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ARTICLE

# "Watch Your Tone!": Music and Meaning in Bobi Wine's "Tugambire ku Jennifer" and the Kampala Street Vendors

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## Abstract

Music enhances participation in emerging democracies where the rights of association, assemblage, and and the freedom of expression are suppressed by the state apparatus meant to guarantee them in the first place. Ugandan Afropop musician and politician, Robert Kyagulanya (aka Bobi Wine), composed the song "Tugambire ku Jennifer" (Tell Jennifer on Our Behalf), which articulated the social aspirations of Kampala's street vendors. The song's meaning does not begin and end with the composer's intent but stretches to its effects on the listeners. Analyzing meaning through the lens of speech act theory provides an understanding of what music means when it simultaneously reflects and shapes society.

## Résumé

La musique affermis la participation dans les démocraties émergentes où les droits d'association, de réunion et d'expression sont réprimés par l'appareil d'État censé les garantir tout d'abord. Le musicien et politicien afro pop ougandais Robert Kyagulanya (alias Bobi Wine) a composé la chanson *Tugambire ku Jennifer* (Dis à Jennifer en notre nom), articulant les aspirations sociales des travailleurs de rue de Kampala. Le sens de la chanson ne commence pas et ne se termine pas avec l'intention du compositeur, mais s'étend jusqu'à ses effets sur les auditeurs. L'analyse du sens à travers le prisme de la théorie des actes de langage permet de comprendre ce que signifie la musique lorsqu'elle reflète et façonne simultanément la société.

## Resumo

Nas democracias emergentes, onde os direitos de associação, de reunião e de expressão são reprimidos pelo próprio aparelho de Estado que os deveria garantir, a música permite melhorar a participação dos cidadãos. Robert Kygulanya (também conhecido como Bobi Wine), político e músico afropop, compôs a canção "Tugambire ku Jennifer" (Diz a Jennifer em Nosso Nome), na qual expressa as aspirações sociais dos trabalhadores de rua de Kampala. O significado da canção não começa e acaba com as intenções do compositor, mas alarga-se aos seus efeitos sobre os ouvintes. A análise do significado sob a perspetiva da teoria do ato discursivo permite compreender o que a música significa quando reflecte e, simultaneamente, molda a sociedade.

**Keywords:** Bobi Wine; music; street vendors; Kampala; Uganda; performativity; illocution; participation

## Introduction

In November 2011, Jennifer Musisi, the executive director of the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) at the time called for the removal of about 8,500 vendors from the streets of Kampala, Uganda's capital. Musisi's call was aimed at enforcing the new urban regulations which had been passed by Uganda's 10th parliament on January 14, 2011. Under its mandate, the KCCA proposed a new redevelopment plan of upgrading and reconstructing Kampala city roads, reducing traffic congestion, increasing local revenue, recovering previously seized KCCA institutional assets, enforcing compliance with law and order in the city, redeveloping public schools and health centers, managing pollution in the city, and beautifying the city. The plan was meant to ensure a healthier working environment.

To put into effect the new urban regulations and redevelopment plan, the KCCA security officers forcefully evicted the street vendors, most of whom allegedly operated businesses without legal permits. Although the new urban regulations were hailed by the merchants who operate businesses in shops, and as such, regarded the street vendors as competitors in business, the brutality that characterized the forceful eviction of the vendors was not pleasant. In protest, and as a means of survival, the street vendors resorted to violence and robbery, actions that led to an escalation in police brutality against the protestors. Subsequently, Ugandan Afropop music star, and politician, Robert Kyagulanyi (aka Bobi Wine, the Ghetto president) released a popular song and an accompanying music video, "Tugambire ku Jennifer" (Tell Jennifer on Our Behalf), condemning the brutality and the unfair implementation of the new labor laws that would strip the street vendors of their source of livelihood. In voicing their discontent, the street vendors sonically spoke to the city authority but only through Wine.

Drawing on fieldwork in Kampala, I discuss the social/cultural conditions under which the production, circulation, and consumption of Wine's "Tugambire ku Jennifer" took place. Drawing on the notion of *performativity* to refer to how

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utterances (verbal/sung) simultaneously do and perform what they say, what John Austin (1962) has called "illocutionary acts," I analyze the song's expressive components, both spoken and sung, as well as some of the images in the music video to understand how the assemblage of symbolic material at once articulates and provokes meanings among listeners. By analyzing how "Tugambire ku Jennifer" intervenes in and shapes the social conditions it simultaneously reflects, I demonstrate music's potential to construct meaning. I argue that music's meaning does not start and end with the composer but also stretches to the listeners.

## What Does it Mean for Music to Mean?

Since the mid 1990s, Critical Musicologists have sought to understand musical meaning from a social/cultural lens as opposed to an autonomous perspective, which assumes music's existence outside the cultural domain. To this end, many have employed hermeneutic and semiotic analytical models when analyzing Western/European art musical works. Over time, the quest to go beyond representation and symbolic signification led scholars to various social/cultural theoretical and methodological models including affect theory (Qureshi 2000), performativity (Davidson 2014; Butler 1990), speech act theory (Chung 2019), and theories of cognition (Tolbert 2001), among others. From the various debates that have been going on, what seems to be common consensus is the negotiation of musical meaning between its creators and active consumers (Tagg 2012; Kramer 2011). This means that musical meaning is a nonlinear process, capable of producing multiple meanings within a particular historical and social/cultural context. Such a form of "interhuman communication" (Tagg 2012, 44) should hold true to musical styles that employ verbal utterances. However, the search for musical meaning in songs with verbal utterances should not be limited to textual analysis, since such a commitment would fall short of exploring the question at hand. This is why Tolbert (1992) suggests the use of multiple analytical tools of analysis. And while a hermeneutic approach would subject musical meaning to speculation, given music's intrinsic dimensions (such as structure and form), its use in tandem with other analytical models can provide enterprising discoveries, whether in instrumental music, or music styles with text.

