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The Great (Re-)Transformation

What to learn from Karl Polanyi on
climate change policies?

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Content

1) Introduction: The Great Transformation revisited.....	1
2) The Great Transformation – context and validity	4
2.1) The Great Transformation from pre-industrial society to fascism and communism	5
2.2) Climate change in a liberal world	9
2.2.1) Putting a price tag on climate change: REDD+ and Carbon Trade as projects of transcendence	12
2.2.2) Reclaiming regulative capacity: the German state re-embedding the economy in energy politics	13
3) Approaches on The Great (Re-)Transformation revisited	15
3.1) WBGU	15
3.2) Germanwatch	17
4) Conclusion	17
Literaturverzeichnis	20

1) Introduction: The Great Transformation revisited

With the Kyoto-Protocol and later the creation of the Durban-platform, which will eventually lead to some new institutional agreement on Greenhouse Gases (GHG) reduction, climate change has been recognized by the international community as a major global challenge. Since, measures countering it have improved. However, even with scientific consensus on climate change as a fact and improved knowledge as well as capacities on renewable energies, the emissions of GHG are growing globally, due to the increasing energy consumption of the emerging economies and the difficulties industrialized countries have in reducing their emissions. A fundamental question arises in the face of this global threat, considering the fact that potential solutions are known: Why are the states as major actors in the UNFCCC negotiations not being more successful at reducing GHG?

Realizing that humankind is coming close to crossing planetary boundaries, some organizations have re-discovered¹ a work of Hungarian-British economy-historian Karl Polanyi: The Great Transformation (TGT) written in 1944. The Term is used inter alia by the German Advisory Council on Global Change (WBGU) as well as by the prominent watchdog-NGO Germanwatch. WBGU puts its understanding of TGT of modernity thus:

“Der WBGU begreift den nachhaltigen weltweiten Umbau von Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft als „Große Transformation“ [zu] klimaverträgliche[n] Gesellschaften. Das Ausmaß des vor uns liegenden Übergangs ist kaum zu überschätzen. Er ist hinsichtlich der Eingriffstiefe vergleichbar mit den beiden fundamentalen Transformationen der Weltgeschichte: der Neolithischen Revolution, also der Erfindung und Verbreitung von Ackerbau und Viehzucht, sowie der Industriellen Revolution (...).“ (WBGU 2011: 5)

Polanyi referred to the latter, in an exhaustive analysis of the European states' transformation from mercantilist to liberal market-societies. This was put into effect by the states themselves, first of all by the United Kingdom, which created the “fictitious commodities”² land, labor and money. The key argument of Polanyi's analysis is pointing out the devastating consequences in which the singling out of the economic sphere from traditional societies ushered. This would constitute the roots of the big catastrophes of the 20th century:

“Nineteenth-century (...) disintegrated as the result of (...) the measures which society adopted in order not to be, in its turn, destroyed utterly by the action of

¹ Apart from scientific discourse, which already existed in the 90s (cf. Bernard 1997: 75).

² Fictitious commodities are subjugated to the supply-and-demand mechanisms of the market (→ commodification), even though they are not produced originally for being sold (cf. Polanyi (2001: 74; 141).

the self-regulating market. Apart from exceptional circumstances, the conflict between the market and the elementary requirements of an organized social life provided the century with its dynamics and produced the typical strains and stresses which ultimately destroyed that society. External wars merely hastened its destruction." (Polanyi 2001³: 257).

It is not surprising that Polanyi's work has been rediscovered in times when "his account of the vulnerability of the small and weak peripheral states of Central and East Europe to a pull on the 'golden thread' [the gold standard] reads like a preview of IMF stabilization programs" (Polanyi-Levitt 2013: 98) or austerity measures inside the European Union (cf. Holmes 2013: 285). The catastrophe to which the policies of budget-fixed central banks have led should make current societies attentive to the dangers they potentially face. Likewise, the ignorance which some contemporary liberals prove with regard to the impossibility of a self-regulating market make Polanyi's sophisticated analysis relevant to the present (cf. Block 2001: XXXIII).

Polanyi's study identifies the commodification of money by creation of the gold standard as the mechanism which subordinated societies and thus finally led to the breakdown of the international order (cf. TGT: 3). Yet, there is even more in Polanyi, which is brought to play right now, than just monetary policies. It is the nature of liberal capitalism itself which hinders society from voicing its collective interests, because the individual notion of liberty has become preponderant:

"Liberal economy gave a false direction to our ideals. (...) No society is possible in which power and compulsion are absent, nor a world in which force has no function. It was an illusion to assume a society shaped by man's will and wish alone." (TGT: 266)

The market society, Polanyi argues, is characterized by anonymous contractual relations intermediated by the market, which take the collective responsibility from the individual, who is isolated from his kind from that point on (cf. *ibid.*; TGT: 171). Together with the misconception that the market economy would not need violence to impose itself, this argument makes his analysis valuable for today, in a world where globalization is often referred to as kind of a law of nature, which ignores the power-related discontents it brings along (cf. Stiglitz 2001: VII).

