



Afrobeats and the Poetics of Depression

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ABSTRACT: This paper reads Afrobeats lyrics as literary texts, using close-reading techniques to explore how Afrobeats give voice to emotional struggle and psychological renewal. It examines the emotional and psychological expressions embedded in the genre through the concept of Afrodepression. While Afrobeats is inherently multimodal, this study deliberately foregrounds the lyric as its site of analysis. Drawing on Psychodynamic Music Therapy (PMT) as a theoretical lens, the paper investigates how Afrobeats lyrics articulate affective states such as trauma, depression, existential anxiety, and self-reclamation, treating these as thematic categories for analysis. Within this framework, Olamide ft. TI Blaze's Sometimes (Remix) (2022), Omah Lay's Soso (2022), Asake's Yoga (2023), and Shallipopi ft. Odumodublvck's Cast (2024) serves as a case study under these thematic concerns. The paper argues that Afrobeats functions as a therapeutic outlet for both artists and audiences, offering a space for emotional expression, catharsis, and self-reflection. Through recurring imagery, rhythmic repetition, and symbolic language, these songs transform private pain into collective resonance. By bringing together the interpretive tools of literary analysis and the insights of psychodynamic theory, the paper argues that Afrobeats offers more than entertainment; it becomes a form of emotional storytelling and a therapeutic language. Ultimately, the study positions Afrobeats as a psychodynamic and cultural text that embodies the complexities of African emotional life and the search for healing in contemporary society.

Keywords: Afrobeats, Afrodepression, lyrics, therapeutic, Psychodynamic Music Therapy (PMT).

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I. INTRODUCTION

Afrobeat is a musical subgenre of highlife, established by Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, who is widely regarded as its originator. Fela's Afrobeat revolutionised music in Nigeria, a fusion of traditional music with Western instruments, with its thematic preoccupation centred on Nigeria's social issues, often caused by the Nigerian government (Shonekan, 2009; Dalamu&Ayoola, 2024). In the past decade, Afrobeats has risen from a localised West African musical form to a global sonic phenomenon celebrated for its infectious rhythms, upbeat instrumentation, and dynamic fusion of indigenous and diasporic styles. Afrobeats is the dominant contemporary Nigerian music genre, characterised by its fusion of African rhythms, high-energy beats, and Highlife, Juju, and Fuji music, with a mix of local and global influences that often touch on socio-political issues (Waterman, 1990; Yusif, 2024). Spearheaded by Nigerian artists like Burna Boy, Wizkid, Davido, Asake, and Olamide, the genre has come to symbolise youthfulness, creativity, and the vibrancy of contemporary African identity. However, contemporary Afrobeats take this further by incorporating narratives of struggle, mental health, and emotional distress into their music and personalising these struggles in ways that resonate with a global audience (Gustavson et al., 2021). The lyrics of many contemporary artists reflect not only the exuberance of the genre but also the emotional and psychological turmoil faced by Nigerian youth. Mental health concerns, particularly depression, have increasingly found expression in Nigerian popular culture, particularly in contemporary music. A nuanced emotional register has begun to surface in Afrobeats, revealing a poetic undercurrent of psychological disquiet, existential anxiety, and emotional vulnerability. Increasingly, Afrobeats is becoming a vessel not only for entertainment but for the articulation of personal and collective

mental health struggles - a phenomenon that this paper refers to as the poetics of Afrodepression (Yusif, 2024; Gustavson et al., 2021). In this way, lyrical introspection and affective storytelling transform Afrobeats into a space where emotional distress is given an outlet in contemporary African life.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Although discussions regarding mental health in African popular music are increasingly receiving academic scrutiny, the emotional lexicon utilised to articulate these experiences remains insufficiently theorised. This paper presents the concept of Afrodepression as a heuristic framework for analysing how contemporary Afrobeats expresses culturally rooted experiences of psychological distress. Afrodepression encompasses not only clinical depression among African youth but also a wider cultural phenomenon where emotional fatigue, existential anxiety, and social pressure are articulated through musical and lyrical performance. For a long time, music has been a way for people to express their feelings and work on their mental health (Gustavson et al., 2021). Recent research shows even more how music shapes cultural identity and emotional expression in African and Black communities (Myrie et al., 2022). In Nigeria, new research shows that musicians are using their art more and more to raise awareness about mental health and fight the stigma that comes with being mentally vulnerable (Adebisi et al., 2024). Afrodepression, therefore, provides a conceptual framework for understanding how Afrobeats artists convert individual challenges into collective cultural expression, enabling emotional vulnerability to coexist with the genre's external aesthetics of vitality, rhythm, and celebration (Yusif, 2024). Consistent with earlier arguments that African cultural texts function as repositories of social experience and ideological negotiation (Anigala & Eguvwebere, 2025), contemporary Afrobeats similarly operates as a cultural archive through which emotional suffering, social anxieties, and psychological resilience are narrated.

