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**THESIS – THREAD OF LIES**

**EXEGESIS – COMMUNAL  
CONSCIOUSNESS: *THREAD OF LIES*  
AS COMPOSITE NOVEL AND  
LITERARY DEPICTION OF  
HOMOPHOBIA**

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## **Acknowledgement**

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## **Abstract**

*Thread of Lies* is a work of fiction that deals with homophobia; the trauma and dejection homosexuals face in the twenty-first century. The death of a lesbian couple is the background behind the plot. The exegesis explores the genre (the composite novel) of the creative work, the impacts of religion and politics on homosexuality, and the societies that gay novelists, James Baldwin and Sarah Waters, portray in their fictio

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

#### Synopsis of Creative Project (*Thread of Lies*)

*Thread of Lies* is a *composite novel* that deals with homophobia in diverse societies. It is mostly set in Nigeria, Australia, New Zealand, and England.

The work has five recurring protagonists, functioning together as a collective protagonist. Morris and Dunn (1995) define the collective protagonist as "either a group that functions as a central character", or "an implied central character who functions as a metaphor (an aggregate figure who [...] may be [...] archetypal)" (p. 59). It must be noted that there are other vital characters besides the five protagonists: the structure of a composite novel, which will be discussed in chapter two, does not support the classification of characters as 'minor' (Gorman, 1998). The five protagonists introduced below, however, drive and shape the story in central ways and impact the roles the rest of the characters in *Thread of Lies* play.

#### Protagonists

**Rayleigh Johnson** is a British journalist who goes to Nigeria after receiving the tragic news of her sister's death. The cause of death is vague. Rayleigh embarks on a mission of unveiling the truth.

**Kay Johnson** is Rayleigh's sister, a lesbian who decides to settle in Nigeria with her partner, Ruky, despite the country's negative stance on same-sex relationships.

**Rukevwe George (Ruky)** is Kay's partner. She has a Christian upbringing, but leaves the faith and becomes an atheist after settling into the affair with Kay. Prior to leaving the faith, she had struggled with her Christian devotion.

**Michael Merije** is a black Australian man' born in Sydney to Nigerian parents. He is a homosexual who has had several failed relationships in the past. This often weighs him down emotionally. His parent's rejection disturbs him, and speaks to the larger questions of (in)tolerance and acceptance raised in the fiction.

**Dafe Ogheneovo** is an intellectually disabled man in his early twenties, whose parents are politicians active in Nigeria's government. He murders the lesbian couple, Kay and Ruky, after returning to Nigeria from England, where he was unsuccessful in establishing a football career.

### **Plot and Background**

The deaths of the lesbian couple, Kay and Ruky, serve as the background and the catalyst for the plot of the composite novel. Rayleigh carries out an investigation, intending to make a documentary about the deaths. She realises there are two sides to the story surrounding the incident. One side accuses the Niger-Delta rebellious movement (an organisation fighting for a better share of Nigeria's oil revenues) of the murder. The second side points at Dafe, son of two politicians. Over the course of her investigation, Rayleigh establishes close relationships with Chioma (a journalist) and Michael Merije, both of whom are very supportive. Rayleigh falls in love with Michael who fails, being homosexual, to reciprocate her romantic feelings, despite the fact that he likes and respects her.

The narrative often moves back and forth in time, and so the way Kay and Ruky are killed is revealed in the middle of the work, even though it is highlighted in earlier sections.

Another switch in narrative focuses on the offender. Dafe Ogheneovo's efforts to establish a football career suffer a setback after he is sexually abused by a teammate, Cap J. This affects him traumatically, and his increasing bitterness and volatility become a source of concern for everyone around him, including family members. He verbally attacks his coach and also assaults a teammate named Diarra. He ends up being deported back to Nigeria, where he murders Kay and Ruky. His parents send him to New Zealand, where his father has citizenship, to protect him from the consequences of his actions. In New Zealand, Dafe is institutionalised in a compulsory care facility that provides rehabilitation and welfare for criminal offenders with intellectual disabilities and other mental illnesses. Dafe's mental state does not improve, and he assaults many fellow inmates and staff members. He attempts arson, unsuccessfully, and on his second attempt, he seriously hurts himself and becomes disfigured.

