



المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات  
Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies

The Fifth Annual

# International Winter School Program

Social Media, Surveillance, and Societies of Control

6 - 11 January 2024



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# International Winter School 2024

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# **About the International Winter School**

The International Winter School (WS) is an annual program organised by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS) that seeks to provide an in-depth and critical look at selected topics and it provides an opportunity for participants to network with regional scholars, gain substantive feedback from respected academics. The IWS invites regional and international lecturers to generate these much-needed discussions and provide participants with nuanced feedback and intellectual exchange.

Since its launch in 2020, the IWS has received hundreds of applications from around the world. This made the program a place where specialists in the field can meet others from across the world and form ties with the various departments at the ACRPS. Thus, the program is a starting point for future collaborations, opportunities for guest lecturing, and a place for getting a better idea of the research conducted in the field from the Arab World.

The theme of the 2024 International Winter School, "Social Media, Surveillance, and Societies of Control" was selected to reflect emerging research concerning the interaction between social media, surveillance, and control by governments and corporations and the vulnerability of popular culture to manipulation and control through social media, and how they shape each other is critical in understanding the impact of the new media age on our societies. The vast amount of data, the ever-changing nature of social media platforms, and the sophisticated nature of surveillance, control, and manipulation techniques present major challenges for legislative bodies, social scientists, and computer scientists. Furthermore, the current gap between computer scientists and social scientists conducting research on the topic represents another obstacle.

As such, the objective of the 5th round of the IWS is to provide research tools and an in-depth and critical reading of studies written by academic experts on the interactions between surveillance, manipulation, and control (by state and corporate and other agents) and social networking platforms. Participants will have the chance to present and receive feedback on their research papers in dedicated sessions, looking at social media and surveillance in different regions and examining it in relation to a variety of social and political issues. The research projects reflect on data collected in the United States, Egypt, Iran, India, Saudi Arabia, Palestine and Nigeria. The diverse nature of the empirical work to be presented alongside the theoretical focus of the lectures and the tools provided in specialized workshops, will provide a unique opportunity to enrich our understanding of this year's International Winter School topic.

# Timetable

## Day 1: Saturday, 6 January 2024

10:00 – 11:15	<p><b>Public Lecture</b></p> <p><b>Moderator: Hani Awad</b></p> <p>David Lyon: Popular Metaphors for Surveillance and Why They Matter</p>
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## Day 2: Sunday, 7 January 2024

10:00 – 11:15	<p>Public Lecture</p> <p><b>Moderator: Mohamad Hamas Elmasry</b></p> <p>Ahmed Al-Rawi: Misinformation, Surveillance, &amp; Trolling on/in the Middle East</p>
11:15 – 11:30	Coffee Break
11:30 – 13:30	<p>Roundtable 1</p> <p>Social Media and War</p> <p><b>Moderator: Fadi Zaraket</b></p> <p>Ahmed Al-Rawi, Marc Owen Jones, Mohamad Hamas Elmasry, Mohamed Zayani, Nadim Nashif*</p>

## Day 3: Monday, 8 January 2024

10:00 – 11:15	<p><b>Public Lecture</b></p> <p><b>Moderator: Rania Elmalky</b></p> <p>Marc Owen Jones: From Greenwashing to Pro-Dictator Tweeting: Harmful Deception Operations on X</p>
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\* This participant will present online.

## Day 4: Tuesday, 9 January 2024

<b>10:00 – 12:00</b>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Roundtable 2</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Social Media, Surveillance, and Societies of Control</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Moderator: Hani Awad</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Ahmed Al-Rawi, David Lyon, Fadi Zaraket, Heather Jaber, Marc Owen Jones, Taha Yasseri</p>
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## Day 5: Wednesday, 10 January 2024

<b>14:45 – 16:00</b>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Public Lecture</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Moderator: Issam Nassar</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Rebecca L Stein*: War, Social Media, Visual Politics</p>
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## Day 6: Thursday, 11 January 2024

<b>10:00 – 11:15</b>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Public Lecture</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Moderator: Fadi Zaraket</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Taha Yasseri: Can Crowdsourcing Rescue the Social Marketplace of Ideas?</p>
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\* This participant will present online.

# Lecturers





**Ahmed Al-Rawi**

Associate Professor of News, social media, and Public Communication at the School of Communication at Simon Fraser University. He is also the founder of the Disinformation Project, and his research interests are related to news, global communication, misinformation, and social media with emphasis on Canada and the Middle East. Al-Rawi is also a founding member of the Media & Digital Literacy Academy in Beirut.

