

Social Consciousness in the Lyrics of Folarinde Falana (Falz): A Critical Discourse Analysis Perspective

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This paper examines the nature of social consciousness in the music of Folarinde Falana (Falz) with a view to unveiling how language is steeped in critical social engagement in his art. Data for the study comprises lyrics of nine songs of Folarinde Falana (Falz). The selected songs are *Talk*, *This is Nigeria*, *E No Finish*, *Brother's Keeper*, *Hypocrite*, *Wehdone Sir*, *My People*, *Child Of The World* and *Amen*. The songs were purposively selected because they feature moral instructions on different aspects of the life of a normal Nigerian and also challenge the government by showing the inadequacies in the actions and treatment of the citizens of Nigeria. The gathered data was analysed through the analytical lens of critical discourse analysis. The analysis revealed that Falz focuses on the issues of religious manipulation and deception, gullibility of followers in religious circles, social pranks and irresponsibility of the Nigerian masses, the socio-economic struggles of the masses and leadership failure. The musician uses everyday language to stir the consciousness of the general public for the apprehension of the nation's woes. Even though as a musician, Falz injects a lot of fun into his music on social problems in Nigeria through the use of slangy expressions and exclamations, he still keeps his eyes on the seriousness of the issues he raises.

Keywords: Music, social consciousness, lyrics, Falz, critical discourse analysis

1. Introduction

Music has for long been a major means of social consciousness raising in human societies (Rose 1991; Abiakwu 2020). Major musical trends and forms came into existence out of the need to address important social and cultural issues. For instance, hip-hop music came into being as a result of the yearnings of Black (African) Americans and Latino Americans to protest against discrimination in the U.S. in the late 1960s and early 1970s, leading to the creation of "their own kinds of cultural expressions" (Milliman, 2019: paragraph 5). Since then however, the hip-hop tradition has remained a major medium of protest culture and social crusade even in climes other than America.

In particular, the importation of the hip-hop culture into Nigeria and its huge acceptance among the people especially the youth has created a fertile soil for it to serve as an agent for social conscientisation in the Nigerian society. Many Nigerian hip-hop artistes have over the years broached crucial burning issues in the society through their arts. One remembers Idris Abdul Kareem's 'Nigeria *jagajaga*' released in 2002 which lampooned the government of the time for failing to attend to the needs of the people in the country among others (Ojo, 2020: paragraph 4). Tu face Idibia is also known to have criticised the government through his music at various times in the past. Osiebe (2016:13) argues that "an increased number of popular musicians have started producing protest political music and unity political music, following Nigeria's democratization in 1999....". However, of recent, there seems to be a new wave of musical activism of the hip-hop school in Nigeria especially through the music of Folarinde Falana, popularly called Falz.

Since the incursion of Folarinde Falana into the Nigerian musical terrain as a detour from his legal academic background, he has always steeped his songs in critical social engagement and criticism. This however does not come as a surprise to many people given his parental background as son to a human rights activist in Nigeria, Femi Fala, and being a lawyer himself.

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Therefore, in this paper, attention is drawn to the language and style of Falz in his musical activism and critical social engagement. The paper seeks to unveil the maladies in the Nigerian society as projected in the lyrics of Falz and show the linguistic character of his music.

2. Language, Music and Societal Edification

The relationship between language and music can be said to be as old as the inception of language use. This is because as language is produced, it becomes natural to produce music with it. Jentschenke (2016) remarks that the relationship between language and music is in fact particularly strong in human beings during early infancy. Gonsior (2011:1) states that both music and language can be found in human societies and they “share fundamental similarities such as being based on acoustic modalities and involving complex sound sequences”. He further states that every infant is born with two systems: the language system and the musical system. While the linguistic system of the infant comprises consonants, vowels and the pitch contrast of the native language, the musical system comprises the timbres and pitches of the culture’s music.

Apart from this relationship between language and music, Gonsior (2011:1) remarks that “language and music are both acoustic phenomena (sic) and rely on changing acoustic patterns that are modulated in addition to pitch evolution”. They are also similar in the sense that just as language is based on a finite number of linguistic features –phonological, syntactic, morphological, etc., but generates infinite sentences, “music is also based on a limited set of sounds, notes or tones” (Gonsior, *ibid*). Recent neurological studies have also provided more evidences indicating that language and music “may well have developed together, not entirely independently” (mempowered.com, paragraph 8). Other more recent findings have not only shown that “music and speech functions have many aspects in common...” (Jancke, 2012: paragraph 1), but have actually come up with “the strongest and boldest hypothesis” that “apart from their basic building blocks, language and music are in fact identical” (Tsoulas, 2014: paragraph 12).

The most interesting aspect of the relationship between language and music is that they both function as a means of communication and forms of expression. And in fact, this is what links them with the subject of societal edification and transformation as the case may be. Language is a purveyor of ideas and is socially constitutive just as it is socially constituted. The implication of this is that language has a way of shaping the realities in the society. After all, the more one hears of a particular thing through language, the more the thing or fact sticks to one’s mind or memory. That is why language is used for persuasive purposes such as making people to behave in certain ways which are considered beneficial to them and the society at large. This explains the use of language in certain campaigns for social action or social change in human societies. A typical example is the *Change Begins with Me* campaign being run by the current government of Nigeria.