Without doubt, "musical meaning is complex" (Kramer 2011, 65) and the status quo similarly applies to popular music whose meanings are never ending but always becoming because of the social/cultural, psychological, and emotional conditions of its creators, distributors, and listeners situated in physical and virtual spaces. Such situatedness and its attending relations based on producing, circulating, and consuming music engenders nonlinear processes as catalysts of musical meanings. This way, meaning becomes crucial to shaping music's ontological character. This article analyzes meanings embedded in Wine's "Tugambire ku Jennifer," whose materiality is rooted within specific historical and social/cultural conditions of Uganda. Thus, my use of the term *music* in this essay transcends its common reference to Western/European art music (which is notated), to include popular music and its semantic forms (such

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as narration) with the capacity to "mean not primarily by what it says, but by the way it models the symbolization of experience" (Kramer 2011, 5). And since music is capable of articulating social experiences, there is a need to engage with its study *in* and *as* culture (Merriam 1964) if we are to appreciate the meanings constructed by its creators and consumers.

On the problem of meaning in African music, Kwabena Nketia—the father of African musicology—notes that within an African context, musical meaning is intertwined with its milieu of performance and reception (Nketia 1962, 3), a basis for ethnographic analysis. When it comes to popular music, Tagg (1982) calls for an interdisciplinary analytical approach to meaning, which engages music makers and consumers. Indeed, any claim of music's meaning devoid of a deeper interrogation of the social/cultural conditions of its production, distribution, and consumption would be insufficient, as emphasized in the seminal article "Popular Arts in Africa" by Karin Barber (1987), which appeared in the *African Studies Review.* Barber highlights how popular arts in Africa are reminiscent of meaning beyond verbal utterances, implying that such utterances (by the creator or performer) should not be the sole determinant of musical meaning; the interpretations of listeners should also be considered. Thus, Barber (1987) and Nketia (1962) challenge Africanist scholars to look beyond textual and symbolic material if their search for musical meaning is to yield any meaningful results. This essay engages with the question of whether Bobi Wine's song "Tugambire ku Jennifer" is capable of evoking affects among listeners, and if so, how such affects are crucial to constructing meanings among various actors (including music creators and consumers). Taking inspiration from speech act theory, I provide analytical avenues of understanding musical meaning in Wine's "Tugambire ku Jennifer," whose sonic character is partly shaped by verbal utterances with a close relationship to the music and linguistic tonality.

## Musical Meaning through Speech Act Theory

The application of verbal utterances is a common feature in several African musical styles. Unlike the West/Europe where text and music are often framed as a dualism, several African expressive arts take exception. Using tonal indigenous languages in music of Africa constitutes a complex musical "thing," whose intangible thingness, as shaped by text and music (a series of musical notes and harmonies) produces an irreducible unity that is at once music and speech. As an African, I have noted how my mother tongue has over time shaped my English accent, receiving compliments from many English-speaking Americans who claim that my accent sounds musical. I suppose this is because they feel that it bears some musical resemblance stemming from my pitch variations when I speak English. They are right—the very reason why I do not consider speech and music as a dualism is because the two are complementary to each other. This way, my view is that verbal utterances and music are both musical—utterances being musical and music being verbal. By this complex relationship, however, I do not mean that music is a language. Rather, my task is to bring to attention that once tonal text and music interact with each other, they produce some sonic emergent properties whose unity becomes what I call *Afrosonicity*, a sonic

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marriage between music, verbal utterances, and other artistic idioms, which transcends the common dualism between text and music. In line with DeLanda (2006), *Afrosonicity* refers to an assemblage of music and tonal African utterances and other artistic idioms, whose sonic totality is irreducible to neither music nor verbal utterances. Rather, *Afrosonicity* renders African popular music *musical*, calling for performativity as an entry point into the complexity of musical meanings. It is with such a background that I frame Wine's "Tugambire ku Jennifer" as *music* whose meaning is embedded in the song's performative character and thus, in its significance to the listeners.

Performativity has since John Austin's (1962) work provided an important analytical template of understanding music's meaning—through an examination of the social contexts in which utterances (spoken or sung) are performed —so that the intention of the performer, and the effects that utterances ascribe on hearers, are taken into consideration. This way, any performative analytical approach should not exclude the social dynamics and its attending actors and discourse as shaped by the emergent relations of music's production and consumption. This is because the effects that vocal utterances have upon the perception and social behavior of the listeners determine the effects that music bears upon them, and as such, the meanings that accrue from practices of listening.

Exemplary scholarship by Africanist scholars who have heeded to the performative analytical lens are commonly present in two scholarly disciplines: English and Linguistics. For example, in an article which appears in the peer-reviewed journal *African Research Review*, Ahidjo Embugushiki (2010) demonstrates how the solemnization ritual of Christian weddings is not a culmination of mere statements, but the very constitution of social performance at the event. And in *Ogirisi*, a relatively new journal of African studies, Martha Egenti and Benjamin Mmadike (2016) provide an analysis of utterances at *Igbo* funerals to demonstrate how traditional African rituals are characterized by performative acts with affective significance on those in attendance. While these studies engage with meaning, they lack a theoretical undertaking of musical meaning. Yet, artists have never disappointed us with a lack of creative works, which continue to shape society.

In pursuit of the question of *musical meaning*, this essay joins the growing lineage of scholars who have since the early 1970s drawn upon the work of John Austin (1962) and John Searle (1976) to understand how utterances simultaneously communicate and do what they say. But in engaging linguistic theory as an analytical template, we must remain cognizant of the view that meaning is not limited to musicians, but also stretches to the perception of listeners (Barber 1987). Here, emphasizing or assuming *a* musician's intention would be misleading, owing to music's capacity to produce multiple meanings once in the ears of listeners. Such meanings rather than *a* meaning, for listeners, are very much possible, as Beaster-Jones (2019) has noted in his analysis of linguistic analogies, as well as Andrew Chung (2019), who has drawn upon speech act theory to demonstrate music's efficacy, and how its capability "exceeds its representational modalities … [thus, becoming], dissatisfyingly, the other of its meanings." Chung challenges us to engage with the deeper contexts of music's production and consumption if we are to arrive at its meaning.