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## **Misinformation, Surveillance, & Trolling on/in the Middle East**

This presentation focuses on the evolving phenomena of misinformation, trolling, and surveillance in the Middle East. I argue that in some Arab countries, the state is not the only party involved in information operations but many political parties and even militias have developed their own cyber armies used to discredit their opponents and silence dissent. Using large datasets, interviews with human rights activists, and guided by empirical evidence, I show how critical journalists and activists are often targeted with coordinated social media disinformation campaigns to tarnish their credibility and harm their reputation. In many cases, generic accusations of being a terrorist, extremist, or foreign agent are used in different countries, while some of these attacks, especially against women, tend to be sexist and personally demeaning. In terms of surveillance, many Arab governments have managed to purchase sophisticated tools to monitor political opposition members under the pretext of fighting terrorism, and some armed groups use a variety of other methods including hacking and spamming to counter online criticism, intimidate opponents, and promote propaganda. I also refer to Arabic language information operations targeting the Middle East with a focus on Iran, Russia, and the US.



**David Lyon**

Former Director of the Surveillance Studies Centre at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario. Educated at the University of Bradford UK, Lyon began in Secularization Studies, and has been studying surveillance since the mid-1980s. A pioneer in Surveillance Studies, he has produced a steady stream of books – translated in to 18 languages – and articles, starting with *The Electronic Eye* (1994) and most recently *Pandemic Surveillance* (2022). He has led several large collaborative research projects on surveillance, with research funding totalling almost \$8 million. His work has been recognized in Canada, Switzerland, the US, and the UK with a number of fellowships, prizes, awards and an honorary doctorate. He is the co-editor with Elia Zureik and Yasmeen Abu-Laban of *Surveillance and Control in Israel/Palestine*, Routledge 2011, co-author with Elia Zureik of "Coronavirus and the Palestinians" *The Jerusalem Quarterly*, 89: 51-62, and author of "Liminal lights in dark places: Elia Zureik's Sociological and Critical Contribution to Palestinian and Surveillance Studies" in Ahmad Sa'di and Nur Masalha eds., *Decolonizing the Study of Palestine: Indigenous Perspectives and Settler Colonialism after Elia Zureik*, Bloomsbury 2023.

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## Popular Metaphors for Surveillance and Why They Matter

Living in an era of surveillance capitalism, AI, and platform companies, there is a need, not only for serious social scientific work to analyse their origins and impacts, but also for popular metaphors to capture aspects of the phenomena and encourage the wider population to engage with the issues. Three such metaphors are "Big Brother," from George Orwell, "Panopticon" from Jeremy Bentham and also from Michel Foucault's analysis, and the "Eye of God", which is a more general trope with a long historical pedigree. This lecture compares and contrasts the three metaphors and elaborates on the third. How these metaphors are used in the public evaluation of surveillance is critically important because they offer civil society opportunities to interact with the public issues, which are today bound up with the power of large corporations and their relationship with governments on the one hand, and with human rights, justice, care, and social-political participation, on the other.



**Fadi Zaraket**

Associate Professor at the Doha institute for Graduate Studies and Founder of the Digital Arabic Social Spaces Research Unit at the Arab Center for research and policy studies. He received a PhD in Electrical and Computer Engineering from University of Texas, Austin. His research is concentrated on automated reasoning and its applications to language understanding and information extraction, in particular for Arabic texts. He has published in renowned peer reviewed journals and participated in conferences in the field.

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## **Reverse Engineering Social Media**

This workshop introduces a reverse engineering approach to social media platforms. The approach enables recognizing the different components and structures that make social media work, allow it to form communities and societies, and link individuals, personas and entities to them. The workshop also presents methods to leverage reverse engineering to collect data and information and reconstruct it in a way that enables systematic academic studies.



**Hamdy Mubarak**

Principal Software Engineer at QCRI. He has participated in building state-of-the-art tools for processing the standard, classical, and dialectal varieties of Arabic ([farasa.qcri.org](http://farasa.qcri.org)), Speech Transcription and Translation ([qats.qcri.org](http://qats.qcri.org) and [st.qcri.org](http://st.qcri.org)), Question Answering, and Fake News Detection ([tanbih.org](http://tanbih.org)) projects in addition to leading the efforts in analysing social media content ([asad.qcri.org](http://asad.qcri.org)). Formerly Arabic NLP R&D Manager at Sakhr Software between 1994 and 2013, working on morphological, syntactic, and semantic analysis of Arabic and building commercial NLP applications for governments like Search Engine, Machine Translation, TTS, etc. He has published 120+ papers in top tier conferences on computational linguistics, speech and social computing.

