberal script lose or gain attractiveness, and what drives the rise of alternative scripts? Are the causes for current contestations different from earlier ones? Third, what are the consequences of the intensified contestations of the liberal script? Are these contestations of a temporary nature or do they indicate the decline of the liberal script in the long run? Which implications do contestations and the responses to them have for politics, societies, individuals, and the global challenges the world is facing in the 21st century?

This working paper outlines the research program of SCRIPTS.¹ We introduce “script” and discuss how the concept allows to address gaps in the research on contestations of liberal ideas and institutions. We then use the analytical dimensions of our concept to identify core principles of the liberal script that are present in all its temporal and spatial varieties. Finally, we demonstrate how our conceptual approach enables us to address the questions of what, why and to what effect the liberal script is currently contested. The paper concludes by discussing how different theoretical and methodological perspectives that are necessary to explore contestations of the liberal script can be incorporated through what we refer to as “double reflexivity”.

2 CONTESTATIONS OF THE LIBERAL SCRIPT

Research about liberalism in the social sciences, area studies, and the humanities has its own history of contestations. Scholars have deconstructed the fundamentals of liberal thought, criticized the liberal bias of theories, and analyzed the empirical challenges to liberal ideas and institutions. Regarding liberalism as a component of the discourse of modernity, postcolonialism and poststructuralist theory have criticized the universalism of key liberal concepts and the abstraction of liberalism from its colonial origins (Jefferess 2008; Young 2016). They seek to unmask the epistemic foundations of the colonizers’ knowledge orders (Spivak 1990) and advocate the provincialization of European culture (Chakrabarty 2000), the hybridization of intellectual spaces (Bhabha 1994), and practices of performative (collective) action (Butler 1997; Chatterjee 2004) to overcome the double standards of the global liberal order. Discourses on non-European or “multiple modernities” emphasize that different nations and regions go through their own processes of modernization, inventing their own modern scripts that may sometimes resemble liberalism, but have their independent cultural roots and own dynamics.² Historians have recently tak-

¹ This first working paper is derived from the proposal for the Cluster of Excellence “Contestations of the Liberal Script”. The proposal is the outcome of a collective effort that started in 2016. We thank all the PIs of SCRIPTS as well as the many colleagues who commented on earlier versions.

² Eisenstadt/Schluchter 1998; Knöbl 2010; Comaroff/Comaroff 2012; for a postcolonial criticism of the concept of multiple modernities, see Bhabra 2007; for the concept of entangled modernities, see Randeria 2007; Therborn 2003)

en the same line, by highlighting the contingency of the success story of the West (Bayly 2004; Morris 2010). Social theorists, in turn, have paid particular attention to the problematic connection, central to the liberal script, between capitalism and democracy (Wagner 2011, 2012), which resonates with research of political economists on the internal contradictions of “democratic capitalism” and “neo-liberalism” (Crouch 2011; Piketty 2014; Rodrik 2012; Streeck 2014). Scholars working on legal pluralism and norm contestation point to the ubiquity of local conflicts about the adequate norm interpretation and norm application reflected in a variety of translations, appropriations, and contestations of the liberal script (Merry 2006; Nafziger et al. 2010). Some also stress the functionality of contestations for the liberal script (Pope/Meyer 2016; Wiener 2008, 2014), social anthropologists alert us to the “frictions” of globalization (Tsing 2005) that may result from political violence (Appadurai et al. 2006), social movements (Li 2007), or the unintended consequences of Western intervention (Finkel et al. 2007). Similarly, sociologists and political scientists have analyzed the ambiguous consequences of globalization leading to fragmentation and integration (Beck 1997; Cerny 1995; Rosenau 1997; Zürn 1998). Students of law and politics also have been interested in the emergence of “non-liberal democracy” and “autocratic legalism” in post-democratization Latin American countries (Couso 2011; Corrales 2015) as well as in post-accession member states of the European Union and post-Soviet countries (Levitsky/Way 2010; Börzel/Schimmelfennig 2017; Keleman 2017). Legal scholars often argue that liberal-constitutionalism erodes “from within” (Scheppele 2013; Pech/Scheppele 2017). The international relations literature has focused on processes of regime-shifting and contestation, driven by rising powers (Anderson et al. 2008; Kahler 2013; Hurrell 2006), and on the challenges implied by the rise of non-liberal states to world power status (Ikenberry 2008; McNally 2012; Stephen 2014). The attention paid during the 1990s to the international aspects of democratization has been recently redirected to the study of the “international aspects of authoritarianism”, looking at the emergence of regional alliances and organizations among autocratic states and non-liberal democracies (Whitehead 2014; von Soest 2015; Cooley 2015; Ambrosio 2008). Some see the politicization of liberal institutions as a result of the rise of international and transnational authority (Zürn et al. 2012). It is reflected in the restructuring of political space within most Western democracies and connected with the rise of a new cleavage line (Kriesi et al. 2008). Others aim at a global sociology of domination by emphasizing resistance to processes of global ruling (Onuf/Klink 1989; Daase/Deitelhoff 2015).

