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**Faculty of Letters and Languages**  
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Master Degree in Literature and Civilization**

**Self-actualization in Akwaeke Emezi's Freshwater**

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المشرف مذكرة الماجستير.

Self actualization in Akwaa

Emogi's Freshwater.

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## **Declaration**

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## **Dedication**

*I dedicate this work first and foremost to myself*

*To my dear parents*

*To my siblings*

*To Chaima, Hadjer, and Manel*

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## **Abstract**

The ‘self’ is a complex concept, which beholds a number of connotations to the individual’s own reflective consciousness. In this research, we tackled this concept with reference to the protagonist of Akwaeke Emezi’s *Freshwater* (2018). This study is initiated by a dual assumption of the self as it manifests through internal and external realities. Concerning the inner self, it is viewed as a plural entity compiled of a number of partitions. On the other hand, the outer self is a motif that is relative to different disciplines and schools of thought. With regards to that, the study will investigate such concept from the outlooks of sociology, spirituality and psychology respectively.

**Keywords:** self, sociology, spirituality, psychology, psychoanalysis, self-actualization, Jung, Freshwater, Emezi

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## **General Introduction**

Youths have a lot of concerns. It is true, they are constantly striving to be acknowledged by their parents, their peers, the community, and themselves. It does not help that the world of today is drenched in postmodern ideologies, which carry little to know certainty. This is what evokes the feeling of loss in young adults. So they end in an existential dilemma highlighted by the question “who am I?” The answer to this question lies in the word ‘self’, which indicates one’s core existence. In the context of self, researchers and thinkers alike took diverse directions to work out a solid definition. On the one hand, there exists the religious perception which links the self to the metaphysical terms ‘soul’ and ‘spirit’. On the other hand, there is the term ‘identity’ which connotes a social construct. Additionally, the self is also associated with the mind and its consciousness in psychology. The aim of this study stems from the manifold connotations of the word self, especially the social, spiritual and psychological points of view. In this regard, this dissertation will tackle the concept of self-actualization in the case of the protagonist of the novel *Freshwater* (2018) by Akwaeke Emezi.

As a work of African literature, *Freshwater* comes with a number of expectations highlighted by a postcolonial attribute. Surely, the novel does deliver a ‘reconstructive’ performance via the centralization of Igbo ontological beliefs. . This deployment of mystical elements categorizes the novel under the magical realism mode, which is common in postcolonial writing. Significantly, magical realist writers seek to challenge what the western traditions label as realism by creating a shared platform in which fantastical elements blend with the real and neither dismiss the other. Decidedly, authors from South American and African descents adopted this literary mode to challenge cultural imperialism by illustrating the third world consciousness as more than just exotic otherness. They take inspiration from

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their people's mythologies and folktales to both represent and appropriate their cultures. African writers in particular opt for incorporating elements from local traditional oral sources which carry in themselves fantastical elements. This gives the African magical realist writing a sacred spiritual value, for it carries ontological overtones.

African writers such as Achebe, Morrison and Ben Okri have their share of magical realism works. In novels such as *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *Beloved* (1987), and *The Famished Road* (1991), the authors integrated spiritual beliefs from their traditional religious backgrounds for the purpose of sustaining beliefs that are dissolving from the collective memory of their people. Generally, authors of this genre opt for reticence by refraining from explaining the ontological elements in their writing for the purpose of reconstruction. *Freshwater* is yet another literary work that incorporates ontological beliefs of Igbo people. However, Emezi does it differently from other works from the mother continent by placing such beliefs in a forward stance in regards to the narrative. Hence, the supernatural beings are given voice and authority to narrate the majority of the work from the first person perspective, leaving a narrow opening for rationalizing predispositions of 'the real'.

The main character in *Freshwater* is a girl named Ada. This girl supports an unusual existence, the author labels it as 'born with a foot on the other side'. The other side implies the metaphysical world that is beyond material reach. Ada is contaminated with inhuman creatures named 'Ogbanje' (see chapter 3) with whom she share her mind and her body. This transports Ada to a liminal space between a number of binary opposites amongst which is life and death, human and spirit, and good and evil. In her liminality (which later turns into a numinosity) the protagonist lives a life full of painful events to finally arrive at developing a sense of self. The metaphysical beings that dwell in the marble of Ada's mind are spiritual beings whose manifestation transcends the matters of the heart. As a result, they conquer the mind and they are capable of embodiment. Hence, the accomplishment of a 'true' self is

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parallel to that of an ‘inner’ one. This is because Ada’s bildungsroman is finalized when she assembles the different parts of her self. Notably, the author of *Freshwater* does not limit Ada’s case to spirituality only, but indicates compensatory ‘diagnosis’ to her condition. From there, this study aims to investigate the plural nature of the self and then synthesize that such phenomenon is reached via the merging of its social, spiritual and psychological interpretations.

Admittedly, the concept of the plural self and the fractured identity is common in the critical responses *Freshwater* received. In the review posted by The Guardian for instance, Ayòbámi Adébayò wrote: “It is a fitting culmination for the extraordinary journey *Freshwater* charts, a manifestation of Ada’s realization that she is irrevocably an amalgamation of all her varied and even divergent selves”. On the other hand, a number of writers recognized the novel’s efforts in challenging western assumptions of identity by identifying with indigenous Igbo beliefs. An example is Eric Anderson’s article which was posted in Openlettersreview. In this article, the writer acknowledged *Freshwater’s* distinction from fellow African literary works that focus on young women’s struggles in diaspora such as Adiche’s *Americanah*. In favor of *Freshwater*, Anderson claims: “Emezi’s book charts the way in which Ada comes to trust her inner reality rather than adjusting to what the external world wants to impose upon her.” Alternately, Patti Wahlberg recognizes the novel’s multi-faceted interpretations in Seattle Review of books through the author’s “exploration of age-old philosophical topics and current cultural concerns such as morality, self-harm and the meaning of gender”. It seems however, that the concepts of mental illness and gender identity are the ones that attract attentions the most. In The New York Times, Tariro Mzezewa wrote “It is an unflinching account of the way mental illness can grow, transform and destroy not just relationships, but one’s sense of self as well. Unlike many depictions of dissociative identity disorder in fiction, Emezi steers clear of hysteria and

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fear-driven drama.” In the context of gender identity however, Karolína Zlámalová dedicated her Master’s degree dissertation to discuss the gender issue in relation to self-identity.

When asked to introduce the novel’s main character, Emezi used the expressions ‘plural individual’ and ‘singular collective’ to refer to Ada. This took place in Asian American Writers’ Workshop, in which the author was guested. In the interview, Emezi disclosed few important details regarding the nature of the protagonist’s case. For instance, the uniqueness of Ada’s cognitive system goes back to neurodivergence which denotes atypical mental functions. In addition, the author raised a point that it is quite unnecessary to judge Ada and her ‘others’ as either good or bad. This is due to the fact that each alter has a unique vision and attitude vis-a-vis the world. Based on that, we will approach the plurality of the self from a Bakhtinian perspective for the sake of uncovering the polyphonic nature of the work which manifests both formalistically and contextually.

The study’s second goal is to determine the meaning of self through the fusion of its sociological, spiritual, and psychological interpretations. For this purpose, a syncretistic multi-disciplinary approach will be adopted. The second chapter of this dissertations will be approached from a sociological point of view since the self is bound to social relations. Therefore, we will provide an interpretation for the main family structure in the novel, which is the family of the protagonist. With references to Murray Bowen’s family therapy, and John Bowlby’s attachment theory, we aim to locate the dysfunctions that hinder the early stages of the development of self. Afterwards, the sociability of the self will be taken to a broader context as part of the protagonist’s immigration life. Significantly, we will tackle certain postcolonial themes such as displacement, diaspora and acculturation.

The postcolonial themes will be sustained in the third part which prioritizes the spiritual context of self. For starters, historical records of the missionary’s role in the colonial

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plan in Igboland will be revisited. Then, an overview of Igbo cosmological beliefs will be provided to clarify the conceptuality of such beliefs in the literary work studied. Again, we go back to the concept of the self to refer to it from the outlook of Igbo ontological beliefs. Finally, the self will be studied from a psychological stance. Specifically, the Jungian psychoanalytical theories, which Murray Stein gathered in his *Jung's Map of the Soul* will be the backbone of the content in this part. The categorization of Ada and her 'others' in accordance to Carl Jung's map of the psyche will go ahead of unraveling the 'self' archetype. Finally, delineating the 'individuation' process will bring the previous Jungian elements together since such process is deemed crucial to achieve wholeness of the self.

## Chapter 1

### 1.1 Introduction:

Regardless of the interpretation of the case of the protagonist of *Freshwater*, which entails existing in cohesion with alters, we deduce primarily that the self is a compound. Emezi's narrative structure supports such claim through the juxtaposition of internal and external realities of Ada. As seen in the plotline, the 'alters' interact both within one another and outwardly. As a result, a cacophony of consciousness is manifested in the novel, where each has their own perception of phenomena without overwhelming the other. This notion is to be discussed in the first part of this chapter using a <sup>1</sup>Bakhtinian approach, which will cover the concepts of polyphony, dialogism, and the carnivalesque. The second part specifies the tripartite nature of Ada's self as reflected in the narrative voices. Therefore, it is dedicated to provide an analysis of the triplet narrative voices which are: 'we', Asughara and Ada.

### 1.2 A Dialogue of selves

*Freshwater* is a story with a 'rebirth' narrative arc, its plotline follows the momentum of sufferance, recognition and transcendence. Decidedly, it is a <sup>2</sup>bildungsroman, for "The subject of these novels is the development of the protagonist's mind and character, in the passage from childhood through varied experiences—and often through a spiritual crisis—into maturity; this process usually involves recognition of one's identity and role in the world." (Abrams and Harpham 255). This growth is interpreted as developing a sense of self, which is the main topic for this research work. In the context of the novel, the author presents the protagonist as one part of a whole, for both her mind and body are shared by otherworldly creatures. So in order to fulfill the bildungsroman, Ada has to acknowledge her

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<sup>1</sup> In reference to the language philosopher, and literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin.

<sup>2</sup> A German term signifying "novel of formation" or "novel of education."

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'others' in order to be unified with them to arrive at her true 'self'. In this plurality, the 'alters' are also main characters, who prove to be just as worthy of Ada. From two particular 'others' who possess narrative authority ('we', Asughara), to fellow archetypal characters (Saint Vincent, Yshwa), the author gives voice to such internalized realities allowing them to be heard externally. As a result, *Freshwater* gains a polyphonic attribute as seen in Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of the novel.

If we were to view Ada's 'others' as mere 'voices' in her head then we can say that Emezi succeeded in catalyzing the polyphonic novel both formalistically (since Bakhtin is associated with this school of criticism), and literally. In *Discourse in the Novel* Bakhtin wrote that "The novel as a whole is a phenomenon multiform in style and variform in speech and voice. In it the investigator is confronted with several heterogeneous stylistic unities, often located in different linguistic levels and subject to different stylistic controls" (261). Indeed, the various stylistic voices indicate a variety of speech styles and voices including the author, everyday speech, formal and informal discourses of writing, and the distinct style each character brings about. Therefore, the linguistic richness of the novel is similar to the way language pervades cultures on a daily basis. It is in this interaction of discourses that the novel gains its polyphonic attribute which "implies not only a plurality of voices, but also a genuine encounter among the various subjective points of view" (Steinby and Klapuri 40).

