

**RETHINKING ARTIVISM IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN MUSIC: A STUDY OF FOLARIN  
FALANA'S *THIS IS NIGERIA* AND *JOHNNY***

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**Abstract**

This study examines socio-political activism in contemporary Nigerian music, focusing on Folarin Falana's *This Is Nigeria* and *Johnny*. Falz, a prominent Nigerian rapper, actor, and lawyer, leverages his music to interrogate systemic failures in Nigeria, including corruption, police brutality, insecurity, and religious hypocrisy. Using content analysis, the study applies Feldman's art-critical performance theory to examine the thematic, structural, and performative dimensions of the selected songs. *This Is Nigeria* adapts the performative framework of *This Is America* to the Nigerian sociopolitical context, combining lyrics, imagery, and rhythm to highlight governance challenges and social decay. *Johnny* narrates the extrajudicial killing of a young man, revealing the human consequences of institutional corruption and police impunity. The analysis demonstrates that Falz's music functions as both a reflective archive of societal challenges and a call for civic engagement, illustrating how political activism can raise awareness and inspire collective action. By situating Falz's songs within the framework of activism, the study contributes to understanding music as a medium for social critique and transformative activism in contemporary Nigeria.

**Keywords;** Contemporary Nigerian music, social critique, activism and transformative musicology

**Introduction**

Over the years, the relationship between activism and art has grown, increasingly examining and addressing various socio-political issues in society. Music has emerged from this growth, reflecting diverse societal issues and events, both past and present. It has served as a mass medium within the entertainment industry, not only to entertain but also to educate audiences and society at large. In this regard, music has increasingly been directed toward activism and raising awareness. As a performative art that relies heavily on lyrics, rhythm, and beats, music has moved beyond mere entertainment to become a tool for activism. It has become deeply rooted in advocacy, engaging with the meaning of its lyrics while focusing on audience perception, reception, and the influence it exerts on individuals within their environment.

In Nigeria, Afrobeat and contemporary music have long served as platforms for social and political commentary, addressing issues such as governance, corruption, and inequality. Artists such as Burna Boy, Olamide, and Kizz Daniel, among others, have historically used their music not only to entertain but to provoke thought and inspire action among audiences. Within this context, Folarin Falana's music has gained significant popularity alongside the growth of Afrobeat in 21st-century popular culture, yet it has received limited academic attention concerning its socio-political commentary. This study, therefore, examines activism in Falana's *This is Nigeria* and *Johnny*. These songs were selected because they raise questions about the context of the artist's intent and the essence of his message. The focus of this study is to investigate how Falz's music functions as a vehicle for socio-political activism in Nigeria. The methodology, theoretical framework, literature review, and analysis of Falz's *This is Nigeria* and *Johnny* will be presented in this chronological order.

**Research Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative content analysis approach to examine how Folarin Falana (Falz) communicates social and political activism through music and visual performance. Content analysis was chosen because it allows for a systematic examination of both textual (lyrics) and visual (music video) elements, enabling the identification of patterns, themes, and socio-political messages embedded in artistic expressions.

Two of Falz's popular songs, *This is Nigeria* (2018) and *Johnny* (2019), were purposively selected for their prominence in public socio-political debates and their explicit engagement with issues such as corruption, police brutality, and civic responsibility. Additional materials, including music videos, verified social media posts, and secondary sources such as news reports from reputable outlets (e.g., Premium Times, The Guardian Nigeria, BBC News Africa) and institutional reports (e.g., World Bank, National Bureau of Statistics), were included to enrich the analysis and provide contextual depth. Selection criteria for supplementary materials prioritized official or verified sources, public accessibility, and direct relevance to the themes of activism highlighted in the songs.

Data were collected entirely from publicly available platforms. Lyrics were transcribed from official releases, and supplementary statements from the artist and government officials were gathered to support triangulation and enhance the robustness of the findings. Secondary sources were used to contextualize socio-political events referenced in the songs, verify public responses, and strengthen the credibility of interpretations.

The analytical procedure involved repeated reviews of the lyrics, music videos, and related materials, during which words, images, symbols, and character actions linked to activism were systematically coded and organized into broader thematic categories. These themes were then interpreted through Feldman's art-critical performance theory, which provides a framework for understanding how artistic expressions generate meaning, critique society, and stimulate public awareness. Specific attention was paid to how the four components of Feldman's theory—description, formal analysis, interpretation, and judgment—guided the coding and thematic organization.

