



Disponible sur
JA3P

Journal Africain de Psychologie et Psychologie Pathologique
ISSN: 2960-7027 / e-ISSN: 2960-7035
site web: <https://ja3p.com/journal> / e-mail: infos@ja3p.com
BP: 01 BP 6884 CNT Ouaga 10040 Ouagadougou
Burkina Faso



Article original

Analysis of Collective Trauma of Women in Donal Ryan's The Queen of Dirt Island

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Pour citer

Kaboré, A., & Ouedraogo, W.-W. J., (2025). Analysis of Collective Trauma of Women in Donal Ryan's The Queen of Dirt Island. *Journal Africain de psychologie et de Psychologie Pathologique*, 1(1), p.159-172. [Numéro spécial: Terrorisme, psychotraumatismes des personnes déplacées internes et remodelage identitaire dans les pays du Sahel]

Mots clés: Trauma, resilience, traumatic events, women, Donal Ryan.

ABSTRACT

This study critically analyses Donal Ryan's *The Queen of Dirt Island* (2022) from the perspective of collective trauma, trauma experience, its destructive effects and the strategies of resilience. It draws on a mixed approach, combining two literary critical theories, that is, Cathy Caruth's and Michelle Balaev's trauma theories and Ann Masten's Resilience theory. It reveals how trauma is represented and experienced in the novel individually and collectively, how trauma affects the characters' psyches and lives in a destructive way. It also shows the resilience mechanisms developed by the characters to overcome their traumas. The study highlights that in Donal Ryan's novel *The Queen of Dirt Island*, four generations of women face pangs of traumatic events which drastically affect their emotional and psychological states but they jointly manage to thrive, which may lead readers of this literary work, especially those victims of terrorism in the Sahel region and in conflict zones worldwide, to avail of the same resilience mechanisms in their handling of their traumas.

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<https://doi.org/10.2025/ja3p.v1.s1.8>

RÉSUMÉ

La présente étude est une analyse critique de *The Queen of Dirt Island* de Donal Ryan sous la perspective du traumatisme collectif, l'expérience du traumatisme, ses effets destructifs et les stratégies de résilience. Elle s'appuie sur une approche mixte qui combine deux théories de critique littéraire, à savoir les théories du traumatisme de Cathy Caruth et de Michelle Balaev puis la théorie de résilience de Ann Masten. Elle révèle comment le traumatisme affecte le psychisme et la vie des personnages de manière destructive. Elle montre aussi les mécanismes de résilience que les personnages développent afin de surmonter leur traumatisme. L'étude souligne que dans *The Queen of Dirt Island* de Donal Ryan quatre générations de femmes font face à d'extrêmes situations traumatiques qui affectent gravement leurs états émotionnels et psychologique mais celles-ci se démèlent solidairement pour s'en sortir et s'épanouir ce qui peut inciter les lecteurs de cette œuvre littéraire, principalement les victimes du terrorisme au Sahel et dans les zones de conflit de par le monde, à profiter des mêmes mécanismes de résilience dans la gestion de leurs traumatismes.

Dominated by stories of loss, precarity, troubles and vulnerability, Donal Ryan's *The Queen of Dirt Island* (2022) is set in the 1980s. The novel focuses on the lives of four generations of women who face serious and various troubles from the death of a son, a husband and a father to patriarchal social pressure. The women had to fight for their survival not having to rely on anybody to protect, care and rescue them. The women face specific traumas to which other people show sympathy and empathy. This situation leads to collective trauma experienced by all the four generations of women. This paper aims at exploring how trauma and resilience theories can be dually applied to Irish literature, in general, and, particularly to *The Queen of Dirt Ireland* by Donal Ryan, to relevantly reveal trauma representation patterns, trauma destructive effects and the characters' coping strategies. It is of utmost importance to use literary theories in order to highlight the social function and message that literary works convey in order to satisfy the needs of society. This paper showcases the therapist's role of Donal Ryan's selected work in its capacity to recollect the Irish people's suffering so as to offer remedies to psychological wounds and to provide readers with resilience strategies in the handling of their traumas. A definition of key terms and theories will precede the in-depth analysis of the selected novel.

Understanding trauma and resilience

Engaging with trauma theory

Initially, trauma is a concept used in the medical domain. It refers to physical pain or injury before the 1860s. During the industrial revolution in Britain, severe accidents known as the railway spine occurred and wounded the victims beyond the physical level. Thus, the concept of trauma started to be used in reference to psychological wounds (Eilefson, 2015, p. 5). It is practically in the 1890s with the rise of psychoanalysis that the use of trauma as a psychological concept was reinforced.

The necessity to understand the suffering of war veterans during World War I strengthened and consolidated the psychological use of the concept of trauma by medical professionals,

psychologists, psychoanalysis critics. In the quest of the knowledge on trauma, each scientific branch sketched a definition to the concept of trauma to confer it a specific meaning. New concepts related to trauma were coined such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, shell shock, etc.