The term Afrodepression, as employed in this study, encapsulates the emotionally charged expressions of pain, anxiety, loneliness, and trauma embedded in Afrobeats music, particularly among millennial and Gen Z Nigerian artists. It signals a shift in the genre's emotional narrative - from songs of material success, love, and exuberance to lyrics that subtly or explicitly reflect inner turmoil, social disillusionment, and psychological fatigue. Although the term Afrodepression occasionally appears in contemporary music commentary, it remains largely under-theorised within academic scholarship. Consequently, this study utilises the concept as an interpretive framework to analyse how Afrobeats artists express culturally ingrained experiences of psychological distress.

This paper situates Afrodepression within the broader discourse of African mental health narratives. It examines these melancholic currents in Afrobeats through the lens of Psychodynamic Music Therapy (PMT). This therapeutic framework originates in Freudian psychoanalysis and emphasises the role of music in expressing the unconscious. PMT posits that music can serve as a vehicle for catharsis, sublimation, and emotional resolution, enabling individuals to process repressed conflicts and traumas non-verbally (Bruscia, 2000; Kim, 2016). Within this framework, music is a cultural product and a therapeutic space in which artists and audiences engage in symbolic expressions of psychological realities. This approach is particularly salient in African contexts, where conversations about mental health are still emerging from the shadows of stigma and cultural silence (Gureje et al., 2005; Adebayo et al., 2021).

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Psychodynamic Music Therapy assumes that musical creation and performance provide symbolic outlets through which unconscious conflicts and emotional experiences become communicable. This aligns with Akoni and Eguvwebere's (2025) conception of the performer as an expressive medium, where performance functions as an embodied process through which internal psychological states are negotiated and communicated. In Psychodynamic Music Therapy (PMT), music is perceived as a non-verbal symbolic language that conveys unconscious emotions, internal conflicts, and desires that may be difficult to express verbally. Through musical improvisation, rhythm, and tonal expression, individuals can externalise and examine psychological tensions in ways that promote emotional insight and integration (Bruscia, 1998; Priestley, 1994; Metzner, 2015). The application of Freudian theory to music therapy further enhances the understanding of Afrobeats as a medium for exploring the tension between the id, ego, and superego. Freud (1913) posited that the human psyche is organised into three interrelated parts: the id, ego, and superego. The id embodies primal impulses and desires that pursue instant satisfaction, frequently repressed by societal and ethical limitations. The ego acts as a mediator, balancing these impulses with the realities of the external world, whereas the superego represents internalised moral codes shaped by cultural, religious, and societal norms. Utilising this model, Eguvwebere and Akoni (2024) employ Freudian psychoanalysis to analyse the character of Niru in Uzodinma Iweala's *Speak No Evil*. Their analysis posits that Niru's id serves as the epicentre of his homosexual desires, which strive for fulfilment despite the constraining moral frameworks established by his family, religion, and cultural milieu. The superego, influenced by prevailing ideologies, imposes moral judgment and repression, whereas the ego endeavours to reconcile these opposing psychic forces.

A similar pattern can be traced in the expressive world of Afrobeats. The id manifests in the unrefined and frequently unrestrained expression of emotional anguish, yearning, and fragility found in song lyrics. The artist's carefully crafted public persona, which often shows confidence, success, and resilience, is another way that the ego shows itself. The superego, on the other hand, shows up in the cultural expectations around Afrobeats, where artists are often told to sing about happiness, success, and celebration, even though their lyrics suggest that they are going through hard times. From this psychoanalytic perspective, Afrobeats can be viewed as a creative domain where conflicting psychic forces are reconciled and articulated.

As a therapeutic tool, music allows individuals to express repressed psychological content in ways that words alone may not permit (Bruscia, 2000). By applying PMT to the Afrobeats genre, this paper explores how these songs, through their sound and lyrics, function as therapeutic portals that allow both artists and listeners to engage with unresolved psychological issues, social discontent, and cultural trauma.

The core principle of psychodynamic music therapy is that music promotes emotional catharsis and self-expression, providing a secure environment for individuals to confront and examine their unconscious emotions. Bruscia (2000) and Edwards (2015) assert that music serves as a principal conduit for unconscious material, facilitating the emergence of repressed emotions and traumas. In a psychodynamic context, music serves to establish a reflective environment wherein feelings of anxiety, depression, or unresolved grief may be explored, transformed, and ultimately assimilated into the individual's conscious awareness.

