

**A THEMATIC ANALYSIS
OF
MBUTHIA MURUTHI'S COMIC WORKS**

BY

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Declaration

This project paper is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in another university.

Candidate 

Date... 1.8.08

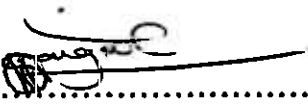
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This project paper has been submitted for examination with our approval as university supervisors.

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Dedication

This project is dedicated to my loving wife

Hannah Nyachira Irungu

and

Our three great sons;

Kennedy Kinyanjui Irungu,

Martin Muchui Irungu

and

Douglas Njenga Irungu.

It's through your moral, spiritual and financial support that this project has seen the light of the day. Thank you for your patience.

I also dedicate it to my loving mother Mary Wanjiku Njenga in whose love and inspiration I came of age. To my late father Douglas Njenga Warari, may God rest your soul in eternal peace. And why not, to my relatives and friends?

To you all I say, may God shower his blessings upon you, all the days of your lives.

Acknowledgement

'This God –how perfect are his deeds, how dependable his words!... Lord alone is God.'

2Sam.22:32

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Abstract

This study brings to you an interesting study of Gikuyu contemporary comedy, in which we focus on a popular artist, Mbuthia Muruthi .Mbuthia, a producer and an actor under the stage name 'Machangi ' has taken the Gikuyu language users and non –user's by storm through his series of fourteen comedies.

This study set out to do a thematic and stylistic analysis of Mbuthia's comic works with an aim of identifying his role as a social commentator. The first chapter gives an introduction of comedy, outlines the statement of the problem under study as well as stating the objectives of the study, the theoretical framework, Literature review, methodology, scope and limits of the research.

The second chapter gives a general overview of Mbuthia's works giving a synopsis of each episode. In the synopsis, the study gives a detailed and descriptive presentation of the plot of every episode.

The third chapter gives a thematic analysis of Mbuthia's comic works. In this chapter, we highlight the themes that are at the centre of focus in these comedies. These themes include; Violence on women, Male chauvinism, Poverty, Infidelity in marriage and Child abuse.

Through this study we have examined the social responsibility bestowed upon the artist by his society and the binary interdependence between the artist and his community. We have found out that the artist engages in pointing out certain vices that seem to hinder the development of his society .These include; corruption, girl child discrimination, domestic violence and infidelity among others. Through the research we have also noted that Mbuthia draws his inspiration from the society and humorously makes it laugh in

amusement at its own folly and weaknesses. We therefore welcome you to this inspirational examination into an artist exploration of his community using comedy, a genre of literature.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction/statement of the problem

As the adage goes ‘When a dog bites a man, its no news, but when a man bites a dog, Oh! it’s great news.’ Ever thought about a donkey wearing a jacket? How about a man dressed in a skirt? Comedy is all about presenting the normal in its abnormal style, the usual appearing in its unusual form with an intention of creating fun and thereby provoking laughter.

To begin with, what is comedy? D.H. Kiiru in his -Introduction to Literary Criticism defines comedy thus;

‘Comedy is a kind of play which involves laughing at people caught up in tricky or difficult situations from which they are eventually released or which will be overcome or resolved through gaiety. One form of comedy, called the satiric comedy, laughs at human folly with the ultimate aim of correcting or reforming the folly or irrationality of human beings’.

Kiiru continues to categorize comedies and in particular elaborates on satiric comedy, which he says ‘laughs at human folly with the ultimate aim of correcting or reforming the folly or irrationality of human beings.’ A good example of comedy is Shakespeare’s A Midsummer

Night's Dream where the characters are caught up and depicted in a light, funny, exaggerated or ridiculous manner but in the end things are resolved happily.

Comedy is a category of drama that is generally light in tone; it is concerned with issues that are not serious, have a happy ending and is designed to amuse and provoke laughter. There are several types of comedy namely; Old comedy, New comedy, Comedy of humors, Comedy of manners, Farce, Satire, commedia dell'arte (improvisational theatre) and Slapstick. Traditionally the basic comic form and type is supposed to have been created around 488 BC by Epicharmus of Syracuse. The basic elements of comedy were derived from phallic choruses and processions that took place at the planting and harvest rituals and later during the festivals of Dionysus.

Comedy , literally means 'song of revelry' and those drunken revels in honor of the god of fertility early impressed on comedy a sexual frankness and a savage ridicule of contemporary characters who were considered to be either absurd or offensive. Old Comedy, tended to be loose, broad farce including a great deal of buffoonery and obscenity.

In terms of plot and structure, the most important aspect of Old Comedy was the development of a plot construct that could be called *the happy idea*. The happy idea is conceived by the leading character—usually a character on a somewhat lower order than the leading characters of tragedy—early in the play. The comedy then grows out of attempts of that character to put the happy idea into effect. This concept is the essence of such comedies such as Aristophanes' *The Birds*

Old Comedy with its strong satire gave way to New Comedy after the death of Alexander the Great. It was designed to entertain an educated leisure class and thus it became comedy of manners with emphasis to the private affairs of Greek citizens of the class that attended the plays. According to Pickering, Roman comedy took most of the conventions of the Greek New Comedy.

Comedy of humors was developed by Ben Jonson in Elizabethan theatre in the early seventeenth century. It is based on Roman Comedy and stresses ridicule directed at characters who are dominated by a single trait (or “humor”) to the point of obsession. The late Wahome Mutahi was popularly known to have stormed the Kenyan comedy

scene with his comic play *Mugathe Mubogothi* and humorous articles entitled *whispers* which he used to write in the *Sunday Nation* newspaper. The artist satirized the behavior of certain social figures including the president of the day.

Comedy of manners is a form of comic drama that became popular in the later half of the seventeenth century in France and among English playwrights during the Restoration. It emphasizes a cultivated and sophisticated atmosphere, witty dialogue and characters whose concern with social polish is charming, ridiculous or both. In England the comedy of manners developed from the exiled court's exposure to French court drama; and it was also the result of social situation in which the select court audience, removed from any contact with the real world outside the court, created its own artificial world, reflected in the drama. In our Kenyan scene this kind of comedy is commonly perfected in the popular KBC TV programme *Vioja Mahakamani*.

Commedia dell'arte is a form of comic theatre which originated in Italy in the seventeenth century in which dialogue was improvised around a loose scenario calling for a set of stock characters, each with a distinctive costume and traditional name. Being an improvisational

theatre that performed extemporaneously from brief scenarios it had its birth in the streets and became so popular that within one hundred years it was the most popular type of theatre in the whole of Europe. Commedia troupes were plying not only in the streets and villages but also in palaces and great halls of the nobility.

In addition to the main stream of comic drama recent years have introduced special forms as the Theatre of the Absurd as named by Martin Esslin and consisting of works by such play wrights as Samuel Beckett as Pickering puts it;

“Toxic mood of cheerfulness” that Sigmund Freud attributed to comedy since at least for the time to be a thing of the past. But the comic spirit is not dead and comedy no matter how black remains with us, a guard against our ego and our pretensions, showing our selves to us as we really are.’

Comedies emerged from the need to help the audience purge their suppressed emotions, after watching serious tragic plays, an experience we undergo after reading or watching a tragicomedy like Shakespeare’s The Merchant of Venice Comedies have survived the

onslaught of modernity and have extensively embraced modern technology. It's in this vein that Mbutia as a comedian has managed to propel his comic works and decentralize it from the early 1970s and late 1980s comic works done by Kenya's popular comedians such as Wahome Mutahi who did their comedies in closed theatre halls. Definitely, only a few people could find time to go to watch simply because most people were busy or too tired after their days work. Of course some people could not afford to pay the high entry.

Mbutia's comedy works squarely fall under the same categories of the Mandingo plays, serving the social role of reflecting on the social shortcomings of the society.

Mbutia's comedies are all packaged in the modern technological CDs which are easy for many people to watch in their homes using DVD players and computers as they relax after a hard days work or during their leisure time. It is this genre of literature that Mbutia utilizes to give social commentaries on the human day- to- today experiences, a fundamental role of literature. In so doing, he fulfils an integral function of literature, that of reflecting on events and social forces which have shaped the present society.

This study wishes to embark on a thematic analysis of Mbuthia's comic works in order to place his works in the literary circles. Thereafter, we shall be able to comment on Mbuthia himself as a social commentator from the perspectives emerging from his artworks. It's from this analysis that we shall be able to identify the artist's social role.

It's worthy noting that there are other equally competitive comedians within the Gikuyu community such as Dominic Githingithia, Kihoto, Warigia and Kianangi. Githingithia for example takes into account conflicts within the family institution. He performs his works in public places and more so during public functions and social gatherings.

In spite of the great social impact that Mbuthia has made for the last ten years of his career as a popular comedian, and his prolificacy as a community theatre artist, there has not been, any academic focus on his works. His contribution as a social commentator remains relatively unacknowledged. This study, therefore, aims at launching a forum for a critical analysis of his works and thereby welcomes other future scholars to research more on this relatively new genre of Gikuyu

literature. As we shall see in this study Mbuthia's works bring to us a dimension of comedy that is one of the most valuable treasures we possess and we must cherish and use it, if only so that we can depend on it in times of tribulations to show us what we are and what we are not.

Aims and Objectives.