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## Using Social Media and AI for Community Safety: Tools, and Case Studies

This workshop explores some tools that can be used to increase community safety including the detection of hate speech and spam. Using social media and AI, we present case studies to better understand political conflicts, rumours and opinions about COVID-19 vaccinations, attacks on Qatar before the World Cup, biases and propaganda, etc. It goes on to discuss some of the safety concerns in Large Language Models (ex: ChatGPT) including biases and hallucinations.



**Marc Owen Jones**

Associate Professor of Middle East Studies at Hamad bin Khalifa University, where he lectures on and researches digital repression and informational control strategies. His recent work has focused on social media disinformation and harassment in the Middle East, but he has written on media and informational controls, revolutionary cultural production, digital misogyny, and digital propaganda. He completed his PhD in Government and International Affairs at Durham University, which won the 2016 best thesis award from AGAPS (MESA). His publications include, *Political Repression in Bahrain*, published by Cambridge University Press (2020), and *Disinformation and Deception in the Middle East* published with Hurst Books and Oxford University Press (2022).

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## **From Greenwashing to Pro-Dictator Tweeting: Harmful Deception Operations on X (formerly Twitter)**

Deception "is the willful manipulation of the information space through erroneous content and manipulated forms of distribution, with the intent to cause some form of harm through demonization, adversarial content, omission, misdirection, whitewashing or influencing information availability in the service of political power maintenance" (Jones, 2022). By showcasing original research gleaned on the UAE and Sudan this lecture explores the manifestation of climate change propaganda and astroturfing polarization strategies in Sudan on social media. These case studies highlight the difficulties conceptualizing the "deception order" and "deception operations", proposing a model to determine the interactions between deception agents and geopolitics. By doing so it decentres the state-centric approach to digital authoritarianism, acknowledging the "supply-chains" of deception that enable illiberal practices.



**Rebecca L Stein**

Professor of Cultural Anthropology at Duke University and the author and/or editor of five books on Israeli and Palestinian cultural politics. Most recently she published *Screen Shots: State Violence on Camera in Israel and Palestine* (Stanford University press, 2021) and *Digital Militarism: Israel's Occupation in the Social Media Age* (with Adi Kuntsman, Stanford University press, 2015)

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## **War, Social Media, Visual Politics**

Over the course of the Israeli war on Gaza, social media has emerged as a political battlefield in new ways and degrees, in the hands of all political actors and constituents. This paper considers how social media has functioned as a forum, in Eyal Weizmann's sense, for a negotiation over the terms of wartime visual evidence. I focus on some of the newer visual evidentiary tactics deployed during this current war, which distinguish the social media battlefield from digital warfare of the past: namely, the entrance of AI into the political space as a tool of visual persuasion, and the rise and popularization of open source (OSINT) investigative operations as a forum for producing, performing, and negotiating visual evidence. Drawing on my earlier writings on "digital militarism", I particularly focus on the attempts of the Israeli state and its supporters to manage the visual evidentiary field, and the state-anxiety generated by the proliferation of Palestinian smartphone witnesses in Gaza, with their ability to generate images of Israeli state aggression in real time. I consider Israeli state efforts, by means of the visual field, to combat the force of their eye-witness images of wartime lethality.



**Taha Yasseri**

Professor at the School of Sociology and a Geary Fellow at the Geary Institute for Public Policy at University College Dublin, Ireland. He has a PhD in Complex Systems Physics from the University of Göttingen, Germany. He previously served as a Senior Research Fellow in Computational Social Science at the University of Oxford, where he was also a Research Fellow in Humanities and Social Sciences at Wolfson College, and a Turing Fellow at the Alan Turing Institute for Data Science and Artificial Intelligence. His interests lie in the analysis of large-scale transactional data and conducting behavioural experiments to understand human dynamics, machines' social behaviour, government-society interactions, online political behaviour, mass collaboration and collective intelligence, information, and opinion dynamics, hate speech and content moderation, collective behaviour, and online dating.

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## Can Crowdsourcing Rescue the Social Marketplace of Ideas?

Why does Wikipedia work but not social media? This lecture begins with this question about the paradox of openness and misinformation in the digital age, before discussing the success of different initiatives to combat misinformation on social media. Facebook and X (Twitter) recently introduced community-based review platforms to combat misinformation. In this talk, I will discuss the potential advantages and drawbacks of such community-based approaches to content moderation, based on past research and initial analysis of Twitter's Birdwatch data. The analysis generally supports a community-based approach to content moderation, but also warns against potential pitfalls. While it can be a powerful tool in the fight against misinformation, it is important to ensure that the implementation of the new infrastructure focuses on collaboration rather than relying on crowd-based "validation" to avoid potential pitfalls. To this end, further research is needed, utilizing methods from complex systems studies, social psychology and behavioural sociology, and computational social science to explore the implications of crowd-based content moderation.

