



## **Mental Health and Identity Crisis in Abidemi Sanusi's *Kemi's Journal* And *Zack's Story***

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### **Abstract**

In recent years, mental health has become imperative as the individual is constantly overwhelmed by internal conflicts. While existing literature explores this theme, this study focuses on two underexplored novels: Abidemi Sanusi's *Kemi's Journal* and *Zack's Story*. Mental health, identity crisis, spirituality and societal expectations are factors that continually mould an individual's personality. The novels provide a compelling and insightful exploration of these factors, and this study examines how they are portrayed in the main characters of the novels. Using Freud's Psychoanalysis and Erikson's Psychosocial Theory, the research analyses the characters' internal conflicts and their journey toward self-discovery. Findings are that the path to psychological stability is complex but driven by resilience and the pursuit of authenticity. The ability to sustain mental health amid identity struggles is essential for personal growth and fulfilment in today's challenging world. Ultimately, the study not only fosters a deeper understanding of the psychological implications of navigating multiple identities and managing mental struggles but also suggests practical ways in which literature can be used as a tool for education, empathy, and inclusion, making a compelling case for the power of storytelling in addressing complex social issues.

**Keywords:** mental health, identity crisis, psychoanalysis, spirituality, societal expectations

## Introduction

In recent years, the exploration of the complexities of human existence, mental health, and personal identity has gained prominence in scholarly discourses. For literary studies, authors have also continued to highlight the psychological landscapes of their characters and express their internal struggles to maintain their sanity and survive in modern life. Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stressors of life, realize their potentials, learn, relate and work well, and then contribute to the development of their community (Carney and Robertson, 2022). It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships, and shape the world we live in. Wikipedia further suggests that mental health determines how an individual handles stress, interpersonal relationships, and decision-making. From the perspectives of positive psychology or holism, mental health may include an individual's ability to enjoy life, create a balance between life activities, and make efforts to achieve psychological resilience.

Identity crisis, as a significant mental health concern, is a phase many people go through when they question or reassess who they are or desire a sense of belonging. Identity is basically important for social connection and overall wellbeing, although it is very subjective and happens when an individual's sense of self becomes insecure, unstable, and not clearly defined. According to Medical News Today, the period of identity crisis happens during the fifth stage of Erikson's stages of development. During an identity crisis, a person "tries on" different identities and ways of being. They may question their family's values and cultural norms and begin developing their own system of values and unique personalities, separate from their family. At the end of this stage of development, a person either resolves the crisis and has a firm identity or has identity confusion. In Erikson's theory, an identity crisis is a normal, predictable part of healthy development.

*Kemi's Journal* and *Zack's Story* by Abidemi Sanusi stand as seminal works in this regard, offering insights into mental health, and personal identity. *Kemi's Journal* presents readers with an intimate portrayal of Kemi, a young British-Nigerian woman faced with the challenges of navigating through her personal desires, spirituality, and societal expectations. While *Zack's Story* is a sequel and almost a response to *Kemi's Journal*. Sanusi invites readers into Kemi and Zack's inner world, where we witness their joys, sorrows, and, most importantly, their internal struggles through the stream of consciousness mechanism. The novels tell a story of two narrators in love. Readers are also confronted with the struggles of other characters, the complexities of their quest for identity, and the impact of spirituality and societal expectations on their individual well-being. In this study, the term "identity crisis" extends beyond alienation and dual cultural heritage to focus on the characters' search for self and the impact of spirituality and societal expectations on this quest.

Central to our analysis of *Kemi's Journal* and *Zack's Story*, is the application of Freud's psychoanalytic theory and Erikson's Psychosocial theory to offer valuable insights into the complexities of modern life, personal identity, and mental health. By examining the novels using these theories, the study explores the mental state of characters, examines the manifestation of the identity crisis and the search for self, and investigates the influence of spirituality and societal expectations on the characters' personal identity, mental health, and psychological. The overall emphasis is on literature as a tool for education, empathy, and inclusion, making a compelling case for the power of storytelling in addressing complex social issues.