However, since music is a great corollary to language, it also functions in social campaigns as agencies, governments, among others, use the appeal of music to garner support for their cause. Music in particular is often effective in public enlightenment campaigns because the listeners do not only enjoy the message but also the lyrics and rhythm of the music being played. This thus stimulates them to be more interested in the message being passed across. In fact, most social campaigns are often laced with music such that it is in music that language comes to the fore. For instance, many of the jingles produced for social campaigns such as the earlier mentioned *Change Begins with Me* campaign in Nigeria are musically rendered.

Robbins (n.d.) remarks that the many protest movements in the United States in the 1960s were successful because of the role that music played in their operations. According to Robbins (*ibid*), the movements were fighting against environmental degradation, homophobic violence, sexist oppression, institutionalised racism and traditional modes of authority. But the emergence of politically charged music in the form of rock music, blues, gospel, jazz and classical music changed the political situation of that time in America and brought liberation to many. Such is the power of music to bring about change in human societies.

Part of why music continues to be a potent agency for social awareness and social mobilisation is the fact that it moves crowds. Music is a major property of communities. It is used as well to create communities. Since the essence of public enlightenment campaigns is often to make as many people as possible to be aware and interested in the subject of the campaign, campaigners often use music because music has a special way of pulling crowds. People gather and begin to sing and dance immediately they hear music being played and this helps the campaigners or mobilisers to get the attention of such people. Especially in the Nigerian context where there is still a great deal of illiteracy and people can hear music on the roadside and abandon what they had initially set out to do, one realises that music plays such an important role in grassroots mobilisation.

Hip-hop music in particular serves in public enlightenment and mobilisation in Nigeria in view of the growing acceptance of the musical genre. Even though hip-hop is most popular among the youth, its increasing popularity makes its acceptance in the Nigerian society to extend beyond the youth to different strata of the Nigerian society in the present times. Therefore, any campaign or mobilisation for social conscientisation involving the use of hip-hop music is likely going to be effective as it will reach out to as many people as possible in the society.

In particular, Falz's hip-hop music continues to become more and more popular in Nigeria in view of the critical engagement with important issues in the Nigerian society which excites his fans and listeners to his music. Therefore, the message of social reformation and societal rejuvenation being passed across in his music reaches out to multitudes of Nigerians.

3. Methodology

Data for the study comprises lyrics of nine songs of Folarinde Falana (Falz). The selected songs are *Talk*, *This is Nigeria*, *E No Finish*, *Brother's Keeper*, *Hypocrite*, *Wehdone Sir*, *My People*, *Child Of The World*, and *Amen*. The songs were purposively selected because they feature moral instructions on different aspects of the life of an average Nigerian and also challenge the government by showing the inadequacies in their actions and treatment of the citizens of Nigeria. The selected data were closely read and the important discursive features marked for critical discourse analysis.

4. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in critical discourse analysis (CDA) focusing on Fairclough's (2015) dialectical-relational approach. According to Wodak and Meyer (2009:27), Fairclough's approach to CDA "focuses upon social conflict in the Marxian tradition and tries to detect its linguistic manifestations in discourses, in specific elements of dominance, difference and resistance". The approach provides affordances for the analysis of discourses by focusing on the dialectical relationships between semiotic systems and social practices. Fairclough (2018:13) captures this succinctly when he argues that "CDA offers better explanatory understanding of relations between discourse and other components of social life". He states further that "CDA combines critique of discourse and explanation of how discourse figures in existing social reality as a basis for action to change reality" (Fairclough, *ibid*). In the context of the present study, one is motivated to examine how Falz's lyrics figures in existing realities in Nigeria and as a basis for action to change the realities.

Data analysis from the perspective of dialectical relational approach spans description, interpretation and explanation (Fairclough, 2000). At the level of description, attention is paid to the formal features of the discourse such as vocabulary (lexis, metaphor), grammar, cohesion and text structure. At the stage of interpretation, how meanings of texts link the texts with their contexts is examined. Finally, at the explanation level, the analyst teases out meanings relating to the broad ideological and topical issues underlying the discourse. The choice of the theory for this study is based on its affordances for the explication of meanings relating to issues of social change and ideology and the dialectics of the oppositions in discourses and texts reflecting the class struggles in the society.

Therefore, in analysing the data for this study, at the descriptive level of analysis, we pay attention to the expressive values of lexical and grammatical resources in the discourse. At the interpretive level, we link the text to the context while at the explanation level, we relate the text to the broad ideological processes of social transformation in Nigeria. The description, interpretation and explanation are done simultaneously in the course of the data analysis.

5. Data Analysis and Discussion

In this section, we analyse the lyrics paying attention to the major discursive tropes in them. We then carry out linguistic analysis while discussing the various issues under each of the headings.