# Rountable Speakers

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## Heather Jaber

Assistant Professor at Northwestern University in Qatar. She received her PhD in communication from the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania and holds an MA in Media Studies from the American University of Beirut. Jaber's research and teaching examines digital and popular culture, affect and emotion, and transnational media. In her research, she examines the affects and emotions that sustain national imaginaries in the MENA region by analyzing the digital performances which work to unsettle or repair them. She is particularly interested in narratives of shame and pride that circulate online and their relationship to an imagined global belonging.



## Mohamad Hamas ElMasry

Professor of Media Studies at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies. Elmasry received his PhD in Mass Communication from the University of Iowa, where he was a Presidential Fellow. Elmasry's research on Arab media systems, news coverage of race, and the media and terrorism has appeared in reputable peer-reviewed publications, including *Journalism*, *Journalism Practice*, *Journalism Studies*, *International Communication Gazette*, and *the International Journal of Communication*. He has also written for *Al-Jazeera English*, *Middle East Eye*, *The New Arab*, *Muftah*, and *Jadaliyya*, and appeared on Al-Jazeera, CNN, BBC World News, and other networks.



## Mohamed Zayani

Professor of Critical Theory at the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar. His works include *The Digital Double Bind* (Oxford University Press, 2024; with Joe F Khalil); *A Fledgling Democracy* (Oxford University Press, 2022); *Digital Middle East* (Oxford University Press, 2018); *Bullets and Bulletins* (Oxford University Press, 2016; with Suzi Mirgani); *Networked Publics and Digital Contention* (Oxford University Press, 2015; winner of ISA, ASA, ICA, NCA, AGSS book awards); *The Culture of Al Jazeera* (McFarland, 2007; with Sofiane Sahraoui); and *The Al Jazeera Phenomenon* (Pluto Press, 2005).





## Nadim Nashif

Advocate for digital rights and a dedicated social entrepreneur. He currently holds the position of Founder and General Director at 7amleh – The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media, an organization committed to advancing digital rights in Palestine. In addition to his role at 7amleh, Nadim serves as a policy analyst for Al-Shabaka: The Palestinian Policy Network. He co-founded Untold Palestine and directed the Wusol digital academy, as well as the Baladna Association for Arab Youth, which he formerly directed. With a career spanning over two decades, he has actively addressed community development concerns, making a significant impact both locally and globally.

## Moderators

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### Hani Awad

Researcher in the Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies and a lecturer in the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies. Awad has a DPhil in International Development from the University of Oxford. He is the author of *the Dilemma of Authoritarian Local Governance in Egypt* (Edinburgh University Press, 2022), and *the Transformations of the Arab Nationalism Concept* (Beirut: Arab Network for Research & Publishing, 2012) [in Arabic]. He published in the *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* and the *Middle East Critique*, among other academic journals. His research interest includes local governance, politics of Authoritarianism, socio-political mobilization, informality, local politics, Islamic movements, and social movements in the Middle East with special focus on Egypt and Palestine.



### Issam Nassar

Head of the history program at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies. Specialized in late Ottoman history in the Levant and in the history of Ottoman photography. The co-author of *Camera Palaestina: Photography and Displaced Histories of Palestine* (2022); and *The Storyteller of Jerusalem: The Life and Times of Musician Wasif Jawhariyyeh, 1904-1948* (2014) among other books and essays.



### Rania Elmalky

Professor of Practice at the Journalism Program at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies. She holds an MFA in Documentary Production and Studies from the University of North Texas, where she taught media arts writing with a focus on narrative screenwriting, and production from 2018-2020, and was recognized with the Media Arts department's Academic Excellence Award and successfully completed a one-year teaching certification. Elmalky also holds an MA in Journalism from Westminster University, which she attended as a Chevening scholar. Her transition to documentary followed a long editing and reporting career in Cairo-based *Daily News Egypt*, then the local publishing partner of the International Herald Tribune. During her six-year tenure as Editor, she mentored dozens of journalists, and spearheaded an overhaul of the publication's website, introducing multimedia and devising the paper's social media strategy. In 2011, she was shortlisted for the Anna Lindh Journalism Award in Monaco. In 2019, she won the Best Denton Documentary Award at the Thin Line Festival for her animated documentary *489 Days*, which was also among the official selection of Berlin's Factual Animation Festival and was selected for broadcast by KERA, a PBS affiliate in North Texas. She holds an MA in English and Comparative Literature from the American University in Cairo.



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