

Evocations of poverty in selected novels of Meja Mwangi and Roddy Doyle: a study of literary representation

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Declaration

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own original work, that I am the authorship owner thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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Abstract

The study explores fictional representations of poverty in selected novels of Meja Mwangi and Roddy Doyle, respectively Kenyan and Irish – examining techniques of literary representation and how the two authors make imaginative use of various stylistic techniques and verbal skills in a selection of their texts to achieve compelling representations of poverty. The study recognizes that poverty is one of the most recurrent subjects of discussion in the world, that it is a complex and multifaceted concept and condition and that it affects societal, political and economic dimensions of life. The study considers the (broad) United Nations definition of poverty as: “... a human condition characterised by the sustained or chronic deprivation of the resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights” (United Nations High Commission for Human Rights, 2002).

Rather than suggest that fiction replaces other approaches in the study of poverty, the study calls for a complementary “conversation” between fiction and the social sciences in depictions of the condition of poverty. However, the study notes the advantage that fiction has in its nuanced exploration of the subject of poverty. In fact, fiction reflects social reality in interestingly subversive but also empowering ways – showing a unique way of dealing with difficult situations. Fiction is equipped with the subtle instruments and complex power of literary devices to articulate multiple layers of possible meanings and human experiences and conditions vividly and movingly – in ways that are accessible to a variety of readers. While giving a voice to the voiceless – the poor – narrative fiction opens inner feelings and thoughts of the depicted poor and enables the reader to probe deeply into the inner feelings of characters depicted; allowing the reader to develop a deeper understanding of the condition of poverty, but also allowing the reader to bring his or her interpretation to bear on what is represented.

The five main chapters of the thesis are thematically arranged, but the analysis draws on a variety of theoretical paradigms including but not limited to those of Maria Pia Lara and Mikhail Bakhtin. Significant to the study is Maria Pia Lara’s ideas of literature as a “frame for struggles of recognition and transformation” (Lara, 1998: 7) and of the “illocutionary force” (1998: 5) of literature – its ability to articulate aspects of a human condition (such as poverty) vividly and compellingly. Bakhtin’s suggestion that “language is not self-evident and not in itself incontestable” (Bakhtin, 2004: 332) is important – capturing the idea of a distinctive flexibility of discourse in the novel and rejecting simplistic ideas that there is a single truth concerning a particular situation such as poverty.

Opsomming

Hierdie tesis onderneem 'n studie van literêre voorstellings van armoede in geselekteerde romans van Meja Mwangi en Roddy Doyle, respektiewelik 'n Keniaanse en 'n Ierse outeur. Die analise sentreer rondom die literêre tegnieke waarvan die skrywers gebruik maak en ondersoek hul verbeeldingryke gebruik van verskillende stilistiese tegnieke en verbale kunste in 'n seleksie van hul tekste om sodoende indrukwekkende voorstellings van armoede te boekstaaf. Die studie erken dat armoede een van die mees bespreekte onderwerpe in die wêreld is, dat dit 'n komplekse en veelkantige konsep en tipe lewenservaring is en dat dit by sosiale, politiese en ekonomiese lewensdimensies aansny. Die studie maak gebruik van die breë definisie van armoede soos verskaf deur die Verenigde Volke: "... 'n menslike kondisie wat gekenmerk word deur die langdurige of kroniese ontneming van die bronne, kapasiteite, keuses, sekuriteit en mag wat nodig is ten einde 'n adekwate lewensstandaard en ander siviele, kulturele, ekonomiese, politiese en sosiale regte te kan geniet" (Verenigde Volke Kommissie van Menseregte, 2002).

Insteede daarvan om te suggereer dat fiksie ander maniere om oor armoede te bestudeer, behoort te vervang, stel hierdie studie voor dat 'n komplementerende "gesprek" tussen fiksie en die sosiale wetenskappe behoort plaas te vind aangaande die toestand van armoede. Nogtans meld hierdie studie die voordeel aan waarvoor fiksie beskik in die genuanseerde ondersoek aangaande die onderwerp van armoede. Fiksie reflekteer sosiale werklikhede op interessante, selfs subversiewe maar ook bemagtigende maniere – sodoende manifesteer dit 'n unieke metode van omgaan met moeilike situasies. Fiksie beskik oor subtiele instrumente en die komplekse krag van literêre metodes om die veellagige moontlike betekenis en toestande waardeur armoede gekenmerk word, te artikuleer – op heldere asook aandoenlike maniere wat terselfdertyd weerklank kan vind by 'n verskeidenheid van lesers. Terwyl dit 'n stem verskaf aan die stemloses – die armes – open narratiewe fiksie die dieper gevoelens en gedagtes van die armes en maak sulke werke dit vir die leser moontlik om deur te dring tot die binneste gevoelslewe van die karakters. Op hierdie manier maak fiksie dit vir die leser moontlik om 'n beter begrip van die ervaringswêreld van armoedige mense te bekom, maar word dit ook vir die leser moontlik om sy of haar eie interpretasie te maak van die voorgestelde toestand van armoede.

Die vyf hoofstukke van die tesis is tematies gestruktureer, maar die analise maak gebruik van 'n paar teoretiese perspektiewe wat die van Maria Pia Lara en Mikhail Bakhtin insluit. Lara se idees aangaande letterkunde as "[a] frame for struggles of recognition and transformation" en oor die "illocutionary force" (Lara, 1998: 7, 5) van letterkunde – m.a.w. die mag van literêre voorstellings om aspekte van menslike ervaring (bv. armoede) op duidelike en kragtige maniere uit te beeld – en Bakhtin se suggestie: "language is not self-evident and not in itself contestable" (Bakhtin, 2004:

332) is belangrik omdat dit die kenmerkende buigsaamheid van diskoers in die roman saamvat en simplistiese idees dat daar 'n enkelmatige waarheid i.v.m. 'n komplekse toestand soos armoede kan wees, verwerp.

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Dedication:

To Mama Anna Siri who left too early.

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Introduction

This thesis focuses on fictional representations of poverty. It undertakes an analytical investigation of techniques of literary representation in examining how two authors – Meja Mwangi and Roddy Doyle, respectively Kenyan and Irish – make imaginative use of various stylistic techniques and verbal skills in a selection of their texts to achieve compelling representations of poverty. Poverty is one of the most recurrent subjects of discussion in the world. The (perceived) poverty levels of various regions of the world and of individuals within these regions have a direct bearing on the relationship between these regions/individuals and others. Poverty affects societal, political and economic dimensions of life

Though scores of literary texts portray situations of poverty, there is a relatively small quantity of critical academic studies of representations of poverty from a literary perspective. In an article titled: “Poverty and the Limits of Literary Criticism”, Gavin Jones asserts that poverty has “occupied innumerable ... writers as a literary theme. ... Yet poverty has rarely been isolated as a fundamental category ... [for] critical discourse by literary critics or cultural theorists ...” (Jones, 2003: 2). However, in tandem with other disciplines, literary representations have great potential to unblock inquiries around this and other subjects. A literary study permits an imaginatively alert and wide ranging response to the representation of a subject such as poverty, compared to its representation in texts recording factual or statistical approaches to the topic. Conceding that poverty is complex, with “many faces”, I do not confine my thinking (as Wilson and Ramphele caution) to income and other statistics (though statistics are an important indicator of poverty) or to those “characteristics that appear important to people living within sheltered walls of an urban university” (Wilson and Ramphele 1989: 15). I therefore analyse fictional representations of ordinary but profoundly taxing conditions resembling those described by Mrs. Witbooi, who is quoted in Wilson and Ramphele (1989: 14). She declares: “Poverty is not knowing where your next meal is going to come from, and always wondering when the council is going to put your furniture out and always praying that your husband must not lose his job. To me that is poverty”. The United Nations on the other hand defines poverty (more broadly) as: “... a human condition characterised by the sustained or chronic deprivation of the resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights” (United Nations High Commission for Human Rights, 2002). In my dissertation I explore the subtle, critical and evaluative accounts of poverty composed by the two authors of my choice, bearing in mind that poverty is a condition experienced and understood (and portrayed by the two authors) as relative to its social context.

Meja Mwangi is Kenyan and Roddy Doyle Irish. Forty-six percent of people in Kenya are estimated to live in poverty, figures that are based on the percentage of persons living on less than about seventy-four U.S. cents a day in rural areas, and on less than some 1.4 dollars in the urban

areas (Mulama, 2007). On the other hand, seventeen percent of the Irish population is “at risk of poverty”. This is also called relative poverty or income poverty. It means having an income that is below 60% of the *median* income (the median is the mid-point on the scale of incomes in Ireland). This information gives some indication of the differences but also, similarities in the degree and nature of poverty in the two settings.

The evident disparities but also similarities between these two settings give the study much significance. Though far separate, both countries have at different periods and in different ways experienced not just poverty, but also colonisation. (Ireland occupies an ambiguous position in terms of colonisation.) Ireland emerged from colonisation (at the departure of the British in 1922) with many problems – problems that, as in other previously colonised societies, have persisted. The political, social and economic situations in the two societies represented show certain differences, but also various similarities. In fact, as Jimmy in Doyle’s *The Commitments* puts it: “the Irish are the niggers of Europe, lads. ... An’ Dubliners are the niggers of Ireland ... say it loud, I’m black an’ I’m proud” (Doyle, 1988: 13). The statement assumes that Africans (including Kenyans) and Irish Dubliners are in comparable ‘underdog’ positions. Nevertheless, differences abound between actual conditions in the two countries and (most importantly for the study) in the various representations of poverty by Mwangi and Doyle. The study considers the differences and similarities between the two represented contexts – Nairobi/third world and Dublin/first world. While characters in Doyle’s work are poor in relation to some other members of the fictional Dublin community, the conditions and experiences of poverty depicted in Mwangi’s work are generally much more excruciating – often characterized by starvation, shelterlessness and general sordidness, resulting in a downward spiral in the life of most of Mwangi’s characters. On the other hand, the life of most of Doyle’s characters is shown to follow a slight upward curve. This is partly because in Doyle’s setting, unlike in Mwangi’s, state social security alleviates the burden of poverty. The differences in contexts and conditions ensure that most of Doyle’s characters emerge from experiences of poverty, in spite of their vulnerabilities, strong, resolute, enthusiastic, high-spirited, and feeling relatively more secure on an emancipatory journey, while most of Mwangi’s characters are pitifully shattered by an encounter with excruciating forms of poverty.

The study addresses the questions: How do imaginative features of the chosen texts allow these literary representations to contribute meaningfully and uniquely towards a greater understanding of the complex and relative notion of poverty, and what are the critical issues around the subject of poverty that the studied literature opens up for inquiry? The study consequently concentrates on those features of these fictional texts which challenge, expand or give credence to different types of social theory concerning poverty. The detailed analysis of the works selected for study will pursue the following goals:

- exploring the broad imaginative strategies that the two writers employ in depictions of poverty;
- investigating how the writers mediate a more intricate understanding of aspects of poverty, challenging certain established and simplistic views concerning poverty;
- exploring the functioning of techniques of literary representation such as dialogue, scene-setting and metaphors in portraying poverty;
- investigating the characterisation of the emotional lives of the poor;
- showing how poor people are represented "naturally" in interaction with other persons in an imagined community;
- considering the voices given to the poor to represent their situation in the chosen texts;
- exploring connections (as depicted) between different dimensions of poverty – material, moral, psychological, spiritual and social;
- examining depicted responses of the poor to their situation as well as attitudes of the societies represented towards the poor;
- examining how literary representations complement, enrich or complicate knowledge bases built up in other fields concerning poverty and its attendant factors.

A selection of theoretical paradigms will be brought to bear on particular features of the literary texts. These include aspects of social theory comprising theories of crime; theories of political economy; urban sociology theories as well as discourse and narrative theory; selected theories on literary analysis, a selection of postcolonial theory; gender theory; and (to a very minor degree) theories of the subject. While literary critics have studied different aspects of Mwangi and Doyle's works, none has isolated evocations of poverty specifically for study as is envisaged in the scope of this study. Therefore, while this study is indebted to earlier studies on Mwangi and Doyle's works, it also differs from them in terms of its central focus and other important respects. While this is not the stage where I explore in any detail the works of literary critics who have studied the literary production of Mwangi and Doyle, two landmark studies stand out and deserve a brief review because they undertake a comprehensive study of works by Mwangi and Doyle respectively. These are Lars Johansson's *In the Shadow of Neocolonialism: Meja Mwangi's novels 1973-1990* (1992) and Ulrike Paschel's *No Mean City: The Image of Dublin in the Novels of Dermot Bolger, Roddy Doyle and Valmulkins* (1998).

In his full-length study of Mwangi, Johansson (1992: 13) makes the argument that Meja Mwangi whose literary "productivity stands out in the Kenyan literature in English" has, with remarkable vitality, treated all the thematic areas that have found expression on the Kenyan literary scene since independence in 1963. Johansson proceeds with a detailed delineation of the three broad but key thematic directions that (he suggests) Kenyan fiction in general and Mwangi's work in particular have followed. These include: the exploration of traditional and rural society against the emerging

modern society; an examination of the Emergency in the 1950s during which the Mau Mau was defeated by the colonial power in collaboration with African Kenyans, and thirdly the study of the modern urban environment in isolation from the rural hinterlands (Johansson, 1992: 12). Clearly, Johansson's study covers a broad array of themes while mine has as its central focus evocations of poverty. It is hoped that limiting the scope of this study allows for depth. However, like Johansson's (as I show more clearly later in this introduction), my study is informed by Bakhtinian concepts of discourse theory. As in the case of Johansson's study, this thesis applies Bakhtinian theory on discourse – exploring how it shapes one's understanding of the different discursive positions advanced on the subject of poverty in the fictional works that are studied. Johansson for his part draws on aspects of Bakhtinian theory to examine the issues listed above and more specifically, the question of land in Kenya.

Ulrike Paschel's *No Mean City? The Image of Dublin in the Novels of Dermot Bolger, Roddy Doyle and Val Mulherns* is a useful study of Doyle's fiction. Although it focuses specifically on depictions of setting in these authors' works, a variety of pertinent thematic points emerge from the study of Dublin, albeit with little substantial study of any of the many subsidiary themes that are explored. It presents the argument that Dublin is "a city full of contradictions". On the one hand, it is the capital of Ireland, on the other hand it is seen as "un-Irish"; in it, one finds attitudes that are at the same time foreign and not foreign; it is a city where its inhabitants demonstrate a "fierce pride in being Dubliners on the one hand and on the other hand show disregard for the city's architectural heritage"; it is a city where "[t]he gap between rich and poor is constantly widening" and it is a city with "the reputation of being a very friendly city ... but at the same time it is also the city with the highest crime rate in Ireland" (Paschel, 1998: 6). These are the kinds of contradictions that Paschel explores in Doyle's works and in the works of the other two authors that she selects for study. One sees only muted commentary on representations of poverty in Paschel's study, while the theme of poverty is central to the exploration of representation in my study. For the obvious reason that it predates them, Paschel's work unlike this study does not discuss two very important texts in Doyle's literary repertoire – *A Star Called Henry* (1999) and *Paula Spencer* (2006). Although Paschel's study is different in design, conception, approach and most importantly, focus from mine, I draw on it for a fruitful exploration of the kinds of complexities and ambiguities constituted in depictions of poverty in Dublin.

My research focus is predominantly literary, whereas most critical texts on the subject of poverty are by social scientists. Yet "literature and the social are related to each other because they mutually mirror systematic heterogeneities that manifest themselves as constellated and reconstellated thresholds" (Quayson 2003: xxxxi). In this study I take seriously the point raised by Quayson – exploring ways in which literature and social sciences intersect but also diverge and how they complement and challenge each other in engaging with a pertinent socioeconomic issue

such as poverty. While in this introduction I do not discuss the many social science texts that inform this study, the contributions of one landmark study stands out – an article eloquently titled “Fiction of Development: Literary Representation as a Source of Authoritative Knowledge” by David Lewis, Dennis Rodgers and Michael Woolcock (2008). In it, these three social scientists explore differences between fiction and social science, but most importantly for this study, indicate how new and compelling meanings could be derived from a “conversation between” the social or “factual” and the fictional depiction of a subject such as poverty. In reading the fictional texts, I investigate how subjective knowledge is mediated by the fictional representational form. Considering the point that Lewis makes, that “the line between fact and fiction is a very fine one”, I interrogate the view that “there can be significant advantages to fictional writing over non-fiction” (Lewis et al. 1998: 198). It would be simplistic and perhaps arrogant and even dismissive of the contribution of the nonliterary disciplines – in opening up understandings of poverty – if one wholly embraces the idea that Lewis et al. advance concerning the advantages of literary fiction. However, the works of fiction that I study clearly illustrate “the value of taking literary perspectives on developmental [and social issues such as poverty] seriously” – indicating that “all knowledge of reality is unavoidably subjective but also that it is inevitably mediated by the representative forms that describe it” (Lewis et al. 198-199). This suggests that we apprehend a topic such as poverty differently – one might say, “experientially” – by encountering literary rather than social science (textual) representations of it. The novels that I study provide “readers with an immense variety of richly textured commentaries on man’s life in society, on his [or her] involvement with his fellow-men”, allowing for “an intensity of perception” (Lewis et al. 1998: 202) and a balanced and compelling understanding of the condition and experiences of poverty. Without negating the importance and significance of the social sciences in opening up sophisticated understandings of the subject of poverty, and aimed at different “audiences” than individual readers, the literary fiction that I read has the advantage of “nuanced understanding and detailed depiction of poverty” but also “enjoy[s] a freedom of fabrication that allows it to present ... [the] unbearable hardship [that accompanies poverty in a manner that] ... manages to entertain” (Lewis et al. 1998: 206) while also having the possibility of shocking the reader into action or at least conscientising him/her. As Lewis, Rodgers and Woolcock write, the privilege of fictional creativity allows works such as the novels under study in this thesis to “transcend [their] difficult, even unattractive subject matter [poverty] and [to] edge towards a universal appeal based on a kind of humanism” (Lewis et al. 1998: 207). In fact, John Marx in an article titled “Failed-State Fiction”, suggests that a key representational advantage of fiction is “... giving crisis a human face ... offer[ing] a humanizing counterpoint to the cold statistical calculation” of the social sciences (Marx, 2008: 598-599).

I would like to emphasise the point that the discussion above – on the relevance of fictional representation – should not be misinterpreted as implying that the study of fiction in its exploration

of poverty can or should replace approaches to it in other disciplines. Rather, my study explores how “fictional forms of representation can be valuably set alongside other forms of knowledge” (Lewis et al. 1998: 208), or rather, whether “a richer and ‘truer’ perspective on the experience of [poverty] ... is achieved by holding the insights and imperatives of literature, social science and policy making in tension with each other ...” (Lewis, et al. 1998: 210 emphasis in original) – creating a conversational space for literary fiction and social science. In the thesis, I generally consider how analyses of literary representations of poverty can be used to respond to and create the opportunity for a reinterpretation of social theories, and for this reason I make many references to a considerable body of social science publications on the topic.

Like Lewis et al., Martha Nussbaum in her book *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (1996) makes a case for the distinct potential of literature to offer profound and compelling portrayals of human conditions. As a review on the cover of her book states, she “argues elegantly that the novel, by engaging our sympathy in the contemplation of lives different from ours, expands our imaginative capabilities so we may better make those judgments that public life demands of us” (Nussbaum, 1996). As a scholar of classics and ethics, Nussbaum approaches the subject of the relevance and potential of literature in the study of socioeconomic issues from a disciplinary and theoretical angle that is different from that of Lewis et al. described above – though making points that (like those in the text by Lewis et al.) inform this study in terms of how one delineates the value of fiction in depictions of socioeconomic issues such as poverty. Nussbaum postulates a Dickensian facts-and-figures character – an economist and “public man” whom she names Mr Gradgrind – with whom to stage a debate. She agrees with him that literature “is subversive”; “dangerous and deserving [of] suppression” (Nussbaum, 1-2). Yet, rather than seeing the examples of the use of the literary imagination (in this study) as being in contest with what Nussbaum conceives as “its rivals” (Nussbaum, 1996: 4) – social scientific thought – I see literature as being complementary and in conversation with the social sciences in depictions of conditions such as poverty. However, the subversive and dangerous nature of literature as Nussbaum understands it is different from the kind of hostile perception of literature projected in the words that she attributes to the economist. In fact, Nussbaum sees the subversive and dangerous nature of literature as a positive attribute which implies “that it is no frill, that it has the potential to make a distinctive contribution” (Nussbaum, 1996: 2) to the reader’s understanding of a socioeconomic condition such as poverty. In exploring how literature imaginatively and vividly captures a variety of human conditions that result in/from (and that are related to) the subject of poverty, I ask questions similar to the kind of questions that Nussbaum raises in her work – questions such as:

... what sense of life [do the novel] forms themselves embody: not only how the characters feel and imagine, but what sort of feeling is enacted in the telling of the story itself, in the shape and texture of sentences, the pattern of the narrative, the sense of life that animates

the text as a whole. ... what sort of feelings and imagining is called into being by the shape of the text as it addresses its imagined reader, what sort of readerly activity is built into the form. (Nussbaum, 1996: 4)

The kind of questions that Nussbaum raises in the quote above are pertinent to my exploration of the representational features in the literary texts that not only allow the characters to feel and imagine the condition that they depict, but also equip the reader to immerse him or herself in the fictional world of the characters, possibly becoming more sympathetic and compassionate where human suffering is depicted and increasingly critical where human characters are shown to exercise any kind of cruelty towards others – justifying the point that Nussbaum makes, that “[t]he novel is a living form and in fact still the central morally serious yet popularly engaging fictional form of our culture” (1996: 6).

Various discourse and narrative theories inform my reading of the fictional texts – especially ideas delineated by Mikhail Bakhtin in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin* (2004) and by Maria Pia Lara in *Moral Textures: Feminist Narratives in the Public Sphere* (1998). Maria Pia Lara presents her text as a work primarily concerned with feminist issues, yet the arguments in *Moral Textures: Feminist Narratives in the Public Sphere* (1998) invite us to think of ways in which novelistic discourse captures and vividly discloses complex conditions and experiences such as poverty. She points out that narrative in the novel form stands as a “frame for struggles of recognition and transformation” (Lara, 1998: 7) – “narrating a past that best generates a sense of personal identity”; creating “access to a different level of moral reasoning” (Lara, 1998: 96) and offering a sense of “hope for a utopian future” (Lara, 1998: 5). Drawing on these perspectives that Lara presents, I ask questions about how the narratives present evocative, compelling, refreshing (and sometimes sobering and disturbing, or on occasion redeeming) reflections of the lives of poor characters. In the process of speaking about their condition and experiences, some poor characters are shown to acquire greater strength and may develop a survivalist spirit that instills resilience which can in some instances begin to transform a shockingly barren, shuttered, and even sub-human life – often because they refuse to give up on what is frequently their only resource: hope. Yet, Lara’s focus on the struggle for “recognition” (Lara, 1998: 157) also helps one to grasp the bleakness of the lives of those who fail in this struggle.

Maria Pia Lara’s study further describes novels as “narratives in the public sphere” that “address the [powerful] *other* with powerfully imaginative speech” in order to create “different kinds of recognition” (Lara, 1998: 8). Drawing on perspectives such as the one highlighted here, I examine how characters who are shown to be poor are given the narrative power that fiction offers them to challenge and question the status quo in a process that Lara has termed “emplotment” (1998: 93). The perspectives that Lara presents usefully express the focus informing the design and method of this research undertaking. The novels that I study exemplify some of the points that she makes –

showing the “capacity of narratives to disclose previously unseen marginalization, exclusion and prejudice” (Lara, 1998: 8) and they demonstrate, as she has argued, that “emancipatory narratives can themselves create new forms of power, configuring new ways to fight back against past and present injustices, thus making ... transformation... possible” (Lara, 1998: 5). The mere act of giving a voice to poor characters or of the poor claiming a voice and space through the fictional texts to express the emotions and experiences that characterize their lives could be seen as beginning an “emancipatory” or even therapeutic and empowering process that in most cases (especially in Doyle’s works) culminates in the revival and the empowerment of previously disempowered subjects. Lara’s views are very important in my examination of how the poor are (in Mwangi’s and Doyle’s texts) given the power of voice to bear witness to how they have suffered, adapted or survived, but in some instances, how they have made extraordinary choices that enable this survival. I argue that the resilience of the poor characters these authors depict suggests that, rather than weakening, some experiences of poverty (especially when spoken about/narrated) have the potential to make a person stronger, braver, more rational, more objective and more realistic – implying that fictional narratives show a “society’s ways of coping with the past, the present, and a possible, utopian future” (Lara, 1998: 7). Alternatively, I examine how fictional narratives do not only show how society copes, but also enable coping through a process that Lara (1998: 93) has termed “emplotment” – where the poor (to transfer Lara’s gender focused idea to the subject of this study) “have developed a pattern in which the present is the source of future possibilities” and where they “create individual meaning through [inserting] other stories” (Lara, 1998: 93) – rather than mere tales of sordidness and meaningless suffering – into the public sphere. Lara suggests in other words, that fictional representations, if endowed with what she calls “illocutionary force” (Lara, 1998: 93), can change public perception and so affect the social position of those struggling for recognition, for the better. Considering the views on narrative discourse expressed in Lara’s text, I examine the alternative representational possibilities for poverty opened up by the literary texts, particularly in those sections of the texts that subvert, enlarge or embody certain common perceptions of the poor and of poverty – showing how narrative has the potential to empower not just the fictional characters engaged in a fictional narrative act, but also the reader.

Attentive to the claim by Lara (1998: 93) that literary depiction “... gives new meaning to society’s own larger narrative” – fictional and actual – I investigate whether the fictional authors’ literary representations of poverty can be shown to capture salient and actual aspects of poverty in the two broader societies they represent. In this regard, I read the representation of poverty in the fictional Dublin society as reflecting some aspects of the nature of poverty in actual Dublin, Ireland, Western Europe and maybe, the First World in general, and the depiction of fictional Nairobi as representing dimensions of the state of poverty in actual Nairobi, Kenya, Africa or the Third World in general. It would be simplistic to assume that this is always the case, but considering Lara’s view (above), I examine how the fiction gives meaning to the larger narratives of the actual societies

mentioned here. Although some of the depictions (I argue) reflect the actual situation in the two societies depicted, fiction is equipped with the subtle instruments and complex power of literary devices, and can use undertones and “speech-acts” to achieve what Lara has termed an “illocutionary force” (1998: 5) – the ability to vividly and compellingly articulate aspects of the human condition – here, of poverty – using speech-acts that make experiences of this condition accessible to a variety of readers.

I explore how the fictional texts studied in this thesis reveal the “experiences of human complexity ...” (Lara, 1998: 96), using the yardstick of a liveable life as articulated in her statement that:

[e]verybody needs to live an individual life, not that of others, which is to say that everybody must have the right to choose what he or she wants to be, with due self recognition. ... all individuals should be able to live in their own context, in their own historical and social situation, without the risk of losing their integrity as human beings. (Lara, 1998: 104)

Though poor by Irish standards, characters that Doyle depicts as being poor, unlike most of the characters in Mwangi’s work, do find it possible to “live an individual life” – as conceptualized in the passage above. This (I argue) is because the condition and experience of poverty depicted in Mwangi’s works is generally much more excruciating – often characterized by desperate hunger, squalor and lack of shelter, resulting almost invariably in severely limited individual choices, hopelessness and a downward spiral in the life of most of this author’s characters. On the other hand, the life of most of Doyle’s “poor” characters is shown to allow them the space for greater individual choice and resistance to adversity while most of Mwangi’s characters end up broken by the severity of the forms of poverty to which they are subjected. My analysis of the two fictional societies and contexts (aided by views that Lara expresses) reveals that one must exercise caution, sensitivity, open-mindedness and avoid arbitrariness when applying a complex concept of a condition such as poverty (as a descriptive term) to different people, situations and contexts. This is partly because poverty is not just an economic condition – it is multidimensional.

In exploring the literature under study, I take seriously and relate points raised by Lara to the idea of the complex and multidimensional nature of poverty. I examine how characters such as Paula (who appears in Doyle’s *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* and *Paula Spencer* by the same author) as well as The Bathroom Man (in Mwangi’s *Going Down River Road*) have been depicted as being poor, while they also “cut a different kind of moral figure” (Lara, 1998: 94) from some of the other characters such as Denise and Tumo Kudwa in the same works by Doyle and Mwangi respectively. I show that the multidimensional nature of poverty explains why characters such as Paula and The Bathroom Man resist the humiliation of poverty because they have “access to a different level of moral reasoning” (Lara, 1998: 96) from their neighbours and relatives who are portrayed as being better off. Nevertheless, the study seeks to avoid any kind of over-simplified

moral polemics, particularly steering clear of sentimentalizing poverty, or downplaying its mostly destructive effects – focusing more on the nuances of the narratives.

Lara's ideas on the significance of "effective ties and relationships" in situations of adversity are usefully applicable to the way the characters in the novels are shown to rely on social capital to survive adversity. Lara notes (for example) "that the best relations are the product of lasting friendship" (1998: 97) and that "one of the main attributes of moral subjects is that they are not divorced from their effective ties and relationships ... defined in terms of emotional support for other human beings" (Lara, 1998: 101). Focusing mainly on depictions of family and friendship ties in the novels, I explore how poor characters rely on social relations and support systems to survive adversity and how in times of difficulty relatives and friends (especially in Mwangi's works) employ the strategy of talk to "contest and restructure conceptions of subjectivity, notions of morality and expectations about the good life" (Lara, 1998: 4). I argue that it is the balanced but nuanced assessments of people in interaction with others, of human nature, of varying human dispositions and temperaments as well as of varying attitudes and responses to adversity within imagined social communities, that make Mwangi and Doyle's accounts of human conduct worth consideration.

An additional interest of this study is to explore how poverty is experienced differently in the fictional Dublin and Nairobi settings, but also how it is experienced by different categories of persons in each of the fictional societies. One such category is women (as against men) and here, too Lara's theory (which as I mentioned earlier is concerned with gender issues) helps in opening up understanding of the experiences of women in situations of poverty. Lara articulates the view that in situations of adversity such as poverty, "the circumstances of women are considerably more chancy and often more threatening than those of men" (Lara, 1998: 99). I examine how the selected works of literature capture some of the complexities of the route by which women (in situations of adversity) have to navigate a way towards survival through treacherous socioeconomic circumstances. Characters whose experiences illustrate this point include women such as Paula and Veronica (Jimmy Sr's wife) in the Irish setting, as well as Mama Baru and the Bathroom Woman in the Kenyan setting. In addition to dealing with what is shown to be very deplorable material conditions, poor women in Mwangi's work – compared to women such as Paula and Veronica (whose material condition is relatively less deplorable) – have to ensure the survival of their families. While Paula's financial position is relatively much less desperate than the Kenyan women's, unlike the other women in the two authors' works (and more particularly, the women identified above), she is made extremely vulnerable by prolonged marital abuse, her own consequent alcoholism and incidents of drug and alcohol addiction in her family. I examine how she and the other women portrayed in the selected texts, in spite of their "considerably more chancy circumstances" (than men), use their creativity and resilience to survive adversity, arguing

in addition that the less excruciating nature of poverty in Doyle's work ensures that the lives of women in the fictional Irish setting are comparatively less "chancy and threatening" than those of women in the fictional Kenyan setting.

This study is informed by Bakhtinian theory – a theory that is pertinent to the question of how discursive positions interact in a novel, creating the complexity that ensures a balanced representation of social issues. Aided by a reading of Bakhtin's writings in *The Dialogic Imagination* (2004), I investigate how the chosen works of fiction make use of what Bakhtin terms "stratified and heteroglot" (Bakhtin, 2004: 332) narrative language to offer vivid, vibrant and balanced perspectives on the subject of poverty. Bakhtin claims that in a novel, "language is not self-evident and not in itself incontestable ... [adding that i]t is precisely this that defines the utterly distinctive orientation of discourse in the novel – an orientation that is contested, contestable and contesting" (Bakhtin, 2004: 332). This perspective hints at the point that, by placing alternative or even contradictory positions (as held by different characters) in juxtaposition, the "dialogic" novel as Bakhtin calls it refuses simplistic ideas that there is a single truth concerning a particular situation such as poverty, and undermines ideological certainties. I argue in the thesis that even where a character such as Zahai assures Jack that "[y]ou must see the *truths* ..." (Mwangi, 1989: 111 my emphasis), she posits a notion of truth that is too simplistic. Considering the fact that multiple perspectives ("truths") are advanced on the issues narrated in the novels studied in this thesis, claims and assurances of "truthfulness", such as that made by Zahai, rather than bearing witness to any kind of absolute truth, serve as an invitation to the reader to question the implicit assumption that such an absolute truth exists. The novelists, I argue, show reticence around the possibility of an absolute truth – avoiding being seen as upholding an agenda – rather leaving the reader with the liberty to negotiate meaning and to distinguish truth from untruth.

A key function of the examples of novelistic discourse that I examine in this thesis (as suggested above) is how the novelists' skillful juxtaposition of different voices opens up their novels to varied angles of interpretation and layered, complex meanings. An additional dimension of the chosen texts that I examine under this rubric is how varied discourses compete for rhetorical space, or complement each other in a single literary text – ensuring subtle depictions of complex human conditions such as poverty. Bakhtin has suggested that "the novel [form] requires speaking persons bringing with them their own unique ideological discourses" which bear on "another's words, another's utterance" (Bakhtin, 2004: 333). Bakhtin is making the point that characters in a novel actively engage in the "interpretation, discussion, evaluation, rebuttal, support" (Bakhtin, 2004: 337) of each others' discourse, hence preventing static, monologic "truths" from prevailing in such texts. I examine how discursive engagements by characters in the novels shape the reader's interpretation and response to what is narrated. Through discursive engagement, Bakhtin suggests, novelists demonstrate how human beings spend time "consider[ing] the psychological importance

in our lives of what others say about us, and the importance, for us, of understanding and interpreting these words of others” (Bakhtin, 2004: 338). This makes an important point about the central role of language as evaluative social intercourse in the lives of actual persons and novelistic characters. Drawing on Bakhtin’s paradigm, I examine how the vividly articulated narratives concerning experiences of poverty that the reader encounters in the texts emerge precisely because the authors have pulled together various narratives and in fact, rhetorical voices, that deepen understanding of poverty beyond the often single “factual” and statistical voice of the distant and often detached researcher that the reader would encounter in most social science texts on poverty. Where multiple voices are shown to compete for rhetorical space in the novels that I study, I question whether “the voices of those othered by the dominant discourse/forces acquire a new authority” (Bueno, 1996: 192) and whether such acquired “authority” in turn sets these characters on a path towards recovery or survival after an encounter with difficult, even extremely difficult material conditions. Besides describing the interaction of discourse by means of the various voices and perspectives presented in the novels, I show that what sets the works of fiction that I study apart from nonfictional evocations of poverty is what Bakhtin (2004: 260) has described as their sheer “expressiveness, imagery, force [and the] clarity” with which the authors capture the conditions and experiences of poverty. This point of Bakhtin’s resonates with Lara’s notion of “illocutionary force” in narratives – that is, the effective and evocative power of imaginative writing that is required in the struggle for “recognition” of “marginalized groups” and with her view on “the capacity of narratives to disclose previously unseen marginalization, exclusion and prejudice” (Lara, 1998: 8). In other words, I examine how the stylistic uniqueness of the novel as a genre in general but also, the manner in which Doyle and Mwangi in particular employ stylistic elements characteristic of the novel genre, allow the sophisticated, profound, vivid, emotionally arresting, educative and even entertaining depictions of difficult human conditions in general and of poverty in particular.

One interest of this study is to examine how the poor are modeled in the fictional works as subjects of discourse. I am concerned with questions of which characters have the ability to speak about poverty and to ascribe poverty to another, and whether the poor in the represented First and Third World fictional societies are afforded the same narrative space to speak about their condition. Furthermore, I inquire whether the poor characters claim or rather, are given a voice to speak as well as considering the implication of speaking about one’s condition and experiences of poverty.

Although I do not make general use of Judith Butler’s writings in this study, an aspect of Butler’s theory (in the specific passage cited below) regarding precarious lives resonates with my study. In this thesis I examine responses to human life – inquiring whether in situations of extreme material deprivation, poor subjects are characterized as being despicable, even less than human, or more precisely whether an encounter with extreme adversity results in denigration of those who are

exposed to such adversity, pain and “injury”. In exploring this issue, I take seriously some of the points that Butler raises in the passage below in which she suggests that:

specific lives cannot be apprehended as injured or lost if they are not first apprehended as living. If certain lives do not qualify as lives or are, from the start, not conceivable as lives within certain epistemological frames, then these lives are never lived nor lost in the full sense. ... the frames through which we apprehend or, indeed, fail to apprehend the lives of others as lost or injured (lose-able or injurable) are politically saturated. ... The precariousness of life imposes an obligation upon us. We have to ask about the conditions under which it becomes possible to apprehend a life or set of lives as precarious, and those that make it less possible, or indeed impossible. ... it does not follow that if one apprehends a life as precarious one will resolve to protect that life or secure the conditions for its persistence and flourishing ... if we are to make broader social and political claims about rights of protection and entitlements to persistence and flourishing, we will first have to be supported by a new bodily ontology, one that implies the rethinking of precariousness, vulnerability, injurability, interdependency, exposure (Butler, 2009: 1-2)

The questions that Butler raises in the passage just quoted – on the precariousness of some lives – link in different ways with questions I raise in my study: especially the conceptualization of what I will term respect for a subject’s perceived humanity – which Butler conceives as the human potential and capacity to protect or secure the “conditions for ... persistence and flourishing” in other humans, while Lara for her part describes it as a “shared notion of recognition that can be conceived in a larger, transcommunitarian sense” (Lara, 1998: 143). I examine in the thesis whether the depicted conditions of poverty in the novels that I study render the poor vulnerable and defenceless and perhaps even less than fully human (especially) in the eyes of some of the rich characters in the works. I attempt to grasp how the fictional texts present something of the intertwined totality and complexity of human existence – an existence where some of the depicted poor are debased and dehumanised by poverty to a level similar to or in extreme cases, even lower than that of animals. The poor are shown to make dead-end choices – in some instances, in desperation at extreme misery choosing a life trajectory that exposes them to deadly situations in trying to survive. I argue in the thesis that these powerfully affective representations of human precariousness, vulnerability and near bestial modes and states of existence (instances of what Lara calls the “illocutionary force” of the novels) serve as an affective cautionary appeal to humanity to respond urgently to the kind of extreme, dehumanizing adversity that some humans are exposed to in society – fictional and actual. Rather than reading such evocations simply as a criticism of these desperately poor characters, I examine whether the representations of such extreme vulnerability and precariousness function instead as compassionate, sobering and redeeming reflections of the lives of the poor, while directing the satirical gaze towards the rich and powerful who are (in some cases) shown to be indifferent and to lack compassion for the less fortunate.

Differences in power evidently come into play in the social gaps between characters belonging to different strata or classes. By power here, I mean material power, closely linked with social

hierarchies, but also the power of perception or (in Butler's words) the power to "apprehend". This is similar to narrative power which in most cases, the poor and the weak lack or struggle to claim while the rich and the powerful own and exercise it: on and frequently at the expense of poorer subjects. The situation of poor characters that I describe above is what Lara terms the "struggle for recognition". I question whether in the process of perceiving and responding to the poor inhumanely or as being less than human – because their "lives do not qualify as lives" or perhaps because of the lack or loss of humanitarianism, humaneness or Ubuntu – the precarity and vulnerability of some of the poor characters is aggravated, limiting their chances of a full recovery or even survival.

While exploring how literature captures ways in which perceptions of and responses to poor subjects aggravate or minimize levels of precarity, this thesis also explores how nuanced representational strategies allow fiction to "surprise even the trivial and the selfish into attention" (Lewis et al., 2008: 210) – with the potential of invoking compassion for those who (in the fictional and by extension actual societies) find themselves in agonizing and vulnerable situations. While acknowledging how the lives of characters already affected by poverty are made more vulnerable and precarious by the attitude of members of the fictional societies and the low value often placed on these lives, I show in the thesis that the communities depicted by both Mwangi and Doyle are like any other group of humans who are depicted in a particular human condition, shown to exhibit a complex set of somehow intertwined but varied subjectivities and psycho-social dynamics – positive and negative. I show how, though in short supply in some instances, the presence in the depicted human communities of values such as human compassion, integrity and mutual assistance are particularly necessary. I explore aspects of the texts that can be read as simple and yet rational affirmations of humanitarianism – a value that is shown in the novels to be restorative for poor characters. I examine how poor characters are depicted managing, coping and surviving not just because of their personal and individual resilience, but also because they benefit from humane socioeconomic value systems in the fictional communities in which they are shown to live. In Doyle's work, one sees this in the relationship between Paula, her children and her siblings, though in one instance, Paula is indignant at her sister's charitable offer (of a chicken) which she sees as insulting and condescending. In Mwangi's work, one sees this in the sharing relationship between Mama Baru and Mama Pesa – though assistance is mostly unidirectional from Mama Pesa to Mama Baru, because Mama Pesa is more privileged.

I also draw on the writings of some postcolonial scholars in this study. The work of Stephanie Newell, a postcolonial and literary scholar with a focus on Africa, is useful. Two of her works – *Ghanaian Popular Fiction: Thrilling Discoveries in Conjugal Life & Other Tales* (2000) and *Readings in African Popular Fiction* (2002) – though used minimally in this thesis, serve as expository texts concerning African fictional trends, but also offer refreshing perspectives on some

of the realities that postcolonial African writers concern themselves with. The former text discusses the idea of mimicry, creativity and “audience responses in postcolonial Africa” (Newell, 2000: 2). The text points out that

[w]hen metropolitan genres [such as the novel] are absorbed and ‘mimicked’ by consumers ... [postcolonial] theorists ask if we are witnessing another, more invidious form of colonialism, a type of invasion which occupies the very imagination and fantasies of new audiences ... or perhaps ... [whether this] suggests [that] cultural imports from the West are being radically transformed by their performances in new contexts.
(Newell, 2000: 1 emphasis in original)

The views raised in the quote above are important, as I examine in this study how the novel form, without necessarily signaling any type of *recolonisation* as Newell inquires, has been transposed, transformed and adapted to local narrative approaches in Africa – especially if one considers how verbal devices such as proverbs are applied to achieve rhetorically rich narratives that ensure that fiction “... help[s] readers to generate their own explanations [of poverty in general and more specifically,] of personal success, failure and assist[ing] ‘locals’ to make sense of [the local condition and experience of poverty in] an ever globalizing world” (Newell, 2000: 161 emphasis in original). Drawing on views expressed by other postcolonial theorists such as Edward Said and Homi Bhabha, Newell (2000: 1) examines “... the impact of postcolonial migrations upon [local] ideas and ideologies ... [arguing that t]hrough the experience of displacement, ... the migrant takes up a position in the zones ‘in-between’ cultural certainties, introducing doubt into homogenous concepts such as national identity and national history” (Newell, 2000:1 emphasis in original). Newell’s ideas here refer to the actual and not necessarily the fictional, and the migratory direction implied in her theorem is from the postcolonial to the metropolitan society. However, her theory can for example be applied to the fictional situation of Mister Felix in *Weapon of Hunger* who (I argue) occupies a zone of *in-betweenness* as a settler in the postcolonial fictional Kenyan society.

This study also benefits from views expressed in *Readings in African Popular Fiction* (2002), a book edited by Stephanie Newell. With a focus on popular fiction, the contributors discuss the works of a large variety of prominent African writers from North to South and from West to East of the continent – Meja Mwangi included – and the text covers a broad range of thematic concerns, many of which are pertinent to this study. Of particular importance to this thesis is an article titled: “Men and Women, City and Town in Kenyan Novels of the 1970s and 1980s”. In it, Nici Nelson argues that “good novelists produce social descriptions of interest and authenticity to students of society” (Nici 2002 108) and she proceeds to examine issues that I too (though with little detail, as my own focus is on poverty) cover in this thesis. These include representations of urban women such as Wini and the other women that Ben and Ocholla interact with in Mwangi’s *Going Down River Road*; representations of rural women such as Mama Baru and Mama Pesa in *Striving for the*

Wind and representations of rural/urban life – an issue to which I give significant attention in the thesis.

Although I draw on the postcolonial writings of Newell (above) mainly to illustrate the form and concerns of the postcolonial African novel, it should be noted that the Irish “postcolonial” experience and adaptation of the novel form from (for example) the classic Nineteenth Century English novel – with its preoccupation with upper-class families, romances and property issues – deserves mention. Doyle’s focus on poor and working-class Irish people in novels written mostly in an idiosyncratic, dialogue filled style that give the poor the strongest voice could be considered a type of postcolonial writing. It should however be noted that classic Nineteenth Century writers such as Dickens also draw attention to the plight of the poor in their works and give them voice.

The novels of the two authors are analysed as texts embodying ideas, attitudes, perceptions and meanings concerning as well as depicting conditions of poverty and responses to them. This process of analysis involves examining rhetorical and representational features used to make particular readings or reactions possible and compelling – representational features such as characters and characterization; setting, tone and imagery. I analyse how the two authors use these features to achieve the affective power of vividness and evocative resonance or endow the writings with what Lara terms “illocutionary force”. The representational features are identified and analysed as tools used by the authors in portraying the issues which are named in my chapter titles below.

- *One tale, two cities: a study of the Dublin and Nairobi settings in Meja Mwangi’s Going Down River Road (1976) and Roddy Doyle’s The Van (1991).* This chapter undertakes a brief study of the two authors’ use and representation of urban settings, attempting an investigation of some differences and parallels between the depicted Dublin and Nairobi settings and examining the idea of a triangular city – made up of the home, the workplace and the entertainment facility – that is evoked through the medium of language, showing three central points of human activity and engagement, connected to each other by means of the city street, which is also itself an important space of urban human activity in the novels. The chapter focusses on how an evocative description of setting achieves vividness of depiction and enhances literary appeal, but is also an important evaluative, analytical and effective device for making meaning of the condition of poverty in each of the two settings. A discussion of setting in the first chapter presents a background of issues that are subsequently covered in greater detail in the rest of the thesis.
- *Imagining a social reality – poverty: balancing aesthetic features and the real.* In this chapter, I study elements of literary representation in Mwangi’s *Striving for the Wind* (2003) and Doyle’s *The Commitments* (1988). I investigate whether the authors’ literary representations of poverty can be shown to capture salient and actual aspects of poverty in

the societies they evoke, or whether the authors could be read as prioritising the aesthetic aspects of their writing over the former. Studied elements include narrative style; evocations of character or personality; tone (empathetic; humorous; satirical etc.) and implicit themes. I consider how their works open space for a distinctive understanding of the condition, experience and idea of poverty. The two authors evoke varied perceptions of characters in the novels, raising the question whether certain aspects of the characters' personalities are seen as determined by their material conditions. The texts offer varied levels of meaning pertinent to the issue of poverty and underline the position that poverty arises out of a combination of factors. Doyle, like Mwangi, uses setting to transmit pertinent messages about material polarization, inequality and exploitation, thereby impacting significantly on readers' understanding of these and other poverty related conditions and experiences. The reader is likely to find the grossly demeaning and crude quality of the classist rhetoric of some who are rich (especially as reflected by Baba Pesa in Mwangi's *Striving for the Wind*) offensive. I argue that Baba Pesa's conceited feeling of self-importance based on his monetary wealth could invoke the reader's disgust at his depraved personality. The grossly insulting, deliberately insensitive tone in which he addresses poor members of his community appeals to the reader's sympathy for the poor – Baru in particular. The works of the two authors (I argue in the thesis) serve as an expository force, "... help[ing] readers to generate their own explanations" (Newell, 2000: 161) of poverty in general and more specifically, of personal success and failure.

The two works under study in this chapter are in many respects very humorous, and I explore the effectiveness of the device of humour in depicting conditions of poverty in the two texts, examining how the brutally skeptical and amused responses of Juda and of Joe The Lips in particular (in Mwangi and Doyle's two abovementioned novels) balance humour and awareness of the seriousness of the poverty that surrounds them. When characters in the novels are shown laughing at themselves in situations of relative poverty (in Doyle's setting) and in situations of devastating indigence (in Mwangi's work), I argue that the comic stances "celebrate the vibrancy, stoicism and resourcefulness" of these fictional communities (Persson, 2003:47), but also show human societies with (in Mbembe's words – 2001: 148) "an endless exchange of pain and pleasure between agents and victims" of poverty who are in a state of mutual interaction. I examine whether "an increased sense of humour helps [the poor] deal in a more positive ... fashion with a variety of life circumstances and situations" and whether "humor can increase the likelihood of conscious efforts at seeking alternative perspectives to problems" (Abel, 2002), but also, how humour and the other representational devices impact on how the reader makes sense of the depicted conditions and experiences of poverty.

- *Fed up to here? A matter of attitude.* This chapter analyses Meja Mwangi's *The Cockroach Dance* (1979) and Roddy Doyle's *A Star Called Henry* (1999). Mwangi's title is overtly expressive of a condition of poverty as captured in the image of the dancing cockroaches that the human characters in the novel live with, which emblematically represent them. Doyle's on the other hand is sarcastic, questioning whether it is possible to attain stardom when one is exposed to the kind of material misfortune that Henry experiences. Here, attitudes to the condition of poverty will be addressed. This entails an examination of characters' responses to poverty – especially those of the poor themselves. Do they show indifference or resilience, self-pity or resignation (among other attitudes) to their situation? I also examine the attitude of the rich of the represented societies towards the poor and in addition their conceptions of poverty. The fictional narratives do not necessarily guide me towards making a value judgment on the logicity or illogicity, correctness or incorrectness of the positions and responses shown towards each other by characters in the two texts. I consider this to be beyond the scope of the study in any case, and instead examine whether the two authors use the creative space that fiction allows to suggest the complexity and diversity of human experience, attitudes, choices and responses to adverse conditions such as poverty.
- *Telling and showing: rhetorical and descriptive evocations of poverty:* By “rhetorical”, I mean the ways in which speaking characters use oratory and the power of voice to offer competing, compelling and varied perspectives that enable the reader to visualise or otherwise imagine the depicted condition of poverty. By “descriptive”, I mean the vivid sensory (often pictorial) record or account of situations and the depiction of persons and places – using words. I explore ways in which the two representational strategies complement each other in the two texts under study. The study analyses Meja Mwangi's *Weapon of Hunger* (1989) which details the venture of an American musician turned philanthropist into the heartland of an imaginary African society. There, he finds that the population is facing extinction due to excruciating poverty that results from war, natural calamities, human indifference and greed. The dramatically described ventures and encounters that Jack makes and has with all sorts of characters take the reader not just through a pictographic but even what seems a cinematographic portrayal of the condition of “African” poverty.

Additionally, the chapter examines Roddy Doyle's *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* (1998), which depicts the trials, tribulations and most importantly, the resilience and survival of an abused housewife, mother and cleaner of homes and offices. I examine whether, though disguised with fictional subtlety, the text places the commonly unheard voice/perspective of the poor and marginalized at the forefront of narrative rhetoric in order to appeal for sympathy for their plight – in Doyle's text (but I apply the same

question to Mwangi's). Additionally, I explore the authors' achievement of vividly imagined and resonant representations of poverty by studying descriptions of the material conditions of characters and their surroundings. I examine how, through a combined use of different representational devices such as voice, description of settings and actions, the two authors poignantly evoke the presence of poverty in society and in characters' lives. Also, I examine how the characters that they create either claim a voice, or are given one to represent their condition, as well as the range of their experiences and perceptions of poverty. I investigate whether the views expressed by characters in the novels create space for deep, varied and distinct conceptions of poverty, questioning whether the characters are – in the process of voicing their condition and experiences – shown to develop greater understanding of their situation as they strip away the superfluities imposed by what seems the ubiquitous uncertainty created by poverty. Through the description of social and rhetorical interaction between characters, the reader is made to visualise the kind of dramatically tense and complex situations that characterize the lives of the poor.

- *The multi-dimensional faces, façades and markers of poverty*: This chapter examines different forms of poverty – material, moral, psychological, spiritual and social. In it, I examine whether the material condition of poverty is shown as eventually leading to or instead as resulting from the other dimensions of poverty – moral, psychological, spiritual and social. I also examine what/who marks one person or a group of people as being poor (or not) and on what basis such assessments are shown to occur. To examine these issues, I analyse Meja Mwangi's *Kill Me Quick* (1973) and Roddy Doyle's *Paula Spencer* (2006). *Kill Me Quick* chronicles the experiences of two young Kenyans, Meja and Maina. Roddy Doyle's *Paula Spencer*, a sequel to *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* (1996), captures the second part of the life of Paula Spencer who at this stage is a recovering alcoholic. In the chapter, I consider whether and how an approach that considers the multiple dimensions of poverty enables a deeper and broader understanding of poverty. I additionally examine whether in situations where the poor have had an encounter with multiple dimensions of poverty, they are strengthened or shattered – considering how the different contexts of poverty (the Irish and the Kenyan) impact differently on the potential of the poor in these societies to overcome adversity.

My reasons for choosing this research focus are manifold. The interest in poverty flows from my own experiences of poverty in Cameroon and South Africa. The focus on Ireland and Kenya was not, however, my choice because these two societies are in any way epitomes of poverty. Rather, I decided to focus on these two societies because of the awareness of the rich literary productivity that the two societies have seen. Additionally, the two depicted societies are suitably representative of First World and Third World situations (respectively) – permitting a comparison not just of the context of poverty in the two societies, but more broadly, a comparison in general of the First and

the Third World varieties and contexts of poverty. The focus on Mwangi and Doyle's works was influenced mainly by the fact that the subject of poverty is so centrally and forcefully represented in the works of these two authors. They judiciously balance the aesthetic qualities of their novels with convincing depictions of the "reality" of poverty (and related issues). Their fictional renditions of poverty hence allowed for an exploratory, interactive engagement with the topic of poverty and its fictional depiction and assessment, in turn allowing reflections upon the authors' renditions of the dimensions of deprivation experienced by their characters. This is what is undertaken in the chapters that follow.

Chapter 1: One tale, two cities: a study of the Dublin and Nairobi settings in Meja Mwangi's *Going Down River Road* and Roddy Doyle's *The Van*

Just as landscape and space map make the writer, so does the writer impose her map of language on her place, but that neither map is accurate is to be expected, even desired. Language is the ultimate arbiter; by naming a place, gives it life, existence. ... the intimate relationship between language and place, provides us with a literary map. (Aritha van Herk, 1984, 64)

... given that such maps emphasise certain places, people and flows, but suppress others, they encapsulate a particular 'way of seeing'. (Hubbard, 2006:77)

This chapter examines the fictional urban setting of Doyle's *The Van* (based on the compendium edition in which *The Van* is the third of three texts) and of Mwangi's *Going Down River Road* (2003, first published in 1976), examining whether, as claimed by Herman Melville, "all [or more specifically, the two fictional] cities are alike" (quoted in Lehan, 1998: 176). The two communities represented in the novels are in some ways reflections of the macrosocial, macropolitical and macroeconomic environments in which they are located – representing elements of the broader cities of Dublin and Nairobi, the Irish and Kenyan states respectively or perhaps even of the continents of Europe and Africa in general. Quoting Kapuscinski (2001: 271), Floris describes Nairobi as

... a [somewhat shattered] mirror of the world that pushes everything to extremes, where everything becomes exaggerated, excessive, hysterically exorbitant, ways of mediating disappear, nothing can mitigate a situation: you cannot come to a compromise, gradualness, intermediary stages. It is a continuous fight for life or death. (2006: 137)

On the other hand, though Dublin is an up and coming European city, its rapid growth has led to "a rather chaotic, unplanned sprawling, yet bustling city. Those who can, reap the benefits, while those who cannot get left behind, often in pockets of the city where unemployment, illiteracy, and crime are met with increasingly hostile responses" (Kincaid, 2006: 183). These dramatically fast-paced, brutally aggressive and 'survival of the fittest' descriptions of Nairobi and Dublin are captured to varying degrees in the two novels – suggesting that the "landscape images created by authors of [the two pieces of] fiction bear some relationship to the objective landscapes and landscape attitudes of the real world outside literature" (Salter and Lloyd 1977: 4).

The two cities (Nairobi in Mwangi's novel and Dublin, represented by the fictional Barrytown area in Doyle's novel) are also the settings of most of their other works that I analyse in the other chapters of the thesis. As such, this chapter, by discussing setting presents a background of issues that are subsequently covered in greater detail in this thesis. Setting in the context of this study is multifaceted – comprising

the ways in which cities assemble people, things, ideas and resources and distribute these in the city. [Further, urban spatiality is shaped by] assemblage, juxtaposition, mobility,

separation as well as the pure physicality of the built environment Openness, circulation, juxtaposition, fragmentation, inertia, immobility, opacity and erasure [offer hope for urban dwellers, though the city also brings together unresolved tensions like:] stasis/movement, hope/despair (Robinson, 2008: 91)

Various signs, symbols and human interactions invite the reader to perceive and relate variously to different spaces in the city. I examine how the authors imaginatively invite one to penetrate the socio-economic dynamics at play within and between various spaces, determining how private and public spaces are interrelated. I seek to understand whether private and public spaces “make sense in relation to each other, as ... interdependent notions” (Mandipour 2003: 3). I examine how the contexts of particular spaces differentially affect the conditions of characters, but also influence relations between human characters in these spaces. Additionally, I investigate how the authors create intersecting spatial triangles in the city. Here, I determine how human conditions, relations, activities and movements in and across the settings of *house*, *workplace* and *entertainment* spaces are interconnected by city streets to form a triangle. Generally, the idea of the city has seen changing conceptions temporally and across different ideological paradigms.

The city according to Lehan (1998, 3) is “an evolving construct” produced by Western civilization. It is conceived and perceived differently within different ideological paradigms and time frames. During the Enlightenment, the city was seen “as a means of controlling nature for the purpose of bringing wealth into being”. Romantics on the other hand (especially poets like William Blake) “maintained that the city encouraged luxury, allowing a radical departure from the natural state that led to decadence and waste. ... find[ing] capitalism responsible for the dehumanized commercial city”. For the naturalists, the “city was a place of limits ... [that could] produce only so much wealth; therefore if some were wealthy, others had to be poor”. Modernism “... [turned] to aestheticism, religion and politics – tried to ground the self within the city but the result was often individualism either autistic or power hungry Modernism looked back toward what were considered simpler times”. For the postmodern, among other things, “urban activity becomes more abstract and ‘unreal’ as power operates from hidden sources. Such a city is at once a physical reality and a state of mind: to read the city is to read an urbanized self, to know the city from within”. The ‘self’ of the postmodern city is “discontinuous ... fraught and overloaded with electronic stimuli – a self ... that must read signs as if one is a Parisian in Tokyo” (Lehan, 1998: 285-287).

The fictional texts that I study in the chapter, but also those analysed in other chapters of the thesis, represent elements of the city identified by the paradigms as discussed by Lehan in the paragraph above. More specifically, urban settings in the two novels in this chapter exhibit features of the postmodern city but also, to a certain extent, features attributed to the other ideological movements listed. As ideas about and the state of cities have evolved, the demographic shape of the city in

general has also evolved, with varying consequences. At the turn of the nineteenth century (according to Lehan), “14 percent of the global population lived in cities and only eleven cities had a population of a million inhabitants. [Comparatively, at the turn of the twentieth century,] “there are four hundred cities with a population of at least a million”. Among these are Nairobi and Dublin, and population numbers form a significant feature of the two cities as they have implications for dynamics of or within the cities. The United Nations Population Fund in 1996 speculated that “half of the world’s population will be living in urban areas by the year 2006”. These increases in urban population have led to overpopulation, greater poverty, short supply of resources, unemployment, multiethnic tensions, shortage of energy, the replacement of personal freedom with central authority, abstract and interconnected commercial activity and increased difficulty in reading and understanding (illiteracy), especially at the margins of urban sprawl (Lehan, 1998: 287, 288). These predicted adversities have in fact seen fulfillment in most cosmopolitan cities of the world. They are causes and at the same time, indications of the condition of poverty. Such cities include the fictional but also the real cities discussed in this study. Probably, the levels of poverty in the city are bound to increase if the trend described here is not reversed. Examining evocations of “spatial practices (the routines that constitute the everyday), representations of space (the knowledges, images and discourse that order space) and spaces of representation (which are created bodily)” (Hubbard, 2006: 103), this chapter consists of three broad sections. These are firstly, *people as infrastructure*, which considers the nature of human situatedness in urban space. Secondly, the idea of the *triangular city*, in which I examine how the urban setting represented in the novels is structured (through the medium of language) into a triangle consisting of three main angles of human activity (namely the house, the workplace and the entertainment facility) interconnected by the city streets. Lastly, the chapter deals with the idea of *private and public space*, in which I identify the intricacies of imagined and real boundaries between private and public space. In short, I deal with the idea of “the relationship between people and places ... [and] the very essence of what living in towns and cities was [and is] all about” (Worpole, 1992).

People as infrastructure

Mwangi’s *Going Down River Road* opens with a somewhat humanised cartographic encapsulation of what one may call ‘professions’ of and relationships between those occupying a rundown complex on Grogan Road, “which was no place to brag about” (Mwangi 2003: 18) – the scene of most of the action of the novel. I frame the discussion in this section by means of the notion of “people as infrastructure”, which as an urbanized social infrastructure is “capable of facilitating the intersection of socialities so that expanded spaces of economic and cultural operation become available to residents of limited means” (Simone, 2004: 407). Ben’s (the protagonist’s) neighborhood accommodates

all sorts of people There was a childless woman who lived on hawking green vegetable matter. . . . two refuse collectors, a Grogan Road mechanic who swore he was not a thief, and three retired whores who only did the occasional special duty with the landlord or somebody else. There were two office clerks and their messengers and families. There were the city council policemen and the unlicensed roadside cobbler [and t]hen there were Max and his bugs . . . bust[ing] everybody's ears with their loud music. (Mwangi, 2003: 3)

The passage does not directly describe the physical space, neither does it name the characters but it shows the “conjunction of heterogeneous activities [and] modes of production” (Simone, 2004: 410) that create a platform (in this case, a rundown urban setting) for social interaction and livelihood. Descriptions of the professions, habits and activities of the characters in this passage foreshadow gloom, desperation, abandonment and the dilapidation not just of their lives, but possibly of the environment and of the broader society represented. The characters vary on different dimensions, but are unified not just by occupancy of a common space but also their almost exclusively lowly status. They are an example of what Floris describes as island cities, suggesting that “[i]n Nairobi there are fragments of space where groups of people who have a homogenous income live” (2006: 20). While they “try to keep out of one another's way, they form emergent interdependencies ranging from crude patron-client relationships . . . enabl[ing] participants to exploit” each other. In the Mwangi passage quoted above, one sees “inseparable connections between place[s], people, actions and things [, but also] a relation of non-relation” (Simone, 2004: 409). The idea of non-relationships is a significant aspect of an urban setting. In this case, the most obvious relationship that exists between the characters is that of people sharing a common space. However, beyond that are other, subtle layers of intersection and interaction, resulting primarily from the need to survive or exist. The passage depicts what seems to resemble Balzac's city of limits in which “we cannot have wealth without poverty, success without failure, the capitalist without the criminal” (Johnson, 1998, 58). In this case, the exploitative landlord stands for the wealthy and the ‘successful’ capitalist, while Max and his bugs represent the criminal element that is a feature of every city, and every other occupant of the plot represents the struggling but resilient poor and perhaps the failures of the urban community which is possibly representative of a larger entity – the fictional and maybe the actual Nairobi.

The *human infrastructural* makeup of the Grogan Road plot reveals the nature of interdependent networks that ensure survival in the urban setting. The childless woman hawks green vegetable matter to the other inhabitants in order to sustain herself, the refuse collectors dispose of the other inhabitants' (the city's) refuse, Max and his bugs as well as the Grogan Road mechanic introduce an element of criminality and anti-social behaviour commonly found in poorer areas of the world's cities. In this case, the narrator implies that the other inhabitants accuse him (the mechanic) of theft, leading him to swear that he is not a thief. The hint of surveillance, accusation and defence seen here are instances of conduct resulting from the cramped state of the plot. Such surveillance would be uncommon in the more cosmopolitan (parts of the) city, where inhabitants are often

individualistic and self-minding and would frequently seek legal or other official remedies for their concerns. The three retired sex workers, who “offer occasional special duty to the landlord or somebody else” represent the immorality, but perhaps also the likelihood of abuse of power in the urban setting. The relationship between the city council policemen and the unlicensed roadside cobbler captures the somewhat discordant and ambiguous dimensions of human relationships in the urban setting. Relationships that in this case shift from “racing one another round town in the course of duties, before coming home to be “good neighbors” for the night” (Mwangi, 2003: 3). Max and his bugs whom Ben, the protagonist, hates and the narrator describes as “trouble makers” represent an additional dimension of human relations in the urban setting – one that causes discomfort, but remains an inevitable and virtually “natural” feature of the city. However, their excessive actions provoke a reaction from Ben when he (Ben) discovers Baby (the nameless boy that his girlfriend Wini abandons in his care) drugged in Max’s room. He “grabs him [Max] by the collar, hauls him up and shakes him [before turning to the real culprit Sancho whom] he bulldozes, ... bashes on the face ... [and] hauls ... into motorcycles ... snorting fire and spitting venom” (Mwangi, 2003: 164). The extreme abuse of Baby by Max and his bugs and the consequent outburst of anger and violence from Ben suggest that when people are indiscriminately cramped together and sharing very limited resources in “relation[s] of no relation[s]”, there is potential for such irresponsible actions (as shown by Max and cohorts) and resultant explosive torrents of violence from ‘victims’ like Ben.

There is a sense that neighbours may share common struggles and experiences in urban settings, but many relationships are significantly impersonal, superficial, or transient. However, a multi-faceted transactional economy and society emerges from Mwangi’s depiction, in which underprivileged city dwellers seek a livelihood. The impersonality of these relationships is the reverse of what one sees in the relationship between colleagues in the novel, but only if such collegial relationships do not extend beyond the public spaces (as I show later in this chapter).

In Doyle’s *The Van*, the *human infrastructure* is shaped by dynamics of setting that are completely different from those that do so in Mwangi’s *Going Down River Road*. Relationships in the novel are not shaped by the concept of neighbourliness, conceptually and physically. The three representative characters in the novel are bonded together by friendship. These are Jimmy Sr who, at the point that the reader meets him in the novel, has been laid off his job as a plasterer; Bimbo, a baker who is subsequently laid off as the plot progresses and Bertie, who is informally employed – selling used and seemingly stolen goods. Certainly, these characters represent the working class. Though they are poor, the physical setting is distinctly different from that which gives rise to the kind of relationship between Ben and his neighbours as described in the earlier paragraphs. In this instance, they live in proper separate housing, with Bimbo owning his home while Jimmy rents his from the Corporation. Nonetheless, they live out of each others’ proximity and as such, interact

with one another out of desire and not out of necessity, as is the case in Mwangi's *Going Down River Road*. As such, there is seemingly little potential for the kinds of interaction and explosive conflict that ensue in the Grogan Road setting of Mwangi's novel. However, inhabitants of both the Nairobi and Dublin communities are shown to be strikingly similar in one aspect. This is the "urban residents' constant state of preparedness ... [to] constantly change gears, focus, and location. ... the need to ensure oneself against a lifetime without work ... prepare for the possibility that even work will produce nothing" (Simone, 2004: 424). In the two novels, characters demonstrate the kind of preparedness that Simone recommends as appropriate to and identifies in residents of the urban setting. In the case of the two novels, it is a psychological rather than a material preparedness. When Ben in *Going Down River Road* loses his job as a military officer, he seeks and gets a job as a pair of hands – a labourer in the construction industry. Likewise, when the two friends Jimmy and later Bimbo (in Doyle's *The Van*) get laid off, they buy and renovate a chips van and employ themselves – improving on their economic situation, but not necessarily their personal relationship. These instances are indications that inhabitants of the urban setting are psychologically prepared to deal with the uncertainties of their settings and the perpetually shifting fortunes that characterise life in the urban milieu.

Triangular city

The triangularly shaped setting of *Going Down River Road* and *The Van* offers significant insights on the subject of poverty, human dynamics in the city and the general condition of the fictional and perhaps the actual city – Nairobi and Dublin or, more particularly, poorer communities within these cities. Here, I refer to the three locations of human activity in the city. These are what Worpole (1992: 100) refers to in his paradigm of the planning debate as the "geographical zones of work, leisure and home" or (in other words) the *house*, *workplace* and *entertainment facilities* as well as the intersecting *street*. These parts of the city seem to comprise the primary points of human activity in the novels and in cities in general. Here, I examine the physical state of these three spaces but also, how descriptions of the physical state of a setting reflect the state of mind and condition of human characters. I identify how characters in the two novels interact with one another and the spaces, as well as ways in which humans relate with each other within the various spaces. The spaces of transition (the city streets) between the three intersecting points also allow for moving representations of the human condition in the city and the condition of the city itself. In the case of *Going Down River Road*, the movements and activities of Ben, Ocholla and the people around them create the triangle, while those of Jimmy Sr, Bimbo, and (to a lesser extent) Bertie and the people around them do so in *The Van*.

Ben's 'house' or more exactly, room in which he was hosted by his girlfriend Wini on Grogan Road captures not just the condition of the city, but also the human condition in the city – one that is shrouded in misery and foreshadows a general sense of socio-economic misfortune. Some

descriptions of parts of the house symbolise the human condition. The house here is portrayed simply as a refuge for Ben. This and the physical description of the house and/or its surroundings highlight the feelings and states of belonging, alienation, deprivation, chaos and disintegration. Ben has to share a communal shower with other occupants. One that is “dark, cold and stale-smelling”. The floor is littered with “broken bits of soap ... and general trash [while] slimy green fungus grew on the outer edges of the floor [and a] woman’s blood-stained underpants hung on the nail behind the door” (Mwangi, 2003:6). The city or, at least, this part of Nairobi shows dilapidation, abandonment, resignation and total decay. One is shown a society where the human condition is reflected in the physical decay of the environment. The broken pieces of soap symbolise the brokenness of characters’ lives, while the “slimy green fungus” at the edges of the floor stands for the characters in this setting who simply exist as “fungus” and “trash” at the edges of society. Further, the narrator suggests that “[o]ne of the strange looking patches of peeled paint [in the shower] resembled the naked bottom of a bending woman. Like Wini bending over Baby’s cot” (Mwangi, 2003: 6). The peeled patch in the shower which symbolically stands for Wini is evocative. It points to the erosion of moral values in the city – to the extent that Wini brings men home into the single bedroom that she shares with her son. Also, the peeled patch that looks “like Wini” foreshadows her (merely) shadowy existence in the home – not just in the life of Ben, but also that of her son (Baby), whom she locks up in the room whenever she goes out and finally abandons, locked up in the room, never to return to him. Like the peeled shadowy patch on the wall, she peels herself off her son, boyfriend (Ben) and the face of the city. In fact, she becomes just a shadow that looms nowhere but in the mind of Ben. Her son (Baby) for his part completely forgets about her. All these bleak images of the house are further worsened by the presence of Max and his thugs who “burst everybody’s ears” with loud music, but also engage in various forms of illegal activities – activities which, as noted earlier, attract violent responses from Ben. The house as portrayed here stands against common “understand[ing of] home as a secure, solid, structure”. The home in the plot where Ben lives loses its meaning as “‘le pacifique’, [the] peaceful” space” (Johnson, 2003: 118). These chaotic images of the Grogan Road home are evocative of parts of the broader Nairobi setting. Such images of inadequate accommodation are further entrenched in passages that describe the small informal slum shelter that Ben and Baby subsequently share with Ocholla and, much later, also with Ocholla’s two wives and many children.

