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# Heteronormative Versus Non-Normative: A Reading of Chinelo Okpalanta's Under The Udala Trees and Jude Dibia's Walking With Shadows

Chidimma Adaku Nwannewuihe

### Abstract

Colonialism had transforming impact on African ideologies of gender and sexuality. Administrators and religious leaders in unison with the African tradition enforced heterosexuality as the central axis of sexual definition which has become the ideal template for social order. In Africa, marriage, especially customarily constricted is a heterosexual relationship between a man and a woman or women. Same sex relationship as a thematic concern in contemporary African literature has been treated with silence and abstinence from African writers in the past but it has gone beyond that stereotype in Nigeria since the West boldly identified with homosexuality to the extent of challenging the hetero-normative African social order. Therefore, this paper seeks to examine Chinelo Okparanta's *Under The Udala Trees* and Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows* As non-normative challenging the hetero-normative orientation of marriage. This stems from the value the Nigerian society and Africa at large place on natural procreation and the stringent adherence to Christian and Islamic religions. Until recently, African writings depict same sex relationships in a negative light and unsympathetically so, due to the monothematic representations of this subject in African literary texts, again, Africans perceive homosexuality as innately alien to African cultures. This paper exposes Okparanta and Dibia's sympathetic representation of homosexuality which challenges the Nigerian/African cultural orientation. However, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical Criticism is adopted as the theoretical framework since the texts deal with socially-based identities, gender and sexual identities which do not conform to the norm.

**Keywords:** Hetero-Normative, Non-Normative, Homosexuality, Contemporary and Homophobia.

### Introduction

The politics of being anti-queer or homophobic is common in contemporary Africa; this is why homosexuality and more recently, also transgender identity are viewed as "Un-African". The contested matter of homosexuality has since the classical era

been reflected in various literary genres and art forms. In the light of this, Ibrahim (2015) notes that out of the fifty-five African states recognised by the United Nations and African Union, homosexuality has been outlawed in thirty-four countries. Also, Kretz (2013) maintains that in some sub-Saharan nations like Malawi, Uganda, Nigeria, and

Kenya, support for homophobia is by both the people and laws that are drafted by these particular nations that make homosexuality illegal.

To further buttress this assertion from Kretz, On 7<sup>th</sup> January, 2014, the then Nigerian President- Goodluck Jonathan signed his assent to the same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013 (SSMPA). Under pre-existing law, Nigeria criminalizes consensual same-sex sexual activities in private which attracts a maximum penalty of 14years imprisonment. Besides Nigeria, sexual acts between males have been termed illegal and seen as “unnatural Carnal knowledge” in Ghana since the colonial era. The majority of Ghana’s populations hold anti-LGBT sentiments. Also, there are several cases of physical and violent homophobic attacks against LGBT people, and these attacks are often encouraged by the media and religious as well as the political leaders which are the people who make up the “main-stream”. Furthermore, Ghana’s parliament according to (BBC News, Accra) on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February, 2024 passed a tough new bill that imposes a prison sentence of up to three years for anyone convicted of identifying as LGBTQ. In order to further fight the effort of the LGBTQ sympathizers so as to put a stop to the growing trend which

poses a serious threat to the conservative African value system and culture, the parliament imposes a maximum of five year jail term for anyone forming or funding LGBTQ groups. This additional penalty by the Ghanaian parliament is akin to that of Nigeria’s Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act (SSMPA) which states that Registering, Operating, or participating in gay clubs, societies and organizations, directly or indirectly making public show of a same sex amorous relationship in Nigeria gets 10years imprisonment. Also inclusive is one who acts as a witness to this type of union, and even anyone found aiding and abetting a Same-Sex Union. These laws justify that, societies cannot function arbitrarily, there is hardly any society all over the world without laid down principles, guidelines, procedures, and ethics, be it written or unwritten, that shape and govern the society’s modes of operation. This is evidently true because the laws criminalizing same-sex relationships keep the African societies sanitized to an extent, thereby making it possible to still uphold African cultural values such as heterogeneous marriage which procreation is the end product