5.1 Falz and his Polemic on Religious Manipulation and Deception

One major feature of Folarinde Falana's social commentary in his music is his polemic on religious manipulation and deception in the Nigerian society. In his frustration with the Nigerian society, he still finds it unbelievable and unacceptable that people lay claim to religious sanctity in the midst of the decay. There are many parts of his lyrics in the different songs that evidence his frustration with the glorification of religion and the deceit and manipulation embedded in it. Let us consider the text below:

People just dey do like say na dem be Jesus
 People so wicked but they so religious
 Christian and corrupt no suppose be mixture
 Real musulumi e no suppose dey thief jor. (*Hypocrite*, L10-11, 16-17)

In the excerpt, drawn from a track titled *Hypocrite*, Falz considers the religious coloration of most Nigerians as hypocritical and highly unreal. He draws his assertion focusing on the two major religions in Nigerian: Christianity and Islam, to which the greater population of Nigerians have affiliation. In the first line, there is the mention of Jesus to whom holiness is ascribed. However, the musician quips that such association is fake in view of the fact that holiness is missing in most adherents. The second and third lines help to clarify why Falz frowns on Nigerians' association with or in fact self-portrayal as Jesus. In the second line is the juxtaposition of two attributes which negate each other with one being more like Jesus and the second being more unlike Jesus. While "religious" appears Jesus-like, the attribute of wickedness associated with most adherents in Nigeria is not Jesus-like. In furtherance of his attack on the self-acclaimed religious status of Nigerians, Falz nullifies the Christian identity of Nigerians by stating that ideal Christians are not supposed to be corrupt which he considers to be the situation in Nigeria. Similarly, in the fourth line, since many of the politicians and non-politicians who steal money in Nigeria are either Muslims or Christians, Falz paints the picture that the religious labels of most Nigerians are insincere and are nothing but decoys.

Falz's language in addressing the subject shows the derision that he has for fake Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. In fact, he uses the expression "musulumi" instead of "muslim" in a humorous, sarcastic and emphatic way to show that if you are a true practitioner of Islam, you dare not steal. He continues his humour by referring to stealing as "thief".

Perhaps, Falz's greater blow on religion in the Nigerian space can be found in the excerpt of his lyrics of the song *Talk*:

Three private jets, you say you buy am for church
 Eh eh, say you buy am for church
 But your congregation no dey follow fly am of course
 Eh eh, dem no dey fly am of course (*Talk*, L56-59)

In the text above, Falz exposes corruption within the hierarchy of the church in Nigeria. Here, he alludes to popular conversations about clergymen in Nigeria buying jets for what they call "the work of God". The insincerity of the men of God in saying they bought the jets for the church is emphasised in the lyrics, as the musician intentionally repeated the expression "say you buy am for church" to indicate that indeed the jets were not bought for the church but the personal use of the clergymen. Falz however makes his intention clearly known through the use of sarcasm in the third line when he says that the congregation do not fly the jets. The repetition of the content in the last line heightens the sarcasm and the rejection of the idea that jets are bought for churches but rather are for the personal use of clergymen. The musician also attempts to allude to humour by using the expression "eh eh" which is a feature of popular Yoruba discourse. Therefore, just to underscore his point in a jocular way that pastors are cheating their congregants, he uses speech styles of Yoruba, English and pidgin. Still to show his disdain for religious assertions in the Nigerian nation, Falz ridicules the religious actors in the following lines:

This is Nigeria
 Praise and worship we singing now
 Pastor put his hands on the breast of his members
 He is pulling the demons out (*This is Nigeria*, L31-34)

Here, Falz seems to be mocking Nigerian pastors and preachers as fake people who use the opportunity of their positions and the gullibility of the people to sexually exploit women during church service. First, he legitimises the action as Nigerian by using the expression "This is Nigeria" to state that this is the kind of thing that we indeed witness in Nigeria. But of course one could see the radical posture of Falz in this instance because it is not in every church that pastors put their hands on the breasts of women congregants during praise and worship. But because he sees nothing good in the religious activities in Nigeria which are widely acclaimed to be vast and unparalleled all over the world, he uses the few examples that have been recorded and reported to generalise. Even though the example here invokes some sense of eroticism, it serves to show how debased religion is or can be in Nigeria. Finally, on Falz's attack on religious deception and manipulation in Nigeria, we present the excerpt below:

Sheybi emi mo pe musulumi ododo ni mi
 Born again Christian ni mi
 Shomo 'ye ti moti ji
 Servant of God dey break law?
*(But I know that I am a good Muslim
 I am a Born-again Christian
 Do you know how much I've stolen
 Does a servant of God break the law?) (Brother's Keeper, L11-14)*

Using Yoruba language, his indigenous language, largely in the excerpt above, Falz further mocks the religious tags that people brandish in Nigeria. He indeed can be said to have no respect for either Muslims or Christians going by the way he presents them in his lyrics. In the above excerpt, he adopts the first person pronouns as a satirical strategy. The voice narrating is actually that of the guilty person who indulges in all manner of sins and iniquities. The worst is that he identifies himself with either Islam or Christianity to show that Islam and Christianity as presently practised in Nigeria are nothing but a ruse. He ends the excerpt with the rhetorical question which translates to "Has servant of God become a law breaker?" Since Muslims generally refer to themselves as servants of God and Christians as children of God and both (Christian and Muslims) are supposed to serve God, one really wonders how they have now degenerated to the extent of stealing money that belongs to the generality of the citizenry. Through the rhetorical question, the voice in the text seems to state that stealing public fund does not amount to breaking the law because he is a servant of God. The rhetorical question is also a confirmation of acceptance that they indeed steal public funds, which for them is not an acceptance of guilt but of the right to do so. The rhetorical question is meant to trigger all kinds of pensive thoughts in every Nigerian who claims to be a Christian or Muslim but steals or commits some other sins.