Ocholla’s bare and dusty hut is far more dilapidated than Wini’s room, from which Ben is ejected by the landlord. The state of the hut is worsened by the unannounced arrival of Ocholla’s two wives and the “party of little boys and girls of all sizes [and] ages [This results in] the room becom[ing] instantly crowded. There is hardly room to breathe, let alone sit down” (209). In addition to the problem of overcrowding, one realises, ironically, that the dilapidated state of the urban hut is strangely unfamiliar to Ocholla’s family, who come from the rural area. This debunks marginalising perceptions of rural citizenry, suggesting that levels of material poverty in this

society (at least as perceived by the poor migrant from the rural area) are higher in urban areas than in rural areas. This leads one to assume that the rural migrants ironically perceive the state of the urban house as being less livable than the rural house. One sees this in the exchange between Ocholla's humorously naïve rural family on the one hand, and the urban members of the household, especially Baby – who seems to respond to questions related to the state of the house in an expertly superior tone – a tone that may be typical of a false sense of superiority often shown by urban dwellers towards those from the country. One of Ocholla's girls comments: "Mama, ... See, Mama [– pointing to a hole left in the roof because of insufficient roofing material.] They have a window in the roof. Mama, I like Daddy's house". Then "the woman looks up at the stars above [and naively] expresses wonder at her husband's genius" (Mwangi, 2003: 212). The children and their mother are here portrayed in conformity with a common illusion concerning "the innocence and simplicity of the countryside and the peasant" (Paschel, 1998: 26). The reader, though aware of the irony in the woman's naïve misperception of the situation, recognises the resilience of the poor in the midst of adversity in Ocholla's ingenuity (or a lack of it). One of the boys further interrogates: "[h]ow do you close it? Baby responds: "[w]e don't", leading the boy to a further question: "[w]hat if it rains?" Again, Baby responds: "[i]t hasn't rained yet" (212). This line of conversation, occurring significantly between innocent children, enables Ben and Ocholla to realise the enormity of their deprived living condition – one in which they (and perhaps other urban Kenyans) lack the ability to have a roof or, in this case, a completed roof over their heads. With this realisation, "... Ocholla tortures his dry hair [while] Ben wriggles uncomfortably". As this happens, a "bewildered rat crosses the room so fast" prompting the older wife to ask nervously: "[d]o you have snakes here?" (212). In this context, the house loses its essence not only as a "space in which individuals perform their social acts [but also] where they feel safer and in control of their bodies" (Mandipour, 2003: 24). In this instance, the house, contrary to what Mandipour suggests, does not "protect individuals from the outside world" – in terms of the rain that "hasn't rained yet". Also, it seems the two friends Ben and Ocholla lack 'warmth' or companionability in the home, but seek and find it in the public spaces of the pubs. In fact, the passages quoted above illustrate the failed attempts by "characters [who] strive to establish a house as a home ... [for] houses do not necessarily signify homes" (Johnson, 2003: 13). The characters that one sees in this setting, especially Ocholla's newly arrived family, find themselves in a condition of "displacement" and "deterritorialization" – physically and psychologically. In a sense, they are homeless, if one considers Johnson's suggestion "that the notion of being at home hinges on material dwelling places as well as on abstract categories of belonging or residing *chez soi* [in one's home –] an architectural as well as psychological, geographical as well as social concept" (Johnson, 2003: 120). Such a condition of homelessness, or what Homi Bhabha calls "unhomely dwelling places" (Johnson, 2003: 29), is (it seems) a particular feature of the urban setting – not just in parts of Nairobi, but also of other African cities and perhaps even of Dublin. This foreshadows the idea of multidimensionality and perhaps even the cross-cultural nature of poverty which I discuss in

greater detail subsequently – the notion of home, or rather homelessness, also takes multiple dimensions (as I show later).

In *The Van*, the meeting between Bimbo, Bertie and Jimmy Sr's families in Bimbo's house captures the image of, attitudes to and interactions with and within the house in the Dublin setting – creating space for Bimbo's and the Rabbittes' houses to be contrasted. Because Jimmy Sr is not in his own house, “[he] couldn't do what [he] wanted”. The omniscient narrator advises that “[y]ou had to watch yourself” when “you” were not in your house. This is similar to the kind of displacement experienced by Ocholla's family in Mwangi's novel, when they find themselves in an unfamiliar space. However, one realises that in *The Van*, Jimmy Sr is clearly aware of spatial boundaries as he shows restraint in developing and exercising a sense of belonging. The reverse occurs when Ben in the Nairobi setting permanently moves into Ocholla's house, although the move is unannounced. The differing attitudes and feelings towards a friend's or strange space (in the two novels) result from a sense that Ben's presence in Ocholla's house is involuntary (compounded by urgent economic need), but perhaps also indicates a greater sense of entitlement to a friend's or a relation's space within ‘African’ value systems. On the other hand, Jimmy Sr's presence in Bimbo's home is transitory, voluntary and there is a lesser sense of entitlement to each other's spaces, leading to a much lower or nonexistent likelihood of conflict, as in the case described in *Going Down River Road*. However, there is also a sense that material conditions determine the degree of flexibility in the use of or rather, socialization in space and the house, particularly in the Dublin setting. Traditionally, it is Jimmy Sr and “Veronica's turn to have the rest of them in their house [but they all rather go to Bimbo's house because] they hadn't the money to buy the drinks for them all” (398). One sees communal use of space here, but also how economic conditions of space owners hinder desire to use space in particular ways, under particular circumstances, for particular purposes and on particular occasions. However, unlike in Ben and Ocholla's slum house, when the three families meet in Bimbo's house, “the room [only] gets fuller” but not crowded. The spacious room allows Bimbo's “mother-in-law [space to sit] over there in her corner” (400), suggesting how standards of accommodation differ between the Dublin house compared to the Nairobi shelter, and perhaps the more general economic differences between the two fictional and probably actual cities. At another level, the meeting of the three Irish families seems to suggest that the Dublin setting (inconsistently with common perception) is much more male dominated than the Nairobi setting. Males predominate in the plot, and when females appear as they do in Bimbo's house, they usually confine themselves to the kitchen. Interestingly, this is the reverse of the situation in Mwangi's Nairobi setting, where women, especially Ocholla's wives and Wini, are shown to be more assertive, outgoing and perhaps even domineering but also, self-reliant and resilient and independent.

Jimmy Sr's Corporation house (where much of the novel is set) represents different kinds of dynamics within the urban house in the Dublin setting. Members of Jimmy Sr's household, according to Paschel (1998: 89): "are meant to be taken as a typical representative of an ordinary working class family ... most of the family [of six children and an illegitimate grandchild] still live in the house". This causes overcrowding and as such, Darren has to sleep in the front room. Like Ocholla's household, this working class household is relatively large, though, consisting almost exclusively of members of the nuclear family (unlike the extremely extended family household in the Nairobi setting). Maybe this can be seen as a feature of the Nairobi social dynamic, though the Dublin household demonstrates enormous solidarity towards members of the family, including even Leslie, the petty criminal of the family, who has run away because he is in trouble with the police. The reference to many children in this family, the existence of a petty criminal and the existence of an illegitimate grandchild begotten from a teenage pregnancy may be seen as corroborating prejudicial notions that would perceive such occurrences as being typical of the working classes of society. However, in this case, the depictions are (according to Parschel – 1998: 90) only used to highlight the tolerance and family spirit among members of the working class family. This is balanced, however, by depiction of an element of intolerance, insensitivity and a measure of over-sensitivity in the house, as demonstrated by Darren's remark (explained below) and the consequent uproar. Jimmy Sr admonishes Darren for showing disrespect during a family dinner in the words: "[d]on't you forget who paid for tha' dinner in front of you, son, right". Darren responds: "I know who paid for it, The state". He is referring here to Jimmy Sr's unemployed status and his dependency on the state's social welfare system. This statement elicits varying interpretations from the reader and responses from the other members of the household, capturing and drawing readers into dynamics at play within the working class house in the Dublin setting. The implication of the reference here to social welfare is that the Irish poor "are far better protected by the social net" of the state (Paschel, 1998:12) than those in Nairobi – hence, social welfare is something that does not feature in Mwangi's novel. However, the statement throws the entire household into a state of near chaos. Jimmy Sr "looked like he'd been told that someone had died" and leaves the table with the words: "[v]ery nice". In one of the few passages of prose narrative in the novel, the author recounts that "[f]or a while after the dinner, he'd had to really stretch his face to stop himself from crying – not faint exactly – He kept having to lift himself up, and sit up straight and open his eyes full; he couldn't help it". Sharon for her part angrily questions her brother: "wha' did yeh go an' say tha' for? ...wanting to slap the face off him [as she] kicked Darren under the table. ...". Jimmy Jr, another member of the household, "grabbed Darren's sleeve [and swore,] – [y]eh fuckin' big-headed little prick, yeh, ...". To all these, Darren, apparently realising the delicacy of the situation that results from his insensitive statement, responds: "I was only jokin It was true; mostly", while the conciliatory mother, Veronica (Jimmy Sr's wife), changes the subject by questioning Linda and Tracy (the young twins): "[w]hat did you do in school yesterday?" (440-441). Here, the dramatic incident poignantly suggests how the condition of

material deprivation and unemployment could disrupt a working class family and emotionally perturb the nominal bread winner. Jimmy Sr does not only lose his son's respect, but his ego becomes vulnerable. He loses authority and self-esteem when he loses his job, and consequently, independence. Here one sees lack of respect displayed towards the head of the household, resulting partly from his condition of lack and dependence on the state and (at times) on other members of his family. Possibly, there is also overreaction and over-sensitivity from Jimmy Sr, resulting from low self-esteem caused by his economic condition, and an acute show of un/awareness and in/sensitivity by some members of his family as to the extent to which the material condition of poverty causes emotional damage, especially shame and anxiety (insecurity).

Veronica's implicit intercession in the incident that results from Darren's comment does not only capture her personality, but also introduces additional elements of Jimmy Sr's household and by extension, dynamics of the urban triangle in general. She is a symbol of rationality, tact and compassion, whose emotional skills seem to create some degree of stability in an otherwise volatile home environment. She diverts attention from the tension created by Darren's comments when she asks the twins: "[w]hat did you do in school yesterday?" (441). One may however assume that she raises the issue not primarily to determine whether the twins are coping in school but rather, as a cover-up to diffuse the tension. This is a position that one may describe as *smoothing the surface* with regards to socio-economic issues in the house – an attitude that in interesting ways may allow such issues to remain unresolved. Seemingly, the twins' (indifference to) school work is mentioned but remains unaddressed in the home, and as a consequence, its manifestation reoccurs under unusual circumstances in another space of the urban triangle – the street. The recurrence of issues across the spatial triangle (as in this case) connects the parts of the triangle thematically. This is demonstrated when I later examine how the twins' indifference to school (resulting perhaps from the fact that the subject was merely mentioned but not addressed by the mother) leads to a future confrontation between these two and Jimmy Sr, not in the house but on the streets. Nonetheless, the family dynamics at play in Jimmy Sr's house evoke the idea that: "[t]raditionally, Irish society has always been family orientated All of Roddy Doyle's novels reflect this orientation towards the family" (Paschel, 1998: 70). As shown in this dinner scene, members of the family live together under one roof and interact with one another at different levels, with varying implications of affection and animosity.

The street is a significant component of urban spaces. In addition to "other ritualistic functions" (Worpole 1992: 41), it serves as a "rhizomatic space" which "connects any point to any other point" (Johnson, 2003: 89) of the triangle. These points include the *house*, the *workplace* and the *entertainment facility*. The unsanitary state of the Nairobi street is to an extent comparable to that of Ben or Wini's house described earlier. Ben leaves the filthy setting of Wini's house, and finds himself in even greater filth on what appears to be a back street. He uses the short-cut covered with

“human excrement ... [where] swarming path-finders [are] walking to their work stations” because he cannot afford the bus fare to work. Other than boots that carry what the narrator describes as “street dough”, the wind

carried ... with it the smell of shit and urine, the occasional murmur, the rare expression of misery, uncertainty and resignation. They walked slowly, quietly, their slow tortured boots kneading the mud and the shit on the path. Every now and then one of them stopped to add hot urine to the dough. (7)

The disgust-provoking nature of the imagery in the passages above evokes the decaying state of the city street even more potently than that which is used to describe the house. It conjures up a condition of urban (physical and moral) decay, abandonment and human recklessness. In fact, one sees a society in a state of perpetual soilure, doom and gloom. The imagery used is similar to that representing the urban setting of the Ghanaian writer Ayi Kwei Amah’s novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1988). In the Mwangi passage quoted above, the wind is symbolic. By evoking the wind as carrying “shit” and “urine” as well as “misery, uncertainty and resignation”, a picture of persistent and prevailing doom is painted. The exact point from which the wind starts blowing and where it stops is indeterminate and indefinite. So, the image of the blowing wind and the kind of load it carries expands the discourse here beyond just the back street described to cover the broader city of Nairobi. Also, it suggests that the street links all the points of the human triangle of activity in the urban setting – connecting the house, workplace and entertainment facility. The kind of depressing and nauseating luggage that this wind carries presents a damning, compellingly unpleasant picture of the Nairobi city street.

The more conventional and formal city street introduces the reader to a slightly different, but not an entirely redeemed set of urban street dynamics from the ones discussed above. In addition to the deadly fast cars, there is the stinking Nairobi River, as well as the crowded, cheap road-side food kiosks which partly confirm Philip Amis’s point that “[s]treet hawkers and informal sector traders are among the strongest visual images of any urban area in the South” (Amis, 2004: 145). The two sweepers form an important fixture in the street. Commenting on them, the narrator declares: “[t]he two sweepers, their brooms and their street belonged to one another” (8-9). This passage evokes the permanence of the sweepers on the city streets – permanence that influences how the two sweepers share with and relate to each other and to the street itself – including its users. Although the elder of the two street sweepers only has a cigarette stub, he calls for and shares it with his “mate” who wears a similarly sweat-smelling greatcoat (9). The sharing spirit shown by the street sweepers goes deeper than their limited material resources. It extends to their ability to relate easily to other street users, to each other and to the actual street itself. Without any prior familiarity with Ben, they engage in discussions about the weather and their job with him. In fact, the street, in addition to being “the backbone of the everyday surroundings for people”, is a space where “people will meet, stop and gossip” (Worpole 1992, 41). This is seen in the street setting in Mwangi’s novel when the

elder sweeper and Ben engage in a relatively lengthy conversation on the weather and the condition of their (the sweepers') job – a practice that “is less likely to happen in a ... workplace or institutional setting” (Worpole 1992, 41). This gives the city street a very significant meaning as a neutral space where experiences of total strangers from varied backgrounds are projected and possibly mediated in a dialogic process between humans and street. The suggestion that the “[t]wo sweepers, their brooms and their street belonged to one another [and t]he rainy, misty twilights and dawns were their lot” (9) is evocative. It reflects the human condition in both physical and natural features. The narrator seems to suggest here that the sweepers' lowly condition is 'natural'. The sweepers seem to share a certain kind of reciprocal familiarity and intimacy with (among other things) natural elements like the rains that sometimes help them sweep or drain the street of its filth. This I assume results from “something of a belonging about them [and] some sort of a permanency” (8) that is similar to the “hard black tarmac road that they swept”. Therefore, the permanency of the human presence on the street and the kind of relationships that result from such permanence transform the city street from impersonal to personal space. Though one may expect that the very obvious elements of material poverty shown by the characters, their permanence on the street and the pressure of natural forces on the human beings on the street would have disastrous psychological and physical effects on their characters, rather, Mwangi's depiction of the street interactions instead somehow “suggests coherence in the face of chaos” (Lehan, 1998: 291).

The house and the city street intersect in interestingly conflicting ways in *Going Down River Road* but also, as I show later, in *The Van* – an intersection that raises questions on the place of the house as a milieu for inculcating positive values in children. The street is portrayed as a monster waiting to engulf children in those cases where the setting of the house fails to protect them from itself (the street). Ben finds the police chasing after “a gang of rugged street urchins” and is shocked to discover that Baby (the son abandoned in his care by his former lover Wini) is one of them. Only then does he discover that the boy's ears are “dark and swollen from repeated pinching and twisting”, the traces (as Baby claims) of his treatment by his teacher. Also, it is only on the street that Ben discovers that Baby “can't remember” when he last went to school. Indeed, unknown to Ben, for a long time, Baby has spent his time “parking cars [and] running away from police ...” (232-233). It is only after the street incident that Baby, smiling shyly and asking for another cake, listens to and accepts Ben's plans for him (Baby) – plans that the narrator describes as “[t]hings fathers are supposed to tell their sons”. Ben declares conclusively: “I will take you to school myself. I will ask the teacher not to beat you ‘for nothing’ again. And you for your part will go to school every morning, without fail, and bring me a confirmation letter from the teacher every day” (234-235). The preceding, enlightening scene suggests that the problem of street children is almost universal and that it is strongly linked to conditions in a child's home. This particular situation results from Ben's failure to spend sufficient quality time with Baby at home, taking notice of what he experiences in school and its effect on his life and remedying the situation before it (almost) gets

out of hand – as seems to be the case here. The incident on the street results from the condition under which they live in the house – a condition in which there is extreme overcrowding (as earlier indicated), and in which members of the household have more pressing basic survival needs to deal and cope with than the boy’s school experiences. As such, they neglect care even towards the most vulnerable members of the household – children like Baby. In short, the private space of the house becomes less convenient and comfortable for familial dynamics that should take place there than the public space of the street. As such, a problem that should otherwise have been resolved in the home finds a somewhat shaky resolution on the street.

Similar interactions between house and street but also among people/citizens and street, are represented in *The Van*. However, unlike in the Nairobi setting, “there is very little actual description of the outward appearance of Barrytown [fictional Dublin in *The Van*, since] ... Doyle is more preoccupied with representing the people that ‘make’ the suburb” (Paschel 1998: 88). Earlier in this chapter, Veronica, Jimmy Sr’s wife, is encountered questioning the twins about school but in that instance, the questions (as I argued) seem to be intended solely to divert the attention of members of her household from Darren’s disrespectful and provoking remarks about Jimmy Sr’s dependence on social welfare, and not necessarily to understand and address any problems that the children might be facing out of the house. Later in the novel, Jimmy Sr, like Ben in Mwangi’s novel (as discussed above), discovers that the twins (Tracey and Linda) are members of The Living Dead – a gang of young children similar to that from which Ben extracts Baby. They (The Living Dead) “gave Jimmy Sr and Bimbo terrible trouble [by] rock[ing] the van ... throwing stones at the van; ... [as a result of which] Bimbo, Jimmy Sr and Sharon got an almighty fright ...” (522). Contrary to Baby’s case that finds resolution in the impersonal setting of the street, attempts to mediate and resolve the crisis involving Linda and Tracy in the house fail. When questioned about their involvement in the gang, the twins protest, saying: “[y]ou’ve no proofYou’ve no witnesses.... Well, it wasn’t me anyway, said Tracy. – Or me, said Linda”. Jimmy Sr concludes in his typical mischievous style: “I didn’t spend a fortune on your hair ... so yis could get picked up by snot-nosed little corner boys. ... Next time yis are lookin’ for your fellas go down to the snobby houses an’ get off with some nice respectable lads, righ” (524). In this instance, one sees again that the house loses its essence as a space where families ordinarily should gain knowledge of what everyone, especially each child, is experiencing and where difficulties faced by members of the household should be resolved. This may be because the family is faced with many other more pressing survival needs – in this case, Jimmy’s Sr’s unemployment and dependence and its consequent economic impact upon the family, among other relatively lesser challenges like the teenage pregnancy of Sharon and the criminal life of Leslie. Also, there is a sense of a society facing an erosion of values – the value of reciprocal respect between parents and children. This is shown by the actions and verbal exchanges quoted above. Such erosion or loss of values is contrary to the degree of respect seen in the incident involving Ben and Baby. Respect, I assume, is replaced

in the Dublin setting of Jimmy Sr's house by a search for freedom and a legalistic justification for every accusation, as shown by the twins' insistence that Jimmy Sr provide "proof" and "witnesses". As in Baby's case discussed earlier, the twins' actions and their relationship with their family, as well as the rebellious attitude of children in both novels, demonstrate that the cities "appear to be collectors of situations that are exceedingly ... fragmented, where the process of social cohesion and integration is becoming more and more difficult" (Floris, 2006: 29). This breakdown of social cohesion is partly due to the increasingly exacting economic challenges faced by city dwellers. Additionally, the social dynamics that one sees on the streets of Mwangi's fictional Nairobi and Doyle's Dublin street indicate that "the streets of the city afford no neutral spaces in which subjects of different socioeconomic ... backgrounds can interact as equals; the divided city structures the conditions of social existence" (Johnson, 2003: 130). Certainly, the actual cities of Nairobi and Dublin would exhibit the kind of divided structures that Johnson evokes here, but the fictional cities are depicted as predominantly uni-sectional – portraying their socially and economically deprived sections. Although the narrators make passing comments about the "other" city – the socially and economically viable parts of the city – the two authors do not seem to show much concern for the polarisation which is a common feature of most actual cities, opting rather to represent the gloomy side of the city. This is possibly intended to raise a heightened awareness of the condition of poverty in the two cities. However, the non-portrayal of the "other" – the prosperous and viable part of the city – does not necessarily imply its absence. Rather, this demonstrates the concern of the authors; which is to evoke the condition of human adversity and displacement, but also resilience and resistant strength among the poorer urban dwellers.

In *Going Down River Road*, the workplace that forms part of the *triangular* city is a construction site where workers 'act out' their sorrows, conflicts, aspirations and various forms of conditions of deprivation (among other things). Discussions on the site suggest that the broader society is going through a period of high unemployment – a situation that is exploited by labour officials, as Ben and Ocholla "had to bribe a labour officer" to gain employment on the site as labourers (35). This seems to be a general trend, as Floris's study of a Nairobi slum suggests that finding a job in Nairobi is the fourth sector in which corruption is most frequently practised – 13% of respondents take this position (2006: 118). Like the other parts of the triangle, the construction site also shows signs of chaos. The narrator reveals that "[t]he site bears the appearance of a futile battlefield" and the chaos and deprivation do not only exhibit themselves and their impact on the characters physically. They seem to affect the workers mentally and psychologically. The narrator claims that, "[l]ike the rest of the hands, he [the driver of the concrete mixer] is mad this afternoon. Hungry and mad" (97). The condition of poverty is seen here as a potent determinant of the mental state of the labourers or urban dwellers in general and of their actions. Machore, one of the hands, tries to rape a nail girl and all "Yusuf [the supervisor can do is to threaten] to fire him next time he tried to rape any of the nail women *without his prior consent*" (98) – emphasis added), thereby leaving a

grievously abusive act unsanctioned. This might be because, like the hands, Yusuf faces a greater challenge – that of providing the basic necessities of life – in his case, not primarily that of food, but rather the *bhang* (cannabis) to which he is addicted. The site is chaotic to the extent that there are attempted and actual murders. Onesmus tries to settle scores with Ben by attempting to bury him in a heap of gravel (106). Conversely, he (Onesmus) is the one who eventually dies, creating suspense in which the reader is left wondering whether he might have died accidentally or was murdered by Ocholla to protect Ben. After his death, “construction goes on just as before ...[for] when scum like Onesmus die, they are quickly forgotten” (176); clearly considered expendable or deserving of death.

A regular feature of the site is the lunchtime workers’ parliament. Ironically, it is the same “ragged barefoot” (189) Machore who had attempted to rape the nail girl who chairs the “barefoot labourers’ parliament” in which they “haggle over the non-existent rights of ... cement mixer[s]” (189). The parliament discusses a range of issues from gossip tidbits to broader political and moral issues. They speculate that “the Minister for Food owns all the food kiosks in Eastleigh. ... His wife owns half the Tree Bottoms Hotels Empire ... [and] they (the minister and his family) are applying for a Sukuma Wiki retail monopoly” (103). The speculations point to an extremely polarised and unequal society in which the hands are “madly hungry” while a single family owns excessive wealth and masses of food. This may also be an indictment of the greedy and opportunistic nature of some of the privileged members of the society. However, despite the hard labour and the pain of hunger that the hands have to endure, they are very extravagant with the money that they receive on payday. As such, some hands’ wives come to the site “to catch their men before they pass through Eden and Karara Centre” (188). This suggests a link between parts of the triangle – house, work and entertainment facility – and, symbolically, efforts by the women to dislodge the link between work and entertainment facilities.

In *The Van*, the van offers diverse ways of understanding the work environment. As I show in the section that follows, it is a private space but also a public work environment that offers significant insights on the urban, though somewhat more informal workplace. Here, I discuss changing perceptions and attitudes to the van as a business, but also how the relationships between characters are continually shifting and being shaped by the changing perceptions of and attitudes to the business. Like *Going Down River Road*, *The Van* paints a picture of high unemployment or diminishing job opportunities and consequently, growing poverty in the families represented – and, by extension, also in the larger Dublin (like the Nairobi) setting. In the case of Dublin, “[t]his is due [partly] to the non-replacement of traditional non-skilled jobs such as, for instance, on the docks” (Paschel, 1998: 12). When the novel opens, Jimmy Sr, a plasterer, had already been unemployed (it seems) for an unspecified but lengthy period and Bimbo, a baker, later gets laid off. Coincidentally, like Ben and Ocholla, Jimmy Sr had been employed in the construction industry,

which is itself unstable and seasonal. All three – the major characters and friends in the novel (Bertie, Bimbo and Jimmy Sr) – are or become unemployed and are subsequently self-employed (as the plot advances). As in *Going Down River Road*, Doyle's *The Van* represents characters who, when employed, are employed exclusively in the informal or perhaps casual employment sector. The predominance of the informal employment sector in so many works of fiction of this type may be seen as an evocation of the real situation in the actual cities represented, and perhaps in the broader society evoked, or even a larger portion of the developing world or the world at large – a situation in which “[a]ccess to formal sector employment is everywhere quite limited and in all the cities ... recourse was taken to casual labour or informal income generating opportunities” (Beall 2004: 57). This argument is further advanced by Worpole (1992: 91), who suggests that “work has become less skilled, more casualized, more part-time and conceptually short-termed”. I assume however that the evocation solely of informal sector employment spaces and predominantly of housing that is informal is not a complete reflection of the real societies. Any real society is more diversified than the sections of fictional cities depicted in the two novels. The authors here seem to set out to portray

their reality [although] the exclusions and narrative silences in the text[s] are as important as what is included, with the selective and partial representation of people and place deemed a crucial means by which social inequality has been perpetuated (and justified); ... whoever controls information about society is, to a greater or lesser extent, able to exert power in that reality. (Hubbard, 2006: 73)

Though the workplaces represented in both novels (the construction site and the van) are informal, the process of procurement, management and the hiring of staff in the van is much more informal (though legitimate) than in *Going Down River Road*, where prospective employees have to deal with corrupt officials. None the less, the casual nature of operation in the workplace (the van) or of the process of employment causes the first signs of misunderstanding between the two “partners”, Bimbo and Jimmy Sr. Realising that Jimmy Sr cannot peel, “Sharon [, his daughter] asked him if she could work in the van some nights... . [a]nd he said Yeah” without consulting Bimbo, the actual owner of the van. When Bimbo hears about the appointment, he insists that “[s]taff appointments should be a joint decision Between the two of us [. Still, Jimmy Sr argues that] its only Sharon, for fuck sake.” Yet they both agree finally that they will “make these decisions together” (467). In this instance, one sees a different set of employment dynamics from those at play in the Nairobi setting. Sharon seeks and gets employment through her social network. With varying both negative and positive ramifications, an unspecified yet evidently high percentage of job seekers find employment and employers find employees in the world through such social network transactions. This fictional case does not necessarily qualify as nepotism, but rather results from a work environment that is casually conceived, thereby making all transactions there problematically casual. Subsequently, Jimmy Sr expresses the feeling that Maggie, Bimbo’s wife, has become too influential in decision making when she starts using the “we” pronoun when she

discusses the business, leading Jimmy Sr to question: “[w]hat did she mean, We? She’d never been as much as inside the van” (526). Events subsequently lead Jimmy Sr to conclude that “Bimbo and Maggie were the ones in charge ... he was sure they talked about business in bed every night and he wasn’t in bed with them” (554). This realisation reminds him that “[p]artners was the word Bimbo’d used at the very start, maybe it was time to remind him of that” (556). With this in mind, Jimmy Sr asserts: “ – [t]his place should be called Bimbo and Jimmy’s Burgers [to which Bimbo vehemently objects,] – [n]o, ... very – too fuckin’ quickly” (558). These changing perspectives and attitudes to the business could be attributed to the high level of informality with which the business is initiated and operated in the first place, not even as a family business, but as a business of members of two families. This leads to ambiguity of ownership and conflicting claims of authority. This in turn results in a breakdown in Jimmy Sr and Bimbo’s relationship, reaching a climax when Jimmy Sr physically attacks Bimbo towards the end of their night on the town. He “smacked Bimbo’s face, and all of the violence went out of him” (597). Soon after this incident, Bimbo tells Jimmy Sr that “from now on he’d be paying [him] Jimmy Sr a wage. ... Instead of the old way, the fifty-fifty arrangement” (602). This further complicates their relationship, and these complications only get resolved when they dispose of the van by dumping it into the sea. The van here has become an obstruction to the friendship and mutual respect that existed between Jimmy Sr and Bimbo prior to its acquisition. Jimmy Sr’s ill feelings about work are, however, overshadowed by the good feeling that comes with “knowing there’d be money there when he put his hand in his pocket; not that he’d much time to spend it” (556). These passages seem to suggest (as I argue in chapter five of this thesis) that finding a job and creating material wealth do not necessarily lead to psychological ‘wealth’ and happiness. Though Jimmy Sr and Bimbo have become materially much better off, the conflict that results from the source of their wealth, the van, torments both of them psychologically. Also, while Jimmy Sr gains financial power, he suffers other forms of disempowerment, not only because of his treatment by Bimbo and Maggie, but also in the way his son Darren treats him in the van. As an employee, Darren brazenly disobeys Jimmy Sr’s basic instructions, retorting: “[g]o in yourself.” This causes Jimmy Sr to exclaim: “what a staff” (549). This exclamation aptly captures the discord that arises from not respecting social boundaries. The van as a workplace here serves as a site of conflict, resulting partly from fluid or blurred boundaries between social spaces as colleagues, family and friends and perhaps home, work and even (to an extent) entertainment facility. Characters involved in the conflict that arises from interactions with and in the van are comparable to Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s urban subject – a subject that he sees as “materialistic[,] ... decadent [and transformed into an] autonomous self grounded in money” (Lehan, 1998: 145).

As in the case of the home, the street and the workplace, representations of the entertainment facility as a spatial component of the triangle offer significant insights into the condition of deprivation in the setting of the two novels. In both novels, these are almost exclusively drinking

spots – such as Karara Centre and New Eden in *Going Down River Road* and Hikers in *The Van*. In both novels, there seems to be a close correlation between the condition of deprivation and the magnetic appeal of the drinking facility or even outright alcoholism. This could be attributed to what Floris (1992: 95, 96) qualifies as “[d]rinking as a means of escapism [which] allows a person a few moments of cheap leisure to forget his own situation [, adding that] alcoholism is a by-product of the environmental and human conditions ... [people] live in”. Representations of entertainment facilities in both novels seem to justify this perception or rather, popular stereotype concerning the lives of the poor.

Karara Centre, a drinking spot situated up River Road in Nairobi, is “crowded with its usual mass of haunted, hungry faces, poverty-hypnotised faces, hateful faces, and the fragrant stink of unwashed bodies and burst sewers” (64). This setting is a pure epitome of poverty, the arrested life of the poor and a crumbling social fabric. Like the home and other parts of the Nairobi spatial triangle, human misery here is matched by spatial decay and dilapidation. The suggestion that Ben and Ocholla “have never by-passed [Karara Centre]... on their way from doing the rounds” (64-65) shows its addictive appeal. Attraction or even addiction to drinking spaces in the novel is not particular to Ben and Ocholla. They enter Karara Centre to realise that “[a]s usual, there are a lot more people ... [there] than there will ever be anywhere [, forming a] crowd of ragged, emaciated low-income drinkers, pathetic and not giving a shit about it [their condition of deprivation]”. Therefore, regardless of the economic challenges that they face, the poor are shown here indifferently investing much in entertaining themselves or drowning their sorrows in drink. This, I assume, is done in an effort to escape the reality of their situation. There may be an implicit suggestion that the poor are less prudent with time and money than others. Theirs is an attitude that Shek (2004: 2) describes as “prodigality (... [the] wasteful spending pattern of poor people)” – suggesting that it is this attitude which is partially responsible for the condition of poverty. Indeed, drinking houses are shown to be popular among the poor or among urban populations in general, where as much as “half the eligible population visit a pub at least once a week” (Worpole, 1992: 22). None the less, such houses, rather than resolving, seem to intensify the problems encountered and experienced by urban dwellers like Ben and Ocholla who, despite (or because of) all the drinking, find themselves at the end of the novel worse off economically and psychologically, standing in front of a drinking house with their relationship in complete tatters. Despite the apparent show of indifference to their situation, despite the material condition which consequently impacts on them psychologically and the self-destructive addiction to drinking houses, some positive character traits remain intact, as the patrons are described as “nice people” despite their condition of misfortune (65).

At another level, drinking houses are symbols of temptation in the urban setting. There is a suggestion that the poor in the urban settings are vulnerable to temptations that lead them to engage

in morally degenerate acts in the entertainment facilities that they visit. Characters in Mwangi's novel show a kind of "shallowness" that Johnson (1998: 64) generally attributes to city dwellers, whose "lives lack substance and direction, and who dissipate energies on sensuous pleasures that lead to a fateful decadence". The metaphorical New Eden, another bar on River Road, evokes the kind of elements that Hubbard (2006: 61) describes as "a locus of immorality ... – a temptation trap" of the city. The drinking house "tempts" (140) Ben to go into it and to later engage in irresponsible intercourse with a sixteen year old girl. The girl shares a small room as "home" in the bar with her one month old baby and with other prostitutes and their customers. The room is "stale with urine and sex [and in it, prostitutes] shout *next*" (my emphasis) to a queue of waiting sex customers, in the presence of the one month old baby (146-148 – emphasis added). This is indeed a shocking representation of life in the urban drinking house. It stands as an indictment of the moral and psychological decay that the condition of poverty has created in the Nairobi setting. Here, the "city ... [is] imagined through antithetical notions of desire and disgust" (Hubbard, 2006:64). Though one may also attribute the level of immorality seen in this space to an apparent inherent weakness on the part of the characters involved, such human weaknesses are products of the city – since cities, according to Worpole, serve as "moulds in which men's lifetimes have cooled and congealed, giving lasting shape" (1992, 26). Here, the level of immorality shown by the characters could be attributed to the pressures of (and molding by) the city. The bestial indecency shown by patrons of New Eden and the city in general signals Honoré de Balzac's "belief that there was a connection between animality and humanity, nature and society – an urban world [that] created a social species analogous to the animal world of nature" (Lehan, 1998: 57). Indeed, the context of the sexual act between Ben and the young sex worker exemplifies the kind of urban subject described in the quotation above.

Furthermore, the material and physical condition of the patrons and the employees matches the physical state of the drinking house (especially in Karara Centre). The barman is "underpaid, frustrated and sits gloomily at his place, his bloodshot eyes hardly moving" (65). The space shows as much dilapidation as its occupants. The "shattered bar mirror ..." behind the frustrated and gloomy barman symbolises his equally shattered life. The suggestion that "shelves [are] stacked with empty whisky and brandy bottles that can never have been emptied here" symbolises the emptiness of the occupants' lives but also, the fake life that they live as the bottles are not even emptied there. "The dark grey walls" point to the bleakness of patrons' lives – an impression which is heightened by a description of what they consume – "a home-made brew that looks like muddy water" (66). Therefore, among other things, Karara Centre and New Eden exhibit the dreary life of urban dwellers by reflecting the human state in physical structures. They may function as spaces of escape from the turmoil of home and work, but they also themselves evoke the turmoil experienced therein, thereby indicating the cyclical state of desolation experienced by no or low-income urban inhabitants.

As in *Going Down River Road*, spaces of entertainment in *The Van* offer pertinent additional perspectives on life in the urban spatial triangle of the setting – Dublin. When unemployed, Jimmy Sr. gets hold of “young Jimmy’s fiver and a two quid Veronica’d given him so he could buy a round for himself, Bertie and Paddy, ... he leaves the house for Hikers” (374). Here, he wants to put up a show of still being one of the “boys”. Also, as in the Nairobi setting, this suggests “the stranglehold which pubs have on British evening life” (Worpole, 1992: 75). Hikers, like other pubs in Dublin and elsewhere in the world, serve as a “great meeting place, where Dubliners socialise, exchange news and gossip and conduct business transactions” (Paschel, 1998:19). While in Hikers, Jimmy Sr and his friends engage in what one can characterise as a debate on the need for segregated or (instead) integrated spaces in bars. This arises from Bimbo’s claim of ‘ownership’ of and ‘belonging’ to a section of Hikers. He declares: “This is our sceneOur floor with no carpet on it. Our chairs here with the springs all stickin’ up into our holes. We fit here An’ those fuckers over there should go upstairs to the lounge where they fuckin’ belong” (379). Here, he is referring to “three couples, all young and satisfied looking” (376). Bimbo’s mentality as portrayed here captures the kind of situation that Worpole (1992: 71) highlights when he praises British “older segmented” pubs that allowed patrons to do different things “all in the same pub but separately”. A loss of the segmented pub to mixed usage, according to Worpole, is “perhaps one of the greatest contributory factors to many people [as in Bimbo’s case] feeling that ‘the young’ have taken over” (1992:71). Ironically, like the young couples that are “satisfied looking”, what Bimbo (ironically) expresses here, beyond a claim to ownership and belonging, is also the feeling of “satisfaction” with the lowly standard of “their section” of the bar. The passage expresses a sense or feeling of permanency that would otherwise be attributed to the home. Evidently, in the context of the two novels analysed in this chapter, the line between the parts of the triangle (house, workplace, entertainment facility and intersecting streets) are significantly blurred, with various implications.

Hikers furthermore serves as a space where emotions are purged. Bimbo comes in to cry when he is “let go” – laid off (412). After spending time with his friends and strategising on how to use the lump sum that he would be paid (which he eventually uses to buy the van), Bimbo “started laughing” (415). He eventually leaves the bar drunk and singing “BA BA BAH” (422). The narrator suggests that “Bimbo looked much better” (422). There is a clear suggestion here that the bar in this case, much more than in the Nairobi setting, serves as a therapeutic space. This is possibly because, unlike in the Nairobi setting of Karara Centre and New Eden, Hikers is less chaotic and shows a lesser degree of deprivation in all its forms, thereby allowing patrons to come out drunk but slightly transformed in some dimensions of their lives. At another level, Jimmy Sr. seems to regain his sense of self-worth in Hikers after the degrading comment by Darren and also, when he insists on taking his turn in the strictly observed tradition of “buying rounds”. This is

despite his friends' considerate insistence in coming to his rescue. This is quite unlike what happens in the Nairobi setting, where friends and strangers alike seem to set out to coerce a drink out of each other. There seems to be a distinct difference in the code of behaviour (in terms of sharing) between patrons in the Nairobi and the Dublin bar. In the Dublin setting, patrons are portrayed as having a formalised form of 'ubuntu'. The Irish patrons, unlike in the Kenyan setting, abide strictly by the tradition of taking turns to "buy rounds", – I assume because they (Irish patrons, including those in conditions of economic misfortune) are more likely to have money for drinks. In Jimmy Sr's case, if he does not get money for his "rounds" from his family members, he could get it from the state in the form of social welfare that is evidently unavailable to the bar patron in Nairobi. The Kenyan bar patrons for their part set out to coerce a drink from each other – an attitude that may be attributed to the feeling of entitlement to assistance – resulting partly from their condition of relative economic misfortune. In analysing sections of the novels that deal with the triangular city, one sees strongly interconnected interactions of different kinds between the private and public space. The rest of this chapter deals with the idea of private-public space in the two settings.

Private and public space

In both novels, private and public spaces intersect, but also diverge in ways that bring various levels of meaning to bear on the urban space as depicted in Mwangi and Doyle's works in particular and the urban setting in general. Private space here refers to the "intimate space of the home" and of the mind, while the public refers to the "interpersonal space of the ... workplace and the impersonal space of the busy city streets" (Mandipour 2003: 1). A universal feature of the city, according to Mandipour (2003: 1), is how it "divides its space into public and private spheres and how this division controls movement ... and activities". In this section, I examine how characters behave variously in each of the two kinds of space (private and public) and the impact of transferring or completely removing certain behavioural practices from their 'traditional' space to the other private to public, and vice versa.

Ben and Baby's movement into Ocholla's small and bare hut presents a symbolically poignant representation of the catastrophic outcome of any behaviour, attitude or activity that invades or contravenes the private-public divide or boundary. When Ben loses his room and moves in with Ocholla (without any prior notification), Ocholla quite passively if reluctantly admits him and Baby into his home with a sigh and the words: "[m]ight as well get down on your ass too, Ben" (Mwangi, 2003: 186). This is when he realises that Baby is already sitting on the dusty floor. Commenting on the invasion and the thoughts going through Ocholla's mind, the narrator states:

It is one thing being buddies, drinking together, talking, eating and even more recently sharing a cigarette end. It is quite another thing sharing a shanty hut, the absolute possession, the retreat of the vanquished heart. It is one thing asking your buddy to buy you

a drink, lend you some money. But it is quite another matter forcing him to smile at you and invite you to his last morsel, the bit he will not share with his wives and children. This is betrayal of companionship, exploitation of your buddy. Bud-exploitation. (Mwangi, 2003: 186)

The quoted passage aptly captures the abnormality and awkwardness of the invasion of private space – an awkwardness that Ocholla also hints at in his reluctance, though he still admits his friend and the latter's adopted son into his home. This (in spite of the recognition that the invasion is awkward) highlights the significance of communal reliance and assistance in the Nairobi setting, or perhaps among the poor of Mwangi's novel or yet still, among Africans in general. Subsequently, the relationship between the two friends turned roommates is shown to have deteriorated largely (I assume) as a consequence of their sharing private space.

As the two friends spend time in Karara Centre, their usual public sphere of entertainment, they react to the additional presence of Ocholla's family in the hut. Ben charges: "[w]e can't afford to keep them [Ocholla's family] here. They must go back to the *shamba*. ... They must go, the hut is too small for us". Commenting on Baby, Ocholla for his part accuses the youngster:

[w]e like him ... I mean they like him, Ben. But ... he is little bit too aggressive. ... He beats the boys, rapes my girls ... terrorizes the whole family. And they say he ... he eats too much. ... [Ocholla adds,] I could help you and Baby build another one [hut] for the two of you. (244-245)

Ben retorts: "[t]hat is not your hut; yours was razed before your bloody women came. That hut belongs to you, me and Baby. We built it together... shut up". (245) With these words,

Ben grabs his beer bottle [and threatens: o]ne more word out of your bloody arse and I smash your goddam teeth in. Just one word ... one. ... [Ocholla in response] grabs his cap, wrings it violently, murderously, strangles it, his eyes fixed on Ben. ... Then slowly, angrily, he (Ocholla) climbs down from the stool and staggers his wounded pride out of the bar (245-246)

These passages open up powerful perspectives on the idea of public and private spheres but also present a complex picture of the notion of private space – in terms of claims to ownership, feelings of belonging and alienation. Some of the quoted passages raise the idea of the inner space of the self and the outer space of the world. According to Mandipour: "[t]he distinction between the private and the public ... starts ... between the inner space of the consciousness and the outer space of the world, between the human subject's psyche and the social and physical world outside" (2003: 7). The narrator penetrates and relays (to the reader) thoughts that are going through Ocholla's mind. There is an indication that what Ocholla's psyche recognises as the boundaries of friendship is at odds with the "social and physical world outside", represented here by Ben and his needs or demands – or, indeed, attitude of entitlement. Although Ocholla is unenthusiastic about the sudden intrusion from Ben and Baby, the inner space of the mind surrenders to the outer space

of the world as Ocholla, despite the thoughts conveyed to us, is unable to turn them away and preserve his privacy. He, or rather his subconscious, seems to be going through a conflict. Here, Mwangi represents the impoverished “urban settings as spaces that individuals engage with through both mind and body (social action being subjective, situated and embodied)” (Hubbard, 2006:118). However, contrary to Mandipour’s suggestion that the mental world of consciousness is private because “only the individual is aware of and has access to” it, the omnipotent third person narrator in this and other fictional cases has the potential and opportunity to penetrate this inner space and reveal its content to the reader – thereby bridging the gap between the inner space of the self and the outer space of a somewhat harsh world in the fictional mode of representation. This is achieved “through the publicly available tool[s] of language ...” (Mandipour, 2003: 17).

Additionally, the passages reveal a tendency (by the poor characters) to engage in activities and attitudes that disrupt the cherished African value of *ubuntu*. The narrator seems to suggest that friendship and all the exchanges that go with it, like drinking together; talking; eating; sharing a cigarette end; lending each other money; and buying each other a drink – positive values of sharing that alleviate the impact of poverty in some poor communities – are abused when some members of the community move from these less personal forms of sharing to more intimate ones like sharing one’s “shanty hut” and treasured “last morsel”. Ben’s intrusion or supposed inconsideration for the boundaries of sharing or in fact, “betrayal and exploitation” of his friend’s and perhaps of the traditional ‘African’ value of *ubuntu* or humanity captures the kind of setting dynamics that Simone (2003: 25) describes as: “a multi-layered shell”, mentioning that “these layers can change ... individuals live in a particular social context, where their location and protective layers of privacy makes sense Anyone outside the social norms could violate these norms by not seeing them or not acknowledging them”. The narrator’s description of Ben’s request for assistance as “betrayal and exploitation” depicts it as being antithetical or as stated above, abusing the traditional African conceptions of *ubuntu*. In this fictional (urban Nairobi) case, as much as elsewhere, the notion and the value of charity is imagined differently from how it would be in traditional African communal value system (of human interdependence). In the fictional case, the view that Ben is betraying and exploiting his “buddy” results from a rather more precarious poverty of urban shanty existence – compared to the more communal ways of moral communities.

One aspect of the shift towards a subversive form of *ubuntu* – in cases of extreme urban deprivation is the claim and counter claim of ownership of resources and property, where the line of ownership is fluid. Resisting removal from the same hut that he had paradoxically begged Ocholla to allow him and Baby to share “just for a night”, Ben now claims: “[t]hat is not your hut; yours was razed before your bloody women came. That hut belongs to you, me and Baby. We built it together” (Mwangi: 2003: 245). This claim and counter claim of ownership result partly from an apparently tenuous tenure of land and house – a fictional evocation of the suggestion that citizens

in various parts of Africa struggle to meet the “need for housing and shelter and as a social asset without which it is difficult to fully participate in society”. This often renders the poor, like Ben, “squatters or renters living in makeshift shanty houses” (Devas, 2004: 55). In addition to the implied inability to fully participate in society due to lack of permanent housing, Ben is situated outside the social norm of marriage and so fails to see and acknowledge the values that Ocholla upholds in terms of private space as the head of a family. Ocholla declares: “I am not exactly like you, Ben I have a wife, wives and kids. I feel different, Ben” (Mwangi 2003: 245). Ocholla and Ben occupy different private social spheres (layers) and hold different values and as such, relate differently to the idea of private space. The shift towards capitalist responses in the urban setting renders the plight of the poor in the African urban setting much more unsettling than in the rural setting, as there is little and in most cases no access to communal assistance in the urban setting. This may be partly due to mistrust that results from the kind of attitude shown by characters (or people) like Ben. When Ben is homeless, Ocholla accommodates him out of compassion, but Ben later begins to lay claim to ‘Ocholla’s home’ and to throw his family out of it, claiming: “[t]hat is not your hut; yours was razed before your bloody women came” (Mwangi, 2003: 245). This quote shows a complete shift or, indeed, a reversal in Ben’s attitude, compared to the scene in which he earlier sought accommodation from Ocholla. Earlier, Ben pleads lamely: “Well, ... just a visit. ... A visit. Well, I had to. You know, the landlord had ... well, it will only be for the night. Only tonight. It will only be for a few days Then ... well, only a few days” (Mwangi, 2003: 185, 186). Ocholla responds to the babble with a sigh and halfheartedly admits Ben with the words: “[m]ight as well get down on your arse too” (186). I assume that the insinuating, wheedling and eventually possessive attitude exhibited by Ben here is common among urban dwellers in general, where resources are scarce, leading to aggressive competition for space and place and deterioration in determination – a point that I elaborate in chapter five of this thesis.

Finally, the passages quoted in this section point to the probability of disaster when the boundaries between the private and public are not respected. When Ben ignores the social boundaries of friendship and extends his relationship with Ocholla to the private, the end is near catastrophic. This is because the harmonious private space gets disrupted in this process of public-private intersection. When Ben and Baby move in, Ocholla’s home loses its essence as a space where Ocholla and his family can “perform their social acts, where they feel safe[r] and in control of their bodies” (Mandipour, 2003: 24). The fluidity of the boundary between the public and the private space impacts negatively on different layers of life – such as the social, since Ben and Baby’s presence renders Ocholla’s hut much “too small”. Baby is a “little bit too aggressive[,] ... beats the boys, rapes [Ocholla’s] girls ...[and] terrorizes the whole family”. On an economic level, Ocholla charges that Baby “eats too much.” (Mwangi, 2003: 244). There is an indication here that the disorientation and discomfort resulting from the encroachment onto the private space eventually result in a near fiery and explosive end to the relationship between the two friends – a relationship

that by all indications shows warmth, merriment, mutual respect and cordiality prior to the blurring of the private-public divide through Ben's invasion of Ocholla's private space. Both men, fail to outmatch each other in the rhetorical contest over the hut and Ben becomes aggressive. He explodes: "shut up, ... grabs his beer bottle [and threatens: o]ne more word out of your bloody arse and I smash your goddam teeth in. Just one word ... one. ...". In response, Ocholla "grabs his cap, wrings it violently, murderously, strangles it, his eyes fixed on Ben. ... Then slowly, angrily, he [Ocholla] climbs down from the stool and staggers his wounded pride out of the bar ... " (Mwangi, 2003: 245-246). In this exchange, the two friends are shown to have violated each other, symbolically transferring the physical violence to the bottle in Ben's case and to the cap in Ocholla's case. This is a point of disruptive intersection between the private and the public, as unresolved feelings of betrayal and exploitation and entitlement to the private space culminate in this violent outlet in the public space. However, the two friends are shown in a conciliatory mode at the end of the novel – one that (it is suggested) would be concretised in an awareness and acceptance and respect of the boundaries between the private and the public spaces. Ben hollers hoarsely: "[w]ait for me; don't leave me here alone, buddy [and Ocholla in response] looks back, hesitates, stops and leans against a parking meter, [as] Ben staggers faster [after him] down the deserted River Road" (Mwangi, 2003: 246).

In *The Van*, the chips van represents a dimension of space that qualifies as private space or property – one in which, like in the Mwangi novel, conflict occurs and relationships become tense when the boundaries between the private and the public are not respected. Such conflict results from a disruption or manifestation of or disrespect of the private-public boundary and movement from exclusion to inclusion within what is initially supposed to be private space or property. This happens when friendship gets extended beyond the public milieu to the private – a situation that resonates with that depicted in Mwangi's *Going Down River Road*. When Bimbo is about to buy his chips van, his friend Jimmy Sr discourages the idea, referring to the van in non-possessive terms as "poor Bimbo's van". This is in spite of Bimbo's more inclusive statements to Jimmy Sr. Such as "we're after getting' a bargain ..., we got it for nothing ... we'll have to have the van ready for the World Cup" (Doyle, 1998: 458, 459 – emphases added). As in *Going Down River Road*, the narrator shows the ability (here) to penetrate Jimmy Sr's private mental space in order to reveal that "Jimmy Sr didn't like the sound of that", referring to the repeated use of the 'we' pronoun to include him (Jimmy Sr). The generously and selflessly inclusive attitude shown by Bimbo is manifest, considering the fact that he is the one paying for the van, as "Jimmy Sr hadn't a bean to his name" (481). Bimbo here displays an inclusive communal mentality towards what he might justifiably have considered his private property and space. Here, he "dismantle[s] the private ownership of private property", not in the sense in which communists advocate the "abolition of private property" (Madanipour, 2003:58) for the good of the entire community, but yet, Bimbo's generosity is indeed liberal and uncommon – more so, in a society (fictional and real Dublin) that (I

assume), to a great extent embraces capitalism. In the novel, Bimbo does not require Jimmy Sr to contribute initial capital towards the purchase of the van as would be the case in a typical capitalist transaction. The unreserved enthusiasm to share (shown by Bimbo) contrasts with what one sees in *Going Down River Road*, where the owner of the private property, Ocholla, only hesitantly admits Ben into his home. The nature of the two spaces differs, however, as in Ocholla's case the property is his home, while the van as an estate symbolises different things in Bimbo's case. The van is actually or even symbolically more costly for Bimbo than the hut for Ocholla, since Bimbo purchases it with much of his life's savings and it is the sole source of income for him and his family. In spite of this, Bimbo apparently willingly allows more porous and less restrictive borders for his (Dublin) private space or property than Ocholla in the Nairobi setting. This may be as a result of varying degrees of deprivation in the two settings, which I would argue also determine the degree to which individuals protect and resist invasion of their private space. Without intending to generalise, one may assume that Ocholla's more protective attitude towards private space suggests that the scarcer resources are, the greater the level of protection shown towards such resources. This may be a reflection of the general society – the informal settlements, Nairobi and perhaps a certain proportion of Africa in general. Therefore, despite the collectivist African value that recommends the “sharing [of] everything that belongs to them, even the smallest thing” (Floris, 2006: 26), challenges in the urban setting call for a rethinking of values. In fact, the positive communal values that would be found in a rural area disappear in an urban slum and get replaced by possessive, individualistic tendencies. However, characters in both novels (Ben and Ocholla in *Going Down River Road* and Bimbo and Jimmy Sr. in *The Van*) show shifting attitudes in terms of use of space and conceptions of its significance.

In both novels, ways in which characters deal with each other and undertake transactions with each other suggest that they are torn between what Floris qualifies as “primary sociability” (which entails exchanges of various types, without demand for personal gain) and “the market” which (I assume refers to capitalist principles or transactions). For example, in *Going Down River Road*, Ocholla, though hesitantly, admits Ben and Baby into his home without requiring financial compensation. In *The Van*, Bimbo makes Jimmy Sr a business partner without requiring a financial contribution from him (Jimmy Sr). However, in both novels, these benevolent acts result in contestations around rights and ownership of the properties which are at the centre of the transactions – the hut in the case of *Going Down River Road* and the van in *The Van*. I attribute the shifts to the influence of capitalism among other factors. However, at the end of both novels, these characters resolve their differences and seem to attach lesser value to the van and the hut than to maintaining their friendship. The shifting interactions suggest that these characters prefer what Floris qualifies as “primary sociability” – which under specific (urban) conditions, becomes the means through which “alliances, kinship, family and therefore, relationship with the neighbours develop”. This preference is, however, “not due to good-heartedness but ... seems to be the most

effective way of surviving” (Floris 2006: 46, 49). Indeed, Paschel specifically suggests that “Dubliners have almost perfected the art of survival [by] showing a considerable amount of solidarity and community spirit” (Paschel, 1998:20). In both novels, Ben and Ocholla’s co-habitation in the hut, and Jimmy Sr and Bimbo’s “co-ownership” of the van, occur mainly on the basis of sociability, but it is this same sociability that eventually results in conflict that threatens to destroy the relationships, perhaps because it (sociability) is in conflict with the forces of the market and capitalism in the urban contexts in which the novels are set. Evidently, both friends are damaged by the conflict over resources – perhaps never to fully recover the level of trust that formerly existed between them. Nonetheless, their relationships or rather primary sociability is shown to survive (perhaps only precariously) the pressures of capitalism – indicating their “desire to counter the sense of loss they experience in the city by forming [and maintaining] self-sustaining communities” (Hubbard, 2006: 207).

Unlike Ben in *Going Down River Road*, Jimmy Sr in *The Van* is invited into Bimbo’s private space, rather than imposing himself onto it. However, moving from a friendly relationship in the impersonal public space into the intimate, personal and private space of the van seems to lead (in due course) to near catastrophic consequences, as they do in Mwangi’s text. Although Bimbo and Jimmy Sr try to keep out of each other’s way, “[t]hat wasn’t easy in a space as big as two wardrobes. You couldn’t go anywhere without someone getting out of your way first” (Doyle, 1998: 494).

Subsequently, while on an adventurous trip into town, Jimmy Sr. charges that they were turned down by two women that they flirted with because Bimbo had informed the women that they worked in a chips van, causing Bimbo to boisterously and angrily retort: “is it not good for you now? ... It pays your wages ... If you don’t want to work in it... you can leave anytime yeh want” (Doyle, 1998: 598). Upon their return from this fun trip that turns sour, Bimbo informs Jimmy Sr. that he (Jimmy Sr) would be receiving a wage from then on, rather than half of the profit made (Doyle, 1998: 602), causing Jimmy to express the regret that “[h]e should have bought the half of the van when he’d thought about it. ... He’d just been greedy. And now he was working in someone else’s chipper van, like working in McDonalds or Burger King” (Doyle, 1998: 603). This incident alerts the reader as well as Jimmy Sr to the vulnerable state of urban existence but also the dangers of transgressing spatial boundaries. When the poor perpetually share the same space (the van) this leads to a complete breakdown in their (Jimmy Sr and Bimbo’s) relationship, which is metaphorically reminiscent of Robert Frost’s claim that “[G]ood fences make good neighbours”. When the ‘fence’ between the private and the public life of the two friends gets broken, there is a consequential breakdown in their relationship. However, the two friends later attempt a partial patch-up of the badly damaged friendship in Hikers, over some pints, and drive out to the coast – where Bimbo disposes of the van by sinking it into the sea with the exclamation: “mission acc-

omplished... – come on Jim” (Doyle, 1998: 632). This resonates with the similarly muted and partial reconciliatory scene between Ocholla and Ben. Economic pressures result in the transgression and in some cases the intersection of private-public boundaries in the two novels, creating conflict between friends and such conflict seems to only find resolution in public spaces of entertainment. The two resolution scenes seem to suggest that friendship in the urban setting survives when the boundaries between private and public space are recognised and respected – something that is clearly a challenge for the urban poor in contrast with the wealthy and with rural dwellers because of the intensely crowded and overcrowded urban living spaces of the poor.

The van unlike the hut goes through three stages that Hegel identifies. These are “[i] taking possession of the thing ... making it ... ours, [ii] using it and [iii] alienating it” (Mandinapour, 2003: 57). Bimbo takes “possession” of the van and draws in Jimmy Sr as a partner (“making it ours”) not because he, (Jimmy Sr) contributes a share of the start-up capital, but rather on the basis of a communal ethos basis (friendship), then they “use” and later “alienate” it when it is disposed of in the sea. This is to deal with the perception or realisation that it stands in the way of their relationship – perhaps highlighting the perspective that “a man’s wealth is directly proportional to the goods he [or she] can do without” (Floris 2006: 141) – a point that I develop in greater detail in chapter five of this thesis. Like his predecessors, including James Joyce, Doyle portrays “the entrapment of the commercial class in a new kind of city controlled by money and commodity relationships. [Dublin has an] ... effect on human consciousness of the expanding city; the city [is seen] as a maze, seemingly beyond human scale”. Also, in depicting the twin’s delinquency and Darren’s disrespect towards his father (as discussed earlier), Doyle portrays “the breakdown of the family” (Lehan, 1998: 107) as a result of economic pressures faced by the urban subject.

To summarise in conclusion, this chapter covers three broad aspects of the city in Mwangi’s *Going Down River Road* and Doyle’s *The Van*. These are, firstly: the idea of *people as infrastructure* in which I examine the location of urban subjects in terms of their careers and socio-economic class, arguing that, like *The Van*, the novel *Going Down River Road* represents characters drawn exclusively from the working class or unemployed sector of society. I argue that by focusing exclusively on this category of urban dwellers, the fictional text does not necessarily reflect the full reality of the two cities (which would be much more diverse). Rather, the exclusively working class community reflects particular concerns of the authors, who seem to set out to portray the urban condition of hardship resulting from poverty or relative poverty. Secondly, I consider the idea of the *triangular city*, arguing that the two fictional cities are given a triangular shape. The triangle comprises three interconnected points – the house, the workplace and the entertainment facility, joined together by the city street. Here, I examine how human actions and interactions with and within a particular point of the triangle have ramifications concerning and affecting other points of the triangle – which could be assumed to be more closely connected for the poor than for the

wealthy in one city. Thirdly, I examine the notion of *private and public space*, highlighting the implications of actions and ways of relating that blur or transgress the boundary between private and public space – where these, too, tend to become uncomfortably closely entangled for less well off city dwellers.

Chapter 2: Imagining a social reality in the fiction of Meja Mwangi and Roddy Doyle – poverty: balancing aesthetic features and the real.

My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel – it is, above all, to make you see. That – and no more, and it is everything. (Conrad, 1997: 1 quoted in Lewis, 2008: 198)

In this chapter, I study elements of literary representation in Mwangi's *Striving for the Wind* (2003, first published in 1990) and Doyle's *The Commitments* (1988). Studied elements include narrative style, depictions of setting, evocations of character or personality, tone (empathetic; humorous; satirical) and implicit themes. I consider how their works open space for a distinctive understanding of the condition, experience and idea of poverty.

Mediating experiences in the third person narrative voice

The narrative approach adopted by both Mwangi and Doyle is evocative. Mwangi's *Striving for the Wind* is narrated predominantly in the third person – which gives the omniscient third person narrator access to various dimensions of the experience and the condition of poverty. Also, the third person narrative voice allows the narrator to mediate the experiences of poverty that are being narrated. As the novel opens, the omniscient narrator makes an observation that is laden with meaning:

Baba Pesa, the man after whom the road was named, was the richest man on this hill and the next and the next. He owned three hundred acres of hills and valleys, forests and plains, trees and rocks and more cattle and goats and chicken and tractors; things that his ten-acre neighbours didn't even dream about.
(Mwangi, 2003: 1)

This passage directly captures the kind of material conditions that the novel deals with and its rhythmic form and use of repetition and listing significantly mimic the oral narrative form. The narrative approach exhibits to “an appreciable degree the artistic characteristic of accurate observation, vivid imagination and indigenous expression” (Okpewho, 1995: 124). This kind of narrative approach in the words of Conrad (1997:1) quoted in Lewis (2008: 198) “make[s] the reader] hear, ... feel ... above all, ... see”. The reader is made to hear and feel the woes of the ten-acre neighbours on the one hand and the swanks and snobbery of Baba Pesa on the other and to see the masses of land and livestock that Baba Pesa on the one hand owns and on the other hand, his neighbours' meager ten acres. The text exemplifies the gross individualism and material polarization in Kambi, a rural African village. However, there is an implied power in surviving on ten acres. In fact, there is nothing in this specific passage to suggest that the ten-acre neighbours are less contented with life than Baba Pesa on the basis of their material conditions. Not “dreaming” about the things that Baba Pesa has may be attributed to the fact that they recognize the difficulty of acquiring these possessions, but perhaps also to their worldview which perhaps does not prioritise abundance of material possessions. They may simply hold a different set of values. Some,

like Mama Baru's mother, come from an era where "fine words were ... valued more than wealth" (116), while Juda believes that, with or without material wealth, "everybody [in the village] is a somebody" (153). In Baba Pesa's worldview on the contrary, all what matters is that "money speaks and it calls [him] daddy", an attitude that leads him to categorise most members of his community as "indisciplined small people" (123). These sets of competing worldviews and perspectives show the complex nature of Kambi village and by extension, any human community – suggesting that the experience and perception of states of wealth and self-worthiness are indeed relative.

Additionally, the narrative approach in the Mwangi passage foregrounds the importance of material conditions as a significant designator of individual identity. The material conditions ascribed to the two categories of Kambi village inhabitants "make clear the identities of the contenders [for scarce resources, in the process,] distinguishing *us* from *them*" [my italicization] (Polleta and Jasper, 2001: 291). It is likely that most of the Kenyan and perhaps African readership in general would in the words of Doyle in Sbrockey (1999: 550) "recognize themselves in" or relate more to the "ten-acre neighbours" than to the "richest man". These two fictional categories (ten-acre neighbours and the richest man) are somehow representative of the "us" and the "them" respectively of real society. This argument is based on the fact that "more than half of Kenya's population is poor" (Kimalu et al, 2001: iii) and poverty levels in Africa in general, according to the World Bank, have increased, "leaving almost half the residents of that continent poor". The imaginative text to some extent hints at the reality of this dimension of society. This is significant, as "not only are certain works of fiction 'better' than academic or policy research in representing central issues relating to development, but they also frequently reach a wider audience and are therefore more influential" (Lewis, 2006: 198).

When characters are identified variously as "the richest man ..." and "ten-acre neighbours", these identifying features set up and subsume a dynamic of empowerment and extreme disempowerment. The absurd existence of a lone "richest man" on the one hand and an implied multitude of "ten acre neighbours" on the other hand is significant and to a certain extent captures the reality of the post-independent Kenyan land situation. At independence, "land was ... the key source of national wealth [in Kenya ... however,] a significant majority of Kenyans ... were squatters or landless" (Odhiambo, 2008: 74). Though not completely landless, the ten acres owned by the neighbours in comparism with Pesa's immense three hundred acres to a certain extent evoke the kind of situation that Odhiambo outlines above. The literary narrative complements the socio-economic reality where, as in the fiction, the most important resource – land – is held by a select few, creating a condition of material impoverishment for many. The literature hyperbolizes the situation as one individual, Baba Pesa "the father of money", is shown to own nearly all the land and consequently, nearly all the wealth, leaving the majority of his "ten acre neighbours" deprived of sufficient land

to prosper and certainly (materially) poor, consequently condemned to what David Butz and Michael Rimeester qualify as “the third space ... of the radically disempowered – those condemned ... not to win” (Persson, 2006: 59). The narrative here “enjoys the freedom of fabrication [or more appropriately, creativity] that allows it to present ... exemplifications of [a] social phenomenon [Pesa’s wealth and his neighbours’ impoverishment], in a way that empirically grounded academic literature sometimes cannot” (Lewis et al., 2006: 206).

Dialogue: the palmoil with which words are eaten

At another level, dialogue as a narrative feature is used to great effect in *Striving for the Wind*. In various ways, “the novel [mimics the dramatic genre and] incorporates [its features] into its peculiar structure” (Bakhtin, 2004: 5). Though also of a high aesthetic quality, the novel as shown by the quoted dialogue “achieves a high degree of realism through the ... reporting of direct speech”. In other words, the narrator makes the situations described “seem more authentic by invoking the words of others” (Wolfson, 1978: 220). Additionally, the selected dialogues lend themselves to a variety of “conversational implicatures” (Sinex, 2002: 282) which I attempt to interpret.

Dialogue one:

Pesa: Do you ever pay for the milk or do you know only how to fetch?

Moses: We pay.

Pesa: When?

Moses: Sometimes. (13).

The conversation continues:

Pesa: If your father would sell me his land ... he might afford a milk cow of his own.

Moses: Yes, Where would we graze our milk cow?

Pesa: Where the landless graze theirs, By the roadside. (15)

In dialogue one, Moses’s responses to Baba Pesa are naively forthright, deliciously humorous but most importantly, forceful and serious in tone and intention. When Moses responds: “we pay”, the unusual seriousness, assertiveness, confidence and conviction in his tone seems to throw into relief Baba Pesa’s habitual effort to ridicule others. The reader is almost made to anticipate a possibility that Moses, much more than his father, would “take on the [exploitative] system [that Pesa represents] rather than bow down to it” (Odhambo 2008: 79). Though young and in a position of material misfortune, the phrase “we pay” reveals his mind-power. Moses and his family are poor and it is likely that they may not be paying for all the milk that they collect, but the conviction in tone suggests that “lack of money is [not necessarily] equated with complete powerlessness and real fear” (Sinex, 2002: 283). He is offered a voice but one that is to a certain extent as fragmented as his experiences. In spite of the show of power, his adolescent vulnerability is evoked in the naïve “yes” response that precedes his question: where would we graze our milk cow? The reader is however likely to sympathise more with the adolescent than with Baba Pesa whose appetitive

financial and ridiculing motive is seen continually playing itself out at the expense of defenceless victims like the entire Baru family. In fact, the satirical weapon is directed squarely at Baba Pesa and his pettiness, stinginess and lack of humaneness in contrast with his wife. By implication, Baba Pesa's mainly materialistic worldview has numbed him against the suffering of others around him.

The conversation problematises arguments like those advanced by Mbiti (1970) and Jagers (1988, quoted in Boykin 1997: 410). Mbiti claims: "communalism is seen as central to the Afrocultural social ethos ... [illustrated in] the West African axiom I am because we are and since we are therefore I am". Jagers for his part declares: "[t]here exists an emphasis on social bonds and mutual interdependence such that the good of the individual is closely intertwined with the good of the group". The exchange between Moses and Baba Pesa suggests that Kambi village like any other African society exhibits complexities beyond the kind of simplistic communal ideal that Mbiti and Jagers ascribe to *Africa*. In fact, it would be difficult and perhaps even impossible for communalism to thrive exclusively in a society with the kinds of extremities shown in the Mwangi novel. Baba Pesa shows what Odhiambo (2008: 75) terms "predatory tendencies [typical of] a capitalist world [where] personal pursuit of social and economic opportunities and material things generally implies exploitation [. This] in turn produces winners [like the extremely wealthy Baba Pesa] ... and victims" like the extremely impoverished Baru. These extremities make it impossible for any of these values to thrive exclusively in actual society and intrinsically weaken any formulaic theorization that classifies African socioeconomic practices in binary or dichotomizing categories of communalism or capitalism. When Pesa makes the notoriously derogatory comments that he does, one sees this as an attempt to confer a certain identity on his "others" – the poor. When Moses declares: "we pay", he is resisting the conferred identity. The dialogue that follows further articulates the sophisticated nature of Kambi village socialization and responses to poverty.

Dialogue two

Mama Pesa: [after advising Moses to pay no attention to Baba Pesa's words] Why are you not in school?...