The musical experience serves as both a mirror and a mask, illustrating the dual expressive quality of Afrobeats, characterised by vibrant rhythms that frequently accompany nuanced expressions of emotional turmoil. In Psychodynamic Music Therapy (PMT), musical engagement is conceptualised as a mechanism through which individuals externalise and symbolically convey internal emotional states. PMT theorists contend that musical performance and listening serve as modalities of emotional projection, enabling musicians and audiences to express unconscious emotions through sound and rhythm (Bruscia, 2000; Kim, 2016). This dynamic is especially pertinent in Afrobeats, where artists like Omah Lay and Olamide often blend stories of personal hardship and social isolation with lively, celebratory beats. The emotional dissonance between the vulnerability of the lyrics and the exuberance of the music is similar to the psychodynamic tensions described in PMT, where unconscious conflicts come to light through symbolic and emotional expression.

This paper explores how Afrobeats artists give voice to emotional distress within songs that, on the surface, radiate confidence, pleasure, and ease. By drawing on psychodynamic music therapy as an interpretive framework, the study offers close readings of four contemporary Afrobeats songs—Olamide ft. TI Blaze's *Sometimes (Remix)* (2022), Omah Lay's *Soso* (2022), Asake's *Yoga* (2023), and Shallipopi ft. Odumodublvck's *Cast* (2024). Rather than approaching these songs as purely celebratory or escapist, the paper pays attention to the introspective lyricism, recurring imagery, and emotional contradictions through which artists articulate inner tension and unease.

What emerges from these readings is a complex layering of emotional expression. Beneath the upbeat rhythms and infectious grooves of Afrobeats lie narratives of exhaustion, anxiety, and quiet despair. The lyrics imply that the genre often exists in a realm of emotional duality, where overt displays of happiness coexist with more nuanced expressions of vulnerability. In this sense, Afrobeats functions simultaneously as both a mirror and a mask. On the one hand, it reflects the lived realities of psychological struggle, social pressure, and uncertainty experienced by contemporary youth. On the other hand, it conceals these tensions beneath the pleasurable textures of rhythm, melody, and performance, allowing emotional distress to be communicated without disrupting the genre's celebratory aesthetic. This tension allows difficult emotions to be expressed without openly disrupting the genre's reputation for joy and vitality.

Seen this way, Afrobeats songs become sites of emotional negotiation. They invite listeners to encounter feelings of alienation, confusion, or vulnerability in ways that feel familiar and socially acceptable. Pain is not shouted; it is folded into melody, repeated lines, and carefully chosen words. The contrast between rhythm and ruin, between groove and grief, is not accidental but central to how Afrobeats communicates emotional truth. It is precisely this balance that enables the music to speak to a generation negotiating mental health challenges within complex social and postcolonial conditions.

By foregrounding these psycho-emotional dimensions, the study challenges dominant readings of Afrobeats that focus almost exclusively on celebration, success, or global visibility. At the same time, it adapts insights from psychodynamic music therapy not as a clinical tool, but as a way of listening more closely to how lyrics function as outlets for unconscious feeling. Within this framework, Afrobeats can be understood as a form of emotional self-care and cultural survival, offering artists and audiences a shared language through which distress can be acknowledged, managed, and momentarily relieved.

Ultimately, the paper argues for a literary reimagining of Afrobeats as more than entertainment and background sound. The genre emerges as a poetic archive of pain, a space where unspoken emotions are stored, reshaped, and released through language. In attending to the emotional release performed by Afrobeats lyrics,

this study positions popular music as a meaningful site for understanding how African youth confront vulnerability, resilience, and the ongoing work of survival in postcolonial societies.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The study proceeds from the assumption that artistic texts are embedded within the social conditions from which they emerge. This analytical perspective has informed previous socio-literary investigations of Nigerian texts (Ativie & Eguvwebere, 2025) and is extended here to contemporary Afrobeats, where lyrical expression provides insight into the emotional experiences of Nigerian youth. This study takes a qualitative literary approach, relying on close reading to uncover the emotional and psychological dimensions of selected Afrobeats lyrics. While Afrobeats, as a genre, thrives on the interplay of rhythm, performance, and visual culture, this paper deliberately listens to the lyrics (words) as a form of poetic and psychological expression. The goal is not to deny the genre's multimodal nature, but to foreground how language itself becomes a space where emotion and meaning unfold.

The analysis examines each song as a text, facilitating the symbolic release of unconscious material, adhering to the principles of Psychodynamic Music Therapy (PMT). PMT elucidates how repetition, metaphor, and tonal play in the lyrics reflect the functioning of the psyche, illustrating an unintended encounter between emotion and reflection. In this context, close reading transforms into a form of listening, attuned to nuance, ambiguity, and the emotional resonance of language.

To provide structure and coherence, the analysis is structured on four emotional and psychological themes that arise from the lyrics: trauma, depression, existential anxiety, and self-reclamation. Each theme anchors a case study: Olamide ft. TI Blaze's *Sometimes (Remix)* (2022) is read as a meditation on survival and depressive struggle; Omah Lay's *Soso* (2022) as a text of wounded vulnerability; Asake's *Yoga* (2023) as a narrative of grounding and spiritual renewal; and Shallipopi ft. Odumodublvck's *Cast* (2024) is depicted as a portrait of disillusionment and self-assertion in the face of societal pressure.