In this regard, *Freshwater* manifests a plurality of consciousness illustrated by the different forms of language use present in the narrative. For instance, the authorial voice of Emezi is distinguished by the lyrical style, which evokes intense emotions in the reader making one feel as if they are perceiving the world for the first time. In addition to that, the



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epigraphs<sup>3</sup> present at the head of each chapter in the literary work serve as the echoing voice of the author in the reader's mind. Such epigraphs hint at crucial elements in the plotline as well as clarifying the ambiguities in them. An example is the eleventh chapter's epigraph, which is written as follows: "You will always be in the process of change because every time you get born into a basilisk, that basilisk consumes itself so you can be born into another basilisk." This connotes to a number of things. Firstly, the significance of the snake in Igbo culture in addition to their belief in reincarnation. Moreover, there is an implication that the main character is to undergo change after hardships because joy blossoms out of pain.

Given the fact that *Freshwater* is an autobiography, there is none obscuring the author's consciousness from prevailing in the narrative. Still, Emezi performs "aesthetic contemplation, in which the author sympathetically co-experiences the hero's life but still remains at the distance of another human being to him" (Steinby and Klapuri 38). In other words, even if Ada's story is inspired by events the author underwent, the protagonist exists in the narrative autonomously through actions and consciousness as expressed by her speech. This type of free-agency is what made Bakhtin drawn into Dostoevsky's works. He was fascinated by the Russian author's polyphonic novels in which he:

creates not voiceless slaves (as does Zeus), but free people, capable of standing alongside their creator, capable of not agreeing with him and even of rebelling against him [...] A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels. What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event. (Bakhtin 6).

Just like Dostoevsky's, Emezi's novel is one that is driven by the consciousness of the characters as reflected in their use of language. Whereas the author steps back from the

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<sup>3</sup> Short statements placed at the beginning of documents or chapters.

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central authorial position, allowing the characters to genuinely share their subjective points of views.

Just like Emezi dissociates with Ada despite their relatedness, to each of the characters their own truths that they confront each other with. This is because “Whenever someone else’s “truth” is presented in a given novel, it is introduced without fail into the dialogic field of vision of all the other major heroes of the novel” (Bakhtin 73). Certainly, to each of the partitions of Ada’s self their own distinctive outlook on the world. These individualized views are brought to the surface when they are presented with one another, when they are ‘dialogized’. Hence, Ada steps closer to actualizing her ‘self’ when she listens to the voices within her without allowing them to muffle her own voice, for that is that is the exact purpose of polyphony: allowing all the voices to be heard without restrictions.

However, the internal realities must interact with external ones in order to fulfill their utmost dialogic purpose, which is the actualization of self in the context of this study. Since ‘The loss of the self comes from separation, dissociation, and enclosure within the self’ (Friedman 27), Ada has to step outward and listen to the external voices of consciousness to make ends meet. In that sense, the internalized dialogues (with her ‘others’), and the externalized ones (with friends, family, and other individuals) blend together despite their variations, mirroring the novel since the latter “is caught between centripetal or unifying forces on the one hand and centrifugal or divisive forces on the other hand--forces that squeeze it together, giving it shape, and forces that pull it apart.” (Davidson 11). An instance takes place in the twenty first chapter of *Freshwater*, where Ada meets a priest named Lechi who “read her and prophesied and tested her” (Emezi ch. 21).and then “he reached inside us (this is ‘we’ narrating), through us, and he pulled the Ada out into the light”. After that, “Ada was ready to take her own front”.

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Since the polyphonic feature of *Freshwater* manifests at the core of narrative through the voicing of metaphysical creatures in contrast with humans, it is deduced that this work of literature contains a carnivalesque aspect. Initially, most magical realist works have a sense of carnival because of this literary mode's ability of normalizing 'absurd' phenomena. As a result, "Carnival becomes a fictional shorthand, invoking a tradition of cultural politics of resistance" (Cooper 24). This way, Emezi challenges 'formalities' and substitutes them with other realities that are reasonable both in Igbo culture, and in the novel respectively. The most distinct manifestation of carnival in *Freshwater* happens to be in a scene of a carnival. In this scene, the protagonist attends a masquerade ceremony during the harmattan<sup>4</sup> season. While the folk are dancing, the metaphysical creature "occupy their own space and play out their dramas in their own time dimension" (Cooper 25). Indeed, "Masquerade ceremonies invite spirits, giving them bodies and faces" (Emezi ch. 2). This is the ultimate imagery of an order that is overthrown. The physical bodies swap places with the non-physical existences. So while metaphysical is alive and communicating outwardly, the physical is thrashing around completely oblivious of its whereabouts.

In extension to the carnivalesque elements in *Freshwater*, Emezi utilizes the grotesque imagery to transgress boundaries of internal and external realities. As we explained earlier, the carnival depicts the ambivalence of life, which makes it incomplete since it is in a never-ending cycle of contradictions. The grotesque concept of the body is an elaboration to that, for it pictures the human body in distorted abnormal ways. On this, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White wrote: "To complete the image of grotesque realism one must add that it is always in process, it is always becoming, it is a mobile and hybrid creature, disproportionate, exorbitant, outgrowing all limits, obscenely decentred and off-balance, a figural and symbolic resource for parodic exaggeration and inversion." (9). Therefore, such

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<sup>4</sup> A season in West Africa characterized by cold-dusty wind. It lasts from November to March.

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imagery portrays unfinished metamorphosis of birth and death, symbolizing growth and becoming, which is exactly what the novel studied is about. Considering Freshwater, there are a number of motifs in the context of the grotesque body. For example, the terms ‘flesh’ and ‘skin’ are constantly referred to as objects of sacrifice. The following passage is one of many grotesque scenes that take place in the novel: “She raised the blade ... and she dropped it on the skin of the back of her hand, in a stroke that whimpered. The skin sighed apart and there was a thin line of white before it blushed into furious red wetness” (Emezi ch. 4).

Due to the nature of the grotesque, the “abomination of the fleshly” as seen in *Freshwater* is often accompanied by a rebirth of some sort. For instance, the alter Asughara came to being after Ada was raped. In her words, Asughara says: “I was a child of trauma; my birth was on top of a scream and I was baptized in blood” (ch. 7). These are also common circumstances in births: the mother’s body undergoes deformation for the purpose of delivering a new life. This is reminiscent of Hermann Hesse’s ‘rebirth’ analogy which he wrote in his *Demian* (1919). The analogy goes as such: “The bird fights its way out of the **egg**. The **egg** is the world. Who would be born must first destroy a world” (78). Likewise, each demolishing act Ada’s body undergoes leads to the forging of a part of herself. After all, “Everything is shedding and everything is resurrection” (Emezi ch. 22).

Since the violation of the flesh enriches the non-physical part of one’s existence, it is deduced that the interior of the body bears more importance than its exterior. The cutting, the starving, and the tattoos were all means through which Ada acknowledge her ‘other’ and enriched her sense of ‘self’. In other words, she dismisses the worldly to embrace the eternal metaphysical. William Shakespeare addresses this exact theme in Sonnet 146 where he warns against focusing on external beauty at the expense of values that enrich the soul. In this poem, the relationship of the interior and exterior parts of the body is symbolized by a gloriously decorated mansion that is poor and empty on the inside. The poet the proceeds to

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wonder about what remains of such empty mansion once it decays. Afterwards, he advises to:

“Buy terms divine in selling hours of dross;  
Within be fed, without be rich no more.  
So shalt thou feed on Death, that feeds on men,  
And, Death once dead, there's no more dying then.”

Here, Shakespeare says that in order to eternalize the soul, one has to dismiss embellishments of the body. As a result, the soul if fed and the body is rendered without value. So when death visits the individual, the latter will feed on the former. Finally, one can enjoy eternity because death is dead.

Although it is pictured in a transcendent manner, Ada undoubtedly faces death at the end of the novel. But since the protagonist accepted her plurality by acknowledging, embracing and associating with her ‘others’, her death is “the beginning that is the end” (Emezi ch. 22). Here we sense the carnivalesque in *Freshwater*, highlighted by the inversion formal roles. Thus, death becomes a birth, and the end becomes a beginning. We must not dismiss the role of polyphony in the realization of such reality. It is due to this free agency in vocalization that the internalized and marginalized realities are heard. Paired with outward voices, all these realities mix and match to arrive at an ultimate ‘self’.

### **1.3 Analysis of the Narrative voices**

While *Freshwater* covers a variety of consciousness that illustrate diverse individuals from diverse socio-historical backgrounds, it is important to focus on the cacophony of voices in Ada’s mind alone for the sake of sustaining the study’s syncretistic assumption on the self and ultimately, the polyphonic nature of the novel. The Ogbanje gods that are given the first word in the novel take a mental and physical toll on Ada as the vessel through which they exist in the world of humans. It is true that they are creatures from the other realm but

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their manifestation in the physical realm transcends their metaphysical state. As a result, the narrative authority in this novel shift from the metaphysical beings that dwell in the mind to the physical/material being (Ada) establishing a mind-soul-body relationship to their collective self.

Three distinct voices narrate *Freshwater*. They are ‘we’, Asughara and Ada. Significantly, each of these voices have their own weight in the narrative. The author attributes to each voice distinct characteristics to differentiate them from one another. Whether it is motifs, diction, or imagery, each narrative voice is directed by designated literary devices to reflect their points of view regarding the world.

Firstly, the ‘we’, a collective with no specific number of the singular entities that make it plural. ‘We’ initiate the novel, telling tales of their pre-bodily existence through flashbacks as in: “There was a time before we had a body, when it was still building itself cell by cell” (ch. 1). ‘We’ dissociate with the body calling it “flesh”, “the fetus”, and “she”. What is notable about ‘we’ is their ancient sacred-like discourse, which radiates a sense of timelessness and antiquity. Their narration is adorned with detailed descriptions and sophisticated jargon for example: “This is all, ultimately, a litany of madness—the colors of it, the sounds it makes in heavy nights, the chirping of it across the shoulder of the morning. Think of brief insanities that are in you, not just the ones that blossomed as you grew into taller, more sinful versions of yourself, but the ones you were born with, tucked behind your liver. Take us, for instance” (ch. 2). Moreover, a number of expressions used by ‘we’ come in the form of aphorisms such as “Blood and belief. This is how the second madness began” (ch. 4), and also “Here is the empty that follows it all” (ch. 5). Through the use of such aphorisms, ‘we’ are presented with an omniscient attitude, which is further emphasized by their critique of modern-day behavior. For instance, in their description of Saul (Ada’s

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father), 'We' criticize his Eurocentric westernized attitude towards traditional Igbo beliefs. Ironically, they call him "a modern Igbo man" (ch. 1).