By the end of this study we should be able to;

1. analyze Mbuthia Muruthi's comic works.
 2. identify the themes tackled by Mbuthia Muruthi in his comic works.
 3. comment on the stylistic devices used by Mbuthia in his comic works.
 4. understand the social role of the author.
- In short we shall attempt an analysis of the artist's thematic concerns and see how he uses this genre of literature to criticize, creatively decipher and extrapolate on the challenges facing our society. This study will therefore look at the major concerns of the author through focusing on the dominant themes in the analyzed episodes.

Justification and significance of the study

The study is important because it seeks to shed light on contemporary society through study of comedy. Since it is a popular genre in the Kikuyu society, we shall strive to identify how the artist is trying to use his skills as an artist to communicate to the wider social audience and the role being played by the comedy in molding the society using entertainment as a vehicle of disseminating social values.

Mbuthia's comedies are available in almost all public places including public transport vehicles, especially in urban areas, which of late have integrated video CD players in their '*mobile theatre*'. The flexibility of this media enables the author to disseminate information widely, conveniently and affordably across all the sections of the society. The important role being played by this comedian in creating awareness to the target audience about certain issues affecting the society and thereby influencing their way of life, cannot be underestimated.

We also appreciate the fact that the artist has undertaken to prove that community drama has survived the onslaught of modern civilization and continued to propagate the social values just as the traditional verbal art did. Oral literature has therefore, embraced modern technology to survive but not to perish.

Justification of this study is also based on the fact that a contemporary oral artist such as Mbuthia Muruthi is part and parcel of a great oral tradition. Mbuthia incorporates Gikuyu proverbs and jogs with the aesthetic aspects of Gikuyu language to produce comic effect. In fact most of the episodes are derived from these proverbs hence he perpetuates oral traditional values in his presentation of contemporary social, political and economic issues. Mbuthia is therefore, a reservoir, a social commentator and a critic worthy of study.

This study wishes to undertake an analysis of his works in order to bring it to the attention of the wider scholarly audience, an undertaking that has not been given due attention. Through this study we will open the avenue of other scholars and researchers to venture more into this relatively grey area.

Scope and limitation

This study will focus on Mbuthia Muruthi's fourteen episodes of his comic works which are in form of CDs. The comedies will be analyzed as they appear on a computer screen therefore any comments will purely be on the recorded work. Mbuthia has emerged as one of the most popular comedians and has recorded his comedies over the last ten years.

These recorded episodes differ in the scope and the time period each takes but they all range between 30 and 45 minutes.

Hypothesis

This study is based on the following assumptions,

1. That the works under study are crafted around certain dominant themes.
2. That each of the fourteen comedies communicates specific ideas drawn from the themes in 1 above.

3. That an analysis of the thematic concerns in 1 above will lead us to an understanding of the social role of the author.
4. That Mbutia uses some specific comic styles to captivate his target audience.

Literature review

In the following review, we shall explore the various sources of information that are related to our task. Special focus will be on works done by scholars both in and out of the University sources that inform and enrich our information data.

According to Ruth Finnegan, Comedy is not new in Africa. She observes that there are several analogous forms. She points out that drama presents itself in a wide range of forms which can be subjected to interpretation. She however emphatically points out that the central idea of the various forms of drama as that of enactment of representation through actors who imitate persons or events Finnegan p 501.

In a generalized statement Wole Soyinka in Myth Literature and The African World, observes that African literature is formulated around certain frameworks of ideological intent (61). True to this statement,

Opiyo Mumma mentioned in his PhD thesis, In the Search of a Kenyan Theatre ; The Theory and Practice, Drama and its Potential in Kenya that all African theatre reflect on the social issues affecting the society in a more realistic form than does poetry and fiction.

Definitely the process is not very easy as Zakes Mda observes in When People Play People: Development Communication Through Theatre when he examines the social and political constrains under which a theatre for development operates. Mda traces roots of drama looking back to when drama practitioners and intellectuals held workshops in target communities, and where community members created plays.

They were performed to provide entertainment to the community. This stage was inspired by buratically inspired plays on themes such as family planning, health education and building pit latrines and succeeded with a stage where villagers make plays about their problems. Mbuthia Muruthis comedies fall in this third stage of theatre development, a stage in which community seeks to address its own problems through an artist as its own social commentator. In

order to capture his audience Mbuthia may seem to gain support from Mda's observation that;

Development and extension workers are used as actors, performers and animators. They research specific problems of the target community before plays are devised. There is therefore contact between performers and potential audience before plays are performed (17-18).

Mbuthia uses the verbal art coupled with dramatic aspect of comedy to perform what Oladales Taiwo says in his article 'The Role of African Women in Literature and Society'(1984)'that the verbal art formed the basis and provided the material for modern African literature.'

Through studying works by previous scholars, this study relates the thematic concerns in Mbuthia's works, to works by Masheti Masinjila, Ciarunji Chesaina and Mugumbi who point to a feminine agenda. Chesaina covers the social and economic exploitation of women in Coming to Birth by Oludhe Macgoye a view equally shared by Mugumbi.

Masheti addresses power imbalance in the context of the wife husband relationship within the society. Elsewhere, Sophie W Macharia in her article “Freedom Choice; Kenyan Women Writers” argues that the situation of women is changing as much as that of the whole society (45). She continues to state that as the society grows so is the birth of a new woman ‘A woman who shifts from a victim to one who can make her own individual choices that affect her life.

Mbuthia’s works although addressing the issues affecting women just like other scholars did however; he takes a different perspective on the same. As we shall find later he focuses on the violent treatment of women and especially so the beating of women besides their being misused by their male counterparts.

Machogu O.in his M. A Thesis, Humor in Kenya, undertook a stylistic study of how novelists use humor to captivate the interest of their audience and thereby deliver their message. He closely relates with Obiero Odhiambo in his M.A Thesis, Symbolism in the Drama of John Ruganda by the fact that they both tackle the element of style and its effectiveness in message delivery. Similarly, Kimingichi

Wabende in his M .A Thesis, Molding a new image: Gender perspectives in Margret Ogola's –The River and the Source and Oludhe Mackgoye's –Coming to Birth examines the place of a woman in the Luo community through his analysis of the two novels. In an examination of place Peter Onyancha in his M .A Thesis on Dialectic and Dramatic Techniques in Ngugi Wa Thiongo and Micere Mugo's The Trial of Dedan Kimathi and Ngugi wa Thiongo and Ngugi wa Mirii's(the late) I will Marry when I want interrogates the relationship between dialectics in society and dramatic techniques employed in the two texts.

His focus was on dialectical process and how it determines the dramatic dispensation. Onyancha's key concern was on how casualty and dialogue or debate in social process bears on the structure and the dramatic conflict. Closely related to Mbuthia's comic works, although not exactly the same is Onyancha who establishes the significance of ideology against art. It's important to note that art is a vehicle for delivering social ideologies. Drama is a unique genre in that besides passing the message to its audience which is common in other works of art, enacts life in a manner that reflects real life situations.

Through drama Ngugi and Mirii attempt to address the political and social developments that prevail in Kenya during or before their time of writing. Comedy, which closely relates with drama, utilizes some cathartic effects from fun and laughter. The styles may include humor, dramatic scenes, costume masking and dances and aesthetic use of language. Kariuki Gakuo(2004) has also worked on an area closely related to our current study. In his M A Thesis, An Examination of the Themes of Political, Economic, Social and Cultural Alienation. He undertakes a detailed analysis of songs by popular Gikuyu song artist Kamaru wa Wanjiru. Kamaru and the subject of our study share a common role in the society in that they both pass for social commentators to the target community albeit using different genres to reach the audience.

Kamaru, a popular Gikuyu song artist, uses the song Mbuthia uses the comedy. Ngugi wa Thiongo on the other hand uses the play while Oludhe Macgoye uses the novel. However all of them have a central responsibility of shaping the moral values and passing commentaries on their target societies. This review has found out that writers in

Kenya have used four different methods to reach out to their societies in order to disseminate or comment on social and cultural issues affecting the society. To begin with we have seen how writers use the novel in Margret Ogola's The River and the Source as examined by Kimingichi in his M A thesis-Molding a new image ;Gender perspectives .

We have also seen how Ngugi Wa Thiongo uses the play –Ngahika Ndeenda as examined by Peter Onyancha to perpetuate issues relating to his society. Other works as done by Wasamba Gender Perspectives in Creative works of Oludhe Macgoye who examines the place of women in the artist's world view have gone a long way to change the mental framework of the contemporary society towards women. Makamura K. in his M A thesis has also examined Gender Relationships in Endless Road. In drama Obote M J undertook to explore the effectiveness of drama in social message delivery through his engagement in his examination of The Vision of the Heroic Self in Soyinka's Tragic Drama.

Secondly we have identified the song as a genre of literature which artists use to explore and comment on issues affecting the society. To do this we have seen works by Kariuki Gakuo who examines the theme of cultural alienation from a popular Gikuyu artist's perspective. Thirdly poetry is an equally powerful genre which perpetuates the artist's vision of the society. Okot P' Bitek uses the poem as a tool to examine the social developments within the Acholi community and explores such thematic concerns as colonialism, alienation, religion and traditions in his Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol(1975)

Fourthly Ngugi uses the novel as in Weep Not Child . The River Between and Ngugi Detained to explore the socio political environment of his society at a particular time in history.

This study embarks on a relatively new approach for message delivery using not the popular song, not the novel, not the play and not the poem but popular comedy. The artist under study concretizes his message and packages it into fun and amusement to entertain as well as educate. With very few scholars having seemingly given attention to popular comedies this study has a niche to explore the effectiveness

of this genre and especially so within the context of the Gikuyu community. This is the knowledge gap that this study intends to fill.

