

Finding Meaning in Uncertain Times

Monday, 11 November 2024

Roundtable

Summary

The ever-accelerating flow of news and current events is a reminder that our century is one of ‘uncertainty’. Transformations in governance and economies, and the impacts of climate change faced by Muslim societies, are indicative of this and prompt alignment of individual sensibilities. This Roundtable seeks to explore the notions of uncertainty and change. It will address how individuals find meaning in instability and develop circumventing solutions. Crucial to our discussion will be the themes of morality, conventional and ethical registers, which we will address as empowering frames. The Roundtable will focus on Muslim societies from an interdisciplinary lens, twinning themes such as education and knowledge; piety and religious practice; creativity and language; and migration, human rights and law. Key matters for consideration will include: What does “uncertainty” entail? How do individual and communal approaches to empowerment articulate with each other? How do moral structures adapt to everyday challenges? Instead of addressing these terms as mere synonyms, the discussion will emphasize the context, allowing for a better assessment of human capacity towards understanding and action in everyday life.

Programme

2.00pm: Introduction by Convener & Chair

2.10pm: Session 1 - What are the causes and contexts of uncertainty and change?

2.35pm: Q&A with the audience and supplementary questions from the Chair

3.00pm: Tea break

3.15pm: Session 2 - How does uncertainty induce new forms of empowerment, commonality, and collective action? How do religion and other value systems play a role in addressing changes and uncertainty?

3.40pm: Q&A with audience and supplementary questions from the Chair

4.00pm: Conclusion

Convener and Chair

Dr Marion Breteau is Associate Researcher at the French Research Center for the Arabian Peninsula (CEFREPA), Kuwait. She is currently a Visiting Research Fellow at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies and a global member of the TikTok Cultures Research Network (Curtin University, Australia). After having investigated online dating in the Sultanate of Oman as part of her Ph.D. in sociocultural anthropology, she has turned to TikTok affordances by foreign domestic workers in the Gulf states. Her work addresses bodily and sensory experiences, focusing on aesthetics, emotions, and the digitalization of migrant control. She was previously an Assistant Professor at the American University of Kuwait and held other teaching positions at Aix-Marseille University, France.

Contributors and Discussants

Ms Haironesah Domado is a doctoral candidate at the Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University. She is currently a Chevening Fellow at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies. Haironesah Domado is a researcher-practitioner, and her current research explores the intersection of conflict, peace, and gender in the context of women's empowerment discourses in non-Western contexts, particularly in conflict-affected Muslim regions of the Philippines.

Dr Sarah Hopkyns is Assistant Professor at the University of St Andrews and a Visiting Research Fellow at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies. She has previously worked in the UAE, Canada, and Japan. Her research interests include language and identity, language policy, translingual practice, linguistic ethnography, linguistic landscapes, and English-medium instruction (EMI). She has published widely in journals such as *Asian Englishes*, *Language and Intercultural Communication*, *Linguistics and Education*, *Multilingua*, and *World Englishes*, and has contributed numerous chapters to edited volumes. Sarah is the author of *The Impact of Global English on Cultural Identities in the UAE* (Routledge, 2020) and co-editor of *Linguistic Identities in the Arab Gulf States* (Routledge, 2022).

Ms Rima Kalush is a DPhil student in Migration Studies researching the situation of migrants in Libya through a critical ethnography of Afro-European migration governance. Her DPhil project takes an interdisciplinary approach that reflects her interests in human rights, labour rights, and migration. Since 2011, she has worked as the editor and, later, director of Migrant-Rights.org, an advocacy and research organization focused on the Gulf states and wider Middle East. Her work has been published and referenced by *Al Jazeera*, the International Labour Organisation, and *Jadaliyya*, among other institutions. She holds an MPhil in Middle Eastern Area Studies from the University of Oxford, as well as a BA in History and a BA in Politics from the University of California, Davis.

Ms Alice Königstetter is a PhD candidate at the Institute for Near Eastern Studies, University of Vienna, Austria, under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Stephan Procházka. Her dissertation, *Voices and Silences in Contemporary Women's Fiction from Kuwait*, explores representations at the intersection of language, nationality, and gender. She is currently a Visiting Fellow at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium, at the Department of Linguistics and Literary Studies. In addition, she is an affiliated PhD Researcher at the French Research Center for the Arabian Peninsula (CEFREPA), Kuwait. Her research is funded by the Austrian Ministry of Education, Science, and Research, the University of Vienna, and Literar-Mechana. Alice's research interests include postcolonial literature, cultural production in the Arab Gulf region, and gender studies.

Professor Adeel Malik is an economist with a strong multi-disciplinary orientation. His research revolves around the politics of trade reform in Muslim societies, the impact of political dynasties on economic development, religion's political economy, and exceptional institutional arrangements in frontier regions on conflict. Professor Malik obtained his DPhil in Economics from the University of Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar in 2004. Alongside his role as Globe Fellow in the Economies of Muslim Societies at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, Professor Malik is also an Associate Professor of Development Economics at the Oxford Department of International Development. He is also a Senior Associate of the Cairo-based Economic Research Forum, Senior Fellow of the Policy Initiative in Beirut, and Research Fellow of CERP in Lahore.

Ms Lynn Pais is a graduate student in Public Health and International Development at the University of Sheffield. She is a *magna cum laude* graduate of the American University of Kuwait (AUK) in Social and Behavioural Sciences with a concentration in Anthropology. She was awarded a Summer Scholarship to study at George Washington University, DC. She has held leadership roles as President of the Anthropology Club and Secretary for Sigma Tau Delta (Alpha Rho Eta Chapter) at AUK. Lynn is also a trainer and mentor at En.v, a Non-Governmental Organization for youth community life in Kuwait.

Dr Mohammad Talib taught sociology at Jamia Millia Islamia University (Delhi) from 1979 to 2001. In 2002, he came to Oxford as the Islamic Centre's Fellow in the Anthropology of Muslim Societies. He retired in 2021 and is now Senior Associate with the Centre. He is currently working on a project entitled 'Madrasas in recent history: an alternative view between anthropology and international relations'.

Registration

Please register for this event using this link (<https://www.oxcis.ac.uk/form/uncertainty-and-meaningfulness>). Please note the cut-off date for registration is Friday 8 November, 4.00pm.