As highlighted by Beata (2014, p.33), a difference is to be made between the meaning of trauma as it is conveyed in psychiatry and sociology, in the field of memory studies, and the trivialized meaning used in literature, mainly in the domain of trauma studies. In this perspective, trauma theorists, such as Cathy Caruth and Michelle Balaev proposed a definition of the concept of trauma. For Caruth (1996, p.11) basing on the Latin origin, *traumatos*, of the concept of trauma, it can be defined as “an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena”. According to Balaev (2008, p.150), trauma is “a person’s emotional response to an overwhelming event that disrupts previous ideas of an individual’s sense of self and the standards by which one evaluates society”.

These two definitions of trauma reveal that trauma has destructive impacts on individuals by affecting their psycho-emotional lives and their interactions in the society. Therefore, trauma could be defined as an overwhelming situation which psychologically wounds a person, a group of people or a community exposed to a specific situation.

Cordner (2014, p. 8) also defines trauma as “an event or series of events that overwhelm the individuals or community to the extent that it remains difficult to process, thus fracturing the identity”. This establishes the point of trauma stratification into individual trauma, collective and or intergenerational trauma.

Individual trauma is perceived as personal or interpersonal trauma which an individual experiences alone. In this perspective, Shoukat et. al. (2021, p. 118) draw on Cathy Caruth’s understanding of trauma to account that individual trauma makes a person stuck at a point and mingle his past and present and causes impairment of the individual consciousness and language which result in the person’s inability to realise what happens to him/her and to express his/her feelings.

Collective trauma, as approached by the American Psychology Association (2024, p.1), refers to “an event or series of events that impact not only one person but also a group of identified or targeted people. Collective trauma usually refers to traumas rooted in oppression or discrimination toward a minority group by a dominant group...”. From these perceptions of individual and collective traumas one can conclude that the traumatic event or situation can cause individual trauma when the effect is limited to a person or is performed on a single individual and it becomes collective trauma when it goes beyond a single individual scale to affect a whole group of people, or a community, or a nation.

By discussing the trauma theory, it is worth mentioning that a decade after the concept of trauma was trivialized to be used in trauma literary studies, that is in the 1990s, critics from different schools worked in order to elaborate a theory of trauma which would be used autonomously. According to Luckhurst (2006, pp. 497-500) there were four trauma theory schools. First, there was the Freudian psychoanalysis school where the critics developed a model of trauma subjectivity for the analysis of the effects of trauma on the memory. Next, there was the feminism school which elaborated a trauma theory for analysing trauma resulting from physical and sexual abuse. There was also the New Historicism school where the critics shaped a trauma theory intending to examine historical narratives to reveal the lost, the silenced, and the repressed in the traditional theories for bringing recovery from those traumas. Finally, there was Yale School, the most prominent trauma theory school from which came the pioneer of trauma theory, Cathy Caruth, along with Shoshana Felman and Geoffrey Hartman. They elaborated a trauma theory which can be used autonomously from psychoanalysis. Their trauma theory model is concerned with understanding the question of trauma representation in

fiction, trauma experiencing paradigms, the limits of knowledge of trauma by emphasising on trauma unspeakable and the unknowable nature of trauma.

Cathy Caruth wrote books such as *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) and *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996) in which she discusses in detail the contours of their model of trauma theory. The Caruthian trauma theory holds that “trauma is an unrepresentable event that revealed the inherent contradictions within language and experience.” (Balaev, 2018 p. 363). This model of trauma theory aims at addressing the issues of trauma representation in fiction, how to disclose trauma in what is not spoken and not known. In *Trauma: Explorations of Memory* for example, Caruth (1995) shows clearly the intent of her theory which is to examine the effects of trauma on the human psyche, how trauma eludes communication and goes beyond language processes (p. 4). In addition, Caruthian trauma theory tends to highlight the fact that trauma effect is latent, unassimilable and returns to haunt the survivors later on. However, the Caruthian trauma theory lies within the boundaries of neurobiological trauma and psychoanalysis, studying the psychological reactions to trauma, focusing on the discourse of trauma to discover what is not expressed and unknown and crediting less attention to events like the historical, political, and social realities that are contained in the fictional works.

This gap gave rise to a second wave of trauma theory, known as the pluralistic trauma theory, developed by Michelle Balaev. This pluralistic theory agrees with the Caruthian theory on the aspects such as the overwhelming and latent nature of trauma because it holds that “trauma creates a speechless fright that divides or destroys identity” (Balaev, 2008 p. 149). However, the pluralistic trauma theory claims that the examination of trauma must take into account the cultural context in which trauma is experienced. That cultural context includes the geographical places, time period, the social realities and the history involved in a fictional work.