Theoretical framework

Our study wishes to borrow the principles of the sociological approach in analyzing the thematic concerns. Sociological theory was a brainchild of some great social theorists namely; Marx Weber , Durkheim, Parsons, Manton, Sorokin and Simmel to name just but a few. These theorists unlike the natural scientists or mathematicians probe into the character of our institutions or values, our folkways and morals, our ideas and beliefs concerning which people we think we should look up to and who should look upon us.

According to Howard Becker, Theory in and on itself without any consideration for practical applications, can be intellectually engaging. He states that theory is always an endeavor to press beyond the present appearances of reality to examine the masks that are

behind the present. In fact Cuzzrot puts it 'To understand society you must get 'outside it.' However if you get outside it (to the extent that it might be possible), you find yourself becoming inarticulate and for want of a better word, mad.

One actually finds himself in a classic form of what Joseph Heller referred to as catch 22-moments. When we find ourselves damned if we do and damn if we don't. 'It's actually a dilemma situation'

The task of a good artist is a delicate one. He or She is expected to step aside from his or her community observe all that is going on regarding the social behavior then step in using a literary device that can fit in to the target audience he socially belongs.

There is no way in our society that we can award the service of an artist. He /she offer's us words of advice observation and wisdom. Their observations are based on all that the society engages in at a particular moment in time.

Artists who did their works in the period of slavery gave comments based on such themes as torture, poverty, racism, dehumanization, violence and generally all that went with slavery. In Africa some

artists like Chinua Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thiongo and Okot .P Bitek wrote works that portrayed suffering under colonial imperialism.

Today a good artist addresses the contemporary themes based on the social worldview in the society. In Kenya a modern artist may tend to engage his writing on themes such as crime, domestic violence, corruption and sociopolitical and economic issues affecting the people of a given society.

Max Weber who was among the earliest proponents of the sociological theory and a great intellectual states that; 'a good artist or sociologist should have a powerful sociological imagination'. This suggestion is echoed by Hoffman, a Professor of sociology University of Pennsylvania who exemplifies 'par excellence 'concept of creative imagination and craftsmanship.

As Cuzzrot observes, a dedication to social science implies first of all a specific sense of craftsmanship. as craftsmen, good social scientists we are aware of and interested in the latter modes of understanding

ourselves and our social systems one of them as C.Wright Mills infers to it , it's a matter of sociological imagination.

The sociological theory adopts several approaches in tackling sociological problems. Among them are the humanist and naturalist approaches. Artists adopt a humanist as well as a naturalist position in tackling the issues affecting the society. They use language as a social device through which human beings communicate.

In using a naturalistic approach they focus on the sociocultural institutions to highlight on the issues affecting the community. The sociocultural institutions are; the family, Church and the government. That is why we find them presenting domestic violence, marital conflicts or solidarity and corruption among other themes within the social human establishments.

An artist therefore is a teacher, a leader and a guide for his/her people. Their artworks are mainly based on generalizations and not necessarily the truth. This helps in the conventional applicability of their artwork across ages, time and location. The universal

applicability of the works helps to enhance the effectiveness of the themes under discussion. We therefore intend to be guided by the sociological approach in the study of Mbutia's comic works with a strong conviction that this is the most appropriate and engaging theory for our case.

Methodology

This study will embark on a thematic analysis of Mbutia Muruthi's comedies. The comedies shall be analyzed as they appear in their recorded CD-Roms. Mbutia has packaged his work in form of dramatic episodes each of which lasts between thirty and forty five minutes.

Having closely observed all the fourteen episodes we shall embark on writing a synopsis for each episode and thereafter we shall do a thematic analysis of the artist's work. The purpose of giving the synopsis is to cater for the non-Gikuyu language users in order to bring them on board to this study.

Our key instruments for analyzing Mbutia's works are;

1. Library research based on books, B.A Dissertations, M.A and PhD Theses that may have relevant or necessary data to inform our study.
2. Viewing of all the selected Mbuthia's comic episodes in their recorded original CD –ROMs.
3. We shall also present some photographs which will help us in the illustration of the themes under discussion..
4. For the purpose of analysis, we shall apply the ABC of Gender Analysis by Wanjiku M. Kabira and Masinjila which provides a valuable set of basic tools of analysis.

In application of the ABC of gender analysis will pose questions such as; Who talks in this episode? Who acts? Who vocalizes? Who gives instructions? Who executes them? These leading questions will guide us in the analyzing the gender perspectives that Mbuthia propagates in his works.

Finally we shall explore any relevant information from the internet.

Chapter two

General overview of Mbuthia's works.

Synopsis

In this chapter the study will engage itself in a descriptive analysis of each of the fourteen comedies presented by Mbuthia. I shall attempt to give a synopsis of each of fourteen comedies namely; Mundurume in Mugambo (a man's voice is everything), Kuria ni kuriha (You must pay for what you eat.), Ndirenda Gukuhikia (I want to marry you), Kuria ni kuriha (As you eat so must you pay.) Ndirenda Gukuhikia , Interview, (interview) Mwana ni Mwana (A child is a child),Utari ni Muigire(God has a plan for everyone)Muciari ni muciar(parent is a parent) Micii ni ndogo (Families are made of secrets)Mugunda mukuru(An old shamba) among others.

Episode one: Mundurume ni Mugambo' (a man's voice is everything);

In this episode the main character Machangi gets married to a relatively young woman of about 30yrs who seems to be half the age of the husband who is well in his late seventies .They exchange the usual marriage vows in a very colorful wedding.

Soon after, the author presents the same family living in a very poor and desperate economic condition simply because all the money the man had earned went into the wedding expenses.

Machangi turns into a lazy husband who only comes home during meals and there on disappears till night fall. The family suffers a great deal due to lack of the basic needs. Since he cannot meet the family's financial needs, the wife goes out searching for a job. Since the wife is working, the husband has no choice but to take over the wife's responsibilities. He therefore undertakes the duties of a baby sitter, cook and more of a puppet, just because he fails in his responsibility as a breadwinner. This does a great deal of harm to his 'manly' respect and we see him struggling to fight out the situation using all manner of dramatic styles for example hitting his wife and running away before she gets hold of him.

On the other side of the fence his friend has a different story. Though not working, Kianangi does his best to provide for his family. He assists in the domestic chores such as milking and feeding the animals. This however gives him a reason to have command in the home. He gives orders which are followed without question. Machangi goes seeking advice from his friend on how to earn the respect back but to no avail. He is given a wrong advice of beating up his wife. Back at home the wife has seen her mistake and is ready to settle scores on a round table. Coincidentally this is the time at which the wife beating plan is being taken to action. He beats her thoroughly before his friend stops him. He is advised to 'take full responsibility of providing of the family's basic needs like food shelter and clothing'. Machangi promises to be a good husband.

Episode two: 'Kuria ni kuriha'(You must pay for what you eat)

In this episode Mbutia presents a stock character, Machangi who undertakes to borrowing money from each of his friends in the name of paying back through the coffee bonus. We see him borrowing petty

items such as salt, cabbages, tomatoes, meat and money amounting to shillings ten thousand.

Apparently, at the end of the month Machangi has no plan of paying his debtors. He proceeds to the bank to collect money in a rural trading center. Once he receives the money he embarks on a week long drinking spree with friends and *having it nice* with women and the remaining change ended up being stolen by thieves. Back home the friends from whom he had borrowed from are streaming one after another demanding for their due. This puts the wife in a very stressful situation especially so considering the fact that her hard earned coffee bonus, which was a whole year's saving, had gone down the drain.

Finally Machangi trots back home in desperation. The wife receives him warmly and empathizes with him to an extent of shedding tears. This reception increases the already too much guilt in Machangi to a point of finding no reason for existence. To his debtors he seeks sympathy through pretending to be so sick to a point of death. He then fakes his own death. When he 'dies' the community is angry and decide to cremate him. He takes them by storm when he 'rises' from

the 'dead' when he realizes that they were about to pour petrol on him. Somehow the plan works because the naïve village debtors swore never to recover their money from a 'risen dead'.

Episode Three: 'Ndirenda Gukuhikia' (I want to marry you).

In this episode, the author presents the main character in a desperate economic position in an opening scene of a pavement in a city street as a shoe-shiner.

Soon, a lady appears from around the corner and they both engage in a conversation as he shines her shoes. The lady, who apparently is a prostitute, narrates her previous night's experiences with a certain tycoon or senior politician who picked her from their usual street for the 'job'. Unfortunately, the police catch up with them and arrest her after some money changing hands the rich tycoon is released but they retain the poor lady.

As the police were leading her to the police station, they force her to choose between offering herself for an overnight sexual gratification

to the cops and sleeping in police cells, facing prosecution and the embarrassment of a possible imprisonment thereafter. She opts to buy her freedom through offering her body.

The lady narrates how the police spent the whole night taking turns on her for sex then disposing her without giving 'even a hundred shilling for breakfast'.

Just before she completes narrating the story, a city council officer appears and demands to have his shoes polished or else he arrests Machangi. Beside him is an old woman who is selling her tomatoes, onions and carrots arranged according to their prices. This askari demands shillings twenty from the old woman, picks bananas from her only remaining stock and doesn't bother to pay. When finally the city council truck appears Machangi takes off with the shoes while the woman runs away with all her wares dispersed in different directions.