5.2 Gullibility of Followers as Key to Religious Manipulations

Falz in his lyrics decries the excessive and unfortunate gullibility of religious followers who troop to their churches only to enrich the pastors. By raising this consciousness, he perhaps hopes that people would be able to exert some caution on themselves and stop being manipulated. In *Amen* for example, he states:

We gullible to the core
 If you drop all you got
 Its impossible to be poor
 Put your hands in your purse
 Give everything to the church
 And I promise you
 The Lord will come knocking on your door (*Amen*, L23-29)

The pastor told the members to "...drop all you got//...put your hands in your purse//give everything to the church", and they do so, just like that, without asking what the church does with the money. The determiner "all" and the pronominal "everything" direct our attention to the fact that the pastor demands that the members do not keep any money back for themselves, but should rather "give everything to the church". The critical question they are yet to ask, perhaps, is how does the money get to "the Lord", and how is the money spent? Yet they see the pastor riding in Rolls-Royce and moving about with bodyguards. This is why Falz mocks such congregants by repeating the pastor's "promise" that "The Lord will come knocking on your doors".

However, Falz addresses part of the reason for the congregants' gullibility in the following lyrics:

My goal is to make sure you give Christ your soul.
 If you don't put your offering and tithe in the bowl
 Blessings on your life go slow (*Amen*, L17-19),

In the above lyrics, Falz tries to show how pastors play on the intelligence of their congregants. In the first line, Falz shows how pastors use the message of salvation which is coveted by every religious person to gain their confidence in the build-up to asking for money, while the last two lines directly show the subtle threat involved in manipulating church members to give money to the church, as the consequence of not giving money to the church is presented as eventual decline in the blessings of such persons. Here, the pastor alludes to the popular scriptural verdict of sowing and reaping in which case giving money to the church is sowing.

Since nobody wants their blessings to decline, coupled with the existing failure of government to make life bearable, they quickly want to heed the instruction of the pastor that they should give to the church even when their financial condition does not allow for such. Falz thus highlights the gullibility of the congregants due to their uncritical nature in the following lines:

Your pastor dey go holiday abroad
 But you still dey pray in the name of God
 Make you see food oh
 Make you no fail to chop
 Man of God dey chop
 Him dey robust.
 In your small salary
 You will pay your tithe
 Fellowship in the day
 Crusade for night
 So you're out here looking for more chiz
 But apostle is getting on Forbes list (*Webdone Sir*, L32-43)

The musician contrasts the situation of pastors and congregants to really show the gullibility of the congregants. While the pastor goes on holiday, eats good food, and gets more and more wealthy, the church members still hang their hopes in God, engage in fasting that keeps them from eating, pay tithe from their “small salary”, and are busy with fellowship and crusade day and night.

Perhaps in response to Falz’ lyrics, some church members in Ghana are beginning to demand a refund of their tithe when it appears that they are not getting anything for their “investments” (<http://news-af.feednews.com/news/>), while a pastor in Nigeria who said he is planning to make sure there are churches everywhere has been told by other church goers that he was only planning to have those churches as business centres (<https://www.pulse.ng/news/>). Pastor Adeboye had posted on the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) website (rccglighthouse.org.au): “To accomplish No. 2 and 3..., we will plant churches within five minutes walking distance in every city and town of developing countries and within five minutes driving distance in every city and town of developed countries.” (RCCG Light House, 2017, paragraph 3). However, the human right activist, Barrister Femi Falana (Dachen, October 2017) and another Christian leader, Cardinal Olubunmi Okogie, have disagreed with Pastor Adeboye as they both see such churches as “business centres”. Okogie argues thus while speaking on Pastor Adeboye’s plan: “And I’m just telling you that those churches that he is talking about are just business centres. They rented houses and in order to make more money, they license them”(Jannah, October 2017). This shows that Falz’s lyrics are proving effective in raising public social conscience.

5.3 Social Pranks and Irresponsibility of the Nigerian Masses

Falz also shows that societal decadence is not just about the government, pastors and gullible congregations by highlighting series of acts and pranks amounting to social irresponsibility usually exhibited by liars and cheats and the Nigerian populace on a daily basis. He employs contrast as a discourse strategy to show in concrete terms what they do and what their responsibilities are but which they fail to take care of. For instance, he quips:

You dey pop bottle when you dey club
 But your renting dey hard you to pay up (*Webdone Sir*, L2-3);
 ...
 You dey owe money since last year
 But na brand new jeep when you drive here (*Webdone Sir*,5-6);
 ...You dey pop Zobo give this fine girl
 You dey tell Mary say you will die there
 So you get seven babes you dey take shine
 And you promise all marriage at the same time (*Webdone Sir*, 7-10);
 ...
 And you claim that you came from the north side
 But your name is James on the online (*Webdone Sir*, L11-12)
 ...
 According to your friends and your tight gee
 You were finishing school in the 90's

But we read it in the paper and the magazine
That your present age is nineteen (*Wehdone Sir*, L15-18)

In other words, you have money to attend club and drink alcohol but you do not have money to pay for your house rent, you owe people money but you drive around in “brand new jeep”, you have a fiancée who you give zobo drink, but you have other “seven babes” that you take around while you promise marriage to each of them, and lies about your true origin and name, source of income and age. The contrast of status as painted by Falz is quite striking, showing the level of irresponsibility by some people. For instance, Falz stresses the level of irresponsibility by some parents, the role of the father-figure in the life of a child and the consequence of its absence:

Mommy raised her daddy never dropped a dollar
Daddy ran away didn't wanna have a child
Mummy wasn't ready still remember how she cried
But time flies all that one is in the past life (*Child of the World*: L3-6)

...