Moses: We have no money to pay for the fees

Mama Pesa: Tell you what, If you do some work for me on Saturday, I will see that you get a hundred shillings for your school fees. (15-16)

Mama Pesa's words in the dialogue above capture a compellingly "sharp and decisive dissociation" (Driver, 1991: 341) from her notoriously duplicitous and inhumanely materialistic husband. She compensates for her husband's shortcomings and unlike her husband, shows maternal instinct, exemplifying the common maxim in some African societies that children belong to the entire community and that women are mothers of "the nation". The care she shows cushions Moses against the general state of material impoverishment and this crystallizes in the fact that Moses "suddenly brightened up" (16), indicating that "the narrative offers a[n imaginative] resolution for a particular predicament ... through dialogue ... [- the lack of money but also showing] the spiritual

and therapeutic function of narrative” dialogue (Ochs and Capps, 1996: 29). Her care and concern for Moses rests along the ideological position that “internal [and perhaps external/community] surveillance mechanisms impel women to fulfill and gain satisfaction from the enactment of caregiving responsibilities” (Spitzer, et al. 2003: 270) within poor communities. These communal attributes are not reflected just by the rich women that Mama Pesa represents but also by the poor – for example, Mama Baru as seen in dialogue three below.

Dialogue three:

Mama Baru: [turning down money that Mama Pesa is paying her for dried maize declares] No, ... I cannot accept it.

Mama Pesa: I came to buy, ... I must, therefore, pay. ...

Mama Baru: People on the same hill must not trade with each other What shall I then do when I want milk from you and I have no money? (29)

I argue that Mwangi in the conversation between the two women calls attention to a survivalist socio-economic system embraced by poor communities, in particular the poorer in those communities and more particularly women. Crucially underlying this system is a “characteristic echo of human mutuality and reciprocity where social interactions among neighbours, ... generate *social capital* [my emphasis] and the ability to work together for a common good, which is especially important for the poor [. Through this system,] poor women are capable of extend[ing] the household's sources of livelihood” (Ghazali, 2003: 183, 184). Although this argument essentialises “the poor” in a way reminiscent of Mbiti’s argument above, one sees a level of objectivity demonstrated in Mwangi’s passage, in which he uses novelistic dialogue to fictionalize responses to the condition of poverty – imagined and perhaps reflective of actual conditions. Rather than denigrate the poor, the fictional representation shows Mama Baru to be firm, resolute, eloquent, thoughtful and a resilient strategist and matriarch who is in a condition of material misfortune, but shows intellectual sophistication and self-assertion in her theorisation – which draws on a complex universal system of social capital, attributed not just to Africa but also to Asia and Latin America. As she hastens to declare explicitly, she embraces the system more for the good of her family and not just with the intent of fostering communal good or out of any kind of co-optation. Although she may not be typical of all women in her condition, Mama Baru, contrary to her husband (and several of the impoverished male characters in the novel) is shown in the cited dialogue to refuse creatively the subject-position assigned to the impoverished in the novel. She has a very sophisticated mindset and mind power and is shown to be enterprising in seeking the good of her family. Dialogue between male characters in the novel as seen in the passage below allows the reader to gain greater insight into how they experience (poverty and their worldview in general):

Dialogue four:

Baru: Get out of my way! ... Today I shall kill the dog [referring to Baba Pesa] ...

Mutiso: You use your best panga to kill a dog? ...

Pesa: A man can not respect you when he can take at will what you hold dearest to

you. Today I shall kill him ...

Mutiso: Let us sit and you tell me about these things that you say are worse than death.

Baru: But, I too, I am a man, ... I must protect what is mine! ...

Mutiso: But when you cannot kill the leopard who preys on your goats you must strengthen your boma and keep a fire burning as you watch. ...

Baru: The pain is very deep ... But your words are wise. Will you come with me to the Chief?

Mutiso: I am but an old goatherd I work for Baba Pesa who has been as good a master as any I ever worked for. (76-77)

The preceding passage captures Baba Baru's eventual attempt to resist Baba Pesa's stranglehold over and his domineering and abusive attitude towards himself and his family. Rather than showing a victim, the passage portrays a poor but empowered, uncompromising and resolute Baru seeking to protect himself and his family. Rather than evoking the reader's sympathy, admiration is evoked for the new Baru. In capturing the issues, the passage shows fundamental literary richness. First, it moves from a temperamental climax to an anticlimax. This is shown by the shifting tone and mode. There is significant variation in tone and mode between the opening sentence "Get out of my way! Today I shall kill the dog" and the closing sentence, "The pain is very deep ... But your words are wise. Will you come with me to the Chief?" The transition from a violent to a peaceful temperament has the effect of showing the therapeutic function of *talk*. Second, the passage makes significant use of animal imagery which evokes varied perceptions of Baba Pesa but also reveal the personalities of Mutiso and Baba Baru. When Baru threatens, "[t]oday I shall kill the dog" and Mutiso appeals "[y]ou use your best panga to kill a dog?", this shows how meanly Pesa, in spite of his wealth is perceived – as a dog by some in his community. This may in turn manipulate the reader into sharing these perceptions of him. However, I argue that Mutiso's question "You use your best panga to kill a *dog*?", just like the opposing image of the leopard in the statement "when you cannot kill the *leopard* who preys on your *goats* you must strengthen your boma and keep a fire burning as you watch" are tactical. The wise, thoughtful and tactful goatherd uses this kind of rhetoric intentionally to dissuade Pesa from the act. The dialogue shows Mutiso to be an immense valuable vehicle for raising key issues in the novel and most importantly, holding the centre together for many of the vulnerable characters in the Pesa and the Baru households – and, indeed, for mediating a fragile cohabitation between the two families. In spite of these functions, he has his own vulnerabilities and lives at the fringe of society. In fact, he is "without roots, without a sense of home and place, [which] is one of the [noted causes of the] most serious, ... psychological disorders" (Dogra, 1998: 506). As the text indicates: "[e]xactly where Mutiso the goatherd had come from no one really knew. He said he came from the eastern land Exactly when Mutiso came from wherever he claimed to have come from was also another mystery ..." (107). In addition to his mysterious origin, and inspite of the sophisticated views and skills that he may command, he acknowledges his limitations in the statement: "I am but an old goatherd ..., I work for Baba Pesa who has been as good a master as any I ever worked for" (77). For a society like Kambi Village to rely on the counseling abilities of a character like Mutiso for stability is a positive

statement on the resilience and the untapped and perhaps often unappreciated abilities of those like him who live in conditions of extreme misfortune and at the fringe of society, but it may also be a pessimistic comment on the fragility of the whole society. At another level, portraying Baba Pesa as a dog and at the same time as a leopard – animals with contrastingly dichotomous qualities – is significant. On the basis of his material wealth, he possesses leopard-like power, but his sexual escapades and other vile acts are dog-like and despicable. There seems to be a correlation therefore (at least in this case) between wealth derived power or conceptions of power and human depravity. Baba Pesa considers himself extraordinarily powerful in relation to everyone else in the village and exercises massive abuse of that power, abusing members of the Baru household sexually, physically and psychologically and, in fact, abusing most other members of the community in one way or another. The image of the leopard is a positive and at the same time a negative attribute, as it captures both Baba Pesa’s predatory tendencies and his power.

Proverbs are effectively and significantly deployed in the dialogue. In some cases, use of proverbs as a culturally embedded, social mode of communication requires key contextual knowledge to be understood. As such, when Mutiso uses proverbs as a vehicle to counsel Baba Baru and by extension the reader, he (in so doing) claims an insider identity. Elsewhere in the novel he is placed as an outsider, but this dialogue suggests that he possesses attributes of an insider – he is both inside and outside of the community, suggesting that the narrative “generate[s] a multiplicity of partial selves” (Ochs and Capps 1997: 21) of Mutiso. One is stable and inside the community and the other is at the periphery. It is this peripheral status that makes Mutiso a key vehicle for driving the themes of the novel. Because he sits perpetually in “the woods, like a faithful genie” he performs a key surveillance function and a witness’s role not just for the community, but also for the reader. When Mutiso uses proverbs the didactic function of his message is heightened, for the characters he is speaking to and (by extension and perhaps more importantly) for the reader.

In further examining how dialogue as a narrative device drives the story and raises key issues around the subject of poverty, it is important to consider Juda’s conversation with his friends.

Juda: The future ... belongs to the tillers of the land and the herders of cattle. That is you boys

Youth: No one can make it without money

Juda: All you need is brains You have the muscles. And the sweat. Brains is all you need. ...

Juda: Nothing is more stupid than laziness and self-neglect. Dedication to self-improvement is a duty to society.

Elija: [who has been eavesdropping]: Well said, brother, It seems you have been neglecting your duty to self and to society. (101-102)

Juda’s theoretical argument on the importance of agriculture echoes statistics that “agriculture [in actual African societies] ... accounts for between 25 – 40 percent GDP and remains between 70 –

80 percent of the labour force” (Commander 1988: 98). The fictional version demonstrates that “narratives are [indeed] versions of reality” (Ochs and Capps 1997: 21). Juda’s views about the stupidity of laziness and self-neglect and the importance of dedication to self-improvement as a duty to society, are evocative proclamations. They show that “narrative is an essential resource in the struggle to bring experience [and perhaps, also vulnerabilities] to conscious awareness” (Ochs and Capps 1997: 21). The principles that Juda expounds and his brother’s sarcastic undertone suggests that Juda is deeply aware and conscious of key prerequisites for material success, but refuses to abide by any of these as he subverts and rebels against any kind of ethic to do with hard work – partly in revolt against his father and brother Elija who uphold very rigorous and perhaps even inhumane work ethics. Juda opens up new spaces of subjectivity for himself and friends – “you boys”. I use the term "subject" here to refer variously to: a subject of inquiry, subjection to the power of another or a thing, and subject as a thinking agent and as observer. He is shown to be an impressive thinker on the subject that he speaks about whereas his friends take the position of victimhood, subjecting themselves to the power of poverty. Though the points he advances are illuminating and perhaps “versions of reality”, they are incongruous with Juda’s own lifestyle and personality – he is a true embodiment of laziness. This way, the comments assume a humorous as well as a satirical value. Read more broadly, Juda stands as an allegory or a parody of the post-colonial African leader at whom the satire in this episode is sharply pointed. The chasm between Juda’s rhetoric and his actions in this episode – the ‘do as I say and not as I do’ syndrome is typical of some African leaders and contributes to the state of affairs on the continent – a state of affairs where, though not homogeneously, “sub-Saharan Africa’s development has lagged behind that of other regions since the end of the colonial period ... [and] theories [have] laid the blame with African politicians and bureaucrats” (Englebert, 2000: 7-8). Since fictional narration allows for multiple interpretations and for the microscopic to be conflated onto the broader, I argue that the kind of mentality that Juda (who himself assumes a leadership role in the community of youths) represents partly explains his and the group’s impoverished material condition. This (by extension) explains the situation in some parts of and communities in Africa. In another light, Mwangi uses Juda here to introduce the notion of causality or "essentialism", "determinism" and "reductionism" (Yapa 1996: 718) to the discourse on poverty. The youth’s statements: “no one can make it without money” and Elija’s accusation: “[i]t seems you have been neglecting your duty to self and to society” (102) raise urgent questions that require radical rethinking around the notion of making or of being made poor – in other words, causation. The youth’s proclamation imagines the kind of society that Chilman (1991:192) describes as “two-tiered with the rich getting richer [because they have capital] and the poor getting poorer”. However, the origins of poverty or deepening poverty are much more complex. As Chilman (1991: 191) further explains: “family [or individual] well being ... is a product of the larger economic and social world in which families [and individuals] are embedded and their own internal worlds of development”. One such internal world of development is attitude to work and self development which Juda neglects as he shows extremities

of laziness in spite of his seeming intellectual sophistication. In fact, as the fictional Elija implies when addressing Juda it is common “to equate poverty and its consequences with individual failure, lack of thrift or laziness” (Seccombe, 2002: 389). These are some of the attributes that are saliently evoked in the many gnomic utterances which offer pertinent but nuanced explanations for the material condition of Juda and his friends. Considering all that has been said, there is no single cause to the condition of poverty and Mwangi’s text confirms this complexity. The dialogue in creating interpretative space for the reader to discover various levels of meaning pertinent to the issue, also underlines the position that poverty arises out of a combination of factors such as exploitation, inequalities in access to capital and individual failures such as laziness. Additionally, there is a clear indication in the passages that are analysed here that in poverty discourses, “the line between fact and fiction is a very fine one” (Lewis et al., 2008: 198).

The empowering potential of Narrator-less fiction

Doyle’s “narrator-free” (Sbrockey, 1999: 537) narrative approach in *The Commitments* is evocative and effectively highlights ways in which characters understand and conceptualize their immediate surrounding and more particularly, poverty and poverty related issues. The novel is written mostly in the form of a dialogue between friends who are struggling to form and to sustain a musical band. The dialogue and rhetoric that band members engage in is “extremely funny” and “accurately captures northside speech and linguistic behavior”; it therefore has the potential to reflect “real” experiences by extension (Persson, 47: 2003). Doyle, using dialogue, creates a “theatre of social consciousness”, raising some pertinent issues and problematising understanding of poverty and related issues. In this section, I identify and discuss passages taken from a series of episodes in which the characters mostly pun on the term *soul* in the process of proclaiming the significance of the musical genre (soul) for the fictional society. Joey The Lips claims that he returns to Dublin from his (fictitious) international travels with the intention of bringing soothing and crime alleviating soul to Dublin. He declares: “[t]he Brothers wouldn’t be shooting asses off each other if they had soul ...” (27). Here, he is referring to the conflict between the Catholic and Protestant communities in Northern Ireland which lasted from 1969 to 1998, commonly referred to as “the troubles”. The infusion of such historical and political statements into the narrative reflects Doyle’s claim that “I write about Irish, urban characters and they drag the politics behind them”. Here he is hinting at the level of reality that is embellished in his fiction. This approach should, in his view have the effect that many “people [would] have recognized themselves in the book[s]” (Sbrockey, 1999: 550). Drawing on the distinctive benefit of disguise that fiction allows, Doyle uses the image of the “brothers” rather than referring directly to the conflict. Commenting on the level of literariness in his work, he declares: “it’s literary. It’s a literature. Every word – every choice I make in regards to words is a literary decision” (Sbrockey, 1999: 549). The term brothers connotes and subsumes a brotherly relationship between the conflicting parties and perhaps seeks to affirm the universal humanity of ‘man’, thereby implying the absurdity of conflict within this particular

brotherly community and among sectors of humanity in general. In narrating the views of these working class and mostly unemployed youths, Doyle in his own words is “manipulating the reader” (Sbrockey, 1999: 548) out of warring tendencies.

Jimmy Jr further comments: “Dublin’s fucked up with drugs. Drugs aren’t soul”. Jimmy’s view leads a band member to inquire, “__ Wha’ about’ drinkin’?” Responding to the question, Jimmy Jr declares, __ “(t)hat’s different __ That’s okay. The workin’ class have always had their few scoops. ... Guinness is soul food” (66). The band members conceive a society where the role of soul is overrated and it is expected to instill respect and value for human life, rationality and (generally) to lead to a lawful society. While highlighting the *soullessness* of drugs, they seem to suggest that drinking is normal, it is *cool*. In a paper interestingly subtitled, “Are Slumps Really Dry Seasons”, Johansson et al. (2006: 215) argue that “drinking is used as a form of self-medication in time of psychological stress during economic downturns”. There is little to explicitly show psychological stress in the community that Doyle represents but the band members in various ways show signs of economic misfortune. When Jimmy refers to Guinness as soul food, he sees it as food for the mind that is stressed by economic circumstances – self-medication. Arguing that drugs are soulless and drinking soulful shows subversive or contradictory morality (considering the many negative side effects of drinking) – this captures the kind of subversion and contradiction that is further highlighted in Jimmy Jr’s view that “soul is a double-edged sword ... __ [and t]he first side is sex”. Indeed, the band members practise what they preach – the *soulfulness* of sex. However, the sexual acts in the novel have been read as a form of resistance against “a top down economic system which does not seem to need their services and in which decisions are taken above their heads” (Persson, 2006:62). Therefore, when “Imelda, Natalie and Bernie – all have sex with one particular band member, [it implies that though poor and consequently without much power,] they are in control of when and with whom to have sex” (Persson, 2006:63). This is particularly subversive in a society like theirs with a strong religious and perhaps moralistic ethos. Therefore, economic disempowerment does not lead to absolute disempowerment and lack of control. Making the novel narrator-less offers the poor characters that are represented some sort of power. I argue that this is intended to give the band members narrative power and consequently, to show them as being in control. Generally, the dialogue is humorous but poignant, showing how the characters attempt the following: to take charge of their own lives; seek alternatives to social challenges; adopt subversive responses to dominant forces; win back some economic space using the musical enterprise. One is led to visualize embodied framing of the incidents narrated as “possible life events” (Ochs & Capps, 1996:19) – especially as the issues narrated resonate with social theory. The word soul assumes metaphorical significance as it may also be interpreted as referring to the heart and mind of the fictional community. Therefore, bringing soul to Dublin could imply, giving Dublin or the “brothers” a soul/mind, a heart – i.e. *ubuntu*; humanism. This view is implied in the statement: “we are bringing ... the soul, back to the people” (98).

Subsequent narrative incidents in the novel further reveal how the characters by punning on the term soul conceptualize the idea of *soulfulness* and *working-classness*. Jimmy Jr declares that soul is “the rhythm o’ the factory too. The workin’ man’s rhythm ...” (35) During one of their shows, Joey The Lips declares: “__ We are bringing the music, the soul, back to the people . __ the proletariat. ____ That’ p,r,o,l,e,t,a,r,i,a,t. ... Ordinary people making music for ordinary people. ____ Simple music” (98). A number of readings ensue from these narrative excerpts. Their choice of soul music is significant. It is a genre of music born of poverty, struggle and the marginalization of African Americans in the United States of America. Soul is synonymous with dispossession and evokes pain and emotion. It is partly this choice of music that makes the band identify themselves as the “blacks of Dublin” but more so, their experiences of the kind of adversity that they see as similar to experiences of people of African descent around the world. The act of setting up the band assumes metaphorical significance, here serving to reclaim a sense of self-worth and the possibility of self-empowerment. It has been suggested that the act

constitutes the third space, [the space of the radically disempowered] in that it is an act to set up an alternative space to the one offered by official Ireland at an economic, political, social and cultural level. In that act, which grows into a kind of community action, they sing and name themselves [as well as their community] into existence; it is as if they insist that they, too have a story to tell [a role to play] and experiences that should be taken seriously. They seem to refuse to accept a situation in which their lives are controlled by the state and thus they reclaim some space that has been lost through unemployment [and its effects on them]. (Persson, 2006: 63)

Like in Mwangi’s work where members of the Kambi village community are identified variously as “the richest man” and “ten-acre neighbours”, the socio-economic condition of members of this fictional community become key indicators of identity. This is suggested by denominators such as “brothers”, “workin’ class”, “the factory”, “the proletariat”, “ordinary people”, “workin’ class hands” and “hardest workin’ band”. The level of assertiveness shown in the naming shows the self-affirming attitude of a group of people who are neither ignorant nor shy of their unfortunate material condition. They are fully aware of it and their rhetoric shows great resilience, creativity, resistance and power in the face of adversity. The conversational and dialogic narrative approach in *The Commitments* opens up space for a deep understanding of poverty and issues related to poverty. These include ways in which socio-economic conditions serve as indicators of identity and ways in which an artistic or a cultural act could create a self-affirmative and an empowering space for experiences and views of the poor and the working class. The dialogue is funny and the youths (much more than Juda and his friends in *Striving for the Wind*) try very hard to creatively overcome adversity. At another level the story is “an indictment on the apathy which breeds teenage disillusionment [and] urban despair The six young people ... have only their fantasies ... to sustain them against the harshness of their environment [or setting, and i]magination is their only

defence” (Mac Anna, 1986: 24). They “are either unemployed or on the periphery of the job market” (Persson, 2006: 62).

Mirroring a social reality in the polarized setting of the haves and the have-nots

Setting is used by the two authors to great effect. While Mwangi masterfully describes setting to capture a sense of gross material polarization and inequality in Kambi village, Doyle’s characters make poignant statements that concomitantly reveal the polarized nature of the Dublin setting. In fact Mwangi and Doyle to a certain extent lead the reader to imagine a setting where, in the words of Ngugi (quoted in Nazareth, 1980: 102), “there are only two tribes ... the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’ ... [, with the have-nots] struggling for crumbs from the master’s tables”. Here, Ngugi hints at the kind of material inequality and polarization that Mwangi and Doyle capture in their works. The first page of *Striving for the Wind* intractably declares that Baba Pesa owned “three hundred acres of hills and valleys [and his neighbours a meager] ten acres” (1). This is hyperbolic as Baru’s wealth pales into insignificance when compared to Pesa’s. This sets the scene for the kind of dynamics of extreme inequality, empowerment and disempowerment at play in the rest of the novel. By extension, this also resonates with the situation in the actual/broader society since “income inequality ... [like elsewhere in Africa causes severe problems] in Kenya ...” (Okwi et al., 2007: 16769). Indeed, “the wealthiest ten percent of households in Kenya control more than 42 percent of income, while the poorest 10 percent control less than one percent of income” (Mulama, 2007). Mwangi seems to suggest that this kind of situation (the extreme level of inequality) in his setting is created by the “powerful’ like Pesa – through their actions and words – and not just for pure materialistic reasons but, it would seem, for vain self-affirmative reasons that result (in my view) partly from their personal insecurities but also from an obscure or even subconscious awareness of the moral invalidity or the anti-social quality of their lifestyle. This, despite the overly and overtly ‘braggart’ style of their (Pesa’s) self-projection. When Pesa seeks to dispossess Baru of his ten acre piece of land, he argues: “it is not the land [he (Pesa) wants. He declares:] ... I want him out of my view” (37). He shows such greedy possessiveness in the presence of the indifferent Chief who should defend the rights of the weak like Baba Baru. However, Baba Pesa has shattered the Chief’s sense of fair adjudication by offering him drinks – foreshadowing an ominous state of affairs for poor and weak members of this fictional society and actual African societies. The Chief is an allegorical representation of some leaders in actual African societies – embodying aspects of the phenomenon commonly referred to as “politics of the stomach”. The fact that he halfheartedly dissuades Baba Pesa from pursuing his evil plans to seize Baru’s land, rather than exonerate him directs the satirical weapon at him even more forcefully as he is shown to be fully aware of the wrongfulness of Pesa’s actions but does little to stop him.

When Moses nails the sign “BARU ESTATE” to their fence, Baba Pesa roars: “[t]here’s only one estate in this district. Mine! The rest, including yours are *shambas*”, causing Moses to “replace the

word ‘estate’ with *shamba*” (18). Though Moses replaces the word estate with *shamba*, the mere act of initially nailing up the word “estate” suggests that “[t]he spatial stratification of physical space, ... exclusive ownership of the land, and yet, ironically, the privilege enclosures, the no-go zones that this demarcation creates, invite the violation it intends to forestall” (Simatei, 2005: 87). Moses in this simple act but also in repeatedly crisscrossing the boundaries between the “estate” and the “shamba”, in various ways violates the spatial exclusivity which ironically is also violated by Baba Pesa and Elija, who stand out for advocating this kind of exclusivity in the novel. This is seen in the ways they ambivalently demonstrate hatred/rejection/contempt on the one hand and sexual desire on the other for both Mama Baru and Margaret in the case of Baba Pesa and for Margaret in Elija’s case. Additionally, the materially polarized setting and the consequent “material deprivation experienced by the poor [are in this case] socially constructed” by Baba Pesa in actions and words (Yapa, 1986: 708). By reporting the direct words of Baba Pesa in his outburst about the sign, Mwangi in this representation sharply ridicules and draws the reader’s attention to the vanity [or brutal arrogance] of Baba Pesa and “his type” (32). Conversely, Mwangi’s ability to metaphorically describe the setting projects the physical state of the spatial onto the psychological state of the characters(s). When he writes: “The Baru place was ... surrounded on all sides but one by Pesa’s three hundred acres”, one visualizes not just how the physical space is surrounded, but also senses the metaphorically evoked pressure and state of suffocation imposed on members of the Baru household by the state of being surrounded. Although they are not surrounded on one of the four sides, this side has nothing but “a cluster of stunted thorn trees”. The *stuntedness* is a metaphor for the physical effects that the economic conditions and the notoriously abusive activities of Baba Pesa have on the members of the Baru household (16).

In describing or rather, listing public amenities that would be found in the village, Mwangi’s narrator claims that: “Kambi was in itself a sane and ordinary village” with “one school”, “three churches”, “six bars”, “two beer halls serving alcoholic maize porridge”, “one and a half butcheries”, “one general store”, “a restaurant”, a “maize mill” and a “private clinic run by the harvest doctor”. Mwangi’s style is versatile (from pictorial descriptions to listings like this one) and each adds value to the text and the message conveyed. It has been argued that: “predictable relationships between [public] amenities, quality of life and local economic performance exist” (Steven et al. 2001: 352). Contrary to this social science view, one cannot predict such a relationship on the basis of the list above. There is no set standard for the types, quantity or quality of amenities that would give a particular setting the outlook and standard of economic fortune or misfortune – economic fortune and misfortune are relative states. Therefore, the list of amenities does not allow the reader to make a value judgment about economic conditions of inhabitants but rather creates the sense that in spite of the chaos in the setting, it (like any other inhabited space) has a multifaceted and a heterogeneous but normal life that deserves to be valued and respected. The author influences the audience to share this view by using the device of narrative point of view

when the omniscient narrator prefixes the list of amenities with the claim that: “Kambi was in itself a sane and ordinary village”. Any actual society is expected to have most of the amenities listed. As such, by listing these, Mwangi gives the fictive setting a semblance of reality and of course normality – imagining a social reality in the fiction.

Setting in Doyle’s work as in Mwangi’s text offers space for an understanding of the idea of material deprivation and polarization in the society represented. “For Roddy Doyle, the hidden wound in independent Ireland remains the poverty ... in the North Dublin working class that is the signature setting of” *The Commitments* (McMullen, 2004:128). Mirroring the unequal material conditions of the Dublin setting, Jimmy Jr declares: “[t]he culchies have fuckin’ everythin’. An’ the Northside Dubliners are the niggers o’ Dublin” (Doyle, 1988: 13). Here, Doyle, unlike in his other novels, does not disguise his setting into a fictional Barrytown but places the action in an existing space – Northside. The fictional Northside referred to in Jimmy Jr’s assertion above stands for Kilbarrack and other areas on the Northside of Dublin. In fact, the fictional Northside resembles the “real” Northside which (similar to Jimmy Jr’s Northside) is viewed by some commentators as “less salubrious than its counterpart across the river, the Southside” (DublinLocal.com). As in Mwangi’s novel, setting in this case effectively offers insight into extremities of material polarization in the society represented. In Mwangi’s text, it is polarization between rich and poor characters (neighbours) in the same space, but in Doyle’s, it is spatial polarization – between the North and the Southside. When Jimmy Jr claims that [t]he culchies have fuckin everythin’. An’ the northside Dubliners are the niggers of Dublin” (13), there is a clear attempt by Doyle to show the polarized nature of these two Dublin spaces. This is the only (passing) comment about the affluent Southside of Dublin. This suggests that the affluent Southside exists in the imaginary subconscious, but Doyle sets out exclusively to portray a poor working class part of the society and to appeal to a mass audience that would most likely relate to the experiences and conditions represented. In doing this, Doyle creates a character (Jimmy Jr) who does not only declare the society polarized but who has internalized the idea that society is polarized to the extent that he seeks to act out his own polarizing sentiments. Jimmy Jr in his advert for band members seeks to enhance polarization and separateness when he states that “... southsiders need not apply” (15), deliberately excluding (probably) wealthier Dublin youngsters. Here, the material polarization of the society has gained mental or psychological currency. It is likely that southsiders would not have applied anyway. Doyle here captures what Teddy (2005: 375) described as “widespread attitudes” in actual Dublin society – a point that he (Teddy) illustrates with the story of a Dublin landlord who placed a rental advertisement in the *Connacht Sentinel* newspaper that read: “4 Bedroom House, no coloured, fully furnished”. Here, I do not intend to suggest that Dublin is a mainly or even an exclusively discriminatory society. Discrimination is a common human vice – traces of which would be seen in most human societies, imagined and real – especially in sources where material resources are scarce. Doyle’s fiction reflects social reality in interestingly subversive ways. Jimmy’s advert is a

humorous response that seeks to resist, invert and mock top-down discriminatory tendencies in the Dublin setting. Here, fiction reverses the common order of discrimination by giving the disempowered the power to discriminate against the powerful. This way, the powerful may, in seeing themselves in and experiencing this fictional moment of discrimination, become more empathetic. I am not suggesting here that discrimination is exclusively one directional (from the powerful to powerless) but rather that the powerful in society are more likely to be exposed to the mechanisms that facilitate discrimination, a situation that Doyle subverts here, thereby creating new ways of thinking. In conclusion, Doyle like Mwangi uses setting to transmit pertinent messages about material polarization, inequality and exploitation, thereby impacting significantly on readers' understanding of these and other poverty related conditions and experiences.

Characterization: a struggle between good and bad, need and greed

Characterization is another literary element that in various ways offers insights on the subject of poverty in *Striving for the Wind* and *The Commitments*. First I analyse Mwangi's text, in which he creates "simple binary oppositions between 'good' and 'bad' characters" (Newell, 2002: 5) through whom he undertakes a compelling representation of poverty. Though Mwangi later on complicates the categories (in the passing episodes indicative of Pesa's formerly unsuspected capacity for goodness), the two binary categories are represented in *Striving for the Wind* by Baba Pesa (who is bad) and Baba Baru (who is good). First, I discuss the character of Baba Pesa who (as an embodiment of the bad) exhibits ills such as extreme greed and selfishness, disregard for others and exploitation in various forms. He commits abuses of varying degrees and forms – including the sexual abuse of a minor – a form of abuse that leads to pregnancy and eventual death during childbirth. Baba Pesa, in spite of his excessive wealth, sets out greedily (as earlier stated) to dispossess his neighbor Baru of his tiny (ten acres) piece of land. Seeking to justify his actions, he claims that he (Baba Pesa) would have a better wheat crop if he "get[s] that little man [Baru] to move out [of his tiny piece of land]" (36). This allows for a number of readings. Firstly, one can attribute Baba Pesa's efforts to dispossess Baba Baru not just to greed, but also to the power dynamic that he (Baba Pesa) imagines – one in which he believes that he deserves to own all the land with his neighbours working for him. He indeed asks Baba Pesa a number of times to sell his land to him and to come and work for him. He is seeking economic power and through that, symbolic power. The condition, experiences and attitudes of the two characters (Pesa and Baru) become synonymous with a struggle between need and greed. There seems to be a suggestion that the richer a person gets, the more voraciously he or she seeks riches and the more inconsiderate, selfish and demeaning of others he or she becomes – (a point that I develop further in chapter five of this thesis). Baba Pesa sees Baru as a "little man" whose "shamba" stands as a reminder of the incompleteness of his [Pesa's] might, power and material richness. His estate would (in his view) attain completeness only when it includes Baru's "tiny piece of land". Here, Baba Pesa shows a reprehensible desire to amass wealth – and not even for material wellbeing. Accumulation assumes

psychological and symbolic currency for him. He is shown to derive a much distorted sense of self-worth, self-esteem and self-aggrandisement from it. He asks the chief (who ironically should protect and defend Baba Baru): “How do you expect me to go on sharing my fence with a flea?” – referring to Baba Baru. Ironically, the reader (unlike the chief/character that Baba Pesa speaks to) is likely to be shocked by the grossly hyperbolic and crude quality of the classist rhetoric that the rich (represented by Baba Pesa) engages in. Such insensitivity appeals to the reader’s sympathy for the poor – Baru. Indeed, there seems to be a suggestion that the condition of poverty renders the poor vulnerable, defenceless, and perhaps even less than fully human in the eyes of the rich and yet, they (the poor) exhibit a greater sense of humanity as seen in the episode that is analysed later – where Pesa confronts Baru while he is entertaining guests in his *shamba*. At the same time, the portrayal of Baba Pesa’s character seems to suggest that material wealth leads to the pursuit of more wealth in a process that might make one act obsessively and inhumanly.

Later in the novel, Baba Pesa treats members of his community in ways that further demonstrate that his “penchant for embarrassing others was also [indeed] legendary” (36). In a number of instances in the novel, he is seen making fun of his drinking companions – “the members” – but also, of other members of the community. He mocks Daktari’s work ethic, claiming that the Health Inspector performs his duty “strictly for beer”. Furthermore, he accuses him of giving the chief’s brother “a licence to operate a filthy bar” (36). In the same episode, he announces that he (Baba Pesa) is “not drinking with men who plough with oxen” – referring to all those who do not own a tractor and none but he himself owns one in the entire village. Subsequently, he orders all the beer in the bar for himself and “the members”, commanding a customer who disapproves of this move in the words: “go home and drink your wife’s porridge” (37). He instructs the barman in the words: “[d]o not serve any more beer to these undisciplined small people until they learn to behave”. He uses his riches to justify this instruction when he claims that “[m]oney speaks. ... [a]nd it calls me daddy” (123). In another instance, equally intended to embarrass, he orders and watches “with satisfaction as old, old men hopped about like uncircumcised boys singing a song that even their grandchildren considered too daft” (70): all for a drink. While showing how the state of impoverishment renders these old men vulnerable, these incidents also portray Baba Pesa as wealthy but depraved as indicated by his bad manners and boorish snobbery. His self-conceited claim of authority and importance based on monetary wealth would not sway the reader’s disgust for his depraved personality. His character allows the reader to question the common perception of the rural setting of popular fiction – as a “source of identity and tradition” (Nici, 2002: 112). It is not traditional to treat anyone, less so “old, old men” anywhere (rural or urban) in the manner that Pesa does. Rather than showing the rural area as a space where traditional values are observed, the despicable – shameful and shaming – acts that Baba Pesa commits suggest the reverse. They imply that this rural setting is becoming affected and infected by an economic system which (even though the new ethos is here represented solely by Baba Pesa) is progressively being shaped by a cash

economy at the expense of core moral and communal values. This is a disorientating shift as few or rather, just one person has the cash. This results in the kind of absurd relationship or social dynamic where Baba Pesa holds excessive power over members of his community. At another level Baba Pesa's riches or rather his self-designated status as "the father of money" has transformed him into an extremely abnormal buffoon – as he indeed is. He is a social misfit who seems to exclude and include himself socially when it pleases him, showing how "people may be socially excluded [or exclude themselves] even if they are not materially poor" (Alcock, 1997: 6). In his case, it is self exclusion when it occurs. The analysis above deals with a specific narrative act and does not generally suggest that all rich people are inhumane or misfits. Indeed, even Baba Pesa as seen below, like any other human being displays a certain degree of goodness though it is short-lived and overshadowed by his atrocious personality.

In an unexpected twist that complicates the notion of the binary attribution of "goodness" and or "badness" to particular characters in the novel, a near humane side of Baba Pesa is shown. This is seen when "down on the Baru, field, [he does not only] drink from a calabash", but also assists in ploughing Baba Baru's few acres of land with the plough attached to his (Pesa's) car. In this instance, the reader is almost given the impression that the soil that Baba Pesa for the first time is shown having direct contact with has had a humanising effect on him, making him act as if he is humane after all. Indeed, he informs his wife that "[f]or once, that drunken son of yours is right. It does feel good to bury your feet in the soil and be one with the earth" (188). This humane moment in Pesa's conduct is short-lived. Baba Pesa tells Baru why he (Pesa) is ploughing his (Baru's) plot, admitting unabashedly that he is doing it "[f]or very selfish reasons [He adds:] you heard I have no diesel? ... If this piece of iron can plough your place... [t]hen maybe it can plough my land too". Responding to this self-confession of selfishness, the unfazed Baru responds: "I knew there was something to it" and Pesa confirms his inexorable egocentricity in the words: "I never do anything for nothing" (188). This admission justifies an earlier expression of bewilderment by his wife. When she realizes that he is assisting Baba Baru, she declares: "I never thought I would see your father [Pesa] do anything for any one" (186).

The claims and incidents referred to and discussed here open space for a number of readings. They highlight the dichotomy between the unassailable power to which riches create access and the true extent of power that can actually accrue from material riches. The "poor" Baru, who is not reliant on technology that he of course cannot afford, is shown in a position of power and control here. While he ploughs, the unavailability of diesel for the tractor prevents Baba Pesa from cultivating the soil. This, in spite of the much awaited, long and sought after rains having finally arrived. This brings Baba Pesa face to face with the reality of his limited power. Baba Pesa is alerted to the possibility that the kind of power, might, authority, freedom and supremacy that he imagines that his riches provide him with is indeed limited. At another level, this may simply suggest the

conflicting relationship between the ancient and the modern, the rural and the urban and the traditional and the technological – with the rural, the traditional and the old, tried and tested ways for once triumphing over the modern. This is ironic since the rich conceive an order where it is assumed that money can buy anything that the human mind conceives. Also, the passages (as shown by responses to Baba Pesa’s actions and the self-confession of selfishness on the Baru farm) suggest that attributes such as extreme greed, selfishness and desire to accumulate wealth at all costs, though foreign to this community but embodied in Pesa, are gradually being accepted as normal. The shock that the characters express in relation to Baba Pesa’s expressions of his humane side, the unfazed manner in which Baba Baru accepts Baba Pesa’s confession that he is helping “for a very selfish reason” and the nonchalant manner in which Baba Pesa acknowledges his selfishness give the impression that Pesa’s non-existent sense of social responsibility has become common knowledge and to an extent (as mentioned earlier) even accepted as normal for him. Therefore, Baba Pesa is simply “bad” though he is “rich” materially. His binary opposite, Baba Baru (as shown in the paragraph that follows) embodies the reverse. Although he exhibits his own fair share of human frailties, he is “good” in terms of character but “poor” materially. It should be noted that this does not necessarily imply that the rich are always bad and the poor good. As mentioned earlier, it would be a simplistic and an over-generalised position to take, but this specific case clearly allows for a reading that associates poor characters with good conduct and rich characters with reprehensible behaviour.

The episode in which Baba Pesa storms into Baba Baru’s *shamba* with the intention of “buying his [Baru’s] land” further shows how characterization opens space for a better understanding of the two binary opposites (Pesa and Baru) and consequently, the dynamics and dimensions of poverty that are revealed through their characterisation. Baba Baru is shown drinking honey beer with “old men with tyre sandals”, Juda Pesa, and Pata Potea (the assistant chief). His guests come from a representative cross-section of the community. They are not only from the ranks of the old and poor (as shown by the “tyre sandals”), and in Baba Pesa’s view the “useless”, but also the youthful – represented by Juda. They also come from members of the community’s leadership. This scene shows Baba Baru as being materially poor as he indeed is. Although Baba Baru is materially poor, he shows a strong communal tendency which reveals the traditional values of communality – illustrating the African adage that a “man’s wealth is his people”. At the gathering in his *shamba*,

Baru has a large brown beer honey gourd balanced between his feet. From this traditional beer holder, known as *nyanga*, he poured the drink into a large horn and passed it round the circle. Each friend received his share, a horn at a time, and passed it round as was the tradition, a sign of togetherness. (Mwangi, 2003: 40)

In the passage above, a near sacred form of respect is shown for traditional values. This is the opposite of the scene in which Baba Pesa humiliates “old, old men” by ordering them to sing and dance to entertain him in exchange for a drink. Baba Pesa’s action shows an ugly departure from

the traditional African value of respect for the elderly and of selfless generosity. In the case of Baba Baru and his companions, not only do they drink a traditionally brewed drink from traditional vessels (the *nyanga* and the horn), but the manner in which they share signifies tradition, *ubuntu* and togetherness. The reader gets the sense that the commendable values personified in Baba Baru and his companions are associated with the materially poor. By representing Baba Baru as being materially poor but morally upright, Mwangi amplifies the conversely negative attributes associated with Baba Pesa.

The text depicts Baba Pesa as being materially rich but without moral values (an issue that I cover in greater detail in chapter five of this thesis). He is arrogant, individualistic, selfish, materialistic and generally disrespectful of others in his community and in general, stands against values normally associated with rural settings in Africa. On the other hand, the gathering at materially impoverished Baba Baru's *shamba* is a performative act of communality, selflessness, generosity, patience, respectfulness and restraint. The representation of the two characters discussed above suggests that in *Striving for the Wind*, the traditional is associated with the good while the modern is associated with the bad. However, though the rural in Africa is commonly "represented as a source of identity or tradition" (Nici, 2002: 112), a perverse form of modernity embodied in and symbolized by Baba Pesa seems to be encroaching on the traditional in the immediate post liberation rural African community represented. Generally, the two characters are (with some exception, as when Pesa shows that he is emotionally affected when Margaret dies) placed mainly on divergent material and moral trajectories. The materially rich character Pesa shows an extreme form of moral impoverishment while the materially poor character, Baru is morally rich.

As in Mwangi's work, characterization is a key representational feature which is used to evoke experiences of and the condition of poverty in Doyle's work. Though spatially separated, Mwangi and Doyle seem to have created characters (Jimmy Jr and his lay about friends and Juda and the other band members) who are near replicas of each other in personality, in the way that they are perceived by their peers and to a certain extent in terms of economic circumstances. In *Striving for the Wind*, Juda and his friends are almost entirely unemployed, while "in *The Commitments*, ... the young future band members are either unemployed or on the periphery of the job market" (Persson, 2006: 62). Jimmy Jr like Juda assumes a position of superiority in his microscopic community that consists of his band members and in Juda's case, among his friends down in the market he is respectfully referred to as "Profethar" to impress on him the high regard in which they hold him and the intellectual and leadership role that he is seen to play in their group (8). Like Juda, Jimmy takes on the role of the motivator, moral guide and counsellor who gives the group of youth the kind of hope and the sense of self worth that the system under which they live fails to offer them. The conversation that follows shows him in these roles. Jimmy asks rhetorically: "Why did yis form the group?" and provides the answer: "Yis want to be different, isn't tha' it? Yis want to do

someh'n' with yourselves, isn't tha' it? ... Yis don't want to end up like ... these tossers". The narrator comments: "the lads enjoyed watching him. ... They were very impressed" (10-12). The narrator adds that ...[h]e'd won them" and having won them, they plead: "Will yeh manage us, Jimmy"? and Jimmy responds: "Yeah, Am I in charge?" They answer "Yeah" (14). Jimmy, like Juda, is shown to have a very sophisticated intellectual capacity and to possess a powerful rhetorical ability in spite of the conditions of material impoverishment and unemployment surrounding them. Jimmy employs a complex set of rhetorical devices here to gain power and control over the group. He promptly responds to the rhetorical question that he poses and mocks their creative power in the statement: "So if yis want to be different what're yis doin' doin' bad versions of other people's poxy songs", thereby further disempowering and diminishing their sense of self-esteem that is already fractured by experiences of poverty and unemployment.

In applying these rhetorical strategies, Jimmy opens horizons of control for himself and propels himself to the point that he is "in charge" and they are dependent on him for the survival of the band and by extension, economic sustenance. In fact, as in Juda's case, Jimmy's group becomes hopelessly dependent on him to the extent that when he leaves them together for a few minutes and is outside negotiating a musical gig – for them, the group (partly due to the absence of Jimmy Jr the leader) disbands forever. Similarly, Juda's friends can not contemplate a life without him. When he starts spending much of his time with his wife Margaret, one of his "true friends" informs him: "I am looking for you all over. ... The others said to look for you ... It is boring without you" (Mwangi, 2003, 176-177). When Juda announces his decision to leave for India, his true friends plead with him not to go, as they wonder: "what shall we do without you" (180)? There is a suggestion here that both Mwangi and Doyle create a community of individuals who are not interdependent but *uni-dependent* on a centre (Juda and Jimmy Jr). This may be a suggestion not of the strength of these two characters, but of the degree to which the psychology and self-esteem of characters in these two communities have been intensely damaged by the condition of poverty in which they live – to the extent that their existence and survival rests on other characters who (in both cases) are themselves frail in many respects. However, Jimmy and the other band members (in the act of forming the band) show an extraordinarily exemplary emancipatory attitude, in spite of or in response to their circumstance of unemployment and resultant poverty. Their capacity for self-organisation, their creativity and resilience give hope to poor communities attempting to improve their material conditions. The band members in forming the band "resist a sense of worthlessness created by unemployment ... [and insist] that their experiences be taken seriously" (Persson, 2006: 69).

Another significant element of fiction that Mwangi and Doyle use to portray the nature of poverty is the themes that are constructed in both texts. In *Striving for the Wind*, one of these themes is teenage pregnancy and related issues that the narration around it opens up. Circumstances

surrounding Margaret's pregnancy (because of her liaison with a much older Baba Pesa) as well as the consequences of the pregnancy are significantly evocative, assuming various levels of symbolism. At the beginning of the relationship, which lasted

nearly a year and a half, ... Baba Pesa would stop and pick her up and drop her by the school gate two kilometers down the road. Then one day, he had brought her a pen Every week after that he had brought her presents which she hid in the bush by the roadside All sorts [of presents] Rings, hair pins, perfumes, powders and, later on, shoes and underwear. ... Then one day, he had stopped suddenly on the road from the school, pulled her out of the car and dragged her into the bush by the old *mubiri* tree. (117)

It is clearly indicated that Baba Pesa uses his powerful economic status to exploit the teenager whose disadvantaged economic condition and naivety render her extremely vulnerable. Most of the presents that Baba Pesa offers in exchange for sexual access to Margaret's body are valueless and worthless – with the exception of the pen. The gift of a pen in exchange for her body symbolizes the predicament of many children and more particularly, girls for whom education is a near impossibility or where possible, it is accessed at a great cost. Symbolically, the near worthlessness of most of the items shows the low regard he has for her, as further demonstrated by the fact that he rapes her in the bush. Margaret consciously hides the presents and conceals the sexual act after “he had given her money and warned her never to tell anyone about it” (17). This narrative act creates a complex dynamic and blurs the line of agency – between the victim and the victimizer. There is no doubt as mentioned earlier that Baba Pesa (taking advantage of his economic power) abuses her. Pesa is an adult, powerful in every sense of the word, who “dragged” her into the bush. Once she had been raped, Margaret stays silent because she knows of course that her parents and the community are likely to blame her and/or she would in any case be powerless against Pesa – not to mention her probable awareness that he would deny the accusation and brand her a whore and he had threatened her with dire consequences, should she dare to inform anyone. So she is trapped – as so many poor girls in her position are trapped and ruined. The reader is made to sympathise with her on the basis of the points raised above. In this case, economic misfortune renders her susceptible to abuse. The novel foregrounds the multiple dimensions of victimhood that Margaret suffers – she is the victim of the powerful and abusive Pesa as well as of a society that blames women for their abuse but also, a victim of the material conditions in which she lives. However, Margaret like the young men and women in *The Commitments* shows a very subversive form of resistance to her condition of impoverishment and disempowerment – subjected to the whim of Baba Pesa's money power, she, unlike many in the novel, attempts to benefit from it. This to a certain extent shows her inner strength rather than weakness.

Baba Pesa subsequently denies causing the pregnancy and his son Juda, to the shock of characters in the novel, offers to marry Margaret, setting up a series of incongruous episodes and occurrences. Although Baba Baru (Margaret's father) gives his consent to the marriage, he “for the first time

ever” agrees with Juda’s father that Juda is “a raving lunatic” (132). Additionally, Juda’s brother Elija reminds him that “your brother will be your son” (131). All of these narrative perspectives indicate the controversial nature of Juda’s decision to marry Margaret, but it is just one of the many subversive representations of Juda. Juda’s character creates space for a deep understanding of aspects of poverty. A brief introduction to Juda Pesa and a discussion of his unique character is necessary here. I deliberately select to discuss Juda’s character here rather than in the earlier section on characterization because of the uniqueness of his character traits in the novel but also because his character traits open up the issues under discussion here – responses to Margaret’s pregnancy and its implication for the rest of the plot as well as in highlighting the subject of poverty.

He is the first son of Baba Pesa, who dashes his father’s dream of educating his son in “Armenia” (America) – purely for his (Baba Pesa’s) own pride. As Juda himself puts it: “... he insisted I stay in school even when he knew it wasn’t doing me any good. So that he could silence his age mates in the bar with how learned his son was” (143). Juda becomes a lay-about and a drunk who spends his time philosophising to his lay-about friends – both human and animal (the animal represented in the novel by the symbolically named Confucius, a village mongrel). At the same time, Juda assumes the role of the “moral” voice, the satirist as well as the economic, the social and the political activist in and commentator on the community – through his (often drunken) public rants in the village market. On one such occasion,

... Juda Pesa climbed the rickety leaning windmill [from which he gets arrested and shot at a couple of times by the police] to harangue the mostly indifferent market crowds while his true friends and ruffians heckled him and picked pockets to finance the after-show drink. [He cautions the crowd, saying:] [y]ou may laugh, you fools, But one day, you will realize what I am talking about.... They had heard it all before [He continues,] [j]ust a year ago this square was a market Then you fools had to sell off every grain you had, every goat and every hen. Today, you come here with your money but what is there to buy? ... So what he wanted them to do was to take their little money back home and with it build granaries large enough to store a year’s supply of foodstuff. Then they could, if they wished, sell the rest to the millers and the food merchants. ... What about beer? asked an uncouth youth in the background. Can you grow beer? Juda chose to ignore the remark but filed the youth’s name for further action in the bar later. (55)

In another instance just before the departure of some villagers to the forest – led by the *caricaturely* dressed Baba Pesa, the Chief and the Chief Priest to offer sacrifices to the gods in exchange for rain, “Juda who was the first to see the absurdity of this chaotic return to the roots ... nearly fell off [his] windmill laughing. ... they [the entire community] now saw clearly the absurdity of their fancy dress party and of what they really were trying to do, and laughed at themselves and at each other” (81).

At another instance, while *educating* his layabout friends on the true nature of education. Juda declares:

[s]chool education is not the only education. Where do you think Choma learned to make goats's-head-and-hooves soup? ... Not in any school, I can tell you, Juda informed them. ... you have more education than your fathers ever will and you are more blessed than the brothers who read more than you. While they roam the streets of the cities looking for work they will never find, you can set up businesses right here. (91-92)

He adds:

... [a certificate] is a mere piece of paper that says that you have read and understood this and that book, and behaved in this and that way. That is all! The mere possession of it does not make you any less or more of a human being than you were in the first place. (136)

Marriage with Margaret changes him as he (according to his mother)

does not drink as much as he used to do [. Instead, he spends much time with Magaret on picnics drinking coke. As a result,] his true friends, the boys from the-dead end corner, missed him a great deal. Without him their normal lives were thoroughly interrupted. They grew restless and fought unsupervised wars among themselves. (175)

The length of the passages quoted above reflects the level of complexity of Juda as a character and the significant ways in which themes are revealed through his character. He is a very rounded, controversial, unpredictable, principled, thoughtful, intellectually sophisticated and somewhat practical character who yet exhibits his own fair share of human frailties. His economic theory which advocates saving on wealth which in this case is material and not cash is pertinent. His criticism of the cash mentality further shows how this rural setting as an embodiment of other African societies embraces the foreign/modern values (of cash over subsistence material products) at their own peril. In outlining the corollary deficits of a money-value economy, Juda advocates an economic system that is not “monetarised [and relies on] a considerable amount of home production and exchange in kind” (Nakwani, 2008: 135). Juda’s theory, read from a broader perspective, radically questions the local economic dispensation (and its social effects) in all its immediacy of terms of trade in some African countries – where cash and even subsistence agricultural products are sold at lower prices on the world market. The consequences of this for nutrition, the environment and the economies of these countries (and more specifically on that of Kambi village) are critical.

The passages also show how Juda serves as the mirror through which the community sees its follies, absurdities, contradictions and chaos, thereby laughing at itself. This is the case when Juda starts the laughter that brings the community to realize the absurdities surrounding the rain making proceedings, as well as the caricatured clothes worn “not only on the wrong body; but also on the wrong occasion” (80). The rain-making episode also reveals the exploitation of the poor, who in

some cases are forced to grudgingly contribute their only goat (79) for the rich to sacrifice to the gods. Lastly, the episode shows the ironical usurpation of the ceremony by the impure Baba Pesa. These farcical situations lead Juda to declare that “life ... is a big laugh” (83). Juda’s response to the rain-making episode is evocative. His brutally skeptical and amused response balances humour and awareness of the seriousness of poverty depiction. When the whole gathering laughs at itself in this condition of extreme drought and the likelihood of more devastating poverty, the comic stance “celebrates the vibrancy, stoicism and resourcefulness of that community” (Persson, 2003:47), but also shows a human society with “an endless exchange of pain and pleasure between agents and victims” (Mbembe, 2001:148) of the scourge of poverty in a state of mutual interaction.

Juda’s views are practical and at the same time raise interesting questions around the notions of formal and informal education as Juda, the most educated member of the community ironically adopts a dismissive response to formal education. This response may enable the less educated and poor characters to exorcise any complexes that may result from their *uneducated* condition as they are made to see the value and worth of the knowledge that they have acquired from informal educational situations such as Juda’s public lectures. His claim that he actually acquired formal education simply to satisfy his father’s pride and not because he found any fulfillment in formal education is informed by his conceptualization of education to include the informal. In fact, Juda sets out to highlight the relative nature of education as he further confesses to Margaret that “[t]he truth is I get more education from the people down in the village than I got from my fellow scholars at the university” (143). Nevertheless, he is aware that formal education has the potential to empower, to enrich and indeed to take one out of a life of poverty, but he identifies a trajectory where the riches that could be accumulated by the educated have the potential to transfigure one into an empty and a vain creature – a cadaver. In this regard, he concurs with Margaret that formal education allows him to be a “big man ... bigger ... a *njumbe* even ... bigger ... more important and perhaps even richer than [his] father. But in no time at all, [he concedes hastily, he] would have been dead and empty inside” (143). Material riches therefore do not necessarily result in a fulfilled life.

The trajectory of the teenage pregnancy ends with a significantly metaphorical scene of nativity and mortality. While Margaret dies, her twins (a boy and a girl) survive, a situation that Mama Pesa explains in the words: “[o]ur daughter has been restored to us” (215). In her worldview, the survival of the twins is equated to the restoration of the dead mother. This scene is symbolic but also serves a significant didactic function. Margaret’s death serves as warning to poor teenage girls against sugar daddies. At another level, the emotions that Baba Pesa expresses in the scene suggest that there is renewed hope for the inhabitants of Kambi village. He, in a rare moment of awakening, is conscious of the consequences of his actions and his response signals a likely end to the abusive, greedy, avaricious, dehumanizing and generally inconsiderate actions attributed to him in the

novel. Upon hearing about the birth of the twins he exclaims joyfully, “good”, but he is subsequently informed about Margaret’s death. Shocked by the death, the talkative and ever boastful “Baba Pesa cleared his throat several times and found out he had nothing to say” (315). He seems indeed subdued, but also transformed by these incidents. Also, the reader is left with the impression that Juda’s relationship with his father might improve subsequent to these chaotic and abominable incidents and that the Baru and Pesa households might live in greater harmony. The novel espouses the moral lessons that poor teenage girls should beware of older men and that rich older men should not exploit poor teenagers. In this case, the moral is embedded in the symbolism of life and death (as discussed above), showing Mwangi’s powers of literary evocation.

Doyle’s *The Commitments* also raises themes that offer significant insights into the subject of poverty. Some of these themes are highlighted in the words of Jimmy Jr in the passage that follows:

why are yis doin’t, buyin’ the gear, rehearsing’? Why did yis form the group?

Well __ Money? ...

Where are yis from?

Dublin.

What part o’ Dublin? Barrytown. Wha’ class are yis? Workin’ class.

Your music should be abou’ where you’re from an’ the sort o’ people yeh come from. Say it once, say it loud, I’m black an’ I’m proud. ...

The Irish are the niggers of Europe, lads. An’ Dubliners are the niggers of Ireland. The culchies have fuckin everythin’. An’ the northside Dubliners are the niggers of Dublin. Say it loud, I’m black an I’m proud. ...

What are we Jimmy? *The Commitments*. (11)

The context of the conversation is the formation of a musical group and attempts to select a suitable name and genre of music that the band should play. The formation of the band and its naming take a symbolic significance around which the issues are narrated. In this act, the band members try to take charge of their lives as the musical group is supposed to be an alternative social economy through which they make some money which should emancipate them from the excruciating poverty that characterizes their lives. Broadly, the concept of “commitment” signifies their dedication to self-improvement and to rehabilitate their society from ills such as drugs. The claim that: “I’m black an’ I’m proud. ... The Irish are the niggers of Europe”, is significant. It suggests that the kind of inequality that they experience transcends local boundaries as their proclamation captures self-affirming slogans that evoke the experiences of people of African descent around the world and “foregrounds the many absurdities attending on the tragic history of racism in the US”. At the same time, the statement suggests that “racism does not require people of colour and racial discourse proliferate[s] even in the near-[total]-absence of racial difference” (Teddy, 2005: 374). Economic marginalization is here equated to racial marginalization. Jimmy Jr’s indignant words: “the culchies have fuckin everythin” taps into a whole set of rigid values and norms that have governed Irish private and public life for generations, thereby showing how, in spite of its high aesthetic quality, Doyle’s work is permeated with expressions of actual social pertinence. However,

these observations are humorously presented. It has been suggested that “an increased sense of humour helps the individual deal in a more positive ... fashion with a variety of life circumstances and situations” and that “humor can increase the likelihood of conscious efforts at seeking alternative perspectives to problems” (Abel, 2002). Through these themes, “*The Commitments* ... register[s] the ways in which the relationship between “First” and “Third” Worlds [is] enacted daily in the streets of the capital city [Dublin]” (Paschel, 1998:69) and through this the condition and experiences of poverty, especially among the working classes, are revealed.

In conclusion: Meja Mwangi and Roddy Doyle in *Striving for the Wind* and *The Commitments* respectively use narrative, setting, characterization, and themes as key representational devices to represent poverty in comparable experiences, conditions and views in the two fictional societies. Some of the fictional situations reflect what is commonly experienced by masses in actual society on a daily basis. Their works open space for an understanding of issues such as the polarizing role of poverty, the impact that an increasing shift from a subsistent agricultural towards a cash economy in rural areas has on the state of poverty and the response of the poor and of the rich to each other and to their material conditions. These issues are further discussed in subsequent chapters in this thesis. The works of the two authors (I believe) serve as an expository force in individual readers’ lives: “... help[ing] readers to generate their own explanations [of poverty in general and more specifically,] of personal success, failure and assist[ing] ‘locals’ to make sense of [the local condition and experience of poverty in] an ever globalizing world” (Newell, 2000: 161).

Chapter 3: Fed up to here? A matter of attitude

Few engines can be more powerful, and at the same time more salutary in their tendency, than literature. (Godwin, 1993:20 as quoted in Lewis, et al. 2008: 201)

There is no impression of life, no manner of seeing it and feeling it, to which the plan of the novelist may not offer a place. (Cosser, 1972: xv)

This chapter analyses Meja Mwangi's *The Cockroach Dance* (1979) and Roddy Doyle's *A Star Called Henry* (1999). Mwangi's title is overtly expressive of a condition of poverty, captured in the image of the dancing cockroaches that the human characters in the novel live with. Doyle's on the other hand is sarcastic, questioning whether it is possible to attain stardom when one is exposed to the kind of material misfortune that Henry experiences. The chapter examines how the two authors use literature to undertake a distinctive representation of attitudes and responses to conditions, forms and experiences of poverty. It examines whether and how characters rely on hope, show indifference, resilience, self-pity and resignation towards their situation, or whether they seek to use their material condition as justification for criminal actions. The chapter further determines what the implications of any of these responses to poverty are. Also, I examine whether poverty is portrayed as a communalizing or rather an individualizing agent. I further study the attitude of the rich of the societies represented towards their relative state of material fortune and towards the poor, concentrating on the value that is attributed to money. Deeply aware of the argument that "the creative imagination of the literary artist often has achieved insights into social processes which have remained unexplored in social science" (Lewis et al, 2008: 202), I make the fictional texts the primary focus in this study. However, as is the case in the other chapters, I draw on critical social theory to elucidate some of the views towards which the fiction gestures.

Poverty-crime intersectionality

Here, I examine whether and with what implications Mwangi as well as Doyle's characters resort to crime as a survivalist strategy. When *The Cockroach Dance* opens, Dusman Gonzaga, the protagonist, charges that his roommate Toto has suddenly developed a suspicious penchant for spending money. Dusman comments: "I thought you were paid peanuts like the rest of us" (Mwangi, 1979: 5). This apprehensive response to what seems a profligate poor is significant, partly because the view is expressed by another poor character. This "flat, matter-of-fact" (Driver, 1996) tone captures Dusman's innocence and his awareness of his and generally, any poor person's condition of monetary limitation. Also, it foreshadows the subsequent narrative excerpts which dissociate him from what seems a common tendency by the poor of Mwangi's fictional world to acquire or attempt to acquire wealth illegitimately. His characterization is polemical as it serves to introduce a competing discourse to the idea of poverty-crime intersectionality. Narrative perspective depicts Dusman as one of few exceptions of the poverty-crime link. This is shown in the instances referred to below: when Toto calls Dusman a "a rotten moralist" (282), when Dusman

himself appeals to the policemen detaining him in the words, “look at me. Do I look like a thief?” (340) and when Toto confesses his guilt and pleads “to the judge that Dusman be set free as he [Dusman] was an innocent victim of circumstances” (367). Although represented elsewhere in the novel as somehow depressive, Dusman’s uprightness contrasts with the criminality of most of his neighbours who randomly commit crimes and justify these by calling attention to their material condition and needs. The favourable representation of Dusman undermines the prevalent association of poverty and crime in other genres of representation. A newspaper quoted in Mwangi’s text depicts one such homogenizing comment. In what is obviously a generalization, the newspaper describes all of Dacca House as “a den for criminals” (366). Mwangi uses the strategy of individuation to open space for the reader to compare the fictional and “real” representations and in so doing, to understand the distinctive and relatively nuanced ability of fiction to undertake a balanced representation of social issues. This demonstrates that “fictional accounts ... sometimes reveal different sides to the experience of [poverty and related issues] ... and may even sometimes, do a better job of conveying the complexities of [poverty and related issues] than research based accounts” (Lewis, 2008:205). Contrary to the fictional representation, the newspaper excerpt is generalized and simplistic and such generalizations are dangerous yet common in actual society. Although the fictional representation is richly textured and undertakes a balanced representation, it does not disguise the view that most of the poor characters living in Dacca House do commit crime. In portraying Dusman as depressive but, unlike his roommate and neighbours, law abiding, Mwangi shows the diversity rather than the uniformity of responses shown by poor characters towards experiences of poverty. The fictional representation creates a varied “intensity of perception” (Lewis et al, 2008: 202). It captures the dynamic responses of the poor to conditions of poverty, thereby turning away from any kind of social image that indiscriminately associates criminal tendencies with poverty. The literary representation in this case subverts and qualifies the kind of common view that anachronistically presupposes, in a strangely straightforward way, that poor members of society comprise “the *dangerous classes* [my emphasis] which must be dealt with severely” (Lizotte, 1978: 565). The balanced nature of the representation signals the view that: “the effectual way for extirpating ... prejudices ... seems to be literature” (Godwin, 1993: 20 as quoted in Lewis, 2008: 201).

Many of the characters in the novel are poor and as mentioned previously, they commit crimes and justify these criminal acts with a rhetoric that stresses their condition of material misfortune. Here, I analyse sections of the text where a rhetorical strategy is applied to invite the reader’s attention to either a fused or a fractured relationship between poverty and crime. Different characters call attention to their condition of material need to defend, explain or even justify criminal acts committed by them. Ironically, some of the explanations that the poor offer as justification for criminal acts deepen the reader’s awareness of their fallibility. In engaging with the idea of a link between poverty and crime, I consider the view expressed by Hirschi & Gottfredson quoted in

Birkbeck and LaFree (1993: 114). They argue “that criminality is a necessary but not [a] sufficient condition for crime to occur, because crime requires situational inducements”. I interpret criminality here to mean the individual disposition to commit crime and situational inducement on the other hand to mean the conditions that lead to or facilitate crime. In this study, poverty or a conceptualization of the condition of poverty by characters is read as a situational inducement in the context of the argument presented by Hirschi & Gottfredson. Most inhabitants of Dacca House, the main setting of the novel, generally articulate their predicament (criminality) as resulting from the condition of poverty or a desire to free themselves from the shackles of poverty. One such character is Toto, Dusman’s roommate who gets involved in a scam involving a travellers’ cheques forgery with Joan, Mister Benson and “the others”. The latter are Europeans who flee with his share of the money while he is detained and as humorously stated, sentenced to “seven years of hard labour, without beer and women” (361). The narrative around the Europeans’ flight with Toto’s money, occurring at the dawn of Kenyan independence is significant when considered from a broader national perspective. It allows one to argue that the contentious view by Frederic Jameson (1986) that: “all third world texts be read as national allegories”, has some validity (Lewis, 2008: 204).

Toto explains his motivation to commit crime in the words: “I wanted to get out ... out of Grogan Road. I have had it and I am sick of it Dusman” (362). The emotions expressed here make visible the unfavourable experiences Toto has had at Dacca House and suggest that he is indeed fed up. These emotions may be genuine, but one wonders whether they justify his actions. It has been suggested that “[g]enuine emotions put pressure on one’s behavior in certain distinctive ways” (Brock, 2007: 212). However, it remains questionable whether “pressure” alone or in fact, just the conditions of poverty are justifiable agents for these acts.

To some extent, his actions are emblematic of

Rogue capitalism ... [where an individual] seeks special advantage and unfair profit ... [mainly due to g]reed, [need for] social prestige, and often obscure forms of psycho-emotional gratification. ... It brings with it the violation of trust and the wanton expenditure of a society’s most precious commodity. [Interestingly, the commodity referred to here is not material wealth but] ... the ability of people to work together for common purposes (Varsava, 2005: 79)

Encapsulated in the quotation above is the rejection of a simple nexus between poverty and crime. The quote also suggests a distinction between lack as signifying the absence of basics on the one hand and lack as signifying the absence of luxury, fame and comfort on the other hand. Prior to his arrest, detention, trial and conviction, Toto promises: “one of these days I am going to be big” (246). When he is detained, he confesses: “I know what I am doing in this hole. Protecting my interests” (355). He further assures his roommate in the words: “think of two hundred thousand shillings ... it is all mine ... I have earned it. It means to hell with Dacca House I have

paid for the car, the one I told you about. ... A beautiful car. Next week I move out of Grogan Road to live in Westlands with Joan” (356-357). When his roommate inquires where he got the money, Toto retorts: “[w]hat does it matter? ... I got it, and that’s what is important. ... [He promises:] I will make a few phone calls in the morning. Bail us out and get us a lawyer” (357-358). Toto’s tone is confident; reeks of arrogance, pride, abrasiveness, inconsideration, insensitivity, foolishness and an annoying attitude of entitlement to ill-gotten wealth. These unattractive tendencies of his have the potential to distance the reader from him and what he embodies. Here, Mwangi uses the subtlety that fiction allows him to make nuanced satirical statements. The nuanced representation shows the distinctiveness of literature, suggesting that “appeals founded on generalizations and statistics [may] require sympathy ready-made, a moral sentiment already in activity; but a picture of human life such as a great artist can give, [may] surprise even the trivial and the selfish into attention” (Lewis et al., 2008: 210). Generally, the poor are represented in social criticism mostly as victims, but fiction’s ability to “reveal different sides of the experience” allows it to give a more clearly etched but balanced picture of the poor (Lewis et al., 2008: 205). The narrative diminishes the credibility of arguments that seek to enhance the victimhood idea that the poor commit crime mainly to avoid the sting of poverty. Toto’s attitude suggests that he commits criminal acts, not out of the necessity to satisfy any fundamental or basic needs such as those for food, shelter or clothing, but rather to satisfy his extravagant and materialistic need for comfort, luxury and fame. In illegitimately acquiring the large sum of money, buying a beautiful car, promising that “one of these days I am going to be big” and indeed speaking and acting *big*, Toto is depicted uncompromisingly to indicate that the condition of poverty does not justify his crimes. He seems to commit crime with an avowed intention of achieving social prestige rather than to ensure subsistence. In striving for what also seems to be psycho-emotional gratification, Toto becomes unaware of or is simply in denial of the immorality of his acts. This is seen in his snobbish and contemptuous response to his roommate’s questions regarding the source of the money. The depiction of Toto indicates that the rogue capitalist personality results in a diminished sense of what constitutes immorality; a loss of moral awareness.

Depicted mostly as a destabilized subject, Toto expresses an incongruous mix of emotions and attitudes. It is ironic that he finds himself behind bars for a crime he boasts contemptuously about, but when he learns from his lawyer that his accomplices have escaped with his share of the money, he comes in distraught and “crying like a hurt child” (361) or rather, “... a gullible imbecile” (363) who according to Dusman is not “... dignified enough to live [even] in Dacca House” (365). This scene graphically captures the crushingly unpleasant implications of crime, suggesting that rather than empowering the poor, it has the potential to further disempower a poor person to the level of a “crying little child”. The episode serves as a caution against resorting to insincerities and crime as a response to the condition of poverty. Implied in the narration is the view that, when poverty intersects with crime, the poor person may be only further destabilized and decentred, rendered

more vulnerable and, interestingly, open to being abused as Toto is abused by his European accomplices – a “gullible imbecile”. Ironically, in the process of seeking to leave Dacca House which metaphorically stands for the effort to rid himself of the condition of poverty, Toto becomes even more undignified to the extent that he is not fit to live [even] in Dacca House (365) – which is represented as one of the most rundown accommodation sites in the fictional setting. This predicts doom, not necessarily for the poor in general, but specifically for the criminal poor.

Other inhabitants of Dacca House appear in the same court as Toto and also appeal to the scarcity-crimes syndrome to defend themselves. Undermining the poverty related justification offered for the crime Sukuma Wiki commits, the magistrate sentences him to four years for stealing City Council metres and trying to sell them to the Mayor of the city. Sukuma Wiki is portrayed not just as a poor character but one who is criminal, unintelligent and dimwitted. He tries to sell stolen goods to the “owner” – the mayor. Sukuma Wiki’s dimwittedness serves as a crucial adjunct to Toto’s gullibility as discussed earlier. However, the authorial intention here might not necessarily be to represent the poor as being generally less intelligent, but as suggested earlier, rather to suggest that the condition of poverty combined with a desire for comfort renders them extremely vulnerable.

