

## Religion, Sexuality, and Power in *Singeli* Music Genre: A Critical Analysis of 'Pita Huku' and 'Mungu Atusamehe' Songs

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### Abstract

In Tanzania, one of the East African countries, *Singeli* is a new and dynamic form of music known for its vivid social commentary. It plays a vital role on the Tanzania music scene, where it serves as a cultural expression that allows artists to address various social issues to a broad audience. This article analyses two songs—“Pita Huku” (‘Go this Way’) and “Mungu Atusamehe” (God Forgive Us)—to explore the social manifestations of power and sexuality. Deploying the Critical Social Theory, the article examines how religion serves as the ultimate authority in establishing moral standards, further influencing the power balances/imbances in society. Both songs, ultimately, depict religion as the yardstick of morality in society while condemning women’s sexuality and transgression in and outside marriage. The article indicates that the songs depict women as both victims of stereotypes and as failures in serving as moral arbiters in the society, hence further eroding societal values and norms. For most part, the songs appear to spare the men the condescending glare of society, hence enabling and perpetuating the retention of patriarchal structures.

### Keywords:

Critical Social Theory, Power, Religion, Sexuality, *Singeli*

<https://dx.doi.org/10.56279/ummaj.v11i1.7>

### Introduction

In the dynamic landscape of Tanzanian music, *Singeli* has emerged as a cultural force, intertwining diverse musical influences with poignant social commentary. As a music genre that originated in the 2000s, it is known for its fast-paced rhythms, energetic beats and often socially

conscious lyrics that reflect the experiences and struggles of everyday Tanzanians. *Singeli* plays a significant role in society by serving as a cultural expression that allows artists to address various social issues. At the heart of this musical movement lies an intricate exploration of power dynamics and expressions of sexuality, which have become defining features of the genre. Two songs that have notably contributed to this discourse are “Pita Huku” (Go This Way, mainly implying ‘Go To Hell’) composed and sung by Abdallah Ahmed, popularly known as Dullah Makabila and “Mungu Atusamehe” (God Forgive Us, which in principle implies God Forbid because of the widespread sins committed with impunity) composed and sung by Dakota Mtu Hatari featuring Mbwana Joseph Kulungi (aka Mbosso). Through their vivid lyrics and rhythmic beats, these tracks have garnered widespread acclaim and provoked critical conversations about the intersection of power and desire within the Tanzanian society.

“Pita Huku” and “Mungu Atusamehe” with their evocative lyrics and pulsating rhythms serve as a vivid reflection of the power dynamics that often shape interpersonal relationships in contemporary Tanzanian culture. Through their exploration of themes such as marriage, religion, prostitution, and witchcraft, the songs present a nuanced portrayal of the intricate power struggles inherent in relationships. Moreover, the accompanying music videos and the artists’ visual representation add a layer of complexity to the narrative, inviting audiences to contemplate the multifaceted nature of power and its manifestation within modern society. However, this article focuses on the song lyrics, with the visual representation serving as additional food for thought rather than the main focus.

Moreover, the two songs do not only explore the intricacies of power and sexuality but also venture into the domain of spiritual and moral consciousness. Within the lyrical narrative, themes of redemption, forgiveness, and salvation are intricately woven together with intimate expressions of human desire and vulnerability. The introspective lyrics of these songs serve as an imperative reminder of the perpetual tension between earthly desires and spiritual aspirations. Through this artistic exploration, the pieces invite listeners to reflect on the nuanced facets of

human nature and the perpetual quest for moral righteousness. Thus, the selection of the two songs was informed by how thematically they confront societal injustices and moral decadence through religious allegory. They both also directly call on faith as a means for overcoming these social moral dilemmas.

In this article, we explore power dynamics and expressions of sexuality within the Tanzanian society, as evidenced by *Singeli* songs. Simultaneously, we will delve into the role of religion as the paramount determinant of morality that the songs imply. The objective is to dissect the multifaceted layers inherent in *Singeli* music, employing a critical lens to unveil the societal manifestations of religion, power, and sexuality. Our analysis further examines how religion operates as the ultimate authority in establishing moral standards, actively shaping and influencing the wider socio-cultural milieu. Through this comprehensive study, we aim not only to unravel the complexities of power and sexuality within Tanzanian society but also to contribute to a nuanced understanding of the societal structures and power imbalances at play, with a critical eye on the impact of religious influences on cultural norms.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This article explores power dynamics and sexual nuances embedded in *Singeli* lyrics with recourse to the Critical Social Theory—a sociological approach rooted in the Marxist tradition. The theory originates from luminaries like George Lukacs and the Frankfurt School (Scott, 1978; Postone, 2005). In its scrutiny of social structures and power imbalances, the theory directs attention towards knowledge-constitutive interests. These fundamental orientations to knowledge and action are deeply rooted in the evolving conditions of human classes. According to Habermas (quoted in Scott 1978), these interests function as transcendent, invariant social rules, shaping the underlying structure of the human experience, although not immediately apparent in consciousness. As Habermas posited, the correlation between different types of knowledge and the deep structure of human experiences adds nuances to the context in which human affairs are thrive.