In the same episode a woman character is presented as one complaining of how fate has been unfair to her for having denied her a husband. Kianangi the neighbor to this woman assures her of 'connecting' her with a prospective husband. He however alerts him

that there are so many other ladies out there who have contracted him to get them husbands. She suggest that he 'marries' her as a second wife or even cheat to be employed as his house help but play as a 'wife' in the absence of the real wife.

The woman desperately replies that she doesn't mind, so long as she gets a husband to be associated with. Soon or later, Machangi the long time friend of Kianangi visits the later after so many years since their last meeting.

After exchanging the usual traditional greetings, Machangi declares his mission. He is looking for a wife. This is the opportunity of introducing lady Wanyuru to the man Machangi. They soon agree to join as husband and wife despite their advanced age. The poor Machangi cannot sustain the wife since there is nothing for them to eat. The wife goes around looking for a job. She is invited for an interview in a flower firm where she succeeds to get a job. The wage she gets is so little that she requests the husband to join her and apply for a job to sustain the home.

Episode four- Interview

This episode has four main characters: Machangi, Kianangi, Wanyuru and Kanyuira

The main character, Machangi, is fond of sleeping as late as midday. As the scene opens the wife is complaining of hunger and abject poverty that has ridden their home as a result of joblessness, alcoholism and laziness of the husband. The time is midday and the husband is still in bed nursing his hangovers. They engage in a heated conversation over the poverty level and the behavior of sleeping during the day while all the other husbands are busy working.

The wife vows to leave the poverty ridden home as she cannot cope with the extreme poverty. The hopeless man complains that jobs cannot be found indeed, the wife blames the husband for his irresponsibility He has led the home to suffer in hunger.

In an effort to challenge Machangi to be more aggressive in looking for jobs, Wanyuru vows to divorce him and go back to her parent's home.

The husband threatens her and reminds her that poverty in the home was caused by the large herd of cattle in dowry form that he took to the wife's home. He continues to threaten her with a beating if she dares to leave him.

When he meets with Kianangi the same story is discussed that joblessness is everywhere and where you get a job you have to pay a bribe. They decide to start a toilet digging company since people no longer fill toilets; they have decided to be emptying toilets as a job creation. To solve this problem and possibly alleviate the poverty. Meanwhile, Wanyuru attends an interview for a job. She is successful in the meantime Machangi has disappeared from the family to avoid the embarrassment of the poverty in the home.

Wanyuru also informs Kianangi that Kanyuira's flower firm has been offering employment to workers. He is excited about the innovations of the lady. Kianangi takes interest to seek employment too. Wanyuru coaches Kianangi on the modalities of passing the interview and the possible questions that would lead to getting the job.

Among the questions asked in the interview are;

‘Mukingo niuri ndawa?

Question: Do AIDS have a cure?

Answer: Doctors are saying it's curable but the medicine is yet to be discovered.

Machangi is the stupid character who is coached on the same answer for the interview questions. On his approach to the interviewer he is confronted with different questions which contradict- he is chased away.

Episode 5 –Muciari ni Muciari

This intriguing episode opens with a meeting between Machangi and Kianangi in the middle of a road. They discuss at length about the prevailing poverty, hunger and joblessness. To rationalize poverty, Kianangi gives an analogy explaining why the blacks are poor, why the whites are intelligent and why Indians are progressive in business. The scene progresses with a discussion of both Machangi's wives discussing the long time suffering under beatings from the authoritative and uncompromising husband.

Warukungu, Machangi's second wife has had a thorough beating and we see her hand on a sling. They engage in a lengthy discussion of how she had been seriously beaten by her husband the previous night.

She pledges to leave her home as the suffering in the family life ridden with beatings all through. She arrives at a decision to quit this kind of life once and for all.

Her co-wife thinks differently, she is ready to hold on to the marriage to the last moment .However, she also despaired later in the scene.

Soon Machangi comes in to send all of them away after a beating. He is left alone. Wanyuru gets married to Kianangi who is able to bring up the children and educate them till they get jobs.

Ten years later, Warukungu the former second wife who left the difficult life in Machangi's home meet with Wanyuru. She talks of her very progressive business in Mombasa. On the other hand, Wanyuru is doing very well in her second marriage.

As the two discuss, Machangi appears from behind. They all react differently against each other by narrating what the time gap had created. However, Machangi believes that Warukungu started a commercial sex workers business. ...biashara iria itabataraga stock (...the only business that does not require initial capital)

Mwarania, Machangi's daughter revisits her father after so many years. She has a problem explaining the history. Interestingly the

daughter (Mwarania) comes back to seek parental blessings. They strongly believe that their father is Machangi and that the disagreement between the parents has no relevance to their lives. They all decide to revisit their old father (Machangi). In fact Machangi is at pain to recall his own daughter Mwarania. After a long conversation the daughter unites with the father. She leaves him with enough money to support himself.

The theme of betrayal emerges in this moving episode. The children are presented as the uniting factor. They go against the grain to put family back to unity the disagreements that set the family apart. Finally the daughter declares that she has named her child after Machangi her biological father. This triggers controversy over who is who, the one who sired them or the one who brought them up. The children, Mwarania puts sense to the father that he contributed to all these by sending her mother away.

The whole family finally reunites Machangi takes off the family back home. They are all seen to be in tears of joy as they walk back to their old home, united as before.

Episode six: ‘Mwana ni Mwana’ (A child is a child regardless of its sex.)

This is quite an interesting episode which the author presents an initially strong dual – who decide to purchase a two storey house. One of them, Kianangi purchases the ground floor while his friend purchases the second floor. Sooner or later, the owner of the ground floor decides to leave for another estate. This automatically obliged the owner of the second floor to purchase the ground floor or have his house demolished.

On mutual agreement, and good comradeship Kianangi offers a small gift to Machangi just as a sign of unity.

As the plot unfolds, we are presented to the third character, Wanyuru, (Machangi’s wife) who is lamenting over the suffering she is undergoing. She has a family of three girls and no food in her house, no cooking fat, firewood is a problem and poverty is rampant. We later learn that she has a nagging problem; her husband Machangi has been wetting the bed for a long period. She cannot bear it anymore. She could not address the problem to her husband for discussion, and therefore decides to send his best friend Kianangi to warn him over it.

As the story unfolds, Wanyuru, Machangi's wife is blamed by the husband for giving birth to 'pigs' an abusive name for female children. There is a strong conflict between Machangi and his wife which at some point leads to violent beatings over the wife's inability to bear him a baby boy. Machangi addresses his wife in a tone of arrogance and bitterness since as he claims girls are only there in the home to feed, grow and get married leaving him without an inheritor. He wants a child to call a man and not just 'pigs'. Machangi's friend reminds him of a case from a neighboring village where a poor family had educated their four daughters to the University level. They took up executive jobs in international business companies and later flew to Europe and America. They remembered to plough back their parent's efforts by improving their living standards.

Soon, Wanyuru is pregnant with the fourth child. Machangi is very anxious and hopes that at least this time the wife would bear him a baby boy. Efforts by his friends to remind him that every child is important in its own way regardless of its sex seem, to make no sense to Machangi. In fact he is reminded of a neighbor who had eight sons

yet the family was always in chaos with disagreements between them over land and other related property. He is advised to think twice. It was also reported to him that the family which had eight sons ended up never assisting the parents. Machangi is advised that what counts in a child is not the gender but the upbringing since everyone was created with a given talent.

Harmony was everything and mutual co-operation in a family was the key to development. The climax of this episode is when we see Machangi standing outside the house in which his wife is in labor. He is so obsessed with the anticipation of a boy child that he buys tokens in for a baby boy yet to be born, expecting an 'heir' at least. Machangi comes out clearly to give ultimatum and threats to his wife that if she does not give birth to a boy, at least this time, he would kill her. However, Wanyuru retorts by reminding him that boys are 'produced' by the men. The women ululate when the child is born and Machangi dances very vigorously with songs of birthday and other related songs. He is convinced that a boy child to inherit him is finally born. To his surprise and disappointment he is informed that it is a baby girl. Machangi grows literary mad. He beats everyone and threatens to chase his wife away.

Kianangi makes it clear using illustrations from the successful homes where girls have uplifted the standard of living of those families after going through education, getting top jobs and uplifting the economic status of their parents.

As the scene comes to an end, Machangi is still stubborn on his hard line stance that he needs a boy child to inherit him. He is convinced that it is the wife who is on the wrong and advises her to seek advice from other women on what should be done to get a boy child.

Episode seven: ‘Mucii ni Ndogo’ (a family’s strength is in its secrets)

Set in a rural home, this episode has the following characters, Machangi, Kianangi, Warigia, Wanyuru and Machangi’s son

This is a presentation of two parallel families, juxtaposed as opposites. In Machangi’s marriage, he as the husband of the home is made to undertake all the household chores. He is subjected to washing dishes, running to the market, washing clothes, nursing the baby failure to which he receives a thorough beating.

On the other hand, Kianangi is the authoritative head of the home. He orders his wife to cook, cultivate the shamba and tend the animals. To the extreme, he orders his wife to pick him from the gate and carry him on her back every time he comes from his rounds.

We see him carried by the wife just as a young baby as the wife crumbles under his weight. When Kianangi finds his wife with a friend – who happens to be Machangi's wife, he beats her violently since he believes, she could enlighten his wife and hence pose a threat to his enjoyed 'freedom'. Machangi seeks help from Kianangi on a possible plan of action aimed at liberating him from his authoritative wife. Unfortunately the plan fails and thus the message '*Micii ni ndogo*' every marriage has its own institutional rules, ethics and secrets which govern specific unit family set up)

Episode eight: 'Mugunda Mukuru' (old is gold)

In this episode, action is set in a rural home but later develops changing to an urban home.

