

There is a troubling contradiction regarding the relationship between music and social justice in the East African Church. On the one hand, music is a dominant part of global Church liturgy, but social justice themes are not common in East Africa's Church songs. On the other hand, the dominance of biblical Christianity in the East African region contradicts the widespread nature of injustices such as police brutality, genocide, corruption, abductions, terrorism, gender-based-violence, the refugee crisis and high levels of poverty. Alfred Olwa (2015) projected that by 2020 Christians would form 67 per cent of East Africa's population, which would represent 45 per cent of the Christian community in Africa.¹ In 2023, Kenya scored 31/100 in Transparency International's corruption perception index, and Uganda 26 out of 100, indicating high levels of corruption. Tanzania has been accused of police brutality and the torture and killing of government critics. Although South Sudan and the DRC are defined as Christian nations, violence leading to the flight of millions into refugee camps is the order of the day. It is evident that the East African Church has failed in addressing this rampant injustice. One of the clear ways in which this is manifested is the lack of sermons that speak truth to power and the absence of social justice messages in East Africa's church music. This study is concerned with this lack of social justice music and the need to involve Gospel musicians in reversing the situation. Although nearly all Church gatherings include music, the bulk of it is on evangelism, adoration, God's love, greatness and power, but hardly on poverty eradication, femicide, gender-based violence, corruption or police brutality, which themes are viewed as secular or political and hence avoided as unchristian. Yet the bible urges believers to fight for justice and defend those who cannot defend themselves (Isaiah 1:17; Amos 5:24; Proverbs 31:8-9; Micah 6:8; James 2 and Romans 12:8-21). There is a dire need to understand this discrepancy and identify successful models to inspire and instruct Church musicians on how to write social justice music. It is our assumption in this study that the writing, performance and distribution of more social justice music can push back the levels of injustice in the region. Therefore, it is our conclusion that the East African Church could improve their social justice witness by learning from these effective models.

The main objective of this study is to show how three Christian musicians have successfully use music to promote social justice. To realize this objective, we shall ask three questions:

- i. How have Garth Hewitt, Mahalia Jackson and Juliani used music to promote social justice?
- ii. Which factors have contributed to the absence of social justice music in the East African Church?
- iii. What lessons can East Africa's Gospel musicians and clergy learn from the Discographies of our case studies?

In answering these questions, we have employed ethnography and discourse analysis to analyse the material of our three case studies. It is our hope that this research can provide a new way of

¹ Alfred Olwa. *Christianity in Eastern Africa*. Regnum Books International, 2015.

understanding the convergence of music and social justice within the African context and lead us to new insights into the use of faith-based sonic activism and technology in the promotion of justice.