### **Theoretical Clarification**

To explore mental health and identity crises in Abidemi Sanusi's *Kemi's Journal* and *Zack's Story*, this study adopts two theories to offer valuable insights into the interaction of the conscious and unconscious mind, the formation of personality, and the potential for internal conflicts that can manifest as both mental health struggles and a multifaceted identity crisis. These theories are Freudian Psychoanalytic theory and Erikson's Psychosocial theory, which are explained in the following:

#### **Freudian Psychoanalytic Theory**

Sigmund Freud conceptualized the Psychoanalytic Theory after he observed that there is a connection between repressed ideas and the impulses that regularly crop up to the consciousness of an individual ("Psychoanalysis," n.d.) Freud's psychoanalytic theory posits that the human mind is structured into three distinct parts: the id, ego, and superego. The id represents the unconscious reservoir of primal desires and drives, the ego acts as the mediator that strives to fulfil these desires in socially acceptable ways, and the superego represents the internalised societal norms and morals, spiritual beliefs and an individual's personality. All these govern human behaviour. This tripartite model emphasises the role of the unconscious in shaping behaviour and personality ("Psychoanalytic Theory," n.d.)

According to Freud, the conscious mind is aware of the present perceptions, memories, thoughts, and feelings. It exists as the tip of the iceberg. Under this conscious mind, a preconscious mind carries the available memory. From this preconscious mind, a person can retrieve memories into the conscious mind. There is no dispute about the two layers of the mind (Freud, as cited in Sibi, 2020.) Freud's perception suggested that these two layers are only the smallest parts of the mind. The larger part is the unconscious. All the things, which are not easily available at a conscious level, such as our drives or instincts, memories, and emotions associated with trauma. Like an iceberg, the unconscious mind plays an important part of the personality. It acts as the repository of primitive wishes and impulses. (Main, 2023.)

### **Erikson's Psychosocial Theory**

Erik Erikson, influenced by Freud, developed the psychosocial theory of development, which emphasizes that personality evolves across the lifespan through social relationships. He proposed eight stages, each with a core conflict essential for healthy development ("Psychosocial Theory," n.d.).

The Psychosocial theory focuses on the understanding of self, identity formation, social relationships, and the mental processes connecting individuals to their social world. According to the theory, development is the result of continuous interactions between individuals and their environments. For Newman and Newman (2020), adolescent development is characterized by normative psychosocial crises, which are predictable tensions that emerge from the conflict between individual needs and societal demands throughout life. It highlights the crisis of adolescence, where individuals struggle with establishing a personal identity versus feeling confused about who they are. However, the crises are not isolated events, but rather ongoing processes that can be revisited and reintegrated throughout life, shaping an individual's sense of self and their relationship to the world.

The fifth stage of Erikson's eight developmental stages, which is Identity vs. Role Confusion, is relevant to the theme of identity crisis explored in Sanusi's *Kemi's Journal* and *Zack's Story*. This stage, occurring during adolescence, centres on the individual's quest to establish a coherent sense of self amidst the complexities of social expectations and personal values. Successful navigation of this stage leads to a strong sense of identity and purpose, while failure can result in confusion, uncertainty, and a lack of direction. In stage 5, the ego identity crystallises, the two opposing qualities are ego identity and confusion/diffusion. Those who develop ego identity yield the virtue of fidelity, while the inability to do so – ego confusion – creates a quality of repudiation. With a stronger sense of ego identity, the interaction with the outer and inner world is of rejecting incongruent evaluations of self and a decreased level of anxiety, respectively.