On the other hand, the European and Western cultural concept of marriage as Bamilola (2019) posits “is a union between two mature

individuals of same or different sexes who claim to love each other enough to accept to live together as husband and wife. He further explains that, while this concept underscores monogamy, the western culture also permits homosexual as well as heterosexual marriages constitutionally, a practice many believe is predicated on the Western world's prerogatives on freedom of conscience, thoughts and choice by mature individuals, which of course, may rightly be regarded as the fundamental basis for happiness and fulfilment" (123). Bamilola's position on the Western constitution concerning marriage would have been all-encompassing during Barack Obama and Joe Biden's regime. But with Donald Trump as the new President of America, the rights of the LGBTQ+ have been rolled back. Trump insists that; "the American Government will use the term "sex" rather than "gender", while mandating that identification documents issued by the government, including passports and visas, be based on individual biological classification as either male or female. The United States will only recognize only two sexes, male and female that are unchangeable".

### **Enforcing Heteronormativity**

In order to fully grasp the retorts of a heteronormative social order concerning same sex relationship or non-normative relationship, this paper examines the various ways in which such a society responds to the presence of other forms of sexuality besides the socially accepted form of sexuality. This echoes the outlook of Warner (1993) on heteronormativity which states that heterosexuality, predicated on the gender binary, is the norm or default sexual orientation in most societies. Therefore, heteronormativity presupposes that sexual and marital relations are only fitting between people of the opposite sex. It demands for the configuration of biological sex, sexuality, gender identity, gender roles in a way that privileges heterosexuals.

Moreover, heterosexuality as Adrienne Rich (1993) lays claim to is an ideology that lays the foundation towards understanding heterosexuality as both structural and institutional. According to Rich, it creates a society where homosexuals are intended to conform to heteronormative norms or remain on the margin. In the same light, Butler (1999) appends that "heterosexuality requires binary gender relations where the masculine and the feminine are differentiated from one another". Again, Rich (1993)

concur by stating the essence of heterosexuality that “the approval of heterosexuality by societies is to maintain the binary order of sexuality (male-female), where the immediate family, especially in Africa, becomes the driving force to stimulate the hetero-normative standards in the younger generation”. This is apparent in Okpalanta’s *Under the Udala Trees*, where, Ijeoma’s mother persistently heaps her daughter Ijeoma with both religious and cultural ideas that a man and woman were meant to be united by marriage as opposed to a marriage between men and men or women and women. Her mother helps in promoting patriarchal and heterosexual values. She maintains that lesbianism has no place and Ijeoma must acknowledge heteronormativity. In mama’s words; “there’s nothing more important now than for us to begin working on cleansing your soul” (65). Adaora’s dependence on the interpretation of the binary gender roles as part of God’s expectation is made clear during the Bible study sessions. This shows the role of religion and the certainty of a Supreme Being, whose words are the templates that guide behavioural patterns. This is the reason Mama constantly refers Ijeoma to the bible to know God’s stand on homosexuality. Mama admonishes thus; “don’t you see? It is that

same behaviour that led to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; the very same behaviour that you and that girl engaged in” (73). Also, Mama’s discomfort about Ijeoma and Amina’s relationship could be likened to grandmother in Maddy’s play *Big Berin* where she inquires; “Homosexuality? Wheyting be dat?” (16).

Mama’s reliance on the interpretation of the binary gender roles as part of God’s expectation is made clear during the Bible study sessions. She starts off her Bible lesson in the book of Genesis to drive her point home to Ijeoma. She goes: “For this reason, a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh” (82). Furthermore, Okpalanta through the character of Mama stressed the last part of the bible in Igbo, (Igbo happens to be one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria where the writer hails from, which also forms the main setting of the text) to show the importance and value of the Igbo language and also to export the Igbo culture. It goes thus: “24 N’ihi nkea ka nwoke garapu nna-ya na nne-ya, rapara n’aru nwunye-ya: ha ewee gho otu anu-ar. (Stressing on), “Nwoke na nwunye. Man and wife. Adam na Eve. I ne ghe nti? Are you listening?” She was shaking her finger, a reminder and a warning. I nodded. She said it again: “Nwoke na

nwunye. Adam na Eve. Man and wife” (82). On the other hand, the non-normative trait creeps up in her mind, making her (Ijeoma) to see the bible and the messages in it as metaphors and symbols of that time that are not meant for her generation (82-483). In the same light, Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theory of personality calls Ijeoma’s suppressed inner thought the “**Id**” which he believes has its basis on the pleasure principle and embodies such instincts as ; sex, thirst, sleep, sickness, hunger, cold, heat, etc. Freud adds that it is the primary component of the personality and the deepest level of the unconscious. According to him, the “**Id**” becomes focused on certain erogenous areas. Freud submits that man is born with the “**Id**” which is an important part of the personality. It is the source of all psychic energy.