These aspects give insights permitting to understand the trauma experienced by the individuals and the community. In this way, as clearly stated by Balaev (2018), the pluralistic trauma theory “relies more heavily on the external stressor to show that trauma occurs in specific bodies, time periods, cultures, and places, each informing the meaning and representation of traumatic experience” (p. 366). The pluralistic trauma theory comes as a complement of Caruthian trauma theory in linking together trauma experience, language, knowledge and the social significance of trauma. This allows us to consider, in trauma investigation, multiple ways of trauma representation in fiction. Therefore, this paper considers the perspectives given by both the Caruthian and the pluralistic trauma theories to analyse trauma in *The Queen of Dirt Island*.

Theorising resilience

Resilience studies were instigated by World War II. During this time of hostilities, scientists from a wide range of fields like scientists, clinicians, sociologists, psychologists, scholars, researchers, etc. were preoccupied by the quandary of the children exposed to the atrocities of the war, such as bombings, death, starvation, genocide, displacement and so on (Masten, 2014, p.4). From that time, researchers from all the fields aforementioned tried to find an appropriate definition to the concept of resilience. So, the concept was approached differently and it has been difficult to find a single definition to the concept as it is acknowledged by Bertsia and Poulo:

It is obvious that the definition of Resilience has not been a fixed and firm one over the decades. Through plenty of definitions an effort has been made to provide a better understanding of the term. Every single one of them has adopted a different point of view. So, one can easily realize that the concept is extremely

complicated and all these definitions have both common characteristics and significant differences. In fact, the definition of Resilience is not a simple task, as it constitutes a complex and broad concept which can usually be mixed up with other terms. (2023, p. 2).

In spite of this difficulty, one can draw on the etymology of the concept for sketching a definition. The term “resilience originates from the Latin word resiliens, which refers to the pliant or elastic quality of a substance” (Ledesma, 2014, p. 1). Many of the definitions can be found on this etymological ground. Among many other definitions, there is Cloete and Mlambo (2014) who define resilience as a “dynamic process wherein individuals display positive adaptation despite experiences of significant adversity or trauma” (p. 93). For Ledesma (2014), resilience is “the ability to bounce back from adversity, frustration, and misfortune” (p. 1). And van Breda (2018) sees resilience as “the capacity to rebound from adversity strengthened and more resourceful” (p. 3). It appears from these definitions that resilience is the adaptation abilities that individuals develop to survive and respond to life hazards, traumatic events or adversity.

In the same line, Masten (1991), a prominent author of resilience studies, with other researchers point out that resilience can be described by three phenomena, such as good outcomes despite high-risk status, sustained competence under threat and recovery from trauma (p. 426). Therefore, resilience is determined by psycho-emotional strengths and processes which permit an individual who faces adversity, trauma, tragedy and other stressful situations to have capacity or the competence to keep up and get back to his/her normal or even to a better state of life after times of crises.

Based on these miscellaneous understanding and definitions of the concept of resilience, scientists of many disciplines shaped resilience theories in order to meet the need of understanding how trauma of individuals and how people adapt to adversity in a troublesome world marked by pandemics, armed conflicts, natural catastrophes, etc. With the pioneers of resilience studies such as Norman Garmezy, Michael Rutter, Emmy Werner, all directly implicated or impacted by World War II, resilience at its beginning was concerned with children who faced bombings, death, starvation, genocide, concentration camps... during war time. It was also conscribed in domains such as psychology, psychotherapy and medicine. Later on, research on resilience expanded to the other disciplines with an emphasis in social works.

As any other theory, resilience theory also evolved through time and changed its focus proportionally to the evolution. So, the contemporary resilience theory aims at understanding profoundly the intrinsic biological mechanisms of resilience at work in individuals' lives who are exposed to the various traumatic situations of the twenty-first century (Liu et al., 2018, p.1). It is in this respect that critics like Southwick (2014) encourage resilience researchers to focus on evaluating and teaching methods to enhance resilience rather than allotting a great deal of time to examine the negative consequences of trauma (p. 2). Southwick has been preceded in this claim by Cloete and Mlambo (2014) who suggest a combined application of trauma and resilience theories to literature. They contend that “trauma theory and resilience theory should be studied in relation to one another. Traumatised people are able to make resilient choices for their lives and the lives of those who depend on them” (p. 104). This claim strengthens the aim of this paper to analyse on the one hand, the four generations of women's traumas and on the other hand to explore the resilience strategies developed by the women to cope with their trauma and thrive.

Analysis of trauma and resilience in The Queen of Dirt Island

Synopsis of The Queen of Dirt Island

The Queen of Dirt Island is set in the 1980s. It is substantially about four generations of women who live together, linked by tight family relations. The central characters are Saoirse Aylward who lives with her mother Eileen, her grand-mother Nana and she will soon give birth to a daughter named Pearl. The novel opens two weeks after Saoirse's birth, coinciding with her father's death in a road accident. After becoming pregnant, Eileen is dismissed by her parents and she married Saoirse's father (in 1982) when she was two months pregnant. Eileen chose to stay in her widowhood with her mother-in-law, Nana, and to take care of Saoirse without relying on Saoirse's paternal uncles Chris and Paudie but to fight for her daughter's well-being. For that she could rely on Nana's support.