### **Synopsis of Abidemi Sanusi's *Kemi's Journal* and *Zack's Story***

*Kemi's Journal* (2005) tells a story of the female-protagonist, Kemi as she navigates her dilemmas as a Christian woman, trying to find a balance between her Christian creed and her personal desires. Her dilemma springs from her love for God, Zack; an unbeliever, and her constant fall into premarital sex. Through her internal monologue or stream of consciousness, the reader is introduced to her mental crisis and emotional turmoil as she wonders if "God [really] understand[s] the kind of challenges people like me face every day" (Sanusi, 2005, p. 6). Her confusion is made worse when juxtaposed with her seemingly perfect Christian's friend, Vanessa. Vanessa's piety contradicts Kemi's mental and spiritual turmoil – she desires Zack to satisfy her personal/sexual urge and God to maintain her spiritual balance. The novel reaffirms that there is a growing emphasis on exploring mental health

challenges in contemporary literary works with greater honesty than the silence and stigma that were attached to such discourses in the past.

On the other hand, its sequel, *Zack's Story* (2006) offers a perspective on the identity struggles and moral dilemma of the protagonist, Zack, who has to deal with the issue of being a mixed-race individual with no knowledge of his parentage. Zack has to handle his identity crisis, balance his new-found Christian faith and also deal with other of his life challenges. Both novels adopt the first-person narrative technique to address everyday struggles and moral questions faced by contemporary individuals.

### **Mental States and Internal Conflicts in the Novels**

*Kemi's Journal* and *Zack's Story* both explore several mental health concerns portrayed through the life of some characters in both novels. Such mental health cases include Kemi's depressive mood and anxiety, Zack's traumatic experiences and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and Foluke's neurotic disorder. Freud's theory of Psychoanalysis provides us with the tools to analyse these characters' unconscious minds, the portion of their mental process that operates beneath their conscious awareness and influences their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.

According to Freud, internal conflicts often arise from clashes between these unconscious forces and the conscious mind's attempts to maintain control and adhere to social norms. Understanding mental states necessitates exploring the unconscious or unresolved conflicts from the hidden domain, which can manifest as anxiety, depression, irrational behaviours, or other forms of mental distress, as seen in some of the characters. Kemi's thoughts, behaviours, and emotional experiences, reveal her struggles with desire, her attempts to reconcile conflicting beliefs, and moments of intense guilt or self-sabotage; as manifestations of the dynamic interplay between her id, ego, and superego.

*Kemi's Journal* was written as journal entries of the protagonist, giving us a vast insight on her thoughts and feelings, from her unconscious, maybe intrusive thoughts, to her interaction with other characters. The first-person perspective of the novel helps us dig deep into Kemi's personality. At the beginning of the novel, Kemi is dissatisfied with the reality of her life, she lives a life in which she does not live for herself but for God. She wishes to satisfy the needs of her id which wants to party, be more social, and shake her "boogie" on a yacht. However, she finds herself going to church, attending prayer meetings, living "a glitzy advertisement for Boring Inc," (Sanusi, 2005, p. 7) life, and even deciding to keep a spiritual diary. Kemi shows signs of emotional stress from thinking about things she would want to do if this "Christianity stuff" (Sanusi, 2005, p. 8) were not a hindrance. She believes the church is stealing her joy, as without the moral codes and orders of chastity, she will willingly be with Zack, her ex (Before Church). She even goes ahead to define God as "the great joy stealer who gives people impossible needs that cannot be met by his archaic rules," (Sanusi, 2005, p. 42), a statement she writes after she finds herself sleeping with Zack. Her desire for Zack steams up a majority of her depression and inner conflict.

