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Falz's Hip Hop Activism: A Philosophical Ideology of Marxist Critique of Nigerian Society

Idowu James Adekunle[1,*], Eniola Rachel Ogundipe[2]

[1]Department of English, University of Ibadan, Oyo State 200005, Nigeria.
[2]Department of English & Literary Studies, KolaDaisi University, Km 18, Ibadan, Oyo State 200005, Nigeria.

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[*]**Corresponding author:** Idowu James Adekunle, Department of English, University of Ibadan, Oyo State 200005, Nigeria.

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Abstract

This study investigates how the Hip Hop music of Falz articulates Marxist critiques of class struggle, alienation, corruption, and economic inequality in contemporary Nigerian society. Employing a qualitative and interpretive approach, the research undertakes close textual and contextual analyses of four purposively selected live-recorded songs: This Is Nigeria, E No Finish, Talk, and Hypocrite. They were purposively chosen because of the unique way they explicit socio-economic and political decadence in Nigeria. The analysis focuses on identifying the Marxist ideological structures embedded in Falz's lyrical constructions and performance strategies, and on situating these within Nigeria's broader political economy marked by capitalism, state dysfunction, and systemic inequality. The study contends that Falz mobilizes Hip Hop as a form of philosophical engagement and cultural resistance, transforming popular music into a vehicle for ideological critique. It contributes to scholarship on African Hip Hop by foregrounding its role as a dynamic site of political consciousness, social interrogation, and postcolonial cultural production.

Keywords

Marxism; Nigerian Hip Hop; Falz; Philosophical analysis; Social commentary

1. Introduction

The intersection of music and ideology has long attracted scholarly interest across disciplines such as sociology, philosophy, anthropology, and cultural studies. Music, as a universal means of communication and a reflection of human activities, functions not only as an expression of culture but also as a site for ideological struggle and social critique (Gramsci, 1971; Blacking, 1976; Goble, 2015; Methr et al., 2019; Adekunle, 2021). Anthropological and ethnomusicological research underscores that music has been an enduring characteristic of human civilization, serving as a medium through which individuals and groups articulate identity, resistance, and collective experience (Mithen, 2005; Cross, 2016; Welch & McPherson, 2018, Adekunle, 2023). Within this context, Marxist theory has been particularly influential in examining the ways music mirrors and contests social realities, exposing issues of alienation, class struggle, and cultural hegemony (Adorno, 1941; Rose, 1994; Kelley, 1996; Adekunle, 2024). Hip Hop, for example, has emerged as a critical form of expression for marginalized communities, offering both a reflection of exploitation and a tool of resistance (Decker, 1994; Perkins, 1996).

In the Nigerian context, Hip Hop operates as a powerful vehicle for ideological discourse and social transformation.

Artists such as Falz employ the genre to critique systemic corruption, inequality, and political injustice, thus situating Nigerian Hip Hop within a Marxist framework of cultural resistance (Osumare, 2012; Babatope, 2018; Adebanjo, 2019). Moreover, music's ability to foster social awareness and cohesion extends beyond entertainment—it embodies educational, psychological, and socio-political functions that shape human development and societal consciousness (Biasutti & Concina, 2013; Fancourt & Finn, 2019; Adekunle, 2025). Consequently, Nigerian Hip Hop exemplifies how music, as both a cultural and ideological artifact, continues to mediate between personal expression and collective critique, reflecting broader struggles for justice and equality within the human condition.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study draws on the theoretical frameworks of Marxism and critical theory to analyze Falz's music. The concept of ideology, as developed by Althusser (1971), is particularly relevant in understanding how music reflects and shapes social relations. The study also engages with the work of African scholars such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986), who has written extensively on the role of culture and ideology in shaping social and political discourse.