These different literatures have produced important insights about liberalism and modernity. Against the background of the current contestations, however, a comprehensive analysis of the following issues is missing:

- how the liberal script has evolved through internal and external contestations and their entanglements across time and space;
- the extent to which contemporary contestations affect core principles of the liberal script, how they differ across countries and regions, and to which extent they differ from previous contestations;

- the content of and prescriptions derived from currently competing scripts and whether we see the emergence of truly alternative scripts which reach beyond specific localities;
- why the recent wave of contestation added up so strongly in the last decade;
- what the likely consequences of the contemporary contestations of the liberal script will be, particularly with regard to the global challenges of the 21st century;
- what the future development of the liberal script is likely to be.

By putting the contestations of the liberal script in a broader historical, global, and comparative perspective, the Cluster aspires to answer three sets of research questions, which target the identified research gaps:

1. To what extent do current challengers target the liberal script? Are alternative concepts of political and social order that claim universal validity on the rise (Keane 2013), or are they varieties of existing liberal ideas (Müller 2013)? If they are genuine alternatives, are they gaining in appeal both inside and outside liberal societies? In what way does the current criticism of liberal concepts for organizing societies build on older traditions of challenging and contesting Western power (Acharya 2009), and how does it compare to earlier contestations in history (Finchelstein 2017)?
2. What are the causes of these contestations? Under which conditions does the liberal script lose or gain attractiveness, and what are the drivers of the rise of alternative scripts? To what extent are the causes of current contestations different from earlier ones? Is the success of scripts a mere function of the distribution of material power in the international system (Gilpin 1981)? Or is its success explained by higher problem-solving capacities and/or the diffusion of normative ideas and discourses about the good order (Hall 1986; Goldstone 2008)?
3. What are the consequences of the intensified contestations of the liberal script and the potential rise of alternatives for politics, societies, and individuals as well as the challenges the world is facing in the 21st century? Is this merely another backlash against the ongoing spread of liberalism (Lipset/Raab 1970), or are we dealing with powerful new ideas and scripts that will shape conflicts and create cleavages over how to organize societies at the domestic and international levels for a long time to come (Lipset/Rokkan 1967; Hooghe/Marks 2018)? Conversely, might we even see the beginning of the end of the dominance of the liberal script?

SCRIPTS is not the only attempt to come to terms with contemporary contestations of liberal ideas and institutions, but it is unique in several regards. First, our concept of scripts, which sees the liberal script not as a constitutive component of modernization but as one necessarily competing with other scripts, allows us to study different contestations within a single framework, bringing together social sciences and area studies. Second, most other projects and initiatives either focus on the liberal international order challenged by revisionist powers and, more recently, faced with hostility from democratic governments that pursue nationalist and protectionist foreign policies. Alternatively, they focus on internal challenges to liberal political systems, mostly in the form of right-wing populism and the declining confidence in the ability of liberal institutions to protect their economic wealth,

social welfare, physical security, or cultural identity. SCRIPTS investigates both internal and external contestations, concentrating on how they are linked and entangled. This approach provides a better and more contextualized understanding of the core components of the liberal script and its historical and spatial variations than research from an internal perspective, which is usually found in the literature (e.g., Winkler 2010). Third, most other research explores specific challenges, such as the violation of human rights, the rejection of regional integration, or social exclusion. By looking at borders, orders, re-allocation, and temporality, our investigations go beyond that and cover these four major issues that are key to any society. Fourth, we systematically include non-liberal states in our study, not only as contestants but also as areas in which liberal ideas and institutions are contested. The Cluster also engages in historical comparisons to explore the nature and the causes of previous contestations. Finally, we provide an account of the role of alternative scripts as a possible cause and a consequence of the contestations. We do this without exclusively locating the authorship of the liberal script geographically or culturally in the “West”.