In addition, this trait exhibited by Ijeoma is also evident in Jude Dibia’s *Walking with Shadows*. In the novel, Adrian is aware of the cultural and religious values, and then the implication of living in a homophobic country (Nigeria), he pushes his homosexual sexual urge to the subconscious and tries his best to lead a normal heterosexual life. While Abdul and Femi his homosexual partner succumb completely to their id. This is why Sigmund Freud is of the opinion that man is

generally bad and that if societal laws do not change him, he becomes destructive. Also, Adrian’s sexuality is foreshadowed at the beginning of the novel as he discovers that he is attracted to that which is regarded as effeminate but which he strongly believes would disappear after his baptism and that; “he would be a new person” (4 – 5). Same goes for Ijeoma in *Under the Udala Trees*; she feels that attending the revival of an “onye ocha minister” will automatically fix her emotions towards her fellow girl (Amina). Ijeoma wonders thus; “it was as if all I have to do was show up at the revival, take a full Sunday regimen of “onye ocha” prayer tablet, and just like that, everything would be fixed” (189). Again, Adrian and Ijeoma’s thoughts that baptism and Christian revival respectively should be able to literally wash and totally cleanse their attraction for same sex relationship which is considered a non-normative sexual practice gives credence to the power of Christian religion which is also part of the main stream. However, this attraction for the same sex is what Freud refers to as “early experiences” and he opines that, “those experiences play a large role in personality development and they continue to influence behaviour later in life”.

Ijeoma's mother symbolises patriarchal authority, which she has internalised; she aims to ensure that Ijeoma submits to heteronormativity. For this to sink in properly one Biblical passage is used repeatedly to emphasize the concept of hetero-normativity, the bible passage goes thus: "Leviticus 18: Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is an abomination!" (75). Thurmand (2015) argues that hetero-normativity is an oppressive structure that is upheld and is considered natural. Here, Thurmand's use of the word "oppressive" stands for "enforcement" and this is why Ijeoma's mother makes it a point of duty to enforce the hetero-normative values into Ijeoma. For that reason, Mama represents the traditional and religious tool or medium used to advocate for a sane and orderly society.

In addition, Mamas character represents majority of Nigerians who believe that homosexuality is un-African and should not be allowed to flourish in the country. Throughout the text, Mama clings to religious and cultural norms. She is the typical example of homophobia. She believes that any relationship or marriage without procreation is not acceptable though some reviews have shown that in some parts of Nigeria, woman-to-woman marriage is allowed. For instance, Guarav Desai (1997)

in "Out in Africa" made reference to Ifi Amadiume's seminal work on "Changing Construction of Nnobi Society". In that work, Amadiume shows how "the institution of woman-to-woman marriages in pre-colonial Nnobi society suggest that there existed in this, certain fluidity in the gender-sex system so that biological sex did not necessarily determine social gender. In other words, Amadiume by drawing on a pre-colonial social institution in which women could marry other women and play the social role of a husband insisting that: "the phenomenon of woman to woman marriages should not be misread as any kind of institutionalized lesbianism and that such a reading has been carried on by Black lesbians in the West, which she (Amadiume) points out that it can only be as a result of the interpreter's wishes and fantasies and this ultimately reveals nothing more than her ethnocentrism"(740). She further warns those westernized black women who go about creating a false narrative about Nnobi (which is a town in the Eastern part of Nigeria) just to satisfy their ego in order to push the Agenda of same sex marriage that; "Such a reading would be shocking and offensive to Nnobi women for whom lesbianism remains a foreign practice" (740). The quintessence of Amadiume's position

suggests that, in as much as these women are married according to tradition, it does not in any way mean that they practice lesbianism. She adds that “sexual practice in Nnobi is exclusively heterosexual” (741). However, for the sake of clarification, this type of marriage was contracted during the pre-colonial era in the Eastern part of Nigeria to continue a family lineage where there’s no male child to keep the family name or for procreation in cases where a wife is not able to bear children for her husband.