Marxism offers an extensive critique of capitalist society, rooted in the framework of historical materialism that the view that material production and class relations fundamentally shape social evolution (Marx & Engels, 1970). In Capital, Marx explains that profit originates from surplus value, revealing how wage labour enables capitalists to extract unpaid labour time from workers (Marx, 1976). This analysis links exploitation to the nature of commodity production, the labour process, and capitalism's tendency toward periodic crises (Marx, 1976; Luxemburg, 2003). In his early writings, Marx also explores the idea of alienation, portraying how workers become disconnected from their work, the objects they produce, their fellow humans, and their own potential (Marx, 1978).

Marxist thought weaves together the economic, political, and cultural dimensions of society through the concepts of base and superstructure and the functioning of ideology (Marx, 1978). Later theorists expanded on these ideas: Gramsci introduced the concept of hegemony to describe how power is maintained not only through force but also through consent (Gramsci, 1971); the Frankfurt School underscored how mass culture perpetuates social conformity (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002); and Althusser's theory of ideological state apparatuses explained how institutions sustain capitalist relations (Althusser, 1971). Subsequent Marxist scholars extended the framework to new arenas, including imperialism (Lenin, 1969), world-systems analysis (Wallerstein, 1974), neoliberal restructuring (Harvey, 2005, 2010), and the interrelations of capitalism, gender, and social reproduction (Fraser, 2014).

A major strength of Marxist analysis lies in its capacity to connect the profit motive at the enterprise level with capitalism's broader systemic crises and instability (Harvey, 2010). Marxism also predicted the persistence of economic inequality as an inherent consequence of capital accumulation (Piketty, 2014; Milanović, 2019). The Marxist labour theory continues to illuminate how technological innovation and labour discipline serve the expansion of capitalist production (Marx, 1976). Furthermore, Marxist theories of ideology remain vital tools for understanding how education, media, and culture work to reproduce social hierarchies (Gramsci, 1971; Althusser, 2006).

2.1 Contemporary Relevance to this study

The existing literature highlights the significance of Marxist ideologies in understanding the relationship between music, culture, and society. This study contributes to ongoing discussions about the role of Hip Hop in shaping social and political discourse, particularly in the Nigerian context. By analyzing Falz's music through a Marxist lens, this study provides insights into the ways in which music can be used as a tool for social critique and commentary.

3. Method

3.1 Method of Collection

The live performance videos of Falz analyzed that were purposively in this study include: This is *Nigeria*, *E No Finish*, *Talk*, and *Hypocrite*. They were purposively chosen because of the unique way they explicit socio-economic and political decadence and exploitation in Nigeria. The research undertakes close textual and contextual analyses with expression of Marxist ideological themes in their lyrical content.

3.2 Method of Analysis

The collected data were examined using content analysis, a qualitative research method that involves systematically

interpreting and categorizing textual materials to identify recurring themes, patterns, and meanings. This analytical approach enabled a detailed exploration of the selected videos, focusing on how Marxist ideologies are represented and communicated through lyrical content, imagery, and performance techniques. Themes were pinpointed repeatedly analyzing lyrics through a Marxist lens, focusing on concepts, like ideology, alienation, and class domination. This iterative process ensured consistent interpretation across songs.

4. Data Analysis

Falz goes on to identify several former Nigerian leaders whose records are marked by corruption, self-interest, and authoritarian materialistic tendencies. Ibrahim Babangida, for instance, is widely regarded as a political "Maradona," a nickname that reflects his manipulative tactics, questionable decisions, intolerance, and persistent hunger for power. Beyond diverting public funds for personal use, he also denied Nigerians their democratic right to choose their leader when he annulled the June 12, 1993 presidential election, which had been won by Chief M.K.O. Abiola. Babangida subsequently proclaimed himself the first military president and installed an Interim National Government (ING) headed by Ernest Shonekan.