In this determination, she met adversity from the law which urges her not to leave her daughter and go working or having romantic relationships until she is fifteen years old. Otherwise, she will be refused to care for her daughter, Saoirse. Nana leaves her sons and spends all her days with Eileen at her house and eventually finds accommodation in Eileen's and the three of them lived together. Eileen also had to resist several men's advances, even her deceased husband's brother, Chris, who proposes to marry her. She categorically rejected any man's proposition. Worse, Eileen has to cope with her own brother's, Richard, wickedness. He refused to let Eileen pay proper visit to their parents when they were on their death-beds. Richard also nearly strangles her because of Eileen's share in the family land, "the Dirt Island", which is the most valuable.

The burden of the three women is added with Saoirse's early and unplanned pregnancy. At Saoirse's sixteenth year, she went out with her friends for a party and she accidentally had sex with one of the musicians of the band when they were inebriated. Saoirse gives birth to a daughter named Pearl. This situation becomes a matter of dishonour for them. But Pearl's mother, grand-mother and great grand-mother decided hand in hand to fight for the well-being of Pearl. Not long after that, Saoirse's uncle, Paudie, is arrested and he dies in Prison. As to crown it all, Nana gets a stroke which partially paralysed her and Eileen and Saoirse cared for her till she recovered.

Saoirse starts to have a normal life by meeting Josh and Honey, a couple from the neighbourhood. Honey leaves her husband, Josh, at Saoirse's care and goes back to London. Saoirse and Josh have an affair and Saoirse starts enjoying life and tastes real love. But this will not last long because Josh proposes to Saoirse to write a novel inspired by Saoirse's family life story. Blinded by love, she recorded everything about her and her family for Josh. The day when the novel is printed and loudly read to Saoirse by Josh, their romantic affair splits because Saoirse realised her naivety of letting herself be used by Josh who always keeps good bond with Honey and joins her later on.

Another striking situation that the women meet is when Doreen, Chris's hysterical wife, brings Pearl to a deep pool in the forest where she nearly drowns with Pearl. But fortunately, Chris manages to take Pearl away from Doreen when she lets herself fall in the pool and dies. After this tragedy, Chris pitilessly sold all the family land to Richard without informing Nana, his mother and his sister-in-law, Eileen. Eventually, Eileen exchanges her "Dirt Island" with her marital family land to arrange things. The three women nourished their hope in Pearl's success and sent her to a famous school in London.

Exposure of women to trauma. The four generations of women's exposure to trauma starts from the opening to nearly the end of the novel. And they face trauma from a variety of sources. First of all, the women are victims of a sense of loss. In fact, the death of their relatives traumatises and haunts them. For instance, the trauma is perceptible through Saoirse's

declaration:

Living fathers, then, weren't much of a thing. Better to have a mother who smoked and wore sunglasses even when it wasn't sunny and had long hair, not like the other mothers whose hair was mostly short like their husbands', and a grandmother who was your mother's mother-in-law who walked down to see you nearly every day, and a father who was dead, forever young, sitting on a chair at a table with his own father and all his dead relations... (Ryan, 2022, p.8).

This passage reveals the mourning atmosphere in which they live every day and shows that Saoirse, her mother and her grand-mother can't escape the trauma of being either orphaned or widowed. In fact, all of the women are surrounded by dead people. Nana is traumatised by losing her husband and her two sons. Nana reveals how painful it is to live with the load of losing your beloved one. She sobs:

I don't know in God's name. What must I have done to have those two fine men taken from me?... Saoirse couldn't quite follow her grandmother's words. They felt like a stream of sparkling water that the sun was shining on so fiercely that you couldn't quite see the stream itself but just the light off it, blazing up from the earth and into your eyes, like the stream that ran down from the hills and through the village and into the Callaghs where it met the lake. (Ryan, 2022, p.20)

Also, in this passage one can perceive how speaking about dead relatives makes the character re-experience the sadness and bitterness of death.

As far as Eileen is concerned, the loss of her husband keeps her stuck to her past and she is unable to enjoy life anymore. This leads to a fracture of her identity. Her daughter, Saoirse, notes Eileen's abnormal behaviour and her inability to talk about Saoirse's anniversary or to give her detail about the photographs which were shot a few hours before her father's death. Saoirse reveals this fact about her mother's psychological state when she scornfully says: "She wondered why her mother was so adamant about the memory's falseness... Her husband might have been gone from this world but he was and always would be her husband and that was all there was to it now for good and for glory" (Ryan, 2022, p.4).