To ensure validity and reliability, two researchers independently coded the data. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion, and emergent patterns were compared with existing literature and verified secondary sources to strengthen credibility. Ethical considerations were observed by relying solely on public data, ensuring accuracy in representation, and treating sensitive social issues with care. The study acknowledges potential limitations, including the small sample size of two songs and reliance on publicly available materials, which may limit the generalizability of the findings

### Theoretical Framework

Feldman's art-critical performance theory provides an approach for systematically evaluating artworks by moving from direct observation to deeper meaning and informed judgment. Feldman (1994) emphasizes that an artwork should first be examined for its thematic significance before considering its stylistic qualities. This framework has also been applied to socio-political and activist contexts, as demonstrated in projects such as Serafina's *Voice That Shakes* and the work of *Alimen et al. (2023)*

Art-critical performance theory draws on various artistic forms—including songs, spoken word, dance, and film—to illuminate social and political issues through performance. It uses artistic provocation to stimulate dialogue and inspire change on matters such as governance, culture, and justice. Feldman outlines four components: description, analysis, interpretation, and judgment. In this study, these components guide the examination of Folarin Falana's *This is Nigeria* and *Johnny*. Description identifies the key lyrical, visual, and symbolic elements; analysis explores how these elements work together to construct meaning; interpretation connects them to broader socio-political realities in Nigeria; and judgment evaluates the effectiveness of the songs as tools of activism. Together, these four components enable a structured and critical understanding of how Falz employs artistic performance to communicate and challenge socio-political realities.

### Literature Review

Scholars from different schools of thought have defined activism from multiple perspectives across various art forms. While there is no single definition, examining these perspectives provides a broad understanding of activism in relation to this study. According to Korpe (2013), "activism is a wide term that stretches from a strategic communication tool and protest to aesthetic expression with political under- or overtones, commonly inviting the by-passers to see, hear, feel, interpret and be affected" (p. 8). Activism describes the use of art as a form of activism, where expressions such as poems, spoken word, and music are employed to raise awareness, promote social change, and challenge societal norms. Ardenne (2008), Abarca (2006), and Szmulewicz (2017) further note that activism is a blend of art and activism that emerged from urban and graffiti art as well as situationism—creative movements of the twentieth century. These definitions demonstrate that artworks are now understood beyond the notion of "art for art's sake," highlighting their evolution into creative tools aimed at social change.

Diverlus (2016) posits that "activism is the understanding that, in the absence of social consciousness, art cannot reach its full range of potential and without creativity, activism risks being one dimensional and irrelevant" (p. 191). While there are no fixed steps for perceiving art, it is essential to grasp the messages embedded in shapes, strokes, rhythms, objects, images, or performance choices made by the artist. Only through this engagement can audiences connect with the intended message or interpret meaning from their own perspective. Art functions as an autonomous entity, yet scholars increasingly explore its meaning and purpose in relation to social change. This supports Danko (2018) argument that the arts are now widely used in academic literature to describe socially engaged practices, including political activism. Belfiore and Bennett (2008) also note that art's autonomous status became a badge of honor in the late twentieth century, allowing artists to critically reflect on society from a morally grounded position. In this study, these ideas are brought together to view activism as the use of music—specifically Falz's songs—as a creative platform for socio-political commentary and public awareness in the Nigerian context.

Scholars, particularly in the humanities, have highlighted that fine artists who are socially and politically conscious have used their art to reach beyond the art world to achieve societal change. Artists such as Pablo Picasso, a Spanish painter whose work speaks against war; Ai Weiwei, who criticized the Chinese government's stance on democracy and human rights; Banksy in Britain, creating awareness on issues such as racism, war, and poverty; Keith Haring, whose bold and colorful murals focus on AIDS, drug addiction, and nuclear disarmament; Faith Ringgold, who used mixed media and performance art to address issues of family,

race, class, and gender in America; and the Guerrilla Girls, whose art actively opposed sexism and racism while wearing gorilla masks, all show how art can challenge society. Similarly, Nigerian artist Falz uses music and performance to critique corruption, police brutality, and social injustice, adapting the global model of socially engaged art to the Nigerian context. This demonstrates not only the independent power of art but also that the use of art for activism, or artivism, has a lasting impact. Therefore, if artistic expression today continues to draw on this autonomous power, it highlights the enduring success of socially engaged art across cultures and time.