By reading these songs through PMT and close reading, the paper seeks to elucidate how Afrobeats lyrics translate private feeling into shared experience. The method, therefore, balances literary sensitivity with psychological insight, positioning Afrobeats not only as a cultural text but as a therapeutic language through which emotional pain and resilience are expressed.

V. ANALYSIS

5.1. Depression and the Struggle for Survival - Tiblaze ft Olamide- *Sometimes Remix* (2022)

In "Sometimes Remix", Olamide and TI Blaze confront existential despair with lyrics that poignantly capture the emotional vulnerability of modern life. The line:

They call me T I Blaze

Hmm yoyo oh oh

Every day man, ah been knocking

Every time man ah been working

Steady grinding wan tire me

But I no fit quit hustle for mummy (Hustle for mummy)

These lines introduce the artist, T I Blaze, and describe his daily struggles. He is constantly working and grinding, feeling tired but unable to quit because he needs to provide for his mother. He also suggests that material possessions, such as food, do not always bring him joy, hinting at a deeper emotional struggle.

"Sometimes food no dey give man joy."

This line uses synecdoche, where "food" stands for the basic pleasures and comforts of life that have lost their meaning or their capacity to bring joy. This evokes a sense of psychic emptiness and narcissistic injury where external comforts no longer soothe the internal pain, mirroring the Freudian concept of the pleasure principle failing to bring satisfaction.

Why life come hard

Na every time I dey sad (Ayy)

...

They said I have gone astray

These lines show T I Blaze's emotional pain and sadness. He mentions "excessive bombing" and "military" dating, possibly referencing a tumultuous relationship or inner turmoil. He feels far from his mother and worries about her perception of him, fearing she thinks he has gone astray. This stanza highlights his emotional struggles and feelings of disconnection.

But no one to ginger me

I ginger myself

I woke myself, then I said to myself

Boy Blaze, remember what mama said

Sooner or later them go hear my cassette for their radio

In this verse, Olamide describes T I Blaze's feelings of isolation and disconnection as an up-and-coming artist. He has no one to motivate or encourage him, so he must self-motivate. Olamide recalls his mother's advice and his own goals, hoping to achieve success and recognition ("them go hear my cassette for their radio"). This stanza highlights his resilience and determination to succeed despite challenges.

Aimoyeshenking but no loose guarding

Lorulorulafinboshe

Why life come hard

And man no wan to do bad (to do bad)

Cause I no wan suffer later

Na every time I dey sad (Ayy)

These lines repeat earlier themes, with T I Blaze expressing his vigilance and focus despite life's challenges. He questions why life is hard and reiterates his desire to avoid doing bad things, fearing future suffering. The stanza ends with a repetition of "Na every time I dey sad," emphasising his ongoing emotional pain.

RabbanaAatinaFilduniaHasanatan

WafilAakhiratiHasanatan

WaQinaAthaabalNaar

Mi o sheynigbana

Auzubillahminashaitannirajeem

Erukutigberusara bi ẹ ni to lo gym

These are a prayer or invocation, seeking blessings and protection from harm. T I Blaze asks for blessings in this life and the next and seeks refuge from the fires of hell. He also says, "Mi o sheynigbana," which means "I don't want to go astray." The final two lines are a mixture of Yoruba and Arabic phrases, with "Auzubillah" "mina shaitan nirajem" being a common Islamic phrase for seeking refuge from Satan.

Lorulorulafinboshe

Why life come hard

And man no wan to do bad (to do bad)

Cause I no wan suffer later

The final four lines of the lyrics reveal a heartfelt cry for solace and protection from suffering. With the words "Cos I no wan suffer later", they express a deep-seated desire to avoid future pain, hinting at a sense of foreboding or anxiety. This fear is coupled with the admission, "Na every time I dey sad", showcasing the artist's ongoing struggle with emotional pain. In a poignant prayer, they seek blessings and protection from a higher power, asking for "good in this world and good in the hereafter" and refuge from the "fires of hell". Finally, with the Yoruba phrase "Mi o sheynigbana", the artist longs for guidance, confessing, "I don't want to go astray" or lose their way. Through these lines, the artist's vulnerability, emotional depth, and yearning for direction shine through, creating a mental picture of the experience of the average Nigerian youth.

Olamide's lyrical tone is characterised by an understated melancholia, which complements his musical delivery. His words often carry a rhyme scheme that reinforces the repetitive nature of emotional distress.