The critical social theory discerns and highlights tangible injustices that demand attention and rectification. It rejects the notion of universal truths applicable across all times and places, asserting that knowledge is inherently situated (Leonardo 2004). In other words, knowledge is socially constructed, intimately linked to the specific historical context and timeframe in which it emerges. The way we interpret reality is profoundly influenced by our particular historical location. History shapes our understanding of the world based on the societal norms and values prevalent in the specific temporal and cultural setting.

Furthermore, the critical social theory provides a thorough critique of societal structures to foster change on a broad scale. At its core, this framework centres on scrutinising the assumptions and ideologies that underlie the processes of how gender production, reproduction, resistance, and transformation under patriarchy within the fabric of everyday experiences for both men and women. In the context of critical gender theory, the examination extends beyond surface-level observations, delving into the intricate interplay between power dynamics, societal norms, and individual agency. It seeks to unravel the complex tapestry of gender construction, shedding light on how cultural, economic, and political forces contribute to shaping gender roles and identities (Coakley & Pike 2014).

In literary criticism, considering context, basically linked with the concept of 'influence,' assumes a significant position. Drawing on the insights of Louis Renza, influence encompasses components traditionally perceived as external to the creation of literature itself, exerting pressures that extend beyond the literary domain. As Nyairo (2004) elucidates, this situation plays a key role in both the production and reception of literary texts, constituting a fundamental force in generating meaning and knowledge. Nevertheless, Nyairo, (citing Taussig, 1992), issues a cautionary note, asserting that contexts do not invariably present a steadfast, absolute truth regarding the societies they represent. Rather, these contexts are susceptible to the influence of subjective interpretations, underscoring the notion that a literary text, such as the *Singeli* lyrics in question, manifests as diverse voices addressing social issues of its temporal milieu. At this

juncture, Weber (2010, p. 353) enters the discourse, arguing from a sociological perspective that “literature provides a lively space for individuals to explore hope and expectations”. In this literary analysis, the interplay between external influences, contextual dynamics, and subjective interpretations converges to shape a nuanced understanding of literature’s multifaceted role in reflecting and engaging with the complexities of society.

Aligning with Habermas’ perspective, Critical Social Theory aims to restore awareness to individuals regarding their active yet historically limited positions in the complexities of society. By dissecting historically specific forms of control on human freedom, the theory engages in a critical analysis of society and its institutions. Through this engagement, we apply Critical Social Theory to analyse *Singeli* songs as repositories of information and interpretation and bodies of critical knowledge structured to critique prevailing societal issues.

### **An Overview of *Singeli* Music**

*Singeli* is a fast-growing contemporary music genre that dominates the coastal belt of Tanzania. Its origin can be traced back to *vigodoro*<sup>1</sup> conducted since the early 2000s in the socially and economically disadvantaged and unplanned areas of Kinondoni (Stockt 2019). Selemani Jabir Msonjel (Msaga Sumu) is the pioneer of *Singeli*. Msaga Sumu who was formerly a master of ceremony (MC) used to entertain audiences by singing about his experiences and community on looped beats of *Taarab* (coastal music), a style commonly used in *vigodoro* traditional dances sometimes with explicit vibes (Mukandabvute & Gores 2021). Subsequently, many upcoming young artists followed Msaga Sumu’s footsteps, making *Singeli* prominent, especially among the Swahili people in the coastal belt. This popularity received official recognition from BASATA<sup>2</sup> in 2020, which identifies *Singeli* as one of the forms of Tanzania music genres representing daily social realities of Tanzanians and their broader context.

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<sup>1</sup> Local parties organised by women, especially the Zaramo ethnic group that are conducted during night involving women dancing music such as *Taarab*

<sup>2</sup>National Arts Council

*Singeli* is characterised by a unique style of fast-paced beats. This style requires the singer to gather enough energy and breathe effectively to match the beats. Repetitive sounds also constitute a defining feature of *Singeli*, whose lyrics are in most part in Kiswahili, although occasionally incorporating codeswitching between Kiswahili and English. Though the linguistic landscape in Tanzania is diverse, *Singeli* uses Kiswahili to reflect this diversity as it addresses daily social issues. Given its provocative style, language, and theme, Stockt (2019, p. 75) claims that *Singeli* is specifically targeting the less-educated and low-income individuals, especially the youths. However, Stockt's assertion raises some scepticism. The diversity of *Singeli's* audience, its cultural manifestations, and the nature of music preferences all challenge Stockt's notion that *Singeli's* impact is confined to a particular social class – specifically those with lower income and education levels. Attending various graduation ceremonies for over three years, has provided us with insight, revealing that *Singeli* is a prominent feature, with attendees enthusiastically participating by shouting out verses. This challenges the assumption that *Singeli* is predominantly embraced by individuals with limited educational and economic backgrounds. In essence, against Stockt's assertion, we argue that *Singeli's* influence in contemporary Tanzania transcends educational levels, income, age and gender boundaries, further cementing its malleability and its ability to permeate all areas of the society.