### **Folarin Falana (Falz)**

Born on October 27, 1990, in Lagos State to human rights activist Femi Falana, Falz uses his music to address social and political issues in Nigeria. His work evolved from comedic rap to socially conscious commentary, with a major turning point in 2018 with *This Is Nigeria*, a reimagining of Childish Gambino's *This Is America*, highlighting corruption, police brutality, religious exploitation, drug abuse, and youth marginalization. In 2019, he released *Johnny*, which mourns victims of police brutality. Both songs gained prominence during the #EndSARS protests in 2020, in which Falz actively participated. Falz's music blends Afrobeat, hip-hop, highlife, and storytelling rap, employing witty wordplay, code-switching, and strong rhythms to amplify his messages of social critique and activism.

### **Musical Analysis**

*This Is Nigeria* has sharp, electronic, synthetic sounds that create tension and disorder. Falz uses a dark synth pad, a sustained, electronic tone that repeats like a loop, giving a cold, unsettled feeling that mirrors chaotic situations. The harmony sits on a short minor progression, meaning a sequence of chords in a "sad" or tense key that keeps repeating without resolving, making the music feel stuck or unresolved. The bass stays low, adding a serious and somber quality, while the continuous loop reflects recurring national issues. Falz uses speech-like tones and a tight rap flow, with sudden lifts in pitch and strong, forceful delivery. Extra-musical sound effects, such as "yeeeee," dog-bark "gbooo," alarms, gunshot cues, and bomb-like noises, create a sense of shock and danger.

In contrast, *Johnny* uses warmer, softer sounds, simple expressive chords, and melodic, emotional singing to highlight empathy, sadness, and reflection.

### **Analysis of Folarin Falana's (Falz) *This is Nigeria***

Folarin Falana's (Falz) *This is Nigeria* (2018) is an adaptation of Donald Glover's (the American Childish Gambino) *This is America* in the context of Nigeria society. The song highlights the various socio-political issues in Nigeria with a focus on capitalism and corruption, internet fraud, insecurity, police brutality and religious hypocrisy through imagery and language. Having a background in law, and as the son of Femi Falana, a senior advocate of Nigeria (SAN) and human right activist, Falz used *This is Nigeria* to sensitize the Nigerian society equating his art and profession as a means of activism. Falz adopted the mixture of pidgin and English to reach out and access various minds of Nigerians regardless of the class and educational level. He also explored the storytelling style to create imagery in the mind of the audience. Therefore, some stanzas and lyrics of the songs will be subjected to critical analysis to prove the song as a means of activism.

### **Capitalism and Corruption**

Falz started the song with an introduction to provide one of the core and foundational causes he believes is responsible for the present state of Nigeria.

*Extremely poor. And the medical facilities are poor  
We operate a predatory neo-colonial capitalist system  
which is founded on fraud and exploitation  
And, therefore, you are bound to have corruption*

The lyrics above examined the poor medical facilities in Nigeria hospitals especially government owned hospital. The Nigerian government medical care center suffers several challenges such as shortages of essential resources like beds and medication, inadequate infrastructure, lack of adequate power supply, and overpopulation which leads to shortage of hospital beds among others. Dating back to 2018 when the song was released, statistics showed that Nigeria had 19,907 hospital beds with a turnover rate per bed of 99.7% and an average duration of stay of 3.3 days. This led to a 0.9 hospital bed-to-population ratio which is agreeable insufficient (Soyemi&Aborode, 2022). The introduction also highlighted the continuation of a pre-existence capitalist system adopted from the British before Nigeria gained her independence in 1960. According to Abe, Baba, and Obadimu (2025), British colonial domination in Nigeria was driven largely by economic motives to exploit valuable exportable resources and integrate them into the imperial economy, reshaping local production systems to benefit British industrial interests.

Another corrupt act Falz highlighted is the missing thirty-six-million-naira, which government clerk Philomena Chieshe claimed was swallowed by a snake (Premium Times, 2019). This incident elicited strong

reactions from Nigerians, many of them critical and dismayed. While the story may seem humorous, it illustrates the extent of selfishness and how deeply corruption has penetrated the fabric of Nigeria's workers and political offices.