5.2. Trauma and Vulnerability - Omahlay- Soso (2022)

Soso, take my pain away

Soso, take my pain

"Soso" encapsulates the essence of emotional exhaustion through the metaphor of seeking relief from pain. The first stanza of the lyrics is a repetition/call of Soso to take away his pain. These opening lines of *Soso* are a haunting expression of OmahLay's emotional pain and desperation. The repetition of "Soso take my pain away" is a cry for help, a plea to escape the overwhelming pain he is feeling. The use of "pain" in different ways ("take my pain", "take my pain away", "pain, pain, pain") emphasises the intensity and urgency of his emotions. The addition of "mad" suggests that the pain is driving him to the edge of sanity. The repetition of this phrase becomes a mantra, a desperate attempt to will away the pain and find some sense of relief. It is a powerful and emotional opening to the song, setting the tone for the rest of the lyrics.

Ahn, ahn

All of the things them talk, I no dey hear, hear

Try wetin I do if you no dey fear, fear

One mind dey tell me to disappear, 'pear

Soso, come and help me, oh 'cause I don pray

Maami, I don break commandment

I can't stay for one place

For God sake, oh my dear

Come take my pain away from me, oh
Soso, take my pain away (take-take, take, take-take)
Soso, take my pain (soso, please, come take my pains away)

In these lines, OmahLay expresses his emotional numbness and disconnection from the world around him. "All of the things them talk, I no dey hear, hear", suggests that he is tuning out the opinions and criticisms of others, unable to cope with their words. The line "Try wetin I do if you no dey fear, fear" implies a sense of hopelessness and desperation, as if he is trying to find a way to escape his emotional pain but is unsure of how to do so.

The phrase "One mind dey tell me to disappear, 'pear" is a chilling admission of suicidal thoughts, highlighting the severity of his mental health struggles. He is crying out for help, asking, "Soso, come and help me, oh", and acknowledging that he has prayed for relief but feels like he has broken spiritual commandments ("Maami, I don break commandments"). The "spiritual commandments" OmahLay refers to are likely a personal and cultural reference to his spiritual beliefs and values. In the context of the song, it seems that he has broken some moral or spiritual code, leading to feelings of guilt, shame, and disconnection from his spiritual practice or community. In Nigerian culture, where OmahLay is from, there are various spiritual traditions and beliefs, including Christianity, Islam, and traditional African religions. The specific commandments he refers to may relate to any of these traditions or to a personal blend of spiritual beliefs. Some possible interpretations of the "commandments" he feels he has broken include: moral codes or rules within his religious or spiritual community, personal promises or commitments he made to himself or others or spiritual principles or values that he feels he has compromised.

The repetition of "Soso take my pain away" becomes a desperate plea for relief, with Omahlay begging for someone or something to take away his pain. The use of "For God sake, oh my dear" adds a sense of urgency and desperation, emphasising the depth of his emotional suffering.

Cut my dreadlocks
Girlie, me, I don't pray
Maami, I don break commandment
I can't stay for one place
For God sake, oh my dear
Come and ginger me
Only you dey feel my pains
Give me vitamins wey go take these pains away
Soso oh, soso, soso, oh
Sosotake my pain away (take-take, take, take-take)
Soso take my pain (soso, please, come take my pains away)
Soso take my pain away (so, so, so-so)

In these lines, Omah Lay expresses a sense of humiliation and shame, asking to "Cut my dreadlocks." This alludes to Samson's hair being cut in the Bible, which strips him of his powers. He repeats the phrase, "Maami, I don't break commandment," suggesting a sense of guilt and remorse for past actions. The line "I can't stay for one place" implies a feeling of restlessness and disconnection.

The plea, "For God's sake, oh my dear," adds a sense of urgency and desperation, like he is begging for help. "Come and ginger me" is a Nigerian phrase meaning "come and encourage me" or "come and soothe my pain".

The line "Only you dey feel my pains" suggests that he feels isolated and alone in his suffering, like no one understands his emotional pain. "Give me vitamins wey go take these pains away" is a metaphor for seeking healing and relief.

The externalisation of pain reveals a regressive tendency in Omah Lay's character, invoking Freud's theory of projection, in which the artist projects his emotional conflict onto others, hoping for external intervention.

5.3. Self-Reclamation and Spiritual Renewal - Asake -Yoga (2023)

Yoga yoga I dey on my away
I deymaya
Make nobody kill my yoga, yoga
 ...
Make nobody kill my yoga, yoga

In this context, *yoga* is a metaphor for peace or a mental state. These lines highlight the artist's desire to protect his mental well-being, which he represents through *yoga*. He repeats, "I dey on my away," indicating a need to escape or find solace. The phrase "Make nobody kill my yoga" suggests a fear that external influences will disrupt his mental balance. The repetition of *yoga* and "I deymaya" creates a sense of urgency and desperation, emphasising the importance of maintaining mental stability. In terms of psychological therapy, these lines

suggest a desire for self-care and protection from external stressors. Asake may be advocating for setting boundaries or finding healthy coping mechanisms to maintain his mental health.