The second narrative voice belongs to the 'beast-self' Asughara. Originally a part of 'we', this consciousness deems herself the protector of Ada for bursting forward during the last's moment of weakness and taking charge. Unlike the ceremonial 'we' who address the vessel as 'the' Ada, Asughara is more casual and informal, preferring to address Ada by her name alone. Furthermore, Asughara's crudeness reflects in her explicit narrative, which compiles all the blasphemous expletives. She is confident, egotistic and borderline vulgar. Her fascination with the bodily experience in the human world makes her hyper possessive of Ada, which is why she associates with the latter as a stronger, mightier co-existence. Moreover, Asughara is the narrative voice with the most colloquial words and expressions that go back to the West African and Igbo identity. These colloquial words include 'No wahala', 'Abi', 'sha', 'sef' and 'wallahi'. Besides that, Asughara's narrative has a number of hypophoras in which she asks questions and proceeds to answer them in order to first, familiarize the reader with her unique view of the world as in "is this how humans feel? To know that you are separate and special, to be individual and distinct? It's amazing" (ch. 6). And second, to emphasize her sarcastic stance towards human behavior like in "but how could he know? Humans" (ch. 10). Obviously, Asughara is as critical as 'we' when it comes to humans, which is why she also expresses her disdain towards them through insults and derogatory adjectives such as "useless".

Ada is the third and the last voice to possess the authority to narrate the events from her own perspective. Notably, Ada's narrative is featured in four chapters only out of the overall twenty-two. The chapters she gets to narrate are dispersed and different from one another. The first time the reader hears from Ada is in the ninth chapter in which she is unsure and uncertain. Her voice is weak, expressing a great deal of alienation and loss in the

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lines: “I’m talking as if I’m them. It’s all right. In many ways, I am not even real. I am not even here”. Five chapters later, another account from Ada makes an appearance in the form of a poem about her mother. In chapter 19, Ada writes a letter to Yshwa where she confesses having a number of ‘lovers’ as her outlet towards liberation. She specifically writes “It’s just easier to focus on love and an existence outside this world. At least that feels like freedom”. Conversely, she expresses how empty she feels with this much freedom and ultimately ends her letter with a supplication for Yshwa to fill her emptiness with spiritual wholeness where “[he] will be the one to whom [she] directs [her] longing”. The last of Ada’s narration also happens to be the final chapter of the novel. In this part, her tone is firm and certain, it is a mixture of all the narrative voices. She comes into terms with herself as a collective that involves by saying “I am my others; we are one and we are many”.

Through the use of a triplet of first-person narrative voices, Emezi sheds light on the sophistication of the protagonist’s self. Since all three narrative voices fall under one whole, they showcase the diverse interpretations of the self. If ‘we’ are directed from a historical and spiritual outlet, Asughara’s experience prioritizes momentarily self-satisfaction by indulging in pleasure physically. On the other hand, Ada’s meaning of self starts with an existential crisis as a reaction to the loneliness and despair she encountered since infancy. This polyphonic variety of *Freshwater* is the basis for the unity factor that prevails in the narrative both on the levels of the discourse in the novel, and in the selected theme of self.

### **1.4 Conclusion**

Initiating our discussion of the concept of ‘self’ in *Freshwater* called first for proving the assumption that self is plural. With Bakhtin’s theories of polyphony, dialogism and the carnival we illustrated the way the author of the literary work studied sustains our primary assumption both in form and in content. In other words, *Freshwater* does fall under the



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polyphonic and dialogic categorizations, but the author takes this matter a step forward and makes such polyphony a part of the storyline and the narrative respectively. As a result, the internal non-material realities escape marginalization and earn voices to prove their existence. Here is where carnival is located. It is precisely in the subversion noticed in the plotline, where formal order is overthrown and replaced by folk culture. Notably, the Igbo metaphysics manifest strongly while the material body undergoes abomination for a greater purpose. There is an eternalizing factor in the grotesqueness of the body. Thus, self is both plural and eternal. We further tackled this by providing an analysis of the three narrative voices of *Freshwater*. At this point, we managed to cover the internal aspect of the self. However, the external world still exists and it is bound to certain disciplines that we will pinpoint in the coming chapters.

## **Chapter 2 Self in the Social Context**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Since humans are social beings by nature, the concept of self entails a sense of belonging. Owing to that, this chapter intends to investigate the undertones of selfhood in freshwater from a sociological point of view. Firstly, it discusses the protagonist's relationship with her family from infancy to adulthood in relation to Murray Bowen's family systems theory. Additionally, there is an emphasis on the attachment issues and their effect on the main character as seen in Paul Bowlby's attachment theory. The second part borrows from postcolonial theory to address the self in the midst of diaspora by addressing issues of otherness, as well as displacement.

### **2.2 It all starts at home**

Solid relationships play an important role in the actualization of one's self. The author of *Freshwater* chooses to approach this idea from a gloomy perspective, choosing to illustrate failed relationships instead of romanticized ones. For that reason, Starting with the social aspect of Ada's life is done on purpose because the fractures in her family and the struggles in her social life were the ones she suffered from first while being conscious of the reasons behind her sufferance. The dysfunction of her family in particular marks a starting point for her failure in developing a sense of self because according to the novel's timeline, her awareness of the existence of spiritual and psychological aspects manifested later than her awareness of a social aspect.

In the context of the self's association with social relations, Ato Quayson takes from Axel Honneth's *The Struggle for Recognition* (1996). In his essay entitled *Self-Writing and Existential Alienation in African Literature: Achebe's Arrow of God*, Quayson assumes that

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an intersubjective understanding of social reality is the basis for the “practical relation-to-self” from which identity derives. Since the family is the primary social group from which larger social groups stem, it also has a “practical relation-to-self”. Functionalist sociologist George Peter Murdock defined the family as “a social group characterized by common residence, economic corporation and reproduction” (Pathak, 83).

Definitions of the family are various, to each their own subjectivity. While some sociologists focus on the reproductive aspect of family, others prefer to make a point of the economic one. Alternately, American psychiatrist Murray Bowen employs an interactive approach based upon the idea that “people have less autonomy in their emotional functioning than is commonly thought.” Therefore, he labels the family as an ‘emotional unit’ because “The thoughts, feelings, and behavior of each family member, ... , both contribute to and reflect what is occurring in the family as a whole” (Kerr and Bowen 22). Based on this definition, one can interpret the dynamic of Ada’s family.

In the early parts of the novel, the protagonist’s family is accentuated. In the first chapter specifically, a background story of Ada’s parents is provided from the narrative voice ‘we’ via flashbacks. The reader then figures that Ada’s parents are from different backgrounds: the father is Igbo and the mother is Tamil. Consequently, they form an interracial couple and their children are miscegenous. What the couple has in common is their Christian religious belief in addition to both being workers in the field of health (the mother, Saachi is a nurse while the father, Saul is a doctor). However, as ‘we’ proceed to narrate the story of Ada’s birth, they hint at the collapse of the marital relationship of Saul and Saachi. This is done through foreshadowing, with the author stressing both parents’ cultural background, and the negative traits of the father indicatively.

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The emphasis on the opposing mentalities of the protagonist's parents is executed through the literary device 'foil', with which Eemzi juxtaposes Saachi and Saul. As a "practical woman" (ch. 1), Saachi "didn't believe in pride when it came to Ada and the others" (ch. 6), she works hard for the wellbeing of her children, and choosing to travel abroad in order to provide for them since the father considers any money spent on someone other than him a waste. Saul was "a blind man, a modern man" (ch. 1) who "cared more about himself" (ch. 3). He was affected by westernization which lead to him drifting away from his Igbo identity unlike Saachi who still kept in touch with her roots through simple practices, such as affixing a 'pottu' to baby Ada's forehead as a way to "repel the evil eye" (ch. 1). This collision of different ethnic backgrounds and mindsets lead to the collapse of their marriage, rendering the children helpless as the family falls apart the same way a nuclear family dysfunction occurs as explained in Bowen's family theory. "Three categories of dysfunction occur in nuclear families: (1) illness in a spouse; (2) marital conflict; and (3) impairment of one or more children." (Kerr and Bowen 163). The three categories are present in Ada's family, starting from the disagreements between her parents, to her mother's mental health issues and the effect the former two have on her.

The character of Ada's father, Saul draws an archetypical image of individuals who are obsessed with status. In their description of the man, 'we' say "He needed people to see him glow; he desired the glory of something" (ch. 3). Unfortunately, this constant craving for attention translates to an absence in his familial house. Interestingly enough, this 'familial' house is often addressed as either number seventeen or number three. The narrative voices 'we' and Asughara save the word 'home' for a greater purpose, opting to call Ada's childhood house with mere numbers. Back to the father, it is his careless behavior that lead to the crumbling of his marriage. To 'we', it was interesting "how he didn't even have to go anywhere in order to leave her" (ch. 5).

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Consequence of the husband's lack of interest in his family, the wife has to perform double parenting duties in order to compensate his underperformances. Bowen's family therapy explains this relationship dynamic as in "The person most prone to becoming symptomatic is the one who makes the most adjustments in his or her thoughts, feelings, and behavior to preserve relationship harmony" (Kerr and Bowen 172). It is this marital conflict between Saul and Saachi that leads to the latter being overwhelmed with responsibilities and thus developing chronic anxiety. 'We' narrate that while "Saachi was drowning in anxiety. It rattled her chest and surged up her throat; it made her hands shake and then she cried and could not breathe" "Saul did not help. He was an impatient man, a blind man (ch. 4).

When a marital conflict occurs in the family, children are automatically affected by it because "children in the family are more vulnerable than others to becoming caught up in the intensity of whatever patterns exist." The most vulnerable child is usually "the one who grows up most appended to or least separate emotionally from the parents" (Kerr and Bowen, 211), for "he is the child most likely to be a repository for family anxiety (absorb a disproportionate share of it" (213). Similarly, Ada proves to be the most affected child out of the three because she is emotionally integrated to people around her since she "cared about more than those two [her mother Saachi and her sister Anuli]—she cared about Saul and Chima, about her friends; she had a long list of loved ones" (ch. 18). Thus, she is considered the child suffering from impairment which obstructs Ada's sense of self differentiation. Additionally, family emotional process brings forth other issues such as autism, depression, suicide, phobias, schizophrenia, and other internalized kinds of emotional problems that may emerge in childhood, adolescence, or early adult life. Moreover, the anxiety projected between her parents, her mother's illness and departure, and her father's indifference towards herself and her siblings leads to her developing a number of attachment issues namely 'maternal deprivation' and a 'father complex'.

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In Freshwater's plotline, the separation of Ada and her mother is a part of the wicked creatures' big scheme of driving Ada mad. 'We' confess once Saachi's presence was no longer perpetual in her children's lives that "this is how you break a child, you know. Step one, take the mother away" (ch. 3). Indeed, maternal deprivation affects the child negatively and its impact lasts a lifelong. Bowlby's attachment theory stresses that "continual disruption of the attachment between infant and primary caregiver (i.e. mother) could result in long term cognitive, social, and emotional difficulties for that infant" (McLeod). Further, "the effects to be permanent and irreversible". Truly, Ada was completely devastated by her mother's absence judging from the way "She rooted like she'd lost her face, snuffling in the particular heartbreak of a little child, crying for her mother to come back, come back, please just come back" (ch. 4).