The U.S. Department of State's 1994 report on human rights practices in Nigeria described 1993 as a year in which the nation's human rights situation deteriorated sharply. The report notes that Babangida's inconsistent political decisions intensified economic hardship and provoked recurrent civil unrest and interethnic conflict, resulting in numerous civilian casualties. His administration frequently resorted to arbitrary arrests and detentions to silence dissent. It shut down media outlets critical of the annulled June 12 election and enacted harsh decrees that prevented judicial review. Security agencies routinely intimidated human rights groups, pro-democracy advocates, journalists, and student activists. Other abuses included extrajudicial killings, police brutality, overcrowded and unsafe prisons, violence and discrimination against women, and restrictions on freedom of expression, movement, the press, and political and labour associations. All these are features of superstructure, political alienation and economic inequality. s

Sani Abacha's coup later that same year removed the interim government and inaugurated a prolonged era of repression and instability. His rule was so brutal that Nigeria was suspended from the African Union for gross human rights violations. Abacha's legacy of cruelty continues to resonate long after his death, comparable only to that of a few infamous African leaders such as Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, Idi Amin of Uganda, and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt. Among his numerous atrocities were the massive looting of public funds, targeted killings to eliminate perceived opponents, and the systematic suppression of constitutional rights. Many Nigerians reacted with relief and celebration when news broke of Abacha's death in 1998.

The third leader referenced by Falz is Olusegun Obasanjo. Although he may not match Babangida or Abacha in outright tyranny, many Nigerians view him as a symbol of democratic-era manipulation and self-serving governance. Having ruled both as a military leader and later as a civilian president for eight years, he still attempted to secure a controversial third term at the end of his tenure—a move Soni Daniel's 2016 Vanguard article describes as an expression of an insatiable lust for political dominance that threatened the hopes of the electorate. Obasanjo remains politically influential, often positioning himself as a mentor to emerging politicians who benefit from his wealth and connections, much of which critics argue were amassed through questionable means.

These three figures occupy central positions in Nigeria's political history, collectively governing the country then only 56 years old for nearly two decades. By juxtaposing ordinary Nigerians with these leaders notorious for corruption and abuses of power, Falz suggests that many citizens, despite outward displays of moral righteousness, share similar tendencies and may even be capable of greater wrongdoing. He draws on Nigeria's legacy of authoritarianism to highlight his criticisms of ongoing class inequality and suppression of dissenting ideas as revealed below:

In *This is Nigeria*, Falz makes a mockery of the Nigerian religious system which only enriches the pastors and makes the members poor as follows:

4.1 The Law of Retribution and Social Imprudence

Pastor house na him dey fine pass
My people them dey stay for poor surrounding
(This is Nigeria (Falana, 2018))

Nigeria is endowed with abundant natural and human resources, yet the exploitative behaviour of its leaders combined with the complacency and enabling attitudes of many citizens has accelerated the nation's decline. From Marxist

ideology, Falz argues that Nigerians often remain indifferent to the greed of those in power, even as public wealth is diverted to advance private ambitions. Deploying sharp satirical criticism, he suggests that regardless of how excessive the looting becomes, many citizens continue to respond with an unwavering and misguided loyalty. It is disheartening, he notes, that the nation's governance is dominated by individuals whose actions mirror those of rogues, kleptomaniacs, murderers, and habitual deceivers people who freely apportion the country's resources among themselves. For such politicians, Nigeria becomes an open field where public funds can be plundered with minimal resistance. Falz mockingly highlights the jubilation with which these leaders seize citizens' pensions, oil revenues, and agricultural earnings. Emphasizing the vulnerability and lack of accountability within Nigeria's financial systems effectively left at the mercy of what he portrays as hardened looters, Falz laments the collective naivety and complicity that have seeped into the everyday behaviour of Nigerians.

