Michael Zürn and Johannes Gerschewski

Sketching the Liberal Script. A Target of Contestations

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Sketching the Liberal Script

A Target of Contestations

Michael Zürn and Johannes Gerschewski

ABSTRACT

In this working paper, we aim to make the amorphous concept of "liberal script" more tangible, manifest, and concrete. We do so in three steps. First, we elaborate on the added value of the term "script" for the social sciences. While "script" has been used in other disciplinary contexts, we translate it to the social sciences by delineating it from rival and more widespread terms like institution, order, practice, and ideology. Second, we map different methodological approaches to the empirical study of what the liberal script is. We put forward a reconstructive approach that combines a sociological analysis with a philosophical filter. Third, we engage into spelling out what the "liberal" in the liberal script could mean. We formulate theoretical expectations about the content of the liberal script, its internal architecture, as well as its varieties.

1 INTRODUCTION[1]

In a Financial Times interview on the eve of the G20 summit in Osaka, Japan (27 June 2019), the Russian president declared that "the liberal idea" had "outlived its purpose" as the public turns against immigration, open borders, and multiculturalism.[2] Viktor Orbán uses similar descriptors to Putin in promoting his illiberal turn:

> Let us confidently declare that Christian democracy is not liberal. Liberal democracy is liberal, while Christian democracy is, by definition, not liberal. [...] Liberal democracy is in favour of multiculturalism, while Christian democracy gives priority to Christian culture; this is an illiberal concept. Liberal democracy is pro-immigration, while Christian democracy is anti-immigration; this is again a genuinely illiberal concept. And liberal democracy sides with adaptable family models, while Christian democracy rests on the foundations of the Christian family model; once more, this is an illiberal concept.[3]

Contestants of the liberal idea come not only from the realm of politics. Liberalism, understood in a different way, is also the target of contestation in scholarly discourse. Critical voices from the Global South point, for example, to its complicity with century-old structures of domination (Chakrabarty 2000; Pitts 2005). In this view, liberalism reinforces imperialism, colonialism, and racist stratification in world society. Not least, a current critique of liberalism equates it with neoliberalism and points to a coalition between neoliberals and new conservatives that dismantled structures of solidarity (Cooper 2017; Slobodian 2018). Not to forget those voices that declare the end of liberal democracy since it has proven to be inferior compared to the effectiveness of an autocratic Chinese model that above all showcases

1 We would like to thank our fellow members of the Cluster of Excellence SCRIPTS, the 2019–2020 BGTS cohort, as well as our colleagues at the Global Governance Unit at WZB for stimulating discussions. For providing intensive feedback, we are particularly grateful to Tanja Börzel, Anne Menzel, Friederike Kuntz, Alexandra Paulin-Booth, Tully Rector, Mattias Kumm, Christoph Möllers, Gudrun Krämer, Rainer Forst, Stefan Gosepath, and Peter Katzenstein. For excellent research assistance, we thank Louisa Böttner.

2 https://www.ft.com/content/670039ec-98f3-11e9-9573-ee5cbb98ed36 (accessed 5 April 2021).

3 Viktor Orbán at the 29th Bálványos Summer Open University and Student Camp, 29 July 2018, https://miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-speech-at-the-29th-balvanyos-summer-open-university-and-student-camp/ (accessed 5 April 2021).

eminent successes in reducing poverty and managing growth (Daniel Bell 2006, 2015).

These various criticisms target different facets of liberalism. For some, liberalism has become a scapegoat for "postmodern" values that they seek to attack, equating them often with a "leftist" and cosmopolitan project detached from the experience of "normal" people. Others points to the weakness of the liberal model by slowing down necessary decisions in offering too many opportunities for participation. At the same time, liberalism is considered as the ideology that made domination over the wretched of the earth possible (Fanon 1963). The amorphousness of liberalism makes it an easy target for today's authoritarian and populist leaders but also post-structuralist and post-colonial thinking. At the same time, neoliberalism is criticized by many who consider themselves as real liberals (e.g. Schmidt/Thatcher 2013). Similarly, practices of domination and exploitation by liberal societies are criticized not only by post-colonial voices but also liberals (Hobhouse 1911). It seems that contestants of the liberal script target not only liberal principles as such, but they also challenge practices in seemingly liberal societies from the point of view of liberal principles. Without doubt, liberalism is today an essentially contested concept (Gallie 1956) and "resists easy descriptions" (Wall 2015: 1).

How do we know then that the mentioned contestants from Orbán to Hobhouse really contest the liberal script? The seemingly obvious needs to be made transparent by providing the reasons and reasoning behind such a judgment. This requires the conceptualization of "contestation", the "liberal idea", and the notion of a "script". We deal with the questions of what is a contestant and what is a contestation in other contexts. In this working paper, we want to focus on the "liberal" and the "script". In doing so, we build on the proposal for the Cluster of Excellence "Contestations of the Liberal Script – SCRIPTS" (Börzel/Zürn 2020).

To start, defining the noun in the liberal script seems to be the easier task. "Script" is a quite specific term utilized for the purposes of our research program. It carries much less historical and political baggage than all the "-isms" that refer to streams of political thinking or big theories. It is also an abstract concept that explicitly aims to empirically compare different scripts. In section 2, we discuss the meaning of script and propose a definition which can distinguish it from similar concepts in the social sciences.

Things get much more difficult when we move to the qualifier "liberal" and thus to a specific script. The liberal script consists of a complex set of prescriptive and descriptive statements about the organization of society that come with a certain epistemological set-up and some (but not complete) enactment. Prescriptive or normative statements refer to beliefs about how things should be; descriptive or empirical statements refer to beliefs how things work and include beliefs about causal relations. It, therefore, seems impossible to find a definition of the liberal script in the strict meaning of the term. The liberal script cannot be captured in a one-sentence definition that identifies distinctly what is in and out. While it may be possible to find such a definition for specific components of the liberal script, such as markets or property rights, it is an insurmountable task to do so for a complete script that brings together several such components in a particular but variant relationship.

The problem is well known in the social sciences in general. While it may be possible to define what society is, it is hard to say in one sentence what characterizes the US-American society – unless we come up with a formal definition freed of any meaning and all the relational elements of

society. For some specific research purposes, such an operational definition like "the US American society consists of the people with a US passport" may be useful, but certainly not for the study of the problems of American society. A similar operational definition of the liberal script – say "all the statements that contain the word liberal" – would help very little to identify and categorize the contestations of the liberal script. We, therefore, aim for sketching or characterizing the liberal script by identifying components that stand in a particular relationship with each other. Our goal is a useful sketch, not a one-line definition of the liberal script.

Since the liberal script certainly is more than one liberal idea, a second difficulty arises regarding the relative importance of and the relationship between different liberal components. The semantics of the script varies depending on the concrete context. There is not one invariant liberal script that remains unmodified in different times, different societal contexts, or different areas in the world. As Michael Freeden (2015: 22) puts it: "There is no single, unambiguous thing called liberalism." The liberal script in 19th century England is different from the liberal script in late 20th century Sweden. The liberal script today has different meanings in Uruguay than in South Korea.

Regarding this second difficulty, we argue that this variety of the liberal script does not preclude, but rather suggest thinking systematically about the commonalities. We propose thinking more thoroughly about varieties of one liberal script, i.e., a class with a differing set of ideas that show significant commonalities and overlaps. This seems to us a better solution than proposing distinct liberal scripts in the plural (e.g. Katzenstein 2020). The classic conception of a definition requires spelling out both the *differentia specifica* vis-à-vis the species on the same abstraction level and the *genus proximum* at a higher level. If we aim to conceptualize distinct liberal scripts in the plural, we not only need to find a sufficient criterion that distinguishes a liberal from non-liberal scripts, but also a criterion that has enough discriminatory power to distinguish between liberal script A and cases in which the variation constitutes another liberal script B. As paradoxical as it might sound, to speak of liberal scripts in the plural imposes at least as many tasks in constructing them as using the liberal script in the singular allowing for varieties. In addition, it seems to preclude the flexibility of working with family resemblance and overlaps between the components within one liberal script. In this paper, we opt for varieties, since it makes it easier to capture the inbuilt ambiguity of what liberalism is.

Speaking of a liberal script and its varieties does not necessarily lead to an ethnocentric conception of liberalism. Shmuel Eisenstadt ([2002] 2017) included the notion of "multiple modernities" against a use of the notion of "varieties of modernizations" according to which the Western modernization constitutes the gold standard with deviations from it that are somehow deficient. Our understanding of varieties of the liberal script defies the notion of one original liberal script and deviations from it. It considers different varieties of the liberal script across time and space as equal.

There is a third and related difficulty in sketching the liberal script. The authors of this discussion paper are political scientists from Germany. Given the diversity of world society, this is quite a specific perspective. It unavoidably raises the issue of positionality. While this is an issue for all conceptual discussions and observations in the social sciences, it is especially sensitive when it comes to the sketching of a contested concept like liberalism. It is impossible to overcome the issue of positionality for any conceivable set of authors. Any of the components of the liberal script and each of their relationships that we describe may be rather a function of our position in world

society than expressing common understandings. While this is true, it does not disqualify our arguments as such. It needs a positive argument in which way our positionality leads to what kind of distortion in our argument. In the spirit of "double reflexivity", this paper thus invites challenges of our characterization with a deconstructing intent. The paper represents one attempt (among alternatives) for sketching the liberal script. For specific purposes, there may be good reasons to use alternative sketches that substantially differ from our approach. In this case, the paper may serve as a background against which the crucial differences can be identified and put forward.

This paper is organized as follows. We start section 2 by discussing the concept of "script" and how it differs from similar concepts like order, ideology, practice, or institutions. In section 3, we discuss different methodologies for sketching a script. We suggest a sociological approach that is qualified with a philosophical check by the observer. Section 4 aims to describe the liberal script and its varieties by formulating expectations of what the current liberal script is about. These expectations need to be adjusted by systematic empirical explorations. We start by identifying a first layer of the liberal script, understood as the justificatory basis for developing additional components. This first layer is based on the idea of individual self-determination and its derivatives. The additional components that speak to societal, economic, political, and cross-cutting issues of a liberal script are then discussed in two ways: first, as a set of concepts that share a family resemblance as described by Wittgenstein. Second, we carve out the most critical tensions between many of these concepts demonstrating how and why the liberal script is dynamic over time and can come in many varieties as a result of resolving these tensions.