In light of the above, this paper aims to analyse why TGT has re-appeared as a term in the context of climate change. One obvious allusion in using the term "TGT" is pointing out the sheer scale of the project low carbon-development is for today's industrialized countries and emerging economies. The next point to be made is that the

³ From here on: "TGT"

market society had a huge comeback⁴ after decades of Keynesianism, while antidotes on the destruction it causes are being searched:

“It is held that the globalisation of the world economy, and the neo-liberal ideology that underpins this process, mark a return to the “market utopia”, (...) Globalisation is thus merely the A-phase of a new double-movement; the societal response against the ideological push to make markets regulated by economic criteria alone is already predictable. Indeed, it is necessary if society and its natural environment are to survive.” (Lacher 1999: 313)

Lacher contests the positive notion other authors of International Political Economy attach to the protective intermediate counter-movement after World War II. He opposes that it even “exacerbated the crisis of the market system and contributed to its catastrophic disintegration” (Lacher 1999: 314f). He further relates to modern “welfare capitalism as an extension of the limited protectionism prevalent since the 1870s” (ibid.: 323), which for him in both cases brought the inconsequent de-commodification of labor. The argument here will be extended to the inconsequent de-commodification of land, while acknowledging that this was not in Polanyi’s focus of analysis, since he could not foresee the crisis in which the potential breakdown of ecosystems and climate change are about to throw global society. According to this interest of analysis, this paper argues that the rediscovery of Polanyi’s work is due to the absence of protectionism in climate change policies and related fields in the last years. First an overview of TGT and the connection to today’s issue of climate change will be presented. Second, the commodification of nature in Climate policies will be further characterized. These include the main contributors to CO₂-emissions, Industry, traffic, deforestation and agro policies on a national and world scale. Subsequently, the actual approaches of WBGU and Germanwatch will be tested on this problematization. According to the main thesis, we will further assume that these actors will criticize commodifying policies and demand a full de-commodification of nature. This would consequently encompass the de-commodification of labor and money, since “the subjugation of ‘the market’ can only be total” (ibid.: 324). Hence, it is also assumed that they give a certain notion of Re-Transformation, since the degree and pace of the industrial revolution is a major concern to Polanyi⁵, so the connotation he gave to The

⁴ When the neo-liberal elite of the USA made the same mistakes as the liberal economists of 19th-century Great Britain in reading Adam Smith wrong and not understanding the degeneration of a free-market system without a state intervention (cf. Ziv (2014b: 34:00 f.), cf. TGT: 117)) - A development which Polanyi himself didn’t foresee in his optimism about the post-war period (cf. TGT: 259)) and his assessment of “having seen the end of the self-regulating market” (ibid.: 148). Nevertheless, it should not be withheld that Polanyi acknowledged certain virtues of Market Society, as “moral freedom and independence of mind” (TGT: 254). Likewise, the certain de-commodification of labor especially shall not be objected.

⁵ *“Improvements, we said, are, as a rule, bought at the price of social dislocation. If the rate of dislocation is too great, the community must succumb in the process.” (TGT: 79)*

Great Transformation is a rather negative one. In a conclusion, the references to TGT will be summarized to give an outlook on what to learn from Karl Polanyi in respect of climate change policies.

2) The Great Transformation – context and validity

To describe the general conditions of a contemporary GT in relation to climate change, first Polanyi's work on TGT of his time will be valued, then the climate change-regime in its position within a liberal world will be described. Polanyi mainly saw commodified labor - and especially money - as the roots of the de-generation of the international system. For the purpose of this paper, the focus has to be on nature (in Polanyi's words: land⁶) as a commodity, with the liberal world economy laying potentially the tracks for ecological and meteorological systems for a road to perdition. The thesis will then be elaborated by examining the assumption that the shortcomings of protectionist policies now become apparent. Following, the concrete references and justifications of contemporary TGT-advocates, why they refer to Polanyi around 70 years after "The Great Transformation" was published, will be reflected.

As already indicated, the "comeback" of Polanyi did not happen out of the blue. In fact, it is rather his "disappearance" in the post-war-period which has to be explained and which was due to two main reasons: First to that "in the highly polarized debates between the defenders of capitalism and the defenders of Soviet-style socialism, there was little room for Polanyi's nuanced and complex arguments" (Block 2001: XIX). However, in the years after the end of the Cold War, it grew evident that capitalism could neither keep its promises, after communism being disqualified already (ibid.: XIX), so the need grew for explanations of society and economy which take the deficits of both into account. The second reason was that the re-embedding of economy in society actually seemed to be successful until the late 1960s, when Keynesianism lost its post-war momentum and Mises and Hayek came back into the game through Milton Friedman (cf. ibid.: XX), and with the 80s found implementation by Thatcher and Reagan (Piketty; Polanyi-Levitt; Friedman; Reagan and Thatcher, quoted in (Ziv 2014a: 41:00 ff.). Therefore, with the arrival of the neoliberals, it became

⁶ Note that he also pointed to the necessary formation of a counter-movement for the purposes of nature preservation: "*The economic argument could be easily expanded so as to include the conditions of safety and security attached to the integrity of the soil and its resources - such as the vigor and stamina of the population, the abundance of food supplies, the amount and character of defence materials, even the climate of the country which might suffer from the denudation of forests, from erosions and dust bowls, all of which, ultimately, depend upon the factor land, yet none of which respond to the supply-and-demand mechanism of the market. Given a system entirely dependent upon market functions for the safeguarding of its existential needs, confidence will naturally turn to such forces outside the market system which are capable of ensuring common interests jeopardized by that system.*" (TGT: 193)

apparent that the polarizing forces of market economy had not been tamed by the new protectionist movement (cf. Polanyi-Levitt 2013: 100 f.).

In its active role in constructing society, Neoliberalism reminds of 19th century liberalism, consciously pushing for liberalization, thereby reviving Polanyi's famous statement that "laissez-faire was planned, planning was not" (TGT: 147). This paradox can be rediscovered on the one side in the highly organized liberalization of world economy by the Bretton Woods institutions or the Eurozone-countries. On the other side, as will be argued, the climate change regime for instance is fragmented and relatively weak institutionalized.