The “**id**” asserts itself in Abdul, another character in Dibia’s *Walking with Shadows*. Abdul’s need and gratification are placed over those of his family members, he therefore reprimands Adrian for his unsure behaviour over his sexuality; “you sound like you are ashamed of your past. You sound like you had a choice in determining your sexuality... you sound like it is a curse to be homosexual and you could be punished for your crimes” (24). The above scenario proves that, Adrian is not actually ashamed of himself just the way Abdul sees it but because his family has imbibed the hetro-normative values in him. He understands that homosexuality is perceived and considered a taboo in Nigeria and Africa at large. As a country with high religious and cultural values, Nigeria sees homosexuality as a sin

against God and humanity hence the harsh law criminalizing same sex relationship with penalty of fourteen years jail term, if found guilty. In fact this is why Gaurav Desai (1997) in “Out in Africa” refers to homosexuality as; “Non-normative sexual practices that are unethical” (736). Desai goes on to explain that:

...It is not entirely clear where the moral high ground lies. Just as Western feminism finds itself in a “nervous condition” Vis-à-vis its negotiations with non-Western practices such as incision and clitoridectomy, an anti-homophobic politics finds itself unable to open up gay-affirmative spaces without running the risk of being culturally insensitive. And yet, if no “culture” is so monolithic, so homogenous, as to be fully recuperable within a singular sexual, aesthetic, economic, moral or epistemic order, if “culture”, that is, always exceeds the limits it seeks to set for itself, then what divides the “culturally sensitive” from the “culturally insensitive?” could sensitivity to the needs and desires of some subjects mean risking insensitivity to the needs and desires of others? If so, to which subjects as

voices must such a politics pay heed?  
(736-737).

In essence, Desai compares those who are anti-homophobic like Abdul to “Western feminism” as he acknowledges that the idea of homosexuality is “culturally sensitive” and that while discussions of trends like this is being carried out, one should be rest assured that emotions would be heightened especially from those who are vested in the African culture who perceive same sex relationship as a Western import. Also, Hrdy echoes this thought in “The Truth about Homosexuality in Africa” thus:

The common belief among Africans is that homosexuality is primarily a story of seduction by Europeans and/or Americans, in which the Africans acquiesced out of fear or from a desire for money... But we know that this is a lie, and this is an attempt to shed some light on our true history, that which our colonial masters had ensured was kept hidden from us. In the black/white relationships that did develop into homosexual unions, the white partner appears to have been the aggressor. No doubt the abuse of African people by European/American people has included sexual abuse. What is untrue, the lie is that such abuse was the origin of African homosexuality.

In Okpalanta’s *Under the Udala Trees*, another instance of Mama trying to persuade Ijeoma to surrender to heterosexuality, can be seen when Adaora (Mama) paints a picture of what and how marriage should be as ordained by God and accepted by the society. She goes thus; “Marriage has a shape. Its shape is that of a bicycle. It doesn’t matter the size or colour of the bicycle. All that matters is that the bicycle is complete, that the bicycle has two wheels. She continues; the man is one wheel and the woman the other wheel and that one cannot do without the other. One wheel comes before the other and the other wheel has no choice but to follow. What is certain is that either wheel is able to function fully without the other. And what use is it to exist in the world as a partially functioning human being? (213). Mama’s reproach influences Ijeoma’s decision to marry her childhood friend (Chibundu) not that it is her true intention but because that is what society expects of a young woman. Mama sternly warns Ijeoma; “A woman without a man is hardly a woman at all (213). She adds that ijeoma should make haste to get a man for herself; “ Gee nti. Listen, oge na agakwa. Time is passing. If you are not careful, you’ll find yourself like that candle, all burnt up and nothing to show for it” (213). Mama’s outburst may be perceived as harsh

considering the fact that Ijeoma is her only child but Mama on the other hand, understands the societal expectations and would not want her to fall short of societal expectation because of the consequences that comes with being a defiant to the rules that govern the society. The society expects a woman to get married and bear children and this can only be made easier when the woman is in her prime. Mama's point also shows conformity to heterosexuality. In that case, Foucault (1990) is of the view that women are expected to conform without questions to societal norms. In the text, Amina, Ijeoma's childhood lesbian lover already conformed by marrying a boy up North. That is why the school teacher asked Ijeoma to do same.