Enemies, I get them too much

It is better to get them surplus

Who go dey for you no go take off

Hmm hmmoju tele gan (Oju tele gan)

("Hmm, hmm, I have seen so much (I have seen so much))

Modupe, mothank God

(I give thanks, I thank God)

Omoloremogbayemokeko

(I, a child of misfortune, have succeeded and learned)

Ori labietetiegbe ko

(A wise head listens while the group remains silent)

Ilu labi magic ko soro (Magic ko soro)

(The city is imbued with magic; magic does not speak (Magic does not speak))"

Asake confesses to having too many enemies, which could represent external struggles or negative thoughts that overwhelm him. The phrase "It's better to get them surplus" suggests a sense of resignation or hopelessness, as if he feels like he cannot escape these enemies. The line "Who go dey for you no go take off" implies loyalty from feeling trapped, like he cannot break free from these negative influences because they always have a way of staining his name.

The repetition of "Oju tele gan" creates a sense of urgency and desperation, emphasising the artist's emotional struggle. He then shifts to a tone of gratitude, saying, "Modupe, mo thank God" and acknowledging his struggles with "Omo lore mo gay mo keto," which means "I'm tired of my life." This contrast highlights his complex emotional state, oscillating between desperation and gratitude.

The lines "Ori labietetiegbe ko" and "Ilu labi magic ko soro" suggest a desire for escape or solace. The artist's head spins as he searches for a magical solution to his problems. This reinforces the idea that he is struggling to cope with his emotions and is desperate for a way out (therapy through music).

What can fa?

What can fa?

Keep distance if you wan come whine me

Ma lo fa

Ma lo far

I still balance, I still gallant

Alubarika

Bara mi mecca

Para pass para

Al'asake tin pa dollar ah-ah

Here, Asake is asking rhetorical questions, "What can fa? What can fa?" which could be translated to "What can happen? What can happen?" or "What's going on? What's going on?" He expresses uncertainty or confusion.

The next line, "Keep distance if you wan come whine me", suggests that he is setting boundaries, warning others to keep their distance if they are not real with him (unfriendly friends/haters). The repetition of "Ma lo fa/Ma lo far" emphasises the need to maintain emotional balance and stability. Asake asserts his confidence and resilience, saying, "I still balance, I still gallant," which means his ability to maintain composure and dignity despite challenges.

"Alubarika/Bara mi mecca" suggests seeking spiritual guidance or blessings, while "Para pass para" indicates different levels of anger and desperation. Finally, "Al'asake tin pa dollar ah-ah" could be translated to "Asake doesn't need money" or "Asake is not materialistic," emphasising his focus on spiritual growth and emotional well-being over material wealth.

The rest of the song repeats the chorus, serving as a mantra or refrain that reinforces the main themes and emotions. The repetition creates a sense of urgency, emphasis, and unity, tying the whole song together.

In this context, the chorus "Yoga, yoga, I dey on my away... Make nobody kill my yoga, yoga" serves as an emotional anchor, underscoring the artist's desire for balance, harmony, and protection against negative influences. The repetition also creates a sense of intimacy and vulnerability, as if the artist is sharing his innermost thoughts and feelings with the listener. It is like a personal mantra, a reminder to prioritise our emotional well-being and maintain our spiritual balance in the face of adversity.

5.4. Existential Anxiety and Societal Pressure - Shallipopi ft Odumodublvck – Cast (2024)

They call me Shallipopi

(B', Busy)

Say, say-say-say (wahala)

Say, say-say-say

Worldwide Plutomainians, that na normal thing (eh)

Presido with the big machine (confirm)

Your girlfriend friend wanna suck my thing (eh)

But no be that kind person I be (mole eh)

If I puff smoke, give you and you no pass (eh)

You no pass, that means say e don cast (e sharp)

In Naija slang, "cast" often refers to being exposed, caught, or revealed - there is an unconscious fear of being seen too clearly or being found out. However, Shallipopi turns this into empowerment - embracing the fall, which suggests an inner working through of shame and self-acceptance.

"Cast" sees Shallipopi and Odumodublvck explore themes of betrayal and paranoia, using repetition and visual imagery to evoke a sense of psychic fragmentation. The lyrics carry a metaphor of being "cast" or "exposed," which, in psychodynamic terms, symbolises the fear of public rejection or narcissistic collapse. This underscores the ego's vulnerability, which fears being unmasked and exposed as less than perfect.

The song starts with the lead artist introducing himself as Shallipopi. The repetition of "say" and "wahala" (a Nigerian Pidgin English term for trouble or chaos) creates a sense of urgency and energy, which is what makes it resonate as a club and street anthem.

