

## **How can Marxist higher education research help us regain the future in the age of uncertainty?**

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This keynote begins with a question: *How can Marxist higher education research help us regain the future in the age of uncertainty?* The very formulation presupposes, first, that we indeed inhabit such an “age.” Yet this uncertainty is unevenly distributed. In the global South and East, in countries like Turkey and Poland alike, it manifests not only as ecological collapse, wars distant and close, all-pervasiveness of precarious employment, or the destabilisation of university knowledge production under artificial intelligence, but also as intensified dependency on the global core, academic and economic alike. Our regions have long been experiencing uncertainty through volatile currencies, structural adjustments, the dictates of international organisations, and the persistent reproduction of peripheral positions within global academic capitalism.

To address our question we will start from engaging the classics. John Kenneth Galbraith’s *Age of Uncertainty* (1977), while sensing the Zeitgeist properly, framed a Western crisis of growth and hegemony. Thirty years later Zygmunt Bauman (2007) emphasised the individualisation of anxieties caused by the maturation of the age of uncertainty. But all in all, both theorists just grasped two ends of the same period called by Immanuel Wallerstein (2004) a moment of „bifurcation”, a broader and deeper shift in the capitalist world-system, a point where the system can no longer sustain its existing equilibrium. The capitalist world-system entered such a moment in 1968 and was supposed to mutate into another form over approximately 50 years. Today, uncertainty that marked the bifurcation moment seems to be hardening into certainty: of climate disaster, technological unemployment, extractivism-led wars, climate migration met with racist border regimes, and the undermining of the role of higher education. The future has been stolen, but not equally, and not in the same way everywhere.

To “regain” the future implies constituting a collective “we.” Yet whose future is at stake, and against whom must it be defended? For semi-peripheral and dependent societies, the question is not merely about sustaining universities, but about resisting forms of academic dependency that reproduce subaltern futures. Here, Marxist higher education research offers a distinctive contribution. Unlike mainstream approaches to study higher education, it insists on situating universities within the contradictions of global political economy, while at the same time aligning with social forces that resist dispossession and aims to change, both the university and the societies at large. Following a recent proposal of an integral critique (Szadkowski & Krzeski 2025), this lecture will proceed discussing the three moments constituting the specificity of Marxist higher education research as critique: *within* (critique of academic capitalism and its dependent formations), *against* (joining collective struggles to reclaim futures in the periphery), and *beyond* (prefigurative exploration of non-capitalist relations already germinating). In this sense, Marxist higher education research is not

only an intellectual practice but also a solidaristic and imaginative project - indispensable if we are to reclaim futures otherwise foreclosed by the certainties of destruction.