2 SCRIPTS AND FAMILIAR CONCEPTS

We define a script as shared understandings about the organization of society that are expressed in normative statements on how society ought to be (*Sollen*) and empirical statements on how it is (*Sein*) (Börzel/Zürn 2020). Scripts also contain action repertoires for how to arrive from *Sein* to *Sollen*, and vice versa. "Script" thus relates to many of the widely used terms in social sciences, ranging from political and social institutions, cultural norms and practices, ethical values, instrumental reasons, as well as routines and habits. We are aware that "script" is not a broadly used concept in the social sciences. It is no neologism, however. While it shares many similarities with the mentioned familiar concepts, it also has its distinctive features. In the following, we outline the different uses of the term and compare the term scripts to similar concepts, arguing in favor of its advantages.

Literally, a script is nothing more than something written. In everyday language, a script is used most often in the context of movies and theaters in which it refers to the written document that details the dialogue and stage directions. In this sense, "scripts" refers to a structure that constrains action: scripted action is remotely guided action. This use of the term has an illustrious career in psychology. Schank and Abelson (1977), for instance, refer to scripts as stereotypical knowledge structures that allow us to understand and act appropriately in a familiar situation, sometimes referred to as "schemes" or "frames" (Mandler 1984). A script enables us to "handle stylized everyday situations" (Schank/Abelson 1977: 41). Often, these behavioral scripts comprise not only a one-time reaction but refer to a sequence of actions. A script is, therefore, a temporally ordered, sequential action stereotype. Gioia and Poole (1984: 449) have summarized this understanding neatly: a script is for them a "schematic knowledge structure held in memory

that specifies behavior or event sequences that are appropriate for specific situations". Both the sequential action stereotype and the schematic knowledge structure make clear that scripts contain a set of different statements that stand in a given relationship to each other. Scripts consist of more than just sentences or statements. They also contain narratives and tell a story (see Koschorke 2012). Along this line, Benedict Wilkinson (2020) has recently published a book about the stories terrorists tell themselves with the title "Scripts of Terror". All these usages of the term come close to and borrow from sociological role theory (see Goffman 1956; Mead 1934). They all point to a usage of the concept that accounts for actions on the individual level. Individuals read and internalize scripts that guide their actions.

There are also versions of the meaning of the term that target the organizational level. In this usage, scripts guide and constitute organizations and groups. Marketing, management, and organizational studies have particularly focused on particular action stereotypes. Scripts are used here as behavioral guidelines, explicating how to diversify products, how enterprises should grow, how employees should be trained, or what mindsets are needed when starting new ventures (Drori et al. 2009; Haley/Haley 2016; Lord/Kernan 1987). Scripts are then understood as being an essential part of a behavioral and mental "success recipe" for organizations (Gioia/Poole 1984). In contrast, cultural studies have a looser, less rigid, and less specified understanding of scripts. They focus more on the construction of dominant narratives as orientations for social groups. Prominent examples concern the construction of race or gender (Jackson 2006) or "blackness" (Godreau 2015), leaving more room for interpretation of what a script entails as well as for actors' improvisation.

The so-called Stanford School has developed the version of the concept that focuses on the macro level of the world-society (Boli/Thomas 1999; Meyer et al. 1997). Their "Western Script" consists of dominant cultural systems and practices of organizing society. It 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 as well as for-profit corporations, intimately tied to the rationalizations of institutions, enacted on particular occasions that generate global awareness, carried by infrastructure of world society, spurred by market forces, riven by tension and contradiction, and expressed in the multitude ways particular groups relate to universal ideas" (Lechner/Boli 2005: 6). Our understanding of scripts is also located on the macro level and displays obvious similarities. Unlike the Stanford School, however, we adopt a generic concept of scripts that we dissociate from the specific content of a given script. According to the Stanford School, there is one Western Script that structures world society. Competitors are missing. Behavioral deviations from the script are therefore considered as decoupling.

We can distill from the above discussion that script is a multifaceted concept that contains features that are of particular interest to us. First, it brings together normative, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions. Second, it may work on the level of society as a whole so that it helps identify a knowledge structure about how society is organized, how it should be organized, also reflecting on the relationship between these two dimensions. Third, scripts are in a permanent contest with each other. Scripts can change and adapt to specific circumstances to succeed in the competition, leaving sufficient analytical room for tracing developments over time and space. In our understanding, a script finally speaks to the most fundamental questions of a legitimate order of society – how society draws boundaries and includes and excludes members, how it (re-)allocates its resources, and what understandings

of temporalities it relies upon (see Börzel/Zürn 2020). Thus, the concept of scripts comes, fourth, with a structure that allows its descriptions to be organized. A script on the working of society as a whole can be translated into subscripts about borders, orders, (re-)allocation, and temporalities that are of heuristic value.

A script and its subscripts are recurrent over time; it is held by significant groups so that it becomes part of the public discourse; it competes with other scripts about the appropriateness of polities and policies; it justifies political arrangements and polices. To the extent that a script becomes dominant, it partially gets materialized in social practices (Althusser 2014). But a script needs to be kept analytically separate from practice. Different scripts exist in parallel, but greed and other selfish motivations may be reflected in practices. Our understanding of a script thus upholds the distinction between ideas and activities and thus also the social dynamics that can arise from gaps between the two. Yet the concept is meant to be analytically descriptive, even if we refer to normative elements of the script. We thus can describe a liberal and a fascist script, although our normative beliefs are in stark opposition to the latter.

While we are well aware that the social sciences rely on a broad portfolio of concepts that are similar to scripts, we argue that "script" displays, in addition to commonalities, some differences from those concepts. Important and similar concepts in the social sciences are practices, institutions, orders, and ideologies. All of these refer to a set of norms and injunctions for social processes, and they are all about societal structures that guide action for actors on different levels. Although these concepts are contested themselves, we can identify some aspects of the common usage of these terms that differ in important aspects from what we want to capture with the term "script". None of these rival terms thus covers identical terrain.

To start, neither "institution" nor "practice" can be used to capture the macro level of societies. A given institution and a given practice are always part of a broader set of institutions and practices in which they are embedded. Even if we use these terms in the plural, they do not include an idea of how different institutions and practices relate to each other. Practices and institutions do not focus on the macro structures of societies. Practices emphasize an activity-centered micro perspective or meso perspective, highlighting instantiations of patterned actions of individuals and organizations. Schatzki (2001: 2) identifies the minimal core of practices according to which an "array of activities", in which the activities are embedded, depend on, and represent expressions of shared skills and implicit knowledge (Reckwitz 2002). As such, practices can be seen as "socially meaningful patterns of action which, in being performed more or less competently simultaneously embody, act out, or reify background knowledge in and on the material world" (Adler/Pouliot 2011: 6). While practice theory argues with emerging fields as the nexus between interwoven practices that constrain activities, practices are "much more closely tied to individuals than are the orders and order-establishing phenomena of much macro social thought" (Schatzki 2001: 5). Practices gain their distinctive take, specifically by emphasizing that they "never possess the *sui generis* existence and near omnipotence sometimes attributed to structural and holist phenomena" (Schatzki 2001: 5). This is exactly the criticism of the macro-systemic nature of a concept like "script" as an order-instituting entity that motivates practice theory.

While practice theory starts with patterned activities, institutionalist accounts start from constraints on these activities. Institutions embody "the rules of the game" and "the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction", as the famous definition of Douglass North (1990: 3) postulates. Institutionalists share an interest in

"formal rules, compliance procedures, and standard operating practices that structure the relationship between individuals" (Hall 1986: 19). Institutions only develop independent explanatory "bite" (Capoccia 2016) or a "distorting effect" (Immergut 2006: 240) when they become more than mere epiphenomenal intermediaries between actors' strategies and the aggregation of their preferences to macro outcomes. It is, therefore, safe to say that they operate on a meso level. The consensus definition of international regimes as "principles, norms rules, and decision-making procedures around which expectations converge in a given issue-area" (Krasner 1983: 275) makes this abundantly clear. International regimes are secondary institutions in world politics based on a few primary institutions like sovereignty that reaches beyond the meso level (Hurrell 2007). However, even these primary institutions are only part and parcel of the broader concept of the global order.

"Order" is a term that social scientists often use to describe the interplay of institutions on the macro level. The global order thus consists of different institutions and practices (Hurrell 2007). A constitutional order, to use another example, is one in which foundational and limitational institutions interact with each other (Krisch 2010). Order – as much as scripts – thus works on the macro level. The notion of order, however, includes an element of dominance. An order exists and an existing order prevails over imaginations of alternative orders. At any given time and social space, there can be only one order. While there may be struggles about the right order, only one is according to the logic of the concept present. You may aim for a socialist order while living in a capitalist world, but the socialist order is not present in this case. Since the concept of order includes an element of dominance, proponents of the order concept often talk about a hybrid order to describe situations in which different ideas about the right order not only compete but also fuse. On the contrary, different scripts may and are expected to compete with each other at the same time in the same social space. Scripts do not need to be dominant to exist. Scripts are "imagined orders". Moreover, it is possible to describe a merely factual order without capturing the meaning of its underlying norms and rules. To use an example by Kratochwil (1989): An extra-terrestrial person may describe an American Football game as an order in which people alternate between a movement of contraction and expansion. On the contrary, it is not possible to describe a script without understanding the meaning of its norms and rules to describe a script.