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Not to be confused with any attempt to make a case for music as a language, my aim is to demonstrate music's multiple meanings when it simultaneously embodies saying and doing. As I will show, music is capable of arousing affect, thus shaping meanings among listeners, as scholars such as Qureshi (2000), Roseman (1986), Feld (1990), Seegar (1987), and Basso (1985) have demonstrated. Using Bobi Wine's song "Tugambire ku Jennifer," I demonstrate music's potential to engender meanings through three main phases: (1) data (message or construction of locution); (2) intent (intention of the singer); and (3) effect (of the utterances on listeners). These analytical phases have their roots in Austin's (1962) work, *How to Do Things with Words*, which at once foregrounds intention (of the speaker), and its resultant consequence on the listeners (an aftereffect of the performed utterances). Austin developed a taxonomy which breaks down speech acts into constatives (descriptions of reality) as well as performatives (utterances which simultaneously say and do). Other conceptual categories in his taxonomy include locution (spoken utterances), locutionary intent (the speaker's intention in uttering speech), and the effect of the utterances on the listeners, all of which constitute an avenue of realizing musical meaning.

Taking inspiration from Austin, John Searle (1976) developed a linguistic taxonomy foregrounding three illocutionary acts: (1) directives, (2) expressives, and (3) perlocutionary utterances, all of which are relevant to this study. For Searle, directives are utterances intended for the listener. Expressives are utterances that convey inner psychological states. Yet, unlike directives, perlocutionary utterances are intended for the hearer to respond. This means that the hearer is aroused by perlocutionary utterances, which leave them no choice but to respond accordingly. Austin (1962) and Searle (1976) understand speech acts as bearing *simultaneity* (in terms of intention and effect). Such characteristic behavior of speech acts problematizes their capacity beyond conveyance to include consequential effects of utterances, and their ability to evoke affects among listeners. It should be noted that such a quality of simultaneity as embedded in performatives has inspired scholars such as Jacques Derrida (1977), who has attempted to deconstruct speech act theory, Victor Turner (1982) who has problematized ritual as a theatrical form of cultural expression, and Judith Butler (1990) who has argued that performativity constitutes repetitive bodily acts in the social construction of gender.

Wine's "Tugambire ku Jennifer" embodies illocutionary acts, which provide a starting point for understanding the song's meaning. As my analysis will show, Wine's utterances (both spoken and/or sung) caused tension among the musician, the street vendors, as well as the Kampala Capital City Authority that acts on behalf of the state. After hearing the song, whose message attracted censure by the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC), the KCCA officials responded to the protests and criticism on media, by suggesting alternative working spaces outside Kampala city. This article not only demonstrates the potential of music to mean but also how such meaning can shape the social conditions of society. Before I discuss how "Tugambire ku Jennifer" means when it arouses response from its listeners, a brief introduction of Bobi Wine, the Ghetto president, is in place to situate how his social/cultural predisposition shaped his intentionality and approach to artistic delivery.

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## Bobi Wine, the Ghetto President Who Speaks and the People Listen

Bobi Wine, also known as the Ghetto president, is a renowned Afropop music artist and the current president of the National Unity Platform (NUP), Uganda's strongest opposition party. Wine grew up in Kamwoya, a ghetto suburb of Kampala city, where he experienced first-hand the hardships of living a humble life. His late father owned several acres of land in Kamwokya, as well as a decent home. However, part of the neighborhood remains a ghetto suburb characterized by impoverished houses and poor sanitation. When I conducted fieldwork in Kamwokya, I jumped streams of sewage to get to my interlocutors. I also came across young men and women using the sewage streams as bathrooms for urination during daytime. I was told that not all houses in the ghetto had toilets, thereby inviting the tenants to share with others or to use sewage trenches. I also noticed that most of the young men and women living in the Kamwokya ghetto are *bayaaye* (hooligans) known for engaging in shady street behavior which involves drugs, alcohol, as well as the manipulation of people for personal gain (Pier 2021, 641). Although Bobi Wine has never indulged in most of the dubious street behaviors of the *bayaaye*, except for some rumors about his use of marijuana going as far back as twenty years, he understood their culture to the extent of learning and mastering *Luyaaye*, the pidgin language of the *bayaaye*, which is based on *Luganda*, the main language of the Baganda people of Buganda kingdom in Uganda. Besides mastering walking with swag (a typical behavioral pattern among the *bayaaye*), Wine also learned how to appropriate such behavioral styles in his music videos to negotiate a sense of belonging to the ghetto communities.

Bobi Wine's Afropop career kicked off in 2000 whilst pursuing his ordinary Secondary School Certificate at Kitante High School in Uganda. From the start, he was branded the "Ghetto president," owing to his humble beginning from the ghetto suburbs of Kamwokya, followed by his gradual rise to Afropop music stardom. Wine's brand as Ghetto president was not meant as fun. It was a serious endeavor premised upon an understanding that his music group, *Fire Base Crew*, would emerge as a shadow government among the ghetto communities. Below Wine, there was a vice president and several cabinet ministers who operated the music group based on the organizational principles of democracy. When I interviewed Wine in 2014, he informed me that from the inception of his group, his shadow government was meant to exemplify democratic governance. This included taking collective responsibility, as well as listening and looking out for each other (Bobi Wine, personal communication, 2014). With such a socio-musical persona centered on an intimate connection with ghetto communities, Wine emerged from below, later becoming a symbol of hope in Uganda's governance.

From the start, Bobi Wine's popular music approach has been characterized by a cross-pollination of Ugandan, Jamaican, and Western/European popular music idioms, which not only reflect the globalizing effect on expressive cultures, but also his need to reach out widely. Textually, Wine commonly incorporates *Luyaaye* utterances alongside *Luganda* and English, an assemblage of languages that animates his songs with a unique flavor. And when he performs,