Of course there are important differences to be stated as well: Despite some parallels in the international system – a long relative peace with conflicts and forced integration of the “periphery” (cf. TGT: 192) – it is not easy to compare the „Hundred Year's Peace“ (first chapter of “TGT”), the Pax Britannica, with today's world. Polanyi himself pointed to the singularity of the institutional setup which marked and fostered TGT (cf. TGT: 4). In this era of fastest-ever integration of world trade (cf. O'Rourke/Williamson 2002: 422), peace and stability were rather the by-product of conservatism and business-interests, and coexisted with domestic repression (cf. TGT: 7). Today, on the contrary, we can assume a genuine interest in democracy and peace, while business and democracy do not necessarily seem opposed anymore.

But exactly in this professed dissolution of the contradiction between economy and politics, one important parallel in the discursive structure of market society can be discovered: The orthodox liberals of Polanyi's time aimed at overcoming the differences by fully realizing the market economy, declared a Utopia by Polanyi, which they deemed just impaired by socialists and social democrats in its proper working. In contrast, counter-movements like the Austrian socialist government in the 1920s believed they could overcome the polarization, but without really re-embedding the economy. Meanwhile today's liberal thought has been integrated in social democratic policies, with the wish to transcend the contradiction by integrating economic logic into politics. (Cf. Holmes 2013: 287 ff., cf. Polanyi: 298)

The recognition that this “Third Way” between liberalism and socialism leads to a wrong track since the double-movement signifies a contradiction, not a synthesis (cf. Polanyi-Levitt 2013: 100), is an important part of the hypothesis.

2.1) The Great Transformation from pre-industrial society to fascism and communism

As indicated above, for Polanyi "(...) the origins of the cataclysm [the 2nd World War] lay in the Utopian endeavor of economic liberalism to set up a self-regulating market

system" (TGT: 31). The Great Transformation, although Polanyi never gives an explicit brief definition, is described as an interaction between technological innovations, which entailed economic transformation with the political system fostering the latter. This process had the historically unique result that economy was singled out as the superordinate system of society, with land, labor and money being artificially commodified. Social uprooting and the bipolarization between political and economic system were results of the turbulent transformations of the 19th century. Finally, this resulted in total havoc, when the nationalist states uncoupled from the international order, first constituted by the Concert of Europe, later the League of Nations (cf. TGT: 31). What follows describes the features of TGT.

One very important aspect is the particularity of market economy ("an economy directed by market prices and nothing but market prices"), of which according to Polanyi humans never even thought of before it was created in the waves of industrialization. Most traditional ("tribal") societies had arranged their economic structures by redistribution and reciprocity, collective principles which ensure the resilience in case of crisis and thereby encourage strong social bonds (and still are present to a certain degree). In those societies, the motive was to be recognized in the community. Later the principle of householding emerged, which still had nothing to do with the motive of gain, which is particular in market society. Even with the creation of worldwide (but highly regulated) trade in the era of Mercantilism, the self-regulating market which would determine the whole body of society still was unimaginable. (Cf. TGT: 45 ff.)

Likewise, trade according to Polanyi, who thereby objected the liberal belief in the human propensity to barter (Polanyi 2001: 60; 77), did not grow within communities naturally (but between several), and was traditionally not based on free markets (cf. TGT: 281 ff.).

The national markets, and in particular the one of the United Kingdom, were created in the mercantilist period by forging a common currency and increasing agricultural production. Therefore the subsistence farming on common grounds or in cottages was ended by enclosures, which Polanyi called a "revolution of the rich against the poor" (TGT: 37), dislocating people, eventually leading to the necessity of a national labor market (cf. TGT: 96). The main benefit which the detachment of man and nature has for the market economy is "that each element could fit into that part of the system where it was most useful" (TGT: 188). This process was even more devastating in colonized societies, which saw their labor and land commodified within just some years, be it by direct slavery or by forced integration in the world market (cf. TGT: 188).

Another factor which required the allocation of working force according to the needs of divided labor was the invention of "the machine" (Lacher 1999: 316). Additionally, the higher production costs favored the creation of a finance-based economy, off the subsistence-based (Polanyi 2001: 42–44; 78). However, the squire resisted change and the Speenhamland-Laws of 1795 marked a protectionist period of almost 40 years, but in the end failing completely. The conclusion drawn by contemporaries was that market has to be let alone to function, moreover that the human instinct as fear of death by hunger would be the best driving force of economy.

Those doctrines, deduced from natural sciences by Malthus, Ricardo and others, ignorant in respect to the humanitarian consequences this implied, led to the Reform Bill of 1832 and the Poor Laws of 1834. Those laws "detached [man] from home and kin, torn from his roots and all meaningful environment" (TGT: 87). The consequence was, that man was for the first time subjected to the spell of unregulated, independent markets and since is unable to regain full control even though they are manmade (cf. Lemmerich 2015).

With the commodification of labor, human society became an accessory of the economic system since labor concerns "the forms of life of the common people" (TGT: 79). This also affects man's relation to nature:

"What we call land is an element of nature inextricably interwoven with man's institutions. To isolate it [from man] and form a market for it was perhaps the weirdest of all the undertakings of our ancestors. (...) Market economy involves a society the institutions of which [man and nature] are subordinated to the requirements of the market mechanism." (TGT: 187)⁷

The finality of this this process is the "subjection of the surface of the planet to the needs of an industrial society" (TGT: 188). After the privatization of land, the produce of it became subject of international trade. The worldwide mobility of goods once established led to a state where nature is treated according to the mechanisms of supply and demand of the integrated world market. The notion of production for man himself within the natural surroundings he disposes of gets lost. (cf. TGT: 187ff)

After the "smashing up of social structures in order to extract the element of labor from them" (TGT: 172), all interference with the markets are in theory inhibiting the operation of economy (cf. TGT: 72). Thereby, the market economy is put in practice, which thenceforward determinates the market society and is defined in its order by Polanyi

⁷ In this analysis, Polanyi is pretty close to Marx's different aspects of alienation, which also include both the alienation from his kind as well as from his surroundings (cf. Marx 1844: 512 ff.). This contains a useful explanation for the relation of man and nature in market-society: Man, being alienated from nature, cannot transcend the natural basis anymore on which the goods are produced. Hence consumerism, irrespective of the environmental repercussions – this is the dilemma market-society faces in the private sphere in respect to the commodification of nature.

by the self-regulating mechanism of prices and expectation that human beings behave in such a way as to achieve maximum money gains (cf. TGT: 71).