Sukuma Wiki seeks clemency on the grounds that “he had a wife and six children and he had tried to sell the parking metres in order to buy his wife a new dress, and to renew his hawking licence which had expired” (369). In addition to showing the pressure that the poor face in caring for their families, the reader is made to see the ironical harshness of a capitalist system that pushes a character to commit crime to comply with the demands of the system – renew his permit. Also, a defence based on the argument that he has six children and commits the crime to buy his wife a new dress stands out and suggests how different subjectivities seek to fulfill their dignity and self-valorization. Unlike Toto who commits crime in the process of seeking comforts like a “beautiful car”, Sukuma Wiki seeks to buy his wife “a new dress” at the risk of imprisonment. This kind of multiple representational perspectives is evocative and again shows the potential of fiction to “reveal different sides to the experience of” poverty (Lewis et al., 2008: 205). It is not intended to guide the reader towards making a value judgment on the logicity or illogicality, correctness or incorrectness of the positions taken by either of two characters. That is beyond the scope of the study in any case. Rather, Mwangi here uses the creative space that fiction allows to suggest the complexity and diversity of human experience, attitudes, choices and responses to adverse conditions such as poverty. Second, it suggests the fluidity of what constitutes need, scarcity and ultimately, poverty – implying that conceptions of these states of being vary from person to person. Wiggins & Dermen (1987: 62) have argued that: “I can only need to have x if whatever may be identical with x is something that I need. ... What I need depends not on thought or the working of my mind ... but depends on the way things really are” The representation of Sukuma Wiki’s

motives in Mwangi's text questions the dissociation of need from thoughts and the working of the mind as implied by Wiggins and Dermen above. One can conclude that, although "a common ground ... exists between fiction and non-fiction" (Lewis, et al., 2008: 202), non-fictional representations in some cases may be "starkly contrasted with those of fictional writing on development" (Lewis et al., 2008: 202). I argue that needs could result from a material condition, but can only be conceived as needs by the mind. In fact, when Toto commits crime with the intention of buying a car, it is because he mentally conceives his desire for a car as a need and takes action to fulfill the need/desire. It is not simply because he cannot move around physically due to lack of transport or a car but also, because the intensity of his desire transforms it conceptually into a need. Mwangi's text offers critical representations of varying conceptions of 'need' by individuals. Sukuma Wiki's need is a new dress for his wife, because the dress is considered identical with a greater need – which is to satisfy his wife and to care for his family. In Toto's case, his 'needs' are identical with his individualistic desire to amass wealth and seek personal comfort at all costs. In fact, he seems to exclude his friend, roommate and closest associate – Dusman – in his plans for the future when he hopes to be "big". This is seen in his boastful rant (before he realizes that he has been duped) that: "[n]ext week I [not we] move out of Grogan Road to live in Westlands with Joan" (357). It should be noted that the actual Westlands is traditionally the social and entertainment centre for expatriates and wealthy Kenyans living in the actual city of Nairobi. One cannot undermine Wiggins and Dermen's additional suggestion that conceptions of need depend on the way things really are. In the context of the novel, the way things are for Sukuma Wiki is that he is married with six children and so unlike Toto, is likely to conceive needs to comprise first and foremost, the fulfillment of his matrimonial and parental material responsibilities – caring for his six children and wife.

In what is clearly an exploration on the non/criminal nature of prostitution and its link to poverty, the same court where Toto appears fines Charity Njeri "of no fixed abode" one hundred shillings or six months imprisonment. Her offence is loitering for the purpose of prostitution. The magistrate in passing judgment claims that "prostitution and immorality were on the increase and ... young women [like Charity] must learn to earn their living like other citizens without resorting to indecent work" (368). Pleading for leniency, Charity states that "she was an unemployed, unmarried mother of two little boys whom she had to feed and educate" (368). The exploration of and the institutional response to Charity's "indecent work" or "crime" of prostitution is juxtaposed with the sarcastically presented narrative on Tumbo Kubwa's indirect but sophisticated and materially far more rewarding involvement in the same trade. Mwangi writes: the "Lord in all his generosity had made available the rooming houses and girls" on Hasrat Road to Tumbo Kubwa who runs a "tax-free" brothel. Ironically, he "would not enter [the] house of evil [because h]e was God-fearing" (152) and "often read sermons ... [and] denounced ... fornication" (151). For these reasons, his

brother “Kichwa Kubwa handled the rooming business and delivered the thirty shillings each girl paid every night” (152).

Representations of prostitution and responses to it in the two episodes quoted above (Charity’s and Tumbo Kubwa’s) are evocative. They are satirical, ironical and depict an institutional attitude that is more sympathetic towards the rich than the poor. While the legal arm of the state admonishes and punishes Charity, the greatest beneficiary of the sex industry in the fictional city of Nairobi is Tumbo Kudwa who enriches himself in what seems to be a tacitly permissive response to his activities. Though no reason is provided for her condition of unemployment, it is assumed that Charity can not find any other kind of work, let alone “decent” work. This interpretation debunks and mocks the magistrate’s expectation that she should do “decent work”. The concept of “decent work” is in itself very complex but commonly applied vaguely, even in actual societies such as South Africa. When the magistrate admonishes her and expects her to do decent work, he seems not to consider the causes of her unemployment. Causes that are considered in the social science perspective, that “low potential for female labor market earnings is often taken to be an important reason why women go into prostitution, and in any society, a higher proportion of poor women prostitute themselves” (Edlund and Korn 2002: 182). Mwangi is criticising the inhumane approach of those administering the legal process. Edlund and Korn’s view cannot serve as an absolute justification for female prostitution, but it suggests a link between social and economic circumstances and prostitution – one that the court appears to ignore. Mwangi mocks the one-sidedly moral and biased positions expressed in the court as being simplistic when considered in relation to the impunity with which Tumbo Kubwa operates his brothel. I argue here that Charity’s “crime” – if indeed it is a crime – is victimless, while Tumbo Kubwa, the actual, though unnoticed and yet unconvicted criminal, victimizes and in fact exploits the girls in his brothel. Considered in relation to actual society, this bias may result from the view that “levels of institutionalization [between street prostitution and brothels] vary [but also the assumption that brothels are] safe [since] surveillance reduces the risk of robbery, assault, and venereal disease” in brothels (Edlund and Korn 2002: 187). In fact, “Legal regimes have varied, [on the subject] as has enforcement. It seems that brothels, when legal or tolerated, dominate street prostitution” (Symanski, 1974 and Fisher, 1997 quoted in Edlund and Korn, 2002: 187). Important here is the fact that permissive attitudes to brothels allow the criminal yet self-righteous rich like Tumbo Kubwa to get richer, while victims of economic misfortune like Charity are further victimised and impoverished by the system.

The fictionally represented institutional or legal responses to self-employed (Charity) as opposed to employed prostitution (in the brothel) are diametrically the reverse of certain actual and in fact United Nations responses, as seen in the case below.

On 18 July 1997, the [UN] court in the Hague overruled a decision by the immigration office of the Ministry of Justice [in the Netherlands] who had denied a Czech woman permission to reside in The Netherlands for the purposes of prostitution. The European Union has association treaties with Poland and the Czech and Slovak Republics, which gives nationals the right to self-employment in The Netherlands. The Ministry argued that prostitution could not be seen as labour in this sense and the Czech woman took the Dutch state to court with the above result. The court made it clear that prostitution is labour in the full juridical sense and so, when nationals of these countries can prove that they are able to support themselves as self employed (not employed) sex workers, they must be given permits. (Visser, 1997 quoted in Kilvington et als. 2001: 84)

The magistrate's moral and legal position in Mwangi's literary narrative contrasts with the actual legal response described above. In the fictional account, there is an implied suggestion that state institutions are tacitly permissive of a situation where sex workers are employed and exploited as seen in Tumbo Kubwa's rooming business, while at the same time expressing disapproval when such women are self employed, as seen in Charity's case. Implicit in the text is a narrative perspective that in a nuanced and subtly implicit way condemns Tumbo Kubwa and his exploitative business. Contrary to the critical texts quoted above, fiction benefits from the luxury of literary devices such as the ironical and satirical undertones that are directed at Tumbo Kubwa to present what is a more "richly textured" (Lewis, 2008: 202) but refined criticism of societal ills.

The Dacca house characters who appear in court fit the theoretical model that would consider them as a group of individuals with an external locus of control. Such individuals explain events in their lives "as a result of circumstances unrelated to [their] actions" (Palomar et al., 2005: 380). They see themselves as far removed "in terms of control and responsibility for the course of events in their lives, both desirable and non-desirable" (Palomar et al., 2005: 380). This points to an attitude of victimhood which diminishes the psychological potential to resist adversity. Mwangi furthermore questions superficial, simplistic, prescriptive institutional responses to socio-economic problems which do not consider all the many powerful mediating factors to such problems. In so doing he subtly raises the complex question whether prostitution should be criminalized, even when it is victimless and where it is the only means of survival for women like Charity. The court serves as a space where, though largely ignored, the voices of poor characters such as Sukuma Wiki and Charity can be heard – at least fictionally. Interestingly, in what seems a part of the narrative strategy, the voice of Toto, who is represented less favourably elsewhere in the novel, is silenced and marginalised when the court episodes are narrated. Although the Dacca House inhabitants' perspectives are countered by the magistrate, their explanations open space for a degree of empathy. They are placed in a position of rhetorical contest with the Magistrate who (I would conjecture) symbolizes some of the state institutions that might in the first place have created the circumstances of poverty that are partly responsible for their criminal conduct. They are, though still poor, empowered in the process of explaining their actions – the author thus gives a voice to the voiceless, a matter that I examine in greater detail in chapter four.

It would be simplistic to consider the *criminal-poor* exclusively as victims, as the text does not allow for such a one-sided reading. Rather, they are like any group of humans who are depicted in a particular human condition, shown to exhibit a complex set of somehow intertwined but varied psycho-social dynamics. I italicize the term *criminal-poor* above to note the contention and controversy embedded in a causal association of the two states of being. When the magistrate finds all of them guilty, his sentencing is a counter narrative to those whom he punishes; one that resists and delegitimises any subsumption of scarcity as justification for crime – at least from a legal perspective. Yet the fascinatingly varied and distinct set of justifications that the different characters offer presume a diversity of subjectivities in a similar social condition – poverty and resultant criminality.

In *A Star Called Henry*, Doyle like Mwangi creates space for the reader to engage with imaginaries of the poverty-crime link or response, and to examine how, or rather whether the characters he creates resort to criminal activities solely as a coping strategy and a response to conditions and experiences of poverty. It is clearly evident that the protagonist of the novel, Henry Smart, grows up and lives in a condition of alienation, homelessness, abuse and general material misfortune and squalor. However, Doyle (like Mwangi) does not in any way suggest that Henry, a poor character, engages in crime exclusively in response to his condition of material deprivation. Though embedded in the extraordinary literary subtlety of the text, a series of interconnected and complex motives (including the response to poverty) characterize Henry's evidently criminal lifestyle. Doyle skillfully weaves a series of gripping confessions by Henry into the narrative – confessions which capture the above mentioned experiences of homelessness, loneliness, alienation, abandonment, excruciating poverty and the consequent engagement in crime, all of which characterize his life right from childhood. Some of these are shown in the passages quoted below. Henry confesses:

I shared everything with Victor We slept where we fell and ate whatever we could find and rob. We survived. The streets were ours. No one could touch us. We knew every sound and warning, every escape route. We grabbed what we needed and ran. ... we knew and expected everything. Our dirt merged with the streets. We were made of Dublin Muck. We made a living. We robbed and helped, invented and begged. ... We were little princes of the streets, We were often cold, always hungry but we kept going going going.
(63)

Henry adds: “[w]e sold newspapers we’d stolen. We stole back flowers we’d sold. We ate while we ran; we slept standing up ...” (65). These experiences result in the fact that Henry “was eight and surviving. [He had] lived three years in the streets and under boxes, in hallways and on wasteland ... [He] slept in the weeds and under snow. ... [He] was bright but illiterate ...” (70). The passages above are vividly dynamic in nature and reveal a varied mixture of emotions and attitudes that, though subtly stated, offer and imply explanations for (and of) the protagonist's state of being and conduct. The reader is left in no doubt that the criminal activities are to a greater extent

motivated by efforts to survive the deplorable condition of material deprivation that seems to find its match in the protagonist's admirable survivalist instincts. The strength of the narrative lies in the symmetrical construction of each sentence to juxtapose a particular material condition with the resultant crime committed in response. In the statement, "we... ate whatever we could find and rob", "whatever we could find" and "rob" indicates the "criminal" act committed in response to the condition of homelessness and lack of basics such as food. The act of grabbing in the sentence "we grabbed what we needed and ran" shows the response to the state of general neediness. These simple yet poignant sentences subtly link crime with the condition of material deprivation – showing the extremities of poverty on the streets of a fictional Dublin where children as young as Henry and Victor lack provision of the most basic needs such as shelter and food. Here, the author uses the device of pathos to appeal to the reader's sympathy and to draw his or her awareness to the issue of juvenile crime committed in response to excruciating poverty. The episodes that are described suggest indeed that "crime fills the cracks in a shaken economy and the tears in the broken social fabric of a fractured society" (Moller, 2005: 265). The kind of socio-economic cracks, brokenness and *fracturedness* that encourage juvenile and youth crime are not limited to the fictional Dublin setting, but are universal, as shown by the material condition and the resultant activities of Meja and Maina in Meja Mwangi's *Kill Me Quick*, which is yet to be discussed in this thesis. Though concerned with poverty, the passage quoted above also offers an array of alternative yet poverty related explanations for the criminal acts committed. Among these is the protagonist's desire to carve out a reputation for himself.

It has been suggested that "reputation concerns draw those who expect no direct gain from street crime to nevertheless commit crime ... [and this] explains why the young are involved in more street [and general] crime than the old" (Silverman, 2004: 764). Henry's boastful narrative tone above, like Ivan's in the same novel and Toto's in *The Cockroach Dance*, illustrate the argument that the criminal acts committed result partly from a desire to develop a reputation on the *streets*. However, unlike the social science explanation above, the fictional character in claiming or seeking to affirm a reputation through the criminal acts (as shown in the passages that follow) also derives "direct gain from street crime" in the form of basic survivalist needs such as food. Henry proclaims: "We survived. ... The streets were ours. ... No one could touch us. We knew every sound and warning, every escape route. ... We made a living. ... We were little princes of the streets ... we kept going going going (63). However, he acknowledges: "... I was bright but illiterate" (70). These statements are short but firm. The narrative firmness symbolizes the emotional firmness of the character, who exudes enormous strength of character in the midst of adversity. Some of the crimes that Henry commits, though survivalist, also serve to affirm the reputation that he conceives – as owner of the street, as untouchable, as streetwise, as a prince of the street and as a survivalist. Though the statements serve as a reflection of his inner strength, they also originate from what I assume is an effort to put up a façade to deal with the pain and

dehumanizing impact of poverty on the street. In fact, while resolutely conveying his survivalist ability, the misery of the street is captured in statements such as: “[w]e were often cold, always hungry” (63), “... we slept standing up” (65) and “... I’d lived three years in the streets and under boxes, in hallways and on wasteland. I’d slept in the weeds and under snow. ...” (70). The hyperbolic device applied in describing these conditions is in competition with and almost subdues and neutralizes the firmness of tone and character that I analyse earlier. Here, one sees not just a competing narrative but a competition of two forces – the excruciating nature of poverty and the persona of the poor responding to poverty. A significant element of the narrative is the symbolic juxtaposition of the physical state of the “poor” body and the physical environment, as suggested by the following statements: “[o]ur dirt merged with the streets We were made of Dublin Muck”. This narrative strategy objectifies the poor, deepening the reader’s awareness of the harshness of the experiences of poor characters and the failure of state or social perception, recognition and care – poor people seem to or are seen as merging with the contemptible and discardable: detritus, street dirt.

Elsewhere in the novel, Henry tells Victor that “we need to better ourselves”. In an effort to achieve this, they seek enrolment in a mission school where he abrasively but naively informs the Nun in a tone of entitlement: “[w]e’ve come for our education” and she retorts sarcastically “[h]ave you indeed”, adding, “your’re four years late” (70-71), referring to his age. In spite of the resistant and alienating response that they get at the school, he learns how to write his name before they are dismissed or rather, they run away after they are described as “pagans” (78) by a Nun. This brief moment of a quest to “better” themselves and the rejection, contempt and indifference that they encounter place blame squarely on the society for the condition of general deprivation that Henry, Victor and other poor members of the community face, but also to a certain extent, makes the criminal activities committed in the process of dealing with poverty less reproachable. Significantly, it is only after Henry seeks but fails to receive any attention and care from the system that he notes: “[h]ey, Victor, ... We haven’t had a thing to eat in three days” and they “went off looking for a shop with bread in it, with a good wide door for escape and some short-sighted old jossler behind the counter...” (79-80). Implied here is the possibility that crime is a response to societal indifference, alienation and deprivation where the deprived and opportunistic criminal “rationally chooses victims depending ... on how likely he thinks they are to resist his assault” – which explains the choice of the “short-sighted ... jossler”. When Victor later coughs to death on the cold street, Henry notes that “the city killed Victor ... And, today, the king was being crowned. In another city. In London. Did their children die under tarpaulins?” (83). It seems evident that it is the experience of poverty and the kind of inequality and indifference narrated above that turns Henry into the freedom fighter that the reader is introduced to in the passage below. Henry states:

... We ambushed pigs on their way to Britain. Our butchers slaughtered them in the yard beside Binns' Bridge and we delivered them to Donnelly's bacon factory in Coombe – Irish pigs, Irish labour, Irish stomachs – ... Somewhere in the excitement of ambush and convoy I remembered my time in Liberty Hall. I looked at the sharp, angry cheekbones of women we passed and the skinny, meatless legs of the children who ran beside us. ___ We should give this bacon out to the people, I said to Jack as I steered the cart onto Patrick Street. ___ No, Henry, he said. ___ Not a good idea. We don't want to interfere with internal trade or anything like that. (179)

The passage above captures a number of linked but also, strangely competing issues and dialectics. It shows one of Henry's many exploits as a freedom fighter, rebelling against a system that he blames for his material condition. Clearly, his material condition is exploited to influence him to become a freedom fighter, as is seen when he is approached with the question: "do you love Ireland, lads? ... do you want to earn a few shillings for yourselves? ___ Easy money ... [for helping] win back the land that had been stolen from us" (69-70). The act of ambushing and butchering pigs described above suggests that: "[i]n the conventional economic analysis, rebellion is indistinguishable from crime" (Collier 2000: 389). Additionally, "[during] ... insurrections the insurgents are indistinguishable from bandits or pirates" (Grossman 1999, 269 quoted in Collier, 2000: 389). At another level, there is a compelling depiction of a strong correlation between poverty and rebellion, or the desire for freedom. Henry seeks economic freedom, beyond the political, as suggested by the statement: "Irish pigs, Irish labour, Irish stomachs". In fact, the experience of poverty awakens and renders him self-conscious, a situation that in actual society has been expressed by Albert Camus when he claimed that "he had learned about freedom not from Marx, but from poverty" (Letemendia, 1997: 442). Unlike his comrade Patrick, Henry shows great empathy and compassion for the poor when he proposes: "[w]e should give this bacon out to the people". His empathetic attitude is explicitly attributed to his past experiences of poverty as captured in the statement: "[s]omewhere in the excitement of ambush and convoy I remembered my time in Liberty Hall" when he was poor and vulnerable himself. Here, "empathy ... [symbolizes his] desire for personal control" (Cialdini as quoted in Lane, 2001: 479) in the midst of the power that has been amassed in his new role as a powerful freedom fighter. When Patrick in responding to Henry's proposal to give the bacon away to the poor declares: "not a good idea. We don't want to interfere with internal trade or anything like that", this predicts economic doom for the poor and more particular, Henry's despair, frustration and betrayal by a capitalist system that perpetuates itself. While they seek to replace a system that seems to be indifferent to the plight of the poor, Patrick's view holds little hope for the poor – predicting that the more things change, the more they remain the same, at least for the poor. Unlike most of Doyle's works analysed in this thesis, the artistic strength of *A Star Called Henry* lies in the force of description as seen in the statement: "I looked at the sharp, angry cheekbones of women we passed and the skinny, meatless legs of the children who ran beside us".

Henry further confesses:

I wandered the city in the daytime and waited. And every night, without fail or decision, I ended up in front of Dolly Oblong's. I watched the sailors and locals coming and going ... I broke into a house on Merring Square and walked out the front door at five in the morning with two matching suitcases full of books, all of them written by women. (164) ... I was more than two minutes' cycle away from anywhere with a suitcase full of stolen books, all by female authors, strapped to the back of a bike I'd borrowed from Collins. I had nowhere to go. There was the water beneath me but I didn't want to abandon the bike or drench the books. I'd spent the night slithering into big houses around Kenilworth Square, spent hours reading the titles and the authors on the spines, selecting the best and the fattest, from off the shelves and the bedside tables of sleeping owners. I listened. ... Not a sinner out, except me, not a footstep or a bike chain complaining. (241)

The passage above moves away from Henry's response to material poverty to capture his response to emotional, intellectual and other forms of poverty which have been conceived as:

lack of well-being ... defined by the level of satisfaction in different areas of life, such as family relations, ..., education ... personality, ... close friends, socialization, ... social activities, personal development and knowledge, ... work, active/passive recreational activities, personal expression and creativity, among others. (Flanagan, 1978 & Pullium, 1989 as quoted in Palomar et al., 2005: 377)

It is obvious that Henry is lacking in most of the areas listed in the quote above. Clearly, he is abandoned by his family from childhood. More especially, he seems to have had no real relationship with his mother. To make up for this he engages in a relationship with a much older widow, Annie, and his much older female teacher Miss O'Shea, whom I assume represent the mother figure that he never had. The fact that the books he steals are by female authors is not coincidental but symbolic. It symbolizes his desire and yearning for the maternal love that he has not experienced in his life.

Clearly, Henry expresses a strong yet unfulfilled yearning for education and knowledge as seen firstly in the episode where he and his brother are unsympathetically thrown out of the school that they attend for a few days and secondly, in his attitude to books, which assume metaphorical significance. Henry steals two suitcases of books at five in the morning. He spends the night slithering into big houses reading the titles and the authors on the spines of books and selecting the best and the fattest, from off the shelves and the bedside tables of sleeping owners. Though he had nowhere to go, there was the water beneath him and he didn't want to drench the books. One would have expected Henry, a desperately impoverished character – materially – to direct the kind of risky attention that he gives to books rather towards fulfilling lower level needs such as food and shelter or money and material luxuries. Rather, he seems over-dedicated to “the book” as an object and as an embodiment of knowledge. In response to his exclusion from the world of books and formal education and knowledge, he resorts to crime to fulfill his yearning. Perhaps this is a form of rebellion against a society that has denied him access to formal education, knowledge and books.

Generally, the characterization of Henry captures the social psychology of an individual who has experienced the material but also, most of the non-material forms of impoverishment quoted in Palomar et al., (2005: 377) above. He is shown to have a distorted personality, he lacks close friends if any at all, his life is devoid of socialization, he is not exposed to any social activities and in spite of his attempts, he is denied all opportunities at personal development. He does not work; he engages in no active/passive recreational activities and seems not to have much space for personal expression and creativity except the space afforded by violence and crime. Experience of these levels of impoverishment “urge[s Henry’s] ...fictional self ... into a marginality” (Driver, 1983: 30) of near-cynical opportunistic crime. A level of near cynicism is indicated that does not only signal the danger of this state of affairs for the broader society – beyond the fictional – but also foreshadows a frighteningly pessimistic future for a society where youths such as Henry confess: “I wandered the city in the daytime and waited. And every night, without fail or decision, I ended up in front of Dolly Oblong’s. I watched the sailors and locals coming and going ...I broke into a house on Merring Square ...” (241). When Henry commits this crime after wandering the city without “decision”, one can only deduce that he is responding, not to any material need but rather to emotional, psychological and social needs – needs that in some cases could result in responses that are far more disastrous for the individual and society than responses to material needs. To a certain extent, one can argue – especially if one considers Henry’s failed attempts to satisfy some of the non-material needs that Doyle calls attention to – we are presented with a structuralist understanding of poverty and its resultant effects. Crime in this case is depicted as being a product of weaknesses in society's economic, political and social structures.

Hoping against hope

In addition to the criminal tendencies discussed above, characters in Mwangi’s *The Cockroach Dance* and Doyle’s *A Star Called Henry* respond to their material condition in ways that conceptualize hope as a significant survivalist commodity. In this section, I specifically isolate the characters Dusman in Mwangi’s text and Henry in Doyle’s text for analysis.

Dusman’s response to poverty is encapsulated mainly but not exclusively in a narrative around his car – a car that assumes symbolic significance in the novel. The omniscient narrator who shares narrative space with Dusman in the novel reports that:

Dusman had clung stubbornly to his car. He believed in her. She was his whole past, the only past he remembered without regret. She reflected the respectable side of his life’s achievements. What Dacca House took out of his personality, the car gave back. Even as she lay immobile on the street below, she gave him pride as the only member of Dacca House who owned a car. But most of all she was his ticket out of Dacca House. As long as she was there he knew he would one day leave. He had come to Dacca House in the old Triumph, and that was the way he would leave. To give her up would be like selling not only his past, but the promise of a better future as well. (8)

Dusman shows an authentic and delightfully assertive kind of nostalgia for his past – constituting the “respectable side of his life’s achievements”, symbolised by the car. The past is crudely contrasted with the dehumanising effects of poverty that he experiences in the present, symbolised by Dacca House. “[D]espite the difficulties put in [his] path [by poverty in the present] and however extreme the anguish” (Driver 1991: 337) of his present condition, “she [the car gives] him pride as the only member of Dacca House who owned a car ... [. Additionally, it gives him hope that a]s long as she was there, he knew he would one day leave” (8) Dacca House. The vehemence and conviction with which his hopeful nature is evoked could potentially elevate a reader who finds him or herself in a condition of adversity into a more hopeful spirit. Dusman in this and other sections of the novel engages in some sort of transtemporality to make sense of his situation. His understanding of the future is informed by experiences of and resources from the past such as the car. He habitually strips temporal connections and disconnections to articulate an imaginary of a stable or an unstable sense of self or to make sense of his condition. In his present state, he finds pleasure, strength and the energy to survive not in the present itself but in the past that he reminiscences over. In symbolically rejecting a future characterised by any kind of poverty, expressed in the hope of leaving Dacca House in his car, he again calls attention to the past as enabling a materially fulfilling future, regardless of the extent of his current predicament. Implicit in the narrative is an attempt by the character to deal with the present state of economic misfortune by supplanting it imaginatively with pleasant images of the past and hope for a better future. This allows for a multiplicity of interpretations. It partly depicts Dusman’s daydreaming personality, which may in most instances be a weakness of character as he seems to deny the presence of displeasing circumstances, but more importantly it captures an inner strength that enables the poor (Dusman) to build his future on little more than hope, even when the object of that hope – the car – is being torn apart, piece by piece.

Mwangi uses the device of anthropomorphism by giving the car animate qualities through the repeated use of the “she” pronoun. This elevates the car and its perceived enabling function of getting Dusman out of Dacca House and symbolically out of poverty to a hyperbolic proportion. To a certain extent, it shows how, in an increasingly materialistic world, man’s hope and reliance for surviving adversity is pinned more on materiality than on humanity. Contrary to his predictions, the car does not eventually drive Dusman out of Dacca House and poverty. This recognition subverts two common responses to poverty. Firstly, it questions a response to poverty where the poor rely largely on the material for survival. When the reader meets Dusman by the end of the novel, he is still in Dacca House, but he seems finally to begin to find authentic fulfilment in living, and this is not derived from the car or any material, object but from a sincere and authentic relationship with humanity – the Bathroom Man and his wife. Secondly, when the car remains immovable this serves to undermine Dusman’s wishful efforts to predict the future, suggesting that: “it would be suicidal to consider the future as a simple extrapolation of the present [or past] predicting the future of

any human activity ... is generally recognised as precarious, tentative and highly subjective” (Serge et al., 2005: 21). Although this is generalised and not absolutely applicable to all predictive cases, in this case, it is a viable argument.

When Dusman later realises that his car has been scrapped by thieves, he “rubbed his tired eyes, scratched his hair and said nothing” (9). Reacting to this nonverbal response, Toto questions: “[a]ren’t you going to say anything”. Dusman responds: “Like what” and Toto adds: “Like, Damn it, say anything, curse, swear, cry out loud. She is your bloody car, isn’t she? And they have just stolen the goddamned wheels, haven’t they? Man, you have no car any more, don’t you understand? No car” (9). Here, one sees how a failing fortune coupled with the deterioration of hope and the overarching presence of adversity has the potential to momentarily dampen, numb and crush the human spirit and personality, transforming and circumscribing the poor to a subjectivity of verbal/narrative silence. Implied in the nonverbal response is the view that “more suffering is lived through than is seen from the outside. ... that mankind prefers to suffer in silence, prefers to live in the world of silence, even if it be by suffering, than to take its suffering into the loud places ... ” (Picard, 1952: 84 quoted in Sheriff, 2000: 114). When fiction captures such a response to adversity, it reflects narrative strength rather than weakness. The silence of the character creates space for the reader to enter the psychological world of Dusman and to bring his or her [the reader’s] own interpretation to bear on the silent response. In this case, two interpretations are possible. One may assume that Dusman is gradually giving up on any hope of leaving Dacca House in his car or ever leaving at all or, perhaps he is still hopeful but is simply subdued and muted by the experiences. These two possibilities are further discussed below.

When Dusman approaches a mechanic for help with repairing the car, the mechanic assures him: “[y]es, I can make that rattlebag move, but first it has to have wheels”, making Dusman realise that: “[w]hichever way he looked at it, the whole story started and ended with the wheels. Wheels, wheels, wheels” (12). When he asks the mechanic about the possibility of selling the car, he retorts: “For that load of crap, Why should anyone in his right mind want to buy such misery”, to which Dusman responds approvingly: “[t]hat is what I thought” and the mechanic corrects: “[y]ou got your slippers on the wrong feet too” (13). When the mechanic uses expressions such as “rattlebag”, “load of crap” and “misery” to describe the car, this mocks and discredits Dusman’s view that the car is his “promise of a better future” and by extension, questions any hope that he might have for a better future. Dusman agrees submissively with the mechanic that: “[w]hichever way he looked at it, the whole story started and ended with the wheels. Wheels, wheels, wheels” and unquestioningly accepts the mechanic’s somehow degrading views about the car in the words, “[t]hat is what I thought”. This shows the complete disintegration of hope, but also reflects how he has been overwhelmed by experiences – to the extent that he might have become psychologically unstable – wearing his “slippers on the wrong feet” – one of his and one of Toto’s. The reader is

made to sympathise with Dusman, but also made aware of *how poverty resists the hopes and efforts of the poor to resist its sting*.

The material object of Dusman's hope – the car – is progressively being stripped by thieves. However, the narrator recasts what is probably a pessimistic situation to one that bequeaths hope on the poor. The narrator in one of the many instances of metaphorical representation of the state of the car triumphantly echoes the point that the Triumph, evidently and symbolically, the car's "essentials were held together by scavenged parts and their sheer determination to stick together" (34). The car's determination stands as a metaphor for Dusman's determination – a determination that ironically is born out of nothing materially hopeful in his present circumstance. The hopeful dimension of his personality, as earlier stated, is drawn from a conception of a temporal connectivity – one that is echoed in the statement that the car "was still Dusman's only touch with the *past* and his only hope for the *future* [my emphasis]" (34). Significant here is the urgency with which the narrative calls attention to hope as an extraordinarily important, though slightly elusive commodity that poor characters like Dusman, especially when positioned on what seems like a trajectory of misfortune and poverty, rely on for survival. It has been suggested that:

The levels of poverty, sickness, and starvation in the world mean that a strong demand for hope exists in the world ... hope is a powerful psychological hook. Hope is constituted of imagining and believing in the possibility that some state of affairs in the future will come to pass. Once an individual is in the grip of hope, it becomes rational for an individual to reason in the following instrumental way: Since I hope for X, I should do Y. (Drahos, 2004: 24)

In Dusman's case, he hopes that his disintegrating car would *drive* (the italics indicates the literal and figurative implication of the word 'drive') him out of Dacca House and poverty. Therefore, he has to hold firmly onto the hope and the object of that hope – the car. Read in relation to Drahos's paradigm, hope in the car and the hope to leave Dacca House in the car motivates the action Y, which in this case is Dusman's clinging steadfastly to the car. The fiction allows for an additional dimension to Drahos's theoretical model. In addition to the x and y dimensions of hope, there exists a z dimension which serves as the overarching motivator of the other two dimensions, viz the fear of worsening adversity. In Dusman's case, it is the fear that: "If this one [the car went [he] would sink even lower in his social and financial standing. His status in Dacca House would change from being a temporary resident to that of a permanent one". (35)

Although Doyle's conceptualisation of hope shows slight differences, he like Mwangi emphasises the importance of hope as a commodity on which the poor build their resilience and resistance to the condition of poverty. Dusman's hopefulness in *The Cockroach Dance* is grounded on a private and introspective expression of the feeling of hope which rests on a more personal symbol – his car. Henry's hope to liberate himself from a life of poverty is embedded in a broader, public and a

more abstract symbol – the liberation of Ireland. It has been argued that “public hope [which is] invoked by political actors in relation to a societal goal ... is the most dangerous kind of hope” (Drahos, 2004:18). The phrase “most dangerous” implies that all hope to varying degrees is dangerous. I interpret danger here as implying the possibility of incurring dashed hopes. In both cases (Dusman’s and Henry’s), the authors articulate and depict the simultaneously hopeful and hopeless situation and nature of the poor.

Henry’s response to his material condition and consequent involvement in the struggle is built around a conception and a sense of hope. While Dusman’s hope is self generated, Henry’s is carefully induced through the use of rhetorically well crafted utterances such as those attributed to Collins, one of the leading figures in Doyle’s fictional Irish struggle. He arouses Henry’s hopes with the words: “do you want to earn a few shillings for yourselves? ___ Easy money ... [for helping] win back the land that had been stolen from us” (69-70). When Henry hopefully accepts this offer as a possible outlet from poverty, with broader nationalistic benefits, it is an important comment on the possibility that, “in times of acute economic crisis the poor might flock to political movements ...” (Pinard, 1967: 262). Henry’s positive response to Collins’s manipulative and hope arousing appeal originates in the hope, through political resistance, of minimising or eradicating the condition of poverty that he is experiencing. Subsequently, Collins further assures him: “we’re nearly there, Henry, we’re nearly there” (209) – statements that make Henry believe that he is “one self-important little rebel [with] no idea of [his] tininess and anonymity” (209). This episode reveals the potent effect of political rhetoric, especially on a vulnerable person. One also sees the dangerous nature of publicly inspired hopefulness for the poor and how it has the potential to result in a somewhat vain self-conception and a distorted sense of personality as well as exaggerated hope resting on flimsy foundations. The language/words/tone of Collins’ appeal is in itself hopeful in nature and this is a rhetorical strategy that he applies with the intention to transmit hope, implying that hope is infectious, as his hopeful words are shown to have an emotionally motivational impact on the poor – Henry. Overall, Collin’s approach is systematically and structurally designed – he shrewdly exploits Henry’s vulnerability – despite his condition of material misfortune, his language is hopeful and he is acutely aware of the need not just to create, but also to sustain hope when he says: “we’re nearly there, Henry, we’re nearly there” (209). In spite of all this, hope to a certain degree remains an ambivalent concept and state in the novel.

The ambivalence constituted in the kind of hope that is evoked in *A Star Called Henry* is twofold – the ambivalence of narrative and ambivalence of experience. The ambivalence of hope is seen not just in the unsettling reality in which Henry finds himself when the war ends, but also in Collins’s attempt to sustain hope in the words: “we’re nearly there, Henry, we’re nearly there” (209). Ironically, rather than achieving the narrative intent, the words show potential betrayal and narrative ambivalence. The phrase “nearly there” is vague and could mean anything and nothing at

the same time, predicting the uncertain states of fatalism, despair and disillusionment that await Henry. The end of “the great war” (207) brings him to the disappointing reality that Collins becomes “minister of Finance [while] Henry Smart got wet” (209).

There was no Henry Smart M.P., ... I was one of Collins' anointed but, I was excluded from everything, ... I'd no farm in the family, no college, no priest no past. ... And none of the other men of the slums and hovels ever made it on to the list. We were nameless and expendable, every bit as dead as the squaddies in France. (288)

As in Dusman's case, hope evades Henry, with even more fatal emotional and psychological consequences. This is possibly so because the public hope which he relies on “is the most dangerous kind of hope” (Drahos, 2004:18) and seems not to depend on an individual's personal attributes and disposition but on the actions and attributes of others – such as human integrity, sincerity and compassion – attributes which seem to be in very short supply in *A Star Called Henry*. At the end of the struggle, one of Henry's combatant compatriots, Jack Dalton, now in a position of power, lambasts him unashamedly: “[y]ou've no stake in the country, man. Never had, never will. We needed trouble-makers and very soon now we'll have to be rid of them. And that, Henry is all you are and ever were. A trouble-maker. The best in the business, mind. But ...” (327). This is a total reversal of the hopeful images conjured in Collins's words quoted earlier. Embodied in Henry's situation is the suggestion that “only those [like Henry] who [had] not [yet] lost faith and hope can see the horrors of the World with genuine clarity” (Havel, 1990: 141 as quoted in Drahos, 2004: 22). Hope is obviously intangible and in my view, as earlier mentioned, extremely elusive in some instances, even an irrational attempt to give sense to life. But it is in a trajectory transition from this state of potential irrationality (hopefulness) to one of hopelessness (realisation/reality) that one is, like Henry able to finally grasp something of the intertwined totality and complexity of human existence. Upon reaching this state of mind and being, Henry comes to the final realisation that the “We” of Collins's assurance is exclusive of those who like him come from an impoverished background with “no farm in the family, no college, no priest no past. ... men of the slums and hovels” (288). This implies that even in empowering situations like that prevalent at the end of the war, those who stand a chance to get empowered constitute just/mostly those who already have a certain degree of access to the requisite empowering resources like “a farm”, “college” and “a past”. Those lacking these fundamental resources (such as Henry) seem condemned to perpetual deprivation. This to a certain extent explains the sustained and massive expression of feelings of betrayal by *liberated* people in fictional and actual societies like Ireland and post-apartheid South Africa which is unrelated to this study but aptly exemplary of this point. The kind of frustration that Henry shows is a consequence of dashed hopes, suggesting that in some cases of adversity, a “low aspiration level [may] help reduce frustration” (Lewis, 1968 : 413 as quoted in Parker and Kleiner, 1970: 517). Dalton's words to Henry graphically convey the shocking image of a state of gloom and doom for the poor, whose only hope for surviving poverty is the unreliable, elusive or treacherous commodity – hope.

The poor: embarrassed, despairing, frightened and shamed by the condition of poverty

Here, I examine the responses of characters that are portrayed by Mwangi and Doyle as being poor as seen by other poor characters. Perceptions of and reactions to the Bathroom Man, particularly by Dusman, as well as the general representation of the Bathroom Man's condition and his response to poverty, are very evocatively represented. One such evocative moment in the novel occurs in the narrative excerpt below:

Thinking about the Bathroom Man filled [Dusman] with despair. Soon he was assailed by overwhelming storms of shame, guilt and, sometimes, fright. He was embarrassed for the Bathroom Man, ashamed that anyone should live in a dark bathroom like a slimy, black African toad. The thought of how extremely vulnerable human life was filled him with bitter helplessness and sometimes frightened him into violent, destructive rage. [However,] Dusman like most of his neighbours did not make much money. (66)

Here, Dusman experiences the poverty of the *other* "as a crisis, as shame and stigma, as wasted life" and this experience or perception solicits his "fear, and horror Poverty is seen as a state of mind and often affects [the poor's] emotional lives. ..." (Strier, 2005: 354-355). It is significant that even though Mwangi represents the Bathroom Man as living in the most excruciating state of poverty, he [the Bathroom Man] rarely portrays his emotions or response to the experience of poverty overtly. This way, Mwangi problematises understanding and conceptions of poverty, raising the question whether determination of what constitutes poverty should be self-defined by the extremely poor (such as the Bathroom Man) or based on how they are perceived by others (like Dusman) as being poor and also, whether poverty is a condition to be ashamed of and if so, who should be ashamed or rather, who should be shamed by whom. Of course, the Bathroom Man is poor, but is he poor because he is perceived to be poor or rather because he perceives himself to be poor? Secondly, does his attitude to the condition of poverty subvert or entrench the real life confession that "poverty is to live without honor ... My sons feel ashamed of me" (Strier, 2005: 356)? When Dusman expresses the kind of melodramatic emotions captured in the Mwangi quote above, the implication is that Dusman is frightened and in fact, repulsed by the level of poverty around him but also, by his own poverty. Perhaps he is frightened by the possibility that his slow descent into poverty, captured partly in the image of the increasingly deteriorating state of the car, would eventually culminate in a condition similar to that of the Bathroom Man. His response therefore could be read as the hatred, pity, remorse, admonishment and rejection that the poor inflicts on the self, as punishment for being poor, if one considers the fact that he is himself poor.

The statement: "Dusman like most of his neighbours did not make much money" (66) identifies him as a poor character. His reaction to poverty reflects the potential of fiction to give a voice to a somewhat voiceless group of people or in fact, the poor claiming the right to speak for themselves, no matter how depressing the experience may be. Gugelberger and Kearney (1991:4) argue for the

potency of a narrative that creates a character like Dusman with the ability of “seeing and feeling” and narrating conditions and experiences that require attention, suggesting that when this happens, the author is “pushing the limits of the ... novel in the direction of a corrective representation”. In this case, Dusman’s perspective has the potential to correct or at least call attention to the plight of the poor as he speaks as one who has *lived with poverty*. Further, quoting George Yuidic (1985), Gugelberger and Kearney (1991:4) argue that witnessing and telling results in an “authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of a situation (e.g., war, oppression, revolution, [or poverty, adding that:]) ... [t]ruth is summoned in the cause of denouncing a present situation of exploitation and oppression or deprivation” like the one Dusman and other tenants of Dacca House experience. In typical Mwangi style, the strength of the fiction lies in how the condition of poverty and the ensuing emotions are captured in a vibrantly pictorial description. The image of a *man* living in a “dark bathroom like a slimy, black African toad” reveals the extremity of human deprivation. The simile in the passage quoted here effectively paints a picture of the poor, debased and dehumanised by poverty to a condition similar to that of an animal that faces extinction and may be nauseating to many. This is hyperbolic and serves a cautionary appeal to humanity to respond urgently to this kind of dehumanisingly extreme adversity. Additionally, the narrative captures the problematic nature of common and likely responses to this kind of adversity. This is seen in Dusman’s response, which is characterised by “overwhelming storms of shame”, “guilt”, “fright”, “embarrassment”, “bitter helplessness” as well as “violent and destructive rage”. The emotions embedded in this response are poignant. They may not necessarily constitute a proactive attitude towards reversing the situation of the poor, but they are authentic and reflect a state of human despair. However, the fact that they find an outlet, the mere act of giving a voice to or claiming the voice and space to express the emotions could be seen as beginning a therapeutic and an empowering process that is likely to culminate in the revival and the empowerment of the disempowered subject.

With exceptional intensity and from a different angle, Doyle also gives the poor a voice to respond to the poverty of other characters in their surroundings. This is seen when Henry declares: “I looked at the sharp, angry cheekbones of women we passed and the skinny, meatless legs of the children who ran beside us. ___ We should give this bacon out to the people, I said to Jack as I steered the cart onto Patrick Street. ___ No, Henry, he said. ___ Not a good idea. We don’t want to interfere with internal trade or anything like that” (179). Doyle’s representational approach here is different from that adopted by Mwangi in the passages analysed above. Unlike Mwangi who captures the internalised response to the condition of poverty – Dusman’s emotions – Doyle undertakes a more descriptive narrative, providing the reader with a pictorial imaginary of the condition of the poor. The image of “sharp” and “angry” cheekbones and of the “skinny” and “meatless” legs are evocative, appealing to the reader’s sense of sight as in reading the text, the reader is made to picture the deplorable physical condition of the famine-struck poor. It is

important that Doyle evokes these kinds of moving images of the famine in a European setting. Usually, nowadays, such images are associated with Africa or India. This destabilises simplistic and generalised notions of African poverty or famine, suggesting that these conditions are universal. When Doyle describes the state of the “cheekbones” and of the “legs”, he uses the device of metonymy to create imaginatively engrossing literature which in the process of exposing very harsh human conditions, also makes for interesting reading. By extension, if the legs and the cheekbones can stand for the individuals whose condition is described, then the individuals – the poor of Doyle’s fiction and their condition – stand for the whole; the poor of the world and their condition. This attributes some degree of universality to the conditions described. Unlike Mwangi, Doyle attempts to empower the poor doubly in the excerpt above. Henry is given narrative power, a voice, but also the power or potential to respond proactively to the condition that he describes. However, in a move that symbolizes the constraints faced by the poor, Jack stops him. This foreshadows Jack’s show of even more shocking insensitivity later as discussed in the section subtitled: “dis/empowering value of money”.

The life of the poor and dead-end choices

This section examines how *The Cockroach Dance* as well as *A Star Called Henry* imagine life for the poor and depict characters to whom *life* has presented what I consider dead-end choices – as well as other related issues. None of the choices accessible to the characters seems to be a plausible solution to their condition of impoverishment. Dusman spends much time thinking about the Bathroom Man’s condition and wonders: “how do they create life in a bathroom” and Toto responds: “maybe they don’t” (159). The simple statements of enquiry and doubt by the two characters are suggestive and may have a number of implications. In one sense, the word “life” could be interpreted as referring to the state of animate or inanimate existence – implying the possibility that extreme poverty can be equated figuratively with a descent into an inanimate state of being. Possibly, “life” stands for the act of reproduction but also, the general material condition of human existence. The multiple layers of possible meanings reveal the distinct possibilities that fiction opens up, creating space for the reader to bring his or her own thoughts and feelings to bear on a particular, evolved human condition. Whatever the authorial intention might be, the tone of the roommates’ (Dusman and Toto’s) conversation betrays undertones indicative of a mocking attitude full of disdain, ridicule and wit exercised upon the Bathroom Man’s life and situation. It is important to examine the three possible implications of the word “life” as used by the two characters. If one considers life to imply the ability to reproduce, Dusman’s question and Toto’s response call the reader’s attention to the physically deformed child of the Bathroom couple. This is an insensitive implication, but a plausible interpretation, which implies a link between material wellbeing and the biological creation of life. The unfortunate material conditions of the Bathroom Man would stand for disharmony and reflect the kind of situation that Lund (2005: 97, 98) explains as follows: “when the harmony and just measures of the rising pulses, the circulating humours, and

the moving airs or spirits, are disturbed or lost, deformity enters, and with it, calamity and ruin". Lund, (2005: 103) further explains that such calamity is characterised by "want of capacity, a want of comeliness, and poverty", but he questions: "who can look on ugliness, infirmity or poverty, as ridiculous in themselves?" (106). Implied in Lund's paradigm is the view that characteristics and states of being such as lack of capacity, lack of comeliness, or ugliness and infirmity coincide with the condition of poverty. By implication, poverty is associated with the grotesque body – a body that, like that of the Bathroom Man's child (as implied by Dusman and Toto), results from the inability to create comely life under the kind of material conditions in which the Bathroom couple lives.

In a balanced rhetoric that seems at the same time to vilify the poor and the broader society for creating poverty, the narrative also, in a profoundly implicit way, seems to adopt an absolutory tone towards the poor. This mixture of positions results in a somewhat "pathological tangle" (Harvey and Reed, 1996: 467) on the subject of poverty. Dusman declares: "I hate him The Bathroom Man ... it had a great deal to do with the Bathroom Man having betrayed his masculinity, his very manhood, by bringing his faithful wife and his baby to live in a bathroom by the trash cans" (162). He continues: "... It was bad enough for a man to be content to live in a garbage can. But for a man to just sit and slobber with his retarded child leaving his wife to do all the thinking for him was too much. Such men ought to be castrated" (271). The narrative perspective that implies that the Bathroom Man is "content" and "just sit[s] and slobber[s]" in his material condition places all the blame for his condition of agonizing impoverishment at his doorstep. Implied in the statements is the view that his passivity is blamed for the state of poverty. The state of poverty in turn, but perhaps, also the passivity, is an indication of or even a result of what Dusman conceives as a loss of the Bathroom Man's manhood and manliness. Additionally, Dusman suggests that these states of being render one less than manly to the extent that castration is required to make the loss of manliness physical or complete. If the condition of impoverishment or the perceived passive response to it is associated with the betrayal of manliness or justifies the need for castration, this raises a complex, controversial, simplistic and questionable gender position – that passivity and resignation to poverty are not masculine and therefore, from my deduction, attributable to non-masculine gender categories. The indictment of the Bathroom Man ignores the fact that under the circumstances that he finds himself, living in a bathroom is the most amenable of the options open to him. Alternative to this is the "the shanties [and] his wife and child did not wish to return to the ramshackle hovels across the river and he had no intention of forcing them to by thought, word or deed" (269). This demonstrates the kind of extremely inhumane, constraining and dead-end choices that the condition of poverty avails to the poor. This information acts as a counter narrative to Dusman's contempt and has the potential to solicit the reader's empathy for the Bathroom Man. Rather than implying solely a weakness of character, the Bathroom Man's response or perceived response to poverty may be interpreted as showing the adaptive potential of the poor in

circumstances of excruciating material deprivation. This kind of adaptive mechanism and strategy “allow(s) the poor to survive in otherwise impossible material and social conditions” (Harvey and Reed, 1996: 467) – like those in which the Bathroom Man lives. He is shown to have suffered, adapted and survived the condition of poverty.

As in Mwangi’s text, the condition of excruciating poverty also places impossible choices in the path of characters in Doyle’s text. In Doyle’s fiction, life in a bathroom is not one of the options but an unidentified body of poor people are forced by their deplorable material conditions to submit themselves foolhardily to the possibility that

[t]he trenches are safer than the Dublin slums, [as] the recruitment poster had claimed ... [The narrator comments,] ... it was true if it referred to the chances of your children getting a good meal. There were men ... who’d gone to France to survive. ... They were vulnerable, even frightened. (182)

The poor of fictional Dublin like those of fictional Nairobi are depicted in impossibly challenging situations that require them to make extraordinarily difficult decisions. While the condition of poverty presents the Bathroom Man with the option of choosing between life (or abjection in Dusman’s view) in the bathroom on the one hand and “the ramshackle hovels across the river” (269), on the other hand, in the case of the poor of Doyle’s Dublin, it is the more extreme option of choosing between “Dublin slums” on the one hand and “the trenches”, “a good meal” and the likelihood of death on the other. None of the choices embodies any prospect of a better life, casting doubt on any possibility of a decent life for the poor – whatever the choice they make. The two authors use the device of pathos to appeal to the reader’s empathy for the poor who seem to be condemned to a life of perpetual discomfort either in a “bathroom” of Dacca house or “the ramshackle hovels across the river” in *The Cockroach Dance* and either the “Dublin slums” or the “trenches” of France in *A Star Called Henry*.

The paradox of the statements “there were men ... who’d gone to France to survive” and of the qualifying phrase “[t]hey were vulnerable, even frightened” is evident. The paradoxical representation conveys a heightened sense of ways in which the vulnerability and fright that results from situations of extreme poverty forces the poor to make extraordinarily stoical decisions. The decision is self sacrificing but understandable as the reader is made to see that none of the spatial options is humane – all lead towards a dead-end. In *A Star Called Henry*, those who like Henry and the other “men of the slums and hovels” chose to stay in fictional Ireland rather than go to the trenches of France, are “every bit as dead as the squaddies in France” (288). The poor of both fictional worlds are yet able to make a choice, no matter how embarrassing, stoical, self-sacrificing and foolhardy, which again shows the extraordinarily adaptive and resilient nature of the poor.

The pathology of poverty: self-inflicted or externally imposed?

In an abrupt but implicit shift in narrative perspective, Mwangi's narrator reports that "[t]he Bathroom Man was one of the first to rise in Dacca House, in and out of the shower-room long before most of the tenants had ventured into the morning chill" (158). This implies that he does in fact not "just sit and slobber" as Dusman thinks. He does not only rise early but works a full day as a mechanic. This is implied in the statement that "it was five o'clock before the first working neighbour came home. Soon after came the Bathroom family" (174) and the report that he is "[o]n his way home in the late afternoon, after another day of greasy hard work ..." (159). These narrative perspectives exonerate the Bathroom Man from the negative image of a slobbering and lazy individual who does nothing to remedy his family's material conditions. If he goes to work early, works a whole day and returns late, the reader is invited to question why he remains poor. This trajectory of hard work and poverty keeps open the possibility that an external force beyond the control of the poor is written deep into explanation of poverty as social pathology. In the case of the Bathroom Man, this force is the society, capital and the rich, represented by Tumbo Kubwa, whom Dusman accuses in the words: "[Y]ou cheat us a lot, These hovels are not worth what you make us pay for them. And charging the man for living in a bathroom is worse than murder ... no one should live in a bathroom even for free You are raving money-mad" (164, 165). Since a section of this chapter specifically examines the attitude of society and more particularly, of the rich towards the poor and in the creation of poverty, I do not deal with the perceived role that society and the rich like Tumbo Kubwa play in increasing levels and states of poverty. However, it is clear that the narrative carefully places partial blame for the condition of horrendous poverty on the exploitative and uncaring attitude of rich characters such as Tumbo Kubwa. The multiple but in some instances charged narrative perspectives above open up wide, varied but nuanced interpretative space for the reader to determine possible causes of poverty, at least the fictional poverty. Also, the narrative perspectives point to the potential of fiction to undertake a balanced yet vivid representation of poverty. Conversely, they serve to indicate the epistemologically problematic nature of attempts to seek a single and absolute pathological explanation for a complex phenomenon such as poverty. Written deep into the fabric of the story is the degree of

personal damage the poor sustain at the hands of a society that has ceased to care. [The narrative perspective] concedes [that to a certain extent,] the poor have been damaged by the system [the society and the the rich] but insists this damage does not ... [necessarily] disqualify them from determining their own fate. (Harvey and Reed, 1996: 467)

As seen below, they do not entirely escape Mwangi's satirical weapon.

Mwangi's text raises the question: do the poor invest sufficiently in efforts to alleviate poverty and determine their own fate, or have they rather resigned themselves to the crushing force of poverty? A number of passages, drawn from different episodes in the text, afford an enlightening to the issues highlighted in this question. The narrative states: "it seemed Dacca House dwellers were

brothers in at least one thing – remaining tormentingly noncommittal. It was quite unclear how far they would go to haul themselves out of the garbage pit they were in” (215). Additionally, they are described as “jelly-assed sewer rats with points of views so narrow they could hardly see where they were going” (217). As these thoughts went through his mind, “Dusman crushed a couple [of cockroaches] under his shoes. Two monsters, huge enough to drag a plough and work for their eats, lazy thieving, dirty bastards. One of these days he’d teach them a lesson in self reliance” (106). Further, the narrator predicts that “[i]f one day a neighbour gives up on life and decides to end it all by hanging first his family then himself out in the yard, the others will no doubt stand by their doors and watch” (225). Generally the narrator expresses a pained and angry outburst of disgust and indignation, significantly, not at the plight of the poor, but rather at their response to their condition of poverty. Where Dusman is explicitly shown to be the narrator, his response to how the poor react to the state of poverty is narrated mainly in the third person by a narrator who clearly shares the same experiences that he narrates. In these instances, the author generally becomes a muted voice in the story. This may be because, as an educated and supposedly, a rich middle class member of Kenyan society, he cannot with as much authenticity, authority and conviction as the poor themselves claim to speak about the experiences of the poor. When Dusman, a member of the poor community, expresses some of the views above, this suggests indeed that “one should bear [authentic] witness ... after having had one’s throat under the knife. Poverty ... leaves behind in people who have experienced it an intolerance which doesn’t take well to someone who speaks of a certain kind of destitution without knowing what they are talking about” (Letemendia, 1997: 447).

Dusman conceives of a state of self-perpetuating pessimism for the poor, but evident in the text is also, a certain sense of a pessimistic fictional narrative tone. However, more deeply embedded in the pessimistic narrative are undertones that subtly absolve the poor from blame for their condition of impoverishment. When Dusman claims that Dacca House inhabitants are “grown up men whose greatest preoccupation in life was keeping their stomachs full” (217), rather than attributing a weakness of character to the poor (which could be narrative intention), the reader is likely to see an image of confined poor and made to wonder whether they can do otherwise. In fact, it is an understandable fact of life that in survivalist circumstances like that in which they live, “bread alone interests them and, without bread, what would they do with formal liberties” of the type that Dusman thinks they should be fighting for? (Letemendia, 1997: 447). “For ... the residents of Decca House, the primary issue is simply one of survival” (Kurtz, 1998: 131). The description of the Dacca House inhabitants as being “tormentingly noncommittal”, unwilling to haul themselves out of the garbage pit” (215), and having “points of views so narrow they could hardly see where they were going” (217) reveals the kind of intolerance and impatience that poverty breeds in characters like Dusman. Ironically, his intolerance and impatience are not directed at poverty and the external forces that may have placed the characters in the condition of poverty, but rather at their own perceived noncommittal response to the condition of poverty. Dusman’s positions and

views point to the kind of existentialist theories that suggest that “every man is responsible for who he is [, a view and an attitude that] explains the ... disappearance of compassion” (Letemendia, 1997: 452) in the fictional and actual society, among the poor themselves and between the poor and the rich.

The state of affairs that Letemendia (1997: 452) describes is metaphorically captured in the episode that follows: “Dusman crushed a couple [of cockroaches] under his shoes. Two monsters, huge enough to drag a plough and work for their eats, lazy thieving, dirty bastards. One of these days he’d teach them a lesson in self reliance” (106). This episode stands as a hyperbolic metaphor for the compassionless response of society to the vulnerable. This shows the complexity of effect as Dusman is himself one of the poor. They are perceived as or indeed blamed for being responsible for their condition of poverty or general vulnerability and therefore, deserving to be taught “a lesson in self reliance”. I am not suggesting here that the existentialist position that places blame on the poor is completely incorrect or untrue. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to make such broad pronouncements. However, as in any human society, some members of the fictional Kenyan society as seen in the depiction of the professional beggar(s) and of Toto (below) are emblematic of the existentialist argument.

Professional beggars “drink late into the night like everyone else, and, after being ejected at closing time, vanish into the dark back alleys to reappear on duty in the main streets in the morning” (21). The following conversation between Dusman and a beggar to whom he has just given tea illustrates the point more fully.

Beggar: What about the bread?
Dusman: What bread?
Beggar: To go with the tea you just bought me
Dusman: I am not your father.
Beggar: I know but ...
Dusman: Get someone else to pay for it.

Illustrating the same point is the episode in which Toto after four nights of continuous drinking returns home to lament to Dusman and the “cockroaches [that] scrambled from the dirty pots and pans, and took cover under the table[:] I am hungry I am starving. ... I can’t sleep hungry” (75). The cockroaches metaphorically point to the extent to which poverty has dehumanised the poor characters in the novel but the episodes above also characterise the poor characters represented as being absurdly irresponsible and indifferent to their situation. Consequently, they are depicted as being to a certain extent responsible for “who [they are]”. Alternatively, when the poor exhibit this kind of hedonistic attitude, it may simply be read as an adaptive strategy. In fact, it has been suggested that “short range hedonism makes possible spontaneity and enjoyment” (Lewis, 1968: 413 as quoted in Parker and Kleiner, 1970: 518), and this has the potential to minimise the negative

psychological impact of adversity on the subject, thereby serving as a survival strategy. The accusation that Dusman levies at Tumbo Kubwa, the rich and hypocritical landlord who makes it his mission in life to exploit the poor, has a balancing impact. It shifts attention from the poor, suggesting that he or she like any human being may have weaknesses that contribute in determining his or her material condition but, to an undetermined extent, “the poor man is innocent of his poverty” (Letemendia, 1997: 452).

While Dusman vilifies other poor characters in the novel for responding inappropriately to their condition of poverty, the narrative in an ironical twist that exposes his self-righteous attitude also lambasts him, suggesting that because he fails to master the condition that he lives in, it affects him psychologically to the extent that he suffers “from an age-old mental disorder, as yet without a scientific name, referred to simply as fed up to here” (137). The depiction of a poor character suffering from a psychological disorder is balanced against the narrative view that he still dreams of “getting out of Dacca House [but he is not sure where he dreams to leave for as] it is never clear where it is because [he] never get[s] there. Something violent happens like ... like a door bangs shut and [he] wake[s] up on Grogan Road” (142). The “something violent [that] happens like ... a door [that] bangs shut and [he] wake[s] up on Grogan Road” (142) is a metaphorical statement for all the external factors (earlier discussed) that restrain the poor from exiting a life characterised by poverty.

Doyle like Mwangi creates space for the reader to examine whether some instances of poverty in the Dublin setting are perceived and represented as resulting from the characters’ inherent weakness and inability to resist poverty. Henry reports that “[w]hile [the Dockers’] children starved – and their wives too, on top of being fucked by the stevedore after he’d drunk his cut of the wages ... – the dockers drank themselves into fighting form” (159). Presumably, the dockers earn little money and are therefore representative of a cross-section of poor characters. Apparent in this passage is the intensity with which Doyle (like Mwangi) depicts the poor – the dock workers as living a very extreme, hedonistic lifestyle. The point here is not necessarily that the poor do not deserve to entertain themselves. Rather, the invectives are directed at the idiosyncratic habit where the poor overindulge in these pleasures at the expense of more fundamental responsibilities like taking care of their starving families. When the quoted passage begins with the statement “while their children starved ...”, this could potentially raise the reader’s sensitivity to the consequent starvation and subsequently to the agent of that starvation – the drinking. This way, the narrative strips naked the possibility that the poor of Doyle’s fiction or rather, their lifestyle, is somewhat responsible for their material condition – poverty and starvation. This highly satirical representation of the poor shows an avowed narrative intent to diminish what in some instances seems an unfounded denial of responsibility by the poor who repeatedly call attention to their victimhood to explain their situation, with the danger of keeping themselves in perpetual poverty.

While Doyle casts doubt on biased perceptions of the poor merely as victims of societal neglect, the poor of fictional Dublin are shown to be partially responsible for the experiences of poverty in their families – depicting them as self-victimisers. However, like Mwangi, he delicately balances this with a depiction of the societal victimisation that has contributed to creating the prevailing status quo.

Just two days after Henry announces assertively that “[w]e’ve come for our education” (71) the two – Henry and his brother Victor are

onto the street and away [where he reports that] we ran until we were safe ... just two snot-nosed, homeless kids among thousands. ... I’d had two days of schooling. But it was enough. I knew it was in me. I could learn anything I wanted. I was probably a genius. Victor started crying and I knew why. It was the warmth, the singing, making words, the chalk working across his slate, the woman who’d made him feel wanted. I missed it too, already, but there were no tears. We sat under the wall at Baggot Street Bridge and hid from the world. We were well out of it. Miss O’Shea [the caring teacher who had admitted them into the school] had just been a bit of good fortune. A lucky knock on the door. The Nun [who had driven them away] had been the normal one. (79)

The passage above is moving and points uncompromisingly at an effort by the poor to navigate a course for themselves, away from poverty, an effort that the text implies is thwarted by the vehement resistance that societal attitudes place in their way. Later in the novel Henry explains his inability to reap the rewards of the revolution in the words “I’d no college” (288). This places blame squarely at the doorstep of a society that has nipped his passion for education in the bud. This narrative position subverts the invective directed at the poor for his condition of poverty. Examined in detail, the Doyle text above allows for a number of pertinent readings that further enlarge the view that the condition of poverty is to a greater extent imposed on the poor by societal attitudes. When Henry reports that they were “onto the street and away” [where they] ran until [they] were safe”, this has the dangerous implication that they are made to feel safer on the street than in an educational institution where care and compassion should create a feeling of safety. The phrase “two snot-nosed, homeless kids among thousands” suggests that their experiences and condition are not peculiar. It signals the alarming possibility that they are just representative of many other poor, abandoned and neglected children in the fictional and perhaps the actual society.

A significant element of the passage quoted above is the set of poignantly assertive declarations attributed to Henry. He declares: “I’d had two days of schooling. But it was enough. I knew it was in me. I could learn anything I wanted. I was probably a genius”. These statements reveal his confident personal disposition contrasting with the perception that poverty results from a dispositional weakness on the part of the poor. When Henry declares that “Miss O’Shea had just been a bit of good fortune. A lucky knock on the door. The Nun had been the normal one” this serves a balancing function in the narrative, suggesting that while indifference to the poor is a common characteristic of society or perhaps even a norm as indicated by the statement “the Nun

had been the normal one”, the significant incidence of spontaneous compassion cannot be ignored. However, the triumph of indifference over compassion is obvious in the episode. Owing to the fact that chapter five of this thesis deals with the multidimensionality of poverty, it suffices simply to state briefly that not only is societal indifference shown to create material poverty, but also other dimensions of poverty such as the spiritual and moral. This is clearly demonstrated in the movingly denunciatory words:

Mother, she'd wanted to be called. Never. Not even sister. Fuck her [the Nun]. And religion. I already hated it. *Holy God we praise thy name*. Fuck Him. And your man on the cross up over the blackboard. Fuck him too. That was one good thing that came out of all the neglect: We'd no religion. We were free. We were blessed. (79)

To an extent, the profoundly emotional and insulting tone of the passage just quoted with frightening crudity cautions and alerts readers to the possibility that this kind of radicalism is common in human society where indifference, lack of compassion and the resultant swell in the number of the poor and in the levels of poverty are common.

Redeemed at last: favourable representation of the resilient poor

This section analyses passages that show a more self valorizing, affirmative, assertive, sociable, caring, active, dynamic, and empowered attitude and response of the poor to their condition. Also, I examine the survivalist mechanism that enables the kind of resilience that the poor exhibit. Reversing the shockingly barren, shuttered, and in some instances, sub-human life that the Bathroom Man is shown to lead, the novel in an abrupt twist in narrative perspective offers a sobering and redeeming reflection of him and his family.

The narrator in what is justifiably a long quotation comprising passages from different episodes in the text, reports that the Bathroom man at last pays Dusman the sum of

[t]wo thousand shilling [that he owes him for the car, prompting Dusman to comment:] I knew you were a decent man. But, Christ, I mean, hell ... I never expected this much [Giving] two hundred shillings ... [back to the Bathroom Man, Dusman advises, b]uy your wife a pair of shoes, You should be able to buy a decent pair with that. You are more honest than I thought ... I mean I knew you were honest but ... buy your wife the shoes. Let her dress like ... like a white woman again. [The Bathroom Man later returns to sign the petition that he had previously turned down. He says firmly,] I will sign. (377-378)

Preceding the passage above, the emboldened Bathroom Man declares:

They may bring the cops I am not afraid of them any more Not after what they did to us when they raided Dacca House Made us wake the baby in the middle of the night to drag our bed out of the room. ... Our baby could have died of pneumonia. It made me realise on which side I was. If they could do that to us, what good does it do being innocent? (370)

Watching the Bathroom Man sign, Dusman inquires where he learnt how to write like this and the Bathroom Man responds:

I was an apprentice at the village polytechnic [a revelation to which Dusman exclaims,] I will be damned, Who could ever have guessed The following day, he received clearance from Tumbo Kubwa and moved his family into Sukuma Wiki's room [after which he comes to Dusman saying, m]y woman begs you to share dinner with us tonight Now that we have a big room ... [After dinner in their new home, Dusman is] very happy both for [the Bathroom Woman] and her husband. She was a full woman now, accomplished by the fact that she now had a house to live in, to clean and spend the day in and invite friends to. (882-383)

This passage clearly demonstrates that in spite of all odds, the Bathroom Man and symbolically and generally, the poor of Mwangi's fiction have resiliently survived poverty and what seems like near destructive circumstances with almost no personality scars. The Bathroom Man has rebounded, at least emotionally, psychologically and verbally, from his adversity or perhaps has been rather strengthened and made more resourceful by the adverse material, psychological and emotional experiences that he goes through. As a resilient character, the Bathroom Man shows an indomitable spirit of "endurance [which culminates in the kind of] self-righting, ... growth" (Walsh, 1998: 4 as quoted in Seccombe 2002: 385) that he exhibits in the passage above. His resilient spirit "entails more than merely surviving, getting through or escaping [the] harrowing ordeal [of poverty]. ... the qualities of resilience enable ... [him] to heal from painful wounds, take charge of [his life], and go on to live fully" (Walsh, 1998:4 as quoted in Seccombe, 2002: 385). It has been noted that "most social scientists prefer to focus on social problems, rather than on the ways in which seemingly vulnerable people [like the Bathroom Man] avoid [or deal with such] problems" (Seccombe, 2002: 385). Mwangi carefully balances the two. Most of the story invokes the Bathroom Man's condition of chronic poverty as a problem but the celebratory resistance that the novel posits as shown in the quote above invites the reader into the emancipatory possibilities for those among the poor who are luckier and try harder. This shows the distinct ability of fiction to portray social problems in a balanced way that enculturates optimism while depicting the devastation wreaked upon individuals and society by a problem such as poverty. Subtly implied in the novels is the view that the poor taps into certain survivalist mechanisms to overcome adversity.

Arguing that "poverty is a social problem, not merely a personal one", Seccombe recommends "three ... factors to improve resiliency in the face of poverty: (a) personality traits and dispositions, (b) family protective and recovery factors; and (c) community strengths". He adds that "these factors place the likelihood of resilience primarily on unique, situational, or random experiences of persons either individually or in families and communities" (2002: 385-388). Here, I examine whether the Bathroom Man's resilience eschews or lends credence to the kind of paradigm that Seccombe advances. Although the fictional passage that I am analysing in this section illustrates with particular acuity how the Bathroom Man survives remorseless conditions and experiences of

poverty, he is constantly on the edge of indigence as his material condition has not improved to any significant degree except for the suggestion that he is moving into a proper room. Nonetheless, he survives the sting of poverty and this is by navigating a course where factors such as those recognised in Seccombe's paradigm (personality traits and disposition, family protective and recovery factors and community strengths) make up for the material deficit and enable survival.

It is important to analyse these three factors in the context of the Bathroom Man's resilience, starting with his personality traits and disposition. He shows a positive "self-concept", "self-esteem" as well as good "problem solving skills" and "good mental" state – attributes which Seccombe (2002, 388) identifies as essential to this category. Although Dusman and other tenants express deleterious sentiments of embarrassment at his condition, the Bathroom Man is in no way shown to have any kind of negative self-image or self-embarrassment relative to his condition. In fact, the mere fact that he can bear to live in a bathroom stands for a personal outlook that pays little attention to what others think of him. This can only be attributed to a unified or stable conception of selfhood. This kind of stable and coherent self amplifies the recognition of insecurities of his neighbours who are ironically better off than he. It should be noted that the analytical perspective that I advance concerning his response to poverty is not intended to lend any kind of nobility to poverty. Poverty is an absolutely undesirable condition. However, the fact that he negotiates incessantly and finally convinces Dusman to give him his vehicle on credit, strips and sells it and makes a profit, shows his problem solving skills and good mental state which potentially can take him out of a life of poverty. This debunks any kind of cynicism directed at him, questioning the perception that "every man is responsible for who he is" (Letemendia, 1997: 452), enlarging the view that if external constraints that confine the poor are eliminated, the poor person often exhibits the potential and disposition to extricate him or herself from poverty. In the Bathroom Man's case, discussed above, fiscal capital is one of the many constraints in the sense that, if he can sell Dusman's car which he secures on credit, he could buy, strip and sell a lot more cars at a profit if he had the money available.