In addition to the trauma resulting from loss, the women are traumatised by abandonment. For example, Eileen is a victim of abandonment by her family and this constitutes a source of trauma. She painfully confesses:

How could he do this to me? My own brother. And I adored him, you know, I adored him. I'd have died and gone to Hell for him. How could my family believe such evil things? And Saoirse heard her mother's voice breaking, cracking into pieces that came out of her in a line of ohs, oh, oh, oh. And Nana then, shushing her". (Ryan, 2022, p.10)

Eileen's family rejection and rude reactions to her makes her suffer intensely. She cannot not bear the thought that her biological family can get rid of her and not worry about her. This feeling of abandonment haunts her and makes her weep even though the event took place a long time ago. Eileen's trauma in this case illustrates the latency of trauma which can be re-experienced at any time. Saoirse reveals that her maternal grand-parents waited till she became a teenager before coming and she complains that her mother's family came to disturb her mother's peace and quietude (Ryan, 2022, p.42).

Besides, it is revealed that the women, even though they are vulnerable in their marital and parental status, are not gratified by the tenderness of society; instead, social pressure adds

trauma to their trauma. In fact, Eileen is in trouble because she leaves her daughter, Saoirse, for work.

It was about Mother's job. There was an allegation that Saoirse, a minor child, was being left alone in the house while her mother, a single parent, was working in Thornton's bookmaker's in Nenagh... that wasn't the finish of it. Mother was summoned by letter to Nenagh, to an office by the hospital, where she had to wait on her own while Saoirse was brought to a room by a lady who looked like she was at least as old as Nana.... She was crying because, for the first time in her life, in this office of a woman whose job it was to protect children, she was afraid. (Ryan, 2022, pp.44-46).

This passage reveals how women are harassed by society, the law. Eileen has to answer a call about her care for her daughter. Being a single mother, she is prevented by the law to leave her home alone and/or have a romantic affair until Saoirse becomes mature. So, it was alleged to the children's protection department that Eileen does not satisfy this regulation even though Saoirse was fourteen then. Thus, she goes to answer the summon along with Saoirse who undergoes an examination.

This case causes trouble and trauma to Nana, Eileen, and Saoirse because the outcome of this could have been Saoirse's retrieval from her mother and grand-mother. All of them were traumatised by the sight and presence of Concepta Quirke, the woman who supervises and investigates Saoirse. On Concepta Quirke's visit, Nana bitterly questions her: "Are you Nonie Quirke's daughter? I am, the lady said. And what are you doing going around to people's houses tormenting them?" (Ryan, 2022, p.43). This question shows how the women are traumatised by the case. Also, Eileen reveals that they are permanently under this traumatising social pressure when she questions her guest: "Tell me, Concepta, what's on your mind? What kind of a poison-pen letter did you get this time? Am I a prostitute or a murderer or a gunrunner or what is it now?" (Ryan, 2022, p.44).

Moreover, the three generations of women's traumas originate from land issues owing to the patriarchal society in which they live. As a matter of fact, Eileen faces oppression from his elder and only brother, Richard, who wants her to waive her bequest land (Ryan, 2022, p.122). He goes further to threaten her sister's life by trying to strangle her in her house in front of Nana who is paralysed and stuck on her sick bed unable to help her daughter-in-law. Fortunately, Eileen is rescued by Josh and Saoirse.

Mother's face was purple and her brother's face was white. She was on her back on the floor near the table and one of her shoes was lying near the door and Richard had his hands around her throat and he was making a high, whining sound, a kind of pitched moan, a pulsing woo, wee, woo, wee, woo, wee...and Nana was out of her chair, screaming, Eileen! Eileen! Eileen! Mother was sitting up now, holding her two hands to her livid throat, her eyes bulging and her lips and chin striated with blood. She was making a gurgling, wheezing sound; she was trying to get up, reaching a hand towards her daughter. Saoirse moved finally, down to the bloodied floor, and took her precious bleeding mother in her arms. (Ryan, 2022, pp.175-176).

This passage shows three possibilities of undergoing trauma which is experienced proportionally by the women. There is trauma from victimhood experienced by Eileen being aggressed physically as well as emotionally by her elder brother to gain the possession of the land. This incident reveals how her life was valueless than her possessed land in her brother's eyes. Also, even though she is a widow, her brother is careless and determined to get what he wants by will or by force. Richard's behaviour reveals how women are traumatised in

patriarchal society.

Nana, experienced trauma by being an impotent bystander. Glued to her bed, paralysed, the old woman is screaming by looking at her beloved daughter-in-law being strangled by her brother. Nana's trauma is twofold also; trauma from her inability to rescue her daughter-in-law and trauma from being shocked at the sight of the nearly murder scene occurring nearby her bed. As for Saoirse, she is traumatised as a direct bystander, by seeing her only maternal uncle trying to strangle her mother for a land's sake.