"Ideology" is the fourth rival concept. The concept covers macro-structural features, focusing mostly on explaining, repressing, integrating, motivating, or legitimating social classes, the people, or any other social group acting out of a position of dominance or subordination. Ideologies provide cohesion to social groups and compete over public recognition to "create public justifications for the exercise of power" (Müller 2011: 92). A recent approach to the study of political ideologies, therefore, comes especially close to our understanding of script. This more recent version does not invoke the traditional and often pejorative understanding of ideology as losing touch with reality or the blurring of real-world experiences but sees it as the ubiquitous and inevitable study of political thinking more generally. It tries to evade the previous judgmental underpinnings, and, instead, defines political ideologies as condensed and semantically frozen assortments of concatenated concepts that structure political thinking and that generally serve justificatory purposes (Freeden 1996, 2006; Freeden et al. 2013). We share with this new understanding of political ideologies the explicit openness for comparative research and its dedication to ideological morphology, i.e., the relationship between different elements (Freeden 1994). While some ideologies – like communism – have formulated a detailed

action program, usually ruling out any variations from a pre-set orthodoxy, others – like nationalism – usually avoid particular reference to concrete actors and actions, allowing for more internal variety. Ideologies are, therefore, also open for variations in space and time.

In spite of significant similarities, we prefer to use the concept of scripts over this very recent use of the term "ideology" for three reasons. First, the older concept of ideology is much more prevalent (Gerring 1997). Ideologies are often understood as too abstract and vague, "something concocted by spinners of dreams, otherworldly intellectuals, or machinators of totalitarian design" (Freeden 2006: 4). With Marx and Engels as forerunners, political ideologies are understood as nothing more than distortions of reality, masking the mechanics of an unjust and repressive rule. In modern political thought, the study of totalitarian regimes particularly contributed to the negative image of political ideologies. Ideologies were grand narratives calling for single (and pure) truths on how to mold whole societies, Manichean in their outlook and with an intra-mundane and eschatological appeal (Arendt [1951] 1966; Drath [1954] 1968; Friedrich/Brzezinski 1956). The German historian Bracher (1982) has aptly called the twentieth century the century of ideological struggles. This pejorative normative ballast that the term "ideology" carries still casts a long shadow on the study of political ideologies. It remains too often a polemical *Kampfbegriff*. Second, the concept of script emphasizes its epistemological underpinnings. Most descriptions of ideologies overlook this part. Scripts have an inbuilt semantic that points to particular and very specific action repertoires for becoming knowledgeable. Third, our concept of script contains a heuristic tool that allows fruitful comparisons due to the need to contain implicit or explicit statements about the borders, the constitutive principles, the (re-)allocation of goods, and the inscribed temporality of a society. For these three reasons, we prefer the term script over the term political ideology.

We define a script as a set of descriptive or empirical and prescriptive or normative statements about the organization of society, creating justifications for the exercise of power. It pushes us to ask questions about the internal coherence and tensions within a script, about borders, orders, (re-)allocation, and temporality, about the processes of change and innovation within a script as well as about internal and external contestations. While there are overlaps to similar concepts in the social sciences, scripts are specific in uniquely bundling features, as sketched in Table 1.

		Script	Ideology	Order	Institution	Practice
Commonality	Contains prescriptions about the organization of society	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Differences	Applies to the macro level	Y	Y	Y	N	N
	Allows for parallel existence in the same social space	Y	Y	N	N	N
	Contains explicitly ontological statements and comes with an epistemology	Y	N	N	Y	Y
	Asks for authors	Y	Y	N	Y/N	N
	Provides a heuristic for comparative mapping	Y	N	N	Y	N

Table 1: Five Similar Concepts: Commonalities and Differences
Source: Authors' own table.

3 HOW TO STUDY THE LIBERAL SCRIPT?

How can we grasp a specific script in methodological terms given the enormous variance in time and space? Since the liberal script consists of a complex set of statements about the organization of a society, the goal cannot be to offer a definition in the strict meaning of the term. Instead, the liberal script can be captured by identifying components that stand in a particular relationship with each other. This is no small task given the varieties of the liberal script.

In general, one can distinguish four methodological approaches to capture what a script entails; each of them comes in several versions. A sociological approach asks the question of *what liberals actually think, say or do*.[4] A philosophical approach, in turn, aims at uncovering the *inner architecture of liberal thinking and its justifications,* distinguishing different components and their relationship to each other.[5] A historical approach looks at the *genealogy of liberal ideas* over time and space and may identify temporal layers.[6] Last but not least, an interpretative approach that draws from all the methods identified above comes up with a *reasoned judgment of the observer*.

In order to reconstruct the liberal script, we suggest a combination of two perspectives. First, the sociological perspective could be employed to identify the components of the liberal script. Second, in line with the philosophical approach, the relationship between these components and their inner architecture can be reconstructed. Regarding the first step, the components can be first identified as liberal when they are regularly and convergently part of accounts by self-proclaimed liberals or those considered liberals by others (sociological account). Convergence could be examined, for instance, by using claim-analysis of documents by liberal proponents. Claims-making analysis is a method via which the claims of liberal speakers (self-proclaimed or ascribed) can be analyzed as to the positions they take regarding the organization of society, based on which justification, directed at what kind of addressees, and in the name of which constituency the speaker claims to speak (de Wilde et al. 2014; Koopmans et al. 2005).[7] This method would allow us to identify the beliefs of liberals about the features of a well-organized society and their underlying beliefs about how society works. As a result of the analysis of liberal speakers[8], one should be able to get a grasp on the most relevant components of the liberal script. This is the sociological part of our understanding of the liberal script.

4 The sociological approach resembles what Duncan Bell (2014: 686) has described as a summative approach: "The liberal tradition is constituted by the sum of the arguments that have been classified as liberal, and recognised as such by other self-proclaimed liberals, across time and space." However, the sociological approach also allows opting for a threshold of convergence instead of the sum of all statements.

5 This is similar to Duncan Bell's (2014: 686) stipulative approach: "Stipulative accounts identify necessary (though rarely sufficient) conditions for a position to count as a legitimate exemplar of a tradition. 'Liberalism' is typically constructed from interpretations of the meaning and interrelation of core concepts, such as liberty, authority, autonomy, and equality."

6 This often comes in the form of canonical approaches that distil liberalism from exemplary writings from thinkers like Locke, Kant, Mill, and Rawls (Duncan Bell 2014).

7 Formally speaking, we can distinguish four types of sociological claims analysis: First, public statements by those who describe themselves as liberals. The problem here is that we get many false positives. Second, we can look at those who are described by others as liberals. This however requires a time-intensive two-tiered research process and creates distortions given the strategic use of the term liberal in the public discourse depending on the local context. Third, one can analyze the justifications of those who exercise power in the name of a liberal order based on Müller's (2011: 92) account according to which ideologies do not depend on sophisticated philosophical texts but on the "capacity to fuse ideas and sentiments" to "create public justifications for the exercise of power". Fourth, one could analyze what liberalism consists of in the eyes of critiques. Fifth, one may analyze practices in liberal societies in order to uncover the underlying script (Adler 2019).

8 In principle, "liberal speakers" could entail elite members as much as "ordinary" citizens – academics as much as non-academics. The difference would not be methodical, but rather in identifying the proper text corpus and the conclusions that one is able to draw from the respective empirical analyses.

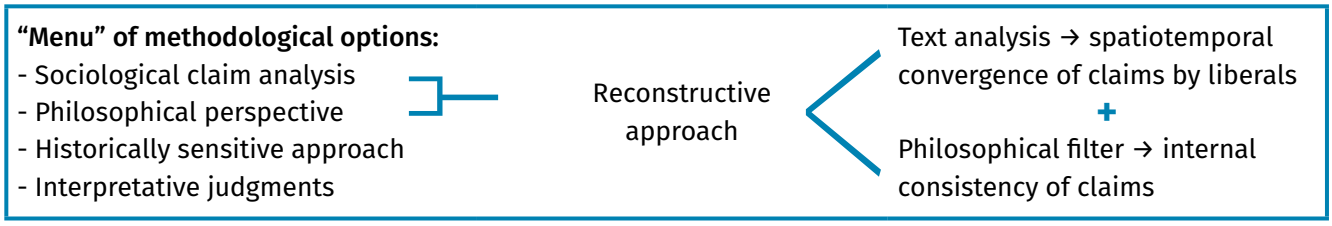

Figure 1: Methodological Approaches

Second, one may in a next step identify a philosophical filter and analyze in what relationship the components stand to each other. In this second step, one would ask whether the component claims can be reasonably defended as part of a more or less coherent liberal script. This consistency check possibly allows to exclude self-proclaimed pseudo-liberals such as Jörg Haider and his FPÖ or Geert Wilders and his Freedom party by identifying inconsistencies with the morphological structure of liberalism (Freeden 2015: ch. 7).[9] We thus exclude statements by self-proclaimed liberals that are contradictory to the internal logic of the liberal script. In this way, we exclude scripts that ask, for instance, for national liberty without accepting limitations of executive state power. This second step is partly inspired by Freeden's (1994, 1996) proposal to focus on the morphology of ideologies. The morphological approach aims to impose a structure on ideologies and so enable scholars to identify their inner architecture. To the extent that a script consists as an ideology of "complex combinations and clusters of political concepts in sustainable patterns" (Freeden 2003: 51), it is not only necessary to identify the individual components, but also the relationship between these components. "Ideologies, liberalism included, clump ideas together in certain combinations that have a unique profile, a distinct morphological pattern" (Freeden 2015: 33). Figure 1 provides an overview of the proposed methodological approach to study the liberal script.

We see two advantages in combining a sociological with a philosophical approach. First, it allows us to systematically compare scripts with each other. By identifying a source on the basis of which we can identify a script, we point to the raw material from which any script needs to be reconstructed. This source should not be biased towards certain varieties of the script nor conflate the desirable with the descriptive (Rector 2020). By identifying the raw material of scripts via claims, we can describe the prescriptions of given scripts from the point of view of the observer. Moreover, the philosophical filter brings order into fuzzy and often convoluted raw material. It disentangles core from secondary concepts and detects configurations of interrelated concepts. A successful script is always a "freeze-frame of the meanings of the concepts employed" (Freeden 1994: 158) that locks in and de-contests meanings of these concepts. As such, the philosophical filter allows tracing the variety and changing configurations of the employed concepts over time and space. It also opens avenues to compare the liberal script with competing alternative scripts.[10]

The use of the philosophical filter has a second merit. It provides a structure for describing

9 It also helps us to include accounts that are not from self-proclaimed liberals but use the components of the liberal script with a defensible morphology (in terms of liberal philosophy). Social-democratic parties in Western Europe from about the 1960s on are an example.