3 SCRIPT AS AN ANALYTICAL CONCEPT

To explore what is contested, why, and to what effect, we employ the analytical concept of “script”. The social sciences have developed a variety of different approaches to notions of script. On the micro level, intersubjective scripts assign behavioral expectations to individuals that are often internalized. Role theory may be the best-known case in point (Mead 1934; Goffman 1956). On the meso-level, organizational sociology has developed quite sophisticated understandings of scripts. Business studies, for instance, have identified specific firm styles; this includes the diversification of products versus a focus on core products (Gioia/Poole 1984) and the provision of action guidelines for employees of service organizations (Harris, Harris, and Baron 2003). On the macro-level, the Stanford School on World Society Theory (Meyer et al. 1997; Boli/Thomas 1999) argues that the Western script consists of dominant cultural systems and practices of organizing a society that has produced a world culture. This “global script” is defined as

...culture of world society, comprising norms and knowledge shared across state boundaries, rooted in nineteenth century Western culture but since globalized, promoted by non-governmental organizations as well as for-profit corporations, intimately tied to the rationalization of institutions, enacted on particular occasions that generate global awareness, carried by the infrastructure of world society, spurred by market forces, riven by tension and contradiction, and expressed in the multiple ways particular groups relate to universal ideas. (Lechner/Boli 2005:6)

Our understanding of scripts is similarly located at the macro-level. Unlike the Stanford School, however, we adopt a generic concept of scripts, which we dissociate from a specific (modern) script as in World Society Theory. Accordingly, we define a script as descriptive and prescriptive knowledge about the organization of society. This concept allows us to analyze liberal ideas about the organization of societies and changes therein, on the one hand, and alternative concepts of social and political order, on the other. We understand

it to be an empirical question of where the liberal script is dominant, whether contestants challenge parts of the liberal script or advance truly alternative scripts that do not just deviate or dissent from the liberal script but reject its fundamental principles. Moreover, we do not confine the “authorship” of the liberal script geographically or culturally to the “West”.

Societies do not portray themselves in terms of scripts. Rather, they use scripts to describe and compare ideas about the organization of societies across time, regions, and cultures. Scripts manifest themselves in political theories, public discourses, constitutions, party manifestos, and justifications of policies and political positions. Scripts do not only describe; they also prescribe and affect the organization of societies. They are therefore also reflected in societal practices. Conjointly, they influence analytical categories in the social sciences and humanities. Accordingly, there is a risk of reproducing and legitimating the liberal script by applying Western concepts and methods as well as certain standards for scientific quality developed by liberal societies. We need to be constantly aware of the extent to which our methods and ontological premises might be part of the liberal script.

Scripts, in our understanding, contain *components* that can be analytically distinguished and need to address substantial *issues* about the organization of society. A script thus can be unfolded along two dimensions. The first dimension of a script is classified by four analytical components: (1) The *plot* gives meaning to the script and consists of ideas and key objectives regarding justice, development, notions of good and evil, and the mechanisms needed to realize them, by linking meaning and action. (2) *Actorhood* refers to specific types of actors and agency. Who are the legitimate bearers of rights and obligations, and who are marginalized by the script? Which actors are the moral reference points and which are core institutional actors? And which modes of action are associated with these actors and in which settings? Furthermore, these settings are defined by (3) the *scenery* of the script. What are the institutional structures of the system and the practices embedding a script? What are the dominant markers of social differentiation? Finally, a script contains ideas about how strongly discursive and behavioral practices are allowed to deviate from the script. How much room do actors have for the interpretation of ideas and institutional prescriptions? What kind of exceptions are possible? The (4) degree of *decoupling* (DiMaggio/Powell 1983) cuts across the other three components and shall be investigated for all prescriptions and collectively shared beliefs regarding actorhood, plot, and scenery. By including the acceptable degree of decoupling into the conception of script, we avoid a binary notion of institutional performance where either a practice is in line with the script, or it is an example of an on-ground decoupling from the (still existing) script as in World Society Theory. It also allows for a distinction between decoupling that provides for flexibility and adjustment reinforcing the script, on the one hand, and decoupling that involves double standards and substantial discrepancy between plot and scenery, and behavioral practices undermining the script, on the other.

The second dimension is classified by the themes a script needs to speak to. Functionalist versions of sociological theory argue that all societies have to find answers to necessities that are central to their organization and condition their adaptability (most famously

Parsons 1949). While we reject the notion of functional necessity, scripts most often contain prescriptions and collective understandings about core issues regarding the organization of society. They are essential for the architecture of basic institutions as well as for their legitimacy and social functioning. There are four core issues we consider important to any script. (1) *Borders* determine who belongs to a group or society and who can be legitimately excluded. (2) *Orders* refer to core ideas about the institutionalized rules of the game, which allow for political and social coordination within a given society. (3) For the *(re-)allocation of goods and life chances* in the face of social and material scarcities, scripts involve rules and goals. (4) Certain understandings about *temporality* and progress provide information on time scales, imaginations of transience and eternity, and the reproduction of social structure. Scripts may potentially speak to other themes than *borders*, *orders*, *(re-)allocation* and *temporality*. Yet the four themes catch the major issues for the organization of both liberal and non-liberal societies. Moreover, each of these four themes is associated with one of the global challenges the world is facing in the 21st century. The global migration flows primarily refer to the themes of *borders*; regarding *orders*, the crisis of democracy is prevalent; growing inequality speaks to the theme of *(re-)allocation of goods and life-chances*; while the sustainability crisis is associated with the theme of *temporality*.

