

**Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
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SYMPOSIUM
INTERNATIONAL
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**13th UMA International Interdisciplinary Symposium
3 - 5 December 2026**

Uncertainties/Certainties

CALL FOR PARTICIPATION

INTRODUCTION

To examine the tension between uncertainties and certainties is to closely engage with the turbulences of the contemporary world. Certainty, a subject of contrasting interpretations, has at times been understood as the ultimate goal of rational knowledge—from the Cartesian *cogito* to the universalist promises of the Enlightenment, and through positivist confidence in scientific progress. At other times, it has been challenged by critical philosophical and scientific currents that have highlighted the limitations of any claim to a single, absolute truth. Notable examples include F. Nietzsche's (1913) questioning of established moral values in favor of a perspectivist conception of truth, S. Freud's (1915) discovery of an unconscious psychic life beyond the subject's control, and K. Popper's (1973) introduction of the provisional nature of scientific truth.

In this context, uncertainty increasingly asserts itself as a structuring paradigm (E. Morin, 1984), paving the way for contemporary ideas of complexity (E. Morin, J.-L. Le Moigne, H. Atlan), risk (U. Beck, M. Callon, B. Latour, P. Lagadec), and chaos (R. Thom, I. Prigogine, I. Stengers), all of which break with deterministic logics. This question also resonates within non-Western thought traditions, where the relationships between doubt and certainty have been explored through their unique philosophical and theological frameworks. *This dynamic suggests that certainties should not be viewed as outdated illusions, but rather as stabilized forms of knowledge in constant tension with uncertainty. This tension between certainties and uncertainties is also embedded in social practices, knowledge systems, and historical contexts, reconfiguring itself across diverse cultural and geopolitical spaces.*

Beyond these epistemological ruptures, the modern project of mastering reality itself invites for broader scrutiny. Sciences, often under the sway of positivism, have long advocated for a

perspective aimed at making the world more legible, predictable, and manageable. Critics of modernity (K. Marx, S. Freud, the Frankfurt School) have exposed the illusions underlying such ambitions. This questioning leads to the recognition that uncertainty is not merely a limit of knowledge, but an inherent attribute of both physical and human realities. The more we learn, the more objects reveal unexpected shadow areas. As E. Schatzman (1988) demonstrated, science not only produces certainties but also organizes its own uncertainties.

Beyond the mere framework of scientific practice, certainties and uncertainties reflect civilizational choices, societal models—including gender relations (J. Butler, 2005)—political values, and life projects. Certainty, in this context, refers to the need to maintain an established order based on recognized legitimate forms of knowledge: scientific, political, economic, medical, or media-driven. Uncertainty, conversely, encourages vigilance regarding the claims and promises of these same discourses.

It is from this perspective that U. Beck, in *The Risk Society* (2001), analyzes the transformations of advanced modernity. He notes that the expansion of wealth and control is accompanied by an increase in health, ecological, political, and financial risks. Uncertainty, therefore, proves to be constitutive of the system rather than accidental. When statistically quantified, uncertainty can be converted into probability, offering decision-makers a confidence scale upon which to base action.

CONTEMPORARY FORMS OF UNCERTAINTY

The contemporary context is marked by a proliferation of areas of uncertainty. Health (Covid-19) and environmental crises, reconfigurations of geopolitical power relations, economic uncertainties (2008 financial crisis), changes in the world of work, upheavals induced by artificial intelligence, and "media warming" (D. Boullier, 2019) all contribute to the recomposition of social, political, and cultural benchmarks. Legal sciences also illustrate these tensions, particularly through the rise of normative and jurisprudential uncertainty linked to the complexity of current social dynamics.

Current armed conflicts and geopolitical uncertainties further encourage deep reflection on the notions of sovereignty and, crucially, on the international order, which is at the heart of present turbulence. The stakes are multiple and complex, requiring in-depth analyses to illuminate the transformations of the international order and debates on its ethical and humanitarian foundations, transcending ideological, nationalist, and polarizing divides.

Uncertainties in Life and Material Sciences

Beyond the humanities and social sciences, tensions between certainties and uncertainties also permeate other disciplinary fields. The exact sciences themselves have profoundly renewed our understanding of this relationship. Whether in complex systems, climate models, or quantum physics, contemporary scientific advances demonstrate that uncertainty is not always a sign of temporary ignorance destined to disappear. In some cases, it appears as a constitutive dimension of observed phenomena. The uncertainty principle formulated by Werner Heisenberg in 1927 marked a major break in the history of science by challenging the deterministic ideal inherited from classical physics (M. Kumar, 2011; J.-M. Lévy-Leblond, 2022). The debates it provoked,

notably between Einstein and Bohr, illustrate the intellectual fecundity of the tensions between different conceptions of reality and knowledge.