The big difference between market economy's leading principle of barter and traditional economic principles is that the latter do not necessarily create distinct institutions, whereas the first does and consequentially subjugates society to them, because "market economy can function only in a market society" (Polanyi 2001: 60; 77). The shaping of market society is thereby, as Polanyi emphasizes, a process facilitated by lawmaking and other forms of political support, especially in the international spreading of it, which was fostered by "haute finance" and politics hand in hand:

"The Pax Britannica held its sway sometimes by the ominous poise of heavy ship's cannon, but more frequently it prevailed by the timely pull of a thread in the international monetary network". (TGT: 14)

This international monetary network proved an even more integrating force than the political concord of the Concert of Europe (cf. TGT: 10): for Polanyi, the gold standard was the prerequisite for global liberal trade in fixing the exchange rates and thereby ensuring investment and international cooperation in competition.

The other side of the coin was that the international enforcement of the gold standard showed huge flaws, once the balance was fading away: Financial policies were unable to be adapted to the needs of the domestic economics and had priority to social policies which in the long run led to the growing strength of the counter-movements. Before the 1st World War, the pressures of the gold standard could not be externalized anymore by achieving new colonies, before the 2nd, they could not be internalized anymore: the over-competitiveness of the US had led to an uncontrolled inflow of money (cf. TGT: 28) and the financial bubble burst in 1929, ripping the economies of many countries away, setting free the already strong nationalist sentiments.

The protectionist counter-move, which is in the focus of the hypothesis, has to be depicted further: for Polanyi, it is an essential part of the market society which is threatened by annihilation of its substance, hence the "urge on the part of a great variety of people to press for some sort of protection" (TGT: 156 f.). Contrarily, it became evident in the 1920s that market economy required non-interventionist government so as to not threaten the untouched functioning of the markets. Thus, the conflict between financial stability and social policy became evident, between "employers and the employees, with the rest of the population swinging in to the support of the one or the other of the leading group" (TGT: 237). Subsequently, in Germany and other countries, strikes and other interventions were discredited and thus the will to preserve financial stability destroyed the social cohesion of society.

"Eventually, the moment would come when both the economic and the political systems were threatened by complete paralysis. Fear would grip the people, and leadership would be thrust upon those who offered an easy way out at whatever ultimate price. The time was ripe for the fascist solution." (TGT: 244)

We can take two aspects out of this historic failure of market society: the double-movement is inherent in an economy which exposes its members to existential risks and it can explode if opportunity is seized by benefitting fractions. Plus, the counter-movement, which aims at protecting the people from dilapidation, can even catalyse social conflict, as long as it does not re-embed economy. Accordingly, Great Britain and the US went off the gold standard in time to prevent subversion (Polanyi 2001: 234; 242).

2.2) Climate change in a liberal world

As pointed out, the crisis which led to the World Wars are to be traced back to the commodification of money, primarily. In contrast, the crisis we are facing globally today is derived from the commodification of nature first of all.⁸ The threat to which it exposes humanity consequently is not one of immediate breakdown and war, but of suffering desolation which is irreversible in many domains.

Nowadays, the liberal free market idea has spread even wider than Polanyi could probably have imagined⁹. With the creation of the WTO, the free-trade domains were extended for the major part of the world to goods, services, agriculture tariffs, textiles and intellectual property rights.¹⁰ Therefore, the frame of analysis has to be enlarged as well: When one refers to Polanyi advocating positive liberty – that is to say a collective organization of society to increase the freedom of all (cf. TGT: 262f) – the global scale has to be envisaged. This scale, applied on the global problem of climate change, means to advocate restricting the freedom of the few (global wealthy persons who emit the lion's share) to safeguard the basic freedom – life, homestead, work – of the many which are already and potentially threatened by climate change.

Contrarily, state structures have merged with private rationales in consequence of the neoliberal rollback and the Third Way approach to dissolve the contradictions of the

⁸ At least regarding the question of this paper which investigates on immediately climate change-relevant policies. The threats to which international financial policies expose the cohesion of societies and the international cooperation generally are significant for environmental politics as well Polanyi (cf. Pettifor (2013), but this connection is too complex to be analysed here.

⁹ Even though international Trade grew most in the 19th century, which can accordingly be assigned as the period fastest integration of world markets, the growth of international trade afterwards still was higher than the growth of the international production (cf. O'Rourke/Williamson 2002: 422)

¹⁰ Again, discriminating developing countries by depriving them of the possibility to steer their domestic economies more comprehensively, just as the industrialized countries actually did in their liberalization period (cf. Hopper (2012: 142 ff.); Stiglitz (2001: IX, XIII).

two domains. Neo-liberalism however ignores the fact that market society, if not constructed inclusively, is often bolstering big business which is especially detrimental to sustainable growth¹¹. Moreover, market-based approaches which are technical in nature avert the value-oriented solidary and consensual tackling of common problems.

