



Scripts of Terror

Knowing the Psyche in Assad's Syria

Dima Wannous

Date: May 14, 2026

Time: 4pm (Cairo time)

Online via Zoom

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82476172273?pwd=sU6IBgRV2tav7AkpUggHvRqmvkgOOD.1>

Language : Arabic and English (with translation)

Dima Wannous's *The Frightened Ones* explores how the Assad regime in Syria shapes ordinary lives through massacres, surveillance, fear, and the workings of the imagination. The novel follows Sulayma and Nassim, two patients of a Damascus psychiatrist, as their lives reveal the intricate ways in which power, family bonds, and personal history intersect under Assad's rule. Their experiences—marked by loss, panic, and the constant anticipation of the worst—produce unique knowledge about the psyche in a “state of barbarism” (Seurat) that permeates even the most intimate aspects of life.

By examining generational stories, and the blurred boundaries between reality and paranoia or recurrent nightmares, Wannous's work offers a rare perspective on how the psyche is lived, written, and known under authoritarianism. This session will feature a discussion with the author, moderated by **Mira Younes, PhD, a psychoanalyst and researcher in health studies**, exploring how the novel captures the "scripts of terror" that define life in Syria before, during, and shortly after the revolution, as well as therapeutic experiences.

Dima Wannous is a Syrian novelist and journalist. She studied French Literature at Damascus University and continued her studies at the Sorbonne in Paris, later specializing in translation in Lyon.

Dima began her media career in Damascus as a radio presenter and editor at the French section of Radio Damascus (2000–2004). She later worked in television as a producer and presenter, notably hosting cultural and political programs at Orient TV between 2007 and 2019, where she interviewed prominent intellectual and political figures from across the Arab world and the West.

Between 2011 and 2015, she contributed to leading Arab publications including *As-Safir* and *Al-Hayat*, and was among the founding members of *Raseef22*. She also served as Cultural Editor at *Al-Modon*. Her essays and opinion pieces have appeared in international outlets including *The Washington Post*.

From 2019 to 2022, she presented the daily live TV show *Shababik* on *Al-Araby TV*. She later worked as London correspondent for *Al-Araby Al-Jadeed* (2022–2023).

Alongside her journalism career, Dima is an internationally recognized novelist. Her short story collection *Tafasil (Details)*, *Dar al-Adab*, 2007) was published in Arabic and later in German translation. Her first novel, *Al-Kursi (The Chair)*, *Dar al-Adab*, 2008), was followed by her critically acclaimed novel *Al-Khaifoun (The Frightened Ones)*, *Dar al-Adab*, 2017), which explores fear as a central mechanism of dictatorship.

The Frightened Ones was shortlisted for the 2018 International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF) and has been translated into more than ten languages, including English (Harvill Secker / Knopf), French (Gallimard), German (Blessing), Dutch, Italian, Swedish, Turkish, Polish, Norwegian, and others. Wannous was also selected for "Beirut 39," the Hay Festival's project celebrating the most promising Arab writers under the age of 40.

Research Seminar

Knowing the Psyche in the Middle East and North Africa (20th and 21st century)

In collaboration with the ANR Project Saha

This seminar reflects on new scholarship about the psyche as object of knowledge and care in the Middle East and North Africa. It aims to highlight a polycentric approach to the history of psychiatry, psychology, and psychoanalysis. Thus, by focusing on the 20th and 21st centuries, it looks at these dynamics in post-independence states in their historical depth. It also fosters a conversation between studies of what is usually known as medicine, religion and popular knowledge.

Sessions with social science researchers and mental health professionals will explore such subject matters as knowledge production, actors' trajectories, health policies, practices of care, and representations – all elements of a regional history of norms that relate to interiority and mental health.

This session is part of a cycle co-organized with the project SAHA (ANR/IFPO). SAHA aims to study the structuring of public action in the field of mental health in the context of war and multi-sectoral crisis in Lebanon and, more generally, in the region. The aim is to understand how and in what terms the right to mental health is defined and constructed when political, social, and economic inequalities permeate every aspect of daily life for the majority of the population, and when war is a constantly renewed possibility. To this end, this research programme explores ordinary social experiences and everyday practices relating to mental suffering and care.

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