Originally, *Singeli* was common in urban night street (Uswahilini, ghetto) parties. It has expanded its boundaries, penetrating a range of social gatherings and celebrations such as weddings, sports festivals, birthday parties, graduation ceremonies, and political gatherings to mention a few (Mukandabvute & Gores 2021). Its penetration into these events weaves it into the daily life fabric of Tanzanians, becoming an integral part of social commentary. Whether they find themselves using motorbike transport commonly known as *bodaboda*, taxi stands, roadside stalls, salons, or bus terminals, the fast-paced beats and rhythms of *Singeli* are prevalent. As Karin Barber (1987) asserts, *singeli*, like other popular arts, is a social fact<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> As Barber uses it, it emphasises the power of music and its dynamic presence in society and its undeniable influence on social life.

that is widely accessible. Its prominence in cities fosters playing or listening to it, whether willingly or unwillingly, as people go about their routines. As such, cities, particularly Dar es Salaam, constitute a model example of *Singeli's* broad appeal, challenging stereotypes about its exclusivity to certain social groups (Barber 1987).

As a social commentary and soundscape in cities, *Singeli* has entered the competitive music scene in Tanzania, challenging other forms of music especially Bongo fleva. There has been a clash of ideas between *Singeli* and Bongo fleva artists regarding the two genres' quality, effectiveness and efficiency. *Singeli* has even sparked a question of Tanzanian music identity: which one is the real and original Tanzanian music? Alongside *Singeli* artists, Nyoni (2007, p. 242) contends that the forms of Tanzanian music, particularly *kwaya*, *Taarabu* and Bongo flava originated in global cultural interaction. This means that Tanzania music is a fusion of local and foreign musical elements.

Despite its influential capacity, there are still clashing perspectives regarding the reception of *Singeli*. According to Mukandabvute and Gores (2021, pp. 98-106), the perception of *Singeli* is twofold: either viewed as propagating or condemning moral decay in society. Given this perspective, numerous literary scholars assert that literary works such as music convey messages open to diverse interpretations depending on an individual's viewpoint within a specific context. Such external effects not only broaden literature [such as songs - *Singeli*] but also define its purpose and thematic landscape. In so doing, the connection between literature and society validates the artistic power of literature by using social issues as textual materials. Through their artistic representation, these materials shape and reshape an individual's perspective in interpreting literature, as seen in *Singeli*, either provocatively or critically. This is more evident as we analyse the issues of religion, power, and sexuality in two *Singeli* songs: "Pita Huku" and "Mungu Atusamehe". These two songs were chosen because of their thematic similarities, especially in using religion as the yardstick for judging societal malaise.

The next section of this paper provides an in-depth analysis of the two songs, using the critical social theory to explore the interaction between

sexuality and power, and how religion serves as a moral reference, validating social judgement.

## **Analysis and Discussion of the Selected Songs**

### **“Pita Huku” and “Mungu Atusamehe”**

The analysis of this paper centres on the songs “Pita Huku” ‘Go this Way’ and “Mungu Atusamehe” ‘God Forgive Us’. “Pita Huku” was released on YouTube on 22<sup>nd</sup> December, 2022. The song addresses various societal issues, focusing on power and sexuality. Its title, “Pita Huku” ‘Go this way’, is imperative and implies two divergent paths, guiding individuals along a specific direction. The dual paths reflect a messaging style connected to actions and behaviour determining one’s fate, either leading to Heaven or Hell. The song conveys the message through the persona’s assumed divine power, assessing individuals based on their conduct on earth. What is interesting is how this image of an afterlife formulates new ways of looking at life as it informs, cautions, and prompts contemplation on behaviour, including those of power and sexuality, both within and beyond a broader context of Tanzania (Barber 1987).

As the lyrics suggest, the persona is endowed with divine power. With this power, the persona describes how each person, using their power and position, behaved and treated others in society. Based on the descriptions, the persona passes judgement while directing the character to either Heaven or Hell. Discerning which persona is destined for heaven or hell requires consideration of two aspects: firstly, the narration of behaviour serving as the basis for judgement, and secondly, the emphasis the persona places on the phrase ‘pita huku’ (Go this way). The absence of stress in pronouncing this phrase signifies that a person is destined for heaven, whereas the strongly stressed pronunciation indicates consignment to hell. This style of expression manifests that Makabila is in favour of spirituality as an intervening force of moral order.

The song “Mungu Atusamehe” introduces a thematic continuum from the song “Pita Huku”. The title, translating to “God Forgive us” in English,



highlights a collective desire for ethical change and a reformed society that reveres God, and has undergone spiritual recovery. Released on YouTube on 26 July 2023, the song “Mungu Atusamehe” reveals its introspective exploration of repentance and spiritual transformation over intentional sexual transgressions. Contrary to “Pita Huku”, which revolves around morality through the dynamics of power and sexuality, “Mungu Atusamehe” adopts a collective narrative perspective. Using the first-person plural objective pronoun *tu* in “Atusamehe/ forgive us” implies that the whole society including the persona is morally rotten. Simultaneously, the use of past tense reflects both the societal past experiences of misconducts and serves as a line of demarcation, separating individuals’ past transgressions from the present agency of spiritual forgiveness.

The similarity between the two songs is evident as both weave intricacies of social and individual misdeeds with either repentance or eternal damnation. In the lyrics of “Pita Huku”, the persona is between heaven and hell, illustrating the consequences of power on sexuality. In “Mungu Atusamehe”, the persona puts forward the society for spiritual healing, perhaps as one cannot, when people die, take the righteous path to heaven instead of hell.