Additionally, the diminishing of Saul as Ada's fatherly figure results in the development of a father complex. The Father complex (commonly referred to as 'daddy issues') is related to female attachment needs. It arises from the nature of attachment style the child forms with his/her caretakers. In Ada's case, Saul was unresponsive and emotionally unavailable. In a reference to 'We' "the kids were more Saachi's than his" (ch. 3). This means that the father figure was not prominent in the children's life so Ada ended up with an **anxious-preoccupied** attachment style, which makes her crave the care and attention from males around her starting from Yshwa himself! When Saachi left, Ada could turn to her father to fill the void of an absent mother. However, he too was unavailable so Ada turned to the only fatherly figure she could find close which is Yshwa to whom she prayed to be held. During her youth, she projected her needs on romantic partners, to whom she clung (the ones who Ada liked herself, not the ones who Asughara lured in for fun). Soren and Ewan are two examples of males whom Ada feared losing and sought constant reassurance despite the emotional damage they caused her.

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Home is supposed to be the safe space in which one takes their baby steps towards building oneself. Unfortunately, Freshwater's protagonist missed up on having a proper home. It all started with the conflict between her parents, which aroused from lack of interest on the father's side. The problems are taken to an extreme measure with maternal deprivation and absence of father figure. Such problems that arise in the familial home affect Ada negatively. She was lonely, "Saachi left and Saul was always at his hospital, and the Ada was at the whim of Chima [her brother]'s hands. He beat her often because he could" (ch. 20). All in all, a wrecked home is the first step towards the hindrance in developing a sense of self.

### **2.3 Self in Diaspora**

Moving to America to pursue her studies marks a new chapter in Ada's journey towards self-actualization. By now, the main character is sixteen years old, which makes it convenient for the author to address modern day teenage issues such as drinking, smoking, underage sex, body image and peer pressure. Emezi deployed these issues as an extension to the problem displacement, which serves as yet another obstacle in the quest for self. As a result, diaspora is tackled as a postcolonial concern.

As a part of the university plans her mother made for her, Ada moves to Virginia. This is ironic on the part of the author, for it is in this place where Ada is subject to utmost violation, it is where her innocence is tainted. Moreover, this new school introduces her to the feeling of alienation especially to fellow 'black kids' who judge her as stranger upon learning she listens to Linkin Park<sup>5</sup>. Similarly, Ada herself does not understand them and their hatred towards "the white equestrians who lived on the honors floor with her". This is an allusion to the colonizers, who came aboard their horses into the lands of indigenous

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<sup>5</sup> An American rock band.

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people. An allusion Ada fails to recognize because she is not well educated when it comes to her own people's history. However, "America would teach her that later" (ch. 5), for experiencing life in diaspora would provide her with a better understanding of what it means to be black in America.

'Blackness' in America is associated with colonial history. Undoubtedly, the effects of colonialism are not exclusive to the mainland since displacement is an essential part of the colonial strategy. Being the reservoir of the human resource needed for transatlantic slave trade, it is estimated that about 2.5 million West Africans were taken away from their home to be enslaved in the Americas. These people had to undergo horrific circumstances that started from their homeland then throughout the journey across the pacific, and finally in the new land. Certainly, such horrendous experiences would be engraved into the African consciousness and even unconsciousness for a prolonged period of time that is yet to come to an end, because the legacy of slavery is still very much alive. Hence why 'We' include the enslavement tale of the African ancestors within that of the gods, both to glorify and mourn their story:

But there are others, and anyone who knows anything knows this, knows about the godly stowaways that came along when the corrupters stole our people, what the swollen hulls carried over the bellied seas, the masks, the skin on the inside of the drum, the words under the words, the water in the water. The stories that survived, the new names they took, the temper of old gods sweeping through new land, the music taken that is the same as the music left behind. And, of course, the humans who survived, those selected among them, the ones in white, the ones shaking shells and mineral deposits, the ones ridden, the ones chosen, the ones who follow, work, and serve because calls pass through blood no matter how many oceans you drop death into. (ch. 8)

This excerpt narrates the story of enslavement starting from when the 'corruptors' captured the Africans to transport them in containers to the new land where they took new names and worked in mines. It also highlights the survival of their culture through oral traditions as well



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as music. The closing line of the excerpt emphasizes the persistence of the African identity that withstands corruption by transmitting across generations through ancestral blood.

The lack of knowledge on black people's history causes Ada to experience cultural shock from encountering fellow black people. This would not have happened without undergoing displacement. This is a common theme in African literature. Authors reflect their experiences in the stories they tell of migration specifically. By moving between different cultures, societies and languages, the identities of the characters undergo transculturation. Such works of literature reminisce the homeland while emphasizing the desire for a 'better' life in the new country. Still, the movement from one place to another evokes feelings of unbelonging and uprootedness in the heart of the immigrant, leading him towards a spiral of alienation and loneliness. Alternately, the immigrant may acculturate himself to fit in with the new environment leading to the splitting or worse, the loss of his native cultural identity. Freshwater uses 'hair' as a primary example to first draw a difference between African Americans and just 'Africans' such as Ada and second, to illustrate acculturation. The American girls are firstly introduced as "Black girls with slick, straight hair" (ch. 5) who "fluttered at the state of hers [Ada's hair]", for it is the opposite of theirs, "a confused mix of textures and lengths, thick and awkward". Soon after, they "sat her down firmly in front of a television and relaxed her hair, blow-drying and flat-ironing it until it was decided and bone-straight". After that, they introduced her in her 'new' form to the boys who perceived her as an exotic other, while the girls "leaned against the walls and flipped their silked-up hair".

In failing to associate with the 'black kids', Ada gravitated towards the other international students "who didn't quite fit either" (ch. 5) including "the long jumper from Jamaica, the soccer players from Saint Lucia and Uganda and Kenya, the Dominican cigar-smoking girl". With them, the protagonist was able to scratch the surface of a sense of self.

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This goes back to the feeling of belonging and acceptance she perceived. It is noted that these international students all come from countries that have a history with slavery. Kenya and Uganda are two centers of east Africa's forgotten slave trade. Jamaica, Saint Lucia and Dominican Republic on the other hand are Caribbean countries who served as destinations for the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Together with Ada who is Nigerian, they share a common descent from Africa which is different than that of the African American kids whose apprehension of America is unequalled.

The difference between the American and the international students is their perception of Ada. Despite their Africanism the 'black kids' perceive Ada as exotic based on their westernized perspective, which is granted due to their acculturation to the western ideal. In postcolonial criticism, the term 'other' arises when two groups from different cultural backgrounds interact, the first categorizes the second as 'other' by stigmatizing them. In other words, 'othering' occurs when a major group takes in religious, cultural, and even physical identifiers of another group as primitive, savage and bizarre. In the same manner, the 'black kids' ritualize their welcoming of Ada in the school. The girls show her around to the boys with one of them reacting with "Oh, word? That's cool" when Ada says she is from Nigeria. The males proceed to express disturbing attraction towards her and then retaliate when they find out she is not of age yet. This is an example of 'exotic othering' where the 'other' is fetishized due to not belonging to the status quo. The reactions Ada receives for just existing as she is are micro-aggressive romanticizing discrimination.

On the other hand, the international students were not as superficial as the black kids because they "could see past flesh" (ch. 16). They were also different from Ada for being aware of the existence of other realities other than the one at hand. They were interesting since "they prayed to gods, were ridden by them". Malena the Dominican girl is one prominent figure in Ada's life because she accepts her the way she is. The two girls share a

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bond so special that Malena declares to Ada: “you’re my sister and what I wouldn’t do for my sister and my blood” (ch. 8). On the part of ‘we’, they confess when talking about Malena: “we loved her, from back when we all lived in the mountains, for the way she loved us, all of us, and never made the Ada feel insane”. Indeed, the Dominican girl was also a bridge between alternate realities which is why she never perceived Ada as unusual since “it was normal for her, to be mounted and then left by saints, gods, spirits”. And even though her origins/religion is Dominican Voodoo, she does not dismiss the Igbo origins of Ada. On the contrary, Malena encourages Ada to return to her motherland which serves as the key for fulfilling the social aspect of the self. This is narrated in the novel as it follows:

You need to really know your roots, mi amor,” she said. “It’s a long journey, but once you get that started, you’ll feel much better. It’s difficult because you don’t really know what you’re getting yourself into when you make your commitment with them, and it’s difficult because they’re overprotective of us. But you’ll have a better sense of self.” She paused. “You know how old you are? You’re older than me, Ada. Spiritually, you’re older than me. You’re sixteen thousand years old. Because of who you are, because of who you’re born into. You have a different name. You’re wiser. You just need guidance. (ch. 22).

The previous passage serves as the resolution to the problem of self in the social context. It interprets Ada’s connection to her motherland as a commitment, in which spirituality and ancestors are involved. Therefore, a return to the motherland is the key to having a better sense of self.

Displacement from one place to another gives birth to other social problems that come with diaspora. This is the case of Ada who undergoes unprecedented alienation in America due to the separation from her mother land. In America, Ada learns that being black carries a different sense than in Africa. When she is perceived as an ‘exotic’ other by the black kids, she finds solace in other international students who are spiritually ridden such as Malena, who guides Ada ‘like a prophet’ by advising her to return to her motherland to find her ‘self’ in the social context.

## 2.4 Conclusion

The dissociation from society starts at home which is in itself a miniature society comprised of the family members. As a result, integrating in the bigger society becomes difficult. In other words, to be socially aware of oneself requires strong familial relationships as well as awareness of one's origins. The author of *Freshwater* presents this idea by drawing a picture depicting a dysfunctional family. From a careless father, to an overwhelmed mother, and an abusive brother, the protagonist is brought up abandoned and lonely. The loneliness escalates and become alienation when Ada travels to America for the purpose of her studies. In America, she finds herself on the margins, not belonging to any group of people. She does make friendships, but they do not satisfy her curiosity to figure herself out. Ultimately, per advice from a friend, Ada figures that her trip towards knowing oneself entails a return to the homeland, for it is there where the stories of her people revolve. However, this call back home is rooted in the metaphysical creatures residing within her, for they were opposed to the idea of displacement from the first place. 'We' say: "It was an insult to be subject to the decisions made around what was just a vessel." Indeed, these are spiritual beings who necessitate a return home for reasons the following chapter will cover.

## **Chapter 3 Self in the Spiritual Context**

### **3.1 Introduction**

To have a sense of self is equivalent to existential well-being. It is the element that gives the individual a presentiment of their purpose in life. The notion of uncovering the meaning of one's life is pertinent in *Freshwater* through the inclusion of religious and spiritual beliefs. The author built the story around ontological beliefs of Igbo people, providing a unique account of events from the points of view of metaphysical creatures. Thus, spiritual belonging marks another aspect of self that the protagonist must realize. This chapter is dedicated to elucidate the spirituality of the self. The first part tackles spiritual dissonance from a postcolonial standpoint as represented in the work studied. This is the case of Igbo people, who were entitled to the forced religious belief of Christianity that came with the colonial missionary. In the second subtitle, elements of Igbo cosmology are uncovered in order to understand the 'Ogbanje' phenomenon as manifested in Ada. Finally, the Igbo concept of self is defined with a reflection on Ada's particular case.