### Internet Fraud

Aside from the Nigerian government indulging in neo-colonialism, Falz also highlights how the citizens have contributed to and embodied the practices of exploitation and fraud. In the song, Falz says

*Yahoo Yahoo don tear everywhere now  
And we act like it is so cool  
Casting the P, I am being castigated for just for trying to be noble*

These lyrics indicate the high rate of internet fraud among Nigerian youth, which is believed to result from unemployment. While the song condemns internet fraud and highlights the sociopolitical implications of unemployment, it also criticizes hypocrites who engage in the same acts but speak against them to maintain a clean slate—this is the literary interpretation of 'casting the P, I am being castigated for just trying to be noble.' It is crucial to note that Falz also gives credit to Nigerian youths who are struggling to make ends meet, as reflected in the lyrics below.

*This is Nigeria  
No electricity Daily o  
Young people are working multiple jobs  
And they say we Lazy o*

This lyric is a direct attack on President MuhammaduBuhari referred to Nigerian youths as “Lazy Nigerian Youths” during his interview at Commonwealth Business Forum, 2018. It also shows Falz unbiased judgement in his presentation of happenings in the Nigeria society.

### Insecurity

Insecurity has been a major issue in Nigeria for decades. According to UNICEF (2023), 276 schoolgirls were abducted in the middle of the night from their dormitory in Chibok, Nigeria. Of these, 96 girls remain in captivity, and thousands more children have been subjected to serious violations of their rights. The abduction of these female students, aged 16 to 18, was carried out by the Islamist militant group Boko Haram. However, abduction is not the only security concern; over the past three years, there have also been alarming incidents involving Fulani herdsmen and their unlawful killings, as noted below.

*This is Nigeria  
There's plenty wahalasha  
Fulani herdsmen still dey slaughter carry people dey massacre*

The crisis involving Fulani herdsmen which is framed around religious and ethnic tension in Nigeria is a complex conflict driven by fierce competition over land and resources between pastoralist Fulani herders and settled farmers. While the Fulani herdsmen are predominantly Muslims and settled farmers Christians, this ongoing struggle has led to significant loss of life, widespread displacement, and heightened insecurity, especially across Nigeria's central states. Falz uses his song *This is Nigeria* to reinforce the voices of Nigerians especially in the rural areas whose dilemma are left unattended to, and who are victims of this unlawfully killing.

### Police Brutality

Police brutality is another societal decadence faced most by the Nigerian youths. In *This is Nigeria*, Falz directly attacks the Nigerian police force, especially its Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) and other law enforcement agencies who are accused of bribery, wrong accusation and arrest and being selective in their treatment of Nigerians.

*This is Nigeria  
Look at my nation oh  
SARS stop me for road, any explanation,  
You go talk am for station oh*

The last two lines of the lyrics above highlight the corruption within the Nigerian police force. This creates imagery of how SARS unlawfully arrests and detains mostly youths, forcing them to pay money. In the music video, Falz visualizes this by showing two SARS officials arresting three university students who plead to identify themselves with their ID cards but are denied. He further depicts the corrupt practices of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad when one of the supposed criminals is released on the spot after his wealthy father offers money in exchange for his son's freedom. Uwazuruike (2021) states that 'initially created in 2018, #EndSARS was reborn after social media reports of the shooting of a young man by SARS operatives in Delta State.'

In this regard, it is possible to say that Falz's highlighting of the corruption embedded in the Special Anti-Robbery Squad in *This Is Nigeria* may have been one of the factors that contributed to the October 2020 EndSARS national protest movement. The protests called for the total reformation of the Nigerian police force across all thirty-six states. Lasting about three weeks, and supported by both print and digital media, the protests were a response to police brutality, particularly by SARS.

The Nigerian youths coming together for a common cause represents collective identity. The protesters sleeping in front of Aso Rock (the government house) and on roads demonstrates acts of transgression, as defined earlier in this paper. The protests also took on a performative structure, with various artistic acts such as singing, unified clothing, and audience participation—almost every protester held the Nigerian flag with 'EndSARS' written in red on the white portion, symbolizing the blood of Nigerians who were victims of police brutality. During the protests, participants formed human chains as symbolic representations of the struggle against brutality, often raising a fist in the air as a sign of resistance.