The line "Worldwide Plutomainians, that na normal thing (eh)" suggests that the artist is part of a global community (Plutomainians) where these kinds of events or betrayals are common.

The next line, "Presido with the big machine (confirm)," could be interpreted as a reference to power, status, or sexual prowess.

The lyrics then take a provocative turn with "Your girlfriend friend wanna suck my thing (eh)" - a clear reference to sexual desire.

However, the artist quickly clarifies that they are not interested in casual encounters, saying, "But no be that kind person I be (mole eh)".

The following lines: "If I puff smoke give you and you no pass (eh) You no pass, that means say e don cast (e sharp)" suggest a sense of testing or challenging someone, with "e don cast" implying a sense of rejection or exposure. On a deeper level, Shallipopi implies that when a friendship is no longer mutual, it becomes toxic, turning the situation negative and souring camaraderie.

No last chance (eh)

E don cast oh (wahala)

E don cast oh, e don cast

Weii, e don cast (clear road oh)

E don cast, e don cast (say-say)

Say, e don cast (eh, no go dey)

Ehn, e don cast oh, e don cast (eh)

E don cast, e don cast (wahala)

Say, e don cast (no go dey)

This part of the lyrics continues the theme of rejection and finality, focusing on moving on and exploring new connections. The repetition of "e don cast" emphasises that a decision has been made and that there's no going back. The phrase can be interpreted as a form of reaction formation - putting up a brave front to cover deeper vulnerability. The use of "wahala" and "clear road oh" suggests a sense of impending doom and a determination to forge a path.

Pluto, are you feeling the vibration? (ODUMODUBLVCK)

Sensational, abobi condition am, eh

Willy-willy practitioner

This one naseñoritaabinamacita? (All)

Big kala need your bunda, pam am (gun)

If she no fuck oh, if she no suck (prraa)

Who go pay for her wig and handbag? (None)

When e wan sup, she gohalla big gun (never)

All along, she dey follow me boss, loss

Punish me like African mom (gbo)

Shallipopi, who go mount us? (Gbo)

Odumodublvck's verse brings a new level of playful, sensual, and confident energy to the song, exploring themes of desire, pleasure, and relationships.

He starts by asking if Pluto (likely a community of fans) is feeling the vibration, setting a sensual tone. The line "Sensational, abobi condition am, eh Willy-willy practitioner" suggests a sense of excitement and exploration, with "abobi" meaning "my brother" and "Willy-willy" possibly referencing sexual prowess.

The next line, "This one naseñoritaabinamamacita?" is a playful way of asking if the person is a "señorita" (young lady) or "mamacita" (older woman), showing curiosity and interest.

The lyrics then take a more explicit turn with "Big kala need your bunda, pam am (gun) If she no fuck oh, if she no suck (praa)", emphasising sexual desire and pleasure.

The following lines, "Who go pay for her wig and handbag? (None) When e wan sup, she gohalla big gun (never)" suggest a transactional relationship, where material goods are exchanged for sexual favours.

The verse ends with a playful jab at traditional authority, saying, "All along, she dey follow me boss, loss Punish me like African mom (Gbo)" and "Shallipopi, who go mount us?" (Gbo)", possibly referencing the commercialisation of sex despite the strict moral ethics of African mothers.

Comot body, we dey burn kpef (okay, eh)

For the context, cash, cast

Obrigado, on a conquest

Worldwide Plutomainians, that na normal thing (eh, worldwide)

Presido with the big machine (confirm)

Your girlfriend friend wanna suck my thing (ahh)

But no be that kind person I be (mole eh)

If I puff smoke give you and you no pass (ehn)

You no pass, that means e don cast (no be sharp boy?)

No last chance (eh), e don cast oh (wahala)

E don cast oh, e don cast

Weii, e don cast (clear road oh)

E don cast, e don cast (say-say)

This section is a repetition and variation of previous lyrics, with some new additions.

"Comot body, we dey burn kpef (okay, eh)" suggests a carefree attitude, letting loose and enjoying oneself.

"For the context, cash, cast Obrigado, on a conquest" implies a sense of determination and focus, with "Obrigado" possibly being a reference to a conquest or achievement.

The repetition of "Worldwide Plutomainians, that na normal thing (eh, worldwide)" and "Presido with the big machine (confirm)" reinforces the themes of global connection and confidence.

The lyrics "Your girlfriend friend wanna suck my thing (ahh) But no be that kind person I be (mole eh)" reiterate the speaker's disinterest in casual encounters.

The section ends with a repetition of the "e don cast" refrain, emphasising rejection and finality. The phrases, "no be sharp boy?" and "clear road oh", reinforce the idea of moving on.