### **3.2 Spiritual Dissonance**

On the global scale, religious devotion is a controversial concept at this moment of time. Postmodern ideology rejects the idea of spiritual beliefs and ultimate truths. On this matter, the author of *Freshwater* challenges antireligious convictions by writing a spiritual-heavy narrative. Throughout the novel, the focus is primarily on the ontological beliefs of Igbo people, but there is also the inclusion of Christianity in addition to a glimpse of Dominican Voodoo<sup>6</sup>. It is given that Emezi's purpose is to both accentuate, and revive Igbo cosmological beliefs in the face of change. There is a postcolonial overtone to the way the author approaches this notion. For instance, the narrative voice 'we' mourns the vanishing

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<sup>6</sup> Also known as the 21 Divisions. Traditional shamanism practices of Dominican people.

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of the Igbo religion from its people's lives by recalling historical events related to the colonial experience. Undoubtedly, colonizers played a major role in swaying Igbo folk from their inherent spiritual beliefs.

When major European powers initiated their colonial plans in what is labeled today as third world countries, the missionary mentality played a major role in the success of these colonial strategies. Spreading the Christian faith was one of the tools to 'civilize' the indigenous 'savage' people. As a result, the natives of the colonized lands deviated from their endemic religious and spiritual beliefs to embrace a religion that they did not fully understand. A religion that was by all means foreign.

Since the novel is narrated mainly by pure spiritual Igbo entities, the clash between the Igbo innate religion and the Christian acquired religion is crystal clear. Although the novel does not reject the existence of other religions besides the Igbo one, it illustrates how a forced religion that people convert to without fully embracing it is inconvenient and holds no spiritual essence. This is evident in historical accounts of colonialism in Igbo land, for the missionary initiated their plan to convert Igbo people to Christianity in 1857 only to be encountered with indifference from the natives' part. The pioneer missionary, John Christopher Taylor noted how Igbo people were not elated by the teachings of Christianity, "nor did they consider the 'regenerating power' of Christianity relevant to their needs. Believing that their traditional religion was better for them than 'this new religion'". It was only at the beginning of the 1900s that the people started warming up to the new faith but only because they "were alienated from the traditional society; or suffered from certain social disabilities; or experienced certain natural misfortunes" (qtd. in Ekechi 103).

Undoubtedly, a group of people who share the same cultural and religious beliefs would not simply just convert to a foreign religion introduced by foreign people in a foreign

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language. But the colonial missionary overlooked this assumption by being overconfident in their ability to persuade Igbos to convert. High Commissioner of Southern Nigeria Leslie Probyn did criticize this by noting that Africans “are a very cautious race, and . . . will not accept new ideas merely because they were presented to him by a white man' unless these ideas were 'obviously useful” (qtd. in Ekechi 104). Owing to the Africans’ lack of receptivity, which is applicable to Igbo people, the colonial power opted for using the element of ‘terror’ in order to strengthen the missionary’s chances to influence colonized folk. On their part, military soldiers engaged violently with the villagers by molesting them and ruining their belongings from their animals to their lands. At the same time, some other villages received preferential treatment in addition to a certain degree of immunity to the soldiers’ threats. Consequently, “Fear and insecurity coupled with the realization that Christianity had suddenly become a badge of honour, persuaded many people then to reconsider their position vis-a-vis the Christian missions.” (qtd. in Ekechi 105). It is noted however that the individuals who converted at that time “do not know much about the faith, and seem to think that it is associated with the work of settling native disputes' and freedom from onerous exactions.” (qtd. in Ekechi 106). As a result, a big number of villagers swarm into churches due to the newly acquired appeal of Christianity. On the other hand, native religious men (Aro priests) still managed to restrain the Christian movement in inner villages especially. It was until the British violated their sacred citadel by destroying the Arochukwu oracle (Ekechi) that the Aro priests’ influence diminished as well as the Igbo’ link to their deities

Emezi allegorically depicts the switch from Igbo religion to Christianity through the character Saul, who is the protagonist’s father. Additionally, Saul is a prototype to the Igbo who embraced a foreign culture that defies the values of their native one which still subsists. In the novel, he is signaled by the prayer he made in his desire to have a daughter. And so

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'we' say "All we know is that there was a prayer, that the Ada was the answer" (ch. 4). At the same time, 'We' wonder about their existence as an answer to a Christian westernized man's prayer. Specifically, they question the motif behind which their mother goddess Ala responded to such a prayer by saying "Perhaps the prayer caught her eye as it slid from Saul's mouth; perhaps she picked it on a whim, just to remind the world that she was still there, the owner of men. Since the corrupters broke her shrines and converted her children, how many of them were calling her name anymore?"

Just like her father Saul, Ada too was unfamiliar with her Igbo cultural origins. At first, "Ada had been obsessed with her christ, that Yshwa. She loved him, or to be more accurate, she adored and worshipped him" (Emezi ch. 7) this made Asughara furious, for from her point of view "he was never there for her, not like me, not even close" Which is partially true since Ada's connection to the Christ was fragile due to her not understanding the religion. Themes like sinning, forgiveness, and repentance were giving her more pain than redemption especially after the destructive experience she had with Soren. Moreover, the Ogbanje's lack of morality and their resentment for Christ further fueled Ada's sense of guilt and widened the distance between her and Christ. 'We' admit to that by confessing: "The Ada wanted to follow him, that much was clear; she had never tried to steer all of us as firmly as she was attempting now, but we were many and she was small" (ch. 18). Thus the frail connection to Yshwa as a deity was broken because "Ever since Soren, she couldn't kneel or press her palms together to worship Yshwa the way she used to—it felt false." Despite her trials to restore the faith, she failed because "she just couldn't believe that she would ever be clean again" (ch. 7).

Losing the faith in Christianity as a religion did not dismiss the figure of Christ from Ada's life. He started manifesting in her mind just like the ogbanje do, but his presence was more of an outlet for Ada to express her mind and thoughts, for he was there to listen to her



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concerns that the others would not understand because he too is/was human. An instance is Yshwa's awareness of Ada's secret fear: "that she had become evil because of the things Asughara had done" (ch. 18). From Asughara's perspective however, there is no evil in her actions because she believes avenging Ada by hurting her loved ones is the only way to help. This is a consequence of the ogbanje's lack of a moral code since [The ogbanje are] creatures of God with powers over mortals.... They are not subject to the laws of justice and have no moral scruples, causing harm without justification (qtd. in Emezi ch. 7). Eventually, Yshwa's mission of saving Ada includes the others as well for they are all parts of one greater whole. On their part, the Ogbanje start warming up to Yshwa's presence in Ada's mind, they even declare that they "could accept him as an older sibling" (ch. 18).

Since Ada "had decided that her life was better with Yshwa in it" (ch. 18), the Ogbanje became friendlier by taking Yshwa in as another 'brothersister'. They even tried to follow his example by perceiving humans with more grace and kindness. This is the way Ada established balance between the seemingly 'incompatible' religious figures in her life. She particularly chose Yshwa to be a part of her because "she needed a moral code to control [them] with, one that could protect her and others from [their] hungers." This moral code is none other than 'love' which is simple: she is able to love, they should not be able to hurt. Still, Yshwa's influence on the Ogbanje is limited because Ada believes in him not as a deity "she believed that the church around him was irrelevant, and she hoped that her afterlife would be one of oblivion", but as a figure of moral conduct. For that reason, she discloses that praying to him for releasing her from the ogbanje was pointless because "he has no effect on them" (ch. 22).

Since the self is bound to spirituality, *Freshwater* accounts for Christianity in the postcolonial frame to illustrate the loss of connection to Igbo beliefs. The protagonist's father

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is the primary example for the Igbo who strayed from their initial religious beliefs, opting to embrace Christianity despite their lack of knowledge of this faith. This has a direct effect of the protagonist, for she too inherited this biased religious belief. It is only after Ada disregards Christianity without dismissing the figure of Christ that she finds inner peace. However, it does not end there, for she has to come into terms with the Ogbanje as part of Igbo spirituality.

### 3.3 Igbo Cosmology and the Self

Freshwater opens up with the dedication: “For those of us with one foot on the other side”, and proceeds to tell a story that transcends the realm of humans by introducing the ontological beliefs of Igbo people. Similar to the research conducted on the novel, Igbo thinking is syncretistic so uncovering Igbo ontology is an extension to finding oneself in a social context. This is because <sup>7</sup>Odinani conducts all aspects of life starting from the myths of the universe to human nature. On this matter, Nwoga emphasized that:

The Mythology of a Community contains those stories which represent the underlying truths behind the life of the community.... The Mythical stories and cosmogonic tales of the Igbo are good sources from which we can distill the Igbo conception of Ultimate causalities, their beliefs systems as they relate to deities and the relationship between man and the other forces . (qtd. in Okoye 52)

Thus unraveling the Igbo concept of ‘self’ calls first for an overview of Igbo ontological beliefs.

In Igbo cosmology, the world is divided to three: “The Eluigwe-The Sky; The Ala Mmuo- The Spirit world; The Ala mmadu – The land of the living” (Okoye 52). The sky/the heavens is where the supreme deity Chukwu resides, the sun being his eyes on earth. Chukwu or Chi Ukwu (the Great Spirit) is the maker of both the physical and the spiritual dimensions

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<sup>7</sup> Also known as Odinala. Traditional religious practices and cultural beliefs of the Igbo people of southern Nigeria.

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of the cosmos. He is also the one to create and assign the minor gods that comprise the Igbo pantheon. Chukwu has no human attributes, he is omnipotent and omnipresent all throughout space. Additionally, humans have no direct contact with their supreme god and can only reach him through other spiritual creatures which serve as his ambassadors. Ancestors, Alusi (smaller deities, incarnations of the supreme deity) and personal Chi are intermediaries which belong to spiritual world that works in parallel to the world of the living (Okoye 52).

Out of all the Igbo Alusi (minor deities), the goddess Ala is the most prominent. She is placed right after the supreme god Chukwu in the Igbo pantheon. In *Freshwater*, Ala's presence is the most conspicuous. 'We' introduce her as "the earth herself, the judge and mother, the giver of law. On her lips man is born and there he spends his whole life. Ala holds the underworld replete in her womb, the dead flexing and flattening her belly, a crescent moon above her (ch. 1)". This excerpt summarizes Ala's attributes as the mother of nature who gives life and to whom spirits return after death. Moreover, since she is the earth itself, any violation of moral laws is profane to her sacristy which gives her the power to judge human behavior.

Ala the goddess of water is symbolized by a python which is usually associated with negative conceptions as in Christianity, where the reptile represents temptation, deceit and a reincarnation of the devil himself. This contrast is emphasized in *Freshwater* specifically in the following extract: "Before a christ-induced amnesia struck the humans, it was well known that the python was sacred, beyond reptile. It is the source of the stream, the flesh form of the god Ala". Therefore, bringing harm on a snake is considered irreverent act in Igbo traditions and it has negative effects on whoever commits such an act. An instance takes place Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, where a character named Okoli is rumored to kill a snake. As one of the people who joined 'a new faith', Okoli "brought the church into serious conflict with the clan ... by killing the sacred python, the emanation of the god of

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water .... The royal python was the most revered animal in Mbanta and all the surrounding clans. It was addressed as 'Our father,' and was allowed to go wherever it chose" (Achebe 116). Okoli later falls ill and dies as a sign "that the gods were still able to fight their own battles" (118). Similarly, Ada's father Saul commits the same abomination by killing the python that the goddess Ala manifested in to encounter her children. After being hacked to bits by Saul's machete, "Ala ... dissolved amid broken scales and pieces of flesh; she went back, she would not return" (ch. 1). The modern Christian Saul "... had no idea what he had done", the repercussions from such a volatile act would attest later.