### **Power and Sexuality in “Pita Huku” and “Mungu Atusamehe”**

The songs “Pita Huku” and “Mungu Atusamehe” intricately illustrate the intersection of power and sexuality within a societal framework deeply influenced by religious morality. Each song delves into familiar scenes within a society marked by a noticeable imbalance in power distribution. These compositions vividly portray everyday scenarios, shedding light on the challenges arising from an uneven power distribution. Central to both songs is the overarching theme of divine judgment. In navigating the complex interplay of power and sexuality, the lyrics ultimately relinquish the power of final judgment to God. Whether beseeching forgiveness or invoking divine condemnation, the songs pivot towards a recognition of a higher authority. This divine arbiter holds the sway over determining eternal destinies – a profound aspect that underscores the societal reliance

on religious morality as the ultimate guide for evaluating human actions, particularly in the realms of power and sexuality.

### **Power play in sexual relationships**

At the core of all sexual relationships lies the fundamental concept that they are, fundamentally, manifestations of power dynamics. This assertion underscores the idea that power plays a pivotal role in shaping the dynamics and interactions within intimate connections. To comprehend the intricacies of sexual relationships, one must acknowledge the inherent power structures that influence individuals' behaviours, expectations, and experiences (Horley & Clarke 2016). In "Pita Huku", this dynamic is explored within the marital institution where once married, the man assumes power within the household and the society, determining the morality of his wife.

*You, an aged woman, marriage would have given you respect  
But daily on social media, you dated young people  
You complain about your husband's obesity, that he cannot make love  
Aah, you aged woman, pass this way*

This extract encapsulates a perspective that subscribes to entrenched societal norms, particularly those about gender roles and the perceived sanctity of marital institutions. The verses underscore the societal expectation that a woman's esteem is intricately linked to her matrimonial status. Such a viewpoint posits marriage as an indispensable determinant of societal respect for women, reinforcing the overarching notion that her societal worth is contingent upon adherence to established marital norms (Haller 1981). Within this paradigm, the passage implicitly advocates for the adherence of women to prescribed roles within the confines of marriage. It implies that once a woman has entered the covenant of marriage, she is obligated to unwavering commitment to her spouse, notwithstanding any perceived deficiencies in his physical attributes or intimate prowess (Person 1986). The act of criticising her husband's sexual performance is portrayed as a transgression against the anticipated fidelity and loyalty intrinsic to marital expectations.

Furthermore, the song posits age as a salient factor in the construction of societal respect. The assertion that “you, aged woman” presupposes a hierarchical valuation system wherein the attainment of a certain age and marital status becomes a societal prerequisite for garnering respect (Calasanti & Slevin 2001). This accentuates the intersectionality of age and marital status in shaping societal perceptions of women. The lyrics suggest that women beyond a certain age should eschew the pursuit of sexual satisfaction in favour of contentment within the confines of marriage. This reflects a particular ideological stance concerning gender norms, societal expectations, and viewpoints that prescribe distinct roles and behaviours contingent upon an individual’s gender and age.

The critique levelled against the woman for engaging in extramarital relationships with younger partners is framed within a moral and religious discourse. The passage conveys a moral condemnation, suggesting that such actions not only contravene societal norms but also evoke a spiritual retribution, as evidenced by the reference to eternal damnation. This moralistic stance positions the woman’s actions as socially objectionable and morally reprehensible, invoking a normative framework rooted in religious tenets (McGuire 2008).

The utilisation of the institution of marriage in this stanza serves to fortify prevailing patriarchal power structures within the society. Maintenance of power is achieved through a multifaceted approach. Primarily, it posits that a woman’s attainment of social recognition is contingent upon her marital status. After entering matrimony, her societal standing is contingent upon her fidelity to her spouse, irrespective of encountering challenges within the marital union, even if such challenges lead to sexual dissatisfaction. Moreover, beyond a certain age, any deviations from societal norms are attributed to her culpability, as societal expectations dictate that she should have established a domestic existence devoid of aspirations beyond the confines of her marriage. Additionally, modern technology is also blamed for the ruin of married women, tempting them through social media, which causes them to ruin their marriages. Finally, the association with religious morality exacerbates the consequences,

wherein deviance from these social norms is portrayed as risking eternal damnation in hell.

In “Mungu Atusamehe”, Meja Kunta perpetuates a problematic narrative regarding the power dynamics in sexual relationships, depicting a scenario where a man wields disproportionate authority over a woman’s choices. He uses explicit references to anal sex and traditional erectile medication to underscore his perceived sexual dominance, implying that a man’s decisions take precedence over a woman’s agency. The symbolic use of *Kwa Mpalange*<sup>4</sup> (lit. to the Mpalange place’) to represent sodomy adds another layer of insensitivity, as it ties the act to a specific location with colloquial connotations. Additionally, the artist endorses the use of *Mkongo*<sup>5</sup>, a natural remedy originating from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), reinforcing traditional gender roles by associating male potency with sexual prowess:

*Hey guys, I’m sorry God, I’m sorry, dear God  
Here I get drunk using the money for rent  
I’m sorry, God, I’m sorry, dear God  
If I go to mpalange, it is bad luck, not intentional*