Based on these conceptualizations, we use the two dimensions to describe and analyze the structure of scripts. The next section will demonstrate how the four analytical components allow us to identify core principles of the liberal script that are present in all its temporal and spatial varieties.

4 THE LIBERAL SCRIPT

The liberal script has served as a transferable matrix for modernizing and redesigning the way societies are organized. In its development, it was shaped and redefined through interactions with alternative scripts, contestation, rejection, and resistance both from within and from the outside. Despite the interactive dynamics and entanglements of scripts, we maintain the notion of a core. The *liberal script* consists of descriptive and prescriptive knowledge about the organization of society based on the core principle of individual self-determination. We identify the four core components of the liberal script which define its boundaries and against which we can map temporal and spatial varieties.

- *Plot*: Key objectives are to free humanity from the shackles of ignorance (enlightenment), to protect self-determination, to tolerate differences, to progress, and to grow. Guiding principles for achieving these objectives are, on the one hand, rationality and, on the other hand, universal values, which include freedom, equality, justice, and meritocracy. Individual self-determination is complemented by collective self-determination. Representative democracy and the rule of law guarantee and limit individual freedom. Equal rights, which protect individual freedom, expand over time (i.e. from white property-owning men to eventually all individuals). Minority rights and religious differences are tolerated. Markets are perceived as both the most efficient mechanism for allocation and the

manifestation of individual freedom. The combination of economic freedom, property rights, and markets create an elective affinity of the liberal plot with capitalism. Based on the exploitation of nature, scientific and technological innovation ensure permanent economic and societal progress, while maintaining sustainability.

- *Actorhood*: Individuals and public institutions, which bear rights and obligations, are the constituent actors in politics and society. While societal organizations serve as intermediaries between individuals and public institutions, individuals are endowed with inviolable human rights, ensuring political and economic freedom and self-determination. Nation states, and more recently international organizations, are public institutions which guarantee these rights. At the same time, they have the authority to limit individual activities that have undesirable effects (e.g., environmental degradation, excessive distributional inequality) and thus are derivative of individual rights.
- *Scenery*: Societies are organized in bounded communities and political orders, such as nation states, which have a monopoly on the legitimate use of force and the ability to effectively enforce central decisions. The coercive power of political orders is constrained by the rule of law and participatory institutions. As a particular enactment of political order, nation states are externally considered to be formally equal to each other as sovereigns. However, growing interdependence, fostered by international cooperation and open markets, qualifies the autonomy of nation states. International institutions ensure world peace by providing collective goods beyond the nation state and by protecting liberal values at the global level.
- *Decoupling*: The liberal script is based on individual self-determination, which includes the legitimacy of “interpreting” rules in a new way. The maximum use of individual creativity is considered a major source of self-realization and innovation. The emphasis on freedom reflects the idea that everything that is not prohibited by the script is permissible. This allows for a relatively high degree of freedom in the application of liberal prescriptions. The limits of freedom arise according to the script when the freedom of others is compromised. Against this background, collective or delegated third parties determine how much decoupling between liberal prescriptions and behavioral practices is acceptable and when these limits are overstepped. While the liberal script allows for some decoupling, it is rather restrictive regarding exceptions. Exceptions are only legitimate if they can be encapsulated in generalizable rules.

This description is compatible with a denaturalized understanding of the liberal script. In this view, we see the liberal script primarily as *one* cultural enactment rather than *the* instrumental response to functional necessities of modernity (Thomas 2013). The use of the concept thus allows for its provincialization (Chakrabarty 2000), which also means that local cultural practices affect and intervene in the application and generation of the liberal script.

Moreover, the liberal script has developed, since its beginning, in interaction with other, external scripts for organizing societies. The delineation of the liberal script at the end of the 18th century was not a purely endogenous development occurring within a Western vacuum. From early on, the liberal script has imported elements, among others, from wealthier

and better-governed regions in the Middle East and China. European colonialism represented a highly asymmetric but still not entirely one-sided relationship, as colonial processes also had an impact on the colonizing societies of Europe. Historically, it is neither possible for Western societies to claim the “copyright” for the liberal script, nor does it make sense to contrast an “occidental world” with an “oriental world”, emerging independently of each other (Said 1978). Nevertheless, for those societies and states that were not in the “Western” core, the liberal script appeared as a structural power coming from the outside, which was most often mediated through locals who either rejected its core components or became agents of its appropriation and acculturation. Even though the liberal script and its institutions emerged as a hybrid of diverse global influences and has been seen as a cultural expression rather than a functional necessity, it can be considered as an “external blueprint” of political and social order claiming universal validity (Jaeger et al. 2015).