In addition to the goddess Ala, Ogbanje are spiritual beings that hold a crucial part in the narrative of *Freshwater*. Ogbanje indicates an evil creature that takes the form of a child in order to undergo repetitive cycles of life and death for the purpose of tormenting the human parents. Similarly, the concept of 'changeling' is found in European folklore denoting a fairy who takes the place of a child who is taken by other fairies

In order to understand the Igbo concept of Ogbanje, one has to recall the Igbo myths of existence. It is previously mentioned that the universe is comprised of the heavens/the sky, the spiritual world and the human/physical world. The birth of a person starts with a tripartite negotiation of one's destiny between the individual, his Chi and the supreme god Chukwu. After settling on a life plan, the individual is to cross from the heavens to the physical world. There are two entrances to the physical world, each is guarded by a specific deity. Nne-mmiri (Water mother) is in charge of the water route while Onabuluwa ("he who shortchanges destiny") handles the land route. The purpose of these deities is to "to test the resolve of transiting humans and attempt to alter their destiny or "life contract" previously agreed upon with Chukwu" (Ilechukwu 240). This is where the role of the 'Chi' comes into play. If one is in harmony with their Chi, their destiny would not be affected by the portal deities. On the other hand, those in dissonance with their Chi are more likely to "succumb

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to the hazing, ridicule, allure, flattery, or enticement of the portal deities or their agents” and this is where the Ogbanje complex arises. The portal deity baits the Ogbanje with worldly rewards recurrent during their short life span. The promise is sealed with an “iyi uwa’ (oath of the world) that binds the Ogbanje to the world of the living while ensuring its rebirth to the same mother the destruction of the ‘iyi uwa’ terminates the Ogbanje’s oath. (Ilechukwu 143).

In Igbo thought, the self is not just a material entity. On the contrary, the self is sustained through both the physical and spiritual realms. By interacting with other beings across realms, the individual’s life, action and destiny are accounted for. As a result, the self is both ethical and existential as represented by the individual and his personal Chi. Jude Chudi Okpala wrote that “a human being is half of a person without the chi, which is an invisible divinity, a manifestation of Chi-ukwu/Chukwu, which guides an individual in life and draws the individual to Chi-ukwu or Chukwu (Great chi or God)” (560). Indeed, the Chi is the stronger half of a person because “man could not rise beyond the destiny of his chi.” (Achebe 131).

Owing to the above explanation of the Ogbanje phenomenon, Ada is interpreted as one who came through the water portal as ‘we’ narrate : “...we were wrenched, dragged through the gates, across a river, and through the back door of the thin woman’s womb, thrust into the rippling water and the small sleeping body floating within” (ch. 1) Her destiny altered to one of a short life span that entails “desirable physical appearance... at the expense of human relationships” as the commitments to the water deity ‘mammy water’ bring about. However, the case of Ada is different because “When the transition is made from spirit to flesh, the gates are meant to be closed” which is the opposite of what took place, the gates were left open. “So there she was: a fat baby with thick, wet black hair. And there we were, infants in this world, blind and hungry, partly clinging to her flesh and the rest of us trailing

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behind in streams, through the open gates.” ‘We’ conclude that this the main problem is that “we were a distinct we instead of being fully and just her.” However, being distinct proves to be convenient for it means Ada is also distinct, which leads to the potential of acknowledging oneself. It also gives the Ogbanje the ability to change. Ultimately, ‘we’ confess “...here is the truth: she was easier to control when she thought she was weak. Here is another truth: she is not ours, we are hers” (ch. 21)

So instead of dissociating from the ‘godlings’ Ada concludes that they are her Chi, her other half. She recalls the Igbo proverb “*Ichuru chi ya aka mgbu*” (ch. 22), which means “One does not challenge their chi to a wrestling match”. Ada embraces the paranormal beings as part of herself as in: “I am my others; we are one and we are many.” Moreover, the strong connection she forms with the goddess Ala levitates her state and relieves her from worldly concerns. It all goes back to the peculiar case of Ada’s incarnation “...a child of Ala as well as an Ogbanje, to be mothered by the god who owns life yet pulled toward death” (ch. 20). This liminality implicates a sophisticated self that binds binary oppositions which is exactly what takes place in *Freshwater*. The ‘godlings’ no longer see Ada as a mere vessel for existing in the physical world but as a fully developed individual. Hence why by the end of the novel they fall to the background allowing Ada to take charge, which she does by resonating with the meaning behind her name (Ada means ‘oldest daughter’). Ultimately, the girl surrenders to Ala, her ‘mother’, to transcend worldly limits.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

In the first step towards recognizing the self spiritually, we acknowledged the juxtaposition of Odinani and Christianity in the narrative of *Freshwater*. We addressed the dissonance between Igbo people and the faith colonialism forced upon them. It is this misinterpretation of the Christian religious beliefs that put the protagonist in a spiral of

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agony, dragging her further from existential well-being. However, Ada starts finding meaning to her existence when she reaches back to her roots to gain knowledge of Igbo ontological beliefs. So we uncovered Igbo cosmology from the supreme deity, to his Alusi, and the Ogbanje phenomenon. Acknowledging the existence of otherworldly creatures within her, Ada takes a step closer towards finding herself. Finally, she seals the bond to Odinani with a prayer to her mother the goddess Ala. Thus, the protagonist's sense of self blooms further with pure spiritual belonging. However, another facet of the self is yet to be realized. It is that of psychology, for the undertones of mental health are recognizable in the narrative and they cannot be ignored.

## **Chapter 4 Self in the Psychological Context**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In tackling mental health issues, Emezi gives a new dimension to the concept of self in *Freshwater*. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Ogbanje metaphysical beings prove to be an active part of Ada, for they aid her in the spiritual awakening. However, their existence is not limited to spirituality since they reflect as psychological issues the girl undergoes. In that sense, a psychological actualization of self takes place at the level of the mind as an extension to the social and spiritual one. Therefore, the study will adopt Carl Jung's theories on the human psyche to illustrate the categorizations each alter fall under in the Jungian model of the psyche. Additionally, the psychological realization of the self is to be supported by the individuation process as an extension to the Swiss psychiatrist's classifications of the different elements of the psyche, and ultimately the unification of such elements towards achieving wholeness.

### **4.2 *Freshwater* Characters and the Jungian Model of the Psyche**

For those who are unfamiliar with Igbo mythology, *Freshwater* would initially come off as an allegory to the mental disorder named 'dissociative identity disorder' or multiple personality disorder. This is what Alex Brown admits to in the review posted in TOR.com, before allowing to be carried by the narrative as it pleases. Indeed, the presence of the Igbo metaphysical creatures is unmistakable, and Emezi does an excellent job in keeping such beliefs the focal point of the narrative. Despite that, the author does not deny the psychological dimension of the story. This is done by integrating this psychological interpretation of the Ogbanje phenomenon within the life story of the protagonist. Owing to that, the concept of self is extended to a psychological supposition, which we will carry on with a psychoanalytical study of the novel.



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There is a number of instances in which the author of *Freshwater* alludes to the multiplicity of the protagonist's self. The narrative voice 'we' is the most prominent one of all, for it joins the narrative voices under the first person plural pronouns. The narrative voices Asughara and Ada, in addition to the other alters, interact in a place called the 'marble', which is the word Emezi uses to refer to the mind. On our part, we are borrowing the word 'psyche' in the context of the psychoanalytical study we are carrying on with.

In etymology, the word psyche used to imply 'soul' or 'spirit' for the two were considered responsible for animating the physical body. Later, psychologists adopted the word 'psyche' to refer to the mind as the entity in charge of both cognitive (memory, perception, judgment...) and non-cognitive aspects (instinct, emotions...) of human thinking. On their part, psychoanalysts interpreted their patients' behavioral and thinking systems in order to map their own models of the psyche. In the case of Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung, he deviated from the approach of his colleague Sigmund Freud, which was mostly based on repressed emotions, to develop a more multi-faceted approach to the mind. Decidedly, the Jungian model of the psyche is an interactive hierarchy that combines distinct elements functioning on different levels of consciousness.

Three main components make up the psyche, namely the conscious, personal unconscious and collective unconscious. In his book *Jung's Map of the Soul* (1998), which compiles Jung's main thoughts, Dr. Murray Stein initiates his unrolling of the Jungian psyche by introducing the Ego as the most central feature of consciousness. He writes that "ego refers to one's experience of oneself as a center of willing, desiring, reflecting, and acting." (24). Indeed, since consciousness is the field in which the individual is awake, there has to be an 'I' in a state of active awareness establishing personal identity. Because of its centered placement, the ego works as a mediator between consciousness and unconsciousness. In fact, the ego determines a great deal of what one should be aware of, and what should be part of

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unconsciousness. In Stein's words, Jung attributes to the ego the ability to "...repress" contents it does not like or finds intolerably painful or incompatible with other contents. It can also retrieve contents from storage in the unconscious" (Stein 27).

Based on what has been said, one can say that 'we' play the role of the Ego in Ada's psyche. The reason behind this claim is the dominance of 'we' in the narrative, for they are in a constant state of awareness of themselves as reflected in the way they recount their origins. Additionally, they possess the ability to manipulate Ada's memories, a procedure they labeled 'sectioning' which gave Ada "isolated pockets of memory, each containing a different version of her" (ch. 20). Since it is the Ego's job to arrange memories, 'we' repressed the memories associated with traumatic events to protect Ada from the pain they bring about. Amongst these memories is that of being molested by the neighbor and his son during her childhood. When 'we' dismissed such happening from Ada's consciousness, it became unfamiliar to her hence why "When she reached back for the memory, it would be as if it belonged to someone else, not her".

