

"BAHASHA YA OCAMPO": A THEOLOGICAL AND SEMIOLOGICAL READING OF JUDGEMENT IN THE MUSIC OF JULIANI

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to illustrate how Julius Owino (Juliani) has defied silence as an East African Gospel musician and used his artistic career to fight for justice. The article also demonstrates how Christian music can be used for social activism and the bridging of the sacred and the secular through the advancement of sonic activism. Music is a powerful agent for social, political, educational, therapeutic and religious transformation. The study employs the qualitative method by specifically reading the song "*Bahasha ya Ocampo*" by Juliani as a discourse in sonic activism, particularly emphasising the theological and semiotic portrait of "judgment" in the song. Juliani uses this song to warn that God's judgement is more severe than that of I.C.C. Prosecutor Jose Moreno-Ocampo. Drawing from the success of musicians like Bob Marley, Mahalia Jackson, Garth Hewitt, Eric Wainaina, Oliver Mtukudzi, Fela Kuti, Thomas Maphumo and Miriam Makeba, among others who have successfully leveraged music to crusade for human rights and social justice, the study argues for the potentiality of such music in the Christian Gospel mission. This article also defends the potentiality of positive social impact given that Harry Belafonte, Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie brought nearly fifty musicians together in 1985 to record the song *We Are the World*, which raised millions of dollars for poverty intervention in Africa. The discussion gives us a panoramic view of Juliani as a justice advocate, elaborates on "judgment" as a theological term and then embarks on a semiological reading of the song.

Key terms: Faith-based activism, judgment, justice, semiotics, sonic resistance, theological reading.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Who is Juliani?

Julius Owino (AKA Juliani) is a prolific Kenyan Christian hip-hop artist who writes and performs socially-conscious songs to fight for the rights of the downtrodden and critique socio-economic ills in society. He has also utilised music to crusade for causes such as environmental protection, youth involvement in agriculture, development of talents and a call to chastity, truth-telling and political accountability. Born in 1984 in Dandora Estate on the eastern side of Nairobi, Juliani has broken artistic, cultural, religious and ideological barriers to make Christian music (and especially hip-hop) a great catalyst for positive social change. His early justice and artistic influences stem from interactions with socially conscious youth who also wrote songs about Kenya's economic and political decline. In the Foreword of the book *The Street Is My Pulpit* by Mwenda Ntarangwi, Juliani gives some vital information about his early upbringing:

For a young person to be noticed, he or she had to join a gang. To be a member of a gang, such as Kamjesh or Mungiki, back then was the in thing. Later, the more I worked on turning my talent into a skill, the more I got the attention of many people, including those at Mau Mau Camp, a group of rappers famed for speaking on what was happening politically and socially in society, who later welcomed me into the group (Ntarangwi, 2016).

When conducting my research on the nexus of music and social justice at Africa International University in 2024, Juliani was interviewed as one of my case studies. From the interviews, one can equate Juliani with John the Baptist's mission of being "a voice crying out in the wilderness", pleading with the people of Kenya to "make crooked paths straight" and "prepare the way" for the Messiah and His call to righteous living and justice. Juliani is not afraid to speak truth to power. Through cutting, cryptic lyrics that mainstream dreadlocks, jeans, the Sheng dialect and HipHop as legitimate expressions of Christian evangelism, he is able to reach multitudes of youth with the Gospel message. The discussion below takes a closer look at the theme of "judgement" as one of the expressions of Juliani's efforts to speak Christian truth to power. The analysis presents sonic activism as an agent for the promotion of human rights and a tool for empowering the church for social transformation. Kigame (2025) provides a microcosmic representation of the main themes Juliani carries in his music.

Table 1: Juliani Songs Thematic Summary

Song Title	Theme	Subthemes
<i>Utawala</i>	Poor governance	Corruption, economic injustice, inequality and poverty, politicians' arrogance, tribalism
<i>Bahasha ya Ocampo</i>	Political injustice	Post-election violence, God's judgement of ethnic profiling
<i>"Machози ya Jana"</i>	Extra-judicial murder	Injustice
<i>Hela</i>	Economic hardship	High cost of living, love for money, salvation
<i>Exponential Potential</i>	Hard work	Unity, development of basic amenities/infrastructure, belief in God, justice
<i>Kama Si Sisi</i>	Change	Human rights advocacy, realisation of

		people's potential, growth
<i>Rauka</i>	Environmental conservation	Pollution, wastage of resources, hunger
<i>Hatutakoma</i>	Persistence on social change	Economic, social and gender inequality, greed,