10 Take for example the nationalist script. According to Andrew Vincent (2013: 463), the "regulative themes of nationalist ideologies" are constellations of six interrelated features whose individual weight depends on the concrete context and spatiotemporal changes. The features that he identifies are ethnicity, identity, territory, sovereignty, culture, and prosperity.

scripts. Scripts are not alphabet soups, but they are ordered. We propose distinguishing between first-layer principles and secondary ones.[11] First-layer principles are components of the liberal script that fulfill a double function: On the one hand, they are claimed as desirable ideals, and, on the other hand, they serve as justificatory reference points for additional aspects of the liberal script. The reference to individual rights in the Declaration of Independence is an example: "We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness [...]." Because "these Truths" are "self-evident", there seems to be no need for further justification. They fulfill a similar function to an assumption in deductive theorizing. The self-evident rights are used as normative reference points for the justification of other aspects of the liberal script. The outcome of collective self-determination, for instance, shall not violate individual rights, and it has to follow a procedure, which provides each individual with a voice. Assumptions thus often serve as a justification of other components of the script. Second-layer components are those that are strongly associated with the liberal script, but often justified with reference to first-order principles.

The enormous variety of the liberal script is captured in two different ways. A first approach may be labeled with Wittgenstein a family resemblance approach. We argue that different varieties of the liberal script only have a partial overlap of components with each other. Yet, if the overlaps are sufficiently numerous, we talk about a family resemblance structure between all the different varieties of the contemporary liberal script. Moreover, the varieties that come close to full congruence form together what we call a nuclear family. The family resemblance approach thus allows drawing not only a line between the liberal script and other non-liberal scripts, but also between different varieties of the liberal script. For example, forms of the liberal script that emphasize the concepts of tolerance, solidarity, and self-determination may belong to a different variety than forms that emphasize markets, principle of merit, and individual rights. However, the overlap of components may still be sufficient to see them as part of the larger liberal family.

A second approach for capturing variety may be labeled as the tensions approach. The more we move away from liberal first-order principles, the more tensions between different components of the liberal script become apparent. We will use four significant tensions and consider different ways of resolving them to identify different varieties of the liberal script. For instance, the tension between economic markets and social solidarity is resolved differently in the Scandinavian version of the liberal script than in the US version. This move also helps to establish additional outside borders. Since the tensions are endogenous to the liberal script, an utterly one-sided resolution falls outside of the liberal script. A script that dissolves markets entirely in favor of a fully equal distribution of goods falls outside the liberal script as well as radical libertarianism in which the individual freedom of the strong dominate solidarity concerns.

In sum, we propose a reconstructive approach that combines a sociological with a philosophical perspective. In a first step, one needs to evaluate convergence of claims brought forward by liberals. In a second step, we apply a filter to check for internal consistency and inherent contradictions in order to rule out self-proclaimed pseudo-liberals. The second step focuses on the relationship between different components and thus on the (changing) figuration and constellations of

11 We are aware that Freeden (1996: 75–91) proposes a three-tier formation and distinguishes between core, adjacent, and peripheral concepts. He suggests that all political ideologies share this morphology.

component concepts. In principle, this allows for the identification of different layers of the liberal script as well as for the detection of internal variety based on family resemblance structures as well as for making visible internal tensions.

Within the scope of this discussion paper, we are neither able to carry out a systematic claims analysis nor do we engage in deep philosophical thinking. In the remainder of the paper, we thus offer our preliminary understanding of the liberal script that can lead to expectations for studying the liberal script along the suggested lines. These expectations need to be probed in more systematic empirical explorations. The outcome of this paper therefore is preliminary and currently based on our own judgment and interpretation. As a consequence, it unavoidably falls victim to a certain positionality. However, our account is ready for a thorough empirical examination by using sociological text analysis methods and careful philosophical evaluations. At the same time, the liberal script that we develop can be adjusted and further developed on the basis of research carried out in the Cluster.

4 THE LIBERAL SCRIPT – ARCHITECTURE, VARIETIES, AND INNER TENSIONS

In the previous sections, we defined a script as shared statements on how to organize society and laid out a strategy on how to determine what makes a script liberal. We now want to explore our expectations about the liberal script. In line with our considerations, we first identify the central components of the liberal script. Given that we do not perceive the liberal script as mere assemblages of concepts, we aim to sketch the relationship between the different components. We, therefore, introduce different layers, discussing to what extent they are exclusive to the liberal script before we then highlight inner varieties and tensions that arise.

Two limitations need to be kept in mind. First, our sketching of the liberal script refers exclusively to its current shape. We only grasp regional varieties but no historical developments of the liberal script. In addition, our discussion is based on qualitative reading of works about liberalism and aims to formulate expectations that only then can be tested via claims analysis. A full analysis in line with our reconstructive approach would demand a comprehensive sociological claims analysis in which we would consider what liberals themselves say is liberal. In the future, we might bolster the choice of these components by a more systematic content analysis of liberal speakers.

4.1 THE FIRST LAYER

We assume that the liberal script contains two layers. The first layer can be seen as the main reference point of liberal thinking in our times. It points to an abstract ideal that comes without any institutional connotation and serves as the justificatory foil for the secondary concepts. Many consider the existence of such a liberal core as a necessary condition for a liberal script in our times. We share this intuition. The second-layer concepts are, to some extent, derived from the first layer and come equipped with some institutional expectations. The notion of a first layer or even core of the liberal script is therefore different from the idea of a gold standard. It points to a necessary condition before something qualifies as a liberal script. It is open to the liberal equality of all the scripts built on this core. It is thus especially in the configuration with the second-layer concepts that varieties of the liberal script gain traction and become more concrete. The liberal script links together and bundles first and second-layer components, creating space for potential overlaps and interdependencies.

In a review article, Steven Wall (2015) posits that individual liberty might be the closest candidate for a core principle of liberalism. To think of a

liberal script without thinking of liberty is meaningless to him. In a similar attempt, Michael Freeden (2015: 55–70) distils the core of liberal thought and argues that it consists of seven principles: liberty, rationality, individuality, progress, sociability, the general interest, and limited and accountable power. In his assessment, liberty inhabits a special status in this list since "if we were to remove the idea of liberty from any such version [of liberalism], liberalism would forfeit an absolutely crucial distinguishing element. It is simply unimaginable to entertain, and empirically impossible to find, a variant of liberalism that dispenses with the concept of liberty" (Freeden 2015: 58).

We agree, but submit with Bernard Williams that liberty is a political value. It should not be equated with what Williams (2005: 78) calls "primitive freedom"[12], i.e., the "simple idea of being unobstructed in doing what you want by some form of humanly imposed coercion". Primitive freedom is a "proto-political" value. The political needs to be considered as well. The political can be equated with collective choice and the way one deals with mutual disagreements and political opposition. Liberty thus refers not only to private freedom, but to authoritative limitations to liberty to protect the liberty of others (Williams 2005: 83). This authoritative source needs to be legitimized.

The key question for liberty as the first-layer principle of liberalism thus is how far a person's freedom should be extended or protected, which in turn must be determined collectively. This is based on an anthropological belief in the autonomy of individuals which translates into the right of self-determination. According to the late David Held (1995: 147), one underlying principle of liberalism is the idea that "persons [...] should be free and equal in the determination of the conditions of their own lives, so long as they do not employ this framework to negate the rights of others". The idea that individual self-determination depends on legitimate infringements on personal freedom has two implications that lead us to two additional components of the first layer. On the one hand, this understanding presupposes a distinction between a private and a public realm. The dividing line between what counts as private and as public can be subject to change, can shift over time, and depends on political decisions. The presence of a private realm that needs to be substantially protected is however part of the package (Rössler 2001). On the other hand, the value of liberty for each individual presupposes the assumption of equal moral worth of those individuals considered as liberal subjects, a group which, of course, has become more inclusive only over time. If there were not this a-priori form of quality, privacy could not be protected consistently. Even politically curtailed personal freedom may negatively affect the personal freedom of others. The "art" of the political lies therefore in legitimating the right cost of liberty, presuming that the moral worth of one individual should not be placed above others. Yet, it should be noted that the equal moral worth of all at the same time serves as a justification for many different forms of inequality within a liberal system as well.

To recall once more, this identification of the core refers to our times. With admirable clarity, Rosenblatt (2018), for example, shows that the origin of the term "liberalism" is *liberalitas*. *Liberalitas* originally carried connotations of personal generosity, civic-mindedness, as well as strength and building of character. According to her study, liberals used to be moralists and it is only over the course of the centuries that liberalism has become more and more politicized. Yet, we suggest that today's vanishing point is liberty, concretized as individual self-determination under political circumstances and coming with a private-public

12 Primitive freedom is for Williams the ratio of desires to obstacles faced, leading to the paradox situation that you could increase freedom by getting rid of obstacles or by reducing desire.

distinction and the notion of the equal moral worth of individuals.

Our conception of the first layer leaves out follow-up questions like how this individual freedom can be normatively grounded (e.g. via natural rights, contract theory or principles of deliberation), how it should be brought about, and what kind of institutional embodiments it requires. Our conception also does not say much about the persons that possess autonomy and individual self-determination. Given that we formulate expectations about the current liberal script, the answer to the question needs to go beyond white males with private property. The current liberal script excludes any racial, gender, or class discrimination in answering the personhood question. In that respect, the liberal script has broadened its notion of personhood over time. Still, there are variations required for minimum age or rights for persons labeled with mental health disabilities. These questions about the normative grounding of individual self-determination, the inclusivity of the concept and especially its practical implementation and institutional embodiment will help us account for varieties of the liberal script – across and within regions.