It is clear that Zack has a significant impact on Kemi's mental health: "Felt so despondent after Zack left, I cried and totally indulged in a reassuring bout of self-pity" (Sanusi, 2005, p. 12). Even after she chooses Zack over God, her emotional turmoil continues, she feels guilty and is not comfortable with the choices she makes, "I felt suddenly overwhelmed with depression. Why do I keep lying to myself?" (Sanusi, 2005, p. 76). Her conflict results in an on and off relationship with Zack with the depressive states negatively impacting her daily functionality. The low mood, and feelings of hopelessness that characterise depression can make it difficult to complete even basic tasks. Kemi's ability to concentrate, make decisions, or participate in work is significantly impaired as she struggles to not think about Zack, "Can't concentrate, I keep on thinking of the Holy Spirit and what a disappointment I must be to him. Then I think of Zack..." (Sanusi, 2005, p. 20).

Kemi's depressive state is further triggered by her job, which she appears not to enjoy very much. At the beginning of the novel, she ponders on whether to go to work or call in sick. She complains about her colleague, Robert, who she thinks is unfortunate that he sits opposite her because "he's got a pretty bad body-odour problem" (Sanusi, 2005, p. 10). Kemi's boss, Amanda, also doesn't make work easier for her, she then decides to quit her job, however, after attaining remarkable success with the Singing Diaper contract, she remains in the job and her inner conflict continues: Notable to this study is how she assumes what people think about her, even before she is confronted. After she puts her difficult colleague Sharronne in her place, she convinces herself that "the whole office thinks I'm a paranoid religious fundamentalist who cannot hold onto her clients... if I'm still in this job next week, it'll be a miracle" (Sanusi, 2005, p. 58).

Kemi's depressive episodes hit the roof on Friday July 27, where her diary entry says, "I think I'm pregnant" (Sanusi, 2005, p. 106). Kemi gets pregnant and her mental health falls into its most tragic state throughout the novel, she now has to deal with the consequences of her actions, and the egotistical needs of her Id finally leaves her at the peak of her emotional turmoil. Her interior conflict starts to reflect on her exterior: "They said I looked poorly and should have called in sick" (Sanusi, 2005, p. 107). This internal turmoil manifests itself as depression, difficulty sleeping and guilt. "My eyes hurt. I've been crying non-stop for over a week. I wish I could rewind the tape of my life. All I ever thought about was my desires. I wanted Zack and I didn't care how I got him. And now, this" (Sanusi, 2005, p. 120). Instead of loving her unborn child, Kemi resents it, and plans to terminate the pregnancy, while she blames Zack, saying "It was all his fault. I was fine. Doing okay in church, trying to serve God. But Zack had to come hover around like a lovesick puppy" (Sanusi, 2005, p. 113). Kemi's depression heightens, she feels "dead inside" (Sanusi, 2005, p. 143).

The protagonist of *Kemi's Journal* wholly embodies Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theories on many instances, her id which is represented by Zack "the devil's incarnate," has more influence over her personality, her ego, which can sometimes be seen in her parents, constantly struggles to justify the id's behaviour and make it socially acceptable, while her superego, the aspect of the

human mind responsible for establishing moral and societal codes is represented by Vanessa, Pastor Michael, The Sanctified, and all the religious factors surrounding her. Notably, Kemi's depression also stems from the suffocating weight of external expectations. Her constant concern about the judgment of her society, her family and the church specifically creates her internal conflicts.

Anxiety is also one of the defining attributes of Kemi's mental health. Anxiety is an emotion which is characterised by an unpleasant state of inner turmoil and includes feelings of dread over anticipated events. From a psychoanalytic perspective, anxiety can be understood as a signal of internal conflict, often rooted in the unconscious mind. For Freud, anxiety arises when the ego struggles to manage the demands of the id and the superego, fearing a loss of control or the disapproval of others. Kemi's recurring anxiety reveals a profound fear of loneliness, this fear, rooted in her unconscious mind, fuels a deep-seated conflict within her psyche. Her nightmare about being "40 years old, single," (Sanusi, 2005, p. 75) vividly illustrates her fear of isolation. While she attempts to rationalise this fear, her anxiety betrays a deeper desire for companionship. This suggests a conflict between her conscious acceptance of societal norms and unconscious yearnings for a different path. This conflict is further highlighted in her statement, "I want someone of my very own. If I stay in church, I will not find that person" (Sanusi, 2005, p. 79). Here, Kemi recognizes a clash between her desire for intimate relationship with the opposite sex and the limitations imposed by her religious community that may prioritise singleness and discourage proactive seeking of a partner. Her anxiety stems from projecting herself into the future, envisioning a life without love (Zack). This fear ties into an unconscious belief that being alone equates to unhappiness. Her mental state resembles an unstable, divided house.