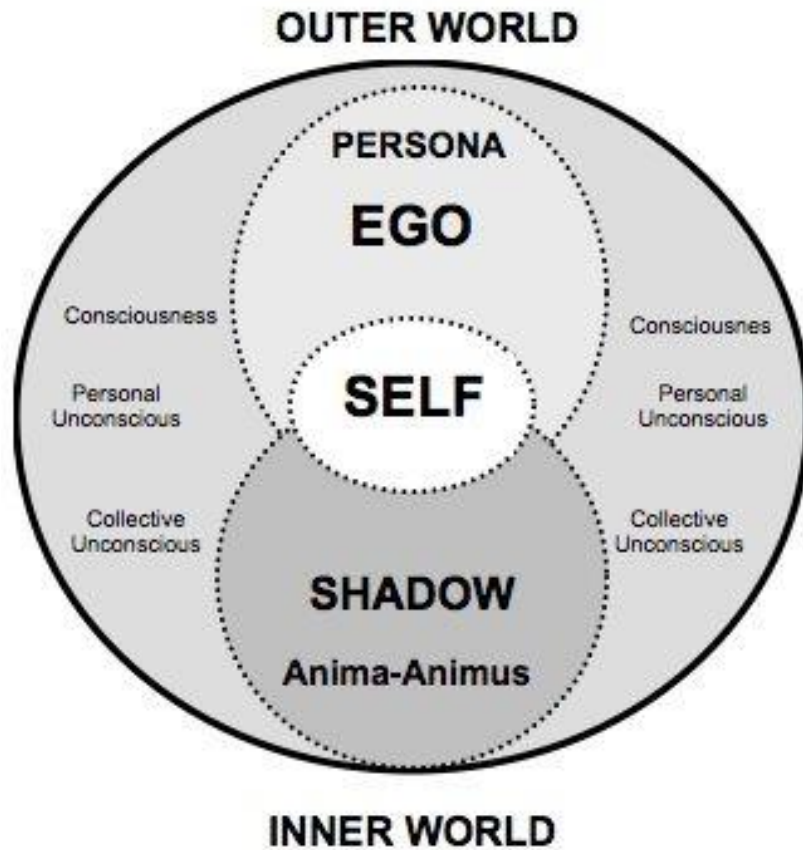
When the 'Ego' restrains events from consciousness, they automatically fall into the 'personal unconscious'. It is called 'personal' because it goes back to one's own experience. This division is ruled by 'complexes' which Stein defined as "A feeling toned autonomous content of the personal unconscious, usually formed through psychic injury or trauma." (215). In other words, complexes are psychic episodes caused by momentary triggers. They take over ego consciousness whenever stimulated resulting in inexplicable behaviors. Eventually, complexes impose patterns on the conduct of one's life. Accordingly, a pattern is observed in Ada's inability of forming stable relationships despite her immense feelings of love and affection. This is due to the bonding problems she underwent as a child as discussed in the first part of the second chapter.

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The deepest level of the psyche is the ‘collective unconscious’, it is Jung’s most revolutionary and distinctive contribution to the field of psychoanalysis. When treating patients, Jung noticed a recurrent pattern in the contents of their unconscious as manifested in dreams and fantasies. Additionally, he also found uncanny similarities between religious symbols as well as mythological motives of different civilization through his studies in comparative mythology. For that reason, he attributed collectiveness to this zone of the unconscious. The following is a precise explanation of the collective unconscious is quoted in Stein’s *Jung’s Map of the Soul*:

“Just as the migratory and nest building instincts of birds were never learnt or acquired individually, man brings with him at birth the ground-plan of his nature, and not only of his individual nature but of his collective nature. These inherited systems correspond to the human situations that have existed since primeval times: youth and old age, birth and death, sons and daughters, father and mothers, mating, and so on. Only the individual consciousness experiences these things for the first time, but not the bodily system and the unconscious. For them they are only the habitual functioning of instincts that were preformed long ago.” (qtd. in Stein. 87)

The collective patterns manifest in archetypal images in the individual’s unconscious. An archetype is “An innate potential pattern of imagination, thought, or behavior that can be found among human being in all times and places.” (Stein, 215). In other words, archetypes are cognitive predispositions that are innate to humans. They affect one’s sense of perception thinking, and feeling resulting in specific ways of behaving. An example is the archetype of the mother. Yearning for the affection of the mother is innate in the psyche of young children which leads them to project their needs on their primary caretaker, whether or not such a caretaker is their biological mother or not. Other archetypes do exist including the hero, the ruler and the sage. However, For the sake of this study the sub-personalities are to be highlighted. These are archetypal representations constellated in the human psyche. They are the Persona, Shadow, Animus, the Wise old man, the great mother, and the Self.



**Figure 1:** Jung's Model of the Psyche

It is only suitable to start with the Persona since it is at the front of the model. The persona serves as the social mask one puts on to blend in with fellow individuals. The mask changes in accordance to the setting and to the people one interacts with. The purpose of the mask is not only to conceal the undesirable parts of the personality, but also to obstruct traits of the personality which defy the social norms. In *Freshwater*, Ada is the embodiment of the Persona since it is her face that is confronting the outside world. This is based upon multiple instances of Asughara expressing being hidden behind a façade. At first, Asughara enjoys causing mischief without being recognized. However, as time goes by she becomes “a little insulted to be mistaken for Ada” (ch. 7). In the matter, Asughara says “I refuse to believe

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that I looked anything like her—it must have been the humans who just couldn't tell the difference". Not being able to be distinguished from the innocent front of Ada goes back to Asughara representing a more sinister archetype situated in the depths of the psyche.

The shadow is that darker archetype residing in the abysmal zone of collective unconsciousness. The shadow is proportional to the persona which means the shadow grows with the level one has in identifying with their persona. The reason behind this is the fact that the shadow realm is where the characteristics one subdues when putting on the social mask are disposed. Because one has to adopt certain behaviors when interacting in the outside world (consciously put on a persona), the neglected traits slide to the unconscious part of mind to form an opposing entity. Hence, Asughara is the incarnation of the shadow archetype.

To exemplify the bond between the persona and the shadow, Dr. Stein refers to the following pairs: Narcissus and Goldmund, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Cain and Abel, and Aphrodite and Hera. He then concludes that the two archetypes (persona and shadow) "are usually more or less exact opposites of one another, and yet they are as close as twins." (105). In a similar manner, Ada and Asughara are bound by an opposing yet complementary relationship, which is illustrated in the following excerpt as narrated by Asughara (Ada in *Italics*, Asughara in **bold**): "*Sometimes when I think about you, I can see you standing right next to me and it's like we're twins.*" I gave her a look. "**You know we're identical, right?**" She shushed me with her hand. "*Except, when you're standing next to me, you're all covered in blood.*" I drank some more. "**That seems accurate.**" (ch. 16).

Saint Vincent is another alter of Ada's. Contrary to Asughara, Saint. Vincent is a male which makes him the 'animus' based on Jungian archetypal images. Stein wrote that "The usual shorthand definition is that the anima is the inner feminine for a man and the

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animus is the inner masculine for a woman.” (Stein 123 124). The Animus/Anima denotes a contra-sexual sub-personality in the psyche. Unlike the persona which shields the ego from the society outwards, the animus/anima is oriented inwards since it “should function as a bridge, or a door, leading to the images of the collective unconscious” (Stein 122). This archetype manifests in dreams and visions because “As psychic components, they are subliminal to consciousness and function from within the unconscious psyche”. Accordingly, ‘we’ narrate: “Saint Vincent stayed in our realm and in the marble of the Ada’s mind, while Asughara met him in the marble but moved in the flesh” (ch. 11). As a result, “Saint Vincent preferred to move inside the Ada’s dreams” since he is unable of complete embodiment because of the obstruction of the female genitals. Thus he manifests in a full masculine form in Ada’s dreams.

The wise old man is a mana personality (mana personalities “give the individual a feeling of direction toward a realisable heightening of CONSCIOUSNESS” (a critical dictionary of Jungian analysis 89). In *Four Archetypes*, Jung writes; The figure of the wise old man can appear so plastically, not only in dreams but also in visionary meditation (or what we call “active imagination”) (Jung 111). It manifests as an authoritative elderly spirit which “always appears in a situation where insight, understanding, good advice, determination, planning, etc., are needed but cannot be mustered on one’s own resources”. The archetype “compensates this state of spiritual deficiency by contents designed to fill the gap.” (Jung 112). Evidently, Yshwa is the wise old man in Ada’s unconscious because he serves like a mentor to her. Truly, Ada did not care enough about Christianity as a faith, but the figure of Christ remained as a trusted guide for the alters as revealed by the following statement of his: “I will lead you,” ... “down the paths of righteousness for nothing, other than the sake of my name.” (ch. 18).

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The Great Mother is another mana personality that is derived from the mother archetype. Jung took this concept from comparative religion in which different versions of mother-goddesses were approached. In *Four Archetypes*, Jung provided a detailed explanation of the mother symbol by listing the qualities associated with it as follows: “maternal solicitude and sympathy; the magic authority of the female; the wisdom and spiritual exaltation that transcend reason; any helpful instinct or impulse; all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth and fertility.” (15). In that sense, the mother archetype takes various shapes and forms starting from the personal mother, to any woman who provides aid such as a nurse. Additionally, different religions and mythologies have their multiple variations of this archetype including the Virgin Mary. Even ‘we’ know that “It was all the same, a million mothers with a million names all flicking their quick tongues over the clear path to our spine.” (ch. 8). Jung also stated that there is a figurative mothering figure in “things representing the goal of our longing for redemption, such as Paradise, the Kingdom of God, the Heavenly Jerusalem.” Moreover, he included concepts that arise “devotion or feelings of awe” like “the Church, university, city or country, heaven, earth, the woods, the sea or any still waters, matter even, the underworld and the moon” (14). In fact, whatever corresponds to fertility and reproduction stands for the mother archetype.

Significantly, the word mother is a motif that the author employs 99 times in the novel. On the most part, the word signifies either the ‘human’ mother (Saachi) or the ‘first’ mother (the goddess Ala). There is also a reference to a figure in Dominican Voodoo named Santa Marta “La Dominadora”. Other figurative implications of the mother are prominent in the recurrence of natural motifs such as the moon, the earth, and most importantly, water. It is noted that all these motifs go back to the goddess Ala (for more details, see the previous chapter). The moon is her symbol, ‘we’ call her “the earth herself”. Even Ada speaks of earthly mother connections in saying: “the sand is my mother and no one can run from her.

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They say that she can find you as long as your feet are touching the earth, and once she does, the earth can split open like a pod and just swallow you up” (ch. 22). This signifies that Ada, although maternally deprived from a young age, was still motherly contained by the different archetypes of the great-mother.

The Self is the last and most important component of the psyche. It carries a unifying principle associated with the archetype of wholeness. The Self takes the form of “quaternity or mandala images (squares and circles)” (Stein 147), which are symbols that carry a sense of ordered wholeness. Jung placed the Self at the center of his model of the psyche, deeming it the ultimate milestone in one’s life. Significantly, it is such a sophisticated concept that he regarded as a mystical “transcendent nonpsychological entity” (Stein 147). Because of its numinosity, Jung equated the self to the God-Image which stands for “whatever an individual claimed to experience as God, that which represented the person's highest value whether expressed consciously or unconsciously, and typical religious motifs” (Samuels et al. 61-62). Granted, Jung did differentiate the motif of God as ultimate being by saying: “what God is in himself remains a question outside the competence of all psychology” (qtd. in Samuels et al. 61).