She never had a daddy figure so she needs the love (*Child of the World*: L35),

Falz thus points to the consequences of millions of broken homes and the absence of love in our contemporary time. This calls to mind the problem of single parenthood prevailing in our contemporary society. It is an unfortunate prank from a father not to be responsible so as to raise the children together with the mother, and vice versa. A corollary to that social evil is rape which ‘Shola’ in Falz’s *Child of the World* is subjected to:

She went to be an intern for her uncle
Just a little hustle before she go to law school
My daughter the Lord will be your muscle
Omo Jesu mummy know she love the gospel
But uncle Peter agbayaalainitiju
One late night became wild in the sitting room
Uncle please stop, shh be silent
Uncle didn't stop till he broke the hymen (*Child of the World*, L10-17)

Uncle Peter took advantage of her and took her virginity in a rape. She then decides to continue in that path, giving in to the temptation of the carnal pleasure, and consolidates on that sexual experience, until her life becomes a total mess:

She’s in deep, her whole life don deteriorate
Many belle she don get she don terminate
Queen runs girl, she no get any competition
Gomina, senator, she giving everybody tuition
Somebody tell her say the consequences no dey lightly
Until she tested positive to HIV (*Child of the World*, L44-49)

Arising from the above is the issue of sex without responsibility. This is an evil that does no one any good, except perhaps the less-than-ten minute pleasure. Most people who engage in sexual activities outside marriage are not ready to be responsible for the consequences, and that is why they are not married in the first instance, and their escapades are always fraught with pains and regrets that are, at times, life-changing. We can see this in the life of Shola’s mother who got pregnant when she “wasn’t ready” (*Child of the World*: L5). The same applies to Shola, and perhaps by implication most of the prostitutes.

Another social prank and evil is the internet fraudsters who describe themselves as self-employed business persons and riding one of the best cars around, perhaps getting the money through evil ritual means, as well as a prostitute euphemising herself as an entrepreneur:

Olosho say na business
Who dey check whether it is pure
Yahoo boy gan pe ara e ni entrepreneur (*My People*, L27-29)

...

You that didn't complete three square meals

But you are driving the latest range rover 2017 model
 Wehdone Sir!
 You are into yahoo yahoo activity
 And you say out to your friend
 I'm a self employed businessman
 Wehdone Sir!
 You are a member of the ladies of the night
 But you still call yourself a entrepreneur
 Wehdone Ma! (*Wehdone Sir*, L64-73)

Internet fraud (“yahoo-yahoo activity”, L64) and prostitution which Falz metaphorises as “ladies of the night” (*Wehdone Sir*, L71) are thriving industries where people’s lives are being serially messed up, just for the money – another pointer to the social reality of broken homes. Prostitutes commit abortions without care but later regret it. The complicit role of the wealthy men who patronise them is also crucial, as they are like the killers who never want the knife around their own neck. All these show Falz as keenly conscious of the many socially irresponsible behaviour and pranks that Nigerians indulge in which show perpetrators as cheats and irresponsible. For instance, the Zobo drink mentioned above is a cheap, popular local drink made from certain plant claimed to possess some herbal and therapeutic qualities. Giving your fiancée zobo indicates that you are not quite rich, but then you are keeping several other fine girls: “babes you dey take shine”, with a promise to marry them while spending lavishly on them. Also, the expressions: “call yourself” in L72 above, and “pe ara e ni” (*call himself*) in L29 below:

Olosho say na business
 Who dey check whether it is pure
 Yahoo boy gan pe ara e ni entrepreneur (*My People*, L27-29)

show that the title “entrepreneur” is self given, more of a wishful thinking, and thus self defeatist. The Yoruba word “gan” (meaning “even”) in L29 above is an adverbial that is “used for emphasis to indicate something surprising, unlikely, or extreme” (Microsoft Encarta Dictionary, 2009). The choice of these expressions is meant to foreground the deplorability of such ventures, namely internet fraud (Yahoo-yahoo activity), prostitution, and the act of euphemising the perpetrators as entrepreneurs. In these ways therefore, Falz shows a keen awareness of these social issues and projects them in his lyrics, indicating that societal decadence is not just about the government but also about the people themselves.

5.4 The Socio-economic Struggles of the Masses

Falz shows an uncanny, strong awareness of the daily, difficult, deplorable and detestable socio-economic struggles that the Nigerian masses pass through in his lyrics, and the very harsh environment in which they fight to survive. He thus turns himself into a social crusader of some sort. He tries to capture the unending daily survival stories of the common Nigerians on the street thus:

My people dey hustle to make it raba (L3, 7)
 ...
 Everybody trying to hustle for that daily spend (*My People*, L31),

describing life in his mother tongue (Yoruba) as more difficult than mathematics:

Aye le ju mathsi lo
 (*life is more difficult than mathematics*) (*My People*, L5, 9),

and the unending hope for a breakthrough and escape from this seemingly unending suffering:

My people dey hope dey breaki-fada (L4, 8),
 amidst which people continue to live life as if nothing is amiss:
 But my people dey bubble like no wahala (*My People*, L5, 10).