In *Zack's Story*, a sequel to *Kemi's Journal* by Abidemi Sanusi, we encounter a Kemi who is now navigating the complexities of marriage and motherhood. Married to Zack, and mother to their young child Yanis T, Kemi finds herself in internal conflict once again. Her id drives her with a strong desire to return to her career, while her superego, influenced by societal and familial expectations, pressures her to prioritise nurturing her child. Zack, who represents the voice of her superego, complicates matters further by suggesting that Kemi's wish to resume work stems from selfishness. He also manipulates her guilt over her past consideration of terminating her pregnancy, using it as leverage to criticise her desires: "That's because you know what you're like deep down inside. You never really wanted Yanis." (Sanusi, 2006, p. 51). This external manifestation of her superego in Zack, increases her inner conflict and takes a toll on her mental health. She starts to doubt herself, "Maybe there's something wrong with me. I thought I could do it...the mother thing...but there are times I resent him so much..." (Sanusi, 2006, p. 53). In response, Kemi's ego steps forward to mediate between these conflicting desires. Striving to establish a balance, she enrolls Yanis in a nursery, choosing to return to work regardless of Zack's disapproval. Although going back to work and nurturing at the same time feels rather fulfilling for Kemi, the decision is not an easy one as she constantly experiences both the physical and mental stress of doing both.

However, this decision is an example of the ego's role in negotiating between the desires of the id and the moral demands of the superego. By taking this step, Kemi captures the essence of Freudian psychological theory, embodying the struggle of the id, with the ego and the superego in the quest for mental and emotional balance.

Sanusi also reveals the complex mental health struggles of Zack, Kemi's on-again-off-again boyfriend and later, husband. Shaped by a childhood marked by abandonment and unresolved trauma, he exhibits a pattern of behaviour suggestive of trauma bonding, unresolved grief, and a deep longing for acceptance. Erikson's psychosocial theory, which emphasises the impact of social interactions on personality development across the lifespan, provides a valuable lens to analyse Zack's inner conflict. In *Kemi's Journal*, we see Zack's attachment to Kemi's parents, even after their breakups, highlighting a deep-seated need for the love and familial connection he has been denied of, as a child. Kemi's statement, "He's like a son to them" (Sanusi, 2005, p. 33.) This yearning for acceptance connects to an unconscious fear of rejection, potentially making it difficult for him to assert boundaries in his relationship with Kemi's parents. He confesses: "I am just a boring lawyer who craves familial stability..." (Sanusi, 2006, p. 36). Furthermore, the nature of his relationship with Kemi, despite her repeated betrayals, suggests the presence of trauma bonding. His inability to let go, even when recognizing the unhealthy dynamic, stems from Zack's painful past. Kemi's intermittent affection triggers a subconscious hope that, like his childhood trauma, he can eventually find resolution and the stable love he craves. This hope fuels a dependency on her, regardless of the emotional pain it causes. Through the lens of Erikson's theory, Zack's unresolved trauma can be linked to potential difficulties he may have faced during the stages of Trust vs. Mistrust (infancy) and Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt (early childhood).