The narrative toward the last chapter shifts to Michael, who reveals that Rayleigh has finally made the documentary. The screening of the documentary has a profound emotional effect on him, and he decides to leave Nigeria as a

consequence. Back in Sydney, his parents' rejection of his sexuality hasn't changed, and this eventually fuels his decision to commit suicide.

Rayleigh, who never learns of this suicide, establishes a romantic relationship with her friend Chioma on the evening of the screening.

The closing chapter goes back in time, focusing on Kay and Ruky living together in an unwelcoming society in Nigeria.

### **Perception and Conviction**

Nigerian society is intolerant and insensitive toward gay people. *Thread of Lies* portrays and analyses some of these negative attitudes toward homosexuals. There is a deep cultural and religious bias against homosexuality in Nigerian society. I don't support homosexuality, but I am anti-homophobia. I condemn the negative social perceptions and reactions against homosexuality. In Christianity, adultery, fornication (sex between couples outside marriage), prostitution, and homosexuality are all considered immoral. However, this same religion largely ignores adultery – when it happens between church members, it is habitually met with silence. The church routinely weds pregnant couples without condemning fornication. I am not condemning the church. My point is this: if other forms of immorality are met with this (hypocritical) treatment, why is homosexuality met with such outward hatred and violence?

### **Technique and Writing**

In writing *Thread of Lies*, I switch between multiple points of view: the first person, the second person, and the third person. Further, the third person moves between the third person limited and the third person subjective.

The central figure, Dafe, has no control over his own life or what goes on around him, but influences basically every sequential event in the work. Given complications like these, I found it illuminating to use multiple points of view. This practice gave me room to view characters from different perspectives. The first person tended to bring out the sincerity in a character for me. It is employed with a host of characters, including Michael Merije and Rayleigh Johnson, in various sections of the work. It is never, however, used with Dafe. This is because he is never sincere. The second and third person points of view are employed in the chapters in which he plays a leading role.

When the narrative shifts into the second person, Rayleigh owns the voice: she is the one saying ‘you’, making her the subject of the narrative. Dafe is often the object of the narrative here, although Ruky has a similar role in one chapter.

The third person, which switches between subjective and limited positions, gave me a profound understanding of my characters: where the ‘subjective’ searches the heart and inner motivations of the character, the ‘limited’ focuses on the character’s outward actions only, letting those actions speak for themselves.

Travelling between countries is a major theme in the novel, and all the core characters move or journey from one country to another. My own trip to Australia during the period I was writing most of Michael’s side of the story had a significant effect. I could see a part of my personality in Michael, particularly in terms of his racial consciousness. Although, unlike Michael, I am not gay and neither was I born in Australia, my own perception of Sydney informed his in a major way. The journey as a thematic metaphor, linking the outer movement of the characters to their inner development, brings people of different races and backgrounds together in the novel and links the third world to the first world, establishing a world of its own.

### **Motivation and Aims**

I didn’t set out to write a composite novel on homosexuality. My interest is in society’s responses to homosexuality (particularly homophobia). *Thread of Lies* also examines a lot of societal issues that tie into society’s responses to homosexuality, such as parenting, love, business, religion, and political corruption. It is mostly set in Nigeria, where homosexuality is punishable with the death penalty, or with jail sentences as long as fourteen years. The sections which are set in Australia, England, and New Zealand give room for comparisons across cultures.

I have researched and explored the negative responses and impacts of politics and religion on homosexuality in different societies and have mirrored them in the creative project. This exegesis will be analysing the effects of politics and religion on homosexuality. It will also analyse the societies portrayed in the works of gay authors, James Baldwin and Sarah Waters, particularly *Giovanni’s Room* (1956) and *Another Country* (1962) by Baldwin, and *Fingersmith* (2002) and *The Night Watch* (2006) by Waters.

## CHAPTER 2

### Genre

#### The Composite Novel

The practice of writing novels in which chapters or various sections can stand independently as (short) stories of their own has been around for quite some time. Early works that fit into this category include: Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896), Gertrude Stein's *Three Lives* (1909), Henry James' *The Finer Grain* (1910), James Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914). Henry Miller's *Black Spring* (1936), Richard Wright's *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938), and Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982) are some further examples. These writers have put together a collection of interrelated short stories fused into one whole. However there has been some subsequent confusion as to how these works should be characterised and classified. Several different names and labels have been suggested by various scholars and critics, leading to much debate. Examples of the many names suggested by writers and scholars for the genre are: story cycle, short story cycle, multi-faceted novel, story novel, paranovel, short story composite, rovelle, anthology novel, short story sequence, and narrative of community (Dunn and Morris, 1995). Nagel (2004) gives an overview of this debate

Nagel sees this form as a *short story cycle*, "rich, with origins decidedly antecedent to the novel, with roots in the most ancient of narrative traditions" (2004, p. 1). He sees the 'short story cycle' as a collection of verses or narratives around some outstanding event or character. Nagel's definition is in line with what Dunn and Morris call a 'composite novel'.