Additionally, market-based approaches like Emissions trading schemes (ETS) are prone to be defective in absence of a legislator and the “shadow of hierarchy”, which makes the states succumb to the selfish solution of the prisoner’s dilemma. This fact is due to a different scope on which the market would have to be regulated: The liberal states of the 19th century were, as Polanyi showed, far from being inactive. It was state authority which unified the regions, integrating them into a now encompassing statehood (inter alia in respect to tariffs, monetary union, education system, military – (Polanyi 2001: 58; 69; 284) and simultaneously creating the fictitious commodities. Next to creating the actual conditions of liberal economics, the state was the main actor of protectionism. In the global sphere however, the nature of liberalization was rather due to a bottom-up-force: the national states interconnected and integrated themselves and one another gradually in the economic domain, while political cosmopolitanism still is a utopia. So naturally the scope of protectionist action to buffer the damages caused by market economy is limited.

The argument becomes a bit more nuanced if one assigns to the US the role of hegemon with regulative capacity within the “Pax Americana”: while liberal state action of the 19th century had its limits in checks by the population (which was the cause e.g. for Bismarck’s social laws), in the Bretton Woods system there was a big legitimacy gap between the US government with affiliated institutions like the IMF and the World Bank and social repercussions in the periphery (cf. Stiglitz 2003: 17), later ecological repercussions worldwide.

Problem-inherent issues like this responsibility bearing gap¹², the time-lag from cost-intensive decision-making to the reaping of benefits, collective action problems, un-

¹¹ Like in Brazil, where 40 000 farming oligopolists “account for” 120-130 deputies, because the electoral system favors candidates which can rely on big spendings for their election rallies; contrarily, the 14 mio. Small scale farmers can only count on 10-20 deputies, which does not give them much opportunity to voice their causes (expulsion, dependency on big firms, damages by pesticides and of biodiversity, (illegal) wood destruction because of the big monocultures which are favored) (cf. Hübener 2014). Those calamities of the connection between big business and state instruments of repression is another example for that laissez-faire still is planned and neo-liberal structural adjustment policies have played a part in this game.

¹² Which is not just valid for representation in international financial and other organizations, but also for private consumption – the Bangladeshi family who has to flee from floods, the Senegalese coastal resident losing his fishing grounds, the Sahel-nomads who have to migrate because their lands desertificate – all those are indirectly affected e.g. by American SUV-riders or German coal plants and all of those cannot voice their issues to the responsible persons and politicians, because they are geographically

clear responsibilities due to scientific uncertainties and free riders problems in mitigation are major obstacles for international climate change negotiations (cf. Andresen 2014: 26). The polluter pays and CBDR-principles, although part of the Kyoto-protocol are hence far from being fully implemented, and the equity principle is controversial anyway. Therefore, it has to be stated that despite significant progress in the institutionalization and diversification of the climate change regime, progress on emission reduction is low (cf. *ibid.*: 25). But even the institutional setup cannot be designated as encompassing, considering that at present, countries which account for just 15% of the global CO₂-emission share are covered by the 2nd period of the Kyoto-protocol. The climate change regime as it is today can be characterized as institutionally fragmented with a pledge-and-review model instead of an encompassing deal at its centre and an important feature of this regime being the implementation of market-based approaches to mitigation (cf. Bauer 2012: 252).

The problem of the counter-movement for Polanyi is that it could not re-embed economy in the society, according to Lacher. Hence, a protectionist counter-movement of nowadays in respect to climate change would to be evaluated on how far it withdraws nature from the sphere of free markets.

Contrarily to a re-embedment, the new feature of liberalism in its present form is that it is not pushing for the separation of polity and economy anymore, but that politics have adopted economic logics. It aims at overcoming the defects caused by market society by adopting "better" market strategies, applied by the state. The concept of "Green Growth", reconciling economic prosperity and sustainability, is an example. Christopher Holmes therein perceives a strong comeback of the belief that markets would govern themselves and can even manage risks.

"Since the UN's Brundtland Report in 1987 the notion of sustainable development has framed a great deal of environmental policy thinking on the basis that it can serve ecological, economic, and social goals all at the same time. This 'ecological modernist' ideal retains its popularity precisely on the basis of its vision of an overcoming of the contradiction that Polanyi saw between marketisation and environmental protection. (...) Underpinning carbon markets is the idea that, provided property rights are applied to environmental resources in a sufficiently complete manner, the market will automatically internalise the harmful effects of production." (Holmes 2013: 287 ff.)

This aspect of fused state and market logic is one part of the mainstream counter-movement against Climate Change. Yet, claims to a Third Way cannot distract from the fact that the polarization engrained in market economy still threatens politics to

and also temporally distant to them. So in short, there is no adequate representation by transmittance of preferences to politic bodies, which is actually the main idea of political liberalism.

not “illegitimately” interfere with the market mechanisms (cf. *ibid.*: 285 ff., Polanyi-Levitt 2013: 101 f.). This is reflected partially in market-based climate change mitigation efforts.

2.2.1) Putting a price tag on climate change: REDD+ and Carbon Trade as projects of transcendence

Apart of looking at inherent problems of emissions trading and REDD+, it is worthwhile taking a step back and assert that it is not a self-evident fact that climate change was defined as an emissions problem:

"This understanding of the problem is not inaccurate, but it is a specific type of focus that is not the only way to conceive the problem. A focus on emissions is a focus on proximate causes of the problem. This may appear to be a subtle difference, to focus on the emissions of greenhouse gases rather than the processes that produce them, but it is more than semantics. Defining a problem based on its symptoms (adaptation efforts work from this definition when they look to deal with the consequences of global warming), or its proximate causes, or its fundamental causes makes for very different policy responses." (Hoffmann 2013: 9)

Connected to market-based approaches, this one-sided definition of proximate causes is prone to ignore other external costs which it does not include. One example would be the inclusion of forests as carbon stocks within the REDD+ mechanism, which opens the door to plant forests as such instead of protecting rainforests (cf. Lederer 2012: 110). Consequentially, NGOs fear an implementation of REDD+ by a market-based approach (cf. *ibid.*: 109).