The main characters are, Machangi, Kianangi and Diana.

As the scene opens Kianangi comes back from his usual village strolls. He has succeeded to get a job. His wife packs his belongings and sees him off to the bus stop. She is excited that at last her husband has secured a job and that the life long status in the home would change, at least for the better. Apparently, Machangi disappears for fourteen months without sending any financial help to the home. Mwarania, Machangi's wife gets concerned and seeks assistance for advice from Kianangi then a family friend.

She gets financial assistance while they make arrangements on how to trace her husband.

Finally, Machangi comes back carrying a kilo of 'meat'. This is a stone which he wraps in a way that it appears like a kilo of meat. To the wife's disappointment, it is revealed to her through a friend that Machangi had gotten a new wife, purchased a house and that they had been living happily together.

'The marriage of convenience' lasts for six years until one day when Machangi loses his job. Subsequently the mistress disowns him after having ensured that all the official documents regarding the land are documented in her name.

Diana, the mistress has intelligently managed to squeeze every cent out of the old man. Now that the deal is done, she chases him away like a poor dog.

The poor old Machangi is finally led out of his own city house and desperately lands in his old rural home only to be received by his former wife. Machangi arrives as a prodigal son, just to find his wife and son who although hesitant to receive him finally give him a hand of welcome.

Episode nine: 'Utari ni Muigire' (every dog has its day)

In this captivating episode, Mbuthia presents his audience with an interesting scene which depicts conflict of interest within a family. Initially, Machangi's daughter Mwarania is at the center of the conflict. She has come to age and is in the process of choosing her fiancée. She hopes to have a young man by the name Gikumbu.

However, her mother comes in to control her love affair by choosing a fiancée who, according to her suits her daughter because he comes from a rich family. She works hard to make sure that her decision is followed. Indeed, she suggests that Warigia's marriage to a lover of

her own choice would bring an endless period of suffering from poverty.

The tag of war exceeds when the father steps in to rescue the daughter by taking sides with her. The drama proceeds to an anticlimax when the daughter's suitor visits the girl looking shabby and desperate. Her mother becomes violent and insists that the daughter must get married to the rich old man who was almost the age of her father.

In her opinion the daughter prefers a peaceful poor marriage to a chaotic wealthy one. The young mans intentions of marrying the girl were sincere and out of love. He had quite substantial education and was in fact a graduate with a degree in Engineering but due to the scarcity of jobs he was yet to secure employment.

His daughter's decision is firm and when Machangi's wife realizes that she is fighting a loosing battle, she quits in frustration and later we find her sick with stress. On the contrary, when the daughter gets married to the poor young lover he soon lands on an executive job.

The couple quickly gets rich and sooner than later they are able to support their parents.

At this juncture the mother confesses the reason behind opposing her daughter's marriage. As she puts it she would not imagine their daughter suffering the way she herself had, since the beginning of her marriage life. It becomes quite clear that in life there is always a fortune for everyone hence the need to avoid hasty judgments and therefore "Utari ni Muigire. (There is luck for everyone).

Episode ten- Ruo rwa Mwana (The pain of a child)

In this episode Mbuthia examines the pains of parenting. He carefully weaves a story that reminds his audience of the social responsibilities that lie ahead of them during the parenting process; which he points out that it's a lifelong process. He focuses on the strong bonding between a parent and the child and advises the children on the need for children to obey their parents and always seek their guidance. The parents are equally challenged to be protective to their children with a caution against being overprotective.

Episode eleven; 'Fitina' (Jealousy)

This episode generally presents to the audience the normal life experiences focusing on social conflicts that normally emerge from day -to- day human interaction. He highlights on jealousy among people and the effects that it has on a community.

Episode twelve; 'Weka wega' (niwe weika). (All the actions you do will reflect on you)

Based on a Gikuyu proverb which emphasizes on the value of being good to others, this episode is perhaps one among those that qualifies the artist as a community teacher. The opposite proverb to the title of this episode is, 'weka uru nowe weika' meaning that once you do a wrong you equally do it to yourself. through the characters and scenes we are able to figure out the values cultivating good behavior and how this affects the family and the society at large.

Episode thirteen: 'njika na njika' (tit for tat)

This is a brief episode which dwells primarily on promiscuity. We are introduced to a two characters who are great friends. Along the way one of the friends Kianangi betrays the trust given by his friend Machangi and privately establishes an affair with the friend's wife.

The author juxtaposes this private relationship with Machangi- who also begins to see his friend's wife behind Kianangi. This state of affair continues one day when the truth emerges the two are mutually guilty and therefore reconciliation is the only way forward.

Episode fourteen: 'Mwana ni wau?'(who is the child's owner?)

In this captivating episode the author uses a conversational mode to discuss the value of education. The two characters –Machangi and Kianangi discuss an incidence where a friend died because he took the wrong drugs since he couldn't read the label.

The author goes ahead to present the theme of promiscuity through a scene that's rather controversial. Two men Machangi and Kianangi have been having a private affair with the same woman. A time comes and she conceives a baby boy. Coincidentally both men come to welcome the baby with pomp and joy-bearing in mind that it was a

boy. Machangi comes first and gives the child a name. Kianangi also comes and gives the baby a name of his own. However when they both meet and claim ownership of the baby, the wife turns them in circles. In the end the baby is discovered to be Machangi's. However Machangi takes this opportunity to abandon the wife who ends up loosing on both ends. Kianangi swears to break the news to Machangi's wife and they part ways.

Having gone through the major episodes in Mbuthia's works, it's important to observe that he is tackling some key issues that are affecting his present society. Perhaps this issues form the basis of his popularity as a comedian in that the audience is able to identify with positively or otherwise with the issues he engages in using a comic style.

Mbuthia presents the theme of violence on women as perpetuated by their male counterparts he goes ahead to discuss and highlight the theme of poverty which is at the centre of the audience's worldview.

Corruption has also been a topic on his works, a vice the society seems to be addressing with an aim of rooting it out in all its networks. He also addresses the theme of conflict within marriage.

The major reason this study has undertaken the responsibility of giving a clear synopsis of each of the episodes is to bring to the attention of the non Gikuyu speakers the issues being discussed and therefore entice them to take interest in watching them.

CHAPTER THREE

Thematic and Stylistic Analysis

Having provided a transcription of the episodes through the synopsis given above, we therefore wish to undertake a thematic analysis of Mbutia's comic works as we set in our objectives. To begin with, we shall identify the main themes stating where they appear in the plot of the synopsis provided. Later we shall provide pictorial illustrations to enhance our understanding of those themes

In his book The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903 Leakey contends that;

‘The most fundamental basis of Kikuyu Social Organization was the family. Marriage was traditionally regarded as the basis of propagating this social organization and was therefore one of the most important rites of passage in a Gikuyu's life. In

addition to bringing together the individuals and nurturing the family, marriage also enhanced social cohesion by bringing together the families who were henceforth united by the solid bonds that tied them together.' Leakey 1997 p.1

Basically all these episodes are set up in a marriage institution. The Gikuyu family was meant to fulfill exactly what Leakey observes above in a traditional set up. However, with the coming of Christianity, colonialism and the modern western civilization, the status quo has not been easy to maintain. Having presented the key synopsis of the key episodes of Mbutia's comic works, we hereby wish to undertake a thematic analysis of his works.

According to Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, a theme is the central idea being discussed in a given work of art. Right from the beginning of the above episodes Mbutia sets out to present an ideal situation that portrays harmonious family life depicted in a Christian marriage, he therefore supports the premise that happiness comes with equality, gender balanced approach to life where each member of a family is given a share in decision making. He portends to a

participatory approach to decision making process within a family institution.

Change of gender roles.

In the first episode which has as scene in the Christian church, the bride and the bridegroom take their vows to be together for better and for worse. This commitment to a Christian marriage is contradicted by what follows immediately thereafter as we are treated to the very opposite of our expectation. In fact none of the two partners live according to their commitments. Machangi's soon takes to local bars thus neglecting the family to rot in poverty. At the same point, his wife Warigia goes to bed on an empty stomach. At this level of the scene we start blaming the husband for neglecting his responsibilities. The wife takes a step to go looking for a job and comfortably manages to get one. Being the bread winner Machangi's wife easily takes control of the affairs of the home. She becomes the decision maker while the husband shamelessly takes a second position in the running of the family. He is left with no choice but to follow the wife's orders. He is made to clean the baby's nappies, cook, collect firewood, sweep the house and even wash clothes up to and including the wife's inner wears.

As illustrated in the picture below, Machangi must *make the hay while the sun shines*, he is hurriedly washing the wife's clothes in time or else he suffers the consequences when the wife comes back from work. Besides he has the food in the kitchen and the baby to take care of.



Machangi is made to wash clothes. If you can't beat them, join them!

Since he has failed on his responsibility as a husband in providing food, shelter and security, he has no choice but to step aside and allow the wife to do it. In the above illustration, Mbutia uses the comic rule of exaggeration to portray the theme of the changing lifestyles in the modern family set up. House hold chores such as child care were the duty of women while men took care of the animals.