Dunn and Morris (1995) describe the composite novel as "a literary work composed of shorter texts that though individually complete and autonomous – are interrelated in a coherent whole according to one or more organising principles" (p. 2). According to Morris and Dunn, the term 'composite novel' emphasizes the integrity of the 'whole', while the term 'short story cycle' emphasizes the integrity of the 'parts'.

Lundén (1999), who advocates the use of the name 'short story composite', defines the genre as "the mode of narrative that most explicitly and deliberately

combines features from two established genres, the *short story* and the *novel*” (p. 32).

Ferguson (2003) seems to disagree with the work of other critics, particularly regarding the name for this genre of writing. She says that “a cycle by its name should ‘go around’ something—in time, in the consideration of a theme (returning to its point of origin?)” (p. 2). Ferguson describes Dunn and Morris's definition as capacious and relatively vague. Matheny (2012), who concurs that the genre stands between the short story and a novel, sees the name differences and genre question based on the ways the stories in a collection are connected.

The need to identify the genre in which a particular group of stories stands as a sequence or cycle speaks to the reason we work to classify objects in other areas: so that the reader can read strategically to understand the work (Ferguson, 2003).

This section's aim is not to choose a suitable name for the genre, as the terms 'composite novel', 'short story cycle', and 'short story composite' all seem to refer to the same type of work. The argument does, however, shed some light on the reasons I have adopted the term 'composite novel' for *Thread of Lies*. I have chosen this term for the distancing from the short story that it implies. *Thread of Lies* has a scope beyond the short story and the various stories it contains, which makes it more like a novel. It must be emphasised here that the term 'composite novel' is also used to avoid confusion as to the genre of the creative project. The complications of this genre as identified by other scholars, however, are not discarded.

### **Objective and Significance**

The objective of writing *Thread of Lies* was to tie together a series of tales that would come together to form one whole. Ingram (1971) describes that the “[c]yclical habit of the mind is the habit of drawing smaller units into the integral wholeness of a superstructure” (p. 25). Dunn and Morris (1995) emphasize the concept of symbolic function, or the need to seek order, to arrange, to make connections. The standalone nature of the chapters or stories frees them from strict linearity, since the plot progresses spirally (subsequently visiting the past) rather than in a linear pattern. So it is vital for chapters to be strong enough independently to stand on its own.

The writing of *Thread of Lies* adheres to the several prescriptions for the composite novel as prescribed by various scholars. In the formative stages of the work, I intended to involve several characters, of different nationalities. Some

questions arose regarding how to link these different characters and fit them into a single narrative. This is close to Kennedy's classification of different stories that 'literally represent communities - an interweaving of voices and narrative, a communal consciousness' (2005, p. xiv). There arose a necessity to establish a connection between the characters and their respective countries. A community had to be built. Linear time turned out to be too reductive and deceptive (Dunn and Morris, 1995) for this sort of story: there was a need to distort chronology so the character's lives could connect explicitly. Dunn and Morris (1995) suggest that "[t]he construction of time line [must be] both horizontal and vertical, [and convey] both distance and depth" (p. 116). Lundén (1999), in his definition of a short story cluster, says that chronology should not be strictly adhered to. This liberated the writing to explore the past, and even the future, without the aid of dates and flashbacks (though applied for clarity).

In *Thread of Lies*, the murder of a lesbian couple links protagonists of different nationalities. That is to say, Rayleigh is linked to the deaths because of her connection to Kay as a sister; Michael is linked to the deaths because of his homosexuality's connection to the couple's sexuality. Dafe, being the murderer, has already established his own connection, by 'murdering'. This is in accord with Nagel (2004), who sees the genre as a collection of verse or narratives around some outstanding event or character. *Thread of Lies* works by combining "several separate pictures" (Luden 1999; p. 14) of the outstanding central event or character.