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his stage presence illuminates *kiyaaye* (adjective for *bayaaye*) behavior including walking with swag, speaking *Luyaaye* during transitions of songs, and sometimes dressing like a *muyaaye.* In the end, *Luyaaye* and *kiyaaye* mannerisms became a cornerstone of Wine's artistic approach and consequential popularity among the youth who constitute the majority of Uganda's electorate. With time, the Ghetto president enjoyed some degree of social power to the extent of intervening in conflicts in the ghetto, later culminating in the cultural capital that shaped his political prowess. In 2017, he became a member of parliament (MP) for the Kyaddondo East Constituency, an avenue that Wine used to continue voicing the social constraints of the common people, and in so doing, to keep Museveni's ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) party in check. While in parliament, Wine presented as Museveni's topmost critic as manifested in several of his Afropop songs including, "Tugambire ku Jennifer," "Uganda Zuukuka" (Wake Up Uganda), "Situka" (Rise Up), "Freedom, Tuliyambala Engule" (We Shall Wear the Crown), and "Ogenda" (You Are Going) among others. A common thread in these songs is Wine's advocacy for the smooth transition of power in Uganda. By singing the failures of Museveni's governance, Wine commonly employs textual utterances and visuals as a template of advocacy for change. Although his political ideologies have mostly attracted the youth, several mid-aged and senior citizens support his cause.[1] Thus, it was not surprising for Wine to compose "Tugambire ku Jennifer" to contest the forceful and brutal eviction of the Kampala street vendors in 2011. An examination of the sonic anatomy of the song enhances an understanding of how the street vendors related to it through their own construction of meanings. The following are the first and second phases of my analysis (data and intention), involving an examination of the song's sonic structure and how its audiovisual assemblage suggests the singer's intention and its consequential effects on the listeners. Although a close examination of the phraseology of the spoken and sung utterances will be undertaken, the singer's intention is only a basis for unveiling the deeper meanings of the song, as located in the multiple interpretations of listeners. As the main argument in this article follows, music's meaning resides not in the musician's presupposed intent, but rather in the very potential of the song's utterances to evoke responses from the hearers.

## The Audiovisual Assemblage of "Tugambire ku Jennifer"

"Tugambire ku Jennifer" has an intro, three verses, a refrain, and an outro (intro, verse/refrain, verse/refrain, verse/refrain, outro). Except the intro and outro rap in English, the verses and refrain are sung in *Luganda.* The message of the song contests police and KCCA brutality against the street vendors. It condemns the forceful eviction of the street vendors from Kampala without providing them any alternative spaces of work. Additionally, part of the message voices the concern of several street vendors and sympathizers who feared that some unemployed vendors could be forced into poverty, hunger, and criminality as a way of survival. Accordingly, "Tugambire ku Jennifer" takes its title from Bobi Wine's intention to caution Jennifer Musisi to *watch her tone*, or else the city and its people would be destined for disaster.

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In the first verse, Wine narrates a brutal encounter between the KCCA security men and a female food vendor. In the second verse, he calls attention to his encounter with police brutality when his own merchandise was forcefully seized. He describes two classes of vendors, one with the capacity to redeem their merchandise if seized, and the other, without such capacity. A clothes vendor represents the latter working class whose only option, if their merchandise is seized, is either to return to their rural village or to end up pickpocketing for survival. The final stanza of the song contests rampant unemployment in the country, which is accordingly the root cause of the high rate of crime in Kampala city. Wine ends the third verse by calling upon the KCCA officials, street vendors, and other stakeholders who partake in shaping the destiny of Kampala city, to collectively participate in crafting the city regulations (see Figure 1 for the text of the first verse).

The intro and outro of the song are rapped in English, against an instrumental background. This style of beginning and ending on the one hand renders the song cohesive. On the other, it magnifies the song's message. The recurring utterances foreground repetition as a performative imperative which illuminates the dramatic character of the song. Meanwhile, the spoken/rapped utterances in the intro and outro are central to the structure of the song. Although textually different, the two present a stylistic consonance (in terms of musical/vocal approach). The stanzas have a similar melodic line, with subtle variations in the second and third. These melodic variations are not only central to the maintenance of familiarity and the accumulation of interest in the musical material but are also important in enhancing a sense of forward motion. After all, it is these very variations, however subtle some may be, that render repetition an imperative of Bobi Wine's approach to his "Tugambire ku Jennifer."

In presenting his perspective about the 2011 vending dispute in Kampala city, Wine articulates the social constraints of the street vendors, who are simultaneously speaking to him, as well as the city boss. Through Bobi Wine, the voices of the aggrieved street vendors are implicitly presented in the very way that the

| | |
|---|---|
| (1) Lwali lwa Mande bweluti; | (1) It was a usual Monday; |
| N'obukuba nga bw'atonnye. | right after some light drizzling. |
| (2) Lwakya nga olunaku olulala; | (2) Morning arrived like any other day; |
| Naye mu kuziba lwakyuka. | But by dawn, it was a different day. |
| (3) Mu ghetto gye njoleza e motoka ku makya, | (3) In the ghetto where I wash my car each morning, |
| Wentera n'okufuna ekyenkya. | Is also where I usually have breakfast. |
| (4) Mba ndi kukyenkya, | (4) While taking breakfast, |
| Atuguza emmere ebweru n'alaajana. | Our food vendor screamed from outside. |
| (5) Obusajja bwasalako omukazi omunaku | (5) Men surrounded the poor woman, |
| Nga bukambwe okukira ennumba. | With much anger than like of black wasps. |
| (6) Mbu emmere gy'otunda eriwo mu bukyaamu | (6) That the food they are vending is there illegally, |
| Era nkukutte. | Thus, you are under arrest. |
| (7) Olwo ne bawamba buli kyayina, | (7) Then they seized all her property, |
| Amasowaani, maseppiki n'akaaba; | plates, saucepans, only to break into tears. |
| (8) Ne bamubuuza nkuyambeki maama, | (8) They asked, how can help mum, |
| Kuba osilaanye; naŋŋamba: | Because you are stranded; and she told me: |

**Figure 1.** Text of verse one[2].

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refrain of the song is textually structured. Thus, the very first refrain is based on the narrative of the first verse, which features KCCA brutality against a female food vendor. Re-enacting this plot in the music video, Wine bears witness to the cruelty of the KCCA men who suddenly jump off their pick-up truck to seize the woman's food, plates, saucepans, utensils, and the furniture on which her customers sit. She is man handled and thrown to the back of the truck, an action that not only drives her to tears but also strips her of her dignity in the eyes of the viewers (Figure 2). Following a heated moment of brutality, Bobi Wine intervenes by asking whether he can possibly do anything to help the poor woman, who responds, *tell Jennifer on our behalf to reduce her anger*, a request that Wine employs to caution Musisi to watch her tone. The usage of the pronoun *our* in the street vendor's response assumes a sense of collectivity and thus, the presupposition that the female vendor has spoken on behalf of herself and others who are experiencing similar hostility from the KCCA officials. This way, the female vendor passes on a message from fellow street vendors to Wine, who is being asked to advise the KCCA boss to solve the ongoing dispute amicably. To give the song a collective voice, therefore, Wine adopts the woman's response, *tell Jennifer on our behalf to reduce her anger* as the refrain, a musical decision which successfully articulates the overarching message of the song. See Figure 3 for the translation of the refrain in English.[3]