In these struggles, they live low and difficult life:

She bend down like person way no like boutique (L26)
 ...
 But na condition way make the crayfish bend (L30)

...
 I see so many faces dey struggle
 Looking for any way to chop (*My People*, L75-76),

they embark on difficult business trips in spite of the Boko Haram insecurity, and run into highway armed robbers:

Roadtrip to Akure
 We do this for the passion
 Armed robber block us for highway before we reach Ibadan
 On my way to Lokoja
 See wetin they do to me
 You dey wonder why copper no wan go Maiduguri (*My People*, L40-45)

Maiduguri is the home of boko haram fighters. In their bid to survive, Falz recounts the various efforts of the people further:

I see so many faces ee struggle
 Looking for any way to chop
 I see so many things ee scatter
 But we leaving everything to Allah
 I see so many call on Jesu
 To be putting food on table
 Na who get life the gratitude
 So we shinning thirty-two (*My People*, L76-83).

In the above text, Falz mentions that people eat whatever they find and not what is good for their health, and take solace in religion. But the fact is that things have fallen apart and there is pure chaos. People find themselves in a state of helplessness, calling on God to provide their needs, and only thanking God that they are still alive, and laughing it all off. He goes further:

Yahoo boy gan pe ara e ni entrepreneur
 But na condition way make the crayfish bend
 Everybody trying to hustle for that daily spend (L29-31)
 ...
 Uni dey on strike oo
 Doctor dem no gree work (L56-57)
 ...
 Naira getting lower (L91)
 ...
 Minimum wage would only get you so far (*My People*, L94)

In the text above, we see that some take to internet fraud known in Nigeria as “Yahoo-Yahoo” which they euphemise as ‘businesses’ and ‘entrepreneur’; strike actions by lecturers and medical doctors make life more difficult; while there is no hope in minimum wage because inflation continues to destroy the economy which in turn devalues the currency. However, doing these is one thing; the extent of their effectiveness in solving societal maladies is another. These are all socio-economic issues requiring government intervention. Yet in the midst of all these difficulties and sufferings, people still have time to dance and appear happy:

But my people still dey groove
 Dey be dancing alingo
 ...
 But my people dey bubble like no wahala
 ...
 But out in Calabar
 We still dancing alanta
 And shokil’Abeokuta
 We still dancing galala (*My People*, L51-52, 75, 96-98).

In the text above, the suffering people “still dey groove”, meaning that they are “having a nice time”; they are “dancing”, and “still dey bubble like no wahala”, meaning that “they are still lively with emotion as if they have no problems in life”. No wonder Nigerians have been depicted as happy people. The three instances above depicting the people as happy and dancing are each introduced by “but”, a contrastive conjunction implicating a sharp contrast to the general atmosphere of socio-economic difficulty, chaos and struggles that are the lots of the people. This indicates a sense of contrast to the previous or prevailing situation. It is therefore a case of happiness in the midst and in spite of suffering, and not vice-versa. It further shows that the Nigerian people have learnt to handle their sad situation, using an effective coping mechanism which consists in a combination of religion and emotional stability strategy (ESS) known as “mind-over-matter” (MOM). The Merriam-Webster dictionary describes “mind over matter” as a phenomenon “used to describe a situation in which someone is able to control a physical condition, problem, etc., by using the mind” (Merriam-Webster.com dictionary); while according to the Longman Dictionary, it is “used to say that you can use your thoughts to control physical feelings or an unpleasant situation” (ldoconline.com). Marchant (2011) tries to explain the underlining issue behind MOM from the point of view of fighting loneliness as follows:

Your attitude towards other people can have a big effect on your health (paragraph 1). An isolated person would be at greater risk of physical trauma, whereas being in a group might favour the immune responses necessary for fighting viruses, which spread easily between people in close contact (paragraph 3). So, ending loneliness is...all about our attitude to others: lonely people become overly sensitive to social threats and come to see others as potentially dangerous (but) tackling this attitude reduced loneliness more effectively than giving people more opportunities for interaction or teaching social skills (Marchant, 2011, paragraph 1-4).

Hawkey and Cacioppo (2010) remark that “as a social species (sic), humans rely on a safe, secure social surround to survive and thrive. Perceptions of social isolation, or loneliness, increase vigilance for threat and heighten feelings of vulnerability while also raising the desire to reconnect” (2010:218). In other words, we all need one another to survive especially in difficult circumstances, and this is what the dances and happy mood being provided by the entertainment culture is availing the masses, helping to kill loneliness and to reduce morbidity and mortality.

This is the socio-economic situation of the people as painted in Falz lyrics, showing a deep social consciousness. However, in line with the mind-over-matter response to this socio-economic reality, the general discourse mood in Falz’s lyrics that chronicles the people’s struggles is not that of violent reaction to the hardship but of peaceful, intelligent observation which calls people’s attention to the prevailing situation. This in itself is a call to help create in the people an awareness and recognition of their own situation, a platform for discourse and a silent revolution, but one that requests only a civil way-out of the hardship.