Nagel (2004) says "a 'short story cycle' is less unified than a novel but has much greater coherence and thematic integrity than a mere collection of short stories." Some of the chapters in *Thread of Lies* are respectively independent, but inform and build on each other to form 'one' novel. Letting the reader fuse these stories together to get a single picture demands deep involvement. This is in agreement with Dunn and Morris (1995), who indicate the need for readers to face the same task (as the writer) of mapping the work, that is to say, establishing connections between and among text-pieces. For example, in *Thread of Lies* the reader meets Michael's late partner, Paul, for the first time during his funeral in an early chapter. Paul is dead at the time that he is introduced, but the reader gets a sense of the relationship between him and Michael which is fleshed out as more chapters give hints of the affair. The same thing happens with regard to Kay's relationship with Rayleigh. It is clear, Kay passes away at the beginning of the composite novel; the

reader will have to construct her relationship to Rayleigh as they come across the hints in further chapters.

Lundén (1999), comparing the novel to the genre in question, states that the composite version is more multi-voiced and open-ended, defusing closure and resolution of plot (p 39). In this he agrees with Dunn and Morris (1995), who characterise narrative points of view in the individual stories of the composite novel as increasingly complex, moving from simple first-person narration to limited omniscience to omniscience. This allows the writer to explore different points of view and forms of narrative voice as I have done in the *Thread of Lies*, providing tools for the reader to understand characters from multiple angles.

Furthermore, *Thread of Lies*, as a composite novel, gave me space, as a writer, to explore issues affecting societies, connecting them to the plot(s). Nigel (2004) proposes that the genre, “with its concentric as opposed to linear plot development possibilities, lends itself particularly well to exploring themes of ethnic assimilation, which mirror some of the major issues facing societies.” (p. 300)

## CHAPTER 3

### Homosexuality

#### **Politics and Religion**

The western world in the twenty-first century appears to be well on the way to a wider acceptance of homosexuality. That this acceptance is not universal is clear, as homophobic attitudes are displayed both in political debates and in people's everyday remarks. Religion and politics have in the past, and even presently, taken stands for and against homosexuality. It certainly seems that these religious and interpersonal opinions are core sources of social and public homophobia.

In African countries, families of victimised homosexuals have been made to pass through a lot of public shame as depicted in the creative project. Grimshaw (2004) associates homosexuality with doubts, anxieties and guilt in his examination of Iris Murdoch's fiction set in nineteenth century Europe. Green (1982) associates homosexuality with hostility and humiliation in several works of American and European fiction between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Homophobia and sexual discrimination has long been part of man's behaviour, and it is not just an African trait as the west's own track record shows. It is true, however, that homosexuals in most parts of Africa presently live in fear, are tormented by guilt, and are on a regular basis, publicly humiliated. Mirroring this in *Thread of Lies*, Michael Merije suffers both from the rejection of his family in the western world, and from witnessing the awful consequences of homophobia in Nigeria.

#### **a. Political Impacts**

Politics have had a tremendous impact on homosexuality. The Swedish government threatened, in 2009, to cut off aid and support to Uganda because of the Ugandan government's anti-gay campaign (Cheney, 2012). This would have led to a higher rate of poverty in Africa if it had been implemented. *Thread of Lies* depicts this differently: the scandal regarding the death of the lesbian couple in the composite novel is kept away from the public by Nigeria's government, lest it put the country at the same risk of sanction from the west.

*Thread of Lies* explores the judicial system in Nigeria through its portrayal of the public trial of two homosexuals, Gregory Pink and Nicholas Ekpo (p. 79). Michael Merije, stunned by the abuse gay people face in Nigeria, attends this trial and finds it deeply traumatising.

Due to the political sanctioning of homosexuality in Nigerian society, I would argue that gay people have suffered embarrassment, cruelty, and humiliation. *Thread of Lies* employs a sympathetic approach by depicting the trial through Michael's point of view, although other characters present in court gain satisfaction and a certain scornful humour from the situation. Bisbey (2011) explains that gender-based humour directed toward homosexuality tends to reinforce homophobia and the gender binary that informs it.