Our understanding of the liberal script also accounts for internal contestation and criticism as an integral part of its evolution. Many developments have been contested within societies, which describe themselves as liberal. One obvious point of criticism can be found in the separation of the “internal” from the “external”; the liberal script has always permitted social relationships and practices that contradict key components of the script. An example of this sort of double standard is colonialism. Another is the separation of “private” and “public”, which has been criticized for depoliticizing relationships of domination, such as slavery and gender relationships. Another point of criticism is the enormous discrepancy between liberal ideals and social practices within the liberal core. Class difference, for instance, contradict liberal ideas of political equality and equality of opportunities. A third systematic point of criticism concerns the expansion of instrumental reason and rationality to penetrate all areas of life and value spheres. The commodification of human beings may lead to a trivialization of culture while undermining the normative underpinnings of the script. Finally, the liberal script has been criticized for claiming to be universally valid, while hardly being universalizable. Among other things, the global spread of a Western lifestyle overburdens the earth’s ecological adaptability. Besides criticism from the “outside”, self-criticism from the “inside”, enabled by the guarantee of the freedom of thought, thus constitutes an integral part of the liberal script. These contestations have often been accommodated within the liberal script, giving rise to different manifestations of the script (or at least different forms of its enactment). However, each of these four types of criticism still feeds the internal and external challengers of the liberal script.

Against this backdrop, the liberal script evolved, on the one hand, by interacting with alternative and competing scripts. Monarchical traditionalism in the late 18th and early 19th, unrestrained nationalism in the latter half of the 19th century, as well as fascism and communism in the 20th century, are prime examples. As a response to these collectivist scripts, the liberal script increasingly included the idea that society should be based not only on civil rights but also on political rights in order to allow for collective self-determination, and on social rights, as collective support for those in need (Marshall 1950). On the other hand, the liberal script evolved through social movements from within liberal societies and from regions that often challenged the consistency of its plot and scenery. Anti-colonialism,

the campaign of extending voting rights to men of different social classes and (often later) to women, and social movements against racial and social discrimination are criticisms from actors that confront the liberal script with its plot and self-identify as liberal, themselves. Thus, in a wave-like fashion, the idea of self-determination, the core of the liberal script, expanded while being perpetually accompanied by recurring counter-movements (Reus-Smit 2013). Internal and external challenges account for the continuous refinement, pluralistic nature, and openness of the liberal script. While elements of the story about the unfolding of the liberal script have been studied extensively, an integrated history of the liberal script, which would include its variations across space and time, focus on its interaction and entanglements with other scripts and assess inherent contradictions and internal criticism, is still missing. SCRIPTS will contribute to a global history of the liberal script for which internal and external contestations and their interactions are constitutive.

These internal and external contestations led to the development of the current version of the liberal script, which emerged after the end of the Cold War and was spelt out by the Copenhagen Criteria of the European Union (EU) or the Paris Charter of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Its basic principles have been instantiated and protected by specific institutional arrangements. These consist of effective and sovereign *states* which maintain a monopoly on the means of violence and the ability to enforce and guarantee liberal rights, rules, and decisions as well as a welfare component. Externally, the cooperation of states is promoted by a *rule-based international setting*, such as a multilateral, international order regulated by international law, and it is built around *human rights* as constitutional rights (particularly political and civil rights), which circumscribe sovereignty. Internally, states rely on a rule-based *market economy* and an *electoral democracy* as the core mechanisms for allocating wealth and power. They are constrained by the *rule of law*, e.g., in the form of independent and impartial judicial institutions, and bound by the *neutrality of state*, which limits its authority to regulate religious and moral behavior. The fall of the Iron Curtain led many proponents of the liberal script to expect that the liberal script would prevail around the globe and result in the end of history. Suddenly, a world of constitutional democracies that respected human rights, established a free market system, and that institutionalized the key pillars of world peace, through open borders and membership in international organizations, suddenly seemed to be within reach (Fukuyama 1991). However, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the transformation of Eastern Europe and other parts of the world, as well as intensified globalization have made the social and ecological side-effects of a globally integrated market economy ever more visible. Moreover, the surge of Islamic fundamentalism, revisionism in Russia and the rise of China, as well as the proliferation of right-wing populism and nationalism in Europe and the US, constitute new (or renewed) challenges for liberal societies. These contestations have tended to converge in the negation of the diversity of lifestyles (gender relations, multiculturalism, LGBTI) and the rejection of political authority beyond the nation state. They soon proved that the liberal triumphalism was premature. These challenges do not only account for major conflicts in domestic and international politics. Some of them pose as major contestations of the liberal script by questioning the legitimacy of its key actors and the validity of its main objectives and core principles.