5.5 Leadership Failure as a Trope

Finally, one major theme that runs through Falz’s music is leadership failure and the neglect of the citizens by the political class. Falz views the political class as a bunch of self-seeking people who do not have the interest of the masses at heart. Below we examine various excerpts showing the disconnection between the leaders in Nigeria and the citizens:

Four year tenure, three year holiday
 Eh eh, three year holiday
 Our senator, don dey fight Kung-fu again
 Eh eh, kung-fu again
 They dem never tire, they wan continue the race?
 Eh eh, they wan continue the race
 We buy your story, but you no give us change
 Eh eh, you no give us change
 Na you talk am o
 No be me talk am o (*Talk*, L21-30)

In the text above, Falz points out the insensitivity and lack of commitment of Nigerian leaders to the national cause. Right from the first line, one can see the sadness of the musician at the poor attitude of Nigerian political leaders to governance. Even though Falz may be said to be hyperbolic by stating that Nigerian senators spend three of their four-year tenure on holiday, he paints a picture of how uncommitted the senators are by going on holidays too often. Implicit in the declaration by the musician is thus the rhetorical question:

How can senators who are often on holidays make laws that will enhance the development of the country? Very witty of Falz is the use of the collocates: “buy” and “change”. When one buys something and deserves change, which is “the balance of money given back to a customer who has handed over a large sum than the cost of the goods or services purchased”, and the “change” is not forthcoming, then one has a right and a duty to complain. This is very protective of Falz as it might shield him from state sponsored harassment when he claims he is simply talking about commercial transaction. However it is indeed a socio-political transaction: we bought their trust and promise with the whole of our hearts, and they should give us the change they promised us and which we trusted they would give us but appears not forthcoming.

In the third line, the musician hints at another malaise among the senators which borders on physical assault amongst themselves. Falz here mocks them over their incivility of exchanging physical punches in the hallowed chambers which constitutes a wholly bad example to the young Nigerians for whom they should be models. More frustrating for the musician as it is for most Nigerians is that the senators like to perpetuate themselves in office by deciding to contest for their senatorial seats every four years unless they are defeated. Since it is a truism that repeating failure brings more failure, the musician indirectly laments the doom that awaits the country in future over the circulation of unproductive senators who are more comfortable going on holidays.

The musician intentionally uses the word “change” in the text in order to allude to the campaign slogan of the ruling political party in Nigeria, the All Progressives Congress (APC). The Party had used the slogan to obtain popular support in the build-up to the elections but upon their victory failed to deliver on their promises to the electorate. This explains why Falz says “We buy your story but you no give us change”. This implies that even though we believed you and voted for you, the change promised us has not been delivered. The dialogue invoked in the last two lines of the textlet is meant to show that since the discourse is critical of state actors, especially senators, the musician is showing caution, especially in the Nigerian nation where state agents such as the Police and Department of State Security (DSS) among others are used to harass people that are perceived to be critical of the government or government actors. Therefore, the dialogue is used as a shield to protect the musician by passing the responsibility for what has been said about bad leadership in Nigeria to the interlocutor.

The language of the text as typical of Falz is simple and everyday in order to accommodate every Nigerian in the discourse on the failure of the leaders of Nigeria to do the right things. The musician uses the Nigerian Pidgin for the purpose of appealing to all strata of the society. He also interjects the text with the popular language form in Yoruba and some other discourses in Nigeria, “eh eh”, which is used for marking emphasis or surprise. Therefore, as the musician presents a flaw of the leaders in a line, the other line is laced with “eh eh” to emphasise the flaw raised in the previous line. Below, we consider another excerpt with the message of bad leadership:

Corruption and indiscipline
 With no regard for the life of a citizen
 Mtcheww
 So sickening
 I hope you greedy motherfuckers is listening
 Ahn
 Shey you dey see the insecurity
 Still no regard for the life of a citizen
 Ahn it’s so sickening
 I hope you choke on your dinner this evening
 You carry million dollar
 Keep put for house
 When many brother
 Never see food to chop
 And many sister come dey prostitute for am
 Just to make sure they keep something in account
 This no be club song
 I no come to shout
 Na real strong matter I wan talk about (*E no finish*, L2-20)

In the text above, Falz further exposes and attacks Nigerian leaders. He starts by highlighting the realities of corruption and indiscipline among the leaders which he frowns at by using the expression “so sickening” to describe their attitude. To show his distaste for the corrupt acts of the leaders, he uses the pejorative expression “greedy motherfuckers” in reference to Nigerian political leaders.

Falz points out that the leaders do not care about the insecurity in the land and as such do not care about the lives of the citizenry. This angers him so much that he repeats “it’s so sickening” with the exclamation mark “Ahn” showing complete disapproval of the height of insensitivity of the leaders to the insecurity problem of the nation.

In fact, as a mark of his bitterness, he wishes the leaders death while taking their sumptuous dinner since the masses do not have anything to eat and are dying. He uses the expression “choke on your dinner” as a wish of death for the leaders. Even though one may frown on the fact that a human being is wishing another death, it only goes to show how severely painful leadership failure is in Nigeria. To further justify his position, he juxtaposes the situation of the leaders with that of the masses in the second part of the text by saying “you carry million dollar keep put for house” (you hide millions of dollar in your house) while on the other side “When many brother never see food to chop and many sister come dey prostitute for am just to make sure they keep something in account” (while many people got nothing to eat and girls have to resort to prostitution to make money). Such graphical illustration of the situations of the leaders and the led indeed is bound to evoke resentment in the led, hence one can excuse the harsh use of language and ill feelings of the musician towards the political leaders. Falz still emphasises the seriousness of the issue he addresses when he cautions his listeners that he is not in a frenzy mood but a sober one as he is interested in discussing only the serious matter of problems in the Nigerian nation.