My focus is obviously on Nigeria, although it mirrors the African continent as a whole with 40 out of 53 countries deeming homosexuality illegal (Anderson, 2007). In the homophobic society depicted in *Thread of Lies*, Nigeria's leaders in government condemn homosexuality, much like Namibia's President Sam Nujoma. Their intolerance also recalls Zimbabwe Head of State Robert Mugabe's unpopular attack on homosexuality in 2006 (Anderson 2007). This condemnation of homosexuality by African leaders can be said to mirror the views of the majority in their respective countries, influenced by religion and cultural values.

In western countries, even though, as I have pointed out, homophobia still exists, policies and reforms in favour of homosexuality have led to social changes, which Escoffier (1985) notes in his analysis of the sexual revolution and gay identity politics. There are open communities of lesbian and gay men in many cities of the western societies. Why, however, should these communities separate themselves from society if the society really identifies with homosexuality? It is for the same reason that Kay and Ruky had to leave London, even though Kay's family had no issues with her sexuality, which is the subtle personal and social homophobia that has taken the place of public condemnation.

While homosexuality has received public sanction in many western societies - openly gay men and lesbians have been elected to city councils, state legislatures and the congress - this sanction often does not mirror personal attitudes. In *Thread of Lies* Greg, Ruky's uncle, who appears to be in support of gay marriages having lived in Sweden during era the bill on gay marriage was passed, reveals to Ruky (to her disappointment) that he doesn't support gay rights. He reasons that if gay

people should be given rights, then incestuous relationships should also have to be legal (p. 172).

### **b. Religious Impacts**

Religion has been very formative in shaping the attitudes of people and societies. Chike (2007) states that the Anglican church is struggling with the issue of homosexuality at the present time because of interference of non-religious views (p. 1). The Catholic Church's stance on homosexuality, I would argue, has also been challenged in recent times: for example, in the Philippines, the LGBT rights movement contested against Catholic dominance of the state. Homosexuality and Christianity are the closest of enemies in the twenty-first century, as both sides' longstanding arguments have had impacts on larger social and political thinking on the issue. The Pentecostal movements have undoubtedly been opposed to homosexuality, even though their voices have drawn little attention. Lewis-Williams (2006) sees the Pentecostal position towards homosexuality as very harsh, and this is portrayed in *Threads of Lies*.

Most of the characters in the *Thread of Lies* are very sensitive to issues that concern religion. Dafe, who murders the lesbian couple, has religion as a backing, although inwardly, his drive has more to do with his own bitter emotions and mental instability.

Many Christians would agree that homosexuality displeases God so much that that was the reason He destroyed the city of Sodom as stated in the Bible (Rogers, 2011). Dafe capitalises on this long standing religious condemnation to commit the crime in *Threads of Lies*. Most modern Christians, I would argue, define homosexuality as immoral, and would insist Sodom was condemned because of homosexuality. Jeater (1993) says sex occupies the realm of the 'moral', and links sex to the concept of sin. However, as stated earlier, the Church has gradually become more tolerant, if not outwardly accepting, of other sins such as adultery or fornication.

Since *Thread of Lies* concerns itself with religious views toward homosexuality, it is vital to analyse scriptures in the Bible. The Bible categorises fornication, adultery, and homosexuality as the same kind of sin: 1 Corinthians 6:9 ("Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with

mankind”). However, bible scholars that are opposed to homosexuality may also refer to Leviticus 18:22 (Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind; it is abomination”). The penalty for this is in Leviticus 18:29 (“For whosoever shall commit any of these abominations, even the souls that commit them shall be cut off from among their people”). This was the law before the New Testament. However, it wasn’t only homosexuality that had such penalty in the Old Testament. Adultery also called for the death penalty. Today, adultery has no (legal) penalty other than in some parts of the Islamic world.

In *Thread of Lies*, Michael Merije questions religion when his parents pressure him about getting married to a woman. He asks his mother if Adam was ever married to Eve, as it wasn’t stated in the Bible (p 21). Religion itself has been carved to fit into accepted societal structures. The world’s slow acceptance of same-sex relationships is mirrored in *Thread of Lies* by the journey of Rayleigh, who at the beginning of the work seems to oppose gay relationships, but goes into a gay affair at the end. Religion no doubt presents the strongest social opposition to homosexuality. Some people have deviated from religion, but still order their lives on the platform of its edicts and traditions, both which have influenced the governing of societies.