The opening phrase of the refrain of "Tugambire ku Jennifer" is characterized by a melodic descent, which resonates with several musical laments of folk songs

**Figure 2.** A screenshot of the female food vendor being arrested.

| | |
|---|---|
| (1)Tugambire ku Jennifer, | Tell Jennifer for us, |
| akendeeze obukambwe: | To reduce her anger: |
| (2) Tugambire ku Jennifer, | Tell Jennifer for us, |
| Ekibuga kyaffe. | The city is ours. |

**Figure 3.** Text of the refrain.

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common among singing traditions of Uganda. As a tonal repetition of the first measure, the third measure of the refrain retains a similar pitch logic, melodic contour, text, and off-beat attack on the very first beat of the refrain. The second and fourth measures of the refrain share a similar melodic contour but with a varying intervallic interplay. Against three primary chords (I, IV, and V) common in many popular songs, subtle pitch variations in the refrain are employed to enhance forward motion. The repetitive textual motives against the varying melodic segments rearticulate the message anew, rendering the structure of the refrain performative in and by itself. It is in the refrain that Wine calls upon the intervention of the KCCA authority by singing the request of the street vendors. This way, the lyrical structure of the refrain embodies the voice of the vendors, but only through Wine who is at once directly and indirectly speaking to Jennifer, the city boss, *to reduce her anger on the street vendors*—a precaution to watch her tone. Directly, Wine calls upon the city boss by uttering her name, *Jennifer*. Indirectly, however, he employs the expressive phrase, *tell Jennifer for us*, to absolve himself of any direct intention on his part as the singer. Whenever the refrain is sung, it should be emphasized that Bobi Wine is at once directly and indirectly speaking to the city boss, even though he sounds as if he is acting on behalf of the vendors who, through the actions of the female vendor are channeling their appeal to the city boss through Bobi Wine. It is this multi-tasked character of the lyrics and their implication that bears perlocutionary intent—of evoking Jennifer's response to do something about the aggrieved street vendors. Accordingly, I argue that the multi-tasked structure of the refrain renders it performative and, with utterances that bear what Searle (1976) calls "perlocutionary" intent, caused the hearer (in this case the city boss and other city officials) to do something in response to the message at hand. The core of the drama in the song's refrain lies in its very performative action, whose illocutionary nature I now turn to by discussing some of the meanings that my interlocuters constructed when they listened to the song in relation to their social conditions.

## Effect: Meaning(s) through the Lens of Listeners

At the beginning of this essay, I noted that music's meaning does not begin and end with the singer, but also involves the interpretations of the hearers, an argument that is noted by Tagg (2012) and Kramer (2011) among others. Such meanings are thus enhanced by a web of actors (human and nonhuman), including musicians/singers, producers, listeners, visual images used in the music videos, and objects employed in reinforcing the visual narratives. To be sure, the construction of meaning depends on one's social position relative to the effect of the song they are listening to and the material conditions of its production. For instance, in the imagination of several sympathizers, "Tugambire ku Jennifer" is a sonic intervention in the social constraints of the street vendors even though many who were not directly affected by the eviction did not care that much. For the vendors, the song means a lot to them, and I heard different perspectives that seem to tally around the same theme—unemployment. Yet for the state,

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"Tugambire ku Jennifer" is an attack on its style of governance since its utterances are directed at the KCCA boss who acts on its behalf. Accordingly, this interpretation of the song forced the hand of the state to the extent of instructing the director of the UCC to censor the song. However, this did not impact the song's popularity since it was successfully circulated and consumed on social media.

Charles Kabugo, a 48-year-old man who used to sell used textbooks, is one of the street vendors that I interviewed. He told me that he had used his meager savings to switch business to a small food restaurant at Wandegeya, a suburb of Kampala. Kabugo was furious that he could not continue his used-textbook business because Wandegeya had a different makeup of clientele, in addition to its expensive rent. To most vendors who had never paid rent while exploiting the city space, the idea of paying so much rent was shocking. When I spoke to Kabugo about Wine's "Tugambire ku Jennifer," he noted that:

> We know that Bobi Wine is addressing Musisi [the city boss], and surely, he should not be shy about it because it is to our benefit. You see, many of us have been able to bring food to the table and pay tuition for our children by vending on Kampala's streets for more than fifteen years. How shall we survive without space to transact business? We are glad that Bobi Wine voiced our concerns to Jennifer. (Kabugo, Kampala, July 12, 2014)

On why Bobi Wine's song was interpreted as a critique of governance by the state and its officials, Paul Mugambe, a 34-year-old fruit vendor at Makerere Kikoni, also a suburb of Kampala, mentioned that "Bobi Wine's song was censored because it targets the KCCA boss and her cruelty in the so-called cleaning up of the city. I have worked as a vendor in Kampala city for over ten years; who is Jennifer to take this away from me?" (Mugambe, Kampala, July 15, 2014). Kabugo's question, if aligned to Mugambe's sentiments about the song, hints at part of the singer's intent, which was not only shaped by the forceful eviction of the vendors from the streets of Kampala, but also Bobi Wine's style of delivery, which disguises his caution against Jennifer to watch her tone. At the same time, Jennifer is asked for indulgency in the plight of the street vendors. However, a common sentiment in Kabugo and Mugambe's testimonies is unemployment, which affects their ability to afford the rising cost of living, and thus, the growing hardships of sustaining their lives and families.

Interesting is how several of my interlocuters related their plight to Wine's "Tugambire ku Jennifer," particularly praising the song's refrain, not only for its simple and memorable melody and lyrics, but also its embodiment of their voice when Bobi Wine asks Jennifer to *reduce her anger* against the street vendors of Kampala city. As such, I took particular interest in analyzing the refrain due to its musical character whose nature performs several roles at once. For example, in addition to its intent, the refrain —*tell Jennifer on our behalf to reduce her anger; tell Jennifer that the city is ours*—is simultaneously an expressive and a directive, two important qualities of illocutionary acts, according to Searle's (1976) taxonomy. The expressive quality of the song's refrain stems from the message of the food-

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vending woman, who requests Wine on behalf of the other street vendors to voice their concerns before the city boss. Once Wine delivers the message of the street vendors, it consequently comes off as a *directive* calling upon the city boss to reconsider her approach in the matter at hand. Indirectly, however, the message of the refrain is also a caution against high-handedness. This is how the structure of the refrain embodies an expressive and directive quality, two properties of speech that render it peculiar compared to the verses.