Juliani grew to stardom as a solo artist in 2005 when he released his first single in collaboration with Ukoo flani, MauMau musicians Johny Boy and K-Swiss Agano. The song was titled, "*Fanya Tena*" and appeared on a compilation album titled *Kilio Cha Haki*, which translates as "cry for justice." Influenced heavily by American hip-hop artists, Sudanese rapper, Jal, Reuben Kigame, Ukoo Flani MauMau and the late Safaricom CEO, Bob Collymore, among others, Juliani's music is a complex outpouring of social criticism, the Christian faith, a bit of pantheism and business principles (Kigame, 2025). His deep reflection and feelings drove him to a deep sense of despair following Kenya's Post-Election-Violence that broke out in December 2007 and lasted until February 2008. It is this violence that led Juliani to write the song, *Bahasha ya Ocampo*. The lyrics have been provided below, together with a literal translation.

Bahasha ya Ocampo (Featuring Jaya)

Chorus

niliponea bahasha ya Ocampo
 lakini kile naogopa hata zaidi
 finger of God
 ikini-point
 yule yule yule yule (mwenye dhambi wewe)
 yule yule, yule yule
 yule yule yule yule
 yule yule, yule Yule

Verse 1 (Juliani)

politicians wanabonga mob
 that's why kwa parliament kuna speaker
 ndio ujue
 vitu ziko wrong
 pedestrians wanapisha gari kupita
 kwa zebra crossing
 kama una chuki nami heri
 ni-poison na rat and rat
 kuliko uninunulie Passat
 funds za elimu free inalipia watoto wa minister private school fees
 kukuwa mtu mzuri ni hatia
 walinishuku niki-offer mrembo lift kwa njia
 tafadhali samahani shukran
 ni terms zimepotea kata tu kwa skin ya msudan
 kisu ni cutlery
 kwa mkono ya roho mbaya nisilaha ina-increase casualties

ukipenda utamu ya sweetie kuwa tayari kuvumilia cavities

Verse 2 (Juliani)

Maboy ni wa-humble
wakiwa na warembo
trouser inateremka down to earth
wanapenda from the belt down
si from the belt up
flower, coffee, movie si free
pakipa nikiku-hug haimaanishi naku-love
after episodes za Tyra Banks
wanadhani urembo ni kuvaa tighter pants
wanafunika less
so na-address
hizi issue
mguu split ka sign ya peace ka DVD
ni ma-player, wanahitaji CDs
sell self, wanaume
ni river
upate bank
lazima u-get wet
hio ndio advice tunawapea
njaa hustler fala

Verse 3 (Juliani)

unatumia Panadol kutibu H1N1
there's none but one
kwake uje
zingine zote
ni ka watchman kulinda police station
haisaidii, walivaa high heels
wakaribie heaven
nili-bend knees
nika-touch heaven
mtulivu husema sorry zitabaki thirty-two
mjuaji usimpikie githeri, itakuwa ngumu ku-chew
mwili yake ilipata shimo ka flute
Yesu, kupata haikuwa flukes
after ile kisa Eden
ngumu kupata visa heaven
great mathematician
alitoa one earth, ndio apate all together heaven

Chorus (Jaya)

niliponea bahasha ya Ocampo
lakini kenye naogopa hata zaidi
finger of God
ikini-point
yule yule yule yule
yule yule, yule yule
yule yule yule yule
yule yule, yule Yule

Translation

(Chorus by Jaya)

I escaped Ocampo's envelope
But I what I fear even more
Finger of God
Pointing at me
That that that that (the same) (you sinner)
That that
That that that that (you sinner)
That that

Verse 1 (Juliani)

Politicians are talking a lot
That is why there is a speaker in parliament
So that you know
Things are wrong
Pedestrians are paving way for cars to pass
On the zebra crossing
If you hate me, better
Poison me with rat and rat
Than buying me a Passat
Free education funds pay for the minister's children's private school fees
Being a good person is a crime
They suspected me as I offered a beautiful girl a lift on the road
Please I am sorry, thank you
This are lost terms, just cut it off a Sudanese's skin
A knife if cutlery
In the hand of an evil soul, it's a weapon that increases casualties
If you like the sweetness of a sweet, be ready to persevere cavities