In *Threads of Lies*, the lesbian characters, Ruky and Kay are atheists, as they have found their lifestyle incompatible with religious belief.

## CHAPTER 4

### Depiction of the Society in the works of James Baldwin and Sarah Waters

#### *a. Giovanni's Room* by James Baldwin

Baldwin's focus is on a relationship between two men in France - David and Giovanni. It is David's idea to end their short but passionate gay relationship because of his desire to live a 'normal life'. It is a sad decision for both men. Inasmuch as David wants to live a normal life, he cannot deny his homosexual orientation. Giovanni is not David's first gay partner, having had a sexual affair with another character, Joey, while he was still in America. What David has developed for Giovanni is deeply emotionally rooted. On Giovanni's part, he is so drawn into this affair that he suffers emotionally when David withdraws to rescue a tentative relationship with his girlfriend, Hella. Everything seems to go wrong after the two men break up, as Giovanni ends up in a police net after murdering his (ex) employer.

The depiction of David's past in the novel hints at an upbringing in an American society that sees homosexuality as a crime. Moreover, in 1956 when the novel was published, homosexual behaviour was still criminalised in America -- it remained a criminal act until the 1960s (Betvelzen, 2012). Baldwin depicts both American and French society in his novel, the former being hostile to homosexuality, the latter more permissive and accepting. Betvelzen (2012) states that David is fully aware that society can be very unforgiving towards gay relationships. In France, a lot of Baldwin's characters live openly as homosexuals. David's reasons for not wanting to settle down with Giovanni speak to the societal expectations that still face people (including homosexuals) in modern day societies, particularly the need to marry and have children (*Giovanni's Room*; p. 93). David cannot fulfil this expectation because of his desire for men. When his girlfriend discovers he is gay at the end of the novel, she leaves him. Baldwin depicts a homosexual struggling with his own identity in *Giovanni's Room*; according to Blackmer (1995), David realizes that accepting his homosexuality will lead to suffering in life (society). He doesn't want to accept his sexuality and risk that suffering in order to be with Giovanni.

Relating this plot to *Thread of Lies*, there is a parallel to Michael Merije's life in the sense that his parents wanted a normal life for him despite his strong attraction to men

*Thread of Lies* portrays the western world that tolerates homosexuality and an Africa that doesn't in a similar way to Baldwin's conceptions of America and France. In Baldwin's novel there are open gay clubs in France, but in America, society only allows secret avenues where men search for boys.

There's also the inward conflict in Baldwin's protagonist, David, which is identical to the inward conflict in Dafe. Both deny their homosexuality, yet desire gay sex, or rather, a homosexual relationship. David prefers to be closeted as a homosexual and, again according to Blackmer (1995), the biggest threat to his passing as a heterosexual is Giovanni. Hence David's desire to keep the affair brief and secret.

The deep emotional connection between Giovanni and David in Baldwin's fiction informed Michael and Paul's relationship in *Thread of Lies*. Unlike, David and Giovanni, Michael and Paul do not break up, but much of the emotional anxiety in their relationship comes from the same sorts of guilt and anxiety that Baldwin portrays.

### ***b. Another Country* by James Baldwin**

Baldwin sets *Another Country* in a predominantly racist era of history, and one of his protagonists, a black jazz drummer called Rufus, is affected by an internalisation of this racism that makes him hate himself. He is aggressively sexual with any person who is white because he seeks power. His eventual suicide brings his circle of friends (all white) closer, and the plot stretches and touches a lot of themes with homosexuality as the focal point. As in *Giovanni's Room*, Baldwin mirrors two opposing societies in America and France. Rufus' ex, Eric, one of *Another Country's* vital characters, could *simply live a free life as a homosexual in France*, but in America he must *make a conscious decision to live as gay*, as there is a heightened homophobic sense of awareness (Keily, 2005).

Signoriello (2005) states that relationships in *Another Country* are complicated and destructive because the characters cannot separate their public selves from their private selves. This is in contrast to the homophobic society painted in *Thread of Lies*, as in the latter, as much as the gay characters try to keep their lives private,

people insist on meddling with them. For example, in the case of Kay and Ruky, a religious group confronts them right in front of their home with prayers calling for them to repent (p. 264).