### Religious Hypocrisy

Falz employs sarcasm to implicitly address the issues of fake religious leaders in Nigeria. Sharing the same method with Bill Talen (Reverend Billy) in using religious language, Falz makes a joke of the pastors' tactics in his song with the lyrics:

*My brothers and sisters  
I want you to put your hands up right now  
Because your miracle is coming this week  
If you believe me, let me hear you say, Amen*

This above is a direct attack on the face wants of pastors who are highly revered and respected by their followers/worshippers and a means to sensitive the Nigerian Christians of religious commercialization where pastors pay people in pretense for miracle. The song also emphasized on how female members are sexually harassed under the pretense of prayer.

*This is Nigeria Praise and worship we singing now  
Pastor put his hand on the breast of his member  
He is pulling the demon out*

Religious commercialization is also visible at the ending of the song where Falz calls out two Famous and respected religious leaders. He states how the congregations offering and tithes are used to build privatized schools church members cannot afford to send their children because of the high cost. Falz intentional omission of the pastors and church's names agrees with one of the techniques suggested by Del Gandio (2008) in looking at language and propaganda. He ends the song stating that "*but what happens every day is that the system has allowed it*". This takes us back to the beginning of my analysis of *This is Nigeria* which provided insight into why and how Nigeria found herself in their present social political state. It is crucial to note that the constant use and repetition of "*This is Nigeria*" at the beginning of every lyric is another propaganda technique to reinforce how things are in Nigeria.

### Analysis of Folarin Falana's *Johnny*

Falz's *Johnny*, from his album *Moral Instruction*, tells a heartbreaking fictional story of a young man who was gruesomely killed by the Nigerian police. The story reveals the challenges ordinary people face in a system that often fails to protect them. The song addresses deep issues such as corruption, misuse of power, and the vulnerability of innocent lives, especially those of the youth, due to the dysfunction of the country's institutions. By juxtaposing Johnny's aspirations with his brutal fate, Falz dramatizes how even talented, ambitious youth can become victims of extrajudicial police killings. These lines reflect widespread accounts of police brutality in Nigeria, where young people are often killed with impunity.

As Afolabi and Gabriel (2025) observe, Falz released songs such as *This Is Nigeria* and *Johnny* prior to the 2020 #EndSARS protests, using them to critique systemic failures, bad governance, and corruption in Nigeria; the *Johnny* video was later released in November 2020.

This study highlights four major themes in *Johnny*, which reveal the systemic breakdown and realities of governance in Nigeria. According to Anazodo and Igbokwe-Ibeto (2015), good governance involves transparency, accountability, and allowing people the freedom to make choices and pursue their personal or collective goals. They further note that a major cause of underdevelopment in Africa is corruption and poor leadership, a problem of which Nigeria is no exception. These insights form the conceptual framework for analyzing and interpreting the themes portrayed in the song.

### Police brutality and injustice

The theme of police brutality and injustice is central to Falz's *Johnny*. The artist directly addresses police officers using derogatory language. The song begins with a short refrain:

*"JJB  
Johnny just dey come..."*

*Ahn  
Johnny just drop  
Na person shout am down  
Johnny weydeyinnocen  
Johnny weydey new in town  
Them kill am for Jos  
For no just cause”*

This introduction situates Johnny as an innocent passerby who is killed for “no just cause.” The scene highlights the random and unpredictable nature of deaths caused by police violence in Nigeria. It portrays the gruesome killing of a young man who was unarmed and innocent. The mention of the victim’s location in northern Nigeria underscores that police brutality is a nationwide problem.

In the music video, three police officers are also captured on camera shooting a young man in broad daylight. These scenes reflect Falz’s critique of the unbridled abuse of power, where police officers threaten or shoot innocent people without justification. This violation warrants a critical examination of the legal protections afforded by the Nigerian constitution, which stipulates that all persons are entitled to respect for their person and that no one shall be subjected to torture or inhuman or cruel treatment (Human Rights Watch, 2010). Similarly, the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, of which Nigeria is a signatory, provides that every individual is entitled to respect for human dignity and recognition of legal status, and that any form of slavery, torture, cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment is prohibited (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

Effectively, this song highlights the moral indictment of law abuse by Nigerian police officers. It reveals the stark contradiction between the rights granted under the law and the lived experiences of ordinary Nigerians. The song situates Johnny’s killing within the broader context of the #EndSARS movement, incorporating clips from Lekki Toll Gate and images of protest victims. Prior to the movement in October 2020, the Nigerian government had repeatedly promised reforms within the police force since the return to democracy, yet meaningful progress remained minimal. Whenever cases of police brutality, extrajudicial killings, or unlawful arrests of innocent citizens drew national or international attention, authorities typically issued similar assurances of reform (Augoye, 2020). These statements, often intended to appease public outrage, rarely resulted in tangible change (Amnesty International, 2020).