*The way we love gossiping, witchery and quarrelling, forgive us  
Mixer Mkongo to hit them severely, forgive us  
In church nowadays, we don’t give offerings; forgive us  
Nowadays, they are busy playing with men, and they don’t marry. Forgive us*

The verse “Mixer *Mkongo* to hit them severely...” suggests that the deliberate use of erectile medication to enhance sexual performance is intended to exert dominance over women during intercourse, reflecting not only the harshness of male behaviour in sexual encounters but also highlighting their objectionable actions that warrant condemnation. Despite the critical perspective, the tone in this passage seems to glorify

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<sup>4</sup> Literally, this is the name of a street in Buza ward, Temeke, Dar es Salaam. It is perceived that prostitutes around this area prefer sodomy. Hence, the inclusion of the name in the lyrics connotes anal sex

<sup>5</sup> A natural remedy for male potency extracted from the bark of the *Mkongo* tree found in the Democratic Republic of Congo

the act strangely, adding a celebratory dimension to an otherwise disapproving analysis. Overall, the two stanzas raise concerns about the underlying forces of harmful sexual experiences.

### **Societal perspectives on sexuality and prostitution**

The critique of sexuality also extends to the realm of prostitution, where societal judgment often places blame on women for supposedly leading men astray (Wardlow 2006). This perspective appears to oversimplify the dynamics at play, neglecting the broader context and the shared responsibility in intimate relationships. The criticism often lacks an acknowledgement of the agency and autonomy of both individuals involved, disproportionately burdening women with the responsibility for moral transgressions without duly considering the agency and choices of men. In “Pita Huku”, for example, the persona says:

*A prostitute, you cause a person to abandon his family  
You use his children's fees to drink beer  
You are unsatisfied to cheat in bongo<sup>6</sup> you travel up to Turkey  
You take pills, and you don't even get pregnancy  
In front of your in-laws, you pass wearing a khanga  
You prostitute with your intention; you sex even with the witchdoctor  
You, prostitute, pass this way*

The lyrics intricately weave a narrative where a prostitute is implicated in the fragmentation of a family unit, introducing a narrative thread that suggests a direct correlation between women's perceived immorality and the disintegration of familial bonds (Wardlow 2006). This narrative unfolds against the broader backdrop of familial disarray, prompting a deeper and more nuanced examination of the socio-moral dimensions embedded within the societal fabric.

Central to this narrative is the apportioning of blame to women for the breakdown of the family structure, with their perceived immorality being identified as the root cause. This attribution carries dual implications for

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<sup>6</sup> The term refers to Tanzania

women—on the one hand, they are ascribed with sexual prowess; on the other hand, they are systematically disempowered through the stigmatisation of their perceived immorality (Tasker 2002). This juxtaposition reflects a complex and contradictory societal attitude towards women, simultaneously acknowledging their sexual agency while marginalising and labelling them as immoral and malevolent. The lyrics contribute to the reinforcement of traditional gender roles and stereotypes. The characterisation of women as the destabilising force within the family unit oversimplifies the intricate dynamics and perpetuates societal expectations that hinder progress towards gender equality. Moreover, these lyrics reflect on the role of the family unit as the cornerstone of societal structure. The lyrics implicitly position the family as a societal cornerstone, emphasising its vulnerability to external forces, particularly the perceived immorality of women. The women are thus, as in the above stanza, placed at the core of the family, their morality being pivotal in the social structure. A perceived dysfunction, such as the need for sexual pleasure or prostitution, sends society into disarray.

The introduction of Turkey as a travel destination complicates issues pertaining to the morality of the society by hinting at the potential influence of globalisation and its impact on traditional society. The lyrics again suggest that women are influenced, as with social media, by ideas from the West, which in turn destabilises and ruins the traditional societal and familial structures. The song, however, is also damning to men who abuse their power, especially religious leaders. Religion is seen as a complex institution with both liberatory and oppressive potentials. It can provide individuals with a sense of community, moral guidance, and purpose (Ehsan 2021). Yet, certain interpretations and practices within religious frameworks may contribute to systemic inequalities and the perpetuation of traditional power structures. In “Pita Huku”, religious leaders are accused of squandering church funds and misleading their congregation, especially women therein, with promises of gifts from God in return for sexual favours:

*You were trusted by the church; you led every mass  
But you considered yourself as God, because you have money*

*You believed in superstition and made love with the believers  
Pastor, pass this way [Go to Hell].*

These lyrics not only serve as a musical expression but also functions as a critical commentary on the ethical dimensions of power dynamics, particularly within the domain of religious leadership and as a commentary to men who abuse their positions once they are in a position of power and influence (Ehsan 2021). The lyrics also incriminate these religious leaders, contending that they have engaged in financial improprieties, including the misallocation of church funds. This alludes to an increasing number of reports of pastors, especially within the African continent<sup>7</sup> <sup>8</sup>. Moreover, a poignant critique is directed towards the manipulation of congregants, notably women, through the exploitation of their spiritual beliefs. This manipulation is portrayed as a transactional exchange, wherein promises of divine favour are dangled as incentives for engaging in morally questionable acts, specifically sexual favours. The portrayal of the religious leaders takes a nuanced turn. The lyrics vividly depict a juxtaposition between the outward façade of leading masses in worship and an internalised sense of godliness fuelled by material wealth. The accusation resonates with a sense of betrayal. Leaders are portrayed as succumbing to the allure of their financial affluence despite according to themselves, a divine status.