Chorus (Jaya)

I escaped Ocampo's envelope
But I what I fear even more
Finger of God
Pointing at me

That that that that /the same the same (you sinner)
That that
That that that that (you sinner)
That that

Verse 2

Boys are humble
With beautiful girls
The trouser drops down to earth
They like from the belt down
Not from the belt up
Flowers, coffee, movies are not free
Just because I hug you does not mean I love you
After Tyra Bank's episodes
They think beauty is wearing tighter pants
They cover less
So, I am addressing
These issues
Leg split like the peace sign like DVD
They are players, they need CDs
Sell yourself, men
It is a river
Get a bank
You must get wet
That is the advice we are giving you
Hunger, hustler, foolish

Verse 3 (Juliani)

You are using Panadol to treat H1N1
There's none but one
Come to Him
All others
Are like a watchman manning the police station
It does not help, they wore high heels
To near heaven
I bent my knees
I touched heaven
The calm say, there will remain thirty two sorries
Do not cook githeri for the know-it-all, it is hard to chew
His body found a hole like a flute
Jesus, to find him was not flukes
After the Eden case
Difficult to get a visa in heaven
Great mathematician

He gave one earth, so that he can get heaven all together

Chorus (Jaya)
I escaped Ocampo's envelope
But I what I fear even more
Finger of God
Pointing at me
That that that that (you sinner)
That that
That that that that (you sinner)
That that

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Art as a tool for social justice encompasses the utilisation of artistic expressions and creative practices to address social inequalities, advocate for marginalised communities, and promote positive social change (Mukahi, 2023). Historically, music has served to represent the demands of social movements, e.g. street protests have always employed songs as a means of fighting for rights (Spencer-Espinosa, 2022).

In *Music and Identity*, Frith (1996) states that people use music to show their cultural capital or their lifestyle, and define their identity based on images, slogans, lyrics and shifts those different types of music present. In the same way, Street (2012) explores the role of music in political communication, emphasising its ability to convey ideological messages and challenge dominant narratives. Music serves multiple critical functions in social movements, for instance, as a tool for mobilisation (Taylor, 2016), as a medium for message dissemination and gender activism (Rodriguez, 2024), and as a means to create collective identity (Forbes & Krause, 2024; Duman, 2024).

This discussion can be executed using different theoretical frameworks. The concepts of "sonic activism" and "Musicological Semiotics" have been selected as the theoretical foundation because of their direct application to the work of Juliani as a Christian who also doubles up as a social activist. Sonic activism refers to the strategic deployment of sound as a tool of socio-economic and political resistance. Such sound can be in the form of crowd chants, whistles, screams, crying, feet marching, tear gas canisters exploding or the use of music to foster solidarity or pass a message (Kigame, 2025). Music for social activism transcends mere general sounds in that it employs lyrics, rhythm, instrumentation, and performance to question dominant narratives and disrupt the status quo. Miriam Makeba used music to fight for justice in South Africa, Thomas Maphumo in Zimbabwe, Fela Kuti in Nigeria, Joseph Kamaru in Kenya, and Ramy Essam and El-General in Egypt and Tunisia, respectively, during the Arab Spring. From a Christian perspective, some of the greatest voices of sonic resistance are British cleric Garth Hewitt, American Civil Rights activist Mahalia Jackson, Rwandan Catholic musician Kizito Mihigo and the intercontinental sounds of the group called Silver Wind. (Kigame, 2025).

Several scholars inform this theoretical anchor. For instance, Wuthnow and Evans (2002) discuss this aspect using music as a site of Black cultural resistance. Gilroy (1993) anchors the discussion on diasporic identity and music. Byrd and Levy (2013) anchor it on gender, political activism and mediatisation. Thiong'o (1986) provides a great literary foundation for the theory in his work on decolonising the mind and reclaiming

African cultural forms. As cited earlier, the book titled "*The Quiet Hand of God: Faith-Based Activism and the Public Role of Mainline Protestantism*" Edited by Wuthnow and Evans (2002), focuses on the role of the six biggest denominations in America and how they shape public policy through Christian activism. These include American Baptist, Evangelical Lutheran, Presbyterian USA, Episcopal, United Church of Christ and United Methodist Church.