Finally, the women's traumas result from their own performed actions. In fact, the past misdeeds and the events that they experienced turn to haunt them as a ghost traumatising them. Those memories make them relieve the bitter experience. The past memories engender melancholia, jaundice for the women. For instance, Saoirse is haunted by her insane love affair she had with Josh for she sees it as a betrayal of Honey. In fact, Honey by leaving for London left Josh, her husband, with Saoirse, asking her to care about him. Few days after Honey's departure, Saoirse had sex with Josh and fell in love with him. Saoirse's pang of jaundice is revealed through the following passage:

She heard clearly in her imagination, as if she were in the car with them, leaning forward from her seat so that their faces were almost touching, Honey's voice, in a high pitch of anger, saying, Serves you right, you stupid, faithless little bitch, serves you right for trying to steal my man, for thinking you could have him, for stabbing me in the back, you and your stupid heart, trying to give it to someone who didn't want it, he only used you, he used you, and I told him to do it, I told him you'd look after him, and you did, you stupid little girl, you gave him what he wanted, what all men want. An easy fuck. (Ryan, 2022, p.208).

In this passage the past is reflected through the hearing of Honey's sharp and piercing voice of Honey in her imagination which reproaches severely and stabs Saoirse's heart and mind resulting in a bitter trauma. Also, Saoirse is traumatised by her stupidity and naivety when she unfolded the whole of her family history to Josh who wrote it as a novel and wanted to publish it. Saoirse considers that she had been used by Josh sexually and emotionally in order to meet his objective (Ryan, 2022, pp.219 -220). Eventually, Saoirse is traumatised by her daughter's, Pearl, question about her father. This question reawakens her teenage sexual imprudence which led to Pearl conception. Saoirse cannot answer her daughter because she does not know the name nor the place where Pearl's father is. In fact, she accidentally had sex with a musician when she was drunk during her very first night she went out for romance. She woke up that morning naked in an empty van (Ryan, 2022, p.68). All Saoirse knows about Pearl's father is that he is a singer. And that singer had no idea of Pearl's existence. This past reality caught her in a ghostlike situation and haunts her when she is addressed to by her daughter, Pearl:

Pearl was thirteen before she asked about her father...Saoirse told her child her father's name. What? Like the singer? He is the singer. The singer is your father. Saoirse told her daughter word for word the truth...Wow, Mam. So, he has no idea that I exist? And Saoirse shook her head. How is that possible? And Saoirse had no answer, nothing prepared to say to her daughter beyond the bland plot points of the truth. She felt a bilious acid wave of panic rise from her stomach into her throat. (Ryan, 2022, p.231).

Through this conversation between Saoirse and her daughter, Pearl one can see how traumatic Saoirse's past is for her.

In summary, it clearly appears through the above analysis of trauma that even though trauma is undergone somehow by one of the women, it affects the other women's lives as well. They are in a kind of life web which links the four generations of women to one another. Thus,

their trauma is individual, collective and generational at the same time.

Similarly to the characters analysed in this novel, many victims of terrorism and the other conflicts in the Sahel meet most of the sources of trauma abovementioned. For instance, among the refugees, mostly composed of women and children, one can see people who lost many of their family members such as their husbands, fathers, uncles, brothers, sons, etc. sometimes the victims witnessed the killing scenes of their relatives being powerless and passive bystanders. They are certainly traumatised by these murdering scenes or rather by the imagination of what happened to their relatives. Also, many of the victims of terrorism and the other conflicts in the Sahel fled away the hostilities by abandoning everything behind them like their valued belongings, their cattle, their lands, crops, etc. They become bable refugees and deprived of their dignity who have to deal with the trauma resulting from the sense loss that they cannot escape. In addition to their pathetic conditions, many victims of terrorism and the other conflicts in the Sahel, undergo rejection by their relatives who live in more peaceful zones of the countries because the latter assume their inability to carry responsibility of the victims. Others are not accepted in their host societies because of biases concerning the refugees. Obviously, this rejection combined with their past which acts out as a ghost add trauma to their traumas. Eventually, many victims of the crises in the Sahel due to land exploitation; being in their majority farmers, they would need some portions of land to grow crops and once again some are refused land use due to the fact that they are not belonging to the host community. This situation fuels fervently their trauma. In a nutshell, what the four generations of women in Ryan's novel undergo as sources of trauma, are mostly experienced by many victims of terrorism and conflicts in the Sahel.

However, The Queen of Dirt Island does not only reveal the four generations of women's traumatising plight but also their resilience strategies.

Women and resilience strategies The Queen of Dirt Island

The analysis of Donal Ryan's novel in the lens of resilience theory allows to reveal some strategies developed by the women to overcome their pangs of trauma and thrive. As resilience theory in general maintains that it is not the nature of trauma that matters the most but the way in which the exposed individual handles the adversity, Donal Ryan four generations of women managed to handle their trauma.