Similarly, “Mungu Atusamehe” expresses morally questionable behaviours, including commercial sex, deceit, and cheating. The lyrics are riddled with explicit references to sexual acts and destructive behaviours like alcoholism. The frequent mentions of “cheating” serve as a distressing symbol of the erosion of ethical values within relationships. This acknowledgement of transgressions only reinforces societal norms associated with these behaviours. The first verse, for example, unfolds with the singer recounting his personal experience of commercial sex and infidelity, detailing how these actions have endured in life:

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<sup>7</sup> [Fake pastors and false prophets rock South African faith - BBC News](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Of false prophets and profits: Meet the Pentecostal preacher taking on the prosperity gospel | African Arguments](#)

*If doing commercial sex, we have done it more  
If it is lying, we have been deceiving each other  
If cheating, we have cheated often  
What remains is to return to the Lord*

In this passage, Meja Kunta seems to portray a social perspective on sexuality, specifically about prostitution. It appears that he normalises the presence of prostitution within society, implying that it is no longer considered strange. This perspective raises questions about the societal attitudes towards prostitution as a common phenomenon, challenging its abnormality. The proclamation that “what remains is to return to the Lord” seems more like an attempt to absolve guilt than a genuine commitment to change. By urging the return to the Lord, Meja Kunta attempts to mask individuals’ immoral sexual acts with a veneer of religious redemption. However, this covert attempt to discourage such acts in relationships is questionable, as it implies that the sole source of moral guidance in Tanzanian society is religion (source). The underlying message suggests a lack of accountability for one’s actions, relying on religious rhetoric as a convenient escape route from personal responsibility.

### **Reflective confessions and cultural commentary**

The song “Mungu Atusamehe” begins with the persona’s distinctive self-identification as “stupid dogs”, framing the narrative within a context of humility and self-awareness. The repetitive plea for divine forgiveness sets the tone for a reflective exploration of human behaviours and societal norms. Within the self-awareness frame, the lyrics list the vices of society in an almost prayer mode of repentance:

*Hey guys, we are stupid dogs, may God forgive us  
The way we love alcohol and music, May God forgive us  
Hey, we are stupid dogs, may God forgive us  
The way we love sex and cheating, May God forgive us*



*The way we love gossiping, witchery and quarrelling, forgive us  
Mixer Mkongo in order to hit them severely, forgive us  
In church nowadays, we don't give offerings; forgive us  
Nowadays, they are busy playing with men and they don't marry. Forgive us*

The lyrics openly acknowledge sexual trysts for alcohol as well as music, sex, cheating, gossiping, witchery, quarrelling, and resorting to violence. Each item on this list represents a facet of human conduct that may be considered morally ambiguous or socially frowned upon. Through the lens of critical social theory, these behaviours can be interpreted as a response to a wider socioeconomic dilemma. The refrain seeks forgiveness implying a genuine sense of remorse, signalling a willingness to confront and rectify perceived transgressions. The exhaustive list of indulgences, coupled with the recurrent plea for forgiveness, establishes a poignant narrative beyond a simple confession of vices. It becomes a cultural commentary, a call for introspection, and a nuanced reflection on the ever-evolving dynamics of morality within the social context. However, "Pita Huku" also refers to vices that society should not judge harshly. Even though the character's description refers to things that could be considered unpleasant to society, they still pay their dues to God:

*All day, you insult, not provoked, but you quarrel with people  
In fact, you get drunk and pee in your clothes  
But regarding charity, you were offering  
You, the drunkard, pass that way*

*I know you are disappointed  
That's why I see you holding your cheeks  
In fact, you work as a DJ, which is undeniable  
But whenever it was time for worship, you turned off the music  
You DJ, pass that way*

The lyrics portray a character who, throughout the day, indulges in insulting others and initiates unnecessary quarrels. There is a vivid image painted of drunkenness leading to an untidy state, yet paradoxically, there is an acknowledgement of their charitable contributions to the community. The juxtaposition of these seemingly contradictory behaviours highlights

a complexity in the character's persona, challenging the societal tendency to categorise individuals solely based on apparent vices. Moreover, the emotional turmoil expressed in holding one's cheeks introduces a psychological depth to the lyrics. This emotional layer suggests an internal struggle, possibly linked to societal judgments or personal conflicts stemming from the disc jockey (DJ)'s lifestyle choices, urging a thoughtful consideration of the impact of societal expectations on the character's well-being and self-perception.

The character's role, as a DJ, adds layers of meaning to the exploration, for it is within this profession that the narrative uncovers a tension, a power struggle of sorts. Turning off the music during worship is symbolic, representing a negotiation between societal expectations regarding entertainment, often associated with themes of sexuality, and the character's personal convictions tied to spirituality. In socially critical perspectives, this struggle can be seen as a microcosm of broader societal power dynamics, highlighting how dominant ideologies shape individual behaviours and beliefs. The DJ's behaviour and choices illustrate the tension between conforming to societal pressures and maintaining personal authenticity. This internal conflict unveils a complex interplay of authority and influence, where the character grapples with the expectations imposed by external norms and the integrity of their own values.