The intersection of music and social justice is gaining more attention in East African scholarship than in the years past. Over the last ten years, considerable work has gone into analysing emerging trends of convergence and how they affect politics, culture, education and faith (Kigame, 2025). Recent scholarship has predominantly approached the music and social justice nexus in East Africa through three theoretical frameworks. The first emphasises the role of music as a form of "cultural resistance", drawing on Nyairo's (2003) concept of "sonic activism. This framework presents East African musicians as cultural intermediaries who translate social justice concerns into accessible cultural expressions.

The second builds on the decolonial theory. This perspective examines how contemporary East African musicians engage with and challenge colonial legacies through their artistic expressions while simultaneously advocating for social justice.

The third framework is an approach to music as a form of social capital that facilitates collective action for justice. This theoretical perspective has been particularly influential in analysing how musical networks in urban East Africa create platforms for social justice advocacy.

Recent studies have applied these theoretical frameworks to various social justice movements in East Africa. Notable examples include:

- a) Gender Justice and Musical Expression (Mwangi, 2020).
- b) Economic Justice and Musical Protest (Hassan & Ahmed, 2024).
- c) Environmental Justice.

Sonic resistance refers to the use of sound in general and music in particular as a tool for challenging cultural and political injustices. Taking the example of the song *Anguka Nayo*, which became a rallying symbol of Gen Z's resistance to Kenya's finance bill 2024 and a simultaneous call for integrity and accountability in government, sonic resistance may be viewed as some form of subversive sound production where music is used to challenge prevailing narratives of power, corruption and inequality. Sahera and Setina problematise this struggle by viewing music and performance as acts of social resistance. For them, the main emphasis is on the use of sound technologies to impose power on masses of people. For our study, we go beyond the application of technology and view the entire soundscape as possessing agency for cultural resistance.

Turning to Musicological Semiotics, Hall (1997) showed us the possibility of using semiology to study popular music. For a long time, popular music was not viewed with semiological interest, but one would ask why, given its potency with "signs" and "signifiers", connotations and denotations. Again, music comes to us loaded with multiple layers of symbols, including individual notes, chords, phrases, counterpoints, cadences, melody and harmony, not to mention rhythmic patterns which can be read from the simple to

the complex. Besides the tonal mediascape, we have lyrical content which can be subjected to poetic analysis, aesthetic morphologies, language meanings and translatability.

The semiotic interest is compounded by the possibility of both etic and emic approaches to the study of music works and recent developments in videographic representations (Haapanen & Manninen, 2021). Juliani, being a skilled musician, utilises all of the above and more. He is a melody maker who understands how to harmonise his songs, as seen in the powerful chorus of the song *Utawala*. He is a great poet who can wield rhyme and rhythm effortlessly but is also capable of evoking deep emotion, e.g. in the song *Machosi ya Jana* (Yesterday's Tears), which laments the murder of Lawyer Willie Kimani by the police in which he asks for "More handkerchiefs" because his eyes are red from crying but the crying does not seem to stop. The emic interpretations may be more readily visible to musicians and poets like Juliani, but the etic sense must be surrendered to free interpretation by the audience.

It is worth noting that Dunbar-Hall uses the term "musical semiology." I opt to use "musicological semiology" to remove the ambiguity that comes with the former. It is unlikely that we can speak of semiology as an area of study being a recipient of musical essence. I prefer "musicological" because of the "logos" in the term. It is an area of inquiry rather than something that bears musical ability or packaging. We shall return to this when conducting the semiological reading of *Bahasha ya Ocampo*. Right here is a good place to bring in our third operational term, "theology."

3.0 THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT FOR "*BAHASHA YA OCAMPO*"

Encyclopedia Britannica credits the Greek philosophers with the emergence of the concept of theology but subsumes it under the mythical. The article entry in the Encyclopedia posits that it is the Christian faith that deepened and expanded the concept of theology. The Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology gives us a comprehensive definition: Biblical theology is the "study of the Bible that seeks to understand what the biblical writers, guided by God, believed, described, and taught within their historical and cultural context," focusing on "the progressive revelation and development of theological ideas throughout the Bible, emphasising the unity and coherence of God's redemptive plan" (Elwell, 1996).

When reading the song, *Bahasha ya Ocampo*, in the light of Christian theology, we must bear in mind two different but related concepts, i.e. judgment and justice. Besides the attribute of God as "Creator", the other attributes that run like a scarlet thread throughout the Bible are "judgment" and "justice." So central is the concept of judgment in Scripture that two canonical books, i.e. Judges and Daniel, bear the term. "Daniel" actually implies "God is Judge." Wherever you find God's judgment, you will find the aspect of God's justice. Therefore, *Bahasha ya Ocampo* is both judgment and justice because the two operate together. Genesis 18:25 summarises this in a rhetorical question: Will not the King of all the earth do what is right?"