Firstly, Nana, Eileen and Saoirse developed optimism and determination as strategy to overcome their traumas. As a matter of fact, Eileen, facing the adversity of widowhood, decides not to consider herself as a widow but to keep herself in the bondage of marriage and fight for her daughter, Saoirse. For instance, the passage, "[...] her mother denied that she'd ever entertained a suitor, even for a moment. Her husband might have been gone from this world but he was and always would be her husband and that was all there was to it now for good and for glory." (Ryan, 2022, p.4). In effect, the decision Eileen made results from optimism which makes her hope that the future will be better even if she faces adversity in the moment.

Also, she adds determination to her optimism in order to be able to keep her decision. One more case is that Eileen uses her optimism and determination to wisely turn down her brother-in-law's, Chris, proposal to marry her in order to keep her covenant to be for her husband alone for good and glory. She answers: "I love you dearly, Chris, said Mother. And I'd be a lucky, lucky woman if I was free to marry you. But I'm still in my heart and soul married to your brother and I will be I'd say for all of eternity." (Ryan, 2022, p.24).

These strategies allow Eileen to care about her daughter Saoirse up to fourteen without working and having a romantic affair. Eileen's optimism and determination is measured through her ability to observe the law. This is illustrated in the passage below:

It was about Mother's job. There was an allegation that Saoirse, a minor child,

was being left alone in the house while her mother, a single parent, was working in Thornton's bookmaker's in Nenagh. Mother drew a sheet of paper from her handbag. There's my roster, Concepta Quirke. I only work during school hours. And her grandmother minds her on Saturdays. (Ryan, 2022, p.44).

In fact, as a single parent in charge of a child, she is prevented from leaving a minor child alone and going to work. Otherwise, her daughter will be retrieved from her and placed in a family. Facing this dilemma, she develops another resilience strategy by going to work during the school time of her daughter.

Moreover, the title of the novel, "The Queen of Dirt Island", is semantic regarding the strategies of determination and optimism that Eileen presents throughout the narrative. In effect, one of the biggest adversity and source of Eileen's trauma is her contention with her biological family. Eileen has been abandoned by her close relative since her pregnancy till Saoirse becomes a teenager before they laid eyes on one another (Ryan, 2022, p.42). Eileen was forbidden to go to the parental home for fifteen years and she goes back there for her mother's funerals (Ryan, 2022, p.49). In addition to that, Richard, Eileen's brother, wanted to possess by hook and crook the share of his sister's land heritage, "the Dirt Island", which was the most valuable part of the family land. Eileen's resilience strategy of determination and optimism helps her fight to keep her heritage till she willingly decides to barter it. Richard aggresses Eileen and nearly strangles her because she refuses to sign a document which will give ownership right to him on all the family land (Ryan, 2022, pp.175-176). Due to Eileen's optimism and determination, all of Richard's manoeuvre is fruitless.

Nana also sets as an example of resilience of optimism and determination. After the death of her husband, the death of her second son, followed few years by her eldest son's, Paudie, arrestation and his death in prison, the old woman of the seventies is strengthened by optimism and determination to give a good meaning to her life and be helpful to her daughter-in-law, Eileen, and to her grand-daughter, Saoirse. Addressing her grand-daughter, she states:

Whatever about the future, she said one day, worrying about the past is the hollowest of all things...There's no going back for man or God or any creature that ever lived. We can only go back in our minds and even then, we're going back to something that doesn't exist except the way a dream exists. So, we can forget changing the past and all we can do is look after our present moment, planting good seeds in it so that our next moments might be fruitful. Isn't that right, Saoirse? (Ryan, 2022, p.79).

This declaration of Nana reveals her resilience through optimism which makes her hope for a brighter future even though the present times are hard and the past is black. So, she comforts her grand-daughter and daughter-in-law to keep up and stay strong.

Secondly, the women, in addition to optimism and determination, develop the resilience strategies of agency and hard work. Agency is in fact this ability of not being passive to any situation that happens to one but to undertake some initiatives in order to change one's situation and prosper. Eileen, helped by her mother-in-law and her daughter, Saoirse, uses this strategy combined with hard work to face their challenges and adversity:

Nana approved. Saoirse and the child will need more space... Nana had to concede the point. But still they hadn't the price of an extension and that was all there was to it. Mother sat one evening later that week at the kitchen table with a ruler and pencil and a sheet of paper that nearly covered the entire table, and the sheet was taped in place at each corner. There was a library book open on the sheet, and Mother had her glasses on and she was copying from what looked like a diagram of a house onto the paper, and after four hours or maybe

five she shouted, YES! and she sat back in her chair and lit a cigarette... (Ryan, 2022, pp.95-96).