Keily (2005) also states that the purpose of sexual encounters in *Another Country* is to gain an inward forgiveness of self and this “shakes the very core of those involved, freeing them from the rigidity of their self-made identities”. I would disagree with this assessment: it seems Rufus never forgives himself and never forgives the people around him, leading to his eventual suicide. There is no sense of forgiveness in *Another Country*, as Baldwin’s treatment of the characters suggest the impossibility of maintaining of freedom and liberation (in terms of sexuality and race) (Signoriello 2005).

According to Kiely (2005), “in Baldwin’s poignant treatment of white, male sexual identity and identity politics he illustrates the unwillingness of American society to approach the topic of race”. In contrast, I would argue that Baldwin treatment was a protest calling for both racism and homosexuality to be confronted and treated with equality in society.

Baldwin depicts a society in *Another Country*, in which the black and white races need each other, but the white race fails to listen to and authenticate black experience (Keily, 2005). In *Thread of Lies*, ‘religion’ plays a similar role to ‘racial subjection’ in *Another Country*, as gay characters Kay and Ruky were objects of attacks and condemnation.

However Rufus, who is an object of racial subjection in Baldwin’s fiction, informs the construction of *Thread of Lies*’ character, Michael, a black gay man from Australia. Just like Rufus, he has a distorted relationship with his family; just like Rufus he ends his own life.

### **c. The Night Watch by Sarah Waters**

In *The Night Watch*, Waters depicts a society in London during World War II. Most of her major characters are lesbians living comfortably in the absence of homophobia, though there are negative remarks against gay relationships. Perdec (2011) explains that the war had engendered a more relaxed morality, a higher degree of sexual freedom. Women’s sexual independence increased as a result of their domestic, financial and professional independence when men had gone to the front.

Waters gives gay relationships in the society she is depicting all the features of straight relationships, portraying emotions, romance and even breakups. She uses the Second World War as a metaphor too: while the key characters, Kay and Helen, have a healthy relationship before the war, they fall out during the war. After the war is over, Helen leaves Kay and settles with another lesbian character, Julia. In contrast, *Thread of Lies* does not give same-sex relationship a healthy or natural environment; instead, the lesbian characters face active homophobia.

Waters also presents a society in her novel that depicts men's cruelty toward women; she takes a strongly feminist stance. Perdec (2011) says the post-war return to "normal", with men returning from the front and reclaiming their jobs, their patriarchal status in the family (society), and their control over sexuality, was a disappointment to most women, whether straight or gay. One of the male characters, Reggie, horribly maltreats Viv, a woman with whom he is having an extramarital affair. Reggie gets Viv pregnant and lures her into experiencing a painful clandestine abortion performed by a dentist. This nearly leads to her death, as she suffers severe haemorrhage. *Threads of Lies* does not make sexism a focus of its depiction of society, but it gives a hint of its on-going existence as shown in the conversation below between Rayleigh and Chioma in *Thread of Lies*:

'Rayleigh. Some women aren't meant for men... Perhaps your sister was right to stick to the path she took. I have had brief relationships with wild animals that saw themselves as men.'

Rayleigh gave a short laugh.

'I have dated married men, confused men, and arrogant men. They thought they could ruin me... I learnt to forgive them even before they jumped in my bed.' (p. 232)

Waters depicts women who are liberated by virtue of having no men in their lives, as the society portrayed in the novel looks at a time of massive transformation, when men were away fighting and women took over in several areas. Women do men's jobs, make decisions in the household, and become the major bread-winners in their families (Perdec, 2011). However Waters reverses the liberation of her character, Kay, at the end of her gay affair. She becomes depressed, lonely, and disoriented. Waters also does not liberate Viv, a woman

entangled in a man's world. *The Night Watch* isn't so much a protest against men's dominance over women, as an indication that women can indeed stand alone.

*The Night Watch*'s characterisation of a lesbian affair informed the writing of the relationship between Kay and Ruky in *Thread of Lies*. Kay in the *Thread of Lies* was named after the Kay in *The Night Watch*, but these two, besides being British, have entirely different personalities.

#### **d. *Fingersmith* By Sarah Waters**

While *Fingersmith* was written in the first years of the twenty-first century, its focus is on the Victorian era: the London society in this work is constituted of the poor wretches, petty thieves and criminals living in the Borough, the sedated and abused madwomen in the asylum, and the almost backward servants at Briar (De Schryver, 2010).