The musical dissonance and the sharp, staccato beat amplify the track's dark, aggressive tone, adding to the feeling of psychic unrest. The lyricism incorporates a repetition of "Cast," creating an intense sense of psychic imprisonment in which the artist feels trapped in the cycles of paranoia and defensive projection. This obsessional repetition is often common in people dealing with unresolved internal tensions or trauma. Through this, the song conveys the literary poetics of internal conflict - struggling with an identity in crisis. The rhythmic, almost hypnotic beat allows for a trance-like state, supporting emotional release and nonverbal processing.

VI. INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

The emotional struggles represented in Afrobeats are not simply personal experiences but reflections of wider social realities. This supports the socio-literary proposition that cultural texts encode collective anxieties and historical conditions (Ativie & Eguvwebere, 2025). The selected songs by Omah Lay, Asake, Olamide, and Shallipopi offer a glimpse into the lives of many Nigerians today. They touch on sensitive topics like mental health and the desire to escape the difficulties of everyday life. These themes resonate deeply with listeners, making the songs incredibly popular. One reason for their resonance is the high level of stress and anxiety in Nigerian society. Many people struggle to make ends meet, facing poverty, unemployment, and political instability. The songs provide a voice for those struggles, validating listeners' emotions and experiences. By incorporating song excerpts and emphasising their literary devices, we better understand how these Afrobeats songs use figurative language, symbolism, and repetition to convey complex psychological and emotional states.

Each song offers a narrative of Afrodepression, in which the tension between external appearance and internal reality plays out through literary poetics, revealing how Afrobeats serves as both a reflection of cultural trauma and a cathartic release for listeners. These artists use metaphor, repetition, and irony to craft songs that speak to the psychic fragmentation inherent in Afrodepression. Consistent with Eguvwebere and Aihebholoria's (2022) argument that metaphor structures public understanding of complex realities, the figurative language employed in these songs enables artists to articulate psychological distress in culturally resonant ways that extend beyond literal descriptions of depression.

The analysis of songs like Tiblaze ft Olamide - *Sometimes Remix* (2022) highlights the prevalence of stress, anxiety, and coping mechanisms in Nigerian society, with music serving as a means of escape, solace, and community. These songs validate emotions and experiences, giving voice to the frustrations and desires of a generation. The themes of escape, frustration, and disillusionment in Asake's *"Yoga"* (2023) and Omah Lay's *"Soso"* (2022) underscore the need for positive change and better societal outcomes. The study also demonstrates how the Afrobeat genre, with its distinctive street vibes and cultural essence, shapes the impact of Nigerian song lyrics. Its characteristic rhythms and melodies, combined with the contemporary influence of Nigerian Amapiano, create a unique sound that resonates with listeners across economic backgrounds, amplifying themes of mental health, intimacy, and substance narratives. The selected songs demonstrate the universality of psychological struggles within the Afrobeats narrative.

Furthermore, they emphasise the collective trauma and psychological impact of cultural dislocation, societal pressure, and emotional repression experienced by the African diaspora. As such, Afrobeats transcends its role as a genre of entertainment and becomes a psychotherapeutic tool, offering an alternative form of therapy that resonates with its audience's cultural and emotional realities. This analysis underscores the vital role of music in addressing the psychological needs of individuals and communities, illustrating the dynamic relationship between art, psychology, and emotional healing in contemporary African music culture.

VII. CONCLUSION

Globally, music has played a vital role in addressing mental health issues. From blues and jazz to hip-hop and Afrobeats, artists have used their craft to express pain, resilience, and healing (Aliyeva, 2024). The selected lyrics suggest a society grappling with complex issues of identity and well-being. By acknowledging and addressing these issues, Nigerian society can promote positive values, well-being, and resilience among its youths, and help them understand the values, desires, and challenges of young Nigerians, as well as the role that music plays in shaping and reflecting their experiences (Gustavson et al., 2021). The findings of this study reveal that Afrobeats songs offer an extensive reflection of the country's societal challenges, cultural norms, and psychological factors. Afrobeats music, when analysed through the lens of psychodynamic music therapy, reveals is a powerful medium for emotional exploration and self-expression, especially in addressing the complex experiences associated with Afrodepression. The genre provides an avenue for emotional catharsis, enabling artists and listeners to confront and process feelings of grief, anxiety, and existential disillusionment. The integration of psychoanalytic theory into the analysis of Afrobeats reveals the symbolic meanings and metaphorical language embedded in the songs, mirroring the techniques of psychodynamic therapy to unearth unconscious material. By engaging with the repetitive lyrics, rhythms, and melodic structures, listeners can reflect on their own psychological struggles, potentially leading to emotional healing and self-reflection. Afrobeats not only offers an engaging musical experience but also serves as a reflective space where listeners can process and heal from their psychological and emotional wounds, making it a significant cultural force that bridges the worlds of music and therapy.

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