As he puts it;

'reke nyambe hure ino athiaga nayo kanitha tondu ingikorwo itahurite ino, no njuragirwo' (Let me wash her Sunday best dress or else I stand to face the death sentence if it's not washed in good time) Fear can be felt from his statements.

On the contrary Kianangi his best friend despite beating his wife and mistreating her in all ways takes his responsibilities well and fulfills them. Even after ordering his wife around like one of his children he has among his orders to be brought a milking can so that he can milk the cow. At the end of episode one, Kianangi's wife is seen to be very smartly dressed just as a well kept wife would be while he himself is dressed in tattered clothing. This shows the seriousness with which he takes his marital obligation.

The husband in the Gikuyu community is supposed to be the head of the family. He is expected to take full responsibility of the wife and children by providing food shelter land and security. The predominant patriarchal society assigned the woman's place to be the kitchen and probably the garden to tend the crops. However in the modern society the status quo is never the same. We are finding women aggressively taking his responsibility of providing for the family more responsibly and effectively than even the men. This has caused changes in the family roles. Women are able to start active businesses and even get employment both in the private and public sector.

At the family level men have not taken their wives economic empowerment positively. The men feel insecure and tend to think that the women will undermine their authority. Mbutia presents this state of affairs humorously in the pictures below taken from episode one- Mundurume ni Mugambo (A man's authority is his voice) where he challenges the men to either take responsibility of their families or fall lazy and face the consequences in this case loosing authority and toeing the line taken by Machangi as illustrated in the picture. In this episode its Machangi's wife who is the breadwinner while Machangi takes the back seat in the kitchen.

The wife has managed to instill so much fear in the husband that he is not certain of the next minute in the marriage. This is confirmed later in the scene when the wife comes from her place of work to find him struggling to feed the baby while food has overcooked in the kitchen. The artist is sending the signal that cultural rooting and our cultural system are so strong that giving them an overhaul could land us in a mess.



Machangi is busy in the kitchen. (Reversal of gender roles)

Since he can not sustain the family Machangi takes to doing the household chores which were traditionally left for women. In this picture we see him performing cuddling the baby



Modern trends, more so from the western civilization, has brought about drastic changes in the African cultural systems of practice. Mbutia uses the comic concept of exaggeration to illustrate this trend.

More and more men in our society today have offered to take part in the household chores though not fully. However that is through free will. In Machangi's case it's out of desperation. Mbutia captures this phenomenon in a humorous way that manipulates exaggeration to create laughter.

Childcare is a natural responsibility for every parent whether human or animal. In the illustration below Machangi goes at it full blast. The author send signals to fathers, albeit humorously, to consider consolidating their efforts in the child upbringing and stop delegating or absconding altogether a primary responsibility.



Child up bringing is a primary responsibility of both parents.

Machangi undertakes the duties that traditionally were meant for the women.

In the above picture the character Machangi has to fetch water from a far away river as he carries the baby.

At this level the author seems to agree with the feminist theorists who set to challenge the notion that 'biology is destiny' Abbot, Wallace p10. They argue that biological differences between men and women do not explain their roles and these need to be understood as socially constructed or in need of sociological explanation.

Women empowerment

In our modern society women have competently proved to possess the intellectual capacity and organizational skills just like the men. However the battle has not been completely won especially in Africa, Kenya and in this particular context the Kikuyu community which is predominantly a patriarchal society. Muthia propagates the theme of social change within the gender roles through the presentation of an empowered woman. Although he tends to exaggerate the artist tickles the mind of the audience and more so the male chauvinist who felt that from a humanistic perspective, women did suffer a lot from oppression. In fact Muthia tries to ask the men in his first, third and sixth episodes

- . How does it feel to be in your wife's shoes? Can you imagine that our female colleagues have borne these sufferings for generations? Is it fair?

To be precise, women have suffered a lot under the male rule. This is because society has for a long time structured institutionalized and operationalized sociocultural systems that despise the girl child from the time of birth till the time she dies. For instance as feminist activists have found out, when a girl child is born in the Kikuyu

community the women in the 'labor ward' are supposed to announce the birth of a child by giving three ululations to the birth of a baby girl. For a baby boy they were supposed to give five ullulations. On the onset, discrimination of girls begins with a marked difference in the reception to life both at the social and cultural levels.

What follows is that a girl child is handled very delicately – she is expected to stay home with the mother and learn the household chores such as cooking fetching water cleaning and learning how to respect men. This is illustrated by the episode Mwana ni Mwana. As Mbutia puts it in this very controversial scene, Machangi will not rest until the wife bears him a boy child and not the 'pigs' she has been giving birth to.



In the picture above Machangi demoralizes his own daughters saying 'Look at these pigs. One, two, three.... Why do you change your sex at birth? Where is my kipii(boy)'

He laments that his life is empty and is ready to take any necessary measures on the wife for not bearing a baby boy. In the modern society the girl child is not 'expected' to take 'hard' courses in subjects like sciences because they are for men. Thanks to artists like Mbutia they have proved it otherwise. At the cultural level and in fact even today girls are given dolls that depict children and mothers of tomorrow during their birthdays. Boys on the other hand are given dolls of images of cars animals such as leopards and lions.

At this early level of psychological preparation the girl child is set to bear the responsibility of a wife and mother of the children.

Domestic violence has taken a center stage in almost all the episodes that Mbutia presents. According to Abbott and Wallace, feminist sociology involve challenging the dominant patriarchal ideologies that seek to justify women's subordination as natural and therefore inevitable.pp17

Violence on women

It's an effort to reverse the notion that 'knowledge' in the society should be seen in the perspective of the men. Mbutia seems to be addressing this inequality by presenting the numerous scenes where

women are subjected to violent beatings, negligence and in extreme conditions overt mistreat. In one scene Kianangi treats his wife with so much disregard that she crumbles under his weight as she carries him from the gate to the house on her back. This arouses the audience's feelings against that kind of violation of rights.

In spite of the women facing physical violence they also face psychological and social torture. Mbutia presents to us a society where the man of the home neglects the family completely leaving the wife to struggle to feed the children through performing petty casual jobs and using the meager daily wages to feed and keep alive the family-including the husband. The consequences of the neglect are as good as you can guess. This is best illustrated in episode three Ndirenda Gukuhikia (I want to marry you) where Machangi takes to drinking and forsakes the family to languish in abject poverty. This reminds us of a recent demonstration by women in Muranga who demonstrated by marching to the local District Commissioners office claiming that their husbands have taken into drinking illicit brew to an extent of forsaking their primary responsibilities over them and especially so the conjugal ones.

Machangi's behavior goes as far as beating his wife to a point of breaking her hand. There is a Gikuyu proverb that says 'Ndiakagwo ta ya wakini' (you should avoid copying /aping other peoples way of life) and it's followed closely by another 'mwigerekanio wariire chiura matina'(copying someone's way of life led to someone biting the buttocks of a frog) ,Mbuthia comically approaches the theme of violence on women using exaggeration as a comic device. Exaggeration as a comic device just like incongruity found in surprise depends on norm from which to depart. In every given society there those societal norms acceptable to all and sundry for instance, it is expected that any normal person must dress in clothes. The clothes must be as a norm, proper fitting. When you therefore see a person dressed in very tight under fitting clothes, which is common with young adults in our society these days, you are bound to laugh at them.

Before Machangi goes to the city to start his new employment, his son Kihui requests his father to buy him a 'sagging' trouser ones he gets money. In his reply, Machangi asks "are you referring to these

trousers which when worn by young boys they appear like they have soiled themselves?”

That discussion mainly focusing on the consent of exaggerated dressing relates with some popular comedians in the Kenyan streets where the Kenyan group popularly known as ‘Reddykuluss’ capitalized on satire rising leaders and especially so the former immediate president Moi “Na hayo ndio maendeleo” this Reddykuluss group had a character who used to dress like a lady with exaggerated breasts and wearing skirts but the voice was that of a male.

Mbuthia uses exaggeration to portray the overlying mistreatment, torture, dehumanization and degrading of women in the target community especially so during the traditional period and before the introduction of the western culture. An incidence in episode seven ‘Micii ni ndogo’ is brought out by Kianangi using the wife as a horse to pick him from the gate whenever he comes in.

In reality this can not happen in the exaggerated form but as we laugh at what happens the message is given loud and clear that the woman’s

position in the Gikuyu community was that of oppression by the predominant male patriarchal system.

Traditionally wife beating was accepted as a way of ensuring that a wife acquired proper discipline. There was in fact a stereotype that purported that a woman who was never beaten by her husband hard enough to scream for other women to hear meant that the husband did not love at all. On the other hand men who never beat their wives would not be allowed in an elders beer party's stereotype went on to emphasize that women went an extra mile to provoke their husbands for a beating in order to seek attention for love.

Today women have risen to these challenges and their level of awareness has increased. Muthia uses a comic scene in episode three to illustrate this radical change.



Machangi gives his wife a thorough beating.

Machangi's first wife is complaining to Warigia about their husband's ruthless behavior. It's at this juncture that we pose to ask a question;

Isn't this happening in the society today?

One of his wives bears witness of Machangi's obsession of wife beating.



Wanyuru (left) and Warukungu -Machangi's wives- share the bitter experiences. Warukungu nurses a broken arm ,as result of violent beating.

Mbuthia brings about the theme of domestic violence using dialogue between the wives. He enhances this through the demonstrated dramatic mode where the two wives discuss their husband before he violently appears and begins to quarrel them, separates them in fear that they might attack him, then follows it with a humorous statement from Machangi in episode three that men were not created to live with women after all

... 'ndiramanya ni kii kiuru na machangi thiku turi.