4.2 Political Instability and Insecurity

Never ending recession o
When looter and killers and stealers are still contesting election o
Politicians wey thief some billion and billion e no dey go prison o
Police station dey close by 6
Security reason o
(This is Nigeria (Falana, 2018))

He also turns his attention to those in positions of authority, the superstructure, who feed only themselves (surplus) while neglecting their responsibility to care for the masses and promote societal development. Their failure has left many citizens wandering in search of food. The song portrays a society where hunger has stripped people of strength and agency where it functions as a deliberate tool of oppression wielded by the government to keep the populace subdued. These leaders, or so-called leaders, devote their energy to exploiting those who already have almost nothing, thereby increasing the number of people living in extreme poverty. Falz also highlights the culture of silent suffering, in which hunger is weaponized to render people too weak to resist. In *E No Finish*, he refers to them as "my brother," underscoring that he, too, is affected by this collective hardship, even if circumstances prevent him from openly confronting it.

I hope you choke on your dinner this evening
You carry million dollar
Keep put for house
When my brother
Never see food to chow
And many sister come dey prostitute for am
Just to make sure they keep something in account
(E No Finish (Falana, 2019))

Drawing from the ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, one might assume that as the divide between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie widens, the oppressed will eventually rise up and overthrow their oppressors. However, the Nigerian situation contradicts this expectation. Despite the worsening conditions in the country, many Nigerians appear immobilized in their pursuit of self-determination and remain easily swayed by the manipulative tactics of cunning politicians.

Falz proceeds to examine the entrenched political culture of nepotism, which manifests as preferential treatment for one's relatives or associates while marginalizing those outside these circles. In Nigerian politics, it is common for leaders to attempt to handpick their successors often selecting individuals from their own family or ethnic group thereby disregarding the electorate's democratic right to choose. In *E No Finish*, Falz addresses corruption, dishonest public officials, greed, theft, and various other societal problems. He further explores the themes of suffering and hunger that afflict the population. In *Talk*, he illustrates this reality when he states that:

Four-year tenure, three-year holiday
Eh Eh, three-year holiday
(Talk (Falana, 2019))

At this point, Falz is urged by the backup singers to focus his criticism primarily on the country's leaders, the bourgeoisie. They encourage him to expose governmental excesses and scrutinize the self-serving policies enacted by those in power, the superstructure. Dramatically, these backup singers symbolize the wider Nigerian populace, who tend to attribute the nation's failures exclusively to political leaders and portray them as the sole architects of the country's misfortune. This sanctimonious stance serves as a way for many citizens to absolve themselves of both direct and indirect participation in the degradation of national institutions, shifting full blame onto the government. Falz, however, refuses to be swayed by the popular but incomplete narrative promoted by the masses. Instead, he seeks to interrogate social and political realities with honesty and accuracy, resisting the tendency to accept simplified explanations for complex national problems.

Pastor put his hands on the breast of his members
He's pulling the demons out…
Fulani Herdsmen still they slaughter
Carry people they massacre
This is Nigeria
(This is Nigeria (Falana, 2018))

His initial hesitation to respond to the backup singers' call to criticize the leaders does not stem from a lack of words, but from a fear of offending the public with the harshness of the truth he intends to reveal. Acknowledging that truth can be bitter especially when directed at a deeply flawed society filled with individuals who often prefer comforting lies he questions whether he will be able to maintain the goodwill of friends and family if he chooses to express his thoughts with complete honesty.

4.3 Moral Decadence and Civilian Pitfalls

People just dey do like say they no dey shit
People just dey do like say they no dey breathe o
People just dey do like say they get superpower
People just dey do like say they no dey weak o
Oh! Nobody wan dey sow where e no dey reap o
(Hypocrite (Falana, 2019))

Nevertheless, he cannot keep the truth to himself, and he ultimately decides to express his views, no matter how unpleasant or offensive they may sound. For him, those deserving criticism are not only the leaders notorious for corruption but also his own "brothers and sisters" and the wider population. He argues that there are clear parallels between the irresponsibility of the leaders and the reckless behaviour of the citizens. Falz stresses that the difference between those who blatantly misappropriate public funds and the ordinary people who engage in everyday forms of misconduct is far less substantial than many would like to believe.

