

# **‘How to assert but not confront?’: An Analysis of Mary O’Donnell’s *Where They Lie* from the Perspective of Pluralistic Trauma Theory and Transculturalism<sup>1</sup>**

*José Manuel Estévez-Saá*

**Abstract:** Neither the Peace Process nor the Belfast Agreement in Northern Ireland has been able to successfully exorcise all the haunted and haunting voices from the times of the Troubles. Mary O’Donnell’s recent novel, *Where They Lie* (2014), focuses on the painfully silenced stories about ‘the Disappeared’, their families and friends.

The present article reads O’Connell’s novel from the critical perspective offered by trauma studies (taking into account both classic trauma theory and the more recent contribution of pluralistic trauma theory), and deploys the importance of considering the fictional treatment of transgenerational traumas.

The question of the “Disappeared” in Northern Ireland is deployed in the context of contemporary Ireland, and O’Donnell’s novel dwells as well on current relationships and exchanges between Northern Ireland and the Republic. At a given point in the novel, a seminal question is posed by one of the protagonists, ‘How to assert but not confront?’ (215); and the present research maintains that O’Donnell’s message should be interpreted from the prism of transculturalism (McLeod 2011, Gilsenan Nordin et al. 2013, Dagnino 2014), since transcultural policies offer an ethical alternative to the treatment of political and cultural conflicts, and an opportunity to learn to live with the traumatised other.

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