## **Conclusion**

This article has analysed critically the interplay of power and sexuality in *Singeli* songs. It has found that selected songs utilise religion as a moral benchmark, positioning it as a societal yardstick against which individuals reflect on their behaviour, particularly concerning sexuality. The article also exposes a perplexing trend where women's agency in sexual matters is consistently disregarded. The songs, with their multifaceted themes that entail everyday life, underscore the prominence of intimate relationships, attributing their pervasive influence on the distinctive style of *Singeli* music, which is particularly appealing to the youths. Notably, the recurring themes of sexuality and spirituality unravel a nuanced portrayal

of societal attitudes towards power dynamics in sexuality. The songs depict women as both victims of stereotypes and, paradoxically, as moral arbiters in a society where religious foundations are being eroded. In essence, the article unequivocally asserts that *Singeli*, through its social relevance, serves as a medium that not only reflects but also challenges prevailing social problems pertaining to sexuality, shedding light on religion's role as a determinant of moral standards in contemporary Tanzania.

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## Appendices

### 1. Pita Huku (Go This Way) By Dulla Makabila

We mama mtu mzima ndoa ingekupa heshima  
Ila kutwa mitandaoni ulidate na vitoto

Unadai mumeo ana kitambi hawezi kupeleka moto  
Aaah we mama pita huku  
Uliaminiwa na kanisa, ukaongoza kila misa  
Ila ulijiona Mungu mtu kisa una pesa sana  
Uliamini ushirikina na kula kondoo wa bwana  
Mchungaji pita huku

Kutwa ulitukana, hujachokozwa unagombana  
Yaani unalewa mpaka unajikojolea  
Ila suala la sadaka ulikuwa unajitolea  
We mlevi pita huku

Najua umekata tamaa  
Ndo maana nakuona umeshika tama  
Najua umekata tamaa  
Ndo maana nakuona umeshika tama  
Yaani kazi yako Udj hilo halipingiki  
Ila kila ulipofika muda wa ibada ulizima mziki  
We DJ pita huku

We kwanza una laana  
Chumbani kwako kuna mafuta kila kona  
Unapenda kwa mpalange  
Mtume hataki hata kukuona  
Aaah we shoga pita huku

Nikutazama unatia huruma  
Maana naona hutoboi  
Ushawatoa mimba Amina na Zena  
Na ulivyo fundi hukosei  
Nawe dokta pita huku

Yaani kufumba kufumbua ukajiona umefika  
Sheria ukaipindisha  
Masikini ukawakomesha  
Na ukanenepa kwa rushwa  
We hakimumu pita huku

Wewe mtoto wa kike ila nawe una demu  
Na mademu wanakuita shemu  
Aaaah inauma sana  
Hata baba na mama hawataki hata kukuona  
Maisha yako yote laana  
Hauna mashine ila kazi tu kusagana  
Tom Boy pita huku

Malaya unafanya mtu anatelekeza mpaka familia  
Ada ya watoto wake ikifika kwako unakoga bia  
Yaani kudanga bongo huridhiki unaenda Uturuki  
Unakunywa vidonge hata mimba hushiki  
Mbele ya shemeji zako unapita na kanga  
Malaya ukiamua lako unampa mpaka mganga  
We malaya pita huku

Mchawi unafanya watu wanafukuzwa kazi  
Wengine unawauwa kwa kuwapa maradhi  
Mchawi unawaachanisha mpaka wapenzi  
Mchawi unawanyima watu usingizi  
Mchawi oooh nakosa cha kuongea  
Usiku unageuka paka mabati unarukia

Mchawi unaua mtu anaacha familia  
Msibani unatokea unalia hadi unazimia  
Mchawi ndo chanzo cha umasikini  
Unapita kwenye pembe hivi milango huioni  
Na uchawi mkaupeleka Usafini  
Yaani Lavalava hata aimbe vipi haonekani  
We mchawi pita huku

[TRANSLATION]

**Go this way**

You an aged woman, marriage would have given you respect

But daily on social media, you dated young people  
You complain about your husband's obesity, that he cannot make love  
Aaah you aged woman, pass this way

You were trusted by the church, you led every mass  
But you considered yourself as God, because you have money  
You believed in superstition, and made love with the believers  
Pastor, pass this way

All day you insult, Not provoked but you quarrel with people  
In fact, you get drunk and pee in your clothes  
But regarding charity, you were offering  
You the drunkard, pass that way

I know you are disappointed  
That's why I see you holding your cheeks  
In fact, you work as a DJ, which is undeniable  
But whenever it was time for worship, you turned off the music  
You DJ, pass that way

You, firstly you are cursed  
There are oils in every corner of your room  
You enjoy at *mpalange*  
The Apostle doesn't want even to see you  
You gay, pass this way

That is, in the blink of an eye, you thought you are done  
You violated the law  
You victimised the poor  
And you became fat through bribery  
You the judge, pass this way

You are a lady but you also have a *demu*  
And the ladies call you in law  
Aaaah it hurts a lot  
Even your father and mother don't want to see you

All your life is ruined  
You don't have a machine but only what you do is *kusagana*  
Tom Boy, pass this way