Political hysteria
Yahoo Yahoo don tear everywhere now
And we act like it's so cool
(This is Nigeria (Falana, 2018))

Although he admits that a small segment of the population earns a living through honest means, he condemns the majority for being deeply embedded in a culture of corruption, each contributing in various ways to its continued survival. Falz refers to the populace as "200 million thieves," suggesting that Nigeria is a nation largely occupied by citizens who are willing to succeed at any cost, often with little regard for integrity or moral principles. His assertion becomes difficult to refute when one considers the prevalence of cybercrime, armed robbery, bribery, corruption, nepotism, and favouritism across the country. Among many Nigerian youths, one of the most lucrative ventures is cyber fraud, popularly known as "Yahoo" or "Yahoo Yahoo" within everyday speech. Faced with these realities, Falz questions why the government remains the sole target of criticism when the country is replete with individuals who are themselves dishonest and unethical. He deepens this social critique by declaring:

Everybody get fault for inside matter

We dey talk human rights
We no respect am
Who are we to crucify the homosexuals?
Most of una don dey involved from time
But no be anybody business who you wan climb
You dey form gentle man when we dey with you
But you go still go home beat your wife to stupor
(Hypocrite (Falana, 2019))

Falz expresses deep disgust at how readily Nigerians attempt to absolve themselves of responsibility for the country's social decay by shifting blame onto the government, portraying leaders as solely accountable for the consequences of our collective failures. He criticizes the self-righteous posture of citizens whose actions and inactions have directly contributed to the widespread decline visible across the nation. Historically, military dictatorship and colonial domination were perceived as the major sources of the common man's suffering, and many hoped that democratic governance would provide relief from these hardships. However, conditions have deteriorated even further under civilian administrations. As Nnenna Ibe (2017) observes, corruption now permeates every tier of government from the office of the local government councillor to the presidency. Falz reminds us that these institutions are run by Nigerians who are products of the same society they mismanage. This is what is known as economic exploitation in Marxist theory. At this point, he proposes a crucial remedial step one he believes holds the potential to genuinely transform the nation for the better.

Pastor wey dey do like say e no be sinner
See the speck in your eye no dey point finger
What about the really greedy politician
Acting like he really care for the layman
And what about even you voters,
wey dey act like say you only see two jokers
Recycle the same corrupt men,
Later you complain you say you hate the government
(Hypocrite (Falana, 2019))

He expresses sorrow over the way many Nigerians appear to derive a strange sense of endurance even joy from their suffering, unable to resist oppression because they have already surrendered their political agency during elections. This surrender, he argues, is rooted in hunger and poverty. Throughout Nigeria's electoral history, it has become evident that the party with the most financial resources or the one that spends the most often emerges victorious. This pattern makes it difficult for citizens to speak out, as many politicians literally buy their way into office. After accepting small monetary rewards or material gifts during campaigns, the people are left without the moral or political leverage to demand accountability or enjoy the true benefits of democracy.

And the fake prophet, some dey for convent
With under-aged boys, wey they make boyfriend
And you claim consent when you messing with a minor
Some say na devil box so no telly for their parlour…

Ehn ehn, because she no be virgin you no meet am well
But the one wey tie scarf you no give am help
Oh you say you no dey smoke you no dey drink liquor
But your heart e dey evil shey you see the picture…

Small man thief for market
You set fire for em body
Big man thief money we dey hail am like dummy

We dey suffer, we dey smile

We dey fear to talk
My people no get chop, my people no get work
These days we no know if authority dey for office
Cause the yawa wey we see, no be security we you promise
And the cup e don full, we don tire for all the rubbish
All the punishment
Na me talk am o!
(Talk (Falana, 2019))

He argues that Nigeria's only path away from its current slide toward disaster is a nationwide renewal of moral consciousness grounded in sincere repentance. In his view, expecting national transformation while corruption remains entrenched is a futile exercise. No amount of optimism or wishful thinking will restore the nation's dignity unless truthfulness and integrity become guiding principles for the ordinary Nigerian. Drawing on biblical teachings, he concludes that the greatness of any nation is ultimately shaped by the character of its citizens. He imagines a future Nigeria populated by upright individuals and led by genuinely democratic leaders. Until a moral reorientation capable of lifting the Nigerian psyche out of its present ethical decline takes place, he maintains that meaningful change will remain out of reach.