Climate change has been defined as a problem caused by a liberal world order: in this, the information on prices in relation to environmental impacts never is complete, as the external effects of e.g. coal-fired plants are not included sufficiently. Hence the free market necessitates a state intervention. By now the market's powers as well as their limitations are known, just the best way of intervention is disputed (cf. Stiglitz 2001: VIII). Accordingly, in 2009, the G20 have agreed to cut their astronomical subsidies on fossil fuels, which according to OECD estimates could lower the worldwide GHG emissions by 10% until 2050 (cf. Belschner/Westphal 2011). However, the G20 lacks the ability to act in this matter due to a prisoner's dilemma in absence of an encompassing coordination (cf. *ibid.*: 7 f.). So the protectionism on domestic industries and societies from the uncertainties of the integrated world market hampers the de-commodification of nature.

Similarly, due to their regional limitedness and lack of price setting-mechanisms, ETS as currently implemented are not “economically attractive” enough (Bauer 2012: 258).

The closest to de-commodify emissions would be setting a minimum price for emissions according to climate goals. The carbon trading itself already is an intervention in the market, but in prices as low as now, it is not reflecting states' capacity to steer its economy according to common welfare, i.e. sustainability. Due to the inflexibility of the market (once the system got flooded with certificates, the price broke down) and the EU's incoherency (division between business and environmental interests and between member states) the reform of the ETS has been postponed for several years (cf. Geden 2013) and the prices for GHG emissions in the ETS stay low (cf. Dröge 2013). This is also hampering innovation, for instance in renewable energies (cf. *ibid.*).

In the example of air traffic emissions, which have been included in the ETS in 2012, the prisoner's dilemma in global climate change policies become evident as well: An ambitious measure implemented within a limited region is prone to lead to disadvantages for this region, if the rest of the international community does not go along with it (cf. Dröge/Richter 2012). The consequence is the erosion of the rules which the state(s), in this case the EU, have made unilaterally, due to the lobbying power of air traffic enterprises (Krieger/Richter 2015: 4:00 ff.)

The adjusting effects of ETS are therefore very limited in comparison to the adjustment they would have to make to counter climate change in a market-based way. A high degree of coordination on the state-side would be necessary, which is not possible at the moment due to the fragmented governance of climate policies and the low degree of commitment some states show.

If this kind of protectionism is even aggravating the crisis of market society will have to be evaluated in the long term, but in the short term it is probably better to at least have a price for emissions and some money to support protection than leaving nature (e.g. the forests) to the unprotected exposure of markets, that are swallowing it for production without paying at all. To put it in terms of the UNFCCC-negotiations: it is better to have a low-standard unbinding bottom-up agreement, supplemented with market mechanisms, in compromise with non-compliant countries, than having no agreement at all.

2.2.2) Reclaiming regulative capacity: the German state re-embedding the economy in energy politics

There seems thus to be growing congruence between business and public interests also in respect to climate change, when the first is (apart from business with interests in fossil fuels) acknowledging that the conservation of nature is vital to its own interest and the second is adopting business logic. But where are the real checks and balances between the political system and the economics? Where to find standpoints which indicate that "political rulers [...] would have parallel interests with the ruled

whose wealth would swell their revenue, while the merchant's interests were naturally antagonistic to those of his customers" (Adam Smith, quoted from TGT: 173)?

We have defined the re-embedding of economy in society as pulling goods back from the grip of the market forces and subjugate it to the needs of society as a whole, which thereby realizes its positive freedom. Accordingly, the German Energiewende in its general approach can be seen as an attempt to re-embed energy policies in society, in reaction of public opinion being seen as anti-atomic energy after the catastrophe in Fukushima. The high guaranteed prices on Renewable Energies are a clear move away from the price-setting mechanisms of the free market, with the purpose to build up new technologies as an aim defined by the state (cf. Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Energie 2014). So if we are to ask:

"Can leadership be changed from nationalist competition to a focus on the future and towards building things, moving people and living lives in ways that reduce the scale of human transformations of the biosphere?" (Dalby 2014: 7)

Then the Energiewende would indicate a „yes, we can“. But even here, the climate change and sustainability discourse gets reframed in energy security notions, due to the crisis with Russia and the fact that the renewable energies bear high initial costs, also for climate change mitigation policies (cf. Lederer 2014: 15 f.). Here again, the argument of Polanyi can be applied that as long as labor (which finds expression at least in perceived interest in low energy prices to keep jobs in international competitive environment) is not de-commodified, nature hardly will be withdrawn from the market logic.

This becomes clear in a rough comparison to a policy field which is not subject to geopolitical considerations currently: Agro policies, which could well use a push from the state towards more sustainability as well, which is stated by the scientific board of the corresponding federal ministry. It implicitly duns a re-embedding of livestock production in reference to what role society wants to attribute to this industry, not what "rational" economics require (cf. Bundesministerium für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft 2015: 1; 4). However, international competition pressures the sustainability of domestic economies in this field as well, hindering the state until now to intervene on behalf of ecological sustainability (cf. *ibid.*: 2).

As we have seen, the states resort to protection by different measures, which partially try to protect nature (such as national subsidies on renewable energies), partially protect labor (such as national subsidies on fossil fuels) in an often contradictory way. This signifies that the market-economy has separated man and nature to such a degree that the protection of both in a short term contradicts one another. This, again,

is the quest of modernity: reconcile man's interest with his surroundings, which necessitates a Great Re-Transformation ("TGRT").