Zack's conversation about his parents in *Kemi's Journal*, also reveals emotional scars, it hints at repressed anger, grief, and an internal conflict in his perception of God. His anger likely arises from the abandonment he has experienced and the resulting hardships he faces as an orphan. This unresolved trauma potentially hinders his spiritual connection and makes it difficult for him to internalise a sense of love and safety. The haunting loss of his unborn child from his previous relationship with "that woman" (Sanusi, 2006, p. 7) also compounds his trauma: "She killed my baby without telling me and that's what you're planning to do" (Sanusi, 2005, p. 115). By linking this unresolved grief to Kemi's situation, Zack demonstrates fear and an inability to distinguish between past and present. This suggests the lingering impact of trauma, and hints of PTSD, manifesting as a desperate need to control and protect himself from further emotional devastation. His fixation on preventing another loss, and going as far as suing Kemi, explains his relentless insistence that Kemi keeps the child, even at the expense of her well-being. Erikson's stage of Intimacy vs. Isolation (young adulthood) emphasises developing close, committed relationships. Zack's fear of abandonment and inability to separate past from present suggest he might be struggling at this stage.



A deeper dive into Zack's mental health and internal struggles is seen in his own narrative account, *Zack's Story*. Zack frequently recalls Kemi's initial thought of aborting the baby, letting this memory cloud his judgment and convince him that Kemi lacks love for their child: "Kemi just doesn't want to be with Yanis. After all, she did try to abort him" (Sanusi, 2006, p. 42). His past trauma and having to fight to keep baby Yanis alive, dominate his unconscious mind copiously affecting his conscious manifestations and somewhat triggering an irritation towards Kemi and her desire to get back to her normal career life. Consequently, both of them are seen arguing a lot more in *Zack's Story* than they ever have.

The effect of Zack's trauma heightens during a business trip to Liberia, where he unexpectedly encounters Grace, his ex-lover who had ended the life of their unborn child. Zack is overwhelmed with anger, due to his deep-seated hatred for Grace, whom he had only been able to refer to as "that woman" because "...her name was very inappropriate" (Sanusi, 2006, p. 7). Despite Grace's apparent transformation into "Mother Theresa" (Sanusi, 2006, p. 89), living with and aiding locals affected by the war in Liberia, Zack sees this as a facade and finds himself unable to forgive her or reconcile with his past: "...nothing could erase what she'd done to me. I still hated her. And the more time I spent with her, the harder it was for me to control my dislike for her" (Sanusi, 2006, p. 89). This encounter leaves him distraught; he keeps it from Kemi and dreads spending a week in Liberia working alongside Grace. Generally, Zack's trip to Liberia intensifies his inner turmoil. Witnessing the war's aftermath, visiting a displacement camp, and hearing the harrowing tales of George, a child soldier, added to the emotional burden he carries. This experience leaves a lasting mark on his psyche. From a Freudian perspective, Zack's inability to manage his past trauma translates to a reliance on repression, a core defence mechanism.

By burying his emotions, particularly those tied to Grace, he likely sought to minimise pain and maintain a sense of control. However, this strategy backfires in Liberia, forcing the repressed emotions to the surface, shattering the illusion of control he has carefully constructed. This breakdown highlights the limitations of repression – while it may offer temporary relief, it doesn't eliminate the underlying emotional turmoil.

Foluke is also significant to our mental health and internal struggle discourse. *Kemi's Journal* portrays Foluke, Kemi's cousin, as a deeply troubled individual struggling with unresolved past traumas, confusion about her identity, and speculated mental health issues. Although Kemi labels her as "an absolute nutter" (Sanusi, 2005, p. 11), Foluke's behaviour suggests a more complex situation that warrants a compassionate perspective. Foluke's experience reveals a history of trauma, "abused when she was a child" (Sanusi, 2005, p. 23) and highlights her attempt to make sense of her experiences. Her decision to "come out" and her "fascination with women and the things that can progress us in the way of the ancient goddesses" (Sanusi, 2005, p. 23) could be interpreted as her search for self-understanding and an alternative sense of belonging after uncovering a painful past. Foluke's actions are a manifestation of her emotional

turmoil and desire to find healing. The pressure Foluke feels from her parents, who believe they have "offended God" due to her being different, contributes to her inner turmoil. Kemi's statement, "There's enough stuff in there to keep a therapist in business for life" (Sanusi, 2005, p. 23) shows the extent of Foluke's neurotic disorder. Her emotional volatility and tendency to view life in extremes are apparent in her abrupt switch from embracing faith to rejecting it completely after Kemi's moral failures. This suggests a fragile sense of self that is easily swayed by external circumstances.