A prostitute you cause a person to abandon his family  
You use his children's fees to drink beer  
You are unsatisfied to cheat in bongo you travel up to Turkey  
You take pills and you don't even get pregnancy  
In front of your in-laws, you pass wearing a *khanga*  
You prostitute with your intention, you give even the witchdoctor  
You prostitute, pass this way

You the witch, you cause people to get fired from their job  
You kill other by inflicting them with sicknesses  
You the witch, you even cause separation between lovers  
You the witch, you deprive people of sleep  
You the witch, ooh I'm even short of words  
In the night you become a cat, stepping over corrugated iron

The witch, you kill a person and they leave their family  
You attend in mourning and cry until you pass out  
The witch is a source of poverty  
You pass around the corners; don't you see the door?  
And you took witchery to *Usafini*  
That is, regardless of how good Lavalava sings, he is unrecognised  
You the witch, go this way [to Hell].

2. **Mungu Atusamehe (God Forgive Us)**  
**By Dakota Mtu Hatari**

Jamani Pumbavu zetu mbwaa sisi Mungu atusamehe  
Tunavyopenda pombe na muziki Mungu atusamehe

Kama kudanga si tushadanga sanaa  
Kama uongo tumeshadanganyanaa  
Kama kucheat si tushachiti sana



Kilichobaki turudi kwa Bwana

Jamani Pumbavu zetu mbwaa sisi Mungu atusamehe  
Tunavyopenda pombe na muziki Mungu atusamehe  
Jamani Pumbavu zetu mbwaa sisi Mungu atusamehe  
Tunavyopenda ngono na kucheati Mungu atusamehe

Jamani ,Samahani Mungu, I'm sorry my God,  
We hapa nalewa natumia hela ya kodi  
We samahani Mungu, I'm sorry my God  
Nikiendaga kwa mpalange bahati mbaya sio kusudi

Jamani Pumbavu zetu mbwaa sisi Mungu atusamehe  
Tunavyopenda pombe na muziki Mungu atusamehe  
Jamani Pumbavu zetu mbwaa sisi Mungu atusamehe  
Tunavyopenda ngono na kucheat Mungu atusamehe

Tunavyopenda umbea uchawi kurogezea ... tusamehee  
Mixer mkongo ili kuwakomoa ... tusamehe  
Nyumba ya ibada skuhizi sadaka hatutoi ... tusamehe  
Kazi kuwachezea wanaume sahivi hatuoi ... tusamehee  
Kuna mademu wanamiliki mademu wenzao ... tusamehe  
Kuna mabwana wanamiliki mabwana wenzao ... tusamehe  
Hao hao Mungu umewaona hao ... tusamehe  
Hao hao God umewaona hao ... tusamehe

Jamani Pumbavu zetu mbwaa sisi Mungu atusamehe  
Tunavyopenda pombe na muziki Mungu atusamehe  
Jamani Pumbavu zetu mbwaa sisi Mungu atusamehe  
Tunavyopenda ngono na kucheat Mungu atusamehe

Jamani ,Samahani Mungu, I'm sorry my God,  
We hapa nalewa natumia hela ya kodi  
We samahani Mungu, I'm sorry my God  
Nikiendaga kwa mpalange bahati mbaya sio kusudi

Jamani Pumbavu zetu mbwaa sisi Mungu atusamehe  
Tunavyopenda pombe na muziki Mungu atusamehe  
Jamani Pumbavu zetu mbwaa sisi Mungu atusamehe  
Tunavyopenda ngono na kucheat Mungu atusamehe

[TRANSLATION]

**Let God Forgive Us**

Hey, we are stupid dogs, may God forgive us  
The way we love alcohol and music. May God forgive us

Being it doing commercial sex, we have done it more  
Being it lying, we have been deceiving each other  
Being it cheating, we have cheated often  
What is left is the return to the Lord

Hey, we are stupid dogs, let God forgive us  
The way we love alcohol and music, May God forgive us  
Hey, we are stupid dogs, may God forgive us  
The way we love sex and cheating, May God forgive us

Hey guys, I'M sorry God, I'm sorry dear God  
Here I get drunk using the money for rent  
I'm sorry God, I'm sorry dear God  
If I go to *mpalange*, it is bad luck not intentional

Hey guys, we are stupid dogs, may God forgive us  
The way we love alcohol and music, May God forgive us  
Hey, we are stupid dogs, may God forgive us  
The way we love sex and cheating, May God forgive us

The way we love gossiping, witchery and quarrelling ... forgive us  
Mixer *Mkongo* in order to hit them severely ... forgive us

In Church nowadays we don't give offerings ... forgive us  
Nowadays busy playing with men and they don't marry ... forgive us  
There are females in love affairs with fellow females ... forgive us  
There are males in love affairs with fellow males ... forgive us  
Such couple God, have you seen then? ... forgive us  
Such couple God, have you seen then? ... forgive us

Hey, we are stupid dogs, may God forgive us  
The way we love alcohol and music, May God forgive us  
Hey, we are stupid dogs, may God forgive us  
The way we love sex and cheating, let God forgive us

Hey guys, I'M sorry God, I'm sorry dear God  
Here I get drunk using the money for rent  
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The way we love sex and cheating, let God forgive us