In life sciences, contemporary research highlights various forms of uncertainty, from the incommensurability of experimental facts (L. Fleck, [1934] 2005) to the latest advances in epigenetics. This uncertainty stems from the variability of life, the plurality of observation scales, and the limits of projection (M.-H. Boucand, 2019). Random mutations on genomes provide a fundamental illustration: while driving evolution and generating the diversity and adaptation essential for life, they can also, depending on the context, trigger pathological processes with irreversible consequences. When these mutations affect genes regulating cell proliferation and differentiation, the cell escapes the body's control signals and enters an anarchic dynamic. This is cancer, where biological uncertainty directly translates into diagnostic, prognostic, therapeutic, and clinical uncertainty (E. Hirsch, 2019).

Advances in epigenetics, microsatellites, the role of histones, and the possible heritability of traumas now challenge the certainty of genetic determinism. The human microbiota illustrates a similar logic within microbial communities: the balance between symbiosis and dysbiosis, between health and pathology, remains a dynamic system whose causal mechanisms still resist definitive certainty. This is despite increasingly strong correlations with diverse pathologies such as colorectal cancers, metabolic disorders, and neuropsychiatric disorders (S. Kouidhi et al., 2023). For living systems, uncertainty is not merely a knowledge gap to be filled; it is the fundamental principle by which life transforms, adapts, and sometimes derails. Contemporary biology does not produce definitive certainties about life; instead, it maps probabilities, identifies regularities, and learns to navigate the complexity of biological systems (H. Atlan, 1999).

Uncertainty: A Transversal Datum

Economics and management sciences are similarly affected by uncertainty, evidenced by market fluctuations, unstable value chains, and the limitations of models based on perfect rationality. The economic tradition itself, from A. Smith to J. M. Keynes and F. Hayek, has progressively integrated uncertainty as a constitutive element of decision and knowledge (M. Biziou, 2022). However, these disciplines also demonstrate that knowledge and action systems rely on regimes of relative certainty, which are crucial for decision-making and the stabilization of practices.

More broadly, diverse fields such as sports sciences, veterinary sciences, information and communication sciences, political sciences, education sciences, and even design and design arts and practices—where uncertainty is also considered a cognitive material and a resource for design processes—each, in their own way, demonstrate the structural nature of this uncertainty. This constitutes a pervasive reality that influences modes of knowledge production, frameworks of intelligibility, professional practices, and decision-making processes. Each day, new uncertainties qualify the certainties of the previous day, fueling a continuous revision of knowledge. The dialogic relationship between certainty and uncertainty, understood as their constitutive tension, seems to be emerging as the hallmark of contemporary knowledge production. In this context, the advent of computer technologies, which has largely contributed to informational inflation and the proliferation of fake news, has led to the emergence of collective and individual defensive mechanisms—political, professional, and personal—in the face of disinformation, all of which

warrant further exploration. These dynamics also involve the production and stabilization of forms of social, institutional, and cognitive certainty, without which contemporary societies could not function.

CERTAINTIES AND UNCERTAINTIES IN MUSLIM AND ARAB THOUGHT

In the Arab-Muslim world, the journey of certainty and uncertainty revolves, among other things, around the foundational text of the Quran. Presented as an obvious and unequivocal word, it served as the basis for the construction of the legal, theological, and ethical architectures of civilization. However, very early on, this foundational certainty was confronted with the tensions of interpretation and the demands of changing historical, social, and political realities. Arab-Muslim thought is thus not reducible to a simple opposition between dogmatic certainty and marginal doubt; on the contrary, it constitutes a historical space for internal debates on the conditions of truth, the validity of knowledge, and the legitimate forms of certainty. In this context, the reflection on *shakk* (الشك, doubt) and *yaqîn* (اليقين, certainty), found in the works of al-Jāhiz (159-255 H / 776-868), al-Fārābī (257-339 H / 870-950), Ibn Sīnā (370-428 H / 980-1037), and later, al-Ghazālī (450-505 H / 1058-1111), as well as the tensions between *'aql* (العقل, reason) and *naql* (النقل, revelation), testifies to an ancient consideration of the complex relationships between truth, doubt, and certainty. Philosophical, theological, and mystical approaches to knowledge, along with reflections on the limits of human understanding, have thus contributed to making uncertainty not a flaw in the system of thought, but a constitutive dimension of any construction of truth.