Judgment is a central theme throughout Scripture, often portrayed as an expression of God's righteousness and sovereignty. *Ecclesiastes 12:14 declares:* "For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil."

Matthew 12:36 adds that "on the day of judgment people will give an account for every careless word they speak."

Romans 2:5–6 mentions the impartiality of God's judgment: "God will repay each person according to what they have done."

Revelation 20:12 provides a vivid description of final judgment, where the dead are judged "according to what they had done as recorded in the books."

The Bible presents God as a "righteous judge" who settles things fairly and without partiality. Romans 2:11–16 and James 2:4 confirm this categorically. 1 Timothy 4:8 says He will award the crown of righteousness. Only a righteous judge can award such a thing because it would be in His nature. Isaiah 26:9 states, "My soul yearns for you in the night; my spirit within me earnestly seeks you. For when your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness."

In theological terms, divine judgment is not merely punitive but also restorative. Bible scholar N. T. Wright argues that biblical judgment aims to set the world right, reconciling creation with God's justice and holiness (Wright, 2013). Regarding judgment by humans, we are warned against hypocritical and unfair judgment. Matthew 7:1–5 has Jesus saying: "Do not judge, or you too will be judged," thereby cautioning against self-righteousness and myopic moral entitlement. However, John 7:24 calls for "righteous judgment"—judging not by appearances but by truth. 1 Samuel 16:7 says God does not judge the way people do and that He looks at the heart and not outward appearance. The eschatological vision of perfect creation in Isaiah 11 shows us how the Messiah will not judge simply by what He sees or hears. The prophet says, "With righteousness He will judge the needy and with justice give decisions for the poor of the earth." (Isaiah 11:1–9). In the same way, Paul admonishes the need for discernment within the Christian community (1 Corinthians 5:12–13), affirming the need for internal accountability while reserving final judgment for God.

It is evident that Divine judgment is just, comprehensive, and rooted in God's holiness. On the other hand, human judgment must be humble and fair and emulate God's nature and truth. Justice is foundational in the Hebrew Scriptures and is portrayed as an essential attribute of God. God puts forth a clear moral duty for us all in Micah 6:8: "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." Isaiah 1:17 prioritises justice over mere religion, requiring believers to take care of orphans, widows, the poor and the stranger. In the 61st chapter, Isaiah clearly states that the Holy Spirit anointed the Messiah to proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for the captives and the replacement of brokenness and despair with beauty. *Amos 5:24* calls for justice as a continual flow: "Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!"

The Torah (books of the Law) and *Nebhiim* (the Prophets) consistently advocate for the rights of the marginalised. Justice, in this sense, includes both legal fairness and social equity (Hebrew: *mishpat* and *tsedaqah* respectively).

The mission of Jesus is closely linked with justice. *Luke 4:18*, quoting Isaiah 61, declares His purpose: "to proclaim good news to the poor... freedom for the oppressed."

James 1:27 states: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows..." The New Testament extends the Old Testament's call for justice to a global and spiritual dimension, emphasising justice in the Kingdom of God as both a present reality and a future hope.

4.0 SEMIOTIC READING

Juliani's song, *Bahasha ya Ocampo*, serves as a potent form of semiotic inquiry, offering a layered critique of Kenya's post-election violence, political corruption and blatant evasion of justice, especially by Kenya's elite. Released during a politically volatile period following the 2007–2008 post-election violence, the song reflects the artist's use of music as a tool for social commentary and civic engagement. Below, we shall briefly examine the song's linguistic, symbolic, cultural, and political elements to uncover the deeper meanings encoded in the work.

The title of the song is itself a most potent symbolism that connotes multiple layers of meaning. This title, which is rendered in standard Kiswahili, can be translated as "*Ocampo's Envelope*". It is a powerful semiotic anchor for all that the song is intended to communicate. An envelope is a piece of paper that is usually artistically folded to serve the purpose of concealing and privatising communication. Physical postage of mail has utilised this tradition, with envelopes of different sizes being fashioned to serve various content volumes. An envelope is thus a symbol of secrecy or confidentiality. To open someone's envelope without their permission is viewed as criminal and may attract penalties. Not even postal staff are permitted to open someone's sealed envelope.