Further, the phrasing of the refrain not only bears direct and indirect intent, but also a psychological effect. This is because most of my interlocutors expressed psychological torment for losing their power to subsist on the streets of Kampala. For instance, John Ssentumbwe, a 52-year-old used-textbook vendor noted that, "since my merchandise was seized by the KCCA men, my children have not attended school. I exhausted all my meager savings and I worry everyday about the future of my family" (Ssentumbwe, August 2, 2014). Similarly, Jackson Kayizzi, a 28-year-old who at the time of this interview was vending second-hand men's shoes at Saint Balikuddembe market in Kampala, noted that, "it is very unfair for KCCA to evict us without providing affordable alternative spaces. How do they expect us to survive without a working space?" (Kayizzi, Kampala, August 2, 2014). I could not imagine Kayizzi's pain as it was clearly visible through the motion of his hand gestures and his completely displeased face. He spoke with anger and disappointment in the state and its KCCA officials, thereby presenting some of the psychological moments that are effectively employed in the sonic attributes (such as text and visuals) of the music video. A case in point is the visual reenactment of an eviction scene during which one poor woman is brutally arrested after the KCCA forcefully seizing her food and property. We will recall that the woman resorted to crying and once an opportunity presented itself, she requested Bobi Wine to tell Jennifer to reduce her anger against the street vendors.

Noteworthy, the way in which directives and expressives are repeatedly presented in combination with the visual images of the song effectively foregrounds a historical reality of brutality against the Kampala street vendors. The reenactment of a forceful eviction, and the use of repetition as strategies of emphasizing the narrative, among others, renders the song's intentionality (of speaking, protesting, cautioning, and provoking Jennifer to respond in some way) effective. All utterances in the refrain are part of the very context in which they are framed and, as such, textuality, melodic motion, melodic motion, repetition of phrases, and texture become central to the performative character of the song. In other words, it is through repetition in the refrain that the song's intent is articulately reinforced.

## The Politics of "Tugambire ku Jennifer"

The political fabric of "Tugambire ku Jennifer" stems from the brutal implementation of the new KCCA city policies, as well as the production of a song that provided a platform for criticizing the city governance. During the implementation of the new Kampala city policies, the street vendors, caught off guard,

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performed resistance because they had not been provided with alternative and affordable vending space. Despite their resistance, the KCCA security, together with police reinforcement, forcefully evicted the vendors without any regard to their subsistence. The eviction was brutal, involving beatings and arrests. Some were shot at with rubber bullets and others with canisters of tear gas. Shortly after, a series of more protests in the city sprung up, only to be met with intense brutality. This is why Bobi Wine was moved to release his single "Tugambire ku Jennifer" at a time when the scenes of brutality were still fresh in the minds of Ugandans. The song's refrain "Tugambire ku Jennifer akendeze obukambwe" (tell Jennifer to reduce her anger) not only became a cliché for the street vendors and several sympathizers but also an avenue of protest and discontent against police and KCCA brutality. At stake was the livelihood of the vendors who had nowhere to run their businesses. This is why several Ugandans welcomed the song as an expressive channel of interrogating the brutal style of implementing the new city laws. Discontent against brutality became a topic that prominently featured on several radio and TV talk shows, as well as in the print and online media. Owing to this ongoing pressure, the city officials initiated dialogue with the street vendors and their sympathizers. Meanwhile, "Tugambire ku Jennifer" and the media continued their advocacy for better labor conditions. Soon, the song became an anthem for the street vendors and rendered their voices audible. It provided a sense of collectivity, an opportune chance of imagining their plight within an uncertain future. With a powerful local musician in support of their effort, the vendors were able to draw upon music's inspiration to position themselves as stakeholders amidst the ongoing negotiations of Kampala's urban regulations.

Although the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC)—Uganda's regulatory body for broadcasting—does not censor most of the songs broadcast over the media, "Tugambire ku Jennifer" was an exception because of its heavy critique against city governance. Pending further investigations, the director of the UCC condemned the song and instructed all the radio and TV stations not to play it, or else they risked closure. On September 18, 2012, the *Observer*, one of Uganda's local print media, reported that the UCC had long warned musicians against using their songs (and the media) to attack individuals (Musasizi 2012). Defending its censure, the UCC initially alleged that the language of "Tugambire ku Jennifer" was a direct attack against the KCCA executive director, an undertaking that was demeaning before the eyes of the state authorities and the public at large. However, as reported in the *Observer*, many did not believe the UCC. Moreover, some competing voices counterargued the UCC, denying that the song did not directly reference the KCCA boss, since the name Jennifer is common among many Ugandan girls and women. Frank Mutebi, a businessman in Kampala asked, "How can the UCC tell whether Bobi was referring to the city boss? For God's sake, there are many Jennifers" (Mutebi, June 14, 2014). Interestingly, others praised Bobi Wine for boldly coming out against Jennifer's new city policies and their forceful implementation, as noted by Mutebi: "even if Bobi Wine is referring to the city boss, he has done a brave act that many of us cannot undertake (June 14, 2014).

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Although many celebrated Bobi Wine's song and its attending message, the UCC was not bothered. Moreover, their so-called "pending investigations" against Bobi Wine have never yielded any meaningful conclusions, even up to the time of this writing. Shamefully, it is almost thirteen years since the song was censored, yet the public has never heard back from the UCC's investigations. This level of reluctance for accountability, according to my interlocuters, speaks to the UCC's intention to silence Bobi Wine's critique. However, the singer's message was not muted. The Internet provided Wine an avenue of countering censorship, and he did not waste any time before publishing "Tugambire ku Jennifer" on YouTube, where the song trended, as proved by the number of downloads and shares on Facebook and other social media platforms. Within a short period of time, the song had gone viral, finding its way to local taverns and dancing clubs around Kampala city and beyond. Interestingly, the song became a part of daily speech, with many people still using its phrases in day-to-day conversation. Indeed, the politics of "Tugambire ku Jennifer" was very much entangled in the social conditions that rendered its production, circulation, and consumption.