Falz, in Johnny, anticipated the eventual escalation of public dissent, illustrating that the injustices he highlighted were not isolated incidents but symptoms of a systemic problem. As observed by Owoaje and Sofola (2021), protest songs during #EndSARS frequently satirized the Nigerian police for targeting innocent youths rather than addressing actual criminal activity. Falz’s use of epithets such as “bloody bastard” and “trigger-happy nigga” exemplifies this musical satire, a recorded tradition in protest music, emphasizing citizens’ deep-seated frustration and anger.

Through vivid storytelling, sharp language choices, and emotionally charged scenes, the song’s portrayal of Johnny’s death not only presents the event but also organizes, deepens, and evaluates it, guiding the audience from merely witnessing the incident to understanding its broader meaning and moral weight.

### **Governance Failures**

Apart from police brutality and injustice, Falz also highlights the issue of corruption and poor governance in Nigeria. The song portrays Johnny’s death as not merely a random crime but as a reflection of deeper societal issues linked to corruption and governance failures. In *Johnny*, Falz interrogates the purpose of wasteful violence:

*“What you wasting all the blood for? / Sheyna religion abi culture / Abi politician weydey sponsor”*

Here, Falz implies that politicians or elites instigate conflict and division, whether for “*religion, culture*” or for personal gain. This question aligns with academic discussions on Nigeria’s deep-rooted corruption. Van Duyne and Harvey (2025) note that corruption in Nigeria is pervasive and “has become embedded within Nigerian society,” creating opaque conditions where bribery and exploitation flourish.

The lyrics, “*All because dem no oblige you when you ask me some cash,*” directly reference petty bribery, illustrating that Johnny was attacked because he refused to pay. This scenario exemplifies how even low-level police extortion reflects the overall failure of governance, where accountability and justice are often absent. The demand for “cash” in exchange for leniency typifies the petty corruption that Van Duyne and Harvey (2025) argue is enabled by systemic opacity. Falz links police brutality to the broader corruption system, demonstrating that Johnny’s death occurred due to his refusal to comply with an unjust order from a police officer.

This illustration underscores the daily threats and fears faced by ordinary Nigerians, echoing an incident in 2024 in which a businessman reportedly lost his life in Abia State after refusing a bribe requested by a police officer. It also recalls media reports suggesting that certain government agencies allegedly employed thugs to disrupt the #EndSARS demonstrations, reflecting a tendency among those in power to silence citizens’ calls for justice through coercion.

In this way, Falz's narration arranges the events surrounding Johnny's death in a manner consistent with Feldman's approach—presenting the situation, revealing its underlying structure, and allowing the audience to grasp its deeper meaning and the moral burden of corruption in everyday Nigerian life.

### Civic Consciousness and Youth Activism

The narrative employed by Falz in *Johnny*, which centers on a young man from Jos, universalizes the tragedy depicted in the song. The recurring refrain, "*Johnny just drop... Johnny weydey innocent*," highlights the vulnerability of many victims of such violence—primarily young adults with no criminal records who are just beginning their lives. This perspective encourages listeners to engage emotionally with the song, raising awareness of injustice and inspiring collective political consciousness. As Gabriel and Afolabi (2025) note, music and art during the #EndSARS protests "challenged stereotypes of youth apathy, showcasing a generation politically engaged and resolute" (p. 10).

Falz, a prominent figure among the youth and a trained lawyer, strategically connects music, popular culture, and politics. Through Johnny's narrative, he appeals to audiences to recognize their civic responsibilities. For example, when Falz sings, "*Johnny say him wan be doctor*" and "*E wan go study*," he emphasizes that the victim is not a criminal but an ordinary student with aspirations to serve society. The song thus functions as a critique of a failed system that extinguishes the hopes and dreams of the youth. It calls for societal reflection, asking, "*Why you wasting all the blood for?*" and "*What is the point of the gunshot?*" while urging Nigerians to examine their collective moral responsibilities.