3) Approaches on The Great (Re-)Transformation revisited

The role of civil society in the unfolding of sustainable, re-embedded economy should not be overestimated (cf. Geden 2009). Without denying the pivotal role of private consumption for climate change mitigation, approaches which aim at a Great Transformation have to focus on the role of the state, which has to re-regulate the economy it unleashed, shown in the last section. Contrarily to this, the neoliberal mindset would be expected to let the state "responsibilize" (Joseph: 13) the individual in climate change matters as well and by that delegate its obligations.

So how do the WBGU and Germanwatch use the concept of TGT? Do they give a certain notion of TGRT as in emphasizing the necessity to fully re-embed economy? Do they explicitly criticise what was identified as protectionist policies, and in this acknowledging the trade-offs which have to be made in the course of an encompassing transformation? And who do they see in charge for TGRT?

The analysis given here cannot fully seize their activities as agents in the political arena, but rather summarizes the conceptualizations given in publications which explicitly address TGT.

3.1) WBGU

Other than the IPCC, the WBGU is a board with the task to not solely collect and match scientific knowledge but to also give policy-recommendations and sees itself as a facilitating actor in the process of transformation (cf. WBGU 2011: 2).

In its 2011-annual report "Social Contract for a Great Transformation" it applies the concept of TGT as the necessity to reconstruct the economies in a way compatible with planetary boundaries (cf. *ibid.*: 417), which also constitutes its understanding of re-embedding (cf. *ibid.*: 98). In this, the WBGU applies a positive notion of freedom comparable to Polanyi's, defining the Social Contract as a contract for change in respect of environment, and enlarging it to international equity aspects. For example it advocates restraining individual's freedom to protect community regarding public canteen offer of meat dishes and the inclusion of external effects in the meat prices, with the first having been shown in time to be highly unpopular within German electorate (and thereby showing the limitations of science-guided politics). (WBGU 2011: 8; 15)

Accordingly, the WBGU contributes an active role to the state in the process of transformation:

„Es ist jetzt eine vordringliche politische Aufgabe, die Blockade einer solchen Transformation zu beenden und den Übergang zu beschleunigen. (...) Ein zentrales Element in einem solchen Gesellschaftsvertrag ist der „gestaltende Staat“, der für die Transformation aktiv Prioritäten setzt, gleichzeitig erweiterte Partizipationsmöglichkeiten für seine Bürger bietet und der Wirtschaft Handlungsoptionen für Nachhaltigkeit eröffnet.“ (ibid.: 1 f.)

The part of the state in addition to using its shaping force includes enhancing and applying knowledge, supporting pioneers of change in developing visions and fostering international cooperation (ibid.: 6 f.).

The value of the WBGU report certainly lies in its encompassing advice for policy implementation which can be deemed pragmatic in addressing policy makers.

However, it lacks both a specific problematization of TGT and the explicit reference to market society, which has been expected relating to Polanyi. As for the first, the WBGU gives the term TGT, also in Polanyi's work, a positive connotation and thereby tries to dissolve the trade-offs between labor and nature in the short term (cf. ibid.: 2). Following the “big push”-argumentation, certain economic and societal blockades can be overcome with the resolute and concentrated support of the state to foster innovation (cf. ibid.: 6). Furthermore, the WBGU emphasizes the notion of Green Growth for mitigating climate change by uncoupling economic growth and the consumption of resources, while also significantly improving energy efficiency (WBGU 2011: 39; 135). Two things are important to note here: first, in its notion of TGT the WBGU is focussing on an emission-centered approach in order to mitigate climate change, thereby leaving out a more inclusive definition of sustainability. This can be observed as well in the stance that working ETS would be the most important tool to mitigate climate change (cf. ibid.: 11). Second, it does not consent to De-Growth-arguments, but in fact states that uncoupling is possible, if investments (and growth) are transferred from conventional to sustainable technologies (cf. ibid.: 189). The board concedes that the feasibility of uncoupling is not proven yet and that Rebound-effects are possible (cf. ibid.: 6; 149), but does not discuss explicitly how to counter that.

The WBGU is thus depicting transformation as a technical, deliberative process (cf. ibid.: 10 f.), thereby providing another example of an attempted dissolution of the double-movement. Likewise, commodification of labor and nature are not mentioned explicitly in the report and not included in the notion of re-embedding¹³ so the application of Polanyi is limited here.

¹³ (WBGU 2011: 337). The notion of an “embedded liberalism” can be contested arguably with the fact, that it was precisely in “this advanced capitalist world that ecological disembedding increased exponentially in intensity and came to subsume literally all corners of the planet” (Bernard 1997: 87).

3.2) Germanwatch

The NGO Germanwatch is paralleling the WBGU in explaining why they use the concept TGT with the current multiple crisis which shows us that we reach planetary boundaries (Schwarz/Rostock 2012: 1). They also emphasize the role of pioneers in civil society, which according to them have to be encouraged by an active state. Also, the equity aspect and the importance of South-North and South-South-cooperations are included in their concept of sustainability as well. However, the notion of TGT is more comprehensive than that of WBGU, not just aiming at GHG reduction:

"Making the transition from a fossil to a post-fossil economic system is a major challenge. However, in a Great Transformation, it merely marks the switch, in one first sector, towards a closed substance cycle economy as a response to planetary boundaries. Definitive answers to social issues, such as intergenerational justice, must also be sought." (Rostock 2012: 3)

Accordingly, Stefan Rostock gives a notion of renouncement to TGT: "It means more sustainable mobility and perhaps less mobility – and fewer (long-haul) flights in particular" (ibid.). So for Germanwatch, it is rather about TGRT which includes human lifestyles and the coexistence with the nature specifically (cf. ibid.). Correspondingly, Rostock concretely refers to Polanyi's concept of embedment:

"The way out of the current situation is undecided, but it can be managed successfully. Now it's all about re-embedding: the financial system into the economic system, the economic system into the socio-cultural system, and the socio-cultural system into the natural environment. No doubt about it – it's a major challenge for our own and the coming generations." (Ibid.)

