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Trauma and Insecurity in Hanan al-Shaykh's *The Story of Zahra* (1980)

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Abstract

The themes of insecurity and trauma in literature have been widely linked with war narratives. In their war novels, Arab novelists seem mainly concerned with exploring the traumatic effects of wars on individuals' internal and external experiences. In her 1980 novel *The Story of Zahra*, the Lebanese novelist Hanan al-Shaykh captures the way the Lebanese Civil War and sex engender feelings of trauma and insecurity that thwart the personal growth of the female protagonist Zahra. The novelist allows us to delve deep into the inner workings of the heroine's mind to grasp how her developed sense of insecurity leads to her inexorable mental and physical destruction. As such, drawing on Judith Herman's Trauma theory, this paper aims at showcasing how war when interconnected with sexual and domestic violence can destroy the psycho-social aspects of women's existence. Zahra develops a sense of social and psychological insecurity as a result of her internal struggle with finding a place for herself amidst the chaotic warring political landscape of Lebanon. Inescapably, Zahra ends up a victim of her uncontrolled insecurities and traumatic experiences. Thus, the personal story of Zahra illustrates how women are the main victims of both political and domestic/ sexual violence in the context of war.

Key words: War narratives; Lebanese Civil War; traumatic experiences; psycho-social insecurities; mental and physical destruction.