The mere thought of marrying Chibundu makes Ijeoma to have a feeling that she would be perceived as normal like every other girl and no longer queer. Then again, she does not have to worry about being found out (259). She was however not sure about it. During her traditional wedding, she tries to bring the issue of her sexuality up, but her mother cut her short, insisting that her marriage to Chibundu is the right thing to do (262). Chibundu therefore represents patriarchal dominance over women which gives preference to male heirs over female ones. He sees Ijeoma as a baby making

machine instead of a partner in marriage because his society makes him believe it is so. On this, Butler (1999) maintains that neither the naturalised heterosexuality nor division of sex and gender are natural but are socially constructed to serve the purpose of reproduction. Therefore, Ijeoma's connection with Chibundu, unlike her relationship with Ndidi, is as a result of cultural expectations. Ijeoma's nightmare started after the birth to their daughter- Chidimma, and Chibundu's hope dashed because he wishes to have a male child as his first. He insists that Ijeoma must give him a son, to the extent of being condescending and even abusive to Ijeoma (316).

In desperation for a male child, Chibundu buys a toy car that their daughter is not allowed to play with; he claims that the toy car was meant for their boy (307). Chibundu's questionable attitude towards his daughter is what Freud calls "Displacement" as one of the six defence mechanisms employed by an individual when in denial to satisfy an impulse by acting on a substituted object or person in a socially unacceptable way". In other words, Chibundu is supposed to take out his frustration on his wife or better still- God, who gives children and not an innocent one year old baby girl. Mama sees Ijeoma's marriage to Chibundu as transition

from homosexuality to heterosexuality. In *Under the Udala Trees*, we see how ecstatic Mama is about Ijeoma's probable future as a wife and mother and gave her consent even before Chibundu proposed to her daughter. In addition, another character in denial is Ndidi, her type of denial is what Freud refers to as "Sublimation"- This is a type of defence mechanism that is similar to the one discussed above, (that is "displacement"). But this mechanism involves satisfying an impulse by acting on a substitute in a socially accepted way. For instance, Ndidi in Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees* and Ebele (Adrian) in Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows* buried themselves in their individual works so that they can suppress the fact that they are attracted to the same sex, (which is not socially acceptable in Nigeria). The character of Mama also lived in denial, in the sense that she does not want to discuss anything about the death of her husband with her only child-Ijeoma, she blames the war for making her send away her only child Ijeoma to Nnewi where she united with Amina who was also a house help in the school teacher's house (88-91). Freud therefore refers to Mama's state of mind as a defence mechanism otherwise known as "denial". Here, the ego blocks upsetting or overwhelming experiences from awareness,

causing the individual to refuse to acknowledge or believe what is happening.

However, Chibundu's acceptance of Ijeoma's relationship with Ndidi does not mean he relinquishes his control over her and the household. Several years later, after he discovers the letters she has been writing to Ndidi, he admits that he was rough on her the previous night. As a result, he alternates between embracing her sexuality and highlighting her marital status once more. In the text, Okparanta focuses on Ijeoma's inner war- her personal struggle to come to terms with her sexuality in an environment where her sexual preferences challenge cultural norms. Ijeoma's first experience with Amina which she describes as "tingly and good and like everything in the world is perfect" (118) and her relationship with Ndidi are the experiences that shaped her sexuality later in life. This explains Juliana Makuchi Nfah- Abbenyi citing Julia Kristeva that, this type of relationship is defined as "subject-in-process, as they seek to reactivate the repressed feminine and appropriate a semiotic, maternal link" (747).

Ijeoma's attempt to lead a "normal" heterosexual life as a married woman and then the realization that the road leads only to unhappiness because she is sexually attracted to women, staying in a

heterosexual relationship becomes thorny for her. Consequently, Ijeoma and Ndidi's total attraction to fellow women is what Belaya refers to as "feminine way of loving". On the contrary, Richard Bjornson as cited in the same article insists that "Beyala's Lesbian approach to the reality of contemporary Cameroon is unusual within the context of the country's Literate culture" (420). Ndache Tagne's claim in the same article concurs that "Ateba's homosexuality yearnings will raise an outcry from a number of African readers", and readers will be scandalized by the "pornographic" content of Beyala's first novel" (97). The purpose of this paper aligns with Tagne's opinion which is against the pornographic content of the works of lesbian / gay advocates scandalizing the readers because Nigeria as a homophobic country condemns the LGBTQ community and what they stand for. Some parts of Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees* can be seen as pornographic which can be traced to the character of Ijeoma. She fantasizes thus: "any sort of self-pleasure was a sin in the eye of God. Never mind all of that. I did it anyway. I went about it very quietly, slowly at first and then faster and faster. Before long my throat was catching with fulfilment and relief and

there was not an ounce of guilt accompanying it" (194-195).