Thus, Quranic truth, conceived as an epistemic and normative foundation, has always been subject to internal tensions and doctrinal reconfigurations. Shiite and Kharijite dissent (1st H / 7th century) on the one hand, and Mu'tazilite rationalism (2nd-5th H / 8th-11th century) on the other, introduced uncertainty into the very heart of the processes by which orthodoxy was elaborated. Far from being a homogeneous and stable edifice, tradition thus appears as a field of tension between the stabilization of certainties and the openness of interpretations. It is in this context that we find the intellectual adventures of major figures such as the existential skepticism of al-Tawhīdī (310-414 H / 922-1023), the critical doubt of al-Ma'arrī (363-449 H / 973-1057), the philosophical rationalism of Ibn Rushd (520-595 H / 1126-1198), and the sociological and historical synthesis of Ibn Khaldūn (732-808 H / 1332-1406) in the *Muqaddima*. These intellectual trajectories attest that religious, theological, or political certainties do not function as endpoints of knowledge, but as poles of provisional stabilization constantly reworked by the uncertainties of critical thinking.

This dynamic continues in the reconfigurations of Arab modernity, where the tension between heritage and modernity constitutes a structuring pattern of contemporary Arab thought. This thought is characterized by the persistence of *turath* as a space of reference and by the rise of uncertainties related to the political and epistemic changes of the contemporary world.

In this continuity, the major historical ruptures of the Nakba (1948) and the Naksa (1967), considered not only as political events but as epistemic and cultural fractures, have contributed to the crisis of historical certainties and narratives of intellectual sovereignty. Contemporary globalization prolongs and amplifies this displacement by generalizing a regime of uncertainty that does not abolish certainties but permanently reconfigures them in a now globalized space of circulation of knowledge, crises, and forms of legitimation.

CERTAINTIES / UNCERTAINTIES AND FRONTIER RECOMPOSITION

Some contemporary reflections, such as those of B. Latour (1999) on the recomposition of the relationship between science, nature, and politics, the work of D. Fassin (2012, 2014) on vulnerabilities, inequalities, and moral economies, or the analyses of I. Stengers (1997) inviting a rethinking of the relationships between knowledge, uncertainty, and complexity, show the extent to which the boundaries between knowledge, beliefs, legitimacy, and lived experiences are becoming more difficult to draw. The boundaries between the true, the plausible, and the false are proving more and more porous, thus accentuating the feeling of a world where benchmarks move faster than the analytical frameworks available to apprehend them.

The social construction of certainties also deserves special attention. How does knowledge become "certain" in the eyes of a society? By what institutional, rhetorical, and political mechanisms are certainties imposed and legitimized? This is at the heart of Latour's work on scientific facts as collective constructions and Fleck's (2005) work on the thought styles of scientific collectives—a dimension that this symposium intends to explore in all its complexity.

Finally, societies in the Global South experience and manage uncertainty under specific conditions that warrant critical examination: institutional fragility, incomplete statistical data, predominant orality, local climate unpredictability, and unstable health systems, among others. This aligns with epistemological critiques from African thinkers such as Paulin Hountondji (1994), who addressed the theoretical dependence of the South, and Felwine Sarr (2016), who emphasized the need to develop frameworks of intelligibility specific to societies whose future is structurally built on uncertainty. This perspective, consistent with the African and Mediterranean focus of the University of Manouba, broadens the debate beyond analytical frameworks developed in Northern societies and fosters dialogue between radically different experiences of uncertainty.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

The symposium invites us to question the conditions under which contemporary societies can still produce forms of legitimacy as collective certainties erode and traditional modes of understanding reality are increasingly permeated by uncertainty. How can freedom of judgment and action be preserved in a world where uncertainty becomes structural, even instrumentalized? To what extent does uncertainty affect the very foundations of ethics, balancing the relativization of norms with the search for common principles? How do the dynamics of uncertainty reconfigure social relations, including gender relations, in both public and private spheres? At the level of public decisions, how do uncertainties related to climate, health, media, and economic crises reshape collective choices and decision-making policies? This symposium aims to address this collective imperative: to think differently about a world that resists established frameworks.

This invitation to collectively (re)think the Uncertainty/Certainty binomial, launched by the University of Manouba, proposes four interdisciplinary thematic axes for debate:

1. **Thinking the Uncertain: Epistemology, Science, and Complexity.**
How do disciplines construct their certainties? Through what mechanisms does knowledge become legitimate and stable? This axis covers the philosophical and scientific foundations

of uncertainty, disciplinary approaches (mathematics, physics, biology, medicine, history, geography, computer science, economics, law), the conceptualization of complexity, and the pedagogies of uncertainty.