Mother and Nana pushed their bodies to the limit of their endurance, working and working day after day until the light was gone and the pile of blocks reduced in height as the walls of the room grew higher... By the end of the third week the walls stood, tied and insulated and nearly straight, the roof was on, and the neighbours to a woman were amazed. (Ryan, 2022, p.97-98).

These passages exemplify a case of agency of the three generations of women. There was a need to extend the house so as to make more room for Saoirse and her baby to be born. Yet, they didn't have financial means to pay a bricklayer for the job. So, Eileen converted herself into an engineer assisted by Nana who weakened by the ages and Saoirse with her pregnancy nearly to term. These brave women reveal their agency and hard work which permitted the extension for Saoirse and her baby to be built in three weeks.

One more case of agency is manifested through the way Eileen and Nana handle the land issue caused by Chris. As a matter of fact, Chris, Nana's only living son then, sells the family land to Richard, Eileen's cruel and greedy brother. After this misdeed, Chris leaves the village and is accommodated in the town (Ryan, 2022, p.198). This has been done without informing Nana. This situation worsens Nana's sickness. Amidst this adversity Eileen reveals her agency by bartering her heritage, "the Dirt Island" with her family-in-law farm and returns the land to Nana and Chris:

So, Richard got Dirt Island back and Chris got back the farm. When Nana heard the news, she was silent for a while. Then she nodded slowly and she reached out her hand towards her daughter-in-law. Thank you, Eileen... Nana declared that the miracle that had been worked had extended itself outwards and enveloped her in its magic. She began to spend the best part of her days out of bed, and to move herself slowly around, out to the garden... (Ryan, 2022, p.227).

This passage demonstrates that Eileen's graceful action resulting from her agency helps restore the Aylward family in their dignity, contributes to the recovery of Nana from her paralysis and brings a kind of revival in the Aylward's family.

Thirdly, the women 's resilience is shaped by solidarity, complicity and love. These three concepts are strategies which helped them to overcome all the adversity they faced. Passages such as "it didn't suit Mother, having secrets from Nana", "It was a miracle how they loved each other still", "they're solid wrapped in one another", "They had a way of being around one another that was based on each having a natural grasp of the other's particularities and peccadilloes", "they nursed one another's wounds without ever seeming to do so, they fed one another's spirits", "hearing the names the younger woman would call the older woman",... (Ryan, 2022, p.199), show the women supporting each other to overcome their traumas and thrive. For instance, Nana and Saoirse's solidarity and affection give Eileen solace when she lost her father: "Saoirse went to the kitchen to make tea. Through the archway she saw that Mother was beside Nana now, and Nana's arms were around her, hugging her tight into herself, like a mother would hug a crying child..." (Ryan, 2022, p.170). During Nana's repetitive strokes up to her paralysis, she could rely on Eileen's caring. Nana even decided to leave her home to live with Eileen, Saoirse and Pearl. (Ryan, 2022, pp.143-144). Together the four generations of women practice mutual help, which allows them to overcome and survive from all the traumas they faced. They together meet their objective which is revealed through the success of Pearl. Pearl carries out her studies at Mary Immaculate College and has to further her studies in a training school for becoming a teacher (Ryan, 2022, p.241). This success appears as a symbol of thriving for the four generations of women.

As announced in this aim of the study, this paper is to provide some strategies which the victims of terrorism and the other conflicts in the Sahel to avail these resilience strategies in order to overcome their traumas. Practically, not only the victims but also all the populations living in the Sahel should practice solidarity and love towards one another. Also, the victims of those crises could draw from the determination, the optimism, the hard work and the sense of agency of the four generation of women discussed in this paper. This will help them handle successfully their traumas engendered by terrorism and the other conflicts in order to overcome those traumas and thrive in their lives.

Conclusion

This paper focuses on how four generations of women, central characters of Donal Ryan's novel *The Queen of Dirt Island*, are traumatised. On the one hand, drawing on the trauma theory developed by Cathy Caruth and Michelle Balaev, it is revealed that the women live in a hostile, violent and patriarchal society. The trauma of each woman affects the other due to the fact that they constituted together a life web and they face similar adversities. The analysis showed on the one hand that the women's traumas originate from a variety of traumatic events: widowhood, orphanage, precarity, social pressure, violence, betrayal, etc. So, it appears that they are traumatised through victimhood, by their own misdeeds and by being passive bystanders of traumatic situations occurring to a member of theirs. On the other hand, basing on resilience theory, it is highlighted that despite the hostile world and the adversity in which they live, the four generations of women develop some resilience strategies to cope with their traumas. These resilience strategies range from optimism, determination, agency, love, solidarity, complicity which helped the women to thrive and prosper. Thus, in the twenty-first century world which is dominated by adversity of all kinds such as terrorism, armed conflicts, natural disasters, precarity etc., people can avail of some of the resilience strategies used by the four generations of women in *The Queen of Dirt Island* in order to overcome their adversity and thrive too.

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