This abominable act by Ijeoma according to McLeod (2014) is what Freud explains in the third stage of his five psychosexual stages as the developmental stage which he called - "the phallic. At this juncture, it is safe to say that the idea of same sex relationship is associated with high level of moral decadence which challenges the true essence of the Christian religion and African culture. But then people like Ijeoma and Ndidi in *Under the Udala Trees* and Adrian in *Walking with Shadows* have mastered the act of suppressing this part of them for too long in their subconscious because the Nigerian society is hetero-normative and according to Freud, "their "super-ego" which is that portion of the mind where morality and higher principle reside encourages them to act in socially and morally acceptable ways". This is because of colossal consequences that come with disobedience to laid down rules of that magnitude. In the novel, Ndidi educates Ijeoma on how the LGBTQ community has been able to find pleasure in who they are and what they stand for though they do that with an air of fear and improbability of their lives because they are constantly attacked by homophobic uniform men and civilians alike. Ndidi tells her of how the formal church was

burnt (206) and the uncertainty of the lives of the people that belong to that community because if caught, they can be burnt alive or stoned to death. The attack on the church building while Ijeoma and Ndidi were there and also, the burnt body of Adanna their friend by the police confirms that (206-209). This type of treatment according to Tilsen and Nylund (2010), has to do with “the notion of heterosexuality and the postulation that each individual is heterosexual leads to the development of homophobia. They further add that “various power relations for this reason, react either consciously or unconsciously in an attempt to stabilise hetero-normativity”. Kaoma (2018) confirms that this rejection of same sex marriage both religious and politically, is possibly geared towards protecting African heritage. In both texts, there are a lot of instances of disapproval, hostility and even killings of the homosexuals. They practically lived in fear throughout the texts. This therefore asserts that Nigeria is homophobic.

Religion plays a major role in both Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees* and Dibia's *Walking with Shadows*. Hunsberge and Jackson (2005) posit that “individuals use religion to derive values from society and in so doing religion will have the influence

of heterosexism that exists in the society. Consequently, high levels of prejudice will arise due to the legitimization of heterosexism by religious ideals and beliefs”. In *Walking with Shadows*, Adrian's religious upbringing kept him grounded to heterosexuality throughout his life; he lived in the closet as a homosexual from his childhood to adulthood, got married to Ada and even had a daughter before his sexuality was exposed by his colleague as revenge. The fact remains that no matter how hard a gay person tries to hide his sexuality by living in the closet, sometimes, their body gestures give them away. However, while growing up, Adrian's siblings have always wondered why his behaviour and mannerisms are the way they are (130–131), and Chika recollects thus; ...“He was a sissy! And everyone hated a sissy...” (137-138). This therefore expounds Brian Moylan's description of different types of gay in “Field builds”, they are; Twinks, Bears, Gay Jocks, Gay-Listers, Circuit Boys, Show Queens, Art fags and Drag Queens with their sub- categories but the description is not the focus of this paper. Nonetheless, Dibia's protagonist (Adrain) belongs to the “Circuit Boys” they pay particular attention to their looks: often muscular, waxed preen, usually with tribal tattoos and enjoy all-night dance parties in

different cities around the country, their subcategories are Tweakers and muscle Marys. Ada his wife muses; "...His hair was always in place, always perfect, his eye brows, a perfect bow, His mustache eternally trimmed" (30). On Ada's part, the **"ego"** balances the wrath of the society with her desires and so, she ignores all the signs, her **"id"** which is the pleasure –seeking side of her enjoys the beautiful polished nature of Adrian and this blinds her to the signs of Adrian's homosexuality (30).