Falz continues using everyday language for the purpose of accessing everybody in the society. He also uses exclamations such as “Mtchew” and “Ahn” effectively to emphasise his surprise at various realities in the Nigerian society. Still on language, there are slangy expressions such as “chop” (eat) and “strong matter” (serious issue) in the text to inject fun and creativity into it without losing the seriousness of the issues being raised. Below is another text laden with Falz’s frustration at Nigerian leaders:

Na me be your problem
 If you no know
 Make you check well
 I no give you light since
 Because I want to sell fuel
 And if to say you get light
 Then you no go buy generator
 I be criminal
 I’m the one that should pay you
 But you should pray for
 I’m so heartless
 I’m probably the biggest kind of monster in the whole planet
 I dey use taxpayer money to dey flex...
 I go buy jet
 When my people start to kill each other
 I go quiet
 E no concern me
 Crisis never reach my town yet
 That one na one aspect
 I never pay civil servant salary for a few years
 I don’t listen to them, their wives or children
 But you for check my convoy
 I just add one new benz (*Brother’s keeper*, L2-25)

Using the personal style, Falz presents the ills in the society foisted by the leaders who are supposed to work hard to prevent such ills. The “I” which is prevalent in the text is a satire representing the government and political leaders and shows their lack of sobriety over what they have being doing negatively to harm the people of Nigeria. Falz presents the government as intentionally not making electricity available to the citizens in order to force them to buy generators and petrol. Through this, the implication is that while the government and the political leaders become richer, the people become poorer. Falz considers this to really be a bad action and thus makes the government to self-name itself as “criminal” and describe himself “heartless” and “the biggest kind of monster in the whole planet”. This negative self-description satirises the government or political leader as inherently evil on the one hand and on the other hand unrepentant, as the self-accusations may be tantamount to telling the people that yes, I am doing all of this to you, what can you do about it?

He further talks about the use of tax payer's money for personal enjoyment out of selfishness, and when there is crisis in the land, such leaders do not border as long as they are protected in their respective communities. To really show that they are monsters, the killing of people by other people does not mean anything to them as long as they are protected. One of the worst ills of the leaders is the non-payment of salaries which Falz comments on in the fourth to the last line. This is so bad because a government that does not pay salaries for years is inviting not only problems to the families of the civil servants but to the society at large as it is the money received by workers that will trickle down in the society. Falz however juxtaposes this bad situation created for the masses with their own situation characterised by enjoyment in which they go about in convoy and adding to the cars in their convoy periodically. So, Falz points out the inhumanity meted out to the people by their own very leader whom they suffered to vote in by queuing up at polling stations. Below is another text with the message of leadership failure in Nigeria:

Somebody tell Baba Fela say e too talk truth
 Say the government still dey shoot on youth
 Animal still dey put on suit and agbada
 Our leader dem still confuse
 Nothing wey dem talk dem never talk before
 Political robbers
 All of them be fraud
 Big thief talk
 My people je, applaud
 Wey dey still dey cause sorrow, tears and blood (*E no finish*, L24-34)

In the text above, Falz alludes to Fela Anikulapo Kuti popularly called Fela who was known during his lifetime as a singer activist. Through this, Falz attempts to add credence to his activist music because Fela is respected both as a musician and as an activist. In the lyrics, Falz paints a poignant picture of the government and political leaders of Nigeria as irresponsible. Drawing from the popular lyrics of Fela "Animal dey wear agbada, animal dey wear suit", he states that up till now, "Animal still dey put on suit and agbada". Therefore, to Falz, just as Fela labelled Nigerian leaders of his time "animals", the current crop of politicians have never changed from being animals too. He presents Nigerian leaders as confused people who do not have any original ideas to sell to the people other than to regurgitate what they had earlier said. To show his distaste for Nigerian politicians as people who are corrupt, he gives them three labels characterised by semantic unity. He calls them "political robbers", "fraud" and "Big thief". He believes that Nigerian political leaders rather than spread the wealth are stealing the nation dry and in the process causing sorrow, tears and blood just as Fela earlier complained.

6. Conclusion

This paper has shown how Folarinde Falana (Falz), a younger generation musician in Nigeria, has steeped his hip-hop music in critical social issues for the purpose of appealing to the sensitivities of the audience in order to challenge the status quo in the Nigerian nation. The paper has clearly shown that Falz's music goes beyond entertainment to critical social engagement in Nigeria. Focusing on the issues of religious manipulation and deception, gullibility of followers in religious circles, social pranks and irresponsibility of the Nigerian masses, the socio-economic struggles of the masses and leadership failure, the musician uses everyday language to stir the consciousness of the general public for the apprehension of the nation's woes. Even though as a musician, Falz injects a lot of fun into his music on social problems in Nigeria through the use of Nigerian Pidgin, slangy expressions and exclamations, he still keeps his eyes on the seriousness of the issues he raises through the use of such linguistic devices as euphemism, direct contrast, labeling, semantic unity, metaphorisation and satire. In fact, many of the exclamations used by the artiste were for the purpose of highlighting the seriousness of the issues and the absurdities in the Nigerian nation. This work thus shows that Falz replicates the burning desire in musical legends such as Fela Kuti, Lagbaja, etc., for the reformation of the Nigerian society through music.

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