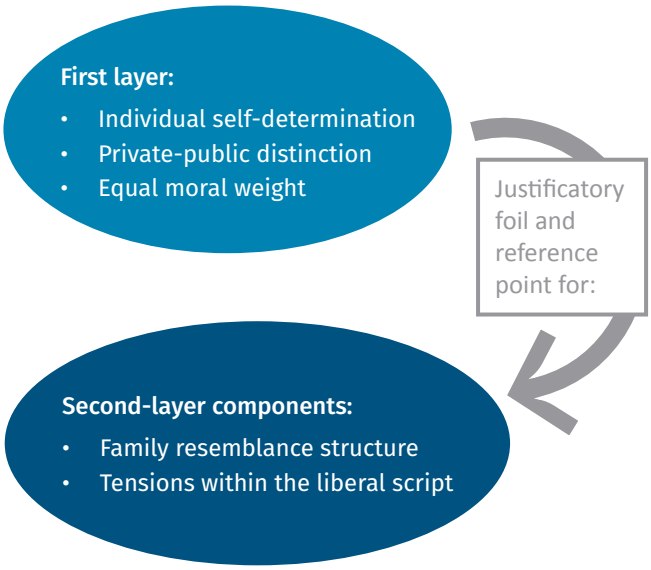

Figure 2: First-Layer Principles

4.2 THE SECOND-LAYER COMPONENTS

When we move to the second layer, we see much more variation. The second-layer components point to regularly converging components in accounts of self-proclaimed liberals or those considered liberals by others (sociological account). Conceptually, we use the family resemblance approach to capture these. We acknowledge a general fuzziness ("Unschärfe") of concepts and argue based on Wittgenstein (1984: 278) that the second-layer components constitute a "complicated net of similarities that overlap and cross".[13] While we argue that the first layer remains the major gravitation center, the secondary components stand in a family resemblance relationship with each other. Family resemblance means that we do not demand that all of these secondary components need to be present to qualify a certain figuration of components as liberal. Instead, family resemblance argues that a certain number of components suffices in order to qualify as liberal.[14] If the overlaps are sufficiently numerous, we talk about a family resemblance between all the different varieties of the contemporary liberal script. Moreover, the varieties that come close to full congruence together make one branch (the nuclear family) within the larger family. The family resemblance approach thus allows drawing a line between the liberal script and non-liberal scripts (a sufficient amount of overlap), and between different varieties of the liberal script. In this section, we focus on spelling out the second-layer components before we move to different families within liberalism in the next section.

13 In the German original it reads: "Wir sehen ein kompliziertes Netz von Ähnlichkeiten, die einander übergreifen und kreuzen. [...] Ich kann diese Ähnlichkeiten nicht besser charakterisieren als durch das Wort 'Familienähnlichkeit'."

14 In other words, family resemblance can be understood as an m-of-n rule, with the logical operator OR between the individual components (Goertz 2006: 27–68).

We order the second-layer principles along political, economic, and societal principles. In political terms, we consider civil, political and social rights, the rule of law, and collective self-determination as second-layer features. This view strongly resonates with the historical development of liberalism as political thought and political praxis. Liberalism first turned against arbitrary power, whether exercised by monarchs or entities like the church (Fawcett 2018; Rosenblatt 2018) in order to establish basic civil rights, before people demanded more political participation and social inclusion (Marshall 1950).[15] It is often claimed that in 1814 the *liberales* in Spain were the first to adopt the word for their political struggle in reviving the constitution and re-establishing principles of freedom, criticizing the *serviles* for their blind obedience to the crown. With the advent of "new liberalism" in the 19th century, liberals like J. A. Hobson, Leonard Hobhouse, and later John Maynard Keynes considered questions of social progress more thoroughly. Fundamentally rethinking justifications for state interventions into the market, social rights, ranging from social welfare to education, became an integral part of the liberal script (Rosenblatt 2018: 100–115, 184–207). As such, we perceive civil, political, and social rights as important second-layer political components that we expect to find in a sociological claim analysis.

The refusal of external arbitrary intervention lies at the heart of Judith Shklar's (1989) work on "liberalism of fear". Advancing Isaiah Berlin's discussion of "negative liberty" (Berlin [1969] 2017), Shklar forcefully argues that the overriding aim of liberalism is "to secure the political conditions that are necessary for the exercise of personal freedom". To her, "every adult should be able to make as many effective decisions without fear or favor about as many aspects of her or his life as is compatible with the like freedom of every other adult" (Shklar 1989: 21). The political conditions that secure the absence of fear of arbitrary rule are the rule of law and the separation of power. Governments need to be both limited and constitutional (Schochet 1979). This becomes obvious when contrasted with illiberal and autocratic rule (Linz 1975). It is not by coincidence that liberalism has gained prominence and strength in the 20th century by sharply delineating and demarcating itself from autocratic alternative scripts, whether in their communist or fascist version (Müller 2011). These competing scripts had no inbuilt institutionalized guarantee for respecting individual and minority rights, but rather start from group identities and imagined futures that are rendered in terms of absolutes. Instead, repression of deviant behavior is both definiens for autocratic rule and explanans for its stability. Liberals, instead, "share a distrust in power – be it the power of the state, of wealth or of the social community" (Fawcett 2018: 2).

From the first-layer component of liberty and individual self-determination, we derive the right to collective self-determination. In a liberal sense, this right is based on the idea of self-legislation. It starts from people's individual autonomy, before it then reaches out to a group's right to self-determination. Alien, foreign, or otherwise imposed rule needs to be discarded. Instead, it must be the prerogative of the individual members of the collective to negotiate among themselves to what extent liberty is expanded or contracted. In the words of state theorist Hans Kelsen (1945), the addressees of the laws need to be identical to the authors. It stands in sharp contrast to autocratic rule, in which addressee and author diverge. In our sociological claim analysis, we have therefore good reason to expect that liberals state not only the right to individual, but also to collective self-determination. Collective self-determination in turn is limited by the rule of law and the respect for civil, political, and social rights.

15 In the Declaration of Independence, these fundamental rights are "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness". In the Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen, these rights are: "la liberté, la propriété, la sûreté, et la résistance à l'oppression".

In economic terms, the second-layer components we propose are principles of property rights, market exchange, and a broad notion of a principle of merit. These components also resonate with the rich tradition of classic economic liberalism. The right to private property can be directly derived from the notion of individual self-determination and belongs to the private sphere. Some belongings and the right to control them are seen as a necessary condition for a life of liberty. When it comes to the right of private property, a classic philosophical distinction is drawn between a Lockean justification of property rights as inherent natural rights, and, in contrast, proponents like Benjamin Constant and Jean-Baptiste Say, who perceived property rights as a social convention. While the latter view is closer to our understanding of economic liberty with a political bent and therefore subject to negotiation and regulation, Locke has argued that there are limits to private properties. These limits are reached when others are harmed. Irrespective of the philosophical justification, we expect property to play a significant role in today's liberal script that should be mirrored in today's liberal claims.

Markets are seen as the location which allows trading entitlements of capital (Pistor 2019). In some versions of liberalism, markets are seen as a natural and emergent place of economic transactions, self-regulated by an efficient prize mechanism. In most understandings of the liberal script, however, markets depend on a political and legal environment that protects exchanges from arbitrary interventions (Pistor 2019). Slobodian (2018) has shown that even the "neoliberal Geneva School" shares this concept of markets. Similarly, the vast majority of 19th century liberalism did not argue in favor of laissez-faire (Rosenblatt 2018: 80–86). Instead, the government had a right to regulate any industry. As such, we do not perceive laissez-faire as the economic derivative of the first-layer principle of liberty. Laissez-faire and primitive freedom could be adequately paired. As a suitable second-layer principle, we suggest therefore market economy – under political constraints that might legitimize government intervention. To what extent this intervention into the market is seen as rightful and justifiable is as contested as the expansion and contraction of liberty. The most extreme examples of the expansion of liberty and minimal intervention that are either borderline to the liberal script or even perceived as an *aliud* to it, are libertarian thinkers like Robert Nozick (1974).

Markets as a platform of exchange for property entitlements come with the notion that the (re-) allocation of goods and wealth is driven by market performance. Rewards and merits from economic activities must be deserved by performance. It should be clear, however, that the underlying concept "deservedness" has no clear-cut specification within the liberal script. One extreme conception is built on a 1:1 relationship between market success and deservedness. It includes the right to pass on wealth to future generations re-distributed to whomever the owner favors (e.g. tax exemptions for foundations). Other conceptions consider re-distributive corrections of market outcomes not only as necessary for other reasons like solidarity and social rights but justify it with undeserved inequalities produced by markets. In these cases, high tax rates with no exemptions and high inheritance tax rates are seen as necessary to uphold the principle of merit.

Similar to the "Americanization" (Rosenblatt 2018: 245–64) of the liberal idea in the mid-20th century and its tight coupling to democracy as a joint bulwark against totalitarian threats, we expect that economic concepts loom large when assessing today's liberal script. Despite its rich conceptual history, liberalism as of today is often reduced to the economic ideas of neoliberalism, as exemplified in the Vienna School with proponents like Ludwig von Mises, Wilhelm Röpke, and Friedrich von Hayek and its "heir", the Chicago School

(Harvey 2007; Slobodian 2018). Neoliberalism is heavily criticized and pejoratively used – due to its atomistic notions of individuals and exaggeration of efficiency, among other reasons – for being a powerful tool of repression, domination, and exploitation in the hands of the wealthy and powerful, for dictating policies of national governments and International Organizations, and for producing and widening social inequality. These critiques stem often, but not exclusively, from Critical Theory and left economic perspectives (Saad-Filho/Johnston 2005). We do not want to reduce neoliberalism to a mere obsession with ideological market fundamentalism nor do we make any attempt to take sides in the normative debate. Instead, we acknowledge that the neoliberal project goes way beyond such a simplified image, ranging from family values to knowledge production and philosophy of science (Cooper 2017; Plehwe et al. 2020). This means, in turn, that liberal economic concepts permeate other societal fields. In this light, we expect that today's liberal script is heavily influenced not only by a political discourse, but also by economic conceptions. This should be mirrored in a sociological claim analysis.

