

Public Lecture of the Third Vienna Karl Polanyi Visiting Professorship

Venue: WU Wien, TC 2.03, Welthandelsplatz 1, 1020 Wien

Date: May 17th, 2022, 19.00 – 21.00 CET

Zoom: <https://wu-ac-at.zoom.us/j/94916773989>

19.00 Welcome Addresses by

Veronica Kaup-Hasler, Executive City Councilor for Cultural Affairs and Science), (tbc)

Dani Rodrik, Harvard University, US (via zoom)

Colleen Schneider, WU Vienna, IKPS

Official Granting of the Vienna Karl Polanyi Guest Professorship to Ayşe Buğra, professor emerita at Bogazici University & Atatürk-Institut for modern Turkish history, Istanbul, Turkey

Laudatio: Marguerite Mendell, Concordia University, Montréal, Canada & IKPS (via Zoom)

Keynote by Ayşe Buğra on

“Universalism, cultural difference and the “revenge of politics”: Revisiting Karl Polanyi in the contemporary global political environment”

There is an apparent contradiction between the denial and affirmation of diversity in neoliberal global capitalism. On the one hand, it was assumed that “There is no alternative” to market-dominated, open economies, leaving little room for diversity in economic institutions and policies. On the other hand, the “cultural turn” predicted geopolitical conflicts due to a “clash of civilizations” or promoted “alternative modernities” in which social and political relations and institutions are shaped differently from those in Western democracies. The lecture problematizes this “culture talk” that impedes a proper diagnosis of the current threats to democracy and the rule of law in both Western and non-Western countries. By drawing on Polanyi’s idea of the “countermovement” against the disruptions caused by a market-dominated economic order, illiberal political parties and movements that challenge liberal democracy are part of a reactionary countermovement. Claims to exclusive representation of the “real people” against “internal and external enemies” of the nation are sustained by idealizing the will to protect society’s historically given cultural identity. Contrary to such culturalization and in line with Polanyi’s reflections on “the reality of society” and “freedom in a complex society”, it has to be stressed that the ideals of equality and freedom are not limited to Western societies. Empowered by information and communication technologies, all over the world dissidents who embrace the ideals of equality and freedom will continue to exist in increasing numbers. Ignoring their voices by references to civilizational difference is neither compatible with global justice nor with peaceful international co-existence.

Discussion

Moderator: Andreas Novy (WU Vienna, IKPS)