Moreover, as Ada tries to reconcile with the reality of Adrian's 'coming out', she could not help but wonder how Adrian manages to suppress his emotions all these years. Ada's amazement explains Freud's postulation of the conscious – which is where our current thoughts, feelings and focus live, unconscious – which at the deepest level resides a repository of the process that drive our behaviour, including primitive and instinctual desires, and subconscious – which is the home of everything we can recall or retrieve from our memory". Adrian manages to push his sexuality to his subconscious; he employs a defence mechanism to suppress unpleasant memory and tries to blend with the hetero-normative by burying himself in his work (81). At this point, a war ensues between Adrian's **"id"** and **"superego"**, he

deliberates on whether to conform to society's demands or not. Here, the **"super ego"** fights the **id** for supremacy. "A part of him was certain that he still wanted to remain married and the other part was demanding to be recognized (98).

In *Under the Udala Trees*, Ijeoma almost shares the same fate with Adrain. At this point, she is torn between staying in her marriage because of her daughter and choosing her peace of mind by rekindling her lesbian relationship with Ndidi. Her horror and frightening nightmares hunted her. Sometimes, she interprets the dream as a revelation that her freedom from her marriage is around the corner and other times, she experiences the feeling of guilt as sinner (312-313). Consequently, Mcleod (2013) explains Freud's opinion on dreams from his book- *The Interpretation of Dreams* as game-changing, before him, dreams were considered insignificant and insensible ramblings of the mind at rest. But the book reveals that; "dreams translate forbidden wishes and taboo desires into a non-threatening form through; condensation (the joining of two or more ideas), displacement (transformation of the person or object we are concerned about into something or someone else), and secondary elaboration (the unconscious process of turning the wish

fulfilment images or events into a logical narrative". In the novel, Ijeoma's second dream paves way for her liberation; she realizes that "...they (Ijeoma and her daughter Chidimma) are both choking under the weight of something larger than them, "something heavy and weighty, the weight of tradition and superstition and of all our legends..." (312-313). At this point, Ijeoma resolves to leave her marriage and Freud calls this repressed emotions that are pent up in the subconscious which is the "Id". Freud elucidates that there are two biological instincts that make up the "Id". They are: "Eros"- which brings out the survival instinct in an individual and "Thanatos"- which brings out the death instinct in an individual. Ijeoma therefore switches on her survival instinct to live for her only child after she suffered a miscarriage. Ijeoma's reunion with Ndidi her lesbian lover after walking away from her marriage shows her liberation but she "may never" be totally liberated as Nigeria is a heteronormative society. People like them can only remain in the closet and dream (321).

## Conclusion

No doubt, the two novels (*Walking with Shadows* and *Under the Udala Trees*) are targeted at the Nigerian audience to arouse

the feeling of sympathy for the LGBTQ+ community and this is because contemporary Nigerian writers are shifting their trend to the topical issues which same-sex marriage/homosexuality tops the chart. This paper has appraised the diverse ways Okparanta and Dibia are able to show through their characters the reactions of a heterosexual community to same sex relationship. It is safe to say that heteronormativity (as represented in the texts) is a means used to ensure that homosexuals conform to heterosexuality through heterosexual marriages. Also evident is the tension between family expectations rooted in African traditions and the desire for individual happiness in both novels. However, this pressure to conform reflects the traditional value placed on family loyalty and honour, even at the cost of individual happiness. In *Under the Udala Trees*, the expectations placed on Ijeoma by her family are stern, principally as it concerns marriage and sexuality. Her mother and her guardian (the school teacher) frown at ijeoma's sexual involvement with her fellow girl (Amina) because of the value placed on family harmony and the weight of sustaining social reputation. The novel also explains the anguish that comes with having to make a choice between family and personal

happiness, where the cost of opting for love over tradition will amount to a profound sense of loss and alienation. The sense of loss and alienation especially from friends and family became the major factors that propelled Adrian in *Walking with Shadows* to relocate to London. Therefore, Adrian's relocation to London authenticates the actual reason this paper suggests that homosexuality as a non-normative in Nigeria is a social construct that is motivated by the Western people and spread by African LGBTQ activists. Vignal Daniel (1983) supports this claim that "homosexuality is a Western influence on Africa" because the Western world is the only safe haven for people like Adrian. This paper concludes with the assertion of Brenna Munro (2007) that "Gay modernity might be scripted by the West, but the terms of this modernity are being revised by queer Africans and their sympathizers" (754).

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