For the societal sphere we consider the belief in the diversity of lifestyles as an important second-layer component. In the beginning of this paper, we referred to the illiberal and populist politicians that use this societal value against the liberals. For them, "liberal" means multiculturalism, open borders, and modern family arrangements. The plurality of liberal lifestyles is perceived as threatening tradition, prompting them to call for an illiberal state. This criticism reveals an important dimension of today's liberal script. Indeed, in the course of the 20th century "alternative categories based on gender, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation slowly worked their way into mainstream liberal consciousness" (Freeden 2015: 50). Identity politics have gained a prominent place in today's liberal script. Connected through experiences of suppression, discrimination, and injustice, minority groups aspire to raise greater awareness of their situation, seeking to actively expand their individual right to self-determination. As such, they point to the core of what is liberal. It derives from the idea that every person has equal moral worth and that no person, including their respective lifestyle, should be placed above others. As such, tolerance of difference is a tenet of liberal societies.

In most varieties of the liberal script, the principle of tolerance towards different lifestyles not only applies to all known parts of society but also to unknown parts. Openness for new ideas, newcomers, and new insights points to a second element of the liberal script in the societal sphere. Open societies let other people and cultures in as long as they accept the liberal script. Open societies are open to new insights as well as the emergence of new identities. In this sense, liberal societies are open societies. As Karl Popper (2013: 203) has put it: "Arresting political change is not the remedy; it cannot bring happiness. We can never return to the alleged innocence and beauty of the closed society. Our dream of heaven cannot be realized on earth. Once we begin to rely upon our reason, and to use our powers of criticism, once we feel the call of personal responsibilities, and with it, the responsibility of helping to advance knowledge, we cannot return to a state of implicit submission to tribal magic."

Popper's juxtaposition of a closed and open society finally leads us to a cross-cutting sphere of the liberal script. In this cross-cutting sphere the idea of progress, the growing control of nature via human reasoning, coexist with an epistemology that emphasizes the permanent need to question existing insights and ask for rational procedures to produce knowledge. This epistemology on the one hand involves an element of humility and thus acknowledges the limits of rationality and planning. On the other hand, the major promise of liberalism is progress in the long-term. This

includes both material and moral progress. Material progress is the outcome of competition of private interests and rights within a politically protected market environment. In many varieties of the liberal script, private property and free markets have a deontic quality. More importantly, almost all varieties of the liberal script see it, in consequentialist terms, as the best way of producing growth and wealth. Large parts of the thinking of Adam Smith, John Stewart Mill, and David Ricardo were adopted by the liberal script. Accordingly, free competition in unbiased markets is producing the most efficient outcome, i.e. most aggregate wealth, for each given state of technology. Free markets, in addition, are seen as the best driver for the development and diffusion of new technologies. Since the industrial revolution, the liberal promise of wealth had an almost uncontested appeal. If you want to be wealthy and access to as many consumer goods as possible, you need to live in a liberal society. It has been the rise of the developmental states, most recently the Chinese economy, which has put a question mark to this link. The production of wealth and technology also leads to control over nature. Self-aware and self-confident people and societies are not subject to the destinies controlled by god and nature; therefore, liberal societies have control over nature. Liberal societies may even exploit natural resources for wealth and progress. It is only more recently that this "right" of liberal societies has been qualified. At least in some variants, it now reads that natural exploitation is possible to the extent that the further development of technology promises to repair it without damage for future generations (Fücks 2015).

The liberal script also promises moral progress. Systematic knowledge production in liberal societies is dependent upon an idea of social progress (Forst 2019) and most likely leads to moral progress over time. Liberals perceive human nature as rational and widely share an optimistic future outlook that includes a notion of progress as a "movement from less desirable to more desirable states – 'the idea of moving onward' as Mill puts it" (Freeden 1996: 145). This notion is so strong that it was even used to deny the right to collective self-determination (Mehta 1999), though only as a temporary measure. As such, liberals place heavy emphasis on free education and trust in the general principles of Enlightenment (Wall 2015: 4–6). Moral progress depends on the absence of closed rule, demanding instead an epistemic setup that is open and achieves progress through competition for innovation. Liberals share a deep distrust in fixed, comprehensive, and absolute truths, rather seeing knowledge as preliminary and in a state of permanent revision, acknowledging epistemic uncertainty. Moral progress in this sense is part and parcel of a critical and rationalist epistemology. It does not refer to deities, authorities, or ideologies to solve problems, instead acknowledging, as John Dewey (1935: 32) has put it, "the central role of free intelligence in inquiry, discussion and expression".

In sum, we distinguish four spheres of second-layer components of the liberal script. The societal, economic, and political spheres contain elements that are quite distinct from each other. The political sphere refers to the liberal's mistrust of power concentration, demanding rule of law and separation of power, the universality of human rights, and the basal right to collective organization. The economic sphere emphasizes not laissez-faire and freedom at all costs, but a market principle in which the government has a right to intervene, to a greater or lesser extent. Relatedly, the economic sphere underlines the right of private property and merit principle. In the societal sphere, we refer to toleration of different lifestyles and openness to the unknown as the hallmark of liberal societies. The fourth cross-cutting realm adds second-layer components that are more general and reflected in at least one of the three other realms. Figure 3 provides an overview.

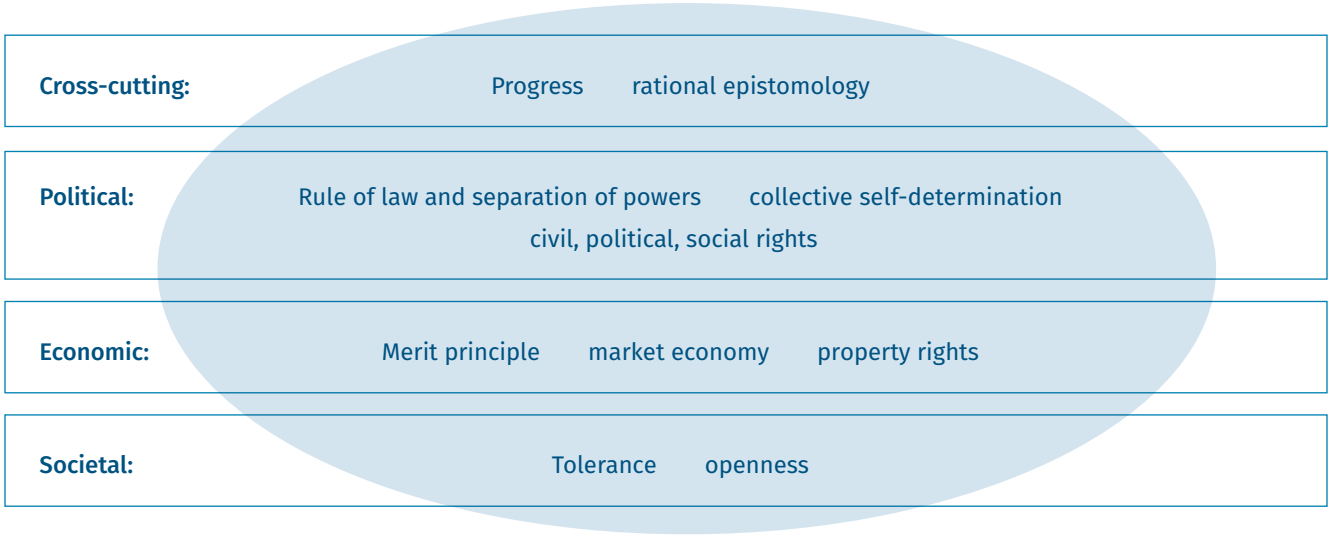

Figure 3: Second-Layer Components

4.3 VARIETIES OF THE LIBERAL SCRIPT

In the final step of our analysis, we focus on varieties. We use two different approaches to identify varieties within the contemporary liberal script: (1) family resemblance and (2) inner tensions. We would like to re-iterate that this contribution formulates a preliminary set of expectations. These expectations can and must be adapted on the basis of later empirical research.

4.3.1 FAMILY RESEMBLANCE

The methodological considerations of family resemblance allow us a flexible approach to the second-layer components outlined above. We argue that varieties of the liberal script do not need to touch upon all of the second-layer components, needing only to allude to a sufficiently large number of them. The m-of-n-rule applies.[16] We expect that when conducting a systematic sociological claim analysis, coherent families emerge. The families constitute clusters with sufficient conceptual overlap of the secondary components, not denying marginal internal differences and uncertainties surrounding them. Yet, it should also be explicitly noted that these families are all anchored in the first-layer principle. We propose that the contraction or expansion of the first-layer principle of liberty, i.e., to what extent personal freedom is legitimately cut or extended, affects the ordering of the second-layer principles.

More concretely, we expect to see four nuclear families within the liberal script. First, we expect to find a neoliberal nuclear family starting from the assumption that the first-layer principle of liberty needs, especially in the economic realm, to be considerably expanded. At the same time, the protection of the market needs to be de-politicized and locked in institutionally. In this light, a neoliberal understanding accentuates, above all, the economic principles that we outlined above. The right of private property, the merit principle, and the market with its promise of efficiency are the hallmarks of this liberal nuclear family. Yet, it is important to note that it should not be equated with laissez-faire and complete state abstention from markets. Even historically, classic liberals did not uniformly subscribe to these practices. In contrast, the idea of the state as the mere “night

16 For this working paper, we do not want to further specify the m-of-n-rule, say for example that 5 of the 10 components need to be present to qualify as an exemplar of the liberal script. This would make our flexible approach more rigid and would run counter to the explorative spirit in which this working paper is written.

watchman" was from early on heavily contested (Rosenblatt 2018: 105–8). Also, reducing today's variant of neoliberalism to laissez-faire would simply be a misreading. Neoliberals of today do not perceive the market as a natural datum, but as a social and political product that needs to be protected and held operational. In this sense, state intervention and neoliberalism are not polar contradictions, but the role of the political is to "oppose any action that might frustrate the operation of competition between private interests" (Dardot/Laval 2013: 47). In the societal and political sphere, it is this competition that needs to be safeguarded.

The neoliberal variety does therefore not abstain from political intervention, but includes the function of rule of law in maintaining a competitive market that embodies potential for innovation. As such, it shares the cross-cutting liberal optimism for material and moral progress. This liberal family does not only emphasize competition as a driver for technological innovation, but also has an elective affinity to an open and rational epistemology for solving problems and questioning authoritative answers. We therefore expect to see a coherent cluster forming around the economic components, the rule of law, progress, as well as notions of a rational epistemology.