The Kiswahili word for envelope is *bahasha*. In most cases, when the term is used, the visual connotation is often an envelope in its sealed state being received or sent out. In the Kenyan political lexicon, the phrase *Bahasha ya Ocampo* references the envelope delivered by the then-International Criminal Court (I.C.C.) Chief Prosecutor Luis Moreno Ocampo in December 2010, which reportedly contained the names of six high-profile Kenyan individuals suspected of committing crimes against humanity. These crimes were committed during the 2007–2008 post-election crisis, which resulted in over 1,300 deaths and the displacement of hundreds of thousands.

Semiotically, the *bahasha* (envelope) functions as a symbol of the concealed truth, justice, and suspense, embodying the tension between national sovereignty and international accountability. It signifies the anticipation and anxiety of a nation awaiting the unmasking of powerful individuals implicated in orchestrated violence.

What is more, in Kenyan informal language use, *bahasha* carries the additional connotation of concealed bribery, often containing illicit money or incentives. Such envelope bribery contents are often referred to as *kitu kidogo*, translated as 'something small' although the amounts in cash remain indeterminate. Indeed, musician Eric Wainaina has a song titled *Nchi ya Kitu Kidogo*, which translates to "country of something small" or "nation of bribes", drawing from the tradition of police officers asking for bribes, especially from motorists or illicit brewers by persuading them to give them "a little money" and they would overlook an offence. This dual interpretation transforms the title into a polysemic symbol representing both the promise of justice and the threat of its commodification. Through this double entendre, Juliani problematises the judicial process, hinting that the pursuit of justice might be tainted by political interference and corruption.

Another important aspect is Juliani's employment of political Figures as Metonymic Constructs. Throughout the song, he avoids naming the individuals whose names are said to be in Ocampo's envelope. Metonymy is a figure of speech where a word or phrase is used to represent something related to it. For

example, "Hollywood" was used to refer to the film industry, *Koinange Street* to refer to Kenya's commercial sex culture and industry and *The White House* or *State House* to refer to the President or the executive branch of the U.S. or Kenya government, respectively. Juliani uses metonymic references—referring indirectly to *watu kwa bahasha* (the people in the envelope). This abstraction transforms the individuals into representations of the Kenyan political elite widely perceived as untouchable and immune to legal repercussions. They feel and live like they are untouchable by anyone or anything, a real representation of impunity.

These shadowy, unnamed figures serve as signifiers of a broader system of impunity and elite immunity. Juliani's decision to anonymise them reinforces the sense of omnipresent yet elusive power, simultaneously indicting a whole class of leadership while avoiding direct confrontation or legal jeopardy.

There are different ways of categorising metonymy.

- Referential metonymy: where one entity or event is used to refer to another.
- Propositional metonymy: involving A relationship between two propositions.
- Illocutionary metonymy: involving pragmatic inferencing, as in asking for a "five" (five pounds). In Kenya, when you say "give me a G", you mean you want to be given 1000 shillings.
- Situational metonymy: Evokes a situation where one can infer a relationship between events. For more information on this, see Encyclopedia Britannica.

We now move to an interesting idiom carried by the first line of the chorus which is sang by a lady called *Jaya*: *Niliponea bahasha ya Ocampo* (I escaped Ocampo's envelope). This statement carries various layers of signification. First, the verb *kuponea*, which can be literally rendered as "narrowly missed" or "manage to escape a trap", connotes skilful trickery, smart play, cryptic manipulation, or literally "stealing away from." Juliani uses this phrase to imply that Kenya's politicians are conmen and women who believe they can outsmart anyone and any system by sheer trickery. Most believe they can do this by using money. He is implying that the politicians who incited Kenyans to fight and kill each other actually believe they can outsmart the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court in Hague. He makes *Jaya* dramatise it through personalisation. This gives it a global application.