Furthermore, Kemi's reluctance to engage with Foluke "...I've refused. Emotional, mental, spiritual and hormonal imbalance reasons and all that. And the fact that I would want to hurl myself over a cliff once I leave her presence" (Sanusi, 2005, p. 25), reveals the strain placed on relationships and interaction with people due to mental health struggles. Additionally, in *Zack's Story*, Foluke still struggles. Although I would personally say she has made great progress mentally, we still see her going against her whole family and insisting on marrying some "penniless gold-digger lover" (Sanusi, 2006, p. 106) she meets online. Her behaviour indicates a longing for acceptance, leading her to settle for a partner who merely professes love without genuine connection. "I just want to be happy. To have someone of my own...Why is it so hard?" (Sanusi, 2006, p. 108), she expresses to Zack in a conversation, revealing the unconscious motive behind her rebellion. Supporting Foluke, like other mentally struggling individuals, will demand a level of empathy, selflessness and sacrifice.

### **Spirituality, Societal Expectations, and the Impact on Mental Health and Identity in the Novels**

*Kemi's Journal* and *Zack's Story* invite us to examine the impact of spirituality and societal expectations on mental health and identity development. Through the Freudian and Erikson lenses, we analyse how these external forces shape internal conflicts, influencing the characters' sense of self and psychological well-being. The tension between rigid religious codes, the pressure to conform, and the pursuit of authentic expression provides a fertile ground for exploring these psychodynamic concepts and their relevance to human struggles with self, faith, and societal norms.

Kemi's religious faith often functions as a defence and coping mechanism, shielding her from the full weight of her anxieties and internal conflicts. Religion, Freud believes, is an expression of underlying psychological neuroses and distress, an attempt to gain control over the external world. Kemi's adherence to strict religious codes offers her a sense of control and moral superiority, helping her suppress unacceptable desires (id) driven by her yearning for intimacy. Her daily verses serve as a source of guide and direction. "These daily verses. There are days when they're my lifeline and I drink them like water in the desert and there are days when I can barely stand to read them because I'm afraid of what I'll find" (Sanusi, 2005, p. 41). Zack, in his journey as a born-again Christian, also attests to the consolation he draws from the verses in their daily devotion: "I was becoming dependent on these Bible verses...the

more verses I read, the more I was compelled to read" (Sanusi, 2006, p. 75). Notable is how these verses correspond to their current life circumstances and experiences.

Faith serves as a way to manage anxieties and guilt, temporarily easing the tension between the unconscious desires and the demands of the superego. Moments when Kemi's faith thrives she would write, "I'm going to church tomorrow... The only place I've been able to get sensible help from has been the church" (Sanusi, 2005, p. 92) and she frequently affirms, "I can do all things through Christ. I'm strong. I'm a born again demon-kicking, spirit-filled Pentecostal believer!" However, as *Kemi's Journal* progresses, the fragility of faith as a defence becomes evident as Kemi's inner conflicts intensify and her faith falters, "I am not going to church today. It's not like I can't worship God in the privacy of my own house" (Sanusi, 2005, p. 101). For Kemi, religious beliefs shape her mental health and identity, acting as a double-edged sword that provides both comfort and contributes to inner conflict.