Second, we expect to find an open society interpretation of the liberal script. This nuclear family shares the heavy emphasis on the core value of liberty with the neoliberal variety; however, it is somewhat de-politicized. Personal freedom should be expanded as much as possible. While the neoliberal variety is characterized by economic concerns, the open society understanding is driven by societal tolerance and openness towards different lifestyles. Marking a strong delineation between the private and the public realm and taking individual's equal moral worth seriously, it highlights a multicultural society, open borders and fair chances for immigration, diversity of sexual orientation and an emphasis on LGBTQ rights, as well as modern family configurations. It demands a society that is generally open to difference and the unknown, with a strong emphasis on civil rights. Will Kymlicka (1995) has coined the term of "group-differentiated rights" that goes beyond a mere toleration of minorities, but argues in favor of an active accommodation and entitlement for external protection of minority groups. Highlighting the value of one's own cultural membership, the right to collective self-determination, even below the national level, is stressed in this understanding of the liberal script. In a bottom-up sociological claim analysis of liberals, we expect to find a family resemblance structure that revolves around secondary components of societal tolerance and openness, augmented by heavy emphasis on the political dimensions of civil rights and collective self-determination.

Third, we expect to find a social-democratic interpretation of the liberal script. As opposed to the two other nuclear families, the social-democratic variety emphasizes the dependence of freedom on a conducive political environment. This means that the general role of the political in making freedom possible is increased (Williams 2001). Historically, the social-democratic understanding of the liberal script has its roots in the new liberalism that emerged in the 19th century as a reaction to the "social question" (Rosenblatt 2018: 220–33). Ironically, the new liberalism was a diametrically opposed answer to the shortcomings of then liberal thought compared to the similarly named neoliberal answer a century later. Both were responses to a perceived crisis of liberalism. Yet, they fundamentally differ regarding the role that markets should play. New liberals – like later social democrats – justify the state's active role in curbing individual freedom to better protect collective interests only in order to ultimately "guarantee the real conditions for achieving individual goals" (Dardot/Laval 2013: 47). Welfare, labor protection, progressive income tax, unemployment

benefits, social insurance policies, health systems, and access to education are only some of the major policy areas of the social-democratic understanding of the liberal script. At the end of the 19th century, "most people now realized that the state was morally obliged to step in on behalf of the helpless and oppressed" (Rosenblatt 2018: 228). We argue that this social-liberal tradition can be perceived even today. Social and political rights serve as the backbone of this variety of the liberal script. It also emphasizes the rule of law, yet in a markedly different way than the neoliberal script. While the latter sees the rule of law as a function of guaranteeing market operations, the social-liberal variety sees it in the Polanyian countermovement of social protection. The social-liberal understanding also stresses the market but does not assume it as a self-regulating entity.

Fourth, we expect to find a nuclear family that has deeper nationalist and conservative roots. In the history of ideas, nationalism and conservativism are routinely depicted as the ideological antipodes to liberalism. But, similar to socialism and the incorporation of socialist ideas into the social-democratic nuclear family, liberal ideas have merged with nationalist and conservative thought, producing a distinct right-wing family as well. Yet, it should be noted that the premise of nationalism is that groups have intrinsic value in themselves as well as having value to their members (Kelly 2015: 329; Rosenblatt 2018). In contrast, in liberal thought, the individual always comes first, the group second. "National liberalism" is therefore only reconcilable to the extent that it does acknowledge the prioritization of the individual over the nation. All varieties of liberalism akin to nationalism need to acknowledge individuals as right bearers but emphasize the value of a national identity based on shared language, descent, geography, and political history. Liberal key thinkers from Mill to Berlin saw nationality as a "way of taming the more dangerous and destabilizing tendencies of a democratic order" (Kelly 2015: 338) as it ties together individuals into a political entity. This legacy of viewing nations as consolidators of power and stabilizers of liberal government is stressed here. As such, this family particularly underscores the political value of collective self-determination – sometimes even to the detriment of human rights. Moreover, the conservative perspective adds an emphasis on tradition, status quo orientation, a sense of hierarchy, and continuity, making it thus skeptical about the intrinsic value of progress (Skorupski 2015). In societal terms, this nuclear family stands in stark contrast to the cosmopolitan worldview and downplays instead societal dimensions of tolerance and openness (Fawcett 2018: 459–60). Finally, national-conservative liberalism shares with the neoliberal family the commitment to a small but strong state and the economic principles of merit, markets, and property rights.

These four nuclear families are not mutually exclusive. In empirical reality, we might find political positions that combine aspects of the four families. While we acknowledge that parts of these families can be complementary to each other, we maintain that the four nuclear families outlined above are inherently coherent and empirically frequent. It is no mere coincidence that in many countries political party formations have crystallized along these lines. In a systematical claim analysis, we expect the secondary components to converge into these main nuclear families. Yet, we anticipate that further families beyond these four might emerge as well.

4.3.2 TENSIONS

Most varieties of the liberal script are rooted in different readings of the first layer that lead to differences in their substantiation in the second layer. Different understandings of liberty, the distinction between private and public, and the notion of equal moral worth of involved individuals create tensions. In the second layer, these tensions come

into the open. These tensions are a necessary part of probably any script, but especially of the liberal script. Contestations of and struggles about the meaning of existing concepts are part of the liberal script and an open society. Moreover, these tensions provide a useful starting point to map the most important varieties of the liberal script.

In our understanding, social tensions are different from outright contradictions. Tensions describe a relationship between two or more items that do not stand in a zero-sum relationship with each other. They rather describe a relationship between two or more forces that balance each other, and at least one of them tends to extend. Tensions can be productive by creating new balanced results that allow all forces to develop in parallel. Thus, they refer to variable-sum games. It follows that a completely one-sided resolution of a tension built into a script leads us beyond its borders, since the tension is a necessary part of the script. For instance, if the tension between economic market competition and societal solidarity leads to a completely one-sided resolution in favor of the latter, it may factor out competition completely. Then it is not a liberal script anymore. If the tension is resolved completely one-sidedly in favor of the former, it may entirely destroy the vision of equality and move it outside of what can be described as the liberal script.

We consider four tensions as most important. Each of them points to different variants of balancing individual rights and collective goals. Each of these tensions can be loosely associated with one of the spheres discussed above. At the same time, each of the four tensions speaks especially to one of the four Research Units of our Cluster.[17]

Rights versus Majority: In current varieties of the liberal script, the notion of collective self-determination is closely associated with the democratic principle. Democratic practices are conceived as participatory and egalitarian. But giving a voice to all does not ensure that it is a liberal voice. Those who have civil and political rights may favor policies that work against these rights. In democratic theory, non-majoritarian institutions are the solution. Non-majoritarian institutions can be defined as entities that exercise some level of specialized public authority separate from that of other institutions and are neither directly elected by the people nor directly managed by elected officials (see also Thatcher/Stone Sweet 2002: 2). These institutions are expected to protect the democratic process and the civil, political, and social rights of institutions by trumping majority institutions. They protect the democratic process by controlling democratic decisions (see Preuß 1994).

This creates a tension that comes in two versions. In the first version, it pits national institutions against each other, when, for instance, a constitutional court considers a parliamentary decision as unconstitutional or certain decisions about macro-economic policies are delegated to central banks. In terms of deliberative democracy, the tension concerns most generally the epistemic quality of decisions made by democratic institutions assuming that they are vulnerable to leaving the path of reason (Landwehr in press). In this version, it is more generally the tension between expertise and the majority that is at stake. The tension runs through the history of collective self-determination. The theme dominated debates between British and American intellectuals during the American revolution. While the Americans pointed to the will of the people, the British side emphasized the rule of law and individual rights. Today, many populist parties pit the will of the (silent) majority against the technocratic rule of liberal experts. The second version of this

17 These tensions therefore provide a useful starting point for unfolding a third layer of liberal scripts that develops liberal subscripts on the basis of the heuristic distinction between borders, orders, (re-)allocation, and temporality (see Drewski/Gerhards 2020).

tension is more recent. It points to tensions between international and European norms on the one hand and popular sovereignty on the other. In this case, international institutions consider global agreements and norms as superior to national policies. Defenders of popular sovereignty often interpret this as just another form of the rule of liberal cosmopolitans via experts. The Brexit campaign is a textbook case of this.

The tension between rights and majority mainly falls into the political realm. It affects most clearly issues of order, understood as those parts of the script that speak to secondary rules for agenda-setting, rule-making, rule-adjudication, and rule-enforcement. Both one-sided resolutions of the tension fall outside of the liberal script. A ruthless rule of the majority and unconditional nationalism violates individual rights and runs against the ideas of universalism and openness. At the same time, a technocratic rule based on the claim of epistemic and moral superiority undermines the whole idea of self-determination. There are, however, many different ways of balancing the tension that all point to different varieties of the liberal script. Both constitutional law and political science work with conceptual differentiations that capture this variety. The difference between Westminster and consensual democracies is one of them (Lijphart 2004), different notions of multi-level governance another (Hooghe/Marks 2001).

Markets versus Solidarity: Property rights and market competition are an integral part of the liberal script. In some understandings, liberalism cannot even be divorced from capitalism (see Kocka 2013 for discussion). In this view, a private economy based on capital entitlements and free exchange is necessary for freedom and the cause for dynamic innovations and wealth in liberal societies (Schumpeter 2005; Weber 1956). At the same time, such an economy produces inequalities that may go beyond any reasonable notion of deservedness. Moreover, high levels of sustained inequality undermine the equality of opportunities in the economic realm (especially if wealth can be transferred within families) and even the first-layer concept of equal moral worth in the societal and political realm. Economic wealth can be translated into undue cultural and political influence. Poverty may deprive people of the resources needed to exercise political rights and thus prevents participation in society (Dahl 1989). In short, a market economy may violate social rights with repercussions for civil and political rights.