Falz joined other celebrities and activists, including DJ Switch, Burna Boy, and Mr. Macaroni, in leveraging their influence during the #EndSARS movement to foster civic engagement (Aniche&Iwuoha, 2024). The line, "*Na person shoot am down, Johnny weydey new in town*," reminds audiences that the victim could be anyone. By telling Johnny's story, Falz not only draws attention to social injustice but also promotes unity among citizens. In alignment with Feldman's art-critical performance approach, the narrative guides listeners from merely witnessing Johnny's experience to understanding its broader civic significance and the moral responsibilities it imposes on the youth.

### Systemic Impunity and the Quest for Justice

Systemic impunity and the quest for justice constitute another significant theme in the song. Following the depiction of Johnny's killing, Falz portrays a familiar pattern of unaccountability, as illustrated in the lyric, "*You waste a life and try to tell me that you sorry after*." This line conveys indignation toward perpetrators who face little to no accountability, reflecting real-world patterns in which police killings frequently go unpunished. For example, Amnesty International (2017) reports that SARS officers are "rarely held to account" for torture or extrajudicial killings. Falz's condemnation, expressed in the lyric, "*Madman! waka! You be bloody bastard!*," channels widespread public anger against a system that routinely shields perpetrators from justice.

The refrain, "*Johnny continue to drop... Eyanmelo lo ma ku*" (Yoruba for "How many people will die?"), repeated at the song's conclusion, underscores that Johnny's death is "just another chapter" in Nigeria's broader narrative of state violence. By referencing multiple locations—"*Johnny drop for Borno... Johnny kpie for Plateau... Johnny drop for Lagos*"—Falz situates Johnny's case within a larger national context, emphasizing that these tragedies are systemic rather than isolated. His repeated invocation of "*Eyanmelo lo ma ku*" reinforces the imperative of collective remembrance and accountability.

This sentiment resonates with #EndSARS protesters' commitment to memory-work. For instance, the Lekki Tollgate massacre on October 20, 2020, "is etched into Nigeria's collective memory," with annual commemorations suffused with "We will never forget" imagery. Falz himself embodied this commitment: when announcing the *Johnny* video, he wrote, "*We will never forget the heroes that have been unlawfully slain... For every single Nigerian life snatched away unlawfully, we must make sure we get justice*." The song parallels this ethos, serving as both tribute and demand; by invoking Johnny's name repeatedly, Falz enshrines these young lives within the public consciousness.

### Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Folarin Falana's *This Is Nigeria* and *Johnny* constitute deliberate and strategic forms of socio-political activism, utilizing multimodal artistic strategies—lyrical composition, visual imagery, and performative rhetoric—to interrogate systemic failures in Nigeria. *This Is Nigeria* critically addresses corruption, neoliberal capitalism, insecurity, police brutality, and religious exploitation, employing narrative storytelling, symbolic imagery, and language techniques to convey the lived realities and social frustrations of Nigerian citizens. *Johnny* narrates the extrajudicial killing of an innocent young man, exposing the moral, civic, and institutional consequences of governance deficits, police impunity, and endemic corruption. By dramatizing individual and collective experiences of injustice, Falz foregrounds the human cost of systemic failures while stimulating audience reflection on broader societal issues.

Applying Feldman's art-critical performance theory, this study demonstrates how Falz's songs move from simple depiction of social issues to deeper meaning and critique. In *This Is Nigeria*, descriptive elements like lyrics and visual scenes present the realities of corruption, insecurity, and police brutality. The analysis interprets these elements, showing how Falz connects individual experiences—such as poor healthcare, internet fraud, and violent policing—to broader societal failures. Evaluative judgment emerges in the study's assessment of how effectively the songs communicate these issues and inspire reflection. Similarly, in *Johnny*, storytelling and imagery highlight the human cost of extrajudicial killings, provoking empathy and civic awareness. Through these examples, the study illustrates that Falz's music not only portrays social problems but also encourages critical reflection and collective engagement, particularly among Nigerian youth, demonstrating the practical relevance of Feldman's descriptive, interpretive, and evaluative stages in understanding activism

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