Juliani is saying that many of us think we can escape human justice, and so he adds, "*Kile ninaogopa zaidi*, Finger of God" (But what I fear more than anything else is the Finger of God); "*Ikinipoint yule, yule, yule*" (Pointing at me as He says, that one, that one, that one). His message is that it is extremely dangerous for God to point at you with His divine finger, singling you out with the words, "There he/she is!" The biblical equivalent of this action is Judas Iscariot identifying Jesus with a kiss in order to make it easy for arrest. During my interview with Juliani, he told me that the use of "finger of God" in the song was inspired by Prime-Time News at the time about a religious group led by Joseph Elon and former news anchor Esther Arunga. Their church was called *Finger of God*. This is artistic creativity involving current affairs and the symbolism in the names of religious groups. The symbol of "finger" is more than an identifier. It is a judgment motif. When someone points a finger at you, it may signify a warning or declaration of violence. God's finger can fashion creation or scribble in the sand to enumerate human sins.

This leads us to Juliani's use of Intertextuality and Historical Context. A semiotic reading must consider the intertextuality embedded in the lyrics. Juliani draws upon Kenya's collective memory and lived political

experience to build his critique. References to Ocampo and the I.C.C. allude to Kenya's failure to domestically address the violence and atrocities of 2007–2008, leading to the outsourcing of justice to the international community.

This intertextuality situates the song within a broader narrative of postcolonial justice, national failure, and international scrutiny. By invoking these associations, Juliani encodes within the song a critique not only of individual actors but of institutional decay, ethnicised politics, and performative justice. This is closely connected with dual signification. Sample the double sense of the word “speaker” in the opening line, “*Politicians wanabonga mob ndio maana kwa Parliament kuna Speaker.*” (Politicians talk a lot; that’s why in Parliament there is a speaker). This is a cryptic play on a “speaker” as a tool to amplify the voices of those who want to speak but also the name of a discussion moderator in Parliament. As noted before, the term “*bahasha*” operates as a floating signifier with contradictory meanings. On the one hand, it stands for justice involving the I.C.C. process of offering hope to victims and survivors of violence. On the other, it connotes bribery and the institutionalisation of corruption in Kenyan governance.

Juliani uses this tension to highlight the fragility of justice in Kenya, suggesting that legal proceedings are vulnerable to manipulation, intimidation, and political compromise. Thus, the envelope not only holds names but becomes a metaphor for the stakes of justice itself, potentially subject to erasure, tampering, or delay.

In order to see how Juliani utilises tension and contrast in the song, we cite a literal translation of part of the third stanza of the song *You are using Panadol to treat H1N1*

There’s none but one
Come to Him
All others
Are like a watchman manning the police station
It does not help, they wore high heels
To near heaven
I bent my knees
I touched heaven.

Juliani also employs Voice, Persona, and Street Consciousness and adopts the voice of a streetwise observer—an ordinary Kenyan reflecting on political developments from the margins. This voice is crucial in Kenyan hip-hop, which often functions as a vehicle for subaltern speech, allowing marginalised youth to speak truth to power. The artist uses sheng (urban street slang), biblical allusions, and poetic metaphors to connect with his audience.

This linguistic register resonates with urban youth, giving legitimacy to his critique and positioning him as both a cultural intermediary and moral agent. The persona he adopts is not that of a neutral commentator but an engaged citizen, demanding accountability in a system that often silences dissenting voices.

Next, let us look at the semiotics associated with live performance and videographic representation. As mentioned earlier, we are dealing with several layers of semiotic representation. Although the power of *Bahasha ya Ocampo* lies primarily in its lyrics, Juliani's performance style also contributes to its semiotic

richness. In live sessions before audiences or if one watches his music videos, it is evident that Juliani typically avoids flamboyant outfits or materialistic imagery. His "minimalist visual aesthetic" emphasises simplicity, solidarity, authenticity, humility and alignment with the masses. He particularly uses his voice, dreadlocks and simple clothing, as well as his dancing, to connect with Kenyans from all walks of life, but especially youth from informal settlements and the urban environment. This is quite a message given the contrast with the flamboyance common in the dominant visual imagery in contemporary music filming, where wealth and power are often flaunted and glamorised. Instead, Juliani's aesthetic underscores a grassroots ethos, reinforcing the semiotic message that true power resides with an informed and morally grounded citizenry and in the simplicity and authenticity of the artist.

We close by looking at Juliani's use of Christian theological Semiotics. As a devout Christian gospel artist, Juliani infuses his lyrics with moral and religious undertones. He invokes God, conscience, and divine justice, using these ethical signifiers to contrast the secular failure of the state with the spiritual imperative for truth and righteousness.