Much more than the Bathroom Man, Henry but also Ivan in *A Star Called Henry* are shown to possess a very high and perhaps inflated sense of selfhood and self-esteem. Henry declares: "I knew it was in me. I could learn anything I wanted. I was probably a genius" (79). This personality trait and self-conception shapes his response to adversity. It shows an inner strength that propels him into and successfully through a range of dangerous adventures. These include the numerous criminal acts that he commits to survive, his strategic choice and manipulation of women such as Annie and Miss O'Shea and the remarkable feats that crown him as Collins's "most anointed" combatant/revolutionary or "trouble-maker". The reader is left with the impression that Henry (as I argue in the case of the Bathroom Man) is to a certain extent cushioned from the devastation of poverty and the general state of deprivation by his personality traits and disposition. Additionally,

with his extraordinary personality, he has the potential if presented with the right opportunity or if as selfish and greedy as Ivan – to turn adversity to privilege as Ivan does. Implied here is the worrying possibility that one can only acquire wealth by resorting to the kind of selfish and underhanded activities and mentality that Ivan exhibits. Some of these are captured when Ivan declares:

I'm King of the Republic around here, boy. And I don't want reminders that I was once a runt that people only noticed to laugh at. ... I'm a businessman. ... All these years I thought I was a soldier, a warrior even. A fuckin' nation builder. Fighting for Ireland. ... All the best soldiers are businessmen. There had to be a reason for the killing and late nights, and it wasn't Ireland ... Nothing moves in this country without my go-ahead. I have ... a cut of the ceremonies, the pubs. Every bloody thing. I'm even in on the Sunday collections. (314-315)

In the passage above, Ivan whom Henry recruited into the struggle and trained uses his shrewd personality to take advantage of the situation that the revolution presents and enriches himself. I discuss this in greater detail in the section of this chapter that examines the value of money.

Here, I examine whether the Bathroom Man's ability to endure hardship is underpinned by family protective and recovery factors. These according to Seccombe (2002, 388) include "warmth" within the family, "affection", "cohesion", "commitment", "emotional support for one another" as well as "sharing ... core values around financial management". The Bathroom Man is obviously the most materially impoverished member of Dacca House. At the same time, he is the character whom Mwangi singles out, with the greatest narrative clarity and acuity, to depict as nurturing the most desirable family protective and recovery mechanisms in the standards of Dacca House.

Evidently, the Bathroom couple offers "emotional support for one another" as well as "sharing ... core values around financial management". After his failed attempt to convince Dusman to sell the car seats to him, the Bathroom Man "went back to his bathroom to tell his wife the bad news" (31). Returning from the second failed attempt, she asks: "what did he say? ... [and the husband responds] No, Dusman spied on their reaction through the torn curtains. It was something they had talked over, he thought. Perhaps they had lost sleep over it planning how to approach him" (32). When Dusman eventually decides to sell the car seats, "the Bathroom Man stumbled expectantly out to his room and, after a short burst of intimate exchange with his wife, came back with the money" (37). Obviously she (though in the background) is a full participant in the processes that result in the business deal that sees them buying and reselling the car – suggesting that they share core values around financial management, which ensures their resilience.

The Bathroom family is buttressed by warmth within the family, affection, cohesion, and most importantly, commitment to each other, the marriage and key values of decency as illustrated in the passages that follow. "Dusman thinks his hatred had a lot to do with the Bathroom Man bringing

his *faithful wife* [my emphasis] ... to live in the bathroom” (162). Elsewhere, it is noted that “she had never been touched by any man other than her husband” (204). When Magendo, using material goods as a trap attempts to seduce or indeed to rape her, she “push[es] him away ... [and l]etting out a strangled cry she yanked the door open and ran out of the room. ... escaped to the public garden to await her husband” (204-205). She is shown to be an absolute embodiment of a faithful wife in spite of her family’s limited material resources. It is ironical that she finds the public garden safer than Dacca House – her home, but the irony serves to show how vulnerable the poor characters of Dacca House are – magnifying the significance of the fact that the Bathroom family draws on the family survivalist mechanisms to overcome the many vulnerabilities that Dacca House places in the path of its occupants. When her husband loses his job, she understandingly allows him to sell her only source of pride – the pair of shoes that Magendo had given her. This is at the expense of being embarrassed publicly by Magendo to the point of urinating in her clothes in front of all the neighbours’ wives, and, dropping in status from “the woman who dressed like a white woman” to “the barefoot woman whose husband had sold her shoes” (210). This is for the common good of the family. When the Bathroom Man resists signing Dusman’s *coup de house* (218) document, it is because “his wife and child did not wish to return to the ramshackled hovels across the river and he had no intention of forcing them to by thought, word or deed” (269). His response to Dusman’s efforts to convince him: “[b]ut my wife and child ...” (270). Giving up, Dusman insults, “[y]ou call yourself a man? ... Letting her do your thinking for you. Is she the one with the potatoes or are you?” (271). Perhaps the over-sensitised disdain engendered in Dusman and Magendo’s attitude towards the Bathroom Man is born out of envy – envy for a man who unlike them benefits from the intimately profound warmth, affection, cohesion, commitment, faithfulness, loyalty and openness described above to survive what is obviously the most remarkably melancholic and deprived life of Mwangi’s fictional Nairobi and I would assume, that of most actual societies. The family protective factor becomes a more valuable compensatory factor that makes up for the deplorable economic and social conditions in Dacca House – something that most members of Dacca House lack. Clearly, the Bathroom Man’s resilience is built around his personality and disposition and the family protective mechanism, enshrined in the delicacy of feelings that the family shares. Although he lacks endowment in material capital, he draws strength in the social wealth embedded in human capital, mainly his wife. The Bathroom couple and by extension, the poor in general are shown to rely on non-material resources to survive poverty. This is largely due to their advanced and stable emotional intelligence, sensibility and sensitivity. Interestingly, it seems that rather than breaking them, their condition and experience of deprivation and abuse strengthens them. Indeed, the Bathroom Man decides, fully aware of all the possible consequences, to sign the rent boycott petition because he has been hardened by the abusive actions of the cops. Their survival spirit is drawn from universal principles such as courage, love, compassion, empathy, patience, and integrity. Materially, they are extremely poor but abundantly

rich in these principles, an issue that I cover in greater detail in chapter five on the multidimensional nature of poverty.

Like Mwangi, with the exception of the depicted Bathroom Man, Doyle does not describe family life in his novel in any detail. The limited depiction of tangible family ties in the novels affords the reader a significant interpretative angle. It lends itself to the assumption that the levels of poverty experienced or rather, the kind of impact that poverty has on most of the poor characters would have been minimised by family relations, which I argue have the potential to cushion the poor against the devastating effects of societal phenomena such as poverty. In *A Star called Henry*, the only explicitly portrayed, though short-lived family relationship is between Henry and his brother Victor. The short-lived nature of this relationship offers a very significant interpretative space. It allows the reader to compare Henry's disposition in the short fictional period when Victor is alive with the prolonged, lonely but eventful fictional period after his death. Conversations and interactions with his brother and others reveal a more subdued, rational, thoughtful, stable, optimistically aspiring yet protective character in the episodes where Victor is shown to be alive. This may be because, in spite of the misery that the streets of Dublin dump on them, they still have something worth living and working for – the relationship between the two of them. This steadfast reliance, dependence and support for family is portrayed in the episode where Henry introduces Victor to the Nun in the cautionary words: “[h]e’s me brother, Where I go he goes. ... __Once you understand and know that, you’ll have no trouble from either of us” (71). On the night when Victor dies, he confesses sorrowfully: “I couldn’t see him, although I knew that he was right against me, where he always was when we slept. I could feel him. I touched him, waited for another cough” (80). When he eventually realises that Victor has died, he confesses: “... I left him there. He was dead. I walked” (81). In these narrative episodes, Doyle uses pathos as a device to evoke the reader’s sympathy for the miserable experiences of the characters depicted. Evident in the novel is the fact that when Henry “walked” away from Victor’s body, he walked away from the kinds of positive aspirations that had led him to seek their education and from rationality into a life characterised by hopelessness, more misery, and the irrationally self-destructive acts that he commits. His life assumes a range of new forms of poverties as he has lost his only remaining moral and emotional pillar, cushion, compass and direction – family. It is probable that Henry would not have become a freedom fighter if Victor had survived and he might not have become the maladapted and despairing character that he is portrayed to be at the end of the novel. The society betrays or ignores his cautionary words: “Where I go he goes. ... __Once you understand and know that, you’ll have no trouble from either of us” (71) and consequently, he becomes trouble for the society. The family bond between the two children serves as an important survivalist mechanism, but the mere fact that two young children are neglected and abandoned to depend solely on each other for survival is a shocking indictment on the kind of inhumanity, indifference, insensitivity

and insecurity to which the fictional society exposes its most vulnerable citizens – children. This feeling is emotively and unambiguously captured when Henry declares:

Dublin didn't care. ... my brother was dead on a cinder path behind the Grand Canal Dock and nobody cared about that either. What had killed Victor? Consumption, probably; I didn't know – I was only nine. ... There was only me and Victor. We were all that mattered. ... we had no father to run for the doctor. And no doctor who'd come, anyway. When you'd nothing except your big brother. ... The city killed Victor. (82-83)

I next examine how the fiction under study conceptualises the idea of community – the last of three survivalist mechanisms that Seccombe postulates in his paradigm – since I have just discussed the first two, which are personal disposition and family.

Poverty: A Communalising or individualising force?

Of all three factors proposed in Seccombe's theory, the sense of community is the least manifested in Mwangi's text. The Bathroom Man and most tenants of Dacca House show a warped sense of community. However, as the novel comes to a close there is a depicted shift in position with regards to this element as the Bathroom Man joins the community of rent boycotters by signing Dusman's protest letter, inviting Dusman to his house and showing a spontaneity in his interaction with Dusman that is at last natural and human. The text turns away from a subjectivity that places importance in materiality of wealth. The Bathroom Man and Dusman, two of few characters who survive the remorselessly cruel material and social conditions of Dacca House, are set on a trajectory that might eventually give some coherence to their lives – one that is grounded in emancipatory practices that rely not on material but rather, human wealth and a sense of community. However, this change of attitude would take a lot of doing and time to have a significant impact as the gulf that exists between characters is too wide. This is suggested by the fact that Dusman, "lying awake with a happy stomach that night [after the meal in the new home of the Bathroom family] ... realised he still did not know the Bathroom Man's real name" (382). It is in all likelihood the beginning of a better community, though, as it is noted in what seems a movingly optimistic tone that "he did know something about him now. The child was a boy and the father a man" (382). The fact that the Bathroom Man continues to bear his identity as the Bathroom Man till the end of the novel nevertheless implies that chronic poverty has a lasting impact on one's identity and does not just disappear with a few adjustments. As sustained as his condition has been, the process of ridding himself of poverty seems possible, but would require sustained effort. It is important briefly to examine whether poverty has a communalising or an individualising impact on members of the Dacca House community.

The apparent fact that there is no real sense of community at Dacca House could be attributed to a number of forces – all of which are linked to the material condition of the characters. The kind of impoverishment that is represented in *The Cockroach Dance* has the potential to provoke very

profound, radical and competitive survivalist instincts and tendencies. In this process, the subject of such a condition becomes very individualistic. In the novel, every resident of Dacca House barely survives. In fact, when Dusman makes an effort to organise the residents to operate as a collective, the effort is met with deep resistance, primarily because all that matters to them is their basic survival. The Bathroom Man for example cannot associate himself with Dusman's communal protest schemes because "his wife and child did not wish to return to the ramshackle hovels across the river and he had no intention of forcing them to by thought, word or deed" (269). In fact, because they can barely survive, the notion of community is inconsequential to them – as Dusman laments, their "greatest preoccupation in life was keeping their stomachs full" (217). It should however be noted that *The Cockroach Dance* portrays a unique situation and the suggestion that poverty plays an individualising function does not necessarily preclude the possibility of a communalising outcome in other situations. In fact, in *Kill Me Quick* (2003) Mwangi shows how poverty affects people and how attempts to cope with the condition of poverty result in the communalisation of the poor. Therefore, one cannot generalise in an analysis of a complex and multifaceted phenomenon such as poverty. Conditions as well as experiences of poverty are varied, responses are varied and effects on its victims are even more varied.

Doyle's text, like Mwangi's, also creates space for the reader to examine whether the condition as well as the experience of poverty has a communalising or an individualising impact on the members of the fictional community and whether this results in their survival or demise. During the revolution, Henry confesses that "I'd never been so close to people before. There'd only ever been Victor. I was sharing the world with these men. I trusted them; their nearness lit me" (106). Obvious in the confession is the possibility that Henry's involvement in the revolution is grounded in the fact that it offers him what society has denied him – a community to rely on. Implied in the statement: "I was sharing the world with these men" is the view that they provide him with a safety net against various forms of poverty – material, spiritual, moral and psychological. This amplifies the argument that I presented earlier, that Henry's involvement in the struggle has deep seated personal motivations such as the fulfilment of individual basic material and nonmaterial needs – the need for a community in this case. However, the narrative perspective implies that Henry's need is for a microscopic communal affiliation as he seems to place little value on the broader nationalistic and patriotic function and significance of the struggle. This implies that human struggles are more about the basic needs of humanity than the broader political ideologies that critics erroneously place at the fore of explanations for such struggles. This argument is further illustrated in the two quotes that follow from Doyle's text. He writes: "*We Serve Neither King Nor Kaiser*. So said the message on the banner that hung across the front of Liberty Hall ... [Henry contemplates:] If I'd had my way, *Or Anyone Else* would have been added, instead of *But Ireland*. I didn't give a shite about Ireland" (91). While sharing a meal with the young revolutionaries that he has trained, Henry confesses that he has never eaten cabbage, "this [the cabbage] is worth dying for ... ___ The right of

the people of Ireland to eat grub like this. And I meant it, every word. ... __He's a fool of a boy, said Missis O'Shea, __ but he's hit the nail on the head of this one" (218). In brief, the struggle in his view does not have much macroscopic political value to him. Rather, it is a struggle for dignity in community, in other words, "to eat grub like this".

Dis/empowering value of money

Here, I examine the response of the rich to the general state of poverty in the fictional society, to the poor and to their distinct position of material fortune. Additionally, I examine the conceptual value given to money. Tumbo Kubwa who is representative of the rich in Mwangi's work is according to Dusman "money mad". His "greed – inordinate desire for wealth" (Sloan, 2002: 37 as quoted in Li-Ping and Chiu, 2003: 14) makes him predatory and his predatory tendencies range from charging high rent for the rundown Dacca House to running a brothel where women are exploited for his financial gain, to renting out a toilet to his cousin as accommodation. These narrative instances imply that he values money over humans. When Dusman philosophises on the value of money, the reader is given the sense that the rich, far more than the poor and with crushing implications, set great store by money, implying that "the meaning of money is [indeed] in the eye of the beholder" (McClelland, 1967: 10 as quoted in Li-Ping and Chiu, 2003: 14). Dusman

had long discovered that money is little more than paper or metal, on whose face a certain value is placed, and most times forced. It has no life of its own, no character and no loyalty to any particular person or thing. It belongs to whoever has it in his pocket, and the more one has, the more of its negativity, and its amorphous nature one acquires. A case in point – Tumbo Kubwa, honourable councillor and successful businessman. Wealth had torn him from his God and whatever good he may have sincerely believed in and dropped him smack in the centre of the necropolis. It had turned him into an unashamed dealer in social diseases and human cadavers. There were many others like him, who gauged human worth by how much it would bring into their business. Thus, to Tumbo Kubwa especially, the lives of the girls in Home Boarding and Lodging were each worth thirty shillings a day, and that of the Bathroom Man no more than what he paid for the bathroom. Ironically, while Tumbo Kubwa, in all his semi-literate wisdom, sincerely believed that wealth had given him a name, it had on the contrary, saddled him with anonymity worse than death. (197)

The ironies in the passage above are obvious. It is these ironies that make the passage a profoundly poignant chronicle of what the narrative conceptualises as man's vain and imprudent tendency of attaching extreme value to money. The human tendency to attach much value to money is ironically in opposition to the true nature of money. Money is in Dusman's view amorphous, as "[i]t has no life of its own, no character and no loyalty to any particular person or thing". Paradoxically, the more money one has the more one chases after money, the more money one accumulates, the more depraved one becomes and the more insensitive and inhumane one becomes. The "well known Judea-Christian proposition: the love of money is the root of evil" is evoked in the fictional representation (The Bible: 1 Timothy, 6: 10 as quoted in Li-Ping and Chiu, 2003: 14). Rationally and practically considered, the importance of money cannot be ignored as it determines

whether humans live a comfortable and dignified or rather an uncomfortable and undignified life of the sort that the Bathroom Man is shown to experience. Read from another angle, the satirical device is not directed at the physical object – money – but rather at the negative attitudes that have their origin in man’s greedy attempts to accumulate excessive wealth at all costs. Therefore the fictional text conveys the view that “the love of money is the root of evil, but money is not” (Li-Ping and Chiu, 2003: 14).

Though set in spatially and temporally disparate contexts, the similarity in narrative perspective and tone between the Mwangi passage above and the Doyle passages below is extraordinary. When Ivan whom Henry recruited into the revolution acquires wealth, he adopts an arrogant tone that calls attention to the apparent power that his financial wealth brings with it. He declares:

I’m King of the Republic around here, boy. And I don’t want reminders that I was once a runt that people only noticed to laugh at. ... I’m a businessman. ... Ireland’s an Island. ... I was doing my accounts one night there and suddenly realised that I already controlled the Island, my part of it anyway. ... Nothing moves in this country without my go-ahead. I have cattle, land, a cut of the ceremonies, the pubs. Every bloody thing. I’m even in on the Sunday collections. ... What was I three years ago? __A little lad. ... A harmless poor eejit. ... Not these days, boy. ... Nobody works without the nod from Ivan. A sweet doesn’t get sucked without a good coating of the profit ending up on Ivan’s tongue. I’m a roaring success, boy. ... An Irish is in charge around here, Captain. We’re free. ... I’ve stopped the war here. ... I’ve made deals with them. The Tans, the Auxiliaries, the Military, the poor old peelers. All of them. They still charge around in their tenders and armoured cars but they’re looking after business for me. (314-315)

Ivan adds that your

wife keeps killing them She’s costing me a fortune, Captain. She’s interfering with free trade and I can’t have that. [Henry inquires: a]nd the Tans setting fire to houses and creameries. ... You could stop them ... [to which Ivan responds,] I could, ... Nine times out of the ten. Money would have to change hands. But not necessarily from mine to theirs. [While speaking to Henry, Ivan drinks from a bottle, leading Henry to speculate that i]t was going to kill him; ... it was killing him already. But much too slowly. ... [Henry later confesses:] I was grateful to Ivan. ... I was a complete and utter fool. ... Everything I’d done, every bullet and assassination, all the blood and brains, prison, the torture, ... everything had been done for Ivan and the other Ivans Just like my father, except he’d been paid for it. ... I heard a car, Ivan’s. (317-319)

In another instance, Jack Dalton, one of his former commanders gives Henry a note with the name of a person [whom Henry usually should murder. But this time, the note reads: “Smart Henry [and Jack comments: y]ou’ve no stake in the country, man. Never had, never will. We needed trouble-makers and very soon now we’ll have to be rid of them. And that, Henry is all you are and ever were. A trouble-maker. The best in the business, mind” (326-327).

Previous to the conversation with Ivan and Jack, Henry confesses:

I’d been thrown out of Cable Café before I was properly in the door ... and I took out all the café windows with timing and precision that impressed but didn’t surprise me. I shot

and killed all that I had been denied, all the commerce and snobbery that had been mocking me and other hundred and thousands behind glass and locks, all the injustice, unfairness and shoes. (105)

Ivan's personality, more especially his materialistic outlook, is to a certain extent analogous with that of Tumbo Kubwa. The characterization of the two characters, the contexts in which they operate and their response to wealth/poverty and others around them are remarkably similar. In the quest to amass wealth, they both illustrate extreme levels of self-centeredness, greed, inconsideration, abuse, inhumanity, opportunism, power, aggressiveness and total disregard for core moral values. It is implied with uncomplimentary undertones that the evil qualities of the two characters enable them to accumulate material wealth. It would however be a naive generalization to read this as being permissive of the view that all wealth is acquired through a systematic and structural manifestation of these attributes. In spite of the similarities, the representations and the circumstances represented would be expected of any two disparate human conditions/experiences or artistic creations that show some noteworthy differences. The character that embodies the accumulation of wealth in Mwangi's text, Tumbo Kubwa, is placed at the background of the narrative, while Dusman's narrative role in revealing materialistic tendencies is foregrounded. He takes the leading role in commenting on aspects of Tumbo Kubwa's materialistic character. Ivan is given narrative voice – he boastfully recounts his newly found fortune. The different narrative approaches signify generational differences between the two characters, showing an older and more verbally withdrawn and conservative Tumbo Kubwa who presumably has become accustomed to his status as the richest member of his (fictional) community. On the one hand the reader is exposed to a more youthful character, the vociferously manic Ivan who is yet unaccustomed to his new status of wealth and clearly exhibits a juvenile attitude of boastfulness.

Presumably, the reader is to be distanced from and repulsed by Ivan or rather the depiction of Ivan more than from Tumbo Kubwa on the basis that Ivan's confessional narrative is crudely, unapologetically, self-conceitedly and insensitively stated, though with greater semblance of authenticity, since the views are heard from the "horse's own mouth". His generally repulsive tone and attitude, I argue, arise out of a personality that shows dangerous signs of maladjustment to the extremity of the shift from excruciating poverty to excessive wealth. The unsympathetic views expressed about Tumbo Kubwa could be seen as mere perceptions with a lesser potential to sway the reader's sympathy towards Dusman's narrative perspective. Significantly, Ivan's rant causes Henry to come to the realisation that he "was a complete and utter fool. ... Everything [he had] done, every bullet and assassination, all the blood and brains, prison, the torture, ... everything had been done for Ivan and the other Ivans" (318). Implied in this self-*realisatory* confession is the sense (again) that, positioned underneath the surface of revolutions and revolutionary discourses (fictional and real) are fundamental materialistic aspirations of the kind that Ivan exhibits. However, the accumulation of wealth, especially through illicit means (as argued earlier in this

chapter), destroys the individual in other areas of his or her life. Although Ivan boasts contemptuously of his wealth, he at the same time gets hooked onto alcohol with the likely outcome that “[i]t was going to kill him; ... it was killing him already. But much too slowly”. Additionally, when Ivan confesses that “three years ago ... [he was a] little lad ... [a] harmless poor eejit” and qualifies that with the statement, “[n]ot these days”, the implication is that money or the desire and actions undertaken to acquire it have had a transformative effect on him – from a harmless “eejit” to a harmful rogue that he indeed has become.

In conclusion, the powerful narratives of both *The Cockroach Dance* and *A Star Called Henry* allow the two works of fiction to transcend their difficult and even unattractive subject matter – poverty and related issues – “and edge towards a universal appeal based on a kind of humanism” (Lewis, 2008: 207). Rather than ascribing a weakness of character to the poor, narrative excerpts, which call attention to responses and attitudes such as criminality, resignation, fatalism, low aspiration, hopelessness, exploitation, indifference, materialism and insensitivity also create an interpretative space for the reader to see the poor’s ability to turn perceived weaknesses into realistic adaptive mechanisms. The mechanisms “help to reduce frustration” (Lewis, 1968: 413 as quoted in Parker and Kleiner, 1970: 518) and to keep the poor sane. Even where these responses are seen as a weakness in the characters’ response to poverty, this does not necessarily indicate an inherent weakness on the part of the poor. Of course the poor undoubtedly show signs and feelings of powerlessness and relative inability to empower themselves and improve their situation. In most cases, however, this is because they are shown to be vulnerable to the condition of poverty and the exploitative and indifferent responses of society and the rich towards them, or perhaps the poor intentionally refusing to be aspirational and hopeful as a mechanism to avoid dealing with the negative ramifications of dashed hopes. I have not implied in the chapter that it is wrong, improper or impossible for the poor to have aspirations but rather that unfulfilled aspirations, could have as much or even a greater disruptive effect on the poor as despairing apathy. In fact, by the end of the novels, all the main characters, ranging from the Bathroom Man to Dusman to Henry, have become realistic; self-consciously aware of what is achievable and what is not, less beset by illusions, relatively more contented and emotionally and psychologically, if not materially more stable and wiser. I conclude that this is as a result of their experiences of poverty. Applying a range of narrative techniques and literary devices, the authors evoke not only the humiliations of poverty, but the resilience, strength, tenacity, creativity and the triumph of the poor in the face of adversity. In spite of their shockingly miserable material conditions, characters such as the Bathroom Man, Dusman and Henry survive and seem to be on the way to *recovery*. Generally, the poor refuse to give up and creatively make the best of their deplorable situations as illustrated by the concluding passages below, from the two novels. From Mwangi’s:

In the end, all the plush, luxurious and not so luxurious motor cars wind up as scrap metal in the hands of those who have never driven a car, theirs to do with whatever they wish, to rip apart and mutilate and create more practical items out of them. ... the car bodies are hacked and hammered into charcoal braziers, drums, washing basins and pots and pans. The tyres end up as cheap Akamba sandals, that leave tyre tread marks in the mud, and bedsprings and, sometimes, even door hinges, so that shanty dwellers do finally own a part of a car, in the end, no matter how long it takes.

(Mwangi, 1979: 157)

And from Doyle's: "Annie went out foraging and came back with bread under her shawl and a job for me" (Doyle, 1999: 151).

Chapter 4: Telling and showing: rhetorical and descriptive evocations of poverty

Those who suffered silently must be given a context [fiction] in which they could speak out with their own authentic voices. (Camus, as quoted in Letemendia, 1997: 441)

[In literature,] the voices of those 'othered' by dominant discourses acquire a new authority, no matter how marginalized or effaced they might be. (Bueno, 1996: 192)

In this chapter, I analyse Meja Mwangi's *Weapon of Hunger* (1989) which details the venture of an American musician turned philanthropist into the heartland of an imaginary African society. There, he finds that the population is facing extinction due to excruciating poverty that results from war, natural calamities, human indifference and greed. Additionally, the chapter examines Roddy Doyle's *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* (1998), which depicts the trials, tribulations and most importantly, the resilience and survival of an abused housewife, matriarch and cleaner of homes and offices. In analyzing both texts, I examine how the characters that they create either claim a voice, or are given one to represent their condition, as well as their experiences and perceptions of poverty. The views expressed by characters in the novels create space for deep, varied and distinct conceptions of poverty, while the characters, who themselves are in the process of voicing their condition and experiences, are shown to develop greater understanding of their situation as they strip away the superfluities imposed by what seems the ubiquitous uncertainty created by poverty. Although both novels deal with the subject of poverty and related issues, the approaches of the two authors are distinctly different. Mwangi's work is narrated mainly in the third person, laced with interludes of dialogue. Doyle's is narrated mainly in the first person voice of the protagonist (Paula), interfused with occasional reported dialogue, but even this is reported in Paula's voice. While the action of *Weapon of Hunger* takes place in a mostly imaginary and a broader global, continental and national setting, *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* is more localized within the Dublin setting and more particularly, in the home environment. In fact, because of its more global concern, Mwangi's work deals with issues of poverty from a broader and more general perspective, while Doyle's represents poverty related issues from a domestic perspective with a significant emphasis on how women experience poverty. By domestic here, I mean the residential home. However, Doyle offers occasional impressions of the broader Dublin workplace and street. The two novels are very different in nature – especially in terms of the distinctly microscopic (Doyle) and macroscopic (Mwangi) conceptualization of the two settings; the alternative narrative approaches and generally; the different kinds of impoverishment depicted in the two settings. Considering these differences, I analyse the works in two separate sections in this chapter, starting with Mwangi's work followed by Doyle's. The former section is structured according to the following four subtitles:

- “If we give in we shall surely die in silence”: poor voices/voices of the poor
- “Africa feeds on herself”: a western perspective?
- “No starvation today, no civil war tomorrow”: a rhetorical representation

- “All thin, scrawny and emaciated”: descriptive representations of poverty.

Similarly, the section that analyses Doyle's text is divided into sections under the following subtitles:

- “Wheels off the magic bus”: the elusiveness of the poor's aspirations
- “It kills me writing that and reading it - I could never afford good shoes for my kids”: the dawn of reality
- “If he'd had other work, he would have put that anger to use”: pitiful victim?
- “It's not so bad now”: relativity of the condition of poverty and of perception
- “Neighbours above, below and beside us”: descriptive representations of poverty
- “I never gave up, I made ends meet”: the resilience of a poor woman.

If We Give in We Shall Surely Die in Silence: Poor Voices/Voices of the Poor

Here, I examine how the poor of Mwangi's novel are offered a "privileged space to speak" (Bueno, 1996: 189) and how the poor characters use the power of voice to speak with exceptional lucidity about their situation and against the unfortunate circumstance of their existence. I investigate whether "the registering of the marginal as a ... voice enmeshed in the battle of voices necessarily represents an opening through which the subaltern/marginal/other can be heard and his/her wishes, rights, desires acted upon" (Bueno, 1996:191). It should be noted that the views expressed by the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized citizens of Arakan are contrasted with what could be considered the dominant discourses of the state and to a lesser extent, the West. Although this section deals mostly with the voice of representative members of the Arakan – a marginalized community in the state of Borkan – textual/narrative innuendos either conflate or undermine their perspectives and in some instances complicate it.

The voices of the poor are registered in the text mainly but not exclusively through the views expressed by the following members of the Arakan community: Shakira, Zahai and Danachew. Shakira, a rebel fighter with a state-sponsored price on his head, tells Jack during their ominous first encounter that in Borkan there is

... [n]o water, no rain, no anything. So the cows die and the donkeys die and the goats die and the people too die. People, as you know die most quickly. Dozens, hundreds of people die. ... You see, my people, they want freedom and self-government. Things like that. But me, me I want what they want but I also want blankets for my men for it is cold in these mountains. (21-23)

The passage above brings into sharp focus the lack of fundamental needs but also, the shocking condition to which natural calamities, human egocentrism and an imperious and indifferent state expose citizens, foreshadowing the kind of annihilation portrayed later in the novel. The simple,

seemingly neutral, objective and emotionless nature of the sentences above is evocative. It evokes Shakira's simple and ordinary nature and by extension, the ordinariness of the desires and demands that he and "his people" are fighting for. This points in turn to the largely unjustified fear of a vulnerable state towards a character who seems to seek nothing but the basic necessities for a decent existence. However, in oppressive and tyrannical societies, the oppressor's fear is "primal, [his or her] instinct for self protection powerful" (Bosworth, 1979: 8), explaining the promise by the state that "much money" would be given to anyone who kills Shakira (28). He is perceived as a dangerous element and this is precisely because he, unlike the multitude of other impoverished characters in the novel who are mostly invisible and silent, is shown as "engendering [not just] a voice, a persona" (Prins, 2004: 52), but one that threatens the very state that he sees as being responsible for his deprived material condition and that of "his people". Subtly constituted in Shakira's voice is the complexity of their dilemma as a community. In the blunt but casually, even simplistically stated revelation that they have "no water, no rain, no anything", the natural emerges as a deleterious force that places man constantly at the edge of indigence. However, Shakira hastens to mention his people's struggle for "freedom and self-government" – implying the denial of this by a monstrous state that indeed abuses them. The two inimical forces (natural hazards and state abuse) are the daily realities of their existence, symbolically signaling the impression of a fatal conspiracy between nature and particular men, represented by their national state leadership, to impoverish and if possible, annihilate vulnerable members of this community. Shakira's statement: "... they want freedom and self-government. Things like that. But me, me I want what they want but I also want blankets for my men for it is cold in these mountains" (23). This relativises need – disclosing attempts to balance material needs (blankets) with nonmaterial needs (freedom and self-government). This is related to the idea of the multidimensionality of poverty – an issue that I discuss in great detail in chapter five of this thesis. Mwangi does not romanticize Shakira for being a champion of the poor, however. While he and his people are engaged in efforts to defend themselves against abuse by the state and fighting to claim their freedom, he is abusive and curtails Jack's freedom, seizing the blankets meant for the inhabitants of Kalam – in spite of Jack's attempted refusal, Shakira "unslung his rifle", referring to it by the "communist word Kalachnikov", and threatening: "this thing is good for getting what we want" and justifying the theft with the claim that: "... we too are victims of the drought" (22). The episode complicates conceptions of victimhood. While Shakira represents himself and his people as victims, he is at the same time seen as an oppressor. Mwangi indicates how situations of lack and consequent competition over scarce resources bring out human ruthlessness. Shakira's validation of forcefully dispossessing Jack is weak and the reference to communism (which implies that he is adhering to some communist principle) is even more laughable. These actions and ideas, coupled with the fact that he is indifferent to the death of his men, imply that he would be no different from the leadership in Akan that he opposes, if he were eventually to be in a leadership position. Mwangi indicates a dangerous, recursive cycle of hypocrisy, outlining a gloomy future for the people of

Arakan who seem "destined to spend most of their lives in poverty [due to] stiff competition [and] predatory tendencies in which concerned subjects recognize [only] exploitation as the order of life" (Odhiambo, 2008: 75).

Like Shakira, Zahai Deste leads one of the rebel factions and uses the power of voice that the novel offers her to represent the kind of adversity that she and other members of her community experience. She assures Jack: "[y]ou must see the *truths* [my emphasis] I have to show you, hear the many things I have to say to you" (111). The statement "see the truths" and "hear the many things" point to the imaginatively evocative power of Mwangi's text, which has a multiple sensory appeal – appealing to Jack's, but potentially also to the reader's ears and eyes. Yet Zahai posits a notion of truth that is too simplistic. If one considers Tarski's theorem on the "undefinability of truth" as quoted in Raatikainen (2000: 617) and the fact that multiple perspectives ("truths") are advanced on the issues narrated in the novel, Zahai's claim and assurance of "truthfulness", rather than bearing witness to any kind of absolute truth, serves as an invitation to the reader to question the implicit assumption that such an absolute truth exists. The extract above could be seen as illustrating an attempt by a voice-engendering character to use the opportunity offered to her to manipulate not just another character (Jack), but also the reader to share her perspective. Such a narrative approach has the potential to retain both Jack's and the reader's interest – communicating "truths" which I analyse in the paragraphs that follow.

With uncompromising vehemence, Zahai invokes the perseverance and defiant nature of her people, but also bemoans the paradox of their situation – where the supposed discovery of natural resources and more particularly oil, rather than bringing an opportunity for a better life, is ironically a curse to her people. She declares: "... we have friends in Rome and all those other places and they too have friends elsewhere who have seen satellite photographs of our desert. They told us the whole desert is oil. Richer than the desert of Arabia ..." (142). She cautions: "the only way they can steal our natural resources is by wiping us off the face of the earth. The drought and the famine have given them a good cover to depopulate the whole of the central and north western deserts ..." (143). Following the accusations levied at the state, she speculates that "if we had meekly given in to the might of the feudalism we would all have starved to death in silence. If we give in to the generals we shall surely die in silence" (197-198).

Zahai's views open space to engage with the important discourse of oil in the world and in Africa in particular, as well as the dialectical issue of un/truthfulness of representation – raising the question whether her truth is absolute and whether the presence of oil in a country alleviates or deepens poverty. Implied in the passage is the view that "the friends in Rome and all those other places ... [and the] friends elsewhere" – the West – if at all they exist, are influential actors in the global wealth exchange and distribution system, operating in the background when it comes to the issue of

natural resources in the fictional state and in actual societies in Africa – but with serious implications for the poor in these states. Yet, although Zahai presents her version of the story as "truth", the mere use of indefinite expressions such as "... all those other places and ... elsewhere" to refer to the unnamed places undermines the truth claim. This information is mere hearsay, from friends who find themselves in locations that, other than Rome, remain unnamed. They receive the information from other unnamed friends who do not physically discover oil, but rather claim to have seen satellite pictures. This information relayed from absent voices or perhaps mere empty echoes from unnamed sources and places, is anecdotal, suggesting that Zahai's truth claim is dubious. In fact, the novel in more than one instance asks whether the land of the Arakans has reserves of oil and whether the state is indeed attempting to remove the inhabitants with the intention of exploiting it or allowing the oil to be exploited by Westerners, rather than (as claimed) to rescue them from the drought. Zahai in the passage above limns out the former perspective – displacement due to oil. However, her perspective is not wholly favoured by the text, as the narrative shows a continual dialectical play between different versions that imagine the possibility of either lack/or the presence of oil in the land of the Arakans, as well as the possibility (rather than a certainty) that the displacement of the people results from a desire to exploit their resources. The novel shows reticence around the notion of an absolute truth, leaving space for the interpretation that "all knowledge ... is unavoidably subjective but also that it is mediated by the representational form" (Lewis et al., 2008: 199) – leaving the reader with the liberty to negotiate and distinguish truth from untruth. Hence, the fictional work avoids being seen as upholding an agenda. In spite of the perspectives that she expresses so eloquently, "the reality that ... [Zahai] is creating is [merely] a reality of words" (Bueno, 1996: 47), intended as so often in situations of human pain and misfortune to make sense of the experiences that she faces by attributing blame. One may deduce that the fictional state maneuvers its citizens into the uncertainty that prevails in the novel concerning presence or lack of oil to ensure exclusive exploitation rights and self-enrichment from oil wealth – a common feature of many actual African states.

The statement that "the drought and the famine have given them a good cover to depopulate the whole of the central and north western deserts, ..." makes it seem that a conspiracy exists between nature and the ruling class, or rather, that the leadership, being avaricious and venal, is using natural hazards as a cover-up for its greedy, materialistic and egotistic intentions. Nature symbolically acquires a personality, becoming one of the characters in the novel – one that is mute and perhaps, because of its muteness, both oppressor of human beings and a victim. It is a victim when the state uses it to disguise and justify inhumane acts in the process of seeking material rewards – oil. This exemplifies the view of a former United Nations Secretary General, that "[t]he term natural disaster has become an increasingly anachronistic misnomer. In reality, it is human behavior that transforms natural hazards into what should be called *unnatural* [my emphasis] disasters" (Annan, 1999 as quoted in Fara, 2001: 47). What the novel discloses more explicitly than

Kofi Annan's view above is that in contexts such as that depicted in the novel, a "natural" disaster is exploited in order to reap material reward, in the process further dispossessing and impoverishing human beings. In the midst of this abuse of both humans and nature, the defiant voice of Zahai stands out. She declares: "[t]he only way they can steal our natural resources is by wiping us off the face of the earth". Here, literature serves as a space where "the voices of those othered by the dominant discourse/forces acquire a new authority, no matter how marginalized or effaced they might be" (Bueno, 1996: 192). Important here is the recognition that the state, though dominant, is metaphorically marginalized in the fictional context by virtue of the fact that it is mostly silenced in the text, while the poor (conversely) are metaphorically empowered through being given space to voice their experiences, their suffering and being shown as seeking ways to overcome adversity. The allusion to "silence" in the statements "... if we had meekly given in to the might of the feudalism we would all have starved to death in *silence*. If we give in to the generals we shall surely die in *silence*" (197-198 my emphasis) is symbolic. It symbolizes the power of voice, which in this case is a power that the novel gives to Zahai as she describes their situation, but also one which she and her people have claimed and used to resist the generals and to avert death (as she indicates). The two sentences quoted here suggest that Zahai is aware of the possibility that their struggle against adversity may result in death, but a death that is honourable because of the power of voice that enables them not to die in silence. The state's poor and sidelined subjects have been given narrative and representational power in the novel to indicate that the poor when aided by the power of voice, develop an empowered personality that can enable their survival. When one considers the kind of power embodied in Zahai's words here in relation to the physical power that she exercises as the leader of a band of mostly male guerrillas, there is a clear indication that "surely words are actions ..., [and] actions can also be words" (Bueno, 1996, 206). The power of the voice becomes a privileged space where the abrogation and negation of and resistance to abuse and exploitation are manifested. These narrative excerpts from a greatly invigorated Zahai have the potential to inspire readers who may in actuality find themselves in situations of material exploitation similar to that evoked by Zahai, since "[i]t is the function of the best fiction to save us from ourselves, from our own illusions ... from our self-imposed darkness ... " (Bosworth, 1979: 9).

It is important to examine the view that Zahai expresses on the oil complex or curse in greater detail. Unlike most of Mwangi's works of fiction, the setting of this novel is imaginary. This, I would argue, allows the reader to interpret the narrative incidents in the fictional setting as reflecting matters related to the oil complex in certain parts of Africa or more generally, all of Africa. In this sense, I here examine how the narrative around oil is a fictionalized version or perhaps a fictional prophecy of the actual situation in an African society – possibly the Niger Delta or even all of Nigeria, or yet still, the extensive oil-rich Coast of Guinea in Africa. A number of strikingly similar aspects – around the politics, discourse and the economy of oil stand out between

the two (the fictional and the actual), particularly, the Niger Delta of Nigeria. The most remarkable and important of these (for the purpose of my study) is the paradox and contradiction of "oil without wealth" (Watts, 2008: 36) in the two communities (fictional and actual) where the oil is found. In the fictional setting, in spite of the speculation that "the whole desert is oil. Richer than the desert of Arabia", the novel eloquently represents and reflects on the point that members of the community where the oil is supposedly found experience the most damningly fatal form of poverty, as they are shown starving to death. The text emphasizes that the society was previously prosperous, apparently until the discovery of oil. In an actual society, it is made palpably clear that the

... multi-billion dollar industry has ... proved to be a little more than a nightmare. ... According to the IMF oil did not seem to add to the standard of living and could have contributed to a decline in the standard of living. ... life expectancy [has] ... according to World Bank estimates, fallen. ... Oil has wrought only poverty. (Watts, 2008: 34-35)

In both the fictional and the actual society, poor local communities engage in very active rebellion, protesting that the discovery of oil has, contrary to common expectation, worsened their situation. The response to such protest is more "state violence ... [as t]he government's presence, ... is only felt in the form of machine gun and jackboots" (Watts, 2008: 35). In what seems a satirical representation of the militarized state, the text contains the announcement – in a frighteningly sad-edged tone – that a school receives "a direct hit from one big bomb. The school house and all its two hundred pupils just disappeared" (141). In response to this kind of brutality, the state in both the fictional and some actual societies (such as the Ogoniland region in Nigeria) faces what seems a never ending insurgency from impoverished citizens and very strong ethno-nationalistic sentiments – sentiments that in the fiction are captured in Zhai's claim that "[w]e Talacs are Talacs and will never be anything else" (144). It is from the oil without wealth contradiction that the insurgency of the poor and the ethno-nationalistic sentiments draw sustenance (Watts, 2008:36). As one critic observes, Mwangi's "fiction ... like all human striving after truth ... is a[n] approximation of life. It ... engages us, as does reality itself, through the senses, in that it aims to re-create the experience of life rather than just to abstract life's meaning" (Bosworth, 1979: 9). In fact, it has been suggested that "*Weapon of Hunger* alludes to the situation in Ethiopia in the mid-1980s. ... the separatist region of Arakan [is] a clear reference to Eritrea which achieved independence from Ethiopia in 1993" (Kurtz, 1998: 119). Besides showing the similarity in experience and response to abuse and poverty between a fictional and actual societies, Mwangi's mimetic ability to fictionalise what seems actual human experience cuts across temporality and spatiality. He writes in Kenya and his novel is published in the year 1989, but the metaphors and thematic concerns in the fictional/imaginary setting are familiar to observers of the current situation in a number of actual African societies and especially strikingly resemble conditions in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

Zahai's voice immerses the reader in the complex politics and discourse of food/foreign aid as a poverty alleviation strategy. In a tone that captures optimism and pessimism, resentment and affection, appreciation and aversion, resignation and defiance, despair and hopefulness, she reveals how her people, "trapped in a fate they can neither change nor escape, doomed to a nightmare existence" (Bosworth, 1979: 16), nevertheless refuse to give up. She declares:

Mister Rivers, ... [w]hat you are doing is right. But it is not enough. A person who begs for food becomes a slave to the one who feeds him. We must not become dependent on the outsiders for food. If tomorrow the Americans need their food, all of it, then we shall all die from hunger and you will have wasted your life trying to save us. A person dying from thirst must never ignore the ever present danger of drowning. We need the food you give us, it is true. But we have a saying in Talacina that when you give a man bread you feed him for a day whereas when you teach him to farm you feed him for generations. We also need to take our destiny in our hands, to do ourselves what you are doing for us. We must find permanent solutions to these problems of drought, disease and despotism. Our farmers have forgotten how to farm We must teach them to farm again before the next rains. It is true our land is no longer rich and fertile as before But we must learn to live with it, make it more productive. Then all we need is rain. [Jack responds,] No, Zahai, ... When the rains come this whole country will wash away to the sea. You are going to need more than rain to get you back on your feet. (154-155)

Carefully placed in the narrative is the perspective justifiably held that in a situation of poverty like that experienced by the Arakans, food aid plays an important role and reflects the view that "giving is a human instinct, perhaps the oldest" (Farah, 1993: 192). When Zahai declares: "Mister Rivers, [w]hat you are doing is right", it is important that this view is expressed in the voice of a victim of poverty and hunger rather than an intellectual or a critic who may be distant from the "real" experience of poverty. Intended as a simple, rational affirmation of humanitarianism, her view on the importance of food aid evinces unmistakable authenticity, potentially appealing to the reader. Additionally, it serves as a fictional example of the chorus of voices in the actual world that have expressed the same sentiments. One somewhat hyperbolic expression of this notion can be cited:

... that each of us have a moral obligation to donate *nearly all our money* [my emphasis] to famine relief ... It requires us to give up some of our own wealth in order to prevent other people from being hungry, even though we have never met those people and have not caused their famine. (Peterson, 2004: 294)

However, the literary narrative qualifies the extent of the usefulness of foreign food aid, suggesting that an overdependence on it not only renders the victim of poverty and hunger less self-reliant, with the likelihood of the provision of food donations becoming a disincentive to work – further entrenching poverty and hunger, but potentially even (eventually) enslaving the recipients. Considering my previous point, that the imaginary setting of this novel could stand for any part or even the whole of Africa, the literary perspective that seeks to question an overdependence on food aid could be read as a parallel to views expressed in social theory. Views contrary to those expressed by Peterson above suggest that: "African countries needed to aim at achieving national self-reliance and avoid drawing up plans in which external assistance had a preponderant share"

(Ewing, 1968: 362). It is further noted that “in the whole range of activities where self-reliance is both necessary and possible, there are no areas more important than education, manpower planning, and training” (Ewing, 1968: 370). These constitute “what Africa can do unaided. Hitherto, the main emphasis has been on how to obtain more foreign capital” (Ewing, 1968: 372). A second set of perspectives, obviously intended to question the effectiveness of food aid, is that “[o]ne of the dilemmas of food aid is that efforts to provide it have often ended in deadlock or mutual loss. And one of the paradoxes is that the aid, when given ..., has often led to an increase in hunger” (Hopkins, 1992: 228). This is because food aid “has an adverse (disincentive) effect on food production in recipient countries” (Hopkins, 1992: 238).

While clearly highlighting the importance of food aid, the fictional representation (as I suggested earlier) but also the social theory quoted above highlight the contradictory and paradoxical situation resulting from dependence on food aid – hinting at the possibility “that he begs who has no self-pride, and he works responsibly who intends to be respected” (Farah, 1993: 193). Zahai, like the social scientists cited above, advances the point that self-reliance is both necessary and possible even in situations of extreme human adversity. She subtly advances the view that “emergencies [should be] once-off affairs, not a yearly excuse for asking for more. [Implied in her views is the question,] how many years have we been passing the empty bowl?” (Farah, 1993: 194). Emphasizing the need for self-reliance, Mwangi's fiction suggests that there are no instruments more important in achieving it than education and training – in the fictional case, agricultural training. The emphasis that Zahai places on agriculture resonates with actual societies in Africa where “agricultural economists have for four decades argued the importance of investment in agriculture ... for poverty reduction” (Tschirley and Benfica, 2001: 334). In fact, it has been argued that, “despite the difficulties faced by farmers, the economies of Sub-Saharan Africa are very dependent on agriculture which in 1991 still provided a larger contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) than the industrial sector” (Morgan and Solarz, 1994: 58). As a writer, Mwangi seems to see it as his prerogative to create characters who offer perspectives that relate the fictional to the actual situation in their world. Considered from another angle, his writing is simply shaped by the reality of the world around him. Zahai's voice conveys a poignant message, but the poignancy of the message lies in the way she expresses herself and the fact that she speaks from “experience”. She calls attention to the oral repertoire at her disposal, creating an impression of strength, determination, wisdom and stability of personality in the proverbial statements: “A person dying from thirst must never ignore the ever present danger of drowning” and “we have a saying in Talacina that when you give a man bread you feed him for a day whereas when you teach him to farm you feed him for generations”. In cases like this where the oral is allowed to infuse the literary, “a synthesis takes place in which characteristics of the oral culture survive and are absorbed, assimilated, extended, and even re-organized within a new cultural experience” (Obiechina, 1993: 123) to offer distinctive perspectives on issues represented. Such a synthesis

results in "greatly invigorated form [in this case Mwangi's novel,] infused with [a resilient, defiant and self-reliant response and] energy through metaphors, images and symbols, more complex plots, and diversified structures of meaning" (Obiechina, 1993: 123). Zahai's ability to resist the state as well as the condition of extreme material deprivation and, as the lone female character from the Arakan background represented in the novel, to lead the guerrillas successfully, is possible in spite of or because of her Western education or rather, because she combines Western education/knowledge with a sophisticated and deep awareness of local values/knowledge and beliefs as seen in her belief in the Khamsin and the proverbial expressions. This enables her to espouse aspirations and hold boldly and authoritatively to values, beliefs and attitudes that are nourished by her submergence in the two worlds – values such as respect for the elderly (as she shows towards the older Danachew), equality, political freedom, democracy and (most importantly) economic and social freedom. The result of such a successful cultural synthesis is a stable and a unified self which reveals itself in her actions, but most importantly, her amplified voice and her defiant and resilient nature. Jack's rebuff: "No, Zahai, ... When the rains come this whole country will wash away to the sea. You are going to need more than rain to get you back on your feet" serves to depict the enormity of the challenge that she and her people face and consequently, to amplify the kind of will that enables her to speak with such defiance in spite of the enormous challenges placed in her path.

Shakira and Zahai represent the voice of the more youthful and energetic brand of leadership of the Arakan community – leadership that seems to be vibrant and forward looking, but also to have confidence in warfare as a solution to their problems. The older members of the community's leadership (represented mainly by Danachew and Sidelil Kidan), in enlarging on some of the views that the former two advance, draw on the old to offer new perspectives on the condition and experiences of poverty and adversity in general. Showing a "deliberate orientation towards the epochal" (Ingram, 2001: 165:), they attempt to give meaning to the present material condition by reflecting on the past, giving credence to the argument that:

[i]n seeking the past, we also seek to know our-selves, ... shape our attitudes to [the] present and [the] future. Hence the past is of more than mere academic interest: we are part of it, and it is part of our origins, values, psyche [and part of our material condition]. (Lawton: 1987: 262)

In statements that seem dressed up as nostalgic recall, the two characters use the power of voice to bear witness to the senseless and near speechless misery that their community has suffered, adapted to or survived, but in some cases they show, people made the extraordinary choice of death over extreme levels of material deprivation and adversity. Some such choices, in a way that seems to reflect the universality of responses to poverty, are somewhat similar in nature to those analysed in chapter three – where the Bathroom Man in Mwangi's *The Cockroach Dance* elects to live in a bathroom while the unemployed of Doyle's *A Star Called Henry* seek the prospect of a decent

meal, with the likelihood of death, in the trenches of France. These three sets of characters are driven by experiences of extreme poverty and the desire to deal with the condition of poverty to make extraordinarily or lethal choices.

When Danachew reports that "[i]n the old days ... they used to work the fields at night and lie in camouflaged hideouts during the day when the risk of aerial attack was high" (130), this captures the indomitable spirit of the poor who are not only resilient but diversely creative in their struggle to survive adversity. In spite of their resilience and creativity, they are overcome by what again seems to be a symbolic conspiracy between a warlike state ("aerial attacks") and nature ("drought") (130). This coincidence of adversities defeats the poor, leaving them "dependent on food assistance from outside and whatever they could wrestle from enemy convoys" (130). Because this issue (the imaginary conspiracy) is covered in great detail earlier in this chapter, here I only briefly argue that Danachew in expressing this view subtly absolves the poor from blame for their dependence on food aid and even condones criminality, since such responses are shown to originate from impossibly difficult circumstances beyond their alleviation or control. Additionally, the narrative posits the disastrous implications of a war-drought-poverty nexus. The statement "in the old days", like the authorial choice to set the novel in an imaginative space, again locates the events narrated in the novel in an indeterminate period, allowing for a trans-temporal reading of the issues narrated.

For his part, Sidelil Kidan, the old village chief declares that

[t]he land is heavy with bones of the dead... More people died from hunger and the rest scattered to look for other feeding centres to stay in ... [O]ffering apologies for ... his peoples impatience and their inability to form a straight line [, he declares,] we used to be a gentle, patient people, But hunger is a terrible teacher. People become restless, faithless, and, in their desperation not to die of hunger, they become selfish, like animals. Many were the people who had left their weak and dying relations to fend for themselves and gone away to faraway places to die. Others had joined the nomad warriors to die with them. (212-214)

The passage quoted above allows for a number of readings. The images of a land "heavy with bones of the dead" and of "the rest scattering to look for feeding centres" are evocative of the havoc that hunger has wreaked on this community. Even those who stay behind or who survive the calamity seem damaged by the "terrible teacher" – poverty and consequent hunger – to the extent that they cannot enact the most basic rules of social order, like forming a straight line. They have become impatient, restless, selfish, indifferent and defeated; they have lost compassion and a sense of the value of human life. The human being, as depicted in the passage above, loses his/her humanness because hunger debases the person to a bestial level. Some members of the depicted community have stopped living as if they are in *culture* but rather as if they are in *nature*. The act of scattering to look for feeding centres is synonymous with the animal tendency of constantly changing territory and seeking new territories that offer the prospect of food for survival. It

indicates a regression to prehistoric man's survival strategy of scattering and gathering food in the jungle. The act of leaving one's weak relations to fend for themselves also resembles that of or falls below the animal level as many animal species would under similar circumstances at least stay with their weak and dying relations till the end. This is an example of what Butler (2010: 1) terms "precarious life", arguing that "specific lives cannot be apprehended as injured or lost if they are not first apprehended as living. [...] these lives are never lived nor lost in the full sense". The narrative perspective that attributes bestial characteristics, instincts and tendencies to humans who experience extreme material deprivation is obvious and undisguised, but frightening. This is most clearly expressed when Sidelil Kidan states that this community has come to behave "like animals" (214); his sorrow at such regression failing to alleviate the conviction with which he speaks. Sidelil Kidan draws on the bestial domain and animal metaphors to appeal for some degree of social control in the human species. With profound effect, the author presents the anti-social state of people stripped of dignity; a situation filled with ominous potency.

The narrative excerpt analysed above indicates that all

[h]umans [indeed] possess animal-like qualities that must be ideally suppressed or harnessed for the well-being of the individual and of society at large. It is this ambivalent cognitive connection to the animal kingdom that permits animals to be named [in allusion to humans] for the sake of maintaining social control; animal metaphors highlight the potentially disorderly qualities within human nature. ... animal metaphors overwhelmingly revolve around areas of potential disturbance within the human community. ... A[n] ... area of potential disturbance represented in the metaphors is the excessive presence among humans of qualities that are normal among animals. ... [These include] restlessness, ... [and] filth [which] are ... singled out for ridicule in animal metaphors ... [In applying animal metaphors to human beings, human society is] guided by [the value of] adherence to a principle of moderation and balance. (Brandes, 1984: 212)

What Brandes describes in the passage quoted above is the kind of conjunctive and chiasmic existence that Butler (2010: 7) terms that of the "human animal". When members of the fictional community commit acts that can only be associated with the animal world, these (rather than showing simply a weakness in character) suggest that adversity has dehumanized them, leaving them with no option but the gloomy prospect of death or survival by exercising near cannibalistic tendencies. Even where they abandon their weak relations to fend for themselves, they themselves can only go to "faraway places to die". When they decide to join the nomad warriors, it is "to die with them". The image of unavoidable death is repeatedly evoked to depict the extreme situation of the poor in a war-ravaged, drought-stricken and politically oppressive context. Also, the narrative raises the question: "what social conditions help form the very ways that choice and deliberation proceeds"? (Butler, 2006: 16). Because members of the community that has had these experiences take full ownership of the narrative matrix, the story has authenticity and weight, enabling the reader to participate imaginatively. The evoked situation appeals to the reader's moral indignation, guilt and compassion and could serve to justify efforts by persons like Jack (and by extension,

some segments of the international community) to invest in food aid in the fictional setting and the actual world. Although the community's hardship terrifies and appalls the reader as the novel proceeds to its frightening conclusion, the fact that the community is afforded a self-representational voice restores some measure of dignity to them in affording them a type of recognition. Their lives are, at least, made "grievable" (Butler, 2006: xv). The experience of poverty injures them deeply, but their depiction suggests that "to be injured means that one has the chance to reflect upon the injury" (Butler, 2006: xii).

Africa Feeds on Herself: A Western Perspective?

When Jack encounters Mister Felix, a former European Colonial Administrator who lost his land in Kenya at independence as well as his mines in Rhodesia at independence there, Mister Felix states:

Jack Rivers! The man who thinks he can change the course of history! Well, let me tell you something, Jack. You can change anything in the world you like, but Africa is one bitch in the world that never changes. The living catastrophe, I call her. Famines, ignorance, disease and civil strife are the four wheels on which this great continent turns. Mass starvation and death are as old as history here, part of the scheme of things. Without their controlling effect, Africa would burst at the seams and overspill into the rest of the world. Africa would conquer the world! ... Africa has had too much to drink. Africa is drunk on herself. The old whore does not need food aid from us. Africa feeds on herself. ... Africa cannibalises herself You see, Africans must die in millions before they can see reason. (37)

Africa is represented quite reductively by Mister Felix. The focus of my thesis is poverty and the metaphors that are used to describe Africa in the passage quoted above stretch beyond the evocation of poverty, but they are important to this study as they amplify the insights glimpsed in the text, especially in terms of the etymology of poverty that seeks to explain what causes it and the effects it has on victims – the poor. Mister Felix's tone is flatly sarcastic and sinister – sarcasm that is directed at Jack and his humanitarian efforts, but more broadly (in what seems a gross generalization) at the perceived, potentially non-redeemable nature of Africa. It would be naive to read the passage simply as an indictment of Africa. Rather, it is a complex representation of the multifaceted yet dynamic challenges faced by the fictional and actual Africa and of the untapped or abused potential of Africa. The crudely sinister and satirical, yet subtly authoritatively balanced representation is achieved through a simultaneity of perception and of voicing. On the one hand, extremely negative images are used to depict Africa, portraying the whole huge and various land mass (and its inhabitants) as a "bitch", a "living catastrophe", a continent which turns on four wheels – "famine", "ignorance", "disease" and "civil strife" – a continent characterized by "mass starvation and death", "drunk on herself", "cannibalis[ing] herself", its inhabitants as yet to see "reason" (37). This is a terrifying, demeaning representation that might shock the reader. However, the passage simultaneously if very subtly evokes positive images of what Africa potentially could have been. Mister Felix suggests that "without [the] controlling effects" – referring to the situation captured by the images highlighted above – "the *great continent* [my emphasis,]... Africa would

burst at the seams and overflow into the rest of the world. Africa would conquer the world!". The image of a simultaneously catastrophic and at the same time great continent with the potential to overflow and conquer the rest of the world allows for a number of readings. Firstly and most importantly for the purpose of this study, Mister Felix's views imply that poverty experienced in the fictional society results from and at the same time contributes to the negative elements and images of Africa. Africa becomes a persona in the passage, as shown by the statements: "Africa has had too much to drink. Africa is drunk on herself. The old whore does not need food aid from us. Africa feeds on herself. ... Africa cannibalizes herself". The personification of Africa as a person in a state of self-perpetuated depravity, inebriation and geared to its own destruction would shock African readers in particular. In personifying Africa, the narrative simply implies that Africans themselves are perpetrating acts which perpetuate the continent's degradation. This is obvious in the more explicit statement: "Africans must die in millions before they can see reason" (37). This is a very generalized, hyperbolic and homogenizing conception of the self-destructive nature of "Africans", but one that has the potential to brutally alert African readers to the possibility and the danger of similar conditions in actual societies that they inhabit. In this regard the narrative stands as a cautionary message to Africans. Implied in the passage is the view that material conditions in the fictional African setting are deplorable – to the extent that they exemplify the common but stereotypical perception of actual Africa as a continent of extreme forms of world poverty. Implied in the representation, however, is the view that this and any state of poverty does not occur naturally. Implicitly, Mister Felix blames Africa and Africans for the prevailing material conditions.

Mister Felix voices a set of complex yet brutal perspectives on Africa or rather, relates to Africa with "an unsettling mixture of monstrous strangeness and unwelcome likeness" (Ingram, 2001: 159), and this is because of his hybrid position – his *situatedness* both as an outsider and at the same time an insider. Although he is not an African, he has had an array of experiences in Africa "from the days of colonial empire" (37) – experiences which have shaped him, like many others in his situation, into "hate generators against the very thing they love most" – Africa. It is this ambivalent hate/love relationship with Africa that allows him the space to offer the perspectives that he does. He is a settler, seemingly "with an unknown country behind [him] as well as in front" (Ingram, 2001: 167), and this might serve generally as a reflection of the kind of experience some settlers have in some actual African countries. Again, returning to the idea of the relativity of truth, there is obviously a "continual dialectical play between different versions" (Ingram, 2001: 160) of truth in the episode. I argue that Mister Felix's views, though expounded with much conviction, are subtly subverted by other narrative undertones. Jack tells him: "I think you've had too much to drink" (36). Timothy Carter, speaking about Mister Felix, declares: "[h]e gave the best of his years to colonial Africa He lost his vast land holdings in Kenya at independence, went down to Rhodesia and lost his mines there too at independence. Such people easily turn into village

lunatics" (37). This leads Jack to question: "... why doesn't he just leave?" to which Timothy responds: "... he can't, you see, None of them ever can. That's what's so tragic" (37). The situation in which Mr Felix finds himself and the views that he expresses exemplify a postcolonial situation where "the migrant takes up a position in the zones 'in-between' cultural certainties, introducing doubt into homogenous concepts such as national identity and national history" – in this case, continental concepts (Bhabha, 1994: 212-235 as quoted in Newell, 2000: 1). In postcolonial migratory situations such as that shown through a depiction of Mister Felix, ["t]he migrant's subjectivity seems to have been constructed in a different way to that of the person who stays at home" (Newell, 2000:2) – a person such as Zahai and the other freedom fighters in the novel who, unlike Mister Felix do not just complain – or not as wryly as Mister Felix – but attempt to change the situation in the fictional state and by extension, the African continent. While the narrative excerpts analysed above serve to question the foundation of and the motives for some of the views that Mister Felix expresses, they also depict a particular view of poverty – one that is psychological and material and experienced in the fictional instance by the settler in post colonial Africa who is dispossessed of his property rights by the post-colonial subject who "use[s] extra-economic measures to [seize and] accumulate ... a large share of the resources [previously] held by Europeans, which would then enable them to replace the colonial, settler, landowning class" (Simelane, 2002: 336). Presumably it is mostly this newly emerged post-colonial resource-owning middleclass African that Mister Felix chastises.

His views result mainly but not exclusively from his condition of belonging and at the same time being/feeling displaced from the African setting. This state of being results partly in and is at the same time a consequence of material losses to indigenous Africans. So while poverty is "perceived as lack by some [the indigenes, it is] expressed as loss" (Ingram, 2001:163) by the settler, but this situation could also be reversed. Though a vital issue, I would be brief here as I cover issues of the multidimensionality of poverty in greater detail in the last chapter of this thesis. Generally, the narrative perspectives advanced by Mister Felix are not uncommon. In other representational forms, "the dominant narrative of contemporary Africa is [that of] tragedy" (Grant and Agnew, 1996: 729), wherein Africa is depicted as being "in dire straits", finding itself in a "declining situation", and being "in the process of falling out of the world economy" (Grant and Agnew, 1996: 729). As in the other representational forms, the fictional representation examined above suffers from two drawbacks. Firstly, situations in or perceptions of "specific countries [are] sometimes taken to represent the *Dark Continent* [my emphasis] in its entirety" (Grant and Agnew, 1996: 729). In the fictional representation, Mister Felix's experiences in two specific countries – Kenya and Rhodesia – are presumably taken to represent the whole continent. Secondly, "available explanations [of the situation of Africa] make use of representations ... that are left unexamined but are vital ..." (Grant and Agnew, 1996: 729) – representations such as the diversity of voices that emerge in Mwangi's text. These include the voices of the poor Arakans, the leadership of

Arakan as well as those of radical and die-hard foreign humanitarians such as Jack, which would commonly remain unrepresented and as such, unexamined in other forms of representation. In fact, Mister Felix, as in some mainstream western representations, seems to ignore these voices and the perspectives that they advance. His perspectives on Africa exemplify certain unmodulated and harsh views of poverty as "deserved" by the poor and by extension, the proverbial wisdom that "people get the government they deserve, and we [Africans] deserve beggars to be our leaders" (Farah, 1993: 194) – by implication, Africans deserve to remain poor and beggars. In the narrative excerpts that I analyse above, Africa becomes a sort of symbol or metonymy for poverty. In spite of its resemblance to the other representational forms, fiction's distinct ability to pull together a variety of representational voices and consequently, perspectives, stands out compellingly.

No Starvation Today, No Civil War Tomorrow: A Rhetorical Representation

Here, I examine various rhetorical positions taken by different sets of voices that are represented in *Weapon of Hunger*. Interestingly, Mwangi summarises all the rhetorical perspectives stated elsewhere in the novel into a single dream. The dream narrative shows how the different rhetorical positions compete for a voice and space, with the potential to "promote identification and emotional reaction" (Nussbaum, 1996: 6) in the reader, who may become "psychologically [and emotionally] intimate with [or alienated from some of the] fictional characters" and consequently, induced to variously "admire, pity, envy ... fear [hate, grieve for and with the] creatures of fiction" (Brock, 2007: 217). While the narrative may allow the reader to "form bonds of identification and sympathy" (Nussbaum, 1996: 7), the diversity of perspectives that the dream episode raises afford the reader a "judicious" position from which he or she can go beyond the emotions to assess from his or her own "spectatorial viewpoint the meaning of those sufferings", accusations and counteraccusations and "their implications for the lives involved" (Nussbaum, 1996: 90).

While flying from Akan to Rome, Jack dreams of various incidents, each representing a strand of the four major sets of voices that compete for rhetorical space in the novel. These are (1) the voices of the indifferent and uncaring members of the Western world; (2) voices of the rich, indifferent and abusive elites of the Borkan Republic; (3) voices of members of the impoverished Arakan community and (4) voices of compassionate and humanitarian individuals in the Western World. In his dream, "[a] hungry looking white man wearing a wrinkled suit ... informed him with authority, [that] Africa was, is and will remain the spittoon of the world ..." (38). By using the description that shows the speaker to be "a hungry looking white man wearing a wrinkled shirt", Mwangi identifies him unambiguously as being poor. In spite of his poverty, his voice carries strength, he is authoritative and he states his conviction with such force as to make him the binary opposite of the unsophisticated and subdued voice of the African poor (in the same dream - as discussed later). This suggests that, while poverty is a universal condition, it is experienced differently and impacts differently on persons from different backgrounds and in different parts of the world, a situation

that is also influenced by individual self-conception. Unlike the poor African character examined later, the "wrinkled" White Man's Western experience of poverty seems to result in lesser or no mental upheaval at all. The fact that he seems relatively less traumatized by impoverishment and fully confident in tone could result from the fact that he, despite his poverty, is aware of his relative advantage over people living in the "spittoons" of the West, as well as knowing the compensatory, relatively greater possibility that the society in which he lives offers him, with the likelihood of survival in some dignity (that at least dresses him in a "suit", albeit wrinkled). The authority of his tone is in binary opposition to the feebly meek voices of the Arakan poor – possibly offering him a greater prospect of (eventually) overcoming his present adversity. Perhaps his ability to speak so confidently – indeed, sneeringly – about Africa, in spite of his own poverty, is explained by the fact that he sees Africa as a "spittoon" that serves to relieve the Western poor like himself from his or her economic woes. His view of Africa is crude, but it is left to the reader to determine whether the African condition – as the spittoon of the world – results from an inherent weakness in Africans or rather, from external forces that Africans cannot control. The depiction of the next Western character in Jack's dream makes the answer to this question obvious when the hungry looking white man is

... shoved aside by a white blond amazon, so heavily adorned with African gold, diamonds and ivory that she could hardly walk. She shook a fat fist in Jack River's face and screamed [, y]ou don't go around messing with things you don't understand. Africa must die, so that we all may live. Turning away from the foul smell of the angry amazon, (38)

The passage above captures the simplistic/Western tendency to imagine a single "African continent largely empty of the identifiable, individual Africans [and Africas]" (Lonsdale, 2005: 390) that comprise "thirteen per cent of the world's population [but] contributes only two per cent of the world's commerce. ... due to unfair terms of trade" (388). Clearly, levels of poverty on the African continent are alarming and this is because they are shown to be deepened by Western attitudes and actions, a view that is entrenched by the suggestion that, in the actual global economy, the West "exploit[s] African resources for very little in return" (Lonsdale, 2005: 388) and with blatant arrogance. This state of affairs is clearly indicated in the segment of the dream quoted above. Obviously, the woman is richer than the man that Jack first encounters. In comparison, the woman acts more aggressively than the hungry looking white man, as shown by the act of shoving him aside, shaking "a fat fist in Jack River's face" and screaming. In comparison with the rich woman's cruder and more violent assertiveness, the poor person simply "pushed up to him", which is less aggressive. Equally, her tone in the statement "Africa must die, so that we all may live" is more aggressive and even more contemptuous of Africa and Africans than the poor white man's. Her attitude and tone are, if one considers her relatively more advantaged material condition, suggestive of the propensity for people to be more contemptuous towards the poor when rich. She is (to a much larger extent than the hungry looking white man), a substantial beneficiary of the exploitation of Africa and African resources (turning Africa into a spittoon of the world). This is suggested by

the descriptive phrase telling the reader that she is "so heavily adorned with African gold, diamonds and ivory that she could hardly walk". It therefore serves her personal interest fiercely to defend the status quo in relations between Africa and the West. She does this without reservation, as suggested by her crude, insensitive, inhumane and incendiary warning and proclamation: "[y]ou don't go around messing with things you don't understand. Africa must die, so that we all may live". The kind of dismissive contempt that she shows towards Africa symbolizes the extremity of pressure placed on Africa by external forces that work to impoverish the continent. Mwangi implicitly answers the question (raised previously) whether the condition of Africa as the spittoon of the world should be blamed on inherent weaknesses in the African or more on external forces. The latter is shown to hold sway to a greater extent. Although the views expressed by the "hungry looking white man" and still more aggressively by "the angry amazon" may be incendiary, or rather, because they are incendiary, they are flatly subverted by authorial stratagem. When Jack turns "away from the foul smell of the angry amazon", this symbolizes the complete rejection of the "foul" views that she espouses about Africa.