5 CONTESTATIONS, CAUSES, AND CONSEQUENCES

Our conceptual approach enables us to address the three major research questions regarding the relative strength of the liberal script and its alternatives, the developments that underlie the rise and decline of scripts, and the consequences for politics, societies, and individuals, coupled with global challenges of the 21st century. It serves different analytical purposes to treat the liberal script both as containing a core plot (to distinguish liberal from non-liberal scripts) and as a time-specific manifestation (to expound actorhood and scenery in more detail). When studying current contestations, we focus on the version of the liberal script in its 1990s manifestation. To categorize contestations as reformist or revisionist (proposing a competing script), we use our core understanding of the liberal script. This core concept, as developed above, is also the reference point for when we analyze varieties of the liberal script in time and space. Using the concept of scripts for studying liberal ideas about political and social order, and their contestations in this way allows for a fruitful and unique interaction between area studies and the social sciences. It offers a cultural and distancing perspective through which otherwise naturalized assumptions about “the liberal West” can be problematized and compared to potential alternative scripts.

Contestations: To identify contestations, we will focus on challenges of the liberal script as it was spelt out after the end of the Cold War. Our concept of scripts allows us to sketch “multiple modernities” (Eisenstadt 2003) and “entangled modernities” (Conrad/Randeria 2002) in both meanings of the term. There are multiple pathways of and multiple interactions and entanglements with Western modernity, on the one hand, and multiple modernities from the perspective of a more fundamental critique of the liberal script, on the other (Fanon 1961; Said 1978; Chakrabarty 2000). Societal transformations in East Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe, or the EU’s Southern member states hit worst by the global financial crisis may bring about liberal varieties or alternative scripts based on different institutions, cultural practices, and understandings of selfhood, that differ from the specific Protestant Anglo-American tradition or “civilization” (Katzenstein 2010, 2012). We aim at delimiting the core content of the contemporary liberal script by contrasting it to recent historical, internal, and external competitors (e.g., communism in the last century) and to current challengers (e.g., authoritarian populism). We will explore whether challengers to the liberal script draw on similar normative sources for criticizing the liberal script and for developing alternatives, and we will probe to what extent they build on other traditions of challenging and contesting “Western” power. We will also investigate the degree to which liberal societies are rewriting the liberal script by making rights and access conditional, e.g., upon the acceptance of liberal values, or whether the liberal script is internally replaced by alternative, non-liberal models of in- and exclusion. Contestations directed towards the plot, in contrast, attack the fundamentals of the liberal script and prepare the ground for the rise of alternative scripts. To identify conditions under which decoupling turns into the rewriting or the decline of the liberal script, we draw on a debate in the social sciences and humanities regarding the main drivers of social and political change.

Causes: Scripts develop in contexts that are important for their understanding. We will inquire about why and how the diffusion of the liberal script, which started in the late 18th century and was strongly contested in the first half of the 20th century, accelerated in the second half of the 20th century. The social science literature points to three sets of factors that may drive the diffusion of scripts: coercion, functionality, and legitimacy (see, e.g., Simmons et al. 2008). According to one view, the liberal script mostly spread as a process of domination, in which the imposition of liberal ideas and institutions involved high levels of contestation and decoupling in many places. According to another view, it was the effectiveness of liberal institutions in solving societal problems which led to its diffusion (Acemoglu/Robinson 2012; North et al. 2012). Alternatively, we might have witnessed the global diffusion of certain ideas that established themselves as universal standards of appropriateness for the organization of societies as stipulated by World Society Theory (Boli/Thomas 1999; Meyer et al. 1997). All three sets of factors do not only ignore processes of selective adaptation and localization (Börzel/Risse 2012), but they also have difficulty explaining the increasing contestations of the liberal script and the emergence and diffusion of alternative scripts. We need theories that can explain both the rise of the liberal script and the change of tide in recent years. Consequently, our efforts go beyond empirically testing existing theories. We aim at developing theory by integrating and extending previous theoretical arguments to account for both observed diffusions and contestations of the liberal model.

We start out by separating four types of explanation (table 3.1-1). On the one hand, we distinguish between endogenous and exogenous causes of contestation. Endogenous causes relate to basic tensions inherent in the different components of the script, which cannot be fully resolved in practice. Actorhood and scenery are necessarily imperfect realizations of the liberal plot and are therefore always open to contestation. Basic tensions can be alleviated by decoupling.