Umuhe irio, no mbara

umuike atia, no mbara

I do not understand what's wrong with Machangi these days.

Give him food he still beats me

No matter what I do he still beats me

Closely related to the theme of violence on women is the presentation of male chauvinism. Using the ABC of gender analysis by Wanjiku Kabira and Masheti Masinjila some leading questions may help us to identify this theme. In episode two five six eight and nine, all the scenes are dominated by two men who spend most of their time discussing strategies on how to punish their wives .

Traditions and decision making within the family

In almost all and especially so episode seven-‘Micii ni Ndogo’(the strength of a family is its secrets) we get to hear Machangi and Kianangi planning to humiliate the women the more and probably coming up with ways and strategies of ‘trimming’ their wives to size. This is brought out through their dialogue in various situations of the episodes. As the traditions dictate parents have a primary responsibility of guiding and counseling their children. Mbutia presents this in a scene in episode nine ‘Utari ni Muigire.’

We see Wanyuru advising her daughter against possible misbehavior which may lead her to getting pregnant and possibly contract H.I.V Aids the case with some neighbors daughters. She finds time to caution her as seen in the picture illustration below.



Wanyuru advises her daughter to marry a rich man. Her daughter opts for a simple man of her choice -Love is richer than wealth.

By use of proverb Wanyuru advices her daughter over the wise choice of a fiancée

muthomi mugi aikagia maitho kabere

An intelligent student focuses ahead.

However Mbuthia cautions against parents who go on to make decisions for their children in matters pertaining marriage as she puts it ‘

mbece ni guethwo ciethagwo. Mami

, tungiendana na mwanake ona atari na kindu ri

na ni tuiguithanitie -ri

hari na thina?

Ningi mbece ti cio wendo!

Mother, if I fall in love with a young man even though he is not wealthy

And we agree

Is it any problem?

After all, love is not money!

Money is only earned.

Her choice of a fiancée was not the best. Sooner than later the daughter is out to prove her wrong. She looks for a loving responsible

and educated suitor who becomes the 'messiah' He rescues both of his parents- in law from the hands of poverty.



The poor young lovers, before marriage.

The two are seen deciding on the way forward. They are left with only two choices, to obey and please their parents and forego their love or disobey them and fulfill the desires of their hearts.



The couple, a few years later.

Having made the right choices, they are now enjoying the fruits of their love and companionship. They even return home to greet their parents and help them out of their financial problems.

The author comes out strongly in defense of the girl child especially so against forced or arranged marriages in episode nine-Utari ni Muigire(every dog has its day) where Wanyuru tries to force her daughter Mwarania to marrying a rich elderly man who she doesn't love. In our contemporary society children are falling victims of wrong career advice from parents who force them to do subjects which will presumably lead them to courses of their parent's choice.

In the course of the conflict of interest they end up choosing courses of their parent's choice and become frustrated in life. The young adults should only be guided but left to decide on their careers based on their ability and passion.

As stated earlier an artist is a product of society. He operates from a strategic position which sometimes puts him in a situation which Joseph Heller referred to as Catch 22. The reason being that for an artist to comment effectively on issues affecting a society in which he himself or herself is party to ,he has to rise above the same society that houses him. As mentioned earlier in this study the task of a good

artist is a dedicated one he or she is expected to step aside make an observation and make comments on the issues going on in every aspect of the society be it social political religious or economic. Then proceed to castigate the issues with an aim of criticizing correcting or informing his audience. For the artist to be socially relevant he or she must engage himself in current issues or developments in the society hence the artist is a social commentator, a guide and teacher.

Parenting

Mbuthia approaches the modern family institution with a theme of a child rearing practice. Through parenting the extreme side of the authoritative wife who orders her husband around, he puts in the middle of the equilibrium a boy child who observes the commotion and conflict of interest between the parents. By presenting a model comic scene Mbuthia seems to be criticizing the ideological presumptions of the approaches to modern marriage lifestyles.

The child grows seeing the violence in the home and ends up losing the attention of both because they are too busy to have time to sit back and guide their children. They turn to explore the world on their own creating a new lifestyle maybe based on the wrong role models.

Mbuthia seems to provoke the mind of the modern society or his audience through questioning the value of the modern child upbringing systems. Rather he asks the question, who is responsible for the child? Is it the father or mother the teacher or is it the house help? Perhaps this is an appropriate time to reflect on the scene to question the root cause of the violent behavior of unrest in schools and frequent strikes, an issue the society is painfully supposed to address.

It's no surprise that the few students questioned on the reason behind the strikes and burning of school property among other violent actions have no mature reason to warrant this malice. They give lame excuses as not having enough blue bands on their piece of bread, inadequate music systems in their school buses among other petty reasons. We may not deny that the embrace of technology has encompassed our whole lifestyle and has made life easier but then we should question the value of the gadgets the students are demanding to be allowed in school. The rationality of burning schools is completely out of ignorance and brings to the need to reflect back and question our parenting system, leadership and our mode of socializing children.

Are we taking our responsibility seriously? When we as parents quarrel in front of our children and discuss issues that are supposed to be totally private in public are we being responsible? All these issues are brought out in a dramatic form through Mbutia's comedy in episode seven 'Micii ni ndogo'. An interesting aspect of literature is the ability to use art, fiction manifest on to the society its own weaknesses. Mbutia as an artist draws his inspiration and the content of his art work uses his comic skills to bring all the identities and their differences together through dramatic engagement with his audience and the society as a whole.

In the picture below Machangi's son witnesses a violent exchange of vulgar words between his parents and a resultant fight.



Machangi and Wanyuru fight in front of their boy child, Kihiu.

As Holguist observes, 'through the comic episodes, the community has talked to itself. The dialogism here is a necessary multiplicity in human perception and in the final analysis the song becomes a communal medium in which the parents, children and the society as a whole attribute to the community rather than an individual(Holguist1989) Mbutia's comedies can today be termed as a task in the house entertainment. It's therefore imperative that whichever theme he addresses is either aimed at challenging or encouraging the community. It may also be a way of questioning the society's standards of doing things and more so our idea of embracing western values.

Though indirectly, Mbutia points to the direction of a selective application of the western civilization to our own child upbringing .He questions our family lifestyles. Although there are some outdated cultural values within our traditional way of life, Mbutia seems to suggest that there is need of a balance between the modern and the traditional values and thereby come up with a tailor made system which neither neglects our culture nor blindly apes the Western civilization in its entirety.

Corruption

Mbutia Muruthi artistically uses the elements of drama through aesthetic use of language, creating dramatic scenes to comment on the nagging problem of corruption in the society. Through the second episode 'Kuria Ni Kuriha 'to eat is to pay' he tactfully puts together a scene where hawkers are busy selling their wares on a city pavement. He later introduces a city askari who approaches the hawkers demanding that they give him twenty shillings each but offers to shine the askari's shoes for the free.



A Council askari dressed in civilian clothes demands a twenty shillings bribe from mama mboga and black mails the shoe shiner to offer 'free service' or risk eviction.

Meanwhile an old woman who appears to be desperately looking for the first customer to buy her bunch of bananas is subjected to the bitter edge of corruption. The city askari goes on to eat her bananas. Unable to do a thing the woman walks away with no words said. Mbutia does not spare the police force in matters of corruption. Using narration as a technique to deliver his message, he uses the lady to narrate her ordeal with the police. Having been arrested in the middle of the night together with a rich tycoon she artistically gives a well developed incident on how the police took her to their house. They gave her two options to choose to go to the cells for two days and latter face the judge or agree to offer them overnight 'service' and be released the following day.

Desperately the woman chooses the second option and as the story progresses the police officers 'use' her the whole night taking turns only to release her the following morning without even some money for breakfast.

Sexual abuse

Its worth noting that while the rich tycoon was able to buy his freedom but the poor lady could only offer her body for it. Again we see the vulnerability of women in an arrogant society which takes advantage of the poor helpless women to attain their selfish ends. At this level we find the poor woman in a state of psychological conflict. She is, according to Jaggar and Rothenberg, facing a state of psychological barrier which as they put it 'a competent and motivated woman is thus caught in a double bind which few men have been faced. She must worry 'not only about her failure but also success' .p15. The woman despite being a prostitute has rights which the police deny her. She deserved proper payment for her services or otherwise should have been given the proper procedure of dealing with her case

say she could be fined. All this happens in episode two, Kuria Ni Kuriha '(You must pay for what you eat)

Poverty

Mbuthia has come out powerfully to portray his concerns for the economic status of the community. Through portrayal of pathetic rural scenes with very old timber and mud houses he manages to bring out the picture of poverty. To emphasize on this Mbuthia's main characters dress in costumes in costumes that depict extreme or even abject poverty. As illustrated I the picture the costumes clearly speak for themselves about the economic status of the community. This is as illustrated below.



Machangi struggles to light the fire in a smoke filled wooden kitchen. He sleeps all day long while the wife earns the daily bread for the family.

It's also worthy of mention here that as an artist, Muthia stretches the aesthetic aspect of kikuyu language and even uses proverbs in a humorous style that provokes laughter such as

When he is excited he says

'Ngai ndariaga ngima' - God does not take ugali

When he is nervous and worried he says

'Ngai uka na ndugatumane' - God come down and don't send your messenger

At one instance Machangi and Kianangi decide to start a toilet digging company as a business and a job creation. As they put it, people in the village had stopped using toilets more often which means the demand for new toilets is low. Subsequently they decide to empty those already in existence. It's interesting how Muthia satirizes the economic status of the rural mass and the question of lack of employment.