The society Waters depicts here is similar to that of *The Night Watch* in her representation of men and how they ruin women's lives. A character in *Fingersmith*, Mr Gentleman, dominates two women's lives (the main protagonists, Sue Trinder and Maud Lily), taking advantage of them and trying to swindle them. Mr Gentleman, deceitful and criminal-minded, must die before the women can live and share the love they had developed for each other. This is in contrast to *Thread of Lies*, in which the men are portrayed as weak. Michael Merije's empathy over the death of the lesbian couple, his homosexuality, and the rejections he suffers are all disturbing to him, but opting for suicide is portrayed as weakness; Dafe's killing of the lesbian couple is a display of weakness, as it springs from his hatred of his own homosexuality.

Waters does not depict homophobia in *Fingersmith*; neither does she explore the role lesbianism plays in wider society. She plants a seed of love between two particular characters, and as the plot develops, Sue and Maud fall in love with each other. Hall (2006) says Waters "resituates female same-sex desire within culture and discourse" (p. 22).

Just as in *The Night Watch*, Waters indicates in *Fingersmith* that women are better off without men in their lives. Mr Gentleman, who acts in the novel as a husband figure, does not leave a good impression.

. The portrayal of men and women in *Fingersmith* differentiates it from the society depicted in *Thread of Lies*. Sue and Maud are heroic figures, which is in sharp contrast to Kay and Ruky who were (killed) ruined by a Dafe, a man. She empowers Maud and Sue with union. On the other hand *Thread of Lies*' lesbian couple's union cost them their lives.

The romantic scenes [including sex scenes] between the *Fingersmith*'s lesbian couple, Maud and Sue, informed *Thread of Lies* in its construction of lesbian relationships.

## CHAPTER 5

### Conclusion

Different points of view and narrative techniques are fused in *Thread of Lies*, giving the reader the opportunity of viewing characters and the plot from multiple perspectives, hence providing opportunities for a deeper insight into a central occurrence. *Thread of Lies* explores the people and events connected with the murder of a lesbian couple in Nigeria.

The composite novel according to Morris and Dunn (1995) is like a “spider’s web – with many little threads radiating from a centre, criss-crossing each other. As with the web, the structure will emerge as it is made and you must simply listen and trust” (p. 89). This is one description among many for the genre that *Thread of Lies* falls under.

Linear time is completely distorted in the narrative, as the story progresses through the deliberate weaving of past and present. Morris and Dunn describe the nature of progression in this genre as “spiral-like rather than linear” (p. 90). Other features which *Thread of Lies* shares with the genre as a whole, as formulated by Morris and Dunn, are: ‘recurring characters’, ‘shared incidents’, ‘common setting’ and a ‘unifying element’.

*Thread of Lie’s* most central characters, Dafe, Rayleigh, and Michael, are connected because of Dafe’s act of murder, which is the “shared incident” in a “common setting” - Nigeria. The ‘unifying element’ is also Nigeria as it links all recurring protagonists and some back stories. It must also be stated that travelling in this composite novel is a ‘thematic metaphor’ which illustrates the world’s growing acceptance and tolerance of homosexuality, which has long been a source of argument.

The portrayal of the western societies, being Australia, England and New Zealand in the project, positively depicts the tolerance and protection of gay individuals against discrimination. However, even these countries are yet to grant equal marriage rights to gays and lesbians - signs that their tolerance and acceptance of homosexuality is still only partial. Africa, with Nigeria on the forefront, on the other hand, manifests high intolerance of homosexuality in the twenty-first century. Religion and politics will continue with their leading roles on the debate on homosexuality until a decision that accommodates every opinion is met.

As well as current religious and cultural debates, my work has been informed by fictional works of James Baldwin and Sarah Waters, who both portray different society's attitudes toward homosexuality. In Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* for instance, we see the psychological trauma that David and Giovanni are thrown into because of the society's influence on their decisions to breakup. In *Another Country*, we see a discriminatory society, in which Baldwin tries to equate sexual discrimination and racial discrimination. In *The Night Watch*, Waters depicts lesbians living freely in a society wounded by war and losing its values. And then we see a sexism issue in *Fingersmith* where Waters portray men as evil in their cruelty against women.

*Thread of Lies* depicts a homophobic society in Africa, comparing it to the mounting change in the west that has led and is leading to a greater tolerance and accommodation of homosexuality.

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