If decoupling, however, undermines the credibility and legitimacy of core principles, we may see some rewriting in the form of adjusting the scenery and empowering certain actors. At the same time, liberal practices may erode the pillars on which the script is built. Market dynamics may weaken the idea of meritocracy by creating enormous levels of inequality (Piketty 2014) and undermine the sustainability of planetary resources (Meadows et al. 1972; Ostrom 2009). Similarly, individualization and commodification may hurt the communal or civic resources on which liberal societies depend (Bell 1973; Putnam 2000), and the appeasement of labor demands may ultimately push the state into an unresolvable crisis (Habermas 1973; Streeck 2014). Endogenous explanations view international tensions and non-intended effects in the unfolding of the liberal script as major causes of contestations. For instance, the current crisis of the liberal world order is explained by the endogenous dynamics triggered by institutional decisions in the 1990s (Zürn 2018). Exogenous explanations take social processes that are not caused by the liberal script itself as the major causes of its contestations. Other external explanations include the success of a market economy in the non-liberal political system in China, the presence of cultures, which are antipodal to the liberal script, and further external shocks. The future of the liberal script

crucially depends on the existence and appeal of alternative scripts that are more than just deviations or dissents from liberal ideas, institutions, and practices.

On the other hand, we distinguish between ideational configurations (including perceptions of functionality and legitimacy) and material structures as causes for contestations. Ideational contestations abundantly draw upon discourses about modernization theory, which describes human development as a process where developing societies adopt what we refer to as the liberal script of modernity; i.e. disenchanting “local mysticisms” (Weber 1963). Postcolonialism has shared the idea that the liberal script was essentially written by Europeans. Its diffusion, however, is not equivalent to progress but involves the repression and destruction of local scripts based on material power. Simultaneously, contestations of the liberal script can be seen as driven by structural transformations such as industrialization, imperialism, or the globalization of production (Kriesi et al. 2008; Conrad 2012).

SCRIPTS uses these explanations to systematize our accounts for contestations of the liberal script. We strive to integrate the various approaches in order to get a better understanding of both different types of contestation taking place in different contexts and the aggregate rise of contestations since the beginning of the new century (see table 1).

Consequences: Scripts influence discursive and behavioral practices. They are not only a function of power relations; they also constitute power. The attractiveness of a given model of society is a source of “productive power” (Barnett and Duvall 2004) or “soft power” (Nye 2004). While these ideational effects have been neglected for a long time, today many students of world politics would agree that the projection of North American power after World War II would have been inconceivable without the attractiveness of the US social and political model as the most significant *mise-en-scène* of the liberal script. The projection of the “American Way of Life” and its representation in Western culture have been crucial for social and political developments on the national and the international level and our imaginations about the “West and the Rest” (e.g., Gienow-Hecht 2006). In a later stage of the Cluster, we will investigate the consequences of contestations for politics, society, and individuals as well as for the global challenges the world faces in the 21st century, which we expect to differ depending on whether contestations target the core of the liberal script or one particular variety.

	ENDOGENOUS	EXOGENOUS
Material Structures	e.g. economic crises and rising inequalities	e.g. rise of non-liberal Powers
Ideational Configurations	e.g. unresolvable tensions within the liberal script such as religious freedom vs. secularism	e.g. rise of new ideologies/ alternative scripts

Table 1: Causes of Contestations of the Liberal Script

In a first step, we look at the immediate consequences of contestations on the national and global level. We distinguish between three possible outcomes. First, the liberal script prevails by adapting its scenery and actorhood constellation. Second, it survives, but not without substantially transforming its plot. Third, the liberal script declines, losing relevance compared to alternative scripts. To differentiate between *adaptation*, *transformation*, and *decline*, we draw on the study of societal contestations. Current contestations may be a backlash to the “liberal triumph” of the 1990s. The unfolding of the liberal script has always implied the disempowerment of groups that traditionally played dominant roles in society. Some examples include the disempowerment of nobilities and monarchs in Europe, the decline of slaveholders by the anti-slavery movement, the weakening of beneficiaries (mostly) in colonial states by anti-colonialism, the circumscription of privileges for men by the emancipation of women, and the diminishing of entitlements for white people by the anti-discrimination movements. Against this backdrop, Seymour Martin Lipset wrote a history of backlash in the US as one in which liberal progress was always countered by a temporary backlash of “white men” (Lipset/Raab 1970). On the occasion that the current contestations turn out to be mere backlashes, some adaptations in liberal practices in response to the contestations may place the liberal script back in the driver’s seat of the 21st century’s global history.