Cooke and Kasule (1999, 17) note that acquaintance with the current post-authoritarian Ugandan regime enhances a better understanding of the circumstances under which today's artistic forms are created. Indeed, Wine's "Tugambire ku Jennifer" demonstrates the creator's knowledge of such social/political dynamics of Uganda in general, and Kampala city in particular. Playing with such dynamics has foregrounded Bobi Wine as a champion of the rights of marginalized groups of people in Uganda. After all, most of his songs are popular for engaging with the social constraints of the common people. A strong proponent of better labor conditions in the country, Wine's "Tugambire ku Jennifer" creatively drives the point home.[4] By blending performative utterances with musical repetition and the reenactment of scenes of brutality in the music video, Bobi Wine not only articulates the social constraints of the Kampala Street vendors, but also protests the heavy-handed top-down approach by the KCCA men and the police. Interestingly, the musical structure of the song reflects the very performative action that Wine delineates when he sings "Tugambire ku Jennifer." The song won the hearts of Ugandans, many of whom have since drawn upon it as a sonic symbol of the social constraints they endure to make ends meet. They look at the song as a success for having intervened in and shaped the very social conditions that it simultaneously reflects.

## Intervening in, and Shaping the Social Conditions of the Kampala City Vendors

On the afternoon of June 20, 2014, I visited some of the street vendors who had relocated to Kasubi, a suburb of Kampala. I had travelled back to Uganda during the summer of 2014 to follow up with my previous fieldwork with the vendors. Kasubi was under contention because it was overcrowded by the street vendors, each competing for spaces on the roadside, thereby causing traffic jams in the area. Local authorities of the area were negotiating the relocation of the Kasubi

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vending place. At Kasubi, I was welcomed by a collage of melodious/verbal utterances competing for my attention as a presumed customer. A friend of mine whom I had travelled with introduced me to Juliet Nalunkuuma (a food vendor) and Tom Kayongo (a used-cloth vendor). Nalunkuuma and Kayondo expressed interest in my research and hoped with enthusiasm that their help as interlocutors would translate into an official document to be presented before the KCCA. The two walked me to the chairperson of their vending association and to other vendors who had relocated to the Kasubi outskirt of Kampala city.

With Nalunkuuma and Kayongo's help, I was invited to attend a street vendor's meeting, which took place on August 2, 2014, at Paya Gardens, Nakulabye, a suburb of Kampala. About 500 vendors had convened to plan the future of their businesses. There, we were welcomed by loud music that boomed from three speakers positioned some distance apart from each other. As though the vendors could not have enough of it, "Tugambire ku Jennifer" boomed out of the speakers to their enjoyment before and after the meeting. Later, I also learned that the vendors had agreed to use the song as an expression of their collective identity and struggles with the city authority. At the end of the meeting, I asked the DJ why he played Bobi Wine's song over and over, and he responded: "I was instructed to play it many times. Obviously, all the street vendors know that this is their song" (DJ, Kampala, August 2, 2014). And before the chairperson of the emergent labor association left, I asked him why they considered "Tugambire ku Jennifer" as their song, and he replied that:

> It is a very important song to us. It is our song that we identify with. In fact, when it had just been released, we went to the streets of Kampala singing it, shouting *tell Jennifer on our behalf, tell Jennifer that the city is ours.* We marched to the song as we attempted to go to the freedom square to protest our forceful eviction, only to be tear-gassed by the police. (Chairperson, Kampala, August 2, 2014)

Later, I interacted with more vendors, several of whom were still congregated and chatting in small groups. With soft music playing in the background, I spoke to one Hope Atuhairwe, a cloth vendor who noted that: "'Tugambire ku Jennifer' empowered us as you can see. We have never had a meeting of such a kind. Bobi Wine's support for our struggles has brought us together as family and given us a voice to counter Jennifer and her brutal men" (Atuhairwe, August 9, 2014). Atuhairwe's reference to "family" is an exemplifier of music's potential not only to mobilize, but also to enhance collective ties based on a common identity and struggle.

When I travelled back to Uganda in the summer of 2015, several street vendors had relocated to the outskirts of Kampala city. However, they were still experiencing forceful eviction by the KCCA men who kept knocking down any small-unit shops located on the road reserves. Meanwhile, media houses were hosting speakers to debate the plight of street vendors since this was still a matter of interest to many. Radio listeners and TV viewers called in during talk shows to speak against the KCCA and police brutality as well as the unfair labor

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conditions within Kampala city. However, I noticed that some changes had taken place. For instance, KCCA's initial refusal to negotiate with the street vendors had come to an end, prompting the former to provide some official vending spaces in markets located outside Kampala city. Unfortunately, the vending spaces were not affordable, which forced many out of business. Others moved to cheaper but crowded market spaces. To this effect, Nalunkuuma narrated that:

> We have had several meetings since you last visited Uganda. Wandegeya market is now open for former street vendors to rent but it is expensive and many of us cannot afford it. We have resisted the rent but the authority has kept a deaf ear. In fact, during our most recent meeting, we agreed that since Bobi Wine identifies with us, we should use his song to protest the harsh rent; however, this never happened because Jennifer summoned our leaders before our plan took off. [I asked her: "Why would you use Wine's song to protest?" And she replied:] Wine's song gives us the zeal to do things together; it gives us good morale to cause some considerable amount of chaos that can attract the attention of the President if need be. We feel that since Wine has come out to fight for us, there are many people out there who equally sympathize with us. (Nalunkuuma, Kampala, June 18, 2015)

Nalunkuuma's testimony calls to mind collective identity formation as "a central catalyst of broader changes in values, ideas and ways of life" (Eyerman and Jamison 1998, 7). We can imagine in Nalunkuuma's narrative the potential of an emergent collectivity coming together to forge subversive performative action (by contesting the legitimacy of the KCCA actions). If such a collective organizes to retaliate against the KCCA, there will certainly be consequences (in terms of time, energy, resources, destruction of property, or injury of lives, among other things) that may lead to consequential hardships in the livelihoods of the affected people.