The presence of religious language in the song functions to elevate the discourse beyond mere political critique. It places the search for justice within a transcendent moral framework where divine judgment hangs over the corrupt elite who believe they are untouchable. He wants them to know that, regardless of their attempts to evade earthly consequences, God will still catch them. Both the Book of Job and the New Testament writers were convinced that God's power and wisdom would prevail over the cunning works of human beings, and He would judge all.

Luis Ocampo-Moreno analogically mirrors the role of God as a prosecutor. His vast legal knowledge and efforts in conflict resolution mimic the judgment seat. Juliani wants everyone to see him as a thorough human investigator and prosecutor but also wants everyone to be cognizant of the superiority of God's judgement. Ordinarily, nobody can simply evade the justice of the I.C.C. Juliani wants all to know that God's judgement is worse and that it will prosecute and condemn the perpetrators of Kenya's post-election violence.

5.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study establishes that Christianity cannot be divorced from social activism and that the tendency to see activism as secular is unbiblical and unprofitable for the church. Secondly, musical styles are neutral as agents of communication and can, therefore, be employed by Christians to spread the Gospel. Juliani demonstrates this by utilising hip-hop, the Sheng language and culturally relevant dressing, including the wearing of dreadlocks. Thirdly, the study established sonic activism as a theory that can be employed as a mouthpiece for biblical passages on justice and judgment. It was also established that the church can leverage digital technology, such as music production and performance, with amazing results. Last but not least, Juliani's song, "Bahasha Ya Ocampo", shows Christian musicians as powerful voices that the church can use to speak truth to power. Church musicians can follow Juliani's example and write songs that address social and political issues.

6.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: There is a paradox concerning the ubiquitous magnitude of Christianity in Africa and the corresponding little social justice music by Christians. The irony is that the Bible urges Christians to be

involved with social justice, but Church music often includes themes on doxology, evangelism and topics such as prosperity, but hardly justice. This needs further investigation. As our study findings show, there is a need for Church leaders and musicians to harmonise music and social justice. This can be done through seminars, sermons that teach proper doctrine on music and justice and the provision of more space for Christian musicians in Churches to sing their social justice songs.

Recommendations: The relationship between theology, music and sonic activism is wanting. There is a need for more scholarship by Christian theologians to interrogate the convergence between these fields. Interdisciplinary research can serve this need in a big way. More significantly, the nexus of music, theology and critical discourse analysis that gives semiology its proper place is badly needed. It is time to stop dichotomising the observations and tools of semiology on the basis of sacred and secular. Christian universities should pay more attention to the semiological discussions, concerns, questions and applications from the works of scholars such as Barthes et al. (1972) and others. Christian theology should also take an interest in musicology in general, but especially what ethnomusicologists are saying out there.

Last but not least, Christian scholars need to pay attention to what individual Christian artists are saying. The church seems wired to ignore the cries, emotions, angst, despair, analyses, imagery and entire spectra of semiology and discourse analysis. Pastors are loaded with robust theological educations, but all of it seems to ignore and bypass the complexity of lyrics, melodic and aesthetic screams oozing from the mouths, pens and technological structures of the numerous Church artists. For instance, who has really paid attention to *Bahasha ya Ocampo*? In the song, Juliani deploys an extremely "dense" matrix of signs and symbols to critique Kenya's political elite and the country's relationship with justice and accountability, but which pastor or theologian is paying attention? As seen at the beginning of this article, Juliani is like Socrates, who wants people to know themselves and examine their lives. He is like John the Baptist, calling people to repentance and restitution.

The tendency for the church to ignore artistic prophecy and edification is not a concern of Juliani alone. The author has recorded tonnes of social justice songs, but the church seems more interested in worship songs than social justice music. Pastors, Christian media, musicians and scholars need to engage with musicians who use music and contemporary arts to advance the Gospel. Through linguistic ambiguity, intertextual references, and the use of metaphor and irony, Juliani constructs a semiotic narrative that is both deeply Kenyan and globally intelligible, but is the East African Church listening to him? The song *Bahasha ya Ocampo* is an exemplar of music as a form of resistance, where cultural production intersects with political discourse, but this area is under-researched.

Juliani's work reveals that in post-violence Kenya, justice is not merely a legal matter but a contested field of meaning as well as a divine responsibility shaped by Scripture, language, memory, power and performance. *Bahasha ya Ocampo* is not just a mirror of God's judgement but remains a significant cultural artefact that challenges us to engage critically with national and global history as well as the never-ending struggle for truth and justice.

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