Jack next encounters "... a well fed black man in a three piece suit ... a learned African [who asks] questions: w]hat's the point of saving the children from starvation today so they may die from civil war tomorrow?" (39). Here again, description serves as an important narrative device that complements voice, offering insightful though controversial perspectives on the causes and condition of poverty in Africa. The description of the African as "a well fed black man in a three piece suit ... a learned African" positions him as wealthy and perhaps a member of the ruling elite. He is representative of an appallingly arrogant, selfish, unsympathetic, unpatriotic and brutally inconsiderate class of Africans – the ruling elite in the novel – which includes postcolonial leaders such as General Dinka and Colonel Tesfaye Gus who "engage in continuous calculations of how to ... extract maximum benefits from an otherwise disadvantaged society" (Mbembe as quoted in Odhiambo, 2008: 76). The description has significance for how the reader responds to what the character says. Clearly, his views stand as a disturbing reminder of the dilemma of the African poor who are exposed to tremendously damaging forms of callousness, arrogance and selfishness from their own compatriots and (worst of all and paradoxically) all this in leadership that one would expect to defend the interests of vulnerable citizenry. The "well fed" African's indifferent response to the poor, contrary to that shown by the two Western characters discussed earlier, originates from the kind of self-destructive mentality that Mister Felix attributes to Africans and indeed serves as an illustration of Mister Felix's view that "Africans must die in millions before they can see reason" (37). This way, the novel returns blame for the poverty in the fictional and by extension, actual African states to the doorstep of Africans – not necessarily the poor, but rather the rich, the elite, the leadership. Lonsdale (2005: 382) deals extensively with this idea, suggesting that in actual African society, newly emerged leaders or former "freedom fighters have become, too often, the lords of misrule. One has only to think of the transmutation of Mugabe or, from an earlier era,

Kwame Nkrumah, Hastings Banda, or Haile Selassie" (Lonsdale, 2005: 382). Like actual African leadership, that which is shown in the dream has become insensitive to the plight of the very citizenry that he (for this kind of leadership is mostly male) has sworn to safeguard. Male African leadership is shown to have failed, justifying the claim that "Africa's women [such as Zahai] have the best claim to that title [of being leaders] ... the stories of their endurance evoke our wonder and admiration [as they are] so much tougher-minded" (Lonsdale, 2005: 382); so often more selfless, compassionate and above all, more rational. Faced with this situation, "Africans and their friends [such as Jack Rivers] have become disillusioned with the fruits of freedom, either stony and pitiless as in the Sudan and Zimbabwe, or shrivelled into nothing as in Somalia, or utterly corrupted, as in the Congo" (Lonsdale, 2005: 382) – conditions which are the daily reality of the Arakans in Mwangi's novel. Despite the textual analysis and the critical theorization that I introduce above, it would be a simplistic generalization to suppose that conditions in all of Africa are equally dreadful, as "many African states are not entirely incapable of delivering the public goods of societal [and economic] renewal, as in Senegal, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Botswana or South Africa" (Lonsdale, 2005: 382). The issues raised above again illustrate how Mwangi's fiction captures or even predicts the realities of African existence, without compromising literary beauty. The passages analysed above "offer us insight into the complexities and dynamism of human nature as well as society" (Odhiambo, 2008: 81).

Jack's response to the well fed black and learned African, but more so, the interruption of the response, is significant. "Jack started to explain that maybe if there was no starvation today there would be no civil war tomorrow. Then saw that the angry mob was after his blood and decided that the best course of action was to save his own life" (39). This is rhetorically evocative. Jack's explanation emphasizes the causal link between poverty/starvation and war, generally implying the interconnectedness of poverty and other extreme human/socioeconomic conditions such as war. War theories have expressed this same view, suggesting that "civil war begins with a sense of deprivation when economic conditions differ from expectations [resulting in] grievance[s which] provide fertile recruiting grounds for rebels" (Selbin et al., 2001 as quoted in Barbieri and Reuveny, 2005: 1232). In the fictional instance, Jack sees poverty and its by-products such as starvation as having the potential if not attended to of destabilising human society and creating civil strife. Based on this perspective it would be plausible to argue that some civil wars in parts of actual Africa, especially the Horn of Africa, result from excruciating conditions of poverty, but also from ineptitude, indifference and the kind of coldness that certain powerful well fed Africans show towards the poor and their deprivations. The mob that comes after Jack's blood represents the desperate and starved people, who often lash out at those within reach, even if blameless (like Jack), because those truly responsible for their suffering like the well fed African are beyond their reach. The black man's flamboyance and elegance stands in total contradiction to the masses of ragged and starving Africans, pointing to the possibility that Africa is indeed not poor but rather

plagued by gross levels of inequality with the richest twenty percent of the population monopolizing the wealth of the continent, leaving the masses to starve (Nel, 2003: 618). As suggested earlier, it is to a great extent these "large gaps between the rich and the poor [that] give rise to political instability" (Nel, 2003: 618) of the kind seen in the novel and in some actual African societies. In fact, it is "the perception of the deprivation of the poor, relative to the opulence of the rich that motivates rebellion from below, or provides justification for attempts by the counter-elite to mobilize the poor into resistance" (Nel, 2003: 618) – of the kind in which the Arakans are engaged. The relatively poorer appearance of the hungry looking white man suggests that the West, like any other society, also has its poor and so provides food aid to Africa out of humanitarian compassion, not because of abundance and self-sufficiency, as no society is self-sufficient. The excerpts analysed in this section complicate common and simplistic associations of standards of poverty and wealth exclusively with particular societies, universalizing the conception and experience of poverty and inequality. Indeed, the representation stands as a reversal of common and actual interpretations of the Western world's unquestioned economic viability and power on the one hand and Africa and the third world's underdevelopment, on the other. Read as images that stand variously for the economic situation of the two sections of the world, the image of "a well fed black man in a three piece suit ... a learned African" juxtaposed with "a hungry looking white man [European] wearing a wrinkled suit" are ambivalent in their effect. Possibly, ambivalent representation foreshadows the current reversal of fortunes seen in the economic/financial situation in the actual world – one in which the Euro zone is experiencing deep financial challenges to the extent that it is considering borrowing money from some of the previously less advanced Southern and Eastern BRICS countries - Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. If valid, this point again demonstrates the prophetic potential of Mwangi's fiction.

The depiction of the poor and their perspective is an important component of the rhetorical arguments highlighted in the chain of encounters in Jack's dream.

Fleeing down a long and dusty road, Jack Rivers was brought to a sudden stop by a victim of the famine, so emaciated he was hardly recognizable as a human being. The creature shrugged off the rags to show her naked devastation and her wailing was heart breaking. She held out her arms Father, she said. Embrace me father. I am hell on earth.
(39)

The tone of the poor speaker here contrasts compellingly with that captured in the depiction of the poor Westerner. The poor African speaks with a subdued, timid and a pitiful tone, and (unlike the Westerner) without authority. Her voice carries a tone of desperation that has the potential to sustain the sympathy that Jack already feels for the poor, while also appealing effectively to the reader's compassion. The poignant depiction of her miserable state – physically as much as emotionally – is achieved through a combined use of different representational devices: voice, description and actions. The voice (wailings and pleas for an embrace), the description (emaciated)

and the actions (shrugging off rags) are carefully crafted to reveal the woman's level of desperation, which also serves to justify Jack's mission and to debunk efforts by the Westerners and the African elite who seek to discredit the value of such humanitarian enterprises. Indeed, Mwangi's simple yet shockingly moving representation of the African poor overrides efforts to downplay their misery. The depiction of extreme levels of deprivation appeals to a variety of senses, key among which is sight (through the pictorial descriptions as well as the actions) and hearing (through the wailing and the plea for compassion). This kind of depiction of "subjective human experience, so complex and chaotic, so dependent on the sense" (Bosworth, 1979: 9-11) metaphorically "light[s] the] candles in our self-imposed darkness and illuminate[s] the real world ... [with the potential] to save us from ourselves, from our own illusions" (Bosworth, 1979: 9). One sees a level of representational privileging where authorial intention, though disguised with fictional subtlety, seems to place the commonly marginalized voice/perspective of the poor at the fore of narrative rhetoric in order to appeal for sympathy for their plight. Metaphorically, this character stands for all the poor of Africa, appealing for sympathy – a process that continues in the passages analysed below.

The kind of narrative perspective that seeks to arouse compassion for the poor is further entrenched through the voice of the "weathered white missionary in a sun-scorched cassock. Son, said the missionary solemnly, Africa demands nothing short of human sacrifice of her lovers. Are you ready to die for her" (39)? This introduces an additional dimension to the set of rhetorical voices – one that is founded on religious morality. It serves as an example of the view expressed in an editorial of *The Economist* (1985, 18-19 as quoted in Hearn 2002: 46), which discusses the relatively more significant but often ignored role of foreign missionary goodwill and finances in poverty alleviation efforts in Africa. It declares that "... do-gooders in sandals often do more good than international civil servants... dollar for dollar the[se] small bodies help more people than the big donors."

Although the missionary comes from the same racial and possibly, geographical background as Mister Felix, the hungry looking "white man" and the angry amazon, the values that he espouses are (unlike theirs) pro-poor and pro-Africa, and therefore in complete contradiction to those attributed to the other three. This serves to destabilize any reading that may generally associate the West with indifference to the plight of the poor in Africa. As in any society, members of the fictional Western world adhere to diverse values and views. In expressing his view, the missionary does not only subvert the position taken by the African elite, but as an outsider, magnifies the degree of callousness shown by them. Significantly, [b]efore Jack could make up his mind one way or another, the stewardess woke him ..." (39). This allows for a number of readings. It creates suspense, heightening the reader's desire to read on and determine the course that Jack's humanitarian mission will take after this encounter with different moral and rhetorical positions.

This abrupt interruption symbolically predicts that none of Jack's efforts to improve the situation of the poor comes to full and substantial execution. The novel depicts this in many ways, tangibly and intangibly. When Jack attempts to challenge the elite's view that seems grotesquely unsympathetic to the poor, an angry mob comes after his blood, and before Jack makes up his mind here, he is awakened. This kind of rupturing distraction is again seen, with greater implication, in the episode where Jack paradoxically kills the leaders of the very people that he comes to save – Shakira and then Zahai – and it is seen in the fact that by the end of the novel, "rumour has it that ... he is somewhere in the Central Highlands where he is held captive by the guerrillas of the Arakan Liberation Front" (229). Ironically he is held captive by a faction of guerrillas who claim they are at war to defend the material rights of the same people (the Arakans) that he sets out to serve and to rescue from starvation. These failings point to the chaotic and complex nature of the crises that the novel depicts – a complexity that results from the multi-faceted but interrelated and enormously disorientating forces at play – poverty, drought, oppression, war, foreign manipulation and ethno-nationalism. Jack's failings are more explicitly shown in the fact that most of the truck loads of food that he brings do not reach the poor and seem not to offer them significant relief. These points all predict an ominous future for the poor of fictional Africa (and of the world), who seem to depend largely on food aid, if the supply line is so unreliable. The symbolic obstacles, rather than minimizing the value of Jack's efforts, point to the precariousness of the poor's situation and serve as a warning as well as a call to innovative and concerted action. The fact that Jack's individual and unilateral effort does not have a significant impact implies that a multilateral response is required to achieve "poverty alleviation, poverty reduction, and poverty elimination" (Toye, 2007: 506). To illustrate this point, Toye draws an analogy between poverty alleviation debates and the Mediaeval theological debate on how many angels could dance on the head of a pin. Raising the question: "how many angels can dance on the head of the poor?" and answering: "an infinite number", it is suggested that "poverty reduction ... has a natural attraction for angels of all kinds: the angels of non-governmental mercy, the great and good angels of the government aid bureaucracies and international financial institutions not forgetting the cohorts of angelic academics" (Toye, 2007: 505). The need for this kind of multilateral, all encompassing response arises from the sad reality that "many national elites seem pretty comfortable with things exactly as they are with zero poverty reduction, or even negative poverty reduction In these circumstances, the obvious angelic alternative is to go global ... a global summoning of political will for poverty reduction" (Toye, 2007: 507). Stepping away from a fictional encounter to an analysis of critical theory, one could argue that the sarcastic nature of Toye's paradigm implicitly subverts even the ability of the global and multilateral approach to alleviating, let alone eradicating poverty. This leaves one without a clear understanding of how poverty *could* be alleviated, emphasizing the need for carefully situated, deeper and further inquiry around the subject of poverty.

It is useful to consider the significance of the dream narrative analysed above. Generally, a dream narrative is metaphorically very important in highlighting the kind of issues raised in the more recent sections above. This is mainly because dream narratives that are used to open up rhetorical positions have very evocative features – features such as those highlighted in the article by B. O. States interestingly titled: “Dreams: The Royal Road to Metaphor”. Jack's dream "occurs on both the conscious and unconscious levels" (States: 2001: 110) as the personalities that he encounters are archetypes of people and ideas that he encounters or deals with in his conscious state. In dreaming about these dialectical positions, Jack goes "through a process we might call self-interpretation. ... Thus[,] the dream could be thought of as what the mind creates in response to what it has already created" (States, 2001: 110). The "dream images ... seem relevant ... in the sense that they fit smoothly into" Jack's struggles to make sense of the extreme levels of adversity that humanity is exposed to and the incomprehensible human incongruities that he comes across in his humanitarian ventures. "In short, the plotting of the dream ... [captures Jack's] natural urge to speculate about the cause and relevance of events that occur. His dream [is symbolic of his conscious engagement in] speculations [on how to] alter the world itself (States, 2001: 111). The dream device creates a competitive and uncensored narrative space for human perceptions and views which, while arousing conflicting emotions in Jack, contribute to shaping his decision to return to Arakan – something that he eventually does.

All Thin, Scrawny and Emaciated: Descriptive Representation of Poverty

A number of descriptive excerpts are analysed earlier in this chapter. To illustrate more specifically and clearly how description functions as a narrative device to undertake a compelling representation of poverty, I isolate descriptions of two fictional communities - Shom and Bahadir - for analysis. In Shom,

... doors squeaked eerily. Out of their crumbling huts, almost as though out of their graves, the survivors of the killer famine crawled out to meet the strangers. ... all thin and scrawny, emaciated to the point of being uniformly unrecognizable, a row of skeletons. ... Their clothes ... were worn and grimy, imbued with the stench of death, a hot and dusty smell that seemed to permeate everywhere. Without a word, they made their way to the water bowser and milled around. The new-comers stood shocked beyond thought. Their first encounter with the true face of hunger, the crushing, dehumanizing state of extreme starvation. The numbing shock manifested itself in many ways, from a clutching terror that made one want to turn away and run, to a revulsion that made stomachs churn and heads swim with giddiness. ... The surest remedy was to ... talk to the living corpses and reassure oneself that they were indeed human and harmless (108)

As at Shom, the human condition at Bahadir as described below is despicable. There, Jack finds “[b]roken people, ghosts of people that had somehow survived, with their bodies more or less intact, the worst, most devastating of all natural calamities, half naked and half dead. They gathered round the convoy, about two hundred people in all ...” (212). One sees in the fictional episode above how Mwangi has “developed a decidedly cinematic vision in his writing ...” (Kurtz, 1998:

115) where the creak of doors that squeak eerily and of crumbling huts paint a picture of dilapidating physical surroundings that symbolize the dilapidation embodied in the characters – one that results from their grotesquely unfortunate material condition. Their physical state is captured in descriptive expressions such as “thin and scrawny”; “emaciated”, “row of skeletons”; “[b]roken people”; “ghosts of people”; “half naked and half dead” and in the reference to their “worn and grimy” clothes. These descriptions are of dreadful conditions and point to the terrible physical impact that poverty has on the poor.

The awful picture is accented and indeed amplified by a description of movements and actions which show that the poor “crawl” almost as out of “their graves”. So, “[w]ithout a word, they made their way to the water bowser and milled around”. At Bahadir, “they gathered round the convoy”. Poverty and the state to which it has reduced its victims is movingly dramatized, with great potential to appeal to the reader. Some of the movements that are described here deserve analysis. The image of humans “crawling” suggests that their poverty has debased them to the level of reptiles. Suggesting that they crawl “almost as through out of their graves” evokes eery pictures similar to those in horror screen scenes such as Michael Jackson's *Thriller*. This ghostly atmosphere reveals the horror that characterizes their existence. It suggests that they may be alive, but that extreme poverty and starvation have reduced them to near lifeless creatures. The image of death predominates in the novel's depictions of the poor, equating extreme forms of poverty with death. The wordless movements suggest that the deformities that poverty causes are not only physical, or rather, it shows how a fictional text can only resort to the dramatisation of an impossible dialogue with those too wrecked by poverty to speak for themselves, or initiate a discussion. The acts of milling around the water bowser and gathering around the convoy are symbolic. They symbolize the animal-like behaviour or attitude of herded animals milling and perhaps scrambling for the waterhole when given the opportunity by the herder. By extension, the convoy and the supplies that they bring symbolically replace the natural sources of animal subsistence – food and water, which in the human context are increasingly diminishing and creating a dependence on food aid.

An important aspect of the descriptive passage quoted above is the responses to the described condition of poverty by Jack and his convoy.

The new-comers stood shocked beyond thought ... The numbing shock manifested itself in many ways, from a clutching terror that made one want to turn away and run, to a revulsion that made stomachs churn and heads swim with giddiness. ... The surest remedy was to ... talk to the living corpses and reassure oneself that they were indeed human and harmless. (108)

Their responses preempt the effect that the descriptive narrative is likely to have on the reader. Like the fictional new-comers, the reader is likely to be numbed, shocked and revolted, and such

responses have the potential to solicit not just sympathy for the poor, but also to galvanize support for humanitarian ventures like that undertaken by Jack. The text does not ignore the possibility that witnessing such excruciating adversity may make "one want to turn away and run". However, rather than turn away and run, the characters "talk to the living corpses and [in so doing] reassure [themselves] that they were indeed human and harmless" (108). Beyond just emphasizing the importance of talk/voice, this narrative excerpt shows how poverty turns the human body into a grotesque object of fear and shame. However, the human ability to deal with such sights humanely is shown in the convoy member's rapid recovery from the shock, in accepting the humanness of these deformed subjects of extreme poverty.

It should be noted that the descriptive narrative has a sensory appeal that extends beyond just seeing (as shown above) to smelling and feeling. The sense of scent is invoked through the statement: "[their] clothes ... were ... imbued with the stench of death, a hot and dusty smell that seemed to permeate everywhere", while feeling is invoked through the statement: "[t]he numbing shock manifested itself in many ways" (108). In capturing four of six human senses in one passage, the novel offers a compelling representation of dire poverty. The reader is taken through an imaginative process of smelling the stench that is evoked and feeling the numbness that an encounter with extreme poverty elicits. The novel communicates a heightened awareness of a dreadful state of poverty. Generally, the poignancy of Mwangi's work lies in his ability to balance representational strategies. Descriptive representations such as those analysed above allow "an intimate sensing[,] reveal[ing] successive layers of meaning" and submersing the reader into "imaginings of ... the uniting thread [and] tapestry[,] of place [and human] evocation" that paint a visual picture of poverty (Pocock, 1996: 377). Indeed, the descriptions "give outward expression to a myriad of inner feelings and promptings" that are embodied in the characters described, enabling the reader to profoundly observe and absorb the conditions described (Pocock, 1996: 377).

The rest of this chapter examines how Doyle uses voice and description as a representational device to depict experiences of poverty. I trace ways in which Paula Spencer uses the power of voice that fiction affords her to narrate her condition and experience of poverty and to attempt to make sense of what seems a meaningless situation. As in the analysis of Mwangi's text, the analysis of Doyle's *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* is partitioned into different sections. Section one examines how she articulates an enthused and buoyant attitude that characterizes her youth and which shapes her aspirations, but also reveals how rapidly the aspirations turn into illusions and then into disillusionment. This is covered in the section titled: *Wheels off the magic bus: the elusiveness of a poor woman's aspirations*. As she matures, the reality of her material condition – characterized by poverty and misery – dawns on her, as shown in the third section titled *It kills me writing that and reading it – I could never afford good shoes for my kids: the dawn of reality*. This realization is articulated in a voice that characterizes herself, but in some instances, also her

husband and children as victim/s. Victimhood is the focus of the section: *If he'd had other work, he would have put that anger to use: Pitiful victims?* As is shown in section four, Paula gets a better understanding of her material condition by drawing on the idea of relativism. In this section, I examine Paula's state of relative deprivation. At her poorest, Paula is still better off than the poor of Mwangi's novel who are facing life-threatening deprivation. This section will be titled: *It's not so bad now: relativity of condition and perception*. Voice serves as an important device that offers poignant representations of the condition of poverty, but description plays a complementary role, enabling the reader to visualize aspects of Paula's life as shown in section five on: *Neighbours above and below us as well as beside us: descriptive representation of poverty*. In spite of the adversity that characterizes her life, Paula's voice exposes or perhaps enhances her tenacious and resilient personality, which is the focus of section six, titled: *I never gave up, I made ends meet: reclaimed space*.

Wheels Off the Magic Bus: the Elusiveness of a Poor Woman's Aspirations

Here, I examine how hopefulness turns into despair as the aspirations of the poor progressively fade away. In the early stage of their relationship, Paula and Charlo are luxuriously and in Charlo's case, cheekily aspirant. Their aspirations and more importantly how they are voiced create space for an understanding of their worldview and by extension, that of other poor persons. They promise themselves:

We'd go over Europe and Asia, through India. There was something called the magic bus. We'd save enough money and take our time. ... The Taj Mahal. We'd go through Burma and China. ... We'd drop in on Chairman Mao for a cup of tea. We'd spend the winter in Shanghai, then we'd head south for Australia and the rest of our lives. Summer in the winter. Upside-down. Aborigines and Skippy. (132-133)

Significant in the passage is the geographical and socioeconomic situation of the places that they plan to visit. Although they plan to "go over [unnamed places in] Europe", the few named places that she lists are geographically in the East and the South. This stands as a subtle indication of rupture with the mainly capitalist West that Paula inhabits and an attraction to places where core values would seem more advantageous to the poor. Symbolically, the choice of Burma and China, a cup of tea with Chairman Mao and winter in Shanghai suggest the kind of values that they aspire to – socialist and humanist compassion as a strategy to deal with material misfortune. Mao Tse-tung stands as a symbol of the human ability to overcome indigence and adversity. This is on the basis of his ability, "from the Liberation in 1949 until his death in 1976, ... [to] direct one of the most ambitious, wide-ranging, and, some would say, inspiring programs of social [and economic] engineering ever undertaken" (Eberstadt 1980: 120). Even the plan to visit Australia is symbolic. This, more so because the visit is with the intention, not to interact with and experience mainstream westernized Australian society but rather, the indigenous Aboriginal Australians and the Skippy. There has "been seen to be some relationship between the Aborigines and the Irish. ... the very

large number of people who are of mixed blood in [Australia] ... are in fact a mixture of Aboriginal and Irish" (Ingram, 2001: 166). The Aborigines serve as an inspiring example of how human society, aware of the challenges placed in its path, lives creatively and aspires to a set of societal values that would – drawing on the significantly important human capital – ensure survival. One such creative response to adversity is seen in the suggestion that in conditions of material adversity, "... Aboriginal families ... [take] up residence with people ... with whom it was essential to have social relationships that permitted ... a willingness to share ... resources" (Gould, 1991: 14). Conversely, as a marginalized group, it is possible that the poor European simply feels affinity with the marginalized Aboriginals.

Paula hastens to announce that "We didn't go. We didn't want to. We didn't need to. We were happy. We had money. We could see the mountains from the roof flats we were moving into. We were in love. Our whole lives ahead of us" (133). Their reason for not going is significant. They choose to stay because of the glimpse of a hopeful future in their home country and immediate surroundings. It should be noted that they are indeed (as I argue above) planning the trip in the first place as an escape from what seems at that moment an unfavorable socioeconomic future in their home into societies where they foresee the prospect of benefiting by a humanist socioeconomic value system. However, in the immediate postnuptial period captured above, the need for this escape dissipates with the conception of favourable material fortunes and a renewed sense of hope in their homeland. This is captured in the statement: "[o]ur whole lives ahead of us". Clearly, the life that they are shown living subsequent to this statement in the novel is a far cry from what they initially hoped for. The novel emphasises the unstable nature of human experience, suggesting that, while the mind conceives a desired existence, the reality is often the reverse, or continually elusive.

In what stands as a prelude to the revelation of a somewhat demented personality, Charlo expresses his version of aspiration in a tone that is arrogant and insensitive. During their wedding, Charlo asks the chauffeur – possibly of a vehicle in which they are driving: " __ How much do these things cost? [referring to the vehicle] ... __ I don't know, said the chauffeur. __ I don't own it. ... I'll get you one, Charlo told me. __ How much are your wages, pal" (135). This again points to the aspiring nature of the two young people. The views that they express have a number of implications. Firstly, they suggest that it is a common human tendency to be hopeful, regardless of current material circumstances, when youthful. Secondly, they indicate the impermanence of human conditions, suggesting that materially speaking, the two characters are reasonably comfortable at the beginning, but their situation deteriorates progressively. The changing material fortunes of Paula and Charlo are representative of the changing economic and material fortunes of Dublin, a point that is emphasized in the fiction when Paula states that: "If he'd had other work when all the building around Dublin stopped and there was nothing left for him to do. He would

have put that anger to use" (191). Paula's view confirms that "[t]he downward spiral of [Dublin and] urban decay was real enough ... [in the 90s, partly blamed on] landlords for abandoning buildings" (Smith, 1999: 99). The abandoning of buildings by landlords stands symbolically for the general lack of employment creation that aggravates poverty. The poor use this as an explanation of a condition that originates in a complex strand of causes and therefore requires innovative responses to deal with it. In response to poverty, the poor seem to "manufacture illusions to ease [their] pain" (Bosworth, 1979: 17). One might argue that the psychological and emotional effects of poverty on Paula and Charlo are aggravated by their dashed hopes of ever exiting a life of poverty. In spite of its elusiveness, hope (as I argue in chapter three of this study), in all likelihood, is the only commodity on which the poor rely for surviving adversity. Even at the climax of the many abuses that Charlo inflicts on her, Paula still *hopes* that "[h]e'd be fine. He'd get a job and everything would go back to normal. He loved me" (205). Nonetheless, eventually she has to undertake a transition from living in illusory hope and aspiration to self-realization and awareness of the reality of her situation – as shown in the section that follows. When this happens, the voice assumes a level of authenticity that allows understanding of the reality of daily experiences of poverty in the Western context.

It Kills Me Writing That and Reading It – I Could Never Afford Good Shoes for My Kids: the Dawn of Reality

The tone in which Paula recounts the experiences of poverty discussed here is subdued and less elaborate than that in which she and her husband initially forecast their future. The tone of her voice evokes her inner feelings but also, her material state of being – suggesting that poverty is both a material and a metaphysical condition. She states:

I've never been able to afford good shoes for my own kids – *good* shoes – and they've never complained about cold feet. Poor Leanne had to go through one whole winter in runners and she never whinged once. She got them drenched one day and I took them off her when she got home from school. (9-10)

Shoes or rather a lack of shoes is symbolic of general lack that characterizes the life of her family. The shoes and by extension the "cold feet" are metonymic of the general lack and pain that the poor are exposed to. The suggestion that "they've never complained" and Leanne "never whinged once" draws attention to how Paula's children are brave and unselfish, in not plaguing her to get them things that she cannot afford. Additionally, the point implies that poverty has the potential to numb its victim who, left with no alternative, bears the pain of poverty silently. It is this same silence that is broken in the *Woman Who Walked into Doors* when Paula's voice acquires a liberating significance in her narration of poverty. When she recounts that Leanne is without shoes for a year, while in one of the houses that she cleans, "the kids have everything" (95), the satirical weapon is directed sharply at a society with gross levels of material inequality. By extension, this attacks the human vice of selfish accumulation. It would be naive to read this episode merely as satirizing

inequality. What I interpret as an attack on inequality could also be read as a depiction of the relative nature of poverty (or poverty "perception") and, since I cover the issue of relativity in greater detail in a subsequent section of this chapter, I will be brief here. Paula's daughter does not entirely lack shoes in the sense of having to go barefoot. She has shoes, but not good shoes – runners, inadequate protection in the freezing European winter. Obviously, many children in the world and more particularly Africa – actual and the fictional that Mwangi depicts – are completely without shoes. This points to the relativity of poverty – shown more explicitly when Paula declares that:

My kids never complained though, and they would have if they'd been really cold. That's one of the good things about living where we live; you're never alone, there's always someone as badly off as you - there are plenty. Now and again it would be nice to see somebody worse off, but I only get that comfort from the telly, the reports from the third world on the News. The pictures from Sarajevo were very bad but they all seemed to have good warm clothes. (10)

Implied here is the view that the extent to which a subject of adversity feels the pain inflicted by adversity does not depend solely on the intensity of the pain created. Rather, it depends partly on how the subject makes sense of his or her pain in relation to that of others in his or her surroundings and beyond. Paula's children do not complain and it is not because they do not feel cold without good shoes. Rather, it is because they find comfort in the possibility that they are "never alone, there's always someone as badly off as [they are] – there are plenty" (10). Paula's relativist response to her condition of poverty extends beyond the local to assume an international dimension as she takes note of reports from the Third World – Sarajevo in particular, where the situation depicted is "very bad" (10). The situation in Sarajevo is considerably worse than that in her local community/city/country (Ireland). In a statement that further complicates the notion and the conception of the relativity of poverty, even in this very bad situation, the poor of Sarajevo "all seemed to have good warm clothes" (10).

In a narrative perspective that contrasts with the cheerful demeanor transmitted by Paula's voice in some of the earlier passages analysed previously, she questions: "What did I do in the 80s" (204)? Responding to this seemingly rhetorical question, she announces:

I walked into doors ... I discovered that I was poor, that I'd no right to the hope I'd started out with. I was going nowhere, straight there. Trapped in a house that would never be mine. With a husband who fed on my pain. Watching my children going nowhere with me; the cruelest thing of the lot. No hope to give them. ... I was their future. ... Violence, fat and an empty fridge. A bottle of gin but no meat. Do your homework, say your prayers, brush your teeth, say please and thank you ___ and you will end up like me. (204)

The voice that the reader "hears" in this passage is very different from the voice that narrates Paula's initial hope and desire to explore the world. Opposed to the youthful voice that evokes the possibility of a bountiful future, this is a more mature and realistic but less ecstatic and a more

melancholic Paula. She has accepted her reality and she has grown. It is this acceptance and growth that eventually enables the determination and resilience that she shows later in the text. The images conjured by the passage are intensely depressing – images such as "walking into doors" (her explanation for injuries inflicted by her abusive husband); the discovery that she is "poor" (which signals her coming of age, growth and a sense of self-consciousness of her reality); "going nowhere" and being "trapped" (which show the stagnation, gloom and general paralysis that accompanies poverty); a husband who "feeds on [her] pain" (which conjures a cannibalistic image of her husband, or rather, of his treatment of her). Obvious in the narrative excerpt is the reality of her material condition – one where she is trapped in "a house that would never be [hers]", referring to her permanence as a tenant, a state of being that remains unchanged throughout the novel and into the sequel to this novel, *Paula Spencer* (2006) – where she is still a tenant. Additionally, the passage above captures the reality of an "empty fridge", but one in which she can still afford "a bottle of gin but no meat" (referring to her alcoholism) and the negative consequences that this has had on her family. Generally, the passage, using a variety of appalling images, captures her adverse material conditions and the resultant emotional, psychological and spiritual deprivation – dimensions of poverty covered in greater detail in the fifth and last chapter of this thesis. It is in recounting these adversities that Paula reclaims her selfhood, grows, resists and begins to liberate herself from material adversity and all the challenges that it places in her path.

If He'd Had Other Work, He Would Have Put that Anger to Use: Pitiful Victim?

In this section, I examine how Paula seeks to attribute blame for her circumstance. She blames herself, Charlo and the broader society and perhaps fate. She declares: "[h]e left me without money and I was guilty ... the kids ... went hungry and it was my fault" (206), adding that "[m]y children have gone without food because of my drinking" (88). Further, she blames: "[m]e and my big mouth. I'd have made him his tea" (169). The passages quoted above allow for a number of readings. It is possible that the pressure inflicted on Paula by her adverse material conditions, coupled with the abuse that she suffers at the hands of her husband, have diminished her sense of selfhood and self-esteem – to the extent that she unduly blames herself for the suffering endured by her children. She seems to reveal a prevailing sense of guilt and self-admonishment as she blames herself even for working after hours to take care of her family (160). The repeated expression of self-admonishment is ironical as it is clearly revealed that her children go hungry mainly because her husband "left [her] without money". The possibility of a diminished sense of self or perhaps even an expression of the low value that she places on her own needs as a person is again seen in the fact that she seeks to justify what seem to be unjustifiable beatings inflicted on her by blaming herself: "me and my big mouth. I'd have made him his tea" (169). One may read the act of self-blame simply as an attempt to keep herself in check in the future. Read from this angle, it suggests the possibility that Paula is unlike her husband and, in spite of the adversity and abuse that is placed in her way, very mature, sensitive, selfless, able to take responsibility and, if anything, too

conscientious. It is these same characteristics that the husband is shown to lack, resulting in his demise and her survival. Even when she admits that "[m]y children have gone without food because of my drinking", this, rather than show weakness of character, reveals her awakening strength of character and spirit and stands as the first step to her recovery, which comes to completion in the sequel, *Paula Spencer*. Paula's predicament in *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* implies that in poor households like her's, the material, emotional and psychological brunt of poverty is borne mostly by women. This is precisely because women like Paula, in comparison with their husbands, seem to have a high level of sensitivity with regard to the impact of adverse material conditions on their family – more especially, on the children. As such, they invest a lot more (emotionally and physically) into reversing this, and as such, expose themselves to greater strain than the men. Rather than destroying her, the strain generally strengthens the woman, and more particularly, Paula. The obstacles placed in the way of Irish women such as Paula, rather than reduce them to subdued victims,

... have meant that Ireland has a continually vibrant women's [response to adversity]. Irish women are still subjected to ferocious forms of social control, yet far from reducing [them] to silent acquiescence, those very controls have served to fuel the dynamics of ... protest. (Myth, 1993 as quoted in Smyth, 1995: 38)

Elsewhere in the novel, Paula portrays herself as a victim of her husband's profligate lifestyle and of his uncaring nature. Paula articulates this predicament in a voice that appeals to the reader's sympathy. The evocative effect of the statements lies in their pitiful tone of voice. She declares: "I wanted Charlo to come in and see me, to see how desperate I was. He had money, I knew he did. The smell of his breath told me that. He didn't come home that night, though. I'm almost certain he didn't. I don't put all the blame on him, either" (10). In addition to describing herself as being "desperate", the reader is likely to "hear" even greater desperation in her voice than in the actual inscription of the word "desperate" on the page. This way, the novel appeals to a multiplicity of senses, using a simple/single narrative act – evoking our sight in the inscribed word "desperate", and smell in the phrase: "smell of his breath" and, most importantly for this section, hearing but also feeling through the pitiful tone of voice. Such a multi-evocative representational approach is effective and "readers [may]... find themselves led ... to fear, to grief, to pity, to anger, even to" compassion (Nussbaum, 1996: 53). In such a narrative instance, "[e]motions are not just likely responses to the content of [fiction]; they are built into their very structure, as ways in which literary forms solicit attention" (Nussbaum, 1996: 53). In fact, when a representation such as that in the fictional passage above evokes grief, pity and fear for the plight of the character and fear too for themselves, the reader "would not want it to be repeated [in actual life], indeed [s/he] would try to avoid it and prevent the occurrences of occasions which [s/he] thought would evoke it. Certainly [s/he] would not go out of his or her way to bring about those occasions" (Eaton, 1982: 51 as quoted in Brock, 2007: 228). Returning to the key issue of victimhood, in the specific instances highlighted above, Paula obviously conceives of herself as a victim and the tone serves to heighten

the evocation of victimhood. Effective use of voice to appeal to one's hearing would, I argue, allow for a greater prospect of the reader being affected by the emotions brought to life in the words. Although Paula blames Charlo for her condition, she at the same time seeks to deflect blame from Charlo through the statement: "I don't put all the blame on him, either" (10). She espouses the perspective that while she is a victim of Charlo's callousness, Charlo is himself a victim – a perspective that she states more explicitly elsewhere, as I show in the analysis below.

Paula declares: "If he'd had other work when all the building around Dublin stopped and there was nothing left for him to do. He would have put that anger to use" (191). Clearly, Paula here blames broader, deteriorating economic circumstances in fictional Dublin for her husband's material condition and his consequent appalling actions. She calls attention to the rising unemployment and the resultant idleness and mischief as explanations and perhaps even justification for his "useless anger" - his inability or perhaps refusal to look after his family materially, the physical abuse of his wife, the commission of the robbery and murder that result in his shooting by the police and all the other incongruities that he embodies. Surely, the gravity of these acts puts into sharp relief any effort to use unemployment or poverty as justifications. Of course, prolonged unemployment could potentially impact negatively on an individual's personality, but it does not necessarily condition one to act violently and criminally, in the way Charlo does. Evidently, his insensitivity, irresponsibility, violence and lack of compassion and the near total neglect of parental and marital care he exhibits result from more fundamental individual dispositional weaknesses. Appealing to this kind of victimhood rhetoric as a way of giving meaning to human ineptitude in the face of adversity is unconvincing if one considers that "[a]ctions [such as those committed by Charlo] ... deny [others their] dignity, even if [he has] ... unblemished intentions and the victims [such as Paula] welcome the actions" (Greenawalt, 2000: 781).

Nonetheless, Paula clearly articulates the position that society or some in the society, more especially the rich, are partly to blame for worsening her condition or feeling of poverty - material, psychological and emotional. Speaking about one of the houses that she cleans and its occupants, she recounts: "the kids make shite of the house all week and I arrive on Fridays and clean it up so they can start all over again on Saturday. I think kids should clean up their own messes. Mine always did" (95). There is a clear attempt in the narrative to suggest that kids in this rich household are spoilt. To make this view more apparent, Paula compares them with her own kids, who unlike those in the rich house, clean their own messes. Implied here is the suggestion that material wealth does not necessarily ensure decency and stability in the other dimensions of one's personality and life, in this case, responsible upbringing of children. In a description that enables the reader to visualize the "unbelievable" (95) state of the house and by extension the irresponsibility of the children and their rich mother, she describes: "[m]arker and paint on the walls and fridge, dirty clothes on the stairs, crumbs and bits of stood-on sandwiches all over the place. They wait for

me. I even have to put the videos and CDs back into their boxes because the room would look untouched if I didn't" (95). The description serves as an indictment of the mother and partly explains why she feels guilty, as suggested in the passage that follows. Paula explains:

She doesn't work; she leaves the house when I arrive. She kind of sneaks; she looks guilty. So she should, the bitch. She gets home just when I'm leaving. I saw her sitting in her car once, outside their gate on the road, waiting for me to finish; I saw her from their bedroom window. Waiting for me. (95)

The suggestion that this woman does not work but at the same time does not invest the free time in bringing up responsible and disciplined children heightens the evocation of an irresponsible rich person. This can however not be read as a generalized characterization of all wealthy women. When Paula states that the woman sneaks away guiltily without offering reasons for her supposed feeling of guilt, this opens an analytical space for the reader to bring his or her own interpretation to the narrative instance. Possible explanations could be offered for her feeling of guilt: the (implied) deplorable upbringing of her children; the fact that her house is in the state that Paula describes; the fact that the woman is uncomfortably aware of the wide gap of material inequality between the rich represented by herself and the poor – represented by Paula. Perhaps she feels guilty because of the inconsiderately unpleasant work conditions that she creates for Paula, as demonstrated in the statement: "the kids make shite of the house all week and I arrive on Fridays and clean it up so they can start all over again on Saturday" and in the suggestion that "[t]hey wait for me". Paula seems to articulate the view that the family members go out of their way to deliberately dirty the house, increasing her work load and "preparing" it for her, perhaps with the malicious intention of making her justify the wages that she sometimes does not even get on the normal payday – Friday. Generally, Paula represents her relationship with her employer here as that of victim and victimiser – a view that is stated more explicitly in the passage that follows.

She declares: "she's left me short a few times. ... It's not fair; I have to remind her the next week. I need that fuckin' money. It's Friday. It's the only house I feel jealous in; the kids have everything. I know; I pick it up" (95). Obvious in the passage above is the possibility that the woman who seems to be representative of a section of the rich in Paula's fictional Dublin is inconsiderate and insensitive. This is conveyed vividly through Paula's imitation of the tone in which the woman communicates the information to her. She mimics: "___ I'll see you next week. I forgot to get to the bank". The woman announces it to her too casually, unapologetically, and she seems to regard as normal the fact that she cannot pay Paula's meager but to her, essential wages on the payday. As a wealthy person, she is perhaps not exposed to the ravages of poverty and as a result is insensitive to the fact that the poor (Paula and her family's) sustenance depends on the "little" money that she earns from the cleaning job. Indeed, "[s]he has no fuckin idea" (95) of the implication of her inconsiderate actions. Access to wealth does not necessarily reduce her compassion for the poor but rather, it diminishes her understanding of the world and experiences of the poor and of poverty.

While Paula feels guilty for the hunger of her children, the woman, in spite (or because) of her wealth, feels guilty for the state of her house, the attitude of her children and her own inactivity, suggesting that material wealth does not necessarily guarantee a sense of fulfillment. The strength of the passages lies in Paula's ability to adopt multiple narrative voices and approaches in what seems a carefully crafted narrative. In varied voices, while she voices her understanding of the situation, Paula also dramatizes the woman's voice, making her actions more vivid. Additionally, she uses different narrative approaches to deepen understanding. This brief episode exhibits Doyle's ability to use a voice embodying character to craft an episode that starts from a simple act, builds momentum and reaches a climax, taking the reader along with it. Clearly evident in the passages analysed above, besides the conceptualization of victimhood, is a representation of poverty as a relative condition – a point covered in greater detail below.

It's not so bad now: relativity of condition and perception

Paula, in narrating her situation, repeatedly hints at the relativity of human experience in general but more particularly, the relativity of poverty, as well as the relativity of her changing subjectivity. Poverty as she conceives it, "turns out to be not objective and immutable, but socially determined and ever changing ... [undermining] any attempt to rigorously quantify a definition of poverty" (Pradhan and Ravallion, 2000: 462). She declares: "[i]t's not so bad now. I'm a veteran. I'm a scrubber, first class. I've won medals" (109). She is in this instance redefining herself as a producer of wealth rather than just a consumer of wealth, as she is depicted in the episode where she blames Charlo for leaving her and consequently her children without money and therefore, hungry. Emphasis is not placed on the monetary value of work here, but rather in its self-affirmative or image-affirmative value. When she declares that "it's not so bad now", she is not referring just to her improved material condition, but also to what seems an elevated sense of self-esteem which seems to result from the fact that she has accepted her reality (as discussed earlier). Depicted here is the possibility that "the circumstances of the individual relative to others in [a] reference group influence perceptions of well-being at any given level of individual command over commodities" (Pradhan and Ravallion, 2000: 462). This is in spite of the fact that she is aware of the inferior nature of her job, as subtly articulated in what seem to be self-directed sarcastic undertones in the statements: "I'm a veteran. I'm a scrubber, first class. I've won medals" (109). Through the self-directed sarcasm or mockery, she rates/assesses her current situation as less comfortable in relation to that of others in her society, but also more comfortable than her previous condition as a wife. This relativised conceptualization of self and career is made more explicit in the statement: "Dolly Parton won't be playing me in the film __ but it's my job" (106). Considered in relation to the episode where she sees herself merely as a victim of Charlo's abuse, one is made to recognise that when an abused person and in particular an abused woman becomes independent and less reliant on another person (a man, in this case) for material and emotional sustenance, she becomes more self-assertive and materially, psychologically and emotionally more stable and better equipped to

navigate a new and a more sublimated course. Additionally, she thrives on adversity and this is symptomatic of many Irish women's response to adversity where, with

... the persistence of poverty[,] ... continuing denials of human and civil rights [which] constitute real and serious deprivations[,] ... Ireland ... is still one of the very few countries in the world to have elected a feminist head of state and to positively delight in her adroit leadership on social issues. [Additionally Ireland has] a higher proportion of women in parliament than Britain, France or the USA. (Gardiner, 1993 and Rose, 1994 as quoted in Smyth, 1995: 38)

In theorizing the situation of the Irish woman, the critical text quoted above deepens and broadens the discourse on relativism to a national dimension and beyond. In spite of the adversity that she has to contend with on a daily basis, the Irish woman (the fictional and the actual), relative to women elsewhere in the developed world, shows extraordinary courage and therefore is shown to dismantle the objects that subject her to poverty.

In spite of personal stability, Paula does not have any utopian expectations as she is constantly alerted to her relatively less fortunate material circumstance by what she perceives as the wastage of material resources by others in her community. She confesses: "I read a magazine if I find one in an office bin. ... I've found books in the bins a few times. I couldn't believe it the first time. A book! Thrown away" (109). When she hears that Mrs Doyle's daughter suffocated in a fridge in a field, Paula wonders: "A fridge in a field. The luxury of it as well, being able to throw away a fridge" (151). Paula's views situate her as one who lacks – also implying that where one has experienced or is experiencing poverty, s/he tends to attribute a higher value to material goods even if damaged than do those who are wealthy – thus indicating a wide gap of material inequality in her society. This explains why the collection of, survival on and the trade in scrap and second-hand goods discarded by the relatively wealthier citizens is a common phenomenon in actual societies, especially those with a wide gap of inequality such as South Africa. Additionally, the emphasis that Paula places on her reading the magazine found in the bin suggests that the aspirations of the poor are not limited to basic material necessities, but also to higher level but less accessible privileges, such as education and the opportunity to own and read books. Paula expresses shock, not at the suffocation of Mrs Doyle's daughter in the fridge, but rather at the unimaginable "luxury" of throwing away a fridge. This does not necessarily depict her as being insensitive. Rather, it suggests that the poor, when faced with incidents such as the suffocation, pay greater attention to the material aspects of the incident.

Paula's statements may seem to suggest that the poor deliberately expose themselves to the world of the wealthy, in an attempt to make sense of and give meaning to their own situation. Paula declares: "I like the morning cleaning. ... I like seeing into other people's houses. Funny I hardly ever feel jealous" (93). She adds, "[i]t's the only house I feel jealous in; the kids have everything. I

know; I pick it up" (95). She is shown engaging in what seems to be a form of voyeurism. It is significant that she finds it "funny" that she "hardly ever feels jealous" in the houses that she cleans, but is particularly jealous in the house where "the kids have everything". This implies that jealousy is a natural human attribute especially in situations of gross material disparity, yet that in her own case it occurs on behalf of her children rather than on her own account. Such jealousy could be negative but also, positive. In her case, she is shown to be motivated in her quest for material improvement by the exposure to wealth and by converting the feeling of jealousy into constructive effort to better her situation. Of course, jealousy is not always constructive; such jealousy could in other cases find negative, malicious outlets. In her case, it should be noted that she is not selfishly jealous but feels so on behalf of her children – paradoxically an "unselfish jealousy".

Paula's attempt to relativise understanding of poverty transcends spatiality. Seeming to justify the physical abuse she suffers at her husband's hands, she declares: "Me and my big mouth. I'd have made him his tea. ... If I was in India or Africa I'd be picking my own fuckin' tea" (169-170). Key in the passage quoted here is Paula's understanding of her situation in relation to that of Indian and African women. This is significant, considering that poverty is commonly associated with India and Africa, or rather, that these two regions are commonly associated with extreme levels of poverty and despair. In comparing what she recognises as her own more favourable situation to those of African and Indian women, Paula lends insight into the more general and universal "intimations of postcolonial promise and despair" – especially for women and, as a marginalized and deprived postcolonial subject, her personal despair as well (8). She suggests that the postcolonial woman, "weighed down by the intransigence of cultural gender roles and values, refuses to be passive. ... She must act" (Shaw, 2007 13). She universalizes the experience of poverty by the postcolonial woman but also makes explicit the point that her Dublin setting – fictional and by extension actual – leaves her relatively better-off than the Indian and African woman. The Indian and the African woman, she implies, would not only be expected to make tea for her husband unquestioningly, but also pick her own tea. If one considers the lethal condition of poverty depicted in Mwangi's *Weapon of Hunger* as representative of Africa in general, then Paula's point concerning the relatively poorer state of Africa is valid. She may be considered poor in the Irish context, but in an African and perhaps an Indian context, she would be seen as being relatively rich. Although it is a common tendency mostly in some nonfictional forms of representation, the condition and experiences of poverty on a whole continent cannot, however, be generalized. Paula's relativist response to her condition and experience, I conclude, allows this subject of poverty to develop a deeper understanding of her situation as the *Other* serves as a mirror in which she recognises her relative advantage (or disadvantage) and acts upon it.

Neighbours above and below us as well as beside us: descriptive representation of poverty

Here, I examine how Paula uses the power of voice not simply to *tell* but also to *show* her situation – taking the reader on a visual tour of the setting that she describes and enabling one symbolically to inhale the scents that she describes. She states:

We were in our flat in Sherrard Street, It was nice ... __ except for the smell when you came in the hall door downstairs, the warm, sweating smell of old cabbage and nappies. Even the damp patch in the living room had a pattern that made it look deliberate. ... We shared the bathroom and toilet with four other flats. There were some right dirtbirds and weirdos on our floor. ... I remember the winter when I was pregnant with Nicola, the mornings; looking out the door to see if the toilet door was open, the cold dash back to the flat. The people trying the door, the dash back to the flat. ...there were neighbours above and below us as well as beside us (165)

This quotation shows a remarkable resemblance to that analysed earlier in this chapter to show how Mwangi uses description to represent conditions of poverty. This resemblance occurs in terms of artistic and dramatic quality. Interestingly, the above passage, as suggested when I analysed Mwangi's descriptive passage, also demonstrates dramatic influences on the novel, resulting from Doyle's practice as novelist and dramatist. The reader is made to imagine and to have a heightened encounter with the "warm sweating smell of old cabbage and nappies" in the hall. These images serve to portray the space as unpleasant to inhabit and indeed as a health hazard. The claim that "[e]ven the damp patch in the living room had a pattern that made it look *deliberate*" (my emphasis) could be read as referring to the possibility that the extremely unhygienic conditions of the accommodation are partly a consequence of human actions, as they indeed are if one assumes that the smelly nappies and cabbage are a consequence of littering by occupants and their crowded accommodation. The passage also implies that institutions charged with the responsibility may not be providing services such as sewage removal, but even so the poor inhabitants are to an extent responsible for the lack of hygiene. This is seemingly out of malice and carelessness, if one considers Paula's assertion that "[t]here were some right dirtbirds and weirdos on our floor". Implied in the narrative is the view that the poor, especially in overcrowded conditions (and with serious ramifications), are less likely to be concerned about non-material but equally important aspects of their life such as hygiene. They are more concerned with fulfilling the most basic material needs such as food, water and shelter. Indeed, the deplorable condition of this Dublin community is made worse by overcrowding, as captured in the statement: "[w]e shared the bathroom and toilet with four other flats ... There ... were neighbours above and below us as well as beside us". The overcrowding results in the dramatically described acts of "looking out the door to see if the toilet door was open, the cold dash back to the flat. The people trying the door, the dash back to the flat" (165). The reader is made to visualize with dramatic flavour, the movements described and in so doing, to develop an intimate understanding of the deplorable condition that is described. Dramatisation enables Doyle to achieve "a more lively and vivid presentation of events" (Waters, 1966: 161). Although the entertainment value of the episode stands out, the serious

purpose of the message is also implicit throughout. Implied here is the view that the life of the poor is characterized by endless negotiation and renegotiation to ensure access to the most basic amenities that are commonly taken for granted. The poor characters are taken to the extreme of having to negotiate access to a toilet – the facility where the most basic and natural human act is supposed to happen, unhindered. The problem of the non – or inadequate provision of toilet facilities to the poor is a serious indictment on any society, showing the extent to which the human rights and dignity of the poor are abused. This is a universal issue in many actual (non-fictional), societies such as South Africa, where what has been termed "the open-toilet saga" has become part of mainstream political discourse. This, mainly because both the ruling African National Congress ANC and the main opposition party, the Democratic Alliance (DA), have been accused of causing the poor in some of their municipalities to use open toilets. When faced with poverty or the difficult situation of distributing scarce services to citizenry, it seems society is more likely to neglect hygiene and sanitation amenities such as toilet facilities which are seen as less fundamental basic survivalist needs than the provision of water and shelter – despite the evident effect of poor sanitation on human health. Doyle subtly insists that often neglected issues such as hygiene and sanitation require official attention in service provision endeavours. He demonstrates the health implications of the unhygienic conditions described in the statement: "there was always someone coughing" (165). The evocation of the intense negotiations and the deplorable conditions under which this community is shown to live – the acts of "looking out the door to see if the toilet door was open, dash[ing] back to the flat ... trying the door, [and] dash[ing] back to the flat" (165) – are wryly humorous and serve as comic relief that might minimise the effect of reading about what could strike one as a merely depressing or shocking conditions. In this way, artistic pleasure is retained even while human misery is compassionately evoked.

I never gave up, I made ends meet: the resilience of a poor woman

In this section, I examine how Paula's voice captures the resilience that ensures her resistance to poverty and her eventual survival. I analyse passages in which her creativity, tenacity, temerity, personal talent, dedication to a culture of work and balance (but also ability to compromise) are evoked as qualities that she uses to cope with and eventually overcome poverty.

Paula's creativity helps her to deal with the general state of lack that characterizes her life and those of her children. When Leanne's only pair of shoes gets wet in school, she reports:

I stuffed them with paper and put them up to the fire and hoped to God they'd be properly dry in the morning because I didn't have the money to get her another pair. They were still damp, a bit less than wet, at bedtime so I put them in the oven. I preheated it, then turned it way down and put them in. I sat in the kitchen for an hour and kept taking them out to make sure they didn't melt. It worked. (10)

This episode reveals Paula's desperation. Apparent in the passage also is the suggestion that, in spite of the desperation, the ability to survive adversity but more particularly, to care for one's offspring is beyond measure. It is this spirit that nurtures the kind of creativity or "the discovery of [the kind of] novel ideas [and] actions" (Fredrickson, 2003: 333) that Paula exhibits in the passage above.

Although Doyle portrays realistically how the poor attempt to cope creatively with poverty on a daily basis, his evocation also bears symbolic significance. The wetness of the shoes may stand for the ways in which experiences of demeaning poverty dampen Paula's spirit and by extension, those of her family members. Stuffing the shoes with paper, putting them up to the fire and hoping to God they would be properly dry, warming them in the oven and generally minding them, stands for the processes of mending a human spirit that has been dampened and harmed by experiences of material adversity. The statement "[t]hey were still damp, a bit less than wet, at bedtime" suggests that once one has experienced extreme levels of poverty and abuse of the type that Paula is exposed to, a sense of brokenness results, to the extent that quick-fix measures do not ensure speedy recovery. The process is gradual, as suggested by the statement: "I sat in the kitchen for an hour and kept taking them out to make sure they didn't melt" (10). Eventually, the human person, even after the kind of adversity and deep brokenness that Paula experiences, has the potential over a sustained period of systematic "mending" to recover from the various shocks of poverty, as suggested by the statement: "it worked". Caring for and helping her children through conditions of poverty becomes for Paula an important self-affirmative and self-fulfilling mechanism, but also a good reflection of her personality and state of mind. In fact, it has been suggested that "being helpful not only springs from positive emotions, it also produces positive emotions. People who give help, for instance, can feel proud of their good deeds and so experience continued good feelings" (Fredrickson, 2003: 335). The fictional passage has the potential to inspire hope in and build the spirit of a person who is experiencing/has experienced excruciating poverty or has been affected physically, emotionally and psychologically by this kind of challenging material adversity.

Paula engages in a narrative journey intended to show the reader how she survives poverty – largely due to her creative ability. The emphasis that she places on creativity as a coping mechanism in situations of adversity is in itself symbolic. It parallels the significant importance of any creative act in providing understanding of, and possibly even solutions to social challenges such as poverty. In the context of this study, the importance of the novel form as a product of artistic creativity and a contributor to social knowledge and personal learning becomes recognizable. Returning to the issue of her creative response to poverty, I examine Paula's claim concerning Charlo:

He beat me brainless He left me without money They [the children] went hungry. I could invent a family meal with an egg and four slices of stale bread but I couldn't think properly. Couldn't think. I know for how long: seventeen years. ... Pain and the fear of it. ... over and over; world without end. Until I saw him looking at Nicola. (206)

Obvious in the passage above is juxtaposition of adversity with Paula's creative potential, but also the representation of the ambivalence of experience. The adverse conditions placed in her path include being beaten "brainless"; being "without money" and "hungry children". These are enormous challenges for one individual to bear and Paula's struggle to cope serves to amplify the simple yet powerful response of inventing "a family meal with an egg and four slices of *stale bread*" (my emphasis). Paula shows some level of ambivalence and perhaps even contradiction in representing her condition and experience. While (as she indicates) she deals with her adverse material condition through inventiveness and creativity, she at the same time contradicts herself in the repetitive statement that she "couldn't think". It raises the question, can one be creative and inventive and at the same time unable to think? The narrative ambivalence suggests that traumatic and disorientating experiences of the kind that she is exposed to can in some cases only be narrated in a disorientated voice. The suggestion that she bears the kind of adversity described for seventeen years, rather than showing weakness of character, depicts her adaptive potential and survival skills. Implied in the passage is the view that when such adversity affects women, and most importantly their children, they are likely to develop a stoic response and it is this stoicism, aided by her creative ability that enables Paula to survive the years of deprivation. The representation suggests that women can also "hide their feelings and emotions regardless of physical or emotional pain [, a view that is commonly held about] successful masculinity [which] is associated with stoicism in the face of stress, pain, and adversity" (Umberson et al., 2003: 233). This kind of statement by implication considers women emotional and men stoic. Paula is of course both female and stoic in the face of stress, pain, and adversity. Subtly placed in the passage is the importance of creativity in dealing with emotional and socioeconomic challenges. Paula's creativity is symbolic of the role of the creative artist and more particularly, the role of creative novelists such as Mwangi and Doyle in offering hope to people in difficult socioeconomic circumstances and helping readers to recognize the creativity, courage, even heroism, of characters (and people) like them.

The more Paula talks about her experiences, the more assertively she expresses her resilience. In what seems again to be a juxtaposition of material condition and the response to the condition, she states: "the hidings, the poverty, the pain and the robbery. I never gave up. ... I always borrowed a tenner till Thursday. There were always Christmas presents, birthday presents. ... There was always some sort of food. ... I guarded the fridge. I made ends meet" (205). Paula in no way disguises the fact that she is poor and subjected to abuse. She experiences these in proportions that are unpleasantly shocking, but this seems to be of lesser importance than her response to the condition – as implied in her narrative perspective. It is shown in the depersonalized and in fact less formal

expressions in the statement: "the hidings, the poverty, the pain and the robbery". In removing her person from the adversities narrated, she makes this aspect of her narrative less apparent to the reader but perhaps also represents these as the common experiences of women in general. What she clearly foregrounds and links to herself are the responses to adversity, as suggested by the personalized statements: "*I* never gave up", "*I* always borrowed a tenner", "*I* guarded the fridge" "*I* made ends meet". I italicize the word "*I*" in these statements to note the emphasis that she in this instance, through personalization, places on her proactive response to adversity – implying that while women may have similar experiences of adversity; responses to such adversity are unique. The reader is made to focus more on Paula's unique responses to adversity than on the actual adversity that she suffers. In so doing, the reader is made to see the sharp debunking or undermining of any readings of her response to poverty as embodying attitudes of victimhood – this is a reversal of narrative perspective to that discussed earlier in the section of this chapter that deals with the conceptualization of victimhood.

Paula does not just seek to resist the condition of poverty, but also the feeling of poverty. Depictions of her in the course of the novel suggest that one may be poor in reality but survive the condition of poverty by imagining oneself to be rich and by erecting physical and mental symbols of richness on which one relies for survival. In her case, one such symbol is her son Jack, as seen in the statement:

Whenever I feel poor I always search for Jack and look at him; he looks well-fed and prosperous I have spent more money on his clothes than on all the others put together. I've gone without food to make him look good. No hand-me-downs for Jack; no way. He is my mascot; my statement. He's my baby. (88)

The message conveyed in the passage achieves intended effect on the reader through a trajectory of carefully juxtaposed feelings and actions. Acting on the "feel[ing of] poverty", she "search[es] for Jack to look at him", she spends "more money on his clothes than all the others put together" and she goes "without food to make him look good". A number of meanings could be deduced here. First, Paula recognizes the fact that she is poor and it is based on this recognition that she can take action to redress the poverty. One may be poor but, unlike Paula, not feel poor and as such, not take any action against the feeling of poverty and consequently, remain perpetually poor. Also, the steps that she takes portray Paula as a very proactive character and it is partly this pro-activeness that ensures her survival. The actions are intended to attain non-material richness – the feeling that her son Jack "looks well-fed and prosperous", the feeling that he is her "mascot" and, most importantly for this chapter, the feeling that he is her "statement" – a pun – through him or because he serves to restore her self-esteem, he enables her to make a "statement" or, read figuratively, to develop a voice. The mental image that she builds around Jack serves as a façade that minimizes what would otherwise have been a subduing, demeaning feeling of poverty.

Looming behind the façade of security and prosperity that she imagines in the image that she creates of Jack, is the continued "possibilities of the embarrassing sting of poverty. ... Hence the clinging to [façades out of and in response to that very] fear" (Kirby, 2006: 638) as a way of dealing with or even escaping such embarrassment. In fact, Paula's dedication to Jack's image is not coincidental. It is carefully planned, partly with the intention to avoid recurrence of an embarrassment that she had suffered previously, as she recounts:

... (I'll never forget the time I saw a woman in the supermarket looking at Leanne. ... Her basket was empty. ... I recognize the coat, she said. ... I'd got the coat from the Vincent de Paul. Never again. The humiliation, Jesus and there were other things that upset me then, and still do. Where was *her* daughter? ... Why was her basket empty? It was just an ordinary blue coat. The poor woman. (88)

Implied in the passage above is the fact that she had bought the jacket (possibly used by the woman's child previously) in a secondhand clothing shop. It is for this reason that she feels humiliation and decides (true to the cliché that experience is the best teacher) that there would be "[n]o hand-me-downs for Jack". It is significant that the woman's "basket was empty". Although not the only explanation, it is possible that her basket is empty (especially if one reads the statement "the poor woman" literally) because she (like Paula) is poor. Paula labels this as an embarrassing episode, but it also shows how the poor in seeking to cope with the condition of poverty create simple but viable survivalist interdependence strategies like buying and selling used goods. The woman, presumably with the intention of dealing with her own condition of poverty, sells her daughter's jacket – which Paula buys for the same reason. This does not, however, romanticize the condition of having the poor in society recycling used goods among themselves. In fact, Paula seeks to question such a situation through the expression of the feeling of "humiliation", the fact that she is "upset" and her decision "never [to] forget" the incident. Also, I do not in my analyses above intend to suggest that only the poor resell their possessions or buy used goods, but it is a useful strategy that they adopt to survive adversity.

Paula voices her response to poverty and life in general in a narrative that highlights the significance of work, her attitude to work and the impact that work has on her psychological, emotional and material state of being. Although it may also be read as a suggestion of the possibility that masturbation is her only source of sexual pleasure, she associates the physical act of working with the imagination in the statement: "I'm as well off with my hand and my imagination. Mind you, when you've seen what my hand does all day – wiping, scouring, cleaning other people's bins and toilets – my imagination has its work cut out" (91). The statements "I'm as well off with my hand and my imagination" and "my imagination has its work cut out" are evocative. It is possible that the reader may, in seeing Paula resist and survive the condition of poverty and general hardship, undermine or ignore the rigorousness of effort and the strength of character required to achieve this. The two statements on the role of the imagination above serve to debunk any facile

and inappropriate reading of Paula's survival as easy. It is not, and she only survives because of the fact that her "mind" is able to bear what her "hand" does or rather, she has to be "well off with [both her] hand and ... imagination" to do what she does "all day" – wiping, scouring, cleaning other people's bins and toilets. The poor and women in particular are sometimes chastised for not caring enough for their children. The excerpt below serves to subvert such views that chastise women unfairly, implying that life presents the poor with impossible choices. In Paula's case, she has to choose between on the one hand spending time with her family and letting them starve, or on the other hand, working after hours to ensure their sustenance and in so doing (with many implications) spending less time with them. Read from another perspective, the repeated reference to the role of the imagination serves metaphorically to highlight the significance of imaginative responses, interpretations and representations (such as those offered by Mwangi and Doyle) to unfavourable human conditions such as poverty.

Paula expresses some of the positions introduced in the analysis above as follows:

I don't mind the cleaning, except for the time of day. I should be at home, like everyone else. There's something inside me fighting. I like the idea of me working. It's not glamorous __ Dolly Parton won't be playing me in the film __ but it's my job. I do it; I earn money for my family. It's just the time of day. I'm knackered. And guilty __ I should be at home. The building is so empty ... I'd like to see the offices when they're being used ... You're pushing your hoover through square feet of carpet that have nothing to do with people __ When you should be at home with your family, putting your feet up or going out or anything else. It isn't natural. It's a fight. (106-107)

Paula is like any human character shown to embody desires and feelings but these are balanced against the constricting reality of her situation. She desires "to be at home, like everyone else" and to be "putting [her] feet up or going out or anything else" after hours and she desires to clean and "to see the offices when they'd being used". At the same time, she feels "knackered" and "guilty". However, she is deeply aware that her reality requires that she work after hours to "earn [extra] money for [her] family". It is by finding the kind of balance that Paula is shown to negotiate in this instance that she resists adversity and eventually succeeds not just in claiming a voice to speak about and to her condition, but also to overcome it. The statements "[i]t isn't natural. It's a fight" suggest that the potential of the poor to overcome adversity should not be taken for granted. It shows the enormous resilience of the poor and suggests that, rather than weakening, experiences of poverty have the potential to make a person stronger, braver, more rational, more objective and more realistic. The passage shows the enormity of challenges that the poor in general and women in particular are faced with in trying to cope with the demands of a professional and family life. In dealing with this kind of challenge on a daily basis, Paula invents a value system that serves to inspire and guide her. Paula's response to this undesirable and difficult situation draws on personal values in a manner that exemplifies the kind of situation highlighted in the excerpt below. The author, writing from a social science perspective, suggests that:

Values help give meaning to life and provide the standards that individuals use to evaluate and define actions and events throughout the multiple domains of their lives. Values can be described as a person's stable, internalized beliefs about how he or she should behave and have the ability to predict how a person will perceive and evaluate environmental stimuli. As a consequence, an individual's value system is a guide, or roadmap, that determines the extent to which actions and events are deemed desirable or undesirable. Values are general evaluative standards that guide behaviors to achieve desired end states. ... [A category of such values is t]erminal values [which] represent a person's preferred end states, such as a feeling of accomplishment, family security, and social recognition. ... satisfaction is an emotional response resulting from individuals' estimates of how well life factors (e.g., work family conflict) either enhance or frustrate their values. Every emotional response reflects two estimates: (a) an estimate of the discrepancy between what is wanted (valued) and what is obtained and (b) an estimate of the importance of the value to the individual. Events in an individual's life may either further or hinder that individual's attempts to attain his or her life values. The extent to which work ... help[s] or hinder[s] individuals' value attainment is a critical component of their experience at work ... because values determine the meaning that work holds for individuals. ... values and value attainment are important influences on work and life satisfaction ... Indeed, because value inconsistent behavior produces negative affect, individuals who are prevented from behaving in accordance with their values within their work and family domains will exhibit lower levels of satisfaction than individuals who are able to behave in accordance with their values. (Meglino & Ravlin, 1998: 31)

Faced with a "work family conflict" situation, Paula seeks and finds satisfaction in both domains, balancing them carefully and as a consequence, satisfying her core value of taking care of her family, with the money that she makes from working after hours. Although she sacrifices not just time with her family but personal rest and leisure in order to work after hours, in the statement: "I don't mind the cleaning", she emphasizes the point that she is satisfied with the choice that she has made and it is this satisfaction that enables survival. In fact, she survives because she finds pleasure in and shows passion for what she does, but most importantly, because she has a good sense of balance between work as a profession and work as a motherly responsibility. The passage below captures the feeling of pleasure that bolsters her spirit.

In the passage, she pretends to be hurrying the children while preparing them for school in the mornings, saying:

chop chop. making sure they have their lunches, checking they've all the right books in their bags. [She reports: w]e're not poor first thing in the morning. They like it. They know I like ... [saying] ...[c]ome on, come on, hurry hurry. Busy busy. They love it when I fly around the house saying that. Busy busy. Busy busy. (92)

In mimicking an overwhelmed but caringly excited mother, she turns the performance of domestic work into play and it is this playfulness and joyousness that enable her to cope with the enormity of pressure placed on her by the demands of her domestic and professional duties, coupled with poverty and abuse. The "joy and playfulness build a variety of [coping] resources [and] signal the absence of threats[,] ... transform[ing her] for the better, making [her] more optimistic [and] resilient" (Fredrickson, 2003: 333-334). In spite of the abuse that she suffers and the poverty that

characterizes her life, she shows extraordinary care for her children but most importantly, she does so with gracious joyfulness, if one considers the depressing circumstances that characterize her existence. Self-motivation and joy become important mechanisms from which she draws strength for surviving depressing experiences. If indeed she is pretending (as suggested by the statement: "they know I'm pretending" – 92), then the pretence is intended to minimize the possibility that the pressures that she faces could affect her children. In so doing, she seeks to enrich their lives, as suggested by the statement: "we're not poor first thing in the morning". She enriches her life and her children's imaginatively and it is this imaginative conception of richness that enables her to take the valiant position that she does in the passages analysed below.