In a turn of events since at least 2012, the KCCA have embarked on constructing markets on the outskirts of Kampala. Wandegeya market (located near Makerere University) is one of these projects that was ready for use in 2014. However, rental costs, as Nalunkuuma noted, were high for the former street vendors to afford. As a result, a greater portion of the market remains unoccupied to date. Even more interestingly, the establishment of such market projects has been politicized through complex interpretations. For instance, Kayongo disclosed that:

> The idea of relocating the street vendors outside Kampala city is only a strategic ploy to disintegrate our solidarity. Surely, I do not think that Jennifer will succeed in tricking us. We will continue fighting for our unity and cause wherever we will be. We will never give up. (Kayongo, Kampala, June 19, 2015)

In addition, an anonymous female employee with the KCCA noted that, "dissolving the unity of Kampala street vendors was indirectly part of cleaning up the

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frequent strikes in the city, which in the history of the country have left many injured, and others dead" (personal communication, June 26, 2015). Yet, another senior employee with the KCCA who similarly requested anonymity for fear of retaliation against him attested that:

> The relocation of all Kampala city street vendors was only done in the interest of cleaning up the crowded city. We have heard the vendors and Wine's song. But all our boss is doing is for the betterment of the city. We are trying to build a better institution of accountability because many of these vendors have evaded taxes for long, and yet they were polluting the city by using free space. (personal communication, Kampala, June 29, 2015)

The issue of accountability as hinted upon by the anonymous KCCA official came to light on May 17, 2015, when, to the surprise of the former Kampala Street vendors, Jennifer reintroduced street vending in Kampala city. However, this would not take place daily as in the past. Jennifer cautioned that vending in the city would only take place on Sundays, and strictly at Kampala's Luwum Street. Among other rules, vending edibles would no longer be tolerated on the streets for fear of possible contamination with dirt, which can consequently cause sickness (Wandera 2015).

When I visited Luwum Street one Sunday afternoon on June 28, 2015, I was able to speak to some vendors who expressed mixed reactions about the so-called new arrangement. For instance, Jessica Ntambirwe, a female shoe vendor in her early 40s said, "we are grateful that Jennifer has reconsidered her previous position even though many of our old customers are not used to the new arrangement. But I hope we will get there" (Ntambirwe, Kampala, June 28, 2015). Similarly, Peter Mugambi, a male cloth vendor in his mid-30s said, "it is exciting for Jennifer Musisi to revive street vending in Kampala city, since it is a culture that many of us are used to. My only kind request is to reduce the fee of transaction by 50 percent so that others can affordably participate and contribute to the likely vibrancy of this new arrangement" (Mugambi, June 28, 2015). Although some vendors called attention to the disadvantages of Jennifer's rebranded project, it was evident that the KCCA was responding to the pressure which had been mounted by the street vendors and sympathizers. Thus, the construction of music meaning in Bobi Wine's song, "Tugambire ku Jennifer" can be imagined and understood in its wholistic entirety, not only through the message as delivered by the singer but also through the very process of the song's circulation and interpretation by various listeners (such as the street vendors, sympathizers, and the KCCA officials, who were consequently moved to respond to the song's perlocutionary intent).

## Conclusion

The question of musical meaning has engaged musicologists and music theorists, who have in turn predominantly drawn upon the Western/European art music canon as a basis of answering the problem. However, this has left a vacuum for

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interrogating musical meaning in musical styles that incorporate verbal utterances, as is the case with several modern African expressive musical styles. As a precaution, the analysis of an African popular song requires the acknowledgement of such an expressive art form as a "constellation of arts" (Stone 2010), which combines singing, poetry, and dancing among other things. Thus, I have introduced the notion of *Afrosonicity* to destabilize the meaning of what is commonly conceived of as *musical*, and by doing so, to consider popular African musical arts as sonic assemblages. It follows hereafter that textual, visual, and discourse analysis should be the basis of understanding musical meaning. In this case, discourse is engendered by how listeners talk about music, and in so doing, how they construct meanings. I have employed speech act theory as an avenue of understanding the verbal utterances that Bobi Wine employs in "Tugambire ku Jennifer" and their capacity to shape musical meaning. Additionally, I have used visual and ethnographic analysis to provide a wholistic account of the song's meanings. It should be noted that the tonal nature of Luganda, one of the languages Wine employs in "Tugambire ku Jennifer," shapes the melodic contours of the song. This way, the song becomes musical, not by its melodic or harmonic logic, but by its sonic elements, whose emerging properties (auditory or visible) work together to engender an Afrosonic assemblage capable of multiple interpretations. Thus, Wine's "Tugambire ku Jennifer" exemplifies both how music means and its potential in shaping the social conditions of society.

At the time of this writing, Bobi Wine, the Ghetto president, remains the most popular opposition leader in Uganda. His words, whether spoken or sung, are seriously taken because of their bearing on the social conditions and politics of the country. Without doubt, he remains one of few artists within the East and Central African region who uses his artistic capital to resist authoritarianism, corruption, police brutality, and any form of social injustice. His most recent award-winning documentary, *Bobi Wine: The People's President* was nominated for an Oscar award but did not win it. Nevertheless, this nomination speaks volumes about Bobi Wine's continued popularity among Uganda's youth today and in years to come as he reassembles his team of supporters to run for presidency, for the second time, in 2026.

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## Notes

1. An exception to Bobi Wine's advocacy for the marginalized publics is the LGBTQ+ community. In the past, he did not support their aspirations, which caused the denial of his UK visa application after

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an invitation to perform during the 2014 Uganda summit. He has since then retracted his position against the community.

2. The English translations of this verse represents the intended meaning of the singer rather than the poetics of the original *Luganda* utterances. This is similar to Kafumbe's (In Press) approach to translations in his forthcoming book *Power Relations in Court Song": Lyrical Meaning and Political Life in Uganda*.

3. This music video can be accessed on YouTube at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGicDL5aIps. Also, Wine's interview about his song can be accessed at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SqCihoMaHqk

4. Although Bobi Wine's perspective about same-sex loving individuals has changed over time, he was once publicly homophobic. For instance, in 2014, several media outlets in Uganda and beyond reported that he had been denied a UK visa because of his support of the "ban all gays" slogan, which undermined LGBTQ+ advocacy for acceptance in society.

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