In *Talk and Hypocrite*, the artist directs his criticism at various sectors and public figures, highlighting issues such as neglect of responsibility, exploitation, oppressive policies, and religious insincerity. His intention is to awaken the moral consciousness of those implicated and inspire genuine transformation. He portrays government officials—politicians and affluent members of society who present elaborate agendas and use persuasive rhetoric to win public approval. Initially, they appear transparent and committed to the people's welfare, but this façade quickly fades. The people's excitement proves short-lived, disappearing as swiftly as a charm that loses its power.

Repetition, as a literary device, involves the deliberate reuse of words or phrases to reinforce meaning and enhance memorability. It operates at multiple levels of language, from sounds and single words to extended phrases and ideas. Although excessive repetition can weaken a text and make it monotonous, it often serves as a powerful rhetorical strategy, lending strength to an argument or amplifying a central theme.

In this work, repetition functions not only as a tool of emphasis but also as a means of sustaining focus on the core subject of critique. It underscores the gravity of the issues being addressed and reveals deeper societal flaws, particularly the uneven distribution of opportunity. The artist illustrates a society where progress eludes many, yet a privileged few can manipulate their way into positions of advantage. A striking example appears in the line accusing pastors of selling hope and faith while exploiting the poor and leaving them in suffering. This reflects a distinctly Marxist portrayal of society, where wealth and resources remain concentrated in the hands of a select minority. Such dynamics stand in stark contrast to the ideals of a communal system, which seeks to eliminate these forms of inequality.

4.5 The Roles of the Citizens in a Corrupt System of Government

Falz is widely recognized for his incisive satire and his bold critique of societal flaws. In the song, the word "mumu" which roughly translates to "a fool" in English is used deliberately to expose the unquestioning, often irrational behavior he believes characterizes many Nigerians. Although he openly denounces the corruption of political leaders, he refuses to absolve citizens of their own role in the country's ongoing decline. Falz challenges the widespread tendency among Nigerians to blame the government alone for the nation's backwardness, a mindset rooted in a culture of scapegoatism that shapes public political judgment.

Rather than directing responsibility solely at those in positions of authority, he broadens the critique to include the general populace. He argues that ordinary citizens often participate in various forms of misconduct and moral compromise, contributing significantly to the societal decay they condemn. In this sense, he asserts that the public is not merely a victim of failed leadership but also a collaborator in the corrupt practices undermining the nation's wellbeing.

Conclusion

The analyses of Falz's *Talk* and *Hypocrite* reveal a profound artistic interrogation of Nigeria's socio-political climate. Through sharp satire, biting criticism, and deliberate use of literary devices such as repetition, Falz exposes the multilayered corruption, hypocrisy, and moral deterioration permeating both the leadership and the citizenry. His work challenges the conventional narrative that locates blame exclusively at the feet of political officeholders, instead

urging Nigerians to confront their own complicity in sustaining the very system they denounce. By calling citizens "mumu" and "hypocrite," he forces a confrontation with the uncomfortable truth that national decay is not solely the product of governmental failure but also of widespread ethical compromise among ordinary people. Ultimately, Falz's artistic vision calls for a transformative shift in collective consciousness one rooted in honesty, accountability, and moral renewal. Until this internal reorientation occurs, both the leadership and the governed will continue to reproduce the patterns of decadence that hinder genuine progress.

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