As already argued above, an entirely one-sided resolution of the tension falls outside the liberal script. A socialist solution that thoroughly excludes competition and market exchange cannot be described as liberal. Accordingly, a version of capitalism that is fully protected from political interventions and that does not foresee any correction to the distributional outcome of markets strongly violates components of current varieties of the liberal script. This may be called neoliberalism but also falls outside the liberal script as described. It may be just another road to serfdom. There is still much variation in the handlings of this tension. For instance, on the basis of the framework of Hall and Soskice (2001), scholars have distinguished different varieties of capitalism, including coordinated, liberal, dependent, and hierarchical forms of market economies. Similarly, Esping-Andersen (1990, 1999) has distinguished different types of welfare regimes.

The tension between markets and solidarity touches all the spheres of the liberal script. However, it originates in the economic realm producing effects that play out in all the realms. In any case, it mainly concerns issues of allocation and reallocation.

Competing Interests versus Common Good: A somewhat less obvious tension within the liberal script concerns the self-understanding of the

society the script addresses. It thus emerges in the societal realm but also has political repercussions. It plays out most vividly regarding temporality issues, especially regarding the tension between short-term interests and long-term interests of future generations.

The liberal script foresees autonomous individuals with the capacity to develop their own will and preferences. An individual that does not know their own interests comes close to a contradiction in terms within the liberal script. At the same time, the liberal script makes a distinction between private and collective goods. In many instances, the long-term collective good can only be achieved if the immediate and short-term individual interests are subordinated to collective norms as the expression of the collective will. This tension leads to different understandings of the public realm. In one extreme variety, the public realm is the place in which competing interests come together to negotiate with each other. In this view, the political realm comes close to a market of pre-determined interests. The outcome of this game is a more or less fair form of the aggregation of private interests. Theories of pluralism (including asymmetric pluralism) conceive the political realm in this way (Laski 1930; Schumpeter 2005). In another variety, the public is the space in which the collective strives for the common good. Individuals participate in a process of arguing and deliberation leading in theory to an outcome that transforms prior interests.

Again, any one-sided resolution of the tension seems incompatible with the liberal script. The common good cannot wholly dominate private interests. At the same time, collective norms should be more than just the mere aggregation of interests. Different varieties of the liberal script balance this tension in different ways. While republican orientations emphasize the common good and the collective will, pluralist versions emphasize the free interplay of interests. The tension plays out especially regarding issues of temporality. Any decision dominated by an aggregation of interests contains the potential of externalities, producing costs for those who could not participate. Within a given community, the interests of future generations are a likely victim. Democratic decisions in the present may therefore easily affect the rights of future generations. Justice across generations requires deliberations that transform the private interests of existing actors.

Cosmopolitanism versus Bounded Community: The fourth manifestation of the tensions built into the liberal script leads to struggle over borders (Zürn et al. 2019). A long-standing debate within liberal political philosophy has pitted those emphasizing universal responsibility to humanity (Caney 2005; Pogge 1992; Singer 2002) against those emphasizing that there are "limits to justice" (Sandel 1998) in geographical, institutional, or cultural terms (see also Nagel 2005; Walzer 1994). On the one hand, cosmopolitanism is seen as the necessary implication of liberal and universal thinking in a globalized world (Beitz 1979; Goodin 2010; Pogge 1989). In this view, the growing density of transactions across borders leads to a global community of fate (Held 1995), suggesting similar moral obligations to all people independent of national borders. In response, others have pointed to the normative dignity of smaller human communities (Miller 1995) or the decisive institutional context of the state (Nagel 2005). The proper development of the community may in this view even trump an absolutist version of individual rights. The positions can be subsumed under the notion of communitarianism.

This debate, at its core, is one about the status of communities and their relationship to individuals. At stake are two border issues. One is about the constitution of borders. While liberal communities need some borders, there is no democratic way to decide about borders in the first place. The liberal script depends on the existence of

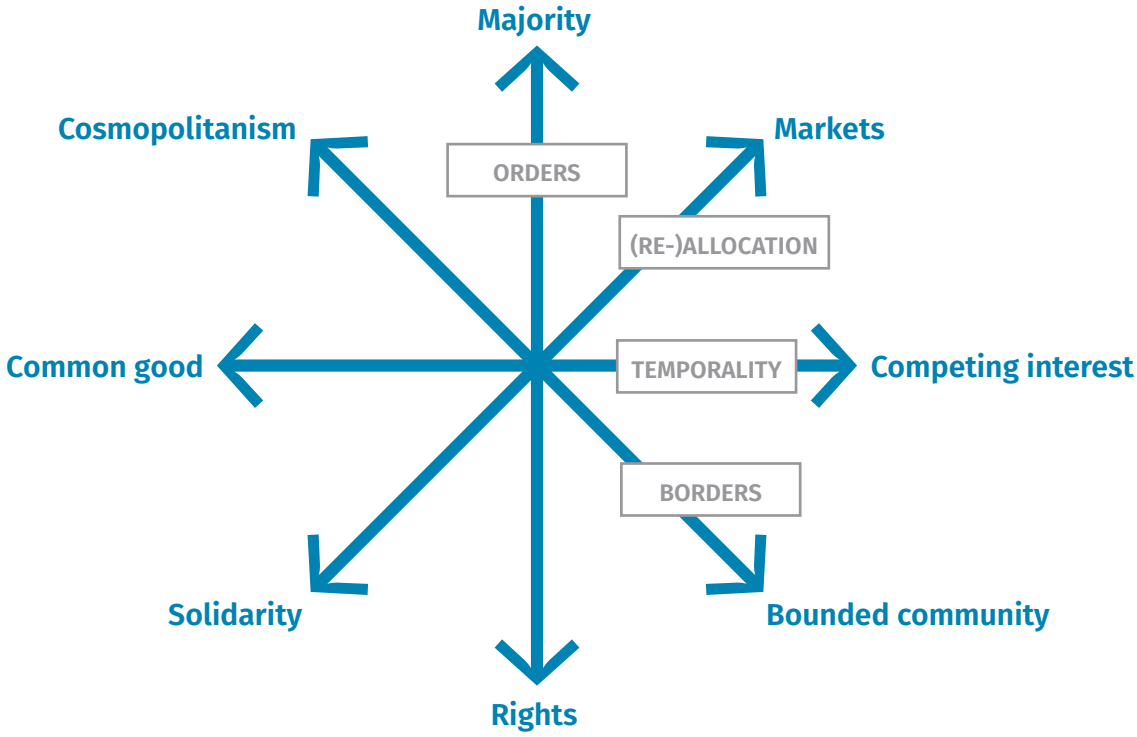

Figure 4: Tensions Within the Liberal Script

communities, although the constitution of communities and the associated act of exclusion violates the idea of equal moral worth. The other issue at stake is the management of existing borders. While some universal rights of individuals require the freedom to move and to exit, any community claims the right to control its borders.

Any one-sided resolution of the tension moves outside of the liberal script (Merkel/Zürn 2019). A world consisting of billions of individuals with humanity as a whole as the only communal bound can hardly develop notions of solidarity or organize democracy. On the contrary, a closed community that produces externalities without taking any responsibility for them, is normatively as deficient as primitive freedom. In the current world, we see different ways of balancing the tension. One is related to the notion of open society. Open societies often have a long tradition of immigration and less developed welfare regimes. The Swedish *folkshemmet* interpretation has a much more fixed notion of a given community and usually much more developed welfare regimes. Currently, the Schengen area with the EU may be considered as a regionally limited but very open interpretation of this tension.

5 CONCLUSION

In this contribution, we develop an approach in determining the content of the current liberal script. In a first step, we clarify the term "script" before we turn our attention to the adjective of "liberal". We delineate scripts from other rivalling, more widespread social science concepts like ideology, institution, order, and practice, showing the added value that the term "script" carries. In methodological terms, we outline a reconstructive approach that fruitfully combines a sociological perspective with a philosophical filter. While a systematic empirical analysis is still to be conducted, we propose a conceptual architecture that comprises two layers, leaving enough internal flexibility to account for variety via a family resemblance structure and highlighting internal tensions. We maintain that the different varieties of the liberal script are all anchored in the principles of liberty, a private-public distinction, and equal moral worth. We depict second-layer components and order them along political, economic, societal, and cross-cutting spheres. This is done in the spirit of facilitating and stimulating empirical work within the cluster.

In doing so, we follow Tully Rector's (2020) advice to avoid two fallacies: advocacy and exclusion.[18] The first can be labeled advocacy error. It occurs when "we select and order definitional components based on their moral desirability or attractiveness, or impose an artificial form of consistence on them" (Rector 2020: 7). While we consider some consistency as necessary in order to exclude pseudo-liberal speakers, we aim to identify all the central components of the liberal script, including the tensions built into them. The social struggle over handling these tensions may lead to outcomes that we consider as morally indefensible. Because of these tensions, the varieties of the liberal script have some downsides. Moreover, we identify components of the liberal script that may produce morally problematic repercussions if unchecked: markets, strong individualism, and exclusive community-building with the inherent goal to dominate others are among them. This does not prevent us from expressing some sympathies for the liberal script.

The second error happens if we "rely, in our construction of the concept of liberalism, on a narrow set of arguments, texts, and historical examples, privileging some standpoints over others in a way that is epistemologically invalid" (Rector 2020: 7). In principle, our sociological claims analysis approach encompasses all liberal speakers and, therefore, is an attempt to be inclusive. While any actual effort to carry out such an effort may include operational decisions excluding some actors to some extent, it is principally an open approach. Yet, we do not bring it to the end in this paper. It is rather an effort to create a set of statements about the liberal script that can be corroborated, rejected, or developed further with the help of empirical analysis. We mainly develop a set of descriptive hypotheses about the components that belong to the liberal script. At the same time, we use a morphological approach to develop statements about the relationships and tensions between these components. In sum, empirical research will undoubtedly lead to changes and adaptations of our account. At least, we hope our approach has helped us avoid the mistakes of advocacy and exclusion.

18 The paper by Tully Rector to which we refer here is an internal discussion paper of the Theory Network at SCRIPTS. Upon request, we are happy to share it.

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