The rigidity of religious systems and the internalisation of strict moral codes can create significant mental health challenges. Characters like Vanessa demonstrate how internalised religious expectations can lead to self-doubt and struggle to reconcile natural desires with perceived spiritual imperatives. The pressure to conform to these idealised images like the "Jesus sister" persona can foster a sense of inadequacy and perpetuate an unhealthy suppression of one's true self. While faith can offer solace and a sense of purpose, it can also become a source of internal conflict, anxiety, and a fragmented sense of self. Sanusi, in both novels, highlights the importance of finding a balance between personal authenticity and spiritual traditions, emphasising the need for flexible, compassionate faith that allows individuals to integrate their natural desires and vulnerabilities without self-condemnation.

In the same manner, societal expectations have a powerful influence on the characters, creating external pressures that significantly impact their psychological well-being and sense of identity. The characters struggle with the pressure to conform to prescribed roles and expectations. Kemi in particular, feels burdened by societal expectations surrounding marriage and family life. Her recurring nightmare of being a lonely single woman at 40 represents her fear of societal disapproval and judgment. Her life choices are heavily influenced by the opinions and societal expectations that she constantly considers. "I needed them to not think badly of me" (Sanusi, 2005, p. 79); "I didn't want everyone looking at me and judging me for staying with Zack" (Sanusi, 2005, p. 83); "What would everyone say?" (Sanusi, 2005, p. 113). This constant pressure to embody an idealised version of herself, hinders her ability to explore her true desires and forge a genuine sense of self.

The constant battle between her unconscious desires and the fear of societal disapproval fuels anxiety, which manifests as recurring nightmares, emotional outbursts, and difficulty navigating decisions about her future. Kemi's obsession with public opinion runs her sanity to the ground till she gives in and owns up to her true self. Similarly, strict moral codes create guilt and shame around

Kemi's sex life, hindering her ability to experience intimacy without self-condemnation. This guilt is a tool the superego employs to punish her for her indulgence of her desires (id). The conflict between her natural urges and the fear of disapproval creates a mental prison, leading to a state of deep despair and emotional exhaustion.

Both *Kemi's Journal* and *Zack's Story* portray characters who struggle with societal pressures to conform to predefined roles, exemplifying Erikson's concept of how societal expectations can restrict individual exploration during Identity vs. Role Confusion. Their journeys highlight the importance of achieving a balance between fulfilling societal roles and carving out a path that aligns with one's authentic self. The pressure to conform can lead to anxiety and a sense of inauthenticity, as seen in Foluke's fragmented identity. Zack, raised without knowledge of his heritage, and a lack of fundamental sense of belonging, struggles to define himself outside of societal labels. Vanessa's decision to break free from societal expectations and explore her own desires highlights this quest for self-discovery. Kemi, amidst her internal conflict, struggles with the desire to reconcile her faith with a more personal and fulfilling existence. These quests for authenticity, while sometimes messy and challenging, demonstrate the characters' desire to find their own place in the world, separate from societal and religious dictates.

Ultimately, *Kemi's Journal* and *Zack's Story* serve as reminders that the journey toward self-discovery and mental well-being is often shaped by the complex interplay of religious beliefs and societal expectations. By dissecting the characters' experiences through both Freudian and Erikson lenses, we have gained a deeper understanding of how internal conflicts and external pressures influence the delicate balance of the human psyche. The theories succinctly highlight the complexity of internal conflicts, the role of unconscious motivations, and the lifelong process of self-discovery.

### Conclusion

*Kemi's Journal* and *Zack's Story* provide a compelling and insightful exploration of the intertwined nature of mental health and identity development. By employing Psychoanalytic and Psychosocial theories, we gain a deeper understanding of how the characters' internal struggles, societal pressures, and spiritual beliefs shape their experiences. The novels remind us that the path toward self-discovery and psychological well-being is complex and often fraught with challenges. However, they also highlight the inherent human resilience and the enduring desire for authenticity and wholeness. The study, ultimately invites us to reflect on our own internal conflicts, the influence of external forces, and the ongoing journey of forging a true sense of self

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