The episode in which Charlo is shown burning notes is very dramatic and the narrative is very carefully structured to involve the reader emotionally in the dramatic and distressing experience that the characters experience. Money here is represented symbolically. Charlo hopes to manipulate the power that he assumes money offers him to orchestrate abuse against his wife (Paula), as seen in the account that she offers. Paula exclaims: "[a] pile of money in front of me, a wad that would keep us going for as long as I needed to think about. ... He watched me waking up. He watched me calculating, seeing the things I was going to get with the money" (208). Clearly, money as a commodity is in short supply in Paula's world and it is for this reason that she has to wake up to the reality of a moneyed existence for the first time in her life. However, this is short-lived. Charlo, deeply aware of the lack of money that characterizes her existence, evidently assumes that Paula would attribute great value to money and as such, become completely vulnerable to abuse and blackmail. Hence, using the power that he imagines money allows him, he engages in a systematic process of abuse. When he places the pile of money before her (in the passage identified above), it is a deliberate ploy and intended to solicit the response that she shows, exposing her to some degree of vulnerability and consequently, laying the grounds for even greater abuse – as shown in the excerpt that follows. "He picked up one of the notes. The twenty-pound note came down again in front of my face. On fire. __ Look at that, he said. He lit more notes with the flame. Isn't that a shockin' waste? He said" (208). This suggests that in a household where the wife is completely dependent on the husband for financial support, money becomes a tool for manipulation, blackmail and abuse. The tendency to use money or rather the power that it seems to give men – especially where the man is the sole breadwinner – seems to be a universal phenomenon, as seen in the real life narratives of Nigerian women quoted below. One of them confesses:

He [her husband] sent me home to the village because I confronted his girlfriends. By the time I spent one month at home, I had no money to meet my daily needs with my nine month old baby. Everybody I complained to said I was foolish to have confronted him as long as he provided enough money and food for me and my children. I started feeling guilty. (Ilika 2005: 81)

In another instance, it is noted that “at the birth of a female baby a person with money is invited: *Onyeji ego gbaa nga* [my emphasis], meaning: He who has money, let him come forth” (Ilika, 2005: 85). Yet another woman declares that

there is nothing like rape within marriage. ... Sometimes you overcome him. Other times he has the upper hand. Next morning he pays back with enhanced feeding money and gifts to appease you. If you tell people your husband raped you, they will raise eyebrows and utter cynically, who else should rape you? Then you will look stupid and ashamed. (Ilika, 2005: 82)

Conversely, another woman, a civil servant reports that

I work and earn a good salary and even pay a good part of the children's school fees. In some families now women are even the breadwinners. Men should therefore not control the wife's movement and actions unduly. ... in the olden days ... every wife was a house-wife. Now, women work and earn and contribute to the family income. They should be freer. (Ilika, 2005: 83)

The experiences shown and the views expressed in the social science text quoted above, except for the last, are a shocking revelation of how some actual societies (like the fictional society that Doyle depicts) have embraced the idea that money affords men legitimate power which they can use to "put women in their place", while a lack of it makes women vulnerable to male abuse. The poverty of women is generally associated with their frequent lack of freedom and independence. Though more liberated in perspective, the last view does not directly question the money-abuse link. While the view of the last woman quoted emphasizes how the improved financial situation of women is accompanied by greater emancipation, she does not question the money-abuse link. This is seen when she suggests that women should "be freer" and that "men should ...not control the[ir] wife's movement and actions unduly" – women in her view should be free only in cases where they have access to monetary wealth. This evokes a sense of conditional freedom for women and implicitly shows a permissive attitude to the abuse of women who are poor and dependent on men for sustenance – such as Paula in the first part of *The Woman Who Walked into Doors*. The fictional episode in which Charlo burns the notes, but also the narratives based on actual experience (quoted above) demonstrate that domestic abuse (in this case financial) is not a random act. It is planned systematically and carried out in a fashion that shows deep malice. However, it seems Charlo misreads the situation. He seems – as suggested by his words: "[l]ook at that" and “[i]sn't that a shockin' waste?" – to expect her to "grab at what was left" but she "didn't answer him" and rather reports: "[f]unny, I didn't care that much. It was interesting, watching it burn. It was so light" (208). When Paula adopts what seems an unresponsive attitude to abuse, this, rather than show a weakness of character, depicts her great strength. She is emboldened and ushered onto a path to self-determination by the abuse that she suffers. Unlike a majority of victimized women narratives as quoted in the actual situations above, Paula resists and debunks the perception that monetary

wealth empowers and permits men to lord it over their wives and that a lack of it disempowers and renders women vulnerable.

Rather than giving him the satisfaction of seeing her vulnerability, Paula seeks to understand the reason for Charlo's vindictive actions. She states:

... [but] why was he doing this, making us broke again, him as well as us? I remembered: I'd told him I was leaving, that I wasn't taking any more. ... He'd laughed when I told him I'd get a job, that I didn't need his fuckin' money, that I could fend for myself better than he ever had. ... He made himself laugh like a baddy in a film. ... __ Where would you be without me? He said. ... I could never get past the door. There were too many things. Things I didn't have. Money, somewhere to go. He said ... [h]e'd come after me and kill me. And the kids. He said he would never let me take care of them. I was not fit to look after them. ... they'd be better off dead. (208-209)

This narrative excerpt sustains and amplifies the argument that Charlo relies on the power that money brings, in this case, not just to abuse, but also with the intention to punish, discipline, control, and to keep her in check – or actually to inflict terrible physical harm and dreadful anxiety. When he burns the notes, it is a statement of his conceived power over her weakness, but is also intended to abuse her psychologically – as suggested earlier and as explicitly stated above – to punish her for threatening to leave him. Additionally, he uses the power that he thinks money offers him to control her. Or rather, he thinks he can use the power of money to control her, as suggested by his response to Paula's threat to leave him. He states: "[w]here would you be without me? He said. ... I could never get past the door. There were too many things. Things I didn't have. Money, somewhere to go. He said". Here, poverty is depicted as a condition that curtails and stifles human freedom, liberty and symbolically, imprisons its victims. However, it seems Charlo underestimates the power of the moneyless, women and the poor in general.

Rather than allow herself to be subdued by the systematic schemes that Charlo, aided by his relative monetary advantage, deploys to suppress, oppress and abuse her, Paula declares boldly that "I couldn't go through the door so I fucked him through it instead. ..." (214), adding that "I hit him on top of the head. ... I felt great, so satisfied" (217). She further confesses that she commands him: "[g]o away, will yeh! Go away! And he did. [She] couldn't believe it. He did what [she] told him to. He walked away. His head still down. He said nothing at all" (223), a situation about which she reports: "[i]t was a great feeling for a while. I'd done something good" (225). This episode stands out as the highlight and climax of Paula's growth out of adversity and subjugation and it is her resilience and generally undefeatable spirit that enable her to survive her poverty. Although she goes through a huge variety of oppressive or – even horrific – experiences, she comes through a winner and seems to be on her way to an independent, fulfilling, productive and materially and emotionally self-sufficient life. Evident in the passage is an expression of Paula's feeling of

liberation and the suggestion that the power of voice that she claims (or rather, that the author allows to her) has been therapeutic and liberating.

It should be reiterated that Paula's journey to this kind of liberated end has not been easy. It has been filled with "[pain and ... fear. ... over and over; world without end. Until [she] saw [Charlo] looking at Nicola", their eldest daughter (206). Implied here is the sense that Charlo is about to transfer his abusive tendencies to their daughter Nicola, perhaps to exploit her sexually, and this becomes the last straw for Paula – the loving, caring and selfless matriarch who would, it seems, sacrifice everything to protect and save her children from any kind of adversity.

Conclusion

The chapter has examined ways in which the authors offer characters a voice to speak up and to speak about their situation and in the process go through a therapeutic and liberating process or at least, attempt to liberate themselves from poverty. While Mwangi's work (in what seems a generalization) represents a lethal form of poverty in an imaginary Africa, Doyle's is set mainly in Dublin and more specifically in the home environment, with occasional representational glimpses of the workplace and the city streets. Doyle depicts a form of poverty that is domestic (shaped by interactions, relations, conditions and attitudes within the home) and perhaps even gendered in nature. Mwangi's work makes use of a chorus of voices to portray conditions and experiences of poverty and in so doing, offers many perspectives on and consequently a more extensive understanding of dire poverty. However, most of the action, and articulated positions, conditions and experiences of poverty are centred around or observed by Jack Rivers, an American musician turned philanthropist who goes against all odds, but with little success, to bring food relief to a section of inhabitants of an imaginary, desolate African state. The failure of his mission is in itself symbolic. It stands as a call to more innovative, more concerted and multilateral global response to the scourge of poverty in Africa and elsewhere in the world. On the other hand, Doyle solely uses the first person narrative voice of Paula, a poor and a battered house cleaner, a housewife for a short part of the novel and mother who, through her creativity, selfless love for her children, resilience and determination to "make ends meet" eventually survives the condition of poverty. By tracing Paula's growth out of adversity Doyle offers a very favourable representation of her, while Mwangi appeals strongly to the reader's sympathy for the poor of his novel. Although Paula is characterized as being poor in the Irish context represented, when read in relation to and in comparison with the African characters and condition depicted in Mwangi's work, she would be considered materially wealthy. Without necessarily romanticising the condition of poverty, Doyle's novel suggests that some experiences of poverty, rather than weaken the poor, can strengthen them. Mwangi on the other hand shows that the experience of extreme poverty – starvation – will destroy the people. Generally, the two authors, without compromising or perhaps because of literary sophistication, offer compelling representations of localized forms of poverty and related issues,

reflecting, prophesying about but also subverting the actual condition and experience of poverty as depicted in the social science texts discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 5: The multi-dimensional faces, façades and markers of poverty

... to get at experience we need to remain open to divergent readings that evoke the uncertainty, the exigency, the novelty, and the multiplicity of what is definitely human. (Kleinman, 1997: 316)

... all knowledge of reality is unavoidably subjective but ... it is inevitably mediated by the representative forms which describe it... . (Lewis et al., 2008: 199)

This chapter examines different dimensions of poverty – material, moral, psychological, spiritual and social. I investigate whether the material condition of poverty is shown as eventually leading to, or (instead) as resulting from some of the more intangible forms of poverty listed above. Also, the chapter examines whether and how the other dimensions of poverty impact on the material and are impacted upon by the material. Additionally, I interrogate: what/who marks one person or a group of people as being poor (or not) and on what basis are such assessments shown to occur? The chapter also investigates ways in which persons who are characterized as being poor show attitudinal responses to poverty that are variably constituted as façades – putting up appearances. To examine these issues, I analyse Meja Mwangi's *Kill Me Quick* (1973) and Roddy Doyle's *Paula Spencer* (2006). *Kill Me Quick* chronicles the experiences of two young Kenyans, Meja and Maina, neither of whom can (despite completing high school) find a job in the city. Despite their efforts; both are therefore forced by circumstances to live and eat in the dustbins of Nairobi, eventually resorting to a life of crime. This leads to a repeated return of both to the notorious prison cell Number Nine, and the prospect of a death sentence for Maina who is (by the end of the novel) accused of murder. Roddy Doyle's *Paula Spencer*, a sequel to *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* (1996), captures the second part of Paula Spencer's life. She is at this stage a recovering alcoholic, in the process of mending a dysfunctional relationship with her children on the one hand and her sisters on the other, all of whom (with the exception of her daughter Nicola) are facing personal crises of different kinds and magnitude. At the same time, she has to deal with the microeconomic/financial dynamics (within her immediate family) as well as the macroeconomic or financial dynamics in the broader/changing Dublin society.

The chapter considers differences and similarities in the two represented contexts – Nairobi/third world and Dublin/first world. While Paula the main character in Doyle's work is poor in relation to some other members of the fictional Dublin community, the condition and experience of poverty depicted in Mwangi's work are generally much more excruciating – characterized by starvation, shelterlessness and general sordidness, resulting in a complete downward spiral in the life of the two major characters, Meja and Maina. On the other hand, Paula's life is shown to follow a light upward curve. In fact, while Paula could be considered poor in relation to other characters in the fictional Dublin society, she has a paying (though casual) job, while Maina and Meja are shown to be mostly jobless. Maina and Meja are typical examples of “what Angus Calder has appropriately dubbed ‘Mwangian Man,’ an intelligent, usually well-educated individual whose inability to find a

job that uses his skills, or sometimes any job at all, leads him to ever greater cynicism, disillusionment and despair” (Kurtz, 1998: 124). While Paula has a social security net in the form of the Corporation house and a supportive family, Maina and Meja are completely without any kind of social security. These differences in contexts and condition ensure that Paula emerges from experiences of poverty, in spite of her vulnerabilities and feelings of guilt, strong, resolute, enthusiastic, high-spirited, and feeling relatively more secure on her emancipatory journey, while Maina and Meja are pitifully shattered by an encounter with excruciating forms of poverty. It should also be noted that *Kill Me Quick* is the earliest of Mwangi’s works, first published in 1973 at a time when Kenya (like other African countries) was still dealing with the change from a colonial to a postcolonial existence or rather, when the signs that the promises of decolonization would prove deceptive became increasingly noticeable to the citizenry. Doyle’s text on the other hand comes much later in his writing career – it was published in 1996 at a time when Ireland (after the “Irish troubles”) was dealing with new challenges such as immigration and of course poverty – ironically, during the boom years of Ireland. In spite of the differences highlighted above, one sees some similarities in conditions depicted in the two contexts. These conditions and experiences (which are mostly social) relate to and/or result from and are dimensions of poverty. They include problems of alcoholism and drug addiction; family breakdown; crime; overtaxed bodies; depression; cynicism and lack of self-confidence and a sense of self-worth. Clearly, the varying levels of poverty result in and from different conditions and experiences of third world and first world poor subjects.

The material dimension of poverty

In this section social inequality is the key issue highlighted by the co-existence of the extremely poor and the extremely rich in the same fictional setting. Levels of poverty in Doyle’s fictional Dublin are not as apparent and as deplorable as in Nairobi. Dublin in particular and the Western world in general is wealthier than Nairobi and the third world in general and material wealth is more evenly spread in the Dublin setting than in Nairobi. It has been suggested that

Europe ... has always been the contrast of the third world [and particularly, Africa. A] continuously increasing share of Africa [is] among the world poor ... Because of Africa's rapid population growth and its lower than average economic growth, this region's share among the world's poorest 60 percent increased from 8 percent at the end of the 19th century to 17.5 percent in 1992... Poverty, largely an Asian problem until just after World War II, is fast becoming an African problem. (Bourguignon and Morrisson, 2002: 739)

Inequality as conceived in this chapter includes both interstate and interregional but also intrastate and intraregional inequality. The presence on the Nairobi street of both “ragged beggars” and “pot bellied executives” (1), indicates inequality – captured through a comparison of the physical appearance of the poor and the executives. “Pot *belliedness*”, a marker of wealth and consumerism, has a negative connotation, showing subtle narrative wryness towards the consumerist rich. Also,

while Maina and Meja eat “fruits in various stages of decay” (1), the text calls our attention to a manager who, “obviously sleepy from the effects of a heavy lunch, looked up lazily from his work” (5) when Meja enters his office. Mwangi directs the satirical weapon at the rich who engage in excessive consumption. In a metaphorical depiction of inequality, “the early morning wind [following the Shanty Land fire] sprang up [and] the smoke was carried away from the valley into the city centre and beyond, spreading its message of sorrow to the suburbs with their beautiful roads and clean lawns” (94). This kind of metaphorical passage “...gives new meaning to society’s own larger narrative” (Lara, 1998: 93) on the triple problem of poverty, unemployment and inequality. The represented society is poor. However, the excruciating poverty of many – the “ragged beggars”, those who eat “fruits in various stages of decay” and “reject[s living] in ... rubbish bin[s]” (59) are directly contrasted with the excessive extravagance of the few “pot bellied executives” and managers who are overfed and consequently lazy and sleepy in the office. I generalise the characterization of these persons and depictions of their condition to suggest that they are representative of two poles in society. The fact that the manager is “sleepy [and lazy] from the effects of a heavy lunch” serves as a subtle criticism of the excessive lifestyle of some wealthy members of the fictional society who “cut a different kind of moral figure” (Lara, 1998: 94) from the poor such as Meja and Maina. This narrative perspective is likely to solicit unsympathetic responses to the depicted rich and appeal to sympathy for the vulnerable and desperate poor. Such a narrative has the potential to “reformulate values, beliefs, self-images, boundaries and frontiers. ... appear[ing] as a frame for struggles of recognition and transformation” (Lara, 1998: 7).

Mwangi depicts the material polarity and disparity of characters but also of physical space. This is seen in the way the Razor and Maina “came to the shanties so abruptly that Maina was stunned by the quick change from the city and its skyscrapers” (59), pointing to the co-existent proximity of a wealthy part of the city and the impoverished part. This evokes a typical town planning nightmare in Africa in particular where, in cities with a high level of material inequality, shanty settlements spring up regularly and grow rapidly, side-by-side with wealthier well designed suburbs. In fact most African cities such as fictional and perhaps actual Nairobi and other third world cities

contain the places of the wealthy and the noble as well as the shanties of the poor The walls, then, hide what they protect, and they protect a great variety. To someone who is not familiar with the neighborhood, what is behind the walls is unknown. They create a pervasive sense of a somewhere else...a ... mystification. (Siegel 1986:125-126 as quoted in Newberry, 2008: 241)

Levels of material inequality are obviously high in third world societies. In response to the abrupt change from the wealthier, part of the city to the shockingly impoverished part, the “stunned ... Maina held his breath at a sight he would never have thought existed, out of the fiction books he had read at school. Welcome to Shanty Land, the Razor said with a new confident voice” (59-60). The Razor for his part questions: “[w]hy are you looking into the rubbish bin, he does not live in

one of them, does he?” (59). This is when the Razor accompanies Maina to search for Meja – in their “home” – the city dustbins. In portraying vividly how gross inequality elicits shock from a poor person, the text profoundly heightens the reader’s perception and awareness of the abnormality of the depicted situation, suggesting that such levels of inequality may be a common feature of some fictional and in fact of actual societies, but this does not make the situation normal and acceptable. The “expressiveness, imagery, force [and] clarity” (Bakhtin, 2004: 260) of the narrative ensures that the reader, with a heightened alertness, sees what is obviously an abnormal but a common existence in “dustbins” and in “shacks ... built of paper, tin, mud...” (59). Both characters react with shock to each other’s uninhabitable habitation, but ironically accept the equally atrocious nature of their own habitation – indicating the complex paradox of experience, but also showing how a poor person could, after living in a particular condition of poverty over a sustained period, become adapted to and familiar with that condition, in spite of its grossly shocking nature. Life in dustbins and rundown shacks is neither condonable nor livable, but the poor have (at least in the passages quoted above) learnt to live with and to find ways to survive these most impossible conditions that they are faced with – creating what seems to be uninhabitable but endurable habitation for themselves. This shows their adaptability, resilience and creativity.

Doyle’s work also reveals some level of inequality and polarity between the poor and the rich. However, the form and level of poverty depicted in Doyle’s work is not as dehumanizing as that shown in Mwangi’s work. Consequently, the gap between the poor and the rich is not as wide in Doyle’s work as it is in Mwangi’s. This makes us profoundly aware of the difference between first and third world societies – fictional and actual. Relative to her sisters, Paula is characterized as being poorer as she is shown to lack the “basics” (24). Although the text is not specific on what constitutes the basics that “she ... wants” (24), it is obvious that what constitutes “basics” in the Dublin setting is different from basics in the Nairobi setting, where poor persons are shown in a state of complete lack of food and shelter most of the time. The standard by which Paula is assessed as *lacking* is her in/ability to own a holiday home and to go on holiday as her sisters. This is something that would be considered a luxury by the relatively poorer characters in Mwangi’s text and indeed by most poor persons in the third world. The kind of relativity that is evoked by the word “basics”, implies that “language is not self-evident and not in itself incontestable It is precisely this that defines the utterly distinctive orientation of discourse in the novel – an orientation that is contested, contestable and contesting” (Bakhtin, 2004 332). Although Paula recognizes her relative disadvantage, “[s]he isn’t envious [of her sisters] – she really isn’t. [She reassures herself that] Jack’s too old. And he has his summer job. ... Leanne went to Spain somewhere, last year” (25). One sees here a polarity between the poor and the slightly better-off within each of the two societies, but also a polarity between kinds and forms of poverty between the two societies and by extension, inequality between Africa and Europe. It has been suggested that high levels of “inequalities greatly disadvantaged Africans in their dealings This

disadvantage helps explain why the Europe/Africa inequality in per capita income has since risen to 40:1 (Pogge, 2005: 38). This is a very frightening level of inequality between Africa and Europe and by extension the third and the first world. A situation that as predicted “would be fully erased only early in the 24th century” (Pogge, 2005: 38). Judging from the gross variance in material conditions and standards between the fictional Nairobi and Dublin, it is probable that this situation would not be erased even by the 24th century as predicted in the social science text quoted above.

In spite of their more favourable situation (in relation to the Nairobi poor), a degree of inequality exists between poor characters and those that are better-off in Doyle’s work. Carmel owns a house in Bulgaria and goes “there and other places” (243) for holiday, but Paula does not “even have a passport yet” (243). In spite of her relative disadvantage, Paula’s aspiring nature and the things she aspires to are a reflection of her personality and elevated sense of self-worth. It is her persistent, resilient, patient and most obviously, aspiring spirit that makes her stand out as “fuckin’ amazing” (243) in her sisters’ words. The simple use of the word “yet” in the statement “I don’t even have a passport yet” (243) captures the sense that she, in spite of all the challenges that poverty places on her path, is not ready to give-up – an attitude that, contrary to what one sees in Mwangi’s text, ensures her survival or at least, growth towards an upward curve. I do not mean that Mwangi’s characters are inherently less aspiring, but rather that the enormity of their adversity renders their efforts fruitless. Carmel acknowledges Paula’s tenacity and combatant spirit when she declares: “*Yet, You see, that’s it. You said yet [my emphasis]. You’re going to get one. We know you are. You’re fuckin’ amazing, by the way. ... If it was me, says Carmel, I wouldn’t bother getting a passport*” (243). This statement recognizes Paula’s inner strength and the possibilities that lie ahead of her. This is an example of the view that [b]y narrating a past that best generates a sense of personal identity, [poor] women have developed a pattern in which the present is the source of future possibilities” (Lara, 1998: 93). The narrative strategy where a character (Carmel) is made to interpret the words and personality of another character serves to shape the reader’s interpretation and response – in this case, the interpretation of how Paula’s inner strength and “amazing” personality ensures her survival. This approach calls for greater compassion and respect for the poor – Paula. Paula’s resilient and combatant personality is liberatory and partly explains why she remains hopeful in spite of all the adversity. Compared to the poor in Mwangi’s text, she has a more elevated sense of material satisfaction and aspires to a lush lifestyle (a holiday) by comparing herself and her situation to the living standards attributed to her sisters – standards that are extremely high in relation to what Mwangi’s characters can dream of affording. Generally, material conditions in the Dublin setting and perhaps most societies in the first world are not as daunting as those depicted in the Nairobi setting – thereby giving the poor of Dublin the possibility of continuing to hope and to aspire to attain a standard of living that would be unimaginable to most of the poor characters depicted in the Nairobi setting.

Paula's sisters are better-off but not necessarily better persons than she. Acknowledging that "[fuckin' everyone]" (187) but herself has a car, Paula informs her mother: "[y]our daughter, ... [Denise] goes to hotels in her car and fucks men" (187). Paula recognizes that Denise like Carmel is wealthier than she is, yet also questions Denise's moral integrity. The narrative implies that a person may be wealthy materially but have a questionable moral capacity. Though materially less privileged, Paula has "access to a different level of moral reasoning" (Lara, 1998: 96) when compared to Denise who engages in an extramarital affair. The narrative evokes material "possessions to signal and ascribe individual essence. ... to project an image or to judge others, possessions serve as primary indicators of personal substance [or a lack thereof, implying that] ... people are what they have; in Sartre's (1943) terms, being is defined by having" (Hunt et al. 1996: 65). Paula attributes moral agency to the car which Denise drives "to hotels".

The Irish society that Rita and Paula encounter when they go shopping is experiencing an economic boom, symbolized by "the clothes shops for kids", people with "more money than they needed", "the new cars", rising "house prices" and the sight of construction "cranes" (166). In spite of the economic boom, poor people (though seemingly fewer in number and more privileged than in Mwangi's text) exist at the fringes of society or live side-by-side with those who are better-off. Although Paula is relatively poorer than many in her community, she (at this later, more settled and secured stage of her life) feels "... nice. She knows she has the money. She didn't have to do the arithmetic when she was filling the basket. The euros were in her pocket" (27). Although she is poor in relation to other members of her society, she is extremely contented with her improving material condition, making Meja and Maina pale into complete nothingness when compared to her.

The characters that Mwangi creates, (compared to those in Doyle's text) are shockingly poor – materially. I here discuss a selection of representative episodes to show how agonizing the condition of material deprivation depicted in fictional Nairobi is. The narrator points out that in one of the paper-walled huts "[a]ll [Maina] could see was a lot of desperately poor people [the gang members] trying their best to hold on the only thing they had in the world, Life" (62). This depiction illustrates the point that Mwangi's "vivid portrayals of Nairobi's marginal spaces and the people who inhabit them cut to the core of postcolonial Kenyan social reality ..." (Kurtz, 1998: 141). The gang members are explicitly shown to be "desperately poor", but even more significantly, trying "their best to hold on the only thing they had in the world, Life" (62). They fail woefully as their disorientating poverty eventually crushes them, resulting in the psychological and physical disintegration of individuals within the gang but also, the disintegration of the gang as a whole. Returning from the city, the reality of his poverty hits Meja, he collapses, losing consciousness just at the entrance to his parents' home. His sister calls the family to the scene but when they arrive, "he had fled" (114). Clearly, the city has failed Meja materially and he is shown in turn to have failed his family because of his unrewarded stay in the city. The symbolic shilling

that he leaves behind when he flees is described variously as “battered”, “dirty” and “old” (114). The unattractive physical appearance of the coin symbolically captures the appalling material condition but also, physical appearance of Meja, who is himself physically battered as he returns home with a limp after a long stay in hospital. The coin constitutes “all his wealth”, “all the money he brought from the city” and that it is “still a shilling” (114) – attributing symbolic value to the coin and in the act of leaving it behind. The symbolic value of the coin far surpasses its monetary value. Clearly, in leaving his family “all his wealth” – one shilling – the reader gets the impression that Meja would have provided them with all their material needs – “the blue necklace and school fees” (114) if he had the means. This way, the reader develops greater compassion and sympathy for Meja. Ironically, while the family expects him to help them, he is himself dependent on the help of others as he does not earn the shilling that he leaves behind through any kind of productive work. Rather, it is balance from the money that he is given by a generous and kind nurse at the hospital, when he is released.

This charitable act, as well as the kindheartedness of the nurse and of Ngigi – Meja’s friend in the stone quarry – balances cynical views previously expressed by Meja and Maina on human nature in the Nairobi setting. Like any human society, the fictional Nairobi society is constituted of unkind, indifferent and selfish but also kind, caring and selfless individuals. This, read against the generalized and one-sided views that Meja and Maina advance on what they see as the absolutely indifferent, uncaring and selfish nature of urban dwellers, points to the paradox of perception and of representation – indicating that although “the novel requires speaking persons bringing with them their own unique ideological discourses” (Bakhtin, 2004: 333), such discourses do not represent the general rule in the society. The nurse’s kindness and generosity is commendable but the fact that Meja, “after [many] years of absence” (114) can only afford to bring back a borrowed or rather, a begged shilling shows the absolute failure of the city to fulfill the aspirations of the educated youth in postcolonial Africa and by extension, the aspirations of their families. The narrative foreshadows doom for Meja and perhaps the youth of actual Nairobi in general. After this catastrophic homecoming attempt, Meja is seen going back to the city, encouraged by his “submerged hope for a utopian future” in the city (Lara, 1998: 5). In the city, his material and social condition worsens as he becomes a regular jailbird in Cell Nine where “[t]he only possessions the inmates had in the world was that small bit of sleeping ground” (166). Generally, the material condition of the Dublin poor is shown to follow a slight upward curve while that of the Nairobi poor follows a considerable downward curve.

The moral dimension of poverty

In this section, I examine how Mwangi and Doyle evoke moral attitudes and conducts, interrogating whether and how evoked attitudes are linked to the material conditions of the characters represented. The two novels evoke a multiplicity of moral dialectics, but I select a few to

examine – assessing whether a character’s material condition is shown to determine whether he or she is mean towards other characters, whether a position of material advantage is shown to determine a character’s potential to show *ubuntu* – humanness and kindness instead of meanness of spirit. Writing from the perspective of the privileged, Landes (1990: 1) argues: “we are so rich and they so poor because we are so bad and they so good: we are greedy, ruthless, exploitative, aggressive, while they are weak, innocent, virtuous, abused, and vulnerable”. Though there is some level of truth in Landes’ theorem, it would be simplistic to take for granted that such a clear moral binary exists between the rich and the poor. In *Kill Me Quick*, Meja wonders whether “... a beggar given the opportunity could be as mean as a rich man, or even worse” (48). Meja’s view allows for two interpretations. Firstly, it presupposes that any human being, poor or rich, possesses the disposition to be mean, “given the opportunity”. Secondly, it implies that the likelihood of mean conduct increases as one becomes wealthier.

While Meja negotiates his entry onto the city street scene, he is guided by the more street savvy Maina who also enjoys an extraordinary mental agility and quickness of wit, offering lessons on the malignant nature of city inhabitants. Maina in one of his many critical assessments of city inhabitants declares "that in the city everybody minded his own business and none noticed the other. Not as a fellow human being anyway" (9). Additionally, he claims that "[e]verybody tried to cheat you, from the ragged scrap metal buyer to the barrel woman for whom you chopped wood" (11). The two youths in their interactions with one another, in spite of or because of their vulnerability and tenuous and peripheral existence, transcend, dismantle, and subvert values that they express in the statements just quoted as inhumane. While they toil during their momentary employment on a farm, Meja selflessly offers: "[m]aybe I could lend you my pay. Maybe you would like to go back home and ..." (33). Additionally, the narrator states that: "there was one good point about Maina. Whatever he stole from the kitchen [on the farm] he always brought to share with his friend" (27). The two youths exhibit qualities that are different from those they attribute to the city (as uncompassionate, uncaring, indifferent and inhumane) – a city where, when man "noticed the other", it is not "as a fellow human being" but as an object of exploitation that should be "cheated". If the city is indeed as cruel as they suggest it is, then this is a frightening situation which may be explained partly by the possibility that experiences of harsh material conditions have rendered city inhabitants inhumane as they compete aggressively for survival.

In spite of the damning assessment of city dwellers by the two, *Kill Me Quick’s* “powerful narrative ... allows it to transcend its difficult, even unattractive subject matter and edge towards a universal appeal based on a kind of humanism” (Lewis, 2008: 207). Meja and Maina, by virtue of the very nature of their existence, demonstrate what it means to be human as seen in their selfless generosity to each other – serving as an example of the view “that the best relations are the product of lasting friendship” (Lara, 1998: 97). Contrary to the negative attributes of coldness that they associate with

“all” city dwellers, they themselves are materially impoverished but also, “morally congealed ... friends” (Lara, 1998: 95). Their mutually compassionate relationship is possible partly because they or at least Meja is new in the city and as yet uncontaminated by what they see as the vicious moral decadence of the city. The idea of the “imaginary signification” of the immoral city that “exists around us and also lives within us” does not as yet apply to them – urban immorality of the city “exists around [them but yet, not] within” them (Robins, 1996: 130 as quoted in Amin and Graham, 1997: 413). It should however be noted that while they are kind towards each other, the pranks that Maina in particular plays on Meja could be seen as disrespectful and abusive, qualifying what I described above as kindness, compassion and care for each other. Through what Lara (1998, 5-6) describes as “speech-acts”, the two characters “create fragile and falsifiable agreements about what needs to be done in the [fictional] social world”.

In *Paula Spencer*, a noticeable confluence of suspicion, apprehension and nastiness, dressed up as caution, is exuded by some of his family members in response to attempts by John Paul, Paula’s estranged son. This is when he attempts to reestablish a relationship with his family. It should be noted that he is symbolically named after Pope John Paul the Second – who at this time is dying, as hinted in the novel. When John Paul informs his mother that “the landlord wants us out”, Paula wonders: “[i]s there something he wants? ... If she was any good she could offer him help. Is that what he's looking for? For her to give him the money, take out the chequebook and a pen that clicks” (113). When Paula informs Nicola, her virtuous daughter, that John Paul visited her, Nicola questions bluntly: “what did he want? ... He came to see Leanne, [Paula] says. ... [Nicola interrogates further:] did he ask you for anything? Ah Nicola. No. No. He didn't. ... He's not like that now, ... [Paula] says. Maybe, says Nicola” (131). It is possible and understandable that John Paul’s family adopts a skeptical and or perhaps what seems a judgmental attitude towards him at this stage in the novel on the basis of objectionable acts that he committed before his separation from his family – while he was still addicted to drugs – but also because material motives are attributed to his return to the family. It has been argued generally that “poverty, financial stress [and] job insecurity ... weaken family life ... [leading to] less family cohesion” (Fish and Osborn, 1992: 410) – a situation that, with damaging implications, is captured in the passages quoted above.

The moral and psychological crisis faced by all but two of the Spencer children (Nicola and Jack) serves to illustrate how “[the] in/ability of parents to provide support and guidance in the face of stress and disadvantage affects child resilience” (Smith and Carlson 1997: 239). This state of affairs is extremely dangerous, considering the fact that it has to varying degrees disturbed and in fact, destabilised the nucleus of society – the family unit – in the two texts, foreshadowing the tragic annihilation of poor members of the family whose survival is precariously balanced against an eroded emotional and moral nexus. Nonetheless, Doyle’s poor triumph while Mwangi’s are crushed by adversity. Contrary to the skepticism shown by some in his family, as the novel

progresses John Paul begins a process of talking about the difficult past with Paula and in so doing, builds a very stable and mutually trustful relationship with her. We see that “[t]he channels by which new forms of solidarities are fuelled rely on the capacity of narratives to disclose previously unseen marginalization, exclusion and prejudice” (Lara, 1998: 8). John Paula and Paula can reestablish a “normal” relationship because they (unlike Meja, Maina and their poor families in the rural areas) have some form of stable material base and are therefore shown to require mostly emotional rather than material support from each other. John Paul is after all not after material benefits. Rather, he simply “[... w]anted the kids to know they have a granny” (229). We see that a less stressful material condition allows family members to reconnect much more easily in Doyle’s work than in Mwangi’s. Greater material stress and the tendency for family members, (especially parents) to be dependent on their children, but also the children’s inability to meet these expectations, pull family members apart. This situation is most obvious in Mwangi’s text. The triumph of the Dublin poor and the failure of poor persons in the Nairobi setting, partly illustrates the point that “one of the main attributes of moral subjects is that they are not divorced from their effective ties and relationships ... defined in terms of emotional support for other human beings” (Lara, 1998: 101).

When Paula states that the family that she has served for three years has left unannounced (173), this is similar to the idea that Maina expresses – that in the “city everybody minded his own business and none noticed the other. Not as a fellow human being anyway” (9), and “[e]verybody tried to cheat you” (11). Paula’s employers seem not to notice her “as a fellow human being” but rather as a pair of hands that serve them. Such impersonal treatment of servants as advocated in Schlegel’s theorem discussed below are age-old. Schlegel (1983: 68) indicates that right from the 1880s, employers kept up “the appearance of distance and anonymity, striving to retain a measure of distance for themselves” – an approach through which “[s]ervants could be induced to respond in a similarly impersonal manner” (65). The representational excerpt above could be read generally to represent the tendency for some in society, especially the rich and the upper classes intentionally to seek ways to create barriers between themselves and the poor and the working classes. However, the elusive attitude of the employers – the rich – elicits derogatory remarks in both the social science text (Schlegel’s) and the fictional text (Doyle’s). Paula calls her employers “fuckers” (173) while in the 1880 society that Schlegel (1983: 68) describes, an impersonally treated “servant called her mistress a mean beast, a base and cheeky person or a pig”. The verbally abusive reaction of the less privileged, the poor, the marginalized and the powerless of society, rather than portraying them solely in a negative light, shows their strength and desire to resist their marginalization. It is an indication of what Lara (1998: 5) has termed “illocutionary force” where the insults can be seen as “emancipatory narratives [which] can themselves create new form[s] of power, configuring new ways of fighting back against past and present injuries, thus making ... transformation possible”. Paula, in spite of the power of voice that fiction allows her cannot

express her dissatisfaction with the impersonal attitude of her employers directly to them. This shows the limitedness of the power that she and by extension the poor and the weak of society have to directly challenge and resist what seems a haughty attitude of the rich.

Paula's employers do not try to cheat her, as suggested by the phrase "they didn't owe her anything" (173). However, the method of payment – leaving the "money ... on the kitchen table" (173) with no prior warning, and no note to apologise, thank or say farewell to her deepens the view that they treat her with contempt – "not as a human being" or as less than human. The perception of the inhumane and impersonal relationship that exists between Paula and her employers is heightened by the suggestion that she served them for "three years", but "hardly knew them ... hardly ever saw them" and in fact, has "never seen the husband. But she ironed his shirts and sorted his socks" (173). The employers are directly reproached even though "[t]hey didn't owe her anything. It's not that" (173) – implying that she is disturbed by their apparent lack of civility – unannounced departure – rather than the expectation of any kind of material benefit. It should be noted that the kind of impersonal, "cold", uncivil and inhumane relationships described above cannot be generally attributed to all inhabitants in this urban setting, least of all, all rich persons. Some of the relationships, regardless of relative material disparity between parties in those relationships, are warm and cordial. This is seen in the interactions between Paula and Rita – her neighbor.

Unlike in the relationship between Paula and her employers, "Paula and Rita can look straight at each other" and share "biscuits" (133). Their relationship is mutual, genuine, humane and congenial. Paula and Rita are in a sharing relationship and this and other such relationships in the texts studied in this chapter and elsewhere in the thesis show how in situations of adversity, the practice of sharing – between members of a family, friends (as in the case of Paula and Rita in Doyle's text and Meja and Maina in Mwangi's text), neighbours and the broader community serve as an important form of social capital that ensures survival or sustains the spirit to survive. These cohorts of engagement seem built on the core value of "sharing" and are shaped by age affinity – the youthful Meja and Maina as well as the Razors gang – but also by gender affinity – Paula and Rita – as well as the shared material or non-material condition. Paula's relationship with Rita again serves to qualify what is seemingly a generalized view advanced by Maina that *all* city dwellers are "cold", impersonal and lacking in moral integrity. The bond between the two women is nurtured by their common experience of misfortune and the upheavals in their respective families. If one reads this against the compassionate relationship that exists between Meja and Maina (in spite of the impish pranks that Maina plays on Meja on the farm), then it makes compelling the argument that persons with a common experience of misfortune are often pulled together by their shared misfortune – easing their survival. Such misfortunes in Rita's case include the fact that her son is a criminal and her daughter had a baby out of wedlock (133).

The argument that relationships based on a shared experience of adversity enable the poor to cope with the harsh realities of the city is symbolically enhanced when Meja and Maina are put irreversibly on the path of destruction immediately they are accidentally separated. The separation occurs when a crowd erroneously suspects that a parcel of rotten apples that Maina throws, Meja catches and runs with is a valuable object stolen from a shop. The act of spontaneously catching the rotten apple packet and running away from the crowd chasing Maina indicates that the kind of “sharing” practised by the two characters is very spontaneous. The crowd chases Meja from the back to the main street and into an accident and the two youths lose each other and with that, each other’s company, guidance and compassion – each becoming more vulnerable to the insincerities and inhumanities that they talk about persistently when together. The physical and emotional rupture has deleterious consequences – a trajectory of imprisonment for Meja and eventually the prospect of a death sentence for Maina. When together, they compensate for each other’s material impoverishment by mobilizing non-material resources – “resources needed to motivate coping with life stress, providing support to elevate self-esteem, and to help manage and regulate negative feelings aroused by life stress” (Smith and Carlson 1997: 231). Their relationship exemplifies the view that “resilient children seem to be especially adept at actively recruiting surrogate parents” (Smith and Carlson 1997: 239). They represent each other’s surrogate parent and the rupture of this mutual role of “parenthood” partly explains their failing fortunes in the second part of the novel.

Doyle like Mwangi portrays social relations as a form of wealth (from a different perspective) – through the depiction of the relationship between Paula and Rita who is better off than Paula. The differing material conditions between the two women allow the reader to examine the nature of relationships, where they exist between poor persons and those who are slightly better-off. Paula compares Rita’s material advantage not against what the reader sees as her (Paula’s) relative material disadvantage, but rather against her social and more particularly, family advantage, seen in the suggestion that, unlike her, “Rita has no sisters”. Here, the narrative evokes the common affirmative adage that “a person’s people constitute his or her wealth” – implying that an approach that considers the multiple dimensions of poverty enables a deeper and a broader understanding of poverty. Furthermore, it indicates that rather than being just a condition of lack of money,

[p]overty is a complex set of instances of social exclusion that stretches out over numerous areas of individual and collective existence, and which results in the poor being separated from the generally accepted living patterns in society and being unable to bridge this gap on their own. (Vranken, 2001: 86 as quoted in Dewilde, 2004: 335)

The narrative excerpts discussed above depict family relations (as I argue in chapter two of this thesis but also, elsewhere in this chapter) as an important form of social wealth that compensates for a lack of material wealth and in this case, contributes to enabling Paula’s survival. This is a privilege that is lacking in Maina and Meja’s life. The unavailability of family support partially

explains the disastrous impact that poverty has on the two youths as well as the fact that the poor of Mwangi's work, contrary to those of Doyle's work, are consumed by their condition of abject poverty. This is a significant contradiction, considering the view that “in practice the family is usually the main provider in [Africa in particular and] the less developed world [in general], especially in places with weak public security mechanisms” (Amato, 1993: 249) – such as the Kenyan setting. The contradiction results from the subversive impact of rapid and increasing urbanisation, capitalism, consumerism and all other *isms* that are often blamed for the erosion of moral values in African societies but also, because of what is (in comparison to the fictional Irish society) depressing levels and forms of poverty in fictional Kenya – made worse by the complete lack of material, moral and social support from family and the state. Unlike Paula who lives in a Corporation (City Council) house and is therefore relatively more secure, Meja and Maina are mostly homeless and consequently, extremely vulnerable as “[h]ousing has been [described as] one of the four major pillars of the welfare state. It has always been recognised as comprising a key aspect of everyday life, closely associated with security and with health and well-being” (Kemeny, 2001: 54). This again shows the difference between the context and the nature of first and third world poverty.

Meja and Mwangi like other poor persons in *Kill Me Quick* are displaced from the important social cushion of family, but it seems even the presence of family in the city may not necessarily cushion them, as some of the fictional episodes and social science studies have shown that in situations of extreme urban impoverishment like theirs:

interaction tends to occur in transitory, superficial roles. These processes lead to a condition of weak social integration whose psychological consequences include loneliness, depersonalization, tension, and predatory forms of behavior. This perspective predicts that levels of helping between friends and family, as well as between strangers, are lower in large cities than in small towns [and villages]. (Amato, 1993: 249-250)

Paula complains that “[h]er sisters have given up on her. Her last text from Carmel [who is shown to be the more caring of Paula’s two sisters] was ages ago She was offering Paula a chicken. *Spare chkn. Wnt? Paula didn’t answer. Shve it up yr arse*” (74) – she thinks she should have responded. This quotation creates space for a number of interpretations. Paula complains that “[h]er sisters have given up on her”, but would turn down the offer of a chicken – implying that she is more in need of emotional than material support. Persons who have become accustomed to the perspective that “levels of helping between ... family ... are [normally] lower in large cities” (Amato, 1993: 250) might see the kind of generosity that Carmel shows towards Paula as unusual, even insulting and undermining of their independence and capabilities – which I assume partly explains why she considers responding: “[s]hve it up yr arse”.

Much more than Paula, Meja and Maina are shown to be distant or perhaps even completely severed from their families. It seems their families, in direct contrast to what one sees in Paula's family, feel entitled to help from the two youths – aggravating their situation, as the two youths are made to feel guilty as they cannot provide the required help and are themselves in dire need. The worldview of the rural members of Meja and Maina's families indicates (contrary to what one sees in the Dublin context) that "levels of helping between ... family" (Amato, 1993: 250) are expected to be higher. This worldview (expressed by Maina's father) originates from the erroneous belief that education and city life are automatically rewarding and that family in rural areas should reap the rewards of education and city life as they imagine are embodied in their offspring and siblings. The dissonance between expectation (by family members in the rural area) and reality (the shocking poverty of Meja and Maina) is shown as a situation that separates families in the fictional Kenyan setting. When Meja returns home, the narrator reports that "inside the hut, he felt, warmth and love and familiness flourished. So near, yet so far away. ... And here he was scarred and afraid of going home. He dared not face" (112) his family without the expected material gains that city life is thought to have given him. This results in his collapse, and when he recovers, he returns to the city without seeing his parents, without providing the beautiful blue necklace" (110) that he promised his one sister and without providing the much needed school fees for his younger sister. Mwangi shows how the two youths are pressured by extreme material adversity, a situation that is worsened by expectations of assistance by members of their families. Their life is an antithesis of the view that

[e]verybody needs to live an individual life, not that of others, which is to say that everybody must have the right to choose what he or she wants to be, with due self recognition. ... all individuals should be able to live in their own context, in their own historical and social situation, without the risk of losing their integrity as human beings. (Lara, 1998: 104)

Meja's return to the city signals a continuation of a futile search for the elusive dream of wealth that the city so alluringly promises. Although "he felt [the] warmth and love and familiness [that] flourished in his parents' hut ..., [he, pushed by his inability to provide for his family] opted to return to the coldness, misery and cruelty and loneliness" of the city. This is a complex situation, a poor person who cannot even take care of himself is ironically and (contrary to the situation in Doyle's setting) subjected to a social code that requires him to take care of his parents and siblings – forcing him to make an impossible choice.

When Maina for his part returns to his home village, he receives reports that his family "wasted" all the family wealth educating him, but he failed to take care of them in return and that the family as a result were forced to sell their remaining possessions and leave the village. Distraught, he murders two people in the village who deny him shelter, resulting in his predicament as a condemned murderer by the end of the novel. The poverty of Meja and Maina is material but more so, social

and moral. The fact that they seem permanently cut off from their social wealth, their family “roots” – unlike the Dublin characters who are at various stages only temporarily separated but eventually reunited in solidarity – leaves them (the poor of fictional Nairobi) in perpetual poverty. The two fictional contexts (Dublin and Nairobi) stand as illustrations in literature of the view expressed by Vranken as quoted in Dewilde (2004: 335) that:

[p]overty is a complex set of instances of social exclusion that stretches out over numerous areas of individual and collective existence, and which results in the poor being separated from the generally accepted living patterns in society and being unable to bridge this gap on their own. (Vranken, 2001: 86 as quoted in Dewilde, 2004: 335)

Clearly, an understanding of poverty that is mainly economic, ignoring the kind of social and moral paradigms highlighted by the fictional and the social science texts above is simplistic and superficial. Additionally, the perspectives advanced by the fiction and the views expressed by the social theory above make it “clear that a richer and *truer* perspective on the experiences of ... [poverty] is most likely to be achieved by holding the insights and imperatives of literature, social science and policy making in tension with each other, irrespective of which one is more *truthful*” (Lewis et al., 2008: 210 emphasis added).

The psychological dimension of poverty

In this section, I examine psychological states of poverty, investigating whether and how experiences of poverty are shown to affect the minds of poor persons or rather, whether the condition of poverty is in itself mental or rather a result of mental states. A key dimension of poverty evoked in *Kill Me Quick* is the extent to which poverty batters its victims, rendering them hollow and empty as metaphorically reflected in the episode where, after selling their scrap, "Meja looked at the coins in his hands. They were all old and battered and the hole in the middle of each ten cents piece told of nothing but emptiness and deficiency" (12). This conjures a feeling and state of emptiness as I show below.

Members of the Razor gang that Maina has joined are described as being "sober and hungry and as gloomy as ever. When there was no Nubian Gin and no food and bhang, absent also were fun and laughter, song and life" (89), so "the gang idled, weighed down by their hungers and hopelessness" (91). In the early part of life on the street, Maina and Meja restrict themselves to the backstreets (as I mentioned earlier), but they later "graduate" into the main streets and in Maina's case, into gang life – a process that shows them descending progressively into criminality, culminating (as was mentioned earlier) in regular trips to the notorious prison cell Number Nine. Mwangi has provided his readers “with an immense variety of richly textured commentaries on man’s life in society, on his involvement with his fellow-men, to the extent that literature can constitute a key form of social evidence and testimony” (Lewis et al., 2008: 202). Members of the Razor gang (who are excruciatingly poor) seem to “lack the resources (symbolic[, psychological] and material) to

control and to make sense of what befalls them” (Kleinman, 1997: 319). Alternatively, they have been psychologically numbed or perhaps overwhelmed by the experience of extreme levels of poverty, to the extent that they are forced by circumstance to live apathetically in the presence of extremely perplexing and obvious poverty – seen in the view “... that poverty and ignorance dwelt among them”, as well as the “overcrowdedness” of the hut, their “near-nakedness”; “the fact that they had no personal possessions”, they lack a “fireplace”, have no prospects of “supper”, and the uncertainty of where to “sleep” on the “dusty floor” (66). It should be noted that they do not live in these inhumane conditions because they lack the zeal to change their circumstances, but because the circumstances are overwhelmingly difficult to change. They are depicted as a marginalized group that “accepts its situation as a normal, even justifiable part of social order. This explanation of passivity assumes at least a fatalistic acceptance of that social order and perhaps even an active complicity – both of which Marxists might call mystification or false consciousness” (Scott, 1985: 39). It is possible that in spite of their depressing material situations, these characters do not see themselves as “poor”. If this is the case, then it complicates and challenges views that prescribe standards of poverty or attribute poverty to other persons or mark other persons as being poor – suggesting that poverty is partly psychological and raising the question: can one be as shockingly poor as the Razor gang members are portrayed to be, and not feel oneself to be poor? If the answer to this question is yes, then their momentary feeling of contentment results from the suggestion that “[w]hat they had, they shared equally and unselfishly: conversation, bhang, human togetherness and yes, a little poverty too” (66) – their humanness.

The reader is exposed to the “suffering [of the poor] that includes the individual level but also transcends it as cultural representation, as transpersonal experience, and as the embodiment of collective memory” (Kleinman, 1997: 317). Though materially impoverished, the characters in the specific episodes discussed above enjoy a brief moment or feeling of “*moreness* [my emphasis] – a term that James [Williams] favored as a multilevel signifier of whatever is subconscious” (Kleinman, 1997:316). Although the way in which they make sense of and respond to their condition and experiences is absurd and ironical, it subverts the common epistemological traditions where “meaning [is] ... understood as a largely bourgeois preoccupation, incongruent with the sheer exigency of surviving that is the destiny of the one-fifth of humankind existing under the grinding deprivations of extreme poverty” (Kleinman, 1997: 318). They seem to bring their own meaning to bear on their condition – absurd and inappropriate as it may seem. These characters, having been exposed to gross indigence, are resigned to fate; which explains why they in what is identified as a rare instance of access to monetary wealth, become wasteful, as seen in the description that they “devoured the food efficiently and savagely ... and [s]oon, very soon, Sara's purchases of food were annihilated and the leftovers, which were few were *thrown into a corner to rot*” (my emphasis, 76-77).

A prolonged encounter with excessive poverty has destabilised the gang members to the extent that they live only for the moment – eating gluttonously and throwing leftovers "into a corner to rot", rather than preserving some of the food for future consumption. Resulting from the deleterious impact of poverty on their psyche, there is a total lack of future-directed orientation in the gang or even a decreased sense of self-esteem and this explains why, when the reader next meets them, they are "hungry and as gloomy as ever" (89) and are "weighed down by their hunger and hopelessness" (91) after "devouring food savagely" and throwing leftovers away "to rot" (77). The irony and absurdity of this situation are quite obvious. The vulnerability of the gang members as well as the paradoxes that characterize the lives of other members of this shanty community are metaphorically encapsulated in the suggestion that, while the gang is partying, "[t]he candle flame danced desperately in fear of the encroaching darkness. ... it flickered for the last time and was swallowed in the cold dark. ... Shanty Land was now covered in a curtain of darkness to cover its misery, its happiness, its affections and its secrets" (83). The image of the candle flame symbolically predicts the disintegration or indeed the destruction of individual members as well as the gang as a whole by the end of the novel – an annihilation that results partly from the paradoxes that are constituted in their psyche and actions: wastefulness in the midst of prevailing material deprivation. This reveals the "experiences of human complexity ..." (Lara, 1998: 96). Prolonged and excruciating poverty has significantly affected members of this gang as indicated by their symptomatic "feelings of hopelessness, excessive appetite, excessive sleepiness, low energy, low self-esteem, ... [and] difficulties in making decisions" (Lever et al. 2005: 383-384) – a situation that is to a certain extent also seen in Paula's feeling of guilt in *Paula Spencer*.

In spite of these feelings, members of the gang stand as an example of the view that "a person who experiences depression may report a fairly high level of [subjective] wellbeing" (Lever et al. 2005: 383-384). This is partly illustrated by the narrative perspective that "[w]hat they had, they shared equally and unselfishly" (66). Unlike Paula and the poor of Doyle's work, they lack access to any kind of social security, but this is to a limited extent compensated for by this sharing attitude within the gang – at least in the specific merriment episode – not to imply that the Dublin poor do not also have sharing relationships. It should be noted that the episode that I am discussing in Mwangi's text is a single moment of illusory happiness – of a drunken well-fed evening based on money obtained by means of a once-off luckily successful crime of theft. It can therefore not be seen as a reflection of the quality of life led by these poor Shanty Land gangsters. However, considered in its specificity, the episode depicts poor persons who exemplify the view that "[r]ich or poor is a state of mind. People may be financially poor but psychologically rich, and vice versa" at a particular moment in life. Their attitude can be read as a reflection of the "...common expression: It is not the person who has too little, but the person who always craves more, that is poor" (Tang and Chiu, 2003: 17). The postulations above should be understood specifically within the context of the

merriment scene as the gang members are shown in the rest of the novel mostly in a miserable socioeconomic state of existence.

When the action of the novel shifts to the prison, one again sees a depiction of how material poverty has psychologically shaped the characters that are represented. The text indicates that "[t]hey all seemed happy and contented with life in prison ... [and feel that i]f all one did in prison was eat and drink and get himself locked up and counted like cattle, things were not very bad" (140). The mindset shown here is a frightening revelation of how poverty has rendered these characters vulnerable, leading them to make very difficult choices – preferring to give up their freedom for what they see as material “luxuries” of prison. The episode creates the impression that the complete deterioration or even lack of social support and economic opportunities have forced these young men to choose imprisonment over living freely in a society that does not offer them any possibility of a decent life. This is a reverse of the situation depicted in Doyle’s text, where the poor draw on social and family support networks to deal with the condition of poverty and consequently to reposition themselves on a slight upward curve. The poor youths depicted in the quote above from Mwangi’s text are condemned to a near perpetual life either in prison or (when out of prison), in a state of appalling poverty. They are depicted as victims of circumstance.

When Maina is accused of murder, it is reported that “[t]he police cannot get a word out of him and the papers said that he was *mad* [my emphasis]. ... [Meja disagrees:] Maina is not mad ...” (174). Meja, himself a prisoner for theft, characterises Maina as one who “had always wanted to remain clean, ... who would rather eat from the dustbins than steal ...[and who] only knew how to laugh and smile” (175-176). Mwangi’s generally compassionate evocation of Maina and Meja as well as of the other poor youths stands out – in contrast with what the two youths conceive generally as indifferent attitudes directed at them by the society. The reader might, influenced by the author’s kindly evocation, also develop greater compassion for the poor characters that he or she is reading about in the fiction and perhaps those that he or she encounters in actual society. Meja’s statement: “I don’t even understand how we came to be among criminals” (175) is evocative. It creates space for the reader to bring his or her understanding to why and how the two youths, in spite of their education and effort to find work have failed and become psychologically “shattered” to the extent that Maina is now classified as mad. Yet it also serves as a cautionary note: that a society that fails to provide decent economic opportunities for its youth lays the groundwork for calamity. Even when Meja and Maina find what is a semblance of work on a farm, the narrator comments: “two educated young men earning one-tenth of what their education entitled them to and living under forced labour conditions” (25). The warning constituted in the depiction of the two youths is also directed at actual societies such as Kenya and even South Africa. Although South Africa is not the setting of the novel, it has experienced similar situations where the youth, partly because they have lost hope, tend to commit atrocious and incomprehensible acts similar to that of which Maina is

accused. Considering the South African situation in particular, John Comaroff (1999: 284 as quoted in Durham, 2000: 13-14) indicates that:

young people ... feel increasingly unable to attain the promises of the new economy and society [... which results in a] sense of a crisis of promise and frustration. ... Caught up in these reports are cross-cutting images of youth as victims of circumstance and ... also images of youth as unruly, destructive, and dangerous forces needing containment.

The kind of images mentioned in the social science text quoted above are similar with those evoked in Mwangi's text – images which call attention to how “[d]isenchanted states” resulting from “decayed” (Durham, 2000: 13-14) moral imperatives foreshadow doom for society as the youth are forced to use violence to negotiate a space of existence for themselves. Maina as seen in his silence has lost his voice and the power to articulate his misery and the will to live, because of the overwhelming nature of poverty and general adversity that he experiences. Before he embarks on the journey back to his family – which marks the starting point of his denouement, Maina is shown to be a very strong-willed, good natured and generally, a likeable person. The fact that he is shown to possess these good attributes and qualities heightens the reader's perception of how overwhelmingly tragic his destruction is. The state in which Maina is shown by the end of the novel *Kill Me Quick* is the reverse of what one sees in *Paula Spencer*. Unlike Maina, Paula and members of her family are (for reasons to do with their more privileged material state that I have highlighted repeatedly in this chapter) shown at the end of Doyle's novel to be rebuilding their lives and on their way to overcoming poverty and all sorts of adversities that they have experienced as individuals or as a family.

Like Mwangi's *Kill Me Quick*, Doyle's *Paula Spencer* evokes the psychological dimension of poverty, showing how experiences of material deprivation impact on the psyche of characters represented. Listening from Jack's bedroom door, Paula hears Eminem, an American rap artist, tell "his mother to bend over and take it like a slut ... [and Paula] was sure that Eminem fella had good reasons for his anger" (46). It should be noted that like Paula, Eminem's mother – as it has been reported in real life, as is portrayed in the film and as hinted in *Paula Spencer* – is an alcoholic. In suggesting that Eminem “had good reason for his anger”, Paula is referring to the fact that the alcoholism of Eminem's mother is partly responsible for how he feels and of course for the vulgarity that he directs at his mother in his songs. With an understanding of this background, the reader is aware that she is attributing blame for how Eminem thinks and for what he says and does (partly) to the mother's alcoholism. By implication, she is (owing to her own alcoholism) taking the blame for the kind of unpleasant personality traits that one sees in some of her children – John Paul and Leanne in particular. Obviously, the alcoholism portrayed by Kim Bassinger (who takes the role of Eminem's mother) and of Paula Spencer is not the only explanation for the kind of personality disorders that their children exhibit. Also, the implied effects of alcoholism on their children cannot be read as a suggestion that all children of alcoholic parents eventually exhibit

personality disorders. In fact, Paula puts Jack and more so Nicola through similarly difficult situations, but they turn out to be very responsible persons. Moreover, in subtly acknowledging how her alcoholism affected her children, Paula sets herself and the whole family on a path to recovery.

A month later, Paula watches Eminem's film *8 Mile* with Jack. It depicts "[t]he angry young man, the alco ma[, and she realizes that] Slim Shady [the child character in the film] is Jack Spencer [her son]. And Paula was Kim Bassinger" (46) – the mother of the child character in the film. Jack does not show any overt signs of anger. He exhibits a high level of responsibility – providing most of his material needs – but is extremely and abnormally withdrawn, silent and generally uncomfortable in the presence of his mother. These traits could simply be indicative of his personality, but could also be symptomatic of anger that he does not express. The literary representation draws on the alternate representational and aesthetic forms (music and film) to subtly highlight the fact that in cases where children have been exposed to the kind of traumas that Jack and his siblings have, they cannot remain completely unaffected. The traumas range from having an abusive father to having an alcoholic mother, coupled with less than perfect economic conditions in the home. Probably, Jack has not yet dealt with some of the difficult circumstances that his parents put him through as a child. It is clear that in spite of what he has suffered and how he feels, contrary to the youths that one sees in Mwangi's text, he has the advantage of family support that is likely to enable him deal with any unresolved sentiments from the past and to recover eventually. Views that Paula expresses about Eminem's "words" about his mother invite us to see how significant a novelistic speaking subject's comments on "... another's words, another's utterance ... [become an important] object of interpretation, discussion, evaluation, rebuttal, support" (Bakhtin, 2004: 337) and self reflexivity – enabling an improved way of relating to fellow human beings – in this case, Paula with her children.

In another instance, Paula discovers that "Leanne's hands are ... desperate. Scratched raw, especially the wrists. Paula hates to see those scratches, self-inflicted – all her life" (149). This kind of self-harm is associated with borderline personality disorder or depression. Clearly, the experiences that Leanne and her siblings have had result in varying levels of effects on each of them. It seems the effect is graver in her case. When the narrative declares that "Paula hates to see those scratches", this reveals the kind of motherly care that she shows towards her family and that eventually enables their survival – something that the young people depicted in Mwangi's text lack. Of course, she can afford to care for her family, other than the parents who are mainly in the background in Mwangi's text, because her material condition is better. While the families of the urban youths portrayed in Mwangi's text are concerned mainly about surviving material adversity and therefore are inattentive to their children's situations, Paula's material deprivation is not so

extreme that she is desperate. As such, she is in a position to give some attention to her children and to provide some material support.

Clearly, Paula's sisters are better off than she is. This is seen in the suggestion that they go on holidays frequently, they both own cars, they both own holiday homes locally and Carmel owns a holiday home in Bulgaria and can afford medical treatment in a private hospital. In spite of their more advantageous material condition, at least two weaknesses are personified in each of the two sisters. They are described variously as being "thick" and "gormless"; a "joker" and "bitter", while Paula describes herself as an "alco" and "hopeless" (235). This suggests that in every human community, regardless of level of material wealth, one would expect to find different levels and forms of human vice embodied in each individual – implying that Paula, because she is poor, is not necessarily less human than any of her sisters or any member of the society for that matter. While the weaknesses of the sisters are highlighted in the passage just quoted, the reader is aware that they care for and offer material support to Paula, while Paula and Denise offer emotional support to Carmel when it is revealed that she has cancer. As moral subjects, "they are [in spite of their individual states of being] not divorced from their affective ties and relationships ... in terms of emotional support for other human beings" (Lara, 101) – the reverse of what one sees in *Kill Me Quick*. It is important that Paula recognises and acknowledges her weakness, but also those shown by each one of her sisters – as seen in the quotation above. In speaking about her sisters' weaknesses, Paula reflects on her own weaknesses, becoming increasingly virtuous and responsible – indicating that [n]arratives can be seen as instruments and expressions of learning" (Lara, 1998: 103).

While the negative attributes exhibited and the difficult circumstances faced by some members of Paula's nuclear and extended family are shown openly, it is noted that "John Paul did his hurting out of sight"(53). This is a feature of a "normal" human community where there is no conventional way of dealing with difficulties. Each individual in this fiction has a unique way of dealing with difficult situations. John Paul is characterized in the novel as an introvert – a quality that inhibits him from physically exhibiting his pain and speaking out on the difficulties that he has gone through while growing up. Because he apparently could not cope with the effects of a difficult childhood, he turned to drugs to deal with his "hurting". This further explains the view I expressed earlier that, while Paula's children suffer the same form and level of adversity growing up in what is a complex human situation, the impact on them varies depending on their individual personalities and dispositions. In his case, his introverted character limits the chance of him speaking about his problems, making him vulnerable and more likely to resort to drugs as an escape from the difficult reality. It is significant that as the novel draws to an end, he has quit drugs and started the process of sharing his painful experiences and the feelings that he has bottled up for so long with his

mother – doing “his hurting” – openly and this is likely to complete his recovery process and eventually ensure survival.

Turning attention to Paula whose feelings are constantly oscillating, the narrator reports that “[s]he's losing her fuckin' mind. She can feel it. She can put her hands on the cracks. [This is in spite of the fact that s]he found the extra hours. She worked” (85). This feeling is further captured, metaphorically, when Paula goes “... back to the soup. She filled a bowl for herself. Cracked bowl ...” (101). The *cracked* state of mind that the narrator literally and metaphorically associates with Paula indicates that she has not recovered completely from the effects of her dysfunctional and impoverished past – material, moral and psychological. Clearly, Paula’s material condition has improved, as seen in the statement: “[s]he found the extra hours. She worked” but this does not result in an entirely contented Paula as she is still in a cracked state of mind. This is because the experiences that she has had or put her family through are so horrendous and the effects long lasting. The conversation that follows between Paula and her alcoholic daughter Leanne depicts the effects of the difficult past and how the family is dealing with the past. Paula states bluntly and unashamedly:

I'm an alcoholic, Leanne. I know, she says. I know you do, love. You've always known. But I've never told you and I should've. Remember when I woke up once and you were beside me and you were asleep? And your face was stuck to a pillow with your vomit. Do you remember that? Paula nods. (68-69)

The passage quoted above depicts one of many instances in which Paula and members of her family *talk* about the unpleasant aspects and incidents in their past – an approach which, with subtlety posits the ideal of *talk* as the first step towards a cathartic process, following traumatic experiences. In fact, the kind of power/powerlessness embodied in the ability to talk or not to talk – losing one’s voice – is symbolically captured in the episode where Maina, after murdering two persons in his village, loses his speech and with that, the zeal to live. This is a perspective previously examined in greater detail in chapter four of this thesis. The episode above in which Paula and Leanne talk about her past as an alcoholic mother seems to be a form of counseling that could have a catalytic effect, enabling recovery from the traumas of the past. Leanne is herself an alcoholic, suggesting that it is habitual (though not a general rule) that some personality traits result from the state of a parent’s moral and/or psychological wellbeing or a lack thereof. However, it is significant that the Spencer children, unlike Meja and Maina, are afforded the opportunity to talk with their mother about the difficult past. The family employs the strategy of talk to “contest and restructure conceptions of subjectivity, notions of morality and expectations about the good life” (Lara, 1998: 4) or at least, a better life which they, unlike the poor of Mwangi’s work, are shown to be on their way to attaining.

Commenting on Paula, the narrator suggests that "[i]t isn't just about the money. She doesn't hate her work. She doesn't like it either. It keeps her going. ... The panic attacks, whatever they are, don't come if she's busy. ... She can't go mad if she has to go to work" (200). The passages quoted above draw on several psychologically crushing experiences – resulting from the lack of money (and severe marital abuse) in Paula's past – to invite the reader to see the psychological value of money and work. The material value of money is balanced against its symbolic value. Money has a high psychological value in her life and this results from her moneyless past – motivating her to work harder in order to avoid a moneyless future, the kinds of embarrassment that she has suffered and most importantly, to avoid experiencing "the terror of having no money"; "the prison of having nothing"; "putting things back up on the supermarket shelves because the tenner in her pocket turned out to be a fiver" and "going five days before the next hope of a hand-out from Charlo" (52). In boldly expressing these kinds of past difficulties that she has encountered, Paula progressively improves on her situation, "demonstrat[ing] that emancipatory narratives [of this kind] can themselves create new forms of power, configuring new ways to fight back against past and present injustices, thus making ... transformation... possible" (Lara, 1998: 5). As argued elsewhere in this thesis, "people [like Paula] who have experienced financial hardship tend to be obsessed with money" (Lim and Teo, 1997 as quoted in Tang and Chiu, 2003: 18), but in this case, the value of work and consequently of money lies in its ability to restore Paula to a stable and confident state of mind – an enhanced sense of security and wholesomeness. Various studies but also "conventional wisdom" have shown that "unemployment is associated with a marked decline in self-esteem, ... or to damaged ego, loss of self-worth, loss of self-respect, loss of self-confidence, feeling inferior" (Shamir, 1986: 61), while the opposite effects are elicited when unemployed and poor persons like Paula become employed and relatively better off. Maina, Meja and the other poor characters in Mwangi's work, much more than Paula, are seen to exemplify the point on the link between unemployment and low self esteem because of their perpetual unemployment status. In addition to providing her with money that enables an improved state of material wellbeing, work acquires a new dimension – enriching her psychologically. This section of the chapter has examined evocations of how poor "people make, negotiate and unmake meaning in the greatly divergent contexts of human conditions, and perhaps even especially, in conditions of breakdown and disruption" (Kleinman, 1997: 317) – a process that impacts either negatively or positively on their material and psychological wellbeing.

The spiritual strength of the poor

This section studies how the material and the spiritual dimensions of poverty are linked. By spiritual here, I mean the attitude and outlook of the characters represented – how they are encouraged and stirred up to resist and to survive adversity. Nourished by their high spirit after losing their jobs on the farm, Maina urges Meja virtuously, bravely and assertively or one may say,

even stoically: "... we have got to hang on to what we have got, life" (49) – an attitude that is, though with sharp narrative mockery, associated with the other inhabitants of Shanty Land.

Meja and Maina are shown to rely on what Mwangi describes as "the right spirit" to delay what seems an unbridgeable impasse. I suggest that they merely delay it because, in spite of their tenacious spirit (mainly because of the excruciating nature of their poverty, the absence of social capital to cushion them and other factors discussed elsewhere in this chapter), they (unlike the poor of Doyle's novel) do not survive adversity and poverty in the long run. A very sarcastic and mocking tone is used to capture the mindset of Shanty Land inhabitants. The text makes statements such as: "often you could hear a veteran who had been there for ages ... who was now accelerating towards the grave, say when I get money. I will And that was the right spirit" as well as the expression "the heavenly Shanty Land" (85) to describe a place that is obviously more like an embodiment of hell on earth. In spite of the narrative tone, the reader's sensitivity is still drawn to the indomitable spirit and strength of characters. Their hopefulness, rather than being a weakness, shows their strength. To show the importance of this kind of hopefulness and spirit in surviving adversity, and the danger of losing it, the narrator suggests that Maina attempts suicide because his spirit has weakened, stating that his friends who cut him down from the rope when he hung himself "were very sorry about their friend's failure of courage and they told him so" (152). The point emerges most forcefully in the view that "Maina [of] the backstreets [who earlier in the novel] talked full of ideas and hopes for a future was the same man, the same teacher now desperately trying to die" (153). This points to the enormous difficulties involved in keeping one's spirit strong when exposed to the kind of dehumanising poverty that the characters experience. The demise of Maina by the end of the novel seems to suggest that in order to survive adversity, one needs a consistently high spirit. Lack of such consistency explains the fact that Maina "footed the thirty miles from the city to his home village. But ... as he climbed the steep path leading to his home, his courage started to lag behind. His conscience lagged behind too" (155). The failing spirit results from the frustration, guilt and shame that he feels for not reaping the elusive fruits of the supposedly greener pastures of the city. These feelings consequently lead to the commission of the atrocious act of murder. Like Maina, Meja got "close to his home and then turned round without seeing his parents [which] was no longer a matter for feeling. There was no room for such feelings in his mind" (45). As in Maina's case, when Meja's spirit fails, he returns to the city and becomes a criminal there. The narrative appeals to the reader's sympathy for the two youths who, in spite of the kind of spiritual tenacity that they exhibit, are crushed by overwhelming adversity.