2. **Governing and Acting in Uncertainty: Risks, Crises, Decision Ethics, and Political Accountability.**

How do we make decisions and govern when certainties are lacking? This axis covers the management of wars, health, climate, and financial crises, as well as crisis communication, the ethics of public decision-making under uncertainty, organizational management in the face of the unpredictable, geopolitical reconfigurations and the uncertainty of the international order, and the specific challenges of Southern societies facing institutional and structural environmental uncertainty.

3. **Articulating and Representing Uncertainty: Discourse, Narratives, and Imaginary.**

How is uncertainty shaped, narrated, and instrumentalized? This axis covers the literary, artistic, and cinematographic expressions of doubt and ambiguity, the discursive forms of certainty and its contestation, the "manufacture of doubt" as a deliberate strategy in media and digital spaces, and the effects of generative AI on the boundary between verified information and plausible statements.

4. **Uncertainty-Proof Identities, Memories, and Beliefs.**

How do individuals and societies maintain their identity, religious beliefs, and cultural certainties in a recomposing world? This question explores the destabilization of collective benchmarks and the identity-based responses it generates. It also examines fragile memories in the face of multiple competing narratives (disputed memories) and the intellectual resources, particularly within Arab-Muslim and African thought, that allow us to contemplate and navigate uncertainty.

From this perspective, the work of Paul Ricœur (2000) encourages us to consider uncertainty as an inherent part of historical narratives and memorial constructions.

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Academic Framework and Participation

Within the tradition of previous editions, this three-day event of exchange and reflection will provide a unique opportunity to integrate diverse disciplinary perspectives, compare methodological approaches, and explore new research avenues centered on the theme of **Uncertainties / Certainties**. The aim is to foster the creation of original knowledge and promote dialogue among various stakeholders in research and society.

Target Audience

This call is open to professors, researchers, doctoral students, and early-career researchers from the University of Manouba, other Tunisian universities, and international academic institutions and research centers.

We welcome proposals from all scientific fields within the humanities and social sciences, experimental sciences, exact sciences, or any other discipline that can illuminate, from either a contemporary or historical perspective, the complex dynamics between uncertainties and certainties.

Special consideration will be given to contributions that enhance our understanding of the scientific, social, economic, environmental, technological, or political challenges characterizing our era, which is marked by crises, changes, and profound transformations.

The participation of students, socio-economic actors, practitioners, and decision-makers is strongly encouraged, as are inter-institutional and international collaborations.

Additionally, a specific call is open to students from Tunisian universities who wish to participate in a documentary filmmaking workshop related to the symposium's theme.

Form

Participants are invited to submit proposals in one of the symposium's thematic areas, in the following formats:

- Oral presentations
- Poster presentations
- Roundtables or panels
- Practical workshops
- Masterclasses
- PhD seminars

Proposals for papers should include an abstract, while proposals for roundtables, workshops, or masterclasses should be submitted as a concept note.

Submissions

Proposals must be submitted online to the Symposium Scientific Committee no later than **August 31, 2026**, via the dedicated online form. [Click here](#) to access the application form

Additional Information

For any questions related to this call or the symposium's organization, candidates are invited to contact the organizing committee at the symposium email address: symposium.manouba@uma.tn.

Only coffee breaks and lunch breaks will be provided during the three days of the symposium.

Timeline

- **31 August 2026:** Deadline for the submission of proposals.
- **15 September 2026:** Notification of acceptance by the Scientific Committee.
- **3–5 December 2026:** Symposium dates.

Guidelines for Paper Abstract Submissions

Proposals submitted for the UMA Symposium must comply with the following requirements:

- **Title**
- **Five (5) keywords**
- **List of authors/contributors**

- **Abstract (maximum 500 words)**
- **Language:** Arabic, French, or English
- **Font size:** 12 pt
- **Submission:** All proposals must be submitted through the online application form: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScFxFxVxopK4q69EnSZXwO5el4ELaHtd69hXwvFrMz0Hjirgkyw/viewform?usp=header>

Guidelines for Concept Notes for Roundtables, Masterclasses, and Practical Workshops

Concept notes for proposed roundtables, masterclasses, and practical workshops must include:

- **Type of proposed event:** Roundtable, Masterclass, or Practical Workshop
- **Title**
- **Objective**
- **Description (maximum 500 words)**
- **List of contributors/participants**
- **Submission:** All concept notes must be submitted through the online application form: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScFxFxVxopK4q69EnSZXwO5el4ELaHtd69hXwvFrMz0Hjirgkyw/viewform?usp=header>