The Self archetype, the God-Image, along with the mandala are unmistakable in *Freshwater*. In fact, the three are seamlessly blended in Ada. She is the daughter of Ala who is a goddess herself incarnated in the form of a python. The python is not only a holy figure in Odinala, but also a crucial symbol in Jungian theories. On this matter Stein wrote:

“The serpent symbolizes the self in its strongest and most blatant paradoxicality. On the one hand, it represents everything that is “snaky” in human nature: cold-blooded instincts of survival, territoriality, base physicality. On the other hand, it symbolizes the wisdom of the body and the instincts— somatic awareness, gut intuitions and instinctual knowledge. The serpent has traditionally been a paradoxical symbol, referring both to wisdom and to evil (or the temptation to do evil). The



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serpent therefore symbolizes the most extreme tension of opposites within the self.” (153)

Granted, the unification of conscious and unconscious material is equivalent to the unification of the good and evil aspects of the individual personality. The serpent not only illustrates the union of opposites, but also forms a mandala by curving on itself. Paired with the being the psychical form of Ala, all these elements come together to unite the ultimate self. The following passage illustrates this unification flawlessly:

“Her voice came with meaning. I had forgotten that if she is a python, then so am I. If I don’t know where my tail is, then I don’t know anything. I don’t know where I’m going, I don’t know where the ground is, or where the sky is, or if I’m pointing away from my head. The meaning was clear. Curve in on yourself. Touch your tongue to your tail so you know where it is. You will form the inevitable circle, the beginning that is the end.” (ch. 22)

Utilizing the literary device that is paradox in the expression “the beginning that is the end” (ch. 22), Emezi alludes to the ultimate truth of the self. To come at the end of finding oneself means to return to the starting point. What must be discovered in the end is the beginning, which is the map of the soul. In other words, Ada’s new chapter of life starts only after recognizing the different parts that make up her psyche.

As a plural individual, Ada’s self is a combination of a number of variants. They are comprehended in accordance to the Jungian model of the psyche, which is made up of a conscious part along with an assortment of archetypes and archetypical images in the unconscious. These partitions contribute a great deal in Ada’s self-actualization. At the center of consciousness, sits the Ego incarnated in the novel by the entity ‘we’. Ada represents the Persona, a veil that protects the Ego from the outside world. The contrasting version of the Persona is situated in the collective unconscious marked by Asughara who plays the Shadow archetype. Additionally, the male presence in Ada’s unconscious is none other than the Animus Vincent. There are also the two mana-personalities: The Wise Old Man and The Great Mother who appear during times of disorientations to provide guidance.

When all these different entities are assembled, they fulfill the archetype of wholeness better known as the Self.

### **4.3 The individuation Process and the Unification of the Self in**

#### ***Freshwater***

Reaching that elevated state of wholeness is not an easy task to accomplish. The main character had to undergo a great amount of sufferance to emerge in her final transcendent form. It is this tough journey of unifying the binary opposites to make up the self that Jung named the ‘individuation’. To quote Stein, “Jung used the term individuation to talk about psychological development, which he defines as becoming a unified but also unique personality, an individual, an undivided and integrated person.” (161).

The ‘Individuation’ process is thus considered as a rebirth illustrated by archetypes of transformation. In *Four Archetypes*, where Jung brought up the universal motifs he found through comparative religion, the psychoanalyst exemplifies the archetype of transformation by a Jungian take on the 18<sup>th</sup> Sura of the Qura’n entitled ‘The Cave’. He interpreted the cave as “the place of rebirth, that secret cavity in which one is shut up in order to be incubated and renewed.” (Jung 81). He further provides an elaborated Jungian interpretation of the story of ‘the sleepers’ to deduce that “Anyone who gets into that cave, that is to say into the cave which everyone has in himself, or into the darkness that lies behind consciousness, will find himself involved in an—at first—unconscious process of transformation.”(Jung 82).

‘Individuation’ takes place on two fundamental stages of life where a number of alterations occur in the individual. Jung recognizes two stages of life, the first of which the development of the Ego and the Persona happens. The second stage carries “the classic Jungian meaning of individuation” (Stein 163), which stands for the unification of the conscious and unconscious parts of the psyche. Emezi’s narrative, although built in a non-

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linear time frame, depicts these two stages ideally. The awakening of 'we' in the masquerade (ch. 2), which they labeled 'the first birth', is parallel to the development of the ego. Afterwards, the 'second birth' took place with Ada acknowledging and naming the ambiguous unconscious entities, which emerged fully at a later stage of the plot under the names 'Asughara' and 'Saint. Vincent'. The placement of these two characters in the Jungian model of the psyche was revealed earlier as the Shadow and Animus respectively.

On the Individuation, Jung wrote that "There are natural transformation processes which simply happen to us, whether we like it or not, and whether we know it or not." (75). Indeed, this craving of wholeness is unquestionable in *Freshwater*, it is accentuated in a number of passages including: "The whole is greater than the individual" (ch. 13), "all we wanted now was wholeness" (ch. 20), "I realized how useless it had been to try and become a singular entity." (ch. 22), "We were all one, together, balanced for a brief velvet moment in a village night." (ch. 2).

Despite the hardships that came with the development of the different components of the psyche, Ada still went through the individuation process to reach the ultimate version of herself. The novel closes off with a transcendence to the level of a God-image as represented by the Igbo deity Ala. This is a literal denotation to what Jung labeled: the "return to the mothers" (Stein 163). The coming passage is the last of the novel. It is flooded with a variety of archetypal images associated with the self, including the mother, transformation, wholeness, and the serpent. It goes as follows:

"My mother draws closer now. I can see a red road opening before me; the forest is green on either side of it and the sky is blue above it. The sun is hot on the back of my neck. The river is full of my scales. With each step, I am less afraid. I am the brothersister who remained. I am a village full of faces and a compound full of bones, translucent thousands. Why should I be afraid? I am the source of the spring.

All freshwater comes out of my mouth." (Emezi ch. 22).

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The allusion in this extract is used to approximate an image of rebirth to the reader. In itself, rebirth is an allusion to the new beginning Ada is about to experience as a fully integrated individual, who underwent the individuation process.

### **4.4 Conclusion**

Regarding the self, *Freshwater* is not exclusive to the given spiritual context it is built on. The author leaves an opening for other interpretations regarding the individual plurality of the main character. This brings about a psychological dimension to the narrative, which we addressed using psychoanalytical theory through Carl Jung's works. Known for his archetypal theory, Carl Jung developed an interesting map of the human psyche that is more known as the Map of the Soul, an expression coined by psychiatrist Murray Stein. According to this map, we sorted the alters that dwell in the 'marble' of Ada's mind. From 'we', to Asughara, to Saint. Vincent, and even Ada herself the characters find their significant representative in the Jungian model of the psyche. We also stretch to include Yshwa and the multiple implications of 'the mother' to recognize the Wise Old Man and The Great Mother. In order to unify all these features to reach the Self, the protagonist had to undergo the individuation process. At the end of this process, a new beginning is written for Ada. It is in a way a reincarnation into a new complete version of herself highlights by an actualized self.

## **General Conclusion**

Between the narrow-minded old-school philosophies on the self, and the dismissing postmodern ideals, we aimed at reviving the concept of self by tracing it in the novel entitled *Freshwater*. This was done through a syncretistic approach to support the initial hypotheses of this study, which are that self is both plural and multi-disciplinary. In this research, we limited our investigation of the meaning of self to three disciplines; namely sociology, spirituality, and psychology. However, arriving at this stage of the research would not have been possible if a Bakhtinian study of the novel did not take place at first. By tracing the polyphonic, dialogic, and carnivalesque elements in the text, we not only managed to locate the collectiveness of the self, but also to set the tone for the diverse interpretations of the self-phenomenon that are yet to come. This is because the results of the polyphonic reading were twofold: firstly, the multiple voicedness of the narrative was located both formalistically and contextually. Secondly, multiple readings of the narrative were granted due to the novel's simultaneous portrayal of different realities.

In the sociological context, we based the research first on the protagonist's familial relationship as the first social group the individual experiences being a part of. This part shed light on the dysfunction of the family, which serves as a stumbling block for Ada to develop a sense of self. Following the novel's plotline, which later takes the protagonist to America, we extended our research to address the postcolonial concerns present in the text. Displacement, diaspora, and acculturation are the postcolonial notions we highlighted to arrive at a conclusion for the self in the sociological context. This conclusion entails the return of the protagonist to her motherland to establish an association with her native cultural identity.

Tackling the self from a spiritual perspective was done in a complementary manner to the previously discussed aspect. This is because the cultural identity Ada is returning to

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is inclusive of spiritual beliefs of this culture. So we maintained the postcolonial approach to address the historicism of the Igbo religious beliefs in the face of colonialism. After deducing that existential well-being cannot be possible when the main character is dissonant from the Christian faith she identifies with, we specified a part for uncovering the Igbo ontological beliefs present in the novel. In his regard, Ada finds solace and belonging in the dualistic concept of self as found in Odinala.

The last context we placed the self in the psychological one. Again, this section takes from the novel's plotline, which entails the spiritual beings' manifestation as mental illnesses including anxiety, mood, eating and psychotic disorders. With regards to that, we approached this part of the study with the psychoanalytical theories of the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung. By classifying Ada and her 'others' in accordance to Jungian model of the psyche, we managed to track the plural nature of the self as well as the unification principle of self-actualization.

In this research, we considered self-actualization as the resolution to the numerous problems the protagonist of *Freshwater* undergoes from childhood to adulthood. Even if she is unaware of the relevance of the multiple phenomena manifesting on different levels of her consciousness, the transcendent feeling that follows the many realizations equalizes the recognition of self. Thus there is a sense of self the in social, spiritual and psychological contexts present in the novel, which ultimately refers to the plural nature of self. In other words, the plurality of the self manifests first inwardly through the microcosmic state of the individual, for the latter is a miniature universe carrying its own inner reality. Secondly, the self is plural due to its syncretistic attribute which traces it across a multitude of disciplines and schools of thought.

## General Conclusion

This dissertation, we believe, offered a unique take on the idea of the 'self' via the multi-disciplinary approach we adopted. In this regard, we attempted to shrink the barriers between mysticism and science to arrive at a middle ground where a set of different realities coexist to complement one another. This brings about an invitation for future research to broaden the plural zone of the self to include other perspectives on such notion.

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## Résumé :

Le " soi " est un concept complexe, qui comporte un certain nombre de connotations liées à la conscience réflexive de l'individu. Dans cette recherche, nous avons abordé ce concept en nous référant au protagoniste de *Freshwater* (2018) d'Akwaeke Emezi. Cette étude est initiée par une double hypothèse du soi tel qu'il se manifeste à travers des réalités internes et externes. En ce qui concerne le soi intérieur, il est considéré comme une entité plurielle composée d'un certain nombre de partitions. D'autre part, le soi extérieur est un motif qui est relatif à différentes disciplines et écoles de pensée. À cet égard, l'étude examinera ce concept du point de vue de la sociologie, de la spiritualité et de la psychologie respectivement.

## ملخص:

"الذات" مفهوم معقد يحمل في طياته عددا من الدلالات للوعي الانعكاسي للفرد. في هذا البحث، تناولنا هذا المفهوم بالإشارة إلى بطلة الرواية *Freshwater* (2018) للكاتبة Akwaeke Emezi. تستهل هذه الدراسة بافتراض مزدوج للذات يتجلى من خلال حقائق داخلية وخارجية. فيما يتعلق بالذات الداخلية، يُنظر إليها على أنها كيان متعدد مؤلف من عدة أقسام ومن ناحية أخرى، فإن الذات الخارجية هي فكرة مرتبطة بمختلف التخصصات والمدارس الفكرية. يهدف هذا البحث إلى التحقيق في هذا المفهوم من وجهات نظر علم الاجتماع، الروحانية وعلم النفس على التوالي.