Unlike in *Kill Me Quick*, the poor in the Dublin setting, (probably because of a very strong and consistent spirit, cushioned by *social wealth* and/or a relatively less traumatizing encounter with poverty) are shown to deal with, resist and survive adversity. It should be noted that I unpack the differences in social circumstances between Mwangi and Doyle's characters much more fully in

the section that deals with the social dimension of poverty. Compared to Meja and Maina Paula is shown (in spite of her misfortunes) to find more reason to be in high spirits. She expresses the feeling of "love" for and fulfillment in Nicola and Jack; the knowledge that "she made them" and the general feeling of "Pride and Joy" – states of being that are metaphorically evoked when she sees a shop with the name "pride and joy". In the shop, "Paula didn't buy anything [because s]he'd no money", but she still felt "pride and joy ... when she saw Jack or Nicola" (166), and this serves to demonstrate that a person can be materially poor, but draw on non-material resources like her "pride and joy" in her family to ensure high spirits, which would in turn become a resource, ensuring that she is "strong and resilient in a potentially harsh economic environment" (Seccombe, 2002: 391). This is done by embracing and developing

those relationship patterns, interpersonal skills and competencies, and social and psychological characteristics which create a sense of positive family identity, promote satisfying and fulfilling interaction among family members, and contribute to the family's ability to deal effectively with stress and crisis. (Seccombe, 2002: 391)

Paula faces a fair share of challenges in establishing the kind of ideal family relationship that Seccombe espouses. She has terrible guilt feelings for her past treatment of her children and the damage done to them. The family relationships and the process of mending fences with her children do not constitute a straightforward, easy and simple success story. However, "through the transformative experiences of repair, remoralisation and regeneration" (Kleinman, 1997: 316) she begins the process of creating a relatively civil relationship with her children, the reverse of what one sees in the case of Meja and Maina who remain permanently separated from their families and consequently, condemned to a life of perpetual impoverishment and loneliness. The stable relationship that Paula builds with her family partly contributes to ensuring her high spirit and her family's resilience, recovery and survival. This is not necessarily because Paula has a stronger spirit than the poor of Mwangi's work. Rather, it is because the circumstances of the poor of Mwangi's work and by extension, the poor in most third world societies (mostly in the south) are much more horrendous than those of the "poor" of Doyle's work and by extension, the poor of most first world societies – mostly in the north. The varying levels of precariousness between characters in the two novels are indicative of a more general situation that Comaroff and Comaroff (2012: 4) have described as follows: "... the south continu[ing] to be the suppressed underside of the north".

The names of the characters in both texts have significance. Naming creates varying conceptions of personhood in the two novels. In naming his protagonist Paula Spencer – her first and surname – she is made to appear true to life, given an embodiment of an autonomous self by Doyle, while the two youths remain archetypes as their first names Maina and Meja could stand for anyone, including the author (Meja Mwangi). It is significant that Mwangi names his main character after himself. A possible interpretation is that he aims to depersonalize the issues he is writing about,

implying that anyone else, himself included, could be in the situation that Meja and Maina find themselves in the novel – if exposed to the kind of difficult circumstances that the two experience. This partly exonerates them from blame for their condition of impoverishment, placing blame on a society that is shown to have failed its youth. It is also a mechanism that works against facile condemnation of “criminal youths” among the urban poor, requiring the reader to take note of how well behaved and well intended, but poor and unemployed young men in the city, will be driven into criminality despite themselves, given their abandonment by family and society.

The social dimension of poverty

This section examines how poor communities are affected by problems of alcoholism and drug addiction as well as the extent to which the human body is overtaxed in the process of seeking to survive adversity. Although both texts deal with the problem of crime, I select not to cover it in this chapter as chapter three of the thesis undertakes an in-depth study of poverty-crime *intersectionality*. Also, the two texts portray varying dimensions and complexities concerning the nature of social relations, but I do not deal with it in this section as it is integrated into the discussion in the preceding sections.

The social dimension of poverty: addictions

Though poorer, the community portrayed in Mwangi’s text does not experience the extreme level of drug and alcohol abuse and addiction that one sees in fictional Dublin. However, fictional Nairobi is not completely free of incidents of alcoholism and drug abuse. There is no obvious indication that the impoverished members of the Razor gang or any other community of persons depicted in Mwangi’s text are terribly addicted to alcohol or drugs though the gang members do clearly abuse drugs and alcohol. The novel states that Maina and the other members of the gang “now drank freely straight from the bottle” and smoked bhang partly because “there was nothing else to do” (77). The text seems to suggest that they engage in substance abuse partly as a result of their circumstances – lives characterized by joblessness and idleness – nothing else to do. The suggestion that the “hallucinating cigar was passed from one set of wet lips to the other” evokes a ritual of comradeship – one in which the poor are shown to share unselfishly and unreservedly. Significant in the passage is the effect that an excessive use of both alcohol and drug has on the gang members. “The Crasher [cries] drunkenly ..., Maina now drank freely straight from the bottle ..., [h]is senses were numbed”, ... Maina’s drunken senses were aroused” and the cigar that is passed around is described as “hallucinating” (77-78). It is possible that members of the gang and poor communities in general resort to hedonistic consumption of drugs and alcohol as a means of dealing with the condition of material deprivation – numbing their senses, increasing feelings of wellbeing and causing them to act “freely”. The alcohol and drugs that they use function as stimulants but also suppressants, explaining the momentary expression of ecstasy that is followed by a slump back into a state of perpetual despair when the reader next meets these characters in the

text – pointing to the ineffectiveness or ephemeral effects of alcohol and drugs as a solution to difficult human conditions. I do not aim to suggest here that drug and alcohol abuse is exclusive to poor communities, but it seems they are common problems in many poor communities such as Shanty Land. However, addiction to drugs and alcohol seems to have attained a chronic stage in the relatively wealthier fictional Dublin setting.

With varying implications and for a variety of reasons, alcoholism is shown to be a major problem that the fictional Dublin society grapples with. Paula declares: “[e]veryone is an alco these days” (137) – wondering: “[a]lcoholics can stop drinking but what is there for the children of alcoholics? Is it always too late? Probably. She [Paula] doesn’t know” (251). The passages just quoted point (in a generic way) to the complex nature of the problem of alcoholism but also the enormity, depth and long lasting nature of the emotional, psychological and physical scars that result from situations of sustained alcohol abuse. Alcoholism is shown to have a ripple effect – affecting not just the individual alcoholic but their family and society broadly. Many societies, fictional and actual, first world and third world, have acknowledged that “alcoholism [and drug addiction are] ... common and costly” (McGue, 1999: 109) behavioral disorders in poor communities. It must however be noted that although Paula was for a long but unspecified period (as shown in the prequel, *The Woman Who Walked into Doors*) addicted to alcohol, when the reader meets her in *Paula Spencer* she has been “off the bottle” for over ten months. However, the effects of her alcoholic past form a significant portion of the narrative – a past that is rhetorically shown to have had a long lasting effect on her family and to have led to some of the most difficult challenges that she has to deal with in the present – portrayed in *Paula Spencer*.

A key perspective advanced or implied in the narrative supposes that Paula attempts or indeed, (in Leanne’s case in particular) contributes to turning her children into alcoholics. The rhetorical conversation in the quotation that follows between the two, Leanne and Paula, reveals this most poignantly:

Leanne: ... you want to tell me I’m an alcoholic?

Paula: And that gives you the right to hit me?

Leanne: I’m an alcoholic? Join the fuckin’ club. Have a drink, Leanne.

Paula: I never did that, says Paula.

Leanne: What?

Paula: I never made you drink with me.

Leanne: Well, take a bow. Saint Paula of alcos. She never made us drink with her.

Paula: Ah, shut up, Leanne. She could kill the little bitch. Paula’s proud of how far she’s come.

But Leanne is mocking her and it seems so stupid. I never made her drink with me. ... (72)

The conversation indicates that “[t]he possibility of engaging others through a powerful dialogue conceives of language as possessing a disclosive capacity” (Lara, 1998: 2). The discomfiting conversation captures the narrator’s view that “[t]he house isn’t big enough for two alcoholic

women” (179), but most importantly, it gets the reader to visualise the kind of dramatically tense and complex situations that characterize the lives of the poor of Doyle’s work who, forced by circumstance, have to live together in spite of the tension – a situation that is made worse by the challenges that they face in dealing with a past that is filled with unpleasant memories. Paula is concerned over what Leanne says about her, and this urges the reader to “consider the psychological importance in our lives of what others say about us, and the importance, for us, of understanding and interpreting these words of others” (Bakhtin, 2004: 338). Although Paula’s circumstances have improved materially and she has stopped drinking, her image and social reputation remain tainted (at least in her daughter’s eyes). Leanne, in addition to blaming Paula for her own addiction to alcohol, also downplays and undermines all that Paula believes she has accomplished subsequently. The injurious force of her attitude towards Paula lies less in the fact that she physically hits her mother, but more in the very mocking and contemptuous tone that Leanne uses. However, in portraying a daughter who hits the mother, the narrative opens space for the reader to see the disastrous consequences of alcoholism on the family and society in general. Unlike in Mwangi’s text where members of the family are not shown to deal collectively with issues that affect them, Doyle here depicts a family that is nearly torn apart by a social ill – alcoholism – but which, in the process of talking about the problem, are on the way to mediating and negotiating a way out of their social and material predicament. Rather than being a weakness, the conflict situation above suggests that Doyle’s characters negotiate a way out of adversity by confronting their problems – past and present. The dialogue shows that “subjects engaging in speech-acts learn to configure disclosive possibilities of new understandings, to relate in different ways things that were once otherwise” (Lara, 1998: 5). When this happens, one sees “narratives as society’s ways of coping with the past, the present, and a possible, utopian future” (Lara, 1998: 7). Although Paula and her family, unlike Meja and Maina are shown to be dealing with adversity, one does not see the probability of a “utopian future” as the effect that substance abuse has had on members of the family remains undisputed – as further shown in the passages below.

Drug (like alcohol) addiction is shown to be a much more serious problem in fictional Dublin than it is in fictional Nairobi. There are three possible explanations for this. First, it is possible that contrasted with Mwangi, Doyle is much more concerned about drug and alcohol addiction in working class communities, hence the detailed depiction. Second, unlike the Dublin society depicted, levels of poverty (as I have indicated earlier) are much more tragic in the Nairobi community depicted. As such, poor members of this community cannot sustain a heavy addiction to alcoholism and drugs because of their near moneyless existence. Third, it is possible that the problem of alcoholism and drug abuse might be equally or more serious in the sector of Kenyan society depicted. However, because of nonexistent family units and a complete breakdown in communication channels, these remain (contrary to Doyle’s text) unspoken of within the family circle and therefore, hidden from the reader.

As with alcohol, Paula's family is shown to be battling with heavy drug addiction. We know this from conversations held between members of the family – conversations that are emancipatory as they “open up possibilities for creating different kinds of recognition and solidarity between ...” (Lara, 1998: 2) family members and the community. While acknowledging her family's predicament Paula clearly depersonalizes the problem of drug addiction, portraying it as a broader societal ill – a point that is enhanced by the suggestion that Star (her daughter-in-law's) “mother's an addict too. ... It's a hard thing to imagine, a granny who's a heroin addict. But John Paul got there before Paula; it was hard to imagine a granny who's an alcoholic. He wasn't being vicious. She smiled” (117). Important here, owing to the main concern of this thesis is the connection between poverty and drug addiction. One can plausibly argue that when Paula states that “a lot of families had one – more than one” (80), she is referring to her immediate community; a community made up of mostly working class citizens and migrants from other parts of the world, some of whom (like her) are living in Corporation houses because they are poor. Considering Paula's household as representative of some or even most of the poor households in her community, it is probable that members of these working class homes, like those in her home are faced with challenges such as poverty, overcrowding, women and children abuse and the exposure of children to substances of various types – making them vulnerable to drugs. There seems therefore to be an association between poverty and drug addiction. This, however, does not imply that drug addiction is exclusive to poor communities. Probably, many from rich families in the fictional society and obviously, actual societies, are addicted to drugs, but the fiction particularly portrays a poor character (John Paul) who is addicted to heroin. John Paul is young, poor, exposed to the abusive relationship between his parents and generally vulnerable. So, he turns to drugs partly as an escape from the difficult reality that characterizes his life – a habit that he cannot sustain. As such, he resorts to petty theft, as seen in the statement “[h]e'd walked into the house and he'd walked straight back out with the television” (80). Again, I do not imply here that only poor drug addicts engage in petty crime to feed their habit. It is a common tendency for most drug addicts (rich but mostly poor) to commit petty crimes. However, in this instance, the narrative depicts a character who is poor, comes from a poor background and seems to be pushed by stress to become addicted to drugs – a habit that he has no real means of financing. Clearly, substance abuse as seen in the paragraphs above is a major problem in poor communities.

The social dimension of poverty: overtaxed and mechanized bodies

A key aspect represented in the two novels is the extent to which the human body is overworked as poor persons seek to improve or to turn their material conditions around. The poor draw on desperate survival instincts to place their bodies under extreme physical exertion and strain – in response to the pressure that they face in society. When Meja seeks employment in a stone quarry, the foreman inquires: “[w]hy don't you try creating some more muscle then come back? Meja ...

wondered where big muscle was created on empty stomach” (123). This highlights the question that Tenner (2003: 12) has posed: “is the body really becoming more mechanized” in situations where people are poor and vulnerable? The answer is obviously yes in this case. What Meja lacks in muscle, he makes up in spirit. In spite of his spirit and effort, when Meja attempts breaking “the solid rock cliff[, it] ... twisted its many jagged faces in contempt” (124). His friend Ngigi who helps him secure the job observes that “[t]he rock is tough and obstinate”. Indeed, “the brutal rock looked down on [Meja] and smiled solidly” (126). Noticing “the poor condition of Meja’s wounded hand”, Ngigi “wondered what drove the poor man to such desperation” (126-127). The response that this rhetorical question is likely to solicit from a reader with a deep awareness of Meja’s situation is: excruciating poverty. In what is a personification of the rock, the narrative heightens the reader’s awareness of the viciously difficult circumstances that the poor are exposed to. In characterizing the rock as “contemptuous”, “tough”, “obstinate” and “brutal”, the narrative metaphorically evokes the difficult socio-economic circumstances that render Meja’s efforts to improve his life futile. Here, the narrative interestingly portrays the cruelty of nonhuman elements on the human being – subtly indicating the limitedness of human ability and tenacity or rather, mocking human effort to turn around what seems to be defiantly difficult circumstances. The might of the rock and symbolically, the enormity of the obstacle that the poor have to contend with is seen in the descriptive words above – words which assume hyperbolic proportions when compared with the depiction of Meja’s fragility in the foreman’s words: “[h]ow heavy are you? Oh it is useless. You can’t weigh more than a hundred pounds. What could you possibly do here with that sort of muscle? We just can’t have you” (122).

The symbolic cruelty of the rock is carefully balanced against a rare instance of human kindness in the text – shown by Ngigi. He inquires caringly: “[a]re you all right? Is there anything I can do for you?” This kind of care alerts Meja to the fact that: “[i]t would be foolish to go away in need if the quarry man could assist him out of his problems. Maybe he was losing a good future friend. He stopped and turned round” (119). Ngigi’s compassion and kindness indicate that as one moves away from the city, one moves closer to kindness and away from urban indifference. The context within which Meja and Ngigi are depicted is at the outskirts of the city. The text shows how Meja recognizes the good in this particular human character. It is balanced against statements in which Meja chastises his fellow man for being uncaring, unkind and selfish and the two perspectives offer a balanced assessment of human nature. It is this kind of balanced assessment of human nature that “makes [Mwangi’s] ... account of human action meaningful” (Lara, 1999: 9).

Meja draws on three important resources at his disposal to overcome the enormous challenge symbolized in the rock. First, he exhibits a very resilient spirit as seen in the foreman’s words: “I appreciate your spirit” and in Ngigi’s view that “[i]f he believed he could work in the quarry maybe he could” (123). Second, he benefits from the luxury of human kindness embodied in Ngigi – a

luxury because this type of kindness, especially between strangers is rare in the text and only seen elsewhere in the text when a nurse at the hospital where Meja is hospitalized assists him with transport fare to go home to his family. Third, Meja draws on what is shown as his sophisticated intellectual ability. After Meja's momentous success on his first day in the stone quarry, Ngigi questions: "[t]ell me, my friend, how did you do it" and he responds: "I followed the line of weakness I knew you would never believe it But that is exactly what I did" (131). Meja, unlike "all the miners [who] were large and muscular and very much unlike himself" has "thread arms, legs with bones almost showing through the skin", but he makes up for this disadvantage with the three resources at his disposal as listed above. However, he eventually "creates" muscle by digging rocks over a sustained period of time, transforming himself into "a big man . . . [whose] shoulders were sagging under a mountain of muscles" (134). Meja's good fortune is however short-lived. In spite of the muscle and all the other resources that enable him to dismantle a large chunk of rock, Meja succumbs to adversity – becoming an unemployed criminal and a perpetual jailbird when the quarry closes.

Like Meja, Paula's body bears scars of physical strain. Unlike Meja, the bodily injury that she has suffered does not result just from work but also from the physical abuse that she has suffered from her husband. Therefore, pain is inflicted on her body from two sources – abuse by her husband and subsequently, hard work. Of course, pain is doubly inflicted on Meja's body as well – when he is knocked down by a car while running with a parcel that Maina has thrown to him and also, when he digs rocks. Because of the abuse that Charlo inflicted on her, Paula's "back is at her – its been at her for years. Old injuries, the Charlo damage; The scar on her chin, the pain in her back, the way she has to turn her head when she's listening to someone, because she can't hear too well with her left ear – they're the old Paula" (93). The narrator adds: "[a]ll of Paula's past is in her back One last kick from a man who died twelve years ago" (247). Attempting to rationalize what are clearly irrational acts of abuse, Paula claims in *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* that "If he'd had other work when all the building around Dublin stopped and there was nothing left for him to do. He would have put that anger to use" (Doyle, 1996: 191). This claim supposes that the abuse results from Charlo's frustrations over difficult material conditions. This is an untenable attempt to justify an act that is unjustifiable – domestic abuse, ironically presented by the victim of the abuse. This is an abnormal but a common attitude that has the potential to fan the flames of domestic abuse. The narrative suggests that in some difficult material conditions, the woman or rather her body suffers double abuse – inflicted in this case by the spouse on the one hand and on the other by the taxing work that she does in an effort to rescue herself and her family from the clutches of poverty. Symbolically, her body becomes a "a map of his abuse. She just has to look at the bones in her right hand, or feel her shoulder She could get up and go over to the exact spot where she lay after Charlo had given her a hiding" (135). The pathos of the situation is recorded in Paula's index of her injuries and scars – "the Charlo damage". In fact, the pain she experiences is

symbolically imprinted even on the floor of the house in which she still lives with her children – twelve years after his death. The reader is made to imagine the psychological pain that is suffered perpetually by a victim of abuse when s/he is forced by material circumstances to continue living in the same space where abuse occurred. Through the images, the narrative prompts the reader to feel and to visualize the pain that Paula as a representative of other poor and maritally abused women has suffered. Of course, domestic abuse is not exclusive to poor homes but the text in this specific case portrays an abusive situation in a poor home. It could be assumed that poor families are exposed to a lot more pressures and stressors than richer families, increasing the likelihood (in poorer homes) of domestic abuse.

Doyle further shows how, after surviving years of physical abuse at the hands of her husband, Paula continues to suffer a new form of bodily harm – mainly from the taxing work that she does. The narrator declares: “[t]here’s no energy in her. Nothing in her legs. Just pain. Ache. ... Every footstep cracks her” (1-2). Clearly, she is physically drained by the long and exhausting hours of tedious work that she does. This is a situation commonly experienced by poorly paid working class and poor individuals. Such a situation is partly explained by the shifting understanding of the real worth of “time”. It has been noted that there is

a shift away from an earlier understanding of the real worth of time toward a substitution of money for time, as capitalism raised the price of time. In a culture where time is merely money, we risk perverse effects ... – a powerful incentive for workers to work as many hours as they could. ... Where time is money, it's hard to protect time for ... low-wage workers [such as Paula]... . The commensurability of time and money has other detrimental social effects. It transforms a resource that is equally distributed (time) into one that is distinctly unequal (money). Both wealth and income are unequally distributed. But everyone is born with twenty-four hours a day. (Schor, 1992: 166)

The quotation above is only a partial explanation of why Paula works very long hours – putting her body through excessive strain. Interestingly, she finds fulfillment in the feeling of tiredness as shown by the words: “[s]he’s always tired. ... She’s tired at night and that’s the way it should be. A hard day’s work and that. She likes being tired. Tired and sober – its different” (9). In juxtaposing her tiredness with soberness, the narrative hints at the possibility that work, though tiring, brings with it a sense of self-worth that reduces or even eliminates the chances that a recovering addict like Paula would again turn to alcohol to seek fulfillment or to cope with difficulties or even to deal with idleness and loneliness. It should be noted that though strenuous, work only aggravates the injuries that Charlo inflicted on her. Also, it seems the psychological and material (monetary) value of long hours of work make up for the kind of physical pain that work inflicts on her as seen in the confession that she is “earning more than she ever did. But the back is there, the twinge. ... She can’t stand straight” (246). In spite of the “pain”, the “back” and the “twinge”, she does not stop working, again showing the near mechanization and exertion of the body of poor persons. Paula’s life is indeed difficult, serving as an example of the claim that in situations of material deprivation,

“the circumstances of women are considerably more chancy and often more threatening than those of men” (Lara, 1998: 99). Generally, the vulnerable poor are subjected to and exposed to a multiplicity of perpetually harmful experiences which leave lasting physical impediments on their bodies – the back ache in Paula’s case and the limp and injured hand in Meja’s case.

Unmasking the poor: Façades of wealth

This section examines how the poor respond to their condition of poverty by exhibiting what seem to be superficial appearances – “... bear[ing themselves] physically [and emotionally] in a certain way, to be mindful of what would offend, insult, ... shame” (Sherman, 2005: 273) or betray their state or feeling of impoverishment. I also examine how the poor are shown to hide their feelings of despair behind a façade of contentment. When Meja first arrives on the street, he is comically "dressed in an old baggy black suit, a wide tie and a pair of oversize shoes that once belonged to his father" (4). Meja is obviously overdressed for the street. The clothes convey a deeper symbolic message about Meja's state of mind. He arrives in the city with inflated hopes of securing a job that would enable (and require) him to dress daily in a suit – an attitude that is captured not just in the relatively flamboyant style of dress but also in the fact that the suit is oversized, which stands as a metaphor for the deceptively luring promises of the city. The oversized clothes gives him the appearance of a fatuous jester or even a buffoon (a Charlie Chaplin) – making the reader doubt his ability to survive the city before he even starts trying; hinting that his hopes to make it in the city are illusory – mostly because the odds are against him. This point is made clearly below.

Men are, one and all, actors They put on a show ... without deceiving anyone And it is a very good thing that this happens in the world. For if men keep on playing these roles, the real virtues whose semblance they have merely been affecting for a long time are gradually aroused and pass into their attitude of will. (Sherman, 2005: 276)

Contrary to the view expressed in the social science text above, Meja’s appearance does not find realistic expression – “pass into [his] attitude of will” – owing to the enormity of the odds against him. His attempt to dress appropriately to impress a prospective employer, as shown in a quotation below, results in embarrassment and imprisonment. The fact that he wears what is possibly his father’s best garments for the journey to the city opens analytical space. The reader's awareness is drawn to how the family’s hopes for a better life are invested in Meja and symbolically, in his move to the city. Also, Meja’s educational and even post educational endeavours have been a material drain on his family – heightening the reader's sympathy for a family that has given up so much with no foreseeable realization of the kind of returns that they hoped for. When his newfound friend Maina cautions: "[t]hose clothes could fetch you a few shillings Take good care of them. You might need the money" (4), this shows that a sustained period of living on the street has rendered Maina realistic – making him accept the reality of poverty, but also creative in his response. It must, however, be noted that poor persons put up appearances to mitigate the kinds of prejudices that they attract when they dress and act authentically. Meja informs his cell mates:

I had decided to stop taking other people's property for a while after I left here [prison]. ... I decided to get a job. ... But all they did was look at my appearance when I hobbled in and wag their heads sadly. ... So then I had to do something about my appearance ... I pinched some clothes from a parked car and went to look for a job dressed smartly in them. I went to some house in the suburbs to look for any manual labour. ... Just at that moment a man opened the door and recognized his clothes in turn. (168-169)

This is humorous and indicates how fiction, even in depicting “almost unbearable hardship and tragedy ... manages to entertain” (Lewis, 2008: 206). Embedded in the humourously presented story is a sense of the harsh reality of the poor person who is forced by a judgmental society to put up appearances. The fact that his action results in embarrassment and a prison term indicates that trying to create an appealing façade (by using the proceeds of crime) will not necessarily succeed in helping or allowing the poor to emerge from the morass of poverty.

Poor persons in the Nairobi setting do not only put up appearances in the way that they dress but also in gestures. During one of his many job searches, "Meja breathed hard and put on his most intelligent look in an effort to cover his misery" (5). However, he still does not get the job he hopes for – implying that, like the physical makeover (in stolen clothes) this has failed him. However, it has been argued that “posed facial expressions can please ... in addition, they can be self-exhortative, a way of coaxing along a corresponding inner change” (Sherman, 2005, 278). This implies that the feigned expressions shown in the passages above could, while possibly pleasing the potential employer, also become internalized – giving Meja an inner feeling of “intelligence” and “merriment” – as indeed happens in the text.

It is shown that the greatest impact of poverty on the poor is emotional and Maina attempts to deal with the emotional havoc that poverty causes him – through the catalytic act of crying all alone and in secret. In so doing, Maina hides the state of emotional disorientation wrecking him as he would, after crying, "dry his tears, put on a smiling mask and walk briskly back to reality as merry as ever, and no one would know anything had happened" (31). Theories that deal with the phenomenon of appearance suggest that the “recipient [of these appearances – in this case the reader] knows enough not to probe beyond the façades: to steal information ... that was intended to be hidden may show disrespect for others and be an invasion of their privacy” (Sherman, 2005, 276). Narrative fiction, however, has the advantage of opening up these inner feelings for a reader who would probe deep without feeling guilty about being invasive or voyeuristic. Space is opened for the reader by the narrative’s depictions to ask questions such as: “[d]oes the fact that we can ... hide our inner sentiment, ... [or] fake it, detract from or add to our capacity for” (Sherman, 2005) survival? It is significant that Meja’s smile is described as a mask, as it indeed is. By putting on the array of physical and emotional masks, Meja in particular but Maina as well simply postpone the

calamity that befalls them towards the end of the novel. The odds against them are simply too overwhelming.

In *Paula Spencer*, Paula feels sorry for "[t]he African lads [who] come in dressed to kill, like businessmen and doctors. They change into their work clothes and back into their suits before they go home. Ashamed. God love them. Handsome lads. They deserve better" (39). Paula recounts that like the men, the African women who work with her "like wigs, some of them, or bits of wigs - extensions. Going to work with purple hair. These girls have style" (59). Clearly, the African characters depicted here are shown to put up appearances. Their actions are narrated in a wry or rather, a somewhat quizzical tone as seen in the use of phrases such as "ashamed"; "God love them"; "they deserve better"; "going to work with purple hair"; and "these girls have style". In spite of the tone, the reader sees their inventiveness and creativity. The two novels seem to suggest that in cases where poverty has placed poor people in embarrassing situations, they seek to reclaim their esteem by putting up appearances – a response that is humanly understandable and pitiable – especially in cases where such poor persons are, like others in their community, aware that "[t]hey deserve better" (39).

The African characters are consciously trying to claim a Western identity (to fit in) but also, to portray themselves as being of a higher social and economic class than they actually are. It is common practice for vulnerable migrants to accept jobs that are inferior to their skill level and training. One may assume that this is the case with the group of male migrants that Paula works with. The fact that they dress in suits might be a way of dealing with what might be (in their reasoning) inferior work or maybe some sort of reminiscence over their lives as professionals in their countries of origin. This does not negate the possibility that one would find worse poverty in their homeland. The Africans portrayed in the Dublin setting are psychologically affected, if not by the condition of poverty, then by the challenges of exclusion and perhaps invisibility or even visibility that they face as migrants, to the extent that they seek to claim a space and an identity for themselves and perhaps one that would make them visible or conversely, blend with the rest of the society. On the other hand, the "purple" brightness of the African girls' hair may simply be intended to brighten their spirit while the suits worn by Paula's male cleaning colleagues and Meja create an image of a successful life – at least in prospect. Meja and (I assume) the African characters in *Paula Spencer* are, contrary to the view that "outward emotional demeanor can sometimes move inward and effect deeper changes of attitude" (Sherman, 2005, 278) not shown to have changed in attitude or status in the novel. This is partly due to the enormity of the odds against them.

Though minimally, Paula also engages in efforts towards an outward show of "wealth". When Carmel (her sister) visits, "Paula's blushing. She can feel her face burn. She'd wanted Carmel to

notice the stereo. But she hadn't. It's no big deal. Every house has one, or two or three of them" (238). Although she seeks to prove her worth to her sister, Paula is realistic and acknowledges the relative limitedness (in the Dublin context) of what she has achieved so far. This conscious awareness and acknowledgment of what she has achieved and how much more others around her have achieved propels her to work harder to better her situation – at terrible cost to and strain on her body. The stress that Paula but also some of the other characters examined earlier, both in Mwangi and Doyle's texts place on material possessions as markers of wealth indicates how the consumerist mentality is deeply entrenched in the two societies, Nairobi and Dublin – fictional and perhaps actual.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined representations of the multidimensional nature of poverty – focusing on the material, moral, psychological, spiritual and social dimensions, but also on how people put up appearances in conditions of poverty. The chapter has drawn on social, discourse and feminist theories and a variety of critical theoretical paradigms to illustrate the points I made. Compared to the Dublin society represented, material conditions in the depicted Nairobi setting are much more deplorable – and worsened by the complete lack of social security. Examining the moral dimension of poverty, I conclude that some experiences of poverty such as financial stress and feelings of insecurity and vulnerability have the potential to weaken a person (morally). This could lead to reduced family cohesion, greater physical and emotional rupture (especially in the urban setting) – with extremely deleterious consequences for poor individuals, the family unit and consequently, the broader society. While some poor persons are shown to have questionable moral values, it is made clear that this is not a rule. In fact, it is shown that in some instances, material wealth increases the chances for people to become immoral.

A study of the psychological dimension of poverty reveals that prolonged and excruciating poverty may result in depression, which manifests itself in the form of the “feelings of hopelessness, excessive appetite, excessive sleepiness, low energy, low self-esteem, ... difficulties in making decisions”, depression and guilt (Lever et al. 2005: 383-384) . These states of mind aggravate the poverty of characters – especially where they are seen to have given up as Maina and Meja have. Paula survives while Meja and Maina are crushed by devastating poverty. However, the depressing effects of prolonged poverty are also seen in Paula's “cracked” state of mind. Her feelings clearly oscillate between feeling very contented with what she has achieved to feeling guilty about the pains she put her family through while drinking heavily. Even where material conditions improve as in Paula's case, after a prolonged encounter with poverty, emotional and psychological recovery is very slow. The texts suggest that improved material conditions do not necessarily guarantee improved psychological and moral wellbeing. However, characters in Doyle's text, unlike in

Mwangi's, acknowledge and talk about their difficult past – suggesting that full recovery would accompany the improving material condition, a reverse of what happens in *Kill Me Quick*.

The poor of both texts exhibit a high level of spiritual tenacity similar to the kind expressed by the speaker in D.H Lawrence's poem *Riches*. However, while such tenacity ensures that Doyle's poor overcome the condition of poverty, it does not have the same effect in Mwangi's work. The destabilizing poverty suffered by Mwangi's poor results in actions such as Maina's attempt to commit suicide, "because his spirit has weakened". One sees that spiritual tenacity has its limits, especially where poverty is as dehumanising as seen in Mwangi's work. Paula survives adversity, not necessarily because she is more tenacious than Meja and Maina but rather, because her material condition and context are far less devastating than those of Meja and Maina. The context in which she lives allows for her tenacious spirit to thrive while Meja and Maina's is limited and dampened by extreme adversity. Meja can only lament their fate when he recounts the story of the murders that Maina committed to his cell mates, while Maina has, due to a failing of his spirit, lost his zeal to live, as he only requests: "kill me quick" – as captured in the title of the novel.

In examining the social dimension of poverty I argue that while both societies are shown to be affected by the problem of alcoholism and drug addiction, the two ills are shown to be more chronic in the Dublin society. Second, I suggest that while poor persons generally overwork, strain and overtax their bodies when faced with the condition of poverty, the situation is made worse for women such as Paula by domestic abuse and a stronger urge to nurture their offspring regardless of the odds.

Lastly, this chapter has examined how, by putting on an array of physical, emotional and gestural "masks", the poor attempt to hide their inner misery. When Maina weeps in private, he purges unwanted emotions before returning to the open – renewed. So, what the text describes as a "mask" – an appearance when he returns to the open after weeping could also be a sign of a renewed Maina – resulting from purged emotions. Some of the African characters represented in the Dublin setting also put up appearances in what seems to be an extraordinarily creative style of dressing. The African migrants resort to these appearances to deal with the feeling of exclusion from mainstream society, contempt and economic marginalization, situations that are commonly faced by migrants in most host societies but also, to hide their status of menial workers from their families. Through the façades, they claim an identity for themselves and blend in with the rest of the society. Paula like Meja, Maina and the African migrants shown in the Irish setting also puts up appearances of "wealth". In the episode where she makes an effort to get her visiting sister to see her new stereo, she intends to show off or exhibit her wealth and through that, to change perceptions that are held about her as being poor. This is a sign that she feels insecure. It must however be noted that she, in spite of all that she has experienced – in spite of the insecurities, the guilt and the appearance that

she puts up – is on the whole portrayed as being a very tenacious person. In both texts, narrative fiction opens inner feelings – enabling the reader to probe deeply into a character’s mind and emotions without feeling guilty at being invasive, and thereby, allowing for a deeper understanding of the issue under study – poverty. I conclude that a study that considers multiple dimensions of poverty – the material, moral, psychological, spiritual and social – makes possible a profound and compelling understanding of the subject of poverty.

Conclusion

Poverty: a complex and multifaceted concept and condition

The texts analysed in this study encourage us to think of poverty as complex and multifaceted – suggesting that conditions as well as experiences of poverty are varied, responses to it vary and effects on its victims are even more varied. Rather than offering a simple or rather, a simplified version of human conditions and experiences of poverty, the two authors use the creative space that fiction allows to suggest the complexity and diversity of attitudes and responses to adverse conditions such as poverty and the kinds of choices made by those who live in poverty. My approach is that it is difficult or even beyond the scope of this study to articulate with absolute certainty or delineate with precision what constitutes states of being such as need, scarcity and ultimately, poverty – implying that conceptions of these states of being vary from person to person and from context to context. Based on this understanding, I examine how the two authors' texts problematise ways of understanding and conceptions of poverty.

The texts that I study clearly illustrate the point that there is no uniformity of experience and response by any two subjects and that no two contexts of poverty are similar. While poverty is a universal condition, it is experienced differently and impacts differently on different persons within the same society, and on persons from different backgrounds and in different parts of the world. While many characters in Doyle's works are poor in relation to other members of the same fictional (Dublin) community, conditions and experiences of poverty depicted in Mwangi's works are generally much more excruciating – characterized by starvation, shelterlessness and general squalor, resulting most often in a gradual worsening of the quality of lives of many of the characters. In most of his texts, life in fictional Kenya is characterised by depressing levels and forms of poverty – made worse by the lack of official social assistance. This is the reverse of what one sees in the fictional Dublin society, where Paula's family – in *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* (1998) and in *Paula Spencer* (2006) – as well as Jimmy Sr's family – in *The Van* (1991) – live: in Corporation (City Council) houses, being therefore relatively much more secure than most of the depicted characters in Mwangi's work, who are generally homeless and consequently, extremely vulnerable. The differences between the two contexts mark the differences between the nature of First and Third World poverty that Doyle and Mwangi respectively capture.

Significantly, the texts reveal that an understanding of poverty that is mainly economic, ignoring the kinds of social, moral, psychological and spiritual paradigms highlighted by the fictional texts, is simplistic and superficial. The multiple representational perspectives of the texts are evocative of the potential of fiction (to borrow the words of Lewis et al., 2008: 205) to “reveal different sides to the experience of” poverty – articulating the sophisticated nature of human socialization and responses to poverty. I explore whether the novelists portray a character/person as poor because s/he is perceived to be poor, or rather because s/he perceives him or herself to be poor. Attempting

a response to this question, I examine whether, in spite of the (depicted) depressing material situations, some characters nevertheless do not see themselves as “poor”, and why this is the case. The novelists raise the question: can one be as shockingly poor as characters such as the Razor gang members – Meja, Maina, Dusman and the other inhabitants of the rundown complex on Grogan Road – in Mwangi’s works, as well as Henry and Victor – in Doyle’s work – and yet not feel themselves to be poor? Since the answer to this question is yes (in the case of the Razor Gang members), then their feelings of contentment result from the suggestion that “[w]hat they had, they shared equally and unselfishly: conversation, bhang, human togetherness and yes, a little poverty too” (66). In other words, solidarity in their humanness (a way of life that also characterizes Doyle’s depictions of the boy brothers Henry and Victor as seen in Henry’s confession that “I shared everything with Victor ...” – Doyle, 1999: 63) seems to be the alleviating or transforming factor. If such characters (in spite of their characterization as being poor) do not see themselves as being poor, then I suggest that the novelists complicate and challenge views that prescribe set standards of poverty or attribute poverty to other persons or mark other persons as being poor – indicating that poverty is much more than a material condition.

Poverty as a concept, a condition and an experience takes on a gendered dimension that is both complex and multifaceted – with women bearing a greater burden, but also holding the centre together in many situations of poverty. In exploring this perspective in the study, I have analysed the situation of women such as Paula and Veronica in Doyle’s works and (in Mwangi’s works) the situation of women such as the Bathroom Woman, Mama Baru, Mama Pesa and the extraordinarily powerful and outspoken Zahai. Drawing on the fictional as well as documented real life narratives of a selection of women in Nigeria as portrayed in an article titled: “Women’s Perception of Partner Violence in a Rural Igbo Community” by Amobi Linus Ilika (2005), I argue that the poverty of women is generally associated not just with lack of material resources but also, their frequent lack of social freedom and independence. Views expressed in both the real life (Nigerian) and the fictional narratives emphasize a trajectory linking money and abuse where it is seen that the poorer and therefore more dependent a woman is, the more vulnerable she is to abuse. The fictional texts that I study (especially in the Dublin setting), much more than the real life narratives, emphasize how the improved financial situation of women is accompanied by greater emancipation. Paula breaks the poverty-abuse link through her silent but profoundly powerful and evocative resistance to Charlo’s attempt to abuse her emotionally by burning money that she needs desperately (hoping that she would stop him). However, most of the women in the real life narratives (and to a lesser extent, the female characters in the Kenyan setting) accept their fate and confirm the poverty-abuse link. This, I argue does not imply that the women represented in the Irish setting are more resilient than those shown in the documented real life narratives and in the fictional Kenyan society. Rather, the difference is symbolic of the difference in experience and context between the First World and the Third World woman. The situation of the Third World woman (I argue) is characterized by

excruciating states of impoverishment and the lack of social assistance which curtails women's ability to take the kind of emancipatory positions that Paula in particular does. By referring to the poverty or in this case, dependency-abuse link, I mean a situation where women are dependent on men for money and as a result, endure emotional, physical and worst of all, sexual abuse from the men. Paula's resistance to emotional abuse in the scene where Charlo burns the money stands out as the highlight and climax of her growth out of adversity and subjugation. It is her independent personality, resilience and indomitable spirit and the generally more empowering social conditions in which she lives that enable this resistance and the subsequent act of throwing her abusive husband out of the house – eventually taking control of her life and surviving general adversity and poverty. It should be noted that, though not to the same extent as Paula, the Bathroom Woman, Mama Baru and Mama Pesa are pivotal in holding the centre together in their families – where men have failed – and Zahai leads a band of men who look up to her for leadership, guidance and protection with commendable effrontery, against a mighty and oppressive Borkan state. She is one of few women whose representation subverts the view that [a]lmost every Mwangian female serves as an object of male sexual desire” (Kurtz, 1998: 120). Therefore, in spite of the claim or rather, the reality that in situations of material deprivation, “the circumstances of women are considerably more chancy and often more threatening than those of men” (Lara, 1998: 99), some of the female characters that Doyle and Mwangi depict are generally shown to exhibit a high level of resilience and tenacity. Recognising that poverty is both a complex and a multifaceted concept and state of being, I take the position in this study that one is able to imagine the complexity mainly because fiction allows the reader access to multiple layers of possible meanings, revealing the range of distinct possibilities that fiction opens up, and creating space for the reader to bring his or her own thoughts and feelings to bear on what is a difficult human condition – poverty. This leads us to recognize the evocative strength of varied narrative approaches adopted by the two authors.

Poverty – one tale, many “tellings”: narrative voices, dialogue, description

All five of Mwangi's novels as well as three of Doyle's novels that I study in this thesis are narrated predominantly in the third person – which gives the omniscient third person narrators access to various dimensions of the experiences and the conditions of poverty that they narrate. Additionally, the third person narrative voices allow the narrators to mediate the experiences of poverty that are being narrated. However, Doyle's *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* and *A Star Called Henry* are narrated mainly in the first person narrative voice. The first person narrative voice allows the reader to see with especial pathos, the personality and the perspective and the emotional life of the poor characters narrating the stories – reversing the common trend of poverty narratives coming from elite academics in nonfictional texts, thereby making the narratives seem authentic and compelling.

It should however be noted that the narrative texture of works studied in this thesis are more complex and richer than just showing features of first or third person narrative voices. Their texts are interfused with occasional reported and direct dialogue. Dialogue between characters in the novels gives the stories a sense of objectivity, impartiality in representation, complexity and balance, but also allows the reader to gain greater (and quite intimate) insight into how they experience poverty and their worldview in general, additionally demonstrating the view expressed by Lara (1998: 5): that “subjects engaging in speech-acts learn to configure disclosive possibilities of new understandings ...” – in this case, of poverty. The dialogue, in creating interpretative space for the reader to discover various levels of meaning pertinent to the issue of poverty, is in many instances also humorous, but always poignant – showing how poor characters in the texts attempt through dialogue to take charge of their own lives; seek alternatives to social challenges; adopt subversive responses to dominant forces and win back some power. Through “overhearing” depicted conversations and “witnessing” characters’ rhetorical engagements with one another, the reader gains significant and varied insights into and perspectives onto their condition and experiences of poverty. Indeed, dialogue drives the stories towards some of the tense conflicts that one sees in most of the novels, including those narrated mostly in the first and third person narrative voices. I argue that a key aesthetic value of works by the two authors is their ability to involve the reader emotionally in the dramatic, distressing and overwhelming but in some instances hope inspiring experiences of characters and situations that they depict.

Narrative silence is an important evocative device in the two authors’ works. In both their works we see the strategic silence of the narratives on what the reader imagines are existing but ignored wealthier sections of the settings that the works depict. Although the texts of both authors make passing comments about the “other” cities – the socially and economically viable parts of the cities – they do not seem to show much concern for the polarisation which is a common feature of most actual cities, opting rather to represent if not only then largely the more run-down or squalid side of the city. This is possibly intended to raise a heightened awareness of the condition of poverty in the two cities. However, the non-portrayal of the “other” – the imaginable prosperous and viable parts of these urban settings – does not necessarily imply their absence. Rather, this demonstrates the concern of the authors; which is to evoke the condition of human adversity and displacement, but also resilience and resistant strength, mostly among poorer urban dwellers, and the low level or lack of intervention in the plight of the poor by those who are wealthier.

Significantly, the silence of characters, the silencing of characters and the breaking of silence by characters is evocative in the texts. For example, it is significant that when Jack’s convoy arrives in hunger stricken Bahadir, “[w]ithout a word, [the silent poor] made their way to the water bowser and milled around” (Mwangi, 1989: 108) the convoy and trucks bringing relief. The silent state to which poverty has reduced its victims is movingly dramatized, with great potential to appeal to the

reader. However, the act of coming out of their hiding places, though timidly and silently, and milling around the newcomers points to the fact that these people may be shattered and silenced by gross adversity, but they have not given up as yet. On the other hand, the suggestion in Doyle's *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* that Paula has "never been able to afford good shoes for [her] own kids [but that] ... they've never complained" and Leanne "never whinged once" (Doyle, 1998: 10) again points to how the poor often suffer in silence. This draws attention to how brave and unselfish Paula's children are in not plaguing her to get them things that she cannot afford, but (most importantly for the issue under consideration here) this implies too that poverty has the potential to numb and perhaps silence its victim who, left with no alternative, bears the pain of poverty silently. Rather than reading such silence as illustrating just a weakness of character on the part of the poor, I suggest in the thesis that silence is shown to be a coping mechanism in conditions of adversity. It is this same silence, I argue, that is broken in the *Woman Who Walked into Doors* when Paula claims a voice – a voice that acquires a liberating significance in her first person narration of poverty. In *Kill Me Quick*, Mwangi writes: "[t]he police cannot get a word out of [Maina] and the papers said that he was mad" (1973: 174, my emphasis). Maina, as seen in his silence, has lost his voice, the power to articulate his misery and the will to live – because of the overwhelming nature of poverty and general adversity that he experiences. When fiction captures these kinds of silent responses to adversity, it reflects narrative power rather than weakness. The silence of characters such as Maina creates space for the reader to enter their psychological world and to bring his or her [the reader's] own interpretation to bear on the silent response.

Silence is not just a narrative strategy in the texts but also a motif. In *Striving for the Wind*, Juda confesses: "... he [i.e. his father] insisted I stay in school even when he knew it wasn't doing me any good. So that he could *silence* [my emphasis] his age mates in the bar with how learned his son was" (Mwangi, 2003: 143). This is an important statement which partly explains that, while the poor are numbed and silenced by their experiences of poverty, their silence – as in the case of the poor characters that Baba Pesa seeks to and in fact, does silence most of the times – are sometimes deliberately silenced by the rich. In spite of the silence, attempts to silence and indeed the actual silencing of some poor characters in the texts, I conclude that fiction provides the poor with a valuable space to express themselves vicariously (through authorial skill) and through that, to contribute to recognition of the human worth of the poorer (and poorest) members of society.

While narrative persona, voice, dialogue and even silence serve as important devices that offer poignant representations of the condition of poverty, description as a narrative device plays a complementary role, enabling the reader to visualize the state of poverty depicted. A key artistic strength of texts by the two authors lies in the force of description; offering insightful perspectives on poverty with significance for how the reader responds to what is described. It is necessary here to mention briefly some instances of description in a selection of texts that I study in this thesis.

Mwangi in *Weapon of Hunger* describes the “wailings and pleas for an embrace” by the poor, their “emaciated” bodies and the actions of “shrugging off” rags (by the poor). Furthermore, their physical state is captured in descriptive expressions such as “thin and scrawny”; “emaciated”; “row of skeletons”; “[b]roken people”; “ghosts of people”; “half naked and half dead” and in the reference to their “worn and grimy” clothes (Mwangi, 1989: 108). We see the dreadful state of their existence and the terrible physical impact that poverty has on the poor. The descriptions are carefully crafted to reveal the desperation of the poor characters, to appeal to the reader’s sympathy and to justify the value of humanitarian enterprises such as that portrayed in the text *Weapon of Hunger*. As in Mwangi’s fiction, descriptive narratives such as that presented concerning one of the houses in which Paula works enable the reader to visualize the “unbelievable” (95) state of the house and by extension the irresponsibility of the children and their rich mother and consequently, the abuse of the poor by the employer. Paula describes it as follows: “[m]arker and paint on the walls and fridge, dirty clothes on the stairs, crumbs and bits of stood-on sandwiches all over the place. They wait for me. I even have to put the videos and CDs back into their boxes because the room would look untouched if I didn’t” (95). The description serves as an indictment of the mother, leaving the reader with the impression that the family intentionally burdens the poor cleaner – Paula – with the mess described. The excerpts quoted above are intended merely to illustrate specifically and clearly how description functions as a narrative device to achieve a compelling representation of poverty through the portrayal of dismaying scenes that accentuate and indeed amplify the other narrative devices. The two authors’ use of description as a narrative device has artistic and dramatic dimensions, achieving dramatic intensity in scene-setting in their novels through which the reader is enabled to imagine and to have a heightened encounter with the kind of human difficulty that the characters suffer because of poverty. This appeals to the reader’s sympathy, with the likelihood of soliciting a reaction from a reader who is implicitly exhorted to act against circumstances that breed the kind of poverty that is described – creating what Persson (2003: 47) describes as a “theatre of social conscience”. I conclude that the multiple narrative approaches and devices that the two authors apply in their texts allow for a vivid and profound as well as compelling representation of poverty. In studying the narrative strategies of the two authors, I draw extensively on ideas delineated by Michael Bakhtin, Maria Pia Lara and Martha Nussbaum.

The affective imaginary

A reader of the texts under study in this thesis is likely to be taken through an imaginative process that (as Pocock suggests) would enable him or her to “profoundly observe and absorb the conditions described” (Pocock, 1996: 377) – a process that should impact on the reader in a variety of ways. The chosen texts to varying degrees depict situations and experiences of homelessness; loneliness; alienation; abandonment; abuse; contempt; marginalization; starvation; hopelessness; diminished self-esteem; inequality and other poverty related difficulties and adversities. Through such depictions, the authors use the device of pathos to appeal to the reader’s sympathy and to draw

his or her awareness to the issues narrated. I argue in the thesis that the distinct ability of fiction to represent vividly and movingly what it shows us, allows the texts to portray a social problem such as poverty in a manner that appeals to a variety of emotions in the reader – anger; concern; a sense of urgency; compassion; shock or even horror but sometimes, inspiration that stems from hopefulness.

In spite of all the odds placed on their path, most of the poor characters, through their resilience and creativity, resist the demeaning effects of poverty and in most cases, eventually take charge of their lives. The kind of resistance, resilience and tenacity that the novels depict invite the reader into the emancipatory possibilities for those among the poor who try harder – motivating readers who may be faced with similar situations to attempt to emancipate themselves and inspiring respectful recognition of the courage and dignity of many poor people who resemble the fictional characters. Subtly captured in the novels are survivalist mechanisms that the poor draw on to overcome adversity. The reader is not only exposed to the importance of the novel form as a product of artistic creativity and a contributor to social knowledge and personal learning, but brought to recognize that even in poverty, people retain the potential to hope and to strengthen the spirit to resist challenging material adversities like those that are portrayed. In fact, the repeated reference to the role of the imagination in some of the cases where the poor are shown to resist poverty – especially in depictions of Paula in Doyle's *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* and in *Paula Spencer* – serve metaphorically to highlight the significance of imaginative responses, interpretations and representations (such as those offered by Mwangi and Doyle) to unfavourable human conditions such as poverty. We also see in this thesis, however, that the novelists recognize the sad, bitter truth that it is not in all cases that the poor are able to overcome poverty, emphasizing the need for carefully situated, deeper and further inquiry around the subject of poverty.

The impact of poverty: dehumanizing and deadening

Some of the novelistic narratives that I study in this thesis have frightening impact in their depictions of bestial characteristics, instincts and tendencies that emerge in human beings who experience extreme material deprivation. This is most clearly expressed when Sidelil Kidan states that members of his community have come to behave "like animals" (Mwangi, 1989:214). His sorrow at such regression in combination with the conviction with which he speaks might persuade the reader to grieve or feel sorrow for the poor who have been bestialized by an encounter with devastating material conditions.

When Jack and his convoy arrive at the community of Bahadir (Mwangi, 1989: 112), I suggest, the local people's conduct of milling around the water bowser and gathering around the convoy can be seen as symbolic. It indicates the behaviour of herded animals milling around and perhaps

scrambling for the waterhole when given the opportunity by the herder. By extension, the convoy and the supplies that they bring symbolically replace the natural local sources of subsistence – food and water – which in the human context are increasingly diminishing and creating a dependence on food aid. With profound effect, the author implicitly evokes animal metaphors to represent the anti-social state of people stripped of dignity by extreme poverty. This representation of the way dire need can reduce human beings to behave in animal-like ways is horrifying but creates an indelible impression of a grim reality.

The image of death predominates in the two novelists' depictions of the poor, equating extreme forms of poverty with death. In Doyle's *The Van*, Jimmy Sr labels a group of notorious youth (whom he later discovers include his two grandchildren) as the "Living dead" – a group whose actions give "Bimbo, Jimmy Sr and Sharon ... an almighty fright ..." (Doyle, 1991: 522). On the other hand, Mwangi's narrator in *Weapon of Hunger* labels members of the desperately poor fictional community of Bahadir which Jack and his convoy come across as "living corpses", stating: "the surest remedy was to ... talk to the living corpses and reassure oneself that they were indeed human and harmless ..." (Mwangi, 1989: 108). Still in Mwangi's *Weapon of Hunger*, the depiction of the wordless movements of the starved community of Shom shows how the human body is turned into a grotesque and lifeless object by a depressing situation of poverty, where "[m]ass starvation and death are as old as history ..." (Mwangi, 1989: 37). In *Kill Me Quick*, Maina, like a tethered and soon to be butchered animal, surrenders himself to the prospect of a death sentence, pointing to the disempowering, the numbing or even the deadening of humanity and human feelings by extreme adversity. In fact, the metaphorically titled novel *Kill Me Quick* with frightening implications foregrounds the point that some of the poor of Mwangi's novel and more particularly Maina have resigned themselves to death as the only possible way out of poverty. This situation resonates with that of the poor of Doyle's *A Star Called Henry*, who prefer to risk death in the trenches of France which they think "are safer than the Dublin slums" (Doyle, 1999: 182).

The authors pun on the metaphors of life and death. In *Striving for the Wind*, we are made to imagine that Margaret's death during childbirth is metaphorical of the death of the evil ways of Baba Pesa, who rapes and impregnates her, but also the beginning of a new, more cordial and respectful relationship between the Barus and the Pesas. The death also serves as a warning to teenage girls against sugar daddies and older rich men who exploit young girls. Similarly, the death of Charlo in *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* signals the birth of the more independent, invigorated and resourceful Paula, but it also serves as a warning to those who resort to crime as a way of dealing with their poverty. Another narrative instance around the subject of death in Doyle's works is when the little boy Victor coughs to death on the cold street and his (slightly older) brother Henry notes that "the city killed Victor ..." (83). The images, metaphors and

narratives of death and deadening poverty are shocking indictments of fictional and perhaps actual societies where the poor, abandoned to their miserable existence, are reduced to “living corpses” that surrender themselves to death or have to make impossible, equally deadly choices. The narratives should shock but also appeal to the consciences of the readers who might have been unaware of or indifferent to the extent of the suffering of the poor. I argue that the two novelists make a contribution in the best way they can (as writers) to the alleviation of poverty by insisting through their novels that society notice the urgent plight of the poor. Possibly, I argue, the poor characters’ lifelessness, fatal choices and apparent surrender to death, rather than being proof of weakness, is also an indication of strength as it shows their stoicism and courageous resignation to or acceptance of unavoidable fate, having done what they can to resist it.

De/Africanised and universalised poverty

I explore in this thesis whether the texts that I study either question or promote simplistic and generalised notions and images of what is conceived in some representations – literary and nonliterary – as “African poverty” or rather, whether experiences and conditions of poverty are given a universal interpretation. An approach that I consider as “deaffricanising” poverty is the fictional conception of poverty as a universal condition through the depiction of conditions and experiences of poverty in what is supposed to be a relatively wealthier part of the world – Western Europe, represented by Ireland. In one of many depictions of poverty in his texts, Doyle undertakes a descriptive narrative, providing the reader with a visual imaginary of the condition of the poor in fictional Dublin. He uses the evocative images of “sharp” and “angry” cheekbones and of their “skinny” and “meatless” legs to describe the poor (Doyle, 1999: 179), appealing to the reader’s sense of sight. In reading the text, the reader is made to picture the deplorable physical condition of the famine-struck poor. I argue that it is important that Doyle evokes these kinds of moving images of famine in a European setting since usually, nowadays, such images are associated with Africa or India. Such depictions deaffricanise and universalize poverty, suggesting that these conditions may be common in Africa and other Third World societies, but they are universal. In another instance and text, Doyle’s main character Jimmy Jr, in what I again see as a statement of the universality of poverty, declares that “the Irish are the niggers of Europe, lads. ... An’ Dubliners are the niggers of Ireland ... say it loud, I’m black an’ I’m proud” (Doyle, 1988: 13). Although the reader is aware of their relatively better material conditions, the statement gives the impression that the Irish in general and the Dubliners in particular are marginalized and impoverished materially and perhaps also psychologically and therefore need, like marginalized and impoverished “African” Americans during the height of civil right activism in the US, vigorously to seek their liberation – economically and psychologically. Here again, Doyle universalizes human experiences of adversity. Through these kinds of narrative perspectives, an African reader or any other reader for that matter – especially one who is poor or has knowledge of poverty – would, without necessarily being made to accept as normal the kinds of extreme poverty seen in fictional and actual African

societies, be made to realize that Africa is not an exception when it comes to poverty. Feelings such as those captured in Jimmy's words "say it loud, I'm black an' I'm proud" could be rephrased as *I'm poor an' I'm proud*, indicating resistance to adversity and a sense of self-worth in the poor, which demands that their dignity and human worth be recognized.

Besides the depictions of poverty as a universal rather than just an African problem, it is obvious that levels of poverty in the fictional and in fact, actual African societies are shockingly disproportionate. However, some of the narrative perspectives that attempt to portray poverty exclusively as an African problem (partly because of contemptuousness and cynicism of tone) are shaky and unconvincing. As such, rather than sway the reader, they distance the reader from the kind of views expressed and by extension, from generalized and biased views commonly held and expressed by some in nonfictional forms of representation and by some in actual society. Mister Felix, a character in Mwangi's *Weapon of Hunger* (in a narrative that attributes a persona to Africa), states: "Africa has had too much to drink. Africa is drunk on herself. The old whore does not need food aid from us. Africa feeds on herself. ... Africa cannibalizes herself" (Mwangi, 1989: 37). I argue that the personification of Africa as a person in a state of self-perpetuated depravity, inebriation and geared to its own destruction would shock African readers in particular. We see that in personifying Africa, the narrative simply implies that Africans themselves are perpetrating acts which perpetuate the continent's degradation. Implicitly, Mister Felix blames Africa and Africans for the prevailing material conditions. However, we also see that these views on Africa exemplify certain unmodulated and harsh views of poverty as "deserved" by the poor and by extension, the proverbial wisdom that "people get the government they deserve, and we [Africans] deserve beggars to be our leaders" (Farah, 1993: 194) – by implication, Africans deserve to remain poor and beggars. In these kinds of narrative excerpts, Africa becomes a sort of symbol or metonymy for poverty. In spite of its resemblance to the other representational forms, fiction's distinct ability to pull together a variety of representational voices and consequently, perspectives, stands out compellingly. When Paula's attempt to explain her abuse at her husband's hands, I argue, this also captures the universal but also, the relative nature of world poverty. She declares: "Me and my big mouth. I'd have made him his tea. ... If I was in India or Africa I'd be picking my own fuckin' tea" (169-170). This is significant, considering that poverty as I have mentioned earlier is commonly associated with India and Africa, or rather, that these two regions are commonly associated with extreme levels of poverty and despair. Paula Africanises poverty or rather, universalizes the experience of poverty by referring to the postcolonial woman, but also makes explicit the point that her Dublin setting – fictional and by extension actual – leaves her relatively better-off than the Indian and African woman, yet not immune to poverty.

The fictional narratives, I conclude, could allow a character and even the reader to develop a deeper understanding of his or her situation, as the portrayed *Other* serves as a mirror in which s/he

recognises his or her relative advantage (or disadvantage) and may act upon it. A polarity between the poor and the slightly better-off but also a polarity between kinds and forms of poverty emerges between but also, within each of the two regions of the world (Kenya and Ireland, Africa and Western Europe and by extension, First World and Third World). The fictional texts analysed in this thesis complicate common and simplistic associations of standards of poverty and wealth exclusively with particular societies, universalizing the conception and experience of poverty and inequality. Indeed, the juxtaposed representations of poverty by Mwangi and Doyle stand as a reversal of common and actual interpretations of the Western/First World's unquestioned economic viability and power on the one hand and Africa and the Third World's underdevelopment, on the other, creating an ambivalent effect. Poverty is indeed a universal condition, but it differs in nature and intensity from one society and context to another.

The pathology of poverty

An attempt to study the origin of poverty is a challenging endeavour, owing to the fact that poverty is a complex state of being and consequently, results from a range of complex factors. Nonetheless, the texts that I study tacitly offer a number of explanations for the conditions of poverty that the characters experience, while also suggesting that there is no single cause to the condition of poverty. Possible causes highlighted by the texts include: attitude to work and self-development; lack of thrift or laziness; exploitation; social inequalities; lack of fiscal capital; poor leadership and unfair terms of international trade; lack of social support and declining economies. It is necessary to end the list here or risk missing the point of a literary study, which is to study the nuances of fictional representation of the causes and other poverty related issues. This study does exactly this – examining how the representational features amplify the insights glimpsed in the text, especially in terms of the etymology of poverty – examining how fiction explains some of the causes of poverty and shows the effects of poverty on its victims – the poor. I conclude that fiction creates an interpretative space for the reader to discover various levels of meaning pertinent to the causes of poverty – underlining the position that poverty arises out of different combinations of factors such as those listed above. The texts (I conclude) enlarge the view that if external constraints that confine the poor are eliminated, the poor person often exhibits the potential and disposition to extricate him or herself from poverty. This is demonstrated by the emancipation or the beginning of that process in the lives of characters such as The Bathroom Man in Mwangi's work and Paula in Doyle's.

Responses to poverty and the poor

Responses to poverty and to the poor in Doyle and Mwangi's works vary. They include a range from hopefulness and resilience to indifference, self-pity and resignation – all these attitudes having further implications for the poor, for the quality of their poverty and in turn affecting the fictional societies depicted. Both Doyle and Mwangi emphasise the importance of hope as a

commodity on which the poor build their resilience and resistance to the condition of poverty. Aided by their hopefulness, the poor of both novels employ a variety of adaptive mechanisms and strategies that – in the words of Harvey and Reed (1996: 467) – “allow the[m] ... to survive in otherwise impossible material and social conditions”. Many of their characters are shown to have suffered, adapted and survived the condition of poverty – aided by their hopefulness – to make what I consider extraordinarily stoical choices. Some examples of such choices reflect the stoicism or fatalism of responses to poverty, as seen when the Bathroom Man in Mwangi's *The Cockroach Dance* elects to live in a bathroom, while the unemployed of Doyle's *A Star Called Henry* seek the prospect of a decent meal, with the likelihood of death, in the trenches of France.

In spite of all odds, poor characters such as the Bathroom Man and the other Kenyan and Irish poor, but also the relatively better off Paula, are shown to survive poverty and what seem like nearly fatally destructive circumstances (through their resilience) with limited personality scars. I conclude that with few exceptions in texts such as *Weapon of Hunger* and *Kill Me Quick*, many of the characters who have experienced poverty by the end of the novels have rebounded, at least emotionally, psychologically and verbally, from their adversity or are shown to be more hopeful of a better future. I argue that their survivalist spirit is drawn from universal principles such as courage, love, compassion, empathy, patience and integrity. Materially, some of the characters are still poor or even extremely poor by the end of the novels, but they impress us by their adherence to these principles.

In most cases where we see a resilient response to poverty in the texts, it is attributable to the creative personality of the characters. Most of the poor refuse to give up and creatively make the best of their deplorable situations. Responses of characters such as Ben in Mwangi's *Going Down River Road* and Paula in Doyle's *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* and *Paula Spencer* illustrate that one may be poor in reality but survive the condition of poverty by imagining oneself to be rich and by erecting physical and mental symbols of wealth on which one relies for survival. Generally, the resilience of the poor in Mwangi and Doyle's works suggests that, rather than weakening, experiences of poverty have the potential to make a person stronger and more realistic. It seems some of the characters in works by Mwangi and Doyle are strengthened and become more resourceful through the adverse material, psychological and emotional experiences that they undergo. In spite of this, we cannot romanticize any condition of poverty, as poverty in all its forms and shapes is a detestable and demeaning, often destructive condition, as I conclude below.

In spite of their resilience, the texts suggest that the condition of poverty renders the poor vulnerable, defenceless, and at its worst even less than fully human – especially in the eyes of the rich who often treat them (the poor) in a manner that further disempowers and diminishes the sense of self-esteem of the poor, already fractured by experiences of poverty and (in the Kenyan context)

extreme poverty characterized by unemployment, shelterlessness and starvation. The indifference, contempt and arrogance that the rich generally show towards the poor in most of the fictional texts result in a situation where the existence and survival of the poor rests on other characters who (in both contexts – Irish and Kenyan) are themselves in many respects vulnerable. One cannot accurately refer to Doyle and Mwangi's poor characters just as victims, although some of them of course undoubtedly show signs and feelings of dispositional weakness and relative inability and incapacity to empower themselves and improve their situation. In most cases, however, this is because they are shown to be vulnerable to the condition of poverty and the exploitative and indifferent responses of society and the rich towards them, or perhaps the poor intentionally refusing to be aspirational and hopeful as a mechanism to avoid dealing with the negative effects of dashed hopes. I have not implied in the thesis that the two authors indicate that it is wrong, improper or impossible for the poor to have aspirations, but rather that unfulfilled aspirations could have as much or even a greater disruptive effect on the poor than despairing apathy. I conclude in the thesis that by the end of most of the novels that I study, all the main characters, ranging from the Bathroom Man to Dusman to Henry to Paula to Bimbo and to Jimmy Sr, have become more realistic; self-consciously aware of what is achievable and what is not, less beset by illusions, relatively more contented and emotionally and psychologically, if not materially, more stable and wiser. I conclude that this is as a result of their experiences of poverty. Applying a range of narrative techniques and literary devices, the authors evoke not only the humiliations of poverty, but the resilience, strength, tenacity, creativity and the seldom recognised triumph of the poor in the face of adversity. In spite of the shockingly indifferent, contemptuous and even exploitative attitudes of the rich towards the poor, most of the characters that I mention above survive and seem to be on the way to *recovery*.

To better understand responses to poverty and the poor, I examine narrative instances that attribute a value to money over humans in the thesis. I argue in the thesis that the rich, far more than the poor and with crushing implications, are shown to set great store by money, implying – as McClelland (1967: 10) as quoted in Li-Ping and Chiu (2003: 14) states – that “the meaning of money is [indeed] in the eye of the beholder”. I show that Ivan's personality in Doyle's *A Star Called Henry*, more especially his materialistic outlook, is to a certain extent analogous with that of Tumbo Kubwa in Mwangi's *Going Down River Road*. The characterization of the two characters, the contexts in which they operate and their response to wealth/poverty and others around them are remarkably similar. In the quest to amass wealth, they both illustrate extreme levels of self-centeredness, greed, inconsiderateness, abuse, inhumanity, opportunism, power misuse, aggressiveness and total disregard for core moral values. It is implied with uncomplimentary overtones that the evil qualities of the two characters enable them to accumulate material wealth. I take the position that it would however be a naive generalization to read this as being permissive of the view that all wealth is acquired through a systematic and structural manifestation of these

attributes. Many wealthy persons in the texts and in actual societies acquire their wealth in a dignified and legitimate way.

It would be foolish to think that the poor do not place value on money and that they do not strive to acquire it. Of course they do, but the texts that are studied in this thesis reveal that characters who have themselves experienced extreme forms of poverty before gaining access to wealth or power tend not to be as contemptuous, indifferent and marginalizing towards persons that are characterized as being poor – not to the same extent as persons who have not been shown to deal with extreme poverty before attaining their status as the rich and powerful of their societies. This explains why Henry, unlike his comrade Patrick in *A Star Called Henry*, shows great empathy and compassion for the poor when he (Henry) proposes: “[w]e should give this bacon out to the people”. His empathetic attitude is explicitly attributed to his past experiences of poverty as captured in the statement: “[s]omewhere in the excitement of ambush and convoy I remembered my time in Liberty Hall” (Doyle, 1999: 179) – that is, when he was poor and vulnerable himself. I conclude that empathy, as has been suggested by Cialdini et al. (1987), symbolizes his “desire for personal control in the midst of the power that has been amassed in his new role as a [powerful] freedom fighter”. When Patrick in responding to Henry’s proposal to give the bacon away to the poor declares: “not a good idea. We don’t want to interfere with internal trade or anything like that”, I argue that this shows the difference in response towards the poor by those who have “lived” (experienced) poverty and those who have not – predicting economic doom for the poor and foreshadowing Henry’s despair, frustration and betrayal, at the end of the novel, by a capitalist system that perpetuates itself. While they seek to replace a system that seems to be indifferent to the plight of the poor, Patrick’s view holds little hope for the poor – predicting (I argue in the thesis) that the more things change, the more they remain the same, at least for the poor. I conclude that the powerful narratives of both Mwangi and Doyle’s works allow the works of fiction to transcend their difficult and even unattractive subject matter – poverty and related issues – and to edge towards an appeal to the reader to see the poor’s resilience and resistance rather than their weakness and destruction by adversity. Rather than ascribing just a weakness of character to the poor, narratives that I study here create an interpretative space for the reader – indicating that what we see as weaknesses might actually be adaptive mechanisms that ensure the survival of the poor.

Links between poverty and other social phenomena

This thesis has studied how the authors apply narrative strategies that invite the reader’s attention to either a fused or a fractured relationship between poverty and other social phenomena such as crime; family relationship dynamics; urban/rural migration/divides; inequality; war; political oppression and rebellion; foreign aid; substance abuse; teenage pregnancy; rape; alcoholism; marital abuse; informal settlements; drought; land tenure and youth unemployment. Although this study is literary and not social, I take the position that one cannot study a social phenomenon such

as poverty even from a literary perspective in isolation from other socially pertinent and related issues. Encapsulated in the texts that I study are both a rejection and an acceptance of a simple nexus between poverty and some of the social realities listed above. The two authors variously emphasize both a disjuncture and a causal link – a dis/connectedness between poverty and some of the social challenges or rather, extreme human/socioeconomic conditions listed above. The narratives tactfully present a balanced representation of the human condition, diminishing but also enhancing the credibility of arguments that seek to enhance the victimhood idea that the condition of the poor should be blamed on other social conditions such as drought, exploitation or unemployment, but also that acts such as crime; substance abuse; teenage pregnancy; marital abuse; alcoholism and even civil war may result from situations of poverty. Although most of the novels are set in either Nairobi or Dublin, the authorial choice to set some of the novels in an anonymous imaginary space (his version of Barrytown in Doyle's case and the Bokan state in Mwangi's case) locates the events narrated in the novels in an indeterminate space and period, allowing for a trans-temporal and a trans-spatial reading of the issues narrated, thereby equipping the reader with an interpretative space that might be missing if these hardcore social conditions were to be captured in a social science text. In the thesis, I examine whether the presence of some of the social conditions listed above is shown to curtail or to increase the human ability to free oneself from poverty and survive – investigating how the presence or absence of some or all of these social conditions in the fictional Kenyan and Irish societies ensure that the poor of these societies are either consumed by or liberated from their condition of poverty or abject poverty and how the lives of members of the two societies, owing to the kinds and intensity of social challenges that they face (in addition to their poverty) follow either a downward or an upward spiral.

The exploration in this thesis of Meja Mwangi's and Roddy Doyle's both comparable and contrasting, complex fictional evocations of poverty demonstrates the important contribution that (the study of) literature can make to help society gain a fuller, deeper understanding of an urgent social issue such as poverty. Undertaking the study to create the dissertation has proved to be intellectually rewarding and has contributed – in its author's experience of the process of writing it – to an emotionally more nuanced and imaginatively more generous response to the condition of poverty.

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