Alternatively, contestations may become part of a new social cleavage, structuring politics on the national and transnational level for some time to come. Social cleavages are triggered by social revolutions that yield causes of disagreement pitching two sides against each other in structural, ideological, and organizational dimensions. The industrial revolution produced the cleavage between capital and labor that has structured societies, political party systems, and ideologies in many societies (Rokkan 1970; Flora 2000). As opposed to backlashes, cleavages stay for long periods of time and structure political conflicts in all respects. In this view, most current contestations of the liberal script can be read as manifestations of a new cleavage between those in favor of open borders and universal values and those who emphasize the normative significance of borders and communal values

(Hooghe et al. 2002; Kriesi et al. 2008). The liberal script will remain in place but substantially transformed. Finally, the current contestations of the liberal script may lead to its decline. They may produce new scripts that differ not only from the current version but also from the generic core of the liberal script.

In a second step, we want to look more openly at the consequences of the interaction between the contestations of the liberal script and the responses by its defenders. We do not expect to find any clear-cut effects by only looking at contestations. Rather, we aim at grasping the conflict's interactive dynamics regarding the liberal script for politics, society, and individuals. Historical studies will enable us to develop insights and knowledge about the likely event of long-term consequences of the contestations. By taking a perspective that focuses on the interactions between contestations of the liberal script and its response to them, we will also be able to address key challenges of the 21st century, around which the big contemporary debates in the social sciences have evolved: the crisis of the nation state and its borders, the crisis of democracy, the crisis of capitalism, and the crisis of sustainability. The controversy between those who doubt the functionality of the nation state, on the one hand (Held et al. 1999), and proponents of re-nationalization, on the other hand (Miller 1997), has been fueled by the enormous number of migrants crossing borders. Globalization has fostered an ongoing debate about the limits and the crisis of democracy in a globalized world (e.g., Crouch 2004; Rodrik 2012). With the trend towards more equality being reversed in most of the most affluent societies in the North (Milanovic 2016), a new debate about the crisis of capitalism has emerged (Piketty 2014; Streeck 2014). Finally, climate change has made the sustainability of the Western lifestyle untenable (IPCC 2014). By researching the consequences of contestations of the liberal script, the Cluster will contribute both theoretically and empirically to major debates in the social sciences and beyond.

6 CONCLUSION

SCRIPTS addresses fundamental questions about the development of politics and society, and it offers several advantages over existing approaches. First, we aim at developing explanations for why the liberal script has come under pressure, despite its remarkable achievements since World War II and again after 1990.

Second, in doing so, we analyze external and internal contestations of the liberal script, together with their interrelationships and entanglements. For instance, when right-wing populists invoke the notion of national sovereignty and democracy to oppose migration, they use arguments that are similar to those of authoritarian leaders that deny liberal institutions the right to criticize violations of human rights, the rule of law, and democracy. It is important to understand these commonalities and the transnational networks sustaining them. The concept of a script does not only allow us to analyze the nature and the scope of contestations of liberal ideas, institutions, and practices. It also enables us to identify possible alternatives rather than mere deviations to, or dissents from the liberal script.

Third, our approach facilitates the analysis of developments across time and space by incorporating specific perspectives and insights from history and area studies into the social sciences. Historical comparisons enable us to put current challenges in context, distinguish between general and time-specific contestations of the liberal script, and examine their causes and consequences. Correspondingly, we systematically unite the social sciences and area studies to explore the nexus between the liberal script and possible alternatives.

Lastly, the incorporation of different theoretical and methodological perspectives helps us ensure double reflexivity. Reflexivity, in a broader meaning, is part of the social sciences' general self-critique about the relationship of power and knowledge production (Foucault 1970). In a similar vein, area studies, in the context of decolonization, (post)development, and humanitarian interventions, denounced Eurocentrism. Meanwhile, this critical perspective itself can be criticized for accepting concepts, such as positionality, as absolute. Double reflexivity draws on the notion of the "double hermeneutic" (Giddens 1984): social scientists interpret an already interpreted world. A double recognition follows. On the one hand, generalizing social scientists need to consider the impossibility of analyzing global processes with absolute impartiality because their own perspectives are always contextualized. On the other hand, localizing area studies need to acknowledge that academic scholarship has developed methods and mechanisms that allow moving towards generalizations. We emphasize the interdependence between these two perspectives: without generalizing concepts, there is little to deconstruct; without critical reflection, there can be no social sciences. Taking the critique of Eurocentrism and the politicization of knowledge production seriously does not constitute a novelty (see, e.g., Marxist, postcolonial or feminist theories). However, the systematization and institutionalization of double self-reflection in a Cluster that is predominantly dedicated to the productive interaction between the social sciences and area studies constitutes an innovation. While the Cluster is pluralistic in the attempt to bring in different perspectives on studying contestations of the liberal script, the specificity of its approach is procedural, allowing us to develop new approaches via the interaction of different perspectives.

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