As a social commentator, Muthia seems to challenge the youth in the rural areas to rise up to the challenge of joblessness and avoid complaining that the government has not offered employment to them despite the high education they have attained. Rather he suggests that

they should be more innovative and create jobs within their own environment.

He seems to point out that with the government offering money for the youth to begin small scale businesses they should team up and initiate business enterprises in order to benefit from the government kitty. Back to the theme of corruption the author uses episode two 'Kuria Ni Kuriha' (You must pay for what you eat) as an illustration scene to challenge those embers of the society who engage in corrupt practices at whatever level of the social class. He poses a challenge to the architects of economic scums such as the Goldenberg, Anglo Leasing and other such economic crimes that robe the country of its tax payer's hard earned money. This adversely affects the development programmes which are meant to benefit the common person

Infidelity

He presents this character who keeps borrowing money from everyone he comes across and especially so from those hardworking business friends. He promises to pay them with his end of the month coffee boom. When finally he goes to the bank to collect the proceeds

from his coffee he ends up draining it in bars and sharing with women as he engages in promiscuous activities.



Machangi dishes out the hard earned money from the coffee sale to a town Mistress while his poor wife and children are left to languish in poverty back in the village.



Machangi wastes the family's hard earned coffee bonus on drinking.

He leaves the poor wife and children who had apparently worked for that money languishing in poverty not forgetting the chain of debtors who take turn to demand for their due.

As illustrated in episode eight 'Mugunda Mukuru,(Uri Umatho) ' Mbuthia tackles the theme of infidelity within the marriage institution by presenting Kianangi a close friend of Machangi having a private love affair with Wanyuru, Machangi's wife. He portrays women as subjects of manipulation and untrustworthy. He also presents these themes through the scene in which Machangi leaves the family suffering at home just to engage in an affair with a mistress, Diana.



Machangi and Diana debate on whether to take fish or chicken for supper.

The author castigates the behavior by punishing Machangi at the end of both incidences. In the first instance where Machangi is squandering the coffee boom in a bar the character finally ends up in misery after being drained to the last cent by the city 'wife' in the second incidence where Machangi engages himself with Diana we again see him being chased away in misery. This is evident in the picture below.



Machangi is kicked out of his own house.

Surprisingly in both incidences his wife receives him like a prodigal son. The author therefore embraces a vision of society devoid of infidelity and one that values honesty responsibility and love in a family institution

In the above chapter we have identified the main thematic engagements in Mbutia's comic works. In the analysis the study has discovered that Mbutia engages himself in tackling themes of social concern in his society. The themes reflect the social developments in the issues as family conflict, domestic violence and violence on women. Outside the family Mbutia mirrors his society on corruption. He draws attention to the effect the malpractice has in institutions such as the municipal council. In episode two Kuria ni Kuriha-(You must pay for what you eat) we have seen how the police go against the human rights to 'devour' the innocent woman just because she has been found in a city street.

When the police arrest the woman she was in the company of her 'client' a rich tycoon. However they set free the man just because he had the money to buy his freedom while the poor woman didn't and hence suffers the consequence. Poverty is rampant in the family and societal level. Mbutia portrays it in three ways through the language used, the costumes/ attire his characters use and the setting/ environment the scenes where the action takes place (rural home)

Style

Mbuthia has largely incorporated several comic devices in order to captivate interest and laughter in his works. To begin with he has made use of the five main elements of theatrical comic style. There are character, an idea and language which are the subsets of any text.

He has also utilized the two most powerful elements of performance, music and spectacle. Through the use of character, Mbuthia has constituted characters that have intellectual constructs if good acting. In the context, he has picked on Kianangi a very articulate actor who dramatically delivers the message in the different episodes. Through the analysis we have just done, we were able to deliver the themes addressed because, Mbuthia's conception of the theme and his comic mode of delivery were well harmonized. He uses some powerful sensory devices such as costumes which help us easily differentiate associate and identify them with the message are powerfully crafted.

Unlike the Elizabethan acting and that of Shakespeare where actors who played the role of women were solely young boys, Mbuthia adopts the realistic style where a woman acts the position of a woman when female actresses act the place of women (Wanyuru for

Machangi's wife) the voice quality and language use bring the audience to the concept of reality a merit that Mbutia acquires in his comic works

Mbutia uses the traditional Greek dramatic form which used the episodic structure. In this structure the dynamics stand is marked by contrast with those of crisis drama. He however deviates slightly from the rigid characteristic of the formal Greek drama by presenting the plot of his episodes in a way that gives a the climax of the scene just before it ends

He presents his story in series but in a single plot a characteristic he also borrows from crisis drama developed in Rome in the Middle Ages. In Episode seven 'Micii ni ndogo, he presents he presents two stories but portraying a single theme. He has also largely used the comic style of surprise where we see the wife receiving the promiscuous husband with a very hearty welcome against the audience's expectation. Mbutia somehow uses the comic device of repetition which uses the physical and verbal art. By physical he uses gestures and movements while by verbal he uses tonal variation and linguistic elements of Kikuyu language.

In the physical sense he also uses repetition of a comic perhaps incongruent incident can highly be effective. We however acknowledge his wide use of wisecrack, a twentieth century comic style used in American plays which used verbal humor. It largely borders on cynism

We notice the use of wisecrack especially so when Machangi uses the language to cynically attack his wife Warukungu by commenting on the 'business' she does in Mombasa. He says; 'biashara io ni njui ni njega tondu diri stock' (I know that business is very good because it doesn't require an initial capital) referring to prostitution as a lucrative business in with tourists in Mombasa.

Finally we can therefore summarize the man comic devises used by Mbuthia in his works as; Surprise, Repetition, Exaggeration and Wisecrack. These are the stylistic devices he uses to captivate his audience and provoke laughter as he educates as well as entertain them.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this study we set out to undertake a thematic analysis of Mbuthia Muruthi's comic works. Through the study we have been able to isolate various dominant themes in his works. They include corruption (episode two), violence on women (episode one and five), domestic violence, poverty (common all episodes). We have for instance identified the theme of domestic violence which seems to be rooted in the traditional patriarchal society.

Mbuthia has presented the traditional conception of the husband –wife relationship in which the rules governing it were based on a patriarchal system where the husband is the decision maker and the wife a subject of the decisions. As we have seen Mbuthia closely juxtaposes the traditional system with the modern lifestyle where the woman in a marriage is given audience and is part of decision making. He presents the latter relationship as progressive while the former as retrogressive. He therefore seems to be sending a social message through the comedies on the need to tap and empower the potential held in the women if any meaningful development has to be realized. He does this in episode four and episode five.

In so doing he gives the signal to the society that there is need to liberate the woman through education of the society and more so the male sex to come out of the *past - date* perception of an ideal wife. He continues to suggest the way forward for the liberation of the woman as that of opportunities in schools careers and business circles.

This study also established that there certain vices that cripple the society such as corruption. Being a social commentator the artist uses his comedies to educate as well as entertain the mass on the need to fight corruption in the society.

Through the study we have come to a conclusion that Mbutia's major engagement is that of performing a role of a teacher, a guide, a shaper of the social ideals and vision of his society. He completely captures the mind of his society through the comic genre of literature. He uses the opportunity to castigate those engaging in these vices in the society.

Through his works Mbutia champions for an ideal society full of social practices that transcend women liberation. He criticizes and proposes solutions to the problems through this juxtaposition of two families- Kianangi's family where a woman is treated honorably and decisions made amicably between husband and wife in comparison to Machangi's family where violence, demeaning language and shouting at each other are the order of the day. The audience is left to make their own choices. Having identified the artist as a social commentator, this study is therefore convinced that Mbutia and his works have a place in the literary context. His comic works serve a critical function of shaping the ideals of the society which forms his audience.

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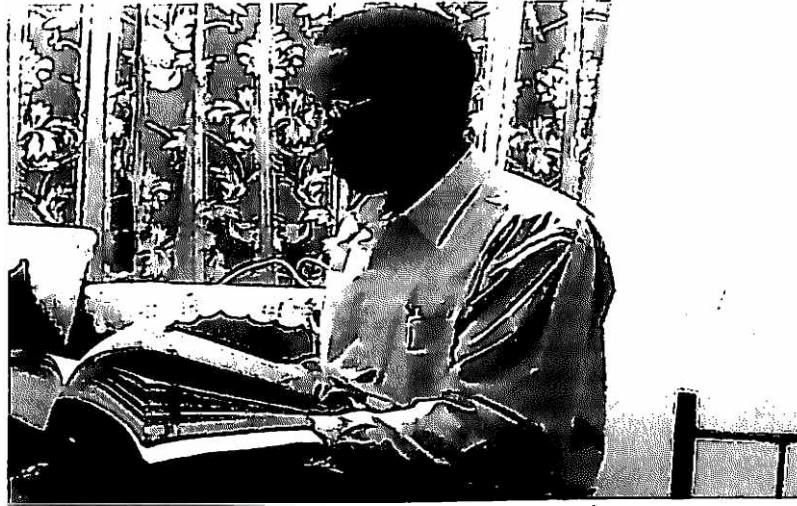
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Irungu Njenga, the researcher



Mbuthia Muruthi, the artist as well as the main actor with the stage name 'Machang'i'