Since this is the depiction of a less technological and more societal process of TGRT, Germanwatch also is more explicit about which political resistances, which "spoilers" of change are to be overcome (cf. Schwarz/Rostock 2012: 1).

Germanwatch as well advocates ETS which in their eyes have to be regulated to function properly (cf. Caspar 2015). The further commodification of nature by market-based approaches to counter climate change has not been exposed as a problem in the report of the WBGU nor in the Germanwatch documents.

4) Conclusion

In conclusion of the hypothesis, the operationalization seems not perfectly suited. It is not the task of Germanwatch, even less of the WBGU to give a general critique on existing approaches to climate change, but to push for their improvement. An approach to deepen the inquiry would rather be to focus on the definition given by different actors for re-embedment, even more following the assumption that TGT can

become a container concept. The discourse will continue between Third Way/Green Growth approaches with emphasis on technology and De-growth approaches which require trade-offs to be accepted and a turning away from neoliberal capitalism. Polanyi is ambivalent in this respect, but can justifiably be applied in a politicized version, as Bernard does:

"If we locate power by examining the configuration of social forces that have promoted and sustained globalisation at both the local and world order levels, then disembedding [and re-embedding as well] ceases to be an issue of policy co-ordination and becomes one of struggle and resistance." (Bernard 1997: 87)

Polanyi likewise stated that "an ideal that would ban [power and compulsion] from society must be invalid" (TGT: 267), giving ground for discussion, which can be related inter alia to Chantal Mouffe's concept of "Agonality".

Generally the debate on how to counter climate change cannot be fully reflected with the means of Polanyi and requires research, e.g. on the question if there is a possibility to uncouple growth and resource use. But we should take his argument about freedom in a complex society serious in "acceptance of the reality of society [which] gives man indomitable courage and strength to remove all removable injustice and unfreedom" (TGT: 268). Society has to define itself as a whole and put the promise of sustainability into practice. This means as well that economy has to serve society, not the other way around (cf. TGT: 257). Lacher puts it thus:

"The conclusion is that to break through the pathology of capitalist development, much more fundamental steps have to be taken: not more protectionism, but some form of socialism in which land, labour and money are no longer thought of as commodities. (...) In fact, Polanyi leaves us with no other choice than that between liberalism and socialism.

We may not want to accept this choice; but then the burden is on us to show what structural transformations in the nature of capitalism may have rendered protectionism and the market compatible. (...) A more civil-society oriented approach to protect society through strengthening reciprocity rather than redistribution may not have such defects [as Keynesianism]." (Lacher 1999: 325 f.)

Hence, besides stronger state involvement in facilitating a sustainable economy, the question is also how to revitalize solidarity, while according to Polanyi the liberal creed "[removed] compassion from the hearts" (TGT: 106 f.). Peter Singer speaks of the global "legacy of connectedness we cannot ignore" (Singer 2003: 1) and which is also to be applied to climate change. Hence the requirement that both international politics and global citizens have to act according to globalized ethics (cf. *ibid.*: 3).

With this important but simple claim being made, we can ask for actors pushing this vision of the world to TGRT: According to Polanyi, conflicts and thus change do not arise necessarily along class divisions, but when active agents succeed in going with

the tide of general interest. This interest in an advanced market-society mostly being the protection from the risks it exposes man and nature to, we can assume that there is a big opportunity now with international recognition of the climate change problem for progressive agents to foster change. Interests resisting this move are therefore not necessarily property-owning-classes, like the heirs of Rockefeller showed in their decision to divest from fossil fuels (cf. Goldenberg 2014), but people, businesses and institutions with stakes in fossil fuels, who slow down change considerably (cf. Bauer 2012: 255). Admittedly, those stakes are high (cf. Carbon Tracker Initiative 2012) and until now to a certain degree low energy, fuel and food prices are common interests. But this can change. Since the conflict of interest between easy and cheap consumption and sustainable acting are not just an issue of the public sphere but inherent in every civil person as well, the climate change problem is the biggest issue of global public discourse known yet. If the discourse and societal practice shift considerably, political agents can be convinced that the political costs of not acting immediately are higher than those of acting.

Finally, there are two kinds of dangers to be considered with Polanyi in mind: First, with failed protectionism and unfolded liberalism having caused social, and in our times natural, destruction, there is a risk of violent repulsion of this liberal status, which also englobes representative democracy. Second, with a transformation necessary this time, social bonds and cultural roots should remain unharmed as far as possible. With a re-embedment of economy in society, new culture will even grow. But this needs much caution in the transformation process, as, lesson learned from Polanyi, fast change can uproot societies and stir big upheavals to the degree of collapse of civilizations. The big challenge of our time is that we actually have to effect a big transformation, and that we have to do it fast. So the risk in this transformation is to harm people who e.g. have their stakes connected to fossil fuel industry or who are affected by big projects of renewable energies (cf. Flores/Mousseau 2014: 21).

The “rediscovery” of Polanyi is a good sign for the debate on sustainability. It will be important to observe if the meaning of TGT is not hollowed, but rather filled with new life, putting the hints Polanyi gave into concrete, emancipative action. One main problem for state action as for civil society is the slippery, always moving state of the modern world order between states and individuals, as Bauman coined it: the liquid modernity. The absence of a fixed structure is also an obstacle for effecting major changes of the order, once realized it is broken. So the task for humankind now is to build new solids. If many particles stop moving together, then maybe something solid can be created again (Bauman 2000: 3).

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